OPINION 6

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WORLD 8

US PLANS TO MEET

TAIWAN'S NEW LEADER

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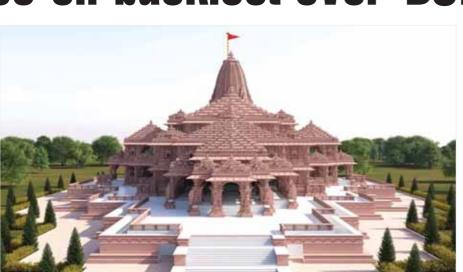
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Congress on backfoot over BJP invite LAC situation sensitive but

war of words has broken Aout between the ruling party at the Centre, the BJP, and the Opposition parties over the "decline" of the invitation to the Ram Temple consecration at Ayodhya by top leaders of the Congress and other Opposition members. While the members. Congress-led Opposition termed the Ayodhya ceremony a political one, the BJP called the Congress "anti-Ram" after the party declared that Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury would not be attending the ceremony in Ayodhya. The Left parties and the TMC have also declined to attend the ceremony, which will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, top political functionaries, celebrities, industrialists, and a host of

eminent personalities. In a letter shared on its official handle on Wednesday, the Congress termed the mega consecration ceremony as an "RSS/BJP event." Congress alleged that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the BJP have turned the temple in Ayodhya into a "political project."

The BJP lashed out at the Congress, stating that the party's stand and its allies "insulted' have regularly Sanatana Dharma. BJP MP Sudhanshu



Congress boycotted the inauguration ceremony of the new Parliament building and the G20 Summit as well.

"From 2004 to 2009, Congress boycotted Kargil Vijay Diwas. The party did not issue any statement for 10 days after the Pokhran nuclear test conducted in May 1998 under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government," Trivedi said.

A day after harsh criticism from the BJP, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on endorsed the Thursday Congress high command's decision not to attend the ceremony of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, saying the BJP has turned a religious event

pointed out that four Shankaracharyas are reported to have boycotted the consecration of the temple "in protest against the misuse of the Ram Mandir for politics." Siddaramaiah's comments turned the issue into a war of words as other BJP leaders also responded to the Karnataka CM's comments.

continued over invitations, TMC leader Derek O'Brien on Thursday recalled West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's over a decade-old quote that "religion is private, festivals are for everyone" and said not a truer word has been spoken. "Religion is private, festivals

As the political war of words

Trivedi recalled how the into a political affair. He also are for everyone', Mamata Banerjee, 2011. Not a truer word spoken," O'Brien said in a social media post. The TMC leader's post came

as the BJP has been criticising Opposition leaders for turning down the invitation to the consecration ceremony on January 22. Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and

Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on "respectfully Wednesday declined" the invitation to attend the consecration ceremony, with the party accusing the BJP of making it into a "political project" for electoral gains and asserting that religion is a "personal matter.

Earlier, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury

invitation, with the Left party saying religion is a personal choice and should not be converted into an instrument of political gain. It is not clear if TMC chairperson Mamata Banerjee has received an invitation for the ceremony.

The Bengal CM had alleged on Tuesday that the BJP was indulging in a "gimmick through inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. The TMC supremo asserted that "she does not support festivities that exclude other communities" and does not believe in dividing masses on religious lines.

remarks, similar Samajwadi Party Akhilesh Yadav said, "religion cannot be a part of politics" and accused the BJP of hiding behind religion. When asked attending consecration ceremony of the Ram Temple, he said, "How can the BJP decide whom to invite and whom not? This does not mean a call from Lord Shri Ram; it is a call from the BIP."

BJP MP Harnath Singh Yadav said that Congress has opposed the Janmabhoomi right from the beginning and left no stone unturned in putting all obstacles that it could. Karnataka BJP President CT Ravi said Congress has always been against Hindutva.

stable: Army chief Pande

As tension continues to prevail at the border with China for the past three years, Army Chief General Manoj Pande on Thursday said the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh is "stable" but "sensitive". He asserted that Indian troops are maintaining a "high state" of preparedness to deal with any challenge.

He also mentioned a decrease in overall incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir. However, he expressed concern about an increase in such incidents in the Rajouri-Poonch sector. Pande pointed out that terror infrastructure continues to thrive across the border, making an apparent reference to Pakistan's support for various terrorist groups. Addressing these points during the annual press conference ahead of Army Day on January 15, the Army Chief said India and China are engaged in talks at both the military and diplomatic levels to resolve the differences. remaining Trouble began in May 2020 Chinese troops attempted to alter the status quo at the Line of Actual



of Army Day in New Delhi on Thursday

Control (LAC) in Ladakh. Expanding readiness, Pande emphasised that our operational preparedness remains at a high level. He also mentioned that the Indian Army is maintaining adequate reserves confront any security challenges in the region. Indian and Chinese troops have been in a confrontation for over three years at certain

friction points in eastern Ladakh, even as both sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks. "Regarding the situation in

Jammu and Kashmir, the Army Chief mentioned that the ceasefire understanding

with Pakistan is holding along the Line of Control (LoC), despite infiltration attempts. He said, "We are successfully thwarting infiltration attempts along the LoC.

General Pande also noted a decrease in overall incidents of violence in Jammu and Kashmir. However, he pointed out that such incidents have increased in the Rajouri-Poonch sector. Expressing concern, he said The situation and terrorist activities in Rajouri and Poonch in the last 5-6 months are troubling because, as peace is being restored in the valley, our adversaries are fostering

proxy tanzeems in the area. Continued on Page 2

When Ram opens His eyes to his followers, Modi will bring down the curtain on non-believer's

Minister Narendra Modi is perform the ceremonial act of opening the eyes of the Ram Lalla idol at the sanctum sanctorum of the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22. The upcoming ceremony signifies the culmination of the seven-day Pran Pratishtha (consecration) rituals, marking a pivotal moment in the history of the revered

A senior official from the Ram Mandir Trust disclosed that the Prime Minister will use a matchstick-sized golden stick to open the eyes of the Ram Lalla idol at the sanctum sanctorum, surrounded by 11 Vedic priests. The conclusion of this act will mark the end of the celebrations, he said.

Commencing on January 16, the Pran Pratishtha rituals will unfold within the sacred precincts of the

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW temple. The centrepiece of these rituals involves the installation of In a momentous event filled with Ram Lalla's new idol, meticulously spiritual significance, Prime crafted from Karnataka's black Ram Lalla's new idol, meticulously stone.

> January 17, when the idol will be placed on an opulent golden throne.

To facilitate the Vedic rituals integral to the consecration ceremony, eight havan kunds will be arranged within the temple's sanctum sanctorum. Each kund will be assigned to a yajman (the beneficiary on whose behalf the rituals are performed), a priest, and several assistants, ensuring the meticulous execution of the ceremonies.

Describing the intricacies of the rituals, a priest involved in the consecration ceremony shared, "A havan kund is a square structure where a sacred fire is kindled, and all offerings are made during a religious ceremony."

Lakshmikant Dixit, a Vedic priest from Varanasi, along with a team



the main rituals. The sanctum sanctorum will witness the presence of 11 Vedic priests, including Dixit, who serves as the head priest orchestrating the sacred proceedings. This momentous conclusion of the

of 121 other priests, will conduct landmark event is not only a celebration of spirituality but also a testament to the unity and devotion of millions who hold the Ram temple in high reverence.

As the nation eagerly awaits the rich heritage.

Pran Pratishtha rituals, Ayodhya becomes the focal point of a profound cultural and religious experience, reinforcing its standing as a symbol of India's

WEEK OF RITUALS: Countdown

for the grand culmination on January 22.

Here is a glimpse into the spiritual journey unfolding at the sacred

January 16 to 17: The host appointed by the temple trust will lead the atonement ceremony on the banks of the Saryu River, purifying the surroundings in preparation for the upcoming rituals.

January 18: Formal rituals commence with Ganesh Ambika Puja, invoking Lord Ganesh for the successful completion of the event. This day also includes Varun Puja, Matrika Puja (worship of seven goddesses), Brahmin Varan (Vedic rituals for knowledge), and Vastu Puja (clearing harmful elements from the surroundings).

Temple. As the historic moment Sthapana, the installation of approaches for the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, a meticulously planned week-long and tranquility involving the ritualistic burning of offerings like grains and ghee, will be conducted.

> The sanctum January 20: sanctorum undergoes purification with holy water from the Saryu. Rituals such as Vaastu Shanti (cleansing the land) and Annadhivas (worshipping the idol using food grains) follow.

> January 21: The idol receives a divine bath with 125 urns, and the Shayadhivas ritual is performed, symbolising the deity's restful

> January 22: The much-anticipated day arrives. In the morning, the Ram Lalla idol is worshipped, leading up to the consecration in the afternoon during the auspicious Mrigashira Nakshatra — a specific celestial time chosen

for the Pran Pratishtha.

CAPSULE

Tremors in north India, epicentre near Kabul

NEW DELHI: An earthquake of magnitude 6.1 struck Afghanistan on Thursday with tremors rippling through parts of north India, the National Centre for Seismology said. The epicentre for the quake, which struck at 2.50 pm IST, was 241 kilometres north northeast of Kabul.

Pankaj Tripathi quits as Election panel icon

NEW DELHI: Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who was appointed as the 'National Icon' of the Election Commission of India, has voluntarily stepped down from his position. "Acknowledging his role as a political leader in an upcoming film, actor @PankajTripathi has voluntarily stepped down as #ECI National Icon as per terms of MoU. #ECI expresses gratitude for his impactful contribution to voter awareness & #SVEEP since Oct 2022," read a statement on the social media handle of ECI, posted by spokesperson ECI on X.

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PM to inaugurate the longest sea link today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL), now known as Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewari Nhava Sheva Atal Setu, the longest sea bridge constructed at a cost of over ₹17,840 crore in the over (17,840 crore in the country, on Friday around 3.30pm. Besides, Modi will inaugurate the 27th National Youth Festival in Nashik and later launch development projects worth over ₹30,500 crore in Maharashtra.

Atal Setu has been constructed at a total cost of more than ₹17,840 crore. It is about 21.8 km long, a 6-lane bridge with approximately 16.5 km over the sea and about 5.5 km on the land. It is the longest bridge in India and also the longest sea bridge in the country. The foundation stone of the bridge was laid by the Prime Minister in December 2016.

According to an official statement, it will provide faster connectivity to Mumbai International Airport and Navi Mumbai International Airport, reducing travel time from Mumbai to Pune, Goa, and South India. Additionally, it will enhance connectivity between Mumbai Port and Jawaharlal Nehru Port.

Around 12:15 pm, Prime Minister Modi will reach where he Nashik, will inaugurate the 27th National Youth Festival. At approximately 3:30 pm in Mumbai, the Prime Minister

will inaugurate and travel on the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri — Nhava Sheva Atal Setu. At around 4:15 pm, the Prime Minister will participate in a public programme at Navi Mumbai, inaugurating, dedicating to the nation, and

laying the foundation stone for multiple development projects. The Prime Minister will inaugurate, dedicate to the nation, and lay the foundation stone for multiple development projects worth more than

₹12,700 crore during the public programme in Navi Mumbai. The Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone for an underground road tunnel connecting Eastern Freeway's Orange Gate to Marine Drive.

The 9.2 km tunnel will be constructed at a cost of more than ₹8,700 crore, representing a significant infrastructure development in Mumbai that

will reduce travel time between Orange Gate and Marine Drive. Furthermore, the Prime Minister will dedicate phase 1 of the Surya regional bulk drinking water project to the nation. Developed at a cost exceeding Rs 1,975 crore, this

project will provide drinking water supply to the Palghar and Thane districts of Maharashtra, benefiting approximately 14 lakh people.

During the programme, the Prime Minister will dedicate approximately ₹2000 crore to railway projects for the nation. These projects include the dedication of 'Phase 2 of Uran-Kharkopar railway line, which will enhance connectivity to Navi Mumbai by extending suburban services from Nerul/Belapur to Kharkopar to Uran. The Prime Minister will also flag off the inaugural run of the EMU train from Uran railway station to Kharkopar.

Other rail projects to be dedicated to the nation include a new suburban station, 'Digha Gaon, on the Vashi/Panvel Trans-harbour line, and the new 6th Line between Khar Road Goregaon railway station.



Indian Army's women team displays their skills during the rehearsals ahead of Ranian Dimri I Pioneer

Modi to blow poll bugle in Maharashtra | Shinde takes dig at Uddhav

mid euphoria over the Eknath A Shinde-led "Mahayuti" coming up trumps in MLAs' disqualification litmus test, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will kick off a campaign for the BJP and its allies for the Lok Sabha polls, by launching, commissioning and dedicating various projects worth Rs 30,500 crore in Maharashtra on Friday.

In a consolidation of a festive mood prevailing in the state over the impending consecration of Ram Lalla's idol at the grand temple in Ayodhya and its victory over its political opponents in Maharashtra, the ruling BJP is going all out to cash in on Modi's visit to the state for launching, commissioning and dedicating various projects worth more than Rs 30,500 crore.

In what is being seen as the launch of the Lok Sabha poll campaign for the BJP and its allies - the Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar), the Prime Minister will use his visit to reach out to the people across the state and galvanise the party workers ahead of the crucial elections.

On his part, Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis has already gone to town, expressing confidence about winning 45 of the 48 seats in Maharashtra, a state that has the maximum Lok Sabha seats after Uttar Pradesh where there are 80 LS

In a major event that will take place in Mumbai, Modi will commission the



Mumbai Trans Harbour Link (MTHL), now named 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu' which has been inaugurated at a cost of Rs 17,840

The Prime Minister will also inaugurate, dedicate to the nation and lay the foundation stone of multiple development projects worth more than Rs 12,700 crore in the public programme in Navi

Modi will lay the foundation stone of the underground road tunnel connecting Eastern Freeway's Orange Gate to Marine Drive. Being built at a cost of Rs 8700 crore, the 9.2 Km tunnel when completed -- will be a significant infrastructure development in Mumbai which will reduce travel time between Orange Gate and Marine Drive.

The Prime Minister will dedicate Phase-I of the Surya regional bulk drinking water project to the Nation. The project, developed at a cost of more than Rs 1,975 crore will provide drinking water of Maharashtra, benefiting a population

Modi will dedicate about Rs 2000 crore railway projects to the Nation. These include the dedication of 'Phase 2 of Uran-Kharkopar railway line' which will enhance connectivity to Navi Mumbai as suburban services running between Nerul/Belapur to Kharkopar will now be extended to Uran. The Prime Minister will also flag off the inaugural run of the EMU train from Uran rail-

way station to Kharkopar.
Other rail projects that the Prime
Minister wil dedicate to the nation will include a new suburban station 'Digha Gaon' on the Thane-Vashi/Panvel Trans-harbour line and the new 6th Line between Khar Road and Goregaon railway stations. The projects will benefit the thousands of daily commuters

Modi will inaugurate 'Bharat Ratnam' (Mega Common Facilitation Centre) for Gems and Jewellery sector at Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone-Special Economic Zone (SEEPZ SEZ), which is first of its kind in India with best available machines, in world including 3D Metal printing.

'Bharat Ratnam' will house a training school for skilling of workforce for this sector including specially abled students. The Mega CFC will transform the export sector in Gems and Jewellery trade and will help the domestic manufacturing also.

The Prime Minister will also inaugurate

the New Enterprises & Services Tower (NEST)- 01 at SEEPZ- SEZ. The NEST 01 is primarily for Gem & Jewellery sector units which will be relocated from existing Standard Design Factory I. The new tower has been designed for large scale production and as per the demand of the industry.

Modi will also launch Namo Mahila

Shashaktikaran Abhiyaan. The Abhiyaan aims to empower women in the state of Maharashtra by providing skill development training and exposure to entrepreneurship development. The Abhiyaan is aimed at the convergence and saturation of women development programmes of the state and central governments.

Meanewhile, setting the tone for the much-discussed consecration of the idol of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya on January 22, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the Kalaram temple located on the banks of Godavari river in the pilgrimage town of Nashik on Friday. The Kalaram temple is in Panchvati area

of Nashik. The Kalaram temple derives its name from a black statue of Lord and its sanctum sanctorum also houses the idols of Sita Mata and Lakshman. It is believed that Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman had stayed in the Panchvati area during their exile.

Modi will also inaugurate the 27th National Youth Festival (NYF) at Nashik. The NYM has been organised in the pilgrimage town of Nashik, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

 $B^{
m uoyed}$ by Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar's ruling to declare his party as the "real Shiv Sena" and reject a plea seeking disqualification of 16 MLAs, including himself, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Thursday took a nasty dig at Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray, by saying that "a political party cannot be run like private limited company". Amid preparations by the Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) to move the Supreme Court against the Speaker's ruling, Shinde dubbed Narwekar's order virtually declaring his party as the winner in its battle against the Uddhav-led Sena and sparing him and 15 other MLAs from his group of disqualification as the "victory of democracy" and "the victory of the ideologies of late Balasaheb Thackeray and Anand Dighe". Talking to media persons after visiting Anand Ashram, an office of his late mentor Anand Dighe, in his home constituency of Thane, Shinde said: The orders (of Election Commission, Supreme Court and Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly) are very clear (in the various cases relat-

went a vertical split in June 2022)... The verdicts are a victory of democracy, all party workers, the ideologies of late Balasaheb and Dighe saheb". Ridiculing Uddhav for "run-

ning the Shiv Sena like a family business", Shinde said: "A political party cannot be run as a private limited company in a democracy like ours where numbers and the will of people are important". Shinde, whose 'Balasahebanchi

Shiv Sena' will contest the April-May Lok Sabha and October 2024 State Assembly elections in alliance with the BJP and NCP (Ajit Pawar), said: "We have sought (before bye-election) the name 'Balasahebanchi Shiv Sena' as name for our party from the Election Commission, while on the other hand he (Uddhav Thackeray) sought name Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray). From this, you can imagine what kind of respect that he has for late Balasaheb". In a related development, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of the ruling BJP said that the Speaker's verdict was ample proof to suggest that Maharashtra would continue to have a stable gov-

Thackeray-led Shiv Sena rushed its party leader, family confidante and party MLC Anil Parab with a copy of the Speaker's order rejecting his party's plea for disqualification of 16 party MLAs for "anti-party activities", to confabulate with senior lawyers on finer points in the verdict. before moving the apex court. In another measure, the Shiv Sena (UBT) indicated that it would make an issue of the AB Forms that it gave to the party candidates ahead of 2019 State Assembly polls, to contest the Speaker's ruling in the Sena MLAs' disqualification case. Pulling out a social media post put out by Shinde thanking Uddhav Thackeray for issuing the AB Form to contest from Kopri-Pachpakhadi constituency of the Thane district in the 2019 Assembly polls, the Shiv Sena (UBT) said that the Speaker's order went against the facts on ground.

In his order, the Speaker held that the Shiv Sena's amended Constitution of 2018 was not on record with the Election Commission and hence what would be considered in adjudicating matters was its 1999

Mamata seeks Indian classical language status for Bengali, writes letter to Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

 $I^{\rm n}$ what the political pundits called a "counter strategy" to the pre-election euphoria around the January 22 inauguration of Ram Temple at Ayodhya, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday played what many called the Bangla card" even as she wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding "Indian classical language" status for Bengali much like Tamil, Malayam and Odiya.

Claiming that a four-volume research work encouraged by her Government had found that Bengali language was more than 2,500 years old the Chief Minister said it was high time the language should get the honour it merited.

The letter written to the Prime Minister read: "Government of India has already officially recognized six languages as having such classical status: Tamil n(2004) Sanskrit (2005), Telugu and Kannada (2008), Malayalam and Odiya (2014). papers establishing the antiquity of the Bengali language for your kind perusal, I will very briefly state the substance of our contention and submit how Bengali eminently qualifies as a Classical Language by the Ministry of Home Affairs. MHA may study our 4-volume documentation to appreciate value of our claim.

The letter also said that "in con-



sideration of the fact that 6 India languages have already been notified as Classical Languages, I would be grateful if you kindly issue necessary instructions to the Ministry of Home Affairs so that the claim of Bengali language as a Classical Language is accepted at the earliest."

Replying to the questions of journalists at the State secretariat Nabanna, Banerjee further slammed the former Left Front Government for not taking any initiative in this regard. "This initiative should have thanks to the worthlessness of the people who ruled Bengal before us," Banerjee said reminding the Pala rule when Bengali culture flourished. It however goes without saying that Palas came at the junction of late ancient and early medieval era dating back to

about 1,300 years. already an international language and one of the largest spoken languages not only in India but also on earth and hence demanded a status that it deserved.

Historians also said that though the early Gupta rulers of Magadha like Maharaj Sri Gupta and his son Maharaj Ghatotkach Gupta initially ruled the areas of Mrigasikhavana roughly corresponding to modern Malda district of Bengal before migrating to Magadha with Patliputra as their capital there was little evidence that Bengali as a script and literature not crossed its nascent age

Demand of Bengali as a classical language apart, the Chief Minister also renewed the demand of renaming West Bengal as Bangla which had been a long pending demand of the past sourced decades. the past several decades.

If Puniab could be the name of provinces of both in Pakistan and India then why West Bengal could not be christened Bangla regardless of the existence of Bangladesh as an dered adding "there is also a practical problem with the name West Bengal."

She said, "in the meeting of states Bengal's turn to speak comes almost in the last as its name starts with 'W' ... by the time we speak the listeners lose interest and our problems do not get the attention that She also said that Bengali was they deserve ... hence from practical point of view too

West Bengal should be renamed as Bangla," adding she had written a letter to the Prime Minister in that context too. In an apparent bid to take some wind out of BJP's Temple sail' the Chief Minister also faulted the Centre for its alleged indifference to the pilgrimages in Bengal. "They spend so much after

Kumbh Mela which in any case demands the attention it gets but they seldom give money for Ganga Sagar Mela affording it a national fair status," despite the fact that unlike the Kumbh Mela, Ganga Sagar Mela came every year she said. 'We host between 80 lakh to 1 crore people here at Ganga Sagar Islands and the State Government has alone spent Rs 250 crore for it without getting any grant from the Centre when the people from all part of the country come here in lakhs," she said reminding this vear her Government had spent Rs 700 crore to develop pilgrimages in Bengal.

"We have spent Rs 165 crore to crore in building a replica of the Jagannath Temple at Digha ... besides we have spent crores for development and maintenance of pilgrimage centres of Tara Peeth, Bakreshwar, Kankali Tala, Devi Chowdhurani Temple, Jalpesh Temple, Tarakeshwar, Kanak Durga Temple and many Muslim and Christian places of worship," she

Operation Jumbo to capture wild elephants in Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Forest
Department on Thursday resumed 'Operation Jumbo' to capture wild elephants and fix radio collars, an exercise suspended after Mysuru Dasara elephant Arjuna died in a fight with a wild tusker last month, officials said.

Eight elephants would be part of the operation which would be centred in and around Belur Taluk in Hassan district as over 50 wild elephants have entered the Malnad region creating menace, they said.

'We have resumed the opera-

tion to capture wild elephants. Eight of our very good ele-phants are part of the operation this time", a senior forest department official said.

'We would start our operations in Belur taluk where more than 50 wild elephants had These jumbos which came around two months ago into the taluk area have to be driven away to the elephant habitat. Last time in November, when we had carried out a week-long operation, all of them had gone back. However, after we suspended the operation,

they had come back so we will

be driving them back," he

ernment that would complete

The mahouts who were part of the operation in which Arjuna died have also been included in this team as well. These eight elephants which

are part of this 'Operation Jumbo, would be led by elephant Abhimanyu, in the forest area and they have already reached the Bikkodu Elephant Camp in Belur taluk. According to forest officials, the

majestic elephant Arjuna, which carried the golden 'howdah' during the famous Mysuru Dasara procession for years, died in a fight with a wild

tusker during a capture operation on December 4 last year. The 64-year-old Arjuna, which served the forest department for over five decades and had participated in many elephant capture operations, died near Yeslur in Sakleshpur taluk of Hassan district. The elephant capture operation

was carried out after a number of human deaths were reported in Hassan and Chikkamagaluru belt. Owing to the pressure from the locals to tame the wild elephants, an operation was launched in Belur taluk on November 24, which was later halted.

HC relief for ED men against FIR in Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

The Calcutta High on Thursday ordered an I interim stay on the proceedings in an FIR registered by the Bengal Police against Enforcement Directorate officials who had last Friday gone to raid the house of Shahjehan strongman --- in connection with his alleged involvement in the multi-crore ration scam and money-laundering there of — but returned with a bloody nose when they were attacked by hundreds of TMC goons.

The Court of Justice Rajashekhar Mantha stopped the police from proceeding on the FIR and asked them to file an affidavit in that regard besides producing the case diary.

In a parallel order another Court of Justice Joy Sengupta verbally directed the administration that no coercive action could be taken till the

coming Monday against the ED officials. Earlier the ED officials — who had on last Friday gone to the residence of Shahjehan at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas to conduct searches in his house - were attacked and badly beaten up by several hundred supporters of the TMC leader who is still at large.

events FIRs were lodged against the ED officials by the police who relied on complaints of some locals. In the FIRs the ED officials were charged with theft of Rs 1.35 lakh rupees and some documents subsequent to which the ED moved the High Court to get the police proceedings stayed.

Expressing dismay at the conduct of the police the Court on Thursday asked the Police as to what made them register an FIR without conducting any preliminary investigation into the matter before ordering an interim stay.

Do not take Respiratory syncytial virus lightly: Study

PNS NEW DELHI

Don't take Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a common infection in children and senior adults lightly. For, and trigger inflammation leading to nerve damage, a new Tulane University study has found.

Published in The Journal of Infectious Diseases, the study is the first to prove that RSV can penetrate nerve cells and may provide the clearest link between RSV and reported neurological symptoms in

children. RSV has been previously detected in the spinal fluid of children with seizures. Additionally, 40% of RSV-positive children under the age of 2 have shown acute encephalopathy, brain damage that can result in confusion, memory loss or cogni-

tive difficulties. The findings underscore the potential long-term impacts

of the disease, as well as the importance of preventative measures such as the two RSV vaccines approved by the FDA in 2023. This is the most common res-

piratory virus in the first years of life as well as an impactful virus among the elderly. This adds a new dimension to the importance of RSV vaccines for both the elderly and mothers to protect their babies, said Dr. Giovanni Piedimonte, University vice president for research and professor of pediatrics, biochemistry and

molecular biology. Researchers studied the virus using 3D peripheral nerve cultures grown from stem cells and rat embryos. After finding they can be infected by RSV, researchers found RSV induced the release of chemokines — proteins that

With low levels of RSV infection, the nerves became hyperreactive to stimulation. At higher levels, they observed a progressive degeneration of the nerve and increased neurotoxicity due to excess inflammation.

LAC situation sensitive but stable: **Army chief Pande** From Page 1

This was an apparent reference to Pakistan. He also noted that terror infrastructure continues to thrive across the border, making an apparent reference to Pakistan's support for various terrorist groups.

"If you look back, before 2003, terrorism in that area was eradicated, and peace prevailed until 2017/18. However, due to the situation normalising in the Valley, our adversaries have become active there," he added.

The Army chief highlighted the increase in proxy wars, pointing out that in the last three years, 45 terrorists were eliminated in these areas. "Last year alone saw five foiled infiltration attempts, resulting in the elimination of six terrorists. Additionally, about 14 terrorists were neutralised in the hinterland," he further stated.

When asked about talks between Bhutan and China to resolve their boundary dispute, the Army Chief mentioned that developments with a bearing on India's security are being closely monitored. He emphasised, "We have robust military engagement with Bhutan and are closely monitoring developments."

Describing the situation along the Indo-Myanmar border as a matter of concern, the Army Chief stated, "We are closely watching

developments there. Expressing concern over the situation at the Indo-Myanmar border, General Pande

highlighted the impact of activities by the

Myanmar army and ethnic armed organisations. He reported instances of Myanmar army personnel and Bhutanese civilians seeking shelter in Indian territories. "We also have some insurgent groups feeling the pressure, attempting to cross onto our side of the border in the state of Manipur. Coupled with the situation in Manipur, this is something we are closely monitoring. We currently have close to 20 Assam Rifle

Battalions deployed at the Indo-Myanmar

border, and there are discussions about further

strengthening our border fence." In response to emerging challenges, the Army Chief outlined the induction of new technologies and the restructuring of artillery and electronic warfare units.

"As part of emergency provisions, we have successfully introduced new technologies to address various domains of warfare. This includes improved vehicles, drones, and counter-drone systems, as well as terrainspecific electronic warfare systems," he said. We have restructured our artillery units and

electronic warfare and electronic intelligence units. Additionally, we are in the process of replacing animals in our transport units with drones. We have devised a plan to optimise our strength significantly, aiming for a reduction of 1 lakh numbers by 2027. We have submitted this proposal to the government," he added. He also mentioned that the integration of Agniveers into the Army is

Congress on backfoot over **BJP** invite

"The Somnath Temple was reconstructed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Babu Rajendra Prasad, and KM Munshi. Jawaharlal Nehru was the Prime Minister during that time. He didn't visit Somnath. So how can the present leadership Congress go to Ayodhya?... First, they were lamenting that they did not receive an invitation, and when they did, they refused to accept it," said

Ahead of the event, the volunteers of the RSS and its affiliates, including the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), have been reaching out to people across the country and inviting them to join the consecration ceremony by offering prayers at temples in their neighborhoods. Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and more than 6,000 people are expected to attend the ceremony on January 22. The temple trust has also invited 4,000 seers from across the country and 50 guests from foreign countries.

NIA raids 32 locations in 6 States

Crackdown on Babbar Khalsa International, Bishnoi gang

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National investigation of Thursday ¬he National Investigation seized several illegal arms and ammunition, along with incriminating documents, digital devices and cash, in a massive multi-state crackdown in connection with cases relating to conspiracies and activities of the banned Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and the Lawrence Bishnoi crime syndi-

A total of 32 locations in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, as well as the Union Territory of Chandigarh, were raided by NIA teams as part of the mega operation that began early Thursday morning, a spokesperson of the premier investigating agency said.

The seizures during the searches carried out in connection with three cases included two pistols, two magazines and ammunition, along with cash amounting to Rs 4.6 lakh, besides documents and digital

terror activities being carried out by the BKI, which was banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and the terrorist-gangster networks operating in the

Such activities include smuggling and induction of terrorist hardware, such as arms and ammunition, explosives, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) etc., from across the borders, the NIA spokesperson said. The terror hardware is being used by the operatives of terror outfits and organised criminal syndicates for carrying out bomb blasts, targeted killings, extortions and funding of such outfits in various parts of the country.

Thursday's crackdown involved raids at 16 locations in a case related to the activities of the chiefs and members of the BKI. The NIA, which had registered the case suo motu (on its own) on July 10, 2023, has identified Harwinder Singh alias Rinda and Lakhbir Singh Sandhu alias Landa as among the key conspirators involved in hatching terror conspiracies as well as smuggling of arms and ammunition into Punjab.

They have also been sending funds to their associates through various money transfer service scheme (MTSS) channels for carrying out terrorist acts, according to the NIA's investi-

A total of seven locations were

raided in the second case registered by the NIA against the organised crime syndicate being run on the directions of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and his associates, including Goldy Brar, under the provisions of the UAPA. Brar, who is based in Canada, was recently declared as an individual terrorist by the

government.

The syndicate has spread its "mafia-style" criminal networks in several states as well as abroad in an active conspiracy with Harwinder Singh alias Rinda, a "designated individual terrorist", the NIA spokesperson said. These networks have been involved in many sensational crimes, such as the killings of popular Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala as well as religious and social leaders like Pardeep Kumar, besides large-scale extortions from businessmen and professionals.

The third case, in which nine raids were conducted, is related to several proscribed terrorist organisations and criminal gangs based in India and abroad, which have been involved in hatching terror and criminal conspiracies in various parts of the country. The searches were part of the

NIA's continuous crackdown on terror outfits and individual terrorists engaged in carrying out criminal and terrorist activities in India, as well as their support networks, the NIA spokesperson said.

fight infections by controlling immune cells — and caused significant inflammation.

NDMC area 7th cleanest in Swachh survey

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has bagged the seventh rank under the "cleanest cities" category in the Centre's annual cleanliness survey, along with a 5 Star Garbage Free City Ranking and Water Plus Certified City; Delhi Cantonment was ranked 7th in the cantonment board category while the Municipal Corporation of Delhi has been ranked 90th among 446 urban local bodies, the results of which were announced on Thursday. This is the first time the MCD has taken part in the Central Government's annual cleanliness survey, after the three civic bodies which existed earlier were unified again into a single entity in 2022. In the city report card released under the Swachh Survekshan, the NDMC has received 99 per cent in the door-to-door collection of waste, 87 per cent in source segregation, 100 in waste generation versus pro-

"Proud moment! NDMC secured Rank 7 in All India Clean City category. Moved 2 rank up from Rank 9 to Rank 7. NDMC also got 5 star garbage free city and the cleanest city within Union Territory in Swachh

cessing and remediation of dump-

sites, cleanliness of water bodies and public toilets and 93 per cent in the

cleanliness of residential and mar-

Survekshan 2023 award. Next year, NDMC will strive to be in top three city," the New Delhi Municipal Council said in a post on X.

The Swachhta Awards were handed over by President Droupadi Murmu and Minister of MOUHA Hardeep Singh Puri at the ceremony attended by Chief Minister Indore, Chief Minister Chattisgarh and numerous other dignitaries, including various Urban Development Ministers from States, Mayors, Mission Directors, Municipal Commissioners and City Officials from various States and Union Territories across the coun-

The award is a recognition of the civic body's continued efforts to ensure excellence in service standards and provide world-class civic amenities to its residents.

NDMC Chairman Amit Yadav congratulated the employees, especially the "safai sevaks", and said the credit for getting the awards and ranking goes to the hard work of the entire team, the civic body said in a statement. Yadav noted that the NDMC has moved two ranks up in the ranking since last year — from the ninth to the seventh spot.

'We need to continue with dedication and focus to improve to provide best all-round services to New Delhi. Next year, we should strive to be in the top three cities," he said. The award is in alignment with "Prime



President Droupadi Murmu with Union Minister for Housing & Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri during the Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023, in New Delhi

Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a garbage-free India under Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban 2.0", the statement said. The theme of the eighth edition of the survey was "Waste to Wealth for Garbage Free Cities".

The NDMC expressed gratitude to the residents and visitors to the area under its jurisdiction for making it the cleanest capital city within a Union Territory.

The accolade is a testament to NDMC's holistic approach to waste management, public awareness campaigns, and innovative initiatives that

have significantly contributed to the city's overall cleanliness. This accomplishment positions NDMC as a frontrunner in India's mission for a cleaner and healthier urban landscape," the statement said. NDMC Vice Chairman Satish Upadhyay hoped that the civic body will achieve the top rank in the coming years by making significant progress.

We must continue with our unwavering dedication to providing the best all-round services to the people of New Delhi while striving to

achieve the pinnacle of cleanliness and civic excellence," he said.
The MCD has been ranked 90th among 446 urban local bodies in 'Swachh Survekshan Awards 2023'.
This is the first time the MCD has taken part in the central government's annual cleanliness survey, after the three civic bodies which after the three civic bodies which existed earlier were unified again

into a single entity in 2022.
Taking a dig at the AAP government,
Delhi BJP president Virendra
Sachdeva said the Arvind Kejriwal government had promised to make Delhi a Paris but the MCD has been ranked 90th in the swachh survekshan. "Delhi's sanitation services have gone down to the worst level during Kejriwal's tenure," he added. The erstwhile MCD, set up in 1958, was trifurcated into — NDMC (North Delhi Municipal Corporation), SDMC (South Delhi

Municipal Corporation) and EDMC (East Delhi Municipal Corporation) in 2012. In May 2022, the three civic bodies were merged again with Gyanesh Bharti and Ashwani Kumar taking er and special officer, respectively. In

charge as its municipal commission-'Swachh Survekshan 2022', the NDMC was ranked 37th, the EDMC 34th and the SDMC 28th, in the category of cities with a population of more than 10 lakh.

Noida, Ghaziabad rank first in UP

Noida and Ghaziabad have bagged the first rank in their categories in Uttar Pradesh, while Gurugram and Faridabad were adjudged the best in their categories in Haryana in the Centre's annual cleanliness survey for 2023 released on Thursday. In 2022 also, all four urban local bodies (ULB) were ranked 1 in their respective categories in the annual survey. Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurugram and

Faridabad are satellite cities of Delhi and form a key part of the larger national capital region (NCR).

While Noida and Gurgaon fall in the category of ULBs with popula-tions between 1 to 10 lakh, Faridabad and Ghaziabad have populations of more than 10 lakh. The survey also released information on ULBs on parameters like door-to-door collection (D2D) of waste, its segregation at source point and processing in percentage terms. It also released a star rating for 'garbage-free cities' (GFC) and

Noida scored 99.46 per cent in D2D, 74.39 per cent in 'source segregation' and 90.65 per cent in 'processing'. The city also scored '5 star' in the GFC status and 'Water+' in ODF status, the result showed. Noida is the only city in Uttar

open defecation-free (ODF).

Pradesh to get a 5-star GFC status and the only one with Water+ in ODF status. Meanwhile, Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation scored 99.5 per cent in D2D, 98.37 per cent in source segregation and 70 per cent in pro-cessing, while it bagged a 3-star GFC status and ODF++, according

to the survey. Gurugram scored 85.13 per cent in D2D, 14.88 per cent in source segregation and 93.31 per cent in processing, and ODF++, the result

Faridabad scored 82.63 per cent in D2D, 19.63 per cent in source segregation, 31.68 per cent in processing, and just 'ODF', it showed.

Both Gurugram and Faridabad were marked with 'No Star' in GFC status, according to the results.

LG approves

DU buildings

translocation of

252 trees for new

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

t Governor Vinai Kumar

Saxena has approved the

translocation of 252 trees and

felling of 15 trees for the pro-

posed academic buildings on the

Delhi University's north campus.

In addition to the translocation

of trees, 2,670 saplings — 10

times the number of affected trees — will be planted as a com-

pensatory measure by the uni-



LNJP gets notice for turning away injured man who died later

The Delhi Government has issued a show-cause notice to the LNJP Hospital authorities asking them to terminate the services of a senior resident doctor, days after the death of an injured man who was allegedly denied admission at four different hospitals.

A similar show-cause notice family welfare department of the Delhi government to the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital authorities asking them to terminate the services of a senior resident doctor.

Pramod, 47, who was arrested after a 21-year-old woman alleged that he had molested her in an inebriated state, died of the injuries he suffered after jumping out of a moving police van on January 3, a senior officer said. He was allegedly denied admission by four government hospitals, including three Delhi government-run facilities, due to unavailability of beds or equip ment, a senior officer had said earlier.

Officials said a meeting was also held with medical directors and medical superintendents of all Delhi government-run hospitals after the incident and they were asked to ensure that such an incident does not take place.

"The patient was first taken to

the Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital where he was administered first aid and was intubated. He was then taken to the GTB Hospital which said that the CT scan machine was nonfunctional and referred the patient to the LNJP Hospital," an

The official said the Jag Pravesh

to the GTB Hospital

their part (Jag Pravesh Chandra Hospital). The GTB Hospital authorities could have got the CT scan of the patient done at the Rajiv Gandhi Hospital, which is in the same campus as the GTB and then admitted the bated and was on assistive tic procedure," another official

The GTB Hospital authorities then referred the patient to the LNJP Hospital where he could not be admitted due to the unavailability of beds in the ICU ventilator

The show-cause notice said the

alism among the medical officoncerned medical director". this SCN failing which action as against him," read the notice.

Chandra Hospital had also sent a junior resident with the patient

'There was no negligence on patient. CT scan is not a line of breathing. CT scan is a diagnos-

"entire episode shows complete lack of empathy and professioncers involved as well as lack of supervision on the part of the 'Now, therefore, Medical Director, LNH is hereby directed to immediately terminate the services of Dr Vikash Yadav, (on duty senior resident on 03.01.2024). Further, Dr Suresh, medical director, LNH also directed to explain the reason for the above said lapse on his part within three days of receiving of deemed fit shall be initiated Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said on January 3 that the city government has sought

an explanation from the three

hospitals run by it, following

allegations that a man suc-

cumbed to his injuries after

being denied treatment.

S ecurity has been beefed up across the national capital ahead of Republic Day celebrations. More than 8,000 police personnel have already been deployed in Delhi for the January 26 parade, a senior police officer said.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Night patrolling staffers have been directed to check hotels, guest houses and dharamshalas. They are checking security measures in place at these facilities, particularly near railway stations and inter-state bus terminals, and their records to know who are visiting the national capital and for what purpose, the police

Police said that they are taking action against anyone found to be violating rules under section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code.

"Recently, when our team was checking a hotel in Paharganj, it found there was no security arrangements. An FIR was reg-istered against the owner of the hotel," the police officer said.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has issued strict directions for verification of tenants and servants, border checking, security of vital installations, malls and markets, and patrolling in areas drawing heavy footfalls



Police said that they are keeping strict vigil from the CCTV control room of strategic locations and Delhi's border areas. "We have intensified patrolling in public places. Group patrolling, night patrolling and

vehicle checking are being car ried out at different places. A double-layer security will be there at bus stands and railway stations," the police officer said Meanwhile, the Delhi Police is conducting mock drills to check

its response preparedness. "Drills have been conducted on how to control riot-like situation...Use water cannon to tackle any situation," another officer said.

In a statement, the central police district said, "As we approach Republic Day, preparations are in full swing. To ensure prompt and effective response, in case of any sabotage/exigency, Central District Police is conducting mock drills on regular basis."

"Such mock drills are being conducted at different places across the district and focused upon improving coordination between different units and

versity. The compensatory plantation cost of about Rs 1.57 crore will be deposited in advance by the university. According to Raj Niwas official, the 4.88-hectare area freed would be utilised for the construction of the inter-disciplinary academic and research building of eminence inside the DSE campus, academic building for faculty of technology, library building that will expand the existing Central Reference Library and an integrated computer centre that had been hith-

erto missing. The entire cost of this project, borne by the central government. Saxena noted that a joint inspection of the project site was carried out by officials of the Forest Department and the university. It was also informed that the project site was not falling in a morphological Ridge area and under the definition of deemed

Further the compensatory plantation of 2670 saplings, i.e ten times the number of trees permitted for transplantation/felling and additional 100 saplings consisting species of Neem, Amaltas, Peepal, Pilkhan, Gular, Bargad, Desi Kikar and Arjun along with other native species shall be carried out by the Delhi University in 24,120 sqm net area at the already identified

areas of the University. Out of the total 267 trees, 252 would be transplanted and 15 would be felled. The approval of LG for transplantation / translocation of 267 trees was required under the provisions of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act,

As the instant project covers an area of more than 01 hectare (4.8834 hectares in this project), therefore the department sought approval from the Government and approval from the LG for

Congress, AAP to hold LS seat sharing talks today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

eaders of INDIA Bloc parties LCongress and AAP will hold further discussions on Friday on seat-sharing in Delhi and in states for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, sources said.

The discussions will take place at a meeting at the residence of senior Congress leader Mukul Wasnik, a source in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said.

The leaders of the parties had met last week at Wasnik's residence on the seat-sharing issue but declined having any substantial talks. The meeting had lasted for nearly two and a half hours.

The INDIA bloc has been formed by opposition parties to take on the BJP-led NDA in the Lok Sabha elections.

On Tuesday, senior AAP leader and the party's Delhi unit convener Gopal Rai had said that his party has stated its stand to contest the polls in five states, including Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, Goa, and Delhi in alliance with the Congress. He had said that an official stand on the alliance was needed to be put forth by both the sides.

The sources claimed that the AAP wishes to contest on four of the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi and has an alliance with the Congress in states also. The Congress is willing to contest Lok Sabha polls in the North East Delhi, Chandani Chowk and New Delhi parliamentary constituencies, they said.

The formal discussion on seat sharing will be held in the second meeting between the two parties on Friday, said the

source in the AAP. In the previous meeting with Congress leaders, AAP was represented by its national general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak and ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bhardwaj. The sources said AAP's Rajva Sabha MP Raghav Chadha who was absent in the first meeting will take part in the talks on

25 Noida call centre workers held for duping Americans

s many as 25 workers of a call centre in Noida As many as 25 workers of a call centre in Toolar were arrested on Thursday for allegedly duping foreigners, including the US nationals, in a suspected cyber scam busted by the STF and the police. The call centre is located in D block of Sector 59 in Noida from where the workers were Task Force (STF) Lucknow headquarters and the Sector 58 police station, official said.

"During the police action, 25 people were arrested for duping foreigners online and thereby making money fraudulently. 34 mobile phones, 22 computer systems, four laptops, five internet routers etc. Were seized from the spot," said a police spokesperson. The thugs contacted the foreigners by posing as representatives of private com-panies approaching them to resolve their techrelated problems, police said.

The thugs told the gullible foreigners that their computer systems or their IP (internet protocol) address have been compromised and assured to get the issues fixed," the police official said. "Then they would have their targets download Any Desk app on their systems (to take remote control of the systems). The accused took payment in the form of gift cards between USD 100 and USD 500



for leading online brands," he added. Those held have been identified as Jayant Lal, Manik Siwach, Mohd Sabir, Shiva Kashyap, Mohit Grover, Adil Rizvi, Divyam Sharma, Ritik Malhotra, Saksham Malhotra, Himanshu Bhardwaj, Rohit Yadav, Ankur Soni, Kailash Shahi, Firoz Alam Bhupendra Singh Yadav, Afroz Khan, Yudhishthir Kumar, Manish Tiwari, Gautam Sehgal, Yash Makkad, Anubhav Tyagi, Sanjeet, Chandrapal Singh, Neeraj Yadav and Nadeem, police said. Some others linked to the scam are absconding but have been identified, they said. An FIR in the case has been lodged under Indian Penal Code sections 419 (cheating by impersonation), 420 (cheating), 467, 468 and 471 (all related to forgery) and under provisions of the Information Technology Act.

Six dry days declared

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

he Delhi Government has The Delni Government declared six 'dry days', including Republic Day on January 26, for the last quarter of the current financial year, officials said on Thursday. In an order, the Excise depart-

ment said Republic Day on

January 26, Guru Ravidas Jayanti on February 24, Swami Dayanand Saraswati Jayanti on March 6, Maha Shivaratri on March 8, Holi on March 25, and Good Friday on March 29 will be dry days during which the sale of alcohol will be prohibit-

Meanwhile, several BJP leaders,

including Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, have demanded that January 22 — when the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya will be held be declared a dry day. No decision has been taken by

the government in this regard, officials said.

exemption under Section 29.

Biting cold, fog persist as minimum temperature dips to 5.8 C

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national capital woke up **⊥** to another rough and cold weather, as fog engulfed the Delhi-NCR region on Thursday morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures on Thursday recorded 18.1 degree Celsius (two notches below the season's normal) and 5.8 degree Celsius (two notches below the season's normal) respectively. The city got much-needed sunlight. However, chilly northerly winds ensured 'cold day' conditions continued in parts of the city, with Jafarpur recorded the minimum temperature of 4.8

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that the cold-day conditions will continue in the region as the wind speed reached up to 15-18 km per hour. Shallow to moderate fog is expected in the morning on Friday and the maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to hover around 19 degrees Celsius and 5 degrees Celsius, respectively, the IMD

Due to the wind speed, the upper fog layer was dissolved, and the sky was mostly clear on Thursday. The air quality index recorded very poor and stood at

348 at 4 pm. It was 337 at 9 am on Thursday, 343 on Tuesday, and 273 on Wednesday. The air quality is likely to be in Very

Poor category from January 12 to 14. According to IMD, the maximum temperature was record-



ed 15.2 degree Celsius in Palam, 17.7 degree Celsius in Lodhi Road, 17.5 degree celsius in Ridge, 17.4 degree Celsius in Ayanagar, 15.9 degree Celsius in Narela, 17.8 degree Celsius in Pitampura and 16.6 degree Celsius in Pusa. Similarly, the maximum temperature was recorded of 15.3 degree Celsius in Gurugram, 15.7 degree Celsius in CDO Ghaziabad, and 17.2 degree Celsius in

The Palam Observatory, near the Indira Gandhi International Airport, reported a visibility level of 100 metres at 5:30 am, that prompting the airport

authorities to put its low visibility procedure into motion. The airport advised passengers to contact their airlines for flight updates while assuring that all flight operations are currently normal. However, it improved to 500 metres by 7 am due to surface winds. Due to low visibility, several flights were delayed. spokesperson for the railways said that fog impacted the schedule of "24 trains approaching Delhi" due to low visibility According to the weather office, 'very dense" fog is when visibil ity is between 0 and 50 metres, between 51 and 200 metres is

"dense", between 201 and 500

metres "moderate", and between 501 and 1,000 metres "shallow". A "cold day" is declared when the minimum temperature is below 10 degrees Celsius and the

maximum is 4.5 degrees below normal. For a "severe cold" day, the maximum temperature must be at least 6.5 degrees below normal.

Hindu Rao Hospital, Delhi

On behalf of the Commissioner MCD, the Medical Superintendent of Hindu Rao Hospital, Delhi-110007, invites auction of unserviceable/ dismantled Surgical items/article of Hospital on 16.01.2024. Interested bidders/scrap dealers can inspect the items at designated place & time and submit their quote price. For details contact: ms-hindurao@mcd.nic.in and mcdonline.nic.in RO NO. - 70/DPI/MCD/2023-24

Medical Superintendent

UK, other nations should join India for global rules based order: Rajnath

efence Minister Rajnath Singh has said the United Kingdom (UK) and other like minded countries should work with India for strengthening a peaceful and stable global rules-based order. He made this assertion during a meeting with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on late Wednesday in London. Sunak said Britain is keen to bolster the defence and security pillar of UK-India

Giving these details here on Thursday, defence ministry officials said Rajnath called on Sunak at 10 Downing Street adding the meeting was warm and cordial. The defence minister highlighted that both nations have made significant strides in moulding and recrafting the historic ties into a modern, multifaceted and mutually beneficial partnership, under the direction of the

leaders of both the countries. Rainath recalled the recent enhancement in bilateral defence engagement, spanning joint exercises, training, capability building, increased interoperability, military-to-military ties especially in the maritime domain.

he pioneer

efforts to enhance defence industrial cooperation, including in the technology domain. He briefed Sunak about his positive interactions with the UK defence industry and the new positive energy in the bilateral defence relationship. The defence minister stated that the UK and other likeminded countries should work with India for strengthening a peaceful and stable global rules-based order, including through partnering India in its inexorable rise, which can be strengthened, reinforced and speeded up with friendly col-Rajnath further stated that

He emphasised the ongoing

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is leading the quest of 1.4 billion Indians towards the national objective of becoming 21st century. Prime Minister Modi's efforts have borne remarkable fruits, growth is sustainably on the upswing, poverty has been reduced drastically, and a business friendly architecture has been put in

place. At the international level,

ready to partner with friends like the UK to strengthen the

rule-based world order. Prime Minister Sunak fully agreed with Rajnath on the need for UK and India to work in the domains of trade, defence and technology. In particular, he expressed hope that the ongoing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations could be brought to a success-

ful conclusion soon. He also underlined his keenness, and that of his Government, to strengthen the defence and security pillar of the bilateral relationship, including through Government backing for stronger business and tech-nology partnerships with Indian counterpart entities.

Rajnath gifted a Ram Darbar statue to Prime Minister Sunak during the meeting, which was also attended by UK National Security Advisor(NSA) Sir Tim

Rajnath also met with UK's

Foreign Minister David Cameron at the Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office. The Ministers appreciated the new momentum and direction of the India-UK partnership, symbolised by intense engagements at various levels.

The defence minister outlined his goal of integrating defence industries of both countries including through supply chain

integration to build resilience. He also emphasised the importance of bilateral start-up level interaction, and identification and discussion of joint projects which India and UK could implement together. Foreign Secretary Cameron

reiterated the UK government's desire to collaborate with India in the defence areas, particularly in the field of defence industrial collaboration, as one of the means by which the UK hopes to strengthen the support for a rule-based international order. Later, Rajnath interacted with the Indian community at India House, London. Over 160 prominent persons of Indian origin attended the interaction. A number of Indian military ex-servicemen, including few family members of World War II veterans were also present. According to PTI report, the minister addressed the gathering to apprise them of the fast pace of growth and development underway in India.

Modi presents chadar for **Ajmer Dargah**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met a delegation of Muslim community members on Thursday and presented them with a "chadar" that will be placed at the Ajmer Sharif Dargah during an event to commemorate the death anniversary of revered Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti.

"Met a Muslim community delegation. During our interaction, I presented the sacred Chadar, which will be placed during the Urs of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at the esteemed Ajmer Sharif Dargah," Modi said on X.

Minority Affairs Minister Smriti Irani and Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) minority morcha president, Jamal Siddiqui, were also present during the meeting.

at Ayodhya airport on January 22: Yogi of 2024. In totality, UP will have 19 airports in the future.

Adityanath announced that over 100 flights will be landing and take off at Ayodhya airport on January 22. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony that took place virtually, the chief minister said that around 100 chartered planes carrying guests to attend the 'pran pratishtha' ceremony are expected to land at the Ayodhya airport on January 22. While Adityanath joined the function from Lucknow, Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia joined from the

Over 100 flights expected

national capital. The ceremonial inauguration took place amid great enthusiasm, with CM Adityanath personally receiving the boarding pass for the inaugural flight. He noted that a large number of plane landings will also help check the potential of the newly-built airport. Speaking on the occasion, Scindia said five new airports will be inaugurated in Uttar Pradesh in one month that will take the total number of airports in the state to 19. Talking about the growth of

As the first tri-weekly flight by IndiGo connecting Ahmedabad and Ayodhya was launched on Thursday

ahead of the much-awaited

consecration ceremony of

Ram temple, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi

the civil aviation sector in Uttar Pradesh in the past 9 years, the Scindia shared that Uttar Pradesh had only 6 airports in 2014, and now the state has 10 airports including the newly inaugurated airport in Ayodhya. By the next month, UP will have 5 more airports, one airport each in Azamgarh, Aligarh, Moradabad, Shravasti, and Chitrakoot. Apart from this an international airport will also be ready in Jewar by the end

Ayodhya airport will be expanded and the runway will be extended that will allow landing of bigger aircraft and operation of international flights, Scindia said. The minister also added that currently the Maharshi Valmiki International Airport is built in an area of 6500 square meters with the capacity of handling 600 air passengers at peak hours which will be expanded to 50,000 square meters and the capacity will also be expanded to 3000 passengers in the next phase. Similarly, the runway which is 2200 meter long will be expanded to 3700 meters so that larger aircraft for international flights could also run from Ayodhya itself. Highlighting the significant developments in Uttar Pradesh's aviation infrastructure, Scindia remarked, "PM Modi and UP CM Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the Ayodhya Airport and Railway Station on December 30. We started the first flight between Ayodhya and Delhi on the same day, operated by IndiGo and Air India Express."He

added, "Today, a new history is being created. We all witnessed New Year's excitement on the holy land of Ayodhya on December 30, when a grand and new Ayodhya airport was unveiled in the presence of PM Modi." Secretary Civil Aviation, Vumlunmang Vualnam, Joint Secretory Asungba Chuba Aao, Special Director, IndiGo, RK Singh were also present during the event. The Maharishi Valmiki International Airport in Ayodhya was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on December 30. On that day, IndiGo and Air India Express operated flights to Ayodhya. The consecration ceremony at

Pankai Tripathi steps down as poll body 'national icon'

PNS NEW DELHI

Actor Pankaj Tripathi, who was appointed as the 'National Icon' of the Election Commission of India, has voluntarily stepped down from his

A statement on the ECI's social media handle, posted by Spokesperson ECI, conveyed, "Acknowledging his role as a political leader in an upcoming film, actor @PankajTripathi ĥas voluntarily stepped down as #ECI National Icon as per terms of MoU. #ECI expresses gratitude for his impactful contribution to voter awareness & #SVEEP since Oct 2022'

Tripathi assumed the role of ECI National Icon in October 2022. These days he is occupied promoting his upcoming project 'Main Atal Hoon', where he portrays former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Tripathi recently shared his interest in politics. Directed by Ravi Jadhav, 'Main Atal Hoon' is set to be released on January 19.

Nowe, TMC skips seat sharing talks with Congress, says party position made clear

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

After Nitish Kumar led JDU, the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee led Trinamool Congress seems to have expressed her party's resentment by deciding not to send its representatives for any meeting with the Congress'

national alliance committee on seatsharing for the Lok Sabha elections as it has already conveyed its position to the grand old party.

The Congress panel has been holding

seat-sharing talks with Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) partners from different states. TMC sources said the Congress contacted party leaders for such a meeting and has been conveyed that they are not keen on sending any representative for

They said the TMC has offered two seats to the Congress -- the ones it won



in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. West

from one seat in Meghalaya and at least two in Assam, party sources said. Party sources added that while the local unit of TMC had an aspiration to fight from one seat in Goa, where it got

around five per cent vote share in the 2021 assembly polls, it will not press for it and support the Congress in the coastal state.

party leader said the TMC's offer is based on the Congress' vote share in previous assembly and Lok Sabha polls. In at least 39 out of 42 seats in West Bengal, the Congress had less than five per cent vote share in

In West Bengal, the Congress got a vote share of 2.93 per cent in the 2021 assembly polls, 12.25 per cent in the 2016 assembly polls, and 5.67 per cent in the 2019 Lok

Sabha polls.

defeating the BJP. Our position is clearfor one to go to Delhi and have another discussion," the TMC leader said. TMC won 22 seats in West Bengal, the Congress won two, and the BJP secured

CISF takes over NIV

Pune security to guard against terrorist attack

CISF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

The Central Industrial **1** Security Force (CISF) has taken over security of the Punebased National Institute of Virology (NIV) to secure the facility against any terrorist attack or sabotage attempts, a senior officer said

Thursday. The induction of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) team took

place Wednesday at the NIV campus situat-Ambedkar Road in the presence of offi-

cials and staff of the institute and the central paramil-

itary force, he said. The CISF, an armed force under

the Union home ministry, guards 68 civil airports and various vital installations in the aerospace and nuclear domain. "In the light of the increased threat perception to biotechnology companies situated across the country, ICMR-NIV is inherently vulnerable to threats

from anti-nationals and saboteurs. The CISF will provide round-the-clock armed security cover to the ICMR-NIV in Pune," a CISF spokesperson

The NIV is one of the major institutes of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). "It is government's apex

research body and focuses on research on animal and human infections and the role of the environment. It led the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic from the front and also

developed the vaccine named Covaxin spokesperson said.

The research areas of NIV include cell repository, electron microscopy, rickettsioses, hepatitis, influenza and related viruses, clinical virology, biochemistry, virus registry, and biostatistics. The CISF squad, headed by an inspector rank official, will provide a counter-terrorist cover and will control access to

Bengal has 42 parliamentary constituencies. Congress office bearers said the offer is too low and difficult to The TMC is also looking at fighting

In the context of West Bengal, a senior

"The Congress leadership should acknowledge the ground reality in Bengal. They are weak. We are ready to lead the fight in West Bengal, we are committed to the INDIA bloc and to ly spelt out with data, so there is no need In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the

Don't agree with on One Nation, One Poll concept: Mamata to panel Sabha and assemblies, and said "I regret that I cannot agree with "While I understand the mean-from is solved, it is difficult to tives for full five years." it would be against the basic the concept of 'One Nation, One ing of one nation in a historical- arrive at any firm view on the "The central or a state governunderstand the exact constitutional and structural implication of the term in the instant case.

Nation, One Government'? I am afraid, it does not." She said unless the "basic enigma" of where the concept came

Does the Indian Constitution

follow the concept of 'One

states which are not expecting general elections to the assembly should not be forced to go for "premature general elections for the sake of introduction of coevality only: that will be basic violation of the electoral trust of the people who have elected

their Vidhan Sabha representa-

term for various reasons, for example a coalition breaking to a vote of no-confidence," she said, adding that during the last 50 years, Lok Sabha has witnessed several premature dissolutions. She said fresh elections are the only option in such a sit-

the Ram temple will be held

on January 22.

5 years survival rate in breast cancer at 66.4 per cent in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

West Bengal Chief minister and TMC supremo

Mamata Banerjee on Thursday

wrote to the high-level commit-

tee on "One Nation, One

Election" expressing her dis-

agreement with the concept of

simultaneous polls to the Lok

The five-year survival rate The five-year survival rate for breast cancer, the most common cancer in India, stands at 66.4 per cent, with variations across 11 geographical areas, according to a study led by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in India, accounting for 28.2 per cent of all female cancers, with an estimated 216,108 cases by 2022.

The age-standardised incidence rate of female breast cancer has increased by 39.1 per cent from 1990 to 2016, and this trend has been seen in every state of India over the past 26 years. The study, published in Cancer,

an international interdisciplinary journal of the American Cancer Society, showed disparity in survival rates across 11 geographical areas.

tional arrangements.

In a letter to the panel secretary,

Banerjee said that in 1952, the

first general elections were

simultaneously conducted for

the central and state levels.

"There was such simultaneity for

some years. But the coevality has

since been ruptured...," she said.

Mizoram (74.9 per cent), Ahmedabad urban (72.7 per cent), Kollam (71.5 per cent), and Thiruvananthapuram (69.1 per cent) had higher survival rates than the national

Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh) had the lowest survival rate (41.9 per cent). Manipur and Tripura also had low survival rate, while the national average stood at 66.4 per cent. Deaths during the 5-year follow-

up period were also the highest

in Pasighat (53.6 per cent) and

lowest in Mizoram.

Neha Dhupia joins fight against e-cigarettes, vaping use among kids

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

disagree with your formulation

She said there are basic concep-

tual difficulties in agreeing with

the committee, and the concept

The West Bengal chief minister

questioned the meaning of 'One

Nation' in the context, and said,

and proposal," she wrote.

fter world fame celebrity **A**like Dr Deepa Malik, Padma Shri, Khel Ratna Arjuna Awardee; Dr Bhavna Barmi who is an internationally acclaimed Clinical Psychologist, a public speaker, founder of Happiness Studio and Head Psychologist at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute, it is now Bollywood actress Neha Dhupia who has joined Mothers Against Vaping, a united front of concerned mothers to combat the promotion of new-age tobacco

devices such as e-cigarettes and vapes among kids and youth. She said, "As a responsible mother, I wholeheartedly support the Mothers Against Vaping group and their cause. The issue is deeply alarming, and all mothers should be concerned as it directly impacts the health of our children.

"We, as mothers, must unite, raise our voices and increase

awareness against vaping and electronic cigarettes to ensure that such habits are completely eradicated from the lives of our children and youth.

of the House, Hawaii State

Zika virus can shrink neuroblastoma tumour in children: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Zika virus infections in preg-nant women can cause serious birth defects but now a team of researchers has found that the mosquito-causing vector could be used to shrink neuroblastoma tumors, a rare childhood cancer that typically develops in the sympathetic nervous system or the adrenal glands.

The development is significant as more than half of patients with high-risk neuroblastoma do not respond to chemotherapy or radiation, or they respond initially, but develop a recurrence.

Researchers studied mice with neuroblastoma tumors that expressed high levels of CD24, a protein developmental protein the virus is known to target. The researchers injected half the mice with saline solution and the other half with Zika virus. The mice injected with the virus experienced a nearly total loss of tumor size and higher dosage testing resulting in complete elimination of the tumor. After a four-week follow-up, there was no recurrence of the tumor and the mice did not develop any symptoms of Zika virus infection or any side



mouse models of human neuroblastoma tumors and treated them with Zika or saline. After 28 days, the saline solution tumors had grown by as much as 800%, while the Zika-treated tumors shrunk approximately 12%. After four more weeks, no further tumor growth was detected. "With further validation, Zika

virus could be an extremely effective bridge therapy for patients with high-risk neurob-lastoma," Joseph Mazar, PhD, research scientist at Nemours Children's, said in the release. 'We also see potential for Zika virus to be used to treat children and adults with other cancers that express high levels of CD24. In a significant breakthrough, a team of US researchers harnessed Zika virus to shrink or eliminate neuroblastoma tumours in mice studies, an advance that suggests the deadly virus could someday serve as an effective cancer therapy.

Thirty Metre Telescope project sees hope with Hawaiians inclusion

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $T^{\text{he Thirty Metre Telescope}}_{(TMT) \text{ project on Mauna}}_{\text{Kea Hui in Hawaii in the USA}}$ which is stuck since 2021 might see a ray of light soon with plans underway to initiate a process for inclusion of the native community ie Hawaiians in decisionmaking process of the muchambitious international scientific endeavor. Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT)

is a 30-meter diameter primary

mirror optical and infrared tele-

scope being established to rev-

India is a Founder-Member

Partner in this project which aims to open new windows to the universe through optical and infrared astronomy. Indian participation in this project was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2014.

olutionize our understanding of

the universe and our place with-

The much ambitious project is stuck since 2021 when the Mauna Kea Hui - comprised of various groups and individuals opposed to the building of the TMT on Maunakea - alleged



the observatory project was in non-compliance with a condition of the University of Hawai?i at Hilo's Conservation District Use Permit, granted by the Hawai?i Board of Land and Natural Resources September 2017. However, to discuss the chal-

lenges and solutions, a five-member Indian delegation led by Secretary Department of Science and Technology (DST) Professor Abhay Karandikar visited the site and discussed the hurdles in the progress of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) project and ways to overcome them, said a state-

ment issued here. The delegation met Prof. Henry Yang, Chairman, Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) International Observatory (TIO) Board, Prof. Robert Kirshner, Executive Director, TIO and TMT Project Managers at Hawaii on January

The discussions centered on TMT's present status, particularly regarding Mauna Kea site, start of civil construction, present funding situation, progress made so far towards in-kind deliverables for the project and expected timelines in the present

Separate meetings were also held with Scott Saiki, Speaker

Legislature, John Komeiji, Chairman, Mauna Kea Stewardship and Oversight Authority, Mitch Roth, Mayor Hawaii County, Kaiu Kimura, native Hawaiian and Executive Director of Imiloa Astronomy Center, Mr. Toby Taniguchi, President of KTA Superstores, Pua Ishibashi, native Hawaiian and State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, Dr. Kimo Alameda, native Hawaiian and Hawaii County Mayoral candi-

It is Congress Bharat Todo Anyay Yatra: Nadda

He questions role of grand old party in uniting country

PTI ITANAGAR

ubbing the proposed 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' by Congress, as 'Bharat Todo Anyay Yatra', BJP president J P Nadda on Thursday questioned the role of the grand old party in uniting the country. The Congress is known for its

had done everything to divide the country and now organising a march to hide its misdeeds, Nadda said while addressing party workers during the state executive meeting here.

The yatra, to be led by Rahul Gandhi, will commence from Imphal on January 14 and culminate in Mumbai on March 20. The Arunachal Pradesh leg of the march is

scheduled for January 20.
"I urge you all to understand the Congress well. It is not the 'Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra' but the 'Bharat Todo Anyaya Yatra' that this so-called INDI Alliance is on. When did the Congress Party unite India? It

"The Congress has always worked for breaking India, destroying India," the BJP chief claimed.

Nadda alleged that the Congress is only interested in "vote bank" politics and never thought beyond voters and politics.

The culture of politics in the country has been changed by the BJP, while (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi has transformed the dynamics of politics to nationalism. Congress does rajneeti, but under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Modi, we do rashtraneeti. Our vision is to leave no one behind," Nadda said. He said that the people of the state should question Gandhi when

who is also the media advisor

to the PDP president,

confirmed that her mother is

safe. "Mufti's car met with a

terrible accident enroute

Anantnag today. Thanks to

the grace of god she and her

security officers escaped

unhurt without any serious

PUBLIC NOTICE

In pursuance to rule 19(2) of DCS rules, 2007, it is to inform publicly that following

members of Padmini CGHS Ltd. (Regd. No

1282) have resigned from the membership of the society i.e.1) Sh. Mahender Pal (M.No.92), 2) Sh. Ram Bilas Jain (M.No.95) 3) Sh. Devinder Kumar Jain (M.No. 96) and 4

Lt. Col. Chandra Prakash (M.No.173)

Further they have been refunded their deposited amount. if anyone have an

objections he/she may file his/her objection in

the office of the RCS, Parliament Street, New Delhi or at society office i.e. 216. Vardhman

Star City Mall, Sector-7, Dwarka, New Delhi-110075 within 7 day from the date of

publication of the public notice.
President
Padmini CGHS Ltd.

(A Subsidiary of Coal India Limited)

Sanctoria, Post: Dishergarh, Dist. Paschim, Bardhman, West Bengal-713333 CIN-U10101WB1975G0I030295

'All the tenders issued by CIL and its subsidiaries

for procurement of Goods, Works & Services are

available on i) Website of Coal India Limited:

www.coalindia.in, ii) Website of ECL:

www.easterncoal.nic.in, iii) CIL e-Procurement Portal: https://coalindiatenders.nic.in,

iv) Central Public Procurement Portal:

https://eprocure.gov.in. In addition, procurement is

also done through GeMPortal:https://gem.gov.in".

injuries," Iltija Mufti posted



the Congress worked to unite the country.

They (Congress) always tried to "divide the country in the name of vote bank politics", he

alleged. "When slogans were raised at INU, where was Congress then? The next day, Rahul Gandhi went to JNU, stood by the students, and said there would be no FIR. Are they not trying to break India?" Nadda questioned and demanded a

public apology from Gandhi. He claimed that Rahul Gandhi even insulted everyone from the OBC community by saying "All Modis are thieves".

"Rahul, please read the history of the country to know how your ancestors divided the country. Be it the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and Shah Bano case, the Mandal Commission, toppling of elected state governments 90 times since Independence under Article 356 and insulting B R Ambedkar...," Nadda said.

"Can anyone tell us what is the agreement between the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of China? Are you not trying to

break and weaken India? After all these, now you are bringing Nyay Yatra", Nadda wondered. The BJP president also alleged that the opposition INDIA bloc was formed to protect black money and the families of the leaders of the respective parties.

These leaders have CBI cases pending against them, he claimed adding: "It is an alliance formed for personal gains. It has no relation to India." Nadda alleged that Congress chief ministers do not keep promises as they come to power, enjoy their term and again come to

power by fooling people. Modi has introduced 'report card politics' in India where

the ruling BJP is accountable to the people and takes along every stakeholder, Nadda said. "The Modi government is committed to GYAN gareeb (poor), youth, annadata (farmer) and naari (poor), shakti (women power). The Modi government has uplifted 13.5 crore people from the poverty line," he claimed.

The BJP president alleged that the previous non-BJP governments ignored Northeast India. "Modi has given huge importance to the Northeast, where he has visited 60 times. He has ended 50 years of violence and turmoil by signing a number of peace accords in the region," he asserted.

Narrow escape for PDP chief Mehbooba

on her way to Khannabal to

meet the victims of a fire inci-

dent at the time of the accident.

Front portion of the SUV was

damaged after it collided

with another civilian vehicle.

Mehbboba Mufti was later

escorted to her destination in

a separate vehicle after she

refused to cancel her

engagement.

02.02.2024

iniuries. The PDP Chief was Mufti's daughter Iltija Mufti,

Baba Farid University of Health

Sciences, Faridkot

Sadiq Road, Faridkot-151203 Ph. 01639- 256232, 256236

E-TENDER NOTICE

1) Medical Gases and other Gases 2) Human Milk Bank equipments 3) Apheresis machine (wit pre bid meeting) 4) Skill Lab equipment of NELS 5) Battery Operated Drill machine with sa Reamer attachment 6) Fully Automated Chemilimiescence Immunoasay system on Rental Bas 7) Fully automated Clinical Chemistry Analyser on Rental Bas 8) Arthoscopy set with complet

Note: Pre-bid meeting of Sr.no.3 shall be held. Please refer tender document for Date, time as

venue for pre- bid meeting.

Terms and conditions can be downloaded from http://eproc.punjab.gov.in. The tenders will be

nstruments 9) Singing the rate contract for X-ray films 10) Green Laser

00/12/181/2023/31366 Dated CHD :- 1/11/2024

PUBLIC NOTICE NOTICE is hereby given to public at large that Mi Deepak Adhikari is purchasing Third Floor of Plo No. 12/2, out of Khasra No. 219, situated in the

area of Village Dindarpur, Delhi colony known a: Shyam Vihar, Phase-II, Najafgarh, New Delr from Mr. Rohit Jakhar, Mr. Sandeep Kumar, Mr Tirath Singh, Mr. Manoj Kumar and Ms. Ren

Pruth who are the owners of the entire plot no 12/2 by virtue of Authorization Slip date 18.05 20/3 registered as doc no. 6139 registerer in SRO IX Delhi and intend to get the financia assistance from Aditya Birla Housing Financia Ltd. If any person(s) // Institution has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right lift or inderest in the said promety may please

title or interest in the said property may pleas contact us within 07 days from the date of thi notice on the address mentioned herein below

failing which my client(s) shall not be hel

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

G2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

 $F^{\text{ormer}}_{\text{Kashmir}} \ \substack{\text{Jammu} \\ \text{Chief Minister}}$ and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti escaped unhurt after her four wheeler met with an accident at Sangam in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district on Thursday. However, Mufti's personal security officer and driver suffered minor

PUBLIC NOTICE

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Kiran Singh is the owner of Plot of land area measuring 70 Sq. Yds. i.e. 58.52 Sq. Mts., pertaining to the Khasra No. 109 Min, situated in the area of Village Bhangel Begumpur, Pargana & Telsil Dadri, District Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) (availing loan from Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited) vide Sale Deed dated 07-07-2023 (doc. No. 5882) executed by Mr. Prashant Kumar alias Prashant Tyagi Slo Late Pramod alias Pramod Tyagi, whereas he inherited the same after the death of his father Late Pramod alias Pramod Tyagi and Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, icense, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise howsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, falling which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.

Kamal Kant Guyta (Advocate)

Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahaluzmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb., J.P., Mob. 9810063351

HAPPY MAKAR SANKRANTI AND **LOHRI TO ALL**

FROM KAMAL PIYUSH



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Daleep S/o Shri Shankar R/o 242/A, Street No-02, Gaon Ghundali Krishna Nagar, Delhi-110051 have changed my name from Daleep to Dalip for all purposes.

PD(237)A

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that Mr. Bharat Bhambai (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagors (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagors/
Borrowers) is the absolute owner of Property No.
44 in Block-A, area measuring 296.2 Sq. yds.
situated in Rajouri Garden, New Delhi, Basai
Darapur, Delhi (hereinafter referred to "said
property") by virtue of Sale Deed dt. 27.06.1994
regd. as Doc. No. 5042 read with Relinquishment
Deed dt. 22.12.2015 regd. as Doc. No. 11103.
Previous Original Sale Deed dt. 05.01.1957
executed by DLF Housing & Construction Ltd. as
"Vendor" in the favor of Mrs. Nanki Devi, Original
Death Certificate of Jit Kaur & Original SMC of
Harbans Lal Bhambani have been misplaced. The
Borrower will create mortgage in respect of the
said property in favour of our clients Indusind Bank
Limited, New Tower, 8th Floor, Hyatt Regency
Complex, Block-A, District Centre Bhikaji Cama
Place, R.K Puram, New Delhi-110066.
Arty person who finds the said documents should Any person who finds the said documents should

FI has any claim and/or objection in respect of th Finas any claim analyor objection in respect of the said property are hereby called upon to infilmate to the undersigned within 10 days from the date of publication of this notice of his such claim if any with documentary evidence in support thereof, failing which all the claim, of such person, Bank, FI shall be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Any objections raised after the abandoned. Any objections raised after the completion of the 10 days shall not be binding

Adv. Priya Rekhi (Advocate A-38, Kailash Čolony, New Delhi-110048 Tel.: +91-1149774545

OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED
CIN No: L28219HR1988PLC030347
Regd. Office: 17-18, Roz- Ka-Meo Industrial Estate, Tehsil Nuh, Distric Mewat, Harvana. - 122103 :www.okplay.in,Email:info@okplay.i

Tel: 011 46190000 Fax: 011 46190090 NOTICE

Pursuant to Regulation 29 read with Regulation 47 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements Regulations, 2015. Notice is hereby given that a Meeting of the Board of Directors o the Company is being convened on Thursday the 30th day of January, 2024 to conside Sub-division/ split of existing equity shares of face value of Rs. 10/- each, fully paid-up by alteration of Capital Clause of the Memorandum of Association of the Company

For OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED

Date: 11.01.2024 Meenu Goswan Company Secretary Place: New Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Sh. Titu Yadav S/o Sh. Shishpal is the owner of Built up House Area Measuring 260 Sq. yds., out of Khasra no. 146 Min. Situated in the Old Abadi of Village Hazratpur Wazidpur, Noida, Pargana Tehsil Dadri, Districti-Gaulam Budh Nagar, U.P. vide Registered Gift Deed Regd. no. 11773 Dated 27.12.2023 SR - Noida executed by Smt. Imarti W/o Sh. Shishpal. This above-mentioned property is going to be mortgage with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/bank/financial institution having any claim/right, lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to above property, should notified to the undersigned/Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address PUBLIC NOTICE along with documentary evidence under address through registered A/d within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim lien or objection shall be deemed to have been

Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court,

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs.

Renu Sharma & Mr. Dhananjay Sharma who are owners of Residential Plot No. D-1, admeasuring 711 sq. yds., ie. 594.46 sq. mfrs., Part of Khata No. 02425, Khasra No. 44 min, Village Dhargal, Pargana Jalalabad, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, U.P.-201017; having purchased the same from Mr. Vikas Tyagi, vide Sale Deed dated 22.04.2022, vide Document No.5492, registered at Sub-Registrar. (Dhaziabad-II) and same to be finance & mortgage by UGRO Capital Limited. To combly the requirements of BANK/NBFC/Fl we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/title/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 14 days from today, falling which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Contact # 011-40046316



S.No./store/248/2023 Chhatarpur, Dated: 11.01.2024 NOTICE INVITING TENDER FOR PRINTING AND SUPPLY OF

DEGREE CERTIFICATES BY GeM PORTAL The Maharaja Chhatrasal University, Chhatarpur Invites Bids via Gem Portal (https://gem.gov.in/) for supply of Printed Degree Certificate approximately 50 thousand in number, for a minimum period of 3 year, from the vendors/firms who are eligible, as per criteria defined in this bid GEM/2024/B/4463769. Bid End Date/Time is 31.01.2024, 11:00:00. The University reserves the right to accept/reject/release or relax any or all/

part of the tender without assigning any reason whatsoever. In case of any dispute or arbitration, the decision of the university will be final. M.P. Madhyam/113243/2024 REGISTRAR

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" for recovery of dues

١	Case Details	Asset Details	Reserve Price	EMD	
١	&				
	TRC/1879/2022 OA/389/2019	Vehicle No UP13AT7302, Make and Model-TATA MOTORS LTD TATA 4923, Manu Year- 2017			
	ICICI BANK VS Jalan Transport Pvt Ltd.	Vehicle No UP13AT7301 MOTORS LTD TATA 4			
ı	Case Details	Asset Details			
1	as per court orders, in the following cases:-				

ICICI BANK VS POOJA MEHTA, OA NO.993/2018 Vehicle No.- HR26CS6856 Make and Model- LAND ROVER DISCOVERY 17.50,000/-SPORT, Manu Year- 2015 Auction Date: January 22, 2024 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.

Auction Portal Name & URL Link: Car Trade and https://www.cartradeexchange.com Contact Person- Swapnil Upadhyay (8126013708)/ Rajeev Ranjan (8584874809) Note: DD/PO of EMD amount (Where applicable) is to be made in

Auction Type: Online Auction

favour of ICICI BANK LIMITED payable at Delhi and all bidders need to submit original DD/PO along with self-attested KYC at the ICICI Bank Ltd. Shal Tower Plot no. 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi-110005 on or before January 20, 2024 by 05:00 pm Terms of Sale

The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves / itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before

Successful bidder shall have to deposit sale amount within 5 days from the auction date by the way of pay order/demand draft/RTGS/NEFT. In case if you fail to make the remaining sale amount within 5 days, your EMD amount will be forfeited (Where applicable)

The intending bidders may visit at ICICI Bank Ltd, Shal Tower Plot no. 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005. for details and

VOIG5

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority

Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida G.B Nagar, (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

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

SL No.	Job No	Name of Work	Tender Amount (in Lacs.)
1	33/DGM/Sr.M. (E&M)-II 2023- 24/ET	Strengthening of Street lights Service road Near Sani Mandir at Sector-121, Noida.	38.16
2	34/DGM/Sr.M. (E&M)-II 2023- 24/ET Providing Street lights poles in Different Parks at Sector-20, Noida.		64.08
3	37/DGM/Sr.M. (E&M)-II 2023- 24/ET	Supply and Installation of Decorative Pole for Beautification & Smart Pole Shashi Chowk to City Center Metro Station, Noida.	58.61
H		'	

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 25.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened / downloaded on dated 29.01.2024 at 11.00 AM. Dy. General Manager (E&M) NOIDA

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA



कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, भोपाल प्रधानमंत्री आवास योजना (PMAY) हाऊसिंग फॉर ऑल प्रकोष्ठ (HFA CELL)

ततीय तल, आई.एस.बी.टी. भवन, होशंगाबाद रोड, हबीबगंज, भोपाल-462011

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	क्र. 956/एच.एफ.ए./2024 भोपाल, दिनांक 11.01.2024 निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु दो लिफाफा पद्धति के अनुसार मोहरबंद निविदायें निर्धारित प्रपत्र पर ऑनलाईन आमंत्रित की जाती है								
			निविदा अवधि				ठेकेदार	कार्य हेतु निर्धारित एस ओ आर	
1.		External Electrification work at Bagmugaliya site. (Second Call)			99,640/-	12,500/-	Tender	MPUADD electrical issr 2021 +SOR & NON SOR ITEM	01 Month

1. निविदा प्रपत्र की निर्धारित राशि एवं धरोहर राशि एवं अन्य आवश्यक दस्तावेज ऑनलाईन प्रस्तुत करने होंगे अन्य समस्त विस्तृत जानकारी www.mptenders.gov.in पर देखी जा सकती है।

2. किसी भी निविदा को स्वीकार अथवा अस्वीकार करने का अधिकार विभाग के पास सुरक्षित होगा।

प्र. कार्यपालन यंत्री (HFA Ele.) नि.क्र. 1401/023/024

नगर निगम भोपाल

कार्यालय नगर परिषद पथरिया जिला दमोह

पथरिया दिनांक 10.01.2024

क्र./लोक निर्माण/निविदा/2024/414 // निविदा आमंत्रण सूचना //

निम्नलिखित कार्य हेतु केन्द्रीय ई-रजिस्ट्रेशन प्रणाली से पंजीकृत समस्त ठेकेदारों से ऑनलाईन निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा का विस्तृत विवरण वेबसाईट <u>www.mptenders.gov.in</u> पर देखा जा सकता है।

ф.	टेण्डर क्रं. जारी दिनांक	कार्य का नाम एवं स्थान	कार्य की समयाविध एवं लागत	निविदा प्रपत्र एवं अमानत राशि	निविदा की अंतिम तिथि
1	2024_UAD_325014_1 09.01.2024	कायाकल्प अभियान 2.0 अंतर्गत विभिन्न स्थानों पर सी.सी. रोड एवं नाली निर्माण कार्य	1- 04 माह 2- 76.26 लाख	1- 10000.00 2- 58000.00	08.02.2024
2	2024_UAD_325015_1 09.01.2024	मुख्यमंत्री शहरी अधोसंरचना विकास योजना (चतुर्थ चरण) अंतर्गत विभिन्न स्थानों पर सी.सी.	1- 04 माह 2- 175.41	1- 12500.00 2- 88000.00	08.02.2024

नोट :- निविदा में किसी भी प्रकार के संशोधन का प्रकाशन ऑनलाईन www.mptenders.gov.in की वेबसाईट पर ही प्रकाशित किया जावेगा, पृथक से समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशन नही किया जावेगा।

मुख्य नगर पालिका अधिकारी नगर परिषद, पथरिया जिला दमोह

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

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.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

(By Order)

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		Description D of Property/ Date of		Name
INO		Symbolic Possession	in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Branch
1.	Arul Samuel & S Mery/ Flat No.501, 5th Floor, Heights &, Temple Green- Heights, Phase II, Old No.180 New No.135 Mathur Village Sriperumbudur Tk Kancheepuram- 602105/ LBCHE00002055255	Property Schedule "A" Schedule All That Piece and Parcel of Land Situate at Old No.180, New No.135, Mathur Village, Sriperumpudur Taluk, Kancheepuram District Comprised in S. Nos. and Extent as Detailed Below, or Thereabouts and Bounded on The: Item Nos. Survey Nos. Extent Cents Sq.ft. North Survey Nos. South Survey Nos. East Survey Nos. West Survey Nos. 1. 30/2 Part 14.25 6,207.30 30/2 Part 30/3 Part 30/5 Part 32/7 Part 2 30/5 Part 1.75 762.30 30/5 Part 30/3 Part 30/2 Part 30/2 Part 3.33/4 19.00 8,276.40 33/2 33/7 34/1 Part 33/3 Part 8. 33/5 4 33/5 Part 5.25 2,286.90 33/3 Part 33/7 Part 33/4 Part 8. 33/7 33/5 Part 5 34/1 Part 52.00 22,651.20 32/7 Part 34/1 Part 35/2 Part 33/2 Part,33/4 Part 8. 33/7 Part 6.00 2,613.60 34/3 Part 34/2 Part 34/2 Part 34/4 Part 8. 34/2 Part 7 34/3 Part 6.00 2,613.60 34/3 Part 34/4 Part 93/1a Part 34/3 Part 8. 35/2 Part 12.50 5.445.00 35/2 Part 35/2 Part 35/2 Part 31/4 Part 34/2 Part 8. 35/2 Part 9.93/1b 33.00 14,374.80 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 93/1C 93/1A 10. 35/3 Part 5.50.50.47.00 35/3 Part 93/1A Part 34/3 Part 34/3 Part 34/3 Part 33/4 Part 8. 35/2 Part 19.3/1B 8. 93/1C 35/3 Part 35/2 Part 11 93/1A Part 30.50 13,285.80 35/1 Part 8. 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 93/1B Part 34/3 Part 34/5 Part 12.93/1C 30.00 13,068.00 35/3 Part 93/2 Part 92/1 & 92/2 93/1B 13 33/2 Part 11.00 4,791.60 33/2 Part 33/4 Part 33/4 Part 34/1 Part 13/3/3 Part 137/5 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 15 137/5 Part 10.50 4,573.80 137/4 Part 33/5 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 15 137/5 Part 10.50 4,573.80 137/4 Part 33/5 Part 8.31/4 Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part 8.31/4 Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 137/6 Part 16.22 Part 93/1A Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part 8.31/4 Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part 8.31/4 Part 34/1 Part 33/5 Part 18.40 Part 8. 34/2 Part 20.02/2 Part 34/2 Part 19.34/5 Part 13.37/6 Part 13.37/1 Part 23.25 Part 33/2 Part 13.37/4 Part 8. 34/2 Part 93/1 Part 34/5 Part 33/7 Part 34/1 Part 34/5 Part 33/2 Part 3	02/07/2021 Rs. 25,80,556/-	Delhi

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

Date: January 12, 2024 Place: Delhi/ NCR Authorized Officer ICICI Bank Limited

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial

(Enforcement) Rules, 2002. Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is". "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act. 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest

Sr. No.		Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1		Sunita Agrawal (Borrower), Shailendra Kumar Agarwal, Gaurav Agrawal (Co- Borrowers), LAN no. LBNOD00002082389	Flat No- 7112, 11th Floor, Tower- 7, Ats, Triumph Sector-104, Gurgaon, Haryana Admeasuring an area of 3150 Sq Feet).	Rs. 3,03,58,669/- (as on January 03, 2024	Rs. 2,21,40, 000/- Rs. 22,14,000/-	February 01, 2024 From 11:00 AM to 12:30 PM	February 23, 2024 From 11:00 AM Onwards

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency agency M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited (URL Link-https://disposalhub.com). The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till February 22, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh. Delhi-110005 on or before February 22, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before February 22, 2024 before 05:00 P.M along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol bagh. Delhi-110005 on or before February 22, 2024 before 05:00 P.M. Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/Scheduled Bank in favour of "ICICI Bank Limited" payable at "Delhi"

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Bank Limited on 8928935040, 8584874809.

Please note that Marketing agencies 1. NexXen Solution Private limited 2. Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd. 3. Hecta Proptech Pvt. Ltd. have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property. The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit www.icicibank.com/n4p4s Authorized Officer

Date: January 12, 2024 Place: Delhi/NCR (Gurgaon) **ICICI Bank Limited**

OICICI Bank

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION-

India dreams big

India poised for a bigger global role, PM Modi's plan to make it a developed nation is difficult but doable

rime Minister Narendra Modi has set an ambitious vision: With the world order evolving swiftly, India is poised to emerge as a developed nation within the next 25 years. This proclamation reflects India's determination to not only adapt to the transforming global dynamics, but also to actively shape its destiny on the world stage. Modi's statement comes at a time when the global balance of power is undergoing significant changes. Established power centres are facing challenges, while emerging economies are seizing opportunities to redefine their roles. India, with its demographic dividend, economic reforms and technological advancements, stands at the forefront of this transformative wave. Central to India's ascent on the global stage is its commitment to economic reforms. The Government has implemented a series of initiatives aimed at boosting economic growth, fostering innovation and attracting foreign investment. The "Make in India" campaign, the Goods and Services Tax



(GST) rollout and efforts to improve the ease of doing business have positioned India as an attractive destination. The Prime Minister's emphasis on selfreliance, as articulated in the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, reflects a strategic vision to build a robust economy. Similarly, he recognises the pivotal role of technology in shaping the future.

India's prowess in IT, coupled with a thriving startup ecosystem, positions the nation as a key player in the so-called 'fourth industrial revolution.' Initiatives such as "Digital India" and "Smart Cities" underscore India's commitment to leveraging technology for inclusive development. Besides, the

geopolitics is favouring India to raise its stock in the new world order. Strategic partnerships and diplomatic engagements have expanded, allowing India to become an important player in regional and global affairs. The Quad exemplifies India's collaborative approach towards addressing shared challenges and promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region. To become a developed nation, however, we would need a lot more: A strong cohesive society, strong leadership, rock-solid democracy and independent institutions. While the vision for India as a developed nation within 25 years is inspiring, it is not without challenges. Issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental sustainability and infrastructural development will be critical. The Government's ability to navigate these challenges, coupled with continued economic reforms and global collaborations, will determine the success of India's transformative journey. But it would go to the credit of PM Modi to have a futuristic vision and inspire people to work for it. This is what leaders are supposed to do: Galvanise the nation for a quantum leap and create a conducive environment for people to perform to their optimal potential. This is what made Japan great and fuelled the American dream. It is now India's turn to join the Super League!



A nomadic shepherd from Rajasthan with his herd during a cold winter day, in Gurugra

Will we ever confront China, call its bluff? -



Despite all our aggressive posturing and chest-thumping, humble pie seems to be our favourite dish, at least when it comes to China

wrote, uneasy science is a hair ■in the mouth." It appears General Naravane, the former Chief of Army Staff, is extremely keen to get that hair out of his mouth. He has done so by penning his memoirs, "Four Stars of Destiny", due out shortly if cleared by the Government. If the few excerpts that have been published are any indication, he appears to shed fresh light on both, the much-touted Agnipath Scheme and the ongoing confrontation with China in Eastern Ladakh. It has most certainly let the cat out among the pigeons, and in many ways, sheds light on why our government's response to Chinese belligerence has been so passive, timid and restrained. Both events may also very well have been responsible for his non-selection as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), after the tragic demise of General Rawat, despite being the senior most amongst the Service Chiefs Of course, the latter may be pure

speculation, because in appointing General Chauhan as CDS, this government has displayed either utter ignorance or a complete lack of sensitivity to how the military process works or the importance of seniority. Thereby, immense damage has been done to the sanctity of the chain of command. The playing of favourites by manipulating service rules and superseding Service Chiefs has not done the incumbent any favours either. His credibility has come under question and that of his appointment is seriously damaged. This lack of cohesion within the upper echelons of our military is reflected in the lack of progress towards theorization and joint-

There are times when those in government, especially at the highest levels, are forced to implement their political masters' policies or directions that they may personally not agree with. Generally, in such circumstances, objections are placed on conceived scheme that has record during discussions, but once a lawful decision has been the Army's capabilities. The given, it becomes their duty to fact that the present Chief and



implement it to the best of their abilities. The dilemma that arises is when the government servant is convinced that the directions to be implemented will have debilitating consequences on the organisation or the country and it would be unconscionable to implement them. In such circumstances, it would be their moral obligation to go public with their objections and refuse to implement them, regardless of their impact on their career. About the Agnipath Scheme, the General admits he was taken aback when his similar, but extremely limited, proposal, "The Tour of Duty' Scheme, was enlarged and pushed through by the PMO for universal application, without the acquiescence of the Service Chiefs. If unconfirmed reports are correct that he had put his misgivings and objections on record to the MOD and therefore paid the price for it, then his relief, General Manoj Pande, has much to answer for.

Undoubtedly, it is a poorly had a debilitating impact on



THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THOSE IN GOVERNMENT, **ESPECIALLY AT THE** HIGHEST LEVELS, ARE FORCED TO **IMPLEMENT** THEIR POLITICAL MASTERS' POLICIES OR DIRECTIONS THAT THEY MAY PERSONALLY **NOT AGREE WITH** the chain of command were aware of its flaws and yet did not back General Naravane speak poorly of their moral courage. They now find themselves in the impossible position of having to cover up the flaws by not exposing the Agniveers to any kind of danger, a ridiculous situation indeed.

As regards the confrontation in Eastern Ladakh, it seems rather intriguing that the Government was given feedback by the Army Chief on the aggressive moves being undertaken by the Chinese, it was left to the Raksha Mantri, no doubt after telephonic discussions with the PM and NSA, to convey to the General to act as he thought necessary. As General Naravane himself points out "I was handed a hot potato. With this carte blanche, the onus was now totally on me." As events transpired, it is quite clear that the General preferred to tread with caution and was unwilling to take any robust measures to regain lost ground to avoid provoking Chinese escalation. Though it seems purely in the realms of sheer wishful thinking if one believes that if escalation suited the Chinese, they would await a provocation by us! Our civilian leadership seems unaware of the dictum "wars are too important to be left to generals". In any case, how can all responsibility be thrust on any one individual? Isn't that the very reason that we have institutions and processes in place for the higher direction of war? Shouldn't all this have been in the purview of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)? Shouldn't it have been convened to take formal cognizance of the prevailing situation, obtain assessments, discuss contingencies and options and give clear-cut directions to the military? Sadly, the impression given is that as events took a turn for the worse, everyone who mattered was intent on passing the buck. Despite all our aggressive posturing and chest-thumping, humble pie seems to be our favourite dish, at least

(The author, a military veteran, is a visiting fellow with tne Observer Kesearch Foundation and a senior visiting fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai, views are personal)

when it comes to China.

Direct mobile broadcasting is a gamechanger



Direct to mobile (D2M) technology removes the necessity for the internet, delivers TV and radio broadcasts directly to mobile

ndia, which is increasingly asserting its self-reliance, ▲has unveiled another instalment of indigenous technology. Sankhya Lab, in collaboration with Prasar Bharati and IIT Kanpur, has developed a technology within India that enables the direct viewing and listening of broadcasts, such as TV and radio, on mobile devices. Importantly, this functionality requires no internet connection or spectrum, thanks to a special chip designed to be compatible with various phones, including iPhones, Androids, and standard mobile phones.

The introduction of this new technology, known as D2M, is expected to trigger a significant revolution in video broadcasting by eliminating the need for internet connectivity. A major advantage lies in its applicability for both central and state governments to implement public welfare schemes and disseminate awareness on a large scale. By incorporating the chip into mobile phones distributed to underprivileged individuals, the government can effectively communicate in remote

Additionally, the technology will alleviate internet traffic and eliminate the need for consumers to have an inter-

D2M proves particularly beneficial for broadcasts with a large audience, such as live telecasts of cricket matches or national addresses by the Prime Minister or President, as it enables viewing or listening without requiring an internet connection. Similar to watching broadcasts on TV without internet, D2M extends this capability to mobile devices through the dedicated chip. This service facilitates broadcasting various programs, including educational or competitive online classes, to inform and enter-

tain the public. areas at a minimal cost. Sankhya Lab has developed stage

the D2M chip using advanced technology, and the service is currently undergoing trials in Delhi. The plan is to expand the service to other metropolitan areas and subsequently to rural regions. Notably, the broadcast can utilise BSNL towers, whose network spans the entire country, ensuring rapid dissemination once the service is efficiently operational. The launch of D2M is poised to elevate India's standing in the global broadcasting arena, providing a world-class facility that will be easily accessible to citizens. This technology not only aids in integrating isolated and deprived individuals into the mainstream but also enhances the reputation of Indian tech-

nology on the international

In conclusion, India's stride towards self-reliance takes another remarkable leap with the introduction of indigenous technology by Sankhya Lab, Prasar Bharati, and IIT Kanpur. The innovation, known as D2M, marks a significant milestone in the realm of video broadcasting by enabling direct viewing and listening of broadcasts on mobile devices without the need for internet connectivity or spectrum. The D2M technology, facili-

tated by a specially designed chip compatible with a range of mobile phones, has the potential to revolutionise communication and awareness nationwide. Beyond the immediate advantage of eliminating the dependence on the internet, D2M holds great promise for the effective implementation of public welfare schemes and large-scale awareness campaigns by both central and state governments. The integration of the chip into mobile phones distributed to underprivileged individuals could foster costeffective communication in

remote areas. (The writer is a journalist; views are personal)

GOOD THINGS TAKE TIME TO HAPPEN Sir — Patience plays a pivotal role in our

lives. When a person turns over a new leaf and stays committed towards it, then he encounters the fruit of hard work. The journey is completely filled with different challenges to be faced every day, and one has to stick to one's guns. Things may not seem to happen the way we expect at the initial stage, but patience is the only thing that gives us the result of our blood, sweat, and

As it is said, tough times never last, but tough people do. The journey of life is like a game of chess, and we play this game with it. After every move of ours, it makes the next move. Our moves are considered to be the choices, and their moves are called consequences. We will be tested, we will be challenged, and we will be pushed to the brink. However, when we are found to play this game well, it wins by allowing us to win the game. The only priority should be to stay zealous and committed to whatever work we do and not to fret too much about the result. As the Bhagavad Gita also says, "Perform your duty but do not have any expectation of the fruit.'

Ayani Dangi | Ujjain

NATIONAL STARTUP DAY

Sir — Eight years after launching Startup India, the Indian government is all set to introduce the next leg of the journey on January 16, which the PM decreed as National Startup Day. While the initial phase concentrated on consumer internet and service-based start-ups, this time, the program will emphasize deep technology entities, encompassing those focused on semiconductor research, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and cybersecu-

The government's involvement, coupled with the growing enthusiasm of private and public stakeholders, will likely create a conducive environment for this budding sector. Founders are eager to get support in the form of tax exemptions, regulatory compliance provisions, and fast-tracked

patent processes, which are essential given

Mental health helpline

THE EDITOR



housands of people have started seeking help from mental health helplines to deal with sadness, sleep disorders, anxiety, stress and other psychological issues. This shows that people have started to express their emotions rather than taking harsh steps to deal

is that men form the majority of people reaching these helplines. These helplines have many benefits- the calls are confidential, listeners don't judge the sentiments and counsellors are good listeners as they are trained to handle others' emotions. Most of the common issues that are heard revolve around relationships, suspiciousness, suicidal tendencies or attempts so the counsellors suggest solutions like stress management, meditation etc to the caller. While it's good to note that the number of

response rates to these helplines has increased

with life's issues. Another heartwarming news

still many people aren't aware of such helplines. The government should increase the number of helplines in areas like Kota, IITs and almost all colleges and schools as students face a high amount of stress and no one is there to understand what they are going through

Gourja Soni | Delhi

the extended time and financial backing that deep tech start-ups require for profitability. Fortunately, insights gained from Startup India II's initial plan tweaks suggest the upcoming phase may introduce stable policies, improved taxation norms, and collaborative research initiatives with academia and industry. This move aligns with the government's ongoing efforts to bolster start-ups. The focus on deep tech anticipates global recognition, attracting investments, and generating employment opportunities. Overall, the Startup India program's second phase is crucial in supporting the growth of deep-tech start-ups, especially as India bolts to become the global flagbearer for technology innovation. C K Subramaniam | Chennai

ODISHA'S GROWING AVIATION INFRA

Sir — Chief Minister Naveen Pattnaik yesterday inaugurated a new airport in Malkangiri district, which falls in the southwestern part of the state. The new airport is spread over an area of 283 acres developed for 70 crores. A 1620-meter-long and 30-meter runway is made for take-off and

landing purposes. Initially, 9-seater aircraft will operate from the airport. This is the seventh functional airport for the state. In recent years, state governments have worked rapidly on making new airports in

the state. These ports will enhance connectivity in the region. Good connectivity will bring avenues of business, tourism, and education. Further, it will bring social and economic developments for the local people that will transform their lives in those areas. Few airports among the seven airports are dedicated in Maoist regions. So good connectivity will also help the administration strengthen the law and order situation and eradicate Maoist elements in those districts. The new and developing aviation infrastructure of Odisha will give a chance for middle-class families to experience flight journeys. It will also help to boost the state's economy, tourism, and regional connectivity. Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

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FIRST COLUMN

THE MALDIVES-INDIA **TIES: DRIFTING APART**

Diplomatic tensions surge as the Maldives Govt tilts towards China



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

n the shifting sands of diplomacy, it is not often that a beautiful postcard picture taken in the backdrop of a blue ocean lined with palm groves creates a tsunami of ultra-nationalist emotions or emoticons clashing between two nations. The postcard in question was shared by Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi when he got to spend some time on the pristine beaches of Lakshadweep islands. This prompted a couple of junior ministers in Maldives to troll the Indian PM on social media, with language which could be considered to be abusive depending on the sensibilities. The junior ministers were promptly sacked and the Maldives Envoy in India was summoned by the Ministry of External Affairs. However, what brewed in the background was a huge wave of Boycott Maldives, trends by an army of Indian social media surfers. Some celebrities who had recently vacationed in the Maldives during the holiday season joined the chorus adding weight to anti-Maldives trends on social media. It is a different aspect that not many social media surfers have ever dreamt of going to Maldives or are even aware of the capital of

What this brief exchange of unpleasantries exposed was the decline in the relationship between India and Maldives especially after Maldivian president Mohammed Muizzu took charge. Mr Muizzu is considered to be pro-China and has largely been part of the India Out campaign for over a decade. India has as, the closest neighbour to Maldives, separated by just 70 nautical, been one of the first responders to any distress for this archipelagic nation. India has for several decades maintained warm relations with Maldives cooperating and helping in the Defence, infrastructure, education and healthcare sectors. The defence sector cooperation is crucial as according to the Ministry of External Affairs, India provides nearly seventy per cent of defence training requirements for the Maldivian National Defence Force.



scenic natural tourist spots is being weaponised, a strategic balance is required with neighbours. India is one of the biggest contributors to the Maldives tourism economy, where well-heeled Indians prefer to spend their vacations. However, the current Maldivian president has been insistent on throwing away a few Indian defence force personnel stationed in Maldives. While this may be a strategic setback for India, it will equally hurt Maldives, as it rushes in the Chinese Dragon's firewall.

He hailed China as the most valued ally. One of the press releases from the President's office stated " Dr Muizzu emphasised the prominence of his visit to China, as it is his first state visit to a foreign nation. Reflecting on the long-standing and fruitful government-to-government and business-to-business cooperation between the two countries, the President expressed his delight at the strong presence of both Chinese and Maldivian businesses at the forum. He stated that China remains one of the closest allies and developmental partners of Maldives. He also noted that the Maldives became a party to H.E. President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative in 2014, which helped infrastructure projects in the Maldives. President Dr Muizzu highlighted his vision for the expansion of the central airport and commercial port, emphasising that the Government is keen to explore partnerships under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. The President also highlighted the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed between China and the Maldives, citing that the FTA would boost bilateral trade and investments, particularly by increasing the export of fish products to China, marking it as a key priority explored within the FTA." Maldives is trying to shift from India First to China First policy, a reversal from the earlier regimes. However, India has to patiently manoeuvre around the firewall and wait for the Maldives to come back as a close ally.

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

Viksit Bharat: Youth to play a pivotal role



Today we celebrate the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda as the National Youth Day. His teachings are a great source of inspiration for the Indian youth



wami Vivekananda, a 19th century Indian philosopher, spiritual leader, a great thinker, orator, poet, and the greatest patron of the youth envisioned the youth as the driving force behind the regeneration of India and the world. He believed that the latent power within the youth, if harnessed and directed towards noble ideals, could bring about a profound transformation in society. Swami ji emphasized the importance of characterbuilding, moral integrity, and a strong sense of self-confidence among the youth. He encouraged them to cultivate a harmonious blend of modern education and spiritual wisdom, advocating for an education system that not only imparts knowledge but also fosters a sense of duty and self-reliance with social responsibility. Swami ji, a great Hindu saint whose

yanti we celebrate as the National Youth Day on January 12 every year, visualized a generation of youth who would be fearless, selfless, and committed to serving humanity. For him, service to the destitute was the real service to God. He wanted the youth of the country to have strong willpower to serve the motherland and the masses. He once said: "Go, all of you, wherever there is an outbreak of plague or famine, or wherever the people are in distress, and mitigate their sufferings" by serving the country.
Swami Ji's electrifying speech at the

World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, on September 11, 1893, left an indelible mark on the gathering comprising religious and spiritual personalities of different faiths from across the world. He started his speech by addressing the gathering from the core of his heart as 'sisters and brothers of America' which was followed by thunderous applause from the audience.

He said: "It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the



THE DREAM OF EK BHARAT, SARVSHRESTHA BHARAT AND MAKING INDIA VISHWA GURU CAN BE REALISED BY FOLLOWING THE PATH SHOWN BY

SWAMI JI

warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects." Further, he told the august audience: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true ... I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations on earth."

His famous clarion call for the youth - 'Arise, awake, and stop not until the goal is reached and You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your soul' emphasised the fact that the strength and vitality of a nation lay in the hands of its youth. For him, youth are the torchbearers of positive change, possessing the energy, enthusiasm, and creativity necessary to shape a better future and encouraging them to recognize and channel their inner strength, urging them to develop self-confidence and fearlessness. He said: "The greatest sin is to think that you are weak...All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark...Take risks in your life. If you win, you can lead; if you lose, you can guide.'

Swami ji advised youth to be on the playgrounds. He wanted youth

with muscles of iron, nerves of steel and gigantic hearts. He was of the firm view that youth should be physically strong and mentally sound. That is why Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has initiated the Fit India movement. I make a humble appeal to the principals of all schools and colleges, and Vice Chancellors of universities to see that our students at least spend one hour on the playgrounds.

When the youth are motivated by high ideals, driven by a sense of purpose, and armed with knowledge, they become an unstoppable force for good. As India is at a turning point today in its history under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Modi ji, the youth has an important role

The 21st century will be India's century as the country polevaults into the future confident of its capabilities. It is the 5th largest economy in the world today and will be the world's 3rd largest economy by 2027, as its GDP crosses US \$ 5 trillion as per the IMF estimate. By 2047, India is poised to be a ÚS \$ 30 trillion economy with all the attributes of a developed nation. It will be a Viksit Bharat in which our youth have to play a crucial role.

In the realm of science and technology, India has achieved noteworthy milestones through missions such as Chandrayaan, showcasing its prowess in space exploration. The Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) of India has gained global recognition under the exemplary statesmanship of Prime Minister Shri Modi ji with initiatives like Aadhaar, UPI, AA

Stack, COWIN platform, and GeM, underscoring the country's commitment to digital innovation. India is making strides toward becoming a global man-ufacturing hub, and its services sector, particularly in IT and non-IT domains, has attained global prominence. The nation boasts a thriving startup ecosystem, hosting over 100 unicorns with a combined valuation exceeding US \$340 billion, positioning itself as the world's thirdlargest startup ecosystem.

During Amrit Kaal, let's make the most of the teachings of Swami Vivekananda to make an Atmanirbhar Bharat! We celebrate January 12, the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, as the National Youth Day, to draw inspiration from the "philosophy of Swami ji and the ideals for which he lived and worked could be a great source of inspiration for the Indian Youth." The dream of Ek Bharat, Sarvshrestha Bharat and making India Vishwa Guru can be realized by following the path shown by Swami ji. He was of the firm opinion that all paths lead to the one true God, as is also mentioned in Rig Veda that 'Ekam Sat Vipra Bahuda Vadanti' (Truth is one; the wise call it by various names.) Let us resolve today to assimilate the essence of the teachings of Swami ji – national spirit, patriotism, unity in diversity, inclusivity and purity! This will be a real tribute to Śwami Vivekanand and a true step towards building Viksit Bharat by 2047.

(The author is the Governor, of Haryana. The views expressed

Startups in the agriculture sector are pioneering innovations

The Software Technology Parks in India (STPI) serves as a catalyst for enhancing innovations in the field of agritech

griculture, the backbone of India's economy, contributes nearly 17% to the country's GDP against the global average of 4.4%, sustains a significant portion of the population, and contributes significantly to the GDP. In the global effort to feed a growing population sustainably, technological advancements and innovation in agriculture are more critical than ever. In recent years, the Indian agricultural landscape has witnessed a transformative wave driven by the Agri-Tech startup ecosystem. Poised at the forefront of innovation, these startups are not only addressing longstanding structural challenges but are also laying the foundation for a more



future, by improving farm productivity and ecological sustainability across the entire agri-value chain. An amalgamation of favourable government policies, increased technology access and rising demand for high-quality produce has galvanized Agri-Tech startups across the country. Never before in India's history has technology been so

Auguring a paradigm shift, dynamic Indian entrepreneurs are today leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Machine learning, and Data analytics to address agricultural challenges. Currently, over 2000 Agri-Tech startups are working across a myriad of domains such as organic agriculture, food processing, horticul-ture, animal husbandry and dairying, fisheries, and a wide assortment of combined agriculture-allied activities, to provide innovative solutions to India's agriculture sector. As per praxis analysis, the agri-tech sector has attracted significant investments amounting to sustainable and prosperous ubiquitous as it is today. USD 958 million approxi- ronmental conservation and

CAGR of about 51% from 2017 to 2022.

Agri-tech start-ups empower farmers to make data-driven decisions, adopt modern practices, and access realtime information through their innovative digital solutions. These solutions offer farmers higher profit margins, assistance in crop grading and packaging, product traceability, market exposure, access to quality inputs, and scientific guidance. They have led to high-yielding seed varieties and the adoption of technology-driven solutions like tractors, drones, and robots, further enhancing operational effi-

Agri-tech contributes to envi-

through ecologically sustainable practices such as organic and precision farming, agroforestry, crop rotation and water management solutions. In the recent past, a virtuous confluence of digital platforms, mechanization together helped radically increase farm output, and improve crop quality while also reducing wastage.

Agri-tech startups have been successful in addressing the various critical challenges plaguing the Indian agricultural industry. These include real-time weather forecasting, disaster mitigation and resilience. The lack of access to timely and accurate information has long been a hurdle for farmers in India.

mately in 2022, growing at a climate change mitigation Agri-tech startups are bridging this information gap through mobile applications and digital platforms. Farmers can now access weather forecasts, market prices, and expert advice at their fingertips. This democratization of information and biotechnology have empowers farmers to make informed decisions, negotiate better prices, and improve overall farm management. Another challenge was structural supply-chain and logistics challenges due to inadequate forward and backward linkages that lead to labour sourcing and inefficiency and are the major cause of farmers not receiving their

due share of the profits.

Supply chain inefficiencies

have led to post-harvest loss-

farmers. Agri-tech startups are introducing innovative solutions to streamline the agricultural supply chain. From farm-to-fork traceability using blockchain technology to data-driven logistics optimization, these startups are ensuring that produce reaches the market in a timely and efficient manner. This not only reduces wastage but also ensures that farmers receive fair compensation for their efforts. Access to fair finance has his-

torically crippled Indian farmers, hindering productivity and technological advancements. Agritech startups offer tailored solutions, providing timely credit, crop insurance, and financial products. es, impacting the income of The Government of India

supports agriculture through initiatives like e-NAM, Kisan Suvidha app, and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, boosting the sector. The Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), under MeitY, aids Agritech startups through mentoring and funding in three CoEs. This ecosystem not only addresses immediate challenges but also fosters practices, sustainable resource efficiency, and rural development. The digitalisation of agriculture attracts tech-savvy individuals, revitalising the sector for a more vibrant and dynamic landscape, ensuring a brighter future for India.

(The writer is the director general, Software Technology Parks of India, views are personal)

'Israel committing genocide in Gaza'

continent away from the Awar in Gaza, South Africa accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians there and pleaded with the United Nations' top court on Thursday to order an immediate halt to the country's military operation. Israel has vehemently denied the allegations. South African lawyers said during the opening arguments that the latest Gaza war is part of a decades-long oppression of the Palestinians by Israel.

The two-day hearing is the public side of a landmark case, one of the most significant to be heard in an international court and which goes to the heart of one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

South Africa is seeking binding preliminary orders to compel Israel to stop its mili-tary campaign in Gaza, in which more than 23,000 people have died, according to the health ministry which is run by Hamas. "Genocides are never

declared in advance, but this court has the benefit of the past



to be released in front of the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray, in Jerusalem's Old City, Israel, Wednesday.

weeks of evidence that shows incontrovertibly a pattern of conduct and related intention that justifies as a plausible claim of genocidal acts," South African lawyer Adila Hassim told the judges and audience in the packed, ornate room of the Peace Palace in The Hague.

"Nothing will stop the suffering except an order from this court," she said. Israel, however, says it is battling a fierce

enemy in the Gaza Strip that carried out the deadliest attack on its territory, killing more than 1,200 people, since its creation in 1948. Israel says it is following international law and does its utmost to avoid harm to civilians. It blames Hamas for the high toll, saying its enemy embeds in residential

South Africa turns a deaf ear to such arguments, insist-

tion in Gaza, the targeting of family homes and civilians, the war being a war on children, all make clear that genocidal intent is both understood and has been put into practice. The articulated intent is the destruction of Palestinian life," said lawyer Tembeka Ngcukaitobi. "What state would admit to a genocidal intent? Yet the distinctive feature of this case has not been the silence as such, but the reiteration and repetition of genocidal speech throughout every sphere of the state in Israel," he

Ahead of the proceedings, hundreds of pro-Israeli protesters marched close to the courthouse with banners saying "Bring them home," referring to the hostages held by Hamas since it attacked Israel on October 7. One of the Israeli protesters outside the court was Michael Nevy, 42, whose brother was kidnapped by Hamas. "People are talking about what Israel is doing, but Hamas is committing crime against humanity every day," he said. At a separate demonstration nearby, pro-Palestinians

protesters waved flags saying: "End Israeli Apartheid Free Palestine" and chanting "Netanyahu criminal" and 'Ceasefire now!

The dispute strikes at the heart of Israel's national identity as a Jewish state created in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide in the Holocaust, during which 6 million Jews were

It also evokes issues central to South Africa's own identity: Its governing party, the African National Congress, 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.

In a sign of how seriously Israel is taking the accusation, it has sent a strong legal team to defend its military operation launched in the aftermath of the Hamas attacks. Israel often boycotts international tribunals or UN investigations, saying they are unfair and biased.

A decision on the request for so-called "provisional measures" will likely take weeks. The case is likely to last years.

ly denied the allegations, it is unclear whether it will heed any order from the court to halt operations. If it doesn't, it could face UN sanctions, although those may be blocked by a US

Israel's lawyers will address the court Friday. South Africa immediately sought to broad en the case beyond the narrow confines of the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. The violence and the

destruction in Palestine and Israel did not begin on October 7, 2023. The Palestinians have experienced systematic oppression and violence for the last 76 years," said South African Justice Minister Ronald Lamola. South Africa argued that Israel's actions in Gaza are an inevitable part of its history since it declared independence. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a video statement Wednesday night defending his country's actions and insisted they had nothing to do with genocide. "Israel has no intention of permanently occupying Gaza or displacing its civilian popula-

Peaceful solution needed for Gaza-Israel conflict

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe on Thursday underlined the need to pursue a peaceful resolution to the Gaza-Israel conflict, emphasizing his country's unwavering commitment to a two-state solution

President Wickremesinghe expressed his consistent public support for Palestine and Gaza and acknowledged Sri Lanka's unwavering support and stead-fast stance for UN resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza," a statement from his office said after he met Colombo-based ambassadors of 10 West Asian countries.

Ambassadors of Palestine, Egypt, Qatar, the UAE, Libya, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Iraq attended the

The President was accompanied by Foreign Minister Ali Sabry among others, local reports "Wickremesinghe advocated for the establishment of a permanent Palestinian government and emphasised that a two-state solution couldn't be

Terrorist attacks by Hamas shouldn't justify the ongoing bombardment of Gaza," it said.

The development comes days after the Sri Lankan Navy, on the directions of the President, announced that it was preparing to join a US-led coalition to protect merchant vessels sailing in the Red Sea against attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Responding to the criticism by the opposition, the government in parliament defended the decision saying safeguarding shipping lines was important as it would adversely impact shipping costs hurting Sri Lanka's already battered economy.

Since November 2023, the Iranian-backed Houthis have been attacking merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea impeding global commerce and undermining navigational rights. They have said they launched the attacks with the aim of ending Israel's devastating air-and-ground offensive in the Gaza Strip that has killed more than 23,000 people.

UNSC condemns Houthi attacks on ship in Red Sea

United Nations (PTI): The UN Security Council has strongly condemned attacks by Houthi militants on merchant and commercial vessels in the Red Sea since November 2023, saying these impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights.

The 15-nation Council resolution Wednesday condemning in the "strongest terms" at least two dozen Houthi attacks on merchant and commercial vessels since November 19, 2023 when the Houthis attacked and seized the Galaxy Leader

The resolution demanded that the Houthis immediately cease all such attacks, which impede global commerce and undermine navigational rights and freedoms as well as regional peace and security.

The resolution was adopt ed with 11 votes in favour, none against and 4 abstentions Algeria, China, Mozambique and Russia.

It urged caution and restraint to avoid further escalation of the situation in the Red Sea and the broader region and encourages enhanced diplomatic efforts by all parties ued support for dialogue and Yemen's peace process under the UN auspices.

India had last week said that it is closely watching the unfolding situation in the Red Sea, amid growing global concerns over Houthi militants stepping up attacks on several commercial ships in the region.

The comments by External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came a day after the Indian Navy said its ships and aircraft remain "mission deployed" to maintain surveillance and undertake maritime security operations in the North and Central Arabian

"We attach very high importance to freedom of navigation, free movement of commercial shipping. It is an evolving situation and we are look ing at all aspects of it," Jaiswal had said at a media briefing in Delhi last week.

Germany ready to help de-escalate Hunter Biden expected to plead not guilty tensions in disputed SCS

Germany's top diplomat said on Thursday that China's actions in the South China Sea violate the rights of Asian coastal states like the Philippines and threaten freedom of navigation, but added that territorial disputes have to be resolved peacefully because "the world doesn't need another crisis."Annalena Baerbock, who held talks with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and other top officials while visiting Manila, said Germany was ready to help de-escalate growing tensions and added that it was crucial to set up "mechanisms" to resolve the disputes peacefully and foster dialogue.

"There are truly rough winds blowing across the South China Sea and this is happen-

regions of the world," she told a news conference in Manila, speaking through an interpreter.

"It is now important to set up mechanisms to solve tensions together in a peaceful way," she said without elaborating. "I think we all agree that the world doesn't need another crisis. There are too many crises at In a symbolic gesture of

Germany's support for the Philippines, Baerbock visited the coast guard headquarters in Manila and boarded a patrol ship, where she briefly flew one of a number of surveillance drones that Germany donated to the Philippines. Philippine coast guard offi-

cials said the drones would help the country defend its territorial interests in the South China Sea, enforce maritime ing in the middle of one of the laws and undertake search and most dynamic economic rescue missions during acci-

dents at sea. Chinese officials did not immediately issue a reaction.

The decades-long territorial dispute escalated last year between Beijing and Manila, sparking fears it could degenerate into a major conflict that could involve the United States, a longtime treaty ally of the

The coast guard ships and accompanying vessels used military-grade laser and water cannons against Philippine coast guard and supply vessels and undertook dangerous maneu-vers near disputed shoals, prompting the Philippines to file a large number of diplomatic protests against China, Philippine officials said.

The US has repeatedly warned it is obligated to defend the Philippines if its forces, aircraft and ships come under an armed attack, including in the

South China Sea. China has warned the US and its allies not to meddle with what it says is a purely Asian dispute and build up its forces in the region, warning of unspecified conse-

China's actions in the South China Sea, which have led to minor collisions with Philippine vessels, are of concern to Germany and other European countries, Baerbock said, because such risky maneuvers violate rights and opportunities for economic development of your own country and other littoral states." Baerbock held the news conference with her Philippine counterpart, Enrique Manalo."They also put into question the freedom of navigation and international law, affecting all countries world-wide," she said, adding that China's claims "are not covered by international law."

in LA hearing on federal tax charges

 $P^{\text{resident Joe Biden's son}}_{\text{will head back to court on}}$ Thursday for arraignment in Los Angeles on federal tax charges filed after the collapse of a plea deal that could have spared him the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024

Hunter Biden is expected plead not guilty to nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses. The charges stem from what federal prosecutors say was a four-year scheme to skip out on paying the USD 1.4 million he owed to the IRS and instead use the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle that by his own admission included drugs and alcohol. The court appearance will

also include a discussion over future court dates and filing deadlines. Meanwhile, Hunter Biden has also been charged

in Delaware with lying in October 2018 on a federal form for gun purchasers when he swore he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs. He was addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He's also accused of possessing the gun illegally and has pleaded not guilty in that case.

The accusations all come from a yearslong federal investigation into Hunter Biden's tax and business dealings that had been expected to wind down over the summer with a plea deal in which he would ĥave gotten two years' probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble. The deal unravelled when

a federal judge who had been expected to approve the deal instead began to question it. Now, the tax and gun cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the 2024 election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the president's son and Donald Trump, the Republican front-

Hunter Biden's original proposed plea deal with prosecutors had been pilloried as "sweetheart deal" by Republicans, including Trump. The former president is facing his own criminal problems — 91 charges across four separate cases, including that he plotted to overturn the results of the 2020 election, which he lost to Biden, a Democrat. Hunter Biden's criminal proceedings are also happening in parallel to so far unsuccessful efforts by congressional Republicans to link his business dealings to his

US plans to meet Taiwan's new leader

unofficial delegation comprised of former senior officials to Taiwan shortly after the selfgoverned island holds an election for a new president this weekend, a move that could upset Beijing in an alreadyfragile bilateral relationship. A senior administration official confirmed the plan on Wednesday without offering more details but said such a face-to-face meeting was the "most effective way" to engage the new Taiwanese govern-

the region. The official, briefing reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive plans, said the administration believed the move would contribute to peace and stability in the region.

ment and convey US policy in

Beijing claims Taiwan to be part of Chinese territory and vows to unify with it eventually. In August 2022, Beijing

Washington (AP): The Biden reacted angrily by firing misafter then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan. Chinese President Xi Jinping, at his most recent meeting with President Joe Biden in November, called Taiwan the 'most sensitive issue" in US-Chinese relations.

Washington has a security pact with Taiwan to provide it with sufficient hardware and technology to deter any armed attack from the mainland.

The US has stepped up support for Taiwan and its democratically elected government in recent years as Beijing ratchets up military and diplomatic pressure on the island. The US government takes no side on the island's statehood but insists the differences must be resolved peacefully. Biden told Xi in November that the US government opposes any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

Google should pay multibillion fine in antitrust shopping case: EU advisory

AP ■ LONDON

Alegal adviser to the European Union's top court said on Thursday that Google should pay a whopping fine in a long-running antitrust case in which regulators found the company gave its own shopping recommendations an illegal advantage over rivals in search results.

The European Court of Justice's advocate general, Juliane Kokott, recommended rejecting the US search giant's appeal of the 2017 penalty.

In a legal opinion, Kokott

also proposed upholding the 2.4 billion euro (USD 2.6 billion) fine that the European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's top competition watchdog, slapped on Google. The commission had

detriment of competitors.

It was one of three multibillion-euro fines that the commission imposed on Google in the previous decade as Brussels started ramping up its crackdown on the tech industry.

Google appealed to the top EU tribunal after the lower General Court rejected its challenge. Opinions by the Court of accused the company of unfair-Justice's advocate general aren't ly directing visitors to its own legally binding but are often followed by its judges. Their final Google Shopping service to the decision is expected within

months. "Google, as found by the Commission and confirmed

by the General Court, was leveraging its dominant position on the market for general search services to favour its own comparison shopping service by favouring the display of its result," the Court of Justice said in a press summary of the opinion. This "self-preferencing"

amounts to "an independent form of abuse" by Google, it said. Google made changes in

2017 to comply with the European Commission's decision requiring it to treat competitors equally. The company started holding auctions for shopping search listings that it would bid for alongside other

comparison shopping services. "We will review the opinion of the Advocate General and await the final decision of the court," Google said in a statement.

"Irrespective of the appeal, we continue to invest in our remedy, which has been working successfully for several years, and will continue to work constructively with the European Commission.

The commission declined to comment. The opinion was another setback this week for Google, which also said it laid off hundreds of employees on its hardware, voice assistance and engineering teams as part of cost-cutting measures.

Christie ends Republican prez bid



Windham (UK): Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie on Wednesday suspended his Republican presidential bid just days before Iowa's leadoff caucuses, ceding to growing pressure to drop out of the race from those desperate to deny Donald Trump a glidepath to the nomination. Addressing supporters at a New Hampshire town hall, Christie said he had come to the conclusion that he had no pathway to victory.

"Campaigns are run to win. That's why we do them," he said. "It's clear to me tonight that there isn't a path for me to win the nomination."

"My goal has never been to be just a voice against the hate and division and the selfishness of what our party has become under Donald Trump," he added, vowing to continue to warn the party and the country about the dangers of a second Trump term.

that in no way do I enable Donald Trump to ever be president of the United States again. And that's more important than my own personal ambi-

ately endorse any of rivals and instead continued to lace into

Haley, DeSantis tear into each other's records in Republican debate

Des Moines (US) (AP): In their most hostile encounter yet, Nikki Haley and Ron DeSantis attacked each other early and often in Wednesday's Republican primary debate rather than focus on Donald Trump, the absent front-runner, as both tried to demonstrate they were the strongest alternative to the former president

DeSantis and Haley called each other liars and insulted each other's records and character in the opening minutes of the debate. They seemed to relish the chance to go head to head without their lowerpolling rivals interrupting, as in past debates. The two Republicans instead drilled into each other's policy ideas and directed viewers to dueling



campaigns set up.

The one-on-one format displayed their sharp differences over issues ranging from foreign policy to abortion less than a week before the Republican primary process

unclear whether the debate could reshape a race that's been dominated by Trump, who had the stage to himself at a separate Fox News event in Des Moines where he was seldom challenged and teased

the audience about whom he'd pick as his running mate. Standing at lecterns an

arm's length apart, DeSantis and Haley fired off detailed critiques and sarcastic quips from the beginning.
"You're so desperate. You're

just so desperate," the former UN ambassador interrupted DeSantis at one point.

The Florida governor in turn said Haley's "got this prob-lem with ballistic podiatry,

shooting herself in the foot every other day."

In one of her most brutal critiques, Haley ridiculed DeSantis for the turmoil within his political operation, with several rounds of personnel changes and new strategies along with the millions spent

on his behalf.

Google cuts hundreds of jobs amid cost-cutting drive than 20,000 jobs to reassure

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

oogle has laid off hundreds of employees working on its hardware, voice assistance and engineering teams as part of cost-cutting measures. The cuts come as Google looks towards "responsibly investing in our company's biggest priorities and the significant opportunities ahead," the company said in a statement. pany said in a statement.

"Some teams are continuing to make these kinds of organisational changes, which include some role eliminations globally," it said.Google earlier said it was eliminating a few hundred roles, with most of the impact on its augmented reality hardware team. The cuts follow pledges by executives of Google and its parent compa-

ny Alphabet to reduce costs. A year ago, Google said it would lay off 12,000 employees or around 6% of its workforce.

In a post on X — previousknown as Twitter — the Alphabet Workers Union described the job cuts as 'another round of needless layoffs."

"Our members and teammates work hard every day to build great products for our users, and the company cannot continue to fire our coworkers while making billions every quarter," the union wrote. "We won't stop fighting until our jobs are safe!'

Google is not the only technology company cutting back. In the past year, Meta the parent company of Facebook — has slashed more

investors. Méta's stock price gained about 178% in 2023. Spotify said in December

that it was axing 17% of its global workforce, the music streaming service's third round of layoffs in 2023 as it moved to slash costs and improve its profitability. Earlier this week, Amazon

laid off hundreds of employees in its Prime Video and studios units. It also will lay off about 500 employees who work on its livestreaming platform Twitch. Amazon has cut thousands

of jobs after a hiring surge during the pandemic. In March, Amazon announced that it planned to lay off 9,000 employees, on top of 18,000 employees it said that it would lay off in January 2023.

"I am going to make sure tion," he said. Christie did not immedi-

them in his remarks for failing to directly target Trump for fear of alienating the front-run-ner's loyal supporters. Underscoring his deep frustrations, he was overheard on a hot mic before the event began criticizing former United Nations Ambassador Nikki

China 'firmly opposed to external interference' in Maldives

Muizzu winds up visit

hina on Thursday said that Cit "firmly oppose's external interference" in the internal affairs of the Maldives and supports the island nation in upholding its sovereignty and independence as Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu concluded his maiden visit here amid a diplomatic row with India.

"The two sides agree to continue firmly supporting each other in safeguarding their respective core interests, said a joint statement issued at the end of Muizzu's talks with the top Chinese leaders. "China firmly supports the Maldives in upholding its national sovereignty, independence and national dignity, respects and supports the Maldives' exploration of a development path that suits its national conditions, and firmly opposes external interference in the internal affairs of the Maldives," it said, without referring to any country. The statement comes at a

Muizzu, who is regarded as a pro-China leader, was involved in a diplomatic row with India over derogatory statements made by three Maldivian ministers against Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading to a spate of cancellation of reservations of Indian tourists to

Muizzu suspended the ministers with a warning not to make such remarks. His visit to China is also marred by the release of a report by the EU Election Observation Mission of Maldives that said the ruling coalition of Progressive Party of Maldives and the People's National Congress deployed anti-India sentiments and attempted to spread disinformation in the 2023 presidential polls in which Muizzu won.

According to the joint statement, Muizzu agreed to back Xi's doctrines, Global Security Initiative (GSI), which advocates for joint security, besides Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global

Civilization Initiative (GCI) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). "The two sides agree to explore ways towards implementing the GSI in the efforts to deepen cooperation in law enforcement and jointly meet key challenges including those posed by traditional and nontraditional security challenges, to promote the development of bilateral relations and contribute to peace and stability at regional and global levels," the statement said.

"The Maldives highly appreciates the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, the BRI, the principle of promoting amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness with neighboring countries," it said.
"The Maldives intends to

join the Group of Friends of the GDI and work with other parties to promote practical cooperation in areas identified by the GDI, so as to create synergy for accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,"

For its part, Maldives said in the joint statement that it is



"firmly committed to the one-China principle, recognising that there is but one China in the world, the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's ter-

It added that the Maldives "opposes any statement or action that undermines China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, opposes all "Taiwan independence" separatist activities, and will not develop any form of official relations with

"The Maldives opposes external interference in China's internal affairs under any pretext and supports all efforts made by China to achieve national reunification," it said. China and Maldives signed

20 agreements on Wednesday after talks between Muizzu and Chinese President Xi Jinping. The agreements include cooperation in tourism to increase Chinese tourists to the island nation. China is currently placed in third position while Indian tourists constitute the highest with over

The two sides signed the Action Plan for Building a China-Maldives Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership (2024-2028) and inked documents on cooperation in areas such as the Belt and Road, economic and technical, blue economy, digital economy, green development, infrastructure construction, and assistance for people's livelihood, the joint statement said. The two sides will actively promote economic and trade cooperation, fully leverage the mechanism of China-Maldives Joint Committee on Economic and Trade Cooperation, enhance trade facilitation, and promote high-quality development of economic and trade cooperation between the two countries, it said.

The two sides are satisfied with the outcomes of the visit by President Muizzu to China, and agree that the visit is of great significance to advancing the China-Maldives comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, it said.

"Since the establishment of

two countries have always respected and supported each other," it added.

President "expressed appreciation for the warm hospitality of President Xi Jinping, the Chinese Government and the Chinese people, and invited Chinese leaders to visit the Maldives at mutually convenient times" it said. Muizzu, who arrived in China on January 8 on a fiveday state visit, on Thursday held talks with Chinese Premier Li Qiang and discussed the implementation of the various projects China committed to implement. He also met Zhao Leji, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the 14th National People's

Muizzu and First Lady Sajida Mohammad also visited the Huawei Beijing Convention Centre, where representatives from Huawei briefed the president on how these advancements facilitate both governments and individuals in enhancing their daily operations. They also visited Tiananmen Square.

Hasina sworn in as PM of B'desh for fifth term



Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina accepts greetings from the assembled media and election observers during a press conference, a day after she won the 12th parliamentary elections, in Dhaka on January 8, 2024.

PTI DHAKA

 $S^{\mbox{\scriptsize heikh}}$ Hasina was on Thursday sworn in as the prime minister of Bangladesh for the fifth term, days after her Awami League won an over-whelming majority in the general elections boycotted by the main opposition BNP and its allies. President Mohammad Shahabuddin administered the oath of office to 76-year-old Hasina at a ceremony joined by civil society figures and senior civil and military officials at Bangabhaban presidential

palace here. She will serve as the 12th prime minister; her fourth consecutive term and fifth overall term. Hasina, the daughter of Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been ruling the strategically located South Asian nation since 2009. She is among the world's longestserving female heads of government. Following the prime minister, the new members of cabinet were sworn in by the president. Hasina's party won 223 seats in the 300-member Parliament. Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of ex-prime minister Khaleda Zia boycotted the elections after their demand for a non-party caretaker government to conduct the January 7 polls was rejected.

Hasina formed her government for the straight fourth term. She has inducted 25 ministers and 11 state ministers in her Cabinet. "We have not got the (new) ministers and state ministers' portfolios yet but it is expected to be announced later Thursday," a cabinet division official told PTI. Hasina has dropped some heavyweights like foreign min-ister AK Abdul Momen, finance minister AHM Mostafa planning minister Abdul Mannan, agriculture minister Abdur Razzak and commerce minister Tipu Munshi from her new Cabinet. Names of 13 junior minis-

ters out of 18 state ministers in the outgoing government also did not appear in the new list and they included junior minister for foreign affairs Shahriar Alam. The new council of ministers list named 14 new faces as full ministers and seven state ministers though some of them were elevated as cabinet ministers.

Samanta Lal Sen, a doctor specialized on burn wounds, emerged as a new face in the list of full ministers as a technocrat to the surprise of many as he was never known for political activism, Simin Hossain Rimi, the daughter of the first prime minister of Bangladesh Tazuddin Ahmed, is among the new faces named on the state ministers list.

Zelenskyy rules out ceasefire with Russia, says Moscow will use it to rearm

AP ■ TALLINN (ESTONIA)

President **T**krainian Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday ruled out a cease-fire in his country's war with Russia, saying the Kremlin's forces would use the pause to rearm and regroup before overwhelming Kyiv's troops.

"A pause on the Ukrainian battlefield will not mean a pause in the war," Zelenskyy said during a visit to Estonia. "A pause would play into (Russia's) hands," he said. "It might crush us afterward." Limited cease-fires have

occasionally been proposed since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 but have never taken hold. Both sides are scrambling to replenish their weapons after 22 months of fighting and with the prospect of a protracted conflict. With the roughly 1,500-kilometre (630-mile) front line mostly static during freezing winter

weather, they both require artillery shells, missiles and drones that enable long-range strikes. Zelenskyy noted that Moscow is allegedly buying artillery shells and missiles from North Korea and drones

Zelenskyy was in the Estonian capital Tallinn as part of a two-day swing through Baltic countries which have been among Ukraine's staunchest supporters in the war. The Ukrainian president is pressing allies to provide his country with more support, after already receiving billions of dollars in military aid from its Western allies.

"Ukraine needs more, it needs better weapons," Estonian President Alar Karis said during a joint news con-ference with Zelenskyy at the Presidential Palace. "We must boost military production capabilities so that Ukraine may get what it needs," he said. "And it's not tomorrow, they should get it today." Karis noted that European Union countries have so far provided 85 billion Euros (USD 93 billion) of support for Ukraine.
But the flow of support has

slowed, alarming Ukrainians who would find it hard to stand alone against their bigger neighbour. A plan by the administration of US President Joe Biden to send USD 60 billion in new funding to Kyiv is being held up in Congress. Europe's pledge in March to provide 1 million artillery shells within 12 months has fallen short, with only about 3,00,000 delivered so far.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine particularly needs air defense systems to fend off Russian aerial onslaughts that have repeatedly hit civilian areas, though Moscow officials insist they aim only at military targets. Recent massive Russian barrages — more than 500

drones and missiles were fired between December 29 and January 2, according to officials in Kyiv — are using up Ukraine's air defense resources and leaving the country vulnerable unless it can secure further weapons supplies. Zelenskyy won a pledge of more support from Lithuania on Wednesday, and was heading to Latvia after Estonia. The small eastern

European countries are among Ukraine's staunchest political, financial and military supporters. Some people 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 and regained 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

UN concerned over arrests of Afghanistan women for 'dress code violations' that has echoed with events in

AP ■ KABUL

The United Nations mission in Afghanistan said on Thursday it was deeply concerned by recent "arbitrary" arrests and detentions" by the Taliban of women and girls for allegedly violating dress codes regarding the Islamic headscarf, or hijab. The mission said it was looking into claims of ill-treatment of women and extortion in exchange for their release, and warned that physical violence and detentions were demeaning and dangerous.

The Taliban said last week that female police officers have been taking women into cus-

tody for wearing "bad hijab." It was the first official confirmation of a crackdown on women who don't follow the dress code imposed by the Taliban since they returned to power in 2021 — a crackdown

neighbouring Iran, which saw months of protests in 2022 and has long enforced the mandatory hijab. The UN statement said hijab-enforcing campaigns in Kabul and the province of Daykundi have been ongoing since January 1, with large numbers of women and girls warned and detained. The mission also said women from religious and ethnic minorities appear to be disproportionately impacted by the enforcement campaigns. "Enforcement measures

involving physical violence are especially demeaning and dangerous for Afghan women and girls," said Roza Otunbayeva, UN special envoy and head of the mission. "Detentions carry an enormous stigma that put Afghan women at even greater risk," she said. "They also destroy public trust."

Iran's navy seizes oil tanker in Gulf of Oman

Oman that once was at the centre of a major crisis between Tehran and Washington, officials said, a seizure that further escalates tensions in the Mideast waterways.

The vessel was once known as the Suez Rajan and had been involved in a yearlong dispute that ultimately saw the US Justice Department seize 1 million barrels of Iranian crude oil on it. The seizure also comes after weeks of attacks by Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on shipping in the Red Sea, including their largest barrage ever of drones and missiles launched late on Tuesday.

That has raised the risk of possible retaliatory strikes by US-led forces now patrolling the vital waterway, especially after a United Nations Security Council vote on Wednesday condemning the Houthis and as American and British officials warned of potential con-

Thursday afternoon, hours after armed men boarded it. IRNA said the seizure came as the result of a court order, without elaborating. The British military's

United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, which provides warnings to sailors in the Middle East, said Thursday's seizure began early in the morning, in the waters between Oman and Iran in an area transited by ships coming in and out of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil traded passes.

The UK military-run group described receiving a report from the ship's security manager of hearing "unknown voices over the phone" alongside with the ship's captain. It said that further efforts to contact the ship had failed and that the men who boarded the vessel wore "black military-style ship, which it identified as the oil tanker St. Nikolas. It said that the men had covered the surveillance cameras as they

The tanker had been off the city of Basra, Iraq, loading crude oil bound for Aliaga, Turkiye, for the Turkish refinery firm Tupras. Satellite-tracking data analysed by The Associated Press last showed the Marshall Islands-flagged tanker had turned and headed toward the port of Bandar-e Jask in Iran. The St Nikolas was earlier named the Suez Rajan, associated with the the Greek shipping company Empire Navigation. In a statement to the AP, Athens-based Empire Navigation acknowledged losing contact with the vessel, which has a crew of 18 Filipinos and one Greek national. The company did not elaborate.

Attention began focusing on the Suez Rajan in February

AP DUBAI sequences over the attacks. Iran's state-run IRNA news Tran's navy seized an oil tanker agency acknowledged the Tran's navy seized agency agenc from Iran's Khargh Island, its main oil distribution terminal in the Persian Gulf. Satellite photos and shipping data analysed at the time by the AP supported the allegation.

For months, the ship sat in the South China Sea off the northeast coast of Singapore before suddenly sailing for the Texas coast without explanation. The vessel discharged its cargo to another tanker in August, which released its oil in Houston as part of a Justice Department order.

In September, Empire Navigation pleaded guilty to smuggling sanctioned Iranian crude oil and agreed to pay a USD 2.4 million fine over a case involving the tanker. The US Navy's 5th Fleet, which patrols the Mideast, did not respond to a request for comment over the incident.

After the vessel, then-Suez Rajan, headed for America, Iran seized two tankers near the Revolutionary Guard's naval arm threatened further action against anyone offloading the Suez Rajan, with state media linking the recent seizures to the cargo's fate.

Since the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal, waters around the strait have seen a series of ship seizures by Iran, as well as assaults targeting shipping that the Navy has blamed on Tehran. Iran and the Navy also have had a series of tense encounters in the waterway, though recent attention has been focused on the Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

The US and its allies also have been seizing Iranian oil cargoes since 2019. That has led to a series of attacks in the Mideast attributed to the Islamic Republic, as well as ship seizures by Iranian military and paramilitary forces that threaten global shipping.

Cipher case: Pakistan court withdraws

6.0 magnitude quake jolts parts of Pak

Islamabad (PTI): Tremors across Pakistan on Thursday following a 6.0 magnitude earthquake with epicentre in the Hindu Kush region of neighbouring Afghanistan, according to the country's meteorological department. So far, there have been no reports of loss of life or property.

The 6.0 magnitude earthquake struck at 2:20 pm (local time) in the Hindu Kush region at a depth of 213 kms, the Pakistan Meteorological Department posted on X. Tremors were felt in Islamabad, Lahore, and its surrounding areas, and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to DawnNews TV channel. Other cities that rocked after the iolts include Punjab's Sargodha, Khushab and its surroundings, Mandi Bahauddin, Bhakkar, and Nowshera. The earthquake was also felt in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's Muzaffarabad. Geo News said.

Pak rules out dialogue with TTP

PTI ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Thursday said that it was not interested in a dialogue with the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after a leading cleric visited Kabul and talked of dialogue following his meeting with the Afghan Taliban leadership. Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch in her weekly press briefing said that Pakistan's stance was clear because the TTP had accepted responsibility for numerous terrorist attacks in the country.

The spokesperson said there is no change in Pakistan's

policy towards the TTP.
"We have no dialogue taking place with the TTP nor do we have the intent to hold talks with it which is responsible for several terror incidents in Pakistan," she said. She once again demanded the Afghan

action against terrorist elements including the TTP leadership. She said the Afghan authorities should ensure the elimination of terrorist hideouts and hand over to Islamabad those responsible for terror incidents in Pakistan. "Our demand from the Afghan government is that they take action against the terrorists," she said. The issue of talks cropped at the presser in the wake a visit to Afghanistan by the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, who reportedly also met Afghan Taliban's recluse supreme chief Mullah

Haibatullah Akuhnd. After meetings, Rehman said that he would try to revive talks between the government and the TTP. Baloch said Rehman's visit to Afghanistan was neither on

authorities take effective behalf of the Government of Pakistan nor the Foreign Office. "The Foreign Office had given a briefing to Maulana Fazlur Rehman before his visit. He has gone on his own volition," she said. The spokesperson also reiterated that the maulana had not gone to Kabul as a representative of Pakistan. Speaking about terrorism, Baloch said that Pakistan, along

with Afghanistan and Iran, will continue to work together in its efforts against terrorism. "Pakistan strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Kerman, Iran," she said. Pakistan had held several rounds of talks brokered by the Afghan Taliban with the TTP in the past but the negotiations failed in 2022 after which the militant group resumed terror activities. The TTP has become a thorny issue between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban.

Pak EC challenges HC verdict on PTI's internal elections

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's top poll body on Thursday moved the Supreme Court against Peshawar High Court (PHC) verdict that annulled its decision to declare as "unconstitutional" the organisational polls in the jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party and revoked cricket 'bat' electoral symbol.

On the other hand, Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party filed a contempt of court petition against the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) over its failure to comply with the order issued on the party's petition. The developments come ahead of general elections scheduled on February 8. "The Peshawar High Court decision should be declared illegal. PTI

did not hold intra-party elections as per the Election Act," the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in its plea submitted to the top court, according to a report in Geo News. The petition comes after sources told Geo News that ECP had held a meeting to review the PHC decision and shared that the meeting had reviewed options whether to approach the Supreme Court or not. In a major relief for PTI, the Peshawar High Court 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

stay order on Imran's in-camera trial PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Ahigh court in Pakistan on Thursday withdrew its stay order on jailed former premier Imran Khan's in-camera trial in the cipher case while declaring all proceedings in the case after December 14 as void and invalid. Justice Miangul Aurangzeb of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard the appeal against the in-camera trial of 71-year-old Khan and his 67-year-old former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi.

The special court judge Abual Hasnat Zulqernain on December 14 had ordered an in-camera trial due to involvement of sensitive matter, and it was challenged in IHC which had stopped the trial of the case till January 11. Attorney General Mansoor Awan and

Khan's lawyer Salman Akram Raja appeared in court. Justice Aurangzeb told Awan that if he wanted the proceedings to start again, then he should do it from the date the order was passed. A relevant order will also be issued on the matter.

The attorney general in his response assured to start the proceedings again, adding that 13 witnesses were ready to have their statements recorded again. After the assurance, the court annulled all proceedings of the cipher case trial after December 14 and cancelled the stay order.

The case is related to a cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in March 2022 and Khan and Qureshi are accused of mishandling it for political purposes. Both were indicted last month and both pleaded not guilty. The Federal

Investigation Agency registered the case on August 15 and the trial is being held in the Adiala Jail Rawalpindi. Khan and several of his party leaders have been facing numerous cases since the ouster of the party from power in April 2022 and later in the wake of the May 9 violence last year.

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

pended by the Islamabad High Court, but then he was arrest ed in the cipher case and remained in the Attock jail on judicial remand. He was later shifted to Adiala jail.

Inter ministerial meet to discuss ways to insulate India trade from Red Sea crisis

¬he commerce ministry has called a high-level inter-ministerial meet next week to discuss ways to insulate India's trade from the ongoing problems in the Red Sea, a senior official said on Thursday.

Senior officials from five ministries -- external affairs, defence, shipping and finance and commerce -- will participate in the deliberations.

The commerce ministry has also set up an internal strategic group, comprising additional secretaries of the ministry, to discuss global issues impacting the country's trade on a daily basis and prepare a strategy to deal with them.

"The idea of the inter-ministerial meeting is to see how we can strategise our trade so that it gets least affected in such a sit-

The situation around the Babel-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea

the pioneer

to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to recent attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants. Due to these attacks, the shippers are taking consignments through the Cape of Good Hope, resulting in delays of almost 14 days and also higher freight and insurance costs. The issues being faced by the stakeholders concerned were discussed at a high-level meeting in the commerce ministry

Stakeholders, including traders, shippers, container firms and freight forwarders were there at the meeting.

on January 4.

'We are doing this inter-ministerial consultation meet based on that stakeholder consultation meeting about what meathe problem," the official said. The stakeholders have stated that freight and insurance costs have increased as they have to take a long route now and due to that, the turnaround time has increased.

Exports to Europe, the east coast of the US and Latin America are facing problems. The strategic group formation assumes significance as the government has to take strategic decisions during war and conflict like situations. That group is meeting every

morning and discussing global issues and I have directed them to develop a strategy. They are also working on the Red Sea area," the official added. Further the ministry is also looking at ways to increase exports in countries like Australia, with which India has implemented an interim



free trade agreement. 'We have started an exercise to see global imports of all countries and see where we can

increase our share in that," the official added.

The data analytics wing of the commerce ministry is working

Change ()+63.47

71,721.18

Red Sea crisis on India's trade in value terms Due to attacks, shipping lines

on analysing the impact of the

through the Red Sea and taking the longer route via the Cape of Good Hope, encircling the African continent. According to exporters, due to

rising freight rates, some are postponing shipping their goods. Besides, the uncertainty may lead to a shortage of containers

The increase in freight rates varies with the route. Apart from basic freight rates, risk surcharge and peak season surcharge have also shot up. The trade route of Bab-el-

Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea is shorter and faster than the Cape of Good Hope route, making it the preferred option for most shipping companies.

The route starts from major Indian ports like Mumbai, INPT, or Chennai, heads westward through the Arabian Sea, gates through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea.

From there, ships can reach various European ports, depend ing on their destination. The Cape of Good Hope route is longer and slower than the Suez Canal route, but it avoids

the potential for delays or disruptions at the Suez Canal. It is typically used for bulk cargo shipments where time is less critical or when political instahility in the Middle East raises concerns about using the Suez

The route starts from the same Indian ports, heads southward across the Indian Ocean, rounds the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, and then sails northward along the west coast of Africa before entering the Mediterranean Sea and reaching European

'Interim Budget may peg FY25 fiscal deficit at 5.3 per cent'

Rating agency ICRA expects the government to peg the fiscal deficit target at 5.3 per cent of GDP and keep disinvestment proceeds estimates to below Rs 50,000 crore in the interim budget for 2024-25.

The fiscal deficit, which is the indication of government borrowing to bridge the gap between total revenue and expenditure, is estimated at 6 per cent of GDP in the current financial year, a tad higher than 5.9 per cent projected in the Budget presented in February, last year.

However, the direct tax and Central GST collections are expected to exceed the Budget estimates for 2023-24 by Rs 1 lakh crore and Rs 10,000 crore, respectively, said 'ICRA's Interim Budget 2024-25 Expectations' report on Thursday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the interim budget on February 1 in the Lok Sabha. ICRA said it is expecting the Centre's capex to undershoot the Budget Estimate of Rs 10 lakh crore by Rs 75,000 crore, implying a robust year-on-year growth of 26 per cent. This growth rate is, however,

lower than the required growth as per Budget estimates of 35.9 per cent over last fiscal. The capex has averaged at Rs

73,200 crore/month, lower than the required monthly average of Rs 83.400 crore to meet the bud-

geted target of Rs 10 lakh crore. ICRA apprehends that the momentum of capex and execution of projects may slow down in early 2024 prior to the general elections, resulting in the FY24 capex target being missed. On the disinvestment target, ICRA said given the uncertainties involved in market transactions, it will be prudent to set a moderate target of sub-Rs 50,000 crore for FY25, instead of a higher aim that may disrupt the budget math if there is a large shortfall in such receipts by the end of the fiscal.

"Amid delay in execution of some large disinvestment plans, a target of sub-Rs 50,000 crore would be prudent for FY25," ICRA said

In the current fiscal, the government has so far mopped up over Rs 10,000 crore from CPSE disinvestment, substantially below the Rs 51,000 crore estimated for the full fiscal

The report further said the fiscal deficit in 2023-24 may not said.

overshoot the budget estimates of Rs 17.9 lakh crore in absolute terms but as a percentage of GDP it will be a tad higher at 6 per cent because the size of nominal GDP in the fiscal is projected to be lower the budget calculations.

ICRA expects the GoI to target a fiscal deficit of 5.3 per cent of GDP in FY25, midway through the expected print of 6 per cent in FY24 and the medium-term target of 4.5 per cent for FY26. This would entail an absolute fiscal deficit of Rs 17.1 trillion in FY25, a welcome decline from the Rs 17.9 trillion budgeted by the central government.

"We believe that a higher amount of capex vis-à-vis our expectation of Rs 10.2 trillion for FY25 would impinge on the GoI's ability to bridge half the required consolidation in the coming fiscal, thereby making the task of attaining the medium-term target set for FY26 even more challenging," ICRA

Equity benchmarks end with marginal gains

Benchmark equity indices ended marginally higher on Thursday, trimming most of their intra-day gains, as investors remained concerned over the quarterly results of IT behemoths TCS and Infosys.

Awaited announcements of the US inflation data on Thursday and domestic macroeconomic numbers on Friday also forced investors to stay on the sidelines. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 63.47 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 71,721.18. During the day, it jumped 341.76 points or 0.47 per cent to 71,999,47.

The Nifty gained 28.50 points or 0.13 per cent to 21,647.20. Among the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement, Axis Bank, IndusInd

Bank, Power Grid, Tata Motors, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the major gainers. Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, Wipro, Larsen & Toubro and Nestle were among

"Global equities largely rose as investors awaited the US inflation data that will help clarify the path for Federal Reserve policy,"

the laggards.

said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.79 per cent and midcap index jumped 0.66 per cent. Among the indices, energy jumped 1.57 per cent, oil & gas rallied 1.05 er cent, consumer durables (0.89 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.71 per cent).

Industrials, IT, services, realty and capital goods were among the laggards. Elsewhere in Asia, bechmarks in Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains while that of Seoul ended lower. European markets were $trading\,hig\bar{h}er.\,The\,US\,markets$ Wednesday. "In anticipation of inflation data

Change () +28.50

21.647.20

TOP LOSERS

Dr Reddyn Labs

ended in the positive territory on

from the US, the Indian market exhibited range-bound trade. Though investors anticipate US inflation to ease, global markets, expecting a CY24 interest rate cut, have already priced in opti-mism. Profit booking occurred amid moderating Q3 corporate earnings and concerns about premium valuations," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geoiit Financial Services.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.56 per cent to USD 78 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,721.35 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark ended 271.50 points or 0.38 per cent higher at 71,657.71 on Wednesday. The Nifty advanced 73.85 points or 0.34 per cent to 21,618.70.

Food delivery platforms see 18 per cent jump in orders

PTI MUMBAI

Online food delivery platforms in the country together saw a record 6.5million orders on New Year's Eve 2023, clocking an 18 per cent year-on-year growth, a report said on Thursday.

On New Year's Eve 2022, online food delivery platforms in the country had recorded 5.5-million orders. Redseer's Big Data analysis on Consumer

Behaviour noted that the spike in food delivery orders on NYE23 was a nationwide phenomenon as metros, tier-1 cities and rest of Indian cities show almost similar growth in order volumes on this

Consumers kept on ordering in high volumes throughout the day on New Year's Eve 2023, with the spike peaking for dinners and late-night orders, where the GMV (gross merchant value) delivered was 2.5-3x of other days of the year, it said. Redseer's Big data analysis also observes that on NYE23, customers not only ordered higher volumes, but they also spent more per order. According to Redseer, the average order value was up to 30 per cent higher than that of other days of the year, it said. Spike days like the IPL, Cricket World

Cups, Diwali, NYE, among others, are critical for online food delivery services as customers order more and spend



more, said Abhijit Routray, Associate Partner at Redseer.

"It was heartening to see the jubilation in the ecosystem on NYE23 with a record number of orders being delivered. More importantly, the fact that the momentum was seen across India and across city tiers was testament to the size of the opportunity in India," Routray said.

There are up to 20 days in a year where online food delivery platforms witness significant jumps in order volumes. But the most significant of those spike days is on December 31 or the New Year's Eve (NYE), which witnesses by far the largest spike in orders on any given day of the vear, it said.

time of filing of the story

Net direct tax collection grows 19 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The net direct tax collection so far this fiscal rose 19.41 per cent to Rs 14.70 lakh crore, reaching about 81 per cent of the full-year target, the income tax department said on Thursday.

The government has budgeted to collect Rs 18.23 lakh crore from direct taxes (personal income tax and corporate tax), 9.75 per cent higher than Rs 16.61 lakh crore mopped up last fiscal.

"Direct Tax collection, net of refunds, stands at Rs 14.70 lakh crore which is 19.41 per cent higher than the net collection for the corresponding period of last year. This collection is 80.61 per cent of the total Budget Estimates of Direct Taxes for FY 2023-24," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement. Refunds amounting to Rs 2.48 lakh crore have been issued during April 1, 2023 to January 10, 2024.

On a gross basis, direct tax collection up to January 10, 2024 registered steady growth. The gross collections are at Rs 17.18 lakh crore, 16.77 per cent higher than the gross collection for the corresponding period of last year. The growth rate in gross Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) is 8.32 per cent and 26.11 per cent respectively.

RBI will not emulate others on crypto mania: RBI chief

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said the central bank does not "emulate" others when it comes to regulations and asserted that the bank's as well as his own opposition to cryptocurrencies remain unchanged, a day after US regulators allowed bitcoin Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs).

He also said that emerging markets and the world cannot afford to have a "crypto mania".

"What is good for another market need not be good for us. Therefore our views -- both that of the Reserve Bank and personally that of mine -- remain the same," Das said.

Addressing a financial sector seminar organised by business daily Mint here, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) chief also said that for emerging market economies and advanced economies, travelling down that



path of cryptocurrencies will create huge risks which will be very difficult to contain going forward.

"The question is why do you want to go down that road? What is it that you are going to get?," Das said while responding to a query about the development in the US with respect to cryptocurrencies.

Personally Das and RBI, as an institution, are opposed to private cryptocurrencies on the grounds that they pose tremendous threat to the financial sta-

"The US capital markets regulator in the same announcement

also issued necessary cautionary advice and necessary warning to investors to be careful along with the risks it poses. Our position, my position and the RBI's position on this remain unchanged irrespective of who does what. Just because someone has done something, we are not here to emulate them," he said.

The remarks were in the context of the US regulator SEC permitting bitcoin ETFs. The approval is seen as a landmark event in the adoption of cryptocurrencies in mainstream finance as the ETF structure gives institutions and financial advisors a familiar and regulated way to have an exposure to bitcoins.

"I don't wish to comment on what a regulator of another country has done; they know what is best for their country. But I would like to say that they themselves have flagged risks in the product and advised people to be very careful.

FMCG distributors to boycott HUL products in Maharashtra

 $F^{MCG} \ distributors \ demanding \ restoration \ of \ old \ margin \ structures \ from \ the \ leading$ maker HUL on Thursday said they would boycott its products in Maharashtra, starting with Taj Mahal Tea.

The distributors further said that if the company does not pay attention to their demand, then they will boycott the Kissan brand and leading detergent brand Rin along with Taj Mahal tea brand going ahead.

HUL, which owns brands such as — Lux, Lifebuoy, Surf Excel, Rin, Pond's and Dove, has reduced the fixed margin by 60 basis points and increased the variable margins by up to 100 to 130 basis points for its distrib-

The distributors are demanding a minimum basic margin of 5 per cent. They are supporting incentive parameters, but they



should not interfere with the dis-

tributor's margin. The All India Consumer Products Distributors Federation (AICPDF), an umbrella body for distributors, has raised concerns over the new margin structure. AICPDF on Thursday shared a

statement from the Maharashtra

Consumer Products Distributors Federation (MSCPDF), in which they have started noncooperation against HUL from January 11, by boycotting its products starting with Taj Mahal MSCPDF plans to keep the Taj Mahal Tea brand as "Inactive" till January 25, which "should be kept in Frozen so that it does not

get booked and billed." However, if "the company does not pay attention to our legiti-mate demand, then Kissan brand along with Taj Mahal tea will be Inactive / Frozen from January 25 to February 10," MSCPDF said.

MSCPDF further said if no solution is found even after this, then products under HUL's leading detergent brand "Rin along with Taj Mahal and Kissan brands will be Inactive from February 10 to February 25." An E-mail sent to HUL remained unanswered by the

The federation further said from March 1, a nationwide movement will be organized in all the states along with a dharna with 1,000 distributors in front of HUL's Mumbai-based head office.

"This movement will start from Maharashtra and spread to different parts of the country week after week," AICPDF statement said, adding by February, more than 1,500 to 2,000 distributors from other parts of India are expected to participate.
Generally, FMCG companies

provide two kinds of incentives fixed margins and variable margins. Most of the companies have fixed margins, which are around 450 to 600 bps and also give variable margins, which depend on factors such as performance.

AICPDF claims to represent over 4 lakh distributors and the

stockist pan India. Two years before also AICPDF was in loggerheads with HUL over margin parity between business-to-business platforms and cash-and-carry players. It had called for a boycott of HUL products, which was later called off on January 4, 2022

GIFT City should develop platform for green credits trade, says FM

PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the GIFT City should develop a platform for trading 'green credits' and also build a diverse fintech laboratory to help India become a USD 30 trillion economy by 2047.

She said the GIFT City, poised to be the "gateway for financial and investment hub", is designed to provide advantages to India's entrepreneurs in accessing global finance.

"The much-awaited direct listing of stock in GIFT IFSC was announced earlier. We are going through the process in a systematic manner and I'm confident that it will happen at the earliest. With that Indian companies should be able to access global funds easily being listed in India," she said addressing the seminar 'GIFT City-An Aspiration of Modern India.' Gujarat International Finance Tec-City

(GÍFT)-IFSC is being promoted as a tax-neutral enclave for the financial

Listing out the growing presence of operations at International Financial Services Centres (IFSC), Sitharaman said there are now 3 exchanges, including International Bullion Exchange, 25 banks, including 9 foreign banks, 26 aircraft lessors, 80 fund managers, 50 professional service providers and 40 fintech entities in the GIFT City.

India should aim to become a manufacturing hub for shipping and there are 8 ship leasing entities working in IFSC that would enable access to global finance, she said. "The Government of India has taken

a clear position that we will strengthen shipbuilding activities in India," she said, adding that the existing capaci-ty of shipyards can be used to make

India a good manufacturing hub for shipping lines. With regard to fintech, Sitharaman

said in India, the fintech adoption rate

is 87 per cent as against the global average of 64 per cent. She said the GIFT City should aim to

build a diverse fintech laboratory for the world and address the needs of

both Indian and foreign firms.
The GIFT City should look at being a platform for green credits. It should also aim to build diverse fintech laboratory to achieve the target of India's economy becoming USD 30 trillion by 2047, Sitharaman said.

Further, the minister said India has a funding gap of USD 10.1 trillion to meet its net zero commitment by 2070 and GIFT City could help in bridging

that gap.
"I would think the authorities here should work on getting a platform ready so that green credits can be sold by people who are planting trees. "Miyawaki forests are coming up all

over the country, some credits for that and any other practices that you do in afforestation or activities which are full of the green certification, meaning using renewable energy, solid waste management, and so on, should be able to first come here to say I have credits, which I wouldn't want to sit, let it be traded. This place should be the place for getting those credits bought and sold," Sitharaman said. The minister said India is now driving the growth engine of the world and it can become the bridge between the developed Western world and the

As India continues onwards to the path of financial prominence on the global stage, the people of India want to become innovators and entrepreneurs, and GIFT City can help in realising these aspirations, she added.

Global South.

AVANI REMAINS TIED SECOND

ndia's Avani Prashanth braved a tough round three to hang onto the shared second place on the third day of the Australian Masters of Amateurs tournament in Southern Golf Club here

Avani, who shared the second place with two others at 3-under 143 for two rounds at the Par-73 course, was four shots behind the new leader, Lion Higo from Gold Coast, Australia.

Higo, who plays US College golf in Pepperdine, played rounds of 71-71-70 Avani, ranked 50th in the world, and one of the top contenders for the title shot 77 on this day, but still managed to be in second place with Rianne Malixi of the Philippines, who shot 1-over 74. Malixi rose from third to tied second at 3-

under 143

The third player in the tie for second place was the leader of the first two rounds -Nika Ito of Japan who crashed to 5-over 78. She had rounds of 68-70 on the first

Needing a fast charge to make a bid for the lead, Avani struggled early with bogeys on

Mumbai City FC come from

head it towards goal. An error of judgement by Phurba Lachenpa saw the ball bounce off the bar and straight

into the path of Alex Sanchez, who accepted what will undoubtedly be his simplest

chance this season. Gokulam had a shock lead.

Despite Mumbai's overwhelm-

ing pressure late in the half -which forced Paul into a few

smart saves - Gokulam's goal remained unbreached at the

Mumbai kept probing for an equaliser throughout the second

half, but despite their over-

whelming possession created

little in terms of clear chances.

The substitute Seilenthang

Lotjem came close with a bril-

70th minute, but it drifted just

counterattacks, to perfection.

From their first corner of the

game, in the 72nd minute Bouba

almost doubled their lead, rising

corner from a sharp angle to draw Mumbai City level. For

Gokulam, further heartbreak

Deep into the injury time a needless foul by Basith Ahmed

Bhat on the edge of the box saw

Gokulam concede a penalty. El

Khayati made no mistake from

the spot, sending Paul the wrong

way to help Mumbai take all

wide.

yet again.

was to follow.

three points

liant shot from distance in the

behind to take full points

PTI BHUBANESWAR

Mumbai City came from a goal down to beat Gokulam Kerala 2-1 in their

Group C match of the Kalinga

Super Cup here on Thursday.

An off-colour and youngster-

filled Mumbai City were made

to struggle for the points and rely

on a penalty to seal it in injury

Mumbai City settled into their

groove early into the game and

were almost presented with a

goal in the fourth minute of the game. Abdenasser El Khayati

shrugged off his marker on the

left wing, before crossing the ball

into the six-yard area, where

Avilash Paul punched it into the

path of Nathan Rodrigues. The

The game entered a pattern,

where Mumbai City, predictably,

constantly probed Gokulam's

defensive structure. Their hard

pressing and eagerness to win

the second ball caused huge

problems for Gokulam who

struggled at times to even get out

In the 12th minute, this high

press style saw Jayesh Rane steal the ball just outside the

Gokulam box and lay it to

Gurkirat Singh. The striker shot

Mumbai City's ability to keep the

pressure also came with its own

caveats — that of an overconfi-

dence seeping in. Gokulam

made them pay for it in the 23rd

minute, off a simple two pass

Debutant Nikola Stojanovic

played a long ball from his own

half into the Mumbai box, where

Aminou Bouba rose highest to

of their half.

counter attack

youngster volleyed high.



after six holes.

Things turned worse with a fourth bogey on 12th. She attempted a comeback with two birdies on 13th and the 15th but two bogeys on the 14th and 18th saw her finish the day at 4-over 77.

Overall, the Indian amateur star played well, but was unable to keep the momentum going despite some excellent play on the first two days.

She has another round to try to add to her international laurels.

Heena Kang had a rough international debut as she ended with a final round of 83 and missed the cut, which was applied after three days. The top-33 and ties will play the fourth and final round.

Among men, Rohit Narwal shot 73 after

76-70 and missed the cut as did Sandeep Yadav (84-74-75).

The Top-45 and ties will play the final round in the men's section.

The lead in the men's section was shared by Scotland's Oliver with Mukherjee (69-70-66) and Max Moring (67-67-71) at 11-

New Zealand's Zackary Swanwick (67-67-72) was lying third at 10-under 206.



'Asian Games missed opportunity for Olympic berth'

Will book Paris ticket in qualifiers: Schopman

PTI ■ RANCHI

Indian women's hockey team head coach Janneke Schopman on Thursday admitted that the Hangzhou Asian Games were a missed opportunity to seal a Paris Games berth but the country is confident of making the grade in the Olympic qualifiers beginning here on Satur-

day.
Having failed to book a direct
Olympics berth at the Hangzhou
last vear, the Asian Games last year, the Indian team is looking for the 2024 Paris Games through the

qualifying tournament here. The top-three teams out of eight competing in the January 13-19 tournament will qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. "We did not qualify for the Olympics from the Asian Games

and we know it was a missed opportunity. But we don't dwell on the past," Schopman said at the pre-tournament press conference.

"We are hoping to do well in this tournament. We need to be better (than before) and if we play to our best, we can qualify for the Olympics (from here)." India, who are placed in Pool B, begin their campaign against the USA on Saturday, before facing New Zealand (January 14) and Italy (January 16). The knockout matches will be held on January 18 and 19 respectively. "USA is a threat. We have played against them earlier, though the past or the rankings do not matter much. We are a good side, we want to play good hockey and we are ready for the tournament," she said.

"We don't want to think for things on which we don't con-

trol but we will do whatever we can on things which are in our

Asked about specific areas where the Indian team needs improvement, she said, "We want to play according to our principles and foundation. Our game plan is to understand the situation, make right decisions according to the needs of the game in that particular point.

"We also need to have 11 players on the field (meaning try to earn minimum cards) during a match

Former Indian men's team drag-flick expert Rupinder Pal Singh had a short stint will the women's side to fix the penalty-corner conversion woes, and Schopman said the players had benefited from it.

Despite winning the Asian Champions Trophy here, India had wasted plenty of penalty corners in the subsequent tour-naments, including in the Asian Games, and Schopman had marked it as an area that needs improvement.

"Rupinder has the expertise as he is an experienced player. He knows the pressure on the top of 'D'. It was a great help for the likes of Gurjit Kaur and Deepika to fine-tune their skills. I am very happy with that." Captain Savita Punia said her side would look to play attacking hockey.

"Our strength is attacking though we are also good at defending. We will do just that in upcoming matches," she said. We respect the other teams and it will definitely be challenging for us in the tournament. But we will focus on our strengths instead of worrying about other team's strengths."

BFI to organise talent hunt programmes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI), in A association with power company REC Limited, will organise the Western Open Talent Hunt Programme at the Army Sports Institute in Pune.

The competition for the elite and youth categories will take place from January 12 to

The event is part of the four open preliminary tournaments that the BFI has planned to organise across the country for elite, youth, junior and sub-junior categories for both men and women boxers.

These are open tournaments and anyone can participate and get themselves enrolled to showcase their skills.

"Boxing Federation of India and REC are committed to the growth of Indian boxing and this REC Open Talent Hunt Programme is a significant step to identify and nurture budding boxers from across the country," BFI Secretary general Hemanta Kumar Kalita said.

'The programme is open to any boxers who possess the skills and have potential. It is a big opportunity for boxers to make an impact in the national scene. Through this programme, BFI and REC also aim to promote the sport in every corner of the country and increase the participation and exposure for the game."

In addition, the boxers will also have the



chance to win a wild card entry for national camps, presenting them with a unique opportunity to train and compete at the highest level under the guidance of experienced coaches and mentors as well as to represent the country

The winners will be invited to participate in the pruning trials for inclusion in the BFI's national camps, creating a pathway for talents to make a direct cut and get a shot to play for the country.

The boxers, in their respective categories, can participate in all four open tournaments and the top performers will compete in the combined final.

The Northern Open Talent Hunt was held at SAI NCOE in Rohtak in September last year while southern and eastern tournaments are scheduled to be staged in Bangalore (January 28 to February 13) and Guwahati (February 28 to March 15)

Satwik, Chirag enters men doubles quarterfinals

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

India's Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty continued their impressive run to advance es anarterfinals but Kidambi Srikanth failed to cross the second round at Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Thursday

highest yet again and seeing his World No. 2 Satwik and Chirag, header bounce off the crossbar, who had a stellar run in 2023 That miss ended up hurting with six titles, beat France's them barely four minutes later. Played through brilliantly by El world No. 36 Lucas Corvee and Ronan Labar 21-11 21-18 to set Khayati, the substitute Ayush up a clash with China's world Chhikara finished into the far No. 32 He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang

> The Indian women's doubles pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto, who claimed the Guwahati Masters super 100 title last month, shocked seventh seeded Japanese pair of Wakana Nagahara and Mayu Matsumoto 21-19, 13-21, 21-15 to inch closer in their effort to qualify for the Paris Olympics. Srikanth, however, failed to rein

in his errors and went down 13-21 17-21 to Hong Kong's Ng Ka Long Angus in the second round.

Satwik and Chirag, the Asian Games gold med out an aggressive game to gallop to 11-2 lead at the break in the opening game. A seven-point burst after resumption gave the French pair hope as they made it 12-14.

But the Indian combination soon found their bearing to run away with the opening game after gathering the remaining seven points on the trot.

The Indians, however, wouldn't have been prepared for what came next as Corvee and Labar came out blazing on all cylinders to take an 11-4 cushion in the interval

From 4-11, Satwik and Chirag, however, made it 16-16 with Chirag and Satwik once again scripting a remarkable recovery. Once the French went long, the Indians had the advantage. Labar pounced on a weak return



to keep themselves in the hunt. A deception from Chirag, followed by a flat exchange, gave India three match points. They squandered one before Labar served into the net.

Earlier, a series of unforced errors and bad line judgements put Srikanth, world ranked 24, on the back foot as world No. 20 Ka Long looked in fine fettle during the 38-minute men's singles match.

Srikanth had a promising start as he led 6-1 at one stage but his inconsistencies in execution once again came to the fore as Ka Long reeled off six straight points to turn the tables.

The Hong Kong player, who had come into the match after losing twice to the Indians in last two meetings, gained in confidence and another six-point burst put

him in command as Srikanth crumbled.

In the second game, Srikanth looked to take more initiative initially and managed to eke out cross-court smash.

But Ka long, who has a good record against Indian players,

quickly turned the tables again to lead 14-12, as Srikanth failed to recover in time to reach a shot during a rally. The Indian tried to extend the

rallies but Ka Long was relentless with his retrievals and showed exquisite touch. Soon the Hong Kong player was up

The Indian gathered a few quick points with Ka Long committing a series of unforced errors to narrow the deficit to 16-18. Soon, a backhand flick came to

Ka Long's rescue as he deposed a smash kill from Srikanth and then sent one at the backline, which the Indian could not reach. Srikanth, next, sprayed into net to end his agony



Open Super 1000

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

ndia's Kidambi Srikanth failed to rein in his errors and went down in straight games to Hong Kong's Ng Ka Long Angus in the second round of the Malaysia Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Thursday. A series of unforced errors and bad line judgements put Srikanth, world ranked 24, on the back foot as he lost 13-21 17-21 to world no 20 Ka Long in a 38-minute men's singles match Srikanth had a promising start as he led 6-1 at one stage but his inconsistencies in execution once again came to the fore as Ka Long reeled off six straight points to turn the tables.

The Hong Kong player, who had come into the match after losing twice to the Indians in last two meetings, gained in confidence and another six-point burst put him in command as Srikanth crumbled.

In the second game, Srikanth looked to take more initiative initially and managed to eke out a slender 11-10 lead with a jump cross-court smash.

But Ka long, who has a good record against Indian players, quickly turned the tables again to lead 14-12, as Srikanth failed to recover in time to reach a shot during a rally.

The Indian tried to extend the rallies but Ka Long was relentless with his retrievals and showed exquisite touch. Soon the Hong Kong player was up

The Indian gathered a few quick points with Ka Long committing a series of unforced errors to narrow the deficit to 16-18. Soon a backhand flick came to

Ka Long's rescue as he deposed a smash kill from Srikanth and then sent one at the backline, which the Indian could not reach. Srikanth, next, sprayed into net to end his agony.

Sangwan bags India's 16th quota place in shooting for Paris Olympics

PTI JAKARTA

Rhythm Sangwan on Thursday became the 16th Indian shooter to secure a 2024 Paris quota place with a bronze medal in 25m sports pistol at the Asia Olympic Qualifiers, ensuring India will send its largest-ever shooting contingent to the global showpiece in July-August this year. India's previous largest squad contained 15 shooters at the 2020 Olympic Games in

Jakarta is turning out to be a happy hunting ground with three shooters — Esha Singh, Varun Tomar (both 10m air pistol) and now Rhythm — securing quota slots for the country so far.

The 20-year-old Rhythm, who hails from Haryana and was a part of the team that won the 25m sports pistol gold at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year along with Esha and Manu Bhaker, shot 28 in the final to settle for bronze

But her third-position finish was enough to fetch a Paris quota for the country as the two Koreans, Yang Jiin (41) and Kim Yeji (32), who won gold and silver respectively were ineligible for Olympic quota spots. This is Rhythm's third medal in the ongo-



ing Asian Olympic Qualifiers after she finished third in 10m air pistol on Monday with Esha clinching gold. She also won the 10m air pistol mixed team silver with Arjun Singh

Cheema on Tuesday.
An Olympic quota place had eluded Rhythm on Monday after Pakistan's Kishmala Talat had won the silver in 10m air pistol. But, on Thursday, Rhythm was happy she could get the monkey off her back.

Rhythm credited her personal coach Vineet Kumar for the success in the Qualifiers. "I am really happy that I won the bronze medal and could win the quota for my country," Rhythm said after the match.

"I would like to thank my personal coach Vineet Kumar. It's all because of him I'm here today. I would also like to thank all my supporters out there," said the affable shooter. Asked which of the three medals she prided the most, Rhythm said all the medals here were close to her heart but the fact that the bronze on Thursday also earned India an Olympic quota made it special.
"I think all of them (three medals here) hold

a special place in my heart. But, yes, I mean I could do this for my country... I could win the quota for my country, so, yes, it holds a special place. Thank you Vineet sir, keep your blessings," she said.

Rhythm shot two rapid-fire series of 100 on Monday to qualify for the final with a top score of 588. She then had 28 hits out of her first 35 targets, finishing behind the Korean pair, who were ineligible for quotas in the

That released two quota slots for other shooters and Rhythm earned one. Rhythm began the day placed fifth after the first precision round on Wednesday, coming up with a near-perfect second rapid-fire round. Her 298 out of 300 propelled her to 588, three clear of Yeji Kim, the first of three

Koreans to enter the top eight.

Aman overcomes Chinese opponent to win gold at Zagreb Open



PTI ■ ZAGREB

Indian wrestler Aman Sehrawat came up with a commanding performance to bag the gold medal in the Zagreb Open Ranking Series tournament, defeating China's world No. 7 Wanhao Zou 10-0 here.

Sehrawat's victory by technical superiority last night came as a bright moment for the embattled Indian wrestling community, which has been grappling with a host of issues, including the suspen-

sion of the newly-elected federation by the sports ministry and protests by junior grapplers. The Indian contingent is competing under the United World Wrestling (UWW) banner as the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) was suspended by the clocked between fewerest alleging. ed by the global body last year for not adhering to the time-line set for elections. The 13th ranked Aman started off with a 15-4 win, against a higher-ranked Muhammet Karavus of Turkey. Aman achieved technical superiority within 21 seconds of the second period of three minutes. The champion wrestler, a bronze medallist at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year in the 57kg category, then secured a place in the semifinal defeating 19th ranked American grappler Richards Zane Raye Rhodes by technical superiority (11-0). In the last-four, Aman met another lower-ranked grappler, Roberti Dingashvili of Georgia, winning the bout 11-0 against the world No. 16.
Against world No. 7 Wanhao Zou, Aman had his

task cut out but the 20-year old, known for spending hours on the mat perfecting his skills, gave the Chinese a tough time, winning the bout 10-0. Asian Games silver and Commonwealth Games gold medallist freestyle grappler Deepak Punia could not make it to the 86kg medal round after he lost in his first bout to Kazakhstan's Azamat

In the repechage round, he won one bout and lost the other to go out of contention for a medal.

Not surprised at Virat inclusion in T201 squad: De Villiers

Tirat Kohli is managing the backend of his international career quite niftily, hence AB de Villiers isn't one bit surprised at the possibility of his good mate playing another T20 World Cup in some months' time.

Kohli, who last played a T20 during the showpiece's semi-final against England in Adelaide in November, 2022, is back in the national squad for the Afghanistan T20Is and will play the last two games

"I am not surprised at all. I am very happy for Virat and Rohit. You want to get your best team out there to win the T20 World Cup

Yes, I understand the criticism out there that youngsters have been missing out and guys who have been playing all the time," De Villiers, who is a commentator in SA20, told PTI during an interaction with select media. De Villiers feels that both skipper Rohit Sharma and Kohli are still part of the best Indian T20 side and the move to consider them for the global meet is a prudent one.

"I was in a similar position at the backend of my career and it didn't work out for me. It's working out for Virat and Rohit and I think it's the right move,

rienced players to be out there and they have been there and done it before and they can try to win World Cup for you," De Villiers, one of South Africa's greatest batters in the postapartheid era, said.

Asked what is it that ticks for Kohli and the recipe of his near 16-year journey for India, De Villiers spoke about the optimum balance that an elite sportsperson needs to strike, something he wished to have achieved.

'Virat grew up with cricket in his blood and that keeps him going. Same thing that kept me going and towards the end of my career when fire start-ed burning out that's when I called it

"I think he has got a fantastic balance in his life with his family and spends a bit of time with them. He has started managing his career well which I could have done better towards the end of my career," De Villiers said.

'NEWLANDS TRACK WAS NOR-MAL FOR ME': The shortest Test in terms of overs was recently played at the Newlands, Cape Town, where India beat South Africa by seven wickets in just over 106 overs of play across one and half days.

Was that the fastest Newlands track



said De Villiers.
"Newlands is known for a lively first session on Day 1. If you can fight it out, it gets a lot easier after that but it has shown once again that you got to play positive cricket. Aiden Markram scored that hundred. I think gameplans were wrong for both teams on Day 1," he observed.

"Both teams were very conservative, not taking the bowlers on, getting them off their lengths just like you do with good spinners in India. If you let them bowl to you, you are not going to survive.

"It was lively, it was fast but I think they could have played it better in the first innings. In the second (innings), there was better batting." 'BAZBALL BASED ON CONDI-

TIONS': De Villiers said 'Bazball', England's aggressive method of batting in Tests under coach Brendon McCullum can't be a "one size fits all"

The South African, who has 22 Test hundreds in 114 games, feels that positive cricket always doesn't mean going hell for leather without respecting conditions

"I don't believe in Bazball. I believe in positive cricket. You can't play conservatively. It's about absorbing the pressure and applying as much as you can when you get the opportunity. "It (Bazball) can be applied on any

conditions provided time is right. Identifying the moment and running through the door when it's open," he

opined England will face India in a five-match series at the latter's home from later this month.

'NO ONE FROM RCB HAS CONTACTED ME': A bona-fide RCB legend, it is surprising that De Villiers hasn't been sought by the franchise for being a mentor or consultant despite being the greatest all-round T20 bat-

ter of his generation.
"I haven't spoken to anyone there. No one has contacted me at all. If I am asked to be there for a day or 2 as mentioned by Virat - he made a light comment that why don't you spend time with us, and that offer is still on table, more as a friend, and not as coach or any role to play?

But the 39-year-old said he would be happy to guide anyone in Royal Challengers Bangalore, who wants T20 batting tips from the legend him-

'If some batters talk to me, I will definitely share my knowledge and experience and maybe there will be a more professional role on the table.

Presence of Kohli, Rohit will give India solidity in T20 World Cup: Raina

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Contrary to the prevalent notion of it as a backward step, former India all-rounder Suresh Raina on Thursday termed the selection of veterans Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli into the national squad for the T20I series against Afghanistan as a wise call with the World Cup

fast approaching.
Rohit and Kohli were included in India's T20 squad after a gap of 14 months, and Raina said their presence will give the squad a lot of solidity.
"If you look at the World Cup

venues (in the USA and the West Indies), the wicket will be a bit tricky. India will need the experience of Rohit and Kohli there. Kohli is about to make 12000 runs in T20 cricket.

So, their presence will boost India's batting. Their presence will certainly better India's chances to win the T20 WC," said Raina, now an expert with JioCinema and Sports18, in a select interaction.

"Their form in the ODI World Cup was very good, and Rohit brings in a lot of intent to the dressing room as the leader as

Raina opined that Kohli should ing slots to Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal

"I think Kohli should bat at No. 3. His experience will bring in some solidity, especially in the challenging pitches in the US and the Caribbean. There are fearless, young cricketers like Jaiswal, Rinku Singh or Shubman Gill but Rohit and Kohli will give the unit a lot of solidity.

Their presence is very important when we chase a target especially in a high-pressure event like the World Cup," said Raina. The former middle-order batter, who was part of India's World



Cup wins in 2007 and 2011, was delighted to see the progress of Rinku Singh.

"Rinku has done well in the available opportunities for him and he showed a lot of presence of mind as a finisher as well. He is a fearless cricketer.

"It is important to have him around and if Rishabh Pant gets fit in time (for WC), then the team will have another match-winner," said Raina.

· 37-vear-old backed Samson as his leading choice for the wicketkeeper batsman role and called the Kerala player the

'Sanju has made a wonderful hundred against South Africa recently. He is definitely a captain material as his mind is ticking all the time while on the field. We have some very good options for wicketkeeper-batter role — KL Rahul, Jitesh Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Pant whenever he comes back after getting

In that context, Raina hoped Samson would come up with a good outing against the Afghans

and in the IPL 2024.

"I prefer to have Sanju in the middle-order because he has a lot of shots. He plays those pick-up shots against pacers from the length. Hopefully, he performs well in the IPL too before the selectors sit down to select the team for the T20 World Cup.

So, it is a good chance for Sanju against Afghanistan, and he can be our X-Factor in the World

Raina said India will not have it

easy against Afghanistan in the three-match T20I series, and the batters will have to put the visiting bowlers under pressure.
"India batsmen will have to attack Afghan spinners. They have quality spinners like Noor

Ahmad and Abid Nabi, so it won't be easy for us. Afghanistan uses their spinners well in the Power Play. We have Rohit, Kohli, and Gill,

who plays spin very well. So, we have to attack them from the start and it will keep the Afghan bowlers under pressure," he

Rashid absence an opportunity for others to step up and become household names: Trott

The absence of Rashid Khan in the T20I series against India is an opportunity for other Afghanistan players to perform against the heavyweights and become household names like the star leg-spinner, feels their head coach Jonathan Trott.

The celebrated spinner, who underwent a back surgery after the ODI World Cup in November, was named in the squad but will not be available for the three games as he undergoes his "I believe, with Rashid out of the

side, it's a good opportunity for other players to come in and step up and become household names like he is," Trott said during an interaction with 'JioCinema'

"Obviously, we are going to miss a player like Rashid, his leadership and the overall package he brings to the side. But it'll be good to see who is going to



ty and pressure, just a couple of months after the World Cup," he replied when asked if the spin-ner's withdrawal has impacted team selection.

The series starts with the first T20I here on Thursday, and Afghanistan will look to take inspiration from their impressive outing in the ODI World Cup in October-November last year to prepare in earnest for the upcoming T20 World Cup.

a former England Test specialist, said his team is fortunate to have players who have competed against these stars in the IPL. "Any side that India selects is strong. Add to it the likes of Rohit and Virat and they have been world-class players for a while. We are fortunate enough to have players who have played quite a lot of cricket against them in the IPL.

"The other guys have watched them on TV, so there will defi-Speaking about the challenges of standing up to men like Rohit them on TV, so there will defi-nitely be some plans for them. It's about executing those plans and making sure that on the day we are ready to do that," Trott

said.
Kohli, though, will not be playing in the series-opener due to personal reasons.
When asked about Afghanistan's plans to stop India, Trott said the visitors will have to perform to the best of their abilities in all departments of the game.
"We need to be better in all three

"We need to be better in all three facets of the game. We need to win those key moments under pressure. That's what today's practice is all about, so that players are ready to perform whenever they get the opportunity to make an impact in a game," he

On the areas of focus for the series, he said, "We had a good 50-over World Cup and obviously these three games are important. We are here to win but with one eye on the T20 World Cup in June in the



Nepal cricket body suspends Lamichhane after conviction in rape case

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal spinner Sandeep Lami-chhane was on Thursday suspended by the country's cricket body after being sentenced to eight years in prison for raping an 18-year-old woman. The Kathmandu District Court

announced the verdict on Wednesday and Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) issued a statement this morning, responding to the development. "We inform you that Sandeep Lamichhane has been suspended from any kind of domestic and international cricket activities as he has been convicted and sentenced," the CAN said. A single-judge bench also imposed a Rs 3,00,000 fine on the 23-year-old, besides ordering him to pay a compensation

Lamichhane's lawyer Saroj Ghimire was quoted as saying by 'The Kathmandu Post' that the cricketer "will appeal the decision in a higher court."

warrant was issued by the Kathmandu police for Lamichhane, leading to his suspension as the Nepal captain by the Cricket Association of Nepal. Although he was playing in the Caribbean Premier League for Jamaica Tallawahs, the franchise released him with immediate effect, and he returned to Kathmandu, where he was arrested.

Delhi Capitals in advanced talks to buy stakes in English county side Hampshire: Report

PTI LONDON

Indian Premier League fran-chise Delhi Capitals could be eyeing a foothold in English cricket as it's in "advanced talks" to buy stakes in county side Hampshire, according to a

report. A report in the 'Daily Telegraph' said former Hampshire chairman Rod Bransgrove, who still holds majority share in the club, is close to agreeing a deal to sell the county side to GMR Group, the co-owners of Delhi Capitals. "Hampshire County Cricket Club's majority shareholder is in

advanced talks to sell his stake to the part-owners of Indian Premier League team Delhi Capitals," the report said.

If the deal comes to fruition, it

will make Hampshire the first county side "to be owned by an overseas franchise", it said. The benefits of buying a county side for GMR could include

a foothold in the English game, it added. With The Hundred franchise

tournament in England gaining popularity, the deal could give GMR a "first-mover advantage", and also help the IPL franchise "develop its own players".

The development comes amid reports that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is exploring opening up 50 per cent stakes in a few Hundred teams, and giving host counties the option to to sell their shares. Bransgrove, who was in-charge of Hampshire for nearly 23 years, relinquished his post as chairman last year but continues to hold more that 60 per cent of the shares. The report added that Hampshire is one of the three county clubs, besides Northamptonshire and Durham, which are not member-owned, giving Bransgrove the choice to sell his

stakes "without fan input". Bransgrove is credited with developing the Ageas Bowl, which, for the first time, will host an Ashes Test in 2027.

The country side had a partnership with IPL side Rajasthan Royals between 2010 and 2013, and played T20 cricket as Hampshire Royals.

GMR have a 50 per cent stake in Delhi Capitals in both the IPL and Women's Premier League (WPL). They also own Dubai Capitals in the UAE's ILT20 besides a share in USA's Major League Cricket side Seattle In September last year, an arrest

Real Madrid beats Atletico 5-3

AP RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)

fter own-goals, goalkeeping Ablunders and a milestone by Antoine Griezmann, Real Madrid outlasted Atletico Madrid in thrilling extra time victory in the semifinal of Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

Two late goals gave Madrid a 5-3 win over its rival in a match in which Griezmann surpassed Luis Aragonés as Atletico's alltime top scorer with 174 goals. Madrid will play Sunday's final against either Barcelona or Osasuna, who meet on Thursday in Riyadh.

"It was a back-and-forth match." Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "They did well in the first half and in the second we were able to improve. Both teams played very well. It was a spectacular match, we won because we had a bit more energy in the

Atletico took the lead with a header by Mario Hermoso after a cross by Griezmann six min-

utes into the match, but Madrid went ahead with Antonio Rüdiger scoring in the 20th and Ferland Mendy in the 29th. Griezmann scored his milestone goal with a right-footed low shot from outside the area after using a nifty move to change directions and get past defenders in the 37th. The France forward had gone scoreless in three straight games since tying Aragonés with a pair of goals against Getafe in the Spanish league in December. An own-goal by Rüdiger in the 78th put Atletico ahead again before Dani Carvajal equalized in the 85th to send the game into extra time. Rüdiger's own-goal came after a mistake by Madrid goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga while going for a ball crossed into the area. Kepa couldn't hold on to the ball and it ricocheted off Rüdiger and went backward into the net.

Madrid took the lead late in extra time after Atletico defender Stefan Savic found his own net while trying to intercept a



cross by Carvajal in the 116th, and Brahim Díaz sealed Madrid's win in stoppage time by hitting the open net after Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak had left his area to try to help the attack the other way. Díaz sped past Oblak near midfield to get to the ball and send it into the open net.

Díaz was shown the game's only

yellow card for taking his shirt

off during the celebration. No

Madrid derby has gone without

a yellow card since 1974.

It was the first of three matches in less than a month between the Madrid rivals. They will also meet in the Copa del Rey next week at Atletico's Metropolitano Stadium, and in the Spanish league in February at Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Madrid had won its last five games in all competitions and is

enjoying an unbeaten run of 20

consecutive matches. The team's

only loss this season came against Atletico in the Spanish

league in September.

Diego Simeone's team went on a strong run after that home win against Madrid, advancing to the knockout round of the Champions League and getting near the top of the Spanish league, but it has won only two of its last six matches in all competitions and dropped out of the Champions League places in the Spanish league. Atletico and Madrid also met in the 2020 Super Cup final, with

Madrid winning on penalties in what marked the first time the competition was taken to Saudi Arabia in a lucrative multi-year deal for the clubs and the Spanish soccer federation. It was a mostly quiet crowd during Wednesday match, and there seemed to be jeers during the

German great Franz Beckenbauer, who died this week. Madrid midfielder Toni Kroos who has criticized the decision by top players to play in Saudi Arabia, also was booed by the

moment of silence in honor of

Saudi crowd. The Super Cup's new "final four" format pits together the top two teams in the Spanish league last season and the last two Copa del Rey finalists.

Liverpool staged a second-half fightback and scored twice in a three-minute span to beat Fulham 2-1 in the first leg of the English League Cup semifinals on Wednesday. With second-tier Middlesbrough defeating Chelsea 1-0 on Tuesday in the first of the semifinals, another upset looked on when Fulham took the lead at Anfield through Willian in the 19th minute after Virgil van Dijk failed to make a clearing header.

Liverpool's attacking threat was limited in the first half without Trent Alexander-Arnold, who is injured, and Mohamed Salah, who is away with Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations.

A double-substitution in the 55th saw Darwin Núñez and Cody Gakpo enter and it proved decisive, with Núñez having a hand in both of Liverpool's goals and Gakpo scoring one of them. After Núñez's layoff, Curtis Jones equalized with a shot that took a vicious deflection off the back of Tosin



Adarabioyo and looped into the corner past stranded goal-keeper Bernd Leno in the 68th. Núñez then crossed for Gakpo to sweep home a finish in the 71st, handing Liverpool the advantage ahead of the second leg at Fulham's Craven Cottage on Jan. 24. The Reds could have been taking a bigger lead to London but Leno saved brilliantly at the feet of Núñez in the

The victory comes three days after another second-half recovery at Arsenal, where Liverpool won 2-0 in the FA Cup. "It's the mentality in the group, in the club," Gakpo said. "In the city, everything is like this. The mentality is to keep going, that it doesn't matter what has happened. "If you have that mental-

Fulham was competing in the semifinals for the first time in its 144-year history, while Liverpool a record nine-time winner of the competition - was looking to reach the final for a recordextending 14th time.

ity, a lot of beautiful things can

happen."

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