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AXAR EYES
GOOD SHOW IN
ENGLAND
11 SPORTS

Narendra Modi begins Anushthan for Ram Mandir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With just 11 days remaining until the 'Pran Pratishtha' (consecration ceremony) at the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will lead the performance of the rituals, has commenced an 11-day-long rigorous fasting period that includes Yam Niyam, involving regular prayers and yoga. In a message on Friday, the Prime Minister informed the public about adhering to the rituals prescribed in the scriptures before conducting the Pran Pratishtha of Ram Lalla on January 22.

"I am fortunate to witness this auspicious occasion. The Lord has chosen me as an instrument to represent all the people of India during the consecration. With this in mind, I am commencing a special ritual of 11 days starting today," Modi said in a message on X.

"In the scriptures, the Pran Pratishtha of a deity's idol is a detailed and comprehensive process. Detailed rules, which must be followed several days before the ceremony, have been provided for this purpose. The Prime Minister consistently adheres to rules such as Brahmamuhurta Jagran, Sadhana, and a Satvik diet in his daily routine. However, for the next 11 days, the Prime Minister will follow an ascetic routine, including



Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to the crowd during a roadshow in Nashik on Friday. (Right) The PM walks on the newly built Atal Setu, the longest sea bridge in India.



PTI

rigorous fasting," the functionary said. "I am emotional and overwhelmed with emotions. For the first time in my life, I am experiencing such feelings," he said, noting that the dream carried in the hearts of many generations as a resolve will be witnessed by him as it is being realised.

The inner journey he is undergoing can only be felt and not expressed, Modi said in an audio message, adding that he is unable to articulate with words the depth, expanse, and intensity of the feelings. The Prime Minister remarked that the upcoming event is a sacred occasion for all Indians

and devotees of Lord Ram. Everyone is eagerly anticipating the historic moment on January 22 when the idol of Ram will be consecrated at what followers believe to be his birthplace. In an audio message, PM Modi expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to witness what he deemed a "historic

and "auspicious" occasion. He is undertaking a special regimen based on the guidelines he has received from eminent individuals on the spiritual journey. Officials said that Modi has decided to strictly adhere to all instructions laid down in scriptures, despite his busy schedule and responsibilities.

"For this, the Prime Minister has embarked on an 11-day adherence to Yam Niyam leading up to the Pran Pratishtha," one official said. "Yam Niyam" prescribes several austere measures, including yoga, meditation, and discipline in various aspects for its practitioners. *Continued on Page 2*

Ram dresses up for event

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In the serene vicinity of Vishishtha Kund, where the rhythmic hum of machines echoes within Bhagwat Prasad Pahadi's workshop, a master tailor entrusted with the monumental task of crafting attire for Ram Lalla, an unexpected hurdle has brought the needle and thread to a temporary pause. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, overseeing the construction and preparations for the revered Ram Temple in Ayodhya, is yet to provide the crucial measurements of the main idol of Ram Lalla. This unforeseen delay has rippled through the meticulous preparation of the sacred clothing, leaving artisans and devotees alike on edge.

Bhagwat Prasad Pahadi, a seasoned tailor with years of experience in stitching garments for the divine, expresses his predicament with a mix of dedication and concern. Without the essential measurements from the Trust, he finds himself unable to start the intricate stitching process required for Ram Lalla's attire. Undeterred, Pahadi assures

that upon receiving the green signal, all garments for Ram Lalla will be meticulously crafted and ready within a maximum of two days. At present, Bhagwat has stitched three distinct costumes for the revered idol — one in pristine white, another in auspicious yellow, and a third in vibrant red. However, Champat Rai, the representative of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, has disclosed only partial information regarding the idol, stating that it would stand at 51 inches in height and have a shyam varna, a dark complexion. Other specifications crucial for the precise stitching of the attire remain undisclosed, contributing to the unexpected pause in the garment creation process. Despite this temporary setback, Bhagwat Prasad Pahadi finds himself inundated with orders from devoted patrons not only within the State but across the entire country. Calls and inquiries are pouring in from places as diverse as Jaipur, Madhya Pradesh, Makrana, Gujarat, and Haridwar, underscoring the widespread demand for meticulously crafted attire for Ram Lalla. *Continued on Page 2*

CAPSULE

Ultras fire upon Army vehicles in Poonch

Jammu: A day after Army Chief General Manoj Pandey expressed concern about the situation in the Rajouri-Poonch region, terrorists targeted a convoy of Army vehicles near Krishna Ghati area in the Poonch district once again on Friday evening, from a nearby forested area. Fortunately, no one was injured. P2

India to clock 7.2 per cent growth: Deloitte

New Delhi: India is expected to clock a GDP growth in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent in the current financial year on the back of improving economic fundamentals, Deloitte India said in an update to its quarterly outlook. As per NSO also, India will grow by 7.3 per cent in 2023-24. P10

IAF 2016 Wreckage located off Andaman in Bay of Bengal

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

The mystery surrounding the missing IAF plane has finally been solved after nearly eight years, as some parts of its wreckage were located at a depth of nearly 3.4 km in the Bay of Bengal recently. The ill-fated AN-32 transport plane, with 29 personnel onboard, was en route to the Port of Blair after taking off from Tambaram airbase in Chennai on July 22, 2016, when it went missing. Providing details on Friday, the Defence Ministry said that a scrutiny of the images captured by an autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) deployed by the National Institute of Ocean Technology recently confirmed that the wreckage located 310 km off the Chennai coast is of an AN-32 aircraft. "The search images were

scrutinised and found to be conforming with an AN-32 aircraft. This discovery at the probable crash site, with no other recorded history of any other missing aircraft report in the same area, points to the debris as possibly belonging to the crashed IAF AN-32," the ministry said in a statement. The IAF's AN-32 aircraft with registration number K-2743 went missing over the Bay of Bengal on July 22, 2016, during a mission. One of the most extensive search and rescue missions in the country, involving aircraft and ships, could not locate any missing personnel or the wreckage of the plane since it disappeared. The National Institute of Ocean Technology, operating under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, recently deployed an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) with deep-sea



exploration capabilities at the last known location of the missing AN-32 aircraft.

"This search was conducted at a depth of 3,400 metres using multiple payloads, including a

multi-beam SONAR (Sound Navigation and Ranging), synthetic aperture SONAR,

and high-resolution photography," the Defence Ministry said. Analysis of search images indicated the presence of debris from a crashed aircraft on the seabed approximately 140 nautical miles (310 km) from the Chennai coast, it added. The transport aircraft took off from the Tambaram air base in Chennai at 8:30 am on July 22, 2016, and was supposed to land at Port Blair in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around 11:30 am after covering a distance of 750 nautical miles (1,300 km). When the plane failed to land, the search and rescue mission was launched at 11:45 am. Reports indicated that radars had last seen the plane about 9.15 am, 200 km east of Chennai. The service personnel on board the missing plane included four officers and 25

others, officials said. While the plane was manned by a crew of six, other passengers included 11 from the IAF, nine Navy men, two from the Army, and one from the Coast Guard. Port Blair is the home to the tri-services command. Sixteen minutes after take-off, the pilot reportedly made the last call and said, "Everything is normal." The aircraft rapidly lost altitude from 23,000 feet and was off the radar around 9:12 am, 280 km off the Chennai coast. Almost eight years after the crash, debris from the crashed aircraft has been located 310 km from the coast in the same area. The massive search operation launched then included the Navy's Dornier aircraft and 11 ships: Sahyadri, Rajput, Ranvijay, Kamorta, Kirch, Karmuk, Kora, Kuthar, Shakti, Jyoti, Ghariyal, and Sukanya.

ED raids TMC Ministers

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Backed by a new-look Central Armed Police Forces armed to the teeth, the Enforcement Directorate conducted raids on Friday at the residences of Bengal Fire Minister Sujit Bose, his senior party colleague, Trinamool Congress MLA Tapas Roy, and Subodh Chakraborty, a South Dum Dum municipality councillor. The raids were carried out in connection with the multi-crore municipal services recruitment scam that surfaced early last year when ED officials raided the house of businessman Ayan Sil due to his alleged links with the teachers' recruitment scam. While an 11-hour raid concluded at Roy and Chakraborty's residences, officials were still conducting searches at Bose's house at the time of the latest reports. While the first team of ED officials raided two houses and an office belonging to Bose in Birati, located in the northern fringes of Kolkata, the second team conducted raids at the residence and office of Tapas Roy on SN Banerjee Road in central Kolkata. Simultaneously, a

third team carried out a raid at the residence of Subodh Chakraborty, a councillor in Dum Dum Municipality. The TMC leadership strongly reacted to Thursday's raids, characterising them as part of pre-election vendetta politics. Bengal Minister Shashi Panja remarked, "This is nothing but vendetta politics before the elections. As they cannot defeat us politically, they are resorting to this route." TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh criticised Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari, stating, "The ED is being prompted by Suwendu. A few days ago, he had said, 'Wait and see what happens in North 24 Parganas. Mamata Banerjee had earlier entrusted Sujit Bose with the charges of Basirhat and Dum Dum Lok Sabha constituencies. The ED has been manipulated to target him, preventing him from dedicating time to the organisation. The BJP aims to score in a vacant field, but that is their daydream. They will never succeed in their nefarious designs.' Another TMC spokesperson, Debangshu Bhattacharya, warned the "BJP's Babus from Delhi," saying, "If a veteran man like Tapas Roy, who

enjoys a clean image, is targeted, you can easily guess what the ED and BJP are up to." He added, "Everything will be remembered in the future, and nothing will be forgotten." Roy, a former Bengal minister normally known for his integrity, however, refused to comment, said, "The party leadership will react to today's developments. Insofar as I am concerned, I have never been involved in any kind of monetary transaction. The raids could be related to politics because no one would have raided my house had I not been a politician." Bengal Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury also gave a clean chit to Roy, saying, "I do not believe that Tapas Roy is involved in corruption." However, none would vouch for Bose, even as BJP leader Samik Bhattacharya asked, "How can a man who began his career as a fast-food seller earn so much money to construct palatial buildings and own so much property?" Bose's son, on the other hand, stated, "We have nothing to hide. We are cooperating with the ED and answering all their questions as law-abiding citizens of the country."

Delhi freezes under five year low

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi continues to grapple with harsh weather conditions as a cold wave prevails in the national capital on Friday. Despite sunshine, Delhi shivers as the minimum temperature drops three notches below the season's average, reaching 3.9 degrees Celsius, the lowest this season so far. This marks the lowest minimum temperature recorded in the past five years. The average maximum temperature was 19.3 degrees Celsius, one notch below the season's normal. According to IMD data, Jafarpur recorded 3.2 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road 3.6 degrees Celsius, and Palam 4.9 degrees Celsius. With Delhi reeling under intense cold, the peak power demand of the city surged to an all-time high of 5,701 MW on Friday morning. According to the State Load Dispatch Centre's real-time data, the peak power demand in Delhi at 10:49 am on Friday was 5,701 MW. The power distribution companies (discoms) have estimated the winter peak power demand to reach up to 5,760 MW this year. The previous highest peak winter demand was 5,611 MW on Wednesday morning. Discom officials stated that since January 1, Delhi's peak power demand has risen by over 11 percent. A BSES spokesperson mentioned that



Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

the company's discoms, BRPL and BYPL, successfully met the peak power demand of 2,484 MW and 1,185 MW, respectively. Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) also successfully met the all-time highest winter peak power demand, reaching 1,774 MW in its area — North Delhi — without any network constraint or power outage, as stated by a spokesperson of the discom. IMD data showed that the maximum temperatures in Palam, Lodhi Road, Ridge, Ayanagar, Jafarpur, Mungeshpur, Narela, Pitampura, Pusa, and SPS Mayur Vihar were

recorded as 16.1 degrees Celsius (four notches above normal), 18.8 degrees Celsius (one notch above normal), 18.6 degrees Celsius (one notch above normal), 15.2 degrees Celsius (five notches above normal), 14.4 degrees Celsius (five notches below normal), 16.6 degrees Celsius (three notches above normal), 18.8 degrees Celsius (one notch above normal), 17.5 degrees Celsius (two notches above normal), and 17.7 degrees Celsius (two notches above normal), respectively. An IMD official stated that sunlight helped lift daytime temperatures

slightly, but the clear sky contributed to a drop in nighttime temperatures, causing discomfort in the national capital region for the past two days. They added, "The minimum temperature was likely to rise again from Saturday as a fresh western disturbance approaches the northern plains, bringing cloudiness." Many parts of the national capital region were covered in very dense surface fog, reducing visibility to zero at the airport for over four hours from 4:30 am. Road, rail, and air traffic were affected due to the dense fog. Satellite imagery revealed a layer of fog/low-level clouds over Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, extending up to northeast India. Patches of fog were also visible over Odisha. The Delhi-NCR experienced some relief on Thursday as the sun shone through the thinned layer of fog, but chilly winds kept temperatures down. The IMD explained, "With skies becoming clear after nearly two weeks of dense upper-level fog, the same formed closer to the surface, making days colder. The same fog prevents substantial heat loss at night, not allowing the minimum to dip sharply." In previous years, the minimum temperature during the corresponding period until January 11 has dropped as low as 1.1 degrees Celsius, with several seasonal lows coincidentally recorded on January 1.

Modi takes dig at dynasty politics

PN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Taking an indirect dig at the Gandhi-Nehru family, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday exhorted the youth for participation in democracy to "dilute" the dynasty politics in the country.

While inaugurating the 27th National Youth Festival (NYF) in Nashik in north Maharashtra, Modi said: "There is a reason for this hope, this aspiration — India is the Mother of Democracy. The greater the participation of youth in democracy, the better will be the future of the nation. The participation of youth will dilute dynasty politics."

"First-time voters can bring new energy and strength to our democracy," the Prime Minister said. "The upcoming 25 years of Amrit Kaal is a period of duty for you...When you keep your duties paramount, the society will progress and the country will also progress," the Prime Minister said.

Recalling his request made to the Youth in the country from the Red Fort, the Prime Minister urged the youth to promote the use of local products, make use of only 'Made



in India' products, keep away from any kind of drugs and addiction, raise their voices against using abusive words in the name of mothers, sisters and daughters and put an end to such evils.

Expressing confidence that the youth of India will fulfill every responsibility with full devotion and ability, Modi said: "The lamp that we have lit to realize the dream of a strong, capable and competent India will become an immortal light and illuminate the world in this immortal age"

Highlighting the tradition of keeping Yuvashakti paramount, Modi quoted Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda. "Swami Vivekanand filled the country with new energy and enthusiasm during the period

value of yoga and Ayurveda and Indian youth is becoming brand ambassadors of Yoga and Ayurveda.

Urging the youth to enquire through their grandparents about the consumption of bajra roti, kodo-kutki, ragi-jowar during their times, the Prime Minister said out that it was the mentality of slavery which led to this food being associated with poverty and found its way out of Indian kitchens.

Averting that his government has given a new identity to millets and coarse grains as super-foods, thereby making a comeback in Indian households as Shree Anna, Modi said: "Now you have to become the brand ambassador of these cereals. Your health will also improve with food grains and small farmers of the country will also benefit", Modi added.

Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnis and Ajit Pawar, Union Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Anurag Singh Thakur and Union Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs Nisith Pramanik were among those present at the NYF inaugural ceremony.

Terrorists hit Army convoy in Poonch



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A day after Army Chief General Manoj Pande said the situation in the Rajouri-Poonch region is a matter of "concern", suspected terrorists late Friday evening once again targeted a convoy of army vehicles near Krishna Ghati area of the Poonch district from a nearby forested area. No one was injured in the surprise attack which took place around 6.00 p.m.

The security forces have launched a massive search operation in the area to track down the footprints of the terrorists hiding in the thickly forested area.

The fresh attack comes after almost three weeks of a dastardly attack on two army vehicles in the Dera ki Gali area of Surankote tehsil in Poonch. Four soldiers were killed in action in the deadly strike on December 21, 2023.

Confirming the attack on an army convoy, Nagrota-based White Knight Corps posted a tweet on X (earlier Twitter), "At around 6.00 p.m on Friday, a Security Forces convoy of vehicles was fired upon by suspected terrorists from a jungle near Krishna Ghati in the Poonch sector. No casualties to own troops. Joint search Operations by the Indian army and Jammu Kashmir police are in progress."

Two held for attacking ED officials in WB



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Almost a week after the Sandeshkhali attack on the ED officials leaving three persons badly injured the Bengal Police on Thursday managed to arrest two persons, North 24 Parganas SP Joby Thomas said.

The two persons are Mehboob Molla and Sukomal Sardar the police said refusing to divulge whether they were connected to the alleged mastermind of last Friday's

attack Shahjehan Sheikh a local TMC toughie whose house the ED officials had gone to raid in connection with the ration scam.

Reacting to the Thursday's arrest Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said, "if the police arrests only two small fries one week after the attack where one thousand five people were involved then you can easily understand the credibility of the Bengal Police that works under Mamata Banerjee as the Police Minister."

Study reveals 200 genes linked to depression

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A groundbreaking study has uncovered more than 200 genes linked to depression, shedding light on the complex nature of the condition, offering potential drug targets and insights into its development. Importantly, it emphasises the need for diverse genetic datasets to better understand and treat this widespread mental health disorder.

The research, published in Nature Genetics, found more than 50 new genetic loci (a locus is a specific position on a chromosome) and 205 novel genes that are associated with depression in the first large-scale global study of the genetics of major depression in participants of diverse ancestry groups.

The study also showcases the potential for drug repurposing, as one of the identified genes encodes a protein targeted by



a common diabetes drug, while also pointing to new targets for drugs that may be developed to treat depression.

Depression is very common, yet how it develops is still poorly understood. Genetic research using big data offers new avenues to understand the disease and has uncovered

dozens of genes associated with depression, each of which individually confers only a small increase in risk. It can also help find new drug targets, but so far, research has mainly focused on people of European ancestry, which the researchers say is a major shortcoming, especially for such a

complex condition as depression.

The international research team reviewed genetic data from 21 study cohorts from several countries and included nearly one million study participants of African, East Asian, South Asian, and Hispanic/Latin American descent, including 88,316 people with major depression.

The study has made major advances in identifying genes that are linked to the risk of depression, both for newly identified links and by strengthening prior evidence, and showcases some genes with potential implications for drug development, such as NDUFAF3.

The protein that NDUFAF3 encodes has been implicated previously in mood instability, and it is targeted by metformin, the first-line drug for treating type 2 diabetes. Animal studies of metformin have suggested a possible link with

reduced depression and anxiety, so this latest finding further suggests that additional research into metformin and depression may be warranted. Surprisingly, the researchers found less overlap in the genetic hits for depression across ancestry groups than expected, at about 30% (based on a new method developed by the research team to gauge the degree to which a genetic association found in one ancestry group is applicable to another ancestry group), which is less overlap than previously found for other traits and diseases.

Lead author Professor Karoline Kuchenbaecker (UCL Psychiatry and UCL Genetics Institute) said, "Here we show beyond doubt that our understanding of such complex diseases as depression will remain incomplete until we overcome the Eurocentric bias in genetics research and look for causes in diverse people across the world."

Macron diplomatic adviser meets EAM Jaishankar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Less than two weeks ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India, his diplomatic adviser Emmanuel Bonne and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday deliberated on bilateral issues and global developments of mutual concern. Bonne is currently on a visit to New Delhi ostensibly to firm up various aspects of Macron's trip.

French President Macron will be the Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations on January 26.

"Glad to meet Emmanuel Bonne, Diplomatic Advisor to President of France. Spoke about strong India-France convergence on multiple issues. Also shared perspectives on global developments of mutu-

al concern," Jaishankar posted on X.

"Look forward to President @EmmanuelMacron's State visit for Republic Day 2024," he added.

In another post, Jaishankar also congratulated Stephane Sejourne on becoming France's minister of Europe and foreign affairs. Sejourne succeeded Catherine Colonna.

"Congratulations @steph_sejourne on your appointment as the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic," Jaishankar said.

"Looking forward to working with you for further strengthening our strategic partnership and realising goals set by our leaders," he said.

New Delhi's invitation to Macron for the Republic Day celebrations comes amid a

rapid upswing in ties between the two countries including in areas of defence and security, clean energy, trade and investment and new technologies.

In July last, the defence ministry approved the purchase of 26 Rafale (marine) jets from France, primarily for deployment on board the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. France has already responded to India's initial tender for buying the jets.

The two sides are also expanding cooperation in the maritime domain including in the Indian Ocean Region. India and France also expressed commitment to cooperate in the co-development and co-production of advanced defence technologies, including for the benefit of third countries.

Depleting population of vulture species stabilised: Survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In partially good news that the declines of resident species of Gyps vultures has stopped, but dashes any hopes that there are signs of recovery, a survey data has suggested that the populations of the drastically depleted resident vulture species have at least stabilised at their new low levels. This is, however, in contrast to Nepal where the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) threat has been more effectively addressed since around 2012 and both resident species of Gyps vultures have increased consistently and significantly, says an update on vulture population trends in India.

Extensive road transects carried out by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), one of India's oldest conservation organisations, for the eighth time since 1992 have provided the longest-term and most comprehensive information available on changes in vulture numbers in India.

The 17,000 km of road transects took place across 13 states using standardised times and observers. They took place at the end of the breeding season, which maximises the chances of seeing flying vultures, and at a time when migrant species are absent. Indian banned veterinary use of the NSAID diclofenac in 2006.

Evidence from these surveys suggests that the ban has been



partially effective. However, populations remain at very low levels, following declines of 97.9 per cent for the long-billed vulture and 99.8 per cent for the white-rumped vulture since 1992, and 48 per cent and 87 per cent declines respectively since 2002.

Vibhu Prakash, recently retired from BNHS and coordinator of all eight surveys, said, "These surveys are an important measure of how well the vultures are doing. Getting the permissions and experienced team together is always a challenge, but there is no better way of getting a clear picture of the status of vultures across a large swathe of India."

John Mallord, RSPB Research Scientist, explained, "We had hoped to repeat the survey sooner, but Covid-19 and other constraints meant that this was not possible, so it was a big relief to get it completed. Although the results are largely positive, it is also clear that there is much more work to do. "Similar surveys in Nepal show a very different picture, with populations growing as fast as it is possible to do.

Tiger poisoning death: 3 arrested in Telangana

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Forest officials in Telangana probing the death of a tiger in Kagaznagar forest due to suspected poisoning found that three persons, including a juvenile, had poisoned a cattle with an intention to kill the tiger.

The Forest officials were directed to conduct an investigation into the cause of death of a male tiger on January 8 in the Dargaon beat of Kagaznagar Range in Komaram Bheem Asifabad district, the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden said.

"During the probe, it was found that three persons, including one juvenile male, have poisoned a cattle with an intention to kill the tiger," the release said. Accordingly, they have been arrested on January 11 for producing them before the competent court on Friday, it said.

While the juvenile is released on parental bond, the two accused have been sent to 12 days judicial custody, it said.

The search and screening of the forest area surrounding the place of the tiger's death continued for the third day, it said.

Keeping the recent death of two tigers in Kagaznagar forest area abutting Maharashtra and the corridor of Kawal Tiger Reserve in view, the senior officials of Telangana discussed the matter with their Maharashtra counterparts. It was decided to conduct a meeting to discuss various inter-state issues, including securing the tiger habitat and corridors in this tiger landscape, in the third week of January, the release added.

Modi embarks on 11 days spiritual...

From Page 1

Modi follows many of these disciplines, such as waking up during an auspicious time before sunrise, meditation, and consuming "satvik" food, in his daily life, they said.

Later, the Prime Minister performed darshan and puja at Kala Ram Mandir in Nashik, Maharashtra. He also conducted darshan and puja at Shree Ram Kund, paying floral tributes to the statue of Swami Vivekananda. The Prime Minister then listened to the epic narrative of the Ramayana, specifically the "Yudh Kanda" segment, depicting Lord Rama's return to Ayodhya.

This narrative was presented in Marathi, and the PM listened to the Hindi version through AI translation.

Noting that it is also the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, he mentioned that the spiritual guru had

stirred the soul of the nation, and the self-confidence he emphasised is now reflected in the form of the grand Ram temple.

It is also the birth anniversary of Jijabai, the mother of the Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, he added.

On this occasion, he remarked that it is natural for him to remember his mother, who continued to chant 'Sita Ram' until the end of her life. Modi mentioned that when he witnesses the occasion, 140 crore Indians will be in his heart, along with the memories of an uncountable number of people whose sole purpose has been the construction of the Ram temple.

Asserting that the masses are also a form of God, he stated that their blessings infuse him with new energy and urged them to share their views and bless him.

Ram Lalla attire in...

From Page 1

So far, I have made over 25,000 dresses, and more orders are pouring in. This demonstrates the unwavering devotion and faith of the people in Ram Lalla," Bhagwat said.

The meticulous work of crafting the wardrobe for Ram Lalla involves a budget of approximately Rs 10,000. This comprehensive set encompasses three intricately designed curtains, a large bedsheet, six smaller bedsheets, six colorful dupattas, and a quilt that bears the essence of devotion and craftsmanship.

Bhagwat explained that each day is dedicated to a specific color for Ram Lalla's attire. White is stitched on Monday, red on Tuesday, green on Wednesday, yellow on Thursday, cream on Friday, blue on Saturday, and pink for Sunday. This adherence to a weekly color code adds a symbolic and spiritual dimension to the attire.

As Ayodhya continues to be a focal point of spiritual and cultural significance, the meticulous preparation of every element associated with the revered deity stands as a testament to the devotion and reverence that permeate this sacred city.

CM inaugurates Krusho Odisha 2024, requests women to play active part in agriculture

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday inaugurated Krusho Odisha-2024, during which he laid foundation stones of the new building of IMAGE to be constructed at a cost of Rs 113 crore and the Rs 28-crore Krushi Udyog Bhawan.

The event's theme this year is 'celebrating women in agriculture'.

Calling upon women to participate in agriculture in large numbers, Patnaik said empowering women not only empowers a family, but benefits the entire society.

He said that through Mission Shakti, women have become partners in all aspects of development including agriculture. Asserting that there are many opportunities for women in the field of agro business, Patnaik said schemes like 'Amara Mukhyamantri Krushi Udyog Yojana', 'Millet Mission', 'Coffee Mission' and others will help women to excel in agriculture business. He appealed to women to take advantage of these schemes.

Noting that his government's KALIA scheme is one of the best plan for farmers in the country, Patnaik said his government has extended the scope of KALIA scholarship through which farmers' children can get a boost for higher education.

Patnaik said agricultural scientists and field-level experts have an important role in the growth of the agricultural sector in the state. The CM welcomed their views and suggestions for the improvement of agriculture and the welfare

of farmers.

The CM also laid the foundation stone for the new campus of IMAGE (Institute on Management of Agricultural Extension) at Siripur here. The campus will be built at an investment of Rs 113 crore and operate as a Center of Excellence in the field of agricultural extension.

Similarly, Krushi Udyog Bhawan is being established at Nayapalli at an investment of Rs 28 crore to encourage farmers in the field of agro business. Patnaik felicitated eminent agricultural scientist Dr Swati Nayak and nearly 17 farmers were awarded under the Mukhyamantri Abhinaba Krushi Yantrapati Saman Yojana. As many as 10 successful women farmers were felicitated for their contribution in the farming sector.

Patnaik also launched the 'SAFAL' portal of Odisha State Cooperative Bank's Agricultural Loan Module. This will enable farmers to get crop loans quickly and conveniently. He also inaugurated an agricultural exhibition organized on the occasion.

Informing about the three-day event, an official said there will be 17 technical sessions in coordination with different state government departments, central government, ICAR institutes, CGIAR institutions, and NGOs along with farmer scientist interactions, seminars, farmer facilitation centre, experience learning centre, display of farm machinery, exhibition stalls on the farm produces, felicitation of awardees for women farmers and women SHGs.

Prez Murmu greets citizens on eve of harvest festivals



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu Friday greeted people on the eve of harvest festivals and wished that these occasions foster the spirit of love and harmony besides making the country more peaceful and prosperous.

According to a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President greeted her fellow citizens on the eve of Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Magh Bihu and Pongal, which fall on January 13, 14 and 15 respectively.

"These festivals are living forms of the country's cultural heritage as well as the symbols of unity in diversity, she said.

"On these occasions, we bathe in holy rivers and undertake charity and other cultural activities. These festivals, celebrated in different manifestations across the country, forge social amity, unity and brotherhood," the president said.

"These agricultural festivals also promote environment conservation, she said.

"We also recognise the hard work of our farmers by celebrating these festivals. May these festivals foster the spirit of love and harmony and contribute in making our country more peaceful and prosperous," Murmu added.

Ram temple consecration celebrations to generate ₹15,000 crore business in city

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
Given religious fervour associated with the consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, markets in Delhi are expected to generate business worth over ₹15,000 crore during the ceremony on January 22 with a huge quantity of flags, special clothes, garlands, lockets, key chains, pictures of ram darbar, diyas, banners and angvstra imprinted with the picture of Bhagwan Ram arriving in local markets from other cities. With less than two weeks to go for the grand event which will be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, temples and

markets associations are readying to celebrate the consecration of Ram Mandir. According to traders, Lighting arrangements are being made in Naya Bazaar, 21 thousand lamps will be lit in Sarojini Nagar Market. Saffron balloons and flags will be put up in Lajpat Nagar market, Sundar Kand will be recited. Special arrangements are being made in Rohini, shopkeepers of Nehru Place will also celebrate Diwali on the day of Pran Pratistha. Special decorations will be done in Chandni Chowk and Sadar Bazaar on 22 January and a procession will be taken out. Stating this here on Friday,

Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) Chairman Brijesh Goyal and President Subhash Khandelwal said the local markets receiving these products include Sadar Bazaar, Chandni Chowk, Maliwada, Kinari Bazaar, Karol Bagh, Gandhi Nagar, Tank Road. Goyal said special programs will be organised on January 22 in more than 100 retail and wholesale markets. Each market association is sharing its programs, business organizations are following each other's ideas. Ahead of the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the demand for saffron flags bearing images of



Lord Ram, Lord Hanuman and the upcoming grand temple has risen manifold. Saffron flags bearing images of Lord Ram and the upcoming Ram

shopkeepers. "Saffron flags carrying images of Lord Ram and the upcoming Ram temple are particularly a big hit among the devotees," he added. There is tremendous enthusiasm in the markets of Delhi on the day of inauguration of Ram Temple and all the market associations are busy in preparations for this. Goyal said special programs will be organised on January 22 in more than 100 retail and wholesale markets. There will be a bhandara in Kashmiri Gate, garlands have been put up in Kamla Nagar, saffron flags have been put up in Khan Market, people of Karol Bagh are also busy in

preparations, Sunderkand will be held in Laxmi Nagar, there will be lighting like Diwali in Dariba Kalan, jewelers will give discounts. There will also be a Ram concert here, there will be Bhandara for everyone, boxes of laddus will be distributed in Bhagirath Palace, the gates will be decorated. Special demand is being seen for Ram temple model, Ram costume, garland, crown, bow, flag, locket, key rings, photo of Ram ji etc. Flags are being sold for ₹60 to ₹300. The price of badge is ₹50 per piece while beautiful models of Ram temple are being sold for ₹200 to ₹1000, he said adding a large number of kurtas and T-

shirts with Ram ji's photo are being sold in the markets. The business of people dealing in earthen lamps, rangoli, sweets, gift items, flower arrangements, orchestra, tents and decorations, electric strings has increased suddenly. Goyal said nanner of any political party and photo of any politician will not be displayed adding there was a consensus among the traders that Lord Ram belongs to everyone and no one is greater than God, hence neither the banner or flag of any political party nor that of any photo of politician will be used in the celebration of the inauguration of Ram Temple.

25 IPS officers transferred

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
In a major reshuffle in Delhi Police, at least 25 IPS officers, including special commissioners Dependra Pathak, HGS Dhaliwal and Ravindra Singh Yadav, and two DANIPS officers were transferred by Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Friday. As per the order issued by the LG's office, Special Commissioner of Police (law and order zone I) Dependra Pathak (1990-batch IPS) has been transferred to the Security unit. Special CP (Crime) Ravindra Singh Yadav (1995-batch IPS) will now be heading the Law and Order Zone I. The order stated that the changes have been done on the basis of the recommendations from the Police Establishment Board. According to the order, Special CP HGS Dhaliwal (1997-batch IPS) has been shifted to Traffic Zone II and Special CP SS Yadav (1997-batch IPS) has been transferred to EOW (Economic Offences Wing). Special CP Madhup Tiwari (1995-batch IPS) will head Law and Order Zone II, while Special CP Sagarpreet Hooda (1997-batch IPS) has been shifted to PCR (communica-



tions) and given an additional charge of Perception Management and Media Cell Division. Special CP (1996-batch IPS) Shalini Singh has been shifted to the Crime unit and Special CP RP Upadhyay (1991-batch IPS) will head the Special Cell. Special CP Virender Singh (1991-batch IPS) has been transferred to the Licensing unit and Special CP K Jagadesan (1998-batch IPS) has been given the charge to head Traffic Zone I. Special CP Chhaya Sharma (1999-batch IPS), who is heading the Training Division, has been given the additional

charge of SPUWAC (Special Police Unit For Women & Children) and SPUNER (Special Police Unit for North-Eastern Region). The Lt Governor has also transferred 16 deputy commissioners of police-rank officers. DCP Usha Rangnani (2011-batch IPS) has been transferred to Airport unit, Ingit Pratap Singh (2011-batch IPS) to Vigilance unit, Pranav Tayal (2011-batch IPS) to Special Branch with additional charge of Tech and PI unit. Sanjay Kumar Sain (2011-batch IPS) to Crime Branch, Manoj C (2011-batch IPS) to Special Cell, Guguloth Amrutha (2011-batch IPS) to EOW, Deotosh Kumar Surendra (2011-batch IPS) to Headquarter II with additional charge of Headquarter III. M Harsha Vardhan (2012-batch IPS) has been transferred to Central district, Devesh Kumar Malha (2012-batch IPS) to New Delhi district, Rohit Meena (2012-batch IPS) to Southwest district and Rakesh Paweriya (2012-batch IPS) to Crime.

Cops step up security, arrest 6 people ahead of Republic Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Ahead of Republic Day celebrations, the Delhi Police has heightened vigil and arrested six people along with 12 pistols and 75 live cartridges in separate operations this week, officials said on Friday. The force has deployed a large number of personnel and is carrying out round-the-clock patrolling and vehicle checking. The special cell of the force has been carrying out drives against arms trafficking ahead of Republic Day celebrations. In a special drive, the special cell three firearms suppliers, including a former state-level athlete, and seized 12 semi-automatic pistols from their possession. "We received secret information that a member of a Madhya Pradesh-based firearms dealer, Pushpendra Singh, would come to Kalindi Kunj Road on January 7 to deliver firearms to his associates," Special Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) HGS Dhaliwal said. The police laid a trap and



arrested Singh and two others -- Naeem and Manish Bhati - who had come to receive the consignments. "We recovered a total of 12 pistols from them. It was revealed that Singh was a state-level athlete and participated in an event at the junior level in 2015," the police officer said. In another operation, the Delhi Police arrested 22-year-old Ehti Sham-ul, a resident of Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh, during a vehicle check near the ITO bridge on Wednesday. He was carrying 45 live cartridges that have been seized, the police said. In a separate operation conducted by the north district police, two criminals were

DDA to open outdoor sports facilities at Roshanara Club

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Delhi Development Authority on Friday said it would open the outdoor sports facilities for lawn tennis, basketball, cricket and mini football at the historic Roshanara Club here from January 13. The move comes months after the century-old club -- the cradle of Indian cricket - was on September 29 sealed by the Delhi Development Authority, which had taken possession of club. The DDA has decided to open the outdoor sports facilities for playing lawn tennis, basketball, cricket and mini football (futsal) ground of the club, to the general public "w.E.F. 9 am from January 13, 2024 at a nominal price on the basis of pay-and-play," the urban body said in a statement. According to DDA, those who are interested to avail the facilities will have to pay a nominal fee on basis of pay and play. For cricket during weekdays, the nominal fee is Rs 11,800 and for weekends, the fee will be Rs 16,500. For Basketball, Rs 100 is fixed for one hour. Similarly, Rs 240 per hour is fixed for Tennis (Synthetic court) and Rs 100 for clay court. Established in 1922, the club is one of the oldest clubs in Delhi. The club is committed to provide a top-notch sports experience so that fitness enthusiasts can indulge in their favourite outdoor activities. Everyone is requested to come and have the best experience in the salubrious ambience of the club, it added. The historic club was established on August 15, 1922. Endowed with natural beauty, green pastures and colonial-era charm, the Roshanara Club, located in north Delhi, has emerged as one of the most prestigious clubs in the country. In November, the Delhi High Court had rejected a plea seeking reopening of the club, noting that it had already directed the authority to devise a scheme to run it.

DDA's Patang Utsav

International Kite Festival

13-14 January, 2024

at **Baansera**
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About 100 acre of degraded landscape of C&D waste, restored and rejuvenated into an open breathable public green space under thick bamboo cover.

INAUGURATION BY

Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena
Hon'ble Lt. Governor, Delhi

on 13th January, 2024

13th January 2024 | 12 PM Onwards
14th January 2024 | 10 AM Onwards

For location, scan QR code

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ Showcasing innovative kites from India and abroad
- ◆ Theme pavilion on history of kites
- ◆ Patang Bazaar
- ◆ Traditional food and handicrafts stalls
- ◆ Cultural performances by folk artists
- ◆ Exclusive activities for kids

Celebrate Lohri, Makar Sankranti, Bihu, Pongal, Maghi and Uttarayani with us

DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Interim Budget on February 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The last session of the 17th Lok Sabha will be held from January 31 to February 9 and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the interim Budget on February 1. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Friday said that the interim Budget Session will commence with President Droupadi Murmu addressing both Houses of Parliament. The President addresses both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha at the beginning of the first Session after each general election and at the beginning of the first session of each year. The President's speech usually highlights the government's past achievements and policy priorities for the upcoming year, providing a broad frame-



work of the government's agenda. "Interim Budget Session 2024, last session of Seventeenth Lok Sabha to be held from 31st January to 9th February, with address of Hon'ble President to the Parliament. On 1st February, Hon'ble FM @sitharaman ji will present the Interim Union Budget," Joshi said in a social media post. The new government, which

will be sworn in after the Lok Sabha polls expected in April-May, will present the full-fledged budget later. Since the term of the 17th Lok Sabha ends on June 16, it is set to be the last session of Parliament before general elections are announced. In 2019, the Lok Sabha polls were announced on March 10 and voting was held in seven phases between April 11 and May 19.

Covid JN.1 sub variant cases cross 1,000 mark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The number of cases of Covid-19 sub-variant JN.1 has crossed 1,000 mark with Uttar Pradesh becoming the latest State to join the list of 16 States and UTs which have detected its presence, according to the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG). In the meantime, India has recorded 609 new cases of Covid, while the number of active cases of the infection has declined to 3,368, the health ministry said on Friday. Three deaths — two in Kerala and one in Karnataka — have been reported in a span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am. Regarding Covid-JN.1 variant, the INSACOG showed Karnataka has reported the highest number of cases at 214, followed by Maharashtra (170), Kerala (154), Andhra



Pradesh (189), Gujarat (76) and Goa (66). Telangana and Rajasthan have recorded 32 JN.1 cases each, Chhattisgarh has recorded 25, Tamil Nadu 22, Delhi 16, Uttar Pradesh 6, Haryana five, Odisha three, West Bengal two and Uttarakhand one, according to the data. A total of 1,013 cases of JN.1 have been detected till now across the 16 states and UTs. The Centre has asked the states and Union territories to maintain a constant vigil amid an uptick in the number of Covid cases and the detection of the JN.1 sub-variant in the coun-

try. The States have been urged to ensure effective compliance of the detailed operational guidelines for the revised surveillance strategy for COVID-19 shared with them by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The states have also been asked to regularly monitor and report district-wise cases of Influenza-like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) from all health facilities for an early detection of a rising trend of cases. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly-increasing spread, but said it poses a "low" global public health risk. The JN.1 sub-variant of the coronavirus was previously classified as a variant of interest (VOI) as part of the BA.2.86 sub-lineage, the parent lineage that is classified as a VOI, the world body said.

NCC has grown into largest uniformed youth body in world, says CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Friday said the National Cadet Corps (NCC) true to its motto of 'Unity and Discipline' has grown from a modest beginning into the largest uniformed youth organisation in the world with over 17 lakh cadets. He lauded the NCC's contribution in inculcating the qualities of discipline, leadership and camaraderie amongst the youth of this country. He made these observations during his visit to the NCC Republic Day Camp 2024 here. General Chauhan also highlighted the commendable efforts of NCC cadets in nation building and their significant contribution in activities such as 'International Yoga Day', 'Har Ghar Tiranga', 'Puneet Sagar Abhiyan' and other similar placed initiatives.

He also mentioned about participation of NCC cadets in sports and adventure activities which have been vital ingredients of NCC curriculum. He was happy to learn about the achievements where NCC cadet teams participated in Subroto Cup and Jawahar Lal Nehru Hockey Championship. He also complimented the NCC cadets for winning Medals in the Mavlankar Shooting Championship. He advised the NCC cadets to strive for excellence and to be optimistic in life not worrying about success or failure.

AAP Rajya Sabha picks Sanjay Sinha, ND Gupta, Maliwal elected unopposed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

AP's Rajya Sabha nominees in Delhi — Sanjay Singh, N D Gupta and Swati Maliwal — have been elected unopposed, officials said on Friday. No candidate from any other party filed nomination for the elections. "All three Rajya Sabha nominees have been elected unopposed. And, certificates have also been issued today," said a senior official in the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer's (CEO) office. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal congratulated the newly elected MPs of the party. "Many congratulations and best wishes to the three leaders of AAP elected to Rajya Sabha. I am confident that you will strongly raise the issues of the common people in Parliament and fight for the rights of the people of Delhi," Kejriwal, who is also the AAP national convener, said in a post on X in Hindi.

The last date for filing nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections was January 9 while the scrutiny of nominations took place on January 10. The last date for the withdrawal of candidature was January 12. Singh, Gupta, and former Delhi Commission for Women chief Maliwal had filed their nominations for the January 19 Rajya Sabha elections here on January 8. AAP had nominated Maliwal as its Rajya Sabha candidate, and renominated Singh and Gupta for a second term in the Upper House of Parliament. The six-year term of Singh, N D Gupta and Sushil Kumar Gupta ends on January 27. Maliwal's name was nominated by the party to replace Sushil Gupta. Singh, who is in jail in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped Delhi excise policy, had arrived at the transport department office amid tight security to file his nomination papers.

Government asks retired employees to share work experience for reforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked retiring and retired employees to share their experience while in service, a move aimed at bringing in future governance reforms, according to an official statement issued on Friday. On the directions of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Department of Pension and Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) had launched an on-line platform entitled "Anubhav portal" in March 2015 for sharing experiences of retiring/retired central government employees while working with the government. It is envisaged that this culture of leaving notes by retirees will become the foundation stone of good governance and administrative reforms in future, the statement said. Government has notified the Anubhav awards scheme 2024, it said. To participate in the scheme, retiring central government employees and pensioners are required to submit their Anubhav write ups, 8 months



prior to retirement and up to one year after their retirement, the statement said. Thereafter, the write-ups will be published after assessment by concerned ministries/departments, it added. The published write-ups will be shortlisted for Anubhav awards and jury certificates. The last date for submission under Anubhav awards scheme 2024 is March 31. Till date, 54 Anubhav awards have been conferred from 2016 to 2023. According to the scheme, all the Anubhav write-ups published on the Anubhav portal, with effect from July 31, 2023 to March 31, 2024 will be considered for five Anubhav awards and 10 jury certi-

icates, the statement said. To encourage the broader participation in the Anubhav awards scheme, 2024, the DoPPW has undertaken an outreach campaign to reach out to every pensioner to submit his experience. In this regard, meetings have been held with nodal officers of ministries/ departments and central armed police forces, it said. "Ministries/departments have been requested to reach out to pensioners for timely submission of Anubhav experiences. Knowledge-sharing sessions on the format of documentation of award-winning nominations have also been convened," the statement said.

Murmu, Modi pay tributes to Swami Vivekananda on birth anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday paid tributes to Swami Vivekananda on his birth anniversary. He was born on January 12, 1863. His birth anniversary is observed as the National Youth Day. In her tributes, President Murmu hoped that his teachings and ideas continue to guide future generations. "I pay my humble tributes to Swami Vivekananda on his birth anniversary. A great spiritual leader and reformer, Swami ji travelled across the country to make Indians aware of their rich cultural heritage," Murmu said in a post on X. Swami Vivekananda inspired the youth to work for nation-building and to serve humanity, she said. "He had spread the great Indian spiritual message to the West. May his teachings and ideas continue to guide future generations," the



President said. Paying tributes to Swami Vivekananda, Prime Minister Modi noted that he established Indian spiritualism and culture on the global stage. Full of energy and dynamism, Swami Vivekananda's ideas and messages will inspire the youth all the time, Modi said

in a post on X. Modi inaugurated the 27th National Youth Festival in Maharashtra's Nashik later on Friday. The festival is organised every year on Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary and saw participation of youths from across the country.

India successfully test fires new Akash NG missile

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



In a boost to self-reliance in developing advanced missile technology, India on Friday successfully test fired the New General Akash (Akash-NG) missile from the integrated test range, Chandipur off the coast Odisha, defence ministry officials said here. The missile has a range of more than 80 km, it was learnt. Giving details, they said the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) test fired at 1030 hours. The flight test was conducted against a high-speed unmanned aerial target at very low altitude and the successful firing of the weapon system has paved the way for its user trials. "During the flight test, the target was successfully intercepted by the weapon system and destroyed," the ministry said in a statement. "It has validated the functioning

of the complete weapon system consisting of the missile with indigenously developed radio frequency seeker, launcher, multi-function radar and command, control and communication system," it said. The system performance was also validated through data captured by a number of radars, telemetry and electro-optical tracking systems, the ministry said. "The flight test was witnessed by senior officials from DRDO, Indian Air Force, Bharat Dynamics Limited and Bharat Electronics Ltd," it said. The Akash-NG system is a

state-of-the-art missile system capable of intercepting high-speed and agile aerial threats. It is learnt to have a range of around 80 km. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented the DRDO, the Indian Air Force and the concerned public sector undertakings for the flight test. The successful development of the system will further enhance the air defence capabilities of the country, he said. Chief of DRDO Samir V Kamat also congratulated the teams associated with the successful flight test of the missile.

Congress launches anthem, slogans for Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With all set to begin with his second leg of Bharat Jodo Yatra from Manipur on Sunday, the Congress on Friday launched the anthem — Saho Mat Daro Mat — and couple of slogans for the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that will cover a total of 6,700 km through 15 States and end in Maharashtra. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi will be leading the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the rechristened second part of the Bharat Jodo Yatra, from Manipur to Mumbai in Maharashtra and will be traversing 6700 kms through 15 states covering around 100 Lok Sabha constituencies. The shared on social media the song and slogan "Nyay ka haq milne tak". In this regard Rahul met representatives of civil society organisations and people's movements for a dialogue on

the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra beginning on January 14 from Imphal in Manipur. The attendees raised issues of 'nyay' (justice) affecting groups across India including Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, women, unemployed youth and unorganised workers. The meeting comes ahead of the yatra that he is leading from Manipur to Maharashtra. Welcoming all the suggestions from members of the civil society organisations, Rahul expressed his determination to fight for 'nyay' through the yatra. The meeting "Dialogue on Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" was organised by a platform of civil society organisations called Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Congress general secretary (Organisation) KC Venugopal and senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh also interacted with the attendees. He will be interacting with several civil society groups and members during his yatra while

travelling in a bus, party leaders said. The Congress has said that this is not an electoral yatra but a political yatra and will highlight the injustice done on people and will listen to the people's problems. The yatra has been timed ahead of the Lok Sabha elections slated later this year and is being seen as the Congress' effort to reach to the people ahead of the general elections. During the day Rahul at a function to mark National Youth Day, said emotional issues are being "misused" politically and attention is being diverted from real issues, in a "betrayal" of the people of the country. He stressed the need to remember the thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, who regarded the energy of the youth the basis of a prosperous country and service of those suffering and the poor as the greatest penance.

3 suspended Congress MPs express regret to Privileges Committee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three Congress members of the Lok Sabha, who had reached the Speaker's podium leading to their suspension from the House, on Friday expressed regret for their behaviour to the privileges committee of the lower House. Congress members Abdul Khaleque, J Jayakumar and Vijaykumar Vasanth were suspended during the Winter Session and the matter was referred to the privileges committee. The three MPs appeared before the committee and expressed regret over their behaviour in the Lok Sabha. "The committee has accepted their expression of regret and decided to recommend to the Speaker to revoke their suspension," a parliament source said.

During the Winter Session of the Parliament, 100 opposition members were suspended from the Lok Sabha for unruly behaviour. While the suspension of 97 members was till the conclusion of the Winter Session, Khaleque, Jayakumar and Vijaykumar, who had reached the presiding officer's chair, were to face action pending the report of the privileges committee. Another source said the committee was likely to submit its report to the Speaker on Monday, paving the way for revocation of their suspension. During the Winter Session, the Opposition members kept up the protests in both Houses of the Parliament demanding a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah on the breach in Parliament security on December 13.

Lakshadweep on Government agenda to develop it as seaweed hub

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Beyond being hailed as a picturesque destination for tourism, Lakshadweep is also on the Government's agenda to turn it into country's seaweed hub, beginning of which has been successfully initiated with a first-ever commercial-scale pilot farming launched in the region last year by a private firm under the guidance of marine research body Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI). Eying its potential, the CMFRI along with Indian Agriculture Council of Research (ICAR) with the help of Niti Aayog has huge plans: A production of about 30,000 tonnes worth Rs 7.5 million in a year for

which a farming demonstration of seaweeds was launched in nine inhabited islands. Rich in nutrients, climate-smart seaweeds are increasingly recognized as a superfood and a valuable resource with various applications, ranging from economic benefits to environmental sustainability. Seaweeds have numerous applications in industries such as food, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics. The recent launch of a commercial-scale pilot seaweed farming project initiated by TSC-Purple Turtle Company in Lakshadweep marks a significant step towards harnessing the immense potential of this island territory, said an official from the CMFRI. It said the indigenous red



algae, Gracilaria edulis and Acanthophora spicifera, are some of the species being

planned in nearly 2500 bamboo rafts which will benefit 100 families belonging to

about ten women self-help groups. In fact, seaweed cultivation has been the pet project

of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who since his days as Chief Minister of Gujarat, had been stressing on its promotion for the fishermen and coastal communities looking to double their income and boost the rural economy. It has been estimated that India can produce one million tonnes of dry seaweed providing employment to nearly 2 lakh fishers with an annual income of Rs 1 lakh per individual. The global demand for seaweed has been expanding steadily. According to Global Market Insights, the commercial seaweed market is expected to surpass USD 95 billion by 2027. Last year, President Droupadi Murmu had met the SHGs

during her visit to the island, appreciating their efforts in seaweed farming. "Traditionally known for its unique tuna fish, beautiful corals, reef fish and other creatures, soon the islands are likely to be known as the seaweed farming hub of the country," Dr K Mohammed Koya, a senior scientist with the CMFRI was quoted by a report. "Our studies revealed that the island has a potential of producing nearly 30,000 tons of dry seaweed per year worth Rs 7.5 million by farming only 1% (200 ha) of its 21,290 hectares of lagoon area (inhabited islands only)," Dr Koya added. The ICAR-CMFRI's involvement in seaweed cultivation dates back to August 2020, ini-

tiated under the National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA) of the ICAR. The Centre has also taken up production of seaweed on an industrial scale for which it has enlisted the support of National Cooperatives Development Corporation and has been roping in Farmers Produce Organisations and co-operatives in order to harness its potential. The Lakshadweep Administration on its part has been actively endorsing government initiatives such as the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) and Mudra Loans to facilitate fisheries sector development, expecting positive outcomes for the seaweed enterprise.

BJP to speed up development work in Rajasthan: Vaishnav

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Friday alleged that the UPA Government had ignored a big state like Rajasthan and said that work will now pick up pace in the state under the "double-engine" BJP government.

He also said that after the BJP formed government at the Centre the budget for development of railways has increased manifold.

After inspecting the ongoing redevelopment works of the Jaipur railway station, Vaishnav said, "As per Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, complete transformation of stations is underway. Our focus is to make the railways world-class."

He also announced that the Ajmer-Delhi Cantt Vande Bharat train will now make a stopover at the Gandhinagar railway station here besides the main Jaipur station.

Vaishnav said that Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma has given instructions for the state chief secretary and the Railways general manager to meet once a month.

Talking to reporters here, the Railways minister said, "Before 2014, a big state like Rajasthan was completely ignored by the then UPA government. Now, redevelopment of 83 stations is being done in Rajasthan and the work will speed up under the double-



engine government."

He later met party workers and officials at the BJP's state headquarters here.

Interacting with reporters, Vaishnav said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme was started in 2023 and under it, work is going on to make more than 1,300 railway stations across the country world-class.

The Modi government had passed a railway budget of Rs 9,500 crore for Rajasthan. Under this, work is going on to make 83 railway stations of the world-class under the Amrit Station Scheme. Out of this work on 25 to 30 railway stations has been completed, the Union minister said.

Vaishnav said that based on Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma's proposal, Sanganer railway station has been included in the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

The work to lay 400 km of new railway line in a year is going on in Rajasthan. For this, 15 km of railway tracks are being laid every day, the minister said.

Vaishnav was on a one-day visit to Jaipur during which he reviewed the progress of the redevelopment work of Jaipur station being done at a cost of Rs 717 crore. He also inspected the Sanganer station.

NIA files charge sheet against four in ISIS Kerala module case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday filed a charge sheet against four members of an ISIS module based in Kerala's Thrissur for their involvement in raising funds to promote the agenda of the global terror network, an official said.

They were identified as Mathilakath Kodayil Ashif alias "Ashif M K", Seyid Nabeel Ahammed alias "Nabeel", Shiyas T alias "Shiyas", and Saheer E P alias "Saheer Turkey".

They have been charged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a spokesperson of the federal agency said.

The official said Ashif and Nabeel were members of the erstwhile National Development Front (NDF) as well as the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), and had committed murders for the PFI, besides participating in its violent agitations.

The duo got into violent extremist and jihadi ideologies through the PFI, followed by activities of the India Fraternity Forum while in Qatar, the official said, adding in Qatar, the two had joined ISIS through other Indian

nationalists who had migrated earlier and joined the terror group in their controlled territories.

The investigation established that in order to raise funds for their eventual migration to ISIS-controlled territories, the accused persons had conspired and established an ISIS module in India with the aim of radicalising and recruiting impressionable youth, the spokesperson said.

The official said the module also sought to raise funds for promoting the ISIS agenda through crimes, including robberies, based on distorted interpretation of the 'ganimah' (war spoils), as envisaged in religious texts.

Ashif and Nabeel recruited Shiyas to the ISIS module and took the oath of allegiance to the ISIS chief.

The module was involved in identifying and attempting to recruit impressionable youth to their ISIS module by propagating pro-ISIS literature, videos and other propaganda material, both in person and online, the official said.

The NIA had arrested Ashif, Nabeel and Shiyas on various dates after registering the case on July 11 under various sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Indian Penal Code.

PM inaugurates Atal Setu, country longest sea bridge

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated the country's longest sea bridge 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Sewri-Nhava Sheva Atal Setu' which connects south Mumbai with the satellite city of Navi Mumbai, and said the completion of the ₹17,840 crore project was the reflection of a changed India.

When he laid the foundation stone of the project (then called Mumbai Trans-Harbour Link (MTHL)) which had faced a lot of roadblocks on December 24, 2016, he had resolved that the country will undergo a change, the PM said at the program near Navi Mumbai, noting that the bridge's construction got completed despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

The six-lane trans-harbour bridge is 21.8 km long with a 16.5 km sea-link. "Earlier People were fed up with mega projects getting stalled and had given up hope that such projects would ever be completed. It was



Modi's guarantee that the country will change," the prime minister further said.

Before 2014, mega scams were a topic of discussion while now mega projects getting completed is a topic of discussion, Modi said, adding, "Dreams are coming true ten years later. The sea bridge is a reflection of 'Viksit Bharat' (developed India)."

The upcoming Navi Mumbai international airport, Mumbai coastal road, AURIC (Aurangabad Industrial City) in central Maharashtra's Marathwada region, the

Mumbai-Delhi Industrial Corridor and the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project will boost Maharashtra's economy in the years to come, the prime minister said.

The Atal Setu was an important part of his government's 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp' (resolve to make India a developed country), he said, adding that not just the country but the whole world was "looking at the bridge."

Each mega project is crucial for the country's development, Modi said, adding, "for us, it is not a day's event or something for publicity in the media."

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given to public at large that Ms. Monica Gogia inherited the property bearing No. 70, Block-B-6, Sadafjung, Residential Scheme, New Delhi by the virtue of WILL dated 07.11.2004 executed by Mrs. Sudesh Bhatta who was owner of the said property vide Conveyance Deed dated 07.04.2021 which was registered as DOC No. 5937 in Sub Registrar VII New Delhi. That Ms. Monica Gogia intend to get the financial assistance from Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If any person(s) / institution has/have any objection(s) or claim(s) with respect to the right, title or interest in the said property may please contact us within 15 days from the date of this notice on the address mentioned herein below, failing which my client(s) shall not be held responsible in any manner whatsoever.

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

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client Mr. Pashendra Kumar Atri intends to purchase Freehold Residential Flat No. 085, Tower-1, 8th Floor, Raheja Sampada/Navodaya, Sector-92, Gurgaon, Haryana from Mr. Anindya Maiti and Mrs. Anusuya Maiti (presently alive) through their Attorney Mrs. Suchismita Ghosh Pal who had lost/misplaced the Original Allotment Letter dated 12.06.2010 and Flat Buyer's Agreement dated 22.06.2010 issued in the name of Mr. Anindya Maiti and Mrs. Anusuya Maiti and my client is mortgaging the same to HDFC BANK Ltd. If anybody including Bank, Financial Institutions, persons, relative has any claim, right, interest whatsoever in the said property shall inform within 7 days to the undersigned with documentary evidence. In the event of no response to this notice, than our client shall presume that title of the said property is unencumbered and clear.

Karnail Singh, Advocate,
K-8, Basement, Jungnaga Extension New Delhi
Contact No. 9811163263 & 9953683363

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender No.: 43-TRD-NDL-2023-24 Dated 11.01.2024
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open e-tender for the under noted work:

1 Name of work with its location: Part-A: Design, supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE modification work in connection with construction of FOB at Adarsh Nagar (Km.8907) for entry from Shalimar Bagh in the section of ADEN/DLI under Sr. DEN-III, Part-B: Provision of 25 KV/230 V, 25 kVA, Auxiliary Transformer in connection with replacement of signalling gears with electronic interlocking at HNZM station.

2 Approx cost of work: Rs. 65,04,213.11/-

3 Earnest Money Deposit: Rs. 1,30,100/-

4 E-Tender Bid Online Submission period: 29.01.2024 (00:00 Hrs.) to 12.02.2024 (15:00 Hrs.)

5 E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time: 12.02.2024 (15:00 hrs.)

6 Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen: www.ireps.gov.in

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 150/24

IIM Ranchi has cancelled the recruitment process for four (04) positions advertised in 2021. For more details and refund claim of application fee, visit <https://iimranchi.ac.in/careers/>

Sd/-
Director, IIM Ranchi

क्यूबिकल फाइनेंशियल सर्विसेज लिमिटेड

31 दिसंबर, 2023 को समाप्त तिमाही के लिए अलेखापरीक्षित वित्तीय परिणामों का विवरण का उद्घरण (लाख रुपये में)

क्र. सं.	विवरण	समाप्ति तिमाही 31-12-2023 (अलेखा-परीक्षित)	समाप्ति तिमाही 31-12-2022 (अलेखा-परीक्षित)	समाप्ति वर्ष 2023 (अलेखा-परीक्षित)
1	परिचालन से कुल आय	37.36	30.2	114.80
2	कर से पूर्व की अवधि के लिए लाभ / (हानि)	9.40	3.28	-19.67
3	कर के बाद की अवधि के लिए शुद्ध लाभ / हानि	13.37	0.66	-28.57
4	द्विचक्र शीयर पूंजी	1303.40	1303.40	1303.40
5	पुनर्मुल्यांकन रिजर्व को छोड़कर रिजर्व	-	-	82.49
6	प्रति शेयर आय (हॉलीपैस) (प्रत्येक रु. 2/-)	0.02	0	-0.04
	द्विचक्र शीयर पूंजी	0.02	0	-0.04

दिनांक: 12.01.2024
स्थान: नई दिल्ली

ICICI Bank Registered Office

Registered Office : ICICI Bank Ltd, 4/10, Mythree Tower, Bormmanahalli Hosur Main Road Bangalore- 560068

PUBLIC NOTICE: Builder Cancellation

This is to bring to your notice that ASHWANI SHARMA/ POOJA (Borrower/s), has availed Home loan facility vide facility agreement number- LBGUR0000472780, located at FLAT NO. 1802, 18TH FLOOR, TOWER AMBROSE, SPORTS HOME, SPORTS CITY, PLOT NO. GH-02, ADJOINING TECHZONE- 4, WEST GREATER NOIDA-201307, UP. The Borrower/s has failed to pay the contractual amount to the builder as per the terms and conditions of the agreement.

The Bank has informed the same to the Borrower through letter dated November 15, 2023, informing that DEVI SAI CONSTRUCTION PVT. LTD. has cancelled the allotment of the above mentioned property. You are therefore requested to resolve this matter with the builder within 7 days from the date of this publication.

Please take further notice that post cancellation of the allotment of the said property ICICI Bank shall not be bound and/or responsible for any other allotment done by the builder.

Dated: January 12, 2024
Place: Delhi/ NCR

Sd/-
For ICICI Bank Limited

APPENDIX IV-A Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. (CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029) ("Secured Creditor"), the physical possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 31.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 74,52,351/- (Rupees Seventy Four Lakh Fifty Two Thousand Three Hundred Fifty One only) pending towards Loan Account No. HLAPPAN00320145, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 10.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 11.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from OMBIR, POONAM DEVI, SEEMA and DEEPAK KUMAR (PROPRIETOR, NIRMAL TRADING CO.).

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 45,80,000/- (Rupees Forty Five Lakh Eighty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 4,58,000/- (Rupees Four Lakh Fifty Eight Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

SHOP NO. 1, MOHALLA KALAN, SITUATED IN LUXMI CLOTH MARKET, NR BUS STAND, SONEPAT, HARYANA- 131001.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date: 10.01.2024
Place: SONEPAT

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

APPENDIX IV-A Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. (CIN: L65922DL2005PLC136029) ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 31.01.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 23,60,747/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Sixty Thousand Seven Hundred Forty Seven only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLJKS00368516, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 10.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 11.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from AMIT KUMAR and SAROJ.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 22,50,000/- (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,25,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Twenty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT ADMEASURING 55 SQ YARDS (SUPER BUILT UP AREA) ON FIRST FLOOR (LHS/NORTH PORTION), SITUATED ON PLOT BEARING NO. A-1/72, TOGETHER WITH PROPORTIONATE UNDIVIDE OWNERSHIP RIGHTS IN THE LAND UNDERNEATH ADMEASURING 100 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 7, SITUATED AT A BLOCK, JAWAHAR PARK, DEVI ROAD, NEW DELHI-110062.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomeloans.com. For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Date: 11.01.2024
Place: NEW DELHI

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	C Balaji/ C Jyothi/ LBBNG00005595205	(As Described in The Loan Document/ Property Document Covering All That Piece and Parcel of Property Bearing Site No.6 (Old No.21) Bearing Bmpm Katha Pid No.2-72-6, Situated at 17th Cross Road, Ward No.2, Jalahalli Muthyalanagar, Bengaluru, Now Within Limits of BBMP, Measuring East To West 30 Feet and North To South 40 Feet Totally Measuring 1200 Square Feet Together With Building Consisting of Ground, First and Second Floor Total Built Up Area Approximately 1650 Square Feet, and Bounded on: North: Road; and South: Private Property Old (Site No.34), New No.16 East: Private Property Old (Site No.20), New No.05 West: Private Property Old (Site No.22); New No.07/ Date of Symbolic Possession On/ 08/01/2024.	31.08.2023 Rs. 85,03,005.00/-	Bangalore

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantor(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

BSES BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi

TENDER NOTICE Date: 13.01.2024

Sealed tenders under two Bid System (Unpriced & Priced) is invited for following job from all bidders.

NIT No.	Brief Tender Description	Cost of Tender Document (₹)	Estimated Cost (₹)	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BR/24-25/RB/CR/AG/1174	REPAIRING OF 1 NO. 20/25 MVA, 66/11 KV, SR.NO. JN22030, VOLTAMP MAKE POWER TRANSFORMER AT HASTAL GRID IN BRPL.	1180/-	1.15 Cr.	2.30 Lakhs	02.02.2024 15:30 HRS	02.02.2024 15:45 HRS

For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/submission of tender documents etc. please visit our website www.bsesdelhi.com

Head (Contracts & Materials)
Regd. Off. - BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019 | Corporate Identification No.: U40109DL2001PLC111527
Telephone No. : +91 11 4910 7235 | Website : www.bsesdelhi.com

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, CENTRAL (R&B) CIRCLE, BHUBANESWAR

Mail id: secbbsr@gmail.com

E-procurement Short Tender Call Notice No. 27 of 2023-24 No. 177 (Estg.) Bhubaneswar the 10th January 2024

The Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar on behalf of the Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bids for one number building work to be received in online bidding, double cover system for construction work as detailed in: <https://tendersorissa.gov.in>. The details of bid documents will be available in the above website from 5.00 P.M of 16.1.2024 to 3.00 P.M of 22.1.2024. The bidders must possess compatible Digital Signature Certificate of Class II or III. Bids received online shall be opened at 5.00 P.M. of 22.1.2024 in the Office of the Chief Construction Engineer, Central (R&B) Circle Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal www.tendersorissa.gov.in. Addendum/Corrigendum, if required, will be available only in the Website.

Sd/- Er. P.K. Mohanty
Chief Construction Engineer
Central (R&B) Circle, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-34005/11/001/2324

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER

P.H. DIVISION, BHANJANAGAR AT CHATRAPUR
Phone - 06811 263909- FAX - 06811 263950 - E-mail - eehchpr@gmail.com

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement

2nd Corrigendum dated 11.01.2024

To Bid Identification No. 66/ 03 / SPH(C) / 2023-24 dt. 19.12.2023

Name of work- Procurement of 100mm to 300mm dia size D.I pipes in connection with laying of pipe line in different ULBs under P.H Division, Bhanjanagar under State Plan BASUDHA for the year 2023-24 & 2024-25

Estimated cost Rs. 172.86 lakh

Period of availability of bid and opening Revised as per Corrigendum

(i)	Period of availability of tender on-line	From 11.00AM of 27.12.2023 to 5.00PM of 06.02.2024
(ii)	Last date & time of seeking clarification	Upto 5.00 P.M. of 01.02.2024
(iii)	Last date & time of bidding on-line	5.00 PM of 06.02.2024
(iv)	Date & time of opening of Bid	1.00 PM of 09.02.2024

All other terms and conditions in the DTCN remains unaltered.

Superintending Engineer
P.H. Division, Bhanjanagar
at Chatrapur

OIPR-13172/11/001/2324

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Pawan Makhija/ Sarla Devi/ Chandni Jain/ Roop Chand/ Amit Kumar Pawan Kumar/ LBJA00002033529	Flat No. B3-2003, 20th Floor, Tower- B3, Emerald Bay, Sector- 104, Village Dhanwapur, Gurgaon/ January 10, 2024	June 17, 2023 Rs. 31,95,837/-	Delhi/ NCR & Jaipur
2.	Pramod Kumar/ Rita Kumari Mandal/ LBDEL00002377877	Flat No. 32, Second Floor, LIG, Sector-34 Pocket 3, Block F9, Rohini, Delhi/ January 10, 2024	September 14, 2023 Rs. 10,68,944/-	Delhi/ NCR & Dhanbad
3.	Jyoti Yadav/ Narendran Yadav/ LBWAR00006238135/ LBWAR00006291288	Flat No. 504, Fifth Floor, Tower-D, Ramsons Kshitij, Village Dhoraka, Near Ayushman Hospital, Sector- 95, Pataudi Road, Sub Tehsil Harsara, Gurgaon/ January 10, 2024	August 11, 2023 Rs. 21,28,608/-	Delhi/ NCR & Bhiwadi
4.	Rakhi Sharma/ Satpal Sharma/ LBND00002388573	Flat No. 10, 2nd Floor, Pocket 2, Block B3, Sector 34, Rohini, Delhi/ January 10, 2024	August 28, 2023 Rs. 8,24,225/-	Delhi/ NCR
5.	Vandna Choudhary/ Ranjit Choudhary/ LBDEL00003227001	DDA LIG, Flat No. 163, Ground Floor, Pocket A 1, Siraspur, Delhi/ January 10, 2024	August 28, 2023 Rs. 10,97,808/-	Delhi/ NCR
6.	Kishor Kumar/ Sanjay Kumar/ LBDEL00002375470	Flat No. 26, First Floor Sector G 8, Pocket 3, Block F 16, Narela Delhi/ January 10, 2024	September 27, 2023 Rs. 24,18,692/-	Delhi/ NCR
7.	Hardeep Singh Johar/ Dambande Kaur/ LBANDUR0000267904	Flat No. 1181,18th Floor, Type-B, Tower1 Ats Triumph, Sector 104 Gurgaon/ January 10, 2024	July 19, 2023 Rs. 1,77,72,057/-	Delhi/ NCR
8.	Mohan Singh/ Neeetu/ LBDEL00003153859	Shop No GF 161, Ground Floor, Gaur City Centre, Plot No C-1A in GH-01, Gaur City 2, Sector 4, Greater Noida, Noida, Uttar Pradesh/ January 11, 2024	September 28, 2023 Rs. 20,96,847/-	Delhi/ NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantor(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

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIED

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Keshav Kumar Thakur, S/o Sh. Gauri Shankar Thakur, R/o H-No. C-1/748, Kh No.- 1885, Phase-4, Bandh Road, Aya Nagar, Delhi-110047, hereby declare that Keshav Kumar Thakur and Keshav Kumar one and the same person. In future I shall be known be as Keshav Kumar Thakur for all purposes.

PD(237)C
I, Daleep S/o Shri Shankar R/o 242/A, Street No-02, Ghundali Gaon Krishna Nagar, Delhi-110051 have changed my name from Daleep to Dalip for all purposes.

PD(237)A



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A long, winding road

Another Yatra to boost Congress' fortunes is set to start, but will it be a seamless effort?

Rahul Gandhi's Nyay Yatra is making headlines even before its start, not so much for its objectives but if it would ever happen. After being denied permission by the Manipur Government to start the Yatra from there, Rahul's path in pursuit of justice has hit a political roadblock. As the Congress gears up to launch the Nyay Yatra on January 14, a cloud of controversy hovers over its kickoff in Manipur. Rahul's journey aims at highlighting issues of economic inequality and social injustice across the country. The initiative is expected to shed light on the Congress party's vision for addressing these challenges and providing "Nyay" or justice to people. If the standoff persists, it could lead to an ugly spat or even a legal battle as Congress has made it clear it will start the Yatra from Manipur, come what may. But this tussle could divert attention from the Yatra's core agenda. A better approach would be to alter the route rather than go on the course of an altercation with the Government.



Besides, the situation in Manipur is still volatile and the Yatra could exacerbate that. With the Nyay Yatra, as with the earlier Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul aims to engage with people from different sections of society, understanding their concerns and amplifying their voices.

The Nyaya Yatra, which translates to "Justice March," is essentially a political campaign organised by the Congress party to focus on economic disparities and social injustices prevailing in various parts of India, with an eye on the upcoming general elections. Congress party obviously is in the election mode and is using this Yatra to test the public mood.

The agenda revolves around inclusive growth and equitable distribution of resources. The issue of unemployment is at the core of Rahul's 'economic despair' pitch. The Yatra also seeks to address issues related to caste, religion and gender-based discrimination, emphasising the need for a more equal society. Given the challenges in the agricultural sector, the Yatra will also bring to light the difficulties faced by farmers and advocate for policies that support their welfare. The Nyay Yatra is expected to highlight the concerns of unemployment among the youth and publicise Congress' strategy to create job opportunities. To be fair to the Gandhi scion, he has all the right to go on a foot march anywhere in the country. He and his party are doing what any political party is supposed to do: Establish a dialogue with people, listen to their concerns and give them space in their election manifesto. Besides, it would be an opportunity for people to know what the party and its leaders have to offer. Rahul's Nyay Yatra has the potential to address critical issues of economic and social justice in India. These are the issues that the BJP must also be concerned about and would do well to launch a 'meet the people' campaign along the lines of Rahul's Yatra.

PICTALK



Cadets perform during the NCC Republic Day Parade 2024 camp, in New Delhi

Myanmar's Junta in retreat

The situation in Myanmar is in a flux. The Three Brotherhood Alliance's offensive continues with its triumphant progress



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

It has been over two months since the Three Brotherhood Alliance (henceforth the Alliance) launched their co-ordinated military offensive against Myanmar's ruling Junta on 27 October 2023. Comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), active in the Kokang Special Region of northern Shan State, the Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in the Shan State, and the Arakan Army (AA), based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part, the Alliance has heaped defeat after defeat on the Sit-Tat, as Myanmar's junta-controlled Army is called.

The Kokang, a media site affiliated with the MNDAA, quoted the latter's chief, Peng Deren, as saying in his New Year's speech that the alliance had seized over 250 military targets and five border crossings with China, and had taken about 1,000 prisoners of war. That he was not exaggerating is clear from the Alliance's capture of the critically important city of Laukkaing, the capital of the Kokang Self-Administered Zone, geographically a part of the northern Shan State, on January 4, 2024, when the junta's forces, who had surrendered, were allowed to withdraw.

The fall of Laukkaing, one of the Sit-Tat's seven Regional Operation Commands (ROCs), to the Alliance, has clearly been the junta's biggest defeat to date. A report by AP's Grant Peck, datelined January 6, 2024, quoted a statement posted by the Alliance, as stating that 2,389 military personnel—including six brigadier-generals—and their family members had surrendered by January 5 (Friday) and had been evacuated to safety. The pressure on the Sit-Tat is all the greater because the Alliance is not fighting alone. According to the website, The Irrawaddy, several resistance organisations including the People's Defence Force (PDF), the armed wing of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), and one of the country's most powerful armed ethnic organisations, the Kachin Independence Army



(KIA), are coordinating with the Alliance's operation.

The Sit-Tat had been struggling on most fronts and had lost control over most parts of Myanmar even before the Alliance had launched its current offensive. A Briefing paper released on September 5, 2022, by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, a group of international experts supporting the country's struggle for democracy, said that the junta had stable control over only 72 out of the country's 330 townships, constituting just 17 per cent of Myanmar's land area. The NUG and ethnic resistance organisations effectively controlled over 52 per cent of Myanmar's territory and 23 per cent was contested.

The offensive had made things worse for the junta, whose effective military strength is far below what appears on paper. According to a piece by Ye Myo Hein (datelined May 4, 2023) featured by the United States Institute of Peace, it was found on the basis of "extensive interviews with military deserters and defectors, analysis of internal military directives and meeting notes, historical records of troop movements and sizes, and casualty counts from primary conflict data and military hospital records," that the Sit-Tat, whose "headcount, which was



THE FALL OF LAUKKAING, ONE OF THE SIT-TAT'S SEVEN REGIONAL OPERATION COMMANDS (ROCs), TO THE ALLIANCE, HAS CLEARLY BEEN THE JUNTA'S BIGGEST DEFEAT TO DATE

widely thought to total 300,000-400,000 before the coup," currently "had a strength of about 150,000 personnel. Roughly 70,000 are combat soldiers. At least 21,000 service members have been lost through casualties, desertion and defection since the coup. At this troop level, the Sit-Tat is barely able to sustain itself as a fighting force, much less a government."

A report by Sui-lee Wee in The New York Times (datelined December 10, 2023), cites the People's Embrace, a group that supports defectors from Myanmar's security forces, as saying that at least 4,500 soldiers had defected. It further states that Myanmar's Defence Services Academy, the country's equivalent of the United States' well-known officers training facility at West Point, "admitted 83 students this year [2023], far below the usual number of about 1,000"—attributing the observation to a lecturer at the academy who declined to be named for lack of authorisation to speak to journalists. The Sit-Tat is finding it increasingly difficult to get recruits and, according to several reports, resorting to abductions to fill its ranks.

The junta has tried to make up for its weakness on the ground by savage air strikes against three targets—the Peoples

Defence Force, the armies of the ethnic minority groups like the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), and one of the country's most powerful armed ethnic organisations, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and the country's civilian population. The severe reverses it has suffered on the ground indicate that the air attacks have had little impact militarily. The attacks on civilians, deliberately aimed at killing and injuring as many people as possible, and ensuring large-scale destruction of property, have clearly been aimed at punishing the people for overwhelmingly opposing the junta. While serving little military purpose, these are causing the people's anger against the generals to soar.

The junta knows that it will be ousted and according to rumours, some generals are seeking peace with the opposition, even at the cost of defenestrating its head and the Sit-Tat's chief, Min Aung Hlaing. According to a report in the Al Jazeera (January 4, 2024), Myanmar's Independence Day celebrations on January 4 this year, lacked their usual pomp, and Hlaing was notably absent from the proceedings.

(The writer is a consultant Editor with The Pioneer, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop the wastage of foodgrains



India is an agricultural country. Agriculture is the main means of livelihood in rural areas. Thanks to the tireless hard work of the farmers, today the country has become self-sufficient in grains. Due to a lack of proper storage and maintenance, the hard work of farmers gets wasted. Today, about 22 percent of the total grain

production in the country i.e. 74 million tonnes is wasted every year.

This issue is exacerbated by the insufficient number of warehouses in rural areas. It is imperative to initiate the construction of new warehouses in villages to fortify the rural economy. The government should proactively make arrangements for proper storage facilities in these regions. Presently, a substantial segment of the country's population grapples with the harsh realities of poverty, starvation, and malnutrition.

Effectively reducing grain wastage is crucial in tackling societal challenges like hunger and malnutrition. Establishing well-equipped rural warehouses not only addresses food wastage but also boosts the local economy, creates jobs for youth, and serves as a catalyst for holistic regional development.

N Mateeni | Mumbai

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DESPICABLE CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY

Sir — It is spine-chilling and shocking to note that Suchana Seth, a celebrity mother, and who is a successful CEO of an AI start-up company in Bengaluru, and who has carved a niche for herself in the professional world, has strangled her four-year-old son to death in a hotel in Goa. It has been revealed that Suchana Seth and her husband were estranged on divorce and that she didn't want her husband to see the kid for whatever reasons and under whatever circumstances, and hence took the extreme decision. Nevertheless, such a crime in a mature society is unthinkable, and horrifying and contradicts the habitude of unconditional love that a mother offers to her child and the unbreakable bond between the two. By murdering her kid for egotistical reasons, the name and fame that Suchana Seth earned in her profession over the years, have broken into smithereens.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

vat banks. Banks have to get their deposits insured by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation and pay a premium for it so that if the bank is in trouble at any moment, people's deposits remain safe. This has been stated in RBI's latest 'Financial Stability Report'. If such a disaster occurs in one bank, it will affect all the banks of the country. That is why while upgrading SBI and HDFC banks, RBI has asked them to increase their buffer amount. The basic question here is that for the last several decades, governments have been advising the general public that money deposited in households or non-productive money is not useful for development in the country. That is why NSS, Kisan Vikas Patra and many savings schemes were started. Is it not necessary that RBI, in its regulatory role, forces these banks to secure the money of the general public by paying a premium? By merely saying that SBI and HDFC are such big banks that there can be no threat to them, RBI is shirking its responsibility.

N Ashraf | Mumbai

CONTROVERSY OVER AYODHYA

Sir — A specific Union minister has accurately asserted that the nature of the Congress remains unchanged. He rightly alleges that the Congress still refers to Lord Ram as an "imaginary figure" rather than acknowledging him as a character in the revered epic Ramayana. If this assertion is not accurate, it would be appreciated if he could enlighten the "anti-Hindu" brigade about the precise period, whether BC or AD, during which Lord Ram ruled over Ayodhya, supported by concrete proof. A true Hindu, like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, seeks to purge negative elements within their religion rather than blindly adhering to it.

Instead of criticizing Jawaharlal Nehru for declining an invitation to attend a ceremony at the Somnath Temple in Gujarat, the BJP should learn from this epitome of secularism. Nehru, enlightened enough not to equate the State with religion, exemplifies how a Prime Minister in a multi-religious diverse nation, with its Constitution endorsing secularism, cannot afford to make a public spectacle of a religion associated with a particular section of the population only.

No amount of congratulations is sufficient for the Congress for daring to swim against the saffron "mainstream" and refusing to attend the Ram Temple inauguration on January 22. Doing so would have amounted to a direct endorsement of the riot-inducing Rath Yatra demanding a Ram temple, the communal invocation of Islamophobia, the barbaric demolition of the Babri Masjid through illegal muscle-flexing, and the resulting deterioration of the erstwhile secular ambience of the country, perhaps irreversibly.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

SECURITY OF DEPOSITORS' FUNDS

Sir — The country's banks insecurely deposited the public's money to provide insurance premiums. While more than half of the deposits in government banks are unsecured, this figure is two-thirds in pri-

Tourism requires goodwill, not arrogance

The Maldives Government should realise that their economy is dependent on tourism and in the business of hospitality, one needs to be humble and not arrogant



UMANG KOHLI

For India, the Indian Ocean Region is a strategic space, since it provides for important trade routes and abundant resources. The Indian Ocean region provides the Indian defence forces with strategic depth and manoeuvrability too, making them capable of striking deep into Pakistan and China with stealth. So, India has long been wary of Chinese presence in the region and in countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives. The strategic importance of these countries can not be underplayed.

The President of Maldives, Mohamed Muizzu, is close to China since he oversaw key infrastructure projects backed by Beijing in Maldives back in the day. Since the time he was elected, there has been a deliberate distancing from India. There are many instances that point to that. The President has been pushing for the withdrawal of 77 Indian troops from Maldives who have been deployed there for humanitarian roles. The government of Maldives is also reviewing 100-plus agreements between the two countries. Of which, it has



already scrapped the hydro-

graphy agreement that allowed India to survey the territorial waters of the island nation. The President made his first foreign trip after being elected to Turkey, and at present, he is in China. This is a stark departure from the past, as traditionally the Presidents of this island nation have visited India on priority. Besides, the Vice President of Maldives has also been playing an active role at the China-sponsored Indian Ocean Forum. All these things have acted as a catalyst for the current controversy and have made Indians feel bitter about the provocative remarks by some of the Maldives ministers. Is the new Maldives government less liberal and more rigid towards India? Given that India is the third biggest trading partner of Maldives and ranks number one when it comes to tourism, the question that arises is if the time

has come when India should leverage its position as a trading partner to set the strategic equation with Maldives right? These are the questions that have emerged out of the recent controversy that started from social media but is now having strategic undertones. These undertones are sure to reverberate in Beijing when President Muizzu is there. He is expecting to meet President Xi of China and a lot of business leaders, requesting them to invest in Maldives' infrastructure. Maldives' government may have exaggerated the India card for negative sentiment votes and needs to understand the importance of synergy with India. Avoiding Chinese influence is crucial for regional strategic balance. Ministers' irresponsible comments rightly led to their suspension. India should focus on Lakshadweep's infrastructure, including fast ships, luxury hotels, and a sustainable ecosystem, outlining a vision plan for flourishing tourism.

Lakshadweep's unparalleled beauty deserves attention, but it must be coupled with a commitment to infrastructure

development. Like Spiti and Kasauli in Himachal, sustaining tourist interest requires addressing water, electricity, and accommodation shortages. Implementing optical fibre network capability would enhance tourism and strategic potential. Encouraging destination weddings in Lakshadweep is a promising idea for affluent families. Maldives' government should realise that their economy is dependent on tourism and in the business of hospitality one needs to be humble and not arrogant. If their ministers keep on being arrogant, they may never recover from this hit on their tourism sector, no matter how many agreements they sign with China for infrastructure development. Maldives should realise that synergy between the two countries in various fields including tourism could further improve ties and also help travellers across the world. Cooperation and collaboration should be the way forward.

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



FIRST COLUMN

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: THE ULTIMATE YOUTH ICON

He was at the forefront of the cultural and spiritual renaissance of the country



RAVI VALLURI

Barely thirty years of age, the young monk from India rose on September 11, 1893, in Chicago, where his baritone voice resonated thus, "Sisters and brothers of America. It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome that you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks of the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of all religions, and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects...."

These were the inspiring words and thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, the intrepid evangelist. Born Narendranath in Calcutta (now Kolkata) on January 12, 1863, he lived barely 39 years. His unwavering surrender to his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa metamorphosed his personality.

The dynamic and resplendent personality of Swami Vivekananda was representative of the socio-political-cultural-religious renaissance that occurred in the second half of 19th century India. Narendranath's early struggle in courting for jobs where he was unsuccessful made him sceptical and scornful of the rigmarole of daily existence.

The clairvoyant saint, Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his obedient devotee were both bound by one cardinal principle. This was service or seva to mankind. Swami Vivekananda, like the Buddha, comes across as a powerful reader of the human mind by adopting a less visceral approach to attend to the muddles and complications confronting humans. He was full of vitality and zest, infinite dynamism, with high prana and energy levels.



He was a man possessed, with little time for rest, to fire the imagination of people in general and the youth in particular. Swami Vivekananda was markedly influenced by the characters of Sita, Savitri, and Damayanti of Hindu mythology. He was inspired by their contribution to Indian womanhood, which he believed was a living embodiment of Universal Motherhood.

Swami Vivekananda, an undaunted seva warrior versed in Vedanta, urged monks to discard the Bhagavad Gita for football, advocating for robust minds and bodies. Well-versed in political ideologies like socialism, anarchism, and nihilism, he influenced Congress youth during the Swadeshi movement. Nehru even drew parallels between Vivekananda's socialism and traditional Vedanta, acknowledging the Swami's impact on the evolving political landscape. The indomitable Swami was at the forefront of the cultural and spiritual renaissance of the country. His mind was unsettled by the prevailing poverty, caste system and the social mores of the times. He dreamt of contemporary India rising from the huts of the impoverished peasantry, cobblers, fishermen and other deprived sections of the society.

However, what really stood out in his personality was the pristine quality of humility. His modesty made him accessible to all. He never appropriated the movement. He was very clear in his mind that after him, several more Vivekanandas would rise to serve the motherland and each one of them would be greater than him. There may be many who would try to appropriate his contribution to India today but would appear weak mimics. Romain Rolland, the renowned philosopher has aptly written, "If this man is not a God-man, who else is?"

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd and is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

India needs a new automobile policy

India needs to discourage the production of large cars, which are not only costly but also have social costs associated with them



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGRAWAL

Then Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh (UPA regime) had once rightly termed SUVs as 'Socially Useless Vehicles' misusing diesel subsidies for the elite rich capable of purchasing these luxury vehicles. Earlier the then Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit had also insisted on discouraging big cars which occupy more parking space and road-traffic share. India needs an altogether new car policy whereby the production of big and costly cars may be practically discouraged. Rather it is time that an improved version of auto-rickshaws with provision of air-conditioning may be introduced in the market so that at least middle-class people may like to switch to such air-conditioned auto-rickshaws which will occupy less road and parking space apart from being eco-friendly because auto-rickshaws are now either electric-charged or having CNG-engines. It may be recalled that once the Mexican Ambassador to India in Delhi preferred a private luxurious auto-rickshaw rather than any luxury car.

It is beyond understanding why and how authorities and certain individuals prefer promoting car manufacture in India as if cars are basic necessities rather than a luxury. There are so many other sectors of use for commoners where production should be increased like laying down metro-network in more and more cities. Car manufacturers then can switch over to producing metro coaches for which efforts should be made to get export orders also. They can also utilise their production capacity for the manufacture of three-wheeler auto-rickshaws including air-conditioners.

All such steps may be taken to discourage the manufacture of costly cars with ex-showroom prices above rupees ten lakhs (inclusive of all taxes) in the country. GST along with cess, road tax, insurance-premium and all other levies may be doubled on costly cars than cars with ex-showroom prices of less than rupees ten lakhs. Categorisation of cars should be based on ex-showroom price rather than length and engine capacity.

There should be a complete ban on loans for cars having ex-showroom prices above rupees ten lakhs. Costlier cars are nothing but status symbols, and status-conscious persons must be paying heavily for their show of status in society. Also, import duty on imported cars should be quite high to discourage the import of foreign-made cars. It is observed that there are tax disputes on paying import duty on imported cars gifted to Indian celebrities who are otherwise extremely rich. Complete import duty should be charged on imported cars received as gifts from foreign elements by Indians.

All government purchases of cars (central, states and their undertakings) may be compulsorily from economy-range of cars. However, exceptions may be for cars used by President, Vice President, Prime Minister and foreign dignitaries coming to India. Telangana government in the year 2021 was criticised, and rightly too, for the purchase of a fleet of 32 new luxury cars priced at rupees 30 lakhs each for use of Additional Collectors.

The then Maharashtra government approved the purchase of six luxury cars each costing rupees 22.83 lakhs with a total expenditure of rupees 1.37 crores for



TOO MANY VARIANTS OF ANY CAR MODEL CONFUSE CUSTOMERS. THERE MAY BE JUST TWO VARIANTS APART FROM THE THIRD WITH AUTOMATIC GEARS

its Education Department during the corona-period in the year 2020 that too with the state facing financial crunch when the government should have concentrated more on fighting corona. It is time that suggested air-conditioned auto-rickshaws replace cars for use in government departments and their undertakings. Cars must not be sold with GST subsidy through Canteen Stores Departments for army personnel. Diesel engines must not be allowed in cars of any category. With petrol and diesel having procurement prices almost the same, diesel is deliberately priced lower because it is used for public transport and goods carriers. It is a misuse of lower-priced diesel to allow it to be used for cars. Supreme Court-appointed Environment Pollution-Prevention-Control committee headed by Bhurelal rightly suggested a total ban on non-CNG cars in Delhi. However odd-even system for plying cars as suggested by the Committee may cause big problems for middle-class people.

Affording rich will purchase more cars separately registered in odd and even numbers to counter the move. With the lack of infrastructure in the public transport system in Delhi, the best way is to remove any type of capping on a number of auto-rickshaws in Delhi in the interest of middle-class people. This will bring an adequate number of auto-rickshaws onto roads negating the usual behavior of auto-drivers in not going according to meter-reading or denying going to required destinations.

Already US giant Ford has also been compelled to discontinue the manufacture of cars due to mounting losses. The idea should be to discourage other foreign car manufacturers in India and also to shut down production so as to save

Indian money going to foreign countries. Instead, every step should be taken to encourage the export of cars manufactured by Indian companies to other countries.

Car-scrapping policy to compulsorily abandon 10-year-old diesel cars and 15-year-old petrol cars in cities like Delhi in the name of curbing pollution is indirectly promoting the car-industry in India. Pollution can and should be controlled by making it mandatory for each registered workshop for every type of vehicle to compulsorily install pollution-checking machines where every vehicle going out of workshops must be given check-out with a pollution certificate.

Rather such pollution-checking-service and certificates should be provided free-of-cost by automobile workshops because it is not very costly. Presently if a vehicle fails in pollution-checking at the pollution-checking-centre, then it has to be first taken to some automobile, and then again driven to the pollution-checking-centre with a cycle repeated till the vehicle passes the pollution-checking test.

It should be made compulsory for each vehicle to be computerised and checked for fitness by authorised workshops of car manufacturers every ten years. Cars failing to test and not fit for necessary modification can be ordered to be scrapped. The present scrapping-policy of compulsorily scrapping cars after 10 years in respect of diesel cars and 15 years for petrol cars is very harmful for those especially senior citizens sparingly using their cars. Different-coloured number plates can be introduced for cars found fit for use after an initial ten years.

Too many variants of any car model confuse customers. There

may be just two variants apart from the third with automatic gears, one basic LX for economy customers and the other Vx with all company-fitted extra accessories and luxuries for affording customers. There is no sense in having too many confusing variants like Lx, Lxi, Vx, and Vxi for the same model. India being the biggest consumer-market amongst nations with free economies, has certainly the power to dictate its consumer-friendly terms for global market leaders collaborating car-manufacture in India.

Union government should induce standardisation of common accessories like tyres and batteries so that the same parts may be used in different models of cars produced by various car manufacturers. It will heavily bring down the cost of consumables through their bumper production in extra large numbers in some limited sizes and specifications. It can be achieved by merging some nearing sizes and specifications. Such guidelines though also mentioned in the auto-policy of the Union government, are never followed in actual practice.

Extra-ordinary heavy prices of car spares provide heavy profit to car manufacturers for which they have monopolies. The study can prove that a new car assembled from new spare parts purchased at maximum-retail-price will cost much more than the price of a new car purchased from a car-dealer at an ex-showroom price. The National Anti-Profitting Committee under the Department of Revenue of Central Government should ensure that car manufacturers may lower the prices of car spares with some reasonable margin only.

(The writer is a Guinness world record holder and an RTI consultant, views are personal)

Economic implications of the abrogation of Article 370

Today, Jammu and Kashmir are on the fast track of development, with private investments flowing in, tourism booming and household income at an all-time high

Recently, the issue of abrogation of Article 370 in the state of Jammu and Kashmir has come into focus again due to the decision of the Supreme Court on the petition filed against the same; that the removal of Article 370 was constitutional and it cannot be reversed. It is noteworthy that on August 6, 2019, Article 370, a special provision for the state of Jammu and Kashmir, was abolished through a parliamentary resolution. Now that more than four years have passed since the abrogation of Article 370, it will also be important to understand what Article 370 meant for the economy and people of Jammu and Kashmir and how auspicious or inauspicious it was for them.



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

If we look at the GDP figures, we find that after the removal of Article 370, there has been an unprecedented increase in the GDP of the state. The Economic Survey of the year 2022-23 of the state of Jammu and Kashmir shows that during the year 2022-23, the GDP growth in the state was 8 per cent, while the growth rate of the entire India was recorded only at 7 per cent. Talking about employment,

the unemployment rate has decreased to 5.2 per cent, while the labour force participation rate has increased to 61.5 per cent, much better than the national average. The annual per capita income in Jammu and Kashmir has increased from Rs 1.2 lakh in 2019-20 to Rs 1.7 lakh in 2022-23. Although the per capita income shows significant growth, it is still below the national average of Rs 1.97 lakh. Although the share of agriculture and industry in GDP has declined by about 2 per cent between 2020-21 and 2022-23, this has been compensated by the services sector, which includes tourism. It is noteworthy that meanwhile, the contribution of the service sector to GDP has increased from 61.6 per

cent to 63.6 per cent. Meaning of abolition of Article 370 Historically, Article 370 was included in the Constitution of India as a short-term provision by Presidential order in 1954. Due to this section, constitutionally, the state of Jammu and Kashmir had a kind of autonomy. Many laws in the state of Jammu and Kashmir were different from the rest of India. For example, many types of taxes were not levied there. Citizens of other parts of India couldn't buy land there. Not only this, the rules of succession there were also different from the rest of India, which were especially against women. At the same time, provisions like reservation, right to education and right to

information were also not applicable there. Despite being a short-term provision, Article 370 could be removed only after nearly 70 years of the Constitution coming into force, due to reasons, which more political. **Development through tourism** After the removal of Article 370, Jammu and Kashmir witnessed a remarkable boost in tourism, signifying improved peace and law enforcement. The Economic Survey of 2022-23 reveals a substantial rise in tourist numbers. In 2021, 1614 foreign and 664163 domestic tourists visited the Kashmir Valley, whereas in 2022, foreign tourists increased to 19947 and domestic tourists to 2288495. The enhanced law

and order situation led to a 3.5 times surge in domestic tourists and a 13 times increase in foreign tourists (excluding Jammu). Including Amarnath pilgrims, a record-breaking 27 lakh tourists visited Kashmir, highlighting the Tourism Department's efforts to promote development through tourism schemes. **Increasing revenue** In any economy, whether it is the economy of a country or a state, apart from GDP and per capita income, economic growth is also reflected in revenue figures. If seen from this perspective, GST increased by 13.54 per cent in the nine months from April 2022 to January 2023. Growth in GST is expected to reach 18.14 per cent by the end of this financial year. Not only this, now the proportion of entities filing GST returns has reached 97 per cent and the number of entities filing returns in 2022-23 has increased by about 29 per cent. **Core sector growth** In the agricultural sector, the production of food grains increased by 12 per cent, the export of vegetables to other states and union territories increased by 30 per cent, the area under fruits increased by 2 per cent, production of fruits increased by 19.4 per cent in the year 2021-22. There was a growth in the export of fresh and dry fruits by 27.12 per cent in 2021-22 and the total exports were estimated at Rs 6369 crore. Similarly, a significant increase has also been recorded

in the production of flowers. Today, Jammu and Kashmir has reached at fifth position in terms of income of agricultural households after Meghalaya, Punjab, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh. Private investment is not only increasing but 208 small mining leases have also been made till the year 2020-21. It is a matter of great joy that today when the whole world is moving towards battery-operated vehicles to avoid global warming and environmental crisis, the large reserves of Lithium recently found in Jammu and Kashmir is giving India a boost in the field of battery manufacturing.

(The writer is a professor, at PGDAV College, University of Delhi, views are personal)

US, British militaries launch retaliatory strikes against Houthis

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US and British militaries bombed more than a dozen sites used by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen on Thursday, in a massive retaliatory strike using warship- and submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles and fighter jets, US officials said. The military targets included air defence and coastal radar sites, drone and missile storage and launching locations, they said. President Joe Biden said the strikes were meant to demonstrate that the US and its allies "will not tolerate" the militant group's ceaseless attacks on the Red Sea. And he said they only made the move after attempts at diplomatic negotiations and careful deliberation.

"These strikes are in direct response to unprecedented Houthi attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea - including the use of anti-ship ballistic missiles for the first time in history," Biden said in a statement. He noted the attacks endangered US personnel and civilian mariners and jeopardized trade, and he added, "I will not hesitate to

direct further measures to protect our people and the free flow of international commerce as necessary."

Associated Press journalists in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, heard four explosions early Friday local time. Two residents of Hodieda, Amin Ali Saleh and Hani Ahmed, said they heard five strong explosions hitting the western port area of the city, which lies on the Red Sea and is the largest port city controlled by the Houthis. Eyewitnesses who spoke with the AP also said they saw strikes in Taiz and Dhamar, cities south of Sanaa.

The strikes marked the first US military response to what has been a persistent campaign of drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since the start of the Israel-Hamas war. And the coordinated military assault comes just a week after the White House and a host of partner nations issued a final warning to the Houthis to cease the attacks or face potential military action. The officials described the strikes on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

'5 die, 6 hurt in US-led strikes'

Dubai (AP): US-led airstrikes on Yemen's Houthi rebels in response to their attacks on Red Sea shipping pulled the world's focus Friday back on the years-long war raging there, even as tensions rise across a Middle East already torn by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The strikes killed at least five people and wounded six, the Houthis said, without elaborating on what was targeted.

As the bombing lit the predawn sky over multiple sites held by the Iranian-backed rebels, Saudi Arabia quickly sought to distance itself from the attacks as it seeks to maintain a delicate détente with Iran and a cease-fire in the Yemen war from which it hopes to finally withdraw. The attack also threatened to ignite a regional conflict over Israel's war on Hamas, which the Biden administration and its allies have been trying to calm for weeks.

Meanwhile, the US Navy acknowledged an attack days earlier on a ship in the far reaches of the Indian Ocean —

an attack that may signal Iran's willingness to strike vessels as part of a wider maritime campaign over the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Tehran on Thursday separately seized another tanker involved in an earlier crisis over America seizing oil targeted by international sanctions on the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. It remained unclear how extensive the damage from the US strikes were, though the Houthis said at least five sites, including airfields, had been attacked.

The United Kingdom described its strikes hitting a site in Bani allegedly used by the Houthis to launch drones and an airfield in Abbs used to launch cruise missiles and drones.

Hussein al-Ezzi, a Houthi official in their Foreign Ministry, acknowledged "a massive aggressive attack by American and British ships, submarines and warplanes."

"America and Britain will undoubtedly have to prepare to pay a heavy price and bear all

the dire consequences of this blatant aggression," al-Ezzi wrote online.

Mohammed Abdul-Salam, the Houthis' chief negotiator and spokesperson, separately described the US and Britain as having "committed foolishness with this treacherous aggression."

"They were wrong if they thought that they would deter Yemen from supporting Palestine and Gaza," he wrote online. Houthi "targeting will continue to affect Israeli ships or those heading to the ports of occupied Palestine," he wrote.

Since the attacks began in November, however, the Houthis have begun targeting vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade.

The Houthis' military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, in a recorded address, said 73 strikes hit five regions of Yemen under their control, killing five and wounding six. He did not elaborate on who was killed.

Joint action in self-defence: Sunak

London (PTI): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Friday that the country's joint air strikes with the US against Houthi military targets in Yemen overnight was a "necessary and proportionate action in self-defence." The US-led strikes are the first against the Houthi militia since it started targeting international shipping in the Red Sea from November 2023. Sunak accused the Iranian-backed group of threatening UK ships as the US Air Force said more than 60 targets at 16 locations used by Houthis in Yemen were struck.

"Despite the repeated warnings from the international community, the Houthis have continued to carry out attacks in the Red Sea, including against UK and US warships just this week," said Sunak. "This cannot stand. The United Kingdom will always stand up for freedom of navigation and the free flow of trade. We have therefore taken limited, necessary and proportionate action in self-defence, alongside the United States

with non-operational support from the Netherlands, Canada and Bahrain against targets tied to these attacks, to degrade Houthi military capabilities and protect global shipping," he said.

"The Royal Navy continues to patrol the Red Sea as part of the multinational Operation Prosperity Guardian to deter further Houthi aggression, and we urge them to cease their attacks and take steps to de-escalate," he added. The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) said RAF typhoons conducted two precision strikes on Houthi sites, including an airfield used to launch drones and missiles over the Red Sea, and another site used to launch attack drones.

"The detailed results of the strikes are being assessed, but early indications are that the Houthis' ability to threaten merchant shipping has taken a blow," the MoD said. A joint statement from the governments of the UK, US, Bahrain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand and

Republic of Korea reiterated that despite strong warnings, the launch of numerous missiles and one-way attack aerial vehicles against ships in the Red Sea, including US and UK vessels, had continued.

The statement noted: "In response to continued illegal, dangerous, and destabilising Houthi attacks against vessels, including commercial shipping, transiting the Red Sea, the armed forces of the United States and United Kingdom, with support from the Netherlands, Canada, Bahrain, and Australia, conducted joint strikes in accordance with the inherent right of individual and collective self-defence, consistent with the UN Charter, against a number of targets in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen."

"These precision strikes were intended to disrupt and degrade the capabilities of the Houthis use to threaten global trade and the lives of international mariners in one of the world's most critical waterways."

Israel defends itself at UN top court against allegations of genocide

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

Accused of committing genocide against Palestinians, Israel insisted at the United Nations' highest court Friday that its war in Gaza was a legitimate defense of its people and said that it was Hamas militants who were guilty of genocide.

Israel described the allegations levelled by South Africa as hypocritical and said that one of the biggest cases ever to come before an international court reflected a world turned upside down. Israeli leaders defend their air and ground offensive in Gaza as a legitimate response to Hamas' October 7 attack, when militants stormed through Israeli communities, killed some 1,200 people and took around 250 hostage.

Israeli legal advisor Tal Becker told a packed auditori-

um at the ornate Palace of Peace in The Hague that the country is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

"In these circumstances, there can hardly be a charge more false and more malevolent than the allegation against Israel of genocide," he added, noting that the horrible suffering of civilians in war was not enough to level that charge.

South African lawyers asked the court Thursday to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in the besieged coastal territory that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians. A decision on that request will probably take weeks, and the full case is likely to last years — and it's unclear if Israel would follow any court orders.

On Friday, Israel focused on the brutality of the October 7 attacks, presenting chilling video and audio to a hushed

audience to highlight what happened that day.

"They tortured children in front of parents and parents in front of children, burned people, including infants alive, and systematically raped and mutilated scores of women, men and children," Becker said.

South Africa's request for an immediate halt to the Gaza fighting, he said, amounts to an attempt to prevent Israel from defending itself against that assault.

Even when acting in self-defence, countries are required by international law to follow the rules of war, and judges must decide if Israel has.

As the two days of hearings ended Friday, ICJ President Joan E Donoghue said the court would rule on the request for urgent measures "as soon as possible." Israel often boycotts international tribunals and UN investigations, saying they are

unfair and biased. But this time, Israeli leaders took the rare step of sending a high-level legal team — a sign of how seriously they regard the case and likely their fear that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing.

Still, Becker dismissed the accusations as crude and attention-seeking.

"We live at a time when words are cheap in an age of social media and identity politics. The temptation to reach for the most outrageous term to vilify and demonize has become, for many, irresistible," he said.

He said charges Israel is facing should be levelled at Hamas.

"If there have been acts that may be characterized as genocidal, then they have been perpetrated against Israel," Becker said.

France's youngest PM holds cabinet meeting

AP ■ PARIS

France's new prime minister, Gabriel Attal, held his first Cabinet meeting on Friday with one motto: "work, work, work," according to President Emmanuel Macron's office.

The newly appointed Attal, 34, the youngest premier in France's history, leads a relatively small team of 14 ministers who gathered at the presidential palace, the Elysee, around Macron. The government will be reinforced within the next 10 days by additional junior ministers, Macron's office said, adding that Attal's smaller government is meant to be more efficient and "get quick results."

French Cabinets usually have between 30 and 40 members, including junior ministers.

Macron's office has said the change of government seeks to reflect a rejuvenated image, with fresh faces joining high-profile ministers who retain their jobs. The interior, finance,



Newly appointed French Government's Spokesperson Prisca Thevenot arrives to attend the weekly cabinet meeting after a cabinet reshuffle, at the Elysee Palace in Paris, on Friday. AP/PTI

defense and justice ministers remain in place. Stéphane Séjourné, 38, has become

France's youngest foreign minister. During the handover ceremony with his predecessor,

Catherine Colonna, Séjourné said on Friday he intends to follow the road map set by Macron "of an independent France in a powerful Europe, able to make its voice heard in a new multilateral world."

Séjourné also is Attal's ex-partner. Attal is France's first openly gay prime minister.

The youngest minister, Marie Lebec, in charge of relations with parliament, is 33.

The French presidency said Macron will speak next week about his top priorities for the year, before Attal makes his general policy speech at parliament. That's expected to be next week.

Under the French political system, the prime minister is appointed by the president, accountable to parliament and in charge of implementing domestic policy, notably economic measures. The president holds substantial powers over foreign policy and European affairs and is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

FAA to audit Boeing Max9 aircraft

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Federal Aviation Administration will begin auditing Boeing's aircraft production and increase oversight of the troubled manufacturer after a panel blew off a jetliner in midflight last week, the last in a string of mishaps for its marquee aircraft. The agency's move comes just a day after it announced an investigation into whether Boeing failed to make sure a fuselage panel that blew off was safe and manufactured to meet the design that regulators approved.



The FAA said on Friday that it would audit Boeing's 737 Max 9 jetliner production line, as well as the company's parts suppliers "to evaluate Boeing's compliance with its approved quality procedures." The FAA statement said it also would look into safety risks from the agency delegating inspection authority to company employees, and will consider moving those functions to an independent third party. It is time to re-examine the delegation of

authority and assess any associated safety risks," FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said in the statement. "The grounding of the 737-9 and the multiple production-related issues identified in recent years require us to look at every option to reduce risk." The agency also will increase monitoring of 737-Max incidents that happen while the plane is in use. Boeing said on Thursday it would cooperate with the FAA investigation, which is focusing on plugs used to fill spots for extra doors when

those exits are not required for safety reasons on Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners. The FAA investigation is focusing on plugs used to fill spots for extra doors when those exits are not required for safety reasons on Boeing 737 Max 9 jetliners. One of two plugs on an Alaska Airlines jetliner blew out shortly after the plane took off from Portland, Oregon, a week ago, leaving a hole in the plane. The cabin lost pressure and the plane was forced to return to Portland to make an emergency landing.

Taiwan prepares to elect president

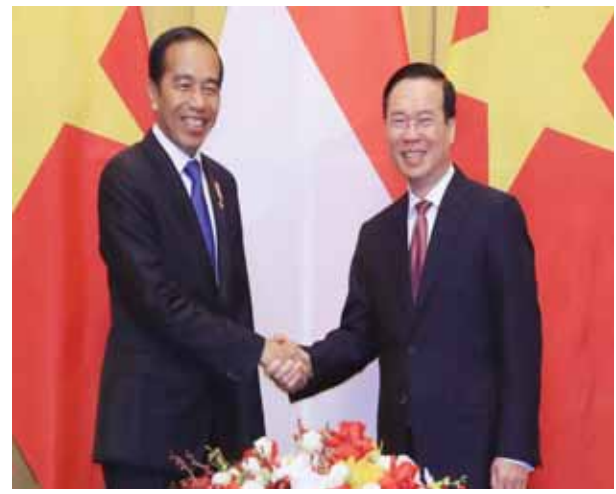
AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan is preparing to elect a president and legislature on Saturday in what many see as a test of control with China, which claims the self-governing island republic as its own territory to be unified with force if necessary. The presidential race is tight, and both China and Taiwan's key ally, the US, are weighing in on political and economic issues they hope will sway voters.

The election pits Vice President Lai Ching-te, representing the Democratic Progressive Party, against Hou Yu-ih of the main opposition Nationalist Party, and former mayor of the capital Taipei, Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party.

The US strongly backs Taiwan against China's military threats and the Biden administration plans to send an unofficial delegation comprised of former senior officials to the island shortly after the polls.

That move could upset



Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong, right, and Indonesian President Joko Widodo shake hands before a meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam Friday. AP/PTI

efforts to repair ties between Beijing and Washington that plunged in recent years over trade, COVID-19, Washington's support for Ukraine, which China has refused to condemn at the United Nations. Along with

the tensions with China, much in the Taiwan election hinges on domestic issues, particularly over an economy that was estimated to have only grown by 1.4 per cent last year.

That partly reflects inevitable cycles in demand for computer chips and other exports

from the high-tech, heavily trade-dependent manufacturing base, and a slowing of the Chinese economy. But longer-term challenges such as housing affordability, a yawning gap between the rich and poor, and unemployment are especially prominent.

Candidates will make their final appeals on Friday with campaigning to end at midnight. The candidate with the most votes wins, with no runoff. The legislative races are for districts and at-large seats.

While dinner table issues gather the most attention, China remains the one subject that can be ignored but not avoided. The two sides have no official relations but are linked by trade and investment, with an estimated 1 million Taiwanese spending at least part of the year on the mainland for work, study or recreation. Meanwhile, China has continued flying fighter planes and sailing warships near the island to put teeth behind its pledge to blockade, intimidate or invade.

2 Indian-origin entrepreneurs to contest Mayor of London election

London (PTI): The election for the Mayor of London is scheduled for May 2 and the battleground of candidates challenging the incumbent, Sadiq Khan, is gradually expanding with two Indian-origin entrepreneurs in the race as independent candidates. While businessman Tarun Ghulati, 63, had launched his mayoral campaign during a visit to India at the end of last year, property entrepreneur Shyam Bhatia, 62, is the latest entrant to the contest making up nearly a dozen candidates. Ghulati's election tagline is "trust and growth" and Batra has gone for "ambassador of hope".

"There is a growing belief that the current incumbent has lost support and another major party contender is considered very uninspiring by the voters," Ghulati told PTI.

"I am standing as an independent candidate to become the next Mayor of London because I want to encourage the free flow of ideas and policies without party ideology and bias. I am getting ideas from the people and will accordingly work for the people involving them where feasible in the decision-making process," he said.

Making London safe for all, getting London moving again, levelling up for Londoners, strengthening London's communities, and championing London are among the top priorities for the city the Delhi-born strategic advisor has called home for over 20 years.

"London is ranked the best city in the world and is a proud global city. As Mayor of London, I am determined to do whatever it takes to ensure that London, my chosen home, retains its place as the leading global city and that all Londoners feel safe, secure and empowered with opportunities for growth," he said.

Storm forecast cancels flights and classes across US

AP ■ PORTLAND

Tyrone McDougald wore a long-eared, leopard-style hat as he sorted through racks of warm clothes at a homeless service centre in Portland, Oregon. He was already wearing multiple layers, but with no roof of his own, he grabbed two more coats to help him face a bitter cold snap arriving in the Northwest.

"I'm hoping that I can get in a shelter," he said. "That would relieve a lot of the burden." An approaching storm was expected to deliver snow to Portland, a city more accustomed to winter rain, by Saturday.

It's one of a number of sprawling storms bringing everything from what the National Weather Service called "life-threatening wind chills" in South Dakota to the

possibility of tornadoes in the South.

School and flights were cancelled in advance in parts of the South and Midwest. Republican candidates campaigning ahead of Monday's Iowa caucuses were contending with a blizzard warning covering most of the state, and Nikki Haley's campaign cancelled three Friday events and said it would be hosting "telephone town halls."

Advocates were particularly worried about homeless people as well as older residents who might be snowed or iced in, especially in the Pacific Northwest, where the winters are typically mild.

In one hour Thursday, during the lunch service at Blanchet House, a homeless services nonprofit in Portland, about 165 warm clothing items were claimed — including the

coats McDougald grabbed. Julie Showers, the nonprofit's spokesperson, said people were desperate for dry clothes and shoes after days of cold rain.

"We worry about frostbite, hypothermia," she said. "There are a lot of people experiencing homelessness in Portland that are in mental health crisis ... and slowly become hypothermic laying on the street because they don't understand how cold it's getting."

McDougald said he's spent the past two years unsheltered: "I'm hoping I don't have to do another whole winter out here." In the Chicago area, which could see more than half a foot (15 cm) of snow by Saturday, advocates also worried for the growing population of migrants sent up from the US-Mexico border.

Hundreds are staying in eight parked "warming buses" to avoid sleeping outside while they await space in city-run shelters.

Among them was Angelo Travieso, a Venezuelan bused up from Texas. He wore a light jacket and sandals with socks.

"I slept sitting because there is almost no space left," he said. "The buses are also small and you practically have to stay inside because of the heating, because it is deadly cold outside."

In Portland and Seattle, temperature highs were expected to hover around the mid to upper 20s (0 to -3.3 Celsius) and lows in the low 20s and teens (about -5 C to -7.7 C) from Friday through at least Monday. The homelessness agency in King County, home to Seattle, activated its highest tier of severe weather operations through at least Tuesday,

working with cities to open 24/7 shelters and with transit partners to provide transportation to shelters. Seattle City Hall served as a shelter for up to 40 people Thursday night.

Multnomah County, home to Portland, provided outreach groups earlier in the week with clothing and cold weather supplies to distribute to people living outside, including wool blankets, tarps, tents and sleeping bags, said spokesperson Denis Theriault.

Cold spells in the past have been deadly for Portland's homeless population. Two people died of cold in 2022, an annual county report on homeless deaths found. That was down from eight deaths from hypothermia in 2021 — the same year four people also died of overheating during the unprecedented and devastating "heat dome" that saw temper-

atures soar to an all-time high of 116 F (46.7 C) in Portland and smashed heat records across the region. The heat wave killed hundreds across Oregon, Washington and British Columbia.

Portland winters do not include regular or extended periods of snow, so the city's transportation department only salts or de-ices about a third of the street grid.

Past snow and ice storms have effectively paralysed the city, including in 2017 and in 2021, when freezing rain coated roads in dangerous ice and many ice-laden trees snapped and fell on power lines, cutting power to hundreds of thousands of people. Last February, nearly 11 inches (28 centimeters) fell in what amounted to the second snowiest day in the city's history, taking drivers by surprise and stranding them on

freeways for hours.

Norman Chusid, owner of the Ankeny Hardware in southeast Portland, said he had to keep his store open two hours past closing on Wednesday to serve all the customers. The store has been selling 3 to 5 tons of ice melt every day, he said.

"Snow shovels have been going like crazy," he said.

At higher elevations, heavy snow, high winds and white-out conditions were expected to envelop the Cascade Mountains and make travel "very difficult to impossible," the weather service said. Fresh snow, measured in multiple feet in certain areas, already blanketed the Cascades earlier in the week.

An avalanche at a ski resort near Lake Tahoe in California on Wednesday swept up four people, killing one.

UK PM Rishi Sunak makes surprise visit to Ukraine

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Friday travelled to the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on a surprise visit after unveiling GBP 2.5 billion for 2024-25 in military aid to the country locked in conflict with Russia, an increase of GBP 200 million on the previous two years.

Sunak met President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to sign a historic UK-Ukraine Agreement on Security Cooperation, intended as the first step in developing what Downing Street described as an "unshakable 100-year partnership" with Ukraine.

The pact commits the UK to consult with Ukraine in the event it is ever attacked by Russia again, and to provide "swift and sustained" assistance for their defence. "I am here today with one message: the UK will also not falter. We will stand with Ukraine, in their darkest hours and in the better times to come," said Sunak in Kyiv.

"For two years, Ukraine has fought with great courage to repel a brutal Russian invasion. They are still fighting, unflinching in their determination to defend their country and defend the principles of free-



dom and democracy," said Sunak from Kyiv.

"The UK is already one of Ukraine's closest partners, because we recognise their security is our security. Today we are going further — increasing our military aid, delivering thousands of cutting-edge drones, and signing a historic new security agreement to provide Ukraine with the assurances it needs for the long term," he added.

Of the GBP 2.5 billion earmarked for 2024-25, at least GBP 200 million will be spent on a major push to rapidly procure and produce thousands of military drones for Ukraine,

including surveillance, long-range strike and sea drones.

The technology will give Ukraine cutting edge, battle-tested capabilities to defend their citizens and target the invading Russian forces on land and sea, the British government said.

Most of the drones are expected to be manufactured in the UK, with the Ministry of Defence working with international partners to significantly scale up the number of drones provided for Ukraine's defence.

During his visit to Kyiv, Sunak met emergency workers responding to the aftermath of Russian airstrikes. According to

10 Downing Street, the UK PM announced a further GBP 18 million in aid for Ukraine, building on almost GBP 340 million already provided. Some of that funding will support organisations like the UN and Red Cross to provide humanitarian aid on the frontline, and GBP 8 million will go to fortify Ukraine's energy infrastructure against further Russian attacks.

"As part of efforts to cement the close bond between our two nations and Ukraine's place at the heart of Europe, the UK will also provide additional funding and resources for English language training in Ukraine," Downing Street said. The Ukrainian government has proposed legislation to promote English in Ukraine, boosting economic competitiveness and diplomatic ties. The latest announcement will see the UK fund online English lessons for Ukrainians of all ages, as well as providing resources and teacher training.

The UK government said Friday's visit builds on months of direct diplomacy between Sunak and Zelenskyy, as well as a world-leading record of UK military, diplomatic and economic support for Ukraine during the ongoing conflict with Russia.

Myanmar military agree to immediate cease-fire

PTI ■ BEIJING

Beijing (AP): Myanmar's military has reached a cease-fire agreement with an alliance of ethnic minority guerrilla groups it has been battling in the country's northeast, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Friday. Myanmar's military government confirmed the development. The agreement was brokered at talks mediated by China on Wednesday and Thursday in Kunming, a Chinese provincial capital about 400 kilometers (250 miles) from the border with Myanmar, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said.

"China hopes the relevant parties in Myanmar can conscientiously implement the agreement, exercise maximum restraint toward each other and solve the issues through dialogue and consultations," she said at a daily briefing in Beijing. Maj Gen Zaw Min Tun, the spokesperson of Myanmar's ruling military council, said in an audio note to journalists that the two sides had met in Kunming and after talks, agreed on a temporary cease-fire agreement.

"We will continue discussions We will continue to work for the strengthening of the cease-fire," Zaw Min Tun said. A previous cease-fire pact reached in mid-December was not honoured by either side.

Chinese spokesperson Mao said the military and the Three Brotherhood Alliance — which comprises the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army — agreed to an immediate cease-fire, the disengagement of military personnel and the settlement of their disputes through negotiations.

"The two sides promised not to undermine the safety of Chinese people living in the border area and Chinese projects and personnel in Myanmar," she said. Independent Myanmar media and foreign media with Myanmar-language news services reported similar details, but there was no immediate direct word from the alliance about the cease-fire development. The media reports said the military agreed to stop aerial bombing and artillery shelling in northern Shan state, which abuts China, and the Three Brotherhood Alliance agreed to halt its offensive and not seek to capture more towns and army encampments.

China denies US think-tank report on research ships

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Friday denied an American think-tank report alleging that its vast fleet of "scientific research" ships is collecting data from the oceans, including in the Indian Ocean, for military purposes, especially for submarine operations, saying that the Chinese vessels operations are in line with the UN Convention on Law of the Seas.

Separately, China's official media accused the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) of releasing the report coinciding with the current visit of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, who reportedly plans to permit the Chinese research ships after a recent ban by Sri Lanka following concerns expressed by India. "I do not know what is the basis of this report you mentioned and why (you) reached such a conclusion," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing when asked for her reaction.

"The scientific activities of the Chinese side are totally in line with UNCLOS (UN Convention on Law of the Seas) and we have made contributions to the marine and scientific area," she said.

An editorial in the state-run Global Times on the CSIS report said: "The timing of this report is delicate, coinciding with the visit of Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu to China, while another South Asian country, Sri Lanka, recently announced the suspension of foreign research vessels including those from China entering its waters under India's pressure."

Maldives and China signed 20 agreements during President Muizzu's five-day visit during which he held talks with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping. "The CSIS report rightly comes at a time when some countries need to manufacture a "China threat" narrative in the Indian Ocean region and provides them with ammunition," the Global Times said.

India has been flagging concerns over the repeated voyages of the huge Chinese research vessels to the Indian Ocean and docking in Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, which China acquired on a 99-year lease as a debt swap. Following this, Sri Lanka

China's exports rise 2.3% in Dec amid uneven recovery

PTI ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong (AP): China's exports grew slightly for a second consecutive month in December even as deflationary pressures continue, according to official data released Friday, underscoring an uneven recovery in 2023. Customs data showed that exports in December rose by 2.3% compared to the same period last year to \$303.6 billion in a sign that demand may be picking up after months of decline earlier in the year.

Imports also rose by 0.2% compared to the same time last year to \$228.2 billion, up from a 0.6% decline in November. China's total trade surplus for December was \$75.3 billion, up 10.1% from \$68.3 billion in November.

"The continued sluggish external demand is still the main factor restricting export growth," said deputy director Wang Lingjun at a news conference Friday. "Factors such as protectionism and unilateralism also have an impact on exports, which will still face many difficulties."

Deflationary pressures persisted in China's economy, with consumer prices in December declining 0.3%, a third consecutive month in decline, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed Friday. China's producer price index for December — which measures prices that factories charge wholesalers — fell 2.7% in a 15th straight month of decline.

last month clamped a one-year ban on the research vessels, much to the chagrin of Beijing.

Recent reports from Sri Lankan media said Muizzu, regarded as a pro-China leader, plans to permit Chinese research vessels to dock in Maldives port. The CSIS report said China is undertaking sweeping efforts to transform its navy into a formidable "blue water" force capable of projecting power far beyond its shores.

As the People's Liberation Army (PLA) ventures into less familiar waters like the Indian Ocean, Beijing has sought to deepen its understanding of the maritime operating environment by studying water conditions, currents, and the seafloor. "To survey the Earth's oceans, China has developed the world's largest fleet of civilian research vessels. While these ships support scientific and commercial objectives, they are also being used to

advance Beijing's strategic ambitions," the report said.

The study reports satellite imagery to reveal how China is quietly using submarine diplomacy to deepen its influence along the Bay of Bengal.

The data collected by China's civilian research fleet, which is outfitted with cutting-edge measuring and monitoring equipment, can help fill in major gaps in the PLA Navy's underwater capabilities, the report said. The underwater domain is critical to China's interests in the Indian Ocean.

Chinese submarines could be called on to support a wide range of missions, ranging from intelligence collection to nuclear deterrence patrols, it said. In a crisis, Chinese attack submarines operating there could complicate attempts by US or allied forces to interdict China's supply lines or traverse the region to reach the Pacific.

Parties in Pak demand timely polls

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A week after Pakistan's Senate passed a resolution to postpone the February 8 general elections, a similar resolution was submitted to the upper house of the Parliament while two prominent parties unanimously filed a requisition for the Senate session for timely polls. Moving the resolution, independent Senator Hidayat Ullah on Friday called for postponing the February 8 general elections given the "security challenges."

"It said the upper house 'calls upon the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and the Supreme Court' to consider holding peaceful elections and postpone the polls for three months in the view of the security challenges," Geo News reported. On Thursday, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) unanimously filed a requisition for the Senate session for timely polls.

Quoting sources, The News International newspaper said that PTI Senator Ali Zafar took signatures from other members on a requisition demanding a discussion on the issue of general elections. "Besides, PPP and Jamaat-e-Islami senators have also supported the move," it added.

The requisition contends that Pakistan cannot afford political uncertainty; therefore, to strengthen the democratic process and under Article 224 (2) of the Constitution, the general elections should have been held within 90 days. There were only 14 members out of the 100-strong Senate when on January 5 the resolution, moved by independent lawmaker Senator Dilawar Khan, to delay the polls was passed in the light of extreme weather in hilly areas and the deteriorating

'Bat symbol' case: CJ says SC 'won't take over' election commission's job

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on Friday said that the Supreme Court would not "take over" the job of the election commission, as it took up the poll body's petition challenging the Peshawar High Court's decision to restore jailed former premier Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's 'bat' election symbol.

A three-member bench — comprising CJP Isa, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, and Justice Musarrat Hilali — heard the case. Responding to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) counsel Hamid Khan's arguments, Justice Isa noted that there was a "very clear line of demarcation" between the functions of a constitutional and a statutory body. He remarked, "If they're (ECP)

doing their job, we won't take over their job [or] how to do it [or] how better to do it."

At one point during the hearing, CJP Isa observed, "The election commission is not just a quasi-judicial body. It is a constitutional body."

"It has two functions; one [is] regulating the affairs of political parties, which is an ongoing exercise, and the other is free and fair elections," he added. On December 22, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) decided against letting PTI retain its electoral symbol for the general elections, saying that it had failed to hold intra-party polls as per its prevailing constitution and election laws. Subsequently, the PTI approached the Peshawar High Court (PHC) against the ECP order on Dec 26 and a single-

member bench restored the electoral symbol of the party till January 9 and directed that the case be fixed before a divisional bench. 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 polls.

It also directed the electoral body to return the PTI party its iconic cricket 'bat' electoral symbol back and upload the party's certificate of internal elections on its website, Dawn newspaper reported. During Friday's hearing, Hamid appeared as the PTI counsel while Makhdoom Ali Khan was present as the ECP lawyer. The hearing was later adjourned till 1:30 pm.

N Korea to welcome Russian tourists

AP ■ SEOUL

Russian tourists reportedly going on a ski trip to North Korea will be the first international travelers to visit the country since its borders closed in 2020 amid the global pandemic lockdown. The report, published Wednesday by the Russian state-run Tass news agency, underscores deepening cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. It also follows the meeting last September between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin at a cosmopolitan in Russia's Far East.

Tass did not specify a time-frame but the report brought some surprise to Asia observers who had expected the first post-pandemic tourists to North Korea to come from China, the North's biggest diplomatic ally and economic pipeline. According to Tass, an

unspecified number of tourists from Russia's far eastern region of Primorye will first fly to the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, where they will visit monuments such as the "Tower of Juche Idea," named after the North's guiding philosophy of "juche" or self-reliance.

The tourists will then travel on to the North's Masik Pass on the east coast, where the country's most modern ski resort is located, Tass said. It said the trip was arranged under an agreement reached between Oleg Kozhemyako, governor of the Primorye region, and North Korean authorities.

Kozhemyako traveled to Pyongyang in December for talks on boosting economic ties as part of a flurry of bilateral exchanges since the Kim-Putin summit. Ahead of the trip, he told Russian media he expected to discuss tourism, agriculture and trade cooperation.

The Kim-Putin summit deepened outside belief that North Korea is supplying conventional arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine, in return for high-tech Russian weapons technologies. The White House said last week that it has evidence Russia fired additional North Korea-provided missiles at Ukraine. The United States, South Korea, Japan and others issued a joint statement condemning the missiles transfer. North Korea and Russia are locked in separate confrontations with the United States and its allies — North Korea for its advancing nuclear program and Russia for its protracted war with Ukraine.

North Korea has been slowly easing pandemic-era curbs and opening its international borders as part of its efforts to revive its economy devastated by the lockdown and persistent U.S.-led sanctions. Its reputation also suf-

fered a blow in August 2022, when Pyongyang made a highly dubious claim that it had beaten a domestic COVID-19 outbreak.

"For North Korea, tourism is the easiest way to earn foreign currency under the international sanctions regime," said Koh Yu-hwan, former president of Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

Koh said he expects Pyongyang to eventually also open North Korea to Chinese tourists. Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul, said "visitors from Russia are unlikely to be as financially lucrative for North Korea as the return of more numerous visitors from China."

"But the domestic political risk is relatively low while providing symbolism of revitalized relations with Moscow in line with Pyongyang's current geopolitical narrative," he added.

US Air Force ends search, recovery ops for Osprey

PTI ■ TOKYO

Tokyo (AP): The US Air Force on Friday announced the end of its more than a month long search and recovery operation at the site of a CV-22B Osprey crash that occurred off the southern Japanese coast in late November, expressing regret at not being able to find the last of the eight crew members killed. Air Force said it would now focus on finding the cause of the November 29 crash off the coast of Yakushima Island that left eight members of the Air Force Special Operations Command dead. The Osprey was on a routine training flight to the southern island of Okinawa. Divers located the remains of seven crew members in the weeks following the crash, but the body of Maj. Eric Spendlove, a medical operations flight commander, has not been found.

Japan launches satellite to watch for N Korean missiles

AP ■ TOKYO

Japan successfully launched a rocket carrying a government intelligence-gathering satellite Friday on a mission to watch movements at military sites in North Korea and to improve responses to natural disasters. The H2A rocket, launched by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd., lifted off from the Tanegashima Space Center in southwestern Japan, carrying the optical satellite as part of Tokyo's reconnaissance effort to rapidly build up its military capability.

The government's Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center and MHI declared the launch a success, saying that the Optical-8 satellite was successfully separated from the rocket and entered its planned orbit. The optical satellite can capture detailed images,

though its capability is limited in severe weather. Japan began the intelligence-gathering satellite program after a North Korean missile flew over Japan in 1998. Japan aims to set up a network of 10 satellites, including those carrying radars that can operate at night or in severe weather, to spot and provide early warning for possible missile launches.

Applauding the successful launch, Hiroki Yasuda, a senior official at the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center, told reporters that the Optical-8 is crucial to Japan's information-gathering capability. "With the security environment surrounding Japan becoming increasingly severe and uncertain and growing natural disaster risks, intelligence satellites are crucial for foreign affairs, defense and security as well as disaster response purposes,"



Yasuda said. "We need to steadily reinforce our intelligence capability." It will take several months for the satellite to start supplying information, Yasuda said.

Yasuda said the existing network of intelligence satellites, including those used

beyond operational life, captured images of quake-hit western Japan Japan for disaster response purposes. The New Year's Day temblors killed 215 people and caused extensive damages to buildings, roads and lifeline. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government, under its national security strategy adopted in 2022, is pushing to deploy long-range U.S.-made Tomahawk and other cruise missiles as early as next year to build up more strike capability, breaking from the country's exclusively self-defense-only postwar principle, citing rapid weapons advancement in China and North Korea. Friday's liftoff is being closely watched ahead of a planned launch of a new flagship H3 rocket developed by MHI and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency as the successor to the H2A. The first test flight of the new rocket failed last year. Masayuki Eguchi, MHI executive in charge of the defense and space segment, said Friday's successful launch boosts encouragement and motivation for a successful launch of the H3, now planned for Feb 15.

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Under Graduate Degree	- B.A.
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	- M.B.A
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Admission is Open for academic session January-2024 batch and LAST DATE to apply online is 29th Feb 2024. All Courses are approved under entitled category by UGC-DEB. New Delhi vide letter no. F.No. 39-2/2023 (DEB-II) dt. 17, August, 2023. For any enquiry, please contact the Directorate office via email, contact-us@gndu-online.in or via phone@ +91727200818 / 7740083403; 0183-2623520. Note: Any Correspondence/Addendum to the Admission Notice may be issued, if required, as per rules & regulations of the University, will be published on the Directorate website only.

DEAN ACADEMIC AFFAIRS
Director
Directorate of Online Studies
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

NA/12/211/2023/31239 Dated CHD :- 1/8/2024

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

SSA-12020/8/2022-MIS-SSA/1407205/2024 Dated 12.01.2024
Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites bids vide : GEM/2024/B/4471826
Dated : 11-01-2024 for Supply Installation and Maintenance of IT equipment for Vidya Samiksha Kendra through GeM portal.
Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit the bid in GeM portal accordingly. The bid is also available in SSA website : <https://ssa.assam.gov.in>

Sd/-Executive Director,
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19
Janasanyog/CF/484/23/13-Jan-24

NOTICE INVITING REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

SSA-12020/3/2023-MIS-Sec-SSA//405122/2024 Date : 11.01.2024
Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites Re- RFP through e-Tendering process for establishment of call centre for Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK) under Samagra Shiksha Axom.
To participate in this tender process through e-procurement document, bidder should have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) and have to register in the portal <https://assamtenders.gov.in> by themselves.
The Bidder may be downloaded the tender schedules containing the tender details, terms and conditions, from the website shall submit their tender on-line on the website <https://assamtenders.gov.in>.

Sd/-Mission Director,
Samagra Shiksha Axom
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19
Janasanyog/CF/484/23/13-Jan-24

India likely to clock 6.9-7.2 per cent GDP growth: Deloitte

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India is expected to clock a GDP growth in the range of 6.9-7.2 per cent in the current financial year on the back of improving economic fundamentals, Deloitte India said in an update to its quarterly outlook. As per the first advance estimates of national income released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the Indian economy is estimated to grow by 7.3 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal, against 7.2 per cent a year ago, mainly due to a good show by mining & quarrying, manufacturing and certain segments of services sectors. Deloitte India's recent economic outlook report said there is an underlying momentum that is building up in the Indian economy, as seen in the improving economic fundamentals. India's current account deficit

(CAD) was at 1.9 per cent of GDP in 2022-23 and is expected to be further lower in 2023-24, it said. Further, foreign exchange reserves remain at a comfortable level of Rs 568 billion which is equivalent to over 10 months of import cover. At present inflation stands at 5 per cent which is albeit high as per the reserve Bank of India's target range, but much lower than what it used to be a decade back, it added. "Improving economic fundamentals have buoyed our outlook and we expect India to grow between 6.9 per cent and 7.2 per cent over FY2023-24 in our baseline scenario, followed by 6.4 per cent and 6.7 per cent over the next year. "And, while the global economic scenario remains modest and will impact the Indian economy, the country will be able to navigate uncertainties better than



the rest of the world," said Runki Majumdar, Economist, Deloitte India. However, she remains concerned about persisting inflation which recently moved back to 5.6 per cent after showing signs of easing in the previous month. "High inflation is expected to persist till H2 FY2024, due to

interact with each other and come together to make complex products, services, and solutions. Over the past 10 years, India has diversified its export basket and moved towards higher value-added products. As a result, the proportion of engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, and electronics goods in total exports increased, while traditional baskets' share fell, it said. Majumdar said digitisation, high-end manufacturing capacity addition, and improved competitiveness through exports formed the three pillars of India's decade-long vision and the country is witnessing the outcomes translating into sustainable growth. However, India will have to be more competitive and further scale up commoditised products by taking advantage of its large domestic market, she said.

Sensex soars nearly 850 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surged over 1 per cent to hit their fresh all-time highs on Friday, driven by a stellar rally in IT stocks after TCS and Infosys reported better-than-expected financial results. Besides, a strengthening rupee and hectic buying on tech, realty and oil counters amid a mixed trend in global markets further bolstered sentiment, traders said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex zoomed 847.27 points or 1.18 per cent to settle at a new closing high of 72,568.45. During the day, it jumped 999.78 points or 1.39 per cent to reach a new intra-day record of 72,720.96. A total of 2,112 stocks advanced, while 1,742 declined and 88 remained unchanged on the BSE. The Nifty climbed 247.35 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at a lifetime closing high of 21,894.55. During the day, it rallied 281.05 points or 1.29 per cent to reach its fresh intra-day record peak of 21,928.25.



On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark jumped 542.3 points or 0.75 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 183.75 points or 0.84 per cent. "Indian markets soared to new heights in a powerful rally, driven by IT heavyweights. Green shoots of recovery in the IT sector on the back of an improved outlook for BFSI in FY25 positively influenced market sentiments. The robust performance of PSU banking stocks is underscored by the inherent synergy between their loan portfolios and the prevailing business cycle. "Noteworthy is the fact that this upward surge remained resilient amid mixed global cues on account of higher-than-expected US inflation and positive job data, which tempered expectations for an imminent rate cut by the US Fed," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.



Civil aviation sector on upswing: Scindia

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday said 75 new airports have been built in the last ten years as part of the Narendra Modi government's vision to reach a vast number of common citizens and asserted the key sector was on the upswing and still holds a lot of potential. Earlier people only heard about airlines getting shut down in India, but now things have changed and new air carriers are being established to make flying accessible to citizens, he said. Scindia was speaking at the formal inauguration of the aircraft Maintenance Repair Overhaul (MRO) facility of AAR-Indamer at Mihan SEZ in Nagpur. He said the facility's inauguration was a very important event in the history of MRO evolution in India. "This event is significant in many ways as it signifies the coming of age of civil aviation in India. Civil aviation has enjoyed a historical journey in India and the sector is over 100 years old. But, it is now that the sector has assumed tremendous scale and offers vast opportunities," said the minister. He said India's civil aviation sector had only 400 aircraft ten years ago, but the number has grown to 713 planes at the last count and more will be added

Industrial production growth decelerates to 8 months low of 2.4 per cent in November

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's industrial production growth decelerated to an 8-month low of 2.4 per cent in November, mainly due to poor showing by the manufacturing sector, according to the official data released on Friday. The factory output growth measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) was 2.4 per cent in November 2023. The previous low of IIP growth was recorded at 1.9 per cent growth in March 2023. The IIP growth at 2.4 per cent in November is the lowest so far in the current fiscal. During April-November 2023-24, the IIP growth works out to be 6.4 per cent, up from 5.6 per cent in the corresponding peri-

od a year ago. The IIP for October 2023 was revised to 11.6 per cent from provisional estimates of 11.7 released last month. "India's Index of Industrial Production grows by 2.4 per cent in November 2023," an official statement said. It also stated that the growth rates over the corresponding period of the previous year are to be interpreted, considering the unusual circumstances on account of the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. As per the IIP data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the manufacturing sector's output growth decelerated to 1.2 per cent in November 2023 against 6.7 per cent a year ago.

The power generation growth also slowed to 5.8 per cent in November 2023 compared to 12.7 per cent growth in the year-ago period. Mining output growth came down to 6.8 per cent in the month under review from 9.7 per cent growth a year ago. As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment contracted 1.1 per cent in November this year compared to a growth of 20.7 per cent in the year-ago month. Consumer durables output during the month declined by 5.4 per cent against 5 per cent growth a year ago. Consumer non-durable goods output contracted by 3.6 per cent compared to a 10 per cent expansion a year earlier.

Forex reserves fall sharply by \$5.89 billion to \$617.3 billion: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Forex reserves declined sharply by USD 5.89 billion to USD 617.3 billion for the week ending January 5 after rising for four consecutive weeks, according to the weekly Reserve Bank data released on Friday. So far this fiscal, the reserves have increased USD 55.72 billion, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). In the previous reporting week ended December 29, the reserves rose USD 2.759 billion to USD 623.2 billion, the highest so far this fiscal. In the week before that, the reserves increased USD 4.471 billion to USD 620.441. In October 2021, the forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank stepped in to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year. Foreign currency assets — the single-largest component of the reserves — declined USD 4.96 billion to USD 546.65 billion. Gold reserves also declined USD 839 million to USD 47.48 billion during the reporting week, while the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down USD 67 million to USD 18.29 billion, the RBI said. The country's reserve position with the IMF also declined USD 26 million to USD 48.66 billion in the reporting week.

Super sports car segment in India to register 30 per cent growth this year: McLaren Automotive

PTI ■ MUMBAI

British luxury carmaker McLaren Automotive on Friday said it is expecting the super sports car segment in India to register 30 per cent growth this year. McLaren is also looking to deliver about 20-odd cars to customers in India after witnessing a blip last year owing to supply chain issues. Earlier the company, which entered the Indian market in November 2022, unveiled its super sports car the 750S, priced at Rs 5.91 crore. Built at the McLaren Composites Technology Centre (MCTC) in Yorkshire, UK and imported as a completely built unit, 750S is the lightest and most powerful series-production from the company, achieving 0-200kms/hour in 7.2 seconds (Spider 7.3 seconds), as per the company. "This segment (the cars, which are priced upwards of Rs 4-5 crore) has also seen a healthy growth last year. I think post-Covid, 2021 was kind of a startup year (from the volume's perspective) and then 2022 was a good year. "While the year 2023 was better and we're thinking 2024 will be still better," Infinity Cars Chairman and Managing Director Lalit Choudhary told PTI in an interaction. Infinity Cars is the official dealer for McLaren Automotive in India. Noting that the super sports cars segment may see 30 per cent growth this year, he said that McLaren is aiming to deliver as many as 20 cars to the customers in India.

Rupee rises 11 paise to settle at 82.90 against \$

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee strengthened for the eighth consecutive session and settled with a gain of 11 paise at 82.90 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, buoyed by robust equity market sentiments. Forex traders said an upward move in crude oil prices and stronger American currency, however, contained the uptick of the Indian currency, even as investors remained concerned about the domestic macroeconomic data to be released later in the day. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened weak at 83.08 and traded between 82.86 and 83.10 against the greenback during intra-day deals. The unit finally settled at 82.90 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 11 paise over its previous close, amid a bullish trend in domestic equities, wherein benchmark indices climbed lifetime highs. The domestic currency settled 2 paise higher at 83.01 on Thursday. In the last eight trading sessions, the local unit added 42 paise,

since the level of 83.32 versus dollar recorded on January 2. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee gained on strong domestic markets and a weak US dollar. However, the surge in crude oil prices amid the escalation of tensions in the Middle East capped sharp gains. "Fresh inflows from foreign investors may also support the rupee. However, a rise in global crude oil prices may cap sharp gains. Traders may remain cautious ahead of inflation and IIP data from India. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.55 to Rs 83.20," he added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.09 per cent higher at 102.38 on Friday. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 2.95 per cent to USD 79.69 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex surged 847.27 points, or 1.18 per cent, to settle at a fresh peak of 72,568.45 points. The Nifty also soared 247.35 points, or 1.14 per cent, to a new record of 21,894.55 points.



Leather exporters seek fiscal incentives in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Council for Leather Exports (CLE) has asked the government to provide fiscal incentives in the Budget such as the PLI scheme and reinstatement of import duty exemption on certain goods to boost manufacturing and exports. The council has also suggested the government to consider permitting the export of all value-added leathers, including crust leathers, freely without any export duty, norms, inspection, testing or certification. CLE Chairman Sanjay Leekha said that the import duty exemption was available to the industry for the last 30 years but was withdrawn two years back and this has made the availability of international leather difficult for the industry. "In case, it is reinstated, it could ensure that our products manufacturing sectors would have access to international leather and hence make us more competitive and more up-to-date with our product offerings," he said. He also said that export duty should be levied only on Raw Hides and Skins, Wet Blue Leathers and anything beyond that should be considered as a finished product and it should be freely permitted to be exported. "This has actually become a necessity because, in the last few years, our sector has lost almost USD 1 billion of exports...We can bring back USD 1 billion of exports if the norms are changed," he added. The council has also sought an extension of the PLI (Production Linked Incentive) scheme to the leather and footwear sector to promote domestic manufacturing. On exports, he said, unfortunately, there is a little downturn due to the global slowdown in the current year. However, he expressed confidence that the slowdown is temporary, and the exports will bounce back.

BUSINESS BRIEF



VIT-AP, BUIMERC INDIA INK MOU
AMARAVATI: In a significant step towards advancing technology for societal impact, VIT-AP Technology Business Incubation Foundation (VTBIF) and Buimerc India Foundation (BIF) joined hands in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony held at the VIT-AP University Campus on Wednesday, January 10, 2024.



PONGAL FESTIVAL CELEBRATED
KATTANKULATHUR: Celebrating traditional festivals and taking part in the events around it will keep people, especially youth and students close to their roots, TR Paarivendhar, MP, and Founder & Chancellor, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, said on Friday. In his Special Address at the 2nd Annual SRM Pongal Festival Celebrations organised by Tamil Perayam - Paarivendhar Students Tamil Forum, Dr. Paarivendhar said people needed not just basic material comforts, but also had to be exposed to their culture, and tradition so that they remain close to their roots.

Karvy case: SAT rejects Axis Bank plea on invoking pledged shares

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) on Friday rejected Axis Bank's appeal with respect to releasing shares that were pledged by Karvy Stock Broking Ltd in favour of the private sector lender. The lender's appeal was for passing appropriate orders directing Sebi, NSDL and NSE to comply with the SAT's ruling last month and remove all the lock-in and all other obstacles with respect to the invocation of the pledged shares. In its order passed on December 20, SAT quashed Sebi's two orders passed in January 2020 and December 2019 that barred lenders from invoking the pledge on shares in the Karvy Stock Broking matter. Sebi, NSDL and NSE were also directed to release the shares in four weeks. The tribunal's ruling had come on appeals filed by Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank,

IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finance against the two Sebi orders. Dismissing Axis Bank's plea on Friday, SAT clarified that "four weeks from the date of the order were available both to Appellant Axis Bank and to Sebi, NSE and NSDL to implement the directions given by this tribunal in its order dated December 20, 2023". According to the tribunal, the unilateral action on the part of Sebi, NSE and NSDL in transferring the shares to investors was "illegal and without jurisdiction". "... The tribunal went on to give separate directions for the appellant Axis Bank and for other appellants. The separate directions were required due to the status of pledged shares as for the shares pledged to Axis Bank this tribunal had directed parties to maintain status quo vide its order dated December 17, 2019," SAT said on Friday. For other appellants, the tri-



bunal said the pledged shares had been transferred to the clients of the broker by the respondents. Against this backdrop, the SAT on Friday said its December order "needs to be read in totality". In the December order, the tribunal, as an alternative option, had directed the respondents "to compensate the appellants (lenders) with the value of the underlined securities pledged

in their favour along with interest 10 per cent per annum within the same period". Sebi and NSDL have already filed an appeal before the Supreme Court, challenging the order of the SAT. Axis Bank's counsel argued that leeway of four weeks was given only in the case of appellants other than Axis Bank. For Axis Bank, the order of the Tribunal became effective immediately and therefore,

there is no restriction whatsoever on the bank from invoking the pledge of shares created in its favour and selling the shares to the extent of its full and complete dues. Counsels of NSDL and Sebi stated that they did not press for stay at the time of pronouncement of orders on December 20, 2023, as they believed that the tribunal had granted four weeks time for compliance of directions in the said order. The total dues payable to Axis Bank, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finance was over Rs 1,400 crore, according to Sebi's order passed in December 2019. An outstanding amount of Rs 80.64 crore, along with interest, was due to Axis Bank from Karvy, Rs 642.25 crore to ICICI Bank, Rs 344.5 crore to Bajaj Finance, Rs 208.5 crore due to HDFC Bank, and Rs 159 crore to IndusInd Bank, the order had said.

SATWIK, CHIRAG ENTER MEN DOUBLES SEMIFINALS

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Star Indian shuttlers Satwik-Sairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty reached their second successive semifinal after humbling China's Ren Xiang Yu and He Ji Ting in straight games at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament here on Friday. The world number 2 Indian pair, who won the Asian Games gold medal last year, looked in control during the rallies and were also proactive at the net to eke out a dominating 21-11 21-8 win over world no. 32 Yu and Ting in just 35 minutes. The second-seeded Indians will face either Korea's Kang Min Hyuk and Seo Seung Jae or third seeded Malaysian pair of Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik. Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto, however, suffered a 15-21 13-21 loss to Japan's Rin

Iwanaga and Kie Nakanishi in the women's doubles quarterfinals. The world no. 24 Indians, who created a flutter after stunning former world no. 1 and twice world champions Mayu Matsumoto and Wakana Nagahara on Thursday, couldn't sustain the same performance against the combination of Iwanaga and Nakanishi, going down 15-21 13-21 in a 39-minute match. This was the Indian pair's second loss to the world no. 15 Japanese duo, having suffered a narrow defeat in the finals of the Syed Modi International Super 300 in Lucknow last month. Ponnappa and Crasto had claimed the Guwahati Masters Super 100, besides reaching the finals in two more events in Lucknow and Odisha last month. Satwik and Chirag, who had a sensational season in

ASHWINI, TANISHA LOSE IN MALAYSIA OPEN



2023 with six titles, produced a near-perfect game as they were lightening in their exchanges. They inserted pace in the rallies and also mixed things well to make it a one-sided affair. The Chinese pair, who had played a close straight game match against the Indians at China Masters last year, looked clueless as Satwik and Chirag dished out a masterclass to completely dominate the opening game. The Indians were 7-0 up in a flash, leaving Yu and Ting to do the catching up act. Satwik and Chirag were 11-2 at the break and quickly closed out the first game. The Indians continued the momentum after the change of ends, leading 11-4 at the interval. A return from Chirag gave the Indians 12 match points and they converted it in the second chance.



Avani finishes second

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Avani Prashanth carded a fourth and final round but still ended up second to Rianne Mikhaela Malixi of the Philippines by one shot in the Australian Master of Amateurs Championships here Friday. The Indian was in fine fettle and her 70 on the day saw her finishing the 72-hole event with a total of 6-under, even as the 16-year-old Malixi, who was tied with the Indian in the second place after three rounds, shot 4-under 69 to grab the title. Avani had rounds of 71-68-77-70 for a 6-under 286 while Malixi with 70-72-74-69 carded 7-under 285. Japan's Nika Ito, who led after the first two rounds, finished third with 68-70-78-71 at 5-under 287, while the 54-hole leader, Australia's Lion Higo was fourth with cards of 71-71-70-76. Malixi and Avani will battle it out again next week at the Australian Amateurs and then at the Women's Amateur Asia-Pacific in Thailand in early February. The win also marked a fine birthday present for Malixi's mother, Michelle, who celebrated her birthday on Wednesday. But Avani was not disheartened. "Well, I think it was a good week. I can't complain too much. But I didn't have the best day in the third round. But there's always the next week." Nevertheless, it was another fine result for Avani, who since

finishing sixth at the same event last year, has been in great form. She won individual honours at Queen Sirikit Cup, where Malixi was third. Avani also topped the Asian Games trials ahead of the professionals in India, but was only 18th at the event. The Indian star also won the Ahlssell Final for professionals on the Ladies European Tour Access Series and was fourth in the individual section at the World Amateur Team Championships in Abu Dhabi. In addition, she was in Top-10 at LET's pro events, the Magical Kenya Ladies Open and the Hero Women's Indian Open, and closed 2023 with tied 13th finish at the Mallorca Ladies Open. The other Indian participant in the women's section Heena Kang missed the 54-hole cut, as did Rohit Narwal and Sandeep Yadav. It was a big win for Malixi, who was the most consistent player with rounds of 74 or better on each of the day, while Avani, Ito and Higo had a down round once each. After a fine 32 front nine, when the finish became tight, Malixi broke away from Ito with a birdie on the par-3 16th. She then capitalized on the latter's costly mistake on the 17th to pull ahead. Malixi matched Avani's pars in the last two holes to grab the win. Malixi was emotional as she was given the symbolic Green Jacket of victory, while sharing the podium with men's champion Phoenix Campbell.



India starts as clear underdogs against Australia in AFC Asian Cup opener

PTI ■ AL RAYYAN (QATAR)

Securing a knockout round berth looks difficult but not impossible as the Indian football team takes on title contenders Australia in its opening group match of the AFC Asian Cup here on Saturday. Eliminated in the group stage in their last two appearances in 2011 and 2019, India face an uphill task this time also, as they have been clubbed with Australia, Uzbekistan and Syria in Group B. India's hopes of making it to the round of 16 in the continental showpiece depends on the outcome of the match against Syria on January 23 as Australia and Uzbekistan (January 18) are way ahead of them in terms of quality. A win against Syria can put India in the third place in the group, offering a chance for a knockout round berth. The top two teams from each group, along with four best third-placed sides from across six groups, progress to the knockout round of 16. Head coach Igor Stimac and captain Sunil Chhetri have already hinted that Australia (25th in FIFA ranking) and Uzbekistan (68th) — the favourites to take the top two spots in the group — are possibly out of reach for India. India had beaten Syria in the past — in the 2007 and 2009 Nehru Cup tournaments — and that provides a ray of hope for the Chhetri-led team, ranked 102 in the world. A knockout round berth will be a huge achievement for India, who are making their fifth appearance in the Asian Cup, after coming close in the last edition in 2019, and especially for

Chhetri, who will be playing for the last time in the prestigious tournament. The 39-year-old talisman will be playing in his third Asian Cup, after his 2011 and 2019 campaigns, having scored four goals in six matches, the most by an Indian. India will start as clear underdogs at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium against mighty Australia, the 2015 champions, who have come here with ambitions of regaining the title and who won 4-0 in the 2011 edition group match in the only earlier clash between the two sides in the tournament. Australia are one of the regular sides in the FIFA World Cup from Asia and they are a confident bunch after making it to the round of 16 in the last edition in Qatar. They had made a quarterfinal exit in the 2019 Asian Cup. The Socceroos are a mix of experienced and young players with 19 of the 26 currently plying trade in European leagues while only four are playing in the domestic A-League. The remaining three play in Japan and Saudi Arabia. India have come into the tournament with the best available squad, after three key players — defender Anwar Ali, defensive midfielder Jackson Singh and the nippy winger Ashique Kuruniyan — missed out due to injuries. Chhetri seems to be getting better with advancing age but despite his hunger for goal, it will not be easy for him and his team-mates to breach the Australian goal, manned by captain and experienced custodian Mathew Ryan, who won the Asian Cup in 2015 and was

part of the squad that qualified for each of the last three World Cups. Stimac's men would do well to keep the damage to the minimum as the number of goals conceded may play a role later in deciding who makes it to the round of 16 as third-place team. "We didn't have much knowledge of Australian team back then (2011)...Compared to minute details we have now. We have watched their friendlies against Palestine and Bahrain, we know which leagues their players are in, and individual clips on them," said Chhetri. "With this familiarity, the fear factor goes out...Of course they are a couple of levels above...But at least we know what we are up against." Statistically, the two countries have played eight matches against each other with Australia having won four times and India thrice, with one game ending in a draw. All of India's wins have, however, come before 1957. The Indian men's senior team is also playing for the first time under Video Assistant Referee (VAR) in the match against Australia on Saturday. VAR technology will make its full debut in Qatar following its successful implementation from the quarter-final stage in the 2019 edition in the United Arab Emirates. All 51 matches at the Asian Cup in Qatar will also see VAR complemented by the Semi-Automated Offside Technology (SAOT) system. The India-Australia match will also see Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita creating history by becoming the first woman referee to take charge of a game in the Asian Cup.

Sheoran shoots gold, Tomar silver

PTI ■ JAKARTA

Indian shooters Akhil Sheoran and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar claimed gold and silver respectively in the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event of the Asian Olympic Qualifiers here on Friday, continuing the country's dominant show in the continental event. Sheoran shot 460.2 to emerge victorious in the eight-men final, while Tokyo Olympian Tomar finished second on the podium with a score of 459.0. Thailand's Thongphaphum Vongsukdee settled for the bronze medal after managing 448.8. The duo of Sheoran and Tomar combined with Swapnil Kusale to also win the team gold medal in the same event ahead of Chinese and South Korean teams. The Indians aggregated 1758 points, a huge 14 points more than the second-placed team. In the individual qualification, Tomar was placed third with a total score of 588, while Sheoran finished sixth with 586. India's Niraj Kumar Chain Singh also participated in the qualification but for gaining ranking points only and was not eligible for entry into the final. The medals won Friday took India's tally to 10 gold, eight silver and six bronze in the event. In the 50m rifle 3 positions, all three Indian men made the finals of the individual competition comfortably with Aishwary taking second, Sheoran third and Swapnil (584) the fourth qualifying spots, as China's Yu Hao topped the 44-strong field with a 589. Sheoran reaped the rewards for consistent



shooting in the 45-shot final and was in the reckoning after every position. He went from strength to strength, breaching 153 in the first kneeling position, 154 in prone and then shot 100.9 over the first 10 standing shots to zoom to second place. Besides Tomar, Thailand's Vongsukdee was engaged in an intense competition as the final five single shots in the standing position ensued, and Sheoran produced three big scores to wrest the gold ahead of his challengers. At least a couple of Indian men have also put themselves in serious contention for the one Paris Olympics quota place that they can win between themselves in the 25m rapid-fire pistol event. After the first day of qualification, Adarsh Singh and Vijayveer Sidhu were in the sixth and seventh spots respectively with identical scores of 288. Gurpreet Singh was further down with 281.

Coco enters Australian Open as teenage Grand Slam champion

AP ■ MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA)

Now that the pressure to win a Grand Slam singles title as a teenager is over, Coco Gauff feels liberated enough to discuss her next target: a career tally in double digits. Could be 10, 11 or more... No limits. Plus, an Olympic medal in Paris this year. Preferably gold, but silver or bronze would do — in singles, doubles or mixed. She's entering the Australian Open as a reigning Grand Slam champion, new territory for the 19-year-old American. Had she not fulfilled those expectations at last year's US Open, this would have been her last shot at being a teenage major winner. Gauff, who turns 20 in March, believes she can play with more freedom now in pursuit of a second major title as the No. 4 seeded player at Melbourne Park. The tournament starts on Sunday, a day earlier than usual. Defending champion Novak Djokovic, aiming for a recording-extending 11th Australian title and 25th overall, announced ahead of the schedule's release that he'd be playing Sunday night — the first of three first-round night sessions.

Gauff's first-round match is against Anna Karolina Schmiedlova, a 29-year-old from Slovakia who has only been past the third round once in 35 majors. Having rebounded from a shocking first-round exit at Wimbledon to winning a breakthrough major title at the very next major in New York was helped with a shift in mindset. "I think I put too much pressure on winning a Slam. I think I was feeling like I have to do it," Gauff said. "When I went on the scene at 15, I felt like I had to win a Slam as a teenager because that's what everybody thought. "Honestly, going into US Open, I didn't expect it. I felt like I was having a bad season, and my focus was just get through the season and focus on the Australian Open this year." It was the loss at Wimbledon that helped her take pause, relax and think about all those rounds before the final, one by one. She'd thought losing in the first round would have been the worst thing to happen to her. Turns out, "wasn't even that bad," she said. "The world didn't end. The sun still shines. I still have my friends and family. "I realized that losing isn't all



that bad and that I should just focus on the battle and the process and enjoy it. I found myself being able to play freer and trust myself more." Gauff is in the same quarter of the draw as four-time major winner Naomi Osaka and Caroline Wozniacki, both past Australian Open champions who are returning to Melbourne Park as mothers for the first time. Leylah Fernandez, the 2021 US Open runner-up, and No. 8 Maria Sakkari are also there. Defending Australian

Open champion Aryna Sabalenka is in the same half of the draw and could be a semi-final rival. Sabalenka had a breakthrough win at Melbourne Park last year and reached the semifinals at the French Open and Wimbledon and the final at the US Open, where she took the first set off Gauff before losing in three. In tune-up tournaments, Gauff successfully defended her title in Auckland, New Zealand, last weekend and Sabalenka reached the final in Brisbane. Second-ranked Sabalenka said she's a

better player 12 months on from her triumph in Australia. "I had an incredible season last year, improved a lot as a player and as a person," she said. "I did really a great season. We worked a lot. I felt like I improved a lot. I feel really great and feel like I'm ready to go." On the other side of the draw, No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek is in a tough section, starting with an opener against 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin. Their only previous meeting was at the 2020 French Open when Swiatek beat Kenin in the final. "My first Grand Slam final was against Sofia, and now, we're playing in the first round. It's pretty weird," Swiatek said. "That's how our life journeys kind of went apart." Awaiting the winner of that match is either 2016 Australian Open winner, Angelique Kerber, in her comeback from a maternity break, or 2022 finalist Danielle Collins. At the bottom of that side of the draw are No. 5 Jessica Pegula and 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu, who hasn't gone past the second round at a major since then and is coming off eight months on the side-

lines following operations on both wrists and an ankle. On the men's side, Djokovic has long dominated Melbourne Park. He's on a 28-match winning streak here — 21 before and seven after the tournament he was forced to miss in 2022 because he wasn't vaccinated for COVID-19. He's the only one of the so-called Big Three in the field after 22-time major winner Rafael Nadal withdrew last week, his comeback from a year-long injury layoff lasting just three matches. Djokovic is establishing new rivalries now, some with much younger players such as 20-year-old Carlos Alcaraz, who beat him in the Wimbledon final, and No. 4 Jannik Sinner, the 22-year-old Italian who beat him twice in a month late last season in the round-robin stage of the ATP Finals and at the Davis Cup. Sinner has played some exhibitions since then, but not a competitive match ahead of his opener against Botic van de Zandschulp. If the seeds progress in rankings, he could meet Djokovic in the semi-finals. "Just staying in the present moment, to be honest," Sinner said. "At the end of the year, I played really good.

Rupinder mantra for Indian women team drag flickers

PTI ■ RANCHI

Penalty corners have been the Indian women's hockey team's Achilles heel for a while but it could well turn a corner in the upcoming FIH Olympic Qualifiers here, says former men's team drag-flick star Rupinderpal Singh, who claims to have figured the problem in his short five-day training stint with the side. Rupinder, who was one of the stars of India's historic bronze medal-winning effort at the Tokyo Olympics, quit international hockey in September 2021. Last month, he was brought in to help the women's side fix its penalty corner conversion woes ahead of the FIH Olympic Qualifiers beginning here on Saturday. After winning the Asian Champions Trophy here, the Indians had wasted plenty of penalty corners in the subsequent tournaments, including the Asian Games, where they missed Olympic qualification. "In today's hockey, the penalty corner defence of all teams have become very strong.



It's not like before," he told PTI in an interview ahead of the tournament in which India would need to finish inside top-three for a Paris ticket. And to counter that, Rupinder advocated the classic 'offence is the best defence' approach. "The most important thing for a drag-flicker is to understand and execute plans on how to beat the first rusher. So, we have worked on a few variations on how to beat the first rusher during the camp," he elaborated. First rusher is the player mandated to run straight to the drag-flicker to block or deflect the stroke, when a penalty corner is

taken. "Gurjit (Kaur) and Deepika are very good drag-flickers and doing well. Both are experienced players. It depends on their planning on the day and how they execute that," Rupinder said. The 33-year-old, regarded as one of the best drag-flickers of the country, represented India in 223 matches. Nicknamed 'Bob', Rupinder scored four crucial goals in Tokyo, including a penalty stroke in the third-place match against Germany. Rupinder said rest is just focussing on the basics, which includes confident execution of team plans and presence of

mind to find opportunities in active play. "I didn't want to change their style but I worked on their thinking before the match and during match situations. I mainly worked on their basics. The focus entirely was on basics," he added. He might have quit international hockey, but Rupinder hasn't given up hope of competing and wants to feature in the next Hockey India League, which is set to be revived later this year or early next year. "I am still active although I have retired from international hockey. Recently I played in the Australian league and now, I am looking for opportunities in other leagues," he said. "I hope to play in the HIL but it depends on many factors. It is up to the teams whether they choose me or not. But I am actively training, working on my fitness." Rupinder, who has two Asian Games medals in his kitty — a gold at the Incheon Games in 2014 and a bronze in the 2018 edition in Jakarta, is also actively involved in coaching.



Sharath, Sathiyan star attractions in WTT qualifiers

PTI ■ MAPUSA (GOA)

Achanta Sharath Kamal and Sathiyan Gnanasekaran, alongside 35 other paddlers from the country, are set to compete in the singles qualifiers as the upcoming WTT Star Contender gears up to achieve the highest-ever Indian participation. The second edition of the tournament will be played at the Peddem Indoor Stadium here from January 23 to 28. Nine Indians, including the highest world-ranked Indian paddler Manika Batra and Harmeet Desai, secured direct entry into the main draw. The inclusion of 32 new names in the qualifying list brings India's total participation to 41 across categories. This surpasses the previous highest of 40 participants in the inaugural edition of the tournament. Besides experienced campaigners like Sharath, Sathiyan, Ayisha Mukherjee, Sutirtha Mukherjee and Sanil Shetty, the qualifiers will also provide glimpses of India's bright future through some promising youngsters such as the current national champion Poymantee Baisya, Puyas Jain, S Fidel R Snehit, Mudit Dani, Jeet Chandra, Diya Chitale, Yashaswini Ghorpade, Archana Kamath, Swastika Ghosh and Suhana Saini among many others. The 2023 World Championships doubles bronze medallist Cho Dae-seong, 17-year-old Oh Junsung from Korea and Hungarian paddler Bence Majoros are among the international stars to be seen in action in the qualifying rounds which will offer eight singles and four doubles main draw spots.

Lloyd bats for Rohit, Kohli inclusion

PTI ■ SATGACHIA (WEST BENGAL)

West Indies great Clive Lloyd on Friday advocated for the inclusion of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in India's T20I World Cup squad, saying the duo's experience is indispensable and filling the team with just youngsters is not prudent. The selectors recently picked the veteran duo for the ongoing T20I series against Afghanistan, indicating that they're still in the scheme of things for the shorter format. Kohli missed the lung-opener in Mohali due to personal reasons.

There is a raging debate on whether the duo should play or make way for youngsters considering India's ICC trophy drought. The latest setback was the final loss to Australia in the ODI World Cup in November last year.

"You want to pick your best team, you can't just fill the team with youthful players. You need experience," the two-time World Cup winning captain said in a media interaction here.

The 79-year-old was the chief guest at the 75th foundation day ceremony of the Satgachia High School, about three hours from Kolkata.

"Kohli is still one of the best players around. Rohit is quite good as captain. So you pick your best team. You will have some young players too, because you have so many cricketers here, and they are pushing the older players..."

...And that's how it should be. But I'm sure that you will have a very formidable side."



T20I WORLD CUP

ble side." Talking about his favourite Team India batters, Lloyd picked Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer.

"I liked this fellow Gill, he looks a good cricketer, and (Shreyas) Iyer," he said. "India have a lot of good cricketers at

the moment, I must say. And I think what I like about it is they have a much more balanced side," he added.

The legendary West Indian, however, is of the view that the Indians are playing too much cricket that may make the

sport itself "stale".

"Yes, I think they're a very good side, and they will do well for quite a while if they continue in this manner."

"But my problem is that they might be playing too much cricket, and then, you

know, you can get stale," he said, voicing a general concern in the cricket community about tight international schedules.

LOSING PLAYERS TO T20S DISTURBING: Blaming the advent of T20 franchise leagues for decline of West Indies cricket, Lloyd said Test cricketers should be "paid well".

West Indies failed to qualify for the ODI World Cup last year, while in the 2022 T20 World Cup, they failed to reach the tournament proper, crashing out of the group stage.

Lloyd was bitter with his country's players for putting T20 above other formats. "I don't mind T20. It's excellent. It's good entertainment. But I think too much of it might be hampering cricket throughout the world. It's hampered us in the West Indies. We only have five million people, 14 islands..." he pointed out. "And we are losing a lot of our players to the shorter formats, and they're refusing to play for their country, I find that very disturbing."

Lloyd said countries like India don't face this situation because of their huge talent pools.

"Other countries like India, Pakistan, England and Australia have a lot of people. So they can afford to lose one or two players because they can replenish those people," he said.

"If you're saying that Test cricket is the highest cricket, then they should be paid much better. You're paying the guys who are playing the shorter game, so it doesn't make sense," he said.



I think taking SA20 to India in future could be a great move: Boucher

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Taking the SA20 to India in future could be "great" despite the logistical challenges such a move may involve, feels former South Africa cricketer Mark Boucher.

Like the 2009 edition of the IPL was held in South Africa due to general elections in India, Boucher admitted the SA20 could be organised in the cricket-crazy Asian nation in near future.

"I think it's a great idea; I'm not against it. The IPL happened in South Africa, and we can do the same, as both cricketing nations share a great relationship," Boucher said during a virtual media interaction on Friday.

"Although the challenges of playing in India will be different, it will still be great. Maybe Graeme Smith (SA20 commissioner) can work on it," he added.

'IPL HAS BOOSTED YOUNGSTERS IN INDIA: The ongoing SA20 season has seen all the major South African stars participating in the competition.

Boucher said that although the opening season of SA20 was a trial, it follows the same principles as the IPL, where the aim is to give a platform to young cricketers to express themselves.

"The first edition was a success despite being a trial one; the crowd came in large numbers to watch high-quality cricket. The one thing we can learn from the IPL is how it has boosted the youngsters in India, and that's exactly what we are trying to do here."

"It still might take a couple of seasons to put us on the map, but I am confident of it helping and boosting South African cricket, just like the IPL's high-performance cricket."

The current SA20 is clashing with South Africa's upcoming Test tour of New Zealand, where a second-string side will

be taking part, a move criticised by many in the cricket fraternity.

Speaking on the same, Boucher expressed concerns and felt that scheduling does need to get better in the coming years.

"Something has to be done; we need to get the scheduling right. Our best players are playing in the league (SA20), which is needed for it to be a success."

"This tournament was on the cards for a long time, so there should have been discussions with New Zealand to reschedule the tour. Test cricket is the ultimate format of the game, and you want the best teams playing against each other." Boucher also hoped to see Indian players' participation in the future editions of SA20. The tournament has six teams and all of them are owned by IPL franchises.

"Not sure why (Indians are not playing in SA20). Cannot answer it since it's above my pay grade. Maybe we will see them in the future."

"But we cannot blame or question the BCCI about it. Look at the product (IPL) they have created."

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Vihari relinquishes Andhra captaincy



PTI ■ MUMBAI

India player Hanuma Vihari will not be leading Andhra in the ongoing Ranji Trophy after having stepped down from captaincy to focus on his batting. On Friday, during Andhra's Group B match against Mumbai, senior batter Ricky Bhui was leading the side.

According to media reports, Vihari's decision was personal and he wanted to focus on his batting.

Vihari managed 51 runs in the season's opening Ranji game against Bengal, which ended in a draw with Andhra bagging three points for taking the first-innings lead.

Interestingly, he was mulling a move to Madhya Pradesh before the start of the season, as he was eager to play under domestic coach Chandrakant Pandit to revive his international career. Vihari has represented India in 16 Tests so far, scoring 839 runs at an average of 33.56, including a ton and five half-centuries, with a top score of 111 against the West Indies in Kingston in 2019.

Having made his Test debut at The Oval in 2018, his last outing also happened to be in England, in Birmingham 2022. As far as Bhui is concerned, he had scored 175, his 15th first-class hundred, in the match against Bengal. Appearing in his 11th season with Andhra, Bhui's marathon knock helped his team get a 36-run lead over Bengal and begin the tournament on a positive note.



Warner to arrive at SCG by helicopter for BBL match

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Celebrations around David Warner's farewell from Test cricket will continue as the flamboyant opener will arrive at the iconic SCG by a helicopter to play in a Big Bash League (BBL) match for Sydney Thunders.

Flying in straight from his brother's wedding in the Hunter Valley, the 37-year-old's chopper will touch down on the outfield near the "Thanks Dave" logo, which was painted for his last Test. "He's going to take a lot of effort to come and play for us," Thunder quick Gurinder Sandhu was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

Warner pulled the curtains

down on a glorious Test career in front of his home crowd at the SCG last week, guiding Australia to a convincing win in the third Test with a fluent half-century. "We love having him here. Last year he was awesome for us, maybe didn't score as many runs as he would have liked but around the group and passing on knowledge was awesome to have him around."

He's one of the better team men. All the fans get to enjoy him playing cricket." Warner has already announced retirement from ODIs but will be available for T20Is and T20 leagues across the globe.

Sydney Thunder will play Sydney Sixer in a local derby here on Friday.

I wanted to implement what I have learnt from Dhoni: Dube

PTI ■ MOHALI

Shivam Dube made a punchy return to India Sfold with a match-winning 60 off 40 balls against Afghanistan in the first T20I here, and credited the iconic MS Dhoni for the transformation in his attitude and approach. Dube's fifty headlined India's facile six-wicket win on Thursday, and the knock also earned him the player of the match award.

"When I came to bat, I wanted to implement what I have learnt from MS Dhoni about finishing games. I keep speaking to Mahi bhai. He tells me about how to tackle different situations. He has given me two-three tips and rated my batting."

"So, I feel if he rates my batting then I'll keep playing well. My confidence went up because of that," Dube told 'JIO Cinema'.

Dube's previous appearance for India was in last year's Asian Games at Hangzhou. The Mumbai player was part of the India squad for home T20I series against Australia but did not get a chance to play and was not selected for the away series against South Africa. Dube also found shades of Dhoni in the way Rohit Sharma captained the side, and allowed him the space to perform.

"Both allow me to bat higher in the order. There's a lot of work to be done and I know they will back me and want me to do well. So, that makes me feel a lot more positive," he



added. Dube also grabbed the important wicket of Afghan captain Ibrahim Zadran (25 off 22 balls), and the pacer said he has been working on his bowling.

"The changes have not come suddenly. In the off-season, I worked a lot on my fitness. After that, I bowled a lot in domestic cricket too so things kept improving."

"I was able to find the right areas and also generated decent pace," he said.

The 30-year-old Mumbaier was cautiously optimistic about his chances of finding a place in the Indian team for the T20 World Cup in June.

"It's a dream for every cricketer to contribute and help his country win. So, that's (selection for WC) always at the back of the mind. But there's a lot of time left for it, so I want to take it step by step," he added.

Axar eyes good show in England Test series, IPL to gain T20 World Cup berth

PTI ■ MOHALI

Forced to sit out of the ODI World Cup with an injury, Axar Patel said he is pinning his hopes on the IPL 2024 to rekindle his chances of getting a berth in the India squad for the T20 showpiece in June.

The left-arm spinner gave a good account of himself in the first T20I against Afghanistan here Thursday, taking two wickets while conceding 23 runs in four overs.

"My job is to give 100 percent to my work ethics and the process. I am not worrying too much about what will happen to the World Cup team selection, and if I do that, I will be putting pressure on myself."

Right now, I want to focus on the IPL and then we also have a Test series against England coming up soon," Axar said in the post-match press conference.

India have just two more T20Is scheduled ahead of the World Cup to be held in the West Indies and the USA, and Axar was aware that there will be too many contenders jostling for an India berth.

"Yeah, we are going to play the last two T20Is before the World Cup, and then we have the IPL. I know there is a lot of competition out there (for a WC

spot in India team), but my competition is to myself and I just want to focus on adding to my skill sets," he added. That polishing the skill-level part, Axar said, had begun during his recovery time at the NCA.

"It was unfortunate that I got injured during the World Cup and missed it. But I took it positively and tried to improve my game. I was working during my time at the NCA - things like line and length, slower ball and such variations."

I was trying to add something more to my bowling as a left-arm spinner, as we don't have that many variations like a leg-spinner such as googly. But



I was looking to add those 5 or 10 percent to my bowling," said Axar. The 29-year-old was also delighted to see his efforts at the NCA paying off in the series against Australia and in the first game against the Afghans.

"I was not trying to be overtly aggressive on this (Mohali) pitch and batsmen took some chances against me and that also worked for me. I was trying to mix my deliveries up like slower balls etc."

It worked for me in the series against Australia as well and I have carried that confidence into this series. I am looking at putting more pressure on the batsmen," said the Gujarat bowler.

AP ■ AUCKLAND (NEW ZEALAND)

Daryl Mitchell and Kane Williamson made brisk half-centuries to propel New Zealand to a 46-run win over Pakistan Saturday in the first of five Twenty20 Internationals. Mitchell blasted 61 from 27 balls, following Williamson who scored 57 from 42 as New Zealand made 226 for eight after being sent in, the highest-ever total against Pakistan in a T20 international.

Pakistan had a chance as long as Babar Azam was at the crease. But, when he was out for 57 in the 16th over, the size of the run chase became insurmountable. The tourists finally were all out for 180 in 18 overs. Tim Southee took four for 25 for New Zealand to become the first bowler from any nation to claim 150 wickets in T20 Internationals.

Williamson's 18th half-century in T20s came in difficult circumstances. Batting first drop, he came to the crease on only

the third ball of the New Zealand innings after Devon Conway was out for a first-ball duck.

He also lacked recent time in the middle after missing New Zealand's recent T20 series against Bangladesh as he continues a controlled return from the serious knee injury he suffered while playing in the Indian Premier League in April.

Williamson also was in the shadow early of Finn Allen who smashed 35 from 15 balls at the top of the order, including 24 runs - 6, 4, 4, 4, 6 - from the second over bowled by Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi.

He batted watchfully at first but when Allen was out, Williamson steadily gained momentum to reach his half-century from 40 balls with eight boundaries. He was twice dropped, on nine by Babar from the bowling of

Abbas Afridi and on 39 by Iftikhar Ahmed off Usama Mir. Just as Williamson took up where Allen left off, Mitchell stepped up the pace of the New Zealand innings after Williamson and reached his half-century from 22 balls. His score of 61 included four powerful sixes down the ground.

"I thought the partnerships we built throughout the middle with Kane and (Glenn Phillips) as well allowed us to build a platform to put the bowlers under some pressure which you always try to do at Eden Park," Mitchell said. "Also, the way the boys bowled at the end there was superb."

New Zealand piled on runs through the middle of its innings - 80 between the eighth and 14th overs - but didn't finish quite as strongly as it would have hoped. Glenn Phillips made 19 runs from 11 balls and



Mark Chapman 26 from 11 at the death. But, New Zealand may have been a batter short in the absence of Mitch Santner who was ruled out of the match at the last moment after testing positive for the coronavirus. Abbas Afridi finished with three for 34 on debut.

Saim Ayub gave Pakistan an explosive start to its innings when he hit 27 from eight balls with three sixes and two fours. But, he was immensely unlucky to be run out backing up too far. Mohammad Rizwan had to dodge a delivery from Adam Milne who picked up the ball on his follow-through and threw out Ayub at the non-striker's end.

New Zealand would have been concerned when Pakistan was 62 for one after five overs with Mohammad Rizwan and Babar at the crease. Rizwan fell before the end of the power play, top-

edging a ball from Tim Southee which hung for a long time in the night sky before being caught by Conway, the New Zealand wicketkeeper.

Ish Sodhi pulled off a brilliant one-handed catch off his bowling to dismiss Fakhar Zaman, but Pakistan was 109 for three after 10 overs, still in the race. Babar and Iftikhar added 40 for the fourth wicket but the Pakistan run rate began to dip below New Zealand's.

As Pakistan's set batsman, Babar was crucial, but New Zealand did well to limit him by bowling shorter to restrict his access to the shorter straight boundaries at Eden Park.

Pakistan was 159 for four at the end of the 15th over, needing 68 runs from 30 balls. Its task became much harder when Azam Kham and Shaheen Afridi fell to the first and third balls of the 16th over, bowled by Adam Milne.

Babar fell at the start of the 17th over and with him went Pakistan's last hopes.