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## ଘରେ ଘରେ ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀ

ଲକ୍ଷ୍ମୀ ଯୋଜନାର ପ୍ରମୁଖ ବୈଶିଷ୍ଟ୍ୟ

- ଗ୍ରାମାଞ୍ଚଳରୁ ସହରାଞ୍ଚଳକୁ ସୁନିଶ୍ଚିତ ବସ୍ ସଂଯୋଗ
- ସୁଲଭ ଓ ନିର୍ଭରଯୋଗ୍ୟ ସେବା
- ମହିଳା, ଛାତ୍ରଛାତ୍ରୀ ଏବଂ ସ୍ଥାନୀୟ ସମ୍ପ୍ରଦାୟକୁ ସଶକ୍ତ କରିବା
- ପର୍ଯ୍ୟଟନ ଏବଂ ଆଞ୍ଚଳିକ ଅର୍ଥ ବ୍ୟବସ୍ଥାକୁ ପ୍ରୋତ୍ସାହନ
- ଯାତ୍ରୀ ଏବଂ ସଡ଼କ ସୁରକ୍ଷାକୁ ଗୁରୁତ୍ବ
- ସ୍ବଚ୍ଛ ଏବଂ ବୈଷୟିକ ଜ୍ଞାନକୌଶଳ ଦ୍ବାରା ପରିଚାଳିତ ସାଧାରଣ ପରିବହନ

ମହିଳାମାନଙ୍କ ପାଇଁ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତରୁ ବୁକ୍ କୁ ଯିବା ଆସିବା

୫ ଟଙ୍କା ମାତ୍ର

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ବାଣିଜ୍ୟ ଓ ପରିବହନ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର



# 'Complete Baramunda bus terminal by mid-Feb'

Pandian asks BDA during review

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

ST Chairman Kartik Pandian on Tuesday visited the project site of Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT), Baramunda here, during which he asked the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) team to expedite the remaining finishing activities and get it ready for inauguration by mid of February.

Pandian made the early morning visit at the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to assess the progress of various ongoing activities aimed at ensuring early operationalisation of the facility. The ISBT is poised to become a crucial transit hub not only for the people of Odisha



but also for those from neighbouring States.

Pandian took stock of the facilities provided for commuters including waiting areas, sanitation facilities, bus bays, upcoming F&B outlets, lighting installations and restroom facilities.

He directed officials to make provision of proper Odia signage and map facility to guide the commuters.

Spanning over 15.5 acres of

land, the ISBT project, spear-headed by the BDA, aims to offer a range of passenger amenities, office spaces, parking facilities, food courts, restaurants and commercial areas. The feel and experience will be that of an airport.

The ISBT is a significant project that will benefit the people of Odisha by providing a modern and efficient transportation hub. The terminal is designed to cater to the

needs of passengers and provide them with a comfortable and convenient experience.

The terminal will provide a world-class travel experience to passengers and is equipped with modern amenities such as state-of-the-art Aahaar Centre, restaurants, multi-storied car parking, pick-up/ drop-off facility, solar panel system and sewage treatment plant.

It also has provisions for police facilitation centre to ensure the safety of passengers, administrative building for managing the terminal operations, toilet facilities for passengers, ramp facilities for the convenience of passengers with disabilities and baby feeding rooms for mothers travelling with infants.

Besides, there will be a children's play area, a primary health clinic and additional parking for seasonal buses.

## In Baleswar Driver saves 70 passengers before death



PNS ■ BALESWAR

Around 70 passengers of a tourist bus had a narrow escape as the driver of the vehicle managed to stop it before suffering a heart attack and subsequently dying.

The incident took place near Patapur Chhak under the Nilagiri police limits in Baleswar district on Tuesday.

According to reports, the bus carrying tourists from West Bengal was heading towards the Panchalingeswar

Temple in the district, during which the driver suffered the heart attack.

As soon as he experienced pain in his chest, he stopped the bus on roadside, averting a certain road mishap and saving the lives of the passengers.

The driver, who fell unconscious, was rushed to the Nilagiri Sub-divisional Hospital, where he was declared dead by a doctor. The deceased was identified as Sheikh Akhtar of the Howrah area.

## Sculptor Yogiraj reciprocates wishes to Sudarshan

PNS ■ PURI

Sculptor of Rama Lalla idol of Ayodhya temple Arun Yogiraj has thanked Odisha-based sand artist Sudarshan Patnaik. Impressed upon the glamorous Rama Lalla idol after the Prana Pratistha (consecration) ceremony, sand artist Patnaik had showered his praises on Yogiraj. Reacting over the praises, the Mysore based stone sculptor reciprocated his thanks to Sudarshan.

After the consecration ceremony was over on January 17, Sudarshan on his X handle, tagging Yogiraj, conveyed a salute and wrote of a blessing of Biswakarma.

"You are a blessing of Biswakarma. The idol of Sri Ram you crafted was really very heart touching. As an artist, it has impressed me a lot.



Let the blessings of Ram remain on you forever," wrote Sudarshan on X.

In reply, Yogiraj said, "Your good wishes are very much for me. Your wishes will give me inspiration and enthuse me on my workplaces."

Worth mentioning here that the Mysore based stone sculptor Yogiraj has turned a global figure overnight following his marvelous creation on stone. After the consecration ceremony, the idol of Rama has gathered acclamations from every nook and cranny of world by making the sculptor a cynosure.

## R-Day fest at DAV K Nagar Students encouraged to work for motherland



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar observed the 75th Republic Day with pomp and grandeur. In the formal meeting organised to mark the occasion, Principal Balaram Mahapatra rendered the official welcome address and inspired the students to take part in nation building while upholding the dignity and rich tradition of the country.

Chairman Madan Mohan Panda hoisted the national flag and advised the students to devote themselves to the service and development of the motherland and to materialise the dreams of the freedom

fighters by giving precedence to the country's interest. During his interaction, he encouraged the teachers and urged them to do their best in order to excel in all fields of academic excellence.

On the occasion, a chorus portraying the valour and patriotism of great freedom fighters was staged by the students. Similarly, the students of Std.-I and II presented a beautiful display of different aerobic postures in a rhythmic manner. The chairman encouraged the students by giving away the prizes and certificates to winners of different intramural competitions. All staff members were present.

## Dense fog hits life; temp rises in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dense fog engulfed various parts of the State on Tuesday morning affecting vehicular communications.

In Bhubaneswar, the fog restricted visibility to 50 meter.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here said dense fog was also witnessed in Koraput, Rourkela, Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Angul and Kendrapada while Baripada, Talcher, Chandbali and Bhawanipatna experienced

shallow to moderate fog.

The night temperature also rose across the State in the last 24 hours. Semiliguda in Koraput district was the coldest place at 9.3 degree Celsius.

The mercury hovered around 12 degree and below at eight other places.

The twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack recorded 16.8 and 16.5 degree, respectively. The weather office also forecast 2-3 degree rise in the night temperature during next two days with no large change thereafter.

## In city CRPF jawan found hanging in hotel room

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Mystery shrouded the death of a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan, whose body was found hanging in a hotel room at Ashok Nagar under the Capital police station here on Tuesday.

The deceased was identified as Mir Singh, a native of Rajasthan. The body was found hanging from a ceiling fan of the hotel room by the staffs.

The reason behind the jawan's death was yet to be ascertained. Getting information, a team of the Capital police reached the spot and

started an investigation.

The hotel staffs were questioned in connection with the incident. A forensic team also reached the spot.

The deceased had come to Bhubaneswar on the Republic Day. It was not clear whether the jawan died by suicide or some other reason. The door of the room was open and was not locked from inside.

"As it was checkout time of the customers, our service staffs noticed the jawan hanging. We learnt that the deceased was talking loudly with someone over phone in the past few days," the hotel managers said.

## In Khordha Failure in love affair: Girl kills self

PNS ■ KHORDHA

A girl allegedly ended her life by hanging herself over a rift with her boyfriend in Khordha district on Monday. The deceased was a resident of Sunakhala in Puri district.

She was working as an assistant at a private clinic in Mukundaprasad in Khordha for the last six months and residing there.

Her body was found hanging from a ceiling fan with a dupatta at the clinic in the evening.

On being informed, police reached the spot, sent the body for postmortem and started an investigation into the matter by questioning the staffs.

As per the girl's colleagues, she had been posting 'sad' status on WhatsApp for the last few days. Her last WhatsApp



status, which was posted at around 6 pm on the day, featured the photo of a girl crying with the caption, "I am waiting for my death".

It was suspected that the girl took the extreme step over disturbance or failure in the love affair.

## Martyr's Day at Utkal University

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the death anniversary of the Father of Nation Mahatma Gandhi, the Alumni Association of Utkal University jointly with the Alumni Connect and the NSS Wing observed the Martyr's Day at the Ahimsa Sthal at Vanivihar campus on Tuesday.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Sabita Acharya and Alumni Association office-bearers and members led by its vice-president Raghunath Prusty offered floral tributes to the Mahatma.

VC Prof Acharya and vice-president of the Alumni As-



sociation Prusty addressed the gathering on the relevance of the teachings of Gandhiji and the need for its

following especially by the students. While Dr BN Patra, in-charge of NSS Wing welcomed the participants, Dr

Birakishore Dash, joint secretary gave a vote of thanks. This was followed by cleaning of the Gandhi Sthal.

## Intach's 39th Foundation Day Ekamra Kshetra heritage walk held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The 39th Foundation Day of the Indian Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (Intach) was celebrated with a heritage walk in the Ekamra Kshetra of the temple city. Besides Intach members, historians, students and persons with a keen interest in history and culture gathered at the Mukteswar Temple Complex early in the morning to set out on a walk on the Temple Trail.

State Convener of Intach AB Tripathy flagged off the walk from the 7th Century Parsurameswara Temple. He spoke of the stellar role of Intach in the conservation and preservation of Kalingan heritage in the last two decades through its 13 Chapters spread over different districts.



The walk, curated by Tarani Pattnaik, covered the Kedar Gouri, Mukteswar, Parsurameswar, Kotitirtheswara, Champakeswar, Swarna Jaleswar and Subarna Jaleswar temples, which span from the early 7th Century till the 14th Century C.E. The heritage experts shared with the participants the little known yet important details of Old Bhubaneswar and infused ev-

eryone with a sense of pride of the glorious past. Students of the Heritage Clubs of Einstein Academy of Technology and Management, GITAM, and IITM too participated in the walk.

Convener of the Bhubaneswar Chapter Anil Dhir spoke of Intach's State of Built Heritage of India initiative, which is a pioneering pan-India programme under-

taken to highlight the challenges and apathy concerning unprotected built heritage as well as recommend the way forward.

Dhir said that one of the integral part of this initiative is to create an ongoing database of endangered built heritage. The purpose is also to solicit attention of policymakers for establishing conservation priority, he added.

# Stellar role of KISS in transforming society

Since 2004, Odisha has been a 'revenue surplus' State in terms of GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product). From being the official sponsor of the Indian national hockey teams to conducting marquee global events like hockey and football (junior) world cups, Odisha has come up a long way. But from an outsider's perspective, the image and perception of poverty, backwardness and destitution still persist and linger around.

According to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, real economic development takes place through 'inclusivity', i.e., when every section of the society comes up the social pyramid. So, when we talk about 'social inclusivity', the development of the marginalised sections of the society is imperative.

India's tribal communities, often referred to as Adivasis, represent a



SOURAJEET PRADHANI

mosaic of cultures spread across different regions. With over 700 tribes and around 84.3 million people, they constitute about 8% of the country's population.

Any individual or institution that is working for the upliftment of the lowest stratum of Indian

society is actually contributing towards inclusivity and real economic development. One such institution in Bhubaneswar is KISS (Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences). Founded in 1993, KISS is the first-ever exclusive tribal university in the world which has nurtured over 60,000 tribal children. It is the brainchild of a well-known educationist of India, Dr Achyuta Samanta. Over the past three decades, Dr Samanta has pursued his goal of creating an egalitarian society.

The KISS has been instrumental in bringing about tectonic changes among tribals in three key areas-quality education, health and nutrition and women empowerment. There are reasons behind this. Dr Samanta has come from a very poor and destitute family. Having grown up in difficult circumstances in

Kalarabanka village of Odisha, he had to go through the rigours and hardships of life. After losing his father at the age of four, he had seen his mother toil very hard to manage the household expenses. From a very young age, Dr Samanta realised the importance of quality education and used it as a tool to come out of poverty and impoverishment.

Secondly, the impact of Dr Samanta's mother in developing his personality and character has been immense. He has been steadfast in enhancing the role of women in shaping our society. Women, according to Dr Samanta, need to be provided with the requisite opportunities to empower them and bring gender equality.

All the experiences of Dr Samanta led to the birth of a vision, which if not solve the issues

completely but at least address them. The culmination of the vision was the creation of the KISS, which endeavours to bring the marginalised sections of the society like tribals, women, etc., to the forefront and assimilate them in the mainstream-social ecosystem.

Providing quality education to the impoverished tribal population is quite a daunting task. Due to their inherent background in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, etc., the medium of communication is the biggest challenge. Early socialisation of children at the KISS with the other senior students of the same tribe and endeavour of tribal teachers to bring cultural awareness and sensitivity to the classroom environment has helped the tribal students in excelling in both academics and sports.

The KISS is synonymous with

rich sporting culture aided by excellent infrastructure. The KISS has been the abode of over 15 Olympians, 500 international players across different sports, 7 Arjuna Awardees, etc. In the recent Asian Games in China, KISS students bagged an overall tally of 9 medals- 4 Gold, 4 Silver and 1 Bronze.

A very important aspect of education is its end result, i.e., employment. Today, we see so many students with myriad degrees but with no job. The KISS provides vocational training to these tribal kids through its programme "Earn while you learn" so that they can financially take care of themselves and their families.

The impoverished India has eternally been subjected to malnutrition and absence of safe drinking water. The inadequate coverage of government-sponsored

health services has had severe detrimental impact on the tribal population. The KISS has confronted the issue of malnutrition head on by providing nutritious and healthy meals to its students.

The KISS is an embodiment of women empowerment of the marginalised section of the society. A lot of encouragement is given to the women students to dream big and subsequently transform the dreams into reality. The female students have brought laurels to Odisha in each and every aspect of life.

Finally, the KISS has been able to put Odisha on the global map, wherein many global personalities have visited the KISS campus. The inclusive model of KISS has become a reference point for other global institutions to emulate in their pursuit of achieving sustainable development.





**OPINION 6**  
MASTERSTROKE OR  
POLITICAL HAKAKIRI?

**WORLD 8**  
IMRAN, QURESHI SENTENCED  
TO 10-YEAR PRISON TERM

**TRAVEL 10**  
FOOTLOOSE IN THE ENCHANTING  
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

BHUBANESWAR, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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## POLITICAL TURMOIL IN JHARKHAND

ED likely to arrest Soren; Wife may take oath as CM

RAJESH KUMAR ■  
NEW DELHI/RANCHI

After Bihar, it is now Jharkhand, its neighbouring State, that is heading towards political uncertainty. On Tuesday, Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who was evading questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), convened a meeting with his party leaders and ministers. His wife was also present, giving indications that Soren may hand over the baton to his family. There is also speculation that Soren could be arrested by the ED if he appears before them for questioning on January 31. In Patna, former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday appeared before the ED for questioning in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged land-for-jobs scam, a day after his father and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad appeared before it. Soren ended the suspense over his whereabouts after he resurfaced in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi on Tuesday, after probe agency officials failed to locate him for nearly 30 hours. The reappearance of JMM chief comes amid frenetic political developments in Ranchi and Delhi. Travelling in his official car, Soren smiled and waved at the media persons amid intense speculation of his whereabouts.



Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren with JMM MLAs after paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, in Ranchi, on Tuesday

House, Raj Bhavan and ED office, from 10 am to 10 pm, officials said.

Demonstrations, rallies or meetings cannot be held in and around these areas. BJP MP Nishikant Dubey has claimed that Kalpana Soren may replace husband Hemant, and it's for this purpose only that the alliance MLAs have been instructed to remain in Ranchi. Dubey said Hemant has called all allied MLAs to reach Ranchi 'with their luggage.' In a post on X, Dubey queried how a man who is absconding will protect the people of the State.

A big piece of advice to those who are doing wrong on the instructions of Chief Minister Hemant Soren: the CM is proving himself to be a fugitive, running away from facing the investigating agency. The man is facing insults in the country and abroad all day long. How will that man protect the officers or the people of the State?" he said.

In the 81-member Assembly, JMM has 30, Congress 16, RJD 1, while the Opposition BJP has 25, Jharkhand Vikas Morcha 3, All Jharkhand Students Union 2, and others 4. ED officials had reached his Delhi address on Monday to question him in a money-laundering case but could not locate him. The chartered plane on which he traveled from Ranchi to Delhi is parked at Delhi airport.

Soren chaired a closed-door meeting with MLAs and Ministers of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led ruling alliance and asked all the party MLAs and that of its alliance partners Congress and RJD to stay in the State capital in view of the political situation until further instructions. Soren's wife, Kalpana Soren, was

also present amid a strong buzz that she could take up the reins of the Government if he is arrested. Earlier in the day, Governor CP Radhakrishnan who has repeatedly expressed displeasure over the "deteriorating law and order" in the State, called Chief Secretary Lalbiaktluanga Khiangte, and Director General of Police Ajay Kumar Singh at the

Raj Bhavan here to take stock of the situation. After the meeting, the DGP said, "Elaborate security arrangements have been made across the State to maintain law and order, including deployment of an additional 7,000 policemen." Prohibitory orders have also been clamped in key areas of Ranchi, including areas near the CM

## Severe cold wave grips north India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A bitter cold, brought on by a sharp dip in the minimum temperature across north India, compounded the woes of commuters already affected by poor visibility. The bone-chilling cold disrupted daily life across States. The 40-day harsh winter period, known as 'Chilla-i-Kalan,' ended on Tuesday with no snowfall in the plains of Kashmir and below-normal precipitation in the higher reaches of the valley. While there was light to moderate snowfall in the higher reaches at the fag-end of the 40-day period, most of the Chilla-i-Kalan, when the chances of snowfall are maximum and most frequent, remained dry. The valley witnessed a prolonged dry spell this winter, with no snowfall in the plains. During the 40-day harsh winter period, a cold wave sweeps the region, and temperatures drop considerably, leading to the freezing of water bodies and water in supply pipes. The cold conditions continue in even after the culmination of 'Chilla-i-Kalan' with a 20-day 'Chilla-i-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chilla-i-Bachha' (baby cold).

## BJP thrashes AAP, Congress in Chandigarh Mayor Polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■  
DELHI/CHANDIGARH

In a major setback to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress, the BJP swept the Chandigarh Mayoral polls on Tuesday, retaining the three top posts in a setback to the AAP and the Congress which had contested the elections as allies. BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar defeated the AAP's Kuldeep Kumar for the Mayor's post,

polling 16 votes against the 12 won by his rival. Eight votes were declared invalid. BJP nominees Kuljit Sandhu and Rajinder Sharma were declared elected to the posts of senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor, respectively. AAP leader Raghav Chadha said they will approach the Punjab and Haryana High Court seeking fresh elections. The AAP has allied with the Congress for this civic poll — pitched as the first real electoral test of the INDIA



BJP's Manoj Sonkar being greeted by party councillors after he won the post of Mayor in the Chandigarh municipal corporation polls in Chandigarh

block ahead of a Lok Sabha election in less than three months' time but the alliance failed to deliver. The loss has further weakened the Opposition group, which is already on the edge of collapse after two of its biggest members — Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) walked out. In Punjab, the AAP and the Congress have indicated that they are reluctant to contest the Lok

Sabha polls together even though they are both in the INDIA grouping. But they agreed to contest together in Mayoral elections in Chandigarh, the Union Territory that serves as the Capital of both Punjab and Haryana. As part of the alliance in Chandigarh, the AAP contested for the Mayor's post while the Congress fielded candidates for the two other posts.

### In Kendrapada

## 100 stranded in M'nadi as boats develop snags

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

As many as over 100 passengers were stranded in the Mahanadi river on Tuesday morning when two boats ferrying them from the Bahakunda ferry ghat in Kendrapada district to Musadiha ferry ghat in Paradip developed technical snags.

Both the boats had started their journey from the Bhakunda ferry ghat to Musadiha overloaded with passengers. The boats' engines developed some mechanical malfunction and got stranded midway. This triggered panic



among the passengers.

Even, a mechanic was sent in another boat to repair the two stranded boats but he failed.

Later, all the passengers were rescued safely after three hours with the help of a mechanised boat that was engaged for rescue opera-

tions,

After the rescue of the passengers, the two boats were towed to the shore by the two mechanised boats.

## BJP walkathon yet to pick up steam

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The walkathon led by K Surendran, president of the Kerala BJP, which began in Kasaragod on January 27, is yet to garner any response from the State's electorate. The Pada Yatra (walkathon) serves as a prelude to the BJP's campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha election and revolves around the theme "Modi's Guarantee," a term coined by the Prime Minister during his visit to Thrissur on January 3. The poor turnout at meetings addressed by Surendran highlights the fact that the Kerala BJP, without Prime Minister Narendra Modi,



lacks significant support in the State. The public meeting took an unexpected turn on Monday evening when film actor Suresh Gopi, who addressed the Kannur stretch of the Yatra, announced that the Uniform Civil Code would be implemented immediately after the results of the 2024 polls are declared.

## WR JE's huge assets under Vig scanner

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Tuesday conducted raids on the properties of Sanjay Mohanty, Junior Engineer (JE) of the Water Resources Department, CADA Division in Malkangiri district, on the charge of amassing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income.

Simultaneous searches were conducted on the properties linked with Mohanty at seven places in Bhubaneswar and Baleswar and Malkangiri districts.

During searches,, a three-storied building and a 2-BHK flat in Bhubaneswar, 11 plots in Jaleswar of Baleswar, cash of Rs 1.43 lakh, and a four-wheeler along with other assets were unearthed.

The raids were still ongoing. The movable and immovable assets found so far in the names of Mohanty and his family members may likely go up further.



## State Govt introduces 2-yr-bond for admission to med colleges

After completion of courses, candidates have to serve in State institutions for 2 yrs

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government has modified the existing policy for doctors passing out of government medical colleges in order to retain them in government service for at

least two years.

The Health and Family Welfare Department has introduced a bond for all the medical students seeking admission to government medical colleges. The bond will be applicable for all candidates seeking admission in government medical colleges either under State quota or all-India quota in PG Diploma /Diplomate National Board (DNB) /Doctorate National Board (DrNB)/ MD/ MS/ MDS/ DM/ M.Ch. courses or any other courses as may be adopted in the State and notified from time to time.

It will be ensured by the DMET (Directorate of Medical Education) that no admission of any kind is allowed without submission of bond.

After completion of any of the above courses, the candidates will have to serve in any health institution of the State for two years. After serving for two years, the direct as well as in-service doctors will be released from bond condition.

The certificates will not be retained henceforth by the college authorities and may be released after the admission is

over. In case a candidate gets opportunity for higher study immediately after completion of course, the bond will cease to operate and come into force after return from study. They will have to submit a declaration in the form of an affidavit before a JMFC.

The State Medical Council (OCMR) will not release the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for registration in any other State unless it receives a clearance from the DMET Odisha regarding the fulfilment of bond conditions. Any service or training after

PG (Senior Resident / Tutor / Faculty in Medical Colleges/ Medical Officer in PSUs or other departments) in Odisha under the State Government will be counted towards Post-PG Bond service.

Private healthcare institutions registered under the Odisha Clinical Establishment (Control & Regulation) Act, 1990 and subsequent Amendments thereunder will not engage any doctor unless they obtain an affidavit from the concerned doctors duly sworn in before an Executive Magistrate to the effect that they are

not violating any bond provision for the post PG Service and have fulfilled all the bond conditions.

Monetary penalty for defaulters (for not serving in state for two years after completion of course) will be double the amount of stipend/salary received during study period.

Candidates leaving the course before completion resulting in lapse of a seat will be liable for monetary penalty of Rs 10 lakh and the amount of stipend / salary received by the date leaving the course.

In case of nonpayment of

penalty, recovery procedure will be initiated against the defaulters violating the bond conditions as per the Odisha Public Demand Recovery Act, 1962.

Releasing a notice, the department said, "There is a dearth of doctors in the State and there is a reluctance to serve the State after completion of their courses amongst the doctors studying in different Government Medical/ Dental Colleges at the cost of State exchequer."

"In order to overcome the dearth, the government has

modified the existing policy for execution of an agreement in shape of Bond with the objective to retain the passing out doctors to utilize their services in the greater interest of the State," the notice said.

Speaking about the new bond, DMET Director Sachchidananda Mohanty said, "The rule will be enforced in private medical colleges as well. The government aims to provide healthcare to all. A penalty of twice the stipend or salary is not a big one. It will help bring in more specialist doctors in public service."



## In Jajpur Quack brands toddler with hot iron to ‘cure’ fever

Girl suffers  
severe burn  
injuries

AKSHAY ROUT ■ JAJPUR

A three-month-old girl suffering from fever was allegedly branded with a hot iron rod by a village quack as a cure in Jajpur district recently, leaving her with severe burn injuries.

"As there was no doctor in the village and nearby areas, the girl's parents approached a quack to treat their daughter," said Jayanti Mohant, an ASHA worker.

Dr Subhashis Jena, Medical Officer of the Community Health Centre (CHC) in Sukinda, said Manguli Pradhani's daughter is being treated at the CHC. "During our visit to Talanagada village on Friday, we found burn marks on the child's body.

Such branding by hot iron or inflicting burns on the body as a cure for various illnesses is still prevalent in tribals-dominated villages of Jajpur district," he said.

The Jajpur administration has directed the Sukinda BDO to submit a report about the brandings. "We have ordered police to take legal action against the quack," said Kalinganagar ADM Nabakrushna Jena.

The area inhabited by Juangs, a vulnerable tribal group, was in the news seven years back after the death of 22 children in three months from alleged malnutrition. "After these deaths, the authorities carried out development works the area. Still, many tribal people depend on quacks to treat their children," said Amarbar Biswal, a social worker.

## R-Day by UCCIL Sweets distributed among slum kids

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL) celebrated India's 75th Republic Day in its Nayapalli office campus with great spirit.

The National Flag was unfurled by Additional Director, UCCIL and CEO and Managing Director of ESSAR MINMET, Odisha, Shashi Sekhar Mohanty amidst a grand celebration in presence of the Directors and many distinguished members of the Chamber.

The programme was coordinated by honorary secretary AK Sharda along with vice president SK Swain and honorary joint treasurer A Khandelwal.

Among the senior members present were advisor to the Board of Directors Dipak Rathor, former president of UCIIL SK Tamotia, Sanjay Pattnaik and Manoj Prusty.

The flag hoisting was done with a good number of members and local children from the slum areas. Sweets and food packets were distributed.

## INBRIEF

### MINAKSHI PRESIDENT OF ODISHA MAHILA CONGRESS

Bhubaneswar: Minakshi Bahinipati was on Tuesday appointed as the new president of the Odisha Mahila Congress. A notification in this regard was issued by the AICC. Minakshi is the wife of Jeypore Congress MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati.



### ASSEMBLY SECRETARY'S SERVICE EXTENDED BY 1 YR

Bhubaneswar: The service period of senior bureaucrat OSD-cum-Secretary of the Odisha Legislative Assembly (OLA) Dasarathi Satpathy has been extended further for a period of one year with effect from February 1. The State Department of General Administration has issued a notification in this regard. Notably, Satpathy has played a major role for modernisation, e-administration and introduction of NeVa besides beautification of the OLA premises.



### CM OPENS LEPROSY COLONY AT PALASPALLI

BHUBANESWAR: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday inaugurated a newly-constructed Leprosy Colony at Palaspalli here. The colony has 31 houses with 94 beneficiaries getting the Madhubabu Pension.

### BJP HOLDS BANDH ON RAIL PROJECT IN NABARANGPUR

Nabarangpur: The BJP Yuva Morcha on Tuesday observed a 12-hour dawn-to-dusk bandh in Nabarangpur district protesting the delay in land acquisition by the Odisha Government



for the Jeypore-Nabarangpur railway project. The protesters alleged that despite the Central Government allocating funds for the project eight years ago, the State Government has failed to secure the necessary land, causing significant delay in the project's execution. They also demanded that the State Government officially recognise the Nabarangpur College and the Pendrani College at Umarkote as government colleges.

### GORAKHPUR-HATIA MAURYA EXP EXTENDED TO SAMBALPUR

Bhubaneswar: The Railway authorities have extended the Gorakhpur-Hatia Maurya Express train up to Sambalpur in Odisha. The train originating from Hatia will have stoppages at Rourkela, Jharsuguda and Sambalpur railway stations in Odisha.

### BIJU PATNAIK PARK INAUGURATED IN PALLAHARA

Pallahara: A Biju Patnaik Park was inaugurated here the local MLA Mukesh Pal. Angul Collector Sidhartha Sekhar Swain was chief guest. Jindal Steel & Power CSR chief Prasant Hota,



BJD Youth president Kunabihari Das, Sub-Collector Sushant Pati, BDO Pallahara Dillip Bara and ZP Chairperson Reenarani Naik were guests of honour. The park is sponsored by the Jindal Steel & Power and built at a cost of Rs 2 crore.

### MAJOR PORTS, CHILDREN ATHLETICS MEET AT PARADIP

Paradip: The 44th All India Major Ports Athletics Meet and 31st Children Athletics Meet jointly organised by the Major Ports Sports Control Board and the Paradip Port Sports Council kicked off at Gopabandhu Stadium here on Tuesday. Around 250 participants from eight major ports of India are participating in 12 groups and 133 events in the sports extravaganza. Paradip Port Authority Chairman PL Haranadh inaugurated the two meets. Haranadh said it is important to organise such events as they ensure a feeling of camaraderie and brotherhood among the Major Ports.



### REPUBLIC DAY HELD WITH FERVOUR IN PALLAHARA

Pallahara: On behalf of the National Day Celebration Committee, the 75th Republic Day was observed with a great pomp in Pallahara sub-division stadium. The National Flag was hoisted by the Sub-Collector. Troupes from different schools participated in a parade. The NCC wing of the Mahatab High School was declared the champion. International artist Bijaya Biswal was felicitated. Dillip Bara (BDO), Akankhya Mohapatra (Tehsildar), Indurekha Paschimakabat (SDPO), Parao Tudu (IIC) and Subhasri Tudu (Deputy-Collector) were present. The Sub-Collector with committee members visited the local jail and hospital and met the jail inmates and patients.



### WOMEN KRUSHI FAIR AT BALANGA

Balanga: The Central Institute of Women Agriculture (CIWA) organised a Women Krushi Fair at Balanga on Wednesday in association with CIWANI Women SHG. Nimapara MLA Samir Ranjan Dash inaugurated the programme. CIWA Director Dr Mrudula Devi, Dr Sumita Acharya, SBI Manager Jitendra Kumar Jena and IPO Subodha Kumar Nayak attended as guests. Dr Sabita Mishra presided. More than 400 women farmers attended the meeting. Dr Arun Panda, Dr Ananta Sarkar, Dr Debendra Sarangi, Bhikari Charan Behera, Prabhat Nayak and Parikhita Mallick coordinated.



### AQUILAW OPENS OFFICE IN BHUBANESWAR

Bhubaneswar: AQUILAW, a distinguished full-service law firm, has announced the establishment of its newest branch in Bhubaneswar. With its presence in three key cities, Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai, AQUILAW has evolved into a leading legal powerhouse, boasting a team of approximately 80 professionals.

### ICICI PRUDENTIAL LIFE LAUNCHES ANNUITY PLAN

Bhubaneswar: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched ICICI Pru Guaranteed Pension Plan Flexi with Benefit Enhancer, the industry's first annuity plan which offers a 100% refund of premiums at any time from the date of purchase. An annuity product provides customers with a guaranteed income for life enabling them to lead a financially-independent retired life.

## Gobinda Patnaik given Pranatanth Award



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Noted social worker and social entrepreneur Gobinda Patnaik was honoured with the prestigious Pranatanth Award by the Pranatanth College of Khordha on Sunday.

Besides, noted literary person Amaresh Patnaik was awarded the Manjari Devi Samman by the college management.

The awards were given away by Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena and college management president and local MLA Jyotirindranath Mitra

on the 75th anniversary of the college. Mitra said the award was given to Patnaik for his outstanding social work for the upliftment of women, senior citizens, children and the weaker sections of the society.

Patnaik in his speech said the award shall motivate him to work further for the disadvantaged sections of the society. Senior journalist Pradosh Patnaik, former VC of Utkal University Major Khirad Mohanty, Lecturers, students and others were present in the function. College magazine "Pratik" was inaugurated on the occasion.

## Dist-level Pani Panchayat Pakshya at Balanga



PNS ■ BALANGA

The Puri District Level Panipanchayat Pakshya was observed at the Water Resources Department office premises here on Wednesday. Nimapara MLA Samir Ranjan Dash inaugurated the programme and said that the State Government has given emphasis on development of canal and irrigation system.

Among others Satyabadi MLA Umakanta Samantray, Nimapara Block Chairman Sankar Bhoi and Balanga Sarapanch Anjali Pradhan attended as guests of honour.

Executive Engineer Amiya Kumar Seth presented the aims and objectives of Pani Panchayat at the meeting. More than 194 Pani Panchayat members of the Balanga, Gop, Nimapara, Kakatpur, Satyabadi, Pipili and Delanga area participated.

Nimapara WR Executive Engineer Baikuntha Nath Dalai presided over the meeting. Students of different schools of Puri district participated in quiz, painting, and debate and were felicitated. Er Sangram Kesari Mohanty gave vote of thanks.

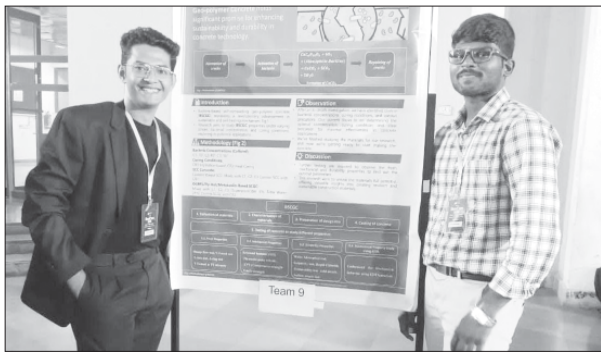
## VSSUT students' research papers among 10 best

At (ResCon) 2024, held by IIT Mumbai

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Two final year students, Chinmay Kumar Das and B Priyajogi of Civil Engineering of VSSUT, Burla have earned accolades for their institution as well as State for their research paper.

Their research paper was on the BSCGC (Bacteria Based Self-Healing Self Compacting Geo-Polymer Concrete), titled "Healing Cracks, Building Future, Nurturing Sustainability." The duo is conducting their research under Dr Saubhagya Kumar



Panigrahi, Department of Civil Engineering, which was presented at the Achar Research Presentation (ResCon) 2024, which was conducted by IIT Mumbai. And, it was placed within the best 10 and well appreciated by the juries.

The distinguished work of

these students garnered accolades from the prestigious EnPower Research Wing at IIT Mumbai.

Notably, the team achieved the 7th position among the top 10 undergraduate researchers nationwide.

"Each year IIT Mumbai in-

vites research papers from various institutions in the title Res-con. It accepts 40 papers out of which only 10 are shortlisted for display in the exhibition. Our project BSCGC found a place within best 10 and was adjudged as 7th one," said Chinmay, a native of Bhadrak.

"Basically the project focuses on developing concrete which are made of industrial waste products unlike conventional cement. The bacteria would heal even the hairline cracks in the concrete used in constructions which are otherwise not seen to the naked eyes. This is the crux of the project," he said.

## 42 Similipal villages now electrified

2,300 tribal families in inaccessible areas in K'jhar, M'bhanj get the benefit

PNS ■ BALESWAR

In a significant development, power supply has now been extended to the roots in northern Odisha, ensuring electricity for 42 villages in Similipal, TP Northern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPNODL) a joint venture of Tata Power and the Government of Odisha, has successfully provided power to over 2,300 families residing in mountainous and inaccessible villages across Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts.



This accomplishment is part of the 'Biju Gram Jyoti Yojana' (BGJY), a joint initiative with Government of Odisha aimed at bringing illumination to every home. On the occasion of Republic Day, Chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik virtually dedicated the service to the general public.

The ceremony was graced by Minister of Science and Technology, Public Enter-

prises, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disability Ashok Chandra Panda, Collector and DM, Mayurbhanj Vineet Bharadwaj, advisor, Rural Electrification (ODSSP) Diptiman Bal, Jilaparishad, Mayurbhanj president Bharati Hansdah as well as CEO of TPNODL Bhaskar Sarkar.

Prominent figures present on the occasion included Chief

Commercial Officer of TPNODL, Praveen Verma, Chief Project Pradeep Mohanty, Project General Manager Rajeev Nayak and CSR Head Dilip Kumar Sahu.

More than 6,000 residents across 42 villages of Astakuanara, Gudagudia, and Bareipani Gram Panchayat are expected to benefit from the electrification drive.

## Voters Day: Awareness drive held by BU

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The PG Department of Political Science, Berhampur University in collaboration with the NSS celebrated the National Voter's Day here on Thursday. The department also organised a community outreach programme to spread awareness about voting rights to mark the event.

Coordinator of the PG Department of Political Science Dr Rajesh Seth along with other faculties led the students to the nearby adopted villages of the university. Students campaigned with posters and banners to aware voters about their rights and their role in



strengthening democracy.

Program Officer of NSS, Berhampur University Dr Shankarsan Malik guided the students to interact with the locals to make them aware about the judicious use of votes.

Assistant Professor of PG Department of Political Science Sanjaya Meher con-

ducted the observation of pledge by the students in front of the Administrative Block of the university. A large number of PG students participated in the event. Among others, Dr Sharada Prasanna Rout, Dr Soumendra Kumar Mohanty and Dr Kirtimayee Routraya coordinated the event.

## In Balangir 'Drunk' doc thrashed after patient's death

PNS ■ BALANGIR

High-voltage tension prevailed at the Bhima Bhoi Medical College Hospital here on Monday night as a doctor, who was allegedly in a drunk condition, got thrashed after a patient's death at the healthcare facility.

Reports said a person of the Kandhapalipara area in the district had been admitted to the hospital in the evening. At around 8 pm, his family members met the nurses and inquired about the on-duty doctor, to which the nurses replied that the doctor was not avail-



able.

The patient's kin waited for the doctor till 11 pm. However, the patient allegedly died before the arrival of the doctor.

On reaching the hospital, the doctor, after being requested by the family members, checked the patient and declared him dead.

Moments later, the patient's relatives ascertained that the doctor was in an inebriated condition, following which they allegedly manhandled him

Later, the doctor was rescued by the security guards.

While the patient's family members demanded stringent action against the doctor, the hospital Superintendent ordered for a probe into the allegations.

## In Jajpur HC stay on machine-aided sand lifting has no takers

AKSHAY ROUT ■ JAJPUR

Sand mafias continue to rake in the moolah by rampantly plundering minor minerals in various parts of Jajpur and other districts even though the Orissa High Court has imposed restrictions on machine-aided sand lifting from rivers.

The HC stay on sand lifting through machines has allegedly been thrown to the winds at many places. The alleged administrative apathy has in-

stead encouraged the sand mafias to continue their loot with impunity.

As per reports, the violation of the HC stay is quite noticeable at different ghats of the Baitarani, Kharasrota, and Budhha rivers in Jajpur where sand is being lifted day and night with excavators and powerful compressors. Same is the situation at some ghats of the Kusei river near Deogaon in Keonjhar. The National Green Tribunal, convinced of excess sand mining in the

Kusei river, had earlier ordered an investigation into it. However, the local administration has allegedly looked the other way.

The lease of sand mining was earlier under the Revenue Department and raids on behalf of tehsil offices were often carried out. It is alleged that after the sand ghat leasing was brought under the Mines Department, raids are seldom conducted.

Prakash Sahu, a resident of Basudevpur in Jajpur, la-

mented that truckloads of sand are being lifted with machines from Kamlapur ghat and other ghats in the district while boats are used for sand lifting. "What the administration is doing to enforce the HC stay on machine-aided sand lifting? When we asked the tehsildar, he said he has no power to carry out raids," Sahu added.

Ranjit Das, a resident of Markandpur in Jajpur observed, "The sand miners are violating the HC order. The administration is encouraging

the mafia to loot the minor mineral. The sand mafias are lifting sand with machines and boats day and night."

As for the rampant sand loot, ADM (Revenue) of Jajpur Subhendu Kumar Samal said, "The issues related to sand leasing and mining are the look-out of the Steel and Mines Department. The Deputy Director of Mines will look into that. I will urge the DDM to take up the issue with the district-level committee."

In Cuttack, most sand ghats

have remained closed since January 11 on the grounds that sand mining is not possible without machines. A single truckload of sand was earlier available at Rs 5,000 while its price has spiked to Rs 13,000 to 14,000 now. Soaring prices have made things difficult for common people.

Sushanta Patnaik, a house owner, said, "A truckload of sand is priced over Rs 10,000 while a tractor-load is around Rs 3,500. Due to shortage of sand, construction work has been affected."



# Koreans to visit Ram temple

PTI ■ AYODHYA

According to Korean legend, a teenage princess from Ayodhya crossed the ocean in a boat some 2,000 years ago, sailed 4,500 kilometres to Korea and married King Kim Suro who founded the Gaya Kingdom in the north Asian country. The princess, Suriratna, then became Queen Heo Hwang-ok. The fable is hardly known in India, nor is the fact that some 60 lakh people in South Korea, who consider themselves descendants of Suriratna, consider Ayodhya as their maternal home. It was therefore natural that many of them eagerly watched the Ram Temple consecration online from their homes on January 22. And now they can't wait to visit Ayodhya to see the grand new Ram temple complex up close. Many members of the Karak clan visit Ayodhya every year to pay tributes at the memorial of Queen Heo Hwang-ok at the Queen Heo Memorial Park, which was set up on the banks



of Sarayu river in Ayodhya in 2001 in a partnership between the Uttar Pradesh government and the Gimhae city in South Korea. "Ayodhya is very special to us as we see it as our grandmoth-

er's home," said Kim Chil-su, the secretary general of the Central Karak Clan Society. He was among those who attended the January 22 'Pran Pratistha' ceremony of the new idol of Ram Lalla at the

temple, a few kilometres away from the Queen Heo Memorial Park. Spread over a 2,000 square metre area, the park features a meditation hall, pavilions dedicated to the queen and king,

pathways, a fountain, murals and audio video facilities. The pavilions are built in a typical Korean style with tiled sloping roof. "We visit Ayodhya every year to pay tributes at the memorial and this time we plan to go to the new Ram temple too. We watched the ceremony on-line and what a feeling it was. I haven't been to the old makeshift shrine but have read about the dispute," Yu-Jin Lee, who plans to travel with 22 others to the city in February, told PTI over phone from South Korea. Queen Heo Hwang-ok is revered as the progenitor mother of the Gimhae Heo families, according to an ancient Korean history text, "Samguk Yusa". It states that the queen came to Korea in AD 48 from 'Ayuta'. She is still revered as the progenitor mother of the Gimhae Heo families of the Karak clan. In a post on X, the South Korean embassy had also congratulated India for the consecration ceremony on January

22. "The place holds a great symbolic importance for Korea-India relations based on the matrimonial link between Queen Suriratna (Heo Hwang-ok) from Ayodhya and King Kim Suro from Gaya (Korea) in 48 AD," it said. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former South Korean president Moon Jae-in signed an MoU for expansion of the memorial. South Korean First Lady Kim Jung-sook attended the inauguration of the beautification work in 2018. In 2019, commemorative Rs 25 and Rs 5 postage stamps for the queen were also issued by India. Indian diplomat N Parthasarathi, who served as an ambassador to South Korea, also wrote a novel based on Suriratna's life, "The Legend of Ayodhya Princess in Korea. It was translated in the Korean language as "Bi Dan Hwang Hoo", or Silk Princess, and published in Seoul. Later, the National Book Trust of India published a children's book based on the novel.



## No political personality is ready to sail in sinking boat Congress: BJP

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Congress is a non-performing asset, a liability and a sinking boat, a senior BJP leader alleged on Tuesday and said no political party will associate itself with it. "The Congress had made attempts to create the INDIA alliance, but the Congress party has become a NPA (non-performing asset) in the country and has become a liability," former BJP MLC and party's in-charge for Srinagar parliamentary constituency Surinder Ambar said. Justifying his assertion, Ambar said West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee earlier decided to contest the Lok Sabha elections alone and then Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar left the INDIA bloc and returned to the NDA. "Congress is a sinking boat and no political personality is ready to sail in it," the BJP leader told reporters after inaugurating the party's election office in Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency. On Tuesday, the BJP inaugurated its election offices in all five constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir. Ambar said the BJP believes that election is the biggest festival in the country and is celebrating it by launching election offices. "We have created 38 depart-

ments for the elections and made 38 convenors and 38 convenors. Those 38 departments vary from election office to social media to strategic aspects and will touch all aspects of the election," he added. The former MLC said the BJP is looking to win at least 330 seats on its own in the upcoming general elections. "For the NDA, the score will be over 400 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will score a hat-trick," he added. Meanwhile, the party's general secretary (organisation) for Jammu and Kashmir, Ashok Koul, said the INDIA bloc has broken away and many partners have left it. "We have said it from the very beginning that it is not an alliance but a photo session. All those meetings were a photo session. As far as Kashmir is concerned, we do not see that any political party will enter into an alliance with it," Koul said. "There was a Gupkar alliance and now we do not see that as well. All of them will contest. The BJP will contest all the six seats, including Ladakh, and will try to win all of them," he added. Koul further said the assembly elections will also take place in Jammu and Kashmir. "We will see to it that the assembly elections take place after the parliamentary polls," he added.

## Odisha wins top prize for vibrant Tableau at 75th Republic Day Parade

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stealing the limelight during the 75th Republic Day parade here recently, Odisha's vibrant tableau, showcasing the resilience and strength of women intertwined with the state's exquisite handicrafts clinched the first prize in the judge's choice category. A big umbrella on the Odisha tableau denoted the "wholehearted" support of the central and state governments to the artisans under the "Viksit Bharat" programme while the "War Horse of Konark Temple" symbolised Odisha's rapid progress in shaping a developed India. Meanwhile, Gujarat secured the top spot in the people's choice category with its tableau highlighting the enchanting Dhorodo tourism village. The tableau transported onlookers to the picturesque landscapes of Dhorodo, capturing the essence

of Gujarat's unique cultural and tourist attractions with the theme 'Dhorodo: Global Identity of Gujarat's Border Tourism'. In the judge's category, Gujarat finished second while Tamil Nadu was ranked third. The Southern State highlighted the historical significance of the Kudavolai electoral system, which emerged during the 10th century Chola era and marked an early stride towards democracy. On the other hand, in people's choice category, Uttar Pradesh which showcased an artistic image of Ram Lalla whose new idol was recently consecrated at a grand temple in Ayodhya bagged the second position followed by Andhra Pradesh which clinched third place. The winners were awarded at a ceremony held at Delhi Cantonment here, recognizing the states and Union Territories that participated in

the grand parade. The Culture Ministry's tableau, titled 'Bharat: Mother of Democracy', claimed the first prize among the tableaux presented by various ministries and departments. Adding to the accolades, the Ministry of Home Affairs tableau, which depicted 'vibrant villages', secured the second prize in this category. The tableau highlighted the diverse and thriving rural life across the country. A total of 16 captivating tableaux from states and Union territories, along with nine from central ministries and departments, rolled down the Kartavya Path during the grand celebrations in the presence of Chief Guest of the Parade, French President Emmanuel Macron. For selecting winners in the people's choice category, the Government had conducted public voting through the MyGov platform.

## Mamata reduced Congress, Left to zero in WB: TMC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress said Tuesday the Congress being the biggest party in the INDIA bloc has more responsibility and should have left the seat-sharing issues related to West Bengal to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, reiterating the regional party will fight on all the 42 Lok Sabha seats in the state. "If Mamata Banerjee can reduce the Congress and the Left to zero (in assembly polls), it can also reduce the BJP to zero (in Lok Sabha elections)," TMC leader Sudip Bandhopadhyay told reporters, following an all-party meeting ahead of the Budget session here. "If the Congress wants to do something in Bengal, it should leave the matter to Mamata Banerjee," he said. The Congress is the biggest party in the INDIA bloc and has the most responsibility, he said, adding his party remains a member of the alliance. Airing the regional party's grievances with the Congress over the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and seat-sharing talks, he said had



the main opposition party informed the TMC about the Yatra in advance Banerjee could have joined it. He suggested the Congress' invitation to its main leader to attend the yatra came when it was too late. "We never received an invite from Rahul Gandhi. We received an invite from the party yesterday. What is the point of it when the Yatra has already begun," he said. The yatra is reentering Bengal on Wednesday. Bandhopadhyay also asserted the exit of Janata Dal (U) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar from the alliance is not a setback.

## UDF Opposition criticises Governor policy address

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Congress-led UDF opposition on Tuesday criticised in the Assembly the manner in which Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan read the government's policy address in the House and opposed the motion of vote of thanks to the Governor by terming it a "paradox". The Left front too slammed Khan's brief reading out of the customary policy address by terming it as a 'comic play', but at the same time backed the vote of thanks to the Governor. Indian Union Muslim League MLA K P A Majeed questioned the need for a vote of thanks to the Governor who only briefly read the policy address. "What the Governor did was a farce. Now the Speaker will have to send a letter of thanks to him. Is it not a paradox?" he asked. Both fronts also used the discussion on the vote of thanks to lash out at each other on various issues, including the financial problems plaguing the state. While the LDF accused the opposition of not supporting its efforts to raise the state's problems before the central government, the UDF said that the Left front was hand-in-glove with the Governor. The opposition alleged that the LDF gov-



ernment was mired in corruption and the row between Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was a "drama" to hide such matters. "They both are the two sides of the same coin," UDF MLA M Vincent alleged. The UDF also alleged that there was nothing worth reading in the policy address in the first place and therefore, even if the Governor had spent hours reading the entire thing, it would not have made a difference. On Monday, senior CPI leader and former minister E Chandrasekharan moved the motion of vote of thanks to the Governor.

Chandrasekharan, during discussion on the motion, had said that his party's stance was that there was no need for a Governor's post in the state and must be done away with. The ongoing discord between Khan and the Left government revolves around various issues, notably the functioning of universities in the state and his refusal to sign certain bills passed by the assembly. Amid the face-off, the Governor had on January 25 concluded his customary policy address to the Kerala Assembly within just two minutes, reading out only the last paragraph.

## Uproar in Rajasthan Assembly over MoU on ERCP

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan Assembly on Tuesday witnessed uproar over the MoU on the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project as the opposition Congress raised slogans expressing dissatisfaction with the state government's statement. The proceedings of the House had to be adjourned twice for 20 minutes each due to the uproar by the Congress MLAs. Earlier on Sunday, a tripartite MoU was signed between the Centre and the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments in New Delhi for preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) of the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP). Responding to a discussion on this issue, the Rajasthan government assured that the state would get ample water as a result of the agreement.

## Former Union Minister Jaswant daughter in law killed, son injured in car crash

PTI ■ ALWAR

Congress leader Manvendra Singh's wife was killed and the former MP and his son were injured when their SUV met with an accident in Alwar on the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, officials said. Manvendra Singh, who is son of the late BJP stalwart and former Union minister Jaswant Singh, and his family were on their way to Jaipur from Delhi when the accident happened. Police said the driver, Narendra, apparently lost control of the car which skidded off the road and hit a cemented parapet on the vacant space between two elevated roads near Naugava. Alwar Additional Superintendent of Police Tejpal Singh said three the people were travelling in the SUV. They and their driver were rushed to a private hospital after the accident. Dr Vikrant Solanki of the hospital said that Chitra Singh, aged around 55, died during

treatment while Manvendra Singh (59), his son Hamir Singh (25) and their driver were injured. Manvendra Singh is out of danger, he said. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, former BJP state president Satish Poonia, former chief minister Ashok Gehlot and other leaders expressed grief over the incident. Expressing grief over the accident, Gehlot said posted on X, "I pray to God to give peace to the departed soul and courage to the family." Satish Poonia said the incident was shocking. He condoled the demise of Chitra Singh and wished for a speedy recovery to the injured. Manvendra Singh, a former MP from Barmer, had quit the BJP and joined the Congress. He also contested the 2018 assembly elections against then chief minister and BJP leader Vasundhara Raje from Jhalrapatan constituency. He had lost the poll. Manvendra Singh's father Jaswant Singh had died in 2020 aged 82.

## Ruling Left, Opposition blame each other in Assembly on Kerala economic woes

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The discussion in the Kerala Assembly on Tuesday on the state's financial problems saw the ruling Left and the Congress-led UDF blame each other, with the opposition finally walking out of the House in protest, alleging a lack of any plan on the part of the government to improve the state's plight. State Finance Minister K N Balagopal denied any mismanagement or extravagance on the part of the government, as claimed by the UDF, and squarely blamed the Centre's policies and neglect towards Kerala for its economic woes. The UDF opposition, which moved an adjournment notice in the morning to suspend the scheduled business of the House and discuss the issue, alleged that the Left administration failed in tax administration and collection, and that was one of the main reasons for the state's financial woes. Denying the allegations, the

government contended that state functioning has not come to a halt as the opposition was trying to project and that Kerala has seen development in education, health, infrastructure, basic facilities, etc. Despite the financial woes. Earlier in the day, the UDF, in the adjournment notice, alleged that the mismanagement and extravagance of the Left government were the causes of the financial problems in the state. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan welcomed the adjournment notice moved by the opposition to suspend the scheduled business of the House and discuss the issue. During the discussion on the issue, Leader of Opposition (LoP) V D Satheesan and other UDF MLAs, including P K Kunhalikutty, Roji M John and Mathew Kuzhalnadan, said that the state government failed in GST implementation, preventing the loss of its share in IGST and collecting tax from the sale of gold. "Mr Finance Minister, you



have miserably failed. Even now, try to improve your tax collection," the LoP said to state Finance Minister K N Balagopal during the discussion. Kunhalikutty said that despite the financial problems, other than calling for a protest against the Centre, the LDF government has not come up with any economic plan to address the issue. At the same time, the opposition conceded that the policies of the Centre and its neglect towards Kerala did contribute

to the state's economic problems. "But it was not the sole reason as claimed by the Left government," Satheesan said, alleging that the state's financial position was in a "pathetic" condition. Refuting the charges, Balagopal said that the state's functioning has not come to a halt, as the opposition was trying to project. He said that the state is making payments for pensions, salaries, and clearing dues for construction works and will continue to do so even

if it is a bit delayed. "All this is being done despite no help from the central government and the policies that are financially choking us," the minister said in the House. The minister as well as various other LDF MLAs and ministers said that the opposition, instead of joining the Left front to protest against the Centre's neglect and policies, was keeping mum about it. "They have 18 MPs in the Lok Sabha, but have never raised the issue in Parliament nor outside it," they contended. At the end of the discussion, Satheesan said that the opposition raised the issue in the House in the hopes that the government would say that it would come up with some plan to deal with the issue. "However, in the absence of any plan from the end of the government, we are staging a walk-out," he said. Subsequently, Speaker A N Shamseer ruled that the adjournment motion was rejected.

## Gadkari: National highways network in MP will be equivalent to that of US network by 2024 end

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday said the national highways network in Madhya Pradesh will be equivalent to that of the US by the end of 2024. Gadkari also said the Road Transport and Highways Ministry is exploring the field of ropeway and cable cars, and 27 ropeways will come up in MP. He laid the foundation stone for 15 national highway projects totalling 498 kilometres costing Rs 8,038 crore, at a function held in Bhopal. He said the Road Transport and Highways Ministry will either start or complete the work of national highways of Rs 3 lakh crore in Madhya Pradesh by this year-end. "By the end of 2024, the network of national highways in Madhya Pradesh will be equal to that of America (network)", Gadkari said. He also said a tender for a 2-km long ropeway connecting Ujjain railway station with Mahakaleshwar temple will

be issued in February. The project will cost Rs 171 crore, he added. "We are working in the field of ropeways and cable cars. We have decided to develop 27 ropeways costing Rs 7,234 crore in MP," the Union minister said, adding that study is being conducted for a long ropeway in Omkareshwar. Gadkari recalled when he was Shipping minister, he had prepared a water taxi scheme in Mumbai to ease traffic. "A ropeway, a cable car, or a sky bus can be run on the lake (Bhopal's Upper Lake). We will surely help if you (Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav) send a proposal," he said and added that the tenders for all 27 rope-way works will be issued soon. He also said good roads will attract industries and capital investment, which will give a boost to employment in MP and also eradicate poverty. Gadkari appealed to CM Yadav to provide government land along the ring road so that logistics parks, cold storage and industrial clusters

could be developed with the Central fund. He also said a multi-modal logistics park, costing Rs 1,111 crore, is proposed on a 255-acre land. Gadkari said the 245-km stretch of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, costing Rs 20,000 crore, is passing from Madhya Pradesh and the distance between both cities will be covered in 12 hours. "The express highway will be completed by December this year. Once completed, one can travel to Mumbai in around 5-6 hours from Madhya Pradesh, which will help in business development," he added. The construction of a 687-km highway between Indore and Hyderabad costing around Rs 18,000 crore will be completed by 2025, the Union minister said and shared details of other projects in MP. After constructing a green-field highway for Rs 5,000 crore between Agra and Gwalior, the distance from Gwalior to Delhi will be covered in four hours, Gadkari added.



# Win some, lose some

Nitish switching sides leaves the INDIA bloc in confusion but limits his own bargaining power

In a move that did not leave many seasoned politicians flabbergasted, JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar has executed a somersault by rejoining the BJP alliance barely 18 months after he walked out of the NDA, spilling bad blood all around. Importantly, his latest move saw Nitish abandoning the plank of Opposition unity, which he was passionately championing until very recently. In fact, he was the de facto convener of the INDIA bloc, which has been cobbled together to take on the BJP's national might. As a prime mover of the INDIA bloc, Nitish's departure puts a cloud over the coalition's future, which may have to undergo a realignment, potentially impacting its cohesiveness and effectiveness. However, there is more to this development than meets the eye: While it certainly is a major setback for the Opposition, what with Mamata Banerjee and Bhagwant Mann already having announced to go it alone in their respective States of West Bengal and Punjab, it provides an obvious edge to



the BJP while straitjacketing Nitish from performing any more antics, at least till the Bihar Assembly elections next year. The lack of communication between Bihar Chief Minister Nitish and his deputy, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, is said to have compounded their unease with each other. Matters did not help when Central agencies started questioning Tejashwi's mother and sister in the alleged land-for-jobs scam. The BJP's inclination towards a representative from an extremely backward caste or a prominent Other Backward Classes (OBC) group adds complexity to the situation. Nitish has the additional duty of ensuring that Bihar adds

handsomely to the NDA's kitty in the general elections. Nitish's decision to realign with the BJP has far-reaching consequences, influencing not only his political trajectory but also the future dynamics of the NDA and INDIA bloc. Interestingly, the Bihar developments coincide with Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entering the State. It is sure to have a dampening effect on the Congress' campaign and lower its confidence considerably. However, nothing can be said with finality about Nitish. It will all depend on the understanding he has with the BJP and how the latter treats him. His switch was ostensibly prompted by the treatment he received from his INDIA partners. During alliance meetings, clashes of aspirations and perceived attempts by the RJD to expand its influence within the JD(U) hint at a shifting power dynamic. Nitish's political somersault and his realignment with the BJP have unleashed a series of ripple effects that extend far beyond the borders of Bihar. The departure of this seasoned politician from the INDIA bloc has injected an element of uncertainty into the political equations, casting shadows over the future cohesion and effectiveness of the coalition. The nation observes closely as this strategic realignment unfolds, shaping the future contours of Indian politics.



Artistes perform during the presentation of the best tableau in the Republic Day parade, in New Delhi

# Masterstroke or political Harakiri?

Nitish Kumar has rejoined forces with the BJP, cementing his reputation as a leader known for frequent shifts in political alliances for personal benefit

On Sunday, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar threw a bombshell by leaving the ruling Mahagathbandhan in Bihar and returning to the NDA coalition. He also quit the opposition coalition which he had built eight months ago. This dismantling of the bloc has dealt a significant blow to the INDIA bloc at the national level. They missed the slim chance of defeating the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. It is worth exploring how Bihar's politics may affect the national landscape. Kumar's decision to return to the NDA fold could benefit the BJP but weaken the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Congress in Bihar. It could ultimately impact the opposition bloc at the national level. This BJP- J.D. (U) partnership could improve the chances of the BJP winning more seats in the upcoming 2024 general elections and help Modi achieve a hat trick.

The BJP tried to break the opposition coalition and partner with the J.D. (U) alliance. The Party sees Nitish Kumar as a critical ally in Bihar and believes their partnership can win in the 2024 elections. Kumar has only 45 seats in the current Assembly, while the RJD and BJP have 78 and 79 seats, respectively. Despite this, Nitish managed to continue as the chief minister. Did the Congress party have a hand in Nitish Kumar's departure from the IN.D.I.A. opposition bloc? The reason behind this setback was the decision to sideline Nitish and promote Congress. Kumar accused the Party of being responsible for the failed alliance, arguing that the situation arose due to poor communication. KC Tyagi of the Janata Dal-United (JDU) has levelled accusations against the Congress party that it conspired to dominate the Opposition bloc. On January 13th in Mumbai, the Chief (CPI-M) Sitaram Yechori proposed Nitish Kumar as the convener of the bloc. This suggestion was supported by most of the other leaders present. However, Rahul Gandhi voiced his disagreement. Mamata



Banerjee subsequently proposed the name of Congress chief Kharge as the coalition chief, a move Tyagi claims was part of a broader conspiracy. Tyagi stated that Nitish Kumar mobilised an alliance that united all non-Congress parties. However, it is now disintegrating. The situation in Punjab and Bihar is on the verge of collapse, and the coalition in West Bengal is also falling apart. Nitish confirmed that he left the INDIA alliance because it didn't meet his expectations. He felt he was the only one working towards the coalition's goals. Although the partnership has brought together all non-Congress parties, the alliance disintegrated in West Bengal and almost collapsed in Bihar and Punjab. There is also an untold story. Lalu Yadav, the leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), encouraged Nitish Kumar to form an opposition coalition at the national level to aim for the position of Prime Ministerial candidate. The purpose of this plan was to pave the way for Lalu Yadav's son to become the Chief Minister. However, the plan

LALU YADAV, THE LEADER OF THE RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL (RJD), ENCOURAGED NITISH KUMAR TO FORM AN OPPOSITION COALITION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL TO AIM FOR PRIME MINISTERSHIP

failed when Mallikarjun Kharge was chosen as the leader of the new coalition. Consequently, Nitish Kumar sided with the (BJP). Kumar's credibility has been tarnished because of his unwavering desire to hold power, regardless of the repercussions. He has changed political allegiances several times, always for his benefit, and currently holds the title of Chief Minister with the longest tenure. Nitish's track record shows that after exploring other options in 2013, Nitish Kumar left the BJP and allied with the RJD, and Congress. After the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he aligned with the BJP again and became the Chief Minister in 2020. However, two years later, Kumar left the BJP and formed a new government with the RJD, and Congress. Now he has dumped the RJD. That is why he is called Palti Ram. Despite being an experienced politician, Nitish Kumar's frequent changes in stance have cost him the chance to be considered as a prime ministerial candidate for the opposition party, especially at

the age of 72. The BJP's dismantling of the INDIA bloc may facilitate Prime Minister Modi to win his third term. In Bihar, mobilising OBC votes to achieve electoral success is imperative. In November 2023, Bihar increased the reservation for Scheduled Castes and Extremely Backward Castes. It is unclear how long the Nitish and the BJP partnership will last. They may work together until the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, but what will happen afterwards is uncertain. The Bharatiya Janata Party may support Nitish only until the Lok Sabha polls and their support could decrease afterwards-some question whether the alliance will continue until the 2025 Bihar Assembly polls. Nitish has shown that it's possible to retain power by using clever bargaining skills and winning a few seats, even if only 4% of the electorate belongs to their caste. But one thing is sure: Given Nitish's track record, there could be other flip-flops.

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

# A father's courageous fight against girl's sexual assault

Despite threats and coercion, Ranjit, supported by his resilient daughter, pursued justice with unwavering courage

When Ranjit took on the might of the powerful in his tribal village in Ranchi district, Jharkhand, to pursue action against the rapists of his 13-year-old daughter, he didn't think he would get justice. But he was still determined to go ahead. So, even though the village mukhiya was unresponsive and the police inspector on duty refused to file an FIR, Ranjit didn't give up. He called up the Superintendent of police who came to the station to help him file the case under the POCSO Act, leading to the arrest of the three perpetrators.

Thereafter began the real battle. Pressure was mounted from all sides to compromise by offering money to withdraw the case and, marriage to one of the perpetrators. Threats were made to burn their home, kill Ranjit and cause other physical harm to the family. Somehow he braved the storm, riding on the extraordinary and unwavering courage of his daughter, (the sexual assault survivor), who stood firm in her fight for justice.

After a year of struggle, including withstanding



humiliation in court from the public prosecutor, Ranjit and his daughter were vindicated when the verdict came in their favour and the three were sentenced to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment. In a country where rape is reported every 20 minutes and conviction rates are less than 30%, this success inspired filmmaker Nisha Pahuja to document Ranjit and his daughter's dogged fight for justice. To Kill A Tiger, which took eight years to film, has been nominated for the Best Documentary Feature for the 2024 Oscar awards. The survivor, who is now 20, went on to complete school. She hopes to show other survivors like her, that girls are not to blame for sexual assaults and that is why she agreed to reveal her face in the

film. But had her father Ranjit not stood up for her, she may have remained just another statistic in crime records. Ranjit attributes his ability to withstand all pressures and to raise his voice for justice to the training he received through an intervention engaging men as responsible partners and caring fathers in the context of gender equality and child rights.

Initiated by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) in Jharkhand in 2015, this program developed innovative ways to work with men and boys on issues of masculinities. Implemented in three districts in partnership with NGOs Srijan in Ranchi, Chotanagpur Sanskritik Sangh (CSS) in Gumla and Sahyogini in Bokaro, the intervention was able to reduce gender differences in the burden of household and care work and, reduce gender disparities in education, according to an independent evaluation of the programme. Importantly, it reduced gender-based violence in families and villages engaged in the intervention. This assessment found positive mindset changes in atti-

tudes towards child marriage sexual harassment of women/girls and policing of sisters/daughters by brothers/fathers. Male members of the program questioned their violent masculinities, began exercising less 'power over' their women relatives supported them more, and started challenging norms on masculinities.

This initiative, coupled with government and other NGO interventions, has helped to change two important community norms. It now believes that investment in education, especially girls' education and an increase in age at marriage is necessary. Initiatives like these engaging men and boys have shown that the journey towards more gender-transformative masculinities is possible. What makes it imperative to scale such interventions urgently is the disturbing increase in the incidence of rape between 2020 and 2022. In Ranjit's Ranchi district, figures suggest that approximately every 1.75 days there is an incident of rape.

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



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

## THE BEHAVIOUR OF BUREAUCRATS

Sir — The idea of bureaucrats embodying exemplary conduct for the public takes a blow when incidents like the Singrauli SDM episode surface. His act of having a female employee tie his shoelace in public triggered outrage, highlighting the stark contrast between expected behaviour and reality. The swift transfer in response to public outcry via social media underscores the need for greater accountability and sensitivity among those entrusted with positions of power.

Such blatant abuse of authority cannot be tolerated, especially in public spaces. Moving forward, the government must prioritize not only competence but also ethical conduct when selecting officials for crucial roles. Common courtesy and respect for basic human dignity should be non-negotiable, forming the bedrock of every bureaucrat's interaction with the public. Only then can we rebuild trust and pave the way for a government that truly serves its people.

N Mateeni | Mumbai

## DILAPIDATED POST OFFICES

Sir — People are infuriated over the lackadaisical attitude of authorities towards improving the condition of the post offices in the country which has been lying in a dilapidated condition for a long. Residents have complained that even the name of the post office has not been displayed properly at most of the places. Moreover, the internet services fail to provide connectivity during peak hours. A member of the grievances redressal committee said higher authorities of the postal department had not shown any interest in improving the condition of the post office. The infrastructure of the post office needs to be improved. There is a need to beautify the staff counters to give a neat and clean look to these counters. There is also a need to provide better seating arrangements. There was also a need to recruit more staff at the post offices. Retires invest their hard-earned money, wait for hours and then become

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### IMD completes 150 years



Recently, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) celebrated its 150th year of establishment and service to the nation. On this memorable occasion, the IMD has launched several initiatives, such as 'The Weather Analysis and Forecast Enabling System

(WAFES Framework of Climate Services (NFCS)). Over the years, the IMD has been playing a significant role in weather forecasting and monsoon predictions. It plays a multidimensional role in the country's major affairs, conducting general elections, the launch of ISRO missions, and the growth of infrastructural and agricultural sectors.

The IMD faces a lot of challenges posed by changing climates and the ever-increasing demand for accurate and timely weather information. As the country navigates the complexities of its diverse weather patterns, perhaps the fusion of AI and traditional meteorological methods may well be the key to a more adaptive and efficient forecasting system, ultimately safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of the people of the country.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

disappointed without getting their hard-earned money. It is high time to heed the fact that the residents living in pensioner's paradise are put to the test every time they go to pick up their monthly earnings. It is time to have better working conditions in Post Offices.

C K Subramaniam | Chennai

## UGC DEGREE IN MARATHI

Sir — The University Grants Commission has taken major steps to provide degree and post-graduate education in other languages along with the Marathi language. Accordingly, a master's training program has been organized next month for professors to create educational materials. As a result of this, students will get a great opportunity to learn the local language in the coming academic years. Local language has been given priority in the national education policy. But the necessary educational materials are not available. As a result, many rural students are unable to study in the local language. Even during the three years of implementation of NEP, many course materials are not available in the

Marathi language. It will also be given. The support of the Indian Language Committee will be taken for this. Overall, this is good news in the background of the strangulation of the Marathi language going on in all areas. Today, children are not given education in their mother tongue in many places. If education is given in the mother tongue, children understand quickly and they understand anything immediately. Recently the volume of English has increased in all areas. In many places, Marathi schools are on the verge of closure. Even today, despite fulfilling all the conditions, the Marathi language does not get the status of the Abhijit language from the Centre. For that, it is necessary to try at all levels. Overall, it is necessary to give priority to Marathi in all fields. It is good news that Marathi is being included in degree and post-graduate education. It is expected to be implemented as soon as possible.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

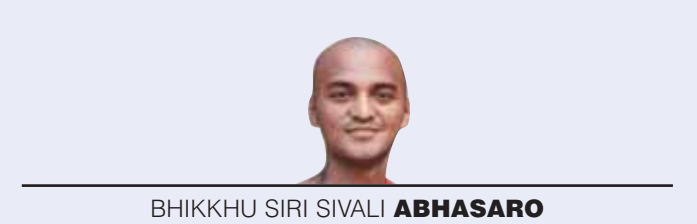
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FIRST COLUMN

AHIMSA: THE PATH TO PEACEFUL EXISTENCE

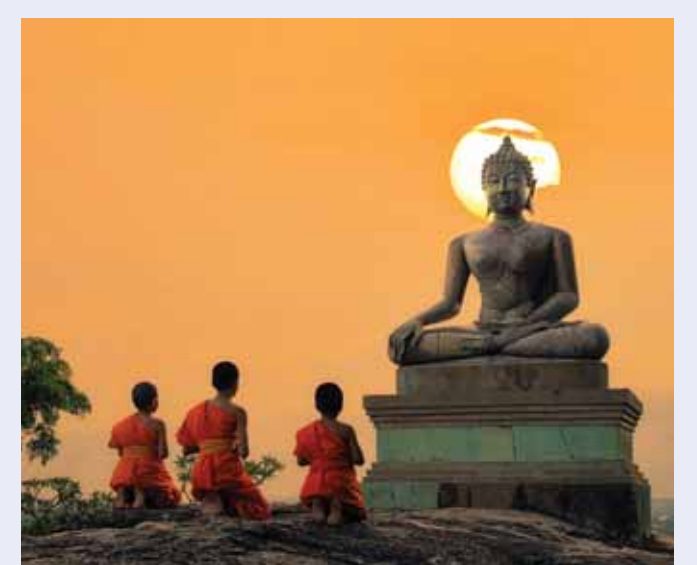
Buddhism's essence lies in non-violence, compassion and enlightenment



Buddhism, founded by Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha, is a philosophy and way of life that places great emphasis on the alleviation of suffering and the pursuit of enlightenment. Central to the teachings of Buddhism is the principle of non-violence, or "ahimsa," which holds a profound and essential role in shaping the ethical framework of this ancient spiritual tradition.

The Essence of Non-Violence in Buddhism:

- Compassion and Interconnectedness: Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected and share a common desire for happiness while seeking to avoid suffering. Non-violence stems from the understanding that causing harm to others ultimately results in harm to oneself. Compassion, a key tenet of Buddhism, encourages followers to cultivate empathy and extend benevolence to all living beings.
- The First Precept: The Five Precepts form the ethical guidelines for Buddhist practitioners, with the first precept explicitly stating, "I undertake the precept to refrain from taking life." This foundational principle underscores the sanctity of all life and emphasizes the commitment to non-violence as a fundamental aspect of ethical conduct.
- Karma and Consequences: Buddhism teaches the concept of karma, the law of cause and effect. Engaging in violent or harmful actions generates negative karma, which can have repercussions in this life or future lives. By practicing non-violence, individuals seek to break the cycle of negative karma, promoting a path towards enlightenment and liberation from suffering.



- Mindfulness and Contemplation: Buddhist practices, such as mindfulness meditation, cultivate awareness and self-reflection. Non-violence is not only manifested in physical actions but also in the thoughts and intentions of individuals. By developing mindfulness, practitioners strive to eliminate harmful thoughts and cultivate a mindset of kindness and non-harming.
- Conflict Resolution: Non-violence plays a crucial role in conflict resolution within Buddhist communities. Rather than resorting to aggression or retaliation, followers are encouraged to seek peaceful solutions through dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation. This approach aligns with the Buddha's teachings on skillful means to address conflicts without causing harm.
- Example of the Buddha: The life of the Buddha serves as a profound example of non-violence. From his renunciation of the royal life to his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha consistently demonstrated compassion and refrained from causing harm to any being, even in the face of adversity.

Non-violence, deeply rooted in the core principles of Buddhism, is a guiding force that shapes the ethical conduct of its followers. Through the practice of compassion, mindfulness, and the observance of the Five Precepts, Buddhists strive to create a world free from violence and suffering. By embracing the philosophy of non-violence, individuals embark on a transformative journey towards personal well-being, social harmony, and the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

*(The writer is a Buddhist monk and spiritual guide, views are personal)*

# Drones can revolutionise the agriculture sector



The Government's inclination towards precision agriculture implies that drones are poised to become an integral component of cultivation practices



In Punjab, where drones remain associated mostly with dropping drugs and arms from Pakistan in border areas, now they are poised to gain a new skyline to revolutionise the agriculture sector.

Kiranpal Kaur of Sekha village in Barnala district, who has only completed her education up to class 10 and has never travelled in a plane, is now a trained drone pilot. She travels across the district to provide rental services for spraying fertilisers and pesticides and undertaking surveys to check for any crop damage in the fields. These Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are the cutting-edge solution for driving agriculture towards higher efficiency, sustainability and profitability.

To further empower rural women Self Help Groups (SHGs), the subsidised 'Namo Drone Didi' Scheme was launched in December last year with an outlay of Rs.1261 Crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2025-26. The scheme aims to equip and train at least 15,000 women SHGs. Kiranpal is among the first batch of 22 rural women SHGs in Punjab, out of 300 women SHGs across the country, to be equipped with Kisan drones.

**Potential:** The market cost of a high-end drone that can perform multiple tasks is approximately Rs 15 lakh. However, the government has introduced subsidised schemes that offer subsidies of Rs 4-8 lakh on each drone and a 3% interest subvention on loans. This initiative is expected to have a significant impact on the Indian agriculture drone market, which is projected to grow at an annual average rate of over 25% from 2024 to 2028. Additionally, the global market for agricultural drones is expected to reach USD 4.7 billion by the end of 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 31.3% during the forecast period of 2024 to 2026. The increasing demand for agricultural drones, which have several applications such as field mapping, automated seeding, fertilizer sprayers, crop analysis, and imaging, is expected to propel market growth in the coming years.

The adoption of drone technology serves as an advanced decision support system



THE USE OF DRONES, EQUIPPED WITH HYPERSPECTRAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGY, HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN HOW WE PERCEIVE CROP HEALTH

that facilitates targeted intervention and reduces the wastage of critical resources such as water, chemicals, and fertilizers. The high-resolution imagery obtained from drones can provide valuable insights that enable targeted intervention and prevent the unnecessary application of treatments across the entire field. Moreover, drones can help convert the abstract concept of precision agriculture into multifaceted approaches through compelling data and actionable insights.

**Remote sensing and monitoring:** Effective monitoring of crop health is crucial for farmers to achieve maximum yield and profits. The use of drones equipped with hyperspectral imaging technology has brought a revolutionary change in how we perceive crop health. In a recent study, it was revealed that drones can detect pest infestations up to 2 weeks earlier than traditional monitoring methods. This early detection can potentially save up to 30% of the harvest that might otherwise be lost.

**Precision crop management:** Finding a balance between agricultural production and environmental preservation is crucial. The excessive use of chemicals and water scarcity can lead to environmental degradation, which is a pressing concern that the agriculture sector must address. Drones can play a vital role in solving these issues by accurately identifying areas that require water. By doing so, farmers can reduce water usage by approximately 25%, thereby promoting sustainable agriculture.

Drones are not only useful for surveillance purposes, but when equipped with the right analytical capabilities, they can also provide actionable insights for real-time crop management. For example, by utilizing data collected and analyzed by drones, farmers can reduce fer-

tilizer usage by an average of 26% by applying it only where needed. This is not only beneficial from a financial perspective but also contributes to sustainable agriculture that reduces environmental impact.

**Efficient field scouting:** Given India's vast geographical expanse, monitoring remote or hard-to-reach farms is a unique challenge. Here, drones are an asset, reducing the hours of manual labour involved in field scouting to mere minutes. According to recent estimates, drones can cover 200 acres in just 30 minutes, offering timely and accurate data. It is valuable for smallholder farmers, who make up close to 68% of the Indian farming community, enabling them to act before a problem like a pest infestation becomes economically damaging. This efficiency in field scouting allows farmers to stay ahead of potential issues, even in remote or less accessible parts of their farms. Instead of labour-intensive, time-consuming manual inspections, drones provide a cost-effective and timely alternative. According to the estimates prepared by IFFCO, a drone takes just around 8-10 minutes to spray one acre.

Data-driven decision-making: We are in an era where data-driven strategies are not the exception but the rule, and agriculture is keeping pace. Drones generate extensive datasets that offer an in-depth look into crop health, growth patterns, and other variables. For example, a farmer can now optimise planting densities of sugarcane-based on drone-collected data, potentially increasing yields by up to 10%. Imagine a farmer in the heart of Punjab who can now use drone-acquired data to optimise planting densities, manage nutrients effectively, and plan their harvest with precision. Such data-driven decisions can lead to higher yields and, consequently, better profits.

Cost savings: In a sector where profit margins can be wafer-thin, drones serve as a cost-effective ally. Early detection of potential issues allows for timely and, therefore, less costly interventions. By helping farmers make data-backed decisions, drones help avert financial setbacks. By advising on agri-input use before visible crop issues occur, they can prevent the need for expensive interventions later during the crop cycle.

Weather forecasting: For a good yield, optimum weather remains crucial. Equipped with weather monitoring technology, drones can serve as weather stations in the sky, providing real-time data on the weather. This information is invaluable for planning farm operations and responding to changing weather patterns. In India, where monsoons can be a farmer's best friend or worst enemy, having up-to-the-minute weather data is a game-changer. It allows farmers to make informed decisions about when to plant, irrigate, or harvest, ultimately improving farm resilience.

Conclusion: The government's shows a growing affinity for precision agriculture suggests that drones are set to become an integral part of crop cultivation practices. By blending traditional farming expertise with advanced technology, farmers can anticipate a more optimistic and fruitful future. Moreover, the government can offset the 80% cost of drone adoption through significant savings on fertilizers and pesticides subsidies, as the use of drone technology leads to reduced consumption.

*(The Author is vice-chairman of Sonalika Group and vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)*

# Charting a course for India's maritime security

To strengthen its standing as a global leader in maritime security, it is imperative to adopt a robust Maritime Domain Awareness framework

The adoption of a robust Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) framework is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by maritime-dependent industries and nations worldwide. In order to demonstrate the necessary commitment towards the protection of marine infrastructure and maritime domains, India must strengthen its maritime security programmes by keeping the rapidly changing maritime geopolitics and emergence of diverse threats in attention. By prioritising research and development funding and promoting international MDA partnerships, India can position itself as the global leader in maritime security.

India's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) concepts



must undergo a significant transformation, shifting from traditional water surface-centric initiatives to embrace space-based monitoring and AI-driven Operational Technology (OT) systems. The focus on maritime security needs to extend beyond territorial limitations to encompass regional and global perspectives, recognizing the heightened competition in seas. Given India's substantial glob-

al role in maritime affairs, effective MDA models must be prioritized as a fundamental component of the maritime security outlook. This evolution is essential to proactively address emerging threats, enhance surveillance capabilities, and foster international collaboration in securing maritime interests.

In the context of multilateral Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) cooperation, the Maldives' geographical proximity to China's expansion goals and the rising maritime incidents underscore the critical need for vigilant maritime monitoring. Proactively addressing China's increasing influence in the South China Sea is imperative. Given its status as the largest stakeholder and the key actor in the Indian

Ocean Region, India must take the lead in institutionalizing MDA. Recognising the inadequacy of limited national capacity to protect vast water expanses, this necessitates fostering multilateral cooperation, promoting inclusivity, and leveraging sophisticated technologies. As one of the largest maritime operators strategically positioned in the region, India should formalize a framework for multilateral MDA cooperation involving relevant parties. This initiative can facilitate access to robust yet affordable MDA resources, while also fostering intelligence sharing and joint exercises to collectively address diverse maritime security challenges. India has demonstrated a strong commitment to

enhancing its Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities, particularly in the aftermath of the "26/11" attacks. Notable initiatives, such as the National Marine Domain Awareness (NMDA) project and the collaboration with France on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) satellite constellation, highlight India's proactive efforts to create an integrated MDA network. To ensure a cohesive and successful MDA approach, there must be a focus on establishing a specialised coordination body, conducting regular audits, and evaluating past initiatives. Recognizing the dynamic nature of maritime threats, the involvement of multiple stakeholders and adaptability to evolving scenarios are emphasized, contributing to the

resilience and effectiveness of the MDA framework. Integrating current unmanned technology with human intelligence transforms marine security. India can lead maritime security by integrating these technology into marine plans faster. Real-time threat identification, thorough monitoring, vessel vetting, due diligence, and AI insights to optimise the MDA framework are required. Technology, especially AI, improves Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) for countries like India. For early threat detection, deliberate investments in cutting-edge surveillance and intelligence technology like ASVs, UAVs, and UUVs are necessary. Autonomous systems like ASVs, UAVs, and UUVs improve reaction and marine security.

Initiatives such as the National Command, Control, Communication, and Intelligence (NC3I) network demonstrate the scope of MDA operations. Succinct and adaptable MDA is the result of periodic revisions in response to emerging threats and the active participation of experts from diverse disciplines. For autonomous system integration and preparation against emerging threats, a specialised task force, learning processes, and technology infrastructure updates are essential. It is imperative that collaborations be formed with academic institutions, research centres, and technological firms. Cybersecurity and interoperability assure MDA unmanned system security

and efficiency. Regular cybersecurity audits strengthen MDA systems against evolving cyber threats. India must modernise its technology and form new cybersecurity alliances to handle marine security issues. Since the "26/11" event, India's Navy and MDA have increased maritime security initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to securing the whole maritime domain. Recent successes in right-time detection and fast eradication of varied marine threats highlight MDA's naval operating concept evolution. Investment in naval personnel training and cutting-edge technology would help the Indian Navy meet MDA goals.

*(The Author is working with an Independent Think Tank; views are personal)*



# Imran, Qureshi sentenced to 10-year prison term

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a special court on Tuesday for leaking state secrets, in a major blow to his bid to return to power in the February 8 general elections.

The decision to sentence Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was announced by special court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain during the hearing of the case held at the special court in Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi established under the stringent Official Secrets Act. The 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician is already serving a three-year jail term after being convicted of corruption.

Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has faced numerous troubles starting with the denial of its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, Qureshi, 67, and a number of other party leaders. The controversy first emerged on March 27, 2022, when Khan — less than a



Gauhar Bano Qureshi, left, daughter, and Mehriene Qureshi, wife of Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a deputy leader of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan's 'Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf' party, speak with media following a special court decision, outside the Adiyala prison, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on Tuesday. A Pakistani court on Tuesday sentenced former Prime Minister Khan and one of his party deputy Qureshi to 10 years in prison each, after finding them guilty of revealing official secrets. **AP/PTI**

month before his ouster in April 2022 — while addressing a public rally waved a letter before the crowd, claiming that it was a cipher from a foreign nation that had conspired with his political rivals to have his government

overthrown.

Khan did not reveal the contents of the letter nor did he mention the name of the nation it came from. But a few days later, he accused the US of conspiring against him and alleged that

Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Affairs Donald Lu had sought his removal. The cipher was about former Pakistan ambassador to the US Asad Majeed's meeting with Lu. The case was filed against Khan and Qureshi on August 15 last year by the Federal Investigation Agency, which accused both of violating the secrecy laws while handling the cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in Washington in March 2022. The verdict comes nine days before the February 8 general elections, which the PTI is contesting amid a state crack-down and without an electoral symbol.

Both Imran and Qureshi have been in jail in the run-up to the elections. While Imran's candidature was rejected, Qureshi was cleared to run for an NA seat from Thar. But today's conviction means that both of them have been disqualified from contesting elections for the next five years, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Both Khan and Qureshi had pleaded not guilty to their involvement in the offence relat-

ed to the alleged misuse of diplomatic cable for political purposes.

The PTI leaders confirmed the development by saying that it was a 'sham case with no access to media or public'.

"Legal team will challenge the decision in a higher court and hopefully will get this sentence suspended, given the poor proceedings of a case when Islamabad High Court had annulled proceedings twice, ordered access to media and public but on the contrary, access of legal team was denied, and a decision reached in a haste," the party said in WhatsApp message. "God willing kaptaan and vice kaptaan will be back soon, and this sentence will be (thrown) in the dustbin in the appeal stage," the party said. This is Imran's second conviction as he was also convicted in the Toshakhana corruption case on August 5, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. It was Qureshi's first conviction. The Islamabad High Court had suspended his sentence. However, a division bench had later rejected Imran's petition seeking the

suspension of the conviction.

At today's hearing held in the Adiala Jail, Khan and Qureshi were given a questionnaire under Section 342 (power to examine the accused) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

After Imran recorded his statement, the court asked him about the whereabouts of the cipher (diplomatic cable), to which the former prime minister replied: "I have said the same in my statement that I do not know. The cipher was in my office." The judge then sentenced the two leaders to 10 years in jail in the case. After announcing the verdict, the judge stepped out of the courtroom, at which Qureshi protested that his statement was not recorded. PTI leader Gohar Khan said that the special court judge had announced the verdict in haste, adding that proceedings were not being conducted in accordance with the law and the Constitution. "He asked questions himself and the way our witness was cross-examined, you cannot find any such examples in history," he said while speaking to the media outside the Islamabad High Court.

## Northern Ireland political party agrees to end 2-year boycott

AP ■ LONDON

Northern Ireland's largest British unionist party has agreed to end a boycott that left the region's people without a power-sharing administration for two years and rattled the foundations of the 25-year-old peace. The breakthrough could see the shuttered Belfast government restored within days. After a marathon late-night meeting, Democratic Unionist Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson said Tuesday that the party's executive had backed proposals to return to the government. He said agreements reached with the UK government in London "provide a basis for our party to nominate members to the Northern Ireland Executive, thus seeing the restoration of the locally elected institutions".

The breakthrough after months of inconclusive negotiations came after the UK government last week gave Northern Ireland politicians until Feb 8 to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and the local government or face new elections. "All the conditions are in place for the Assembly to return," Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said. He said he would publish details of the UK government's new proposals on Wednesday, after briefing all of Northern Ireland's main political parties.

The DUP walked out in February 2022 in a dispute over post-Brexit trade rules. Ever since, it has refused to return to the government with the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein. Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland's peace process, the administration must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists.

The walkout left Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people without a functioning administration to make key decisions as the cost of living soared and backlogs strained the creaking public health system. Amid mounting public frustration, teachers, nurses and other pub-

lic sector workers staged a 24-hour strike this month calling on politicians to return to the government and give them a long-delayed pay raise. The British government has agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) for its public services, but only if the executive in Belfast gets back up and running.

The political impasse in Northern Ireland stems from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union and its borderless trading bloc after decades of membership. The DUP quit the government in opposition to new trade rules put in place after the UK left the EU in 2020 that imposed customs checks and other hurdles on goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK.

The checks were established to maintain an open border between the north and its EU neighbour, the Republic of Ireland — a key pillar of the peace process that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland. The DUP, though, says the new east-west customs border undermines Northern Ireland's place in the UK.

In February 2023, the UK and the EU agreed on a deal to ease customs checks and other hurdles for goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. But it was not enough for the DUP, which continued its government boycott. Donaldson said further measures agreed by the British government will "remove checks for goods moving within the UK and remaining in Northern Ireland and will end Northern Ireland automatically following future EU laws".

The DUP's decision faces opposition from some hard-line unionists, who fiercely guard Northern Ireland's place in the UK and say even light-touch post-Brexit checks create a de facto internal trade barrier. Dozens of protesters gathered outside the DUP meeting venue outside Belfast late Monday, waving placards saying, "Stop DUP sellout".

## Philippines, Vietnam agree to cooperate on disputed SCS

**Hanoi (Vietnam):** The Philippines and Vietnam signed an agreement Tuesday on preventing and managing incidents in the disputed South China Sea during Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s visit to Hanoi. Several countries, including the Philippines and Vietnam, are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, and high-seas face offs between Chinese and Philippine ships have intensified over the past year in the contested waters, fuelling fears of a wider conflict.

The Philippines and Vietnam agreed Tuesday to increase coordination on maritime issues and work to promote trust and confidence, the Philippine government said in a statement. They didn't release

details about what actions they would take under the agreement. "Vietnam remains the sole strategic partner of the Philippines in the ASEAN region," Marcos said during a meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart, Vo Van Thuong, referring to the regional grouping of Southeast Asian nations.

He added that while maritime cooperation was the "foundation" for this partnership, relations between the two nations had expanded. The two countries also signed a deal on Tuesday for Vietnam to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million metric tons (1.6 to 2.2 million US tons) of rice each year at affordable prices.

Vietnamese rice accounts for 85 per cent of imported rice in the Philippines and the two countries agreed to create a framework for ensuring stable supplies. **AP**

## Israeli undercover forces kill 3 militants

AP ■ JENIN

Israeli forces disguised as civilian women and medical workers stormed a hospital on Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored how deadly violence has spilled into the territory from the war in Gaza. The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the wards of the Ibn Sina Hospital in the town of Jenin. The ministry condemned the raid and called on the international community to pressure Israel's military to halt such operations in hospitals. A hospital spokesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating that it was a targeted killing. The military said the militants were using the hospital as a hide-out, without providing evidence. It alleged that one of those targeted in the raid had transferred weapons and ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by the Hamas assault on southern Israel on October 7 that triggered the



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel on Tuesday. **AP/PTI**

war in Gaza.

Footage said to be security camera video from the hospital that circulated on social media showed about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed, dressed as women with Muslim headscarves or hospital staff in scrubs or white doctor's

coats. One in a surgical mask carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other. The forces were seen patting down one man who kneeled against a wall, his arms raised. The Associated Press has not independently verified the footage, but it is in line with its

## US, Chinese officials hold meeting in Bangkok: WH

**Washington (PTI):** US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi held more than 12 hours of meetings in Bangkok, the White House said Monday. "Over the weekend, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held more than 12 hours of meetings in Bangkok with his counterpart from the People's Republic of China, Director Wang Yi," John Kirby, NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the White House told reporters at a news conference here.

"Sullivan and Director Wang took stock of progress on key issues following the meeting between President (Joe) Biden and (Chinese) President Xi (Jinping) back in November. Now, that includes discussing efforts to resume military-to-military communication, which has occurred; addressing artificial intelligence safety and risks; and advancing bilateral counter-narcotics cooperation," Kirby said.

In fact, the launch of a working group on counter-narcotics will begin Tuesday in Beijing. The US delegation will be led by Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jen Daskal.

"The two sides also held constructive discussions on global and regional issues, including those related to Russia's war against Ukraine; the Middle East, of course; the DPRK; the South China Sea; and Burma. And they also discussed cross-Strait issues," Kirby said.

At a separate news conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed that the United States and other allies engage with China in dialogue on issues of mutual concern, like climate change and arms control.

## China protests deportations of its students

AP ■ BEIJING

The Chinese government has protested to the United States over the treatment of Chinese arriving to study in America, saying some have been interrogated for hours, had their electronic devices checked and in some cases were forcibly deported from the country. Xie Feng, the Chinese ambassador in Washington, said dozens of Chinese holding valid visas have been denied entry over the past few months when returning to school from overseas travel or visiting relatives in China, according to a post on the Chinese Embassy website.

"When they landed at the airport, what awaited them was an eight-hour-long interrogation by officers who prohibited them from contacting their parents, made groundless accusations against them and even forcibly repatriated them and banned their entry," he said on Sunday at an event at



the embassy on student exchanges. "This is absolutely unacceptable." The protest comes as the US and China try to boost student and other exchanges to shore up their relations, which have turned confrontational in recent years over trade, technology, human rights and, more fundamentally, the future direction of the world. Nearly 290,000 Chinese students are in the US, about one-third of the foreign students in the country, according to the embassy post. China has

more than 1.3 million students studying abroad, more than any other country, it said.

In a separate online statement, the Chinese Embassy said it had made "solemn representations" to the US government about the treatment of students arriving at Dulles airport in Washington, D.C. The statement reminded Chinese students to be cautious when entering through the airport.

It wasn't clear whether Xie's comments referenced cases only at Dulles or at other

entry points as well. China's state media have reported at least three cases since November at Dulles where Chinese students lost their valid student visas, received a five-year entry ban and were repatriated following long hours of interrogations.

They were asked if their studies were financed by the Chinese government, if they were members of the Chinese Communist Party or its youth arm, and if their research was linked to the Chinese government, the Chinese military or key state laboratories. The students were headed to the National Cancer Institute, Yale University and the University of Maryland respectively.

At least eight Chinese entering the US with valid documents were repatriated since November, according to state media reports. The US Department of Homeland Security and the American Embassy in Beijing did not respond to requests for comment.

## Macron gets ceremonial welcome in Sweden

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

French President Emmanuel Macron was welcomed on Tuesday with pomp and ceremony at the start of a two-day state visit to Sweden during which he will meet Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the Scandinavian country's monarch, King Carl XVI Gustaf.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, were greeted by the king in the inner courtyard of the downtown Stockholm royal castle that is the official residence of the Swedish royals. There, Macron and Carl Gustaf reviewed members of the Grenadier Guards that had lined up.

Macron noted that it had been too long since a French president visited Sweden — the last time was in 2000, when Jacques Chirac traveled to the Scandinavian country. "My visit is therefore first and fore-

most to renew our friendship, our partnership in the European Union, and as Sweden prepares to join NATO, our alliance," Macron said. Later Tuesday, Macron is to discuss the future of European security at a military academy in Stockholm, together with Kristersson and the king. Russia's war on Ukraine and Sweden's NATO application are likely to be on the table.

After more than a year of delays, Türkiye earlier this month completed its ratification of Sweden's bid to join NATO, meaning Hungary is now the last member of the military alliance not to have given its approval. All NATO countries must agree before a new member can join the alliance. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden and neighbouring Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military nonalignment

to seek protection under NATO's security umbrella. Finland joined the alliance last year.

On Wednesday, Macron and his wife are to travel to Malmo, Sweden's third largest city, in southern Sweden, where they will visit a European multidisciplinary research facility under construction and visit a company to discuss green technologies. At home, Macron's government faces angry farmers who have camped out around Paris. They demand better pay, fewer constraints and lower costs. On Monday, they encircled Paris with traffic-snarling barricades, using hundreds of tractors and hay bales to block highways leading to the capital. The French president initially was to travel to Sweden in late October, but the visit was postponed due to the Gaza war that began with Hamas' attack in southern Israel on October 7.

## Indian student who went missing at Purdue University confirmed dead

**Washington (PTI):** An Indian student pursuing a double major at the prestigious Purdue University in the US state of Indiana, who went missing on Sunday, has been confirmed dead, the university has said.

Tiptecanoe County Coroner's Office officials were called around 11:30 a.m. on Sunday to 500 Allison Road in West Lafayette for a possible dead body. Upon arrival, a "college-aged male" was found deceased outside Maurice J. Zucrow Laboratories on Purdue's campus. Neel Acharya went missing on Sunday. "It is with great sadness that I inform you that one of our students Neel Acharya has passed away. The leadership in the Department of Computer Science expresses our profound sorrow for his passing. I

am deeply saddened by his loss. My condolences go out to his friends family and all affected," Chris Clifton, interim head of the university's Computer Science Department, said in an email to the department on Monday.

Clifton said Neel was a driven individual and academically talented. He pursued a double major in computer science and data science and was a John Martinson Honors College student. "He aspired to pursue numerous academic achievements and shared profound connections with his friends. He was very proud of and cared deeply for his brothers at Triangle Fraternity. Neel could be counted on to reach out to others and make them feel included. He was an achiever and an includer, with

his: most notable qualities being genuine kindness and unwavering compassion," Clifton said. Clifton told the local Purdue Exponent newspaper that he received an email from the Office of the Dean of Students confirming Acharya's death. "A deceased person was found that matched Neel's description and had Neel's ID on (him)," he said.

Goury Acharya, the mother of the dead student, in a post on X on Monday, said: "Our son Neel Acharya has been missing since yesterday January 28 (12:30 AM EST) He is studying at Purdue University in the US. He was last seen by the Uber driver who dropped him off at Purdue University. We are looking for any info on him. Please help us if you know anything."

Houston (PTI): "Universe Chants Jai Shree Ram" aerial banner across the US city of Houston enthralled Indian Americans as the excitement of the inauguration of the Ram Mandir continues to thrill the community members days after the spectacular ceremony in Ayodhya. After recent freeze and rain, devotees dressed in ethnic wear, waving saffron flags and chanting "Jai Shree Ram", gathered at the Gujrat Samaj of Houston and other venues on Sunday to watch the spectacle.

The pilot of the aircraft on which the banner was flown was also greeted by resounding chants of "Jai Shri Ram". The organisers spread the word about the first-of-its-kind aerial banner crossing across Houston on Sunday between 1-3 p.m. through a flier "Embracing the

## 'Universe chants Jai Shree Ram' aerial banner enthral Indian-Americans

Skies, the Universe Chants Jai Shri Ram". The devotees stayed glued to the sky across the city as the flier read: "Keep an eye on the sky and chant Jai Shri Ram when you see the plane in your area with the above message." Umang Mehta, the organiser of the aerial show, told PTI: "The project was designed to celebrate the opening of Shri Ram Temple after 500 years of long struggle of sacrifice and determination and send a refreshing message that resonated with members of the Hindu community in a captivating and unforgettable way." Besides being the first word heard from the moon, Houston earned another feather in the cap, with this aerial banner. It was an effective way to share our joy with the world, as this is probably the first time in history that an aerial banner

hailing Shri Ram was flown anywhere in the world," Dr Kusum Vyas, another organiser helping the project, said.

The aerial banner project was conceived by Umang Mehta and assisted by Dr. Kusum Vyas, Saurabh Shandilya, Achalesh Amar, and Anant Srivastava with support from the International Hindi Association (IHA). "The clear skies were lit up with Shri Ram chants, a proud divine moment, which amalgamated culture and Indian pride, on the occasion of 'Pran Pratishtha in Ayodhya,'" said Swapan Dhairyan, trustee IHA.

Capturing rare moments of the view, Saurabh Shandilya said: "The city experienced an enchanting view as the banner adorned the skies, contributing a cultural vibrancy to our diverse atmosphere."

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## Indian-origin couple convicted in UK

**London (PTI):** An Indian-origin couple in the UK, whose extradition was sought by India, has been convicted of exporting more than half a tonne of cocaine to Australia after an investigation found that they were behind a front company that had sent the drugs by plane under a cover load of metal toolboxes.

Arti Dhir, 59, and Kavaljitsinh Rajjada, 35, from Hanwell in Ealing were identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) investigators after Australian Border Force intercepted the cocaine worth 57 million pounds upon its arrival in Sydney in May 2021, the agency said in a statement on Monday.



# Maldives govt approaches SC over Pres impeachment bid

PTI ■ MALE

Even as the main opposition announced its plan to impeach Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the government has approached the Supreme Court over the recent amendment to Parliament's standing orders which makes the process of impeachment easier, according to media reports on Tuesday.

The Attorney General's Office filed the case on Sunday, the same day when clashes broke out in the House between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers following differences over the approval of four members of his cabinet.

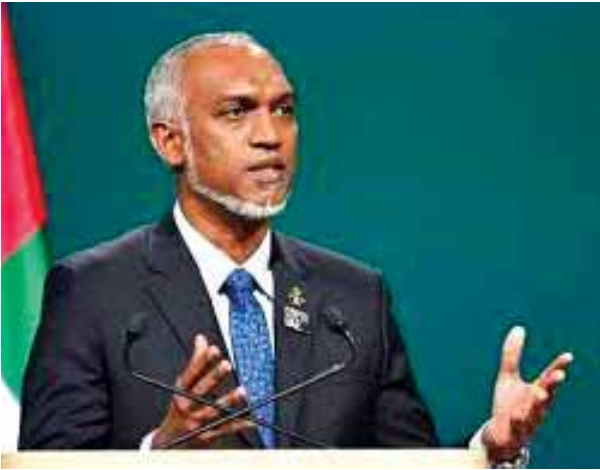
The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, on Monday, had stalled

approval of three members of President Mohamed Muizzu's cabinet.

Soon after, the MDP had announced that it planned to submit a motion to impeach President Muizzu and that it already started gathering signatures for the same.

The three ministers were, however, re-appointed by Monday evening. The whole row about allowing or not of the three ministers started after seven lawmakers resigned from Parliament in November, to assume top positions in Muizzu's administration.

"But the Elections Commission decided against holding by-elections as the parliamentary elections are scheduled for this year," online news portal Sun.mv reported on Tuesday. Taking advantage of the situation, the main oppo-



sition MDP amended Parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total number of MPs, it said.

Therefore, Parliament cur-

rently requires 54 votes to impeach President Muizzu, instead of the previous 58, as, according to the amendment to the standing orders, the total number of MPs is now 80,

instead of 87. Last week, the MDP and the Democrats announced an alliance to work together in the Parliament "to hold the government accountable." "The MDP and Democrats, have 56 MPs between them; 43 MPs from MDP, and 13 from Democrats. They, therefore, have the power to impeach the president, if they wish," Sun.com said.

Attorney General Ahmed Usham told Sun.com on Tuesday afternoon that his office "filed the case with the Supreme Court on Sunday but the court has yet to register the case." On Monday, a lawmaker from MDP confirmed the party had gathered enough signatures to file an impeachment motion. But the party has not yet submitted it.

Pro-China Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incum-

bent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year. On January 24, calling India the "most long-standing ally," the MDP and the Democrats expressed concern about the Muizzu government's "anti-India stance."

The Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic importance.

## MDP QUESTIONS REINSTATEMENT OF 3 MINS

A day after Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu re-appointed three members of

his cabinet, who were denied approval during a vote in Parliament, the main opposition party on Tuesday said it is looking into the legality of his move.

Led by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which has the highest number of members, the Maldivian Parliament on Monday voted to deny approval to Housing Minister Ali Haidar Ahmed, Islamic Minister Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed and Attorney General Ahmed Usham, while Economic Minister Mohamed Saeed narrowly survived the same fate. However, by evening, President Muizzu had reinstated all of them.

Ali Niyaz, a top MDP official, told Sun.mv that the reappointment of the three ministers was open to a huge legal

debate. "We (the MDP party) are therefore seeking legal counsel to determine whether the president is authorised to make such a decision and also to decide the MDP's next move. "Our stand is clear. They do not have our approval. This stand hasn't changed," Niyaz was saying.

The Maldivian Parliament has a total of 80 members. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has 45, followed by its ally The Democrats (DEM) with 13 members. Of the ruling coalition of PPM-PNC, the Progressive Party of the Maldives has 2 while the People's National Congress has 13 members.

There are three independents while the Jumhooree Party and the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) have two each.

# HK begins work on its own National Security Law

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong began public consultation on a local National Security Law on Tuesday, more than three years after Beijing imposed a similar law that has all but wiped out dissent in the semi-autonomous city. The new law could expand the government's ability to prosecute residents for offenses like collaborating with foreign forces to influence legislation or "publish misleading statements", and to close down civil society organisations.

Some of its provisions threaten criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, calls for the city to enact a national security law, but it's been delayed for decades because of widespread public opposition based on fears it would erode civil liberties. In 2003, an attempt to pass a version of the law sparked street protests that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved.

But the city's crackdown on political opposition likely clears the way for the bill to pass easily. Since 2020, many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested, silenced or

forced into exile. Dozens of civil society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut down.

The draft text will be written later based on input from public consultation, which will begin Tuesday and will end on February 28. But the city released a 110-page document Tuesday outlining its plans for the legislation.

City leader John Lee called the legislation a "constitutional responsibility".

"We shouldn't wait any longer," he said during a news conference. "The threats to national security, they are real. We have experienced all these threats. We have suffered from them badly." Both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have hailed the previous National Security Law for restoring stability after the massive pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Lee said a local version is still necessary to keep Hong Kong safe against "potential sabotage" and "undercurrents that try to create troubles", in particular surviving ideas about Hong Kong independence. Lee also said that some foreign agents may still be active in

Hong Kong. He said other countries, including the UK, UK, and Singapore, have similar laws to safeguard security and Hong Kong would draw from them.

Critics worry authorities will use a domestic national security law as another tool to crack down on dissidents, further eroding freedoms that were promised to the former British colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The Beijing-imposed security law criminalised subversion, advocating secession, and collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs as well as terrorism, but did not cover all the offenses authorities wanted to target.

Eric Lai, a research fellow at the Georgetown Centre for Asian Law, said that the one-month public consultation was shorter than the three months typical for important laws, saying it appeared to be "window dressing".

Highlights of the package include a ban on "threatening national security by collaborating with external forces to interfere in the affairs of our country or the HKSAR through improper means".

The document also suggested that colluding with an "external force" to publish a mis-

leading statement with the intent of endangering national security could be considered an espionage offence.

It also bans inciting public officials to abandon the Basic Law or their allegiance to Hong Kong and China, expanding an existing law that only covered members of the police and other security forces. Lee promised that people could still criticise the Hong Kong government and express opinions, as long as they do not intend to endanger national security. The government has already muzzled most dissent using existing laws. Hundreds of people have been arrested under the 2020 law.

Some 47 people were charged under the 2020 law for participating in an unofficial primary election, and two were convicted during the same time under an older sedition law for clapping in court and insulting a judge during a trial.

Lee said that the law will not provide for suspects to be transferred to mainland China for trial, unlike the 2020 law.

Security chief Chris Tang said the legislation would cover the use of computers and electronic systems to endanger national security, as well as disclosing state secrets and espionage, treason and sedition.

The proposal includes an expanded definition of state secrets that covers the "economic and social development of Hong Kong," as well as defense and diplomatic activities. The leader of the city's largest pro-democracy party called for clarification about how the law will define state secrets. Democratic Party Chairman Lo Kin-hei asked if journalists could be liable when reporting on inside information from the government in the public interest.

The proposal also seeks to revise and update several existing laws covering treason, theft of state secrets and espionage. Parts of the proposed law are to be applied beyond Hong Kong's borders. The government suggested it may use the new law to cancel the passports of fugitives overseas, citing a similar US law. Such laws could affect the many activists who went into exile fearing arrest. The Hong Kong police have offered bounties of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 128,000) on at least 13 activists abroad, including former lawmakers Nathan Law and Ted Hui, who they accuse of colluding with external forces to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

# 5 terrorists killed as Pak security officials thwart attack on Mach jail

AP ■ KARACHI

At least five terrorists of a banned group were killed when Pakistani security forces thwarted at least three coordinated attacks with rockets and sophisticated weapons by militants on a high-security jail in the country's restive Balochistan province, authorities said on Tuesday. A senior police official said at least 15 rockets were fired at the Central Mach Jail on Monday night where some dangerous militants and death row prisoners have been incarcerated. Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the Pakistan Army and Frontier Constabulary Balochistan acted swiftly to thwart the attacks during the night. "Five militants of the Balochistan Liberation Army were killed by security forces during the attack," he said. "They fired rockets at the Mach jail building but couldn't hit the target," he added.

Unconfirmed reports said at least two policemen were killed while a truck driver was injured in the attack but there was no official confirmation of casualties or injuries. The rockets

were fired from nearby mountains and exploded in different areas of Mach town.

After firing rockets, terrorists attacked a camp of the security forces near the central jail and also entered the Mach railway station.

Announcements were then made from loudspeakers for the people to remain indoors as the firing continued, the official said.

The Inspector General Prisons in Balochistan, Shuja Kasi, confirmed that rockets hit the walls of the residential colony of the Mach jail. "Mortar shells and rockets exploded close to the walls of the colony," he said, adding that no casualty was reported so far.

He said at present 800 prisoners were kept in Mach jail, including some death-row prisoners.

The minister claimed the terrorists were affiliated with the Aslam Acho group, with the Majeed Brigade of the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) group later claiming responsibility for the attack. One security official said the gun battle between the heavily armed terrorists and forces had lasted

for a couple of hours before they fled into the surrounding mountains before daylight broke.

He said no damage was reported to any of the installations. The attack was an apparent retaliation for Pakistani strikes on what the country said were insurgent hideouts in Iran earlier in January.

The BLA threatened to launch attacks on security forces in Balochistan and elsewhere following Pakistan's January 18 strikes on their camps in Iran that left at least nine persons dead.

The strikes were made in response to an Iranian strike in Pakistan that appeared to target a different Baloch militant group with similar separatist goals.

Pakistan's Balochistan province, as well as Iran's neighbouring Sistan-Baluchistan province, have faced a low-level insurgency by Baloch nationalists for more than two decades. Although the government says it has quelled the insurgency, violence in the province has persisted.

Iran and Pakistan share a 900-kilometer, largely lawless, border, across which smugglers and militants freely roam.

# Ukraine's strikes on targets inside Russia expose Putin's claims

AP ■ MOSCOW

The wail of air raid sirens is commonplace in Belgorod, a Russian border city whose residents are on edge following a Ukrainian missile attack on a New Year's holiday weekend that left dozens of people dead and injured. A spectacular explosion rocked a huge fuel export terminal on the Baltic Sea southwest of St. Petersburg this month from a Ukrainian drone, forcing the energy company Novatek to suspend operations for several days.

Last week, an apparent drone attack in the Black Sea port of Tuapse in the southern Krasnodar region hit one of Russia's largest refineries and ignited a fire, while another big refinery in the Volga River city of Yaroslavl, north of Moscow came under attack early Monday, but officials said there was no damage. There also have been strikes on a gun-

powder factory in the Tambov region and arms producers and military facilities in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Tula regions. Attacks like these are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly 2-year-old war. "Ukraine has increased its capacity to strike back against Russia," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent podcast.

"You see increased Ukrainian attacks against Russian critical infrastructure, retaliatory attacks against cities like Belgorod and greater strikes against Russian military bases in Crimea," he said.

As Putin ramps up his campaign ahead of the presidential election in March, he wants to maintain an air of normalcy. But the increasingly frequent Ukrainian attacks

have raised the visibility of the war on Russian soil, and there are other signs the conflict is increasingly challenging the Kremlin's tight control of the political scene. Thousands across Russia have signed petitions supporting the longshot presidential bid of liberal politician Boris Nadezhdin, who has made ending the war his main campaign issue. Wives of some soldiers rounded up in a partial mobilization in 2022 have pushed for their discharge. And despite a tight ban on protests, hundreds rallied in Bashkortostan province, clashing with police to protest the jailing of a local activist.

Certainly the December 30 strike on Belgorod marked a bloody escalation in the minds of many Russians. A barrage of missiles struck the city of 340,000, which is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the Ukrainian border, on a holiday weekend when people

were out shopping, ice skating and watching New Year's festivities. Officials said 25 people were killed, including five children, and over 100 were injured.

Residents described seeing victims with horrific injuries and pools of blood staining the sidewalks. One resident told the RBC news outlet he saw a baby carriage hit by shrapnel, the bloodied parents lying next to it. A drug store clerk said injured pedestrians ran into his pharmacy, seeking help.

"I'm seeing requests on social networks from people who write: We are scared, please help us get to a safe place!" said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, adding that several hundred people were evacuated, including over 1,000 children heading to camps in neighbouring regions. Holiday and religious festivities were muted or cancelled entirely.

# EU moves toward using profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union nations have decided to approve an outline deal that would keep in reserve the profits from hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian central bank assets that have been frozen in retaliation for Moscow's war in Ukraine, an EU official said. The tentative agreement, reached late on Monday, still needs formal approval but is seen as a first step toward using some of the 200 billion euros (USD 216 billion) in Russian central bank assets in the EU to help Ukraine rebuild from Russian destruction.

The official, who asked not to be identified since the agreement was not yet legally ratified, said the bloc "would allow to start collecting the extraordinary revenues generated from the frozen assets ...

to support the reconstruction of Ukraine." How the proceeds will be used will be decided later, as the issue remains mired in legal and practical considerations.

There is urgency since Ukraine is struggling to make ends meet, and aid plans in the EU and the United States are being held back over political considerations including whether allies will continue helping Ukraine at the same pace as they did in the first two years of the war.

EU leaders will meet on Thursday hoping to approve a 50-billion-euro (USD 54 billion) support package for Ukraine over the solitary opposition of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Even if using the unfrozen assets, which now go untapped, seems like a practical step to take, many fear that

financial weaponisation could harm the standing of the EU in global financial markets.

Early this month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for a "strong" decision this year for the frozen assets in Western banks to "be directed towards defence against the Russian war and for reconstruction" of Ukraine.

The EU step late Monday paves the way if EU nations ever want to impose such measures. Group of Seven allies of Ukraine are still looking for an adequate legal framework to pursue the plan.

The US announced at the start of Russia's invasion that America and its allies had blocked access to more than USD 600 billion that Russia held outside its borders — including roughly USD 300 billion in funds belonging to

Russia's central bank.

Since then, the US and its allies have continued to impose rounds of targeted sanctions against companies and wealthy elites with ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The World Bank's latest damage assessment of Ukraine, released in March 2023, estimates that costs for the nation's reconstruction and recovery will be USD 411 billion over the next 10 years, which includes needs for public and private funds.

Belgium, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union for the next six months, is now leading the talks on whether to seize Russia's assets.

Belgium is also the country where most frozen Russian assets under sanctions are being held.

# Indonesian police arrest 3 Mexicans after tourist hurt in armed robbery

**Denpasar (Indonesia) (AP):** Indonesian police said on Tuesday they have arrested three Mexicans for alleged robbery on the resort island of Bali that left a tourist from Turkiye badly wounded. The arrests were made Saturday at a villa in Ungasan village of Badung district in Bali where the Mexican men had been staying since December 7 as tourists, Bali Police spokesperson Jansen Avitus Panjaitan said.

The three men who were arrested and a fourth Mexican man broke into a villa near the popular tourist spot of Kuta last week after pointing their guns at a security guard and forcing him to surrender, Panjaitan said. The four men armed with

three guns sprayed bullets toward several guests who ran out of the villa for safety. The suspects stole US dollars and Indonesian currency worth about USD 5,900 from the villa, and shot a 39-year-old Turkish man in his stomach, left hand and left back chest, police said.

The suspects planned the robbery by preparing guns and surveilling the targeted villa, police said.

Surveillance camera recordings and witness accounts led police to the four Mexican suspects, one who was still being sought and three who were paraded at the news conference wearing handcuffs and orange vests.



Supporters of Sri Lanka's main opposition shout slogans as police fire water cannons to disperse them during a protest rally against high taxes and increases in electricity and fuel charges, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday.

AP/PTI

# ChatGPT violated European privacy laws, Italy tells OpenAI

AP ■ ITALY

Italian regulators said they told OpenAI that its ChatGPT artificial intelligence chatbot has violated European Union's stringent data privacy rules. The country's data protection authority, known as Garante, said on Monday that it notified San Francisco-based OpenAI of breaches of the EU rules, known as General Data Protection Regulation. The watchdog started investigating ChatGPT last year, when it temporarily banned within Italy the chatbot that can produce text, images and sound in response to users' questions.

Based on the results of its "fact-finding activity," the watchdog said it "concluded that the available evidence pointed to the existence of breaches of the pro-

visions" in the EU privacy rules. OpenAI has 30 days to reply to the allegations.

It didn't respond immediately to a request for comment. The company said last year that it fulfilled a raft of conditions that the Garante demanded to get the ChatGPT ban lifted.

The watchdog had imposed the ban after finding that some users' messages and payment information were exposed and because ChatGPT didn't have a system to verify users' ages, allowing children to get answers from the AI tool that were inappropriate for their age. It also questioned whether there was a legal basis for OpenAI to collect massive amounts of data used to train ChatGPT's algorithms and raised concerns that the system could sometimes

generate false information about individuals.

The growing popularity of generative AI systems like ChatGPT are also drawing increasing scrutiny from regulators on both sides of the Atlantic.

The US Federal Trade Commission opened an inquiry last week into the relationships between AI startups OpenAI and Anthropic and the tech giants that have bankrolled them — Amazon, Google and Microsoft. Competition regulators in the 27-nation EU and Britain, meanwhile, are also examining Microsoft's OpenAI investments. AI systems also face broader oversight in the EU, which is finalising its groundbreaking AI Act, the world's first comprehensive rulebook for artificial intelligence.



# FOOTLOOSE IN THE ENCHANTING KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

*From being the pearl capital of the world to a land of cultural wonders, breathtaking landscapes, and heart-pounding adventures, the island nation of Bahrain is one of the most popular and tourist-friendly countries in the Middle East. Explore the best of Bahrain with*

**NIVI SHRIVASTAVA**

Nestled in the heart of the Middle East, the Kingdom of Bahrain stands as a jewel awaiting discovery by discerning travellers and luxury seekers. Blessed with a geographical location unlike any other in the region, this nation seamlessly blends natural wonders, opulent hospitality, vibrant shopping streets, and captivating landscapes. Brimming with rich Arabic culture, the Islamic kingdom gets the name from an Arabic term “al-Bahrayn,” which translates to “the two seas.” The blend of the two seas is a symbol of the Arabian Gulf and the freshwater springs that run beneath the sea, hinting at the unusual blend of saline and sweet waters surrounding the archipelago.

My journey in Bahrain starts at the iconic Al Fateh Grand Mosque, a masterpiece of Islamic architecture that serves as a testament to the country’s heritage. An usher at the entrance informs us to cover our heads with a traditional scarf and lends us a beautiful abaya (women’s robe) as a sign of respect inside the holy mosque. As I stepped into the colossal prayer hall adorned with intricate calligraphy and mesmerizing chandeliers, a sense of serenity and bewilderment captured my attention. The mosque, with its stunning blend of modernity and tradition, is located in the heart of the capital city, Manama. Constructed in 1987, the Al Fateh Grand Mosque is named after Ahmed Al Fateh, the founder of Bahrain, and can accommodate over 7,000 worshippers.

## PEARL OF THE GULF

Thanks to the distinctive blend of geothermal springs and sea water, natural Bahraini pearls (locally known as dana) are famous for their superior quality. Renowned for its ethical pearl harvesting and fair trade practices by preserving the centuries-old industry, the exceptional brilliance of Bahraini pearls has been a constant throughout the ages, gaining international acclaim for their unparalleled brilliance, purity, and beauty. Our local guide Eman Ali informed us about the ancient connection of Bahrain with the Indian sub-continent. The historic nation was once the seat of the ancient Dilmun civilization from the late fourth millennium to 800 BC, and over the years it has etched its place in history as the epicenter of pearling, boasting a legacy that spans over 4,000 years. The artistry of pearl diving is still carefully preserved at the Bahrain Pearling Trail in the historic district of Muharraq, where you can find the best of glistening pearls that once adorned the crowns of kings and queens.

## AN EXOTIC SEASCAPE

To experience the famous blend of seas first-hand, we decide to explore the exotic islands of Jarada with a super-modern motor boat. On a bright sunny day, we cruise along the coastline, reveling in the luxury of the sleek vessel cutting through the gentle waves to reach the secluded paradise. Here we are ready to snorkel in the pristine waters and swim with the vibrant underwater marine life. Schools of colorful fish dance around coral formations, creating a mesmerizing spectacle beneath the surface and we pick up the famous oysters to try our luck in finding the Bahraini pearls. Although, we weren’t lucky enough to



find the precious pearls, the fresh catch of the day was served to us for lunch along with some delicious grilled food that our local chefs prepared on the island. For a nature enthusiast like me, the pristine beaches of Jarada Bahrain Island were the most unexpected exotic sight in the Gulf. The azure waters, soft sands, and vibrant sunsets are just perfect to indulge in a leisurely afternoon basking in the sun or go for an adventurous dive in the idyllic retreat.

## THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

Revvng up the tempo, I couldn’t have missed visiting the Bahrain International Circuit - home to the adrenaline-pumping Formula 1

Grand Prix. A momentous addition to my Bahrain odyssey was experiencing the roar of engines, the screech of tires, and the pulsating energy of the racing tracks. For those craving a taste of speed, the go-karting experience at the adjoining race circuit provides an exhilarating opportunity to channel their inner racer. Eager to try this one-of-a-kind activity, I went ahead with the go-karting race and donned professional racing gear for a pulsating driving experience. The moment I gripped the steering wheel of the sleek go-kart, I was transported into a world of speed and precision. As I stepped onto the track, the distinctive roar of engines reverberated around me, creating an atmosphere charged with excitement. With every twist and turn, I navigated

the circuit feeling the rush of wind against my face and the roaring sound of the engine pumping up my adrenaline levels. Whether it was the sharp corners that demanded finesse or the straight stretches that begged for full throttle, each lap was worth every dime. The thrill of go-karting at this iconic venue was an experience to remember, and the track’s layout, designed to challenge even the most seasoned drivers added an element of strategy and accomplishment. The Bahrain International Circuit’s commitment to delivering a world-class motorsports experience was evident in every detail, from the well-maintained track to the state-of-the-art facilities that surrounded it. As I crossed the finish line, the elation of the experience lingered, leaving me with a newfound appreciation for the artistry of motorsports and it most definitely added a thrilling glimpse into the world of professional racing.

## A BLEND OF NEW AND OLD

Delving into Bahrain’s storied past, a visit to the Bahrain Fort offered me a fascinating glimpse into the Dilmun civilization. In the carefully restored ancient ruins, with their labyrinthine passages and towering walls, one can still hear the whispering tales of a bygone era. As the sun set over the Arabian Gulf, the massive fort provided a captivating backdrop for contemplating the rich history of this island nation.

As we left the past behind and entered the vibrant shopping streets of Bahrain, the mood changed instantly. No visit to Bahrain would be complete without indulging in its luxurious markets and upscale malls. The Manama Souq, a bustling labyrinth of narrow alleys, enticed me with its aromatic spices, vibrant fabrics, and intricate handicrafts. Meanwhile, the city’s modern malls, such as City Centre Bahrain and The Avenues, showcased a dazzling array of international brands, culinary delights, and entertainment options, offering a taste of Bahrain’s cosmopolitan allure.



# HURT F1 DREAM ENDED SO QUICKLY: Nyck

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hurt that his dream of racing in Formula 1 ended “prematurely”, Dutch racer Nyck de Vries is busy charting the next chapter of his life as the former champion returns to the Formula E series buzzing with positive energy. The 28-year-old was axed by F1 team AlphaTauri after just 10 races as he failed to score points in his rookie F1 season last year. “Of course it hurts in a way to end your dream so quickly and prematurely but I have been able to reflect on it well,” De Vries told PTI. De Vries had entered F1 on the back of championship-winning stints in F2 and Formula

E and a long-time F1 reserve role, which meant there was more pressure on him to perform compared to other rookies. “There was always pressure and I don’t think I was necessarily in an easy situation and it didn’t quite work out for various reasons. But pressure is relative, everyone experiences it. I’m thankful for the opportunities.” “I see life as a journey, it was a chapter in my journey and now I continue my journey elsewhere. When a door closes it always opens a new one,” he added. After the F1 snub, the Dutch racer has returned to the familiar all-electric Formula E series, signing up with India’s Mahindra Racing.

“The transition (from F1 to FE) happened really quick. Quite shortly when it happened I travelled to London for the final round of the championship last year to be back in the paddock, in the environment, to see if there was a spot available for me this season. “Even though I took a bit of time out I also quickly focussed on building my program for this year. I’m very happy to be back in Formula E. I had a good break, good time off and now I’m full of positive energy,” he added. Though he won the 2021 Formula E world championship, De Vries still has a lot to catch up on as the series has moved on from the Gen 2 to Gen 3 cars. “It was almost like 14-15



months ago that I last drove the Formula E car and that was a Gen 2, I had a couple of brief experiences in a Gen 3 car but a lot has developed since then,” he said. De Vries finished 15th in the season-opening Mexico City race and also in the Diriyah E-Prix. Given Mahindra’s struggle with reliability and efficiency with the Gen3 car, he has realistic expectations from this season. “It’s about managing expectations. If people expect us to dominate this year they are dreaming. We collectively know where the team was at the end of last year. “The hardware didn’t really change, that doesn’t mean we can’t make a lot of progress and improvements but we have to

be realistic,” he said. “It’s more about building process in the moment collectively and getting ready for building a solid structure for the near future when things do change and we start to fight in front,” he added. Much to the disappointment of the Indian fans, the second edition of Hyderabad E Prix was scheduled to be held on February 10 was cancelled by Formula E due to an alleged breach of contract by the new Telangana government. “India is a big part of our (Mahindra) DNA. I would have been happy to meet our colleagues in India and hopefully make them proud in their home country. It wasn’t meant to be this year but hopefully in the future we will get to do it.”

## Avani eyes one more shot

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

India’s Avani Prashanth is looking forward to a packed calendar over the next few weeks as she criss-crosses across the continent in search of golf glory at one of the world’s best amateur events. The 17-year-old Bengaluru golfer, who started 2024 with two weeks in Australia while getting close to winning at one occasion, is now all set to tee off at the Women’s Amateur Asia Pacific (WAAP) golf. Avani will make her fourth appearance at this event which carries extra significance, since the winner gets to seal a berth in three of the five women’s Majors. On her part, Avani feels this event owes her one good finish before she moves on in her career. Avani was also thrilled for receiving a special invite to the Augusta National Women Amateur championships, which is held a week before the storied Masters at the Augusta National. Immediately after the 2024 WAAP, Avani will be off for the Kenya Ladies Open on the Ladies European Tour, where in she finished in the top 10 last year. The next on her schedule is another well-known amateur event, the Sage Valley Invitational. She started 2024 with a runner-up finish at the Australian Masters of Amateurs and missed a top 10 by a whisker at the Australian Amateur Championships. The focus for Avani and her five teammates, who have been fielded by the Indian Golf Union, is the WAAP.



Her teammates are Vidhatri Urs, Mannat Brar, Keerthana Rajeev Nair, Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang. They will tee off at the Siam Country Club. The team is accompanied by former national champion Vandana Agarwal. The top stars this week will include world No 4 Minsol Kim of Korea, Japan’s Hinano Muguruma (22nd), Sayaka Teraoka (23rd), Mamika Shinchi (33rd), Rin Yoshida (38th) and defending champion from Thailand Eila Galitsky (40th). India’s Avani is 42nd and Rianne Malixi from the Philippines is 43rd. While this is the fourth appearance at WAAP for Avani, it is the second time for Vidhatri and Mannat. The other three, Keerthana Rajeev Nair, Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang are making their debut at WAAP. Interestingly, Ceerat Kang’s sister Heena played at the WAAP in 2022 at the same course.

Vidhatri’s cousin Pranavi Urs, now a pro on the LET, has also played at the WAAP in the past. Avani, coming off her nine-hole practice round just before the rains arrived, said, “Somehow I have not managed to finish better than T-16.” Avani won the 2023 Queen Sirikit Individuals besides picking a title on a women’s pro event in Europe. She has multiple top 10s on Ladies European Tour events. “Many of these girls I have been playing with over the years are here. We are all close to finishing with our amateur careers. It is great to be here once again,” she said. “I have known Eila (Galitsky) since we were about nine. We played together in US Kids Golf, then at various other events. Now we will be playing at Sage Valley and ANWA together. We have also roomed together, and stay in touch,” Avani added. “I also know others like Rianne

(Malixi), Minsol and many others. So it is great to see everyone here. It’s a great event and I really want to do well, maybe win it once, before I turn pro,” she said. **PRIZES AND FIELD:** The prizes are considered as the very best in amateur golf for women. The winner gets starts at three major championships in 2024 — Women’s Open, the Evian Championship and Chevron Championship. In addition, the winner will get invitations to play in the 121st Women’s Amateur Championship, Augusta National Women’s Amateur Championship, the Hana Financial Group Championship and the Women’s Australian Open. The field is made up of 90 players from 22 countries and only those in the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR) list are eligible to play. The leading 50 players (plus ties) progress past the 36-hole cut and play the final two rounds.

## Sneha, Hitaashee prepare for another battle in 3rd leg

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Sneha Singh and Hitaashee Bakshi, who had finished in the top two in both the two earlier legs in the ongoing Women’s Pro Golf Tour season, will be back for another shot at the third event which begins at Tollygunge Club here Wednesday. Sneha and Hitaashee were tied for second when amateur Nishna Patel won the opening leg. In the second leg, Sneha edged out Hitaashee, who finished runner-up. Sneha, winner of the 2023 Hero Order of Merit, has taken the early lead once again, with Hitaashee chasing her. It has been a good start for Hitaashee, who was injured last year. Besides finishing second in the opening two legs, she won the Thailand Tour’s LPGA Qualifying Tour, granting her access to pro tournaments in



Thailand. Amandeep Drall, Ridhima Dilawari and Seher Atwal will be among the other leading contenders in the third leg. Some of the other leading stars of Hero WPGT are going to South Africa for the Sunshine Ladies Tour starting next month, including Vani Kapoor, Tvesa Malik and Neha Tripathi. Besides, a few others like Amandeep and Seher will also be joining them for some events. An interesting feature of both the events held so far this season has been that at least the top three finishers have totalled under-par scores, underlining the tremendous improvement in the quality of women’s golf in India. A total of 29 girls will tee off in the third leg, and the field includes two amateurs — Anaahat Bindra and Sinjini Mukherjee.

## India lose to Netherlands in quarterfinals

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Mohammed Raheel’s hat-trick went in vain as India suffered a 4-7 defeat to the Netherlands in the quarterfinals of the FIH Hockey5s Men’s World Cup here on Tuesday. Apart from Raheel (1; 7; 25’), Mandeep Mor (11’) scored for India. For the Netherlands, Sander de Wijn (4; 15’), and Alexander Schop (10; 26’) scored a brace each, while Lucas Middendorp (12’), Jamie van Aart (13’), and Pepijn Reyenga (20’) also found the net. The match started on a promising for India as Raheel showcased his skills with a remarkable field goal in the very first minute, setting the tone for an intense competition. However, the Netherlands swiftly responded to India’s early lead, with de Wijn (4’) lev-



elling the score. Undeterred by the quick equaliser, India intensified their offensive strategies, leading to another goal by

Raheel. Despite the renewed lead, the Netherlands, demonstrating resilience, managed to equalise

once again, courtesy of a goal by Schop. The back-and-forth nature of the match continued, with Mandeep reclaiming the lead for India. Nevertheless, the Netherlands countered with a rapid succession of goals, as Middendorp and van Aart skilfully found the back of the net, swinging the momentum in favour of the Netherlands. Heading into half time, de Wijn delivered a crucial challenge goal, leaving India behind. The second half witnessed the Netherlands asserting their dominance, as Reyenga and Schop extended their lead. Despite a valiant effort by Raheel, who scored again to complete his hat-trick, India fell short. India will next play against Kenya in the 5-8th place match later in the day.

## Divya alleges sexism by spectators at Tata Steel Masters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian chess player Divya Deshmukh has alleged that she endured sexist behaviour from spectators at the recently-concluded Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee, Netherlands, saying they “focussed on irrelevant things like her hair, clothes and accent” during the tournament. The 18-year-old International Master from Nagpur, who won the Asian women’s chess championship last year, shared a lengthy social media post calling out the misogyny that women players face routinely while elaborating on her unpleasant experience in Wijk Aan Zee. “I have been wanting to address this for a while but was waiting for my tournament to be over. I got told and also myself noticed how women in

chess are often just taken for granted by spectators,” Deshmukh said. “Most recent example of this on a personal level would be in this tournament, I played a few games which I felt were quite good and I was proud of them. “I got told by people how the audience was not even bothered with the game but instead focused on every single possible thing in the world: my clothes, hair, accent and every other irrelevant thing,” she wrote in an Instagram post on Sunday. Deshmukh finished 12th in the Challengers section with a score of 4.5 at the Tata Steel Masters. The teenager said while male players were getting their share of spotlight purely for their game, the women were judged for aspects which had nothing to do with their ability on the chess board.



“I was quite upset to hear this and I think is the sad truth that people when women play chess they often overlook how good they actually are, the games they play and their strength,” she said. “I was quite disappointed to see how

everything was discussed about in my interviews (by the audience) except my games, very few people paid attention to it and it is quite a sad thing. “I felt it was unfair in a way because

if I go to any guy’s interview there would be way less judgement on a personal level, actual compliments about the game and the player,” she asserted. Despite the progress made in women’s sports in terms of pay scale, female athletes are still subjected to sexist behaviour and are often asked about their outfits. Deshmukh said women players are under-appreciated in general and often endure hatred. “...Every irrelevant thing is focused on and hated on while guys would probably get away with the same things. I think women face this on a daily basis and I’m barely 18. “I have faced so much judgement including hatred over the years for things that don’t even matter. I think women should start getting equal respect,” she added.

## Bhutia demands resignation of AIFF president Chaubey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former captain Bhaichung Bhutia on Tuesday demanded the resignation of All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey, holding him responsible for the “current mess” in the administrative side of the game in the country, following the dismissal of Shaji Parabhakaran as secretary general. Bhutia attended Tuesday’s executive committee meeting of the AIFF called here to discuss the dismissal of Parabhakaran on November 7. Parabhakaran was not initially invited for the meeting but joined it virtually. “I told the executive committee members that Kalyan Chaubey and treasurer Kipa Ajay should also resign. Shaji Parabhakaran should not be made the only scapegoat. All three of them are equally

responsible for taking decisions without the approval of executive committee,” Bhutia told PTI. “All three of them were taking the decisions and if Shaji has to be removed, the president and treasurer should also be removed,” said the legendary striker. “Indian football is in mess, there is politics in the sport, cutting out each other after little over one year of taking charge, it is not good. The national team has been left in the lurch during the Hangzhou Asian Games as well as in the Asian Cup where there was inadequate training time for the team.” Parabhakaran was removed as secretary general on November 7 for “breach of trust” but a single bench of the Delhi High Court had on December 8 ordered an interim stay on his



sacking. In its latest order of January 19, the High Court pointed out that Parabhakaran was dismissed by the emergency committee of the AIFF whereas the federation’s constitution provides that only the executive committee has the power to do that. Another source confirmed

Bhutia’s version and added that Parabhakaran asked the executive committee members to explain what constituted the “breach of trust.” “He (Parabhakaran) asked the executive committee to explain what constituted breach of trust on the basis of which he was dismissed. He said he had not committed any financial

irregularities or fraud. He also said that there was no emergency committee constituted for the AIFF and how can there be a reference to the emergency committee for my dismissal,” the source said. “Parabhakaran also said that he would have, in any case, resigned because his relationship with the president was nearing breaking point.” AIFF vice president NA Haris then intervened and said that the matter is sub-judice. Bhutia, who lost in the AIFF presidential poll in 2022, also said that he did not know what constituted the “breach of trust” which led to Parabhakaran’s dismissal. “I am an executive committee member but I don’t know what was the breach of trust Shaji had committed. I am not told nor briefed about it.” Bhutia said that he proposed

live streaming of the AIFF annual general or executive committee meetings for the sake of transparency. “Nowadays, even the Supreme Court and High Court case hearings are streamed live, so what is the problem in doing the same for AIFF AGM or executive committee meetings. So, I proposed live streaming of AIFF meetings.” Talking about the Indian team’s group stage exit in the AFC Asian Cup in Doha, Bhutia said, “Asian Games and Asian Cup are the two most important tournaments for India and both were disasters, not due to players or coach but because of the AIFF top brass. “In the Asian Games, the team played its first match just a few hours after landing in Hangzhou. In the Asian Cup, the team was not given adequate training time.”



## Mumbai Open Tennis Championship to be held from February 5-11

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Players from 31 countries will take part in the Mumbai Open Tennis Championship to be held here from February 5 to 11 following a gap of six years. The tournament will be played at the newly-laid tennis courts at the Cricket Club of India (Brabourne Stadium), which is organising the event along with the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA). The third edition of the Mumbai Open will feature three top 100 players in the singles and six top 100 players in the doubles event, which is a part of the WTA USD 125K series. The qualifying matches will be played on February 3 and 4 whereas the main draw will start from February 5. Kayla Day of the US, who won the 2016 US Open girls singles and currently world No 82, will lead the 32-player field, along with Japan’s Nao Hibino, who is the winner of three WTA

Tour singles titles. The former French Open semi-finalist Tamara Zidansek, ranked 97th, is the third player from top 100 in the singles. Ankita Raina is the only Indian confirmed in the singles main draw. India’s top-ranked doubles player Prarthana Thombare and her Dutch partner Arianne Hartono have a direct entry into the doubles event. The wild cards for the tournament are expected to be announced soon. “The WTA Mumbai Open has attracted some big names and rising stars in the past, including two-time Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, who won her first WTA USD125K title right here in Mumbai in 2017,” said members of the organising committee Sanjay Khandare and Pravin Darade in a statement. Sabalenka had won the first edition of Mumbai Open in 2017 while Thailand’s Luksika Kumkhum won the next in 2018.



# Rohit is past his prime: Boycott

## India missed Kohli in Hyderabad Test

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England opener Geoffrey Boycott feels India skipper Rohit Sharma is “past his prime” and the hosts badly missed the peerless Virat Kohli in the series opener against England in Hyderabad. Despite enjoying a strong position after the first innings, India lost by 28 runs against England in the first Test to trail 0-1 in the five-match series. In the absence of Kohli, the onus was on Rohit to shoulder the responsibility in the batting department but he could only manage 24 and 39 in two innings as the Indian batting crumbled big time while chasing 231 on a fourth day pitch. And Boycott believes it is a golden chance for England to beat India in their own backyard after 12 years. “This India team are ripe for

the taking and England have a golden chance to be the first side to topple them on their own patch for 12 years,” Boycott wrote in his column for ‘The Daily Telegraph’. “India badly miss Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja has a hamstring injury and will not play the second Test. Their captain Rohit Sharma is nearly 37 and past his best. He makes pretty cameos but has scored only two Test hundreds at home in four years. They are also weak in the field. They dropped Ollie Pope on 110 and that cost them 86 runs. It lost them the match.” The Indian spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Jadeja and Axar Patel looked a pale shadow of themselves on a spin-friendly but not exactly dust-bowl of a Hyderabad wicket. The English batters came out with a perfect tactical ploy, using sweeps and reverse



sweeps to great effect to counter the threat. “England bamboozled India with their sweeps and reverse sweeps and to lose after taking a 190-run lead will be mind-blowing for India. It has never happened to them before on their own pitches where they thought they were invincible,” Boycott wrote. India were dealt a big blow after the Hyderabad defeat as Jadeja and KL Rahul have been ruled out of the second Test starting in Visakhapatnam on February 2, due to injuries. While Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury during play on Day 4 of the first Test, Rahul complained of pain in his right quadriceps. Because of the balance that he brings into the playing, Jadeja’s absence will be massive feels the legendary opener. “Jadeja is a huge blow. He is a great all-rounder, top bowler,

brilliant fielder and was their best batsman in the first Test. Kohli is their talisman. He is a magnificent batsman who averages 60 on Indian pitches but he also gives them great energy in the field. He is a big loss and England must make the most of it before he comes back for the third Test,” Boycott wrote. He believes that England have India on the mat and could well be hosts’ first series defeat in a dozen of years. “Once in a while a team are in the right place at the right time to clinch a big series win and England could be in that position right now in India. India are due a (series) defeat at home, the signs are good as they have lost Kohli, Jadeja, Mohammed Shami and Rishabh Pant and are playing opponents full of confidence after a remarkable win. England must take this rare opportunity,” he further wrote.

# Selected spinners give us best opportunity to beat India: Stokes

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Long before debutant spinner Tom Hartley bowled England to a famous win in the first Test against India, skipper Ben Stokes had asserted that the tweekers picked for the series ‘give us the best opportunity’ to humble the Asian giants in their own backyard. Playing in his first Test, left-arm spinner Hartley picked up seven wickets in the Indian second innings to script a 28-run victory for the tourists, who gambled with a lone specialist pacer in Mark Wood in Hyderabad. “I think sometimes inexperience can be looked at into a bit too much. There’s no doubt that experience makes players feel more comfortable and settled, especially in this environment,” Stokes said in an interview with ‘JioCinema’ when asked about his approach behind selecting spinners just before the start of the series opener. He added: “But the spinners we’ve selected on this tour are ones we think will give us the best opportunity to beat India. For me, it’s not just about the spinners but understanding the talent they have and allowing them to go out there and express that talent and giving them the platform and the best possible opportunity to not worry about the



outcome too much and focus on what cricket actually is.” In the run-up to the five-match series, there was a bit of chatter around the visitors’ inexperienced spin unit, but Stokes is not one to read much into all these analysis. “As a bowler, your job is to think about taking wickets. As a batsman, it’s about going out there and scoring runs. Anything more than that is overcomplicating it. I’m just taking away that fear and anxiety around the outcome.” No team has beaten India in India since 2012, when England under Alastair

Cook emerged triumphant after losing the first Test, and that is not lost on Stokes. On the challenge of beating India in India, Stokes said, “India is a hard place to come and win a game, never mind a five-match series. It’s been a mission for any team who’ve come here to turn over India. We understand that and respect that. “But again, it comes down to opportunity. We’ve got an amazing opportunity ahead of us. The squad we’ve picked from spinners to our seam bowlers to our batters, I think it’s going to give us the best opportunity to win a series in India.”

Having led the country to some fines wins since taking over Test captaincy from Joe Root, Stokes says he never aspired to be a leader. “It’s something I never had any aspirations to do or really thought about too much, to be honest. I never really had too much responsibility around captaining or anything, either in age-group cricket or any other level. “I had a little taste of it with the Durham Academy. This opportunity presented itself to me and it was something I couldn’t turn down. It’s a role I have grown into, it’s a role that I’ve really enjoyed. “I love everything that comes with it, the responsibility of looking after people from different types of angles. Whether it be out in the field or away from the field. Understanding different individuals and personalities, because in a team sport, you have got a lot of people and not everyone is the same. That’s helped me mature as a person. When the discussion turned to ‘bazball’, he said the team tries to stay away from the term. “It’s a phrase that was created by the media. Something that we try and stay away from. It just came from what we have managed to do over the last two years and how we’ve played.

# Deepti rises to joint second among bowlers in T20I rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India’s Deepti Sharma rose one place to joint second while team-mate Renuka Singh also moved up a spot to 10th in the latest ICC women’s T20I bowling rankings issued on Tuesday. Deepti’s rise was largely due to South Africa spinner Nonkululeko Mlaba dropping three places from earlier spot to fifth after one wicket from two games against Australia. Similarly, Pakistan’s Sadia Iqbal took the joint second spot with Deepti after moving up one place. England’s Sarah Glenn was at fourth after rising a rung. England spinner Sophie Ecclestone maintained a healthy lead at the top of the T20I rankings for bowlers. There was no change within the top 10 of the latest T20I rankings for all-rounders with Deepti retaining the fourth spot. Among batters, India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana remained at fourth to be the highest ranked Indian while Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali



Verma and Harmanpreet Kaur were unchanged at 13th, 16th and 17th respectively. Australia’s Beth Mooney overtook compatriot Tahlia McGrath at the top of the T20I rankings for batters after a splendid innings against South Africa. Mooney has already scored two half centuries in the shortest format of the game in 2024, with her most impressive recent knock coming when she scored a brilliant 72 not out from just 57 deliveries in a Player of the Match performance against South Africa in Canberra.

# India pummel New Zealand by 214 runs

## ICC U-19 World Cup

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

Musheer Khan’s superlative showing in the ongoing ICC U-19 World Cup continued as his second hundred trampled New Zealand by 214 runs in a Super Six encounter here on Tuesday. After India’s top performer Musheer’s 131 backed by opener Adarsh Singh’s 52 powered India to a huge total of 295/8, left-arm spinner Saumy Kumar Pandey (4/19) and pacer Raj Limbani (2/17) ripped apart New Zealand’s top order to bowl them out for a mere 81 in 28.1 over. Limbani struck on the first and the fifth ball of New Zealand innings to ensure momentum remained India’s way throughout. India vice-captain Pandey finished with splendid figures of 10-2-19-4 as he knocked the stuffing out of Black Caps’ chase. Left reeling at 27/4 in the Powerplay, New Zealand could never really stage a comeback as Indian colts like every edition are looking favourites to win the tournament. For New Zealand, it was their third heaviest defeat in terms of runs and also their third lowest total at the U-19 World Cup stage. Earlier, Musheer flayed New Zealand attack with his second century of the ICC U-19 World Cup while opener Adarsh Singh struck 52 as India posted a stiff 296-run target. On a perfect batting wicket here at the Mangaung Oval, Musheer tore apart the Kiwis bowling line-up to become the first batter in the current competition to breach the 300-run mark, going past Pakistan’s

Shahzaib Khan with his stupendous effort. En route his 131, Musheer blasted 13 fours and three sixes off just 125 balls and once showed admirable temperament to up the ante just when it was required. Busy at the crease constantly, the 18-year-old Musheer motored on from one end unleashing strokes in all directions, while he began with an upper-cut for a four. His innings was spruced with fine running between the wickets and ended in the death overs when he was looking to accelerate. Musheer and Adarsh carried out a fine recovery job with a 77-run stand for the second wicket after an early blow for India. Adarsh took charge of attacking the bowlers as he looked good while driving on the rise and also played the pull-shot with élan. It was only unfortunate that he failed to keep a drive in check when Zac Cumming (1/37) teased him with one outside off. A thick edge off Adarsh’s bat flew to Oliver Tewatya at point in the 18th over, which ended the charge for the left-handed Indian opener who made 52 off 58 balls with six fours. There also was some disappointment in store for India captain Uday Saharan who failed to convert his start and was dismissed for 35 (57 balls, 2 fours). He had two fifties on trot at the start of the tournament. Saharan, nevertheless, did a fine job of consolidating the innings for his side, putting on 87 with Musheer which also happened to be the best stand for India in this game.

However, Musheer’s century and Adarsh’s contribution at the top notwithstanding, India lost wickets in a flurry towards the end to fall short of breaching the 300-run mark, finishing at 295 for eight. Brief scores: India U-19 295/8 in 50 overs (Adarsh Singh 52, Musheer Khan 131, Uday Saharan 35; Mason Clarke 4/64) beat New Zealand U-19 81 in 28.1 overs (Oscar Jackson 19; Raj Limbani 2/17, Saumy Pandey 4/19) by 214 runs.



### EAST COAST RAILWAY

NOTIFICATION FOR  
ENGAGEMENT OF COMMISSION AGENT FOR  
BARITHENGARH (BRTG) PASSENGER HALT

No. G.51/P/H/BRTG      Date : 24.01.2024

APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED FROM INTERESTED CANDIDATES FOR ENGAGEMENT AS COMMISSION AGENT TO SELL TICKETS AT BARITHENGARH (BRTG) PASSENGER HALT IN BETWEEN BYREE (BY) AND DHANMANDAL (DHM) STATIONS UNDER THE JURISDICTION OF KHURDA ROAD DIVISION. COMMISSION PAYABLE TO THE COMMISSION AGENT WILL BE AS UNDER:

Amount of Sale of tickets per month	Commission payable
* ₹ 1/- to 15,000/-	15%
* ₹ 15,001/- to 50,000/-	12%
* ₹ 50,001/- to 1,00,000/-	9%
* ₹ 1,00,001/- to 2,00,000/-	6%
* ₹ 2,00,001/- and above	3%

Security Deposit for above halt is ₹ 2,500/- [₹ 2,000/- towards Security Deposit + ₹ 500/- towards 50% of cost of Railway materials] which is to be deposited after selection.

Application duly filled in should reach this office by 1500 hrs. on or before 23.02.2024 (Friday). If the last day i.e. 23.02.2024 happens to be or is declared to be a holiday, application will be received by the same time on the next working day. All the received applications will be opened at 1530 hrs. on 23.02.2024. The Railway reserves the right to reject any application without assigning any reason whatsoever.

For complete details, application format and other terms & conditions please visit our website : [www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in](http://www.eastcoastrail.indianrailways.gov.in)

PR-1034/O/23-24      Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager / Khurda Road



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA  
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER  
SUBARNAREKHA IRRIGATION DIVISION NO-I, JHARPOKHARIA  
A/P/O:-Sankucha, Via:- KM Katta, Dist:-Mayurbhanj  
Mail id: [sidivision1@gmail.com](mailto:sidivision1@gmail.com)  
Government of Odisha

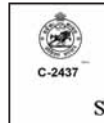
1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum to "e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE  
Ref:- Bid Identification No. 02/ 23-24 of SE, SID Division No-I, Jharpokharia  
Dated 25.01.2024

In partial modification to SI No 5 i.e. Class of Contractor of the following works mentioned against SI No 1. (from SI no 1 to SI no 8) may please be read as " C and D Class Contractor" and details are as follows:-

Sl No	Name of work
1	1)Construction of Sanatan Matha Building at Rangibeda under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 2)Construction of Office Building & Meeting Hall for Primary Fish Farmers at village Rangibeda of Haladia Reservoir under R & R assistance of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 3)Construction of Pratikhyalaya at Hatimoda and Rangibeda under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 4) Construction of Smaashan Ghat Building at Rangibeda under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 5)Construction of Compound Wall of Baba Subarneswar Mohadev Temple at Rangibeda under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 6) Construction of Two Addl Class Room and Compound wall of Khairbani UGME School under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 7) Construction of Community Hall at Tilagadia under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project 8) Construction of Community Hall at Kaladand under R & R assistance of Haladia Reservoir of Subarnarekha Irrigation Project
2	SI No.- 1)Rs 09.60 Lakhs 2) Rs10.10 Lakhs 3) Rs09.10 Lakhs 4) Rs06.52 Lakhs 5)Rs08.10 Lakhs 6) Rs17.66Lakhs 7) Rs09.27 Lakhs 8) Rs09.35 Lakhs
3	SI No:-1) Rs9600/- 2) Rs10100/- 3) Rs9100/- 4) Rs6600/- 5) Rs 8100/- 6) Rs17700/- 7) Rs9300/- 8) Rs9400/-
4	06 (Six) Calendar Months for the works SI No 1 to SI No 8
5	"C" and "D" Class Contractor for the works SI no 1 to SI no 8
6	25.01.2024 at 10.00 AM
7	03.02.2024 up to 5.00 PM
8	05.02.2024 at 11:00 A.M.
9	Superintending Engineer, Subarnarekha Irrigation Division No-I, Jharpokharia

Further details can be seen from the e-Procurement Portal "<https://tendersodiasha.gov.in>"

OIPR-32085/11/0003/2324



OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL: GUNUPUR  
No. 164 /24 Dt. 25.01.2024

**TENDER CALL NOTICE**

Sealed Tenders are invited from intending registered firms/ authorized suppliers/ manufacturing unit having valid GST, PAN,MSME for “Supply of Sanitary Disinfectant items to Gunupur Municipality”. The prescribed bid documents/related terms & conditions shall be available from following websites: [www.gunupurmunicipality.gov.in](http://www.gunupurmunicipality.gov.in) from 25.01.2024 to 07.02.2024. The tenderer shall have to furnish in Security Deposit of Rs. 10,000/- and paper Cost of Rs. 2000/- in shape of DD from any scheduled Commercial Bank or any nationalized bank in favour of Executive Officer, Gunupur Municipality payable at Gunupur along with the tender. Sealed tenders along with valid GST, PAN, MSME ,Security Deposit and Tender Paper cost should reach to the undersigned on before 12.00 PM on 07.02.2024by Regd. Post/Speed post and will be opened on the 07.02.2024 at 4.00 PM in the office of the undersigned in the presence of the bidders or their authorized representatives present if any at that time. The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason thereof.

OIPR-13104/11/0037/2324

Executive Officer  
Gunupur Municipality



GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA  
Sports & Youth Services Department  
Request for Proposal


Sports & Youth Services Department, Government of Odisha call for bids from leading agencies to the Procurement of ELEIKO make weightlifting equipment for Department of Sports and Youth Services, Govt fo Odisha (PAC ITEMS). The details of the document are available at the below mentioned website.

Website: <https://sports.odisha.gov.in/>  
<https://tendersodisha.gov.in/>  
Interested firms/ parties/ agencies are advised to study the RFP document carefully before submitting their bid.

Important Dates adn Information?  
Date of Publication - 25.01.2024  
Last date and time of submission of proposal - 16.02.2024; Time:05:00 pm.  
Opening of the Technical Bid- 16.02.2024; Time : 06:00 pm.

OIPR-29001/11/0198/2324

-sd-  
Commissioner-cum-Secretary



Government of Odisha  
Sports & Youth Services Department  
Request for Proposal

Sports & Youth Services Department, Government of Odisha calls for bids from leading agencies to the Procurement of UCS make Polevault equipment for Department of Sports and Youth Services, Govt of Odisha. The details of the document are available at the below mentioned website.

Website: <https://sports.odisha.gov.in/>  
<https://tendersodisha.gov.in/>

Interested firms/ parties/ agencies are advised to study the RfP document carefully before submitting their bid.

**Important Dates and Information:**

Date of Publication – 25/01/2024

Last date and time of submission of proposal – 16/02/2024; Time: 05:00 pm.

Opening of the Technical Bid - 16/02/2024; Time: 06:00 pm.

OIPR=29001/11/0197/2324

-Sd-  
Commissioner-cum-Secretary