



OPINION 6

MASTERSTROKE OR
POLITICAL HAKAKIRI?

WORLD 8

IMRAN, QURESHI SENTENCED
TO 10-YEAR PRISON TERM

TRAVEL 10

FOOTLOOSE IN THE ENCHANTING
KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

DEHRADUN, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 31, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹2

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POLITICAL TURMOIL IN JHARKHAND

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■
NEW DELHI/RANCHI

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



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

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

Demonstrations, rallies or meetings cannot be held in and around these areas.

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey has claimed that Kalpana Soren may replace husband Hemant, and it's for this purpose only that the alliance MLAs have been instructed to remain in Ranchi. Dubey said Hemant has called all allied MLAs to reach Ranchi 'with their luggage.' In a post on X, Dubey queried how a man who is absconding will protect the people of the State.

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

In the 81-member Assembly, JMM has 30, Congress 16, RJD 1, while the Opposition BJP has 25, Jharkhand Vikas Morcha 3, All Jharkhand Students Union 2, and others 4.

ED officials had reached his Delhi address on Monday to question him in a money-laundering case but could not locate him. The chartered plane on which he traveled from Ranchi to Delhi is parked at Delhi airport.

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

Soren's wife, Kalpana Soren, was

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

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

Severe cold wave grips north India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

BJP thrashes AAP, Congress in Chandigarh Mayor Polls

RAJESH KUMAR ■
DELHI/CHANDIGARH

In a major setback to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress, the BJP swept the Chandigarh Mayoral polls on Tuesday, retaining the three top posts in a setback to the AAP and the Congress which had contested the elections as allies.

BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar defeated the AAP's Kuldeep Kumar for the Mayor's post,

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



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

electoral test of the INDIA bloc ahead of a Lok Sabha election in less than three months' time but the alliance failed to deliver.

The loss has further weakened the Opposition group, which is already on the edge of collapse after two of its biggest members — Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) walked out. In Punjab, the AAP and the Congress have indicated that they are

reluctant to contest the Lok Sabha polls together even though they are both in the INDIA grouping. But they agreed to contest together in Mayoral elections in Chandigarh, the Union Territory that serves as the Capital of both Punjab and Haryana.

As part of the alliance in Chandigarh, the AAP contested for the Mayor's post while the Congress fielded candidates for the two other posts.

Two CoBRA Commandos among three killed in Naxal attack

PTI ■ RAIPUR

At least three CRPF personnel, including two commandos of its elite jungle warfare unit CoBRA, were killed and 14 others injured in an encounter with Naxalites along the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, police said. Among the three slain personnel, two belonged to the CoBRA's 201st battalion and one to the CRPF's 150th battalion. The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is the elite jungle warfare unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The exchange of fire occurred near the Tekalgudem village when a joint team of security personnel was out on a search operation, Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said. On Monday, a new camp of security personnel was set up in Tekalgudem, a Maoist stronghold along the inter-district border, around 450 km away from Raipur, he said. After setting up the camp, the personnel of the STF, District Reserve Guard and CoBRA, were carrying out a search in nearby Jonaguda-Aliguda villages when Naxals opened fire, he said.

India saves Iran vessels from pirates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian Navy came to the rescue of an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel and rescued 19 crew members, including Pakistanis, after pirates attacked the ship. Coincidentally, it was the second such effort by the Indian Navy warship INS Sumitra in the last 36 hours in the east of Somalia. The first rescue also involved an Iranian fishing vessel, Iman, on Monday. In a similar action, the Indian Navy responded to the hijacking of a Sri Lankan fishing vessel in collaboration with Seychelles defence forces and the Sri Lanka Navy, officials said here on Tuesday.



An anti-piracy operation by the Indian Navy's INS Sumitra, rescuing Fishing Vessel Al Naeemi and her Crew (19 Pakistani Nationals) from 11 Somali Pirates off the East Coast of Somalia

This action was also undertaken off Somalia. Providing details, they said a hijacking incident was reported onboard the Sri

Lankan-flagged multiday fishing trawler Lorenzo Putha 04 about 955 nautical miles east of Mogadishu, Somalia. Three pirates had

boarded and hijacked the fishing trawler on January 27. The Indian Navy deployed INS Sharada to locate and intercept the hijacked fishing vessel.

Additionally, efficient operational coordination and information sharing through the Sri Lanka and Seychelles International Liaison Officers at IFC IOR, New Delhi, resulted in the interception of the hijacked fishing vessel by SCGS Topaz in Seychelles EEZ on Monday.

The three pirates surrendered to the Seychelles Coast Guard (SCG), and all six crew members are safe, and the vessel is being escorted to Mahe, Seychelles.

BJP walkathon yet to pick up steam

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

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



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

Bharat pays tribute to the Father of the Nation

DEEPAKJ KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

While the thoughts and vision of Mahatma Gandhi remain the wisdom for governance across the world, the paths he took around the globe are remnants that millions and millions of his followers cherish, particularly on the occasion of his martyrdom, observed as Martyrs' Day, as done on Tuesday. One such memory from the past, rarely read or known about, is the place where Mahatma Gandhi, on August 16, 1908, led 3,000 Muslims, Hindus, and Christians outside the Hamidia Mosque at Johannesburg in South Africa, where they burned their passes — documents classified as "non-white" by the Government.



President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi on Martyrs' Day, observed to mark the death anniversary of the father of the nation, at Rajghat in New Delhi

The punitive action by the British included imprisonment. The huge bonfire, lit in a cauldron, marked the first burning of passes in South Africa and the beginning of Gandhi's satyagraha, or passive resistance, campaign. The place has been built as "Truth" by senior IFS officer Anju Ranjan during her posting (2019-2023) as Consul General in South Africa and is now thronged by visitors who relive the places in South Africa where Gandhi spent his early years and transformed himself to lead India towards Independence four decades later. "I came to know about the importance of the venue where the passes were burnt by Gandhiji. With the help of locals, I managed to raise money for developing the Truth

pillar as well as the Tolstoy farm," said Anju, currently serving as Deputy Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), New Delhi. The 2002 batch IFS officer was also instrumental in revamping and redeveloping the entire Tolstoy farm, including the library, among several other perspectives related to Gandhi. As per various reports, the entire area of historical importance was vandalised in the 1970s. Besides the revival of the Tolstoy farm in Johannesburg, Anju was instrumental in generating awareness, organising for 75 prominent Indian community members — a Gandhian trail (Tolstoy to Phoenix) for the first time to mark the places of Gandhian importance in South Africa.

Ladakh prime sanctuary for endangered snow leopards

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is home to 718 endangered snow leopards, as revealed by a first-of-its-kind scientific survey spanning five years between 2019 and 2023 across the Himalayan range. The high-altitude region of Ladakh emerged as the prime sanctuary for the elusive majestic cats, boasting the highest number at 477 individuals. State-wise population estimates further indicate 124 snow leopards in Uttarakhand, 51 in Himachal Pradesh, 36 in Arunachal



Pradesh, 21 in Sikkim, and 9 in Jammu and Kashmir. The much-anticipated Status Report of Snow Leopards in India was released on Tuesday.

Ensure timely use of 15th Finance Commission funds: Maharaj

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Panchayati Raj minister Satpal Maharaj instructed the officials to ensure timely expenditure of the funds allotted under the 15th

Currently, the government is undertaking necessary actions in this regard. He also emphasised that conducting a video conference meeting

haraj further informed the officials about the intention to increase the amount allocated for Panchayat building construction from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh, through funding from the Central government. The meeting also entailed discussion regarding the transfer of 29 subjects to Panchayats.

Further, Maharaj stated that the department has successfully trained approximately 40,000 public representatives through the National Gram Swaraj Abhiyan. A total of 450 public representatives have been given exposure visits to Panchayats in other States, resulting in exceptional work being accomplished. Soon, similar exposure visits will be organised for other representatives to bring the positive practices from other States to their respective Panchayats, the minister added.

Finance Commission. The minister issued this instruction during a review meeting held here on Tuesday.

During the meeting, Maharaj said that a proposal for restructuring the departmental structure has already been submitted to the government.

should be held with the district magistrates in case any challenges arise during the collection of Panchayat Development Index (PDI) data.

He also said that credit cards should be facilitated for the employees of the Panchayati Raj department. Ma-

Ramdev's wax figure unveiled at Madame Tussauds in Delhi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The wax figure of Swami Ramdev was unveiled by the renowned Madame Tussauds, New York in Delhi. After the unveiling programme, Swami Ramdev said that this epitomised the growing influence of Indian culture on the global stage, adding

While thanking Madame Tussauds for spending Rs two crore on making this replica, he said that this was a tribute paid not to an individual but to the time-less heritage inherent in the Sanatan Dharma, Ayurveda and Yoga.



that the Indian culture could not be constricted in the figures of the Indian icons standing in the Madame Tussauds, New York. He further said he felt proud over the fact that the Ayurveda/Yoga surge now sweeping across the world had been started by Patanjali.

"I received offers of Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan which I politely rejected because a saint is above both adoration and contempt," he said and added that all the people born in the lap of Bharat Mata were Bharat Ratnas.

UTU to establish new polytechnic campus in Narendranagar

BTech course to be offered in campus

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Veer Madho Singh Bhandari Uttarakhand Technical University (UTU) will soon establish a polytechnic campus in Narendranagar. The upcoming BTech course for the academic session 2024-25 will be offered at the campus, with 60 seats in computer science and engineering, 30 seats in electrical engineering, 30 seats in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 30 seats in food technology.

During the meeting, Singh said that work would be done on a sharing basis. In the pharmacy building located in the polytechnic campus one 60-seat and three 30-seat classrooms would be allocated for use by the campus institute. Additionally, the teachers' rooms at the polytechnic would be utilised by the teachers of the campus institute, he said.

Singh further added that to enhance capacity and ensure smooth operations, two rooms in the new building under construction could also be used. The executing institute officials assured the university administration that two rooms on the first floor of the building under construction would be prepared



meeting held under the guidance of university vice chancellor Onkar Singh on Tuesday. During the meeting, the officials discussed the operation of the new campus institute, specifically focusing on the utilisation of buildings and providing additional equipment for the resources available at the polytechnic campus. This would cater to the needs of the first-year BTech students.

and made available promptly, he said.

Singh further stated that there are currently three vacant residences of type-four and four vacant residences of type-five will continue to be used for restoration of OPS for all the employees.

PNB bags the Rajbhasha Vajanti 1st prize

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Haridwar circle office of Punjab National Bank (PNB) was presented the Rajbhasha Vajanti first prize at

aside from a number of senior Central government officers working in various projects from Haridwar,



the 37th meeting of the Nagar Rajbhasha Karyanyayan Samiti (NRKS) organised in Haridwar. Among those who attended the programme was the director, THDCIL (Personnel) Shailinder Singh

Rishikesh, Roorkee and the mountainous areas of the State. At the meeting, selected agencies which come under the NRKS Rajbhasha Vajanti Yojana were presented the Rajbhasha shields.

250 PS, ROs of secretariat service to get OPS benefit

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In a major gift to the personal secretaries of the State secretariat services, the state government has decided to give those personal secretaries the option of Old Pension Scheme (OPS), who were appointed in the service after clearing the additional PS examination- 2007 . These employees are at present covered under the New Pension Scheme (NPS).

The approval for the option of OPS was given by the additional chief secretary Radha Raturi. A similar order for the review officers appointed in the secretariat services on the basis of the ARO examination 2007 is likely to be released on Wednesday. A total of 250 employees of the State secretariat will get the benefit of the OPS. These employees were demanding OPS on the plea that the notification of their recruitment examination was issued before the implementation of the NPS.

The president of Uttarakhand chapter of National Movement for Old Pension Scheme (NMOPS), Jeetmani Painyuli expressed happiness on the development.

He said that the NMOPS will continue to fight for restoration of OPS for all the employees.

अधिकासी अभियन्ता, पीएमजीएसवाई0 खण्ड लोनिवि0, नरेन्द्रनगर

दूरभाष 01378.227082 ईमेल eepmgsynarendranagar@rediffmail.com

पत्रांक 46 / 3९0

अल्पकालीन निविदा सूचना

दिनांक 23.01.2024

महामहिम राज्यपाल महोदय, उत्तराखण्ड की ओर से अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा निम्नलिखित कार्य की मोहरबंद निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा दिनांक 30.01.2024 से 06.02.2024 तक किसी भी कार्यदिवस में 10:00 बजे पूर्वानुसार से 5:00 बजे सायं तक सप्ताह '8' में अंकित कार्यालयों से क्रय किये जा सकते हैं तथा दिनांक 07.02.2024 को अपराह्न 01:00 बजे तक सप्ताह '8' में अंकित किसी भी कार्यालय के निविदा बॉक्स में डाली जा सकती है। प्राप्त निविदायें दिनांक 07.02.2024 को अधोहस्ताक्षरी के कार्यालय में गठित समिति द्वारा अपराह्न 03:00 बजे उपस्थित ठेकेदारों अथवा उनके अधिकृत प्रतिनिधियों के समक्ष खोली जायेंगी।

निविदा के साथ रु० 100/- का नॉन ज्यूडिशियल स्टॉम्प पेपर मात्र रु० 1.00 के रेवेन्यू टिकट पर हस्ताक्षर कर निविदा की दरों की वैधता के लिये संलग्न करना आवश्यक होगा। निविदा सम्बन्धी शर्तें प्रपत्र जी०पी०डब्ल्यू०-8, जी०पी०डब्ल्यू०-9 तथा शासनादेश संख्या-120/II(2)/2014/20 (सामान्य)/2011 दिनांक 08.01.2014 के अनुसार मान्य होंगी।

क्र० सं०	कार्य का नाम	घरोहर घनराशि	निविदा मूल्य	कार्य पूर्ण अवधि	निविदा की वैधता अवधि	ठेकेदारों की पंजीकरण की श्रेणी	निविदा विक्रय हेतु निर्धारित कार्यालय
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1	प्रतिकर मद के अन्तर्गत निगेर-खाना मोटर मार्ग के कि०मी० 3 से भदनी मोटर मार्ग पर क्षतिग्रस्त पैदल रास्तों का पुनःनिर्माण कार्य।	31500	5000+ GST	02 माह	45 दिन	मार्ग कार्य हेतु पंजीकृत श्रेणी 'डी' एवं उच्चतर	1. अधिकासी अभियन्ता, सिंचाई खण्ड-1 (PMGSY), नई टिहरी। 2. अधिकासी अभियन्ता, सिंचाई खण्ड (PMGSY), चम्पा। 3. अधिकासी अभियन्ता, PMGSY खण्ड, लोनिवि० नरेन्द्रनगर

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(ई० मधुसूदन बलोनी)
अधिकासी अभियन्ता
पीएमजीएसवाई० खण्ड लोनिवि० नरेन्द्रनगर

नगर पालिका परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला टिहरी गढ़वाल

पत्रांक 1303 / निविदा सूचना / 2023-24 ई-निविदा सूचना

दिनांक 29.01.2024

एतत् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला में निकाय निधि / राज्य वित्त आयोग / 15वें वित्त आयोग के अन्तर्गत इच्छुक ठेकेदारों / फर्मों / कम्पनियों से निविदाये कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला में दिनांक 12.02.2024 को अपराह्न 02:00 बजे तक ई-निविदा के माध्यम से दो लिफाफा (Double bid system) के अन्तर्गत तकनीकी भाव पत्र (Technical Bid) एवं वित्तीय भाव पत्र (Financial Bid) के माध्यम से www.uktender.gov.in पर ऑनलाइन के माध्यम से आमन्त्रित की जाती है, जो कि उसी दिन सायं 03:00 बजे निविदा समिति के द्वारा निविदादाताओं / उनके प्रतिनिधियों के समक्ष खोली जायेंगी तकनीकी विड में सफल निविदादाताओं की ही वित्तीय विड निविदा द्वितीय चरण में खोली जायेंगी। निविदा प्रपत्र पालिका कार्यालय मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला व www.uktender.gov.in पर दिनांक 12.02.2024 तक सायं 02:00 बजे तक निविदा के साक्षे निधारित मूल्य जी०एस०टी० सहित अदा कर कार्यालय में नगद / बैंक ड्राफ्ट जमा कर प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं, कार्य सम्बन्धी विस्तृत सूचना एवं अन्य निविदा शर्तें निविदा प्रपत्र के साथ संलग्न है। जो कि कार्यालय मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला व में किसी भी कार्य दिवस में देखी जा सकती है। निविदा को बिना कारण बताये स्वीकृत / अस्वीकृत / निरस्त करने का अधिकार अध्यक्ष निविदा समिति का होगा।

क्र० सं०	कार्य का नाम / विवरण	घरोहर घनराशि	निविदा शुल्क	निविदा की वैधता	कार्यपूति दिवस
1	वार्ड संख्या-11 के अन्तर्गत श्री कुलानन्द पांथरी के मकान से बिजेन्द्र राणा मोनाल स्कूल से बुद्धि सिंह के मकान तक व श्री योगेन्द्र थपलियाल के मकान से मोनाल स्कूल से श्री बहुगुणा जी के मकान तक सी.सी.मार्ग एवं भूमिगत नाली एवं यू-ट्राईप नाली का निर्माण कार्य	91760.00	5000+ 18% GST	90 दिवस	120 दिवस
2	वार्ड संख्या-11 के अन्तर्गत श्री कपूर राणा के मकान से श्री राजेश लेखवार जी के मकान तक सी.सी.मार्ग एवं नाली निर्माण कार्य	91760.00	5000+ 18% GST	90 दिवस	120 दिवस

अधिकासी अधिकारी

प्रशासक

PUBLIC NOTICE

Registered office: ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai- 400051
Corporate Office: ICICI HFC Tower, JB Nagar, Andheri Kurla Road, Andheri East, Mumbai- 400059
Branch Address: Showroom no. 301, 3rd floor, Shri Ram Arcade, Old Municipal No. 74, Rajpur Road, Dehradun Pin: 248009
Branch Address: 66/1, Opposite Shikha Petrol Pump, Purvawali, Dehradun Road, Roorkee, Uttarakhand - 247667.

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ("ICICI HFC") and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ Loan Account Number & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Mahesh. (Borrower), Kamlesh. (Co-Borrower), Johri Gaon Kutalwali Sinaula Dehradun Uttarakhand 248003. LHDEH00001458847	226 House No 226 Mauja Johari Gaon Anarwala Pargana Kendriyadood Dehradun Dehradun 1 Dehradun Uttarakhand 248001. Bounded By- North: Land Of Others., South: 15 Ft. Wide Road., East: Property Ofsm. Neetu Kumar., West: Land Of Smt. Somlata Shreshtha..	11-01-2024 Rs. 43,732.52/-	03-01-2024
2.	Mahesh. (Borrower), Kamlesh. (Co-Borrower), Johri Gaon Kutalwali Sinaula, Dehradun Uttarakhand 248003. LHDEH00001458848	226 House No 226 Mauja Johari Gaon Anarwala Pargana Kendriyadood Dehradun Dehradun 1 Dehradun Uttarakhand 248001. Bounded By- North: Land Of Others., South: 15 Ft. Wide Road., East: Property Ofsm. Neetu Kumar., West: Land Of Smt. Somlata Shreshtha..	11-01-2024 Rs. 10,71,443/-	03-01-2024
3.	Vahidan. (Borrower), Abdul Mujeeb (Co-Borrower), R 66 Chota Bharuwalla Grant Clement Town Dehradun Uttarakhand 248002. LHDEH00001498245	Khata Khatauni No. 1913(according To Crop Year 1417 To 1422) Khadra No. 244 Min, Area 1240 Square Feet, Measuring 115.24 Sq.meters, Situated At Mauza Majra, Pargana Kendriyadun, Tehsil And District Dehradun Uttarakhand. Bounded By- North: Land Of Others 62 Ft., South: Land Of Seller 62 Ft., East: 20 Ft Wide Road, West: 3 Ft Wide Road Then 20 Ft.	11-01-2024 Rs. 10,48,517/-	03-01-2024
4.	Vahidan. (Borrower), Abdul Mujeeb (Co-Borrower), R 66 Chota Bharuwalla Grant Clement Town Dehradun Uttarakhand 248002. LHDEH00001498365	Khata Khatauni No. 1913(according To Crop Year 1417 To 1422) Khadra No. 244 Min, Area 1240 Square Feet, Measuring 115.24 Sq.meters, Situated At Mauza Majra, Pargana Kendriyadun, Tehsil And District Dehradun Uttarakhand. Bounded By- North: Land Of Others 62 Ft., South: Land Of Seller 62 Ft., East: 20 Ft Wide Road, West: 3 Ft Wide Road Then 20 Ft.	11-01-2024 Rs. 53,870.06/-	03-01-2024
5.	Pinki Kashyap (Borrower), Parveen Kumar (Co-Borrower), 453 Chaybagh Shani Mandir, Ambiwala Ambiwala Dehradun Uttarakhand 248001. LHDEH00001414306	1694/4 Khata Khatauni No 1613 Fasl Year (1399-1404) Khadra No 1694/4 Min Mauza Arcadia Grant Pargana Pachwadood Dehradun Dehradun 1 Dehradun Uttarakhand 248007. Bounded By- North: Property Of Lalita Devi / 32.1 Ft. South: 15 Ft Wide Road / 15 Ft. East: 15 Ft Wide Raod / 33 Ft. West: Land Of Other / 28 Ft.	11-01-2024 Rs. 7,08,729.96/-	03-01-2024
6.	Pinki Kashyap (Borrower), Parveen Kumar (Co-Borrower), 453 Chaybagh Shani Mandir, Ambiwala Ambiwala Dehradun Uttarakhand 248001. LHDEH00001450346	1694/4 Khata Khatauni No 1613 Fasl Year (1399-1404) Khadra No 1694/4 Min Mauza Arcadia Grant Pargana Pachwadood Dehradun Dehradun 1 Dehradun Uttarakhand 248007. Bounded By- North: Property Of Lalita Devi / 32.1 Ft. South: 15 Ft Wide Road / 15 Ft. East: 15 Ft Wide Raod / 33 Ft. West: Land Of Other / 28 Ft.	11-01-2024 Rs. 9,24,747.44/-	03-01-2024
7.	Shaukin. (Borrower), (Co-Borrower), Saheeda. (Co-Borrower), Sherpur Hariwar Bhagwanpur Hariwar Uttarakhand 247661. LHROK00001536203	- Kh No 6 Situated At Makkhanpur Mahdood Alam Mustahkum Pargana And Tehsil Bhagwanpur Distt Hariwar Bhagwanpur - Roorkee Uttarakhand 247667. Bounded By- North: Passage 20 Feet Wide., South: Shiv City Colony., East: Private Plot No. 4., West: Private Plot 2..	11-01-2024 Rs. 8,15,000/-	03-01-2024
8.	Shaukin. (Borrower), Ikarar. (Co-Borrower), Saheeda. (Co-Borrower), Sherpur Hariwar Bhagwanpur Hariwar Uttarakhand 247661. LHROK00001536205	- Kh No 6 Situated At Makkhanpur Mahdood Alam Mustahkum Pargana And Tehsil Bhagwanpur Distt Hariwar Bhagwanpur - Roorkee Uttarakhand 247667. Bounded By- North: Passage 20 Feet Wide., South: Shiv City Colony., East: Private Plot No. 4., West: Private Plot 2..	11-01-2024 Rs. 51,367.9/-	03-01-2024

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitization and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 31, 2024
Place: Dehradun, Roorkee

Authorized Officer
ICICI Home Finance Company Limited

Dehradun linked with border district Pithoragarh by air now

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami inaugurated the air service between Pithoragarh and Dehradun on Tuesday. The CM travelled in the first flight from Naini Saini airport in Pithoragarh. Congratulating the people of the State for the new air service, the CM expressed gratitude to Prime Minister

construction of all weather road. Dhami said that now with the air service available one can reach Pithoragarh in one hour from Dehradun.

He said that the Dehradun airport is being upgraded to international standards and a new terminal is being constructed here. The Airports



Narendra Modi and the Civil Aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia for the gift to the State. He said that Uttarakhand is an important State for religious tourism. Dhami said that earlier one used to reach the border district of Pithoragarh from Delhi and Dehradun in 17 hours and now this time has been reduced to 11 hours with the

Authority of India has already conducted an OLS survey for developing Pantnagar airport into an international airport. The State government is also planning to make the Dehradun- Almora- Pithoragarh helicopter service regular. He said that after the visit of Adi Kailash and Jageshwar Dham by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi the number

of tourists visiting these places has increased. PM Modi is giving national and international recognition for the tourists' spots of Uttarakhand. Dhami expressed confidence that the new air service will prove to be a milestone for promoting tourism in Pithoragarh district. He said that initially the air service to Pithoragarh will be available thrice a week and later its frequency will be made five days in a week. The CM also requested the civil aviation minister to start an air service from Pithoragarh to Hindon airport.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony in a virtual mode, Scindia said that the double engine government is committed to development. Remembering his old association with the State, Scindia said that Uttarakhand is Devbhoomi. He said that the 19 seater service between Pithoragarh and Dehradun will be available on Monday, Tuesday and Friday. Scindia said that the air service will be beneficial for both locals and the tourists.

MP Ajay Tamta termed the day historic and requested that an air service connecting Pithoragarh to Delhi should also be started.

Noxious fumes kill three seeking warmth in room

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Two men died of asphyxia in their sleep and one died during treatment due to noxious fumes from smouldering coal in their closed room in the wee hours of Tuesday in Nainital. The officials informed that the men were labourers who were living near the High Court in Nainital. They reportedly lit an Angethi using coals on Sunday night to keep their room warm and went to sleep. The coal in the Angethi reportedly

continued to burn till late Monday night and since there was no way out for the noxious fumes, it accumulated in the closed room due to which, the three men started suffocating. The officials said that the victims' families were repeatedly trying to call them since Monday morning and when they did not respond, they called their contractor. The contractor reached their room late on Monday to check on them and found them un-

conscious. They were taken to hospital for treatment where doctors declared two men Rakumar (25) and Avneesh (21) as brought dead and Maninder (21) was referred to a higher centre in Haldwani where he died on Tuesday morning during treatment, as per the officials. The police reached the hospital and took the bodies to carry out further proceedings, the officials added.

Radha Raturi set to be the new chief secretary of U'khand

She will be the first woman CS of the State

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Senior officer of Indian Administrative Services (IAS) Radha Raturi will be the new chief secretary of Uttarakhand. She will take charge from the incumbent CS SS Sandhu who is superannuating on January 31. Raturi is at present the additional chief secretary in Uttarakhand government holding key responsibility of chief minister office, home and secretariat administration. An officer of the 1988 batch of IAS, she will be the first woman CS of the state. Her husband Anil Raturi is a retired IPS officer who has served as the director general of the State police force. The



appointment of Raturi to the top post of administration in the State became apparent when it became clear that the government is not giving another extension to outgoing

CS Sandhu. Raturi is slated to retire in March this year and it is expected that the government will give her an extension in view of the Lok Sabha election.

Alert issued- heavy rain and snowfall likely in mountains today

Rain & snowfall likely in State after major deficit in winter

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After most of the winter passed by sans rain and snowfall, the weather is set to take a turn with heavy rain and snowfall forecast in the State on Wednesday and Thursday. The State meteorological centre has issued an orange warning (Alert) regarding the possibility of

to occur. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 17 degrees Celsius and eight degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun on Wednesday.

The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various parts of the State



heavy rain/snowfall likely to occur at isolated places in the mountainous regions of the State today. Further, thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/hail are likely to occur at isolated places in the districts of the State. Light to moderate rain/snowfall is likely to occur at most places in the districts of the State. In addition to this, snowfall is likely to occur at places situated at altitudes of 2,500 metres and above in the State today. The State meteorological centre director Bikram Singh said that rain and snowfall is likely in the mountainous districts on January 31 and February 1.

The meteorological centre has further forecast that the provisional State capital Dehradun is likely to witness a partly to generally cloudy sky. Light to moderate rain/thunderstorm accompanied with lightning/hail is also likely

on Tuesday were 21.9 degrees Celsius and 6.8 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 22.6 degrees Celsius and 5.1 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 14 degrees Celsius and 0.6 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 14.6 degrees Celsius and 2.9 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

It is pertinent to mention here that Uttarakhand has been suffering from a major deficit of rain and snowfall during the winter season this year with negligent weather activity being witnessed from November till date. This has had a considerable effect on agriculture and also tourism to some extent. Experts state that weak and reduced frequency of western depression has resulted in this situation. It remains to be seen whether the rain and snowfall forecast in the State compensates to some extent for the deficit suffered so far.

STF arrests Hawala operator involved in 2,327 cyber crimes from Gujarat

Accused is allegedly involved in at least Rs 10 crore worth of cyber fraud

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The cyber crime police station of Uttarakhand Special Task Force (STF) arrested a Hawala operator from Gujarat's Surat on charges of facilitating fake bank accounts and SIM cards in Dubai to carry out financial fraud in the country. The accused is

to supply cyber fraud kits containing SIM cards and bank accounts, the DSP said. The police also seized crucial items from his possession during the arrest including 42 debit cards, 30 chequebooks, 20 micro sim cards, a Dubai Metro card, a Dubai sim card,



allegedly involved in at least Rs 10 crore worth of cyber fraud. He is also linked to over 2,327 cyber crimes across the country including 36 criminal cases in Uttarakhand, the deputy superintendent of police of STF Ankush Mishra said. The accused identified as Moradiya Hardik Kumar (32) is a resident of Surat and has been actively involved in cyber crimes and Hawala operations.

a passport, a card swiping machine and seals of three fake companies among other items. Kumar had planned to continue his cybercrime activities in Dubai but was taken into custody before executing his plans, Mishra claimed.

The seized items including documents and electronic devices have also provided crucial evidence against Kumar, exposing a national scam of about Rs 10 crores. He has allegedly committed fraud in multiple states like Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, Haryana, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, and Andhra Pradesh. The accused had also planned to deliver 40 bank accounts to Dubai in a few days. The STF is investigating the matter and will connect with authorities of other states too, DSP added.

The STF found during the investigation that the accused is associated with a total of 104 cases and 2,327 cyber crimes nationwide. He was apprehended from Surat based on technical evidence and intelligence gathered by Uttarakhand police. According to the investigation, the accused used fake sim cards, various mobile handsets and fake bank accounts to commit crimes. He also used to travel to Dubai and Thailand often

State trying to protect IFS officer accused of sexual harassment: Congress

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Congress has alleged that the State administration is trying its best to suppress the truth in the recent incident involving alleged sexual harassment of the daughter of a former BJP MLA from Uttarkashi by senior IFS officer Sushant Patnaik.

Interacting with the media persons, the chief spokesperson of state Congress Garima Dasauni said that though the administration tried to hide the incident which recently took place in the office of pollution control board, the truth has come out. She said that the harassed woman is the daughter of a former BJP MLA from Uttarkashi. Dasauni said that the then member secretary of board Patnaik tried to molest the daughter of the former BJP MLA deployed in the office of the board. She said that the victim submitted a written complaint to the DGP



after which Patnaik was removed from the post and attached to the office of principal chief conservator of forests. She questioned why Patnaik was removed from the post if he is not guilty.

Dasauni said that the status of women security in the State can be understood from this incident where the daughter of a former BJP MLA is also not safe. Dasauni also criticised the

State government for not recommending the name of noted folk singer Narendra Singh Negi for the Padma awards. She claimed that the name of Negi was there in the list but was struck down by the government when Negi released a video in support of the land law movement. She said that the people of Uttarakhand will not tolerate Negi's insult.

The president of Mahanagar Congress Jaswinder Singh Gogi said that unemployment and price rise are at their peak in the State. The unemployed are being lathi-charged when they protest against recruitment scams. He said that the recent data of NCRB shows that Uttarakhand is at top among nine Himalayan States in crimes against women. Gogi said that in the last one year 907 women were raped and

778 were kidnapped in one year. He said that the Agnipath scheme has hit the youngsters of the State hard.

President to felicitate police constable for saving 25 lives

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Police constable Naresh Joshi who is posted as a driver in Udhm Singh Nagar district will be felicitated with Jeevan Raksha Padak by the President for saving 25 lives on August 30, 2022 while risking his life. He is being awarded for his bravery under the Jeevan Raksha Padak Series Award 2023. The officiating director general of police Abhinav Kumar also congratulated him for this achievement.

Talking about the courageous act for which Joshi will be receiving the medal, officials said that on August 30, 2022 at 5 AM, the police received information about ammonia gas leakage from a cylinder in a warehouse located in the Transit



Camp of Azadnagar area in the Udhm Singh Nagar district. Many people also fell unconscious. The police force rushed to the spot after getting the information and found that many people had also started experiencing breathing problems and burning sensation in their eyes, among other health issues. Many people were on the verge of suffocat-

ing to death due to inhaling the leaked poisonous gas.

The officials said that considering the severe condition of people, constable Joshi placed the cylinder in an e-rickshaw and drove it away from the densely populated area from where it was later taken in a closed vehicle for its disposal as per the procedure. Joshi displayed indomitable courage and bravery and took the leaking cylinder of poisonous gas without caring for his own life to save 25 lives. The DGP said that Joshi is a well deserving candidate for this medal and has made the State proud across the country.



Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005.


The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Rashmi Dimri, Baldev Singh Bisht, B 52 Sector II, Defence Colony, Uttarakhand, Dehradun- 248012 A/c- LBGUR00002384070	Flat No. 2094, 9th Floor Tower 2, ATS Marigold Sector 89A Gurgaon- 122001 (Along with 2Nos of Car Parking Space)	21/12/2023 Rs. 93,77,756.1/-	29/09/2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 31, 2024
Place : Dehradun

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited



Registered Office Address: Unit No.601, 6th Floor Piramala Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Kamani Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kurla (West), Mumbai- 400 070.
CIN:L65910MH1584PLC032639, Web Side:- www.piramalfinance.com
Branch Address: Dhiraj Baug, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Agra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West)- 400602.

DEMAND NOTICE

Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The undersigned is the Authorised officer of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL) [formerly known as Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd. (DHFL)] under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to PCHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Description of secured asset (immovable property)
(LC No. 09700005279 of Dehradun Branch) Avdesh Kumar Srivastava (Borrower)	16-01-2024/ Rs. 8,13,498/- (Rs. Eight lakh Thirteen Thousand Four Hundred Ninety Eight Only) NPA (09-10-2023)	Khasra No. 1741 Situated At Mauza Mehuwala Mafi Pargana Pachwa Doon Dehradun Dehradun Uttarakhand:- 248001
(LC No. 28600002108 of Haridwar Branch) Vipin Yadav (Borrower) Vandana V (Coborrower 1)	16-01-2024/ Rs. 1168792/- (Rs. Eleven lakh Sixty Eight Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety Two Only) NPA (09-01-2024)	Part Of Plot No-08, Khasra No-1674, Hanumant Puram, vill- Salempur Mehdood, Pargana- Roorkhee, Haridwar Haridwar Uttarakhand:- 249402
(LC No. 09700009258 of Dehradun Branch) Hinal (Borrower) Madhu Lama (Coborrower 1) Dawa Sharpa (Coborrower 2) Neema (Guarantor 1)	16-01-2024/ Rs. 1661728/- (Rs. Sixteen lakh Sixty One Thousand Seven Hundred Twenty Eight Only) NPA (09-01-2024)	khasra No 570, 569 And 573 Kha, Mauza Domet Pargana, Pachwadood Tehsil Vikasnagar, Dehradun Dehradun Uttarakhand:- 248001
(LC No. 15000003270 of Haldwani Branch) Vivek Kumar (Borrower) Shalini (Coborrower 1)	03-01-2024/ Rs. 1055205/- (Rs. Ten lakh Fifty Five Thousand Two Hundred Five Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Part Of Khasra No. 11 Min Pvt. Plot No. 50 Village Fulsunga Rudrapur Udhamsinghnagar Uttarakhand:- 263153
(LC No. 15000003551 of Haldwani Branch) Munnakumar Yadav (Borrower) Sanjana Yadav (Coborrower 1)	03-01-2024/ Rs. 1419441/- (Rs. Fourteen lakh Nineteen Thousand Four Hundred Forty One Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Part Of Khasra No 70 Min Pvt Plot No 19, Krishna Vihar Fulsungi Rudrapur Udhamsinghnagar Uttarakhand:- 263153
(LC No. 15000003829 of Haldwani Branch) Babu B (Borrower) Mohd Hanif (Coborrower 1) Mahamooda (Coborrower 2) Riyasat (Guarantor 1) Mohd. Haneef (Guarantor 2) Mohd. Gulfam (Guarantor 3)	16-01-2024/ Rs. 751273/- (Rs. Seven lakh Fifty One Thousand Two Hundred Seventy Three Only) NPA (10-12-2023)	Part Of Khasra No. 823/1/1 Min Village Sarvakhera Near Ananj Mandi Kashipur Udhamsinghnagar Uttarakhand:- 244713

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of PCHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date: 31-01-2024
Place: Uttarakhand

Sd/- (Authorised Officer)
Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited

Neighbours need each other: Jaishankar on Maldives row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As diplomatic tension simmers between India and Maldives, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said at the end of the day neighbours need each other. He also said "history and geography are very powerful forces. There is no escape from that," Jaishankar said in the backdrop of "India out" campaign in the island nation.

In another development, since the diplomatic spat erupted three weeks ago, from being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position, according to Maldives official data.

Amid a diplomatic row that erupted after Maldivian politicians posted derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Jaishankar said that neighbours need each other. On the 'India out' campaign in

the Maldives, Jaishankar, during an interaction at IIM-Mumbai, said, "History and geography are very powerful forces. There is no escape from that."

His remarks came in the backdrop of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu earlier urged the Indian government to withdraw its military personnel from the Maldives on or before March 15. This was a part of the 'India out' campaign by the Maldives amid a diplomatic row.

Besides, President Muizzu, considered pro-China, has been reviewing bilateral agreements signed with India by the previous regime in the island nation.

Meanwhile, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), an opposition party, has collected signatures needed to initiate a no-confidence motion to launch impeachment proceedings against the Muizzu government. The

impeachment motion is likely to be introduced in the Maldives parliament soon. From being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position in the last three weeks, amid a diplomatic row between New Delhi and Male, according to official data.

Official figures released by the Maldives Ministry of Tourism showed a notable drop in the number of Indian travellers visiting the island nation.

Over 2 lakh Indians visited Maldives annually in the last three years, the highest from any country post-COVID 19 pandemic, the data showed.

However, the travel hotspot for Indians is now facing a backlash after three ministers from the Maldives cabinet made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep earlier this month.

According to the statistics,



Maldives received over 1.74 lakh tourists till January 28 this year, of which only 13,989 were Indians. Russia topped the chart with 18,561 tourists from the country visiting Maldives, followed by Italy (18,111), China (16,529) and UK

(14,588). Germany is at the sixth spot followed by USA, France, Poland and Switzerland.

Over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, of which maximum were Indians (2,09,198) followed by

Russians (2,09,146) and Chinese (1,87,118).

The number of Indian visitors to Maldives was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 and over 2.11 lakh in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open for international tourists

during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period.

In 2018, India was the fifth-largest source of tourist arrivals in the Maldives with 90,474 visitors. In 2019, India reached the second spot with 1.66 lakh Indians visiting that country. Many netizens on social media claimed that they have cancelled their scheduled trips to the Maldives because of the row, with the hashtag "Boycott Maldives" trending on X for several days this month.

Joining the 'boycott campaign', EaseMyTrip, an online travel aggregator, had announced it has suspended all flight bookings to the island nation on its website "in solidarity" with India.

Meanwhile, the government of the Maldives had suspended three of its deputy ministers after they criticised Modi for his post on X following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that

it was an attempt to project the Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives. The Maldivian foreign ministry had said the government is aware of the "derogatory remarks" made on social media platforms against foreign leaders and that their personal views do not represent the country's position.

Situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is home to nearly 1,200 tiny coral islands that stretch along a length of 871 kilometres. From personalised spa treatments to adventure sports activities to world-class cuisine, the island nation offers myriad experiences, making it a great choice for visitors.

The beautiful beaches and the island experience, coupled with affordable airfare that is even cheaper than the cost of travel to some Indian cities, have been a big draw for Indian tourists.



Defence MoS Ajay Bhatt during the presentation of the Republic Day parade 2024 best marching contingent trophy to Delhi Police Women among the CAPF and others auxiliary forces in Judges Choice category, in New Delhi

PTI

REPUBLIC DAY PARADE Delhi Police all women contingent gets best marching award

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt on Tuesday here gave away the best marching contingents and tableaux awards for this year's Republic Day parade. Delhi Police women marching contingent bagged the best marching award amongst the paramilitary forces while the Sikh Regiment got the award in the services category. The colourful tableau of Odisha that showcased women empowerment in the state as well as its rich handicraft and handloom sector has bagged the first prize among the tableaux showcased by various states and UTs, officials said on Tuesday. Gujarat's tableau showcasing Dhorado tourism village has earned the first place in the people's choice category. Culture Ministry's tableau themed 'Bharat: Mother of Democracy' bagged the first prize among tableaux which were displayed by various ministries and departments during the ceremonial parade. Ministry of Home Affairs

tableau depicting 'vibrant villages' has won the second prize.

A total of 16 tableaux from states and Union territories, and nine from central ministries and departments had rolled down the Kartavya Path during the grand celebrations which was graced by French President Emmanuel Macron. The states and Union territories which presented their tableaux included Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Ladakh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana.

Three panels of judges were appointed for assessing the performance of Marching Contingents from three Services, Marching Contingents from Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)/other auxiliary forces and tableaux from various States/Union Territories and Ministries/Departments.

RS chairman revokes suspension of 11 Opposition MPs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha Privileges Committee on Tuesday held 11 suspended opposition MPs guilty of breach of privilege and contempt of the Council of States, but Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar revoked their suspension allowing them to attend the Budget session, sources said.

In its report to the Rajya Sabha chairman a day before the session starts on Wednesday, the committee also recommended that the period of suspension already suffered by the members be treated as "sufficient punishment" for the transgression.

The MPs held "guilty of breach of privilege and contempt of the Council" of States are Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dang, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G C Chandrashekhar, Binoy Viswam, Sandosh Kumar P, M Mohamed Abdulla, John Brittas and A A Rahim. The committee presented the report to Dhankhar, taking note of the situation that the suspended members would not be able to attend the special address of President Droupadi Murmu to both Houses of Parliament, the first address in the new building of Parliament, on Wednesday.

The committee usually submits its recommendations to the House.

The sources said the chairman invoked the authority vested in him under the rules of procedure to revoke their suspension enabling the members to attend the special address by the president.

The matter of 11 MPs suspended by the chairman during the Winter session of Parliament were referred to the Privileges Committee.

Prenatal exposure to air pollution can cause respiratory distress in newborns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prenatal exposure to air pollution specifically fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) increases the risk of severe respiratory distress in newborn babies, according to a study, thus revealing a better understanding of infant respiratory distress, the leading cause of admission in neonatal intensive care units and death among infants worldwide.

Mothers' exposure to air pollution while pregnant is known to be associated with adverse long-term respiratory issues, such as asthma, in their children. However, what we didn't know is that maternal exposure to air pollution could cause babies to suffer severe respiratory distress soon after

birth, said Chintan K Gandhi, assistant professor of pediatrics at Penn State and corresponding author of the paper, about the need to conduct the study. It is published in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives

To conduct their study, the researchers analyzed data from the Maternal-Infant Research on Environmental Chemicals (MIREC) Study led by Health Canada. The MIREC Study team estimated the women's exposures to PM2.5 and NO2 beginning three months prior to pregnancy through the end of the third trimester by using models based on satellite information and ground-level air quality monitoring devices. The MIREC team found that during the study period, the



women were exposed to PM2.5 concentrations ranging from 1.47 to 23.71 micrograms per cubic meter of air (µg/m3), with a median of 8.81 µg/m3, and NO2 concentrations ranging from 1.72 to 53.10 parts per billion (ppb), with a

median of 18.02 ppb. To provide context, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provides standards for maximum annual exposures of 9.0 to 10.0 µg/m3 for PM2.5 and 53 ppb for NO2.

However, Gandhi said, "There

really is no safe level of air pollution."

Using data from the MIREC study, the team led by Penn State researchers examined associations between the mothers' exposure to air pollution and physician-diagnosed respiratory distress in newborns. The examination extended beyond diagnosis to encompass the severity of respiratory distress, quantified by the necessity for oxygen, mechanical ventilation and systemic antibiotics in the infants.

"This nuanced approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between maternal air pollution exposure and the varying degrees of respiratory distress observed in newborns," Gandhi said.

NMC bars medical college Profs from private practice during duty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a move aimed to weed out ghost faculty, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has barred the faculty in medical colleges from engaging in private practice during college hours and made 75 per cent attendance mandatory for them. The medical regulator issued the "Minimum Standard of Requirements for Postgraduate Courses-2023 (PGMSR-2023)" guidelines last week. "Faculty shall be full-time and shall not engage in private practice during college hours. It shall be mandatory to have at least 75 per cent attendance of the total working days for the required number of faculties," as per the guidelines.

It also stipulated that 80 per cent of hospital beds should be occupied throughout the year by patients requiring inpatient care and minimum 15 per cent of the total beds in the department imparting post-graduate training should be Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds/high dependency unit (HDU) beds exclusively of that department.

"Hospital building shall



conform to existing national building norms and various local statutory regulations for hospitals taking into consideration requirements of the hospital as a service provider, including administration, registration, records storage, out-patient and inpatient areas, operating theatres, ICU, radiology and laboratory services and emergency areas, etc."

There shall be an increase in the faculty, infrastructure and other staff in subjects of radio-diagnosis, anaesthesia, pathology, microbiology, and biochemistry with the increase in the number of beds in the hospital. Also, there shall be an increase in the faculty and infrastructure, if workload in the department is more, the guidelines said.

Post-graduate medical colleges

or institutes started under Section 3.1(iii) of PGMER-23 (Standalone post-graduate medical college/institute) will have minimum 220 beds and will compulsorily have the functional departments of biochemistry, pathology, microbiology, radio diagnosis, anaesthesiology (when there are surgical speciality).

The institution shall have adequate in-house laboratory and imaging facilities for training of post-graduate students, which should be fully run by the respective department.

There shall be digital data of records of investigations done in various departments and laboratories besides a well-equipped air-conditioned blood bank capable of providing component therapy, as per the guidelines.

UGC removes 'de-reservation' draft guidelines amid backlash

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Tuesday removed from its website, the draft guidelines suggesting "de-reservation" of reserved posts if enough candidates from the SC, ST and OBC categories are not available, amid a controversy over the issue.

The commission chairman, M Jagadesh Kumar, however, said "the guidelines have been removed from the website as the time period for stakeholders to submit their feedback is over". A controversy erupted on Sunday over UGC's draft guidelines proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be "declared unreserved" if enough candidates from these categories are not available, with the Congress terming it a conspiracy to do away with quota in higher education institutions. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan clarified that not a single post will be de-reserved and there is no scope for ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

University Grants Commission



(UGC) Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar also made it clear 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".

The draft guidelines have drawn flak from several quarters. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP is "only busy snatching the jobs of youths". The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) also staged a protest against the UGC chairman on the issue on Monday.

Stepping up an attack, the Congress on Monday demanded the dismissal of UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar over the draft guidelines for "de-reservation" of posts in higher education institutions, with party leader Rahul Gandhi alleging it was a "conspiracy" to end the reservation given to SC, ST and OBC categories.

Pradhan, however, hit back at Gandhi saying his politics is completely based on lies.

India ranks 93 among 180 nations on corruption index

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the corruption perceptions index for 2023 as its overall score remained largely unchanged, according to a Transparency International report.

The index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. In 2023, India's overall score was 39 while in 2022, it was 40. India's rank in 2022 was 85.

"India (39) shows score fluctuations small enough that no firm conclusions can be drawn on any significant change. However, ahead of the elections, India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecommunication) bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights," the report said.

In South Asia, both Pakistan (133) and Sri Lanka (115) grapple with their respective debt burdens and ensuing political instability, it said.

"However, the two countries have strong judicial oversight, which is helping to keep the government in check. The Supreme Court of Pakistan strengthened citizens' right to information by expanding this right under Article 19A of its Constitution to previously restricted institutions," it said. The report said as Bangladesh (149) emerges from the least developed country (LDC) status, with economic growth supporting a continued reduction in poverty and improving living conditions, the flow of information on the public sector is hindered amidst an ongoing crackdown against the press.

Noting that China (76) has made headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption crackdown by punishing more than 3.7 million public officials for corruption over the last decade, the report said a closer study of the cases with guilty verdicts found that public officials often use corruption as a way to drive up their income.

However, the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the long-term effectiveness of such

anti-corruption measures, the report said.

The report said as the Asia Pacific region faces a big 2024 election year, with people coming out to vote in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, South Korea and Taiwan, the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reveals another year of little to no meaningful progress towards curbing corruption.

"For five years in a row, the average CPI score for the region stagnates stubbornly at 45 out of a possible 100. Very few countries show sustained turnarounds that indicate significant changes in corruption levels and several historically at the top are slowly declining," it said. Seventy-one per cent of the countries across Asia and the Pacific have a CPI score below the regional average score of 45 and the global average of 43 out of 100. These weak scores reflect the lack of delivery by elected officials on anti-corruption agendas, together with crackdowns on organised civil society and attacks on freedoms of press, assembly and association, the report said.



activist in the sector pointed out that even as the deadline to make all public places including hospitals accessible under the central flagship Accessible India Campaign by 15 June 2022 and despite the progressive legal mandate, the hospitals under Delhi Government remain inaccessible to PwDs including patients, faculty with disabilities, and staff with disabilities. For instance, he pointed out at the Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC) Hospital, the auditorium is not accessible, reserved parking not close to the entrance, and the library

not being accessible. The BSA Hospital's Physiology department and academic block do not have a lift despite this medical college being the newest one to be built.

Similarly, the GTB Hospital, of which the petitioner is the nodal officer, has written multiple times to the Public Works Department to share access audits but it hasn't been done so. Moreover, the new hospital building at GTBH and other hospitals are under progress and they should follow the accessibility standard right from the beginning with the involvement of administrators or doctors with disabilities.

Singh further said that even though the Union Health Ministry has framed Accessibility Standards for Healthcare in 2022, the hospitals are slow to follow it in letter and spirit.

Responding to the order, Dr Singh said, the mission mode approach implies a targeted and time-bound strategy to expedite the process of making hospitals more accessible, emphasizing the urgency and importance of this initiative.

People must not rely on online information for serious advice: Experts

MANSI BHAMBRI ■ DEHRADUN

People should refrain from relying on Google or any application as a source of actionable information, particularly when it comes to health advice, experts said. They said this in light of a recent case in Dehradun wherein a young man killed his mother

can be detrimental to both the individual and those around them. To prevent the worsening of this disorder, counselling and proper treatment are of utmost importance. If any family member or parent notices a change in their child's behaviour such

sues as they often provide incorrect information,” Sharma said.

She further said parents must take adolescents to a doctor as the treatment and medication options for such conditions have changed over time.

Talking to The Pioneer, neuropsychologist Dr Sona Kaushal Gupta that considering the recent incident, timely treatment could have prevented such an unfortunate incident from occurring. “Individuals must not rely on information from Google, as it can provide incorrect information



after suspecting her of poisoning him after reading online that slow poisoning could be one of the probable causes of stomach ulcers.

According to the clinical psychologist Dr Pratibha Sharma the son may be experiencing symptoms of a paranoid condition, which is seen in cases of personality disorder. She said that individuals with this disorder tend to make unfounded assumptions and have a fear of death. The presence of this disorder

as sleep disturbances and restlessness, it is advisable to seek assistance from a psychologist. “In today's society, the influence of Google has significantly altered people's perceptions. Google does not always provide accurate information, which can have adverse effects on individuals suffering from a paranoid disorder, leading them to engage in risky activities. Considering recent incidents, it is advisable for people to refrain from consulting online platforms for health-related is-

and cannot replace a doctor. Additionally, counselling is recommended for individuals with such disorders, as the treatment methods have evolved and no longer rely solely on shock therapy,” Gupta said.

She further urged parents not to indulge in conflict with their children and to change their parenting style following the recent incident in Dehradun.

Two frauds caught from Patna for stealing from Tehsil account

PNS ■ PAURI

The Pauri district police nabbed two interstate fraudsters-Patna residents Nihal Sinha and Rohit Raj from Patna in Bihar for fraud amounting to more than Rs 11 lakh from the account of Yamkeshwar Tehsil of the district. The arrested accused committed fraud in the account of the government institution and local bodies using fake cheques and clone cheques in different parts of the country.

According to the information provided by the police, Yamkeshwar Tehsildar Sudha Dobhal lodged a report in the Yamkeshwar police sta-

tion on November 20 last year. The complaint had stated that some unknown person had committed fraud of Rs 11,17,027 from the government account of Yamkeshwar Tehsil using 13 fake cheques from the different account holders. The police registered a case against the unknown under sections 420/467/471/120-B of the Indian Penal Code on the complaint of Tehsildar. Taking cognisance of the case the Pauri senior superintendent directed the formation of a team and directed it to crack the case and arrest the accused involved in fraud. The police team on investigation

found that the accused withdrew Rs 11,27,027 from the account of different people of Begusarai, Lakhisarai and Munger in Bihar using fake cheques. The police found that all the accounts were opened in the (fake) name of Kausal Yadav, Vinod Yadav and Varun Yadav in different places using fake addresses on the basis of fake Aadhaar cards. The police checked footage of CCTV cameras of ATMs of different places and found that the money had been withdrawn from the accounts in question. Acting on tips off and surveillance the police arrested both the accused from Patna.

Demand raised to include sun temple in Pithoragarh in Manaskhand Mandir Mission

PNS ■ NAINITAL

The president of Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Employees Federation Dinesh Gururani has urged the State government to include the sun temple at Chowbati in Pithoragarh district which resembles the famed sun temple in Konark in Odisha in the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. Stressing on appropriate beautification of the temple, he demanded that the State government should enhance road connectivity to facilitate smooth movement of devotees. He said that it is unfortunate that while the asphaltisation of road from Didihat to Chowbati had been done at the State gov-

ernment's behest, the four-kilometre stretch from Chowbati had remained untouched. He further said that it did not stand to reason as to why the historical sun temple in Pithoragarh has been kept outside the purview of the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. “While the State government has arranged accommodation for visitors to the Katarmal Sun Temple located in Almora district after implementing a beautification project, the temple in Pithoragarh has remained uncared for, left vegetating in developmental slump,” he said and added that he had already written to the district tourism officer demanding

beautification of the Madh Sun Temple. Experts say that this sun temple in Pithoragarh is one of rare temples in Uttarakhand whose architecture was inspired by the south Indian temple architectural style. Earlier known as Naghar, the temple is believed to have been built by Lord Vishwakarma while some believe that it was built by the Pandavas. Gururani said that marking the Surya Parva on February 15, Sundarkand would be recited inside the temple. This aside, a religious and cultural programme would be held in the temple premises the same day to mark the auspicious occasion.



CM Pushkar Singh Dhama pays tribute to MK Gandhi on his death anniversary on Tuesday
Pioneer photo

Woman shot by husband in head gives statement to police in hospital

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Taniya, whose husband Subham had allegedly shot her in the head near Badasi Bridge on Thanoroad in Dehradun on January 12 finally gave her statement to the police on Tuesday. Due to health issues, she gave her statement to the Raipur police in the presence of the magistrate in the Government Doon Medical College hospital where she is currently undergoing treatment.

The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said that the police asked doctors about Taniya's health and they informed that she can give a statement. She stated in her statement before the magistrate that her husband Shubham shot her in the head. The police will

take further action in the case based on this statement. The SSP also said that Taniya's health is better but still unstable.

It is pertinent to mention here that Taniya sustained a bullet injury in her head due to which her condition has been critical for about three weeks. The police arrested her husband on January 21 after he opened fire on police and shot a sub inspector in the stomach when a police team reached a homestay to nab him. He had also allegedly killed his father in Haryana's Sonapat in September last year, which is being investigated by Haryana police. Singh said that they are in touch with Haryana police and will take action in the case accordingly here.

**NORTHERN RAILWAY**

CORRIGENDUM

Sub: Tender notice no.274-DRM-MB-23-24 dated 19.01.2024

The above noted tender is to be opened on 14.02.2024. In this tender name of work should be read as CTR work of 1.092 Km in the jurisdiction of SSE/ P-Way/MB under ADEN/HQ instead of CTR work of 1.092 Km in the jurisdiction of SSE/P-Way/RJK under ADEN/HQ. Other terms and condition will remain same. 309/2024

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विद्युत परीक्षण खण्ड (नगरीय), 18 ई०पी० रोड, देहरादून, ई-मेल-stdurban@yahoo.in

पत्रांक: 180 / वि०प०ख०(न०) / दे०दू० दिनांक : 30.01.2024

निविदा सूचना

मूल निर्माताओं / अधिकृत विक्रेता / अनुमती एवं प्रतिष्ठित ठेकेदारों से निम्न सामग्री की आपूर्ति हेतु मोहरबन्द निविदाये दो भागों में (प्रथम भाग में धरोहर धनराशि एवं मूल निर्माता एवं अधिकृत विक्रेता का प्रमाणपत्र, अनुभव का साक्ष्य तथा द्वितीय भाग में दरें, जो कि निविदा खुलने की तिथि से कम से कम 6 माह के लिए वैध हों) आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा प्रपत्र किसी भीकार्य दिवस में अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय से दिनांक 14.02.2024 12.00 बजे तक रु० 295 / - (क़र सहित) खण्डीय कार्यालय में नगद मुगतान के उपरान्त क़य़ किये जा सकते हैं। जो दिनांक 14.02.2024 को 15:00 बजे तक खण्ड द्वारा प्राप्त की जायेगी तथा दिनांक 14.02.2024 को 15:30 बजे उपस्थित निविदादाताओं के समुख़ अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता अथवा उनके द्वारा अधिकृत प्रतिनिधि द्वारा सार्वजनिक रूप से खोली जायेगी। धरोहर राशि रु० 10,000.00 मात्र किसी भी राष्ट्रीयकृत बैंक की एफ०डी०आर० / सी०डी०आर० के रूप में ही अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के पक्ष में बन्धक होनी चाहिये। धरोहर राशि एवं समस्त साक्ष्यों के बिना निविदा प्रस्ताव का भाग दो नहीं खोला जायेगा। यदि किसी कारण वश निविदा खोलने के दिन कार्यालय बंद रहता है, तो अगले कार्य दिवस में निविदा खोली जायेगी। अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता को यह अधिकार है कि वह विना कारण बताये निविदा को निरस्त कर सकते हैं।

निविदा सं०-14 / वि०प०ख०(न०) / 2023-24

1-विभिन्न अनुपात की एल०टी०-सी०टी० की आपूर्ति हेतु।

अधिशासी अभियन्ता, वि०प०ख० (नगरीय), दे०दून

राष्ट्रहित में बिजली बचाये

**उत्तराखण्ड पावर कारपोरेशन लि०**

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, विद्युत ज्ञानपद खण्ड, 33/11 के०बी० उपस्थान, भीरकान (नैदाल)

निविदा सूचना

अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा निम्नलिखित जानपदीय कार्यो हेतु केन्द्र / राज्य सरकार / निगमों के अनुमती प्रतिष्ठित, आयकर,जी.एस.टी. एवं ई.पी.एफ आदि में पंजीकृत तथा जी.एस.टी. ई. पी.एफ, जमा करने के नवीनतम बालान की प्रतियाही ठेकेदारों से हस्ताक्षरयुक्त मुहरबन्द निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती हैं जो दिनांक 16.02.2024 के पूर्वान्ह 11.00 बजे तक बेची जायेगी तथा निविदाएं उसी दिन अपरान्ह 03.00 बजे तक जमा की जायेंगी जोकि उसी दिन अपरान्ह 03.30 बजे अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा उपस्थित निविदादाताओं /अधिकृत प्रतिनिधियों के समक्ष सार्वजनिक रूप से खोली जायेंगी। उक्त तिथि में अवकाश होने पर निविदाएं अगले कार्य दिवस में प्राप्त की व खोली जायेंगी। निविदा की वैधता खुलने की तिथि से 03 माह होगी। निविदाएं किसी भी कार्य दिवस में अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय में देखे व निविदा धनराशि बैंक ड्राफ्ट / बैंकर्स चेक / नगद जमा करने पर निविदा प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं किसी भी अथवा सभी निविदाओं को बिना कारण बताये अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा निरस्त करने का अधिकार सुरक्षित है। डाक से निविदा मंगवाने पर डाक व्यय रु० 100.00 अतिरिक्त देय होगा तथा डाक से हुए विलम्ब पर विभाग का कोई उत्तरदायित्व नहीं होगा। जिन निविदाकारों पर विभाग द्वारा पेनाल्टी लगाई गई हो अथवा जिनके द्वारा विभागीय कार्य संतोषजनक एवं पूर्ण नहीं किए गए / कराये जा रहे हों, उन्हें एकल अथवा संयुक्त रूप से भी निविदा नहीं बेची जायेगी। शर्तेशरी निविदाएं स्वीकार नहीं की जायेंगी। निविदाकार निविदा प्रपत्र खरीदने से पूर्व निर्माण कार्य स्थल का भूली-भौति निरीक्षण कर लें। पिछले 03 वित्तीय वर्ष में एक अनुबंध के अन्तर्गत अनुमानित लागत का 80% या दो अनुबंधों के अन्तर्गत प्रत्येक में 60% या तीन अनुबंधों के अन्तर्गत प्रत्येक में 40% तक के जानपदीय कार्य (civil works) का अधिशासी अभियन्ता (ज्ञानपद) / उच्च स्तर के अधिकारी द्वारा जारी किया कार्य अनुभव प्रमाण –पत्र प्रस्तुत करना अनिवार्य है। निविदा भाग 01 में, अनुभव प्रमाण-पत्र, आयकर मुद्रा, जोडएस०टी०, ई पी.एफ. पंजीकरण एवं चरित्र प्रमाण पत्र, निविदा वैधता हेतु हस्ताक्षरयुक्त रु० 100.00 के स्टाम्प पेपर पर रु० 01.00 का रसीदी टिकट लगा तथा धरोहर धनराशि, अधोहस्ताक्षरी के पक्ष में प्रतिभूत करते हुए सी.डी.आर. / एफ.डी.आर. / एन.एस.टी. के रूप में तथा वॉित्त प्रमाण पत्रों तथा ई पी.एफ, जी.एस.टी जमा करने की नवीनतम सत्यापित प्रति सहित प्रस्तुत की जायेगी। धरोहर धनराशि निविदा के निर्णय होने से पूर्व वापस नहीं की जायेंगी। निविदा भाग 02 में कार्य की दरें प्रस्तुत की जायेंगी। निविदा भाग 01 में वॉित्त धरोहर धनराशि एवं वॉित्त प्रपत्रों आदि के नहीं पाये जाने पर निविदा भाग 02 नहीं खोला जायेगा। क्रम संख्या-1, 33 / 11 के०बी० उपस्थान, हलदुखाना, कोटद्वार (पौडी) में स्टोर का निर्माण एवं अन्य विविध जानपदीय कार्य। निविदा संख्या 26 / विजाखत्री / 2023-24, धरोहर धनराशि रु० 45000.00, निविदा मूल्य रु० 1180.00 (जी.एस.टी. सहित), कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि – 4 माह। 2. 33 / 11 के०बी० उपस्थान, कोटद्वार (पौडी) में जे०डो० (वितरण) स्टोर की चाहर दीवारी का निर्माण, एस०जी०आर० के सामने भौड निर्माण एवं अन्य विविध जानपदीय कार्य। निविदा संख्या 27 / विजाखत्री / 2023-24, धरोहर धनराशि रु० 45000.00, निविदा मूल्य रु० 1180.00 (जी.एस.टी. सहित), कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि-4 माह। 3. 33 / 11 के०बी० उपस्थान, सिगडडी, कोटद्वार (पौडी) में एस०जी०आर० भवन की विशेष मरम्मत एवं अन्य विविध जानपदीय कार्य। निविदा संख्या 28 / विजाखत्री / 2023-24, धरोहर धनराशि रु० 45000.00, निविदा मूल्य रु० 1180.00 (जी.एस.टी. सहित), कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि-4 माह।

पत्रांक सं.: 73/वि०ज०ख०(न०)/टी-1/निविदा दिनांक : 30.01.2024 “राष्ट्र हित में बिजली बचावें” अधिशासी अभियन्ता

**कार्यालय नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश**

Haridwar Road Rishikesh, Distt-Dehradun, Pin-249201

Website : www.nagarnigamrishikesh.com, Email : nprishikesh@gmail.com

Ph :0135-2430015,1800313529

संशोधित विज्ञप्ति / निविदा सूचना

नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश के आई०एस०डब्ल्यू०एम० प्लाट लालपानी कक्ष सं०-1 हेतु प्रोजेक्ट मैनेजमेन्ट कन्सल्टेंसी (पी०एम०सी०) के चयन हेतु इच्छुक अनुमती, दक्ष, कम्पनी / फर्मो से 2 बिड सिस्टम (तकनीकी एवं वित्तीय) के अन्तर्गत दिनांक 01.02.2024 से 14.02.2024 तक ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है जो **website-www.uktenders.gov.in** पर देखी जा सकती है।

पत्रांक :- 3593 / सा०प्र० / 2023-24 दिनांक : 30.01.2024

सहायक नगर आयुक्त, नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश


नगर पालिका परिषद, मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला टिहरी गढ़वाल

पत्रांक 1305 / निविदा सूचना / 2023-24 ई-निविदा सूचना दिनांक 30.01.2024

एतत् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला में निकाय निधि / अवस्थापना विकास निधि (अनुसूचित जाति बाहुल्य क्षेत्र) के अन्तर्गत इच्छुक ठेकेदारों / फर्मों / कम्पनियों से निविदाये कार्यालय नगर पालिका परिषद मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला में दिनांक 13.02.2024 को अपराहन 02:00 बजे तक ई-निविदा के माध्यम से दो लिफाफा (Double bid system) के अन्तर्गत तकनीकी भाव पत्र (Technical Bid) एवं वित्तीय भाव पत्र (Financial Bid) के माध्यम से **www.uktender.gov.in** पर ऑनलाईन के माध्यम से आमन्त्रित की जाती है, जो कि उसी दिन सांय 03:00 बजे निविदा समिति के द्वारा निविदादाताओं / उनके प्रतिनिधियों के समुख खोली जायेगी तकनीकी विड में सफल निविदादाताओं की ही वित्तीय विड निविदा द्वितीय चरण में खोली जायेगी। निविदा प्रपत्र पालिका कार्यालय मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाल व **www.uktender.gov.in** पर दिनांक 13.02.2024 तक सांय 02:00 बजे तक निविदा के सापेक्ष निर्धारित मूल्य जी०एस०टी० सहित अदा कर कार्यालय में नगद / बैंक ड्राफ्ट जमा कर प्राप्त किये जा सकते हैं, कार्य सम्बन्धी विस्तृत सूचना एवं अन्य निविदा शर्तें निविदा प्रपत्र के साथ संलग्न है। जो कि कार्यालय मुनिकीरेती-ढालवाला व में किसी भी कार्य दिवस में देखी जा सकती है। निविदा को बिना कारण बताये स्वीकृत / अस्वीकृत / निरस्त करने का अधिकार अध्यक्ष निविदा समिति का होगा।

क्र० सं०	कार्य का नाम /विवरण	धरोहर धनराशि	निविदा शुल्क	निविदा की वैधता	कार्यपूर्ति दिवस
1	वार्ड संख्या-01 के अन्तर्गत खाराश्रोत में अनुसूचित जाति क्षेत्र के मार्गों व नालों का निर्माण कार्य	116420.00	6000+ 18% GST	90 दिवस	120 दिवस

अधिशासी अधिकारी प्रशासक

**ICICI Bank**

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005.

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Ashish Joshi/ Lakshmi Joshi (LBHWR00005331713) & B-26/ 1, Rajnagar Jwalpur Madhu Vihar Jmalpur Kla, Haridwar Uttarakhand Haridwar- 249407	Khasra No. 321, Village Jwalapur, Tehsil And District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249403	21/ 11/ 2023/ Rs. 1,37,658/-	03/09/ 2023
2.	Ashish Joshi/ Lakshmi Joshi (LBHWR00005193716) & B-26/ 1, Rajnagar Jwalpur Madhu Vihar Jmalpur Kla, Haridwar Uttarakhand Haridwar- 249407	Khasra No. 321, Village Jwalapur, Tehsil And District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249403	21/ 11/ 2023/ Rs. 12,45,444/-	03/09/ 2023
3.	Vijay Singh/ Nisha Devi (LBRUD00005470217) & House No-21, Vankhandi Nagar Fulsunga, Nr Hanuman Mandir, Rudrapur Udhham Singh Nagar Uttarakhand Rudrapur- 263153	Khasra No. 185 Minjumla, Private Plot No. 21, Gram Fulsunga, Tehsil Rudrapur, District Udhham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand- 263153	21/ 11/ 2023/ Rs. 9,88,530/-	03/09/ 2023
4.	Vijay Singh/ Nisha Devi (LBRUD00005470216) & House No-21, Vankhandi Nagar Fulsunga, Nr Hanuman Mandir,rudrapur Udhham Singh Nagar Uttarakhand Rudrapur- 263153	Khasra No. 185 Minjumla, Private Plot No. 21, Gram Fulsunga, Tehsil Rudrapur, District Udhham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand 263153	21/ 11/ 2023/ Rs. 24,77,359/-	03/09/ 2023
5.	Raj Kumar/ Hans Mukhi (LBDEH00005055534) & Basantpur, Tehsil Vikasnagar District Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248198	Shop Built Over Khata No-484 (fasli Year 1418-1423), Khasra No. 1442 Minjumla, Situated At Mouza Jivangarh, Pargana Pachwadoon, Tehsil Vikasnagar, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	21/12/2023/ Rs. 10,47,122/-	03/10/ 2023
6.	Hari Gopal/ Guddi Devi (LBHWR00005551105) & Gram Shyampur Nowabad, Pargana Nazibabad Tehsil And District Haridwar Uttarakhand Haridwar- 249401	Plot No. 23, Khasra No. 370, Situated At Ward No. 59 Sitapur, Gram Jawalapur, (Inside Nagar Nigam), Pargana Jawalapur, Tehsil And District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249407	01/01/2024/ Rs. 22,00,750/-	03/10/ 2023
7.	Pawan Singh Malik/ Raman Malik (LBDEH000005400745) & Vijay Bhawan Jyoti Enclave, Kiddlewala Behind Kiddlewala, Power House Rajpur, Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248008	Khata Khatauni, No. 924, Fasli Year 1399 To 1404, Khasra No. 893, Situated At Mauja Rajpur, Pargana Parwadoon Distt Dehradun Uttaranchal	28/12/2023/ Rs. 15,67,621/-	03/10/ 2023
8.	Pawan Singh Malik/ Raman Malik (LBDEH00005400743) & Vijay Bhawan Jyoti Enclave, Kiddlewala Behind Kiddlewala, Power House Rajpur, Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248008	Khata Khatauni, No. 924, Fasli Year 1399 To 1404, Khasra No. 893, Situated At Mauja Rajpur, Pargana Parwadoon Distt Dehradun Uttaranchal	28/12/2023/ Rs. 16,31,229/-	03/10/ 2023
9.	Mohd Shaheed Ahmad/ Shaheen (LBDEH00006114798) & House No 184, Dronpuri Sattowali Ghati, Kanwali District Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Khatauni Khata No-1476 (Fasli Year 1420 To 1425), Khasra No 642, Situated At Mauza Kargi Grant, Pargana Pachhwadoon, Tehsil Sadar, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	29/12/2023/ Rs. 7,709/-	02/10/ 2023
10.	Mohd Shaheed Ahmad/ Shaheen (LBDEH0000636030) & House No 184, Dronpuri Sattowali Ghati, Kanwali District Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Khatauni Khata No-1476 (Fasli Year 1420 To 1425), Khasra No 642, Situated At Mauza Kargi Grant, Pargana Pachhwadoon, Tehsil Sadar, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	29/12/2023/ Rs. 1,99,401/-	02/10/ 2023
11.	Mohd Shaheed Ahmad/ Shaheen (LBDEH00006035869) & House No 184, Dronpuri Sattowali Ghati, Kanwali District Dehradun Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Khatauni Khata No-1476 (Fasli Year 1420 To 1425), Khasra No. 642, Situated At Mauza Kargi Grant, Pargana Pachhwadoon, Tehsil Sadar, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	29/12/2023/ Rs. 9,85,386/-	02/10/ 2023
12.	Priyanka Saini/ Vikas/ Bhojram (LBDEH00005357101) & Near Jeevan Deep Ashram Nand Vihar Roorkee Uttarakhand Haridwar- 247667	Part of Khasra No. 97 Minjumla, Situated At Village Sunehra, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 247667	29/12/2023/ Rs. 3,64,511/-	03/10/ 2023
13.	Priyanka Saini/ Vikas/ Bhojram (LSBAH00004003319) & Near Jeevan Deep Ashram Nand Vihar Roorkee Uttarakhand Haridwar- 247667	Part of Khasra No 97 Minjumla, Situated At Village Sunehra, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand 247667	29/12/2023/ Rs. 18,27,081/-	03/10/ 2023
14.	Priyanka Saini/ Vikas/ Bhojram (LSBAH00004003291) & Near Jeevan Deep Ashram Nand Vihar Roorkee Uttarakhand Haridwar- 247667	Part of Khasra No. 97 Minjumla, Situated At Village Sunehra, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand 247667	29/12/2023/ Rs. 23,57,410/-	03/10/ 2023
15.	Sandeep Kumar/ Harsha Chawla (LBDEH00005756830) & S/o Haresh Kumar Gurudwara Road, Prem Nagar Main Bazar Doiwala, Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248140	Khatauni Khata, No. 168 (1399 To 1404 Fasli), Khasra No. 513/2, Situated At Mauza Markham Grant-I, Pargana Parwadoon, Tehsil Doiwala, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248140	29/12/2023/ Rs. 1,62,131/-	07/10/ 2023
16.	Sandeep Kumar/ Harsha Chawla (LBDEH00005740319) & S/o Haresh Kumar Gurudwara Road, Prem Nagar Main Bazar Doiwala, Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248140	Khatauni Khata, No 168 (1399 To 1404 Fasli), Khasra No 513/2, Situated At Mauza Markham Grant-I, Pargana Parwadoon, Tehsil Doiwala, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal 248140	29/12/2023/ Rs. 43,43,721/-	07/10/ 2023
17.	Amit Kumar/ Parmod Kumar (LBROK00001471403) & Shivpuram, Subhash Nagar, Roorkee, Uttaranchal Roorkee- 247667	Plot At Kh No. 6/4 M Ka Part, Gram Shafipur, Shiv Puramlane, Opp. Shiv Mandir, Subhash Nagar, Roorkee, Uttaranchal - 247667	05/01/2024/ Rs. 2,37,692/-	09/07/ 2023
18.	Vinita Kamboj/ Anil Kumar Kamboj (LBDEH00006068982) & 247/1 Park Road Laxman Chowk Ankhih Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Property No. 247/1, Nagar Nigam, Park Road, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	10/01/2024/ Rs. 80,237/-	11/10/ 2023
19.	Vinita Kamboj/ Anil Kumar Kamboj (LBDEH00006060853) & 247/1 Park Road Laxman Chowk Ankhih Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Property No. 247/1, Nagar Nigam, Park Road, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	10/01/2024/ Rs. 7,22,366/-	11/10/ 2023
20.	Vinita Kamboj/ Anil Kumar Kamboj (LBDEH00005398468) & 247/1 Park Road Laxman Chowk Ankhih Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Property No. 247/1, Nagar Nigam, Park Road, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	10/01/2024/ Rs. 9,74,285/-	11/10/ 2023
21.	Vinita Kamboj/ Anil Kumar Kamboj (LBDEH00005362788) & 247/1 Park Road Laxman Chowk Ankhih Uttarakhand Dehradun- 248001	Property No. 247/1, Nagar Nigam, Park Road, District Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	10/01/2024/ Rs. 10,81,517/-	11/10/ 2023
22.	Sujal Kumar Gupta/ Ajay Kumar Gupta (LBDEH00005693144) & House No. D-17 Phase 1, Raghav Vihar Raghav Vihar, Smithnagar Pauri Garhwal Garhwal, Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248007	Shop Municipal No. 103/3, (New No. 192/152), Ansari Marg Dehradun, Uttaranchal 248002	25/11/2023/ Rs. 20,35,680/-	04/09/ 2023
23.	Anil Kumar/ Deepali Devi (LBDEH00005460492) & 94 Thapali, Pauri Gamwal, Pauri, Uttarakhand- 246146	Khata Khatauni No. 360, (1399- 1404 Fasli), Rajeev Nagar, Khasra No. 354 Minjumla, Situated At Mauza Markham Grant, I Parwa Doon, Dehradun, Uttaranchal- 248001	25/11/2023/ Rs. 9,85,859/-	03/09/ 2023
24.	Amit Sharma/ Naresh Chand Sharma (LBROK00001001423) & 3 Old Railway Road, 39 Maqtool Puri, Roorkee, Uttaranchal- 247667	Mathura Vihar Colony, Western Ambar Vihar Talab, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee, New Hanuman Mandir, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 247667	25/11/2023/ Rs. 4,89,714,47/-	05/09/ 2023
25.	Julie Rao/ Rajendra Rao (LBHWR00005599982) & 1194, Vishnu Lok Colony, Bhel Uttarakhand, Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 249403	Plot No. 335, Part of Khasra No. 595, Situated At Anandika City, Mauza Badhedhi Rajputana, Pargana And Tehsil Roorkee, District Haridwar, Uttarakhand- 247667	29/11/2023/ Rs. 10,05,242/-	02/09/ 2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 31, 2024 Place : Dehradun

Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

Win some, lose some

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

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



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

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



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

Masterstroke or political Harakiri?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After a year of struggle, including withstanding



humiliation in court from the public prosecutor, Ranjit and his daughter were vindicated when the verdict came in their favour and the three were sentenced to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment.

In a country where rape is reported every 20 minutes and conviction rates are less than 30%, this success inspired filmmaker Nisha Pahuja to document Ranjit and his daughter's dogged fight for justice. To Kill A Tiger, which took eight years to film, has been nominated for the Best Documentary Feature for the 2024 Oscar awards.

The survivor, who is now 20, went on to complete school. She hopes to show other survivors like her, that girls are not to blame for sexual assaults and that is why she agreed to reveal her face in the

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

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

This assessment found positive mindset changes in atti-

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

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

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



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

THE BEHAVIOUR OF BUREAUCRATS

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

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

N Mateeni | Mumbai

DILAPIDATED POST OFFICES

Sir — People are infuriated over the lackadaisical attitude of authorities towards improving the condition of the post offices in the country which has been lying in a dilapidated condition for a long. Residents have complained that even the name of the post office has not been displayed properly at most of the places. Moreover, the internet services fail to provide connectivity during peak hours. A member of the grievances redressal committee said higher authorities of the postal department had not shown any interest in improving the condition of the post office. The infrastructure of the post office needs to be improved.

There is a need to beautify the staff counters to give a neat and clean look to these counters. There is also a need to provide better seating arrangements. There was also a need to recruit more staff at the post offices. Retires invest their hard-earned money, wait for hours and then become

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IMD completes 150 years



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

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

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

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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

C K Subramaniam | Chennai

UGC DEGREE IN MARATHI

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

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

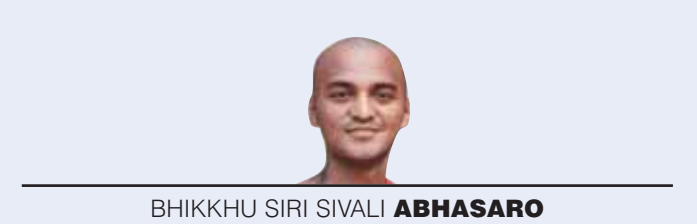
Shantaram Wagh | Pune

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

AHIMSA: THE PATH TO PEACEFUL EXISTENCE

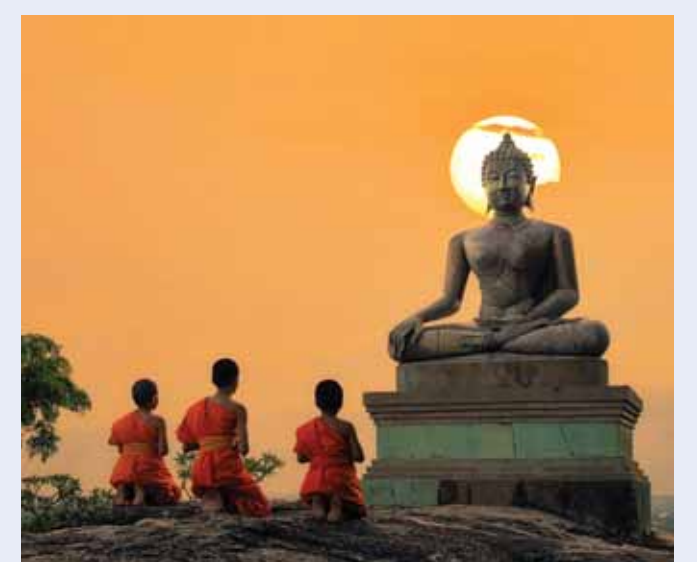
Buddhism's essence lies in non-violence, compassion and enlightenment



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

The Essence of Non-Violence in Buddhism:

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



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

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

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

Drones can revolutionise the agriculture sector



AS MITTAL

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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Precision crop management: Finding a balance between agricultural production and environmental preservation is crucial. The excessive use of chemicals and water scarcity can lead to environmental degradation, which is a pressing concern that the agriculture sector must address.

Drones can play a vital role in solving these issues by accurately identifying areas that require water. By doing so, farmers can reduce water usage by approximately 25%, thereby promoting sustainable agriculture.

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

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

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

Data-driven decision-making: We are in an era where data-driven strategies are not the exception but the rule, and agriculture is keeping pace. Drones generate extensive datasets that offer an in-depth look into crop health, growth patterns, and other variables.

For example, a farmer can now optimise planting densities of sugarcane-based on drone-collected data, potentially increasing yields by up to 10%. Imagine a farmer in the heart of Punjab who can now use drone-acquired data to optimise planting densities, manage nutrients effectively, and plan their harvest with precision. Such data-driven decisions can lead to higher yields and, consequently, better profits.

Cost savings: In a sector where profit margins can be wafer-thin, drones serve as a cost-effective ally. Early detection of potential issues allows for timely and, therefore, less costly interventions. By helping farmers make data-backed decisions, drones help avert financial setbacks.

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

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

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

Charting a course for India's maritime security

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

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

India's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) concepts



PADMALOCHAN DASH

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

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

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

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

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

resilience and effectiveness of the MDA framework.

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

security.

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

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

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

Imran, Qureshi sentenced to 10-year prison term

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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



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

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

overthrown.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

suspension of the conviction.

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

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

Northern Ireland political party agrees to end 2-year boycott

AP ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Philippines, Vietnam agree to cooperate on disputed SCS

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

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

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

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

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

Israeli undercover forces kill 3 militants

AP ■ JENIN

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



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

war in Gaza.

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

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

US, Chinese officials hold meeting in Bangkok: WH

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

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

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

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

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

China protests deportations of its students

AP ■ BEIJING

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Macron gets ceremonial welcome in Sweden

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indian student who went missing at Purdue University confirmed dead

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indian-origin couple convicted in UK

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

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

Maldives govt approaches SC over Pres impeachment bid

PTI ■ MALE

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

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

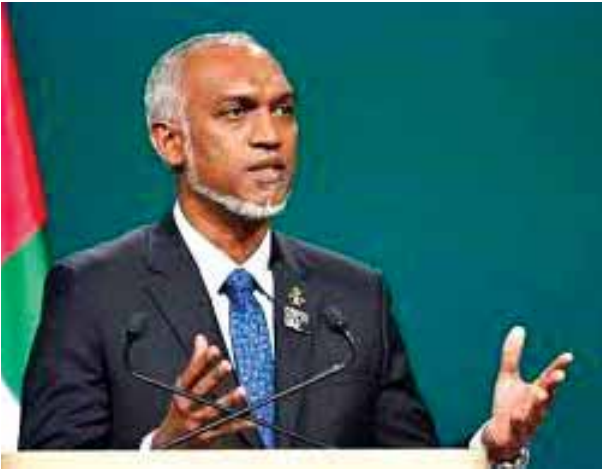
The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, on Monday, had stalled

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

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

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

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



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

Therefore, Parliament cur-

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

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

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

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

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

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

MDP QUESTIONS REINSTATEMENT OF 3 MINS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HK begins work on its own National Security Law

AP ■ HONG KONG

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ KARACHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ MOSCOW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ BRUSSELS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Russia's central bank.

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

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

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

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

Indonesian police arrest 3 Mexicans after tourist hurt in armed robbery

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

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

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

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

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



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

ChatGPT violated European privacy laws, Italy tells OpenAI

AP ■ ITALY

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

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

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

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

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

generate false information about individuals.

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

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



FOOTLOOSE IN THE ENCHANTING KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN

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

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

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

PEARL OF THE GULF

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

AN EXOTIC SEASCAPE

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



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

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

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

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

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

A BLEND OF NEW AND OLD

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

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

HURT F1 DREAM ENDED SO QUICKLY: Nyck

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

Avani eyes one more shot

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

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



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

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

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

Sneha, Hitaashee prepare for another battle in 3rd leg

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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



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

India lose to Netherlands in quarterfinals

PTI ■ MUSCAT

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



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

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

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

Divya alleges sexism by spectators at Tata Steel Masters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

Bhutia demands resignation of AIFF president Chaubey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

Rohit is past his prime: Boycott

India missed Kohli in Hyderabad Test

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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



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

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



Deepti rises to joint second among bowlers in T20I rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India’s Deepti Sharma rose lone place to joint second while team-mate Renuka Singh also moved up a spot to 10th in the latest ICC women’s T20I bowling rankings issued on Tuesday. Deepti’s rise was largely due to South Africa spinner Nonkululeko Mlaba dropping three places from earlier second to fifth after one wicket from two games against Australia. Similarly, Pakistan’s Sadia Iqbal took the joint second spot with Deepti after moving up one place. England’s Sarah Glenn was at fourth after rising a rung. England spinner Sophie Ecclestone maintained a healthy lead at the top of the T20I rankings for bowlers. There was no change within the top 10 of the latest T20I rankings for all-rounders with Deepti retaining the fourth spot. Among batters, India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana remained at fourth to be the highest ranked Indian while Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma and Harmanpreet Kaur were unchanged at 13th, 16th and 17th respectively. Australia’s Beth Mooney overtook compatriot Tahlia McGrath at the top of the T20I rankings for batters after a splendid innings against South Africa. Mooney has already scored two half centuries in the shortest format of the game in 2024, with her most impressive recent knock coming when she scored a brilliant 72 not out from just 57 deliveries in a Player of the Match performance against South Africa in Canberra.

Selected spinners give us best opportunity to beat India: Stokes

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

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



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

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

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

Injuries to Rahul, Jadeja cause major selection headache

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Untimely injuries to Ravindra Jadeja and K L Rahul have given a major selection headache to India as they seek to bounce back in the second Test against England, following a rare defeat at home. Both Jadeja and Rahul were among India’s main performers in the first innings of the Hyderabad Test before England turned the tables on the formidable hosts. Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury while going for a quick single during the Hyderabad Test while Rahul has complained of pain in his right quadriceps. The duo’s unavailability adds to the woes of the home side, which was clearly stunned by England’s ‘Bazball’ strategy. Jadeja, with his exceptional all-round abilities, makes himself almost irreplaceable and Rahul too has been among India’s standout batters across the ODI and Test format since returning from a surgery in September. Virat Kohli remains unavailable due to personal reasons and after a shock reverse in the series opener, the management will be missing him even more in Visakhapatnam where the second Test begins on Friday. Rohit Sharma and Rahul Dravid have enough options to choose from with selectors adding three players to the squad -- Sarfaraz Khan, Sourabh Kumar and Washington Sundar. A straightforward selection will be Rajat Patidar, who was also a part of the 15 in Hyderabad. He could take Rahul’s place in the



middle-order with Kuldeep Yadav replacing Jadeja as the third spinner alongside R Ashwin and Axar Patel. Another option for India is to do what England did in the opener, play only one pacer for four spin choices. In that case, Mohammed Siraj could make way for Kuldeep and the team can accommodate either Sarfaraz Khan or Washington to solidify the middle-order. Sourabh, who also bowls left-arm spin like Jadeja and is a decent batter with a couple of first-class hundreds to his name, can be a dark horse in that race. The ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam has staged two Tests till date and the pitch is usually a batting friendly one at least in the first innings. Batting first at the venue back in 2019, India had racked up 502 in the first innings against South Africa with Mayank Agarwal getting a double hundred and Rohit scoring a brisk 176 in his first innings as a Test opener. Spin legend Anil Kumble feels wrist spinner Kuldeep’s presence in the eleven will be helpful.

Will not be afraid to play all spin attack in Vizag: England coach

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Tom Hartley has not only won the opening Test for England but more importantly dented the psyche of the Indian batters, who might have to face an all-spin attack in the second Test starting here on Friday. England beat India by 28 runs in the opening Test with debutant Tom Hartley bagging seven in the second innings having gone for plenty in the first. McCullum is eagerly waiting to have a look at the track and judge how it would behave. Although traditionally a high-scoring ground, it has seen domination by the spinners

lately, deeming that the conditions are likely to suit the latter. On the same note, McCullum warned that if the pitch indeed favours the spinners, the Three Lions would not be afraid to field an all-spin attack, hinting that uncapped spinner Shoaib Bashir, who missed out on Hyderabad due to visa delay, could be handed his debut. However senior most spinner Jack Leach’s knee injury will be a concern. However in Hartley, Joe Root, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Bashir, he would still have four spinners and he can replace Mark Wood with an extra batter. “If the wickets continue to spin



as much as what we saw in the first Test as the series goes on, look, we won’t be afraid to play all spinners or a balance of what we’ve got,” the former New Zealand skipper was quoted as saying to SEN Radio. “Bash (Bashir), he was obviously with us during our

camp in Abu Dhabi, and he really impressed with his skill set. He fitted in seamlessly within the group, and he’s a guy who’s got an immense amount of enthusiasm, albeit at a young age and pretty limited in his first-class experience.” “When he arrived, boys gave him a huge cheer, and he got to witness something pretty special with the fellas bowling us to a Test win. He comes into calculations for the next Test match,” added McCullum. McCullum was all praise for the manner in which Ben Stokes handled a relatively inexperienced spin attack with such ease. Hartley managed to grab nine

wickets in his debut Test, including mesmerising figures of seven for 62 in the second innings. Although the 24-year-old was hammered for 131 in the first innings, especially by young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, he overcame the obstacles in the subsequent innings, as McCullum believes that allowing him to play with freedom was a real sign of leadership from Stokes. “He’s only played a handful of first-class games and was probably a bit of a punt, selection-wise. But, we saw something in him that we thought would work over there, and he’s a tough character,”

India pummel New Zealand by 214 runs

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

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

Earlier, Musheer flayed New Zealand attack with his second century of the ICC U-19 World Cup while opener Adarsh Singh struck 52 as India posted a stiff 296-run target. On a perfect batting wicket here at the Mangaung Oval, Musheer tore apart the Kiwis bowling line-up to become the first batter in the current competition to breach the 300-run mark, going past Pakistan’s Shahzaib Khan with his stupendous effort. En route his 131, Musheer blasted 13 fours and three sixes off just 125 balls and once showed admirable temperament to up the ante just when it was required. Busy at the crease constantly, the 18-year-old Musheer motored on from one end unleashing strokes in all directions, while he began with an upper-cut for a four. His innings was spruced with fine running between the wickets and ended in the death overs when he was looking to accelerate. Musheer and Adarsh carried out a fine recovery job with a 77-run stand for the second wicket after an early blow for India. Adarsh took charge of attacking the bowlers as he looked good while driving on the rise and also played the pull-shot with elan. It was only unfortunate that he failed to



ICC U-19 World Cup

keep a drive in check when Zac Cumming (1/37) teased him with one outside off. A thick edge off Adarsh’s bat flew to Oliver Tewatiya at point in the 18th over, which ended the charge for the left-handed Indian opener who made 52 off 58 balls with six fours. There also was some disappointment in store for India captain Uday Saharan who failed to convert his start and was dismissed for 35 (57 balls, 2 fours). He had two fifties on trot at the start of the tournament. Saharan, nevertheless, did a fine job of consolidating the innings for his side, putting on 87 with Musheer which also happened to be the best stand for India in this game. However, Musheer’s century and Adarsh’s contribution at the top notwithstanding, India lost wickets in a flurry towards the end to fall short of breaching the 300-run mark, finishing at 295 for eight. Brief scores: India U-19 295/8 in 50 overs (Adarsh Singh 52, Musheer Khan 131, Uday Saharan 35; Mason Clarke 4/64) beat New Zealand U-19 81 in 28.1 overs (Oscar Jackson 19; Raj Limbani 2/17, Saumy Pandey 4/19) by 214 runs.