

OPINION 6

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WORLD 8

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MONEY 10

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Bihar Political Pot Cools Down

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
PATNA/NEW DELHI

Ending a week-long period of speculation, JD(U) president Nitish Kumar did another political somersault on Sunday, this time securing the backing of the BJP and re-appointing himself as Chief Minister by taking the oath for a record ninth time to lead the Bihar Government.

Eighteen months ago, Nitish had parted ways with the BJP, despite winning the 2020 Assembly elections as part of the NDA coalition.

He joined the RJD-Congress coalition in August 2022, leading the Government with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav as his deputy.

After Nitish's coronation, Tejashwi said it marked the end of Nitish style of politics and the demise of JD(U) in Bihar.

Governor Rajendra Arlekar administered the oath of office and secrecy at the Raj Bhavan in Patna, with BJP president JP Nadda in attendance, after a well-orchestrated change of regime over 72 hours in the crucial State that holds 40 Lok Sabha seats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the newly sworn-in NDA Government in Bihar, led by Nitish, will spare no effort for the State's development. Alongside Nitish, BJP leaders Vijay Kumar Sinha, State BJP chief Samrat Choudhary took oath as Deputy CMs, and BJP's Prem Kumar took oath as a Minister.

Nitish Kumar sworn in as Bihar CM



JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar takes oath as Bihar CM during the swearing-in ceremony of new State Government, at Raj Bhavan in Patna PTI

JD(U) members Vijay Kumar Choudhary, Vijendra Yadav, and Shrawan Kumar also took oath, along with former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi-led Hindustan Awam Morcha's Santosh Kumar Suman and Independent legislator Sumit Singh.

Other members of the council of Ministers will be decided in a day or two, sources said.

Referring to his party's alliance with the NDA, Nitish said, "We will stay together. Eight leaders took oath as Ministers today, and the rest will be inducted soon."

Responding to Tejashwi's statement, "JD(U) will be finished in 2024," Nitish said, "We work for the development and progress of Bihar. We will keep doing the same, nothing else. Tejashwi was not doing anything. Now I am back where I was before (in the NDA), and now there is no question of going anywhere."



Samrat, Vijay appointed Deputy Chief Ministers

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary (54) and Vijay Kumar Sinha (64) on Sunday emerged as dark horse in the second generation leadership of BJP in Bihar.

Choudhary, who belongs to backward caste, is likely to get Home portfolio in the new Nitish Kumar Cabinet while Sinha is from upper caste. Other party leaders who are likely to be made Ministers in the new Government are Nitin Nabin, Shahnawaz Hussain, Rampreet Paswan, Neeraj Singh Babloo. BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi, who was deputy to Nitish Kumar when the BJP and the JD(U) was in an alliance in the

State, is wanted back in the State.

Sources said Bihar has as many as 40 Lok Sabha seats, making it very significant politically. The bigger picture appears to be the factor that led the BJP to welcome Nitish, infamous for his flip-flops, back into the NDA fold.

As the country gears up for the Lok Sabha polls next year, the BJP now appears a formidable force armed with the charisma of Prime Minister Modi and meticulous election machinery. Addressing a Press conference in Patna, shortly after he attended Kumar's swearing in with his party as an alliance partner, BJP national president JP Nadda asserted that NDA will "sweep" the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

No respite from winter chill



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after bright sunshine, Delhiites once again woke up to a foggy morning and extreme cold on Sunday, causing delays in flights, trains, and other modes of transportation. The minimum temperature was recorded at 6 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, while the maximum temperature settled at 18.6 degrees Celsius, normal for the season's average. Mayur Vihar was the coldest area in Delhi, recording the maximum temperature at 14.6 degrees Celsius, the lowest in the city. The India Meteorological

Department (IMD) has forecast dense fog for the next five days, coupled with cold conditions for the next two days in North India. According to the IMD, from January 31 to February 1, there will be a generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle. From January 28 to 30, the city may witness moderate fog conditions. The Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 324 at 9 am, settling at 384 in the "very poor" category at 6 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The IMD weather forecast predicts that the Western Himalayan Region will be

impacted by a new Western Disturbance starting on January 28. From January 31, the Western Himalayan region and the adjacent plains of Northwest India are expected to be affected by another disturbance in the west. "Light/moderate isolated to scattered rainfall/snowfall is very likely over Uttarakhand and light rainfall over Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh from January 31 to February 2," the Met office said in a statement. Over the next two days, these weather systems are predicted to bring light, isolated rainfall or snowfall to parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, and Himachal Pradesh. From January 29 to February 1, there will be moderate, scattered to fairly widespread rainfall or snowfall. The IMD also issues a warning, saying on January 28, dense to extremely dense fog conditions are likely to be present over a large portion of East Uttar Pradesh as well as over certain areas of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, West Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar for a few hours during the night and morning. Over the next three days, the area is expected to see isolated pockets of dense fog."

One dead after stage collapses during jagran at Kalkaji temple

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

A woman died, and 17 devotees were injured when a stage set up for a religious function, attended by singer B Praak, at the Kalkaji temple here, collapsed on Sunday around 12:30 am. The deceased has been identified as Tina, a resident of Tughlakabad extension. According to police, a 'jagran' (religious function) was organised at the Mahant Parishar of Kalkaji temple on Saturday, and around 1,600 people attended it. The temple management had hired event planners to organise the jagran. No arrests have been made so far, police sources said. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal condoled the death of the woman and wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. "The accident that happened last night during a 'jagran' at the Kalkaji temple is tragic. A woman has died; may her soul rest in peace. I wish for the speedy recovery of the 17 injured people," Kejriwal said in a post on 'X'



A collapsed platform at Kalkaji Mandir, in New Delhi, on Sunday. At least one person was killed and 17 others suffered injuries after the platform collapsed during a jagran programme, according to officials PTI

in Hindi."I appeal to the people of Delhi to take special care of safety standards in any kind of big event and make arrangements in such a way that no untoward incident happens," he added. Deputy Commissioner of Police (southeast) Rajesh Deo said no prior permission

had been granted for the event at the temple. "However, sufficient staff was deployed to maintain law and order. There was a gathering of around 1,500 to 1,600 people at around 12:30 am on Sunday," he said.

According to the police, an elevated wooden platform supported by an iron frame

was set up near the main stage for the families of the organisers and VIPs. Around 12:30 am, the elevated platform broke right from the middle as it could not bear the weight of the people sitting on it and collapsed, injuring those seated on it and close to it on the ground, the DCP said.

An eye-witness, Varun, said there was a large gathering at the temple as singer B Praak was present. "All of a sudden, the stage collapsed, and those who were sitting close to the stage received injuries. The singer had left by that time," he said. Another person who was present at the temple said he heard a loud noise and saw people running out. "It was a stampede-like situation. Everyone was running for their lives. I was outside the temple when I got to know that the stage collapsed and some people received injuries," he said. Among those who had gone to attend the function but returned home early because of the huge rush at the temple, 20-year-old Suman Kanojia of Chirag Delhi said, "I went there with a relative at around 10 pm and returned by 11 pm because it was so crowded. We thought of staying there a little longer but thankfully we didn't." "There was a huge crowd. There were temple volunteers around to manage the crowd but no policemen," Kanojia said.

Ram rule inspired Constitution makers: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the rule of Lord Ram was a source of inspiration for the Constitution makers, noting that pictures of him, Sita, and Lakshman adorned the pages of the Constitution. In the first Mann Ki Baat broadcast of this year, Modi said the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya brought people across the country together, making the collective strength of the country visible. "And that is why, on January 22 in Ayodhya, I talked about 'Dev to Desh' and 'Ram to Rashtira,' he said.

"Everyone's feeling is the same, everyone's devotion is the same. Ram is in everyone's words, Ram is in everyone's heart," Modi said. During this period, many people sang Ram bhajans and dedicated them to Lord Ram. On January 22 evening, the whole country lit 'Ram Jyoti' and celebrated Diwali, he noted. "During this time, the collective strength of the country was visible, forming the basis of our pledge for a developed India," the Prime Minister said. The collective power will take the country to new heights of progress, he said. In his broadcast, he urged young voters to register themselves so that they could exercise their franchise and



lauded the growing participation of people in voting at a time when many countries in the world are seeing a downward trend. Nearly 45 per cent of votes were cast in the first national elections in 1951-52, and the percentage has been going up while the number of electorates has surged to 96 crore, over three times the US population, he said. In the monthly broadcast, Modi noted that the absence of a common language for the terminology of diseases, treatments, and medicines in alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha, or Unani was a longstanding problem, and said a solution has been now found. He said, "I am happy to share

that the Ministry of AYUSH has categorised the data and terminology related to Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani medicine, with the help of the World Health Organization as well. Through the efforts of both, the terminology related to disease and treatment in Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha medicine has been codified." He said an advantage of this would be that if patients go to another doctor with their slip, the doctor will get complete information. "That slip will help one in knowing one's illness, treatment, what medicines one has been taking, for how long the treatment has been going on, what things one is

allergic to," he said. In a reference to the recent Padma awards, Modi said many of those bestowed the honour were those who worked at grassroots and away from the limelight to make big changes in society. "I am very happy that the system of Padma awards has transformed completely in the last decade. Now it has become people's Padma," he said. The contribution of each one of the Padma awardees is an inspiration for the countrymen, he said and added that many of them were those who brought glory to the country in the world of classical dance, classical music, folk dance, theatre, and bhajans.

GUEST COLUMN

Amrita Pritam’s anguished plea to Waris Shah was written when she was on a train from Dehradun to Delhi



Jaskiran Chopra

The partition could not divide the composite culture and literature of Punjab. It runs in the blood of the people and makes the geographical division meaningless. The famous nazm of renowned Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam is regarded as her masterpiece and it brought her great fame at the age of 28. It was the first major literary expression on the pain and anguish of the partition. It captured the hearts of people on both sides of the border as it expressed their pain without mentioning any community or religion. Ajj Aakhaa'n Waris Shah Nu is the title of the nazm she wrote in November 1947 while she was on a train from Dehradun to Delhi. She had been in Dehradun for some time after leaving Lahore. Little must have she known that this poignant poetic appeal to Waris Shah would make her immortal. Even today people on both sides recite and sing this nazm which urges the great Sufi poet to rise from his grave and take a look at Punjab that has been soaked in

blood and the daughters of Punjab have been ravaged by the mad violence.

It is so fascinating to know that famous poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz said that he read this nazm while he had been imprisoned and when he came out, he found that people were reciting it on the streets and tea shops of Lahore. Just as Waris Shah and his great work titled Heer Waris Shah is common to people on both sides, so is Amrita's nazm that moves people to tears. She tells Shah, who is now regarded as a Peer, to write a new page in the history of Punjab. He should rise and do something for the weeping daughters of Punjab. For Heer, he wrote reams. Today, thousands of Heers are being tortured, humiliated and killed. These daughters, says Amrita, are looking towards Shah. Heer's uncle Qaidon poisoned her. Today, so many Qaidons are stealing love and beauty. Where should we look for another Waris Shah?

I am sharing the major part of the nazm with its English translation by Khushwant Singh...

Ajj Aakha, 'n Waris Shah nu, kito'n kabara 'n vichon' bole, te ajj kitaab e-ishq da koi agla varqa Phhol, Ik roye e dhhi Punjab di, tu likh likh maare wain, ajj lakhani dhihiyaa, 'n rondiyan, tainu Waris Shah nu Kehn, Uthh Dard manda deya daria, Uthh tak apna Punjab, Ajj Bele Laasha, 'n vichhiyan, te lahu

di bhari Chenab, kisay ne Panja'n paaniyan wich diti zeher rala, 'te ohna paaniyan dhart nu dita paani la, jithhay Wajdi si phhook pyar di, oh vanjhli gayi gawaach, Ranjhay de sab veer aji bhoole gaye uss di jaach, dharti te lahu vasya, kabara 'n paiyan chon, Preet diyan shehzadiyan, aji vich mazaara 'n Ron, Aji sabe Qaidon bann gaye, husn ishq de chor, aji kithho 'n lehaaiye lab ke, Waris Shah ik hor? Aji Aakhaan Waris Shah nu, kito'n kabara 'n vichon bolte, aji kitaab e-ishq da, koi agla varqa Phhol.

To Waris Shah, I turn today

Speak up from the graves amidst which you lie.

In our book of love, turn the new leaf

When one daughter of the Punjab did cry, you filled pages with songs of lamentation

Today a hundred daughters cry, O Waris Shah, to speak to you,

O friend of the sorrowing, rise and see your Punjab,

corpses are strewn on the pasture, blood runs in the Chenab,

Some hand had mixed poison in our five rivers, the rivers in turn had irrigated the land, where the windpipe trilled songs of love, that flute has been lost,

Ranjha and his brothers have lost the art,

Blood keeps falling upon the earth, oozing out drop by drop from graves,

the queens of love weep in tombs, it seems all people have become Qaidons, thieves of beauty and love,

where should I search out another Waris Shah? Waris Shah, open your grave, write a new page in the book of love.

This nazm will always be relevant in the world where bloodshed and mindless violence happens often. It is a poet's plea to humanity to move towards love and beauty. Her personal pain became the voice of the people and even today, this nazm is recited and sung at the Dargah of Waris Shah at Jandiala Sher Khan where the poet was born. It is in Sheikhupura near Sialkot. An annual Urs is held there and Heer is sung at large gatherings throughout the year. The Punjabi Sufi poet is now saint Waris Shah whose mazar is visited by people from both sides of Punjab and others too. The nazm is secular in nature and thus belongs to the entire humanity.

The story of Heer and Ranjha presented by Waris Shah in his 1766 work was quite different from some earlier versions that were penned. His version has remained the most loved and ultimate narration of the legend which came into Punjab's folklore and then into literature. Shah wrote the love story to enhance and beautify the legend while depicting the society, in-

stitutions, customs, language and landscapes of Punjab. His work is the best creative expression of Punjabi genius. Renowned film maker Chetan Anand has immortalised the story in his 1970 film Heer Ranjha which had dialogues in poetry written by Kaifi Azmi and enchanting music by the great Madan Mohan. The film Pinjar, based on Amrita Pritam's story had this nazm on Waris Shah sung by Wadali brothers. This Qissa of Heer and Ranjha, down the centuries, has fired the imagination of artists on both sides of the border, giving rise to paintings, songs, poetry, dramas and films.

It is believed that this was a true story as the graves of the two lovers exist in Pakistan. However it changed down the years and this story of timeless tragic love became larger than life. In Waris Shah's Heer, the character of Ranjha is quite similar to that of Waris himself. The tune in which the verses of his Heer are sung has existed since his own times. I grew up listening to Heer being sung by people in the family.

This beautiful lament was the first major poetic expression of the horrors of the partition and will thus always have a very special place in literature.

(The author is a senior journalist. Views expressed are personal)

Dhami's roadshow draws huge crowd in Agastyamuni

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh took out a massive roadshow in Agastyamuni town of Rudraprayag district on Sunday. On his one-day visit to the district, the CM started the roadshow from old Dewal to the Agastyamuni sports ground. Large number

Nauni Kauthig (fair) at Rudraprayag on the day. In the fair he interacted with the members of different women self help groups and inquired about the local culture. He also participated in the Prasad making activity of the Women SHGs. Getting nostalgic, the

of the artists. He also took active interest in the fabric weaving activity of the workers in another stall.

The CM was informed that the women SHGs associated with Kedarnath Yatra did a business of more than Rs 70



of people from the town and nearby villages were lined up on both sides of the road to welcome the CM. MLAs Bharat Chaudhary, Shaila Rani Rawat and BJP district president Mahavir Panwar accompanied the CM in the roadshow. The CM also attended the Bwyai, Bwari,

CM said that he used to help his mother in the making of delicacies during the festival period. Dhami said that he had also collected fodder from the forest and helped his mother in kneading dough. In the stall of the rural business incubator the CM participated in the stone painting activity

lakh last year. These groups sold Rs 65 lakh of the Prasad made from Chaulai (amaranth) in the Yatra. These groups are employing 500 women. The district administration of Rudraprayag has now taken a target of selling Prasad worth Rs two crore in this year's Yatra.

Dense fog & cold day conditions warning issued for plain districts

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The temperatures in Dehradun and other parts of the State remained lower than normal on Sunday. A partly cloudy sky intensified the effects of the cold in the provisional State capital. Similar weather conditions are expected on Monday. The State meteorological centre has issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding dense fog likely to occur in some parts of Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar districts along with cold day conditions

likely to occur at isolated places in these districts today. Shallow to moderate fog is likely to occur in some parts of Dehradun, Pauri and Nainital districts during the morning hours. Apart from this, dry weather is likely to prevail in the State today. Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly cloudy sky with mist likely to occur during the morning hours. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 20 degrees Celsius and six de-

grees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State on Sunday were 18.5 degrees Celsius and 5.8 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 14.4 degrees Celsius and 7.2 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 13.2 degrees Celsius and 3.1 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar, 14.6 degrees Celsius and 3.6 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

Authorities find unhygienic conditions in restaurants and meat shops in Doon

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A joint team of the Dehradun district administration and the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) conducted an inspection of hotels, restaurants and meat shops in various areas of Dehradun. The team conducted inspections in areas including Prince Chowk, Gandhi Road, Tyagi Road and railway station, among others. The team found unhygienic conditions in a hotel situated near the railway station. The meat stored there was also in a bad condition. The officials

also found unhygienic conditions in a restaurant and a dhaba located at Prince Chowk. The officials said that the team also found no valid license besides poor hygienic conditions at Shamsheer Singh meat shop. The teams also found a few restaurants functioning with expired licenses and in unhygienic conditions. The management of Hotel Siddharth Paradise also failed to provide a waste control certificate. The team also found a restaurant allegedly serving expired coffee, chocolate pow-



said that the validity of the hotel's food safety license had also expired and the hotel administration was also unable to present the bill for the meat. Considering this, the team imposed a hefty penalty on the hotel. Besides this, the team

der and green tea. The officials said that the management of all the establishments were issued challans for violations and a report was submitted to authorities concerned to take further action as per the rules.

MCH inspects food establishments

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Municipal Corporation of Haridwar (MCH) along with the Haridwar district administration and the police conducted inspections of food establishments near the railway station and bus stand on Sunday.

The food safety officer Kapil Dev and sanitation inspectors Srikant and Dharendra Semwal inspected 12 shops in the railway station

and the bus stand.

They also took four samples of Pakodas, Chana Chat, milk and curd. Besides this, they also issued notices to three food establishments for violations. Besides this, the MCH issued challans to eight establishments under the Anti-Littering Act and for the use of single use plastics and collected a challan of worth Rs 7,500, the officials added.

ADG orders two-month campaign to arrest wanted criminals

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The additional director general of police (Crime, Law and Order) AP Anshuman ordered all district police in-charges to start an intensive two-month campaign to arrest wanted criminals. He also directed them to carry out threat assessment in all districts in view of the Assembly session scheduled to commence on February 5. He stated this in a meeting held in police headquarters that was joined by senior police officials including DIGs, SSPs and SPs among others via video conference. He asked all officials concerned to alert the police and informer's network besides

making necessary arrangements. All in-charges should make the police headquarters aware of the number of police personnel required to carry out duties in their respective districts accordingly. Besides this, the ADG also ordered continuous monitoring of social media platforms to ensure no misinformation is being spread by anyone that can potentially disturb peace, law and order. He also asked the in-charges to ensure police officials and personnel deployed on duty follow the recently released standard operating procedure (SOP) regarding social media policy by the Centre.

Anshuman also directed all senior/superintendents of police to personally reach the spot in serious criminal cases like murders and robberies. He also directed the inspector general of police and deputy inspector general of police to personally visit the sites of double murders and more intense criminal cases in their respective areas to become an integral part of the investigation. He directed all senior police officials to comply with detailed SOP issued by the police headquarters.

Police organise slow race to raise awareness on road safety

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police on Sunday organised a slow race as part of the 34th Road Safety Month campaign that commenced on January 15. This race was organised to raise awareness among the people against over speeding. It aimed to give them the message that driving at high speed cannot always win the race as one can even lose one's life due to it, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said. He informed that it was a 50 metre race that started from Kanak Chowk to the Employment office junction. The traffic police had chosen such participants who were penalised for over speeding and other traffic violations in the past along with those who followed traffic rules and have not yet been penalised for any traffic violations. A total of 26 citizens participated in the slow race along with a few traffic police personnel and police inspectors. Singh said, "The slow race was inspired by the concept of the story of 'The Hare and the Tortoise Race'. We wanted to give people a similar message that if we drive our vehicles within the prescribed speed limit on the road, we can keep ourselves and others safe from road accidents. This is the real win from fatal road accidents that kill hundreds of people every year due to over speeding." The number of accidents is increasing every year due to a number of reasons but it can be minimised if all follow traffic rules every time they come out on roads and public places, he added.

‘Sanatan is self-evident principles’

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The founder of Sanatan Sangam Trust and Subharti Group, Atul Krishna said that Sanatan means those principles which are not made by any person and are self-evident. Nature has given these principles to humans in the form of religion and if followed aptly, a person can do great things for himself and the entire race. He stated this in a Sanatan Sangam organised on Sunday. He said that Sanatan means something that is eternal and which is eternal, is unchangeable. The light of Sanatan Sangam will do the work of eradicating the darkness that has spread all around due to mutual conflict in recent times, Krishna added. The chief guest BJP State chief Mahendra Bhatt said that Sanatan is a very broad subject that includes happiness of the mind as well as the body. In Sanatan, religion, artha, kama and moksha have been talked about for happiness and this sacred ideology should not only be limited to cities. It should be taken to every village which will be done by Sanatan Sangam Trust. He also praised the unique initiative of Subharti Group and said that in today's era, such events are very necessary to connect the society. People from every section of the society should unite and work in the interest of the country. The Minister of State Vinay Rohilla and village head of Jhajhra, Pinky Devi were also present at the event along with vice chancellor of Subharti University Rajesh Mishra and pro chancellor DB Roy.

<div><div><div>TATA</div><div>TATA CAPITAL HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED</div></div><div>Regd. Address: 11th Floor, Tower A, Peninsula Business Park, Ganpant Rao Kadam Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 013</div><div>CIN No. U67190MH2008PLC187552</div></div>			
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Loan Account No.	Name of Obligor(s)/ Legal Heir(s)/Legal Representative(s)	Total Outstanding Dues (Rs.)	Date of Demand Notice & Date of NPA
TCHHF 03740001 00079212	Mrs. Anita Aggarwal (Borrower), Mr. Anuj Aggarwal & Mr. Arpit Aggarwal & Ms. Rupali Aggarwal & Ms. Chandani Aggarwal & Ms. Parul Aggarwal & Aggarwal Filing Station Through its Partners (Co-borrowers)	As on 08/01/2024, an amount of Rs. 81,13,568/- (Rupees Eighty One Lakh Thirteen Thousand Five Hundred Sixty Eight Only)	08-01-2024 28-02-2021
Description of the Secured Assets/ Immovable Properties/Mortgaged Properties: All Piece & Parcels of Residential Plot being Part of Property bearing M.C. No. 28, Admeasuring 255 Sq. Mtrs. Situated at Anand Chowk, Dehradun (Uttarakhand), with all common amenities mentioned in Sale Deed. Bounded as: - East – Property of Trilok Chand Aggarwal, West – Land of Shri Ashwani Kumar Aggarwal, North – Public Road, South – Rest Property of Seller.			
9693700	Mr. Manish Kumar (Borrower), Mrs. Ekta Kumar (Co-borrower)	As on 17/01/2024, an amount of Rs.2,24,67,550/- (Rupees Two Crore Twenty Four Lakh Sixty Seven Thousand Five Hundred Fifty Only)	17-01-2024 07-01-2024
Description of the Secured Assets/ Immovable Properties/Mortgaged Properties: All piece & parcels of Residential 4BHK Apartment/Flat bearing No. 1201, Block B, 12th Floor, consist of total area 4200 Sq. Ft. including terrace of 1100 Sq. Ft. Situated at Premier Urban, Sector-15, Part-02, Gurgaon-122001 (Haryana).			
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Place : Dehradun (Uttarakhand)		For Tata Capital Housing Finance Limited	

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In my Army records my Son's name is mistakenly recorded as NIKHIL DHONDIYAL whereas his correct name is NIKHIL DHOUNDIYAL as mentioned in other all documents. Army No.4078686X, Ex NK Shiv Kumar, R/o Jolly Grant, Doiwala, Dehradun Uttarakhand. vide IN-UK01211333135319W Affidavit dated 28.01.2024 before court Dehradun.

In my Army records my Daughter's name is mistakenly recorded as ANSHIKA DHONDIYAL whereas her correct name is ANSHIKA DHOUNDIYAL as mentioned in other all documents. Army No.4078686X, Ex NK, Shiv Kumar, R/o Jolly Grant, Doiwala, Dehradun Uttarakhand. vide IN-UK01211333135319W Affidavit dated 28.01.2024 before court Dehradun.

In my Husband's service records my name is mistakenly recorded as CHANDA DHONDIYAL whereas my correct name is CHANDA DHOUNDIYAL as mentioned in other all documents. Chanda Dhondiyal W/o Army No. 4078686X, Ex NK, Shiv Kumar, R/o Jolly Grant, Doiwala, Dehradun Uttarakhand. vide IN-UK01211413117915W Affidavit dated 28.01.2024 before Dehradun.

In my Army records my son's name is mistakenly recorded as MOHEET SINGH whereas his correct name is MOHIT NEGI as mentioned in all other documents. No. 4060510 Ex NK BHIM SINGH R/O BHAUWALA DEHRADUN UTTARAKHAND. vide IN-UK00948506054719W Affidavit 25.01.2024 before Dehradun.

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Kharge gives partymen mantra of hard work to throw BJP out of power

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge launched the election campaign of the party for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections here on Sunday by exhorting the party workers to work hard and throw the BJP out of power. Addressing a well attended workers conclave at Bannu School ground the Congress president said that the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is working hard day and night and the workers should work in the masses to get positive results in the elections. Taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the one man worship being practiced by the BJP, the Congress president said Modi wants to become the 11th Avatar of Lord Vishnu. He said that Modi has a habit of taking credit for everything and is an expert in telling lies. In an offensive on the guarantees of Modi, Kharge said that his guarantees can be understood from the fact he had promised to bring all the black money deposited in the foreign banks and deposit Rs 15 lakh in the bank account of every citizen. He said that the Modi government had promised to double the income of farmers and create two crore new jobs every year but all these promises have proved to be hollow. The Congress president said that the BJP and PM Modi have made it a habit of asking about 70 years of Congress party rule but everyone knows what the Congress had done for the country. "Our governments had built



Pantnagar university, opened AIIMS Rishikesh and IIT Roorkee in Uttarakhand and set up companies such as GAIL, SAIL, HAL, NITs, IIMs and ushered in the green revolution in the country. What have you done other than selling the PSUs and selling the country," asked Kharge amid an applause from the crowd. He said that the Food Security Act, Right To Information and MNREGA were brought by the Congress and the BJP has done nothing for the poor. The Congress president said that Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi laid down their lives for the unity of the country while Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi spent years in jail during the freedom struggle. He said that the people who are questioning Congress were seeking jobs from the British and had no role in the free-

dom struggle. He said that the Congress protected democracy and the constitution in the country. "Modi ji would have sold tea and I would have worked as a labourer had the constitution not been there," he said. Kharge said that the people of Uttarakhand want to know about the murder of Ankita Bhandari and are agitated as those involved in the murder are getting protection from the government. He said that the youngsters of Uttarakhand have been hit hard by the Agnipath scheme. The Congress president said that more than 30 lakh jobs are vacant in the government sector in the country but the Modi government is not filling them. He claimed that a conspiracy to end reservation in government jobs is being hatched and efforts to re-establish the practice preached by Manu are being undertaken.

Speaking on the occasion the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara said the Agnipath scheme has shattered the dreams of youngsters. The Leader of Opposition (LoP) Yashpal Arya said that the mining mafia is ruling the roost in Uttarakhand. Former PCC president Pritam Singh said that the Congressmen will put up a united fight in the upcoming elections to defeat BJP. Former PCC president Ganesh Godiyal said that

sumes time. He claimed that PM Modi always dreams about Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and now Rahul Gandhi is causing him sleepless nights. Kharge also alleged that the Nyaya Yatra of Rahul Gandhi was deliberately disrupted by the BJP government of Assam.

Rahul Gandhi causing sleepless nights for Modi: Kharge

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge drew applause from the crowd whenever he attacked PM Modi. Seeking apology from the people for arriving late in the public meeting, Kharge said that now one has to seek permission from Modi to board the plane, step out of it and embark on a helicopter and its landing which con-

Flop Kharge rally proves public doesn't trust Cong anymore: BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Bharatiya Janata Party has opined that the Congress rally addressed by the party's national president Mallikarjun Kharge was a flop. The BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt said that the people do not trust the Congress anymore, which was witnessed in its Dehradun rally on Sunday. Bhatt said, "The Congress president focused only on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the rally and was unable to make any trustworthy statements in front of the public. His address was centered on opposing Modi. The Congress president was referring to PM Modi as an avatar in a humorous manner but his words seemed venomous," Bhatt said. He further averred that it

was the BJP government which took care of the soldiers due to which now the families of soldiers are being provided all facilities. One Rank One Pension and various other better decisions taken in the interests of soldiers can be considered achievements. The BJP State president further said that the Congress was doubtful of the crowd which would gather for Kharge's address and had booked the Bannu School ground earlier. However, it still moaned about not getting the Parade Ground for the event in order to gain public sympathy. The public today is leaning towards the BJP and it has faith in Modi's development policy. The Congress would not have had to cry before the public

today if it had facilitated inclusive development, Bhatt said. "The Uttarakhand visit of any central leader of the Congress does not augur well for that party. When the Congress State in-charge first visited Dehradun, about 1,000 members from the Congress and other parties joined the BJP. Today, when the Congress national president visited Doon, a former Congress MLA, other Congress leaders with public support along with a total of 3,000 people joined the BJP. The Congress is taking out a Nyay Yatra in the country but is unable to do justice to its own party workers. The Congress leaders and workers are going where their honour is secure," the BJP State president added.

Former MLA & many others join BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Former MLA and senior Congress leader Shailendra Rawat, a number of public representatives and office bearers of various parties from different districts joined the Bharatiya Janata Party here on Sunday. The party has claimed that more than 2,500 political workers joined the party in the programme held at the BJP State headquarters.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt congratulated all those who had joined the party and exhorted them to get started on the party's mission. Bhatt said that as the patron of the party, he will take care of their honour and sentiments. He said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership the nation is

achieving new heights in development while Uttarakhand is progressing swiftly under chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami's leadership. "The nation's global standing is at the top while Uttarakhand is emerging as a swiftly developing State. All of you have to fully cooperate in the mission to make Uttarakhand the best State by 2025 and India a developed nation by 2047.

All of us together have to achieve a record victory in the coming Lok Sabha elections and further strengthen Narendra Modi. At present, the political scenario in Uttarakhand is like it is across the nation- it is coloured in saffron. This is the reason why there is a consistent rise in the number of people wanting to join the BJP. A

week later, the party will organise an even bigger programme in which a large number will join the BJP," Bhatt added. Speaking as the CM's representative, cabinet minister Ganesh Joshi said that Lord Ram and Narendra Modi dominating the national discourse and the large number of people joining the BJP is enough to make one certain that the BJP will form its government at the Centre with more than 400 seats.

The party will win all the five Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand by a margin double than the previous margin based on the works done by chief minister Dhami, he said. Rajya Sabha MP Naresh Bansal said that the BJP is not a party of nepotism but works with the sense of a family.

Multitudes rally for domicile status and strict land laws

PNS ■ HALDWANI

Members of various political, social and cultural organisations along with the general public took out a large rally in support of the demands for 1950 as the cut off year for domicile status and a strict land law in Uttarakhand here in Haldwani on Sunday. The Mool Niwas Bhu Kanoon Samanvay Sangharsh Samiti, which organised the rally, said that thousands of people from different parts of the State attended the rally. Addressing the gathering on the occasion, the co-ordinator of the organising committee Mohit Dimri said that 23 years after its creation, Uarakhand which achieved statehood after more than 40 activists lost their lives, is still struggling with an identity crisis. More than two decades after creation of the State, the natives have not been able to get their justified rights. The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the natives are now being relegated to the position of second class citizens in their own State, he alleged. "It is very important to imple-



ment 1950 as the cut off year for domicile status and enact a strict land law in the State. The issue of domicile is related to the identity of Uttarakhand and the future of its people. The future of Uttarakhand is not secure without winning the fight for domicile," he said.


Joint coordinator of the committee Lusun Todariya said that it is essential to make 1950 the cut off year for domicile status and bring a strict land law to ensure

that the rights of the natives of Uttarakhand are secure. The youths of the State are today facing the problem of unemployment, he added.

Pahadi Army founder Harish Rawat said that the manner in which the rights of the natives are being ended, the natives will soon face an identity crisis. The speakers said that there will be serious consequences if the government doesn't act according to public sentiment on the issues of domi-

cile and strict land law. They said that the movement in support of these demands is receiving resounding support across the State. The large number of people attending the Haldwani rally after the rally held in Dehradun on December 24 clearly shows that the people of Uttarakhand are prepared for a decisive fight for their rights, cultural identity and existence, they said.

The organisers said that the plan of action to further expand this movement will be announced soon. Dimri said that a public awareness campaign will be started across the State, adding that the committee will organise various programmes in a phased manner which will also include interacting with the youths in villages and universities in the State.




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New legislations will strengthen India of tomorrow: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the government was modernising laws keeping in view the present context and asserted that these legislations will further strengthen tomorrow's India. Addressing the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Supreme Court here, he said that with the enactment of three new criminal justice laws, India's legal, policing and investigative systems entered a new era.

"It is important to ensure that the transition to the new laws from the ones dating back to hundreds of years is smooth. In this regard, we have already started training and capacity building work for government employees," the prime minis-

ter said. Modi urged the Supreme Court to come forward to work towards the capacity building of other stakeholders."An empowered judicial system is a part of 'Viksit Bharat'. The government is working continuously and taking many decisions to form a trusted judicial system. The Jan Vishwas Bill is a step in this direction. In the future, this will reduce the unnecessary burden on the judicial system," the prime minister said. He said that the law on mediation will lessen the burden on courts as the legislation will improve the alternative dispute resolution mechanism. The prime minister said the Supreme Court has strengthened India's vibrant democracy and given many important verdicts on individual rights

and freedom of speech which have given new direction to the country's socio-political milieu. "Today's economic policies of India will form the basis of tomorrow's bright India. The laws being made in India today will further strengthen tomorrow's bright India," the prime minister said. "Laws made today will brighten the future of India. With changes happening globally, the world's eyes are set on India, as the world's faith is growing stronger in India. In such times, it is important for India to take advantage of every opportunity given to it," Modi said. He also noted that last week the government had approved Rs 800 crore for the expansion of the Supreme Court building. In a lighter vein, Modi hoped that no one moves a petition



challenging the expansion of the top court's infrastructure. He also hinted that the new Parliament building pro-

ject was challenged in the courts. Prime Minister Modi underlined that ease of living, ease of doing business, travel and communication, and ease of justice were the nation's top priorities. "Ease of justice is the right of every Indian citizen and the Supreme Court of India, its medium," he said. To ensure last-mile justice delivery, the prime minister noted the recent decision on phase-III of the e-courts project to improve digital infrastructure of subordinate courts. Expressing happiness at the availability of decisions in a digital format and the beginning of the project of translating Supreme Court decision in local languages, Modi hoped for similar arrangements in other courts of the country.

He said the use technology may have teething troubles, but it expands the horizons to improve justice delivery. Modi also noted that India's first woman judge of the Supreme Court, Justice M Fathima Beevi, was recently given the Padma Bhushan. Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, other judges of the apex court, top law officers and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal were present. Modi also launched citizen-centric information and technology initiatives that include Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR), Digital Courts 2.0 and a new website of the Supreme Court. The Digital Supreme Court Reports (SCR) will make Supreme Court judgments available to the citizens of the country free of cost

and in electronic format. The key features of digital SCR are that all 519 volumes of the Supreme Court reports since 1950, covering 36,308 cases, shall be available in a digital format, bookmarked, user-friendly, and with open access. Digital Courts 2.0 application is a recent initiative under the e-Courts project to make court records available to the Judges of the district courts in electronic form. This is coupled with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for transcribing speech to text on a real-time basis. The Prime Minister also launched the new website of the Supreme Court. The new website will be in bilingual format in English and Hindi and has been redesigned with a user-friendly interface.

Judiciary needs to begin difficult conversations: CJI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The judiciary's ability to remain relevant as an institution requires it to recognise challenges and begin "difficult conversations", Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said on Sunday as he flagged issues like "adjournment culture" and long vacations. He also stressed on increasing the representation of marginalised sections and providing a level playing field to first-generation lawyers.

The CJI was speaking at a function organised by the Supreme Court on the occasion of the inauguration of the Diamond Jubilee Year of the establishment of the apex court in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief guest for the occasion. The CJI also highlighted the demographic changes undergoing in India and said that women, traditionally under-represented in the legal profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary. The CJI said Chandrachud called for the inclusion of diverse sections of the population into the legal profession, noting the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes "is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the Bench".

Terming it as a "momentous occasion" in the history of the



nation, CJI Chandrachud said that women can now be seen in important positions in India. "There is a focus on greater inclusion of the marginalised sections of society. Equally inspiring is the confidence of the younger population to succeed in their professional lives," he said. The Supreme Court of India came into existence on January 28, 1950. It initially functioned from the Parliament House before it moved to the present building here. CJI Chandrachud said, "Traditionally, the legal profession was a profession of elite men. Times have changed. Women, traditionally under-represented in the profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary." The CJI also flagged the structural issues affecting the judiciary, such as pendency of

cases, archaic procedures and the culture of adjournments, stressing that in the near future, these issues must be addressed. "Our effort in our work as judges and administrators must be to ensure dignity to the district judiciary, which is the first point of contact for citizens. "Our ability to remain relevant as an institution requires us to recognise challenges and begin difficult conversations," he said. The CJI said there is an urgent need to emerge from the adjournment culture to a culture of professionalism. "Second, we have to ensure that the length of oral arguments does not interminably delay judicial outcomes. "Third, the legal profession must provide a level playing field for first-generation lawyers - men, women and others from marginalised seg-

ments who have the will to work and the potential to succeed; and "Fourth, let us begin the conversation on long vacations and whether alternatives such as flexitime for lawyers and judges is possible," he said. He highlighted that in the recruitment examination for Junior Civil Judges conducted in several states like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, more than 50 per cent of the selected candidates were women. CJI Chandrachud also highlighted the recent senior designation of advocates by the Supreme Court to a record number of women. "We, as judges and administrators, cannot be ignorant of these rising aspirations. "Before the beginning of 2024, only 12 women were designated as 'Senior Advocates' in the history of the Supreme Court over the last 74 years. Last week, the Supreme Court designated 11 women from different parts of the country as Senior Advocates at one selection," he said. The programme held in the Supreme Court premises was also attended by Union Minister of State of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal,

serving and retired judges of the top court and the high courts and lawyers and law students. Attorney General R Venkataramani, Bar Council of India chairman Manan Kumar Mishra and Supreme Court Bar Association President Adish C Aggarwala also addressed the gathering. In his address, CJI Chandrachud said, "Our legitimacy will endure from the inclusion of diverse sections of the population in our system. Therefore, we need to make more efforts to bring different sections of the society into the legal profession. "For instance, the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the Bench." He added that it is the 75th year since the founding provided an opportunity to meet these challenges and step into the future with an honest assessment of our progress. "We must reflect on the journey that we have traversed and renew our pledge to uphold the Constitution within and beyond the courtrooms," the CJI said. The programme was also attended by the Chief Justices of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Mauritius, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

No reserved posts can be dereserved, clarifies MoE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved after draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available. The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders. The draft guidelines have drawn flak from several quarters. The Congress alleged there is a "conspiracy" to end reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in higher education institutions and that the Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" on the issues of Dalits, backward classes and tribals. The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a protest against UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar on the issue on Monday. Kumar also clarified that there

has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation. "Reservation in Central Educational Institutions is provided for all posts in direct recruitment in Teacher's cadre as per the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019. "After enactment of this Act, no reserved post is to be de-reserved. Ministry of Education has given directives to all the CEIs to fill up the vacancies strictly as per the 2019 ACT," the Ministry of Education wrote on X. The UGC chairman also posted: "This is to clarify that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation. "It is important for all HEIs to ensure that all backlog positions in the reserved category are filled up through concerted efforts." According to new draft guidelines by the UGC: "A vacancy reserved for SC or ST or OBC cannot be filled by a candidate other than an SC or ST or

OBC candidate, as the case may be. "However, a reserved vacancy may be declared unreserved by following the procedure of de-reservation where after, it can be filled as an unreserved vacancy." "There is a general ban on de-reservation of reserved vacancies in case of direct recruitment. However, in rare and exceptional cases when a vacancy in a Group A service cannot be allowed to remain vacant in public interest, the University concerned may prepare a proposal for de-reservation of the vacancy giving the following information: The proposal will be required to list -- efforts made to fill up the posts; reasons why it cannot be allowed to remain vacant and justification for de-reservation. "The proposal for de-reservation in case of Group C or D should go to the Executive Council of the University and in case of Group A or B should be submitted to the Ministry of Education, giving full details, for necessary approval. After receiving the approval, the post may be filled and reservation may be carried forward," the draft guidelines added.

Panel to review antidefection law to be constituted soon, says Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Sunday said a committee to review anti-defection law will be constituted soon. Birla said this on the concluding day of the 84th All India Presiding Officers Conference in Mumbai. Birla informed that a Committee under the Chairmanship of Speaker, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, Advocate Rahul Narwekar, will be constituted to review the Anti-Defection Law. Vice President and Chairman Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankar delivered Valedictory Address. Governor of Maharashtra Ramesh Bais, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Hariवंश; Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rahul Narwekar; and Deputy Chief Minister, Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis graced the Valedictory Session and addressed the distinguished dignitaries. 26 Presiding Officers from 18 States, including 16 Speakers attended the Conference. In his address Dhankar recalled the spectacular Republic Day celebrations on Kartavya Path that revealed our exponential, phenomenal and all around growth, cutting edge of country's woman power emerging as a unique feature besides the technological prowess, depth of Indian culture and upbeat mood of the nation. "Disruption in legislatures is cancerous not only for legislatures but also for democracy and society. Curbing it is not optional but absolute necessity to save sanctity of legislature. No time is left we are perhaps cliffhanging and we need to awaken ourselves. It is alarmingly worrisome that disruption and disturbance in Legislatures- temples of



democracy, have assumed monstrous dimensions posing existential challenge to these institutions," the Chairman Rajya Sabha said. Dhankar said it is high time for Presiding Officers to invoke their authority to ensure discipline and decorum as lack of these is virtually shaking the very foundations of Legislatures. Referring to the observations of Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding making legislatures paperless in his video address on inaugural day, Birla informed that Lok Sabha has achieved remarkable success in this direction through Digital Parliament. Mentioning about challenges posed by new technologies in the functioning of Legislatures, Birla spoke about telecast and broadcast of proceedings expunged by the Chair and observed that an action plan is required in this direction. Birla opined that media, including social media, should report authentic records of parliamentary proceedings. On the day five resolutions were adopted which were urge Parliament and State/UT Legislatures to review and align Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in accordance with the letter and spirit of our Constitution; encourage Parliament/State/UT Legislatures to take effective steps at capacity-building of

grassroot Panchayati Raj institutions and Urban Local Bodies to further help strengthening the vibrant and ancient democratic ethos of our country; recommended legislative bodies to adopt and promote emerging technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), for improving efficiency, transparency, productivity and engagement with citizens; recognising the important role of Legislative Committees and to resolve that AIPOC will take pro-active measures to implement "One Nation One Legislative Platform" for resource and experience sharing between legislatures and closer public engagement with the citizens. On the occasion Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Hariवंश said dissent in some form has always been part of the democratic set up, however, that must be within limits and adhere to the rules and procedures of the House. "These days, disruptions start from the first few days of the session and continue for several days indicating that these disruptions are often planned and meant to interrupt the primary job of the legislature," said Hariवंश. Hariवंश urged to ensure better party coordination and consensus in smooth functioning of legislatures.

Railways completes employment process for 1.5 lakh new posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India's national transporter, Indian Railway, which is also the largest employer has recently completed the employment process for 1.5 lakh posts in various capacities including to address the prime concerns of safety and security of the passengers as well as property of the railways. Sources in the Ministry of Railways said that the railways' recruitment arm-Railway Recruitment Board - has started with new process to bring out vacancies on a regular basis, practically every year because infrastructure and operations are increasing every year besides to counter the allegations on the BJP government in failing the employment expectations within then job seekers. "Vacancies in multiple categories will be filled on a yearly basis. The recruitment of



5696 ALP (Loco pilots) has started. It is to be noted that the vacancies in ALP category are 3190. It means more number of recruitment process has been started than the ALPs vacancies. It is a regular process and recruitment being done as per the vacancies arise," said a senior railways official. IR is increasing its infrastructure and operations day by day. The vacancy assessment is done for every six months or sometimes less

than that period also. "We have recently completed the employment process for 1,50,000 new employees and immediately after concluding that, we started the new process of selection of ALPs. There will be more employment opportunities in technical and non-technical popular categories and also in Group D. To ensure more opportunities for everyone, this will be an annual process," said Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav.

Shah to launch project for agri, rural banks computerisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday will launch the Rs 225 crore-project envisaging computerisation of offices of the Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (ARDBs) and the State Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCSs) across the country at an event here. This initiative, part of a broader digitalization effort, targets 1851 units of ARDBs in 13 States/UTs aims enhancing efficiency, promoting transparency, and ensuring uniformity in operations, ultimately enabling quick access to services and saving time for both administrators and the public.



The implementation involves linking these units with NABARD through a national unified software, marking a significant step in modernizing the country's cooperative banking sector. "Furthermore, the initiative aims at reducing transaction costs, facilitating loan distribu-

tion to farmers, and enabling real-time data access for better monitoring and assessment of schemes. "This will benefit small and marginal farmers, connected with ARDBs for credit and related services through Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACSs) at the grass-

roots level," said an official from the Ministry. During the event being jointly organized by the Ministry and national cooperative lender National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), the Minister will also launch computerization of offices of the RCS in all States and Union Territories, motivating them for e-functioning and implement an IT-oriented workflow by the Cooperative Acts and Regulations of the States and Union Territories. Along with this, its targets also include better efficiency, accountability, and transparency in RCS offices, setting up analytics, and ensuring linkage with the national database. The Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACSs) are



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A day ahead of his annual 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' interaction with the students, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it has become a good medium to discuss issues related to education and examinations. In his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said over 2.25 crore students have registered for the programme this year, noting that the corresponding number was merely 22,000 in 2018 when it

was organised for the first time. The prime minister said this is one programme which he always looked forward to as it gives him an opportunity to interact with the students and he also tries to mitigate their exam related stress. "Many innovative efforts have also been undertaken to inspire the students and spread awareness about exam related stress. I urge all of you, especially the youth and students, to join in record numbers tomorrow. I too would love to talk to you," he said.

Arif claim on SFI attack blatant lies: CPM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The ruling CPI(M) will continue its attacks against Governor Arif Mohammed Khan despite the Union Home Ministry's decision to upgrade his security to that of Z Plus and the deployment of CRPF commandoes to ensure his protection. This was stated by MV Govindan, Kerala CPI (M) secretary while speaking to media persons on Sunday. Govindan, in a no-holds-barred attack charged the Governor as liar, buffoon and stooge of the RSS. "Whatever he claims about Saturday's

attack on him by our SFI comrades are blatant lies. The people in the State have seen what happened at Nilamal (where the Governor's car was intercepted by CP I(M)/SFI activists) on Saturday. The Governor is spreading falsehood across the country," charged Govindan. The party secretary made it clear that the demonstrations and agitations against Arif Mohammed Khan would continue and the SFI activists would be provided with all help by the CPI(M). "Kerala is the best State in the country and the Governor is trying to make the Center



intervene here and get the Government dismissed. It will not work in Kerala," said Govindan. His statement has to be read with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's views on the Centre's decision to upgrade the Governor's security and hand over the same to the CRPF. "This is unheard of anywhere in the country. The CRPF security is meant for RSS hotheads and the Governor is one among them. Even if the security is overseen by the CRPF, the Kerala Police is the only authority which is capable of arresting or prosecuting those who demonstrate the Governor,"

said Vijayan (also known as Karana Bhoothan) while reacting to the Center's order. Karana Bhoothan said there is no law and order problems in the State and Governor is the only person making a hue and cry over it. "There is no security threat to me or other ministers," he pointed out. But the chief minister's convoy consist of nearly 60 cars/SUVs and 500 policemen whenever he comes out in the open. The recently concluded Nava Kerala Sadass was in the news because of the high handed behavior of the cops and the party activists who unleashed a terror across the

State by beating up those who dared to wave black flags at the chief minister's convoy. V Muraleedharan, union minister of State for foreign affairs alleged that the chief minister has literally insulted and disgraced the elite CRPF as a force to provide exclusive security to RSS activists. Political pundits are of the view that the CPI(M) is trying to force the Centre to dismiss the Kerala Government under Section 356 of the Constitution so that in the ensuing election the party could get public sympathy and return to power.

Kerala Government hikes wages of Anganwadi workers, helpers

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government on Sunday announced a wage hike for over 60,000 Anganwadi workers and helpers in the state with an increment of up to Rs 1,000. Announcing the decision, Finance Minister K N Balagopal said the wages of Anganwadi workers and helpers with more than 10 years of service would be raised by Rs 1,000. The wages of others would be hiked by Rs 500, he said in a statement. A total of 60,232 workers in the sector would benefit from the pay hike. At present, Anganwadi workers and helpers draw a monthly salary of Rs 12,000 and Rs 8,000 respectively in the state. They would be eligible for the revised wages retrospectively from December 2023. There are 33,115 Anganwadis in the state under 258 Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), the statement added.

Will soon identify Rahul body double used in Nyay Yatra in Assam: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he will soon share the name and address of the "body double" purportedly used by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the state. Sarma had brought up the allegation of the Congress MP using a "body double" during the Yatra at a press conference on Thursday, during which he quoted a news report claiming that the person sitting and waving at people from the Yatra bus was "probably not Rahul Gandhi at all". "I don't just say things. The duplicate's name, and how it was done -- I will share all details. Just wait for a few days," the chief minister said on Saturday in Sonitpur district on the sidelines of a programme, when asked by reporters about the allegation



against Gandhi. "I will be in Dibrugarh tomorrow (Sunday), and the next day also I will be out of Guwahati. Once I am back in Guwahati, I will give the name and address of the duplicate," he said. The Manipur-Maharashtra Nyay Yatra, being led by Gandhi, had travelled through Assam from January 18 to 25, during which the Congress MP had alleged that Sarma was the "most corrupt CM of India". The opposition party also

alleged denial or problems in route permissions through the state by the BJP-led government. The situation reached a flashpoint when Congress leaders and workers broke police barricades erected to prevent them from entering the main city limits of Guwahati. An FIR was registered against Gandhi and others over the incident, with Sarma later stating that they would be arrested after the Lok Sabha polls as he did not want to "politicise" the issue prior to

the elections. Sarma maintained that the Congress will need "all the Gandhis" -- Sonia, Priyanka and Rahul - to defeat him in the state. "Let them bring Priyanka Gandhi's son also," he said. "They have already put up their hands (in surrender). They couldn't do it through Rahul, so they will now get Priyanka and then Sonia," Sarma said, referring to the Congress' proposed programme in the state involving Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. On BJP and its allies' Lok Sabha poll prospects in the state, the CM said, "We have 11-and-a-half assured seats. We are working on how to convert it into 12. We are not bothered about any Congress list (of candidates)." There are 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Of those, nine are currently held by the BJP, three by Congress, one by AIUDF and one Independent.

Reached seat sharing understanding with some INDIA Bloc partners: Kharge

PTI ■ KALABURAGI (KTK)

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday said his party has held talks with all alliance partners of INDIA bloc on seat-sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, and reached an understanding with some of them, while the dialogue with others is at the final stages. He said the Congress has already begun preparation for the Lok Sabha polls with the



ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' led by party leader Rahul Gandhi and his own visit to various places across the country. "Our party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is going on. I have also visited Telangana, and will be travelling to Dehradun, Odisha, Bihar, Delhi, Kerala and other places. Dates have been fixed for my visits and Rahul Gandhi will also come to a few places. We have already started our preparations. It is

our party work and programme, we will do, it should not be compared with other parties," Kharge told reporters here. On seat sharing with alliance partners, he said he has constituted a six-member committee headed by Congress leader Mukul Wasnik. "The committee has already held talks with everyone -- with partners in Bihar, also AAP, TMC, and all our alliance partners.

India have often become "target" of conversion attempts by mainstream religions, with individuals enticed through "temptation of material benefit", Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed on Sunday. He urged younger generations to keep alive the indigenous faiths and religions, while also outlining the measures taken by his government in this regard. Sarma was speaking at the inaugural session of the 8th International Conference and Gathering of Elders here, which will continue till February 1. It has been organised by the International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS), a non-profit socio-cultural forum for spiritual masters of ancient traditions and cultures of the world. Emphasising the importance of indigenous faiths and culture globally as well as in India and Assam, which are home to several tribes and communities, Sarma said it is essential to preserve these age-old belief systems as these are integral to the country's cultural landscape. "Unfortunately, indigenous communities in India often become the target of conversion efforts by mainstream religions. Missionary activities carried out by various religious groups can result in a decline of population who practise indigenous faith," the CM maintained. He claimed that the "temptation of material benefit, education and healthcare benefits provided by missionary organisations influence individuals to convert".

Addressing the press conference, Yadav said that an MoU will be signed for the benefit of the people. "I hope that by today evening an agreement will be ready and an MoU will be signed for the benefit of the people. It will have large scale benefits in terms of tourism, industries, educational institutes and irrigation belt. I hope that areas of both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan will prosper," the Madhya Pradesh chief minister said. He said that it will benefit the people of Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Indore, Ujjain and Dewas, and seven dams will be built. He said that some issues are pending and talks at the

bureaucratic level are on. A decision will be taken by the evening, he added. Earlier, Yadav upon reaching Jaipur Airport, had said that he has come to take a decision on water distribution of Parvati, Chambai and Kali Sindh rivers, which will benefit both the states and lakhs of farmers. "Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments are going to take some decision regarding long pending river water distribution of Parvati, Chambal and Kali Sindh," Yadav told reporters at Jaipur Airport. He further said, "The decision will not only be for the betterment of both the states, but will also change the lives of lakhs of farmers. It will open the doors for development opportunities in tourism, industries and other sectors." Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP), an ambitious drinking and irrigation water project, was announced by the BJP government in the state budget 2017-18 for the permanent solution to the problem of drinking and irrigation water in 13 districts of eastern Rajasthan, namely Jhalawar, Baran, Kota Bundi, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Tok, Jaipur, Dausa, Karauli, Alwar, Bharatpur and Dholpur.

Sikkim: BJP leaders in huddle with eye on polls

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Leaders of the BJP in Sikkim held a meeting to take stock of the party's organisational strength with an eye on the Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections, which are held simultaneously in the state. The meeting, held on Saturday, was attended by the party's state president DR Thapa, chief advisor Tseten Tashi Bhutia and other executive members. At the meeting, the BJP leaders discussed the party's organisational strength, its growth in Sikkim, and the formulation of a comprehensive roadmap for the upcoming elections. The party's state leadership emphasised the importance of strengthening the organisation at the grass-roots level. Addressing the gathering, Thapa spoke on the importance of collective responsibility for the growth of the party. He urged everyone to work together, maintaining that only through concerted efforts the organisation can thrive and achieve its goals. In the 32-member Sikkim assembly, the BJP has 12 MLAs.

Manipur tribal organisation to oppose fencing of India, Myanmar border

PTI ■ IMPHAL

A tribal organisation in Manipur's Churachandpur district said it will "oppose" the Centre's decision to fence and Indo-Myanmar border. Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) held a public consultation in the district headquarters town on Saturday where it was resolved to "oppose" the Centre's decision to fence the Indo-Myanmar border and to cancel the Free Movement Regime, a statement issued by ITLF said. The Free Movement Regime allows people living on both sides of the border to travel 16 km into each other's territory without a visa. Four Indian states -- Arunachal Pradesh,

Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, share a 1,643-km-long border with Myanmar. The statement said the ITLF also decided to approach the Mizoram government for the "political future of Kuki Zo people". More than 31,000 people from Myanmar, mostly from the Chin state, have taken refuge in Mizoram following the military coup in the neighbouring country in February 2021. Many also took shelter in Manipur. Union Home Minister Amit Shah on January 20 said in Guwahati that the government will end the free movement of people at the India-Myanmar border, and fence it completely so that it can be protected like the country's boundary with Bangladesh.

Surya Namaskar to be conducted in all Rajasthan Government schools

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Surya Saptami' on February 15 will be observed in Rajasthan with a mass 'Surya Namaskar' programme in all government schools across the state. Following the order of School Education Minister Madan Dilawar, Director of Secondary Education Department Ashish Modi issued an order directing all chief district education officers to conduct 'Surya Namaskar' in morning prayers. He said that the department aims to make a world record on February 15 by conducting



mass 'Surya Namaskar' by students, parents and teachers in all the schools. "The practice of 'Surya Namaskar' has already begun in schools. All the students are expected to perform 'Surya Namaskar' along with their parents and teachers.

Those with medical conditions will not participate," Modi told PTI. He said that initially the event is for one day on 'Surya Saptmi', and if the government instructs, further orders will be issued to make it a regular campaign in view

of the health benefits of 'Surya Namaskar'. Modi said that chief district education officers have been instructed in the order, issued on January 23, to conduct training of 'Surya Namaskar' to teachers and students by qualified instructors. The director said that 'Surya Namaskar' will be performed simultaneously by students, parents, teachers, villagers in all schools on February 15 and this would become a "world record". He said that education officers have also been asked to update about the number of participants by 2 pm on February 15.

Pondy Government steps up security ahead of Dhankar visit

PTI ■ PUDUCHERRY

The Puducherry government has stepped up security before the two-day visit of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on January 28 and 29. Puducherry District Magistrate E Vallavan said in a release on Saturday that Section 144 (2) of CrPC would remain in force on the two days, restricting the use of aerial platforms such as drones or balloons. The order declares the areas coming within the limits of Puducherry and Oulgarat municipalities as 'no-fly zone'. The district magistrate said any violation of the order would be punishable under section 188 of Indian Penal code and other relevant provisions of the law. The vice president is scheduled to address students at the Pondicherry Central University here today. He is the ex-officio Chancellor of the University. Dhankhar would offer prayers at the famous shrine of Manakula Vinayakar here on January 29 and would proceed to Chidambaram in the neighbouring Tamil Nadu to pray at the shrine of Lord Nataraja, official sources said. This is Dhankhar's first visit to Puducherry after he became the vice president.

Modi wave felt across India, says Pradhan

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Claiming that India has been witnessing a "Modi Wave", senior BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asserted that Odisha is all set to witness a major political change with the people of the state reposing trust in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pradhan said this while attending booth-level public contact programmes in Bhubaneswar and Pipili.

"Today, entire India including Odisha has been witnessing a Modi wave. The blessings and respect of the people of Odisha towards the Prime Minister are increasing. Modi guarantee is the hope of people," Pradhan said. During the booth-level public contact programmes, he had breakfast and food in house of BJP workers in different places and also painted the party's poll symbol 'lotus' at the doorstep of the house he visited. Taking to X, Pradhan said, "Joined a walk at Gobindpur



Siula I Pipili, the heart of rich art, culture and heritage. I put stickers on Modi's message in

every house and met the village elders, women and youths and distributed

pamphlet prepared on the successful schemes implemented by the Modi government." Speaking to reporters in the state capital, Pradhan said politics in Odisha has been taking a turn as people at the grassroots level have made up their minds to go in for a significant change in the upcoming elections. He said there is a lot of enthusiasm among women and youth about the Prime Minister Modi. To add to the BJP's growth,

Pradhan said, "People of Odisha are reposing their faith in the guarantee of Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the Modi guarantee," he said. "I sincerely feel that the Modi guarantee will definitely do magic in Odisha in the upcoming elections and bring a major change in the state's political scenario," Pradhan said. He said the morale of workers and leaders of BJP and youths in Odisha is high as the prime minister is scheduled to visit Odisha next month.

Stree shakti

The rise and rise of women power in India across sectors calls for celebrating women and womanhood

In recent years, India has witnessed a remarkable and inspiring phenomenon — the meteoric rise of women across varied fields. From business, medicine, politics and education to science and technology, Indian women are breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes and taking giant strides in traditionally male-dominated fields. This surge of empowerment is aptly celebrated as 'Stree Shakti', highlighting the strength, resilience and capability of the nation's female force. One of the most noticeable trends in recent times is the increasing presence of women in leadership roles and entrepreneurship. Women-led businesses are flourishing, contributing not only to the nation's economic growth but also challenging the conventional gender roles. From tech startups to traditional enterprises, women entrepreneurs are carving a niche, proving that gender is not a hindrance to success. In the fields of science and technology, women are making groundbreaking contributions, redefining



the landscape of innovation. India has seen a rise in the number of women scientists, engineers and innovators who are actively involved in cutting-edge research and technological advancements. Their achievements not only propel India's progress in these domains but also inspire the next generation of women to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). It is indeed a matter of pride that many women contributed to the successful Chandrayaan-3, which speaks volumes about their determination. Moreover, the healthcare sector in India has been witnessing a significant transformation, thanks to the rise of

women in medicine. Women doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals are at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and advancements. Their contributions extend beyond traditional healthcare roles, influencing healthcare policies, research and the overall well-being of society. In the realm of education, women are excelling as educators, administrators and researchers. Female scholars are contributing to diverse fields of study, bringing fresh perspectives and insights to academia. While celebrating the rise of 'Stree Shakti', it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that women continue to face in their professional journeys. Gender bias, stereotypes and systemic hurdles persist, but the resilience and determination of women in India are breaking down these barriers. Organisations, both public and private, are recognising the importance of gender diversity and actively working towards creating more inclusive work environments. The Prime Minister's clarion call for 'Beti Bachao, Beti Pado' is indeed a laudable step but the real challenge is to change people's mindset. Rising women power in India is not only about today's achievements but also about paving the way for future generations. The celebration of 'Stree Shakti' is a celebration of diversity, equality and the collective strength of a nation on the path of progress.

PICTALK



Artists who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Delhi

PTI

Virtual reality and AI will transform real estate market

Artificial Intelligence and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics

The integration of technology into the real estate sector is ushering in a new era of innovation and efficiency. As digital transformation accelerates, emerging technologies are poised to reshape the property landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for stakeholders across the industry. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies are revolutionising the property viewing experience. By offering immersive virtual tours and interactive floor plans, these technologies enable prospective buyers and tenants to explore properties remotely, thereby expanding market reach and enhancing customer engagement. In 2024, VR and AR applications will become increasingly sophisticated, offering personalised experiences.

Blockchain and Smart Contracts: Blockchain technology and smart contracts are transforming property transactions by enhancing security, transparency, and efficiency. By creating immutable digital records and automating contract execution, these technologies



mitigate fraud risks and streamline the conveyancing process. In the coming years, the adoption of blockchain and smart contracts will become more widespread, enabling seamless, secure, and cost-effective real estate transactions.

AI and Data Analytics Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics. By analyzing market trends, identifying investment opportunities, and optimizing property management processes, AI-driven solutions are enhancing decision-making capabilities and driving operational excellence. As AI algorithms become more advanced and data analytics tools more sophisticated, the integration of these technologies will continue to

redefine the real estate industry's competitive landscape. In conclusion, the fusion of technology and real estate in 2024 is not merely a trend but a seismic shift that promises to redefine the very essence of property transactions and experiences. This transformative journey unfolds across multiple dimensions, each offering a unique blend of innovation, efficiency, and opportunity.

At the forefront, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing property exploration, transcending the limitations of physical distance and enabling prospective buyers and tenants to embark on immersive journeys through properties from the comfort of their homes. The evolution of these technologies in 2024 is set to introduce personalized experiences that resonate with individual preferences, thereby amplifying market reach and fostering deeper connections between properties and potential occupants. Parallely, the emergence of Blockchain technology and smart contracts is ushering in an era of unprecedented security, transparency,

and efficiency in property transactions. These innovations are not only mitigating fraud risks but also reimagining the conveyancing process, paving the way for seamless, secure, and cost-effective transactions that resonate with the demands of the modern era.

Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics is empowering real estate professionals with a treasure trove of actionable insights and predictive capabilities. These advancements are not only enhancing operational excellence but also shaping a future where data-driven strategies and insights drive growth, innovation, and success. Beyond the technological innovations, the real essence lies in the transformative impact these advancements are poised to create. In essence, as we venture further into 2024 and beyond, the confluence of technology and real estate is paving the way for a new era characterised by innovation, efficiency, and opportunity.

(The writer is an industry expert; views expressed are personal)



SANJEEV SRIVASTVA

Charting a path for Hindu-Muslim unity

The historic consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya signifies not just a momentous event but a call for reconciliation

Every battle must end, so must every dispute. Killings are more easily forgotten than the destruction of buildings. But when a residence of the divine is destroyed, it is unforgettable. For a Hindu, a mandir is a residence of God. The reason is that an elevated human soul either meets the divine or obtains a glimpse of Him as Ramakrishna Paramahansa did. This is very different from a synagogue, church or mosque, all of which are merely prayer halls. Their respective faiths and adherents do not consider them to be residences of the divine.

January 22, 2024 is now behind us. It has been an epoch-making day, led by the man who made it possible. The Prime Minister's consecration of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya marked the return of Lord Rama to his abode on earth after 500 years of not only waiting, but ceaseless struggle and sacrifices. Ever since Mughal invader Babar's henchman Mir Baqi destroyed the original temple at Ayodhya in 1528 AD, Hindus never gave up the struggle to reclaim the birthplace of Rama. The history of battles waged by the Hindu faithful is a long one, but December 6, 1992 was the day when the edifice known as Babri Masjid was sent to the dust. But, as our Prime Minister has said, now is perhaps the time for reconciliation.

The Somnath Temple at PrabhasPatan near Veraval (Gujarat) was destroyed by the Turkic marauder Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 A.D. Even after a thousand years later, the devilish crime has not faded from Hindu memory. Thereafter, of course, several thousand temples have been demolished or desecrated. By European traditions and the way they have conducted their politics, the dispute over these desecrations and loss caused should have been settled before New Delhi agreed to part with the share of pre-1947 India's assets to Pakistan at the time of Partition. Unfortunately, nothing was done. Instead, more temples were destroyed even in the Kashmir Valley, where India ruled.



Three-quarters of a century have since passed. Surely, it is beyond time that the issue should be settled and a reconciliation and a reconciliation achieved, if the two communities are expected to coexist cordially in the same country. The question is: what is the gesture required to bring about such a reconciliation?

Very broadly, the desecrated temples can be divided into two categories. Until the period of the Lodi Sultanate, which began from 1451 onwards, and the spread of its rule over certain regions of northern India, Islamic invaders intruding into the country were not accompanied or followed by their architects. The pre-Lodi Muslim sultans therefore, converted temples into mosques readily by smashing the edifice along with the murtis (idols) inside the sanctum sanctorum, and replacing them with mehrabs (a niche in a mosque, which indicates the qibla, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) to face Mecca and a minbar (pulpit) of steps, whereupon the imam stands every Friday to deliver his khutba (Islamic sermon).

Many temples were broken down and converted into such mosques. A prominent example of such a conversion



THERE WOULD BE ABOUT 200 TO 300 SUCH CONVERTED AND RE-CONVERTIBLE EDIFICES. THEY COULD BE RETURNED TO HINDU INSTITUTIONS, WHILE THE THOUSANDS OF RECYCLED ONES COULD BE LEFT ALONE

is the Dhaj Dina Kaljhpora, which stands at about a full-length's distance from the popular Ajmer Sharif dargah. The odd name signifies that this particular conversion was effected within sixty hours of the desecration of the original Hindu place of worship, because Shahbuddin Ghori was in a hurry to pray on his return journey via Ajmer. His slave Qutbuddin Aibak obediently had the conversion executed within two and a half days for his master and badshah to pray when he returned. The erstwhile temple had actually been a complex of three temples, which were promptly combined and converted into a mosque-like edifice. It is therefore, even now, in a condition to be reconverted into a temple, almost equally quickly.

There would be about 200 to 300 such converted and reconvertible edifices. They could be returned to Hindu institutions, while the thousands of recycled ones could be left alone, as a gesture for the process of reconciliation. These were the temples that were broken down almost to the plinth level and reconstructed with the debris being utilized in such reconstruction. The reconstruction using the same debris was done in Islamic style. These

are present in the country by the thousands, with 3,000 of them having been catalogued after being identified either with documentary evidence and/or epigraphs. These latter structures could be left alone with an apology for having reduced them to such a state, along with an undertaking that such criminal acts shall not be repeated. An undertaking must also be given that the restored temples handed over to Hindu institutions and bodies will be given away irrevocably, and no claim on them whatsoever shall ever be made in the future.

Other issues too, will inevitably come up. As part of the process of reconciliation, issues such as the uniform civil code—which are part of the Constitution of India, but as a Directive Principle—should be dealt with suitably. So also should the issue of the outdated and debilitating waqf, called a "dead hand" by a former chancellor A.A.A. Fyzee. The intention must be to not keep pending any ongoing irritant between the two communities. Let peace and goodwill prevail.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Sir — Birthday, a joyous bell, tolls yearly, awakening us to life's transient journey, as articulated by Kannada litterateur Rayasam Bheemasena Rao, aka 'Beechi.' Each celebration veils the inexorable march from newness to oldness, a reminder of aging. The initial birthday elates parents, but with time, the sheen fades. Aging, though golden at times, heralds the onset of the end. Birth mirrors morning's welcome, while death echoes evening's farewell—a cyclical journey from vitality to fatigue in life's fleeting passage.

Demise carries inherent sadness, its intensity shaped by one's connection to the departed. The passing of those deemed anti-national or anti-social elicits little collective grief; their demise isn't labeled as such by society. While family may mourn, society often finds relief. Birth heralds joy, death, sorrow—yet in troubled families, each birth may sow discord, each death easing societal burdens. Happiness at birth prevails, sorrow in death is the norm, not the exception.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

SHETTAR'S 'GHAR WAPSI'

Sir — Opportunism and greed have overruled all values in politics. Days before the Karnataka assembly elections in May 2023, former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar had joined the Congress miffed over being denied a ticket. Unfortunately, though the party comfortably romped home, Shettar lost in his bastion. But despite the defeat, he was made a member of the state legislative council. Now, after nine months in Congress, Shettar is back in the BJP. Political circles are agog with reasons for Shettar's "ghar wapsi" but one cannot overlook the fact that he is the same person who had declared that he would never return to the BJP in his lifetime.

There is no doubt that Shettar, being a powerful member of the influential Lingayat community in Karnataka, has contributed to the rise of BJP in the state.

Dietary controversy



The move that has ignited widespread criticism, the Maharashtra government has decided to mark the food preferences of students on their identity cards, distinguishing between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The contentious decision aims to streamline the dis-

tribution of specific food items, namely bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians, under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti scheme. The state's school education department had previously announced the inclusion of additional items in midday meals to enhance nutritional value, introducing bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians.

A recent department circular recommends using visible red or green dots on students' ID cards to signify their dietary preferences, causing widespread criticism from educators who deem it unnecessary. Critics argue that the classification, indicating egg consumption consent, may not consider occasional exceptions, especially in diverse cultural backgrounds. Religious sentiments, particularly concerns about offending vegetarians, further complicate the implementation. The circular's practicality is also questioned, as objections highlight potential issues with this rigid system.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

The BJP is wary of the fact that his deserting the party could have resulted in some of its candidates losing the elections in the Kittur Karnataka region. With the all-important general elections a few months away, the BJP wants to leave nothing to chance. Shettar may also have struck a deal. That being said, the party would have sent a great message to all turncoat politicians had it declined to welcome Shettar back.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

WOMEN POWER AT KARTAVYA PATH

Sir — The 75th Republic Day celebration turns more glorious with the maximum participation of Women this time in the Republic Day parade. For the first time in history, a women tri-service contingent marches down the Kartavya Path, showcasing the Women's Power of New India. The 100 women artists heralded the parade invocation with their musical band. Later Monika Lakara commended

her team. CISF contingent is also led by Kashyap Monika, Megha Nayak commended Ambika Patil commended the ITBP marching band, Jaya Sharma commended the SSB band, and so on. Watching Indian women march proudly along the Kartavya Path on the 75th Republic Day is profoundly touching. Their gallantry embodies the fulfillment of their responsibility to the nation. The delightful spirit of Nari Shakti, evident in their jubilant participation, fills every Indian with a sense of triumphant pride. This inclusive celebration signals to the world our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Witnessing women leading development in a new India transforms every celebration into a true jubilation, an honor to behold.


Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TEACHERS ARE THE PIVOT OF EDUCATION

A satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of pupils



SAKSHI SETHI

The culture of work ethic rests on delayed gratification, hyper-competitiveness and the perpetual need to outperform what machines can do. The outcome is often disappointment and life dissatisfaction. Living in a so-called modern-day technological world, a workplace environment today has a direct impact on job satisfaction. Of course, money, work-life balance and diversity play a crucial part, but being fulfilled and happy at your job is a hard feeling to beat. A favourable work environment can boost morale, motivation, teamwork, performance and production whilst a poor work environment can contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. It is a well-established reality that organizations in the world today can no longer survive without focusing on their employees.

If they have to be at a competitive edge, they have to invest in their human resources and place them on top priority. Studies have even found that more than half of job seekers would reject a job offer if they found that the company to which they are looking forward had a bad workplace culture as it can negatively impact their mental and physical well-being and above all their career growth. The Indian Education System for instance is facing a continuing concern in terms of recruiting and retaining its quality teachers.

It is widely acknowledged that teachers have a pivotal role in the development of an inclusive education system for it is believed that the teacher is the most vital single factor of influence in the system of education. Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly accountable for teaching outcomes to meet rigorous accreditation standards. It is the teacher who matters most as far as the quality of education is concerned. A well-adjusted and satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of his/her pupils. It is in the interests of educational institutions and the systems to ensure that levels of job satisfaction are held high so that the main focus of educational institutions, is not hindered. Job satisfaction in any field of work depends a lot on how conducive the work environment is.

Poor working conditions, low levels of pay, no scope for career advancements and lack of recognition will definitely result in increased rates of absenteeism, poor productivity, frustration and even high turnover rates resulting in a decline in target achievement and finally its closure. Employee turnover affects the productivity of the company.

An employee may serve in an organization for a long time provided that he/she is contented with his/her work. The behavior of an employee also depends on their satisfaction. When a worker is satisfied and contented, he tends to behave well for it has been often said, "A Happy Employee Is a Productive Employee." Remember, job satisfaction is like a high-wire balancing act, with multiple factors constantly in play. There is nothing more discouraging in the workplace than being insecure about the job.

Human resources are the most important resources in any organisation and in order to ensure that an organisation can compete with other firms, retaining efficient and experienced employees is the first and foremost step.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Historical factors at play in Israel-Palestine conflict



SUKHDEV SINGH

This conflict finds its roots in history that spans over a century when the Zionist movement, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, gained momentum

The past 114 day-long Israel-Palestine war has an immediate as well as a long historical context: the immediate context of the war is the Hamas attack killing 1200 and taking 120 Israeli civilians as hostages on October 7 last year; while its long history begins with the proposal to establish the Jewish homeland, Israel, in this region after their dispersion from European countries. During the first world-war, the proposal gets impetus and the 'conflict' becomes intense with the British promising Jews to help them set up the Jewish homeland in Palestine after the collapse of Ottoman Empire for their influence on the US to support the post-war policies of the Britain. The conception and claim of homeland by the Jews dispersed from Europe on the same swathes of land where a mix of Muslim, Jew, and Christian population is already in place holding their identity as Arabs or Palestinians generates a 'conflict' of Jewish-Israeli nationalism pitted against the Palestinian-Arabic nationalism. The 'conflict' gains intensity at the revelation of the three self-contradictory agreements made by the British authorities during this time for their own imperialist interests treating the region as 'terra nullius' or 'booty of the war': these agreements are famous as the 'Hussain-McMahon Correspondence' (1915-1916), the 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' (1916) and the 'Balfour Declaration' (1917).

The 'Hussain-McMahon Correspondence' promised Arabs the independence of Palestine in exchange for their support for the British against the Ottoman (Uthman) Empire in the First World War, yet, on the other hand, in contradiction the 'Balfour Declaration', promised the Jews their 'homeland' in the Palestine. But after the war, using 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' between the British and the French, the British took Palestine region under their 'Authority' securing a safe access to India through the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf but deepening the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The Palestine region remained under the British Authority until 1948 and between 1917- 1948, emigration of Jews in Palestine and the Israel-Palestine conflict swelled in parallel. In 1930, the Arabs launched a revolt against the British colonial rule in Palestine and its policy of Jewish resettlement here, which resulted in a plan to partition Palestine into the Jewish and Arab states leaving Jerusalem under international administration. The Jewish leaders accepted but the Arab states and the Palestinians rejected the proposal.

On the other hand, during the Second World War, the Jewish Holocaust campaign in Germany and some other European countries left the Jews homeless. In August 1945, by the American President, Truman's appeal to the British Prime Minister, Attlee, to settle 100,000 Nazi Holocaust victims in Palestine, America also joined the powers that would determine the future of Palestine, though neither America nor Britain offered them refuge in America or Britain. The Arabs sympathized with the displaced Jews, but opposed the creation of Israel on the Palestinian territories. America and Britain continued to orient their policy on Palestine to their convenience.

Tired of the Second World War and directly dealing with the civil war in



Palestine, the British government ended its Authority over Palestine at midnight on 14 May, 1948 leaving the Jewish-Arab factions fighting each other during the civil war. On the same day the Jewish leadership in Palestine announced the establishment of the State of Israel. The birth of Israel from a violent war caused the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinian-Arabs. It is called by the Jews the 'War of Independence' but by the Palestinians as the 'Nakba' meaning 'destruction and desolation'. Since then Palestine has been a land of 'conflicts', 'battles' and third party 'peace agreements'. The current 'Israel- Palestinian war' building on more than 100 years of conflict and internecine battles for their 'homelands' in the same geographical territories is guided by the right-wing nationalism on both sides, with the external third party players consistently present to fulfil their (neo)colonial interests. In the 2023-24 Israel-Palestine war, Israel and Hamas or Palestine are the parties directly in conflict, and much of the discussion about the war is usually focused on 'who of the immediate players in the war is more culpable' and 'who of the two has a stronger claim for its 'homeland' in the same region, while the role of third parties in the war remains elusive.

One breed of third party players is of those coerced into war and circumscribed by their regional geographical, cultural and historical existence; they are affected by what happens in the region. But there is another breed of third party extra-regional powers in the war whose presence is guided by their geo-political and economic interests; they act as catalysts to turn the 'conflict' into a 'war' and choose between 'right' and 'left' to their convenience. To understand the multifaceted politics of the Israeli-Palestinian war, it is also important to describe the role of these catalyst forces at work behind the war.

By vetoing the UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' America and Britain have helped the war to inflame and by sanctioning the sale of weapons and ammunition twice, America has fuelled the war and encouraged the right-wing Israeli government passion for displacement of Palestinian population. In the name of eliminating Hamas and their bases, the indiscriminate heavy bombardment by Israel, with the unflinching support and encouragement by the US, has led to the mass destruction of ordinary Palestinian civilians. Israel's current war against Hamas is in reality a war against Palestinians. The Israel-Palestine war of 2023-24 is the worst not only because the majority of the dead are civilians but also because it is being fought like a genocide. The right-wing Israeli government, led by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, wants complete Israeli control in Palestine and does not recognize any role for the Palestinian Authority. Two Israeli ministers of the Israeli government have revealed their ideology by their advice to the Palestinians to leave for the country that permits them.

The American support has reinforced such an ideology. Facing challenges from within and without, pressure from the countries of West Asia and fear of Israel becoming more intransigent, America has reviewed its policy in Palestine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with the leaders of Turkey, Qatar and Jordan on his fourth diplomatic tour of West Asia to drum up support for the US post-war plan of 'two states' and reconstruction of Gaza. In a press conference he has said that the Palestinians should not be pressured to leave Gaza.

But the US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller's comments on a lawsuit in the International Court of Justice by South Africa against Israel for committing 'genocide' contradict its 'peace proposal' and exposes its position on displacement.


On the one hand, America's support for a 'two-state solution' and criticism of Israel's claim for Jewish state on the whole region, but on the other hand, billions of dollars annual US aid to Israel for years and sale of arms during the war and veto of UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' exposes its ambivalent policy on Gaza and cleverness as of Britain during the First World War. After all, Israel is using the US aid and weapons to occupy Palestinian territories and disperse the Palestinian population.

(The writer is retired professor Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member, Governing Council, INTECH; views are personal)

Unsung heroes in Padma awards list to boost heritage preservation

Among the latest Padma Shri awardees, 34 were ordinary citizens, including tribals and those working for tribal welfare

The Padma Awards, the prestigious civilian honours in India, are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. These awards aim to acknowledge achievements across various fields where a component of public service is evident. The history of the Padma Awards dates back to 1954 when the Government of India established two civilian awards— Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. The latter initially had three classes: Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg, and Tisra Varg. They were later renamed Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri through a Presidential Notification issued on January 8, 1955. Even though the Padma award has been bestowed on various




BIJU DHARMAPALAN

celebrated people since 1954, it was only from 2014 onwards that it started focusing on the common man. Till then, it was a distant dream for a commoner to aim for the award. Even when we recognise a scientist working in the lab for their note-worthy contributions, we often forget the thousands of real 'scientists' who work on the field utilising the knowledge they gathered through the ages from their forefathers. There are great farmers who are developing new plant varieties

and cultivation packages. There are great tribal healers who can cure diseases even without the least knowledge of modern science. There are great conservation biologists who know how to conserve nature without any understanding of ecology. There are excellent climatologists who can predict weather simply by looking at the changes happening in nature. There are exemplary people working in astronomy, metallurgy, engineering and other fields. These people work selflessly for the benefit of society without realising even the significance of their work for society. Behind every architectural marvelance or artistic work, there is the craftsmanship of our skilled labour force. Unfortunately, people recognise only the finished product, not the hand that made it happen.

There are thousands of such people who live amongst us without seeking any attention. They may not hold a PhD degree or a professional degree, but their knowledge and scientific skills are more than those of a trained scientist.



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There are thousands of such people who live amongst us without seeking any attention. They may not hold a PhD degree or a professional degree, but their knowledge and scientific skills are more than those of a trained scientist.

In the recent list of 110 Padma Shri awardees, it was announced that 34 were such ordinary people, of whom more than one-third are tribals or those who have worked for tribal welfare. The prominent unsung heroes include Parbati Baruah, fondly known as "Hathi ki Pari," a female elephant trainer from Goalparahas, Assam. Defying

deep-rooted stereotypes, Baruah has devoted four decades to addressing human-elephant conflicts. Her scientific methodology has supported three state governments in effectively managing and capturing troublesome tuskers, illustrating the effectiveness of challenging conventional norms.

The farming community is doing yeoman service for the nation and humanity. It's appreciable that many farmers found a place on this year's Padma list. Sathanarayana Beleri, the rice farmer from Kasaragod, conserves 650 traditional rice varieties on his farm without any sophisticated infrastructure, which even ICAR institutions don't do. Other farmers who were recognised include Sarbeswar

Basumatary, the tribal farmer from Chirang, Assam; K Chellammal, an Organic farmer from Andaman; Yanung Jamoh Lego from Arunachal Pradesh and Sanjay Anant Patil of Goa. Many people who work in nature conservation, folk arts and craftsmanship have also been recognised.

The knowledge these exceptional people garnered was passed down through generations orally and is not documented properly. The knowledge is shared only among the close family members. In most cases, the second generation shifts away from the traditional workforce, moving toward more lucrative urban jobs. In the long run, if there are no takers for this traditional knowledge, it will become

extinct, as happened to the Indian Knowledge system. Modi government's initiative to recognise such people is a futuristic vision to preserve the remnants of still-prevailing Indian knowledge. This will revive interest in their community to carry forward the great work their forefathers have been doing. Recognition through a coveted award like Padma Shri will also provide them respect from other members of the society. The government has fostered a sense of self-confidence and admiration for one's work by making the Padma award accessible to the common man.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal)

UN chief calls for resumed funding of Palestinian aid agency

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

The secretary-general of the United Nations on Sunday called on countries to resume funding the main agency providing aid in the Gaza Strip after a dozen of its employees were accused of taking part in the Hamas attack on Israel that ignited the war four months ago.

The dispute engulfing the UN agency for Palestinian refugees came as US officials said negotiators were closing in on a cease-fire agreement. The emerging deal would bring a two-month halt to the deadliest-ever Israeli-Palestinian violence, which has stoked instability across the Middle East.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the agency known as UNRWA would be forced to scale back aid to more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza as soon as February. The coastal enclave is in the grip of a severe humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation as fighting and Israeli restrictions hinder the

delivery of humanitarian aid to the besieged territory. “The abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences,” Guterres said in a statement.

“But the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalised. The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met,” he added.

He said that of the 12 employees accused of taking part in the attack, nine were immediately terminated, one was confirmed dead and two others were still being identified. He said they would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution.

A GAZA LIFELINE AT RISK OF COLLAPSE

UNRWA provides basic services, from medical care to education, for Palestinian families who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding the country’s creation. They now live in built-up refugee

camp in Gaza, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The refugees and their descendants number about 6 million, and in Gaza they are the majority of the population. UNRWA, which has some 13,000 staff members in Gaza, expanded its operations during the war and runs shelters that house hundreds of thousands of newly displaced people.

More than 2 million of the territory’s 2.3 million people depend on the agency’s programmes for “sheer survival”, including food and shelter, UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said. It’s a lifeline that could “collapse any time now”, he said after the funding was suspended.

The United States, which is the agency’s largest donor, immediately cut funding over the weekend, followed by eight other countries, including Britain, Germany and Italy. Together, the nine countries provided nearly 60 per cent of UNRWA’s budget in 2022.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 26,000

Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85 per cent of the territory’s people. The October 7 Hamas attack into southern Israel that sparked the war killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took about 250 hostages to Gaza.

PROGRESS IN CEASE-FIRE TALKS

Two senior Biden administration officials said US negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 remaining hostages.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas in a first 30-day phase. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow

more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a weeklong cease-fire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets on Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel.

Despite the apparent progress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated in a televised news conference late Saturday that the war would continue until “complete victory” over Hamas. Netanyahu also lashed out at the mass protests held by families of the hostages and their supporters calling for another cease-fire and exchange deal. He said the demonstrations “strengthen the demands of Hamas”.

Netanyahu’s popularity has plummeted since October 7 and he has faced mounting protests demanding new elections, with many Israelis blaming him for the unprecedented security failures that day as well as the plight of the hostages. Tens of thousands of Israelis join weekly Saturday night protests in Tel Aviv, and recently dozens of relatives of the hostages have started protesting outside of Netanyahu’s private residence in Caesarea.

ISRAEL UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER COURT RULING

The dispute over UNRWA came as the International Court of Justice ruled Friday that Israel must do its utmost to limit death and destruction in its Gaza offensive and facilitate more humanitarian aid.

The binding ruling stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but was in part a rebuke of Israel’s conduct in the war. The case brought by South Africa to the UN court alleged Israel is committing genocide, which Israel vehemently denies. A final ruling is

expected to take years.

The amount of aid entering Gaza remains well below the daily average of 500 trucks before the war, and UN agencies say distribution has been severely hampered by the fighting and delays at Israeli checkpoints. In the past week, family members of the hostages and their supporters have blocked aid trucks from entering Gaza at the Kerem Shalom crossing, contributing to the backlog. On Sunday, dozens of protesters again blocked the entry, chanting “No aid will cross until the last hostages return.” Later in the day, the military declared the area around the crossing a closed military zone, which would prohibit protests there.

The move appeared aimed at ensuring the crossing can function. Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the militants embed themselves in the local population.

Israel says its air and ground offensive in Gaza has killed more than 9,000 militants, without providing evidence.

US sees signs of progress on deal to release hostages

Washington (AP): US negotiators are making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas in Gaza for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages who were captured in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, according to two senior administration officials.

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive discussions, said Saturday that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phases.

In the first phase, fighting would stop to allow for the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas.

Israel and Hamas would then aim to work out details during the first 30 days of the pause for a second phase in which Israeli soldiers and civilian men would be released. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

While the proposed deal would not end the war, US officials are hopeful that such an agreement could lay the groundwork for a durable resolution to the conflict.

The New York Times first reported on Saturday that progress has been made towards an agreement for a pause in fighting in exchange for the remaining hostages.

CIA director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets on Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage negotiations.

President Joe Biden on Friday spoke by phone with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Qatar’s ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. Calls with both leaders focused on the hostage situation.

Mali, Niger & Burkina Faso withdraw from West Africa regional bloc ECOWAS

AP ■ ABUJA

West African nations Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have withdrawn from the regional economic bloc known as ECOWAS, their respective juntas announced Sunday, accusing the bloc of “inhuman” sanctions to reverse the coups in their nations.

The juntas said in a joint statement read out on state television in all three countries that they have “decided in complete sovereignty on the immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),” alleging that the bloc has “moved away from the ideals of its founding fathers and pan-Africanism” after nearly 50 years of its establishment.

“Furthermore, ECOWAS, under the influence of foreign powers, betraying its founding principles, has become a threat

to its member states and its populations whose happiness it is supposed to ensure,” their statements read.

Widely seen as West Africa’s top political and regional authority, the 15-nation bloc of ECOWAS — formed in 1975 to “promote economic integration” in member states — has struggled in recent years to reverse rampant coups in the region where citizens have complained of not benefitting from rich natural resources. It’s not immediately clear how that process of the countries’ withdrawal from the bloc would be carried out. ECOWAS didn’t immediately respond to an Associated Press inquiry, though the bloc has said it only recognises democratic governments. The bloc’s regional court also ruled last year that juntas lack the power to act in place of elected governments on behalf of their nations.

Sunday’s announcement is the latest twist in a series of events that have deepened political tension in West Africa since it experienced its latest of a string of coups — in Niger — last year. It also comes as the three nations have formed a security alliance after severing military ties with France and other European nations and turning to Russia for support.

The joint statement accused ECOWAS of failing to assist those three countries in fighting “existential” threats like terrorism — the common reason cited by their militaries for deposing their democratically elected governments.

“When these States decided to take their destiny into their own hands, it (ECOWAS) adopted an irrational and unacceptable posture in imposing illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions in violation of its own texts,” the statement noted.

Climate activists throw soup at glass protecting Mona Lisa

AP ■ PARIS

Two climate activists hurled soup on Sunday at the glass protecting the Mona Lisa at the Louvre Museum in Paris and shouted slogans advocating for a sustainable food system. This came amid protests by French farmers against several issues, including low wages.

In a video posted on social media, two women with the words “FOOD RIPOSTE” written on their t-shirts could be seen passing under a security barrier to get closer to the painting and throwing soup at the glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci’s masterpiece. “What’s the most important thing?” they shouted. “Art, or right to a healthy and sustainable food?” “Our farming system is sick. Our farmers are dying at work,” they added. The Louvre employees could then be seen putting black panels in front of the



Mona Lisa and asking visitors to evacuate the room.

Paris police said two people were arrested following the incident.

On its website, the “Food Riposte” group said the French government is breaking its climate commitments and called for the

equivalent of the country’s state-sponsored health care system to be put in place to give people better access to healthy food while providing farmers a decent income. Angry French farmers have been using their tractors for days to set up road blockades and slow traffic across France to seek

better remuneration for their produce, less red tape and protection against cheap imports. They also dumped stinky agricultural waste at the gates of government offices.

On Friday, the government announced a series of measures that farmers said do not fully address their demands.

Those include “drastically simplifying” certain technical procedures and the progressive end to diesel fuel taxes for farm vehicles. Some farmers threatened to converge on Paris, starting Monday, to block the main roads leading to the capital.

New Prime Minister Gabriel Attal visited a farm on Sunday in the central region of Indre-et-Loire.

He acknowledged farmers are in a difficult position because “on the one side we say we need quality” and on the other side “we want ever-lower prices.”

Finns go to polls to elect new President

AP ■ HELSINKI

Voters in Finland were electing a new president on Sunday at an unprecedented time for the Nordic nation that is now a NATO member with its eastern border with Russia closed — two things almost unthinkable a few years ago. Polls across the country opened at 9 a.m. (0700 GMT) and will close at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT).

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy, particularly when dealing with countries outside the European Union like the United States, Russia and China. Some 4.5 million citizens are eligible to vote for Finland’s new head of state from an array of nine candidates — six men and three women. They are picking a successor to hugely popular President Sauli Niinisto, whose second six-year term expires in March. He is not eligible for re-election. No candidate is expected to get more than 50 per cent of the vote in Sunday’s first round of voting, pushing the race into a runoff in February. Recent polls suggest that former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, 55, and ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, are the leading contenders.

Stubb, who represents the conservative National Coalition Party and headed the Finnish government in 2014-2015, and veteran politician Haavisto, an ex-United Nations diplomat running for the post for the third time, are each estimated to garner 23 per cent-27 per cent of the votes. Finland’s new head of state will start a six-year term in March in a markedly different geopolitical and security situation in Europe than did incumbent Niinisto after the 2018 election.

‘Revolutionary changes taking place in India-US relationship’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Revolutionary changes are taking place in the India-US relationship, the outgoing Indian Ambassador here, Taranjit Singh Sandhu has said, stressing that the bilateral ties have only covered the tip of the iceberg and are going to go far and wide. Addressing a gathering of Indian Americans at the Republic Day celebration here, Sandhu said it is important that their second generation remains connected to India.

“I only wanted to tell you that today revolutionary changes are taking place in India, also in US-India relations,” he said, “And therefore it is important that your children and your families are aware of India, stay connected with India,” Sandhu, who retires later this month from the foreign service after more than 35 years, said. As international capital and multinational companies move into



India, all the young Indian Americans will be uniquely placed to get most of those job opportunities, Sandhu said.

“So therefore, not only for emotional, cultural, and so many other reasons but also for economic and commercial reasons, pay attention, stay connected with India,” Sandhu said. The event in McLean, Virginia was organised by the National Council of Asian Indian Associations. The outgoing ambassador was also felicitated by the community leaders for his

role in strengthening the India-US relationship. Sandhu speaking at another farewell reception organised by the Indian American Business Impact Group said that the India-US relationship has so far only touched the tip of an iceberg.

“The fact is, we have only covered the tip of the iceberg. In all these sectors, this relationship is going to go far and wide,” he said. “We are already hearing about AI, the different dimensions of AI (Artificial intelligence). India is going to play a very, very important and critical role.

Look at any of the International Monetary Fund or World Bank projections, the recovery of the world economy, India will be playing a very critical role,” he said. Sandhu reiterated that for the career prospects, jobs and growth of their kids, Indian Americans should remain connected to India.

4 die in LA murder-suicide shooting

Los Angeles (AP): Four people are dead following what police in Los Angeles characterised as a murder-suicide in the Granada Hills area on Saturday.

Officers responded shortly before 7 pm to a report of a shooting in the 11600 block of Lerdo Avenue and found four people who were pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators determined the shooting was a murder-suicide, the Los Angeles Police Department said.

After receiving the call, there was no answer when the officers arrived and knocked at the door, police said.

Police forced entry into the home and a survivor of the shooting directed them to three victims.

The deceased included a man in his late 40s and two women, one in her late 40s and another who was about 80.

Nepal, China to sign implementation plan of BRI projects: Nepal DyPM

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal and China will sign the implementation plan of the Belt and Road Initiative “very soon”, Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha said on Saturday, nearly seven years after the two neighbours inked an agreement to undertake ambitious Beijing-backed infrastructure projects in the Himalayan nation. “Once we sign the implementation plan, we will move into the implementation phase,” Shrestha, also the Minister for Home Affairs said while addressing an event here that is part of the Silk Road Youth Forum and South Asian Cooperation Conference.

He said the two countries will sign the implementation plan of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) “very soon” without specifying any date. His statement came as Sun Haiyan, a senior leader of China’s ruling Communist Party, was visiting

Nepal and meeting the country’s top leaders. The signing of the BRI implementation plan is the key to negotiate and execute the projects under the initiative.

Nepal and China signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the BRI in 2017. However, not a single project under the initiative, a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, has either been executed or negotiated.

The BRI, which aims to enhance connectivity and promote economic cooperation, has opened up new avenues for collaboration between the two nations, Shrestha said, adding that one of the cornerstones of Nepal-China cooperation is infrastructure development.

“For nations like Nepal, nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, these initiatives open up possibilities for enhanced connectivity that can transform the economic landscape,” he said. “China’s support

in building critical infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and energy projects, has been instrumental in propelling Nepal towards economic growth and stability,” Shrestha said.

The signing of the BRI implementation plan between Nepal and China has been one of the prime agenda since early 2020 but an agreement has been elusive due to differences between the two sides over investment modality. The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported.

Meanwhile, speaking during an implementation programme with various political leaders of Nepal that was organised here, Sun Haiyan, the Vice Minister of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China, urged the stakeholders of both nations to not get affected by the attempts by other countries to spoil ties between China and Nepal.

UK’s museum gets grant to mark legacy of Punjab’s last Maharajah

PTI ■ LONDON

A museum in the UK has been awarded nearly 200,000 pounds in grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to mark the legacy of Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Sikh empire. Ancient House Museum in Norfolk’s Thetford was awarded the money on its 100th anniversary, BBC reported. The museum was founded in 1924 by Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, the son of Maharajah Duleep Singh.

The 198,059 pounds (USD 2,51,712.99) grant will be used to tell the family’s story through displays, the report said.

Maharajah Duleep Singh was the youngest son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, who founded the Sikh empire in the Punjab in 1799. After the



deaths of his father and brother, Duleep Singh became ruler of the kingdom at the age of five but was removed from the throne after Britain annexed the Punjab in 1849. At the age of 15, Duleep Singh arrived in England and later made his home at Elveden Hall in Suffolk.

His family remained in the area for the next century. Prince Frederick, Duleep Singh’s second son, donated Thetford’s Ancient House Museum to the people of the town.

He was a part of the Suffolk and Norfolk Yeomanry and served in World War One.

The museum is now starting a two-year project to showcase “the fascinating history of the Duleep Singh family”, said Robyn Llewellyn, the director of England, Midlands and East for the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Norfolk County Council said the new displays would include “a sumptuous ‘treasury’ of Anglo-Punjab history, a model of Elveden Hall, a loan of a portrait of Duleep Singh and displays marking the family’s contributions and activism to achieve universal suffrage.”

The museum will also exhibit the family’s items, such as Duleep Singh’s walking stick, which was given to him by King Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales.

Joe Biden assurances to shut down border if Congress sends him deal

AP ■ COLUMBIA

Bidding to salvage a border deal in Congress that also would unlock money for Ukraine, President Joe Biden offered fresh assurances Saturday night that he would be willing to close the US-Mexico border if lawmakers would only send him a bill to sign.

Biden — also eager to disarm GOP criticism of his handling of migration at the border — said at a political event in South Carolina that he would shut down the border “right now” if Congress passed the proposed deal. The framework hasn’t been formally agreed to by Senate Democrats and Republicans and would face an uncertain future in the GOP-controlled House. “A bipartisan bill would be good for America and help fix our



broken immigration system and allow speedy access for those who deserve to be here, and Congress needs to get it done,” Biden said. “It’ll also give me as president, the emergency authority to shut down the border until it could get back under control. If that bill were the law today, I’d shut

down the border right now and fix it quickly.” The deal being negotiated in Congress would require the US to shutter the border if roughly 5,000 migrants cross illegally on any given day. Some one-day totals last year exceeded 10,000.

Former President Donald Trump has been pressuring Republicans for weeks to kill the negotiations. He’s loathe to give a win to Biden on an issue that animated the Republican’s successful 2016 campaign and that he wants to use as he seeks to return to the White House. Negotiators had appeared to be closing in on a deal, but it started to fray after Trump’s admonitions to conservative lawmakers grew stronger.

In a written statement on Friday evening, Biden said the deal would allow him “a new emergency authority” to close

the border. He added: “And if given that authority, I would use it the day I sign the bill into law.”

It was a stark claim from a Democratic president that was met with astonishment and shock from immigrant advocates who have said his policies do not reflect the progressive approach they had expected.

“Voters want to see our elected leaders do the hard work to fix our frayed immigration system,” said Deirdre Schifeling, chief political and advocacy officer at the American Civil Liberties Union.

“President Biden and Congress must abandon these proposals and heed voters’ demands for fair and effective immigration policies that manage the border and treat people seeking safety with dignity.”

Iran launches 3 satellites into space

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Iran said on Sunday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a programme that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles.

The launch comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, sparking fears of a regional conflict. While Iran has not intervened militarily in the conflict, it has faced increased pressure within its theocracy for action after a deadly Islamic State suicide bombing earlier this month and as proxy groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels conduct attacks linked to the war. Meanwhile, Western nations remain worried about Iran's rapidly expanding nuclear programme. Footage released by Iranian state television showed a nighttime launch for the Simorgh rocket. An Associated Press analysis of the footage showed that it took place at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province.

"The roar of the Simorgh (rocket) resonated in our country's sky and infinite space," said Abbas Rasooli, a state TV reporter, in the footage. State TV named the launched satellites Mahda, Kayhan-2 and Hafez-1. It described the Mahda as a research satellite, while the Kayhan and the Hafez were nanosatellites focused on global positioning and communication respectively.



This photo released by the Iranian Defence Ministry on Sunday claims to show the launching of Simorgh, or "Phoenix," satellite carrier at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province

AP/PTI

Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister Isa Zarepour said the Mahda had already sent signals back to Earth. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh programme, a satellite-carrying rocket. The Simorgh, or "Phoenix," rocket failures have been part of a series of setbacks in recent years for Iran's civilian space programme, including fatal fires and a launchpad rocket explosion that drew the attention of former US President Donald Trump.

The footage showed the rocket launched Sunday bore the slogan "We Can" in Farsi,

likely referring to the previous failures. The Simorgh is a two-stage, liquid-fuelled rocket the Iranians described as being designed to place satellites into a low Earth orbit.

However, the US intelligence community's 2023 world-wide threat assessment said the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology. That report specifically cites the Simorgh as a possible dual-use rocket. The United States has previously said Iran's satellite launches defy a UN Security

Council resolution and called on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. UN sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile programme expired last October. Under Iran's relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani, the Islamic Republic slowed its space program for fear of raising tensions with the West. However, in the time since, the 2015 nuclear deal Rouhani shepherded with world powers has collapsed and tensions have been boiling for years with the US.

Hard-line President

Ebrahim Raisi, a protégé of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who came to power in 2021, has pushed the programme forward. Meanwhile, Iran enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels and enough material for several atomic bombs, though US intelligence agencies and others assess Tehran has not begun actively seeking a nuclear weapon.

On Friday, France, Germany and the United Kingdom condemned an Iranian satellite launch on January 20, similarly calling it capable of helping Iran develop long-range ballistic missiles.

"We have longstanding concerns over Iran's activity related to ballistic missile technologies that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons," the countries said. "These concerns are reinforced by Iran's continued nuclear escalation beyond all credible civilian justification."

Tehran maintains the largest arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Mideast, in part due to decades of sanctions following its 1979 Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy hostage crisis blocking it from advanced fighter jets and other weapon systems. The US military and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment Sunday. However, the US military has quietly acknowledged the January 20 launch conducted by the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard was successful.

US flays ban on Venezuelan oppn leader's candidacy

AP ■ CARACAS

The US government and nearly 30 conservative world leaders on Saturday condemned the decision of Venezuela's highest court to block the presidential candidacy of opposition leader María Corina Machado. The Biden administration, however, remained noncommittal about reimposing economic sanctions on Venezuela, which it has threatened to do if the government of President Nicolás Maduro failed to ensure a level playing field for the country's presidential election this year.

"The United States is currently reviewing our Venezuela sanctions policy, based on this development and the recent political targeting of democratic opposition candidates and civil society," US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. Machado won a presidential primary held in October by the faction of the opposition backed by the US. She secured more than 90 per cent of the vote despite the Venezuelan government announcing a 15-year ban on her running for office just days after she formally entered the race in June.

The former lawmaker and longtime government foe was able to participate in the primary, because the election was

organized by a commission independent of Venezuela's electoral authorities. Machado insisted throughout the campaign that she never received official notification of the ban and said voters, not ruling-party loyalists, were the rightful decision-makers of her candidacy. Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice on Friday upheld the ban, which was based on alleged fraud and tax violations, and accuses Machado of seeking the economic sanctions the US imposed on Venezuela.

The ruling came more than three months after Maduro and the US-backed opposition reached a deal to work on basic conditions for a fair election. The two sides agreed to hold the election in the second half of 2024, invite international electoral observers, and create a process for aspiring presidential candidates to appeal their bans. The deal led Washington to ease some economic sanctions on Venezuela's oil, gas and mining sectors.

Miller said that Friday's decision from Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice "runs contrary to the commitments made by Maduro and his representatives" under the agreement signed in October on the Caribbean island of Barbados. He said that the appeal process "lacked basic elements, as Machado neither

received a copy of the allegations against her nor was afforded the opportunity to respond to those allegations."

Gerardo Blyde, the chief negotiator for the opposition group known as the Unitary Platform, said Saturday that the court's ruling violates the Barbados accord. He urged Maduro's allies to reverse it, arguing the decision as it stands constitutes a "violation of due process and the right to due defense" of Machado.

But Maduro's chief negotiator, National Assembly leader Jorge Rodríguez, on Friday insisted Venezuela's government hasn't broken the terms of the accord and vowed to hold the presidential election this year. While the opposition's candidate remains in doubt, Maduro will be seeking six more years in office. Maduro's entire decade-long presidency has been marked by political, social and economic crisis. Under his watch, millions of Venezuelans have fallen into poverty and more than 7.4 million have migrated. In a statement Saturday, the international nongovernmental organization Democratic Initiative of Spain and the Americas said that Machado "continues to be the legitimate representative of the Venezuelan opposition and its presidential candidate before the international community."

Ukraine says corrupt officials stole \$40 mn meant to buy arms for war

Kyiv (AP): Employees from a Ukrainian arms firm conspired with defense ministry officials to embezzle almost USD 40 million earmarked to buy 100,000 mortar shells for the war with Russia, Ukraine's security service reported. The SBU said late Saturday that five people have been charged, with one person detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. If found guilty, they face up to 12 years in prison.

The investigation comes as Kyiv attempts to clamp down on corruption in a bid to speed up its membership in the European Union and NATO. Officials from both blocs have demanded widespread anti-graft reforms before Kyiv can join them. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected on an anti-corruption platform in 2019, long before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Both the president and his aides have portrayed the recent firings of top officials, notably that of Ivan Bakanov, former head of the State Security Service, in July 2022, as proof of their efforts to crack down on graft. Security officials say that the current investigation dates back to August 2022, when officials signed a contract for artillery shells worth 1.5 billion hryvnias (USD 39.6 million) with arms firm Lviv Arsenal. After receiving payment, company employees were supposed to transfer the funds to a business registered abroad, which would then deliver the ammunition to Ukraine. However, the goods were never delivered and the money was instead sent to various accounts in Ukraine and the Balkans, investigators said.

Pak seeks comprehensive investigation after nine labourers shot dead in Iran

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has sought a comprehensive investigation into the killing of nine of its nationals in a brutal attack in Iran that occurred days after the tensions between the two nations following a tit-for-tat cross-border fire. Nine Pakistani workers were gunned down and three others were injured by unidentified attackers who opened indiscriminate fire on them in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province near the border with Pakistan on Saturday.

Iran's Mehr news agency reported that "according to witnesses, unknown armed men killed nine non-Iranians in a house in the Sirkan neigh-

bourhood of Saravan city" in Sistan-Baluchestan province. No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistan's Foreign Office has demanded a comprehensive investigation into the attack and swift prosecution of those responsible for it. "We are in touch with Iranian authorities and have underscored the need to immediately investigate the incident and hold to account those involved in this heinous crime," FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said and condemned the "horrifying and despicable" attack.

She said Pakistan's consul in Zahedan was en route to the hospital to assist the injured and was expected to arrive

within a few hours due to the considerable distance and security challenges. The Pakistani diplomat was also scheduled to meet local authorities to demand decisive action against the perpetrators.

After the news of their deaths spread, the relatives of the victims protested in front of the assistant commissioner's office in Alipur and appealed to the government of Pakistan to ensure the return of the bodies of their loved ones to Muzaffargarh. Baloch said that efforts were underway to facilitate the prompt repatriation of the remains of those killed in the attack. "This cowardly attack does not diminish Pakistan's resolve to combat terrorism," she added.

Pakistan's ambassador to Iran Muddasir Tipu, expressed his shock over the killings, ensuring full support to the families of the bereaved. "We have called upon Iran for full cooperation in this matter," Tipu posted on X. The incident comes just a day before the Iranian foreign minister visits Islamabad, which is expected to include discussions on border security and the challenge of militant sanctuaries along the shared border.

This incident, which occurred within a week of the tit-for-tat strikes by Iran and Pakistan in each other's territories, is likely to add to the tension between the two countries.

Commonwealth observer group to visit Pak to assess elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Ahead of general elections in Pakistan on February 8, a 13-member Commonwealth observer group led by former Nigerian President Dr Goodluck Jonathan will be deployed to offer an independent and comprehensive assessment of the country's electoral process. The general elections in Pakistan will be held on February 8, and there are approximately 128 million eligible voters.

On election day, members of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) will observe and consider all aspects of the election process across Pakistan, from the opening of polling stations and the voting process to the counting of ballots and the

announcement of results. The observer team, which has been selected by the Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland, comprises multi-disciplinary experts from across the Commonwealth nations and would be chaired by former Nigeria president Jonathan.

A 13-member Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) is due to arrive in Islamabad on February 1 and will remain in the country until the electoral process is completed. The observer group will offer an independent and comprehensive assessment of the electoral process," a statement from the Commonwealth Secretariat Media and Public Affairs division said.

Commenting on the visit of the delegation, the Secretary-General said: "The Commonwealth is pleased to support Pakistan's democratic journey. We look forward to peaceful and fair elections."

"I am grateful that former Nigeria president Dr Goodluck Jonathan has once again accepted our invitation to serve as chair of an election observer group. The team of observers will assess the conduct of the process as a whole and, where appropriate, make recommendations for the further strengthening of the electoral system," she added. Patricia said that she was hopeful that the recommendations would benefit the people and government of Pakistan in strengthening their electoral processes.

PTI could be banned if Imran is convicted in cases pending against him: Reports

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party could be banned if its founder and former prime minister and other top brass are convicted in the cases relating to the May 9 violent incidents and violation of the Secrets Act in the cipher case, according to a media reports on Sunday. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after several years of probing into the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's funding unanimously declared that the party had received "prohibited funding" in August 2003.

This created an opportunity for the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to dis-

solve the party. Khan was however disqualified from Parliament, Geo News reported. The cipher case pertains to a piece of paper, purported to be a diplomatic cable — the cipher — that Khan had waved at a public rally on March 27, 2022, and naming the US, had claimed that it was 'evidence' of an "international conspiracy" to topple his government.

On May 9, 2023, violent protests erupted after the arrest of Khan by paramilitary Rangers in Islamabad. Over 20 military installations and state buildings, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, were damaged or torched in the violent protests that followed Khan's arrest in a corruption case. The party ran into trouble after the May 9 violence by its supporters. Hundreds of rioters were arrested in the days after the attack and booked on various charges. Highly placed sources that had been part of the previous Shehbaz Sharif government told The News on Saturday that the ECP verdict had provided an occasion for the PDM government of the time to raise the question before the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare the PTI a banned entity but the government opted to agitate the matter later at an appropriate time. Sources that had been part of the previous Shehbaz Sharif government on Saturday said the ECP verdict had provided an occasion for the PDM government of the time to raise the question before the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare the PTI a banned

entity but the government opted to agitate the matter later at an appropriate time. Senator Azam Nazir Tarrar, the law and justice minister of the previous government and leader of the house in the Senate, said the government was struggling to save the country from default and opted to delay the matter. Tarrar said the PTI had defied several laws under the Elections Act of 2017, and committed offences which, once the government decided to agitate regarding the PTI's lawful existence, could be conveniently decided by the apex court. To a query, Tarrar said the caretaker government could also knock on the doors of the highest court for the purpose but the next government would have to consider it with seriousness.

Climate change figures prominently in Pakistan political parties' manifestos

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

After Pakistan was by catastrophic floods in 2022, two major political parties in the country have prominently highlighted the importance of dealing with climate change-related issues in their manifestos ahead of the February 8 general elections. Ranked as the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change according to the Global Climate Risk Index, a UN report has warned that Pakistan will experience increasingly severe extreme weather events.

The total damage from the devastating floods in 2022 that hit 33 million people in Pakistan is estimated at PKR 3.2 trillion (USD 14.9 billion), with a total loss of PKR 3.3 trillion (USD 15.2 billion). But not just annual, large-scale floods,

Pakistan has faced melting glaciers in the north triggering Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), record-breaking heat waves, droughts, forest fires in various regions and cyclones in the southern parts that have been exacerbated by the changing climate in recent years.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as its head, released their manifestos on Saturday and promised a multitude of things to their voters. One common thing in both was the emphasis on climate change-related issues and the promise of many mitigation and adaptation measures. While the PML-N mentioned the measures under the section 'Building a Climate Resilient

Pakistan', the PPP had a separate chapter 'Green New Deal: Climate Resilient Futures' in its manifesto. The third prominent party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) headed by incarcerated Imran Khan, has not released any manifesto as yet, however, given its track record of implementing 'Billion Tree Tsunami' as part of the party's 'Green Growth Initiative', it is known that climate change is part of their discourse.

Before it was replaced by a caretaker administration in August, Pakistan's outgoing government had approved a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) in July 2023. It sets out how Pakistan will deal with challenges brought by climate change. However, there are a whole lot of things that need to be done vis-à-vis climate change. Extreme events such as

the devastating floods of 2022, which directly and indirectly affected 33 million people, exposed Pakistan's vulnerabilities to the effects of climate change and weakness in the state's pre- and post-disaster planning, including the lack of proper early warning systems. Both PML-N and PPP parties have addressed these issues.

"We must do everything to ensure that we increase our climate resilience and protect our people and our land from the dangers of climate change," stated the PML-N manifesto.

The PPP manifesto said, "Our priority will be to not just adapt and shock-proof our people from the risks of extreme weather, but to educate and mitigate against the dangers of such global threats ... to build resilience against the existential threat of climate

stress, environmental degradation, pollution and waste." The PML-N, which gave the example of its 2022-23 rule, that had designed and initiated the implementation of the 'Climate-Resilient Recovery Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework', termed the 4RF, said, it will continue effective implementation of this Framework in the government and envisioning a 'Resilient Pakistan by 2029'. "This commitment extends beyond immediate gains, ensuring a sustainable legacy for future generations," it said.

After listing its achievements in the environment and climate change section for its previous two terms, the PML-N manifesto mentions 'Promise 2024-2029' with 16 main pointers. The list starts with a promise for clean air with var-

ious steps to be taken for good air quality, including transboundary cooperation between India and Pakistan to reduce the impact of crop burning dependent on the direction of the wind; speaks of a 'Green Pakistan Programme' and banning plastics apart from proper waste management.

The document promises action for increasing forest cover; launching a 'National Adaptation Plan' to enhance the country's capacity for climate change adaptation and also mentions carrying out national environment conservation awareness-raising campaigns focusing on energy, water, solid waste management and air quality. It talks of developing and implementing a sector-based Carbon Credit Policy Framework for Pakistan; 4RF (Resilient, Rehabilitation,

Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework) to ensure transformative measures for sustainable climate resilience; incentivising climate-resilient agriculture investment and promises 'National and Provincial Action against Climate Change' including disaster risk management and reduction, urban planning climate, finance and climate-resilient infrastructure.

On the other hand, the PPP manifesto spoke about bringing in policies that "will also aim to leverage renewable resources for cheap, clean energy to power the homes and schools and workplaces of the most vulnerable, protect our forests and wildlife, and to lower air and water pollution, as a priority for our cities and rural waterways while retaining our reform focus on gen-

der inclusion." The Green New Deal will include building Climate Resilient futures on the ground "by climate-proofing all investments and infrastructure and by ensuring all upcoming energy solutions are clean, people-friendly and generate jobs for local communities."

The manifesto promised that the investment in Pakistan's public sector infrastructure including roads, communication, health, irrigation and agriculture would all be made with a focus on climate resilience; green energy parks harnessing solar power would be set up; climate-smart agricultural practices along with crop insurance and also climate resilient health facilities. One important approach was to address climate change as a Human Rights Issue.

India gas demand to rise 6 per cent in 2024: IEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's natural gas demand is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2024 with a rise in consumption in fertiliser units, power generation and industrial sectors, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Following the 7 per cent year-on-year decline observed in 2022, India's primary gas supply rose by 5 per cent in 2023, with growth primarily driven by the petrochemical, power generation, refinery and industrial sectors. "Natural gas demand in India is expected to increase by 6 per cent in 2024, mainly supported by higher gas use in industry (including in the fertiliser sector) and stronger gas burn in the power sector amid the

development of its national pipeline grid and city gas infrastructure," IEA said Gas Market Report released last week. India's natural gas demand had risen to 64 billion cubic meters in 2023. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports rose by 7 per cent on the year to 29 billion cubic meters last year, with import dependency at 44 per cent of the nation's natural gas consumption. Domestic production was up 6 per cent on the year to 35 billion cubic meters on the back of a rise in output from Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block. "We expect India to increase its LNG imports in 2024 by 7 per cent, fuelled by demand from the power and fertiliser sectors, as the country plans to stop importing urea by 2025," IEA said.



Natural gas extracted from below surface and seabeds is used to make fertiliser, generate electricity, convert into CNG to run automobiles, piped to households for cooking purposes

and used as fuel and feedstock in industries. India's domestic production is insufficient to meet demand and so the fuel is imported as LNG in cryogenic ships.

Power companies imported 2.32 billion cubic meters of LNG in 2023, making up around 9 per cent of total imports and up by 76 per cent on the year. In November 2023 India approved mandatory blending of compressed biogas into the domestic gas supply. The mandate will be set at 1 per cent of total compressed natural gas and domestic piped natural gas consumption from 2025, and raised gradually to 5 per cent from 2028-29. On reforms, IEA said, "India continued to advance gas market reforms in 2023. The country introduced a unified pipeline tariff system on April 1, which could benefit consumers located far from domestic gas supply sources and/or LNG terminals. In addition to the market reforms, India is considering

establishing strategic gas reserves to enhance gas supply security". The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) introduced the Unified Tariff (UFT) policy in April 2023 to create a single, consistent and fair tariff structure for natural gas transport across the country. The UFT policy will apply to a network of 21 pipelines, representing around 90 per cent of pipelines in operation or under construction. The price of transporting gas consists of two components - a fixed unified tariff based on the levelised cost of service of the entire pipeline network, and a variable zonal factor depending on distance. "The UFT policy aims to create a more stable, competitive and transparent pricing regime, which should benefit both gas supply and demand.



Auto firms seek continued push to green mobility, infra development

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government needs to continue with favourable policies to promote green mobility while also focussing on infrastructure development at a robust pace in the upcoming Budget, according to some leading firms in the automobile space. The Union government is all set to present the interim Budget on February 1. "We expect capex on infrastructural projects to continue, aiding the automotive sector. The policy push for green mobility should remain a key focus for the government, encouraging faster adoption of electric vehicles," Mercedes-Benz India MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The luxury car industry has a significant value contribution to the GDP and the segment aspires for a rationalised duty structure and GST on priority, he added. "Overall, we expect consistency in various policies and no surprises in the upcoming budget," Iyer stated.

Luxury vehicles currently attract the top GST slab of 28 per cent with an additional cess of 20 per cent on sedans and 22 per cent on SUVs, taking the total tax incidence to up to 50 per cent. Toyota Kirloskar Motor Deputy Managing Director (Corporate Planning, Finance & Administration and Manufacturing) Swapnesh R Maru said the automaker remains confident that the Government will continue its push towards shifting the economy and transportation sector to a greener future that is less dependent on fossil fuels. "Looking ahead, policy stability and continued emphasis on spurring investment and infrastructure development will not only further enhance the country's global competitiveness but also lead to growth of the manufacturing and service sector," he added.

JK Tyre & Industries Chairman & Managing Director Raghupati Singhania said that consistent automotive policies would propel sectoral expansion.

"A robust budget is vital for India's journey to become the third-largest global economy," he noted.

Mahindra Last Mile Mobility MD & CEO Suman Mishra said that by driving inclusive income generation, electric three-wheelers and commercial vehicles pave the way for financial upliftment of many.

"We call upon the Union Budget 2024 to prioritise this segment through continued FAME support, fostering economic empowerment for the most deserving and environmental well-being for all," she noted.



No disruption in oil flows to India, only freight up due to Red Sea crisis: HPCL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing attacks on shipping vessels by Houthi militants in the Red Sea have not impacted the flow of crude oil to India but freight has gone up due to rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) chairman Pushp Kumar Joshi said. India, the world's third-biggest oil importer, gets a bulk of its Russian supplies through the Red Sea. Russian supplies made up for over 35 per cent of India's total crude imports in 2023, amounting to 1.7 million barrels per day. Russian ships and cargoes are not being prime targets of the attacks at this stage however rerouting of ships around the southern tip of Africa instead of transiting through the Suez Canal and Red Sea has led to ships taking longer voyages, resulting in the shortage of

ships and rise in freight charges. In a post-third quarter earnings call with investors, Joshi said HPCL has tied up crude oil supplies till mid-April and it does not see any supply disruptions. HPCL meets 44-45 per cent of its crude oil needs on term contracts with national oil companies such as those in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The remaining is on the spot or from the current market, he said. "Term crude has not been impacted (due to the Red Sea crisis)," he said, adding the spot imports are on DES basis where the shipping is arranged by the supplier. "The spot supplies too are not impacted," HPCL, he said, has "already tied up crude requirements till fiscal year end (in March) and the first couple of weeks of April." "Crude oil supplies have not seen any disruption as of now.

FPIs take out ₹24,700 crore from equities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have dumped Indian equities worth Rs 24,700 crore so far this month, owing to surging bond yield in the US. On the other hand, they are bullish on the debt market and infused Rs 17,120 crore in the debt market during the period under review, data with the depositories showed. According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 24,734 crore from Indian equities this month (till January 25). Before this, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 66,134 crore in the entire December and Rs 9,000

crore in November.

"The rising bond yields in the US is a matter of concern, and this has triggered the recent bout of selling in the cash market," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

"The rally in global stock markets was triggered by the Fed pivot which saw the 10-year bond yield falling from 5 per cent to around 3.8 per cent.

"Now the 10-year bond is back at 4.18 per cent, which indicates that the Fed rate cut will come only in H2 of 2024," he added. FPIs started the new year with a cautious approach opting to book profits in the Indian equity markets as



they touched all-time high levels.

Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for further cues, before taking investment decisions with respect to investing in

emerging markets like India, Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director-Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

On a bullish stance in the debt markets, experts said that the announcement by JP Morgan Chase & Co. In September last year that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024 influenced the inflow in the country's bond markets in the past few months.

FPIs made a net investment of Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, Rs 14,860 crore in November, and Rs 6,381 crore in October, data showed.

In terms of sector, FPIs were sellers in auto & auto ancillary, media & entertainment and marginally in IT, and they bought in oil and gas, power and selectively in financial services, Geojit's Vijayakumar said.

Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt market. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market. The flow in Indian equities came following a worst net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore in 2022 on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three years.

Binny Bansal quits Flipkart board

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal has resigned from the company's board, according to a company statement. The development comes after around six months of Bansal selling an entire stake in the company. "I am proud of the Flipkart Group's achievements over the past 16 years. Flipkart is in a robust position, with a strong leadership team and a clear path forward, and with this confidence, I have

decided to step aside, knowing the company is in capable hands. I wish the team the best as they continue to transform experiences for customers, and I remain a strong supporter of the business," Bansal said. He co-founded the e-commerce firm with Sachin Bansal in 2007. Sachin Bansal stepped down from the Flipkart board in 2018 after Walmart acquired a 77 per cent stake in the company at a valuation of USD 21 billion.



Besides being an active angel investor, Binny Bansal has also started his own firm to provide marketing support to

sellers on e-commerce platforms.

"His insights and deep expertise in the business have been invaluable to the Board and company. Flipkart is the outcome of a great idea and a lot of hard work, built by teams committed to transforming how India shops. We wish Binny the best as he embarks on his next venture and thank him for the deep impact he has enabled for the Indian retail ecosystem," Flipkart CEO and board member Kalyan

Krishnamurthy said.

The valuation of Flipkart has increased to around USD 38 billion. The firm, however, still continues to run in losses. The company posted a 9.4 per cent increase in consolidated net total income to Rs 56,012.8 crore in financial year 2023 against Rs 51,176 crore in FY 2022.

Despite a rise in the total income, Flipkart's consolidated loss widened to Rs 4,890.6 crore in FY23 from Rs 3,371.2 crore a year ago.

CNH plans to invest up to USD 50 million in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Italian-American off-road construction and agriculture firm CNH is planning to invest up to USD 50 million in the farm machinery segment in India this year and launch a 105HP tractor in May, according to a top CNH India official. CNH, which produces and sells farm machinery and equipment under the New Holland brand, will focus on the compact range of tractors of below 30-40 horsepower (HP), besides targeting to sell 1,000 baler machines (used for managing stubble) this

year. Currently, CNH India has a four per cent market share in the tractor business in India and has a considerable presence in the 45-50 HP range of tractors. Speaking to PTI, CNH India and SAARC Country Manager and Managing Director Narinder Mittal said there is a huge potential in India's agriculture sector, and the company intends to double its market share to 8 per cent in the next four years. "We plan to invest about USD 40-50 million in the current



calendar year in the agriculture segment, including the programme investment," he added. Out of which, USD 25-30

million will be invested in the tractor business alone, he noted. Under the programme investment, Mittal said the

company is working on a specific tractor model of above 45 HP with a new engine for higher fuel efficiency. The cash flow for this will begin this year and the new model is likely to be launched by the end of 2025, he added. On a product launch, Mittal said a bigger tractor of 105 HP is lined up for the launch in May this year. This tractor is used for bailing and ridge application.

At present, the company is importing bigger tractors of more than 100 HP to meet the growing demand for baler

and ridge machines in the country, he said. Stating that balers help in managing stubble, Mittal said there is a growing awareness about the use of such machines in the country, and consequently, the company's sales of balers have gone up significantly in 2023. CNH India sold about 840 small square balers in 2023 against 450 in the previous year. The company also sold 50 big and round balers in 2023, the company official said. "We expect that we should be touching 1,000 balers this year," he said,

adding the company is selling balers in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Madhya Pradesh. Balers compress agricultural residue into manageable and transportable bales. Small square balers that cost around RS 11-12 lakh per unit can be used with existing tractors, while the big/round balers that cost around Rs 2 crore per set require above 100HP tractors for operation. The company manufactures small balers in Pune but imports some components that it intends to localise by the middle of this year.

Rana Talwar, first Indian to head a global bank, dies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran banker Rana Talwar, who was the first Indian to head a global bank -- Standard Chartered Plc, died at the age of 76 years. Talwar, son-in-law of DLF Group chairman emeritus K P Singh, breathed his last on Saturday, sources said. He is survived by his wife Renuka and son Rahul. Besides DLF, he served on the boards of various companies including Asahi India Glass Limited and Great Eastern Energy Corporation Limited. The company regrets to inform about the sad demise of Talwar, a non-executive director, on Saturday, January 27, 2024, which was intimated to the company by the family members, DLF said in a regulatory filing. Born in 1948, Talwar started his career as a banker in India with Citi Bank after passing

out of the prestigious St Stephens College, Delhi. During his stint at Citi Bank, Gurvirendra Singh Talwar also known as Rana Talwar, was responsible for building the US-based bank's retail businesses across Asia Pacific and the Middle East. He was subsequently responsible for all of Citibank's retail businesses across Europe and the United States. He was a member of the Citibank/ Citigroup Policy and Operating Committees. Talwar left Citibank in 1996 to join Standard Chartered Plc as Global Chief Executive. He was the first Asian to become the Chief Executive of an FTSE 25 company and of a major global bank. He was responsible for repositioning Standard Chartered Plc as a leading emerging markets bank, including the acquisition of Grindlays Bank from ANZ Bank.

Average flat size expands 11 per cent in top 7 cities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Builders are constructing bigger homes to meet consumers' demand as the average size of flats rose 11 per cent last year across seven major cities, according to Anarock. Real estate consultant Anarock has analysed the fresh supply of housing units during 2023 across the primary residential market of seven major cities. The data showed that average flat sizes in the top 7 cities rose to 1,300 square feet last year from 1,175 square feet in 2022. In the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata, the average size of apartments fell, but it grew in Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Chennai in 2023. The average size stood at 1,050 square feet in 2019, 1,167 sq ft in 2020, and 1,170 sq ft in 2021.



"Northbound housing prices in the top cities have in no way dispelled the demand for generous living spaces," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said. The supply of bigger luxury homes increased significantly last year, he

said, adding that around 23 per cent of the total new launches were in the luxury category. "The demand for bigger-size homes was kick-started by the pandemic, but there are no signs of it waning three years later. Led by an

enduring 'new normal' in homebuyer preferences, this demand seems eminently sustainable," Puri said. Krisumi Corporation MD Mohit Jain said the aspirational segment of society is playing a pivotal role in propelling the demand for premium homes, which are spacious and bigger in size. "This trend may continue in the foreseeable future," he added.

Among seven major cities, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata were the only two cities where the average flat sizes decreased in 2023.

In MMR, the average flat size fell 5 per cent to 794 sq ft in 2023 from 840 square feet in 2022. In Kolkata, the average flat size saw a 2 per cent decline to 1,124 sq ft last year from 1,150 square feet in 2022. Delhi-NCR saw the highest 37 per cent rise in average

flat size to 1,890 square feet in 2023 from 1,375 sq ft in 2022.

Anarock said that developers in the Delhi-NCR are actively tracking demand and launching larger homes. The demand is skewed significantly towards luxury apartments, which are primarily defined by bigger sizes.

Hyderabad has the highest average flat size at 2,300 square feet, up 30 per cent from 1,775 square feet in 2022.

In Bengaluru, the average flat size increased by 26 per cent to 1,484 sq ft in 2023 from 1,175 sq ft in the previous year. The average flat size in Pune saw an 11 per cent increase to 1,086 sq ft in 2023 from 980 sq ft in 2022.

Chennai saw a 5 per cent rise in average flat sizes to 1,260 square feet in 2023 from 1,200 sq ft in the previous year, Anarock said.

431 infra projects show cost overrun of ₹4.82L crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 431 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.82 lakh crore in December 2023, an official report stated.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out of 1,820 projects, 431 reported cost overrun and 848 projects were delayed.

"Total original cost of implementation of the 1,820 projects was Rs 25,87,066.08 crore and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 30,69,595.88 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,82,529.80 crore (18.65 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for December 2023 said. According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till December 2023 is Rs 16,26,813.80 crore, which is 53 per cent of the anticipated cost of the projects.

However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 638, if delay is calculated on the basis of the latest schedule of completion. Out of the 848 delayed projects, 202 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 200 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25-60 months, and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

Hseih, Elise win Australian Open women doubles

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Hseih Su-wei of Taiwan has become the second-oldest woman to win a Grand Slam doubles title after teaming with Elise Mertens of Belgium on Sunday to win the Australian Open women's doubles. The second-seeded pairing of Hseih and Mertens beat 11th seeded Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia and Lyudmyla Kichenok of Ukraine 6-1 7-5 in Sunday's final. It was Hseih's seventh Grand Slam women's doubles title and Mertens' fourth, their second together. Hsieh follows Rohan Bopanna of India who became the oldest men's champion when he won

the men's doubles title Saturday with Matthew Ebden of Australia. American Lisa Raymond was eight days older than Hsieh when she won the 2011 US Open women's doubles. Martina Navratilova was 49 when she won the mixed doubles at the 2006 U.S. Open with Bob Bryan. Hsieh has the benefit of being coached by Australian Paul McNamee who won six Grand Slam doubles titles, including two Australian Opens and was the Australian Open chief executive until 2006. She already had taken out the mixed doubles at the current tournament with Jan Zielinski



of Poland. Mertens won the Wimbledon title with Hsieh in 2021 and won the Australian Open title the same year with Aryna Sabalenka, who won her second straight singles title in Melbourne on Saturday. She also won the U.S. Open women's doubles in 2019. Mertens will return to the No. 1 WTA doubles ranking on Monday, a position she first held in May, 2021. She has spent 28 weeks in the top ranking spot. Hsieh and Mertens needed only 1 hour, 33 minutes on Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to pad their already impressive Grand Slam resumes. They

took the first set in just over half an hour. The second set was much tighter as Mertens lost her serve in the opening game. She recovered to serve for the championship at 5-3 but was broken again. Finally, Hsieh and Mertens took the match when they broke Kichenok in the 12th game. Mertens leapt into the air in delight; Hsieh was more reserved. They make a formidable combination, Mertens with the stronger serve, Hsieh with skillful touches around the net and flat, strong groundstrokes. "It was a tough final," Mertens said. "The second set was

really close. "It was a really great match for us and we had to stay focused all the time." Ostapenko and Kichenok faced a tough road to the final, beating the US Open champions Gabriela Dabrowski and Erin Routliffe 7-5 7-5 in the semifinals. They lacked communication and teamwork in the first set but worked better together in the second in which Ostapenko's serve was dependable. Kichenok lost her serve in the fourth, eighth and final games. Kichenok ended her comments at the presentation ceremony with the words Slava Ukraini, Glory to Ukraine.

International kayaking tournament in Tawang from February 5 to 10

PTI ■ TAWANG

A six-day international kayaking tournament will be organised next month near India's border with China in Arunachal Pradesh on the fast-flowing Tawangchu river, in which two rivers from Tibet converge before it flows through Tibet to finally reach the Brahmaputra. Beginning February 5, the "Tawangchu Tides" tournament will see participants experience heart-pounding thrills as they navigate the river's Class V rapids, according to a statement issued by the organisers. The event is being organised under the patronage of



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Union minister Kiren Rijiju, who also belongs to the state, the organisers said, adding that the tournament will start from Lumla, near Tawang. Tawangchu is the main river of Tawang. Strategically significant Tawang is located at an altitude of above 10,000

feet and is close to the border with China. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 1,129-km-long LAC with the Tibet Autonomous Region. As many as 130 kayakers from across the world are expected to join the event, the statement said, adding, "It's not just a sport; it's a wild, unforgettable journey where

passion meets the untamed waters of Arunachal Pradesh." The event will be witness to the kayakers' incredible skills and precision as they navigate a course filled with gates and obstacles. The race is a single lap of the course, according to the organisers. "Experience the camaraderie of a global community, sharing a common love for adventure and conquering the Tawangchu river's thrilling rapids together," the statement read. It said there will be nine competition categories, catering to every kayaking skill and style. The entire Tawang district is known as the basin of the Tawangchu. Two fast-flowing

rivers from Tibet 'Tsona Chu' and 'Nyamjang Chu' join the Tawangchu in the district. The combined river then flows west into Bhutan, from where it enters Assam as river Manas and later, merges with the Brahmaputra river. The organisers said participants will be provided top-class tented accommodations equipped with electricity supply, warm food and hygienic toilets. Tawang is also a historic and picturesque town, known for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage. His Holiness the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was born here. The town is also home to one of Asia's oldest monasteries founded in 1680.

Hockey5s Women World Cup India lose to Netherlands, finish runners up

PTI ■ MUSCAT

India lost 2-7 to the Netherlands in the final to finish runners-up at the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup here. Jyoti Chhattri (20th minute) and Rutuja Dadaso Pisal (23rd) scored for India in the summit clash on Saturday. Janneke van de Venne (2nd, 14th), Bente van der Veldt (4th, 8th) and Lana Kalse (11th, 27th) struck a brace each for the Netherlands, while Sosha Benninga (13th) was the other goal-getter. For their exemplary performance in the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup, Hockey India has announced a cash award of Rs 3 lakh for each player and Rs 1.5 lakh each for the support staff. Both the teams probed for their chances after the



start and it wasn't long before the Netherlands found an opening. Janneke van de Venne took a long-range shot which deflected off the Indian goalkeeper Rajani Etimaru into the goal to hand Netherlands the lead. Moments later, Bente van der

Veldt found herself open in front of the Indian goal and smashed the ball into the net to double the lead. A period of Netherlands dominance followed. Bente van der Veldt remained alert in front of the Indian goal as her quick overhead shot sailed past the Indian defence

into the goal. With four minutes to go in the first-half, Lana Kalse pounced on a loose ball and unleashed a powerful shot to make it 4-0 in Netherlands' favour. Soon after, Sosha Benninga used a deft touch to bypass Rajani in goal and further extended their lead.

As the Netherlands continued to put pressure on the Indian defence, Janneke van de Venne capitalised on an opening and scored to end the first half 6-0 in the Netherlands' favour. The Dutch dominance continued in the second-half, resulting in a challenge which was saved by Rajani. India opened their account five minutes into the second-half as Jyoti found some space and struck a shot from distance to beat Netherlands' goalkeeper Kiki Gunneman. Rutuja then received the ball under pressure, turned on a sixpence and breached Netherlands' goal to make it 6-2. As India started to pile on the pressure, a quick counter-attack goal from Netherlands' Lana Kalse restored their five-goal cushion.

Trying to complete a wire-to-wire victory at Bradenton Country Club, Korda rebounded with the late flurry after making consecutive bogeys on Nos. 7 and 8 in 10-15 mph wind with the temperature in the upper 70s. "I'm actually kind of taken back with how much support I've been getting this week," Korda said. "Being in Florida I always get a lot of support, but hometown, it's crazy. I was born just in the hospital just down the road from here. It's been nice seeing friends and family come out ... Feeling the support." The eight-time LPGA Tour winner was 13 under. "It's a confidence boost knowing I can climb up the leaderboard and contend and stay in contention," Korda said. "Definitely didn't have the great start today." Coming off a victory in the Tournament of Champions, Lydia Ko was tied for second after a 69. Megan Khang (66) and Ayaka Furue (69) also were 9 under. "It was really windy," said Ko, a victory short of entering the LPGA Hall of Fame.

Xavi will not continue at Barcelona after this season

AP ■ BARCELONA

Xavi Hernández won't continue as Barcelona's coach after this season, saying he can't get the team out of a slump. Xavi announced his decision on Saturday, minutes after Barcelona lost to Villarreal 5-3 in the Spanish league, leaving it 10 points adrift of leader Real Madrid. "I would like to announce that on June 30 I will cease being the coach of Barça," Xavi said. "As a Barcelona fan, I can't allow this situation to continue, we need a change of

course and of dynamics." Xavi said he made the decision "several days ago," and although the hard defeat to Villarreal set the scene for him to announce the decision, he "would have made" it soon enough. He said he hoped this decision will decrease the stress and tension his team is enduring. "The feeling of being the coach of Barcelona is cruel, it is unpleasant, you feel like you don't get the respect you deserve," Xavi said. "It wears you down, affects your mental health, your emotions, up to the point that



you say you can't go on. My loved ones know that." Xavi returned to Barcelona as the coach in November 2021 with his only experience a stint in Qatar. He has a contract through the end of next season. The 44-year-old Xavi led Barcelona to the Spanish Super Cup title and the Spanish league title last season, the club's first trophies since the exit of Lionel Messi. The club mortgaged its future to help him do that by signing players like Robert Lewandowski. But Barcelona has struggled

this season and has shown severe signs of suffering as collapse this month. Barcelona saw its best two chances of getting a title in this campaign evaporate recently. Xavi's side exited the Copa del Rey quarterfinals after losing in extra time at Athletic Bilbao 4-2 on Wednesday, a loss that came two weeks after Barcelona was dismantled by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup. After the Villarreal debacle Xavi said his players' lacked the "maturity" to know how to hold onto leads, and after

the Bilbao loss he also underscored that he was playing with several young players. But that seemed at odds with the fact that his starting side was led with veterans like Lewandowski, Ilkay Gundogan and players in their prime like Pedri González and Frenkie de Jong. Barcelona is set to play Napoli in the Champions League round of 16 next month. Xavi said he was still motivated to lead the team at what is no doubt a long-shot bid at ending his stint with a European Cup.

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona again showed it is not a championship-caliber team when it conceded twice in stoppage time to lose a 5-3 thriller with Villarreal in front of its stunned fans. In one of the wildest games of the season on Saturday, Villarreal was up 2-0 then Barcelona roared back with three goals in a 12-minute span to lead 3-2 in the 72nd minute. But Barcelona's defense again let it down and new Villarreal arrival Goncalo Guedes leveled on a counterattack in the 84th. Striker Alexander Sorloth, who also set up two goals, then found the winner in stoppage time and José Morales added to Barcelona's misery. Barcelona was trying to bounce back in La Liga from

its elimination from the Copa del Rey at Athletic Bilbao this week. Instead, its loss to an erratic Villarreal only added more pressure on beleaguered manager Xavi Hernandez to turn things around. Real Madrid rallied to win at Las Palmas 2-1 without top scorer Jude Bellingham and reclaim the league lead. It opened up a 10-point gap over Barcelona in third. "This is a huge blow," Xavi said. "We lost this game because of our mistakes. Today is difficult to digest for me as a coach but also for my players, who are all feeling really bad. "We did the hardest part



which was to turn it around, and we even had more chances to score, but that was when our problems started. We are paying a heavy price for our mistakes this season." **WHERE'S THE DEFENSE?** Gerard Moreno opened the scoring near halftime from a pass by Sorloth. Former Barcelona youth player Ilias Akhomach took full advantage of horrible control by João Cancelo, who came on at halftime, to double the advantage. Gundogan pulled one back for Barcelona in the 60th. Substitute Pedri González took a second before an own goal by Eric Bailly put the hosts

ahead. Barcelona then looked close to sealing it with a fourth goal before Sorloth launched Guedes on the flank to beat goalkeeper Iñaki Peña from an angle to make it 3-3. The Norway striker put Villarreal back in front after Barcelona failed to clear the ball from its area. "If you are losing 0-2 and then go up 3-2 you cannot give it away and lose like that," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong said. "This cannot happen to an elite team." Cancelo, like De Jong, backed Xavi and tried to take the blame as players. "It truly was a disaster,"

Cancelo said. "Those were the worst 45 minutes of my career." Barcelona's defense, which is missing injured goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is falling apart in January. Barcelona was crushed by Madrid 4-1 in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, and on Wednesday it conceded twice in extra time to lose at Bilbao 4-2. **MADRID RALLIES** Vinícius Júnior and Aurélien Tchouaméni scored second-half goals for Madrid in the Canary Islands. After a first half stalemate between the league's top defenses, midfielder Javi Muñoz put Las Palmas ahead in the 53rd from a pass by Sandro Ramirez. "We played a good first half against a great rival," Muñoz said.

Hartley hurts India on debut

England record memorable 28 runs win in 1st Test

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The pushback started by incandescent Ollie Pope was given its perfect conclusion by debutant left-arm spinner Tom Hartley whose soul-ripping spell fashioned England's memorable 28-run win over India on the fourth day of the first Test here on Sunday.

India's chase of 231 went horribly south once Hartley (7/62) spun into India's top-order, igniting a rot that saw India getting bowled out for 202 in the final over of the day. England now lead the five-match series 1-0.

This is India's fourth defeat in home Tests since 2013 and first ever in Hyderabad (across two venues in the city).

India's approach during chase was in complete contrast to how Pope tackled Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja with a lot of intent. The spin twins have

never been lethal on surfaces which aren't exactly dustbowl and England's second innings batting show won't do their reputation any good.

"With a lead of 190 we were in control but exceptional batting - probably one of the best I've seen in Indian conditions, well played Ollie Pope. I thought 230 was gettable but it wasn't to be," India skipper Rohit Sharma said after the match.

Rohit's opposite number Ben Stokes termed it as his team's greatest win.

"Since I've taken the captaincy on, where we are and who we're playing against, it's 100% our greatest victory," Stokes said.

Earlier, Pope's brilliant 196 took England to 420 in their second innings, and gave them a substantial lead and genuine hopes of stretching India. And England did way more than stretching the hosts.

In fact, this defeat will leave a



deep burn in Indian hearts as they stumbled against a 25-year-old rookie Lancastrian with a combined experience of three international matches on a pitch that did not hide any demons.

There was appreciable turn and variable bounce but nothing this set of Indian batters could not have negated. Three dismissals showcased the travails of Indians on the day - Shubman Gill (0), Yashasvi Jaiswal (15) and Shreyas Iyer (13) fell to their own ineptitudes.

Jaiswal made a half-hearted charge against Hartley and the spinner pulled back his length after spotting movement of the batter. All the left-hander could manage was to spoon a catch to Pope at silly point.

Gill followed the suit two balls later in the same over. He made a hard-handed, indecisive push at the ball after Hartley tossed one around the off-stump. Pope

did the rest at silly point.

Jack Leach, who is still not 100 per cent after taking a blow on his knee while fielding, dealt another telling blow to India's aspirations.

He produced a rather regulation ball that went across the right-hander from around the stumps, and Shreyas just poked the ball to Joe Root at first slip. It was just a nothing dismissal that encapsulated India's turmoil on the day.

India could have felt a greater pinch with Iyer's dismissal as he is one of the better-equipped batter in this batting unit to negate spin.

In-form KL Rahul (22) looked all set for another impact innings, but Root pinned him on the back-foot as the batter attempted a whip on the on-side.

Rahul went upstairs after the on-field umpire gave him leg before, but the TV umpire too concurred with his distant colleague's decision.

Ashwin, Jadeja struggle on track that is not exactly dust bowl

PTI ■ HYDERABAD



Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are India's stormtroopers at home, tossing over opponents like pioneer dolls and their numbers validate their supremacy too.

They started the Hyderabad Test against England with a combined tally of 500 wickets, one behind Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh.

Now, they stand on top of the Indian chart with 511 wickets and certainly in the company of all-timers such as Broad-Anderson (1039), Warne-McGrath (1001), Murali-Vaas (895) or Ambrose-Walsh (762).

Despite that lofty achievement and a fairly decent haul, Ashwin and Jadeja might not look back at the first Test against England with whole lot of fondness after visitors scored 420 in second innings at four plus runs per over. Yes, their six-wicket haul (6/156) in the first innings had played a significant part in India bundling out England for 246. Hence, it was natural for one to expect Ash-Jaddu to knock the stuffing out of England in their second innings, particularly after having established a huge 190-run lead.

At least, that's the set pattern over the better part of the last decade in home Tests. But there was a turn in the script here at the RGI Stadium.

England batters under Ollie Pope tightened their swash

in the second innings with a barrage of sweeps and reverse sweeps from the stump line to keep the Indians forgot their own on a pitch that offered turn albeit the slower version. It wasn't the crumbling minefield from Rajkot a couple of years back.

In fact, head coach Rahul Dravid had offered a subtle caution. "It (The pitch) looks good one from what I've seen. It may spin a little bit. But how quickly and how fast, I am not sure," Dravid had said in a media interaction a few days back here. It panned out precisely that way as both Ashwin and Jadeja struggled to make an impact. Once Pope and even tailenders took the attack to them, they seemed a bit flustered.

Fully fit Chahar sets sights on T20 World Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A challenging phase on personal front behind him, which sidelined him for a few assignments, India seamer Deepak Chahar is ready for a comeback and has set his sights on the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the United States and West Indies later this year.

Chahar had to miss India's tour of South Africa in December followed by the home T20Is against Afghanistan after his father suffered a brain stroke, from which he has recovered now.

"For me, my father comes first. I am here only because of him. Whatever I have achieved is because of my father. If I am not there for him in those situations, then obviously, what kind of son I am?," Chahar told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"If the series was in India, then I would have surely tried to play. You can come to the hospital if you need within 4-5 hours. But obviously, (from) South Africa it takes 2-3 days to come back.

"It was an easy decision to be with my father -- any son would do that," he added.

Chahar said while he did not get a lot of time to train apart from doing fitness-related work, he went to the NCA to work on his readiness as he eyes a spot in India's T20 World Cup squad.

"I was with my father in the hospital for 25 days. He was not in Agra. He was admitted in Aligarh. We all had to stay there," he said.

"I was only able to do some exercises. I was not able to do any cricketing activities.



That's why I was not ready for the Afghanistan series. I had not practised for a month or so.

"After that I went to the NCA. I started my practice again and now I am fully fit. Everything is good. I trained really hard for the IPL and the World Cup," he added.

Chahar said there is extra motivation for him to push for his case for selection, given that he has missed the last two T20 World Cups due to injuries.

"I have missed two (T20) World Cups because of my injuries. If I was fully fit, I would have been a part of the World Cup team as well. In any scenario or (in) any team combination, there is always a requirement for a bowler who can bat at No. 7, 8, 9. I have done that and scored runs for

the Indian team," he said.

Mahi bhai should play for another 2-3 years

For someone who shares a special bond with Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Chahar said he credits the CSK captain for harnessing his career and giving it longevity, but does not want the legend's impending retirement to hit the side anytime soon.

"It took me 2-3 years to get comfortable around him (Dhoni). I see him as an elder brother and I think he treats me as a younger brother," he said.

"We have our fun moments. During lockdown, we played a lot of PUBG together. We played a lot of games together. We spent a lot of time together off the field. I've been lucky to learn so much

from him," Chahar said.

"I would say because of him only I got a chance to play for India because before that, he gave me a really big chance to play all the 14 games in IPL. In 2018, I played all the 14 games."

Chahar said Dhoni, who has been struggling with a knee injury for the last one year or so, should stop taking additional responsibility in the CSK set-up at this stage of his career and must look to enjoy his game.

"I personally think he has a lot to give to cricket. He can play for another 2-3 seasons. I will only decide. For us, it will be very difficult to play for CSK without him. Everyone has (always) seen CSK with Mahi bhai," Chahar said.

"He should not be taking it at this time because it is the end of his career. He should be enjoying not taking responsibility and pressure for the team. He has prepared so many cricketers like Ravindra Jadeja and other players, those who can do that job, they are good at it," Chahar added.

Chahar said players thrive when the environment is good in the team, citing similarity between Ranji Trophy-winning side Rajasthan in 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons.

Himanshu four wickets put Delhi on cusp of improbable win

PTI ■ MOHALI

Stung by scathing criticism, skipper Himmat Singh pulled a beleaguered Delhi from the dungeons with a counter-attacking 194 before Himanshu Chauhan's four-wicket burst put them on cusp of an improbable victory over Uttarakhand in the Ranji Trophy here on Sunday.

Having scored 264 for nine in their second innings, Delhi had Uttarakhand on the mat at 95 for six, chasing a target of 173. Uttarakhand need to score 77 on the final day with four wickets in hand.

After being bowled out for 147 in the first innings and then conceding a first-innings lead of 92, Delhi were left stuttering at 11 for five in their second innings with five of the top six back in the pavilion without troubling the scorers.

But Himmat, considered among the top two batters in the Delhi set-up, took it upon himself, adding 182 for the sixth wicket with keeper-batter Lakshy Thareja (43, 125), who played the second fiddle to perfection.

Himmat, who was batting on 109 after the second day's play, hit 27 fours and a six, with a lot of shots coming square of the wicket on the off-side.

After Thareja was dismissed, Himmat also added another 30 runs with Hiamnshu (16), who was lethal with the new ball once again.

Chasing a target of 173, it

was off-spinner Hrithik Shokeen, who got opener Avneesh Sudha caught by close-in fielder Arpit Rana before Himanshu removed Kunal Chandel (0), Yuvraj Choudhary (0) and Jiwant Singh (3) in quick succession.

Uttarakhand were reduced to 15 for 4 before Swapnil Singh (36) and veteran Aditya Tare (36) added 78 for the fifth wicket before Shokeen and Himanshu removed both by end of third day's play to put Delhi in driver's seat.

Brief Scores: Delhi 147 and 264/9 d (Himmat Singh 194, Lakshy Thareja 43). Uttarakhand 239 and (target 173) 95/6 (Aditya Tare 36, Himanshu Chauhan 4/19).

Sandeep scores 150 as Odisha set 388-run target for HP

Opener Sandeep Pattanaik scored 150 while Anurag Sarangi contributed 70 as Odisha scored 425 for eight in their second innings to set a target of 388 for Himachal Pradesh in another Group D game in Cuttack.

At stumps, HP were 33 for one with 355 runs required on the final day for outright win. HP, however, will want to ensure three points as they had a slender first-innings lead of 38. Odisha scored 138 in first innings while HP scored 176.

Brief Scores: Odisha 138 and 425/8 (Sandeep Pattanaik 150, Rishi Dhawan 3/82). HP 176 and (target 388) 33/1.

Joseph 7-68 inspires West Indies to a stunning 8 run win over Australia

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

Shamar Joseph braved a toe injury and grabbed 7-68 as the young fast bowler inspired the West Indies to its first win in Australia in 27 years in a gripping conclusion to the day-night test at the Gabba on Sunday.

Joseph, who hobbled off the field late Saturday evening when he was struck by a searing Mitchell Starc yorker from the final ball of West Indies' second innings, flattened Australia for 207 to give the West Indies a memorable win by eight runs.

Opening batter Steve Smith was left stranded with an unbeaten 91 off 146 balls as Joseph kept coming hard at the Australian batters with his pace.

"Shout out for my teammates for their support," Joseph told broadcasters soon after masterminding West Indies' memorable win. "I wasn't even going to come to the ground today, but the doctor did something to my toe. I don't know what he did, but it worked."

The 24-year-old Joseph, who made his test debut at Adelaide where the West Indies lost by 10 wickets inside three days, sprinted towards boundary in joy as he clean bowled No. 11 Josh Hazlewood and leveled the two-match series 1-1.

"I just stuck to the basics," Joseph said. "I feel like we win the entire series by winning this test ... I cried for my five-wicket haul but I'm so happy now. I'm not even tired. I would have kept bowling."

West Indies had not beaten Australia in a test match since it won by 10 wickets at WACA in 1997, and Cameron Green and Smith well negotiated the first hour after they resumed the 216-run chase at 60-2 and raised Australia hopes of finishing the home test summer 5-0 after it routed Pakistan 3-0 and also won the first test against the West Indies in dominant style.

But Joseph returned with a stunning spell of fast bowling to breathe life when he grabbed 6-60 off an unchanged ten overs spell before the first session ended that left Australia still needing 29.



Joseph reached speeds of close to 150 kph (93 mph) and tore through the Australian middle order in a breathtaking spell. He bowled Green (42) to break a 71-run stand before blasting

through Head's defence with a superb yorker with his next ball while bowling the left-hander from around the wicket.

It was the second time in the

match that Head was dismissed first ball.

Mitch Marsh (10) and Alex Carey (two) both came and went quickly as Australia wobbled and belief grew for

West Indies of achieving a stunning upset.

Starc made a quickfire 21 before he became Joseph's fifth wicket when he was caught by Kevin Sinclair at cover.

Cummins, who scored a career-high 64 not out in the first innings, could only manage two before he edged a ball through to Joshua da Silva with Australia still requiring 41 runs to win.

Smith and Lyon brought down the target to 29, but Alzarri Joseph had Lyon caught behind soon after the break, one ball after he couldn't grab a tough return catch.

Smith then played a superb lapshot for a six off Alzarri Joseph over fine leg and brought the target down to single digits.

But Shamar Joseph would have the final say as he uprooted Hazlewood's off stump with another pacy delivery to seal West Indies' famous win amid wild celebrations by the tourists.

"Obvious disappointment after a loss but that was a fantastic test match and a fantastic series," Cummins said. "I thought in particular, Shamar, the way he bowled today, he was right up for it and unfortunately we weren't good enough."

"I thought West Indies were

fantastic. They outplayed us this week. Sometimes you always learn the lessons the hard way."

West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite said his team-mates got pumped up by former Australian cricketer Rodney Hogg's criticism, heading into the Gabba test.

"I must say we had two words that inspired us in this test match," Brathwaite said. "Mr. Rodney Hogg said that we were pathetic and hopeless. That that was our inspiration. We wanted to show the world we're not pathetic. And I must ask him, are these muscles big enough for him?"

Brathwaite praised Joseph's brilliant fast bowling and said he came to know about Joseph's availability only an hour before fourth day's play.

"The doctor said he got an injection and he's quite good and then he told me he's going to do it," Brathwaite said. "I had to back him. He's a superstar and I know he'll do great things for West Indies in the future."

"We have to continue and play with heart and keep fighting for West Indies."