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BHOPAL, TUESDAY JANUARY 16, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹1.50



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# Ayodhya opens its arms to tradition and modernity

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The upcoming consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, where Ram Lalla will be enshrined on January 22, unveils a unique architectural marvel that sets it apart from conventional structures. “Crafted without the use of iron, steel, or cement, this temple showcases a blend of traditional Nagara style with cutting-edge construction technology,” Anil Mishra, a trust member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust said. One of the distinguishing features of the Ayodhya Ram Temple is its exclusive use of stone, a decision rooted in making the structure earthquake-resistant. Mishra explained, “We have chosen stone for its durability, surpassing that of other construction materials. The temple was constructed using remarkably malleable stone, deliberately avoiding iron due to rust concerns and ensuring earthquake resistance.” The stones utilised in the temple’s construction are distinctive, each bearing a groove cut into it, eliminating the need for cement joints between them. These stones hail from Bansi Paharpur in Rajasthan’s Bharatpur, enhancing the temple’s unique character. During the initial foundation testing, the construction team encountered an unexpected challenge — the absence of soil, replaced by sand at the site. To overcome this, specialists cleared out the sand and applied 56 layers of a concrete mix known as Rolled Compact Concrete to prepare the rocks for the foundation. This



specialised mix, which eventually adheres to the rocks, served as the base for the temple. The construction process, steered by the Nagara style, notably seen in structures like the Khajuraho Temple, Somnath Temple, and the Sun Temple of Konark, eschews the use of iron and steel. Collaborating with some of the country’s brightest minds from IIT-Chennai and the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), the temple aims to stand the test of time. A spokesperson from the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust emphasised, “Using only stones, the temple is designed to withstand decay from air, sun, and water, ensuring its longevity for at least 1,000 years.” The integration of ancient architectural styles with modern engineering techniques positions the Ram Temple as a testament to India’s rich heritage and technological prowess.

## Ram Nagari to be fortified

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a proactive move to ensure the safety of the sacred city of Ayodhya, widely recognised as Ram Nagari, comprehensive security measures will be enforced from January 20 to 22. As part of this heightened security initiative, the city will transition into a secure zone with sealed borders, imposing restrictions on the entry of vehicles originating from outside Ayodhya Dham. “No outsider will be allowed to enter the city from midnight on January 20,” Special Director Prashant Kumar said. He shared insights into the security arrangements, emphasising the transformation of Ayodhya into a high-security zone during this crucial period. “Special arrangements have been put in place to ensure the security of the city during the significant ceremony,” he disclosed during an interview with this correspondent. The meticulously planned security protocol includes stringent checks at key intersections such as Udaya intersection, Saket petrol pump, Naya Ghat, and other entry points. Exclusive access will be

granted to residents holding valid identification cards, underscoring the necessity for a meticulous screening process to uphold Ayodhya’s security. In a gesture to accommodate Ayodhya residents amid the heightened security measures, individuals living within Ayodhya Dham and the city will be allowed to return to their homes during the specified period. An appeal has been issued by the police administration, urging residents to exercise caution and refrain from unnecessary outings on January 21 and 22. This plea seeks the cooperation of the local populace in adhering to the security guidelines, fostering a collective responsibility for the welfare of the entire community. Special DG Prashant Kumar underscored the significance of the upcoming event, stating, “The programme in Ayodhya is a very important day for the country and the whole world. Extensive security arrangements are being made for that. Surveillance is also being done through CCTV.”

## Seven days rituals begin

BHANU PRATAP SINGH ■ AYODHYA

The Secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust, Champat Rai, announced on Monday that the consecration rituals for the idol of Lord Ram, known as Ramalala, in the sanctum sanctorum of the Ram Mandir will commence on January 16 and continue until January 22. He also announced that the statue crafted by Karnataka’s Arun Yogiraj would be placed on the pedestal of the sanctum sanctorum. Speaking to the media in Ayodhya,

Champat Rai said, “During the consecration ceremony, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi; Chief of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Mohan Bhagwat; president of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust Mahant Nrityagopal Das; and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will be present in the sanctum sanctorum,” Rai said. Additionally, representatives from various traditions and backgrounds, including engineers from L&T and Tata, are expected to participate in this historic event.

## Amitabh Bachchan buys land

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a move that aligns with Ayodhya’s burgeoning economic landscape, Bollywood luminary Amitabh Bachchan has reportedly purchased a plot in The Sarayu, a forthcoming seven-star mixed-use enclave slated for a formal launch on January 22. Developed by Mumbai-based The House of Abhinandan Lodha (HoABL), this strategic acquisition by Bachchan underscores the evolving economic dynamics of

Ayodhya. The Sarayu, covering an expansive 51 acre, is strategically positioned to capitalise on the cultural and spiritual significance of Ayodhya, particularly with the imminent inauguration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple. Bachchan’s undisclosed but substantial investment, estimated to be valued at ₹14.5 crore for a 10,000-square-foot plot, reflects not only confidence in the local economic potential but also a keen appreciation for the town’s rich spiritual heritage.

## INDIA Bloc fragments further

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW/KOLKATA

In what could be an advantage for the BJP in the general elections, BSP president Mayawati announced on Monday that her party would contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on its own and would consider a post-poll alliance. The announcement by the BSP, though politically expected, will weaken the prospects of the Opposition alliance INDIA Bloc, comprising the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, which was hoping to rope in the BSP for a mega Congress, SP, and the BSP combine to upset the ruling party’s tally in the State which sends the highest number of Lok Sabha members. On the other hand, the tussle continues in the larger Opposition Bloc INDIA Bloc, as the West Bengal Congress has now officially communicated that any truck with the TMC would be “suicidal.” The BSP is not part of the Opposition INDIA Bloc. Although there have been reports that some alliance members have tried to persuade Mayawati to join the group, the SP has indicated that it is not keen on this.



Talking to reporters at the State party office in Lucknow on her 68th birthday, Mayawati also categorically denied reports in a section of the media about her retirement from politics and stressed that she will continue to strengthen the party until her last breath. Mayawati also cautioned her party members against her rival in the State, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, saying he changed colours like a chameleon to mislead them. She said after the Lok Sabha elections, the BSP can join the Government at the Centre on the basis of proper representation to the party. “The party will not contest the elections in alliance with

anyone, but after the polls, unlike the previous times, the party is no longer going to give ‘free support’ from outside,” the BSP chief said. “Regarding the elections, I want to make it clear again that our party will fight the Lok Sabha polls alone on the strength of the poor and marginalised sections, especially Dalits, tribals, Muslims, and people of other religious minority communities. It was on their strength that in 2007, we formed a Government with full majority in Uttar Pradesh by contesting the elections alone. Therefore, keeping in mind the past experience, our party will contest the Lok Sabha elections alone,” she said. Rejecting reports of her retirement circulating on social media after she recently made her nephew Akash Anand her political successor, Mayawati said they are “fake” and have no basis. “I will continue to strengthen the BSP until my last breath.” Akash Anand was not present at the Press conference. Mayawati clarified that the BSP will keep its distance from all parties having casteist, capitalist, and communal views.

## Scindia rebuffs hooligans for unpalatable behaviour

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Monday that unruly passenger behaviour is unacceptable and ‘will be dealt with strongly’ in line with existing legal provisions. Scindia said the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will issue an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) to ensure ‘better communication and facilitation of passengers to minimise discomfort in view of flight cancellations and delays due to adverse weather.’ Besides, Delhi airport operator DIAL has been directed to expedite the operationalisation of the CAT III-enabled fourth runway. “It is my earnest request to all travellers to bear with us during this difficult period. All stakeholders are trying their best to minimise passenger inconvenience. Incidents of unruly behaviour amidst this are unacceptable and will be dealt with strongly in line with the existing legal provisions,” Scindia said. Meanwhile, the DGCA on Tuesday asked airlines to publish accurate real-time



information regarding flight delays and appropriately sensitise staff at airports to suitably communicate with passengers amid fog-related disruptions at airports. The DGCA has invoked the Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) Section-3, Series M Part IV, titled “Facilities to be provided to passengers by airlines due to denied boarding, cancellation of flights and delays in flights.” Against the backdrop of a significant number of flights getting delayed and cancelled and passengers facing tough times, the DGCA has come out with a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

## PM Modi embraces welfare for all

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday that the country can only develop if various welfare schemes reach everyone. He asserted that it is his guarantee that everyone, even those in the remotest areas, will benefit from these schemes. Releasing the first instalment of ₹540 crore to one lakh tribal beneficiaries of a rural housing scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Janati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) via video conferencing, he said the 10 years of his Government have been dedicated to the poor. Invoking Shabari, a tribal woman depicted in the epic Ramayana who served berries to Lord Ram during his stay in forests, the PM said it is natural for him to remember her when he has undertaken a special religious ritual till the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. “The story of Shri Ram is not possible without Mata Shabari,” he said, asserting that she played a significant role in the transformation of ‘prince’ Ram into ‘maryada purushottam’ Ram. “Be it the story of Raja Ram in Treta Yuga or the current situation, welfare is not possible without uplifting the poor, deprived, and the tribals,” he said, noting that over four crore permanent houses were constructed for the poor in the last 10 years. “Modi has reached out to those who were never cared for earlier,” he added. The budget of many welfare schemes for the Scheduled Tribes has risen by five times, and the scholarship for tribal students has grown by two-and-a-half times in the last 10 years, the PM said, adding that the work is on to construct more than 500 Eklavya model schools for them while only 90 existed earlier. His Government has exerted its full force to



ensure that the extremely backward among the tribal population benefit from every scheme, he said. Modi also credited guidance from President Droupadi Murmu, India’s first tribal woman head of State, for the PM-JANMAN scheme, saying as someone who has come from the same background she often spoke about the issues facing them during her interactions with him. Noting that Diwali is being celebrated in Ayodhya in the run-up to the consecration of Lord Ram’s idol at the temple there, he said the festival is also being celebrated in the homes of these one lakh families who have received the first instalment of the funds to construct their own houses. This is a matter of significant happiness for him, the PM said.

# Indian economy welcomes Ayodhya power boost

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22 enters its final stages, and the countdown begins for one of the largest events of the decade, it is likely to generate business worth ₹one lakh crore across India due to the high demand for replicas of the Ram Mandir, printed kurtas, caps, T-shirts featuring the image of the Ram Mandir, flags, hotel bookings, diyas, mithai, etc. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) based its estimate on feedback received from trade associations in 30 cities across different States. Initially, trade bodies and shopkeepers expected to generate business worth over ₹50,000 crore. In Delhi alone, traders’ bodies

are expected to do business worth over ₹20,000 crore, as temples, markets, and residents’ welfare associations are ready to decorate the national Capital like Ayodhya. According to Praveen Khandelwal, the national secretary-general of the CAIT, traders had initially estimated a business of ₹50,000 crores. Still, given the tremendous enthusiasm among the people and the feedback received from trade associations in 30 cities across India, they have now revised the figure to ₹1 lakh crore by way of spending on the purchase of goods and availing different services for the events. The demand for models of the Ram Mandir has also seen a rapid increase, and it is expected that over five crore

models will be sold across the country, with small manufacturing units working day and night in many cities in different States. “Mass-scale devotional musical programmes, hiring a large number of traditional musical instrument players like dhol, tashe, naffri, shehnai, band groups, and craftsmen for the preparation of tableaux for Shobha Yatra, etc., are also going to contribute significantly to the temple economy. Hoardings and other outdoor publicity on a large scale are also on the agenda. Electrifying markets will be another significant step in the celebrations,” Khandelwal said. Speaking about the revised estimate of one lakh crore, Khandelwal highlighted that the passion and commitment



People are shopping for Ram flags at Sadar Bazar in New Delhi ahead of the upcoming inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya  
Ranjana Dilmir / The Pioneer

of businesses and other sections of society towards the Shri Ram Mandir are resulting in the organisation of approximately 30,000 different programmes by trade associations across the country. These events include market processions, Shri Ram Chowki, Shri Ram rallies, Shri Ram Pad Yatra, scooter and car rallies, and Shri Ram assemblies. Sharing details about the upcoming events in Delhi markets, Khandelwal said Delhi will also witness numerous cultural programmes, with folk dancers and singers coming from Vrindavan and Jaipur for performances in many markets. “Over 200 Shri Ram Dialogue programmes will be organised, along with approximately 1000 Shri

Ram Assemblies, Shri Ram kirtans, recitations of Shri Sundarkand, Shri Hanuman Chalisa, continuous 24-hour chanting of Ramayana, uninterrupted lighting of lamps for 24 hours, and devotional music evenings on a large scale are scheduled by trade associations. Besides, more than 200 major markets in Delhi and a large number of smaller markets will witness Shri Ram flags and decorations, with every market adorned with decorative lights. Over 300 Shri Ram processions and Shri Ram pad yatras are planned in various markets across Delhi, along with the lighting of thousands of clay lamps in all markets and at the homes and shops of traders.



# Those entitled, should get benefit of schemes: Modi

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that those who are entitled to have benefits of various Government schemes must get them. They should not remain deprived. He was having virtual dialogue with beneficiaries from from Hatod village in Shivpuri district today. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav participated virtually from Ujjain in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's virtual dialogue with PMAY(G) beneficiaries under PM-JANAM. Prime Minister Modi virtually talked to Lalita Adivasi and Smt. Vidya Adivasi, beneficiaries of village Hatod in Shivpuri district. Smt. Lalita informed the Prime Minister that her elder daughter studies in sixth class. She has

got scholarship, school uniform and also has an account open in Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana. Besides, she has also got benefit of Ladli Lakshmi Yojana. Her son, Dhruv, who is studying in class II, has got school uniform and benefit of mid-day meal at school. Little son is going to Anganwadi. Lalita also informed Modi that she is associated with Sheetala Mata Self-Help Group, which has got the job of managing a cow shed. Prime Minister Modi praised Lalita for her prompt response. Prime Minister Modi informed Smt. Lalita that soon she will be having her own house. The first installment was given to her today. Expressing her gratitude to Prime Minister Modi, Smt. Lalita thanked for all the care about tribal villages ensuring benefits of the schemes

under Janman Yojana. Prime Minister Modi also encouraged the girls who presented cultural programmes. Prime Minister Modi asked Smt. Lalita about how she got to know about Janman Yojana and what benefits she received. Lalita informed that she got information from the officials and the rally held in the village under the Vikasit Bharat Sankalp Yatra. She had never thought of having her own house. Now her family would be happy. She told that her father-in-law Krishna Adivasi got the benefit of KCC, and children are having Aadhar cards, caste certificate. The village had 310 Ayushman cards and 100 more have been made under Janman Yojana. All women in the village had Ujjwala gas connections, but through Vikasit Bharat

Sankalp Yatra, new gas connections were also given. Ujjwala's connections have increased by 20 more in the village. The tap water scheme is also operative. Prime Minister Modi inquired about the village development plan and praised her wisdom, presentation and leadership abilities. Lalita said that it is from the self-help group that she has received training in expressing herself properly. Vidya informed Prime Minister Modi regarding village development. Vidya told that she runs Vaishno Devi Self-Help Group. Under the Pradhan Mantri-Janman Yojana, Aadhaar cards and caste certificates of children etc. have been made and sheds for cows and livestock have also been approved. She told that when she came to village Hatod after

getting married, there were only mud houses. Today village is beautiful and well equipped. Smt. Vidya told Prime Minister Modi through a model that the village has water tank, tap, electricity, paved road and community center, where the villagers install Lord Ganesha on Ganesh Utsav and celebrate the festivals. She told that Ayushman card has been made. There was a time when it was difficult for ambulance to reach the village, now ambulance facility is easily available. This is a great relief to expectant mothers. On a call, Ambulance can be available. It has now become easier to take expectant mothers to Shivpuri. Prime Minister Modi praised Smt. Vidya for her knowledge appreciating the village model and said that it will be known far and wide.



Chief Justice of MP High Court Ravi Vijay Kumar Malimath calls on Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel at Raj Bhawan in Bhopal on Monday.

## FIR against interviewer demanding sexual favour

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Gwalior Crime Branch on Monday registered a criminal case against an interviewer for allegedly demanding 'sexual favour' from a woman candidate in exchange of job in Seed and Farm Development Corporation at Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia Krishi Vishwavidyalaya in the district. On January 3 this year, interviews were held for some posts in the seed corporation at the Agricultural University in the district and the interview panel for the same arrived from Seed Development Corporation, Bhopal. After the interview, an interviewer in the panel allegedly demanded sexual favours from the candidates in the name of providing a job via message. Thereafter one of the candidates, came forward and

lodged a complaint against the interviewer to the Gwalior crime branch. Acting on it, an FIR was registered against the accused interviewer. Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Rishikesh Meena told ANI, "A walk-in interview was held on January 3 in the Agricultural University in the district for the post of Technical Assistant. The candidates shortlisted after filling the application on percentage basis were called for the interview. We have just collected the information from the Agricultural University about the interview panel." "In the preliminary investigation, it came to light that one of their staff, who was technically sound, was in the panel to conduct an interview for the recruitment. After the interview, he had messaged three woman applicants and demanded 'sexual favours'

promising selection. One of the candidates showed courage and exposed the incident," Meena said. The ASP further said the crime branch had registered the FIR into the matter and a team was sent to Bhopal to nab the accused. Meanwhile, Chairman of Madhya Pradesh Seed and Farm Development Corporation Munna Lal Goyal, said, "I received information about the matter on Monday morning that an employee of Seed Corporation had come here for an interview and three women candidates had complained that he had committed obscene acts during the interview. After getting the information, I talked to the managing director and instructed to terminate the employee with a dirty mentality. A notice for the same has been issued today and after three days, he will be terminated."

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

There is no possibility of severe cold in Madhya Pradesh for the next 5-6 day and the weather pattern will prevail till January 20. This will happen due to western disturbance. It has been active in North India since January 16. The system will also affect the state in the next 1-2 days. Due to this, there will definitely be light clouds, but there is no forecast of rain. Meteorologists said, after the system passes, a period of severe cold will begin in the state. At present, the day and night temperature in the state is 4-5 degrees higher than normal. Talking about big cities Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Ujjain, the night temperature has not gone below 10 degrees even

once in the 14 days of January. The temperature here is just above 12 degrees. On the other hand, both day and night are cold in Gwalior. Rewa had the coldest Sunday night in the state. The minimum temperature here reached 5.2 degrees. 6 degrees were recorded in Khajuraho, 6.8 in Sidhi, 7.5 in Datia, 8.3 in Satna, 9.8 in Nowgong , 9.8 degrees in Umaria. Pachmarhi recorded 8.8 degrees. Bhopal recorded night temperature 14.4 (temperature in degrees Celsius), Indore 14.6, Gwalior 8.8 and Jabalpur 11.6 Ujjain 13. Meteorologist SN Sahu said that Jammu has received less snowfall than normal. Due to this, northern winds are not coming and the drop in temperature has reduced. Western distur-

bance will be active from January 16. Its effect will be seen in the state after a day or two. Due to this, there will be light clouds. The minimum temperature will drop after the system passes on January 20. The weather remained clear in Indore on Sunday. Earlier on Saturday, an increase of 1 degree was recorded in the day temperature. Gwalior is the coldest in the state, mercury was 22.6 degrees. Gwalior was the coldest city of the state on Sunday. The day temperature here was recorded at 22.6 degrees. The temperature was recorded at 28.1 degrees in Bhopal, 26 degrees in Indore, 26.2 degrees in Jabalpur and 26.5 degrees Celsius in Ujjain. Talking about the temperature on Saturday-Sunday night, the

mercury in Gwalior was 7.8 degrees. In the rest of the cities the temperature remained more than 12 degrees. The day temperature recorded in Dewas on Sunday was 25 degrees and the minimum was 11 degrees Celsius. Due to continuous change in weather, the color of wheat crop has started turning black. Even in Khajuraho-Sidhi the temperature is less than 25 degrees. After Gwalior, the day temperature in Khajuraho and Sidhi also remained less than 25 degrees. The mercury remained below 27 degrees in Malajkhand, Rewa, Dhar, Nowgong, Satna, Narsinghpur, Tikamgarh, Umaria and Sagar. The highest temperature was recorded in Khandwa at 30.5 degrees.

## 3-year-old boy bitten by dog, pet lovers abuse victim's father

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Stray dogs are continuously attacking children in Bhopal. The latest incident is from Rajiv Nagar where a 3 year old child was bitten by a dog. When the father called the Municipal Corporation's dog squad, the pet lovers got angry. After reaching home, they abused him and then assaulted him. The matter has been reported at Piplani police station. Police have registered a case against the pet lovers under other sections including assault. The matter is of Rajiv Nagar of Bhopal. Vikesh Yadav, who works in a construction company, lives here. On January 11, his 3-year-old child was bitten by a stray dog in the locality. Vikesh Yadav took the child for treatment and informed the Municipal Corporation team about the stray dogs. The team caught stray dogs from the colony. Pet lover Kavita Bhavnani, living in the colony, came to know about this on Sunday. She reached Vikesh's house with her two sons Mohit and Vishal. She asked Vikesh- Had you called the dog squad of the Municipal Corporation? As soon as Vikesh said yes, Kavita and her sons got furious. He abused Vikesh and beat him up and also threatened not to try to capture dogs in future. Piplani police station in-charge Anurag Lal says that resident Vikesh Yadav has lodged a complaint in the case of dog biting of a 3-year-old child in Rajiv Nagar. A case of abuse and assault was registered and investigation was started.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav prepares laddoos to be sent in Ayodhya ahead of the consecration ceremony of Ayodhya's Shri Ram Temple, in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh on Monday.

## Bharat IP Yatra for MSMEs in Bhopal on January 16 and 17

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

India SME Forum in collaboration with the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), Government of India has announced the 'Bharat Intellectual Property (IP) Yatra for MSMEs' in Bhopal, as a part of its National IP Outreach Mission: a two-day workshop to promote awareness and adoption of intellectual property rights amongst MSMEs. Scheduled for January 16th and 17th in Bhopal, at the Radisson Hotel, the event aims to educate small businesses on the strategic use of IP and how it can fuel innovation and drive business growth. The National IP Outreach Mission will cover 30 major cities and 500 aspirational blocks across India, through the accredited IP Facilitation Centres of the Ministry of MSME. The Bhopal Edition of the Bharat IP Yatra is well received by the industry captains and has garnered support from most leading trade associations including, Association of Industries Madhya Pradesh (AIMP), Federation of Madhya Pradesh Chamber of

Commerce & Industry (FMPCCI) etc. Around 200+ MSMEs from across Bhopal are expected to attend the programme on Day 1. The Bhopal Edition of the Bharat IP Yatra also aims to bring together lawyers, entrepreneurs, government officials, and IP professionals to share perspectives and real-world expertise. Recognizing the demand for a more tailored approach to empower MSMEs in terms of Intellectual property and enhance their D2C & exports capabilities, the India SME Forum in collaboration with the Ministry of MSME, GoI is embarking on a journey to make adoption of Intellectual Property more constant across all MSMEs. With the ongoing digitization, MSMEs can particularly benefit from utilizing trademarks, copyrights, and geographical indications to distinguish themselves in the global marketplace. The first day features workshops on "Big Branding for Small Business - Rupees 100 Crore Business Model for MSMEs utilizing IP" & "Creating, Enabling and Growing MSME - D2CBrands Online with Trademarks & Patents".

## Collector convenes meeting of priests

**Bhopal:** Collector Kaushalendra Vikram Singh convened a meeting of religious leaders of major temples of Bhopal district on Monday. In this, cleanliness drive in temples, lighting, lamp lighting, Prabhat Pheri and other topics were discussed. Before this, a time limit meeting was also held. In the presence of District Panchayat CEO Rituraj Singh and other officers, Collector Singh said that the markets in the city should be closed by 11 pm under all circumstances. For this the team kept moving around continuously. Meat should not be sold in the open, this should be followed. Also, government orders regarding loudspeakers should be followed. Collector Singh also took information regarding the preparations for National Voters Day on January 25. He also asked the Mining Department to continue taking action against illegal excavation and transportation of minerals. In relation to the Revenue Maha Campaign starting from January 15, the Collector instructed all the revenue officers to resolve the revenue cases by giving priority to the points under the campaign. He also talked about organising a cleanliness campaign in the Collectorate at 8 am on January 16.

## Weeklong celebrations in MP from today on consecration ceremony

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A weeklong celebration will kick off in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday to mark January 22 consecration ceremony in Ayodhya Ram Mandir. A nine-point order issued by the Madhya Pradesh religious trusts and endowments department late on Friday evening unveiled the plan to hold various religious and cultural programmes across the state for a week from January 16 to mark January 22 Ayodhya event. "Ram Kirtan should be held in every temple in the state from January 16 to January 22, 2024 and lamps should be lit in all the temples. People should be encouraged to celebrate the Ayodhya event like 'Diwali' (festival of lights) by lighting their houses. Ram Charit Leela (drama) should be organised in each locality", the order read. The order said that life-size LED screens should be installed in all the major shrines in the state to telecast live the January 22

consecration ceremony in Ayodhya Ram Mandir. People should be invited to witness the telecast and necessary arrangements should be made for this. Mass feasts should be organised by the temple trusts and temple committees in the major shrines on January 22. Various cultural programmes based on the theme of Lord Ram should be organised and a special cleanliness drive should be launched in all the temples in the state from January 14 to January 22, 2024. All the government schools and colleges should be decorated from January 14 to January 22, 2024. Special cleanliness drive should be launched in government establishments from January 16 to 22, 2024 and they should be lit with lamps from January 21 to January 26, 2024. The pilgrims visiting Ayodhya Ram temple from Madhya Pradesh should be welcomed at various places by showering flower petals on them, the order said.

## Dr Aditya Bhadauria further said that Gwalior has become the hub of arm wrestling, and national and international players are being prepared in Gwalior

Senior, Women category, Disabled category etc. Keshav Pandey added that medals and certificate will be given to the winning players in the competition and the winning players will get a chance to participate in the state level arm wrestling competition which is going to be held in Bhopal on January 28. Secretary of the organization, Dr Aditya

Bhadauria further said that Gwalior has become the hub of arm wrestling, and national and international players are being prepared in Gwalior. World Championship and Gwalior Arm Wrestling coaches Manish Kumar and Bhupendra Kant were also present in the meeting. World Champion Manish Kumar said that this competition is the first district arm wrestling competition after Pro Panja League Season 1. In this competition, the focus of the players will be to get into the state level arm wrestling competition, and then onto the national level competition. Bhupendra Kant said that the registration to participate in the competition will be held on January 15 and 16, 2024 at Gwalior Arm Wrestling Academy, JC Mills, Birla Nagar.



Malayalee devotees offer prayers at Lord Ayyappa Temple on the occasion of Makaravilakku festival in Bhopal on Monday.

## NEP helps youth understand Sanatan: Chief Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that the new education policy guided by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is helping the young generation to know the virtues of Sanatan while gaining knowledge of science. The life of Lord Shri Ram imparts knowledge of values

and makes people realise their duties as a father, son and husband. Yadav was addressing a programme "Shri Ramotsav Sabke Ram" organized by the media group at Samanvay Bhawan here today. He was welcomed by presenting him a Tulsi plant and a memento. The CM said that the principles of governance and ideas of Emperor Vikramaditya endorse

the concept of Ramrajya. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla will strengthen the faith in Sanatan and will prove to be a source of inspiration for the people. Playback singer Deepali Dubey also presented a bhajan in praise of Lord Rama MLA Shri Rameshwar Sharma, Bhagwan Das Sabnani, Ashok Pandey, and media personnel were present.



# Lok Sabha election campaign starts with slogan writing

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party has started a wall writing campaign across the country from January 15 regarding the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Party's National President Jagat Prakash Nadda from New Delhi on Monday and Party's State President and MP Vishnudutt Sharma launched the wall writing campaign in Madhya Pradesh from ward number 45, booth number 159 of Shivaji Nagar in Bhopal.

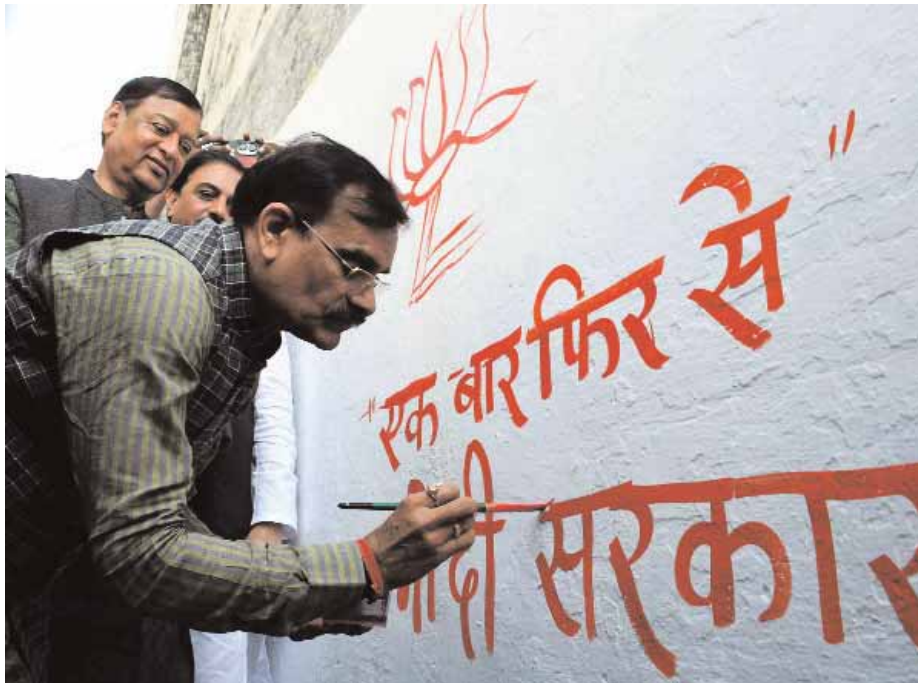
State President Sharma made a lotus flower with his hand on the wall and wrote the slogan "Once again Modi government". After this, the district presidents of the party

launched the wall writing campaign in all the districts of the state. While discussing with the media after wall writing, State President and MP Vishnudutt Sharma said that on the call of Bharatiya Janata Party National President JP Nadda, wall writing will be done across the country from today with the resolution of "Modi government once again". Under this campaign, all the workers are participating in this campaign with the resolution of Ek Baar Fir Modi Sarka' in 2024. In Madhya Pradesh too, at every booth, from the Chief Minister to the public representatives, BJP officials and workers are participating in the wall writing campaign to fulfill the resolve of forming "Modi government once again" under the leadership of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. State President Sharma said that today every section is happy with the public welfare schemes run under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, while India is seen with respect on the global stage. Today, only one voice comes from the mind of every person that Prime Minister Modi ji is the guarantee of fulfillment of every guarantee. I not only have hope, but have full confidence that with the blessings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, guidance of Union Home Minister Amit Shah ji, leadership of BJP National President JP Nadda and hard work of our booth workers, we will get a victory in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Once again the Modi government will be formed with a strong

majority and will work towards realizing the resolve of a developed India. **Like January 22, history will be made in Lok Sabha elections too** State President Sharma said that along with wall writing, BJP workers are also promoting the public welfare schemes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The poor welfare schemes run by Prime Minister Modi have worked to change the lives of the poor of the country. History will be created in the country as soon as Lord Ramlala is consecrated in Ayodhya on January 22. After 500 years of struggle and sacrifice of millions of people, 22 January is going to be history. Similarly, history will be made by BJP's victory in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections under the leadership of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi. After wall writing, State President Sharma visited Kesari Nandan Hanuman Temple in Shivaji Nagar on the auspicious occasion of Makar Sankranti and wished for the happiness, prosperity and progress of the country and the people of the state. As part of the cleanliness campaign being run in temples across the country, State President Sharma cleaned the Hanuman Temple premises. Appealing to the public and BJP workers, the State President said that by joining Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for cleanliness, they should conduct cleanliness campaigns in the temples around them and celebrate by lighting the Ram Jyoti at their residence on the auspicious occasion of Ram Lalla's consecration on January 22.



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) State President VD Sharma launches a wall writing campaign ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo



Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Shivraj Singh Chouhan with his wife Sadhna Singh distributes Khichdi at their residence on the occasion of Makar Sankranti festival in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

## AIIMS Bhopal achieves prestigious NABH accreditation

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In a historic milestone, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bhopal has been awarded the coveted National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH) accreditation by the Quality Council of India, establishing itself as the first government hospital in Central India to achieve this esteemed recognition. The NABH accreditation, a testament to AIIMS Bhopal's commitment to delivering high-quality healthcare services, was officially conferred following a rigorous evaluation process involving comprehensive tests and assessments. The accreditation reaffirms AIIMS Bhopal's adherence to international standards of patient care, safety, and overall operational excellence. Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director, AIIMS Bhopal, expressed his elation at achieving this significant milestone. While



talking to media persons, he said, "Receiving the NABH accreditation is a testament to the unwavering dedication of our team towards providing exceptional healthcare services. This recognition not only reaffirms our commitment to quality but also underscores our position as a leader in healthcare in Central India." To mark this momentous occasion, Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh engaged with members of the media today at AIIMS Bhopal, shedding light on the rigorous processes undergone by the institution to meet the strin-

gent NABH standards. The accreditation process involved a meticulous examination of various parameters, including patient safety, infection control, infrastructure, and adherence to best medical practices. The NABH accreditation serves as a hallmark of excellence in healthcare and positions AIIMS Bhopal at the forefront of medical institutions in the country. The achievement reflects the institution's continuous efforts to elevate healthcare standards and ensure the well-being of the community it serves. AIIMS Bhopal extends its gratitude to the dedicated healthcare professionals, staff, and all stakeholders who have contributed to this accomplishment. The institution remains steadfast in its commitment to providing world-class healthcare services and looks forward to continuing its journey of excellence in the service of the community.

## Fails to get daughter, man kills newborn son

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A man allegedly killed his newborn son in an inebriated state in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district, as he was disappointed at not having a daughter, police said on Monday. The accused said he had hoped to have a daughter as he already had two sons, an official said. The incident occurred in Bajjarwad village under Kotwali police station limits on Sunday evening, he said. Investigations revealed that the accused, Anil Uikhey, was inebriated when he beat up his wife and snatched their 12-day-old son from her, Kotwali police station in-charge Anil Uikhey said. The woman fled the spot, as she was scared of being beaten up further, and when she returned home later, she found the baby dead inside their hut, he said. There were strangulation marks on the baby's neck, the official said. A first information report (FIR) was registered against Uikhey under relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), and he was placed under arrest, he said. On interrogation, the accused said that he already had two sons and had hoped to have a daughter when his third son was born, the official said.



Sikh children exhibit their martial arts in a nagar kirtan ahead of Guru Gobind Singh's 358th Prakash Parv in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

IDBI BANK LTD., WTC Complex, Cuff Parade, Mumbai, Website: www.idbibank.in  
IDBI BANK LTD., Trilok, Ground Floor, Opp. Surya Hotel, Wright Town Jabalpur (M.P.) 482002

**POSESSION NOTICE RULE 8 (1) FOR IMMOVABLE PROPERTY**

Whereas the undersigned being the authorised officer of IDBI Bank Limited under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 16-Jun-2022 and paper publication dated 23-Jul-2022 calling upon the borrower **Smt. Sarla Singh** (Borrower and Mortgagee) and **Praveen Kumar Borkar** (Co-Borrower and Mortgagee) to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs. 2978532.00 (Rupees Twenty Nine Lakhs seventy eight thousand five hundred thirty two only)** within 60 days from the date of the receipt of the said notice. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below, in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the **12th day of January of the year 2024**. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of IDBI Bank Limited for an amount of **Rs. 2978532.00 (Rupees Twenty Nine Lakhs seventy eight thousand five hundred thirty two only)** and interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPERTY**

All that piece and parcel of land comprised in and forming part of Plot, Gat, Block, Survey No. Mohit Township Unit No. 1 N B 401 and **situated as mentioned:** On the East by : Road, On the West by : Govt Land, On the South by : Unit No. 2, On the North by : Road

Together with all buildings and structures thereon and all plant and machinery attached to the earth or permanently fastened to anything attached to the earth.

**Authorised Officer**  
**IDBI Bank Ltd., Branch - Jabalpur**

**Place : Jabalpur, Date : 16 / 01 / 2024**

## Man who had assaulted IndiGo pilot arrested from Amar Colony, S Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sahil Kataria, who allegedly punched an IndiGo Airlines pilot after the flight he was on was purportedly delayed for 13 hours due to fog, was heading to Goa with his wife for their honeymoon. The 35-year-old runs a stationery and toy shop in South Delhi's Amar Colony. He lives with his family in East of Kailash. After a video surfaced of the incident, Kataria was arrested and later released on bail by the Delhi Police after a notice was served to him under Section 41 of CrPC. Senior police officers aware of the matter told The Indian Express, "He had recently got married and was going on a vacation with his wife on Sunday... she was also deboarded from the airplane by CISF and aircraft officers at Delhi Airport after the incident." "He said he was frustrated over the delay and the irresponsible behaviour of cabin crew members which made him lose his calm and assault the pilot," said an officer. In a video after the incident, Kataria can be seen apologising. "He and his wife apologised after the incident to the staff and before police... an FIR has already been lodged and the case will be taken to court," added the officer. The FIR was filed on a complaint by the co-pilot. A day after a passenger attacked an IndiGo Airlines pilot onboard a New Delhi-Goa air-

craft at the Delhi airport over a delay announcement of the flight, civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Monday said the unruly passenger behaviour was "unacceptable". Jyotiraditya Scindia, in a post on social media X, said all stakeholders were working round the clock to minimise fog-related impact. "Incidences of unruly behaviour amidst this are unacceptable, and will be dealt with strongly in line with the existing legal provisions," Scindia said. According to Scindia, aviation regulator the Director General of Civil Aviation will issue a standard operating procedure or SOP for airlines on better communication and facilitation of passengers to minimise discomfort in view of flight cancellations and delays due to adverse weather. Operations at the Delhi airport on Sunday were significantly impacted by dense fog on Sunday resulting in the diversion, cancellation, and delay of many flights. One of the angry passengers on an IndiGo flight, number 6E 2175, punched a pilot when he was announcing a delay in takeoff at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, the police said on Monday. A purported video of the incident, which took place Sunday, surfaced on social media and showed Sahil Kataria hitting the pilot, identified as Anup Kumar, as he was making the announcement inside the aircraft, which was bound for Goa.

**M. P. PASCHIM KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN CO. LTD.**  
Office of The Superintending Engineer (O&M) Circle  
132, Navapure Grid, Barwani O&M, C.M. : U40109MP2002SGC015121,  
Website : www.mpwz.co.in, E-mail : sempsbbbarwani@rediffmail.com,  
sempsbbbarwani1@gmail.com, Ph. : 9424005433  
No./SE/O&M/Pur/23-24/NIT-TS-001/ Indore, Date : 15.01.2024

**NOTICE INVITING TENDERS**

Online-tender is invited for services as per tender specification given below :-

T. S.	Particulars	Tender Value (Approx.) (In Cr.)	Last Date of Online Submission of bid	Due date of online bid opening
001	Outsourcing of Manpower Required for Miscellaneous works in the O&M, Circle Barwani MPKVVCL, Barwani	32.01	05.02.2024 Upto 15:00 Hrs.	06.02.2024 at 15:00 Hrs.

For further information visit our Website <https://www.mpwz.co.in> or <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> M.P. Madhyam/113287/2024

**SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (O & M)**

## Chief Minister seeks blessings from saints

**Bhopal:** Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visited Shri Ram Temple located at Ankpat Marg in Ujjain and sought blessings from Gadipati Tulsidas Maharaj. He hailed Tulsidas Maharaj on becoming the Gadhipati. Chief Minister Yadav, while addressing the saints said that

Simhashta-2028 Kumbh Mela celebrations will be held in a grand manner. Chief Minister Yadav said that Samrat Vikramaditya of Ujjaini had got Shri Ram temple constructed in Ayodhya thousands of years ago. Now, with the firm resolve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Prana Pratishtha of Shri Ram is going to take place on January 22 after the construction of a grand temple in Ayodhya. The

Chief Minister said that a comprehensive action plan is being prepared to clean the Kshipra river before Kumbh Mela. Chief Minister Yadav also visited Shri Chintaman Ganesh Temple and offered prayers. He participated in the Bhagwan Dharamraj Vrat Udyapan programme organized by the women of Gawali Yadav community in Surbhi Garden. He extended Makar Sankranti greetings to women.

**CAN FIN HOMES LTD.**  
(CIN:L85110KA1987PLC008699)  
162, Kuber House, Kanchanbagh Road, Indore-452001, Ph.No. : 0731-2521194/95, 76250 79136, email: indore@canfinhomes.com

**POSSESSION NOTICE**

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of **Can Fin Homes Ltd** in exercise of the powers conferred under sec 13 (2) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 read with rule 8 of security interest (Enforcement) rules, 2002 issued demand notice calling upon the following Borrowers/Co-Borrowers/Guarantors to repay the amounts mentioned in the notice and interest upto the date of final payment within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notices. The borrowers as well as the Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers in particular and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below against each borrowers in exercise of powers conferred on him under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the **Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.** The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the following properties and any dealings with these properties will be subject to the charge of Can Fin Homes Ltd. for the amounts mentioned against each property herein below, which is payable with further interest and other expenses thereon until payment in full.

Name of the Borrowers/ Property Owners/	Description of Mortgaged Properties all that piece and parcel of	Demand Notice Date Possession Date	Outstanding Amount (Rs.)
<b>Mrs. Preeti Shekhawat W/o Vijay Singh Shekhawat, &amp; Mr. Vijay Singh Shekhawat S/o Manohar Singh Shekhawat</b>	House on South Part of Plot No.161 of 'Divya Rock Island' Village Panchderiya, Sanwer, Indore (M.P.) 452001, <b>Plot Area Admeasuring: 500 Sq. ft. and Construction Thereon, Bounded: East: Road, West: Plot No. 104, North: Rest Part of Plot No. 161, South: Plot No. 162</b>	<b>30.10.2023</b> <b>11.01.2024</b>	<b>15,15,857/-</b> <b>+ Interest &amp; Other Exp.</b>

**Place : Indore, Date : 15.01.2024 Authorised Officer, Can Fin Homes Ltd., Indore**

**कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद मंडीदीप जिला-रायसेन**  
दूरभाष एवं फ़ैक्स नम्बर 07450-407022 cmomandideep@mpurban.gov.in  
क्र./5504/न.पा.प./2024 मंडीदीप 15.01.2024  
// ई-निविदा सूचना //

निम्नलिखित कार्यों हेतु केन्द्रीयकृत प्रणाली में पंजीकृत ठेकेदारों से ऑनलाईन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा का विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाइट <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> पर देखा जा सकता है।

क्र.	निविदा क्रमांक	कार्य का विवरण	अनुमानित लागत	थरोहर राशि	निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य	निविदा प्रपत्र अंतिम तिथि
01	2022_UAD 195078_9 (IXth CALL)	CONSTRUCTION OF SEWAGE SYSTEM AT HOUSING BOARD COLONY SATLAPUR (MANDIDEEP)	25322241	126612	15000	29.01.2024
02	2024_UAD 326107_1	CONSTRUCTION OF RCC DRAIN COVER AT WARD NO. 05 FROM HOUSE OF SOURAB JAIN TO TAYAL SHAB HOUSE MANDIDEEP	912411	9125	2000	29.01.2024
03	2024_UAD 326144_1	CONSTRUCTION OF PAVER BLOCK AT WARD NO. 04 FROM HOUSE OF GOVIND SISODIYA TO BHAVANI RAJPUT HOUSE MANDIDEEP	222878	2230	2000	29.01.2024
04	2024_UAD 326152_1	CONSTRUCTION OF PAVER BLOCK AT WARD NO. 12 INFRONT HOUSE OF PRADEEP NAYAK MANDIDEEP	422931	4230	2000	29.01.2024

1. निविदा से संबंधित किसी भी प्रकार के संशोधन का प्रकाशन वेबसाइट <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> पर ही किया जावेगा, पृथक से समाचार पत्र में नहीं दिया जावेगा।

प्रियंका राजेन्द्र अग्रवाल अध्यक्ष	पुष्पा प्रेमशंकर साहू उपाध्यक्ष	सुधीर उपाध्याय मुख्य नगर पालिका अधिकारी
नगर पालिका परिषद मंडीदीप	नगर पालिका परिषद मंडीदीप	नगर पालिका परिषद मंडीदीप

## Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.

Corporate Office: Unit No.802, Natraj Rustomjee, Western Express Highway and M.V.Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai-400069  
Vidisha Branch: 1st Floor, Gaurav Business Square, Opposite Adani Wilmar Plant, Sanchi Road, Vidisha - 464001 (M.P.)



### E-AUCTION – SALE NOTICE

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of immovable Properties under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Asset and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged, possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited will be sold on **"As is where is", "As is what is", and " Whatever there is"** with no known encumbrances Particulars of which are given below:-

S. N.	Borrower(s) / Co-Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount	Description of the Immovable property	Reserve Price (RP)	Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) (10% of RP)	Nature of possession
1.	(Loan Code No. 07600000895/ Vidisha Branch) Mahendra Singh Yadav (Borrower), Kiran Yadav (Co-Borrower)	15-11-2021 & ₹ 6,45,231/-	All that part & parcel of property bearing, P/O Survey No.516/2Min-20 Ward No.02 Paliwal Colony Exchange Road, Near Mata Mandir, Sironj, Vidisha Madhya Pradesh 464228. <b>Boundaries :</b> East- Road, West- Remaining Land of Seller, North -House of Anita Kewat, South - House of Rameshwar Yadav	<b>Rs. 8,40,000/-</b> (Rupees Eight Lakh Forty Thousand Only)	<b>Rs.84,000/-</b> (Rupees Eighty Four Thousand Only)	Physical

- Last Date of Submission of DD of Earnest Money Deposit along with KYC, Tender Form and accepted Terms and conditions (Tender Documents) is **15-02-2024 within 5:00 PM** at the Branch Office address mentioned herein above or uploaded on <https://bankeauctions.com>. Tenders documents received beyond last date will be considered as invalid tender and shall accordingly be rejected. No interest shall be paid on the EMD.
  - Date of Opening of the Bid/Offer (Auction Date) for Property is **16-02-2024 on https://bankeauctions.com at 3:00 PM to 4:00 PM**.
  - AHFL is not responsible for any liabilities whatsoever pending upon the property as mentioned above. The Property shall be auctioned on **'As Is Where Is Basis', 'As Is What Is Basis' and 'Whatever Is There Is Basis'.**
  - The Demand Draft should be made in favor of 'Aadhar Housing Finance Limited' Only.
  - Auction/bidding shall be only through "Online Electronic Bidding" through the website <https://bankeauctions.com>. Bidders are advised to go through the website for detailed terms before taking part in the e-auction sale proceedings.
  - The intending bidders should register their names at portal M/s C 1 INDIA PVT LTD through the link <https://bankeauctions.com/registration/ signup>, and get their User ID and password free of cost. Prospective bidder may avail online training on E- auction from the service provider M/s C 1 INDIA PVT LTD through the website <https://bankeauctions.com>
  - For further details contact Authorised Officer of Aadhar Housing Finance Limited, **Lokendra Rathore (Contact No. 9977783890)** OR the service provider M/s C 1 INDIA PVT LTD, **Mr. Prabhakaran, Mobile No. +91-74182-81709, E-mail: tn@c1india.com & support@bankeauctions.com, Phone No. +917291981124/25/26** As on date, there is no order restraining and/or court injunction AHFL/the authorized Officer of AHFL from selling, alienating and/or disposing of the above immovable properties/secured assets.
  - For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in Aadhar Housing Finance Limited (AHFL), secured creditor's website i.e. [www.aadharhousing.com](http://www.aadharhousing.com).
  - The Bid incremental amount for auction is **Rs.1000/-**.
- Place : Madhya Pradesh**  
**Date : 16-01-2024**
- (Authorised Officer)**  
**For Aadhar Housing Finance Limited**



# IMD instrumental in protecting lives, advancing climate research: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday commended the India Meteorological Department (IMD) for its exceptional services to the nation, saying it has been instrumental in safeguarding lives and advancing climate research. “Today we mark 150 years of the India Meteorological Department’s exceptional service to our nation. From pioneering weather forecasting to advancing climate research, IMD has been instrumental in safeguarding lives and enhancing our understanding of the environment,” the prime minister posted on X. The IMD kick-started its 150th anniversary celebrations on Monday with the launch of the ‘Panchayat Mausam Seva’ that aims to take weather forecasts to every farmer in every village. It also rolled out the National Framework for Climate



Services to mainstream climate information in every sector and activity.

Launching the portals, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said the IMD’s impact transcended mere weather forecasts and has emerged as a safety net, protecting national interests and shielding citizens from the wrath of nature. Dhankhar said there was a time when rainfall forecasts issued by the weather office proved to be incorrect, due to lack of scientific progress, but now the pre-

dictions were precise, “down to seconds”.

He said the IMD’s impact transcended mere weather forecasts and has emerged as a safety net, protecting national interests and shielding citizens from the wrath of nature.

“From agriculture and health-care to aviation and energy, its influence is omnipresent, touching the lives of every single citizen - from farmers tilling the land to jawans guarding our borders,” Dhankhar said.

The vice president also launched a mobile app of the IMD -- ‘Mausam’ -- that integrates all services offered by the weather office and unveiled new initiatives such as the Panchayat Mausam Seva, Decision Support System and the National Framework for Climate Services. The function was attended by Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijju, Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, former secretaries of the ministry and former directors general of IMD.

Union minister Kiren Rijju said India aims to detect and predict all small-scale severe weather events through the augmentation of its weather observation network and the procurement of more powerful computing systems. Rijju emphasised that weather and climate impacts are more pronounced than ever, and India strives to become a more climate-resilient country.

He said that although the IMD’s forecast accuracy has improved by 40 per cent in the last five years compared to the preceding five years, challenges persist in predicting small-scale severe weather events such as cloudbursts.

To address this challenge, Rijju highlighted the importance of augmenting the network of doppler radars and automatic weather stations. The procurement of high-power computing systems will enable the IMD to run higher-resolution models, enhancing the ability to detect and predict all small-scale events in the future, he said. “Everything depends on observations. The more observation capacity we have, the better our forecasting capacity,” the minister added. The meteorological department has already installed 10 doppler radars in the western Himalayan region and plans to establish 11 radars in the eastern Himalayan region, Rijju shared.

## Murmu visits Modi Gallery at PM Sangrahalaya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Newly curated Narendra Modi Gallery at the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya which will be opened to the public from Tuesday i.e. January 16, 2024 already had a first visitor on Monday, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, saw the displays there with deep interest.

Later, the President shared her experience at the venue on a social platform X saying, “My visit to the Prime Ministers’ Sangrahalaya was a pleasant and illuminating experience. “The galleries dedicated to the past Prime Ministers of India not only rekindled many memories but also offered new ways to engage with our past. As the first visitor of the gallery devoted to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I was glad to see his contributions to the various spheres of nation-building coherently showcased in one place. The use of advanced technology makes the content all the more engaging.” During her visit of nearly one-and-a-half hours, the President



also saw the Constitution Gallery in the old building as well as various sections such as Sushashan, Paryavaran, Vikas, Antarrashtriya Sadbhaava, Vigyanodaya, Sanskritik Dharohar, and Suraksha, Jan Bhagidari. She was particularly impressed by immersive and interactive displays. She also visited the experiential zone Anubhuti. President expressed her appreciation for the Sangrahalaya by writing, ‘I am convinced that every Indian citizen who comes here and sees the various galleries of the Sangrahalaya will feel proud’ in the visitor book, according to a statement here. The new building Sangrahalaya has the Freedom and Unity

Gallery, which shows films on Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, before proceeding to the galleries of various Prime Ministers. “The President saw with interest the Badminton racket and charkha, and the passbook of Lal Bahadur Shastri. She also saw with deep interest the letters of Jayaprakash Narayan and his jail diary. She saw the recreation of Pokharan 2 nuclear tests, the display on Golden Quadrilateral, and the Kargil War film. The President also saw with deep interest the display of the Indo-US Civil nuclear deal,” said the statement.

## India has seen significant reduction in poverty in last one decade: Niti Aayog

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

India has experienced a significant reduction in its poverty in the last one decade with 24.82 crore people exiting multidimensional poverty line between 2013-14 to 2022-23, a report by government’s think tank NITI Aayog said on Monday.

The Paper by Prof Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog which was released in presence of BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO NITI Aayog, said India has registered a significant decline in multidimensional poverty line from 29.17 per cent in 2013-14 to 11.28 per cent in 2022-23 i.e. a reduction of 17.89 percentage points. Uttar Pradesh registered the largest decline in the number of poor with 5.94 crore people escaping multidimensional poverty during the last nine years followed by Bihar at 3.77 crore, Madhya Pradesh at 2.30 crore and Rajasthan at 1.87 crore.

The paper also shows that the pace of decline in poverty headcount ratio using the exponential method was much faster between 2015-16 to 2019-21 (10.66 per cent annual rate of decline) compared to period 2005-06 to 2015-16 (7.69 per cent annual rate of decline). All 12 indicators of MPI have recorded significant improvement during the entire study period. To assess the poverty levels in the year 2013-14 against the current scenario (i.e. for the year 2022-23), projected estimates have been used due to data limitations for these specific periods.

Significant initiatives covering all dimensions of poverty have led to 24.82 crore individuals



escaping multidimensional poverty in the last 9 years. As a result, India is likely to achieve its SDG target of halving multidimensional poverty well before 2030. The Government’s persistent dedication and resolute commitment to enhancing the lives of the most vulnerable and deprived have been instrumental in this accomplishment, said the report. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a globally recognized comprehensive measure that captures poverty in multiple dimensions beyond monetary aspects. MPI’s global methodology is based on robust Alkire and Foster (AF) method that identifies people as poor based on universally acknowledged metrics designed to assess acute poverty, providing a complementary perspective to conventional monetary poverty measures. The report attributed the decline in poverty to initiatives like Poshan Abhiyan and Anemia Mukht Bharat which have significantly enhanced access to healthcare facilities, leading to a substantial decrease in deprivation. Operating one of the world’s largest food security programs,

the Targeted Public Distribution System under the National Food Security Act covers 81.35 crore beneficiaries, providing food grains to rural and urban populations.

Recent decisions, such as extending free food grain distribution under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana for another five years, exemplify Government’s commitment. Various programs addressing maternal health, clean cooking fuel distribution through Ujjwala Yojana, improved electricity coverage via Saubhagya, and transformative campaigns like Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission have collectively elevated living conditions and overall well-being of people. Additionally, flagship programs like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and PM Awas Yojana have played pivotal roles in financial inclusion and providing safe housing for the underprivileged.

While the performance of States varies, some States which were traditionally having high poverty have made remarkable progress in helping people escape poverty, thus reducing inter-state disparities in multidimensional poverty.

## Annual deaths from fungal diseases spike to 3.75 million, reveals study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Indicating a disturbing rise in deaths from fungal diseases worldwide, a global study using data from 80 countries including India has said that the annual total of mortalities from such ailment is now estimated at 3.75 million, a figure that doubles previous estimates, and outnumbers deaths from malaria six-fold and from tuberculosis three-fold.

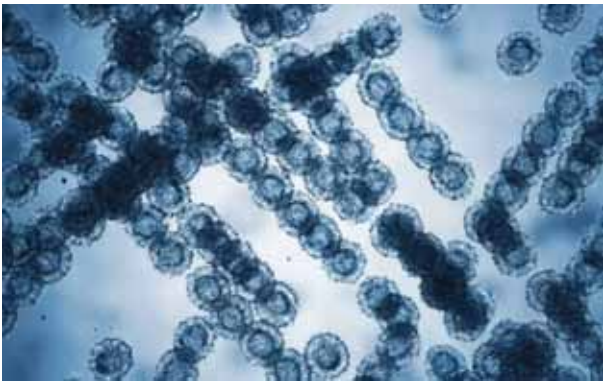
Fungal diseases can be particularly problematic in individuals with weakened immune systems, such as those with HIV/AIDS, cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, and organ transplant recipients. There are about 12 million species of fungi thriving in marine, freshwater, desert, forests and almost all other ecosystems on the earth. Of these, a fraction cause infections in humans.

The research, published in the journal Lancet Infectious Diseases, calculated an annual total at about 6.55 million acute cases.

The work is the result of a collaboration of over 300 professionals across the world who contributed to published estimates for their country and individual fungal diseases.

Previous estimates were imprecise as many fungal diseases exacerbate an existing disorder, itself often severe, such as leukaemia or AIDS, said David Denning, a professor of infectious disease at The University of Manchester, UK.

However, according to the



study, of the deaths linked to fungal disease, around 68 per cent or 2.55 million were likely to have been directly caused by it. Around 1.2 million deaths (32 per cent) had other underlying disease, with fungal disease contributing. “This work is the first global comprehensive annual incidence estimate of fungal disease, yet many gaps and uncertainties remain,” said Denning.

Around a third of 3.23 million chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) deaths worldwide are linked to infection with the fungus Aspergillus, the researcher explained.

Though pulmonary tuberculosis was classified as the cause of death in 1.2 million people in 2019, as many as 340,000 (3.4 lakh) of these could actually be fungal disease deaths, the researchers said.

Of the estimated 311,594 (3.1 lakh) leukaemia deaths globally in 2020, 14,000 (4.5 per cent) could be attributable to aspergillosis, and some to other fungal infections, they said.

Lung and bronchus cancer

annual deaths stand at 1.8 million, with the new estimate indicating that aspergillosis is implicated in 49,000 deaths (2.7 per cent) of them.

Candida -- another type of fungal infection -- is a serious problem in intensive care, complex surgical patients, diabetes, cancer and renal failure, as well as premature babies.

The researchers estimate that about 1.57 million people suffer from Candida bloodstream infection or invasive candidiasis with 9,95,000 (9.9 lakh) deaths (63.6 per cent), each year.

“Our prior estimates of annual mortality were 1.5 to 2 million, yet we now find the probable number dying with or of a fungal infection is double this at about 3.75 million,” Denning added.

Fungal diseases, also known as mycoses, can affect various parts of the body and can range from mild to severe, depending on the individual’s immune system and the specific type of fungus involved. Common fungal infections include candidiasis, aspergillosis, cryptococcosis, and others.

## First in human trials for deadly Nipah vaccine launched in UK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Scientists at the University of Oxford in the UK have launched first-in-human vaccine trials for the deadly Nipah virus which impacts many Asian countries, including India. The trials of the ChAdOx1 NipahB vaccine will consist of 51 people aged 18 to 55, which will be led by the Oxford Vaccine Group. Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus that can be transmitted from animals to humans. It can cause severe respiratory illness and encephalitis, with outbreaks reported in several Asian countries, including India. Developing a vaccine for Nipah virus is crucial due to its potential for causing deadly outbreaks.

Outbreaks have occurred in countries in Asia, including Singapore, Malaysia, Bangladesh and India, with a recent one in Kerala in September last year, they said. Nipah virus is carried by fruit bats and may also be transmitted by contact with infected animals (such as pigs) or from person-to-person via close contact, according to the researchers.

The virus, which is recognised by the World Health Organization as a priority disease requiring urgent research, belongs to the same family of paramyxoviruses as more well-known pathogens like measles, they said.

Despite the first outbreaks of Nipah virus occurring 25 years ago in Malaysia and Singapore, there are currently no approved vaccines or

treatments. “Nipah virus was first identified in 1998, and yet 25 years on the global health community still has no approved vaccines or treatments for this devastating disease,” said the trial’s Principal Investigator, Brian Angus, from the University of Oxford’s Nuffield Department of Medicine.

“Due to the high mortality rate and the nature of Nipah virus transmission, the disease is identified as a priority pandemic pathogen. This vaccine trial is an important milestone in identifying a solution that could prevent local outbreaks occurring, while also helping the world prepare for a future global pandemic,” Angus said.

In-Kyu Yoon, acting executive director of vaccine research & development at CEPI, funders of the trial, said Nipah has epidemic potential, with its fruit bat hosts found in areas home to over two billion people.

“This trial is a step forward in efforts to build a suite of tools to protect against this killer virus. Knowledge gained could also inform development of other Paramyxovirus countermeasures,” Yoon said.

The vaccine uses the ChAdOx1 platform, the same viral vector vaccine platform that was used for the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, the researchers said.

The project will run over the next 18 months, with further trials expected to follow in a Nipah-affected country, they added.

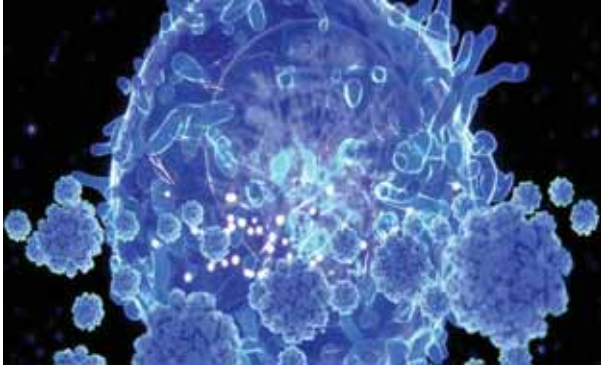
## US scientists find immune cell that can eliminate cancer, Covid-19

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

In a groundbreaking discovery, researchers from City of Hope, California has given a ray of hope to cancer patients as they found that a type of immune cell in the human body known to be important for allergy and other immune responses that can also attack and eliminate cancer and fight viruses like SARS-Cov-2, that causes Covid-19 infection.

Since these cells which are called human type-2 innate lymphoid cells (ILC2s), can be expanded outside of the body and applied in larger numbers to overpower a tumour’s defences and eliminate malignant cells in the future could be manufactured, preserved by freezing, and then administered to patients.

“In the future, these cells could be manufactured, preserved by freezing, and then administered to patients. Unlike T cell-based therapies like CAR T-cells, which necessitate using the patient’s own cells due to their specific characteristics, ILC2s might be sourced from healthy donors, presenting a



distinct potential therapeutic approach as an allogeneic and ‘off-the-shelf’ product,” Yu added.

The cells were tested in mouse models with cancer, according to the preclinical research published in the journal Cell.

“We have identified human ILC2 cells as a new member of the cell family capable of directly killing all types of cancers, including blood cancers and solid tumours,” said Jianhua Yu, Professor in the Department of Hematology & Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation at City of Hope, California, US.

In a previous research focussed on mouse cells, ILC2s had not consistently shown promise

when tested for their cancer-killing abilities. However, in the new study, researchers found “that human ILC2s function as direct cancer killers while their mouse counterparts do not,” said Michael Caligiuri, Professor in the Department of Hematology & Hematopoietic Cell Transplantation at City of Hope.

To test human ILC2s, Yu and the team first isolated the cells from a blood sample. Then, they developed a novel platform that in four weeks can expand ILC2s harvested from the body 2,000-fold. They next injected these externally expanded ILC2s into mice engrafted with human acute

myeloid leukaemia (AML) or solid tumours, including pancreatic cancer, lung cancer and glioblastoma. The results showed that this ILC2 population could kill these tumours via a previously unknown cancer-killing mechanism.

“One convincing and direct piece of evidence appeared when we placed one ILC2 and one tumour cell directly together and found that the tumour cell died, but the ILC2 cell survived,” Yu said. “This proves that the ILC2s directly killed the cancer cell in the absence of any other cell.”

ILC2s are rare in the body, Caligiuri said, found in highest numbers in the lungs, gut and skin. Yu noted that the ILC2s do not need to come from the cancer patient’s own cells, meaning that there may be the possibility of harvesting and freezing ILC2s from healthy donors for ILC2 treatment options in the future.

“We aim to really expand the applications of these findings, potentially beyond cancer treatments,” Yu said, noting that “ILC2s may even work against viruses, such as COVID-19”.

## Modi, Putin discuss ties



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday had a “good conversation” with Russian President Vladimir Putin as they discussed various positive developments in the two countries’ “special and privileged strategic partnership”.

In a post on X, Modi said he and Putin also agreed to chalk out a road map for future initiatives. “Had a good conversation with President Putin. We discussed various positive developments in our Special & Privileged Strategic Partnership and agreed to chalk out a roadmap for future initiatives. We also had a useful exchange of views on various regional and global issues, including Russia’s Presidency of the BRICS,” the prime minister

## Robotic assisted myomectomy performed on US based patient successfully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

A US-based 32-year-old patient diagnosed with two large fibroids within her uterine muscle was successfully treated at an Indian hospital recently in the NCR region through robotic-assisted myomectomy, showcasing the reach of robot-assisted arms in the body parts where human hands cannot reach. The patient has been married for four years and had sought medical attention due to heavy and painful menstrual periods and her inability to conceive.

A medical examination revealed the presence of two fibroid, measuring 5 cm and 10 cm in size, causing her distressing symptoms and infertility issues, said Dr. Anjana Singh, Director & HOD, Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Fortis Hospital Noida.

Explaining about the functioning of the robot-assisted myomectomy, the doctor said that the sophisticated gadget helps the surgeon put tools and a tiny camera through

small incisions on the lower belly.

“This gives the surgeon a better view of the area which moves the tools using a robotic controller. The advanced dexterity of the robotic arms allows meticulous fibroid removal while preserving the integrity of the uterus,” she said, adding that the use of robotic technology decreases postoperative pain, ensuring a more comfortable healing process.

The patient was under the follow-up of the doctors for over three weeks after the surgery, after which she flew back to the USA in the last week of December. The doctors also said that any delay in surgery would have caused the fibroid to grow, worsening her symptoms and requiring a more complicated surgery thereafter.

“The benefits of this cutting-edge procedure were manifold. Firstly, the patient experienced a significant reduction in her heavy and painful menstrual periods, leading to a substantial improvement in her quality of life. Additionally, the removal of

the fibroids eliminated the pressure on her uterine lining and cavity, increasing her chances of conceiving naturally.

The reduced recovery time meant that she could resume her daily activities relatively quickly, added Dr. Anjana Singh.

The case also highlights the growing demand of Indian medical tourism among foreigners. “As in this patient’s case not only were the waiting times for surgery unreasonably long, but the associated costs were also exorbitant. This led her to explore alternative options. In India, she got medical reprieve at a low-cost budget,” said an official from Fortis Noida.

According to reports, India’s medical tourism has grown rapidly in recent years, with an increase in foreign tourists from 183,000 in 2020 to 304,000 in 2021.

It is expected that the medical tourism market is likely to grow at a CAGR of more than 20% between 2023 and 2027 to more than USD 35 billion from current USD 6 billion.



# Good governance is Rajasthan Government priority: CM

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Asserting good governance is his government's priority, Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Monday said that no one should be left out of the public welfare schemes. Addressing a meeting of divisional level officials at Tripura Sundari Temple complex located in Umrai, Banswara, the chief minister laid emphasis on holding public hearings at the gram panchayat level. Sharma, according to an official statement, said good governance is the state government's priority. The chief minister said the Rajasthan government is taking important decisions to ensure the progress of the state. The role of every officer and

employee is very important in implementing the public welfare schemes and the decisions of the government on the ground and providing benefits to the eligible persons, he added. Sharma reviewed the schemes and programmes run in the division and gave necessary guidelines. The chief minister also gave instructions for effective monitoring of the 'Vikas Bharat Sankalp Yatra'. Sharma said that officers should always be available to serve the people. Everyone should work with coordination and cooperative spirit and there should not be any kind of carelessness or laxity, he added. The chief minister said that regular public hearings should be ensured at the gram panchay-



at level so that people do not have to come to the district headquarters and the capital for their grievances. Sharma said the 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra' started under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guidance is proving to be a boon for the underprivileged.

It is the responsibility of everyone that no eligible person in the state should be deprived of the government schemes, he added. The chief minister said that his government has taken a pledge to make Rajasthan free from corruption. "The government is working on

the policy of 'zero tolerance'. As soon as the government was formed, the government took decisions to stop paper leaks, gangsters and corruption. The effect of which is already visible," he added. Sharma directed the officials to take strict action against the corrupt, mining and land mafia. The chief minister said the state government is committed to the development of Banswara and the entire tribal area. He said there is immense potential for development in the area. Earlier, Sharma offered prayers at Tripura Sundari Temple for the happiness, prosperity and prosperity of the state. The chief minister met the members of the Tripura Sundari Temple Management Committee and took information about the arrangements.



BJP National President J.P. Nadda paints party's logo on a wall during the launch of party's Wall Writing Abhiyan, in New Delhi on Monday  
Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

# 1 crore pilgrims take holy dip at Gangasagar

PTI ■ GANGASAGAR (WB)

Nearly one crore pilgrims from across the country attended the Gangasagar Mela and took a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga and the Bay of Bengal on Makar Sankranti early Monday, a senior official said. Traditionally, every year during Makar Sankranti, lakhs of devotees make their way to Gangasagar in West Bengal's South 24 District to take the ritualistic dip and engage in prayer rituals at the revered Kapil Muni Temple.



"This year, the gathering at Gangasagar has broken all past records with a footfall of nearly one crore. Nearly a crore pilgrims took a dip in the sacred waters. Additionally, these pilgrims also offered prayers at the Kapil Muni Temple," a press statement said. Describing the Gangasagar Mela as one of the world's largest religious congregations, state power minister Aroop Biswas urged the Union government to declare it as a "national fair". Last week, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the same request. However, ferry services to Gangasagar, located in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district, faced disruptions for approximately six hours on Monday due to dense fog, according to a police officer. "Ferry services experienced an interruption from 3.30am to 9:40am because of heavy fog. The suspension was implemented as a safety precaution,"

explained the officer from Sundarbans Police District. Disruptions affected ferry services from Kachuberia and Lot 8. Superintendent of Police Koteswara Rao confirmed the resumption of ferry services after visibility conditions improved. This disruption resulted in a backlog, with at least 40 vessels ferrying passengers to or from Gangasagar, the officer added. Given the substantial congregation of pilgrims, the state government heightened security measures at Sagar Island. In addition to state police, personnel from NDRE, SDRE, and the Coast Guard have been deployed with appropriate equipment to respond to any potential emergencies. Biswas on Sunday, had said, "Nearly 65 lakh pilgrims have visited Gangasagar Mela until Sunday noon since the fair's inauguration on January 8." He added that the fairground,

sprawling across the beach, is now under the surveillance of approximately 1,100 CCTV cameras and 22 drones. Security personnel, including 14,000 policemen, oversee the event, and 45 watch towers have been erected. Pilgrims are being transported to Sagar Island through 36 vessels, 100 launches, and six barges operating across 22 jeties. To enhance visibility on the Muriganga River, 300 fog lights have been strategically installed. According to Hrishikesh Panjika, the auspicious timing for 'punya snan' or the holy bath on Makar Sankranti began at 12.13am on Monday and will continue for the next 24 hours. Most of the devotees will follow this timing and take the holy dip. However, some devotees followed the Mahabir Panjika, according to which, the auspicious timing for the holy bath began at 8.42am on Sunday.



## Nitish attends Lalu Makar Sankranti feast

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday treated himself to a Makar Sankranti feast hosted by RJD president Lalu Prasad, belying speculations that the alliance between the two arch-rivals has hit a rough patch. Prasad's younger son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav, who is also the state's deputy chief minister, expressed delight over the visit of his boss and made light of the speculations of a rift in Mahagathbandhan. "We were pleased to have at our place the honourable chief minister on a day we have been, since long, treating people to 'Dahi Chura' (flattened rice with curd), items made of til (sesame) and 'konhri ki sabzi' (pumpkin stew). Other colleagues in the cabinet have been dropping in as well. We welcome them all", said Yadav, who briefly interacted with the posse of journalists. The young RJD leader accused the opposition BJP in the state of suggesting a trust deficit since Kumar took over as the JD(U) national president, replacing Rajiv Ranjan Singh

"Lalan" who gave up the post mid-term. "Ever since Lalu ji and Nitish ji joined hands, the BJP has been scared. Also, we are running a government that has delivered on its promise of job creation on a large scale. As such, there is no need for any explanation on the various theories that have been doing the rounds", asserted Yadav. Notably, a section of the media had claimed that Lalan ran afoul of Nitish Kumar after he allegedly hatched a conspiracy to dethrone the latter so that Yadav could take over as the chief minister. Lalan has reacted by slapping legal notices on the media outlets concerned and claimed that he relinquished the top party post to focus more on his Lok Sabha constituency. Lalan has also said it was upon his request that Kumar, the JD(U)'s de facto leader, agreed to take over as the party chief. Yadav was also asked about the perception that the JD(U) was running out of patience because competing claims by Mahagathbandhan partners were causing a "delay" in finding a formula for seat-sharing for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

## No question of sparing anyone in gangrape case: Siddaramaiah

PTI ■ HAVERI (KARNATAKA)

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said there was no question of sparing anyone involved in the gangrape of a Muslim woman allegedly by six youth from the same community. Six people allegedly barged into a hotel room and assaulted an inter-faith couple during their stay in Hanagal Taluk of Haveri district on January 8, following which two of them have been arrested. The BJP has accused that attempts are being made to hush up the case. "We have arrested all the accused persons. Investigation is going on. We will not allow anyone to take law into their hands irrespective of the faith and caste they belong to," the Chief Minister told reporters here. Stating that nobody will be allowed to law into their hands, Siddaramaiah said the government will take action as per law. There is no question of sparing anyone, he added. On the question of no one from the government having consoled her or offered any relief, the Chief Minister said he received the application just now and government will consider her plea. Regarding the BJP's demand for setting up a Special Investigation Team (SIT), Siddaramaiah explained that those investigating the case now are police and those who will be part of the SIT will be police only. "Investigations are going on. Let the preliminary investigation report come out. Just because former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai has demanded an SIT



probe we will not form it," the Chief Minister said. He also said there is no question of covering up the case. "Those who perpetrated the crime will face stringent action," Siddaramaiah said. Meanwhile, the 26-year-old survivor alleged that no protection was given to her when she was taken home. She also said that at least two accused whose photographs police showed her were not involved in the crime. The survivor also charged that the police were not investigating the case seriously. According to the survivor, the incident happened on January 8. At 1 pm, she checked into the hotel room with a KSRTC driver aged 40, with whom she has been in a relationship for the past three years, they said.

The entire assault which happened inside the hotel room was filmed by the gang. The videos later became viral after they got circulated on social media platforms, police said. In one of the purported videos, six men could be seen knocking on the door of a room. When a man opens the door, the assailants could be seen barging in and heading towards the woman. The gang verbally abused the couple, assaulted them and filmed the woman while she tried to cover her face with a burqa. Former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Sunday charged that attempts have been made to hush up the moral policing incident in Haveri by offering money to the victim.



## Shinde led Sena moves court against Speaker decision to not disqualify Thackeray faction MLAs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena has moved the Bombay High Court challenging the decision taken by the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker to not disqualify 14 MLAs belonging to the rival faction headed by former CM Uddhav Thackeray. Petitions filed on January 12 by Bharat Gogavale, the chief whip of the ruling Shiv Sena against the 14 MLAs, said they were challenging the "legality, propriety and correctness" of the January 10 order passed by Speaker Rahul Narwekar dismissing the disqualification petitions submitted by him against the rival camp Assembly members. In the petitions, Gogavale maintained the Thackeray group MLAs not only violated the whip but also voluntarily gave up the membership of the Shiv Sena political party by

their acts and omissions following a split in June 2022. The pleas claimed the Speaker had failed to consider that along with giving up the membership, the (Sena-UBT) members also voted against the Shiv Sena-led government in cahoots with the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), thereby seeking to topple the ruling dispensation. As per the HC's website, Gogavale's petitions would be taken up for hearing on January 22. While Gogavale moved the HC on January 12, the Thackeray faction on Monday filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the Speaker's order declaring the Sena group led by Chief Minister Shinde as the "real political party" after its split in June 2022. The Speaker had also rejected the Thackeray faction's plea to disqualify 16 MLAs of the ruling camp, including Shinde.

## Goa murder: AI start up CEO police custody extended by five days

PTI ■ PANAJI

The police custody of AI start up CEO Suchana Seth, accused of killing her four-year-old son, was extended by five days on Monday after a Goa court was told she was not cooperating with the probe. Seth was produced before Goa Children's Court after her initial remand of six days expired. Police told the court it was yet to find the motive of the crime and also needed to confront her with details of the statement provided by her estranged husband Venkat Raman. Seth (39) was arrested from Chitradurga in Karnataka on January 8 while she was travelling in a taxi with the body of her son, who she is alleged to have smothered to death in a Candolim-based service apartment, stuffed in a bag. She was brought back to Goa and a court in Mapusa town had remanded her in police custody for six days. A senior official said she has been completely non-cooperative and continues to deny she killed her son. "She has been confirming all other parts, including that she carried the child's corpse in a bag. But she refuses to confess that she killed him. She repeatedly claims her husband is responsible for the child's death," he said. "We had asked for an extension of her custody as we wanted more time to interrogate her. We have to also conduct other formalities like taking her DNA sample. We are yet to find out the motive behind the killing," he said.

## Pongal celebrated with fervour, Udhayanidhi extends Tamil New Year greetings

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Harvest festival Pongal was celebrated across Tamil Nadu on Monday, with grand festivities ushering in the Tamil month 'Thai'. The famous Avaniapuram jallikattu—the bull-taming festival got underway in Madurai coinciding with the festival. Scores of eager tamers tried to subdue the charging bulls by latching on to their hump. People across the state ushered in the auspicious Tamil month 'Thai', preparing the sweet dish 'Pongal', made of rice and jaggery to symbolise prosperity. Many houses were decorated on the occasion and people attired in new dress celebrated the festival with much joy and fervour. Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi, Chief Minister M K Stalin,



AIADMK general secretary and state Leader of Opposition, Edappadi K Palaniswami, DMK MP Kanimozhi, among others extended their Pongal greetings. In his Pongal greetings, DMK Youth Wing chief and state

Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin also wished a happy "Tamil New Year." "Let the regressive Aryan practices perish and Dravidian equality flourish. Wishing you all a #HappyPongal and Happy Tamil New Year. @astrokiru," he

## Former Mizoram CM says he will soon retire from active politics

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Former Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga on Monday said he will soon retire from active politics because of his age. Zoramthanga, the president of the opposition MNF, said he discussed about it with the party's senior vice president Tawnluia, and they both have decided that the party should continue without them. "We have discussed the matter and we agreed that the party should continue without our presence as both of us have become 80. We have also informed our party leaders about our retirement," he told MNF workers after the party's office in Aizawl was inaugurated. He said that party leaders will soon announce a "new arrangement".



Zoramthanga said that the current term of the MNF office-bearers has already expired, and he and Tawnluia have requested the leadership not to give them new responsibilities. Zoramthanga had on December 5 resigned as the MNF president after the party was defeated in the assembly polls. However, his resignation was rejected by the party's leadership.

MNF lost power in the November 7 elections to ZPM, winning 10 of the 40 seats in the state assembly. Zoramthanga has been holding the post of MNF president since 1990 after the death of Laldenga, who founded the party and spearheaded a secessionist movement from 1966 to 1986. He had joined the underground movement led by the MNF in 1966, and became secretary to the president when the outfit moved its base to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1969. Zoramthanga was made the vice president of MNF in 1979. He has successfully contested assembly polls six times — 1987, 1989, 1993, 1998, 2003 and 2018. He served as the chief minister for three terms — 1998 to 2008 and 2018 to 2023.

## AAP, Congress seal alliance for Chandigarh mayoral polls

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

The AAP and the Congress forged an alliance on Monday for the upcoming Chandigarh mayoral polls. Under the arrangement, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will fight for the mayor's seat while the Congress will contest the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor, senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal said here. The development came amid the two constituents of the INDIA bloc holding talks over seat sharing for this year's Lok Sabha polls. But the state units of both parties in Punjab appear reluctant so far to make any concession to the other side. The Congress and the AAP have been separately claiming that they will win all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab. After announcing the alliance of his party with the AAP for the January 18 polls, Bansal said, "This is the beginning of the end of the BJP's misrule in Chandigarh." Chandigarh Congress president H S Lucky said AAP candidate Kuldeep Kumar Tita will contest the polls for the mayor's post while Congress nominees Gurpreet Singh Gabi and Nirmala Devi will fight for the posts of senior deputy mayor and deputy mayor respectively. Congress candidate Jasbir Bunty has withdrawn his nomination for the mayor's post.




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FIRST COLUMN


CONTRASTS IN GLOBAL ROAD ETIQUETTE

A touch of empathy on the road can enhance the quality of life in cities



SANJAY CHANDRA

It might have been around 1965. One afternoon, returning from the market in Aligarh in my father's jeep, we stopped at a red signal. One car, driven at a very high speed, coming from right to left, jumped the signal. He hit a cyclist, and another man crossing the road on the left side, and possibly a few others as well. I can still remember those who had fallen. But the driver did not stop. This left such an impression on my tender 6-year-old mind, that I fear crossing even a traffic signal that is green for me unless I have fully ascertained that no vehicle is moving in any other direction. Over the years, as I have roamed the globe quite extensively, I have noticed an inherent disregard for traffic rules in the Indian subcontinent, where everyone on the road assumes that only they have the right of way. People in other parts of the world are not so callous. One time we were travelling back from a project site to Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, a drive of more than 500 kilometres. I must have dozed off and woke up with a start when I heard a loud thud. Our vehicle had hit an old man at some speed. As per the sequence narrated to me by colleagues travelling with me, the old man was at fault.



My Indian mind was scared, and as the road was deserted, I am ashamed to recall that I, and probably a few of those sitting in the rear, implored the driver to rush from the spot. Reluctantly he tried to move when out of nowhere the nearby villagers rushed in. Local policemen took us to the village police station for our safety. We requested to be permitted to leave as we had to catch a flight. The local policemen eventually decided to let us go, but with the stipulation that one of them would accompany us to Addis; the driver would then have to return to the village next morning with the policeman for the law to take its course. The local driver was persistent that he should be arrested as he had committed an accident. Another time, I travelled to Switzerland. One early morning we were picked up by our host around six. On a deserted junction, our host cum driver stopped at a red traffic signal even though no vehicles were visible in any direction. We stood there till the light turned green. I have seen vehicles waiting patiently on the crowded Sukhumvit in Bangkok, and even in other cities elsewhere, if even a single pedestrian has stepped onto the zebra to cross the road. No driver would honk impatiently instigating the driver in the front to run over the hapless pedestrian. To me these instances across the globe have been revealing, as I continue to see law being broken with impunity by even the very powerful on our roads. Just a little empathy towards others is what is needed in this fast-paced life!

*(The writer is an engineer and author of three books and a creative writing coach; views are personal)*

# Conservation strategies to protect big cat stripes

The primary threat to India's tiger population is the illegal trade in its body parts; international demand for tiger skin and bones never dries up

The tale of tigers highlights the impact of human activities on wildlife bringing out the urgent need for effective conservation strategies to protect these magnificent creatures and their habitats. The surge in the human population and its impact on all entities, living and nonliving, has led geologists to characterize the current epoch as the Anthropocene. As we navigate through it, we bear the responsibility to ensure that the tiger's roar continues to resonate in our forests. This is especially significant as our country shelters around 3,167 tigers, which is more than 75% of the global tiger population. The Status of Tigers Report released in 2023 by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) shows a 6.7% increase in tiger population over 2018 figures. This promising news, unfortunately, is tinged with concern. The Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) reported a worrying increase in tiger deaths, from 143 in 2022 to 206 in 2023. Disturbingly, the figures for tiger mortality and poaching (including seizures), have also risen from 104 and 39 in 2022 to 150 and 56 in 2023, respectively. The authorities need to be concerned also because as per the NTCA report, the figure of 6.7 percent for 2018-2023 is a significant drop from the 33 percent increase between 2014-2018. Further, there is a decrease in tiger populations in the Western Ghats and the Northeastern hills & Brahmaputra plains from 981 and 219 in 2018 to 824 and 194 in 2023. The primary threat to India's tiger population is the illegal trade in tiger bones, coveted for their use in traditional oriental medicine, and the international trade in tiger skin and body parts. However, it's vital not to let the issue of illegal trade overshadow the grassroots issues contributing to the rise in tiger deaths and slowing population growth. The long-term survival of tigers is influenced by the changing dynamics between humans and these majestic creatures. A global study on large carnivore attacks from 1950 to 2019, analyzing 5,440 incidents, highlights escalating conflicts in areas where human activities overlap with carnivore habitats. This complicates conservation efforts, especially in regions with frequent human attacks. Diverse geographical landscapes present different scenarios due to increasing human populations encroaching into shrinking tiger ranges, co-expansion of human and tiger populations, and areas where they were previously extirpated and are now making a return. The overarching challenge in all these areas is the development of effective systems that promote coexistence between humans and the potentially threatening species. Foresters have an onerous task here! Tiger conservation success largely depends on local communities' attitudes towards cohabitation with them. The incidence of carnivore attacks is intricately tied to the socioeconomic context, with recreational activities in affluent areas and livelihood pursuits in low-income remote regions posing distinct risks. The interplay of socioeconomic and ecological factors shapes a complex dynamic that influences human-tiger interactions. Similarly, deforestation, urbanization, infrastructure development, mining, and farmland expansion are causing habitat fragmentation and encroachment, disrupting tiger habitats and increasing human-tiger encounters which cannot be attributed solely to the tigers. Incidents



THE INCIDENCES OF CARNIVORE ATTACKS IS INTRICATELY TIED TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT, WITH RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN AFFLUENT AREAS AND LIVELIHOOD PURSUITS IN LOW-INCOME REMOTE REGIONS POSING DISTINCT RISKS

of tiger attacks, however, significantly impact public sentiment and require careful and sensitive handling. Of late, escalating encroachments, triggered by unchecked regularizations and illegally recognised forest rights under the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA) in the country are bringing larger human populations into closer contact with wildlife. In Protected Areas, tiger reserves were intended to be set up adhering to scientific and objective standards. Critical Tiger Habitats (CTHs) were intended to counteract the irreversible damage to wildlife from human activities. Critical Wildlife Habitats (CWH) could be created under FRA by modifying forest rights in cases where the co-existence of wildlife and forest dwellers is not possible. While many tiger reserves and CTHs have come into existence under the Wildlife Act, no CWHs appear to have been created under FRA. Rather, there are several tiger reserves wherein ineligible forest rights have been recognized under FRA. It is important to realize that close coexistence triggers anthropogenic changes in both human and wild species' behaviours and results in conflicts that dominate people's lives. Traditional methods of prevention and coexistence are fast diminishing and people are becoming less tolerant while sharing landscapes with tigers. While it is important to use the available legal instruments for conserving tigers and their habitat, preventive measures like expanding protected areas including interstate and trans-border tiger reserves, creating corridors, prioritizing relocation of human communities, improving and restoring habitats, enhancing habitat connectivity, and increasing natural prey availability, are all vital components of a comprehensive strategy to contain tigers within their habitat and prevent potential conflicts and deaths. Decisions favouring habitat heterogeneity, such as mosaic of natural and anthropogenic landscapes cou-

pled with the loss of natural prey do emerge as major drivers behind tiger deaths. The predatory attempts of tigers struggling to survive foster a perception that they are adversaries and need to be eliminated. The arrest of villagers and seizure of a cache of 158 unlicensed single-barrel muzzle loader guns as well as pistols, handguns, long-barrel air guns, gunpowder, handmade bombs and an arms-making unit on the boundary of Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha highlights such perception. In lower-income and rural areas, the majority of attacks occur during work or livelihood activities, such as farming, livestock grazing, fishing, and gathering forest products. Inadequate victim rescue and hospitalization facilities reduce the survival chances of human victims further enhances animosity and triggers poaching. With suburbanization, the carnivores may inadvertently approach houses or parks, drawn even by stray animals and anthropogenic food sources. Lack of prey base makes them food conditioned with alteration in their behaviour. Improper garbage management lack of appreciation of risks and inappropriate human behaviours also contribute to attacks on urban peripheries. With such self-created risk levels, people look towards the forest department to keep them safe from 'their' wildlife! Development of safe behaviour patterns requires dissemination of knowledge about defensive reactions by a tigress with offspring, involuntary sudden encounters, food-related attacks (e.g., when a predator is surprised while defending a carcass), predatory or unprovoked attacks, attacks by wounded or trapped animals, avoidance of provocation, or chasing of wild animals etc. Further, the information that the attacks commonly target children, squatting individuals, and solitary beings including animals can also reduce potential conflicts and help manage human-tiger coexistence across diverse conditions.

The information that deterrence is more challenging in the case of predatory attacks as compared to defensive reactions and that predatory attacks primarily focus on the weakest and smallest individuals is also important for foresters. Notably, research reveals that tiger attacks in the Sundarbans mangrove area (Bay of Bengal) were mostly predatory, while leopard attacks in the Kashmir region exhibited a similar pattern. In contrast, tiger attacks and leopard attacks in other areas of India were predominantly defensive. Such intriguing variations highlight the nuanced dynamics of human-wildlife interactions across different regions and should guide forestry professionals to find practical and sustainable solutions. Foresters today face the challenge of unravelling the roots and complexities surrounding tiger deaths and finding solutions, changing people's mindsets, and ultimately ensuring tiger conservation. Negative attitudes toward tigers built because of anthropogenic biases often intensify and flare up after attacks, emphasizing the importance of proactive measures. With limited resources at their disposal and multiple institutions influencing the relationship between humans and tigers, advocacy, as well as coordination, must also become essential traits of foresters. A professional approach that avoids hasty generalisation underscores the urgent need to carry out research that covers ecological and social contexts along with consideration of external threats posed by poaching as well as the internal challenges within the country's conservation framework. As we stand at this critical juncture, it's important to follow the philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Yes, our planet belongs to all species!


*(The writers are former principal chief conservators of forests, UP and Maharashtra, views are personal)*



# The pragmatic approach to counter international terrorism

The idea that a person labelled as a terrorist by one may be considered a freedom fighter by another, needs to be discarded

The recent events in the Red Sea, involving the targeting of an Israeli ship by Iran-backed Houthi groups, followed by retaliatory actions from Israel, along with airstrikes by the UK and US on Houthi locations in Yemen, have heightened tensions in the region. The support extended by Hamas and Hezbollah to the Houthi group raises concerns about the potential for a significant terrorist threat. Previous Israeli strikes, resulting in the death of IRGC General Sayyed Razi Mousavi and Hamas Deputy Leader Saleh-al-Arouri, added to the delicate situation. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi's efforts to garner support have led to a substantial



SUDHIR HINDWAN

increase in the frequency of attacks. Additionally, the double blasts in Karman, Southern Iran, on January 3, 2024, resulting in over 85 casualties and 290 injuries, have further escalated the volatile situation. The violence is spreading to Lebanon and Syria, with incidents like the use of Sana, the capital of Yemen, for planting explosive

devices at airports in Dubai and Midlands a few years ago. From these recent developments, two key lessons emerge. Firstly, there is a likelihood of a surge in transnational terrorist incidents with far-reaching consequences. Secondly, international terrorism is expanding its influence into sea routes, waterways, international trade, logistics, and economies of targeted nations. The global scenario reflects the ability of modern terrorists to strike accurately at chosen times and locations, signaling the growing influence of terrorism in the political landscape worldwide. Despite increased government efforts, terrorism,



both domestic and international, continues to thrive. To address the West Asia issue, collaborative efforts among nations are crucial. A

robust international mechanism for dealing with transnational terrorism must be in place. Media plays a significant role, as irrespon-

sible and exaggerated coverage can fuel terrorism and reduce moral opposition to counter-terrorism measures. Failure to diagnose and address terrorism early can have severe consequences for nations. The strategies of imposing arms and economic sanctions on so-called rogue nations have been counterproductive, garnering international sympathy for these nations. While a permanent solution remains distant, a mature understanding of terrorism by powerful nations is essential. Effective preparedness programs at the government level are necessary. Understanding the motivations of individuals involved in terrorism, along with a well-thought-out approach

to dealing with incidents and their consequences, is vital. Good intelligence, police work, and collaboration with individuals and groups can significantly contribute to improving security. A high-level intelligence network is crucial to anticipate and counter threats, especially with the increasing nexus between drug smugglers and terrorists. The concept of one man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter must be discarded. Local cooperation with law enforcement, even at personal costs, is essential. Prompt and strict decisions by nations are necessary for psychological control of terrorists. In a changing environment,

security apparatuses and police must diversify activities, bringing together technical and professional expertise. The focus should be on anticipating security needs through specialized courses. Addressing the roots of terrorism and creating general awareness, along with public support against terrorist acts, are essential steps. However, the government's attempt to delegate judgment to police and armed forces must be balanced to avoid diluting benefits and impeding peace and negotiation.

*(The wrtier is recipient of Bharat Gaurav and Rastriya Gaurav Award is a professor and an expert of strategic affairs, views are personal)*



# Missile strikes US-owned vessel off Yemen

AP ■ JERUSALEM

A missile fired from Yemen struck a US-owned ship just off the coast of Yemen in the Gulf of Aden, less than a day after Yemen's Houthi rebels fired an anti-ship cruise missile toward an American destroyer in the Red Sea, officials said.

Suspicion immediately fell on the Iranian-backed Houthis, though the rebels did not immediately acknowledge carrying out the assault on the Gibraltar Eagle. It marked the latest attack roiling global shipping amid Israel's war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Houthis have targeted that crucial corridor linking Asian and Mideast energy and cargo shipments to the Suez Canal onward to Europe over the war, attacks that threaten to widen that conflict into a regional conflagration.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which oversees Mideast waters, said Monday's attack happened some 110 miles (177 kilometers) miles southeast of Aden. It said the ship's captain reported that the "port side of vessel hit from

above by a missile".Private security firms Ambrey and Dryad Global told The Associated Press that the vessel was the Eagle Gibraltar, a Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier.

The ship is owned by Eagle Bulk, a Stamford, Connecticut-based firm traded on the New York Stock Exchange. The firm did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Satellite-tracking data analysed by the AP showed the Eagle Gibraltar had been bound for the Suez Canal, but rapidly turned around at the time of the attack.

The US Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Yemen's Houthi rebels did not acknowledge any attack, though they have fired missiles previously in that area. Sunday's attack toward the American warship also marked the first US-acknowledged fire by the Houthis since America and allied nations began strikes Friday on the rebels following weeks of assaults on shipping in the Red Sea.It wasn't presently clear whether the US would retaliate for the latest attacks,

though President Joe Biden has said he "will not hesitate to direct further measures to protect our people and the free flow of international commerce as necessary".

The Houthi fire on Sunday went in the direction of the USS Laboon, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer operating in the southern reaches of the Red Sea, the US military's Central Command said in a statement.

The Houthis did not immediately acknowledge that attack either. The missile came from near Hodeida, a Red Sea port city long held by the Houthis, the US said.

"An anti-ship cruise missile was fired from Iranian-backed Houthi militant areas of Yemen toward USS Laboon," Central Command said. "There were no injuries or damage reported."The first day of US-led strikes Friday hit 28 locations and struck more than 60 targets with cruise missiles and bombs launched by fighter jets, warships and a submarine. Sites hit included weapon depots, radars and command centres, including in remote mountain areas, the US has said.

## Sunak to face UK lawmakers

AP ■ LONDON

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was due to face Parliament Monday to explain why the UK joined the US in striking Houthi targets in Yemen — and why British lawmakers did not get a say on the military action. Four Royal Air Force Typhoon jets took part in last week's US-led strikes on sites used by the Iran-backed rebels, who have been attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea. The US says Friday's strikes hit Houthi weapons depots, radar facilities and command centres.

The Houthis say they have targeted ships linked to Israel in response to the war in Gaza. But they have frequently attacked vessels with no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.US forces carried out another strike Saturday on a Houthi radar site. British Defence Secretary Grant Shapps said Monday that Friday's strikes had been



intended "as a single action" rather than part of a campaign, but did not rule out UK participation in further military strikes."We will now monitor very carefully to see what (the Houthis) do next, how they respond and we will see from there," he said.

Keir Starmer, leader of Britain's main opposition Labour Party, said he supported last week's strikes but expects more openness from the government in future.

"If the government is proposing further action, then it should say so and set out the case, and we're going to have to consider that on a case-by-case basis on the merits," he said.

The smaller opposition Liberal Democrats accused the government of "riding roughshod over a democratic convention" that Parliament should get a vote on military action. "For Rishi Sunak to attempt to ignore elected representatives is disgraceful," Liberal Democrat defense spokesman Richard Foord said.

Sunak's government is facing mounting demands on Britain's ever-shrinking military in an increasingly volatile world. Hours after the strikes on the Houthis, Sunak was in Kyiv, where he announced a further 2.5 billion pounds (\$3.2 billion) in military aid to Ukraine and signed a long-term security agreement with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

## Arevalo sworn in as Guatemala's Prez

AP ■ GUATEMALA CITY

Bernardo Arevalo was sworn in as Guatemala's president on Monday minutes after midnight despite months of efforts to derail his inauguration, including foot-dragging and rising tensions right up until the transfer of power. Arevalo arrives in the presidency after winning August's elections by a comfortable margin. But nothing has been straightforward since, with Attorney General Consuelo Porras and the establishment forces observers say she represents throwing one legal challenge after another at Arevalo and his party.

Despite hundreds of Arevalo's supporters pressuring lawmakers to follow the constitution, even clashing with riot police outside the congress building on Sunday, the inauguration process dragged for hours into the night before he took the oath of office just past midnight.

A progressive academic-turned-politician and son of a Guatemalan president credited with implementing key social reforms in the mid-20th century, Arevalo takes office with expectations of confronting Guatemala's entrenched corruption. But it will not be easy. He has little support in congress and Porras' term as the country's top law enforcement official extends to 2026, though Arevalo has said one of his first orders of business will be to request her resignation.

Supporters had been waiting hours for a festive inauguration celebration in Guatemala City's emblematic Plaza de la Constitucion and were fed up with yet another delay, sweeping police roughly out of their way before gathering outside congress demanding legislators stop delaying and name the delegation that must attend the ceremony.

"If they don't swear him in, we, the people, will swear him in," said one of the demonstrators, Dina Juc, the mayor of the indigenous village of Utatlan Solola. The inauguration was thus tinged by legal wrangling and tensions, just like almost every day since Arevalo's resounding August 20 elec-



tion victory. Congress, which was supposed to attend the inauguration as a special session of the legislature, engaged in bitter infighting over who to recognise as part of the congressional delegation, as members yelled at each other.

The leadership commission tasked with doing that was packed with old-guard opponents of Arevalo, and the delay was seen as a tactic to draw out the inauguration and weaken Arevalo.

"The commission is taking too long to review (legislators') credentials, and they are demanding requirements that aren't even in the law," said Román Castellanos, a congressman from Arevalo's Seed Movement.

Arevalo wrote in his social media accounts that "they are trying to damage democracy with illegalities, inconsequential details and abuses of power."

Samantha Power, administrator of the US Agency for International Development, representing the Biden administration at the inauguration, said via X: "There is no question that Bernardo Arevalo is the President of Guatemala. We call on all sides to remain calm — and for the Guatemalan Congress to uphold the will of the people. The world is watching."

Luis Almagro, secretary general of the Organization of American States, said in the name of the foreign delegations attending the inauguration that the congress must transfer power to Arevalo and respect the will of the people expressed in the elections.

## 'Gaza needs more aid'

Rafah (Gaza Strip) (AP): Gaza urgently needs more aid or its desperate population will suffer widespread famine and disease, the heads of three major UN agencies warned Monday, as authorities in the enclave reported that the death toll in the Israel-Hamas war had surpassed 24,000.

While the UN agency chiefs did not directly point a finger at Israel, they said aid delivery is hobbled by the opening of too few border crossings, a slow vetting process for trucks and goods going into Gaza, and continuing fighting throughout the territory — all of which Israel plays a deciding factor in.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, sparked by the militant group's Oct 7 attack on southern Israel, has prompted unprecedented destruction in the tiny coastal enclave and triggered a humanitarian catastrophe that has displaced most of Gaza's 2.3 million population and pushed more than a quarter into starvation, according to the UN.

Civilians have become desperate. Video posted Monday to X by Al Jazeera showed hundreds of people rushing toward what appeared to be an aid truck in what the news outlet said was Gaza City. The Associated Press could not immediately independently verify the video and it was not clear when the video was filmed.

A day after the White House said it was time for Israel to scale back its military offensive, the World Food Programme, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation said new entry routes need to be opened to Gaza, more trucks need to be allowed in each day, and aid workers and those seeking aid need to be allowed to move around safely."People in Gaza risk dying of hunger just miles from trucks filled with food," said WFP Executive Director Cindy McCain. "Every hour lost puts countless lives at risk." The Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said Monday that the bodies of 132 people killed in Israeli strikes were brought to Gaza hospitals over the past day, raising the death toll from the start of the war to 24,100.

## Not interested in being vice-president: Haley

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-American senior Republican Party leader Nikki Haley, the lone woman in the party's presidential race, has said she is not interested in being the vice-president, asserting that she's running to be the next US president and is contending "to win".Haley's remarks came ahead of the Iowa caucuses on Monday, which formally kicks off the beginning of the long process by which the Republicans and Democrats choose their nominees for the presidential election on November 5.

Replying to a question about how she felt about some voters saying they would prefer her as a vice president rather than a president, the 51-year-old former US Ambassador to the UN said, "I don't play for a second. I've never played for a second. I'm not going to start now."

"I'm not interested in being vice president. I'm running to be president, and I'm running



to win, and we will," the former South Carolina governor said in a CBS News interview.

With the Republican contest to choose the nominee for the November 2024 presidential elections beginning on Monday with the Iowa caucus, former president Donald Trump, a front-runner among the party candidates, maintains a sizable lead over Haley, his nearest rival.

According to the latest Des Moines Register/NBC News/Mediacom Iowa Poll, 48 per cent of likely Republican caucusgoers pick Trump, 77, as their first choice for president — a slight dip from the 51 per cent who said the same in December.

Haley has the support of 20 per cent, an increase of four per cent, while Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

slipped to third place with 16 per cent. Vivek Ramaswamy, another India-American in the race, though still in the race, has now fallen back, and experts don't see much hope for the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur during the primary season beginning on Monday.

On being pressed further on what she would say to voters who like her for vice president but who are still backing Trump, the lone woman in the party's presidential race said, "Well, I think look, if you want four more years of chaos, that's what you're gonna get."

"But what's more concerning is, you look at those head-to-head polls, Trump and Biden are pretty much even. It's going to be a nail-biter of an election. We're going to be holding our breath — I don't want a President Kamala Harris," The Hill newspaper quoted her as saying.

On Sunday, the Indian-American politician said that the Republican contest to

choose the presidential nominee is going to be a two-person race between her and Trump.

"What you're going to see is this is quickly going to become a two-person race. I think it's going to be me and Donald Trump going into New Hampshire. And you're going to see it's already close. It's going to get even closer. And then we're going to take it to my state in South Carolina," Haley told Fox News in an interview on Sunday. Haley's popularity rating has increased in the last couple of weeks, with many experts now believing she is a viable candidate against popular Trump.

"This is going to be definitely an election with two people going into New Hampshire and then into South Carolina.

And so we'll take him on. If he chooses not to debate, that's his plan. But we're going to fight this until the very end. We very much see a path," she said.

## Ramaswamy ruled out as ex-US prez running mate

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump's top adviser Dhas ruled out Vivek Ramaswamy as the ex-US president's running mate after the Republican frontrunner publicly criticised the Indian-American presidential candidate ahead of the Iowa caucus. The Iowa caucuses, which begin on Monday, formally kick off the beginning of the long process by which the Republicans and Democrats choose their nominees for the presidential election on November 5.

Trump's top adviser, Jason Miller, told the New York Post that voters could "probably" rule out 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur Ramaswamy as the ex-president's running mate. "Pretty safe to say it won't be Vivek," Miller was quoted as saying in the report. On Saturday, Trump, 77, lashed out at Ramaswamy, who is



most closely aligned with him in the race for the Republican nomination, accusing him of "deceitful campaign tricks".

The former president's criticism stemmed from shirts that Ramaswamy's campaign is handing out that say "Save Trump, Vote Vivek" on them. Ramaswamy posted a photo with a group of young men wearing them after his event in Rock Rapids, Iowa, on Saturday, which caught the former president's attention.

"Vivek started his cam-

paign as a great supporter, 'the best President in generations,' etc. Unfortunately, now all he does is disguise his support in the form of deceitful campaign tricks," Trump wrote on Truth Social on Saturday. "Very sly, but a vote for Vivek is a vote for the 'other side' — don't get duped by this. Vote for 'TRUMP, don't waste your vote! Vivek is not MAGA," he added.

The criticism marks the first time Trump and his team have made direct, public attacks against Ramaswamy. Until now, Trump has largely avoided criticising Ramaswamy due to his strong praise and defence of the former president. However, the criticisms come as voters will start making their voices heard in the first-in-the-nation caucuses on Monday and as Ramaswamy has started to become more direct in laying out the case for why he is the Trump alternative, ABC News said.

## Trump's grip on Republican politics is put to test in Iowa

AP ■ DES MOINES

Voting is set to begin on Monday night in icy Iowa as former President Donald Trump eyes a victory that would send a resounding message that neither life-threatening cold nor life-changing legal trouble can slow his march toward the Republican Party's 2024 nomination.

The Iowa caucuses, which are the opening contest in the months-long Republican presidential primary process, begin at 8 p.m. EST. Caucus participants will gather inside more than 1,500 schools, churches and community centres to debate their options, in some cases for hours, before casting secret ballots.

While Trump projects confidence, his onetime chief rival, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, is fighting for his political survival



in a make-or-break race for second place. Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, the only woman in the race, stands in DeSantis' way. The two have competed aggressively in recent weeks to emerge as the clear alternative to the former president, who has alienated many Americans and could end up being a convicted felon by year's end. "I absolutely love a lot of the things (Trump) did, but his personality is just kind

of getting in his way," said Hans Rudin, a 49-year-old community college adviser from Council Bluffs, Iowa. He said he supported Trump in the past two elections, but will caucus for DeSantis on Monday.

Polls suggest Trump enters the day with a massive lead in Iowa as Haley and DeSantis duel for a distant second. Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy and former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson are also on the ballot, as is former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who suspended his campaign last week.

With the coldest temperatures in caucus history expected and dangerous travel conditions in virtually every corner of the rural state, the campaigns are bracing for a low-turnout contest that will test the strength of their support and their organisational muscle.

## Canada may put cap on number of international students

Ottawa (PTI): Canada is looking at the possibility of putting a cap on the number of international students to help reduce the surge in demand for housing and fix the system that has gone out of control, Immigration Minister Marc Miller has said, a move that is likely to affect Indian students.

The remarks by Miller came on Sunday as the federal government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau faced criticism for welcoming an increasing number of immigrants — both permanent and temporary residents — while the country faces an acute housing shortage.In an interview with CTV News, Miller said the federal government will need to have talks with provincial governments "to make sure that the provinces that have not been doing their jobs actually rein in those numbers on a pure volume basis." "That volume is disconcerting," Miller said, in reference to the number of international students in Canada. "It's really a system that has gotten out of control."A cap on international students would not be a "one-size-fits-all solution" to housing shortages across Canada, Miller noted.

But he did not reveal the size of the reduction the government is planning on making. India was the first among the top ten origin countries of study permit holders in 2022 in Canada, with a total of 319,000 students. Meanwhile, new reporting by The Canadian Press news agency — citing internal documents obtained through an access to information request — shows the federal government was warned by public servants two years ago that its ambitious immigration targets could jeopardise housing affordability.

## 'It's right time' for Israel to scale back Gaza war as fighting hits 100 days

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The White House said on Sunday that "it's the right time" for Israel to scale back its military offensive in the Gaza Strip, as Israeli leaders again vowed to press ahead with their operation against the territory's ruling Hamas militant group. The comments exposed the growing differences between the close allies on the 100th day of the war. Also Sunday, Israeli warplanes struck targets in Lebanon following a Hezbollah missile attack that killed two Israeli civilians — an older woman and her adult son — in northern Israel. The exchange of fire underscored concerns that the Gaza violence could trigger wider fighting across the



region. The war in Gaza, launched by Israel in response to the unprecedented October 7 attack by Hamas, has killed

from their homes and pushed a quarter of the population into starvation. Speaking on CBS, White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the US has been speaking to Israel "about a transition to low-intensity operations" in Gaza. "We believe it's the right time for that transition. And we're talking to them about doing that," he said on "Face the Nation."

Israel launched the offensive after the Hamas attack killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 others hostage.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead until Hamas is destroyed and all of the more than 100 hostages still in captivity are freed.

## Arctic freeze continues to blast huge swaths of US with sub-zero temp

AP ■ PORTLAND

A dangerous Arctic blast will continue sweeping across the US on Monday and linger through at least midweek, prolonging a bitter cold that set record-low temperatures in parts of the country and threatens to further disrupt daily life, including an NFL playoff game and the first-in-the-nation presidential nominating contest in Iowa.

The National Weather Service said wind chills are expected to push temperatures 30 degrees below zero from the Northern Rockies to northern Kansas and into Iowa, testing the hardness of caucus-goers willing to brave the deep chill on Monday. "You can't sit home," former President

Donald Trump told supporters Sunday. "If you're sick as a dog, you say, Darling, I gotta make it! Even if you vote and then pass away, it's worth it."

Arctic storms left at least four dead and knocked out electricity to tens of thousands in the Northwest, brought snow to the South and walloped the Northeast with blizzard conditions forcing the postponement of the Pittsburgh Steelers vs Buffalo Bills NFL playoff game hosted in bone-chilling Buffalo, New York.

The game was scheduled to be held Monday after being cancelled Sunday. New York Gov Kathy Hochul, a Buffalo native, posted a video on X, formerly known as Twitter, showing near-whiteout conditions. "Conditions right now in

Orchard Park, where the game would have started moments ago," she wrote early Sunday afternoon. "No visibility and dangerously high winds."

The Bills invited diehard fans to help dig out snow-filled Highmark Stadium, offering \$20 an hour for their labour.

"We made progress shoveling, but not much at all," said Logan Eschrich, a storm chaser who made his way to Buffalo and pitched in.

It remains to be seen if the show will go on Monday afternoon. The weather service expects heavy lake-effect snow to push into upstate New York from Lake Erie, adding to the 1 to 2 feet (30.4 to 60.9 cm) of snow already blanketing the region. Snow fell at a rate of 2 inches (5 cm) per hour.



# China fully backs sovereignty of Maldives, says Muizzu

PTI ■ MALE/BEIJING

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has praised his country's strategic relationship with China, saying the two countries respect each other and Beijing fully supports the Indian Ocean island's sovereignty. Muizzu's comments came amid an unease in the Maldives' bilateral ties with India after he took office in November last year.

Muizzu, who returned to the Maldives on Saturday after a high-profile state visit to Beijing at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, noted that China has provided assistance to the development of the Maldives since establishing diplomatic relations in 1972. During his just-concluded visit to China, Muizzu, regarded as a pro-China leader, sought to align Maldives closer to Beijing and both countries elevated their ties to a strategic partnership. He also said China's Belt and Road Initiative has taken bilateral relations to a new level. China is not a country that would interfere with the internal affairs of the Maldives, which is why the two countries have a strong relationship, Muizzu was quoted as saying in an interview with China's state-

run CGTN channel.

He added that the Maldives and China respect each other, and China fully supports Maldives' sovereignty. The President expressed his belief that the China-Maldives relations will continue to grow stronger in the future, the official PSM News quoted him as saying in the interview. He also said his Chinese counterpart President Xi puts the interest of citizens first and that China's economy has reached new heights under his leadership.

He added President Xi has assured him that the Chinese government will help the Maldives achieve its goals. President Muizzu said his vision involves strengthening the economy of the Maldives and bringing progress in accordance with the expectations of the people. He also said he wants to transform the Maldives into a country that works in harmony with other developed countries within the framework of his vision. His remarks came amid a row between the Maldives and India over derogatory comments posted by three deputy ministers of the Muizzu government against Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading to a diplomatic row with India. Muizzu suspended the three

ministers after their social media postings, which stirred concern in India and calls for a boycott by Indian tourists who ranked highest in numbers followed by Russia. Chinese tourists figured third.

Muizzu has also asked India to withdraw its military personnel from his country by March 15. According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives to help operate a Dornier aircraft and two helicopters provided by India. Speaking to the press on Saturday after returning from China, President Muizzu indirectly attacked India.

Without naming any country, he said, "We may be small, but that doesn't give you the license to bully us." He also announced plans to reduce the country's dependency on India, including securing imports of essential food commodities and medicine and consumables from other countries.

"We aren't in anyone's backyard. We are an independent and sovereign state," he said, addressing the reporters gathered at the Velana International Airport. He said that no country has the right to exert influence over the domestic affairs of a country, regardless of its size.

He vowed that he would not allow any external influence on the domestic affairs of the Maldives.

Male is also reviewing more than 100 bilateral agreements with New Delhi signed by the previous government here. Meanwhile, the government of Maldives has issued a statement, firmly backing China on the of Taiwan.

China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force. The victory of Lai Ching-te in Saturday's presidential election is considered a setback for China's efforts to bring Taiwan under its control. His Democratic Progressive Party advocates maintaining the status quo on the issue of reunification.

"The Maldives is firmly committed to the one-China principle, which remains the bedrock of the Maldives relations with China," the foreign ministry said in a press release. The Maldives opposes "any statement or action that undermines China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, opposes all "Taiwan independence" separatist activities, and will not develop any form of official relations with Taiwan," according to the statement.

# Ukraine shoots down 2 Russian command and control aircraft

AP ■ KYIV

The Ukrainian air force shot down a Russian early warning and control plane that can spot targets up to 650 kilometers (400 miles) away and a key command centre aircraft that relays information to troops on the ground in a significant blow for the Kremlin's forces, Ukraine's military chief said on Monday. The planes are fundamental tools in helping orchestrate Russian battlefield movements in Ukraine. Shooting them down, if confirmed, would be a landmark feat for Ukraine in the almost two-year war, as fighting along the front line is largely bogged down in trench and artillery warfare. Russia has largely ensured its air dominance during the war, as Ukraine fights with its fleet of Soviet-era warplanes against Moscow's more modern aircraft.

Gen Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, didn't say how the two aircraft — a Beriev A-50 and an Il-22 — were brought down, but Ukraine has received sophisticated air defence systems from its Western allies.

Zaluzhnyi also did not say where the interceptions occurred, though he attached a video to his social media post



Switzerland's Foreign Minister Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, left, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sit in a helicopter of the Swiss Air Force after Zelenskyy's arrival at Zurich's Kloten airport, Switzerland on Monday.

with an airplane tracker showing two targets disappearing above the Azov Sea, which lies between Ukraine and Russia, north of the Crimea Peninsula and the Black Sea. There was no immediate official comment from Moscow. Russian war bloggers said both planes had come under friendly fire, though they presented no evidence of that. They claimed the Il-22 was damaged but made a successful landing.

The A-50, which is topped with a large radar, typically carries a crew of 15. The Russian air force reportedly has been operating a fleet of nine such aircraft. A February 2023 drone

attack at an airfield in Belarus damaged a parked A-50, but Russian and Belarusian officials described the damage as minor.

The Il-22 is an airborne command post. It oversees military operations and sends radio signals to troops on the front line. The Russian air force reportedly has a dozen such planes. Ukraine is eager to impress its Western supporters with its ability in deploying the advanced weapons it has received. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to meet Swiss President Viola Amherd in Bern later Monday before attending the World Economic Forum in Davos on

Tuesday. Ukrainian officials are striving to keep world attention on the war amid concerns that the conflict is slipping down the list of global priorities. The United Nations appealed on Monday for USD 4.2 billion to help people in Ukraine and displaced outside the country this year.

Martin Griffiths, the UN's humanitarian chief, acknowledged that "the competition for funding is getting greater" because of crises elsewhere, including the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Russia, meanwhile, was looking to deepen its ties with North Korea, whose foreign minister began a three-day visit to Moscow on Monday.

The Kremlin is eager to replenish its weapons stockpiles. It has in recent times turned to Iran and North Korea for supplies.

Pyeongyang has likely supplied several types of missiles to Russia to support its war in Ukraine, along with its widely reported shipments of ammunition and shells, the US and its allies have alleged. Russian and Iranian defense and foreign ministers spoke by phone on Monday to discuss bilateral military and military technical cooperation and regional security issues, according to official statements.

# North Korea tests solid-fuel missile tipped with hypersonic weapon

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Monday said it flight-tested a new solid-fuel intermediate-range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead as it pursues more powerful, harder-to-detect weapons designed to strike remote US targets in the region.

The report by North Korea's state media came a day after the South Korean and Japanese militaries detected the launch from a site near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, in what was the North's first ballistic test of 2024. The launch came two months after North Korea said it successfully tested engines for a new solid-fuel intermediate-range missile, which reflected a push to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in

Guam and Japan. The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Sunday's launch was aimed at verifying the reliability of the missile's solid-fuel engines and the maneuverable flight capabilities of the hypersonic warhead. It described the test as a success but didn't provide flight details. KCNA did not mention whether North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was present at the test, which it said was part of the country's regular weapons development activities. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The North's existing intermediate-range missiles, including the Hwasong-12 that may be able to reach the US military hub of

Guam in the Pacific, are powered by liquid-fuel engines, which need to be fueled before launch and cannot stay fueled for long periods of time.

Missiles with built-in solid propellants can be made ready to launch faster and are easier to move and conceal, which theoretically makes it harder for adversaries to detect and preempt the launch. The North since 2021 has also been testing hypersonic weapons, which are designed to exceed five times the speed of sound. If perfected, such systems could potentially pose a challenge to regional missile defense systems because of their speed and maneuverability.

Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at South Korea's Research Institute for National Strategy, said the test Sunday



This photo provided by the North Korean government, shows what it says a flight test of a new solid-fuel intermediate-range in North Korea Sunday. Independent journalists were not given access to cover the event depicted in this image distributed by the North Korean government. The content of this image is as provided and cannot be independently verified. Korean language watermark on image as provided by source reads: "KCNA" which is the abbreviation for Korean Central News Agency.

would have been focused more on developing a solid-fuel first stage for an IRBM than evaluating the purported hypersonic warhead. Experts say it's unclear whether the North's hypersonic vehicles consistently maintained a desired speed exceeding Mach 5 during its tests in 2021 and 2022. But it's likely that the North is trying to build a hypersonic weapons system powered by solid-fuel booster rockets, simultaneously with its efforts to develop the new IRBM, and may conduct more flight tests soon, Chang said. "In particular, a hypersonic missile with IRBM-level range would be an effective mean for evading US missile defenses and striking Guam," Chang said about the North's ambitions. Lee Sung Joon, spokesperson of South Korea's Joint Chiefs

of Staff, said the military was analyzing the North's latest test but declined to provide specific assessments about the North Korean capabilities demonstrated by the launch.

The South's Defense Ministry issued a statement demanding the North to halt its ballistic testing activities that violate UN Security Council resolutions. It said the South Korean military was maintaining a firm joint defense posture with its US allies and is ready to respond "overwhelmingly" in the event of a direct provocation by the North.

Hypersonic weapons were part of a wish-list of sophisticated military assets Kim unveiled in 2021, along with multi-warhead missiles, spy satellites, solid-fuel long-range missiles and submarine-launched

nuclear missiles.

North Korean military scientists and engineers have been checking off Kim's list of goals, testing for the first time last year a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile, named Hwasong-18, which added to the North's arsenal of weapons targeting the US mainland.

The North's also launched its first military reconnaissance satellite in November and aims to launch three more satellites in 2024, as Kim describes those devices as crucial for monitoring US and South Korean military activities and enhancing the threat of his nuclear-capable missiles.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula are at their highest point in years after Kim in recent months ramped up his weapons demonstrations.

# Feb 8 polls can't be postponed: Pak EC tells Senate

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's election commission on Monday rejected a resolution passed by the Senate earlier this month seeking a delay in the February 8 general election, stating that all arrangements have been completed and it won't be "advisable" to put off the planned polls.

On January 5, the upper House of Parliament passed a non-binding resolution seeking a delay in the general election, citing cold weather and security concerns, increasing the political uncertainty in the country. The resolution, tabled by independent Senator Dilawar Khan, received overwhelming support in the Senate but was slammed as "unconstitutional" by major political parties. It was passed with only 14 lawmakers out of the Senate's 100 members in attendance.

In the statement on Monday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said that it deliberated on the resolution and observed that caretaker federal and provincial governments had been issued directions for "beefing up security matrix" and providing a "congenial environment to the electorate" for peaceful elections. The top electoral body said it had made all the necessary arrangements regarding the conduct of general elections, adding that it had also submitted a commitment to the Supreme Court to hold elections on February 8, 2024, the Dawn newspaper reported.

"Likewise, It would not be out of place to mention here that in the past, general elections and local government elections have been held in (the) winter season," it said.

The letter said that it would not be "advisable" for the ECP to postpone general elections "at this stage," according to the

report. Meanwhile, lawmaker Khan wrote a letter to Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani on Monday, saying that it was "disconcerting" that no "tangible steps" had been taken by the election commission to delay the general elections despite the passage of the resolution tabled by him in the Parliament's upper House.

Asserting that the resolution "aptly reflected the collective aspirations of the House," Dilawar said, "However, despite the Senate's explicit urging and the subsequent dispatch of a copy of the resolution to the ECP, it is disconcerting that no tangible steps have been taken by the ECP to postpone the general elections scheduled for February 8."

Dilawar said that as the mover of the resolution, he "firmly believed" that the concerns articulated in the motion must be promptly addressed. "It is imperative that we ascertain the progress made and ensure the postponement of the general elections scheduled for February 8, thereby facilitating the effective participation of people from all areas of Pakistan and across the entire political spectrum in the electioneering process," Dilawar was quoted as saying by the report. The non-binding resolution tabled by Dilawar was rejected by major political parties, which stated that further deferring the electoral process would be "unconstitutional".

A counter resolution was submitted in the Senate by Senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan, emphasising the need to adhere to "constitutional requirements" and ensure the timely conduct of the polls.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) unanimously filed a requisition for the Senate session for timely polls last week.

# PTI to participate in elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE

The embattled Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's top leader Barrister Gohar Khan on Monday said his party would not boycott the February 8 election despite being forced to contest without its cricket bat poll symbol. Gohar's statement came just days after the PTI party was deprived of its iconic electoral symbol cricket bat and left with no option but to field its candidates as independents for the polls.

"We won't boycott the elections and God willing fully participate in them," Gohar said, adding that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party would issue a list of supported candidates with their respective electoral symbols within three days. A three-member panel of the Supreme Court in its judgment on late Saturday upheld the decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) that in its ruling of December 22 had declared the PTI's intra-

party polls as "unconstitutional" and revoked its poll symbol. Speaking to the media outside the Adiala jail said the apex court's verdict had affected the fundamental rights of the people of Pakistan and it was a "conspiracy against democracy." He also said the party would file a review petition against the judgment, noting that a five-member apex court bench should have heard the matter as the case concerned Article 17 of the Constitution.

When asked about his interaction with the PTI founder Imran Khan, who has been confined in the Adiala jail, Gohar said Khan's message for all party supporters is: "Ghabrana nahi hay [don't worry], remain steadfast and peaceful. Protect your vote and exercise your right on February 8." Separately, the PTI withdrew its plea seeking contempt proceedings against the ECP for allegedly not implementing the apex court's orders of providing the party with a level play-

ing field for the upcoming general elections. The plea was filed on December 26 and the case was being heard by a three-member bench.

PTI A 'TERRORIST PARTY': MARYAM

Senior PML-N leader and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's daughter Maryam Nawaz on Monday said that Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party was deprived of its cricket bat election symbol because it is a "terrorist party". Addressing the maiden election rally of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party in Okara city, some 125 km from Lahore, Maryam fully supported Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa's decision to deprive the PTI of its iconic election symbol.

"The Supreme Court has rightly taken away 'bat' from you (Imran Khan) as a terrorist party cannot be allocated an election symbol," she said.

# Iran sentences imprisoned Nobel laureate to additional prison term

AP ■ DUBAI

A court in Iran has slapped imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi with an additional sentence of 15 months for allegedly spreading propaganda against the Islamic Republic, her family said on Monday. According to a post on Instagram by Mohammadi's family, the new sentence was handed down on December 19. It said Mohammadi had refused to attend the court sessions. The verdict also said that after serving her time, Mohammadi would be banned from travelling abroad for two years and would be barred from membership in political and social groups and from having a mobile phone for the same duration.

The ruling also banishes her from the capital, Tehran, meaning she would likely have to serve the new sentence in another province in Iran. Mohammadi is held in Tehran's notorious Evin Prison where she is serving a 30-month sentence for spreading propaganda against the ruling system, disobediences in prison and defamation of authorities. The latest verdict reflects the Iranian theocracy's anger that she was awarded the Nobel prize last October for years of activism despite a decadeslong government campaign targeting her.

Mohammadi is the 19th woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize and the second Iranian woman after human rights activist Shirin Ebadi in 2003. The 51-year-old Mohammadi has kept up her activism despite numerous arrests by

Iranian authorities and spending years behind bars. Earlier in November, Mohammadi went on hunger strike over being blocked along with other inmates from getting medical care and to protest the country's mandatory headscarves for women. Mohammadi was a leading light for nationwide, women-led protests sparked by the death last year of a 22-year-old woman in police custody that have grown into one of the most intense challenges to Iran's theocratic government. That woman, Mahsa Amini, had been detained for allegedly not wearing her headscarf to the liking of authorities.

For observant Muslim women, the head covering is a sign of piety before God and modesty in front of men outside their families.

## IMF team overseeing SL bailout programme visits Jaffna

Colombo (PTI): A team of senior IMF officials overseeing Sri Lanka's bailout programme has toured the Tamil-dominated Northern district of Jaffna for the 2.9 time under the current USD 2.1 billion agreement, officials said here on Monday. Led by Peter Brueur, the International Monetary Fund senior mission chief for Sri Lanka, the team last week met with the Governor of the Northern province, PMS Charles, and other senior officials and discussed issues related to economic growth in the province, demining programmes, resettlement of conflict-displaced individuals and compensation for conflict victims.

They also discussed the educational matters related to Jaffna University, post-

COVID operations, and the adverse effects of climate change on the northern region, the officials said. The team, which returned to Colombo on Monday, is scheduled to engage with the finance ministry. Talks are expected with Shehan Semasinghe, the state minister of finance, who leads the local IMF engagement under President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The discussions in Colombo are anticipated to focus on the targets outlined in the current IMF programme, which advocates large scale economic reforms in the island nation.

In a meeting with President Wickremesinghe on Thursday last, Brueur had expressed satisfaction with

Sri Lanka's progress in implementing reforms aimed at revitalising the economy.

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1.	<b>For Verka Bathinda Dairy</b> Hiring the outsource Agency (service Provider) for providing Manpower (unskilled/semi-skilled/skilled/highly skilled & other categories) at Verka Bathinda Dairy.	01-04-2024 to 31-03-2026
2.	<b>For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy</b> a) Hiring of insulated Road Milk Tankers for transportation of :- i. Milk from BMCs/MCCs to Verka Gurdaspur Dairy Capacity -10MT. ii. Milk from Verka Gurdaspur Dairy to other milk unions (vice- versa) within and outside state.Capacity 15 MT, 20 MT. b) Hiring of power Plant for conversion of skimmed milk into SMP (Skimmed Milk Power) c) Supply of fresh cut fire wood.	04 03 01 No's
3.	<b>For Verka Ludhiana Dairy</b> a) Outsourcing of various activities of city supply dispatch dock. b) invited for sale of the unserviceable material.	One year with extension upto 3 months. One Time Basis
4.	<b>For Verka Amritsar Dairy</b> <b>Sealed tender for :-</b> a) Allotment of Verka milk booth through Draw System at :- i. Civil hospital Fatehgarh Churian. ii. Civil Hospital Majtha. iii. Govt. Bhai Dharam singh Memorial hospital, Ranjit Avenue iv. Primary Health Centre, Naushera. v. DTO Office Amritsar. b) Hiring of vehicles for supply of fresh milk and milk products on cash & carry basis at vaitcha and surrounding areas (Distance Approx 200 km.	05 01
5.	<b>For Verka Jalandhar Dairy</b> a) Steam Coal having calorific value not less than 5500 kcal/kg. b) The transportation of LSHS Premium & LDO from Panipat, Mathura & Hissar refinery to Milk Plant Jalandhar.	1500 MT (400-500 MT per month) Annual
6.	<b>For Verka Mega Dairy, Bassi Pathana</b> Engaging of outsource agency for providing un-skilled/semi-skilled/skilled/highly-skilled and other post against manpower at Verka Mega Dairy Bassi Pathana.	Annual

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2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

**Dy. General Manager (Purchase)**



# Sensex closes at record high

## Nifty scales 22K, mounts on sharp gain in IT shares

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex closed above the 73,000 level for the first time while broader Nifty scaled the 22,000-point peak on Monday as key stock indices stayed on the record-breaking run powered by a rally in IT shares, Reliance and HDFC Bank.

Rising for the fifth day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 759.49 points or 1.05 per cent to settle at a lifetime closing high of 73,327.94. During the day, it rallied 833.71 points or 1.14 per cent to hit an all-time intra-day peak of 73,402.16.

The Nifty climbed 202.90 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 22,097.45. During the day, it zoomed 221 points or 1 per

cent to reach a lifetime intra-day high of 22,115.55.

A strong rally in IT shares Infosys, TCS, Wipro and HCL Tech after better than expected Q3 results helped the indices scale new record high levels. Oil & gas and energy sector shares also boosted the rally.

“The market gained momentum, led by the uptick in the IT index with the growing optimism about increased discretionary spending and strong deal wins. The US bond yield edged lower as market participants bet on the FED easing cycle, which is expected to start in March,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Among the Sensex firms, Wipro jumped over 6 per cent after the IT company’s



December quarter earnings beat estimates.

The other prominent gainers were HCL Technologies, HDFC Bank, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Bharti Airtel and Reliance Industries.

HCL Technologies on Friday reported a 6.2 per cent increase

in consolidated net profit at Rs 4,350 crore, highest ever on a quarterly basis, in the three months ended December 2023 on the back of growth in both services and software businesses.

Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors,

Tata Steel and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

IT majors were on the front foot while select heavyweights from banking and energy baskets also aided the uptick, according to Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.67 per cent and smallcap index rallied 0.11 per cent.

Among the indices, IT jumped 1.79 per cent, teck climbed 1.79 per cent, oil & gas (1.70 per cent), energy (1.66 per cent), telecommunication (1.41 per cent) and financial services (0.81 per cent).

Commodities and metal were the laggards.

Meanwhile, wholesale inflation index edged up 0.73 per cent in December from 0.26

per cent in the previous month mainly due to a sharp rise in food prices. Wholesale inflation was in the negative zone from April to October.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled in the green while Hong Kong ended marginally lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended on a muted note on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.29 per cent to USD 78.06 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 340.05 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark zoomed 847.27 points or 1.18 per cent to settle at 72,568.45 on Friday. The Nifty climbed 247.35 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 21,894.55.

# Gold rises ₹150; silver jumps ₹300



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 150 to Rs 63,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid strong cues in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal settled at Rs 63,400 per 10 grams.

Silver also jumped Rs 300 to Rs 76,700 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 76,400 per kg in the previous close.

“Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,550/10 grams, up by Rs 150, tracking positive cues

from overseas markets,” Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, gold and silver were quoting higher at USD 2,055 per ounce and USD 23.20 per ounce, respectively.

Gold prices resumed trading on a positive note, supported by haven demand, due to weak US producer price index (PPI) data and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East which have increased the expectations of interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve at its meeting in March, Gandhi added.

# OYO plans 400 properties in spiritual destinations, including Ayodhya, this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hospitality tech platform OYO on Monday said it is planning to launch 400 properties in major spiritual destinations like Ayodhya, Varanasi, Tirupati, and Katra-Vaishno Devi by the end of this year.

The planned expansion in major spiritual hotspots across the country has been fuelled by a surge in domestic travel and rising interest in spiritual tourism, OYO said in a statement.

The hospitality platform has selected various destinations, including Ayodhya, Puri, Shirdi, Varanasi, Amritsar, Tirupati, Haridwar, Katra-Vaishno Devi, and Char Dham route, to launch properties. There has been a 350 per cent increase in searches for Ayodhya on the OYO platform over the past year, driven by the upcoming opening of the grand Ram Mandir on January



22, 2024, it added.

“Spiritual tourism in India is on the precipice of a monumental surge, poised to be one of the biggest growth drivers of our industry in the coming five years. The opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya stands as a testament to this, and witnessing the excitement firsthand as I join in the grand ceremony will be truly humbling,” OYO founder and Group CEO

Ritesh Agarwal said.

Renewed fervour for spiritual journeys extends far beyond Ayodhya, with destinations like Puri, Shirdi, and Varanasi experiencing similar excitement, he added.

“By offering comfortable and affordable accommodation options across these sacred sites, we aim to ensure every spiritual journey finds a welcoming haven, allowing pilgrims to fully immerse them-

selves in the transformative power of religion and spirituality,” Agarwal said.

OYO said Ayodhya has consistently held the top position in searches on its app over the past year. On New Year’s Eve, the city witnessed a 70 per cent surge in OYO app users, surpassing popular leisure destinations, such as Goa at 50 per cent and Nainital at 60 per cent.

To cater to the influx of pilgrims in Ayodhya, OYO has launched 50 homestays, offering a total of approximately 1,000 rooms, it said, adding that the properties are strategically situated near key landmarks, providing easy access to prominent religious sites and tourist attractions.

OYO has also partnered with the Ayodhya Development Authority and Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation to ensure smooth and timely operations, the statement said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Electrolyser Manufacturing, Jindal India and John Cockerill Greenko Hydrogen Solutions are among the six firms who have emerged as successful bidders for getting incentives to set up facilities to manufacture electrolyzers, a critical component required for green hydrogen production.

The bids came in response to a tender by Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) inviting players for setting up 1.5GW manufacturing capacity for electrolyzers, as per a SECI statement.

Bids for electrolyzers manufacturing were invited on July 7 last year. A SECI statement issued on January 12, 2024, showed that Reliance Electrolyser Manufacturing Ltd has bagged incentives of Rs 444 crore for setting up of 300MW of manufacturing capacities for electrolyzers.



Similarly, John Cockerill Greenko Hydrogen Solutions Private Ltd and Jindal India Ltd have also bagged incentives of Rs 444 crore each for setting up 300 MW manufacturing capacity of electrolyzers each.

Ohmium Operations Pvt Ltd has bagged Rs 202.76 crore incentives for 137 MW, while Advait Infratech Ltd (consortium with Rajesh Power Service Private Ltd) will get incentives of Rs 148 crore for 100 MW.

L&T Electrolysers Ltd has bagged incentives of Rs 93.24 crore for 63MW.

The six firms have bagged total incentives of Rs 1,776 crore for 1200 MW under the ‘Bucket-1: Electrolyser manufacturing capacity based on any stack technology’.

As many as 14 firms’ bids were qualified for the incentives. The eight firms which are not allocated any capacity under this scheme are Matrix Gas and Renewables in consortium

with Gensol Engineering; HHP Seven; ACME Cleantech Solutions; Adani New Industries; Waaree Energies; Avaada Electrolyser; Green H2 Network India and Hild Electric.

Under the ‘Bucket-2: Electrolyser manufacturing capacity based on indigenous developed stack technology’, Homihydrogen and Adani New Industries have emerged as successful bidders.

Homihydrogen will get incentives of Rs 150.22 crore for setting up 101.5 MW of electrolyzers manufacturing capacity, while Adani New Industries bagged Rs 293.78 crore for 198.5 MW.

Under the Bucket-2, seven firms were in the fray. As many as five were not allocated incentives under the scheme, which include Livehy Energy; C Doctor And Company, Pratishtna Engineers, Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd and Newtrace.

# Sebi mulls flexibility for AIF, VCFs to deal with unliquidated investments beyond tenure expiry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi on Monday proposed to provide flexibility to Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), Venture Capital Funds (VCFs) and their investors to deal with unliquidated investments of their schemes beyond expiry of tenure.

In its consultation paper, the regulator suggested that instead of launching a new liquidation scheme by AIFs, the same scheme itself can be allowed to continue with the unliquidated investments beyond their tenure for a certain period or dissolution period for fully liquidating their unliquidated investments.

Additionally, the regulator proposed extending flexibility of the dissolution process to venture capital funds through migration to the AIF regime.

At present, the option to launch liquidation scheme is available only to those schemes of AIFs which are under ‘Liquidation Period’-- the period of one year following the expiry of tenure of the scheme for fully liquidating the scheme and not available to VCFs, irrespective of whether their tenure has expired or not.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has sought public comments till February 2 on the proposal.

The proposal came after Sebi received representations from participants in the AIF industry highlighting certain tax related issues. They also highlighted that setting up a liquidation scheme and winding up the original AIF scheme is a process involving time, cost, and efforts, which directly or indirectly, would ultimately be paid by investors.

In the consultation paper, the regulator suggested that during the liquidation period of an AIF scheme, if the AIF decides to opt for dissolution period, then AIF should obtain positive consent of 75 per cent of investors by value of their investment in the scheme.

After obtaining the consent, the AIF should arrange bids for



a minimum of 25 per cent of the value of the unliquidated investments.

The bids should be arranged for units representing consolidated value of all unliquidated investments of the scheme’s investment portfolio.

Sebi suggested that investor approval and bid should be obtained by the AIF before the expiry of the Liquidation Period of the scheme.

“Liquidation schemes that have already been launched by AIFs shall be grand-fathered,” Sebi said.

The regulator also suggested one-time flexibility to AIF schemes, whose Liquidation Period has expired or would be expiring within one month from the date of notification in this regard, to deal with unliquidated investment.

Also, it has recommended extending flexibility of the dissolution process to venture capital funds through migration to the AIF regime. It further suggested that such migration should be smooth and cost effective.

Under the VCF Regulations, VCFs are required to liquidate their investments within three months from the expiry of their tenure, whereas AIF Regulations provide AIFs a Liquidation Period of 12 months for the said purpose.

There is no provision in VCF Regulations for extension of

tenure of VCF scheme. Therefore, any VCF operating beyond their tenure specified in the Private Placement Memorandum (PPM) is in violation of the VCF rules.

Accordingly, Sebi suggested a new framework to facilitate VCFs to migrate to AIF Regulations, so that the proposed flexibility of Liquidation Period and the flexibility of dealing with unliquidated investments by opting for dissolution period / process, can be available by VCFs.

Under the proposed regulatory framework for migration of VCFs to AIF Regulations, a sub-category should be created under Category I - VCFs called Migrated VCFs. Such VCFs can migrate themselves within 6 months of the date of Sebi’s notification in this regard.

Sebi suggested that certain flexibilities under VCF rules should continue to be available by migrated VCFs and accordingly the migrated VCFs should be exempted from the requirements of minimum investment requirement in AIF, minimum corpus size, maximum number of investors in a scheme, manner of calculation of tenure and audit of terms of PPM.

Moreover, certain benefits of AIF Regulations that are not available under VCF rule should be extended to migrated VCFs.

# Rupee rises 6 paise to settle at 82.89 against US dollar

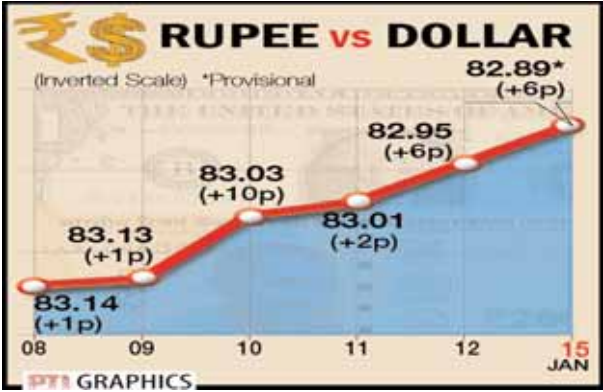
PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee strengthened for the ninth consecutive session to settle with a gain of 6 paise to 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, driven by a rally in the domestic equity markets.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local currency opened at 82.82 and traded between 82.77 and 82.91 against the greenback during intra-day deals.

The unit finally settled at 82.89 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 6 paise over its previous close amid a bullish trend in domestic equities, wherein benchmark indices climbed to lifetime highs.

On Friday, the rupee settled with a gain of 6 paise to 82.95 against the US dollar.



In the last nine trading sessions, the local unit added 48 paise since the level of 83.32 against the dollar recorded on January 2.

Meanwhile, WPI rose 0.73 per cent year-on-year in December 2023 against 0.26 per cent in the previous month, but lower than the forecast of 0.9 per cent.

According to official data, the wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation rose in December at 0.73 per cent mainly due to a sharp rise in food prices.

The WPI inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per

cent.

“We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak US Dollar and positive global markets. Expectations of fresh inflows from foreign investors may also support the rupee,” said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

However, a surge in global crude oil prices and the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Middle East may cap sharp gains. Traders may remain cautious ahead of India’s trade balance data. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.50 to Rs 83.20, Choudhary added.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenbacks strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.09 per cent higher at 102.49.

Brent crude futures, the glob-

al oil benchmark, slipped 0.66 per cent to USD 77.77 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex surged 759.49 points, or 1.05 per cent, to settle at a fresh peak of 73,327.94 points. The Nifty also soared 202.90 points, or 0.93 per cent, to a new record of 22,097.45 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the equity market on Friday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 340.05 crore, according to exchange data.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, retail inflation soared to a four-month high of 5.69 per cent in December, while industrial production fell to an eight-month low of 2.4 per cent in November, according to a set of government data released on Friday.

# Restaurant body seeks restoration of input tax credit, higher GST rate of 12 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Restaurant Association of India on Monday urged the government to restore input tax credit to restaurants while increasing the GST rate to 12 per cent from the current 5 per cent, ahead of the upcoming Union Budget.

In a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) also called for an equitable and fair e-commerce policy, saying balanced policies and regulations are required to enable a level playing field, where platforms can continue to innovate, while restaurants, delivery partners and consumers are protected from potentially exploitative practices.

The restaurant industry was one of the sectors that suffered the most during the pandemic but showed great resilience to survive and has since been on a steady path of recovery. If the sector gets a certain amount of policy and bud-

getary support in the upcoming Budget, it will propel the sector towards an accelerated pace of growth, NRAI said in a statement.

Seeking restoration of GST input tax credit (ITC), the industry body said, “It is the only industry to be pegged at 5 per cent GST without the availability of ITC; a feature designed to avoid cascading taxation”.

The lack of ITC not only reduces the operating margin of the business but also enhances the capital budget for a new project significantly.

This increased project cost slows down the expansion plans, which massively impacts the overall growth of the sector, it added.

“The industry, therefore, recommends restoration of ITC to the restaurants while parallelly increasing the rate of GST to 12 per cent from the current 5 per cent,” NRAI said. It further said, “We understand that it may create a compliance burden on the smaller businesses, and there-

fore, we feel that this can be done on revenue slabs. While restaurants below a certain revenue threshold can continue with the current GST provisions, the organised sector with higher revenues and capex outlay may move towards the proposed GST regime”.

NRAI President Kabir Suri said the growth of the food services industry in India holds immense potential. The industry not only plays a pivotal role in contributing to government revenue but is one of the largest employers in the country.

“Balanced, fair and equitable policies by the government with respect to GST input tax credit, rationalised licensing norms and e-commerce policy will not only benefit businesses and consumers but also make a substantial contribution to overall economic growth and employment opportunities,” said Suri, who is also the co-founder & Director of Azure Hospitality Pvt Ltd.

# India ranked 35th for leveraging future possibilities

PTI ■ DAVOS

India has been ranked 35th on a global index of countries best placed for leveraging future possibilities while the UK topped the list released here on Monday.

The Future Possibilities Index (FPI), a flagship global future trends study released by Newsweek Vantage and Horizon Group on sidelines of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, has Denmark, the US, the Netherlands and Germany in the top five after the UK.

Among large emerging markets, China is placed highest at 19th this year, followed by Brazil at 30th, India (35th) and South Africa (50th).

The study compared the factors that will help governments, investors and other private sector stakeholders leverage six global, transformational trends for growth and well-being across 70 countries.

These six global transformational trends are Exabyte

Economy (advanced digital technologies), Wellbeing Economy (health prevention and wellness), Net Zero Economy (reduction of carbon emissions), Circular Economy (recycling and reuse), BioGrowth Economy (food and agriculture innovations), and Experience Economy (consumption of experiences instead of physical goods).

The combined business opportunity of all six trends is estimated at more than USD 44 trillion by 2030, more than 40 per cent of global GDP in 2023, the study said.

The study used data from recognised international organizations as well as a survey of 5,000 business executives conducted for the project by Phronesis Partners.

These opportunities are likely to benefit the Global North more than the Global South in terms of economic growth and broader societal wellbeing and a strong industry base is needed to benefit, the report found.



# Told to express freely, say big hitting Jaiswal

PTI ■ INDORE

Picked to replace the usually swashbuckling but currently out of form Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal made quite a statement with his 34-ball 68 against Afghanistan in the second T20I here and the promising youngster said it was all thanks to the “go out and express yourself” brief from the Indian team management. The 22-year-old’s strokeful knock at the top of the order and Shivam Dube’s 63 not out off 32 balls, helped India register a six-wicket series-clinching win here on Sunday as the hosts easily chased down the target of 173 with 26 balls to spare. “I have been told to go and express myself and I was trying to do that,” Jaiswal said at the post-match conference on Sunday night. “I was trying to punish the loose balls, and was focused to give my team a good start...I was trying to bat as deep as I can. I was trying to keep my strike rate good. I wanted to keep batting with a good strike rate,” said the 22-year-old opening batter. Jaiswal, who has played just four Tests and 16 T20Is, said he has tried his best to do well for the team whenever he has got a chance. He had scored a 60 against South Africa in December last year. “I keep working hard in my practice sessions and on my process. Whenever I get my chance, I try my best and make



sure that I am doing things for the team which is important,” he said, trying to give an insight into his thought process. “I am just trying to show my intent and trying to do well for my team,” added Jaiswal who hit five fours and six sixes during his innings last night. Asked what transpired between him and senior batter Virat Kohli in the middle during a 57-run stand, he said, “It was really nice...Whenever I bat with him, it’s an honour. “Lots of things to learn from him, like we had small chats about where we can hit. We decided that it was easy to hit over long on and mid off and we were trying to do that. The intent was there and the positive vibes were there and we were just trying to hit good shots.” Dube, on his part, said he and Jaiswal had planned to finish off the run chase. Jaiswal was, however, dismissed in the 13th over. “We both are stroke players. He was batting really well. We had a plan that both will be going, so let’s finish the match as soon as possible. There was not any target (to finish), but we’ve finished on time,” said Dube, whose 63 not out was decorated with five fours and four sixes. “There are many things I have worked on. It’s not about skill (only)... Being focused on every ball is important. I am working on my bowling as well,” Dube, who claimed one wicket in the series-opener in Mohali, said.



## The range I have is god gift: Shivam Dube

PTI ■ INDORE

Bonafide six-hitter Shivam Dube on Monday said his ability to play a wide range of strokes against spinners is ‘god’s gift’ but overcoming issues against express pace and bounce will require plenty of hard work. One of the biggest hitters when the spinners are in operation, Dube blazed away to scintillating fifties in the first two T20 Internationals against Afghanistan, making a fairly good spin attack look pedestrian with his power-hitting. “It’s a pleasure to keep improving my performance as I am going along. The range I have is god’s gift and I have also worked a lot on it. I have developed many areas of my game and I am getting the runs on the board,” Dube told JioCinema. On way to his an unbeaten 63 off 32 balls in the second T20I here on Sunday, Dube smashed four towering sixes and five fours, as India chased down a target of 173 with as many as 26 balls to spare. Also grabbing the headlines with the willow was the returning Yashasvi Jaiswal, who hammered a 34-ball 68. On how hard it is to think only about the present and not about the forthcoming T20 World Cup, Dube said, “In the past I have thought a lot about the future. But I have realised that I got to focus on the present. I have to focus on how to improve my skills, so that’s more important to me. I just try to keep myself grounded and try to focus on what I have to do.” In stark contrast to his penchant

to toy with the spinners, 30-year-old Dube has often looked vulnerable against the short deliveries bowled at good pace. He admitted that the standard of fast bowlers in the IPL is much better than in domestic cricket. On the amount of work that has gone into improving his game against short balls, Dube said, “I have worked a lot on it. When I was playing domestic cricket, I was able to dominate all the bowlers, but when it came to IPL and Indian cricket it was not easy as bowlers were bowling over 140km/hr.” “I worked a lot with side arms, but it is more about the mind-set which I worked.” Dube had a poor start for India’s white-ball team against Bangladesh more than four years ago. Asked about the methods he has employed that’s resulted in a significant improvement, he said, “This credit goes to Chennai Super Kings and Mahi bhai (MS Dhoni) because I always had this game in me.” “They have brought out the best in me. They have always encouraged me and said that they believe in me. Stephen Fleming and Mike Hussey have shown faith in me.” Speaking about his mindset as a finisher, the Mumbai all-rounder said, “As a middle-order batsman, my role is to take on spinners and improve the strike rate. But when it is like getting 20-25 runs, I focus on that.” “What I have seen Mahi bhai do for a long time, I am working in that direction. I have to keep myself calm and composed and just focus on one ball at a time.



## Prakhar breaks Yuvraj Singh Cooch Behar record with unbeaten 404

PTI ■ SHIVAMOGGA

Karnataka’s Prakhar Chaturvedi on Monday broke Yuvraj Singh’s 25-year-old record for the highest score in the U-19 Cooch Behar Trophy final with an unbeaten 404 off 636 balls against Mumbai here. Yuvraj, who went on to become an Indian great, had smashed 358 for Punjab in a game against Bihar back in 1999. India’s World Cup winning captain M S Dhoni was part of that Bihar squad. The highest individual score in India’s premier U-19 domestic event is Vijay Zol’s 451 not out for Maharashtra against Assam in 2011-12. Chaturvedi’s epic effort included 46 fours and three sixes. “Karnataka’s Prakhar Chaturvedi becomes the first player to score 400 in the final of #CoochBehar Trophy with his splendid 404\* knock against Mumbai,” posted the BCCI on X. Chaturvedi’s marathon effort helped Karnataka amass 890 for eight in response to Mumbai’s 380. The game was drawn with Karnataka taking the first innings lead. Harshil Dhamani scored 179 in Karnataka’s innings. The game was called off once Chaturvedi cross the 400-run mark.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI on Monday invited applications to replace one among the five senior national selectors and in all likelihood, former pacer Salil Ankola would be the one on his way out as West Zone is already represented by chairman Ajit Agarkar. The BCCI posted an advertisement on its website listing the same requirements that have been in place for the past couple of years — the incumbent should have played either 7 Tests or 30 first-class matches. Applications will also be considered if the candidate has an experience of 10 ODIs or 20 first-class matches. The last date of submitting applications is January 25.

The five-man selection committee comprises Agarkar (chairman, Mumbai, West Zone), S Sharath (Tamil Nadu, South Zone), SS Das (Vidarbha, Central Zone), Subroto Banerjee (Bengal, Bihar, East Zone) and Ankola (Mumbai, Maharashtra, West Zone). “Save Ajit Agarkar, all the four others completed their one-year term on December 31, 2023. They were given one-year contract,” a senior BCCI official told PTI on conditions of anonymity. “Technically, there is no rule that you can’t have two selectors from the same zone, (but) the BCCI has always maintained the convention of having one selector from each zone and north zone had no representa-

## LIKELY TO REPLACE SALIL ANKOLA



tive after Chetan Sharma got sacked,” he explained. After the 2022 T20 World Cup where India could only make the semifinals, the entire selec-

tion panel, including chairman Chetan Sharma, was sacked. But when fresh applications were invited, Chetan returned to the fold to represent North

Zone following an interview by the Cricket Advisory Committee (CAC) headed by Ashok Malhotra along with Jatin Paranjpe, and Sulakshana Naik. He was later sacked for loose talk on selection matters in a sting operation. “The rest (of the) four, Sharath, Ankola, Banerjee and Das completed five zones. Once Chetan was removed, the BCCI needed a man of stature and once Agarkar was on board, we had two from the same zone. “But no rule was broken as it was always a convention. The BCCI had given all of them a one year term, which is extended every year upto a period of four years. Unfortunately, it seems Salil will have to make a move,” the source added.

## If India prepares pitches which turn a lot, England spinners will also come into game: Nasser

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England captain Nasser Hussain has advised India against preparing turning pitches during their five-Test series, saying doing so will also bring the visiting spinners into the game. The uncapped duo of Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir have been named as part of England’s quadruple spin attack alongside Jack Leach and Rehan Ahmed. India have also named four spinners in their squad for the first two Tests, beginning January 25, with Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav returning to action after missing the tour to South Africa. They will be joined by Ravichandran Ashwin and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja. “I think what India should do is ask for good pitches that spin a bit because I think their spinners and batters will then out-bat and out-spin ours,” said Hussain on the Sky Sports Cricket podcast. “If they ask for pitches that spin a lot then it becomes a bit of a lottery and

brings England’s spinners into the game. The way Bazball goes about its business, they won’t die wondering.” England last won a Test series in India in 2012-13 under the captaincy of Alastair Cook where spin twins Graeme Swann and Monty Panesar starred in the momentous 2-1 triumph. Hussain also said that Indian fans are waiting to see how their side can put England’s Bazball strategy to bed. “There’s been a lot of talk about Indian cricket and there’s been a lot of talk about Bazball,” said Hussain. “My sense in the World Cup was that a lot of Indian fans are waiting to see how to put Bazball to bed.” England opener Ben Duckett, how-



ever, said he is aware India’s seam bowlers can do just as much damage as their spinners. “People talk about how good India’s spin bowling is but at the top of the order against the seam attack, it’s going to be tough no matter how flat the pitches are,” Duckett, who has been named in the 16-member touring squad, said. “I’ve obviously just played against, in my eyes, the best seam attack in the world this summer. I think the preparation in Abu Dhabi will be focused around facing the new-ball spin. “It’s going to be interesting. I don’t think I’ll get out blocking as many times as I did when I was last there.” Duckett made his Test debut in 2016 against Bangladesh. Since then, the

29-year-old is known for playing a variation of sweep shots. “I’ve played a lot of cricket since then and maturity is a big one for me in those years,” Duckett said. “The biggest thing this time around is that whatever India throw at me, it’s not going to be a shock. I’ve played on those kinds of pitches. I know full well what to expect when I get out there.” Talking about India’s spin stalwart Ashwin, he said, “I wasn’t the last left-hander to struggle out there in those conditions against Ashwin. He’s so good everywhere. “I’m sure he’s going to get me out again, he’s a world-class bowler. But I would back myself now on a good pitch or a flatter pitch to not feel like I have to play aggressive shots or sweep every ball. “If those pitches are spinning, and with the way this team have played over the last 18 months, I know what my strengths are and I’m certainly not going to die wondering.”

# Mulani 10 wicket haul powers Mumbai to consecutive bonus point win

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Left-arm spinner Shams Mulani grabbed a match haul of 10 wickets as Mumbai defeated Andhra by 10 wickets to secure a successive bonus-point victory in the Ranji Trophy here on Monday. Following on, Andhra faced a daunting task in their second innings, and despite some resistance from Shaik Rasheed (66) and Hanuma Vihari (46), Mulani’s crafty spin proved too much to handle as the visitors folded for 244 in 73.4 overs, setting an easy target of 34. Mulani returned with 4/96 in the second innings, securing a match-haul of 10/161, his sixth 10-wicket haul in first-class cricket. Mumbai overhauled the target in 8.4 overs keeping all their wickets intact to secure seven points (six plus one bonus point). The 41-times champions, who defeated Bihar by an innings and 51 runs in the opening round, now sit pretty at top of the Group B standings with 14 points from two matches, four points clear of Chhattisgarh who bagged three points against Bihar in Patna.

Mumbai had dominated the proceedings from the start, posting a formidable total of 395 in their first innings. Bhupen Lalwani’s solid 61, aided by Tanush Kotian (54) and Mohti Avasthi’s (53) well-crafted half-centuries, gave them the early advantage. Mulani also contributed with the bat with a patient 38 off 111 balls before he dismantled Andhra’s batting lineup with impressive figures of 6/65. Andhra folded for 184 in the first innings as Ajinkya Rahane was quick to enforce follow-on. **BENGAL BAG THREE IN KANPUR:** Bengal had to settle for three points by virtue of first innings lead over Uttar Pradesh after the entire fourth and final day’s play at the Green Park Stadium in Kanpur was called off due to bad light. Speedster Mohammad Kaif (4/15 and 3/72) was named the man of the match for bagging an impressive seven wickets in the match while also scoring a fighting unbeaten 45. Earlier, after bowling out UP for just 60 in their first innings, Bengal managed to post 188, which helped them pocket the all-important first innings lead. UP’s second essay fightback was



steered by skipper Nitish Rana who was unbeaten on 47 with the team’s score of 178/4, ahead by 50 runs at close on day three. The match however could not get underway on the final day because of bad light as Bengal settled for three crucial points.

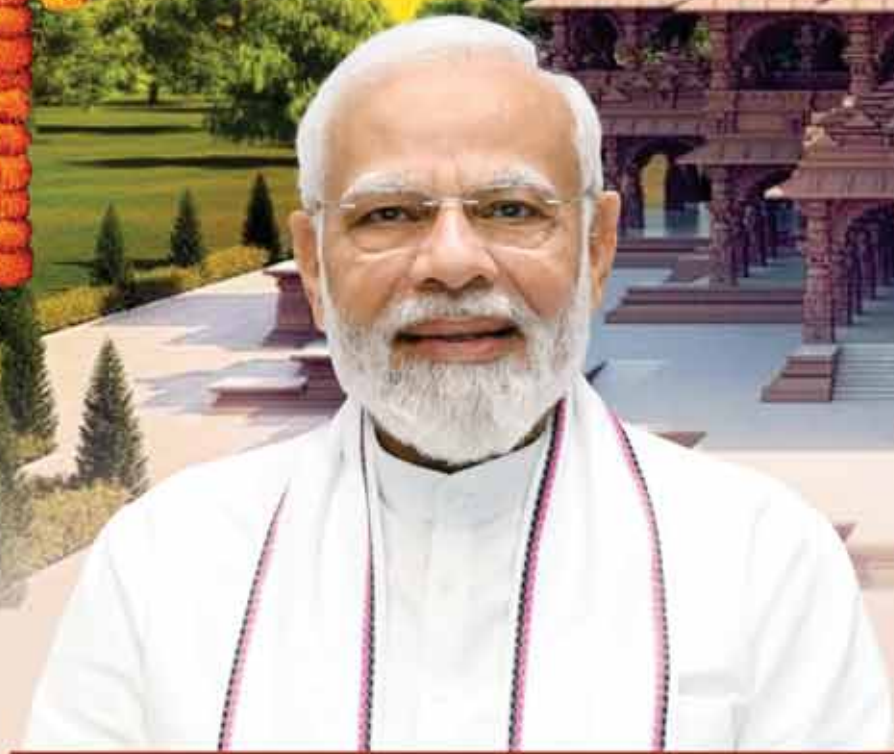
### BRIEF SCORES

**IN MUMBAI:** Mumbai 395 and 34 for no loss. **Andhra** 184 and following on 244; 73.4 overs (Shaik Rasheed 66; Shams Mulani 4/96, Royston 3/45). Mumbai won by 10 wickets. Points: Mumbai 7, Andhra 0. **IN KANPUR:** Uttar Pradesh 60 and 178/4. **Bengal** 188. Match drawn. Points: Bengal 3, UP 1. **IN GUWAHATI:** Kerala 419. **Assam** 248; 64.5 overs (Riyen 116; Basil Thampi 5/82, Jalaj Saxena 4/58) and following on 212/3; 54 overs (Rahul Hazarika 107, Rishav 45). Match drawn. Points: Kerala 3, Assam 1. **IN PATNA:** Bihar 108 and 226/7; 77 overs (Sraman Nigroth 60, Babul Kumar 52, Bipin Saurabh 30 not out). **Chhattisgarh** 329/2 declared; 83 overs (Rishabh Tiwari 138, Ashutosh Singh 134). Match drawn. Points: Chhattisgarh 3, Bihar 1.





# हर्ष, आनंद और अपार उल्लास होगा प्रभु का घट-घट में वास होगा



नरेन्द्र मोदी, प्रधानमंत्री



डॉ. मोहन यादव, मुख्यमंत्री

जन-जन की प्राण शक्ति, भारत की सांस्कृतिक समृद्धि के तिलक, सुखधाम, प्रभु श्रीराम की अयोध्या में भव्य प्राण प्रतिष्ठा के अवसर पर देश उल्लासमय है, भक्ति भाव में सराबोर है। इस शुभ अवसर पर मध्यप्रदेश भी पूरे उत्साह के साथ इस पावन अवसर के लिए तैयार है। इसी क्रम में प्रदेशभर में आयोजनों के माध्यम से इस अवसर को विशेष बनाने के प्रयास किये जा रहे हैं।

## श्रीराम मंदिर अयोध्या में प्राण-प्रतिष्ठा के पूर्व प्रदेशभर में अध्यात्म और आस्था का उत्सव



16 से 22 जनवरी, 2024



श्रीराम वन-गमन पथ के निर्माण को गति देने के लिए  
मुख्यमंत्री डॉ. मोहन यादव की अध्यक्षता में चित्रकूट में न्यास की पहली बैठक से उत्सव का आरंभ

- समस्त जिलों में प्रभात फेरी एवं कलश यात्राएं
- मंदिरों के आस-पास विशेष स्वच्छता अभियान
- 28 पवित्र स्थानों पर श्री रामचरित लीला समारोह, ओरछा एवं चित्रकूट में विशेष आयोजन
- शहरों और गांवों में हर घर दीप प्रज्ज्वलन का आह्वान
- 22 जनवरी, 2024 को मंदिरों, पवित्र नदियों, जलाशयों में दीपदान एवं प्रकाश व्यवस्था
- प्रमुख मंदिरों में एलईडी से प्राण-प्रतिष्ठा का सजीव प्रसारण

- विशेष ट्रेनों और अयोध्या जाने वाले तीर्थ यात्रियों का पुष्प वर्षा से स्वागत
- स्थानीय कलाकारों एवं संस्थाओं के सहयोग से श्रीराम-जानकी से संबंधित चित्र, शिल्प, रंगोली आदि का प्रदर्शन, आध्यात्मिक एवं सांस्कृतिक परिचर्चा, नृत्य-नाटिका, भजन संध्या का आयोजन
- गांवों में श्रीराम कथा सप्ताह में गायन, कथा वाचन, रामचरित मानस पाठ पर आधारित प्रतियोगिताओं का आयोजन