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GLOBAL ECONOMY WILL SLOW FOR THIRD YEAR: WORLD BANK

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PACER SHAMI AMONG THOSE HONoured
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PM Modi woos investors to aid growth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GANDHI NAGAR/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with some of the top global CEOs on Tuesday, on the sidelines of the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, as he sought to attract investments across sectors to boost the economy and create jobs. Later, on the eve of the main summit, PM Modi inaugurated the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show 2024. The show is an exhibition spread across 2 lakh square metres in multiple halls at the Helipad Ground Exhibition Centre, Gandhi Nagar.

A day before the inauguration of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit on January 10, the Prime Minister met with executives from Suzuki Motor Corp, Micron Technology, and AP Moller, discussing industry issues and investment opportunities. Modi and Toshihiro Suzuki, representative director & president of Suzuki Motor Corp, discussed Maruti Suzuki's plans to make India a strong player in the global automotive market by exporting Made in India vehicles. "They also explored deploying global best practices related to vehicle scrapping and vehicle recycling in India," stated the Prime Minister's Office in a post on X.

Maruti Suzuki is planning to establish its second car



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos Horta, Mozambique President Filipe Nyusi and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel takes a look at the replica of made in India light combat aircraft Tejas, at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Trade Show in Gandhinagar on Tuesday

manufacturing plant in Gujarat. This would mark the firm's fifth plant in the country. According to a post on X, Sanjay Mehrotra, the president and CEO of Micron Technology, held a meeting with PM @narendramodi in Gandhinagar, discussing Micron's efforts to enhance the semiconductor

manufacturing ecosystem in India. The US chip-making giant, Micron, has initiated the construction of a ₹2.75 billion semiconductor factory in Sanand, located about 40 km from Ahmedabad. The plant is set to focus on transforming wafers into ball-grid arrays integrated circuit

packages, memory modules, and solid-state drives, with an expected completion date by December of this year. The Prime Minister also met Ahmed bin Sulayem, the Group Chairman & CEO of DP World. They discussed DP World's plans to further bolster investment in India, particularly in the creation of

sustainable, green, and energy-efficient ports, as well as the development of world-class sustainable logistic infrastructure, according to another post by the PMO. Last year, DP World signed a concession agreement with the Deendayal Port Authority to develop, operate, and maintain a new mega-

container terminal with a capacity of 2.19 million TEU per annum at Kandla in Gujarat.

The Dubai-based logistics company currently operates five container terminals in India — two in Mumbai, and one each in Mundra, Cochin, and Chennai — with a combined capacity of approximately 6 million TEUs. Modi also met Keith Svendsen, CEO of AP Moller. "The PM welcomed their expansion plans in the GIFT City. Their discussions encompassed crucial topics such as green hydrogen and the development of logistics infrastructure," said by the PMO. Additionally, he had a meeting with Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University. "They had a productive discussion on enhancing collaboration between the government and academic institutions in the field of cybersecurity. The PM also welcomed Deakin University to collaborate with Indian universities to promote research and innovation," says the PMO post on X.

On Tuesday morning, he arrived at the Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre to conduct bilateral meetings with world leaders and industry representatives, one day before the inauguration of the 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

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Maldives Opposition calls for sacking of President

PNS/AGENCY ■ NEW DELHI



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu

The controversy surrounding the anti-India remarks made by Maldivian Ministers continues to stir up turmoil, refusing to dissipate despite the Maldives Government's swift action to suspend three accused Ministers. The escalating situation now poses a threat to the tenure of the recently elected President, who is perceived as aligning with China. The Opposition in the island nation is actively pursuing the removal of the President. Maldives MP Ali Azim, a member of the Democrats, which broke away last year, has called for Mohamed Muizzu to be sacked as President and asked the MDP — the largest Opposition party — to "initiate a vote of no-confidence".

Furthermore, a second MP, Meekail Naseem, has urged Parliament to question Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer regarding 'derogatory comments against Prime Minister Narendra Modi'. Opposition lawmakers are intensifying their attacks on Muizzu ahead of the general elections this year. MDP leader and former Defence Minister Mariya Ahmed Didi criticised the ruling party for its "short-sightedness" in potentially alienating an "age-old

relationship" and referred to India as "our 911 call". She emphasised, "We have always had an India-first policy." Meanwhile, Maldives' top tourism body has strongly condemned the derogatory comments made by some Deputy Ministers of the country against Prime Minister Modi after he visited Lakshadweep. "The Maldives Association of Tourism Industry condemns the derogatory comments made by Ministers on social media, directed towards Modi as well as the people of India," MATI said in a statement. According to the Maldives Tourism Ministry statistics, over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, out of which more than 2,09,198 visitors were Indians followed by Russians (2,09,146) and China (1,87,118). On the other hand Muizzu on Tuesday appealed to China to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to his country.

Woman to end 3 decades silence vow after Ram Temple opening

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

After maintaining a vow of silence for three decades until the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, 85-year-old Saraswati Devi from Jharkhand is set to break her silence on January 22. Her family asserts that she initiated the "maun vrat" on the day of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, with the solemn commitment to end it only when the Ram temple in Ayodhya is inaugurated.

The Dhanbad resident left for the temple town in Uttar Pradesh aboard a train on Monday night to witness the inauguration of the temple. Devi, who is popularly known as 'Mauni Mata' in Ayodhya, used to communicate with family members through sign language but wrote down complicated sentences.

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Gory details of CEO killing her toddler son emerge

PTI ■ PANAJI

The chief executive officer of an artificial intelligence start-up, arrested for allegedly killing her four-year-old son in a service apartment in north Goa, tried to end her life after committing the gruesome crime, police said on Tuesday, citing initial investigations. The Goa police arrested the accused, Suchana Seth, from Chitradurga in adjoining Karnataka on Monday night. She was brought to Goa on Tuesday and remanded in police custody for six days by a court in Mapusa town, an official said.

The 39-year-old entrepreneur smothered her son to death in a room in the service apartment in Candolim, where they checked in on January 6, and then tried to commit suicide by cutting her left wrist with a sharp object, a senior police official said. The motive behind the gruesome murder was not immediately known, but Seth told the police she and her husband were estranged and that their divorce proceedings were currently underway. "The blood stains that were found on a towel in the



service apartment were due to the slashing of her wrist," he said. After killing her son, the start-up CEO stuffed the body in a bag and left for Bengaluru in a taxi on Monday, according to the police. The murder came to light when the apartment's house keeping staff went to clean the room in which she stayed and found blood stains on the towel, they said. The service apartment management informed the Calangute police. A police inspector spoke over the phone to the taxi driver, who was on way to Bengaluru and had reached Chitradurga district in Karnataka, to take the accused to the nearest

police station. A team of the Calangute police rushed to Chitradurga and obtained a transit remand of the accused, who was brought to Goa. According to Seth's LinkedIn page, she is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of start-up Mindful AI Lab and was among the top "100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics for 2021".

"The motive behind the killing is yet to be ascertained. We have got six days police custody of the accused and we will thoroughly interrogate her," the official said. A Calangute police team led by Inspector Paresh Naik is currently in Chitradurga and waiting for post-mortem on the child's body, he said. Seth has been booked under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 302 (murder) and 201 (destruction of evidence), and also under the Goa Children's Act, said the official. Superintendent of Police (North Goa) Nidhin Valsan said the woman hails from West Bengal and has been living in Bengaluru, while her husband is from Kerala. He is currently in Jakarta (Indonesia) and has been informed about the incident, Valsan said.

Congress, Uddhav agree on seat sharing

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

A day after "hiccups" in the Bihar seat-sharing talks of the INDIA bloc, the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), a coalition comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP, spearheaded a generous agreement on Tuesday to contest the Lok Sabha polls. Sources indicate that the MVA-INDIA has agreed on a seat-sharing pact for Maharashtra, the State that accounts for a total of 48 Lok Sabha constituencies. Although not officially announced, sources suggest that the Congress and the Shiv Sena (UBT) will contest on 20 seats each. While the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena initially demanded 23 seats in the early set of negotiations, the party has now agreed to field candidates from 20 Lok Sabha seats. The meeting took place at the residence of Congress leader Mukul Wasnik, where leaders of the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP were present. "All the members of the Maha Vikas Aghadi came out of the meeting with smiles after we sat down to discuss seat-sharing. I want to assure everyone that we will fight elections together. We have no differences about seat-sharing... We discussed in detail the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi as well," said Shiv Sena spokesman Sanjay Raut.

An NCP representative said that there was a discussion on all the seats, and everything is positive. "The meeting was more successful than expected... There are no differences among us," said NCP-Sharad Pawar faction leader



Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray during a press conference in Mumbai on Tuesday

Dr Jitendra Awhad. Samajwadi Party MP Ram Gopal Yadav mentioned that the meeting was held in a very positive environment. "Everyone is happy. More progress will take place on January 12," Yadav told the media after the late evening meeting.

Congress' Salman Khurshid, who attended the meeting for Uttar Pradesh, remarked that things were moving in the "right direction." "We are on the same page, and I feel we could communicate very well," he added, calling it an "excellent meeting." When asked about the possibility of chemistry developing between Samajwadi Party and Congress, the former Union minister said it was "beyond" his imagination. "We just need to be firm and take it forward," he added.

After holding meetings with Bihar allies JD(U) and RJD, as well as with AAP for seats in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Goa, Congress National Alliance Committee held a meeting with leaders of Maharashtra allies and the first round of discussions with the

Samajwadi Party led by Akhilesh Yadav. In Bihar, where Congress is in a coalition with RJD and JD(U), and with Mamata Banerjee-led TMC in West Bengal, seat-sharing remains an issue among the partners as there seems to be no breakthrough in the matter.

Sources said the meeting was scheduled after the former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray-led faction of Shiv Sena declared that they would contest 23 seats in Maharashtra. The Uddhav Thackeray faction of Shiv Sena, which lost its tag of being the "original" one, is a part of MVA along with the Sharad Pawar-led NCP and the Congress. Congress and other regional parties, including RJD, JD(U), AAP, Trinamool, and DMK, have recently joined hands to form a joint Opposition front INDIA with the aim of putting up a united fight against the ruling BJP to counter the Modi juggernaut.

However, seat-sharing remains a significant challenge as they try to accommodate each other in common electoral spaces. In the case of Bihar, it was indicated that out of the state's 40 Lok Sabha seats, 17 each are likely to be allotted to the JD(U) and the RJD. The Congress is likely to get five seats, and the CPI ML may get one seat to contest the general elections. Congress' first meeting with AAP reportedly concluded at a place where AAP proposed offering three Lok Sabha seats to the Congress in Delhi. Expecting a reciprocation of equal measure, AAP has sought one Lok Sabha seat in Gujarat, three in Haryana, and one in Goa.

Maestro Rashid Khan passes away

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Ustad Rashid Khan, the celebrated voice that made Hindustani classical music accessible to countless listeners, died at a Kolkata hospital on Tuesday after a four-year battle with prostate cancer. The classical singer was 55. He is survived by his wife, two sons and a daughter. Khan, who belongs to the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana, is the great-grandson of the Gharana founder Inayat Hussain Khan. "We tried our best but failed. He passed away around 3.45 pm," an official of the private hospital where Khan was admitted said. He was progressing well under conservative treatment but prolonged stay in hospital resulted in his infection spreading rapidly and complications developed, a

doctor of the medical team which treated Khan told reporters. "I heard about his death. This is a great loss for the entire country and the entire music fraternity. I am in a lot of mental anguish as I still can't believe that Rashid Khan is no more," West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said at the hospital while standing beside his family members. He made West Bengal his home, she said about the singer who was born in Uttar Pradesh's Badaun but came to Kolkata with his family in 1980 at the age of 10. "We had a deep personal bond... He was such a sweet soul. We used to be regularly in touch. We are all with his family," Banerjee said. The Chief Minister said Khan will be given a gun salute and State honours at the State-run cultural complex Rabindra Sadan after his



body is taken out of a mortuary on January 10.

Banerjee said she and her ministerial colleagues will be present there. Khan's body will then be taken to his Naktala home and subsequently the Tollygunje cemetery for last rites.

The musician was on ventilator support. His health condition deteriorated following a stroke last month. He had been undergoing cancer treatment since 2019. As a pall of gloom descended on the music world after his death, lyricist and screenwriter Prasoon Joshi described Khan as a legend and "a voice through which the divine spoke to us".

"Rashid Khan's demise is an irreparable loss to the world of music. Fortunate are those who heard him perform. He was an unparalleled treasure. Milenge

Rashid bhai upar milenge (we will meet in afterlife)," he said. Music director Pritam said losing Rashid Khan Saab is a huge loss for the world of music. Veteran Bengali singer Haimanti Shukla recalled how they would sing together while travelling to a place in the same vehicle. "Rashid bhai was a sweet person who was very popular among contemporary artistes. He would wait to get my 'bhai phonta' (bhai dooj) every year," Shukla said as her voice choked. Young Bengali singer Suvamita described Khan as a father figure whose death will be a great loss to the music world. Another national award recipient singer Iman Chakraborty said, "I cannot imagine Ustadji is no more. This is not the age to die. He had such a mellifluous voice!"

ED raids 7 premises of Shiv Sena (UBT) leader

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a significant development that the ruling BJP cashed in on to embarrass the Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday raided seven residential and official premises linked with its former Minister and current MLA Ravindra Waikar, in connection with an alleged money-laundering case. A team of 10 ED carried out simultaneous searches at various locations at Jogeshwari in north Mumbai for the alleged irregularities in the approvals sought for the construction of a deluxe hotel and the famous Matoshree Club. The ED acted against 64-year-old Waikar and business interests based on a First Information Report (FIR) registered by the Mumbai police, alleging that the former minister had got "illegal" approvals for building a five-star hotel on a plot reserved for a garden and the Matoshree club, from the



BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). The ED has alleged the "illegal" approvals granted to Waikar allegedly caused a huge loss to the BMC, which was ruled for more than two and a half decades by the pre-split Shiv Sena headed initially by late Balasahad Thackeray and now by Uddhav Thackeray. Said to be close to Uddhav Thackeray, Waikar is a five-time BMC corporator and a three-term MLA. He was a minister in the previous Devendra Fadnis-led Shiv Sena-

BJP Government in Maharashtra between 2014 and 2019. Taking to micro blogging site X, BJP leader Kirit Somaiya welcomed ED action against Waikar. "I welcome ED action against Ravindra Waikar. CM Uddhav Thackeray in July 2021 gave illegal Permission for 2 lacs square feet 5 star hotel at Jogeshwari on a BMC reserved Plot Ground. Waikar Partner Chandu Patel involved ₹160 crore Pushpak bullion demonitisation scam," Somaiya wrote.

Mamata's Minister justifies attack on ED

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Opposition tended to find their answers to the alleged police inability to arrest Trinamool Congress toughie Shahjahan Sheikh even four days after his supporters openly challenged the writ of the Indian state by mounting a deadly attack on Enforcement Directorate officials and accompanying central force personnel.

While Banerjee attacked the agencies for arresting her comrades as a part of a definite political conspiracy scripted by the TMC, her senior Cabinet colleague Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay said the ED could face more such attacks as there would now be mass upheaval against central agencies in Bengal.

Launching a frontal attack on the central agencies and the BJP, the Chief Minister on Tuesday said that they were creating for scripting plays to arrest TMC leaders ahead of the elections to enable the saffron outfit to score goals in undefended fields. Stopping short of naming any person or outfit she said, "since the beginning you have been arresting our people in con-



nection with chit fund, coal, cattle, sand and other scams but you never returned a single penny to people who were affected in the ponzi scam ... "Instead helping the people you are targeting the TMC leaders so as to vacate the field before the elections in order to help the BJP win elections... but it is not that easy as we will not give up an inch without fight ... We will make you repent for your misadventure in Bengal."

On inauguration of Ram Temple she said it was an "election gimmick by the BJP ahead of polls which will not work." She said, "those who are doing it may do it but they don't have right to belittle other religions." On whether she would go to Ayodhya she said, "I have many

important works to do... Religion is my personal affair," adding, "till I am there I will not allow the people to be divided in the name of religion or CAA and NRC."

While Banerjee made her remarks from an administrative meeting at Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas her Parliamentary Affairs Minister made even more dangerous and provocative remark when in an apparent reference to Sandeshkhali attack, "we have seen an explosion of public grievances in one place... now there will be mass upheaval like this in other parts of Bengal too ... Wherever the EF will go they will face upheaval." Attacking the agencies for their partisan ways he said, "There

have been scams worth Rs 7.5 lakh crore in BJP ruled India but not a single BJP leader had been touched ... Nothing has been done to leaders like Hemanta Biswasharma but here they are targeting small fried like Shahjahan ... The public outrage was because of this partisan act of the ED ... and if this continues then there will be more such Jan Bisforan (mass explosion) where ever the ED will go in Bengal. Already two ministers, a number of MLAs and a bunch of

senio government functionaries were presently in jail for their alleged involvement in plethora of scams.

He was promptly supported by his party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh who said Chattopadhyay was only making demand for natural justice. The BJP leaders like Dilip Ghosh however said that cognizance should be taken on Chattopadhyay's statements because they amounted to giving provocation to the people.

Cops diluted FIR: ED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate whose team of officials were on Friday attacked by the supporters of a local Trinamool Congress strongman during a raid in connection to the ration scam has said that the Bengal Police had intentionally diluted first information report so as to help the attackers "They have intentionally avoided sections under attempt to murder and

obstruction to public servants on duty apparently to make the light... They have only given bailable sections when our officers were attacked by more than a thousand people... They were injured and had to be hospitalized... Their vehicles were broken," an ED official said. Meanwhile in an apparent bid to correct the alleged "mischief" done by the police a PIL has already been filed in Calcutta High Court and is scheduled to be heard on Thursday.

Municipal Corporation passes proposal for renaming Ghaziabad



STAFF REPORTER ■ GHAZIABAD

The municipal corporation on Tuesday passed a proposal for renaming Ghaziabad, officials said. Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation (GMC) mayor Sunita Dayal said the three names -- Harnandi Nagar, Gaj Prastha and Doodheshwernagar -- will be sent to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who will take a final call. However, any such change of name will ultimately require the Centre's nod. A proposal for changing the name of Ghaziabad was passed by an absolute majority of the councillors. The new name will be decided by the CM," Dayal said. The names have been suggested keeping in mind the demands of the people of Ghaziabad and Hindu outfits,

the mayor said. BJP MLA from Sahibabad constituency Sunil Sharma said last year he had tabled a proposal in this regard in the state Assembly, suggesting that Ghaziabad be renamed as Gaj Prastha. Meanwhile, head priest of Doodheshwar Nath temple Mahant Narayan Giri told PTI that he had suggested the three names to the chief minister last year. These names are related to the Mahabharata as present-day Ghaziabad was a part of Hastinapur, according to Giri. This area used to be a dense forest inhabited by elephants, which are called 'Gaj' in Hindi. Therefore, Ghaziabad was called Gaj Prastha, Giri claimed. A close aide of Mughal emperor Akbar, Ghaziuddin, had changed the name to Ghaziabad, he claimed.

Delhi Government to speed up development works of villages

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Village Development Board has approved schemes worth ₹1,000 crore so far in 2023-2024. Delhi's Development Minister Gopal Rai chaired a meeting of the Village Development Board on Tuesday at the Delhi Secretariat to speed up the development works of the villages. Several development works related to roads, drains, water bodies, community centres, parks, crematoriums, sports grounds etc. are being done. Delhi Development Minister Gopal Rai said a six-member task force has also been formed to monitor the execution of projects as there were complaints of delay. The minister said 564 development projects worth Rs 759 crore were already approved by the board for the villages. So far, projects worth around Rs 1,000 crore have been passed by the board under this head, he added. Rai stated that emphasis will be laid on the construction of roads in the villages. The board on Tuesday approved projects related to new roads worth ₹250 crores. During the board meeting, all the concerned officers were instructed to complete the projects of village development within the time limit. The minister said that a special camp was organized in the Delhi



Secretariat to speed up the development work of the villages of Delhi. In the Board Meeting, the members raised the issue of pending and new proposals. After this, Rai said that to ensure development in the villages of Delhi, CM Arvind Kejriwal had constituted Delhi Village Development Board. So far, projects worth about Rs 1000 crore have been approved in 2023-2024 for the development of city villages. Under this work will be done to provide better amenities in all the villages of Delhi. "Till the last meeting, 564 projects worth about Rs 759 crore were approved in 2023-2024. Under this, development works are being done in 194 villages of the city. Along with this, during the meeting, the officers of all the concerned departments have been instructed to complete the project files related to village development within the time limit," the minister added. Delhi's Development Minister mentioned, "A special camp has been set

up in the Delhi Secretariat to expedite the development work related to the villages of Delhi. During this special camp, officers of all the concerned departments like the Development Department, Delhi Village Development Board, MCD, Irrigation and Flood Control Department and other departments were on the spot disposing or approving the proposals and pending projects related to the development works of the villages of Delhi." Rai further shared that the pending proposals for the development work of the Delhi villages have been worked on at a rapid pace through special camps, in the presence of all the MLAs and authorities. Additionally, any questions or concerns regarding any MLA assembly's files were also promptly addressed. In this special camp, the files have been approved/disposed of by the officers and agencies of the concerned department based on the area at each counter."

3 tigers die in 9 days, poisoning by displaced locals suspected

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The year 2024 has begun with unfortunate news for wildlife enthusiasts, as reports confirm three tiger deaths —two in Telangana and one in Uttar Pradesh — within the first nine days. Adding to the concern, two adult tigers are also reported missing in Telangana. State forest officials have initiated a search to locate them, with fingers crossed. In the previous year, the country recorded a staggering 179 tiger deaths, marking the highest in the past five years. Maharashtra reported the highest number of deaths, with 45 fatalities, followed by Madhya Pradesh with 40. Interestingly, Telangana had no reported tiger mortalities in 2022 and 2023. However, 2024 has begun on a cautionary note for Telangana forest officials. Within the first three days of this month, two royal cats have succumbed to death, and a female adult tiger and another sub-adult tiger are currently missing. In the first incident, a sub-adult tigress was discovered dead in Dargan, Kagaznagar, with Wildlife wing officials initially suspecting a territorial fight, given that the skin, claws, and teeth of the deceased big cat remained intact. Two days later, the body of the second tiger was found in the Kagaznagar Tiger Corridor, located in the Asifabad district of Telangana, according to reports. The search is ongoing for two missing tigers, both sub-adults from the same family. However, there is now suspicion that poisoning of a cattle carcass could be the reason behind these deaths as locals were dissatisfied with the compensation provided to them for relocation from the tiger reserve. The Principal Chief



Conservator of Forests in the State, RM Dobriyal, has said that the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has dispatched a member and experts to the spot. Both deceased tigers were resident tigers of the Kawal Tiger Reserve, and they were sub-adults. According to reports, it is estimated that there are seven tigers in the corridor area near the Kawal Tiger Reserve. Three days after the carcass of a female tiger was found in Dargan forest under Kagaznagar forest division, another male tiger was discovered dead just two kilometers away on January 8. Forest officials, including veterinarians, are investigating the cause of death. The Kagaznagar forest division is estimated to have eight to ten tigers, while four to five big cats migrate from the Tadoba Tiger Reserve in neighbouring Maharashtra through the Pranahita river. Uttar Pradesh reported its first tiger death, involving a full-grown adult male whose carcass was discovered in Baraucha Nullah in the Gola range forests of the South Kheri forest division on January 8. Sanjay Biswal, the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the South Kheri forest division, ruled out foul play in the tiger's death, stating that no apparent injuries or loss of limbs were observed on the body. All vital organs, including nails, jaws, and canines, were found intact, he added. However, the actual cause of

death can only be ascertained after the autopsy of the tiger, following NTCA guidelines, said Biswal. Although NTCA data reports 178 tiger deaths in 2023, including 31 cubs, the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), a non-profit organisation, claims a record 204 striped cats succumbed to various reasons during the same period. According to NTCA, Maharashtra registered the highest number of deaths at 45, followed by Madhya Pradesh at 40, Uttarakhanda at 20, Tamil Nadu at 15, and Kerala at 14 in 2023. Additionally, 54 percent of these deaths occurred outside tiger reserves. "While the average lifespan of a wild tiger is around 10-12 years, 40 percent of tiger deaths in 2023 consisted of cubs and subadults, age classes with naturally high mortality rates due to tiger land tenurial dynamics. "Of the cases where the cause has been confirmed, the trend is evident, with more than 77 per cent attributed to natural causes or causes not related to poaching," said a senior NTCA official when asked if these higher numbers of deaths call for better conservation and monitoring. He also mentioned that wild tigers in India are growing at a healthy rate of 6 per cent per year, balancing the loss of tigers due to various natural causes and maintaining the tiger population according to the carrying capacity of the habitat.

PM Modi woos investors to aid growth

From Page 1 During the bilateral meeting with Timor-Leste President Jose Ramos-Horta, Modi congratulated him on his country's upcoming membership in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and invited him to join the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. The discussions also covered bilateral cooperation in various fields, including development partnerships in health, traditional medicine, energy, IT, fintech, and capacity building, among others, as stated by the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on X. Furthering the Delhi-Dili connect! PM @narendramodi held a productive meeting with President @JoseRamosHorta of Timor-Leste in Gandhinagar," he said. PM Modi congratulated President Horta for Timor-Leste's upcoming membership in the ASEAN, he said. "The PM invited Timor-Leste to join the International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. Discussions covered bilateral cooperation

in various fields, including development partnership in health, traditional medicine, energy, IT, fintech, and capacity building, among others," the MEA spokesperson said. Modi also held a bilateral meeting with President Filipe Nyusi of Mozambique. "Both leaders held fruitful discussions on ways to further bilateral ties, including in the areas of defence, counterterrorism, energy, health, trade & investment, capacity building, maritime cooperation, and people-to-people ties," the official said. They also exchanged perspectives on regional and international issues, including cooperation in multilateral fora, he said. PM Modi also met Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, and they discussed DP World's plans to further bolster investment in India, especially in creating sustainable, green, and energy-efficient ports, and world-class sustainable logistic infrastructure, the PMO said. The President and CEO of Micron discussed with Modi the company's efforts to enhance the semiconductor manufacturing ecosystem in India, as stated in another post on X.

Professor Iain Martin, the vice-chancellor of Deakin University, which has set up a campus at the Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City, also called on PM Modi, and they discussed enhancing collaboration between the government and academic institutions in the field of cybersecurity. Modi also welcomed Deakin University to collaborate with Indian universities for promoting research and innovation, the PMO said. "Keith Svendsen, CEO of A.P. Moller - @Maersk, met PM @narendramodi in Gandhinagar. The PM welcomed their expansion plans in the GIFT City. Their discussions encompassed crucial topics such as green hydrogen and the development of logistics infrastructure," it further said. PM Modi also met Toshihiro Suzuki of Suzuki Motor Corp, and they discussed "Maruti Suzuki's plans to make India a strong player in the global automotive market by exporting Made in India vehicles, along with deploying global best practices related to vehicle scrapping and vehicle recycling into India," the PMO added. The Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, hailed as the biggest-

ever gathering, will be held from January 10-12 and is expected to attract around 100,000 visitors, including chief executives, business leaders, ministers, and diplomats from 133 countries. Billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani, Tata group chairman, executives from Microsoft, Alphabet's Google, and Toyota are expected to attend the event, aiming to attract investments in sectors ranging from chipmaking to green energy and electric vehicle manufacturing. A total of 20 countries are participating in the show, inaugurated ahead of the tenth edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit. Modi, on a three-day visit to his home state, arrived at the venue at 3 pm and undertook a tour of stalls with Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and other dignitaries. Students from local colleges were present in large numbers to greet the PM and other officials at the inauguration. Australia, Tanzania, Morocco, Mozambique, South Korea, Thailand, Estonia, Bangladesh, Singapore, UAE (United Arab Emirates), UK, Germany, Norway, Finland, Netherlands, Russia, Rwanda, Japan, Indonesia, and

Vietnam will present information about their industries at the exhibition. It has 1,000 exhibitors specifically from the research sector. The show also consists of 13 halls dedicated to an equal number of themes, including 'Make in Gujarat' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. Women empowerment, MSME development, new technology, green and smart infrastructure, sustainable energy are the special focus areas for the show.

Woman to end 3 decades silence vow after Ram...

From Page 1 Though she took a break from 'maun vrat' and spoke for an hour at noon every day till 2020, she went completely silent the day the foundation for the temple was laid by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The day Babri Masjid was demolished on December 6, 1992, my mother took a vow to observe silence till the Ram Mandir was constructed in Ayodhya. She has been jubilant ever since the date of consecration of the temple was announced," said 55-year-old Hare Ram Agarwal, Devi's youngest child. "She left for Ayodhya on Monday night aboard Ganga-Sutlej Express from Dhanbad Railway Station. She will break her silence on January 22," Hare Ram, a resident of

Bhowra in Baghmara block, said. He said Devi has been invited by disciples of Mahant Nritya Gopal Das to participate in the Ram temple inauguration event. A mother of eight children, including four daughters, Devi devoted her life to Lord Ram after the death of her husband Devkinandan Agarwal in 1986, spending most of her time in pilgrimages, family members said. Devi is currently living with her second-eldest son Nand Lal Agarwal, an official with Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCCL), an arm of Coal India, at Dhayia in Dhanbad. Nand Lal's wife Innu Agarwal (53) said that a few months after her marriage, she saw her mother-in-law embracing

the vow of silence in devotion to Lord Ram. "Mostly, we understood her sign language. But she used to write down complicated sentences on a piece of paper," Innu Agarwal said. "After the demolition of Babri Masjid, my mother-in-law visited Ayodhya and took a pledge of 'maun vrat' till Ram Mandir was constructed. She used to remain silent for 23 hours a day, taking an hour-long break only at noon. The rest of the time, she communicated with us through pen and paper," she said. "However, when the foundation of the Ram Mandir was laid in 2020 by PM Modi, she went for a 24-hour 'maun vrat' and pledged to speak only after the temple was inaugurated," Innu said.

In 2001, Devi did 'tapasya' (penance) for seven months at Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh where Lord Ram is believed to have spent a major part of his exile, Innu claimed. "Besides, she also went on pilgrimages across the country," she said. According to Innu Agarwal, her mother-in-law wakes up around 4 am every morning and undertakes 'sadhana' (meditation) for around six to seven hours in the morning. "She studies religious books such as Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita in the evening after 'Sandhya Aarti'" she said. Devi eats food only once a day and consumes a glass of milk in the morning and evening. She maintains a vegetarian diet consisting of rice, pulses and roti.

Seat sharing talks so far positive: Rai

'Have kept our stand to fight with Congress in 5 States'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the seat sharing meeting with INDIA Alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, AAP Delhi convener Gopal Rai on Tuesday said the party has kept its stand on contesting in an alliance with the Congress in five States, including Punjab, and the discussion has so far been positive. Meanwhile Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will embark on a two-day visit of Goa on January 11 to assess the AAP's preparations for the Lok Sabha elections. AAP sources said Kejriwal, will also hold meetings with party workers during his visit. "The two-day Goa visit is for assessing the preparations for the Lok Sabha polls. He will also interact with party workers," AAP sources said.



Punjab, Haryana, Goa and Gujarat. Till now, there has been positive discussions," he said on the sidelines of a press conference. The AAP and the Congress are part of the INDIA bloc and held discussions on Monday to discuss seat-sharing for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. When asked about the seats the party is willing to contest, the AAP leader said that there was "no discussion" on specific seats in these states. The AAP is in power in Delhi and Punjab. The Congress units in both the states are opposed to any truck with the AAP. In

Punjab, the Congress and the AAP have openly traded barbs over contesting the elections in an alliance.

"We want to contest the elections in an alliance. In the next meeting, the talks about seats will be held. When we are in an alliance, we have to take an official stand. For that (official stand), both the parties will make their preparations and then discuss," Rai added.

The Congress and the AAP discussed seat-sharing prospects for the Lok Sabha polls in Punjab, Delhi and other states on Monday. They decided to meet again to give a final shape to the arrangements between the two key constituents of the INDIA opposition bloc.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will embark on a two-day visit of Goa on January 11 to assess the AAP's preparations for the Lok Sabha elections. AAP sources said Kejriwal, will also hold

meetings with party workers during his visit. "The two-day Goa visit is for assessing the preparations for the Lok Sabha polls. He will also interact with party workers," AAP sources said.

There are two Lok Sabha seats in Goa and BJP and Congress share one each. AAP, which won two Assembly seats with 6.77 per cent vote share, is demanding one Lok Sabha seat from Congress. However, Congress does not appear keen to share the seats with the Kejriwal-led party.

The AAP has also expressed its willingness to contest the Lok Sabha polls in states, such as Gujarat and Haryana and Goa, the source said. While the AAP wants to contest four of the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national capital, the Congress is eager to field its nominees from the New Delhi, Chandni Chowk and North East constituencies, they claimed.

BJP corners CM over RTI reply on bungalow works

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP leaders on Tuesday shared a copy of the reply to an RTI query seeking the cost of works done at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, accusing him of wanting personal development "at the cost of Delhi's development". The information was sought by a Maharashtra resident Ajay Basudev Bose.



In his application, Bose asked for "Amount spent on Civil, Plumbing, Electrical, Sewage, Carpentry works at the official Residence of Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal from date 31st March 2015 to 27th December 2022."

Responding to the application, the RTI said, "Total expenditure incurred during the period from 2015 to 2022 is Rs 295635074/- for Civil works only."

He also asked for the names of the contractors hired for work and the amount paid to them from 31st March 2015 to 27th December 2022.

Naming the contractors the RTI informed, "Munzareen Ahmad = Rs. 21,89,666; M/s M.A. Builders = Rs. 8,76,626;

Mohd. Arshad = Rs. 17,21,649; and M/s A.K. Builders = Rs. 29,08,47,133." Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri shared information obtained through an RTI, said the Arvind Kejriwal government has crossed all limits in looting the public treasury of Delhi.

He revealed that between 2015 and 2022, Kejriwal spent Rs. 29.56 crores exclusively on civil works at his official residence, exposing how special he considers himself.

This amount could have been used to set up a shelter for

homeless people suffering from the cold in Delhi. Bidhuri revealed that information obtained through an RTI query indicates that the Delhi Public Works Department has admitted that such a significant amount has been spent on civil works at Kejriwal's official residence. Bidhuri further said the truth is now exposed, as he continues to spend millions on his home renovation, draining the hard-earned money of Delhi's taxpayers.

Posting the copy of the RTI on X, formerly Twitter, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra wrote, "Proof that Arvind

Kejriwal wants his personal development at the cost of Delhi's development. The RTI reply received from the Delhi government shows that Rs. 29,56,35,074/- were spent on only civil works at the residence of the Delhi CM."

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has said that corruption & misappropriation of public money in the garb of minor repairs, renovation, sanitary work in Chief Minister's residence has become synonymous with Arvind Kejriwal government.

Delhi BJP President has said that it is shocking to know from a RTI revelation that in 8 years between 2015 to 2022 average of almost Rs. 8.5 crores per year were spent on minor civil work, sanitary, plumbing, carpentry works in CM Kejriwal's residence.

The BJP has been criticising Kejriwal and the AAP, alleging that 45 crore was utilised for the renovation of the chief minister's residence at 6, Flagstaff Road between 2020-22. In response, the AAP has countered, asserting that the BJP is attempting to divert attention from genuine concerns by highlighting this issue.

LG distributes job letters to 398 recruits

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday here distributed appointment letters to 398 newly recruited government officials in a function. Now, total permanent government recruitments in Delhi government departments / civic agencies reaches 22,000 during the last one and half years. Speaking on the occasion, Saxena informed that a total 22000 vacancies in various Departments / agencies of the Delhi Government / civic bodies will be filled on a permanent basis within the next one and half year.



ious Departments of the Delhi Government will be filled. The function on Tuesday was the fourth consecutive function of its kind, following the previous ones held on 24.02.2023, 19.04.2023 and 30.06.2023. During these occasions, Saxena distributed approximately 3,400 appointment letters. Lt. Governor Saxena further informed that among the 149 appointment letters given on compassionate grounds, 103 dependents have been appointed by the Services Department and 46 dependents have been appointed by NDMC. Further,

during the period between May 2022 and May 2023 only, 15,367 posts were filled through DSSSB mainly in Education Department, NDMC recruited about 4,500 individuals with the help of Central Government, 376 posts were filled through UPSC of which 324 posts were of Principals / Vice-Principals lying vacant in Delhi, apart from positions in FSL Delhi. Another 500 posts in Delhi Fire Service were filled through DSSSB along with positions in DTC and Labour Department. He informed that further

22,000 vacancies in various Departments / agencies of the Delhi Government / civic bodies will be filled on a permanent basis within the next one and half year. Saxena congratulated the new appointees on behalf of the people of Delhi and informed the audience that ever since taking over the charge of Lt. Governor of Delhi, he has been stressing upon permanent appointments against government vacancies instead of adhoc and contractual recruitment, underlining that such practices lead to favouritism,

corruption and exploitation of citizens who rightfully deserve a job.

The Lt Governor specially appreciated the efforts of Services Department for formulating a fair and transparent scheme of compassionate appointment in GNCTD which make it possible for realistic and objective assessment of the degree of indigence among the applicants for compassionate appointments.

A K Singh, IAS, Principal Secretary (Services) delivered the welcome speech and congratulated the new appointees. He informed the audience that it has been possible for Services Department to organize these functions in quick succession due to concerted efforts of all the concerned departments. The Chairperson, DSSSB in his report presented during today's function highlighting the achievements of DSSSB in recent times under the supervision and monitoring of Lt Governor. 10,000 selection have already been made. Selection against 9000 vacancies are at different stages of recruitment and 13000 vacancies are under scrutiny. Around 22,000 more vacancies are going to be filled up within a period of next one and a half year.

MCD to come up with uniform policy for cremation of pets, stray animals

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) will soon come out with a "uniform policy" for all its zones for cremation of pets and stray animals, Mayor Shelly Oberoi said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, she visited Delhi's "first animal crematorium" at Dwarka, which has been developed by the MCD, according to a statement issued by the mayor's office.

"Pet lovers can perform a dignified cremation (last rites) of their beloved pets as per Hindu rituals," she said referring to the Dwarka crematorium, according to the statement.

A senior official said that at the Dwarka facility, deceased pets can only be cremated, and added that their burial does not take place there. Currently, people in Delhi either cremate or bury their pets or other animals wherever a suitable piece of vacant land is found.

The pet crematorium at Dwarka offers "eco-friendly animal cremation services with a green technology", Oberoi said. We will soon come out with a uniform policy for cremation of pets and stray animals across all zones of the



MCD. Such facilities will be offered at nominal rates to the public," she added.

Pet lovers can perform last rites in a dignified manner and according to customary rituals with priest services. They can also avail other facilities being provided at the crematorium, the mayor said about the Dwarka facility. MCD officials said currently, there is no uniform policy for cremation of pets.

The crematorium facility is offered free of cost for cremation of street dogs, through veterinary services of the MCD in some zones, while people in other zones can avail such facility for Rs 500, the statement said. The mayor urged all pet owners in and around Delhi to make use of the pet cremation facilities.

She said a "green memorial park" is also being developed and people can plant trees at the park in the memory of their pets. Such a green belt will help in lowering pollution levels, Oberoi said. The MCD pet crematorium in Dwarka is offering services at affordable rates, the statement said.

"Rs 2,000 is being charged for cremation of dogs and small animals weighing less than 30 kg and Rs 3,000 for those weighing above it," it said. Two CNG-operated furnaces at the pet crematorium can be used to cater to 10 private pets and 15 small stray animals in a day. The municipal pet crematorium is spread over 700 sqm. It is situated adjoining the MCD Dog Sterilisation Centre in Sector 29 in Dwarka, it added.

DUSIB puts up 190 night shelter tents for homeless

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a dip in the mercury in the national capital, the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) has set up 190 tents across the city to house the homeless at night. These tents can accommodate approximately 8,000 people. Around 60 tents have been kept as standby and will be used as per requirement, Member Expert, DUSIB, Bipin Rai said.



winter action plan in December 2023.

A total of 15 rescue teams have been deployed on the ground to create awareness about the arrangements. The teams identify clusters of homeless people and inform the control room, which sends volunteers to shift such people to the temporary shelters. Teams of doctors also visit these shelters twice a week. According to the Delhi government, 195 DUSIB shelter homes with a total capacity of 7,092 people are functional in the city at present. DUSIB teams pick up homeless people living on roads or in open spaces from 10 pm to 4 am every day. Each rescue team is equipped with one vehicle, driver and two attendants.

After receiving information about homeless people from the DUSIB control room or other sources, the teams pick them up from the identified location and take them to a nearby shelter or hospital as needed.

A centralised control room with dedicated staff has been set up at Punarwas Bhawan, LP. Estate to monitor and assist the rescue teams. The control room receives complaints and information 24x7 through a dedicated helpline, mobile app and through other sources. The control room can be contacted through toll-free number 14461, 011-23378789 and 011-23370560 (landline) and +919871013284 (WhatsApp). A mobile app, Rain Basera, to track and rescue homeless people is also available. It can be downloaded from Google Play Store. "Any person who comes across a homeless person lying/residing along the roadside can simply click a photograph in his/her smart phone and submit it to central control room. The central control room automatically locates the sender/homeless person through GPS and informs the rescue teams to rescue the homeless person," the DUSIB had said in a notice issued earlier.

City reels under severe cold, maximum plunges to 13.4 C

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The biting chill tightens its grip on North India, bringing bone-chilling temperatures to the national capital. Delhi and its surrounding regions continued to reel under bone chilling cold weather due to northwesterly dry icy winds on Tuesday, with the maximum temperature recorded 13.4 degree Celsius, six notches below the season's normal. The minimum temperature was settled at 7.9 degree C, slightly above the seasonal average as shallow fog wrapped parts of the city. Jafarpur was the coldest place in Delhi where the maximum temperature was recorded of 12.9 degree Celsius. The minimum temperature in Lodhi Road was recorded at 6.4 degree Celsius, lowest in the capital city. The wind chill factor created a condition similar to a cold wave.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) reported unexpected drizzles in certain areas, contributing to the cold weather. Delhi airport witnessed flight delays as foggy conditions continued on late Monday night and early morning on Tuesday. According to Flightradar24 — an online portal that live tracks flights around the world using satellite technology — Delhi airport saw 136 flights delayed on departure and 58 flights delayed on arrival until 10 am on Tuesday while as many as 16 Delhi bound trains or those



traversing through the national capital were delayed. According to IMD, the maximum temperature was recorded of 13.1 degree Celsius in Palam, 13.2 degree Celsius in Lodhi Road, 13.5 degree Celsius in Ridge, 13.5 degree Celsius in Ayanagar, 14.2 degree Celsius in Narela, 14.3 degree Celsius in Pitampura, 13.7 degree Celsius in Pusa and 13.2 degree Celsius in SPS Mayur Vihar. Similarly, the maximum temperature in Gurugram was recorded 14 degree Celsius, CDO Ghaziabad 12.8 degree Celsius, NCMRWF Noida 14.2 degree Celsius. Notably, the city's visibility was affected, with Safdarjung recording the lowest at 500 meters at 8 am, and Palam reporting 300 meters at 5 am. The Delhi airport issued an advisory for passengers that planes, which are not CAT I compliant, may face issues. However, landings and take-offs of flights continued at the

Delhi airport, according to airport officials. The IMD categorized the fog as shallow, with visibility ranging from 999 meters to 500 meters. "Cold Day to Severe Cold Day conditions likely to continue over Northwest India during next 24 hours and abate thereafter," the IMD said. Delhi on Monday recorded its coldest day of the month so far as the minimum temperature dropped to 5.3 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average and almost the same as the hill station of Nainital which had recorded a low of 5.4 degrees Celsius a day earlier. On December 15 last year, the national capital recorded its lowest minimum temperature of the season so far at 4.9 degrees, four notches below the season's average. Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 366, in the very poor category, at 9 am, which settled at 343 at 4 pm.

Sanitation drive across all 12 zones will kick off on January 10: Mayor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi on Tuesday said a sanitation-related drive that will run across all 12 zones will kick off from January 10, as she asserted that people will see a "cleaner and better city" in the next one-and-a-half months. She had said a week earlier that "marathon inspections" will be conducted to enhance the city's cleanliness as part of the "Ab Delhi Hogi Saaf" campaign. "This will be turned into a 'jan jagaran abhiyan' (public awareness campaign), and we want support of the masses, MLAs, councillors, every one," she told reporters here on Tuesday. The mayor also shared a five-day schedule of the campaign that sets off from City-Sadar Paharganj Zone.

"The campaign will start from tomorrow and run till the first week of March. By March, you will see that garbage has been cleared. We will go and clean each gully corner," she said. The campaign will cover all assembly constituencies (70) and municipal wards of Delhi.

The 250 wards of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi are spread across 12 zones. "On January 10, the campaign will cover Chandni Chowk constituency; day two will cover Shadara (South) Zone spanning Trilokpuri and



Kondli constituencies. And, January 12, Madipur and Rajouri Garden constituencies and the West Zone will be taken up," she added.

As Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has promised for cleaning Delhi, "in 1.5 months you will see neater, cleaner and better Delhi".

"All officials, public representatives, myself, the deputy mayor, the leader of the house (in the MCD) will be part of it," Oberoi had said on January 3. "Our only agenda is to make Delhi neat and clean. We got cooperation from all officials, the public and public representatives. Now, our only intent is that all garbage vulnerable points that have been removed be inspected," she had said.

The mayor on Tuesday said about 70-80 per cent garbage vulnerable points have been removed and the sites beautified, and similar such points will also be removed. Garbage vulnerable points (GVPs) are open places where trash is dumped regularly.

Lakshadweep to get dual purpose airfield

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lakshadweep may soon have a dual-purpose airfield for military and commercial operations. The proposal gained traction after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the island recently. At present, the Union Territory has an airstrip in Agatti capable of accommodating only narrow-body aircraft.

The proposal to have a dual-purpose airport at Minicoy Islands in Lakshadweep entails Indian Air Force being the lead agency in handling operations from the airfield. It will have facilities to enable fighter jets to land and take off and keep an eye on the strategic sea lanes the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, sources said here on Tuesday. The Indian Coast Guard was the first one to suggest the development of an airstrip in the Minicoy Islands, they added.



An earlier proposal was moved to the Government to develop a new airfield in the Minicoy Islands. Now, the proposal has been resurrected and sent to the government again advocating a joint use purpose. The airport at Minicoy will also give defence forces the capability to expand their area of surveillance in the Arabian Sea. The airport will also provide a boost to tourism in the region, they said. It was learnt the proposal for the development of a new airport and extending the present facilities were revived recently. The group of islands gained huge popularity since Prime Minister Modi's visit. He also urged adventure seekers to explore various activities in Lakshadweep as he tried his hand at snorkelling.

IAS study centres under lens for fake ads

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), a regulatory authority, under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs on Tuesday came out with draft guidelines specifying "dos and don'ts" to stop misleading advertisements by the IAS coaching institutes. The move comes just months after the authority sent notices for misleading ads to 31 coaching institutes, including Unacademy, Byju's IAS, Drishti IAS, and Vajirao & Reddy Institute.

As per guidelines, coaching institutes shall not claim 100 per cent selection or 100% job guaranteed or guaranteed preliminary or mains. The draft guidelines will be approved and issued soon, Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) Chief Commissioner and Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh said. The Guidelines shall be applicable to all the coaching institutes whether online or physical and cover all forms of advertisement regardless of form, format or medium. As



per guidelines, coaching institutes shall not make false claims regarding success rates or the number of selections and any other practices that may lead to consumer misunderstanding or subvert consumer autonomy and choice.

"The committee observed that there is an urgent need to issue the guidelines and the draft as discussed in the (January 8) meeting should be issued at the earliest," the CCPA said in a statement. The draft guidelines prescribe conditions when an advertisement by a coaching institute will be construed to be a misleading advertisement under the Consumer Protection Act 2019 which inter-alia include concealing information related to the course opted by the successful candidates (whether free or paid) and duration of course, among others. The guidelines also prescribe DO's and DON'T's that need to be observed before coming up with advertisements. It said that the coaching institute shall mention requisite information with the successful candidate's photo, publish the rank secured by the successful candidate, the course opted by the successful candi-

date, the duration of the course, and whether it was paid or free. Further, coaching institutes should not make claims such as '100 per cent selection' or '100 per cent job guaranteed' or 'guaranteed preliminary or mains'.

The font of disclaimer/disclosure/important information in the advertisement should be the same as that used in the claim/advertisement. The placement of such information should be at a prominent and visible place in the advertisement.

The CCPA also clarified that the penalty for misleading advertisement by coaching sector will be governed as per Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the guidelines are just in the nature of clarification to the stakeholders. The font of disclaimer/disclosure/important information in the advertisement shall be the same as that used in the advertisement, it said, adding that the placement of such information shall be at a prominent and visible place in the advertisement.

The consumer regulatory authority said it had taken suo moto action against misleading advertisements by coaching institutes. "In this regard, CCPA has issued notices to 31 coaching institutes for misleading advertisement and imposed fine on 9 of them for misleading advertisement."

Notices were issued to Vajirao & Reddy Institute, Chahal Academy, Khan Study Group IAS, APTI Plus, Analog IAS, Shankar IAS, Sriram's IAS, BYJU's IAS, Unacademy, NEXT IAS, Drishti IAS, IQRA IAS, Vision IAS, IAS Baba, Yojana IAS, Plutus IAS, ALS IAS, Rau's IAS Study Circle and Dhishi IAS.

The CCPA said it had observed that some of the coaching institutes misled consumers by "deliberately concealing important information" with respect to courses opted by successful candidates, the duration of the course so attended and the fees paid by the candidates. Some of the coaching institutes, it said, also indulged in making claims like 100 per cent selection, 100 per cent job guaranteed, and guaranteed preliminary and main examination without providing verifiable evidence.

Become role model for youth, Army Chief urges NCC cadets

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Tuesday urged the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets to put their heart and mind into everything they undertake and become role models for the youth of our nation. He also highlighted about the significant contribution of NCC in national building activities.

He made these observations during his visit to the ongoing Republic Day camp of the NCC here and expressed his delight in the fact that many former NCC cadets hold high positions in the government and Armed Forces. He motivated cadets to take a leadership role in various professions in addition to Armed Forces.

The Chief of Army Staff reviewed an impressive 'Guard of Honour' by smartly turned out cadets drawn from all three Wings of NCC i.e.

Army, Navy, Air Force. This was followed by a brilliant band display by NCC cadets of Scindia School. Later, Pande visited the 'Flag Area' created by the NCC cadets depicting social awareness themes and cultural activities. The cadets provided him a detailed briefing about their respective State Directorate themes. Afterwards, Pande visited the 'Hall of Fame', a proud possession of the NCC that displays a rich archival collection of alumni photographs, models, motivational items, and other themes from the three wings of the NCC. The Army chief applauded the cadets for their impeccable turnout, impressive 'Guard of Honour' and a captivating cultural programme. He motivated the cadets to believe in themselves and equip themselves with determination and move ahead with firm resolve. He wished all NCC cadets success in their future endeavours.

Panchayat institutions should spread awareness on gender violence: Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rural Development Minister Giriraj Singh on Tuesday said it is the duty of panchayati raj institutions to ensure that villages are free of gender-based violence. Addressing a workshop virtually, he stressed that gram sabhas have a major role to play in checking gender-based violence.

"Many times women do not speak out in case of gender violence. Through self help groups, we have achieved a lot of success in this regard. It is the duty of panchayati raj institutions to spread awareness about gender-based violence," Singh said at the workshop on role of panchayati raj institutions in addressing gender-based violence.

He said 70 per cent of India's population lives in villages, and it is important to address the issue in the rural areas to ensure gender equality in the country.

"It is your duty to make panchayats more aware about this issue... Panchayati raj should imbibe it in its system in such a way that the gram sabha can play a big role in stopping gender-based violence," Singh said.



He also said gram sabhas should call meetings specifically to discuss issues related to women and children. He added that empowering women by providing them employment will also play a significant role in reducing gender-based violence. Role of elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions in mitigating and addressing the issues related to gender-based violence and spreading awareness among the state panchayati raj department, NIRD&PR, SIRD&PRs, panchayati raj training institutions and panchayats were discussed at the workshop. Sensitive issues like child marriage, human trafficking, sexual abuse, and domestic violence were also taken up to deepen understanding and enhance collective efforts in addressing gender-based violence.

Focus areas include role of UNFPA in capacity building of panchayati raj institutions in addressing the issues related to gender-based violence, strengthening institutional efforts to address gender-based violence at grassroots level, role of community-based organisations and self-help groups and promoting community-based initiatives to prevent gender-based violence. A handbook for elected representatives - 'Panchayats Free From Gender-Based Violence' was also released.

HC to hear today Delhi Child Rights body plea against freezing of funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court will hear on Wednesday a petition by the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) against the alleged freezing of its funds by the State authorities.

Justice Subramoniam Prasad asked the counsel for the child rights body on Tuesday to serve a copy of the plea to the office of the lieutenant governor and inform it about its scheduled listing.

The petition came up for hearing before the high court on transfer from the Supreme Court.

"The present petition is received on transfer from the apex court. Petitioner is directed to serve a copy (of the petition) on the respondent informing that the matter is listed tomorrow," the court said.

On December 15, the top court had asked the DCPCR to ventilate its grievance before the high court after it complained its funds have been frozen by the state authorities.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, representing the DCPCR, contended before the Supreme Court that the funds of the commission cannot be frozen. "How can six million children of the state be told that not a penny is going to come to the commission?" he asked.

The Supreme Court had then questioned why "every dispute" between the Delhi government and the Lieutenant Governor (LG) should land before it, and directed that the plea be re-numbered as a petition before the high court.

Last year, Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena approved a Women and Child Development Department's proposal to institute an inquiry and ordered a special audit into alleged misuse of government funds by DCPCR.

Saxena also directed that no further request for allocation of funds by DCPCR will be entertained before the completion of the inquiry and special audit.

The DCPCR has said the allegation of misuse of government funds by it is malafide.

WHO to launch module related to diseases based on Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha systems

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The World Health Organisation (WHO) will launch ICD 11 Module 2 (Morbidity Codes) consisting of data and terminology relating to diseases based on Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani systems here on Monday in New Delhi.

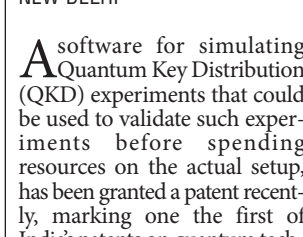
The effort will lead to global uniformity in ASU (Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha) medicine as a code of vocabulary defining diseases. "The global data on diseases currently available is mainly based on healthcare practices to be diagnosed through modern biomedicine. The classification of data and terminology relating to diseases based on Ayush systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani etc. is not yet included in the WHO ICD series," said a senior official from the Ayush Ministry. The Ministry has already developed the Code for Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani Medicine through the National Ayush Morbidity and Standardized Electronic Portal (NAMSTEP). The Ministry of Ayush in collaboration with WHO has prepared a categorization of data and terminol-

ogy related to diseases based on Ayush - Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani systems under TM2 module of ICD11 series. The Ministry has also signed a Donor Agreement with the WHO for the same. "This effort will further strengthen and expand India's public healthcare delivery system, research, Ayush insurance coverage, research and development, and policy-making systems. In addition, these codes will also be used in the formulation of future strategies to control various diseases in the society. Many other member countries of the World Health Organization are also willing to implement a similar format to include the terminology of traditional medical diseases in the ICD," said the official.

Infectious diseases like Malaria and lifestyle diseases like chronic insomnia are included in this classification. Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, Vertigo Guidance Disorder (parent name), commonly recognized by the three traditional systems, as a nervous system disorder known in Ayurveda as 'Bhramaha' siddha as 'Ajal Krikri' and in Unani as 'Sadra-o-Dwar', he explained.

Indian patent granted for work on secure quantum communication

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



A software for simulating Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) experiments that could be used to validate such experiments before spending resources on the actual setup, has been granted a patent recently, marking one of the first of India's patents on quantum technology.

The experimentally friendly tool for which Raman Research Institute (RRI) has been awarded an Indian patent in the field of Quantum Technologies, can be used to design optimal design parameters when planning for such experiments.

The patent was granted for 'Method and system for generating cryptographic keys' to the team led by Professor Urbasi Sinha for their work on secure Quantum communication. The merit of the work lay in the versatility of the software for simulating Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) experiments.

"Our invention, qkdSim, provides a tool to design QKD, which circumvents the huge experimental trial-and-error approach. It overcomes the problem by applying the software development model Agifall, whose three-layered architecture conveniently abstracts simulation of real physical processes. qkdSim comprises distinct modules that model different physical processes and components and combine to simulate full end to end QKD. This simulation enables design and testing implementations for validation

and optimisation," said Professor Sinha.

Last year, India launched the National Quantum Mission which is being co-ordinated by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and RRI, an autonomous institution of DST has been actively involved in this major technological challenge. With the increase in sensitive and personal data becoming digital and made available online, there is an inevitable need for securing and shielding it with leak-proof encryption. QKD is a globally relevant technology that is currently being pursued towards providing a new paradigm for data security that is based on laws of nature, in this case, laws of quantum mechanics. "This is especially crucial to ensure that we shift away from other forms of cryptography that use mathematical hardness of problems as their bases, which can be broken. Our invention will help both in optimal design and validation of available QKD products for their realistic performance expectations. This in turn will help us evolve high end data security that would benefit several sectors including banking transaction, defence services, health sector and many more," said Sinha.

Rajnath holds talks with UK Defence Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday held a bilateral meeting with UK Defence Minister Grant Shapps in London. The meeting was very warm with a fruitful exchange of ideas on both sides. Both Ministers discussed a range of defence, security and cooperation matters with particular emphasis on enhancing defence industrial collaboration, defence ministry officials said here.

Giving details, they said Shapps stressed that the relationship between UK and India is not transactional, instead both countries are natural partners with many commonalities and shared goals.

The bilateral defence meeting was followed by the signing of two agreements between India and UK - an MoU on conduct of bilateral international cadet exchange programme, and a Letter of Arrangement between Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) on defence collaboration in research and development. These documents will provide impetus to the people-to-people exchanges particularly among the youth, and larger area of defence research collaboration between the two countries.

After arriving in London late on Monday, Rajnath began his London engagements by paying floral tributes to Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi at his statue at Tavistock Square earlier on Tuesday.

Toddlers exposed to television more prone to display atypical sensory behaviour: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Babies and toddlers exposed to television or video viewing may be more likely to exhibit atypical sensory behaviours, such as being disengaged and disinterested in activities, seeking more intense stimulation in an environment, or being overwhelmed by sensations like loud sounds or bright lights, says researchers at Drexel's College of Medicine published in the journal JAMA Pediatrics. According to the researchers, children exposed to greater TV viewing by their second birthday were more likely to develop atypical sensory processing behaviors, such as "sensation seeking" and "sensation avoiding," as well as "low registration" — being less sensitive or slower to respond to stimuli, such as their name being called, by 33 months old.

Sensory processing skills reflect the body's ability to respond efficiently and appropriately to information and stimuli received by its sensory systems, such as what the toddler hears, sees, touches, and tastes. The team pulled 2011-2014 data on television or DVD-watching by babies and toddlers at 12- 18- and 24-months from the National Children's Study of 1,471 children (50% male) nationwide.

Sensory processing outcomes were assessed at 33 months using the Infant/Toddler Sensory Profile (ITSP), a questionnaire completed by parents/caregivers, designed to give insights on how children process what they see, hear and smell, etc. ITSP subscales examine chil-



children's patterns of low registration, sensation seeking, such as excessively touching or smelling objects; sensory sensitivity, such as being overly upset or irritated by lights and noise; and sensation avoiding — actively trying to control their environment to avoid things like having their teeth brushed. Children score in "typical" "high" or "low" groups based on how often they display various sensory-related behaviors. Scores were considered "typical" if they were within one standard deviation from the average of the ITSP norm. The findings revealed that at 12 months, any screen exposure compared to no screen viewing was associated with a 105% greater likelihood of exhibiting "high" sensory behaviors instead of "typical" sensory behaviors related to low registration at 33 months. At 18 months, each additional hour of daily screen time was associated with 23% increased odds of exhibiting "high" sensory behaviors related to later sensation avoiding and low registration. At 24 months, each additional hour of daily screen time was associated with a 20% increased odds of "high" sensation seeking, sensory sensitivity, and sensation avoiding at 33 months. The findings add to a growing list of concerning health and developmental outcomes linked to screen time in infants and toddlers, including language delay, autism spectrum disorder, behavioral issues, sleep struggles, attention problems and problem-solving delays. "This association could have important implications for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism, as atypical sensory processing is much more prevalent in these populations," said lead author Karen Heffler, MD, an associate professor of Psychiatry in Drexel's College of Medicine. "Repetitive behavior, such as that seen in autism spectrum disorder, is highly correlated with atypical sensory processing. Future work may determine whether early life screen time could fuel the sensory brain hyperconnectivity seen in autism spectrum disorders, such as heightened brain responses to sensory stimulation." The authors said future research is needed to better understand the mechanisms that drive the association between early-life screen time and atypical sensory processing.

BJP set to win Sikkim Rajya Sabha seat uncontested

PTI ■ GANGTOK
BJP nominee DT Lepcha is set to win the Rajya Sabha election in Sikkim uncontested with no other candidate filing the nomination papers, officials said on Tuesday.
Lepcha, the MLA of Gnathang Machong in Pakyong district, would have anyway won the election with the ruling SKM extending support to him. The BJP and the SKM together account for 31 of the assembly's total 32 seats.
The stipulated time for the filing of nomination ended at 3 pm, and only Lepcha's papers were received by the



office of the Returning Officer, the assembly secretariat said.
"The scrutiny of the nomination papers will take place on Wednesday, it said. Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang and BJP state unit president DR Thapa accompanied Lepcha when he filed his nomination papers at the assembly.
Lepcha was a minister in the previous SDF government, and held portfolios such as Buildings & Housing, and Transport.
In the 32-member Sikkim assembly, SKM has 19 members, BJP has 12 and the SDF has one member. 'BJP did not win any seat in the last assembly elections,

Black flag protest against Kerala Governor amid LDF stir

PTI ■ IDUKKI (KERALA)
Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan faced a massive protest from various youth outfits affiliated to the ruling Left Democratic Front during his visit to Thodupuzha in Idukki district on Tuesday. Governor Khan arrived in Thodupuzha amidst a hartal called by the LDF in Idukki district against his refusal to give assent to the Kerala Government Land Assignment (Amendment) Bill 2023.
As the Governor entered the hill district to participate in a function organised by the Kerala Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samiti, a traders' body, a group of Left activists attempted to obstruct his vehicle, displaying black flags as a mark of protest.
The protests, spearheaded by activists from the Left Front's youth outfits including Students Federation of India (SFI), Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) and Youth Front, gained momentum as they marched towards the venue where the Governor was scheduled to attend the programme.
Earlier, local leaders and activists of the CPI(M)'s Idukki unit took out a march against Khan's arrival to the district. Some of the protesters even allegedly raised objectionable slogans against Khan during the march.



Meanwhile, addressing the gathering after inaugurating the Karunya Family Welfare Scheme of the Samithi, the Governor said he would fulfill his constitutional obligations and would perform whatever duties he has. Amidst an intense tussle between Khan and the CPI (M)-led government over various issues, including the non-signing of certain bills passed by the Assembly, the Governor emphasised that he is a public servant, not a rubber stamp. "I am not a rubber stamp. I have said repeatedly... I have a duty to uphold the constitutional law. I have a duty to see the interest and welfare of the people of Kerala is not compromised by anyone," the Governor said. Khan further asserted that the interests and welfare of the ordinary people of Kerala would be his uppermost priority while discharging his duties.
"But on one thing, there is no question of any compromise, and that is, law and rules will not be allowed to be bent to serve the interests of particular individuals who belong to certain political dispensations. That cannot be allowed," he said. Noting that the "force of argument" and not the "argument of force" is essential during public discourse, Khan said that between 1985 and 1990, there were five attempts on his life, including being hit with an iron rod on his head once. At the age of 72, Khan said, he was living on borrowed time and did not feel threatened by these protests. Later, during his return journey, Khan interacted with some local people gathered on the roadside and exchanged pleasantries with them for a brief time.
The Governor, however, continued to face protests while going back after taking part in the programme. The dawn-to-dusk hartal was announced by the ruling front against Khan's refusal to give his assent to the Kerala Government Land Assignment (Amendment) Bill 2023. Many shops remained closed and the number of vehicles on the roads was comparatively less in the high-range district in the initial hours of the hartal.

Civic schools in Mumbai to hold competitions on Lord Ram

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Maharashtra Cabinet Minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha on Tuesday said Mumbai civic schools will organise competitions to showcase the importance of Lord Ram to students between January 10 and 17 ahead of the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya. Competitions on writing essays, poetry, and painting will be held under 'Maryada Purushottam Prabhu Shriram Jeevan Charitra Spardha', said Lodha.
"The upcoming consecration of Lord Ram's temple in Ayodhya is a historic moment for our country.
"This competition is being organised with the objective that the new generation knows about Lord Ram and Ramrajya," the guardian minister of the Mumbai suburban district said while addressing a press conference at the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) headquarters here.

Uddhav targets Speaker on meeting with CM

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said his party has filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court objecting to a meeting between Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar before the crucial verdict on disqualification petitions against rival Sena MLAs, including the CM.
Narwekar is scheduled to deliver his ruling at 4 pm on January 10, a deadline set by the Supreme Court, more than 18 months after the Shiv Sena suffered a split, leading to the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government headed by Thackeray.
"If the judge (Narwekar) is going to meet the accused, what should we expect from that judge," Thackeray asked, speaking to the media at his residence 'Matoshree' here. The affidavit before the SC was filed on Monday, a day after the meeting, he said. Thackeray's ally and Nationalist Congress Party

Ahead of ruling on Sena pleas



(NCP) founder Sharad Pawar, too, said when someone who is hearing a case meets the person against whom the case is being heard, it "leaves room for doubt".
Hitting back, Narwekar said Thackeray, a former chief minister, should know for what purposes a speaker could meet a chief minister. "If he still levels such allegations, then his motive is very clear. There is no rule that a speaker, while hearing disqualification pleas, cannot do any other work," Narwekar said, alluding to Thackeray trying to pressurise him ahead of the ruling on disqualification pleas by The speaker met Shinde at

Anil Parab said such meetings must be brought to the Supreme Court's notice as it was a serious issue. "We hope the apex court takes this matter seriously," Parab added. Upset over the Shiv Sena (UBT)'s attack, Narwekar said, "As the speaker, I have to discharge work related to the assembly and chief minister is also part of it. As an MLA, I also have to address the issues related to my constituency. There are other issues related to the state and if resolving them requires meeting the head of the government, then I don't think I need anyone's permission."

'Northeast being cited as example of Modi development model'

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
PM Narendra Modi's governance reforms have helped in "mainstreaming" the Northeast, which is now being cited as an example of his development model, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Tuesday.
Addressing the regional

conference organised by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in Guwahati, he said that path-breaking decisions were taken by the Modi government for the development of the Northeast and the impact of those were now visible in the quality of

life of the people of the region. "The reforms were brought in by the central government for ease of governance and ease of delivery of service. Northeast today is being cited as an example of Modi's development model," said Singh, the MoS for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.

C-2319

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER,
P.H. DIVISION, BALASORE
Phone : 9438660004, e-mail: eepbbs@gmail.com
NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement (Online Mode)
Bid-Identification No. SEPHBLS-32 of 2023-24 dt.03.01.2024

The Superintending Engineer, P.H. Division, Balasore on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites Percentage Rate bids in Double cover system in ONLINE mode only.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Bid-Identification No.	Value of Work (Rs. Lakh)	Period of Completion	Availability of bid documents for online bidding	Last date and time of seeking clarification	Date & Time of opening of technical bid
1	Construction of Overhead Water Tank of 1.00 lakh ltr capacity inside Khanqua Sharif for Improvement of water supply to Khanqua Sharif area of Dhamnagar NAC	SEPHBLS-32 dt.03.01.2024	167.63	04 (Four) calendar month	11:00 Hrs. of dt.10.01.2024 to 17:00 Hrs. of dt.25.01.2024	17:00 Hrs. Of 19.01.2024	11:00 Hrs. Of 29.01.2024

The bidders shall have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <http://tenders.odisha.gov.in>. Any addendum/corrigendum/cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website. The authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids without assigning any reason thereof.

Name and Address of the officer inviting bid :- The Superintending Engineer, P.H. Division, Balasore, At-Samalpur, Post-Balia, Dist-Balasore, Pin-756056, Odisha, Phone : 9438660004

Superintending Engineer, P.H. Division, Balasore

OIPR-13053/11/0018/2324

O-2164

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, SUNABEDA e-mail - serwsb2003@yahoo.com

No: 146 Dt: 9.1.2024

1st CORRIGENDUM

In continuation to this office Bid Identification No- CCRWCSBD Online-50/2023-24 invited vide this office Notice No. 6301 Dtd. 20.12.2023, partial modification of TCN has been made as follows:-

Sl No	Item	Time Schedule as per original TCN	Time Schedule as per Corrigendum notice
1	Availability of Tender online for bidding	28.12.2023 at 11:00 AM to 11.01.2024 up to 5.30 Pm	Extended up to 5.30 PM of 18.01.2024
2	Last Date and Time of seeking tender clarification if any	10.01.2024 up to 2.00 PM	17.01.2024 up to 2.00 PM
3	Date & Time of opening of tender (Technical Bid)	12.01.2024 at 11.00 AM	19.01.2024 at 11.00 AM
4	Date & Time of opening of tender (Price Bid)	To be intimated separately	Will be intimated later on to the successful bidders

*** Estimated cost for the work "Package No-PM-SBD-C4" is changed to Rs.147.06 Lakhs instead of Rs.192.94 Lakhs as per TCN.
All other terms and conditions will remain unaltered.

Chief Construction Engineer Rural Works Circle, Sunabeda

OIPR-25182/11/0058/2324

CHANGE OF NAME
I, Santosh Kumari (Existing Name of spouse as per change of Next-of-Kin POR/ Service Documents), spouse of Manohar Lal Chawla (Name of Husband) Resident of 67 SFS Flats Hauz Khaz South Delhi -16 (Address) have changed my Name from Santosh Kumari Existing Name of spouse as per change of Next-of-Kin POR/ Service Documents) to Santosh Chawla (proposed / adopted New Name) vide Affidavit dated 08/01/2024 at Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given on behalf of Mr. Aas Mohd to general public that the some Original Sale Deed dated 04.04.1989, and Original GPA, ATIS Will 03.08.1996 related to the Khasra no. 37, situated in the area of Village Boanaha, Meerut Road, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, (U.P.), have been misplaced. Public is being warned not to deal with the documents. Any person dealing with the aforesaid documents would do so at their own risk and responsibility. Owner shall not be liable in any manner whatsoever for any loss incurred by such persons. If anybody found these documents OR notice any misuse of these documents, Concerned Person is required to communicate at the address given below.

Juris NextGen LLP
E-56, LGF, Greater Kailash Enclave Part-4
New Delhi-48 4014-2662/177-78-78

FORM NO.5
DRTL/KO
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL
600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Temple, Lucknow- 226 007 (Area of Jurisdiction- Part of Uttar Pradesh)

SUMMONS FOR FILING REPLY & APPEARANCE BY PUBLICATION
O.A. No. 28/ 2023

(Summons to defendant under Section 19(4), of the Recovery of Debts due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with Rules 12 and 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal (Procedure Rules, 1993)

O.A. No. 28/ 2023
ICICI Bank Ltd. ...Applicant
Versus
Mr. Krishna Kant Singh & Others ...Defendants To, Defendants :

1) Mr. Krishna Kant Singh, S/o Shri. Bansh Narayan Singh, Resident of Flat No. C-10, Second Floor, Gagan Enclave, Rakesh Marg, Ghaziabad- 201 001 (U.P.).
2) Mrs. Archna Singh, W/o Mr. Krishna Kant Singh, Resident of Flat No. C-10, Second Floor, Gagan Enclave, Rakesh Marg, Ghaziabad- 201 001 (U.P.).
3) M/s Futureworld Greenhomes Pvt. Ltd, Corp. Office at D-39, Sector-6, Opposite Noida Authority, Noida- 201 301 (U.P.)

In the above noted application, you are required to file reply in paper book form in Two sets along with documents and affidavits (if any), personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner in this Tribunal, after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his counsel/ duly authorized agent after publication of the summons, and thereafter to appear before the Tribunal on 13/02/2024 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.

Registrar
Debts Recovery Tribunal
Lucknow

PUBLIC NOTICE
Plot No. 68, Sector 16, Phase 1, Industrial Estate, Bahadurgarh (Allottee ID: 2021JAN70022) measuring 1800 sqm. The captioned plot is in the name of Mr. Joginder Pal Ralli and Bhupesh Ralli Prop. Enclosed Ready-made (P) Ltd. Garments Allotted by HSIIDC vide Regular Letter of Allotment No. 2021JAN70022 for setting up the industrial Project of mfg ready made garments. That the Mr. Bhupesh Ralli S/o Late Sh. Joginder Pal Ralli vide his request letter dated 20.03.2023 intimated that Mr. Joginder Pal Ralli has expired on 09.09.2021. That the legal heirs has furnished the death certificate of late Joginder Pal Ralli and Undertaking indicating the name of the legal heirs of the deceased i.e. (1) Bhupesh Ralli (Son) (2) Alka Kakkar (Daughter) (3) Vimmi Passi (Daughter). That the legal heirs has requested to transfer the said plot to Mr. Bhupesh Ralli has also submitted intimated that they are the only legal heirs of deceased and they have no objection, if the said plot of area is transferred in favour of Mr. Bhupesh Ralli. Through this Public Notice it is hereby informed that in case any person has any reservation/objection to the said transfer he/she can file her objection(s) in writing before the undersigned along with an affidavit within a period of 30-days from the date of publication of this notice. In case no, response/objection is received within the aforesaid period, it will be presumed that no person has any objection for transfer of said share in favour of Mr. Bhupesh Ralli S/o Late Joginder Pal Ralli and the Corporation shall go ahead with the request of transfer of said plot in favour of Mr. Bhupesh Ralli S/o Late Joginder Pal Ralli.

On behalf of Estate Manager
Hayana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited
Sector-17, Industrial Estate, Bahadurgarh (HR)

Public Notice
This is to inform the general public that Ms. Bachhi Devi is the GPA Holder of Property bearing Plot no. 63, area measuring 40 sq. yards, out of Khasra no. 3/20 & 4/15 situated at Vikas Kunj, Mohan Garden, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059. She acquired the above property through GPA, ATIS & Will dated 29.03.2023, executed by Mr. Babji Gupta. Ms. Bachhi Devi is now selling the above said property to Ms. Poonam Sharma and further Ms. Poonam Sharma is currently in the process of mortgaging the aforementioned property with SMFG India Home Finance Co., Our Client. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

Public Notice
This is to inform the general public that Mr. Ajay Goyal of the Residential House No. B-52, Area Admeasuring 350 Sq. Yds (45FT X 73 FT), Comprised in Khasra No.1810, Situated in Residential Colony Known as Old DLF Colony, Sector-14, Gurgaon, Haryana. He acquired the above property through Transfer Deed dated 20.12.2016, executed by (1) Mrs. Saiya Goyal (2) Mr. Sanjay Gupta (3) Mr. Vijay Gupta (4) Mr. Manish Gupta. Doc No-24352. Mr. Ajay Goyal is currently in the process of mortgaging the aforesaid property with KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK LIMITED Our Client. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 10 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 10-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 10-day period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

Public Notice
This is to inform the general public that Smt. Kanta Bansal is the sole owners of Entire First Floor Without Roof Slab and First Floor, On Property Bearing No. 101 area measuring 168 Sq. Mtrs., in Block-AE Situated in the Layout Plan of Shalimar Bagh, Residential Scheme, Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088. This ownership was legally acquired through a Relinquishment Deed dated 16.06.2021 vide doc. No. 6302, executed by Smt. Shagun Agarwal and Sh. Rohak Bansal. Above said owners have misplaced the Original Possession Letter, Site Kabza Letter and Allotment Letter. Anyone who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager of IDFC First Bank Limited. Smt. Kanta Bansal intends to transfer the ownership by way of Sale Deed of the aforesaid floor to Smt. Renu Bansal. Subsequently, Smt. Renu Bansal is in the process of mortgaging the said property with IDFC First Bank Limited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 15 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 15-day period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client. If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 15-day period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +91120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS
CHANGE OF NAME
I, Rupan Kaul D/o S.S.Bedi R/o 655, Sec-11, Chandigarh-160011 do hereby declare that I have changed my name Rupan Bedi to Rupan Kaul after marriage, hence Rupan Bedi and Rupan Kaul are same and one person.
PD(235)C

THE M.P. STATE CO-OPERATIVE MARKETING FEDERATION LIMITED
Head Office : Jehangirabad, Bhopal-462008 (M.P.)
E-OFFER NOTICE
Purchase of Chemical Fertilizers for Kharif 2024 (01.04.2024 to 30.09.2024) & Micronutrients, Water soluble & Organic Fertilizer for Year 2024-25 (01.04.2024 to 31.03.2025)
M.P. State Cooperative Marketing Federation Ltd. Jehangirabad, Bhopal (MARKFED) invited offers to purchase DAP, MOP, NPK (COMPLEX), AMMONIUM SULPHATE, NANO UREA, NANO DAP, SINGLE SUPER PHOSPHATE for Kharif 2024 (01.04.2024 to 30.09.2024) & Micronutrients, Water soluble & Organic Fertilizer for Year 2024-25 (01.04.2024 to 31.03.2025) invited in prescribed E-offer form (with detailed offer terms & conditions). Offer which is available for overview from the date 10.01.2024 can be purchased & submitted online at <https://mptenders.gov.in> by 05.02.2024 upto 05:00 PM. The detailed offer form and terms & conditions are also available at our website www.mpmarkedf.mp.gov.in For any technical details contact on email - eproc@nic.in, Toll Free No. :- 0120-4200462/0120-4001002. Amendments if any, will be published on MARKFED's website :- www.mpmarkedf.mp.gov.in only and no separate notification will be published in the newspaper. M.P. Madhyam/113185/2024 **GENERAL MANAGER (AI)**

SALE NOTICE
The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details	Reserve Price	EMD
ICICI BANK Vs. Sanju Kumar, Execution (Comm.) 144/23	Vehicle No. DL6CM8216, Make and Model - TATA MOTORS LTD ZEST, (Manu Year - 2015)	Rs. 100000/-	Rs. 10000/-

Auction Date: January 25, 2024 From 11:00 am to 02:00 pm.
Place of Auction: Godara Yard, Khewat No. 166/1, Near Atul Kataria Chowk, Behind Gyan Devi, School, Sec-17, Sukhrali, Gurugram-122022
Contact Person: Swapnil Upadhyay (8126013708)/ Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809)
Note: DD/PO of EMD amount is to be made in favour of ICICI BANK LIMITED payable at Delhi and all bidders need to submit original DD/PO along with self-attested KYC at the auction site to participate in the auction.
Terms of Sale
The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves / itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids. All bidders are required to come at auction site with original KYC documents to participate in the auction. Successful bidder shall have to deposit sale amount within 5 days from the approval date by the way of pay order/demand draft/RTGS/NEFT in case if you fail to make the remaining sale amount within 5 days, you EMD amount will be forfeited. The intending bidders may visit at ICICI Bank Ltd, Shal tower Plot no. 23, Near Rostak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicles.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, AJC Bose Road, Kolkata 700020 CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com

Whereas
The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice (Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.))	Name of Branch
1.	Rajmani Kumar/ Sabnam Kumari/ S/O Radhe Shyam Prasad Kisan Colony Phase 2 Near Beur Akhara Anishabad Patna Bihar Patna- 800002/ LBPTN00005314851/ LBPTN00005314853	Khasra Survey Plot No. 59 (Part), Thana Code 113, Thana No. 33, Touzi No. 5070, Khata No. 7/2, Patna Municipal Corporation, Ward No. 7, Mouza Beur, Mausam Mohalla, Kisan Colony, Thana Phulwan Shariff, Sub-Registry Phulwari Shariff, Sadar Registry office And District Patna, Bihar (Admeasuring an area of 1772 Sq. Ft. or 4.0679522 Decimal/ Date of Symbolic 05.01.2024	August 29, 2023 Rs. 2,22,08,271/-	Delhi

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: January 10, 2024 Place: Delhi **Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Double whammy

As fog, severe cold and rising COVID cases together put Delhi-NCR at risk, it is time to be cautious

As winter's icy hand is felt across north India, residents of Delhi-NCR face a double threat — severe cold conditions and a resurgence in COVID-19 cases, including its variant JN.1. The convergence of these two challenges demands a proactive approach from both individuals and the Government to ensure people's wellbeing. Bone-chilling cold is not uncommon to Delhi but this year it made its presence felt rather abruptly. Besides, the respite is still days, if not weeks, away. The weather forecast brings unsettling news for the northern States, predicting dense fog and a severe cold wave persisting until midweek. This cold not only makes outdoor activities challenging but also poses serious health risks, particularly to vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. With temperatures plummeting to unprecedented lows, it is crucial for people to take adequate precautions. Wearing layered clothing, using heaters judiciously and staying indoors during extreme weather conditions are essential steps to safeguard against the harsh weather. Apart from this, this is an accident-prone time, a foggy dilemma for those driving with almost zero visibility at times. Dense fog, a common companion of winter mornings, exacerbates the challenges posed by the cold wave. Reduced visibility on roads and highways increases the risk of accidents and traffic disruptions. Commuters are urged to exercise caution, use fog lights when driving, and strictly adhere to speed limits. Moreover, the railway and aviation sectors are impacted, leading to flight delays and cancellations. Passengers are advised to stay informed about their travel plans and make necessary adjustments.



As if fog and winter chill were not enough, we have the Covid spectre scaring us. Along with harsh weather, there is resurgence of Covid-19 cases. Delhi, in particular, has reported 24 cases of the JN.1 variant, with a total of 35 active cases in the city. This resurgence underscores the need for continued vigilance and adherence to Covid-appropriate behaviour. Individuals must not let their guard down, practising frequent hand hygiene, wearing masks and maintaining social distancing. It is essential for anyone experiencing symptoms to promptly get tested and follow isolation protocols. It goes without saying that the Government must work towards mitigating the risks associated with both the cold wave and the rising Covid cases. Adequate measures should be in place to address the health and safety concerns of the population. The Government must provide shelters for the homeless, distribute warm clothing and ensure the availability of medical facilities to address cold-related illnesses. Simultaneously, ramping up Covid testing, contact tracing and vaccination efforts is imperative to curb the spread of the virus. By working together, we can weather these storms and emerge stronger on the other side, as we did earlier.

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PICTALK



Birds perch on the shoulder of a woman, at a bird show, in Nadia

Thai Generals biding their time



ASHOK K MEHTA

The Thailand military has re-written the Constitution and ensured the formation of a constitutional court and senate, without whose approval no elected Government can function

This New Year, it was a toss-up between Goa and Thailand to escape the harsh Delhi winter. I first visited Thailand in 1989 from Sri Lanka when I was commanding the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) South in Batticaloa. Having conducted three Sri Lankan elections in Batti, I took leave and travelled to Bangkok on an official passport. Bangkok even then was swanky, at least in the downtown area. Since then, I would have come back numerous times — on conferences and vacations, at least 30 times.

The pandemic and ten years of military rule have hurt the economy, especially tourism. But that did not deter our travels, living off the land, thanks to the Oakwood Tiwanon-Ascott chain of residences where you can recreate your home routine if you like. But groceries cost more than twice as much as in NOIDA, though sweet red guavas are available throughout the year. After last December's holiday, I had written about how after Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha's 2014 coup his party misruled for a decade not without squabbling between the Generals — all three former Army Chiefs—the other two Prawit Wongsuwan, deputy prime minister and Anupong Paochinda, interior minister. One more spell of military rule ended last year. But spectacular things have happened since. Real estate tycoon Strettha Thavisin has become PM. But Thais voted for Pita Limajaroenrat of the Move Forward party. The popular business magnate Thaksin Shinawatra who was ousted from power in 2006 is back in Bangkok and sentenced to an eight-year prison term for sedition but a remission by Royal pardon has reduced the jail term to one year. Currently, he is in a Police general hospital while his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who carried the Phue Thai party flag won 140 parliamentary seats, next only to Pita's Move Forward. Pita, who campaigned for change, daringly for reforming monarchy — the untouchable royal defamation law — burnt his fingers and was suspended by the constitutional court and is being investi-



gated for violating election law. Phue Thai cobbled an 11-party coalition holding 314 seats in the 500-member Lower House which included Conservative military-backed parties which it previously opposed. This arrangement was put together between Thaksin when in exile, the all-powerful King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the military and police dispensation. For Thaksin, it is defacto amnesty. The military, which has rewritten the constitution, has ensured the formation of a constitutional court and senate without whose approval no elected government can function.

My local advisor Tun (Thais, like the Chinese, have simplified their unpronounceable names) said the tenth King of the Chakri dynasty is even more powerful than his predecessors and whispered the most embellished story about his owning a hotel in Munich. Tun switched to Strettha whom he described as a fashion-maker, turning out on Christmas day wearing one green and one red sock. He has pledged to rejuvenate the economy for which he offers big ideas. Two immediate ones are to revive tourism which in 2019 pre-pandemic had scaled 39 mn tourists which accounted for 12 per cent of GDP. Strettha has taken several steps

THAILAND IS AT PEACE WITH ITSELF. NO CONFRONTATION BETWEEN RED AND YELLOW SHIRTS OR BARRICADES IN DOWNTOWN BANGKOK NEAR THE ASOK INTERSECTION

to boost tourist figures to 40 mn- reduced tax on import of alcohol, extended bar timings to 4 am, plans to raise 8 new domestic airlines and declared visa-free travel for several countries. Last year, five countries that topped tourist arrivals were Malaysia, China, South Korea, India and Russia, aggregating 28 mn. Strettha's most awaited reform is the digital market scheme which entails USD 290 (10,000 Thai baht) to nearly 50 million Thais to spend to boost the economy. The reform is stuck in law court and might see the light of day by May, Tun said. Meanwhile, Strettha has admitted the economy is not good and has promised to boost FDI. He calls himself a salesman PM. You could add showman, says Tun. He is talking big about deals with Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Tesla. Thailand is at peace with itself. No confrontation between Red and Yellow shirts or barricades in downtown Bangkok near the Asok intersection. In October, a shootout in a shopping mall killed a Chinese and wounded three others. Shootouts occur periodically, warranting new gun laws. A low-key insurgency simmers in the south as the country has its first civilian defence minister Suthai Klungsang. But real power is with Army's

Internal Security Operations Command which Strettha has refused to dissolve despite calls from Phue Thai. Tun said regardless of which government rules in Bangkok, what holds the country together is a monarchy-military alliance. In 2014, just before the Army's 12th coup since 1932, the present King, then crown prince fled to London and camped across the entire fourth floor of Landmark Hotel and returned only when he had worked out a deal with the Junta. I happened to be at the Landmark for a conference and saw his royal guards in action.

So far not too good for the economy. World Bank estimates that the Thai economy will grow 3.2 per cent though Phue Thai had promised 5 per cent growth not reached since 2012. Until Move Forward abandons its Palace reform agenda, Phue Thai will rule. Thaksin will likely replace Strettha with daughter Paetongtarn (his sister Yingluck was earlier PM) as Prime Minister later this year. So back to the Shinawatras and for Thais a prosperous 2024. (The writer, a retired Lt Gen, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, & founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TALIBAN'S DRESS CODE

Sir — Taliban's strict rule, particularly the suppression of women's rights, is exemplified by recent headlines of arrests of women deemed to have a "Bad Hijab." The situation is distressing and disheartening, witnessing the uprooting of women's rights and freedom in the regions under Taliban control.

The Taliban's imposition of a rigid dress code not only violates personal freedom, but it is also troubling to see a regime enforcing a strict interpretation of it, punishing women for not following their specific standards. The arrests not only violate the fundamentals of human rights but also highlight a larger issue of gender inequality and the suppression of women's autonomy.

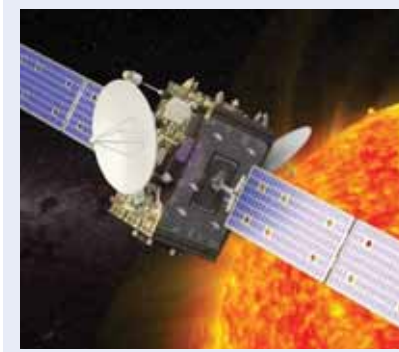
In the face of darkness, our collective voice becomes a ray of hope for those silenced by oppression. As we advocate for the preservation of women's rights, let us stand united in the belief that every woman deserves the freedom to make choices about her body, life, or future. The struggle for women's rights is a universal cause, transcending borders and ideologies. Together, we must raise our voices louder and urge global leaders to prioritize and protect the fundamental rights of women everywhere. In doing this, we contribute to the creation of a world where women are empowered, respected, and free to shape their path without fear or constraint.

Gourja Soni | Delhi

FALLING APART

Sir — PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to Lakshwadeep took social media by storm, but it is a Maldivian minister's snide remarks that have taken the spotlight and highlighted the souring relations between the two countries. This row is only the latest controversy in recent developments that have strained India-Maldives ties. President Mohamed Muizzu, who assumed office last September, had won the election with the campaign "India Out" from Maldives projects and termed New Delhi as a hegemon that is a threat to

ADITYA-L1 makes history



The success of the solar mission, Aditya-L1, marks a watershed moment in India's space exploration journey and is a testimony to the technological prowess and the

relentless dedication of the country's scientists to carry out complex and intricate operations.

In a critical manoeuvre, the scientists at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully placed the spacecraft in the halo orbit around Lagrange Point 1 (L1), its desired destination from where it will make observations of the Sun for the next five years, entering new frontiers of science. L1 is the sweet spot in the Earth-Solar system where the gravitational effects of the two celestial bodies roughly cancel each other out. Aditya will remain at the same position, relative to the Sun and Earth, and its instruments are pointed towards the Sun for a completely uninterrupted view.

Karna Singh | Chennai

Maldivian autonomy. Additionally, unlike his predecessor Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, Muizzu is viewed by many as close to China. Since his election, there has been a deliberate distancing from India, with Muizzu expressing his desire to expel Indian troops from the country to safeguard Maldives' independence and sovereignty. However, India has always stood by Maldives in its good and bad times. New Delhi was among the first to recognize the island nation after its independence in 1965. With the trend of "Boycott Maldives" on social media, the island nation, whose tourism accounts for around 28% of its GDP, tends to lose a large number of tourists from India, affecting its economy apart from a valuable and strategically significant ally.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

JAN AUSHADHI KENDRAS

Sir — The purpose of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Jan Aushadi Kendra is to provide quality generic medicines at affordable prices to all citizens. But they have not become popular, as evident from the annual turnover of all the Kendras in the coun-

try, which is about Rs. 893 crore, negligible compared to that of the Pharmaceutical Industry in India of Rs. 2,89,998 crore. According to different news articles, the Jan Aushadi Kendras have faced several challenges such as poor supply chain management, heavy pressure from the pharmaceutical industry, and quality issues. Customers are wary of buying medicines from them due to problems of supply and quality. They are yet to make an impact due to a lack of awareness among the public and a poor procurement process. These Kendras are akin to Ration shops for providing medicines at cheaper prices to the poor than in regular medical shops, as they sell at very high prices due to exorbitant profit margins. The Government must take steps to popularize the Jan Aushadi Kendras by opening them in hospitals and commercial areas alongside regular medical shops, improving the availability of all medicines at all times and their quality, and creating faith in the public.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The factory of the future will be data-driven and AI-optimised

By drawing on the power of AI, smart manufacturers are realising the very tangible and measurable business benefits

Real-time data is enabling new levels of innovation and the rise of smarter factories when combined with potent tools like edge computing, AI/ML, and streaming analytics. Data is revolutionizing manufacturing. Forward-thinking businesses are combining edge and artificial intelligence (AI) with operational technology (OT) to offer use cases that yield impressive advantages.

The smart manufacturing production environment, also known as "the edge" in manufacturing, is where data is generated by cameras, sensors, machinery, and assembly lines. Businesses gather and translate data from these sources, or automation control systems linked to these sources, using edge computing technologies. Technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and streaming data analytics are used to examine the data to provide quick insights for quick decision-making and quick action. AI at the manufacturing edge AI can advance your organization's ability to protect workers, enhance produc-



tion quality, avoid maintenance issues and fill in skills gaps with machine intelligence. The benefits of AI in action at the edge include: **Lower number of defects:** AI can track parts coming into and moving through the factory. Computer vision helps speed and automate the work in process throughout the entire production cycle. Defects can be identified, flagged, and tracked back to individual processes or components in real-time. **Minimal breakdowns:** AI-driven predictive maintenance systems use data from sensors and IoT data to pinpoint the exact location of maintenance requirements — saving technicians significant amounts of time in diagnoses and allowing the organization to proactively predict and prevent future equipment failures. **Addresses knowledge gaps:** Augmented reality (AR) —

based AI systems allow off-site specialists to visit the factory virtually, using the AR interface to directly evaluate a situation and guide or train on-site workers. The AI can also understand situational context and load standard processes for recommended action, with each step demonstrated in AR, allowing untrained workers to perform complex tasks in cases where specialists are unavailable.

Use edge AI for more value Moving AI to the manufacturing edge promises a lot of tantalizing benefits, but it also poses some unique challenges that need to be overcome for manufacturing-edge AI deployments to be successful. To further simplify deployment, integration, security and management, configured systems built by manufacturing AI experts can accelerate time to value while meeting increasingly stringent profitability, sustainability and safety goals.

By drawing on the power of AI at the edge, smart manufacturers are realizing the very tangible and measurable business benefits that come with better, faster insights at the point of need. This intelligent approach to manufacturing gives them the ability to differentiate and compete in a competitive global marketplace.

production quality and digital twins, all of which require analyzing vast volumes of multi-dimensional data such as images, audio and sensor readings from connected devices and equipment and other assets. Certain use cases, such as those that enable the connected worker to be more productive and safer, rely on high-speed and ultra-low latency connectivity. Together, these technologies and use cases can help manufacturers give their customers what they want when they want it: innovative, high-quality products at competitive prices while meeting increasingly stringent profitability, sustainability and safety goals.

(The writer is, a lead-solutions architect, at Dell Technologies India, views are personal)



SRINIVASCHARY T



FIRST COLUMN

GET RID OF THE REDUNDANT THOUGHTS

Distracting thoughts can be a burden, these must be done away with



BHIKKHU SIRI SIVALI ABHASARO

From the moment you begin practising mindfulness, you'll discover its refreshing nature, and as you progress, it might seem simple to you. However, challenges arise when thoughts involving greed and ill will persist in your mind, resisting normal dismissal. Everyday thoughts can be easily addressed through mindfulness practice, but those filled with distractions require skilful measures for removal. Lord Buddha, provides five solutions for addressing such problems or provides five methods to help overcome such thoughts. The first method involves replacing one thought with another, akin to using a unique tool to remove a thorn stuck in the foot. If a thought filled with hatred arises, counter it by recalling the virtues, merits or positive qualities of the object or person involved, fostering friendly feelings. Similarly, if greedy thoughts surface, focus on the negative aspects of the person or thing to foster detachment. Anitya meditation (impermanence meditation) is another approach, contemplating the fleeting nature of things and recognizing their inevitable destruction.

Additionally, you can practice Anitya (impermanence meditation). Anitya involves recognising the transient nature of things, objects, and people. If not today, then tomorrow, they are destined to undergo change or destruction. It is advisable to contemplate the fleeting nature of things and recognise their inevitable destruction.

The second method involves thinking about the danger associated with a troublesome thought, considering the potential harm it can bring. For instance, consider a scenario where a girl has adorned herself with beautiful ornaments and attire to go out. Now, imagine someone placing a dead snake, dead dog, or dead rat around her neck. How would she feel? Given the unsettling experience, she would swiftly discard the object.



To eliminate any thought, you need to perceive the potential threat or danger associated with that particular thing or person, considering the harm it may pose to you. The third method encourages forgetting the troubling thought, redirecting attention elsewhere, much like averting one's gaze from an indecent scene.

The fourth method involves introspection, questioning the reasons behind engaging in a particular thought and delving into its root causes. By questioning yourself, such as why am I engaging in this activity? What motivates me to do this? By delving into these inquiries, you can effectively extricate the thought from your mind.

If, even after employing the aforementioned four methods, the thought persists, the fifth and final method, as elucidated by Lord Buddha, entails pressing the teeth together, forcing the tongue to the palate, and emphasizing this action until the unwanted thought dissipates. Lord Buddha illustrates this approach by likening it to a strong man holding a weak person, applying pressure until the thought is effectively expelled. By employing these five methods, you can efficiently remove unwanted thoughts from your mind.

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

Ensuring proper utilisation of funds

The new practice of releasing only a quarter of the budgeted amount to States curbs cash surplus. Remaining amount is released after the given money is utilised



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

Overborrowing by governments despite having surplus cash has been a perennial problem in our public financial system. It arises because of the peculiar nature of government accounts. Under the government accounting system, all the taxes and borrowings raised by the government go to the Consolidated Fund of the Government while all other amounts received by a government, say from provident or pension fund contributions of employees, or post office deposits etc. from the public go to an account called Public Account. While disbursements are made from the Consolidated Fund through budgets, governments do not have much control over deposits and withdrawals from the Public Account.

The net accrual to the Public Account is merged with the cash balance of the government and is available for financing its Gross Fiscal Deficit (GFD) if its borrowings on the consolidated fund are insufficient. Additionally, the government may also draw from its cash balance to meet the GFD requirements. The surplus cash balance is the difference between the total financing raised by the government from all these sources less the GFD requirements. While the borrowing under a Consolidated Fund can be adjusted according to needs, the surplus in the Public Account is totally beyond the Government's control, and this is what leads to over-borrowing.

The merger of a public account with the cash balance leads to the problem of over-borrowing. RBI is the banker to both the Central and State Governments and every Government must maintain a minimum cash balance with it. If the actual cash balance falls below the agreed minimum on any day, the deficiency is made good by taking normal and special ways and means advances or overdrafts from the RBI. If the specified minimum cash balance is exceeded by a state, the surplus is automatically invested in 14-day Intermediate Treasury Bills (ITBs) of the Government of India whose returns are much below the RBI repo rate and significantly lower than the rate of interest the government pays on its market borrowings and hence constitutes a negative carry for the government. Since public account balances, being merged with the cash balance, could be invested only in treasury bills, the option of investing them in other more attractive instruments is not available. Thus, the states lose by way of paying higher interest on market borrowings while earning much less from its surplus cash balances, while the Centre through its modified exchequer control-based expenditure management system attempts to optimize its cash balance.

The most perilous and unpredictable consequence of states' cash surpluses is their impact on the Union finances because all treasury bill investments are automatically available to the Central Government and constitute part of its financial liability. They also have inflationary potential with a consequent impact on macroeconomic stability. Government finances are spread over many agencies throughout the country - ministries, departments, subordinate offices and autonomous bodies (ABs) financed by grants. Each maintains its cash balances in the government accounts maintained at specified branches of SBI and other nationalized banks



THE MOST PERILOUS AND UNPREDICTABLE CONSEQUENCE OF STATES' CASH SURPLUSES IS THEIR IMPACT ON THE UNION FINANCES

which act as agents of the RBI which is the banker to the government; it is thus impossible to know the total cash balance available at the disposal of the government in real time to determine borrowing requirements and hence reduce the borrowing costs. In 2010, an IMF Working Paper suggested the concept of a Treasury Single Account (TSA) based on its experiences in different countries for consolidating and managing governments' cash resources. Another IMF paper published in 2011 stated the three key principles of TSA: "(i) unified banking arrangement to promote consolidation of government funds and enable real-time tracking of cash resources; (ii) exclusive treasury oversight, i.e., no government agency other than the Finance Ministry should maintain bank accounts independently; and (iii) comprehensive coverage for complete inclusion of cash balances from all government entities to provide a holistic view of the government's cash position." In India, the TSA system has been adopted in a phased manner, starting with ABs. In 2015, the Expenditure Management Commission recommended bringing the ABs under a TSA for comprehensive oversight and centralised control over the government's financial resources. A TSA for ABs is nothing but an assigned bank account maintained with the RBI to receive all grants from the Centre. More than 200 ABs were brought under the TSA by 2022. The scheme was gradually extended to the States and implementing agencies receiving funds under the Central Sector (CS) schemes which are fully funded by the Centre and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) which are funded both by

the Centre and the States, with the Centre funding the lion's share while implementation responsibilities lie with the States. For the CS schemes with outlays above Rs 500 crore, it is now mandatory to transfer all funds only through a TSA. Each scheme is tagged to a Central Nodal Agency (CNA) which has an account with the RBI or its agency bank, and any unutilized amount will lapse to the Centre at the end of the financial year (FY). During FY23, Rs 2.75 lakh crore was thus allocated to schemes through the CNA route. The TSA model used for the CSS is called Single Nodal Agency (SNA) in which each State designates an SNA for each CSS which opens a single nodal account with a commercial bank. The implementing agencies use the SNA's account through zero-balance subsidiary accounts with predefined drawing limits. The Centre's share for each CSS is released to the state's account with the RBI, which then transfers the amounts to the SNA's account. This arrangement has eliminated delays, enabling the 'just in time' release of funds for payments. More than 3000 SNAs have been created by linking around eight lakh implementing agencies. For both CS and CSS, funds are promptly released by the Central Ministries to CNA/SNA and the float in the account is kept at a minimum.

The Ministries release only a quarter of the budgeted amount at a time, and the additional funds are released only after the utilisation of 75 per cent of the earlier funds to prevent the accumulation of unspent balances. An SNA Dashboard launched in 2022 provides real-time data-driven information on releases, expenditures, balances and interest earned for

each account, enabling better-informed decision-making. A recent RBI Report on state finances stated that this new system of cash management by unifying the earlier fragmented system of banking arrangements has reduced the number of accounts maintaining CSS funds from a humongous 18 lakh to only 3,300, and saved some Rs.10,000 crore for the Centre in 2022-23.

States are already benefiting from the new system- since expenditure on a CSS in a State is being made from a single account, submission of utilisation certificates for the release of more funds has become easier. From the data on unspent balances, the Centre can now see the State-wise float available for a CSS before further release of funds. Several states have also started moving towards a similar system at their level so that they can monitor and prioritise the release of fresh funds to districts, blocks, and gram panchayats based on their utilisation of the previously allocated funds, and monitor the interest credited by the banks on their balances. This may finally eliminate the problem of overborrowing while having surplus cash. For the Centre, though the new system has improved delivery, efficiency and transparency, the real culprits are the huge numbers of CS and CSS, which together account for over 800 schemes. If the Centre is serious about improving financial transparency and efficiency, the number of such schemes must come down drastically.

(The author, a former Director General at the Office of the CAG of India, is currently a Professor at the Arun Jaitley National Institute of Financial Management, views are personal)

Caste census will dominate the general elections

Caste census and reservation are issues which no political party can skip as they know these are vital to garner OBC votes

As the date of the Lok Sabha elections is approaching, the debate on caste census is now gaining momentum. Now BJP also feels that this is the only weapon to strengthen its hold on OBC votes. This is why recently Union Home Minister Amit Shah said in a Vidhan Sabha rally that the BJP has never been against caste census. Such a statement came when its allies from the OBC vote base openly expressed their support for the caste census. According to the Bihar Caste Survey, the OBC population in the state is 63.1%. The Modi government is worried that the caste census could give rise to competing demands, which could upset its delicate caste balance. At the same time, BJP leaders have also



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

gradually realised that the party cannot continue its silence on this issue for long. Earlier many BJP leaders are also keenly watching the opposition's demand for OBC quota within women's reservation. Some state BJP leaders, especially those from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, are believed to have expressed seriousness about the opposition's efforts to create a rift in the BJP's OBC vote

base. After coming to power at the Center in 2014, the BJP, has started aggressively wooing the backward communities. In this, the party made leaders coming from backward communities as MPs, MLAs and ministers and also advised them to convey the government's message to them. Parliamentary committees were asked to convey information to the backward and scheduled castes and tribes from Jammu and Kashmir to the South.

BJP leaders claim that, in the current Lok Sabha, the party has 113 OBC, 53 Scheduled Caste (SC) and 43 Scheduled Tribe (ST) MPs, which is about 70% of its total MPs. This is a far cry from the long-held perception of the BJP being a

Brahmin-Baniya-dominated party. According to CSDS-Lokniti data analysis, the BJP's share in OBC votes is continuously increasing. In 2014, the BJP got 34% of OBC votes and then in 2019, this number increased to 44%. Whereas Congress got 25% OBC votes in 1996 but got only 15% in 2019. CSDS-Lokniti analysis also found that the BJP's vote share among the poor increased by 12% between 2014 and 2019. BJP's vote share increased by 12% among the poor, 5% among the lower class, 6% among the middle class and 6% among the upper-middle class. The increase in vote share was mainly due to the Centre's welfare schemes and Government policies were held responsible for reaching the beneficiaries. However,

now some portion may also decrease due to disillusionment with price rise and increasing unemployment. In this regard, Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the assembly poll-bound state of Chhattisgarh said: "BJP has never opposed the caste census, but a decision will have to be taken only after careful consideration." Not only this, he also met top OBC leaders from at least 10 states in Delhi, which went on till midnight, to discuss strategies to retain the BJP's support base among the backward communities. BJP appointed OBC leader Nayab Singh Saini as its Haryana president. Saini replaces Om Prakash Dhankhar, who belongs to the influential Jat community. Amit Shah announced in

Telangana that if BJP comes to power in the state, it will make a leader from the backward class the Chief Minister. Shah's statement was a change from the BJP's stance on the caste census issue, in which the party was careful not to commit itself in any way. This happened when his allies with the OBC vote base were openly declaring support for the caste census. By such a calculation, firstly, the number of OBCs is expected to be much higher than the share of the reservation to which they are presently entitled. The BJP is worried that the caste census could give rise to competing demands in the states and also inflame other forgotten demands for quota, thereby upsetting its delicate caste balance. They have

realised that the party cannot continue its silence on this issue. The BJP is keeping an eye on this, while the Congress, through its Bharat Jodo Yatra, has been quite successful in establishing Rahul Gandhi as a leader who is the well-wishers of the marginalised. Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) president Mayawati asked people in Madhya Pradesh not to be misled by the Congress's demand for a caste census. She reminded people that after Independence, under the Congress rule, the Kaka Kalekar Commission and the Mandal Commission recommended reservation for Other Backward Classes OBCs. But Congress did not implement them. Amit Shah has tried to

politicize the call for caste census. Similarly, Prime Minister Modi has also claimed that "poor" is the only caste that is relevant. However soon after the Bihar caste survey findings were released, senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi claimed that the survey was the BJP's 'child' as the party was part of the coalition government that had decided to conduct it. Some NDA allies have also supported the demand for a national caste census. More or less, caste census and reservation are too tempting to forget. The general elections would indeed have political parties falling over each other to garner OBC votes. Caste census would come in handy.

(The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)

Blinken in Israel looks to planning for post-war Gaza

AP ■ KTEL AVIV

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks in Israel on Tuesday as he seeks a plan for Gaza's post-war future, while Israel's military pushed ahead with its offensive in the beleaguered territory. Heavy bombardment and fighting shook refugee camps, sending Palestinians scrambling to find safety and hampering aid groups' efforts to get relief to the population.

Blinken arrived in Israel after saying he had secured commitments from four Arab nations and Turkey to help in rebuilding Gaza after the war, something they'd been reluctant to promise before a stop in fighting.

But the US and Israel remain deeply divided over how Gaza will be run when — and if — its current Hamas rulers are defeated. American officials have called for the Palestinian Authority, which currently governs parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to take over in Gaza and for negotiations to resume on the creation of a Palestinian state.

Israeli leaders have staunchly refused both.

Blinken is also trying to prevent the conflict from spreading after an escalation in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah and threats by Israel to step up military action to put an end to almost daily fire across the border from Lebanon by the militant group.

The United States has pressed Israel to scale down its offensive in Gaza to more precise operations targeting Hamas. But the pace of death and destruction has remained largely the same, with several hundred Palestinians killed a day, according to health officials in Gaza. Israel has vowed to keep going until it has destroyed Hamas throughout the territory, in response to the Oct. 7 attack during which militants killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, in southern Israel and kidnapped around 250 others.

Still, after three months of fighting, Hamas has continued to put up a fierce fight.

The Israeli military says it has dismantled Hamas infrastructure in northern Gaza,



Families and supporters of Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza hold photos of their loved ones at a protest calling for their return, outside a meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Israeli President Isaac Herzog, in Tel Aviv, Israel, Tuesday. More than 100 Israeli hostages are held in Gaza after being abducted in a Hamas cross-border attack on Oct. 7. AP/PTI

where large swaths of the cityscape have been demolished. But fighting continues there against what Israel says are pockets of militants. The offensive's focus has shifted to the southern city of Khan

Younis, where ground troops have been fighting militants for weeks, and a number of urban refugee camps in central Gaza. "The fighting will continue throughout 2024," military spokesman Daniel Hagari said.

Throughout the night and into Tuesday morning, Israeli artillery shelling and gunfire echoed through the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, where troops have been pushing in from the north, said one resident, Saeed Moustafa. They were facing heavy resistance from gunmen in the camp, he said.

Like other refugee camps in Gaza, Nuseirat was built to house Palestinians who were driven out of homes during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, and over the decades it has been built up into a densely populated town housing refugees and their descendants.

Families in Nuseirat's northern neighborhoods were fleeing to other parts of the camp, Moustafa said by phone, with the sound of sporadic gunfire in the background. Some tried to head south on the Gaza's main north-south road but found it blocked by Israeli tanks and turned around, he said. In leaflets, the military had told people to use another road, along the coast, to evacuate.

Further south in Khan Younis, warplanes struck multiple areas in and around the city. "It was an intense night. Bombings didn't stop," said Gaber Abu Hamed, who fled his home in Gaza City in the north two months ago.

Since the war began, Israel's assault in Gaza has killed more than 23,000 Palestinians, about two-thirds of them women and children, and more than 58,000 have been wounded, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. The death toll does not distinguish between combatants and civilians. Nearly 85% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million have been driven from their homes by the fighting, and a quarter of its residents face starvation, with only a trickle of food, water, medicine and other supplies entering through an Israeli siege.

The U.N. humanitarian office, known as OCHA, warned that the fighting in central Gaza was severely hampering operations to distribute aid. Several warehouses, distribution centers, health facilities and shelters have been affect-

ed by evacuation orders from the military, it said. Some bakeries in the central city of Deir al-Balah have been forced to shut down. A U.N. warehouse was hit last week, killing a staffer, and five other staffers were detained by the military, with two still held.

The situation is even more dire in northern Gaza, which Israeli forces cut off from the rest of the territory in late October. Tens of thousands of people who remain there face shortages of food and water. The WHO said Sunday it has been unable to deliver supplies to northern Gaza for 12 days because of bombardment and the inability to guarantee safe passage with the Israeli military.

OCHA said the military rejected five attempted aid convoys to the north in the past two weeks, including planned deliveries of medical supplies and fuel for water and sanitation facilities. As a result, five hospitals in the north have no access to supplies, tens of thousands are without access to clean water, and the risk of disease is mounting as sewage systems fail, it said.

Singapore to contribute troops to US maritime security force

Singapore (PTI): Singapore will contribute troops to a US-led international maritime security force formed to respond to attacks by Yemen's Houthis against merchant vessels in the Red Sea, a senior minister of the Asian financial and trade hub said on Tuesday. Singapore is in the midst of a major shipping route to north Asia from the rest of the world and plays a critical trade financing role that is widely dominated by China, Japan and South Korea as well as the rest of the world.

Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen told the Parliament on Tuesday that the Singapore Armed Forces' (SAF) deployment will involve sending a team from the Republic of Singapore Navy's Information Fusion Centre to support information sharing, and a team of planners to work with international partners on operational plans.

A senior national representative for the Republic will also be sent to the 39-nation Combined Maritime Forces' (CMF) headquarters in Bahrain, he added.

"It is in our interest for Singapore to join the cause with the international community to protect and ensure that key sea lines of communication around the world remain open, especially if threatened by unlawful acts by non-state actors or terrorist groups," the minister was quoted as saying by The Straits Times newspaper.

Dr Ng was responding to a question by a lawmaker about how the Red Sea attacks impact Singapore's maritime security, and whether the SAF will be contributing to this effort. He noted that since January 7, Yemen-based Houthi forces have attacked about 20 merchant ships in the Red Sea with missiles and attempted to hijack the vessels.

The Singapore-flagged Maersk Hangzhou, a container ship owned and operated by Denmark, was also attacked. The Iranian-backed Houthi rebels have said the attacks are meant to show support for Palestinian armed group Hamas in its war with Israel in the Gaza Strip.

Haley accuses Biden of giving 'offensive' speech

AP ■ DES MOINES

Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley took aim Monday night at the Democrat she'd like to face in the November election, calling it "offensive" that President Joe Biden gave "a political speech" at the South Carolina church where nine Black parishioners were slain in a 2015 racist attack.

"For Biden to show up there and give a political speech, it's offensive in itself," the former United Nations ambassador and South Carolina governor said during a town hall on Fox News in Des Moines, Iowa. "I don't need someone who palled around with segregationists in the '70s and has said racist comments all the way through his career lecturing me or anyone in South Carolina about what it means to have racism, slavery, or anything related to the Civil War. Biden was in Haley's home state Monday, delivering jobs at some of his possible GOP general election opponents without naming them. He took the pulpit at Mother Emanuel, a historic AME church in Charleston where nine Black parishioners were slain in June 2015 by a white gunman as they prayed during a Wednesday night Bible study.

As governor at the time of the shooting, Haley gained national attention for her response, which included signing legislation into law removing the Confederate battle flag from the Statehouse grounds. During her previous campaigns, Haley had advocated against removing the flag, portraying an opponent's call to do so as a political stunt.

But Haley has been on the defensive for not explicitly naming slavery as the root cause of the Civil War when the question was posed at a campaign event. Her campaign responded Monday with a list of comments attributed to Biden that it said showed he's racially insensitive.

During his speech Monday, Biden called it a "lie" that the war was about states' rights.

"So let me be clear, for those who don't seem to know: Slavery was the cause of the Civil War," Biden said. "There's no negotiation about that."

Haley's campaign followed Biden's speech by sending reporters a timeline called "Biden's Racial Comments and Actions," such as a 1974 reference to himself as being "a token Black" in the Senate; saying in 1981 that George Wallace, the segregationist former Alabama governor, was "right about some things"; and, in 2007, saying then-Sen. Barack Obama was "the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy."

Biden's reelection campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Haley's town hall came a week ahead of Iowa's kickoff caucuses, the first official votes of the 2024 nominating cycle. For Haley, the stakes are high. Amid an escalating battle for second place to GOP frontrunner Donald Trump, she and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis have increasingly traded barbs as they aim to draw lines of distinction between themselves and secure the mantle as the top alternative to Trump.

On Monday, Trump's super PAC released a video with an old clip of the then-South Carolina governor urging an audience not to reference people who entered the U.S. illegally as "criminals." Those comments came a month after Trump's 2015 campaign launch speech, in which he said immigrants from Mexico were bringing drugs and crime with them.

DeSantis' campaign also released its closing argument ad for Iowa caucuses, taking Haley to task for her recent comments to New Hampshire voters that they would have the opportunity to "correct" the decision made by Iowa caucuses — a comment that could signal that she not only doesn't expect to win Iowa, but that she doesn't expect to place second, ahead of DeSantis.

UK Post Office ex-boss hands back royal honour in fallout of IT scandal

London (PTI): A former British Post Office boss at the centre of a controversy of wrongful convictions of hundreds of post office branch managers, including many British Indians, on Tuesday said that she would hand back her royal honour. Paula Vennells, 65, was CEO of the government-owned Post Office Ltd between 2012-19 at the peak of an IT scandal involving a faulty accounting software named Horizon.

Her role came under renewed scrutiny after a hard-hitting real-life television drama series aired recently and a petition crossed a million signatures demanding a revocation of her Commander of the British Empire (CBE) honour for "services to the Post Office and to charity", conferred in the 2019 New Year's Honours List.

"I continue to support and focus on cooperating with the inquiry and expect to be giving evidence in the coming months," Vennells said in a statement on Tuesday.

"I have so far maintained my silence as I considered it inappropriate to comment publicly while the inquiry remains ongoing and before I have provided my oral evidence. I am, however, aware of the calls from sub-postmasters and others to return my CBE. I have listened and I confirm that I return my CBE with immediate effect," she said. The former CEO reiterated that she was "truly sorry" for the devastation caused to the sub-postmasters and their families, whose lives were "torn apart by being wrongly accused and wrongly prosecuted as a result of the Horizon system." Meanwhile, UK Justice Secretary Alex Chalk met with senior judges to discuss possible solutions to the scandal and updated the House of Commons.

Gabriel Attal is France's youngest-ever and first openly gay prime minister

AP ■ PARIS

France saw its youngest-ever prime minister and first openly gay one named on Tuesday as President Emmanuel Macron seeks a fresh start for the rest of his term amid growing political pressure from the far right. Gabriel Attal, 34, rose to prominence as the government spokesperson then education minister and had polled as the most popular minister in the outgoing government.

His predecessor Elisabeth Borne resigned Monday following political turmoil over an immigration law that strengthens the government's ability to deport foreigners.

Macron will work with Attal to name a new government in the coming days, though some key ministers are expected to stay on.

"I know I can count on your energy and your commitment,"



Outgoing French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, left, listens to Gabriel Attal speaking after the handover ceremony, Tuesday. AP/PTI

Macron posted on X in a message to Attal. The president made a reference to Attal reviving the 'spirit of 2017,' when Macron shook up politics and

shot to a surprise victory as France's youngest-ever president on a pro-business centrist platform aimed at reviving one of the world's biggest

Airlines find loose parts in door panels during inspections of Boeing jets

Portland (US) (AP): Federal investigators say a door panel slid up before flying off an Alaska Airlines jetliner last week, and they are looking at whether four bolts that were supposed to help hold the panel in place might have been missing when the plane took off. The comments on Monday from the National Transportation Safety Board came shortly after Alaska and United Airlines reported separately that they found loose parts in the panels — or door plugs — of some other Boeing 737 Max 9 jets. "Since we began preliminary inspections on Saturday, we have found instances that appear to relate to installation issues in the door plug — for example, bolts that needed additional tightening," Chicago-based United said.

Alaska said that as it began examining its Max 9s, "Initial

reports from our technicians indicate some loose hardware was visible on some aircraft." The findings of investigators and the airlines are ratcheting up pressure on Boeing to address concerns that have grown since the terrifying fuselage blowout Friday night. A plug covering a spot left for an emergency door tore off the plane as it flew 16,000 feet (4,800 metres) above Oregon.

Boeing has called an online meeting for all employees on Tuesday to discuss safety. The company, which has had problems with various planes over the years, pledged to "help address any and all findings" that airlines make during their inspections of Max 9 jets. Boeing has delivered more than 200 to customers around the world, but 171 of them were grounded by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Sri Lanka approves bill to set up office for national unity

PTI ■ COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan Parliament on Tuesday passed a bill to establish a national unity and reconciliation office, in a key step towards post-conflict reconciliation with the minority Tamil community. The bill to set up the 'Office for National Unity and Reconciliation' was passed with a majority of 48 votes, while 7 Members of Parliament voted against it.

The seven votes against the bill came from Tamil parliamentarians who claimed it served no purpose as the already established reconciliation mechanisms had failed to provide any redress to the minority community.

The debate on the bill's second reading was held from 10 am to 5 pm. Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakse stated that establishing the reconciliation office would ensure all

communities could live harmoniously. A Secretariat will be established to administer the affairs of the Office of Reconciliation, and a director-general will function as its Chief Executive Officer. The Office would consist of 11 members, of which one member would be nominated by the justice minister and appointed by the president, while the other members on the minister's recommendations.

The member's term of office would be three years, and the president would appoint the chairman on the minister's recommendation. The Office will recommend measures to the government to resolve issues that adversely affect national unity and resolve tensions and conflicts between different communities. It will also find solutions to post-conflict issues,

such as the resettlement of internally displaced persons and the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants.

The bitterly-fought conflict between Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which started in 1983, was ended by the island nation's military by killing the leaders of the LTTE, which fought for an independent state for Tamils in the country's North and East.

Last month, President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office announced its decision to establish the independent commission, calling it a "historic step towards transitional justice and post-conflict reconciliation". It said that the Commission acknowledges every Sri Lankan's inalienable right to ascertain the truth, a pivotal aspect for individuals and communities to heal from past conflicts.

S Korea's parliament passes ban on production, sale of dog meat

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's parliament on Tuesday passed a landmark ban on production and sales of dog meat, as public calls for a prohibition have grown sharply over concerns about animal rights and the country's international image.

Some angry dog farmers said they plan to challenge the bill's constitutionality and hold protest rallies, a sign of continued heated debate over the ban.

After a three-year grace period, the bill would make slaughtering, breeding and sales of dog meat for human consumption illegal from 2027 and punishable by 2-3 years in prison. It doesn't provide any penalties for eating dog meat. Dog meat consumption, a



Animal rights activists attend a protest rally supporting the government-led dog meat banning bill at the National Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday. AP/PTI

centuries-old practice on the Korean Peninsula, is neither

explicitly banned nor legalised in South Korea. It has long

been viewed as a source of stamina on hot summer days. Recent surveys show more than half of South Koreans want dog meat banned and a majority no longer eat it. But one in every three South Koreans still opposes a ban even though they don't consume it. The National Assembly passed the bill by a 208-0 vote. It will become law after being endorsed by the Cabinet Council and signed by President Yoon Suk Yeol, considered formalities since his government supports the ban.

"This law is aimed at contributing to realizing the values of animal rights, which pursue respect for life and a harmonious co-existence between humans and animals," the legislation says.

Explosion at Texas hotel injures 21

Fort Worth (AP): An explosion at a historic Texas hotel in Fort Worth on Monday blew out windows, littered downtown streets with large sections of debris from the building and injured 21 people, including one who was in critical condition, authorities said.

The blast flung doors and entire sections of wall onto the road in front of the 20-story hotel, where rescue crews found several people trapped in the basement, said Craig Trojacek, a spokesman for the Fort Worth Fire Department.

More than two dozen rooms were occupied at the Sandman Signature Hotel when the blast took place, Trojacek said. Authorities said they believe a gas leak caused the explosion and said the hotel had been undergoing construction.



Houston: Members of the Hindu American community during a religious procession in view of the consecration ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, in Houston, USA, Sunday. PTI

Imran arrested in May 9 attack on Pak Army HQ

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan was on Tuesday arrested in a case related to the attack on the Pakistan Army headquarters in Rawalpindi on May 9 last year, soon after his release warrant was issued in the cipher case. An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Rawalpindi had summoned the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, who is already behind bars in cipher and graft cases, in May 9 cases on Tuesday. However, Khan attended the court's proceedings via video link as he could not be produced in the court by Adiala jail authorities owing to security concerns.

Judge Ijaz Asif of the Anti-Terrorism Court Rawalpindi conducted hearings of at least 12 cases linked with the May 9 riots against Khan and others. During the proceedings, police chief of the Royal Artillery Bazar Police Station, which is in the vicinity of the General Headquarters (GHQ), informed the court that Khan was arrested in the GHQ attack case as he was nominated in the case. Police also requested for 71-year-old Khan's physical remand but the judge turned down the plea and asked police to meet him at the jail for probe.

On Monday, the special court formed to hear cases under the Official Secrets Act had issued his release orders in the cipher case.

Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain issued the release order of Khan, stating that the former premier's bail had been approved and he shall be released if not wanted in any other case.

Despite having the release order, Khan remains behind bars due to being arrested in the Toshakhana and 190 million pound Al-Qadir Trust scandal.

On May 9, 2023, violent protests erupted after the arrest of Khan by paramilitary Rangers in

Islamabad. Over 20 military installations and state buildings, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, were damaged or torched in the violent protests that followed Khan's arrest in a corruption case.

The party ran into trouble after the May 9 violence by its supporters. Hundreds of rioters were arrested in the days after the attack and booked on various charges.

Khan and several of his party leaders have been facing numerous cases since the ouster of the party from power in April 2022 and later in the wake of the May 9 violence.

Khan's opponent alleged that he was behind the violence, a charge he denied.

He was ousted through a vote of no-confidence in April 2022. He was incarcerated on August 5 last year, after an Islamabad court sentenced him to three years in jail in the Toshakhana case. He was lodged in the Attock District Jail to serve his prison term.

Later, his sentence was suspended by the Islamabad High Court, but then he was arrested in the cipher case and remained in the Attock jail on judicial remand. He was later shifted to Adiala jail.

COURT INDICTS IMRAN KHAN, HIS WIFE BUSHRA

In another jolt to Imran Khan ahead of general elections, Pakistan's anti-corruption court on Tuesday indicted the jailed former prime minister and his wife in the Toshakhana graft case filed against them by the anti-corruption watchdog.

Judge Muhammad Bashir of the

Islamabad-based Accountability Court conducted the hearing in the Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi where Khan has been incarcerated. The case was filed by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Khan and Bushra Bibi were present when the charges were read. They pleaded not guilty. A day earlier, the court deferred the indictment because Khan's wife failed to appear before the court.

According to the case, the 71-year-old former prime minister and his wife received 108 gifts from various heads of state, out of which they kept 58 gifts. They were also undervalued by them while paying a mandatory price to the state.

The gifts included a jewellery set given from the Saudi Crown Prince which the couple retained at a low price instead of depositing it in the Toshakhana.

Under the rules governing Toshakhana — a Persian word meaning "treasure house" — government officials can keep gifts by paying a price for them but first the gift should be deposited. In the case of the first couple, they either failed to deposit the gift or got it for a low price by allegedly using their authority.

This case is different from another Toshakhana case in which Khan was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and later convicted on its plea for hiding the proceeds from the sale of the state gifts. Khan was disqualified by the ECP and the Islamabad High Court on December 6 rejected his pleas against disqualification.

The same accountability court also conducted the hearing in the Al-Qadir Trust case involving the alleged corruption of about Rs60 billion. The former first couple is accused in the case and the court was set to indict them but it was postponed as Bibi had not been provided with a copy of the case, which was handed over to her today on the orders of the court. Separately, the court rejected the bail petition of Khan in the Al-Qadir Trust case. However, his wife already secured a pre-arrest bail in the case.

Yet another relief to Nawaz Sharif, Maryam ahead of general elections

Lahore (PTI): After securing swift relief from Pakistani courts in different corruption cases since his return from exile, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday got another one as the national anti-graft body closed a major corruption investigation against him and his daughter Maryam Nawaz.

The development comes ahead of the February 8 general elections in Pakistan where Sharif, chief of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party is being considered as a front-runner for a record fourth as the prime minister.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) announced closing a mega corruption probe against 74-year-old Nawaz Sharif and his other family members in the Sharif Trust case.

"The NAB's executive board today approved the closure of a corruption probe against PML-N supreme Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz Sharif and other family members in the Sharif Trust case," an NAB spokesperson said.

The investigation against the Sharif family into the Sharif Trust case was launched in 2000 over allegations of receiving millions of rupees in funds in the Sharif Trust through illegal means. Nawaz and his family members were also accused of misappropriation of funds and making property by using the name of the Trust.

Since his October 2023 return from the UK, where he spent four years in self-exile, Nawaz Sharif has been acquitted in Avenfield and Al-Azizia cases, in which he was convicted for 10 and seven years respectively. Earlier on Monday, Nawaz became eligible to contest next month's general elections after the Supreme Court struck down a lifetime ban on lawmakers under Article 62 (1)(f) of the Constitution for not being honest and righteous.

Nawaz was handed down a lifetime ban by the apex court in the Panama Papers case. He is contesting on two national assembly seats — one in Lahore and the other in Mansahra.

Newly elected B'desh MPs to be sworn in tomorrow

AP ■ DHAKA/BEIJING

Bangladesh's new Cabinet is expected to take oath on Thursday, a day after the newly-elected parliament members are to be sworn in, officials said on Tuesday. "President Mohammad Shahabuddin will administer the ministers' oath of office on Thursday," a Bangabhaban presidential palace spokesman said. Meanwhile, Cabinet Secretary Mahub Hossain said Members of Parliament-elect would be sworn in on Wednesday at the Jatiya Sangsad, where parliamentary speaker Shirin Sharmin Choudhury would administer the ceremony.

Ruling Awami League president, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, is widely assumed to be the premier for the fifth term, fourth consecutively, as her party's new parliamentary committee is expected to elect her for the position in a meeting on Wednesday shortly after their oath of office at the Jatiya Sangsad. Hossain is tasked to invite new ministers to take the oath at Bangabhaban. When asked about the size of the new cabinet and who could be inducted into the council of ministers, the top bureaucrat said, "I have not got any direction yet."

Chief Whip Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury said the Election Commission would publish the results of the polls in the form of a gazette on Tuesday.

The members are expected to take the oath within three days of the gazette notification publication.

The ruling Awami League headed by Prime Minister Hasina won 222 seats; the Jatiya Party 11 seats; the Workers' Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bangladesh Kalyan Party one seat each; and independent candidates won 61 seats.

Hasina won the Gopalganj-3 seat in a landslide victory in the election, securing her eighth term as a lawmaker. On Monday, the Election Commission announced the unofficial voting results in 298 of the country's 300 parliamentary constituencies. Polls for one constituency, Naogaon-2, were postponed following the

death of a candidate in December. The Election Commission will announce the result of another constituency, Mymensingh-3, later as polling of one of the centres was withheld, the Daily Star Bangladesh quoted Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal as saying.

HASINA PAYS HOMAGE TO BANGABANDHU

Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday paid glowing tribute to the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after her party's landslide victory in the 12th parliamentary election.

The 76-year-old leader, ruling the nation since 2009, won a fifth overall term in the one-sided election on Sunday, which witnessed a low turnout.

She paid homage by placing a wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu inside the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Mujibur Rahman's younger daughter and the prime minister's younger sister, Sheikh Rehana, later also separately placed a wreath at the portrait. The prime minister's daughter Saima Wazed and Sheikh Rehana's son Radwan Mujib Siddiq were present on the occasion.

After laying the wreath, Sheikh Hasina stood in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect for the memory of Bangabandhu, who was assassinated on August 15, 1975.

Earlier in the morning, the prime minister along with her younger sister Sheikh Rehana and daughter Saima Wazed went to the Banani graveyard and paid tributes to those killed on August 15.

After laying the wreaths, they stood in solemn silence for some time.

They also spread flower petals on the graves there. Sheikh Hasina and Rehana also offered Fateha and prayed for eternal peace for the departed souls of August 15, 1975.

Saima Wazed and Radwan Mujib Siddiq were present on the occasion. At the Banani graveyard, Bangamata Begum Fazilatun Nesa Mujib, Sheikh

Kamal, Sheikh Jamal, Sheikh Russel and others of August 15, 1975, were laid to eternal rest.

Ruling Awami League-backed candidates won 222 seats in Sunday's voting, while independent candidates — most of them allied with the Awami League — won 62 seats.

Besides, the Jatiya Party won only 11 seats and three single candidates from three parties — the Workers' Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Bangladesh Kalyan Party — secured victory in their respective constituencies.

CHINA CONGRATULATES AWAMI LEAGUE

China on Tuesday congratulated the ruling Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League party in Bangladesh for winning the general elections, saying it wants to strengthen the bilateral strategic partnership with Dhaka and cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.

"China congratulates Bangladesh for holding general elections as scheduled and we congratulate Awami League on winning the elections," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

"As a friend and neighbour, China supports Bangladesh in advancing the post-election political agenda in accordance with the law," she said.

"We are ready to work with the new Bangladesh government based on mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit and non-interference in each other's internal affairs to carry out the traditional friendship and deepen BRI cooperation and strive for new progress of our strategic partnership of cooperation," she said.

During President Xi Jinping's visit to Dhaka in 2016, China was committed to providing USD 40 billion for various investment projects under which Bangladesh will receive USD 26 billion for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and USD 14 billion for joint venture projects.

BRI is an ambitious programme for raising China-funded infrastructure across multiple countries aimed at boosting China's economic and diplomatic clout.

'Bangladesh polls not fair'

Dhaka/UN (PTI): Even as India, Russia, China and several nations from Asia, Africa and South America greeted Sheikh Hasina for securing a historic fourth term as prime minister, the United Nations, the United States and the United Kingdom expressed their reservations terming the polls as "not free or fair."

Hasina's Awami League (AL) won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament on Sunday in the polls boycotted by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition. The Bangladesh government had invited a large number of foreign observers from India and other countries, as well as multilateral organisations, to observe the elections.

The US State Department, in a press statement Monday, said that Washington remains concerned by the arrests of thousands of political opposition members and by reports of irregularities on election day in Bangladesh.

"The United States shares the view with other observers that these elections were not free or fair and we regret that not all parties participated," the State Department said.

"We encourage the Government of Bangladesh to credibly investigate reports of violence and to hold perpetrators accountable. We also urge all political parties to reject violence," it said.

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk called on Bangladesh's newly elected government to take steps to renew the country's commitment to democracy and human rights, voicing distress that the environment for Sunday's poll was marred by violence and repression of opposition candidates and supporters.

"In the months leading up to the vote, thousands of opposition supporters have been detained arbitrarily or subjected to intimidation. Such tactics are not conducive to a truly genuine process," Turk said and noted that democracy was "hard-won" in Bangladesh and "must not become cosmetic." Around 25,000 opposition supporters have been arrested, the UN official said and raised serious concerns about possible torture as at least 10 opposition supporters reportedly died — or were killed — in custody in the last two months.

Lai willing to reopen talks with China

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's leading presidential candidate William Lai said on Tuesday he hopes for a reopening of dialogue with China following almost eight years of Beijing's near-complete refusal to communicate with leaders of the self-governing island it considers its own territory. But Lai told reporters he would continue the current administration's policy of maintaining democratic Taiwan's de-facto independence in the face of Chinese Communist Party threats to annex it by political, military or economic means.

China demands that Taiwan's leadership concede its claim of ownership over the island before reopening contacts. "While aspiring for peace, we harbor no illusions," Lai said at a news conference ahead of Saturday's polls for the presidency and legislature.

"We will build up Taiwan's defense deterrence, strengthen Taiwan's capabilities in economic security, enhance part-



Taiwan Vice President and Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate William Lai, left, and his running mate Hsiao Bi-Khim wave to the press during an international press conference in Taipei, Taiwan, Tuesday. AP/PTI

nerships with democracies around the world and maintain stable and principled leadership on cross (Taiwan) Strait relations."

"Our door will always be open to engagement with Beijing under the principles of equality and dignity. We are ready and willing to engage to

show more for the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Peace is priceless and war has no winners," Lai said.

Lai, currently Taiwan's vice president, is broadly seen as the front-runner in the election to succeed President Tsai Ing-wen, who is barred by law from running for a third

term. Most polls show him well ahead of the main opposition Nationalist Party, or KMT, candidate Hou You-yi, who favors eventual unification with China under its own terms, and the alternative Taiwan People's Party's Ko Wen-je, who has also pressed for renewed dialogue with China and the avoidance of confrontation with Beijing. Voters will also choose a new legislature, where the DPP will seek to hold on to its majority, largely based on its handling of the economy, public welfare and employment opportunities for young people. Skyrocketing housing prices, a declining birth rate and a yawning gap between the super wealthy and working class are also playing into voter sentiments.

Looming over the election has been China's steadily increasing pressure on Taiwan through barring it from major international gatherings, wooing away its diplomatic allies to just a handful, and offering financial inducements to politicians — from the grass-

roots to top opposition figures who could influence the vote or promote policies increasing Chinese access to the island's economy.

The People's Liberation Army sends ships and warplanes on daily missions around Taiwan and the island's Defence Ministry has reported a growing number of balloons crossing over from China. The balloon incidents recall the incursion last year of a Chinese balloon that flew over Canada and the US and was eventually shot down by the US Air Force.

China claimed the aircraft was a weather balloon that had been blown off-course, but the US said it was carrying sophisticated intelligence-gathering technology.

Over the past 24 hours, the ministry reported four Chinese balloons had passed over the island, while 10 warplanes and four warships had entered airspace and waters near the island, part of a campaign to wear down morale and military resilience.

Airstrikes stretching Ukraine's air defence resources

Kyiv (AP): Russia's recent escalation of missile and drone attacks is stretching Ukraine's air defence resources, a Ukrainian air force official said on Tuesday, leaving the country vulnerable in the 22-month war unless it can secure further weapons supplies.

"Intense Russian air attacks force us to use a corresponding amount of air defence means," air force spokesman Yuriy Ilnat told national television. "That's why we need more of them, as Russia keeps increasing its (air) attack capabilities." As soldiers on both sides fight from largely static positions along the roughly 1,500-kilometre front line, recent Russian attacks have used large numbers of various types of missiles in an apparent effort to saturate air defence systems and find gaps in Ukraine's defences. The massive barrages — more than 500 drones and missiles were fired between December 29 and January 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are also using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles.

Ukraine uses weapons from the Soviet era and more modern ones provided by its Western allies. Authorities want to build up the country's own weapons manufacturing capabilities, and analysts say those plants are among Russia's recent targets. "At the moment, we are completely dependent on the supply of guided air defence missiles, for both Soviet and Western systems," Ilnat said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on January 7 that "we lack a very concrete and understandable thing, that is air defence systems," to protect civilian areas and troop positions.

Bhutan's People's Democratic Party wins election

AP ■ THIMPHU

The People's Democratic Party won the most seats in Bhutan's parliamentary elections on Tuesday and will form the new government as residents hope politicians make good on promises to fix the economic crisis in the Himalayan nation.

Latest figures from the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, a national broadcaster, showed the PDP had won 30 of the 47 National Assembly seats to return to power, and the Bhutan Tendrel Party had secured 17. It was the country's fourth general elections since its transformation from a traditional monarchy to a parliamentary form of government in 2008.

The Election Commission of Bhutan will make its final declaration on Wednesday.

Candidates on Tuesday's ballot represented only the PDP of former Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and the BTP led by former civil servant Pema Chewang. A primary round of voting in November eliminated three other parties, including the ruling center-left Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa

party. Bhutan is located between China and India, with both neighbours vying for influence in the landlocked nation of around 800,000 people. The severe economic crisis played a major role in campaigning.

According to the World Bank, Bhutan's economy grew at a rate of 1.7 per cent over the past five years.

With unemployment a chronic problem, an exodus of young people in search of higher education and jobs abroad is undermining the country's economic potential.

In a bid to overcome the economic challenges, Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck announced in December plans for a megacity in Gelephu, a town on the border with the northeastern Indian state of Assam, that will have zero-carbon industries with foreign investment. King Wangchuck said the city-building would be mindful of Bhutanese culture and tradition and will blend with the Himalayan ecosystem. He met with top Indian business leaders who are expected to invest in the project.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry mistranslates alert, erroneously saying China launched missile

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's Defence Ministry mistranslated an alert into English on Tuesday, saying China had launched a missile instead of a satellite and urging caution days before the island's elections. Taiwan holds presidential and parliamentary elections on Saturday that China has described as a choice between war and peace. The bilingual alert sent to residents' mobile phones cautioned in English that there was a missile flyover. The Defence Ministry later issued a statement apologising to the public for the faulty English translation and clarifying that China had launched a rocket carrying a satellite — not a missile.

The ministry said the Chinese rocket flew over southern Taiwan at high altitude. Chinese state media said the

country launched a satellite called Einstein with a Long March 2C rocket from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in Sichuan province in southwestern China. Broadcaster CCTV said the satellite entered orbit and the launch was a success.

The alerts went off in the middle of an international news conference by Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. He clarified it was a satellite launch, told journalists not to worry, and proceeded with the news conference. "We need to stay responsible; we need to stay moderate in order to prevent (a) conflict from happening between Taiwan and China," he said. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen, who was in the southern city of Kaohsiung, urged the public not to worry, according to local media.

Beijing views Taiwan, which is about 160 kilometres off China's east coast, as a renegade province that must come under its control. Beijing has intensified its military harassment of the island inhabited by 23 million people in recent months, sending military vessels and aircraft near it almost daily. Beijing has also been flying balloons — which are feared to be used for surveillance — near the island despite Taiwan's complaints.

China has repeatedly expressed its disdain for the front-runner in Taiwan's presidential election, current Vice President William Lai of the Democratic Progressive Party. Beijing has called Lai "a destroyer of peace" and a separatist, and favours the more China-friendly Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party, whose presidential candidate is Hou Yu-ih.

US citizen held in Moscow

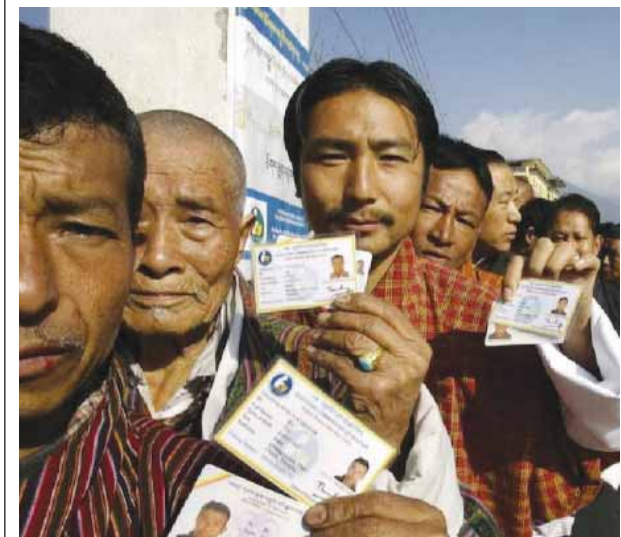
Moscow (AP): A US citizen has been arrested on drug charges in Russia, officials said on Tuesday, a move that comes amid soaring Russia-US tensions over Ukraine.

The arrest of Robert Woodland Romanov was reported by the press service of the Moscow courts. It said the Oostankino District Court ruled on Saturday to keep him in custody for two months on charges of preparing to get involved in illegal drug trafficking pending an official investigation. It didn't offer any details of the accusations.

There was no immediate comment from the US Embassy in Moscow. Russian media noted that the name of the accused matches that of a US citizen interviewed by the popular daily Komsomolskaya Pravda in 2020. In the interview, the man said that he was born in the Perm region in the Ural Mountains in 1991 and adopted by an

American couple when he was two. He said that he travelled to Russia to find his Russian mother and eventually met her in a TV show in Moscow.

The man told Komsomolskaya Pravda that he liked living in Russia and decided to move there. The newspaper reported that he settled in the town of Dolgoprudny just outside Moscow and was working as an English teacher at a local school. The news about the arrest came as Washington has sought to win the release of jailed Americans Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich. The US State Department said last month that it had put multiple offers on the table, but they had been rejected by the Russian government. Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter, was detained in March while on a reporting trip to the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, about 2,000 kilometers (1,200 miles) east of Moscow.



Global economy will slow for third year: World Bank

AP ■ WASHINGTON
Hobbled by high interest rates, persistent inflation, slumping trade and a diminished China, the global economy will slow for a third consecutive year in 2024. That is the picture sketched by the World Bank, which forecast Tuesday that the world economy will expand just 2.4 per cent this year. That would be down from 2.6 per cent growth in 2023, 3 per cent in 2022 and a galloping 6.2 per cent in 2021, which reflected the robust recovery from the pandemic recession of 2020. Heightened global tensions, arising particularly from Israel's war with Hamas and the conflict in Ukraine, pose the risk of even weaker growth. And World Bank officials express worry that deeply indebted poor countries cannot afford to make necessary investments to fight climate change and poverty. "Near-term growth will remain weak, leaving many developing countries — especially the poorest — stuck in a trap: with paralyzing levels of debt and tenuous access to food for nearly one out of every three people," Indermit Gill, the World Bank's chief economist, said in a statement. In recent years, the international economy has proved surprisingly resilient in the face of shock after shock: the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, resurgent global inflation and the burdensome interest rates that were imposed by central banks to try to bring price increases back under control. The World Bank now says the global economy grew half a percentage point faster in 2023 than it had predicted back in June and concludes that "the risk of a global recession has receded." Leading the way in 2023 was the United States, which likely registered 2.5 per cent growth last year — 1.4 percentage points faster than the World Bank had expected in mid-year. The World Bank, a 189-country anti-poverty agency, expects US growth to decelerate to 1.6 per cent this year as higher interest rates weaken borrowing and spending. The Federal Reserve has raised US interest rates 11 times since March 2022. Its strenuous efforts have helped bring US inflation down from the four-decade high it reached in mid-2022 to nearly the Fed's 2 per cent target level. Higher rates are also taming global inflation, which the World Bank foresees sinking from 5.3 per cent last year to 3.7 per cent in 2024 and 3.4 per cent in 2025, though still above pre-pandemic averages.

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India, Sri Lanka discuss early launch of UPI payment system

PTI ■ COLOMBO
Six months after it was announced by the Prime ministers of both countries, India has discussed the early launch of the UPI payment system with Sri Lanka and reiterated its support in the cash-strapped island nation's debt restructuring process. In July 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lanka President Ranil Wickremesinghe signed an agreement on Unified Payments Interface (UPI) acceptance in Sri Lanka during Wickremesinghe's two-day visit to India. The latest discussion took place on Monday during a meeting between the High Commissioner of India Santosh Jha with the Governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), Dr Nandalal Weerasinghe. "High Commissioner reiterated that #India will continue to be a steadfast partner in Lanka's economic recovery in his meeting



with @CBSL Governor. Discussed early launch of UPI payment system in SL, growth in INR trade settlements, and India's support in Lanka's debt restructuring process," said a post on X by the High Commissioner of India here after the meeting. In October, Modi announced that the governments of both India and Sri Lanka are working together on fintech sector connectivity by linking the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and Lanka Pay. He announced to link UPI and Lanka Pay when he was addressing the event to launch ferry

services between Nagapattinam in India and Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka, via a video message. Even as Sri Lanka and India marked their 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2023, New Delhi emerged as a steadfast ally of Colombo, playing a pivotal role in the debt-trapped island nation's steady economic recovery. When the unprecedented economic turmoil struck Sri Lanka last year, India swiftly extended a lifeline to the country with assistance of over USD 4 billion, surpassing the International Monetary Fund's 48-month bailout of about USD 3 billion. On November 29, President Wickremesinghe declared that Sri Lanka is close to securing a statement of agreement from its external creditors on debt restructuring that will enable the IMF to conclude its first review of the USD 2.4 billion bailout facility approved in March 2023.



Majority businesses committed to net-zero emission target: PwC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
About 50 per cent of the Indian businesses surveyed expressed their commitment to achieving the net-zero target, reflecting their desire to address climate change issues and transit to a low-carbon economy, said a PwC report on Tuesday. Of these, about 48 per cent committed to achieving net-zero emission target by 2030, said PwC India's Tax transparency in April-July 2023. The report is based on a market survey of nearly 250 tax heads, sustainability/ESG leaders, CFOs and CXOs of Indian businesses, spanning industries such as financial services, technology, media, and telecom (TMT), retail and consumer, engineering and construction, among others. In recent years, the global business landscape has witnessed a significant transformation in sustainable and responsible practices, said a PwC release, adding "as a core pillar of corporate strategy, companies are investing in sustainability and striving to communicate their intentions, commitments and achievements clearly to stakeholders." According to the survey, nearly 60 per cent of the respondents underlined the need to incentive Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) inter-

ventions by the government. One of the findings of the survey is that with incentives and policy interventions, governments can support businesses in achieving their decarbonisation commitments, addressing income inequality, and promoting diversity and inclusion, underpinning essential elements of ESG transformation for businesses. Looking ahead, the survey suggests the Indian corporates are aware of increasing trend towards more comprehensive and voluntary adoption of tax disclosures in the coming years. This aligns with global practices and the evolving expectations of stakeholders. Such transparency in tax matters is not only critical for business-to-business but also for the overall integrity of the tax system, the release said. "The survey brings to light the evolving nature of tax transparency in the ESG framework, reflecting a pivotal shift in corporate India. "The need to adopt transparent tax practices and effectively communicate tax narratives is key to building trust with stakeholders and aligned with pioneering efforts around India's climate ambitions," said Sambit Mohapatra, ESG Leader, PwC India.

Market rebound loses steam in fag end trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty on Tuesday closed moderately higher after a fag-end sell-off minimised the handsome gains posted in early trading. Besides, investors opted for profit-taking ahead of the start of corporate earnings season and macro-economic data announcements later this week, traders said. After rising sharply during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex trimmed most of the gains during the fag-end trading and ended marginally higher by 30.99 points or 0.04 per cent at 71,386.21. During the day, it jumped 680.25 points or 0.95 per cent to 72,035.47. The Nifty also gave up most of the intraday gains and closed 31.85 points or 0.15 per cent up at 21,544.85. During the day, it climbed 211.45 points or 0.98 per cent to 21,724.45. Markets witnessed a roller coaster ride on Tuesday and ended almost flat, in continuation to the prevailing consolidation phase. Firm global cues triggered a gag-up start in Nifty, which further strengthened with renewed buying in select heavyweights however a sharp cut in the latter half trimmed the gains," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd. Larsen & Toubro was the biggest gainer on the Sensex chart, rising 1.55 per cent, followed by Bharti Airtel, HCL Tech, Tata Motors, Sun Pharma and Tata Steel. On the other hand, Nestle, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE small-



mixed cues from Asian markets as well as high valuation concerns," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In Asian markets, Tokyo and Shanghai settled higher, while Seoul and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended with significant gains on Monday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 16.03 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.72 per cent to USD 77.43 a barrel. The BSE benchmark tanked 670.93 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 71,355.22 on Monday. The Nifty declined 197.80 points or 0.91 per cent to 21,513.

Zee Entertainment shares plunge 8 per cent; market valuation falls by ₹2,036 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of Zee Entertainment Enterprises tanked nearly 8 per cent on Tuesday amid uncertainty over the fate of the USD 10 billion merger between the company and Culver Max Entertainment, formerly Sony Pictures Networks India. The stock tumbled 12.66 per cent to Rs 242.30 during the day on the BSE. It ended at Rs 256.25 apiece, lower by 7.64 per cent. On the NSE, the stock plunged 13.60 per cent to Rs 240.30 during the day. Shares of the company ended at Rs 255.95 each, down 7.98 per cent. The company's market valuation fell by Rs 2,036.3 crore to Rs 24,613.31 crore. In volume terms, 105.74 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and over 15.72 crore shares on the NSE during the day. The fate of the USD 10 billion merger between Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Culver Max Entertainment is hanging by a thread, with the two parties unable to finalise an agreement as the end of the one-month grace period looms. The two parties are yet to come to an agreement over Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL) MD and CEO Punit Goenka leading the merged entity after Sony expressed concerns over market regulator Sebi barring him from holding managerial posts in Zee and any of the entities in a fund-diversion case. Though the Securities and Exchange Board of India order was stayed by the Securities Appellate Tribunal, Sony is not comfortable with Goenka leading the merged entity due to the stringent corporate governance policy in Japan. The deal, which was signed between Zee Entertainment and Sony Pictures Networks India in 2021, has a stipulated period of two years in which the merger was to be completed before December 21, 2023, including regulatory and other approvals with a grace period of one month to complete the transaction.

Draft guidelines to curb coaching centres from making false claims

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Consumer protection regulator CCPA on Tuesday said it is ready with draft guidelines specifying "dos and don'ts" to prevent coaching institutes from making "false claims" in advertisements regarding success rates of candidates. The draft guidelines will be approved and issued soon, Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) Chief Commissioner and Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh told PTI. Singh, who headed the committee that prepared the draft guidelines, said several meetings were held for drafting the guidelines and the recent one was on January 8. Asserting that protection of consumer's interest is a paramount concern for CCPA, Singh highlighted the need for clarity, specifically in addressing certain aspects related to advertisements with respect to coaching centres. "The committee observed that there is an urgent need to issue



For instance, coaching institute should mention requisite information along with the photo of a successful candidate. Details such as rank, type and duration of course and whether free or paid course need to be mentioned along with the photo of a successful candidate, according to the statement. Further, coaching institutes should not make claims such as '100 per cent selection' or '100 per cent job guaranteed' or guaranteed preliminary or mains. "The font of disclaimer/disclosure/important information in the advertisement should be the same as that used in the claim/advertisement. The placement of such information should be at a prominent and visible place in the advertisement. The CCPA also clarified that the penalty for misleading advertisement by coaching sector will be governed as per Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and the guidelines are just in the nature of clarification to the stakeholders.

Tata Renewable plans to invest ₹70,800 cr for projects in Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) plans to make investments worth Rs 70,800 crore for renewable energy projects in Tamil Nadu. The company, part of Tata Power, has signed two Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the Tamil Nadu government to support the development of the state's renewable energy landscape and accelerate the country's clean energy transition, a regulatory filing said on Tuesday. The MoUs were signed on Monday. Under the first MoU, TPREL plans to explore opportunities to develop 10,000 MW of renewable energy power projects across solar, wind, hybrid, RTC (Round The Clock), peak, Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy (FDRE) over the next five to seven years. These renewable projects will be located over 50,000 acres of land in Tamil Nadu with an investment potential of nearly Rs 70,000 crore. This initiative has the potential to generate around 3,000 green job opportunities, according to the filing. The second MoU is to increase the investment commitment to up to Rs 3,800 crore to set up 4 GW of solar cells and solar modules plant in two phases at Gangaikondan in Tirunelveli district.

State-owned CIL on Tuesday said it has extended the tenure of fuel supply pact to ten years from the earlier five years for the non-regulated sector. The move aims at ensuring long-term assurance of coal supply through linkage auction to the non-regulated sector. Coal India Ltd (CIL) has begun the seventh tranche of the linkage auction to the non-regulated sector within days of completion of the sixth round. "CIL has proactively increased the tenure of fuel supply agreement (FSA) to 10 years, beginning with the seventh tranche," the company said in a statement. For sponge iron sub-sector customers, the seventh round of linkage auction started in the last

Coal India extends fuel supply agreement tenure for non-regulated sector

week of December to meet their coal demand, even though the conversion ratio of successful bids into FSAs was low by this sector in the sixth round. "CIL is committed to supplying coal to the extent of the normative requirement of all industrial sectors including sponge iron. In this endeavour, regular linkage auctions, as per the government's approved policy are being conducted for long-term coal linkages," a senior official of the PSU said. The response in the sixth tranche of linkage auction for



While SECL put 7.67 MT for the linkage auction, MCL chipped in with 1.83 MT. Almost the entire quantity was booked, the company said in a statement. Out of the total successful booking of 7.64 MT in SECL by the sponge iron units, only 3.88 MT or 51 per cent was converted into FSAs. In the case of MCL, 1.44 MT got converted into FSAs out of the total booked quantity of 1.83 MT. CIL extended the timeline in order to facilitate the signing of FSAs by 75 days over and above the norm of 90 days.

White collar hiring dips 16 per cent in December: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI
White collar hiring in India witnessed a 16 per cent decline in December compared to the year-ago period due to cautious hiring sentiments in IT, BPO, education, retail and healthcare sectors, a report said on Tuesday. "We observed marginal sequential growth of 2 per cent in December hiring activity compared to November, driven by non-IT sectors. However, the IT sector continued to be significantly impacted pulling the overall index down by 16 per cent against last year signalling a longer wait for a complete recovery in IT hiring," Naukri.Com Chief Business Officer Pawan Goyal said analysing the Naukri JobSpeak Index. According to the Naukri JobSpeak Index, sectors like BPO, education, retail, and healthcare displayed cautious hiring sentiments, witnessing a year-on-year decline of 17 per cent, 11 per cent, 11 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, in job offers in December. Hiring in the IT sector reflected the trend seen in the second half of 2023, the report noted. The sector witnessed a decline of 21 per cent in hiring during December 2023, against the same month last year and a fall of 4 per cent compared to the preceding month of November 2023. However, full stack data scientist, IT infrastructure engineer, and automation engineer were some of the job roles that saw decent hiring despite a cautious job market for the IT industry, it added. Although new job offers in the oil and gas sector were not spectacular in December 2023, it stayed at the level witnessed in the same month a year ago. The Naukri JobSpeak is a monthly index representing the state of the Indian job market and hiring activity on new job listings and job-related searches by recruiters on the resume database of Naukri.Com. Meanwhile, the report found that the hospitality sector continued its growth momentum in new job offers with a 4 per cent increase in hiring compared to December last year. The job growth for this sector is highest in Mumbai and Delhi-NCR. Senior professionals with over 16 years of experience emerged as the most sought-after candidates for hiring in the sector.

No silver bullet to fix deepfake issue; collaborations needed: Nasscom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Tackling the deepfake issue will require regulations and close industry collaboration as there is no silver bullet for it, Nasscom Chairperson Rajesh Nambiar has said, terming it a "real concern", especially in a year when several countries are going for polls. In an interview with PTI, the Nasscom chief also talked about continued concerns over macro headwinds while pointing out that "green shoots" and "clear

pockets" of demand emerging in areas like generative AI. Highlighting that technology has moved from being an enabler to being at the centre of every business, Nambiar, who is also chairman and managing director of Cognizant India, said companies will have no choice but to invest in technology going forward. Nambiar, who took over as the chairperson of apex IT industry body Nasscom in September 2023, termed deepfakes "a real concern". "Deepfakes are a real concern, especially when you look at half of the world's population going into elections in 2024. That is a big number, it is not just in India, not just in the US, there are many countries that are going into elections," he pointed out. The comment assumes significance as polls are scheduled in nearly 60 nations and regions across the world in 2024, including the world's largest democracies — India and the US. Nambiar said that many counter-technologies are being developed to curb the deepfake menace and asserted that regulations will be important. "I wish there was a silver bullet for this. Today, we don't have a silver bullet for it. It is something that will have to be tackled by all stakeholders.

Groundbreaking Android wristphone

New Delhi: Firebolt has introduced the cutting-edge Android smartwatch, DREAM. With the convenience of the Google Play Store, this wristphone condenses the expansive capabilities of a smartphone into a sleek and compact smartwatch design. This 4G LTE nano SIM-enabled wristphone boasts a remarkable 2.02-inch true-view display. This groundbreaking device seamlessly merges style with substance, offering users an unparalleled experience in communication, health monitoring, and entertainment, said Arnav Kishore, CEO & Founder of Firebolt.

SHAMI, SHEETAL DRAW ROUSING APPLAUSE AT EVENT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's best-performing athletes were on Tuesday conferred with the national sports awards by President Droupadi Murmu in a regal ceremony where cricketer Mohammed Shami and para archer Sheetal Devi walked in to a rapturous applause at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Shuttlers Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy were chosen for the coveted Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award for a breakout 2023, during which they won their maiden Asian Games gold — a first for India in badminton —, while also clinching the Asian Championships title and the Indonesia Open Super 1000 title. The duo is currently playing in Malaysia Open Super 1000 and therefore skipped the function. The awards ceremony, usually held on August 29 to commemorate the birth anniversary of hockey legend Major Dhyan Chand, was deferred because of the Hangzhou Asian Games from September 23 till October 8 last year. An atmosphere of gaiety pervaded the Rashtrapati Bhawan as 26 athletes and para-athletes were finalised for the Arjuna Awards this year, with teenager pistol ace Esha Singh the only one to miss

the ceremony. The 19-year-old Esha is competing in the Asian Olympic Qualifiers in Jakarta and, on Monday, had qualified for the Paris Olympics after winning the individual and team gold in 10m air pistol. The imprint of the Asian Games last year, and India's record haul of 107 medals there, was evident in the ceremony as a majority of the athletes, who walked to the dais, were medal winners in Hangzhou. The Durbar Hall reverberated with the claps of the dignitaries when para archer Sheetal Devi, winner of three gold medals at the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, walked up to collect her Arjuna. The 16-year-old is the only international para-archery champion without upper limbs due to a rare medical condition called Phocomelia. The President held Sheetal's award and the scroll as the teenager soaked in the atmosphere and the splendour of the hall. Murmu then walked down the podium to present the Arjuna to wheelchair-bound para-canoist Prachi Yadav, winner of gold in Hangzhou, once again drawing a huge round of applause. Shami, who is currently recovering from an ankle injury, was there to receive the honours and the crowd duly acknowledged

NATIONAL SPORTS AWARDS



his achievements by giving him and his art the pride of place with an ovation. The pace bowler took 24 wickets in seven World Cup games

last year. "My aim is to keep myself fit as far as possible, as the next two tournaments and series are big. I will focus on fitness," he told

PTI at a sports ministry reception last night. Also receiving a huge round of applause was the newly-crowned chess Grandmaster R. Vaishali,

the elder sister of precocious chess talent R. Praggnanandhaa. Vaishali was honoured for becoming the third woman from the country after Koneru

Humpy and Dronavalli Harika to turn GM. Other sporting bigwigs who were chosen for the Arjuna award this year were wrestler Antim Panghal, a former junior world champion and bronze-winner at the senior event last year, boxer Mohammad Hussamuddin (bronze-winner at last year's world championship), and athlete Parul Chaudhary. Among the notable Dronacharya awardees this year is chess coach RB Ramesh, who has groomed Praggnanandhaa. While the Khel Ratna comes with a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, the Arjuna and Dronacharya awards include a cash prize of Rs 15 lakh.

THE RECIPIENTS (2023 AWARDS):

Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award for 2023: Chirag Shetty and Satwik Sairaj Rankireddy (badminton).
Arjuna Awards: Ojas Pravin Deotale (archery), Aditi Gopichand Swami (archery), Murali Sreeshankar (athletics), Parul Chaudhary (athletics), Mohammad Hussamuddin (boxing), R Vaishali (chess), Mohammed Shami (cricket), Anush Agarwalla (equestrian), Divyakriti Singh (equestrian dressage), Diksha Dagar (golf), Krishan Bahadur Pathak (hockey), Sushila Chanu (hockey),

Pawan Kumar (kabaddi), Ritu Negi (kabaddi), Nasreen (kho-kho), Pinki (lawn bowls), Aishwary Prapat Singh Tomar (shooting), Esha Singh (shooting), Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu (squash), Ayhika Mukherjee (table tennis), Sunil Kumar (wrestling), Antim Panghal (wrestling), Naorem Roshibina Devi (wushu), Sheetal Devi (para archery), Illuri Ajay Kumar Reddy (blind cricket), Prachi Yadav (para canoeing).
Dronacharya Award (regular category) for outstanding coaches: Lalit Kumar (wrestling), RB Ramesh (chess), Mahaveer Prasad Saini (para athletics), Shivendra Singh (hockey), Ganesh Prabhakar Devrukhkar (mallakhamb).
Dronacharya Award (life-time category) for outstanding coaches: Jaskirat Singh Grewal (golf), Bhaskaran E (kabaddi), Jayanta Kumar Pushilal (table tennis).
Dhyan Chand Award for life-time achievement: Manjusha Kanwar (badminton), Vineet Kumar Sharma (hockey), Kavitha Selvaraj (kabaddi).
Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy 2023: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (overall winner university); Lovely Professional University, Punjab (1st runner -up), Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (2nd runner-up).



Hockey India appoints Kruis as high performance director

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Hockey India (HI) on Tuesday announced the appointment of Herman Kruis as the new high performance director with the Dutchman serving in the position till September. He will oversee the national junior and senior programmes of HI, including the coaches education pathway among other tasks, an HI release said. Kruis, who is from the Netherlands, has over two decades of coaching experience, and was earlier appointed as coach of Indian men and junior women's teams to oversee their preparations for the FIH Men's Junior World Cup and FIH Women's Junior World Cup respectively. In his vast coaching experience, Kruis has worked with Den Bosch ladies - a club based out of the Netherlands - as their head coach and during his

tenure the team won the European Cup eight times in a row. He was also the head coach for the Netherlands indoor women's hockey team from 2006 to 2008 and he was also the head coach for the Netherlands outdoor team from 2008 to 2010. In his most recent stint, he was the chief coach of the Belarus indoor and outdoor team from 2016 to August 2023. Kruis is a certified FIH coach-educator. "He will oversee the various programmes run by Hockey India including the junior and senior programmes," said HI president Dilip Tirkey. Expressing his delight on being appointed as the high performance director, Kruis said, "The Indian teams are on the cusp of creating history and I look forward to utilizing my expertise in helping the teams and Hockey India in achieving their goals for this year."

Iñaki eager to make family proud at Africa Cup of Nations

AP ■ BILBAO (SPAIN)

Following a World Cup when emotions ran high but the goals failed to flow, Iñaki Williams is eager to lead Ghana deep into the Africa Cup of Nations. Williams, the son of Ghanaian parents who migrated to Spain before he was born, declared his sporting allegiance five months before the 2022 World Cup. The Athletic Bilbao forward was unable to score in three group-phase games as his side failed to advance to the knockout rounds in Qatar, leaving him with a bittersweet experience when his excitement to represent Ghana was not matched by his performances. Now, Williams is confident he will enjoy more success at Africa's biggest soccer tournament in the Ivory Coast next week. "I am heading into this tournament with a different outlook," the 29-year-old Williams told The Associated Press in a recent interview. Williams says he is more prepared and integrated into his new team. Since the World Cup, he has played seven more games for Ghana between qualifiers and friendlies, and he scored his first and only goal to earn a 1-0 win over Madagascar in November in a 2026 World Cup qualifier. "In Qatar, my teammates barely knew me both on and off the field," he said. "But now they know that I am a hard-working and easy-going teammate and that I am here to help the team. The entire group has welcomed me with open arms."

Williams' younger brother Nico, who is also a forward with Athletic, played for Spain at the World Cup. They are both popular in their native Bilbao, where the team has had few Black players because it only fields players



from Spain's northern Basque Country region or adjoining areas. Both Williams boys were born in the industrial city of Bilbao in the north, where they have played for Athletic since their youth.

Their parents' story is quite different. They had to walk barefoot through the Sahara Desert during a long and perilous journey seeking a better life in Europe, and the mother was pregnant when the couple were detained while trying to enter Spain. They eventually received political asylum after taking advice from a charity worker who told them to say they had fled a civil war in Liberia. Williams played in a friendly for Spain in 2016. But when Ghana was interested in him, he decided to change allegiance, with Spain no longer calling him. His decision was influenced in part by a conversation with his grandfather, who encouraged him to join the "Black Stars."

"I know what it meant to him for me to play for Ghana," Williams said about his grandfather, who recently passed away. "I am very excited because I know that he will send down all his strength from heaven. "I am going to fulfill the dream of many of my family members, who feel very proud of me," he said about playing at the tournament. "I don't know what emotions I am going to feel, but I am sure they will be intense." Williams admits he was nervous to see how the Ghana fans would receive him, saying he was "a bit scared" after having played for Spain. "Now they see that I am committed and that I have worked very hard during qualifying, and I feel just like any other member of the team," Williams said. "Everyone is showing confidence in me and my teammates are helping me a lot."

Manish, Siddharth enter pre quarterfinals

PTI ■ MANDYA

Indians Manish Ganesh and Siddharth Vishwakarma registered easy wins to enter the men's singles pre-quarterfinals of the ITF Mandya Open here Tuesday. Ganesh breezed past Neeraj Yashpaul 6-1, 6-1, while Vishwakarma overcame Adil Kalyanpur 6-3, 6-1 to reach the round of 16. However, local man SD Prajwal Dev, who was recently added to the Indian Davis Cup team to



face Pakistan, suffered a disappointment in the men's doubles round of 16. Prajwal and his partner Nitin Kumar Sinha, seeded second in the event, were leading 5-4 against Indo-Korean pair of Woobin Shin and Karan Singh in the first set. But Sinha had to withdraw from the match after developing stomach cramps. The eight seeded Prajwal will meet Korea's Yunseok Jang in the singles first round match on Wednesday.



I want it to be me who makes it to world championship from India, says Vedit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Grandmaster Vedit Gujrathi said "everything came together" for him at the Grand Swiss event on his way to the Candidates, and expressed a wish to make the world chess championship final ahead of celebrated names such as R Praggnanandhaa. The 29-year-old Gujrathi is among the three Indians who have qualified for the Candidates event to be held in April, with the winner of the eight-player competition set to take on China's Ding Liren in the next world championship. It is for the first time that three Indian male players are going to feature in the event. R Praggnanandhaa and D Gukesh are the other two Indians who have qualified for the event, with Nasik's Gujrathi being the first from the state of Maharashtra to reach such a level. "Everything came together in three-day Grand Swiss, where just one game after the other, I kept winning," Gujrathi said during a media conference at the Mumbai Press Club. "Probably this last one-and-a-half years were training (me) for such a situation - when the big-stakes situation came - I was ready for it," he said. "I want it to be me who makes it from India," Gujrathi said. Gujrathi said it was expected to not have five-time world champion Magnus Carlsen at Candidates, as his absence

makes the "dynamics" interesting. "It was expected. It's not a surprise for me that he's not playing. If he would have played, he was without a doubt, a favourite. "That doesn't mean that I'm like, discounting myself. But he would have definitely added a new layer of friction in winning the tournament. But now that he's not playing the dynamics are good," he said. Gujrathi said he had to keep reinventing himself along the journey. "There were a couple of points in career which were very critical, where I thought of almost stopping chess. "One was when I was struggling to become a grandmaster. I was there with my rating, I was like 15-16 years old, but I was struggling to take the final step. It was coming very close. Even on my birthday, I think I missed my grandmaster norms. I still remember that," he said. "The second critical point is two years ago, where I had reached, I was in the world's top 20 and top 30 for a long time. But I was not making the next breakthrough. "Even like, I saw some signs, like Asian Games, I was about to win the gold (medal) but missed out. It was heart-breaking, but there were signs of success, but not entirely," he said. Gujrathi also hoped for support from the state or the central government in order to bolster his preparations while adding that the All India Chess Federation (AICF) has already earmarked Rs 2 crore.

Madrid, Atletico kickoff Spanish Super Cup

AP ■ MADRID

With Real Madrid enjoying good momentum and Atletico Madrid on a bit of a slump, the city rivals meet in the semifinal of the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday in the first of three matches between the clubs in less than a month. After the Super Cup, Madrid and Atletico will clash again on Jan. 18 in the round of 16 of the Copa del Rey, and then on Feb. 4 at the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in their second Spanish league match of the season. Madrid has won its last five games in all competitions and is enjoying an unbeaten run of 19 consecutive matches. The team's only loss this season came against Atletico in the Spanish league, 3-1 at the Metropolitan stadium, which is where the Copa's single-elimination game will take place next week. It's also where Atletico won 20 in a row across all competitions to tie a club record in a streak that ended with a 3-3 draw against Getafe in the Spanish league in December. Diego Simeone's team went on a strong run after that home win against Madrid, advancing to the knockout rounds of the Champions League and getting near the top of the Spanish



league. But it has hit some speedbumps recently, winning only two of its last five matches in all competitions. One of its two recent losses came at Girona, the second-place team at the league's halfway point. The 4-3 defeat dropped Atletico to fifth place, outside the Champions League places. It sits 10 points behind leader Madrid. Atletico and Madrid also met in the 2020 final, with Madrid winning on penalties in what marked the first time the Super Cup was taken to Saudi Arabia in a lucrative multi-year deal for the clubs and the Spanish soccer federation. The Super Cup's new "final four" format pits together the top two teams in the Spanish league last season and the last

two Copa del Rey finalists. The other semifinal will be played on Thursday between Barcelona and Osasuna, last season's runner-up to Madrid in the Copa del Rey. Atletico forward Antoine Griezmann enters the game tied with Luis Aragonés as the club's all-time top scorer with 173 goals. Madrid remains without some of its main players because of long-term injuries, including goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and central defenders Eder Militão and David Alaba. Young Turkey international Arda Güler made his debut in a Copa del Rey match this past weekend and could have more minutes in Saudi Arabia. Vinícius Júnior, Rodrygo and Jude Bellingham are set to lead Madrid's attack.

Former club president regrets attacking Turkish soccer referee

AP ■ ANKARA

The former president of a top-division soccer team in Turkey told a court on Tuesday that he regretted attacking a referee at the end of a league game but denied threatening to kill him. Faruk Koca, who resigned as president of MKE Ankaragucu after punching referee Halil Umur Meler, has been charged with causing willful injury to a public official, threat-

ening an official and violating a law relating to the prevention of violence in sports. He faces up to 13 years in prison if found guilty. Koca attacked Meler on Dec. 11 after a 1-1 draw between Ankaragucu and Caykur Rizespor. The referee, who was also kicked by two other people while lying on the ground, was hospitalised with a minor fracture close to his eye. Meler has also accused Koca of threatening to kill him

during the attack. Koca was arrested but has since been released on bail. He appeared in court with three other defendants who were also charged. "The part about the threat is not true," the state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Koca as telling the court during the opening hearing. "It was the first time in my life that I engaged in a physical intervention against anyone. I am sorry."

Vondrousova withdraws from Adelaide tournament

AP ■ ADELAIDE

Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova withdrew from the Adelaide International on Tuesday citing a right hip injury, five days before the Australian Open starts in Melbourne. The No. 7-ranked Vondrousova pulled out of the tournament hours before her scheduled first-round match against Russian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich. Taylor Townsend will take her place in the draw. Sixth-seeded Jelena Ostapenko was broken while serving for the match at 5-2 in the third set and missed two match points in the next game before finally fending



off Sorana Cirstea 2-6, 6-2, 6-4. The 2017 French Open champion will next play Caroline Garcia, who beat local wildcard entry Taylah Preston, Australia, 6-4, 1-6, 6-3. "I feel like I was sleeping in the first set," Ostapenko said. "I'm not a morning person; I needed time to get into the match. When I start to take time and be a bit more calm, I play better." Czech qualifier Katerina

Siniakova upset former No. 1-ranked Karolina Pliskova 6-2, 6-1, winning 10 consecutive games after dropping serve early. Two days after helping Germany win the United Cup final, Laura Siegemund needed almost three hours for her 6-7 (1), 6-4, 6-4 win over seventh-seeded Liudmila Samsonova, recovering breaks in the second and third sets. In the ATP tournament in Adelaide, Australia's Jordan Thompson followed up his win over Rafael Nadal last week in the Brisbane International quarterfinals with a 6-2, 6-2 over Facundo Diaz Acosta to move into second-round match against No. 4-seeded Lorenzo Musetti.

Do not consider Warner as one of the greats: Buchanan

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former coach John Buchanan, who oversaw Australia's two 50-over World Cup triumphs in 2003 and 2007, does not consider David Warner as one of the greats of the game, saying the title should be reserved for exceptional cricketers like Don Bradman and Shane Warne. Buchanan was in charge of one of the most successful Australian sides between 1999 and 2007. Warner, who retired from Test cricket last week, did not play under him as he made his Australia debut in 2009. Asked whether Warner was a "great", Buchanan, speaking on SEN Breakfast, replied: "I don't think so". The 70-year-old Buchanan, under whom Australia won the 2006 Champions Trophy and etched a world record 16-con-



secutive Test wins twice, said greats of the game are those who have done something exceptional that others just can't match. "I think he (Warner) has certainly performed exceptionally well throughout this career, he sits on 8000+ runs, he's played over 100 Test matches, over 160 ODIs and nearly 100 T20s.



"His averages are reasonable compared to all those in the various formats, his strike rate is obviously higher because of

the way he plays the game. "On performance base, he's right up there. But greats of the game, in my opinion, are people

that really do and have done something exceptional that others just can't match, so therefore you automatically

go to the (Don) Bradmans, (Glenn) McGraths, (Shane) Warnes, they're the greats in my opinion."

The 37-year-old Warner finished his Test career on 112 matches with 8786 runs -- 22nd all-time -- at an average of 44.59 and an impressive strike rate of 70.19. He also scored 6932 runs at 45.30 and a strike rate of 97.26 in ODI cricket -- sixth best for Australia and 48th overall. Meanwhile, Warner confirmed to Club Prairie Fire podcast that his autobiography is in the works but did not reveal much whether the book will contain details of the sandpaper gate - the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in South Africa. There's no publication date set for Warner's autobiography. When pressed by podcast host and former teammate Adam

Gilchrist on whether he would provide his full account of the infamous incident, Warner chose to keep the answer vague.

"...My side of the story and all that, that could be told whenever. There are going to be some things in the book that are definitely going to be related to 2018. It's not potentially going to be around what I know, what others know, because then it just becomes a tit-for-tat. "It's not that kind of story. I want it to be about my journey, my upbringing. There are going to be a few things in there. "You have the Joe Root saga (when he punched Root in 2013)... There are so many different things in there, there are a lot of things in there. It'll be an interesting read and when the time comes we can all pick it to pieces."

Warner did, however, add that "there are going to be a lot of things in that book that I think are going to raise some eyebrows."

Warner was handed a lifetime leadership ban after teammate Cameron Bancroft was caught with sandpaper in his trouser pocket and Australia admitted to ball-tampering during the Cape Town Test against South Africa in 2018. Among the three cricketers who were punished -- captain Steve Smith and Bancroft being the other two --, Warner got the harshest punishment. Following an amendment to Cricket Australia's Code of Conduct for players and staff in 2022, the left-handed batter was to appeal against the ban but later decided not to do so as he apparently found out that the review panel hearing was to be done in public.

SA20 gives me great exposure to learn more about captaincy: Markram

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Aiden Markram is forever grateful to the Sunrisers franchise for showing faith in his leadership abilities as he gets down to defend the SA20 title that Sunrisers Eastern Cape won under his captaincy in the league's inaugural edition. Fresh from his finest Test hundred which he smashed against India last week, Markram is now ready to score big runs in the shortest format. "It's always nice to get runs. It's obviously different format, but from a confidence point of view, it gives you confidence as a player, and to go from that knock straight to SA20, is a nice place to be, but you have to respect that this is a different format," Markram told PTI in an exclusive interview. Winning the inaugural edition of SA20 was a breakthrough moment for Markram, who

was later entrusted with the huge task of leading Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL. "I am not sure as I am not involved in those decisions, fantastic opportunity and privilege to captain any team. It's a great blessing to captain any Sunrisers team. Great exposure for myself to learn from captaincy point of view and wherever it takes you in future, you take it in your stride," the Proteas vice-captain said. The Eastern Cape Sunrisers don't have too many big names save the skipper, England's South African-born player Dawid Malan, and Marco Jansen. "You always feel that responsibility not just from captaincy point of view, but as a senior player also, to lead from the front. We want to give freedom to our players to express themselves and be the best player they can be. If it's their day the team would be in great position."

Maharaj: When Ram Siya Ram plays in background, I get into zone

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Devotional music being played at a cricket ground is a rarity but when Keshav Athmanand Maharaj strides in, the in-stadia DJ gets a special request to play one song: "Ram Siya Ram Jai Jai Ram." And the request comes from none other than the South Africa left-arm spinner himself, prompting India skipper KL Rahul to ask him 'everytime you enter, they play that song' during the recent ODI series in South Africa. In the Cape Town Test, as Maharaj entered to bat, Virat Kohli was seen standing with folded hands. "It was obviously something I put forward to the media lady and requested that song to be played," Maharaj, the Durban Supergiants skipper in the upcoming SA20, told PTI during an interview. For Maharaj, the Durban-born cricketer of Indian origin, Lord Ram is his greatest strength. "For me, God's been my greatest blessing and if I get an opportunity it's the least I can do



and it gets you in the zone and get that respect from other players. Respecting religion and culture is important but it's a nice feeling to hear 'Ram Siya Ram' being played in the background," Maharaj said. Talking about the second edition of SA20, the skipper is confident that his team would do well. "We have a balanced squad, excited to see boys hitting the straps. We saw really good wickets last year," Maharaj said.

Will we see him bowling more in the Powerplay? "It's a case of assessing conditions. If conditions allow me to do that, I will bowl, if not then will assess when to bowl but be a good leader on field and make good decisions tactically. Hopefully, team can feed off that and results will take care of itself," the eloquent Maharaj said. With 158 wickets from 50 Tests, Maharaj is perhaps the most

effective slow bowler that Proteas have had since the end of apartheid. Does he at times feel that he isn't celebrated enough in South Africa as he plays most Tests in conditions that doesn't suit his bowling? A case in point, he didn't get a single over in the Newlands Test against India. "Unfortunately, you live in a world where fast bowlers are highlighted and we have had some amazing greats to have played the game and I am here to do my job and whether I am celebrated or not doesn't really make a difference to me," he calmly replied. "I want to contribute in a positive way for the team and if the team goes in right way, then I have done my job" Maharaj is still the old school spinner who relies on flight to buy wickets rather than just bowling wicket to wicket stuff. Where does he get that get that confidence from? "I trust my preparation and it has been years and years of hard work. The way the game is evolving you also need to evolve your mindset.



ICC rates Newlands pitch as unsatisfactory after shortest ever Test in history

PTI ■ DUBAI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday rated the Newlands pitch for the second Test between India and South Africa as "unsatisfactory" after it ended inside five sessions. India defeated the hosts by seven wickets in the match, which turned out to be the shortest-ever in the history of Test cricket. The victory allowed India to draw the two-match series 1-1. The decision was made under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process. Only 642 balls could be bowled in the match. "The pitch in Newlands was very difficult to bat on. The ball bounced quickly and sometimes alarmingly throughout the match, making it difficult to play shots," said Chris Broad, the match referee for the Test, in his report submitted to the ICC. "Several batters were hit on the gloves and many wickets also fell due to the awkward bounce," Broad further wrote. Subsequently, the Newlands was awarded one demerit point. One demerit point is awarded to venues whose pitches and outfields are rated by the match referee as unsatisfactory. Cricket South Africa have 14 days to appeal against the sanction. If a venue reaches six demerit points, it is suspended from

hosting any international cricket for 12 months. The penalty is 24 months in case of 12 demerit points. "These points remain active for a rolling five-year period. Indian skipper Rohit Sharma was exceptionally vocal in his criticism of the Newlands surface. "We saw what happened in this match, how the pitch played. I don't mind playing on pitches like this. As long as everyone keeps their mouth shut in India and don't talk too much about Indian pitches," Rohit had told reporters in his post-match press meet. "Because you come to Test cricket to challenge yourself. Yes, it is dangerous. It is challenging. So, and when people come to India, it is again pretty challenging as well. If the pitch starts turning (in India), people start talking about 'Puff of dust! Puff of dust!' There's so much crack here (Newlands) on the pitch," he added. Even South African coach Shukri Conrad was critical of the Cape Town track. "I don't know what people want me to say. You only need to look at the scores. 1.5-day Test match! You need to look at how they chased 80 (79). It's a sad state when you need more luck than skill. All the ethics and values of Test cricket go out the window," Conrad said.

I do not go to ground as cricket in South Africa is too political: McMillan

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

As an active international cricketer, Brian McMillan tried his hand at teaching Afrikaans and science in school, and discovered he was good at it. Then, disillusioned with the "politics" in South African cricket administration, McMillan decided to stay away from the game after his retirement as a player, and chose to join his family business instead. There too, he tasted success, as the all-rounder par excellence of his time evolved into an epitome of versatility outside of

cricket. In between, there was also the small matter of completing an MBA course and working with companies like Canon. For seven years since South Africa's return to international cricket, McMillan was a big part of the team: a mean third seamer, who was quicker than expected, a very useful batter, and a fielder with bucket-like hands that pouched anything coming his way in the slip cordon. He was the glue that held the Proteas team before the phenomenon called Jacques Kallis happened to South African

cricket. However, over the years McMillan has stayed away from the ground and South African cricket establishment, concentrating on his family business while keeping a tab on cricketing developments on TV. "Fortunately, I have my family business and we are into finance, telecom, printers and production machines. When I was playing, I had worked for companies like Canon," the 60-year-old told PTI in an exclusive interview, sitting in his sprawling office in Aztec Park area.



"I did my MBA after cricket and before that taught Afrikaans and science in school to supplement my income while I was playing."

With his all-round skills, he would have been sought-after in IPL but he simply said "it is what it is." "Before me Clive Rice, Graeme Pollock, Barry Richards and Mike Proctor could have made money," he said. But why doesn't he go to the ground or associate himself with CSA? "I don't go to the ground as it is too political for me and I have my viewpoints on that. I really love the game and I have my viewpoints on that," McMillan said. "I follow the IPL quite closely and there are a lot of youngsters

coming through. Fortunately, for India, they have got an extremely good side and it was really surprising that they didn't win the World Cup," he said. McMillan did have his issues with the "Black Lives Matter" movement and his contrarian view points didn't earn him friends. "I certainly don't believe in their selection policies. BLM I don't believe in. It's a Marxist thing. I believe all lives matter, how people interpreted it in this country... They didn't have any knowledge to what BLM stood for," he said.

Iyer added to Mumbai squad for Ranji Trophy game against Andhra

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India batter Shreyas Iyer was on Tuesday added to the Mumbai squad for their next Ranji Trophy game against Andhra to be played here from January 12-15. Having struggled with the bat largely during India's two-match Test series in South Africa in challenging conditions, the right-handed batter would be looking to regain form and bolster preparations for the Tests against England beginning January 25. Iyer has replaced middle-order batter Sarfaraz Khan, who will join the India A team for the series against England A in

Ahmedabad. However, Mumbai will be without the services of all-rounder Shivam Dube who has been summoned to the national team for the upcoming three-match series starting against Afghanistan beginning on January 11. The 41-time winners in the Ranji Trophy, Mumbai, are coming off an outright win against Bihar in Patna. Mumbai bagged seven points after they crushed Bihar by a



margin of an innings and 51 runs with their fast bowlers ruling the roost. Mumbai squad: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Shreyas Iyer, Jay Bista, Bhupen Lalwani, Amogh Bhatkal, Suvad Parkar, Prasad Pawar (wk), Hardik Tamore (wk), Shams Mulani, Tanush Kotian, Atharva Ankolekar, Mohit Avasthi, Dhaval Kulkarni, Royston Dias, Sylvester Dsouza.

CA congratulates Perry on 300th international match

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia (CA) has congratulated star all-rounder Ellyse Perry on her 300th international match and hailed her as a role model for the young generation. The 33-year-old reached the significant milestone during the second T20I against India at DY Patil Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday. Perry had scored an unbeaten 34 as Australia claimed a six-wicket victory to level the series. "Congratulations to Ellyse Perry on her 300th international



appearance overnight," Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley said in a statement. "Ellyse is one of the finest all-

rounders the game has ever seen and is the most inspiring role model for young people aspiring to play sport." Perry, who made her international debut against New Zealand in July 2007 as a 16-year-old, has been part of six T20 World Cup wins, two ODI World Cups titles and a Commonwealth Games gold medal. "She has been such an instrumental part of the Australian women's cricket team, which is one of the most successful teams in Australian sporting history. "It is testament to Ellyse's professionalism and sustained performance at the elite level that she has just been nominated for ICC T20 cricketer of the year.

WTC has made it worse for Test cricket: Butcher

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England Test batter Mark Butcher feels the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) has done more harm than good to the longest format. South Africa recently named a depleted squad for the Test series in New Zealand with their top cricketers contracted to play in

the second season of the SA20 as the dates of the two events are clashing. "One of the things that's made this even more inevitable is something that they've done to try to salvage Test match cricket, which is the World Test Championship," Butcher said on the Wisden Cricket Weekly podcast.

"The point is that your bilateral series have to capture the imagination of the fans and the players of the two countries that are playing in it, and then the wider cricket watching public. And the only way they are that is if they are competitive. And that's how it always was." Former Australia skipper Steve Waugh also came down heavily



on the International Cricket Council (ICC) and top cricket boards, including the BCCI, after Cricket South Africa (CSA) named as many as seven uncapped players in a 14-man squad for the two-Test series. "Test match series were and Test matches in and of themselves, single games, were important events. The idea that you

widen the whole thing out to sort of span three years and blah blah blah, some series are worth this, some series are worth that, some teams can't be asked this week - it makes it even more nebulous. "The only effort that's been made to kind of try and keep it relevant, I think, has made it worse," Butcher said. Butcher feels the ICC could have focussed

on other relevant issues to secure the future of Test cricket instead of introducing the WTC. "I don't know, in all of the wrong places the effort has been made. And the places where it might actually have made a difference, i.e., levelling up revenues for TV rights, allowing countries to be able to keep hold of their best players..."