

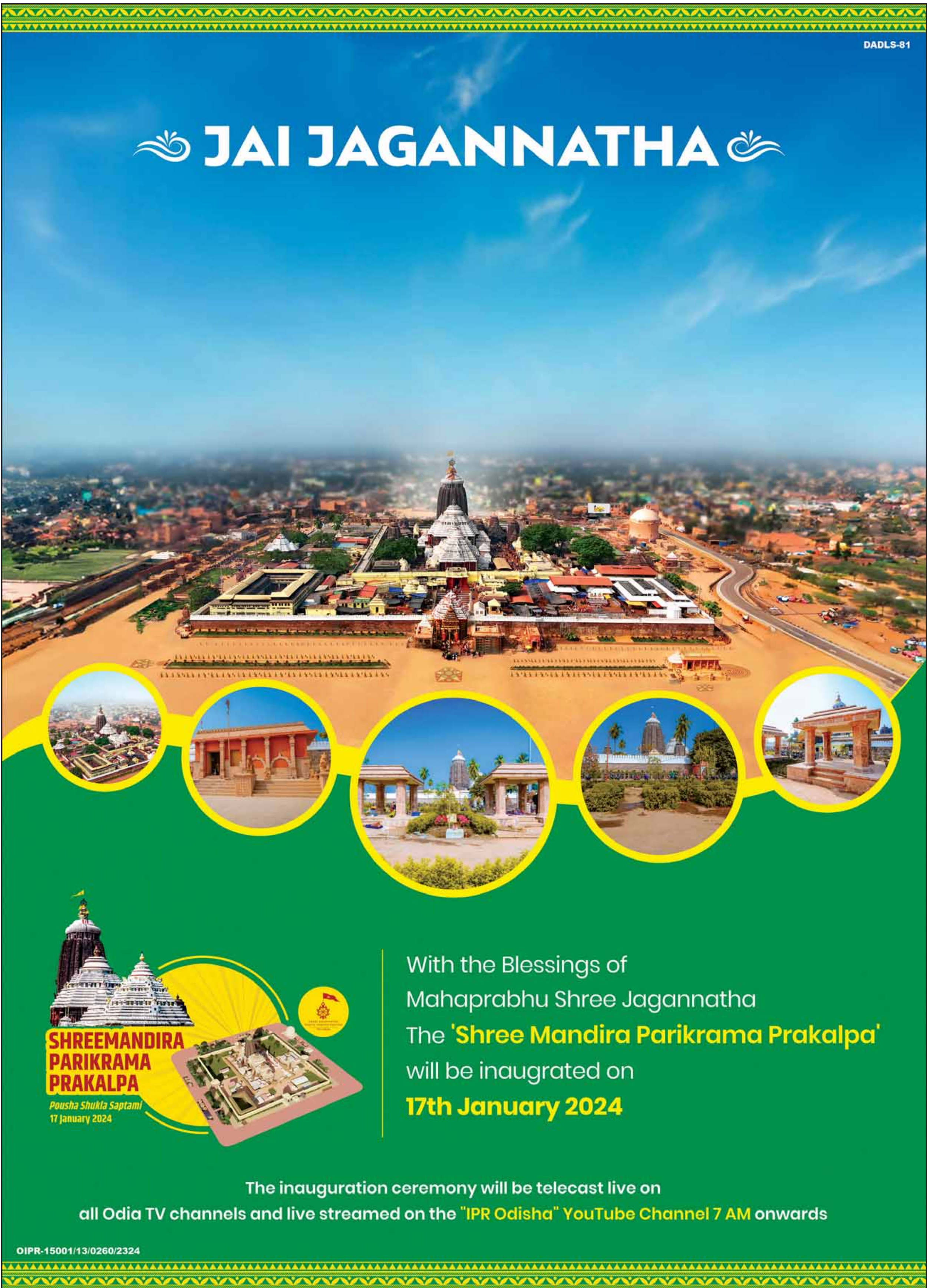


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## JAI JAGANNATHA



**SHREEMANDIRA  
PARIKRAMA  
PRAKALPA**

Pousha Shukla Saptami  
17 January 2024



With the Blessings of  
Mahaprabhu Shree Jagannatha  
The '**Shree Mandira Parikrama Prakalpa**'  
will be inaugurated on  
**17th January 2024**

The inauguration ceremony will be telecast live on  
all Odia TV channels and live streamed on the "**IPR Odisha**" YouTube Channel 7 AM onwards



# 19-yr-old girl found dead in forest in Koraput

Family alleges murder

PNS ■ KORAPUT

A body of a tribal girl aged around 19 years was spotted on Monday morning by locals while it was hanging from a neem tree under mysterious circumstances in a forest near Nua Ghasarda village under the Boipariguda police limits in Koraput district.

The girl's elder brother alleged that she was murdered and then hanged.

The deceased was identified as Gauri Majhi from the village. She had lost her parents in her childhood days and is survived by a sister and a brother belonging to a poor family.

The girl was working as a domestic help at the house of Jeypore police station IIC

Mitrabhanu Mohanty for the last one year to support her family.

On Saturday, Gauri left Mohanty's house without informing anyone. Her mobile phone showed 'switched off' when Mohanty contacted her. Later, Mohanty contacted her family and was informed that she had not gone to her parents' house.

Mohanty and the girl's family searched for her at all probable locations and at last lodged an FIR with the Jeypore police, mentioning the girl to be missing.

"This is a case of murder and she was hanged after being killed. She was in love with a youth from Salapa village and was often talking with him over phone. Another youth from Ratakhandi village near Kunturukhala had been frequently disturbing her and us," her brother said.

The Boipariguda police along with a scientific team

## In Keonjhar Baby girl found under bus wheel

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

A baby girl was rescued from a bus-stand in Champua in Keonjhar district on Sunday night.

A helper of a private bus namely 'Dhabaleswar' that was stationed at the Champua bus-stand found the baby wrapped in a plastic bag while inspecting the wheels of the vehicle at around 9 pm.

He informed the locals as

well as police about the incident. On receiving information, police reached the spot and sent the baby girl to the Champua Sub-Divisional Hospital. The health condition of the baby was stated to be normal.

It was suspected that the mother of the baby might have fled, abandoning her at the bus-stand. Police started an operation to trace the whereabouts of the baby's mother.

reached the spot and initiated a probe into the death. Police seized the body and sent it for postmortem.

# In Baleswar ATM loots: 5 members of Haryana gang held

UBACHAK MOHANTY  
BALESWAR

The Baleswar police claimed to have cracked the loot of two Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in Khaira and Soro areas of the district recently by arresting five members of a criminal gang.

The five criminals, who hail from different areas of Haryana, have been arrested from Bhubaneswar while one more accused is still absconding, said Baeswar SP Sagarika Nath.

Nath said the miscreants had looted Rs 6 lakh to Rs 10 lakh from a Punjab National Bank (PNB) ATM at Mangalpur in Soro and Rs 5 lakh from an Axis Bank ATM at Tudigadia market in Khaira on the wee



hours of January 12.

The miscreants looted the cash by cutting open the vending machine with the help of gas cutters. They even bombed the kiosk while looting it.

The SP said that after committing the crime, the miscreants escaped after brandishing pistol to the security personnel at various check points which were activated after the

ATM loots. The Mayurbhanj police was also alerted and as a police team was chasing the criminals, they had to abandon the car midway.

From CCTV footage and pieces of evidence from the car, police started an investigation by forming special teams, the SP said.

"The criminal gang belongs to Haryana. Some of them are

expert cutters. They used to travel by air, train and road. They used to conduct a recce a day before striking any ATM. The gang is involved in similar ATM loots in Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The car that was abandoned is suspected to be a stole from New Delhi bearing the registration number of Jharkhand," the SP added.

# Dense fog, light rain predicted in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as the weather office said on Monday that there would be no large change in the night temperature at many places in the State during the next four to five days, six places recorded temperature below 10 degree Celsius in the last 24 hours.

Kirei in Sundargarh district was the coldest places in the State for the second consecutive day at 7.7 degree.

The twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar recorded 17.2 degree and 18.5 degree, respectively, the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here

said.

Dense fog may continue to descend in the State for another 24 hours, said the IMD issuing a Yellow warning for 14 districts.

According to the IMD, thick blanket of fog may occur in Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Khordha, Puri, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Balangir and Koraput districts.

On Wednesday, light rain may occur in Bargarh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Deogarh and Mayurbhanj districts.

# BJEM School holds 51st Foundation Day

SUGYAN CHOUDHURY  
■ BHUBANESWAR

The 51st Foundation Day of the Buxi Jagabandhu English Medium (BJEM) School was held here on Monday in a very sombre and solemn atmosphere.

Inaugurating the gala occasion, Regional Officer, Central Board of Secondary Education, Regional Office, Bhubaneswar, K Srinivasan eulogised the achievements of the glorious institution.

Chairman of the school managing committee Raghunath Mishra gave credit to all the stakeholders like the parents community, students, management and civil society for their active participation and co-operation during the



eventful fifty years journey of the institution. Vice-chairman of the committee Prof Dr AK Tiwari wished that the institution march on to observe its centenary celebration with more achievements.

Secretary of the managing

committee, noted social worker and educationist Pratap Jena, and additional manager Sangram Nayak also spoke, among others.

Toppers among the students over the last 50 years were awarded. A cultural extravaganza was held. The founders of the school like late Radha Mohan Mohanty, former noted educationist and principal KC Das, advocate KK Nayak and the first principal of the play school "O. Littlewood" were paid glowing tributes.

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# In Balangir Traders' body chief's body found on rly tracks

Cause of death yet to be ascertained

PNS ■ BALANGIR

A blood-stained body of Balangir Chamber of Commerce president Tripurari Panigrahi was found on the railway tracks near Khujenpali under the Balangir Sadar police station on Monday morning.

The body was first spotted by locals who informed the Government Railway Police (GRP). A GRP team recovered the body and launched a probe into the case.

Panigrahi had not returned home on Sunday night, following which his family members searched for him. On Monday morning, the family members got a telephone call following the recovery of the body. They identified it to be of Panigrahi.

Though the exact cause of his death was yet to be ascertained, it was suspected that he might have died after falling from a train. There were rumours of murder as well. It was suspected that he was killed somewhere and his body was thrown on the railway tracks to make it look like an accident.

Chamber of Commerce members have demanded a high-level probe into the case.

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# Youth electrocuted in Dhenkanal

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

A youth was electrocuted as he came in contact with a 132-KV live wire at Basulei village under the Parjang police station in Dhenkanal district on Monday.

The deceased was identified as 28-year-old Jagan Rout, who belonged to Basulei.

According to sources, Jagan had gone to a nearby forest to

cut tree branches and bring them for his goats. Unfortunately, he came in contact with the live wire while cutting the tree branches. He sustained severe burn injuries on body and died on the spot.

On being informed, the Parjang police reached the spot and sent the body to a hospital in Parjang for postmortem. The cops have initiated a probe into the death.

# It's over to Maharaj Kansa in B'garh!

11-day Dhanu Yatra to last till Jan 25

PNS ■ BARGARH

The 76th edition of the world-famous Dhanu Yatra began here amid much fanfare on Monday evening.

Bargarh MP Suresh Pujhari MP and MLA Debesh Acharya opened the 11 day-long open air theatre in the presence of Collector Monisha Banarjee, SP Prahalad Sahaya Meena, Sub-collector Kumar Nagbhusan, Bargarh Municipality Chairman Kalpana Majhi and Yatra Committee convener Sureswar Sathpathy.

The Bargarh town has been decked up in a royal style, transforming it into the



palatial Dwapara Yuga. The Yatra would be performed across an area of eight sq km at three Darbars and over 11 open theatres till January 25. The central theme of the yatra

is "Krishna Leela and Mathura Vijay."

With the beginning of the event, the town has come under Maharaj Kansa's reign. While Ambapali has been converted into Gopapur, the river Jeera has been transformed to river Jamuna.

To avoid any untoward situation during the yatra, the district administration has beefed up security at the venue. "We have made elaborate security arrangements with deployment adequate police personnel," said SP Meena.

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# Sikhs seek direct Puri-Amritsar train

Meet Rly Min Vaishnaw in Baleswar

PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Sikh community of Odisha has demanded a direct train between Puri and Amritsar via Baleswar, Hijli and Tatanagar.

The train would not only benefit the people desiring to visit these sacred places but also boost the tourism of

Odisha and Punjab, apart from enhancing cultural and trade ties between the two States.

Recently, a Sikh delegation met Railways Minister Aswani Vaishnaw during his visit to Baleswar and the latter assured to do the needful, said Amar Singh Walia.

"It would be a sacred rail link if a train is introduced to connect Puri and Amritsar. Puri has been attached to our Sikh religion since the inception of Khalsapanth," Walia added.

# Karate school holds skill certification prog City Punjabis observe Lohri with fanfare



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Utkal Karate School conducted skill certification cum assessment exam.

Nine students took the training cum certification exam and passed it. OSKA working president Sanat Nayak and senior advocate,

Orissa High Court Kali Prasad Nanda were the guests to grace the award giving ceremony. The qualified candidates are Gopal Deep, Rohit Chhura, Sradhanjali Jal, Tanali Mishra, Rajendra Kesari Samal, Ayush Rath, Pramish Digal, Krishna Shikari and N Anjali.

During their address, the

guests congratulated the successful candidates and wished them success for their future. The exam was organised by founder secretary Utkal Karate School Dr Hari Prasad Pattanayak and assisted by Dr Gouri Mohanty, Dr Avinash Kumar,

Chinmayee Bhuiyan, national medalist Nyasa Kumari and Megha Priyadarshini Das.

Notably, the Utkal Karate School is a certified training partner of Sports and Fitness Sector Council, under the National Skill Development Corporation, Government of India.

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PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The vibrant Punjabi community of Bhubaneswar celebrated Lohri, the grand Indian harvest festival, with fun and fervor.

Over 400 members of the community got together at the Punjab Bhawan. The celebration began during the late evening with friends and relatives gathering at the venue.

The formal 'Lohri Poojan' was performed before lighting up the bonfire after sunset. Members gathered around the bonfire threw popcorn, sugar-candies, sesame seeds, gur and other things in the fire as per the Lohri tradition.

While elders of the community were felicitated, the youth and children were awarded with prizes for their various achievements.

Lohri is a popular winter festival of harvest celebrated widely by Sikhs and Hindus across India. It is observed the



night before Makar Sankranti and is celebrated with great pomp and show in the north Indian region. Adding to the festive atmosphere is the

Bhangra, a spirited dance form deeply rooted in Punjabi culture. With rhythmic footwork and lively movements, Bhangra becomes a joyful expression of the celebration.

pression of the celebration. It's more than just a dance; it's a cultural tradition that binds the community together, celebrating life and togetherness.



# Jagannath cult stretches back to 3000 BC

Contrary to the findings of history which say that the cult of Lord Jagannath started from 1112 AD, the Rig Vedic period together with Hindu mythological scriptures unmistakably point out that the cult stretches back to 3000 BC and even beyond that period. Quoting copiously from scriptures about the Lord's existence, it has been proved to be time older than the dull dispensation of pedantic scholars, observes Sugyan Choudhury.

That the cult of Lord Jagannath is nothing but a part of the Vedic civilization is evident from the RigVeda. The cantos from the Rig Veda "Adaujaru Plabate Sindhutire Apoursham" (10/155) means that an unborn tree from the water, air and earth the trunk of which floats across the ocean and which is not caused by any subject whosever. And again in the Taitariya Prakarana of Rig Veda Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra exist outside the south ocean, which speaks very much for itself.

In the Utkal Skandh of the Skadh Purana, Lord Brahma has said to have exhorted to the Gods that "Long before my creation, Lord Jagannath shines in His blue sapphire colour being resplendent from time immemorial. Today in the second half of my life, Lord Jagannath has taken the icon of a demon size one and shall continue in this holy land of Puri till my life ends". The scriptures have ascertained that one day in the life of Lord Brahma amounts to 432 crores of years of human era.

Likewise 360 days of Lord Brahma contributes to one Brahma year. It is depicted in the pages of Purana that the tribal king Biswabasu was worshipping the Lord as Nilamadhaba at Nilakandara. Similarly, it has been described



that Ajasabar was worshipping the Lord as Sabarinarayan in Kalebare dense forest. It is all acceptable that Lord Nilamadhaba and Lord Sabarinarayan are one and the same being identified with Lord Jagannath. Sir Samant Chandrasekhar has mentioned in his epoch-making book "Siddhant Darpana" that anyway in the first half of the creation Lord Jagannath existed in the form of Nilamadhaba. In the second half of the creation the Lord has assumed the form of Darubrahma underneath beautifully embellished crowned blue wheel of temple of Srimandir. But the said temple may not be possible at the very beginning of the creation of the time.

Although Herman Kulke has traced the origin of Lord Jagannath to 12th century (AD), but from the scripture of Indrabhuti, it is proved that Lord Jagannath belongs to 8th Century AD. Dr Benumadhab Padhi has mentioned in his book 'Darudevata' that Lord

Jagannath belongs prior to 1200 century AD. From the museum at Karachi, three deities are opined to have been

historians opine that this temple was constructed in 1112 AD by King Anangbhim Dev. But the cult

the pages of the Mahabharata wherein at page 114, the Mohavedi beside the Mahodadhi or the ocean has

ultimately stretches our findings to the face that Lord Ramachandra had instructed Bibhisana to worship Lord

Bramhapurusha of the great Lord sleeping beside the sea-shore unmistakably point out to the same purusa is no one but Lord Jagannath himself. All the abataras or manifestations owe their origin to that great Lord or creator. The incarnations may come out from this world. But according to Utkaliya Baishnab cult, all the incarnations come from Lord Jagannath. It is mentioned that Lord Krishna and Arjun had come to Purushottam Khetra i.e. Puri and observed three days' penance and paid their obeisance to Lord Jagannath. In the divine scripture of 'Prem Panchamruta' of Bhupati Pandit, it is mentioned that King Basudev had come as a pilgrim to visit Lord Jagannath at Puri. During his rest at Puri and on the auspicious day of Hari Uthan Ekadasi, King Basudev was placed with boons from Lord Jagannath. Consequently, King Basudev was blessed with two sons, Krishna and Balaram.

The Skandha Purana mentions that King Indradyumna was identified to witness the Lords who were metamorphosed as Darubrahma and by visiting whom the people gained wisdom of self or soul.

Thus it is concluded that the worship of Lord Jagannath had existed much before the manifestation of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama. As per the rites of the Srimandir, it is seen that the worship of Rama and Krishna takes place, after getting the divine dictum in the form of a garland from Lord Jagannath. Thus it can be safely concluded that worship of Lord Jagannath stretches back to long ages. Many a temple has been either lost to the violent claims of the sea or destroyed by ravages of time but then the presiding spirit and the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Jagannath continues to exist here at Puri since time immemorial where all historians and archaeologists admit their failures in tracing His antiquity.



worshipped from 1st century and their origin belonged to the period of the "Kushan" dynasty. Not only that, Nikolas Natovin of Russia has mentioned that Lord Jagannath belongs to before the birth of Christ and was acclaimed as the quintessential Lord throughout the envelope of Asian continent. But now

of Lord Jagannath did exist much before it and safely be accepted.

Noted historian MM Ganguli has mentioned out of his research that the cult of Lord was prevalent before 4th century BC. In his opinion Mahabharata was composed before 4th century BC. Dr Ganguli rests his finding from

been vividly depicted as the sanctum sanctorum of the Lords.

In the Balmiki Ramayan preceding the composition of the Mahabharat, it has been mentioned that Lord Jagannath belongs to "Ikshaku Kula Daivatam" or that Lord Jagannath belongs to lineage Ikshaku. This means that this

Jagannath. The Rigveda was ascertained to have been composed 3000 years before the birth of Christ. Probably this is the reason for which Lord Jagannath was already accepted as the God long before. The illustrious descriptions of Krushna -Arjuna riding through their chariot Nandighosh and reaching the



In Charingal GP of Badachana block in Jajpur district, Muslim people take initiative for the Jagannath Parikrama Rath. Sarapanch Nur Jahan Begum leads the event with PS Member Chandrakala Samal



Jagannath Parikrama Arpan Rath moves in Puri town. Ranjan Ganguly

## Prarikrama mini model show on Jan 17

To give a thrilling experience to devotees

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A show on the mini model of the Shreemandir Parikrama Prakalpa will be screened on January 17 in the Jagannath Ballav auditorium premises, which will continue till January 22. The devotees after tak-

ing a round of the heritage corridor project will have thrilling experience after they take a whole view of the project. A 60 feet long and 12 feet wide big screen will be fitted for the purpose. The show will display about the Parikrama Prakalpa project, besides many things related to Lord Jagannath. A Delhi-based agency has been assigned to run the show.

Besides, for the first time, light and sound show will be



conducted in the Badadanda Municipality market wall. It will display the Kanchi Abhijan of the Lords, starting from Gajapati Purushotam Dev's love affairs with Kanchi princes Padmabati to the war with the King of Kanchi. The show will run in evening. To make the project inauguration event memorable, the light and sound show has planned as per the direction of 5T Chairman VK Pandian.



On the 4th day of Parikrama, Arpan Rath is in Ghatagaon, Jhumpura and Sadar blocks of Keonijhar district. People particularly, women, are waiting outside their houses to greet the Arpan Rath.



# 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 Rijiju, Earth Sciences Secretary M Ravichandran, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, former secretaries of the ministry and former directors general of IMD. Union minister Kiren Rijiju 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. Rijiju 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, Rijiju 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, Rijiju 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



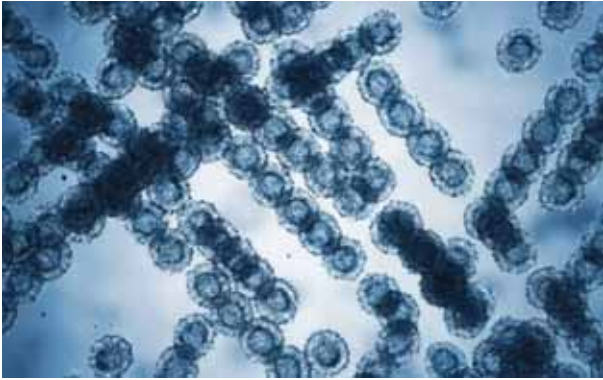
escaping multidimensional poverty in the last 9 years. As a result, India is likely to achieve its SDG target of halving multidimensional poverty well before 2030. The Government’s persistent dedication and resolute commitment to enhancing the lives of the most vulnerable and deprived have been instrumental 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

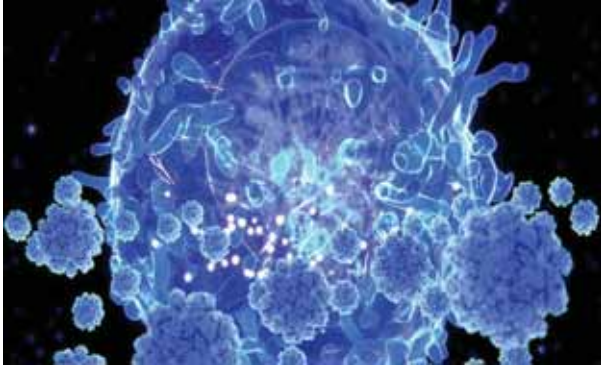
Scientists at the University of Oxford in the UK have launched first-in-human vaccine trials for the deadly Nipah virus which impacts many Asian countries, including India. The trials of the ChAdOx1 NipahB vaccine will consist of 51 people aged 18 to 55, which will be led by the Oxford Vaccine Group. 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. 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.



OPINION 6

TRUMP EXPLOITS  
LEGAL LOOPHOLES

WORLD 9

UKRAINE SHOOTS DOWN 2 RUSSIAN  
COMMAND AND CONTROL AIRCRAFT

MONEY 10

SENSEX CLOSES AT  
RECORD HIGH

BHUBANESWAR, TUESDAY JANUARY 16, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4



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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 General (Law and Order) 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 Janjati 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, nafiri, 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  
Ranjan Dilmri / 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.



## Abandonment

Former Union Minister Milind Deora spoils the Cong's Nyay Yatra party with abrupt resignation

In what has come as a surprise to many, second-generation Congress leader Milind Deora resigned from the party the very day Rahul Gandhi kicked off his Nyay Yatra. The departure of the senior Maharashtra leader to Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena adds to the challenges the Congress has been facing in recent times, and raises questions about its internal dynamics and overall strategy. It is also a telling comment on the way the party is being managed. His father Murlidhar Deora was a veteran Congress leader and the family has had a 55-year association with the Congress. Deora's departure adds to a growing list of young leaders who have left the Congress to embark on new journeys. The lack of resolution for lingering issues and intra-party factionalism has prompted several promising leaders from the Rahul camp to leave. Rahul confidant and former Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia resigned to join the BJP in March 2020 and is currently a Minister in the Modi Cabinet. Another ex-UPA Minister, Jitin Prasada, left the



Congress, citing the party's growing disconnect with people. Subsequently, a series of exits occurred, with Priyanka Chaturvedi joining the erstwhile undivided Shiv Sena, former Mahila Congress chief Sushmita Deb quitting for the TMC, former Union Minister RPN Singh, former Punjab Congress chief Sunil Jakhar and party spokesperson Jaiveer Shergill joining the BJP. The exodus began with then Assam Congress leader Himanta Biswa Sarma leaving for the BJP ahead of the 2014 polls. Congress stalwarts Capt Amarinder Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Kapil Sibal also remain on the exodus list.

Though the 47-year-old Deora did not give a reason for severing ties with the Congress, he has strongly criticised it for not focusing on "constructive issues, suggestions, merit and ability". He also blamed the party for engaging in the criticism of industrialists and businessmen. Though certainly a jolt, Deora's exit will not be a major setback for the Congress as it is already aligned with the Shiv Sena led by Uddhav Thackeray. But it must introspect the reasons for such decisions by second-generation Congress leaders. Though poaching is not new to Indian politics, the party leadership must be concerned about the issues its young Turks might have. Deora's departure brings attention to the internal conflicts and dissent within the Congress. It highlights the need for the leadership to address internal grievances and foster a more inclusive and cohesive environment. Learning from such setbacks, the leadership should focus on rebuilding trust within its ranks and projecting a united front to regain public confidence. A transparent and participatory decision-making process should be implemented to foster inclusivity within the Congress since the top-down approach is not working for it anyway. However, the party should take such incidents in its stride and focus for now on its Nyay Yatra, which should be continued with renewed vigour, focusing on grassroots engagement.

### PICTALK



Artists perform during the celebration of Bhogi, the first day of the four-day festival of Pongal, in Hyderabad

PTI

## The enduring musical heritage of the legends

Both Ustad Rashid Khan and Dr Prabha Atre played pivotal roles in globalising Indian classical music, taking it beyond geographical confines

The news of the passing away of Ustad Rashid Khan on January 9, 2024, came as a big jolt to the entire fraternity of Indian classical music. As tributes poured in – and continue – again the tragic news of the passing away of Dr Prabha Atre on January 13, 2024, has left all of us in shock. This recent departure of two stalwarts, Ustad Rashid Khan and Dr Prabha Atre, has left an indelible void that resonates through the hearts of music enthusiasts globally. These legendary artists were not just virtuosos in their respective domains, but torchbearers who illuminated the path of classical music with their innovative prowess, dedication, and profound 'sadhana'. Ustad Rashid Khan, a name synonymous with the enchanting strains of Hindustani classical music, embarked on his musical journey from a lineage steeped in tradition. Hailing from the illustrious 'Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana', Rashid Khan was a maestro par excellence, wielding the sarangi of his soul with unparalleled finesse. The delicate



fabric of his melody, woven with intricate raag renditions, left audiences spellbound and created a timeless legacy. One cannot help but marvel at Ustad Rashid Khan's mesmerizing exploration of diverse raags, each performance a celestial journey. His rendition of the timeless raag Yaman, or raag Durga for instance, transcended the boundaries of time and space, echoing the purity and precision that defined his artistry. The maestro's command over the intricacies of taal and laya, coupled with the soul-stirring alaaps, revealed a musical genius at the zenith of his craft. Similarly, Dr Prabha Atre, on the other hand, was a luminary in the realm of Hindustani classical vocal music. Her velvety voice and impeccable command over various raags marked her as a true proponent of her Kirana gharana which she

proudly represented. Dr. Atre's journey began in the vibrant cultural milieu of Pune, where she imbibed the essence of the 'Kirana Gharana', ultimately crafting her unique style. One cannot discuss Dr. Prabha Atre's contributions without acknowledging her groundbreaking research and dedication to the art form. Her scholarly pursuits delved into the intricacies of raag structures, laying the foundation for an enriched understanding of the classical repertoire. Her treatises and writings became invaluable resources for students and scholars alike, elevating the discourse surrounding Indian classical music. Dr Atre's dedication to her craft manifested in her rigorous 'sadhana' – a term encapsulating the disciplined and continuous practice that defines the life of a true artist – manifested during her renditions of complex ragas like Maru Bihag or Jogia which became a testament to the countless hours spent honing her craft, transcending the realm of mere performance to attain a spiritual communion with the divine through music.



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Ustad Rashid Khan and Dr. Prabha Atre globalized Indian classical music, transcending borders through collaborations and performances. Rashid Khan's duets with Yo-Yo Ma highlighted music's universality. Dr. Atre, through captivating international performances, spread classical music globally, fostering understanding and appreciation for this ancient art form beyond geographical confines. Maestros Ustad Rashid Khan and Dr. Prabha Atre, honoured with prestigious awards like Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan, exemplify unparalleled dedication and artistic brilliance, celebrated through numerous accolades. Ustad Rashid Khan and Dr. Prabha Atre's departure from the earthly world has left an irreplaceable void in the world of Indian classical music. Their legacy, however, lives on through the timeless melodies and profound impact they have left on generations of music enthusiasts. Farewell! (The writer is a programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, views are personal)

# Trump exploits legal loopholes

As Trump faces charges of election interference, his reliance on presidential immunity raises concerns about the erosion of democratic values in American politics

Donald Trump has historically abused technicalities to justify his conduct. Trump's businesses have involved over 4,000 state and federal legal actions, including six bankruptcies. Contrary to established precedent, Trump had stoutly refused to release his tax returns during his Presidential campaign and when portions of his returns were released, it was found that he had paid no taxes for years. Trump had brazenly said that he had "brilliantly used" U.S. tax rules to his advantage and that he was "smart", for having done so! He was able to minimize his tax liability by reporting heavy losses across his empire, and reports suggested that before 2020, he had not paid taxes in 10 out of the 15 previous assessment years, despite his confessed suitability for the Oval Office – the amoral man had taken cover of technicalities and shunned moral transparency, to cover his tracks. Trump also had the dubious distinction of being the only US President to be impeached twice in office but acquitted each time with the technicality of having requisite numbers of Republicans in the Senate, bailing him out both times. Today, when Trump faces charges of conspiring to overturn the 2020 Presidential election results (won by Democrat candidate, Joe Biden) – he is yet again invoking the technicality of being a President to seek immunity from prosecution charges. However, the provocative conduct of Trump during the 6th Jan 'insurrection' is well documented when he provoked his supporters in Proud Boys, Oath Keepers, QAnon and other far-right supremacists, neo-Nazis, neo-Confederates etc. Right through the proceedings, Trump's patent and weaponised language of falsehoods and misrepresentations was additionally loaded with inflammatory suggestions e.g., "if you don't fight like hell, you are not going to have a country anymore", "invade the capitol", 'storm the capitol' etc., even when he knew that some of his supporters were dangerously armed, as he made his proverbial, 'last stand'. In the bargain, Trump even sold



out his Vice President, Mike Pence, by asking him recklessly to alter the election results and stop Biden from assuming Presidency, unconstitutionally. But as is often the case in participative democracies, many amongst the electorate were convinced and encouraging of Trump's open disdain towards constitutional morality, and propriety and openly supportive of his active 'othering' of those, who didn't fit his worldview. Such diminishment wasn't just reserved for partisan rivals amongst the Democrats, but even for those within the Republican ranks like the late Senator, John McCain, who were shocked at the extent to which the naturally right-wing Republican cadre under Trump had started turning hyper-right, to an extent that it became an exclusivist party. Indecorous aspersions were attributed to Trump's own Vice President, Mike Pence when he refused to toe Trump's wildly unconstitutional advice. Despite his consistently amoral history, Trump leads the Republican Presidential Primaries by a huge margin, and that says something about the 'new normal' in American politics. But if the latest unheeded remark of Trump is anything to go by, it is the 'constitutional propriety' itself that seems to be the problem with



DESPITE HIS CONSISTENTLY AMORAL HISTORY, TRUMP LEADS THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES BY A HUGE MARGIN, AND THAT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT THE 'NEW NORMAL' IN AMERICAN POLITICS

the electorate who at least, unthinkingly prefer the unconstitutional language of illiberality, authoritarianism, and intolerance. Besides talking about the dangerous "bedlam" in case he is denied a shot at elections, he shamelessly spoke about wanting to be, "a dictator for one day" to shut illegal crossings at the US-Mexico border and boost energy projects. Implicit in his invocation of dictatorship was the subliminal suggestion, that firstly he is drawn to unconstitutional solutions i.e., dictatorship, and that the strong-arm methods were the only way to resolve pressing issues. It is also suggestive of his whimsical wish to change the constitution if he had his way. Just days earlier Biden had posted a sage warning, "Whether democracy is still America's sacred cause is what the 2024 election is all about". Yet Biden tellingly trails behind Trump, as if the Americans have tired of the democratic, constitutional, and inclusive ways, and now seemingly prefer a no-holds-barred approach of Trump, despite his unprecedented and unabashed derelictions. Biden has been unable to connect the defence of democracy to the day-to-day concerns of the American electorate. Even the cold fact that the

Democrat dispensation has been able to deliver better results on the most pressing issues for Americans i.e., inflation, health care, jobs, immigration, climate issues etc., - all these hard statistics count for nothing in the face of naked hate, divide and 'revenge'/'retribution' (as repeatedly called out by Trump). Hate is a more potent currency than the language of civility or unity, which is increasingly, wrongly and often fatally, perceived to be a sign of weakness and indecisiveness. The dangerous sign is that Trump's promises and portents don't share a basic belief in constitutional and participative democracy, and that is exactly what enthralls and galvanises his electoral appeal. It isn't about partisan positions as Trump is building his cult and rules. It is as fellow Republican and President George Bush warned about the Trump era, "A malign force seems at work in our common life that turns every disagreement into an argument, and every argument into a clash of cultures. So much of our politics has become a naked appeal to anger, fear and resentment." (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### TOURISM IN LAKSHADWEEP

Sir — If there is one travel destination everyone talked about last week, it's Lakshadweep. After PM Modi's now-famous photos on the archipelago and the subsequent diplomatic fracas with the Maldives, the union territory suddenly made it to everyone's must-visit bucket list. While increasing tourist footfall will benefit the region financially, we couldn't help but worry about what hordes of tourists would mean for its fragile ecology. Environmentalists, locals, and government officials would have to assess the implications of this newfound popularity. For all those who think traveling to Lakshadweep is as easy as buying a flight ticket, we have the complete lowdown in our thorough guide on the permits required, how long it takes to get them, travel and stay options, and more. But if it's a beach holiday that you are looking for, India has plenty of other options. From white sand beaches to off-beat destinations to the prettiest islands and that includes Marina Beach of Chennai. It is time to maintain beaches all around India to provide the best environment and ambience.

C K Subramaniam | Chennai

### REVISITING SWAMI JI'S CALL

Sir — National Sample Survey and Global Hunger Index depict alarming child wasting and stunting in India. Swami Vivekananda's words echo on misplaced priorities, criticizing temple politics and extravagant space missions. He emphasized the great sin of neglecting the masses, attributing it to India's downfall. Vivekananda urged a focus on mass education, nourishment, and care, emphasizing the need to uplift the underprivileged. His call to work for the well-being of the masses remains pertinent for India's regeneration. What Swami Vivekananda said long ago about poor people paying for our education is still relevant today as India

## Alarming rise in alcohol consumption



Alarming rise in alcohol consumption among youngsters, including teenagers, poses serious risks. Studies emphasize the unsafe nature of alcohol consumption under 18, contributing to increased road rage and violence. Whisky, especially detrimental to teenage brains, can lead to memory issues and poor academic performance. A survey reveals a concerning 57 million Indians grappling with alcohol addiction, with a rising percentage among the youth. Peer pressure and curiosity drive many

teenagers to start drinking, leading to addiction. The impact on brain function, causing unconsciousness, raises accident and road rage risks. Legal consequences, including imprisonment, further highlight the urgency of addressing this issue. Parents should also investigate if their children are involved in this. To make their children stop drinking, they should also cease drinking if they partake. If they do not drink, they should send their children to a counselor. Banning alcohol is not a solution because, due to human psychology, individuals tend to do things they are told not to do. In India, in the past 12 months, state governments earned 1.75 trillion from the sale of alcohol. Banning can also have a negative effect on the economy. The government should instruct alcohol sellers not to sell to youngsters. Banning is not a solution; resistance is!

Krishna Kararia | Delhi

relies more on indirect taxes. A poor person has to spend almost all his money to buy essential items and goods and thus has to pay moderate to high GST in the process. The fact of the matter is the poor pay more taxes than the rich in proportion to their respective incomes.

Sujit De | Kolkata

### INDIAN ARMY DAY

Sir — On January 15, 1949, KM Cariappa became the first Indian Army Commander-in-Chief post-independence, succeeding British Commander Francis Butcher. Born in 1899 in Karnataka's Coorg district, Cariappa led the army in the 1947 Pakistan war and retired in 1953. The day is commemorated with army drills in New Delhi, honoring soldiers with medals. The Indian Army, established in 1776, is the world's largest, including the Assam Rifles, the largest paramilitary force, founded in 1835. Army Day pays tribute to India's rich

military history. The Indian Naval Academy in Ezhimala, Kerala, is Asia's largest. The Indian Army houses a unique cavalry regiment, one of only three globally. The Intelligence Department, established in 1941, gathers classified information. India boasts 53 army camps and 9 bases. Post-independence, the army engaged in conflicts, including Kashmir, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, and wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, leading to Bangladesh's independence. The 1971 war witnessed a remarkable victory, forcing Pakistan's significant surrender. The Kargil War unfolded in 1999. The Indian Army, known for building the world's highest bridge in 1982, actively contributes to global peacekeeping under UNO mandates, safeguarding the country's borders ceaselessly, 24/7.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune


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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



BKP SINHA



ARVIND JHA

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



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 (CWHs) 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 recognised 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 wrtiter 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.

## '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



Palestinians displaced by the Israeli bombardment of the northern Gaza Strip play next to the border with Egypt, in Rafah, southern Gaza, Sunday.

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

nearly 24,000 Palestinians, devastated vast swaths of Gaza, driven around 85 per cent of the territory's 2.3 million residents

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.

Pyeonggang 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 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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2.	For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy 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.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy 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.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy Sealed tender for :- 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.	For Verka Jalandhar Dairy 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.	For Verka Mega Dairy, Bassi Pathana 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
NOTE: 1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. <a href="http://www.verka.coop">www.verka.coop</a> & e Tendering portal i.e. <a href="http://eproc.punjab.gov.in">eproc.punjab.gov.in</a> . 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 themselves

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.



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 avoided 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 avoided 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

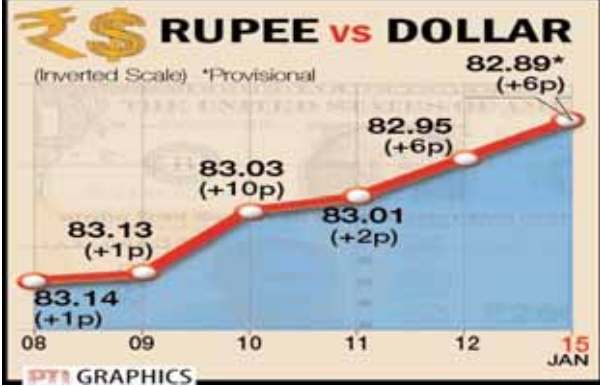
PTI ■ MUMBAI

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 greenback’s 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.

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



# India gold rush continues as Yogesh wins double

PTI ■ JAKARTA

Indian shooters' gold rush continued in the Asia Olympic Qualifiers with Yogesh Singh winning the top prize in individual as well as team event of the men's 25m centre fire pistol competition here on Monday. Yogesh claimed the individual gold medal after shooting 573, finishing ahead of silver winner Muad Al Balushi of Oman (570) and Indonesia's Anang Yulianto (567). The other two Indian participants in the event, Pankaj Yadav (567) and Akshay Jain (564), ended fourth and sixth respectively. The Indian trio aggregated 1704 to bag the team gold ahead of shooters from Oman and Indonesia. In the qualifiers for shotgun in Kuwait City, Lakshay settled for the bronze medal after shooting 33 in the six-man



final. He was placed fourth in qualification with a score of 119. Iran's Mohammad Beyranvand (40) claimed the gold medal after prevailing in shoot-off with China's Yuhao Guo. Commonwealth Games gold medalist Shreyasi Singh had to be content with a fifth-place finish in the final of women's trap, having managed 19 points. Shreyasi had qualified for the final in fourth position with a total of 115 across five rounds. Taipei's Wan-Yu Liu (44) won the gold medal in women's trap and China's Xinqiu Zhang (39) settled for silver. Kazakhstan's Mariya Dmitriyenko (30) ended with bronze. The Indian trio of Shreyasi, Manisha Keer and Bhavya Tripathi, however, won the silver medal in the women's trap team event with a total of 328, finishing behind China and ahead of Kazakhstan.



## Back on track, spirited India eye Italy scalp to keep Paris Olympics hopes alive

PTI ■ RANCHI

Their campaign back on track after a wobbly start, India would look for another spirited all-round performance to outwit lower-ranked Italy in their final pool match and progress to the semifinals of the FIH Women's Olympic Qualifier here on Tuesday. The Indians, ranked sixth in the world, did not have the best of starts to the tournament as they lost to world no. 12 USA 0-1 in their opening Pool B match. But the Savita Punia-led side bounced back strongly and produced a masterclass performance to beat New Zealand 3-1 in a must-win match on Sunday, which kept their Paris Olympics hopes alive. Having missed the bus through Asian Games, the ongoing tournament is India's only chance to qualify for this year's Olympics as top three teams from here will book Paris tickets. The USA are atop Pool B with two wins, while India and New Zealand currently have three points each but the hosts are below the Black Sticks on goal difference. And come Tuesday, the Indians would look for nothing less than a comprehensive win over world no. 20 Italy to progress to the next stage. Top two teams from each pool will progress to the semifinals

scheduled for Thursday. If the performance against the Americans on Saturday was lacklustre, it was a complete turnaround for the Indians against the Black Sticks. Leaving behind the opening match disappointment, the Indians played near-perfect hockey against New Zealand to secure the comfortable win. The Indians were guilty of hurrying with their passes and not playing according to their style — short, crisp attacking hockey — against the USA. But Sunday night, it was a complete turnaround as they utilised every corner of the pitch, including flanks, to build their moves which bore fruit. And, chief coach Janneke Schopman would be expecting the same from her side on Tuesday. There was perfect co-ordination among the backline, midfield and forward players, a thing which was missing against the USA. Salima Tete was omnipresent on the pitch against New Zealand. She was stellar with her performance and build up attacks for the forwardline from left, right and centre. The forwardline too shone bright with the likes of Sangita Kumari, Jyoti, Navneet Kaur and Lalremsiami living up to the team's expectations and the team management would be be

looking for an encore. The backline, consisting of Monika, Beauty Dung Dung, Sonika and Udit were simply brilliant against New Zealand, drawing praise from coach Schopman, who will be looking for consistency from her side. Despite Udit converting a penalty corner against New Zealand, the Indians still have plenty to work on that front. Penalty corner conversion continues to be India's biggest problem as they have converted just one out of the 13 they earned in two matches. Italy, on the other hand, are out of the reckoning after losing two games but would be looking to spoil India's party. Schopman, expectedly, is not taking the Italians lightly. "It's going to be tough because they are feisty, they are Argentinian-spirited, mediterranean-style. But if we move the ball, if we show patience, then our skills will come to shine," Schopman said about India's next match. "Penalty corner, we need to make sure we execute. We need to make sure that our strikers are in good position inside the striking circle." One advantage for India is that they will play after the USA vs New Zealand Pool B match on Tuesday, and they will have a clear idea about the margin of win they need against Italy.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) has contested the disqualification of trap marksman Manavjit Singh Sandhu, who was barred from competition at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers because of "faulty" gun stock, categorically telling the event's Jury of Appeal that he was not seeking any "unfair advantage". Shotgun coach Vikram Chopra has written a letter to the tournament's jury of appeal, a copy of which is with PTI, that Manavjit, a former world champion, had not breached the two International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) rules cited by the tournament organisers for disqualifying the Indian athlete. The two rules under which Manavjit's gun was declared "faulty" are 9.4.2.11 and 9.4.1 (a,b). Rule 9.4.2.11 states: "The depth of the buttstock (either adjustable or Monte Carlo type) measured from the highest point of the cheek rest to the lowest point of the butt plate toe must

## Manavjit was not seeking unfair advantage, NRAI tells Jury of Appeal

not exceed 170mm (17cm). Any butt plate toe vertical extension which is not an integral part of the buttstock and simply intended to increase its depth, is not permitted." According to Rule 9.4.1 (a,b): a) Athletes must use only equipment and clothing that comply with the ISSF Rules; b) Any shotgun, device, equipment, accessory or other item that may give an athlete an unfair advantage over others and that is not specifically mentioned in these Rules, or that is contrary to the spirit of these Rules, including accessories or devices used to facilitate the counting of targets, is prohibited. The Jury chairman Hassan Binhdia, in his decision on Sunday while disqualifying Manavjit wrote that, "The jury decided not to allow the shooter to use the gun with the ver-



tical extension made by the shooter. "The jury committee created to see the protest decided to deny the protest because the gun specification does not comply with Rule 9.4.2.11, which is saying (any butt plate-toe vertical extension, which is not an integral part of the buttstock and simply intended to increase its

depth is not permitted. Thirdly, the gun does not comply with Rule number 9.4.1 (a,b) equipment restriction." A butt plate, made usually of metal and attached to the butt end of a gunstock, helps shooters get the right fit on their shoulder and to adjust their cheek on the stock before firing. Chopra, in defence of Manavjit,

## Egypt and Nigeria have frustrating starts at Africa Cup

AP ■ ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

Big names Mohamed Salah and Victor Osimhen endured a difficult start to the Africa Cup of Nations as Sunday turned into a day for the underdog. Salah needed to score a late penalty to spare Egypt's embarrassment by drawing 2-2 against Mozambique, and Osimhen was unable to lift Nigeria to a winning start as the "Super Eagles" were held 1-1 by Equatorial Guinea in their opening game. Four-time champion Ghana conceded in injury time to lose 2-1 to Cape Verde, maintaining the small Atlantic island nation's record of never losing its opening Africa Cup game in four tournament appearances. "It's a big team in Africa, in the world. Ghana has a lot of good players. But we showed tonight that we have a good team, good players, and we deserved to win," Cape Verde veteran Ryan Mendes said. **CHEERS FOR MOZAMBIQUE:** Salah stayed cool to score from the spot in the seventh minute of second-half stoppage time after Domingos was adjudged to have fouled Mostafa



Mohamed in a VAR review. That denied Mozambique its first-ever tournament win at the 13th attempt. But the team was still cheered by the majority of fans at the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Stadium. Salah had also set up Mohamed to fire in the opener in the second minute of the Group B game. The stadium, which had been filling up with Ghana and Cape Verde fans for the later match at the same venue, erupted when Mozambique winger Witi equalized with a header to Domingos' cross in the 55th, and again three minutes later when Clésio Baúque fired the under-

dogs in front. "It's not the names that play, it's the team, it's everybody," said Mozambique defender Reinildo. "We all save, we all play, we all score, we all concede. That's what does it." Fans booed when the seven minutes of injury time was announced and cries of "Mozambique, Mozambique" rang around the stadium. But Salah showed no nerves as he salvaged a point for "The Pharaohs" as they began their bid for a record-extending eighth title. **NIGERIA DRAWS:** Osimhen scored but missed several good

chances as Equatorial Guinea held on to draw 1-1. Goalkeeper Jesús Owono produced a string of saves to frustrate three-time champion Nigeria in the second half after Osimhen had equalized in the first. Nigeria dominated from the start only to be caught out in the 36th minute when José Machín set up Iban Salvador to fire Equatorial Guinea ahead. Osimhen replied around a minute later when Ademola Lookman's deflected cross dropped kindly for him to head in at the far post. The result leaves coach José Peseiro's team under pressure going into Thursday's game against host nation Ivory Coast, which started the tournament Saturday with a 2-0 win over Ghana-Bissau. **GHANA LOSES OPENER:** Cape Verde substitute Garry Rodrigues scored in stoppage time for a 2-1 win over four-time champion Ghana in Group B. The "Blue Sharks" got off to a great start with Jamiro Monteiro scoring in the 17th minute on a rebound from Jovane Cabral's initial shot saved by Richard Ofori in the Ghana goal.



## Focus on Satwik, Chirag as home shuttlers look to dazzle at India Open

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Expectations will be high when Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty spearhead the home challenge at the India Open super 750 badminton tournament beginning here on Tuesday, hoping to annex their first silverware of the new season. With six titles in 2023, Satwik and Chirag have been a cut above the rest of the Indians, and the runner-up finish at the Malaysia super 1000 has only spiced things up as the Indian shuttlers look to deliver at home. The BAI flagship tournament, which was upgraded to super 750 in 2023, proved a dampener for home shuttlers last season when none of the Indians could cross the second round. In the 2022 edition, Satwik-Chirag and Lakshya Sen stood on the podium with the men's doubles and men's singles crown and the home shuttlers will hope to once again live up to the expectations and prove that last year was an aberration. Satwik and Chirag have the wherewithal to go the distance this time as the duo will be charged up after coming marginally short in the final in Kuala Lumpur on Sunday. "We want to do well in our home country next week, so we don't want to relax with this, we are more hungry and next week we want to do well in front of our home crowd," Satwik said on Sunday. Second seeds Satwik and

Chirag, who were forced to pull out ahead of the second round last year due to an injury suffered by the former, will face world No. 25 Fang-Jen Lee and Fang-Chih Lee of Taipei in their opening round. Chirag added: "We are not done yet. India Open is coming up next week and we want to go one better." While Satwik-Chirag will be one of the frontrunners for the title, all eyes will also be on HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen, and Kidambi Srikanth in men's singles, especially in the absence of two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu, who is nursing a knee injury. Having fared poorly in Malaysia, world No. 8 Prannoy and Lakshya will look to find their rhythm quickly, while Srikanth must have got some confidence back following his win over Jonatan Christie in the opening round last week. Prannoy and Sen will look for a good start, having suffered first-round exits in Kuala Lumpur, when they open against Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen and Priyanshu Rajawat respectively. "India Open has always been special. Since 2012, I have been playing in this tournament and I have a lot of good memories. Having a 750 stature is big for Indian badminton as fans can now see top players perform closely. So there is a lot of hunger to go out there and win this tournament," said Prannoy, who won the world championships and Asian Games bronze medals in 2023.

## Gauff advances to Australian Open 2nd round

AP ■ MELBOURNE

With increased confidence in her serve thanks to some advice from Andy Roddick, Coco Gauff began her quest for back-to-back Grand Slam singles titles with a 6-3, 6-0 victory over Anna Karolina Schmiedlova at the Australian Open on Monday. The 19-year-old American, who won her first major at the U.S. Open in September, wrapped up victory in exactly one hour. "I was a little nervous the first set," fourth-seeded Gauff said. "I think I did well returning, then I found my serve toward the end (of the set). When I was nervous at 3-3, I told myself: I feel good, I look good, so just have fun." That was able to relax me a little bit." Gauff dropped just one point on her serve in the second set and said that former No. 1 Roddick had recently given her some serving tips. "It was really cool," she said. "He's a really chill guy. I met him before but never to that level. I went to Charlotte (North Carolina) for two days. It was a really good two days. I think that my serve has improved. He's probably one of the best servers in history. . . ." Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova was beaten 6-1, 6-2 by Dayana Yastremska. Seventh-seeded Vondrousova missed the Adelaide tune-up event with a hip injury and struggled on serve throughout, hitting seven double faults. "I didn't practice because I was injured," she said. "I think that was the important thing. I lost

myself at the beginning." Third-seeded Daniil Medvedev, the 2021 and 2022 finalist at Melbourne Park, advanced to the second round when his opponent Terence Atmane retired early in the fourth set suffering from cramps. Medvedev had dropped the first set but was leading 5-7, 6-2, 6-4, 1-0 when the 22-year-old Atmane quit. "It's quite funny because when I was feeling tired in the third set, I looked up the other end and saw he was cramping," Medvedev said. "The conditions were fine but it has not been hot these seven days and then it was hot today, so you get more stressed." Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost last year's Australian final to Novak Djokovic in three sets, advanced with a 5-7, 6-1, 6-1, 6-3 win over Zizou Bergs. Stan Wawrinka, the 2014 Australian Open champion and three-time Grand Slam winner, was beaten 6-4, 3-6, 5-7, 6-3, 6-0 by Adrian Mannarino. Ben Shelton, a quarterfinalist here 12 months ago, beat Roberto Bautista Agut 6-2, 7-6 (2), 7-5. Another American, 25th-seeded Seb Korda, defeated Vit Kopriva 6-1, 6-4, 2-6, 4-6, 6-2. Five-time finalist Andy Murray lost to Tomas Martin Etcheverry 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 while Gael Monfils defeated Yannick Hanfmann 6-4, 6-3, 7-5. Four-time major winner Naomi Osaka later makes her much-anticipated comeback to Grand Slam tennis after the birth of her daughter. The Japanese player takes on Caroline Garcia of France in the first round in the last match on Rod Laver Arena.

## Real Madrid beats Barcelona 4-1 to win Spanish Super Cup

AP ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)

Vinicius Júnior did his best Cristiano Ronaldo impression in Saudi Arabia, scoring a hat trick and leading Real Madrid to a 4-1 rout of Barcelona and the Spanish Super Cup trophy. Vinicius scored his three goals in the first half as Madrid beat Barcelona to lift its first trophy of the season on Sunday. After his first goal, the Brazil forward imitated the trademark celebration of the former Madrid great, with Ronaldo reportedly at the Riyadh stadium. "It was for Cris, because he is my idol and now he is playing here," said Vinicius, who was named the best player of the final. "I'm very happy with myself and with my team. It's not easy to play against Barcelona



and to win 4-1 is tough. We played an almost perfect match." Rodrygo also scored for Madrid, which now has 13 Super Cup trophies, one less than the Catalan club. It was Madrid's second Super Cup triumph since the tournament was moved to Saudi Arabia four years ago. Robert Lewandowski scored

Barcelona's goal to make it 2-1 in the first half. The "clasico" between the Spanish powerhouses was a rematch of last year's Super Cup final that Barcelona won 3-1 for its first trophy with coach Xavi Hernández and without Lionel Messi. Madrid had also won at

Barcelona in the first "clasico" of the season in October in the Spanish league. Barcelona played a man down from the 71st after defender Ronald Araujo was shown a second yellow card for a foul on Vinicius. Madrid was already winning 4-1 at the time. The victory added to Madrid's momentum as Carlo Ancelotti's team remains unbeaten in 21 consecutive games in all competitions. Its last setback was a 3-1 loss at Atletico Madrid in the Spanish league in September. In contrast, the defeat adds to Barcelona's troubles and increases the pressure on Xavi, whose team hasn't played well recently. It trails second-place Madrid by seven points in the Spanish league, with Catalan opponent Girona another point ahead at the top having played an extra game.



# 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



tion 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.