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CM inaugurates Odia University

Adivasi Mela in city from tomorrow

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik inaugurated the Odia University at Satyabadi in Puri district on Wednesday.

He unveiled a new building of the university through videoconferencing.

The university has been constructed on nine acres of land with hostels for male and female students, classrooms, library, cafeteria, offices and other infrastructures.

The administrative building of the university has architecture with designs of Odia al-



phabets.

Patnaik had laid the foundation-stone for the university on October 9, 2018 near the Bakula Bana Vidyalaya.

The university has a capacity of 200 students. It was ear-

lier operating from a temporary campus at the Sakhigopal Panthashala in Puri district.

The university offers admissions in three subjects -- Odia Language and Literature, Linguistics and Natural Language

Processing and Regional, Tribal Language and Heritage Studies.

The Chief Minister said the present time is a glorious period for the Odia community. The Parikrama project of the Jagannath Temple was inaugurated recently while the campus of 'Odia Vishwavidyalaya' was unveiled on Wednesday.

Besides, the Samalei project in Sambalpur would be inaugurated on January 27 and the first Vishwa Odia Bhasa Sammilani would be held in Bhubaneswar on February 3, he said.

At Adivasi Exhibition Ground, Unit I

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The annual Adivasi Mela-2024 will be held in the Adivasi Exhibition Ground, Unit-I, near Sishu Bhawan Square, from January 26 to February 5. Stalls in the traditional Adivasi Haat and Tribal Art and Crafts segment will be erected by 22 Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), 17 Micro Project Areas (MPAs), and various line



departments of the State Government. The ground will be open to the general public from 2:30 pm to 9 pm.

A flagship event of the SC/ST Development, Minorities, and Backward Classes Welfare Department, the event show-

cases tribal life, anthropology, besides providing a market for the sale of agricultural products, minor forest produce and craft materials. It also features events such as beautiful tribal dances, a multilingual drama festival in tribal languages, a

drama presented by the SC/ST Development Department Cultural Association and a Bhajan Sandhya.

The most interesting part of the festival is the creation of life-size Adivasi Gaon (tribal huts) showcasing the lifestyle and culture of the different tribal communities and Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). This year, the tribal huts will include the huts of Kutia Kandha, Santhal, Paudi Bhuyan, Hill Khadia and Mankirdia, Juanga Munda, Gadaba, Dongria Kandha, Lanjia Saora, Bonda and Chuktia Bhunjia.

K Nagar DAV observes Parakram Diwas

To commemorate birth anniv of Bose, Sai, Saraswati

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar observed Parakram Diwas, the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Veer Surendra Sai, in addition to commemorating the 200th birth anniversary of Maharshi Swami Dayananda Saraswati in its premises on Tuesday.

Principal Balaram Mohapatra, all supervisors, teachers and members of the Student Cabinet offered their floral tributes to the great patriots of India's freedom struggle. Joining as the chief guest, Dr Gitanjali Mishra of Regional Red Cross Centre, Bhubaneswar reiterated the exemplary valour and audacity of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Veer Surendra Sai and their contribution to the freedom movement of India.

While summing up the cru-



cial role of the great spiritual leader Maharshi Swami Dayananda Saraswati in leading the Indian masses on the right path in their quest for knowledge, she said that the ideologies of these great souls shall continue to rule the over the hearts of thousands and millions of people all over the world till eternity.

A wide range of activities were organised to mark the occasion. The students recounted the glory and sacrifice of the all-time great leaders through their beautiful chorus and small skit. A blood donation camp was organized in collaboration with Ama Odisha and Regional Red Cross Center, Bhubaneswar in which more than fifty units of blood were collected. The chief guest distributed the prizes and certificates to the winners of the Annual Exhibition.

Odisha Biotech Policy 2024 gets Cabinet nod

Motto is to create biotechnology ecosystem that will mark Odisha a key investment destination

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Cabinet on Tuesday approved the Odisha Biotechnology Policy 2024 with the objective of harnessing the potential of biotechnology towards sustainable socio-economic development and to boost the biotechnology ecosystem of the State, said Chief Secretary Pradeep Jena.

The policy seeks to attract

and bring investors and stakeholders together and to empower them to create a flourishing biotechnology ecosystem that will mark Odisha as a key investment destination for biotechnology, said Science and Technology Minister Ashok Panda.

"Incentives provided under the policy include support for development of biotech parks promoted by State agencies or private sectors, capital investment subsidy on actual investment in plant and machinery in biotech units, soft loan assistance to large and mega biotechnology units operating in the State for setting up of production units," the

Minister said.

Eligible biotechnology units will be given the benefit of employment generation incentive which will be applicable only to employees engaged in biotechnology based technical work. Reimbursement for registration of patent, GI, trademark and design will be applicable to the biotechnology units operating in the State, said Chief Secretary Jena.

The biotechnology units will be given financial assistance for obtaining quality certifications from recognised institutions during the policy period, he added. Eligible biotechnology units/ biotechnol-

ogy start-ups will be provided with financial assistance for showcasing their products or technologies in national or international events, he informed.

A dedicated Directorate of Biotechnology shall be created for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of various functions envisaged in the policy for the development of biotechnology in the State, Jena said further.

The Chief Secretary said the State Government will constitute an Odisha Biotech Vision Group (OBVG) to act as a think tank and advisory body on diverse policy related issues.

Storytelling event BhuFesto from Feb 3 to 5

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) is set to host the third edition of the Bhubaneswar Festival of Storytelling (BhuFesto) from February 3 to 5.

This captivating event will take place simultaneously at four distinct locations within the city, Indira Gandhi Park, Odisha Crafts Museum Kalabhoomi, APJ Abdul Kalam Park in Kalinga Nagar and Buddha Jayanti Park in Niladr Vihar.

The festivities will unfold between 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm each day.

Originating in 2018 as part of DOT FEST during the Men's Hockey World Cup, BhuFesto returned for its second edition in January 2023, once again as part of Dot Fest



on the sidelines of the Men's Hockey World Cup. This year, it will be seamlessly integrated into the Ekamra Utsav, coinciding with the 'Biswa Odia Bhasa Sammilani' scheduled from February 3 to 5.

The event promises a diverse range of activities with distinguished oral storytellers such as Biswa Kalyan Rath,

Prachi Tara and Meera Das gracing the stage. Alongside he storytelling sessions, attendees can also enjoy standup comedy, citizen storytelling, inspirational life stories and folk performances.

Notably, all performances will be conducted exclusively in the Odia language.

The BDA says BhuFesto is

not just a festival but a platform for inclusivity, enabling participation from various communities, including schools, colleges, and slums. A special storytelling session using sign language has been curated to cater to the visually and hearing-impaired guests, ensuring an inclusive and enriching experience for all.

HC puts on hold Junior Teacher recruitment

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Orissa High Court on Wednesday ordered to put the recruitment of Junior Teachers in the State on hold till January 30 amid allegations of irregularities in the process.

However, the court allowed the competent authorities to continue the selection process involving the verification of documents.

The next date of hearing of a petition earlier filed alleging irregularities was fixed for January 30.

The State Government filed an affidavit and informed the court that a district-wise merit-cum-preference list has been published.

"We had objected to the selection of candidates based on

a State list and appealed to the High Court to intervene and order the State Government to prepare a district-wise list instead. The State Government informed the court that it has prepared a district-wise list. When the court asked to clarify whether the Government withdrew its earlier prepared State list or not, the party said 'no'. We previously checked with a list of Baleswar district, in which we found that candidates who have not opted for the district in their first preferences have been given appointment," the defence counsel said to mediapersons.

The High Court's interim order given in this connection is still in force, the counsel added.

Dense fog, more rains predicted in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State is currently experiencing cold conditions with overcast weather and intermittent spells of light to moderate rainfall for the last couple of days.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday said that a trough runs from south interior Karnataka to interior Odisha across north interior Karnataka and a cyclonic circulation over Vidarbha, south Chhattisgarh at 0.9 km above mean sea-level.

As per the Regional Office of the IMD here, there would be no large change in the minimum temperature (night temperature) during the next 24 hours following which there would be a drop of 2 to 3 degree Celsius at many places during the next three days.

On Thursday, light to moderate rain or thundershower is very likely to occur at many places over the districts of north Odisha.

Dense fog is very likely to occur in the districts of Kandhamal, Angul, Dhenkanal, Subarnapur, Boudh, Kalahandi, Balangir, Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Jharsuguda and Bargarh

On Friday, light rain very likely to occur in the districts of Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapada, Puri, Ganjam, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Rayagada and Koraput

Dense fog is very likely to occur in the districts of Kalahandi, Balangir, Kandhamal, Subarnapur, Boudh, Bargarh, Sambalpur, Angul, Dhenkanal, Nayagarh, Cuttack, Jajpur, Deogarh, Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Jharsuguda, said the IMD.

HITTING THE BULL’S EYE

No matter what, BJD’s invincibility is difficult to demolish

Quite at the outset, it has to be made clear that even after so much of screaming 'foul' about a few not very acceptable acts in the process of opening of the Puri heritage corridor, the BJD stands out like a colossus among all political parties duly dwarfed by the former for the simple reason of not having any organised grassroots base or a chief ministerial face good enough to attract public attention. The present Congress party, wrongly claiming to be the one formed in 1885, is only thin air in visibility or importance. The newly-formed I. N. D. I. A, of which this oldest political outfit is a member, has proven to be a stillborn baby. The BJP in Odisha too is a broken glass pane letting in chilly air and rain alike because the local leaders are only loudmouths without the skills to even realise the party high command is proudly happy about the BJD doing well in Odisha and honouring all its critical requests during crises the way a true ally stands by. Only one saffron party



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

leader called Aparajita Sarangi is able to move and shake people by her fearless acts of putting tough challenges for the contenders. Even the big guy Dharmendra Pradhan, a second-time Cabinet Minister, hasn't been successful in organising an electorate to send him to the Lok Sabha this time around. He is toying with several constituencies for the last couple of years in vain despite having some fan following in a few pockets. Even the poor man's Yogi of Odisha namely

Pratap Sarangi is not sure Baleswar people will send him to the Lower House yet again. The BJP State boss Manmohan Samal only makes tall claims saying 'this time BJP ministry' without making clear the name of the chief ministerial creature. The other talkative 'lotus guys and girls' only keep ranting like crazy about how ineffective and unethical the BJD Government is without conviction or clarity. For all this, the BJD, with its rock-solid grassroots foundation and spread across the State, is the obvious choice of the people for this party has been delivering the goods, no matter how small or big.

Lately, the critics keep grumbling that the BJD has been methodically hijacked by a Tamil young man for being extremely close to Naveen as he did a long stint as the private secretary to the Chief Minister. V Karthikeyan Pandian, the Tamil wonder boy in question, has recently resigned from the most coveted IAS cadre like Aparajita Sarangi to serve the people of Odisha as a political leader. An

avowed follower of Lord Jagannath the same way as Naveen, both the master and principal aide decided to give the majestic temple surrounding such a facelift as to turn Puri both a preferred pilgrimage and a tourist destination. Incidentally, though unfortunately, the temple allows only 'orthodox Hindus' into it, which though is vague to define. It may be known well here that the majority of famous temples of India permit all humans to have a glance of the sacred deities in the sanctum sanctorum. This very illogically partial arrangement perhaps disturbed Naveen a bit too much, for which he planned a grand heritage corridor around the beautiful temple with exquisitely-carved statues and structures all over. This unique corridor would make possible a most pleasurable detour by visitors from all over the world who are banned from entry into the 12th-century shrine. So, the master and the closest aide duo decided to bring the structure in place knowing well the task was

enormously daunting as age-old religious institutions like monasteries and mutts along with hundreds of private tenements occupied the area lawfully since centuries. To have a decent corridor with all comforting facilities would require at least 150 feet of width all around. VK, the smart go-getter, planned for a 200-feet-wide open space to put up the dream structure superbly. No one in hundreds of years had ever thought of such a structure as that would mean displacing many people and institutions, which is an impossible task as law courts would side by the affected people and the battles would go on and on for decades. But as if the Lord heard prayers, the courts got supportive while the state authorities went to extreme limits to persuade the 'to-be-affected' people to cooperate in return for hugely unimaginable compensation along with rehabilitation packages. Then, there were the statutory hawks including the Archaeological Survey of India and the National Monument

Authority that put their foot first roaring 'No'. This battle turned out to less fierce than convincing the displaced people and several court scuffles later. All went well and the permissions landed in hand quite in good time. That is how within four years, the project got completed.

On every count, the Puri heritage corridor project was at least hundred times more difficult than building the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Once the Supreme Court passed the verdict, the Hindu community over the globe came forward to fund. Crowd funding became child's play. So much money came pouring in as could not have been spent. Nearly four thousand crores came from all over as the sentiment was high. The 500-year waiting period was over and the revenge mood among the Hindus was at its peak. Eventually, only 1,800 crore rupees was spent to build the beautiful temple without any hitch as it was on a clean site requiring no displacement or rehabilitation efforts like in Puri.

So, truly impartial, objective, prudent and clear-headed people would know too well that the Ayodhya Ram Temple construction cannot ever be compared with that of the Puri heritage corridor making. The Ram Temple project has been pretty much smooth and easy.

Naveen and VK may have committed simple silly errors like permitting the people in charge to collect rice and nuts the wrong way. But the intentions having been noble, common people have realised that the structure built against worst odds makes Puri the face of India in a way, not only of Odisha.

No wonder, the BJD has grabbed global attention which will give rich dividends in the 2024 elections. If only the BJP or the Congress had become organised with stellar faces to project as leaders, the BJD may have had some problems. But since the two contenders are broken, disjointed leaderless and sick outfits in Odisha, the BJD is likely to have a cakewalk yet again.

OPINION 6

BHARAT RATNA: HONOURING
THE LEGACY OF JAN NAYAK

WORLD 9

IMRAN KHAN WARNS HIS
PARTY CANDIDATES

MONEY 10

SPACE INDUSTRY SEEKS LIBERAL
FDI POLICY, PLI IN BUDGET

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY JANUARY 25, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4



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PM urges Ministers not to crowd Ayodhya

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI/AYODHYA

A day after a massive rush at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi advised all his Cabinet colleagues on Wednesday to refrain from visiting the holy city for now and to plan their pilgrimage from mid-February onwards. Besides, well-placed sources in the government and within the ruling party BJP told The Pioneer that each party parliamentarian and party office bearer has been given a target to facilitate an Ayodhya visit for people within their constituency or jurisdiction, particularly for women and elderly Ram Bhakts.

Sources mentioned that during the Cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister suggested that, due to the heavy rush and to prevent inconvenience to the public caused by VIPs with protocols, Cabinet members should avoid visiting at this time. The Prime Minister's advisory came after devotees flocked to Ram Mandir in huge numbers a day after the praan pratishthaa ceremony on January 22.

The ministers will visit the Ram Mandir for darshan later from February onwards, sources said. Sources also mentioned that party MPs, as well as the entire Council of Ministers, will "facilitate" at least 2,500 people/devotees from their constituency for the Ayodhya pilgrimage.

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls likely to be held in April-

ACCORD PRIORITY TO DEVOTEES



May, the same pattern to enable a large number of visitors to Ayodhya could be replicated by the State ministers and leaders as well.

The Ram Temple at Ayodhya has been a major poll plank and included in the party's manifesto for the BJP for three decades, along with the abrogation of Article 370, and both processes

have been completed.

This was the second time that the PM had to urge refraining from visiting Ayodhya, with the first instance occurring in December after he inaugurated several projects, including the airport and railway station.

On December 30, anticipating a large turnout, Modi had suggested that people, out of

emotion, should refrain from visiting Ayodhya on the praan pratishthaa day and instead plan their pilgrimage a couple of days later. In the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday, Modi also inquired about the feedback from the public after the inauguration of the highly-awaited Ram mandir in Ayodhya.

An idol of the new Ram Lalla was

consecrated at the Ayodhya temple on Monday, with PM Modi leading the event. The ceremony was live-streamed across the country.

Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting, Union Minister Anurag Thakur shared that the Union Cabinet congratulated PM Modi on the successful praan pratishthaa ceremony.

Air India fined ₹1.1 crore for safety breaches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a penalty of ₹1.10 crore on Air India after an airline employee alleged safety violations on flights operated on certain long-range terrain-critical routes, specifically regarding the operations of leased Boeing 777 planes to the US.

This is the second time in a week that the regulator has penalised Air India. The DGCA had received a complaint from a former Air India pilot alleging that the airline operated Boeing 777 planes to the US without having the required emergency oxygen supply system.

A comprehensive investigation into the matter was carried out by the DGCA, which also issued a show-cause notice to the airline. "Since the operations of the leased aircraft were not in line with regulatory/OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) performance limits, the DGCA has initiated enforcement action and imposed a penalty of Rs 1.10 crore on Air India," the DGCA said in a release on Wednesday.

Reacting to the development, Air India stated that the raised issue had been thoroughly examined by the airline along with external experts. It was concluded that there was no compromise on safety whatsoever, the airline added.

"We disagree with the order issued by the DGCA. The issues raised were thoroughly examined by Air India along with external experts, concluding that there was no compromise on safety whatsoever," Air India said.

PM headed for mega projects launch in Bulandshahr

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address his first electoral rally scheduled in Bulandshahr on Thursday. Given that Varanasi is the home constituency of Prime Minister Modi, the decision to start the campaign from Bulandshahr has sparked speculation about the strategic reasoning behind this choice. The Prime Minister will launch development projects worth more than ₹19,100 crore, including the 173-km-long double-line electrified section between New Khurja and New Rewari on the dedicated freight corridor (DFC), by flagging off goods trains from the two stations. The rally in Bulandshahr will mark the beginning of the election campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and comes days after the praan pratishthaa of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

The BJP claims that around five lakh people will attend PM Modi's rally in Bulandshahr. Many in the BJP feel that Bulandshahr is also lucky for Narendra Modi, as the PM launched his campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls from this city.

Prime Minister Modi also intends to connect with voters and supporters in areas where the party faced challenges in the previous elections. The focus is on sharing the winning mantra and garnering support in a bid to secure victory in the contested



seats of western Uttar Pradesh. The BJP, which swept Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections by winning 71 out of 80 seats, saw, albeit inconsequential, a decline of nine seats in the 2019 general elections. Notably, the BJP holds eight out of 14 seats in western Uttar Pradesh, with defeats in six constituencies in 2019.

With the upcoming 2024 elections, Prime Minister Modi aims to reverse this trend, particularly in the eight out of 14 seats the BJP currently holds in the region.

As Congress and the Samajwadi Party engage in seat-sharing talks for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the political landscape in Uttar Pradesh seems poised for an intriguing

contest in the months to come. On this occasion, PM Modi will launch development projects worth more than ₹19,100 crore, including the 173-km-long double-line electrified section between New Khurja and New Rewari on the dedicated freight corridor, by flagging off goods trains from the two stations. Officials stated that this new DFC section is crucial as it establishes connectivity between the western and eastern freight corridors. The section is also noteworthy for its remarkable engineering feat, featuring a one-kilometre-long double-line rail tunnel with high-rise electrification, the first of its kind in the world. This tunnel is designed to seamlessly operate double-stack container trains. The new DFC section is expected

to enhance the operation of passenger trains due to the shifting of goods trains onto the DFC track, they explained. The prime minister will also inaugurate the fourth rail line connecting Mathura-Palwal and Chhipiyana Buzurg-Dadri sections, along with multiple road development projects. These road projects, developed at a cumulative cost of more than ₹5,000 crore, will improve connectivity and contribute to the economic development of the region, they added.

Among other projects Modi will inaugurate is the Indian Oil's Tundla-Gawaria pipeline and an "integrated industrial township at Greater Noida" (IITGN), developed in line with the prime minister's vision of integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects under PM-GatiShakti.

Built at a cost of ₹1,714 crore, the project is spread over 747 acres and is located near the intersection of the eastern and western dedicated freight corridors, with the Eastern Peripheral Expressway to the south and the Delhi-Howrah broad gauge railway line to the east. IITGN's strategic location ensures unparalleled connectivity, as other infrastructure for multi-modal connectivity is present in the vicinity of this project, officials said.

Centre allows mobile tower in forest to meet 4G target

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry is treading cautiously as it attempts to strike a balance between technological progress and the preservation of natural habitats. It has relaxed regulations for the installation of mobile towers in forest-protected areas, including national parks and wildlife habitats across the country. However, the core and critical wildlife areas of tiger homes are excluded.

This move aims to support the government's ambitious project, spearheading the extension of seamless 4G internet connectivity to 24,680 uncovered villages in the country. The project entails the construction of at least 16,464 telecom towers. However, the approval for such construction in protected areas comes with conditions. Protected land can be allocated to a "user agency" only if no private or alternative revenue land is available.

In its recently issued guidelines, the Ministry also stipulates that the user agency must obtain an undertaking from the district magistrate confirming the unavailability of alternative land. A user agency refers to the entity proposing and



overseeing the construction and operation of the mobile tower. This entity could be a mobile network operator, government agency, or another party seeking permission for installation within a protected area. Notably, no proposal for the installation of mobile towers in the core/critical tiger habitat, as notified under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, will be allowed. The guidelines were formulated in response to a significant number of proposals from various States and Union Territories seeking approval from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife under the Ministry. These proposals aimed at the installation of mobile towers and laying of Optical Fiber Cables inside national parks, sanctuaries, tiger reserves, and tiger corridors.

Lakshadweep scripts a melodious story of hope

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Lakshadweep, a group of islands Arabian Sea, which witnessed anti-India protests for a couple of months by secessionist forces who were out to create a hub of narcotics trade, is back to normalcy and that too in style. The residents of the picturesque islands are busy driving the economy in full speed adding colour to the Blue Revolution conceived by the Centre. Now it is time for agatti, arabianesis, koyas, sulci

palma and purushothamani to rejuvenate the lives of Lakshadweep population. What and who are these characters? That we will come to later in the story.

It all began last month with the two-day long tour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the islands where he interacted with the local residents, especially women. When the women shared with Prime Minister Modi how they are struggling to meet both ends, the latter explained to them about the potential of Pradhan Mantri



Matsya Sampada Yojana (PM MSY), a scheme to bring about the Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development. The Prime Minister conferred with scientists of National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources, a unit under Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Dr UK Sarkar, director, ICAR, briefed the Prime Minister about the five varieties of ornamental shrimps developed by the Centre for Peninsular Marine Fish Genetic Resources.

"Captive breeding of these shrimps is an ideal profession for women because it needs care, skill and of course the motherly touch. Beautiful shrimps with unique colour and design patterns have been developed in captivity by our scientists and we handed them over to the women in Lakshadweep," said Dr UK Sarkar. Dr TT Ajith Kumar, principal scientist and the chief architect of the project, said community aquaculture units, each with an investment of Rs 2.5 lakh and

minimum ten women fishers started functioning before the Prime Minister's flight reached New Delhi.

"There are 45 women fully engaged in breeding these unique shrimps which are a treat to the eyes. We have developed ornamental fish breeds and they command a good market," Ajith told The Pioneer.

"The ornamental shrimps will go much higher places than the ornamental fish breeds and will add colour to the Blue Revolution," he added.

Melanistic tiger safari coming up in Similipal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government is now setting up an exclusive Melanistic tiger safari near Similipal in Mayurbhanj district.

Following this, the, visitors would have the opportunity to watch melanistic or black tigers in the wild near the Similipal Tiger Reserve.

"Glad to announce that Odisha is setting up an exclusive Melanistic Tiger Safari near Similipal Tiger Reserve in Mayurbhanj. Tourists and visitors can now have a glimpse of the rare and majestic species found only in Odisha," said Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik in a X post on



Wednesday. Earlier, the Centre had announced that melanistic or black tigers have been sighted only in Similipal in Odisha.

"Melanistic tigers have been recorded only in Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha. As per

the 2022 cycle of the All India Tiger estimation, a total of 16 tigers were recorded in Similipal, out of which 10 were melanistic," said Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ashwini Kumar Choubey in Rajya Sabha.

‘Write justification while prescribing antimicrobials’

Odisha Govt asks doctors

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government has asked doctors in the State to mention justification while prescribing antimicrobials to patients.

The move came on the basis of instructions issued by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in this regard.

Odisha Health and Family Welfare Secretary Shalini Pandit has written a letter in this connection to all directors of the department, superintendents of government and private medical colleges and hospitals, CDMs and PHOs.

"I am to say that as reported, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) puts many of the gains of modern medicine at risk and threatens the effective prevention and treatment of

infections caused by resistant microbes, resulting in prolonged illness and greater risk of death. Treatment failures also lead to longer periods of infectivity and prohibitive high cost of the second-line drugs may result in failure to treat these diseases in many individuals. Misuse and over-use of antimicrobials is one of the main drivers in the emergence of drug-resistant pathogens. With few new antibiotics in the research & development pipeline, prudent antibiotic use is the only option to delay the development of resistance," wrote Pandit in the letter.

"It is pertinent to mention that the doctors at medical colleges and peripheral health institutions set an example of judicious use of antimicrobials for the next generation of doctors who will face this cri-

sis in a much more severe form. While pharmacists are being reminded to implement the schedule-II and III of the Drugs and Cosmetic Rules and sell antibiotics only on valid prescriptions, it is important that all doctors have to mention the exact indication on their prescriptions while prescribing antimicrobials," the letter said.

"You are, therefore, requested to circulate the letter of Government of India to all doctors working in the medical colleges (both govt. & private) and peripheral health institutions with an instruction to strictly follow the guidelines of Government of India and to mandatorily mention exact indication/ reason/ justification while prescribing antimicrobials for interest of the public," the letter concluded.

CUO talk ‘Ramayana’s ideology inspired the whole world’



PNS ■ KORAPUT

The Central University of Odisha (CUO) organised a seminar on ‘Bharatiya Rama Sahitya Parampara ka Punarmulyankan’ on Monday in its campus on the occasion of Ram Lalla Pran Pratistha at Ayodhya.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Chakradhar Tripathi presided over the programme in virtual mode. DIG of Police (South Western Range), Koraput Charan Singh Meena was the chief guest and General Manager, NAD, Sunabeda, Manmohan Goyal was the guest of honour on the occasion. Other dignitaries present on the dais were CUO Registrar In-charge Prof Narasingh Charan Panda, Consultant, Academic and Administration Prof Vibhash Chandra Jha and Controller of Examinations Dr Prashant Kumar Meshram.

The programme was coordinated by Chairman, Hindi Sansthan of CUO Prof Hemraj Meena.

Prof Tripathi said India’s Mantra of coexistence and correlation is unique all over the world. It is due to the ideology of Ramayana and its characters Lord Rama, Sita and others, he said. Meena said the philosophy of Ramayana is not confined to Hinduism only, but the ideology is followed by people irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. Prof Panda focused on the philosophy of Ramayana era and its impact on the later period of India including Buddhism and Hinduism. Prof Jha said that the Ramayana literature is like an ocean and we just know few of its meaning and its thematic values. Among others, Dr Rudrani Mohanty and Dr Prasenjeet Sinha. Dr Chakradhar Padhan proposed the vote of thanks.

Breakaway group’s vile campaign Nilachal Saraswata Sangha mulls legal action

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Nilachal Saraswata Sangha, Puri, originally established by Paribrajchaarya Paramhansa Srimad Swami Nigamananda Saraswati Dev, is now embroiled in a controversy as a breakaway group has been claiming to be the original sangh. It is allegedly spreading a vilification campaign, which has put the followers of Nigamananda in confusion and utter dismay.

Nilachal Saraswata Sangha president Santosh Kumar Mohanty while addressing a Press conference here said the

group has not only started spreading calumny over the holy name of the great Guru, but has also flouted the judgements of the courts, throwing all norms of decency, decorum and responsible behaviour to the winds.

"The Sangha was established by Swamiji on 24/08/ 1934 and was later registered bearing Regd. No. 7391/390 of 1973-74. The sangha has been functioning throughout the State and the country and even abroad. Shree Thakur Swami Nigamananda Maharaj passed away on December 7, 1985, when two members

from the nine member GB Committee broke away and constituted a coterie group in the name of Nilachal Saraswata Sangha claiming that they are the real sangha. That is how a conflict arose 37 years ago," said Mohanty.

He further informed that the group had kept the image of former secretary late Durga Charan Mohanty in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple where the image of Sadguru had reigned supreme, sparking a furore. Mohanty further alleged that the vested groups are using the seal and signature of a dead man Durga

Charan Mohanty while issuing identity cards, when the judgement of all the courts are in favour of the present groups headed by him. The illegal group is not only spreading malicious lies with malignity but went to the extent of physically attacking some devotees of the genuine sangha, which can never be tolerated any longer, he charged and warned of taking legal action against the group. Prominent among others present in the Press meet were Sangh manager Sarat Kumar Singhdeo and secretary Naresh Chandra Pati.

Sarkhel holds massive rally in Paradip



Drive to mobilise support ahead of polls

PRASANTA ROUT ■ PARADIP

In the run-up to the 2024 general elections, Bapi Sarkhel has intensified his efforts to consolidate support through a series of meetings and public gatherings. During a public meeting held recently, Sarkhel led a 4 km-long roadshow, making a grand entrance at the venue accompanied by a resounding trumpet. At every intersection, enthusiastic men and women greeted him with garlands and flowers.

A massive public gathering unfolded in front of Jaydev Sadan in Badpadia on Sunday afternoon, with Sarkhel’s wife, Deepa also in attendance. Notably, nine councillors from Paradip municipality, four labour union leaders, and Manorama Khatua, head of his women’s association, Kalinga Mahila Shakti, were present.

During the meeting, Sarkhel addressed not only the issues specific to Paradip but also those affecting Jagatsinghpur district. Key among the concerns raised were the employment opportunities for unemployed young women in Paradip-

based industries, swift recruitment for all vacant positions in Government hospitals across the district, and the modernisation of Biju Memorial Hospital. Additionally, Sarkhel advocated for the development of infrastructure and the establishment of a water sports training center for tourism. Other demands included facilitating discounted diesel rates for boat owners, allowing tourists to enjoy boating from Paradip to Bhumunmunda, and providing allowances to fishermen during fishing bans to protect turtles. Sarkhel urged both the State and Central Govern-

ments to regularise DLR and contract workers in various industrial establishments, including Paradip Port, and ensure housing for them.

Although Sarkhel did not specify any political party affiliation or reveal the constituency he intends to represent, the fervor of his preparation suggests significant political activity ahead of the simultaneous elections in the State. Despite inclement weather, approximately 10,000 people attended the rally. Sarkhel announced plans for mass gatherings in Kujang, Rahma, and Tirtol constituencies in the near future.

INBRIEF

BALABHADRA MAJHI JOINS CONGRESS

Bhawaniapatna: BJD leader and former Minister Balabhadra Majhi on Wednesday joined the Congress here in the presence of PCC president Sarat Pattanayak, Odisha Congress in-charge



Dr Ajoy Kumar, former Union Minister Bhakta Das and party MLAs Tara Prasad Bahinipati, Santosh Singh Saluja and Adhiraj Mohan Panigrahi.

SCB EMERGENCY OFFICER DR MAHARANA PASSES AWAY

Cuttack: Dr Bhubanananda Maharana, Emergency Officer of SCB Medical College and Hospital here, passed away while undergoing treatment on Tuesday night. He was 69. The senior doctor had undergone surgery for brain stroke and was being treated at the Neurosurgery Department of the hospital. Maharana was associated with the SCB Hospital for around 50 years.



IIT BBS HOLDS FIT INDIA WEEK

Bhubaneswar: The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar organised a series of sports and fitness activities during the Fit India Week held from January 15 to 22. It aimed to bring about behavioural changes and move towards



a more physically-active lifestyle. The week at IIT Bhubaneswar began with a Mini Marathon on January 15. Director of the institute Prof Shreepad Karmalkar flagged off the marathon. Registrar Bamadev Acharya gave away prizes to the winners of the run. Various sports and fitness activities including basketball, volleyball, table tennis, badminton, cricket, lawn tennis, football and athletics were organised during the week. A yogathon was also held.

MOHANTY INVITED TO POETS’ MEET IN KOLKATA

Baleswar: Baleswar’s popular poet Krushna Kumar Mohanty, the author of ‘Shyamali Das’ and ‘Ruby Ray’, would attend a multilingual poets’ meet to be held at Kolkata on Thursday as an Odisha representative. This event is organised by the Sahitya Akademi as part of the Kolkata International Book Event. Poets of other Indian languages and overseas are invited to recite their poems. Notably, Mohanty, who has been into the literary profession for over four decades, has written several poems and among them some are translated into other Indian languages and published in the Akademi magazine.



VEDANTA INAUGURATES 130 NAND GHARS IN JHARSUGUDA

Jharsuguda: The Vedanta Aluminium has inaugurated 130 Nand Ghars in a ceremony here. The Nand Ghars are a network of modernised Anganwadis supported by Vedanta which



function as hubs of women and child development, enabling accelerated development of local communities. The newly inaugurated Nand Ghars are now set to transform the lives of over 7,000 children in 127 villages in Jharsuguda district.

Sorcery-related crimes still rampant in society

The crimes involving violent attacks and killings in suspicion of practice of sorcery and witchcraft, especially against the women, have been a practice not only in Odisha but also across the world. Though the rate and intensity of such crimes have decreased overtime, they are far from being a thing of the past. According to the latest NCRB data-2022, 85 murders were reported in India on the motive of witchcraft out of which Odisha recorded 10. The human rights violations in witchcraft related issues include murder of people, injuring them, forcing them to eat human excreta, and parading them naked before the public.



SITAKANTA TRIPATHY

Majority of such crimes are committed in the tribal pockets, with women mostly being the targeted groups. People who believe in witches or sorcerers have developed both the sense of accusation and have

cut themselves off from mainstream society. Such people tend to be unaware of advancements the society has made, understanding of different aspects of health and legal systems, and are working on the same age-old superstitions and dogmas. The sense of accusation is developed out of anxiety, tension, of taking law into their hands and playing the blame-game whereas social exclusion arises out of fear, revenge or a sense of respect. Those attitudes are developed either through hereditary ways or learning from propaganda. The terms like Guni, Khata Bula, Kula Bula and Nakha Darpan are some of the local terms used in different parts of Odisha. These issues are

psycho-social problems which need counselling, awareness, legal actions and compensation for the victims.

Witchcraft finds its roots in the beliefs of heresy, and witches are believed to indulge in diabolical activities. In some other cases, the fabric of witches is based on fantasy and magic. These beliefs are based on superstitions and religious dogmas which have no bases in reality and have been clearly refuted by modern science. People practice sorcery with various intentions like causing harm to others, extracting revenge, gaining romantic attraction, while some others practice it to gain familiarity and respect in a given area. The most common suspicious

acts include the loss of livestock, crops and property besides increasing disease and sexual dysfunctions. Some prime motivators behind people indulging in witchcraft include neighbourhood rivalry, family feuds, marital discord, step-parents, sibling rivalries and local politics to name a few. Most of the issues come to the limelight once they get media coverage.

Media houses generally fall short of efforts to analyse these kinds of issues and spread awareness among people. A simplistic argument in favour of the scenario includes ‘incapability of the illiterates to understand such issues.’ However, these incidents are not confined to illiterates only.

Different media reports reflect how the educated and literate people indulge in acts of black magic and even various kinds of animal sacrifices. The implementation of ‘The Prevention of Witch Hunting Act, 2013’ is yet to meet its objectives at the village level. Due to various reasons, legal agencies are yet to expedite probes and trials of offences under the Act.

At this juncture, the news reports on witchcraft must go beyond merely reporting the event. They should follow up the solution mechanisms and find out the reasons for such superstitious practices including lack of healthcare service, illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness in the interior pock-

ets and steps taken by both Government and civil societies. The information must also give comprehensive analysis of the identification of areas and the victims, prosecution of perpetrators and systematic elimination of the practice of witchcraft at regular intervals. The State Government may make more schemes to conduct awareness programmes on such blind beliefs and educate people about the absurd concept of evil spirit and witchcraft. It should also assume a proactive role in providing compensation and legal aid to the victims.

As we declare ourselves as a part and parcel of a modern society, it is important to introspect about what is lacking

in our system because of which such acts are observed even among the educated masses. We, as concerned citizens of the country, need to take active initiatives of developing a spirit of scientific temper and humanism among the people. Along with the media, the education system, the Government as well as non-Government organisations must work towards reaching the grassroots and identifying the factors that allow such belief systems to continue. They should spread and devise strategies to help in eradicating these backward and inhumane practices from our country.

(tripathysk1947@gmail.com; (M) 9778764394)

Three lakh devotees offer prayers at Ram temple

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Despite temperatures plummeting to 2.9 degrees Celsius, the unyielding devotion of pilgrims continues to illuminate Ayodhya, as devotees persist in seeking darshan of Ram Lalla for the second consecutive day. By the afternoon, 3 lakh people had paid obeisance to Ram Lalla, officials said.

Ramesh Mohan Shastri, a 62-year-old devotee from Chhattisgarh, shared his profound commitment, stating, "The cold weather does not deter us. The darshan has given me new energy. I am energised."

Usha Mishra, another devotee, highlighted the patience and dedication of Ram Bhakats, saying, "Ram Bhakats have patience. They are ready to stand in line in this cold, just to have darshan of my Prabhu." The vibrancy of the scene is further enhanced by the presence of devotees, some barefoot on the marble floor, braving the cold with unwavering faith.

Sanjay Singh, a member of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) deployed outside the temple, expressed his emotional response to witnessing the devotion of the people. He said, "It is heartening to see such devotion. Eldery people, some mothers carrying their children, are patiently waiting in line. The chant of 'Jai Sri Ram' is giving them the energy and power to move on."

Following an overwhelming first day where over 5 lakh pilgrims had darshan, strict security measures were intensified on Wednesday after the crowd of devotees went out of control the previous day. Singh, reflecting on the security measures, stated, "Our primary concern is ensuring the safety of the devotees. It's emotionally overwhelming to witness their devotion."

As a precautionary measure, the movement of inter-State buses through Ayodhya has been halted, with no buses allowed to enter the city. Long-route buses now pass through the outer periphery of the city to maintain smooth traffic flow.



Barricading inside the temple premises has been strategically implemented to streamline the devotees' movement and prevent chaos. A security official highlighted the organised arrangement, saying,

"There was a queue outside the temple today. There was an atmosphere of chaos on Tuesday, but that is no

more. Devotees are being sent to the sanctum sanctorum by forming groups."

In adherence to the strict instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, devotees are granted entry onto the Ramjanmabhoomi path after thorough checks. To control the crowd, the police installed sturdy steel railings on Tuesday night, ensuring a structured and safe passage for the devotees.

The detailed makeup of Ram Lalla, adorned in green clothes and a gold crown, adds a visual spectacle to the devotion. Anticipating a continuous influx of devotees, Ramlala is scheduled to give darshan for 15 hours, from 7 am to 10 pm. At noon, the temple doors will briefly close for 15 minutes, dedicated to offering food and aarti to the deity.

"The spectacle of devotion, resilience, and meticulous arrangements continues to underscore the profound significance of the ongoing pilgrimage in Ayodhya, where the spirit of 'Jai Sri Ram' reverberates, providing devotees with the energy and power to persevere in the midst of the cold," Sanjay Prasad, Home Secretary to UP Government said.



Monkey enters Ram temple; beautiful incident, says Trust

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

A monkey entered the sanctum sanctorum of the new Ram temple in Ayodhya and left without creating any trouble, a "beautiful incident" shared by the temple Trust on social media. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust said security personnel deployed there felt as if Lord Hanuman himself had come for a darshan of Ram Lalla, the child Ram deity consecrated at the temple on Monday.

The temple trust shared the incident, that took place on Tuesday night, on its official 'X' handle. "A beautiful incident happened in Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple on Tuesday. At around 5.50 pm, a monkey entered the sanctum sanctorum through the southern gate and reached near the 'Utsav idol'. The security personnel posted outside ran towards the monkey thinking

that it might drop the idol on the ground.

"But as soon as the policemen ran towards the monkey, it ran calmly towards the northern gate. Since the gate was closed, it moved towards the east and passed through the crowd of visitors and went out through the eastern gate without causing any trouble to anyone. The security personnel said that for them it is as if Hanuman ji himself had come to see Ram Lalla," the Trust posted on X, formerly Twitter. The old idol of Ram Lalla, which was earlier kept in a makeshift shrine, is now being referred to as 'Utsav idol'. It has also been placed in the sanctum sanctorum of the new Ram Lalla temple.

Lord Hanuman is regarded as a devout disciple of Lord Ram. The grand temple was opened to public on Tuesday, a day after the consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Gyanvapi survey to be given to both sides: Varanasi court

PTI ■ VARANASI

A Varanasi court on Wednesday ruled that the ASI report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex survey will be given to both sides while making it clear that the report should not be made public, the counsel for the Hindu litigants said.

District Judge A K Vishvesh said both the Hindu and Muslim parties shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public, said Madan Mohan Yadav, the counsel for Hindu side.

Following a July 21 order of the district court, the ASI carried out the scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple here, to determine whether the mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple. Yadav said the ASI submitted its survey report in the Fast



Track Court of Justice Prashant Singh after which the matter came in the district judge court who ordered to provide hard copies of the report to the parties.

On Wednesday, the Muslim side pleaded in the district court that the survey report should be with the parties and not be made public. On this, the court said while acquiring that report, the parties

shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public. The survey was ordered by the court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple. The ASI had submitted its survey report to the district court in a sealed cover on December 18. The ASI had on January 3

urged the court not to make its Gyanvapi complex survey report public for at least four more weeks, citing the December 19 judgment of the Allahabad High Court. ASI counsel Amit Shrivastava had told the district court that the high court had said in its order that, if necessary, the Civil Judge Senior Division Fast Track Court can order a survey of the Gyanvapi complex once again.

Therefore, if the survey report comes into the public domain now, a situation of contradiction may arise. Therefore, four weeks should be given to open the survey report and make it available to the parties, the counsel had said.

The high court had on December 19 dismissed several pleas from the Muslim side challenging the maintainability of a suit seeking restoration of a temple where the Gyanvapi mosque now stands in Varanasi.

Yogi bid to check gun culture in Bulandshahr

PTI ■ BULANDSHAHR (UP)

Nearly 400 'tamancha' - wielding people in western Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district have been rendered ineligible for contesting the elections or Government jobs in the last three years courtesy their conviction under the Arms Act, 1959.

In the last three years, a total of 392 accused have been convicted by the local court under the stringent law, with their numbers rising from 49 in 2021 to 122 in 2022 and 221 in 2023, according to official data.

Those convicted have been jailed and also rendered ineligible for contesting the elections, getting Government jobs or tenders for contract works and cannot apply for passports or arms license, police officials said, citing provisions of the Arms Act. Spread over 4,353 square kilometers with a population of over 35 lakh (2011 census), Bulandshahr is known for its rich agricultural land, sugarcane production, pottery works and historical sites like Buland Darwaza.

However, the district also infamously gained prominence over the past few years due to the prevalence of illegal firearms, particularly single-shot pistols called 'tamanchas' in the region.

The widely believed factors contributing to the proliferation of country-made arms in the region include porous borders with Haryana, historical land disputes and caste tensions leading to a culture of violence and self-defense.

The adjoining districts of Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad have been impacted by this 'tamancha culture' with suspects in several incidents of street crimes like snatching, assaults and robberies either belonging to Bulandshahr or procuring firearms from the district.

However, 2023 saw a significant rise in the convictions of those accused in cases lodged under the Arms Act, 1959, in Bulandshahr.

There were 49 cases and 49 accused in 2021, and 122 cases and 122 accused in 2022, while there were 221 cases and 221 accused in 2023. A total of 392 cases and 392 accused, who were convicted under the Arms Act by the local court, showed the official data accessed by PTI.

"Besides the usual policing and law enforcement, there has been a constant effort to check the 'tamancha culture' which has been prevalent in the district for quite some time now," Senior Superintendent of Police, Bulandshahr, Shlok Kumar, told PTI.

"The number of convictions through the court has risen significantly in the last three years through meticulous and diligent representation by the police and lawyers in the court," he added.

According to official figures, a total of 221 accused were convicted by the local court under the Arms Act in 2023. In 31 cases, the convicts were awarded jail terms ranging from three to seven years.

Caste and religious differences were created to destroy Tamil unity: Stalin

PTI ■ MADURAI (TN)

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Wednesday said caste and religious differences were created "later" to destroy the Tamil unity and urged that cultural festivals like the traditional bull-taming sport jallikattu should be conducted by people unitedly as Tamils.

In his address after inaugurating a grand jallikattu arena named after his father and late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi, Stalin also charged the central BJP with "enacting a drama" over granting permission to hold the sport in the state, before the Supreme Court gave a favourable verdict on the matter.

He recalled that DMK founder, the late CN Annadurai gave Tamil Nadu its name (it was earlier known as Madras Presidency) while Karunanidhi ensured classical language status for Tamil.

His "Dravida model government" has constructed the grand arena in this district to highlight "aeruthazhuvuthal which is a symbol of Tamils' culture," he said.

"At this juncture what I want to tell you is - caste divisions and religious differences were created later to destroy Tamils' unity. Let us conduct such cultural festivals unitedly with the Tamil identity," he said.

Jallikattu is also known as "aeruthazhuvuthal," meaning embracing the bull.

Stalin said that in 2014, there was a situation where jallikattu could not be held in the state and three years later, a massive



'historic' verdict last year allowing the conduct of the bull-taming event, he added.

Further, the 3 year-old DMK government has implemented key initiatives for the region including the Keezhadi museum, besides the jallikattu arena.

The "Kalaigarr Nootrandu aeruthazhuvuthal Arangam", named after Karunanidhi to commemorate his centenary, is spread across 66.80 acres at Keelakarai village in Madurai's Alanganallur, famous for its jallikattu events.

It has been established at an estimated cost of about Rs 62.78 crore. The CM had earlier made announcement in the state Assembly that a separate grand arena will be constructed for jallikattu here.

Among others, the complex has 'vaadivasal' (from where the bulls are released), waiting area for bulls, veterinary hospital and first aid centre and museum and the arena can hold about 5000 spectators.

Stalin also witnessed the first jallikattu event here and presented gold rings to some of the winners, a government release said.

Mayawati calls for Bharat Ratna to Kanshi Ram

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party president Mayawati on Wednesday demanded that party founder Kanshi Ram should get the Bharat Ratna even as she welcomed the central government's decision to confer the award on former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur.

Mayawati lauded Thakur for his commitment to social justice and equality and his work for the extremely backward classes.

"Today, on his 100th birth anniversary, I pay immense tribute to the great leader Shri Karpoori Thakur ji, who fought to ensure constitutional right, social justice and equality to the extremely backward classes in the country throughout his life," the BSP chief posted on 'X'.

Mayawati said she welcomed the Centre's "belated decision" to award Thakur with the title of Bharat Ratna — the country's highest civilian honour. She also said that BSP founder Kanshi Ram should also get the honour for his contribution in helping Dalits live with self-respect.

"The contribution of BSP founder, who is known for helping the Dalits and other neglected people to live with self-respect and for making them stand on their feet, is historic and unforgettable. It is the wish of crores of people that he should be honoured with the Bharat Ratna."

India Russia trade to increase: Sonowal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bilateral trade between India and Russia was at USD 50 billion in the last financial year and is expected to increase this year, said Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal, here on Wednesday.

The Eastern Maritime Corridor between the ports on the east coast of India and the Far East region of Russia promises "immense potential" to unlock new trade opportunities, he said.

The minister was speaking at a conference on 'Operationalising Eastern Maritime Corridor' which was attended by a delegation from Moscow led by A Yu Bobrakov, Deputy Minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic of the Russian Federation, among others.

While welcoming the visiting delegates, Sonowal said the India-Russia partnership is strong and steady building upon strategic convergence, geo-political interests and mutually beneficial cooperation.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi remains



engaged with President Putin through telephonic conversation. The latest discussion took place on January 15," he said.

India and Russia continue to interact at the Ministerial and official levels; most recently, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had a very successful visit to Russia in December 2023, he said.

"Our bilateral partnership has expanded to become truly multi-faceted and encompasses cooperation in military, security, science and technology. Our bilateral trade has registered rapid growth in the last financial year, where it amounted to USD 50 billion, and it is likely to be even more this year," he said.

Why no Bharat Ratna for Savarkar: Uddhav Sena

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday attacked the BJP-led Centre for not conferring Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, on Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar. Addressing a news conference here, Sena (UBT) leader and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut called the Centre's decision to honour former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur with the award posthumously a political move. Since the Narendra Modi government took charge in Delhi (in 2014), 11 people have been conferred the highest civilian award, but Savarkar has not found a place on the list, said Raut.



Thakur was named for the Bharat Ratna on Tuesday on the eve of the birth centenary of the fountainhead of OBC (other backward classes) politics in Bihar. Thakur, who passed away in 1988, was the first non-Congress socialist leader who became chief minister twice - first for seven months in

December 1970 and later for two years in 1977.

"Our position remains the same that Veer Savarkar should be given the Bharat Ratna. Karpoori Thakur is a leader of the OBC and we are happy that he has been named for the Bharat Ratna," Raut said.

Since it is a poll season, Bihar is

important for the BJP, Raut said. Bihar, which sends 40 MPs to the Lok Sabha, is currently governed by Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal.

"BJP's every step is for political selfishness. Key people who participated in the freedom struggle are honoured but why is Savarkar not conferred on Bharat Ratna? Why is BJP fleeing from conferring Bharat Ratna on him," Raut asked.

A polarising figure in modern Indian history, Savarkar is known as "Swatantryaveer" and is revered among several quarters in the country, especially Maharashtra, for his contribution to the freedom struggle. However, critics charge him as a hard-line Hindutva leader.

Up, up and away!

The Indian stock exchange overtakes Hong Kong’s, securing fourth place globally

In what must come as happy news for its economy, India's stock exchange has surpassed Hong Kong's to become the fourth largest global equity market. This accomplishment underscores India's economic resilience and its growing significance in financial arena. The surge of India's stock exchange to this reputable position is due to a confluence of factors. Foremost among these is the comprehensive economic reforms in recent years. Measures such as the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the establishment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) have created a business-friendly environment, fostering investor confidence. Simultaneously, India has witnessed a steady inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), driven by initiatives like 'Make in India' and liberalised FDI norms. These efforts have positioned India as an attractive destination for global investors. Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in transforming the Indian stock market into a more accessible and efficient platform. The widespread adoption of online trading platforms, mobile applications and other technological innovations have democratised investment, expanding the investor base. India's stock market has exhibited resilience during global economic challenges, navigating the uncertainties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This ability to weather economic storms and rebound swiftly has reinforced investor confidence on both domestic and international fronts. The implications of India's stock exchange securing the fourth spot on the global stage are profound. This achievement is expected to attract increased foreign capital, stimulating economic growth, job creation



and supporting infrastructure development. Furthermore, the higher global ranking enhances India's visibility and credibility as an investment destination. The thriving stock market has the potential to translate into capital appreciation for individuals and institutions, thereby potentially boosting consumer spending and overall economic activity. However, amid these positive developments, challenges such as market volatility, regulatory concerns and geopolitical factors must be accounted for. A responsive regulatory framework is crucial to ensuring the stability and integrity of financial markets. Unfortunately, many cases of insider trading and unscrupulous practices have come to light. The sad part is that SEBI, entrusted to safeguard investor interests and regulate the market, has often failed in controlling the frenzy which results in wiping away a sizeable amount of small investors' money. That is a concern to be addressed immediately and SEBI must be made more powerful to deal with unscrupulous brokers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, India's stock exchange securing the fourth position globally is a momentous achievement that reflects growing appeal for investors. As India continues to enact reforms, attract foreign investment, it is poised for sustained economic growth. Managing challenges proactively will be essential to ensuring the long-term stability and vibrancy of our markets.

PICTALK



Students in traditional Punjabi attire during the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade 2024, in Amritsar

Policy reforms needed to boost manufacturing

By creating an environment conducive to manufacturing, India can attract investments and become key player in the global manufacturing hub

With the swift expansion of India's manufacturing sector, the country is poised to become a leading global manufacturing force. Currently positioned among the top three preferred global manufacturing locations, India has the potential to boost its exports to an impressive USD one trillion by 2030. However, within the spectrum of various supply chains, the challenges and opportunities of Indian manufacturing are evident in the wooden pallet sector. To consolidate its position in the pallet industry, essential policy reforms are necessary for sustainable growth and global leadership. Indeed, critical policy changes are required for India to smoothly transition into a global manufacturing hub, ensuring enduring growth and competitiveness on the international stage. Infrastructure Development India needs to focus on developing robust infrastructure, including transportation, power, and telecommunications, to support the manufacturing sector. The government should invest in building modern industrial parks,



logistics hubs, and efficient transportation networks to reduce manufacturing costs and improve competitiveness. **Sustainable Manufacturing** In the era of increasing environmental awareness, sustainable and eco-friendly manufacturing practices are becoming imperative. The government should encourage manufacturers to adopt green technologies and sustainable processes by providing incentives and enforcing regulations that promote environmental responsibility. This not only aligns with global trends but also enhances the reputation of Indian products in international markets. **Simplified Regulations** The regulatory environment in India is complex, and businesses face bureaucratic hurdles. Streamlining regulations and creating a more business-

friendly environment will encourage investment and growth in the manufacturing sector. Implementing a single-window system for approvals, clearances, and licenses can facilitate ease of doing business. Skilled Labour Development India's education system needs to adapt to the changing needs of the economy by providing relevant skills training. Addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector is crucial for its growth. The government should focus on creating appropriate skill sets among the workforce to meet the demands of modern manufacturing. **Government schemes** The government has introduced Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing and increase India's share of global exports. These schemes encourage investments in manufacturing and provide incentives for various sectors, contributing to the growth of the manufacturing industry. **Foreign Investment** India's trade policies and foreign investment regulations

play a significant role in attracting global manufacturers. The government should continue to focus on policies that promote domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependence, and encourage foreign investment in the manufacturing sector. **Tax Reforms** A competitive and stable tax regime is essential for attracting investment. India needs to rationalise its tax structure, ensuring that it is transparent and predictable. Reducing corporate tax rates, providing incentives for research and development, and promoting innovation through tax breaks will encourage manufacturing companies to invest and operate in India. Becoming a global manufacturing hub requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the Indian government, industry players, and other stakeholders. The success of these reforms will not only boost the economy but also create employment opportunities and enhance India's standing in the world of international trade and commerce. *(The writer is an Industry expert, views are personal)*



JAY SHAH

Bharat Ratna: Honouring the legacy of Jan Nayak

The Bharat Ratna, conferred posthumously to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, gives a fitting tribute to his work and ideals

The celebration of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur's birth centenary has been marked by a momentous announcement from the Indian government, bestowing upon him the prestigious Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award in the nation. Renowned for his relentless dedication to reshaping social justice, Karpoori Thakur has left an indelible mark on the lives of millions. His remarkable journey, from the marginalized barber community to the pinnacle of political leadership, is a testament to his unwavering commitment to social reform.

In the dynamic tapestry of Bihar's socialist movement, Karpoori Thakur's name resonated alongside stalwarts such as Ram Vilas Paswan, Sharad Yadav, and Chandrashekhar. Emerging from a disadvantaged background, he surmounted numerous obstacles to not only enhance his social standing but also to champion the cause of those on society's periphery. His enduring influence on the underprivileged persists, symbolizing mental fortitude for the backward society. The government's decision to posthumously honor Karpoori Thakur with the Bharat Ratna underscores the extraordinary legacy of this Bihar-born socialist leader. A statement from Rashtrapati Bhavan lauds him as a trailblazer of social justice and an inspirational figure in Indian politics. The award serves as a fitting tribute to his lifelong dedication to uplifting the deprived sections of society and his relentless pursuit of social justice. Karpoori Thakur's life was a testament to simplicity and social justice, pillars that defined his persona as the people's hero. From his unassuming lifestyle to his humility, he endeared himself to the common folk. Anecdotes abound, such as the incident with Chaudhary Charan Singh, where he refused personal gains even when offered a plot of land during his tenure as Chief Minister. In 1977, another instance showcased his simplicity when he joined party leaders in a torn kurta for a celebration in Patna. Despite offers for a new kurta, he



chose to donate the money to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, embodying his selfless nature. The Bharat Ratna announcement, made a day before his centenary, elevates Narendra Modi's standing among the Bihari and socialist public. Karpoori Thakur, a champion of social justice, envisioned a society where resources were equitably distributed, and opportunities were accessible to all, irrespective of social status. His political journey, beginning in the 1950s, saw him win every election, reflecting the trust bestowed upon him by the people. Serving as Chief Minister from 1970 to 1971 and later from 1977 to 1979, he aligned himself with the working class, laborers, and small farmers. As the Education Minister, he championed the abolition of English in matriculation exams and focused on improving education facilities for the underprivileged. Participating in the Quit India Movement as a youth, Karpoori Thakur remained unwavering during the Emergency, earning praise from leaders like J.R. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, and Charan Singh. His pivotal role in strengthening affirmative action for backward classes, despite strong opposition, laid the foundation for a more inclusive society. Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, hailing from the most back-



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ward section of society, stands as a beacon of inclusivity and a true people's hero, making the Bharat Ratna bestowed upon him a fitting tribute to his monumental contributions to Indian society. The recognition posthumously bestowed upon him not only honors his memory but also serves as an inspiration for future generations to continue the pursuit of social justice and equality. As India reflects on the life and legacy of this exceptional leader, it is a reminder that the struggle for a just society is an ongoing journey, and the ideals championed by Karpoori Thakur still remain relevant. The posthumous conferral of the Bharat Ratna upon Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur stands as a poignant recognition of a leader whose life was dedicated to the service of the marginalized and the upliftment of the downtrodden. As we commemorate his birth centenary, this prestigious award serves as more than a tribute; it is a testament to the enduring impact of his vision for a just and inclusive society. Karpoori Thakur's legacy is multifaceted, embodying simplicity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to social justice. His journey from a humble background to the echelons of political leadership serves as an inspiration, proving that resilience and dedication can break through societal barriers. The government's decision to bestow the Bharat

Ratna upon him is not merely a recognition of past achievements but a call to contemporary and future leaders to emulate his principles. In a time when the pursuit of social justice remains a critical imperative, Karpoori Thakur's life provides a roadmap for leaders to navigate the complexities of governance with integrity and compassion. As Narendra Modi's government makes this historic announcement, it resonates not only with the people of Bihar but with the entire nation. It underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating leaders who prioritize the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. The Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur is a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the ideals of a bygone era with the challenges and opportunities of today. In honouring Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, India acknowledges the pivotal role he played in shaping a more inclusive society and encourages a new generation of leaders to champion his ideals. As the nation pays tribute to this true people's hero, the Bharat Ratna becomes a symbol not only of recognition but also a call to action, urging us all to carry forward the torch of social justice and equality in our ongoing pursuit of a more just and compassionate India. *(The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAIL PROCESS DELAYS

Sir — Indian judiciary is known to move at a snail's pace. As much as bail is a matter of right it is equally important that the right is accorded expeditiously to individuals. In bail orders, there should not be undue delay in the orders of the court reaching the prison authorities. The Supreme Court has said that despite its repeated directives, High Courts are delaying adjudication of bail applications. With the exception of an intervening application, all bail matters have to be decided within two weeks of being filed and all anticipatory bail within six weeks, the top court has reiterated again recently. This order came after an anticipatory bail application was kept pending for judgment for one year by a High Court after it was initially heard. Though bail is a temporary privilege by definition, the nonuniformity in its interpretation has, sometimes, led to chaos. Despite the sheer number of bail applications filed before them, High Courts should evolve a mechanism for their speedy disposal because Section 436 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) defines bailable offences and the underlying principle behind granting of bails by courts, as "personal liberty". Freedom and personal liberty are fundamental rights of a citizen as laid down by Article 21 of the Constitution. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

POLITICAL ALLEGATIONS

Sir — Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said that the Union Home Minister once had termed the National People's Party (NPP) led Meghalaya government "the most corrupt" in the country but later allied with them. Addressing the public in Ri Bhoi district, Rahul Gandhi said, "Meghalaya is not ruled from here but from Delhi. This is not acceptable. The nation is facing the highest levels of unemployment in the last 40 years. Rahul Gandhi reiterated his attacks on Prime Minister Narendra

Coffee plantation in Odisha



The Odisha state cabinet has approved a coffee plantation for sustainable livelihood (CPSC) scheme with an outlay of 1,144 crore. Under this scheme, Coffee plantations in the state will be extended to one lakh from ten thousand acres. The scheme will be implemented in the six districts in the state. Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Keonjhar, and Gajapati will benefit from this scheme.

Additionally, women's Self-help groups will be involved in raising coffee nurseries which will benefit more than fifty thousand farm families in the region. Recently, Coffee has emerged as one of the major production from Odisha due to its agro-friendly climate and support from the state machinery. The coffee produced in the state has already gained international recognition. Coffee is a profitable commercial crop because of its growing popularity in the market. Good quality coffee production on a large scale will make a scope for export to other countries. This scheme will encourage the tribal people of the area to engage in these activities and earn profits. This will boost the economy, tourism, and scientific education in these six districts. If distribution and marketing are done properly Odisha's coffee will spread more and get worldwide recognition through this initiative.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

Modi for "not visiting Manipur" and said that the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party has destroyed the idea of Manipur. Politics of hatred and violence have torn the state apart. Prime Minister after so many months has not bothered to visit Manipur. Is Manipur, not an Indian state?" Congress leader said. Earlier in February last year, the Union Home Minister had said that the Meghalaya government was filling its coffers with poor people's money and said that it is the most corrupt government in the country. BJP and NPP were partners in the outgoing government but fought the assembly polls separately. After the Assembly poll results, the BJP came into coalition with the NPP by extending support. With this, it is a double standard game which is unfortunate. **Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai**

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM SUMMIT

Sir — The 'Back to Basics' strategy, embraced at the World Economic Forum

(WEF) summit in Davos, fell short with elaborate discussions and superficial intentions. Conversations about war-inflicted economic crisis barely captured the scenes. The looming threats of Greenwashing, market volatility, erosion of the tax base through havens, and other critical economic issues were largely neglected. While the IMF anticipates a substantial economic downturn in 2024 alongside mounting debts, the Davos meeting appears devoid of any therapy. Furthermore, the persistent notion that 'Europe's problems are the world's problems' continues to resonate, disadvantaging the ailing Global South. Following a lacklustre COP28 and now the WEF, the desertification of multilateralism is paving the way for the return of Cold War-era bloc politics.

Abhisek Panji | Bhubaneswar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TO STAY BLESSED,
TAKE SHELTER IN GOD

Those who take shelter in God and have faith in him are under His protection



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let us examine in detail some of them. Money is most sought after by almost one and all. Is it a shelter? Yes, it provides material objects, comforts in life, etc. But are these sufficient for quality of life? If they were, rich people would be peaceful, happy and secure. Are they? Because money cannot buy these. One has to go to God for them. One has to do spiritual activities to please God. This is the way the System works. Let us agree that money has an important role in our lives, but it cannot be our shelter. By the way, God can provide what we lack and provide security for what we have, if we remain in His shelter. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.22)The next most sought-after shelter is a sense of enjoyment like eating tasty food, watching something exciting, etc. These are fine if they are appropriate for our needs. (6.17) Otherwise, as the verse tells us our troubles will not reduce. Troubles there must be in this world, an impermanent place of miseries. (8.15) Rather our sufferings will increase manifold if we seek shelter in sex, considered the highest sense of pleasure. It must always be within the limit of dharma to be acceptable. (7.11) Then, there are many, who take shelter in work. They are called workaholics. A new addiction has arrived. These are our cell phones. People are forever checking it for messages, and information, and what happens? The Internet takes charge of us through provocative ads and promises of easy money. One corrupts and the other fools. It has become a pandemic, far from being a shelter.



Everyone is looking for security, beginning with a toddler. He gets it from his parents, especially from his mother. One can understand this, as this is nature's arrangement. But as we grow, we need to make the right choices. We don't; some of us seek from influential persons, and now bogus gurus. Everything has a price, but people generally don't seek it from God, where it is best available. Why? They are not prepared to pay its price, which is to surrender to the Almighty. If one does, troubles will come and go, because God will help. (18.58) Otherwise, they will take their time, as destined. Yes, many turn to God in distress. (7.16) God appreciates it also. (7.18) But again one has to deserve such help by pleasing God by spiritual acts. (18.65)But the modern man chooses to sleep over proper action. Sleeping pills have become quite common. Eat them and everything will be fine. Does it become? Seeking shelter in greed is a common refuge, fueled by the prevailing materialism that drives the pursuit of quick wealth. However, success is not solely determined by greed or hard work; destiny plays a crucial role. Even the poorest work diligently, challenging the notion that wealth is solely a result of effort. The human psyche often grapples with negative emotions such as anger and revenge, leading to a loss of inner peace. The alternative proposed is seeking refuge in God. Amidst life's uncertainties, relying on God's protection is advocated to avoid potential misfortunes. Actively seeking shelter from God instills confidence and invites abundant grace into one's life. Surrendering to God's guidance in the spiritual journey attracts positive fortune, transcending the challenges posed by human nature. Although the decision may contradict inherent tendencies, spiritual intelligence can overcome such resistance. Associating with spiritually wise individuals in satsang proves beneficial in navigating this transformative journey. Once embarked upon, the spiritual path becomes irreversible, guided by the munificence of God.

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

Has the Non-Aligned Movement lost its plot?



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

Acknowledging the paradoxical essence of the Non-Aligned Movement, let us openly recognise the recent assembly's inherent absurdity

Following the opulent Davos event, the World Economic Forum of Klaus Schwab, gathered by Western elites, scrutinized topics ranging from the implications of AI to the looming threat of mysterious Disease X, a surge of anti-Netanyahu sentiments emerged in Kampala. This sentiment was notably expressed by members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during their gathering. The choice of location held historical significance, situated around 53 kilometres from the site of Operation Entebbe, where Benjamin Netanyahu's brother tragically lost his life almost five decades ago. Over the years, Kampala and Entebbe have undergone transformative changes, witnessing the rise and fall of rulers. Yoweri Museveni, Africa's fourth-longest-serving head of state, now leads NAM, a leader with a complex history, having ousted the tyrannical regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote and faced serious accusations of crimes against humanity. The irony lies in Museveni now advocating for justice in Gaza and accountability against Israel, encapsulating the conflicting ideologies within NAM. Addressing the paradoxical nature of NAM, let's candidly acknowledge the absurdity of its recent gathering, which diverted attention from pressing global issues. While many member states grapple with internal conflicts and political chaos, the organization indulges in verbose deliberations. Though we are passing a moment of need, it is crucial to refrain from romanticizing historical achievements and confront current failures. Instead of lamenting only the plight of Palestinians, perhaps NAM should focus on alleviating the tangible struggles of its member countries. If they genuinely wanted to help Palestinians, redirecting financial resources towards essentials such as drinking water and medicine could have a more meaningful impact. Providing victims with necessities rather than holding conferences to indulge in rhetoric would be a more effective use of public funds, emphasizing the organization's responsibility and accountability. Despite its historical significance, the NAM finds itself in a state of decline, resembling a fading relic. Decades have passed since the departure of its original leaders, leaving the organization with waning influence. The current members show little intent to breathe new life into this slowly deteriorating entity. It is essential to grasp the reality that the heyday of NAM is long gone. The organization, which once played a pivotal role, now struggles for relevance. The lack of a cohesive vision and commitment among member countries hastens NAM's natural demise. The time has come for a critical reassessment of its purpose and the genuine dedication of member nations to its survival. The architects of the NAM were visionary leaders from Europe, Asia, and Africa, including Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), and Sukarno (Indonesia). These eminent figures envisioned not only the destiny of the Third World and developing nations but also recognized the crucial role of international peace and security for humanity. Their collective insight emphasized that freedom from superpower rivalry, the cessation of colonialism and imperialism, and global peace required collaboration, not division. The founders aimed to shield newly inde-



DEPENDENT COUNTRIES FROM THE PRESSURES OF BLOC POLITICS. HOWEVER, WHAT BEGAN AS A UTOPIAN DREAM EVOLVED INTO A STAGNANT ORGANIZATION, A CONSEQUENCE OF STRATEGIC MISSTEPS RATHER THAN A NATURAL PROGRESSION. THIS YEAR'S NAM CONFERENCE IN UGANDA, LIKE ITS PREDECESSORS, APPEARED INCAPABLE OF ACHIEVING SUBSTANTIVE OUTCOMES BEYOND CONSUMING TIME AND RESOURCES OSTENSIBLY DEVOTED TO ADDRESSING POLITICAL CRISES. IT IS UNDENIABLE THAT THIS FLOURISHING ORGANIZATION LACKS A VIABLE FUTURE, AND THE PERSISTENT SQUANDERING OF PUBLIC FUNDS YIELDS NO PALPABLE BENEFITS FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. DESPITE BEING RECOGNIZED AS THE LARGEST MULTI-STATE ORGANIZATION AFTER THE UNITED NATIONS, THE NAM'S DISCUSSIONS ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO MERE ORATORY, LACKING THE CAPACITY TO RESOLVE CRISES. THE PLATFORM, ONCE ROOTED IN THE BANDUNG PRINCIPLES, HAS DEVOLVED INTO A SANCTUARY FOR VACUOUS COMMUNICATION, FUNDED BY THE HARD-EARNED MONEY OF CITIZENS IN MEMBER COUNTRIES. SINCE THE INCEPTION OF NAM, THE SO-CALLED THIRD-WORLD AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HAVE WITNESSED NUMEROUS MILITARY CONFLICTS, OFTEN INITIATED AND SUSTAINED WITHOUT HINDRANCE BY THE WEST AND THE SOVIET UNION. THE TERRITORIES OF NAM MEMBER COUNTRIES BECAME PAWNS IN THE GEO-POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THESE POWER BLOCS, WITH RULING ELITES ALIGNING WITH EITHER THE SOVIET OR WESTERN CAMPS FOR POLITICAL SURVIVAL. NOTEWORTHY CONFLICTS SUCH AS THE VIETNAM WAR, THE SIX-DAY WAR, THE YOM KIPPUR WAR, THE SOVIET-AFGHAN WAR, THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR, THE GULF WAR, THE BOSNIAN WAR, THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE, THE KOSOVO WAR, THE U.S.-LED INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ, THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR, AND THE YEMENI CIVIL WAR UNFOLDED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH. THE NAM'S FAILURE TO COLLECTIVELY AND RESPONSIBLY IMPLEMENT ITS PRINCIPLES CONTRIBUTED TO THIS TRAGIC LEGACY, AS ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY COULD HAVE PREVENT-


ed such widespread suffering. Sadly, attempting to resuscitate a moribund enterprise inevitably invites chaos, yielding neither renewed hope nor the impactful contributions promised at its inception. This is the predicament in which the NAM finds itself, failing to live up to its proclaimed principles while catering to the interests of a privileged few. No amount of picturesque portrayal can conceal the stark reality, as the structure of NAM stands as a façade masking inherent falsehood and decay. During this year's conference, leaders reiterated the narrative of member states breaking free from colonialism but grappling with new forms of inequality and hegemony, conveniently neglecting the role of their own hegemonic politics and corruption in fostering these disparities. As discussed at the conference, in the era of globalization, leaders perceive economic concentrations, while the rest of the world sees mere markets or resources. The pandemic underscored the detachment of the smallest needs of these countries from distant production centres. However, amidst politically correct and universalist narratives that neglect traditions, the conference amounted to little more than eloquent words in a spurious sermon, devoid of constructive significance and laden with political hypocrisy. While the dream of a multipolar world is commendable, its realization remains elusive without collective agreement. Proposals for economic decentralization and regional production lack substance if member states, lacking capital management, persist in dependence on Western financial markets and facilitate capital outflow to Western countries through money laundering, rendering the pursuit of economic independence a delusion. Changing the global order necessitates both practical and sincere measures, including the establishment of regional economic hubs, resilient

supply chains, predictable mobility, and reliable data flows. Person-centred policies promoting sustainable lifestyles and digital public infrastructure exemplify the potential benefits of technology. Prioritizing relationships while respecting sovereignty and ensuring viability, especially in addressing food, energy, and health security, as well as promoting women-led development, remains critical. However, since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the foundational principles of the Non-Aligned Nations were shattered. Attempts to recreate the movement faced a lack of consensus among member state leaders. Instead, these states formed selective ties to advance political goals, rendering the "non-aligned" policy a mere pseudo-vocabulary. Unfortunately, leaders within the movement engaged in arbitrary activities, using the platform to cover up abuses rather than addressing them. As the old world order gave way to a new multipolar reality post-Cold War, the NAM struggled to adapt to emerging dynamics. Instead of collectively facing the challenges, many leaders prioritized narrow political goals, hindering the movement's relevance in the changing world. Faced with the need to redefine its purpose and adapt to new challenges, the movement encountered various forms of sabotage and unrest. The failure to interpret challenges during this transitional period affected several organizations within the movement. Ironically, many leaders refuse to acknowledge the end of this history, preventing the birth of a redesigned and reinvented global order that could contribute to achieving a multipolar world. Consequently, the idea of a multipolar world remains but a day-dream.


(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka; views are personal)

Combating the deepfake menace necessitates stern legal measures

Securing truth in the age of synthetic realities is more difficult than ever before. It must be curbed before it becomes unmanageable



SIDDHARTH MISHRA



BHAWNA SHARMA

opening frequently, it can be easily predicted that deepfake technology may achieve an unprecedented level of realism

– blurring the lines between real and synthetic. These incidents also reflect a major concern about the misuse of deepfake technologies in the spread of disinformation and misinformation that is directly hitting the informational security of society at large. In layperson's language, deepfakes are images or videos of a person's likeness or other related things that have been digitally altered in a bid to misrepresent what happened in reality such as facial expression manipulation, face morphing, face swap, face generation and full body puppetry. The synthetic media not only inflict individual harm but have a profound impact on organisations, governments, and society at large. The deleterious effects of deepfakes transcend mere personal consequences, encompassing psychological, financial, and societal realms; they erode the trust that underpins organizations, sow doubt in the halls of justice, and may even threaten the foundations of democracies. Imagine a world where your carefully crafted reputation can be shattered in an instant by a fabricated video. Where companies become pawns in blackmail schemes orchestrated through manipulated footage. Where legal proceedings lose their legitimacy as the authenticity of evidence becomes suspect. This dystopian reality is no longer fiction; it's the chilling consequences of deepfakes. The IT Rules 2021 provides a complete list of prohibited content under rule 3(1)(b). Intermediaries are already bound to act in case of removals, blocking, or complaints regarding any deepfake content posted on their platform. There are speculations that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is soon to come up with new provisions under the IT Rules, 2021 to curb the prevalence of deepfakes. As per the author's understanding, to restrain the spread of deepfakes on the intermediary's platform, there are two ways in which IT Rules, 2021 may be amended. First, to define 'deepfake' and put it in the prohibited category of content under rule 3(1)(B) of the IT Rules, 2021. By doing this, automatically all the other due diligence requirements on intermediaries will apply in case of deepfakes as well. However, the major consequences of deepfake, misinformation, and impersonation are already included in the prohibited category of the list. Deepfake is emerging as a service company. The increased demand for deepfakes has also led to the establishment of several companies that deliver deepfakes as a product or even online service. These services are intended for use by marketers to personalise videos, eliminating the need to record a video for each recipient. Essentially, these services make producing a deepfake video as easy as editing text. Hence, the most appropriate and effective way to restrain deepfake is to directly regulate these companies that provide such deepfake technology. Second, deepfake may be regulated under the proposed Digital India Act by introducing a new class of online platforms, i.e., AI Synthesis Online Platforms (as the name may be called), and providing separate rules for their compliance. The proposed Digital India Act may include a few obligations for AI Synthesis Online Platforms. First, requiring them to ensure adherence to all the existing cyber and data protection legislation in India. Second, such online platforms, in order to ensure transparency, should provide information regarding the number of users of such platforms, their platform's management rules, adopted technologies, tools deployed, and any other relevant information. Third, they may be obliged to deploy technological tools for recognizing false and damaging information created using services of the platform, implement a real-identity information authentication system, and adopt a review mechanism of synthetic data. It should also be obligatory on such platforms to tag or label those contents that are generated by using deepfake technologies. In view of the rising deepfake incidents and the government's apparent concern for the same, it is probable that we may not have to wait for long for the necessary regulations as well as the Digital India Act to come into existence.

(Siddhartha is Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi and Bhawna is a techno-legal policy professional; views are personal)

‘UK has no plans for conscription’

AP ■ LONDON

The UK government said on Wednesday it has no plans to introduce conscription, after the head of the British Army said a “citizen army” would be needed to fight a future war with a country like Russia. Chief of the General Staff Gen. Patrick Saunders said preparing for a potential land war would have to be a “whole-of-nation” undertaking. He praised European nations closer to Russia for “prudently laying the foundations for national mobilization.”

Saunders, who has long argued for more military spending and is due to leave his job this year, said that “within the next three years, it must be credible to talk of a British Army of 120,000.”

“But this is not enough,” he added during a speech at the International Armoured Vehicles conference in London. “Taking preparatory steps to enable placing our societies on a war footing when needed are now not merely desirable but essential.”

He said “Ukraine brutally illustrates that regular armies start wars; citizen armies win them.”

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s spokesman, Max Blain, said the government “has no intention” of introducing conscription.

“The British military has a proud tradition of being a voluntary force. There are no plans to change that,” he said. He added that “engaging in hypothetical wars” was “not

helpful.” Defence Secretary Grant Shapps has also used stark language about the threat to the UK. Last week he referred to Britain “moving from a post-war to pre-war world.” Despite that, the government has no plans to increase the size of the army from its current level of about 74,000 full-time troops, down from 102,000 in 2006. The government says it will increase military spending from just over 2 per cent of GDP to 2.5 per cent — still much less than at the height of the Cold War.

The British Army conscripted soldiers during World War I, and again during and after World War II, but it has been an all-volunteer force for most of its 364-year history.

Maldives oppn parties express concern about ‘anti-India stance’

PTI ■ MALE

Calling India as the “most long-standing ally,” the two main opposition parties in Maldives on Wednesday expressed concern about the government’s “anti-India stance.”

The open support by the two parties — the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the Democrats — came a day after the Maldives government said a Chinese ship, equipped to carry research and surveys, will be docking at a Maldivian port after being permitted by the Male government to make a port call for replenishment.

The permission to allow the Chinese ship comes amid strained ties between India and Maldives after its recently-elected President Mohamed Muizzu made Beijing as his first port of call early this month soon after assuming office. Traditionally, New Delhi has been the first port of call for a Maldivian President.

“The current administration appears to be making a



In picture, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu during official talks in Beijing, earlier this month.

AP/PTI

stark pivot towards an anti-India stance. Both, the MDP and The Democrats believe alienating any development partner, and especially the country’s most long-standing ally will be extremely detrimental to the long-term development of the country,” the two

opposition parties said in their assessment on “the direction in foreign policy” of the Maldivian government.

“Consecutive governments of the country must be able to work with all development partners for the benefit of the people of the Maldives, as the

Maldives has traditionally done. Stability and security in the Indian Ocean is vital to the stability and security of the Maldives,” they told a joint news conference. MDP’s chairperson and former Minister Fayyaz Ismail and the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, MP

Ahmed Saleem, along with Democrats party president MP Hassan Latheef and the Parliamentary Group Leader, MP Ali Azim addressed a joint press conference to flag the issues. The two parties committed to work together on several governance-related issues and expressed concern on another set of issues including the foreign policy and lack of transparency.

The MPs of the two parties together hold 55 seats in the 87-member house. The joint statement was posted on the official websites of the two parties and their official X handles too.

The other issues of concern included a lack of transparency in the financial status of the state and the lack of transparency in the MOUs and Agreements that the Government is signing, especially, with foreign parties, although no country was named in the statement.

The opposition also criticised the attempts at censoring the media and meddling with the freedom of the press.

Building fire kills 39 people in China

PTI ■ BEIJING/ NANCHANG

At least 39 people were killed, nine injured and some others still trapped in a building fire in east China’s Jiangxi province on Wednesday, official media reported. The fire broke out at a street shop in Xinyu city, the local fire response emergency headquarters was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

At least 39 people were killed and nine others injured in the blaze, while some others are still trapped on the site, the report said. Videos circulating on social media showed a column of thick, dark smoke billowing from the building, and fire trucks and ambulances were at the scene of the accident.

The building where the fire broke out had internet cafes and training institutions, Central China Television reported.

The cause of the fire is unclear and an investigation is underway. Following the mishap, Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered steps to



curb repeated occurrences of such accidents and to protect people’s lives and property and social stability. Fatal fires in China are not uncommon due to lax enforcement of building and safety standards.

On Jan 20, at least 13 students were killed when a fire broke out in a school dormitory in central China’s Henan province. All the victims were third-grade students. In November last year, 26 people died after a large fire ripped through an office building in Luliang city in Shanxi province.

A hospital fire in Beijing last April claimed the lives of at least 29 people - mostly patients - and triggered an investigation which saw 12 people detained by police for questioning.

China working to de-escalate tensions in Red Sea

AP ■ BEIJING

China, the world’s biggest exporter, says it is deeply concerned about tensions in the Red Sea that have upended global trade by forcing many shippers to avoid the Suez Canal. China has been in “close communication with all parties concerned and making positive efforts to de-escalate” the situation in which Iran-backed Houthi rebels have attacked international ships with missiles, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing on Wednesday.

China calls for a halt to the harassment and attacks on civilian ships and urges all relevant parties to avoid fanning flames in the area and jointly ensure the safety and security of the route in the Red Sea,” Wang said. Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading up to Egypt’s Suez Canal, a vital route for energy and cargo coming from Asia and the Middle East onward to Europe.

The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has held Yemen’s capital Sanaa since 2014 and

been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen’s exiled government since 2015, link their attacks to the Israel-Hamas war. However, the ships they’ve targeted increasingly have tenuous links to Israel — or none at all. “We are deeply concerned about the recent escalation of the Red Sea situation. The Red Sea is an important international trade route for goods and energy,” Wang said. Wang also referenced the Gaza conflict, linking it to the Red Sea tensions, saying, “The priority now is to end the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible to avoid further escalation and prevent the situation from getting out of control.”

“China is willing to work with all parties to cool down the situation and maintain security and stability in the Red Sea,” Wang said.

China exported more than \$3.5 trillion in good in 2022, the last year for which figures were available. That was about \$1.5 trillion more than the United States, the world’s No. 2 exporter. Some of the world’s largest container shipping companies and oil giant BP have been sending vessels on longer journeys around Africa that bypass the Red Sea. In response

to the growing impact on global trade, the United States and a host of other nations have created a new force to protect ships. At least 90% of the container ships that had been going through the Suez Canal are now rerouting around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, according to Drewry, a maritime research consultancy.

The cost to ship a standard 40-foot container from China to northern Europe has jumped from \$1,500 to \$4,000, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany. But that is still far from the \$14,000 seen during the pandemic. The delays contributed to a 1.3% decline in world trade in December, reflecting goods stuck on ships rather than being offloaded in port. The US and its allies have been striking targets Washington has said are involved in the attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria and were threatening US military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea. China has maintained close ties with Iran, largely based on investment and oil imports, and last year hosted talks resulting in the restoration of Tehran’s diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

‘Shipments affected by Houthi assaults’

Jerusalem (AP): Qatar, one of the world’s top exporters of liquefied natural gas, warned Wednesday that its deliveries had been affected by ongoing attacks by Yemen’s Houthi rebels on shipping over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The statement by QatarEnergy came as an explosion struck near a ship Wednesday travelling through a crucial strait near Yemen, though no damage or injuries were reported, the British military said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but suspicion immediately fell on the Houthis.

Ships carrying liquefied natural gas from Qatar had been delayed previously before heading through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. That’s where the Houthi attacks have snarled shipping in a key route for Asia and the Middle East to ship cargo and energy to Europe.

Qatar, which has served as a key mediator between Hamas and Israel, has yet to see any of its ships attacked, however. A statement from its state-owned Qatar Energy producer said

that its “production continues uninterrupted, and our commitment to ensuring the reliable supply of LNG to our customers remains unwavering.” “While the ongoing developments in the Red Sea area may impact the scheduling of some deliveries as they take alternative routes, LNG shipments from Qatar are being managed with our valued buyers,” the statement said. The statement suggests QatarEnergy’s cargos now are travelling around Africa’s Cape of Good Hope, likely adding time to their trips. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, an organisation monitoring Mideast waterways overseen by the British military, reported a blast Wednesday near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen. The explosion happened some 100 metres (325 feet) from the vessel, but caused no damage and its crew is safe, the British said. The Houthis, who have been launching attacks on ships since November over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, did not immediately acknowledge the incident. The

US and the UK have launched rounds of airstrikes targeting suspected missile storage and launch sites used by the Houthis over the attacks.

EXPLOSION STRIKES NEAR SHIP

An explosion struck near a ship on Wednesday travelling through a crucial strait near Yemen, though no damage or injuries were reported, the British military said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but suspicion immediately fell on Yemen’s Houthi rebels. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, an organisation monitoring Mideast waterways overseen by the British military, reported the blast happened near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen.

The explosion happened some 100 metres from the vessel, but caused no damage and its crew is safe, the British said.

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Fighting in Gaza leaves patients stranded

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces battled Palestinian militants Wednesday near the main hospital in Gaza’s second-largest city of Khan Younis, where medics said hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people were unable to leave because of the fighting.

Israel has ordered residents to leave a swath of downtown Khan Younis that includes Nasser and two smaller hospitals as it pushes ahead with its 3-month-old offensive against Hamas. The United Nations humanitarian office said the area was home to 88,000 Palestinians and was hosting another 425,000 displaced by fighting elsewhere.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said its staff was trapped inside Nasser Hospital with some 850 patients and thousands of displaced people because the sur-

rounding roads were inaccessible or too dangerous. Nasser Hospital is one of only two hospitals in southern Gaza that can still treat critically ill patients, the group said. Gaza’s Health Ministry also said the hospital had been isolated.

The Israeli military said its forces were battling militants inside Khan Younis after completing their encirclement of the city the day before. It said aircraft were striking targets as part of the operations there and had also targeted suspected militants in central and northern Gaza.

Thousands of people fled south from Khan Younis on Tuesday toward the town of Rafah. The UN says some 1.5 million people — around two-thirds of Gaza’s population — are crowded into shelters and tent camps in and around Rafah, which is on the border with Egypt. Even there, Palestinians have found little

safety, with Israel regularly carrying out strikes in and around the town. Palestinian witnesses said that in recent days Israeli soldiers and tanks had pushed into parts of Muwasi, a sandy area along the coast that Israel had declared a safe zone, where tens of thousands of people were living in tents without basic services.

In all, some 1.7 million people have been displaced within Gaza, according to the UN refugee agency. Most have fled from the north, where Israel’s air and ground offensive has reduced entire neighbourhoods to shelled-out wastelands, raising the question of whether residents will ever be able to return.

Gaza’s Health Ministry says the offensive has killed at least 25,490 people — the majority women and children — and wounded another 63,354. Its count does not dif-

ferentiate between civilians and combatants. UN officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease, with at least one-quarter of the population facing starvation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the offensive until “complete victory” against Hamas, which started the war with its assault across the border on Oct 7, killing some 1,200 people and abducting another 250.

ISRAELI DIVISIONS OVER WAR AIMS

Netanyahu says Israel is also committed to returning the over 100 hostages that remain in captivity after most of the others were freed in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners during a November cease-fire. But many Israelis, including at least one member of Netanyahu’s War Cabinet, say that’s impossible

without reaching another agreement with Hamas. The militant group says it won’t release any more hostages until Israel ends its offensive. Families of the hostages are also calling for a deal, and have staged increasingly aggressive protests against Israel’s leaders, even interrupting a parliamentary committee meeting Monday.

BUFFER ZONE IN GAZA

Hamas was still attacking Israeli forces, even in some of the most devastated areas, and firing rockets into Israel. An attack Monday near the border killed 21 Israeli soldiers, the military’s biggest loss of life in a single attack since Oct 7.

Israeli media said the troops were working to create an informal buffer zone about a km (half a mile) wide along the border to prevent militants from attacking Israeli communities near Gaza.

Donald Trump wins New Hampshire Republican primary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has defeated Indian-American politician Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire Republican primary, continuing his march toward the party’s presidential nomination and a possible final contest with President Joe Biden in the November 5 election. With three-quarters of the votes counted, Trump, 77, was leading 55 per cent to 44 per cent. Although only two states have voted so far, Trump’s victory in Tuesday’s primary underscored his dominance of the Republican Party.

The former president won a landslide in Iowa’s caucuses last week. Trump’s victory is remarkable, considering he faces 91 criminal charges, including those related to seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election. But Haley, 52, the former South Carolina governor and ambassador to the United Nations, vowed to fight on, giving a feisty speech to supporters on Tuesday night in which she questioned the former president’s mental fitness and warned Republicans that renominating Trump would lead the party to defeat.

Speaking after the results, Haley - who campaigned hard in the state - congratulated Trump, saying he “earned it”. But she said the race was “far from over” with “dozens of states left to go”. “I’m a fighter, and I’m scrappy,” Haley, Trump’s last remaining rival in the Republican nomination race, said. Haley said when she started, there were 14 of them in the race, and she was polling at two per cent in the polls. “And now we’re the last one standing next to Donald Trump,” Haley said. “A Trump nomination is a Biden win and

a Kamala Harris presidency,” she said.

“And the next one is my sweet state of South Carolina,” she said. Haley is hoping a strong showing in South Carolina could propel her into the March 5 Super Tuesday contests. Trump said that Haley “had a very bad night” and was “doing a speech like she’d won” when she lost.

Trump called her “delusional”. “Who the hell was that imposter that went up on that stage that went before and claimed victory?” he asked.

Team Haley hit back almost immediately, describing his speech as a “furious and rumbling rant”.

Notably, Trump is the first non-incumbent Republican presidential candidate to win both the Iowa Caucus and the New Hampshire primary back-to-back. Trump is the only Republican candidate to have won the New Hampshire primary thrice.

“This is a decisive win for Donald Trump tonight,” former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy told Fox News in an interview. He said that Haley must withdraw from the race in favour of Trump.

In a statement, the Trump campaign asked Haley to drop out of the race. Haley does not have a path to victory. Instead, if Haley stays in the race, she will play an active role in advancing the re-election of Harris-Biden, it said. “Nikki Haley said she’s running to stop the re-election of Harris-Biden. Yet, without a viable path to victory, every day she stays in this race is another day she delivers to the Harris-Biden campaign,” said Taylor Budowich, CEO of Make America Great Again Inc.

Indian American couple convicted after forcing cousin to work at gas station

Washington (PTI): An Indian-origin Sikh couple has been found guilty of exploiting their cousin by compelling him to work extended hours at their store, subjecting him to physical abuse, threats, and confiscating his immigration documents, a US attorney has said. Harmanpreet Singh, 30, and Kulbir Kaur, 43, were found guilty of conspiracy to commit forced labour and other charges after the pair forced the victim, Singh’s cousin, to work at Singh’s North Chesterfield convenience store for little pay, the Department of Justice said in a statement on Monday.

According to court documents, the victim — who was a minor at the time — came to the US in 2018 after the couple promised to help him enrol in school. After arriving, Singh and Kaur took the boy’s immigration documents and immediately put him to work, prosecutors said. According to court documents, the victim was forced to sleep in an office inside the store for days at a time. He was denied access to food, and the couple also refused his requests to return to India and forced him to overstay his visa. Prosecutors said Singh also slapped and kicked the victim when he requested his immigration documents and tried to leave. On several occasions, Singh also threatened the victim with a gun when he tried to take a day off and leave the store. Prosecutors said the abuse and forced labour started in March 2018 and continued through May 2021. Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division said the Singh couple exploited the victim so they could keep him working for their profit.

US strikes three facilities in Iraq

Washington (AP): The US military struck three facilities in Iraq on Tuesday, targeting an Iranian-backed militia in retaliation for missile and drone attacks on American troops in Iraq and Syria over the past several days, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

The US strikes hit militia facilities in western Iraq, near the Syrian border, US Central Command said. “At President Biden’s direction, US military forces conducted necessary and proportionate strikes on three facilities used by the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia group and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq,” Austin said in a statement. “These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against US and Coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias.”

N Korea appears to demolish ‘reunification arch’ as Kim turns against ties with South

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea appears to have torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after leader Kim Jong Un dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula south, according to satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press on Wednesday. South Korea’s military also said Wednesday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week described the Pyongyang monument as an “eyesore” and called for its removal while declaring that



the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North’s constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC appeared to show the destruction of Pyongyang’s

Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification, also called the Arch of Reunification. An image Tuesday clearly showed the arch missing along a roadway.

Clouds and snow cover made it difficult to ascertain when North Korea tore down the monument, but it appeared to be within the last few days. NKNews, a website focused on North Korea, first reported on the satellite images.

The arch was a 30-metre (about 100-foot) tall structure that looked over a highway leading to the city of Kaesong near the border with South Korea. The cruise missile launches were North Korea’s second known launch event of

the year, following a January 14 test-firing of the country’s first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its line-up of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that the US and South Korean militaries were analyzing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details.

“Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Imran Khan warns his party candidates

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has warned his party candidates to launch their poll campaigns peacefully, failing which their tickets to contest the February 8 elections will be cancelled, according to a media report on Wednesday. The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder made the statement while talking to reporters at Adiala jail in Rawalpindi on Tuesday after the hearing of the cipher case, the Geo News reported. PTI-backed candidates are struggling to launch their election campaign amid a crackdown on the party supporters. Asking his party's candidates to take out "massive rallies" and organise public gatherings to show the strength of the PTI in their constituencies, Khan war-ned that he would replace "inactive" nominees with "suitable candidates" if the party electioneering did not pick up steam by Sunday. Khan, who is facing multiple cases, has been incarcerated at high-security Adiala Jail since August last year. His party's electoral 'bat' symbol — a major voter driving force was taken away this month. Furthermore, the party — PTI-Nazriati — with which it sought an alliance also backtracked from its commitment. However, the PTI has vowed not to boycott the polls and run without its iconic electoral symbol. Since the 'bat' symbol

has been taken away, all its candidates will be running with different signs.

EX-PAK AMBASSADOR REJECTS MENTION OF 'THREAT' IN CIPHER

Pakistan's former ambassador to the US and a key witness has rejected the mention of the words "conspiracy" or "threat" in the secret document at the centre of controversy in the cipher case. Involving jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who also is a senior leader from his party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), the cipher case pertains to a piece of paper, purported to be a diplomatic cable — the cipher — that Khan had waved at a public rally on March 27, 2022.

Naming the US, Khan had claimed that it was 'evidence' of an "international conspiracy" to topple his government. Khan and Qureshi, accused of mishandling it for political purposes, were indicted in December 2023 and both have pleaded not guilty.

During a hearing on Tuesday at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, former Ambassador Asad Majeed gave a first hand account to the special court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain about his meeting with a top US government official in March 2022. The News newspaper reported on Wednesday. Majeed was the ambassador of Pakistan to the United States from

January 2019 to March 2022.

Bringing out details about the meeting in public domain for the first time, Majeed said, on March 7, 2022, Assistant Secretary of the US Department of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu was invited to a working lunch, which was a pre-arranged meeting hosted at Pakistan House in Washington.

Communication took place in the meeting, so a cipher telegram was sent to the foreign secretary. The deputy head of Mission and defence attaché were also present in the meeting.

"In the meeting, both sides knew that minutes of the meeting were being taken. The conversation in the meeting was reported to Islamabad in cipher telegram. There was no reference to the words 'threat' or 'conspiracy' in the secret cipher telegram," he said. Majeed further told the court that he was also called to the National Security Committee meeting. "And in the meeting, it was decided to issue demarche. I had proposed to issue the demarche."

He said that the cipher issue was a setback for Pakistan-US relations.

Majeed is one of the 25 witnesses who have recorded their statements in the cipher case, which was launched on August 15 last year. Earlier on Monday, Pakistan's former foreign secretary Sohail Mahmood said that the copy of the controversial cipher had not been returned to the foreign min-

istry until his retirement in September 2022.

PAK EC TO HOLD MOCK TEST OF TRANSMISSION TECH

Pakistan's top electoral watchdog will conduct a mock test of its online system on Friday to transmit and tabulate the results of the February 8 general elections, a media report said on Wednesday. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has prepared the Election Management System (EMS) app for the transmission of results from each polling station to a centralised system where tabulation of all results would be completed.

Through a letter addressed to all four provincial election commissioners, the ECP issued standard operating procedures and guidelines to hold a mock exercise of EMS on January 26, the Dawn newspaper reported. According to the letter, all returning officers (ROs) must certify and finalise Forms 28 and 33 in the EMS and map the presiding officers to polling stations till January 25. The said forms carry details of candidates and the number of polling stations in each constituency, according to the report. The top election body's letter added that dummy Form-45 will be provided to all ROs on Thursday, and they will ask the presiding officers to send results of one-two pages of each National Assembly and Provincial Assembly constituency from their mobile app on Friday at 5 pm.

‘Pita didn’t violate law, can remain lawmaker’

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thailand's Constitutional Court ruled Wednesday that popular progressive politician Pita Limjaroenrat, who was blocked from becoming prime minister even though his party placed first in last year's election, did not violate the election law and can retain his seat in Parliament. Pita had been suspended from the legislature pending the court ruling on whether he violated the law by owning shares in a media company. He was the executor of his father's estate which included stock in ITV, a company that is the inactive operator of a defunct independent television station.

The court agreed with Pita's contention that ITV was not an operator of a media business. By law, political candidates are prohibited from owning shares in any media company when they register to contest an election.

Pita was forced to step down as leader of the progressive Move Forward Party when he was suspended from Parliament. The party's election victory last year reflected a surprisingly strong mandate for change among Thai voters after nearly a decade of mil-

itary-controlled government. But the party was denied power by members of the conservative unelected Senate.

The Senate, whose members were appointed by the military, joined the elected lower house in casting votes to choose a prime minister under a constitution that was adopted in 2017 under a military government. The Move Forward Party now heads the opposition in Parliament.

The nine-member panel of judges ruled 8-1 in Pita's favour on Wednesday.

"ITV did not operate any newspapers or media businesses, therefore, the shareholding didn't violate the Constitution's Article 98. According to the above reasoning, the accused member's parliamentary status isn't suspended," the ruling said.

"I'm happy and will keep working as planned," Pita said after the verdict.

About 40 supporters who had gathered outside the court with signs and flowers cheered Pita as he walked out.

"There is justice for the people. At first, I didn't trust the court but now I see justice," said Jiraporn Bussawaket, 76.

Pita still faces another serious legal challenge this month.

Thousands forced out of their homes after 7.1 quake in China

Uchturpan (AP): As aftershocks continued to rock western China on Wednesday, more than 12,000 people were staying in tents and other shelters, fighting bonfires to fend off the freezing weather. The previous day, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in a remote part of China's Xinjiang region killed three people and left five injured, while damaging hundreds of buildings.

The quake caused significant damage amid freezing temperatures, but the toll on lives and property was relatively light, owing to the sparse population around the epicenter in Uchturpan county, near the border with Kazakhstan.

Footage shown by state broadcaster CCTV on Wednesday showed evacuees eating instant noodles in tents with bonfires providing heat.

Jian Gewa, a 16-year old student in Uchturpan, said he was in the bathroom when the quake began. The entire building shook violently.

"I just thought I had to get myself to safety as quickly as possible," Jian said.

He was evacuated to a school where he was staying in a dorm room with his grandfather, joining about 200 others. Local officials said they planned to check houses' stability before people could return.

The earthquake hit in a sparsely populated area with clusters of towns and villages scattered across an otherwise barren winter landscape. A two lane highway runs from the city of Aksu about 125 kilometers (78 miles) to the area, through frozen brown flatlands on one side and craggy outcroppings on the other. Power lines and an occasional cement factory are virtually the only signs of human presence.

China restores diplomatic relations with Nauru

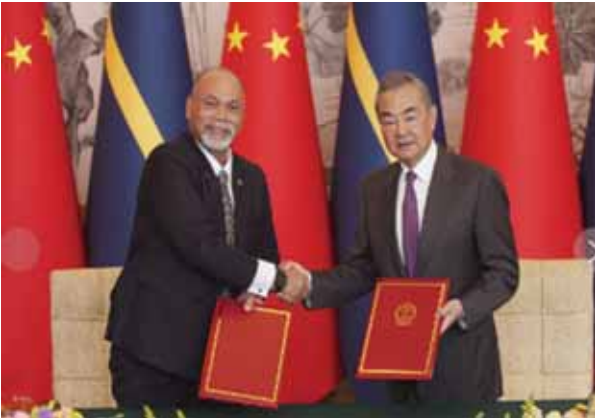
AP ■ BEIJING

China and Nauru formally restored diplomatic relations Wednesday after the tiny Pacific island nation cut its ties with Taiwan earlier this month, in a further move by Beijing to isolate Taipei's democratic government. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, and Wang said the resumption of ties "once again demonstrates to the world that adherence to the one-China principle is an irresistible historical trend."

Aingimea said Nauru recognized that Taiwan is part of China, despite the fact that the People's Republic of China has never governed the island and that Taiwan's 23 million people overwhelmingly reject Beijing's claims to sovereignty over them. "We look forward to the practical cooperation that's going to happen between Nauru and China. The prospect is bright," Aingimea said.

Nauru's announcement on Jan. 15 came just two days after Taiwan elected a new president and left the self-governing republic with only 12 remaining diplomatic allies, although it enjoys strong unofficial relations with the US, Japan and most other major nations.

American officials expressed disappointment with the decision. The United States has diplomatic relations with China but also maintains extensive unofficial ties with Taiwan, including selling it fighter jets and other weaponry for its defense. Nauru first established diplomatic ties



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Nauru's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Lionel Aingimea.

with Taiwan in 1980, then switched to Beijing in 2002, then back to Taiwan in 2005, amid allegations that both sides were paying off or otherwise pressuring Nauruan officials. China claims Taiwan as its territory and doesn't recognize its government or its right to diplomatic recognition, participation in global bodies such as the United Nations or any official contact with foreign political entities. "This policy change is a significant first step in moving forward with Nauru's development," Nauru's government said in a news release announcing the severing of relations with Taiwan.

China has been gradually poaching Taiwan's diplomatic allies, partly to punish the ruling Democratic Progressive Party that advocates maintaining the status quo under which Taiwan has its own government, military and de facto independent status outside of the control of the PRC.

Ten countries have switched ties from Taipei to Beijing since the initial election of DPP President Tsai Ing-wen

in 2016. China says that Taiwan must come under its control at some point and has staged military drills around the island to demonstrate its determination.

At the time of the break with Nauru, Taiwan's Deputy Foreign Minister Tien Chungkwang accused China of purposefully timing the news to the election of current Vice President Lai Ching-te as the island's new leader. He said China's authoritarian one-party Communist government's intention was to "attack the democracy and freedom that the Taiwanese people are proud of." Taiwan now has official ties with 11 countries and the Vatican. Seven are in Latin America and the Caribbean, three are in the Pacific islands and one is in Africa. Nauru's switching of relations has further intensified the focus on Taiwan's remaining allies, most of which are developing nations seen as vulnerable to China's global influence and willingness to offer hefty financial inducements.

Death toll in SW China landslide rises to 34

Beijing (AP): The death toll from a landslide in a remote, mountainous part of southwestern China rose to 34 on Wednesday, while 10 people remained missing, Chinese state media reported. The disaster struck early Monday in the village of Liangshui in the northeastern part of Yunnan province.

Search and rescue operations continued amid freezing temperatures and falling snow.

More than 1,000 rescuers were working at the site with the help of excavators, drones and rescue dogs, the Ministry of Emergency Management said Tuesday. Two survivors were found Monday and were recovering at a local hospital.

State news agency Xinhua, citing a preliminary investigation by local experts, said the landslide was triggered by the collapse of a steep cliff top area, with the collapsed mass measuring around 100 metres (330 feet) wide, 60 metres (200 feet) in height and an average of 6 metres (20 feet) in thickness. It did not elaborate on what caused the initial collapse.

Aerial photos posted by Xinhua showed the side of a heavily terraced mountain had spilled over several village homes. More than 900 villagers were relocated. Zhenxiong county lies about 2,250 kilometres (1,400 miles) southwest of Beijing, with altitudes ranging as high as 2,400 metres (7,900 feet).

Rescuers struggled with snow, icy roads and freezing temperatures that were forecast to persist for the next days. Heavy snow has been falling in many parts of China, causing transportation chaos and endangering lives. Last week, rescuers evacuated tourists from a remote skiing area in northwestern China where dozens of avalanches triggered by heavy snow had trapped more than 1,000 people for a week. The avalanches blocked roads, stranding both tourists and residents in a village in Altay prefecture in the Xinjiang region, close to China's border with Mongolia, Russia and Kazakhstan.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This public notice is being issued under the instruction of our clientless, Mrs. Nilima Gupta W/o Mr. Shyam Hari Gupta, resident of F-5/6, DLF City Phase-I, near Community Centre, Sikanderpur Ghosi, Gurugram, Haryana-122002, who intends to purchase the property bearing no. A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Outub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana, for a valuable consideration, owned and possessed by Mr. Vijay Kumar Khanna s/o Late Sh. R.P. Khanna, resident of A-301, Aurelia, Pan Card Club Road, Baner, Pune- 411045, for the sale of which he has entered into an Agreement to Sell with Mr. Toshank Dhingra S/o Narendar Dhingra, residing at 31A, Anubhav Apartment, Sector-13, Rohini, New Delhi- 110085 on 18th December, 2023 and Mr. Toshank Dhingra by virtue of the terms in his agreement has agreed to nominate his right under his agreement to sell thereby executed an agreement to sell with our clientless on 22nd January, 2024.

This public notice is being issued with a view to make certain that there is no encumbrance to the property bearing A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Outub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana, accordingly, if any persons has any right, title or interest in the above said property of any nature whatsoever, either through Shri Vijay Kumar Khanna or Mr. Toshank Dhingra, may feel free to submit their written objection or their claim over the property bearing no. A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Outub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana and any objection against the aforementioned agreement(s) to sell.

The objections, if any, along with the justifiable grounds, must be submitted in writing within twenty (20) days from the date of this publication to the undersigned at the following address:

Date: 25.01.2024
Place: New Delhi
N.P. Singh Associates
Advocates & Solicitors
G-3, L.G.F. South Extension,
Part-II, New Delhi- 110049
Cont. No.: 011-46020893, 46020894
E-mail: np.singhandassociates@gmail.com

China to boost property lending to support its slowing economy

Bangkok (AP): China's central bank said Wednesday it will cut the ratio of reserves banks must hold as part of a slew of measures to support the slowing economy. The announcement by the People's Bank of China prompted a surge in share prices, with Hong Kong's benchmark jumping 3.6%.

Chinese stock markets have languished in recent months as investors pulled money out, discouraged by a faltering recovery from the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A sell-off earlier in the week was followed by unconfirmed reports that the government planned to get state-owned investment companies to funnel offshore funds into the markets to help staunch the losses. The central bank's moves appear to be part of a concerted effort to stabilize the markets and instill greater confidence in the outlook for the world's second-largest economy.

Central bank Gov. Pan Gongsheng said the deposit reserve requirement would be

cut by 0.5 percentage points as of Feb 5. Pan said that would inject about 1 trillion yuan (USD 141 billion) into the economy. As of December, the reserve requirement ratio was 7.4%.

Pan told reporters in Beijing that the central bank also plans to issue a policy soon on lending to property developers to help support the industry.

China's economy is recovering, he said, allowing ample room for policy maneuvers. "At present, our country's financial risks are generally controllable, the overall operations of financial institutions are sound, and financial markets are operating smoothly," the government website China.com cited Pan as saying.

The economy expanded at a 5.2% annual pace in the October-December quarter, enabling the government to attain its target of about 5% annual growth for 2023. But the recovery remains uneven, and most forecasts say the economy will grow more slowly in 2024.

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYPAL NIGAM
GHINGARIKHAL, RANIKHET, DISTT- ALMORA 263645

Letter No.: 03/Camp Haldwani/

Date: 23-01-2024

E-Tender Notice

1. Name of the work:- CONSTRUCTION OF APPROACH ROAD AT GOVERNMENT MEDICAL COLLEGE ALMORA, DISTRICT- ALMORA

2. Estimated Cost:- Rs. 55.92 Lakh (Without GST)

3. Period of Completion:- 02 Month

4. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 25-01-2024 (17.00 hrs)

5. Online Bid submission: End date:- 07-02-2024 (17.00 hrs)

6. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening:- 09-02-2024 (11.00 hrs)

7. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid:- Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peypal Nigam, Ranikhet.

8. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place:- 27-01-2024 (11.00 hrs) Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peypal Nigam, Ranikhet.

9. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in

PROJECT MANAGER

NAGAR NIGAM DEHRADUN
Telephone: 0135-2714074, Website: www.nagarnigamdehradun.com
Email: nagarnigam.ddn@gmail.com

Nagar Nigam Dehradun invites Request for Proposal (RFP) For For Scientific Dumpsite Remediation of Legacy Waste and Land Reclamation through Bio-mining, Resource Recovery and Rejects Disposal at Danda Lakhaund site, Dehradun from eligible bidders having experience as indicated in the RFP document. Interested bidders are requested to procure the RFP document up to 13.02.2024 from e-tenders portal of government of Uttarakhand. Pre-bid meeting is scheduled at 12:00 noon on 31.01.2024. Any Addendum/Corrigendum including date of extension will be uploaded only on www.uktenders.gov.in. The Municipal Commissioner have right to cancel tender at any stage without giving any reason. The last date for online submission of bids is 13.02.2024 at 3:00PM.

Municipal Commissioner
Nagar Nigam Dehradun

No 26/Legacywaste/2023-24 Date: 24.01.2024

SL Parliament approves Online Safety Bill

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan Parliament on Wednesday approved with amendments the controversial Online Safety Bill that seeks to regulate online content amid criticism from the opposition that claimed it will stifle freedom of speech.

As many as 108 parliamentarians voted for it while 62 voted against the bill that was passed after a two-day debate. The new legislation would lead to the establishment of the Online Safety Commission which is empowered to make punitive rulings on offenses.

A false statement on line would be liable, if convicted, to an imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees.

At the committee stage proceedings, the government went ahead presenting the amendments, which had come from the Supreme Court that checked its constitutionality. The apex court had ruled to amend at least 31 of the full 57 clauses of the bill. The main opposition

leader Sajith Premadasa's assertion to speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena to postpone the committee stage claiming the action was unconstitutional was ignored by the chair.

Earlier, the bill was severely criticised as one which impinged the freedom of expression. The opposition argued, citing the Asian Internet Coalition (AIC), that the bill would hamper efforts to invite foreign investment. The opposition also vowed to repeal it when in power.

The AIC had said, "The proposed legislation, in its present form, poses significant challenges that, if not addressed comprehensively, could undermine the potential growth of Sri Lanka's digital economy."

During the day one of the debate on Tuesday, the opposition urged the Speaker to postpone the two day debate accusing the government of rushing through with it. They cited insufficient public consultation.

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

Letter No.: 195/Nivida-Anubandhi/Ranikhet/08

Date: 23-01-2024

E-Tender Notice

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Tender Value (Rs. In Lakh)	Period of Completion
1.	Construction of Remaining Works of Community Health Centre at Lamgarha, Distt. Almora.	Rs. 134.40	12 Months
2.	Repair & Renovation work at Bipin Chandra Tripathi Kumaon Engineering College Dwarahat Block Dwarahat, Distt. Almora.	Rs. 90.90	12 Months

3. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 25-01-2024 (10.00 hrs)
4. Online Bid submission: End date :- 08-02-2024 (17.00 hrs)
5. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 10-02-2024 (11.00 hrs)
6. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid :- General Manager (Kumaon), Nirman Wing, Uttarakhand Peypal Nigam, Haldwani.
7. Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 30-01-2024 (11.00 hrs) Project Manager Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peypal Nigam, Ranikhet.
8. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in

GENERAL MANAGER

Office of the Superintending Engineer
3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh
Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 364 / 962C(Yata 'C')-03/2024

Date : 23/01/2024

National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (**Two Bid System**) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works in anticipation of sanction. All other information will be available online from date **27-01-2024** at 5.00 PM onward on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (in Rs.)	Validity of Tender (day)	Period of Completion (months)	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	PD PWD Pithoragarh Under Honorable Chief Minister's announcement No. 539/2023, the work of asphaltting of the motor road from Km. 2 of Madmanle Dobans motor road to Barmo under Didihat assembly constituency of Pithoragarh district Under the state plan. (Length- 3.125 Km.).	3.00	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	12	Category 'B' & above for Road works in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/Govt. undertaking.
2	PD PWD Didihat Improvement and asphaltting of Vinayak to Ghasad motor road in Didihat assembly constituency of Pithoragarh district Under the state plan. (Length- 3.00 km).	2.90	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	12	Category 'B' & above for Road works in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/Govt. undertaking.
3	PD PWD Champawat Upgradation work of Circuit House building located in Champawat.	10.50	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	06	Category 'A' & above for Building works in any State Govt./ Govt. of India/Govt. undertaking.

Space industry seeks liberal FDI policy, PLI scheme in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's nascent space sector has sought a liberal FDI policy on a par with the defence industry and production-linked incentive in the interim Budget that the government will present next week.

The industry body Indian Space Association (ISpA) has also sought GST exemption for satellites, launch vehicles and ground equipment manufacturing, lower tax rates for external commercial borrowings and reduction of satellite sector withholding tax from 10 per cent to two per cent, given the low profit margins.

"Our expectation is for enabling a more liberal FDI (foreign direct investment) policy in the space sector. As of now, even one per cent of FDI has to go through the government

approval route and that takes months and months," Awais Ahmed, founder and CEO of Pixxel, a Bengaluru-based start-up, told PTI.

"The defence sector has 74 per cent FDI through the automatic route. Beyond that, you have to go for the government route. At least matching what is there for the defence side would be really helpful in opening up the inflow of external capital for Indian space companies trying to scale up and build more things," Ahmed said.

He also sought a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for space manufacturing. "We need to catalyse and innovate more by having suppliers and folks building a variety of different things for space technology -- whether that is components, satellites, cameras, trackers. That would only be possible to inno-



vate or accelerate through a PLI scheme that sort of enables that to happen," Ahmed said.

ISpA also demanded a PLI scheme for space-grade components along the lines of a similar scheme for drones.

The industry body also wants the government to commit to procuring and adopting space

tech solutions across domains such as agriculture, disaster management. "Now, to propel this promising industry and drive innovation, it is crucial for the government for the development of a comprehensive regulatory framework and to address existing fiscal and taxation challenges," ISpA Director General

Cabinet nod to ₹8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, sources said.

The adoption of gasification technology in India is expected to reduce the country's reliance on imports of natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential products.

The cabinet has given its go-ahead to Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, the sources said.

The government is targeting to gasify 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal by 2030.

In gasification process, coal is partially oxidised by air, oxygen, steam, or carbon dioxide under controlled conditions to produce a liquid fuel known as syngas. Syngas or synthesis gas can be used for power generation and to make methanol as well.



Sweden keen on ties with India on sustainability solutions in aviation

PTI ■ New Delhi

Keen for stronger ties with India, Sweden is looking for cooperation with the country on sustainability solutions in the aviation sector as well as on electrification efforts in the auto space. Besides, Sweden is hoping for the resumption of direct flight services with India, Johan Davidson, Sweden's State Secretary for Infrastructure and Housing, said.

In an interview to PTI, he said India is an important partner as it is also the world's fastest growing aviation market.

While noting that he is impressed by the country's extensive investments being made in airports and aviation for expansion, he said, "there is a lot of interest in Indian growth and new business opportunities for Swedish companies".

Sweden is a leading player in sustainable aviation. More than 80 Swedish companies are active in the sector, with expertise across the value chain and experience in implementing their solutions globally.

Davidson, who was on a brief visit to India last week, also said

the country is "keen to cooperate on the sustainability front in aviation and electrification in the auto sector".

"We have a lot of good companies that can contribute to the green transition in the Indian aviation sector," he said.

To a query on air connectivity between India and Sweden, Davidson said it is hoping for the opening of new direct flight between the two countries.

"In Sweden, the largest group of people from abroad are Indians. We have some 60,000 plus Indians living in Sweden and most of them in Stockholm. A direct flight between India and Sweden would be a popular one, for tourism, business and exchange on a more frequent basis," he said.

In the context of sustainability aspects in the aviation space, a key focus area is Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and Sweden is open for cooperation with Indian on that front too.

"Of course, we are open for that," Davidson said in response to a query on whether Sweden would like to be part of India's transition through SAF as and when it happens.



Government aiming to hike scrap share in steel making to 50pc by 2047

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The government is aiming to increase the share of scrap in steel making process to 50 per cent by 2047, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Wednesday.

The steel minister emphasised on usage of scrap in steel making as manufacturing the metal through scrap and other waste products is less polluting and termed it as a step "towards green steel initiative".

"As per our ministry's vision 2047 document, in the next 25 years, the percentage of scrap will be 50 per cent along with the balance 50 per cent as iron ore," Scindia said at the 11th International Material Recycling Conference in Kolkata.

Use of scrap not only reduces the use of natural resources but also cuts emission by 25 per cent in comparison to the primary route of steelmaking, the minister said addressing through a video message.

More scrap would be needed in the future to reduce emission and produce green steel and for this to happen there is a need for environment-friendly formal scrapping centres, Scindia added.

Today, around 25 million tonnes of scrap are produced in the country and around 5 million

tonnes are imported, he said.

Besides, various waste byproducts generated during mining and steel making can also be effectively used in cement manufacturing, road construction and agriculture, the minister said.

Scindia further said, "Our steel sector is known as a hard to abate sector...With an emissions intensity of 2.55 tonne of CO2 per tonne of crude steel produced."

At present, scrap contributes around 30-35 per cent to India's overall steel production, Sanjay Mehta, President, Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), said.

"India has the potential to become a global leader in recycling, given its vast population and the increasing awareness of the importance of sustainability. The recycling industry in India has the potential to create jobs, reduce the impact of waste on the environment, and contribute to the country's economic growth," Mehta said.

Around 2,000 delegates from across 35 nations have attended the two-day conference which focuses on increasing usage of scrap to promote circular economy, help India achieve the net zero goals and minimising impact on the environment, Mehta said.

Sensex surges 690 points to reclaim 71K level

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by 1 per cent on Wednesday after sliding for the past two sessions, propelled by bargain hunting in metal, commodity and telecom stocks.

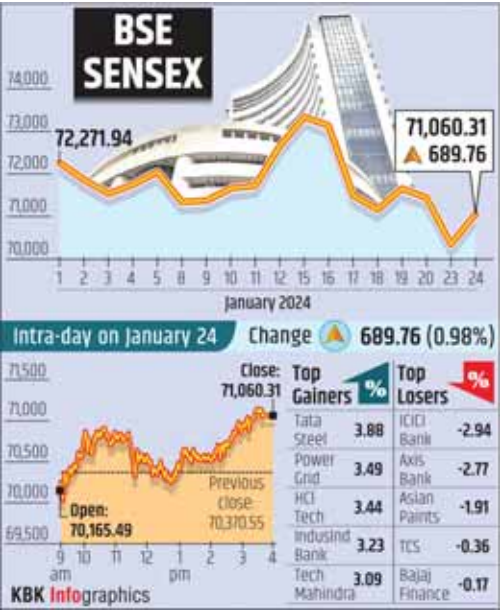
Trading through a patchy track in the opening session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gradually gained ground and jumped 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 71,060.31. The benchmark moved between an intra-day high of 71,149.61 and a low of 70,001.60.

The broader NSE Nifty also closed 215.15 points or 1.01 per cent higher at 21,453.95.

Among the Sensex firms, major 'ing 3.77 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, which gained 3.62 per cent.

IndusInd Bank and PowerGrid closed with a gain of 3.60 and 3.34 per cent, respectively. Other gainers were Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv and Bharti Airtel, among others.

On the other hand, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and TCS



stituents of the NSE Nifty witnessed gains.

Elsewhere in Asia, Japan's Nikkei 225 lost 0.80 per cent, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained sharply by 3.56 per cent. China's Shanghai Composite also ended 1.80 per cent higher.

European markets were higher on Wednesday, with Germany's DAX and CAC 40 of France gaining 1.00 per cent and 0.58 per cent. London's FTSE 100 rose 0.29 per cent.

In the US markets, the Dow closed 0.25 per cent lower on Tuesday, while the S&P 500 settled 0.29 per cent higher and tech-heavy Nasdaq closed the session 0.43 per cent higher.

Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading higher by 0.58 per cent to USD 80.01 per barrel on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Sensex fell 1,053.10 points or 1.47 per cent to settle at 70,370.55. Nifty also declined 330.15 points or 1.53 per cent to close at 21,241.65.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,115.39 crore, according to exchange data.

Gold falls ₹50; silver jumps ₹300

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,250 per 10 grams.

However, silver jumped Rs 300 to Rs 76,000 per kilogram while it had settled at Rs 75,700 per kilogram in the previous close.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams, down by Rs 50, taking cues from the international market," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,026 per ounce, down



USD 2 from the previous close.

However, silver was trading higher at USD 22.70 per ounce.

Gold was trading lower on Wednesday as traders remained cautious ahead of US macro data, including fourth-quarter GDP data due on Thursday, that could offer further insights into the trajectory of Federal Reserve's monetary policy approach, Gandhi added.

Bank credit expansion projected at 15 pc in FY24, 12 pc in FY25: Icra

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rating agency Icra on Wednesday revised upward its bank credit growth projection at 14.9-15.3 per cent this fiscal, but said the same will lose steam and grow at 12 per cent next fiscal.

At 14.9-15.3 per cent, the system level credit expansion in absolute terms will be Rs 20.4-20.9 lakh crore, it said, adding this will be the highest ever incremental bank credit growth and would surpass the previous high of Rs 18.2 lakh crore recorded in FY23 at a growth rate of 15.4 per cent.

The agency had earlier estimated a 12.8-13 per cent credit demand for this fiscal.

However, citing the rising global headwinds and also the higher base coupled with the challenges in deposit mobilisation, the agency said it expects the rate of incremental credit expansion to slow down to Rs 19-20.5 lakh crore or 11.7-12.6 per cent in FY25.

Weaker export demand in certain sectors,



softer commodity prices, and challenges in deposit mobilisation could temper bank credit growth in FY2025, it added.

Further, the agency estimates corporate bond issuances to reach Rs 9.6-9.9 lakh crore in FY24, crossing the record level of Rs 8.7 lakh crore in FY23.

Incremental bank credit growth touched nearly Rs 16.9 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY24 far outpacing the Rs 14.1 lakh crore expansion in the corresponding period last year. This was driven by the retail segment and non-bank finance companies, with annual growth of 33 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, as of November 18, 2023.

While incremental bank credit growth remained reasonably strong at Rs 6.1 lakh crore in Q3 and Rs 10.8 lakh crore in the first half of FY24, it was lower by Rs 1.3 lakh crore in December 2023 against Rs 2 lakh crore during December 2022.

According to Anil Gupta, a senior vice-president at the agency, the relative deceleration in bank credit expansion seen during December 2023 reflects the regulatory measures on increased risk-weights on loans extended to consumer credit and non-banking finance companies, apart from the tight liquidity conditions.



Tech Mahindra Q3 net falls 60 pc to ₹510 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tech Mahindra on Wednesday reported a 60 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 510.4 crore in the three months ended December 2023.

The Mahindra group company had reported a net profit of Rs 1,296.6 crore in the year-ago period while the same was at Rs 493.9 crore in the quarter-ago period. Its overall revenue from operations declined 4.6 per cent to Rs 13,101 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year from Rs 13,734 crore in the same period a year ago.

There was a sharp decline in the operating profit, with the margin narrowing to 5.4 per cent from the 12 per cent in the year-ago period.

Shares of the company closed 3.09 per cent up at Rs 1,407.75 apiece on the BSE.

Rupee settles 2 paise higher at 83.13 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee stayed range-bound and settled 2 paise (provisional) higher at 83.13 against the US dollar on Wednesday.

Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar supported the rupee while rising crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows capped gains.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.15 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.16 and a high of 83.11 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.13 against the dollar, higher by 2 paise (provisional) from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee had settled at 83.15 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as the US Dollar has softened ahead of PMI data and gains in the Japanese Yen. Markets expect PMI data to be better than the previous month's reading. However, concerns over the Red Sea region and elevated



crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Traders may remain cautious ahead of PMI data from Germany, the Eurozone, the UK and the US today. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the US GDP and ECB monetary policy decision on Thursday.

USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.90 to Rs 83.50.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.48 per cent lower at 103.11 on Wednesday.

"US Dollar declined on strong Yen on rising expectations that Bank of Japan may normalise its monetary policy in the coming months," Choudhary added.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.35 per cent to USD 79.83 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to 71,060.31 points. The Nifty climbed 215.15 points, or 1.01 per cent, to 21,453.95 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,115.39 crore, according to exchange data.

1 lakh Fronx sold in record time: Maruti

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said its model Fronx has crossed the 1 lakh sales milestone in the domestic passenger vehicle segment in record time.

The model has crossed the milestone in 10 months, setting a new industry benchmark, the car market leader said in a statement.

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) had introduced Fronx in the domestic market on April 24, 2023.

"Fronx was strategically added to our portfolio to address the growing demand for another compact SUV that blends distinctive design with a captivating driving experience," MSI Senior Executive Officer (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said.

The model has been instrumental in more than doubling the company's SUV segment share to 19.7 per cent last year from 10.4 per cent in 2022, he added.

MSI has also commenced exports of the Fronx for Latin America, the Middle East, and South-East Asian markets.

So far, the company has exported over 9,000 units of the model to these markets.



Burmans get CCI nod for 31.27 per cent additional stake in Religare

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Competition Commission of India has approved the acquisition of 31.27 per cent of additional stake in Religare Enterprises by four entities of Dabur India promoter Burman family, enabling them to become majority owners in the financial services firm.

The fair trade regulator allowed the four entities to acquire Religare's 5.27 per cent through stock market purchase and another 26 per cent through an open offer.

The four entities — Puran Associates Pvt Ltd, M.B. Finmart Pvt Ltd, VIC Enterprises Pvt Ltd, and Milky Investment and Trading Company — are controlled by the Burman family, CCI said in a release on Tuesday.

"The proposed combination envisages the acquisition of 5.27% of the total issued and outstanding equity share capital of Religare

Enterprises Limited (Religare) through open market purchases, and an open offer for up to 26% of the Total Expanded Voting Share Capital of Religare... By Puran Associates Private Limited, M.B. Finmart Private Limited, and VIC Enterprises Private Limited, Milky Investment and Trading Company," the CCI release said.

Religare is engaged in the financial services business through its subsidiaries and operating entities. The Burman family has investments across various sectors such as insurance and FMCG, among others.

As of December 2023, the Burman family's holding in Religare Enterprises stood at 21.17 per cent, according to the exchange data.

After acquisition of additional 31.27 per cent stakes through open offer as well as through purchase of shares in the open market, its ownership in Religare will surpass 52 per cent.

4 NATIONS HOCKEY TOURNEY IN SOUTH AFRICA

INDIA PLAY OUT 2-2 DRAW AGAINST FRANCE

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

The Indian men's hockey team failed to live up to its expectations after a bright start to draw 2-2 against France in its second game of the Four-Nation Tournament here on Wednesday.

Mandeep Singh (8th minute) and Amit Rohidas (19th) scored for India, while France came back in the contest with goals from Timothee Clement and B Gaspard in the 37th and 59th minutes respectively. The Indians had earlier defeated France 4-0 in their tournament opener on Monday.

The match began with both the teams showcasing their defending prowess to hold off the opposition.

India broke the resistance with Mandeep scoring the first goal for his side.

Rohidas doubled India's lead early in the second quarter as they took control of the proceedings with a solid 2-0 lead.

France started showcasing urgency to get back to level terms, but the Indian defence managed to thwart their dangerous attacks.

But India's defence finally



broke down in the 37th minute when Clement reduced the margin.

In the final quarter, both India and France made attacking moves in search of quick goals.

It was heartbreak for India as, at the stroke of the final hooter, Gaspard scored the equaliser for France.

The week-long tournament features France, the Netherlands, India and hosts South Africa.

India will take on South Africa in their third match on Friday, followed by a game against world No. 1 the Netherlands on Sunday.



Nagal gets direct entry into Bengaluru Open

AP ■ BENGALURU,

Sumit Nagal on Wednesday became the only Indian to earn a direct entry into the Bengaluru Open, an ATP Challenger tournament, to be held here from February 10.

Last week, Nagal scripted history as he became only the second Indian male player after Somdev Devvarman to advance to the second round of the Australian Open, after he defeated world no. 27 Alexander Bublik in his opener.

With the cut-off for the Bengaluru Open being at 257, the 137th-ranked Nagal will be among the 21 players from 11 countries to qualify for the main draw of the ATP 100 Challenger tournament.

"This edition is expected to be high on challenges, there are many strong contenders, making this edition more challenging and definitely exciting to watch. My journey continues, and I am enthusiastic about going back on court and making a lasting impact," Nagal, who won Bengaluru Open in 2017, said in a release.

France's Benjamin Bonze, at world no. 106, is the highest-ranked player.

"With eight players ranked in the top 200, including four within the top 150, the level of tennis is such that distinguishing between players in the 100-200 range is challenging," said Priyank Kharge, chairman of the organising committee and a state minister.

The tournament is organised by the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA) at the KSLTA Stadium.

Each of the last five editions, held between 2018 and 2023, have thrown different singles winners.

In 2023, Australia's Max Purcell won the title while Aleksandar Vukic and Tseng Chun-hsin emerged winners in consecutive events in 2022.

India's Prajnesh Gunneswaran won the trophy in 2018 while James Duckworth was the winner in 2020. The tournament was not held in 2019 and 2021.

Mani qualifies for main draw of WTT Star Contender Goa

PTI ■ MAPUSA (GOA)

Indian table tennis player Nithya Mani qualified for the main draw of the ongoing WTT Star Contender Goa after winning her final qualifying round match at the Peddem Indoor Stadium here on Wednesday.

Chennai-based Nithya won a nail-biting contest against England's Tin-Tin Ho 3-2 (11-7 6-11 5-11 11-9 11-7) in a women's singles qualifying Round 3 match to move into the main draw, scheduled to take place from Thursday.

In the women's singles category, Ayhika Mukherjee lost 1-3 (11-5 9-11 6-11 6-11) to Turkey's Sibel Altinkaya, while Spain's Sofia Zhang beat Diya Chitale 3-1 (11-5 6-11 14-12



11-0) in the qualifying round 3 to move into the main draw.

Sutirtha Mukherjee went down 1-3 (8-11 7-11, 12-10 4-11) against Hanna Ryu in women's singles qualifying round 2 to exit the tournament.

In the men's singles category, Sathiyar Gnanasekaran lost 2-3 (7-11 11-7 6-11 11-7 8-11) against Vincent Picard of France in qualifying round 2 stage.

Senegal's Ibrahima Diaw then

got the better of Manav Thakkar 3-0 (12-10 11-6 11-7) in the qualifying round 3.

Jeet Chandra and Payas Jain made their way into the main draw in the men's doubles category as they registered a comfortable 3-1 (11-13 11-7 12-10 11-4) win over compatriots Yashansh Malik and Abhinandh Pradhivadhi.

Sayali Wani and Taneesha Kotecha beat the India pair of Suhana Saini and Yashaswini Ghorpade 3-1 (9-11 11-9 11-6 11-6) in the women's doubles qualifying round 2 to reach the main draw.

In the mixed doubles category, Manush Shah and Diya Chitale overcame the challenge of Snehit Suravajula and Sreeja Akula 3-0 (11-4 11-3 11-8) in the qualifying round 2.

Do not think anyone will ever come close to Djokovic: Tomic

PTI ■ CHENNAI

With the Australian Open currently on, defending champion Novak Djokovic has once again been dubbed as a favourite to retain the title, and former world No. 17 Bernard Tomic of Australia firmly believes there will be no one to challenge the great Serbian.

Djokovic is the leading Grand Slam winner in the Open Era of tennis. He also has the chance of winning the most Grand Slam titles across eras, as another win would allow him to surpass the all-time record of Margaret Court.

Djokovic is eying his 25th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open.

Tomic, who has lost to Djokovic on all six instances in

the ATP circuit, dubbed him a "freak" and also the "G.O.A.T", besides adding that to beat him, one has to play at the highest level at all times.

"I was lucky enough to beat Djokovic at the Hopman Cup 11 years ago (chuckles). He is a freak.

"You have no choice but to play at the highest level to beat him. And, if you lower your level even the slightest against him, you will lose," he told PTI in an exclusive interaction on the sidelines of an ongoing ITF event here.

"I firmly believe he will win the (ongoing) Australian Open. And if he does win, anything is possible. He can even touch the 30-Slams mark. He is the greatest of all time, for sure."

Tennis has mostly been defined by the 'Big 3' era, which has



been dominated by Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Djokovic.

But, with the era on the verge of ending, it is likely to open the doors for other players to assert their dominance in Grand Slams.

Talking on the same, Tomic

admitted that the trio has raised the bar quite high for the sport in current date, besides terming the era as the "toughest".

However, he firmly believes there will be players coming up and dominating the circuit in about 10 years from now.

"Like it or not, everything goes forward in life. Time moves on, and different players come in. The era when I played about five years ago, as Federer, Nadal, Novak, and even Andy Murray were exchanging the top spot quite frequently, was probably the toughest era of tennis," Tomic said.

"Guys like (Juan Martin) del Potro, (David) Ferrer, (Kei) Nishikori and (Jo-Wilfried) Tsonga -- a lot of players who could have won Grand Slams. Of course, they (Big 3) have changed the modern-day tennis and raised the bar quite high.

"Obviously, a lot of similar players are coming through now, like (Carlos) Alcaraz and (Jannik) Sinner. I hope they will win many more Grand Slams in the coming years, and about

10 years from now, we will definitely be here talking about them or some other players."

Although Tomic feels that Alcaraz of Spain and Sinner of Italy would be the next big thing in tennis, he warned that as long as Djokovic is around, others will have to wait for their share of success.

"Sinner is likely to win five or 10 Grand Slams; Alcaraz as well. But, with Novak around for at least two more years, it's always going to be tough for anyone other than him," he continued.

"No, I don't think Novak is done yet, and no one has come close to him. I don't think anyone will ever come close to him in the next 10-15 years. Winning 20 Grand Slams itself will be a tedious task, and if he wins 30, it would be unreal."



Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Ashu Malik pulled off two raid points in dying seconds to help Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers 35-32 in the Pro Kabaddi League contest here on Wednesday.

Vinay picked up three raid points as the Steelers took 4-2 lead in the fifth minute.

However, Ashish and Vikrant effected brilliant tackles and helped Dabang Delhi take 6-5 lead soon after. Malik pulled off a brilliant raid as the Delhi side continued to forge ahead. Malik caught out Jaideep Dahiya and Yogesh tackled Ashish as Dabang inflicted the first all out of the match.

Siddharth Desai effected a raid and Rahul Sethpal tackled Manjeet, but the Delhi side still held a decent lead at 14-9.

Vishal Bhardwaj and Yogesh picked up tackle points in quick

Kiran, Sen enter second round; Prannoy, Srikanth exit in Indonesia Masters

AP ■ JAKARTA

Lakshya Sen and Kiran George advanced to the second round but HS Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth made early exits after suffering narrow losses in their respective opening matches at the Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No. 19 Sen, who is looking to qualify for the Paris Olympics, avenged his Malaysia Open first-round loss to China's Weng Hong Yang with a 24-22 21-15 win in his opening round match here.

The 23-year-old George, who had won Super 100 titles at 2022 Odisha Open and 2023 Denmark Masters, bounced back from an opening game reversal to eke out a 18-21 21-16 21-19 win over France's Toma Junior Popov in another opening round match.

George, also a product of Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy, had qualified for the main draw after registering twin wins on Tuesday.

Sen will now face either Malaysia Open champion Anders Antonsen of Denmark or Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo in the next round, while George will be pitted



against China's Lu Guang Zu. However, world no. 8 Prannoy, who had reached the semifinals at India Open Super 750 last week, lost to former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 18-21 21-19 10-21 in his opening round match.

The 31-year-old Indian, who claimed maiden bronze medals at the Asian Games and world

championships last year, had lost in the first round at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament as well.

For former world no. 1 Srikanth, it was yet another day when he had to return empty handed despite putting up a brave effort against Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, ranked 10th.

Srikanth, who is racing against

time to qualify for Paris, squandered an opening game advantage to lose 21-19 14-21 11-21 to Lee in a 54-minute clash to bow out of tournament. It was his second successive first-round loss of the season.

Sen was under pressure to perform following his miserable start to the new season which saw him make first-round exits in both the events he had participated so far.

His loss against compatriot Priyanshu Rajawat in the India Open had affected his Olympic qualification hopes as he needs to get inside top 16 by April end to make the cut for Paris Games.

On Wednesday, Sen watched his 7-3 lead evaporate as Weng dominated the proceedings to take a 19-12 advantage at one stage. But, Sen produced a rearguard action to pocket 12 of the next 15 points to leave his opponent behind.

After the change of sides, the battle for the first five points was a hard one before Sen marched to 11-6 at the break.

Weng fought bravely to make it 10-11 but it was all a Sen show after that as the Indian reeled off six straight points and held his fort to emerge victorious.



Ivory Coast fires Gasset as coach

AP ■ ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

Ivory Coast coach Jean-Louis Gasset has been fired despite the team still having a chance of qualifying for the Africa Cup of Nations knockout stage.

The Ivorian Football Federation (FIF) said Wednesday that it was terminating the contracts of the French coach and his assistant "for insufficient results in accordance to the contract of objectives they had with the FIF".

Former Ivory Coast midfielder Emerse Faé was to take charge of the team on an interim basis.

Ivory Coast is hosting the Africa Cup but failed to secure automatic qualification to the tournament's knockout stage when it was beaten 4-0 by Equatorial Guinea in its final

group game on Monday.

It left the Elephants with just three points from three group games and reliant on results in other groups to finish among the best four third-place finishers for a place in the pre-quarters.

Equatorial Guinea finished top of Group A with seven points, ahead of Nigeria on goal difference.

Wednesday's final group games in Groups E and F were to determine whether the host nation could squeeze into the knockout stage.

Gasset reportedly tendered his resignation to the president of the FIF, Yacine Idriss Diallo, right after the loss to Equatorial Guinea.

The defeat prompted some irate Ivorian fans to vandalize commuter buses outside the stadium.

INDIA SPINBALL VS ENGLAND BAZBALL

Rohit men bank on spin for first strike

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

India's unalloyed dominance at home over the last 12 years will be put through its most unique examination till date when Rohit Sharma's side faces a trend-defying England in the first match of what promises to be a stirring five-Test series from Thursday.

No team has been as invincible as India at home since their 1-2 defeat against the Three Lions led by Alastair Cook in 2012, stitching together a bull run of 16 successive series wins, including seven series sweeps. If one further breaks down the stats, India have lost just three Tests out of 44 they played in their own backyard in this phase, and this is a power walk even beyond the all-conquering West Indies in the '80s or Australia of the turn of the century.

Several factors have contributed to this astonishing run over the last decade, including favourable pitches,



bowlers who knew how to exploit those tracks and batters who churned out runs like popcorn from a vending machine. But two players have stood head and shoulders above the

rest in these conquests — off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja.

From Thursday, the Ash-Jaddu duet will be on show here at the RGI Stadium,

where the pitch is expected to turn and grip as the match moves towards its conclusion. England already have a taste of what these two can do from their past visits here, and they will be worried, particularly

about Ashwin.

The 37-year-old still retains the burning zest of a 17-year-old to keep improving his craft and since 2012, Ashwin has grabbed 283 wickets from 46 Tests averaging a shade

over 19.

Jadeja might often get viewed as a supporting act to Ashwin, but in his own right, the Saurashtra man is a potent threat, and his deliveries that dart on straight could confuse the batters on a turner.

Jadeja has taken 191 wickets from 39 Tests in the period where Ashwin kicked up a bedlam in opposition ranks to ensure that they don't get breathing space from both the ends. Together, they have bagged 500 wickets at an average of 21.

In all likelihood, India will also include a third spinner to the combination in the form of either Axar Patel or Kuldeep Yadav, with the former having a better chance at the moment.

England will be aware that no amount of preparation involving scruffing up pitches some 1600 miles away in Abu Dhabi will be enough to tackle this real menace, and in that sense, they will also need to tame the demons inside their own minds.



England frustration ends as rookie spinner Bashir gets visa

PTI ■ LONDON/HYDERABAD

England's Pakistan-origin off-spinner Shoaib Bashir was on Wednesday granted visa to play in the five-match Test series against India, ending a "frustrating" wait for the visiting side whose captain Ben Stokes felt "devastated" by the delay.

"Shoaib Bashir has now received his visa, and is due to travel to join up with the team in India this weekend. We're glad the situation has now been resolved," the England and Wales Cricket Board posted on its X (formerly Twitter) page on the eve of the first Test in Hyderabad.

The 20-year-old rookie, who plays for Somerset in the English county, was forced to head back to England from the team's Abu Dhabi training base after a prolonged wait for visa. His family is of Pakistani heritage but Bashir was born in Surrey.

The delay snowballed into a major controversy with a British government spokesperson demanding "fair" treatment for the youngster and Stokes hardly mincing words in expressing his outrage.

Bashir, who is a shock inclusion in the squad with a mediocre 10 wickets from just six first-

class games, was never in contention for a place in the squad for the opening Test. "When I first found the news out in Abu Dhabi, I did say we shouldn't fly until Bash gets his visa," Stokes said in the pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

"But that was a little bit tongue in cheek. I know it's a way bigger thing than doing that. That was probably just emotions around the whole thing. I'm pretty devastated that Bash has had to go through this," he added.

An unnamed British government spokesperson told ESPNcricinfo that it wasn't the first time that citizens of Pakistani heritage faced a delay in securing Indian visas.

"The specifics of this case are a matter for Shoaib Bashir and the Indian Government. But we absolutely expect India to treat British citizens fairly at all times in its visa process.

"We have previously raised the issues British citizens with Pakistani heritage experience applying for visas with the Indian High Commission in London," he said.

India have, so far, not commented on the matter.

Stokes hoped that Bashir would be able to join the squad by the end of this week.



It was a headache to decide between Axar and Kuldeep as third spinner: Rohit

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday admitted that the team management had a tough time making the third spinner choice between Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav for the opening Test against England but hinted that the former might just have made the final cut.

Behind Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, India are primed to pick a third spinner for the first Test against England, starting here from Thursday.

"If the wicket has bounce or if it doesn't have bounce, he (Kuldeep) still is a factor in those types of conditions because he's got superb variations. Obviously, he is a very mature bowler now from what he was a few years back," Rohit said in the pre-match press conference.

"He's not played a lot of Test cricket in India because of Ashwin and Jadeja. We've seen it in the past as well. With our middle-order (batting), in the past, a lot of us (batters) got an opportunity pretty late.

"But that's the reality of it, you can't hide away from it. But yes, he's a very tempting option," he added.

Although Rohit did not give away his final team for the match, he indicated that Axar might just be the one on the final team sheet.

He underlined the utility of

the left-arm spinner as an all-rounder, the strongest clue about the think tanks preference for this Test at least. He dispels the notion that Axar packs similar abilities as Jadeja and, as such, he might slip down the pecking order.

"Axar, you know, with his all-round ability, gives us that batting depth. The consistency that he's shown, playing in these conditions in Test cricket, also is an important factor for us.

"But it was a headache to decide who it is going to be for us. But I am not going to say who it is," said Rohit.

The 36-year-old also hoped that premier spinner Ashwin will deliver one more time in conditions familiar to him.

"Ashwin, obviously, we know his class, we know his quality. Every time he plays the game for us, he tends to impress all of us by a notch (higher). We do appreciate that. "Every time he's gotten an opportunity, he's made sure to put the team ahead. He's shown it for a number of years now. So, yeah, I hope this series is no different for him, and he comes out and does what he does the best," said Rohit.

Ashwin is on the cusp of achieving twin milestones in his storied career.

The 37-year-old off-spinner is 10 wickets shy of the 500-wicket mark in Tests and he can also complete 100 career Test matches if he plays all the five Tests in the series.

Wood is an impact builder: Stokes

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday rated Mark Wood as an "impact builder" with high pace after they decided to enter the first Test against India, starting here from Thursday, with a solitary fast bowler and three spinners.

Wood was preferred over veteran James Anderson for this match, and Stokes said the Durham man's ability to touch 150 clicks tilted the scales in his favour.

"Obviously, what he brings

with his high pace...he is a real impact builder. Bowling the 90 mile an hour with a reversing ball is obviously going to be very difficult to play against. He's another weapon which you can use out here with short, sharp spells, wanting him to be bowling as fast as he can and short periods. There're no worries about these long spells because that's how we're going to use him this week," said Stokes during his pre-match press meet here.

So, how did the team management handle the situation of



looking over a highly-experienced bowler like Anderson? Stokes said Anderson has taken the whole episode quite professionally.

"Jimmy's incredible professional. You never know how conditions might change and what you might feel as the best setup for your team.

But now we're not looking at having to manage Jimmy or his workloads or anything like that. You know, we put him in the spot because we think he's one of the best performers," said Stokes.

However, Stokes asserted that he will not bowl in the series. The premier all-rounder is still recuperating from a knee surgery.

SIRAJ WARNING

If England play Bazball, the match might get over within two days

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj believes England's much-hyped 'Bazball' strategy won't work in Indian conditions and if the visitors go with their ultra-aggressive approach then the match may get over within two days.

'Bazball', a hell-for-leather attacking batting approach, coined after Test team head

coach Brendon McCullum, has given England tremendous success last year but it will face its baptism by fire on sub-continental tracks, which offer turn and bounce in equal measure.

"If England play Bazball in Indian conditions, the match might get over within a day-and-a-half or two. It's not easy to hit every time here as the ball turns sometimes and straightens on other occa-



sions," Siraj told 'Jio Cinema' on the eve of the opening Test beginning here on Thursday.

"So, I think it'll be difficult to see Bazball here. But if they play it, it'll be good for us as the match may get over quickly." Talking about his preparations for the tour, Siraj said: "On their previous tour to India, the matches were getting over quickly. In that series (in 2021) I think I played two matches.

"In the first innings of one of these, I bowled five overs and took two wickets of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow. So, the aim will be to control runs in how many ever overs I bowl. If I get wickets fine, but I'll have to stay patient and continue building pressure on the batsmen." England are set to play five Tests against India.

The 29-year-old Siraj has taken 68 wickets so far in 23 Tests since making his debut a little three years back in Australia. He said focussing on consistently hitting the right spot irrespective of the format and conditions has helped him in his career. "I bowl with the new ball, so my line and length remain the same. I don't change things whether it's the white ball or the red ball.

Maxwell needs to hold up his end of bargain: McDonald

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Glenn Maxwell is a vital cog in Australia's white-ball set up but he must "hold up his end of the bargain" after his "less than ideal" incident in Adelaide, said head coach Andrew McDonald.

Last week Maxwell was hospitalised in Adelaide after he got too drunk after attending a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian pacer Brett Lee and passed out.

He wasn't kept in the hospital for long and was discharged soon after and is now back in training.

"I've spoken to Glenn, had a good chat with him yesterday around the incident. Him looking after himself needs to be a consideration moving forward," McDonald was quoted as saying to Sydney Evening News.

"We've given him the opportunity to rest and rehab in that period of time and I suppose the lessons for him around that would be to take up his end of the bargain in

that space and take care of himself."

Maxwell was rested for next month's three-match ODI series against the West Indies at home and he took the opportunity to attend a golf event in Adelaide before the incident took place.

"We want to see Glenn Maxwell playing cricket for the next three to four years for Australia. Can he get to the next World Cup in 2027 in South Africa? Who knows. But, he's a key player in our white-ball formats," McDonald said.

Roach sees plenty of promise in fellow fast bowler hamar

AP ■ BRISBANE

West Indies veteran fast bowler Kemar Roach is predicting big things for the new guy on the team, 24-year-old fellow paceman Shamar Joseph.

Ahead of the second Test — a day-night match — that begins Thursday at the Gabba in Brisbane, the 35-year-old Roach has 267 Tests wickets, placing him fifth on the all-time list for the West Indies.

In 2009, on his first Test tour, Roach shattered Ricky Ponting's elbow with a blazing bouncer that forced Ponting to retire hurt from the match.

Joseph took 5-94 on debut in the first Test in Adelaide last week, including the wicket of Steve Smith with his first deliv-



ery. Australia won the first Test by 10 wickets in 2-1-2 days.

"The best advice I can give him is to build his own legacy and understand what you want from cricket," Roach said of Joseph.

"That's up to him to determine ... If it's monetary, or if it's just stats and statistics or whatever. There's gonna be a lot of distractions and he's a hot commodity right now."

"The (Twenty20) franchises

are a big distraction but guys still want to relish red-ball cricket. Test cricket is still in the hearts of West Indian cricketers at home. It's just about us to provide support around it."

Roach says the early signs from Joseph were all positive.

"He is a very confident young man and has shared a lot of information with me. We have a lot of conversations," Roach said. "He has a good energy I love. I am happy to be around him and to be a part of his career at the start of it. Let's see how long and how good he can be at the end of it. He is destined to be good if he puts the work in." Meanwhile, Australia opener Usman Khawaja has been passed fit by Cricket Australia's medical team to play


in Brisbane. And Travis Head is likely to play despite a recent positive COVID-19 test.

Khawaja was struck in the head by a West Indies bouncer during Friday's short run chase in Adelaide.

The 37-year-old completed concussion assessments earlier this week, and has been approved to partner Steve Smith in Khawaja's home Gabba test.

"Khawaja was assessed again today and has no symptoms of delayed concussion," a Cricket Australia spokesperson said.

After a match-winning century in Adelaide, Head subsequently contracted COVID-19 but Australia captain Pat Cummins said the 30-year-old was progressing well in his recovery.



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, JEYPORE

e-Procurement for Building works
Bid Identification No: EERWJYP - Online -18/2023-24

Letter No. 463
Date: 22.01.2024

01. Name of the work	:: Building works
02. Total Number of works	:: 11 (Eleven) Nos.
03. Approximate Estimated cost	:: Rs. 33.75 Lakhs to Rs. 38.00 lakhs (approximately)
04. Class of Contractor	:: "C & B" Class
05. Period of Completion	:: within 6 Months
06. Other Details	

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Sl No. of work in notice	Availability of tender online for bidding		Last date and time of seeking tender clarification	Date of Opening
			From	To		
Executive Engineer, R.W. Division, Jeypore	Online Tender/18/ RWD-JYP/2023-24	Sl No 01 to 11	29.01.2024 at 11.00 A.M	06.02.2024 upto 5.00 P.M.	05.02.2024 at 01.30 P.M	07.02.2024 at 11.00 A.M

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in/nicgep/app

All amendments, time extension, clarifications etc. will be uploaded in the website only. Bidders should regularly visit the above website to keep themselves updated.

*N.B. Any Addendum or Corrigendum will be available in the Website only.

Executive Engineer,
Rural Works Division: Jeypore.
/Dt. 22.01.2024

OPNR-25160/11/0019/2324



EAST COAST RAILWAY
Tender Notice No. ST-OT-TELE-ZONAL-PURI-366, Dt. 19.01.2024

NAME OF WORK : TELECOM ZONAL WORK EACH COSTING Rs. 5,00,000/- OR LESS IN THE SECTION UNDER JURISDICTION OF SENIOR SECTION ENGINEER TELECOM / PURI OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION EAST COAST RAILWAY FOR ONE YEAR.

Tender Value in (₹) : 45,27,200.18, EMD (₹): 90,600/-

Bidding Start Date : 29.01.2024, Date and Time of Closing of Tender : At 1100 Hrs. of 12.02.2024.

No manual offers sent by Post / Courier / Fax or in person shall be accepted against such e-tenders even if these are submitted on firm's letter head and received in time. All such manual offers shall be considered invalid and shall be rejected summarily without any consideration.

Complete information including e-tender documents of the above e-Tender is available in website : <https://www.ireps.gov.in>

Note : The prospective tenderers are advised to revisit the website 15 (Fifteen) days before the date of closing of tender to note any changes / Corrigendum issued for this tender.

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41/24	Junior Design Engineer (Mechanical)/ Medical Gas Line System	3
42/24	Junior Design Engineer (Electrical)	1
43/24	CAD Draughtsman (Structural)	1
44/24	CAD Draughtsman (Electrical)	1
45/24	CAD Draughtsman (HVAC)	2
46/24	CAD Draughtsman (Water Supply)	2
47/24	CAD Draughtsman (External Work)	1
48/24	CAD Draughtsman (Equipment)	3

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