

OPINION 6
THE GREAT CHINESE REAL ESTATE MELTDOWN

WORLD 8
REVISED ANTI-TERROR BILL UNVEILED IN LANKAN PARLIAMENT

MONEY 10
INDIA TO BE THIRD LARGEST ECONOMY BY FY28: FM

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ROHIT, KOHLI IN
MOHALI
12 SPORTS



UDDHAV SENA JOLTED

Speaker rejects Thackeray plea, recognises Shinde as real Sena

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major setback to the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar on Wednesday recognised the Sena faction led by Eknath Shinde as the "real Shiv Sena" and rejected a plea by the Sena (UBT) seeking disqualification of 16 Sena MLAs, including Shinde himself, thus retaining the stability of the "Maha-Yuti" Government.

More than 18 months after the Shinde-led Shiv Sena teamed up with the BJP and toppled the Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) Government, the Speaker ruled that the decision taken by Uddhav to remove Shinde, after the June 2022 rebellion within the erstwhile parent Sena, lacked the mandate of the political party and that "the 'paksha pramukh' (party president) does not have the power to remove any leader from the party."

"The 1999 party constitution submitted to the Election Commission by the Shiv Sena was the valid one for deciding the issues related to leadership. The Shiv Sena UBT group's contention that the amended constitution of 2018 should be relied on was



Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) members celebrate after the verdict in the MLA disqualification case came in their favour, in Mumbai on Wednesday

not acceptable....The 1999 constitution made the 'rashtriya karyakarini' (national executive) the supreme body....the 'paksha pramukh' (party president) does not have the power to remove any leader from the party," the Speaker stated in his order.

"The 2018 leadership structure was not in conformity with the constitution of the Shiv Sena (of 1999 which is relied upon). This leadership

structure cannot be taken as the yardstick to determine which faction is a real Shiv Sena political party," Narwekar said.

"The 2018 amended constitution of Shiv Sena cannot be considered as valid as it is not in the records of the Election Commission of India. As per Supreme Court orders, I cannot delve into any other factor on which the constitution is valid. As per records, I am relying on the 1999 constitution of Shiv Sena

as the valid constitution," the Speaker said.

"In view of the evidence and records before me, (it) prima facie indicates that no elections were held in the year 2013, as well as in the year 2018. However, I as the speaker exercising jurisdiction under the 10th Schedule have limited jurisdiction and cannot go beyond the record of the ECI as available on the website and hence I have not considered this aspect while

determining the relevant leadership structure," the Speaker noted.

"Thus, given the above conclusions, I find that the leadership structure of Shiv Sena reflected in the letter dated 27th February 2018 available on the website of the ECI is the relevant leadership structure which has to be taken into account for the purpose of determining which faction is the real political party....," the Speaker said, as he recognised Shinde faction as the "real Shiv Sena".

While the ruling Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) welcomed the Speaker's ruling through celebrations, the Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said that the Speaker's order was nothing but "murder of democracy". He said his party would move the Supreme Court. On his part, Shinde said that in democracy "numbers are important".

It may be recalled that Shinde — who along with 15 Shiv Sena MLAs had walked out of the parent Sena camp — later mustered a strength of 40 rebel Sena MLAs and teamed with the Fadnavis-led BJP and toppled the Uddhav-led MVA government and formed his own government in last week of June 2022.

Continued on Page 2

Sonia, Kharge reject invite to Ram temple inauguration

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, his predecessor Sonia Gandhi, and the Leader of the Party in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, on Wednesday, "respectfully declined" the invitation to attend the consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. They accused the BJP and the RSS of turning it into a "political project" for electoral gain.

The decision of these top leaders was announced by Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh, who also questioned the motives behind the inauguration of the "incomplete" temple by the leaders of the BJP and the RSS.

Last month, Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Chowdhury received invitations to attend the inauguration ceremony of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, scheduled for January 22, 2024. The event will also be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several celebrities, and eminent personalities from around the world, who have been extended invitations by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath



and more than 6,000 people are expected to attend. "Lord Ram is worshipped by millions in our country. Religion is a personal matter. However, the RSS/BJP have long turned the temple in Ayodhya into a political project. The inauguration of the incomplete temple by the leaders of the BJP and the RSS has obviously been expedited for electoral gain," Congress stated.

"While respecting the 2019 Supreme Court judgment and acknowledging the sentiments of millions who reverre Lord Ram, Shri Mallikarjun Kharge, Smt Sonia Gandhi, and Shri Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury have respectfully declined the invitation to what is clearly an RSS/BJP event," said Jairam Ramesh, the Congress general secretary

in charge of communications. The temple trust has also invited 4,000 seers from across the country and 50 guests from foreign countries. The BJP, RSS, and affiliated Hindutva organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad have launched a nationwide mass connect program leading up to the ceremony, urging people to visit the holy place after the event.

The BJP has also instructed all its state units to initiate a campaign starting from January 14 to ensure the cleanliness of temples and their surroundings. They are encouraging people to join the event on January 22 by offering prayers at temples in their respective neighborhoods.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

New Rashtriya Rifles unit in Poonch region

Jammu: In a bid to enhance relations with the civilian population and escalate anti-terrorist operations in the frontier Poonch district, Army authorities have chosen to deploy a new Rashtriya Rifles unit in the regional security grid. P2

Suvendu slams Mamata for jibe on Ram temple

Kolkata: Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari strongly criticised Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, calling her remarks on the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya "insensitive" and accused her of hurting Hindu sentiments by insulting the Supreme Court of India. Adhikari emphasised the significance of the temple's inauguration on January 22 and condemned Banerjee's characterisation of it as an "election gimmick." P2

Will make India developed in 25 years: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GANDHI NAGAR/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday revealed that his government has set a goal of making India a developed country in the next 25 years. He added that all major rating agencies are of the opinion that India will be among the three largest economies in the world in the next few years, and these upcoming 25 years represent India's Amrit Kaal.

Addressing the inauguration of the 10th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, which saw the participation of state heads and CEOs of top private companies, PM Modi said in the rapidly changing world order, India is moving ahead as the "vishwa mitra" (friend of the world). India has emerged as a new ray of hope amid many uncertainties being faced globally, and the world



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala, Mozambique President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi, President of Timor-Leste Jose Ramos Horta, Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat and Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, and others at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024 in Gandhinagar on Wednesday

looks at it as an important pillar of stability, a trusted friend, and an engine of growth in the global economy.

"In the rapidly changing world order, India is forging ahead as 'vishwa mitra'. India has given hope to the world that we

can collectively decide on common goals and achieve them. India's commitment to global welfare, its dedication, efforts, and hard work are contributing to making today's world more secure and prosperous," he said.

Speaking about India's

economy, PM Modi remarked, "Today, India is the fifth-largest economy in the world. Ten years ago, India held the 11th position. Presently, all major agencies estimate that India will be among the top three economies globally in the coming

years. Let people across the world conduct their analyses, but I guarantee that it will happen."

"Today, the world sees India as an important pillar of stability, a trustworthy friend, a partner dedicated to people-centric development, a voice

advocating for global good, a representative of the global south, an engine of growth in the global economy, a technology hub for finding solutions, a powerhouse of talented youth, and a democracy that delivers," he added.

Continued on Page 2

Ayodhya secures its air as sea of dignitaries to land on January 20-22

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AYODHYA

As Ayodhya eagerly awaits the consecration of Ram Lalla at the newly built Ram Temple, the adorned city, with a host of infrastructures in place, is also looking forward to welcoming and hosting well-known dignitaries. This includes leaders, celebrities, industrialists, and sporting personalities, as their private jets and chartered planes are set to land at the newly developed Maharishi Valmiki International Airport in Ayodhya.

Sources said over 100 chartered aircraft are expected to land at MVIAA during January 20-22. Due to the limited availability of hangars and parking bays, these aircraft are to be parked at airports in the vicinity, such as Gorakhpur, Lucknow, and Varanasi.

In an effort to ensure foolproof security, on Wednesday, the Centre approved a security cover of over 150 CISF personnel for the Ayodhya airport. A range of ultra-luxurious private jets, including the 10-seater Dassault Falcon 2000, Embraer 135 LR & Legacy 650, Beechcraft Super King Air 200, Cessna, and Bombardier, are scheduled to touch down in the holy city.

Continued on Page 2

Manipur sets condition for Congress yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After a dispute arose between the Congress and the Manipur Government over the initial denial of permission for a venue where the grand old party's "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" was scheduled to begin on January 14, the N Biren Singh Government on Wednesday approved the venue for the flagging off but with a condition.

In response to protests by the Congress over the last two days, the Manipur Government granted approval for the flagging off of the proposed January 14 Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, albeit "with a limited number of participants". This approval came eight days after the Congress approached the government to request the flagging off of the yatra from Hapta Kangleibung ground.

Only the flagging off of the Yatra with a limited number of participants is hereby allowed on January 14 to prevent any untoward incidents and disturbances in law and order. The number and names



Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh and KC Venugopal during a press conference in Delhi on Wednesday

of the participants shall be provided in advance to this office to enable the necessary precautionary measures to be taken," the order issued by the Imphal East district magistrate's office said.

The order says the Imphal East district superintendent of police has submitted a report stating that a huge crowd is expected during the opening ceremony of the yatra at the venue. In view of the prevailing law and order situation in the state, the large gathering may create problems with law and order.

Continued on Page 2

Heater surge strains power grid in chilly Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The icy, dry northwesterly winds made Delhi shiver, pushing the peak winter power demand to an all-time high of 5611 MW on Wednesday morning. The maximum temperature was recorded at 15.2 degrees Celsius, four notches below the season's normal, while the minimum temperature plummeted to 7.1 degrees Celsius, accompanied by moderate fog in isolated pockets. Jafarpur was the coldest area, with the maximum temperature dropping to 12.1 degrees Celsius, seven notches below the season's normal. Most parts of the capital city experienced a severe cold wave due to the drop in maximum temperature and the presence of dry, icy winds.

The temperature in Sainik Farms plummeted to 4.7 degrees Celsius, as reported by a local source. There were power outages due to a significant surge in heater usage, with a house down the road using 10 of them. The result was complete darkness and

bitter cold in the area. According to real-time data from the State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC) Delhi, the peak power demand reached 5611 MW at 11:08 am. The previous all-time high winter peak demand was 5559 MW on January 5. This year, except for January 2, each day in January has seen Delhi's peak power demand remain above 5000 MW.

According to the discom officials, the spike in power demand is primarily due to increased electricity use by consumers for heating purposes. A BSES spokesperson mentioned that the company's discoms, BRPL (BSES Rajdhani Power Limited) and BYPL (BSES Yamuna Power Limited), successfully met peak power demands of 2,350 MW and 1,174 MW, respectively, in their areas of distribution. BSES reported that the peak power demand during winter months until last year was 5526 MW, recorded on January 6, 2023. Delhi's peak power demand this winter is expected to exceed 5700 MW this year.



Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) achieved a record peak power demand of 1,753 MW without any network constraints or outages amid the cold wave affecting northwest India, as stated by a discom spokesperson. The company anticipates the peak winter demand to surpass the 1,800-

MW mark this season. TPDDL has secured long-term power tie-ups to meet the demand and has ensured the reliability of its equipment during these low temperatures and foggy conditions, she added.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the national capital continues to

experience severe cold day conditions with a mainly clear sky on Wednesday. According to the IMD, the maximum temperatures were recorded as follows: Palam at 12.7 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 14.7 degrees Celsius, Ridge at 14.5 degrees Celsius, Anagar at 15 degrees Celsius, Narela at 13.7 degrees Celsius, Pusa at 14.2 degrees Celsius, Pitampura at 15 degrees Celsius, and SPS Mayur Vihar at 13.5 degrees Celsius. Similarly, the maximum temperatures were recorded in Gurugram at 13.7 degrees Celsius, CDO Ghaziabad at 13 degrees Celsius, and Noida at 14.2 degrees Celsius.

Night shelters in Delhi, designed to provide refuge for homeless people, were full amid the cold weather conditions. These shelters offer blankets, beds, hot water, and food for those seeking shelter. A caretaker from a night shelter in Delhi's Kashmeri Gate mentioned that a rescue team has been deployed to bring people living on roadsides to these homes.

Continued on Page 2

Army to induct new Rashtriya Rifles unit in Poonch region

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Aiming to improve its ties with the civilian population and to further intensify anti-terrorist operations in the frontier Poonch district, the Army authorities have decided to induct a new Rashtriya Rifles unit in the security grid in the region.

According to ground reports, the phased withdrawal of 48 Rashtriya Rifles is currently going on and jawans of the new Rashtriya Rifles are being inducted and likely to take over the command of the existing security camps in the coming days.

Meanwhile, the search and combing operations in the general area were going on to track down the footprints of the hiding foreign terrorists. With the induction of the new Rashtriya Rifles unit in the region, the anti-terrorist operations would be relaunched to flush out the hiding terrorists. The decision was taken at the highest level in the wake of a



surge in the targeted killings of army jawans in the area of operation of 48 Rashtriya Rifles.

The local commanders and the top brass of the Northern Command had briefed Army Chief General Manoj Pande during his visit to the forward posts in the Dera ki Gali area of Poonch.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh was also briefed by the senior commanders after making a fresh assessment of the prevailing security scenario in

the areas south of Pir Panjal. Three senior officers including the Brigade Commander of the 13 Sector Rashtriya Rifles, were earlier attached pending a formal Court of Inquiry into the recovery of three civilian dead bodies under mysterious circumstances in the Surankote area of Poonch on December 22, 2023.

Four soldiers were 'killed in action' during the ambush of two army vehicles by foreign terrorists on December 21 in the Dera Ki Gali area of

Surankote. In Jammu, Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF) Nitin Agrawal Wednesday reviewed the security situation and operational preparedness of the troops guarding the border with Pakistan on the Jammu frontier.

Agrawal, who visited areas located close to the International Border (IB), also called on Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha at the Raj Bhavan here and briefed him about the security situation along the border.

According to a Public Relations Officer of the BSF, Jammu Frontier, "The DG reviewed the security situation and the operational preparedness of the troops with senior BSF officials."

Agrawal is currently on a two day visit to the Jammu region. D K Boora, Inspector General, BSF, Jammu frontier, briefed Agrawal about the security situation here.

Hindus, SC insulted: Adhikari on Mamata's temple gimmick jibe

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Biju Prasad Adhikari has severely criticized Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her "insensitive" remarks that the inauguration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya was "nothing but an election gimmick" saying that she had not only hurt the Hindu sentiments but also insulted the Supreme Court of India.

"After 500 years of struggle we are getting the Ram Temple of Ayodhya which is the birth place of Lord Rama and which will be inaugurated on January 22 ... but the Chief Minister called it an election gimmick ... not only this she said that the this temple was being made with the help of a Supreme Court order ... this in itself is a contemptuous statement as the Apex Court gave a judgment accepted by all the parties ... by dint of that judgment the Hindus got back their Ram Janmabhoomi and the Muslims were given 10 acres of land to build a mosque

... and here the Chief Minister is giving political statements." Adhikari further said that it was Banerjee and not the BJP which was playing divisive politics. "By her statement it is clear that she is trying to pursue an appeasement politics and divide the people along communal lines to garner votes ahead of the elections ... this is her vote bank politics," she said.

Referring to the inauguration of the Ram Temple Banerjee had on Tuesday said that she had "more important works to do." She said "I believe a festival brings all together so it belongs to everyone but religion is a private affair ... I was asked about the Ram Mandir and I said ... the Temple is being constructed with the help of a Supreme Court order ... do whatever you want ... I am not interested in that as I have more important works to do ... it is just an election gimmick ... I will only want that people of other religions should not be ignored and disregarded.

Amid apprehensions that the Trinamool Congress might already have witnessed substantive erosion in her minority vote base Banerjee vowed in the name of "Ishwar" and "Allah" saying, "I vow in the name of Ishwar ... Allah Kasam I will never allow communal divide in Bengal ... there will be no religious discrimination in Bengal ... I will never allow that."

Referring to her remarks senior BJP leader Dilip Ghosh too said that the Chief Minister had made it clear that she thrived by appeasement politics. Meanwhile, in a parallel development Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar attacked the State administration even as TMC leader and strongman Shahjahan Sheikh remained non-traceable even five days after his goons allegedly attacked the Enforcement Directorate officials who went to raid his house at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas --- in relation to the multi-crore ration scam.

BJP moves HC after cops deny permission for Ram Puja at Kalighat

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The BJP has moved the Calcutta High Court after the Kolkata Police denied it permission to organise a special puja of Lord Ram at Kalighat Temple premises right on the day of the inauguration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, sources said.

"We have moved the High Court seeking justice as the Kolkata Police has denied us the permission to hold a special puja of Lord Rama at Kalighat Temple," a functionary of the right wing Kalighat Bahumukhi Sewa Samiti said adding, "we had asked for police permission about a month ago but now they have denied us the permission ... this is a clear mischief ... it is a sin to offer prayers to our Lord Rama on a day when all of India will pray to him."

Kerala Christian farmer fights against heavy handed CPM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M), self-styled protectors and saviours of the minority communities in India, lament from national and international platforms about the "Manipur massacre of Christians by the Sangh Parivar elements", the members of the community in Kerala live in continuous threat by the comrades.

Jiju Thomas (46), a farmer in Peruvannamoozhi village in Kozhikode district has been attacked several times by CPI(M) workers for standing up to their high handedness. For the last 11 years, Thomas has been living under 24x7 police protection given to him under the orders of Kerala High Court. This is the fall out of his resignation from the CPI(M) subsequent to the party cadre seizing his five acre agriculture land (his only source of subsistence) and declared it as surplus land. Though Thomas pleaded with party commissars that the land they had seized does not fall under surplus land, they were adamant and did not pay any heed to his pleas.

"Since the day I got the court order, they turned against me



and my family. Though they had planted a bomb in my bike, I had a miraculous escape. They demolished my house and I was grievously wounded in their attack. It was following these incidents that the High Court ordered police protection to me," Thomas told The Pioneer.

The Marad Special Court where the trial took place sentenced the CPI(M) workers to seven years imprisonment and fine of Rs 10,000/- "But when their appeal reached the High Court, things took a strange turn and the Court quashed the Special Court verdict," he said. When his family members too came under attack, Thomas left with no alternative other than sending them out to Karnataka for their studies. The party workers destroyed the entire crop of coconut and arecanut

saplings he had planted. "Hence I built a building and tried to give it on rental to shop keepers. That too was sabotaged by the comrades who threatened the clients and they made a quick retreat. Though the cops are guarding my house, it is only to prevent housebreaking by the party workers," he said.

Kevin Peter, president Christian Alliance for Social Action (CASA) said this shows the hypocrisy of the Lefts. Kevin and Thomas said that Peruvannamoozhi was one of the prominent party villages (party village where only the dictate of the CPI(M) runs). "The village secretary of the party is the last world and it is he who decides whom and when a rival has to be executed. We have examples of Jayakrishnan and T P Chandrasekharan before us. Both of them were butchered by the executioners deployed by the party," said Thomas.

Thomas further stated that though hundreds of small and marginal farmers in the village have secretly expressed solidarity with him, they were afraid to come out in the open lest they too earn the wrath of party higher-ups.

The White Owl Festival in Nagaland on February 9,10

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Nagaland, one of the smallest States in India and a region about which most Indians remain ignorant, is hosting its first ever literary and book festival. The two-day event to be held on 9 & 10 February, is named "The White Owl Literature Festival and Book Fair" and the venue is Zone Niathu by The Park in Chümoukedima, near Dimapur.

The event is a collaborative project jointly organized by the White Owl Book Lounge, Penguin Random House India, and Cambridge University Press, said a release issued by Penguin Books.

A host of literary figures across the country would rub shoulders during the two day event and is embellished by celebrations of literature, culture, and community. "Vivek Shanbagh, Taslima Nasrin, Sarnath Banerjee, Durjoy Dutta, Viju B., Vasudha Rai, Nikhil Gulati, and Lavanya Karthik, to name a few. Representing the local voice at the festival are eminent authors such as Mmholunlo Kikon, Avinuo Kire, Shelmi Sankhil, and many more," said Chaitanya Srivastava of



Penguin Books. The White Owl Book Lounge is conceived as an epicenter of the State's reading revolution and is the brainchild of Viketunio Rio, the Festival Director. "A vision that started with the book lounge now sees fruition in the form of a grand literary event. Nagaland, along with other northeastern states of India, is a vibrant tapestry of storytelling. Literature, oral and now written, has kept us grounded in our roots and gave us the ability to collaborate with other strengths. Penguin and Cambridge University Press, as partners, will enable this one-of-a-kind event in the region to reach out to a wider audience and invite new and fresh interest in the Northeast," said Rio.

Gauresh Shrinagesh, CEO, Penguin Random House is enthused over the White Owl Literary Festival, the theme of which is Echoes of Narratives. This festival is a perfect way to pay homage to one of the richest literary hubs in our country. We are confident that this festival will attract an array of readers to provide them an opportunity to engage with authors," said Shrinagesh.

It is not books and literature that visitors would encounter here. The White Owl has a café that serves some of the best beverages and snacks in the region. The organizers have lined up an array of the most sought after Naga gastronomic delights. The White Owl is calling.

Manipur sets...

From Page 1

"Moreover, prohibition under Section 144 Cr PC is also in force in Imphal East district," it added.

The Congress has described the state government's decision to deny permission for the launch of the yatra as a 'violation of people's rights'. During a press conference at the AICC headquarters in the national capital earlier in the day, Congress general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and K C Venugopal unveiled a pamphlet and a website dedicated to the yatra. Venugopal stated that the Manipur government has declined permission to commence the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Imphal's Palace grounds.

He emphasised that the Congress is determined to start the yatra from Manipur and mentioned that the party has requested permission to initiate the march from another location in Imphal. A Congress delegation met N Biren Singh at the CM Secretariat in Imphal. The MPCC's comments came a day after the chief minister stated that granting permission for Congress' Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' was

under 'active consideration,' and a decision would be made after receiving reports from security agencies.

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' is scheduled to traverse 6,713 km in buses and on foot. It will cover 110 districts, 100 Lok Sabha seats and 337 assembly segments in 66 days. According to the proposed programme, it will culminate on March 20 in Mumbai. Rahul had earlier led a 3500 kms padyatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir under his Bharat Jodo Yatra programme from September 2022 to January 2023 which saw participation of people from different walks of life.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, party leader Rahul Gandhi and many others from different parts of the country are scheduled to visit the state for the programme. Manipur has been rocked by ethnic violence since May last year and over 180 people were killed.

The violence erupted on May 3 after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Will make India developed in...

From Page 1

All major rating agencies believe that India will be among the three largest economies in the world in the next few years," Modi said, confidently stating that it is his guarantee that the country will achieve this goal. "Today, India has assured the world that we can set common goals and achieve them. India's commitment to global welfare, its loyalty, efforts, and hard work are contributing to making today's world more secure and prosperous," he added. The prime minister emphasised that in a time when the world is surrounded by uncertainties, India has emerged as a new ray of hope. "India's priorities are clear: sustainable industry, infrastructure, and manufacturing; new-age skills; futuristic technology, including AI and innovation; green hydrogen; renewable energy; semiconductors and their entire ecosystem," he said.

"If there is significant resilience and growth momentum in India's economy amidst the current global situation, then a major reason for this is our focus on structural reforms in the last decade. These reforms have enhanced the capacity, capability, and competitiveness of India's economy," he said. India recently celebrated 75 years of independence, and in the next 25 years, it will commemorate 100 years. "These 25 years represent 'amrit kaal' for India, for which the goal of becoming a developed country has been set," he added.

At the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, billionaire Gautam Adani announced a substantial investment exceeding Rs 2 lakh crore in Gujarat, with a primary focus on establishing a green energy park visible even from outer space. The investment is expected to create 1 lakh jobs. Of the Rs 55,000 crore committed at the last summit, the Adani Group has already spent Rs 50,000 crore. Currently, the conglomerate is actively involved in developing a massive green energy park in Kutch, featuring an impressive 30 GW capacity spread across 25 square kilometers. Billionaire Mukesh Ambani announced that his company, Reliance, plans to establish India's inaugural state-of-the-art carbon fiber facility at Hazira. Tata Sons Chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran announced the company's intention to establish a new semiconductor fabrication plant later this year. The semiconductor manufacturing sector holds a pivotal position in Modi's economic agenda.

Suzuki Motor Corporation President Toshihiro Suzuki announced that Maruti Suzuki India will invest Rs 35,000 crore to set up its second manufacturing facility in Gujarat, aiming to ramp up annual production capacity to over 40 lakh units by 2030-31. Lakshmi Mittal announced that ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) is building the world's largest single-location integrated steel plant at Gujarat's Hazira. South Korean semiconductor critical parts maker

Simmtech is preparing for another colocation investment with Micron. Global computing major Nvidia on Wednesday said its partner, Yotta, is set to commission an 'artificial intelligence data center' in the GIFT City here before the end of March.

The PM credited UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan, who attended the summit as the chief guest, for the high growth of India-UAE relations. The future of 21st-century India will become bright with our collective effort. Even during the G20 presidency, India provided a roadmap for a global future and is taking forward the vision in this edition of VGGSS, he added. India is continuously strengthening its partnership with the I2U2 Group (comprising India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States) and other multilateral organisations, Modi said.

He mentioned that his government has strengthened India's banking system through recapitalisation and the use of information technology, eliminating more than 40,000 compliances through ease of doing business, GST, and global supply chain diversion. "We have signed three FTAs to make India a more attractive destination for global business. One of the FTAs is with the UAE. We have opened many sectors for FDI through automatic routes. Today, India is making a record investment in infrastructure," he said. In ten years, India's capex has grown five times, and the

country is also moving rapidly in the green energy and renewable energy sectors, with a threefold increase in green energy and a twentyfold increase in solar energy capacity."

"In 10 years, cheaper phones and data have brought about a new revolution of digital inclusion. Expansion of optical fibre to every village, and expansion of 5G is changing lives of common India. We are the world's third biggest start-up ecosystem," Modi said. Started in 2003 during Modi's tenure as the Chief Minister of the state, the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit has become a significant event. The tenth edition, themed 'Gateway to the Future,' is scheduled to take place from January 10-12, 2024, in Gandhinagar. This edition will commemorate "20 Years of Vibrant Gujarat as the Summit of Success."

He said the changes happening in India are increasing the ease of living of citizens and empowering them. "In the five years of our government, more than 13.5 crore people have come out of poverty and the average income of people has increased along with the participation of female workforce, which is a very good signal for India's future," he said, and called upon the world to join India's growth journey. The government is working to improve logistics and ease of transportation, with the number of airports grown from 74 to 149, national highway network twice, and metro train network thrice in the last ten years, he said.

Sonia, Kharge reject invite...

From Page 1

The party has directed its state units to 'assist' individuals who wish to visit the Ram temple after the consecration ceremony.

On Monday, Himachal Pradesh minister and Congress leader Vikramaditya Singh announced that he will attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The Public Works Department minister, who is the son of former Chief Minister Virbhadr Singh and state party chief Pratibha Singh, also expressed gratitude to the RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad for inviting him to participate in Ram Lalla's 'pran partishta' ceremony. Additionally, approximately 100 Congress office-bearers from Uttar Pradesh, including the party's state unit chief Ajay Rai and state in-charge Avinash Pande, are scheduled to visit Ayodhya on January 15, coinciding with Makar Sankranti. During their visit to the holy city, the Congress leaders plan to take a dip in the Saryu River, visit the Ram temple, and Hanumangarhi temple. Other senior Congress leaders such as Pramod Tiwari and P L Punia are also slated to visit Ayodhya. Congress sources revealed that around 100 Congress office bearers are expected to participate in various events planned for the consecration ceremony.

Former J and K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah refused to comment on the consecration of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya, saying he does not want to indulge in politics on the issue.

UDDHAV SENA...

From Page 1

The Shiv Sena (UBT), in petition seeking disqualification of Shinde and 15 other party MLAs, had claimed that despite a party whip, these 16 MLAs failed to attend the meeting convened by the then chief minister Uddhav Thackeray in June 2022, which amounted to anti-party activity and attracted disqualification as per the rules.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) had moved the Supreme Court

questioning the delay in giving ruling in the MLAs' disqualification case. Subsequently on May 11, 2023, a Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court had asked the Speaker to decide on the disqualification of 16 rebel Sena MLAs, including Shinde. Among other things, the apex court had said that it would not interfere in the disqualification proceedings against 16 Sena MLAs and that the Speaker must decide on the same "within a reasonable period".

Among other things, the Speaker in his order, the Speaker stressed on the importance of the Shiv Sena's constitution in determining the legitimate leadership structure on the ground that it formed the basis for internal governance. An amendment to the Shiv Sena constitution was carried out in 2018, but it was not officially recorded. Hence, the constitution from 1999, registered with the Election Commission of India, was considered valid.

Heater surge strains...

From Page 1

On Monday, the city recorded its coldest day of the month so far, with the minimum temperature dropping to 5.3 degrees Celsius. The Air Quality Index (AQI) in the city improved to the "poor" category, with a reading of 269 recorded at 9 am.

According to the seven-day forecast from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), weather conditions are expected to remain partly cloudy until January 16, with temperatures remaining in the usual range. No prevalent cold day conditions are expected in the next seven days. Due to weather conditions, 18 Delhi-bound trains were running late.

In a statement, BSES mentioned that, apart from long-term agreements with power plants, over 2000 MW of green power will play a significant role in ensuring a reliable power supply to BSES consumers during the winter months. This includes 840 MW of solar power from

SECI, 540 MW of hydro power, 500 MW of wind power, approximately 40 MW from waste-to-energy, and around 160 MW of rooftop solar power installed on rooftops in South, West, East, and Central Delhi. In fact, up to 60% of the maximum 'winter' power demand of up to 3600+ MW in the BSES area will be met with green power. Apart from these, BSES discoms are using avenues like "Banking," "Power Exchange," and ensuring sufficient "Spinning Reserves" to dispose of surplus power, as well as making arrangements to secure power during the summer months.

The IMD has issued a dense fog warning over North-Indian states amid cold weather conditions. The cold wave has intensified in the Northern region of the country over the past few days, with maximum temperatures hovering below normal limits, while night temperatures have also been settling below normal at some places.

Ayodhya secures its air as sea...

From Page 1

Sources mentioned that chartered flights have been granted landing permission but not parking clearance at Ayodhya Airport. The lone aircraft parking space will be occupied by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aircraft. The "Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, Ayodhyadham" has become the country's 68th civil airport terminal to fall under the purview of the specialized Aviation Security Group (ASG) of the central force, according to sources.

The CISF will be responsible for providing anti-terrorist and anti-sabotage coverage to the airport, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister in December 2023. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has sanctioned an armed contingent of over 150 CISF personnel under the command of a deputy commandant-rank officer for securing the Ayodhya airport.

Delhi markets gear up for consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

From lighting thousands of diyas to giving 20 to 30 per cent discount to the customers, the markets in Delhi are gearing up for the Ram temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya on January 22. The markets in the national capital are being decked up and preparations being carried out for the grand celebration.

In Khari Baoli market, some traders are planning to decorate the four gates of the market and name them as Ram Dwar, Sita Dwar, Laxman Dwar and Hanuman Dwar. While several saffron and other flags have been installed in Khan Market. Sarojini Nagar Mini Market Traders' Association president Ashok Randhawa said they are planning to light around 21,000 diyas.

"We have three temples in the market area. We will light up around 21,000 diyas in the market. We are also planning to give 20 to 30 per cent off to our costumers on January 22 and for that we will have a meeting with the shop owners. We will also distribute 'prasad' on that day. There are several shopkeepers, who are from different faiths and they will also join us in the celebration," Randhawa said.

Khan Market Traders' Association president Sanjeev Mehra said there will be a 24 hour 'sangeet kirtan' on January 21.

"The market has been decorated with different flags. A group will come from Vrindavan and they will perform a 24-hour sangeet kirtan. We have Gopal temple in the market and will organise a

Ram Lalla rath yatra on January 22. The yatra will start from the temple and it will culminate there only," said Mehra.

"We will perform 'aarti' around 12.30 pm on January 22 followed by community kitchen ('langar'). Around 1,500 diyas will be lightened inside the market premises, whereas around 2,000 candles will be decorating the footpath," he added.

Meanwhile, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Wednesday organised a significant Shri Ram Sanvad programme at the National Club in the national capital.

"During the event, it was decided that the markets of old Delhi would be filled with devotion to Lord Ram in the coming days. All trader associations in old Delhi will conduct Shri Rama Sanvad pro-



grammes in their respective markets, encouraging the traders and individuals to create a festive atmosphere reminiscent of Diwali on January 22," the CAIT said in a statement.

The trade leaders of more than 100 trade associations of the walled city participated in Shri Ram Sanvad programme on Wednesday.

Considering January 22 as a pivotal day of the century, the trade leaders resolved to launch a "Shri Ram Campaign" across various markets, including Chandni Chowk, Bhagirath Place, Chawri Bazaar, Ajmeri Gate, Daryaganj, Khari Baoli and Sadar Bazaar.

The campaign encompasses Shri Ram hymns, processions

and various events with the aim of illuminating markets with vibrant decorations and colourful lights, the statement said. Large LED displays will be installed in public places and markets on January 22, broadcasting live coverage of the events in Ayodhya, it added.

The markets will feature prominent models of Shri Rama Temple, accompanied by musical performances and recitations of the Hanuman Chalisa and Sundarkand at various locations.

Additionally, elaborate arrangements for hymn recitals and grand feasts are planned in every market, the statement said, adding that collectively, all trade associations have devised an extensive plan to transform the entire urban area into a vibrant representation of Shri Ram's abode. Similarly, some

traders in Khari Baoli market are planning to organise a community kitchen.

"We have formed a group of some traders and planning to organise a community kitchen in January 19. We will also decorate our market for three days -- January 20, 21 and 22. Diyas will also be lightened in the market. Four gates of the market will be temporarily decorated as Ram Dwar, Sita Dwar, Laxman Dwar and Hanuman Dwar," said Kapil Gupta, one of the businessmen of Khari Baoli market.

The CAIT has estimated that business worth over Rs 50,000 crore will be generated in the country following the inauguration of the Ram temple at Ayodhya in January. There is huge demand, large quantities of special cloth garlands, lockets, key chains, pictures of

Ram Darbar, models of Ram temple, Lord Ram Dhruva, Lord Ram Angvasra etc., imprinted with the picture of Lord Ram are available in all the markets of the country. Many types of accessories including decorative pendants and bangles are available in the market. Traders in all the states have made extensive preparations to meet the demand of this additional trade," said CAIT Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal adding urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare January 22 as "Ram Rajya Diwas".

The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday declared a holiday for all educational institutions in the state on January 22, the day of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Congress, AAP to discuss seat sharing for LS polls on Friday, says Lovely

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely on Wednesday said the key discussions on seat-sharing between his party and the AAP to fight the Lok Sabha elections together from Delhi will take place in the next meeting likely to be held on January 12.

Lovely said that no discussion on seat-sharing took place in the first meeting held on January 8 and added it was the first time that the Delhi Congress and the AAP came together for a discussion.

"No discussion on seat-sharing has taken place yet. Media reports stating the AAP offered three seats to the Congress is incorrect. The meeting held on December 8 was the first time we came together for a discus-



sion and various strategies to fight the elections were discussed," Lovely said "Seat-sharing will most likely be discussed in the next meeting," he added.

Speaking about the media reports of AAP offering three seats to Congress, Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said the speculation is "nowhere near truth".

Bharadwaj, who was also present at the alliance meeting on January 8 at Congress leader Mukul Wasnik's residence, said, "All speculation appearing in the media are nowhere near truth. Our discussions are going in a very positive manner and efforts are on to make the alliance strong."

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) maintained its stand on contesting in an alliance with the Congress in five states, including Punjab, and the discussion has so far been positive, party's Delhi convener Gopal Rai said on Tuesday.

"Alliance talks have begun between the two parties. We kept our stand on contesting in an alliance in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Goa and Gujarat. Till now, there has been positive discussions," Rai said on

the sidelines of a press conference. While talks for Delhi's seven Lok Sabha seat started, it was not clear whether there will be any collaboration in other states too. 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.

The opposition parties of the INDIA bloc have decided to get together and contest the upcoming general elections together to take on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) unitedly.

Delhi Police to have first all women contingent for Republic Day parade

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, the Delhi Police are set to have an all-women contingent marching down the Kartavya Path as part of the Republic Day parade this year. In this contingent, all the participants will be women police officers of the city force, most hailing from Northeast states. To provide a fillip to gender equality and women empowerment, the marching contingent of the Delhi Police will comprise only women personnel, Delhi police said, adding that 80 per cent of the participants from the force in the 75th Republic Day parade this year are from the northeastern states.

According to the city police, it follows a policy of recruiting people from the eight states in the northeast to "bridge the



gap" between the force and the people from that region. Shweta K Sugathan, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, will lead the marching contingent of 194 female head constables and constables of the force, an officer said.

The participants practise daily at the Kartavya Path, he added. According to Special Commissioner of Police

in the Delhi Police. Hibu said the Delhi Police has added another feather in its cap this year as the women's pipe band will be led by a female officer -- constable Ruyanguuo Kense.

The band comprising 135 head constables and constables will play the "Delhi Police Song", he added. Last year, a female-dedicated pipe band was inducted in the parade, but it was led by a male inspector, Rajender Singh.

Another officer said the all-women marching contingent will "definitely be the centre of attraction" during the parade. The defence ministry had last year asked all the forces, state governments and departments participating in the Republic Day parade to have women participants in their contingents, bands and tableaux.

Sanitation workers protest outside MCD HQ for regularisation, arrears

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Sanitation workers on Wednesday staged a demonstration outside the headquarters of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) here demanding regularisation and payment of pending arrears. Nearly 500 sanitation workers gathered at the gate of the civic centre to register their protest under the banner of the MCD All Unions Core Committee.

Some sanitation workers also removed their shirts amid the biting cold to register their protest against the administration. Amid police barricading, the sanitation workers also tried to halt traffic on the road.

The protesters, including many persons with disabilities and elderly persons, sat on the road causing traffic jam near the MCD headquarters on Minto Road.

Delhi Congress and their leaders supported the protests and participated in their agitation. Delhi Congress president



Arvinder Singh Lovely held the Delhi government and Centre responsible for non payment of pending arrears and demanded regularisation of sanitation workers. Lovely, addressing the demonstrators, said that when Congress was in power, it ensured that the demands of the MCD workers were met without any protest or financial crunch, as both the MCD and the Delhi Government worked in close co-ordination with each other so that the works of the MCD were not adversely affected. He demanded the regularization of services of all contract workers engaged from March

1, 1996 to 1998 and from March 1, 1998 to 2000. He said that according to the recommendations of 7th Pay Commission, the arrears of MAPC, DA and Bonus should be paid to the MCD workers forthwith, and the pension amount also hiked without any further delay.

Terming the AAP government as anti dalit, senior Congress leader Jai Kishan said sanitation workers have not got anything during the AAP regime in the last eight years. Why does the AAP government not regularise the sanitation workers despite being in power for the last eight years.

Amid biting cold, MCD school students await funds for uniforms

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the biting cold in Delhi, the students in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) schools are still waiting for their winter uniforms as an amount of Rs 1,100 per child for the purpose is yet to be disbursed by the corporation, several principals and teachers claimed.

The calls and texts to MCD Mayor Shelly Oberoi and Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti seeking a response over the allegations went unanswered.

According to the data presented by the commissioner in the budget session, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has a total of 1,536 schools across its 12 zones which includes 44 aided schools and 666 recognised schools. Over seven lakh students are enrolled in the MCD schools, it said.

The corporation had in October last year passed a proposal to provide Rs 1,100 per child for school uniform of the students in all its schools. A



total fund of Rs 56.63 crore annually has to be set aside for this project as per data.

The commissioner had in December last year said that the civic body has allocated the funding for the uniform for the year 2023-24 and the amount is expected to be disbursed to the bank accounts of the students soon. "A total of Rs 56.63 crore has been allocated to all 12 regions at the rate of Rs 1,100 per student for purchasing uniforms for the session 2023-24," said Bharti while presenting the budget.

"A proposal to deposit an amount of Rs 120 for purchasing note book and stationery items for each student and an amount of Rs 300 for purchasing school bag in their bank

account is under process, which will be completed and released soon," he added.

According to the MCD school officials, the students are still waiting for this amount to be credited to their accounts and they are studying without notebooks and bags while the session is about to end and they have exams in February.

"The students have not received the amount for school uniform as of now. They are supposed to get Rs 1,100 per child for the uniform which has not been disbursed," said an MCD school official on condition of anonymity.

"The MCD has not released funds for purchase of bags and stationery for the students," added an official of another MCD school.

As per the passed MCD proposal, the students in all civic schools will get Rs 1,100 to purchase uniform which includes shoes, sweater and socks along with Rs 300 for bag and Rs 120 for stationary items such as notebooks, pencil and other items.

Sachdeva draws LG attention to RTI report on CM house renovation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Wednesday drew the attention of Lt Governor VK Saxena towards an RTI report widely in circulation in media and social media since Tuesday and whose authenticity has not been denied by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's government till now.

The RTI says Rs 29.56 crores were paid to four contractors for maintenance works in Chief Minister's residence by the Public Works Department (PWD) of Delhi government.

Letter says that by Government's silence one thing stands confirmed that the RTI apart from figures of amounts and names of contractors mentioned therein are true, Sachdeva claimed.

Delhi BJP President has said

the RTI issued recently on 29 December 2023 tells that between 31 March 2015 to 27 December 2022 an amount of Rs. 29.56 crores has been paid to 4 contractors for maintenance works in Chief Minister residence by the Public Works Department of Delhi Government.

Sachdeva said though we are not experts in the matter but it is surprising to note that none of the contractors named in the RTI are a well-established name and the amounts given to them for civil, plumbing, electrical and sewerage maintenance work by Public Works Department is exorbitant and it seems that these figures for maintenance work are a bit too high.

As per the RTI one A.K. Builders has been paid over Rs. 29.08 crores while one Munzaren Ahmed has been paid over Rs. 29.86 lacs.

Police issue LOC, reward of ₹50,000 each on two absconding accused in Divya murder case

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram police on Wednesday issued a Look out circular (LOC) and rewards of Rs 50 thousand each against the absconding accused Balraj Gill and Ravi Banga in the Divya Pahuja murder case.

Police in a statement said "During the investigation police team, found that Balraj Singh Gill, a resident of Sector-5, Panchkula, and Ravi Banga, a resident of Gurudwara Road Model Town, Hisar were involved in the murder of Divya Pahuja. All possible efforts are being made by 6 teams of the Crime Branch of Gurugram Police for their arrest.

The statement further said various teams of the Gurugram police are raiding multiple locations to arrest the above two wanted accused. Gurugram Police has announced a reward of Rs 50,000 each on behalf of Haryana Police to anyone giving information about the



above two wanted persons. The name and identity of the person giving information will be kept completely secret. "The wanted criminals are

making every effort to evade arrest and they can also flee abroad to escape, hence Gurugram Police has opened Look out circular (LOC) for both the wanted people so that both the accused do not leave the country," the statement said.

Divya Pahuja, a former model and girlfriend of slain gangster Sandeep Gadoli, was allegedly killed by the owner of City Point Hotel Abhijeet Singh on January 2.

The police have so far arrested four persons including the prime accused, Abhijeet Singh, Om Prakash, Hemraj, and a woman Megha.

The woman had helped Abhijeet in hiding, throwing away the murder weapon, documents, and personal belongings of Divya Pahuja, 27, who was murdered by Abhijeet.

Om Prakash and Hemraj had helped Abhijeet to drag Divya's body into the boot of a BMW car. Later Balraj and Ravi fled with the body and were still on the run.

According to Abhijeet, who allegedly shot Divya in the head, had called Megha to Hotel City Point after the murder and asked her to dispose of the belongings of the deceased woman. Megha told the police that when she reached the hotel, she saw Divya's body.

Abhijeet asked her to dispose of the belongings of the deceased woman, but she was too scared to follow his instructions, sources said.

According to sources, Megha was working with an online food delivery company. Police said that Divya's body might have been thrown into a water body near Patiala. Searches are being made in the area by special teams, accompanied by divers.

Divya was shot dead in Gurugram's Hotel City Point on January 2.

The police have recovered the car which was used to take the body to Patiala, but have not recovered the body yet.

According to police, Abhijeet and Divya were in a relationship.

He told the police that he shot at her in a fit of rage after she refused to delete some of his objectionable pictures.

During questioning, he said that Divya used to blackmail him and also extorted money. Divya came in contact with Abhijeet through a jailed gangster, Binder Gujjar.

Gujjar had asked Abhijeet to assist with his children's education and during that phase, Abhijeet came in contact with Divya. Binder Gujjar is said to be the prime conspirator in the alleged "fake encounter" of gangster Sandeep Gadoli, along with the Gurugram Police, which took place in Mumbai in 2016.

Divya was the prime accused in the case. Later, she was arrested in connection with the gangster's murder, and she spent seven years in jail.

She was granted bail last year in June by the Bombay High Court.

Divya's family has alleged that her murder was conspired by Sandeep Gadoli's family members, along with Abhijeet.

3,000 tulips to greet MPs in newly built Parliament House

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

After Rashtrapati Bhawan, blooming tulips will welcome the parliamentarians and visitors during the forthcoming Budget Session as 3,000 bulbs have been planted in the newly constructed Parliament House. According to Raj Niwas officials, Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena requested Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla during a conversation that tulips be planted at the new Parliament Building.

The officials said the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) made 3,000 bulbs available to the Parliament Secretariat. An official said the tulips are expected to be in bloom when the Parliament convenes for the upcoming Budget Session.

"The MPs and visitors alike will be welcomed by Tulips for the first time ever," he added. The NDMC had procured a record three lakh bulbs this year -- double the amount last year.

While two lakh bulbs will be



adorning various sites in the NDMC area, the remaining one lakh tulip bulbs will be used by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to adorn its various parks across the city apart from Baansera and Asita. The official said that 500 tulip bulbs have also been planted in the Raj Niwas Campus for the first time.

Tulip flowers in yellow, white, orange, purple, blue, pink and red colour shades and other varieties of seasonal flowers like Petunia, Salvia, Cineraria, Antirrhinum, Poppy, Verbena, Dianthus,

Hollyhock, Nasturtium, Coreopsis, Pansy and Lianum etc. Will be planted soon at prominent locations for full public view. While tulips will be planted in 65 locations, other winter flowers would adorn the capital at 91 locations, the officials said.

Tulips would be planted in prominent places, including the diplomatic area of Shanti Path, Talkatora Garden, Windsor Place, Central Park (Connaught Place), Mandi House, Akbar Road, Chanakyapuri, Lodhi Garden and Nehru Park and RML round.

Rajnath meets top Defence industry leaders, CEOs in UK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the second and final day of his visit to the United Kingdom, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday interacted with top UK Defence industry leaders and CEOs at an event in Trinity House, London, Defence Ministry officials said here. The UK-India Defence Industry CEOs Roundtable, co-chaired by Rajnath with his UK counterpart Grant Shapps was attended by a large number of CEOs from UK defence industry; UK MoD officials; Chair, UK India Business Council; and CII India representatives. Some of the major companies represented were BAE Systems, GE Vernova, James Fisher Defence, Leonardo S.p.A., Martin Baker Aircraft Company Ltd, SAAB UK, Thales UK, Ultra-Maritime Rolls-Royce, ADS Group, and MBDA UK. The meeting was also attended by UK Minister of State for Defence Procurement James Cartledge. The Roundtable included thematic discussions on strengthening the India-UK defence industrial relationship. Rajnath welcomed the investment and technology collaboration from the UK, and stated that India is ready with skilled human resource base, a robust pro-FDI and pro-busi-



ness ecosystem, and a huge domestic market. He asserted that under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is surging ahead on the path of becoming a developed economy by 2047. The ambition is backed by a clear headed roadmap to chart the course, and is backed by the collective will-power of 1.4 billion Indians to stay the course. Highlighting the importance of the India-UK ties, Rajnath said there is a symbiotic relationship between the two countries and the Government of India envisions an enriching partnership with UK to cooperate, co-create and co-innovate. "By synergising the strengths of our nations, we can do great things together," he said. Shapps agreed with the statement of Rajnath regarding the

symbiotic relationship between India and UK. Shapps further stated that the ties transcending the normal buyer-seller relationship and is fundamentally a strategic partnership. The industry leaders from UK outlined their current and future plans for India. Aero-engines, Electric Propulsion, missiles, power-packs, and maritime systems were identified as some of the focus areas of joint work. Rajnath noted the positivity and enthusiasm of UK CEOs and business leaders on working in India and with the Indian companies. On January nine, Rajnath held a bilateral meeting with Shapps. Emphasis was on enhancing defence industrial cooperation between the two countries. The bilateral 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. Rajnath also paid floral tributes to Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi at his statue at Tavistock Square. He also visited the Ambedkar House in London and paid tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar. The Ambedkar House was the home of Dr. BR Ambedkar, who lived there between 1921 and 1922 while he was pursuing a degree in Economics at London School of Economics, and a degree in Law at Gray's Inn. Rajnath, while paying tributes to Dr Ambedkar, noted in the Visitor's Book message that it is a great experience to visit the memorial of the creator of venerable Constitution of India, the guiding light of our Republic. Rajnath also visited the Sri Swaminarayan temple at Neasden and paid his respects. He is scheduled to meet UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and the UK Foreign Secretary (Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs) David Cameron later in the day.

One Nation, One Election panel gets 5,000 suggestions



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The panel on 'One Nation, One Election' led by former president Ram Nath Kovind has received over 5,000 suggestions from the public on simultaneous polls, sources said on Wednesday. Last week, the high-level committee had invited suggestions from the public "for making appropriate changes in the existing legal administrative framework to enable simultaneous elections in the country". The sources said over 5,000 emails have been received so far. In a public notice, the high-level committee had said the suggestions received by January 15 would be taken up for consideration. The committee has so far held two meetings since it was constituted in September last year. It had also recently written to political parties seeking their views and an interaction on a "mutually agreed date" on the idea of holding simultaneous polls. It had later sent a

reminder to the parties. Letters were sent to six national parties, 33 state parties and seven registered unrecognised parties. The committee has also heard the views of the Law Commission on simultaneous polls. The law panel could be called again on the issue. According to its terms of reference, the committee is meant to "examine and make recommendations for holding simultaneous elections to the House of the People (Lok Sabha), State Legislative Assemblies, municipalities and panchayats, keeping in view the existing framework under the Constitution and other statutory provisions, and for that purpose, examine and recommend specific amendments to the Constitution, the Representation of the People Act, 1950, the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and the rules made thereunder and any other law or rules which would require amendments for the purpose of holding simultaneous elections".

NIA arrests main accused in Kerala professor palm chopping case of 2010

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday arrested the main accused in the Kerala professor palm-chopping case of 2010, officials said. Savad, a PFI sympathizer who was on the run for the last 13 years and carried a reward of Rs 10 lakh, was arrested from Mattannur in Kerala's Kannur, the agency said in a statement. The accused had cut off the palm of Joseph for allegedly ridiculing Prophet Mohammed in a Malayalam question paper prepared for the internal examination of B. Com students at Newman College, Thodupuzha in Idukki district. "Savad was identified as the main accused in the infamous 2010 case of attempted murder of Professor T J Joseph by chopping off his palm. He was charge-sheeted on 10th January 2011 in the case, one of the earliest such incidents in India reflecting the ideology of violent extremism being pursued by the Popular Front of India (PFI)," NIA spokesperson said. Nineteen accused have so far been convicted for various offences under IPC and UA(P) Act in the case. Of them, three have been convicted for life and 10 others sent to eight years Rigorous Imprisonment (RI) and fine. "All the accused in the case were

either leaders or activists/cadres of the now banned PFI and Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), and were actively involved in the criminal conspiracy relating to the lethal attack on Professor T J Joseph at Muvattupuzha," the spokesperson said. The accused had carried out the barbaric daylight attack on the professor in the presence of his family members on July 4, 2010 when he was returning from the church after Sunday morning mass and hurled a bomb to spread terror among the public before escaping from the scene, the spokesperson said. "The attack had exposed the PFI's nefarious and violent intent and designs to terrorise people and society by targeting the critics of Islam and prominent persons of other religions, and to enforce the decisions of 'Dar-ul-Khada', their pseudo Taliban-styled court," she said. Initially state police registered the FIR at Muvattupuzha police station in Ernakulam district which was later transferred to NIA. "The NIA has been consistently tightening the noose around the PFI across India. Several cases registered by the agency against PFI have revealed a conspiracy to overthrow India's elected government and establish an Islamic State in the country by 2047," the spokesperson said.

Capacity building programme for 38 J&K administrative officers held



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Centre for Good Governance, an apex-level autonomous central government institution, commenced a capacity-building programme for 38 officers of the Jammu and Kashmir Administrative Service working under various capacities, an official statement said on Wednesday. The inaugural session was chaired by V Srinivas, Director General of NCGG and Secretary of the Department of Reform and Public Grievance (DARPG). In his address, Srinivas said the capacity-building pro-

grammes are being undertaken at NCGG, Mussoorie under the Memorandum of Understanding between NCGG and the Jammu and Kashmir government. To date, 318 officers have attended the programmes at NCGG, he added. The digital transformation journey witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir had made significant progress with 1,080 e-services being made available, Srinivas said. "Our training initiative aligns with the evolving governance landscape, focusing on technological advancements that empower citizens, ensure accountability, and bring transparency to daily opera-

tions," he said. Srinivas further discussed the NCGG's efforts in training officers nationally and internationally, emphasising the role of technology in governance and the importance of staying updated for effective governance. The NCGG, established in 2014 by the central government, has the mandate to train civil servants from India and other countries. The statement said that over the years, the centre has successfully trained officers from Bangladesh, Kenya, Tanzania, Tunisia, Gambia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Laos, Vietnam, Bhutan, and Myanmar.

Kharge in touch with all INDIA bloc leaders on seat sharing to ensure coordination: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After initiating seat-sharing talks with various Opposition parties, the Congress on Wednesday said its president Mallikarjun Kharge is in touch with leaders of all INDIA bloc constituents to ensure closer coordination in the Opposition alliance. The assertion comes amid talk that the alliance could have a convener, with the name of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar doing the rounds for the post. There have also been demands for having an office and a spokesperson of the opposition alliance, where 28 parties have come together to take on the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. "The Congress President is in touch with leaders of all parties of the INDIA bloc on how best to give structure to ensure closer coordination in alliance," AICC chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said. He said the Congress president has also talked to all leaders, including Nitish Kumar, and decisions on



key issues within the alliance will be taken soon. Ramesh also said that discussions have started with all political parties, with some being in an advanced stage and some still in the initial phase. "Talks on seat-sharing with TMC in West Bengal and with JD(U) in Bihar are expected to take place in a day or two," he said. Congress has held preliminary talks for seat-sharing in the

upcoming Lok Sabha elections with the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Nationalist Congress Party for Maharashtra and with the Samajwadi Party for Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday. It has also discussed with Bihar alliance partners as well as AAP for Delhi and Punjab. Sources said that seat-sharing talks will again be held among top leaders of the three parties including Sharad Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray, who are

likely to meet Sonia Gandhi around January 14 and 15. Talks were also held separately between Congress and Samajwadi Party leaders for Uttar Pradesh, where Ram Gopal Yadav and Javed Ali were present and the next round of dialogue with AAP and the SP would be held on January 12. The seat-sharing talks were held at the residence of Congress leader Mukul

Wasnik, who is also the convener of the Seat Sharing Committee set up for the purpose by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge. Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot and Salman Khurshid were also present during the deliberations. National Conference vice president Omar Abdullah and one of the constituent of the great opposition coalition, said INDIA bloc partners should speed up their seat-sharing talks for the Lok Sabha elections in states such as Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and Punjab where their prospects are better. "We are a part of the INDIA alliance. We have a total of six seats including Ladakh and I do not think it will take us more than 15 minutes to take a decision on that. I want that wherever we have hopes of winning seats like in UP, WB, Maharashtra, Bihar, Punjab, Delhi, TN, and Kerala, we should speed up the process of seat-sharing discussions," he said.

SC orders constitution of committee in all HCs for implementation of judicial pay commission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that there is a need to maintain uniformity in service conditions of judicial officers across the country, the Supreme Court has directed the constitution of a two-judge committee in each high court for overseeing the implementation of the orders on pay, pension and other retirement benefits for judicial officers as per the Second National Judicial Pay Commission. A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud said Judicial independence, which is necessary to preserve the faith and confidence of common citizens in the rule of law, can be ensured and enhanced only so long as judges are able to lead their life with a sense of financial dignity. "The conditions of service while a judge is in service must ensure a dignified existence. The post-retirement conditions of service have a crucial bearing on the dignity and independence of the office of a judge and how it is perceived by society. If the service of the judiciary is to be a viable career option so as to attract talent, conditions of service, both for working and retired officers, must offer security and dignity," the bench, also comprising Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra, said.



The top court said it is a matter of grave concern that though officers in other services have availed of a revision of their conditions of service as far back as January 1, 2016, similar issues pertaining to judicial officers are still awaiting a final decision eight years thereafter. It said judges have retired from service and the family pensioners of those who have passed away are awaiting resolution as well. The SNJPC recommendations cover pay structure, pension and family pension and allowances, besides dealing with the issue of establishing a permanent mechanism to determine subjects of service conditions of the district judiciary. The apex court said it was of the considered view that a framework has to be set up under the auspices of every high court for institutionalising the implementation of the orders of this Court with

respect to the service conditions of the district judiciary and for implementing the recommendations of the SNJPC. "We hereby direct the constitution of a committee in each high court for overseeing implementation of the recommendations of the SNJPC as approved by this Court. The Committee shall be called the 'Committee for Service Conditions of the District Judiciary' (CSCDJ)," the bench said in an order dated January 4 which was uploaded Wednesday. The top court said the committee shall consist of two judges of the high court to be nominated by the Chief Justice of which one should be a judge who has previously served as a member of the district judiciary and Law Secretary/Legal Remembrancer. "The Registrar General of the high court who shall serve as an ex officio Secretary of the Committee; and a retired judicial officer in the cadre of dis-

trict judge to be nominated by the Chief Justice who shall act as a nodal officer for the day-to-day redressal of grievances. "The senior most judge nominated by the Chief Justice shall be the Chairperson of the Committee. The Chairperson may co-opt officers of the State Government, including secretaries in the Departments of Home, Finance, Health, Personnel and Public Works, when issues concerning these departments are being deliberated upon and implemented," the bench said. The top court said the Chairperson of the Committee may at their discretion co-opt Accountant General to ensure due implementation of the recommendations of SNJPC. The Committee would be at liberty to consult with the representatives of the Judges' Association or, as the case may be, the Retired Judges' Association in the State, it said. "The principal functions of CSCDJ shall be to oversee the proper implementation of the recommendations of the SNJPC, including pay, pension, allowances and all allied matters as approved by this Court by its orders. The court said the functions of the CSCDJ would also include developing an institutional mechanism for recording and archiving institutional concerns pertaining to pay, pension and service conditions of

the district judiciary. "It shall ensure that hospitals of a requisite standard with necessary facilities are empanelled for every district in consultation with the Secretary in the Health Department of the State Government," the bench said. The committee will prescribe benchmarks for empanelment, it said, adding where medical care of the requisite standard for specified ailments is not available in the district concerned, treatment in respect of those ailments may be availed of elsewhere in an empanelled hospital. "The Committee would be at liberty to take incidental measures covering situations where officers who have served in the State are residing outside the State. In such a case, the Committee may consider empanelment of hospitals outside the State so as to facilitate the availing of medical facilities," the bench said. The top court said disbursements on account of arrears of salary, pension and allowances due and payable to judicial officers, retired judicial officers and family pensioners shall be computed and paid on or before February 29, 2024. "Each Committee working under the auspices of the High Court shall submit its report to this Court on or before April 7, 2024, through the Registrar General of the high court," the bench said.

BEL auditorium 'Abhigyaan' inaugurated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Wednesday inaugurated 'Abhigyaan', the state of the art auditorium at the Central Research Laboratory (CRL) of Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), a Defence Public Service Unit (DPSU) in Ghaziabad, UP. He termed the Abhigyaan auditorium as an asset to the scientific community. Interacting with the scientists and engineers of BEL, the Defence Secretary lauded their efforts towards bolstering National Security while carrying forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat. He urged them to have more collaborations with the domestic start-ups and incubators with the aim to provide state-of-the-art technologies/products to the armed forces. He emphasized that more initiatives should come from the scientists and engineers of BEL. The Defence Secretary added that as efforts are being made towards jointness of the three Services, BEL can play an important role in ensuring that the equipment/systems



are provided to the Armed Forces and Indian Coast Guard in an integrated manner. Abhigyaan auditorium consists of excellent acoustics, smart interfaces, a large interactive data wall and three cameras with extensive features for live feed. There are also two high resolution displays for simultaneous presentation and demonstration. The auditorium has a seating capacity for 250 people and will be used for product demos, symposiums, hackathons, tech talks and lectures. Chairman and Managing Director, BEL, Bhanu Prakash Srivastava and other senior officials were also present on the occasion.

AFMS signs MoU with AIIMS for collaboration

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) under the Ministry of Defence and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with objectives of collaboration in areas of mutual interest, combined research and academic activities addressing multidisciplinary scientific and technological issues. DGFMS Lt General Daljit Singh and Director, AIIMS Professor M Srinivas signed the MoU to explore possibilities of joint research projects, common educational activities, and a faculty exchange program. The faculties of these two organizations would explore facilities available with both institutions, especially in investigations, research, and patient care services. The faculty exchange program will smoothen faculty movement from one institution to another for research and training purposes. A collaboration board of five members from both institutions has been formed, which will have monthly meetings to explore possible collaborations.

Goa murder: Toddler was strangled, says doctor

PTI ■ CHITRADURGA (KARNATAKA)

The boy was smothered to death, said a senior doctor here on Tuesday citing the postmortem report of the four-year-old who was allegedly killed by his mother at a service apartment in Goa.

Suchana Seth, the chief executive officer (CEO) of an artificial intelligence start-up,

was apprehended in Chitradurga in Karnataka on Monday night while she was on her way from Goa to Bengaluru, and the boy's body was found in a suitcase. She was arrested on the directions of the Goa Police.

"He (the child) was strangled to death or what we call smothering. Either a cloth or a pillow was used. The child died due to strangulation. It doesn't look like the child was strangled using hands. It looks like a pillow or some other material was used. The Rigor mortis had resolved in the child," Hiriyyur Taluk Hospital's administrative officer Dr Kumar Naik told reporters.

"Usually in India, rigor mortis resolves after 36 hours but in this child's case, there was no Rigor mortis. So, it has been



more than 36 hours since his death," he said. Naik said there was no blood loss or struggle marks on the body.

"We cannot say the exact time but it has been 36 hours since his death," Naik said.

Seth is the CEO of 'The Mindful AI Lab', and according to her LinkedIn profile, she is an AI ethics expert and data scientist with over 12 years of experience in

mentoring data science teams, and scaling machine learning solutions at startups and industry research labs.

"She is on the 100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics List. She has been a Mozilla Fellow at Data & Society, a Fellow at the Berkman Klein Centre at Harvard University, and a research fellow at the Raman Research Institute. She also holds patents in natural

language processing," the profile read. Seth is an expert in 'AI Ethics Advisory & Audits' and 'Responsible AI Strategy'.

A postgraduate from the University of Calcutta, and a research fellow from Raman Research Institute (RRI) and spent two years at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University.

Maha yagya from Jan 14 to welcome Ram in Ayodhya

PTI ■ AYODHYA (UP)

A grand yagya will be held here from January 14-25 to mark the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple, event organisers said on Wednesday. 'Raam naam maha yagya' will be held in Ayodhya in which 1008 shivalingas will be established.

The first phase of the temple is nearing completion and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take part in the consecration ceremony at the temple on January 22.

A tent city has been set up on 100 acres on the ghat of Saryu River, 2 km away from the Ram temple, they said.

The yagya will be led and organised by Atmanand Das Mahatyagi also known as 'Nepali Baba', they said, adding that 21,000 seers from Nepal will participate in the event.

Nepali Baba said that arrangements are being made to accommodate 50 thousand devotees every day and a feast will be organised that will feed about 1 lakh devotees every day.

After the maha yagya, the



1008 shivalingas will be immersed in the Saryu River. The celebrations will begin with the head shaving of the hosts on January 14 while the havan will start from January 17 with the chanting of 24,000 verses of Ramayana, which will continue till January 25.

Nepali Baba said, "We are not originally from Nepal, we are residents of Ayodhya. I was born in the temple town (and shifted to Nepal). The king of Nepal named me as Nepali Baba..."

For the carving of shivalingas, stones have been brought from Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh.

Navy deploying fleet to keep pirates at bay: Chief

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The Indian Navy is proactively deploying its fleet to keep the pirates away and confine them in their waters, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Hari Kumar said on Wednesday.

After unveiling the indigenously manufactured Drishti 10 Starliner Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) by Adani Defence and Aerospace for the Navy, Hari Kumar said there have been about 35 drone attacks on ships largely on Israel-owned or flagged or related vessels in the Red Sea, North and Central Arabian Sea during the last 40-42 days.

Without taking names, he said the immediate neighbours of India collectively hold a very large inventory of UAVs and therefore, it's only prudent that the country and its armed forces continue to harness resident expertise in the domain.

"Recently we have had only two incidents (attempts of pirates to hijack ships). Both were not Indian flagged vessels, but in the second case we had Indian crew so we had to respond. So we boarded and



rescued the crew...So we are now very proactively deploying our units there to ensure that these pirates keep away," he told reporters.

The Indian Navy on Friday thwarted the attempted hijacking of Liberian-flagged vessel MV Lila Norfolk in the North Arabian Sea and rescued all its crew members including 15 Indians.

The Chief of Naval Staff further said the anti-piracy operations have been going on since 2008 and the Navy has deployed over 105 ships over the period.

Hari Kumar, replying to a query on drone attacks on

is being witnessed in the ongoing conflicts in Europe and West Asia, he said.

Further, the "recent incidents" (an apparent reference to the hijack attempts) in the North and the Central regions of the Arabian Sea amply demonstrates the challenges posed by such systems when they fall in the hands of non-state actors and terrorists, he said.

Today, autonomous systems are becoming a preferred choice in the order of battle for nations across the globe, he said.

While the Indian Navy has been operating UAVs over the last two decades, the delivery of 'Drishti' symbolises the Navy's vision to be a 'atmanirbar' force, he added.

With state-of-the-art sensors, advanced endurance, enhanced communication capabilities as well as new age technologies, Drishti could be a potent force multiplier, adding capability in undertaking intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance operations across the Indian Ocean region, he said.

Local polls in JK unlikely before LS polls: Official

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Panchayat and municipal elections in Jammu and Kashmir are "extremely unlikely" to take place before the upcoming Lok Sabha polls as the Centre is yet to amend the law for extending reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in local bodies, a senior official said.

Although the Administrative Council headed by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has taken a decision for extending the benefit of reservation to OBCs in panchayats and municipal bodies, the Centre will have to either pass an ordinance or bring a bill in Parliament for it.

"It is extremely unlikely that the panchayat polls will be held before the Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir. Besides amending the act, the quantum of reservation has also to be decided," State Election Commissioner B R Sharma told PTI.

Lok Sabha elections are due in April-May. Sharma said the commission was performing its statutory



duty of revising and updating the electoral rolls in the Union territory.

According to officials, besides the issues related to OBC reservation, the commission will have to wait till the wards to be reserved are identified. The other major task likely to be carried out before holding the panchayat and municipal polls will be delimitation of the wards to address the skewed distribution of electors.

The housing and urban development department is actively pursuing a communication from the office of the chief electoral officer, which, among other things, suggested transfer of mandate to conduct the municipal electoral processes to the State Election Commission (SEC) in accordance with constitutional provisions.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE

WORKS DEPARTMENT

B-1587 E-mail: ceworldbankprojects@gmail.com

Bid Identification No. CE-W.B.P. (O) - 46 / 2023-24

1. The Chief Engineer (World Bank Project), Odisha on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for construction of Road & Bridge work as detailed below :

2. Nature of work : Bridge works

3. No. of work : 02 nos.

4. Tender cost : Rs.10,00,000 (on-line)

5. Class of Contractor : A/ Special Class Contractor

6. Available of bid document : From 10:00 AM of 10.01.2024 to 5:00 PM of 24.01.2024 in the website

7. Date of opening of Bid : Dt.25.01.2024 at 11.30 AM

8. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website : <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Chief Engineer
OIPP-340021100832324 World Bank Project, Odisha

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

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.	Vikas Saxena/ Anu Saxena/ LBDEL00001978459	Flat No. A 2105, 21st Floor Avj Heights Situated at Plot No. Gh-12/2, Sector Zeta 1 Greater Noida/ January 07, 2024	August 28, 2023 Rs. 27,27,890/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Amit Sharma/ Laxmi Sharma/ LBGUR0003503031	Flat No. 704, 6th Floor, Tower S, Supertech Eco Citi, Gh-03, Sector 137, Noida/ January 07, 2024	September 26, 2023 Rs. 38,62,154/-	Delhi/ NCR
3.	Surinder Kumar Rastogi/ Santosh Rastogi/ Rahul Rastogi/ LBNOD00002375713	Flat No. Sat 4- 912, 9th Floor Block 4, Blossom Zest Situated at Gh-02, Sector 143 Noida/ January 07, 2024	September 27, 2023 Rs. 16,82,784/-	Delhi/ NCR

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 11, 2024 Place: Delhi/ NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that I Arun Nath S/o late Mr. Gopeshwar Nath am filing application in L&DO for substitution of the property no. A-219, Shivalki, New Delhi-110017 in the name of Arun Nath, on the grounds of Court Will Probate. If there are any objections / claims from the general public on this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi or through an email at ldo@nic.in, within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Name : Arun Nath Address : A-219, Shivalki, New Delhi-110017 Phone : 981155273

PUBLIC NOTICE

DYUMN AGRO LLP

Address- W 2, Basement, Green Park Main, South Delhi, Delhi, India, 110016

A notice is hereby given that, Above said LLP is changing its Registered Office from Delhi to Haryana Sh. No. 11, Edmonton Mall, Sec-28, Gurugram, Haryana - 122002.

"Any Person Whose Right or Interest is affected can intimate with in 21 Days of this notice. Contact: 85880 86172

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HDB Financial Services Limited Ground Floor, Zenith House, Keshavnagar Khadye Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai - 400034 Tel No. : +91 22 49116300

FINAL AUCTION CUM SALE NOTICE FOR GOLD ORNAMENTS

The borrower(s) (whose details are provided in the table herein below), in particular, and the public, in general, are hereby informed that the below mentioned accounts are overdue, and the borrowers/account holders have not responded/complied with the communication, and notice sent by HDB Financial Services Limited (the "Company") requesting the borrower to clear his/her their dues as per the documents in respect of the below mentioned loan signed/ accepted by the borrower(s) (such documents, collectively "loan agreement") and therefore defaulted in terms thereof. The Company has in exercise of its rights as a pledgee, decided to enforce the pledge and therefore hold a public auction of the gold ornaments pledged to the company as security for the loan for the purpose of selling the same and realizing/recovering the dues owed by the borrower(s) to the company. The auction will be conducted on 18-01-2024 at the below mentioned local branch of HDB Financial Services Limited from 11.00 am onwards on the date and branches mentioned in the table below:-

Loan No.	Customer Name	Date of Loan	Overdue Amount ₹	Branch Name
13613456	Ram Das Yadav	19/12/2020	12071	Delhi NCR-Burari
34500517	Kailash Yadav	17/05/2023	13189	Delhi NCR-Burari
37047472	Ravi Kumar	21/07/2023	6990	Delhi NCR-Burari
38097290	Sheelendra Singh	18/08/2023	9599	Delhi NCR-Burari
34465398	Surya Narayan Thakur	16/05/2023	11852	Delhi-Badarpur
19526111	Mehboob Ali	16/11/2021	20553	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
24429961	Shuaib Naim	26/05/2022	21295	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
33765712	Rohit So Ram	25/04/2023	30484	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
33921436	Sachin S Chhannu	29/04/2023	44004	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
32960856	Shahrulkh So Mujammil	30/03/2023	15627	Delhi-Dilshad Garden
32765190	Vaun Aggarwal	24/03/2023	25581	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
34287926	Mohan Lal	11/05/2023	9452	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
35190347	Siddharth Gupta	07/06/2023	8836	Delhi-Gandhi Nagar
22194457	Ruby Hussain	10/03/2022	38350	Delhi-Kailash Nagar
37623638	Dinesh Kumar	07/08/2023	25518	Delhi-Kamla Nagar
30759910	Karambir Singh	13/01/2023	16620	Delhi-Karol Bagh Relationship
17390825	Mohd Aadil	10/09/2021	8263	Delhi-Lajpat Nagar
30299447	Arjun Saroj	28/12/2022	6144	Delhi-Malviya Nagar
27641213	Raghvendra Kumar	24/09/2022	20942	Delhi-Rohini
30668601	Rajesh So Ramkishore	10/01/2023	8559	Delhi-Rohini
26084022	Sanjay Saini	25/07/2022	15934	Delhi-Shastri Nagar Relationship
11112291	Jitender Singh	04/03/2020	13974	Delhi-Uttam Nagar
26872965	Mehsin Rahman	24/08/2022	57805	Delhi-Uttam Nagar
36800352	Rinki Devi	13/07/2023	81294	Delhi-Uttam Nagar

The auction shall be conducted on an "AS IS WHERE" and "AS IS WHAT IT" basis and the Company is not making and shall not make any representation or warranties as regards the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. It shall be the sole and absolute responsibility of the potential purchaser to verify, examine and satisfy themselves about the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments prior to placing their bid and for such purpose it shall be open to the potential purchasers to examine, at their sole cost and expense, and at the address set out herein above, the gold ornaments whether with or without expert advice 45 minutes prior to the time stipulated for the conduct of the auction. All the bid shall be subjected to such minimum reserve price as the company may deem fit to fix in this regards. The auction process and sale (if any) pursuant to such auction shall be subjected to such further terms and condition as the company may at sole discretion deem fit to impose.

If the borrower(s) mentioned above pays the amount due to the company in terms of the loan agreement in his individual loan account in full before the auction as mentioned above, the pledged ornaments securing the said loan may be withdrawn from the said auction without further notice. Please note that it is the absolute discretionary power of the undersigned authorized officer of the company, either to postpone or to cancel the auction proceeding without prior notice and without assigning any reason thereof and to reject any or all the bids or offer without assigning any reason for the same.

Authorized Officer (HDB Financial Services Ltd)

Date : 11-01-2024

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

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.	Subal Jalan/ Acme Praxis Pvt Ltd/ Shalini Jalan/ Jalan Transport Pvt Ltd/ LBDEL00003788759	Unit No. 1202, On The 12th Floor Block Iconic Tower (Marvella), Mahagun Moderne, Situated at Plot No. Gh-2, Sector- 78 Uttara Pradesh Noida/ Jan 05, 2024	August 22, 2023 Rs. 3,94,74,632/-	Delhi/ NCR
2.	Niraj Gupta/ Seema Gupta/ LBGUR00001979938	Flat No. 2d, Block-5, 2nd Floor, Regent Enclave, Mousa- Mondalganthei, Police Station Rajarhat District 24 Pargana (North), West Bengal 24 Pargana (North) 700120 (Alongwith Appertanent, Undivided Share In The Land Underneath The Building, Along With Right to Use General Common Areas Together With The Reserved Scooter Parking Space in The Complex)/ Jan 06, 2024	May 20, 2023 Rs. 73,62,924/-	Delhi/ NCR & Pargana North West Bengal
3.	Lakshmi Devi/ Suresh Kumar/ Rgs Logistics 1 Pvt Ltd/ LBNOD00004938303/ LBDEL00002428416	Flat No. P9 1203, 12th Floor Prateek Grand City Situated at 4/BS-01 & 4/BS-05 Siddharth Vihar Ghaziabad/ Jan 06, 2024	September 25, 2023 Rs. 25,37,955/-	Delhi/ NCR
4.	Navneet Verma/ Rajesh/ LBNOD00002412525/ LBNOD00002415327	Flat No. 2BA-811, Tower-3, 8th Floor (Without Roof Rights) River Heights, Noor Nagar, Rajnagar Extn Nn-58, Pargana Loni, Ghaziabad- 201001 (Along With Undivided And Impartly Proportinate Share in The Land Underneath The Building, Along With Right to Use General Common Areas Together With The Reserved Scooter Parking Space in The Complex)/ Jan 06, 2024	August 10, 2023 Rs. 8,63,683/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Violet Mable Furtado/ Ronald Melvin Furtado/ LBDEL00002364476	Flat No. FJ/ UH-116 1st Floor, Urban Homes, Situated at Sahpur Bamhetta Nn-24 Ghaziabad/ Jan 06, 2024	August 28, 2023 Rs. 6,23,702/-	Delhi/ NCR & Bajpe (Karnataka)
6.	Shashi Jain/ Rishant Jain/ LBGHZ00001039389	Flat No. 102, 1st Floor, Type Block A-4, Krishna Apra Gardens, On Group Housing Plot No. 7, Vaibhav Khand Indrapuram Ghaziabad/ Jan 06, 2024	September 14, 2023 Rs. 5,68,810/-	Delhi/ NCR & Mumbai
7.	Alok Kumar/ Pratima Kumari/ LBDEL0000691603	Flat No. 1004, 10th Floor Shipra Apartments, Kaushambi Situated at Kharsa No. 222M & 223M Village Hasanpur, Bhopawar Ghaziabad/ Jan 06, 2024	September 14, 2023 Rs. 3,91,305/-	Delhi/ NCR & Norkela

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Date: January 11, 2024 Place: Delhi/ NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

Sarvy Priya Mahajan Co-operative Group Housing Society Ltd 202, Vardhaman Avon Shopping Plaza, LSC, C-Block Market, Saraswati Vihar, Pitampura, Delhi-110037. In pursuance to Rule 19(2) of DCS rules, 2002, it is hereby publicly informed that Ms. Neha Arora (M.No.592) member of Sarvy Priya Mahajan CGHS Ltd. (Regd. No. 1384) has resigned from the membership of the society. Further another member Sh. Atul Chhabra (M.No.577) also expelled by RCS order No. F.47/1384/GH/Expulsion/RCS/2022/142-4148 dated 27.03.2023. The deposited amount of both the members were refunded through RTGS. If anyone have any objections helpline may file his/her objection in the office of the RCS, Parliament Street, New Delhi or at society office i.e. 202, Vardhaman Avon Shopping Plaza, LSC, C-Block Market, Saraswati Vihar, Pitampura, Delhi-110034 within 7 day from the date of publication of this notice.

Secretary - Sarvy Priya Mahajan CGHS Ltd

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that Mrs. Reena Kamari is the owner of Property Bearing No. 28, (Pvt Plot Bearing No. 11) L&DO area measuring 218 Sq. Yds. i.e. 123.74 sq. mtrs. Comprising of G.F., F.F. & T.F. with roof) situated in the Layout Plan of Lawrence Road Industrial Area, Lawrence Road, Delhi-110025. By virtue of Sale deed dated 21/07/2016 regd. at doc. No. 9491 for Ground Floor. Sale deed dated 21/07/2016 regd. at doc. No. 9492 for First Floor. Sale deed dated 21/07/2016 regd. at doc. No. 9493 for Second Floor and Sale deed dated 21/07/2016 regd. at doc. No. 9494 for Third Floor and the same is to be mortgaged with my client i.e. Axis Finance Limited. Further, Mrs. Reena Kamari has declared that the aforesaid property is free from all sorts of encumbrances and there is no dispute of any nature related to title of any person(s) in any court of law or with any individual, government body or financial institution and any person(s) have any objections or claim in this property, then contact the undersigned within 7 days from the date of this notice on below address. Failing which, it will be assumed that there are no claims or issues in respect of the aforesaid property.

Raghav Kumar Tiwari (Advocate)
Ch. 830, Patiala House Courts, New Delhi - 110001
Mob. : 91-9076183328

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is notified that the following documents standing in the name of Sh. Pradip Kumar Pal of Flat-706, The Mass CGHS Ltd. (Mass Apartments), Plot-24, Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075 have been reported Lost/Destroyed in a fire incident of 09th June, 2023 in the said flat and that Application for issue of Duplicates of these documents has been made with the Society: (1) Share Certificate No.165 dated 29-08-2000, (2) Allotment Letter dated 23-03-2003, and (3) Possession Letter dated 16-05-2003. Anybody having any objection against issue of the Duplicates of these documents to Sh. Pradip Kumar Pal S/o Late Dr. S.P. Pal, may convey his/their objection in writing to the Society, within 15 days of Publication of this Notice.

For on behalf of The
Mass CGHS Ltd (H.S. Bomrali) Secretary.
Dated : 09th January, 2024. Place : New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE

DYUMN CONSULTANCY SERVICES LLP

Address- W 2, Basement, Green Park Main, South Delhi, Delhi, India, 110016

A notice is hereby given that, Above said LLP is changing its Registered Office from Delhi to Haryana Sh. No. 11, Edmonton Mall, Sec-28, Gurugram, Haryana - 122002.

"Any Person Whom Right or Interest is affected can intimate by 21 Days of this notice. Contact: 85880 86172

PUBLIC NOTICE

Whereas, we Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited are in the process of undertaking of development of Group Housing Colony (Phase - II & III) in Sector - 2, Village Gwal Pahari, District Gurugram, Haryana, over an area measuring 14.356525 acres (4.26875 acre licence no 188 of 2023 dated, 13.09.2023 + 10.09675 acres licence no.74 of 2012 dated, 31.07.2012) in accordance with the license granted for a Group Housing Colony by Director General, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh. And whereas, the Building Plan earlier approved at the time of grant of license for the said colony is now proposed to be revised on account of additional license received by Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited for revision of Building Plan (Phase - II & III) of the said colony. And whereas, the office of Director, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh has required seeking of objections against the revision of Building Plan, as a pre-condition for allowing such revision in the Building Plan. Accordingly vide this public notice objections are hereby invited from any of the public in the said colony on the proposed revision of the Building Plan of the said colony. A copy of the earlier approved Building Plan bearing memo no. ZP-837/JD(BS)/2012/26344, dated 20.12.2012 & Zoning Plan Phasing bearing drawing no. 9732, dated 25.10.2023 and the Building Plan now proposed to be revised (in principle approved) bearing memo no ZP-837/JD(RA)/2023/957, dated 09.01.2024 & the same is available for perusal at our office and also on website i.e. parasbuildwell.com and also displayed at our site office for information. The said Revised Building Plan can also be perused at the office of undersigned as well as in the office of Senior Town Planner, Gurugram. Any public having any objection on the proposed revision in the approved Building Plan, may file his objection in the office of Senior Town Planner, Gurugram, within 30 days of the publication of this notice, failing which it shall be assumed that there are no objections to the proposed revision of the Building Plan.

Place: Gurugram Date: January 11, 2024

[Authorized Signatory]
M/s. Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited

PUBLIC NOTICE

Mr. Som Parkash Sethi (Aadhaar No. 2587-8547-9456 & Pan No. ABYPS3902L) S/O Late Sant Ram Sethi, R/O H. No-30, Ishwar Nagar, New Friends Colony S.O., South Delhi, Delhi-110025 has expired on dated: 26.11.2017 and his legal heirs are:

Mr. Aman Sethi S/O Late Sh. Som Parkash Sethi
Mr. Pawan Sethi S/O Late Sh. Som Parkash Sethi
Mr. Raman Sethi S/O Late Sh. Som Parkash Sethi

On request of the legal heirs of Late Sh. Som Parkash Sethi, the provisional transfer of the plot was allowed by HSIIDC in favour of Mr. Divyansh Goel S/O Sh. Mr. Arun Goel Resident of House No A-1/437, 3rd Floor Sushant Lok -2 Sector 55 Gurgaon Sector 56 Haryana 120011, vide PTL No. HSIIDC/3029 dated: 04/01/2024. After the consent of the above mentioned successors of Late Sh. Som Parkash Sethi his stake in the immovable Property Plot/ Building No 21, Electronic City Sector '8, Gurgaon, Haryana is being transferred in the name of Mr. Divyansh Goel S/O Sh. Mr. Arun Goel

Therefore, this public notice has been published that if anyone has any objection, then they may convey their objection in writing along with documentary proof through the registered post to General Manager (Estate), HSIIDC, HSIIDC Office Complex, Udyog Vihar, Phase - V, Gurugram, within a period of 30 days from the date of issuance of this notice failing which the Corporation will proceed with the transfer of plot in favor of Mr. Divyansh Goel S/O Sh. Mr. Arun Goel Resident of House No A-1/437, 3rd Floor Sushant Lok-2, Sector 55 Gurgaon Sector 56 Haryana 120011

For and on behalf of
General Manager (Estate)
HSIIDC, Udyog Vihar, Gurugram



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PAPER WITH PASSION

All at sea

With the Opposition gunning for President Muizzu, the Maldives is going through a precarious phase

The Maldives, an idyllic archipelago in the Indian Ocean, currently finds itself in troubled waters. Among the top choices for Indian tourists because of its pristine beaches, vibrant coral reefs and laidback ambience, the island nation is at the centre of raging political controversy, economic challenges and diplomatic complexities. The Maldives, led by Mohamed Muizzu who became the President last November, is the latest to succumb to Chinese charm and his proximity with the dragon is now pushing his country into turmoil. One of the main issues gripping the nation is the Opposition's call for removing Tourism Minister Ahmed Adeb. The demand adds to political turbulence there, raising questions about Government stability. The situation is being closely watched as it has the potential to impact the nation's reputation as a tourist paradise and investment destination. In a move that hints at its challenges, the Maldivian Government has reached out to China, its "closest ally,"



seeking increased tourism to make up for the cancellations from India. The appeal comes at a time when the Maldives is engaged in a diplomatic tussle with India. The small nation relies heavily on tourism as a key driver of its economy and the call for more Chinese tourists is seen as an attempt to bolster its economic resilience amid the ongoing political uncertainty. China's role in the Maldives' economic development has been growing, with infrastructure projects and tourism investments playing a significant part.

The Maldives' top tourism body also has denounced anti-Modi remarks made by three Deputy Ministers who have since been sacked, highlighting the sensibility of maintaining warm ties with regional powers. If one digs deeper, the Maldives and many other nations, including Sri Lanka, fell for the lure of Chinese investment. These investments were lucrative but designed to colonise these countries. China's influence in the Maldives has expanded significantly in recent years, marked by largescale infrastructure projects and economic investments. While this has brought economic benefits to the island nation, it also raises concerns about the potential impact on its sovereignty. The Maldives must carefully deal with China to ensure economic growth without compromising its independence. Right now, the Maldives finds itself at a critical juncture, grappling with internal political challenges, economic uncertainties and diplomatic intricacies. In such a situation, India's role becomes very important in loosening the Chinese grip on the island nation. It must convince the Maldivian regime to tread cautiously and balance its diplomatic relationships to safeguard its sovereignty. It is also time for India to make more investments in the Maldives to counter Chinese influence. It is yet another attempt by China to circumvent India in the Indian Ocean and it must be taken seriously by the South Block.

PICTALK



A woman flies a kite during the International Kite Festival, in Rajkot

The great Chinese real estate meltdown



PRAFULL GORADIA

The Chinese banks have depleted their resources by funding the construction of flats on an extensive scale, which have no buyers, resulting in a substantial financial strain

Over the years, there has been many whispers about many Chinese products for export being dumped. Importers often wondered: how else can they supply so many products so cheaply? But the greed for cheapness stopped them from stretching their whippers to leave alone protests, but even to gossip. Last their own governments woke up to ban such imports.

To the credit of the Chinese shrewdness, they did not underprice their export goods directly or in any way obviously. A cousin of mine visited the Yellow Kingdom to find out whether he could set up a shop in that country and profit. For a foreigner, he found, it was not so lucrative. All the money required to set up and run the business had to be taken from India. He could not borrow even a part of the working finance locally, not even from a foreign bank. An Indian bank had to remit the money to a local bank, which in turn could be used by my cousin. The minimum wage was not so low but certainly lower than the American or European levels. However, the total wages had to be paid to a government agency, which in turn, handed down a pittance to the workers. The rest stayed with the agency. To a Chinese citizen, the facilities were much more favourable. The land for a factory was leased by the government at a nominal rent. The term loan was given at one or two per cent interest. If there were delays in repayment of the loan or the payment of rent, they were tolerated. But the beneficiary entrepreneur had to export 75 per cent of his production and earn hard currency foreign exchange. This was a must, whether the exporter made a profit or a loss. Perhaps this was the way of accumulating the dollars or the trillions of surpluses in foreign exchange. If necessary, yuans could be lost, but dollars had to be gathered. There is no doubt that this was an exchange of Chinese money for earning foreign exchange. The export prices were thus cut-throat in many an item. Whether this was tantamount to dumping or not is for economists to decide. If the prices



were to be realistic, could not include the losses of Chinese capital as a result of the concessions given to citizen entrepreneurs? The exports were after all, below their costs of production. If the Chinese government was unfair to the importer clients, it was equally unfair to their own country. After Deng Xiaoping came to power, it was decided to adopt a national strategy to go on a building spree. Build, build and build was the Chinese regime's mantra, no matter whether required or not. It would give a boost of demand to the steel plants as well as to the cement industry. Apart from brick making and all other building requirements plus employment of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers, the entire economy was to get an almighty boost. In 2001, when our group visited China for a fortnight, we saw a great deal of building activity almost wherever we went. Streets were being laid, those already existing were being widened. The railings of parks were raised or were being replaced. Above all, on a 280 kilometre drive from Shanghai and back to visit a particular factory, we saw thousands of ten storeyed rows



EVEN IF BANK LOANS BECOME AVAILABLE, DISPOSAL OF THE FLATS WOULD FACE DIFFICULTIES. THE GOVERNMENT CAN RESORT TO DEFICIT FINANCING. THIS RESORT RUNS THE RISK OF CAUSING INFLATION

of residential flats. On the way back, in the dark, we noticed hardly any lights in these apartments, which indicated that these flats were not occupied. We realized that these flats had not been sold then. The current crisis in the Chinese economy is probably caused by non-availability of loans to the potential buyers of the flats. This is serious; because a little over 20 per cent of China's domestic assets are held in real estate, which probably is 30 per cent of China's economy. The banks may have exhausted their funds by financing the construction of the flats and so many of them. A great deal of finance must have been sunk due to the great scale of building that has been carried. When we visited China, we were told that since the Maoist revolution of 1949, the government policy has been not to sell any asset to any individual or any private sector institution but lease the asset including farms to procedure which makes many a buyer in any country somewhat hesitant. A lease may be long, even for 99 years, but nevertheless still a taking-on-rent and is not tantamount to an ownership. After all, a lease can be cancelled or terminat-

ed. Where does the lessee stand? Most lay people would wonder? If this be the problem, even if bank loans become available, disposal of the flats would face difficulties. The government can resort to deficit financing; to put it crudely, print more currency notes than hitherto. This resort runs the risk of causing inflation which carries its own public displeasure. In case, if leasing the obstacle, deficit financing would not be a solution. To half building would cause unemployment especially in steel and cement industries. Equally for the suppliers of other building materials, not speak of the large number of masons and unskilled workers. China might possibly be tempted to sell the enormous number of US Treasury bonds to avail of a couple of trillion dollars. But this will only prompt other countries like Japan, South Korea, India and Germany to purchase them in the open market, while Beijing will only lose a precious leverage. (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOING ABROAD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Sir — Every year, approximately 12 to 13 lakh students go abroad for higher education, resulting in the outflow of around 12 billion rupees from the country, as recently stated by Dr Shailendra Devlankar, the Director of Higher Education, during a ceremony. The reasons behind students opting for foreign education need to be examined. If such educational opportunities are unavailable in the country, then there is no alternative. However, if the facilities exist domestically, and students still choose foreign education, it becomes necessary to consider this phenomenon. A significant amount of the country's funds are allocated to education. Parents, who often take loans to fund their children's education, also need to reflect on this matter. In the 1990s, the general cost of foreign education was around 20 lakh rupees. Over time, increased purchasing power has enabled parents to afford this expense or even more for their children's education abroad. Nowadays, many families have only one child, making it easier for them to support their child's foreign education financially. With the availability of various loan facilities, obtaining an education through loans has become more convenient. The recent trend of choosing Canada for education has witnessed a surge. Whether due to the promise of guaranteed employment post-study or the ease of staying there, many students find it appealing. However, it is essential to consider factors such as the extremely cold weather. Studying in the UK is comparatively more affordable than in other countries. The United States offers distinct advantages, allowing students to generally earn between \$200 and \$250 per week while studying, as exemplified by the recent situation in Ukraine. When deciding on education, it is prudent to consider the overall cost, available opportunities, facilities, and the assurance of future employment.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

SUPREME COURT VERDICT

Sir — Congratulations to the Supreme

Air passenger safety



Whether it is a bus train or flight travel, it goes without saying that passenger safety is the top priority. For the vast major-

ity of those who make their living in business aviation, professionalism and safety norms are synonymous.

A pilot of a flight has to work extra hard to achieve a high degree of professionalism and safety in air travel. Improved professionalism can elevate business aviation's reputation by earning the confidence, trust and support of the passengers. As Air India, the flag carrier of the country has been involved in a series of accidents/incidents over the years, perhaps it can learn a lesson or two of these traits from Japan Airlines (JAL) when it averted a major accident and managed to escape all the 379 passengers after its Airbus collided with a Japanese Coast Guard on January 2.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

DEBUT AT 12

Sir — Indian cricket is fortunate to have exceptionally talented young cricketers, among whom is Vaibhav Suryavanshi. He made his debut at the age of 12 years and 284 days against Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy on his home turf, Patna, becoming the youngest first-class debutant since Sachin Tendulkar. Vaibhav's performances in the Vinoo Mankad trophy for Bihar, along with his contributions in a few under-19 matches, earned him a Ranji cap for Bihar. While confidence can propel him to success, complacency poses a risk. Learning from examples of young talents who failed to live up to expectations is crucial for Vaibhav. Vaibhav's father played a significant role in his training, honing his skills against fast bowling on cement tracks. The young cricketer must avoid squandering his wicket after scoring a cameo. Striking a balance between caution and aggression will be vital for his career. Vaibhav can look to Tendulkar as a role model.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Kerala Govt red flags the Governor

The Marxists want to make it known that they do not approve of the way the Governor is functioning. They see him as a stumbling block

Tuesday (9th January 2024) was observed as a hartal in Kerala's Idukki district by the CPI(M) in protest against the visit of Governor Arif Mohammed Khan to the State's High Ranges. Hartals and bandhs have become routine events in the State thanks to the Left parties which call for total shut down at the drop of a hat. If the district secretary of the CPI(M) is asked why the hartal has been called, chances are that he may have to consult the party higher-ups to give an exact reason. The Marxists see him as a stumbling block to the "progressive" and "revolutionary" measures being implemented by the Pinarayi Vijayan-led Kerala Government.

The "progressive" measures against which the Governor has shown red flag include the move to appoint CPI(M) cadre and fellow travelers as vice-chancellors and faculty members in the State's universities, the proposal by Pinarayi Vijayan to appoint S Manikumar, former chief justice of Kerala High Court as the chairman of State Human Rights Commission in lieu of favors received and



the legislation to clip the wings of the Governor by removing him from the post of Chancellor in all the universities. Mani Kumar during his tenure as chief justice of the State had ensured that the cases involving universities were taken away from Justice Devan Ramachandran and handed them over to another judge who was pliable and amenable to the former. Ramachandran had taken an uncompromising stance against the Government violating the UGC guidelines in the appointment of comrades and arty commissars in universities and other government departments. The Governor's refusal to sign the Kerala Government Land Assignment (Amendment) Bill passed by the Legislative assembly made the chief minister furious and he asked the party leaders to go for an all-out attack against the former. The CPI(M)'s trump card in this

game was M M Mani, MLA, former minister who is very liberal when it comes to verbally attack the rivals whether inside or outside the House. The words he used against the Governor cannot be printed. The chief minister and his ministers as well as party leaders enjoyed Mani's rustic words with hearty laughter. For the last two months, the CPI(M) had given full freedom to the SFI (the student wing of the party) to humiliate the Governor whenever he made any public appearances. When the Governor went to Calicut University to attend an official function, the young comrades waved black flags at him and laid siege to the campus to prevent him from entering the University premises. The police looked the other way and it was only after a serious directive from the Raj Bhavan the cops swung into action and pleaded with the SFI activists to make way for the Governor. All educational institutions in the State spotted banners with slogans that were personally insulting to the Governor. The college where the present higher education minister Bindu was an

English professor has a banner proclaiming "Arif Mohammed Khan, your daal would not get cooked in Kerala." The Kerala Government Land Assignment (Amendment) Bill would have empowered the Government to give relaxation in the restriction that the land assigned by the Government should be used only for agriculture and housing purposes. There are allegations that the Bill was a move to protect the interests of vested lobbies like quarrying and mining barons. At no point of time in the past the State has seen the present kind of stand-off between Governors and the chief ministers. There was a time in the late 1960s and early 1970s when chief ministers like E M S Namboodiripad and C Achutha Menon used to shudder at the mention of the Governor's name. Who can forget V Viswanathan, the ICS officer-turned-Governor who used to keep even Namboodiripad and Menon on tender hooks. (The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN



FIRST COLUMN

UNRIVALLED POWER OF GOD IN SHAPING THE MIND

Intuitions are bestowed solely by God; our minds are impervious to external influence



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

They appear the same but there is a world of difference between the two. Lord Krishna has derided those, who falsely assume self to be a karta in the verse #3.27, where He stated, "All acts are being done in totality by the modes of the material nature. But having consciousness deluded by false ego (ahankara), one assumes that I am the karta." This can be understood by an example of a Tulsi plant. How does a Tulsi plant grow? What all is required? Some earth, a little water, sunlight or warmth and a seed of Tulsi. We can grow it in our homes, but Tulsi plants grow in forest also. Because it is the material nature, which grows them. We can participate in it, but we cannot by any stretch of imagination claim that we are karta of it. We can be a doer only because we don't possess all the resources; only God does. That is the reason God is and He alone can be karta.

Let us understand what a doer actually is. They are in three modes. Beginning with the doer in goodness, "A doer, free from attachment, not an egoist, having a balance between patience and enthusiasm, free from fault of extreme reaction in success and failure, that doer is said to be in goodness." (18.26) "A doer, who is lustful; desirous of chosen fruit of action; greedy; violent; engaged in impure behaviour; full of joy and sorrow, that doer is said to be in passion." (18.27) All of us can be and are doers only, i.e. in one of the three modes. This can be understood by understanding how the 'Karmaphala Principle' works. In simple terms it is: "What we sow we reap." There are two main questions, which arise from this. One: who decides what we will reap for our acts? Two: when and what results will come? The answer to both these is given by Lord Krishna in the famous verse #2.47, "You have no right in ever pre-termining results of actions." This right is in the exclusive purview of God, and God alone. Some of it, he delegates to the divine authority, which works under His superintendence. (9.10) However, The divine authority judges taking into consideration all aspects of our acts including how it will impact others. For example, some person has done a horrible act, which deserves big punishment. But if it is given instantly, family members maybe adversely affected. Therefore, the authorities may delay the punishment. God, on the other hand, has to deal with spiritual acts only, which deserve rewards. This is where the role of God becomes very important.



And God only, assisted by His agencies like the material nature, can be genuine karta. Because He is permanent in the existential sense. We, human beings, are in temporary material bodies. Then, God has all the resources at His command; He owns everything. We are allowed to use what is available, but there is no ownership as such. Upon leaving the body and getting relocated, all material acquisitions have to be left behind. God is omnipresent; He is present everywhere – a requirement for being an effective karta. He is personally available for all, whoever turns to Him. God is always busy doing duties. Only God has the power to give intuitions. Nobody can influence our minds as only God can. He has this power, which a karta needs. How else can a task be accomplished with many involved? God uses many of us as mediums to carry out His tasks as karta. For example, someone needs money, God must arrange to physically give this to that person. God, in fact, appoints many as His 'nimita' (instrument) to carry out what He needs to do like establishing 'dharma' (sound religious principles), as He chose Arjuna of the Mahabharata fame.

Finally, we cannot be like God, but by aligning ourselves with Him, we will lack nothing. The fifth factor mentioned in the verse #18.14 will become favourable to us, yes, daiva. The verse is "The place of action and the doer and many different efforts and the fifth in the connection is providence only."

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

The Centre has no control over subsidies



UTTAM GUPTA

The biggest drawback with the current system of food subsidy is making it available at throwaway prices. It allures dubious players who buy it cheap and sell it at higher prices



The Union government's total expenditure on the three major subsidies - fertiliser, food and cooking gas - during the current financial year (FY) is likely to be around Rs 400,000 crore as against Rs 549,000 crore spent during FY 2022-23. From this, it might appear that the government has made serious efforts to trim the subsidy. But, looking at the situation on ground zero, this isn't so. The subsidy on each tonne of fertiliser produced (or imported) and sold is the excess of the cost of production/import and distribution (or cost of supply) over the maximum retail price (MRP) controlled by the Central government at a low level. It controls the MRP of urea - a major source of nitrogen (N) - directly, while on all other fertilizers carrying phosphate (P), and potash (K) which are decontrolled de jure, the control is indirect. The subsidy is paid to manufacturers or importers to cover the differential between the 'cost of supply' and the MRP.

India depends heavily on imports to meet its fertilizer requirements, the level of import dependence being 100 per cent in 'K', and 80-90 per cent in 'P'. Regarding 'N', 25-30 per cent of the urea demand is met from imports. For domestic production of urea, the country imports at least one-third of the natural gas (NG) requirement; it could be higher if either there is a dip in domestic production of NG or more of it is allocated for priority sectors such as CNG, PNG etc leading to less availability for urea production.

A major determinant of the cost of supply and in turn subsidy is thus the international prices of fertilizers and fertilizer raw materials (FRMs). During FY 2022-23, these prices rose sharply due to global shortages triggered by the Ukraine war. In April 2022, the price of urea touched US\$980 per ton while the price of diammonium phosphate (DAP) - a major source of 'P' - was US\$954 per ton. As a result, actual fertilizer subsidy payments during FY 2022-23 turned out to be Rs 254,000 crore against a budget estimate (BE) of Rs 105,000 crore. For FY 2023-24, finance minister Nirmala



AS IN FERTILISERS, WE DON'T SEE ANY MAJOR REFORMS HAPPENING IN THE FOOD SECTOR THAT WOULD HELP IN REDUCING THE SUBSIDY BILL

Sitharaman set the BE at Rs 175,000 crore, Rs 79,000 crore lower than the actual Rs 254,000 crore for 2022-23. This was on the assumption that international prices would decline sharply from the previous year's high. The prices did decrease during the first four months of the current FY. The price of urea declined from US\$980 per ton in April 2022 to US\$333 per ton in July 2023. On the other hand, the price of DAP decreased from US\$954 per ton in April 2022 to US\$ 454 per ton in June 2023. Had the declining trend continued, the government could have managed to keep subsidies within the BE. But, that hasn't happened. From the third quarter onward, the prices have moved north. The price of urea increased to US\$411 per ton in October 2023. The price of DAP rose to US\$ 535 per ton in December 2023. This has prompted the government to go for an additional allocation of Rs 13,351 crore in December 2023 over the BE of Rs 175,000 crore.

The year could end up with even higher subsidy outgo if prices increase further during January - March 2024; such a possibility is not ruled out given the continuing conflagration in the Middle in particular, the Israel - Hamas conflict and more recently the sporadic attacks by Houthi rebels on merchant ships in the Red Sea. Normally, any effort at prudent fiscal management involves countervailing measures to offset the cost-push effect of an increase in international prices. One such measure could be an increase in the MRP of urea that hasn't been touched for over two decades. Yet, in June 2023, the Modi government decided to continue its availability to farmers at the prevailing MRP of Rs 242 per 45 kg bag for another three years. The government's efforts to plug leakage of subsidized urea

(estimated at 30 percent) by adopting various measures, including neem coating, haven't delivered the desired results.

Food subsidy is the excess of minimum support price (MSP) paid to farmers and handling and distribution costs over the heavily subsidised price of Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice and coarse cereals, respectively paid by 820 million beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). In the budget for 2023-24, Sitharaman had set the BE at Rs 197,000 crore, down Rs 90,000 crore from the RE for 2022-23 of Rs 287,000 crore. Apart from the regular NFSA allocation, the RE for 2022-23 also included subsidy payments for distributing 5 kg of cereals per month for free to all 820 million people under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), a Scheme launched in April 2020 to deal with the situation triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. The PMGKAY was withdrawn from January 1, 2023, and supplies under regular NFSA were made free. This arrangement ran till December 31, 2023.

By ending free supplies under PMGKAY (rightly so, as the pandemic had completely fizzled out, it was no longer necessary to continue the Scheme), during April-December 2023, the government saved a lot of money. But this was partially offset by making supplies under the regular NFSA free. The impact of these decisions was captured while setting the BE at Rs 197,000 crore. But, Modi's sudden announcement in November 2023 extending free supplies under NFSA for another five years has altered the subsidy math.

This is because in the remaining three months i.e. January - March 2024 of the current FY, the beneficiaries won't pay anything instead of Rs 2/3/1 per kg for wheat, rice

and coarse cereals they would have to pay if the regular dispensation were to be restored. This together with a hike in the MSP for all 14 kharif crops by 5-10 percent, announced in June 2023, has led to an increase in food subsidy beyond the BE. To accommodate this, in December 2023, the FM made an additional provision of Rs 5,589 crore under this head.

As in fertilizers, we don't see any major reforms happening in the food sector that would help in reducing the subsidy bill. The biggest drawback with the current system is making food available at a 'throwaway' price which allures dubious players to indulge in diversion and misuse of the subsidized food. Prime Minister's promise of free food for five years ensures that this system won't change till December 2028.

The subsidy on cooking gas was pegged at Rs 2,250 crore in the BE. It was meant to give a subsidy of Rs 200 per cylinder to 96 million households under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY). From October 5, 2023, the subsidy was increased to Rs 300 per cylinder. Besides, the government plans to provide an additional 7.5 million connections under the scheme. Both these post-budget decisions have led to excess payments.

During the current FY, the total subsidy outgo on cooking gas is estimated at Rs 9,800 crore - Rs 7,550 crore higher than the BE. Together with excess payment on fertilizer subsidy of Rs 13,351 crore and food subsidy of Rs 5589 crore, the total excess payment would be Rs 26,490 crore. So, the Centre would end up spending Rs 400,000 crore against BE of Rs 374,000 crore. The Centre has no control over subsidies.

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

The Gaza war beyond the facile factsheet

The motivated US support to Israel has prompted it to reject any kind of political settlement accommodating the rights of Palestinians

The discourse on Israel-Palestine war must target both 'who of the immediate players, the obvious, in the war is at fault' and 'who, the real but obscure catalytic force, benefits the more from the war'. To capture the complex multifaceted nature of the challenges, the discourse must extend beyond the facile factsheet



SUKHDEV SINGH

The current three month long war between Zionist Israel and Arab Palestine has a history and also essentially has third party regional players bearing existential compulsion, affected by whatever happens in the region. The war also has other external players acting as a catalytic turning 'conflict' in to 'war' for their geopolitical, economic interests.

Although in the present post-modern global market, every country gets positive or negative share from this war, most states of the world are in a state of procrastinating ambivalence watching the Israeli Zionists and Palestinian Arabs engaged in a fierce cockfight with the metal spurs fitted to the former. Amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas i.e. Palestinian war,

the Israel has vowed to eliminate Hamas who are fighting it back, while the Palestinian population experiences displacement and death under the dictates and bombing by the Israeli army. Most watch the game and theatre of war with emotional immunity while others showing moral support to the Palestinian people chant slogans like "Palestine will be free, From the river to the sea". The most notable external third party player, the US, has been unequivocally supporting Israel to bombard the Palestinian region resulting in dislocation of the Palestinian civil population and destruction of infrastructure in the name of eliminating and 'dislodging' the Hamas and dismantling their hideouts. The US vetoed the UN proposal for

ceasefire and sanctioned heavy sale of armaments bypassing its congress citing an emergency for Israel. Powered and encouraged by the US, the Israeli Defence Forces have killed Hamas leaders but more Palestinian civilians; the army has ordered the civilians to disperse from one place to another while the two Israeli ministers have openly advised Palestinians to voluntarily migrate to the countries that welcome them. Fearing the war to engulf them, most local players have raised the alarm. Fearing the multifaceted war to take over the globe, many countries under the public pressure have raised concerns. Sensing necessity, the US has responded as a ready-to-be arbiter. The US secretary of State,

Antony Blinken who exercised his special powers to sanction the sale of weapons to Israel about a week ago is on his fourth diplomatic tour to the Middle East to assess the situation and register US visibility. During the tour he has been holding diplomatic meetings with all the local players on the fence. He criticised Israeli Minister's statements in a press conference alongside the Qatar Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, saying: "They [Palestinians] cannot... must not be pressed to leave Gaza," and they be allowed to "return home as soon as conditions allow". Sensing the mood of his supporters, the Israeli President has also rejected his Ministers' 'resettlement of Palestinians outside Gaza'

proposal. The game of 'evict and reinstate' is more tragic than the tragedy itself. Contradicting its 'peace' and 'humanitarian' missions, the US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller criticised South Africa for filing a case against Israel in The International Court of Justice, seeking to institute proceedings against Israel for committing 'genocide' against Palestinians and to direct the immediate suspension of Israeli military campaign. Since 1948, USA has been pampering the Zionist Israel to keep Arab Palestine in control. It is the US more than anyone else that has given Israel enough space to continue the war in Gaza. With Russia caught in its own conflict with Ukraine, USA is the only

major third party external force in the Gaza war. Israel's actions in Gaza have drawn strong criticism from Jordan and other Arab states. To seek buy-ins for the US plan from these regional players, the US Secretary of State, in his current visit to the region, has met Jordan's King and its Foreign Minister on Sunday after meeting the Turkish President in Istanbul on Saturday. His trip to the Middle East is being flagged as a mission to reduce tensions in the region- ironically a game of first igniting and then fighting the fire. To Israel both Hamas and Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank are the two versions of the same enemy. To them defeating and finishing Palestinians is defeating and finishing Hamas and

'the two state solution'. To the Israeli government, the Gaza war is a military operation without aiming to reach any political resolution. The motivated US support to Israel has prompted it to reject any kind of political settlement accommodating the rights of Palestinians. The dual policy of continued yearly US support in Billions of dollars to Israel for years and the criticism of its policies bares its seamy side. After all Israel has been using the US support for occupying Palestinian territories and dispersing the Palestinian population.

(The writer is a retired professor of Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and a Member, of the governing council, INTACH, views are personal)

Maldives, China sign 20 pacts after Muizzu-Xi meeting

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday held talks with his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu after which the two countries signed 20 key agreements and elevated their bilateral ties to a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. The two heads of state announced the elevation of bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

"20 key agreements were signed today between the Government of the Maldives and the Government of China this afternoon and both the Presidents witnessed the signing ceremony," Maldivian President's office said in a post on X.

Muizzu and his wife Sajida Mohammad were given a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of People by Xi and his wife Peng Liyuan at the Great



Hall of People. President Muizzu was accorded a red carpet welcome and a 21-gun salute. President Xi and Peng Liyuan later hosted a state banquet in their honour.

Muizzu's state visit to China is taking place amid a diplomatic row with India over derogatory remarks by his ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the release of a report by EU Election Observation Mission of

Maldives that said the ruling coalition of Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and the People's National Congress (PNC) deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation in the 2023 presidential elections in which Muizzu won.

Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, is visiting China amid the row with India after some Maldivian ministers posted derogatory remarks

against Prime Minister Modi leading to a spate of cancellations of reservations by Indian tourists, who constitute the largest number of visitors to the tourism-dependent island nation.

Besides talks with Xi, Muizzu is expected to meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang and other senior officials before his return to Male on January 12.

Muizzu reached Beijing last night after staying in the Chinese city of Fujian for two days.

In his address to the Maldives Business Forum in Fujian Province on Tuesday, Muizzu appealed to China to "intensify" efforts to send more tourists to his country.

"China was our (Maldives') number one market (for tourism) pre-Covid, and it is my request that we intensify efforts for China to regain this position," he said. His appeal for more Chinese tourists came amid a diplomatic row with India.

Pakistan top court upholds Musharraf's death sentence

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a landmark judgment, Pakistan's Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the death sentence of now-deceased former military ruler Pervez Musharraf given to him by a special court in a high treason case. In December 2019, Musharraf was sentenced to death in absentia by the special court which found him guilty of high treason, for imposing a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, by keeping the constitution in abeyance. However, the Lahore High Court in January 2020 had declared the special court and its proceeding as unconstitutional.

The issue of his sentence and the LHC judgement were before the apex court where a four-member bench headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and comprising Justices Mansoor Ali Shah, Aminuddin Khan and Athar Minallah conducted the hearing. "The impugned passed on January 13, 2020 by the Lahore High



Court (LHC) [...] is not sustainable and accordingly set aside," Chief Justice Isa said while announcing the short order.

During the hearing, Hamid Khan and Musharraf's counsel Salman Safdar appeared before the court. "Musharraf's legal heirs did not follow the case even on multiple notices," the apex court remarked while rejecting the former president's appeal. It is for the first time that a former military dictator has been awarded punishment for subverting the constitution. Musharraf, the architect of the Kargil War in 1999 and the

coup-prone country's last military ruler, died on February 5, 2023 in Dubai after a prolonged illness. The 79-year-old former president was undergoing treatment for amyloidosis in Dubai. He was living in the UAE since 2016 in self-exile to avoid criminal charges back home. The then prime minister Nawaz Sharif had initiated a treason trial against Musharraf in 2013.

On December 17, 2019, a three-judge special court, comprising Justice Waqar Ahmad Seth, Justice Nazir Akbar and Justice Shahid Karim sentenced Musharraf to death - who was sentenced in absentia due to illness and being out of the country - under Article 6 of the Constitution of Pakistan. The Article states that "any person who abrogates or subverts or suspends or holds in abeyance, or attempts or conspires to abrogate or subvert or suspend or hold in abeyance the Constitution by use of force or show force or by any other unconstitutional means shall be guilty of high treason."

Pak SC judge facing allegation of corruption resigns

Islamabad (PTI): A Pakistan Supreme Court judge who was facing allegations of corruption resigned on Wednesday, a day after the apex court's disciplinary committee refused to stay proceedings against him for his misconduct.

In a letter to the Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi, Justice Sayyed Mazahar Ali Akbar tendered his resignation and said that he couldn't carry forward his duties amidst the allegations and the way he was treated.

"It was an honour to be appointed and to serve as a judge first of the Lahore High Court and then as the Supreme Court of Pakistan. In the circumstances which are a matter of public knowledge and to some extent public record, it is no longer possible for me to continue to serve as a judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan," Justice Naqvi said.

"Considerations of due process also compel. I, therefore, effective today resign as judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan," he added.

On Tuesday, the Supreme Court rejected Justice Naqvi's request to stay proceedings against him in the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) over the alleged misconduct. In a letter penned to Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and all top court judges in December, Justice Naqvi stated that the treatment meted out to him by the SJC was "nothing short of disgraceful". The SJC, on October 27 last year, issued a show cause notice to Justice Naqvi amid various complaints alleging bench manipulation and financial misconduct by the SC judge. Pakistan Bar Council, advocate Mian Dawood and others had filed complaints against the Supreme Court judge. The SJC had directed the judge to submit a reply within two weeks. Headed by CJP Isa, the SJC comprises Justice Tariq Masood, Justice Ijazul Ahsan, Lahore High Court Chief Justice (CJ) Muhammad Ameer Bhatti, and Balochistan High Court (BHC) CJ Naem Akhtar.

Hafiz Saeed serving 78-year imprisonment sentence

United Nations : Mumbai terror attack mastermind and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba leader Hafiz Saeed is in the custody of the Pakistan government and is serving a 78-year imprisonment sentence following his conviction in terror financing cases, the UN has said in updated information. Saeed, 73, was designated as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council's Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee in December 2008.

He is in the "custody of the Government of Pakistan serving a 78-year imprisonment sentence since 12 February 2020 as a result of a conviction in seven terror financing cases," the Sanctions Committee said in an amended entry posted through a press release on the UN website.

Saeed's address is listed as House No. 116E, Mohalla Johar, Lahore, Tehsil, Lahore City, Lahore District, Pakistan "as of" May 2008. In December,

India asked Pakistan to extradite Saeed, the 2008 Mumbai terror attack mastermind who Indian probe agencies want in several terror cases.

Last month, the Security Council 1267 Committee enacted a few amendments to certain entries on its ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions List of individuals and entities subject to assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo. Saeed is among those whose information has been amended and the updated details have been made available through the press release. Under these amendments, the Sanctions Committee also noted that Hafiz Abdul Salam Bhuttavi, founding member of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and deputy to Saeed is "confirmed deceased." Bhuttavi, a UNSC-designated terrorist who trained the Lashkar-e-Taiba attackers for the 2008 Mumbai terror attack died in a prison in May last year in Pakistan's Punjab province.

Minivan explosion kills 3 in Af

Islamabad (AP): The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a minivan explosion in the Afghan capital on Tuesday that killed at least three people. The militant group said it detonated an explosive on a vehicle belonging to employees of Afghanistan's main prison in Kabul, killing and wounding about 10 people, according to a statement released by the group shortly after the attack. Police spokesman Khalid Zadran confirmed that a bomb had exploded but said three civilians were killed and four others wounded in the attack.

He added that the explosion occurred in the eastern part of the city, in the Alokhal area, and that police had detained one suspect. The Islamic State group's affiliate in the region has in the past carried out attacks often targeting Shiites, whom IS considers to be apostates.

Khan's party wins back cricket 'bat' symbol

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

In a major relief for Imran Khan's party ahead of the general elections, a high court in Pakistan on Wednesday declared as unconstitutional the election commission's decision revoking the jailed former premier's party's cricket 'bat' electoral symbol and rejecting its organisational polls. The Peshawar High Court directed the electoral body to return the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party its iconic cricket 'bat' electoral symbol back and upload the party's certificate of internal elections on its website, Dawn newspaper reported.

The decision comes shortly after the party withdrew from the Supreme Court its appeal seeking the restoration of its electoral symbol.

On December 22, the Election Commission of Pakistan decided against letting PTI retain its electoral symbol for the February 8 election, saying that it had failed to hold



intra-party polls under its current Constitution and election laws. A two-member PHC bench comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Arshad Ali termed the ECP's decision "incorrect".

The PTI had approached the PHC against the ECP order on December 26 and a single-member bench restored the electoral symbol of the party till

January 9.

On December 30, the electoral watchdog filed a review petition in the PHC, arguing that the court had overstepped its jurisdiction. Days later, in a major blow for the PTI, the high court restored the ECP order, stripping the party of its symbol again.

Subsequently, the PTI moved the Supreme Court against the

restoration of the ECP ruling.

A day earlier, PTI counsel Barrister Ali Zafar had argued before the PHC that the electoral watchdog was "only a record keeper" and did not have the power to "snatch a party's electoral symbol".

After marathon arguments advanced by lawyers representing the PTI and the ECP for almost five hours, the bench had adjourned the hearing till Wednesday.

Justices Anwar and Ali presided over the hearing, where counsels of those challenging the PTI's intra-party polls were to present their arguments.

Speaking to the media outside the PHC after the announcement of the verdict, PTI counsel Zafar said: "Now, no one can stop PTI from winning these elections." Hailing the decision, the PTI Senator said PHC kept its tradition of announcing decisions as per law.

Bangladesh's advancement can't be stopped now: Sheikh Hasina

PTI ■ DHAKA

The advancement of Bangladesh is now unstoppable with the reelection of Awami League to power, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said on Wednesday, and pledged to build a 'Smart Bangladesh' by 2041 as outlined in the party's election manifesto.

In her first speech, three days after her party won the general election that made her the premier for the fourth consecutive term, at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Udyan, Hasina said that the vision and mission of her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were her guidelines in leading the country.

"I am grateful. None can now prevent Bangladesh's advancement," she said.

In an emotionally choked voice, the 76-year-old leader called the people of Bangladesh as her family members and remembered the August 15,



1975 carnage when a military coup killed her father and Bangladesh's founder Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members.

Hasina said she was extra thankful to the voters as they turned up in huge numbers defying the Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) violent boycott campaign through

clandestine arson attacks on passenger trains and transport blockades and voted her party to power for the fourth straight term.

In line with the constitutional provision, Hasina was expected to meet later on Wednesday President Mohammad Shahabuddin to seek his approval to form her new government after the 12th general elections, when she would be the premier for the fifth time and record straight fourth time consecutively.

Soon after the Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) elected her as the Leader of the House, Hasina told them: "Your highest priority must be the welfare of the people."

"You (MPs) will have to ensure balanced development in your respective constituencies," she said.

The ALPP also reelected incumbent parliamentary speaker Shirin Sharmin

Chaudhury and senior Awami League leader and former minister Begum Matia Chowdhury as the deputy leader of the House.

Bangladesh's new cabinet is expected to take oath on Thursday with President Shahabuddin to administer the ministers' oath of office at Bangabhaban presidential palace.

Hasina, ruling the South Asian nation since 2009, secured a fifth overall term in the one-sided election in which she secured a record fourth consecutive term and fifth overall term on Sunday.

Hasina's Awami League won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament in the general elections that were held on Sunday.

With this win, Hasina is poised to become the longest-serving prime minister in Bangladesh since it gained independence from Pakistan in 1971.

Zelensky: Russia can be stopped but Kyiv badly needs more air defense systems

AP ■ VILNIUS

Ukraine has shown the world that Russia's military can be stopped, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Wednesday as he began a visit to the Baltic nations in search of more help for his country against the Kremlin's larger and better-supplied forces in the 22-month-old invasion.

Speaking in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, Zelenskyy said Ukraine still must bolster its air defenses against Russia's intensified missile and drone onslaughts and replenish its ammunition supplies as long-range strikes become the main feature of this winter's fighting.

"We have proven that Russia can be stopped, that deterrence is possible," he said after talks with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda on his first foreign trip of the year.

The massive Russian barages - more than 500 drones and missiles were fired



between December 29 and January 2, according to officials in Kyiv - are using up Ukraine's weapons stockpiles, however. The escalation is stretching Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies.

"We lack modern air defense systems badly," Zelenskyy said, noting that they are "what we need the most."

He acknowledged, howev-

er, that stockpiles are low in countries that could provide such materiel. "Warehouses are empty. And there are many challenges to world defense," he said.

Ukraine hopes to accelerate development of its domestic defense industry and establish joint projects with foreign governments to speed up ammunition and weapons production.

Ukrainian officials traveling with Zelenskyy signed several documents on cooperation on joint arms production. Similar agreements are expected in the other Baltic countries. Zelenskyy is expected to visit this week.

The focus of his two-day trip to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Zelenskyy said on his official Telegram channel, will be security concerns, Ukraine's hopes to join the European Union and NATO, and building partnerships in drone production and electronic warfare

capacities.

Zelenskyy thanked Lithuania for its military assistance and goodwill. He was expected in Estonia and Latvia on Thursday.

"We know how tiring this long-running war is, and we are interested in Ukraine's complete victory in it as soon as possible," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda told reporters.

The small eastern European countries are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters, and some in the Baltics worry that they could be Moscow's next target.

The three countries were seized and annexed by Josef Stalin during World War II before regaining independence with the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

They joined NATO in 2004, placing themselves under the military protection of the US and its Western allies.

Over 200 people died in Japan earthquake

AP ■ TOKYO

As of Wednesday, 203 deaths were reported following the 7.6 magnitude quake that slammed the western coastline of Japan on New Year's. Seven of them were at evacuation centers, where rescued people died from injuries and sickness. Such deaths weren't directly caused by the quakes, fires and mudslides. They happened in alleged safety.

"The pressures and stress of living in a place you aren't used to lead to such deaths," said Shigeru Nishimori, a disaster official at Ishikawa Prefecture, the hardest hit region.

Nearly 30,000 people whose homes were destroyed or deemed unsafe were staying at schools and other makeshift facilities. Even minor rain and snow can set off landslides where the ground is loose from the more than 1,000 aftershocks

that rattled the region for more than a week. Half-collapsed homes might flatten.

Deaths from the New Year's temblor centered on Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture have climbed daily, as rescue teams drew bodies from the rubble. Of the deaths, 91 were in Suzu city, 81 in Wajima, 20 in Anamizu, with the rest in smaller numbers among four other towns. The number of missing people declined in recent days to 68.

Those injured totaled 566, and 1,787 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged, according to Ishikawa officials. A tsunami, reaching as high as about 3 meters (10 feet), spewed into coastal homes after last week's biggest quake. A fire destroyed a part of Wajima city. A search began Tuesday into the remains of the fire for bodies.

Authorities warned about the raised risk of infectious dis-

eases breaking out among people crammed into shelters. Food and drinking water supplies were short, especially initially. People slept on cold floors, some without blankets, amid dropping temperatures and harsh winds. Sheets were hung for partitions.

A week after the disaster hit Ishikawa, camping tents were set up at a big hall to accommodate 500 people - a change that could prevent further post-disaster deaths. People who are pregnant, sick or old get priority for the revamped accommodations. Soon, they'll be able to move to the 110 hotels and inns that volunteered to accept 3,000 people from the quake-damaged region. With schools shuttered, people worried about the children, although some classes were moved to other campuses. As criticism grew about the government's disaster response, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's

administration earmarked 4.7 billion yen (\$33 million) for the disaster to provide food, water, blankets, milk and clothing. The spending was expected to grow.

Meanwhile, Japan's nuclear safety regulators have told the operator of a nuclear power plant in the area hit by a powerful New Year's Day quake to study its potential impact.

The Nuclear Regulation Authority, or NRA, asked for further investigation even though initial assessments showed the Shika nuclear power plant's cooling systems and ability to contain radiation remained intact.

The order reflects Japan's greater vigilance about safety risks after meltdowns in 2011 at a plant in Fukushima, on the northeastern Pacific coast, following a magnitude 9 quake and a massive tsunami. The January 1 magnitude 7.6 quake and

dozens of strong aftershocks have left 206 people dead and dozens more unaccounted for. It also caused small tsunamis. But Hokuriku Electric Power Co., the plant's operator, reported it had successfully dealt with damage to transformers, temporary outages and sloshing of spent fuel cooling pools that followed the quakes.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi emphasised that the plant was safe. Eighteen of 116 radiation monitoring posts installed in Ishikawa prefecture, where Shika is located, and in neighbouring Toyama briefly failed after the quake. All but two have since been repaired and none showed any abnormality, he said. Shika is a town on the western coast of the Noto peninsula, where the quake did the most damage, leaving roads gapping, toppling and collapsing buildings and triggering landslides.



Russian President Vladimir Putin inspects growing tomatoes during his visit to the year-round greenhouse farm "Makatrov Peasant Farm" in Anadyr, Chukotka region, in the Russian Far East, Wednesday. AP/PTI

Yemen's Houthis launch missiles, drones attack

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels fired their largest-ever barrage of drones and missiles targeting shipping in the Red Sea, forcing the United States and British navies to shoot down the projectiles in a major naval engagement, authorities said Wednesday. No damage was immediately reported. The attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis came despite a planned United Nations Security Council vote later Wednesday to potentially condemn and demand an immediate halt to the attacks by the rebels, who say their assaults are aimed at stopping Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

However, their targets increasingly have little — or no — connection to Israel and imperil a crucial trade route linking Asia and the Middle East with Europe. That raises the risk of a US retaliatory strike on Yemen that could upend an uneasy cease-fire that has held in the Arab world's poorest country.

The assault happened off the Yemeni port cities of Hodeida and Mokha, according to the private intelligence firm Ambrey. In the Hodeida attack, Ambrey said ships described over radio seeing missiles and drones, with US-allied warships

in the area urging "vessels to proceed at maximum speed."

Off Mokha, ships saw missiles fired, a drone in the air and small vessels trailing them, Ambrey said early Wednesday. The British military's United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations also acknowledged the attack off Hodeida.

The US military's Central Command said the "complex attack" launched by the Houthis included bomb-carrying drones, anti-ship cruise missiles and one anti-ship ballistic missile.

It said 18 drones, two cruise missiles and the anti-ship missile were downed by F-18s from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as by American Arleigh Burke-class destroyers the USS Gravely, the USS Laboon and the USS Mason, as well as the United Kingdom's HMS Diamond.

"This is the 26th Houthi attack on commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea since Nov. 19," Central Command said. "There were no injuries or damage reported."

"Vessels are advised to transit with caution and report any suspicious activity," the UKTMO added.

British Defense Secretary Grant Shapps described the assault as "the largest attack by the Iranian-backed Houthis in the Red Sea to

date," saying the Diamond used Sea Viper missiles and guns to shoot down multiple drones.

"The UK alongside allies have previously made clear that these illegal attacks are completely unacceptable and if continued the Houthis will bear the consequences," Shapps said in a statement. "We will take the action needed to protect innocent lives and the global economy."

The Houthis, a Shiite group that has held Yemen's capital of Sanaa since 2014, later claimed responsibility for the attack in a televised statement by rebel spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree. Saree claimed the attack "targeted an American ship that was providing support to the Zionist entity," without offering any further information. He also described it as an "initial response" to American troops sinking Houthi vessels and killing 10 rebel fighters last week.

The Houthis will "continue to prevent Israeli ships or those heading to the ports of occupied Palestine from navigating in the Red Sea until the aggression stops and the siege on our steadfast brothers in the Gaza Strip ends," Saree said.

The Houthis say their attacks aim to end the pounding Israeli air-and-ground offensive targeting the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israel-

Hamas war. However, the links to the ships targeted in the rebel assaults have grown more tenuous as the attacks continue.

The Red Sea links the Mideast and Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal, and its narrow Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The strait is only 29 kilometers (18 miles) wide at its narrowest point, limiting traffic to two channels for inbound and outbound shipments, according to the US Energy Information Administration. Nearly 10 per cent of all oil traded at sea passes through it and an estimated \$1 trillion in goods pass through the strait annually.

A US draft resolution before the UN Security Council, obtained late Tuesday by The Associated Press, says the Houthi attacks impede global commerce "and undermine navigational rights and freedoms as well as regional peace and security." The resolution would demand the immediate release of the first ship the Houthis attacked, the Galaxy Leader, a Japanese-operated cargo ship with links to an Israeli company that the rebels seized in November along with its crew.

An initial draft of the resolution would have recognised "the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to take appropri-

ate measures to defend their merchant and naval vessels."

The final draft is weaker, eliminating any UN recognition of a country's right to defend its ships. Instead, it would affirm that the navigational rights and freedoms of merchant and commercial vessels must be respected, and take note "of the right of member states, in accordance with international law, to defend their vessels from attacks, including those that undermine navigational rights and freedoms."

A US-led coalition of nations has been patrolling the Red Sea to try and prevent the attacks. There's been no broad retaliatory strike yet, despite warnings from the US. However, Tuesday's attack appeared to be testing what response, if any, would come from Washington.

Meanwhile, a separate, tentative cease-fire between the Houthis and a Saudi-led coalition fighting on behalf of Yemen's exiled government has held for months, despite the long civil war in Yemen. This has raised concerns that any wider conflict in the sea — or a potential reprisal strike from Western forces — could reignite those tensions in Yemen. It also may draw in Iran, which has so far largely avoided directly entering the wider Israel-Hamas war, further into the conflict.

Legal battle set to open at top UN court over allegation of genocide in Gaza

AP ■ THE HAGUE

A legal battle over whether Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza amounts to genocide opens on Thursday at the United Nations' top court with preliminary hearings into South Africa's call for judges to order an immediate suspension of Israel's military actions. Israel stringently denies the genocide allegation.

The case, that is likely to take years to resolve, strikes at the heart of Israel's national identity as a Jewish state created in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide in the Holocaust. It also involves South Africa's identity: Its ruling African National Congress party has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands" before ending in 1994.

Israel normally considers UN and international tribunals unfair and biased. But it is sending a strong legal team to the International Court of Justice to defend its military operation launched in the aftermath of the October 7 attacks by Hamas. "I think they have come because they want to be exonerated and think they can successfully resist the accusation of genocide," said Juliette McIntyre, an expert on international law at the University of South Australia.

Two days of preliminary hearings at the International Court of Justice begin with lawyers for South Africa explaining to judges why the country has accused Israel of "acts and omissions" that are "genocidal in character" in the Gaza war and has called for an immediate halt to Israel's military actions.

Thursday's opening hearing is focused on South Africa's request for the court to impose binding interim orders including that Israel halt its military campaign. A decision will likely take weeks.

Israel's offensive has killed more than 23,200 Palestinians in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza. About two-thirds of the dead are women and chil-

dren, health officials say. The death toll does not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

In the October 7 attack, in which Hamas overwhelmed Israel's defences and stormed through several communities, Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mainly civilians. They abducted around 250 others, nearly half of whom have been released. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken dismissed the case as "meritless" during a visit to Tel Aviv on Tuesday. "It is particularly galling, given that those who are attacking Israel — Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, as well as their supporter Iran — continue to call for the annihilation of Israel and the mass murder of Jews," he said.

The world court, which rules on disputes between nations, has never adjudged a country to be responsible for genocide. The closest it came was in 2007 when it ruled that Serbia "violated the obligation to prevent genocide" in the July 1995 massacre by Bosnian Serb forces of more than 8,000 Muslim men and boys in the Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica.

South Africa "will have a hard time getting over the threshold" of proving genocide, said McIntyre. "It's not simply a matter of killing enormous numbers of people," she added in an email to The Associated Press. "There must be an intent to destroy a group of people (classified by race or religion for example) in whole or in part, in a particular place."

In a detailed, 84-page document launching the case late last year, South Africa alleges that Israel has demonstrated that intent. Israel responded by insisting it operates according to international law and focuses its military actions solely against Hamas, adding that the residents of Gaza are not an enemy.

It asserted that it takes steps to minimise harm to civilians and to allow humanitarian aid to enter the territory. An Israeli Foreign Ministry statement called South Africa's case a "despicable and contemptuous exploitation" of the court.

Video footage shows Israeli army shot 3 Palestinians, killing 1

Beit Rima (AP): Security camera video from a West Bank village shows a young man standing in a central square when he is suddenly shot and drops to the ground. Two others rushing to his aid are also hit, leaving a 17-year-old dead, moments before Israeli military jeeps roll in.

An Associated Press review of the video and interviews with the two wounded survivors showed Israeli soldiers opened fire on the three when they did not appear to pose a threat. One of the wounded Palestinians was shot a second time after he got up and tried to hop away. The fatal shooting in the village of Beit Rima last week is the latest in a series of incidents in which soldiers appeared to fire without provocation, a trend Palestinians say has worsened since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza three months ago. The Israeli military said troops entered Beit Rima overnight Thursday into Friday as part of a "counter-terrorism operation." It said troops fired at sus-

pects who threw explosives and firebombs at them.

The video, obtained by the AP from a local smoke shop, does not show anyone throwing explosives.

After reviewing the footage, a military spokesperson said soldiers reported that one of the Palestinians — visible kneeling in front of an object just outside the frame — was igniting a Molotov cocktail when he was shot.

The video, however, shows that the first shot does not hit the kneeling man, but rather another Palestinian man, Nader Rimawi. Nader told the AP that the object was a stack of cardboard boxes and scraps of paper that 17-year-old Osaïd Rimawi had gathered and was preparing to light to keep the men warm. Other videos of the shooting posted to social media and reviewed by AP appear consistent with Nader's description of the object Osaïd was preparing to light. It is possible videos taken from other angles could further illuminate what happened.

Antony Blinken seeks Palestinian governance reform for postwar Gaza

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday to seek governance reforms as part of US efforts to rally the region behind postwar plans for Gaza that also include concrete steps toward a Palestinian state.

Blinken says he has secured commitments from multiple countries in the region to assist with rebuilding and governing Gaza after Israel's war against Hamas, and that wider Israeli-Arab normalisation is still possible, but only if there is "a pathway to a Palestinian state."

The approach faces serious obstacles. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government is adamantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, and the autocratic, Western-backed Palestinian leadership, whose forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas took over in 2007, lacks legitimacy in the view of many Palestinians.

The war in Gaza is still rag-



Palestinians look at a damaged residential building after an Israeli strike in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. AP/PTI

ing with no end in sight, fuelling a humanitarian catastrophe in the tiny coastal enclave. The fighting has also stoked escalating violence between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militants that has raised fears of a wider conflict. On his fourth visit to the

region since the war began three months ago, Blinken has met in recent days with the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. He says they are open to contributing to postwar plans in return for progress on creating

a Palestinian state. The Saudi Ambassador to the UK went even further on Tuesday, telling the BBC that the kingdom is still interested in a landmark normalisation agreement with Israel, but that it must include "nothing less than an independent state of Palestine."

'Man accused of stabbing S Korean politician wanted to stop him from becoming president'

AP ■ SEOUL

The man accused of stabbing South Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung in the neck told investigators that he wanted to kill him to prevent him from becoming the country's president, police said Wednesday. Lee was released Wednesday from the hospital after eight days of treatment, including surgery.

Police said they believe the suspect acted alone when he attacked Lee, 59, in the southeastern city of Busan on January 2, leaving him bleeding and slumping on the ground. During questioning, the suspect said he had determined to kill Lee to prevent



him from running for South Korea's presidency, Busan police chief Woo Cheol-Mun told a televised briefing. Woo said the suspect said he was unsatisfied with what he believes were authorities' fail-

ures to punish Lee over his corruption allegations.

Woo said the suspect left a eight-page note that shows similar motives for his attack. Woo said the suspect bought an outdoor knife last April and followed Lee on five events since June.

"It's analyzed that the suspect's subjective political belief led to the extreme crime," Woo said. During police questioning, the suspect had no defense lawyer, according to Busan police. Police handed over the suspect to prosecutors, who will determine whether to indict him and send him to a trial. If he's indicted but still has no lawyer, a court will

appoint one. A Busan court earlier approved an arrest warrant for him on alleged attempted murder. "I caused concerns. I'm sorry," the suspect, who was not identified, said in brief comments to reporters at the Busan police station. Asked by a reporter whether he plotted the attack alone, he said, "Yes. How could I plan this with someone else?"

Democratic Party officials confirmed the suspect became a member last year. The ruling People Power Party said he is currently not their member but media reports said the man was previously affiliated with the party's predecessor.

Kim calls S Korea as principal enemy

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has called South Korea "our principal enemy" and threatened to annihilate it if provoked, as he escalates his inflammatory rhetoric in an election year in South Korea and the US. The White House meanwhile said it has evidence that Russia had fired at Ukraine additional ballistic missiles provided by North Korea. The US, South Korea and their partners issued a statement Wednesday condemning both North Korea and Russia over the missile transfer.

Experts say Kim will likely further raise animosities by test-firing more missiles to try to raise stakes in the standoff with his rivals and influence the results of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in November.

During tours of munitions factories this week, Kim said it's time to define South Korea "as a state most hostile" toward North Korea because of its long-running attempts to topple the North's socialist system. He said North Korea must bolster its nuclear war deterrent, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported Wednesday.

If South Korea dares to use its military force against North Korea, Kim said, "We will have no hesitation in annihilating (South Korea) by mobilising all means and forces in our hands," according to KCNA.

He has made similar threats recently, and analysts say Kim likely hopes that South Korea's liberal opposition, which is seeking reconciliation with North Korea, would win the April elections. Kim apparently also believes he can win

US concessions if former President Donald Trump returns to the White House, analysts said. Kim and Trump met three times as part of high-stakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018-19.

There are concerns that North Korea provocations could trigger limited clashes between the two Koreas along their heavily armed border.

Last Friday, North Korea fired artillery shells near the disputed western sea boundary with South Korea, prompting South Korea to stage its own firing drills in the same area. South Korea accused North Korea of continuing with firing drills in the area over the weekend.

Three bloody naval skirmishes between the Koreas have occurred along the disputed sea boundary since 1999, and two attacks blamed on North Korea killed 50 South Koreans in the area in 2010.

Kim's visit to the munitions factories could also be related to North Korea's reported supply of conventional arms to Russia in return for sophisticated Russian weapons technologies. The factories could include a missile-producing facility as KCNA said they carried out the plan for deploying new weapons to major missile units. Photos released by North Korea showed missile launch vehicles.

US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday that the North Korea-supplied missiles were fired on the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv on January 6. The White House last week declassified US intelligence determinations that the Russians fired North Korea-provided missiles on Ukraine on January 2 and December 30.

'X Corp slashed 30% of trust & safety staff'

Melbourne (AP): X Corp., the owner of the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, has slashed its global trust and safety staff by 30 per cent including an 80 per cent reduction in the number of safety engineers since billionaire Elon Musk took over in 2022, Australia's online safety watchdog said on Thursday.

Australia's eSafety Commission, which describes itself as the world's first government agency dedicated to keeping people safer online, released summaries of answers provided by X to questions about how its policies about hateful conduct were enforced.

The commission said in a statement while X had previously given estimates of the reduction in staffing, the answers were the first specific figures on where staff reductions had been made to become

public. Since the day before Musk bought control of San Francisco-based Twitter on Oct. 28, 2022, until a reporting period imposed by the commission closed May 31, 2023, trust and safety staff globally had been reduced from 4,062 to 2,849 employees and contractors. That reduction is 30 per cent globally and 45 per cent of those in the Asia-Pacific region.

Engineers focused on trust and safety issues at X had been reduced from 279 globally to 55, a fall of 80 per cent. Full-time employee content moderators had been reduced 52 per cent from 107 to 51. Content moderators employed on contract fell 12 per cent from 2,613 to 2,305.

X had also revealed it had reinstated 6,100 previously banned accounts, including

194 who had been suspended for hateful conduct. The commission said it understood those accounts were Australian. X did not provide global figures, but technology newsletter Platformer reported in November 2022 that 62,000 suspended accounts had been reinstated.

Despite these accounts previously breaching X's rules, they were not placed under any additional scrutiny once they were reinstated, the commission said. X's responses to user reports of hateful content had slowed since Musk took over.

eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said a social media platform would almost inevitably become more toxic and less safe for users with a reduction of safety staff combined with banned account holders returning. "You are creating a perfect safety storm,"

Inman Grant said in embargoed comments on Wednesday ahead of the report's release.

Inman Grant said while X could not be forced to lift user safety standards, its failure to do so risked its brand reputation and advertising revenue. "Advertisers want to advertise on platforms that they feel are safe, that are positive and non-toxic. Users will also vote with their feet when a platform feels unsafe or toxic," Inman Grant said.

X did not immediately respond on Wednesday to a request for comment.

X's policy on hateful conduct states: "You may not directly attack other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age disability or serious disease."

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 No. SSA/11/2023-Equity-SSA/4/0272/2024 Date : 10.01.2024
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 Dated : 09-01-2024 for supply of Sanitary Napkins Vending Machines, Sanitary Napkins Incinerator Machine through GeM portal.
 Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit the bid in GeM portal accordingly. The bid is also available in SSA website : <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>
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 पत्रांक- 481 / रोडवे / 2023-24 पुनः ई-निविदा सूचना दिनांक- 10.01.2024
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S.No.	Scheduled/Information	Date	Time
1	Date of Online publication	12.01.2024	01:00 PM
2	Document Online Download start Date	12.01.2024	01:00 PM
3	Bid submission Online Start Date	12.01.2024	01:00 PM
4	Pre Bid (Office Nagar Nigam Haridwar Uttarakhand)	16.01.2024	12:00 PM
5	Bid Submission Online End Date	29.01.2024	02:00 PM
6	Offline Submission of Hard/Original copy of Document End date	29.01.2024	03:00 PM
7	Bid opening Date	29.01.2024	04:00 PM

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Tender Enquiry No.	Estimated Cost/EMD (Rs.)	Availability of Bid Document	Last Date & Time of Bid Submission/ Date and time of Opening of bids
TPDDL/ENGG/ENQ/200001625/23-24 Purchase of Disk based Backup & Recovery solution	80 Lacs/ 2,00,000/-	11.01.2024	01.02.2024; 1600 Hrs/ 01.02.2024; 1630 Hrs

CORRIGENDUM / TENDER DATE EXTENTION

Tender Enquiry No.	Previously Published Date	Revised Due Date & Time of Bid Submission/ Date & time of opening of bids
TPDDL/ENGG/ENQ/200001613/23-24 SITC of 33kV AIS switching station at BBI, Delhi	11.12.2023	11.01.2024 at 1600 Hrs/ 11.01.2024 at 1630 Hrs

 Complete tender and corrigendum document is available on our website www.tatapower-deli.com → Vendor Zone → Tender / Corrigendum Documents
 Contracts - 011-66112222

India to be third largest economy by FY28, developed nation by 2047: FM

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday exuded confidence that India will become the world's third largest economy worth over USD 5 trillion by 2027-28 and a developed nation by 2047, with GDP touching USD 30 trillion.

emphasis is being given to sunrise industries. Also, the FDI policy of the Narendra Modi Government has helped attract foreign investment, with USD 595 billion coming in the last 9 years.

"It is possible that we will be the third largest economy by 2027-28, and our GDP will cross USD 5 trillion by that time. By 2047, it is a conservative estimate that we will reach at least USD 30 trillion in terms of economy," Sitharaman said while addressing a seminar of Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2024.

Stressing that the people of



India have met with the challenges post-COVID and recovery is on a strong footing, she said Gujarat will be the engine of growth in India's march to become a

per cent CAGR (annual growth) between 2011 and 2021 against a national average of 10.4 per cent, the Union Finance Minister said. Sitharaman said India is on track to become an in-house producer of semiconductors, and EV adoption is happening in a big way. All of these are the result of the FDI policy being pursued by the government.

Between April 2000 and March 2023, in 23 years, India has attracted USD 919 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI). 65 per cent of this, or USD 595 billion, has come in the last 8-9 years, Sitharaman said.

"FDI is coming in... Where policies bring in greater certainty, convenience, ease of doing business, FDI flows in. Of course, disruptions of higher US Fed rate and other things can divert it elsewhere. But despite that, we have been receiving that kind of flow of the FDI. It is not as if it's coming only for manufacturing, it is coming in the service sector (as well)," she said.

Speaking about financial inclusion, Sitharaman said 80 per cent of people have bank accounts. The number of bank account holders increased to 50 crore from 15 crore in 2014.



Late buying helps Sensex jump 270 pts; RIL, ICICI shine

PTI ■ MUMBAI,

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty bounced back from intra-day lows to settle higher on Wednesday, supported by a lag-end buying in market heavyweights Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank and HDFC Bank.

Investors preferred to stay cautious ahead of macroeconomic data like IIP and inflation to be released this week, traders said.

After a muted opening, the BSE benchmark swung between gains and losses before settling 271.50 points or 0.38 per cent higher at 71,657.71. The index hit a low of 71,110.98 and a high of 71,733.84 during the session.

The Nifty advanced 73.85 points or 0.34 per cent to 21,618.70.

"The weakness in global indices continued to weigh down the domestic indices with every up move. The market is looking for fresh triggers for a direction, and the release of US and Indian inflation data may provide a near-term direction in the market."

"The investor's focus will be shifted to the earnings season, on a sequential basis, the earnings growth is likely to be lower, while the expectations for auto, capital goods, and cement will remain strong," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Reliance Industries was the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 2.69 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Wipro, IndusInd Bank, JSW Steel, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services and Titan.

In contrast, NTPC, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement,

Axis Bank, Infosys and Nestle were the major laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.35 per cent, and the midcap index advanced 0.23 per cent. Among the sectoral indices, services, consumer discretionary, consumer durables, healthcare and industrials were among the gainers, while FMCG, telecommunication, utilities, realty and power were major laggards.

"Markets were extremely volatile but ended higher on selective buying in late trades as investors await the US inflation data on Thursday, which will provide some hint on Fed's interest rate decision going ahead."

"Helping positive sentiments were improving European stock markets in the backdrop of negative US Treasury bond yields, which were seen weighing on the US dollar," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 990.90 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.19 per cent to USD 77.44 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark ended marginally higher by 30.99 points or 0.04 per cent at 71,386.21 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended 31.85 points or 0.15 per cent up at 21,544.85.

National coal index declines 17.5 per cent in November

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indicating sufficient coal availability in the market, the National Coal Index (NCI) dropped 17.54 per cent to 155.09 points in November 2023.

The NCI was at 188.08 points in November 2022, the coal ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

This shows a strong supply of coal in the market, with sufficient availability to meet the growing demand.

NCI is a price index that combines coal prices from all sales channels, including notified prices, auction prices and import prices.

Established with the base year as fiscal 2017-18, it serves as a

reliable indicator of market dynamics, providing insights into price fluctuations.

"Similarly, the NCI for non-coking coal stands at 143.52 points in November 2023, reflecting a decline of 25.07 per cent, compared to November 2022, while Coking Coal stands at 188.39 points in November 2023, with a growth of 5.79 per cent compared to the corresponding period of last year," the statement said.

The peak of NCI was observed in June 2022 when the index reached 238.83 points, but subsequent months have experienced a decline, indicative of abundant coal in the Indian market.

Musk not attending Vibrant Gujarat but Tesla welcome to invest: Official

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Amid speculation that Elon Musk will visit Gujarat, a senior government official on Wednesday said the billionaire-founder of Tesla is not coming for the ongoing Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit, but they are welcome to invest in the State.

The state is very keen to get Tesla if it comes to India, Managing Director of Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation Rahul Gupta said.

He also said the state is already home to a slew of electric vehicle manufacturers.

To a specific question on whether Musk is expected to attend the three-day event

inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier in the day, a state government official replied in the negative.

"Musk is not expected. If he were to come, would he not attend the inaugural session? Will he be attending the seminars on day 2 and day 3?" the official said on the condition of anonymity.

Speculation was rife that Musk might attend the summit.

"You will appreciate that it is the prerogative of any particular company on where to invest and what to invest. So as far as Tesla is concerned, the government of Gujarat will be more than happy to facilitate them in case if they



decide to come to the state," Gupta said.

He also said the state's industrial landscape and robust infrastructure were among other draws that can entice a company like Tesla.

Earlier, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra alluded to a meeting between Modi and Musk during the PM's last visit to the US.

"There were many elements of value chain, economic and commercial investment driven opportunities that were discussed between the Prime Minister and the leaders."

"And Tesla leadership had extensive meetings with a focus on how exactly can Tesla partner more strongly in the period of investment and manufacturing partnership with India so that it strengthens that segment of the automobile manufacturing in India," Kwatra said.

Maruti to invest ₹35,000 cr to set up 2nd plant in Gujarat: Toshihiro

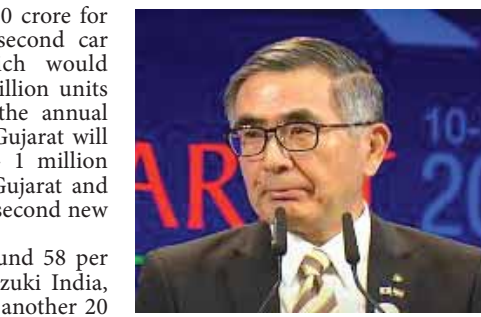
PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Maruti Suzuki India will invest Rs 35,000 crore to set up its second manufacturing facility in Gujarat, Suzuki Motor Corporation President Toshihiro Suzuki said on Wednesday.

Speaking here at the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit (VGGSS), Toshihiro said the plant would have an installed production capacity of 10 lakh units per annum.

"We will invest Rs 35,000 crore for the construction of a second car plant in Gujarat which would produce another one million units per year. As a result, the annual production capacity in Gujarat will be two million units -- 1 million units at Suzuki Motor Gujarat and one million units at the second new plant," Suzuki said.

Suzuki Motor owns around 58 per cent stake in Maruti Suzuki India, which is looking to add another 20



lakh units production capacity by 2030-31 with about 28 different models in the market.

Currently, the auto major has a cumulative production capacity of around 22 lakh units per annum across its two manufacturing plants in Haryana and Gujarat.

The two plants in Haryana -- Gurgaon and Manesar -- together roll out around 15.5 lakh units per annum.

Suzuki Motor Gujarat, a unit of the

company, has also set up a facility in Gujarat with an installed production capacity of 7.5 lakh units per year.

Besides, the car market leader is already in the process of setting up a new manufacturing plant at Sonipat in Haryana with an investment of Rs 11,000 crore in the first phase.

The new plant's first phase with a manufacturing capacity of 2.5 lakh units per annum is expected to be commissioned by next year.

DP World to build container terminal in Gujarat, says chairman

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Global logistics management and services firm DP World will build a container terminal in Gujarat and is committed to further investments in India, the company's Chairman Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem said on Wednesday.

Addressing the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit here, he said the company will continue to partner with the Indian logistics sector and support manufacturing industries in Gujarat and the rest of India to make Indian goods globally competitive and accessible.

DP World started its

operation in Gujarat in 2003 with opening of the Mundra International Container terminal, he said.

"We have invested in the state of Gujarat as well in other state in India, to the tune of USD 2.5 billion..." bin Sulayem said.

These investments were on various activities such as development of multimodal logistics ecosystem, container freight station, inland terminal contract logistic, cold chain and acute first cargo services, among others.

"DP World is planning in the next few years to invest in addition to the USD 3 billion.

India imposes anti dumping duty on 3 Chinese products for 5 years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has imposed anti-dumping duties on three Chinese products -- wheel loaders, gypsum tiles, and industrial laser machinery -- for five years to guard local manufacturers from cheap imports from the neighbouring country.

These duties were imposed following recommendations of the commerce ministry's investigation arm Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR).

The DGTR in separate probes have concluded that these products have been exported at a price below normal value in Indian markets, which has resulted in dumping.

The domestic industry has



suffered material injury due to the dumping of these products.

According to separate notifications of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and

Customs (CBIC) issued last month, the duties have been imposed on gypsum board/tiles with lamination at least on one side.

Such duties have also been

imposed on industrial laser machines, in fully assembled, Semi Knocked Down (SKD) or Completely Knocked Down (CKD) form, used for cutting, marking, or welding operations; and wheel loader imported in the form of Completely Built Unit (CBU), or SKD.

The anti-dumping duties imposed under these notifications will be levied for five years unless revoked, superseded or amended, according to the notifications.

Such duties have also been imposed on gypsum tiles manufactured by some companies in Oman.

Earlier, it was imposed on toughened glass for home appliances; and certain types of flax yarn from China.

While DGTR recommends levying of the duty, the finance ministry imposes it. Countries initiate anti-dumping probes to determine if the domestic industry has been hurt by a surge in low-cost imports. As a counter-measure, they impose duties under the multilateral WTO regime.

Anti-dumping measures are taken to ensure fair trade and provide a level-playing field to the domestic industry. Both India and China are members of the Geneva-based World Trade Organisation (WTO).

India's exports to China during 2022-23 stood at USD 15.3 billion while imports stood at USD 98.5 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 83.2 billion.



Gold falls ₹50; silver declines ₹450

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous close, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams.

Silver also declined Rs 450 to Rs 76,300 per kilogram.

"Gold traded slightly lower on Wednesday, with spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets trading at Rs 63,150/10 gram, down Rs 50 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the MCX, February contract of gold rose Rs 86 to Rs 62,265 per 10 grams. Also, March contract of silver jumped Rs 243 to Rs 72,290 per kg on the bourse.

In the international markets, gold and silver were down at USD 2,030 per ounce and USD 23.04 per ounce, respectively.

Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,030 per ounce, down USD 1 from the previous close in the global markets.

Gold prices traded in a narrow range as investors are keeping a close eye on the US Inflation report which is going to release on Thursday that could influence the Federal Reserve's decision on monetary policy interest rate path, Gandhi added.

Shares of Reliance Industries climb nearly 3 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Reliance Industries on Wednesday climbed nearly 3 per cent to reach its 52-week high-level on hectic buying at the counter during the lag-end of the trade.

The stock of the country's most valued firm by market valuation jumped 2.69 per cent to settle at Rs 2,649.95 on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 3 per cent to reach its 52-week high of Rs 2,658.95. It climbed 2.88 per cent to Rs 2,655 on the NSE.

The company's market valuation also jumped Rs 46,810.44 crore to reach Rs 17,92,872.53 crore.

Buying in the heavyweight stock also helped the equity benchmark indices settle higher after a volatile trade.

NCLAT rejects Jindal Power plea to allow its bid for Tuticorin Coal Terminal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT has dismissed the plea of Jindal Power to allow the company to participate in the ongoing resolution process of debt-ridden Tuticorin Coal Terminal.

A two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) upheld the earlier order passed by the Mumbai Bench of NCLT, which said that under CIRP Regulations, Jindal Power Ltd (JPL) was "ineligible to submit a Resolution Plan" for Tuticorin Coal Terminal.

The appellate tribunal said the process prescribed in the IBC asks for maximisation of the value, but it cannot give a go-by to the existing specific



CIRP Regulations, which prevent the entry of companies that are not in the final list of prospective resolution applicants.

The NCLAT further directed the resolution professional and the Committee of Creditors (COC) to decide on the bid received from Seapol.

"We do not find merit in the present Appeal, which if allowed would mean

contravention and violation of Regulation...The Appeal is, therefore, dismissed," said the NCLAT.

"RP and COC should proceed with its CIR proceedings and decide the resolution plan available with them either way," it added.

JPL had challenged the August 2023 order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which said JPL was "ineligible" as the CIRP Regulations prevented it from submitting any bids midway.

Earlier, the NCLT had allowed JPL to participate in the resolution process, but it held the company ineligible as its name was not in the final list of resolution applicants.

Earlier, the RP of Tuticorin Coal Terminal had filed for

liquidation of the company as creditors failed to find a buyer. However, a firm Seahawk expressed its interest and the opportunity was granted but it did not file any resolution plan.

Around the same time Seapol, which was on the final list of selected prospective resolution applicants, also approached NCLT. After this, the liquidation application was withdrawn. Seapol submitted its plan on February 18, 2023.

While the lenders were considering Seapol's plan, JPL on July 12, 2023, sent an EoI (Expression of Interest) for Tuticorin Coal Terminal, showing its interest in participating in the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP).

Green hydrogen can enable energy transition in India's net-zero journey: WEF report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Green hydrogen in India cannot only provide energy for sectors such as fertilizers, chemicals, refining and iron, but also save carbon emissions compared to fossil fuels, the World Economic Forum said on Wednesday.

In a detailed analysis of what it will take to make green hydrogen a credible energy pathway in India, the report said, "Green hydrogen can enable energy transition as India takes its net-zero journey towards 2070 while supporting its growing energy needs." Hydrogen produced through the electrolysis of water and powered by renewable energy, which is known as green hydrogen, is

considered a clean, flexible and versatile energy carrier that can also help address the tension between energy supply and climate change, the report said.

India is currently the third-largest economy in the world in terms of energy needs, and the country's demand for energy is set to surge. The demand is estimated to grow 35 per cent by 2030.

In 2022, India's energy import bill was pegged at USD 185 billion, a figure that is sure to rise if the country continues to supply its growing energy demand through traditional methods.

At the same time, India set a commitment to achieve net zero by 2070 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow.

Satwik, Chirag advance in Malaysia Open

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR
The Indian men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty began the new season on a winning note, advancing to the second round, while Asian Games bronze medalist HS Prannoy bit the dust in his opening-round match at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Wednesday. The world No.2 doubles combination of Satwik and Chirag overcame a tough challenge from the gritty Indonesian pair of Muhammad Shohibul Fikri and Maulana Bagas 21-18, 21-19, while world No. 8 Prannoy lost to Denmark's Anders Antonsen, a player ranked one spot below him, 14-21, 11-21 in 43 minutes. The second-seeded pair of Satwik and Chirag, which reached the semifinals in 2023, will look to continue the good run and go deep in the draw after the stiff 44-minute test from the world No. 9 duo, which had beaten the Indians twice last year — at the Thailand Open and China Open.

PRANNOY LOSES IN OPENING ROUND



Satwik and Chirag have looked in ominous form, winning the Asian Games gold in Hangzhou, a Super 1000 crown in Indonesia, the Korea Open Super 500 and the Swiss Open super 300 last year before grabbing a career-best ranking of World No.1, albeit for a brief time. The duo asserted early dominance in the first game with powerful smashes to take a four-point lead at 8-4 and never lost the advantage. However, the second game was more challenging with the Indians trailing for most part of the match before levelling at 19-all and taking the last two points. Prannoy, a frontrunner in the Olympic race, had a sensational last season with maiden bronze medals at the World Championships and the Asian Games and a title-run at the Malaysia Masters super 500. But, in the season-opening match here the Indian looked rusty and couldn't match up with his opponent's speed. Another Indian, Lakshya Sen, will begin his campaign against Weng Hong Yang of China later in the day.

Nancy, Elavenil win air rifle gold, silver at Asia Olympic qualifiers

PTI ■ JAKARTA
Budding shooter Nancy Valarivan came up with a grand performance in women's 10m air rifle, clinching gold and silver respectively at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers here on Wednesday. Teenager Nancy, the junior world team champion, shot a superb 252.8 in the final field of eight to clinch the top spot. Compatriot Elavenil was unlucky to miss the gold by a fraction of a point, aggregating 252.7. India narrowly missed a clean sweep in the women's 10m air rifle final after Mehuli Ghosh finished fourth with 210 points behind China's Shen Yufan. India's world champion marksman Rudranksh Patil settled for a bronze medal in men's 10m air rifle shooting 228.7 in the final, which was won by Ma Sihang of China (251.4), while Korea's Daehan Choe bagged silver.



Another Indian to make the final, Arjun Babuta, finished sixth. Rudranksh had qualified for the eight-shooter final placed third with a score of 630.4, while Babuta (629.6) was fourth going into the medal round. Nancy was consistent throughout the final, not having a single below-par score, while Elavenil was unlucky to score a 9.7 in her 10th shot in the final, which finally decided her fate. Earlier, the 24-year-old Elavenil topped the qualification round with a score of 633.8, while Nancy aggregated 632.4 and Mehuli had 631.0.



Avani shoots day best score, rises to 2nd place in Australia

PTI ■ MELBOURNE
Avani Prashanth cherished that-tricks of birdies on both nines to card the day's best score of 5-under 68, which propelled her to the second place on the leaderboard after the second round of the Australian Masters of Amateurs. Avani (71-68), who dropped four shots late in the first round, had seven birdies against two bogeys and she is now 7-under for 36, just one stroke behind the leader, Japan's Nika Ito (68-70) at the Par-73 South Golf Club. Avani, ranked 50th in World amateur rankings, has one more round to go to make a bid for one of the most prestigious amateur titles in the region. The 2023 Queen Sirikit Cup winner birdied the third, fourth

and fifth and then birdied 10th, 11th and 12th and at that stage she was 6-under for the day. She dropped shots on 13th and 18th but in between had a birdie on 17th, which she had bogeyed on Day 1. India's other players were once again struggling as Heena Kang (83-85) was 69th among women. In the men's section, Rohit Narwal (76-70) improved his showing and rose to T-52 up from overnight T-79. Sandeep Yadav (84-74) improved by 10 shots on his first round but was still 95th. Max Moring of Australia (67-67) was tied for the top spot with Zackary Swanwick (67-67) at 10-under each, while Australia's Siddharth Nadimpalli (69-67) was third at 8-under total.

Hockey coach Fulton picks big squad for four nation tour

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India has picked a jumbo 26-member squad for the men's Four-Nation hockey tour of South Africa this month to check out as many players as possible in the crucial Olympic year. The tournament, which will mark the comeback of former captain Manpreet Singh after a break, will be played in Cape Town from January 22 with the other competing countries being France, the Netherlands and hosts South Africa. The Indians will be led by Harmanpreet Singh, while FIH Player of the Year Hardik Singh will be his deputy. "We are quite excited to get on with the sea-

son in the Olympic year with the South Africa tour where we will play quality teams," said India chief coach Craig Fulton. "We have chosen a big squad in order to give players exposure and it will also give me an opportunity to see some of the players in competition mode ahead of the Pro League," he added. Youngsters Arajjeet Singh Hundal and Bobby Singh Dhama have been included following an impressive outing with the junior Indian side. "We have a short camp in SAI, Bengaluru before we leave for the tour. We have also included two young players in the senior side, and it will be interesting to watch them adapt to the level we play," the coach added.



Stalwart PR Sreejesh and Krishan Pathak will continue to do duty under the bar.
THE SQUAD:
Goalkeepers: PR Sreejesh, Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Pawan.
Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Jugraj Singh, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh, Varun Kumar, Sumit, Sanjay, Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem.
Midfielders: Vivek Sagar Prasad, Nilakanta Sharma, Rajkumar Pal, Shamsheer Singh, Vishnukant Singh, Hardik Singh (vc), Manpreet Singh.
Forwards: Mandeep Singh, Abhishek, Sukhjeet Singh, Gurjant Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Akashdeep Singh, Arajjeet Singh Hundal, Bobby Singh Dhama.

Tottenham signs Germany forward Werner on loan from Leipzig

AP ■ LONDON
Tottenham signed Timo Werner on loan from Leipzig on Tuesday, giving the Germany forward another shot at the Premier League after his inconsistent stint with Chelsea. The 27-year-old Werner joined Spurs on a six-month deal that included an option to make the transfer permanent this summer. In the short term, Werner would plug a gap left by the departure of captain Son Heung-min to the Asian Cup with South Korea potentially until mid-February. The move could also boost Werner's resumé ahead of the European Championship this



summer in Germany. Werner played for Chelsea from 2020-22 and helped the London club win the Champions League, but it was still an underwhelming stint in English soccer. He tallied 23 goals in 89 total appearances in his time at

Stamford Bridge. Werner returned to Leipzig in the summer of 2022 and scored 16 goals last season. But he's made only four starts under coach Marco Rose this campaign. The speedy Werner said he was encouraged by his discussions with Spurs' Australian manager Ange Postecoglou. "He gave me straight away the feeling that I need to join a club - what I want to feel when you talk to a manager - and also the tactics and the style, how he lets teams to play, how he lets the team play," he said. "For me, I thought straight away that it fits perfectly."

Middlesbrough gains 1-0 first-leg advantage in League Cup semifinal

AP ■ MIDDLESBROUGH (ENGLAND)
Cole Palmer missed from close range and Chelsea lost 1-0 to second-tier Middlesbrough in the first leg of their League Cup semifinal on Tuesday. Hayden Hackney scored in the 37th minute and Middlesbrough held on at Riverside Stadium against its Premier League opponent. Mauricio Pochettino's expensively assembled team has been eyeing cup trophies to make up for a disappointing Premier League campaign. They'll have work to do in the second leg at Stamford Bridge on Jan. 23. "We had too many chances to score where we didn't score. That is football," Pochettino told Sky Sports. "We have another 90 minutes at Stamford Bridge, and I think we need to be positive." Middlesbrough hasn't been this far in the League Cup since winning the competition in 2004. Hackney scored after sprinting past midfielder Moises Caicedo - a big-money signing last summer - inside the box and poking Isaiah Jones' low cross past goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic into the net. "It was amazing. Great ball. I just got on the end of it," the 21-year-old Hackney said. "We said before the game - try to keep it tight and catch them on the counter."



Palmer, who shot wide earlier in the first half, just needed a tap in to equalize after Middlesbrough goalkeeper Tom Glover misplayed Enzo Fernandez's shot in the fourth minute of first-half stoppage time. In what should have been a simple catch, the ball instead bounced off Glover's chest directly to Palmer, who tried to volley it in from about 5 yards out. He got under it, however, and his left-footed effort sailed over the crossbar. The 21-year-old Palmer, who joined Chelsea from Manchester City for around \$52 million in the offseason, is Chelsea's co-leading scorer this season with eight goals. Middlesbrough is 12th in the Championship and lost to Aston Villa 1-0 on Saturday in the FA Cup third round. "To beat a team of the quality of Chelsea, in any circumstances for us, is unbelievable," said Middlesbrough manager Michael Carrick, the former Manchester United star. "The lads were just exceptional. It was an incredible night."

Now a mom, Naomi Osaka gets ready to make Grand Slam return

AP ■ MELBOURNE
Smaller things are getting Naomi Osaka's attention now that she's preparing for her Grand Slam comeback. She's focusing on being more in the moment. More patient. More conscious of who may be watching her play her first major since 2022, and what kind of impression she'll leave. The first 15-day Australian Open, set to start Sunday morning (Saturday night in the U.S. ET), has been hyped as the tournament of comebacks. And Osaka has top billing among the three former No. 1-ranked, former Australian Open champions returning to Melbourne Park for their first time as moms. The attention on that returning trio — Osaka, Angelique Kerber and Caroline Wozniacki - intensified after another prominent storyline fizzled out when Rafael Nadal's attempted comeback from a year-long injury layoff lasted three matches. The 22-time major winner has a small tear in a muscle near his surgically repaired hip and flew home, leaving Novak Djokovic as the only remaining member of the so-called Big Three. Osaka competed for the first time in more than a year last week; she became a mother in July when her daughter, Shai, was born. The four-time major winner went 1-1 in Brisbane and found herself engaging more with other players, and more eager to acknowledge fans. "A part of me felt like Shai was watching me," she said. "I wanted to do my best for her. Also, when I was signing autographs, I was more aware of kids. I see them differently now because now I'm a mom, too, and I can picture Shai being that age. Yeah, I think while I'm playing, I'm aware of it in the sense that I want to be a good role model for my daughter." The 26-year-old Osaka has a Japanese mother and a Haitian father. She was born in Japan and grew up in the U.S. With endorsements and prize money, she's one of the wealthiest athletes in women's sports. In the past, she's felt enormous pressure. Osaka was open about her issues with depression and anxiety when she withdrew from the French Open in 2021. She later took extended breaks from the game to protect her mental health. She didn't play elite-level tennis at all last year, but realized she really did miss it. "Becoming a mom changed my mindset a lot," she said. "I think



I'm a lot more open-minded, a lot more patient. Also, I feel a lot stronger physically, but I think Shai definitely helped me with the way I view things." Osaka won her second U.S. Open title in 2020 and her second Australian Open title in 2021. Not long after, she said, "I closed myself off a lot." "I don't think that was quite fair... When people give me positivity and joy, I feel like it's fair to return it." In Brisbane, Osaka didn't wear headphones around the tennis venue, a choice she described as "character development!" "I feel like I'm more confident with who I am as a person," she said. "Now I find myself interacting with people." Kerber, who had her Grand Slam breakthrough in Australia in 2016, withdrew from the 2022 U.S. Open because she was pregnant. Her daughter, Liana, was born in February; Kerber's first win since in a competitive match was last week in Sydney as a member of Germany's victorious United Cup team. "For me to start my comeback like this, I mean, it couldn't be better, to be honest," she said. "It was a completely cold start for me. I had no idea where I am." One of her four losses was to top-ranked Iga Swiatek, one of the power players dominating the women's game. Regardless, the feeling of being back "was amazing; what I really missed." Wozniacki won the Australian Open in 2018, ending a long drought in majors. She married former NBA player David Lee the following year, quit the tour in 2020 and had two children, Olivia and James. She returned in time for last

year's U.S. Open, where she lost to eventual champion Coco Gauff in the round of 16. She was given a wild-card entry for the Australian Open and warmed up in Auckland, New Zealand, last week, where she lost to another mom, Elina Svitolina. There'll be other mothers in the 128-player Australian Open women's singles draw, including two-time champion Victoria Azarenka, who reached the semifinals last year while traveling with her son, Leo. She said a stereotype that you can't be an elite athlete and have a family had been broken. "It's actually evolved more and more. The testament of that is how many players are feeling comfortable and confident coming back and continue being on tour," Azarenka said. "I believe that we still have a lot more growth to do in that space." Three women have won major titles in the Open era after having children: Margaret Court in Australia in 1973, Evonne Goolagong Cawley at Wimbledon in 1980 and Kim Clijsters at the U.S. Open in 2009. Serena Williams missed four majors before making a comeback in 2018 after her first daughter, Olympia, was born but wasn't quite able to add to her 23 Grand Slam titles. Defending Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka beat Azarenka in the semifinals at Brisbane last week, and described her and Williams as inspirational for other athletes. "Gives me belief," Sabalenka said, "that maybe one day I can have a baby and come back and play on (a) high level."

Jessica advances to Adelaide International quarterfinals

AP ■ ADELAIDE
Second-seeded Jessica Pegula Shad a 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 win over fellow American Bernarda Pera on Wednesday to advance to the quarterfinals of the Adelaide International. Pera earned a spot in the main draw as a so-called lucky loser from qualifying and then upset former No. 2-ranked Paula Badosa in the opening round. Pegula went 1-for-10 on break points in the first set as Pera's powerful left-handed game led to the unseeded player's early advantage. But Pegula found her rhythm in the second set, where she hit 11 winners to six unforced errors. Pegula will next face Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, who beat fellow qualifier Katerina Siniakova 2-6, 6-3, 6-2. Adelaide is among the last tune-up events for the Australian Open, which starts Sunday in Melbourne. Top-seeded Elena Rybakina, last year's Australian Open finalist and winner of the Brisbane International on Sunday, was

scheduled to play later Wednesday. Tommy Paul, the top-seeded player in the men's draw in Adelaide, beat Australian qualifier Alex Bolt 6-3, 6-2. **SINNER STAYS HOT AT KOOYONG:** Jannik Sinner skipped official lead-in tournaments for the Australian Open and preferred to play at the Kooyong Classic exhibition in Melbourne, which also features No. 8-ranked Holger Rune and Andy Murray. Playing his first match of the season on Wednesday, Sinner beat Marc Polmans 6-4, 6-0. The 22-year-old Sinner finished 2023 by beating No. 1-ranked Novak Djokovic in the round-robin stage of the ATP Finals in Turin and again a week later as



he led Italy to the Davis Cup title in Malaga. He also won late-season titles in Beijing and Vienna which included wins over No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz and third-ranked Daniil Medvedev. Sinner's best result at the Australian Open came in 2022 with a quarterfinal appearance. His best Grand Slam singles to date was a semifinal run last year at Wimbledon. "It was a good end of season last year and I'm starting from zero

to try and get confidence from last year again," Sinner said. "It's obviously tough in the first match you play but I was happy with today." **MEHRTENS ADVANCES AT HOBART:** Top-seeded Elise Mertens has advanced to the quarterfinals at the Hobart International after a 6-2, 6-3 win over Anna Karolina Schmiedlova. Mertens is attempting to win her third Hobart title. The Belgian player, who won in Hobart in 2017 and 2018, will meet Dutch veteran Arantxa Rus for a place in the semifinals. "That would be amazing (to win the tournament again). But we're only in the quarterfinals - I need to win three more," Mertens said.

SPOTLIGHT ON ROHIT, KOHLI IN MOHALI

PTI ■ MOHALI
The return of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to the T20 format after 14 months will be keenly observed when India face a dangerous Afghanistan in the first ever white-ball series between the two teams, beginning here on Thursday.
The three-match contest will be India's last before the T20 World Cup in June, giving the team more clarity on where it stands ahead of the ICC event in Americas.
However, the final 15 will be picked on the core group's performance in the IPL, which precedes the World Cup.
Rohit and Kohli, now that they are back in the T20 setup, are a certainty in that squad but the accomplished duo would first like to get the most out of the games against Afghanistan, who would be without their star spinner Rashid Khan.
Khan underwent a back surgery

in November last year and is still recuperating.
"He is not totally fit. We will miss him in the series. We will struggle without Rashid but one should be ready for any kind of situation," Afghanistan captain Ibrahim Zadran said in the pre-match press conference here, hoping that others in the side would step up.
The focus, however, will firmly be on the two India greats, easily among the biggest crowd-pullers. Their presence on the field would be a big reason for the Mohali crowd to brave the prevailing cold wave.
Rohit, who will also captain the side, will be expected to carry on with his ultra aggressive approach in the powerplay like he showed in the ODI World Cup. Kohli, on the other hand, will look to up his strike rate in the middle overs as the modern game doesn't have room for anchors anymore.
The team, having returned from South Africa last week, will

1ST EVER WHITE BALL INDIA, AFGHANISTAN SERIES



only assemble by Wednesday evening for the series-opener on Thursday evening.
Though the likes of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Tilak Varma remain in the squad after performing top-order duties in the drawn series against South Africa, Shubman Gill is expected to open the innings alongside Rohit.
Across formats, Gill did not have the easiest of times in the Rainbow nation and will be looking to pile on the runs against Afghanistan with the fringe openers breathing down his neck.
In his toughest test yet in a blossoming T20 career, Rinku Singh proved his worth in the South African conditions and will be a key player for India in the middle-order, especially in the absence of the injured duo of Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya.
With Ishan Kishan interestingly left out, Jitesh Sharma and Sanju Samson are the two wick-

et-keeping options for the squad. Having donned the gloves in the previous two series, Jitesh is expected to start ahead of Samson, who finds himself back in the fold after the short series in Ireland last August.
Shivam Dube too is back and can feature in the eleven as a pace bowling all-rounder while three specialist pace options are Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan and Mukesh Kumar.
Kuldeep Yadav will lead the spin attack and other options to choose from are Ravi Bishnoi, Axar Patel and Washington Sundar.
India would be expected to win comfortably in their own conditions but Afghanistan will give them a run for their money.
Having recently exceeded all expectations in their giant-killing run during the ODI World Cup in India, Afghanistan will be high on confidence in a format that suits them the most.
Barring Rashid's injury-forced

absence, the team is at full strength after the likes Mujeeb Zadran, Naveen-Ul Haq and Fazalhaq Farooqi sorted their contractual issues with the country's cricket board.
SQUADS:
INDIA: Rohit Sharma (captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Tilak Varma, Rinku Singh, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Shivam Dube, Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Ravi Bishnoi, Kuldeep Yadav, Arshdeep Singh, Avesh Khan, Mukesh Kumar.
AFGHANISTAN: Ibrahim Zadran (captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (WK), Ikram Alikhil (WK), Hazratullah Zaza, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Karim Janat, Azmatullah Omarzai, Sharafuddin Ashraf, Fajeeb Ur Rahman, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad, Naveen Ul Haq, Noor Ahmad, Mohammad Saleem, Qais Ahmad, Gulbadin Naib and Rashid Khan.

PTI ■ MOHALI
Afghanistan will be without their trump card Rashid Khan in the T20 series against India starting here on Thursday but skipper Ibrahim Zadran was upbeat about the team's chances in their strongest format.
The celebrated spinner, who underwent a back surgery after the ODI World Cup in November, has been named in the squad but will not be available for the three games as he undergoes his rehab.
"He is not totally fit. He is doing his rehab. We will miss him in the series. Without Rashid there are a few players we trust," said Zadran in the pre-match press conference.
"We have many players like Mujeeb (Zadran) who have played a lot of cricket. We have trust in them. We will struggle without Rashid but one should be ready for any kind of situation," he asserted.
AFTER ODI WORLD CUP,

Rashid ruled out, but skipper confident others would step up



PEOPLE EXPECT FROM US: The performance of Afghanistan in the ODI World Cup in India was among the highlights of the tournament. The team was very

has hardly been home since the high of that tournament but knows that the fans' expectations have gone up significantly.
"I only went home for one day but what I heard from teammates, they said all the people were happy. Nowadays, all around the country people expect lots of things from us. It is the only thing in the country that is giving happiness to people of Afghanistan," said Zadran.
"Playing against India on their home soil is difficult but we are here to win, show our skills. We have lots of good players in T20 and we are good in this format, I am sure we will perform well." The games will help Afghanistan fine-tune their preparations for the T20 World Cup and Zadran feels the team must improve in

the batting department.
"We have one of the best spinners in the world, we have fast bowlers as well but our aim is to improve batting skills," said the 22-year-old who also believes that dew won't be a factor despite the cold conditions prevailing in North India.
"We have been training here last two three days, there was no dew," he pointed out.
AIMING TO IMPROVE STRIKE RATE: Zadran wants to improve his strike rate in the lead up to the World Cup in Americas. He has a strike rate of 103 in 27 games, leaving a lot of scope for improvement. Zadran is expected to open alongside Rahmanullah Gurbaz. "I play the anchor role in the team in ODIs. In T20s, the aim is to improve my strike rate but it also depends on the situation. When team needs you, you should be able to play fancy shots."
"I am working on it. We are going to the T20 World Cup. If I increase that strike rate, it will be good for the team," he added.

Chahal will have to wait as Kuldeep grabbed his chance: Imran Tahir

PTI ■ GQEBERHA (SOUTH AFRICA)

Yuzvendra Chahal is still one of the best wrist spinners in world cricket but will have to wait for his opportunity as Kuldeep Yadav is an improved white ball exponent now, reckoned former Proteas lead spinner Imran Tahir.
Tahir felt left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep was able to grab the opportunities that came along his way.
Chahal, one of the finest leg-break bowlers, is currently out of favour as he wasn't selected for last year's ODI World Cup in India and is unlikely to make it to the Indian squad for the T20 WC in the West Indies and the USA in June.
So, what does Chahal need to do?
"I don't think Yuzi was dropped because he wasn't performing. He was bowling really well but it was just that Kuldeep was bowling really well and he went a step forward and formed this combination with Ravindra Jadeja," Tahir told PTI during a select interaction.
"I believe he is one of the best leg-spinners in world cricket and would need to wait for his chance. So, it's not because of his performance but just that the other guy has grabbed his opportunity. I have no doubt he will bounce back," Tahir, who took nearly 300 international wickets across formats for South Africa with his leg-spin, opined.
Tahir believes that if he had to choose top two wrist spinners in the world, then it would be Kuldeep and his former Proteas teammate Tabraiz Shamsi.
"I think Kuldeep... what he had achieved last year and what he was before even though he was good before, I appreciate being a spinner.
I am also a big fan of Chahal but across the globe Zampa also did well and there is Tabraiz Shamsi, he has not got consistent opportunities.
"If he gets opportunities then I think he will do a lot of good things. So, I think Kuldeep and



Shamsi will be my picks," he assessed.
At 44, Tahir will be the oldest active player who is plying his trade in T20 leagues and will play for Johannesburg Super Kings again in the second edition of SA20.
"Expectation is to win. It is as simple as that. I think we came in early and would like to see the work we put in the nets and stuff. We like to see that in games," he said.
Playing under Faf du Plessis is also an advantage as they both share a fabulous relationship and understand the chemistry that a captain and his strike bowler shares.
"Obviously, he (Faf) is a wonderful player and leads from the front and he is always there to help and we have a very good relationship and I played First-Class cricket here and for SA alongside him and many other competitions."
"Faf is a very easy guy to approach and you can always share your feedback even if it's different from what he is thinking. He is always there to help. Last played with him for CSK. Looking forward to that," he added.
Having already played 391 career T20 games and taken 487 wickets, Tahir gave a rather simple explanation for his longevity.
"There's no secret and if I want to play competitive cricket then I need to set an example. The only reason I am playing is that I want to do well.

"More than cricket, I want to inspire youngsters that if they can stay fit and look after themselves, they can play as long as they want. Also, I want to set an example for my son," he said.
Tahir has always been an attacking bowler and doesn't want to become a restrictive option for his skipper.
"It has given me results for 15 years so no point in changing my style. I would rather stick to what I know," Tahir said.
"I know the game has moved way forward than it used to be, batters are coming up with different plans but for me putting the ball in the right areas and being clear with your plans has always been my thing. I just want to carry on but if you look at my record, I have been consistent. That's the plan. I want to keep my plans simple," he said.
Having played for CSK for many seasons, Tahir feels it's his responsibility to apprise the new JSK members about what the Super Kings family means to players.
"JSK family respects us and our families and when you come to play for CSK there's a vibe that you won't get anywhere. Youngsters who are coming in now don't know about the CSK family and we seniors tell them about it. This is the world's best franchise where players and their families come first. We are fully committed as the reward that you get for playing for CSK you don't get anywhere," he concluded.



India women Test wins over England, Australia highest point of season: Muzumdar

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

India women's head coach Amol Muzumdar has said the Test wins at home against England and Australia were the "highest point" for his side during the gruelling season, where India also lost seven out of nine white-ball games.
The coach also did not agree that skipper Harmanpreet Kaur was out of form with the bat despite six consecutive single-digit scores, while conceding fitness, decision-making and DRS calls were areas of concern for the side.
India lost the T20I series to England 1-2 before going down to Australia 0-3 and 1-2 in ODIs and T20Is respectively, but they excelled in the longest format, winning the one-off Tests against the two sides by big margins.
"The biggest positive is the girls have responded really nicely in all the formats. Whether it was Test cricket — we played Test cricket after nine years in India — not many had played red-ball cricket till then. Those two Test matches were the highest point," Muzumdar said during a media interaction at DY Patil Stadium after India lost the third and final T20I to Australia by seven wickets on Tuesday.
Having taken charge of the team shortly before the start of the home season, Muzumdar conceded Indian players need to work on their fitness and fielding, which was exposed in the white-ball matches.
"We really need to, as I said earlier, focus on our fielding and our fitness. Hopefully, in the following months, I will get a chance to work on it," he said.
"Those are some areas where we have identified as a group that we need to raise the bar," he said. Muzumdar added that India also needs to work on its decision-making skills as well as DRS calls.
"It's just that we need to get used to it and we need to get better at it. With the (upcoming WPL) games, even if they (players) get used to taking it in the WPL, probably we might have a better understanding of the DRS," he said. "At the moment, that's one area where I've said before the series that it could be a game-changer, and I still maintain that. But we need to work on that," he added.
The head coach added he was happy with the way the squad managed 11 matches across formats in 35 days against two opponents.
"It is quite a credit to all the girls who had a gruelling season. It was tough. We were playing England and we played Australia back-to-back and in different formats. I'm really happy that we've seen through the season."
"Not many, only Shubha Sathesh... That (injury) also happened on the day of the game and it was a finger injury. Really happy with the kind of work that has been put in throughout the season," he added.

course, the ICC said in a press release.
LIS OF MATCH OFFICIALS:
UMPIRES: Bismillah Jan Shinwari, Donovan Koch, Phil Gillespie, Gazi Sohel, Masudur Rahman Mukul, Mike Burns, K.N.A. Padmanabhan, Roland Black, Faisal Khan Afridi, Rashid Riaz Waqar, Allahudien Palekar, Bongani Jele, Patrick Gustard, Nigel Duguid, Langton Rusere, Forster Mutizwa
MATCH REFEREES: Graeme Labrooy, Shaid Wadwalla, Narayanan Kutty, Wayne Noon.

Two Indians in match officials roster for ICC U-19 World Cup

PTI ■ DUBAI

The ICC Wednesday announced the lineup of match officials for the upcoming U-19 men's World Cup with umpire KNA Padmanabhan and match referee Narayanan Kutty being the two Indian representatives.
The age-group tournament will be held in South Africa from January 19 to February 11.
An experienced roster of 16 umpires and four match referees have been selected to officiate the competition, overseeing a total of 41 matches that will feature the world's best young cricketers. Match official appointments have also been confirmed for the initial group stage fixtures, which includes an accomplished team taking charge of the opening match between hosts South Africa and another former U-19 champion nation, West Indies, in Potchefstroom on January 19.
Bongani Jele will be joined by India's Padmanabhan as on-field umpires for the first East London fixture between Pakistan and Afghanistan. India's Kutty will be match referee for the tie, with Australia's Phil Gillespie and Zimbabwe's Forster Mutizwa as TV umpire and fourth umpire respectively.
Appointments of match officials for later stages of the tournament will be announced in due



defensive pose and the ball hit her bat to race to the boundary, while Harman's appeal for obstructing the field was rejected.
"We both approach it (captaincy roles) very differently, and that's over to her to deal with that. But, from my point of view, there's no animosity there," said Alyssa during the post-match interaction.
"I'm all for, you know, if I need to be given a send off, then so be it. I'm all for it because at the end of the day, I'm chirpy behind the stumps. So if you're willing to dish it out, you've got to be able to cop it," she added.
Alyssa backed Harmanpreet and the India team to come out stronger from this series.
"She has probably had really two hard series on the trot and this series has been a really long one. I'm sure that the Indian team

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI

Australia women's team captain Alyssa Healy has rubbished talks about animosity building up between her and India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur, saying they were just playing "competitive cricket".
India registered their maiden Test win against Australia at the Wankhede Stadium before the visitors came back strongly to win the ODIs 3-0 and T20Is 2-1 in a highly-competitive month-long series.
"I would probably just summarise it to competitive cricket is going out there, doing our job for the side," said Alyssa, following the seven-wicket win in the third T20I at the DY Patil Stadium on Tuesday, which helped Australia take the series 2-1.
Alyssa added the perception of animosity was because both of them approached their roles differently.
During the Test, Harmanpreet had thrown the ball at Alyssa in frustration while she was batting, and the Australian skipper simply smiled back. Alyssa took a

No animosity with Harmanpreet, it's just competitive cricket: Alyssa

do it. "It's just probably nailing down our plans and probably our shot selection, more importantly, over here," she said.
Alyssa added that just two-and-a-half days of bad cricket during the entire month-long tour had led to the Test loss and a rare T20I match defeat.
"We're here in India over a month that we're traditionally at home spending time with our families and it's the first time we've been away this time of year. Literally, the girls have just jumped in and played some good, hard cricket. I didn't hear one complaint, didn't hear one whinge. In the month that we've been here, we played two-and-a-half days of cricket — one and a-half days in the Test match and one T20," Alyssa added.
Alyssa, who was adjudged 'Player of the Series' in T20Is,



"We've gained some valuable information at the same time. Probably some areas where we can improve and some areas that probably that we're nailing at the moment."
"It's pretty cut-throat when you come into a World Cup. You've got to win games and you've got to get yourselves over the line. We're going to have a squad to

credited the team for the white-ball success.
"I don't think I was overly deserving of the player of the series. I'll accept it gracefully, but I thought our bowlers bounced back beautifully in the last two T20Is. Phoebe Litchfield and Elise Perry played some crucial knocks as well... It's a team award," she said.
Feel for Jemimah: Alyssa The Aussie skipper felt for India's Jemimah Rodrigues, who took Alyssa's catch in the seventh over but the decision was given in the batter's favour.
"We were being told they (TV umpires) were looking for some more angles out there. I probably can't really comment too much on it. I didn't really watch the big screen. I didn't really understand what was going on," said Alyssa.
"To be fair, I was walking off. I thought it (catch) went in quite clean. But, sometimes, I think we saw it throughout the ODI series as well... We had three of those overturned that we thought we'd got caught. It's never a nice feeling," added Alyssa.