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NEW DELHI, THURSDAY JANUARY 4, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3



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Kejriwal ducks ED Summons

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal skipped the summons issued against him by the Enforcement Directorate, which sought his presence on Wednesday in the excise policy case. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said that it was illegal and intended to arrest him ahead of elections. Kejriwal mentioned that he is busy with preparations for the Rajya Sabha elections and is ready to respond to any questionnaire from the Enforcement Directorate. The AAP convener also urged the agency to address his earlier letters, in which he sought clarification on the "real intent, ambit, nature, sweep, and scope of the purported inquiry/investigation for which I am being called. This is the third time Kejriwal has refused to appear before the investigators who seek his statement in the excise policy scam case, where the Delhi Government has been accused of tailoring the policy for the benefit of a select few businessmen and seeking bribes in return. Two earlier summons issued by the agency were for his appearance on November 2 and December 21 of last year.



Lambasting Kejriwal and his Jharkhand counterpart Hemant Soren for repeatedly skipping the ED summons, the BJP asserted that every "corrupt leader" will be "punished" for their misdeeds under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule. The party also questioned why Kejriwal did not approach the courts if he felt the action against him was politically motivated. In his letter addressed to the Assistant Director, Directorate of Enforcement, Kejriwal referenced the two previous summonses issued by the ED on October 30, 2023, and December 10, 2023, as well as the latest one issued on December 22, 2023, asking him to appear in person on

January 3, 2024. Expressing deep concern over the lack of response to the queries raised by him in his reply to the summons issued on two previous occasions, the Chief Minister said that the ED official chose to issue another summons on December 22, 2023, in a mechanical way. "It is a matter of concern that despite my comprehensive response(s) bringing to your notice critical dimensions and legal objections involved in issuing summons to me to appear 'in person' in your purported exercise of powers under Section 50 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, you have chosen not to respond. Therefore, I reiterate that the summons are motivated and

issued for vexatious considerations," he said. In his response to the summons, he SAID, "Your silence on the aforementioned critical aspects leads me to infer that you are maintaining unwarranted secrecy and are being opaque and arbitrary in the present matter." Kejriwal had previously declined to appear before the federal agency on two summonses for November 2 and December 21, labelling the notices as "illegal" and "politically motivated." According to ED officials, an individual can ignore an ED summons three times. Since Kejriwal has now exhausted this allowance, the ED can seek a non-bailable warrant (NBW), compelling his appearance before a court. Failure to comply with an NBW may lead to arrest and subsequent court proceedings. "The Delhi Chief Minister maintains that he is prepared to cooperate with the agency but questions the timing and urgency of the summons. Kejriwal's refusal to appear before the ED on two previous occasions has escalated the tension between the AAP and the investigative agency," officials said.

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Victory Sweep for Adani

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to the Adani Group, the Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to transfer the probe into the allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant to a special investigation team and directed market regulator SEBI to complete its probe into two pending cases within three months. Holding that the court must refrain from substituting its own wisdom over the regulatory policies of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud said the facts of the case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from the SEBI. The SC noted that SEBI has completed 22 out of the 24 investigations into the allegations levelled against the Adani Group. "Noting the assurance given by the Solicitor General on behalf of SEBI, we direct SEBI to complete the two pending investigations expeditiously, preferably within three months," said the bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. It also rejected the reliance placed by one of the petitioners on the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) report to suggest that SEBI was lackadaisical in conducting the investigation. "A report by a third party

SC rejects SIT probe against Adani Group



Group's stocks skyrocket

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Adani group companies ended higher on Wednesday, defying a weak trend in the broader equity market, after the

Supreme Court ruled that there was no ground to order an investigation by an SIT or other in agency into allegations against the group.

Detailed report on P10

organisation without any attempt to verify the authenticity of its allegations cannot be regarded as conclusive proof," it said. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions on the Adani-Hindenburg row over allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant. While pronouncing the verdict, the CJI said the SEBI should take its probe to a logical conclusion in

accordance with the law. "The facts of this case do not warrant a transfer of investigation from SEBI. In an appropriate case, this court does have the power to transfer an investigation being carried out by an authorised agency to an SIT or to the CBI. Such a power is exercised in extraordinary circumstances...", the SC said. It said the allegation of "conflict of interest" against some members of the

court-appointed expert committee is unsubstantiated and is rejected. Observing that the power of the court to enter the regulatory domain of SEBI in framing delegated legislation was limited, the bench said, "The scope of judicial review, when examining a policy framed by a specialised regulator, is to scrutinise whether it violates fundamental rights, any provisions of the Constitution, any statutory provisions or is manifestly arbitrary." It said no valid grounds have been raised for this court to direct SEBI to revoke its amendments to the Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPI) and Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) regulations. The bench said the Centre and the SEBI shall constructively consider the suggestions of the expert committee, peruse its report and take necessary steps to strengthen the regulatory framework. The judgment on the PILs, filed by lawyers Vishal Tiwari, ML Sharma, Congress leader Jaya Thakur, and Anamika Jaiswal, was reserved on November 24 last year.

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Peace a day after truckers protest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Barring some sporadic incidents of violent protests, the truckers have called off their strike after the Centre assured representatives of truck and commercial vehicle associations to hold the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), replacing the Indian Penal Code. This new law mandates stringent punishment for drivers and operators in the case of hit-and-run incidents on roads. The strike had disrupted transportation in different cities across the country. Several wholesale vegetable and fruit vendors at Delhi's Azadpur Mandi mentioned that supplies in the national capital could have been hampered on Wednesday. Vehicles from Maharashtra, Kolkata, and Karnataka carrying vegetables were stopped at various locations due to the truck drivers' strike. Transportation was significantly impacted nationwide due to protests, with long queues at petrol pumps triggering fears that 50 percent of the fuel stations across Uttar Pradesh would run dry. An agitation by truck drivers against the new law turned violent in Gujarat's Surat city late Tuesday night, with protesters attacking a police constable. Following this, 23 individuals were arrested. The incident occurred near Magdalla Port on Dumas Road when a large number of truck drivers blocked the road, demanding the withdrawal of the new law on hit-and-run cases.

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SC refuses reprieve to Mahua on expulsion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought a reply from the Lok Sabha secretary general on Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra's plea challenging her expulsion from the Lower House. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta also refused to pass an order on her interim prayer that she be permitted to attend the Lok Sabha proceedings, saying that allowing it will amount to granting her the main relief. "We will consider your plea for interim relief in March," Justice Khanna told Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, who appeared for Moitra. The current Lok Sabha will have one more session — the Budget Session — before the general elections are held. The SC refused to issue notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and the Committee on Ethics of the House. Both were made respondents by Moitra in her plea. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Lok Sabha secretary general, urged the bench not to issue a formal notice and said he will file a reply to Moitra's petition. Mehta said the court should not venture into the internal matter of discipline in another sovereign organ of the State. He said Parliament can internally manage disciplinary issues involving its members through its in-house procedures which are not amenable to judicial review and so Moitra's plea is not maintainable. "Any interference by one organ (judiciary) into the functioning of another organ (Parliament) of the State will violate the separation of powers enshrined under the Constitution," he said.

Justice Khanna said he is not going into these questions at present. The bench, he said, is leaving all issues open to be adjudicated at a later stage. "A number of issues have been raised. We would not like to comment on any issue at this stage. One of the issues is with regard to jurisdiction of this court and the power of judicial review...Solicitor General appears for secretary general, Lok Sabha secretariat. Let reply be filed within a period of three weeks. Rejoinder, if any, be filed thereafter within three weeks," the bench ordered. It listed the matter for resumed hearing in the week commencing March 11. Singhvi said contrary to things floating around, Moitra has been expelled for sharing her parliamentary log-in details. "First, there is only one ground on which she is expelled, which is sharing her login credentials. Second, log-in access to the portal does not amount to its use since there is an additional step for authentication in the form of One Time Password (OTP). Third, there is no existing code of conduct and rules regulating the sharing of password or access to the portal," he submitted. Moitra, he said, was expelled under a rule for hacking. "Can an MP, who is a busy person, not delegate his work? Imagine Hiranandani (businessman Darshan Hiranandani) to be her secretary for a minute... Almost every parliamentarian delegates their work to their secretaries..." Singhvi said. He added the Committee on Ethics of the House acted on a complaint by two private individuals without following the principle of natural justice as Moitra was not allowed to cross-examine them.

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PM Modi rocks in Kerala



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed as he arrives for the 'Sthree Shakti Modikkoppam' Mahila Sangamam in Thrissur on Wednesday

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi literally rocked Thrissur city on Wednesday by holding a 1.5 km long road show and addressing a mammoth women's rally organised by the BJP State unit. The impact his speech made on the women could be understood by the fact that they returned home singing 'Modiyude Guarantee' (Modi's Guarantee), a term the Prime Minister used to emphasise the measures implemented by his government over the last ten years. Furthermore, the Prime Minister declared that the

Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-led LDF were two sides of the same coin. These two alliances were cheating and swindling the people of the State alternately. "Please understand that there is no difference between these fronts except in their names. What they are doing is stealing money meant for development and blaming Narendra Modi for the failures. The Kerala Government accepts with glee all funds allocated by the Centre for various development programmes and squanders them away, denying the poor and downtrodden the benefits of development.

No infrastructure projects have started due to the anti-people policies of the LDF and the UDF, while the rest of the nation is progressing with state-of-the-art roads, highways, rail, and airports," lambasted the Prime Minister. The 40-minute-long speech by the Prime Minister was a charge sheet against the CPM-led Government and the INDI alliance, in which the Communists play a crucial role. "Under the pretext of the 'Hate Modi' campaign, the Communists are cheating the poor people. However, over the last decade, we have played a significant role in empowering the women of the country. The free LPG connections issued to women, the PM Awaaz Yojana in which women were given equal rights while allocating houses - all these were part of the Modi Guarantee we made in 2014. We have liberated our Muslim sisters from the shackles of Triple Talaq and made 33 per cent compulsory reservation for women in Parliament and legislatures," said the Prime Minister. It is worth noting that Kerala is one of the States that is yet to implement the Aayushman Bharat scheme, which assures free medical aid to the poor. Modi also pointed out the criticism by the CPM government in Kerala that the Centre was not allocating the funds requested by the State.

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Fog envelops Delhi, NCR amid lingering cold

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A bitter cold continues to tightly embrace vast swathes of north India, sending shivers down spines and shrouding cities in dense fog. As the cold wave tightens its grip on Delhi, residents of the national capital woke up to a freezing morning on Wednesday, with the maximum temperature settling at 15.7 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal. Parts of the capital city, including Palam, Jafarpur, Lodhi Road, Ridge, Narela, and Mayur Vihar, appeared to be the coldest areas, where the maximum temperature hovered around 13.7 degrees Celsius to 15 degrees Celsius, four to five notches below normal. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the minimum temperature recorded was 7.3 degrees Celsius, which is the seasonal average. In Lodhi Road, the maximum temperature was recorded at 16.2 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature settled at 8.3 degrees Celsius. In Ridge, the maximum temperature was recorded at 16.4 degrees Celsius. The Palam weather observation station also recorded a maximum temperature of 14.9 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the maximum temperature recorded was 13.7 degrees Celsius in Jafarpur, 15.4 degrees Celsius in Narela, and 14.6 degrees Celsius in SPS Mayur Vihar. The maximum temperature is consistently dropping below the season's normal, leading to biting cold day conditions in the national capital region.

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Kuno's Asha wishes India a happy new year

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the cold waves sweeping across most parts of India, there is heartwarming news. Namibian Cheetah Asha, residing in Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park, has brought a delightful New Year gift for wildlife enthusiasts, conservationists, and the broader Indian community. The predator has given birth to three cubs, offering hope for the continued growth and sustainability of the species population in the country. Expressing his excitement, Union Environment Minister

Bhupender Yadav posted on social media, "Purrs in the wild! Thrilled to share that Kuno National Park has welcomed three new members. The cubs have been born to Namibian Cheetah Asha. This is a roaring success for Project Cheetah, envisioned by PM @narendramodi to restore ecological balance." My big congratulations to all experts involved in the project, the Kuno wildlife officials, and wildlife enthusiasts across India, he said about the addition of the three members. officials remain excited,



though cautiously optimistic, keeping their fingers crossed. "It is incredibly exciting to have achieved this milestone, and we are cautiously optimistic that everything will continue to go well for Asha and her cubs," said an official from the Union Environment Ministry associated with the Cheetah project. SP Yadav, Chief of the National Tiger Conservation Authority and also overseeing the ambitious Cheetah reintroduction project in India, said, "It is fantastic news at the beginning of the New Year 2024. We are all delighted with the birth of

these cubs! I hope that Asha proves to be a good mother." His cautious approach arises from the unpredictable nature of Cheetah mothers. For instance, Jawala, who gave birth to four cubs, lost three of them as she started neglecting the surviving one. Experts emphasise that the reintroduction plan cannot be deemed a success unless litters reach adulthood and initiate a second generation." The Minister's post on three births has gone viral on X with advisory and congratulatory comments flowing in.

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INDIA Bloc displays nervous cracks

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Opposition parties, including the Left and the Congress, have demanded immediate arrest of Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee after the Enforcement Directorate earlier told the Calcutta High Court that it had attacked eight properties worth about Rs 7.5 crore belonging to the Leaps and Bounds, a company owned by Banerjee and his other relatives including his parents. "The ED must have attached the said properties because they have been illegally acquired with unexplained money... if it is so then they should proceed to arrest the owners of the company... and it is a public knowledge that Abhishek Banerjee is the Chief Executive Officer of the company," said CPI(M) central committee member Sujay Chakrabarty. Already the ED had arrested former Chief Operating Officer of the company Sujay Krishna Bhadra popularly known as

Kalighater Kaku (uncle of Kalighat) for his alleged links with the teachers' recruitment scam. This, while Kaku had himself gone on record saying that Banerjee --- who besides being the second in command in the Trinamool Congress --- is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Pradesh Congress leadership too demanded junior Banerjee's arrest even as its senior leader Soumya Aich said, "if you do not get the ears you cannot catch the head," adding, "the more the ED makes delay in arresting Abhishek Banerjee the more it will give rise to suspicions in the people's mind that there must be something cooking between BJP which controls the central agencies and the TMC... do we now suspect that the Banerjee's will be spared in lieu of some clandestine seat adjustment in Bengal... because in the given circumstances the BJP is not in a position to reach double digits in the MP elections if it is not



helped by the TMC." Banerjee's legal team however quickly responded, saying that the ED was trying to "draw bogus links between the alleged scam and properties legally owned by Leaps & Bounds." His lawyer said, "attachment of properties is one thing and to establish a link between the attached properties and the recruitment scam is another... the ED is doing this in order to give my client a bad name before the elections." Reacting on the issue senior Bengal Minister Firhad Hakim said that he could not deny that some of those in power were

other relatives who may have been involved in the scam can escape the long arms of law. They will have to go to jail and they will definitely go to jail." The ED and CBI had been conducting a court-monitored investigation into the cash-for-job scam which has affected the lives and careers of more than 25,000 aspirants from primary to the higher secondary levels. According to the ED officials the properties attached by the agency include two high-rises at Kalighat in South Kolkata and some landed properties in North 24 Parganas. Meanwhile, in another startling revelation the CBI has told the High Court about how the Primary TET department had sold out 23 lakh OMR sheets to an Odisha paper mill functioning from Balasore district of that State. According to the CBI sources the total weight of the OMR sheets pertaining to 2014 TET examinations was about 26,000 kgs. At least three companies were involved in selling the OMR sheets, agency

sources said. The agency also told the court that soon after the OMR sheets were disposed off, a panel of 2,871 candidates, was created for appointment to the primary teachers' posts. Incidentally the exams to fill up 45,000 vacant posts were conducted by SB Ray and Company which had its offices around Bhawanipore and Kalighat region in South Kolkata. Senior officials in the Education Department said that OMR sheets were not for destruction and had to be preserved for future queries. "These are public records and have to be preserved for several years... but mysteriously enough they were sold away," a senior official in the Education Department said. In a passing reference the High Court had earlier said that prima facie it seemed that the properties of some top functionaries of the TMC had started witnessing a massive jump from 2014 when the TET scam took place for the first time.

Ships, aircraft remain deployed for maritime surveillance: Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Indian Navy on Wednesday said its ships and aircraft remain "mission deployed" for maintaining enhanced surveillance and undertaking maritime security operations. "In the last one week, Indian Naval Task Groups deployed in the area have investigated large number of fishing vessel and boarded vessels of interest," it said. The Navy substantially enhanced maritime surveillance efforts in view of recent incidents of attacks on commercial ships including that of the drone attack on MV Chem Pluto around 220 nautical miles South West of Port Blair last month. "Indian Navy continues to monitor maritime security situation in North/ Central Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden," the Navy said in a

statement. "Indian Naval ships and aircraft remain mission deployed for maintaining enhanced surveillance and undertaking maritime security operations," it said. It said Indian naval maritime patrol aircraft and remotely piloted aircraft are undertaking persistence surveillance over the area. Indian Navy is also coordinating with Coast Guard for maintaining enhanced surveillance within India's exclusive economic zone.

Delhi LG orders transfer of 21 IPS, DANICS officers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a major administrative reshuffle, Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena has ordered the transfer/posting of 21 Indian Police Service (IPS) and Delhi Andaman and Nicobar Islands Police Service (DANIPS) officers in the national capital. According to the official order issued Tuesday, Sunil Kumar Gautam, a 1989 batch IPS officer has been appointed as the Special CP/Human Resource Division, while Chhaya Sharma (1999-batch IPS) is now the Special Commissioner (Training) and Vikramjit Singh, a 2006-batch IPS officer, has been appointed as the Joint CP of the Western Range. Sagar Singh Kalsi, a 2010-batch IPS officer is now Addl. CP of the Eastern Range. His batch-mate, Satya Vir Katara, has been reassigned as the new Addl CP (Recruitment), as per the order. Other appointments include Vivek Kishore, a 1999-batch IPS officer, assumes the role of Joint CP/Crime, Rajiv Ranjan Singh (2010-IPS batch) is now Addl CP/Northern Range, and Meenu Chaudhary (2000-IPS batch IPS) as Joint CP/HQ while Chandan Chaudhary (2010-IPS batch) will hold the change of Addl CP/Licensing and Esha Pandey (2010-IPS batch) who

has been attached with CBI will oversee as Addl CP/Traffic while Shweta Chauhan (2010-IPS batch) who has been attached to Manipur Government has been given the post of Addl CP/HQ as well. On the other hand, AV Deshpande (2006-IPS batch) will now serve as Joint CP/Ops, while Sanjay Kumar Jain (2002-IPS batch) has been assigned the post of Joint CP/Southern Range. 2010 IPS batch officer DK Gupta has been posted as Addl CP/Traffic while his colleagues Rajender Singh Sagar and Rakesh Kumar have been posted as Addl CP/Armed Police, Addl CP/Security respectively. IPS officer Ankit Chouhan of 2013 batch has been posted as DCP/South District. DANIPS officers K Ramesh (2010 batch), Ashok Kumar (2012 batch) and Dabhi Anand Dinesh Bhai (2012 batch) have been posted as DCP/GA, Addl DCP/South II district and Addl DCP/Security respectively. Recently, the Union Home Ministry too had promoted a total 32 IPS officers to the DIG rank. These included AGMUT IPS officers Dr Eish Singhal, Rajiv Omprakash Pande, Benita Mary Jaiker and Santosh Kumar Meena, all from the 2010 batch who are on deputation, among others, as per the order.

Kejriwal...

From Page 1 "Kejriwal has at least two legal avenues available to him. He can move to court to challenge the summons, asserting his rights and seeking clarity on the allegations. Additionally, he can opt for anticipatory bail, a legal mechanism to safeguard against arrest while an investigation is underway," officials added. Citing the election to three Rajya Sabha seats from Delhi, where the terms of office of the incumbents will expire on January 27, 2024, he said, "Being National Convener of the Aam Aadmi Party, I am held up in the process and run up to these critical elections." "Being the Chief Minister of Delhi, I am also quite occupied in planning and preparations for several programmes and functions for the Republic Day i.e., 26th January 2024," he said. Kejriwal said he "would be happy to respond to any questionnaire" if the agency seeks any information or documents, which are in his knowledge or possession. Former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh are in judicial custody following their arrest in the Delhi excise policy-related money laundering probe. Questioning the timing of the ED summons, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday said the ED has still not answered in what capacity is Kejriwal was being summoned, as a witness or an accused, and alleged the entire excise policy case is politically motivated and an attempt to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Marathon checks to be conducted till Feb end as part of cleanliness drive: Mayor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi on Wednesday said a sanitation-related drive will be run across all 12 civic zones from the first week of January till February end, during which "marathon inspections" will be conducted to enhance the city's cleanliness. Addressing a press conference at the Civic Centre, she said all garbage vulnerable points that have been removed will also be inspected. Garbage vulnerable points are open places where trash is dumped regularly. Ahead of the G20 Summit, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) had announced a plan to identify all garbage vulnerable points and clear them in a timely manner. Oberoi had then said all zonal deputy commissioners of the

MCD were directed to take action in this regard. The Ab Delhi Hogi Saaf -- a citywide cleanliness drive -- was also started by the civic body on August 12. On December 29, Oberoi held a meeting with civic officials to review the work on the removal of garbage vulnerable points. Orders were issued that such points be identified and removed. These have largely been removed, she said and added nodal officers have been appointed in all zones for the job. "Now, we are taking this sanitation campaign forward. We held a meeting yesterday (on Tuesday) with officials, the municipal commissioner, deputy commissioners of all 12 zones... An action plan has been readied under this campaign," Oberoi said.

Peace a day after...

From Page 1

The truck drivers' strike against the new law passed by the government regarding hit-and-run cases has been called off. The Centre, on Tuesday evening, announced that the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which imposes a 10-year punishment and a fine of seven lakhs on drivers for not reporting fatal accidents, has been kept on hold. "The new penal actions have raised concerns among drivers and triggered protests across the state, causing heavy traffic jams on the highways and long queues at fuel stations. Fears arise that petrol pumps may run dry by Tuesday night." The president of the UP Border Transport and Traders Association, Sardar Manjeet Singh, who spearheaded the protest in Ghaziabad, said, "The strike was called off after a late afternoon meeting with the Union Home Secretary and representatives from All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC). We have been assured that the controversial law will not be implemented, and it has been kept in abeyance." Truck drivers, who went on strike to protest against the new hit-and-run law. "It was brought to my notice that the language used during the meeting between truck drivers and district administration in Shajapur was not appropriate for an officer. This government is the government of the poor, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we work for the upliftment of the poor. In such a situation, every officer, irrespective of their position, should respect the work of the poor and also respect their feelings," said Yadav.

Fog envelops Delhi, NCR...

From Page 1

The normal maximum temperature for Delhi at this time is 19.3 degrees Celsius, and the normal minimum is 6.9 degrees. According to IMD officials, "In most parts of the capital city, the maximum temperature has settled below the normal, which is the reason for the cold here." "In Delhi, the temperature is set to hold steady over the next two days, while in some areas, it may drop to around 6 or 7.5 degrees Celsius," said Kuldesh Srivastava, scientist and head of the Regional Weather Forecasting Centre. Srivastava added that the first 10 days of January are considered the coldest, but it is relatively warmer this year compared to the previous year. The cold snap has been particularly harsh for Delhi's homeless people, most of whom sleep on pavements. The cold wave has also been causing health issues, especially in Delhi, which experiences severe pollution levels during the winter months. Dense fog enveloped parts of Delhi, reducing visibility at Safdarjung and Palam to 500 metres and 600 metres, respectively, at 7:30 am, even as the air quality remained very poor. No flights were canceled or diverted until 10 am at Delhi's Indra Gandhi International Airport. A dense layer of fog also engulfed parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Rajasthan amid the prevailing cold wave conditions in North India on Wednesday.

Leopard captured by Forest Department after 7 hour effort

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM/NEW DELHI

A leopard that strayed into Narsinghpur village in Gurugram on Wednesday and injured a 13-year-old boy was captured by forest department officials after seven hours of efforts, police said. The leopard was spotted in the village around 6 am. A CCTV camera installed at a nearby building captured the feline roaming on the streets inside the village, they said. Varun Dahiya, assistant commissioner of police, said a team of 15 police personnel was deployed for the safe rescue of the animal and the safety of the residents. When the leopard entered a house, the teenage boy, Prabhat, came outside and was attacked by the animal, a senior police officer said. He got injuries on his legs and back and was rushed to civil hospital for treatment, the officer said.

Victory Sweep for...

From Page 1

The Adani Group stocks got bludgeoned on the bourses after Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations, including those about fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation, against the business conglomerate. The Adani Group dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements. One of the PILs had alleged that changes to the Securities and Exchange Board of India Act (SEBI Act) provided a 'shield and an excuse' for the

Kuno's Asha...

From Page 1

Like @Samarthj_4530 saying, "What a start to the new year! Please take extra care of them and ensure that all of them reach adulthood. This is a fantastic achievement, congratulations to Kuno management and all the researchers behind this project!" S i m i l a r l y , @PrabuddhaManush on his handle says, 'Please take extra care. These cubs should not die.' These observations follow the case of another female Cheetah, Jwala, who gave birth to four cubs in May last year. Unfortunately, three of them died soon after birth due to extreme weather

SC refuses reprieve to...

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"Natural justice is on two things. First, no cross examination of private individuals was allowed and secondly, when the motion for disqualification was moved in the House, members were not given the opportunity to examine the 439-page report of the ethics committee," he said. Justice Khanna asked whether Moitra has admitted to having shared her log-in credentials to

PM Modi rocks in...

From Page 1

"We have given them more than what they have asked for. But when we ask them how they have spent the money, they get furious," said the Prime Minister. Referring to the Christmas lunch he hosted for spiritual leaders and eminent persons of the Christian community recently, the Prime Minister mentioned that he was blessed by Christian spiritual leaders and wished by the citizens during the meeting. "The BJP has come to power in North Eastern States, which are Christian-majority States, and this itself is an answer to our critics. The BJP has embraced 'Sab Ka Saath,

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Abdul Ghani S/o Abdul Rashid, R/O F-107, Gali No-4, Shastrri Park, North East Delhi, Delhi-110053 hereby declare that I shall be known and addressed as Abdul Ghani for all purpose.

PD(233)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that Hema Jain for Self and as Guardian of Master Chinmay and Divye Jain (Self) (hereinafter called the Owners) claims to be owner and in possession of Apartment No. A3-1006, 10th Floor, Tower-A3, In the Project Solera, Sector-107, Gurugram, Haryana (hereinafter called the said property) by virtue of Law of Inheritance r/w Conveyance Deed Dated 06.02.2019 after the death of Sanjeev Kumar on 31.07.2021, said Hema Jain has also taken Permission from Court for Selling Master Chinmay Share and Said Owners has agreed to sell the said Property to Kirti Sharma And Said Kirti Sharma has agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients, IDFC FIRST BANK LTD, Rajendra Place Branch, New Delhi. Any person's having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 10 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan against the said property and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof.

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GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR
Mail i.d secbbsr@gmail.com
B-1531
E-procurement Tender Call Notice No.24 of 2023-24
No.4424 (Estg.) Bhubaneswar the 29 December-2023
The Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for two numbers road work and two numbers building work to be received in online bidding, double cover system for construction work as detailed in: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5:00 P.M of 04.01.2024 to 5:00 P.M of 18.01.2024. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 11:00 A.M. of 19.01.2024 in the Office of the Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar.
Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersodisha.gov.in.
Addendum / Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.
Sd/-Er.P.K.Mohanty
Chief Construction Engineer
Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar
OIPR-34005/11/0008/2324

SC refuses reprieve to...
which Singhvi replied in the affirmative. "Now, the second question. Can the court go into the merit of the matter?" the bench asked Singhvi to which he replied that an opposition MP cannot be disqualified on such flimsy grounds. Singhvi added, "If you pick every irregularity and start expelling people, then there will be no democracy left." On December 8, after a heated debate in the Lok Sabha over the panel report, during which Moitra was not allowed to speak, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi moved a motion to expel the TMC MP from the House for "unethical conduct". The motion was adopted by a voice vote. The ethics committee found Moitra guilty of "unethical conduct" and contempt of the House as she had shared her Lok Sabha members' portal credentials -- user ID and password -- with unauthorised people, which had an irrepressible impact on national security, Joshi had said. The committee had also recommended that in view of the "highly objectionable, unethical, heinous and criminal conduct" of Moitra, an intense legal and institutional inquiry be initiated by the government with a set deadline.

BJP slams Kejriwal for skipping ED summons for third time

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday mounted a concerted and savage attack on AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal for ignoring the Enforcement Directorate's summons for the third time, saying the Delhi chief minister is shaking in fear. The BJP further said Kejriwal is not appearing before the Enforcement Directorate because he knows that he is the "kingpin" of the alleged liquor policy scam. The party also called him 'kattar beimaan' (staunchly corrupt) and claimed that Kejriwal did not want the truth to come out.

The BJP's reaction came after Kejriwal skipped the third summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy case and sent a written reply calling the notice "illegal". Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit reminded Kejriwal about his 'fight against corruption' and called him a "cheater of his own ideology".

Following the development, BJP National Spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla hit out at the Delhi Chief Minister and alleged he had "something to hide". "Today, once again Arvind Kejriwal has skipped the third



summon. This shows that there is something to hide, and that is why he is absconding like a criminal. Courts have not given bail to Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, and the courts have established that there is a money trail, despite all this they are playing the same victim card," (sic) he wrote on X and posted a video.

Reacting sharply, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said, "Outright dishonest and sinister Arvind Kejriwal is shaking in fear and making one after another lame excuse to skip ED summons."

"It won't be wrong to say that Kejriwal is afraid today because he knows that his arrest is imminent, he is aware that he is the kingpin and has no

answers (to ED's questions). That's why he is trying to evade the process of law," Bhatia told reporters at a press conference at the party headquarters. The BJP leader said it would have never happened in the history of independent India that someone "ordered" a probe agency to withdraw its summons.

"But a corrupt and sinister Arvind Kejriwal tells ED to withdraw its summons. Mr Arvind Kejriwal, you are not above the law," he charged, saying it is the right of the probe agencies to take action against corruption "as per evidence".

Bhatia said that if Kejriwal felt that the ED had issued summons to him out of any alleged "political vendetta", he should

have approached the court seeking relief. "Such dramas will not help because Kejriwal knows that handcuffs are coming closer to him," Bhatia alleged. Kejriwal, who once used to talk about eradicating corruption in India, has himself become a "corrupt termite" in politics, and he has a misconception that he is above the law. Bhatia alleged Bhatia also targeted the INDIA bloc of opposition parties, questioning their "silence" on the issue of corruption.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said the way Kejriwal is avoiding the ED summons clearly shows that he does not have faith in the administrative and judicial system of the country... If Kejriwal finds the ED notices wrong, he should go to the courts but he will not do that. "He knows that his is a clear case of corruption and it is almost impossible to get relief from the courts. The people to whom Kejriwal had shown dreams in the year 2013 are feeling cheated today", Sachdeva claimed. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also advised Kejriwal to join the investigation in the liquor scam to avoid further embarrassment in future.

BJP hatching conspiracy to arrest Kejriwal before LS polls, alleges AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday accused the BJP-led Centre of hatching a conspiracy to arrest Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to stop him from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls. Kejriwal on Wednesday skipped the third summons issued by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy case and sent a written reply calling the notice illegal. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), however, asserted that Kejriwal was ready to cooperate with the agency but claimed the summons were sent with the intention of arresting him. "Why has the notice been sent right before elections? The notice is an attempt to stop Kejriwal from campaigning in elections," the party alleged. AAP leader and Delhi cabinet minister Atishi called the summons a "political" vendetta and said the ED has not responded to Kejriwal's repeat-



ed written requests seeking clarity on why he was being called for questioning. "Arvind Kejriwal has repeatedly asked the ED to tell in what capacity he is being summoned. He has also asked the ED to send all the concerned inquiries in the form of a questionnaire which will be answered duly," Atishi said, adding that the AAP is not afraid of "such summons". "The ED and the CBI have become a political tool for the Bharatiya Janata Party to attack the opposition leaders," she said. Corroborating her views, Delhi minister and AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj questioned

the timing of the ED summons. "The ED has still not answered in what capacity he (Kejriwal) is being summoned - as a witness or an accused," Bharadwaj said while addressing a press conference here. "The entire excise policy case is political and an attempt to stop Kejriwal from campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls. The BJP-led Centre has hatched a conspiracy to get him arrested," he added. Bharadwaj said former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia, who has been in jail for nearly a year, will be proven innocent sooner or later.

The minister also claimed that the threat of arrests and inquiries by the ED and the Central Bureau of Investigation only looms over the opposition leaders while those from the BJP don't face any action in cases against them.

AAP Delhi state convener Gopal Rai said they were ready to cooperate if the ED legally wants answers from them but were "not bound" to answer BJP's summons.

"ED is BJP and BJP is ED. Arvind Kejriwal asked some questions to the ED (in his written reply), but they are yet to respond. Meanwhile, BJP leaders are responding on behalf of the ED. Why? It seems like BJP leaders have become the spokespersons for the ED. This is BJP's summons we are not bound to respond to them," Rai, who is also Delhi's Environment minister said. AAP's chief national spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar said that the BJP is only afraid of one leader -- Kejriwal.

LG approves CBI probe against forest officials in ₹223 cr graft case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has granted permission for a CBI investigation against two officials of the Delhi government's Forests and Wildlife department in an alleged Rs 223-crore corruption case. In another case, Saxena has given his go-ahead to the Anti-Corruption Branch to conduct an investigation against two senior nurses of a Delhi government hospital in an alleged bribery case involving Rs 60,000.

According to Raj Niwas official, in both the cases, Saxena approved the proposals for investigation under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act. He observed that it is in the interest of justice to investigate and conduct inquiries against the accused, the Raj Niwas officials said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a case against Paras Nath Yadav and Alam Singh Rawat, the then senior account officer and the assistant account officer, respectively, in the Forests and Wildlife department for allegedly entering into a criminal conspiracy with LA Khan -- the erstwhile senior branch manager of Bank of Baroda's Paharganj branch -- and others. They were allegedly involved in transferring Rs 223 crore "illegally" and "unauthorisedly" from the 'SUNDRY' account to a fake savings account in the name of Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) at the same branch on the basis of a forged letter, purportedly issued by the Forests and Wildlife department, the officials said.

A file seeking permission to investigate Yadav under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act by the CBI was submitted to Saxena by the Directorate of Vigilance through the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA). The Directorate of Vigilance stated that the CBI, in a letter dated July 12, 2023, submitted that the investigations conducted so far prima facie brought forward the role of two officials in the case of alleged



financial irregularities pertaining to the Forest and Wildlife department. In the alleged bribery case against two women Health department staff, the Anti-Corruption Branch accused them of demanding Rs 60,000 each from two nursing officers for allowing them "light duty". The accused have been identified as Chanchal Rani Pisalla and Rajnesh Verma, then posted at the GB Pant Hospital as deputy nursing superintendent and nursing officer, respectively. One of the nursing officers also alleged that both the accused had already taken Rs 42,000 for exemption of duty from COVID-19 desk. At present Pisalla is posted at Guru Nanak Eye Centre while Verma has been posted in Aruna Asaf Ali Hospital.

Delhi Police sets up 14 members committee to study new criminal laws

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has set up a 14-member committee to study the three new criminal laws and prepare study material for its personnel. The three laws -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam and Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita -- have been cleared by President Draupadi Murmu and are likely to be notified later this month.

The panel will be headed by Special Commissioner of Police Chhaya Sharma and comprises Deputy Commissioner of Police Joy Turkey, Additional DCP Uma Shankar, Assistant Commissioner of Police Hari Singh, Inspectors Rajiv Kumar, Rajeev Bhardwaj, Naresh Malik, Devender Singh, Arun Kumar, Suresh Kumar, Anil Berwal and Sanjeev Kumar and two sub-inspectors Somveer and Rajni Kant.

The committee, under the chairmanship of Sharma, will have to prepare course material for the investigating officers of the force for practical understanding and study of new provisions and changes in the procedures, an official said.

An order dated January 2 from the Delhi Police Headquarters said the com-



mittee may rope in lawyers and retired police personnel to fine-tune the course material to ensure that it is in sync with the judicial process. The co-opted members will also be useful later in conducting classes for Delhi Police personnel and train them in practical applications of BNS, BSA and BNSS, the order said. According to officials, the Delhi Police has appointed retired ACPs Rajender Singh and Ram Singh and criminal lawyers Raunak Singh and Akhand Pratap Singh as the co-opt members. "This committee shall also endeavour to update the skills of the investigating officers under the new laws as mentioned above so that once the notification for application and change over from old

CrPC, IPC and IEA to new BNSS, BNS and BSA respectively is done, our IOs or staff should be well aware of the procedural aspects as well as the nuances of the changes made in the new sections," the order said. The committee may begin to create new training material to be used by Delhi Police for its officers as ready reckoners and for study at Delhi Police Academy.

The Committee shall also be consulting the District DCPs and Joint CPs of Delhi Police for improvements in the material and simultaneously consulting NPA (National Police Academies), NLU (National Law Universities) and Judicial Academy for good references and training materials to be incorporated in our documents, the order added.

27 years old model murdered in Gurugram hotel, three arrested

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

In a sensational case, a 27-year-old Gurugram-based model identified as Divya Pahuja was allegedly murdered under suspicious circumstances at a hotel in City Point in Gurugram, police said.

It is being said that the woman was allegedly killed by Abhijeet Singh the owner of City Point Hotel where the murder took place and his two associates Prakash and Indraj on Tuesday, police said.

However, sources said that the trio accused had been arrested by the Gurugram crime branch earlier in the day. Both Prakash and Indraj used to work in Abhijeet's hotel.

Sources said, Abhijeet killed the woman and then paid his associates Rs 10 lakh to dispose of her body. The police have also collected CCTV footage where the culprits can be seen escaping the crime scene the crime spot in a blue BMW car, carrying Divya's body in the boot. Apart from this, the CCTV footage, shows Abhijeet, the young woman, and another person arriving at the hotel reception on January 2 and proceeding to room number 111.

Later, on the same night, Abhijeet and others were seen



dragging Divya's body inside the hotel wrapped in a sheet. "Based on CCTV footage, the city police have started investigating the matter with several teams from the Crime Branch conducting raids in Punjab and other areas to recover the body.

A case of murder has been registered against Abhijeet and others based on the complaint filed by Divya's family," said a senior police officer requesting anonymity.

Divya's family has also alleged that her murder was conspired by gangster Sandeep Gadoli's family, in collusion with Abhijeet. Divya, reportedly the girlfriend of gangster Sandeep Gadoli, who was killed in a controversial encounter in Mumbai in February 2016, was also accused of being a police informant at that time. The former model and prime accused in the murder of gangster Sandeep Gadoli was granted bail by Bombay High Court in June last year.

28 Greater Noida societies issued notices for inoperative STPs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than two dozen housing societies in Greater Noida Extension, also known as Greater Noida West, have been served notices over alleged non-functional sewage treatment plants, officials said.

In total, notices have been issued to 28 societies by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA), which has warned of strict action against the developers of these societies.

Last month, the GNIDA had issued notices to 37 group housing societies over "improper" disposal of sewage. In Greater Noida, it is mandatory for all projects built on an area of 20,000 sq metres or more to build their own STPs and keep them functional.

However, residents of several societies were continuously complaining to the GNIDA that their STPs have not been built. In some societies, STPs have been built but they are not functional.

"The Greater Noida Authority has issued notices to 28 more builder societies that are not constructing and operating STPs as per the standards to treat the sewerage of the society and sought clarification within a week. If a satisfactory response is not received, action will be taken against them as per the terms of the lease deed," the GNIDA said in a statement on Tuesday.

"Residents of different societies of Greater Noida had complained to GNIDA CEO NG Ravi Kumar that sewerage was being discharged into the drain without being treated through the STP. Even in a survey of the GNIDA, STPs built in many societies were not found as per the standards. Some of these STPs are not built as per the standards and some are not being operated properly," it added. Among the societies which have been issued notices are Gaur City 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 14, 16 Avenue, Golf Home, Park Avenue 1, Galaxy



North Avenue, Ajnara Le Garden, Gulshan Belena, Nirala Aspire, Panchsheel Greens Two, Casa Green, La Solara Grande, Royal Court, Victory One, Kabanas Green, Ratan Pearl, Supertech Eco Village Two and Three, Panchsheel Green 1, Ajnara Homes, Radha Sky Garden, French Apartment, and Gaur Saundaryam, the GNIDA said.

GNIDA's Additional CEO Ashutosh Dwivedi said notices were earlier issued to 37 builders by the sewer department. Now notices have been issued for 28 more builder societies. Dwivedi said that builders who have not constructed STPs in their residential projects should build them and start operating them soon in compliance with the NGT orders. "Strict action will be taken against those who do not do so. Heavy fines will be imposed on such societies. Despite this, if there is no improvement, legal action will be taken in view of the orders of the NGT," he added.

Junior wrestlers protest over losing one year, blame Sakshi, Punia, Phogat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing crisis in Indian wrestling took a new twist on Wednesday when hundreds of junior wrestlers assembled at Jantar Mantar for a symbolic three-hour protest against the loss of one crucial year of their careers, a situation for which they blamed top grapplers Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat. Loaded in buses, the junior wrestlers arrived from different parts of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi, catching the police unawares.

Close to 300 of them came from Arya Samaj Akhara in Chhaprauli, Baghat while many others came from the Virender Wrestling Academy in Narela. The security personnel struggled to control them as they shouted slogans against Punia, Malik and Phogat.

Braving cold conditions, the junior wrestlers arrived at Jantar Mantar at 11am and left after three hours with a warning that if the government does not lift the WFI suspension within 10 days, they will start returning their awards.

The protesters were carrying banners that read: "UWW (United World Wrestling) save our wrestling from these 3 wrestlers". Soon after the election of new office-bearers, the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) announced the hosting



of the Under-15 and Under-20 Nationals in Gonda, UP but the ministry suspended the body, leading to the cancellation of the proposed tournament. Several wrestlers, who could have competed in the junior categories for one last time, lost the opportunity. "It was a symbolic protest. We are giving 10 days' time to the government to revoke the suspension of the new WFI and allow it to hold age group nationals. "If they don't do it, we will start returning our Arjuna and other awards to the government just like Bajrang and Vinesh have done," said Greco-Roman wrestler Sunil Rana, who is an Arjuna awardee and a bronze medalist from the 2023 Asian Games. Muzaffarnagar stadium coach Pradeep Kumar said, "More

than 90 per cent of Akharas (training centres) in UP are with us in this protest. There are only three wrestlers on one side and lakhs on the other. They have spoilt the careers of lakhs of wrestlers across the country."

"These people have no respect for national awards. They are leaving them on the roads," Kumar added, referring to Punia and Phogat returning their government honours.

"They kept saying that they were protesting for women and junior wrestlers but they have spoilt careers of lakhs after earning all the laurels. Their protest is only to get top WFI posts. Once that happens, they will stop all protests," added Kumar. Ironically, almost a year back at the same protest site, the top

three wrestlers had managed to draw huge support for their cause when they called for the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, accusing him of sexually harassing women wrestlers.

Thousands of people from different sections of society, including farmers' groups, social workers, politicians, women's groups and members of the wrestling fraternity, came out to support Sakshi, Vinesh and Bajrang.

The three are now facing protests from within their community, with those assembled at Jantar Mantar accusing them of ruining their careers.

Since January 2023, national camps and competitions have been on hold as the WFI has been suspended twice and an ad-hoc panel is running the

sport. "An entire year for these junior wrestlers has gone waste. The new WFI had taken the decision for the welfare of the wrestlers who had not seen even district or state-level competitions, leave aside the nationals," said Vivek Malik who belongs to the Arya Samaj Akhara in Baghat.

"But the new body was suspended. This body was elected on the instructions of the court but it wasn't allowed to work and prove itself even for three days. The suspension should be lifted and the WFI should be allowed to function."

"They had the task of completing the wrestling calendar before December 31, so what wrong did they do to warrant the suspension?" he asked.

In a memorandum, Sunil Rana, coach Naresh Dahiya, wrestlers Nikki and Varun Gujjar apart from Rajendra 'pehlwan', demanded that "the government should listen to not just the three wrestlers but the entire fraternity."

"We request that the government lifts WFI suspension and take strict action against the wrestlers who insulted the government honours by leaving their awards on the road."

Punia had returned his Padma Shri while Vinesh had returned her Arjuna and Khel Ratna awards, saying that these awards mean nothing when they are struggling to get justice.

Jaishankar to begin Nepal visit today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will pay a two-day visit to Nepal beginning Thursday with an aim to boost cooperation in an array of areas including hydro-power, connectivity, digital payments and trade.

It is expected that both sides will sign an agreement on the modalities that would facilitate Nepal exporting 10,000 megawatt of power to India in the next 10 years in line with a decision taken by the leadership of the two countries in June.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Jaishankar will co-chair along with his Nepalese counterpart N P Sarda a meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Commission, the highest bilateral platform for reviewing the overall ties. "External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit Kathmandu from January 4 to 5 on the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Nepal, NP Sarda for co-chairing the seventh meeting of the India-Nepal Joint



Commission," it said. In Kathmandu, the external affairs minister is scheduled to call on President Ramchandra Paudel and Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'. The India-Nepal Joint Commission was established in 1987 and provides a platform for both sides to review all aspects of the bilateral partnership. "During the visit, the external affairs minister will also call on the leadership of Nepal and meet prominent political figures," the MEA said in a statement. "Nepal is a priority partner of India under its

'Neighbourhood First' policy. The visit is in keeping with the tradition of high level exchanges between two close and friendly neighbours," it said. Nepal is important for India in the context of its overall strategic interests in the region, and the leaders of the two countries have often noted the age-old "Roti Beti" relationship. The country shares a border of over 1,850 km with five Indian states - Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Land-locked Nepal relies heavily on India for the transportation of goods and services.

EAM holds talks with Ukraine counterpart

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday held a "useful" conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba focusing on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Kyiv's peace formula and ways to advance bilateral ties.

The phone conversation came days after Jaishankar paid a five-day visit to Russia during which he held extensive talks with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and called on President Vladimir Putin. "A useful conversation with FM @DmytroKuleba of Ukraine today. Discussed advancing our bilateral cooperation in the year ahead. Exchanged views on the ongoing conflict in Ukraine," the external affairs minister said on X. On his part, Kuleba said he conveyed to his

Indian counterpart the "peace formula" and Ukraine's plan for the 'Global Peace Summit' of leaders.

"My first call in 2024 was with @DrSJaishankar on Ukrainian-Indian relations. I informed my counterpart of Russia's recent escalation of terror and mass air attacks, which caused civilian suffering and destruction," he said in a post on X.

"We discussed further cooperation on the Peace Formula. In this regard, I informed my counterpart of Ukraine's vision for the Global Peace Summit of leaders," he said.

"We agreed to hold the first meeting of the India-Ukraine Inter-Governmental Commission since 2018 in the near future," Kuleba said. He added that the "rejuvenation of this primary mechanism of our bilateral ties will allow us to jointly move forward in a comprehensive manner."

ISRO to launch communications satellite onboard SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

In a first, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch a 4.7 tonne communications satellite onboard SpaceX's Falcon-9 rocket in the second quarter of this year, NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) announced on Wednesday.

The GSAT-20 communications satellite is aimed at meeting the country's broadband, in-flight and maritime communications (IFMC) and cellular backhaul services needs, the NSIL said.

The GSAT-20, which will be renamed as GSAT-N2, will have Ka-Ka band high throughput satellite (HTS) capacity with 32 beams having pan-India coverage, including Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep.

"Bulk of the HTS capacity onboard GSAT-20 satellite has already been secured by Indian service providers," the NSIL said, without specifying the buyer.

ISRO's heavy satellite launch



rocket GSLV-Mk3 is capable of putting into orbit 4,000 kg payloads in Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO), forcing the space agency to seek the launch services of Falcon 9 rocket from the SpaceX stable.

"NSIL is realising GSAT-20 satellite through ISRO and will be launched on-board Falcon-9 under a launch service contract between M/s NSIL and M/s SpaceX, USA," the NSIL said in a statement. SpaceX's Falcon-9 is capable of placing 8,300 kg payloads into GTO.

Till now, ISRO has been using the services of French

company Arianespace for launching heavier satellites. ISRO is now developing the Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV) which will have the capability to put a 10,000 kg payload in GTO. "GSAT-20 weighing 4,700 kg offers HTS capacity of nearly 48 gbps. The satellite has been specifically designed to meet the demanding service needs of remote/unconnected regions," the NSIL said.

As part of space sector reforms announced by the government in June 2020, NSIL was mandated to build, launch, own and operate satellites in "demand-driven mode" for meeting service needs of the user.

As part of this, NSIL successfully undertook its first demand-driven satellite mission - GSAT-24 in June 2022, in which the capacity onboard the satellite was fully secured by M/s TataPlay. GSAT-24 mission was fully funded by NSIL. Presently, NSIL owns and operates 11 communication satellites in orbit.

JK terror, cyber fraud, Khalistani threat on top cops meeting agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Terror threats in Jammu and Kashmir, cyber frauds and activities of pro-Khalistani groups are among the key issues to be discussed at the three-day conference of DGPs and IGP's in Jaipur, beginning January 5.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with the country's top police officers before addressing them at a formal session. Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be present throughout the conference that will span several sessions. Implementation of the recent-

ly-enacted three criminal laws, the Maoist problem, inter-state police coordination and issues to be handled during the general elections are some of the other major issues expected to be discussed during the meeting, a Union Home Ministry official said.

About 250 officers in the rank of Directors General of Police (DGPs) and Inspectors General of Police (IGPs) will physically attend the conference while more than 200 others are likely to attend virtually.

Many officers have been tasked with delivering presentations on specific subjects such as counterterrorism, online fraud,

cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, activities of pro-Khalistani groups and Left Wing Extremism, among others, the official said. There will be detailed deliberations on how to face all these emerging internal security challenges. Till 2013, the annual meet had been held in New Delhi.

The following year, after the Modi government came to power, it was decided to hold the event, organised by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and the Intelligence Bureau, outside the national capital. Accordingly, it was first held in Guwahati in 2014, Rann of Kutch in 2015,



the National Police Academy in Hyderabad in 2016, the BSF Academy at Tekanpur in 2017, Pune in 2019.

In 2020, the meet was held virtually during the Covid pandemic and in hybrid mode in Lucknow in 2021. The confer-

ence was held in New Delhi in January 2023.

The number of business sessions and topics have increased significantly, with a focus on improving policing in the service of the people.

Before 2014, the deliberations largely focused on national security matters. Since 2014, these conferences have a twin focus on national security as well as core policing issues, including prevention and detection of crime, community policing, law and order and improving the police's image, among others, another official said.

Earlier, the conference was

Delhi-centric with officers coming together only for the meet. Residing on the same premises over two to three days has served to build a heightened sense of unity among officers of all cadres and organisations since 2014, the official added.

Direct interaction of the police's top brass with the head of government has resulted in a convergence of views on crucial challenges faced by the country and the emergence of doable recommendations, the official further said.

In the past few years, the topics have been selected after detailed discussions with the

highest echelons of the police service. Once selected, several interactions on presentations are held before committees of DGPs to encourage participation and incorporate ideas from the field and from younger officers.

As a result, all presentations are now broad-based, content-intensive and carry a set of cogent, actionable recommendations.

Since 2015, detailed follow-up of recommendations of past conferences has become the norm and is the topic of the first business session, attended by the prime minister and the home minister, the official said.

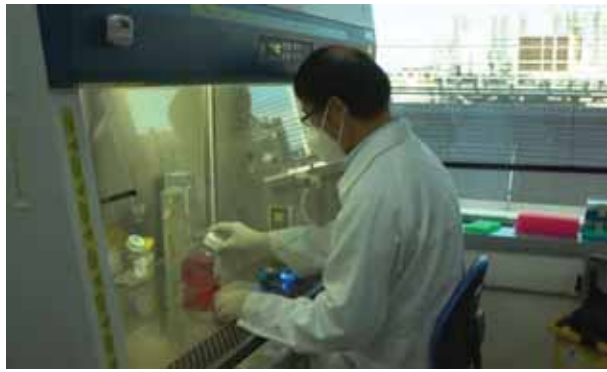
Researchers working to find ways to replace need for regular insulin shots

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Giving a ray of hope to millions of people with diabetes, a team of Australian researchers are inching closer to regenerate insulin in pancreatic stem cells and replace the need for regular insulin injections. Their study is published in the Nature scientific journal.

More than 530 million adults are living with diabetes worldwide, and that number is expected to rise to 643 million by 2030. Situation in India too is not encouraging as it is among the high-occurrence countries of people living with Type 1 diabetes that is predicted to surge by 2040. As of today, there are approximately 8.6 lakh people with Type 1 diabetes in India with one in six young people dying without a diagnosis.

This disease-modifying treatment also represents a promising solution for the significant number of people living with insulin dependent diabetes. The team from Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute demonstrated that the newly-made insulin cells can respond to glucose and produce insulin following stimulation with two US Food and Drug Administration-approved drugs in as little as 48 hours. Further, they confirmed that this pathway of awakening the insulin-producing cells is viable in age groups from 7 to 61, providing much-needed



insights into the mechanisms underlying the regeneration of beta cells.

Using pancreatic cells derived from a child and adult type 1 diabetic donors, and from a non-diabetic person, the team led by Professor Sam El-Osta demonstrated how insulin-producing cells that are destroyed in people with type 1 diabetes can be regenerated into glucose sensing and functionally secreting insulin cells. While current pharmaceutical options for diabetes treatment help control blood glucose levels, they do not prevent, stop, or reverse the destruction of insulin-secreting cells.

The novel therapeutic approach holds the potential to become the first disease modifying treatment for type 1 diabetes by facilitating glucose responsive insulin production by harnessing the patient's remaining pancreatic cells, thereby enabling people living with diabetes to potentially achieve independence from round-the-clock

insulin injections. The development of novel pharmacological therapies aimed at restoring pancreas function addresses the stark reality of donor organ shortages.

"We consider this regenerative approach an important advance towards clinical development," Professor El-Osta said. "Until now, the regenerative process has been incidental, and lacking confirmation, more importantly the epigenetic mechanisms that govern such regeneration in humans remains poorly understood."

This research shows that 48 hours of stimulation with small molecule inhibitors is sufficient to restore insulin production from damaged pancreatic cells. The next step is to investigate the novel regenerative approach in a preclinical model. The aim is to develop these inhibitors as drugs to restore insulin production in people living with diabetes, the team said.

India logs 602 fresh Covid cases; 5 deaths in 24 hours

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

A day after reporting a decrease in corona cases, the infections are once again on rise with the country recording 602 new infections in the last 24 hours as per the Government data while five new fatalities were also registered in the same span. Kerala saw two deaths, while Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Punjab reported one death each.

On Tuesday, India had reported 573 new cases of COVID-19 and two additional fatalities related to the virus occurred, with one each in Karnataka and Haryana.

As of the latest update from INSACOG, the country has reported a total of 312 cases of the COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1. The uptick in the mutant variant comes amid health authorities in the United Kingdom identifying new symptoms associated with the latest Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1, including anxiety and sleep disturbances. JN.1, which belongs to the Omicron lineage, was initially detected in August and has since spread to more than 40 countries including India. Of 312 cases of the COVID-19 sub-variant JN.1 in India, nearly 47% of these cases are concentrated in Kerala. The presence of the JN.1 sub-variant has been identified in ten states and Union territories.



The states reporting JN.1 cases include Kerala (147), Goa (51), Gujarat (34), Maharashtra (26), Tamil Nadu (22), Delhi (16), Karnataka (eight), Rajasthan (five), Telangana (two), and Odisha (one), as per data from the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG).

In December, INSACOG's data indicates that 279 Covid cases in the country were linked to the JN.1 sub-variant, while 33 cases were detected in November. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has designated JN.1 as a "variant of interest" due to its rapid spread, although it is considered to pose a "low" global public health risk. Given the rise in Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant, the Centre has urged states and Union territories to remain vigilant. Ensuring effective pandemic preparedness and disease surveillance, deeply rooted in robust health systems accessible to all individuals, is of paramount importance for enhanced protection against

significant disease outbreaks. Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said recently after virtually inaugurating the NCDC regional branch in Assam, along with six state branches in Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Odisha, West Bengal, and Mizoram. Additionally, he inaugurated BSL-3 labs in Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand, all conducted virtually from the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

Covid-19 cases being reported recently are mild infections and that there was no reason to worry, Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said, adding that the situation in Delhi is still under control and there was no huge rise in cases.

Meanwhile, the Karnataka Government has started administering Covid vaccines in district hospitals starting Wednesday. Those aged above 60 and suffering from comorbidities and those who have not taken the precautionary dose yet can avail this facility. Dr K Ravi, chairman of the Covid-19 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) in Karnataka said that vaccination is advised for those who have not taken the precautionary dose. "Preference should be given to the elderly and those with comorbidities. Individuals already vaccinated with three doses need not take the vaccination," he said.

2,274 cadets to take part in NCC Republic Day Camp 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

A total of 2,274 cadets will take part in the NCC Republic Day Camp 2024 here, which will see enhanced participation of girl cadets this year, its director general said on Wednesday.

During a press briefing at Delhi Cantonment, Director General of the National Cadet Corps (NCC), Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh also said that there is a "steady increase" in enrollment of girl cadets in the NCC every year.

The NCC R-Day Camp which captures the essence of India, will be inaugurated by the vice president and culminate with the PM Rally.

"For this year's NCC Republic Day Camp, we have 2,274 cadets and enhanced participation of girl cadets this year, as 907 of them will be there in this year's camp," he said.

A total of 2,155 cadets, including 710 girls, drawn from all 28 states and eight union territories, had participated in the nearly month-long camp in 2023, according to an official statement issued by the government last year. "Various competitions will be held, starting from best contingent, best cadet and horse riding. The camp captures the essence of NCC training imparted throughout the year," Lt Gen Singh told

reporters on Wednesday. The camp takes place at the Cariappa Parade Ground in Delhi Cantonment.

During his briefing, the DG, NCC gave a presentation on the 2024 camp and later shared information on the NCC's plan to make the training of cadets more relevant to contemporary needs.

"We are in the process of revising the NCC syllabus, which is a continuous process. We want to make this training contemporary, we want to include the latest facets, we are in the process of analysing how we can train cadets on drones, improve life skills and make the training more contemporary and relevant," he said.

The top officer said for instance for map reading, the NCC has already included GPS and satellite imagery training for them.

"So, one is to make our training more contemporary. The second aspect is to improve the infrastructure for training, we have NCC training academies at various places, and we have training aides there. So, the next effort would be to improve the infrastructure so that we can train the cadets well, and the training aides get the latest equipment. And, thirdly also to look after the welfare of all the staff of NCC," Lt Gen Singh said in response to a query.

Wheat production may touch record 114 million tonnes in 2023-2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Wheat production is expected to touch a new record of 114 million tonnes in the ongoing 2023-24 crop year on higher coverage and provided weather conditions remain normal. The last leg of sowing of wheat, the main rabi (winter) crop, is underway and will continue till next week. Till last week, wheat was planted in 320.54 lakh hectares, as per the official data.

Wheat production stood at a record 110.55 million tonnes in the 2022-23 crop year (July-June), compared to 107.7 million tonnes achieved in the pre-

vious year. "We expect that total area under cultivation of wheat will increase this year and God willingly if the climate is alright, the production will be 114 million tonne that's what the agriculture ministry has indicated informally to us," Food Corporation of India (FCI) Chairman and Managing Director Ashok K Meena said.

Area sown to wheat crop is also showing an increase compared to the last year. There was a deficit of one per cent in some states but that will also be made up in the first week of January, he said. "If that is the level of production, we are very confident that

we will be able to procure more than our requirement and also additional stocks needed for the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) for next year," he noted.

When asked if the central nodal agency plans to step up procurement considering the opening wheat balance of 76 lakh tonnes to be on April 1, which is just enough to meet the buffer requirement, the FCI chief said: "We will try our best to provide minimum support price (MSP) to all farmers. Because of the open market sale, the indications are prices have stabilised and are not higher than it was last year. "Since the wheat MSP is high-



er by 7 per cent than the last year, we hope that lot of farmers will be willing to give their produce to the FCI," Meena

said. Last year, the FCI's wheat procurement stood at 26.2 million tonnes, higher than the annu-

al buffer requirement of 18.4 million tonnes. This year's wheat crop will be ready for harvest from April onwards.

FCI is the central nodal agency that buys rice and wheat to ensure MSP to the farmers and distributes the grains for free to 81 crore poor via ration shops. It also uses surplus grain via OMSS to boost domestic availability and check prices.

According to FCI, 5.9 million tonnes of wheat has been sold in the open market through weekly e-auction under the OMSS since June 2023, which has helped stabilise the retail prices. "There has been hardly any increase in retail wheat prices on YoY basis," the FCI

Chairman said, adding that wheat OMSS will continue only till March 15.

However in the case of rice, there is "of course an uptick in prices visible in the open market but the mere fact that we are making huge quantity of rice available through OMSS, I hope that the prices will also not increase substantially," he said.

There has been a lukewarm response for rice under OMSS and so far the FCI has been able to sell only 1.45 lakh tonnes at Rs 29 per kg through weekly auctions. The FCI is using surplus foodgrain stock of 15.6 million tonnes for undertaking market intervention to sta-

bilise the prices of two key commodities.

"Our OMSS intervention has helped stabilise prices of these two commodities. Rice and wheat being important part of CPI basket, we would hope that food related inflation will get controlled to the maximum possible," he added.

With a few takers for FCI rice under the OMSS, the FCI chief said there is a proposal under consideration to retail the grain under the 'Bharat' brand. The FCI has informed the food ministry that it has enough rice stock for the same. "The quantity and price at which Bharat rice to be sold is the decision of the ministry," he said.

Lakshadweep small in size, big in heart: Modi

PTI ■ KAVARATTI

Reaching out to the people of the Muslim-dominated Lakshadweep, which witnessed massive protests by opposition parties against reforms introduced by his government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the archipelago is small, but its heart is large.

The Prime Minister was here to inaugurate and lay the foundation for various projects worth Rs 1,150 crore in the Union Territory.

The development projects cover technology, energy, water resources, healthcare and education sectors.

The projects were launched at a function attended by hundreds of islanders including women and children whom Modi referred to as his "kudumbangal" (family members) in Malayalam.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister remarked that the beauty of Lakshadweep is

beyond words and mentioned visiting Agatti, Bangaram and Kavaratti to meet the citizens.

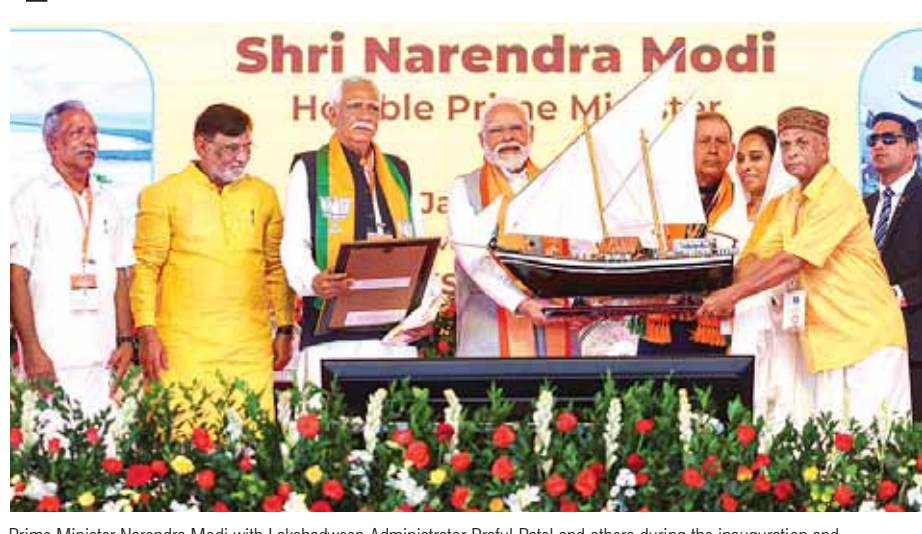
"Even though the geographical area of Lakshadweep is small, the hearts of the people are as deep as the ocean. I am overwhelmed by the love and blessings I am receiving here. I express my gratitude to you all," said Modi, who reached the islands on Tuesday.

He announced the development of a special plan for Lakshadweep under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, focusing on its unique attractions.

Emphasising its potential, he highlighted two blue-flag beaches and upcoming water villa projects on Kadmat and Suheli islands.

Lakshadweep is emerging as a top cruise tourism destination, experiencing a five-fold increase in tourist visits compared to five years ago, he said.

Modi encouraged the people to explore their own country, urging them to visit at least 15



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Lakshadweep Administrator Praful Patel and others during the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of various developmental projects in Kavaratti on Wednesday

places before considering international travel.

He specifically recommended exploring Lakshadweep, assuring that its beauty surpasses many global destinations.

"Once you witness the beauty

of Lakshadweep, other destinations in the world will pale before it," he said.

The Prime Minister mentioned steps taken for Haj Yatris that have benefited the people of Lakshadweep too.

He noted the ease for Hajji visa and digitalisation of the visa process and permission for women to go on Haj without 'Mehram'.

These efforts have led to a significant rise in the number of

Indians going for 'Umrah,' he added.

The PM assured the people of Lakshadweep that the Central government remains committed to enhancing their quality of life, travel convenience and business opportunities.

At the function, Modi handed over laptops to students under the Laptop Scheme and gave away bicycles to school students under 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'. He also handed out PM Kisan Credit Cards to farmers and fishermen.

During his address, Modi took a dig at the previous non-BJP governments at the Centre, stating that their only priority for decades was the development of their own political parties.

"Far-off states, border areas, or those in the middle of the ocean were not given any attention...In the last 10 years, our government has made border areas and locations at the edge of the sea its priority," he said.

He assured the islanders that

those who tried to snatch away their rights would not be spared.

The islands had witnessed massive protests by opposition parties against various reforms introduced by the island administration in various sectors, including education.

Talking about the steps taken for the development of the Union Territory, he informed about achieving saturation of PM Awas Yojna (Gramin), ensuring free ration for every beneficiary, distributing PM Kisan Credit Cards and Ayushman Cards, and developing Ayushman Arogya Mandir Health and Wellness Centre.

He recalled the guarantee given by him in 2020 about ensuring fast internet within 1,000 days.

"In 2020, I gave a guarantee that you will get a fast internet facility within the next 1,000 days. Today, the Kochi-Lakshadweep Submarine Optical Fibre Project has been inaugurated. Now, internet in Lakshadweep

will be available at 100 times higher speed," the PM said.

Modi had announced the project in his Independence Day speech in August 2020.

The project will improve facilities like government services, medical treatment, education and digital banking, he said, adding the potential of developing Lakshadweep as a logistics hub will get strength from this.

Referring to the Low Temperature Thermal Desalination plant at Kadmat, Modi said the work of providing piped water to every household in Lakshadweep is moving at a fast pace.

Modi spoke about his interaction with renowned ecologist Ali Manikfan upon his arrival in Lakshadweep and highlighted his research and innovation towards the conservation of the archipelago.

He expressed immense satisfaction over the present government awarding Manikfan the Padma Shri in 2021.

Talks on for next meeting of INDIA bloc: Tejashwi

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday said that discussions were on among leaders of the INDIA bloc on the next meeting of the coalition, where some key decisions were expected.

Yadav was approached with queries here by journalists who wanted his take on reports in a section of the media that a meeting was likely to be held in the virtual mode.

The young RJD leader, who along with his father and party president Lalu Prasad, has been present at all meetings of the newly-formed coalition held so far, said, "There are discussions with regard to the date and the modalities. It will be made known to all when a headway is made."

One of the key decisions expected at the meeting is defining the role of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president, who had juked the BJP around two years ago vowing to defeat the NDA in the 2024 Lok Sabha



polls by bringing the opposition together.

The longest-serving chief minister of Bihar has been maintaining that he was past all "personal ambitions", though his detractors claim that he had felt slighted when, at the last meeting of the INDIA bloc in Delhi on December 19, a couple of leaders proposed that the octogenarian Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge be declared the Prime Ministerial candidate.

Kumar later told reporters that he had no objections to the proposal regarding Kharge, who, however, backed down saying

such a decision should be put on hold and the focus should be on winning enough seats to form the next government.

Kumar, who is in his early 70s, took over as the national president of the JD(U) a week after the INDIA meet, in an indication that he would be approaching the Lok Sabha polls with a lot of fire in his belly.

Riding high on the prospects of a "second Mandal wave", following the caste survey conducted by his government and the subsequent hike in quotas for the deprived social groups, Kumar seems intent on replicating the experiment nationally by pressing the demand for a country-wide caste census.

To this end, he is likely to address a rally in adjoining Jharkhand, which was carved out of Bihar in 2000, in his first public outreach outside his own state in recent times.

In the last couple of days, there has been a strong buzz that the INDIA coalition may agree to make Kumar the 'convener' and settle for the designation of 'chairman' for Kharge.

Palani Temple buys ₹5.6 crore jaggery

PTI ■ ERODE

Authorities at the Palani Bala Dhandayuthapani Temple, one of the six abodes of Lord Murugan, have purchased more than one crore kg of jaggery powder worth Rs 5.59 crore from November 25-December 31, officials here said on Wednesday.

The jaggery was used to prepare additional quantities of the famed 'Pancharitham', a sweet dish sold at the temple, anticipating the rush of devotees that usually comes during the Sabarimala season, officials said.

The jaggery is procured from Kavindapadi marketing committee in Erode, a district noted for its sugarcane crop and jaggery powder. According to officials of the Kavindapadi marketing committee, the Palani temple authorities purchased 1.18 crore kg of jaggery powder worth Rs 5.59 crore from November 25 to December 31, 2023. The officials said that more than 10 crore kg of jaggery is procured



every year for preparing 'Pancharitham.' Farmers of Aayyalayam, Aayyalayam, Odathurai, Ponnachi Pudur, Koogalur and some other villages in Erode district grow sugarcane. After harvest, the sugarcane is crushed to produce jaggery and jaggery powder. The Palani temple authorities purchase the jaggery from Kavindapadi regulated marketing committee in the auction sale conducted every Saturday.

Local polls in Ladakh after delimitation: LG

PTI ■ LEH

Ladakh Lieutenant Governor L B D Mishra on Wednesday said elections to urban local bodies and panchayats in the Union territory would be held after the completion of delimitation of wards.

Ladakh has two municipalities -- Leh and Kargil -- having 13 wards each, and 193 panchayats -- 98 in Kargil and 95 in Leh. These local bodies completed their five-year term in November last year.

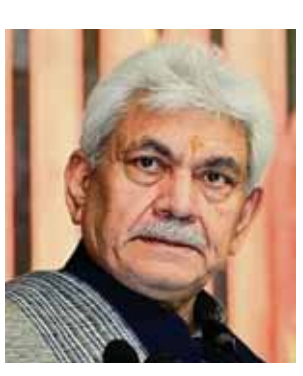
Chairing a meeting of senior officials at the lieutenant governor's secretariat here, Brigadier (retired) Mishra directed that the delimitation of wards be completed at the earliest so that municipal and panchayat elections could be held in the region.

The meeting was convened to discuss ongoing projects and public grievances along with the issues faced by various departments in carrying out developmental works, an official spokesman said.

At the outset, the lieutenant governor asked the departmental secretaries and heads of departments to ensure there is no delay in the implementation of public welfare measures.

He enquired about the assistance provided to the families affected by fire incidents at Chikitan, Tia and Nimoo and asked the officials concerned to provide the required assistance at the earliest.

He also highlighted the need to keep fire tenders at police sta-



tions and train police personnel in operating them, the spokesman said.

The lieutenant governor also highlighted the importance of paying salaries to employees, including contractual or outsourced ones, on time.

Mishra informed the meeting that he would take up with the ministries and institutions concerned the matters related to the establishment of medical, engineering and degree colleges, the expansion of airfield at Kargil, strengthening of All India Radio Kargil, the drafting of recruitment rules for gazetted posts and technicians required for the installation of a pashmina dehairing plant.

The meeting also discussed establishment of police posts in sensitive areas, the need to fast-track helicopter service, especially for rescue operations, and the problem faced in the airlifting of passengers through IAF flights from Thoise-Chandigarh-Thoise, the spokesman said.

BJP protests against Hindu activist arrest

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Several BJP leaders were on Wednesday taken into preventive custody as the party launched protests across the state against the arrest of a Hindu activist in connection with the commotion that ensued during the agitation for a Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya in 1992.

Srikant Poojari (51) was arrested four days ago by the Hubballi-Dharwad police while disposing of pending cases. Poojari had allegedly taken part in the agitation 31 years ago.

Recently, Karnataka Home Minister Dr G Parameashwara directed the police to pursue pending cases. Poojari was arrested in connection with the commotion in Hubballi in 1992.

Responding to a call given by the BJP state president B Y Vijayendra for a protest today, Leader of Opposition in Karnataka Assembly, R Ashoka, MLA Arvind Bellad and other top BJP functionaries staged a massive protest in Hubballi.



They were detained as they attempted to march towards the office of Hubballi-Dharwad police commissioner Renuka Sukumar.

Addressing reporters, Ashoka said the party will intensify its agitation in the city till the case against Poojari is withdrawn and he is released.

The police commissioner said about 90 to 100 people were taken under preventive custody including four legislators.

On the cases pending against Srikant Poojari, Sukumar told PTI, "He has a total of 16 cases against him including three preventive action reports. So that's the total 13 cases of boot-legging, Matka gambling cases and he is a rowdy sheeter in two police stations."

Stalin to invite Modi for Khelo India Youth Games

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Sports Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Wednesday said he would call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi on January 4 to invite him to the Khelo India Youth Games to be held this month in Tamil Nadu.

For the first time, Khelo India Youth Games would be held in the state and it is slated to be conducted from January 19 to 31, Udhayanidhi told reporters, adding he would be inviting Modi for the event.

"I am going to invite him; to participate or not is his wish," he said answering a question.

Udhayanidhi, who also holds the portfolio of youth welfare, expressed confidence that the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would release funds to the state following her visit to Tamil Nadu to assess damage following rains and floods in Thoothukudi and nearby southern regions.

The DMK youth wing's statement is likely to be held (at Salem) before the end of January and a formal announcement would be made by party president and Chief Minister M K Stalin, Udhayanidhi, party's youth wing secretary said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given to public at large that my client S.Mohinder Singh who is the owner of... Built up 2nd floor with roof rights of prop.No.WZ-49, Plot No. 3 measuring 127 Sq. Yds out of khasra no. 15/1, Situated in the area of Village Khayala colony known as Sham Nagar Extension, New Delhi by virtue of Gift deed dated 25.06.2021, registered with SR-II as Doc. No. 5574 executed by S. Davinder Singh who was owner on the basis of Regd. Will dated 04.09.2009, Doc. No. 8605. Now my client intend to get the financial assistance from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited. if any person(s) / Institution has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right, title or interest in the said property may please contact us within 07 days from the date of this notice on the address mentioned herein below, failing which my client(s) shall not be held responsible in any manner whatsoever.

Khairat & Khairat
A-38 Kailash Colony, New Delhi-110048,
Ph. No. 011-49774545

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Ms. Shivani Patil who is purchasing the Freehold Residential Plot area measuring 62 sq. yards (5.83 sq. mtrs.), out of khasra No. 92, situated in Village Bhangle, Begumpur, Pargana and Tehsil Dabri, District Gautam Budh Nagar, UP from Smt. Lata who is a purchaser of the above mentioned property from Chandra Bhushan Pandya and Sh. Uday Pal Pandya through Sale Deed dated 28.10.1995 vide Doc. No. 6194, Original Sale Deed dated 08.04.2004 vide Doc. No. 1908 and same to be financed & mortgaged by Vastu Housing Finance Corporation Ltd. However, Original Sale Deed dated 28.10.1995 vide Doc. No. 6194, Original Sale Deed dated 08.04.2004 vide Doc. No. 1908 has been lost and not available and an FIR has lodged on dated 02.01.2024 with LAR No. 2024000002946 for loss of document. If any Person having any type of claim/indebtedness over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, liens, disputes etc. Lucam Legal LLP B-93B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank, Sector 2 Noida, UP-201301, Contact # 0120-4263793

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Baleshwari is in process to purchase the plot of Land area measuring 115 sq. yds., out of khasra No. 498/1, situated at Damodar Vihar Colony, Village Khoda, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & District Ghazibabad, U.P. (pending loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Ltd) from Smt. Fatma, Sh. Ali Mohammad, Sh. Nazir Mohammad & Sh. Basroo being the only legal heirs of Sh. Faazal Khan, who purchased the same from Jaggo Devi vide Sale Deed dated 4/8/2011 (Doc. No. 7892). All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahaxumi Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vashi, Dist. U.P., Mob. No. 9810983351

ICICI Bank

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

(See proviso to rule 8(6))

Notice for sale of immovable assets

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 proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the 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 ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding (D)	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit (E)	Date and Time of Property Inspection (F)	Date & Time of E-Auction (G)
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Travonanda Holidays Private Limited- (Borrower), Mohd Faisal- (Co-Applicant/ Mortgage/ Guarantor), Reena- (Guarantor), Mohd Abbas. (Mortgagor/ Co-Applicant & Guarantor) Sheeba Naqvi (Guarantor) 629705015540	Shop Bearing Pvt No. G-11, on Ground Floor Up to Ceiling Level Without Roof Rights. A Part of Property Bearing No. A-1/B, Situated in The Abadi of Acharya Niketan, Out of Khasara No. 63 in Mayur Vihar Phase 1 in Village Kotla, ILLAQA Shahdara Delhi-110091 Area -166.34 Sq Ft	Rs. 1.11, 22,381/- as on December 12, 2023	Rs. 39,51,000/- Rs. 3,95,100/-	January 15, 2024 from 11:00 AM to 01:00 PM	February 15, 2024 from 01:00 PM onwards
		Shop Bearing Pvt No. G-12, on Ground Floor Up to Extent of Ceiling Level Without Roof Rights, A Part of Property Bearing No. A-1/B, Situated in The Abadi of Acharya Niketan, out of Khasara No. 63 in Mayur Vihar Phase 1 in Village Kotla, ILLAQA Shahdara Delhi-110091 Area -147.68 Sq Ft		Rs. 35,10,000/- Rs. 3,51,000/-		

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link-<https://disposahub.com>) The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till February 14, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. failing which, this/these secured asset/s will be sold as per schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 on or before February 14, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before February 14, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 on or before February 14, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/ Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at Delhi. For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited On 8928935040/ 8584874809.

Please note that Marketing agencies 1. M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited 2. Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd 3. Hecta Proptech Pvt. Ltd. have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s

Date : January 04, 2024
Place : Delhi/ NCR

Authorised Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

PIRAMAL CAPITAL & HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED
(Formerly Known as Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Limited)

Registered Office Address: Unit No.601, 6th Floor Piramal Amiti Building, Piramal Agastya Corporate Park, Karama Junction, Opp Fire Station, LBS Marg, Kuria (West), Mumbai- 400 070. CIN: L65910MH1984PLC032639. Website: www.piramalfinance.com

Branch Address: Dhiraaj Road, Building "A" Ground & 1st Floor, Beside Axis Bank, Opp. Monalisa Building, Agra Road, Hari Niwas Circle, Naupada, Thane (West) - 400 602.

DEMAND NOTICE

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

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Property address
(LC No. 1970004253 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Alok Nagpure (Borrower) Vijay Kumar Nagpure (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 654187 /-(₹ Six lakh Fifty Four Thousand One Hundred Eighty Seven Rupees) NPA (09-10-2023)	Plot No. 127 Second Floor Springwood Enclave Vase City Nh-24 Ghaziabad Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201302
(LC No. 11900001504 of Noida Branch) Sanjay Kumar Dua (Borrower) Sheela Dua (Co Borrower 1) Ashok Kumar Dua (Co Borrower 2) Om Prakash Dua (Guarantor 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 4040976 /-(₹ Forty lakh Forty Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy Six Rupees) NPA (08-01-2023)	Property No-89 Street No-4 Nirankari Colony New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110009
(LC No. 25600000705 of Delhi Rajouri Garden Branch) Shiv Narayan Pal (Borrower) Jagu Narayan Pal (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 1814967 /-(₹ Eighteen lakh Fourteen Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Seven Rupees) NPA (09-10-2023)	Wz-5b, New No. Wz-5b/2, Built On A Plot No. 165, 1st Floor Without Right, Gali No. 7 Kh. No. 3 Village Nangli Jaitli, Krishna Park Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110018
(LC No. 19700043957 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Bharat Dawra (Borrower) Sukriti (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 1346264 /-(₹ Thirteen lakh Forty Six Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Four Rupees) NPA (08-01-2023)	Prop No-w-122, Upper Ground Floor, Plot No. 31-a, Block-c, Mustki No. 40 Killa No. 14, Kh No-40/14, Sri Ngr Extn, Shakurbasti New Delhi Delhi - 110034
(LC No. 27900001508 of Greater Noida Branch) Girish Kargeti (Borrower) Tulsi Devi (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 2143788 /-(₹ Twenty one lakh Forty Three Thousand Seven Hundred Eighty Five Rupees) NPA (09-10-2023)	Plot No-bb-7,11,rs Plotno-b-276, kh-no- 1240/ 832, Gali No-03 kumaon Square, Westvindh nagar vill- Mandawali Fuzalpur, Shahdara New Delhi Delhi - 110034
(LC No. 09200001823 of Rohini Branch) Bittu Luthra (Borrower) Nidhi (Co Borrower 1) Ankit Luthra (Co Borrower 2)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 2476807 /-(₹ Twenty four lakh Seventy Six Thousand Eight Hundred Seven Rupees) NPA (08-01-2023)	A-36-A, Upper Ground Floor Khasra No. 68/24, Block-A Village Hastal, hastal Vihar Uttam Nagar, Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 25600000812 of Karkarduma Noida Branch) Bharat Kumar Mamoria (Borrower) Shakun Mamoria (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 2006633 /-(₹ Two lakh Six Hundred Thirty Three Rupees) NPA (30-09-2020)	R2-45, Upper Ground Floor Khasra No-54/9, Village Palam, Raj Nagar-2, Palam Colony New Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110045
(LC No. 27300000248 of Dwaraka Branch) Ankit Sharma (Borrower) Neha Sharma (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 1748646 /-(₹ Seventeen lakh Sixty Four Thousand Eight Hundred Fifty Nine Rupees) NPA (08-01-2023)	prop no-W2-B/52, plot no.52 2nd flr without roof, rear side, blk-B ram dutt enclave, vil-Possangipur uttam nagar Delhi New Delhi Delhi - 110059
(LC No. 25500002054 of Netaji Subhash Place Branch) Shalindra Kumar Shukla (Borrower) Chhavi Shukla (Co Borrower 1)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 4183666 /-(₹ Forty one lakh Eighty Three Thousand Six Hundred Sixty Six Rupees) NPA (09-09-2023)	Apartment No-A-2035 tower A Rg residency Plot -GH-02, SECTOR-120 Noida Gautambudh Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 201301
(LC No. 19897M30548 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) M/S Rsg Realtors Pvt Ltd (Borrower)	27-11-2023 / ₹ 4697453 /-(₹ Forty six lakh Ninety Seven Thousand Four Hundred Fifty Three Rupees) NPA (08-08-2023)	FL/AT NO-A-15, FLOOR NO. 4RD FLOOR, GANGOTRY APARTMENT, SECTOR, VIKASPURI, VILLAGE, NEW DELHI NEW DELHI NEW DELHI Delhi - 110021
(LC No. 01400003214 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Sameer (Borrower) Kamla Sharma (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 5191389 /-(₹ Fifty one lakh Ninety One Thousand Three Hundred Eighty Nine Rupees) NPA (06-06-2018)	Unit No. A-602, 6th Floor, Tower/ Block A La Galaxia, Plot No. H R A -11 Greater Noida Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 01400003161 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Gaurav Kumar (Borrower) Niti Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 5970645 /-(₹ Fifty Nine lakh Seventy Thousand Six Hundred Forty Nine Rupees) NPA (10-12-2017)	Unit - G-802, 8th Floor, Tower/ Block G La Galaxia, Plot No. H R A -11 Greater Noida Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 01400002322 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Mibin Babichan (Borrower) Cbin Babichan (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 5072535 /-(₹ Fifty lakh Seventy Two Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Five Rupees) NPA (30-12-2017)	Plot No-903,9th Floor, Tower/ Block D La Galaxia, Plot No. H R A -11 Greater Noida Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 01400003274 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Shalindra Kumar (Borrower) Rajeshree Singh (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 4265191 /-(₹ Forty two lakh Sixty Five Thousand One Hundred Ninety One Rupees) NPA (06-03-2018)	Unit No. 1103,11th Floor, Tower/ Block D La Galaxia, Plot No. H R A -11 Greater Noida Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 01400003274 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Shalindra Kumar (Borrower) Rajeshree Singh (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 5098195 /-(₹ Fifty lakh Ninety Eight Thousand One Hundred Ninety Five Rupees) NPA (08-01-2023)	Unit No. 1204,12th Floor, Tower/ Block B La Galaxia, Plot No. H R A -11 Greater Noida Greater Noida Uttar Pradesh - 201308
(LC No. 27900000841 of Greater Noida Branch) Vedagarbha Khundrakpani (Borrower) Vishnu Kumar (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 10913256/0 /-(₹ One Crore Nine lakh Thirteen Thousand Two Hundred Fifty Six Rupees and Six Paise) NPA (06-03-2018)	Unit No. G-1502 N/A 15th Floor, Tower-g 15th Floor, Sector-G Mayfair Residence, Plot No. GH-078, Tower- G Techzone IV, Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh IN 201308
(LC No. 20000042990 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Karan Khurana (Borrower) Yashpal Khurana (Co Borrower 1) Asha Yashpal (Co Borrower 2)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 1683845 /-(₹ Sixteen lakh Eighty Three Thousand Eight Hundred Forty Five Rupees) NPA (09-11-2023)	Plot No-A-42, Khasra No. 1212, Block-A, Hayat Enclave, vill- Loni, Nr Hayat Park, Block-A, pargana Loni, Ghaziabad,UP Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh - 201102
(LC No. M0030068 of Delhi Branch Branch) Dibya Laskar (Borrower) Joyshree Kakati (Co Borrower 1)	20-12-2023 / ₹ 4412026 /-(₹ Forty four lakh Ten Thousand Two Hundred Twenty Six Rupees) NPA (31-05-2022)	Flat No. 407, Fourth Floor, Without roof/ terrace rights, Plot No. 9/PC-3,GMND Infratech, Urban Square, Sector 9, Vasundhara, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh 201012

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

Date : 04-01-2024
Place: Delhi

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The bill pill

New guidelines for ICU admissions aim to curb inflated bills and ensure ethical treatment

In welcome relief to millions of people who get duped by unscrupulous hospitals, the Government has finally woken up to certain malpractices and issued guidelines for ICU admissions. It is common knowledge that many private hospitals overcharge patients by admitting them into intensive care units (ICU) even if the patient does not need it or is terminally ill. In a bid to regulate and put a check on such malpractices, the Union Health Ministry has recently issued comprehensive guidelines for ICU admissions. These guidelines, developed by a panel of 24 eminent physicians, aim to ensure transparency, ethical practices and prioritised care based on medical criteria. The new guidelines emphasise that these admissions be determined by objective medical criteria, specifically focusing on organ failure and the need for organ support. Parameters such as blood pressure, respiratory rate, breathing pattern, heart rate, oxygen saturation, urine output and neurological status should be constantly monitored in patients awaiting an ICU bed.



Furthermore, the guidelines explicitly state that critically ill patients should not be admitted to the ICU if there is refusal from the patient or relatives. Additionally, patients with a treatment limitation plan due to any existing disease, those with a living will or advanced directive against ICU care, and terminally ill patients with a medical judgment of futility should also be excluded from ICU admission.

The guidelines extend to the discharge criteria from the ICU, emphasising the importance of returning physiological aberrations to near-normal or baseline status. The resolution and stability of the acute illness that led to ICU admission are deemed necessary for discharge. Moreover, patient and family agreement for ICU discharge for either a treatment-limiting decision or palliative care is considered crucial. The Government's decision to rein in errant private hospitals is a much-awaited move that should have come much earlier. During the pandemic, there were numerous cases when hospitals admitted patients in ICUs without caring for them and charging them exorbitantly. While the guidelines are aimed at improving the overall healthcare system, there is need to go deeper. Many a time, unnecessary tests are prescribed which must be done at a hospital itself or its partner lab. But the latest is a step in the right direction. The guidelines are a response to the growing concern of exorbitant bills and unjustified ICU admissions. Inflating ICU bills has become a prevalent issue, and the guidelines seek to address this by promoting transparency, accountability and patient-centric practices. The Ministry's guidelines for ICU admissions mark a significant step towards ensuring ethical practices in hospitals. By placing strong emphasis on objective medical criteria and obtaining prior consent from patients, the guidelines aim to prioritise patient well-being over financial considerations. It is hoped that these measures will lead to a more transparent and patient-centric healthcare system, fostering trust between public and healthcare providers.

PICTALK



Artistes perform 'Kulvi Naati' dance during the Manali Winter Carnival 2024, in Manali

Social practices in changing times



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Today, changes are taking place at a fast pace, often demanding a paradigm shift in the mindset and the policy framework to manage that change. It is not always easy

It is generally agreed that change is the law of life. The body changes, the mind changes, the environment changes, and so does everything else. It is creating a synergy amongst the different paces of change of different entities that is a core concern for management action. The response to this concern needs tactics, the conglomerate of tactics makes for a strategy, and putting together various strategies leads to a policy. The long and short of it is putting the proposition on its feet.

This cyclical insight into the management of change is one of the core propositions of management. Management action itself is embedded in an environment. This environment in recent history has also, been changing at an unprecedented pace over the last century or so. The two world wars contributed to the need for theories related to the management of change. The Second World War and its conclusion led to many wars across the globe. They were over the de-struction of empires and a new kind of war, which was termed as "Cold War". Much of this was converted or evolved into many regional conflicts. Some of them have lasted over decades and are still unresolved. That is another story. The core propositions are simple, one of them is the role technology has played in creating fast-paced changes, and the other is the nature of aspirational communities, which have been emerging all over the globe in different forms and shapes, and all seeking a place under the sun. Gradually, a global class has emerged dealing with some common issues in different parts of the globe. There are several regional issues too. Talking of the global pattern of change, a few commonalities can be discerned, one of them is the way people define their aspirations. Not so long ago, loyalties to some well-timed tested values like honouring one's word or standing by an old relationship were considered a pillar of social norms. Now, whereas some people still remember the above values, there are others who have



'moved beyond' them. By and large, it is an amorphous group with an amorphous identity which found in different parts of the world and sometimes circulates. Dealing with this kind of value amongst the people who matter can be a tricky affair because it requires different insights into organizational dynamics. The people in their twenties, thirties, and forties are particularly overtaken by these values. They constitute the bulk of the workforce across organisations. This means that much that has been learned through management classes has to be redefined and reordered. The older generation of people in their fifties and sixties have a challenge at hand in dealing with the younger generations. To cap it all, there are few books written on all this and the public orientation on all this is still little. The generation in their fifties, sixties and more have learnt and grown up in values that are getting limited mileage. This requires considerable abilities in self-generation. It also needs the ability to straddle across groups of



THE TWO WORLD WARS CONTRIBUTED TO THE NEED FOR THEORIES RELATED TO THE MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE. THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND ITS CONCLUSION LED TO MANY WARS ACROSS THE GLOBE

people with values very different to their own. What is needed is a minimal few days 'retreat' for self introspection which would apply to people in their fifties, sixties or more to reorient to a changing world. Nor is this all. It requires great skills and dealing with the unknown, fast changes, and undefined 'self-interest'. This itself has put many organisations in a crucible of undefined change. The larger recourse seems to be to let nature take its course the very antithesis of goal-directed activity. Introspection by those capable of self-direction and self-growth will be required when in leadership positions. Not only workplaces are changing, the families and their orientation are also changing. The old norms of community living and joint family structure have, often, given way to deciphered and not clearly understood patterns of a unitary family. Separations and divorces among couples have become more common. In turn, the child in the family is getting affected. Not all parents come across as one unit to the

child, nor does the child always get the share of time that is necessary for its well-formed growth. In certain communities, the state has tried to carve out its role in the growth of the child and made itself an appellate authority, but that has also not worked as comprehensively as was the expectation. Under the circumstances, it seems a high priority to teach people how to be calm and introspect. Certain pristine values like honesty, integrity, and respect for one's sense of consistency and fair play, remain relevant. This also cannot be always taught through classrooms, textbooks, or teaching through a syllabus. For this, an eco-system has to be created of self-analysis and self-development. The emerging learning theories will have to factor these in and a culture would have to be created where self-learning is the heart of the matter. In all this careful parenting which is futuristic and far-sighted may hold the key

(The writer is a management consultant. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FINANCIAL STABILITY REPORT

Sir — The global economy and financial system are not yet out of the woods despite warding off recession in 2023. However, India's banking and financial system has successfully weathered domestic rate hikes and global shocks. This seems to be the main message from the Reserve Bank of India's latest Financial Stability Report (FSR) for six months ending September 2023. The report presents data to show that not just banks, but also NBFCs, are sitting pretty with healthy capital buffers.

It is good to see the FSR going beyond reported financials to try and identify segments where the next credit bubbles could be building up. However, if the RBI believes that lenders are downplaying default risks, it will need to undertake Asset Quality Reviews.

Karan Singh | Chennai

ELECTION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Sir — The election in Jammu and Kashmir will be conducted when the Election Commission of India (ECI) Rajiv Kumar thinks it is the appropriate time, keeping in mind the security situation in the union territory. The Union government had informed the Supreme Court in August that it was ready to conduct elections in Jammu and Kashmir at any time, with solicitor-general Tushar Mehta maintaining that the process of updating the voter list was almost over.

On Sunday 8 October, the Omar Abdullah-led National Conference and Congress together won 22 seats in the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Kargil elections, the first polls to be held after Ladakh became a Union Territory following the abrogation of article 370 of the Constitution. The National Conference (NC) won 12 seats, making it the single largest party, while Congress emerged victorious in 10 seats. J&K has been without an elected government since June 2018 after the BJP pulled out of the coalition with Mehbooba Mufti's People's Democratic

Creating a universal language



Creating a single, universal language has been a long desire of mankind that would unite people around the world. In a world of more than 7000 spoken languages, flawless communication has always been a problem to be addressed. But with the rapid improvement in artificial intelligence, it seems as if this ambition might finally be within reach. The solution is not probably the manufacturing of a single universal language like Esperanto or Basic English - but the development of a smooth, computer-generated translation. Despite forcing everyone to speak the same language, this approach means that a person can speak in her language and others will hear

the same in their language in real time. Thus, the difference in language will be done away with as far as understanding each other is concerned. Observing the pace of this technology, it seems that some form of affordable universal communication will be an integral part of everyday life. But there is a fundamental question we should ask: what impact will it have on global linguistic and cultural diversity? Linguistic diversity is a fundamental feature which separates cultures. It is a default identity that every culture possesses dynamic linguistic habits. Despite a medium of communication, it also differentiates us from others. So technology that aims to blur this invisible diversity would certainly have significant effects on human society. This is not the intention to put a blanket on the latest technology-assisted efforts to overcome age-old linguistic confusion through effortless innovation. But with its far-reaching unpredictable impacts, we need to look also at protecting the cultural diversity that characterises our civilization.

Arka Goswami | Durgapur

Party. The legislative assembly was dissolved in November 2018 by then-governor Satya Pal Malik after Mufti staked her claim to form the government. The last assembly election was held in 2014. After Article 370 was abrogated in August 2019, the state was split into two union territories, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Sir — Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud is known for promoting digital initiatives at the Supreme Court (SC). Live streaming of select court proceedings, digitalisation of records and digital courts are some salient features that have been initiated in the top court. The SC has also introduced live transcription of court proceedings, a technology alien to Indian courts. As per a report, the top court has disposed of 52,191 cases as of December 15, 2023, the number

stood at 39, 800 in the preceding year. The Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) software, introduced in 2017 to address the relative urgency of different types of cases, seems to have helped in fixing a timeframe for urgent verification and listing of sensitive matters like bail applications and habeas corpus. Linkage of the SC to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) has helped the top court as well as the common man to quickly access judgements of the High Courts. In September, Justice Chandrachud announced that the SC was "board" the NJDG, another step forward in ensuring the judiciary's transparency and accountability not to mention the augmented efficiency, coordination and decision-making of different courts.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Green buildings for better air quality & lean power bills

Switch to green buildings as they improve indoor air quality and also reduce energy consumption



RAHUL AERON

With the plummeting Air Quality Index (AQI) on the onset of winter, Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) remains a pressing matter as it can severely impact the health of the occupants. Where pollution is engulfing the country, people prefer staying indoors to avoid being exposed to severe pollution levels outside. But contrary to the common misconception that air inside the room is safe, it comes as a surprise to many that indoor air is 10 times worse and more polluted than outdoor air. This is primarily because packed buildings lack proper ventilation.

With people keeping the doors and windows closed during the winter, the air inside the room is incapable of escaping outside. As a result, the indoor air quality deteriorates manifold, making it severely polluted as compared to the outdoor air. The problem is further compounded in commercial and industrial spaces, such as healthcare, construction, factories, hotels, airports, offices, etc., as they come with complex and tight structures. The presence of numerous



indoor air pollutants, such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the form of synthetic building materials, furnishings, cleaning supplies, etc. invariably degrades the air within the closed premises.

To further escalate the problem, the presence of humidity in the space encourages the growth of microorganisms such as mould and mildew that give rise to musty odour and severely affect the well-being of the occupants. Poor IAQ can give rise to breathing issues, lethargy, pain in the eye, coughing, headaches, fatigue, and many more health conditions. In addition to this, inadequate ventilation can cause a phenomenon called 'Sick Building Syndrome' that can impact the overall health and well-being of a person. Therefore, gauging the health consequences arising from

poor IAQ, occupants must focus on improving the ventilation of the enclosed space to experience enhanced public health. As a result, to achieve optimal ventilation, installing an HVAC system in the building can significantly enhance the proper ventilation of the space.

It comes with the ability to supply a steady flow of fresh air throughout the building. It works on the mechanism of bringing fresh air from outside to carry out the dilution of indoor contaminated air. In the process of removing stale air from the inside, it also filters the pollutants coming in from the outside. In addition to ventilating the space, HVAC systems provide thermal comfort to the occupants. They employ advanced desiccant technology to remove moisture from the air with the intervention of hygroscopic substances. It comes in handy in maintaining the optimal RH of the building which invariably contributes to toning down the air as per the requirement of the given space and goes the extra mile to inhibit the growth of unwanted microorganisms such as

mould, mildew, and other substances. Installing advanced Energy Recovery systems can further help in addressing the issue of poor IAQ efficiently. Making use of Enthalpy Wheels, the technology is adept at ventilating the space that too without compromising the air conditioning load of the room. Therefore, the process of improving the IAQ also reduces the operational cost of HVAC systems significantly. Being well equipped with honeycomb-designed chemical filters, it comes in handy in removing the gaseous contaminants from the building. Looking at the rising menace of poor IAQ on health conditions, in addition to employing an HVAC system, people should also adopt Green Buildings with alacrity. By making use of green products, the buildings are the way forward in striking the right balance between the comfort of the occupants and reducing the energy consumption of the building.

(The writer is vice president, Desiccant Rotors International Pvt Ltd, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR REAL HAPPINESS?

We all want to be happy but often mistake pleasures for happiness



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let us understand what pleasures are. They are obtained mainly through contact between our senses and their objects. Our senses are always looking for pleasures like eating, seeing, hearing, talking, etc. The next higher level is through our minds. These are through material gains like fame, power, wealth, etc. Then comes pleasure through intelligence like being able to invent something of importance, write something very creative, etc. The last one comes very close to real happiness, which is sukha, as described in the Bhagavad-Geeta. In verse # 2.65, Lord Krishna states, "In the state of peaceful enjoyment, his all suffering ends soon, because the intelligence of a happy person is firmly established." Believe it or not, in a state of having real intelligence, which is spiritual, one transcends the feeling of material suffering. In the next verse, the Lord clarifies about one, who is neither peaceful nor happy. Contrarily, there will be real intelligence of the faithful and for one who has faith, there will be proper consciousness, and for one who has proper consciousness, there will be peace, and from peace, happiness will be experienced. Such a person, a self-controlled person, by giving all acts, thereby attachments to their fruits by the mind, lives happily in the house having nine gates, neither really doing anything nor getting anything done. (5.13) He in fact reaches the stage of being satisfied by any benefit, which comes of its own accord due to acts done earlier. This in any case happens; our being attached to results doesn't change the outcome. We thus avoid the pain of attachments. Aren't we entitled only to what we have sown earlier?



Now regarding sense pleasures, Lord Krishna guides us when He says, "A person while engaged in action only for maintenance of one's body, does not get afflicted by reactions. (5.21) A few examples will make it quite clear. We all have to eat to maintain our bodies. And we generally know also what is required of us. We go wrong when we eat what is not wholesome or nutritious. Similarly, we know what causes pollution of consciousness, when we see illicit and scary programmes, scenes, photos, etc. The Lord wants us to avoid them; He is not advocating stopping all-seeing. Even sex pleasures are allowed when the Lord affirmed, "I am passionate in beings, according to religious principles." (7.11) Why was the institution of marriage promoted so strongly? Because it keeps us within acceptable limits. One who is capable of tolerating the urge caused by lust and anger in this world prior to leaving the body is a true yogi; he is a happy person.

"This sukha is beyond the senses. There is unlimited bliss, which can be experienced through the intelligence. A yogi realises it and thus situated does not get at all distracted from the absolute essence (God)". (6.21) Such a person is happy from within; does not worry unnecessarily; and becomes free from craving for material objects, which are not required for the maintenance of one's body. (18.54) He is in fact accompanied by God. (6.7) Meeraji said, "I am only for Giridhar Gopal, no one else." Adi Shankaracharya cajoled us to "Bhaja Govindam" because that is where all sukha is. Why Shivaji is called - Aashutosh Ujagar? Because God only is the repository of all bliss.

What is the conclusion? If we are genuinely seeking happiness, we have to take shelter from God. Our minds and intelligence have to come together, i.e. they should both be surrendered to God. Senses have to be disciplined, only to seek objects, which are essential to maintain the body. The sequence is straightforward. One takes shelter from God, which is the first step. Over a period of time, one begins to feel secure, as that is where real security is, nowhere else. Peace begins to descend, and gradually one becomes happy, sukhi and blissful.

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

Channelise youth for a better tomorrow

Half of the world's population is now under the age of 25. This is the largest youth generation to ever exist; imagine what the world would be if they were channelised



RAJDEEP PATHAK

India's Parliament witnessed chaotic scenes on December 13, 2023, when two men intruded into the chamber, shouting slogans and spraying coloured gas whilst jumping from table to table. They released yellow gas from canisters and shouted slogans before being overpowered by the members of Parliament. Simultaneously, two individuals, including a woman, sprayed coloured gas and shouted slogans outside the Parliament premises. All of them have been arrested and sent to judicial custody.

The recent breach in India's Parliament on the 22nd anniversary of the 2001 attack by disruptive individuals highlights the consequences of unchanneled youth energy. The intruders - Sagar, Manoranjan, Amol, and Neelam, in their early thirties and mid-forties, expressed discontent over issues such as farmers, the Manipur crisis, and unemployment through this act. Neelam, surprisingly educated with multiple degrees (in MA, BEd, MEd, CTET, MPhil and NET), was among those arrested. This shocking incident underscores the need to harness the dynamism of the younger generation for constructive nation-building, prompting reflection on the importance of addressing their concerns through positive channels.

Youth occupy a pivotal role in society as the future leaders and driving force of progress. Their numerical strength, combined with energy and innovative ideas, constitutes a potent asset. The National Youth Development Policy emphasises that youths form the foundation of a nation, shaping its development, security, and socio-political landscape. Their creative talents and labour contribute significantly to economic and societal advancements. The dreams and aspirations of the youth serve as a source of motivation, ensuring a nation's vitality and purpose. Consequently, a nation's future is secured through the dynamic potential and vision of its youth.

According to Douglas Bourn, Professor of Development Education and working at University College London, "Youth have their own set of values, expectations and perceptions regarding the authority and the ideal work environment. The characteristics of the youth are reported to have been influenced by leaders, development, technologies and trends of its time globally but their behaviour may vary by region depending on social and economic conditions". Further, Professor of Management, S P Eisner asserts that "Youth tend to have a strong sense of morality, being patriotic, willing to fight for freedom, sociable, and value home and family, and they have different expectations, values, attitude and behaviours.

Time and again, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his address from various public platforms has called upon the strength of youth for the welfare of the society and nation, per se and reiterated his firm conviction on the potential of the youth in the process of development of India in the global stage.

One must also acknowledge that India is a young country with more than half of the citizens under the age of 30. The Indian youth are, therefore, big stakeholders in the country, and, therefore, they must be taken seriously and respectfully as partners in nation-building. Drawing insights from the teachings of



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visionaries like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr., and many others, the transformative role of youth can be further underscored.

The impact of Swami Vivekananda's teachings can be observed in the emergence of youth-led movements aimed at societal transformation. For instance, the "Youth for Seva" initiative, inspired by Swami Vivekananda's call to serve the community, engages young volunteers in various social service activities across the country. These volunteers contribute to education, healthcare, and environmental initiatives, embodying the spirit of selfless service advocated by Swami ji.

Mahatma Gandhi, a key figure in India's independence movement, urged youth to actively engage in societal transformation. Through movements like the Dandi March and Quit India, he inspired a generation of 'satyagraha' advocating nonviolent resistance. In a 1927 'Young India' article, Gandhi emphasised rural immersion, urging youth to serve humbly in villages and lead by example. He envisioned them as messengers of God, fostering empathy and elevating living standards. Mahatma Gandhi highlighted the transformative power of genuine engagement, akin to a controlled stream evolving into a mighty force. Today, his call for selfless service and grassroots involvement resonates, emphasising their enduring significance in nation-building. Likewise, Sardar Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, and Subhas Chandra Bose exemplified the dynamic spirit driving India's independence struggle - though the path was different. Their fear-

less leadership inspired countless youth, symbolising the transformative power of young individuals. In contrast, the intruders (in Parliament) on December 13 tarnished the nation's dignity, lacking the positive impact and inspiration that characterised the selfless dedication of the freedom fighters and leaders who helped shape India's destiny.

Similarly, Raja Ram Mohan Roy's emphasis on education as a tool for social reform finds resonance in initiatives like the "Teach for India" programme that recruits young, dynamic individuals to teach in underprivileged schools, addressing educational disparities and bridging the social gap. Beyond the shores, the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela's anti-apartheid struggle, epitomised by the 1976 'Soweto Uprising,' showcased the fervour of young activists rising for change. Today, the 'Nelson Mandela Foundation' sustains his legacy, empowering youth for social justice.

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s global influence, inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, thrives through nonviolent resistance. Youth leaders like John Lewis and Diane Nash were pivotal in the Civil Rights Movement, using sit-ins and freedom rides to combat racial injustice, resulting in legislative changes and segregation dismantling. Young activists, central to Indian independence and the American Civil Rights Movement, showcased passion and commitment towards challenging oppressive systems. Their enduring impact underscores the transformative potential wielded by dedicated young people, resonating as a testament to the ongoing power of youth in shaping a more just society.

India's youth are at the forefront of a burgeoning startup ecosystem. Companies like Flipkart, Zomato, and Ola, founded by young entrepreneurs, showcase how innovative ideas, driven by youthful energy, can transform industries. These startups contribute not only to economic growth but also to changing societal dynamics.

Not only this, globally, youth-led environmental movements, inspired by leaders like Greta Thunberg, have gained momentum. In India, youth participation in movements advocating for sustainable practices, tree plantation drives, awareness campaigns and now startups reflect a growing consciousness for sustainable living among the younger generation.

As we all know that half of the world's population is now under the age of 25, and 1.8 billion people are between the age of 11-25. This is considered to be the largest youth generation to ever exist. Many countries such as Sweden, Japan, and Germany have already started gaining from the Youth by providing them with opportunities in different sectors.

A thriving nation towards development, India has great potential in its youth power. They are the pillars upon which the success, progress and prosperity of a nation's future are built. When their strength, potential and creativity are properly harnessed, they are great assets to any nation. But it is imperative, that the cliché that youths are the leaders of tomorrow go beyond mere platitudes and words to action. It will be worthwhile to remember that there will be no success without a successor.

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Constitutional powers of courts vis-à-vis CBI investigations

The CBI investigation can only be ordered by the Central Government, the Supreme Court and the High Courts; this does not violate the federal structure of the Constitution

Irrespective of the facts whether the CBI investigation is appropriate in a particular case or not people of the country have much reliance on this agency in comparison to other investing agencies and the state police. The establishment of the CBI is under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act 1946. Police is a State subject of list II. Section 2 of the Delhi special police establishment act 1946 provides for the constitution of a special police force for the investigation of union territory concerning offences notified in section 3 of said act. Section 5(1) says that the Central Government may by order extend the jurisdiction of CBI to any State. However, section 6 requires the consent of the State Government con-



MAHESH TIWARI

cerned to permit investigation of any offence within its territory. This requirement of consent is incorporated in the constitution of India in Entry 80 of List I which follows that the consent of the State Government is a condition precedent to be satisfied before calling upon the CBI to investigate any offence in that State. Alignment with the Federal Structure:-

The consent of the State Government is required for permitting the investigation of any offence within its territory is consistent with the federal structure of the Constitution which ensures the autonomy of each State, in the matter of legislation and executive action. The consent can be in the form of General consent or specific consent concerning individual cases. Almost every State in India has provided the CBI with general consent to investigate within their State however at its discretion the State Government may withdraw the general consent at any time. As of now 8 States (Mizoram, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala, Jharkhand and Punjab) have

withdrawn their general consent required by the CBI to conduct an investigation in their respective states on the allegation that the Central Government was using the federal agency to destabilise the State Government. It is to be noted that all the States which have withdrawn the general consent are non-BJP ruling States. Legal outlook:- In the case of "State of West Bengal & Ors. Vs. Committee for protection of Democratic Rights and Ors. (2010)3 SCC 571", the Hon'ble Supreme Court was called upon to decide the question of whether the High Court under article 226 and the Supreme Court under article 32 of the Constitution of India, can direct the CBI investigation in

cognizable offences which is alleged to have been taken place within the territorial jurisdiction of a state without the consent of that state Government? The question assumed significance on account of the involvement of two basic features of the Constitution, namely the federal structure and the power of judicial review. The constitution bench answered the question referred to it by holding that a direction by the High Court in the exercise of its jurisdiction under Article 226 of the Constitution and the Supreme Court under Article 32 of the Constitution, to CBI to investigate the cognizable offence alleged to have been committed within the territory of that State without the consent of the State

Government will neither impinge upon the federal structure of the constitution nor violate the doctrine of the power of separation and shall be valid in Law. The Supreme Court further reiterated that before directing inquiry by CBI, the Court should conclude after considering the material placed on record that such material does disclose a prima facie case calling for an investigation by CBI. Therefore the constitution bench has declared the law that in view of the constitutional scheme and the jurisdiction conferred on this court under article 32 of the constitution, the power of judicial review is an integral part of the basic structure of the constitution, therefore, any direction

by the Supreme Court or High Court in the exercise of power under article 32 or 226 of the constitution to hand over the investigation to the CBI cannot be termed as violating the federal structure. An important question arises here what is the test that will indicate that the action of the State Government is unreasonable or arbitrary? In this regard, it is worth mentioning here that the law is already settled on this score that, if the Court concludes, after going through the materials placed before it, that the refusal on the part of the State Government to give consent for investigation by CBI in a given case is arbitrary, then and only then, the Court may direct investigation by CBI. So by virtue of law already set-

tled and under the scheme of the constitution, the CBI investigation can be ordered by the three organs only i.e Central Government under the specific consent of the State Government where the alleged offence has been committed or cause of action arose, Supreme Court under article 32 of the constitution and the concerned High Court under article 226 of the constitution of India. Such direction for CBI investigation by these three organs does not violate the federal structure of the Constitution and surely is not an attack on the autonomy of the State.

(The writer is a practicing Advocate in the Supreme Court of India. The article is not for the purpose of legal advice. Views are personal)

Bombing in Iran during honouring ceremony kills 103, 188 injured

AP ■ DUBAI
Two bombs exploded minutes apart on Wednesday at a commemoration for a prominent Iranian general slain in a US drone strike in 2020, officials in Iran said, killing at least 103 people and wounding at least 188 as the Middle East remains on edge over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.



No one immediately claimed responsibility for what appeared to be the deadliest militant attack to target Iran since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. The blasts shook the city of Kerman, about 820 kilometers (510 miles) southeast of the capital, Tehran, and sent shrapnel hurtling into a screaming crowd fleeing the first explosion.

He said the second blast killed and wounded the most people. A delayed second explosion is often used by militants to target emergency personnel responding to the scene and inflict more casualties. Iranian state TV and state-run IRNA news agency quoted emergency officials for the casualty figures, which rose rapidly in the hours after the explosions. Iran has multiple foes who could be behind the

assault, including exile groups, militant organisations and state actors.

While Israel has carried out attacks in Iran over its nuclear programme, it has conducted targeted assassinations, not mass casualty bombings. Sunni extremist groups including the Islamic State group have conducted large-scale attacks in the past that killed civilians in Shiite-majority Iran, though not in relatively peaceful Kerman. Iran also has seen mass protests in recent years, including those over the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in 2022.

The country also has been targeted by exile groups in attacks dating back to the turmoil surrounding its 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iran itself has been arming militant groups over the decades, including Hamas, the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

Taiwan reports China sent 4 suspected spy balloons

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)



Taiwan's Defence Ministry said that China sent four balloons over the island, three of which passed near to a key air force base. The reported incursions on Tuesday come as China has been upping its threat to use force to annex the self-governing republic. Taiwan is holding elections for its president and legislature on January 13, and China has used its military, diplomatic and economic power to influence voters to back candidates favouring unification between the sides.

Despite that, the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party is leading in most polls, reaffirming the electorate's backing for the status of de-facto independence from mainland China.

China regularly sends navy ships and warplanes to waters and airspace close to Taiwan, and its use of balloons to collect intelligence could be a new stage in its campaign of intimidation against the island.

The Defence Ministry said three of the balloons passed from east to west, close to the Ching-Chuan-Kang air base, home to much of the Taiwanese air wings dedicated to defending the island against China's military threat.

The fourth passed north of the port of Keelung, which services Taiwan's crucial trade relations with Japan, a treaty partner with the US. A Chinese balloon shot down by the US after transferring North America last February was equipped to detect and collect intelligence signals as part of a

huge, military-linked aerial surveillance program that targeted more than 40 countries, the Biden administration said, citing imagery from American U-2 spy planes.

A fleet of balloons operates under the direction of the People's Liberation Army, the military wing of China's ruling Communist Party, and is used specifically for spying, outfitted with high-tech equipment designed to gather sensitive information from targets across the globe, the US said. Similar balloons have sailed over five continents, it said.

S Korean police raid house of suspect who stabbed opp leader Lee

Seoul (AP): South Korean police on Wednesday raided the residence and office of a man who stabbed the country's opposition leader, Lee Jae-myung, in the neck in an attack that left him hospitalized in an intensive care unit, officials said. The assault occurred when Lee was passing through a throng of journalists after visiting the proposed site of a new airport in the southeastern city of Busan on Tuesday. The attacker, posing as a supporter, approached Lee asking for his autograph before he took out a 18-centimeter (7-inch) knife to attack him. After receiving emergency treatment in Busan, Lee was transported by a helicopter to the Seoul National University Hospital for surgery. Cho Jeong-sik, the party's secretary general, said Wednesday the two-hour surgery was successful and that Lee remained in the hospital's intensive care unit for recovery. Police and emergency officials earlier said Lee was conscious after the attack and wasn't in critical condition. The suspect was detained by police immediately after the attack. Police said he told investigators he attempted to kill Lee and that he had plotted his attack alone, but his motive is unknown.

Busan police said they sent officers to search the suspect's residence and office in the central city of Asan on Wednesday as part of their investigation. Police said they plan to ask for a formal arrest warrant for the suspect over alleged attempted murder.

Police disclosed few further details about the suspect except that he was aged about 67 and bought the climbing knife online. Police refused to disclose what kind of office he has in Asan, but local media photos showed officers searching a real estate office. Lee, 59, is a tough-speaking liberal who lost the 2022 presidential election to President Yoon Suk Yeol by 0.7 percentage points, the narrowest margin recorded in a South Korean presidential election.

Israel on alert for Hezbollah response after Hamas leader killed

AP ■ BEIRUT

Israel was on high alert for an escalation with Hezbollah on Wednesday after one of the top leaders of the Palestinian Hamas was killed in a strike in Beirut that was widely blamed on Israel and heightened the risk of a broader Middle East conflict.

The killing of Saleh Arouri, the most senior Hamas member slain since the war in Gaza erupted nearly three months ago, provided a morale boost for Israelis still reeling from Hamas' October 7 attack as the militants put up stiff resistance in Gaza and continue to hold scores of hostages. But its implications for the war remain unclear. Israel has killed several top Hamas leaders over the years, only to see them quickly replaced. And the strike in Hezbollah's southern Beirut stronghold could cause the low-intensity fighting along

the Lebanon border to boil over into all-out war.

Much depends on how Hassan Nasrallah — who has led Hezbollah since an Israeli strike killed his predecessor in 1992 — chooses to respond. He has previously vowed to retaliate for any Israeli targeting of allied militant leaders in Lebanon, and was expected to deliver a speech at 6 pm (1600 GMT). Hezbollah and the Israeli military have been exchanging fire almost daily over the Israeli-Lebanese border since the war in Gaza began, but Nasrallah has appeared reluctant to escalate it further, perhaps fearing a repeat of the month-long 2006 war, in which Israel heavily bombed Beirut and southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah said its fighters attacked two Israeli border posts on Wednesday using "suitable weapons" and scoring "direct hits." The two sides

also exchanged fire overnight, but Hezbollah did not directly link its actions to Arouri's killing. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Israeli officials have not commented on the strike that killed Arouri, but Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an Israeli military spokesman, said "we are on high readiness for any scenario." The United States has sought to prevent any widening of the conflict, including by deploying two aircraft carriers and other military assets to the region. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was expected in the region this week.

A HIGH-PROFILE TARGET

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials have repeatedly threatened to kill Hamas leaders wherever they are. The group's October 7 attack from Gaza into southern Israel killed around

1,200 people, and some 240 others were taken hostage.

Israel claims to have killed a number of mid-level Hamas leaders in Gaza, but this would be the first time since the war that it has reached into another country to target the group's top leaders, many of whom live in exile around the region. Arouri was the deputy of Hamas' supreme political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, and headed the group's presence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. He was also a key liaison with Hezbollah. The US State Department had listed him as a terrorist and offered a USD 5 million reward for information about him. Haniyeh said Hamas was "more powerful and determined" following the attack, which killed six other members of the group, including two military commanders. "They left behind them strong men who will carry the banner after them," he said of those killed.



Palestinians walk between the remains of destroyed buildings following the Israeli bombardment on the main road of Gaza City on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Thousands of doctors in Britain go on longest-ever strike

AP ■ LONDON

Thousands of doctors walked off the job in Britain on Wednesday, the start of a six-day strike that was set to be the longest in the history of the state-funded National Health Service. Managers said tens of thousands scheduled appointments and operations will be cancelled during the walkout across England and Wales by junior doctors, those in the first years of their careers. The doctors, who form the backbone of hospital and clinic care, plan to stay off the job until 7 a.m. on Tuesday.

Senior doctors and other medics have had to be drafted in to cover for emergency services, critical care and maternity services. Julian Hartley, chief executive of health care managers' organization NHS Providers, said the strike came at one of the toughest times of the year for the health service, "immediately after the Christmas and New Year period because of the pressures the demands, and of course we've got flu, we've got COVID. "So there's

going to be an impact on patients that will be significant," he said.

Britain has endured a year of rolling strikes across the health sector as staff sought pay rises to offset the soaring cost of living.

The walkouts have strained the already stretched health service still struggling to recover from backlogs created by the coronavirus pandemic.

Nurses, ambulance crews and senior doctors have reached pay deals with the government, but the union representing junior doctors has held out, and negotiations have stalled. The government says it won't hold further talks unless doctors call off the strike, while the union says it won't negotiate unless it receives a "credible" pay offer.

"The notion that we're hellbent on calling strikes and all we want to do is call strikes is not what we want," said Dr. Vivek Trivedi, co-chair of the British Medical Association's Junior Doctors Committee. "What we want is to negotiate an offer we can put to our members and for our members to accept it."

Rescuers race against time in search for survivors in Japan after quakes kill 73

AP ■ WAJIMA

A series of powerful earthquakes that hit western Japan left at least 57 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.

The damage was so great that it could not immediately be assessed. Japanese media reports said tens of thousands of homes were destroyed.

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

"It is not just that it is a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I do not think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resident,

said as she swept around her house. The house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said.

Two of the latest reported deaths came from Suzu, where the death toll grew to 22 people, according to city officials. Twenty-four people died in nearby Wajima city.

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 specialising 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 are probably no people on Earth who are as disaster-ready as the Japanese," 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. A major quake and tsunami in 2011 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.

Investigators focus on air traffic communication after Tokyo runway crash

Tokyo (AP): Investigators were focusing on communication between air traffic control and two aircraft at Tokyo's Haneda Airport on Wednesday, a day after a large passenger plane and a Japanese coast guard aircraft collided on the runway and burst into flames, killing five people.

The accident occurred Tuesday evening when the Japan Airlines flight 516 plane landed on one of Haneda's four runways after the coast guard aircraft — a Bombardier Dash-8 — had also entered, preparing to take off.

An orange fireball erupted from both aircraft as the JAL plane continued down the runway covered in flames while the spewing gray smoke. Within 20 minutes, all 379 passengers and crew members slid down emergency chutes and survived. The pilot of the coast

guard plane, which exploded, evacuated with injuries but five crew members were killed.

The Transport Ministry released a transcript of air traffic control communication of about 4 minutes and 27 seconds just before the crash.

It showed no clear takeoff approval for the coast guard plane.

According to the text, the Tokyo air control gave the JAL Airbus A350 permission to land on Runway C, noting that there is a departing plane, with the JAL pilot repeating the action.

The coast guard plane said it was taxiing to the same runway, and the traffic control instructs it to proceed to the stop line ahead of the runway. The controller noted the coast guard gets the departure priority, and the pilot said he was moving to the stop line.



Sacramento (US) (AP): A 10-year-old Northern California boy has been arrested on suspicion of shooting to death another child with his father's gun, authorities said.

Sacramento County sheriff's deputies answered a shooting report at around 4:30 p.m. Saturday afternoon in Foothill Farms, an unincorporated Sacramento suburb. In a parking lot, they found a 10-year-old boy bleeding from the head and neck. Despite lifesaving measures, he was later pronounced dead at a hospital. The Sheriff's Office said in a social media posting. The boy was identified as Keith Frierson. He had left his apartment a short time before the shooting to ride his bicycle, a relative told KCRA-TV.

Deaths of Indian-origin couple, daughter in US ruled murder-suicide

New York (PTI): The deaths of a wealthy Indian-origin couple and their daughter in the US state of Massachusetts last week have been ruled a murder-suicide by medical authorities after autopsy. Rakesh Kamal, 57, his wife Teena Kamal, 54 and their college-going daughter Arianna Kamal, 18 were found dead in their USD 5 million mansion in Dover, Massachusetts on December 28, 2023.

A firearm was found near Rakesh Kamal. A press release issued by the office of Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey on Tuesday said that autopsy results issued by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner confirm that Teena and her daughter Arianna were

victims of homicide by gunshot. Rakesh died from a "gunshot wound consistent with being self-inflicted". The final autopsy report is likely to be completed in the coming weeks.

The release further said that while full forensic and ballistics testing of the gun has not been finalised, the firearm found with Rakesh is consistent with a .40 calibre Glock 22.

However, the firearm was not registered in Rakesh's name and "he was not licensed to possess it," the release added.

Massachusetts State Police have contacted the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives for assistance in determining the origin of the firearm.



Thousands of people attend a protest rally in Mogadishu, Somalia on Wednesday, after being angry with an agreement signed between Ethiopia and the breakaway region of Somaliland to give landlocked Ethiopia access to its shoreline. Speaking at a joint session of Somalia's federal parliament, the president of Somalia Mohamud said the agreement between Somaliland and Ethiopia is a violation of international law. Demonstrators are waving placards that reads we support the decision of our president and parliament. AP/PTI

Pak HC restores ECP order stripping Imran's party of 'bat' electoral symbol

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

A high court in Pakistan on Wednesday restored the election commission's order suspending the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's organisational polls as void and revoking its iconic cricket bat electoral symbol, in a huge blow to jailed former premier Imran Khan's embattled party.

The verdict, reserved earlier in the day, was announced by Peshawar High Court judge Ejaz Khan on the Election Commission of Pakistan's review petition.

On December 22, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) rejected PTI's organisational 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, founded by Khan, a cricketer-turned-politician, 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 Khan, PTI counsel Anwar said that the ECP was not a judicial institution, adding that seeking court intervention for or against its own verdict constituted contempt of court, the Dawn newspaper reported. Anwar claimed that all parties,

except the PPP, hatched a conspiracy to keep the PTI out of the electoral battle. He further asserted that the Constitution mandated free and fair elections.

On his part, the ECP lawyer said that the PTI had secured a stay order against the commission's verdict. "We have the authority to file a writ," he said. After listening to the arguments, the court reserved its verdict. A day earlier, the ECP counsel presented his arguments, while the PTI lawyers remained absent. Subsequently, the court issued a notice to the PTI for the completion of arguments. The development has left the former ruling party, its candidates, and supporters in limbo in the wake of the upcoming elections slated for February 8.

But it is not the end of the story as the single bench of the PHC also announced that the fate of the case would be decided by a two-member panel on January 9. After the PHC's final judgment, the matter would finally land in the Supreme

Court, which would ultimately decide if the PTI would get the cricket bat as its symbol. Commenting on the new development, PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan said that it showed that the ECP was biased. "Depriving the PTI of bat will leave a question mark on the legitimacy of the elections," he said. He also announced to take the matter to the Supreme Court on Thursday so that the controversy could be settled.

To a question, he said that if the bat was not given to the party, all its candidates would contest as independents but the party would not run away from the elections.

Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (Pildat) President Ahmed Bilal Mehboob termed the court's earlier verdict as "defective" and stressed that the PHC had not only ignored the jurisdiction matter but also hadn't heard the electoral body's counsel on the said issue, Geo News reported.

ISIS trying to establish foothold in Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan, which is witnessing an influx of Tehreek-i-Taliban terrorists in significant numbers in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's tribal districts, is also facing a threat from the Islamic State (ISIS) which is trying to establish a foothold in the country, the Ministry of Interior has said.

The ministry's statement came as the Senate was briefed about the escalating influence and activities of the TTP following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the inaction of the interim Taliban government led by the Taliban against the banned group.

The interior ministry, in a written response during question hour, highlighted the TTP's reorganisation and operational expansion during the peace talks in 2022, which has significantly increased its militant activities. "It has given significant rise to its activities and is seeking the support of other

militant groups to increase strength and capabilities. It is mostly concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially merged districts, with footprints in Balochistan and trying to activate its network in the country," it said.

It said that the arrival of TTP in significant numbers continues in merged districts, along with the recruitment, training and placing of suicide bombers, is a cause of concern.

The ministry said Daesh — an Arabic acronym for the self-proclaimed Islamic State militant group — was also trying to establish a foothold in Pakistan and resorted to terrorist activities against Shias and religious minority communities to ignite sectarian strife. It said fencing along the western borders of Pakistan had largely been completed to further strengthen the state mechanism of curbing the illegal movement from across the border.

However, it pointed out that the two organisations, particularly the TTP, continued to sabotage the fence. Pakistan started fencing its porous borders with Afghanistan in March 2017, after facing a spate of deadly attacks from Afghanistan-based militant groups in the previous year.

ly the TTP, continued to sabotage the fence.

Pakistan started fencing its porous borders with Afghanistan in March 2017, after facing a spate of deadly attacks from Afghanistan-based militant groups in the previous year.

The barrier, being built on the 2,640-km border, also known as the Durand Line, is near completion. It passes through rugged mountains, densely forested valleys and narrow rock passages.

Militants have ramped up their attacks since they revoked a ceasefire with the Pakistani government in November 2022. In the deadliest attack on security forces in the outgoing year, at least 23 Pakistan Army soldiers were martyred and more than 30 troops wounded on Dec 12 after militants belonging to the Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan stormed a compound used by the military in Dera Ismail Khan's Daraban area.

Security forces kill 4 terrorists in northwest Pakistan

Peshawar (PTI): Pakistani security forces killed four wanted terrorists, including a suicide bomber, in an intelligence-based operation in the country's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said on Wednesday.

The operation was carried out on Tuesday in the North Waziristan tribal district bordering Afghanistan, according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) — the military's media cell.

After an intense exchange of fire, four terrorists, including a suicide bomber, were killed by the security forces, it said.

Those killed were wanted by law enforcement agencies for various terrorist activities and were also planning a major terror attack in the district.

Large quantities of arms and ammunition were recovered from their possession, according to the ISPR.

The attack comes as Pakistan recorded an unprecedented spike in terrorism-related violence in the past year, with the total violence-related fatalities reaching a record six-year high, especially in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, according to data released by Islamabad-based think tanks.

According to the annual security report prepared by the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), at least 1,524 violence-related casualties and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations were recorded in Pakistan in 2023.

The total fatalities number marks a record six-year high, exceeding the 2018 level and the highest since 2017, the report said. Another think tank, the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), in its annual report, said that Pakistan witnessed another year of an unprecedented surge in militant attacks.

The PICSS said that the country saw a staggering 69 per cent rise in attacks, an 81 per cent increase in resultant deaths, and a 60 per cent surge in the number of injured.

NATO to help buy 1k Patriot missiles to defend allies

Brussels (AP): NATO announced Wednesday that it would help buy up to 1,000 Patriot missiles so that allies can better protect their territory as Russia ramps up its air assault on Ukraine. NATO's Support and Procurement Agency said it will support a group of nations, including Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Spain, in buying the Patriots, which are used to defend against cruise and ballistic missiles as well as enemy aircraft. According to industry sources, the contract could be worth around USD 5.5 billion.

The purchase could help allies free up more of their own defense systems for Ukraine. The agency said that "other user nations are expected to benefit from the conditions of the contract," without elaborat-

ing. "Russian missile and drone attacks on Ukrainian civilians, cities and towns show how important modern air defenses are," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said in a statement. "Scaling up ammunition production is key for Ukraine's security and for ours." As an organization, NATO provides only non-lethal support to Ukraine, but its members send weapons and ammunition individually or in groups.

Russia's latest round of attacks began Friday with its largest single assault on Ukraine of the conflict, which has bogged down into a grinding winter war of attrition along the 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) front line. More than 40 civilians have been killed since the weekend.

Ukraine targeting Russian border regions

AP ■ KYIV

Russia said on Wednesday it shot down 12 missiles fired at one of its southern regions bordering Ukraine, as Kyiv's forces seek to embarrass the Kremlin and puncture President Vladimir Putin's argument that life is going on as normal despite the 22-month war.

The situation in the border city of Belgorod, which came under two rounds of shelling on Wednesday morning, "remains tense", said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, writing on Telegram. "Air defence systems worked," he said, promising more details about possible damage after inspecting the area later in the day, part of a New Year's holiday week in Russia. Ukraine fired two Tochka-U missiles and seven rockets at the region late Tuesday, followed by six Tochka-U missiles and six Vilkh rockets on Wednesday,

the Russian Defence Ministry said.

The Soviet-built Tochka-U missile system has a range of up to 120 kilometers (75 miles) and a warhead that can carry cluster munitions. Ukraine has received some cluster munitions from the United States but the Tochka-U and Vilkh can use their own cluster munitions.

The Russian side of the frontier has come under increasingly frequent attack in recent days. Throughout the war, border villages have sporadically been targeted by Ukrainian artillery fire, rockets, mortar shells and drones launched from thick forests where they are hard to detect. Lately, as Russia fired missiles and drones at Ukrainian cities, Kyiv's troops have aimed at Belgorod's regional capital, which is about 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city.

Belgorod, with a popula-



Rescuers work at the site of a damaged building after a missile strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, January 2, 2024.

tion of about 340,000, is the biggest Russian city near the border. It can be reached by relatively simple and movable weapons such as multiple rocket launchers.

On Saturday, shelling of Belgorod killed 25 people,

including five children, in one of the deadliest strikes on Russian soil since Moscow's full-scale invasion. Another civilian was killed on Tuesday in a new salvo.

Hitting Belgorod and disrupting city life is a dramat-

ic way for Ukraine to show it can strike back against Russia, whose military outnumbered and outguns Kyiv's forces. The tactic appeared to be having some success, with signs the attacks are unsettling the public, political leaders and military observers.

On Monday, Putin lashed out against the Belgorod attacks by Ukraine. "They want to intimidate us and create uncertainty within our country," he said, promising to step up retaliation. Answering a question from a soldier who asked him about civilian casualties in Belgorod, Putin said: "I also feel a simmering anger."

Many Russian military bloggers have expressed regret about Moscow's withdrawal from the border area in September 2022 amid a swift counteroffensive by Kyiv, and they have argued that more territory must be seized to secure Belgorod and other border areas.

B'desh Prez Shahabuddin casts vote

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin on Wednesday said that voting was the most acceptable method in selecting the leadership of the country democratically and urged people to fulfil their civic duty by voting in Sunday's general election.

Shahabuddin's remarks after casting his vote through the postal ballot assume significance as the main opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by former prime minister Khalida Zia is boycotting the January 7 election.

The BNP is demanding an interim non-party neutral government to hold the election. The demand was rejected by the government headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is heading the ruling Awami League.

Shahabuddin and his wife, Dr Rebeka Sultana, cast their vote at the Credential Hall of Bangabhaban in Dhaka, The Daily Star newspaper reported.



They are both voters of their hometown, Pabna.

"Let's vote ourselves and encourage others to cast (a) vote," the president told the journalists after casting his vote.

"Voting is the democratic right of the people. As a citizen, it is our duty to vote," he was quoted as saying in the report.

Asserting that people give their democratic verdict by casting their vote, Shahabuddin said, "Voting is the most acceptable method in selecting the leader-

ship in a democratic manner."

The president added that he was hopeful that the election would be held in a peaceful and festive environment with the participation of all, the report said. According to the Election Commission Secretariat, registered voters, those imprisoned or in legal custody, expatriates, and polling officers can also vote through postal ballots in the January 7 general polls, the report said. 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.

According to Human Rights Watch, political violence in the country has killed at least 16 people, including two police officers, and injured thousands more in the past three months, when dozens of vehicles, including buses and trucks, were set on fire. Bangladesh has deployed armed forces to assist the administration in holding the upcoming national election in a free, fair, and peaceful manner. The US and other major Western countries called for dialogue between the ruling Awami League and particularly with the BNP to ensure an inclusive and credible election, which saw no headway due to reluctance from both sides. With the BNP boycotting the election and no other credible opposition party against it, Hasina's Awami League is likely to gain the upper hand and will likely form the government for the fourth consecutive term.

Momen: Yunus national asset but did commit crime

Dhaka (PTI): Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Wednesday called Dr Muhammad Yunus a "national asset" but said the Nobel laureate economist did commit a crime for which he was convicted by a labour court. On Monday, Yunus, 83, was sentenced to six months in jail by a court for violating the labour laws, which was termed as "politically motivated" by his supporters ahead of the January 7 general elections. He sought bail after the ruling, which he was granted immediately for a month in exchange for a Taka 5,000 (USD 45) bond.

Yunus and three of his colleagues in Grameen Telecom — one of the firms he founded — were accused of violating labour laws when they failed to create a workers' welfare fund in the company.

"Muhammad Yunus is our national asset... But there are many Nobel Laureates in the world who have done wrong and committed criminal acts, they have been punished," Momen said, adding that in this case, Bangladesh's Nobel Laureate committed a crime. The minister said the judgment was a matter of the court, where Yunus got an opportunity to fight the case legally and was eventually punished for the crime he committed. Asked if Bangladesh's foreign relations will deteriorate after the judgment, Momen said, "Every country respects the law. I don't think there will be any impact regarding this." Many other Nobel laureates in the world have committed crimes and received punishment.

Their convictions did not affect the relations between countries because every nation respects the laws. Thus, we will not encounter problems due to this," Momen said. Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, earning Bangladesh the reputation of being the home of micro-credit through his Grameen Bank.

China's third aircraft carrier Fujian gears up for sea trials

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's third aircraft carrier 'Fujian', the heaviest and most advanced compared to its two previous warships, is gearing up for sea trials, official media reported on Wednesday. State-run China Central Television displayed the latest footage of the domestically built aircraft carrier on its news programme which showed the three electromagnetic catapult tracks uncovered on the ship. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) will push forward with the mooring trials of CNS Fujian, China's second domestically-made aircraft carrier, as scheduled in the new year, said Yin Hongxin, an officer aboard the vessel, official China Daily reported.

China's official media often creates buzz about the progress of new defence equipment like new ships, fighter jets and missiles, displaying their photos to

generate public interest.

China launched Fujian in June 2022 with a lot of fanfare with claims that it could match the US aircraft carriers in terms of technology as Beijing is increasingly coming under pressure from Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy especially in the disputed South China Sea and Taiwan, which it claims as part of its territory.

China claims most of the South China Sea while Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have counterclaims.

China's first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, was a refit of the Soviet-era ship commissioned in 2012 followed by the indigenously built 2nd aircraft carrier Shandong in 2019.

With 80,000 tonnes displacement, 20,000 tonnes more than the first and second aircraft carriers, the Fujian was expected to venture out to far off seas like the Indian Ocean,

India's backyard where the Indian Navy has a robust presence. China has already expanded its naval base at Djibouti in the Horn of Africa to berth aircraft carriers. China has also acquired the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka as a debt swap for 99 years. It is also modernising Pakistan's Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea. China plans to have around five aircraft carriers, according to the official media. The next aircraft carrier China plans to build is expected to be nuclear-powered. Naval experts say Fujian may take some time for operationalisation.

Perhaps PLAN may begin sending aircraft carriers to the Indian Ocean by 2025. The Fujian, which is the "first fully domestically developed and constructed" aircraft carrier with an electromagnetic aircraft launch system (EMALS), has a flat, straight flight deck and arresting device.

Hong Kong prosecutors allege Jimmy Lai urged protests, sanctions against China

AP ■ HONG KONG

Prosecutors on Wednesday alleged that Hong Kong activist and publisher Jimmy Lai had encouraged the city's residents to protest and urged the US to take action against the "oppressive" Chinese authorities in Beijing.

The 76-year-old media tycoon, who founded the now-defunct Apple Daily newspaper, was arrested in 2020 during a crackdown on massive pro-democracy protests that rocked Hong Kong in 2019. The central government in Beijing responded by imposing a sweeping national security law aimed at stamping down opposition. Lai has been in jail for over three years.

Lai's national security trial is



being closely watched by foreign governments, business professionals and legal scholars. Many view it as a trial of the city's freedoms and a test for judicial independence in the Asian financial hub. Lai has pleaded not guilty to two charges of conspiring to collude with foreign countries and another count of conspiring to publish seditious material. He

smiled at family members as he entered the court on Wednesday and put his hands together to show appreciation to supporters in the public gallery. One supporter shouted "Hang in there!" and was hushed by guards.

Prosecutor Anthony Chau on the fifth day of the trial presented what he said were Lai's instructions to senior management and editors at Apple Daily to come up with ways to urge the Hong Kong public to protest a proposed extradition bill in 2019.

The bill, which was later withdrawn following protests, could have allowed suspects to be extradited from Hong Kong to mainland China, where Communist Party-dominated courts are accused of handing down convictions based on

political considerations and using coerced confessions.

Prosecutors submitted 31 pieces of allegedly seditious content published on Apple Daily, including articles and commentaries as well as pages urging people to protest. Some of the material even advocated for violence in the protests, the prosecution argued.

In his commentaries, Lai alleged that the Chinese Communist Party sought to control Hong Kong via "electronic means and totalitarian machines," Chau said. Lai had allegedly also given instructions to Apple Daily to introduce English content for the purpose of asking foreign countries to engage in sanctions against China and Hong Kong, the prosecution said.

Cold breaks record in Sweden

Copenhagen: Temperatures fell below minus 40 degrees Celsius (minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit) in the Nordic region for a second day in a row Wednesday, breaking a 25-year-old record for the coldest January night in Sweden as a cold spell gripped the area.

In Kivikkjokk-Arrenjarka in Swedish Lapland, the mercury dropped to minus 43.6 C (minus 46.5 F), the coldest temperature in the country in January since 1999, Sweden's TT news agency reported.

On Tuesday, Nikkaluokta, a village inhabited by indigenous Sami people in northern Sweden, recorded a temperature of minus 41.6 C (minus 42.8 F). The village is in Lapland, which stretches from northern parts of Norway through Sweden and Finland to Russia. Ida Dahlström of the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute said



A man walks by the Allas Sea Pool, in Southern Helsinki, Finland, Tuesday. Finland and Sweden have recorded this winter's cold records on Tuesday as a temperatures plummeted to over minus 40 degrees as a result of a cold spell prevailing in the Nordic region.

northern Sweden had overnight temperatures of minus 25-35 C (minus 13-31 F) "and the cold seems to stay there for the rest of the week," TT reported. The weather -- cold with snow and gale-force winds -- disrupted transportation throughout the Nordic

region, with several bridges closed and some train and ferry services suspended.

In Finland, the weather is forecast to remain cold across the nation with temperatures down to minus 35 C (minus 31 F) in the north, at least until Sunday.

Adani group stocks settle higher

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of Adani group companies ended higher on Wednesday, defying a weak trend in the broader equity market, after the Supreme Court ruled that there was no ground to order an investigation by an SIT or other probe agency into allegations against the group. The Supreme Court on Wednesday said capital market regulator Sebi must conclude its probe within three months. Adani Energy Solutions zoomed 11.60 per cent, Adani Total Gas climbed 9.84 per cent, Adani Green Energy soared 6 per cent and Adani Power 4.99 per cent on the BSE. Adani Wilmar went up by 3.97 per cent, while NDTV

(3.66 per cent), Adani Enterprises (2.45 per cent), Adani Ports (1.39 per cent), Ambuja Cements (0.94 per cent) and ACC (0.10 per cent) also advanced. In morning trade, Adani Energy Solutions zoomed 17.83 per cent, NDTV jumped 11.39 per cent, Adani Total Gas climbed 9.99 per cent, Adani Green Energy soared 9.13 per cent and Adani Enterprises surged 9.11 per cent. Shares of Adani Wilmar went up by 8.52 per cent, Adani Ports climbed 6 per cent, Adani Power by 4.99 per cent, Ambuja Cements by 3.46 per cent and ACC by 2.96 per cent. Adani Ports and Ambuja Cements also hit their 52-week high levels during the morning



trade. The combined market valuation of all the 10 group firms stood at Rs 15,11,073.97 crore. The group firms together added Rs 64,189.16 crore in market valuation from yesterday's close. In the equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 535.88 points or 0.75 per cent lower at 71,356.60, and the Nifty declined 148.45 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,517.35. The Supreme Court on Wednesday

directed Sebi to complete its probe into two pending cases relating to allegations against the Adani group within three months. Holding that it cannot regulate Sebi's power of investigation, a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud noted that Sebi has completed its probe in 22 out of 24 cases relating to allegations against the Adani group. The apex court also said that the facts of the case do not warrant the transfer of the probe into the matter to a Special Investigation Team (SIT) or other probe agency. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions on the Adani-Hindenburg row over allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant.

ONGC wins 7, Reliance-BP one oil, gas blocks in latest bid round

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) won seven areas for exploration of oil and gas while a consortium of Reliance Industries Ltd and BP Plc walked away with one in the latest bid round. Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said 10 blocks for exploration and production of oil and gas were offered in the eighth round of Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP-VIII). Contracts for the 10 blocks were signed on Wednesday morning, he said. Of the 10 blocks offered, ONGC won seven while Reliance-BP, Oil India Ltd and Sun Petrochemicals Pvt Ltd got one area each. Parallely, three coal-bed methane (CBM) blocks too were awarded and the ninth round of OALP was launched for bidding. "Estimated investments in awarded blocks for a committed exploration work programme is to the tune of USD 233 million," an official note said. India had offered 10 blocks for bidding in the eighth round of the OALP in July 2022. After extending the bid deadline a few times, the round closed in July 2023. Five companies — ONGC, Vedanta Ltd, Oil India Ltd (OIL), Sun Petrochemicals Pvt Ltd and Reliance-BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd — put in 13 bids for the 10 blocks on offer in OALP-VIII, according to the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH). Seven of the 10 blocks on offer received single bids and the other three blocks had two bidders each. Global energy giants like ExxonMobil, Chevron and TotalEnergies, which India has been courting to give a fillip to exploration and production, did not put in any bid. ONGC was the sole bidder for six blocks while Reliance-BP was the sole bidder for the ultra-deep sea block in Krishna Godavari basin, according to the DGH. In all, ONGC bid for nine out of the 10 blocks. It did not bid for the block bid by Reliance-BP. ONGC won seven out of the nine blocks it had bid. Reliance and BP have more than a decade-old partnership and had won a block in one of the previous OALP rounds. The government has been hop-



ing that opening up more acreage for exploration will help boost India's oil and gas production, helping cut down the USD 222 billion oil import bill. In 2016, it brought in an open acreage policy which moved away from the previous practice of government identifying and bidding out blocks to one where explorers were allowed the freedom to identify any area outside of the ones that are already with some company or other, for prospecting of oil and gas. The areas identified are to be clubbed twice a year and offered for bidding. The firm identifying the area gets a 5-point advantage. But except for the first round, private sector participation has been scant. Mining mogul Anil Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd walked away with 41 blocks out of the 55 blocks on offer in the very first round and got another 10 areas in two subsequent rounds. Other rounds have been dominated by state-owned firms. "A momentous occasion in India's quest towards expanding and strengthening oil exploration & production footprint which will significantly accelerate our journey towards energy self-sufficiency," Puri said on the OALP-VIII contract signing. "The steps that the government has taken in the energy sector in the last two years will play a key role in reducing our dependence on energy imports." He said an OALP-IX bid round has been launched. "Contracts signed for 3 Coal Bed Methane Blocks awarded under Special CBM Bid Round-2022," he said. Under the OALP VIII bid round, a total of 10 blocks were offered for bidding comprising an area of 34,364 square kilometres, spread across 9 sedimentary basins and included 2 onland blocks, 4 shallow water blocks, 2 deep water blocks and 2 ultra

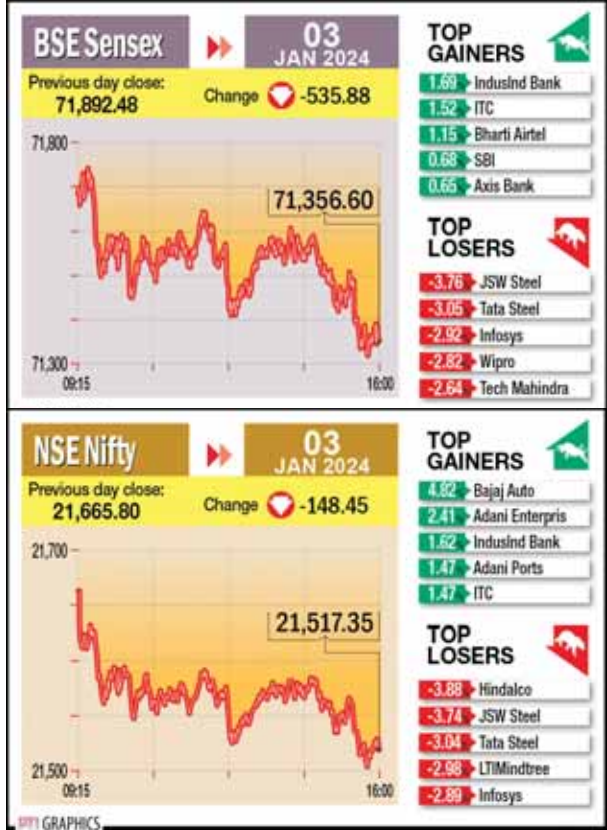
Sensex falls 535 points dragged by HDFC & IT shares



Growth in Asia Pacific emerging markets to remain strong in 2024: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The economic growth in Asia Pacific will remain strong in 2024 and GDP is expected to grow by about 5 per cent in India and a host of emerging market countries, Fitch Ratings said on Wednesday. In its report titled 'APAC Cross-Sector Outlook 2024', Fitch said the outlooks for the banking sectors in India and Indonesia, as well as APAC emerging markets as a whole, move to improving in 2024, partly reflecting the robust economic backdrop. "Economic growth in APAC will generally remain strong in 2024, especially in emerging markets (EMs), supporting sector outlooks across the region. We expect real GDP to expand by, or above, 5 per cent in India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, and China's performance will still be strong by most other countries' standards," Fitch said. The Indian economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 fiscal year. India's GDP expanded 7.8 per cent and 7.6 per cent in the June and September quarters, respectively. Fitch had last month said it expects India to be among the world's fastest-growing large sovereigns, with resilient GDP growth of 6.9 per cent this fiscal, followed by 6.5 per cent in 2024-25. "Robust regional economic growth — particularly in Asia's large emerging markets — should offset headwinds from slowing growth in China, weak global demand and high interest rates, helping to support performance across sectors in APAC in 2024," Fitch Ratings Senior Director Duncan Innes-Ker said. Fitch said headwinds from slower Chinese growth, weak global demand and higher interest burdens following the rise in interest rates over 2022-23 will weigh on performance for many sectors. But the bulk of Fitch's APAC sector outlooks for 2024 remain neutral. "Sino-US tensions have eased recently, but we expect relations to remain challenging, which will lead companies to pursue further supply-chain diversification to limit exposure to geopolitical risks," Fitch said.

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stock markets declined for a second day in a row on Wednesday with benchmark Sensex closing lower by 535 points due to selling in HDFC Bank and IT shares amid weak global trends. The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 535.88 points or 0.75 per cent to settle at 71,356.60. During the day, it tumbled 588.51 points or 0.81 per cent to 71,303.97. The broader Nifty of the National Stock Exchange dropped by 148.45 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,517.35. As many as 32 Nifty shares declined while 18 advanced. Key stock indices closed near their day's low levels due to continued fall in IT and banking shares amid weak global cues ahead of the release of the US Fed meeting minutes. Metal and commodities shares also declined while PSU bank, realty and pharma shares gained on renewed buying. Among the Sensex firms, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle, HCL Technologies, HDFC Bank and Maruti were the major laggards. IndusInd Bank, ITC, Bharti Airtel and State Bank of India were among the winners. "The lack of fresh triggers and concerns over valuation influenced investors to stay sidelined.



Weak global indicators, like contraction in China & Euro zone manufacturing data, added concerns about global economic recovery in 2024. Importantly, the market was waiting for the FED minutes later today for rate insights," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. India's manufacturing sector growth fell to an 18-month low of 54.9 in December

amid softer increase in factory orders and output, despite minimal inflation, a monthly survey said on Wednesday. The PMI was at 56 in November. The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI survey, conducted by S&P Global, showed that there were softer, albeit sharp, increase in factory orders and output, while business confidence towards the year-ahead outlook strengthened. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.30 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.20 per cent. Among the indices, metal fell by 2.44 per cent, teck (1.78 per cent), commodities (0.72 per cent) and financial services (0.20 per cent). Utilities, services, realty, power and healthcare were among the winners. In Asian markets, Seoul and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading lower. The US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.55 per cent to USD 75.47 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,602.16 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Sensex fell by 379.46 points or 0.53 per cent to settle at 71,892.48 on Tuesday. The Nifty declined by 76.10 points or 0.35 per cent to 21,665.80.



Government scraps privatisation of SAIL's Salem steel plant

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government on Wednesday said it has decided not to go ahead with the privatisation of SAIL's Salem Steel Plant (SSP). For strategic disinvestment of Tamil Nadu-based SSP, global Expressions of Interest (EOIs) were invited on July 4, 2019, by SAIL. "Multiple EOIs had been received and bidders were shortlisted. However, due to lack of interest of shortlisted bidders to proceed further with the transaction, Government of India, with the approval of Alternative Mechanism (Empowered Group of Ministers) has decided to

annul the current EOI thereby terminating the present transaction," the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) said on its website. In 2018, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved the strategic sale of three units of Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) — Alloys Steels Plant (ASP) in Durgapur, SSP in Tamil Nadu, and Visvesvaraya Iron and Steel Plant (VISP) in Bhadrwati, Karnataka. In 2019, the government called off the sale process of ASP, while in 2022, the strategic sale of VISP was terminated citing lack of interest from bidders.

Gold plunges ₹230; silver tumbles ₹400



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices plunged Rs 230 to Rs 63,970 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a bearish trend in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the yellow metal ended at Rs 64,200 per 10 grams. Silver also tumbled Rs 400 to Rs 78,400 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 78,800 per kg in the previous close. In the international markets, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,059 per ounce and USD 23.60 per ounce, respectively.

Following a strengthening in the dollar index and a sharp rise in US treasury yields, gold prices came under pressure, Saamil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,059 per ounce, down by USD 14 from the previous close in the global markets. Traders might refrain from placing aggressive bets before the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) December meeting minutes and US jobs openings data, which will be released on Wednesday, for more clarity on the Fed's monetary policy interest rate outlook, Gandhi said.



Certain quality control order norms for AC industry relaxed

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government has relaxed quality control order (QCO) norms for the air conditioner industry to promote ease of doing business. The order was issued in 2019 and it came into effect from October last year. These relaxations have been given after a detailed stakeholder consultation with the industry. To resolve the issues faced by the industry due to the order, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has introduced amendments. According to a government notification, Hermetic Compressors of more than 7000 W (2 TR) capacity have been removed from the order for one year for the manufacturers of air conditioning and refrigeration equipment and related parts. It has also exempted 200 numbers of goods or articles imported per year for the purpose of research and development by the manufacturers. These imported goods and articles however will not be allowed to be sold in the market and should be disposed of as scrap. "The OEMs (original equipment manufacturers) shall maintain a year-wise record of such goods or articles and furnish the same, if so desired by the Government," it said. Exemption have also been given to 6,000 hermetic compressors and heat exchangers domestically manufactured or imported for maintenance and sales per year by each of the manufacturers. This is "subject to the condition that such manufacturers shall declare its old stock" of hermetic compressors and heat exchangers, it added. The DPIIT initially issued Air Conditioner and its related Parts, Hermetic Compressor and Temperature Sensing Controls (Quality Control) Order, 2019 on December 5, 2019. The Temperature Sensing Controls were dropped from the list subsequently as requested by the industry due to practical difficulties. The date of implementation of the QCO was extended three times keeping in view of difficulties faced by the AC manufacturers due to the COVID-19 pandemic, to align with the date of implementation of BEE energy table, non-availability of adequate testing labs, and inability of BIS to undertake in-person audits of foreign manufacturers due to restrictions on foreign travel. "In response to resolve the issues faced by the industry regarding the said QCO...DPIIT introduces amendments in the Quality Control Order vide E-Gazette notification dated 2nd January 2024 for the smoother implementation and Ease of doing business by providing certain relaxation/exemptions," the department said. The DPIIT is establishing a quality control regime in the country for the industrial sectors under its domain in association with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Industry and other stakeholders.

BUSINESS BRIEF

RASGOTRA TAKES ITBP DG CHARGE
NEW DELHI: In compliance of the Central Government order, Rahul Rasgotra, IPS, (MA: 89) has taken over the charge of the Director General, Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force with effect from 1st January 2024. The officer, before joining the elite Force, was working as the Special Director in the IB.

TYAGI APPOINTED CMD, POWERGRID
GURUGRAM: Ravindra Kumar Tyagi has joined as Chairman and Managing Director of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSU under Ministry of Power, Government of India. Prior to this, Tyagi was serving as Director (Operations) of the company. He has over 33 years of rich experience in the power sector at various key positions in leading CPSUs.

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NEW DELHI: After the second wave of D2H, India is ready to enter the third modern phase of broadcasting, Direct to Phone (D2M). Sankhya Lab in collaboration with Prasar Bharati and IIT Kanpur has developed a technology in India through which we will now be able to watch and listen to broadcasts like TV and radio directly on mobile. For this there will be no need of any kind of internet or spectrum. This will be a special type of chip which can be stolen in all types of phones.

Office space demand up 15 per cent in top 8 cities: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Leasing of office space rose by 15 per cent across eight major cities last year, despite a decline in demand in Bengaluru, the largest workspace market, according to Knight Frank. In a webinar, real estate consultant Knight Frank India on Wednesday released its report on the Indian housing and office market. The data showed that office demand grew 15 per cent annually to 59.6 million square feet in 2023, despite global economic and geopolitical concerns. The demand was mainly driven by Global Capability Centres (GCCs), which took on lease 20.8 million square feet last year, up 58 per cent from 2022 level. Knight Frank highlighted that the total office leasing number is the second-best year with the peak level achieved in 2019 at 60.6 million square feet. According to the data for 2023, compared with the previous year, the leasing of office space in Mumbai grew 16 per cent to 7.4 million square feet. Delhi-NCR saw a 14 per cent rise in office space demand to 10.1 million square feet. Pune witnessed a 9 per cent increase in leasing to 6.7 million square feet. Office space demand in Chennai surged 92 per cent to 10.8 million square feet. The absorption of office space in Hyderabad rose 32 per cent to 8.8 million square feet. Kolkata saw a 20 per cent annual growth in leasing to 1.4 million square feet during the last calendar year. But leasing of office space in Bengaluru fell 14 per cent to 12.5 million square feet. In Ahmedabad, the demand fell 15 per cent to 1.8 million square feet.

Shishir Bajjal, Chairman and Managing Director, Knight Frank India, said, "The impetus behind India's recent dominance in office absorption is attributed to its strong economic fundamentals." The year 2024 promises to be a standout year for the office market, driven by India-facing businesses and GCCs, he added. "India will continue to play up on its natural advantages, which include excellent real estate, highly competitive rents, a very strong talent pool and a consistently growing economy, making it a robust end-user market. These factors will catalyse for advancing further demand for office space," Bajjal said. The surge in flexible workspaces would play a pivotal role in fostering growth-oriented businesses in India, he said. "With these factors in play, we anticipate the office market to reach new peaks in 2024," Bajjal said. Knight Frank noted that India's office space absorption has undergone a shift in characteristics, transitioning from being predominantly led by third-party IT services to being increasingly favoured by GCC in recent years.

Mohun Bagan part ways with head coach Ferrando

HABAS TAKES CHARGE

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Wednesday parted ways with their head coach Juan Ferrando after the club's poor run of form in the Indian Super League. Technical director Antonio Habas was made the interim head coach, starting with the Kalinga Super Cup next week, the Indian Super League franchise announced. Ferrando was appointed the Mariners' head coach in December 2021, joining the Kolkata heavyweights from FC Goa. Under him, Mohun Bagan won the ISL title last season and made the AFC Cup inter-zonal semi-finals. Mohun Bagan also won the Durand



Cup with Ferrando at the helm of affairs this season. "Thanks to Juan Ferrando for winning this year's Durand Cup and ISL 2022-23," Mohun Bagan said in a brief statement. The iconic club's performance dipped this season as they made a group stage exit from the AFC Cup, and slumped to fifth position in the ISL standings after three defeats in a row. Habas previously managed ATK Mohun Bagan during the ISL 2021-22 season and he was the first head coach to win two ISL titles. The Spaniard began his journey with Atletico de Kolkata during the inaugural 2014 edition and became the first head coach to win the ISL title.

He had a stint with FC Pune City later on before returning to India to join ATK FC, leading them to the ISL title during the 2019-20 season. Habas was back at ATK Mohun Bagan the following season and guided them to the ISL final. He parted ways with the Mariners midway during the 2021-22 season with Ferrando taking charge. Ahead of the ongoing season, Habas made a return to the Sanjiv Goenka-owned franchise, this time as the technical director. Mohun Bagan are clubbed with arch-rivals East Bengal in the Kalinga Super Cup. The Mariners will begin their campaign on January 9. The arch-rivals will lock horns against each other on January 19.



Naomi Osaka first tournament as a mom ends in loss

AP ■ BRISBANE

A loss didn't bother Naomi Osaka at the Brisbane International as much as the missed opportunity for more matches ahead of the year's first Grand Slam tournament. The four-time major winner's first tournament since becoming a mother ended in a 3-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4 second-round loss Wednesday to three-time Brisbane International champion Karolina Pliskova. Osaka won her first match at the elite level since late 2022 on Monday in straight sets against Tamara Korpatsch. After that win, she said the birth in July of her daughter, Shai, and the changes to her mindset since becoming a mother had given her a better perspective on tennis. A second-round encounter featuring two former No. 1-ranked players was a step up in tempo and a better indication of how Osaka's preparations are going for the Australian Open starting Jan. 14 in Melbourne. "The week is definitely shorter than I wanted it to be," Osaka said in a news conference. "I feel like I'm pretty good where I am right now. Even the last time I played her, I think I played better today. "I feel like, honestly, I think I'm pretty good. Like, the court is just really... It's her court, you know what I mean? I guess I'll see what happens in Melbourne." Osaka won the first set but Pliskova recovered and fired 16 aces and hit 50 winners, saving 10 of the 12 breakpoint chances she faced and making amends for her 11 double-faults. "I saw the stats after and my break points could have been better," Osaka said, "but I think other than that we both played really well... So hopefully she says the same thing!" A former finalist at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open now ranked 39th, the 31-year-old Pliskova was playing for the first time since September after a left wrist injury curtailed her 2023 season.

"A lot of things to improve, but a good start," to the season, said Pliskova, who had her left wrist and hand taped for the opening match of the day on Pat Rafter Arena. She'll next play third-seeded Jelena Ostapenko, who beat Camila Giorgi 6-1, 6-4. Top seed and defending Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka had a 6-3, 6-0 win over Lucia Bronzetti of Italy in the following match. Second-seeded Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, was scheduled to meet Olivia Gadecki in a night match. On the men's side, Australian qualifier James Duckworth beat Yannick Hanfmann 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (2) and fourth-seeded Ugo Humbert had a 6-4, 6-4 win over Alex Michelsen. Osaka's next match will be an exhibition in Melbourne on Rod Laver Arena, the main court for the Australian Open, next week. She was happy with her serve against Pliskova, firing 14 aces and just two double-faults, and winning 83% of points when she got her first serve into play. "I've trained so hard since giving birth, I need to enjoy these moments," Osaka said, adding she's changed her attitude to winning and losing since becoming a mom. "I do feel different. I mean, of course I feel sad, but the sadness is me being like, 'Aww, I wish I could have done better, because I know I'm spending so much time away from her (Shai), so I want it to be worth it somehow.'" Competing in Brisbane proved that all her practice wasn't a waste ahead of the Australian Open, where she has won two of her Grand Slam titles. "For me even stepping on the court is a personal win because a couple of weeks ago I was even doubting if I could play with everyone," she said. "So I guess these two matches that I've had kind of prove to me that I am doing OK, and the year is just going to get better for me."



Jovic continues scoring streak

AC Milan beats Cagliari 4-1 to reach Italian Cup quarterfinals

AP ■ MILAN

Luka Jovic scored two goals to help AC Milan beat Cagliari 4-1 in the Italian Cup on Tuesday. Milan has won the Italian Cup five times but it last lifted the trophy in 2003 and hasn't reached the final since 2018. The Rossoneri will face either Atalanta or Sassuolo in the quarterfinals. Milan coach Stefano Pioli was under pressure after a poor run that had seen his team eliminated from the Champions League at the group stage. The Rossoneri also had a lengthy injury list and rested a number of star players - starting with four teenagers - but hadn't lost to Cagliari at San Siro since 1997. Jovic opened the scoring in the 29th minute following a delightful assist from Theo Hernandez and the duo combined again shortly before halftime. The two goals took Jovic's tally to five in his past six matches. It took the Serbia forward until December to score his first goal for Milan after joining from Fiorentina at the start of the season. Teenager Chaka Traore extended Milan's lead early in the second half, with his third Rossoneri goal in his first start for the team. Rafael Leao capped a great night for Milan in stoppage time, shortly after Paolo Azzini netted a consolation for Cagliari.

Poland advances to United Cup semis with sweep of China

AP ■ PERTH

Poland became the first team through to the United Cup semifinals with a dominant 3-0 win over China in Perth on Wednesday after France completed a sweep of Italy in Sydney to progress to the quarterfinals. Top-ranked Iga Swiatek beat No. 14 Zheng Qinwen 6-2, 6-3 in the women's singles to give Poland an unassailable 2-0 lead after Hubert Hurkacz's 6-3, 6-4 win over Zhang Zhizhen in the men's singles. Polish pair Katarzyna Piter and Jan Zieliński finished the sweep with a 6-3, 5-7, 10-7 win

over You Xiaodi and Sun Fajing in the mixed doubles. The Poland team will travel across Australia for Saturday's semifinals in Sydney, where they will play the winner of the France vs. Norway quarterfinal. Earlier Wednesday in Sydney, Caroline Garcia and Adrian Panarino led France past Italy. Mannarino beat Lorenzo Sonego in straight sets before Garcia beat Jasmine Paolini 6-4, 5-7, 6-4 in the women's singles to give France a 2-0 lead and confirm top spot in Group D. "We have gone a step further than last year," Garcia said.



"Obviously we're very happy with it and we want to keep going." French pair Elixane Lechemia

and Édouard Roger-Vasselin completed the sweep with a straight sets win in the mixed doubles.

Greece was scheduled to play Canada later Wednesday in Sydney to conclude Group B. Greece, which had to make do without Stefanos Tsitsipas in its opening match against Chile, must beat Canada to have any chance of advancing. A win for Canada will see it advance as group winner. Serbia - led by top-ranked Novak Djokovic - faced Australia in the night session in Perth. Djokovic has been bothered by a wrist injury during the tournament but found a way past Jiri Lehecka in Serbia's last Group E match against the Czech Republic.

Emma progresses to Auckland quarters

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Fourth-seed American Emma Navarro was impressive in beating Elina Avanesyan 6-1, 6-2 in just over 70 minutes. "I'm finding my groove a little bit, second match of the year so it's good to have some court time behind me," Navarro said. "I'm happy with my performance today and that I'm able to move on and keep playing some tennis here in Auckland. Meanwhile, the American former teenage star Amanda Anisimova struck the first roadblock in her comeback from an eight months break Wednesday when she was beaten 6-0, 6-1 by Marie Bouzkova in the second round of the Auckland Tennis Classic. Anisimova played her first match since May in the opening round of the Auckland tournament after taking a break from tennis, citing burnout and mental health issues. She beat Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova in two sets in the first round in a match which stretched over two hours. But she was unable to get a foothold in her second round match against fifth-seeded Bouzkova from the Czech Republic who was flawless and didn't give her a single opening.



Bouzkova put 80 percent of first serves in play and managed to neutralize Anisimova's power-hitting game from the baseline. "I think it couldn't get any better for me," Bouzkova said. "I think I stayed very solid. "I tried and Amanda is such a huge hitter so it's not easy to find some winners but I'm glad I could find a few here and there and get the win here today." Anisimova is a former U.S. Open junior champion who was a French Open semifinalist in 2019 and whose singles ranking peaked at 21 that year. She stuck mainly to the baseline on Wednesday and occasionally showed her power game. Bouzkova broke up her game with variations, going to the net at times and using topspin and slice to constantly change the momentum of the match.

West Ham and Brighton settle for 0-0 draw in Premier League

AP ■ LONDON

Defensive-minded West Ham held off late pressure from Brighton to settle for a 0-0 draw that extended its Premier League unbeaten run to four games on Tuesday. One point was enough for Brighton to climb over Manchester United into seventh place, while the Hammers stayed in sixth. Both teams were missing starters through injury, illness and suspension. West Ham was also without forward Mohammed Kudus, who was called up by Ghana for the Africa Cup of Nations. West Ham hasn't allowed a goal in its past four league matches - three of which were victories. Brighton substitute Jakob Moder blazed a shot over the bar from close range in the 87th minute at London Stadium. The visitors threatened again minutes later but goalkeeper Alphonse Areola stretched to save Adam Lallana's shot from distance. Just before the hour mark, Brighton's João Pedro beat several defenders but shot straight at Areola. Tomas Soucek then missed on the other end, shooting wide in the 61st minute after Said Benrahma's cross fell to him. Evan Ferguson provided a spark



off the bench for Brighton. The 19-year-old Ireland striker shot just wide shortly after replacing Danny Welbeck. **MILNER MILESTONE** Brighton midfielder James Milner made his 632nd top-flight appearance to tie Ryan Giggs for second-most in the Premier League. Milner could pass all-time leader Gareth Barry next season. "It's quite a big number. It's taken a long time," Milner said

before the game. "I think it's a nice thing but it's a big game for us tonight. We want to start the year with a win." The 37-year-old Milner is in his first season at Brighton after eight years with Liverpool. He debuted with Leeds in the 2002-03 season at age 16. **NEXT UP** Both teams face second-tier opponents in the third round of the FA Cup.

Greenwood one of three Getafe players sent off in 2-0 loss to Rayo Vallecano

AP ■ MADRID

Mason Greenwood was accused of insulting a referee in the Spanish league on Tuesday, becoming one of three Getafe players sent off in a 2-0 loss to Rayo Vallecano. The referee said in his post-match report that Greenwood insulted him in the 50th minute with an expletive in English, something that the British player and the Spanish club denied. "He doesn't speak Spanish very well, he told me that he was saying something else," Getafe coach José Bordalás said in his post-match interview. "He was frustrated because the referee was not calling any fouls on him, but he never offended anyone. It was just a comment that he made." Referee Jorge Figueroa Vázquez

also said in his report that, after being sent off, Greenwood made a gesture pointing to his head and expressing his disagreement with the decision. Greenwood is playing with Getafe on a loan from Manchester United, which he left at the end of last season following a criminal investigation into a possible attempted rape that was closed by prosecutors. Getafe also lost defender Damián Suárez for allegedly insulting the assistant referee moments after he was substituted in the 70th. The hosts had been playing a man down from the 40th after forward Juanmi Latasa was sent off with a second yellow card. Sergio Camello scored in first-half stoppage time and shortly after halftime to help Rayo end an eight-match winless streak in the Spanish



league. The result left Rayo in 11th place. Getafe stayed eighth. **GOALKEEPER SENT OFF** Real Sociedad overcome a red card to its goalkeeper in the first half to salvage a 1-1 home draw against Alaves. Martín Zubimendi scored with a shot from inside the area six minutes into stoppage time to secure the draw against the fellow Basque Country team. The result extended a 25-match winless streak on the road for Alaves, which also conceded in stoppage time while playing with an extra man in a 1-0 loss to leader Real Madrid at home in the previous round. Luiz Rioja converted a 76th-minute penalty kick to give the visitors the lead. Zubimendi got the late equal-

izer after reaching a loose ball inside the area and sending a low shot into the net. Sociedad played a man down from the 36th after a blunder by goalkeeper Alex Remiro. He left his area to intercept a long cross but misjudged the bounce of the ball, having to use his hand to keep it from going over his head and reaching an Alaves player in front of the open net. Sociedad coach Imanol Alguacil had to replace forward André Silva with reserve goalkeeper Unai Marrero. Forward Takefusa Kubo had nearly evened the match moments earlier with a shot from outside the area that hit the crossbar. The hosts were awarded a penalty in the 88th but the call was reversed after video review. The draw moved Alaves to 15th place, four points from the relegation zone. Sociedad stayed sixth, three points from fifth-place Athletic Bilbao. Sociedad was coming off three consecutive scoreless draws in all competitions, while Alaves had lost three in a row in the Spanish league. It hadn't scored in four straight league matches. Alaves forward Giuliano Simone, son of Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simone, entered the match in the 70th to make his first appearance since breaking his leg in a friendly in the offseason. "It's bittersweet taste," Simone said. "I'm happy to be playing again, but it's a shame that we let the win escape by conceding that goal in the end." On Wednesday, Real Madrid hosts Mallorca, while second-place Girona hosts third-place Atletico.

SIRAJ SIZZLES WITH SIX WICKETS

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Mohammed Siraj produced a spell to remember as India bundled out South Africa for 55, their lowest total against the visitors, inside lunch on day one of the second Test here on Wednesday.

In a straight spell of nine overs, Siraj picked a career-best 6 for 15 as the South African batters made a beeline back to the dug-out, unable to counter the disconcerting bounce and the movement, both inward and outward, that he extracted off the surface.

It was also South Africa's lowest total in Test cricket since their readmission into international cricket in 1991.

India dismissed South Africa for a lowly 55 before the visitors raced to 111 for 4 at tea on the opening day of the second Test here.

India lead the Proteas by 56 runs despite losing the top order. The pitch isn't the easiest for batting and the match could end well inside three days if not two.

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INDIA REACH 111/4 AT TEA AFTER DISMISSING SOUTH AFRICA FOR 55



ment, both inward and outward, that he extracted off the surface. However the Indian batters also didn't fare any better against the awkward angle and steep bounce generated by the new Proteas left-arm speedster Nandre Burger (3/42). Rohit Sharma (39 off 50 balls) and Shubman Gill (36 off 55 balls) hit a dozen of boundaries

between them but talented duo of Yashasvi Jaiswal (0) and Shreyas Iyer (0), from the famed "Khadoos School of Mumbai Cricket" didn't trouble the scorers, after once again being exposed for technical ineptitude. **A SPECIAL SPELL:** Before Siraj's special effort, the only Indian in country's 92 year Test history to take five wickets

before lunch was left-arm spinner Maninder Singh, who achieved the feat against Pakistan in Bengaluru back in 1986-1987. On a humid Wednesday morning, South African batters found what a great leveller the game of cricket is with Siraj ripping the heart out of the Proteas batting with a masterclass of pace, swing

and seam movement. The Proteas innings ended in just 23.2 overs. David Bedingham (12) and Kyle Verreynne (15) were the only two batters to hit the double digits as the South African supporters in stands were stunned into silence.

Jasprit Bumrah (2/25 in 8 overs) also kept the pressure from the other end as Indian skipper Rohit Sharma kept his promise of making opposite number Dean Elgar's life miserable in his farewell Test.

Mukesh Kumar (2/0) also wrapped the tail up and proved that he is way better than a bits and pieces Shardul Thakur in these conditions.

Having been pilloried for conceding 400 plus runs in the heavy defeat at the Centurion, even the biggest of Indian supporters wouldn't have envisaged such a roaring comeback from the bowlers. Siraj kept the ball on fuller lengths between 4-6 metres and with bounce got most balls to jag back in. From the other end, Bumrah hit the back of length area as Rohit set completely attacking fields, albeit of different nature.

When Siraj bowled initially, there was a leg-slip placed while for Bumrah, Rohit himself stood at short leg.



Virat Kohli back in top 10 of ICC Test Ranking

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star Indian batter Virat Kohli jumped four places to ninth in the latest ICC Test Ranking after his decent show in the Centurion Test against South Africa.

Kohli had dropped out of the top 10 in 2022, but his 38 and 76 in the opening Test against South Africa last week brought him back into that bracket, according to ICC. However, he is 103 rating points away from leader Kane Williamson, while Joe Root and Steve Smith took the second and third place respectively. India skipper Rohit Sharma

dropped to 14th as he could only manage scores of five and zero in the Centurion.

Also, KL Rahul moved up 11 slots to 51st after scoring 101 and four in the series opener.

As for bowlers, Ravichandran Ashwin remained on the top spot, despite managing one for 41 in Centurion, while Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah were at fourth and fifth places respectively. Jadeja continued to lead the all-rounders' list, followed by Ashwin in the second place, while Shardul Thakur dropped to 34th.

India sits at the top spot in the team ranking, on 118 points, ahead of Australia and England.

CSA defends Test squad selection for NZ tour

Says fully committed to international cricket

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Cricket South Africa (CSA) has asserted it remains "fully committed" to both international cricket and the domestic SA20 tournament as it defended naming a shadow side for the Test tour of New Zealand, which has faced heavy backlash from current and former players.

South Africa named as many as seven uncapped players, including a new captain, for the two-Test series, while top South African cricketers will play the second season of the SA20 — launched by CSA and IPL investors last year — which clashes with the tour.

"The Board of Cricket South Africa notes the concerns about the composition of the Test squad that will be travelling to New Zealand later this month. We reassure the fans that CSA has the utmost respect for the Test format as the pinnacle of the game we love.

"CSA remains fully committed to international cricket and to strengthening the SA20, a tournament that was initiated by us to help grow and sustain the game," CSA said in a statement. CSA added that the dates for the New Zealand tour were fixed as per the ICC's Future Tours Programme (FTP) for 2023-2027, which was prepared in 2022, much before the SA20 was launched.

"The dates for this (New Zealand) tour were set when the Future Tours Programme (FTP) for 2023-2027 was finalised in 2022. The window for the SA20 had not been determined at that stage.

"Once it became apparent that there would be a clash, we made every effort to find another mutually suitable time-slot for this 2 Test series in consul-



tation with New Zealand Cricket," said CSA.

"Regrettably the constraints imposed by the global cricket calendar rendered this impossible, as the games must be played before April 2025 as part of the World Test Championship."

Former Australian skipper Steve Waugh had slammed CSA's decision while Dean Elgar, who will play his final Test on Wednesday, had also expressed his disgust.

But CSA has expressed confidence in the touring side, saying it will be an opportunity for the uncapped players to showcase their talent.

"We commend head coach, Shukri Conrad and his staff for preparing the selected players for this tour, and we are confident that they will represent the Proteas badge with honour. We wish them all the very best. It is an opportunity to demonstrate the depth of talent that we have in South Africa."

CSA also assured that it will avoid a similar situation in future.

"Our schedule for the remainder of the FTP has been managed to ensure that there will not be any further clashes between our bilateral commitments and the SA20, a tournament that was initiated by us to help grow and sustain the game."

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

The dreadlocks bear a striking resemblance to Bob Marley, the tattoos on his bulging biceps could easily help him pass off as an MMA fighter but the most striking part of Tony de Zorzi's personality is his ability to laugh at himself even as he scores important runs for South Africa. The 26-year-old left-hander is pretty new to international cricket but is inviting attention not just for his flair with the willow but also for his knack of finding all things funny in a routine exercise like facing throw-downs during practice.

"I should have been a boxer (for the way I punched that)," he says in one of his Instagram reels documenting a net session which was, according to him, focussed on blocking deliveries on a supposedly flat deck.

Born to an Italian mother and a Nigerian father, De Zorzi scored his first international hundred recently against India in an ODI and also an 81 against the same opposition in the following game.

"Cricket is tough enough already and you are training to be perfect but as much as professionals are, we make mistakes in games and nets," he explained to PTI in an exclusive interview.

Share a laugh with Tony de Zorzi

"(It's an) opportunity to see what mistakes I made at training and if it brings in a bit of laughter and jokes for guys around and they can relate to my stuff, then it's great," said the new Proteas star, who can easily be mistaken for a boxer or a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighter for his imposing demeanour.

De Zorzi has played just three Tests and five ODIs and he considers it special to have faced a star-studded team like India so early in his international career.

"It's been a special experience for me. Doing well against India at the start of my career, being on the field with some of the guys you watch on TV and now you are playing against them. Really enjoyed it," De Zorzi said.

"Pray hard, play harder and enjoy" are his life's mantras as he doesn't want self-doubt to ever creep into his system.

"There's been a lot of hard work put in yards, trying to enjoy myself and I pray in the morning and I feel the day is my day. So, no reason to doubt yourself," De Zorzi said with confidence.

De Zorzi wouldn't mind being picked by Royal Challengers Bangalore in a future IPL auc-

tion as it would give him a chance to rub shoulders with Virat Kohli. But he is happiest when he is making insta and Tik Tok reels having a good laugh at himself and his batting.

"(It's) just a way of expressing myself, to be honest. A way to learn things like editing and that's why I got into it. I can't draw or write poems so that's my outlet," De Zorzi said.

A former South Africa Under-19 skipper, De Zorzi was also selected for a provincial rugby tournament and had a choice to make about his sporting career. Rugby's loss became cricket's gain.

So when did he take a decision? "Mine was in high school when there was a provincial rugby and SA U-19. A decision had to be made which tournament to go to."

"My mom told me cricket was the game where I would be able to be myself and I just felt there could be more longevity. In rugby, you can get injured and I didn't want to get injured. It's tough work, what these guys do," he said.

At the Under-19 World Cup, his best moment was when he saw



the then junior India coach Rahul Dravid and star-in-making Rishabh Pant in a lift.

"We had a few guys in this team, who played in that U-19 World Cup (2016). Myself, Wiaan Mulder and we didn't do too well as a team. There was a lot of learning about what we need to do to get on to that level," De Zorzi had assessed back then. Amid the on-field disappoint-

ments, running into Dravid and Pant in a lift was a highlight for De Zorzi.

"One thing that he (Dravid) won't remember is me and our coach Lawrence were going for a press conference. As we stepped into the lift, we saw Rahul Dravid and Rishabh (Pant), who I think had an IPL contract. It was exciting, I thought if we could beat them," he recollected.

Talking about his personal journey, De Zorzi said his was a very routine middle class upbringing, devoid of any dramatic story.

"No, I didn't have a crazy childhood or a cool comeback story but I just had a normal middle class childhood. You can just try to better yourself," he stated matter of factly.

But struggles aren't always financial. They are also there as one embarks on a journey to discover the self.

"Everyone has their own struggles and mine is no different. I was never like Quinton (De Kock) and KG (Kagiso Rabada) who were like superstars from age group cricket. I had to find my own way of playing. My personality you can say," he said.

He had to switch teams to find his calling.

"I went to different provinces. I went to Pretoria, Cape Town, which was a big move for me, working with Ashwell Prince, so I took a long time to find my personality as a cricketer and I suppose everything happens in God's time and it happens when it's meant to be," he smiled.

He scored 28 in the Centurion Test against India but was involved in a 90 plus stand with Dean Elgar, who struck 185. De Zorzi it wasn't easy to face the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj.

"Tough wicket and the Indian attack with Bumrah and Siraj is really skilful. That partnership with Dean, we couldn't go bang bang straightaway. (I) would have loved to have kicked off but it wasn't my day. It was Dean's day," he conceded.

So where does he see himself five to seven years' time. "I would like to be in a position where I can take care of my mom so that we can live comfortable lives. That I stay true to my process and that I don't change too much. My old friends, they see me as the same person and I battle it out for South Africa," the new age "Funny Man" of Proteas cricket conceded.

Suryakumar doesn't quite know what to do in ODIs: Hussain

PTI ■ DUBAI

Suryakumar Yadav is a blue bloodless in 50-overs cricket but the swashbuckling batter "is a freak" who is absolutely in command in the shortest format and will be the one to look out for at the T20 World Cup later this year, feels former England skipper Nasser Hussain.

Since beginning his T20I journey for India in 2021, Suryakumar has quickly established himself as one of the best batters in the shortest format of the game, scoring four centuries and 17 fifties from 60 T20Is.

His impressive run got him the

No.1 spot in the ICC Rankings for T20I batters in 2022, which he has held on to since. However, the big-hitting batter has struggled to make a similar impact in ODIs.

"The person for the world to watch out for at the moment in T20 is Suryakumar Yadav," Hussain was quoted as saying by the ICC.

"I mean, the bloke is a freak. The cliché of Mr. 360, but some of the shots he plays... And he is a bit of a freak because in fifty-overs cricket, he doesn't quite know when to go, when not to go, what to do."

"But in T20 cricket, he absolute-

'But he is a freak in T20 cricket'



ly knows what to do every single time almost, and it's a fun game, T20 cricket and watching SKY, that is absolutely fun," Hussain added.

The T20 World Cup is scheduled to take place in the Caribbean and USA in June, and Hussain has backed South Africa to win their maiden ICC trophy.

"I haven't thought too much about this actually... But I'm going to go with South Africa. England are (reigning) champions, but not playing particularly well at the moment. It's in the Caribbean and West Indies are going OK, then you have Pakistan, so can I choose all of

these sides?"

South Africa put some record-breaking performances in the World Cup last year before they lost to eventual champions Australia in the semifinals.

"I'm going to go for South Africa versus England in the final." "I'm following (fellow commentator) Simon Doull a little bit here. Before the (50-over) World Cup, he tipped them to win it and it was a little bit left field. I mean, it's still South Africa, one of the great cricketing nations, sporting nations, but I thought that was a good shout from Doull. And they played some brilliant cricket in that World Cup.

Cummins takes 5 wickets but Pakistan rallies on Day 1

AP ■ SYDNEY

Australia captain Pat Cummins took 5-61 for his third consecutive five-wicket haul as Pakistan's brittle top order was again exposed before a combative lower order rally helped the tourists to 313 on Day 1 of the third and final cricket test.

At 96-5 shortly after lunch Wednesday, Pakistan was in grave danger of being bundled out cheaply after it had won the toss and chose to bat under bright, blue skies at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

But an enterprising counter-attack led by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan with a brisk 88, followed by a half-century from Agha Salman and a stunning maiden test half-cen-

tury by Aamer Jamal helped Pakistan recover to a respectable total. Australian pair David Warner, playing his final test, and Usman Khawaja had to survive one over from spinner Sajid Khan under fading light before stumps.

Warner (6 not out) in characteristic style smashed the first ball for four but was lucky later in the over as he somehow survived the ball bouncing over the stumps from a defensive shot. Australia was 6 without loss at stumps.

Much of the pre-match attention may have been on Warner's last test for Australia, but it was the pace bowlers who stole the spotlight early.

Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood set the tone by each taking a wicket in the first two

overs, before Cummins, coming off a ten-wicket haul in the Boxing Day test at Melbourne, snared two wickets including the prize scalp of Babar Azam as Pakistan batters crumbled. Starc (2-75) struck with the second ball, teasing Shafique into an uncontrolled swipe which the opener could only edge through to Steve Smith at second slip.

Hazlewood (1-65) struck in the next over when he had test rookie Saim Ayub edging through to Alex Carey in his debut innings. From 4-2, Babar and Masood started the rebuild for Pakistan, with Babar especially attacking the Aussie quick bowlers.

But the rally was short-lived as Cummins removed Babar (26) with a ball that came back at the right-hander and struck him on



the pad. Umpire Michael Gough turned down the initial Australian appeal, but the TV umpire overturned the decision.

Saud Shakeel was Cummins' second wicket, edging behind to

Carey to leave Pakistan's first innings in tatters at 47-4. Captain Shan Masood (35) and Rizwan shared a 49-run stand either side of the lunch break to steady Pakistan. Mitchell Marsh (1-27) ended that partnership by

teasing an edge from Masood which flew through to Smith. Rizwan went on the attack and made an enterprising half-century off 74 balls. He continued to play his shots but eventually holed out to Hazlewood as Cummins brought himself back in to the attack to take his third wicket.

"If you look back at all the best bowlers in the history of cricket, they've always had that in them - the ability to come on and take a wicket when the team needs to," Marsh said of Cummins' uncanny knack of choosing the right time to bowl. "I think the best part about Patty is that he always finds a way for us."

The Aussie skipper got his fourth when he had Sajid caught at midwicket by Nathan Lyon for

15 and a deserved fifth shortly after with Hasan Ali (0) picking out Starc in the deep. In between Starc had ended Salman's impressive innings at 53 when he was caught by Travis Head at square leg.

Pakistan's lower order continued, though, and a final-wicket partnership of 86 between Jamal and Mir Hamza frustrated Australia for almost 23 overs. Jamal, who made his test debut in the series-opening match in Perth, blasted nine boundaries and four sixes in an enthralling 82 off 97 balls before finding Starc in the deep off Lyon (1-74) to end the innings.

The lead up to the match has been almost exclusively about Warner's last test for Australia, and the 112-test veteran, flanked by his three daughters, led the

home team out on to the SCG for his final test.

On Tuesday, Warner took to social media to plead for the return of his "baggy green" test cricket cap which was in a bag that went missing in transit between Melbourne and Sydney this week. On Wednesday, he was wearing a new cap.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese joined the appeal for the caps to be returned. "David Warner has represented Australia on more than one hundred occasions," Albanese said in Sydney on Wednesday. "The baggy green caps belong to him. He has earned them and they should be returned." Australia won the first two tests in Perth and Melbourne to clinch the three-match series.

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