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AYODHYA: FROM PUJA TO PROGRESS

WORLD 8

JAPAN EARTHQUAKE TOLL RISES TO 55

MONEY 10

SENSEX FALLS 379 POINTS ON PROFIT TAKING IN BANK & IT STOCKS

NEW DELHI, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 3, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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ROHIT SEEKS REDEMPTION 12 SPORTS



BJP SOUNDS 2024 BUGLE

Truckers hold nation to ransom

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Setting a lofty target for its Selector performance in the upcoming general elections, the BJP sounded the poll bugle on Tuesday with a new slogan "Teesri Baar Modi Sarkar; Ab ki Baar 400 Paar."

The BJP has set a goal to secure 400 plus seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, which is 100 more than the party achieved in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The 400-seat target, which has been gradually revealed by the party's leaders following a significant victory in three Hindi heartland States, was officially endorsed at a high-level meeting chaired by its national president, JP Nadda. The meeting was attended by Home Minister Amit Shah, several Cabinet Ministers, Chief Ministers, and other top leaders. State leaders and some MPs too participated in the day-long meeting at the BJP office.

Sources said the agenda of the meeting, however, was convened to review preparations for the consecration of the Ram Mandir, but it soon shifted focus to initiatives for the Lok Sabha as the party is considering combating the Opposition alliance under the INDIA group. In addition to the slogan, the meeting,



which went on for more than two hours, also focused on the organisational strategies for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls this year. Sources said conveners and co-conveners have been deputised for every Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seat.

Further intensifying its campaign efforts, the party announced that tours by prominent leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Home Minister, the Defence Minister, and Nadda in Lok Sabha clusters, will commence soon. This strategy, stemming from the "cluster-making formula" discussed in the last BJP office-bearers meeting attended by PM Modi, is aimed at maximising the party's electoral outreach. Additionally, the party will also be organising a mega

programme from January 25 to March 25. BJP workers will help devotees willing to visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya from different parts of the country after the January 22 consecration ceremony, which is a 60-day drive beginning from January 25. Though the cost of travel will be borne by individuals, BJP cadres will assist them with information and ticketing. The BJP workers have been advised to participate in all events and functions after the consecration ceremony. They have been advised not to use party logos or flags.

Sources said the party has also decided on an outreach programme to highlight the contributions of RSS and the BJP in the construction of the Ram Mandir. Sources further mentioned that the party has devised a detailed plan to

LOK SABHA 2024

- Teesri Baar Modi Sarkar, Ab Ki Baar 400 Paar
- BJP workers to help devotees visit Ram temple in Ayodhya
- RSS volunteers door-to-door outreach programme on Ram temple
- BJP forms committee to facilitate the joining of new members

leverage the religious and cultural significance of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in its poll campaign to garner votes in the Lok Sabha polls this year. The BJP has formulated a micro-level plan to leverage the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. This plan includes organising free travel to Ayodhya, distributing akshat (sacred rice) to households to invite them to the holy town, and arranging booth-level programmes to connect with new voters. During the meeting, the akshat distribution programme and the arrangement for taking people to Ayodhya post the consecration event were also reviewed. Volunteers of the RSS and its affiliates embarked on a 15-

day nationwide door-to-door public outreach programme on Monday, encouraging people to join the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya by offering prayers at temples in their neighborhoods. "The BJP leadership has given a clear message that workers across all booths must provide all required assistance to those who want to visit the Ram temple," another BJP leader said, adding, "BJP workers have been instructed to celebrate January 22 like Diwali."

The party has instructed the Union Railway Minister to ensure the smooth travel of 35 trains to and from Ayodhya. He has also been asked to ensure that 430 places are connected to Ayodhya from across the map of India. The BJP units in Uttar Pradesh and neighbouring States have been assigned the task of ensuring proper arrangements for people visiting the Ram temple in Ayodhya after the consecration ceremony, according to a source in the party. During its poll campaign, the BJP will also highlight how opposition parties attempted to impede the temple's construction. In a related development, the BJP has started its 20-day "Luv-Kush Yatra" from Bihar's Patna to Uttar Pradesh's Ayodhya.

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PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

With an impending crisis looming large over essential commodities due to a nationwide truckers' strike against the new criminal code, which mandates that hit-and-run cases by truck or commercial drivers can attract up to 10 years in jail and a fine of ₹7 lakh, the Centre initiated talks with truckers' associations on Tuesday.

Sources indicated that the Government appealed to transporters to resume their services immediately, and the transporters have agreed. "We had a discussion with representatives of the All India Motor Transport Congress. The government wants to clarify that the new rule has not been implemented yet. We want to state that, before implementing Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 106/2, we will have a discussion with representatives, and only then will we take a decision," said Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla in a statement after the meeting.

It was reported that the pan-India All India Motor Transport Congress has not yet issued a nationwide strike call in support of the demand seeking the withdrawal of the new provisions. Protests were held in many States on the



Trucks parked during a strike by drivers over new penal provisions in the hit-and-run law, in Nagpur on Tuesday

second day of the strike by some truckers' associations against stricter punishments in the new law on hit-and-run cases. Various truckers' associations have raised concerns about the legitimacy of the hefty penalty. Alongside cab drivers and commercial vehicle operators, they are questioning how they would manage to pay such a substantial fine in the event of an accident.

The Congress has expressed support for the truckers' protest against the stricter punishments for hit-and-run cases. They argue that the potential misuse of the legislation could lead to an "extortionist network" and "organised corruption."

A Central Government official dismissed the concerns of protesting truckers as "misrepresented"

and clarified the provisions regarding hit-and-run cases would apply solely to drivers attempting to escape after an accident without informing the police. Addressing these concerns, a senior government functionary stated that a driver who accidentally hits a person and promptly informs the police or takes the victim to the nearest hospital would not be prosecuted under the stringent provisions of the recently enacted Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). In Patna, tires were set ablaze, and roads were blocked as truck operators voiced their opposition to the new law. They questioned who would provide for their families if they were to stay in jail for 10 years.

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Privileges panel to examine MPs suspension

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Privileges Committee of the Lok Sabha will convene next week to examine the suspension of three Congress members from the House during the Winter Session due to unruly behaviour. Chaired by BJP member Sunil Kumar Singh, the Committee will meet on January 12 to record oral evidence from the suspended Congress members — K Jayakumar, Abdul Khaleque, and Vijayakumar Vijay Vasanth. They were suspended for creating "grave disorder in the House" on December 18.

During the Winter Session of Parliament, 100 Lok Sabha members from the Opposition were suspended for bringing placards and raising slogans, demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah regarding the breach of Parliament security.

While 97 members were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session, the case of Singh, Khaleque, and Vijayakumar — who had reached the presiding officer's chair — was referred to the Privileges Committee. The suspension of these three members will continue until the Committee submits its report to the Lok Sabha Speaker.

In the Rajya Sabha, 46 members were suspended during the Winter Session, including 11 members whose case was referred to the Privileges Committee. The panel, chaired by Deputy Chairman Harivansh, is yet to convene a meeting to examine the suspension of the 11 members referred to it. Opposition members Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiha, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G C Chandrashekar (all Congress); Binoy Viswam and Sandosh Kumar P. (both CPI), M Mohamed Abdulla (DMK), John Brittas and A A Rahim (both CPI-M) were suspended till the House "has the benefit of the Report of the Committee of Privilege".

TMC Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien said the Centre wants Opposition members to behave like BJP MPs Ramesh Bidhuri and Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh — both of whom are facing allegations of misconduct — as 14 Opposition MPs continue to remain suspended from Parliament.

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Release caste survey details for public scrutiny, SC asks Bihar



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Bihar Government to put in the public domain the break-up of the caste survey data to enable those aggrieved to challenge the findings.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta refused to grant any interim relief to the petitioners who have challenged the caste survey and the Patna High Court order upholding the Bihar Government's decision to conduct such an exercise.

"There is no question of interim relief as they (the government) have a high court order in their favour. Now that the data has been put in public domain, there are two-three aspects which remain. First is the legal issue, correctness of the high court judgment and legality of such an exercise," the bench said.

Senior advocate Raju Ramchandaran, appearing for the petitioners, said since the survey data is out, the authorities have started implementing it in the interim and raised the reservation for SCs, STs, Other Backward Classes, Extremely Backward Classes, and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) to a total of 75 per cent from the existing 50 per cent. The bench said this issue

needs to be heard at length. "As far as increasing the reservation is concerned, you have to challenge it before the high court," the bench told Ramchandaran, who said it has already been contested before the high court.

Ramchandaran said the issue is important, and since the State Government is acting upon the data, the matter be listed next week so that the petitioners can argue for interim relief. "What interim relief? They (the Bihar government) have a high court judgement in their favour," the SC said.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the Bihar Government, said the data, including the break-up, has been put in the public domain and anyone can see it on the designated website.

Justice Khanna said, "What I am more worried about is the availability of break-up of data. To what extent the government can withhold the data. You see, the entire break-up of data should be in the public domain so that anyone can challenge the inference drawn from it. Unless it is in the public domain, they cannot challenge it."

The BJP, the main Opposition party in Bihar, has accused the Nitish Kumar Government of irregularities in conducting the caste survey and called the data collected "fake".

The bench then asked Divan to file a report on the caste survey and posted the matter for further hearing on February 5. On October 6, 2023, the top court had questioned the Bihar Government as to why it published its caste survey data. It had, however, refused to restrain the state government from making public further data, and said it may examine if the State has the power to conduct such an exercise.

PM hails TN for cultural leadership

PTI ■ TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a series of projects on Tuesday and laid the foundation stone for new initiatives, collectively worth ₹20,140 crore. The Prime Minister praised Tamil Nadu for its cultural inspiration and expressed admiration for the late DMDK leader Vijayakanth, emphasising a sense of nationalism.

Given the recent challenges posed by rain, floods, and the resulting damage and loss of lives in Chennai and southern Tamil Nadu, PM Modi assured that the Centre was providing all possible support. In response, Chief Minister MK Stalin urged him to declare the heavy showers and deluge as "severe natural disasters" and release appropriate funds to the State from the National Disaster Relief Fund.

Modi laid the foundation stone, inaugurated, and dedicated to the nation 20 projects related to air and seaports, railway, highway, petroleum and natural gas, atomic energy, and higher education in the State from this central Tamil Nadu district, located about 300 km from Chennai. Earlier he attended the Convocation of Bharathidasan University here.

The PM highlighted that these projects would strengthen Tamil Nadu's



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, Chief Minister MK Stalin, Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister of State L. Murugan during a walkthrough of the new terminal building at Tiruchirappalli International Airport on Tuesday

progress, enhance ease of travel, and create thousands of employment opportunities. Stalin stated that the State government, being close to the people, has the duty of providing students with access to education, healthcare amenities, and all other necessary assistance. Therefore, reiterating a request for Central funding to address the aftermath of floods and rains and establishing state rights is not merely a political rhetoric but "the demand of the people," the CM asserted.

Inaugurating the new terminal building at Tiruchirappalli International

Airport, the PM said, "Our endeavour is to consistently expand the cultural inspiration derived from Tamil Nadu in the development of the country." The "revered Sengol" has been installed in the new Parliament building in Delhi, drawing inspiration from the model of good governance provided by Tamil culture to the whole country.

The "Azadi Ka Amrit Kaal" for the next 25 years will play a crucial role in India becoming a developed nation, with both economic and cultural dimensions, the PM added. India takes pride in the vibrant culture and

heritage of Tamil Nadu, he said. While participating in public events in the past, Modi, who had spoken in English on most occasions, spoke in Hindi on Tuesday as well. In his address, the Prime Minister referred to last month's rain and floods in the State and the consequent losses, stating that he was deeply moved by the condition of affected families. "The Central Government stands with the people of Tamil Nadu in this time of crisis. We are providing every possible support to the State Government," Modi said.

Modi praised Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) leader Vijayakanth, who passed away days ago, as a "captain" in both cinema and politics. As a leader in politics, Vijayakanth always placed national interest above everything, the PM noted. "I pay my tributes to him, and I also express my condolences to his family and admirers." He also remembered eminent farm scientist MS Swaminathan of Tamil Nadu, who recently passed away, stating that he ensured food security for the country.

The PM said, the nation is making unprecedented investments in physical and social infrastructure, and it is among the top 5 economies, emerging as a new hope.

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Chilling trends in Delhi, day temperature plunges

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi woke up to chilly weather on Tuesday morning as the maximum temperature consistently dropped below the season's normal due to icy northwesterly winds sweeping through the city, resulting in cold day conditions in Delhi.

The maximum temperature settled at 17 degrees Celsius, two notches below the normal, while the minimum temperature at the Safdarjung observatory was recorded at 10.1 degrees Celsius on Tuesday. The Ridge area in Delhi experienced a temperature of 8.4 degrees Celsius, Palam at 8.2 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 9.2 degrees Celsius, and Mayur

Vihar at 10.3 degrees Celsius. According to the India Meteorological Department, a cyclonic circulation over northwest UP and Haryana is causing alternating waves of warm and cold winds to blow into Delhi. The visibility dipped to 500 metres at Safdarjung in the morning, as reported by the IMD.

The 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 340 at 4 pm. According to IMD officials, a cyclonic circulation over northwest Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Haryana is causing alternate waves of warm and cold winds to blow towards Delhi. There are no signs of the prevailing cold wave loosening its grip on the national capital and vast expanses of north



People enjoy sunshine on Kartavya Path lawns on Tuesday

India. The IMD does not hold out any hope of relief from the current weather conditions in the coming days, stating that cold

wave conditions will persist and may even extend to some parts of central India between January 5 and 11.

"The minimum temperatures are in the range of 6-9 degrees Celsius over most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, West Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, and in the range of 10-12 degrees Celsius over north Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Sikkim, and north Chhattisgarh. These temperatures are above normal by 2-4 degrees Celsius over many parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Gujarat," the IMD stated.

Fog conditions were observed at

8.30 am, with very dense fog in isolated pockets of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Dense fog was reported in isolated pockets of Punjab, and moderate fog in isolated pockets of Haryana, Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, and Sikkim," read a post on the IMD's official handle on X.

"Visibility at 8.30 am in Varanasi was 25, Jhansi 200, Pantnagar 25, Nainital 50, Dehradun 200, Bikaner 25, Jaipur, Udaipur, Dabok 50 each," the IMD stated in its post. According to the IMD, fog is deemed 'very dense' when visibility is between 0 and 50 meters, 'dense' when visibility is between 51 and 200 meters.

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Wait for a BJP-backed maha split in TMC: Adhir

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Pradesh Congress President Adhir Chowdhury on Tuesday made a startling claim regarding the ongoing struggle for power between the Old and the New in the Trinamool Congress saying the internal strife in the Bengal ruling outfit was being "scripted in the BJP party office."

Further he said "it will not be surprising if the BJP after breaking the TMC will project Abhishek Banerjee as the compromise Chief Ministerial candidate," after the 2024 general elections. Because the BJP wanted to play a Maharashtra like game in Bengal the Enforcement Directorate and the Central Bureau of Investigation had stymied down, he concluded.

"Whatever you are seeing in the name of infighting between Mamata Banerjee group and the Abhishek Banerjee group -- being projected as Old-versus-New conflict -- was scripted last year when Bhaipo (read Abhishek Banerjee) was grilled by the ED for nine hours ... it was in that session he was sounded out about the whole screenplay" where he would be exonerated in all the scam related cases in lieu of splitting the TMC and letting the BJP form a Government in the State, Chowdhury said adding "Abhishek Banerjee has no other option but to split the TMC for which the present



drama is being played." Another PCC leader Soumya Aich reminded at this juncture how even in a recent organisational meeting the BJP workers had stunned the central leadership including Home Minister Amit Shah and party president JP Nadda, wondering as to when Abhishek Banerjee whose name recently surfaced in the recruitment scam would be arrested. Cut to the "drama" referred to by Chowdhury. Unprecedented infighting continued in the TMC with both the apparent backers of Abhishek Banerjee --- who besides being the nephew of the Chief Minister also the party general secretary --- junior leaders demanded a bigger role for the junior Banerjee and larger space for the younger generation while the senior leaders like Sudip Bandopadhyay, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, Saugato Roy and Firhad Hakim vehemently defended the cause of the old guards.

"A TMC or for that matter Bengal cannot be thought off without Mamata Banerjee at the helm ... all the attention Bengal gets nationally today is due to Mamata Banerjee ... so she will continue to lead the party and the State for many years to come," Bandopadhyay said. Hakim in his turn said that there was no bickering in the TMC as "Mamata Banerjee is still at the helm and the harness is still in her hands ... she is our leader, we are her foot soldiers and things will continue to be so as long as she desires," adding, "there is no bickering in the party ... everything is being generated by the media." Another old guard and minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay however conceded that there were bickering in all the parties and "such differences had existed before, they do exist and they will continue to exist in future ... but the thing is that Mamata Banerjee is the leader and like she has led us to victory on three successive occa-

sions ... she will continue to do so in future too." Even in the BJP infighting existed but that did not mean that the party was breaking, he said. Junior leaders like Soham Chakrabarty and Riju Dutta on the other hand shot off significant tweets stating "it is impossible to win battles without a commander-in-chief." North 24 Parganas MLA Narayan Goswami on the other hand advised updating of the softwares. "Old soft-wares cannot run the system and have to be up-dated ... if you don't do so you will the TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh however struck a compromising note saying "while Mamata Banerjee is our supreme leader Abhishek Banerjee is our commander-in-chief," adding it is necessary to carry to the people the message of Mamata Banerjee and her pro-people schemes which can be efficiently done by none other than Abhishek Banerjee." Meanwhile, the junior Banerjee who had of late restricted himself to his parliamentary constituency at Diamond Harbour seldom taking part in party programmes in other parts of the State on Monday evening met his aunt at her Kalighat residence for more than two hours. What transpired between the two is not known but insiders surmised the duo would soon come out in the open asking the workers to jointly launch their battle against the BJP.

Milk supplies badly hit in Mumbai as truckers strike enters second day



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Mumbaikars began to feel the pinch of the truckers' flash strike against the new penal law on hit-and-run road mishaps on Tuesday, as large sections of them went without milk after thousands of trucks carrying chilled milk failed to reach the metropolis from different parts of Maharashtra and neighbouring states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. As the strike entered the second day, lakhs of Mumbaikars had to make do without their morning cup of coffee, while children went without their daily share of milk after the retailers either failed to deliver the creamy milk or delivered it long after 10 am. Mumbai receives chilled milk supplies in insulated tankers from districts like Satara, Sangli, Kolhapur and Nashik in Maharashtra, Indore and Dewas from Madhya Pradesh and Anand, Banaskantha, Surat and Mehsana from

Gujarat. Mumbai receives around 50 to 60 lakh litres of chilled milk per day, of which 60 per cent is cow milk and the rest is buffalo milk. "The milk distribution in Mumbai was affected today as thousands of Mumbai-bound trucks are either stranded midway or have not picked up the milk consignment for the point of origin," Chandan Hausilasingh Singh of the Mumbai Milk Producers Association (MMPA) said. Apart from chilled milk, Mumbaikars consume another 4 lakh litres of fresh buffalo milk, which is more expensive and creamier. Most people prefer cow milk to buffalo milk because it is cheaper. According to Chandan Singh, each of the insulated milk-tankers has a capacity of transporting 20 tonnes of milk to its destinations, from where it is unloaded into mini-tankers with a capacity of two-three tonnes for distribution to the last mile retailer.

PM hails TN...

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"Tamil Nadu is becoming a very significant brand ambassador for 'Make In India,'" he added. The Prime Minister reiterated the Central government's approach, where the development of the state reflects in the development of the nation. He mentioned that more than 40 Union ministers toured Tamil Nadu over 400 times in the past year. "India will progress with the progress of Tamil Nadu," he said, emphasizing connectivity as the route for development, providing a boost to businesses and making people's lives easier. The new terminal building here will increase capacity by

three times, strengthen connectivity with East Asia and the Middle East, and create new opportunities for investments, businesses, education, health, and tourism. He expressed satisfaction that the airport, with its strengthened infrastructure, will introduce the world to Tamil culture and heritage. In his Bharathidasan University convocation address, he noted that one of the factors behind India's rise today is the 'rise of our universities.' India is setting records in economic growth as the fastest-growing major economy, and universities are entering global rankings in record numbers.

Chilling trends in Delhi, day temperature...

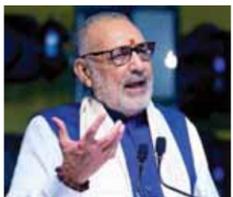
From Page 1

Furthermore, fog is considered 'moderate' when visibility is between 201 and 500 meters and 'shallow' when between 501 and 1,000 meters. Several trains, including both local and long-distance services, experienced disruptions ranging from two to seven hours due to foggy conditions, leaving passengers stranded and frustrated. As many as 26 trains were delayed in their arrival in the national capital as the city was engulfed in shallow fog on Tuesday morning. Trains arriving late in the national capital included Bhopal-Nizamuddin, Bangalore-Nizamuddin, Bhubaneswar-New Delhi Rajdhani, Ranikamlapati Bhopal-New Delhi, Howrah-New Delhi Duronto, Chennai-New Delhi, Puri-New Delhi Purushottam Exp, Kanpur-New Delhi Shramshakti, Howrah-New Delhi Poorva Exp, Saharsa-New Delhi Vaishali Exp, Rewa-Anand Vihar Exp, Prayagraj-New Delhi Exp, Azamgarh-Delhi Kaifayat Exp, Bhagalpur-Anand Vihar Exp, Rajendranagar-New Delhi, Banaras-New Delhi Exp, Ambedkarnagar-Katra Exp, Chennai-New Delhi GT, Chennai-New Delhi, Hyderabad-New Delhi, Ranikamlapati-Nizamuddin, Katihar-Amritsar Exp, Jammu Tawi-Ajmer Exp, Kamakhya-Delhi Exp, Ferozpur-sey, and Ajmer-Katra Exp.

Will penalise States if MGNREGA workers not linked to ABPS: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh on Tuesday slammed the Congress for its criticism of making Aadhaar mandatory for payments under MGNREGA, and said "we will penalise states not workers" if they are not yet linked with the Aadhaar-Based Payment System (ABPS). A day after the ABPS was made mandatory for the rural employment guarantee scheme, Singh said several deadlines were given for linking. He also dismissed former rural development minister Jairam Ramesh's allegations that the union government is "weaponizing technology", especially the Aadhaar against the poor. The ABPS has been made mandatory to ensure transparency, the minister said. According to data provided by the Rural Development Ministry, as on January 2 there are around 14.32 crore active workers under the MGNREGS of whom 14.08 crore (98.31 per cent) have been Aadhaar-seeded.



Also, 12.54 crore workers (87.54 per cent of the total) have completed other steps and are currently eligible for Aadhaar-Based Payment System. Asked about the way ahead for those workers under MGNREGA who have still not been linked to ABPS, Singh said, "We will talk to states. If they raise concerns, we will see what can be the way forward." "We have extended the deadline multiple times over the last one year, now we will talk to states, what is the issue, how will they resolve it... We will penalise states, not the workers," the minister said. The minister said the "road is not closed" for workers yet unlinked. "No one can be stopped from getting work, but we need to bring transparency."

FORDA highlights faculty recruitment issues in Indian healthcare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Federation of Resident Doctors Association (FORDA), a medical association in the country, has drawn the Government's attention to the acute shortage of regular faculty members in medical colleges and health institutions and has urged it to take steps to fill the posts with regular faculty members instead of banking on the contractual and ad-hoc staff. In a meeting with Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday, representatives from the FORDA pointed out that there has been a significant shortage of vacancies for regular posts in key clinical branches such as orthopaedics, medicine, and surgery. These positions are typically filled through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) process. Alarming, this shortage has been ongoing for up to four years, they said. Earlier in a letter to the Minister, they flagged concern that as a result of the persistent shortage of regular faculty members, medical institutions have increasingly turned to contractual and ad hoc recruitment practices.

UGC launches Annual Capacity Building Plan for employees

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has become the first autonomous organisation to have launched an annual capacity building plan after the Centre established the Capacity Building Commission in 2021, according to officials. The annual capacity building plan (ACBP) was officially launched on Tuesday by UGC chairman M Jagadesh Kumar in the presence of R Balasubramanian, Member HR, Capacity Building Commission. "The UGC is the first autonomous organisation to have initiated planning for the capacity building of its employees in collaboration with CBC. The ACBP is a comprehensive plan outlining interventions essential for enhancing individual officials' competencies and the overall capacity of UGC. "The plan is derived from a robust capacity need assessment exercise that was done with UGC officials and staff over a period of six months starting from March, 2023," Kumar said. The UGC chief explained that



the idea is to build, develop and enhance the abilities, talents, competencies, efficiency and qualifications of UGC employees to increase their capacity to serve the higher education system in India. Through the initiative, UGC employees will be trained in four key areas - behavioral, functional, domain and technology competencies. "Behavioral competencies will help the UGC staff take up bigger roles than what they normally perform. Functional competencies will help the UGC staff perform better in administration, procurement and financial management. Enhancing domain competencies help them perform better in specialised fields such as policy making or project management.

Ramesh writes to CEC, seeks time for INDIA bloc to share views on VVPATS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress has written to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, requesting that a team of INDIA bloc leaders are provided an opportunity to meet him and his colleagues to put forward their point of view on VVPATS. In a letter to the CEC, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said that on December 20, 2023, INDIA parties' leaders had requested for an appointment with the ECI to "discuss and provide suggestions on the use of VVPATS" based on a resolution passed at meeting of leaders of the bloc held the

previous day. "We have been trying to meet with the ECI to hand over a copy of this resolution and have a discussion but have not been successful so far in doing so. I once again make a request for an opportunity for a 3-4 member team of INDIA party leaders to meet with you and your colleagues and take a few minutes to put forward our point of view on VVPATS," Ramesh said. In his letter dated December 30, 2023, the Congress general secretary also pointed out that on August 9, 2023 a memorandum had been submitted to the ECI on EVM-related concerns of INDIA parties.

Actor conned by fake army man

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Veteran Bollywood and television comedian-actor Rakesh Bedi has alleged he was taken for a ride by a self-proclaimed retired army man when he attempted to sell his flat at Pune. In a complaint lodged with the Oshiwara Police Station in north Mumbai, 69-year-old Bedi alleged that one Aditya Kumar, who claimed himself to be a retired Army man, had cheated him by promising him to purchase his flat in Pune. Aditya Kumar, who had responded to an online advertisement put out by the actor for selling his flat, had called up Bedi claiming he was interested in buying the flat. Bedi and the purported prospective buyer agreed on the price of Rs 87 lakh for the sale of the flat.

Woman employees can now nominate their children for pension in precedence over husband: Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A woman employee can now nominate her child or children for family pension in precedence over her husband in case of marital discord, the Centre said on Tuesday. Rule 50 of the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 2021 allows the grant of family pension following the death of a government servant or retired government servant.

If a deceased government servant or pensioner is survived by a spouse, family pension is first granted to the spouse. Other family members become eligible for family pension, on their turn, only after the spouse of the deceased government servant/pensioner becomes ineligible for family pension or dies, according to the rules. The Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) has now amended the rules and allowed a woman

employee to nominate her child/children over her husband for the family pension. "The amendment allows disbursement of family pension of a female government servant to an eligible child in precedence to her husband, in all cases where she has filed a divorce petition or a petition under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act or cases under Indian Penal Code," DoPPW Secretary V Srinivas told PTI.

NORTHERN RAILWAY	
NOTICE INVITING TENDER	
Name of work and its location	30-Elect-39-T-R1-23-24-E3 Electrical work regarding Centrifuging, rewinding/repairing of 11/0.415KV Distribution Transformers and others allied works over Delhi Division.
Approx cost of the works in	Rs. 89.18 lacs
Address of the office	Sr. Divil. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
Bid Security	Rs. 178400/-
Date & time of submission of tender	01.02.2024, 12.00 Hrs.
Opening of tender	01.02.2024, 12.00 Hrs.
Website & notice board	www.reps.gov.in & Sr. Divil. Elect. Engineer/General, New Delhi.
12/2024	
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE	

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, देवास (म.प्र.)
क्रमांक/218/SBM/2024 देवास, दिनांक 01.01.2024
// तृतीय निविदा सूचना //

निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु केन्द्रीयकृत प्रणाली में पंजीकृत टेकेदारों से ऑनलाईन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा का विस्तृत विवरण <https://mptenders.gov.in> पर देखा जा सकता है।

क्र.	टेण्डर क्र. जारी दिनांक	कार्य का नाम	कार्य की समयावधि एवं लागत	निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य एवं EMD	निविदा की अंतिम तिथि
01.	2024_UAD_323243_1 01.01.2024	देवास शहर में इन्टीग्रेटेड सॉलिलड वेस्ट मैनेजमेंट सिस्टम को स्थापित करने हेतु सक्षम अनुभवी एजेंसी का चयन करने हेतु निविदा प्रपत्र।	5.00 करोड़ + PPP	20,000/- 2,50,000/-	15.01.2024 06:00 PM

नोट :- निविदा से संबंधित किसी भी प्रकार के संशोधन का प्रकाशन ऑनलाईन <https://mptenders.gov.in> की वेबसाइट पर ही किया जाएगा, पृथक से समाचार पत्र में प्रकाशन नहीं किया जाएगा।
उपायुक्त नगर पालिक निगम, देवास (म.प्र.)

Congress, Jihadi, Evangelist lobby to dampen BJP prospectus

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Congress-Jihadi-Evangelist lobby has developed a system to defeat BJP tactically and this has resulted in the Hindutva party getting mauled up in the elections held to the legislative assemblies of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, according to Prof Stanly Sebastian, a career and educational consultant based in Bangalore. He said many leaders who have crossed over to the BJP has joined the party to subvert its electoral prospectus. "People like Satya Pal Mullick are examples of this category of leaders," he told The Pioneer. Raghunath Ramkrishna Raju, member of parliament representing YSRC has said in a recent interview that massive religious conversion is underway in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana by evangelists with deep pockets. This has to be seen in this context, said Prof

Sebastian. Vote pooling and swapping were the strategies effectively utilized by the anti-BJP forces in Punjab, HP, Telangana and Karnataka. "The unprecedented influx of certain disgruntled leaders from these parties to the BJP camp speaks a lot about the setback suffered by the latter in these elections. It was an act of subversion," said Sebastian. He said that the BJP leadership wholeheartedly welcomed these persons. Prof Sebastian pointed out with facts and figures the vote pooling by AAP, Third Front and the Left to the Congress that led to the BJP's debacle. "Many Congress leaders infiltrated into the BJP after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. They succeeded in getting assembly seats at the cost of long-time workers of the BJP and this led to resentment among BJP activists. The party hoppers succeeded in creating sabotage from inside," said Sebastian.

BJP SOUNDS 2024...

From Page 1

The yatra serves the dual purpose of celebrating the consecration of the idol at the Ram Temple and engaging the influential agricultural castes of Koeri (Kushwaha) and Kurmi, collectively known as "Luv-Kush" in Bihar's political parlance. The culmination of the "Luv-Kush Yatra" will coincide with the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22. The BJP's "Luv-Kush Yatra" is viewed as an attempt by the party to split Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's core constituency of Luv-Kush. It is seen as the BJP's strategic move to shore up its political base in Bihar. The BJP has also planned havans and public meetings during the yatra that will pass through Vaishali, Sitamarhi, Valmiki Nagar, Purnia, Kishanganj, Katihar, Nawada, Nalanda, and Buxar before concluding in Ayodhya in neighboring Uttar Pradesh.

Privileges...

From Page 1 In a social media post, O'Brien, who is among the MPs suspended, took a jibe at the government and mentioned Bidhuri, accused of using a communal slur in the Lok Sabha, and Singh, who is facing allegations of sexual harassment by six women wrestlers. The accusation against Bidhuri is being looked into by a privileges committee. "Two impeccably well-behaved Members of Parliament continue to grace the Lok Sabha -- Ramesh Bidhuri and Brij Bhusan Singh. Maybe the Modi government wants all of us in the opposition to behave like them to avoid suspension from Parliament," O'Brien -- the Trinamool Congress' leader in the Rajya Sabha -- said in the post.

Truckers hold...

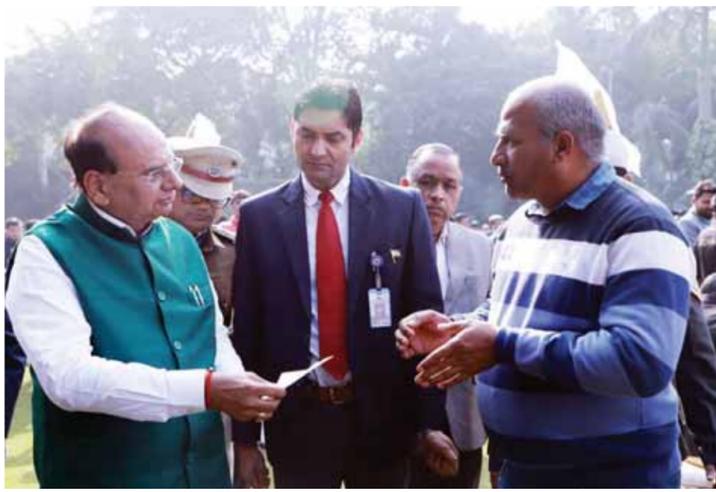
From Page 1 Meanwhile, in Mumbai, a group of truckers attacked a policeman, leading the police to use force to disperse the mob on the Mumbai-Bengaluru highway. Towards the end of Tuesday evening, truck drivers in Maharashtra's Nashik district called off their strike after local authorities assured them of addressing their demands. However, Rajasthan experienced some violence on Monday night as a mob burned a police vehicle and pelted stones at security personnel, leaving three injured in Kerkri district. In Thane, protesters blocked the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Highway and threw stones at the police, resulting in a policeman's injury and damage to a police vehicle. In

Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, private bus and truck drivers blocked the Pitampur highway, with protests also taking place in Bhopal and the Chhattisgarh capital, Raipur. The strike has already impacted the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Amid apprehensions of a fuel shortage, petrol pumps in several States, including the national capital, have witnessed long queues over the past couple of days. Happy Sidhu, the President of the All Punjab Truck Operators' Union, referred to the new law as a "black law" that would devastate truckers in Punjab. Protests have erupted in several states, including Punjab, Bihar, Maharashtra, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh.

LG interacts with 500 villagers as part of Samvaad@Raj Niwas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Continuing with his interactive dialogue series - Samvaad@Raj Niwas, Delhi Lt Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday held interaction with over 500 villagers representing 180 villages in the Capital. The first of its kind engagement with the villagers at Raj Niwas aimed at seeking suggestions and ideas to chalk out a comprehensive plan of action for development of Delhi's villages and thus making the villagers a key stakeholder in the development of urbanized as well as rural villages. The interactive session was organized by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) under the ambitious

"DilliGramodayAbhiyan" ideated and launched by the LG for development of Delhi's villages, officials said. The villagers led by the respective public representatives including the Members of Parliament — Meeenakshi Lekhi, Dr Harsh Vardhan, Manoj Tiwari and Ramesh Bidhuri — lauded this initiative as a landmark in the development of Delhi's villages and said this would emerge as a sustainable model of development before the entire country. Saxena, who has already adopted five villages — Qutabgarh, Jaunti, Daurala, Rawta and Nizampur — said, all villages will be developed on the similar lines by the DDA with the help of Rs 800 crore transferred to the agency recently.



This, he said, is in addition to ₹480 crore of Village Development fund that has already been sanctioned for carrying out development works in 180 villages. Saxena exhorted the villagers to identify the specific problems concerning their villages and the tentative solutions so that they could be incorporated while finalizing the plan of action for each village. Saxena announced that he will be staying overnight in identified villages of the City to get a first-hand account of the problems faced by the residents there. Starting this month, District Magistrates will also visit and stay in the identified villages, hold consultations with the villagers and accordingly finalize the development works in the

villages. This, he said, is in line with the dictum of "Government at the Doorsteps". While interacting with him, a number of village representatives rued that despite a lapse of several decades, their villages lacked even basic amenities like sewer network, roads, parks, schools, hospitals and clean drinking water among others. Some villagers from the urbanised villages complained of acute parking shortage. Saxena lamented that in the past nine years, these villages were completely neglected and no futuristic development work was carried out all these years. He exuded confidence that with the help of ₹800 crore and by engaging villagers in the development works, the

Capital's villages will undergo a facelift in the next few months. Apart from the infrastructure boost in these villages, Saxena also urged the villagers particularly the youths and women to avail of government schemes to set up their own small manufacturing units that will boost village industries as also it will create employment opportunities locally. He reiterated his commitment of creating world class sports infrastructure in Delhi's villages and said coaches and trainers from the Indian Army and Indian Oil Corporation would soon be available to train the local youths who have exhibited their high potential by winning several medals in different sporting events recently.

ED conducts fresh searches in money laundering case against Amanatullah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday undertook fresh searches at about four-five premises in the national Capital as part of a money laundering probe against AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan linked to alleged irregularities in recruitment of staff for the Delhi Waqf Board, official sources said. The raids are being carried out under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said. About four-five premises are being covered by the ED officials, they said. The agency had in October raided the premises of the 49-year-old legislator who represents the Okhla constituency in the Delhi assembly. It had also arrested three of his alleged associates in this case in November. The ED had alleged that Khan acquired "huge proceeds of crime" in cash from illegal recruitment of staff in the Delhi Waqf Board and invested these for purchasing



immovable assets in the name of his associates. "The searches (in October) were conducted in the case related to illegal recruitment of staff in Delhi Waqf Board and illegal personal gains by way of unfairly leasing out of Waqf Board properties during the chairmanship of the board by Amanatullah Khan during 2018-2022," the agency had claimed in a statement. It said a CBI FIR and three Delhi Police complaints formed the basis of the ED action against the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA. Khan, the ED said, "acquired

huge proceeds of crime out of the said criminal activities in cash and this cash amount was invested in purchase of various immovable properties in Delhi in the name of his associates." Several "incriminating" materials in the form of physical and digital evidence were seized during the raids which "indicate" the role of Khan in the offence of money laundering, it said. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had alleged there was a campaign underway to end the AAP and asserted that false cases are being filed against party leaders.

City Government to create industrial hub at Rani Khera

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
In a move to promote industry, the Arvind Kejriwal Government is planning to create an industrial hub on 147 acres of land in Rani Khera in the national capital. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday gave his assent to this proposal. After receiving approval from the Chief Minister, the file has now been sent to the Lieutenant Governor. Upon receiving approval from the LG, further action will commence. The land for the industrial hub is being acquired from the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). This industrial hub will be entirely eco-friendly. Service industries like IT, ITES (Information Technology Enabled Services), and research will be established here. It is expected that there will be several clusters where multilevel buildings will be constructed. According to a press statement, issued by the AAP government, the government will provide land at concessional



rates for setting up industries, and upon its development, this place could provide direct and indirect employment to thousands of people. "The responsibility for developing the new industrial hub in Rani Khera has been entrusted to the Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC) by the Delhi government. The government says that all modern amenities will be made available in this industrial hub. During its development, attention will be paid to all fundamental aspects. Both people from Delhi and outside will be able to acquire land at concessional rates for setting up industries here. Since it will be an entirely environment-friendly industrial centre, land

allocation will prioritize industries that do not cause any pollution. Therefore, this place will promote industries largely associated with the service sector," the AAP government said. The industrial hub in Rani Khera will cater to the needs of service industries like IT, ITES, and research. The aim of developing the industrial hub is to promote business and transform Delhi into a manufacturing centre. Industries to be set up in the industrial hub will have to strictly adhere to pollution standards. Its development will be done in two phases. A smart integrated IT park will be developed here, comprising several building blocks that will be entirely pollution-free. Industries such as IT, ITES, media, biotechnology, research, and innovation hubs will be established here. Approving the proposal, Kejriwal has emphasized completing the development of the industrial hub within the set time frame, directing the departments concerned to take necessary measures.

24 lakh liquor bottles sold on New Year eve, 18 per cent more than last year

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Delhi recorded sales of 24 lakh liquor bottles on New Year's Eve, registering a nearly 18 per cent on-year growth from the corresponding date in 2022. According to official Excise department data, 3,99,60,509 (3.99 crore) liquor bottles were sold in December 2022 through a network of 520 shops. In December 2023, 4,97,80,240 (4.97 crore) bottles were sold from 635 vends. According to the data, 24,00,726 (24 lakh) liquor bottles were sold on New Year's Eve (December 31) -- the highest single-day sales during December 2023. December 31, 2022, witnessed sales of 20,30,664 (20.30 lakh) bottles -- also the highest single-day sales figure for that month. The second highest sales in December 2023 were recorded on Christmas Eve (December 24) when 19,42,717 (19.42 lakh) bottles were sold. On the same day in 2022, the data showed that 14,69,357 (14.69



lakh) bottles were sold. The data also showed that 17,79,379 (17.79 lakh) liquor bottles were sold on December 30, 2023, against 14,66,353 (14.66 lakh) on the same day in 2022. In 2023, the lowest sales were recorded on December 5 when 12,84,222 (12.84 lakh) bottles were sold against 13,81,531 (13.81 lakh) on the same day in 2022. In 2022, the lowest sales were seen on December 4, with 9,03,835 (9.03 lakh) bottles sold. Sales of liquor bottles breached the 10-lakh every day in December 2023.

JNU rolls out online appraisal system for faculty members

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Jawaharlal Nehru University has rolled out an online application system for filing of appraisal forms for its faculty members in a bid to ease out the process of promotions in the university, a varsity official said on Tuesday. With this, JNU has become the first central university to adopt online Annual Performance Appraisal Report (APAR) in the country for its faculty members, the varsity claimed. "This system will benefit the teaching staff at the university by completely digitising the appraisal form submission system, and help in paperless record keeping and upkeep," a senior JNU official told PTI. "We have rolled out e-APAR as part of our digital initiatives," he added. The Jawaharlal Nehru University Teachers' Association (JNUTA) has opposed the move saying that it will make promotions "unnecessarily complicated" by adding a layer of "bureaucracy" to the process.

"The faculty members already submit an annual report listing the academic work done by them throughout the year as per the 2018 UGC order. Introducing another system in the name of digitisation will only make it more complicated and add unnecessary bureaucracy," said DK Lobiyal, president, JNUTA. The assessment of the performance of teachers as "satisfactory" or "not satisfactory" will be based on the review of the head of the department, Lobiyal said, adding that it may leave room for partiality. APAR is an online system using which faculty members can submit the self-assessment of their annual performance to the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the university. Under this, forms submission and assessments will be done online at different levels in the workflow hierarchy. More than 250 teachers have been waiting for their promotions for over seven years despite candidates meeting the eligibility criteria, JNUTA had claimed in November last year.

Over age vehicles can pass through city if DC permits: Government

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Other States crossing Delhi might be able to traverse through the national Capital without being impounded if a Deputy Commissioner rank official is convinced with the documents furnished by the driver. This, along with many other features, is part of the Delhi government's policy for the release of overage vehicles impounded by the Transport Department. The policy is likely to be notified this month. The Delhi High Court had asked the city government to frame a policy on dealing with such vehicles when owners are willing to give an assurance that these would not be used in the national capital. "The policy has been finalised and the file was sent to Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot, who had suggested some corrections. After the Transport department makes the changes, the file will be again sent to the minister and subsequently, the process for the notification of the policy will be started. The process is



likely to be completed this month," said an official. The department plans to impose a fine of Rs 5,000 for two-wheelers and Rs 10,000 for four-wheelers for releasing the impounded vehicles, he added. These vehicles were impounded by the enforcement teams for either being parked in a public space or driven on public roads, the person added. "... If the vehicle is impounded again, it will directly be sent for scrapping and there will be no second chances," he said. Earlier, overage vehicles from other states passing through Delhi were impounded, he said. "But now if such a thing happens, an official not below the

rank of deputy commissioner will have the power to allow the vehicle to go provided he is satisfied with the documents and other details furnished by the driver. "We are not giving that power to the enforcement officer but to a senior official who will study the documents," the official added. The government will also provide a window of six-to-12 months to people to get a no-objection certificate from the department to shift their vehicles outside Delhi if they do not want them scrapped. People will be required to give an undertaking that they will not park their vehicles in public spaces or ply those on the roads.

Government grants permission to 32 more shops to operate 24 hours

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Aiming to create employment opportunities, along with enhancing economic activities within the national capital, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday granted permission for 32 more shops and commercial establishments to operate 24 hours. The Labour Department of Delhi government had proposed the plan to the Chief Minister regarding the operation of these establishments for 24 hours. These commercial establishments belong to the categories of commercial, retail trade or business, provision stores. The government said that all these establishments must strictly adhere to the provisions and rules of the Delhi Shops and Establishments Act of 1954. The government will keep strict watch over them to ensure that no violation of the rules takes place. The proposal has now been sent to the Lieutenant Governor (LG) for final approval. It further said that compliance with Sections 14, 15, and 16 of the Delhi Shops and



Establishments Act, 1954 is mandatory for these shops and commercial establishments. For instance, during summers, women employees will not be permitted to work in any establishment between 9 PM to 7 AM, and during winter between 8 PM to 8 AM. Shops must be open and closed within specified times, and violation of this might lead to the closure of the commercial establishment. An additional 15 minutes will be allowed to open the shop if customers are waiting. Different areas may have different timings for opening or closing shops, and owners will have to adhere to those timings. Under the Delhi Shops and Establishments Act of 1954, the Delhi Labour Department

received 52 applications to operate shops for 24 hours. The department thoroughly examined these applications and documents. Of these, 20 applications did not meet the requirements and were not considered. However, all 32 applications meeting the criteria were approved. It is noteworthy that in the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the number of permissions granted for the operation of 24-hour shops and commercial establishments within Delhi. The Chief Minister periodically approves commercial establishments that meet the criteria. Now, approval has been granted for 32 more establishments, bringing the total to 667.

Hasya Rang Utsav 2024 kicks off with fun and laughter

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The first day of the Hasya Rang Utsav 2024 at the Kamani Auditorium opened with an outburst of laughter and celebration in the heart of the nation's Capital. The three-day event of humour and entertainment aims to present the best in comic talent in plays and stand up. It started with a bang on January 2 and will continue until January 4, 2024. The Chief Guest for the evening, Saurabh Bhardwaj, Minister of Arts, Culture, and Language, Delhi Government, honoured the occasion and set the stage for a spectacular festival filled with humour. "Delhi is currently blessed with pleasant weather, and in this

climate Delhi's cultural and tourism ministry are organising a number of vibrant events. These events showcase a diverse spectrum of colours, including laughter (hasya), poetry (kavya), verses (sher-o-shayari), classical music, classical dance, and thumri. December witnessed a different array of events, and the upcoming January promises to be equally entertaining. Over the next three days, the Kamani Auditorium will host a laughter-filled comedy festival, providing an engaging experience for the audience," he said. On the first day, Ahsaan Qureshi's hilarious stand-up comedy act wowed the crowd with his unique Shayari-style comedy during his performance at Hasya Rang Utsav.



The Great Indian Laughter Challenge runner-up demonstrated his comic prowess by skillfully incorporating a variety

of political and social satires into his performance. His

unique ability to blend humour with insightful commentary provided a refreshing perspective on contemporary issues, making the audience both laugh and reflect. This was followed by the drama "Mera Pati Salman Khan," which was written by Umesh Pandey, directed by Raj Upadhyay, and performed by the highly talented Navras Theatre Group. The play unravels the comedic chaos as two friends reunite, spinning a web of exaggeration about their husbands' handsomeness, wealth, and luxury lifestyles. The comedy mayhem that surrounded society norms and exaggerations of riches and lifestyles was explored in the play. "Hakim.com," a humorous play directed by Fahad Khan

and penned by Akbar Quadri, carried on the road of laughter. The performance kept the audience immensely amused while shining light on societal complexities through its comedic exploration of the conflict between traditional and contemporary medical methods. The journey of laughter will continue on January 3rd and 4th as well. On day two, witness the rib-tickling comedy of renowned comedian Rajat Sood, India's Laughter Champion. The evening progresses with the delightful play "Hayee Padosan," by Priyanka Sharma, followed by the timeless classic "Zindagi Once More," directed by Shuddhodhan Banerjee, scripted by Badal Sircar, and translated by

Nandini Banerjee. Day three promises more laughter with Raja Rancho from The Great Indian Laughter Challenge 2, featuring the comedy script "Bingar Ki Joru" by Ravi Taneja and "Andhere Mein" directed by Sunil Rawat and written by Pratap Sehgal, reaching the festival's grand finale. In addition, On Friday, the 5th of January, experience an evening of laughter with the renowned Sunil Grover, the renowned Gutthi of the "Comedy Nights with Kapil". On the concluding evening of the "Laughter Weekend" on Saturday, 6th January, immerse yourself in the Hasya Kavi Samelan featuring Ashok Chakradhar, Arun Gemini, and other eminent poets.

Rules of CAA to be notified much before Lok Sabha polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 will be notified "much before" the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, a senior Government functionary said on Tuesday.

Under the CAA brought in by the Narendra Modi government, Indian nationality will be granted to persecuted non-Muslim migrants -- Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians -- from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who had come to India till December 31, 2014. There were massive protests in some parts of the country after the CAA was passed by Parliament in December 2019 and received the presidential assent subsequently.

"We are going to issue the rules for the CAA soon. Once the rules are issued, the law can be implemented and those eligible can be granted Indian citizenship," the functionary said.

Delayed by more than four years, rules for the CAA are a must for its implementation. Asked whether the rules will be notified before the announcement of the next Lok Sabha elections that are likely to be held in April-May, the functionary said, "Yes, much before



protests or police action after Parliament passed the law. Meanwhile, in last two years, more than 30 district magistrates and home secretaries of nine states have been given powers to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians coming from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan under the Citizenship Act of 1955.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs for 2021-22, from April 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, a total of 1,414 foreigners belonging to these non-Muslim minority communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were given Indian citizenship by registration or naturalization under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

The nine states where Indian citizenship by registration or naturalization is given under the Citizenship Act of 1955 to non-Muslim minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are Gujarat, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra.

Authorities of none of the districts of Assam and West Bengal, where the issue is politically very sensitive, have been given the powers so far.

The promise of implementing the controversial CAA was a major poll plank of the BJP in the last Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in West Bengal. The saffron party's leaders consider it a plausible factor that led to the rise of the BJP in the state.

According to the manual of parliamentary procedures, the rules for any legislation should have been framed within six months of presidential assent or seek extension from the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

Since 2020, the home ministry has been taking extension in regular interval from the parliamentary committees for framing the rules.

More than a hundred people lost their lives during the

India should deal with China on basis of realism: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said India should deal with China on the basis of realism and not on romanticism of the Nehruvian era adding "the Modi government has been very much more and in conformity with a strain of realism, which originated from Sardar Patel."

India should engage with China with mutual respect, sensitivity, and interest and the approach should be grounded on realism, he said touching upon the difference in opinion between India's first Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhai Patel and then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on the issue.

"I argue for dealing with China from a basis of realism — that strain of realism, which I feel — strains all the way from Sardar Patel to Narendra Modi," said Jaishankar. "I would say that the Modi Government has been very much more and in conformity with a strain of realism, which originated from Sardar Patel," Jaishankar told ANI in an interview.

"Even when it came, for example to the UN Security Council seat, it's not my case that we should have necessarily taken the seat, it's a different debate,



but to say that we should first let China — China's interest should come first, it's a very peculiar statement to make," he said.

"It takes two hands to clap. I pose the issue in this manner if you look at the last 75+ years of our foreign policy, they have a strain of realism about China and have a strain of idealism, romanticism, non-realism. It begins right from day one, there is a sharp difference of opinion — how to respond to China between Nehru and Sardar Patel," the external affairs minister said.

He said India is focusing on how to expand its relationships with nations across the world, and responded to the criticism over his recent Russian visit in Western media by asserting that every nation has its values and interests. He was speaking to the ANI in connection with the launch of his new book

"Why Bharat Matters," which he presented to Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week.

In his interview, Jaishankar also touched upon issues like relationship Pakistan, Canada and Russia and the country's role in the global space.

Describing India's relationship with Russia as "important and steady," Jaishankar asserted that the ties with Moscow have proven beneficial for New Delhi. He emphasized the need for India to approach thoughtfully while dealing with other nations.

Replying to the Western media's criticism over his visit to Russia and the camaraderie between Prime Minister Modi and Russian President Putin, Jaishankar said, "If people can't read me, that means my mind games are working. But the answer is honestly I see no reason that people should take any, you know what was happening

other than at face value because we have always maintained that the Russia relationship is a very important one, very steady one."

Notably, India has maintained a neutral stance on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, advocating for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the issues.

During a meeting with President Putin in Samarkand in 2021, Prime Minister Modi emphasized, "This is not an era of war."

Earlier in December, Jaishankar travelled to Russia for a five-day visit and met President Putin, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Russian Deputy Prime Minister M Denis Manturov.

Speaking about India-Russia ties, Jaishankar said "I think I must have been reacting to how I was asked that particular question and I know that is not your intent. For us, Russia is a very valued partner. It's a very time-tested partner. It's a relationship from which both India and Russia have benefited enormously and my presence here today and the fact you know all the developments that I have pointed out including our growing trade, investments, our military-technical cooperation, our connectivity projects. I think all of this will give you a good sense of the importance and the value that we attach to the relationship."

Shah reviews security situation in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, where five soldiers were killed by terrorists in an ambush in Poonch district a fortnight ago.

A day after the December 21 terror attack, three civilians, aged between 27 and 42, were found dead after they were allegedly picked up by the Army for questioning, sparking outrage. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Army chief General Manoj Pande had vis-



ited Poonch in the wake of these incidents. Officials said Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, Chief of Army staff General Manoj Pande and top officials of intelligence and other security agencies attended the meeting on Tuesday.

Desi anti drone technology being developed to check smuggling

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Use of drones to smuggle arms and narcotics from across the border into Indian territory will be over in the next six months as an indigenous anti-drone technology is being developed to check all such misadventures by the anti-national elements, a senior government functionary said.

Security agencies are working on as many as three designs of the anti-drone technology and the final outcome could be three or a combination of all three.

"The menace of smuggling in arms and narcotics from across the border through the use of drones will be over in the next six months. Definitely the anti-drone technology will be placed by then," the functionary said.

Trials on the new technology are going on and it is in advance stage of finalisation. Dropping of arms, ammuni-



tion and narcotics from Pakistan by using the drones or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir has been a major problem for security agencies for several years now.

The government in August had informed that 53 cases were detected where drones were used for smuggling of arms and narcotics from across the border in Punjab in last three years.

Karti appears before ED again

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MP Karti Chidambaram appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday for a fresh round of questioning in a money laundering case linked to issuance of visas to some Chinese nationals in 2011, official sources said.

The 52-year-old legislator from Sivaganga Lok Sabha seat in Tamil Nadu was questioned in this case on December 23 last year and the central agency recorded his statement under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). He again deposed before the investigating officer of the case at the ED headquarters in central Delhi, officials said.

The money laundering case, filed under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), stems from a CBI FIR.

The probe pertains to allegations of Rs 50



lakh being paid as kickbacks to Karti and his close associate S Bhaskaram by a top executive of Vedanta group company Talwandi Sabo Power Ltd. (TSPL), which was setting up a power plant in Punjab, according to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR.

According to the CBI, the work for setting up the power project was being executed by a Chinese company and was running

behind schedule.

A TSPL executive had sought re-issuance of project visas for 263 Chinese workers for which Rs 50 lakh allegedly exchanged hands, according to the CBI FIR. The CBI had last year raided the premises of the Chidambaram family and arrested Bhaskaram even as Karti was questioned by it.

Karti has earlier said the ED probe was a "fishing and roving" enquiry and that he has submitted documents to the agency in the past. He had called the case "most bogus", asserting he was "certain that he never facilitated even a single Chinese national in their visa process, let alone 250."

He had said this case an attempt to target his father senior Congress leader P Chidambaram through him.

This is the third money laundering case against Karti with the INX Media and Aircel-Maxis cases being probed by the ED for some years now.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to All The General Body Members of the Society "Society for Development of Human Resources" to attend an Annual General Meeting and conduct Election of Governing Body for the Period 2023-24 the same was held on Wednesday, 18th day of October, 2023 at 11:00 AM at Plot No. 37/16, Kharsa No. 76, Ranohla Opp. Dera Baba, Bagga Singh, New Delhi-41.

MEMBER NAME	DESIGNATION
Mr. Parvash Kumar	President
Mr. Balwan Singh Gullia	General Secretary
Mr. Pawan Kumar	Treasurer
Ms. Sonia	Executive Member
Mrs. Santosh Lakra	Executive Member
Mr. S. Reji Kumar	Executive Member
Mr. Pardeep Kumar	Executive Member
Mr. Sanjay Kumar	Executive Member

Sd/-
Balwan Singh Gullia
(General Secretary)

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to all that, I Neel Kamal Jetly S/o, Late V.N. Jetly is owner and resident of Flat No. 3-D, Fourth Floor, Shiv Shakti C.G.H.S. Ltd., Plot No. 10, Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075, have lost/misplaced the SHARE CERTIFICATE No. 10481 Dated 11/06/2008 issued by Shiv Shakti C.G.H.S. Ltd., in respect of Flat No. 3-D, Fourth Floor, Shiv Shakti C.G.H.S. Ltd., Plot No. 10, Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075 on 16/10/2018 and an N.C.R./F.I.R. has already lodged on Delhi Police online portal vide LR No. 1287912/2023 dated 29.12.2023. Founder please inform the undersigned within 15 days, after that the founder/ user will be responsible for the use of the same in all respect, whatsoever.

NEEL KAMAL JETLY
Phone: 9811485037

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority

Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.)
Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & https://etender.up.nic.in. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

(A)

- 04/S.M.(Gangajal)/E.T./2023-24, M/o Park G.Jal (Two year maintenance of Internal Green Park Area/Park Area of UGRs Sector-85, 83, 81, 47, 62, 35, 72, 69 & 118) Noida. Cost Rs. 59.75 Lacs.
- 05/S.M.(Gangajal)/E.T./2023-24, M/o G.Jal (Two year Running Operation for Zonal UGRs in Sector-31, 20, 5, 8, 63, 52 & 61) Noida. Cost Rs. 92.46 Lacs.
- 21/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Desilting of Deep Sewer Line by Super Sucker Machine in Sector-116, 117 and Newly activated area of Sector-75 & 79), Noida. Cost Rs. 96.91 Lacs.

Which can be uploaded by date 15.01.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on date 16.01.2024 at 11.00 AM.

(B)

- 10/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, Internal Development of various W/W Compound (Repair and Maintenance work of CGR-31 in Sector-31), Noida. Cost Rs. 54.14 Lacs.
- 20/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, M/o W/s (Repairing of AC/CI/PVC Water Line in Sector-20, 21, 25 and 26), Noida. (For Two Year), Cost Rs. 49.60 Lacs.

Which can be uploaded by date 08.01.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on date 09.01.2024 at 11.00 AM.

Office: Sector-5, Noida Dy. General Manager (Jal) Noida

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Tender Notice Reference No. PGSC/Admin/ Digital Projection /2023/10
Pushpa Gujral Science City invites online bids for the following:

Sl. No.	Item	Quantity
01	On-line Digitally signed open e-tenders under 2 Bid System are invited in two Bid System from the manufacturers or their authorized registered Indian agents for Supply, Installation, Integration, Testing and Commissioning of High Resolution, High Brightness Full dome Digital 4K 2D multichannel Immersive Projection System with hardware and software packages, interfaces, tools and / or drivers etc. (including integration of existing Audio System and cleaning of existing screen) at Pu shpa Gujral Science City, Kapurthala for projection on existing 23 meter 30 degree tilted dome with 3 (three) years On site Comprehensive Warranty including preventive maintenance and further Comprehensive AMC for next 2 years.	

Interested tenderers can submit online bids through https://eproc.punjab.gov.in by 19.01.2024 (1500 Hrs). Note: PGSC reserves the right to accept or reject any bid and to annul the process at any time, without any liability and assigning any reason thereof.

Closing date & time: 19.01.2024 (1500 Hrs)
For further details, please visit website www.pgsciencecity.org
Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in

Administrative Officer,
Pushpa Gujral Science City, Kapurthala

NA/12/21081/2023/31053 Dated CHD :- 11/2024

Modi condoles death of legal scholar Nanda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday expressed grief over the demise of noted legal scholar Ved Prakash Nanda, and said he was a prominent member of the Indian diaspora in the US who was passionate about strong India-US relations.

An Indian-American academic, Nanda was an expert on international law and had received the Padma Bhushan in 2018. Born in 1934 in Gujranwala (now in Pakistan), Nanda passed away on January 1 in Denver.

In a post on X, Modi said, "Deeply saddened by the passing away of Professor Ved Prakash Nanda Ji, a distin-

guished academic whose contributions to the legal field are invaluable. His work highlights his strong commitment to legal education."

"He (Nanda) was also a prominent member of the Indian diaspora in USA and was passionate about strong India-USA relations. Condolences to his family and friends. Om Shanti," he said.

Home Minister Amit Shah also condoled Nanda's demise.

"Deeply anguished by the demise of Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda Ji, an internationally acclaimed legal scholar. The illustrious career of Nanda Ji was shaped by his academic rigor and profound commitment to legal education," Shah said.

Covid-19 reports begin trickling in from Ladakh, North Eastern States



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Hitherto restricted to a few regions, reports of Covid cases have now started trickling from various pockets covering Ladakh to Northeastern States in the country amid rise in the mutant strain JN.1 virus which crossed 250 mark to touch 263.

The rise in cases comes amid WHO advice calling for adequate precautions given that JN.1 strain spreads fast even as it said that it's not much lethal. On Tuesday, the country reported over 573 covid cases. A total of 263 cases of COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 have been detected in the country so far, with about half of them recorded in Kerala, according to the INSACOG's data updated on Tuesday.

Ten states and Union territories have so far detected the presence of the JN.1 sub-variant of the virus.

These states are Kerala (133), Goa (51), Gujarat (34), Delhi (16), Karnataka (eight), Maharashtra (nine), Rajasthan (five), Tamil Nadu (four), Telangana (two) and Odisha (one), according to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG). The Centre has asked the States and Union territories to maintain a constant vigil amid an uptick in the number of Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-

variant in the country. India has recorded 573 new coronavirus infections, while the active cases stood at 4,565, according to the data released by the Health ministry on Tuesday. COVID-19 cases have been steadily rising in India since the last month when the number of cases spiked especially in Kerala.

Two new Covid-19 cases were reported in Gurugram on Monday, according to the district health department. In Himachal, the State Health Department has directed the district officers to examine cases of influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infections (SARI).

The State has witnessed only two Covid-19 cases during the last 10 days while Uttarakhand reported two Covid-19 cases. Samples of both infected patients have been sent for genome sequencing to identify the presence of new Omicron sub-variant JN.1.

In Ladakh, eleven people were tested positive for Covid-19 infections. Director Health, Ladakh, Dr Mutup Dorje said that all the positive patients have been home isolated and proper guidelines related to Covid protocol have been issued to follow Covid protocol by wearing masks and maintaining distance in public places. On June 1, a person was tested COVID positive in Jammu as well.

Office of the Superintending Engineer
1st Circle, Public Works Department, Almora
Phone/Fax: 05962-230295 Email: sepwdalm@rediffmail.com

Letter No. : 5894(j)/Nivida-01/2023-24 Dated : 30/12/2023

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE RFP (E-Tendering)
Request For Proposal (RFP)

The superintending Engineer, 1st Circle, PWD Almora invites RFP through E-Tendering on behalf of Honourable Governor of Uttarakhand for following works. All other information will be available from dated 03/01/2024 & onwards on website <http://www.uktenders.gov.in>

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Cost of Tender Form	Earnest Money (Rupee in lakh)	Validity of Tender	Time of Completion	Contractor's Category of Registration for tendering
1	Appointment of Engineering Consultancy Firm for carrying out Survey and preparation of land plan based on requirement of The Uttarakhand Roadside land control act 2014 of various state highways in District Almora.	₹ 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 6.00 Lac	120 Days	04 Month	Experience of Similar detailed survey work in NH/NHAI/PSU/ State Govt.
2	Appointment of Engineering Consultancy Firm for carrying out Survey and preparation of land plan based on requirement of The Uttarakhand Roadside land control act 2014 of various state highways in District Bageshwar.	₹ 5000.00 + 18% GST	₹ 1.30 Lac	120 Days	04 Month	Experience of Similar detailed survey work in NH/NHAI/PSU/ State Govt.

'India's growth will be technology driven'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Minister of State Jitendra Singh on Tuesday said India's growth will be technology-driven and the recent science success stories have accelerated the country's ascent to Amrit Kaal vision 2047.

Singh was speaking at the closing ceremony of the Platinum Jubilee celebrations of the Raman Research Institute (RRI) here. The institute was founded in 1948. Amrit Kaal, which roughly translates to 'golden era', refers to the 25-year period from 75 years to 100 years of India's independence.

"Chandrayaan-3, Aditya L1 and the recent XPOsat mission, in which the scientists from RRI were involved, are all India's science success stories that have convinced the world of the country's talents and scientific capabilities. The ascent to India's growth has already started," said Singh, who holds the science and technology portfolio.

He suggested that scientists and scientific institutions need to integrate and work for the country's collective growth. The Union Minister also expressed hope that the country would reach greater



heights by 2047 as envisioned by doyens of Indian science, like the institute's founder-Professor C V Raman. Speaking on the occasion, RRI Director, Tarun Souradeep, congratulated the RRI team and informed the audience about the successful launch of the XPOsat mission and the efforts by the scientists and engineers at the institute towards its primary payload, POLIX.

POLIX, a payload indigenously built by RRI, was onboard the XPOsat mission which was successfully launched on January 1 by the Indian Space Research Organisation. RRI is also involved in the National Quantum Mission announced last year.

Anil Kakodkar, Chancellor, Homi Bhabha National Institute and former Chairman, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), hailed the scientific contributions made by RRI in pushing further the frontiers of knowledge.

In his address, he noted the role of research-led industries that are driving the country's economy. "Today, the bigger driver is research-led industries, where frontier research penetrates into industrial operations. I look forward to an India where industries are churning out research-led products which are ahead of the time. And this is where institutions like RRI can make a big difference," said Kakodkar.

Former ISRO chairman A S Kiran Kumar shed light on the institute's involvement in a range of research areas. "From the National Quantum Mission to the space-mission like XPOsat, RRI is involved in several missions and continues the scientific legacy laid by Professor Raman. Now, the institute needs to ponder in areas it will work in over the next 25 years," he said.

Gujarat to procure tranquiliser guns, cages in view of leopard attack incidents

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat forest department on Tuesday decided to buy more tranquiliser guns and cages as a precautionary measure in view of the incidents of leopards attacking human beings in the state, the government said.

During the 23rd meeting of the Gujarat government's State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) held during the day under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, forest officials informed the board members that the process has been initiated to procure adequate quantities of tranquiliser guns so that violent leopards can be controlled during man-animal conflicts.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Nityanand Shrivastava, made a detailed presentation on the issue of man-animal conflicts during the meeting, the state government said in a release. Since the density of population is high in south Gujarat and leopards are spotted close to human settlements many times, the forest department has decided to buy at least 10 cages for each taluka of south Gujarat to trap leopards posing a threat to human beings, it said.

Moreover, the CM was also informed that the movement and behaviour of leopards are being closely monitored using motion-activated trap cameras and radio collars. The senior official informed the board that five leopards have already been radio-collared to track their movements.

Recently, the forest department set up two rescue centres at Pavagadh and Jambughoda in central Gujarat to keep rescued wild animals, including leopards captured after man-animal conflicts.

Shrivastava added that two new rescue centres for wild animals will become operational very soon in Surat and Valsad districts of south Gujarat.

Dispute over drug money behind Manipur firing

PTI ■ IMPHAL

The situation in the minority-dominated Lilong Chingjao area in Manipur's Thoubal district, where four villagers were gunned down by cadres of the banned People's Liberation Army, remained calm on Tuesday as additional security forces were deployed there, officials said.

The toll in the incident increased to four after one more person succumbed to injuries, while two other critically injured persons were undergoing treatment at the ICU of an Imphal-based hospital, they said.

The incident was seen as the fallout of a dispute over money collected through illegal drug trade, the officials said.

Giving details of the incident, the officials said that some cadres of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) arrived at the house of one person, who has several narcotics cases pending against him.

Within minutes, around 1,000 people gathered outside that the gunmen belonged to the outfit and they were holding an internal inquiry into the incident. Both the organisations are banned under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. After the incident, police held an inter-faith meeting in the presence of civil society leaders and Lilong MLA Abdul Nasir to ease tension in the area.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh also assured that the culprits will be arrested and punished as per the law. The chief minister visited Raj Medicity hospital where the injured were being treated.

After his visit, Singh posted on X, "We strongly condemn all forms of violence, and the state government has launched mass combing operations to nab the culprits and the culprit will be punished according to the law. No one is above the law." Additional security forces have been deployed in the area and vehicular patrolling has been increased to prevent any untoward incident, he said.

The residence of the suspected narcotic dealer at Lilong Chingjao village, 15 km from the Thoubal district headquarters and chased away the PLA cadres. On the run, the PLA cadres opened indiscriminate fire on the locals, killing four and injuring some others.

The Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), the political wing of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), issued a statement claiming



Goa announces single window clearance for land allotment

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Goa government on Tuesday amended its policies to simplify the processes for investors by providing single-window clearance for land allotment and construction to attract industries to the state.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant held a meeting with the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industries (GCCCI), Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), Goa State Industries Association (GSIA) and others.

State Industries minister Mauvin Godinho and Goa Industries Development Corporation (GIDC) chairman Aleixo Reginaldo Lourenco were also present for the meeting.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Sawant said some policies have been amended to attract more investment in the industrial sector and enhance revenue and job opportunities.

Modi visits Lakshadweep

PTI ■ AGATTI (LAKSHADWEEP)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday that numerous developmental projects have been completed in Lakshadweep over the past 10 years of his government, and the Centre is committed to the progress of the islands.

The Prime Minister addressed a public function immediately after his arrival at Agatti Airport. During his address, Modi noted the immense possibilities that Lakshadweep offers and alleged that the islands faced neglect for many years after independence.

"The union territory is full of many possibilities, but for a long time after independence, the infrastructure of Lakshadweep was not given much attention," he said. He mentioned weak port infrastructure, despite shipping being the lifeline of the islands. This applies to education, health, and even petrol and diesel as well, he said.

"Even though shipping is the lifeline of the archipelago, the port infrastructure is weak. Whether it's health, education, or even petrol and diesel, we had to face a lot of problems. All these challenges are being addressed by our government, Modi said.

He said the government has now taken up the task of developing the Lakshadweep Islands in earnest. Expressing optimism about the newly introduced ice plant at Agatti, the Prime Minister emphasised that it would pave the way for enhanced seafood processing possibilities on the island.

The Prime Minister said that many development projects were completed in Agatti in the past 10 years and mentioned the creation of modern facilities, especially for fishermen. He also touched upon the fact that Agatti now has an airport as well as an ice plant.

Thanks to this, Modi said, new possibilities are being created for the seafood export and seafood processing sectors.



National Cooperation Policy is set to be unveiled this month

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Cooperative Tribunal along the lines of the National Company Law, a National Board for Cooperatives similar to the National Board for MSMEs and setting up a RBI-licensed National Cooperative Bank of India are likely to be some of the key features of the much-awaited National Cooperation Policy that is set to be unveiled this month, it is learnt.

The proposed policy offering a roadmap for the next 25 years i.e. from 2024-2047 is in keeping with the Modi Government's vision of 'Sahakar se Samridhi', promoting the cooperative based economic development model, strengthening the cooperative movement in the country and deepening its reach up to the grassroots.

The new policy which would replace the old one formulated way back in 2002 also proposes a ranking framework for states for development of cooperatives, said sources.

The proposed policy has been framed up by a national level panel led by Suresh Prabhakar

Prabhu in 2022.

As per the government data, India has around 8.5 lakh cooperative societies with nearly 29 crore members spread across the country, engaged in an array of activities like agro-processing, dairying, fisheries, housing, weaving, credit and marketing to name a few.

The National Cooperative Tribunal will be entrusted with the task to resolve disputes and reconstruct sick cooperatives while the objective of the National Cooperative Bank of India is to deploy funds for 63,000 Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS), which are village-level cooperative credit societies dealing directly with farmers, said the sources.

Since its formation, the Union Cooperation Ministry under Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah has been taking several steps to strengthen the cooperative ecosystem in India so as to enhance cooperatives' share in GDP.

Model Bye-Laws for PACS making them multipurpose, multi-dimensional and transparent entities, strengthening of PACS through computerization, new

SOUTH INDIAN Bank
The South Indian Bank Ltd, Regional Office: Delhi
3rd Floor, Plot No.21, 21/1, Pusa Road, Karol Bagh,
New Delhi - 110005, Phone: 011 4233 1664/011 4512 8661,
Email: ro1008@sib.co.in

RO-DEL/CRD/SAR/33/2023-24 Date: 02-01-24

To
Borrower
1) Mr. Manoj Kumar Singh at 206 SFS Flat, Dr. Mukharjee Nagar, Delhi - 110001

Dear Sir,
Sub: Notice issued in terms of Section 13(8) of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. A/c: Mr. Manoj Kumar Singh ; Branch: New Delhi Karol Bagh

Ref: 13(2) Notice: Dated: 31-07-2023

As you are aware, the Authorised Officer of the Bank has taken possession of the assets described in the Schedule herein below in terms of Section 13(4) of the subject Act on 08-Dec-2023, in connection with the outstanding dues payable by you to Karol Bagh-Delhi branch of the bank. The amount due from you to the Bank is Rs 12,10,83,376.58/- (Rupees Twelve Crore Ten Lakhs Eighty Three thousand Three Hundred Seventy Six and Fifty Eight Paise only) as on 21.11.2023 with further interest and costs.

AND WHEREAS, the borrower/co-obligant/guarantor has failed to pay the amount due to the bank even after taking possession of the schedule property, notice is hereby given that the assets described in the Schedule herein below will be sold by inviting tenders by public auction by Private Treaty in accordance with the relevant provisions of the SARFAESI Act and its Rules.

The date and time of auction shall be informed through a separate sale notice as per the provisions of the SARFAESI Act, and the property would be sold to the person who offers highest bid amount.

Hence, in terms of the provisions of the SARFAESI Act and the Rules made thereunder, this notice is issued to enable you to discharge the amount due to the bank and redeem the secured asset within 30 days from date of receipt of this notice and before the publication of sale notice mentioned supra.

SCHEDULE OF ASSETS.

All that piece and parcel of commercial unit bearing No. 102, on 1st Floor, 'Aggarwal Auto Mall' without roof/terrace rights, having a built-up area measuring 10650.00 Sq. ft. or 999.32 Sq. Mtrs., a part of freshhold commercial building, built on Plot No. Site-II, District Centre at Shalimar Place, Shalimar Bagh Delhi measuring 6854.00 Sq. Mtrs. along with proportionate rights of land attached thereto along with all their ownership rights, titles, interest in liens, easements, privileges and appurtenances therein and owned by Manoj Kumar Singh morefully described in Sale Deed No 6731/2014 dated 19-06-2014 and registered on 20-06-2014 of Sub-Registrar VI A New Delhi/Delhi and bounded on North: Open Below; South: Open Below; East: Open Below; West: Other Unit, Part-I

Yours faithfully
Sd/
AUTHORISED OFFICER

IN THE BOMBAY CITY CIVIL COURT, BORIVALI DIVISION AT DINDOSHI, BOMBAY
SUMMARY CIVIL SUIT NO. 365 OF 2018

ICICI BANK LIMITED,
A Banking Company incorporated Under the Companies Act, 1956 and licensed as a bank under the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 and having its registered office at ICICI Bank Tower, Near Chakli Circle, Old Pedra Road, Vadodara-390 007, Gujarat and having Corporate office at ICICI Bank Towers, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai-400 051 through its Power of Attorney Holder Mr. Rajesh Chintaman Wankhede The Debt Manager, Age 47 years

Versus
PRADEEP KUMAR RUDRANARAYAN CHAUDHARY
Aged 31 years, Occupation: Service Indian Inhabitant, Residing at House No. B-1515, Shivshakti Nagar, Turbhe Store, Turbhe, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra-400 705. Having permanent address at L-1, 2073, /62/9, Asthal Mandir, Sangam Vihar, Delhi-110 062.

...Plaintiff

PRADEEP KUMAR RUDRANARAYAN CHAUDHARY
Residing at House No. B-1515, Shivshakti Nagar, Turbhe Store, Turbhe, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra-400 705. Having permanent address at L-1, 2073, /62/9, Asthal Mandir, Sangam Vihar, Delhi-110 062.

...Defendant

To,
PRADEEP KUMAR RUDRANARAYAN CHAUDHARY
Residing at House No. B-1515, Shivshakti Nagar, Turbhe Store, Turbhe, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra-400 705. Having permanent address at L-1, 2073, /62/9, Asthal Mandir, Sangam Vihar, Delhi-110 062.

TAKE NOTICE THAT, this Hon'ble court will be moved before her Hon'ble Judge Smt. V.D. INGLE presiding in Court Room No. 02 on 17/01/2024 at 11 O'clock in the forenoon by the above named defendants for the following reliefs:-
The Plaintiff therefore prays that:
a. that it be declared that an aggregate sum of Rs.2,42,313.00/- (Rupees Two Lakh Forty Two Thousand Three Hundred and Thirteen Only) is due and payable by the Defendant to the Plaintiff as per Particulars of Claim mentioned aforesaid together with interest at the contractual rate 24% p.a. from the date of filing the suit till payment and/or realization;
b. that a decree be passed against Defendant directing Defendants to pay to the Plaintiff an aggregate sum of Rs.2,42,313.00/- (Rupees Two Lakh Forty Two Thousand Three Hundred and Thirteen Only) as per the Particulars of Claim mentioned aforesaid along with further interest thereon at the rate of 24% per annum from the date of filing the Suit till payment and/or realization;
c. for costs of this suit;
d. for such further and other reliefs as the court may deem fit in the facts and circumstances of the case ;
Dated this 16th day of December 2023.

For Registrar
City Civil Court, At Dindoshi

Sealer
MRS. SAVITA N. MALKAMPATE
Advocate for the Plaintiff
Office: A-001, Ground Floor, Saryu CHS Ltd., Building No. 9, Suchidham, Behind Bank of India Building, Near Dindoshi Court, Film City Road, Malad (E), Mumbai-400 097. Mobile: 9821482519

PUBLIC NOTICE

Be it known to the general public that my client **Shri Sanjiv Kundra son of Kishore Kundra and Veenu Kundra wife of Shri Sanjiv Kundra resident of Q-1/3, DLF Phase 2, Gurugram, Haryana** has severed his relationship with his son namely **Kanav Kundra** as a result of sufferings harassment due to unbecomingly aggressive and inhumane act & behavior of his above-mentioned son. If anybody keeps any relation or deals with them in any manner whatsoever, he would be doing solely at his own risk and consequences and my client shall not be responsible for the act of **Kanav Kundra**.

Advocate **Nagender Verma**
Verma Associate
Office: 52, Lawyer's Chamber Compound, Durgam Chattrani, Mob. 7250865444

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given to public at large that my client **Mr. Vinod Kumar, Mr. Pawan Kumar, Mr. Parveen Kumar and Mr. Neveen Kumar** who are the owners of Plot measuring 0.77 Marla, out of Khasra No. 1153, Khata No. 1453, Mu No. 291 Kila No. 6/12 (S-6-9), in Jagajr, Haryana, by virtue of the said property may please contact us within 07 days from the date of this notice at the address mentioned herein below, failing which my client(s) shall not be held responsible in any manner whatsoever. **Khatian & Khatian**
A-38 Kalash Colony, New Delhi-110048, Ph. No. 011-49774545

Kerala Minister retracts controversial remarks on bishops amid Church criticism

PTI ■ KOCHI

Facing criticism from various church groups for his remarks against bishops who attended the Prime Minister's Christmas programme, Kerala Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cheriyan on Tuesday said he is withdrawing the controversial parts of his speech related to "cake and wine" that had offended them.

Cheriyan, a senior leader of the CPI(M) in Kerala, however, maintained his stance on the alleged side of bishops regarding "violence targeting Christians" in Manipur and other parts of the country during Modi's Christmas programme.

He addressed the media, acknowledging the criticism from the Catholic Church and other Christian groups, particularly regarding his comments against priests present at the Prime Minister's Christmas event at his official residence in New Delhi on December 25.

"If there is any difficulty and pain in the remarks about cake and wine, those parts are withdrawn," Cheriyan said in response to attacks against him.

He said that the priests had raised concerns about his speech during the inauguration of a CPI(M) local committee office in Alappuzha district on Sunday evening. Cheriyan acknowledged that the mention of wine and cake in his speech may have caused discomfort.

The Minister withdrew his contentious statement following Kerala Catholic Bishops Council's (KCBC) declaration of non-cooperation with the state government until he retracts it.

"The mention of wine and cake is retracted if they feel like it," he said, referring to KCBC president Cardinal Basileos Cleemis' displeasure over his statement.

SRF LIMITED
Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor Mayur Vihar Place, Noida Link Road, Mayur Vihar Phase I Extn, Delhi-110091 Tel. No (Regd office) : (+91-11) 49482870; Fax : (+91-11) 49482900 E-mail: cs@srf.com, Website: www.srf.com; CIN: L18101DL1970PLC005197 Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurugram, Haryana-122 003

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Share Certificates pertaining to shares of the Company detailed below have been reported lost and request(s) for issue of duplicate Certificates in lieu thereof have been received by the Company :-

Sl. No.	Folio No.	Name of the Share Holder / Legal Heir (Claimant)	Cert-No.	Dist-No.	Lost Shares
1	K 0001606	KARTAR CHAND MUNJAL	124790	5244297-314	18
			975869	18568525-60	36
2	SRF0113912	PUSHPA NAVNITBHAI PATEL SAILESH NAVNITBHAI PATEL SHAMIK NAVNITBHAI PATEL	1125029	308152790-3005	216
			1130311	310153278-8825	5548
3	S 0007154	SANTOSH BINDAL	80717	3625509-24	16
			146354	5843518-50	33
			1131303	310559002-197	196

Any person having any claim/objection in respect of the above requests should lodge such claim/objection with the company at its Corporate Office within 15 days of the publication of this notice, failing which the company will consider to give effect to the above requests.

Public is hereby cautioned against dealing with the aforesaid share certificates.

for SRF LIMITED
Sd/-
RAJAT LAKHANPAL
Sr. VP (Corporate Compliance) & Company Secretary

Place : Gurugram
Date : 02.01.2024

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SALE NOTICE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 read with provision to rule 9(1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to public in general and in particular to Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the secured Creditor, the Physical Possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of Karnataka Bank Ltd, the Secured Creditor on 20.05.2022, will be sold on "As is Where is", "As is What is" and "Whatever there is" on 05.02.2024, for recovery of Rs.1,16,21,775.07 (Rupees One Crore Sixteen Lakhs Twenty One Thousand Seven Hundred Seventy Five and Paise Seven Only) i.e. (i) Rs.98,46,076.83 under Overdraft Account No.189700010446001 along with future interest from 01.06.2022, plus cost, (ii) Rs.17,75,698.24 under Bill Discounting A/c No.189690020000301 along with applicable future interest, due to the Karnataka Bank Ltd, Daryaganj Branch-Delhi, 82, Ground Floor, Dayananda Road, Daryaganj, Delhi-110002, the Secured Creditor from (1) M/s Versha Traders, Represented by its Proprietor Mr. Jagdish Prasad Singhal addressed at: F-196/1, Dilshad Colony, Shahdara, Delhi-110095 (2) Mrs. Santosh Singhal W/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Singhal Residing at: Flat No. G-3, Leela Home, Plot No. 23 Sector-IV, Vashi, UP-201012 being borrowers/guarantors/co-obligants.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY:

All that Part & parcel of Basement of property No. F-196(Plot No.196, Block-F), Out of Khasra No.1076/5/2/715, measuring 634.50sqft situated at Village-Finimess Tahipur, Dilshad Extn No.1, Dilshad Colony, Itaha-Shahdara, Delhi-110095, belonging to Mrs. Santosh Singhal W/o Mr. Jagdish Prasad Singhal (common security for M/s Shanti Trading Corporation)

Boundaries: East : Road, West : Part of Property No.F-196, North : Plot No.F-197 South : Part of Property No.F-196

Reserve Price / Usset Price below which the property may not be sold: Rs.30,00,000.00 (Rupees Thirty Lakhs only)

Earnest money to be deposited/tendered: Rs. 3,00,000.00 (Rupees Three Lakhs Only)

(The borrower/s/mortgagor/s in respect is invited to the provisions of Sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in relation of time available to redeem the secured asset).

(This Notice shall also serve as Notice under Sub Rule (1) of Rule (9) of Security Interest Enforcement Rules-2002 to the Borrower/Guarantors)

For detailed terms and conditions of sale, please refer to link in Karnataka Bank's Website i.e. www.karnatakabank.com under the head "Mega E-Auction on 05.02.2024".

The E-auction will be conducted through portal <https://bankauctions.in/> on 05.02.2024 from 11:30 A.M to 12:30 P.M with unlimited extension of 05 minutes. The intending bidder is required to register their name at <https://bankauctions.in/> and get the user id and password free of cost and get online training on E-auction (tentatively on 03.02.2024) from M/s Adlosure, 605A, 6th Floor, Maitravnim, Amserpet, Hyderabad-500038, contact No.040-23836405, mobile 8142000809 and info@bankauctions.in.

Date : 02.01.2024
Place : Delhi

Sd/- For Karnataka Bank Ltd.
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Quantum leap

MGNREGA payments go fully digital via Aadhaar but logistical concerns remain

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is all set for an upgrade. The popular scheme, enacted on August 25, 2005, which came into effect on February 2, 2006, is a social welfare programme that guarantees 100 days of employment per year to rural households. In a significant move towards digitisation, MGNREGA wage payments have transitioned entirely to a digital platform, utilising Aadhaar authentication. Despite its noble objectives, MGNREGA has faced challenges related to reported leakages and instances of corruption. Leakages refer to the diversion or misallocation of funds intended for the programme, leading to inefficiencies. Various reports have highlighted issues such as ghost workers, fake job cards and irregularities in implementation. Addressing these reported leakages was crucial to maintaining the integrity and impact of the programme in alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable livelihoods in rural areas, leading to its upgrade in a fully digital format. The latest shift towards digital payments is part of the Modi Government's broader agenda to promote a cashless economy and increase transparency in welfare schemes. The primary focus of this digital transformation is the authentication of MGNREGA workers using their Aadhaar details. Aadhaar, India's unique identification system, incorporates biometric and demographic information, providing a secure and verifiable means of identification. By linking MGNREGA payments to Aadhaar, the Government aims to eliminate leakages, reduce corruption and ensure that the wages reach the intended beneficiaries directly and promptly. The digital trail allows authorities to monitor payments in real-time, ensuring accountability. The move to Aadhaar-based payments streamlines the disbursal of wages, ensuring that funds reach the workers' bank accounts directly. This eliminates intermediaries and minimises delays. With the Aadhaar authentication system, the Government aims to plug leaks in the system, preventing funds from being misused or siphoned off. However, the transition may not be smooth as many issues on the implementation front may arise. Linking MGNREGA payments to Aadhaar raises privacy concerns as the unique identification system involves the collection of sensitive biometric and personal information. The potential misuse of this data has been a significant point of contention. Another concern voiced by the Opposition is the risk of excluding eligible workers who may not possess Aadhaar cards or face authentication issues. This could lead to the denial of rightful employment benefits to those who need them the most. Besides, the digital divide in rural areas, where internet connectivity and technological literacy may be limited, is going to be a challenge. Having said that, the digitisation of MGNREGA wage payments through Aadhaar is a bold step towards modernising India's welfare schemes. It remains to be seen how the Government responds to the concerns raised by the Opposition and civil society.



The fact that Muslims have abided by the rule of law and accepted the SC verdict in the spirit of closure is laudable. The Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board was offered five acres of land in Dhannipur village, Ayodhya, where they could build a mosque. However, Reuters has reported that the city's sizeable Muslim community of an estimated 350,000 said they are not reaping the benefits of the reported boom.

The Ram temple story is more political than religious. On November 9, 1989, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) performed the Shilanyas ceremony. On August 5, 2019, Prime Minister Modi laid a 40 kg silver brick to mark the beginning of the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. Ayodhya is a city of great cultural, religious, and political significance. The Temple's construction is a victory for the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which led the movement and Modi, whose political career has coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalists. The intense fight by BJP leaders L.K Advani and Dr Murli Manohar Joshi cannot be underrated. The inauguration of the Ram Temple holds great importance in the BJP's campaign for the 2024 elections. The Modi government has fulfilled two of its poll promises. They are - constructing the Ram Temple and revoking Article 370 which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Implementing a uniform civil code is the third core issue that needs to be addressed. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which started in 1989 and

PICTALK



Children dressed as Hindu deities take part in the 'Luv Kush Rath Yatra', from Patna to Ayodhya

Ayodhya: From puja to progress

The Ram temple is a promise that the BJP has fulfilled. The temple inauguration could weaken the Opposition campaign and affect the general elections 2024



KALYANI SHANKAR

The grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya is all dressed up for the inauguration of the Ram temple on January 22 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is fulfilling a longstanding dream of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. A Hindu mob destroyed the Babri Masjid in 1992, claiming it was built on an ancient Hindu temple site in Lord Ram's birthplace. The communal conflict ended when the Supreme Court decided the disputed area belonged to the Hindus in 2019.

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was led by BJP leaders Lal Krishna Advani and Dr Murli Manohar Joshi in 1992, played a significant role in the BJP's current political dominance. The movement aimed to gain the support of Hindus for political purposes, as Advani openly admitted. The Vishva Hindu Parishad, a front organization of the Sangh, led the Ayodhya agitation to construct the Ram temple. The Sangh believes building the Temple is crucial to establishing Hindu Rashtra. In 1992, a Hindu mob demolished the Babri mosque located on the disputed site. This resulted in widespread riots throughout the country. It led to the deaths of approximately 2,000 people, mostly Muslims.

In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that the disputed Babri Masjid site belonged to Hindu groups. Just four years later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's team completed the construction of a temple at the site. The Sangh Parivar could use this event to boost community pride. The BJP plans to promote the Temple's message and symbol. Finally, the Ram temple propaganda could weaken the Opposition campaign. Before the inaugu-



THE AYODHYA MOVEMENT HAD A SOCIAL IMPACT. THE MANDAL COMMISSION REPORT, IMPLEMENTED BY THE VP SINGH GOVERNMENT, CONSOLIDATED THE OBC VOTE BEHIND PARTIES THAT ADVOCATED SOCIAL JUSTICE

ration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched several projects worth Rs 22000 crores, including a new airport and railway station on December 30. Seven new temples will be built within the Temple to honour seven significant figures from Ramayana. These figures include Maharishi Valmiki and Shabri from the Dalit community, Nishad Raj from the fishing community, Acharya Vashisth from the Brahmin community, Rishi Vishwamitra from the Rajput community, and Ahalya and Agastyauni, who are revered by various castes and communities.

The Ayodhya movement had a social impact. The Mandal Commission report, implemented by the VP Singh government, consolidated the OBC vote behind parties that advocated social justice. It combined both the Mandal and Kamandal movements. The current political dominance of the BJP cannot be solely attributed to the Ram temple issue. From 1991 to 2009, their vote share remained around 20%. However, under the leadership of Modi in 2014, the BJP's vote share increased to over 30%,

and it secured a majority in Lok Sabha after 30 years. This percentage rose further in 2019. With the construction of the Ram Temple, the BJP may gain more Hindu votes in 2024. After the death of Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress party distanced itself from the Ram Mandir issue, while the BJP consolidated the Hindu community. The party is confused about whether to adopt a soft Hindutva which may cost it Muslim support. Muslims have begun to support care-based and secular organisations like the Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Bahujan Samaj Party.

The decision of the Supreme Court brings an end to the longstanding conflict and paves the way for peace and development in Ayodhya. With the Centre and state government's commitment to the area, it is expected that Ayodhya will soon be equipped with modern facilities, which will significantly benefit its inhabitants. This progress will lead to a brighter future for the people of this city. (The writer is a popular columnist, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A NEW DAWN IN SPACE EXPLORATION

Sir — The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Monday ushered in 2024 with the successful launch of its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite that would offer insights into black holes in space, making the country only the second to experiment with such celestial objects. Among the payloads that piggybacked the space agency's ever-reliable Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), one was made by women, prompting ISRO to call it an inspiration for the country.

Apart from its capability of timing and spectroscopy-based observations, the insights derived from X-ray polarisation measurements on celestial objects like black holes, neutron stars and active galactic nuclei hold the potential to significantly improve the understanding of their physics.

The mission is poised to play a pivotal role in building expertise in X-ray polarimetry in India, providing a foundation for future advancements and fostering a collaborative network within the astronomy community as well this mission marks a major value-addition to the scientific fraternity.

Jahangir Ali | Mumbai

RUSSIA IS A FRIEND IN NEED

Sir — Russia has always remained pertinent to India but is a costly friend. The relations with Russia can not be denied for being relatively close to the Southern world. It appears more idealistic and the real benefactor in developing basic infrastructure and enabling an economy to be self-reliant. It does not carry vehement institutional conceitedness like the USA where the let-loose departments denigrate India on their manufactured indices. The Western world finds India avoiding the lampooning of Russia for being a regional bully. The Western perspective will always find that Indian interests dwarf their interests. S Jaishankar rightly points out erroneous euro-

Alarming surge in student suicides



The spate of student suicides has prompted stakeholders to come up with desperate measures such as installing anti-hanging devices in hostel room fans and iron mesh in balconies and lobbies. Notably, from 'suicide proofing' fans in hostel rooms to instal-

lation of nets in balconies and lobbies to prevent students from ending their lives, restrictions on glorification of toppers to directives for keeping results of routine tests confidential, roping in mess workers and tiffin service providers to flag early signs of stress if a student is not consuming food properly were among the measures taken this year to prevent further deaths.

Not passing the examination is a big concern for students. Inability to cope with family pressure and inability to cope with the pressure to crack competitive exam are the main reason for suicides. Therefore, the selection process must be reworked and the students must not be pushed into a situation where they say no hope and end their lives. Nothing is more important than valuing life. Failure is the first step for achieving success.

Ibne Farooq | Audanpur

eccentricism. Rene Descartes's 'I think, therefore I am' approach is no longer relevant. The world knows about the quest of the West to get rid of its over-dependence on Russia for hydrocarbons, especially Natural Gas. Four defence deals have been signed with the USA. The EU is our third-largest trading partner. Soon a free trade agreement will be signed with the European Union and the UK. India has all rights to exercise its sovereign rights to exercise its foreign policy besides keeping the option of not putting all eggs in a single basket.

Jimmy Chowdhary | Chandigarh

DIRECT BENEFITS TRANSFER

Sir — To eliminate the intermediaries, leakage in payments, delay in fund transfer, contractors and cash-based monetary benefits to the workers, a new and improved mechanism for providing direct benefits transfer (DBT) to the workers is developed. The government is focusing on implementing the Aadhaar Based Payment System (ABPS) across

all the states of a country to benefit the marginalised and daily wage earner engaged with the MGNREGA scheme for their livelihood.

From now onwards Aadhaar linking with the job card and bank account for the payment becomes a mandatory norm for the MGNREGA workers. The new system uses the 12-digit Aadhaar as their financial address, which will help workers and labourers safe from fraud. To get payment, workers need their job cards with Aadhaar. Further, Aadhaar is to be linked with individual bank accounts and mapped under the National Payment Corporations of India database; the banks' institutional identification number is to be mapped with that database. This could sustainably assist the workers with speedy transactions, reduce the rejection rate and they can get their money on time.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

Phenomenal performance of Indian scientists in 2023

India can march forward only by strictly following scientific principles. We must strive to have more scientific discoveries and inventions



BIJU DHARAMPALAN

The year 2023 saw Bharat emerging as a global leader in Science and Technology. A rejuvenation could be felt in every field of science and technology, from agriculture to space research. This rejuvenation is mainly due to various activities taken by the government during the last decade. Nature's 10, a compilation of ten people they believe have had a major impact on science, published by the prestigious scientific journal Nature, has selected our Kalpana Kalahasti, who played a crucial part in ensuring Chandrayaan-3's triumphant touchdown. India has jumped to the third position in the global ranking in scientific publications and the number of patents filed. The government's Digital India initiative has significantly increased internet penetration, making India the world's second-largest internet market. The rapid evolution of computing technologies since the latter half of the 20th century has brought about transformative changes in every facet of our lives. The government of India, recognizing the significance



of quantum computing, approved a substantial funding package of US\$730 million for the National Quantum Mission (NQM) in April of last year. The year 2023 has been a turning point in Indian space science as we gained a top position in the space race along with other developed countries. India's lunar lander reaches the dark side of the moon. Indian scientists achieved something unprecedented with their Chandrayaan-3 moon lander, marking the first successful mission to reach the unexplored lunar south pole, believed to harbour frozen water reservoirs. Launched in July 2023, the success of Chandrayaan-3 not only underscored India's significant role in space exploration but also demonstrated

that a moon lander could be deployed successfully at an economic cost of \$75 million (£60 million). India sent Aditya-L1, its first mission to study the Sun, into space just a few days after landing on the Moon. The rocket that lifted off on September 2 is now 1.5 million km (932,000 miles) away from Earth. It should arrive at its target L1 or Lagrange point 1 of the Sun-Earth system on January 6, 2024, enabling the spacecraft to view the Sun without any eclipses. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) also completed the first in a series of test flights for its proposed manner mission Gaganyaan, on October 21, 2023. The mission will put India on the small and exclusive list of countries that can launch a crewed spacecraft by itself—Gaganyaan. ISRO has more ambitious plans, as the Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi envisioned, to put an Indian space station in orbit by 2035 and take an Indian astronaut to the Moon in 2040. In the Union Budget for 2023-2024, the Centre has earmarked Rs 600 crore for the 'Samudrayaan' Deep Ocean Mission, which is

aimed at exploring marine biodiversity for the sustainable utilization of resources. A significant component of this mission involves India's inaugural expedition to a depth of 6,000 meters using the domestically developed submersible 'Matsya6000', crewed by a team of three. India has positioned itself as a frontrunner in the renewable energy sector, securing the fourth rank in installed capacity for renewable, wind, and solar power. On January 4, 2023, the Union Cabinet, led by PM Modi, approved the National Green Hydrogen Mission. Even after doing focused research, we were at a loss in controlling environmental pollution and food adulteration, the pillars of human survival. Similarly, on solid waste management and plastic pollution, our scientists have failed to come out with any concrete measures to tackle it. Unfortunately, the focus on these areas has been very poor.

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



FIRST COLUMN

THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHY OF HEDONISM

For Charvaka, pleasure is the penultimate goal of human life



SWAMI CHARANSHRIT

Charvaka, also known as Lokayata, is an ancient school of Indian philosophy that originated around the 6th century BCE. Charvaka, often referred to as Charvaka Darshan, is a materialistic and atheistic philosophy that challenges many of the prevailing ideas within the Indian philosophical tradition. This school of thought is characterised by its rejection of supernatural entities, religious rituals, and metaphysical concepts, focusing instead on empirical evidence and sensory perception as the basis for understanding the world.

Historical Context:

Charvaka emerged during a time when various philosophical schools in India were engaged in intense debates about the nature of reality, the self, and the ultimate purpose of life. The founders of Charvaka were likely influenced by the socio-political and economic changes of the time, which led them to question the validity of traditional religious and metaphysical beliefs.

Core Tenets of Charvaka Darshan:

Materialism: Charvaka is fundamentally materialistic, asserting that the only reality is the physical world. It denies the existence of any supernatural entities, including gods, and dismisses the idea of an afterlife. According to Charvaka, the material world is all that exists, and everything can be explained through material causes.

Empiricism: The Charvaka philosophy places a strong emphasis on empirical evidence and sensory perception. Unlike other schools of thought that rely on scripture or metaphysical speculation, Charvaka insists that knowledge can only be gained through direct observation and experience. This empirical approach leads Charvaka thinkers to reject claims that cannot be verified through the senses.



Scepticism of Authority: Charvaka rejects the authority of sacred texts and religious traditions. Instead of relying on scriptures or the words of religious leaders, Charvaka encourages individuals to question and evaluate everything based on their observations and experiences.

Egoism and Hedonism: The pursuit of pleasure (kama) and the avoidance of pain are central to Charvaka's ethics. The philosophy advocates for a hedonistic approach to life, where individuals seek personal enjoyment and well-being.

Materialist Ethics: Charvaka rejects the idea of dharma, the moral and ethical duties prescribed by Hinduism and other Indian philosophies. Instead, it proposes a pragmatic ethic based on personal well-being and the pursuit of pleasure. This has been a point of contention with other philosophical schools that emphasise moral responsibilities.

Criticisms and Influence:

While Charvaka Darshan presented a bold departure from the prevailing philosophical norms of its time, it faced significant criticism from other schools of thought, particularly the orthodox Brahmanical traditions and later Hindu philosophies. Critics accused Charvaka of promoting a self-indulgent and morally lax lifestyle.

Despite its marginalization and relative obscurity over the centuries, Charvaka has left a lasting impact on Indian philosophical discourse. Its emphasis on empirical evidence, scepticism, and materialism has found echoes in later philosophical traditions and even modern scientific thought. In contemporary discussions on rationalism and scepticism, Charvaka's emphasis on critical inquiry and reliance on observable phenomena continues to be relevant. While it may not have gained widespread acceptance in its time, its influence has endured, contributing to the diversity of thought within the broader philosophical landscape. Charvaka's commitment to empirical observation and rejection of dogma remains a reminder of the importance of critical thinking and questioning in the pursuit of knowledge.

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

New mechanism to ensure utilisation of funds



UTTAM GUPTA

The new mechanism would regulate the release of funds to the states and track their use, thereby preventing idling

The Union government executes a plethora of welfare programs aimed at providing basic and necessary amenities and upliftment of the most disadvantaged members of society. It does so mainly through "Central Schemes" (CS) which are fully funded and implemented by it. A total of 740 CS schemes are currently under implementation. During FY2022-23, the CS spending was Rs 1208,000 crore. In addition, there are "Centrally Sponsored Schemes" (CSS) designed to supplement the efforts of the states in achieving various socioeconomic goals and implementing national priorities. These are funded by the central government and the states in varying proportions viz. 90:10, 60:40, 50:50 and so on depending on the scheme. These schemes are implemented by the states. During FY2022-23, the spending on a total of 50 CSSs was Rs 412,000 crore.

Put together, the total expenditure of the Centre on CS and CSS schemes during FY2022-23 was Rs 1620,000 crore. It was 41 per cent of the total Budget spending of Rs 3940,000 crore during the FY. It is, therefore, imperative that the money is used judiciously. At one level, the government needs to be extremely circumspect in identifying the beneficiaries based on a rational criterion and removing any scope for fictitious claimants. At another level, efficient cash management and technology-based transparent delivery mechanisms hold the key to the efficient utilization of funds.

Since 2022-23, Modi - government has come up with innovative ideas to achieve these goals. At the outset, let us take stock of the arrangements before the FY 2022-23.

Under a large number of fragmented banking arrangements, the central government transferred funds to the implementing agencies (IAs) based on a tentative assessment of their spending requirement. This resulted in inefficient cash management, which often left certain IAs short of funds, while others were sitting on idle money. Consequently, the government was forced to resort to short-term borrowing (albeit for agencies facing shortfall), which imposed an additional interest burden.

For CSS schemes, the Centre transferred funds to state treasuries, and states in turn transferred these along with their shares (for instance, under a scheme requiring fund sharing on a 60:40 basis, out of say Rs 100/- Rs 40 has to be contributed by the state) to the IAs. However, many states delay the transfer of central funds as well as their shares to the agency accounts, causing the funds to lie idle.

Moreover, the states are generally prone to divert the funds for other uses to meet pressing expenditure commitments in those areas or simply use the money to show a better picture of their overall budgetary position. The very fact of funds (read: money transferred by the Centre) being available in their treasury makes them fiscally imprudent. That implementation of the Scheme for which the funds were meant gets hamstrung, doesn't seem to bother them.

To deal with the anomaly of funds remaining idle with certain IAs even as other agencies face shortages, in FY 2022-23, the Centre moved to a Treasury Single Account (TSA) with close to 200 autonomous bodies receiving funds



UNDER A LARGE NUMBER OF FRAGMENTED BANKING ARRANGEMENTS, THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TRANSFERRED FUNDS TO THE IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES BASED ON A TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THEIR SPENDING REQUIREMENT

through this account maintained with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Similarly, two other accounts - a central nodal agency system (CNAS) for central schemes and a single nodal agency (SNA) model for CSSs were opened.

Under the new arrangement, each state is required to identify and designate a SNA account for every scheme. All funds for that state in a particular scheme are credited to this bank account, and all expenses are made by IAs from this account only. The Centre promptly releases funds through these accounts with minimum float allowed meaning only a quarter of the money is released with the rest to be given only after evidence of using the earlier 75 per cent is given. Further, year-end release is avoided.

Furthermore, in June 2022, the Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman launched a SNA dashboard under the Public Financial Management System (PFMS). The dashboard depicts the release of funds made to different states by ministries, further releases made by state treasuries to the SNA accounts, expenditures reported by the agencies, interest paid by banks to SNA accounts etc. in intelligible, informative and visually appealing graphics.

The new mechanism thus regulates the release of funds to the states and tracks their use including at the level of IAs thereby preventing idling. Further, because the funds go to a dedicated SNA account of a scheme, it nips in the bud any chances of the State

diverting funds. As for the outcome, according to the RBI, the number of accounts for CSS schemes has fallen from a whopping 1800,000 to 3,300. Besides, the Centre saved around Rs 10,000 crore in interest during FY 2022-23.

But, these savings are a pittance of 0.9 per cent of the annual interest payments by the Centre Rs 1080,000 crore (FY 2023-24). Moreover, given that at any given point in time, as much as Rs 150,000 - 200,000 crore of central funds lies with state treasuries/IAs, there remains tremendous scope for garnering more savings by eliminating the free float.

How can this be achieved? The Centre intends to roll out a new mechanism. This will require each state IA to maintain an account with the RBI for each scheme. Instead of releasing any money to the IA, the Centre will issue an authorisation as per the sharing pattern to the RBI for the scheme. The state concerned will also give a similar authorization to the RBI.

When the actual payment need arises, the state will move the payment file to the Centre, which will pass it on to the RBI. The RBI, which already has the authorization, would release the amount to the agency from the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) first and then from the State Consolidated Fund (SCF). The advantage of this arrangement is: that since the funds don't need to be parked either with the state treasuries or the bank accounts of IAs, they

won't lie idle in these accounts while having already moved out of the CFI.

Apart from the resultant savings in interest, the idea of 'fund release only when the need arises' helps the Centre in another way. Consider this: during FY2022-23, the CSS spending was Rs 412,000 crore as against the budget estimate (BE) of Rs 452,000 crore. Even then, there were Rs 180,000 crore central funds unspent from the releases of FY2022-23. Had the proposed mechanism been in place, the Centre could have restricted the allocation to Rs 232,000 crore (412,000 - 180,000) thereby improving the fiscal position for that year.

The new mechanism would also help states save money to the extent that their contribution to the IAs is released from SCF only when the demand arises. The states will also be spared the penal interest @7 per cent the Centre charges - under the existing dispensation - on the number of days of delay beyond 30 days in the transfer of its share to the SNA account.

The Centre has already rolled out a pilot scheme for Jal Jeevan Mission with three states Rajasthan, Karnataka and Odisha. After running the pilot, it intends to roll out the scheme pan India. To conclude, 'fund release just when the need arises' is a brilliant idea. The government should pursue its logical culmination with beneficial effects on the finances of the Centre and states.

(The writer is a policy analyst, views are personal)

No concrete plan in place to tackle climate change

Developed countries must give to the environment that they have taken from it; they must help developing nations create environment infrastructure

The latest UN climate summit, COP 28, delivered only partially. It was held in a state whose economy is heavily dependent on oil and gas—the United Arab Emirates. COP 27 did make substantial progress towards the commitment to phasing out fossil fuel, however, COP 28 skipped the word 'phasing out' and instead used the phrase 'transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy'. The text represents a significant regression from previous versions, as this version deliberately kept the language vague. It spoke about how it will "reduce both consumption and production by 2050". It has dropped explicit language on phasing out fossil fuels and instead used vague language to "reduce both consumption and



UMANG KOHLI

production' by 2050. Was it that the president of the summit, who is also the head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, played a role in diluting the earlier commitment? Or is it the collective wisdom of developing nations to gradually transition from fossil fuels rather than phasing them out? Can we phase out fossil fuels within a decade or so or is it a mere facade of the

developed nations? Has the importance of fossil fuels gone down in the last two years? Is humanity serious about environment conservation? Is the world concerned about climate change? The answer to all these questions has not been answered by the text of COP 28.

Most of the countries including India spoke about striking a balance between ecology and economy. Some of the countries tried to impress upon how they were doing more than the others, however, very few came up with a concrete plan to address the problem of climate change. The developed countries are reluctant to give money to the developing countries to transition to renewable energy and developing countries are



reluctant to transition anyway. So, the stalemate continues and the environment keeps suffering. COP 28 brought representatives from 197 countries together, marking the first formal assessment of progress under the 2015 Paris climate agreement. Discussions on adaptation and mitigation

efforts to achieve positive outcomes in the coming years, particularly for vulnerable countries and fragile ecosystems like the Himalayan Mountain range in Asia were carried out in detail. Commitment to assess the vulnerability of the Indian Himalayan region, due to climate change because of

anthropogenic emissions and developmental pathways was made however no concrete road map seems to have been developed for the same. What is being referred to as Global Stocktake, in which nearly 200 countries pledged to move away from fossil fuels, and avoided calling for the "phase out" of coal, oil and gas, as many would have hoped? But it did stipulate the tripling of new investments in renewable energy and the "transitioning away" from fossil fuels in power systems. With no real timeframe given for 'transitioning away', fear of COP 28 only remaining a photo opportunity for world leaders remains. According to the Emissions Gap Report, fossil fuel emissions must be cut by 42 per cent by 2030 to limit the

warming of the earth to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Towards this end, only 27 countries pledged to the Buildings Breakthrough, and merely 60 countries joined the Global Cooling Pledge and Global Methane Pledge. In light of such a slow movement towards compliance with the Emissions Gap Report, the gap concerning meeting emission cut targets is further going to increase. Developed countries must give to the environment that they have taken from it, and that is the environmental balance. The only way to do that is a firm commitment towards spending on infrastructure related to renewable energy in developing nations. Such a firm commitment looks only like a piper's dream as of now. Developed nations too

need to show the urgency and willingness to change to a fossil fuel lifestyle without finding excuses, it's about time. Such urgency also seems to be missing from people and leaders of developing nations. A year has gone by, it's time we went green no matter what the cost or the inconvenience. The younger you are the more you will pay for the delay. We must say no to carbon emissions if we need to have a healthy life for ourselves and our future generations. COP 28 did not show this kind of war-like urgency, all they could muster was a lethargic acknowledgement that we had a problem on our hands.

(The writer is expert on geopolitics and international affairs. The views expressed are personal)

Japan earthquake toll rises to 55

AP ■ WAJIMA

A series of powerful earthquakes that hit western Japan have left at least 55 people dead and damaged thousands of buildings, vehicles and boats. Officials warned on Tuesday that more quakes could lie ahead. Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area.

Damage was so great that it could not immediately be assessed. Japanese media reports said tens of thousands of homes were destroyed. Government spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi said 17 people were seriously injured and gave a slightly lower death toll, saying he was aware of the prefecture's tally.

Water, power and cell phone service were still down in some areas. Residents expressed sorrow about their uncertain futures.

"It's not just that it's a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I don't think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resi-



A vehicle sits underneath a building collapsed following an earthquake in Shikamachi, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan on Tuesday. AP/PTI

dent, said as she swept around her house.

The house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said.

Although casualty numbers continued to climb gradually, the prompt public warnings, relayed on broadcasts and phones, and the quick response from the general public and officials appeared to

have limited some of the damage.

Toshitaka Katada, a University of Tokyo professor specializing in disasters, said people were prepared because the area had been hit by quakes in recent years. They had evacuation plans and emergency supplies in stock. "There is probably no people on earth

other than Japanese who are so disaster-ready," he told The Associated Press. Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin. Katada warned the situation remains precarious and unpredictable. The March 2011 quake and tsunami in northeastern Japan had been preceded by other quakes. "This is far from over," Katada said.

Predictions by scientists have repeatedly been proven wrong, such as with the 2016 quake in southwestern Kumamoto, an area previously seen as relatively quake-free.

"Having too much confidence in the power of science is very dangerous. We are dealing with nature," Katada said.

Japanese media's aerial footage showed widespread damage in the hardest-hit spots, with landslides burying roads, boats tossed in the waters and a fire that had turned an entire section of Wajima city to ashes.

Japan's military dispatched 1,000 soldiers to the disaster

zones to join rescue efforts, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on Tuesday.

"Saving lives is our priority and we are fighting a battle against time," he said. "It is critical that people trapped in homes get rescued immediately." A quake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.6 shook the Ishikawa area as he was speaking. Quakes continued to rock the area, reaching more than 100 aftershocks over the past day.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. The 2011 quake and tsunami caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.

On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido. The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early Tuesday.

Fighting in southern Gaza city

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

Heavy fighting was reported in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis on Tuesday, a day after Israel said it was withdrawing thousands of troops from other areas in a potential shift away from the massive air and ground operations that have devastated the Hamas-ruled enclave.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the war until Hamas is crushed and more than 100 hostages still held by the militant group in Gaza are freed, saying it could take several more months.

But ahead of a visit to the region by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Israel is under growing international pressure to scale back the offensive that has killed nearly 22,000 Palestinians. Blinken has urged Israel to do more to protect Palestinian civilians.

Israel's War Cabinet was to meet later Tuesday, Netanyahu's office said. The agenda reportedly includes a discussion on post-war arrangements for Gaza, a highly polarizing issue in Israel.

Up until now, Netanyahu has not presented any plan despite repeated US requests. He has rejected proposals that the Palestinian Authority, which currently administers pockets of self-rule in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, undergo reforms and then take over administration of Gaza as a precursor to Palestinian statehood.

Word of the troop draw-down came as Israel's Supreme Court struck down a key component of Netanyahu's contentious judicial overhaul plan, which had deeply divided Israelis and threatened the military's readiness before the October 7 Hamas attack that triggered the war.

The ruling appeared to have dealt a fatal blow to the judicial plan. Netanyahu and his allies seem unlikely to revive the divisive initiative during wartime. Elections are widely expected once the fighting winds down, and widespread anger in Israel over intelligence and security failures linked to the Hamas attack could mean a poor showing for those in power now.

The court ruling could meanwhile help Israel fend off allegations of genocide in Gaza made by South Africa at the

Turkiye detains 33 suspected of spying for Israel

AP ■ ANKARA

Turkish authorities have detained 33 people suspected of spying for Israel, Turkey's state-run news agency reported on Tuesday. Authorities were still searching for 13 others believed to have links to Israel's Mossad security service, the Anadolu Agency reported.

The suspects were detained in raids in Istanbul and seven other provinces for allegedly planning to carry out activities that included "reconnaissance" and "pursuing, assaulting and kidnapping" foreign nationals living in Turkey, the agency reported.

The suspects were allegedly recruited to spy on Palestinians residing in Turkey as well as Israeli activists opposed to their government, Anadolu said. Israeli officials allegedly contacted the suspects via social media, it said. The report comes weeks after the head of Israel's domestic security agency, Shin Bet, said in an audio recording that his organisation is prepared to destroy Hamas "in every place", including in Lebanon, Turkey and Qatar. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned Israel of "serious consequences" if it pressed ahead

International Court of Justice. The ICJ and other international tribunals consider whether countries have their own independent judiciaries in deciding on whether to intervene.

TROOPS ROTATE OUT BUT COMBAT CONTINUES

The army said Monday that five brigades, or several thousand troops, would be taken out of Gaza in the coming weeks. Some will head to bases for further training or rest, while many older reservists will go home. The war has taken a toll on the economy by preventing reservists from going to their jobs, running their businesses or returning to university studies. The military has not said publicly whether the withdrawal reflects a new phase of the war. But the move is in line with the plans that

with its threat to attack Hamas officials on Turkish soil. Turkey and Israel had normalised ties in 2022 by reappointing ambassadors following years of tensions. But those ties quickly deteriorated after the Israel-Hamas war, with Ankara becoming one of the strongest critics of Israel's military actions in Gaza.

Israel initially withdrew its diplomats from Turkey over security concerns and later announced it was recalling its diplomats for political reasons, citing "increasingly harsh statements" from Turkish officials. Turkey also pulled out its ambassador from Israel. Erdogan's reaction to the Israel-Hamas war was initially fairly muted. But the Turkish leader has since intensified his criticism of Israel, describing its actions in Gaza as verging on "genocide." He has called for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to be prosecuted for "war crimes" and compared him to Nazi leader Adolf Hitler.

Erdogan, whose government has hosted several Hamas officials in the past, has also said the militant group — considered a terrorist organisation by Israel, the United States and the European Union — is fighting for the liberation of its lands and people.

Israeli leaders have outlined for a low-intensity campaign that focuses on remaining Hamas strongholds and could last for much of the year.

Israel has said it's close to operational control over most of northern Gaza, reducing the need for forces there.

Yet fierce fighting has continued in other areas of the Palestinian territory, especially the south, where many of Hamas' forces remain intact and where most of Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled. Meanwhile, Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced late Monday that residents from seven Israeli communities close to Gaza can return to their homes soon, one of the most concrete signs that the army feels confident it has minimised the threat of rocket launches from parts of Gaza.

Sunak declares success in meeting asylum target

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Tuesday declared he had met his target to clear the country's "legacy" asylum backlog by the end of 2023 and also bucked the trend across Europe by cutting down arrivals of illegal migrants via small boats by 36 per cent. The UK Home Office said that 112,000 asylum cases were processed in the past year, which exceeded Sunak's initial target of 92,000 applications pending at the end of 2022. It claimed that fundamental changes to the decision-making process and boosting efficiency resulted in the highest annual number of "substantive" asylum decisions in a year since 2002. "I am determined to end the burden of illegal migration on the British people. That is why we have taken action to stop the boats, return hotels to their local communities, and deter those wanting to come here illegally from doing so," said Sunak in a statement to mark the start of 2024, a general election year for the UK.

"By clearing the legacy asylum backlog, deciding more than 112,000 cases, we are saving the taxpayer millions of pounds in expensive hotel costs, reducing strain on public services and ensuring the most vulnerable receive the right support. But we cannot be complacent, which is why I am focused on delivering on my commitment to stop the boats and get flights off the ground to Rwanda," he said.

The Rwanda plan involves asylum seekers being flown out to the east African country while their applications are processed, with the controversial measure to go through its parliamentary process in the coming weeks. "While illegal entries across Europe are going up, the number of people coming into the UK illegally is going down. This is a significant achievement, but the job is far



from over," said UK Home Secretary James Cleverly.

"I will continue to do everything possible to stop the boats. No people smuggler will be safe, we will work with law enforcement partners and Governments across the world who want to tackle this threat and ensure that British taxpayer money is not wasted on people trying to abuse our generosity," he said.

The UK government claims it stepped up processing, deploying an additional 1,200 caseworkers, meeting the target to double the number of asylum caseworkers and tripling productivity to ensure more illegal migrants are returned to their country of origin, quicker.

All cases in the so-called "legacy backlog" have now reportedly been reviewed, with 86,800 decisions made. In one four-week period from November 20 to December 17, 2023, there were 20,481 initial asylum decisions made, this is more than the number of asylum decisions made in the entirety of 2021.

However, the Opposition Labour Party hit back at these claims to accuse the government of "misleading" the public. "The asylum backlog has rocketed to 165,000 under the Tories - eight times higher than when Labour left office - and no slicing or renaming the figures can disguise that fact," said Labour's shadow immigration minister Stephen Kinnock.

Planes collide, catch fire at Japan's busy Haneda airport, killing five

AP ■ TOKYO

A passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway at Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Tuesday and burst into flames, with five people on the smaller plane killed, officials said. All 379 people on Japan Airlines flight JAL-516 got out safely before the plane was engulfed in flames, Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito confirmed. The pilot of the coast guard plane escaped but the five crew members died, Saito said.

Tuesday's accident was the first time one of the Airbus A350, among the industry's newest large passenger planes, was severely damaged. It entered commercial service in 2015. The Japan Airlines A350 had flown from Shin Chitose airport near the city of Sapporo, the transport minister said. Coast guard spokesperson Yoshinori



A Japan Airlines plane is on fire on the runway of Haneda airport on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Yanagishima said its Bombardier Dash-8 plane, which is based at Haneda, had been due to head to Niigata to deliver relief goods to residents affected by a deadly earthquake in the region on Monday. The turboprop Dash-8 is widely

used on short-haul and commuter flights.

The coast guard pilot reported to his base that his aircraft exploded after colliding with the commercial plane, Vice Commander Yoshio Seguchi told reporters.

Israel's SC strikes down Netanyahu govt's judicial overhaul initiative

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli Supreme Court's landmark decision nullifying a controversial law passed by Parliament in 2023 received mixed reactions on Tuesday even as the media said the "wise thing" for the government, already fighting a major war against Hamas militants in Gaza, would be to "let go and move on".

The July 2023 law passed by Knesset, the Israeli parliament, had eliminated the reasonableness clause, part of the judicial overhaul, that many criticised would have weakened the judiciary, giving the executive "unreasonable" powers, which would have threatened the basic democratic nature of the Israeli State.

The "reasonableness" law was part of a wider series of judi-

cial reforms introduced by the government led by 74-year-old Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Late on Monday evening, all 15 Supreme Court justices participated in the decision with the ruling passed by a razor-thin 8-7 majority, reminiscent in many ways of the divided population on the evocative issue which saw the largest demonstrations in the country right till the outbreak of the war on October 7 following the unprecedented attack by Hamas militants.

Israel lacks a written constitution and has been governed since its independence based on a certain set of Basic Laws.

Detailing the arguments given by each of the judges, in favour and against, local media reports said Monday's decision was a way for the court to tell the Knesset that it cannot dictate

what the court needs to do and stated that Knesset's next move can possibly be "to legislate a law saying, 'yes, we can do exactly that.'" In other words, if the government decides to push the issue amid a raging war, the country may not know who has the final word: the government/Knesset or the court, an analysis said.

The Jerusalem Post said in a comment piece: "The wise thing for the government to do now is just to forget about it and let it go. The government passed the controversial amendment, and the High Court of Justice shot it down. In the meantime, Hamas attacked, killed 1,200 people, took another 240 hostages, and plunged the country into an existential war." Observing that the current political constellation is expected to change dramatically after the

war in any event, it said that "the governing coalition that pushed through this reform will likely not be the one ruling the country that must longer."

The Post also said: "For the good of the country, move on. Just move on. Let it be, drop the issue now, and continue focusing all energies right now on fighting Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, and even Iranians themselves — don't restart a domestic fight over this. Not now." Times of Israel described Monday's decision as a "landmark ruling" with the court striking down the government's reasonableness limitation law that will go down in history "not for annulling that problematic legislation, dramatic as that decision is, but for upholding by a huge majority the principle that Israel's democracy is inviolable."

Members of Germany's smallest governing party vote to stay in Scholz's coalition

Berlin (AP): Members of the smallest party in German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's unpopular coalition have voted in a low-profile ballot to stay in the troubled government, but the result underlines the three-party alliance's difficulties. The pro-business Free Democrats, who in recent decades have leaned to the right, joined a coalition with Scholz's Social Democrats and the environmentalist Greens, both left-leaning parties, in late 2021. The government has become notorious for infighting, and the poll ratings of the Free Democrats, led by Finance Minister Christian Lindner, have declined sharply.

The party's rules stipulate that a ballot must be held if at least 500 members demand one, and 598 members forced a vote on whether to stay in the coalition.

On Monday, party headquarters announced that those who voted opted to stay in by a narrow margin of 52.2 per cent to 47.8 per cent, with just under 40 per cent of members taking part. The ballot was non-binding and party leaders gave it little public attention, but there was still relief at the outcome. "The fact that only just under one-fifth of our members voted to leave (the government) is what I am experiencing too," Wolfgang Kubicki, a deputy party leader, told Deutschlandfunk radio on Tuesday. "It's not that we are all satisfied with what's going in Berlin but that doesn't mean we should stop governing; it just means that Free Democrats must get better and more assertive in the coalition, and we're working on that now," he said.

Ramaswamy reiterates pledge to withdraw from state ballots

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy has urged his rivals to follow him and withdraw from the ballots of the US states of Maine and Colorado which disqualified the party's frontrunner Donald Trump from contesting this year's race for the White House.

Maine and Colorado disqualified the 77-year-old former president from the presidency this year in the states because of his role in the attack on the US Capitol in 2021.

Trump's disqualification was based on the Constitution's 14th Amendment, which says officials who take an oath to support the US Constitution are banned from future office if they "engaged in insurrection."

In an interview with a news channel on Monday, the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur said his goal was to "nullify" the



two states that have removed Trump from their ballots by boycotting their elections.

Trump, who is facing several legal hurdles ahead of the November 5, 2024 Presidential election, is currently the frontrunner among the Republican Party candidates.

"If they're (the states) going to behave in that unconstitu-

tional way, the Republican candidates can actually stop this form of election interference," Ramaswamy was quoted as saying by The Hill newspaper. "I said I would remove my name from those ballots, and I called on the other Republicans in the race to do the same thing," he said.

Republican party presiden-

tial candidates— Indian American former US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis— have all opposed efforts to block Trump from participating in elections, the report said.

"If they remove Trump's name, my name is off too, and I call on Ron DeSantis, Nikki Haley and Chris Christie to do the same thing.

Their words are cheap. Action speaks louder than words," Ramaswamy said. Pointing out that the other Republican candidates are now "sidestepping" the issue and have been "radio silent" on it, Ramaswamy said, "If every Republican removes themselves, that nullifies Maine, and it nullifies Colorado if they remove a candidate unconstitutionally from that ballot."

Now, their unwillingness to do that, I think, reveals that they're actually complicit in part, in what's happening, even if indirectly.

I think it's unconstitutional, and we need to stand on principle, so my position is clear," he said.

"I think that it was deeply unconstitutional and wrong for one individual secretary of state, without any trial or procedure or anything else, just to decide and wake up one day Donald Trump's not on the ballot.

That's wrong," he added. Trump has denied wrongdoing regarding the January 6 insurrection and has decried the 14th Amendment lawsuits as an abuse of the legal process.

He is under federal and state indictment in connection with his attempts to overturn the 2020 election won by Joe Biden, a Democrat, and he has pleaded not guilty.

Cold spell in Finland, Sweden sends temp below minus 40

Helsinki (AP): Finland and Sweden recorded their coldest temperatures of the winter on Tuesday when thermometers plummeted as low as minus 40 degrees Celsius (minus 40 Fahrenheit) as a cold spell grips the Nordic region.

Cold and snow disrupted transportation throughout the region, including in Norway where a major highway in the south was closed due to the weather and ferry lines suspended operations. Swedish train operators said the cold snap caused substantial problems for rail traffic in the Arctic north.

Nikkaluokta, a small village inhabited by indigenous Sami people in northern Sweden, recorded a temperature of minus 41.6 degrees C (minus 42.8 F) early Tuesday, Swedish public broadcaster SVT reported.

"It's the coldest temperature we have had so far this winter, and it will continue to be quite cold weather in the north," SVT meteorologist Nils Holmqvist said.

The Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute reported temperatures of minus 30 degrees Celsius (minus

22 F) in several locations in northern Sweden, and issued a warning for snow and wind for central and southern Sweden. Its second-highest warning applies from midnight into Wednesday.

In neighbouring Finland, this winter's cold record was recorded in the northwestern town of Ylivieska where temperatures fell to minus 37.8 degrees Celsius (minus 36 F) early Tuesday, and forecasters said temperatures would be lower than minus 40 degrees Celsius in parts of the nation through the week.

Temperatures in the Finnish capital, Helsinki, were expected to hover between minus 15 and minus 20 degrees Celsius (around zero F). In the southern Norway town of Arendal, officials said schools would be closed Wednesday because it wasn't possible to clear the sidewalks in time for children to get to school. Several ferry companies throughout the region cancelled crossings, including those from southern Norway to Denmark where a key bridge was closed to vehicles with light trailers because of strong winds, Danish officials said.

S Korean opp leader stabbed in neck

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's tough-speaking liberal opposition leader, Lee Jae-myung, was stabbed in the neck by an unidentified knife-wielding man during a visit on Tuesday to the south-eastern city of Busan, police said. Lee, 59, the head of the main opposition Democratic Party, was airlifted to a Seoul hospital for surgery after receiving emergency treatment in Busan. Police and emergency officials earlier said he was conscious after the attack and wasn't in critical condition, but his exact status was unknown.



Kwon Chil-seung said Lee's jugular vein was believed to have been damaged and there was concern over the large amount of bleeding. Hospital officials would not comment on Lee's condition.

President Yoon Suk Yeol expressed deep concern about Lee's health and ordered authorities to investigate the attack, saying such violence would not be tolerated, according to Yoon's office.

Lee lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by 0.7 percentage point, the narrowest margin ever recorded in a South Korean presidential election. Since his election defeat, Lee has been a harsh critic of Yoon's major policies. Last year, Lee held a 24-day hunger strike to protest what he called Yoon's failure to oppose Japan's release of treated radioactive wastewater from its crippled Fukushima nuclear power, his handling of the country's post-pandemic economy and his hard-line policies on North Korea. Lee faces an array of corruption allegations, including that he provided unlawful favors to a private investor who reaped huge profits from a dubious housing project in the city of Seongnam, where Lee was mayor for a decade until 2018. Lee has denied legal wrongdoing and accused Yoon's government of pursuing a political vendetta.

Last September, a South Korean court denied an arrest warrant for Lee over the allegations, but Lee reportedly faces a continuing investigation by prosecutors. The court hearing was arranged after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to lift Lee's immunity to arrest, a move that reflected growing divisions within his Democratic Party over his legal troubles.

Lee, who also served as governor of Gyeonggi province, which surrounds Seoul, is known for his outspoken style. His supporters see him as an anti-elitist hero who could reform establishment politics, eradicate corruption and solve growing economic inequality. Critics view him as a dangerous populist who relies on stoking divisions and demonising his conservative opponents. Lee is also known for his self-made success story. He worked in a factory as a boy, an experience that left him with an arm disability. He later made his own way through school and passed the country's notoriously difficult bar exam to work as a human rights lawyer.

Lee joined a predecessor of the Democratic Party in 2005. Previously a political outsider, he rose quickly amid public anger over an explosive 2016-17 corruption scandal that eventually led to the ouster of then-President Park Geun-hye, a conservative.

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Pak SC adjourns hearing in case about disqualification of top politicians

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Tuesday adjourned the hearing until Thursday in a key case that would settle the issue of lifetime disqualification of some leading politicians, including former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan. The verdict will determine once and for all the controversy around the period of disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and the Elections Act 2017.

A 2018 judgment by a five-member bench of the apex court had declared that disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) was for life but changes made in the Elections Act 2017 on June 26, 2023, by a coalition government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) restricted it to a five-year term only. A seven-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa,

while hearing the case today, said that some people were trying to create the impression that the court wanted to give benefit to some "individual or group" through this case. "We are just trying to settle an issue of law," he stated. Most of the arguments were in favour of nullifying the concept of the lifelong ban and limiting it to a five-year term. However, the chief justice said that he also wanted to hear arguments in support of lifelong disqualification and asked the lawyers to come forward.

Later, he adjourned the hearing until January 4 with the remarks that the court would like to wind up the case and settle the legal controversy over the length of disqualification. Sharif, the former prime minister and also a frontrunner for the fourth term in the February 8 general elections, was disqualified in the Panama Papers case in

2017. His rival Imran Khan, who was disqualified in the Toshakhana case last year, also was hit by the same law.

However, Sharif got a kind of relief when his party-led government amended the election laws last year to limit the disqualification to five years which allowed him to file nomination papers for the upcoming elections. However, the controversy was not over as his candidature has been challenged as the interpretation of Article 62(1)(f) clashed with the changes made in the Elections Act 2017.

The outcome of the hearing would decide the future for both Sharif and Khan as well as many other politicians. The 74-year-old Sharif's case was final until the period of disqualification was reduced. However, 71-year-old Khan's disqualification has not attained finality and his appeal against it is still pending.

Incarcerated Khan's nomination papers for the February 8 general elections were rejected on December 30 based on disqualification due to his conviction in the offence of "moral turpitude" in a corruption case and other reasons, a government official had reasoned.

Earlier, the issue came into the focus of the Supreme Court last month during the hearing of a petition of a politician from Dera Ghazi Khan, Badshah Khan Qaisarani, who was disqualified for producing a fake graduation degree.

During the hearing, the chief justice had remarked that the Supreme Court verdict on lifetime disqualification and the amendments made to the Elections Act, 2017 could not co-exist. He further stated that discrepancies in the apex court's interpretation and the law could result in "confusion" in the upcoming general elections.

'Pak likely to get \$700 mn from IMF as next tranche of bailout this month'

Islamabad, Jan 2 (PTI) Cash-strapped Pakistan is expected to get USD 700 million as the next tranche of the bailout from the IMF as the Executive Board of the global lender meets on January 11, according to a media report on Tuesday.

The board of the Washington-based International Monetary Fund is set to deliberate and potentially grant final approval for the disbursement of the next USD 700 million tranche for Pakistan under the existing USD 3 billion Stand-By Arrangement (SBA), the Dawn newspaper reported. According to the IMF Executive Board calendar, upcoming meetings are scheduled for January 8, 10 and 11, with Pakistan's case slated for discussion on the last day. The current IMF programme, amounting to USD 3 billion, is expected to conclude in the second week of April, with approximately USD 1.8 billion remaining undisbursed. The initial tranche of USD 1.2 billion was released in July.

In November 2023, a Staff-Level Agreement was reached between the IMF staff and Pakistani authorities regarding the first review under Pakistan's SBA. This agreement is contingent upon approval by the IMF's Executive Board. Despite expectations for board approval in December, it seems the process has been scheduled for January 11.

This development holds significance for Pakistan's economic landscape as the disbursement of the next tranche could provide much-needed financial support. The outcome of the upcoming meeting will shape the trajectory of the ongoing economic cooperation between Pakistan and the IMF. "Discussions between the IMF staff and the authorities on policies to strengthen macro-economic stability in the coming year continue, and important progress has been made over the FY23 budget," the IMF said in another statement.

The IMF also updated economic projections and data for Pakistan, depicting a challenging outlook for the country in 2024. According to the IMF's latest figures, the projected real GDP for the year is anticipated to experience a contraction of 0.5 per cent, indicating potential economic headwinds. Simultaneously, the projection for the Consumer Price Index in 2024 shows a significant increase.

Militants kill 6 barbers from Punjab in Pak's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Peshawar (PTI): Unidentified militants shot and killed six barbers from Pakistan's Punjab province after abducting them from the restive northwest region, police said. The incident took place in the Mir Ali area of the North Waziristan district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan. ARY News reported on Tuesday.

The victims, who were from the Punjab province, ran barber shops in the local bazaar, police said, adding that they were abducted a day earlier and their bodies were recovered on Tuesday. However, no one immediately claimed responsibility for the killings. Police have launched a search to arrest the culprits who shot and killed the six barbers. The latest incident from North Waziristan came after five labourers were killed in the same province by unidentified militants while they were in their tents.

The gruesome act took place at a time when the province wrestled with a worsening law and order situation due to the rising terrorism at a time when the much-awaited countryside elections were just over a month away.

HC reserves verdict on ECP plea against restoration of PTI's symbol

AP ■ PESHAWAR

A High Court in Pakistan on Tuesday reserved its verdict on review pleas filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan against its decision to suspend the electoral body's declaration of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's organisational polls as "void" and the re-vocation of its electoral symbol - a cricket bat.

Jailed prime minister Imran Khan's party faces uncertainty over its electoral symbol as the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) last month rejected PTI's intra-party elections and deprived the party of its cricket bat symbol. Barrister Gohar Khan was elected as the party's new chairman in the internal elections in December.

The party challenged the verdict in the Peshawar High Court which on December 26 suspended the ECP's declaration of the PTI's intra-party polls as unconstitutional as well as the subsequent revocation of the party's iconic symbol. The election commission challenged the high court verdict. During the hearing presided over by Justice Ejaz Khan on Tuesday, the ECP's counsel contended that the election commission sought a review of the PHC's ruling, the Dawn newspaper reported.

At the outset, Justice Khan inquired if the Supreme Court had passed orders that directives issued by a high court applied to the entire country, the paper said. "Absolutely. The Supreme Court suspended the Lahore High Court's decision regarding returning officers," the lawyer replied. He elaborated that the judgment was suspended under a unilateral decision. "The second point is that the interim relief and final plea are the same," he added.

At one point, the judge asked where the petitioner in the case was to which the ECP counsel said he was unaware. Justice Khan said that he could not issue an order in the case as it was fixed before a division bench on January 9. However, the ECP lawyer said he only wanted the court to withdraw the PHC order, adding that arguments would be presented before the division bench. Subsequently, the court reserved its verdict, the newspaper reported.

On Monday, PTI chairman Barrister Khan said that his party will participate in the general elections even without getting the cricket 'bat' as its electoral symbol. Khan made the remarks during a meeting with journalists in Islamabad where he responded to their questions and talked about the current political situation in Pakistan, including the challenges confronting his party, especially over the election symbol.

Khan said that his party would participate in the Feb 8 elections even on a different symbol if 'bat' was not allotted but he would never leave the field open for other parties. "Even if we do not get the bat symbol, we will still participate in the elections. PTI will not boycott the elections under any circumstances," he said. He also rejected the impression that his party had any dispute with the powerful military establishment. "PTI and Imran Khan have consistently said from the beginning that the military is ours, the country is ours, and there is no dispute with anyone, including the establishment," he said.

He also lamented at the treatment meted out to his party which he termed as "unprecedented" and asked the Supreme Court to take action against lack of a level playing field for the party founded by Imran Khan. His remarks came as the PTI faced unusual pressure to get fair treatment in the run-up to the elections. The party ran into trouble after the May 9 violence when its supporters attacked military installations.

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China to Taiwan electorate: Shun pro-independence forces:

Beijing (PTI): Ahead of the presidential poll in Taiwan, China in a last-minute appeal asked Taiwanese voters to stand on the right side of history by opposing pro-independence forces on the island and supporting peaceful reunification.

In his New Year message to the people of Taiwan, Song Tao China's point man on Taiwan said China unwaveringly opposes "Taiwan independence", safeguards peace, expands exchanges, enhances cooperation, deepens integration and advances reunification to ensure that cross-strait relations move in the right direction of peaceful development.

China claims the estranged island of Taiwan, which remained a democracy compared to China's one-party rule of the ruling Communist Party, as part of the mainland.

Song, who heads the

Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China and the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council or China's Cabinet, also called on Taiwan compatriots to stand on the right side of history, bring cross-strait relations back onto the right track of peaceful development and advance the process of China's peaceful reunification.

China is keeping a close watch on Taiwan's Presidential election as the 19 million electorate of the estranged island set to elect a new leader on January 13 to replace the pro-independence Tsai Ing-wen, who stood firmly against China in her two-term Presidency spanning eight years. She is due to step down adhering to a two-term limit.

China calls her and her ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) separatists and tacitly backs the pro-Beijing Kuomintang (KMT) which advocates close ties with the

mainland. Currently, three candidates are in the fray.

The DPP fielded Vice President William Lai Chiang-te. He was opposed by Hou Yup-ih from KMT and Ko Wen-je from the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Lai is the front runner, with Hou second and Ko in third, according to pre-poll surveys.

According to the survey, 82.7 per cent of Taiwanese think that the threat from China has increased in the last few years. Since President Xi Jinping took over power in 2012, China stepped up efforts to "re-unify" Taiwan strictly enforcing its One China policy, according to high military and diplomatic priority to it.

In the last few years, Beijing ramped up military pressure on Taiwan with massive air and naval deployment in the Taiwan Strait which separates the two, sparking global concerns about possible invasion.

Russia launches fresh drone strikes on Ukraine after promising retaliation

Kyiv (AP): Russia launched a fresh drone assault on Ukraine on Saturday night, after promising that strikes on the Russian border city of Belgorod earlier in the day "would not go unpunished". The Ukrainian Air Force said Sunday that it had shot down 21 of 49 drones launched by Russian forces overnight.

Twenty-eight people were wounded in an attack on the eastern city of Kharkiv, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said Sunday. A central hotel, apartment buildings, kindergarten, shops and administrative buildings

sustained damage, according to the regional prosecutor's office. In the Kyiv region that surrounds the capital, a Russian drone attack caused a fire to break out at a critical infrastructure facility, local officials said. They did not identify the facility further. The Russian attacks came after shelling in the center of the Russian border city of Belgorod Saturday killed 24 people, including three children. A further 108 people were wounded in the strike, regional governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said Sunday, making it one of the deadliest attacks

on Russian soil since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine 22 months ago. Russian authorities accused Kyiv of carrying out the attack, which took place the day after an 18-hour Russian aerial bombardment across Ukraine killed at least 41 civilians. Russia's Defense Ministry said it identified the ammunition used in the strike as Czech-made Vampire rockets and Olkha missiles fitted with cluster-munition warheads. It provided no additional information, and The Associated Press was unable to verify its claims.

SL to set up Truth Commission as part of reconciliation efforts with minority Tamils

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka has taken the first step to set up the much-delayed Truth Commission, a major demand for reconciliation post-2009 with the end to the armed conflict with the LTTE in the north and east of the island nation. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued the gazette for the Bill that will eventually lead to the establishment of 'The Commission for Truth Unity and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka.'

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had run a military campaign for a separate Tamil homeland in the northern and eastern provinces of the island nation for nearly 30 years before its collapse in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader V Prabhakaran.

"The Commission shall investigate, inquire, and make recommendations in respect of complaints or allegations or reports relating to damage or harm caused to persons or property, loss of life or alleged violation of human rights anywhere in Sri Lanka, which were caused in the course of, or reasonably connected to or consequent to the conflict which took place in the northern and eastern provinces during the period 1983 to 2009, or its aftermath," the notification issued on Monday said.

Among the main objectives, the Commission is expected to provide people with a platform and opportunity for truth-telling and recommending ways and means of effective remedies for the aggrieved.

Army to be deployed across B'desh from Jan 3 ahead of polls: Defence Ministry

PTI ■ DHAKA

Thousands of armed forces personnel will be deployed across Bangladesh from Wednesday to ensure that the January 7 general elections are held in a free, fair, and peaceful manner, the Defence Ministry said on Tuesday.

The armed forces will assist the Election Commission and local civil administration till January 10 to help maintain law and order before, during, and after the upcoming national polls, a press release by the ministry said. The Army will be deployed in 62 districts and will perform duties jointly with the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) in 47 bordering upazilas, the release said.

A total of 1,151 platoons of paramilitary border guards

were deployed across the country on December 29, who will work in tandem with the police, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), and armed forces for 13 days surrounding the January 7 polls.

More than 1.89 lakh policemen have also been deployed nationwide to ensure law and order ahead of the elections. The BGB members will solely be deployed in 45 upazilas and will be accompanied by the Coast Guards in four coastal upazilas. While the country's Navy will perform duties in a total of 19 upazilas, including the coastal districts of Bhola and Barguna, the Air Force is also set to provide necessary helicopter assistance to polling stations in remote hilly areas along with electoral assistance in case of emergencies.

Special cells have also been set up jointly by representatives of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies across the country, which will remain operational till January 10, the release said. The January 7 polls are being boycotted by the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by former prime minister Khalida Zia, as its demand for an interim non-party neutral government to organise the voting was rejected by the government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Hasina is also the president of the ruling Awami League.

The BNP boycotted the 2014 election but took part in the 2018 polls, which party leaders later said was a mistake, alleging that the voting was

marred with widespread rigging and intimidation.

Meanwhile, the BNP and its allies were criticised by ruling Awami League's General Secretary Obaidul Quader on Tuesday, who said that the January 7 polls will be participatory, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. Calling the BNP's leaflet distribution mysterious, Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said that the activists of the main opposition party might carry out an attack anytime. "But they will not be able to thwart the election no matter how hard they try," he was quoted as saying in the report.

On Monday, Prime Minister Hasina said the BNP is boycotting Sunday's general election because they found no scope to rig the polls.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE No. EM/PEP/TECH-30/2023/682
Date: 29/12/2023
Name of the Work: Supply, Installation and Commissioning of 23 Nos. High Mast Lighting Tower inside the Port prohibited area. Estimated Cost: Rs.2,91,96,112/-
Last date & time of submission of bid: dt.18/01/2024 up to 16:00 Hrs. Refer our Website for details https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app
Sd/-Executive Engineer (E), PEP-I Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/75/2023-24 dtd.01.01.2024

verka
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting Tender
e tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-
Sr. No. Name of Work/Item Period/Tentative Qty
1. For Verka Chandigarh Dairy Supply, installation & commissioning of 750 KVA D.G.Set with new emission standard (CPCB IV+) of Cummins/Mitsubishi/Kirloskar/Crompton greaves make. 01 No's
2. For Verka Mohali Depot Vehicles of various capacity for the transportation of Verka Products from Verka Depot, Mohali to various destinations in Punjab and others states. Capacity 1MT, 1.5MT, 2.5MT, 4.5MT, 6MT & 9MT.
3. For Verka Patiala Dairy Plastic, E-waste & Scrap material. Annual
4. For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy Hiring of Car is required for marketing purpose. 01 No.
5. For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Hiring of insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in Ludhiana city and adjoining towns. One year with extension up to one year.
6. For Verka Amritsar Dairy Hiring of insulated single portion road milk tankers (Capacity-10000 ltr.) for the transportation of milk from BMC/MCC to Verka Amritsar Dairy. Annual/05
7. For Verka Jalandhar Dairy Hiring of Deep Freezer (cold store) for storage and transportation of white butter from Verka Jalandhar Dairy to hired cold store & Vice-Versa. Annual
8. For Verka Cattle Feed Plant, Khanna Transportation of finished Cattle Feed, Mineral Feed Mixture and UML to various station of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan. Annual
NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.
Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

Sensex falls 379 points on profit taking in bank & IT stocks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex declined by 379 points on Tuesday due to profit-taking in bank, auto and IT shares after recent sharp gains and fresh foreign fund outflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 379.46 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at 71,892.48 with 22 of its constituents ending in the red. The index opened lower and tumbled further by 658.2 points or 0.91 per cent to hit a low of 71,613.74. However, buying in pharma and energy shares helped trim losses. The broader Nifty declined by 76.10 points or 0.35 per cent to close at 21,665.80. As many as 31 Nifty shares declined while 19 advanced. The index hit a low of 21,555.65 but managed to close above the 21,600 level. Banking, auto and IT shares succumbed to selling pressure after recent gains while gains in pharma and energy shares capped the damage.



Among the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra fell the most by 2.78 per cent. UltraTech Cement dropped by 2.46 per cent, Kotak Bank by 2.41 per cent and Larsen & Toubro by 2.36 per cent. ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank, Wipro and Hindustan Unilever also declined. Sun Pharma, Bajaj Finance, Bharti

Airtel, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv and Titan were among the winners. "The market extended yesterday's last hour's sell-off, taking negative cues from Asian peers due to weak Chinese manufacturing data and mounting tensions in the Red Sea, which has the potential to disrupt global trade and

crude supplies," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services said. "Ahead of the impending results season, investors are adopting a profit booking strategy. Auto stocks declined on below-expected volume numbers, while pharma stocks were the standout due to catch-up in the US economy," Nair added. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.08 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.03 per cent. Among the indices, capital goods fell 1.42 per cent, auto declined 1.32 per cent, bankex (1.16 per cent), realty (1.04 per cent), IT (1.03 per cent) and teck (0.75 per cent). Energy, healthcare, services and metal were among the winners. "Markets traded volatile for yet another session and lost nearly half a per cent, in continuation to the prevailing consolidation phase," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking

Ltd said. A total of 1,992 stocks advanced while 1,811 declined and 126 remained unchanged on the BSE. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower while Seoul ended in the green. European markets were mostly trading in positive territory. Asian, European and US markets were closed on Monday for the New Year. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 2.05 per cent to USD 78.58 a barrel. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 855.80 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE gauge eked out a modest gain of 31.68 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 72,271.94 after a muted beginning on Monday. The Nifty went up by 10.50 points or 0.05 per cent to 21,741.90. In 2023, the BSE benchmark jumped 11,399.52 points or 18.73 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 3,626.1 points or 20 per cent.



Norms eased for shifting of used IT hardware goods from SEZs to domestic tariff areas

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has relaxed curbs for shifting of used IT hardware goods like laptops and desktops by a company in special economic zones (SEZs) outside these duty free-enclaves or domestic tariff areas. SEZs are treated as deemed foreign territory for customs laws and bringing goods from these zones into the domestic tariff area (DTA) or domestic market is tantamount to imports. In general, a company from DTA needs a licence for imports of these goods from SEZs. Easing these curbs, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a notification has said that used IT assets (laptops, desktops, monitors, printers) can be moved from SEZ by a company to DTA without a licence for the purposes of further use in their DTA operations "only". However, these equipment should have been used in SEZ units for two years and should not be older than five years from the date of manufacturing. "Import policy of used IT assets (laptops, desktops, monitors, printers) from SEZ to DTA has been notified," DGFT said. It added that in cases where a unit is closing down its operations in SEZ, and relocating to

the DTA, the import of these items is allowed without a licence subject to a condition that those products should not be older than five years from the date of manufacturing. If a SEZ unit has second hand/used/old condition equipment and is being used for less than two years, they can not be shifted to DTA. "Import of any used IT assets which do not fulfil" these criteria "shall be subject to licence for restricted import," it said adding these relaxations will be applicable on the condition that no exemption has been availed from any regulatory requirements, that is Compulsory Registration Order (CRO), Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS), and WPC (wireless planning and coordination) import licence. The development assumes significance as in October last year, the government had tweaked curbs on imports of laptops and computers as it allowed importers to bring in shipments of IT hardware from overseas on a mere 'authorisation' upon detailing quantity and value. The new 'import management system' is aimed at monitoring shipments of laptops, tablets and computers into the country without hurting market supply or creating a cumbersome licensing regime.



Coal India's supply to non regulated sector rises in April, December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned CIL on Tuesday said its supplies to the non-regulated sector rose 31 per cent to 98 Million Tonnes (MT) in the April-December period of the current fiscal. Coal India Ltd (CIL) supplied 75 MT fuel in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal. "Even as CIL supplies to the country's power sector exceeded the projected commitment, the company supplied an all-time high volume of 98 million tonnes to non-regulated sector consumers till December," the maharatna firm said in a statement. With increased production and maximised supplies through all modes of despatch, the coal off-take to power plants of the country by the PSU rose to 454 MT during the April-December period. "This is 8 MT higher than the committed quantity of 446 MT for the period. Compared to 433 MT of April-December last year, the increase is 21 MT with around 5 per cent growth," the PSU said. It produced 532 MT of coal in the April-December period of FY24, logging a year-on-year growth of 11 per cent. Coal stocks at domestic coal-based power plants have surged to 32 MT at the end of December, 5.6 per cent higher than the year-ago period. "Coal stock at CIL's pitheads was around 50 MT as of December end, 56 per cent higher than the inventory of 32 MT of the same period last year, providing a comfortable buffer against any sudden demand surge," the PSU said. CIL accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal output.

Hyderabad, Bengaluru among global airports with highest on time performance: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The airports at Hyderabad and Bengaluru have been ranked second and third among the top ten global airports in terms of operational performance and punctuality, according to a report released on Tuesday. In the 2023 On-Time Performance (OTP) Review prepared by aviation analytics firm Cirium, there are a total of three Indian airports — Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata — and one Indian carrier — IndiGo. With an OTP of 84.42 per cent, Rajiv Gandhi International Airport is at the second spot in the global airports as well as large airports categories. Kempegowda International Airport is at the third position in both the segments with an OTP of 84.08 per cent, Cirium said. Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in the US has topped both the lists with an OTP of 84.44 per cent. In the medium airports category, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose airport in Kolkata



is ranked ninth with an OTP of 83.91 per cent. The medium airports category is topped by Osaka International Airport in Japan with an OTP of 90.71 per cent. India's largest airline IndiGo has an OTP of 82.12 per cent. It is ranked eighth in the low cost carriers category and is at the fourth spot in the Asia Pacific segment.

The low cost carriers segment is topped by South Africa's Safair with an OTP of 92.36 per cent. In the Asia Pacific category, Japan's All Nippon Airways is at the top with an OTP of 82.75 per cent, followed by Japan Airlines (82.58 per cent) and Thai

AirAsia (82.52 per cent) at the second and third places, respectively. An on-time flight is defined as a flight that arrives within 15 minutes of the scheduled gate arrival. For an airport, it is defined as departing within 15 minutes of its scheduled departure, as per Cirium. India is one of the world's fastest growing civil aviation markets, with rising air passenger traffic and more airports are also coming up. In a release, Cirium said the position of the most on-time global airline went to Avianca Airlines, based in Bogota, Columbia. There are no Indian carriers in the global category. A global airport is the one having 25-40 million seats and actual gate departure coverage of 80 per cent or better. Also, such an airport must serve at least three regions, including its own region. Similar are the parameters for the large airports category. Medium airports are those having 15-25 million seats and an actual gate departure coverage of 80 per cent or more.



Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone posts 42 per cent growth in cargo handling in December

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Tuesday said its cargo volumes rose 42 per cent in December 2023 to 35.65 MMT (million metric tonne). According to a APSEZ statement, 10 ports in the APSEZ portfolio delivered their highest-ever cargo volumes, recording new operating milestones. The billionaire Gautam Adani's firm handled 311 MMT of cargo during the nine months of FY24, which is 23 per cent higher year-on-year. Mundra Port alone managed

around 5.5 MTEUs in initial nine months, it added. For the quarter ended December, APSEZ handled around 109 MMT of overall cargo, the statement said. APSEZ CEO and whole-time director Karan Adani said, "APSEZ crossed the 300 MMT cargo mark in just 266 days versus its previous best of 329 days in the previous financial year". Adani said the company is now targeting over 400 MMT of cargo volumes in FY24, surpassing the upper end of the guidance range (370-390 MMT) provided at the start of the current financial year.

HUL receives GST demand, penalties of ₹447.5 crore from 5 States

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading FMCG maker Hindustan Unilever Ltd has received GST demand and penalties totalling Rs 447.5 crore from authorities of five states. These "orders are currently appealable" and the company will make an assessment for that, according to a Monday late night regulatory filing from HUL, which owns brands such as Lux, Lifebuoy, Surf Excel, Rin, Pond's and Dove. The company received a total of five orders passed from different zones of GST officials over issues such as disallowance of GST credit, salaries including allowances paid to expats etc on Friday and Saturday last week. "The orders were received by the company on 30th December, 2023 and 31st December, 2023, respectively and the intimation is being submitted today i.e. 1st January, 2024, being the first working day after receipt of the



orders," said HUL. This includes the demand for tax "on salaries including allowances paid to expats amounting to Rs 372.82 crore and penalty amounting to Rs 39.90 crore" from the Joint Commissioner, CGST and Central Excise, Mumbai East. Besides, Deputy Commissioner of Commercial Tax Officer, Bengaluru has issued a demand of tax "on the grounds of excess GST credit availed amounting to Rs 8.90 crore and penalty amounting to 89.08 lakh". Excise and Taxation Officer, Sonapat, Rohtak,

Haryana, has issued a demand order "wherein GST credit amounting to Rs 12.94 crore has been disallowed and a penalty amounting to Rs 1.29 crore has been imposed". While Additional Commissioner, Central Tax and Central Excise, Kochi Commissionerate has also disallowed GST credit and turnover adjustment amounting to Rs 8.65 crore and imposed a penalty amounting to Rs 87.50 lakh. According to HUL, these GST demands and penalties would have "no material impact on financial, no impact on operation" or other activities of the company due to the intimation of tax payable. "These orders are currently appealable & we will make an assessment to exercise our right to appeal," said HUL. For the financial year which ended on March 31, 2023, HUL's (Hindustan Unilever Ltd) revenue was at Rs 59,144 crore.



Government hikes windfall tax on crude oil

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has hiked the windfall tax on crude oil produced in the country and cut the levy to nil on exports of diesel and ATF. The tax, levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED), on domestically produced crude oil has been raised to Rs 2,300 from Rs 1,300 per tonne, according to an official notification. The SAED on the export of diesel has been reduced to nil from Rs 0.50 a litre. The levy on export of jet fuel or ATF has been cut to nil from Rs 1 per litre. SAED on petrol will continue to be zero. The new rates are effective from Tuesday. India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022, joining a growing number of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies. The tax rates are reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks.

Ducati to ride in 8 new models in India this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Italian luxury motorcycle maker Ducati on Tuesday said it plans to launch 8 new bikes this year in India to strengthen its position in the market. The new models include Multistrada V4 RS, DesertX Rally, Panigale V4 Racing

Replica 2023, Diavel for Bentley, Monster 30° Anniversario, Panigale V4 SP2 30° Anniversario 916, along with the new Streetfighter V4S 2023 which was unveiled globally last year, the company said in a statement. The launch programme will start in the first quarter of 2024 with the Streetfighter V4 Lamborghini, followed by DesertX Rally, Hypermotard 698 Mono, and the new Streetfighter V4 range in Q2, it added. The company said it will bring the Multistrada V4 RS and the Diavel for Bentley, which will be brought to India in limited numbers, in the fourth quarter.

Ducati India Managing Director Bipul Chandra said in 2023 despite the absence of the Scrambler range for the first three quarters of 2023, the company was able to meet its planned volumes with maximum sales coming from brands like Panigale V4, Multistrada V4 and Diavel V4. With eight new Ducati motorcycles slated to be introduced along with two new dealerships, he said the company is "looking forward to a promising 2024 for Ducati in India".

BUSINESS BRIEF



BOOKS ON ENT, HEAD AND NECK LAUNCHED AT SRMIST
Kattankulathur: It was a day when Hippocrates Auditorium at SRM Medical College at Kattankulathur was filled with thunderous applause as two books dealing with various nuances of ENT and Head, Neck and Skull-base surgery were launched by Dr TR Paarivendhar, Founder Chancellor of SRMIST. Dr Paarivendhar released 'Essentials of ENT' and the first copy was received by Dr P Sathyanarayanan (Pro-Chancellor of Academics at SRMIST). 'Atlas of Head Neck and Skull-Base Surgery' was also launched by the Founder Chancellor of SRMIST and the first copy went to Prof Dr Nitin M Nagarkar (Dean - Medical, SRMIST). 'Essentials of ENT' is authored by Prof Lt Col A Ravikumar, Pro Vice Chancellor, MHS. Dr Nitin M Nagarkar has authored Atlas of Head Neck and Skull-Base Surgery. Co-authors of Essentials of ENT are Dr Major S Prasanna Kumar, Professor and HOD of ENT Department at SRHER and Dr Shiva Priya J, who is an Assistant professor at ENT department at SRHER.

Mechanism to monitor steel, aluminium products export at concessional rates to US in the making

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ministries of mines, steel and the department for promotion of industry and internal trade (DPIIT) will set up an internal mechanism to monitor the export of steel and aluminium products at concessional duties to the US, an official said. Indian exports of these products were earlier attracting additional duties in the US, as Washington, in 2018, imposed a 25 per cent import duty on steel products and 10 per cent on certain aluminium products on grounds of national security. In retaliation, India in June 2019, imposed additional customs duties on 28 American products. The US is now allowing these imports from India without paying the extra 25 per cent and 10 per cent duties in return for

retaliatory duties on eight American products like apple and walnut. The official also said that the two countries have agreed to set up a joint monitoring mechanism to enable domestic exports to America of at least 3.36 lakh tonnes of certain steel and aluminium products in a year without paying extra duties. The department of commerce has finalised the terms of references with regards to joint monitoring mechanism (JMM) to enable domestic exports of certain steel and aluminium products to America without paying extra duties and the US has conveyed their agreement with the proposed text. "Ministries of mines, steel and DPIIT have been requested to establish an internal monitoring mechanism to monitor export of steel and aluminium products to



the US specifically under US 232 measure," the official added. As per the mechanism, officials will meet twice a year to review the arrangements. If Indian exporters would face any bottleneck or problem, it

would be conveyed to the commerce ministry and will be taken up with the US during the meetings of the joint monitoring mechanism (JMM). During the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June

last year, the two countries decided to remove trade irritants and as part of that, both sides agreed to end six trade disputes at the WTO. They have mutually resolved those seven disputes and India has decided to remove additional duties on eight US products, including chickpeas, lentils and apples, which were imposed in 2019. The US, on its part, has agreed to provide greater market access to certain Indian steel and aluminium products, a development which would help increase outbound shipments of these goods. The US has agreed to grant market access to steel and aluminium products under the exclusion process of Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act 1962. This market access has restored opportunities for Indian steel

and aluminium exporters, which were restricted since June 14, 2018, because of the US 232 measure under which additional duties were levied on steel and aluminium products respectively. The additional tariffs had impacted USD 1.21 billion worth of India's exports of steel and aluminium to the US in 2018. The duty burden on exports due to additional US tariffs amounted to USD 241 million. The US had settled a similar dispute with Canada and Mexico at the end of 2019. While steel and aluminium imports from these countries got exemption from the extra tariffs, called Section 232 tariff, the agreement provided for aggressive monitoring and a mechanism to prevent surges in imports of steel and aluminium.

BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL

NADAL RETURNS WITH A WIN

PTI ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

Rafael Nadal showed no signs of rust from his year off the tour, winning his return match over former No. 3-ranked Dominic Thiem 7-5, 6-1 at the Brisbane International on Tuesday. The 22-time major winner hadn't played a singles match at the elite level since a second-round exit at the Australian Open last January. He didn't show it. The 37-year-old Nadal made just six unforced errors and dropped only three points on his serve in the first set. He won eight of the last nine games to clinch victory in 89 minutes. Now, ranked No. 672 and playing on a wild card in Brisbane after a long rehabilitation from a hip injury, Nadal said the last 12 months had been among the toughest of his professional career.



"Today is honestly an emotional and important day for me," he said in a post-match TV interview. "It was a very positive level (for) the first day." In the opening match of the day on the covered Pat Rafter Arena, No. 51-ranked Yannick Hanfmann of Germany beat fifth-seeded Sebastian Korda 7-5, 6-4 in a first-round contest. In the women's draw, 2020 Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin was upset by No. 113-ranked Arina Rodionova 7-5, 7-6 (7) in the second round. Kenin was constantly under pressure on her serve despite having chances in both sets against Rodionova, a 34-year-old Australian who has never been ranked in the top 100. Kenin was seeded 14th in Brisbane, a key tune-up tournament for the Australian Open starting January 14 in Melbourne.



CHENNAI OPEN

Krishnan sits atop points table

PTI ■ CHENNAI

International Master P Saravana Krishnan was on top of the points table despite his loss to Adhiraj Mitra in the fourth round of the ongoing Chennai Open International Grandmaster Chess tournament here on Tuesday. Krishnan shared the lead of 4 points with five other Grandmasters - Fedorov Alexei (Belarus), Glek Igor (Belgium), Khusenkhojaev Muhammad (Tajikistan), Manik Mikulas (Slovakia) and Nguyen Duc Hoa (Vietnam). Alexei beat Murali Krishnan but Igor suffered a loss to Rohit S, while Muhammad and Mikulas registered victories over Kolla Bhaavan and Sriram Adarsh Uppala, respectively, all in Round 4. Top seed International Master Aranyak Ghosh,

IMs Elgbyr Mohsen (Egypt), Logon Tegin Semetei (Kyrgyzstan), Viani Antonio D'cunha and Shahil Dey (both India), were half a point behind the leaders (3.5 points). In Round 4, Ghosh pulled off a draw against Mohsen, whereas Tegin Semetei also drew against Nepal's Jaiswal Rupesh. As for Antonio D'cunha, he too drew against Matta Vinay Kumar. Balkishan A from Mysuru caused an upset after trouncing French International Master Buscara Sevan in the same round. Balkishan displayed strength and consistency and has now moved to 3.5 points, only half a point away from the leaders. In the previous round (Round 3) held earlier in the day, Maharashtra's Sharnarshi Shlok had stunned International Master Nitin Senthilvel.

Gauff starts 2024 with 6-4, 6-2 win over Liu

AP ■ AUCKLAND

U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff started her 2024 season and her defense of the Auckland Tennis Classic title Tuesday with a rusty-at-times 6-4, 6-2 win over American compatriot Claire Liu. Gauff used her powerful forehand well but took time to find her range, over-hitting at times in the first set. She raced to an early 4-0 lead then dropped serve, served for the first set at 5-2 and lost serve again to love before composing herself to overcome a tenacious performance by Liu.



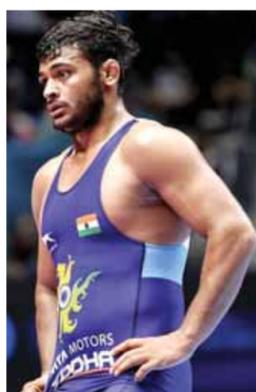
Gauff defeated Aryna Sabalenka in the U.S. Open final 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 for her first major title last year. On Tuesday, Gauff mostly stuck to the baseline while Liu came more often and effectively to the net. But as Gauff settled in and found her service rhythm, she took the second set more convincingly in 35 minutes, the match in 82 minutes. "Happy to start off the season with a win," Gauff said. "I needed to be tested. I feel like I played well today for the first match in a while and I'm happy with my level. Obviously there are things I can improve but I did what I needed to do to win." Former No. 1 Caroline Wozniacki started the New Year with a loss, going down 6-4, 6-3 to second-seeded Elina Svitolina. In a hard-hitting match, there were five service breaks in the first set: Svitolina gained a vital third break in the 10th game. She then broke Wozniacki to lead 3-1 in the second set and again in the eighth game before serving out the set and match. Wozniacki made a strong comeback in 2023 after being away from tennis for more than three years. She looked impressively fit at the start of the new season and her double-handed backhand and running forehand were still weapons.

13 members Indian wrestling team announced

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ad-hoc panel governing the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Tuesday announced a 13-member team for the upcoming Zagreb Open in Croatia after issues related to procurement of visas had been looked into. The first world ranking tournament in the Croatian capital will be held from January 10 to 14. The WFI is being run by a three-member committee constituted by the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) after the Sports Ministry suspended the Sanjay Singh-led newly-elected sports federation owing to violation of its own constitution. The ad-hoc panel is being headed by Bhupinder Singh Bajwa. "Thanks to a timely intervention by the Ministry of External Affairs,

the 25 Indians due to travel to Zagreb will complete the visa formalities on Wednesday," Bajwa said in a press release issued on Tuesday. "The team was facing difficulty in securing a visa appointment. However, the Ministry of External Affairs has helped the team in this regard." The ad-hoc committee chairman said the Croatian Wrestling Federation Secretary-General Tin Bregovic had sent a letter of invitation for the 13 wrestlers, nine coaching and support staff and three referees. "We have taken every step to ensure that the team reaches Zagreb well in time for the tournament," Bajwa said. "We have ensured that India's Olympic hopefuls would compete in their respective weight class along with a 2kg weight allowance



in the first ranking event of the Olympic year," he said. "We are confident that the 13 who will compete in Zagreb will make

the most of the chance to prepare for the Asian Qualification tournament in April and the World Qualification tournament in May." The team: Men Freestyle: Aman (57kg); Yash (74kg), Deepak Punia (86kg), Vicky (97kg) and Sumit (125kg). Greco-Roman: Gyanendra (60kg), Neeraj (67kg), Vikas (77kg), Sunil Kumar (87kg), Narinder Cheema (97kg) and Naveen (130kg). Women: Sonam (62kg) and Radhika (68kg). Coaching and support staff: Kuldeep Singh (team leader and coach), Vinod Kumar, Sujeet, Shashi Bhushan Prasad, Manoj Kumar, Virender Singh and Alka Tomar (coaches); Vishal Kumar Rai (physiotherapist) and Neeraj Kumar. Referees: Satya Dev Malik, Dinesh Dhondiba Gund and Sanjay Kumar.

Grapplers seek UWW help in resolving wrestling crisis

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Several international medal-winning Swrestlers from different states have approached the world governing body UWW, requesting its intervention for restoration of the suspended WFI and accused Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik of orchestrating a "fake agitation". The three wrestlers had led a protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, alleging that he has sexually exploited women wrestlers and sought his arrest. The matter is being heard by a Delhi court and Brij Bhushan is out on bail. The National camps have not been held for a long time due to the ongoing tussle between the elite wrestlers and the BJP MP. An ad-hoc panel ran the sport till recently but was brought back to handle day-to-day affairs of the sports body after the newly-elected body was suspended by the Sports Ministry. "I would like to inform you that due to fake agitation of three wrestlers, the wrestling in India has been destroyed. I am a woman wrestler but I did not face any sexual demand from the previous president," wrote an Asian Games and CWG medal-winning wrestler. "I thought after the election of WFI, this controversy will be over but these three wrestlers are trying to damage wrestling in India. Being a woman wrestler, I personally contacted many women wrestlers but no one corroborated the version of these wrestlers. "My humble request to UWW is to interfere in the matter and a permanent Federation may please be established in India otherwise wrestling will be destroyed," the Arjuna awardee added. It may be mentioned that United World



Wrestling (UWW) had suspended the WFI on August 24 for not holding elections on time and Indian wrestlers had to compete as neutral athletes at the World Championships last year. A junior wrestler from Maharashtra, in her letter to UWW President Nenad Lalovic, wrote how their careers have been stalled in the absence of junior national championships. "Since two years, there is no sub junior and junior competition, the wrestlers are not getting the chance to show their talent as there are only three senior players (creating controversy) and on top of that due to politics, a big crisis has come..... Please give justice to Indian wrestlers by activating Wrestling Federation of India," the wrestler wrote. The newly elected body WFI had announced immediately after the polls that U15 and U20 Nationals will be held in the last week of December in Gonda, UP but due to WFI suspension, the competitions could not be held. Interestingly, the minor who filed a sexual harassment complaint against Brij Bhushan before withdrawing it, also wrote to the UWW admitting that her father filed a fake complaint against the former WFI boss.

India men hockey team to play 4 nations tournament in South Africa

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian men's hockey team will take part in a four-nation tournament featuring France, the Netherlands and hosts South Africa from January 14 as part of the side's preparations for the Paris Olympics. Ahead of the tournament, a 39-member core group will train at the national coaching camp, beginning at the Sports Authority of India campus in Bengaluru on Wednesday, Hockey India said in a media release. Following the 11-day camp, India, who have already qualified for the Paris Games, will head to Cape Town. The test event in South Africa, which ends on January 28, will provide a good exposure ahead of India's Pro League campaign opener in Odisha in February. India are scheduled to take on Australia, the Netherlands, Spain and Ireland in double-header games in the Pro League. "I believe the players are returning fresh from a good break with their families for the holiday season. We begin the hockey season for the year with the South Africa Tour and from here on it will only get busier with regular games leading up to the Paris Olympics.



"Our core group is quite solid with experienced players and some of them named in this group will also be playing the FIH Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat, Oman," Indian men's hockey team chief coach Craig Fulton said. "As always, this camp too will be focused on getting better as a team and we are eager to get on with the season," he added. The core group for the national coaching camp includes goalkeepers Krishan Bahadur Pathak, PR Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera, Pawan Malik, and Prashant Kumar Chauhan. Harmanpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet Singh, Surender Kumar, Varun Kumar, Amit Rohidas, Gurinder Singh, Jugraj Singh, Mandeep Mor, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, Sanjay, Yashdeep Siwach, Dipsan Tirkey, Manjeet.

Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Surender Kumar, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar, Amit Rohidas, Gurinder Singh, Jugraj Singh, Mandeep Mor, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, Sanjay, Yashdeep Siwach, Dipsan Tirkey, Manjeet. Midfielders: Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Sumit, Akashdeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohd Raheel Mousen and Maninder Singh. The list of forwards includes S Karthi, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Simranjeet Singh, Shilanand Lakra, and Pawan Rajbhar.

GOALKEEPERS: Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Sreejesh, Suraj Karkera, Pawan, Prashant Kumar Chauhan. Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Surender Kumar, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar, Amit Rohidas, Gurinder Singh, Jugraj Singh, Mandeep Mor, Nilam Sanjeev Xess, Sanjay, Yashdeep Siwach, Dipsan Tirkey, Manjeet. Midfielders: Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Moirangthem Rabichandra Singh, Shamsher Singh, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Sumit, Akashdeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Mohd. Raheel Mousen, Maninder Singh. Forwards: S. Karthi, Mandeep Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Abhishek, Dilpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Simranjeet Singh, Shilanand Lakra, Pawan Rajbhar.

Hermoso testifies in sexual assault case after kiss at Women World Cup final

AP ■ MADRID

The Spanish player kissed on the lips by the soccer president at the Women's World Cup final appeared in court on Tuesday to testify in the sexual assault case against the former official. Jenni Hermoso was at the Madrid court to give her version of the kiss by Luis Rubiales following Spain's victory over England in the final in Sydney in August. The incident sparked outrage across the soccer world and ignited one of the worst crises

in the history of the sport in Spain. It also led to a boycott of the national team by the World Cup-winning players, and to the eventual resignation of Rubiales despite his denial of wrongdoing and his allegation that the kiss was consensual. Hermoso was expected to reiterate in court her allegations that the kiss was unwanted and Rubiales and his staff tried to pressure her and her family to downplay the incident that tarnished Spain's first Women's World Cup title.

The testimony was expected behind closed doors. Spanish media said Hermoso asked the judge to keep her court appearance as private as possible. She arrived wearing a grey coat and waved to journalists before entering the court through one of its main entrances along with her lawyers. Spanish state prosecutors accused Rubiales of sexual assault and coercion, alleging he tried to convince Hermoso and her relatives to publicly downplay the kiss. The judge is also hearing tes-



timony from other World Cup-winning players, coaches and federation officials, before deciding whether to start a trial. Rubiales previously denied wrongdoing to the judge who imposed a restraining order on him not to contact Hermoso. The 33-year-old Hermoso, the record scorer for Spain's women's team, said last year she received threats in the fallout from the kiss, though she did not elaborate. Hermoso became somewhat of a celebrity in Spain after

coming forward to denounce the kiss and help promote a "Me Too" movement in the country. She was one of the New Year's Eve presenters on public television on Saturday, calling for a 2024 with more equality. The boycott of the national team ended last year after players were given guarantees of change within the federation following the intervention of government officials. Based on a sexual consent law passed last year, Rubiales could face a fine or a prison sentence of one to four years

if found guilty, according to the prosecutors' office in Madrid. The new law eliminated the difference between "sexual harassment" and "sexual assault," sanctioning any unconsented sexual act. FIFA banned Rubiales for three years until after the men's 2026 World Cup. His ban will expire before the next women's tournament in 2027. He resigned as the federation president and as a UEFA vice president on Sept. 10 amid mounting pressure in Spain from lawmakers and players.

INDIAN BOWLERS FACE TALL TASK AS ROHIT SEEKS REDEMPTION

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Rohit Sharma, the leader, will need to channelise the champion tactician that resides in him as India look to restore parity against South Africa and remain consequential in the World Championship points table when the second Test starts here on Wednesday. India are sixth in the nine-team table with 14 points (38.89 PCT) and a defeat will dent their standing further.

Ravindra Jadeja, India's "Most Valuable Player" across formats, will come back to add the requisite middle-order batting balance and steady overs with the old Kookaburra but it will be the skipper's choice of third and fourth speed merchants that will define the embattled team's response.

As harsh as it might sound, no one knows more than Rohit that Prasadh Krishna is pretty undercooked to counter the vagaries of Test cricket and Shardul Thakur's bits and pieces talent will not win him much on most days.

But with three top-order batters, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer compounding the team's worries with their ineptitude while dealing with the

bouncer barrage, Shardul's presence gives the side an assumption of batting depth on paper. Save KL Rahul in the first innings and Virat Kohli in the second essay, none of the Indian batters could cope with the extra bounce and lateral movement at Centurion.

With one loss and one draw in three Tests in the new World Test Championship cycle, India would be desperate for a win, which will be easier said than done at the picturesque cricket stadium where the visitors have lost four of their previous six games. The last six weeks of 2023 haven't exactly been kind to Rohit, who is still trying to pick up the pieces after India's World Cup final defeat.

That final and Rohit have become a tragic love story, and what has added humiliation to the mix is the two and half day defeat at Centurion in the run up to the New Year. The skipper stood as exposed tactically as his batters and bowlers were found to be inept technically in an innings and 32 run defeat.

There would be no better way to start 2024 than a win at the Newlands ground with the breathtaking Table Mountain adding to the scenic backdrop. But South Africa have had an

upper hand against India at this venue and Dean Elgar, who would captain South Africa in his last Test appearance would not want that Rohit becomes the second skipper after Mahendra Singh Dhoni to at least draw a Test series in the Rainbow Nation.

The toss will be crucial at Newlands which is recording temperatures of 33 to 34 degrees and despite decent grass covering, the pitch will be a batting paradise with little help for spinners from either side.

It will therefore not be prudent to retain Ravichandran Ashwin given that Jadeja is fit and available for selection.

However, Rohit's biggest decision as skipper would be whether to rely on his specialist batters and replace Shardul and Prasadh with Mukesh Kumar and Avesh Khan.

There's no guarantee that the two rookies, with a combined experience of one Test (played by Mukesh), will pull any rabbit out of the hat. But with their solid experience of first-class cricket, their presence might just give the skipper a stronger shot at a win. Mukesh has bowled extended spells and is certainly more effective compared to Shardul while Avesh could be the pro-



bial hit-the-deck bowler, who can put the red cherry on hard lengths and extract steep bounce.

But on a track, which gets better for batting with the passage of time, Dean Elgar, Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Keegan Petersen, David Bedingham are a formidable force.

To counter them, the new ball overs will be vital. Jasprit Bumrah would pray that there is a suitable cloud cover known as "Table Cloth" over the mountains and he is not as unlucky as he was at Centurion where he beat the bat 26 times in his first spell without much success.

If the bowlers need to step up, Rohit, the skipper would also need to tell "Rohit the batter" to buck up.

He might be a compulsive hooker and puller of the short ball, but in his heart, Rohit knows that only one career Test hundred in SENA countries in a decade is not a fair reflection of his abilities.

The peerless Kagiso Rabada has made him his bunny and the Indian captain needs to out-think the legend in the making. Lungi Ngidi, who also asks probing questions, won't make life any easier for the Indian skipper and his colleagues.

There would also be the young Nandre Burger to expose the Indian batting line-ups historically fragile technique against left-armers. He would be bowling in and around the rib-cage, occasionally slipping a fuller one across the line.

Virat Kohli looked in imperious form during both innings of the last Test, getting a beauty from Rabada in the first essay and running out of partners en route his 76 in the second innings.

However, there are plenty of questions for a circumspect Indian team and sooner it gets the answers, the better it will be for its captain.

SQUADS:

India: Rohit Sharma (captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Virat Kohli, Shreyas Iyer, KL Rahul (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Avesh Khan, Prasadh Krishna, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kona Bharat, Abhimanyu Easwaran.

South Africa: Dean Elgar (captain), Aiden Markram, Tony de Zorzi, Keegan Petersen, David Bedingham, Kyle Verreyne (wk), Marco Jansen, Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi, Nandre Burger, Keshav Maharaj, Wiaan Mulder, Zubayr Hamza, Tristan Stubbs.



Irfan: India must focus on building bigger fast bowling pool in 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India must focus on increasing the bench strength of their pace attack in 2024 as the Centurion Test exposed chinks in that department, reckons former pacer Irfan Pathan.

Mohammed Shami's absence was felt badly in the heavy loss to South Africa in the opening Test of the two-match series in the Rainbow Nation last week. Jasprit Bumrah, who did not get the support from the likes of Shardul Thakur and Prasadh Krishna in the first Test, is also injury prone.

Speaking to Star Sports on areas India need to improve in the new year, Pathan said: "India need to prepare a good fast bowling unit in 2024. We saw what happened in South Africa, the back ups were not ready. Shami was missed.

"If god forbid, something happens to Bumrah as we have seen in the past, injury can happen to him. If we don't prepare a big pool, we won't get quality pac-

ers like them (Bumrah, Shami). You need to have 7-8 pacers ready for the highest level," he said.

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar wants the Indian team to have the right blend of youth and experience.

"The biggest focus should be on having a good blend of youth and experience. Because that is always something that comes in handy. You need to have a wise cool head to temper the excitement of the younger blood," said Gavaskar.

India must also prepare leaders to take over from Rohit Sharma in due time, added Pathan.

"Leadership is another area we need to focus on. We need to have 2-3 leaders ready as this year we can see many changes. India did very well under Kohli in Test cricket for five years. He led from the front.

"Same with Rohit who led us to the World Cup final and we won Asia Cup under him. We need to groom leaders like them," added Pathan.

30 odd players could be monitored during IPL

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

The Ajit Agarkar-led selection committee will have some sleepless nights before selecting the squad for T20s against Afghanistan with veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli keen to play the World Cup in June.

Both Rohit and Kohli have not played in the shortest format for India since the T20 World Cup semifinal against England in November 2022.

The two national selectors, Shiv Sunder Das and Salil Ankola are both here and will be joined by their chairman Agarkar during the course of the second Test at Newlands.

It is expected that Agarkar and Co will speak to head coach Rahul Dravid along with Test and ODI skipper Rohit, star batter Kohli before announcing the squad against Afghanistan. Around 30 T20 specialists, including India and IPL stars,



will be monitored ahead of the ICC event in Caribbean and United States.

It remains to be seen whether Agarkar and his colleagues select both Rohit and Kohli for the short series starting January 11 in Mohali or directly check their form and fitness during IPL.

The two contemporary legends have apparently made it clear that they would very much like to be part of T20 World Cup.

With England Tests starting in Hyderabad from January 25, it is unlikely that even if Rohit and Virat are selected, they would play beyond a couple of matches.

"Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya aren't fit. The Afghanistan series won't tell you anything. Everything will be decided on the basis of the first month of IPL," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

Workload management and monitoring core group during IPL

The BCCI brass knows that they can't tell any franchise to optimally use a potential pick for the T20 World Cup which will be held in June-July after IPL concludes in last week of May.

"The BCCI can never tell a franchise to manage a star player's workload unless it's a case of injury management," source added.

So there is a possibility that at least 25 to 30 players are zeroed in and monitored closely during the two months of IPL.

There could be a case of injury or fitness issue during the IPL and the selection committee would need two players for each slot, so that the like-for-like replacement is ready.

The only player whose ready replacement won't be available is Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya.



India Women suffer ODI defeat by 190 runs AUSTRALIA COMPLETE 3-0 WHITEWASH

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India produced an abject batting display after a poor show with the ball to suffer a 190-run loss, their third heaviest defeat, in the third and final ODI as a rampant Australia completed a 3-0 series whitewash here on Tuesday.

Having conceded the highest total ever of 338/7 recorded by any opposition against them, India's frailties with the bat came to the fore as they were shot out for 148 in 32.4 overs. None of the Indian batters, who had put up a strong fight in the second ODI here at the Wankhede Stadium, could make a dent in the opposition's march to a 10th consecutive win in away bilateral games.

For Australia, it is their ninth series win against India and fifth in the opponent's backyard.

Australia have beaten India in India 3-0 in 2018, 3-0 in 2012 and 4-0 in 1984. India have also suffered 0-3 whitewash in 2006 and 0-5 clean sweep in 2008 in Australia.

India were rocked twice in the powerplay when Megan Schutt (2/23) cleaned up Yastika Bhatia (6) and then Smriti Mandhana (29) played one straight down the throat of Kim Garth at deep extra cover.

India's plight deepened when skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (3) was dismissed for her third single-digit score in a row.

Looking to sweep Georgia Wareham (3/21), Harmanpreet was beaten by Beth Mooney's anticipation to quickly move on her left from the first slip to complete the dismissal.

Richa Ghosh (19), coming off a superb 96 in the second ODI, played on to her wickets off Wareham with the Australian leg-spinner once again snaf-fling crucial wickets.

India's hopes to take the game deep then suffered a body blow in the 20th over when their most consistent batter in the series Jemimah Rodrigues (25) smashed one straight to Alana King at short midwicket off Ashleigh Gardner.

But the highlight for Australia in the second innings was Phoebe Litchfield's stunning one-handed catch. She flew on her right to complete a diving effort at cover, to dismiss Amanjot Kaur (3) off King.

King (2/21) then produced the ball of the series when she bamboozled Pooja Vastrakar (14) to get one turning from leg stump to hit the top of off. Annabel

Sutherland also chipped in with a measly 3-0-9-2.

Earlier, Litchfield continued her rich vein of form with a magnificent century as Australia Women flayed India.

Litchfield cracked as many as 16 fours and a six to make 119 off 125 balls and put on a record 189-run stand for the first wicket with Alyssa Healy, who also cashed in on the opportunity with an 85-ball 82 (4x4s, 3x6s).

Australia were relentless with the bat from the word go and despite Shreyanka Patil's 3/57, the visitors made merry on a placid wicket that proved to be a batting haven.

Litchfield and Healy's 189-run stand is now the highest for any wicket among all the visiting sides in India in the 50-overs format, bettering South Africans Lizelle Lee and Laura Wolvaardt's 169-run partnership for the first wicket in 2021.

Having possibly missed out on making tons in each of the first two ODIs with scores of 78 and 63, Litchfield showcased her rich arsenal of strokes all around the park to flatten India.

Litchfield, however, was also lucky when Deepti Sharma could not hold onto a tough diving catch to her left, off Amanjot Kaur (10-0-70-2) in the 19th over, when the batter was on 62.

If it was any consolation, Deepti had Litchfield caught by Harmanpreet and with that the right-arm spinner became only the fourth Indian to have taken 100 wickets in one-day cricket.

Patil was the most successful Indian bowlers with 3 for 57 in her 10-over spell, with her twin strikes in the 36th over providing some respite on a tough day out. Patil trounced Mooney (3) and Tahliia McGrath (0) leg-before on consecutive deliveries to peg Australia back, albeit momentarily, as the visitors' aggressive approach again brought them back on top.

Gardner's 27-ball 30 with four fours, Sutherland's 21-ball 23 (2x4s, 1x6s) and late fireworks yet again from King — 26 not out off 14 balls, three sixes, one four — helped Australia better their own record.

King took 19 runs off Vastrakar's final over as Australia bettered their own record for highest-ever total against India in ODIs. Australia had made 332/7 in March 2018 at Vadodara.

Apart from a slew of misfields and dropped catches, Indian team was also guilty of conceding 28 extras, which gave further push to the visitor's massive total.

Australia PM praises Khawaja for showing courage amid stand off with ICC

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has praised Usman Khawaja's courage amid his stand-off with the ICC after expressing solidarity with the victims of the conflict between Palestine and Israel.

The ICC has barred the Australian opener from displaying messages of equality and freedom, specifically a dove logo and an olive branch on his shoes, during the Test series against Pakistan.

The decision was based on the international regulation that prohibits players from showcasing personal messages on their uniforms.

But his act has won him an admirer in the country's premier who touched upon Khawaja's gesture during an address to the Australian and Pakistan teams ahead of the Sydney Test.

"I'd like to congratulate (Khawaja) for the courage he has shown standing up for human values," Albanese said.



"He has shown courage, and the fact that the team has backed him in is a great thing." "When Ussie and Dave (David Warner) go out, it will be a very special moment, when you walk on to the SCG," Albanese added.

The SCG Test will mark the last time Khawaja and Warner will be walking out together to open the innings with the latter retiring from the traditional format after the match beginning on Wednesday.

Last week, Australian captain Pat Cummins had come in support of his teammate, saying the opener's attempt to bring to the fore

the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was "not offensive."

Cricket's global governing body, the ICC, had rejected Khawaja's application to have a sticker showing a black dove holding an olive branch on his bat and shoes during the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan.

"We really support Uzzy. He's standing up for what he believes and I think he's done it really respectfully," Cummins had said on the eve of the second Test at the MCG, which Australia won to wrap up the series.

"As I said last week, 'All lives are equal, I don't think that's very offensive and I'd say the same about the dove,'" Cummins had said.

Notably, the ICC reprimanded Khawaja for wearing a black armband during Australia's 360-run win over Pakistan in Perth, the action coming after he was barred from wearing boots with the messages "Freedom is a human right" and "All lives are equal" in the colours of the Palestinian flag during the match at the Optus Stadium.

Warner ability and importance ensured his contract didn't get ripped up: Clarke

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former captain Michael Clarke has observed that David Warner's extraordinary talent went a long way in ensuring that the explosive opener's contract with Cricket Australia didn't get "ripped up" despite some off-field issues.

The 37-year-old, who will retire from the Test format at the end of the series against Pakistan, has had a stellar career that also had its share of controversies including the ball-tampering scandal in a match against South Africa in 2018.

"Davey has always been a tough character, someone I loved having in the team, that intent, that aggressive approach," Clarke told ESPN's 'Around The Wicket' show. "But he was the same off the field, a little bull, and got into a little bit of trouble along the way," said Clarke, who was Australia's captain in 2013 when Warner was suspended for his altercation with Joe Root in a Birmingham bar, after which he

missed the first two Tests of that year's Ashes.

"But I think he had a lot of support and help from, certainly, senior players and around Cricket Australia that helped him not have his contract ripped up. There was a bit of a fight to keep him because he was so important to the team.

"(There was) the confidence, being his captain, that (at) the start of his career that like all of us, we are young, (he) needed to learn lessons along the way.

"Davey's game has really been learnt at the highest level, playing for Australia, which is not easy to do. So I think he deserves a lot of credit."

Warner's aggressive brand of cricket did not convince many at the start of his career when he



made the cut to Australia first-class cricket from T20s. But Clarke said he proved the doubter's wrong.

"He's had a stellar career, opening the batting (is) such a hard position," Clarke said.

"There were a lot of doubts around the way Davey played.

Could he cut it in Test cricket? (He) started as a T20 player and there was always that risk. I think from day one everyone saw the talent, very gifted, can do things that a lot of players can't do.

"And he's been able to manage that role as an opening batsman

but keep his intent, which is easier said than done."

DRAWING PARALLEL WITH HAYDEN: Speaking further about Warner, Clarke drew a parallel with former Australia openers Matthew Hayden and Michael Slater.

"An Australian batsman that set the tone when it came to opening batting was Matthew Hayden — I used to love watching Haydos and Michael Slater walk out and bat and play that aggressive role — and think Davey continued in that manner.

"If the ball was full and there to drive early in his innings he'd take it on, if it was short he takes on that pull or hook shot, he wanted to score runs.

"That's the name of the game but it's easier said than done, trying

to do that against a brand new ball in Test cricket. Deserves a lot of praise," Clarke added.

PERFECT TIMING: He said it's perfect timing for Warner to retire from the Test format at his home town Sydney.

"Guess I thought it would have been the ideal time to walk away from international cricket in general but (he) wants to keep playing T20 cricket," Clarke said. "Now the balance is going to be between playing domestic T20s and stepping up to play internationally. He'll still have to earn his selection.

"Think his form in domestic T20 is something the selectors will be looking at. We have a lot of young players coming through in that T20 format that they might pick for the World Cup. Again, the way Davey's played in all three formats is credit to him."

Warner has played 111 Tests and scored 8,695 runs at an average of 44.58, including 26 centuries and a career-best score of 335 not out against Pakistan in 2019.