

OPINION 6
HOLISTIC NATIONAL
EDUCATIONAL OUTLOOK

WORLD 8
SUNAK TRIES TO QUELL
CONSERVATIVE REVOLT

MONEY 10
GOVT DISBURSES ₹4,415 CR
UNDER PLI SCHEMES

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 17
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY JANUARY 18, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



PRAGGNANANDHAA
STUNS WORLD
CHAMPION LIREN
11 SPORTS

Modi opens Kerala ports to international business

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The two-day-long whirlwind tour to Kochi and Thrissur by Prime Minister Narendra Modi culminated on Wednesday afternoon with Kerala receiving the country's biggest Dry Dock facility, valued at Rs 1,799 crore, a Ship Repair and Overhauling unit (at an investment of Rs 970 crore), and an import centre for liquefied petroleum gas built at a cost of Rs 1,236 crore. Dedicating these three facilities to the nation, Prime Minister Modi disclosed that these projects would generate 4,000 direct jobs and almost twice that number of indirect jobs.

"We are on our way to reclaim our position as the country with the highest global Gross Domestic Product. Bharat will soon emerge as the centre of global trade. We will be rated as the global Maritime Power thanks to the projects dedicated to the nation, as well as the fast progress underway under the Sagar Mala Schemes," said Modi.

The Prime Minister announced that these three projects would set the tone for the development of the country's southern region. "The capacity of Cochin Shipyard Ltd will increase manifold in the next few years. Major reforms initiated by our government since 2014 have led to an increase in the volume of shipping as well as ease of doing business. More investments are on the anvil, and this would, in turn, generate more employment opportunities," said the Prime Minister.

Quoting data and statistics from



Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers during his visit at Guruvayur Temple in Guruvayur in Thrissur district on Wednesday

PTI

various sources, the Prime Minister said there has been a 140 per cent increase in the number of seafarers from the country. "Our ports have emerged as the ones with the fastest loading and unloading facilities, and this has attracted many shipping companies that used to make use of ports in other countries," he said.

Elaborating on the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (a scheme to bring about the Blue

Revolution through sustainable and responsible development of the fisheries sector in the country), Modi said the project has revolutionised the coastal economy. "It has helped not only the small-scale fishermen but also those engaged in deep-sea fishing," said Modi. The Prime Minister mentioned that the shipbuilding and repairing facilities in India and the new dry dock facility have started paying rich dividends. "Even foreign

vessels are on their way to Kochi because of our efficiency, skill, and quality work. Our own dependence on other countries for shipbuilding and repairing is coming down," said the Prime Minister. Modi further disclosed that 25 crore persons have been liberated from the shackles of poverty during the last nine years of the BJP rule. The fishing community can make use of the Kisan Credit Card for availing loans. The Prime

Minister said that fish production and the export of seafood have shown a steep hike during the last five years.

Dr TT Ajith Kumar, a senior scientist at National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, told The Pioneer the last six years have seen a tremendous turnaround in the livelihood of the fishing community, thanks to the PM MSY.

Continued on Page 2



Inclement weather challenge for Ram devotees

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With the commencement of the rituals for the consecration of Lord Ram in Ayodhya, inclement weather has made commuting difficult throughout northern India, leading to chaos at airports and railway stations, with the numbers growing. On Wednesday, around 120 flights (both domestic and international) at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport experienced delays in arrivals and departures due to heavy fog and reduced visibility in the national capital and surrounding areas.

The crisis is escalating as Indian Railways has decided to cancel and short-terminate all trains, including the semi high-speed Vande Bharats bound for the holy city, until January 22, citing "developmental works". A spokesperson for Indian

Railways mentioned that 20 trains arriving in Delhi were delayed by up to five hours due to foggy weather. Commuting by roads to Ayodhya is also unsafe in the current foggy conditions. Many travelers who had booked their flights and train tickets in advance are concerned about whether they will manage to reach Ayodhya on that day. Railway ticket bookings have surged by 80 per cent, and intercity cab operators are anticipating a 60 per cent spike in bookings, according to travel portals.

While routine commuting across the cities of northern India, including Delhi and NCR, is affected, a significant outcry is reported daily at airports and railway stations, even as the national air and rail transporters claim to have set up war rooms to facilitate passengers.

Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

Centre for Policy Research FCRA registration cancelled

NEW DELHI: The government has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of prominent public think-tank Centre for Policy Research for alleged violation of laws, officials said on Wednesday. The move came nearly a year after the MHA had suspended the NGO's registration under the FCRA. The think-tank was under scrutiny after surveys carried out by the Income Tax department. The FCRA licence was suspended in February 2023 for 180 days.

SC to hear Maharashtra Speaker order on MLAs

NEW DELHI: Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Wednesday hinted that the appeal filed by the Shiv Sena Uddhav Thackeray faction challenging the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's decision to reject disqualification petitions against Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and endorsing the MLAs as the authentic Shiv Sena, might be scheduled for a hearing before a Bench on January 22.

Pakistan warns Iran for attacks, recalls envoy

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Wednesday recalled its ambassador to Iran and suspended all high-level planned bilateral visits in the coming days, hours after Tehran launched an unprecedented missile and drone strikes on what it said were terrorist bases of a Sunni militant group in the restive Balochistan province. Foreign Office spokesperson Muntaz Baloch in a statement read out to the media also said that the Iranian Ambassador to

Pakistan who is currently visiting Iran may not return to Islamabad for the time being. Pakistan also reserves the right to retaliate to the provocation by Iran, she said. Two bases of Balochi militant group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan were targeted by missiles and drones on Tuesday, Iranian state media reported, a day after Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards attacked targets in Iraq and Syria with missiles. "We have also informed them (Iran) that Pakistan has decided to recall its ambassador from Iran and

that the Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, now on a visit to Iran, may not return for the time being. We have also decided to suspend all high-level visits which were ongoing or were planned between Pakistan and Iran in coming days," Baloch said. She said that last night's "unprovoked and blatant breach of Pakistan's sovereignty by Iran is a violation of international law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations".

Continued on Page 2

Bloodbath on Dalal Street

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex nosedived 1,628 points or 2.23 per cent on Wednesday, marking its biggest single-day slide in more than one-and-a-half years following an intense sell-off in banking, metal and oil shares triggered by weak global trends. The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged 1,628.01 points or 2.23 per cent to settle at 71,500.76 with 24 of its constituents ending in the red. During the day, it plummeted 1,699.47 points or 2.32 per cent to a low of 71,429.30. The Nifty tanked 460.35 points or 2.09 per cent to settle at 21,571.95, falling for



the second day in a row. Key stock indices suffered their worst single-day losses in percentage terms since June 13, 2022. HDFC Bank was the major drag, falling more than 8 per cent to

emerge as biggest loser after its third quarter financial results failed to meet market expectations. Its market valuation took a hit of more than Rs 1 lakh crore. HDFC Bank on Tuesday

reported a 2.65 per cent rise in consolidated net profit of Rs 17,258 crore for the October-December period against Rs 16,811 crore in the preceding September quarter. The sell-off triggered selling in other banking shares with Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, SBI and IndusInd Bank closing in the red. Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Maruti, Asian Paints and Tata Motors were among the other major laggards. HCL Technologies, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle and Larsen & Toubro were the gainers.

Continued on Page 2

Congress seeks public help on Manifesto

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress announced on Wednesday its intention to involve citizens and incorporate their suggestions for preparing the party's manifesto for this year's Lok Sabha polls. In this regard, the grand old party launched a website and an email ID to enable itself to prepare a people's manifesto. Addressing a press conference at Congress headquarters, former Union Minister P

Chidambaram, who heads the Manifesto Committee of the Congress, said that the party is holding consultations and seeking suggestions from the public for the manifesto. He emphasised that the manifesto for the Lok Sabha election will be a "people's manifesto." "The present exercise is to receive suggestions from the members of the public. This will be a people's manifesto. So, it is important to gather as many suggestions as possible in the few weeks available to



us," Chidambaram said. "We want to involve the people of India in making the manifesto. We hope people from every walk of life will give their suggestions. We appeal and invite you to provide suggestions you would like to be incorporated into the manifesto to make it a people's manifesto," he added. The former Union minister said that at least one consultation would be held in each State. "The idea is to hold at least one consultation

in each State. In some States, more than one public consultation may be held," he said. When asked if their INDIA bloc allies will also be consulted, the Congress leader mentioned that anyone who wishes to attend the consultation is welcome, but a decision on holding discussions with allies on the manifesto will be taken by the party chief. "If the ally parties of the INDIA group wish to attend the consultation, they are

most welcome.... Whether there will be a higher-level consultation will be for the Congress president to decide," Chidambaram said. Convener of the party's manifesto committee TS Singh Deo said the exercise is being carried out to ensure that the voice of the people is reflected in the document. "It is important to seek the suggestions of the stakeholders so that it does not remain merely an academic exercise," he said.

Continued on Page 2

Aryavarta raag to greet Ram on arrival

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

To adhere to the raag tradition of Aryavarta (the erstwhile name of India), a series of indigenous strings and tappings (taal) from across corners of the country will resonate through the new precincts of Ram Lalla just before his Praan Prathishta on Monday afternoon. The entire musical saaz-sajja (ensemble), referred to as 'Mangal Dhvani,' includes instruments ranging from native Awadhi or Uttar Pradesh's Pakhawaj, Bansuri, and Dholak to Karnataka's Carnatic Veena, Delhi's Shehnai, and Gujarat's Santar, among other melodious instruments. The

scheduled performance will fill the temple premises from 10 am until noon, leading up to the final puja ceremony at 12:20 pm on January 22, in the presence of a host of devotees and dignitaries, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The entire musical extravaganza has been orchestrated by the prestigious Sangeet Natak Akademi which comes under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Culture. The programme is being coordinated by renowned writer of Ayodhya culture Yatindra Mishra.

Sources in the Prati Ram Janmabhoomi Praan Prathishta Samvad Kendra said that the



Photo: Deepak Kumar Jha

decision for this musical occasion has been taken as it has been the Sanatan Dharma tradition that the invocation of Lord should in complete joy and harmony and India has been culturally rich in the music and musical instruments right from ancient times. Maharashtra's Sundari, Punjab's Algoja, Odisha's Mridaal, Madhya Pradesh's Santoor, Manipur's Pung, Assam's Nagara and Kaali while Chhattisgarh's Tambura will also be played by leading maestros in their field for two hours. According to the note circulated by the organisers, Pakhawaj of Bihar, Ravanhatha from Rajasthan, Shreekol and Sarod from West Bengal,

Ghattam from Andhra Pradesh, Sitar from Jharkhand, Uttarakhand's Hudkaa and musically rich Tamil Nadu's Nagaswaram, Taval & Mridangam will also add on to create a divine atmosphere on the day. Government officials said arrangements are being made for the smooth and successful conduct of the consecration ceremony as the nation will be led by the Prime Minister and more than 8,000 guests to visit the temple on this day, followed by lakhs of devotees from January 23 onwards. Besides the live telecasts by Doordarshan a Special News Bulletin titled Ram Ki Paidi, Shri

Ram Ayodhya Aaye Hain, daily Ayodhya round-up, guest discussions, special stories and vox-pops have been arranged. Legendary bhajan artists in the likes of Anoop Jalota, singers Shaan and several others are in the pipeline to lend their voice at several stages of the week long consecration ceremony. Besides several cultural programmes, including dance forms of Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, have already started at locations such as Ram Ki Paidi, Dharam Path, Tulsi Udyan, Circuit House, Saket College, etc, where visitors will be acquainted with cultural activities of different States.

Continued on Page 2

Suvendu moves HC to restrain Mamata rally on January 22

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday moved the Calcutta High Court demanding deployment of central forces and seeking a direction against the "rally for harmony" announced by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on January 22 the day when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Ram Temple Ayodhya.



administration or police but also for the people of Bengal in general," Adhikari said.

"The lives and properties of the people of Bengal is in great danger ... and the TMC is planning to fan a communal disturbance which is why the Chief Minister has decided not only to confine the rally to Kolkata but carry it out in the districts and at block levels ... we will have to stop it at all cost," Adhikari said.

The BJP leader also demanded deployment of central forces in Bengal on January 22 saying he feared that "mischievous elements may create communal trouble --- which is why in the harmony rally is being organized --- to polarize the votes ahead of the elections."

His petition in the High Court comes in tandem with two letters written by his brother and MP Dibendu Adhikari to

Home Minister Amit Shah and Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose to take appropriate action so that peace can be ensured.

"The people must be protected against any kind of violence which some people may want to get votes so I have written to the Home Minister and Governor seeking their attention," the junior Adhikari who though being elected on a TMC ticket has subsequently shifted to the BJP wrote.

The Chief Minister had in an indirect reference to the Prime Minister on Tuesday said that the consecration of deities and inauguration of temples should be left on the priests adding she and her party would organise a "rally for harmony" on January 22.

Though she said that she had nothing against any religion and that the "rally" and "nothing to do with any other event organized anywhere," Banerjee iterated, "the 'Harmony Rally' is not a counter to any other event. I have great respect for the monks and saints. I always listen to them. We are organising the rally to spread the message of unity of all religions, since the next day is the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose."

Sandeshkhali attack: State cops, CBI joint SIT to probe case



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a balanced judgment, the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday ordered the formation of a Special Investigation Team comprising members from Central Bureau of Investigation and Bengal Police to investigate the Sandeshkhali attack case.

Early this month hundreds of supporters of local Trinamool Congress toughie Shahjehan Sheikh had attacked the members of Enforcement Directorate and CAPF when they went to raid his house at Sarberia in Sandeshkhali block in North 24 Parganas in connection with Rs 10 thousand crore ration scam.

Political activities on rise even as mercury dips in J&K ahead of LS polls

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Amid plummeting mercury levels in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the political temperatures are soaring high ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in April-May 2024.

The political parties in the region have already started organizing mass contact programs and preparing their poll strategies to take on their rivals in the poll arena to woo the electorate.

On one hand, the Bharatiya Janta Party is expected to design its poll campaign on the development plank and banking heavily on the charisma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and on the other hand, Kashmir-based regional political parties are aiming to get together to give a tough fight to the BJP to at least retain maximum seats.

Taking the lead, the top brass of the Bharatiya Janta Party has already set in motion the consultative process to first identify the core issues and then work on the poll strategy to woo the electorate spread across all five Lok Sabha seats in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Out of these five Lok Sabha seats, BJP had won both the seats from the Jammu division and three others were won by the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference from the Kashmir valley.

After completing the marathon exercise of Delimitation in the region the BJP is aiming to win at least three Lok Sabha seats this time. The BJP has also convened a high-level meeting in Jammu on January 18 where national general secretaries of the party are expected to fine-tune the poll strategy of the party after taking feedback from local leadership.

The meeting is scheduled to take place here at the party headquarters where the senior leaders are expected to brainstorm on the party's poll agenda. The focus of the BJP leadership is mostly likely on areas where the BJP had failed to make inroads during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

With certain areas of Poonch and Rajouri districts of Jammu region clubbed in Anantnag Lok Sabha seat of south Kashmir, the BJP is hopeful of making an impact and is making all efforts to boost its support base in the Valley.

NCC cadets role models for country youths, says Defence Secretary Aramane

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For the country's youth, the cadets of National Cadet Corps (NCC) are the role models who inspire them to excel in their respective field and contribute to nation building, Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane said here on Wednesday.

Addressing the cadets at the ongoing NCC Republic Day Camp, he also emphasised that the NCC, with its philosophy and vision, energises the youths and train them into better citizens. The objective to expand the NCC is to motivate more and more youth across the country to join the largest uniformed youth organisation and explore its benefits, he added.

The Defence Secretary urged the youth to shed mediocrity and aim high to achieve their goals, which in turn help the country to reach greater heights. "The youth with lots of energy, when not properly directed, will end up doing antisocial activities. The youth has to be properly educated and should be given a task which is constructive and contributes to the nation's



economy and prosperity. NCC cadets can be their inspiration to achieve this objective," he added.

During his visit, Aramane witnessed a mesmerizing Cultural Programme, featuring group dances and ballets that showcased our nation's rich cultural heritage by the NCC cadets. The themes depicted by the cadets ranged from Unity in Diversity, the oneness of the Indian source, the scientific temperament and the improvement to the economy.

The Defence Secretary also visited the 'Flag Area', prepared by 17 NCC Directorates showcasing various social awareness schemes depicted through sand models. He was also briefed on various projects undertaken by NCC cadets on 'Waste to Wealth'.

Ovarian cancer cells spread more easily in aged tissue: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers at the Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Science (IISc) have found that ovarian cancer cells can spread more easily in tissues that are aged because these tissues secrete a unique extracellular matrix that attracts the spreading cancer. The discovery holds importance as ovarian cancer is dangerous as it often goes undetected until it has spread beyond the ovaries, and the symptoms can also be attributed to other conditions.

The researchers used a chemotherapy-induced senescence model to study this phenomenon. They first extracted tissues found in the lining of body cavities from mice models and exposed half of these tissues to chemotherapeutics that are used to treat cancer, pushing them to senescence — a state in which the cells stop replicating but don't die. "What you might call in a body ageing, in a cell or tissue you would call it senescence," said Ramray Bhat, Associate Professor at the Department of Developmental Biology and Genetics (DBG) and corresponding author of the study published in 'Cellular and Molecular Life Sciences'.

The team then exposed both young and aged mouse tissues and human tissue-like cell sheets to ovarian cancer cells. They used time-lapse imaging to tag the normal and cancer cells with different fluores-

cent markers so that they could be studied under a microscope for extended periods of time.

"It's slightly harder to image tissues when compared to cell lines as the latter has only one particular cell type growing," added Bharat Thapa, first author and former biology undergraduate student at IISc. What they found was that the cancer cells chose to settle down more on the aged tissues; moreover, they settled closer to the aged normal cells in the cell sheets.

The team also carried out experiments on human cell lines to replicate the predictions of the computer simulations. They noticed that the cancer cells stuck strongly to the extracellular matrix around the aged cells, and eventually cleared the aged cells away. They also noticed that the aged ECM had higher levels of proteins such as fibronectin, laminin and hyaluronan compared to the young cells' ECM, which allowed the cancer cells to bind more strongly.

Based on their findings, the researchers suggest that this could potentially be one of the reasons why aged populations typically tend to have worse outcomes in cancer than younger populations.

"The fact is that chemotherapy also induces senescence, and that senescence can make things worse," says Bhat. "Appropriate use of chemotherapy could be very important in getting good outcomes in ovarian cancer."

86 per cent 14-18 years old cannot read regional languages fluently: ASER

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) released on Wednesday said more than 86.8 per cent youngsters in the age group of 14-18 years are enrolled in educational institutions but one-fourth of them cannot read a Class-2 level text fluently in their regional languages. The report also said that more than 32 per cent of those aged 18 or above are not enrolled in educational institutions, while more than half of Class 11 and 12 students opt for humanities stream.

The report also asserted that the fear that several older students dropped out of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic due to a loss of livelihood was unfounded. While

the report noted small gender gaps in enrolment, it flagged notable differences between age groups.

The ASER 2023 'Beyond Basics' report puts the spotlight on youths aged 14 to 18 years in rural India, an age group that was also the focus of ASER 2017. "There are small gender gaps in enrolment, but notable differences are visible by age. Older youth are more likely to be not enrolled. The percentage of youth not enrolled is 3.9 pc for 14-year-old youth and is 32.6 pc for 18-year-olds," the report said.

"Overall, 86.8 per cent of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution," the 2023 report said. It, however, underlined that 25 per cent of them cannot read a Class-2 level text fluently in their regional languages.



The report said more than 55 per cent students of Classes 11-12 opt for humanities, followed by science and commerce. It also pointed out that females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) streams than males. "Most of the young people in this age group were enrolled in the arts and humanities stream. In class 11 or higher, more than

half are enrolled in the Arts and Humanities stream (55.7 pc) Females are less likely to be enrolled in the STEM stream (28.1 pc) than males (36.3 pc)," it added.

Last year's report showed that the enrolment levels of children in the age bracket of six to 14 years had gone up marginally from 96.6 per cent in 2010 to 96.7 per cent in 2014 and from 97.2 per cent in

2018 to 98.4 per cent in 2022. According to the report, only 5.6 per cent youngsters in the country are currently undergoing vocational training or have been enrolled in other related courses. "Only 5.6 pc of surveyed youth report taking vocational training or other related courses currently. Youth at the college level are the most likely to be taking vocational training (16.2 pc). Most youth are taking short duration courses (of 6 months or less). A higher percentage of males (40.3 per cent) than females (28 per cent) report doing work other than household work for at least 15 days during the preceding month," it added.

The report pointed out that among both males and females, most youth who are

working in activities other than household work tend to be working on family farms. ASER is a nationwide citizen-led household survey that provides a snapshot of the status of children's schooling and learning in rural India. First implemented in 2005, the 'basic' ASER survey was conducted annually until 2014 and switched to an alternate-year cycle in 2016.

The 'basic' ASER collects information about enrolment in pre-school and school for children in the age group of three to 16, and assesses children aged five to 16 one-on-one to understand their foundational reading and arithmetic abilities. In the intervening years, ASER dives deeper into different aspects of children's schooling and learning in rural India.

DGCA imposes penalties on SpiceJet, AI; BCAS fines IndiGo ₹1.2 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 30 lakh each on SpiceJet and Air India, whereas, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has slapped a fine of Rs 1.2 crore on IndiGo Airlines.

In addition to the BCAS fine, IndiGo has also been levied with a fine of Rs 30 lakh by the DGCA.

The BCAS has also imposed a penalty of Rs 30 lakh on the Mumbai International Airport Ltd (MIAL) for the incident in which the passengers of a delayed flight were seen eating on the tarmac.

BCAS and DGCA have also imposed fines of Rs 60 lakhs and Rs 30 lakhs on the Mumbai airport.

Pakistan warns Iran for attacks...

From Page 1

"This illegal act is completely unacceptable and has no justification whatsoever. Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran," Baloch said, adding that Pakistan has conveyed this message to the Iranian Government.

Separately, Balochistan information minister Jan Achakzai in his reaction to the attack by Iran said that he was "disappointed".

"We are extremely disappointed, as the Foreign Office has already said terrorism is a common threat to all countries in the region that requires coordinated action. Such acts of air space violations by Iran undermine neighbourly relation, trust and renewed trade linkages established with Balochistan," he said in a statement of X.

According to the Foreign

office, the Iranian charge d'affaires here was summoned to the foreign ministry and issued a strongly-worded condemnation of Iran's "violation of its airspace".

Pakistan condemned the overnight attack which killed two children and injured three girls.

Iran's attack could potentially raise tensions in the Middle East, already roiled by Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"Two key strongholds of the Jaish al-Dhulm (Jaish al-Adl) terrorist group in Pakistan" were "specifically targeted and successfully demolished," Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said.

Earlier, former prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was shocked by the Iranian attack on his country.

Shehbaz in his reaction said that the attack was against the spirit of friendship between the two countries. "I am shocked at the Iranian breach

of Pakistani sovereignty. This missile attack is against the spirit of our friendship and principles of good neighbourliness, especially as it undermines the historic relationship between our two countries," he said.

"Sincere dialogue and meaningful cooperation between our two countries is the need of the hour. My condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in the attack," he added.

His response came when Pakistan was apparently struggling to come up with a plausible response to the unexpected Iranian attack against militants' hideouts in its remote south-western region of Balochistan, bordering Iran.

Tehran has repeatedly warned that the Jaish al-Adl militant group is using Pakistani soil in the border town of Panjgur in Balochistan to launch terror attacks on Iranian security forces.

Bloodbath on...

From Page 1

"A nosedive correction in banking stocks, along with concerns over delays in US FED rate cuts, impacted market sentiments. Given the elevated valuations, coupled with the fact that optimism regarding earnings and GDP growth for FY24 is already reflected in the market, triggered the correction," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were also trading with sharp cuts. The US markets ended in negative territory on Tuesday. "Today's market fall is led by banks on the back of HDFC Bank results, showing heightened levels of credit/deposit (CD) ratio beyond RBI's comfort levels. This is the case with most other banks as well. Thus, the markets expect terror attacks on Iranian security forces.

aggressive deposit mobilisation, a slowdown in lending growth, or both. This development can lead to some de-rating of the sector.

"After the significant up move we have witnessed recently, markets are taking a breather, especially since market valuations are higher than historical multiples," said Naveen Kulkarni, Chief Investment Officer, Axis Securities PMS.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge fell by 1.09 per cent and smallcap index declined 0.90 per cent. Bankex tumbled 4.02 per cent, financial services fell by 3.76 per cent, metal by 2.86 per cent, commodities by 2.31 per cent, telecommunication by 1.94 per cent and realty by 1.47 per cent. Among the indices, IT, consumer durables and tech were the gainers. As many as 2,510 stocks declined while 1,301 advanced and 89 remained unchanged.

Aryavarta raag...

From Page 1

Organisers said vivid events will introduce the cultural theme of the new Ayodhya. Renowned spiritual speaker Devkinandan Thakur will narrate the Ram Katha at Ram Katha Park which will run until January 23. "Number of programs have been arranged for the next few months as lakhs of devotees are expected in Ayodhya every day beginning any day this month," said an office bearer of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra.

Modi opens...

From Page 1

"The scheme has started yielding results much earlier than expected because of the enthusiasm shown by the fishers as well as the officials. It is a commendable achievement," said Dr Ajith. Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister worshipped at the Lord Krishna Temple at Guruvayur and the Lord Rama Temple at Thrippayar. He attended the marriage of Bhagya, the daughter of actor Suresh Gopi, and four other couples and blessed them. Before departing from Kochi, Modi addressed the BJP's Shakti Kendra in-charges numbering 7,000 and complimented them for the good work they were doing as Karyakarthis.

Congress seeks public...

From Page 1

In response to a question about whether repealing three recent criminal laws passed by the government will be part of the manifesto, Chidambaram mentioned that there were a few dissent notes against these laws from him, party leaders Digvijaya Singh, and Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, already in the public domain.

Regarding the likely date by which the manifesto would be finalised, the Congress stated that it expected to complete it by February 15 for the CWC approval, as the manifesto has to be approved by the CWC.

Inclement weather challenge for Ram...

From Page 1

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has said that dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail over Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and parts of Uttar Pradesh during January 17 to 22.

Flight movements are set to grow tenfold, with an unprecedented number of chartered flights ferrying India's wealthiest devotees and others to the temple town. According to reports, more than 800 flights, including chartered flights, are expected to land at Maharishi Valmiki International Airport in Ayodhya. On the inauguration day, more than 100 flights are expected to land here. Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia flagged off the inaugural flights connecting

Ayodhya to Kolkata and Bengaluru on Wednesday. Presently, Ayodhya is connected from Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata.

According to travel portals, amid the grand Ram Mandir Pran Pratishtha ceremony at Ayodhya on January 22, airfares on the Delhi-Ayodhya and Mumbai-Ayodhya routes for January 20 and 21 were reported to be around Rs 18,000-20,000 on Wednesday, compared to the average fare on the route ranging from Rs 2,500 to Rs 4,000. In fact, the fares on the Mumbai-Ayodhya route were even higher, ranging from over Rs 20,000 to Rs. 24,000. The Flight Information Display System (FIDS) at Delhi Airport reported a total of 53 flights, including 21 domestic arrivals, 16 domestic departures, 13

international departures, and 3 international arrivals, have been cancelled and are not operating.

These cancellations are attributed to fog and other operational reasons affecting flights to and from Delhi Airport. The visibility recorded at Delhi's main weather station, Safdarjung observatory, and Palam was 200 metres at 5:30 am. Approximately 20 Delhi-bound trains were running late by up to six hours due to the weather conditions. Meanwhile, Delhi Airport has informed the Ministry of Civil Aviation about the delayed operationalisation of the main airstrip, Runway 28/10. The airport attributed the delay to the initiation of the rehabilitation project post the G20 Summit and disruptions caused by GRAP IV measures imposed in Delhi. Runway 28/10 has been

undergoing scheduled re-carpeting since mid-September, with the original completion date set for December 15, 2023. The airport emphasised in its report the necessity of this rehabilitation, crucial for ensuring the runway's continued safety and functionality. Delhi Airport boasts two CAT III-compliant runways: the primary Runway 28/10 and the 29L/11R, situated closest to the Gurugram side. These runways adhere to international standards, facilitating precision instrument approach and landing during adverse weather conditions.

On Sunday, data from the flight tracking service Flightradar24 revealed that 508 outbound flights from the IGI airport were delayed, and 87 were cancelled. Inbound

flights experienced 414 delays and 42 cancellations. Dense fog also affected operations on Monday, and on Tuesday, 50 flights were cancelled.

To address issues promptly, Scindia announced the establishment of "War Rooms" at the six metropolitan airports, where airport and airline operators will collaborate to resolve any problems related to passenger inconvenience in real-time. These "War Rooms" will be dedicated to addressing issues promptly. Furthermore, Scindia assured round-the-clock availability of sufficient CFS manpower to ensure the security and smooth functioning of operations at the airports. Satellite imagery showed a reduction in fog over Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, northern Madhya Pradesh, and Delhi. However, dense

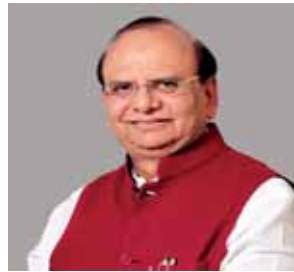
fog continues to prevail over parts of Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. An official from the IMD said, "The distinction between low clouds and fog in satellite imagery is often a challenge."

The layer of early-morning fog over the Indo-Gangetic plains in north India thinned in some parts on Wednesday, according to officials. The IMD mentioned that dense to very dense fog conditions are likely to prevail over north India for the next five days. It also said that cold-day to severe-cold-day conditions would persist over the northern plains for two more days. The IMD concluded by saying, "Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely to continue over northwest India for five days."

Act against revenue officials for Kanwar Mela irregularities: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has asked the Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar to take strict action against three officials of the Revenue Department of GNCTD for gross misconduct in allotment of tentage work worth Rs. 23.40 crore for Kanwar Camps in the National Capital in the year 2022. Giving this information here on Wednesday, officials said Saxena recommended "strict action as per the relevant rules" against the then SDM (HQ), RR Singh, Section Officer, Sanjay Kumar Madan and Junior Assistant, Anurag, based on a factual report submitted by the Chief Secretary in the matter, wherein it was alleged that a scam had taken place in awarding the tentage work for Kanwar Camps by the Caretaking Branch of the Revenue Department, GNCTD. The report underlined the



gross misconduct on part of these officials as the work awarded to the bidders were modified without prior approval of the competent authority and thus causing loss to the government exchequer. The complainant alleged that ordinary tents (shamiana) were set up @ Rs.3.45 per sq.ft, which was @Rs.2.25 in the year 2019. It was alleged that waterproof tents could be used in place of ordinary tents @ Rs.3.45 per sq.ft. Further, the Revenue Department ordered tin shade @ Rs.7.90 per sq.ft instead of pipe structured steel hanger previously used @ Rs.3.90 per sq.ft. In addition,

LED par can light were ordered @ Rs.8 instead of halogen light available for a meagre Re.1 per unit. During the inquiry, the Revenue Department informed the Department of Vigilance (DoV) that the work order for hiring of tentage and electrical items for Kanwar Yatra was, on the basis of extension, awarded to the L1 bidder, which was earlier given the contract in 2019. Kanwar Yatra was not organized in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 Pandemic. The Revenue Department, on 01.07.2022, had received a letter from the Chairman, Tirth Yatra Vikas Samiti, GNCTD, through the Minister (Law) to initiate the process for making arrangements regarding Kanwar Yatra. The Department assessed the need for setting up 181 Kanwar camps (172 Kanwar and 09 Security Camps) across the city for which the financial implication was assessed for Rs. 23,40,15,481/- . Since the L1

bidder expressed his inability to execute the complete work alone, the work was distributed among the L2 and L3 bidders on the L1 rates. The tentage and electric work was awarded to 03 vendors namely Guptajee Tent Services Pvt. Ltd (L1), Mahalakshmi Light House (L2) and Ahuja Tents & Decorators (L3). The Revenue Department stated that prior approval was not taken by the Caretaking Branch to include new items in the work order and they were presumably inserted in the final document by these 03 officers, who signed and certified the work order. The DoV in its report observed that additional items like tin shade, side walls, LED lights, etc. were added in the work orders without approval of the competent authority, which amounted to gross misconduct. Accordingly, major penalty proceedings were recommended against the 03 officials.

Will pay obeisance to Ram Lalla with family after consecration ceremony: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said he will go with his family to Ayodhya and pay obeisance to Ram Lalla at the Ram temple there after the January 22 consecration ceremony. Talking to reporters after meeting the elderly who were departing for Dwarkadheesh under the Delhi government's pilgrimage scheme, Kejriwal said, "I got a letter that said only one person was allowed (for the ceremony) due to security reasons. They said a team will come to give a personal invitation but no one came." Several opposition parties, including the CPM, the Congress, Trinamool Congress, and Samajwadi Party, announced that they would skip the inauguration ceremony. Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena said he was not invited despite the contribution of Balasaheb Thackeray behind the Ram Mandir dream. Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar will also skip the event.



"I want to visit for a darshan of Ram Lalla along with my wife and children. My parents are also longing for a darshan of Ram Lalla. I will go after the January 22 ceremony along with my wife, children and parents," he said. However, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said the Ram temple's trust has sent a formal invitation to the Delhi chief minister by post. "We hope he will definitely grace the historic moment of 'Pran Pratishtha' (consecration) in Ayodhya," he said. The "Pran Pratishtha" of the idol of Ram Lalla will be held

at the upcoming Ram temple in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh on January 22 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it. Thousands of people, including seers and noted personalities, have been invited for the ceremony. Kejriwal, who is the national convener of the AAP, also said after the "Pran Pratishtha", his government will try to arrange more trains to Ayodhya under the Mukhya Mantri Teertha Yatra Yojna (pilgrimage scheme). Visit to a temple is a matter of faith and there can be no politics over it, he said when asked about Prime Minister Modi's visit to temples in different parts of the

country. "Temple (visit) is a matter of faith. Everyone has their faith and belief according to their religion. It's a matter of devotion and faith, and there cannot be any politics in it," he said. Earlier Delhi Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj said he had "no knowledge" about it. "I believe it is important to go to (Ayodhya) but going when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going there is not necessary," he said. On Congress leader Rahul Gandhi defending the decision of his party's top leaders to decline the invite to the ceremony and alleging that the January 22 function has been made into a political event, Bhardwaj said most opposition leaders have said they will go to Ayodhya. "Arvind Kejriwal has already been there. There should not be too much tug of war over the fact that why are you not going there when Prime Minister Modi is going or why will you not sit with him," the AAP leader said.

AAP leaders reciting Sunderkand act of political hypocrisy, says Anurag

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Wednesday here termed AAP reciting Sunderkand as political hypocrisy and asked party supremo Arvind Kejriwal to spell out steps taken by him for temples and priests. Making these assertions on the sidelines of a swacha sewa shramdaan at Balmiki temple with Delhi BJP leaders, Thakur also said "Aam Aadmi Party has set records of corruption. Its Deputy Chief Minister, Ministers, MPs are all in jail. No one arrested is getting bail. Arvind Kejriwal is completely trapped in the quagmire of corruption today. Even after receiving four summons from

ED for many months, these people are not appearing for necessary questioning. They are not appearing there but are doing politics by appearing in front of the media every day," he said. Terming the Sundarkand recitation by Aam Aadmi Party as pure political hypocrisy, Thakur said, "Arvind Kejriwal should tell what he has done for the temples, priests and saints of Delhi in the last 10 years. Why were public money given to the Maulvis and Imams of mosques by the Delhi Government? After all, why were temples discriminated against for 10 years? Today ED summons are coming, so these people are planning to recite Sunderkand." Responding to the Congress



boycotting the life consecration ceremony of Shri Ram Lalla on January 22 and not accepting it

by many Congressmen, the central minister said "The Congress party talks about giving

justice to the people but it talks about giving justice to its own party.

Congress leaders should know that if it separates Ram devotees from Ram, no one will listen to them. That is why no one is listening to him even in Congress. Congress's efforts to distance Ram devotees from Ram are barbaric and people are ignoring them. Indi alliance has always talked about humiliating and crushing Sanatan. There is no such occasion when Congress has not let down Hindus by adopting the politics of appeasement. Till yesterday they were saying that the temple is being built 3 kilometers away. This too has been proven false. All these unrestrained statements are being made only to do politics, to remain in the headlines and to stay away from Ram Temple. Perhaps they cannot believe

that how the Ram temple for which they had raised an army of lawyers to stop it from being built, got built in just two years. For them Ram was imaginary," he said. Thakur further said, "This shows that no matter how much politics these people do, how much they talk about humiliating and crushing Sanatan. He said for the last 10 years, the opposition has been boycotting whatever good is happening in the country. "They boycotted the new Parliament building, they boycotted Modi ji's speech. But they should know that people boycott them for these very reasons. Today they are feeling that due to the boy-

cott of Shri Ram, people may boycott them again, hence they are coming in the shelter of Shri Ram but are avoiding going to Ayodhya. These people do not want to come to the grand airport built in the name of Maharishi Valmiki ji. Do not want to travel in Amrit Bharat/Vande Bharat train. Whatever good is happening in India, they have to oppose it." BJP's National Vice President and Delhi in-charge Bajajant Jay Panda said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given us such an opportunity in the form of this cleanliness Shramdaan due to which along with the devotion of God, we can clean the temple premises and also provide convenience to the people coming to the temple.

Cold wave conditions abate in city as minimum temperature rises to 5.7 C

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Cold wave conditions in Delhi abated on Wednesday after five days with a rise in the minimum temperature above 4°C for the first time since Friday even as the intensity of morning fog reduced and the air quality remained very poor. The Safdarjung station, Delhi's primary, on Wednesday recorded a minimum temperature of 5.7 degree Celsius or two degrees below normal. It was 3.5°C a day earlier. The maximum temperature was recorded 18.2 degree Celsius, one notch below the normal. Delhiites experienced sunlight during the day, which gave respite from the icy cold winds. An average Air Quality Index (AQI) of 373 (very poor) was recorded at 9am on Wednesday compared to 377 (very poor) at 4pm on Tuesday. The national capital is experiencing cold-day conditions for the seventh consecutive day. The minimum temperature in Palam, Lodhi Road, Ridge and



Ayanagar was recorded 5.5 degree Celsius (two notches below the normal), 5.8 degree Celsius, 5.2 degree Celsius (four notches below the normal) and 5.4 degree Celsius (two notches below the normal) respectively. The maximum temperature in Palam, Lodhi Road, Ridge, Ayanagar, Jafarpur, Mangeshpur and Narela was recorded 18 degree Celsius, 17.7 degree Celsius, 18.3 degree Celsius, 18.8 degree Celsius, 17.7 degree Celsius, 16 degree Celsius and 17.3 degree Celsius respectively. Moderate fog was observed in Delhi with dense fog conditions

clouds and fog in satellite imagery is often a challenge," an official of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Early-morning foggy weather in north and northeast India has heavily impacted road, rail and air traffic over the last fortnight. Several people took refuge in government-run shelter homes to shield themselves from the freezing weather. The night shelters in Delhi are aimed at providing a refuge to homeless people who live on the streets and have nowhere else to go in the cold. The shelters offer blankets, beds, hot water, and food to those seeking shelter. The IMD said dense to very dense fog conditions are likely to prevail over north India for the next five days. It said cold-day to severe-cold-day conditions would persist over the northern plains for two more days. "Cold wave to severe cold wave conditions are likely to continue over northwest India for five days," it said. "The distinction between low

Will do whatever needed as per law, says Kejriwal after fresh ED summons

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With the Enforcement Directorate (ED) asking him to appear for questioning on Thursday after he skipped summons thrice in the Delhi excise policy case, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said here he will do whatever needs to be done as per law. Sources in the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Delhi government, however, said on Wednesday that he is unlikely to appear before the agency as he is scheduled to leave for Goa on a three-day tour to take stock of the party's preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Earlier, he was supposed to embark on a two-day tour of Goa from January 11 but had to postpone it due to preparations for the Republic Day programme in the national capital.



Kejriwal was issued the ED summons last week for the fourth time and asked to appear before the agency on January 18. At an event, where he interacted with elderly pilgrims leaving for Dwarkadheesh in Gujarat, the AAP national convener was asked about the Enforcement Directorate (ED) summons asking him to appear on Thursday in connection with the Delhi excise policy linked money laundering case.

Police recover weapon used to murder Divya Pahuja

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Fifteen days after the murder of Divya Pahuja, a former Gurugram-based model and girlfriend of slain gangster Sandeep Gadoli who was shot dead at a hotel here, the police in search operation along with the Municipal Corporation Gurugram (MCG) workers recovered the murder weapon on Wednesday. During the search operation in brushes located near Palam Vihar Mod on Old Delhi Road, the police recovered a pistol along with a live cartridge. "The weapon was recovered following the direction of the prime accused Abhijeet Singh. He was accompanying police following which during a search operation along with MCG workers weapon was recovered," Varun Dahiya, ACP (crime) said. Meanwhile, Abhijeet Singh was



sent to judicial custody after competition eight days police remand period on Wednesday, police said. Divya's body was recovered on January 13 -- eleven days after she was shot dead at a hotel, and was cremated on January 14 by her family members. Divya, 27, was allegedly killed by Abhijeet Singh, the owner of Hotel City Point where she was staying. Divya's body was recovered from a canal in Tohana in Haryana's Fatehabad district on January 13. According to the police, Divya and Abhijeet were in a relationship.

After successful first round of E-Auction, another opportunity to buy a premium home!

Starting from 18th Jan 2024

Phase-II of e-Auction

More than 700 premium flats up for grabs

Penthouses, Super HIG, HIG Dwarka Sector -19 B **MIG Dwarka Sector-14**

All New Freehold Flats | Multi-storeyed Equipped with lifts | Allotment through auction STP, Park, Water Drainage, Playground | Designated parking free with each flat | No restriction for those who own house/plot in Delhi | Apply online through www.dda.gov.in

DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Govt. of India, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023
Follow us on [official_dda](#) [ddaofficial](#) [official_dda](#) [Official_dda](#)

Cooperative to have big share in \$5 trillion Indian economy: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the aim is to ensure the cooperative sector has a big share in the Indian economy, which is projected to be USD 5 trillion by FY28, as the cooperative movement did not grow at the desired pace in the last 75 years. Shah, who also has the Union Cooperation Ministry portfolio, was addressing after inaugurating the new office of Central Registrar of Cooperative Societies (CRCS) spread over 41,000 square feet at the World Trade Centre, Nauroji Nagar in South Delhi. The building has been developed by state-owned NBCC. Shah said the new office has been acquired for Rs 175 crore. The minister highlighted that the government has taken 60 major initiatives in the last 30 months for the growth of the cooperative movement. The Cooperation Ministry was set up in July 2021. Shah said there are success stories of cooperatives since independence but the sector did not grow at a fast pace. "Now we



have decided that in Modi's USD 5 trillion economy, cooperatives will have a big share and the cooperative sector will advance into the 21st century directly from the 19th century," Shah said. To strengthen the cooperative movement, the minister highlighted that the government has amended The Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act and brought model bye-laws to strengthen PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Societies)

and scheme to undertake computerisation of PACS. He said the government has set a target to establish 2 lakh multipurpose PACS/ Dairy/ Fishery Cooperatives in the next five years and informed that 12,000 new PACS have been formed. Shah stressed the need to open more banks in the co-operative sector and asked multi-state credit societies to convert themselves into banks. He highlighted that the regis-

tration of multi-state co-operative societies stood at 102 in 2023, a 10-fold jump from 10 in 2020. Shah also highlighted IFFCO's new innovative products nano liquid urea and nano liquid DAP (di-ammonium phosphate) and expected the demand for these products will pick up in the coming years. He said PACS are providing drones to farmers to spray nano urea and nano DAP.

Tharoor, Scindia clash over flight delays, chaos at airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A war of words erupted between Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia over flight delays due to fog and the ensuing chaos at the Delhi airport, with the Congress leader terming it a "Modi Government-made disaster" and the Minister hitting back at him with the "arm-chair critic" jibe. Scindia claimed Tharoor is "lost in his esoteric world of thesaurus", and for him "data mining of selective press articles from the internet qualifies as 'research'". In a series of posts, Scindia provided a comprehensive rebuttal, emphasizing the government's proactive measures and the technical complexities involved in aviation operations. This after the Congress leader in a series of posts on X attacked the aviation ministry. Tharoor added different media reports in his posts to highlight the airport chaos. Tharoor alleged India's aviation sector is in a sorry state and that the ministry has not been able to ensure airports in Delhi



and other Indian cities are of such global standard that aircraft can land there even in zero visibility. The ministry has also not made sure trained pilots are deployed during winter months who can land in lower visibility, he claimed. "Delhi Airport has been in chaos recently. The young professional wanting to go home for Makar Sankranti. The Army officer was excited to visit his ancestral village for Lohri. The anxious son trying to get home to take care of an unwell parent. Thousands of peoples' lives and schedules have been disrupted by a regular, predictable, foggy winter day. It's a Modi Government-made disaster, a result of the Ministry of

Civil Aviation's neglect and incompetence," Tharoor said in one of the posts. Sharing news reports, Tharoor said that Delhi's IGI Airport got a brand-new CAT III-B (Category III) compliant runway, an advanced landing system that allows pilots to land even when there is fog or the visibility is as low as 50 metres, in 2008 at a cost of Rs 1,000 crore. "In total, Delhi has four runways, two of which are CAT III-B compliant. In all its wisdom, the Modi government began maintenance work on one of the two CAT III-B runways in September 2023, fully aware that it would not be ready for the winter!

"Even worse, a crane from some other construction work was blocking operation of CAT III-B on one runway, even after repairs were complete. Delhi Airport flagged this over 10 days ago, on January 5, but no action was taken," he said. "In addition to runways, pilots must be trained to land with CAT III-B instrument landing. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and the DGCA failed to ensure that airlines have sufficiently trained pilots. Further, it did not even ensure that pilots planning to fly to Delhi during fog conditions were CAT III-B trained. Therefore, multiple flights were diverted to cities like Jaipur and Ahmedabad," the Congress leader said. Scindia gave a point-by-point rebuttal in an equal number of posts. "It is for someone who is lost in his esoteric world of thesaurus that data mining of selective press articles from the internet qualifies as 'research'. Here are some actual facts for arm-chair critic Shashi Tharoor and the Congress IT Cell that might help tackle their lack of depth in understanding of technical sectors like civil aviation.

Buddhist teachings not relics of past but compass for future: Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday said Lord Buddha's message of peace, harmony and co-existence stands stark against forces of hate and terror and asserted that his teachings are not relics of the past, but a compass for our future. He also said that in an age of ethical uncertainty, Gautam Buddha's teachings offer a path of sustainability. He urged people to follow the light of tolerance, justice, and a shared commitment to peace, paving the way for a future where all flourish. Addressing the inaugural session of the 12th general assembly of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace, Dhankhar said Bharat as a nation has been guided by the principles of Buddha. Buddhism was born in India and spread to the diverse corners of the world, he said and cited a statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that we proudly belong to a nation that gave Buddha and not 'yudh' (war). "World today faces challenges that are universal and call for concerted efforts -- be it climate change, conflict, terrorism or poverty. These challenges to humanity are existential and can be addressed by common resolve and collaborative and



collective approach," he said at the event. Dhankhar felt that as technology races ahead, Buddha's Middle Path -- a tapestry of friendship, moderation, and reverence for all life -- offers a sustainable path for people. The principles of Lord Buddha, the vice president said, are no less than a beacon of hope and light to catalyse convergence of all stakeholders on a common platform. The vice president also said that violence has never generated unity and peace has never led to divisions. He noted that the Indian Constitution's artwork reflects 5,000 years of history and referred to Part V, where Lord Buddha graces the section on Union governance. This placement symbolises the ideals of enlightenment -- a parliamentary system, independent judiciary, and bal-

ance of power -- guiding the nation's highest institutions, he said. India is committed to ensuring that the younger generations across the world learn more about Lord Buddha and get inspired by his ideals, he said. "India is proactive, be it the development of the Buddhist circuit, boosting connectivity for international travellers to access sites of Buddhist heritage, or the efforts such as the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture, or the popularisation of Bhagwan Buddha's message," he said. Speaking on the occasion, Union minister Kiren Rijju said Buddhism has given the world passing through transformational challenges a way of life based on peace and non-violence. He said without peace human civilisation would be at stake.

Indian Navy to showcase Nari Shakti in Republic Day Parade

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy will project its military might and firm resolve to safeguard the nation's strategic interests in the maritime domain at the Republic Day parade, amid growing global concerns over the escalating tensions in the Red Sea. The naval tableau at the parade at Kartavya Path on January 26 will also showcase the Navy's "unwavering" commitment to 'Nari Shakti' with an overarching focus on women in all roles and across all ranks, officials said on Wednesday. The contingent of the Indian Navy will have three women platoon commanders -- Lt Mudita Goyal, Lt Sharvani Supriya and Lt Devika H. For the first time, the Navy will have a mixed composition with 144 young men and women marching down the historic Kartavya path reflecting its commitment towards gender neutrality, the officials said. The naval tableau will depict the first fully indigenous Carrier Battle Group, comprising aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, her highly capable escort ships Delhi, Kolkata, Shivalik, and Kalvari class submarine besides light combat aircraft as well as advanced



light helicopter. The tableau will also feature multi-band military communications satellite GSAT-7 and Rukmani satellite. Vice Admiral Gurcharan Singh, the Navy's controller of personnel services, said the naval contingent's participation at the parade would not just be a display of military might, but "would also reflect a resolve to safeguard the nation's strategic interests". The Vice Admiral told journalists that the tableau will also display the Navy's commitment to 'Aatmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in defence as well as its focus on gender neutrality. At present, the Navy has 680 women officers and it has recruited 1,119 women Agniveers so far. "Our tableau this year encapsulates the narrative of a Navy that is not only safeguarding the maritime frontiers but also shap-

ing a future where self-reliance and the empowerment of every individual irrespective of gender, are paramount," Singh said. "It stands as a resounding affirmation of India's maritime prowess and the inclusive strides taken in the journey towards a self-reliant and equitable nation," he said. The Navy has already deployed 10-12 warships in the strategic waters including the Arabian Sea following a spate of attacks on commercial vessels in the region as well as the Houthi militants targeting various ships. Singh said the central theme of the naval tableau revolves around 'Aatmanirbharta' showcasing indigenous milestones achieved by 'Bharat'. As on date, out of 66 ships and submarines currently under construction, 64 are being built at Indian shipyards.

Government may double insurance cover under Ayushman Bharat to ₹10 lakh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections this year, the Government may double the insurance cover under its flagship Ayushman Bharat health scheme to Rs 10 lakh to ensure that serious diseases like cancer and transplants that entail more expenditure are supported by it. Plans are also afoot to include Kisan Samman Nidhi recipients, construction workers, non-coal mine workers and AASHA workers in the next three years in the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY). According to sources, an announcement in this regard is likely to be made in the interim Union Budget on February 1. "In order to ensure that serious illnesses require expenditure of more than Rs 5 lakh such as

transplants and high-cost cancer treatments etc. Are also covered under AB PM-JAY, the ministry is working on finalising a proposal to increase the cover amount from Rs 5 lakh per family per year to Rs 10 lakh per family per year from 2023-24 onwards," the sources said. The increase in coverage to Rs 10 lakh per family per year and increase in beneficiary base to 100 crore individuals will involve an additional allocation of Rs 12,076 crore per annum, the sources stated. The scheme has successfully catered to 6.2 crore hospital admissions amounting to more than Rs 79,157 crore till now since its launch in 2018. If the beneficiary had availed the same treatment on his own outside the ambit of AB PM-JAY, the total cost of the treatment would have gone up nearly two times, the official said.

Modi to inaugurate new Boeing campus in Bengaluru tomorrow



Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate American aircraft manufacturer Boeing's new state-of-the-art global engineering and technology innovation campus in Devanahalli on the outskirts of Bengaluru near the Kempegowda International Airport on January 19, official sources said on Wednesday. The PM will be in the city only for a few hours and according to BJP sources, he will be confined only to his official engagements and there will not be any party-related activities. The Boeing facility in Devanahalli is said to be the largest facility of the aerospace major outside the US. PM Modi's special aircraft

would land at Kalaburagi airport at 9:35 am. PM Modi would leave Solapur at 12:10 pm and land at Kalaburagi Airport at 1 pm. He would leave Kalaburagi Airport at 1:05 pm in a special aircraft to Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru at 2:10 pm. At 2:15 pm, he would leave from the airport to Bhattramarenahalli in Devanahalli taluk by road. He would reach the village at 2:45 pm. The Prime Minister will also launch a transformational Boeing programme for greater participation of Indian women from across all walks of life in the Indian aviation sector, the sources added.

Home Ministry cancels FCRA registration of CPR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has cancelled the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) for alleged violation of laws, a move the public think-tank termed "incomprehensible and disproportionate" and vowed to seek legal recourse against. When the FCRA registration of an organisation is cancelled or suspended, it is barred from receiving any funding from abroad or foreign donors. The MHA action came nearly a year after it suspended the FCRA registration under the NGO's. In a statement, the CPR said the home ministry "actions have had a debilitating impact on the institution's ability to function by choking all sources of funding". The think-tank was under scrutiny after a survey was carried out by the Income Tax department in September 2022. The home ministry has cancelled the FCRA registration of the Centre for Policy Research for alleged violations of the provisions of the foreign funding laws, a home ministry official said on Wednesday. The FCRA licence was suspended in February 2023 for 180 days and then extended for



another 180 days. In October 2022, the central government had cancelled the FCRA registration of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) and the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust (RGCT), both NGOs headed by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, for alleged violation of laws. According to its website, the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) has been one of India's leading public policy think-tanks since 1973. It says that it is a non-profit, non-partisan, independent institution dedicated to conducting research that contributes to high quality scholarship, better policies, and a more robust public discourse about issues that impact life in India. The donors of the CPR included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, World Bank, Ford Foundation, Brown University besides others. Former prime minister Manmohan Singh, former chief justice of India late Y V

Chandrachud and veteran journalist late B G Verghese were among the prominent people who have served as the members of the CPR governing body. When the CPR challenged its suspension in the Delhi High Court, the MHA had argued that the organisation's foreign funding needed to be stopped as it was receiving the contributions for "undesirable purposes" likely to affect the country's economic interest. The home ministry had alleged the CPR transferred foreign contributions to other entities and deposited the contributions in non-designated accounts in violation of FCRA. The CPR said in a statement on Wednesday that it has received a notice from the ministry cancelling its FCRA status. "The basis of this decision is incomprehensible and disproportionate, and some of the reasons given challenge the very basis of the functioning of a research institution," it said.

Former Odisha CM Gamang rejoins Congress after 9 years

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Odisha chief minister Girdhar Gamang on Wednesday joined the Congress along with his wife and son almost nine years after he quit the party. Congress is the only party in the country that does principled politics, said the former nine-time MP from Koraput who had joined the BJP in 2015 and switched to the BRS in January 2023. Gamang asserted that he never left the Congress party's thoughts and ideology. He along with his wife Hema Gamang and son Shishir Gamang and another BJP leader Sanjay Bhoi, also a former MP, formally joined the party at the AICC headquarters in the presence of party treasurer Ajay Maken along with AICC in-charge for Odisha Ajoy Kumar. Girdhar Gamang was elected for the first time to the fifth Lok Sabha from Koraput in 1972 and he subsequently was re-elected to the Lok Sabha in 1977, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2004. He was the Chief Minister of Odisha from February 17, 1999 to December 6, 1999. His wife Hema Gamang won from Koraput constituency in the 1999 elections to the



13th Lok Sabha, while he was serving as the Chief Minister of Odisha. Sanjay Bhoi was a former MP from the Bargarh Lok Sabha constituency in Odisha on the Congress ticket in 2009. "We are happy that today Girdhar Gamang, Hema Gamang ji, Sanjay Bhoi ji and Shishir Gamang ji are rejoining the Congress Party family. These leaders have contributed significantly to the development of Orissa. Their return to Congress will strengthen the party and its ideology. On behalf of the Congress Party, we welcome all of them," Maken said after welcoming the leaders. He also said that these leaders have played a crucial role in the development of Odisha and their return to the party will strengthen the state party

unit and our ideology. "Girdhar ji is popular not only in the tribal society but also in every community," Ajoy Kumar said. Gamang said only the Congress can give respect to its leaders. "The Congress gave me a ticket 11 times, which no other party can do. I remained in another party, but only Congress can give respect," he said. "There is no particular reason. I will live where I was born. I never left the party, its thoughts and ideology," he said when asked why he left the party and has now returned. Asked about Rahul Gandhi's Nyay Yatra, he said, "The step taken by Rahul Gandhi is not political but constitutional. We will continue to fight for social, economic and political justice."

Ayodhya sees surge in devotees ahead of Ram Lalla consecration

PNS ■ AYODHYA
Ramnagari Ayodhya is currently immersed in a tidal wave of devotion as thousands of devotees from across the country through the sacred city to seek darshan of Ram. The fervour has intensified as the consecration of Ram Lalla's life in the Ram temple approaches, attracting an increasing number of pilgrims each day. The number of devotees has seen a remarkable surge, doubling in recent times, with a corresponding increase in offerings to Ram Lalla. The month of December witnessed a generous donation of Rs 2 crore to the deity, a figure that has been sustained into the month of January. Enthusiasm among devotees is palpable as they arrive in Ayodhya daily to witness Ram Lalla before the consecration ceremony. The influx of visitors has



Devotees participate in a Kalash Yatra ahead of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya

translated into a surge in contributions, with an average offering of three to four lakhs per day filling Ram Lalla's donation box, commonly referred to as the 'Hundi'. Prakash Gupta, the in-charge of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust office, said that donations to Ram Lalla have doubled, surpassing the previous monthly average of around Rs 1 crore. In December alone, devotees contributed Rs 90 lakh in cash to the donation box, with additional offerings received through online transactions, cheques, and RTGS, collectively amounting to Rs 2 crore. Even in January, the momentum of generosity continues, with devotees contributing two to three lakh rupees daily in cash at the Trust office counters and Darshan Marg. In just the first 15 days of January, donations have exceeded Rs 1 crore.

Accompanying the surge in offerings is a notable increase in the number of visitors seeking darshan of Ram Lalla. Previously, before December, the daily footfall ranged from 15,000 to 20,000 visitors; however, the count has now escalated to 25,000 to 30,000 devotees each day. The escalating trend of devotee numbers in January. On January 12, over 27,542 visitors vis-

ited Ayodhya, with 28,824 visitors on January 13, 34,226 visitors on January 14, 29,456 visitors on January 15 and 31,123 visitors on January 16. As Ayodhya prepares for the auspicious consecration, the city resonates with heightened spirituality, drawing devotees from all corners of the nation to partake in this momentous occasion.

PIL challenges Ayodhya temple Praan Pratishthaa, alleges political motives

PNS ■ LUCKNOW
In an unexpected legal development, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Allahabad High Court, seeking a ban on the forthcoming consecration programme of the idol of Ram Lalla in the under-construction temple in Ayodhya. The ceremony, set to be attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, faces objections raised by Shankaracharya regarding Praan Pratishthaa, deemed contrary to the Sanatan tradition. The petitioner, Bhola Das of Ghaziabad, alleges that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is leveraging the religious event for political gains, particularly in the context of the impending Lok Sabha elections. Urging an immediate hearing, Das emphasizes that a religious program is scheduled for January 22 in Ayodhya, involving the consecration of the idol of Ram Lalla in the temple under construction. The PIL outlines several objections. Firstly, it contends that the consecration has faced criticism from Shankaracharyas. Secondly, the petitioner argues that religious programs are tra-



The temple under construction in Ayodhya.

ditionally not organized in the Hindi month of Pus, and with Purnima falling on January 25, no religious events should be held until then. Thirdly, it asserts that consecrating a deity in an incomplete temple is improper, stressing that such ceremonies should occur only in completed structures. The participation of the Prime Minister and Chief Minister Yogi in the Praan Pratishtha program is deemed against the Constitution, as it is believed to contradict constitutional principles promoting brotherhood. The petitioner contends that their involvement could negatively impact the country's sense of brotherhood, going against the spirit of the Constitution. Advocate Anil Kumar Bind,

representing the petitioner, stated that the PIL was filed on Tuesday, with efforts aimed at securing expedited consideration and acceptance by the High Court. Simultaneously, the Allahabad High Court has declined to hear a separate PIL challenging a government order issued by the Chief Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Government. The order, issued on December 21, 2023, prohibits bhajans, kirtans, and the reading of Ramcharit Manas in all temples of the state on January 22, 2024. Additionally, the government order mandates the recitation and Rath/Kalash Yatra in all cities.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the public at large that Smt. Sudesh Rastogi W/o. Sh. Mukesh Rastogi is the Title Holder in the Leasehold/Leasable Property Bearing House/Plot No. 39, Block-A, Chorsia Estate, Sector-Sigma IV, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh measuring 220.00 sq. mtrs. (thereinafter referred to as 'Said Property') vide Lease Deed dated 30.10.2006 registered as Bani No. 1, 2/20 No. 1436, pp. 221-248, Par Kramank No. 12708 on 31.10.2006 in the Office of the Sub Registrar, Sadar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. That the original document w.r.t. the Said Property being Lease Deed dated 30th October, 2006 as detailed herein above, has been lost, misplaced and is untraceable as on date, in lieu of which information report dated 17.01.2024 bearing LR No. 1254/175/2024 has been filed with Delhi Police. This notice is thus issued to Public at Large, i.e. any Person(s), Company(ies), Entity(ies), Society(ies), Organisation(s), Financial Institution(s), other Bank(s), HUFs etc. having any knowledge, custody or possession of the above mentioned lost/misplaced original document or otherwise having any claims, rights, title, interests, possession etc. in the Said Property, by way of Ownership, Succession, Inheritance, Sale, Mortgage (except for the State Bank of India), Exchange, Charge, Gift, Trust, Encumbrance, or may come forward with supporting documents, to be delivered to the undersigned within 15 days from the date of this Publication, post expiration of which, any claim(s) or objection(s) if received or received shall be treated as null & void.

PUBLIC NOTICE
(On Behalf of the State Bank of India)
Retail Assets Central Processing Centre, D-40, 2nd & 3rd Floor, South Extension-II, New Delhi-110049. Mobile No. 9873191178. EMAIL: sbi.166883@sbi.co.in

In the court of Ms. Medha Arya Administrative Civil Judge-cum-ARC(Central) Room No. 113, 1st Floor, Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi SC No. : 165/2023

Gurmeet Puri Versus State & Ors.
Gurmeet Puri W/o Late Sh. Arvinder Singh Puri R/o 15, Bela Road, Civil Lines, Near Swami Narayan Mandir, Delhi-110054 To All Concerned FOR SUCCESSION CERTIFICATE UNDER INDIAN SUCCESSION ACT, 1925.

Whereas in the above noted petition the applicant/petitioner has applied for Succession Certificate to the Hon'ble Court Under Section 372 of the Indian Succession Act, 1925, in respect of the debt and securities of P.Rs. ... As per record to be standing in the name of Late Sh. Arvinder Singh Puri, deceased.

Whereas the 13-03-2024 at 10' o'clock in the forenoon has been fixed for hearing or the application notice is hereby given to all concerned.

Given under my hand and the seal of the court on this 15-01-2024. Sd/- Administrative Civil Judge-cum-ARC(Central) Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

Bihar approves ₹2 lakh each to 94 lakh families for self-employment

PTI ■ PATNA
The Bihar Cabinet approved financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh each to about 94 lakh families, with a monthly income of Rs 6,000 or less, for entrepreneurship and self-employment under a State government scheme. "According to the caste-based survey report, Bihar has 94,33,312 families living on an income of Rs 6,000 or less a month. Now, the state government will provide financial assistance of Rs 2 lakh each... For entrepreneurship and self-employment under the Bihar Small Entrepreneur Scheme," Additional Chief Secretary (Cabinet Secretariat) Siddharth said on Tuesday. The financial aid will be given to the families only after approval by a committee, which will be headed by the additional chief secretary of the Industries department, he said. "Under the Bihar Small Entrepreneur Scheme, beneficiaries can invest in small-

scale/cottage industries, which include handicrafts, textile, service sectors and electrical items," the senior official said. The amount will be released in instalments. The cabinet also increased the compensation to labourers working in unorganised sectors in case of death and disability. "Labourers (or their families) working in unorganised sectors will now get compensation of Rs 2 lakh (earlier it was Rs 1 lakh) in case of death (unnatural/accidental), and Rs 1 lakh (from Rs 75,000) for permanent disability. Similarly, in case of natural death of a working labourer, his/her family member will get Rs 50,000 as financial assistance," Siddharth said. Besides, the cabinet approved the expansion of the state government's existing incentives to economically backward classes (EBC) for Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) and Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examinations' preparation.

Former Gujarat AAP MLA to join BJP next month

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
More than a month after he resigned as a member of the Gujarat legislative Assembly, former AAP MLA Bhupendra Bhayani on Wednesday said that he will join the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) early next month. He claimed that he is all set to join the BJP along with his 2,000-odd supporters at a public rally in Visavadar constituency, which he represented earlier, in Junagadh district on February 3. "I will join the BJP on February 3. We have organised a programme in my native village Bhesan (in Junagadh), where I will join the BJP along with my supporters

in the presence of the party's state unit president C R Paatil," Bhayani told reporters. "I will continue to work for the public and the development of my constituency...As far as allotting a ticket for the by-election is concerned, it will be up to the party (BJP) leadership to decide," he added. Bhayani had on December 13 last year handed over his resignation to Gujarat assembly speaker Shankar Chaudhary in Gandhinagar. He was one of the five MLAs of the AAP elected in the last year's state polls, which the BJP won by a thumping majority by bagging 156 seats in the 182-member assembly. It was for the first time that the AAP won seats in the Gujarat assembly polls.

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the OIAHAT RAM S/O. MR. RAMPHAL, the owner of RESIDENTIAL BUILT UP PLOT AREA MEASURING 300 SQ. METER, AND TOTAL COVERED AREA MEASURING 500 SQ. METER, OUT OF KHASRA NO. 796, SITUATED IN THE VILLAGE: HAROLA MAKHANPUR, TEHSIL: DADRRI, DISTRICT: GAUTAM BUDDH NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH, vide Khata No. 100/1981 executed by Mr. Padam Singh in favour of MR. PRAMOD KUMAR AWANA MRS. SUDESH AWANA ARE negotiating the said property with SMFG India Credit Company Limited (Formerly Fullerton India Credit Company Limited) General public hereby informed that if anybody has any charge/interest in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 67 days of this present. Mrs. Prasoona Lata, Advocate FF, Late Pond Plaza Vibhav Khand Indraprastha, Gurgaon-122002. Email: gspccs@rediffmail.com, Ph. 991172964, 813200937

PUBLIC NOTICE
I, Sumanta Kumar Sen S/o Sh. Hem Chandra Sen Lost R/O Flat no. 9, Sahridaya Apartment, Sahridaya CGHS Ltd., A-4, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi-110063 have Lost Original Share Certificate No. S-205/144 of the above Property. Finder Please Contact :- 9871997200

NORTHERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE
Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/Traction Distribution, DRM's Office, State Entry Road, New Delhi for & on behalf of President of India, invites open tender for the under noted work:

1. Name of Work with its location	PART-D: Design, supply, erection, testing & commissioning of 25 KV AC OHE for electrification of un-electrified sidings/diesel sheds at GZB & JDW stations in connection with "Electrification of un-electrified sidings/diesel sheds over DLI Division in already electrified sections".
2. Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 92,17,106.35/-
3. Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 1,84,400/-
4. E-Tender Bid Online Submission Period	01.02.2024 (00.00 Hrs.) to 15.02.2024 (15.00 Hrs.)
5. E-Tender Bid Submission End Date & E-Tender Open Date & Time	15.02.2024 (15.00 hrs.)
6. Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

E-Tender No.: 44-TRD-NDLS-2023-24 Dated 16.01.2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 205/24

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the general public that Sh. Surender Singh is the owner of Built up Property bearing No. 4319 and Old No. 3581, Land area measuring 68.50 Sq. yds. out of Khata No. 173min, 174min, 175min, 176min, 177min, 178min, 179min, 180min, 181min, 182min, 183min, 184min, 185min, 186min, 187min, 188min, 189min, 190min, 191min, 192min, 193min, 194min, 195min, 196min, 197min, 198min, 199min, 200min, 201min, 202min, 203min, 204min, 205min, 206min, 207min, 208min, 209min, 210min, 211min, 212min, 213min, 214min, 215min, 216min, 217min, 218min, 219min, 220min, 221min, 222min, 223min, 224min, 225min, 226min, 227min, 228min, 229min, 230min, 231min, 232min, 233min, 234min, 235min, 236min, 237min, 238min, 239min, 240min, 241min, 242min, 243min, 244min, 245min, 246min, 247min, 248min, 249min, 250min, 251min, 252min, 253min, 254min, 255min, 256min, 257min, 258min, 259min, 260min, 261min, 262min, 263min, 264min, 265min, 266min, 267min, 268min, 269min, 270min, 271min, 272min, 273min, 274min, 275min, 276min, 277min, 278min, 279min, 280min, 281min, 282min, 283min, 284min, 285min, 286min, 287min, 288min, 289min, 290min, 291min, 292min, 293min, 294min, 295min, 296min, 297min, 298min, 299min, 300min, 301min, 302min, 303min, 304min, 305min, 306min, 307min, 308min, 309min, 310min, 311min, 312min, 313min, 314min, 315min, 316min, 317min, 318min, 319min, 320min, 321min, 322min, 323min, 324min, 325min, 326min, 327min, 328min, 329min, 330min, 331min, 332min, 333min, 334min, 335min, 336min, 337min, 338min, 339min, 340min, 341min, 342min, 343min, 344min, 345min, 346min, 347min, 348min, 349min, 350min, 351min, 352min, 353min, 354min, 355min, 356min, 357min, 358min, 359min, 360min, 361min, 362min, 363min, 364min, 365min, 366min, 367min, 368min, 369min, 370min, 371min, 372min, 373min, 374min, 375min, 376min, 377min, 378min, 379min, 380min, 381min, 382min, 383min, 384min, 385min, 386min, 387min, 388min, 389min, 390min, 391min, 392min, 393min, 394min, 395min, 396min, 397min, 398min, 399min, 400min, 401min, 402min, 403min, 404min, 405min, 406min, 407min, 408min, 409min, 410min, 411min, 412min, 413min, 414min, 415min, 416min, 417min, 418min, 419min, 420min, 421min, 422min, 423min, 424min, 425min, 426min, 427min, 428min, 429min, 430min, 431min, 432min, 433min, 434min, 435min, 436min, 437min, 438min, 439min, 440min, 441min, 442min, 443min, 444min, 445min, 446min, 447min, 448min, 449min, 450min, 451min, 452min, 453min, 454min, 455min, 456min, 457min, 458min, 459min, 460min, 461min, 462min, 463min, 464min, 465min, 466min, 467min, 468min, 469min, 470min, 471min, 472min, 473min, 474min, 475min, 476min, 477min, 478min, 479min, 480min, 481min, 482min, 483min, 484min, 485min, 486min, 487min, 488min, 489min, 490min, 491min, 492min, 493min, 494min, 495min, 496min, 497min, 498min, 499min, 500min, 501min, 502min, 503min, 504min, 505min, 506min, 507min, 508min, 509min, 510min, 511min, 512min, 513min, 514min, 515min, 516min, 517min, 518min, 519min, 520min, 521min, 522min, 523min, 524min, 525min, 526min, 527min, 528min, 529min, 530min, 531min, 532min, 533min, 534min, 535min, 536min, 537min, 538min, 539min, 540min, 541min, 542min, 543min, 544min, 545min, 546min, 547min, 548min, 549min, 550min, 551min, 552min, 553min, 554min, 555min, 556min, 557min, 558min, 559min, 560min, 561min, 562min, 563min, 564min, 565min, 566min, 567min, 568min, 569min, 570min, 571min, 572min, 573min, 574min, 575min, 576min, 577min, 578min, 579min, 580min, 581min, 582min, 583min, 584min, 585min, 586min, 587min, 588min, 589min, 590min, 591min, 592min, 593min, 594min, 595min, 596min, 597min, 598min, 599min, 600min, 601min, 602min, 603min, 604min, 605min, 606min, 607min, 608min, 609min, 610min, 611min, 612min, 613min, 614min, 615min, 616min, 617min, 618min, 619min, 620min, 621min, 622min, 623min, 624min, 625min, 626min, 627min, 628min, 629min, 630min, 631min, 632min, 633min, 634min, 635min, 636min, 637min, 638min, 639min, 640min, 641min, 642min, 643min, 644min, 645min, 646min, 647min, 648min, 649min, 650min, 651min, 652min, 653min, 654min, 655min, 656min, 657min, 658min, 659min, 660min, 661min, 662min, 663min, 664min, 665min, 666min, 667min, 668min, 669min, 670min, 671min, 672min, 673min, 674min, 675min, 676min, 677min, 678min, 679min, 680min, 681min, 682min, 683min, 684min, 685min, 686min, 687min, 688min, 689min, 690min, 691min, 692min, 693min, 694min, 695min, 696min, 697min, 698min, 699min, 700min, 701min, 702min, 703min, 704min, 705min, 706min, 707min, 708min, 709min, 710min, 711min, 712min, 713min, 714min, 715min, 716min, 717min, 718min, 719min, 720min, 721min, 722min, 723min, 724min, 725min, 726min, 727min, 728min, 729min, 730min, 731min, 732min, 733min, 734min, 735min, 736min, 737min, 738min, 739min, 740min, 741min, 742min, 743min, 744min, 745min, 746min, 747min, 748min, 749min, 750min, 751min, 752min, 753min, 754min, 755min, 756min, 757min, 758min, 759min, 760min, 761min, 762min, 763min, 764min, 765min, 766min, 767min, 768min, 769min, 770min, 771min, 772min, 773min, 774min, 775min, 776min, 777min, 778min, 779min, 780min, 781min, 782min, 783min, 784min, 785min, 786min, 787min, 788min, 789min, 790min, 791min, 792min, 793min, 794min, 795min, 796min, 797min, 798min, 799min, 800min, 801min, 802min, 803min, 804min, 805min, 806min, 807min, 808min, 809min, 810min, 811min, 812min, 813min, 814min, 815min, 816min, 817min, 818min, 819min, 820min, 821min, 822min, 823min, 824min, 825min, 826min, 827min, 828min, 829min, 830min, 831min, 832min, 833min, 834min, 835min, 836min, 837min, 838min, 839min, 840min, 841min, 842min, 843min, 844min, 845min, 846min, 847min, 848min, 849min, 850min, 851min, 852min, 853min, 854min, 855min, 856min, 857min, 858min, 859min, 860min, 861min, 862min, 863min, 864min, 865min, 866min, 867min, 868min, 869min, 870min, 871min, 872min, 873min, 874min, 875min, 876min, 877min, 878min, 879min, 880min, 881min, 882min, 883min, 884min, 885min, 886min, 887min, 888min, 889min, 890min, 891min, 892min, 893min, 894min, 895min, 896min, 897min, 898min, 899min, 900min, 901min, 902min, 903min, 904min, 905min, 906min, 907min, 908min, 909min, 910min, 911min, 912min, 913min, 914min, 915min, 916min, 917min, 918min, 919min, 920min, 921min, 922min, 923min, 924min, 925min, 926min, 927min, 928min, 929min, 930min, 931min, 932min, 933min, 934min, 935min, 936min, 937min, 938min, 939min, 940min, 941min, 942min, 943min, 944min, 945min, 946min, 947min, 948min, 949min, 950min, 951min, 952min, 953min, 954min, 955min, 956min, 957min, 958min, 959min, 960min, 961min, 962min, 963min, 964min, 965min, 966min, 967min, 968min, 969min, 970min, 971min, 972min, 973min, 974min, 975min, 976min, 977min, 978min, 979min, 980min, 981min, 982min, 983min, 984min, 985min, 986min, 987min, 988min, 989min, 990min, 991min, 992min, 993min, 994min, 995min, 996min, 997min, 998min, 999min, 1000min, 1001min, 1002min, 1003min, 1004min, 1005min, 1006min, 1007min, 1008min, 1009min, 1010min, 1011min, 1012min, 1013min, 1014min, 1015min, 1016min, 1017min, 1018min, 1019min, 1020min, 1021min, 1022min, 1023min, 1024min, 1025min, 1026min, 1027min, 1028min, 1029min, 1030min, 1031min, 1032min, 1033min, 1034min, 1035min, 1036min, 1037min, 1038min, 1039min, 1040min, 1041min, 1042min, 1043min, 1044min, 1045min, 1046min, 1047min, 1048min, 1049min, 1050min, 1051min, 1052min, 1053min, 1054min, 1055min, 1056min, 1057min, 1058min, 1059min, 1060min, 1061min, 1062min, 1063min, 1064min, 1065min, 1066min, 1067min, 1068min, 1069min, 1070min, 1071min, 1072min, 1073min, 1074min, 1075min, 1076min, 1077min, 1078min, 1079min, 1080min, 1081min, 1082min, 1083min, 1084min, 1085min, 1086min, 1087min, 1088min, 1089min, 1090min, 1091min, 1092min, 1093min, 1094min, 1095min, 1096min, 1097min, 1098min, 1099min, 1100min, 1101min, 1102min, 1103min, 1104min, 1105min, 1106min, 1107min, 1108min, 1109min, 1110min, 1111min, 1112min, 1113min, 1114min, 1115min, 1116min, 1117min, 1118min, 1119min, 1120min, 1121min, 1122min, 1123min, 1124min, 1125min, 1126min, 1127min, 1128min, 1129min, 1130min, 1131min, 1132min, 1133min, 1134min, 1135min, 1136min, 1137min, 1138min, 1139min, 1140min, 1141min, 1142min, 1143min, 1144min, 1145min, 1146min, 1147min, 1148min, 1149min, 1150min, 1151min, 1152min, 1153min, 1154min, 1155min, 1156min, 1157min, 1158min, 1159min, 1160min, 1161min, 1162min, 1163min, 1164min, 1165min, 1166min, 1167min, 1168min, 1169min, 1170min, 1171min, 1172min, 1173min, 1174min, 1175min, 1176min, 1177min, 1178min, 1179min, 1180min, 1181min, 1182min, 1183min, 1184min, 1185min, 1186min, 1187min, 1188min, 1189min, 1190min, 1191min, 1192min, 1193min, 1194min, 1195min, 1196min, 1197min, 1198min, 1199min, 1200min, 1201min, 1202min, 1203min, 1204min, 1205min, 1206min, 1207min, 1208min, 1209min, 1210min, 1211min, 1212min, 1213min, 1214min, 1215min, 1216min, 1217min, 1218min, 1219min, 1220min, 1221min, 1222min, 1223min, 1224min, 1225min, 1226min, 1227min, 1228min, 1229min, 1230min, 1231min, 1232min, 1233min, 1234min, 1235min, 1236min, 1237min, 1238min, 1239min, 1240min, 1241min, 1242min, 1243min, 1244min, 1245min, 1246min, 1247min, 1248min, 1249min, 1250min, 1251min, 1252min, 1253min, 1254min, 1255min, 1256min, 1257min, 1258min, 1259min, 1260min, 1261min, 1262min, 1263min, 1264min, 1265min, 1266min, 1267min, 1268min, 1269min, 1270min, 1271min, 1272min, 1273min, 1274min, 1275min, 1276min, 1277min, 1278min, 1279min, 1280min, 1281min, 1282min, 1283min, 1284min, 1285min, 1286min, 1287min, 1288min, 1289min, 1290min, 1291min, 1292min, 1293min, 1294min, 1295min, 1296min, 1297min, 1298min, 1299min, 1300min, 1301min, 1302min, 1303min, 1304min, 1305min, 1306min, 1307min, 1308min, 1309min, 1310min, 1311min, 1312min, 1313min, 1314min, 1315min, 1316min, 1317min, 1318min, 1319min, 1320min, 1321min, 1322min, 1323min, 1324min, 1325min, 1326min, 1327min, 1328min, 1329min, 1330min, 1331min, 1332min, 1333min, 1334min, 1335min, 1336min, 1337min, 1338min, 1339min, 1340min, 1341min, 1342min, 1343min, 1344min, 1345min, 1346min, 1347min, 1348min, 1349min, 1350min, 1351min, 1352min, 1353min, 1354min, 1355min, 1356min, 1357



www.dailypioneer.com

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

PAPER WITH PASSION

Political chess

The BJP aims to win hearts and the battle of the ballot by wooing the youth and OBCs

The BJP's keen understanding of electoral dynamics and its well-oiled, mammoth election machinery have helped it win two consecutive Lok Sabha elections. This time, it is revamping its strategy to strike a hat-trick: Party leaders JP Nadda and Amit Shah have unveiled a meticulous plan that places emphasis on two crucial demographics – first-time voters and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This strategic move underscores the BJP's desire to reach out to new voters to widen its support base. First-time voters constitute a dynamic and influential segment of the electorate. As a generation born into the digital age, they are well-connected, socially aware and often hold the power to shape the political narrative. The BJP leaders recognise the need to resonate with this segment, tailoring their messaging to align with the youth's aspirations and concerns. Nadda and Shah have articulated a multi-faceted approach, including leveraging social media platforms, engaging in interactive campaigns and promoting youth-friendly policies. By adopting a tech-savvy and inclusive approach, the BJP aims to not only secure the support of this crucial segment but also to involve it actively in the political process. Another set of voters on the BJP's mind is the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) which forms a significant portion of India's diverse social fabric. Recognising their importance, the BJP leadership has outlined a targeted strategy to connect with OBC voters. It involves a combination of social and economic policies aimed at addressing OBC-specific needs and concerns.



This commitment is reflected in the party's efforts to provide better educational and employment opportunities to the OBC youth and to address longstanding issues of social justice and equality. Party leaders, including Nadda and Shah, have embarked on grassroots campaigns, townhall meetings and outreach programmes to directly interact with people. This hands-on approach is designed to foster a deeper understanding of the needs and aspirations of these communities. Additionally, the party has been actively promoting young leaders from OBC backgrounds, further emphasising its commitment to diversity and representation. By showcasing leaders who resonate with the lived experiences of OBCs, the BJP aims to build trust and forge lasting connections at the grassroots. However, it would be interesting how the party counters the INDIA bloc's pitch for caste census which it has been ill at ease with. The BJP would also be leveraging the inauguration of the Ram temple, the abrogation of Article 370 and Modi's charisma. The focus on technology, inclusivity and ground-level engagement reflects a nuanced understanding of the diverse needs and aspirations of these crucial voter segments. As the battle unfolds, the BJP's bid to woo first-time voters and OBCs might just prove successful in the upcoming general elections.

PICTALK



Sand artist Sudarshan Pattnaik creates a sculpture on the theme of Jagannath Temple, in Puri

PTI

Holistic national educational outlook



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

India's education system faces critical challenges, particularly in postgraduate education, and raises questions about policies' coherence

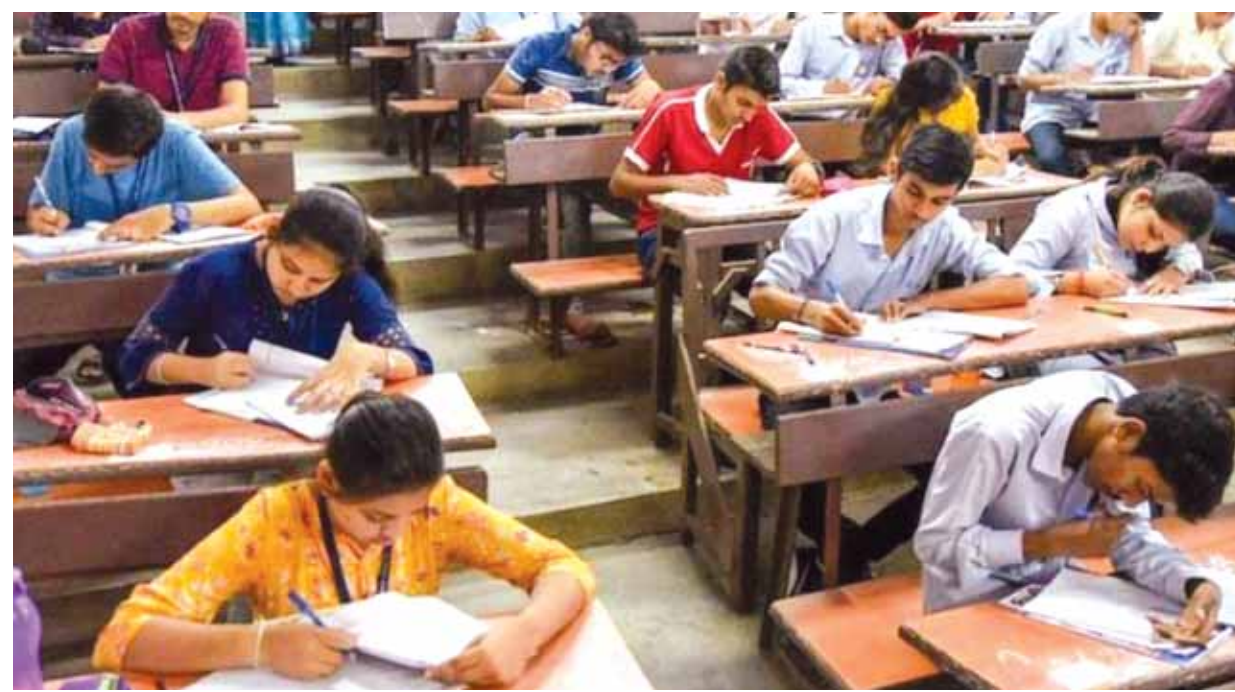
Education in India is passing through, once again, a seminal phase in its growth. Since 1947, it has passed through several phases of change and each phase has had its own tale to tell.

Generally, education is seen in three phases: school education, college education and postgraduate education. School education is broadly divided into three areas, classes 1 to 5, generally known as primary school; classes 5-10 middle school, and classes 10-12, secondary school. These are not rigid levels but are loosely used for classification and easy communication.

The college-level education is from 1st year to 3rd year, which leads to a bachelor's degree and 4th year and 5th year, which leads to a postgraduate degree. The doctoral education could thereafter follow. Institutions are known to specialise amongst these various segments and acquire a brand for that. In school education, some do offer class 1 to class 12 education, and there are others who also offer pre-class 1 education which can be termed as a nursery stage.

Postgraduate education, especially after a master's degree has been normally followed by at least 1 year pre-Ph.D work and at least 2 years of PhD work if one has to go through it. Periodic changes have taken place and continue to take place. Illustratively, a formal 1 year pre-Ph.D work which could lead to a terminal M.Phil degree has been recently abolished. This kind of decision clearly has implications because it will affect the career prospects of those who had an M.Phil Degree but did not go for a PhD degree. This act of doing away with an M.Phil award was sudden for a lot of people, and it affected many careers including those that were in the middle of the 1 year M.Phil course. One of the bigger problems was rendering, useless, a whole year of work without prior notice. This kind of jerk and jolt can have arbitrary effects.

This is an aberration which needs to be understood and perhaps modified. One of the ques-



tion that remains is that education is a concurrent subject. This means, technically, about a degree like M.Phil, the UGC may legislate something but equally, technically the state legislature could continue a different mandate. The UGC could then refuse to give it cognizance for grants. This could lead to complications. That is another story. The history of degrees and their awards across the length and breadth of the country has been at times chequered, yet rarely a few have made it a public issue out of this. Thus, it is that the nation coasts along the narrative of the 5th, the 6th and the 7th pay commission. This happens in different regions concurrently. There are certain States where the State Universities have 62 as the age of retirement whereas the Central Universities in the same State have 65 as the age of retirement. This creates artificial pulls and pressures in the flow of talent of the Faculty and others in a given direction. This also affects the availability of talent in the Central Universities of a given State or the State Universities in a given State.



THE HISTORY OF DEGREES AND THEIR AWARDS ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE COUNTRY HAVE BEEN AT TIMES CHEQUERED, YET RARELY A FEW HAVE MADE A PUBLIC ISSUE OUT OF THIS

These are not minor matters to be trifled with. However, these issues continue to be treated by default in most situations.

In the meanwhile, the so-called discussion on the National Education Policy continues to go on unabated. Most of the comments being made on the National Education Policy, on what it has stated, are so far positive. This is rightly so because the National Education Policy within the limitations of the announcement has indeed given a higher sense of purpose.

This keeps the education movement going forward. What does not seem to be noticed, equally, is that there are many aspects of National Education that need an all-India consideration. The above paragraphs given the categories of education at the school stage, the college stage and the university stage, also need some reflection. This is a need that is not yet sufficiently widely understood or appreciated. The greater is the worry because even the commentaries on this in the press are few and far between.

That having been said there is a need to keep the discussion on education alive. All said and done, the Parliament needs to find time to take up some of these collateral issues on a truly comprehensive level.

The form in which the National Education Policy has been enunciated makes for many valid points. Amongst them number the emphasis on the indigenisation of education and finding the Indian roots of many intellectual traditions. This is valid in science, technology, management, literature, medicine, music and more. This is not going to come easy because Indian intellectual traditions are so much a part of life that one gets away even by ignoring their scholastic tradition in formal educational efforts. This state of dualism where something is recognized as a part of life but does not have its due place in the curriculum, is a hiatus that needs to be bridged.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DRUG MENACE

Sir — The pervasive menace of drugs in society disproportionately affects the younger generation, ensnaring the youth in its perilous grip. The ease of access to drugs exacerbates the crisis, making it a formidable threat to the very fabric of our communities. Drug addiction, a relentless force, stands as one of the most potent destroyers of societies known to humanity, leaving a trail of shattered lives in its wake.

Unlike combating other societal challenges, addressing the drug menace requires a multifaceted and coordinated approach. While enhanced security measures and intelligence networks can combat terrorism, wealth creation tackles poverty, and well-equipped military safeguards against external threats, eradicating drug abuse necessitates the concerted efforts of law enforcement agencies, including the police, NCB, DRI, and other central bodies. NGOs and educational institutions, in collaboration with parents, must actively engage in preventive measures and awareness campaigns. Crucially, governmental intervention is imperative. Counselling programs targeting the youth should be instituted, emphasizing the detrimental consequences of drug abuse. The establishment of more rehabilitation centres is crucial, providing a haven for addicts to undergo comprehensive treatment and recovery. In the face of this insidious challenge, a united front comprising law enforcement, educational institutions, parents, and government initiatives is indispensable to safeguard the invaluable asset that is the youth and preserve the well-being of our society.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

IRAN ATTACKS PAK MILITANT'S BASE

Sir — As per the report, Iran claimed it struck bases belonging to Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni militant group in Pakistan, in a cross-border attack on January 16. It comes after Iran launched similar attacks on Syria and Iraq over the past several

AI is taking away the jobs



Now even the IMF chief had warned that globally, 40 to 60 percent of jobs will be at risk due to AI. Its managing director Kristalina Georgieva said economies with more skilled jobs would be more affected. The words of an International Monetary Fund official cannot be taken jokingly. The phase of layoffs has already started across the world. For example, 'Citibank', a major bank of America, has announced that within the next year, it will reduce its workforce by 10 per cent.

That means the loss of 20 thousand jobs is certain. Similarly, job losses have started in many tech establishments in India due to artificial intelligence. For example, till January 15, seven and a half thousand workers have been retrenched. Not only this, during the last quarter, big companies like TCS and Infosys have laid off 35 thousand employees. It is being said that more people may lose their jobs during this year i.e. 2024. Proponents of AI are never tired of claiming that it will result in a four-fold increase in productivity as well as a huge reduction in costs. This means the prices of consumer goods will fall. But what is the use of such development when most of the people across the world will become unemployed? If there is no money in their pocket, can they buy from the market for their family? Then no matter how much production you increase through AI, it will all go to waste. Computer scientist Geoffrey Hinton rightly said that human existence is under threat due to AI.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

THE POOR ARE GETTING POORER

Sir — According to the Oxfam report on inequality and global corporate power, the world's five richest men have more than doubled their fortunes from \$405 billion to \$869 billion since 2020, at a rate of \$14 million per hour. Meanwhile, nearly five billion people have become poorer in this 'decade of division', facing the economic shocks of pandemic, inflation, and war. The inequality is not coincidental; the billionaire class is orchestrating corporations to generate more wealth for them at the expense of everyone else. In reality, the poor are not just receiving nothing but becoming poorer than the poorest. The situation in the third world countries is even worse as millions are being driven out of the job market every day.

Ibne Farooq | Ausanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Taking science to people through a science festival

The India International Science Festival serves as a vital bridge between the scientific community and society

Scientific discoveries and innovations hold value only when their benefits are appreciated by the general public. Unfortunately, in our society, the average person often fails to comprehend the effort our scientific community invests in bringing forth innovations. They seldom acknowledge the scientific community for the benefits of science they enjoy, whether it be the food they consume, the healthcare they receive, or the communication systems facilitating speedy information transfer. It is in this context that science festivals serve as a bridge between the scientific community and society. Science festivals can bring about significant transformations in society by fostering a deeper appreciation for science, advancing scientific literacy, and motivating individuals to actively participate and contribute to the scientific community. The India International Science Festival (IISF) is a distinctive science festival conceived by Vijnana Bharati in 2015 and supported by various central government ministries. Over the years, it has become a model



system for popularising and propagating science in the community. What sets IISF apart is its format for designing various sessions. The events are crafted in a way that allows every citizen, regardless of their profession, education, or age, to appreciate the advancements made in science, particularly in Indian science. IISF provides a platform for scientists, researchers, and educators to directly interact with the public, bridging the gap between the scientific community and the general public and fostering a better understanding of scientific concepts and discoveries. The ninth edition of IISF will be held at the campus of the Department of Biotechnology's institute HSTI-RCB in Faridabad, Haryana, from January 17 to 20, 2024, featuring 17 major events. The festival is coordinated and implemented by the autonomous organiza-

tion of the Department of Science and Technology, the National Innovation Foundation-India. Key events of this year's IISF include the Student Science Village, Face-to-Face with New Frontiers of Science and Technology, Science through Games and Toys, Students Innovations Festival-Space Hackathon, Vigyanika - Science Literature Festival, State S&T Ministers, Centre, States S&T Secretaries and Officials Conclave, IISF Challenge, Education for Aspiring India - National Science Teachers Workshop, Young Scientists' Conference, New Age Technology Show, National Social Organisations and Institute Meet, Science, Technology and Innovations Exhibition, S&T Media and Communicators Conclave, Start-up, Technology and Innovation B2B Meet, Women Scientists and Entrepreneurs Conclave, and IISF Outreach Events. IISF provides a platform for hundreds of common people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari to share the stage with reputable scientific institutions in the country. This fosters a sense of com-

munity around the appreciation of science, encouraging dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas. Organized annually since 2015, IISF has played a crucial role in developing a culture that values and celebrates science. This cultural shift can have a lasting impact on educational priorities, public policies, and overall support for scientific endeavors. Making science accessible and enjoyable for children, primarily through events like the Student Science Village, Science through Games and Toys, can inspire young individuals to pursue careers in science. IISF brings together people from diverse backgrounds and different parts of the country, creating a sense of community around the appreciation of science. This collaborative environment can lead to increased community engagement in scientific initiatives and projects, promoting a culture knowledge-sharing.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN

ACHIEVE EXISTENTIAL PERFECTION

We should always do our duty because action is superior to inaction



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Everyone is trying to live the best way possible. Obviously, these vary greatly. What way of life may appear great to someone and may be rejected by others? For example, someone goes to the gym regularly and spends considerable time building muscles. Some other prefers to go for long walks and feel that this is the right thing to do. What, then, is the perfect way? Lord Krishna answers this question in great detail in the Bhagavad-Gita. Beginning with, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me." (18.65) Because the creation is God-centered. It has to be for creation to exist for millions of years, which is what we want because we are eternal. "In all respects take My shelter only. By My mercy you shall achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode." (18.62) Aren't we all looking for peace and 'sukha' (happiness)? But, unfortunately, most of us go about it in faulty ways. Someone is working very hard to show off material acquisitions. Is he or she peaceful and happy? Far from it. How about those who are indulging in a limitless sense of gratification? Their lust keeps on increasing never to be satiated. (3.39) Then, there are others, who want to prove their bigness vis-à-vis others. What happens? Their bubble bursts.

Take My shelter only." (18.66) If God is all-important, whose shelter should we take? It sounds not so humble, but God cannot misrepresent Himself just to sound humble. "These people, who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for those practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has." (9.22) Wouldn't we want that? Because God owns everything and controls all. One reality will open your eyes. Whatever we get or not get is already predestined; nothing changes much; everything is almost frozen rock solid. Because the three gunas of the material nature, which constitute our natures, will get it done from us and others. We all are programmed that way. The only way out is to take shelter in God, who can intervene. Now do you agree that we should take God's shelter?



Going further, Lord Krishna states, "Fix your mind in Me only; engage your intelligence in Me; thus hereafter you shall remain in Me only; there is no doubt about this." (12.6) Do you realize the significance of this statement? This is like living with the richest man on earth and better, if we can comprehend it. All we have to do is practice taking shelter, and the mind will gradually become controlled. (6.35) "A person meditating on Me, being connected by practice attains Me." (8.8) And what does God do? "You will cross all impediments by God's kripa." (18.58) Can we imagine such a privileged position? We can if we by patient intelligence carry out God's instructions. (6.25)

Now the other aspect of gaining existential perfection. This is simply doing our duties in the mood of service. Because this is all we have been created for. Even taking shelter of God is a duty towards ourselves, i.e. souls, which we are. Lord Krishna has clearly set this out, when He stated, "You should always do your duty. Because action is superior to inaction. Maintenance of the body will also not be possible through inaction." (3.8) This was an affirmation of what was stated in the earlier verse #2.47, "You have a right only in action." We know what our duties are according to time, place and circumstances.

Therefore, the conclusion is for all of us to see who are seated in vehicles, which are on autopilot, programmed according to our destiny. Nothing much changes and the struggle for existence goes on. However, alerts are forever coming from scriptures, preachers, etc. for taking shelter from God. The wise will take notice and take shelter in God, which involves actually just giving time, not just knowing the theory.

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

Establishing a robust and resilient tax system



UTTAM GUPTA

The Modi Government has successfully addressed all key aspects to ensure the strength and resilience of the tax system

The robustness of the tax regime in a country can be tested by looking at its ability to engineer and sustain an accelerated growth in its GDP (gross domestic product); help the government in garnering tax revenue commensurate to growth in GDP and be 'progressive' in as much as it collects more taxes from those who can afford to pay more while imposing less burden on those who can't.

Look at the growth in real GDP which is GDP at constant prices. After a decline of 5.8 percent during 2020-21 caused by Corona - pandemic, growth in real GDP rebounded to 9.1 percent during 2021-22. It was 7.2 per cent during 2022-23. The pace was maintained at a high of 7.7 per cent during the first half of the current FY. For the whole year, growth is estimated to be over 7 per cent. For tax collection purposes, we need to look at nominal GDP (NGDP) which is GDP at current prices. During 2021-22, growth in NGDP was 18.4 per cent which was higher than the budget estimate (BE) of 14.4 per cent. During 2022-23 also, growth at 16.1 per cent was significantly higher than BE of 10.3 per cent.

During the first half of the current FY, growth decelerated to 8.6 per cent which was lower than the BE 10.8 per cent. This was due to negative inflation as measured by the wholesale price index (WPI) during the first half. During the second half, growth is expected to be higher as the WPI will move to positive territory. For the whole year, it is expected to be 9 - 9.5 per cent.



Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman
Finance Minister

Let us look at gross tax revenue (GTR). It includes gross direct tax revenue (GDTR), GST collection, central excise duty (CED) and customs duty (CD) - net of refunds. GST collection includes Central GST and Integrated GST or IGST collection apportioned to the central government. CED is essentially excise duty collected on petroleum products that fall outside the GST ambit. During 2021-22, GTR grew by 33.8 per cent over the previous year as against the 9.6 per cent projected in the budget. It reflects the combined effect of high growth in NGDP and high 'responsiveness' of tax revenue for every percentage change in GDP - also known in jargon as 'tax buoyancy'. The NGDP growth is 18.4 per cent, and tax buoyancy comes to 1.8 (33.8/18.4). This led to a tax-GDP ratio of 11.5 per cent against BE of 9.9 per cent.

During 2022-23, GTR grew by 12.7 per cent as against BE of a mere 1.8 per cent (having achieved a big jump during 2021-22, considering the higher base, the government was pretty conservative in its estimation). Although tax buoyancy at 0.8 (12.7/16.1) was less than 1, the tax-GDP ratio remained at a high of 11.2 per cent (against BE of 10.7 per cent) largely because of high inflation during the year.

The impact of all these favourable factors is reflected in the GTR increasing by a whopping Rs 1025,000 crore in just two years to reach Rs 3050,000 crore during 2022-23. For the current FY, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has kept the BE for GTR at Rs 3350,000 crore which works out to an increase of 9.8 per cent over the actual for 2022-23. Against this, the actual increase in GTR during the first



TAX COLLECTION GREW AT A FAST PACE DUE TO HIGH NOMINAL GDP GROWTH REINFORCED BY HIGH TAX BUOYANCY. THE HIGH TAX BUOYANCY HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN LIFTING TAX COLLECTION DURING THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR

half was 16.3 per cent over the corresponding period of last year. Considering that the growth in NGDP was a modest 8.6 per cent, it implies a high tax buoyancy of 1.9 (16.3/8.6) leading to a much higher tax-to-GDP ratio.

The BE for GTR at Rs 3350,000 crore includes GDTR: Rs 1823,000 crore; GST: Rs 957,000 crore; CED: Rs 339,000 crore and CD (on imports): Rs 233,000 crore. From April 1 to October 9, 2023, GDTR at Rs 957,000 crore was 21.8 per cent higher than the actual collections during the corresponding period of last FY as against 11.6 per cent higher as per BE. This, in turn, was due to a sharp jump in personal income tax (PIT) collections of 32.5 per cent even as corporate income tax (CIT) collections were up by 12.4 per cent. The GDTR during the current FY till January 10, 2024, is Rs 1718,000 crore. At this pace, for the whole of the current year, GDTR is likely to exceed the BE Rs 1823,000 crore by about Rs 100,000 crore.

The total Central GST collections during the first half of the current FY was Rs 414,000 crore which is 15.9 per cent higher than the corresponding period of last year as against 12 per cent growth as per the BE. For the whole year, Central GST collections could exceed the BE by Rs 10,000 crore. Put together, the excess tax revenue of Rs 110,000 crore will help the Modi - government in offset-

ting the revenue shortfall in other areas such as proceeds of disinvestment thereby ensuring that the fiscal deficit remains well within the 5.9 per cent target.

The important takeaway from the above analysis is: that tax collection grew at a fast pace due to high nominal GDP growth reinforced by high tax buoyancy. The high tax buoyancy has been particularly helpful in lifting tax collection during the current FY. High tax buoyancy, in turn, has to do with relentless efforts by the tax authorities to ensure compliance and prevent evasion.

On the direct tax front, they have successfully used technology to reach out to the assesses in non-intrusive ways; e.g. by sending e-mail reminding them to file a return if not already or generating an 'auto-populated' form - a form in which income of the assesses from various sources is pre-filled. In particular, the use of data analytics and AI has prompted assesses to report their income accurately thereby avoiding short payment.

On the indirect tax front, tax authorities are focusing on strengthening of GST infrastructure with an emphasis on driving all businesses to be a part of the GST network, truthfully report all transactions and prevent fraudulent input tax credit or ITC claims. During 2022-23, they detected GST evasion of over Rs 101,000 crore and recovered Rs 21,000

crore. For the current FY, detected evasion could touch Rs 300,000 crore. Of this, they hope to recover around Rs 50,000 crore during the current year itself.

Is the present tax regime progressive?

Taxes levied on the flow of goods and services or 'indirect tax' are inherently regressive as all persons irrespective of their income pay for these at the same rate. On the other hand, a tax on their income or 'direct tax' is progressive; a person earning more pays at a higher rate. With these basics, let us look at relevant numbers.

The indirect tax to GDP ratio has gone up from 4.7 per cent during 2019-20 to 5.2 per cent during 2022-23. In contrast, the direct tax to GDP ratio increased from 5.3 per cent during 2019-20 to 6 per cent during 2022-23. This being higher than the indirect tax to GDP ratio of 5.2 per cent shows that the government is moving towards a progressive taxation structure.

Look at it from another angle. Of the likely gross tax collection of Rs 3460,000 crore during 2023-24, the direct tax collection is expected to be Rs 1923,000 crore which works out to 56 per cent, the remaining 44 per cent is indirect tax. This also reinforces that India is moving away from a regressive tax regime.

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

A pivotal year of democratic symphonies and seismic shifts

As over two billion voices prepare to unite in a global electoral crescendo, 2024 emerges as a transformative chapter and shaping the future across continents

Prepare for an unprecedented political upheaval in 2024, as a global seismic shift is poised to redefine our world. From the vibrant shores of Rio to the bustling megacities of Delhi, more than two billion voices will harmonize in a symphony of ballots, painting the globe with hope, defiance, and change. In 50 nations, each a unique melody in the grand concerto of democracy, presidential and legislative elections loom on the horizon, promising a year of unparalleled consequence. Beyond the usual winners and losers, 2024 raises a pivotal question: What world do we envision? Will nationalism and autocracy prevail, or will the chorus of democracy drown out the whispers of tyranny? The answer lies with-



BEDANGA

in billions of ballots, where hopes and dreams converge. India, the world's largest democracy, stands at a crucial crossroads in April-May 2024. 1.4 billion voters will determine the fate of 543 parliamentary seats and potentially Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist vision. Modi, seeking a third term amid challenges from the Indian National Congress, faces concerns about rising

Hindu nationalism, institutional erosion, and economic inequalities. Can India's vibrant democracy navigate progress and unity amidst diverse ideologies, riding the momentum generated by the BJP government's initiatives? Meanwhile, across the Indian Ocean, Indonesia, the world's third-largest democracy, anticipates a seismic shift on February 14, 2024. Over 200 million voters will choose their next president, with Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto seeking redemption after two previous defeats. He faces competition from Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo, who promise economic renewal and environmental reforms. In the aftermath of the pandemic and recent floods, voters yearn for



stability and a leader to guide the nation toward a prosperous future. On February 8, 2024, Pakistan faces a high-stakes election, transcending a mere government change to become a nation's tightrope walk.

Cricket legend-turned-politician Imran Khan, despite recent corruption charges, commands attention with his populist Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, aiming to reshape Pakistan's destiny. The political complexity involves historical accusations of military influence, with other parties seeking a return to economic pragmatism and a socialist vision. The queen state of Punjab holds decisive power in this grand political chess game, with the verdict awaiting the invisible hand of the military and the triumph of the ballot box. In March 2024, Turkey anticipates a local election spectacle evolving into a critical referendum on President Erdogan's hold on power, a prelude to the 2025 presiden-

tial showdown. The vote becomes a barometer of national sentiment, intensified by economic challenges and opposition parties challenging Erdogan's stronghold. Ekrem Imamoglu, the charismatic mayor of Istanbul, stands as a symbol of defiance and hope for change, with the 2024 elections becoming a crucible for the nation's future. In November 2024, brace for a seismic clash in the world's most powerful democracy - a potential rematch between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. The political atmosphere crackles with anticipation and apprehension as Trump vies for a second non-consecutive term, wielding the torch of populism, while Biden seeks unity amidst Democratic fac-

tions. The 2024 elections become a microcosm of the global struggle between populism and democratic ideals. In May 2024, the resonant chimes of Big Ben will herald a pivotal general election in the UK, serving as a referendum on Britain's post-Brexit identity, economic recovery, and essence. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak confronts a political tempest, with the Labour Party sensing an opportunity to exploit challenges and offer a vision of unity and fairness. As the electoral drama of 2024 unfolds, the global audience takes centre stage. Choices made will mirror our democratic processes, with the potential for a future where AI empowers, information illuminates, and the chorus

of democracy resonates with truth, unity, and unwavering hope. The 2024 elections, woven with threads of technology and hope, will stand as a digital tapestry against human history, shaping democracy's future. The question remains: Will we usher in a digital renaissance where AI elevates discourse, or will we surrender democracy's soul in our quest for digital efficiency? In 2024, we witness the dance of democracy in the age of AI, where billions hold the brushstroke defining the hues of this democratic masterpiece, and the lingering question echoes in the spaces between code and conscience.

(The writer is a columnist who focuses on matters of global significance; views are personal)

'Thai fireworks factory explosion kills 23'

AP ■ BANGKOK

An explosion at a fireworks factory in central Thailand killed at least 23 people on Wednesday, according to provincial officials. The death toll was announced by authorities with Suphan Buri province, where the blast occurred in mid-afternoon. The Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation said officials were working to secure the site and help affected people. The cause of the explosion is being investigated. The blast came less than a month before Chinese New Year in February, when demand for fireworks is strong. Rescue workers at the scene said no survivors had been found. None were mentioned by provincial authorities, contradicting the department's statement that wounded people had been recovered. Suphan Buri is about 95 kilometres

northwest of Bangkok, in the heart of Thailand's central rice-growing region. The office of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, who is in Switzerland for the World Economic Forum, distributed a video showing him being told over the phone by the regional police commander that there were 20 to 30 workers at the factory at the time of the explosion and that none of them could be found.

Kritsada Manee-In, a rescue worker with the Samerkun Suphan Buri Rescue Foundation, who earlier estimated that around 15 to 17 people had been killed, said an exact count was difficult because the bodies were in pieces. Photos posted on social media showed a thick plume of black smoke over the scene. Photos posted online by local rescue workers showed the factory site virtually levelled flat. National police chief Torsak Sukvimol con-

firmed local news reports that there had been another explosion at the factory in November 2022 that killed one worker and seriously injured three others.

He said police would pursue legal action for any wrongdoing involved.

In July last year, a large explosion at a fireworks warehouse in southern Thailand killed at least 10 people and wounded more than 100, according to officials.

That explosion in Narathiwat province was in a residential area and damaged about 100 houses within a 500-metre radius, according to the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. The Narathiwat governor said that blast was likely ignited by construction work in the warehouse, with sparks from metal welding causing the fireworks stored inside to catch fire and explode.

Sunak tries to quell Conservative revolt

AP ■ LONDON

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a test of his authority and his nerve on Wednesday as he tries to subdue a Conservative Party rebellion and win parliamentary approval for his stalled plan to send some asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda. Lawmakers are due to vote on a bill that aims to overcome a UK Supreme Court block on the Rwanda plan, a day after some 60 members of Sunak's governing Conservatives rebelled in an effort to make the legislation tougher. The dissent cost Sunak two party deputy chairmen, who quit in order to vote against the government on the amendments. A junior ministerial aide also resigned.

A similar rebellion on Wednesday would doom the Safety of Rwanda Bill, and potentially Sunak's 15-month-old government. With polls showing the Conservatives trailing far behind the Labour opposition in opinion polls,



Sunak has made the controversial - and expensive - immigration policy central to his attempt to win an election this year. He argues that deporting unauthorised asylum-seekers will deter people from making risky journeys across the English Channel and break the business model of people-smuggling gangs.

"We have a plan. It's working," Sunak said Wednesday in the House of Commons.

He needs to convince fellow Conservatives, as well as voters, that it's true. But the liberal and law-and-order wings of the Conservatives - always uneasy allies - are at logger-

heads over the Rwanda plan.

Moderates worry the policy is too extreme, concerns underscored when the United Nations' refugee agency said this week the Rwanda plan "is not compatible with international refugee law".

However, many on the party's powerful right wing think the bill doesn't go far enough in deterring migration to the UK. Hard-liners' attempts to toughen the bill by closing avenues of appeal for asylum-seekers failed Tuesday, and some of the Conservative rebels say they will oppose the legislation as a whole if it is not strengthened.

If about 30 Tory lawmakers vote against the bill, it could be enough, along with opposition votes, to kill the legislation.

But many Conservative lawmakers may hesitate to take the option of killing Sunak's signature policy, which could trigger panicky moves to replace him or even spark a snap election. The government has to call a national election by the

end of the year. Sunak insists the bill goes as far as the government can because Rwanda will pull out of its agreement to rehouse asylum-seekers if the UK breaks international law.

Illegal Immigration Minister Michael Tomlinson said there was only an "inch of difference" between the government and its Conservative critics, and "actually we all want the same thing".

He said he was confident the bill "is going to get through tonight".

The Rwanda policy is key to Sunak's pledge to "stop the boats" bringing unauthorised migrants to the UK across the English Channel from France. More than 29,000 people made the perilous journey in 2023, down from 42,000 the year before.

Five people died last week while trying to launch a boat from northern France in the dark and winter cold.

London and Kigali made a deal almost two years ago under which migrants who reach Britain across the

Channel would be sent to Rwanda, where they would stay permanently. Britain has paid Rwanda at least 240 million pounds (\$305 million) under the agreement, but no one has yet been sent to the East African country.

The plan has been criticised as inhumane and unworkable by human rights groups and challenged in British courts. In November, the UK Supreme Court ruled the policy is illegal because Rwanda isn't a safe country for refugees.

In response to the court ruling, Britain and Rwanda signed a treaty pledging to strengthen protections for migrants. Sunak's government argues that the treaty allows it to pass a law declaring Rwanda a safe destination.

If approved by Parliament, the law would allow the government to "disapply" sections of UK human rights law when it comes to Rwanda-related asylum claims and make it harder to challenge the deportations in court.

Massive blast kills 3 people, injures 77 in southern Nigerian city

Abuja (Nigeria) (AP): Three people died and 77 others were injured after a massive blast caused by explosives rocked more than 20 buildings in one of Nigeria's largest cities Tuesday night, authorities said on Wednesday, as rescue workers dug through the rubble in search of those feared trapped.

Residents in the southwestern state of Oyo's densely populated Ibadan city heard a loud blast at about 7:45 pm, causing panic as many fled their homes. By Wednesday morning, security forces cordoned off the area while medical personnel and ambulances were on standby as rescue efforts intensified.

Preliminary investigations showed the blast was caused by explosives stored for use in illegal mining operations, Oyo Governor Seyi Makinde told reporters after visiting the site in the Bodija area of Ibadan.

"We have already deployed first responders and all relevant agencies within Oyo state to carry out comprehensive search and rescue operations," Makinde said, describing the damage as "devastating."

Rescue workers combing through the collapsed structures recovered one more body on Wednesday morning, increasing the death toll to three, Saheed Akiode, coordinator of Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency in the region, told The Associated Press. It was not immediately clear who stored the explosives, and no arrest has been announced. "The investigations are ongoing (and) all those found culpable for this will be brought to book," Governor Makinde said. Most of the 77 injured had already been discharged, the governor said, promising to cover the medical bills of others still being admitted and to provide temporary accommodation for those whose houses were affected. Dozens of residents trooped to the vicinity where some of the injured were being treated in ambulances. Surrounding the area are buildings covered in dust and either destroyed in whole or in part as a result of the blast that also left a massive crater.

Immigration issue challenges delicate talks to form new Dutch government

AP ■ THE HAGUE

Delicate talks to create a new Dutch government around anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders suffered a setback Wednesday when a lingering immigration issue divided the parties involved in brokering a coalition. "We have a problem," Wilders told reporters in The Hague, the morning after a decision by senators from a key Dutch political party involved in the coalition talks to back legislation that could force municipalities to house asylum-seekers.

People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) senators threw their support behind the proposal Tuesday night. The lower house of parliament already has approved the plan, known as the "Distribution Law," that aims to more fairly spread thousands of asylum-seekers around the country. Wilders strongly opposes it. Wilders' Party for Freedom, or PVV, won the most seats in the election,

putting him in the driving seat to form a new coalition after four previous administrations led by outgoing VVD leader Mark Rutte.

Having Wilders in government would reinforce the far right in the European Union, where Giorgia Meloni is already leading the Italian government. The VVD senators' decision came despite opposition from the party's new leader Dilan Yesilgöz-Zegerius — a former asylum-seeker who is in talks with Wilders and two other party leaders about the contours of a new coalition after Wilders' Nov 22 general election victory. Wilders campaigned on pledges to drastically rein in immigration and he has long been an outspoken critic of the legislation that now looks set to be approved in a Senate vote next week.

Yesilgöz-Zegerius and the two other leaders involved in the closed-door coalition negotiations also oppose the legislation that was drawn up by a

junior minister from Yesilgöz-Zegerius' VVD. The legislation aims to push municipalities across the Netherlands to provide temporary accommodation for asylum seekers who have a strong chance of being granted refugee status.

At the moment, many municipalities refuse to make space available. That has led to a crisis in existing asylum-seeker centres, most notably in the northern town of Ter Apel, where hundreds of new arrivals were forced to sleep outside in a reception centre in the summer of 2022 because of overcrowding.

Yesilgöz-Zegerius has said she does not want her party to be in a coalition with Wilders' PVV, but is willing to support a Wilders-led government. The other two parties involved in the talks are the reformist New Social Contract and the Farmers Citizens Movement. Together, the four parties have a strong majority in the 150-seat lower house of the Dutch parliament.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken delisted the Houthis as both a foreign terrorist organisations and as specially designated global terrorists in February 2021 as the adminis-

tration sought to make it easier to get humanitarian aid into Yemen. In its waning days, the Trump administration designated the Houthis a Foreign Terrorist Organization over the strong objections of human rights and humanitarian aid groups.

The foreign terrorist designation barred Americans and people and organisations subject to US jurisdiction from providing "material support" to the Houthis, which the groups said would result in an even greater humanitarian catastrophe than what was already happening in Yemen.

Shortly after the Biden administration took office, Blinken removed the designations in a step that was roundly criticised by conservative lawmakers and others but was intended to keep much-needed food, medicine and other aid flowing to Yemen.

The specially designated global terrorists label to be reimposed on the Houthis

does not include sanctions for providing "material support" and it does not come with travel bans that are also imposed with the FTO label. Thus, it may not pose a substantial impediment to providing aid to Yemeni civilians.

Meanwhile, a senior White House official said on Tuesday that addressing the ongoing threat by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial vessels in the Red Sea is an "all hands on deck" problem that the US and allies must address together to minimise impact on the global economy.

"How long this goes on and how bad it gets comes down not just to the decisions of the countries in the coalition that took strikes last week," White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said during an appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The Iran-backed Houthi group has launched dozens of attacks since November on

vessels in the Red Sea, a vital corridor for the world's shipping traffic, in what they say is an effort to support with Palestinians in the war with Israel.

US and British forces have responded by carrying out dozens of air and sea strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen since Friday. The attacks by the Houthis have continued.

Linda Thomas Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, said last week that 2,000 ships since November have been forced to divert thousands of miles to avoid the Red Sea.

Houthi militants have threatened or taken hostage mariners from more than 20 countries.

The Red Sea attacks have already caused significant disruptions to global trade. Oil prices have edged higher in recent days, though Brent crude futures were down slightly in early trading on Tuesday.

US to relist Houthis as specially designated global terrorists

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is expected to soon announce plans to redesignate Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen as a specially designated global terrorists, according to two people familiar with the White House decision and a US official. The move comes as the Houthis have launched dozens of attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. The group says it has attacked the ships in response to Israel's military operations in Gaza in the aftermath of Hamas' October 7 attack on Israel.

The three people familiar with the decision were not authorised to comment and requested anonymity to discuss the matter ahead of the expected formal announcement.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken delisted the Houthis as both a foreign terrorist organisations and as specially designated global terrorists in February 2021 as the adminis-

tration sought to make it easier to get humanitarian aid into Yemen. In its waning days, the Trump administration designated the Houthis a Foreign Terrorist Organization over the strong objections of human rights and humanitarian aid groups.

The foreign terrorist designation barred Americans and people and organisations subject to US jurisdiction from providing "material support" to the Houthis, which the groups said would result in an even greater humanitarian catastrophe than what was already happening in Yemen.

Shortly after the Biden administration took office, Blinken removed the designations in a step that was roundly criticised by conservative lawmakers and others but was intended to keep much-needed food, medicine and other aid flowing to Yemen.

The specially designated global terrorists label to be reimposed on the Houthis

does not include sanctions for providing "material support" and it does not come with travel bans that are also imposed with the FTO label. Thus, it may not pose a substantial impediment to providing aid to Yemeni civilians.

Meanwhile, a senior White House official said on Tuesday that addressing the ongoing threat by Yemen's Houthi rebels on commercial vessels in the Red Sea is an "all hands on deck" problem that the US and allies must address together to minimise impact on the global economy.

"How long this goes on and how bad it gets comes down not just to the decisions of the countries in the coalition that took strikes last week," White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said during an appearance at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

The Iran-backed Houthi group has launched dozens of attacks since November on

vessels in the Red Sea, a vital corridor for the world's shipping traffic, in what they say is an effort to support with Palestinians in the war with Israel.

US and British forces have responded by carrying out dozens of air and sea strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen since Friday. The attacks by the Houthis have continued.

Linda Thomas Greenfield, the US ambassador to the United Nations, said last week that 2,000 ships since November have been forced to divert thousands of miles to avoid the Red Sea.

Houthi militants have threatened or taken hostage mariners from more than 20 countries.

The Red Sea attacks have already caused significant disruptions to global trade. Oil prices have edged higher in recent days, though Brent crude futures were down slightly in early trading on Tuesday.

Qatar, France send medicine for hostages in Gaza

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

A shipment of medicine for dozens of hostages held by Hamas was en route to Gaza on Wednesday after France and Qatar mediated the first agreement between Israel and the militant group since a week-long cease-fire in November. The medicines arrived in Egypt and were on the way to the border. A senior Hamas official said that for every box provided for the hostages, 1,000 boxes would be sent in for Palestinians. The deal also includes the delivery of humanitarian aid to residents of the besieged coastal enclave.

The agreement came more than 100 days into a conflict that shows no sign of ending and which has sparked tensions across the Middle East, with a dizzying array of strikes and counter strikes in recent days from northern Iraq to the Red Sea and from southern Lebanon to Pakistan.

Palestinian militants are still putting up resistance across Gaza in the face of one of the

deadliest military campaigns in recent history. Some 85 per cent of the narrow coastal territory's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, and the United Nations says a quarter of the population is starving.

Israel has vowed to dismantle Hamas' military and governing abilities to ensure the group can never repeat an attack like the one on October 7 that triggered the war. Militants burst through Israel's border defenses and stormed through several communities that day, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and capturing around 250. Hamas has said it will not release any more hostages until there is a permanent cease-fire, something Israel and the United States, its top ally, have ruled out.

A WELTER OF STRIKES ACROSS MIDDLE EAST

In the past few days, a US-led coalition has carried out strikes against Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen; Iran has struck what it described as an Israeli spy headquarters in

northern Iraq and anti-Iran militants in Pakistan and Syria; and Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have escalated the intensity of their fighting across the border.

Iran's militant allies across the region say they are striking US and Israeli targets to pressure the two countries to halt the Gaza offensive. Iran itself has encouraged the attacks while avoiding direct involvement, but appeared to be flexing its muscles with the strikes in Syria and Pakistan.

The Houthis have vowed to continue attacking international shipping in the Red Sea in what they say is a blockade of Israel, with repercussions for global trade.

Each party appears to be seeking some form of deterrence against its adversaries. But the longer the war in Gaza lasts, the more likely it is that one of them goes a step too far, potentially triggering another war.

The biggest risk is along the Israel-Lebanon border, where Israel has vowed to halt Hezbollah attacks so that tens

of thousands of Israelis can return to their homes in communities evacuated in October. Hezbollah hopes to take the pressure off Gaza by tying down Israeli troops in the north.

Tensions are also soaring in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli forces have conducted near-daily arrest raids that often trigger shootouts with Palestinian militants. Israel said Wednesday that an airstrike in the urban Balata refugee camp in the northern West Bank killed five people. They included a senior militant who was involved in recent attacks on Israelis, the army alleged. Over 350 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since October 7.

HEAVY FIGHTING IN GAZA

Israel said at the start of the year that it had largely dismantled Hamas in northern Gaza and would scale back operations there, focusing on dense urban areas in the center and south of the territory. Additional Israeli forces with-

drew from Gaza on Monday, but there has been little apparent letup in strikes, with scores of Palestinians killed every day.

Gaza's Health Ministry says 24,285 Palestinians have been killed since the start of the war. The ministry does not differentiate between civilian and combatant deaths but says around two-thirds of those killed were women and children. Over 60,000 people have been wounded, and less than half of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functioning.

Israel blames the high civilian death toll on Hamas because it fights in dense residential areas. Israel says its forces have killed roughly 9,000 militants, without providing evidence, and that 190 of its own soldiers have been killed in the Gaza offensive. Militants are still fighting in all parts of the territory, and Israel appears no closer to freeing the remaining hostages.

The deaths of two more hostages were confirmed Tuesday after Hamas said they were killed in Israeli airstrikes.

Blinken calls pathway to Palestinian state necessity for Israeli security

AP ■ DAVOS (SWITZERLAND)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated the need for a "pathway to a Palestinian state" during a talk Wednesday at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in the Swiss ski resort of Davos, saying Israel would not "get genuine security" absent that. "If Israel can be brought into the fold of the Middle East, Blinken said, the region would be coming together to isolate Iran, which he called "the biggest concern in terms of security," as well as its proxies. Those include Yemen's Houthi rebels who have been attacking commercial ships in the Red Sea. "The problem is getting from here to there, and of course, it requires very difficult, challenging decisions. It requires a mindset that is open to that perspective," Blinken said. He said what is different now is the mindset of leaders in the Arab and Muslim world on integrating Israel into the region and that he feels "a fierce urgency" because "we're in the midst of what is human tragedy in so many ways in the Middle East right now — for the Israelis and Palestinians alike." His comments come as a key Iranian official graces the same hallways of the glitzy event in the Alpine snows of Davos: Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian is sitting down for a one-on-one chat with CNN's Fareed Zakaria later Wednesday.

A day earlier, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, said during a Davos panel that his country agreed "regional peace includes peace for Israel" and responded "certainly" when asked if Saudi Arabia would recognize Israel as part of a larger political agreement. "But that can only happen through peace for the Palestinians," through a Palestinian state," he said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu leads a right-wing government that is opposed to Palestinian statehood, and

Netanyahu himself recently said that his actions over the years prevented the formation of such a state. Blinken said Israelis would need to decide on their leadership and direction, saying it's up to them whether the country can "seize the opportunity that we believe is there." He called this "an inflection point" for the Middle East that requires hard decisions.

The leaders of France, Argentina and Spain also will deliver speeches on a busy second day of the elite gathering, where heads of state mingle with corporate executives, activists and more.

Those at Davos are taking up other weighty issues of the day, such as artificial intelligence and climate change. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, speaking at the event, has continuously called for the world to take more united action against global warming.

"Let me be very clear — the phaseout of fossil fuels is essential and inevitable," Guterres said in a speech.

He cited scientists' recent findings that last year was the hottest on record and warned that "droughts, storms, fires and floods are pummeling countries and communities." To combat those effects, Colombian President Gustavo Petro called for an "American pact" between the neighbouring continents on developing clean energy sources.

There are two paths forward," Colombia's first leftist leader said during a panel on Latin America. "We continue to separate into a North that pollutes more and more ... and a South that fails to develop its potential ... (or) there is another way based on a coming together in search of common goals." Another South American leader, new Argentine President Javier Milei, faced a crowd of reporters who tailed him as he arrived in the Davos conference centre and ducked into a side meeting room.

Macron uses broad news conference to show his leadership hasn't faded

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron made a point of showing his leadership hasn't faded in more than two hours of answering questions at a news conference in which he promised a stronger France to face the world's challenges.

"I still have three years and a half in office," he said, describing an ambition to both change the daily life of the French and tackle global crises.

Macron's wide-ranging news conference followed the appointment last week of France's youngest-ever prime minister. The 46-year-old centrist president promised "audacity, action, efficiency" in the hopes of strengthening his



legacy through a series of reforms, starting with an economic bill meant to boost growth and tax cuts for middle-class households. He also detailed how he would preserve France's struggling health system and accelerate changes at schools. He advocated for uniforms in public schools, learning the nation-

al anthem at a young age and expanding a two-week training period in high schools to promote French values and encourage youth to give back to the community.

With no majority in parliament, Macron suggested many of the changes could be implemented without passing new laws. The French president vowed to make France "stronger" to face global crises, announcing plans to deliver more long-range cruise missiles as well as bombs to Ukraine. He also proposed a joint initiative with Qatar to mediate a deal between Israel and Hamas to allow the delivery of medications to around 45 of the more than 100 Israeli hostages held captive in Gaza.



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump embraces former candidate Vivek Ramaswamy at a campaign event in Atkinson, N.H. on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Russian strikes hurt 17 in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV/BRUSSELS

Russia fired two missiles at Kharkiv during the night, hitting apartment buildings and a medical center and injuring 17 people in the city in northeastern Ukraine, officials said Wednesday, in Moscow's latest strikes on civilian areas in the almost two-year war.

The S-300 missiles landed after dark Tuesday, Kharkiv regional Gov. Oleh Synyehubov said on Telegram.

Normally surface-to-air missiles, the S-300s have been adapted by Russia to hit targets on the ground and are cheaper to make than ballistic or cruise missiles. However, they are inaccurate and have a shorter range, analysts say.

Both sides are looking to replenish their weapons stockpiles as fighting along the 1,500-kilometer front line is largely bogged down during winter and the war's focus turns to long-range missile, drone and artillery strikes.

Russia's recently intensified aerial attacks sharply increased civilian casualties in December, with more than 100 Ukrainians killed and nearly 500 injured, according to the United Nations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been making a diplomatic push for Kyiv's Western allies to keep supplying weaponry. He recently visited the three Baltic countries and on Tuesday attended the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, where he met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Ukraine has accomplished a lot more than might be obvious on the battlefield at the moment, Blinken said Wednesday in Davos. Kyiv's forces last year clawed back about half of the territory lost to Russia after the full-scale invasion in February 2022 and have forced the Russian navy to pull back from the Ukrainian coast in the Black Sea, he noted.

"The strategic picture looks ... very different than maybe the day-in and day-out picture" on the battlefield, he said.

Nevertheless, Ukraine remains outnumbered and outgunned by its bigger neighbor.

"This is a ferocious fight and Russia does have tremendous resources that it brings to it," Blinken said.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, also in Davos, took note of comments about "war fatigue" in the West.

"Yes, we are tired" from fighting Russia, he said in English, but added: "No matter how tired or exhausted we will be, we will keep defending our country."

Kuleba's priority this year is air power, Kuleba said, "because the one who controls the skies will define when and how the war will end."

US-made F-16 warplanes pledged by Western allies are "on their way," he said.

At a two-day meeting of NATO's top brass in Brussels, the alliance was working on plans for military exercises later this year — the biggest in Europe since the Cold War.

The head of the NATO Military Committee, Adm. Rob Bauer, said Russian President Vladimir Putin's rationale for the war was his fear of democracy, not any security threat from NATO or Ukraine.

"If people in Ukraine can have democratic rights, then people in Russia will soon crave them too," he said.

The attack on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, struck 20 residential buildings and a medical center, authorities said.

Deeper inside the surrounding region of the same name, areas close to the front line came under artillery fire, according to officials.

Ukraine's air force said it intercepted 19 of 20 Shahed-type drones fired by Russia overnight, although regional officials reported that other drones made it through.

In the southern city of Odesa, three people were injured in a drone attack that forced the evacuation of about 130 people from an apartment building, regional Gov. Oleh Kiper said.

In Kherson, another southern city, artillery fire injured three people and damaged residential districts overnight, according to regional chief Oleksandr Prokudin.

The missile attacks on



In this photo provided by Kharkiv Regional Administration, emergency workers work in an apartment house damaged in Russian rocket attack in Kharkiv, Ukraine, in the early hours of Wednesday.

Kharkiv came from the Russian border region of Belgorod, Ukrainian officials said. That area has seen a recent increase of cross-border attacks by Ukraine.

The Russian Defence Ministry said two winged Ukrainian drones and four missiles were shot down over the Belgorod region overnight and another around noon Wednesday. It gave no details about damage or injuries.

'PLAN FOR UNEXPECTED IN UKRAINE'

Ukraine is locked in an existential battle for its survival almost two years into its war with Russia and Western armies and political leaders must drastically change the way they help it fend off invading forces, a top NATO military officer said on Wednesday.

At a meeting of the 31-nation alliance's top brass, the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Bob Bauer, also said that behind President Vladimir Putin's rationale for the war is a fear of democracy, in a year marked by elections around the world.

Over two days of talks in Brussels, NATO's top officers are expected to detail plans for what are set to be the biggest military exercises in Europe since the Cold War later this

year. The wargames are meant as a fresh show of strength from NATO and its commitment to defend all allied nations from attack.

As the war bogs down, and with US and European Union funding for Ukraine's conflict-ravaged economy held up by political fighting, Bauer appealed for a "whole of society approach" to the challenge that goes beyond military planning.

"We need public and private actors to change their mindset for an era in which everything was plannable, foreseeable, controllable and focused on efficiency to an era in which anything can happen at any time. An era in which we need to expect the unexpected," he said as he opened the meeting. "In order to be fully effective, also in the future, we need a warfighting transformation of NATO," Bauer added.

On Monday, UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps announced that his government would send 20,000 troops to take part in the NATO military exercises — known as "Steadfast Defender" — with many deployed in eastern Europe from February to June. The UK will also send advanced fighter jets and surveillance planes, plus warships

and submarines.

With ammunition stockpiles diminishing as allies send military materiel to Ukraine, the Norwegian government said on Wednesday it was earmarking 2 billion kroner (USD 192 million) to boost defence industry production capacity, saying there is "a need for large quantities of ammunition."

Norway's Defence Minister Bjorn Arild Gram said that "increasing capacity in the defence industry is important, both for Ukraine, but also to safeguard our own security."

Half the funds will go to Nammo, a Norway-based aerospace and defence group that specialises in the production of ammunition, rocket engines and space applications, "to increase the production of artillery ammunition," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store said. In Brussels, Bauer said NATO would continue to support Ukraine long-term. "Today is the 693rd day of what Russia thought would be a three-day war. Ukraine will have our support for every day that is to come because the outcome of this war will determine the fate of the world," he said. "This war has never been about any real security threat to Russia coming from either Ukraine or NATO," Bauer added.

Pak court dismisses Imran's petitions against rejection of nomination paper

PTI ■ LAHORE/ISLAMABAD

In another jolt to Imran Khan, a Pakistani high court on Wednesday dismissed the jailed former prime minister's petitions challenging the decisions of the rejection of his nomination papers filed from two constituencies in Punjab province ahead of the February 8 general elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had rejected the nomination papers of the 71-year-old founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party from the Lahore (NA-122) and Mianwali (NA-89) constituencies.

The ECP had rejected Khan's nomination papers primarily on the grounds of being convicted in the Toshakhana corruption case. Also, his nomination papers from NA-122 were dismissed on the grounds that the proposer was not a voter from the constituency.

In the Toshakhana corruption case, Khan is accused of taking luxurious vehicles from the national treasury in violation of the Toshakhana or state repository rules. All gifts given by foreign leaders to Pakistani top leaders on their trips are kept in the Toshakhana. Later, the Islamabad High Court had set aside the sentence and ordered his release. However, he was not freed as he was undergoing trial in the cipher case.

Khan's petitions challenging the decisions of the rejection of his nomination papers were rejected by a bench of the Lahore High Court (LHC) headed by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi, the Dawn newspaper reported on Wednesday. During the hearing, the court upheld the decisions of the appellate tribunals and rejected Khan's nomination papers, essentially excluding him from the upcoming general elections.

During the previous hearing on Tuesday, the beleaguered PTI founder's lawyer advocate Uzair Bhandari argued that the conviction on the charge of moral turpitude did not fall under the definition of disqualification. He said the conviction of the peti-



tioner could not be equated with the conviction for corruption or accumulating illegal assets and pointed out that an Indian court enlisted the offence of moral turpitude lower than the offence involving financial corruption.

"However, the bench observed that the standards of morality in Pakistan were different from other regions," the Dawn report said.

Bhandari argued that the returning officer (RO) had no jurisdiction to pass the impugned order on the basis of the conviction on moral turpitude. He stated that the Islamabad High Court had already suspended the sentence of the petitioner.

However, a lawyer for the ECP argued that the conviction of the petitioner was still in force and he had not been acquitted by the high court.

PAK'S EC WARNS OF ELECTION DELAY

Pakistan's election commission has warned that the general elections may have to be delayed if the process of changing electoral symbols does not stop, asserting that it could not keep making alterations with the February 8 polls just around the corner.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said in a statement on Tuesday that after the allotment of the election symbols, political actors are "having them changed through various forums," the Dawn newspaper reported.

Asserting that despite having issued repeated instructions to relevant authorities that election symbols should remain unchanged once the

printing starts, the ECP said that if the trend of changing the election symbols did not stop, there would be no other option but to postpone the polls in such constituencies. "If the process of changing the election symbols continues in the same way, there is a fear of election delay because the ballot papers will have to be reprinted, for which time is already limited, and on the other hand, the special paper available for the ballot papers will also be lost," the ECP statement said.

The electoral watchdog said that following the allotment of election symbols, it had already ordered the printing of ballot papers to the three printing corporations, and the printing work had commenced.

According to The Express Tribune newspaper, the ECP's statement came in response to the requests made by political parties and candidates to change their electoral symbols and the applications pending before the higher courts.

Recently, the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) central polls in charge, Senator Taj Haider, wrote to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), urging the ECP to change the electoral symbols of at least seven of its candidates as they had not been allotted the party's 'arrow' symbol. He added that the returning officers declared the party's candidates independent.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Secretary General Nayyar Hussain Bukhari raised the issue, saying the matter would be taken to court.

Similarly, a petition of jailed former prime minister and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's founding chairman Imran Khan against the rejection of his nomination papers is still pending with the Lahore High Court, the report said. Stressing the wastage of paper, the ECP estimated that 2,070 tonnes would be used for printing the ballot papers in the 2024 polls, a multifold increase from the 800 tonnes of paper used in the 2018 elections, the report said.

Chinese economy posts 5.2% GDP growth amid slowdown concerns

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's GDP grew by 5.2 per cent last year, higher than the government's target of five per cent amid mounting market concerns, waning investor confidence and a protracted property market slump in the world's second largest economy, according to official data released on Wednesday.

The country's GDP touched a record 126.06 trillion yuan (about USD 17.71 trillion) in 2023, according to data from China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Despite external pressure and internal difficulties, China has successfully achieved the major targets set for 2023 and recorded a rebound and improvements in the economy, Kang Yi, head of the NBS, told the media here. Kang said that at the same time, the Chinese economy faced an external environment that was increasingly complex, severe, and

uncertain, and that economic growth was still facing difficulties and challenges. Despite exceeding the five per cent target, analysts say that major challenges remain for the Chinese economy, which is still struggling to recover from the COVID-19 lockdowns. "On top of economic growth, other requisites for a confidence boost include a stable property market, receding deflationary pressure, as well as less policy unpredictability," Yu Xiangrong, chief economist for Greater China at Citigroup said.

Property investment, which has been a major drag on the post-COVID recovery, fell by 9.6 per cent in 2023 having dropped by 9.4 per cent in the first 11 months of last year according to the data.

Significantly the NBS, which stopped providing the unemployment data for about half a year amid concerns of shrinking job market, reported on Wednesday that the unem-

ployment rate has dropped to 5.2 per cent.

Unofficial data projected the unemployment was above 21 per cent. The employment situation is generally stable, the NBS data claimed.

The jobless rate in the 16 to 24 age group stood at 14.9 per cent in December, the NBS said but the figure does not include those who are in school.

The exclusion would "more accurately reflect the employment and unemployment status of the youth who are in need of a job after graduation, and the whole picture of employment and unemployment of the youth from their graduation to stable work," it said.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Tuesday, Chinese Premier Li Qiang sought to portray an upbeat picture of the Chinese economy saying that it is making steady progress and will continue to provide strong impetus for the world economy.

US, South Korea and Japan conduct naval drills to show strength against N Korea

AP ■ SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA)

The United States, South Korea and Japan conducted perhaps their biggest-ever combined naval exercises in a show of strength against nuclear-armed North Korea, South Korea's military said Wednesday. The three allies' senior diplomats were to meet in Seoul to discuss the worsening standoff with Pyongyang.

The training in waters off South Korea's Jeju island, which involved an American aircraft carrier, was aimed at sharpening the countries' combined deterrence and response capabilities against North Korean nuclear, missile and underwater threats, and also training for preventing illicit maritime transports of weapons of mass destruction, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

He didn't specify whether the training reflected concerns about North Korea's alleged arms



South Korean army soldiers gather during a military exercise in Paju, South Korea, near the border with North Korea, Wednesday.

transfers to Russia to help that country's war in Ukraine. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been on a provocative run of weapons testing and threats that raised regional tensions to their highest point in years. On

Monday at Pyongyang's rubber-stamp parliament, Kim declared that North Korea would abandon its long-standing commitment to a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of North's constitution

to eliminate the idea of a shared statehood between the war-divided countries. He said South Koreans were "top-class stooges" of America who were obsessed with confrontation, and repeated a threat that the North would annihilate the South with its nukes if provoked. Kim's speech came a day after the North conducted its first ballistic test of 2024, which state media described as a new solid-fuel, intermediate-range missile tipped with a hypersonic warhead, reflecting its push to advance its lineup of weapons targeting US military bases in Guam and Japan. In response to the North's heightened testing activity, the United States and its Asian allies have been expanding their combined military exercises. Kim condemns the demonstrations as invasion rehearsals, and the drills increasingly feature major US military assets, including aircraft carriers, long-range bombers.

Pakistan gets \$700m tranche from IMF

Islamabad (PTI):

Ahead of the next month's elections, cash-strapped Pakistan on Wednesday confirmed that it received over USD 700 million second tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under an existing USD 3 billion bailout package.

The loan was part of a USD 3 billion bailout package agreed towards June last year when Pakistan was slowly drifting towards default.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) confirmed in a statement that it has received "SDR 528 million (equivalent to \$705.6 million) in value 16th January 2024 from IMF following successful completion of the first review by the Executive Board of IMF under Stand By Arrangement (SBA)."

It further said that the disbursement will be reflected in SBP reserves for the week ending on January 19, 2024.

The handing over of around \$700 million brings the total disbursements under the SBA with the IMF to \$1.9 billion, while another \$1.1 billion will be provided in April as the two sides are set to complete the nine month program.

The reimbursement by the IMF comes after the UAE also confirmed the rollover of its two deposits of \$1 billion each placed with SBP for another year. The period of deposit was maturing in January 2024.

Pakistan has avoided potential default with the help from the international donors and friendly countries but its economy is still under clouds. It is believed that another IMF program would be needed at the completion of the ongoing package.

The country's economy has been in a free fall mode for the last many years, bringing untold pressure on the poor masses in the form of unchecked inflation, making it almost impossible for a vast number of people to make ends meet.

China's population declines by 2.08 mn in 2023

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's population dipped for a second consecutive year as the overall numbers fell by 2.08 million last year to 1.4097 billion as India overtook China to become the most populous country in the world in 2023, according to the annual official data released on Wednesday. China's population reported its first decline in six decades in 2022 after the birth rate hit a new low resulting in decades of the one-child policy pursued vigorously by the ruling Communist Party of China to control the population growth with experts predicting a steeper decline in the coming years in the world's second-largest economy.

According to the United Nations Population Fund data, India surpassed China to become the world's most populous nation with 142.86 crore people last year. Last year 9.02

million babies were born in China, down by 5.6 per cent from 9.56 million in 2022 amid the plummeting interest in couples having children, according to data released by China's National Bureau of Statistics.

The falling number of new babies resulted in the lowest birth rate since records began in 1949, with 6.39 births for every 1,000 people, compared with 6.77 in 2022.

China implemented a third-child policy in May of 2021 and rolled out a series of stimulus measures to boost population growth. Several cities, provinces and regions across the country have rolled out incentive policies such as issuing subsidies to families with a second or third child.

China's population growth has been slowing since 2016 as the high cost of raising children, a greater pursuit of individualism and a diversified lifestyle dampen enthusiasm to start a

family. The country's zero-Covid policies, implemented between 2020 and late 2022, are also perceived to have contributed to the slide.

Last year, 11.1 million people also died, pushing the national death rate to 7.87 per 1,000 people pushing the national death rate to 7.87 per 1,000 people, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Researchers warned that the Chinese economy which in the past significantly benefited from a demographic dividend, will have to tackle challenges including fewer working-age people, weaker spending power and a strained social security system as its population ages further. China's overall population is set to see a steeper decline in the coming years, said Professor Peng Xizhe from the Centre for Population and Development Policy Studies at

Fudan University. It's almost certain that the population will go on with negative growth, Peng told the Post.

As the cloud of the coronavirus pandemic wanes, and pronatalist policies "more or less make some difference", the number of newborns per year might rebound a little but is unlikely to exceed 10 million, he said.

"A rise in deaths related to COVID-19 may have occurred in early 2023... Looking ahead, as the population ages, annual deaths will continue growing in the future, surpassing 10 million people each year," Peng said. "Therefore, with deaths outnumbering births, it's almost certain that the population will go on with negative growth," according to Peng. He Dan, the director of China Population and Development Research Centre said most factors that result in the decline in women

choosing to have children or get married can be adjusted through the implementation of supportive policies.

"Though cities have released a slew of supportive policies to support childbearing women to give birth, the public's expectation is still not being met," He Dan told state-run Global Times tabloid.

He proposed a birth guarantee system to provide subsidies to individuals who care for newborns, aiming to encourage intergenerational support and help between family members and strengthen training and guidance on scientific parenting.

He also said the establishment of an "entire lifecycle of family services support system" will be able to alleviate anxiety and stress related to childbirth and provide comprehensive support for reproductive health services, marriage and relationship services, and childcare services, among others.

Princess of Wales hospitalized

London (AP):

The Princess of Wales has been hospitalized after undergoing planned abdominal surgery and will remain at The London Clinic for up to two weeks, Kensington Palace said Wednesday. The former Kate Middleton is expected to return to public duties after Easter, the palace said. The 42-year-old future queen was admitted to the hospital on Tuesday.

"The Princess of Wales appreciates the interest this statement will generate," the palace said. "She hopes that the public will understand her desire to maintain as much normality for her children as possible; and her wish that her personal medical information remains private."

The palace said that Kate, the wife of Prince William, wished to apologize for postponing her upcoming engagements.



soon as possible," the palace said.

After Prince Harry and Meghan's stormy departure to California in 2020, the Prince and Princess of Wales have solidified their position as being among the most popular members of the royal family.

Kate, in particular, has remained a reliable royal in the public eye — the smiling mother of three who can comfort grieving parents at a children's hospice or wow the nation by playing piano during a televised Christmas concert.

₹4,415 cr disbursed under PLI schemes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has disbursed Rs 4,415 crore under Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes for eight sectors, including electronics and pharma, till October this fiscal, an official said on Wednesday. A total of Rs 1,515 crore was disbursed in FY24 till October, while it was Rs 2,900 crore in 2022-23, when payments under the scheme commenced. "Incentive amount of around Rs 4,415 crore disbursed under PLI Schemes for eight sectors including large-scale electronics manufacturing, IT hardware, bulk drugs, medical devices, pharma, telecom, food processing, and drones," Additional Secretary in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Rajeev Singh Thakur told reporters here. When asked about the pending Samsung claim, he said, "One of the cases has been cleared."

The government in 2021 announced PLI schemes for 14 sectors such as telecommunication, white goods, textiles, manufacturing of medical devices, automobiles, speciality steel, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell battery, drones, and pharma with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore. Thakur said the departments implementing their respective schemes are responsible for the disbursements. They, along with Project Monitoring Agencies (PMAs), scrutinise the claim applications and sometimes visit the plants, too. He added that it has been observed that in some cases more time gets "wasted" on back-and-forth communication between PMAs and companies, "so it has been directed to ministries and PMAs to create an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) and reduce the time for processing" of the documents.



The remarks assume significance as certain quarters have raised concerns over slow disbursement of fiscal incentives under the scheme. "It has been told to the PMAs and departments to approve the claim and not to raise unnecessary objections," he added. As on date, 746 applications have been approved in 14 sectors with expected investment of over Rs 3 lakh crore. About 176 MSMEs are among the PLI beneficiaries in sectors such as pharma, and telecom. He said over Rs 1.03 lakh crore

of investment was reported till November 2023, which has led to production/sales of Rs 8.61 lakh crore and employment generation (direct and indirect) of over 6.78 lakhs. There are about 1,000 units under the scheme. These schemes have witnessed exports surpassing Rs 3.2 lakh crore, with significant contributions from sectors such as electronics, pharma, food processing, and telecom. "The disbursement is not showing the numbers but we are hopeful because investments

Stock market crash wipes out ₹4.59 lakh cr



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors became poorer by Rs 4.59 lakh crore on Wednesday due to a sharp fall in the equity markets where the BSE Sensex plummeted 1,628 points, dragged by bank stocks and weak global trends. Extending its previous day's decline, the 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 1,628.01 points or 2.23 per cent to settle at 71,500.76.

During the day, it nosedived 1,699.47 points or 2.32 per cent to 71,429.30. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies eroded by Rs 4,59,327.64 crore to Rs 3,70,35,933.18 crore. In two days of market fall, investors' wealth fell by Rs 5,73,576.83 crore. "Hawkish comments by the US Fed triggered a spike in yields on the US 10-year bonds and the US dollar index, which spooked

European and Asian markets, including India. India's stock market valuations are also expensively valued compared to other global stock indices and investors would wait for more positive cues now to extend their equity exposure. "There are challenges in the near-term such as persisting conflict in the Middle East and worries over delay in the US Fed rate cut, which could dampen investors' sentiment going ahead," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. Among the Sensex firms, HDFC Bank fell by over 8 per cent after the company's December quarter earnings failed to impress investors. Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India and IndusInd Bank were among the other major laggards.



India an extraordinary success story: Blinken

PTI ■ DAVOS

Describing India as an "extraordinary success story", US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday said the "remarkable achievements" of the Modi government have materially benefited and positively impacted so many Indian lives. Speaking here at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2024, he also said the US-India relations have reached a new high with efforts from both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Joe Biden. At the same time, a regular part of the conversation between the two countries has been about democracy and rights, Blinken said. "It's part of a very sustained, very real conversation and a conversation we hope produces positive change and that's the case with India," he said. He was replying to a question on whether the rise of Hindu nationalism in India concerns the US despite the country's robust economic growth and infrastructure building under

the Modi regime. Talking about how he and the US look at India, Blinken said, "We see an extraordinary success story and see the remarkable achievements that Prime Minister Modi has achieved under his watch that has materially benefited and positively impacted so many Indian lives." "We also see the relationship between our two countries that has reached a new place and a new level and that I think has been a very deliberate effort on part of both Prime Minister Modi and President Biden to position it so," he added. The US Secretary of State further said, "At the same time, a constant regular part of our conversation is the conversation about democracy, about rights." "When the President took office, we wanted to make sure that we put back into our foreign policy these fundamental concerns about democracy and about human rights and we have done that. We do it in different ways in different places. Maybe because of the relationship we may have with a country, with a government," he added.

China's economy expands 5.2% against all odds

AP ■ HONG KONG

China's economy for the October-December quarter grew at a quicker rate, allowing the Chinese government to hit its target of about 5% annual growth for 2023 even though trade data and the economic recovery remain uneven. Official data released Wednesday showed that the Chinese economy grew 5.2% for 2023, surpassing the target of about 5% that the government had set. The growth for 2023 is likely helped by 2022's GDP of just 3% as China's economy slowed due to COVID-19 and nationwide lockdowns during the pandemic. China is the second-biggest economy behind the US and has been a key driver of global economic growth. Its economic

slowdown has sparked concern of spillover effects to other economies that count China as a key trading partner, such as South Korea and Thailand. For the fourth quarter, China's gross domestic product also grew at 5.2% compared to the same time last year. On a quarterly basis, the economy rose 1% in Q4, slowing from the expansion of 1.3% in the July-September quarter. Officials from China's National Bureau of Statistics said that measures including "strengthened macro regulation, and redoubled efforts to expand domestic demand, optimize structure, boost confidence and prevent and defuse risks" had helped improve the momentum of recovery, supply and demand. Industrial output, which measures activity in the manufactur-



ing, mining and utilities sectors, rose 4.6% in 2023 compared to a year earlier, while retail sales of consumer goods grew 7.2%. Fixed-asset investment - spending on factory equipment, construction and other infrastruc-

ture projects to drive growth - grew 3% year on year in 2023. China on Wednesday also resumed releasing official data on its youth unemployment

rate after a five-month suspension. Under a new methodology which excludes students from the jobless rate, unemployment for those aged between 16 and 24 stood at 14.9% for December, an improvement from the record-high youth jobless rate of 21.3% in June using the previous methodology. Officials said that the new methodology's exclusion of current students will more accurately reflect employment of "young people entering society." However, indicators point to a largely uneven recovery for China. Trade data for December, released earlier this month, showed a slight growth in exports for a second straight month as well as a slight increase in imports. Consumer prices however fell for a third consecutive month as deflationary

pressures persisted. Julian Evans-Pritchard from Capital Economics said China's "recovery clearly remains shaky." "And while we still anticipate some near-term boost from policy easing, this is unlikely to prevent a renewed slowdown later this year," Evans-Pritchard wrote in a note, adding that it will be "a lot more challenging" for China to achieve the same pace of expansion in 2024. Chinese premier Li Qiang said at the World Economic Forum on Tuesday that China had achieved its economic target without resorting to "massive stimulus." He said that China had "good and solid fundamentals in its long-term development" and despite some setbacks, the positive trend for the economy will not change.

Domestic investors raise stakes in Adani Group

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic investors seem to be bullish on Gautam Adani-led Adani Group as they raised their stakes in five group companies, including Adani Green and Adani Total Gas, in the December quarter. Other group firms where stakes have been raised are Adani Wilmar and cement firms Ambuja and ACC during the quarter, as per an analysis of shareholding data with the BSE. This suggests positive sentiment and confidence among domestic investors in the group. Notably, mutual funds have marginally increased or maintained their shareholding across all entities, barring Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd, and Adani Energy Solutions Ltd in the quarter under review. Moreover, the total shareholder base of the group rose 5 per cent to 68.82 lakh, with substantial increase seen in Adani Total Gas and Adani Energy Solutions. Meanwhile, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have shown mixed trends when it comes to holding stake in the group. Going by the shareholding data, Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) hiked their stakes in Adani Green to 1.67 per cent in the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal from 1.36 per cent in the preceding quarter. Further, they raised ownership in Adani Total Gas to 6.26 per cent from 6.02 per cent in the September quarter, the data showed. Also, their stake in Adani



Wilmar rose to 0.41 per cent from 0.01 per cent in the preceding quarter, in Ambuja to 9.19 per cent from 9.07 per cent, and in ACC to 10.72 per cent from 10.27 per cent. On the other hand, DIIs reduced their ownership in Adani Enterprises Ltd to 3.95 per cent during the period under review from 4.26 per cent in the September quarter. The stake in Adani Ports has been trimmed to 8.37 per cent from 9.72 per cent. Further, the shareholding of DIIs remained unchanged in Adani Power and Adani Energy Solutions during the quarter. DIIs do not hold any stake in NDTV. In December alone, 10 Adani Group companies added close to Rs 3 lakh crore in market capitalisation with the group mcap reaching Rs 14.2 lakh crore at December-end. Moreover, the mcap crossed Rs

15 lakh crore mark on January 3 this year, following the clean chit given by the Supreme Court. The top court delivered its verdict on a batch of petitions on the Adani-Hindenburg row over allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant. The Supreme Court ruled that allegations against the conglomerate do not need more probes, either by a special investigation team or the CBI, and gave capital market regulator Sebi three more months to conclude its investigation. The Adani Group stocks had suffered a bloodbath on the bourses after Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations in January 2023, including those about fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation, against the business conglomerate. The group dismissed all the charges.

Rupee settles 1 paisa lower at 83.13 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee slipped 1 paisa to settle at 83.13 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid massive selling in domestic equity markets and a strong greenback overseas. However, renewed foreign capital inflows and a sharp fall in crude oil prices in the international markets supported the local currency and capped the losses, forex dealers said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic currency opened at 83.13 and traded in the range of 83.07 to 83.17 against the dollar. The unit finally settled at 83.13 (provisional) against the greenback, down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee declined 26 paise to



settle at 83.12 against the US dollar. "The rupee traded flat...With the dollar index rising and sell off in capital markets rupee weakness can continue towards 83.25-83.30. "US retail data will be in focus in the evening, which can give dollar new triggers. The range for rupee can be seen between 82.90-83.30," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.06 per cent higher at 103.05 on Wednesday. Analysts attributed gains in the US dollar to safe-haven demands amid concern over disruption in global trade through the Red Sea route. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 2.09 per cent to USD 76.65 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex fell 1,628.01 points, or 2.23 per cent, to settle at 71,500.76 points. The Nifty also declined 460.35 points, or 2.09 per cent, to 21,571.95 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the equity market on Tuesday as they bought shares worth Rs 656.57 crore, according to exchange data.

Insurance sector may see further listing: Moody's

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having raised Rs 1,930 crore in FY23, the insurance sector may witness further capital transactions, including stock market listings and M&A, to improve the sector's capital adequacy and financial flexibility in the months ahead, a report said. Indian insurers' favourable growth prospects have encouraged the sector to raise capital, outweighing the adverse impact of their weak underwriting profitability, Moody's said in a report. In FY23, the sector's paid capital rose to Rs 75,300 crore from Rs 73,400 crore a year earlier, an increase of 2.6 per cent. "We expect more such transactions, as well as more merger and acquisition (M&A) deals and initial public offerings (IPOs), to improve the Indian insurance sector's capital adequacy and financial flexibility in the months ahead," it said. The report said foreign insurers would continue investing in the Indian insurance market and many foreign companies already present in the country through joint ventures could seek to increase their ownership stakes in their Indian affiliates. "We believe the presence of foreign stakeholders brings particular benefits in the areas of capital adequacy, financial flexibility and governance standards. The raising of limits on foreign ownership of insurance companies has been credit positive for the market," it said. The report said the overall insurance sector's profitability after tax was positive in FY23.

Trade unions, farmers to go on strike on Feb 16

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A joint forum of trade unions and farmers bodies has given a call for a nationwide general strike and Grameen Bandh (rural close down) on February 16, to protest against the anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national policies of the central government. The forum is pressing for their demands which include higher minimum (crop MSP) support price, minimum wage of Rs 26,000 per month for workers, repeal of four labour codes, repeal amendments made to the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, and IPC/GrPC, guaranteed employment as fundamental right etc. "We appeal to all the like-minded movements of students, youth, teachers, women, the social movements and those in the field of art, culture, literature to extend support to the joint

campaigns and culminating actions of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the platform of Central Trade Unions, Federations/Associations on 16th February," a joint statement said. It further stated that SKM and CTUs/Federations/Associations call for a countrywide massive mobilisations at different levels along with the Industrial/

They are demanding MSP@ C2+50 per cent for all crops with guaranteed procurement, dismissal of Ajay Mishra Teni and registration of case on him, Comprehensive loan waiver to small and middle farm households for freedom from indebtedness and minimum wage of Rs 26,000 per month for workers. The C2+50 per cent formula recommends setting the MSP for crops at least 50 per cent above the comprehensive cost of producing a crop (C2) to ensure fair income for farmers. They also demanded the repeal of 4 Labour Codes, repeal amendments made to IPC/GrPC, guaranteed employment as fundamental right, no privatisation of PSUs including railway, defence, electricity, coal, oil, steel, telecom, posts, transport, airports, port & dock, banks, insurance etc.



sectoral strike and Grameen Bandh on February 16, 2024 "against the anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national policies of the central government." The sectoral movements and agitations are going on including strikes. We request them to synchronize their agitations with the February 16 nation-wide programme adopted unitedly by the SKM and CTUs, it stated.

Malabar opens Dwarka store

Dwarka: Malabar Gold & Diamonds has relaunched its store in Dwarka. The revamped store, located at High Street, Ground Floor, Vegas Mall, Dwarka, promises a world-class jewellery shopping experience, boasting more space and more collections. With a wide array of designs for every occasion and an enhanced ambience, we believe Dwarka store will offer unparalleled comfort and convenience to all our esteemed customers, said MP Ahammed, Chairman of Malabar Group.

Praggnanandhaa stuns world champion Liren

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS)

Teenaged Indian chess superstar R Praggnanandhaa defeated world champion Ding Liren of China in the fourth round of the Tata Steel Chess Tournament here, a win which also helped him surpass the legendary Viswanathan Anand as the top-rated Indian player.

After the victory late on Tuesday night, the 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa has 2748.3 points as against 2748 of five-time world champion Anand in the FIDE live ratings. The world chess body publishes the ratings at the start of each month.

With the 62-move win with black pieces, Praggnanandhaa became the second Indian after Anand to defeat a reigning world champion in classical chess.

Praggnanandhaa had also beaten Liren at the 2023 Tata Steel tournament.

He is now third in the standings with 2.5 points in the Masters event.

"That feels good!" Praggnanandhaa said after the win. Explaining his game strategy, Praggnanandhaa said, "From

REPLACES ANAND AS NO.1 INDIAN



the opening itself, I was the one pushing. I got a pawn early on and I felt just pushing without any risk in a position, which is

a bonus with black." His focus at the moment is to just give his best. "My personal goals in this tour-

namment would be to give my best. It is a very tough tournament. Usually tournaments have nine rounds but this one has 13 rounds. So it's like playing one tournament more. I want to give my best and see how it goes," said Praggnanandhaa.

The teenaged Indian GM has been in good form in recent times, having finished runner-up in the World Cup to Magnus Carlsen last year to qualify for the Candidates tournament to be held in April to identify the challenger to Liren.

The Masters group saw Dutch player Anish Giri emerge as the sole leader heading into the first rest day. Giri's endgame prowess secured him victory against teenaged Indian GM D Gukesh to take him to 3.5 points.

Alireza Firouzja is half a point behind the leader on 3 points. The third Indian player in the fray, Vidit Santosh Gujrathi was held to a draw by Jorden Van Foreest in round four. He has 2 points from four rounds.

In the fifth round on Thursday, Praggnanandhaa runs into the leader Anish Giri while his compatriots Gukesh and Gujrathi will take on Ian Nepomniachtchi and Max Warmerdam respectively.

Say that to my face: Djokovic to a heckler in testy 2nd round win



AP ■ MELBOURNE

Defending champion Novak Djokovic challenged a heckler to "say that to my face" during the fourth set of a testy second-round win Wednesday over Alexei Popyrin at the Australian Open.

Before starting the fifth game of the fourth set, Djokovic walked back behind the baseline and engaged with a spectator, gesturing to him to come down and "say that to my face."

That match had been going for almost three hours by then, and Djokovic had dropped the second set and had to save set points in the third. After the outburst, he won three straight games to take the match away from the Aussie player en route to a 6-3, 4-6, 7-

6 (4) 6-3 victory.

After clinching the match on a Popyrin error, he turned around to the crowd again and yelled, pumping his fist to celebrate.

Djokovic has been dealing with a sore wrist and said after his opening match - a four-hour, four-set win over 18-year-old qualifier Dino Prizmic - that he hasn't been feeling well.

He credited Popyrin with bringing out a game plan to unsettle him.

"I haven't been playing my best, but still trying to find form," the 36-year-old Djokovic said. "Particularly in the early rounds, you play players that have nothing to lose. They come out on centre court to play their best tennis.

"Hopefully, I'll be able to build this as the

tournament progresses."

Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost the final here last year to Djokovic, also had a tough time against an Aussie on an adjacent court in the night session.

Tsitsipas had match points in the fourth set and then had to save four set points to force a tiebreaker, which he clinched in a 4-6, 7-6 (6), 6-2, 7-6 (4).

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and US Open winner Coco Gauff avoided the early Day 4 upsets in the women's draw to advance to the third round, along with 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva.

Three-time major finalist Ons Jabeur lost 6-0, 6-2 in 54 minutes to Andreeva in Wednesday's opening match on Rod Laver Arena. Then, 2018 champion Caroline Wozniacki also lost to a young Russian on the No. 3 show court.

Two other 16-year-old players lost their centre-court matches to highly-ranked players: No. 10 Beatriz Haddad Maia accounted for Alina Korneeva 6-1, 6-2 and Sabalenka overpowered Brenda Fruhvirtova 6-3, 6-2 to open the night session.

Gauff extended her winning streak to nine matches at Grand Slams with a 7-6 (2), 6-2 win over fellow American Caroline Dolehide.

Dolehide served for the opening set at 6-5 before US Open champion Gauff took control in the tie-breaker.

"It was really hard," Gauff said. "If you give her something short, she's going to punish you for it, so if I could go back and do something I'd change that."

Gauff will next play another American, Alycia Parks, who reached the third round of a Grand Slam singles tournament for the first time with a 7-5, 6-4 win over 32nd-ranked Leylah Fernandez.



Fernandes late goal propels FC Goa to second win in row

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

An injury-time goal by Brison Fernandes saw FC Goa beat Bengaluru FC 1-0 in their Group D clash of the Super Cup here on Wednesday, giving the Gaurs their second successive win in the competition.

While the loss effectively knocked last season's finalists Bengaluru out of the tournament, FC Goa are sitting strong in the table with six points from two matches.

The game was marked by the lack of cutting edge on both sides, evidenced by the dearth of chances in the first half.

And when the chances did fall, they were squandered away. The first fell to Carlos Martinez, who volleyed towards goal from Noah Sadaoui's brilliantly worked cross.

An acrobatic Sahil tipped the ball over the bar. Bengaluru were guilty of a glaring miss soon after, a mistake from Seriton Fernandes gifting Javi Hernandez the ball inside the box and a gaping goal to shoot at. He shot

over the bar. After an initial period of dominance, Goa lacked urgency in the second half and Bengaluru capitalised, pushing forward in numbers to create a few chances of their own.

Lalremliuanga's shot from a Shivaldo Singh cutback was deflected off target and Carl McHugh was forced to clear off the line from the subsequent corner. Shivaldo, introduced as a substitute, continued to be the biggest positive for Bengaluru in their second half, the architect of their best moments.

And yet his teammates proved to remain ineffective and incapable of finishing off his chances.

The last of those fell to Ashish Jha, who dinked over Dheeraj Singh after Shivaldo's brilliant ball had set him through on goal. His effort went wide.

Late in injury time Goa made Bengaluru pay for their missed chances when Fernandes (90+4) headed Muhammed Nemiil's cross from a tight angle into the far corner to spark the celebrations. For Bengaluru, the cup run is over.

Only National Championship organised by us will be genuine: Ad-hoc panel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after suspended WFI asserted that only the national federation has the mandate to organise the National Championships, the IOA-appointed ad-hoc panel said only the tournament organised by it will be considered "genuine".

The ad-hoc panel also made it clear that only the wrestlers who participate in competition conducted by it will get the "benefits".

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had on Tuesday announced that it will go ahead with the Nationals on Pune from January 29 after its first

Executive Committee meeting post the elections. WFI contended that its constitution mandates only the Federation to host the Nationals and the ad-hoc panel has no authority to conduct the National Championships.

The Sports Ministry, which had suspended WFI citing rules violation, had also said that WFI-organised events will not be recognised.

"It is clarified that only Sr. National Free Style, Greco Roman Style & Women National Wrestling Championships 2023, organised by RSPB is genuine, sanctioned and recognised championship by the Ministry of Youth Affairs &

Sports and all government benefits will only accrue to the sportspersons participating in such National Championships," Panel head Bhupendra Singh Bajwa said in a press release.

WFI President Sanjay Singh had said on Tuesday that they will seek a dialogue with the ministry to get the suspension revoked.

The fight for authority between ad-hoc panel and the WFI has only created confusion among the wrestlers.

"The sport has become a joke. Where do we go? This whole mess should be cleared for the benefit of wrestlers and the sport," said a woman wrestler who did not wish to be named.

Meanwhile, wrestlers from an akhara in Haryana said they will compete in the Nationals which will be organised by WFI in Pune.

"We will go to Pune, we are not going to compete in Jaipur where the ad-hoc panel will conduct Nationals," said the wrestler.

Ad-hoc panel will conduct Nationals in Jaipur from February 2-5 with the help of Railways Sports Promotion Board (RSPB).

Interestingly former RSPB Secretary Prem Chand Lochab, who had the backing of protesting wrestlers, had grabbed the post of WFI Secretary General in the recently conducted WFI elections.



Jabeur, Wozniacki out of Australian Open in 2nd round

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Sixth-seeded Ons Jabeur and former top-ranked Caroline Wozniacki were eliminated from the Australian Open by two young Russian players in the second round on Wednesday.

Jabeur, the runner-up at Wimbledon last year, made 24 unforced errors as she was beaten 6-0, 6-2 by 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva in 54 minutes.

"I was really nervous before the match because I'm really inspired by Ons and the way she plays," said Andreeva, who lost in the final of the junior event here last year.

"Before I started on the WTA Tour, I always watched her matches and was always so inspired. Now I had the chance to play against her."

It is the second successive year that Jabeur has lost in the second round in Melbourne.

Wozniacki, the winner at Melbourne Park in 2018, was beaten 1-6, 6-4, 6-1 by 20-year-old Maria Tomafeeva, who is making her main draw Grand Slam singles debut this year.

Wozniacki, who had two children before returning to the WTA Tour last year after 3-12

years away, led by a set and 2-0 before Tomafeeva turned the match around with some devastating hitting, including 40 winners. "I'm really a bit speechless now," Tomafeeva said.

"It was an honor to play here against Caroline today. I was going into the match without any expectations. I enjoyed every second of it."

Jabeur and Wozniacki played their matches under the roof, on Rod Laver Arena and John Cain Arena, respectively, with rain causing the start of matches on the outside courts to be delayed for several hours.

In the only men's match completed so far Wednesday, fourth-seeded Jannick Sinner beat Jesper de Jong 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 on Margaret Court Arena, the third stadium at Melbourne Park with a retractable roof.

Defending champions Novak Djokovic and Aryna Sabalenka headline the night matches later Wednesday.

Sabalenka, who won her first Grand Slam singles title here 12 months ago, faces Brenda Fruhvirtova, a 16-year-old Czech player. Novak Djokovic, a 10-time winner of the event, plays local hope Alexei Popyrin.

Burkina Faso edges Mauritania 1-0 in Africa Cup

AP ■ ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

Bertrand Traore scored a late stoppage-time penalty for Burkina Faso to edge Mauritania 1-0 in their Africa Cup of Nations opening game.

The match in Bouake on Tuesday was heading toward becoming the first goal-less draw of the tournament until Nuh Mohamed El Abd fouled Issa Kaboré in the penalty area in the third minute of second-half stoppage time.

Traore, an Aston Villa forward, held his nerve and sent the goalkeeper the wrong way to score in the 96th minute and secure three points for the "Stallions," lifting them to the top of Group D after one round of games.

"We believed in it until the end," said Blati Touré, who was named man of the match. Algeria and Angola drew 1-1 on Monday in the other group game.

Burkina Faso reached the semifinals in the last edition. Since 2013, the Burkinabè have made one final and two semifinal appearances, but the country has never won the



Africa Cup. "It means everything," defender Edmond Tapsoba said of the prospect of winning the title for the first time, in an Associated Press interview.

BRAVE WARRIORS MAKE HISTORY: Deon Hotto pounced late for Namibia to upset Tunisia 1-0 and claim the country's first-ever Africa Cup win in their Group E opening game.

Bethuel Muzee did well on the left wing to elude a defender before whipping in a cross to the far post for the unmarked Hotto to head past Tunisia goalkeeper Bechir Ben Said in the 88th minute.

Both Ben Said and his "Brave Warriors" counterpart Lloyd Kazupaa had shown their prowess with important saves before that.

Hotto, who plays for the Orlando Pirates in South Africa, celebrated with two somersaults as he ran toward the ecstatic Namibia fans at the Amadou Gon Coulibaly Stadium in Korhogo.

Namibia, which is taking part in the Africa Cup for just the fourth time, has finished bottom of its group in each of its previous appearances.

Tunisia, considered one of the pre-tournament favorites, is going for its second title after winning the Africa Cup in 2004.

India gear up for tough match against Uzbekistan

PTI ■ AL RAYYAN (QATAR)

After a gritty performance against formidable Australia, India face Uzbekistan in their second group match of the Asian Cup here on Thursday, aiming to assert themselves better than what they managed in the opening game.

India lost to title-contenders Australia 0-2 in the opening match on January 14 after denying the Socceroos any success for 50 minutes. The Australians were at their attacking best but Sunil Chhetri's men managed to avoid a bigger margin of defeat.

The defensive compactness, especially in the first half, would be something that the Indians would like to continue against the Uzbeks, who are a bit disappointed after playing out a 0-0 draw against Syria in their opening match.

Chhetri made the point that the



Central Asian side, ranked 68th in the world as against 102nd of India, would not be as menacing as the Australians, and his thoughts could be a pointer to his side's game-plan.

"Uzbekistan are not Australia, but they're a good side nonetheless. So, it will be a big challenge in this game too," said Chhetri who missed a scoring chance

against Australia. Chhetri had earlier conceded that Uzbekistan as well as Australia are of World Cup level but he and his team will not be too scared of the former, popularly known as "White Wolves", after their fighting show against the Socceroos.

For sure, India will not sit back too deep against Uzbekistan. Instead, they would look to

play their own game and press for counter-attacks with quick transition. The likes of Chhetri, Manvir Singh and other forwards could be looking for chances which were almost non-existent against the Australians. Sandesh Jhingan will, as usual, be the key man in the deep defence. A true warrior on the pitch, Jhingan led a fine Indian defensive effort against Australia. He soldiered on with a bandaged forehead and stitched-up cuts above each eyebrow.

Uzbekistan are a side who have beaten the likes of China, Oman and Bolivia while drawing with Iran and Mexico in the past one year. They are currently at ninth spot among the Asian countries in the FIEFA rankings.

Uzbekistan dominated against Syria but failed to find the target from around a dozen shots. Syria also got enough shots and that will encourage the Indians to try and score.

Uzbek captain Jaloliddin Masharipov, who plies his trade in the Greek Super League, was Uzbekistan's most impressive player in the match against Syria and he could be the man to watch for the Indians.

Nishna cards bogey free 64 to rise to fourth

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A amateur Nishna Patel fired a stunning 6-under 64 to climb to tied fourth position in the second leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Wednesday.

Nishna, who had a disappointing first round of 77, is now 1-over as Hitaashee Bakshi (70) was in lead at 3-under 137 after 36 holes at the Bombay Presidency Golf Club.

Hitaashee, looking for her first win since 2022, shot even par 70 after a first round 67, to remain at 3-under 137. She birdied twice and had two bogeys.

Hitaashee led by two shots over Amandeep Drall (68-71), while Ridhima Dilawari (68-72) was third at even par 130.

The day belonged to Nishna, who after one birdie on the third hole in her first 10 holes, was on fire over the next eight. She birdied 11th and 12th, again had back-to-back gains on 15th and 16th and closed with yet another birdie on the 18th.

Nishna won the first leg in Pune last week and will have to battle it out with Hitaashee, Amandeep and Ridhima as she attempts back-to-back victories.

Tied at fourth alongside Nishna were 2023 Hero Order of Merit winner Sneha Singh (68-73) and Khushi Khanijau (71-70).

The experienced pair of Vani Kapoor (76-69) and Neha Tripathi (71-74) were tied for 10th.

India eye win against Germany to seal Paris Games ticket



PTI ■ RANCHI

Just one win away from securing a Paris Olympics berth, a resilient Indian women's hockey team will need to produce its 'A' game against higher-ranked Germany in the semifinals of the FIH Olympic Qualifiers here on Thursday.

The Indians bounced back from a 0-1 loss to USA in their tournament opener to outclass New Zealand and Italy to seal their semifinal spot as the second-placed team from Pool B.

It was a near-perfect performance in the last two matches with all departments clicking in unison and the Savita Punia-led side would look to contin-

ue the same way in the business end of the tournament.

The top three teams from here will qualify for this year's Olympics and a win on Thursday will guarantee India a ticket to Paris.

In case they fail to do so, the Indians will get another shot in the third-fourth place match against the other losing semi-finalists on Friday.

But the home side needs to approach the match against Germany with a positive mindset. The best aspect of India's performance in the last two matches was their backline. The Indian defenders dished out a superlative effort to keep their opponents at bay.

The defence led by skipper Savita and comprising Uditia, Monika and Nikki Pradhan didn't put a foot wrong in the last two matches, clearing any loose balls inside their circle at the first opportunity.

The midfield too has been resourceful. Salima Tete has been phenomenal with her quick running, along with Neha Goyal. The two combined well to create chances for the forwardline.

ROHIT TON, RINKU FIFTY POWER INDIA TO 212/4

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Skipper Rohit Sharma produced a marvellous, situation-defying hundred, his fifth in T20Is, as India recovered from a top-order meltdown to post a massive 212 for 4 against Afghanistan in the third and final T20I here on Wednesday. Rohit (121 not out, 69b, 11x4, 8x6) and his perfect sidekick Rinku Singh (69 n.o, 39b, 2x4, 6x6) shared 190 runs for a stellar, unbeaten fifth-wicket stand as India came back from a flaky 22 for four after opting to bat first.

The numbers might suggest a different story, but it was not one of Rohit's downright marauding knocks but he had to restrain himself for a good part of his stay because of the situation his team had dug itself in. Even Rinku displayed his destructive instincts judiciously and that gradually-building crescendo was the trademark of their alliance.

Rohit even had to bring out a rather rare shot from his arsenal, reverse sweep to unsettle Afghan spinners.

In fact, a reverse sweep off leg-spinner Qais Ahmad fetched him a T20 fifty for the first time since October 2022. Of course, there were those

inevitable and archetypal pulls too that make a Rohit innings such a compelling watch. The Mumbaikar's on-one-leg pull off pacer Mohammed Saleem that sailed into second tier was an astounding shot. Soon, the fifty blossomed into a hundred off 63 balls, Rohit's first in T20I since his 111 against the West Indies at Lucknow in 2018, which came through a sliced boundary behind point off pacer Omarzai.

This was also Rohit's highest score in T20Is, surpassing his 118 against Sri Lanka at Indore in 2017.

At the other end, Rinku had the simple job of keeping his end up and the left-hander did that job with maturity.

Rinku, though, vented his belligerence when the opportunity presented itself, such as a flicked six off Saleem over square leg and carried on to register his second T20I fifty as the Afghans wilted. However, the rest of the Indian top-order did not cover itself in glory as Rohit could not have anticipated such a breakdown from his frontline batters. Aggression has been the hallmark of India's new T20 template but the approach has its own pitfalls, as it unfolded tonight.

Yashasvi Jaiswal was the first to



depart as left-arm pacer Fareed Ahmad cramped him for room, and the opener's top-edged pull was snaffled by Mohammed Nabi in the deep.

Virat Kohli lasted just one ball. Entering the field to a rapturous welcome from a near-packed stadium, Kohli could not negate a climbing delivery from Ahmad, slicing the pull to Ibrahim Zadran just inside the circle.

Sanju Samson, who replaced wicketkeeper batter Jitesh Sharma in the eleven, too lasted just a ball, a mistimed pull off Azmatullah Omarzai ending in the hands of Nabi.

Amidst the pulling frenzy of his top-order colleagues, in-form Shivam Dube wanted to push one down to the vacant third man space, but all he could do was to nudge the ball to Rahmanullah Gurbaz behind the stumps.

Ahmad ended his first spell with impressive figures of 3-0-10-3 as India ended the power play at a vastly underwhelming 30 for four.

But Rohit, after two failures in the series, found his range at the precise time as India collected 182 runs in the remaining 14 overs and in that 93 came in the last five overs when India batters slipped into overdrive.



Axar, Yashaswi break into top 10 of ICC T20I rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Riding on two excellent outings against Afghanistan in the ongoing series, India left-arm spinner Axar Patel on Wednesday leaped to his career-best fifth place, while opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal rose to the sixth spot in the latest ICC men's T20I player rankings.

Patel's hauls of two for 23 and two for 16 in India's identical six-wicket wins over Afghanistan in the first two T20Is of their three-match series have also lifted him two places to 16th among all-rounders.

Jaiswal's 34-ball 68 in the first T20I in Indore lifted him seven places to a career-best sixth position, while other left-hander Shivam Dube's successive unbeaten knocks of 60 and 63 have helped him shoot up from 265th to 58th.

Batter Shubman Gill moved up seven places to 60th while left-handed batsman Tilak Verma gained three places to joint-61st

while left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh jumped four places to 21st spot.

Among the Afghans, Najibullah Zadran (up one place to 46th) and Mohammad Nabi (up two places to 54th) moved up in the batting rankings.

New Zealand's Finn Allen, whose two innings of 34 off 15 and 74 off 41 against Pakistan Wednesday helped him to reach 16th among batters. His teammate Tim Southee, who took six wickets in the first two matches, is up eight places to 18th in the bowlers' list.

Pakistan's star batter Babar Azam is up one place to fourth after notching two consecutive half-centuries against New Zealand.

The bowling rankings saw Sri Lanka spinners Wanindu Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana take joint-third position.

Pakistan fast bowler Haris Rauf's haul of five wickets in two matches against the Kiwis have lifted him two places to joint 14th.

We might open with two spinners: James Anderson ahead of India tour

PTI ■ ABU DHABI

Veteran English seamer James Anderson says his team might be compelled to open with two spinners in the upcoming five-Test series against India as it looks for ways to counter the traditionally spin-friendly conditions in the host country.

The Three Lions have moved in with four specialist spinners in their squad -- Jack Leach, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley and Shoaib Bashir. Leach is the only one to have experienced playing the longest format in India. The series begins January 25 in Hyderabad and the

English team is undergoing a training camp in Abu Dhabi.

The spin department will receive guidance from Anderson, Ollie Robinson and Mark Wood, who too have Test-playing experience in the country.

"There are only four seamers going, so we will not be expecting to bowl a huge amount of seam. It is just a slightly different role," he told 'The Daily Telegraph'.

"You might not bowl the overs you do in England, but they are still important. It probably puts more importance on spells you do bowl. These are the things we will pass on to the guys.



"Reverse swing will play a big part. There might be occasions where we don't open with a seamer. We might open with two spinners," said the 41-year-old. Anderson has a good record in India, having claimed 39 wickets. Although he did not have an impressive outing during the Ashes at home last year, he still feels he has something to contribute to the side.

"The training I have done this winter, I feel like age is just a number," he continued.

"...People will always look at my age when it comes up on the screen when I come on to bowl, but for me, it is irrelevant. It is how you feel as a cricketer, and I know I can still dive around in the field and put a shift in with the ball just like I have done for the last 20 years. I feel the last five-six years have been the best of my career. Although the Ashes did not go as well as I wanted it to, there have been many series when I have not bowled well throughout my career, and it is just a case of putting in the hard work to make sure it doesn't happen again," he concluded.

The English last won a Test series in India in 2012-13, while their previous tour in 2021 saw them lose the four-Test series 3-1, having won the opener in Chennai.

England hoping for Archer's availability for T20 World Cup

PTI ■ LONDON

England are hoping to have a fully-fit Jofra Archer available for the T20 World Cup later this year despite the ace fast bowler undergoing rehabilitation following the recurrence of his long-standing elbow injury.

Archer, who played a key role in England's World Cup win in 2019, has not played any professional cricket since May last year. He did train with the England white-ball team on their tour of the Caribbean in December.

"Our plan is the T20 World Cup, building him up slowly," England's director of cricket Rob Key was quoted as saying on the BBC's 'Tailenders Podcast'.

The ace right-arm pacer has



been plagued by injuries for the last three years. He made a comeback in white-ball cricket, playing three T20Is and four ODIs in the first quarter of 2023. But, he suffered the recurrence of his right-arm elbow injury during IPL last year, which ruled him out of action once again.

When England were playing

West Indies in Archer's native Barbados at the end of last year, he did play for his former school side without the knowledge of the England hierarchy.

"I saw him bowl in the Caribbean and it was like he'd never been away. I don't want to get back to this thing where he plays and then goes down again," said Key.

Archer was also ruled out of the IPL this season with his franchise Mumbai Indians subsequently releasing him. He was a part of the Mumbai Indians squad in the last IPL and played a few games, though he looked far from his best while managing the elbow injury.

During his IPL stint, Archer also made a quick trip to Belgium for a minor surgery.

Redfern to be first ICC-appointed female neutral umpire for bilateral series



PTI ■ DUBAI

England's Sue Redfern is set to become the first ICC-appointed female neutral umpire to stand in a bilateral series during the upcoming W T20I between Australia and South Africa.

Redfern's appointment follows the International Cricket Council (ICC) decision to appoint one neutral umpire for all ICC Women's Championship series as well as any T20I matches scheduled with them, ensuring some neutrality in running matches while also keeping in mind the long-term development of female umpires.

Seven female neutral umpires will officiate across ICC Women's Championship series with match-day pay on par with those on the ICC Elite Panel of Umpires. ICC's General Manager of Cricket Wasim Khan sees this as a huge development as more opportunities open for women umpires.

"This is a watershed moment for women's cricket as we look to both implement a female match officials' pathway programme and accelerate officiating opportunities for our very best performers. Neutral appointments will give female umpires more exposure to different conditions and will support the learning and development of local female umpires who officiate alongside them," he said in an ICC release.

"Last year we had the first all-female match officials' panel at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa and so it is important that we build on that momentum through a combination of development and high-quality opportunities."

Redfern said her appointment will help build momentum and boost the growth of female match officials.



Australia in control of 1st Test against West Indies

AP ■ ADELAIDE (AUSTRALIA)

Shamar Joseph took the prized wicket of Australia's Steven Smith with his first ball in Test cricket as a rare highlight in an otherwise tough opening day for an undermanned West Indies in the series-opening test on Wednesday.

Australia captain Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood took four wickets each as Australia restricted West Indies to 188 all out and made good use of the Adelaide Oval pitch after winning the toss and bowling first.

Kirk McKenzie, playing his second test, made his maiden half-century to top-score for the tourists before an entertaining 55-run partnership between Shamar Joseph and Kumar Roach for the 10th wicket lifted West Indies towards 200.

Smith's first innings as a Test opener - replacing the retired David Warner - yielded 12 runs before Shamar Joseph (2 for 18) made it a dream debut by having Australia's best batter caught at slip with his first ball and then taking Marnus Labuschagne late in the day.

Australia was 59 for two at stumps, trailing by 129 runs, with Usman Khawaja unbeaten on 30 and Cameron Green - making his first Test appearance for Australia since the Ashes series in England last June - on six not out.

Earlier, Cummins (4 for 41) continued his strong form this Australian summer by taking two wickets in the opening session before Hazlewood claimed his 250th test wicket to have

Australia on top after the first session.

After taking 19 wickets in the recent 3-0 series sweep over Pakistan, Cummins struck in his opening over Wednesday to dismiss opener Tagenarine Chanderpaul, before producing a superb delivery to bowl counterpart Kraigg Brathwaite.

Hazlewood (4 for 44) then claimed his milestone wicket by bowling Alick Athanaze shortly before lunch.

The pace bowler continued his relentless line and length after the interval to have Kavem Hodge (12) caught by Green before McKenzie was finally removed for a fine half-century off 94 balls, with seven boundaries. Justin Greaves (5) quickly followed to be Hazlewood's fourth victim before Cummins returned to add the wickets of Joshua da Silva and Alzarri Joseph as West Indies batting crumbled.

Nathan Lyon ended the late rally by Shamar Joseph and Kumar Roach, having the debutant trapped leg before wicket for 36 off 41 balls, with three boundaries and a six.

Smith, in his 106th test, then strode to the batting crease to open the batting for Australia for the first time. Joseph ensured that it wouldn't be a joyous memory for the veteran. As he teased the edge which was well caught by Greaves at slip.

The bowler sprinted almost to the boundary in celebration as he was chased and mobbed by his teammates in a fairytale introduction to Test cricket for the 24-year-old.

New Zealand beats Pakistan in 3rd T20 to win series

AP ■ DUNEDIN (NEW ZEALAND)

FINN ALLEN SLAMS RECORD-EQUALING 16 SIXES



record when he scored 162 from 62 balls against Ireland in 2019.

Two of Allen's sixes carried more than 100 meters, one passing over the crossbar and between the uprights of the rugby ground adjacent to the University Oval. Three were hit so far out of the ground that the ball could not be found and had to be replaced.

He took a particular toll on Haris Rauf, who conceded only two runs from his first over but 28 runs and 23 runs from his next two overs. Rauf and Allen are teammates at the San Francisco Unicorns in Major League Cricket.

"It was good. I just tried to have a solid foundation and play good cricket shots," Allen said. "What I've been working on is

trying to have a solid foundation, a solid base and trying to build from there and hit the ball where it's supposed to go.

"It's about picking my moments when it's time to go and picking bowlers. I think for me just playing the ball on its merits and were it's supposed to go is what I've been trying to do."

Allen's record total began when he hit consecutive sixes from the

second and third balls of the third over, bowled by Shaheen Shah Afridi. He hit 6, 4, 4, 6, 6, 1 off Rauf in the sixth over which also included a wide as New Zealand reached 67-1 at the end of the sixth-over power play.

Allen's 50 came from only 26 balls and included three fours and five sixes. His six off Nawaz was his longest, carrying 107 meters. After 10 overs, New Zealand was 103-1.

Allen's second T20 international century came from 48 balls and contained 11 sixes and he put on 125 with Tim Seifert (31) for the second wicket from 61 balls. Allen finally was out in the 18th over when New Zealand was 203-4.

Pakistan never really had the momentum to approach such a substantial total. It lost Saim Ayub early and Mohammad Rizwan after a 39-run partnership with Babar.

Babar tried to keep the run chase alive but he lacked support and none of his partnerships was in the range it needed to be to carry Pakistan to victory.

Pakistan has now won only one of its last eight T20 internationals as it heads towards this year's World Cup in the United States and Caribbean.