OPINION 6

WORLD 9

GAZA DEATH TOLL

SURPASSES 26,000

MONEY 10

GOVT HALVES BUDGET

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DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA Late City Vol.34 Issue 26 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

JADEJA, RAHUL FIFTIES TAKE

NEW DELHI, SATURDAY JANUARY 27, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

PAKISTAN FACES BITTER FALLOUT WITH TALIBAN

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WOMEN POWER, MILITARY MIGHT ON SHOWCASE

NEW DELHI

India celebrated its 75th Republic Day on Friday with a grand display of its women power, rich cultural heritage, and military might, which included missiles, warplanes, surveillance gadgets, and lethal weapon systems. French President Emmanuel Macron graced the occasion as the chief guest.

The Republic Day Parade at Kartavya Path in the heart of national commenced with President Droupadi Murmu taking the salute shortly after she and Macron, flanked by the Indian President's bodyguards arrived in a traditional buggy. Prime Minister Narendra Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several other Union ministers, the country's top military brass, foreign diplomats, and senior officials were among those who witnessed the impressive show. The event also featured a gravity-defying fly-past by helicopters and planes, with even dense fog failing to dampen the spirits of the

spectators."
The themes of the celebrations were "Viksit Bharat" and Loktantra Ki "Bharat Matruka" (India-Mother of Democracy). A 95-member marching contingent and a 30-member band contingent from France also participated in the parade.



Women personnel in a marching contingent of the Delhi Police during the 75th Republic Day parade, at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Friday

Two Rafale fighters and an flanked by a Phoenix multi-Airbus A330 multi-role tanker transport aircraft from the French air force were featured in the celebrations. The event concluded with a jaw-dropping fly-past by 46 aircraft of the Indian Air

role tanker transport aircraft from the French air force, roared across the skies of Delhi as India celebrated its 75th Republic Day at a grand parade on Friday, with French President Emmanuel Macron Force.
Two Rafale fighter jets, chief guest.

As around 95 French troops marched down Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital, whizzing warplanes pierced the morning sky, prompting thousands of spectators to crane their necks in wonder and amazement. A 30-member band contingent

attention at the grand parade. This marked the second time the French armed forces participated India's Republic Day celebrations. In 2016, French troops became the first foreign military contingent to take part in the country's biggest ceremonial



President Droupadi Murmu and French President Emmanuel Macron riding in a special presidential carriage arrive at the Kartavya Path for the 75th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi on Friday



Prime Minister Narendra Modi acknowledges the crowd as he leaves after the 75th Republic Day function, at the Kartayya Path in New Delhi on Friday

For the first time, an alltri-services contingent marched down Kartavya Path, reflecting the country's growing Shakti' (women power). In another first, the parade

was heralded by over 100 women artists playing Indian musical instruments such as sankh, naadswaram, and nagada instead of traditional military bands, kickstarting the celebrations. The first Army contingent leading the mechanised column was the 61 Cavalry, established in 1953. It was followed by 11 mechanised columns, 12 marching contingents, and a fly-past featuring advanced light helicopters of the Army

Aviation Corps. Continued on Page 2

After Ayodhya, Time for Kashi

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA

With the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Gyanvapi Mosque in the Kashi Vishwanath premises was built after demolishing a Hindu Temple, the roads are seemingly being cleared to reinstall a similar temple. This move may evoke Ayodhyatype enthusiasm within the Hindu community, which has been fighting the case for decades, similar to the Ram

Janambhoomi case. In a significant development that occurred a couple of days after the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the ASI report, released to both Hindu and Muslim parties on Thursday evening, confirmed the existence of a large Hindu Temple before construction of the existing structure.

"Indeed, this is a joyous moment for all of us and for

those showing their allegiance Dharma. Sanatan Personally, I am very happy, as since my childhood, I used to visit almost every day to pay Parvati, but I could not worship the place where it is believed that Parvati Mata used to worship with holy Ganga water. The area remains under grills as the mosque is there, and now, tides are changing, and the pious place shall be restored to us," said Sita Devi, one of the petitioners in the Gyanvapi case, a resident of Varanasi near the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. Sita was contacted over the phone by The Pioneer from Delhi.

On Wednesday, a Varanasi district court had directed that the scientific survey report prepared by the ASI on the Gyanvapi mosque in July 2023 be supplied to all parties

to the dispute.
Judge AK Vishvesha ordered that all parties to the case



Muslims come out of Gyanvapi mosque after offering 'namaz' amid a tight security arrangements in Varanasi on Friday

should have access to the report about the mosque. After the distribution of the ASI report, all parties will have the right to comment on

Advocate for the Hindu side Vishnu Shakar Jain told the media and shared a few details of the ASI report supplied to both Hindu and Muslim parties. He mentioned that the findings clearly indicate that the mosque was built over

an old temple.

The ASI report, which included a Ground
Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey, raises questions about the historical layers on the site. According to Jain, the current structure seems to have been built upon a pre-existing structure. "These are, in fact, inscriptions on the stone of a pre-existing Hindu temple that have been reused during the construction and repair of the existing structure," he added.

Continued on Page 2

SBI removes Religare from fraud list

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

State Bank of India (SBI), a key lender to Religare Finvest Limited (RFL), has expunged RFL's record, previously marked as a fraud, from the Central Fraud Registry database. This action a court order December 18, 2023, issued by the Delhi High Court instructing SBI to revoke the

fraud designation. SBI officially conveyed this decision to RFL on Friday. In March 2023, RFL, a whollyowned subsidiary of Religare Enterprises Limited, successfully concluded a onetime settlement with 16 lenders through organic collections. The company made payments exceeding Rs 9,000 crore to the country's

banking system.

Presently, RFL is awaiting the removal of the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (ŔBI) in January 2018. Dr Rashmi Saluja, Executive

Chairperson of REL and CMD of RFL, said, "We are pleased to witness the positive



outcome of our efforts. The removal of the 'fraud' tag stands as a testament to the commitment and dedication of the Company's Board, management, and employees in resurrecting RFL and the Group from the brink in the aftermath of fraud perpetrated by the erstwhile promoters and their affiliates, and putting it on the path of growth and development. This is a pivotal step in the revival of RFL." Pankaj Sharma, Chief Executive Officer of RFL, said

that these would open doors for a strategic path towards achieving growth. He said, "The announcement holds great significance for the company, as it will open doors

for our strategic path towards achieving growth. RFL eagerly awaits the much anticipated removal of the RBI Corrective Action Plan (CAP) that was put into effect in January 2018."

The Central Fraud Registry, established under the Reserve Bank of India (Frauds Classification and Reporting by Commercial Banks and Select FIs) Directions, 2016, serves as a web-based and searchable documenting frauds reported by commercial banks and select financial institutions, in accordance with the Master Directions classification and reporting of

Nitish churns the political pot in Bihar MDIA cookie crumbles

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA NEW DELHI

A mid political uncertainty in Bihar, where Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is, in all likelihood, prepared to break ranks with his alliance partners RJD, Congress, and others, and realign with his "natural" ally BJP, former Deputy Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi indicated that doors are never permanently closed to anyone in pol-

Ever since Nitish separated for the third time from the BJP in Bihar, Sushil Modi has, on numerous occasions, said that Nitish will not be welcomed back into the BJP fold. However, sources in both the BJP and the JD(U) indicated that a "dignified" realignment is being worked out against the backdrop of BJP leadership repeatedly tagging Nitish as a 'Paltu Ram'.

BJP sources have asserted that the JD(U) joining their alliance will ensure a sweeping victory



residence in Patna for the NDA in the Lok Sabha polls. In the 2019 elections, the

NDA secured 39 out of Bihar's the BJP in 2022, the party initially declared that its doors 40 seats. However, a faction of BJP leaders from Bihar is reluctant to align with the JD(U), were permanently closed to crises.

citing a perceived decline in Nitish's popularity.

After Nitish severed ties with

Bihar's longest-serving chief minister. However, lately, party leaders have adopted a more conciliatory tone, especially as the INDIA bloc faces internal

Amid this rapidly changing scenario, some political insiders from stakeholder parties suggest the possibility of the existing JD(U) breaking apart. One faction may align with the RJD, while another might join the BJP. Regardless, there seems to be no likelihood of the Assembly being dissolved, as the Bihar Assembly Speaker belongs to the ruling RJD, the largest party in Bihar with 75 MLAs. The BJP follows with 74, while Nitish Kumar's faction leads the State with a modest 43 legislators in the Assembly.

On their part, JD(U)'s political adviser and spokesperson KC Tyagi has asserted that the JD(U) is the "architect of INDIA" and wishes to remain a part of the coalition, although developments in West Bengal and Punjab are causing con-

State BJP president Samrat Choudhary, who met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the party's principal strategist,

in Delhi on Thursday night, asserted that the talks focused on the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. "Our top leaders, like Amit Shah and national president JP Nadda, have publicly stated that the doors of the BJP are closed. As a party worker, I adhere to that stance. Nitish Kumar, to us, is a politician who changes his allies like clothes," said Choudhary.

On Republic Day, Nitish attended the high tea ceremony at the Raj Bhavan in Patna, where his deputy Tejashwi Yadav was absent.

The JD(U) asserted on Friday that the party is "firmly with the INDIA coalition" but emphasised the need for the Congress to engage in "introspection" regarding alliance partners and seat-sharing. Bihar State JD(U) president Umesh Singh Kushwaha made this statement, refuting rumours that his party, led by the chief minister, was contemplating a return to the BJP-led NDA.

TMC locks horns with Congress in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA The Bengal Congress criticise Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for behaving like a BJP leader, even as he complained about the Bengal Government's "non-cooperative" attitude towards Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. "I don't know what their attitude is towards the Yatra as part of the INDIA alliance. I am eager to understand more about the reasons behind their non-cooperative approach," said Chowdhury, Pradesh Congress president. The Trinamool Congress administration, let alone participating in it, has denied permission for the Congress led NDA. Yatra in Siliguri, as informed Continued on Page 2 by the PCC leadership to The

Pioneer. The Congress had planned to organise a rally on January 28 as part of its Yatra in Darjeeling. However, the district administration has denied permission, citing a competitive examination scheduled for the same date.

"There will be a competitive exam for recruitment in the State police on the given date, and the rally will disrupt the exams. Therefore, permission has been withdrawn," said a PCC member, quoting the State administration.
As if the "imprudence" in

Siliguri was not enough, the administration has also withdrawn the permission for the Behrampore Stadium on January 31. Rahul, who is to hold a rally at Murshidabad on February 1, was to spend the previous night there.

Continued on Page 2

Republic Day celebrated with fervour across J&K

 $T^{\text{he 75th Republic Day celebrations passed off peacefully across the Union Territory}$ of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday amid tight security arrangements.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha unfurled the National Flag at the UT level function here at MA Stadium while a series of functions were today held across the Kashmir division with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervor to mark the

Advisor to Lieutenant Governor, Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, unfurled the National Flag at Bakshi Stadium in Srinagar. A large number of civilians participated in the Republic day functions despite intense cold wave

In his Republic Day address, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha highlighted the government's commitment to stamping out terrorism and its



ecosystem and said efforts are underway for a final assault to eradicate the unholy proxy war sponsored by a neighboring country in the Union Territory. Sinha underlined the significance of the successful G20 conclave and said it has given a befitting reply to the enemies of humanity and sponsors of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir by showcasing to the world the region's economic strength, business potential, cultural richness and tourism

opportunities.
"The efforts are going on for

the final assault on terrorism, its ecosystem and unholy proxy war being sponsored by a neighboring country. We have tried to create a new Jammu and Kashmir which has the power, strength of spirituality, modern and scientific facilities and response," the LG said

Day function here. Sinha paid homage to police, army and paramilitary personnel who laid down their lives for the security of the

while addressing the Republic

"While remembering their

Need to keep institutions free from outside interference: Arif

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

day after he delivered a A "knockout punch" on the CPI(M) Government by refusing to read out the policy statement in the opening day of the 2024 session of the Legislative Assembly, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan struck yet another blow on the Marxists for their attempts to pollute and destroy the sanctity of higher education.

Addressing the Republic Day meeting after unfurling the national tricolour at Central Stadium

Thiruvananthapuram, where the chief minister and the State's top bureaucrats were in attendance the Governor stressed the need to keep institutions of higher learning free of outside interference. This is seen as a direct message to the Marxists who exert all kinds of pressures on the Governor to clear the appointment of party cadres as vice-chancellors and faculty members in the

"Outside interference in the



affairs of institutions of higher learning is leading to the undermining of their autonomy and leading the youth to take part in activities that pollute the academic environment. The future depends on what we are in our thoughts and actions. For this, we need institutions of higher education which are truly autonomous and free from any outside interference that leads the youth to engage in activities which pollute the academic environment," said the Governor.

The last few weeks saw the student wing of the CPI(M) staging road siege and black flag demonstrations throughout the State to protest against

Governor Arif Mohammed Khan in his open dissidence to sign on orders appointing the dear and near ones of the party leadership in important positions in universities across the State.

The Government of Kerala

has filed a suit in the Supreme Court challenging the refusal and delay by the Governor in kowtowing the diktats of the chief minister. But his Republic Day message was an equal measure of compliments and criticism of the track record of the Pinarayi Vijayan Government. The Governor appreciated the government for its commendable performance in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and in increasing the number of Primary Health Centers.

He pointed out that the State has become one of the best performers in the Start-up Ranking among the states, stood first in the National Food Safety Index and performed well in eradicating extreme poverty, winning the National Healthcare and Arogya Manthan awards and

coming second in the Performance Grading Index (PGI) report for school education.

Chief Minister Vijayan had fielded two powerful CPI(M) leaders to take on the Governor for skipping the entire speech barring the last paragraph on the opening dau of the budget session. Education Minister V Sivankutty went overboard on Friday by declaring that the post of Governor was totally unnecessary and irrelevant. "The Governor spends 70 per cent of the time travelling across the country. Why should the State pay for his expenses? His speech at the Republic Day function was undemocratic and he spent most of the time to praise the Centre. He did not have anything good to say about Kerala,: said Sivankutty, sonin-law of Marxist ideologist late P Govinda Pillai.

secretary said on Friday that the Governor's behavior does not augur well for the position he holds and was against all democratic norms.

M V Govindan, party's Kerala

Mamata relying on Nari Shakti to win polls

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

Having suffered biggest ever alienation ever since it came to power in 2011 after a number of scams exploded in Congress is heavily banking on the women voters in the coming general elections, inside

The party is heavily relying on the success of the women-centric schemes of which there have been plenty in Bengal even winning it some international accolades in the past several years.

Sources have said that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has directed the district administrations and the party men to carry the women-centric schemes to the maximum number of households.

'We have a number of schemes like --- Rupashree (to assist poor women in marriage), Kanyashree (for education of the girl children), Laxmir Bhandar (Rs 500 per month scheme for the women), Sabuj students a large number of who are women) are to name a few ... the Chief Minister wants us to take to every household ensuring that not a single family is left out," a TMC leader

Incidentally the TMC got a large number of women voters schemes then we are sailing



too helping Banerjee roar back to power for the third consec-

While targeting the women votes the party is also elated about a recent report suggesting an appreciation in the male-female voters' gender ratio in favour of the women. According to 2024's final electoral roll released by the Election Commission, out of every 1000 male voters there 2019 there were 949 female vot-said. ers compared to 1000 men. It On some stray survey reports before the 2021 Assembly polls. The final EC voter data says that there are 3.8 crore males and 3.7 crore out of total 7.5

"Even if we get the votes of half of the women who are benefited from the women-centric

in 2021 Assembly elections through smoothly," said a senior TMC leader looking after the party organization. 'Didi has always been of the opinion that the women should be given preference and being someone who has risen from grassroots she knows the requirements of the women and has devised her schemes accordingly ... these schemes have not only been copied by the central government and other States but also won accoare now 968 female voters. In lades from abroad," the leader

> seats the TMC may not get more than 10-11 with the BJP taking maximum of them, the leader said, "it could well have been so due to some dishonest leaders and vindictive approach of the ED and CBI but for the women voters who are going to vote for us in large numbers."

Murmu revives 250 years old tradition, arrives in buggy

STAFF REPORTER ■ **NEW DELHI**

commitment to stamp out

terrorism and its ecosystem

from the soil of Jammu and Kashmir. I congratulate the

police forces who have bagged

police forces who have bagged 113 gallantry medals – highest among other forces. The police's fight against terrorism is exemplary," he said. "The major resolution of 2024 is to

create a new social setup for

the younger generation. The

new society will give impetus

to India in knowledge, skill

and infrastructure to secure its

place among the developed

He further said during the last

four years, there has been a sea

change in all aspects, particu-

larly in social setup and eco-

nomic empowerment. "It has

proved that impossible is pos-

Jammu and Kashmir, the LG

said, has become one of the

fastest-growing regions in the

country, registering a remark-

able 35 percent increase in the

current year and surpassing the national average.

nations," he added.

sible here", he said.

The newly redeveloped and renamed Kartavya Path (formerly, Rajpath) witnessed the return of an old tradition, which had been abandoned for almost four decades, at the 75th Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. Reviving a 250-year-old tradition on the 75th Řepublic Day, President Droupadi Murmu and her French counterpart Emanuel Macron arrived on the Kartavya Path in a traditional buggy, which made a come-back after 40 years. The presidential buggy was in use for Republic Day functions till 1984, but was discontinued after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi due to security reasons and presidents began using limousines for travel.
During the British era, the buggy belonged to the Viceroy of India. After the partition, both India and Pakistan wanted the fancy buggy, and there to sort this quarrel. Lt Col Thakur Govind Singh from India and Pakistan Army's Sahabzada Yaqub Khan let the responsibility of the buggy ownership rest on a coin. India won the toss and since then the buggy has been with India and the same has been



used by several presidents on various occasions.

Before Murmu, it was India's former President Pranab Mukherjee who rode the horse-drawn buggy in 2014 while attending the Beating Retreat ceremony. Former President Kovind, who succeeded Pranab Mukherjee, continued the tradition of riding the buggy. He inspected the Guard of Honour in the presidential buggy after he took oath in 2017.

buggy is a black carriage that has the Ashoka Chakra, embossed in gold. It has gold plated rims and is drawn by a mixed breed of Indian and Austrian horses. The presidents were escorted by the President's Bodyguard -"Rashtrapati Ke Angrakshak".

The President's Bodyguard is the senior most regiment of the Indian Army. This Republic Day is special for this elite Regiment as the "Angrakshak' have completed 250 years of service since its raising in 1773.

The President's Bodyguard is the oldest cavalry unit. Fifty five horses participate in the parade contingent, with six horses drawing the presidential buggy.

The mix of Indian and mum height of 150cm and weigh around 500kg. Their colours range from bay, dark to grey. The horses' uniform comprises white head collar, bridle bit, white badgor, leather breastplate, steel and leather reins and lance

Absconding accused in Divya murder case held

Ateam of Gurugram Police On Friday arrested an absconding accused Ravi Banga -- in connection with the murder of Divya Pahuja, a former Gurugram-based model and girlfriend of slain gangster Sandeep Gadoli, from Jaipur, an official said.

Banga was absconded since January 2. The Gurugram police had announced Rs 50,000 on his arrest. Divya Pahuja, 27, was allegedly shot dead on January 2 by Abhijeet Singh, the owner of Hotel City Point, where she was staying. According to the police, Divya and Abhijeet were in a relationship and the latter killed the woman in a fit of rage after she refused to delete some of his objectionable photos from her mobile phone.

Balraj and Ravi -- Abhijeet's friends, had dumped Divya's lifeless body in Bhakra Canal in from a canal in Tohana in Haryana's Fatehabad district on January 13.

During the investigation, the police found that Balraj Gill, a resident of Sector-5, Panchkula, and Ravi Banga, a resident of Gurudwara Road Model Town, Hisar, were involved in the

'The accused has been taken on

three days police remand for further questioning," Varun Dahiya, ACP (crime) said. In connection with Divya's murder, the police have so far arrested seven persons including the prime accused, Abhijeet Singh, his aides Om Prakash, Hemraj, Balraj Gill, Parvesh,

Megha. The woman had helped Abhijeet in hiding documents and personal belongings of Divya. Om Prakash and Hemraj had helped Abhijeet to drag Divya's body into the boot of a BMW car.

Ravi Banga and a woman,

Parvesh had supplied the 'murder weapon' to Abhijeet. Divya came in contact with Abhijeet through a jailed gangster, Binder Gujjar.

Binder Gujjar is said to be the prime conspirator in the alleged "fake encounter" of gangster Sandeep Gadoli, along with the Gurugram Police,

Divya was the prime accused in the case. Later, she was arrested in connection with the gangster's murder, and she spent seven years in jail. She was granted bail last year in June by the Bombay High

INDIA cookie...

"They are not allowing us to use the nearby ground either. While the district administration had initially granted us permission, as we had provided them with the plans well in advance, the collectorate is now informing us that they cannot provide the ground for Rahul Gandhi's stay because the CM has an administrative meeting on that day. Is this how an INDIA ally conducts itself?" a PCC leader said.

Chowdhury, who had refrained from commenting in public against the TMC in the past few days, particularly after Banerjee announced her Ekla Chalo (solo campaign) policy in Bengal and accused the Congress of neglecting her, finally spoke up on Friday, faulting the State Government for its antagonistic attitude.

"In Manipur and Assam, the BJP Governments were hostile towards us, impeding every step of Rahul Gandhi ji's Yatra. But in Bengal too, things have been no different. Right from the day we entered this State, we have been facing a hostile atmosphere. I am eager to understand why, despite being a constituent of the Indian National Developmental Alliance, they are being so noncooperative with us.

They withdrew permission for a rally in Siliguri, which was a pre-declared programme, and now they are doing the same in Murshidabad," a visibly

irate Chowdhury said. Another senior PCC leader, Soumya Aich Roy, also accused the Chief Minister of working to disturb the Congress and help the BJP. "Mamata Banerjee cannot stand by the INDIA even if she wants to because she has to save her family from the ED. You know why. She will have to take orders from them and destabilise the Congress here," he said.

However, TMC MP Shantanu Sen, refuting the Congress' accusations, said, "Adhir Chowdhury is responsible for the INDIA alliance falling apart in West Bengal. Secondly, all Opposition parties conduct programmes in the State, and nobody faces any problems. The administration must have taken the decision as there are board examinations in schools."

Political analyst BN Chakrabarty doubted, "There is definitely something brewing up between the TMC and BJP in Bengal. Such a concept may not be completely outlandish in the context of the present and recent developments in Bihar and Maharashtra.'

displays in the columns mechanised included T-90 Bhishma tanks, NAG missile systems, infantry combat vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, the weapon locating radar system Swathi, drone jammer systems, and medium-range surface-toair missiles. The all-women tri-service contingent, led by Captain Sandhya of the Army Military Police, accompanied by three supernumerary officers, Captain Sharanya Rao, Sub Lieutenant Anshu Yadav, and Flight Lieutenant Shrishti Rao, received

tremendous applause. Another all-women Armed Forces Medical Services contingent, headed by Major Srishti Khullar, with Captain Amba Samant of the Army Dental Corps, Surgeon Lieutenant Kanchana of the Indian Navy, and Flight Lieutenant Dhivya Priya of the Indian Air Force, also down marched

The Army's marching contingents included the Madras Regiment, the Grenadiers, the Rajputana Rifles, the Sikh Regiment, and the Kumaon Regiment. Indian Navv's contingent comprised 144 men and women Agniveers, led by Lt Prajwal M as the contingent commander, and

Mudita Goyal, Sharvani Supreiya, and Lt Devika H as platoon

commanders. This was followed by a naval tableau, depicting the themes "Nari Shakti" and 'Sea Power Across the Through Oceans Indigenisation. On display were Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QRSAM), Astra, combat aircraft Tejas, Uttam active electronically scanned array radar (AESAR), advanced electronic warfare systems, and Shakti Cyber Security systems.

The IAF fleet comprised 29 fighter jets, seven transport aircraft, nine helicopters, and a heritage plane. All these aircraft operated from six different bases. Fifteen women pilots, including six from the fighter streams, operated the IAF platforms

during the fly-past. indigenously-built Tejas aircraft flew in a formation of four aircraft. Although there was a previous occasion with one Tejas jet being part of the Republic Day parade, this marked the first time the aircraft flew in

a formation. The ceremony began with the Prime Minister's visit to the National War Memorial, where he led the nation in paying solemn tributes to the fallen heroes by laying a

Minutes later, wreath. President Murmu and her French counterpart Macron arrived in the traditional buggy'.

The national flag was then unfurled, accompanied by the national anthem, and a 21-gun salute using the indigenous 105-mm Indian Field Guns.

Following this, four Mi-17 IV helicopters from the 105 Helicopter Unit showered flower petals on the audience at Kartavya Path. Subsequently, Aavaahan, a band performance by over 100 women artists playing various types of percussion instruments, took place.

The parade commenced with Murmu taking the salute, commanded by Lieutenant General Bhavnish Kumar, the General Commanding, Delhi Area. A total of 16 tableaux from states and Union territories, along with nine from central ministries and departments,

rolled down Kartavya Path

during the parade. The states and Union territories represented in the parade included Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Pradesh, Ladakh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh,

and Telangana.

After Ayodhya, Time for... challenging the survey and

'The reuse of earlier inscriptions in the structure suggests that the earlier structures were destroyed, and their parts were reused in the construction and repair of the existing structure. Three names of deities such as Janardana, Rudra, and Umeshwara are found in these inscriptions," the senior advocate added.

"The ASI has stated that during the survey, a number of inscriptions were noticed on the existing and preexisting structure. A total of 34 inscriptions

were recorded during the present survey, and 32 stamped pages were taken," Jain said while reading out

"The ASI findings suggest

with minor alterations. architectural said, citing the ASI report. Jain claimed that the report Telugu, Devanagari, Kannada, and other scripts. The last page of the ASI report, a copy of which is also with The Pioneer, states: "The structure

destroyed in the 17th

Century, during the reign of

made to the mosque, scientific studies, surveys reusing pillars and plaster carried out, and the study of remains, Some pillars from the exposing the features and Hindu temple were slightly artifacts, inscriptions, art, modified for use in the new and sculptures, it can be structure, and attempts were made to remove the carvings on the pillars," Jain construction of the existed a structure. In July of last year, the court

also revealed inscriptions had ordered the Director of belonging to the ancient the ASI to conduct a Hindu temple, written in scientific survey of the Gyanvapi mosque premises, excluding the area previously sealed by the Supreme Court (wuzukhana or an ablution pond). The ASI carried out the

appears to have been survey. In August of last year, the Supreme Court rejected the Aurangzeb, and part of it plea by the Muslim party

stated that the High Court order for the survey does not warrant interference by the apex court at this stage, as such a survey was conducted even in the Avodhya case. The Muslim parties had

also filed an application under Order VII Rule 11 of the CPC challenging the maintainability of the suit on grounds that the Places of Worship Act of 1991, introduced at the height of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, seeks to protect the status of all religious structures as they stood on August 15, 1947. Both the district court and

the High Court had rejected

the same and held the suit

to be maintainable.

on Saturday afternoon. cation with its Bihar allies, including Chirag Paswan and

former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, regarding the developments in the state. However, they have not received a clear indication about the possibility of JD(U) returning to their fold. Former Lok Janshakti Party president Chirag Paswan revealed that he was "in constant touch with the top BJP leadership" but considered the question of whether Nitish Kumar would be acceptable as a new NDA

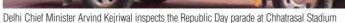
Nitish

From Page 1 Meanwhile, the Congress, which

is a part of the present coalition government in Bihar, has called for a meeting of its legislators led by Congress CLP leader Dr. Shakeel Ahmed Khan in Purnia The BJP has been in communi-

ceremonial boulevard. partner as "hypothetical.'







Ranian Dimri I Pioneer A mesmerising performance



Ranian Dimri I Pioneer



Ranjan Dimri I Pioneer Schoolchildren perform during the Republic Day parade at Chhatrasal Stadium



54 aircraft give grand salute in Republic Day flypast

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The sky above Kartavya Path **I** became a zone of fervent activity when 54 aircraft, including three from the French Air and Space Force, gave a fly past in a grand salute, during the 75th Republic Day ceremony that took place here on Friday.

Captivating the spectators, the contingent flew past with a booming sound and went on to perform several midair acrobatics.

The pilots began with the 'Prachand' formation comprising one LCH in lead with two Apache Helicopters and Two ALH Mk-IV in echelon flying in five aircraft 'Arrow Formation.'

It was followed by the 'Tangail' formation comprising one Dakota in lead with two Dornier aircrafts in echelon fly-

The 'Arjan' formation comprised one C-295 aircraft in lead with two C-130J aircrafts in echelon flying in 'Vic' formation. The 'Netra' formation comprised one AEW&C aircraft and two X Su-30 aircraft in echelon flying in 'Vic' for-

The 'Varuna' formation com-



X Su-30 aircrafts in echelon flying in 'vic' formation. A C-17 aircraft with two Su-30 ac in echelon (streaming fuel) flying past in 'Vic' formation displayed the 'Bheem' formation. The performance was followed by four X Tejas aircrafts flying past in 'Diamond' formation. of six Jaguar aircrafts flying past over the water channel north of Kartvya Path in 'Arrow-head' formation.

The 'Vajraang' formation consisted of six Rafale aircrafts flying in 'Marut' formation.

The last leg of the fly past exhilarated viewers as three Su-30 Mk-I aircrafts in 'Trishul' for-

prised one p-8i aircraft and two mation flew at 900 kmph over water channel north of Kartavya Path along with the IAF Marching Contingent. Approaching the dais, the formation pulled up outwards for Trishul manoeuvre. Next was, one Rafale aircraft flying at 900 kmph behind Trishul formation over the north water chanaircraft pulled up for Vertical Charlie and carried out multi-

> Earlier, the band and marching contingent of France was accompanied overhead by two Rafale fighter jets and one Airbus A330 Multi Role Transport Tanker (MRTT) flying in triangle formation.

In a first, Delhi Police all women contingent takes part in parade

The Delhi Police's all-1 women contingent marched down the Kartavya Path on Republic Day for the first time in its history on Friday.

The contingent was led by Deputy Additional Commissioner of Police Shweta K Sugathan.

The Delhi Police contingent comprised one female gazetted officer, three women sub-inspectors, 44 women head-constables, and 100 women constables, all draped in red 'safa'.

gent of the Delhi Police celebrated after their maiden Republic Day parade, by dancing to the drumbeats and distributing sweets on Friday over their historic achievement.

A video of the members of contingent in their uniforms, waiving their arms and danc-



ing cheerfully to the tune led the contingent in the played by their band, went parade, said. viral on social media.

marching contingents in 2 too, when a woman officer led the male soldiers for the first

"It was a goosebumps moment for all of us. As our contingent reached the Red Fort, we were welcomed by our senior officials with great zeal," Shweta Sugathan, 2018 batch IPS officer who

The audience at Kartavya Sugathan had led the male Path loudly cheered after all Delhi Police marched on the 75th Republic Day for the first time in its history.

History was made today when the first all women contingent and the band of Delhi Police marched on Kartavya Path this Republic Day, said Delhi Police spokesperson Suman Nalwa.

Women, girls among first timers witness Nari Shakti at Republic Day parade STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI in Jaipur on Thursday.

large number of first-Atimers, including girls and young women, attended the 75th Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path here on Friday with 'Nari Shakti' being an overarching theme for the celebrations this year. From Delhi to Rajasthan, they came with friends or family members to witness the landmark occa-

Ranubha Kunwar, 28, a native of Alwar district, attended the parade wearing a traditional Rajasthani attire. "This is the first time I have attended a Delhi, and it was a wonderful experience. The display of 'Nari Shakti' was special for us women," she said

Kunwar said the Republic Day, besides being the 75th one, was also special for her as its chief guest French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were

Bharati Gurjar, a state civil services aspirant from Rajasthan, said she had arrived in Delhi three days ago, just to attend the parade here.

"I have come along with my younger sister, we both attended for the first time. Everything about the parade was amazing, the synchronisation in the marching contingents, the colourful tableaux and vibrant cultural performances. You can't say which aspect one liked the most as everything was great," she said

Her sister, Sunidhi Gurjar, a first-year student of Miranda also ecstatic about attending the ceremonial event for the first time. "India is our 'matrubhumi', motherland, and one feels a wave of patriotism here. India successfully hosted the G20 last year, we achieved the Chandrayaan feat and now with 2047 vision, we are going strong," Sunidhi said.

Delhi Assembly Budget Session | CAQM delays likely to begin from February 15

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Legislative Assembly budget session is likely to start from February 15 and continue till February 20. The Delhi budget this year will be the Aam Aadmi Party's last before the Delhi Assembly polls, which are due in February 2025, and the first for the incumbent finance minister Atishi. This time, the Delhi government is presenting the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 in February instead of March. In the forthcoming budget, the Kejriwal government is set to address several significant issues, placing particular emphasis on education, health, electricity, water, roads, and infrastructure.

According to officials, Delhi Finance Minister Atishi will table the 2024-25 budget of the city government on February 16. A file of the budget session has been sent to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for his approval, the officer added. In a press statement, the Delhi government saidduring the preparation of the budget, the government has sought suggestions from all stakeholders in Delhi, and good recommendations from them have been included in the bud-

get. "The Delhi Government will also present the 'Outcome Budget' for the financial year



achievements and progress made in the previous fiscal year. Delhi is the only state in the entire country where the Kejriwal government presents the Outcome Budget every year. Through the Outcome Budget, complete transparency is provided to the people of Delhi regarding the public expenditure of the previous budget. In a way, the Outcome Budget serves as a report card of the performance of various departments based on the allocated funds in the previous fiscal year," it said.

"Expect allocation of funds, to initiate entrepreneurship programs in colleges similar to schools Demonstrating a clear commitment, the government has highlighted education and health as key priorities for the upcoming financial year, emphasizing their importance for all residents of Delhi, regardless of their socio-eco-

"Additionally, the budget allocates special attention to crucial areas such as water, roads, urban development, and various developmental projects. These aspects have been identified as top priorities for the forthcoming fiscal year, reflecting the government's proactive approach towards addressing the diverse needs of the city and its residents. There is also an expectation of substantial allocation of funds for various developmental projects within Delhi,"it said.

The Delhi government has been preparing the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 for the past 20 days. On January 6, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal chaired the first high-level meeting regarding the budget. During the meeting, the CM held detailed discussions with all ministers on the upcoming budget's priorities.

implementation of stricter curbs

The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas on Friday decided to delay implementation of stricter measures to curb pollution in Delhi-NCR despite the 24hour average AQI in Delhi breaching the 400-mark for the second time in three days. Meanwhile, Cold conditions and thick fog continued in Delhi on Friday during the celebrations of 75th Republic Day as the minimum temperature in the city settled at 4.7 degrees Celsius, officials said on Friday. The maximum temperature was recorded at 20.4 degree Celsius, a notch below the normal. Ridge saw the maximum temperature at 21.9 degree Celsius. The night and morning witnessed as cold day conditions on Friday. People got some respite in the day time due to sun light. Delhi's 24-hour average Air

Quality Index (AQI) stood at 409 at 4 pm, a level requiring authorities to invoke stricter curbs under Stage III of the Centre's Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to control air pollution.



GRAP convened an emergency meeting and took stock of the air quality situation, projected AQI and meteorological forecasts, a statement

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), a dip in temperature and foggy weather allowed accumulation of pollutants in Delhi on Friday. Forecasts by the IMD and the IITM suggest an improvement in Delhi's air quality from Friday itself. It is expected to be in the 'very poor' category in the coming days, the statement said.

Therefore, the committee decided to monitor the situation before considering invocation of stringent actions under Stage III of GRAP," it The CAQM sub-committee

Sustained efforts being made to develop Delhi into global city: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, in his Republic Day speech, on Friday said the central and the local governments are making sustained efforts to develop Delhi into a global and inclusive city. Saxena highlighted various achievements of Delhi, including in the fields of public transport, health, power sector and ration supply, in his speech.

In the last few years, Delhi has made significant progress in the power sector, he said. "The demand for

power is being met without any load shedding." The LG also lauded various agencies including Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Public Works Department (PWD), New D e l h i

Municipal Council (NDMC), Municipal Corporation of Delĥi (MCD), Delhi Police among others, workers and employees and Delhi-NCR for readying Delhi to successfully host the G-20

Summit. The government is committed to giving top priority to health services and making them available to the people, Saxena said. "Delhi has modernised its public transport system. I am proud to inform you that by 2025, 85 per cent of the public transport buses will be electric in Delhi. That is a big achievement on the global level," he said.

The Centre has extended special financial assistance under the FAME (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles) scheme, he said. Efforts are being made for all the sections of society aiming for inclusive development and 72 lakh beneficiaries have received subsidised foodgrains from fair-price shops, the LG

"The number of 'One Nation, One Ration Card' beneficiaries is the highest (in the country), he said. The government is also committed to tackling air and water pollution and conservation of the Yamuna river, Saxena said.



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Property Identification Code (UPIC) latest by 31" January 2024 and pay your outstanding dues to avoid legal action including prosecution and impriso RWA & GHS must register on www.mcdonline.nic.in to avail 10% developmental incentive and additional 5% waste disposal incentive under "Sahbhagita" scheme.

ASSESSMENT & COLLECTION DEPARTMENT

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Bypass project all set to decongest Ayodhya

After Maharishi Valmiki International airport and redevelopment of Ayodhya Dham Junction Railway Station, it is now upcoming 67.57-Km Ayodhya bypass green project project that is all set to boost the economy and at the same time decongest the Ayodhya city in Uttar Pradesh, which has now attined the status of the one of the most popular tourism and economic hubs in the country after the opening of Ram Mandir on January 22.

The Commerce and Industry Ministry on Friday said that the bypass green project in Uttar Pradesh was planned and implemented under the PM GatiShakti initiative with an aim to "cover key districts such as Lucknow, Basti, and Gonda. This project will facilitate improvement in connectivity to economic, social and logistics nodes, including tourist and pilgrim sites, across these three districts." Ayodhya is situated between two economic hubs (Lucknow and Gorakhpur) and major commodities such as leather,



engineering goods, building materials, iron and steel, pass through the city therefore the construction of this bypass route will facilitate uninterrupted freight flows and decongest the city.

Since the consecration of an idol of the new Ram Lalla at the Ayodhya temple on January 22 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the authorities are expecting the city to be the major hub of religious and economic activities. In fact since the D-Day, the city has witnessed the arrival of at least over two lakh devotees and tourists.

The Ministry said that the project will improve multimodality with integrated infrastructure such as Railway

Stations (at Ayodhya Railway Station, Sohwal Railway Station, AN Dev Nagar Railway Station, and Ayodhya Cantt Railway Station) and Airport (at Ayodhya Airport). The 67.57-km-long Ayodhya Bypass Project comprises the Northern Áyodhya Bypass (a total length of 35.40 km) while the Southern Ayodhya Bypass will be 32.172 km. It will cover three key districts along the route including Lucknow, Basti, and Gonda. The Ayodhya Bypass Project is likely to cater to multiple forecasted increases in passenger and freight vehicle movement (from 89,023 in 2023 and 216,928 in 2033) around eight influence areas

Naari Shakti on Republic Day at Kartavya Path



PNS NEW DELHI

Exhibiting the prowess of 'Nari Shakti', 265 women on motorcycles performed various stunts to showcase bravery, valour and determination during the 75th Republic Day parade here on Friday.

Women personnel of the Central Armed Police Force deployed across the length and breadth of the nation provide 'Sarvatra Suraksha', read a message of unity and inclusiveness at the Kartavya Path during the parade. The women bikers of the CRPF, BSF and SSB exhibited the strength of Indian val-

ues, including yoga. The 'commandant abhivadan' display was carried out by Assistant Commandant Seema Nag. It was followed by a display of 'Lakshita' by HC Rita

'Sarvatra Suraksha' was displayed by CT Amandeep Kaur and 25 others armed with the latest weaponry. Inspector Promila Sethi and 21

others showcased the tech edge of the forces while CT Anupam with 15 others represented women deployed on the borders providing security.

Exhibiting 'Naari Shakti', Inspector Sehnaaz Khatoon and 13 other personnel represented women deployed in the hinterland of the country.

Three different teams led by Inspector Soniya Banwri, CŤ Anita Bharti, and CT Rekhan performed different poses of yoga while riding the bikes demonstrating balance and giving the message of a disci-plined lifestyle and mental prowess.

Modi dons Bandhini turban at 75th Republic Day celebrations

On the occasion of India's 75th Republic Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to wear a multi-coloured 'Bandhini' turban safa with the predominant colour yellow, which symbolizes Lord Ram. Bandhini is a type of tie-dye textile popular in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The fabric is decorated by plucking the cloth with fingernails into many tiny bindings that form a figurative design. The yellow colour in his turban holds great significance in many ways.

PM Modi recently led the rituals at the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Shri Ram Lalla in the newly-built Shri Ram Janmbhoomi Mandir in Ayodhya on January 22. The yellow colour in his turban holds great significance in many ways.

Along with the Rajasthani Bandhini print turban, PM Modi wore a white kurta and pyjama with a brown Nehru jacket. The turban with a long trail had shades of yellow, saffron, pink and red. This entire ensemble perfectly reflects his love for the nation, its religious beliefs, and the ideology of unity in diversity. PM Modi's turban was first seen when he arrived at the National War

criss-cross lines, and a tie-

Memorial this morning to honor the bravehearts of the Indian armed forces

Last year too, Modi wore a multi-coloured Rajasthani turban and complemented it with pants and kurta. Later that year, on the 77th Independence Day, he opted for a vibrant Rajasthani-style turban, with multiple colours and a lengthy

In 2019, Modi sported a multicoloured turban as he gave his sixth Independence Day speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort after returning to power for a second term with a thumping majority.

For his maiden Independence Day in 2014, he had opted for a bright red Jodhpuri 'bandhej' turban. In 2015, Prime Minister Modi chose a yellow turban covered with multi-coloured

and-dye turban in hues of pink and yellow in 2016.

The prime minister's turban for 2017 was a mix of bright red and yellow with crisscrossed golden lines all over. He donned a saffron turban for his appearance at the Red Fort in

From a bright red 'bandhani' turban from Kutch to a mustard Rajasthani 'safa', Modi's eye-catching turbans have been a highlight of his Republic Day appearances too.

In 2022, Modi had chosen a unique Uttarakhand traditional cap for the Republic Day celebrations. The cap also had a Brahma Kamal-inspired brooch. Brahma Kamal is Uttarakhand's state flower, which the prime minister uses on every visit to Kedarnath.

UP has highest number of colleges in country: AISHE survey

around the holy city

Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of colleges in the country, followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka according to the government's All India Survey for Higher Education 2021-22. The AISHE survey was released by the Ministry of Education late night on Thursday. The top 10 states in terms of

number of colleges in India include Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Telangana and West Bengal, each having at least 30 or more colleges per lakh population.

According to the survey report, in Uttar Pradesh, there are 8,375 colleges -- up from 8,114 colleges in the previous year - and there are 30 colleges for every one lakh population.

The states and Union Territories which have a high number of colleges per lakh



population are -- Karnataka (66), Telangana (52), Andhra Pradesh (49), Himachal Pradesh (47), Puducherry (53) and Kerala (46).

"Maharashtra comes second with 4,692 colleges. Karnataka comes at the third position with 4,430 colleges whereas Rajasthan is at the fourth position with 3,934 colleges. Tamil Nadu comes at the fifth position with 2,829 colleges fol-lowed by Madhya Pradesh with 2,702 colleges," the report said. "Andhra Pradesh is at the seventh position with 2,602 colleges and at eighth position Gujarat has 2,395 colleges. Telangana is at the ninth spot with 2,083 colleges followed by West Bengal which has 1,514

colleges," it added. The Ministry of Education has been conducting AISHE since 2011, covering all higher educational institutions located in India and imparting higher education in the country. The

survey collects detailed information on different parameters such as student enrolment, teachers' data, infrastructural information, financial infor-

There are 45,473 colleges registered under AISHE belonging to the 328 universities (affiliating). Of these 42,825 responded in the survey year 2021-22. The survey report pointed out that more than 60 per cent colleges are general in nature, 8.7 per cent colleges are specialised in education or teacher education, 6.1 per cent colleges are engineering and technology institutions, 4.3 per cent nursing colleges and 3.5 per cent medical colleges

While 2.7 per cent colleges offer arts courses, 2.4 per cent are dedicated to pharmacy courses, 0.7 per cent science

colleges and 1.4 per cent Sanskrit colleges. "Out of the 42,825 responding colleges, 14,197 colleges are offering PG programmes and 1,063 have PhD enrolments," the report said.

olleges per district are widely distributed across the country As much as 10.7 per cent colleges out of total registered in AISHE are in the top 10 districts. The top 50 districts have 31.3 per cent of total colleges. Bengaluru Urban district has maximum colleges (1,106) followed by the Jaipur (703), Hyderabad (491), Pune (475) Prayagraj (398), Rangareddi (349), Bhopal (344), Ghazipur (333), Sikar (330) and Nagpur

The total estimated enrolment in higher education institutions is 4,32,68,181 out of which 96,38,345 are in universities and their constituent units. 3,14,59,092 is in colleges, and 21,70,744 in Stand-Alone insti-

Rafale jets, French transport aircraft grace 75th Republic Day parade

PNS NEW DELHI

Two Rafale fighter jets flanked by a 'Phoenix' multi-role tanker transport aircraft of the French air force roared off Delhi's sky as India celebrated its 75th Republic Day at a grand parade on Friday with French President Emmanuel Macron gracing it as the chief guest.

As soon as around 95 French troops marched down the Kartavya Path in the heart of the national capital, the whizzing warplanes pierced the morning sky making thousands of spectators crane their necks in wonder and amaze-

A 30-member band contingent from France also drew attention at the grand parade.

It was the second time the French armed forces participated in India's Republic Day



In 2016, French troops became the first foreign military contingent to participate in the biggest ceremonial event in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi

was the guest of honour at the prestigious Bastille Day Parade in Paris in July last year. The Indian Air Force's Rafale

fighter jets and a tri-services marching contingent took part in the Bastille Day parade. As the French marching contingent marched down the

Kartavya Path, the two Rafale jets and the Airbus A330 multirole tanker transport (MRTT) aircraft flew in a triangle formation.

The Rafale jets came from the 104 "Al Dhafra" air base, located in the United Arab Emirates. Their unit traces its origin back to World Wars I and II. The Phoenix MRTT is capable of refuelling two fighters simultaneously or a single surveillance aircraft. It carries up to

110 tonnes of fuel

EC tableau showcases India glory as 'mother of democracy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

The Election Commission's 1 Republic Day parade tableau on Friday rolled down the Kartavya Path showcasing "India--Mother Democracy". The Election

Commission's tableau was on the theme of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, and according to the poll body, it depicted the conduct of "free, fair, inclusive, accessible and participative elections" The Lok Sabha election is considered the world's biggest peacetime logistics exercise of movement of people and material.

The front of the tableau shows an inked finger pressing a but-



ton to cast a vote on an electronic voting machine (EVM). It also depicts the magnitude of the parliamentary elections, which is due shortly and in which nearly 96 crore people will be eligible to cast their vote in 12 lakh polling stations. country.

Nearly 1.5 crore personnel will be deployed for conducting

polling. People from different sections of society have been depicted standing in a queue, showcasing the cultural diversity of the



Over 200 FTII alumni have written an open letter in solidarity with the students of the premiere institute after an alleged attack on them by right-wing activists over a banner decrying the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid.

The letter has been signed by 207 former students of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), including Oscar winner Resul Pookutty, film editor Anupama Chandra, filmmaker Prateek Vats and actor Shardul Bhardwai.

"It is painful to see the students of this great film school being assaulted with impunity. We, as a community of film professionals, educators, and artists of both national and international acclaim, extend our support



ty at this tough and testing moment," the letter said. The incident at the Pune-based film institute took place on Tuesday, a day after the grand consecration ceremony of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya,

Uttar Pradesh. According to police, some 12 to 15 unidentified persons

allegedly barged into the campus by overpowering security personnel and assaulted students while shouting slogans. They tore up and burnt the banner put up by the FTII Students Association (FSA) and read "Remember Babri,

Death of Constitution" The FSA has claimed that its president Mankap Nokwoham

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI

was among those who were attacked. The alumni group said they "unequivocally condemn" the violence perpetrated on the students of the film

'FTII students had organised discussions and screenings on their campus as part of their academic commitment. That intruders were allowed to attack the students is inexcusable," the open letter said.

It said the inaction of the police in investigating and taking action against those responsible for the violence was even "more inexcusable". "We appeal to the police and all relevant authorities to take prompt action against those who perpetrated violence against the students and who entered with the intent to vandalise property on the campus of FTII, Pune."We hold the institute in great affection and regard, and owe to it the rigorous training that turned us into film professionals," it added.

A FIR was registered against unidentified persons at Deccan police station under Indian Penal Code sections 143 (unlawful assembly), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 427 (mischief causing damage) and other relevant provisions, the police said.

The police has also registered an FIR against three students under Indian Penal Code sections 153B (1) (Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration) and 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious

UP tourism launches campaign

PNS NEW DELHI

With an aim to showcase the rich culture, history, and attractions of Uttar Pradesh, which is basking in the glory for being home of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the State Tourism Department in collaboration with Glance, an InMobi group AI first lock screen has launched a grand national photography to capture the region in the frame. On the UP Tourism Day recently, the State Principal Secretary Tourism & Culture Mukesh Meshram inaugurated the photography campaign "UP Close and Personal" aiming to bring the best of the

Appreciating the initiative, Meshram said, "Uttar Pradesh is the heart of India, and we want people all over the world to see its beauty and

Constitutional rights being eroded: Kharge selves included Dalits, Tribals,

PNS NEW DELHI

President └Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday alleged that the fundamental and basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every Indian are slowly being "eroded" and the government is using emotional issues to divert attention and hide the truth from citizens.

Kharge said that the Congress has resolved to fight for the protection of the Constitution, democracy and justice. In his message to the citizens on the 75th Republic Day, Kharge said it was on this day India became a Republic breaking the chains of feudalism and colo-

He said the Constitution was based on the values of Indian civilisational values of Justice, dignity, equality and equal treatment to all. This is the foundation for the social, economic, and political transformation of our country, he said.



dom, brotherhood, secularism, and socialism are India's foundational pillars, he asserted.

The Constitution ensured fundamental rights, social justice, and political rights to every citizen. Today, these pillars are under attack from the government itself," Kharge alleged. The founding fathers of our Constitution Pandit

(Jawaharlal) Nehru, Babasaheb

Ambedkar, Sardar Patel, Babu

Azad and other giants of the Constituent Assembly would not have imagined that the Constitution would face such challenges," he said.

Today, the fundamental and basic rights guaranteed by the Constitution to every Indian, are slowly being "encroached upon and being eroded," he alleged.

"We, the people of India who gave this Constitution to our-

Women, Farmers, and Labourers. Today they are facing assault by the government which is using emotional issues to divert attention and hide the Truth from citizens," Kharge He said poverty is increasing

with 7.5 crore people falling back into poverty under the current central dispensation led by the BJP. "The truth is that due to inflation and falling income, the savings of families are the low-

est in 50 years. The truth is that unemployment is at its highest in 45 years, snatching the future of our youth," he said. "The truth is that today all Constitutional institutions are being hijacked. The truth is that 146 opposition MPs are thrown out of Parliament and important laws are passed with-

out discussion," he said, adding,

whether the Jaitapur project was put on pause, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra said the French power company EDF and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) were discussing elements such as a financing

mechanism and localisation

power plant in Maharashtra's

Responding to questions on civil nuclear cooperation

between India and France and

Ratnagiri district.

"The two entities on both sides even media has been forced to become the government's -- EDF and NPCIL -- are essentially trying to move for-

component of the project.



India, France in talks over financing

ward on these issues and a whole lot of progress has been made," the foreign secretary said. The first memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the Jaitapur nuclear project was inked in 2009 with French nuclear supplier Areva, which went bankrupt

In 2016, the EDF and NPCIL signed a revised MoU, and an "industrial way forward" in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron. In 2020, the EDF submitted its techno-commercial offer for the project. The French company plans to supply six

European Pressurized Reactors (EPR) of 1,650 MW each, considered the most advanced and largest nuclear power plants ever developed.

The Foreign Secretary said discussions were ongoing between EDF and NPCIL to ensure that "what we put on the ground is financially viable, cost effective and has a localisation component." But we are doing so under a

very strong strategic commitment to the partnership on civil nuclear energy space," Kwatra said. "So, from our side the perspective on the principles in which we view this partnership, the specifics, the way we take it forward is absolutely clear," he added.

Kwatra said small and modular reactors (SMR) was a relatively new space in terms of discussions between the two

Bihar will achieve 10 lakh Govt jobs target: Governor

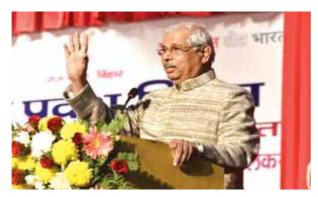
Bihar was committed to providing 10 lakh government jobs to the state's youths, and the target would be achieved soon, Governor Rajendra V Arlekar said on Friday. Addressing the Republic Day

function at the Gandhi Maidan in Patna in the presence of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav, he said the state has so far provided government jobs to 3.63 lakh people and the recruitment drive is continuing.

"The Bihar government will soon achieve the target of

government jobs... The state government is working in this direction as 3 lakh more posts in different departments have created. government has so far provided jobs to 3.63 lakh people in the state, and the recruitment drive is on," he

Apart from government jobs, the state government was also working to create 10 lakh employment opportunities for people in other sectors, and has already created 5 lakh such opportunities, he added. state government recently approved financial



assistance of Rs 2 lakh each to about 94 lakh poor families for entrepreneurship and selfemployment under the Chief

Minister Small Entrepreneur Scheme. The government is committed to the overall development of the socially sections of the society," the governor said.
"The government recently

raised the quotas for deprived castes from 50 to 65 per cent in state government jobs and educational institutions... And has requested the Centre for placing these legislations in the ninth schedule of Constitution to make them immune to legal scrutiny," he said. The governor also spoke about different social welfare measures undertaken by the state government. "A check has been imposed on crime and this will continue in the future too. There is an

and economically weaker environment of social and communal harmony in Bihar," Arlekar said. The governor also thanked

PM Narendra Modi for the Centre's decision to confer Bharat Ratna on former CM Karpoori Thakur.

"Thakur's entire life was dedicated to the poor and deprived. This prestigious award is a tribute to his lifelong dedication to the upliftment of the underprivileged sections of society and his relentless fight for social justice. I express my gratitude to the PM for conferring Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur," he said.

our strength in assembly

polls. Because of our own

mistakes we might have lost

seven to eight seats, or else

our calculation was over 141

He further said, Shettar

quitting the Congress may cause "just one day's

embarrassment to the party

before the media, but the

party workers are happy

about him going out, as it will

help them in organising

"Congress will give the seat

vacated by Shettar to a loyal

Congress worker and fight it

out.....Congress is like an

ocean, we are least bothered

(about Shettar joining BJP),

Shivakumar also said that

Congress MLA Laxman

Savadi, who too had joined

the party quitting BJP ahead

of Assembly polls, has assured

that he will remain in the

Congress and work for the

Congress much better.'

he added.

Focus on SC, ST, poor, women progress, says **Chhattishgarh Governor**

Chhattisgarh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan on Friday said his government's fundamental principle is to pay utmost attention to the development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, economically disadvantaged, women, vouth, children and farmers. In his Republic Day address to the state at Police Parade grounds in the capital Raipur, Harichandan said Chhattisgarh must be transformed into a region, free from Naxal influence, characterized by robust law and order, tranquillity, and a bastion of development. "The success of our

democracy is deeply rooted perpetual of the commitment individual, cooperation, active participation development of the state and the country, and a strong desire for progress in science and technology," he said. On the other hand, we also

acknowledge the significant contribution of our ancient culture and spiritual awareness, he said.

Inspired by the philosophy of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, the pioneer of 'Ekatma Manavvad' (integral humanism), one finds meaningful motivation for the conscientious fulfilment of duties towards humanity and the nation, he said. government's

fundamental principle is to pay utmost attention to the comprehensive development of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled economically sections, women, youth, children, farmers, rural populations, and forest dwellers," he said. "All of us together need to fulfil Atal Bihari Vajpayee swiftly, he said.

Ji's dream of building the state of Chhattisgarh," he

Chhattisgarh must be transformed into a region, free from Naxal influence, characterised by robust law and order, tranquility, and a bastion of development, said the governor. With the strategy of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, and Sabka Prayas', every objective for the betterment of Chhattisgarh will be achieved, he said.

Harichandan paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar, Dr Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr B R Ambedkar, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. "I also acknowledge the current President of India Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi who demonstrated through their leadership that individuals from ordinary families can rise to the highest positions in the country and make

he said. It is a fortunate coincidence that the central and state governments have initiated numerous people-centric policies, schemes, and programs in collaboration, aiming to implement them

significant contributions,"

Forces bringing peace in Manipur, says DGP

 $M_{
m on\ Friday\ said\ the\ state}^{
m anipur\ DGP\ Rajiv\ Singh}$ and central forces are working in coordination to bring tranquillity and peace in the northeastern state.

He also said the state and forces coordination committees at the state and district levels to normalise the situation in the violence-hit state.

"We (State and central forces) are always in constant touch. We have coordination committees at the state headquarters and district levels and have several video conferences," the DGP said on the sidelines of a Republic Day programme.

"For me, all forces are equal. We are working together with state and central forces in coordination and trying to bring a normal situation as soon as possible" Singh said. On the ongoing probe into the killing of the SDPO Singh hill districts.

"Investigation is going on and some people have been arrested. I would not be able to divulge details here. Let the police work." Moreh SDPO Chingtham Anand was shot dead by suspected militants in Tengnoupal district in October last year.

Asked about the current situation in Moreh, Singh said "It will get better with the cooperation of the public and leaders of both the communities.'

More than 180 people have lost their lives since ethnic violence broke out in the state on May 3 last year, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the

BJP trying to lure our leaders: Shivakumar

Accusing the BJP of trying to lure his party's leaders and legislators, state Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Friday indicated that he too was not silent and that many leaders from the saffron party are in touch with him.

His comments came a day after former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar rejoined the BJP quitting Congress. He had joined Congress, ahead of Assembly polls last year, after being denied ticket by the BJP to contest the elections.

'I'm in talks with several (BJP) leaders, many are looking at us, I don't want to reveal names," Shivakumar told reporters here as he accused BJP of making all efforts to lure Congress leaders into the party.

'Whom have they left? They are trying every one, I don't want to take names. But we speaking now that's all, if not

(their) houses would have become empty by now, but we are remaining silent that's all,

On some BJP leaders claiming to be in touch with several Congress leaders and legislators, Shivakumar said, "Don't they know that I'm too in touch with them. Have they left me? Should I read the list...Let's not do it now." Noting that Shettar had

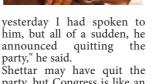
joined Congress unconditionally after quitting BJP accusing it of insulting and ill treating him, Shivakumar said, considering his stature being a senior leader, Congress gave him ticket to contest Assembly polls and despite him losing the polls by a margin of about 35,000 votes, the party made him an MLC.

"Denying a loyal party worker the ticket, we gave him a ticket and treated him with respect.....We were aware about BJP leaders contacting him from the last two-three too know the job, I'm not months, and he kept saying he



yesterday I had spoken to him, but all of a sudden, he announced quitting the party," he said.

party, but Congress is like an ocean, the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief said hundreds of people may come to the party, and hundreds may quit, but no one can do anything to Congress.



"He (Savadi) is a leader of the party and will be an asset to

Nagaland CM for talks on India Myanmar border fencing

Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday said the decision of the Centre to fence the India-Myanmar border needs thorough discussion before being implemented. Asked by reporters about the state's stand on the issue, Rio said the government has to consult the people.

"If the need be then we have to work out a formula on how to solve the issue for the people and infiltration as well, because Nagaland is bordered by Myanmar, and on both sides there are Nagas," he said.



Rio, an ally of the BJP, said India-Myanmar border, and that while many people live on the Indian side, their farms are on the other side.

Therefore there has to be a workable formula," he added. Union Home Minister Amit Shah last week said the fence it completely so that it can be protected like the country's boundary with Bangladesh.

Deputy CM Y Patton had on Monday said that the Nagaland government will government will end the free hold meetings with other movement of people at the northeastern states that share

a border with Myanmar, and then approach the Centre on the issue.

Various Naga civil society organisations and also the NSCN-IM have opposed the Centre's decision, saying that it would "divide" the Nagas living on two sides of the

Goa to tie up with non-profit body for

healthcare: Rane

oa minister Vishwajit GRane on Friday said the

state government was collab-

PTI PANAJI

Mizoram has zero tolerance to smuggling: Governor

PTI AIZAWL

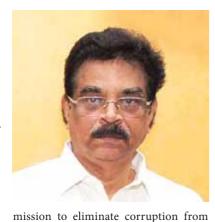
 M^{izoram} governor Hari Babu Kambhampati on Friday said the state government has zero tolerance towards all kinds of smuggling.
Addressing the Republic Day function

after unfurling the tricolour at Lammual in Aizawl, he said the Excise and Narcotics Department is working relentlessly to combat the menace of drug trafficking and drug abuse.

"Stringent measures are being taken to stop the illegal smuggling of areca nuts by law enforcing agencies and the

government," he said. The government was also working to check malpractices at various police check-gates, and instructions have been issued in this regard, he added.

Maintaining that good governance reduces irregularities, enhances the self-respect of people and enables them to optimally utilise their talents and capabilities, Kambhampati said that the state government was determined to get rid of the scourge of corruption.
"The fight against corruption will be



public life and government services will be implemented with greater zeal," he

Kambhampati said that over the next five years, the state government will focus on responsible and responsive administration, ensuring steady and sustainable development in all sectors, supporting industries, ensuring access to social security and social equity, made comprehensive and effective. The youth welfare and development, and

protecting the environment. He also said the government was committed to improving the financial condition of the state.

"It will be our endeavour to set things right through fiscal consolidation, proper fiscal management, austerity measures, pruning non-development expenditure and resource management and mobilisation," he said.
The governor said the government will

accord utmost importance to agriculture and allied sectors since more than half of the state's population depends on it.

"It will be our endeavour to make agriculture both production-centric and income-centric. A separate allocation of funds targeting farmers engaged in agriculture and allied sectors will be provided in the budget,'

Remunerative prices for four important commercial crops -- ginger, turmeric, chilies and broomsticks -- will be fixed and procurement will commence from this financial year for which an amount of Rs 110 crore has been already earmarked, he added.

Rajasthan CM meets Raje at her residence

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Friday called on former chief minister and senior BJP leader Vasundhara Raje at her residence.

Sharma reached Raje's home at Civil Lines and stayed for nearly 20 minutes.

Raje was among the frontrunners for the chief minister's post after the BJP returned to power last month. However, the party leadership chose first-time MLA Sharma

for the post. Since then, Raje has distanced herself from the party. She skipped the Cabinet expansion ceremony on December 30 and was also absent from a dinner for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party MLAs at the BJP office on January 5.

Sharma's meeting with Raje is seen as an attempt to normalise relations ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Six die in Nagaland coal mine accident



PTI KOHIMA

Mumbai pace of development inspiring: UNGA chief

t least six workers were Acharred to death and four critically injured in a fire accident inside an illegal coal mine in Nagaland's Wokha district, an official said.

The incident took place at Richanyan village under Bhandari sub-division of Wokha district around 1pm on January 25, Bhandari MLA Achumbemo Kikon told PTI here on Friday. Kikon, who is in Bhandari to

take stock of the situation, said the workers, all from Assam, were engaged in digging inside the illegal rathole mine when there was a fire killing six of them and critically injuring four others. The injured were rushed to a hospital in Dimapur, an official said.

Expressing concern on such illegal coal mines in Bhandari, the MLA urged the state department to take stringent steps to stop such

Climate change is an

orating with a non-profit organisation to foster a robust and resilient healthcare landscape in keeping with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi of self reliance. The collaboration with NATHEALTH, which has a diverse membership ranging

from providers to tech companies, will fortify and elevate the role of the state's health sector in GDP, employment and digital transformation.



Locker hired by MS. URMILA and MR. PRADEEP KUMAR NAGAR having address at H. No. 1, Vill. Bhuapur, Teh Faridabad, Opp. Govt High School, Faridabad, Haryana-121002, with Faridabad Sec 16, branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd-SCO No. 2, Sector-16, District Center Faridabad (Haryana)-121002 has inoperative since last 7 years. All the 3 letters sent to MS. URMILA joint holder MR. PRADEEP KUMAR NAGAR calling upon them for the same has returned unserved and they are not contactable.

KUMAR NAGAR within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on April 30, 2024 at around

IIT-J tech to reduce traffic, road accidents **PTI** ■ JODHPUR safety by enabling secure and

The IIT-Jodhpur has devel-I oped a cutting-edge technology that it claims can reduce traffic congestion and road accidents.

The Novel MAC-based Authentication Scheme developed by the institute's science and computer engineering department aims not only to enhance vehicle security intelligence but also address multifaceted challenges prevalent on Indian roads. It can contribute to road

real-time exchange of data on road conditions, accidents and traffic jams among vehicles. This information can help drivers make informed decisions and avoid hazards, according to a professor associated with the technology's development. The data collected and shared through the Internet of Vehicles network can also be

analysed to identify accident-

prone areas, patterns of risky

behaviour or road conditions

that require improvement --

leading the authorities taking

proactive measures to address these.

technology is a groundbreaking solution to enhance the security and the efficiency of the Internet of Vehicles, said Debasis Das, an associate professor in the computer science and engineering department.

"With this technology, we have strived to address critical challenges in data protection, communication overhead and security vulnerabilities," he said, adding that NoMAS can also help protect vehicles from theft and unauthorised use.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) president Dennis Francis on Friday said he was inspired by the liveliness, energy and pace of development in Mumbai and shared that he has watched Hindi movies. The visiting dignitary made

the comments during his meeting with Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, a release from the CM Office said. UNGA is the main policy-making organ of the United Nations.

Francis lauded the pace of infrastructure and housing development in Mumbai. Mumbai played an important part in Indindustrialisation, he said. He recalled his country

Trinidad and Tobago's close ties with India. He said the speaker's chair in the Trinidad assembly has been gifted by India,

according to the release. The UNGA chief said he was a geography student and India was part of his studies. He said he has watched Hindi



matter important Maharashtra, Shinde told Francis, elaborating that his government has taken steps like plastic ban, bamboo plantation, green hydrogen policy and deep cleaning campaign Mumbai, according to the release. Strengthening

groups was also important, he 'Vada pav' and 'jalebi' were among the food items on the menu during the meeting, the It is hereby informed that despite this notice if the operation for the said locker is not initiated by MS URMILA and MR. PRADEEP www.dailypioneer.com

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PAPER WITH PASSION-

Peace in paradise

The decline in number of terror incidents in J&K is a good indication to initiate the electoral process

There is an overall decline in terror activities and related fatalities in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has pointed out. There has been a notable 66 per cent reduction in terrorrelated incidents and an 81 per cent drop in civilian deaths in the region, he said. Though this data has triggered a debate on the connection between the abrogation of Article 370 and its implications on the security situation in J&K, it can be safely said that the war on terror is far from over. The number of civilian deaths and terror incidents may have fallen but the figure is still rather large to call it the 'Heaven on earth', as it is often referred to. Article 370 granted special autonomy in governance and decisionmaking to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, even allowing it to have its own Constitution and flag. However, on August 5, 2019, the Narendra Modi-led Government decided to abrogate Article 370 and reorganise the State into two Union Territories – Jammu



& Kashmir and Ladakh. One of the primary arguments for revoking Article 370 was the anticipation of improved security conditions in the region. The reported 66 per cent decline in terror incidents suggests that normalcy is slowly but surely returning to J&K. Ending terrorist activities is crucial for restoring peace and stability not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also in the broader context of national security.

However, it is essential to critically analyse the factors contributing to this decline. Some argue that the increased presence of security forces, coupled with strict counter-terrorism measures, has played a pivotal role in curbing extremist activities. Civilian casu-

alties have been a deeply concerning aspect of the conflict in J&K, often causing widespread unrest and protests. The reduction in civilian deaths suggests a positive shift towards protecting the lives of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. While the reported decline in terror incidents and civilian deaths is promising, it is important to acknowledge that challenges persist. Critics argue that the restrictions imposed on communication and movement in the aftermath of the Article 370 revocation have led to a stifling environment for the residents of Jammu and Kashmir. Concerns about human rights violation and their impact on daily life remain significant issues that need careful consideration. Now that things are returning to normal as per the Government's claim, it is time to reinstate the political process in J&K and allow political parties to restart their activities. Besides, the recent Supreme Court directive to the Election Commission of India to conduct Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 2024 poses a major challenge for the security agencies. To hold free and fair elections there poses yet another challenge as the trouble-makers would like to disrupt the process with all their might. But only after a democratically elected Government is installed in Kashmir can we call it peaceful.



Artistes perform during the 75th Republic Day celebrations in Kullu

Pakistan faces bitter fallout with Taliban



Pakistan deserves little sympathy for the violence it is suffering. Sowing the wind in Afghanistan, Pakistan is reaping the whirlwind

he bitter falling out between Pakistan and Afghanistan's Taliban rulers is one of the striking ironies of contemporary history. Islamabad could not have done more for the Taliban. It was instrumental to their establishment. Its support in the form of the training and arming of their troops, and stiffening of the latter's ranks with the deputation of Pakistan Army's officers and men, enabled them to establish their first regime over most of Afghanistan in September

During the US-led campaign against the Taliban in 2001, Pakistan airlifted, with American consent, a large number of its army personnel and agents of the Directorate-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), along with top commanders and fighters of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, from Kunduz in November 2001. It, of course, did not, in keeping with its usual duplicitousness, tell Washington DC that Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders and rank-andfilers would also be evacuated. Pakistan's support continued in an enhanced and expanded form after an alliance, spearheaded and guided by the United States, post 9/11, ousted the Taliban from Afghanistan in December 2001. Pakistan harboured their leaders, allowed them to function freely in its territory, and, besides arming and training their troops, provided them with sanctuaries in the border areas from where they could foray into Afghanistan. The Taliban would not have survived without Pakistan's support. All this, of course, should not obscure the fact that relations between the latter and Afghanistan were bitterly hostile until Islamabad's provision of support to the Afghan mujahideen following the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The hostility became manifest immediately after Pakistan's independence in August 1947 when Afghanistan was the only nation to oppose Pakistan's entry into the United Nations. It also actively supported armed separatist movements in the Pashtun inhabited territo-



ported armed ethnic Pashtun

and Baloch secessionist ele-

ments in Pakistan. The latter,

on its part, has persistently

tried to have an Afghan gov-

ernment that was subservient

to it and allowed it to use

Afghan territory to gain strate-

gic depth in its confrontations

with India.

The antagonism had infected the populations of both countries. There were attacks on their respective diplomatic establishments on the soil of the other, leading to a break in their diplomatic ties between 1961 and 1963, and border clashes. It is now clear that the The primary bone of contention Taliban share their country's

PRADHAN MANTRI SURYODAYA YOJNA

Sir — India's solar power has an installed

capacity of 70 GW today, 15% of the

total installed power. The aim is for 400 GW of solar power capacity by 2030 or

half of the total power capacity. Riding

on this overall plan, the PM Suryodaya

Yoina of Jan 2024, envisages Roof Top

solar power for 10, mln homes now and

to reach 40 GW capacity by 2026 from

11 GW on date. This is the first scheme

to set a target for the number of house-

holds rather than the amount of electric-

ity to be generated. A report by the



THE PRIMARY BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO **COUNTRIES HAS** BEEN THE DURAND LINE, WHICH WAS DRAWN BY SIR MORTIMER DURAND, AND ABDUL RAHMAN KHAN, EMIR OF AFGHANISTAN, IN historical stand on the Durand Line, which, if anything, has become a bigger source of tension and conflict than perhaps at any time earlier.

There have been armed clashes between the border forces of the two countries leading to periodical closure of border crossings including the principal ones at Torkham and Spinboldak. The clashes have been caused not just by the border dispute but an overall deterioration of the relations between the Taliban and Pakistan resulting from Pakistan's allegation that Kabul was supporting the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which has been carrying out violent terror strikes on its soil. At a press conference on November 8, 2023, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister, Anwar ul-Haq Kakar, launched a scathing attack on the Taliban saying that their support to TTP had contributed to a major increase in violence in his country, causing the death of 2,867 Pakistanis since the Taliban captured power in August 2021. According to Afghanistan's

TOLO news, the Taliban administration spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, has denied the allegation and stated, "We will not allow anyone to use Afghanistan's soil to threaten other countries. Pakistani authorities should understand their responsibilities." Not sur-

ues, aggravated by cross-border terror strikes in Pakistan and the latter's airstrikes against the TTP's bases in Afghanistan. Things have worsened by Pakistan's campaign to deport what it describes as foreigners without valid visas or registration documents as refugees. The principal victims are Afghans, numbering nearly four million, who have poured into the country since the Soviet Union's invasion of their country. According to reports 450,000 of them out of a total number of 1.77 million such people (according to the Pakistani authorities) have left Pakistan. The condition of those who have been forced to leave is miserable, and the uncertainty of those living in the shadow of deportation must be nerve-wracking. The inhumanity of Pakistan's campaign is unpardonable, particularly given the horrible human rights situation and the gender apartheid prevailing in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Pakistan deserves little sympathy for the violence it is suffering. The monster it has created is striking back. As the Old Testament (Hosea 8.7) says,

prisingly, the dispute contin-

(The author is a Consulting Editor, at The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

"For they have sown the wind,

and they shall reap the whiri-

wind."

THE EDITOR

Climate emergency in the time of military conflicts



ry and Balochistan in Pakistan.

There must be concerted global action towards restoring peace, and thereby climate, as both are intricately linked

▼f we don't end the war, war will end us, the quote **▲**from H. G. Wells summarises the realities of Climate Emergency, exacerbated by today's military politics. On the one hand, we have companies adapting their business operations, farmers shunning environ-mentally harmful farming, innovators finding ways to reduce emissions and policymakers trying to channelise finance for addressing climate change. On the other, we have wars erupting in unforeseen corners of the world that have the potential of reversing any positive impact created by efforts towards climate restoration. The enormity of the carbon footprints of a war is evident in a cursory look at data.It is estimated that the carbon footprint of the Iraq War was 141 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent emissions, 21 EU member states emitted less CO2 equivalent in 2019, to put the numbers in context. Only the first year of the Ukraine war generated ~120 million tonnes of CO2, roughly the equivalent of the emissions of Belgium. The emissions from restoration



is estimated that the carbon cost of rebuilding the conflicttorn West Asia could be higher than emissions from many countries taken together. Even if reporting of military CO2 emissions is excluded from climate treaties citing implications on national security, however UNFCC advocates for fixing up the responsibility of warring parties towards the resulting emissions.

Managing conflicts during energy transition: It is obvious that as the dominance of fossil fuels wanes; the economies dependent on it may get anxious. Take the example of Russia, which has been the top exporter of coal, oil and gas all these years, the Arab and the Middle East's prosperity thrived on oil. So that the fact that places are conflict

efforts post-war are worse. It hot spots in the times of an

energy transition, can't be ignored as a mere coincidence. There are a few things the world can learn from history in this regard, especially the Cold War era as against the Hot wars, that can boil up the planet;Diplomacy and Multilateralism: Allies and Multilateral dialogue was one of the powerful soft weapons deployed during the Cold War. The war against climate change cannot be effective until the military wars are diffused through tactful intermediation. All parties need to demonstrate shoulders broad enough to shrug off short-termism and channel their efforts towards the larger collective good.

Leadership: Emerging global powers like India have now demonstrated the ability to

influence the political leadership of the most powerful nations of the world due to interlocked economic interests as well as its credibility of a history of peaceful co-existence and engagement with the world.People-to-people connect: The world is far more interconnected today than the Cold War era during which concerted efforts for people-to-people connect through exchange programs were made. Mobilising public opinion through technology forces leaders to prioritise climate over power.The efforts by large corporations to carbon proof their value chains, incremental expenses from individuals to shift to electric vehicles, austerity in lifestyle - be it flying less or eating less meat or taxes imposed on cross border trade as contributions towards keeping the temperature rise below 2°C and further reduce it to 1.5°C, will go down a hungry bottomless pit unless there is concerted global action towards restoring peace and thereby climate.

(The writer is a novelist an international development advisor and a Chevening scholar; views are personal)

Council on Energy, estimates 250 million households across India have the potential to deploy 640Gw of solar energy capacity on rooftops. We gained some experience in programmes for toilets, drinking water and cooking gas and yet rooftop solar power to less affluent households requires initiatives. Incentives such as subsidies, tax holidays, quicker depreciation, and duty concessions can promote unconventional energy setups, but these can not continue forever. The solar sector needs improved technologies, both for cost reduction and effective scaling up. Such high-quality research backup is not with us today and we depend on others for upto-date technical plants. With dated know-how, we can produce power at an unviable cost while we keep spending on subsidies. We need to be pragmatic in obtaining collaborative technologies in such futuristic endeavours, while we set up our research institutions. **FASCINATING URBAN DEVELOPMENT** Sir —To propel urban development in

India, prioritize the establishment of ecofriendly infrastructure in cities. Implement smart waste disposal systems, invest in sustainable public transport networks, and promote green building

practices. Accelerate the adoption of elec-

tric vehicles by developing a robust

charging infrastructure, providing finan-

R Narayanan | Mumbai

in Punjab. INDIA bloc seems to receive a blow as

Republic day pledge sonal level. The personal constitution outlines values, goals and commit-



n a nation significance of the Constitution can never be undermined. It serves as a backbone of laws and principles that guide a nation's citizens, shape identity and provide a framework for governance. Drawing inspiration from it why doesn't every individual draft a personal constitution as well?Drafting a personal constitution profoundly impacts one's life at a per-

friendly urban planning. Enhance waste management across cities under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan by encouraging community participation in recycling, enforcing effective waste segregation, and deploying technological solutions for streamlined waste collection. Foster collaborations between public and private sectors to ensure the successful implementation and scalability of these initiatives for a greener and more sustainable urban

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

BLOW TO INDIA BLOC

Sir — Putting an end to the rumour Mamata Bannerjee clearly stated that Bengal to go all in for the 42 seats in the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This news comes after Punjab Chief minister and AAP Leader Bhagwat Mann's decision to go solo and win all 13 LS seats

cial incentives, and integrating EV- slowly the winds turn with the regional

ments that form the foundation of an individual's identity. The process of drafting a personal constitution involves personal inspection, self-discovery and personal growth.

It catalyzes self-discovery and empowerment. It is not just a set of rules but a roadmap to a purpose-driven life. Rules like prioritising well-being, building meaningful connections, staying loyal to friends, and challenging comfort zones should be in everyone's constitution as per situations and circumstances. This Republic Day let's pledge to draft a personal constitution and encourage others to do so. This will ensure that everyone becomes a better version of themselves and lives harmoniously.

Gourja Soni | Delhi

parties opting out. Nitish Kumar's dissent in Bihar, Shashi Tharoor's disagreement of seat sharing in Kerala between Cong and CPI(M) clearly shows the Bloc's lack of structural cohesion.

This turmoil continues as it is rare that the regional parties are going to let go of their seats where the congress has lesser seats. The major being Bihar and Bengal where the congress had just two and one seat respectively. Usually, it's unnatural that the regional parties are going to pay heed. Congress's position seems to be downhill as majorly all big regional parties are looking at the elections and then decide on what could be necessary. During the selection of the Chairman of the bloc there was a dissent among the congress insiders while TMC and AAP stressed on Kharge to be the

Sumit Saha | Dhenkanal

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FIRST COLUMN

ATTAINING INNER BLISS AND SPIRITUAL FULFILMENT

Getting into samadhi is difficult but not impossible. And all the effort is worth it



SWAMI CHARNASHRIT

n the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, finding moments of tranquillity and inner peace can seem like an elusive quest. However, ancient spiritual practices offer a path to achieving a state of profound concentration and tranquillity known as samadhi. Derived from Sanskrit, samadhi translates to "union" or "absorption," and it is considered the pinnacle of mental focus and spiritual realization in various Eastern philosophies.

The Significance of Samadhi:

Samadhi holds immense importance in spiritual traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and yoga. It is often described as a state of deep meditation where the practitioner experiences a profound connection with the divine, the universe, or their inner self. In this heightened state of awareness, the mind transcends ordinary thoughts and distractions, leading to a sense of unity and oneness

One of the primary goals of attaining samadhi is to overcome the fluctuations of the mind and achieve a sustained state of inner peace. This state is believed to bring about a profound transformation, fostering a deeper understanding of the self and the interconnected nature of all existence. Practitioners often report feelings of bliss, clarity, and a heightened sense of purpose after experiencing samadhi. How to Attain Samadhi:

Attaining samadhi requires dedicated practice, discipline, and a sincere commitment to the spiritual journey. Here are some key steps that can guide seekers on the path to achieving this transcendent state: 1. Meditation Practices: Engage in regular meditation sessions to calm the mind and cultivate mindfulness. Concentration techniques, such as focusing on the breath or a mantra, can gradually lead to a heightened state of awareness.



2. Yoga and Breath Control (Pranayama): Incorporate yogic practices and pranayama (breath control) into your routine. These practices help harmonise the body and mind, creating a conducive environment for experiencing samadhi.

3. Self-Reflection and Contemplation: Take time for self-reflection and contemplation. Explore the nature of your thoughts, emotions, and desires. Understanding the workings of the mind is a crucial step on the path to samadhi.

4. Mindful Living: Extend mindfulness beyond meditation by practising it in your daily life. Cultivate awareness in every action, whether it's eating, walking, or interacting with others. This continuous awareness gradually deepens the meditative state.

5. Guidance from Spiritual Teachers: Seek guidance from experienced spiritual teachers who can provide insights and support on your journey. Learning from those who have traversed the path to samadhi can offer valuable wisdom and encouragement.

Samadhi is not merely a destination but a transformative journey towards self-realization and spiritual fulfilment. By integrating meditation, yoga, mindfulness, and guidance from seasoned practitioners, individuals can inch closer to the profound experience of samadhi. As the mind transcends its ordinary state, the seeker discovers a sublime connection with the infinite, paving the way for a life imbued with inner peace and purpose.

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

Holistic learning for student growth



DINESH PRASAD

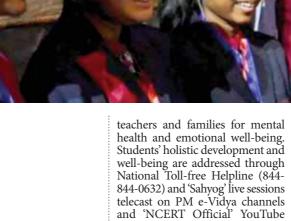
The focus needs to be on nurturing and strengthening students' individual abilities, which will help them strengthen their mental and emotional well-being

he time spent in school is a cru-cial period for every individual, marked by dynamic growth and development. This period is also important as children and adolescents steer through the student life, encountering numerous experiences that shape them as individuals. This journey of school life also poses several challenges that are both unique and demanding, especially in the present-day context, where students face many challenges related to developing skills in academics, educational and career choices, and dealing with the stress and anxiety related to examinations and competitions.

They also need to stay updated about technological advances and adapt to the rapidly evolving world of work. These concerns affect the overall development of the students, impacting not only their academic performance but also their mental health and well-being. Along with the cognitive aspects, holistic development also focuses on the affective aspects, which include an individual's social and emotional skills, attributes, positive social interactions, support perceived, adaptability and perspectivetaking, among others, which serve as protective factors against stress. The purpose of any education system is not only to foster academic learning but also the all-round development of children.

As students go through their academic journeys, they also lay the foundations of a progressive society. Thus, the focus on this period and on ensuring the holistic development of the students is a concern of national importance. Consistent efforts are being made by the country to bring about awareness and support in this regard with a special focus on the younger population. An initial step in this direction was taken by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, who addressed these concerns through 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' and 'Mann Ki Baat' talks with citizens and students. He inspired the students to become AatmaNirbharor self-

With a focus on socio-emotional concerns during interaction with students, the Hon'ble Prime Minister emphasised taking responsibility for oneself and overcoming difficult situations through individual efforts. In one such interaction, he motivated the young listeners, "We have to face temporary setbacks in life but always remember— the capacity to overcome nem resides within us. Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020), emphasises the uniqueness of each student and the need to nurture their individual strengths and abilities towards making them selfreliant. With a holistic approach to education, the policy also focuses on the socioemotional aspects along with academics. The policy further outlines the aim of education as not only 'cognitive development, but also building character and creating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st-century skills'. It lays emphasis on building the skills of the students in the areas of social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions including personal competencies. This will prepare students to deal with all life situations. In attempts towards supporting students to become self-directed and resilient in their approach, under the 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' the Ministry of Education launched 'Manodarpan' on 21st July 2020 (https://manodarpan.education.gov.in). The prime objective of the initiative is to provide psychosocial support to students,



@NCERTOFFICIAL/streams). As students progress from the foundational to secondary stages of schooling, they need a secure, warm, caring, and nurturing environment in order to develop and strengthen their competencies and skills. Hence, the role of parents and teachers is crucial in making students 'AatmaNirbhar' so that they can deal with various challenges in

Channel(https://www.youtube.com/

However, external support, although crucial, is not sufficient to overcome difficult life situations. It is also important to empower students so that they are able to take charge of their own learning, set goals, make decisions and take responsibility for their own educational journey. Resourcefulness is crucial for students to utilise a variety of educational materials and platforms for independent learning. Self-reliance encourages students to be innovative in their approach to learning It promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to adapt to new challenges.

Our teachers need to create opportunities for students to practise self-discipline, as it supports students in making conscious choices that are aligned with their set goals. Students also need to realise that self-discipline encompasses perseverance, persistence, focus, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to manage time optimally. It helps in achieving goals despite challenges or distractions. But how does one build self-discipline? Although it seems like a daunting task, small steps in the right direction such as setting clear goals, identifying and prioritising tasks, distancing one from distractions, following a routine of proper sleep, nutrition and exercise and maintaining an organised learning space, can lead us to our final goal. Practicing self-discipline helps in gaining confidence in one's abilities and is a source of reinforcement to achieve the goals.

Apart self-discipline, what else do **children need to practise?:** It is the understanding of one's own strengths, areas of development, emotions, and thoughts. Taking care of oneself, enhancing skills, adopting a growth mindset, and maintaining social relationships and family interactions are some of the ways of building resilience. All children need to understand that resilience helps in adapting to challenging situations in life by showing behavioural and emotional flexibility. Especially in the context of examinations where students come across many challenges, resilience acts as a critical attribute that impacts their ability to overcome academic struggles and setbacks. It helps them maintain a positive

Schools are spaces where students spend the majority of their formative years and provide opportunities to develop a wide range of skills. In addition to academics, schooling also involves appropriate nurturing of socio-affective development, i.e., self-reliance, self-discipline, taking initiative, independence of thought, understanding relationships with people and the environment, responsible action, etc. To foster academic learning and socio-emotional development, schools need to understand their students and ensure that all of them are treated fairly, valued, and exposed to a wide range of personal and social learning experiences. Teachers can also help in building peer support amongst students by facilitating open communication and cultivating empathy. Positive relationships with peers contribute to a student's sense of belonging and emotional well-being. While school plays an important role, a supportive and nurturing family environment is also crucial for building self-reliance and resilience among students. Examinations are often seen as a major cause of concern among students at all stages of education across the country, sometimes evok-

related to the fear of evaluation and results. Various measures have been taken by the government towards tackling this pertinent concern. In Pariksha Pe Charcha, the Hon'ble Prime Minister has often discussed creating a stress-free environment for youngsters facing the exam years. The much-acclaimed book Exam Warriors (2018) tackles examinations in terms of student mental health in our country's context. In continuing the efforts towards reducing the fear of evaluation among students, the NEP, 2020 has introduced a holistic perspective in assessment with the Holistic Progress Card, a 360degree, multidimensional report that reflects in great detail the progress as well as the uniqueness of each learner in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, including aspects of self-

What is the reason behind this stress?: While it is difficult to identify any one reason behind the stress experienced by students, it is important to recognise that examinations bring with them a sense of being evaluated. However, one must try to not take them as the criteria that define our capabilities. Evaluations and assessments are integral comp nents of life that provide valuable opportunities for growth, self-reflection, and improvements in various dimensions of life.

We often focus on external criteria of assessment and evaluation, using them as our benchmark for progress. Self-reflection, often overlooked in this context, helps us identify our personal progress and hindrances more effectively. Going beyond the traditional academic evaluations, through thoughtful introspection, one can discover valuable insights about self. The more one knows about oneself, the lesser dependence one has on the external criteria of evaluation. By recognising the reciprocal relationship between selfreflection and personal growth, we not only enhance our cognitive capacities but also cultivate emotional intelligence.

views are personal)



WHILE SCHOOL PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE, A SUPPORTIVE AND NURTURING **FAMILY ENVIRONMENT IS** ALSO CRUCIAL FOR BUILDING **SELF-RELIANCE** AND RESILIENCE **AMONG** STUDENTS

(The writer is Director NCERT;

Effective airshed management can curb pollution

For reaping benefits from airshed management, the Government must fast-track the compilation of emission source data at all levels supported by adequate funding

ntensive multi-pronged strategies to fight pollution have come to a nought as is evident by worsening environmental conditions and climate change. Currently, 60 per cent of Indian cities have air that is over seven times more polluted than the permissible limits and is routinely ranked among the world's worst when it comes to air pollution. According to the 2023 World Air Quality Report by IQAir, 39 out of 50 of the world's most polluted cities are present in India, with high 2.5 particulate matter (PM) levels. Worse still, According to the Air Quality Life Index Indians, on average, lose 5.3 years of their life, because of air pollution. Given these conditions, a broad initiative that can



geographical areas is the urgent need of the hour. Airshed management is one such concept that has the potential to resolve the pollution crisis on a large scale by addressing the issue on a regional rather than local basis. Airshed is defined as a common geographic area where pollutants get trapped, creating similar air quality for all. A report by the University of Surrey in association with address air pollution in large the Delhi Pollution Control

Committee (DPCC), CSIR-NEERI underlined the importance of Airshed management in tackling pollution.

Air pollution by nature is never local but transcends borders and regions. The annual problem of air pollution faced by Delhi NCR on account of crop burning by neighbouring states of Punjab & Haryana is an apt example. The University of Surrey report pointed out that specially appointed Airshed councils can help local, regional and central agencies coordinate efforts in fighting air pollution. In order to demarcate Airsheds, India must assimilate emission quantification with the help of the network of 438 continuous air quality monitoring systems aided by the 883 manual stations set up by the

Central Pollution Control Board across various cities. This will help establish an accurate multi-pollutant inventory and enable the division of cities into Airsheds of various sizes. This must be followed by analysing meteorological data to evaluate variations and similarities at the local and regional levels and finally air quality modelling must be done to understand the pollution dispersion. Once delineated in this manner, based on Airshed size, the city administrators can manage the Airshed locally and if the size is bigger interstate collaboration can be resorted to manage the Airshed effectively. Airshed management has paid rich dividends across the world. For instance, Airshed management practices in



Mexico and Los Angeles combine scientific evidence with innovative governance in addition to effective coordination between various agencies to reduce vehicular and other emissions. The Airshed management in California is yet another example wherein the partnership between California Air Resources Board and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) helps monitor and reduce air pollution across the districts in the

India can emulate these examples and manage Airshed effectively in order to control pollution levels in areas where the AQI is critical such as the non-attainment cities (NACs). Cities are declared NAC if over a 5-year period, they consistently do not meet the national ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM 10 (Particulate matter that is10 microns or less in diameter) or N02 (Nitrogen Dioxide). India currently has 131 NACs.To tackle the air pollution in NAC, the government launched the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) in 2019 for nonattainment cities. The NCAP aimed to reduce

PM levels by 20-30 per cent by 2024, compared to 2017 levels, but so far progress under the

programme has been underwhelming – only 39 out of the 131 cities have done apportionment studies to track down sources of pollution and less than 50 per cent of the total funds allocated under the NCAP (Rs 652.61 crores) have been utilised. With the pollution source data collection on a slow track, the design of the airshed too is lagging behind. India must bolster collective motivation and incentives to promote airshed air quality management. Currently, states are designing their own action plans for air pollution management that are essentially citylevel based and not at rural, district and regional levels. India is mostly collecting urban emissions data which is inadequate if effective Airshed management is to be imple-

mented because it requires regional data. The bigger challenge however is ensuring collaboration and coordination between state governments when an Airshed constitutes multiple states. To ensure that India benefits from Airshed management, the government must fast-track the compilation of emission source data at all levels. Besides this, India must also establish effective Airshed Committees that can help in interstate and interdepartmental coordination. These committees would be the first port of call to resolve any issue of jurisdiction, regulatory overlap or any other form of dispute relating to planning or regulation relating to air quality in the region.

(The author is a policy analyst. The views are personal)

World hails India on 75th Republic Day

PTI ■ LONDON/CANBERRA

residents, Prime Ministers Pand Foreign Ministers of several countries on Friday several countries on Friday wished India on its 75th Republic Day and expressed their hope for progress in bilateral relations and close people to-people ties.

These leaders included those from the immediate neighbourhood in South Asia and some from far-flung nations such as Australia. Almost all of them posted their greetings on social media handles and some of them wrote letters or messages to Indian leaders.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese extended his warm wishes to the people of India on the same day as his country celebrates its national day and said, "We have an opportunity to celebrate the depth of our friendship. Australia and India have never been

In a message to President Droupadi Murmu, the British King Charles III said he cherish-es the "close bond" shared between the two countries. "I am confident that our ties will continue to flourish in this very

special seventy-fifth anniversary

year of the Commonwealth - a fitting reminder of the enduring values and aspirations that unite us," he wrote.

Congratulating India on a successful G20 presidency last year, King Charles said, "I look forward to our countries continuing to work together to tackle the world's most pressing global challenges."

Russian President Vladimir Putin commended the privileged strategic partnership with India and he congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Republic Day in a telegram We value the privileged strate-

gic partnership between our countries. I am confident that, through joint efforts, we will continue to systematically boost the constructive cooperation between Russia and India across the board," the Russian leader said in his message published on the Kremlin website.

'This fully meets the interests of our friendly peoples as it in line with strengthening security and stability both regionally and globally," he added. Nepal Prime

Minister Pushapakamal Dahal Prachanda posted on his X handle, "On the occasion of



India as he said, "Our nations

bond is strong, and we contin-

ue to strive for shared growth

and enduring friendship

M U M Ali Sabry, the Minister

of Foreign Affairs of Sri Lanka

echoed the same greetings to Jaishankar and the people of

India. His Ministry's official X handle too posted: "Best wish-

es and sincere greetings from the people and the Government

of #SriLanka to the people and

the Government of the Republic

of #India on the occasion of the

between India and Israel."

75th Republic Day of India, I extend my best wishes to PM Shri @narendramodi ji, the government and friendly people of India for good health,

peace and prosperity. I am confident that the ties of friendship between our countries will continue to grow further," Prachanda said

Israel Katz, Minister of Foreign Affairs and member of the political-security cabinet, Likud in Israel, extended his respect to his Indian counterpart Jaishankar, and the people of 75th Republic Day of India | 26 January 2024! 1

Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong have written to India's leaders, congratulating them on the country's 75th Republic Day, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said on Friday.

In a letter addressed to President Droupadi Murmu, President Tharman recalled his last visits to India as Senior Minister in 2022 and 2023. "Singapore and India share a long and warm

partnership, underpinned by close people-to-people ties and strong cooperation in a multitude of fields," he wrote.

Prime Minister Lee, in his congratulatory letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said the friendship between the two nations was underpinned by "wide-ranging cooperation in trade, finance, defence, and close people-to-people ties." Moosa Zameer, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Maldives congratulated his counterpart Dr S Jaishankar and the friend-ly people of India with "warmest greetings and sincere good wishes" and said, in a post on X, "I am confident that the close bonds of friendship and coop-eration between Maldives and India will continue to flourish in the years ahead. Multiple Embassies and High

Commissions in New Delhi, such as that of Sri Lanka, extended their warm greetings to the Government and people of India on the 75th Republic

French President Emmanuel Macron, who was the chief guest at the Republic Day Parade at New Delhi thanked India after the celebrated event: "A great honour for France."

"every tool in our toolbox" to

prevent other states from doing

so. It was the first time a new

execution method has been

used in the US since 1982,

when lethal injections were

introduced and later became

"According to leading experts,

this method is a particularly

cruel and unusual punish-

ment," the diplomatic service of

the EU said in a statement. It

also expressed concern that the

number of executions in the US

increased last year.

the most common method.



Hundreds turn out to greet Mahrang Baloch

Hundreds of people turned out to greet Dr Mahrang Baloch, the woman who led a month-long sit-in protest in Islamabad to highlight the issue of police torture and missing persons in Pakistan's troubled Balochistan province, as she returned to Quetta along with the participants of the protest march.

Maharang and the participants of the protest march, which started from Balochistan's Turbat, were on Thursday welcomed by hundreds of people, including women, children and students at the Sariab area near Balochistan University as they returned to Balochistan.

The protest march attended by hundreds of Baloch people belonging to varsities, human rights organisations, political parties and other walks of life had started under the umbrella of the Baloch Yakjehti Council (BYC) and garnered a lot of attention when it reached Islamabad from Turbat where it had originated in December.

The protest started after an alleged extrajudicial killing of Balaach Mola Bakhsh for which the Balochistan Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) was blamed by the protesters who had to face tear gassing, baton charges and shelling in Islamabad.

The protest later turned into a massive protest to end the enforced disappearances of students, political workers, and human rights defenders in Balochistan.

"In Islamabad, the policemen pulled the veil (chadar) from the heads of our women and also tortured them," Mahrang Baloch told the people gathered to welcome her and added those who were in the protest march still

didn't give up.
She also said that the protesters were not expecting any justice from the government in Islamabad but marched there to highlight the issues faced by the Baloch people.

"It was our way to tell everyone not to forget our missing brothers and those who suffer torture in state prisons," Mahrang said. Mahrang also made it clear that they had not ended the protest after any negotiations or deal with the government but because of pressure from the police and state institutions.

"If Baloch don't wake up today, their condition will only worsen," she told the crowd. Amnesty International had condemned the harassment faced by Baloch protesters in Islamabad

Additionally, the President of the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M), Sardar Akhtar Mengal, has said that he is willing to withdraw from all seats in the upcoming general elections if all Baloch missing persons are released. He emphasised that he is not

ready to compromise the interests of Balo-chistan merely for the sake of parliamentary seats. During a public gathering in Turbat and Gwadar as part of his party's election campaign, Mengal also highlighted the issue of missing persons in Balochi.

Resource-rich Balochistan, Pakistan's largest but least populated province, has been wrecked by a long-running separatist insurgency which has seen brutal repression by Pakistani security forces and enforced disappearances.

In November last year, interim Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar admitted that according to a UN sub-committee estimate, around 50 people disappeared in Balochistan.



Congo rebel group kills over 19

A t least 19 people were killed when rebels attacked a town in Congo's North Kivu province, the army said late on Thursday, the latest violence in the country's conflict-battered

The rebels shelled the town of Mweso, where they "indiscriminately dropped mortar bombs," which also injured 27 other civilians, army spokesman Lt. Col. Guillaume N'djike Kaïko said in a statement read on state television.

The town's streets were empty Thursday evening, after most of Mweso General Hospital, Kaïko added.

The army blamed the attack on the M23 rebel group, which rose to prominence 10 years ago when its fighters seized Goma, eastern Congo's largest city on the border with Rwanda. Its name refers to a March 23, 2009, peace deal, which it accuses the government of not implementing. There was no response from

the group to the allegation.

UN experts warned last year that attacks by M23 fighters have become more frequent, longer and stronger, and that territory under the group's control "significantly increased," causing massive displace-ment of civilians and indis-criminate shelling. M23 combatants also "deliberately killed civilians" and attacked UN

peacekeeping troops. Fighting in eastern Congo has been simmering for decades as more than 120 groups fight for power, land and valuable mineral resources, while others try to defend their communi-

The security crisis was a key issue in Congo's recent presidential election, in which Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi was reelected with a promise to end the violence. Tshisekedi accuses Rwanda of destabilizing Congo by backing the M23 rebels. UN experts have linked the rebels to Rwandan forces, though Rwanda denies supporting

Rights bodies concerned at execution of man using nitrogen

AP BRUSSELS

The European Union and the UN Human Rights Office expressed regret Friday over the first execution of a man with nitrogen gas in the US state of

The 27-nation European Union and the Geneva-based UN rights office say the death penalty violates the right to life

and does not deter crime.

Kenneth Eugene Smith was put to death in Alabama on Thursday with pure nitrogen gas, a first-of-its-kind execution that placed the United States at the forefront of the debate over capital punishment. Smith appeared to shake and convulse before being pronounced dead at an Alabama

prison after breathing the gas

through a face mask to cause

oxygen deprivation.



"He was writhing and clearly suffering," Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN Human Rights Office, said at a regular UN briefing in Geneva. "Rather than looking for novel, untested methods to execute people, let's just bring an end to

the death penalty. This is an anachronism that doesn't belong in the 21st century." She said the UN human rights chief. Volker Türk, had written

to authorities in Alabama about

the issue, and said his office will

continue to speak out and use

Twenty-four people were exe-

cuted in five states despite a steady, overall decline of the use of capital punishment in the US since 2020," it said. "We call for states that maintain the death penalty to implement a moratorium and move towards abolition, in line with the world-

NATO chief upbeat Sweden to join by March

AP RUSSELS

NATO Secretary-General Jens on Friday that Sweden could be ready to join the military organization by March, after receiving positive signals this week from holdouts Hungary and

Sweden, along with its neighbour Finland, set aside decades of military non-alignment after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 to seek protection under NATO's collective defense umbrella. Finland has since joined, and it along with the other 30 allies must all agree for Sweden to join.



But Turkey and Hungary have held up proceedings. "Sweden's entry into NATO will make

the whole alliance stronger," Stoltenberg

told reporters as he provided details about talks this week with Hungarian Budapest accused Swedish politicians of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and telling "blatant lies" about the state of

The message I have received from Budapest is that the parliament will reconvene at the end of February, so we have to wait for that. But I'm absolutely confident, and I count on Hungary," Śtoltenberg said.

Initially, Hungary gave no clear reason for the delays, and Orbán had insisted that his government wouldn't be the last to endorse Sweden. But the tone toward Stockholm hardened, as the European Commission refused to allow Hungary access to EU funds over democratic

Trump case: lawyers have final

Orban, who has broken ranks with NATO allies by adopting a Kremlinfriendly stance toward Russia's invasion of Ukraine, said Tuesday that he had invited Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to Budapest to discuss "future cooperation in the field of security and defense as allies and part-

Unless an emergency session of parliament is called to debate Sweden's bid, the assembly is due to sit on February



admitted in hospital

PTI ■ LONDON

 $B^{
m ritain's}$ King Charles III was on Friday admitted to a private hospital here for treatment for an enlarged prostate, Buckingham announced.

The procedure will be carried out at the London Clinic private hospital, where Catherine, the Princess of Wales, had surgery last week.

The 75-year-old King visited the Princess of Wales in the hospital this morning, ahead of his own scheduled treatment. It is not yet known how long

King Charles will remain in hospital. King Charles III had made his health problem public as a way of sending a message to

other men to get their prostates checked. A statement from Buckingham Palace said the King was "delighted to learn that his diagnosis is having a positive

impact on public health aware-He also thanked those who had

"sent their good wishes," the BBC reported.

The plan for King Charles to have a "corrective procedure" for his enlarged prostate was revealed by the palace last

A benign prostate problem, which is non-cancerous, is common in men over 50 and is not usually a serious condition, according to the UK's National Health Service.

Around one in three men over the age of 50 will have some symptoms of an enlarged prostate, which is a gland that sits just below the bladder. Charles became King following

his mother Queen Elizabeth's death on September 8, 2022. His coronation took place on May 6, 2023.

Former WWE employee files sex abuse lawsuit

former WWE employee filed a A federal lawsuit accusing executive Vince McMahon and another former executive of serious sexual misconduct, including offering her to a star wrestler for sex.

The graphic 67-page suit on Thursday from Janel Grant, who worked in the company's legal and talent departments, also includes allegations that McMahon, now 78, forced her into a sexual relationship in order for her to get and keep a job and passed around pornographic pictures and videos of her to other men, including other WWE employees.

McMahon stepped down as WWE's CEO in 2022 amid an investigation into allegations that match those in the lawsuit, which was filed in US District Court in Connecticut, where WWE is based. Grant also names as defendants in the lawsuit the WWE and John Laurinaitis, the company's former head of talent relations and general manager

The AP typically does not name accusers in sexual assault cases, but Grant's representatives said she wished to go public.

"Ms Grant hopes that her lawsuit will prevent other women from being victimised," her attorney, Ann Čallis, said in a statement. "The organisation is well aware of Mr. McMahon's history of depraved behaviour, and it's time that they take responsibility for the misconduct of its leadership."
WWE's parent company, TKO



Group, issued a statement saying it is taking the allegations seriously.

"Mr McMahon does not control TKO nor does he oversee the day-to-day operations of WWE," TKO Group said in a statement. "While this matter pre-dates our TKO executive team's tenure at the company, we take Ms Grant's horrific allegations very seriously and are addressing this matter internally.

Email and social media messages seeking comment were also left for McMahon and Laurinaitis.

According to the lawsuit, McMahon lived in the same building as Grant and in 2019 offered to get her a job at WWE after her parents died.

She alleges that he eventually made it clear that one of the requirements of the job was a physical relationship with him and later with Laurinaitis and others. Over the next few years, McMahon lavished her with gifts including a luxury car, the suit says.

one of his star wrestlers - a person not named in the lawsuit - sex with Grant as a perk in 2021 "WWE benefited financially from the

commercial sex act venture orchestrated by McMahon, including by having wrestling talent, such as WWE Superstar, sign new contracts with WWE after McMahon presented Plaintiff as a sexual commodity for their use," the lawsuit states. Grant is seeking unspecified monetary damages and to have the court void a USD 3 million nondisclosure agreement, of which she alleges she received only USD 1 million.

McMahon was the leader and most recognizable face at WWE for decades. When he purchased what was then the World Wrestling Federation from his father in 1982 wrestling matches took place at small venues and appeared on local cable

say in Carroll defamation trial AP NEW YORK Closing arguments are to begin on Friday in the defamation case against Donald Trump a day after the former president left a New York courtroom fuming that he hadn't

been given an opportunity to refute E. Jean Carroll's sexual abuse accusations. Lawyers will get to sum up their cases for nine jurors who will start

deliberating later in the day whether Carroll, a former advice columnist, is entitled to more than the USD 5 million she was awarded in a sepa rate trial last year. The final remarks from the lawyers

come a day after Trump managed to sneak past a federal judge's rules severely limiting what he could say during his turn on the witness stand, which wound up lasting just 3 minutes. "She said something that I consid-

ered to be a false accusation," Trump said, later adding: "I just wanted to defend myself, my family and, frankly, the presidency." The jury was told by Judge Lewis A. Kaplan to disregard both remarks. A different jury last May conclud-

ed that Trump sexually abused Carroll in the spring of 1996 in the changing room of a luxury Manhattan department store. It also found that he defamed her in 2022 by claiming she made up the allegation to sell a memoir.

Trump, the Republican frontrunner in this year's presidential election,

is there for a limited purpose. Kaplan will instruct jurors on the law

that they must accept the verdict reached last year and only determine whether additional damages are owed for statements Trump made in June 2019 while he was president. The claims had been delayed for

Trump's remarks.

has long regretted his decision not to testify at that trial, blaming his lawyers for bad advice. The jury in this new trial has been told that it

before they deliberate, telling them years by court appeals.

Carroll's lawyers seek over USD 10 million in compensatory and punitive damages. Trump attorney Alina Habba has argued against damages, saying Carroll's association with Trump had given her the fame she craved and that death threats she received cannot be blamed on

CarroÎl, 80, testified at last year's trial that she had a chance encounter with Trump at a Bergdorf Goodman store that was flirtatious and light-

hearted until Trump cornered her in a changing room. Her claim that Trump raped her was rejected by last year's jury, though it agreed she was sexually abused. Last week, Carroll testified that her career was shattered by Trump's

last five years, most recently on the campaign trail for president. She said she bought bullets for a gun she inherited from her father and installed an electronic fence around her home. On Thursday, Trump testified that he stood "100 per cent" behind comments he made in an October 2002

deposition in which he denied

statements about her claims over the

Carroll's accusations, calling her "sick" and a "whack job". Kaplan intends to instruct jurors Friday that the jury last year concluded that Trump had digitally penetrated Carroll in the department store, but the same jury did not find that he had raped her, according to how rape is defined under New York

Trump attorney Michael Madaio argued at a conference Thursday between lawyers and the judge that Kaplan should not tell jurors specifically what sexual abuse Carroll had alleged because it was "completely unnecessary and inflammatory". The judge rejected the argument.

state law.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll

King Charles

Gaza death toll surpasses 26,000

AP JERUSALEM

he International Court of Justice was set to read out its decision on Friday on whether to order Israel to halt its offensive in Gaza as the Health Ministry announced that deaths there had surpassed 26,000 since the Israel-Hamas war began.

South Africa accused Israel of genocide and asked the court in The Hague, Netherlands, for interim orders, including that Israel halt its offensive in Gaza. Israel swiftly rejected the filing and asked the court to throw out

The Health Ministry in Gaza said Friday that 26,083 people have been killed and more than 64,400 wounded in the enclave since the Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel, when militants from Gaza killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages.

Gaza's Health Ministry said Thursday that Israeli fire struck a crowd of people waiting for humanitarian aid at a roundabout in Gaza City on Thursday, killing at least 20 and wounding 150. The Israeli military says it was looking into the reports. **CURRENTLY:**

■ Israel vows to fight Hamas all the way to Gaza's southern border. That's fuelling tension with

■ How genocide officially became a crime, and why South Africa is accusing Israel of committing it.

Georgia lawmakers, in support of Israel, pass a bill that would define antisemitism in ■ The US and the UK sanction

four Yemeni Houthi leaders over Red Sea shipping attacks. Here's the latest: MORE THAN 26,000 PEO-

HAMAS WAR STARTED, HEALTH MINISTRY SAYS

RAFAH: The number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the start of the Israel-Hamas war has surpassed 26,000, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Friday.

The ministry said the total number of dead is 26,083, with 64,487 Palestinians wounded since the start of the war on October 7. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll, but has said about twothirds of those killed were women and children.

In the past 24 hours, 183 people were killed and 377 others were injured, ministry spokesperson Ashraf al-Qidra said in a statement.

Israel's blistering ground and air offensive has decimated vast swaths of Gaza during the near-



lv 4-month-old war. The conflict broke out on October 7 when Hamas militants stormed southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted some 250.

SOUTH AFRICA ISSUES A STATEMENT AHEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT'S INTERIM RUL-ING EXPECTED FRIDAY

CAPE TOWN: South Africa's foreign ministry said in a state-ment that it was seeking an interim ruling that "Israel immediately cease its military operations in Gaza, take reasonable measures to prevent the genocide of Palestinians, ensure that the displaced return to their homes and have access to humanitarian assistance, including adequate food, water, fuel, medical and hygiene supplies, shelter and clothing."

The statement late Thursday also said Israel should "take necessary steps to punish those involved in the genocide and preserve the evidence of genocide." Israel has denied the allegations of genocide. South Africa will be represent-

South Africa will be represented at the ruling at The Hague by Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor, who spoke with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken by phone Thursday, according to the State Department. State Department prokesperson Matthew Miller spokesperson Matthew Miller said Blinken spoke about the need to protect civilians in the war in Gaza and ensure there was humanitarian assistance to Palestinian civilians, while working toward lasting regional peace that "ensures Israel's security and advances the establishment of an independent Palestinian state."

The secretary reaffirmed support for Israel's right to ensure the terrorist attacks of Oct.

UN court ruling on Israel genocide allegation

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

The United Nations' top court is set to rule Friday on a call for Israel to halt its military offensive in Gaza, when it issues a preliminary decision in a case accusing Israel of committing genocide in the tiny coastal enclave.

Joan E. Donoghue, president of the International Court of Justice, will read out the highly anticipated decision made by a panel of 17 judges in a case that goes to the core of one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

Friday's ruling, however, is only an interim one; it could take years for the full case brought by South Africa to be considered. Israel rejects the accusation and has asked the court to throw the charges out. While the case winds its way through

the court, South Africa has asked the judges "as a matter of extreme urgency" to impose so-called provisional measures to protect Palestinians in Gaza. Top of the South African list is a request for the court to order Israel to "immediately suspend its military operations in and against Gaza." It is also asking for Israel to take "reasonable measures" to prevent genocide and allow access for desperately needed aid.

In a statement Thursday, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said he hoped the decision would "include immediate action to stop the aggression and genocide against our people in the Gaza Strip ... And a rapid flow of relief aid to save the hungry, wounded and sick from the threat of slow death that threatens them."

Israeli government spokesperson Eylon Levy said Thursday that Israel expects the court to toss out the "spurious and specious charges."

Israel often boycotts international tri- of the territory and driven nearly 85 per



bunals and UN investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But this time, it took the rare step of sending a highlevel legal team - a sign of how seriousy it regards the case and likely the fear that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing.

An Israeli official said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu huddled with top legal, diplomatic and security officials on Thursday in anticipation of the ruling. He said Israel is confident in its case but discussed "all scenarios." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was discussing confidential meetings.

Israel launched its massive air and ground assault on Gaza after Hamas militants stormed through Israeli communities on October 7 killing some 1,200 people, mainly civilians, and abducting another 250.

The offensive has decimated vast swaths

cent of its 2.3 million people from their

More than 26,000 Palestinians have been killed, the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run enclave said on Friday. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its death toll, but has said about two-thirds of those killed were women and chil-

The Israeli military claims at least 9,000 of those killed in the nearly fourmonth conflict are Hamas militants. UN officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease, with at least one-quarter of the population facing starvation.

Marieke de Hoon, an associate professor of international law at the University of Amsterdam, said she thinks the court is unlikely to throw the case out Friday since the legal bar South Africa has to clear at this early stage is lower than the one that would be applied for ruling on the merits of the accusation

"The standard ... Is not, has there been genocide? But a lower standard," she said. "Is it plausible that there could have been a risk of genocide that would invoke Israel's responsibility to prevent

But De Hoon also does not expect the world court to order an end to Israel's

"I think that they will shy away from actually calling for a full cease-fire, because I think they will find that beyond their abilities right now," she said in a telephone interview.

Provisional measures by the world court are legally binding, but it is not clear if Israel would comply with any

Top Hamas official Osama Hamdan, meanwhile, said his group would abide by a cease-fire if ordered and would be ready to release the hostages it is holding if Israel releases Palestinian prison-

How the US, Israel's top ally, responds to any order will be key, since it wields veto power at the UN Security Council and thus could block measures there aimed at forcing Israel's compliance. The US has said Israel has the right to defend itself, but also spoken about the need for the country to protect civilians

in Gaza and allow more aid in.

The genocide case strikes at the nation al identity of Israel, which was founded as a Jewish state after the Nazi slaughter of 6 million Jews during World War II. South Africa's own identity is key to it bringing the case. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Black people to "homelands" before ending in 1994.



2023 marked by milestones in US-India ties: Blinken

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Greeting the people of India on the occasion of the country's 75th Republic Day, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that the US was looking forward to further deepening the vibrant people-to-people ties and advancing the ambitious agenda for cooperation between the two nations.

The top American diplomat noted that 2023 was marked by important milestones in the comprehensive global and strategic partnership between the two nations.

Blinken said the Constitution of India continues to provide an enduring framework for the world's largest democracy and a foundation for its global leadership. "As President (Joe) Biden has

said, our relationship with India is one of the most consequential in the world. The past vear has been marked by important milestones in our comprehensive global and strategic partnership, including our cooperation throughout India's successful G20 Presi-dency and at the G20 Leaders' Summit," Blinken said on Thursday in his Republic Day message to India.

"In the year ahead, we look forward to further deepening the vibrant people-to-people ties between our countries and advancing our ambitious agenda for cooperation on our most vital priorities. I warmly extend my best wishes to the Indian people as they celebrate this special occasion," he said. Earlier in the day, State Department's deputy spokesperson Vedant Patel said India is a key strategic partner of the United States and one that it looks forward to expanding their collaboration in several key areas.

This was quite indicative during Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi's state visit here to the United States this past summer. So this is an area we'll continue to work on in close coordination with our Indian partners," Patel said in response to question at a State Department briefing.

China confirms conviction of a British businessperson on espionage charges

Beijing confirmed on Friday that a longtime British businesspers of in China had been sentenced to five years in prison in 2022 on an espionage

Ian J. Stones was convicted of being bought off to provide intelligence to "external forces," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said when asked about the case at a daily briefing. He did not provide any specific details about the

Both the United Kingdom and United States governments have warned about the risk of detention under China's national security laws. A Japanese pharmaceutical

company employee was detained last year on suspicion of spying. A new version of the law that took effect July 1, 2023, has heightened concerns about operating in China.

Stones' case was not publicly known until reported Thursday by The Wall Street Journal. The American business newspaper said that Stones is about 70 years old and has worked in China for about 40 years. His employers included General Motors and Pfizer before he set up up a consulting firm, Navisino Partners, about 15 years ago, the Journal said.

Foreign business organisations and governments called for greater clarity last year on what foreign firms are allowed to do under what is now known as the anti-espionage law. Of particular concern are tighter restrictions on the transfer of data to other parties, and what data is considered related to national security under the

Raids on the offices of three



foreign companies, two consultancies and one due diligence firm, have further unnerved the business community.

The British government warns about the risk of arbitrary detention in China and the broad scope of the national security law. "You may be detained without having intended to break the law," it says in its foreign travel advice

for the country.
The US travel advisory says that Chinese authorities "appear to have broad discretion to deem a wide range of documents, data, statistics, or materials as state secrets and to detain and prosecute foreign nationals for alleged espionage." It says that foreigners who have been detained for alleged national security law violations include businesspeople, former government officials, academics, journalists and relatives of Chinese involved in legal disputes.

Stones appealed his conviction, but a court upheld the original ruling in September, Wang

He said that the case was handled "in accordance with the law, ensuring the legitimate rights and interests of both Chinese and foreign parties T^{he} UN trade body sounded an alarm on Thursday

AP UNITED NATIONS

that global trade is being dis-rupted by attacks in the Red Sea, the war in Ukraine, and low water levels in the Panama

Jan Hoffmann, a trade expert at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development known as UNC-TAD, warned that shipping costs have already surged and energy and food costs are being affected, raising inflation risks. Since attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea began in November, he said, major players in the shipoing industry have temporarily halted using Egypt's Suez Canal, a critical waterway connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea and a vital route for energy and cargo between Asia and Europe. The Suez Canal handled 12 per cent to 15 per cent of global trade in 2023, but UNCTAD estimates that the trade volume going through the waterway dropped by 42 per cent over the last two months, Hoffmann

Since November, the Iranianbacked Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading to the Suez Canal. The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's exiled government since 2015, support the Palestinians and have vowed to keep attacking until the Israel-Hamas war

The United States and Britain have responded with strikes against Houthi targets, but the rebels have kept up their

Hoffmann, who heads the trade logistics branch at



Geneva-based UNCTAD, told a video press conference with UN reporters that the Houthi attacks are taking place at a time when other major trade routes are under strain.

The nearly two-year war since Russia's February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine and other geopolitical tensions have

reshaped oil and grain trade routes i ncluding through the Black Sea, he said.

Compounding difficulties for shipping companies, Hoffmann said, severe drought has dropped water levels in the Panama Canal to their lowest point in decades, severely reducing the number and size

of vessels that can transit through it.

Total transits through the Panama Canal in December were 36 per cent lower than a year ago, and 62 per cent lower than two years ago, Hoffmann

Ships carry around 80 per cent of the goods in world trade, and the percentage is even higher for developing countries, he

But the Red Sea crisis is causing significant disruptions in the shipment of grains and other key commodities from Europe, Russia and Ukraine, leading to increased costs for consumers and posing serious risks to global food security, Hoffmann said.

This is specially true in regions like East Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia, which heavily rely on wheat imports from Europe and the

Hoffmann said early data from 2024 show that over 300 container vessels, more than 20 per cent of global container capacity, were diverting or planning alternatives to using the Suez Canal. Many are opting to go around the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, a longer and

more costly trip.
Hoffmann said ships transporting liquified natural gas have stopped transiting the Suez Canal altogether because of fears of an attack.

As for costs, he said, average container shipping spot rates from Shanghai have gone up by 122 per cent since early December, while rates from Shanghai to Europe went up by 256 per cent and rates to the US west coast by 162 per cent.

"Here you see the global impact of the crisis, as ships are seeking alternative routes, avoiding the Suez and the Panama

Canal," Hoffmann said

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea said on Friday it was hosting a visit by a Chinese government delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, as it continues its efforts to strengthen ties with Beijing and Moscow in the face of deepening confrontations with Washington.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Sun's delegation arrived in the capital, Pyongyang, on Thursday after crossing the land border between the countries. The report didn't provide further details about the

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been trying to boost the visibility of its partnership with China and Russia as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and strengthen his regional footing by joining a united front against the United States. Kim travelled to Russia's Far East in

September for a rare summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin

and some experts say he is also like-

ly seeking a meeting with Chinese

Chinese foreign minister visits North Korea



President Xi Jinping.

While Kim has prioritized his ties with Russia, which has raised concerns about an arms cooperation that would help fuel Putin's war on Ukraine, the North Korean leader has also invited senior Chinese officials to major state events in recent months while vowing

to strengthen bilateral relations. A Chinese delegation led by Vice Premier Liu Guozhong attended the celebrations for North Korea's 75th founding anniversary last September,

shortly before Kim's trip to Russia.

In July, Kim invited Chinese ruling

party official Li Hongzhong and

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to a major military parade in Pyongyang, where he rolled out his most powerful, potentially nuclearcapable missiles targeting the United States, South Korea and Japan. Sun met with North Korean Vice

Foreign Minster Pak Myong Ho last month in Beijing where they discussed strengthening bilateral ties and coordinating over unspecified "issues of common interest".

Pak then also met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as they pledged to expand friendly exchanges and strengthening "strategic cooperation" in 2024, as the countries mark their 75th anniversary of establishing bilat-

Sun's visit to North Korea comes as US national security adviser Jake Sullivan was planning talks with Wang in Bangkok this week in the latest highlevel talks between Washington and Beijing amid tensions over trade, technology and China's assertive foreign policy in the region. As North Korea's major ally and eco-

nomic lifeline, China is a crucial partner for Kim's efforts to revive an economy crippled by decades of mismanagement and US-led sanctions over his nuclear weapons and missile program, which he has aggressively expanded in recent years despite limited resources.

As permanent members of the UN Security Council, both China and Russia have been thwarting US-led efforts to increase sanctions on the North over its intensified weapons testing activity in recent months, underscoring a divide deepened over Russia's war on Ukraine. Washington and Seoul have been

urging Beijing to use its economic leverage on North Korea to help persuade Kim's government to return to nuclear disarmament negotiations, which have stalled since 2019.

Experts say trade activities between North Korea and China are gradually expanding since North Korea eased its pandemic restrictions and reopened the border last year.

Govt halves Budget support to oil firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has halved the amount of equity infusion in state-owned fuel retailers to Rs 15,000 crore for supporting their investments in energy transition projects, the finance ministry has said.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on February 1 last year while presenting the annual Budget for 2023-24 fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024) announced equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore in Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to support the three state-owned firms' energy transition plans.

Alongside, she had also proposed Rs 5,000 crore for buying crude oil to fill strategic

underground storages at Mangalore in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh that India has built to guard against any supply dis-ruptions. That plan has also been deferred in view of emerging trends in oil markets, the finance ministry said.

While other state-owned oil companies such as Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and GAIL (India) Ltd too have lined up billions of dollars of investment to achieve net zero carbon emissions, the equity support was limited to the three fuel retailers, who had suffered huge losses in 2022 when they held retail petrol, diesel and cooking gas (LPG) prices despite a spike in raw material (crude oil) prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The finance ministry in a post



on X detailing the outcome of the budget announcements, informed about the halving of equity support and deferring of filling strategic reserves.

The Budget (for 2023-34) provides Rs 35,000 crore for priority capital investments towards energy transition and net zero objectives, and energy security by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas," it

Of this, Rs 30,000 crore was towards capital support to oil marketing companies IOC, BPCL and HPCL for green energy and net zero initiatives, and the remaining for purchase of crude oil for caverns at Mangalore and Visakhapatnam, it said.

Finance Committee meeting held on November 30, 2023, it was decided a maximum of Rs 15,000 crore could be provided for equity infusion into OMCs in FY 2023-24," the finance ministry said without detailing the reasons for the decision.

Industry sources said the decision may be linked to a boost in profitability of the three firms in the current fiscal which has partly covered for the losses in the previous 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) fiscal. The three are making good profit this year as the freeze in retail selling prices extends into the 21st month despite crude oil prices having softened.

Based on the recommendations of EFC, approval of the CCEA (Cabinet Committee

"During the Expenditure on Economic Affairs) is being sought. The draft note for approval of CCEA is under process in MoPNG (Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas)," the ministry said. The board of IOC and BPCL

had last year approved rights issues to raise up to Rs 22,000 crore and Rs 18,000 crore, respectively. The government was to participate in the rights issue.

Sources said the two firms plan to halve the rights issue and complete them by March

In case of HPCL, the government will not make any direct equity infusion as it had sold its majority stake in the company to ONGC in 2018. The infusion is likely to be through ONGC which will make the preferential issue of shares to the government.

There were no immediate com-

ments either from ZEEL or

Disney Star over the develop-

On August 30, 2022, ZEEL had announced entering a

strategic licensing agreement with Disney Star for television

broadcasting rights of the ICC Men's and Under-19 global events for a period of four years.

Disney Star will continue to

exclusively stream all ICC tour-

platform Disney+ Hotstar, a

sixth Budgets in a row approved by Parliament, will authorise the government to $F_{\text{Sitharaman will equal the}}^{\text{inance Minister Nirmala}}$ withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India on pro-rata basis to meet expen-

Sitharaman to present

The new government, which is likely to be formed around June, will come up with a final budget for 2024-25 sometime in July. Usually, interim budgets do not contain major policy announcements, but nothing stops the government from taking steps which are necessary to deal with the urgent issues facing the economy.
After the Modi government came to power in 2014, Arun Jaitley took charge of the finance ministry and presented five budgets in a row from 2014-15 to 2018-19. It was in 2017, that Jaitley departed

Piyush Goyal, who was holding the additional charge of the from Rs 2,500 to Rs 12,500.

Minister Morarji Desai when she presents her sixth straight budget on February 1. Sitharaman, the first full-time woman finance minister of the country, has presented five full budgets since July 2019 and

will present an interim or voteon-account budget next week. With the presentation of interim budget on February 1, Sitharaman will surpass the records of her predecessors like Manmohan Singh, Arun Jaitley, P Chidambaram, and Yashwant Sinha, who had presented five budgets in a row. Desai, as finance minister, had presented five annual budgets and one interim budget between 1959-1964. The interim budget 2024-25 to be presented by Sitharaman on February İ, will be a vote-onaccount that will give the government authority to spend certain sums of money till a new government comes to office after the April-May gen-

As the Parliamentary elections naments through its digital are due, Sitharaman's interim budget may not contain any major policy changes. Speaking at an industry event last month, Sitharaman had ruled out any 'spectacular announcement' in the interim budget, saying it would just be a vote-onaccount before the general elections.

A vote-on-account, once

diture for the April-July peri-

from the colonial-era tradition of presenting budget on the last working day of February to 1st of the month.

ministry due to ill health of Jaitley, presented the interim budget for 2019-20 on February 1, 2019. Goyal had hiked standard deduction for salaried taxpayers by Rs 10,000 to Rs 50,000. Also, the tax rebate for taxpayers whose annual taxable income did not exceed Rs 5 lakh was increased After the 2019 general elections, in the Modi 2.0 Government, Sitharaman was given the charge of the finance

Demand for industrial. warehousing spaces in Delhi, NCR falls 42 pc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi-NCR witnessed a sharp 42 per decline in demand for warehouse and industrial spaces last year on high base effect and lower new supply, according to Colliers.

The gross leasing of Grade-A industrial & warehousing spaces fell to 5.1 million square feet in 2023 from 8.8 million square feet in the previous year. As per the Colliers India data, the gross leasing across five major cities rose 2 per cent to 25 million square feet last year from 24.5 million square feet in the 2022 calendar year. The share of Delhi-NCR in

the total demand across five cities came down to 20 per cent from 36 per cent in the 2022 calendar vear.

Giving more details about the Delhi-NCR market, Colliers India said the third contributed 26 per cent to the total gross leasing of spaces in 2023, followed by FMCG and electronic companies which accounted for 17 per cent each to the total demand. The new supply fell 12 per cent to 6.9 million square feet in 2023 from 7.8 million square feet in the pre-

vious year. The total stock of industrial & warehousing space in Delhi-NCR touched 51.5

million square feet at the end of the 2023 calendar year. The average monthly rent stood at Rs 17-35 per square feet, a marginal increase

"Farukhnagar and Faridabad micro markets of the region saw the bulk of industrial and warehousing demand during 2023, accounting for about 75 per cent share in demand," Colliers India said. During 2023, 3PL players were the key demand drivers for the region having leased around 1.3 million sq ft of

Key logistics firms including DHL and Delhivery actively leased warehouse spaces during the last year.

On the demand outlook for this year, Vijay Ganesh, Managing Director, Managing Director, Industrial & Logistics Services, Colliers India, said, "With increasing footfalls in malls and physical stores, increase, which in turn would spur higher demand

for warehousing spaces." "Overall, backed by rising manufacturing output, capital investments, demographic consumption patterns and supportive government policies, 3PL, engineering, automobile, retail and e-commerce segments will continue to see significant momentum in the next few years," he

Disney Star to sue ZEEL for backing out from deal

PTI NEW DELHI

Disney Star is mulling legal actions against Zee Entertainment for backing out from a USD 1.4 billion sublicensing agreement for TV broadcast of international cricket matches in India, according to industry sources. This could brew another legal trouble for Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL), which is already facing an arbitration plea by Sony Group at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre, claiming USD 90 million for breach of conditions of their merger agreement.

Disney Star, an Indian subsidiary of media conglomerate The Walt Disney Company, is working on its strategy over the development, said industry

Ola group's AI firm Krutrim has raised USD 50 million at a valuation of USD 1 billion

in a funding round led by

Matrix Partners, the company

This makes Krutrim the first

artificial intelligence unicorn

"Krutrim, India's own AI com-

pany focused on building the

announced the successful clo-

sure of its first round of fund-

ing. The funding round, led by

prominent investors such as

Matrix Partners India and oth-

ers, garnered an investment of

USD 50 million in equity at a

valuation of USD 1 billion," the

The funds raised will be

instrumental in accelerating

the company's mission to rev-

olutionize the AI landscape,

drive innovation, and expand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

said on Friday.

company said.

from India.

If the rescinded agreement contained an arbitration clause, then Disney Star would have to resort to arbitration proceedings for the resolution of the dispute and if the agreement is short of the arbitration clause, then Disney could initiate legal proceedings to sue Zee for damages. ZEEL, which has already

missed the first instalment of around USD 200 million, has informed Disney Star that it does not intend to move ahead According to the sources, this

is a fallout of the collapse of its

merger deal with Sony. The instalment to be paid to Disney Star was part of the USD 1.5 billion investment committed by Sony Group after its merger with ZEEL, said another industry source while

confirming the development.

Ola's Krutrim India's first AI firm to turn unicorn



Sony Corporation had on Monday announced the termination of the USD 10 billion merger agreement with ZEEL, while seeking USD 90 million for breach of conditions besides initiating arbitration.

As per the merger agreement between ZEEL and Sony, the Japanese entity was supposed to invest USD 1.575 billion in the merged entity and have a sport's global governing body.



ioint statement had said. This was done with the in-prin ciple approval from the International Cricket Council (ICC). Disney Star bagged the broad-cast rights of all ICC events for

four years from 2024 to 2027

sentation of Indian data used

for its training, Krutrim claims

to power generative AI appli-

cations for all Indian languages.

Trained by a team of leading

computer scientists, based in

Bangalore and San Francisco, the model will also power

Krutrim's conversational AI

assistant that claims to under-

stand and speak multiple

Krutrim is a family of Large

Krutrim base and Krutrim Pro

which will have multimodal,

larger knowledge capabilities,

and many other technical

advancements for inference.

Krutrim last month announced

that it will run an early access

programme until January 2024

with a simple sign up page on

Additionally, Krutrim's open

APIs (tool to embed it with

apps) will open to all develop-

ers by February 2024.

the website

Indian languages fluently.

eral elections.

BUSINESS BRIEF



VIT-AP HONOURS 9 UNSUNG HEROES

Celebrations, VIT-AP University honoured nine individuals who exemplified extraordinary dedication and service to society. The recipients included sanitation workers from Guntur Municipal Corporation, recognized for their exceptional efforts in upholding cleanliness and averting the build-up of waste in Guntur city. Additionally, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel were acknowledged for their commendable actions in safeguarding numerous lives amid floods and other critical situations. Furthermore, the DMHO (District Medical and Health Officer) staff played a pivotal role during the COVID-19 pandemic and other emergency scenarios. In addition to appreciation certificates, each individual was also presented with a monetary reward of Rs. 25,000

Oxford terminates deal with TCS for tech glitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Oxford University has terminated its deal with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) after students experienced technical glitches while taking online admission test for the institution.

"Following the technical problems experienced by some candidates during the delivery of this year's online admissions tests by a new provider, TCS will not be involved in the delivery of Oxford admissions tests going forward," a spokesperson for the university said. Thousands of students from

across the world appear for test to get admitted to Oxford every year. The university offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes through 30 colleges across the UK. Prominent Indians who studied at Oxford include former prime ministers Indira Gandhi and Manmohan Singh. In April 2023, the UK-based

institution selected TCS iON, the learning and assessmentsfocused unit of TCS, for conducting the admission tests, Cambridge replacing Admissions Assessment Testing. The university attributed complaints by candidates about technical issues faced while taking online tests for calling

off the handover. "This decision has been made following careful consideration of the issues, as well as feedback from candidates, teachers, and test centers. Our priority is to ensure a highquality experience for all candidates and those involved in supporting them, and we are grateful to the students and their teachers for their patience during this process. Details of the new arrangements will be communicated in the Spring, at the start of the next admissions round," Oxford said.

IGL net profit jumps 41

Krutrim's innovative AI solu-

tions but also underscores the

confidence investors have in

our ability to drive meaningful

change out of India for the world," Krutrim Founder

Krutrim unveiled its base Large

Language Model (LLM) last month. With the largest repre-

Bhavish Aggarwal said.

PTI NEW DELHI

its reach globally

"India has to build its own AI,

and at Krutrim, we are fully

committed towards building

the country's first complete AI computing stack. We are

thrilled to announce the suc-

cessful closure of our first

funding round, which not only

validates the potential of

Indraprastha Gas Ltd, India's leading CNG retailer, has reported a 41 per cent jump in third quarter net profit, as the firm recorded higher sales of CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households and industries.

The company clocked a net profit of Rs 392.07 crore in October-December - the third quarter of current fiscal that started in April 2023 - compared to Rs 278.26 crore in the same period in the previous year, it said in a statement. IGL operates city gas distribution (CGD) networks across 30

districts in 11 geographical

areas across four states of Delhi. Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan.

The company said it "registered an overall sales volume growth of 4 per cent over the corresponding quarter in the last fiscal, with the average daily sales going up to 8.48 million standard cubic meters per day from 8.12 mmscmd.

"Product wise, CNG recorded sales volume growth of 4 per cent in the quarter, while piped natural gas (PNG) recorded sales volume growth of 5 per cent during the quarter, as compared to the corresponding quarter of last year. Within the PNG segment,

domestic PNG showed a

growth of 11 per cent during the quarter, whereas the growth in the commercial PNG segment was 12 per cent during the quarter over the corresponding quarter, it said.

Revenue during the quarter fell to Rs 3,906.60 crore, as compared to Rs 4,072.93 crore during the third quarter of FY'23, due to rationalisation of international gas prices.

IGL meets fuel requirements of over 1.6 million vehicles running on CNG through a network of 802 CNG stations. It has connected over two million households in cities like Delhi, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, and parts of Kanpur, with PNG.

NARUVI HOSPITALS VELLORE CELEBRATES 75TH REPUBLIC DAY



On the occasion of 75 th Republic Day celebration held at Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, Its Chairman Dr G.V. Sampath is saluting the National Flag after hoisting it. Vice Chairperson Mrs. Anitha Sampath. Executive Director Dr. Paul Henry, Chief of Medical Services Dr. Aravindan Nair, Medical Superintendent Dr. Jacob Jose, Chief Operating Officer Mr. Manimaran, Chief Financial Officer Mr. Venkatrangam, Trustee Mr. Sukumar, General Manager Mr. Nithin Sampath, Doctors, Nurses and other staff members including security staff have participated



RS 1.13 CRORE SEED FUNDING TO 10 SRMIST

Kattankulathur: As part of the Start-up India National Innovation Week initiated by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), The Directorate of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) Kattankulathur celebrated 'The National Start-up Day'. The event was inaugurated by SRMIST's Vice Chancellor Dr C Muthamizhchelvan. 10 start-ups from the Med-Tech, Food Tech,

Deep Tech, D2C and Waste management sectors were granted seed funding of Rs.1.13 crore under the DPIIT, Startup India Seed fund Scheme (SISFS). The event brought together start-up founders, aspiring entrepreneurs, industry experts, and students to recognise the innovations and entrepreneurial efforts on campus. The event aimed to encourage and showcase the entrepreneurial spirit among the student start-up community, providing them with valuable insights and opportunities.

Oil regulator launches drive to increase piped gas adoption

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Oil regulator PNGRB has launched a two-month long nationwide drive to increase adoption of piped natural gas as a cooking fuel in household kitchens in an attempt to cut dependence on imported fossil-

"The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) along with city gas distribution entities will run a campaign ventional fuels like firew from January 26 to March 31, cow dung for cooking.

aimed to promote the adoption of piped natural gas (PNG) among households and to expand PNG consumer base across a broader segment of the population," it said in a state-

While PNG has gained currency in the last few years after PNGRB expanded city gas networks to most parts of the country, sizable households continue to use either LPG or conventional fuels like firewood and

While India is about 50 per cent dependent on imports to meet cooking gas LPG needs, use of conventional fuels is considered a health hazard. PNG offers a viable alternative.

It is convenient as it does not require ordering for refills everytime a LPG bottle is exhausted, and is also cheaper.

Stating that natural gas is clean and convenient fossil fuel, PNGRB said the campaign will be focussed on those areas where gas pipeline network has



immediate future. Promotion of natural gas is part of the Prime Minister's vision to

been laid or will be laid in the

increase its share in India's energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030, from the current 6.2 per cent to transform the country into a gasbased economy.

"PNGRB is taking various initiatives to promote natural gas in households as cooking fuel as well as in transport, commercial and industrial sectors," the state-

amongst them to facilitate supply of natural gas to existing registered customers besides enrolling customers for new PNG connections. City Gas Distribution (CGD)

"National PNG Drive is one

entities will actively participate in the National PNG drive, undertake various promotional activities to increase the awareness on the use of PNG - a clean, environmentally friendly, safe and reliable

INDIA ENTERS FIH WOMEN **HOCKEY WORLD CUP SEMIS**



BEATS NEW ZEALAND 11-1

PTI MUSCAT

Rutaja Pisal scored four goals while Deepika Soreng struck thrice as India hammered New Zealand 11-1 to enter the semifinals of the FIH Women's Hockey's World Cup here.

New Zealand took the lead courtesy a goal from Oriwa Hepi (2nd minute) but India equalized within fifteen seconds as Deepika Soreng (2nd) found the back of the net with an astonishing finish.

Rutaja (9th) put India in the lead before Mumtaz Khan (10th, 11th) quickly fired back-toback goals. The goalfest continued with India again scoring two more quick goals, this time from Mariana Kujur (13th, 14th) as the first half ended with

Michelob Ultra spot as part of last year's Super Bowl lineup,

also with a sports theme - it was

set at Bushwood Country Club,

the fictional country club in "Caddyshack," and starred tennis great Serena Williams, for-

mer Dallas Cowboys quarter-back and current TV analyst

Tony Romo, Miami Heat

standout Jimmy Butler, golfer

Rickie Fowler, soccer player

Alex Morgan and boxer Canelo

ifor clubs and country, among

the greatest scorers. He scored

twice in the 2022 World Cup

final that Argentina won

against France on penalty kicks.

Messi is a four-time

Champions League winner, an

Olympic gold medalist and

has been part of 44 trophy

wins, considered the most in

'The artistry that he brings to

the pitch brings fans from all walks of life," Marques said.

'That's why we're excited about

Lionel Messi, his partnership

and where soccer is going in

West Ham United signs Phillips on loan from Manchester City

London, Jan 26 (AP) Kalvin

Phillips completed his move to

West Ham United on Friday on

a six-month loan deal from

Manchester City, where the England midfielder had fallen

out of favour with Pep

Phillips had made just 16

Premier League appearances -

all but two as a substitute - in

18 months at City.
The move should help the 28-year-old Phillips compete for

an England spot at the

European Championship, and

it gives West Ham depth as it

contends for a Europa League

title and another European

There's so much to look for-

ward to in the second half of

the season for the club and I

can't wait to be part of it,"

Phillips had joined City in the summer of 2022, leaving his

hometown and boyhood club

Leeds United to sign a six-year

contract. City had paid a trans-

fer fee of 45 million pounds

Guardiola complained that

Phillips was "overweight" when

the midfielder returned to team

training after the 2022 World

The loan deal reportedly does-

n't include an option to buy.

"Hopefully, he can play the minutes he deserves (that) I

couldn't give to him," Guardiola

said Thursday.

(then USD 55 million).

Phillips said.

spot in the Premier League.

Guardiola.

soccer history.

Alvarez.

India leading 6-1.
India's control of proceedings continued and Rutaja (22nd) scored her second goal of the match. Deepika (25th) also brought up her second goal before Rutaja (26th, 28th) added

two more goals to her tally. Deepika (29th) then scored another goal to complete her hat-trick as India won the game

He'll play either third-seeded Daniil Medvedev or No. 6 Alexander Zverev for the championship on Sunday. Djokovic's bid for a recordextending 11th Australian and

rannik Sinner has upset Novak

career unbeaten streak in semi-

The 22-year-old Italian broke

Djokovic's serve twice in each of

the first two sets but missed a

match point in the third set of a 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 victory

Friday that earned him a place

in a Grand Slam final for the first

finals at Melbourne Park.

25th major title overall will have to wait. He hadn't lost a match at Melbourne Park since 2018 and was on a 33-match winning streak at the season's first major.

hardcourt title.

He commended the 22-year-old Italian for playing "flawless" tennis - it was Sinner's third win Every previous time he'd won a over Djokovic in their last four quarterfinal in Australia, matches - but rated his perfor-Djokovic had gone on to win the mance as the worst he could remember at a major.

SAYS LOSS IS NOT BEGINNING OF END

"This tournament hasn't been

up to my standard or criteria or the level that I would normally

play or expect myself to play," Djokovic said, "but doesn't nec-

essarily mean that it's beginning

of the end, you know, as some people like to call it.Let's see

what happens in the rest of the

A solitary loss in 11 semi-finals at the Australian Open was nowhere near enough for Novak

Djokovic to contemplate a gen-

Djokovic didn't get a look at a

breakpoint during a 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6), 6-3 loss to Jannik Sinner on Friday that ended the 10-time Australian Open champion's unbeaten streak after making the first th

ing the final four at Melbourne

erational change in tennis.

The 36-year-old Djokovic has been dealing with illness and a sore right wrist this month in Australia and wasn't at his peak, by his admission and from observations across the net from

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Djokovic crashes out of Australian Open semis

But, no man has won more Grand Slam titles than Djokovic, who lifted his record to 24 with three titles last year when he went 27-1 in the major tourna-

"I still have high hopes for other Slams, Olympics, and whatever tournaments that I'll play," he said. "It's not the feeling that I'm used to. I mean, it kind of has been incredibly satisfying for me to start off most of my seasons with a Grand Slam win and never lost in semis or finals of Australian Open." The so-called Big Three of Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer have dominated the majors in this era.

Stan Wawrinka's title here a decade ago was the only Australian title that one of the Big Three didn't win since Marat Safin beat Lleyton Hewitt in the 2005 final.

That's going to change this Sunday, with Sinner in his first final and facing either Daniil Medvedev or Alexander Zverev. Federer is retired and Nadal is

Djokovic said he's far from finished, even if his streak of 33 wins here dating to a fourthround exit in 2018 is.

"I'm kind of hot-headed right now. After the match it's very difficult to reflect on things in a more profound way," he said. But I definitely have a lot to be very proud of in terms of what I have achieved here.

Zheng gives China Australian Open finalist a decade after Li Na

Hsieh, Zielinski win mixed doubles title



AP MELBOURNE

Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan and Poland's Jan Zielinski are the Australian Open mixed doubles champles after beatdoubles champions after beating Desirae Krawczyk of the United States and Neal Skupski of Britain 6-7 (5), 6-4, 11-9 on Friday. It was the first championship final of the 15-day tournament

that began Jan. 14. Hsieh and Zielinski led 4-0 in

the match tiebreaker before Krawczyk and Skupski fought back. The teams were tied 7-7, 8-8 and 9-9 before the winners pulled away with the final two points. Hsieh has a chance for a sec-

"The streak was going to end

one day. It was going to happen,

and, you know, at least I gave everything I possibly can under

circumstances where I didn't play well, and I lost to a player

ond title - she will play in the women's doubles final at Melbourne Park with Elise Mertens on Sunday. The mixed doubles win Friday was her seventh major doubles title, including four women's doubles titles at Wimbledon. "I thought it was a really tough match, but we made it," Hsieh said at the trophy pre-sentation. "But I thank you so much for the great match. It was really fun on court to play

Slam in mixed doubles. She won Wimbledon in 2021 and 2022 with Skupski and the French Open and U.

Krawczyk was attempting to complete the career Grand

against you guys."

that has a very good chance to win his first Slam.

Messi to make his Super Bowl debut

AP ■ MIAMI (US)

Lionel Messi nas won see futbol's biggest prize. He'll ionel Messi has won global now be part of American foot-

ball's biggest day.
The Inter Miami star, World
Cup champion and global soccer icon will headline a Super Bowl ad for Michelob Ultra, the brand announced Thursday. A teaser to what will be a 60second spot shows Messi ordering a beer as he walks up to a when the tap stops pouring.

It'll be Messi's first Super Bowl commercial and adds to his massive advertising reach in the U.S. And globally. The game is on Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

"Having the GOAT himself, Lionel Messi, and the Super Bowl as a stage to kick it all off and start the year with a bang, that gets us incredibly fired up," Ricardo Marques, Ultra's vice president of marketing, said in an interview with The Associated Press.

"Messi needs no introduction. The power that he has, the impact that he had upon his arrival in Miami, in the world of soccer and beyond, he's clearly a cultural icon right

Messi's partnership with Michelob Ultra's parent company, Anheuser-Busch InBev, began in 2020. The Super Bowl spot is part of the beer's sizable investment in soccer. The ad follows the brand being revealed as the global beer sponsor of this summer's Copa América.

It's also expected Ultra will partner with the men's World Cup when the tournament is played in the U.S., Canada and Mexico in 2026 as Messi's Argentina aims to defend their

"When you put it all together, we clearly have a very exciting road ahead of us in the context of soccer," Marques said.

Messi is a marketing dream with giant brands such as Adidas, Gatorade, Hard Rock International, Royal Caribbean and Apple TV among others all involved with him. His social media footprint is enormous, with nearly 500 million followers on Instagram

Anheuser-Busch routinely spends millions on Super Bowl ads; last year's game brought an asking price of as much as \$7 million for a 30-second spot, with companies paying it to be on U.S. Advertising's biggest stage and with hopes of reach-

ing an expected audience of more than 100 million The beverage giant had a Klopp announces to step down as Liverpool manager



AP ■ LIVERPOOL (ENGLAND)

Jurgen Klopp has announced he will step down as Liverpool manager at the end of this season. Klopp has led Liverpool to a

Champions League title and Premier League championship in his tenure after being hired in October 2015.

He made the shock announcement Friday that he will resign at the end of the season, saying he is "running out of energy." "I have to. I will leave the club at the end of the season. I can understand that it's a shock for a lot of people in this moment time, but obviously, I can explain it or at least try to

explain it," Klopp said. T love absolutely everything about this club, I love everything about the city, I love everything about our supporters, I love the team. I love the staff. I love everything. That I still take this decision probably shows you that I'm convinced it's the one I have to take

Zheng Qinwen earned a spot in her first championship match at any Grand Slam tour-nament - she'll face Aryna Schelarde for the she'll face Aryna Sabalenka for the Australian Open title on Saturday — by winning a semifinal at Melbourne Park that came 10 years to the day after another Chinese woman, Li Na, claimed the trophy there.

Li, who also won the French Open, is a member of the International Tennis Hall of Fame and remains the only player from her country to earn a major singles title. She was a trailblazer, serving as inspiration for Zheng when she was a kid learning the sport in China. The two spoke in person for the first time during this Australian with offering some key advice. "She (told) me: Don't think too much. Just go for it," the 12thseeded Zheng said after eliminating qualifier Dayana Yastresmka 6-4, 6-4 on Thursday.

"That's enough, I think." That approach has carried Zheng this far, but it's likely some exceptional play will be required to derail defending champion



the final, which is scheduled to begin Saturday at 7:30 p.M. Local time in Melbourne (3:30

Sabalenka, a 25-year-old from during the past two weeks. Her 7-6 (2), 6-4 victory over Coco Gauff in the semifinals - a rematch of the U.S. Open final won by the American teen in September - made Sabalenka the first woman to reach consecutive title matches at the Australian Open since Serena Williams made three in a row from 2015-17, winning two of

Sabalenka, a finalist at three of the past five hard-court Slams. Sabalenka, who briefly displaced Iga Swiatek at No. 1 in the rankings last season, has only faced eng once beating her in the U.S. Open quarterfinals a few months ago. But they have practiced together often, including in Australia, and Sabalenka offered a scouting report about Zheng's style that sounds similar to what folks say about Sabalenka's: "Really aggressive tennis."

Both thrive with big serves Zheng leads the women's field in aces by a wide margin - and powerful forehands.

One edge for Sabalenka: She's been here before.

been here before.

After losing to Zheng,
Yastremska sized up the final,
saying: "If she will be able to stay
stable emotionally — and if she
will be able to hold her level up
like she (did) today pretty well
in important moments — she
can win. And she can win, I will
say, even pretty easy." say, even pretty easy." Hmmmm. Perhaps.

Sabalenka represents a major step up in quality. Until now, Zheng has not had to play anyone ranked inside the Top 50 through her half-dozen matches, instead playing foes who are Nos. 54, 75, 76, 93, 94 and 95. Still, to those who've been paying attention, Zheng is not a revelation, someone who suddenly managed to sneak her way this

far at a major. up the ranks, and the rankings, for some time now, earning year-end WTA honors for being the newcomer of the year in 2022 - when she was the only player to take a set off eventual champion Swiatek at the French Open - and comeback player of the year in 2023.

Now Zheng will make her debut in the Top 10 in Monday's rankings, regardless of the outcome

against Sabalenka.

And Zheng found it meaningful that her own breakthrough came at the site of one of Li's

biggest successes.
"She means a lot, I think, for all the Chinese kids (my age). Because, I think, she's the first one who won the Slams. I mean, the disable form a single control of the state of the that's unbelievable for an Asian woman in that moment," said Zheng, whose coach, Pere Riba, was part of Gauff's team at the end of last season. "She gives a lot of hope in that moment (to)

young kids." You have to see it to be it, as Billie

Jean King likes to say. And now Zheng could provide the same sort of spark for a new generation. The Rod Laver Arena stands were dotted by Chinese flags and signs held by spectators who offered plenty of

Zheng addressed them in Mandarin to offer thanks after closing out Yastremska with a service winner.

She said later that it felt as though she were playing at home.

When Li appeared as a guest of

Tennis Australia earlier in the tournament, she was asked what it means to see Zheng playing

Atletico Madrid back in Copa semis 7 years later

AP MADRID

Seven years later, Atletico Madrid is back in the Copa del Rev semifinals.

Memphis Depay scored in the second half and video review called back a penalty for Sevilla in stoppage time as Atletico held on for a 1-0 victory Thursday to reach the last four for the first time since 2017.

Atletico joins Athletic Bilbao, Mallorca and Real Sociedad in the semifinals. The matchups, which will be played on homeand-away series, will be determined on Friday.

'We expected a tight match like this, with few scoring chances, but in the end we found a way to break through and get the victory, which is the only thing that matters," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak said.

'Hopefully we can win this Copa title again after so many Sevilla thought it had a chance to send the match into extra time when Érik Lamela was brought down inside the area by Pablo Barrios five minutes into stop-

"It was a tough match, a lot of things happened," Sevilla defender Marcao said

page time, but the referee was

called by video review and even-

tually determined there was no



"If I say what I think here, I'll be suspended for two or three

The loss dealt another blow to Sevilla, which was coming off a

5-1 defeat to Girona in the Spanish league, where it sits just outside the relegation zone. It has lost eight of its last 11 matches in all competitions.

Sevilla coach Quique Sánchez Flores said the match shouldn't have been played after three Sevilla fans died in a car accident on their way to Madrid earlier Thursday. The coach appeared in the post-match news conference but said he would not talk about the match, only send his condolences.

'We lost on a day in which we are mourning the loss of these fans who were coming to the match," he said.

'I don't feel like making any analysis about the game. Atletico extended its unbeaten run at home to 26 matches, since a 1-0 loss to Barcelona last January

ies to assess and enforce neutral status for

AP ■ BOURNEMOUTH (ENGLAND)

Bournemouth became the first team to reach the last 16 of the FA Cup by routing second-tier Swansea 5-0, with all the goals coming in the first half and scored by different

Rebounding excellently from a 4-0 loss to Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday, Bournemouth led 3-0 after just 14 minutes of the fourth-round match on Thursdaythanks to goals from Lloyd Kelly, Alex Scott and Luis Sinisterra.

David Brooks set up the first two goals at Vitality Stadium and scored himself in the 35th after running onto a pass from Dominic Solanke, who tapped in the fifth in the 44th.

The fourth round spans five days, with the highlight being Tottenham hosting defending champion Manchester City on Friday. Bournemouth has only advanced beyond the fifth round twice in its history, most recently in 2021.

AP PARIS

 ${f T}$ he United States is predicted to top the medals tables - both the overall count and gold-medal count — for the 2024 Paris Olympics, according to one forecast released Friday, six months before the Games open on July 26.

The forecast comes from Nielsen's Gracenote Sports, which supplies statistical analysis for sports leagues around the world. It also tracks major competitions involving Olympic sports leading up to the Games. Forecasting is particularly difficult this time with most Russian and Belarussian athletes likely to be excluded because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago. Some will be allowed to compete under a decision announced late last year by the International Olympic Committee. "Almost all Russian and Belarussian

competitors have been absent from

Paris Olympic medals headed in big numbers to US, China in one forecast



international competitions since February 2022," Simon Gleave, head of analysis for Gracenote, told The Associated Press. "Any who take part in Paris 2024" will

make predicting difficult. Gracenote predicts the United States will win 37 gold medals and 129 overall.

far behind in the overall total of 85. The next eight with predicted gold and overall medals are: Britain (17-64), Japan (17-56), France (26-53), Australia (15-48), Italy (13-47), Germany (10-39), the Netherlands (16-35) and South Korea (7-23). For Tokyo in 2021, Gracenote named the top-10 medal winning countries, but not in perfect order. In Beijing 2022, Gracenote named the top five countries, but not in perfect order, and eight of the top 10. It also predicted correctly that Norway would break the record for the most medals won at a single Winter Olympics.

It will be up to dozens of governing bod-

individual Russian and Belarussian athletes. They must decide which athletes have not actively supported the war and are not contracted to military or state security agencies. China is a close second with 35 gold, but Russia sent 335 athletes to the Tokyo Olympics held in 2021 - winning 20 golds

among 71 total medals - but only dozens are likely to compete in Paris as individuals. Russia remains banned from team

Athletes and officials from Ukraine, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have repeatedly urged the IOC to expel Russia and Belarus entirely from the Ólympics because of the war Russia started.

The toughest stance on Russian athletes has been taken by World Athletics, which has excluded them from international competitions since the invasion started in February 2022.

Bournemouth

routs Swansea 5-0 in FA Cup

JADEJA, RAHUL CLASSY FIFTIES TAKE INDIA TO 421/7

Ravindra Jadeja's two-layered fifty and KL Rahul's mastery were at the heart of India's 421 for seven, a total which placed them several miles ahead of England after the second day's play of the first Test here on Friday. Jadeja (81 batting) and Axar Patel (35 batting), who added 63 runs for the unbroken eighth-wicket stand, are at the crease at stumps.

are at the crease at stumps. India's lead has now swelled to 175

runs, and England would find it tough to wipe that out once their turn to bat come on third day. But India's ascendancy to the top on

a slightly tacky pitch was more tectonic and Jadeja's risk managing abilities played a huge role in it. In one sense, the situation was ideal for the left-hander, who loves a scrap in the middle. When Jadeja came to bat, Rahul was in full flight and he joined the party with

a few blows of his own.

In fact, the initial 40 balls he faced produced 35 runs as India first closed the gap with England and then swiftly moved into the lead.

But Rahul's dismissal for a 123-ball 86 forced Jadeja to transform his approach. India's lead was still only 42 then, and the home side needed him to bat long to construct more

floors above that fledgling founda-

Jadeja did precisely that. He slowed down indeed, but not to that extend of confining himself into a shell and opened up whenever England bowlers erred in their lengths.

A daring hoick off left-arm spinner Tom Hartley over long-on for a six and a flowing off-drive off leg-spin-ner Rehan Ahmed for a four showcased his power and touch.

England bowlers were all in spirit and optimism while bowling and appealing throughout the day, but they lacked consistency in hitting the right spot, except Joe Root, who is more than a part-timer in these is more than a part-timer in these conditions.

It came as no surprise then that it was Root who put Jadeja in the most unpleasant situation during his knock. The spinner wrapped Jadeja's pads and umpire Paul Reiffel upheld the shout for leg-before.

But the DRS found a massive inside edge as Jadeja survived at 49. He duly completed his 20th Test fifty in 84 balls when he peeled three runs off Root.

The only sore point during his otherwise assured stay was a calamitous mix-up which resulted in the run out of R Ashwin, as Jadeja sold a dummy, jogging a few steps before turning his back only to find his spin



bowling partner standing right next

Though KS Bharat (41, 81 balls) failed to kick on, the wicketkeeper batter helped Jadeja make 68 runs off 141 balls for the sixth wicket, which expanded India's lead. But regret will linger inside Bharat, who recently made a hundred against England Lions for India A, for he could not make his maiden.

for he could not make his maiden Test fifty when the team was in a strong position and there was no

real pressure on him.

However, Bharat will not be the only
India batter who will be nursing that
feeling once they glance back at the
day's proceedings at the RGI

Rahul, Shreyas Iyer and Shubman Gill all could have registered a more substantial score against their names here.

Rahul will be particularly disappointed as he was primed to score a hundred in his 50th Test. Nonetheless, his innings was Nonetheless, his innings was marked by imperious timing and meticulous shot selection, which made it oh-so-pleasing to watch. His fifth-wicket alliance with Jadeja produced 65 runs in just 74 balls during the middle session of play, pinning England on the back-foot. Overall, India made 87 runs during that period, losing two wickets. when Rahul pulled a half-tracker by Hartely to pick Ahmed, the lone fielder in the deep at mid-wicket. Iyer (35) scratched around for a good part of his 63-ball stay and seemed to have weathered the storm, especially against pacer Mark Wood who tested him with a slew of short-pitched deliveries.

of snort-pitched deliveries.
But Iyer let the opportunity to build on it slip away when he played a slog sweep of Ahmed to give a simple catch to Hartley at deep mid-wicket and the Mumbaikar will need efforts with more substance to fight for his place. more substance to fight for his place once Virat Kohli rejoins the squad from the third Test.

In the first session, Yashasvi Jaiswal could only add four runs to his overnight score of 76 before offering a lame return catch to Root, and had he shown a bit of patience to settle down the left-hander could have notched his second Test cen-

tury. Shubman Gill, the other overnight batter, reached 23 but a rather reckless slog sweep off Hartley ended in the hands of Ahmed at deep midwicket. Fortunately for Indian team, it had the collective will to tide over those occasional setbacks to move ahead of England and push for a win



India A close in on victory over Lions

SAURABH GRABS 22ND FIVE-FOR

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar continued his brilliant run for India A with his 22nd career five-wicket haul, putting India A on the cusp of a big win against England Lions at the end of day three in the second 'unofficial Test' have on Thursday. here on Thursday.

Starting the second innings with 341 runs in arrear, England Lions did perform far better in the second innings, They still need 37 runs to avoid innings defeat and only

have two wickets in hand. It was seventh wicket stand of 102 runs between keeper Ollie Robinson (84 batting) and Brydon Carse (38) that enabled Lions to stretch the proceedings to the fourth day. England were 156 for six at one stage and the end seemed near before the Robinson-Carse pair

stemmed the rot. However other than India A win on fourth day, any other result looks improbable unless the heavens open up on

Saturday The third day belonged to Saurabh, who is nearing 300 wickets in first class cricket, after ending with figures of 5/104 in 29 overs. He can add two more to his 289 wickets on Saturday

The pint-sized UP spinner is one of the most distinguished performers among India's

fringe players and has taken five-wicket hauls against most 'A' including from New Zealand A and Bangladesh A.

A and bangiadesn A.
The 30-year-old is also a handy lower middle-order batter with two first-class hundreds and a near 27 average. However it is sheer bad luck

that his career coincided with Ravindra Jadeja and Axar Patel and hence it has been difficult to fit him into the squad.

Saurabh did get a few call-ups for senior India but had to warm the bench on all or

Someone, who is an old school left-arm spinner, happy to flight the ball and put a good amount of loop to deceive the batters in

He first got left-handed opener Keaton Jennings, caught by Sarfaraz Khan, then bowled an arm ball to trap right-handed Oliver Price in-front of stumps. He also removed Carse at the nick of time just after he had completed a century stand with Robinson, drawing him forward only to be stumped by Upendra Yadav.

He got a good support from Bengal speedster Akash Deep (3/57 in 18 overs), who dismissed rival skipper Josh Bohanon (48), who looked in ominous touch.

BRIEF SCORES:

England Lions 152 and 304/8 (Ollie Robinson 84 batting, Saurabh Kumar 5/102)

'No pressure on domestic Mumbai Indians players in WPL 2' **PTI** ■ MUMBAI

Not too many Indian players shone in the inaugural Women's Premier League, but Mumbai Indians' batting coach Devieka Palshikaar believes that they will not be under pressure to perform when the second season gets underway on February 23. Only Harmanpreet Kaur and

Saika Ishaque were impressive among the Indians for the Mumbai team in the WPL last year. Kaur (281 runs) was the most prolific scorer while Ishaque (15 wickets) was the

best bowler for MI.

Overseas players Nat SciverBrunt and Hayley Mathews of
England were the all-round performers for the title-winning Mumbai side.

I can talk about MI players because I don't think the kind of atmosphere we have, our

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

C teve Smith failed again as an

lapsed to be 24-4 at tea Friday

after West Indies posted 311 on

Day Two of the day-night test

Smith shuffled across his crease

too far and was given out lbw

on review to the last ball of

Kemar Roach's first over.

Marnus Labuschagne (three)

was then caught in the next

over by a diving Kevin Sinclair at fourth slip off Alzarri Joseph.

Smith replaced the retired

David Warner as an opener for

Australia but scored just 12

runs in his first innings in that

role in the first test at Adelaide

won by Australia by 10 wickets.

The last two balls before the

break by Roach (3-13) brought

more celebration for the West

Cameron Green (eight), who returned a negative COVID-19

test before play, drove straight

to captain Kraigg Brathwaite at

cover. Travis Head was well

caught down the legside next

at the Gabba.

players will take any pressure," Palshikaar told PTI during a MI Juniors event here.
"Our Indian domestic players

also perform at par with international players, so for MI, I can say there is no pressure at all," she added.

all," she added.
Meg Lanning (345 runs) of finalists Delhi Capitals dominated the batting charts, followed by her Australian compatriot Tahlia McGrath of UP Warriorz. Among bowlers, England's Sophie Ecclestone (16 wickets) was the joint-highest wicket-taker with West Indies' Mathews. Mumbai Indians and India

wicketkeeper-batter Yastika Bhatia said opening the innings alongside Mathews was particularly a learning experience for

"I got to learn a lot from the international stars. They have performed so well for their

losing 4 quick wickets

Australia in trouble after

ball by Joshua Da Silva to leave

Earlier, a half-century on debut

by offspinner Sinclair lifted

West Indies to a competitive

Roach on a hat-trick.



countries and now they are doing it for MI team in WPL,"

"I batted alongside Hayley Mathews in the opening (slot). We used to talk a lot in between overs how we have to approach the next over or how the power play has to go and then after that," she added.

ing 'are you doing fine'. Even Nat Sciver (Brunt) had really impressed me in the last tour nament and the last two innings which he played for us that really inspired me," Bhatia

calm me a down lot, like ask-

Coming off a long home season against England and Australia in which India defeat-

PTI DHAKA

Malik denies match

ed both the visiting teams in Tests, Bhatia said her side will continue to show improve-ment since they lost all three

white-ball series.
"As a team we did really well.
Especially in Test series, we beat both the teams and there was a really good atmosphere which was created by the sup-port staff. There were a lot of positives and in the next series you will see some different results," she said.

Palshikaar, who played one Test and 15 ODIs for India, said the MI Juniors' camp will help discover more players who will

get a chance to play.
"Definitely, working with pro
coaches will help them, even that can increase their confidence that we are working with MI coaches. Technically and mentally also that will give them the extra boost," she



to gender pay equity among cricketers

ricket West Indies (CWI)

Con Friday committed to

PTI ■ KINGSTON

gender pay equity among its players having signed a new Memorandum of Understand-ing (MoU) with the West Indies Players Association (WIPA). The MoU is for the period from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2027 and covers all agreements in respect of player remuneration and updated terms and conditions across the West Indies system. "The MOU outlines plans to achieve parity in international and regional match fees, international national captain's allowances. international team prize money and regional individual prize money for all West Indies cricketers by 1 October 2027," the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) said in a statement. India, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and England have put steps in place in recent

Just last year, the ICC

Shallow said the announcement was a significant moment in the region and major step for all parties in reaching pay equity in the future. "This is a historic day for West

Indies cricket...We are taking a

fixing claims in BPL Former Pakistan skipper

fixing in the Bangladesh Premier League and unsubstantiated claims that his contract with Fortune Barishal was terminated. The rumours stemmed from social media handles insinuating that Malik's contract with

ly refuted allegations of match-

the franchise was terminated due to suspicions of match-fix-The speculation arose after he bowled three no-balls in the opening over during a match

against Khulna Tigers on January 22. Despite the allegations, Malik

went on to play another game for the franchise before the Dhaka leg of BPL 2024 con-"I want to emphasise the impor-

tance of exercising caution when it comes to rumours, especially those circulating recently," Malik wrote in his 'X'



"I want to make it clear that I strongly refute these baseless rumuors. It's crucial for everyone to verify information before believing and spreading it. "Falsehoods can harm reputa-

tions and create unnecessary confusion. Let's prioritise accuracy and rely on credible sources to ensure a clear understanding of the facts. Thank you for your understanding and diligence," he added. Malik also clarified that he had

a discussion with the team captain, Tamim Iqbal, and together, they planned his temporary departure from Bangladesh for a "pre-committed media engagement in Dubai.

announced prize money parity at ICC tournaments for men's and women's teams. WICB President Kishore

times for pay equity among the

genders.

significant step towards creat ing a more inclusive and progressive cricket framework This step reflects our unwavering commitment to gender equality and acknowledges the immense contributions of female players to West Indies cricket," he said.

Davis Cup: Indian team frets over visa denial to reserve player Prajwal

AUSTRALIA-WEST INDIES

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

aptain Rohit Rajpal worked Con Saketh Myneni's volleys while N Sriram Balaji was getting used to not hitting in the alleys as the Indian Davis Cup team continued its preparations for the upcoming tie against Pakistan here Friday

Coach Zeeshan Ali threw more balls on Myneni's body and Rajpal advised him to keep his head a bit down and still.

"Do not go up on your toes, keep your feet grounded when you make contact," said Rajpal. Myneni applied and immediately felt the difference.

This was because it is a bit difficult for taller players to move

sideways, and rivals feed a lot two singles players, Sumit of ball on the body. Myneni has Nagal and Sasikumar Mukund, of ball on the body. Myneni has been peppered with such balls on the Tour and Rajpal wanted his player to be ready for the challenge.

Ramkumar Ramanathan's grunts echoed around Delhi Gymkhana. He first played sets with Balaji and then also practiced with Niki Poonacha, who is also being prepared for the singles matches.

BALAJI TO PLAY SINGLES: Most likely it will be Balaji who will do the singles duty along with Ramkumar and the team is working hard to prepare

him for the challenge.

Balaji is being forced to play come to you all the time. So, singles since the country's top

opted out of the February 3-4

"While switching from doubles to singles, the challenge is to avoid that backhand crosscourt, targetting the alleys. You also have to curb your instinct of going for the lines. But grass suits me. When I used to play singles, I was a serve and vol-ley player," said Balaji.

Ashutosh Singh, assistant coach at the camp, said getting the rhythm of a singles player is key for Balaji, who is a doubles spe-

'In doubles, the ball does not gles player is significant," said Ashutosh, who himself was one of the better Indian serve getting that rhythm of the sin-

and volley players in his playing days Since the courts are expected to

first-innings total. Sinclair (50)

and veteran paceman Roach

(eight) added 31 for the ninth

wicket after the visitors

resumed at 266-8 on Friday.

be fast in Islamabad, Rajpal and Zeeshan had asked the groundsmen not to leave any water on the courts and also advised against rolling the sur-

That way the ball stays low, and that is exactly what the Indian team is going to contend with in Islamabad

While on-court preparations are in full swing, the denial of a visa to Dev is keeping the team management worried. All the Indian players, except Dev, received their visas on Thursday.

"If an injury happens to any player, we will be one-man short. We need Prajwal in the team. We are sending his

papers again to the High Commission. We are waiting and watching. They have rejected his visa without any reason; this is really disappointing," Rajpal told PTI.

Dev is surprised that he has been denied a visa.

"It really came as a surprise. I have travelled to so many countries, and I have never been denied a visa. Even I have a valid US visa. This is really disappointing. It is not in my hands. I am just hopeful that they reconsider the decision and issue me a visa."

CAPTAIN DELAYS DEPAR-

TURE: The Indian team will leave for Islamabad on Sunday but captain Rajpal will join the side a few days later due to a medical emergency in his family. His mother has been hospitalised.

It's my mother who gave me the first lesson of patriotism. Even today she told me that I should go with the team but I have to make sure that she is okay before I finally take the flight for Islamabad," said Rajpal. The captain also thanked his players for agreeing for a long preparatory camp ahead of the tie.

"Playing on grass is completely different. It's better to prepare in best possible manner. I am glad the players skipped playing days on Tour and came here," he said.

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