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RURAL INDIA DESERVES BETTER SCHOOLING

WORLD 8

ISIS CLAIMS RESPONSIBILITY FOR ISTANBUL CHURCH ATTACK

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY SURGE BY TWO PER CENT

NEW DELHI, TUESDAY JANUARY 30, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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JADEJA, RAHUL RULED OUT OF ENGLAND TEST
12 SPORTS

ED hot on the heels of Soren and Lalu

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI/RANCHI

In a stark reminder to the then "hiding" accused Coal Minister Shibu Soren in the UPA-1 Government, his son, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, was allegedly on the run evading the Enforcement Directorate. The senior Soren was on the run from the CBI and surrendered after a fortnight. Now, the ED team reached Hemant's New Delhi residence as they searched for the JMM leader in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam.

On the other hand, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad appeared before the ED in Patna for questioning in connection with a probe into a land-for-jobs scam. Supporters of the RJD gathered outside the ED office to protest Lalu's questioning. According to ED sources, a team of the agency, accompanied by Delhi Police personnel, reached the 5/1 Shanti Niketan building in South Delhi around 9 am and stayed there until late evening, attempting to locate him, but he remained untraceable.

The ED maintained that the searches at his Delhi home were conducted based on fresh inputs related to the land scam. As per procedure, a statement is recorded during the searches. Since Soren was not present, the ED



Enforcement Directorate officials at Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren's residence in connection with a money laundering case in New Delhi on Monday

could not record his statement. Later, a team of seven ED officials reached Jharkhand Bhawan to enquire about Soren's whereabouts. When the staff at Jharkhand Bhawan was asked if the Chief Minister stayed there, they replied in the negative. "We came to the residence of the Chief Minister to question him, but he is not here. The ED teams also went to Jharkhand Bhawan and a few other locations but could not find the Chief Minister," a source said.

The ED teams will remain at the residence until Soren returns, the sources added, noting that authorities are

also keeping vigilance at the Delhi airport. Amid reports of going incognito, Soren, who left for Delhi from Ranchi on January 27 night, has sent an email to the ED agreeing to a fresh round of questioning by the agency's investigators on January 31 at his Ranchi residence around 1 pm.

The ED had previously questioned Soren at his official residence in Ranchi on January 20 in the alleged land fraud case and issued a fresh summons, asking him to confirm his availability for questioning on either January 29 or January 31, according to the sources. Soren had communicated with the

Enforcement Directorate (ED) but had not confirmed the date and time for questioning.

While the Chief Minister's office remained tight-lipped on the development, Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan said that he was keeping a watch on the situation in the State in light of the ED summons to the CM. "I am monitoring the overall situation as the custodian of the Constitution. It is the duty of the Governor, and I am fulfilling it. We will cross the bridge when it comes," he told reporters when asked about the options before the Raj Bhavan in the wake of the political situation

in the State. Soren, who has skipped the ED summons nine times, made an impromptu trip to Delhi on Saturday night, cancelling the scheduled government events for Monday without any explanation, triggering speculations. This further fueled speculation as he cancelled his scheduled events, including a programme in Chaibasa on January 29, in Palamu on January 30, and in Giridih on January 31. His trip to Delhi occurred against the backdrop of the ED asking him whether he would be available for questioning on either January 29 or January 31.

A top Jharkhand Government official said, "It is an unprecedented situation here. No one knows the whereabouts of the chief minister." In Ranchi, security was heightened at the CM House, Raj Bhavan, and Central government offices on Monday as visuals from Soren's south Delhi residence flashed throughout the day. In a related development in Ranchi, JMM workers organised a massive rally on Monday, accusing the ED of targeting Soren. Carrying party flags, banners, and photographs of Soren, they gathered at Morabadi ground, from where they marched towards the CM House, the official residence of the Chief Minister.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with students, teachers and parents during the 'Pariksha Pe Charcha 2024' in New Delhi on Monday

PM tells Exam Warriors: Only compete with yourself

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi advised parents not to treat their child's report card as their own visiting card. He suggested that students should compete with themselves, not others. During his annual Pariksha Pe Charcha programme, while interacting with students, parents, and teachers, the Prime Minister

emphasised the importance of instilling resilience in children to help them cope with pressures. He also asserted parents and teachers should collectively address the challenges faced by students. "It is crucial to instill resilience in our children and help them cope with pressures. We cannot simply switch off, and once the pressure is gone, one must become capable of bearing any kind of pressure. Children should believe that

pressure keeps on building, and they have to prepare themselves for it. Comparing one child with another can be detrimental to their future. Some parents treat their children's report cards as their visiting cards, and this is not good," he said. Modi suggested that parents establish certain rules and regulations, such as creating "no gadget zones in the house" and implementing "no gadgets during dinner."

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Centre calls for All Party meet before Budget 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Budget Session, the Centre has called a meeting of floor leaders of different parties in Parliament on Tuesday. Sources in different political parties said that the all-party meeting is likely to witness acrimonious scenes, as the Opposition, which stood as the INDIA Bloc itself, is divided.

For the last few sessions, they together posed vehement protests both in the Government-convened meet-

ings of all parties and in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The last session saw the suspension of over 150 sitting Parliamentarians, and the issues are set to resonate in the meeting scheduled for Tuesday. The session will begin with President Droupadi Murmu's address to both Houses, marking the President's first address in the new Parliament.

The new Parliament has already observed two sessions — the Special Session in September 2022 when the new building was inaugurated and

the Winter Session. Ideally, the Opposition parties would also convene a separate meeting to strategise, but this time, due to a changed equation in Bihar and West Bengal, the Congress' largest allies and partners in the strategy against the government have changed tracks.

It is a customary practice ahead of every session for leaders of different parties to highlight the issues they want to raise in Parliament, and the government offers them a glimpse into its agenda while seeking their cooperation.

Indian Navy registers yet another victory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A swift response by an Indian Navy warship ensured the safe release of all 17 crew members onboard an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel hijacked by pirates, Navy officials said here on Monday. The incident took place 700 nautical miles west of Kochi in the Arabian Sea.

Giving details here, they said the Indian warship INS Sumitra was mission-deployed along the east coast of Somalia and responded immediately to the distress call after the fishing vessel was boarded by some pirates. "INS Sumitra, on anti-piracy operations along the East Coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, responded to a distress message regarding the hijacking of an Iranian-flagged Fishing Vessel, Iman. The vessel had been boarded by pirates, and the crew was taken as hostages," Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

INS Sumitra intercepted the vessel and acted in accordance with the established Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to coerce the pirates for the safe release of the crew along with the boat, he said. It ensured the successful release of all 17 crew members and the boat, the spokesperson said. The vessel



was subsequently sanitised and released for onward transit.

"Mission-deployed Indian naval ships on anti-piracy and maritime security operations in the Indian Ocean region symbolize the Indian Navy's resolve towards the safety of all vessels and seafarers at sea," Madhwal said.

The Red Sea and parts of the Arabian Sea have, in the past few weeks, witnessed some drone and pirate attacks on merchant vessels. The Indian Navy has stepped up surveillance in the troubled region substantially and deployed task groups consisting of around 10 warships in the face of the recent attacks on India-bound merchant vessels.

Recently, Iran-backed Yemen's Houthi militia has been targeting commercial

shipping in the Red Sea with missiles and drones after the Israel-Hamas conflict began on October 7.

The Houthi rebels declared their support for Hamas. Several shipping companies have suspended their operations in the Red Sea following the attacks, which have forced mariners to change course and take longer routes around the southern tip of Africa.

On Saturday last, India's guided missile destroyer INS Visakhapatnam responded to a distress call made by a merchant vessel that caught fire after a missile attack reportedly by the Houthis in the Gulf of Aden, with the incident putting the spotlight on the worsening security situation in one of the world's busiest shipping routes.

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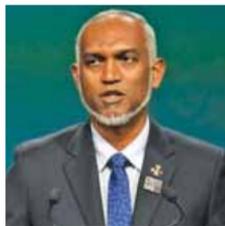
Maldives President swims in deeply troubled waters

PTI ■ MALE

The main Opposition MDP, which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, is planning to submit a motion to impeach President Mohamed Muizzu, according to media reports on Monday.

The development comes a day after clashes broke out in Parliament on Sunday between pro-Government MPs and Opposition lawmakers over differences over the approval of four members of the pro-China President's Cabinet.

After the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and The Democrats' parliamentary group decided to withhold parliamentary approval for four members of President Muizzu's Cabinet ahead of the voting, the pro-Government MPs from the ruling party Progressive Party of Maldives and People's National Congress (PPM/PNC) coalition initiated a protest, obstructing the parliamentary sitting. "The MDP, in partnership with the Democrats, have gathered enough signatures for an impeachment motion. However, they have yet to submit it," sun.com said, quoting a lawmaker from the MDP. The decision to submit an impeachment motion was



taken unanimously in the parliamentary group meeting of the MDP held on Monday, the edition.mv reported. Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year.

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives on November 17, Muizzu formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by March 15, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

The Parliament, which has 87 members, had recently amended its standing orders to make it easier to submit an impeachment motion. The MDP and Democrats, together, have 56 MPs between them; 43 MPs from MDP, and 13 from Democrats.



President Droupadi Murmu during the Beating Retreat ceremony, at Vijay Chowk in New Delhi, Monday

CAPSULE

US will hit back: Biden on attack by Iran militia

Columbia: President Joe Biden said on Sunday that the US "shall respond" after three American troops were killed and dozens more were injured in an overnight drone strike in northeast Jordan near the Syrian border. Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the first US fatalities after months.

WHO warns against tobacco industry marketing tactics

New Delhi: The WHO has cautioned its member nations to be vigilant against the tobacco industry's attempts to influence health policies through financial and in-kind incentives. P4

After apple cultivation success in Mizoram, CSIR to harvest new territories

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Encouraged by the success of its pilot project on apple cultivation in Mizoram, a first in the Northeastern States, scientists from the country's top research agency, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), have devised an ambitious plan to expand the cultivation of high-revenue, low-chilling fruit crops in the region, aiming to boost the income of local communities. This initiative also means that locals won't have to import the fruit from other States, thereby reducing carbon footprints through transportation, as highlighted by Dr Rakesh Kumar, Senior

Principal Scientist from CSIR's Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology (IHBT) in Palampur. IHBT has spearheaded apple cultivation in the region. Dr Rakesh Kumar reflected on the success, stating, "Our experiment, involving the planting of the low-chilling apple variety in 2022, has yielded positive results. While this has encouraged scientists like him to take more such initiatives, locals also seem to be enthusiastic about apple cultivation, considering these crops as a cornerstone of sustainable agriculture and a response to the threats posed by climate change. "We have identified some



potential locations for cultivation in this North-eastern State. To implement these interventions/technologies, CSIR-IHBT has collaborated with Mizoram Science Technology and Innovation Council in Aizawl

(MISTIC), Mizoram, and the College of Horticulture in Thenzawl, Mizoram (CAU, Manipur)," added Er Mohit Sharma, a Chemical Engineer and Principal Scientist who is part of the team for Mizoram initiatives.



Earlier this month, our team visited Mizoram to monitor the growth of aromatic plants and low-chilling varieties of apples, conducting training programmes in various locations, including the College of Horticulture, as

mentioned by Dr Rakesh Kumar.

He explained that the region has the potential to produce low-chilling apple types such as Anna, Dorset Golden, Sun Fuji, and others, as these varieties do not require additional and very cold temperatures to flourish. "Unlike traditional apple varieties, like those grown in Kashmir, which require about a thousand to fifteen hundred hours of chilling, the ones we have introduced in the North East require just about three hundred to five hundred hours of chilling," explained the scientist. Meanwhile, Dr Sudesh Kumar Yadav, Director of CSIR-IHBT in Palampur, added

that apple cultivation is one of the three projects sanctioned to them by the Department of Biotechnology under the Inter-Institutional Programme to support the development and sustainable utilisation of bioresources in Mizoram. "We are also involved in the promotion of Shiitake and Oyster mushroom cultivation, as well as high-value aromatic crops, in addition to cultivating low-chilling varieties of apples." In villages like Khanpui in the Aizawl district, scientists are directly engaging with local apple farmers, assisted by the senior scientific officer of MISTIC, Dr Davy Lalruatlana.

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Paharis wait for ST status in last Budget

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The members of the Pahari Ethnic Group in Jammu and Kashmir have once again set their eyes on the last Budget session for consideration and passing of the bill granting Scheduled Tribe status to the Pahari tribe, Paddari tribe, Koli, and Gadda Brahmins. In the absence of any direct communication with the Union government, the community leaders are left with no other option but to pin all their hopes on the last budget session.

When contacted on the telephone, senior Pahari community leader Syed Mushtaq Bukhari told The Pioneer, "As of now I have no information whether the government is going to pass the bill in the last budget session or not. Let me gather some more information than only I can comment". Originally the Reservation bill to amend the Reservation Act in Parliament to grant ST status to the Pahari Ethnic Tribe (Pahari Kabila), Paddari Tribe,



Koli and Gadda Brahman was introduced on the floor of the house in July 2023 along with two other bills for nomination of two Kashmiri Pandits and one Pakistan occupied Jammu Kashmir (PoJK) refugee in the UT Assembly and grant of reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Government jobs and educational institutions in Jammu and Kashmir. Out of the three, two bills were passed by the Parliament in its winter session in December 2023 while the ST status bill was not taken up. When approached for comments a senior BJP leader from the Rajouri-Poonch belt of Jammu province told The

Pioneer that the Union government is expected to take the final call on the crucial bill during the last budget session. The BJP leader claimed the poll prospects of the party candidate contesting Rajouri-Poonch Anantnag Lok Sabha seat are directly linked with the outcome of the Reservation bill. Paharis are mostly settled in the twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch in the Jammu region and Baramulla and Kupwara districts in the Kashmir division. The Paddari tribe is settled mainly in the Paddar area of Kishtwar district which is one of the remotest areas in the erstwhile Doda region while Koli & Gadda

Brahmins are spread in different areas but their population is very small.

Party insiders, however, claimed the union government may give it a skip this time as well as the party was not keen on annoying the members of the Gujjar Bakerwal community ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. BJP, which is hoping to win maximum Lok Sabha seats in Jammu and Kashmir cannot afford to antagonize the tribal population spread across the Pir Panjal region and parts of North Kashmir in Kupwara.

The Union government has earlier clarified that the reservation of Gujjars and Bakerwals will not be affected while extending ST status to Paharis. But on-ground resistance displayed by a large section of the population has raised many eyebrows.

Out of the nine seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the 90-member Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, a total number of five seats are reserved for STs in the Jammu division and four in Kashmir.

BJP using CAA for political gain in 2024 elections, alleges Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Hours after Union Minister Shantanu Thakur claimed that Citizenship Amendment Act was going to be implemented in a week's time Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee jabbed back saying elections are such big liability on the BJP that they have to "dig out" skeletons of "redundant" issues like CAA or National Citizenship Register. "Suddenly as the elections are approaching the BJP has again started shouting CAA and NRC ... my question is what CAA? What new things are there in CAA? All people who have their names in electoral rolls, are giving votes, have ration cards and getting their getting, have land patta are already citizens of India ... this is because we have already given citizenship to them through these facilities ... there is nothing that can take that from them," Banerjee said alleging "the BJP has dug up a redundant issue once again as they are used to doing this before the elections." Alleging that the Centre was getting the Border Security Forces to issue identity cards to people living along the borders



Banerjee said, "the BSF is an oppressive force ... they always torture the villagers ... now they are giving fake identity cards ... don't accept that card because then you will be entrapped ... if you take those cards then you will come with in the fold of CAA ... I will see how they can force CAA in Bengal ... till I am there ... there will be no CAA, no NEC in Bengal ... I will not let this take place in Bengal which is a peaceful State." Attacking the Centre for trying to browbeat the Opposition parties Banerjee said how the BJP had been threatening the opposition parties with ED and CBI. "They are calling up and saying that they will send ED and CBI to their houses if they do not join the saffron parties," Banerjee said adding

how the BJP was using religion to polarize the country before the elections. She also alleged that the opposition States like Bengal were not being paid their dues. Warning that if the dues were not cleared soon she would start sit-in movements Banerjee said, "they have looted funds from here but not paying back our rightful dues in MNREGA, PM Housing schemes and so many other projects ... now I say if they do not clear the dues then I will start a dharna." The Chief Minister who was in a seven-day tour of North Bengal was addressing an administrative rally at Cooch Behar. Earlier, Union Minister Thakur had told a rally in South 24 Parganas CAA was a reality and would take place soon. "I can assure the people

that in next seven days CAA will be implemented ... it will be implemented not only in Bengal but also in the other parts of the country."

Before him another Union Minister Nisith Pramanik had said that CAA would soon be implemented and that "the refugees who have come from the neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan etc will no longer have to remain aliens as they will be given citizenship through CAA."

Other opposition parties like the Congress and the Left immediately called the verbal duel between the BJP and the TMC a ploy to polarize the voters ahead of the elections.

"These are cunning creatures ... but the people of Bengal have caught their cunningness ... they had been polarizing the voters along communal lines for the past two elections in order to cloak and hide the other issues like unemployment, price rise, corruption, law and order ... so they are trying to divide the people and rule ... but that will not happen this time round," CPI(M)'s central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty said.

Integrity matters in politics: TMC on Nitish somersault

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress another dwindling partner in the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance on Monday circuitously disapproved of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's fifth somersault in a decade or so saying the people of Bihar would be the best judge to evaluate his steps. When asked to comment on Kumar's dumping of the INDIA and joining the National Democratic Alliance, TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Monday said that he was too junior to speak about Kumar's politics but insisted that he always believed in the institution of "political credibility."

He said, "Nitish ji is too senior to me ... he is almost double my age and is much more wise and experience because in politics I am only ten years' old in politics ... but still believe that credibility is one institution that is highly regarded in politics ... I will never let my credibility go for political convenience ... but I again say that I am nobody to give opinions on that as the people of Bihar will decide whether it is good to switch sides every two years... this is because in democracy it is the people are



the best judge... Let the people of Bihar make the judgment." The Left however wondered how many times Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had changed sides. "She was with the BJP, then she left them and went with the Congress in 2001 ... again she went with the NDA and then again left them and went with the Congress before leaving them again in 2012 ... and now she no one knows whether she is in the INDIA or not," a CPI(M) leader and a former Minister said. The Bengal Congress leadership too has been critical of the Chief Minister for trying to impede Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra. Though he invited Banerjee for the fifth time to join the Yatra, senior Congress leader Jairam on Sunday complained that the

Congress-led yatra was being greeted with hostility in the TMC-ruled State a la Assam. "The TMC is a constituent of the INDIA alliance ... but here we see that Rahul ji's posters beige torn," Ramesh said adding the Bengal administration was not cooperating with the Congress. The Pradesh Congress leadership too complained that the State administration had refused to provide accommodation to Gandhi for night stay in the circuit houses. "He was supposed to take his lunch at Irrigation Department's circuit house at Harischandrapur but that was denied by the administration ... then he has not been given accommodation to stay in government facilities either in Malda or Behrampur," PCC leader Soumya Aich Roy said.

AAP Government formulates Delhi Solar Policy 2024

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Power consumers in Delhi have a reason to cheer as the Delhi government has formulated the Delhi Solar Policy 2024 that will not only ensure zero electricity bill to them but also give them an opportunity to earn by installing solar panels on their rooftops. Making amendments to its Solar Policy 2016 the Arvind Kejriwal government has come out with a more consumer-friendly Solar Policy 2024 that will provide 4500 MW of installed capacity of solar power in Delhi by 2027.

Addressing a press conference Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the Delhi Solar Policy 2016, announced in the first term of the AAP government after coming to power in 2015, laid the foundation for solar adoption in Delhi.

"Under the policy, the rooftop solar panels installed by the people in Delhi have the installed capacity of 250 MW electricity. Besides this, various discoms in Delhi purchased 1250 MW solar power from outside Delhi. So, in total, 1500 MW solar power was made available under the policy. We all know that solar power reduces air pollution," he said. The chief minister said as of



now, the Delhi government gives 200 units of electricity free (fully subsidized) to residents and gives subsidy of 50% to those residential consumers who consume 201 units to 400 units a month (partly subsidized) and for those with consumption above 400 units a month, there is no subsidy. "But electricity bills of all residential consumers who install solar panels on their rooftops by opting for this policy will be zero, no matter how much electricity they consume. That is the most important takeaway of the policy," said Kejriwal. The chief minister said not only this, each domestic consumer will also be able to generate an additional income of Rs 700 to Rs 900 per month under the policy and inflation will come down further in Delhi. "As per a recent report by the Central government, the national average inflation rate is 6%, and 7% in Haryana and Gujarat, but in Delhi it is only 3%, which is the lowest in the country. After the

implementation of the policy, the inflation rate will decline further in Delhi," he said. Kejriwal said that it is estimated that there will be an installed capacity of 4500 MW of solar energy by 2027 in Delhi after the implementation of the policy. "The target of Delhi Solar Policy is to increase the total installed solar capacity of Delhi to 4,500 MW by March 2027, that is, by three times of the current capacity of 1500 MW in only three years. This includes 750 MW of rooftop solar plants installations in Delhi and the 3750 MW purchased by the discoms through utility scale solar plants installed outside Delhi by 2027," he said.

The chief minister said that the cost of installing the rooftop solar panels will be recovered in four years. "In addition to zero bill, they will get a monthly income of Rs 700-900 through Delhi govt's Generation Based Incentive (GBI) and the total cost of installing the rooftop solar panel will be recovered in four years. Let us say a residential consumer's average monthly consumption is 360 units and the consumer installs a 2kW rooftop solar plant at approx. cost of Rs 90,000 with taxes and subsidy included.

ED hot on...

From Page 1

Raising slogans such as "Hemant Soren Mat Ghabrana, Hum Tumhare Saath Hain" (Hemant Soren, don't worry, we are with you), the rally passed near the CM House and Raj Bhavan before returning to Morabadi ground. JMM supporters participating in the rally came from various districts, including Khunti, Ranchi, Garhwa, Ramgarh, and Gumla. Regarding the possibility of the imposition of President's Rule in the State, the Governor said it was currently just "guesswork" adding that political parties should not get involved in it. Addressing Soren's skipping of ED summons in connection with a money laundering

probe, he said, "I will tell you one thing—nobody is above the law. Soren has accused the Enforcement Directorate of being 'motivated by a political agenda' aimed at disrupting the state government's functioning. He claims that the insistence on recording his statement again on or before January 31 reeks of malice. In an email to the ED, he alleged that the issuance of summons to him was 'wholly vexatious and a colorable exercise of powers given by the statute.' He urged the ED to preserve the video recording of the seven-hour questioning on January 20, making it available to the Court of Law. Soren agreed to record his statement on January 31 at 1 pm at his residence, as mentioned in the email sent on Sunday.

Indian Navy registers yet...

From Page 1

The Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker MV Marlin Luanda was struck by the Houthi rebels on Friday. The vessel's crew included 22 Indians and one Bangladeshi. Another Marshall Islands-flagged merchant vessel, which was recently attacked by a drone in the Gulf of Aden, docked at the Tuticorin port in Tamil Nadu on Friday after the Indian Navy's explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) specialists undertook a thorough examination of the ship and declared it safe for port entry.

After apple cultivation success in...

From Page 1

Through immersive training sessions, farmers are gaining crucial insights into apple cultivation, pruning techniques, training methods, nutrient management, and the meticulous creation of irrigation basins and pits. "This strategic initiative aims to equip farmers with the latest knowledge and skills necessary for successful low-chilling apple cultivation," informed the scientist.

PM tells Exam Warriors: Only...

He also recommended sharing the passcodes of all mobile phones in the household with every member to establish transparency. The PM emphasised that technology should not be considered a burden, but it is essential to learn how to use it to one's advantage.

"Parents should formulate a set of rules and regulations in the family, like having no electronic gadgets during dinner and creating gadget-free zones in the house. In today's world, one cannot run away from technology. It should not be considered a burden but is mandatory to learn its effective usage," he said.

The PM explained that the stress on students is of three types---induced by peer pressure, by parents and self induced. "At times children take pressure on themselves that they are not performing up to the mark. I suggest that you should set small goals during preparation and gradually improve your performance, this way you will be completely ready before the exams," he said.

The PM also suggested students to "always make friends who are more intelligent and work harder." "You must be inspired by such friends. Don't let the pressure

of studies and examinations overpower you," he said.

Modi said that even though competition and challenges act as inspirations but competition must be healthy. "Lot of parents keep on giving examples of other children to their children. Parents should avoid doing these things..." he said. "You must not compare one child with another as that can be detrimental to their future. Some parents treat their children's report card as their visiting card, this is not good," he said.

"Students need to make themselves ready to go through any condition. If we visit any cold place, we make up our minds, and accordingly, we keep ourselves ready...(in the) same way you have to be ready for exams," Modi said.

"Teachers must expand their connections with students much beyond their subject syllabus so that students can reach out to their teachers even for the smallest of problems. Music teachers can not only help their own students deal with tensions, they can do so for students of the entire school," Modi said. Replying to questions on balancing studies with a healthy life, Prime Minister Modi said many students use mobile-phones and some do it for many hours. He advised

students not to use their sleep time for watching reels. "They should understand that even mobiles need recharge to be used, and similarly, our body also needs to be recharged. On the other hand, some students keep playing all the time, but it is necessary to strike a balance. A healthy body is necessary for a healthy mind. Good and sound sleep is also a must for good health. Don't use your sleep time for watching reels," he said.

"I get into deep sleep within 30 seconds of lying on the bed on all 365 days. When I am awake, I am fully awake, but I am totally asleep while sleeping. Nutrition is also necessary. Our body must get the required nutrition. A good balance of food and regular exercise for fitness are also necessary," Modi said. The PM also advised students to practice writing. "In this age of mobile phones and laptops, students are losing the practice to write while exams are supposed to be handwritten. Of the time dedicated to studies, you should devote at least 50 per cent time to practise writing," he said.

Organised by the Ministry of Education, Pariksha Pe Charcha has been engaging students, parents and teachers for the past six years.

In reply to a question on how he keeps a positive mindset amid the challenges of his job, Modi said every person has to manage situations and tests, and some people believe in waiting for the crises to pass and circumstances to improve. Such people cannot

achieve anything in life, he added.

"My nature is different. I do not keep sleeping while waiting for challenges to pass and the situation to improve on its own. I challenge every challenge and I get to learn new things and evolve new strategies, which also contributes to my development," the PM told students.

Modi said he was confident that over 140 crore citizens of the country were with him. If there are 100 million challenges, then there are billions of solutions as well, he said and cited his government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic as an example. The PM said the government alone cannot eradicate poverty and it can be curbed when every poor person resolves to step up. "It is my responsibility that I fulfil their dreams, give them pucca houses, toilets, educational facilities, health insurance, water... If I give them the freedom from challenges to deal with daily issues and empower them, they will find that poverty is gone," he said, adding that nearly 25 crore people came out of poverty during his 10-year tenure. Modi said he never felt lonely or that he was merely a "chaiwala" who cannot do it.

Interacting with the PM, Chandresh Jain, a parent from Pune, raised concerns about the intrusion of technology in students' live, while Kumari Puja Srivastava, a parent from Ramgarh in Jharkhand, asked him how to manage studies with the abundance of social

media platforms to distract them.

Abhinav Rana, a student from TR DAV School in Himachal Pradesh, asked him how to beat exam stress. "Excess of anything is bad," the Prime Minister said, comparing excess mobile phone usage with home-cooked meals which when taken in excess can lead to stomach problems and other issues, even though it is rich in nutrients.

Raising the issue of striking a balance between exam preparation and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, Dhiraj Subhas, a student of Senior Secondary School from Rajasthan, Najma Khatoon from PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya in Kargil, Abhishek Kumar Tiwari, and a teacher from Tobi Lahme, a government higher secondary in Arunachal Pradesh, asked the prime minister about managing studies along with exercise.

Modi stressed the need for a balanced diet and also emphasised the importance of regular exercise and physical activities for fitness. A total of 31.24 lakh students, 5.60 lakh teachers and 1.95 lakh parents participated in the previous year's edition. This year, an estimated 2.26 crore registrations have taken place on the MyGov portal, highlighting widespread enthusiasm among students. This year's event was held in a town-hall format at the Bharat Mandapam. Two students and a teacher from each state and Union Territory, along with winners of the Kala Utsav, were invited.

Minor sexually assaulted by three friends in Hauz Khas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 14-year-old boy was Amade to lick shoes and perform "unnatural sex" on three of his friends, who also recorded the act and put its video on social media, in south Delhi's Hauz Khas area, police said on Monday.

The incident came to fore Sunday night, when victim's mother received the video on her mobile phone by someone and she approached the local police, they said. Earlier, the Delhi Police had said that video was sent by one of the three juveniles.

The video, also posted on Instagram, showed the boy being made to crouch at knife point, while his "friends" first made him lick their shoes and then forced him to perform an "unnatural act," police said.

Responding to a PCR call Sunday night, the "local police rushed to the spot where the caller said some boys had committed an unnatural act with her 14 year-old son and sent the video clip to her on her mobile phone," an officer said. They took the boy for a medical exam and then to counselling.

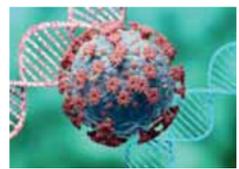
2,083 cases of Covid 19 subvariant JN.1 detected so far: INSACOG

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG) on Monday said 2,083 cases of Covid-19 subvariant JN.1 and its lineages have been detected in the country so far. There are 814 SARS-CoV-2 sequences of JN.1 across 18 states and UTs while its sub-lineage JN.1.1 has been detected in 943 cases. JN.1.11 has been detected in 244 cases while the rest of the cases were detected in the sub-lineages of JN.1. Last month, the Centre asked the states and Union Territories to maintain a constant vigil amid detection of new variants in the country.

The World Health Organisation has classified JN.1 as a separate "variant of interest" given its rapidly-increasing spread, but said it poses a "low" global public health risk.

The JN.1 sub-variant of the coronavirus was previously classified as a variant of interest (VOI) as part of the BA.2.86 sub-lineages, the parent lineage that is classified as a VOI, the world body said. In the meantime, India saw a single day rise of 112 cases of COVID-19, while the number of active cases of the infection



was recorded at 1,460, the health ministry said on Monday.

No deaths have been reported in a span of 24 hours, according to the ministry's data updated at 8 am.

The number of daily cases had dropped to double-digits till December 5, but cases had begun to increase after emergence of a new variant and cold weather conditions. After December 5, the maximum single-day rise of 841 new cases was reported on December 31, which is 0.2 per cent of the peak cases reported in May 2021, sources said. Of the total active cases, a large majority of these (around 92 per cent) are recovering under home isolation.

"The currently available data suggests that the JN.1 variant is neither leading to an exponential rise in the new cases nor a surge in the hospitalisation and mortality," the source stated.

Beating Retreat casts a spell with enchanting desi tunes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Foot tapping tunes played by military and paramilitary bands during Beating Ceremony enthralled the audience at Vijay Chowk. From massed band's 'Shanknaad' to Navy's lilting 'Mission Chandrayaan', mellifluous tunes reverberated across the Raisina Hills in the heart of Delhi as India's rich heritage and towering accomplishments were celebrated during the Beating Retreat ceremony on Monday.

President Droupadi Murmu, supreme commander of the armed forces arrived at the venue in the traditional buggy. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, several union ministers, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, three Service chiefs and general public attended the ceremony where the bands played 31 Indian tunes. Beating Ceremony marks the end of Republic Day celebrations. With sunshine in the daytime, the temperature was bearable during

the event which started around 5:15 PM.

President Murmu arrived at the venue in the traditional 'buggy', adding to the old-world charm of the ceremony that traces its origins to the early 1950s.

The splendid ceremony began with the massed band's 'Shanknaad' setting the tone for the event as the sound of captivating and foot-tapping Indian tunes played by military and paramilitary bands filled the air over the majestic Raisina Hills with the grand Rashtrapati Bhavan as its centrepiece.

This was followed by tunes belted out by pipes and drums bands such as 'Veer Bharat', 'Sangam Dur', 'Kesariya Bana' and 'Deshon ka Sartaj Bharat'. They also made formations of 'Chakravayuh' and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. The CAPF bands played 'Bharat Ke Jawan' and 'Vijay Bharat' among other tunes.

The spectators, consisting of both young and old people, cheered as the bands performed, and many also chanted 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' at the end of the ceremony. The



Indian Air Force (IAF) band then regaled the audience with tunes such as 'Swadeshi', 'Rejoice in Raisina' and 'Tiger Hill'.

The IAF band members made formations such as 'diamond brigade', 'diamond', 'Apache'

much to the delight of the crowd. Some of the members carried instruments decorated with lights which at times

glowed in tricolour theme. Tunes of classic 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram' touched an immediate chord with the audi-

ence.

The crowd was then treated to rich tunes played by the Indian Navy band such as 'INS Vikrant', 'Ekla Chalo Re', 'Samudra Darshak', 'Mission Chandrayaan', 'Jai Bharati' and 'Hum Tayyar Hain'. 'Mission Chandrayaan' was an ode to India's successful lunar mission last year, and they also played in 'Vikram Lander' formation. This was followed by the Indian Army band playing 'Faulad Ka Jigar', 'Agniveer', 'Kargil 1999' and 'Taqt Watan' among other tunes.

The 'Agraneer Bharat' tune led by a flautist was heart-touching, and another tune that followed also enthralled the crowd. Some of the members of this band also carried instruments which were decorated with lights, and the band which arrived at Vijay Chowk in multiple 'Arrow' formations, also made a formation on 'Army's insignia', 'Bharat' (in Hindi), and one marking the victory in 1999 Kargil war.

They followed it up with 'Agniveer; and 'Kargil 1999' tunes. The massed bands then played the tunes 'Kadam Kadam Badhaye Ja', 'Aye Mere

Watan Ke Logon' and 'Drummers Call'.

The event came to a close with the ever-popular tune of 'Sare Jahan se Acha' as dusk made way to the inky night sky while the Raisina Hills complex dazzled with lights of vibrant colours. The President returned to Rashtrapati Bhavan in the traditional 'buggy', which made a comeback on the Kartavya Path during this Republic Day parade, after a gap of 40 years. The principal conductor of the Beating Retreat ceremony on Monday was Lt Col Vimal Joshi.

The Beating Retreat ceremony traces its origins to the early 1950s when Major Roberts of the Indian Army indigenously developed the unique ceremony of display by the massed bands.

It marks a centuries-old military tradition, when the troops ceased fighting, sheathed their arms, withdrew from the battlefield and returned to the camps at sunset at the sounding of the retreat. Colours and Standards are cased and flags are lowered. The ceremony creates nostalgia for the times gone by.

Transplantation of 134 trees for construction of ISTM building approved



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has given permission for transplantation of 134 trees in lieu of the construction of a building of the Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) at the old JNU campus involving 1.7578 hectare of area.

According to Raj Niwas officials, permission has also been granted for the felling of two trees for the project, according to them. The officials said that a compensatory plantation of 1,340 trees, in addition to transplantation or translocation of these trees, at a cost of Rs 76.38 lakh will be carried out.

The forest and wildlife department has informed Saxena that 132 out of 134 trees of native species will be

transplanted at Mehrauli and two trees of exotic species are proposed to be compensated for, they said.

The compensatory plantation in the ratio of 1:10 in lieu of transplantation or felling of trees, totalling to 1,340 saplings would be carried out at Eco Park, NTPC, Badarpur, New Delhi, by the ISTM in an area of 1.40 hectare, the officials said.

It will involve various species such as neem, amalata, peepal, pilkhan, gular, bargad, desi kiker and arjun along with other native species.

The compensatory plantation cost of Rs 76.38 lakh will be deposited in advance by the ISTM. The Lt Governor's permission for transplantation or felling of trees was sought under the provisions of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act (DPTA), 1994, the officials said.

BJP to file police complaint against AAP MLA for poaching charges



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP will lodge a police complaint against the allegation that the saffron party was trying to poach seven AAP MLAs, made by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the party's Delhi president Virendra Sachdeva said on Monday. Leader of the opposition in Delhi assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also slammed the Kejriwal government for making false and baseless allegations against the BJP, saying the chief minister should produce facts in this regard.

Sachdeva said that a delegation of BJP lawmakers led by Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Bidhuri will meet Delhi Police Commissioner on Tuesday and file a complaint with him to launch an impartial probe into

the allegations.

"The AAP and Kejriwal should also help us by giving an affidavit that their MLAs were being poached by the BJP to ensure," Sachdeva said.

Kejriwal, as well as several Aam Aadmi Party leaders, had last week claimed that the BJP was trying to break off MLAs of the party by offering them money and election tickets.

Kejriwal had charged that seven AAP MLAs were contacted and offered Rs 25 crore each to defect. He had also alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to arrest him in the alleged liquor scam and topple his government in Delhi. "BJP is going to demand an impartial investigation into the allegation of Kejriwal and his party leaders, in its meeting with the Delhi Police Commissioner. We challenge

Arvind Kejriwal to join us to demand the probe alongwith us and present evidence of his allegation so that the truth comes out," Sachdeva said. The AAP alleged that seven party MLAs were contacted with offer of Rs 25 crore to each of them and they claimed that after the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister in the alleged liquor scam, the Delhi government will be toppled.

AAP leader and a minister in the Kejriwal government, Atishi claimed that a recording of one of the callers who contacted an AAP MLA will be put in public domain at the right time. The BJP challenged Kejriwal to reveal the names of the seven MLAs of his party and of those who contacted them for defection. Kejriwal should resign, if he cannot do that, the party said.

250 seized vehicles gutted in Wazirabad Police Yard blaze



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

At least 250 vehicles parked at the Delhi Police's 'malkhana (yard)' in Wazirabad were gutted in a fire that broke out in the early hours on Monday, Delhi Fire Services officials said. The yard is used to park the vehicles seized by the police. The fire broke out at 4 am and five fire tenders were pressed into service. The blaze was brought under control at 6 am, a Delhi Fire Services official said.

No one was injured in the incident but about 50 four-wheelers and nearly 200 two-

wheelers were completely gutted, a Delhi Police officer said.

Earlier, the Delhi Fire Services official had said about 200 four-wheelers and 250 two-wheelers were gutted in the blaze.

The Delhi Police officer said the number of vehicles charred in the blaze was counted after the cooling operation was completed.

The 'malkhana' is spread over 500 square yards and is used to park thousands of seized vehicles. The ground is surrounded with bushes and shrubbery. A police officer said it is sus-

pected that someone started a small fire to beat the cold and it spread to the yard.

A team from the Forensic Science Laboratory was called in to ascertain the exact cause of the blaze, he added.

A case under the Section 435 (mischief by fire) of the Indian Penal Code against unidentified persons has been registered at Sonia Vihar police station, the police said.

Another police officer said a similar incident had occurred last year when several vehicles were gutted in a fire. The cause of the fire could not be established at that time.

JNUSU protests outside UGC over dereserving of posts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Students groups on Monday staged a protest against the UGC draft guidelines that suggest "de-reserving" vacancies in Higher Education Institutes reserved for SC, ST, and OBC candidates if suitable candidates are not available.

The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) along with other Left-backed student outfits such as AISA and SFI demonstrated outside the UGC headquarters demanding the proposal be rolled back. In a statement, AISA said that the draft guidelines are detrimental to the ethos of democratic India and will "ruin all inclusiveness and justice from education institutions."

"This notice will not be tolerated by the students and no empty promise, but outright deletion of it from the guideline must be ensured," the statement said. The student body also raised objections to the draft guidelines being issued only in English, online, and without a broadcast to the press. It submitted preliminary comments on the matter in a letter to the University Grants Commission on Sunday. A delegation of students representing different outfits met officials at the UGC office and



presented the grievances of the student community they stand to face if the draft guidelines are implemented. According to the Students Federation of India, students were assured by the UGC officials that the draft guidelines will be revised to remove the clause on de-reservation of SC, ST, and OBC posts.

"Following the protest at UGC, delegates met with the officials of UGC and expressed the grievances of the student community regarding the guidelines released by the body. "The officials accepted that it was a grave mistake that happened from their side and the revised draft will not carry the clause on de-reservation," the SFI statement read.

The Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS) also participated in the demonstration and demanded the dismissal of UGC Chairperson M Jagadesh Kumar. In its statement, the group alleged the draft guidelines are an attempt to lower the number of reserved seats in higher education institutes so that eligible candidates could be rejected as 'not found suitable,' or NFS, category.

The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes,' stipulate that a vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared 'unreserved' if enough candidates from these categories are not available.

IP university starting online admissions from February 1

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The IP University will start the online admission process for all programmes from February 1 to March 31, an official release on Monday said.

The university released three separate admission brochures for the UG, PG and Ph.D programmes for the upcoming academic session 2024-25.

"The online application portal for the old programmes of the university will open from February 1 while for new programmes it will be initiated from February 7," Vice-Chancellor Mahesh Verma told the media.

He added that the university has set up a Centre for Distance and Online Learning to widen the ambit of learning.

The university has this year also opened doors to the international students for Ph. D admissions, Verma said. The university has adopted NEP across all curriculums and the students will be given the benefit of multiple entry and exit.

"The university is also planning to start separate quotas for girls and sports," he said. Verma also informed that a provisional allotment of around 22 acres of DDA land and 160 flats in Education City has been received for development of the proposed third campus of the university at Narela.



The university is going to increase around 1,100 seats in campus schools with introduction of new programmes, he said.

The application fee for the courses has been kept at Rs 1,500 like previous year. In affiliated institutes of the IP University, the new programmes will be introduced in the upcoming academic session, the release said.

The university is also planning to introduce some new courses in the campus schools which await approval of the concerned statutory bodies, it added. Director (Admissions) of IP University, Udayan

Ghose, informed that counselling for management programme on the basis of CAT and CMAT and that of Law programme on the basis of CLAT will start in April.

All the common entrance tests (CETs) of the university will be conducted offline from April 27 to May 12 on OMR sheet like last year.

Counselling will start in the first week of June and will be completed by July 31 for other programmes and the new academic session will start from August 1, the release said. The spot/ mop up round of counselling will also be completed by August 14, it added.

Youth killed in Delhi Jaipur Highway subway over girl

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A 21-year-old youth was stabbed to death in a subway on the Delhi-Jaipur Highway during a clash between two groups of friends over a love affair, police said on Monday.

According to police, the victim, Aakash, was a native of Begusarai in Bihar and lived in a rented accommodation in Naharpur Rupa village with his cousin. He was preparing for competitive exams.

According to a complaint filed by Suraj, his cousin was stabbed in the subway on Sunday by one Krishna, a school friend of Aakash.

Aakash was part of a group which had gone to the subway to sort out a row over a love affair with Krishna, who came there with his own around 10-youth-strong party and launched an attack, police said, quoting the complainant.

"I reached there after some time and saw Aakash's friends trying to run away. Krishna and his friends started pelting us with stones, some of which hit us. In the meantime, two of Krishna's friends caught my brother and Krishna stabbed him with a sharp knife many times and fled," Suraj said in his complaint, according to police.



Aakash was rushed in an auto rickshaw to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead, police said.

An FIR was registered against Krishna and his associates under sections 147 (riots), 148 (unlawful assembly), 302 (murder) of IPC and Arms Act at sector 37 Police Station late Sunday night, police said.

On Monday, police arrested Krishna, and two others, both named Sachin, in connection with the killing.

Krishna, originally from Sainik Colony of Faridabad, lives in Gurugram.

Of the other two, Sachin alias Kalu is a resident of Udiya Khera village from Rajasthan's Udaipur, and Sachin is from Usmapur village of Haryana's Rewari district, police said.

A senior officer said police are questioning the accused and will produce them in a city court tomorrow. Aakash's body was handed over to his kin after post mortem, Probationer Sub-Inspector Krishan Kumar, who is investigating the matter, had earlier said.

US issued 1.4 million visas to Indians in 2023

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The US processed a record 1.4 million visas to Indians in 2023, bringing down visitor visa appointment wait times by 75 per cent, the US Embassy said here on Monday. There was a 60 per cent increase in visa applications from Indians compared to 2022.

Process improvements and investments in staffing have brought down appointment wait times for visitor visas from an average of 1,000 days to only 250 days around the country while wait times are minimal in all other categories," it said.

In 2023, the US consular team in India issued more than 140,000 student visas — more than in any other country, setting a record for the third year in a row. "Taken individually, Mumbai, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai now stand as the top four student visa processing posts in the world. As a result of these surging numbers, Indian students have become the largest group of international graduate students in the United States and make up more than a quarter of the over one million foreign students studying in the United States," the US Embassy said.

"Employment visas remain a top priority. Consular team in India consolidated most petition-based visa processing in Chennai and Hyderabad to increase efficiency, leading to the processing of over 380,000 employment visas for Indians and their family members in 2023 and allowing the US Mission to maintain a minimal appointment wait time," it added.

The US Embassy also said a pilot programme will stream-



line the renewal process for H1B visa holders in 2024. "In 2024, a pilot programme will allow eligible H1B holders to renew their visas in the United States, further streamlining the process for this group," it added.

The US Embassy said the Consulate General, Mumbai, eliminated a queue of more than 31,000 immigrant visa cases delayed by the pandemic.

"Those who have a pending immigrant visa petition and are ready for scheduling can now obtain an appointment within the standard, pre-pandemic appointment window. The US Mission continues to invest in the future of consular services in India and explore ways to provide more efficient and convenient services," the statement said.

"These investments have included the opening of a new USD 340 million facility in Hyderabad in March 2023, the announcement of two new consulates in Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, continued capital improvements to our facilities around the country, and the permanent assignment of more consular officers to India," it added.

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Now, woman employees can nominate children for pension instead of husband

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a path-breaking decision with far-reaching socio-economic impact, the Centre has allowed woman employees to nominate her son or daughter for family pension, instead of her husband, according to an official statement issued on Monday.

Previously, family pension was granted to the spouse of a deceased government servant or pensioner, while other family members became eligible only after the spouse's ineligibility or demise, the statement said.

Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said the Department of Pensions and Pensioners' Welfare (DoPPW) has introduced an amendment to the Central Civil Services (Pension) Rules, 2021, allowing female government employees or pensioners to grant family pension to their eligible child/children after their own demise, in place of their spouse.

The amendment will address situations where marital discord leads to divorce proceedings or cases filed under laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, Dowry Prohibition Act or the Indian Penal Code, he said.

"In a path-breaking decision with far reaching socio-economic impact and in keeping with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policy to provide equitable rights to women, the government has amended the long-standing established rule, thereby granting the woman employee the right to nominate her son or daughter for family pension, instead of her husband as has been practice so far," said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry.

Singh said, the amendment is in line with Prime Minister Modi's policy of giving just and legitimate rights to the women functionaries in every sector. The DoPPW said, the female government servant or pensioner must make a written request to the concerned head of office, stating that family pension should be granted to her eligible child/children in precedence to her spouse, in the event of her death during the ongoing proceedings.



"If the female government servant or pensioner passes away during the proceedings, the family pension will be disbursed accordingly," the statement said. If a woman employee is survived by a widower with no eligible child, the family pension will be payable to the widower, it said.

However, if the widower is the guardian of a minor child or a child suffering from a mental

disorder, the family pension will be payable to the widower, as long as he remains the guardian, the statement said, adding that once the child attains majority and remains eligible for family pension, it will be payable directly to the child.

For cases where the deceased female government servant or pensioner is survived by a widower and children who have attained majority but are still eligible for family pension, the family pension will be payable to such children, it said. Singh said a series of governance reforms have been introduced under the Prime Minister to provide an enabling environment for working women.

The minister said the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has taken concerted efforts to increase the representation of women in central government jobs and to provide them a balance between professional as well as family life.

Parliamentary committee examining Bill on marriage age of girls gets extension

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



A parliamentary committee examining a bill seeking to raise the age of marriage of women from the present 18 years to 21 has been given another extension to table its report.

The Budget session of Parliament beginning January 31 is the last session of the present Lok Sabha before parliamentary elections are announced. The committee will now finalise its report by May following the four-month extension while the term of the 17th Lok Sabha ends on June 16.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha and remains pending there, is likely to lapse when the tenure of the House ends in June.

Bills introduced in the Lok Sabha and pending there as well as those passed by the Rajya Sabha and pending in the lower house lapse on the dissolution of the Lok Sabha. "Chairman, Rajya Sabha, has granted extension of time for a period of four months with

effect from 24th January, 2024 to the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports for examination of The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021," a bulletin issued on January 24 said.

The committee has been given extensions to finalise its report in the past too. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in December 2021 and was referred to the standing committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports which functions under the Rajya Sabha Secretariat.

Soon after introducing the bill, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani had requested the Lok Sabha speaker to refer the bill to the standing committee for detailed examination.

Irani told the House that the government was seeking to bring parity among men and women. She said the Bill also seeks to override all existing laws, including any custom, usage or practice governing the parties in relation to marriage.

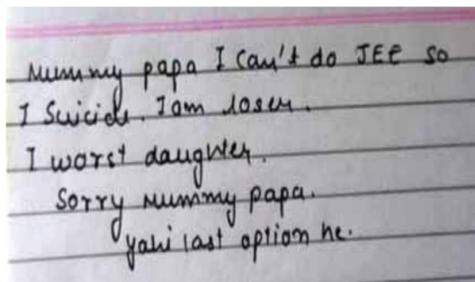
I cannot do JEE, so killing self: Girl writes days before exam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/KOTA

An 18-year-old student preparing for JEE allegedly hanged herself at her home in this coaching hub on Monday, leaving behind a suicide note saying sorry to her parents and calling herself a "loser".

"Mummy, papa I can't do JEE. So I suicide," the note said, according to police. She was to give the JEE test in a day or two. "I am loser. I am worst daughter. Sorry mummy papa. Yahi last option he," the note said.

The suicide was reported on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi held his annual interaction with students preparing for their school board exams, asking them and their parents not to let competition get to them. Niharika lived at her family home in Shiv Vihar Colony in



the city's Borekheda police station area and was to take her JEE test on January 30 or 31, circle officer DSP Dharmveer Singh said.

The suicide note suggested she was under the stress of studies and found herself unable to tackle the exam, the officer said.

The student was the eldest of three sisters. Her father is a security guard at a private bank in Kota, he said. The family hails

from Akwadkhurd village in Jhalawar district and has been staying in the city for the last three years.

Her cousin said Niharika was under severe stress over the upcoming JEE test. She had to repeat her 12th class exam because she got a low score, the relative told reporters outside the mortuary. However, according to him, she was good at studies and devoted seven or eight hours

every day to them. Niharika's grandmother knocked at the door of her room around 10 am. When there was no response, she raised an alarm. The family found her hanging from the ventilation window above the door.

Last year, 26 students allegedly committed suicide in Kota, where children come from across the country to prepare for competitive tests like the National Entrance Exam (JEE) for admission to top engineering colleges.

On January 23, 19-year-old Mohammed Zaid was found hanging in his hostel room in Kota. He had come to the city from Uttar Pradesh's Moradabad district a year back to prepare for the medical entrance exam NEET. No suicide note was found in that case. Niharika was found dead about an hour before the PM's "Pariksha pe Charcha" interaction in Delhi began.

India, Oman to review ties during Defence Secretary 2 days visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Oman will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties during Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane's two-day visit there starting Tuesday. He will co-chair the 12th Joint Military Cooperation Committee meeting with Secretary General, Ministry of Defence, Oman Dr Mohammed bin Naseer bin Ali Al-Zaabi.

Giving details about the Defence Secretary's schedule here on Monday, defence ministry officials said during the bilateral talks, Aramane will review defence cooperation between the two countries and explore new initiatives like industry collaboration to further strengthen bilateral engagements. The two leaders will also exchange views on regional and global issues of shared interest.



The visit will further consolidate defence cooperation and strategic partnership between the two countries spanning every sphere of military collaboration, such as bilateral exercises, staff talks, training as well as new and emerging areas India and Oman have a robust and multifaceted relationship which has expanded into several strategic areas, including defence and security. Both the countries are committed to work under the vision of strategic partnership. The two countries have a common interest in peace and prosperity of the entire region.

Foreign Secretary on 3 days visit to Bhutan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra on Monday travelled to Bhutan on a three-day trip, in the first high-level visit from New Delhi after formation of a new government under People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader Tshering Tobgay.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the foreign secretary is on an official visit to Bhutan from January 29 to 31. "Foreign Secretary Kwatra will receive an audience with His Majesty, the King. He will also call on the prime minister, foreign minister and meet with other senior officials of the Royal Government," MEA said in a brief statement. "The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between Bhutan and India," it added.

Tobgay assumed charge as the prime minister of Bhutan on

Sunday following the PDP's victory in the elections earlier this month. Kwatra's visit comes against the backdrop of an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row that could have implications for India's security interests. Close to three months back, Bhutan's then Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji held talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing.

A Chinese readout on the talks said Bhutan firmly abides by the one-China principle and stands ready to work with China for an early settlement of the boundary issue and advance the political process of establishing diplomatic relations.

New Delhi has been keeping a close eye on the negotiations between Bhutan and China on their boundary row as it could have implications for New Delhi's security interests, especially in the Doklam tri-junction.

28 seismometers to be installed for bullet train project for safety of passengers

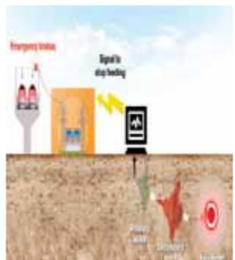
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AHMEDABAD

For the first time ever in any infrastructure project in the country, 28 seismometers will be installed for the Bullet Train project (Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail Corridor) to ensure the safety of passengers and critical infrastructure during earthquakes.

This Early Earthquake Detection System, based on Japanese Shinkansen technology, will detect earthquake-induced tremors through primary waves and enable an automatic power shutdown.

Emergency brakes will be activated when the power shutdown is detected and the trains running in the affected area shall stop.

Out of the 28 seismometers, 22 will be installed along the alignment. Eight will be in Maharashtra — Mumbai, Thane, Virar, and Boisar — and fourteen will be in Gujarat — Vapi, Bilimora, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Mahemabad, and



Ahmedabad. Seismometers will be installed in Traction Sub-Stations and Switching Posts along the alignment. The remaining six seismometers (termed as inland seismometers) will be installed in earthquake-prone areas — Khed, Ratnagiri, Latur, and Pangri in Maharashtra, and Adesar and Old Bhuj in Gujarat. The areas near the MAHSR alignment, where earthquakes greater than 5.5 magnitudes have occurred in the past 100 years, were surveyed by Japanese experts. After a detailed survey and soil suitability study through a micro tremor test, the above sites were selected

India, Saudi Arabia joint military exercise begins in Rajasthan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The inaugural edition of India-Saudi Arabia joint military exercise 'Sada Tanaseeq' commenced on Monday at Mahajan, Rajasthan. The exercise is scheduled to end on February 10, army officials said here.

The Saudi Arabian contingent comprising 45 personnel is represented by the Royal Saudi Land Forces. The Indian Army contingent also comprising 45 personnel is represented by a battalion from the Brigade of the Guards (Mechanised Infantry). Aim of the exercise is to train troops of both sides for Joint Operations in Semi

Desert terrain under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. The drill will enable both the sides to share their best practices in the tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting operations in sub-conventional domain. It will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between troops from both the sides. The exercise will involve Establishment of Mobile Vehicle Check Post, Cordons and Search Operation, House Intervention Drill, Reflex Shooting, Slithering and Sniper Firing. The Exercise will provide an opportunity to both the contingents to strengthen their bond.

Be vigilant against tobacco industry efforts to influence health policies, says WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) has cautioned its member nations to be vigilant against the tobacco industry's attempts to influence health policies through financial and in-kind incentives, ahead of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of Parties meeting in Panama next month.

Noting that country surveys consistently show that children aged 13-15 years in most countries are using tobacco and nicotine products, influenced by the tobacco industry marketing tactics, the WHO has designated this year's World No Tobacco Day to the theme of "Protecting children from tobacco industry interference." According to the latest estimates in the WHO tobacco trends report released recently, globally there are 1.25 billion adult tobacco users. Stating that trends in 2022 show a continued decline in tobacco use rates globally as about 1 in 5 adults worldwide consuming tobacco compared



to 1 in 3 in 2000, Dr Ruediger Krech, Director of WHO Department of Health Promotion said that, "Good progress has been made in tobacco control in recent years, but there is no time for complacency. "I'm astounded at the depths the tobacco industry will go to pursue profits at the expense of countless lives. We see that the minute a government thinks they have won the fight against tobacco the tobacco industry seizes the opportunity to manipulate health policies and sell their

deadly products." The report shows that 150 countries are successfully reducing tobacco use. Brazil and the Netherlands are seeing success after they implemented MPOWER tobacco control measures, with Brazil making a relative reduction of 35% since 2010 and the Netherlands on the verge of reaching the 30% target, it said. However, India seems to have a long way yet in meeting the goal as it does not find mention on the success list. Currently the WHO South-East Asian Region has the

highest percentage of population using tobacco at 26.5% closely followed by the European Region at 25.3%. The WHO also noted that while the numbers have steadily decreased over the years the world will make it to a 25% relative reduction in tobacco use by 2025, missing the voluntary global goal of 30% reduction from the 2010 baseline. Only 56 countries globally will reach this goal, down four countries since the last report in 2021.

Appreciating the WHO initiative to take the battle head on with the Industry, renowned wrestler and actor Sangram Singh said it is a matter of concern that despite the ban on tobacco advertisements, the industry is spending hefty amounts on promotion of such items by adopting various marketing tactics, at the cost of health of the younger generation. He also advocated for strict regulations or prohibitions on surrogate tobacco advertisements involving celebrities in films and sports as their acts have a strong impact on impressionable minds of the teenagers and youth."

Barrackpore protest rally: BJP workers caned, several arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Several BJP men were injured and many others were arrested after a protest rally — at Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas — led by Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar allegedly turned violent prompting the State police to lathi-charge, burst of teargas shells and use water cannon to disperse the crowd, sources said.

Majumdar was leading a rally outside the Barrackpore police commissionerate citing deteriorating law and order situation in the industrial area when the crowd suddenly turned violent and resorted to throwing brickbats at the police leading to a counter-offensive by the men in uniform, a senior police official said.

"We were protesting outside the CP office when the police suddenly started using water cannons and lathis on the innocent party men who were just sitting outside to protest against the deteriorating law and order situation," Majumdar who was still sitting outside the Barrackpore Police Station demanding unconditional release of his party men said adding a police



officer named Ashis Maurya had lathi-charged women without provocation.

"This is winter and it hurts ... knowing this 2full well they have beaten our men as if they are beating animals ... many people were bleeding and many have been arrested for no fault

of theirs ... even passersby were not spared ... we will not leave them ... we will go to court," he said.

The police officials however said that the crowd had gone violent necessitating a lathi-charge.

"They had refused to leave the BT Road creating a big jam during office hours besides suddenly some of them started pelting stones and even hit some of the policemen leading to lathi-charge which was minimal," a local official said.

Nitish to soon expand Cabinet

PTI ■ PATNA

A day after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar formed the government in Bihar in alliance with the NDA, hectic lobbying started for the post of assembly speaker, and other legislators to be included in the council of ministers.

Kumar on Monday chaired the meeting of his new cabinet to distribute portfolios. After the cabinet meeting, leaders of NDA constituents, however, remained tight-lipped about the distribution of portfolios.

According to sources, the cabinet secretariat is expected to issue a notification pertaining to portfolio distribution by Monday evening.

Meanwhile, the BJP has submitted a notice of no-confidence motion to the assembly secretary against Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary, who represents the RJD. BJP leaders, in the notice, expressed a lack of confidence in the present speaker as a new government has assumed power. The motion was signed by legislators of the BJP as well as the JD(U).

The cabinet meeting chaired by Nitish Kumar was attended by all the eight ministers who took oath on Sunday.

Besides Nitish Kumar and Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, BJP's Prem Kumar, JD(U) leaders Shrawan Kumar, Vijendra Yadav, and Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, Hindustan Awam Morcha's Santosh Kumar Suman and Independent MLA Sumit Kumar Singh were sworn in as ministers on Sunday.

After taking the oath as the chief minister of Bihar for the record ninth time, Kumar asserted there is no question of now leaving the NDA.

"I was with them (NDA) earlier, too. We went on different paths, but now we are together and will remain so. I came back to where I was (NDA), and now there is no question of going anywhere else," the 72-year-old politician said.

It has been learnt from reliable sources that the BJP is expected to keep the post of the assembly speaker.

Names doing the rounds for the post of speaker include those of senior BJP leaders Nand Kishore Yadav and Amrendra Pratap Singh.

BJP leaders on Monday indicated that the cabinet will be further expanded in a day or two to accommodate legislators belonging to other castes, minority groups and women.

सर्वजनिक सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को यह सूचित किया जाता है कि संस्था का नाम सिल्वर टावर व्यापारी वेलफेयर एसोसिएशन तथा आवेदन संख्या 10098514 रजिस्ट्रीकृत होना प्रस्तावित है। संस्था कार्यालय एफ04/08ए, डी-6 वेव, सिल्वर टावर नोएडा सेक्टर-18ए गौतमबुद्धनगर उत्तर प्रदेश-201301 में स्थित है।

यदि किसी को रजिस्ट्रीकरण में कोई आपत्ति हो तो वे अपनी आपत्ति इसके कारणों सहित दूरस्थ नॉ 9871431255 पर बता सकते हैं।

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that Mr. Ajay Arora is the sole owner of Plot bearing No. 925/536/536, yds., situated at Bahadurgarh, MIG Phase 1, under Municipal Corporation Bahadurgarh, Tehsil Bahadurgarh, Distt Jhajjar. This ownership was legally acquired through a sale deed dated 08.09.2013 vide doc. No. 4733 executed by Mrs. Mona Arora as GPA of Mr. Sunil Kumar Bhatia prop. of Mrs Sudarshan Industries in favour of Mr. Ajay Arora.

Mr. Ajay Arora is now the process of mortgaging the aforementioned plot with HDFC Bank Ltd. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client.

If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s)-+910120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@gnorth.in

National High Speed Rail Corporation Ltd.
(A Joint Venture of Government of India and Participating State Governments)
2nd Floor, Asia Bhawan, Road No. 205, Sector-9, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110077

Public Consultation for Environmental and Social Considerations for Delhi - Amritsar High Speed Rail Corridor (DACHSRC)

NHSRCL is in process of conducting Detail Project Report (DPR) for the development of proposed High Speed Rail Corridor (HSRC) of approx. 474.772 km from Delhi to Amritsar. This includes Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the proposed corridor and is organizing a public consultation to take valuable feedback from the local stakeholders/public on the proposed project.

Interested peoples of District North Delhi in Environmental and Social considerations for the proposed DACHSRC are invited to participate in the public consultation meeting as proposed at following venue:-

Venue: New Ambedkar Bhawan Near Dada Maldev Gram Sabha Plot Bajitpur Thakran Delhi-110039

Date : 7 February, 2024
Time : 11:00 AM
NHSRCL, New Delhi

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (ORDINARY ORIGINAL CIVIL JURISDICTION)
O.M.P. (T) (COMM.) No. 90/2023 & I.A. No. 18639/2023

INDIABULLS HOUSING FINANCE LTD. ...PETITIONER
VERSUS
RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. & ANR. ...RESPONDENTS

To

RESPONDENTS:
1. RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTOR, G-16, MARINA ARCADE, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS, NEW DELHI-110001
EMAIL ID: rcholding@gmail.com
PH. NO. 011-48218810

2. VITIBA REALTORS PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTORS 106, 1ST FLOOR, SURYAKIRAN BUILDING 19, KG MARG, NEW DELHI-110001
EMAIL ID: vitoba.cos@gmail.com

WHEREAS the above named Petitioner has filed a petition under Section 15 (1) (a) & Section 15 (2) of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act. Whereas, this Court issued notice to you, the above named Respondents.

AND
WHEREAS it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Court that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way, therefore, this notice is given by publication directing you to make appearance before this Hon'ble Court on 02.02.2024 at 10:30 A.M. to defend the above mentioned petition.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day mentioned above, the Petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court in terms of order dated 20th day of December, 2023

Assistant Registrar(O)
For Registrar General

Public Notice

My Client Smt. Bimlesh Devi W/o Sh. Bhupal Singh is the owner of Property measuring 55 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No.403, situated in the extended Lal Dora/abadi of Village Burari Deldi Vide Registered Sale Deed Doc.No. 5232, Dated 08.08.2005 SR-1 New Delhi, executed by Sh. Mahesh Chand Tyagi S/o Sh. Yogeshwar Dayal Tyagi. This above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/bank/financial institution having any claim/lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to above property should notified to the undersigned/Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered a/d within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.

Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092; Mobile no. 9811215181

PUBLIC NOTICE

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

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Jatin Verma, Ashok Kumar, Swarna Devi, House No. 1225, Street No. 10, Ward No. 9, Guru Arjun Dev Nagar, Tajpur Road, Opposite Petrol Pump, Ludhiana, Punjab- 141008, A/c No: LBLUD00004728915	House Comprised In Kharsa No. 734-735, Khata No. 39/42-57/60, Jamabandi Year 1982-1983, Situated At Village Taraf Sandhan, Tehsil And District Ludhiana, Punjab-141001.	02/01/2024 Rs. 18,52,083/-	03/10/2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 30, 2024
Place : Noida

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

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

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 04.03.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 27,18,471/- (Rupees Twenty Seven Lakh Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred Seventy One only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLN000398862, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 23.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 24.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from SUMEET KUMAR SINGH and MUNNI DEVI (GUARANTOR).

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 16,50,000/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,65,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Sixty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
ENTIRE GROUND FLOOR, TYPE H. I. G. (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS), HAVING TOTAL COVERED AREA 65 SQUARE METERS, CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT NO. D-56, BLOCK - D, SITUATED IN S. L. F. VED VIHAR, VILLAGE SADULLABAD, PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI, DISTRICT GHAZIABAD - 201001, UTTAR PRADESH.

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

Date : 25.01.2024
Place : GHAZIABAD

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

कार्यालय नगर आयुक्त, नगर निगम रुद्रपुर (उधमसिंहनगर)

Tel: 05944-242400 Email: nagarnigamrudrapur@gmail.com Visit: www.nagarnigamrudrapur.com

पत्रांक : 3579/स्थांनो/विद्युत अनुमति/2024-25/P.B. दिनांक : 29.01.2024

ई-निविदा सूचना (स्ट्रीट लाईट)

इच्छुक निर्माता फर्म/कम्पनी/अधिकृत आपूर्तिकर्ता/देकेदारों को सूचित किया जाता है कि नगर निगम रुद्रपुर (उधमसिंहनगर) के क्षेत्रान्तर्गत पथ प्रकाश व्यवस्था के लिए विभिन्न वॉटज की एलईडी स्ट्रीट लाईट की आपूर्ति हेतु दिनांक 13-02-2024 तक ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। ई-निविदा से सम्बन्धित सभी सूचनाये, शर्तें एवं अन्य जानकारी उत्तराखण्ड शासन की वेबसाईट www.uktenders.gov.in व नगर निगम रुद्रपुर की वेबसाईट www.nagarnigamrudrapur.com से डाउनलोड कर प्राप्त कर सकते हैं।

(नरेश चन्द्र दुर्गापाल) (उदयराज सिंह)
नगर आयुक्त, नगर निगम प्रशासक, नगर निगम रुद्रपुर उधमसिंह नगर। रुद्रपुर उधमसिंह नगर।

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (ORDINARY ORIGINAL CIVIL JURISDICTION)
O.M.P. (T) (COMM.) No. 89/2023 & I.A. No. 18838/2023

INDIABULLS HOUSING FINANCE LTD. ...PETITIONER
VERSUS
RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. & ANR. ...RESPONDENTS

To

RESPONDENTS:
1. RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTOR, G-16, MARINA ARCADE, CONNAUGHT CIRCUS, NEW DELHI-110001
EMAIL ID: rcholding@gmail.com
PH. NO. 011-48218810

2. VITIBA REALTORS PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTORS 106, 1ST FLOOR, SURYAKIRAN BUILDING 19, KG MARG, NEW DELHI-110001
EMAIL ID: vitoba.cos@gmail.com

WHEREAS the above named Petitioner has filed a petition under Section 15 (1) (a) & Section 15 (2) of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act. Whereas, this Court issued notice to you, the above named Respondents.

AND
WHEREAS it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Court that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way, therefore, this notice is given by publication directing you to make appearance before this Hon'ble Court on 02.02.2024 at 10:30 A.M. to defend the above mentioned petition.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day mentioned above, the Petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court in terms of order dated 20th day of December, 2023

Assistant Registrar(O)
For Registrar General

PUBLIC NOTICE

My Client Smt. Bimlesh Devi W/o Sh. Bhupal Singh is the owner of Property measuring 55 Sq. Yds., out of Kharsa No.403, situated in the extended Lal Dora/abadi of Village Burari Deldi Vide Registered Sale Deed Doc.No. 5232, Dated 08.08.2005 SR-1 New Delhi, executed by Sh. Mahesh Chand Tyagi S/o Sh. Yogeshwar Dayal Tyagi. This above-mentioned property is going to be mortgaged with Fed Bank Financial Services Limited. If any person/bank/financial institution having any claim/lien, any objection whatsoever in regard to above property should notified to the undersigned/Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092 along with documentary evidence under address through registered a/d within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, lien or objection shall be deemed to have been waived.

Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092; Mobile no. 9811215181

PUBLIC NOTICE

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

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005833112) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-237, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 29,12,569/-	07/10/2023
2.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005866052) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-237, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 36,452/-	07/10/2023
3.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005847386) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-235, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 22,765/-	07/10/2023
4.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005833125) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-235, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 10,93,050/-	07/10/2023
5.	Vishva Bandhu/ Mona Sharma (LBMRT00003640733) & 102 Gagan Vihar Rohta Road Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250001	House On, Part Of Plot No. 352, Kharsa No. 229 & 230 Situated At Gagan Vihar Colony, Village Khadoli, Pargana & Tehsil Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	21/12/2023 Rs. 27,00,819/-	03/09/2023
6.	Abdul Rehman/ Rukhshna Begam (LBJHN00006150574) & House No.62, H-Block, Jamia Nagar South Delhi Okhla- 110025	House No.220, Awadhi Rajgarh, Ward No 15, Bake Mauza Bioli, Veeru Nagar, Nagar Nigam, Near Badi Masjid, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, 284001	03/01/2024 Rs. 1,63,717/-	28/10/2023
7.	Abdul Rehman/ Rukhshna Begam (LBJHN00005673350) & House No.62, H-Block, Jamia Nagar South Delhi Okhla- 110025	House No.220, Awadhi Rajgarh, Ward No 15, Bake Mauza Bioli, Veeru Nagar, Nagar Nigam, Near Badi Masjid, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, 284001	03/01/2024 Rs. 14,88,044/-	28/10/2023
8.	Khyati Saini/ Manoj Kumar (LBJUC00004321937) & WZ 168, 3rd Floor, G Block, Gali No 15/81, Nagar, New Delhi Delhi- 110058	House No 3, Part Of Kharsa No 455, Situated At Village Madiyawan Pargana Mahona, Tehsil Bakshi Ka Talab, Jankipuram Extension, District Lucknow, Uttara Pradesh 226005	05/01/2024 Rs. 21,75,094/-	09/09/2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 30, 2024
Place : Delhi NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

E AUCTION NOTICE

MANUFACTURING DEFECTED FOUR WHEELER MOTOR VEHICLE PARTS, BRACKET TRANS JOINT PRODUCED THROUGH HPDC PROCESS, MATERIAL GRADE ADC-12 (ALUMINIUM DIE CASTED COMPONENT)

Interested Buyers are invited to participate in the e-Auction for the disposal of "Manufacturing Defected Four Wheeler Motor Vehicle Parts, Bracket Trans joint produced through HPDC Process, Material Grade ADC-12 (Aluminium Die Casted Component)". The salvage will be sold on "As is Where is", "Whatever there is" and "No Complaint" Basis and belongs to M/s. ASK Automotive Ltd. The materials can be inspected at Plot No. 30-31, Village Nawada Fatehpur, Gurgaon, Haryana - 122001 on working days only between 29-01-24 to 06-02-24 between 10 AM to 5 PM. Kindly contact Mr. Sachin Kapur at 920586799 for inspection.

E-AUCTION WILL BE HELD ON 07-02-24.

Kindly contact Mr. Shamsher Singh at 9702985122 to obtain the form containing terms & conditions of e-Auction or download from website <https://www.sealthedeal.co.in/>.

Auctioneers: Seal The Deal having registered office at 148, Pocket C2, Sector 5, Rohini, Delhi - 110085.

LAST DATE OF SUBMISSION OF FORM & EMD DEMAND DRAFT IS 06-02-24.

MODI RUBBER LIMITED
CIN: L25199UP1971PLC003392

Registered Office: Modinagar - 201204, Dist. Ghaziabad, (U.P.)
Corporate Office: 4-7C, DDA Shopping Centre, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110025; Website: www.modirubberlimited.com
Email: investors@modigroup.net; Phone: +91-11-47107398

NOTICE

Pursuant to regulation 29 of SEBI (LODR) 2015, Notice is hereby given that 304th Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Company is scheduled to be held on Monday, 12th February, 2024 at 11.30 AM at Corporate Office: 4-7/C, DDA Shopping Centre, 4th Floor, New Friends Colony, New Delhi- 110 025 to inter-alia approve the following:

(1) Un-Audited Standalone and Consolidated Financial Statements of the Company for the period ended on December 31, 2023.

The unaudited results shall be published immediately after the conclusion of the Board Meeting.

As already informed to stock exchanges that the Trading Window for the purpose of trading in the shares of the Company for its 'Designated Persons' is closed from 1st January 2024 and shall be opened 48 (Forty-Eight) hours after conclusion of aforesaid meeting of the Board of Directors.

For Modi Rubber Limited
Sd/-
(S K Bajpai)
Head - Legal & Co. Secretary

Place : New Delhi
Date : 29.01.2024

IN THE HIGH COURT OF DELHI AT NEW DELHI (ORDINARY ORIGINAL CIVIL JURISDICTION)
O.M.P. (T) (COMM.) No. 108/2023

INDIABULLS HOUSING FINANCE LTD. ...PETITIONER
VERSUS
RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. & ANR. ...RESPONDENTS

To

RESPONDENTS:
1. RHC HOLDING PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTOR, GROUND FLOOR, PLOT NO. A-3, 4 & 5 SECTOR-125, NOIDA, GAUTAM BUDHA NAGAR
EMAIL ID: rcholding@gmail.com

2. MODLAND WEARS PVT. LTD. THROUGH ITS DIRECTORS 106, 1ST FLOOR, SURYAKIRAN BUILDING 19, KG MARG, NEW DELHI-110001
EMAIL ID: modland.wears@gmail.com

WHEREAS the above named Petitioner has filed a petition under Section 15 (1) (a) & Section 15 (2) of the Arbitration & Conciliation Act. Whereas, this Court issued notice to you, the above named Respondents.

AND
WHEREAS it has been shown to the satisfaction of the Court that it is not possible to serve you in the ordinary way, therefore, this notice is given by publication directing you to make appearance before this Hon'ble Court on 02.02.2024 at 10:30 A.M. to defend the above mentioned petition.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the day mentioned above, the Petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Court in terms of order dated 20th day of December, 2023

Assistant Registrar(O)
For Registrar General

PREMISES REQUIRED IN NEW DELHI & NCR

SBI Funds Management Limited (A Joint Venture between SBI & Amundi), the Asset Management Company for SBI Mutual Fund invites offers from owners/PSUs/PSU Banks/Reputed parties for furnished/unfurnished office premises on **Ground Floor or 1st Floor** with parking facility at **Dwarka & Vasant Kunj & Greater Noida, UP (Commercial space)** area admeasuring around **600 to 800 sq. ft. carpet area**.

The premises should be available for possession immediately or within one month from the date of acceptance of the offer. Interested parties are requested to download the details from our website www.sbfm.com available under 'Downloads - Tenders' and submit offers having premises in those areas only. The last date of receipt / submit of offer in the prescribed formats is **February 09, 2024 at 4 P.M.** The Company reserves the right to reject any or all the proposals without assigning any reasons thereof.

SBI Funds Management Limited
(A Joint Venture between SBI & AMUNDI)
(CIN: U65990MH1992PLC062859)
9th Floor, Crescenzo, C-38 & 39, G Block, Bandra-Kurla Complex, Bandra (E), Mumbai - 400 051.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outstanding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
1.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005833112) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-237, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 29,12,569/-	07/10/2023
2.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005866052) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-237, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 36,452/-	07/10/2023
3.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005847386) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-235, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 22,765/-	07/10/2023
4.	Amit Tomer/ Muni Tomar (LBMRT00005833125) & 1253, Shastrri Nagar, Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250004	Residential L.I.G., H No. I-235, Block I, Scheme No. 3, Situated At Shastrri Nagar, Meerut Uttar Pradesh 250001	22/12/2023 Rs. 10,93,050/-	07/10/2023
5.	Vishva Bandhu/ Mona Sharma (LBMRT00003640733) & 102 Gagan Vihar Rohta Road Uttar Pradesh Meerut- 250001	House On, Part Of Plot No. 352, Kharsa No. 229 & 230 Situated At Gagan Vihar Colony, Village Khadoli, Pargana & Tehsil Meerut, Uttar Pradesh	21/12/2023 Rs. 27,00,819/-	03/09/2023
6.	Abdul Rehman/ Rukhshna Begam (LBJHN00006150574) & House No.62, H-Block, Jamia Nagar South Delhi Okhla- 110025	House No.220, Awadhi Rajgarh, Ward No 15, Bake Mauza Bioli, Veeru Nagar, Nagar Nigam, Near Badi Masjid, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, 284001	03/01/2024 Rs. 1,63,717/-	28/10/2023
7.	Abdul Rehman/ Rukhshna Begam (LBJHN00005673350) & House No.62, H-Block, Jamia Nagar South Delhi Okhla- 110025	House No.220, Awadhi Rajgarh, Ward No 15, Bake Mauza Bioli, Veeru Nagar, Nagar Nigam, Near Badi Masjid, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, 284001	03/01/2024 Rs. 14,88,044/-	28/10/2023
8.	Khyati Saini/ Manoj Kumar (LBJUC00004321937) & WZ 168, 3rd Floor, G Block, Gali No 15/81, Nagar, New Delhi Delhi- 110058	House No 3, Part Of Kharsa No 455, Situated At Village Madiyawan Pargana Mahona, Tehsil Bakshi Ka Talab, Jankipuram Extension, District Lucknow, Uttara Pradesh 226005	05/01/2024 Rs. 21,75,094/-	09/09/2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date : January 30, 2024
Place : Delhi NCR

Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

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

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 04.03.2024 from 02.00 P.M. to 04.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 27,18,471/- (Rupees Twenty Seven Lakh Eighteen Thousand Four Hundred Seventy One only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLN000398862, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 23.01.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 24.01.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from SUMEET KUMAR SINGH and MUNNI DEVI (GUARANTOR).

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 16,50,000/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh Fifty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 1,65,000/- (Rupees One Lakh Sixty Five Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
ENTIRE GROUND FLOOR, TYPE H. I. G. (WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS), HAVING TOTAL COVERED AREA 65 SQUARE METERS, CONSTRUCTED UPON PLOT NO. D-56, BLOCK - D, SITUATED IN S. L. F. VED VIHAR, VILLAGE SADULLABAD, PARGANA AND TEHSIL LONI, DISTRICT GHAZIABAD - 201001, UTTAR PRADESH.

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

Date : 25.01.2024
Place : GHAZIABAD

Sd/-
Authorized officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (UP)<



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Firing blanks

Pak's claim of an India link in the killing of two terrorists on its soil is purely to score brownie points

Pakistan is back to doing what it is known best for --- India bashing. Taking a cue from the India-Canada spat, though that controversy has petered out and Ottawa has even acknowledged that New Delhi is helping it in the probe, Islamabad has accused India of conspiracy to kill two of its citizens (known terrorists) on its soil. While Pakistan's attempt to draw a parallel with the Canada situation is not surprising, it is important to scrutinise the evidence and call Pakistan's bluff. Rather than launching a thorough investigation into the alleged killing of the two operatives, Pakistan has swiftly pointed the finger at India. In doing so, it aims to divert attention from the real issues and create a parallel narrative that manipulates public perception and serves its geopolitical interests. However, it is essential to note that each incident has its unique context, and attempts to equate these oversimplify complex geopolitical dynamics. India has categorically denied any involvement, besides calling for a transparent and impartial investigation to ascertain the facts.



Basically, New Delhi has effectively challenged Islamabad to provide concrete evidence supporting its claims. This is not the first time that Pakistan has sought to blame India for its problems. It has often accused India of instigating insurgents in Baluchistan, though without any evidence. The latest allegation must be seen in light of Pakistan's background of harbouring terrorists on its soil.

It must be remembered that it was Pakistan that provided a sanctuary to Osama bin Laden. The country is currently undergoing a serious existential crisis and would do everything to blame others for its shortcomings. Terrorists that are creating havoc in Pakistan are its own creation. It does not help if it keeps indulging in theatrics to pacify hardliners back home. Pakistan has a history of deflecting attention from internal issues and gain international sympathy. By blaming India, Pakistan hopes to portray itself as a victim of external aggression, conveniently ignoring the persistent issue of terror within its borders. As the world scrutinises Pakistan's claims, it becomes imperative for Islamabad to present verifiable proof linking India to the alleged killing. Until such evidence is produced, the international community must resist the temptation to hastily accept Pakistan's narrative. Instead, nations and global organisations should insist on a thorough and unbiased investigation into the incident. By doing so, they can contribute to the establishment of truth and discourage the manipulation of facts for political gain. The recent allegations linking India to the killing of two terrorists demand a meticulous examination of the facts. The international community must remain objective. By calling Pakistan's bluff, the world can contribute to fostering regional stability and holding nations accountable for their actions. As the situation unfolds, a commitment to truth and justice will be essential in navigating the complex web of geopolitics in South Asia.

shortcomings. Terrorists that are creating havoc in Pakistan are its own creation. It does not help if it keeps indulging in theatrics to pacify hardliners back home. Pakistan has a history of deflecting attention from internal issues and gain international sympathy. By blaming India, Pakistan hopes to portray itself as a victim of external aggression, conveniently ignoring the persistent issue of terror within its borders. As the world scrutinises Pakistan's claims, it becomes imperative for Islamabad to present verifiable proof linking India to the alleged killing. Until such evidence is produced, the international community must resist the temptation to hastily accept Pakistan's narrative. Instead, nations and global organisations should insist on a thorough and unbiased investigation into the incident. By doing so, they can contribute to the establishment of truth and discourage the manipulation of facts for political gain. The recent allegations linking India to the killing of two terrorists demand a meticulous examination of the facts. The international community must remain objective. By calling Pakistan's bluff, the world can contribute to fostering regional stability and holding nations accountable for their actions. As the situation unfolds, a commitment to truth and justice will be essential in navigating the complex web of geopolitics in South Asia.

PICTALK



Indonesian artistes perform during the International Ramayana Utsav, in Varanasi

Rural India deserves better schooling

Despite the Government's support, the Annual Status of Education Report suggests that the urgency for educational reforms is not uniformly recognised across States



J S RAJPUT

The recent 'Annual Status of Education Report' -ASER- published by the NGO Pratham has once again attracted the attention of all those interested in education and the future of India; and its march towards a knowledge society. The first ASER report came in 2005 and it was expected to stir the conscience of not only the education system but India as a whole. By that time, the credibility and public acceptance of government schools was already very low and anyone who could afford it financially made every effort to put their children in private schools, which interestingly, are known as public schools in India. The decline has continued and it is evident by the mad rush in cities and towns, for admission to preschool classes in private schools. People are willing to pay exorbitant fees and the aspiring middle class is ready to cut even other necessary family expenses to educate their children in good schools. Over the years, school education in India has shown remarkable progress on various fronts, but several major concerns have also emerged regarding quality, skill acquisition and institutional work culture.

One of the great achievements of the past few decades has been the social acceptance of educating girls and this has become equally acceptable in rural India also. However, the present report indicates 43.7% of boys having a smartphone as against only 19.8% of girls. It is encouraging to note that 90% of youngsters have a smartphone at home. The present survey was conducted amongst rural kids of 14-18 age group in 28 districts of India across 26 states with a sample of 34,745 children. The quality of the 'growing up' is indicated by the percentages of children who indicated their work aspirations for the future. One was disappointed that 21% could not respond to what they would like to become in years ahead. The top preference of 13% is for a job in the police and 11.4% would like to become teachers.

Agriculture-related work is an aspiration of only 1.4%! One could safely state from other



studies and interactions that in rural areas, preference for becoming a teacher is still considered an achievable choice by parents and family members. Getting a job as a police- is now suspect because of the widely prevalent public perception that it would require too much of resources and sources. Even for the job of teachers, perceptions are changing fast. There is no surety about regular recruitment or recruitment regularly. Even if one gets appointed as a Shiksha-karmi or an honorarium-paid teacher with any other fancy designation, the sword of uncertainty looms large for years together with no guarantee of getting absorbed in the regular pay scale and grade.

One of the universal expectations is the system would become more compassionate, empathetic, transparent, responsive and helpful to the learner. The NEP-2020 has been announced and has entered its fourth year of implementation. One expects that the innovations and changes proposed will become visible shortly.

It must; however; be stated that improvements in the quality of school education -partic-



THE ASE'S REPORT MUST INSPIRE INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS ENTRUSTED WITH THE TASK OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEP 2020 TO ENSURE THAT SPEEDY, ACCURATE AND CORRECT REFORMS ARE PUT IN PLACE

ularly rural schools - are mostly dependent upon the priority it gets from the state governments. The central government has been promptly assisting states in educational reforms in various ways and this includes academic and professional support along with financial contributions to enhance infrastructure, including additional teachers. Education is not getting its due priority in several states. This was particularly true for the states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh which need educational reforms very urgently. After going through the ASER report, one arrives at the inference that the nation must deliberate upon how significant it is to ensure that every child gets a good quality education and acquires the necessary skills, including the skill of acquiring new skills throughout his active professional life. It is also necessary that everyone acknowledges the primacy of the role of teachers and schools in rebuilding a new India. This is not happening uniformly at present. To illustrate the point, I would like to quote the following from the National Education Policy - 2020: "15.2/ According to the Justice/ JS Verma Commission (2012)

constituted by the Supreme Court. A majority of stand-alone TEIs - over 20,000 in number are not even attempting serious teacher education but are essentially selling degrees for a price. Regulatory efforts so far have neither been able to curb the malpractices in the system, nor enforce basic standards for quality, and in fact have had the negative effect of curbing the growth of excellence and innovation in the sector. The sector and its regulatory system are, therefore, in urgent need of revitalisation." The ASER report must inspire individuals and institutions to ensure speedy, accurate and correct reforms are put in place. The neglect of practical work in schools and even in vocational training centres including polytechnics and engineering colleges is a cause of concern. This has already been established by the closure of hundreds of engineering and management institutions, but not much effective improvement is visible at the ground level. And this is just not acceptable in a vibrant responsive system.

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. Views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Schools need Government support



It was established under the Private Education Act (RTE) with the noble purpose of providing quality education to students from economically weak and disadvantaged families. Due to RTE, the condition of private unaided schools has become financially weak. The Maharashtra state government has spent 2400

crores of subsidy to the schools, and the schools themselves have now become financially weak. In 31 thousand schools of the state, 17 thousand 670 rupees were being given to each student in the form of subsidy under the RTE Act. However, the state government reduced this subsidy to 8000 rupees during the Corona period, but the schools accepted it. In fact, this figure has been increasing for the last six years. For this academic year, the government had announced an outstanding grant of 200 crores, but actually Rs. 40 crores reached the schools. The law was enacted with a noble intention through RTE to provide quality education to students from economically weak and deprived families, but the same law is making the school management financially weak and deprived. By withholding crores of rupees, the students and the school management have been indirectly made financially weak.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

public about their rights and empower them to report malpractices. Implementing stringent laws against unethical conduct, coupled with regular monitoring of health centres, can deter misconduct. Moreover, addressing the shortage of doctors by offering competitive incentives for government service can enhance healthcare accessibility, especially for the underprivileged. Strengthening the medical infrastructure and promoting accountability will contribute to a healthier and more equitable society.

Mahi Khandelwal | Ujjain

LONG LIVE THE REPUBLIC

Sir - India's evolution as a republic is a compelling saga of triumph over centuries of darkness, marked by unwavering determination, resilience, and advancement. The struggles and sacrifices of numerous freedom fighters paved the path for a rejuvenated India,

constantly pushing boundaries and asserting its prominence globally. The recent G-20 conference exemplifies India's potential as a leader on the world stage, while the burgeoning spirit of self-reliance foretells a promising future for every Indian. In essence, India's republican journey encapsulates the profound beauty of human perseverance, inscribed in the narrative of progress and the assurance of a splendid future. From overcoming historical challenges to basking in the air of freedom, the tapestry woven is magnificent, reflecting the indomitable spirit that propels the nation forward. The indelible ink of progress and the promise of a glorious future define the essence of India's remarkable journey as a republic—a testament to the enduring human spirit.

Mohd Ashraf Siddiqui | Lucknow

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The rise of digital banking: Fintech trends in 2024

Fintech will drive financial inclusivity, streamline transactions and redefine the way individuals and businesses interact with financial services

Is this financial evolution a gateway to a new revolution? I am sure it is! As we become aware of the opportunities and dive deep to empower the fintech landscape of today, we realise that it is poised for yet another progression. The intersection of technology, regulatory changes, and shifting consumer behaviours offers tantalizing glimpses into the future. Here, we delve into the key predictions for fintech trends in the forthcoming year.

1. Embedded Finance Takes Centre Stage

The convergence of finance with non-financial platforms is set to redefine traditional banking. Embedded finance, wherein financial services are integrated into non-financial platforms, will witness exponential growth. Whether it's e-commerce platforms offering instant credit options or ride-sharing apps facilitating seamless payments, the boundaries between fintech and other sectors will blur, offering consumers unparalleled convenience. For instance, the API provided by PaySprint empowers individuals who are unable to



visit a physical bank branch or face difficulties by enabling them to use our products. This is not it, companies operate under different domains, such as SprintOPN, SprintVerify, and SprintNXT. These are streamlined for customers and follow the fintech trend to meet the expectations of the customers.

2. Decentralized Finance (DeFi) Gains Traction

The DeFi movement, which leverages blockchain to recreate traditional financial systems like lending and borrowing without intermediaries, will continue its upward trajectory. With its promise of transparency, reduced costs, and increased accessibility, DeFi platforms are set to attract a broader user base. Fintech companies focus on this trend and aim to establish a strong presence through API infrastructure. They are providing a trusted collabora-

tion platform for the business community, with zero manual intervention goal is to make online onboarding easy and hassle-free, with minimum documentation required to get started instantly.

3. Rise of Digital Identity Solutions

As digital transactions burgeon, the need for robust identity verification mechanisms becomes paramount. Digital identity solutions, underpinned by biometrics, AI, and blockchain, will emerge as a cornerstone of secure and seamless banking experiences. These solutions will enhance security protocols and streamline customer onboarding and authentication processes.

The banking and financial services would reach the remotest areas and be a catalyst for the Indian Financial Inclusion movement.

4. AI driven Personalization

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will continue to reshape the fintech landscape, particularly in customer experience. Advanced AI algorithms will enable banks to offer hyper-personalized services, from tailored financial advice to



S ANAND

customized product recommendations. This heightened personalization will foster stronger customer relationships, driving loyalty and retention.

5. Sustainable Finance

With increasing global emphasis on sustainability, green finance will ascend to the forefront of fintech innovations. Fintech platforms will integrate ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) metrics, offering users insights into the sustainability credentials of their investments and spending patterns. Moreover, we can anticipate the rise of fintech solutions designed explicitly for financing renewable energy and conservation projects.

6. Evolution of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs)

The exploration and potential issuance of CBDCs by central banks will be a pivotal development. CBDCs, digital representations of fiat currencies, have the potential to streamline cross-border transactions, enhance monetary policy effectiveness, and foster financial inclusion.

(The writer is a digital banking expert; views are personal)

ADDRESS GAZA CRISIS

Sir - The International Court of Justice told Israel to take action to prevent genocidal violence in the Gaza Strip by its armed forces. According to the World Food Programme, there is a risk of pockets of famine in the Palestine enclave as Israeli authorities have been systematically denying the WFP access to northern Gaza to deliver aid. Unicef has described the Gaza Strip as the most dangerous place in the world to be a child. The Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip said that over 26,000 Palestinians including many children and women had been killed leaving more than 64,000 wounded in Gaza. It has been reported that Nasser Hospital and El Amal City Hospital in Khan Younis are under "extreme danger" from Israeli bombardment. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 several sporting bodies banned teams and players from Russia and Belarus from taking part in sporting events. When they are allowed to participate, they have to play as neutral athletes without the names and flags of their respective countries. That is how Daniil Medvedev of Russia and Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus have played in the Australian Open tennis tournament. Similar actions must now be taken against Israeli teams, clubs and players. India should not comply with the demands of the Israeli construction companies to send one lakh Indian construction workers to Israel.

Sujit De | Kolkata

CURB MEDICAL MALPRACTICES

Sir - Recently, 45 government medical officers of Haryana have been accused of indulging in various kinds of malpractices in the course of performing their duties. This reflects poorly on the government health services across the state. A robust and ethical medical system is crucial for India to ensure the well-being of its citizens. Adequate awareness campaigns can educate the



FIRST COLUMN

EAT TO LIVE, DO NOT LIVE TO EAT

Food can't fill emotional hunger and eating doesn't cure sadness



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

We all eat to live to survive because if we stop eating, we will die. Hence to avoid this fate, we all eat good food & drink enough water. However, nowadays there has been a new prevalent fashion of 'live to eat' that's getting rampant in society. This new concept has nothing to do with our biological survival. Those who indulge in this do it because of some other reason outside of simply staying alive. In short, eating to live is a biological understanding whereas, living to eat is a psychological, social, and emotional disorder that needs urgent attention because emotional and disordered eating can wreak havoc on our mental, emotional, and physical health if left unaddressed, and, not to mention, the massive amount of time and energy it takes up, leaving one much less able to focus on what matters in his/her life.

For most of us, emotional eating has become a habit of comfort – in other words, it's a behaviour induced by certain cues like situations, feelings, people, commercials, etc. Scientific studies done over the years reveal that animals & people who were more stressed ended up eating more and getting fatter. In general, most of us consider emotional eating as food addiction, just like we consider shopping, gambling, and other behaviours as addictions. There is no doubt that these behaviours can sometimes seem to take on a life of their own and make you feel like you're just going along for a scary ride. But are they all the same? Well! they do seem like addictions on the surface, and it may be handy to use the term as a metaphor. We need to understand the difference between emotional eating and other behaviours are compulsions, not addictions. A compulsion is something you feel you have to do; an addiction is something you can't live without. Emotional eating, therefore, is a psychological compulsion to do something that would otherwise cause emotional distress, not physical withdrawal. The force that drives the behaviour, is the need to counteract feeling controlled by certain external forces by acting out against those or other external forces.



Learning to recognize your emotional eating triggers is the first step to breaking free from food cravings and compulsive overeating, and changing the habits that have sabotaged our diets in the past. Using food from time to time as a reward, or to celebrate isn't necessarily a bad thing. But, when eating becomes our primary emotional coping mechanism & when our first impulse is to open the refrigerator whenever we get upset, angry, lonely, stressed, exhausted, or bored, we get stuck in an unhealthy cycle where the real feeling or problem is never addressed. Emotional hunger can't be satisfied with food; it only temporarily masks underlying feelings. To break the cycle of overeating, address the emotions triggering the urge. Without effective emotional management, controlling eating habits becomes challenging. Recognize the power you have over cravings; delay satisfying them for a few minutes. Use this time to assess your emotions.

Psychologists who have examined patients with eating disorders found that those who were taught how to meditate had lower levels of relapse and more positive outcomes after release than those who received only conventional diet or nutrition treatments. Hence it would not be difficult to recognise the value of Meditation for the elimination of the habit of stress eating and introduce this theory and practice as a subject in Education so that the youth & children can be saved from this fatal disorder which is more prevalent among them. Remember! Calming the mind for a few minutes may provide the distance needed to make a reasonable and healthy decision about whether to eat a chocolate cake or go in for a meditation session.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Dilemma of regulating speech on social media



RAJDEEP PATHAK

To meet the escalating challenge of hate speech, the relevance of Gandhian communication cannot be overstated



The Internet's rapid global connectivity has positively transformed communication and knowledge-sharing, yet it also poses challenges. Over 3.19 billion social media users can swiftly disseminate harmful content, leading to concerns about regulating online speech. As offensive messages proliferate, despite some measures, countries grapple with the dilemma of how to legislate effectively in the digital age, where the speed of online publishing is in sharp contrast with the sluggishness of regulatory mechanisms.

The ease and anonymity of generating online hate speech, amplified by social media, pose a global menace, transcending borders at minimal cost. Its enduring impact exacerbates societal divisions, fueling violence and discrimination. Recognized also by the United Nations, this crisis violates human rights, correlates with hate crimes, and propels extremist ideologies, even contributing to atrocities like genocide. Effectively addressing this peril is crucial to curtail ongoing disputes, preserve societal cohesion, and protect individuals from dehumanization based on identity factors. Further, hate speech, particularly prevalent in cyberbullying, inflicts diverse harm on young minds, also fostering intolerance. Multiple shreds of evidence prove that the digital realm initially celebrated for fostering connections, has of late transformed into a breeding ground for real-world consequences, where hate speech perpetuates bigotry among children and youth.

One would recall the American student Tyler Clementi's tragic suicide – a result of relentless online bullying due to his sexual orientation that further illustrates the profound consequences of hate speech. Further, the Christ Church Mosque shootings in New Zealand, where the perpetrator live-streamed the massacre after online radicalization, highlight the connection between hate speech and real-world violence. In India, several cases of lethal mob lynchings

sparked by social media-driven rumours, such as 'WhatsApp lynchings,' exemplify the dire consequences of misinformation.

Amidst the escalating threat of hate speech, Mahatma Gandhi's Nonviolent Communication (NVC) philosophy – even after 76 years of his passing away – shines as a guiding light. Mahatma Gandhi was a skilled communicator, using words for profound social impact. Rooted in truth, nonviolence, and empathy, his approach centered on 'Satyagraha' – holding onto truth through love and nonviolence. This Gandhian communication model, prioritizing understanding and dialogue over confrontation, offers a blueprint for addressing conflicts without resorting to hate or violence.

Mahatma Gandhi communicated with simplicity, clarity, and unwavering conviction, making his speeches and writings accessible to all, regardless of education or social status. His unique ability to articulate complex ideas resonated with the masses, mobilizing them for the freedom movement. Through iconic speeches during the 'Salt Satyagraha' of 1930, where he called for 'world sympathy' in his battle of 'rights against might'; or through his actions, when he called off the 'Non-Cooperation Movement' of 1922 as a result of violence in Chauri Chaura in today's Uttar Pradesh, or during his 'Quit India' addresses in 1942, Gandhi inspired millions to join the nonviolent struggle against British rule. His communication wasn't just informational but a powerful moral appeal, urging peaceful action.

Mahatma Gandhi pioneered non-violent communication, advocating it as a life philosophy rooted in love,

compassion, understanding, and respect for all living beings. Beyond a mere tactic, he viewed nonviolence as a transformative force, inspiring global social justice movements. Gandhi emphasized self-reflection as crucial for empathy and understanding, urging individuals to contemplate their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs before engaging in meaningful communication with others. The renowned psychologist, Marshall Rosenberg, says that 'Nonviolent Communication' (NVC) aims to create a safe and respectful space for dialogue, where individuals can express their needs and feelings without fear of judgement or retribution.

In the context of hate speech, NVC can be used to de-escalate conflicts and promote understanding between different groups. By listening to the concerns and needs of those who engage in hate speech, NVC can help to uncover the underlying causes of their behaviour and constructively address them. By creating a safe and respectful space for dialogue, nonviolent communication can help to de-escalate conflicts and promote understanding between different groups.

Marshall Rosenberg further explains: "If we can identify and express our own needs and feelings without blaming others, we can create a more compassionate world", which can lead to a more peaceful and harmonious society.

Experts have advocated for the use of NVC as a tool to counter hate speech. Arno Michaelis, former White Supremacist and founder of 'Serve2Unite' says, "Nonviolent communication offers a way out of the cycle of hate and violence that plagues our world. By listening to the perspectives and needs of those

who engage in hate speech, we can begin to create a more peaceful and just society."

Daryl Davis, musician and activist who spent years engaging with members of the 'Ku Klux Klan' and has had a firsthand experience to witness the power of NVC, feels that NVC can 'transform hearts and minds', for, "By listening to the concerns and needs of those who engage in hate speech, we can create a sense of empathy and understanding, which can ultimately lead to peace."

Addressing hate speech in contemporary communication parlance requires embracing Gandhian principles. For this, prioritising truth through fact-checking and responsible journalism, fostering empathy through open dialogue, advocating nonviolence and tolerance, advancing education with media literacy, and engaging communities collectively, is the need of the hour. Mahatma Gandhi always highlighted 'collaboration', 'active listening', 'respect', 'empathy', and 'forgiveness' for effective use of nonviolent communication in all his campaigns.

Countering hate speech does not mean to limit the freedom to speak. On the contrary, it should mean striving to encourage, foster and protect freedom of expression as a universal human right, ensuring that measures to safeguard individuals and groups from being targeted do nothing to curb access to that right. As we commemorate the 76th anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom, his principles resonate more than ever in the face of the growing conflicts in the world.

(The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



THE EASE AND ANONYMITY OF GENERATING ONLINE HATE SPEECH, AMPLIFIED BY SOCIAL MEDIA, POSE A GLOBAL THREAT, TRANSCENDING BORDERS AT MINIMAL COST

Transforming examinations: From stress to festivity

At the core of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is the focus on a holistic educational approach. It advocates critical thinking and practical application of knowledge

As the Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), I have closely observed the transformative journey of the Indian education system, especially in the context of examinations. Central to this transformation is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' initiative, a pioneering effort to alleviate the stress surrounding exams. We need to understand this significant shift and advocate for a societal movement to destress the exam process. Over the last few decades, the Indian education system has seen a tendency to equate academic success with a student's overall worth, which has inadvertently created an environment of high pressure. This approach has led to neg-



PRIYANK KANOONGO

ative consequences, including student anxiety and mental health issues. 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' emerges as a pivotal initiative, redefining this outlook by viewing examinations as a celebration of knowledge and learning. Through my experiences and interactions within the educational sphere, I have come to understand the importance of this cultural shift. The annual dialogues initiated by Prime

Minister Modi are not just conversations; they are catalysts for nationwide educational reform. These interactions allow for an exchange of ideas and concerns, fostering a supportive and understanding environment for students. At the core of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is the focus on a holistic educational approach. It challenges the conventional focus on grades and marks, advocating for a system that values understanding, critical thinking, and practical application of knowledge. Parents and teachers play a crucial role in this transformation. In many Indian households, there is a deep-rooted belief that academic excellence is the sole path to success, often overshadowing other talents and skills. Changing this mindset

is essential. We need to foster a balanced approach where academic achievements are acknowledged, but not at the expense of a child's mental health or personal growth. Furthermore, the Indian socio-economic landscape demands an education system that is adaptable and inclusive. 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' acknowledges this need and champions an education system that nurtures diverse talents, encouraging critical and creative thinking, essential for tackling future challenges. However, the true measure of success for such an initiative lies in its acceptance and implementation across the nation. This requires a collaborative effort from the government, educational institutions, parents, and students.

In addition to these efforts, there is a need for a broader dialogue on the purpose of education. Education should not just be about scoring well in exams but about developing a well-rounded personality. This includes nurturing emotional intelligence, ethical values, and a sense of social responsibility. 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' can be a platform to initiate discussions on these broader aspects, ensuring a more comprehensive development of our future generations. Moreover, integrating innovative teaching methodologies can play a significant role in transforming the learning experience. Interactive and experiential learning methods can make education more engaging and less intimidating. 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' is a

journey towards an educational system that respects and nurtures individual potential. It marks the beginning of an era where examinations are a part of a larger, more enriching educational experience. Our collective responsibility is to ensure that this change is deeply ingrained in our educational philosophy. With persistent efforts and a united vision, we can redefine the way examinations are perceived, leading to a future where our children are not just academically proficient but also emotionally and ethically strong. In this context, it is crucial to address the broader implications of this stress-free examination approach. Reducing stress is not merely about changing the examination pattern; it involves nurturing an

ecosystem that supports mental well-being and encourages continuous learning. This involves creating supportive environments both at home and in schools, where children can express themselves freely and seek help without hesitation. Additionally, incorporating life skills and emotional intelligence into the curriculum is essential. In today's rapidly changing world, students need to be equipped with skills such as resilience, adaptability, and empathy. These skills, along with academic knowledge, will prepare them to face life's challenges effectively. Continuous dialogue between educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can lead to more informed and effective strategies for educational reform.

'Pariksha Pe Charcha' can serve as a model for such collaborative efforts, fostering a culture of open communication and shared learning. The path forward requires persistence, collaboration, and a shared vision. It is a path towards a future where our education system not only imparts knowledge but also instills values and builds character. With continued efforts and a united commitment to change, we can ensure that the spirit of 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' permeates every aspect of our education system, making it a nurturing, inclusive, and empowering space for all our children.

(The writer is Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, views are personal)

ASEAN optimistic of progress on Myanmar, SCS conflicts

AP ■ LUANG PRABANG

China's increasingly assertive posture in the South China Sea and escalating violence in Myanmar topped the agenda for Southeast Asian diplomats at their meeting in Laos on Monday, with the Laotian foreign minister expressing guarded optimism that progress could be made this year on both acrimonious issues.

Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith told reporters that Thailand was moving ahead with plans to provide more humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, where more than 2.6 million people have been displaced by civil war.

He said it was a good sign that the military leaders who seized control of Myanmar in February 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi had for the first time sent a high-level representative to attend the meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers in the historic city of Luang Prabang in Laos. "We feel a lit-

tle bit optimistic that the engagement may work, although we have to admit that the issues that are happening in Myanmar will not resolve overnight," Saleumxay said. "I think there is probably a small light at the end of the tunnel."

Myanmar has been prohibited from sending its foreign minister or any political representative to high-level ASEAN meetings since the end of 2021, when it blocked the group's envoy from meeting with Suu Kyi. Instead, it has sent non-political representatives to lower-level working meetings but has refused to send anyone to high-level meetings.

In Laos, however, it sent a non-political Foreign Ministry official, ASEAN Permanent Secretary Marlar Than Htike, which Saleumxay called "a positive sign."

ASEAN member nations Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Brunei and Laos have a combined population of nearly 650 million

US denies Houthi claim of attack on USS Puller

Jerusalem (AP): Yemen's Houthi rebels said they attacked a US Navy mobile base at sea Monday without offering evidence, something immediately rejected by an American defense official.

The claimed attack targeted the USS Lewis B Puller, a ship that serves as a floating landing base. The Puller had been earlier stationed in the Arabian Sea as part of American efforts to curtail Houthi attacks on commercial shipping through the

Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Houthi military spokesperson Brig Gen Yahya Saree said in a statement it fired a missile at the Puller in the Gulf of Aden. He offered no evidence. Houthi attacks will continue "until the aggression is stopped, and the siege is lifted on the people of Palestine in the Gaza Strip," Saree said in the statement. A US defence official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said

there had been no reported attack on the Puller. However, the Houthis have previously launched missiles that did not reach their intended target, instead crashing down onto the land or sea.

The Puller served as a mobile base for the US Navy SEALs who conducted a Jan 11 operation seizing Iranian-made ballistic missile and cruise missile components believed to be bound for Yemen.

and GDP of more than USD 3 trillion.

Landlocked Laos, which has taken over this year's rotating ASEAN leadership, is the bloc's poorest nation and one of its smallest, and many have expressed scepticism about how much it can accomplish while

the crises mount. Still, it is the first ASEAN country that shares a border with Myanmar to serve as chair since the military took control of the country, giving it a perspective different from that of previous chairs. Laos has already sent a special envoy to Myanmar for meetings

with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials in an attempt to make progress on ASEAN's "five-point consensus" plan for peace.

The plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by



Representatives pose for a group photo during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers retreat meeting in Luang Prabang, Laos, Monday. From left, Myanmar's ASEAN Permanent Secretary Marlar Than Htike, Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan, Thai Foreign Minister Parnpree Bahiddha-Nukara, Vietnam's Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son, Laos' Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith, Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan, Brunei's Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof, Cambodia's Foreign Minister Sok Chenda Sophea, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, East Timor's Foreign Minister Bendito dos Santos Freitas and ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn. AP/PTI

US 'shall respond' after drone strike by Iran-backed group

AP ■ COLOMBO

President Joe Biden said on Sunday that the US "shall respond" after three American troops were killed and dozens more were injured in an overnight drone strike in north-east Jordan near the Syrian border. Biden blamed Iran-backed militias for the first US fatalities after months of strikes by such groups against American forces across the Middle East since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Biden, who was travelling in South Carolina, asked for a moment of silence during an appearance at a Baptist church's banquet hall. "We had a tough day last night in the Middle East. We lost three brave souls in an attack on one of our bases," he said. After the moment of silence, Biden added, "and we shall respond".

With an increasing risk of military escalation in the region, US officials were working to conclusively identify the precise group responsible for the attack, but they have assessed that one of several Iranian-backed groups was behind it.

Biden said in a written statement that the United States "will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner (of our choosing)." Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said "we will take all necessary actions to defend the United States, our troops, and our interests". Iran-backed fighters in east Syria began evacuating their posts, fearing US airstrikes, according to Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet. He told The Associated Press that the areas are the strongholds of Mayadeen and Boukamal.

US Central Command said at least 34 troops were injured by the one-way attack drone, with eight flown out of Jordan for follow-up care. It described the eight as being in stable condition. The large drone struck a logistics support base in Jordan known as Tower 22. It is along the Syrian border and is used largely by troops involved in the advise-and-assist mission for Jordanian



forces. Central Command said approximately 350 US Army and Air Force personnel were deployed to the base. The three who were killed and most of the wounded were Army soldiers, according to several US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to give details not yet made public.

The small installation, which Jordan does not publicly disclose, includes US engineering, aviation, logistics and security troops. Austin said the troops were deployed there "to work for the lasting defeat of ISIS".

Three officials said the drone struck near the troops' sleeping quarters, which they said explained the high casualty count. The US military base at al-Tanf in Syria is just 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of Tower 22. The Jordanian installation provides a critical logistical hub for US forces in Syria, including those at al-Tanf, which is near where the borders of Iraq, Syria and Jordan intersect.

In a statement on Jordan's state-run Petra news agency, the country "condemned the terrorist attack" that targeted the U.S. troops. That report described the drone strike as targeting "an outpost on the border with Syria" and said it did not wound any Jordanian troops.

Jordan will continue to counter terrorism and the smuggling of drugs and weapons across the Syrian border into stable condition. The large drone struck a logistics support base in Jordan known as Tower 22. It is along the Syrian border and is used largely by troops involved in the advise-and-assist mission for Jordanian

'Trump cannot bully his way through nomination'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump cannot "bully" his way through nomination, Indian-American presidential aspirant Nikki Haley has said after her party said that it's time for Republicans to unite around the former US president and frontrunner in the race for the White House in 2024. Haley is the only remaining Republican after Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Indian-origin entrepreneur turned politician Vivek Ramaswamy withdrew from the 2024 presidential race earlier this month with both endorsing Trump.

After the New Hampshire primary, where she came in second to Trump, there has been increasing pressure on the 52-year-old politician to with-



draw from the race in favour of her former boss. Trump, 77, has also called on her to withdraw from the race. Haley, the former two-term Governor of South Carolina, has refused to quit. The next major primary is scheduled to be held in her home state of South Carolina later next month. "He (Trump) can't bully his way through the nomination. I think, it's not

surprising that he is surrounded by the political elite, but let's keep in mind, the political elite has gotten nothing done for us in stopping the wasteful spending, has gotten nothing done to secure the border, has gotten nothing done to keep us more safe, as we see wars around the world," Haley told NBC News' Meet the Press. "The reason the political elite are upset and the members of Congress are upset is because I've pushed for term limits; I've pushed for mental competency tests. I've said, if they don't get a budget out on time, they shouldn't get paid. So, look, I have fought this political class my entire life, and it's — I'd much rather be fighting for the people than fighting for the elected officials in D.C.," she said.

IS claims responsibility for Istanbul church attack

AP ■ ISTANBUL

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for an attack on a Roman Catholic church in Istanbul during a Sunday Mass that killed one person, in a statement issued late Sunday. The extremist group said that it "attacked a gathering of Christian unbelievers during their polytheistic ceremony" inside the Santa Maria Church in the Buyukkeder neighborhood in Istanbul on Sunday.

Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said shortly before midnight that two men he described as members of the Islamic State extremist movement had been arrested for the attack. One of the suspects is from Tajikistan, and the other from Russia. The statement



claiming responsibility was published on Aamaq, the media arm of the militant group, along with photos of two masked men holding guns whom it identified as the attackers. It described the attack as killing one person and wounding another, while Turkish authorities said no one was injured besides the person killed. Yerlikaya said police had raided 30 locations and detained a total of 47 peo-

ple as part of the investigation into the attack. "We will never tolerate those who try to disrupt the peace of our country — terrorists, their collaborators, both national and international criminal groups, and those who aim at our unity and solidarity," Yerlikaya said.

On Jan 3 this year, 25 suspected Islamic State members were arrested across Turkey, accused of plotting attacks on churches and synagogues, according to state-run Anadolu Agency. The Islamic State has not previously targeted places of worship in Turkey, but the militant group has carried out a string of deadly attacks in the country, including a shooting at an Istanbul night club in 2017 that killed 39 people, and a 2015 bombing attack in Ankara that killed 109.

Rodrigo Duterte accuses Marcos of plotting to expand grip on power

AP ■ MANILA

Former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is throwing allegations at his successor, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and even raising the prospect of removing him from office, bringing into the open a long-rumoured split between the two. In an explosive speech late Sunday, the former populist leader alleged Marcos' legislative allies are plotting to amend the constitution to lift term limits and warned that could lead to him being ousted like his father — the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Duterte also accused Marcos of being a drug addict.

Marcos laughed off Duterte's allegations, speaking to reporters before he flew to Vietnam for a visit. Marcos said he would not dignify the question with an answer, but claimed his predecessor is using fentanyl, a powerful opioid. In 2016, Duterte said that he had used fentanyl in the past to ease pain caused by spinal injuries from a motorbike accident, but has not acknowledged ongoing use of the drug. "I think it's the fentanyl," Marcos said. "Fentanyl is the

strongest pain killer that you can buy... After five, six years, it has to affect him that's why I think this is what has happened."

Members of the House of Representatives have been talking about amending the constitution, and Duterte claimed without offering any evidence that lawmakers who support Marcos, including House Speaker Martin Romualdez, are bribing local officials to amend the 1987 constitution to remove term limits so they can extend their grip on power.

Romualdez, who is the current president's cousin, has denied that claim, saying he wants the constitution amended only to remove restrictions on foreign investment.

Marcos has said he is open to altering economic provisions of the constitution but opposes changing a provision that restricts foreign ownership of land and other critical industries like the media. Philippine presidents can serve only a single six-year term. Opponents of opening the constitution to changes include the Senate. It issued a statement last week warning its

checks-and-balance role could be undermined if the House of Representatives proceeded with plans to pursue amendments in joint session rather than by separate voting in the 24-member Senate and the 316-strong House. The 1987 constitution, which is laden with safeguards to prevent dictatorship, came into force a year after Marcos' strongman father was ousted by an army-backed "people power" uprising amid allegations of plunder and human rights atrocities during his rule.

The speech put credence into months of rumours about a political split with his successor even though Duterte's daughter Sara is Marcos' vice president following their landslide election victory in 2022.

In recent weeks, Duterte's supporters have been angered by reports of an unannounced visit by International Criminal Court investigators last month who are probing widespread killings during the anti-drug crackdown Duterte launched as president. The reported visit has not been confirmed. Duterte, who became notorious for the harsh crack-

down that left thousands of mostly poor suspects dead, claimed in his speech without offering any evidence that Marcos was once on a law enforcement list of suspected drug users. "You, the military, you know this, we have a president who's a drug addict," Duterte said to cheers from a few thousand supporters in his southern home region of Davao city.

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency said Monday that Marcos was never on such a list, contrary to Duterte's claim. In 2021 when he was a presidential aspirant, his spokesman showed two reports from a private hospital and the national police laboratory that separately said Marcos tested negative for cocaine and methamphetamine. The two men also have differences over foreign policy. While Duterte nurtured cozy ties with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Putin while in office, Marcos has been seen as veering toward Washington due to his country's territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea.

N Korea: Kim Jong Un supervised tests of Cruise missiles

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised test firings of new cruise missiles designed to be launched from submarines and also reviewed efforts to build a nuclear-powered submarine while reiterating his goal of building a nuclear-armed navy to counter what he portrays as growing external threats, state media said Monday. The report came a day after South Korea's military said it detected North Korea firing multiple cruise missiles over waters near the eastern port of Sinpo, where the North has a major shipyard developing submarines. It was the latest in a streak of weapons demonstrations by North Korea amid increasing tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan.

North Korea's official newspaper Rodong Simmun published photos of what appeared to be at least two missiles fired separately. Both created grayish-white clouds as they broke the water surface and soared into the air at an angle of around 45 degrees, which possibly suggests they were fired from torpedo launch tubes.

State media said the missiles were Pulhwasal-3-31, a new type of weapon first tested last week in land-based launches from North Korea's western coast. The reports implied that two missiles were fired during the test but did not specify the vessel used for the launches.

State media said the missiles were Pulhwasal-3-31, a new type of weapon first tested last week in land-based launches from North Korea's western coast. The reports implied that two missiles were fired during the test but did not specify the vessel used for the launches.



This photo provided by the North Korean government, shows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, right, as he inspects a test firing of Pulhwasal-3-31 in North Korea Sunday. AP/PTI

X pauses Taylor Swift searches as fake explicit images spread

New York (AP): Elon Musk's social media platform X has blocked searches for Taylor Swift as pornographic deepfake images of the singer have circulated online. Attempts to search for her name on the site resulted in an error message and a prompt for users to retry their search, which added, "Don't fret — it's not your fault." Searches for variations of her name such as "taylorswift" and "Taylor Swift AI" turned up the same error messages. Sexually explicit and abusive fake images of Swift began circulating widely last week on X, making her the most famous victim of a scourge that tech platforms and anti-abuse groups have struggled to fix.

Israel notes 'significant gaps' after cease-fire talks

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israel said "significant gaps" remain after cease-fire talks Sunday with the United States, Qatar and Egypt but called them constructive and said they would continue in the week ahead, a tentative sign of progress on a potential agreement that could see Israel pause military operations against Hamas in exchange for the release of remaining hostages. The US announced its first military deaths in the region since the war began and blamed Iran-backed militants for the drone strike in Jordan that killed three American service members amid concerns about a wider conflict. The statement from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on the cease-fire talks did not say what the "significant gaps"

were. There was no immediate statement from the other parties.

The war has killed more than 26,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, destroyed vast swaths of Gaza and displaced nearly 85 per cent of the territory's people. Israel says its air and ground offensive has killed more than 9,000 militants, without providing evidence. The October 7 Hamas attack in southern Israel killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took about 250 hostages.

With Gaza's 2.3 million people in a deepening humanitarian crisis, the United Nations secretary-general called on the United States and others to resume funding the main agency providing aid to the besieged territory, after Israel accused a

dozen employees of taking part in the Hamas attack that ignited the war.

Communications Director Juliette Touma warned that the agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, would be forced to stop its support in Gaza by the end of February.

CEASE-FIRE TALKS TO CONTINUE

Sunday's intelligence meeting included CIA Director Bill Burns, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, David Barnea, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel.

Ahead of the meeting, two senior Biden administration officials said US negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement that

would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released in a first 30-day phase. It also would call for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The officials requested anonymity to discuss the ongoing negotiations.

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a weeklong cease-fire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, speaking to troops, said that "these days we are conducting a negotiation process for the release of hostages" but vowed that as long as hostages remain in Gaza, "we will intensify the (military) pressure and con-

HK court orders China Evergrande to liquidate

AP ■ HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court ordered China Evergrande, the world's most heavily indebted real estate developer, to undergo liquidation following a failed effort to restructure \$300 billion owed to banks and bondholders that fuelled fears about China's rising debt burden.

Judge Linda Chan said Monday it was appropriate for the court to order Evergrande to wind up its business given a "lack of progress on the part of the company putting forward a viable restructuring proposal" as well as Evergrande's insolvency. China Evergrande Group is one of the biggest of a series of Chinese developers that have collapsed since 2020 under official pressure to rein in surging debt the ruling Communist Party views as a threat to China's slowing economic growth.

But a crackdown on excess borrowing has tipped the property industry into crisis, making it a drag on the economy, as scores of other developers ran into trouble, their predicaments rippling through financial systems in and outside China. Global financial markets were rattled earlier by fears an Evergrande liquidation could cause global shockwaves. But Chinese regulators said risks could be contained. Only a few billion dollars of

provide more reasons for the liquidation order during a separate court session Monday afternoon. Evergrande CEO Shawn Siu told Chinese news outlet 21Jingji that the company feels "utmost regret" at the liquidation order. He emphasised that the order affects only the Hong Kong-listed China Evergrande unit.

The group's domestic and overseas units are independent legal entities, he said. Siu said that Evergrande will strive to continue smooth operations and deliver properties to buyers. "If affected, we will still make every effort to ensure the smooth advancement of risk resolution and asset disposal, and we will still make every effort to advance all work fairly and in accordance with the law," he said. The 21Jingji article appeared to be inaccessible as of Monday afternoon, hours after it was first published.

Evergrande first defaulted on its financial obligations in 2021, just over a year after Beijing clamped down on lending to property developers in an effort to cool a property bubble. It's also unclear how the liquidation order will affect Evergrande's vast operations in the Chinese mainland. As a former British colony, Hong Kong operates under a legal system that is separate, though increasingly influenced by, communist-ruled China's.

The judge was expected to

King Charles III, Kate discharged from hospital



File photo of King Charles III with Kate Middleton

AP ■ LONDON

King Charles III on Monday was discharged from a private London clinic after undergoing a "corrective procedure" for an enlarged prostate. The 75-year-old monarch was admitted to the London Clinic, where the Princess of Wales, his daughter-in-law, also recently had abdominal surgery.

Charles, who ascended the throne 16 months ago, was diagnosed with the benign condition on Jan. 17 after he experienced undisclosed symptoms. He canceled engagements and was urged to rest before the procedure, which had concluded by Friday after-

noon. The king decided to announce the surgery in advance in an effort to encourage other men to have their prostates checked in line with public health advice.

Meanwhile Kensington Palace says Kate, the princess of Wales, has returned home to Windsor after being hospitalized for abdominal surgery.

The palace says "the Prince and Princess wish to say a huge thank you to the entire team at The London Clinic, especially the dedicated nursing staff, for the care they have provided."

"The Wales family continues to be grateful for the well wishes they have received from around the world."

'Pak, Iran militants backed, led by third countries'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In an apparent reference to Taliban-led Afghanistan, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian on Monday said there was "no doubt" that militants located in the border areas of Pakistan and Iran were "led and supported by third countries", days after the two neighbours conducted tit-for-tat military strikes at alleged terrorist bases in both countries.

Abdollahian arrived in Pakistan late Sunday night to de-escalate the tension between the two nations following the military strikes conducted earlier this month. In a joint press conference along with Pakistan Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani, Abdollahian said: "There is no doubt that the terrorists located in the common border regions and areas of Iran and Pakistan are led and supported by third countries and they never favour any good action in line with the benefits of the Iranian and Pakistani governments and nations."

He, however, did not name any nation. On his part, Jilani said Pakistan and Iran have agreed to "establish a high-level constructive mechanism at the level of foreign ministers of the two countries."

Both the nations have agreed to "cooperate to fight terrorism in our respective areas", he said, emphasising



the need to "ally and address each other's concerns".

Jilani said the threat of terrorism posed a common challenge to both countries, and, therefore, Islamabad and Tehran have agreed to "adopt collaborative approaches to confront this menace to leverage the robust institutional mechanism". He said the two sides have agreed to station liaison officers at the Iranian cities of Turbat and Zahedan and an agreement is already in place at the earliest date.

He said Abdollahian's visit to Pakistan at "such short notice" testified to the deep commitment on both sides to solidify ties "with each other. Taking to X, the Foreign Office

said Jilani and Abdollahian have underscored the importance of "robust dialogue and cooperation as the pathway for a positive, forward-oriented and upward trajectory in bilateral relations".

"The two sides agreed to work towards promoting the mutually desired goals of peace and prosperity, based on mutual respect and a collective approach to address common challenges," it said. Abdollahian's visit comes after Iran and Pakistan narrowly avoided an armed conflict after Iran unilaterally targeted alleged sites of militants inside the Pakistan border area of Punjgur. However, the situation was saved when Tehran restrained itself from retaliating after Islamabad launched retaliatory strikes in response to its action. Earlier this month, Pakistan conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province that killed nine people. The attack was seen as retaliation to Iranian missile and drone attacks which targeted two bases of the Sunni Baloch militant group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan's unruly Balochistan province.

Though the ties have improved since the spat, terrorists killed nine Pakistani labourers in Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran on Saturday, fuelling fresh concerns.

Officials register Putin to run in March election

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia's election commission on Monday formally registered President Vladimir Putin as a candidate for the March presidential election, a vote in which he's all but certain to win another six-year term in office.

Putin, 71, is running as an independent, but he retains tight control over Russia's political system that he has established during 24 years in power. With prominent critics who could challenge him either jailed or living abroad and most independent media banned, his re-election in the March 15-17 presidential vote looks all but assured.



largely supportive of the Kremlin's policies. Kharitonov ran against Putin in 2004, finishing a distant second. Boris Nadezhdin, a 60-year-old liberal politician who serves as a local legislator in a town near Moscow, is also seeking to run. He has openly called for a halt to the conflict in Ukraine and starting a dialogue with the West.

Thousands of Russians have lined up across the country to leave their signatures in support of Nadezhdin's candidacy to allow him to qualify for the race, an unusual show of opposition sympathies in the rigidly controlled political landscape that raised a challenge for the Kremlin. The Central Election Commission is expected to review Nadezhdin's papers later this week to decide whether to register him for the race. Under a constitutional reform that he engineered, Putin is eligible to seek two more six-year terms, potentially allowing him to remain in power until 2036.

Malaysia charges ex-min for not declaring assets as probe targets allies of former PM

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia charged a former minister on Monday with failing to declare assets, the latest step in a corruption probe that's targeting several people connected to a former prime minister. Former Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin, who left office more than 20 years ago, is a key ally of ex-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed. Both argue that the probe is politically motivated and that prosecutors have ignored potential corruption among allies of the current government.

A frail Daim, 85, who was just discharged from hospital, turned up in court in a wheelchair. He pleaded not guilty to a charge of failing to declare 71 assets ranging from luxury

cars to a raft of companies, properties and land. He faces up to five years in jail and a fine if found guilty. After his court hearing, Daim called Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim "a wolf in sheep's clothing who cried reforms" but instead abused government institutions to pursue his political foes. He pointed to the case of Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who was also faced trial for corruption until prosecutors dropped 47 graft charges against him last year.

"I am not too bothered about my fate now. Let Anwar throw everything at me. But I fear for the fate of my country," Daim said. Last week, Daim's wife also pleaded not guilty to a similar charge. Daim, one of the country's wealthiest tycoons, insists his offshore

assets were the result of legitimate business activities and investments.

Daim served as Finance Minister from 1984-1989 and again from 1999-2001 under Mahathir. He and Mahathir's eldest son, Mirzan Mahathir, were among several Malaysians revealed to hold millions offshore in the Pandora Papers, a major document leak that revealed offshore accounts held by politicians and billionaires around the world. The anti-graft agency has asked both Mirzan and his brother Mokhzani to declare their assets. Mahathir was Malaysia's longest-serving leader, holding office for 22 years before he stepped down in 2003, and again from 2018-2020. He now supports the opposition Malay-Islamic alliance. Mahathir, 98,

has said he believes Anwar is fishing for evidence to implicate him.

The two men have a long history that has shaped Malaysian politics. Anwar was Mahathir's designated successor in the 1990s before they fell out amid the Asian financial crisis. Anwar was later jailed for corruption and sodomy, charges he said were concocted to kill his political career.

The pair joined hands for the 2018 general elections to oust the long-ruling coalition, while Anwar was in jail on a second sodomy charge. He was pardoned by the king shortly after their victory. Mahathir became premier for the second time in a deal that called for him later to hand over power to Anwar, but their alliance collapsed amid infighting.

China invites B'desh PM Sheikh Hasina for official visit to Beijing

PTI ■ DHAKA

China has invited Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for an official visit to the country as Beijing is keen to work with the new government in Dhaka to cement bilateral cooperation in all fields. "We (Dhaka) will find a suitable time for the visit," Foreign Minister Hassan Mahmud told reporters after he met with Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen on Sunday.

Wen met Mahmud after the Hasina-led Awami League was re-elected to power for the straight fourth term in the elections boycotted by the major opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on January 7. Mahmud said discussions were underway to arrange it at a mutually convenient time for the premier's Beijing tour.

Prime Minister Hasina officially visited China from July 1-6, 2019. She also participated in the 13th Summer Davos Forum in Dalian. During the visit, Hasina called on Chinese President Xi Jinping. "China reiterated its position to further strengthen the bilateral relations during the tenure of the new government in Bangladesh," the foreign ministry, meanwhile said in a statement after the envoy met with the minister.

Soon after the January 7 polls, Chinese President Xi congratulated Hasina and expressed confidence in boosting the bilateral ties. Bangladesh foreign ministry officials said China wanted Hasina to visit China in September last year but the election and other engagements prevented her from visiting at that time.

China's invitation came



shortly after the ruling party's general secretary and Road Transport Minister Obaidul Quader said India stood beside Bangladesh when BNP tried to foil the polls.

"There is no reason for our relations with India to be strained," Quader told reporters after Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Pranay Kumar Verma called on him. Quader said he believed "the wall of confusion and mistrust was finally smashed by Hasina and her Indian counterpart Narendra Modi".

A senior foreign ministry official preferring anonymity said Dhaka would continue to strike a balance in the relationship both with India and China as "we need them both for our stability and development". According to analysts, Hasina deserved credit for skillfully negotiating the rival interests of India and China as Bangladesh is virtually sandwiched between the two feuding Asian giants. She also received the support of the big neighbours and Russia ahead of the elections. India called the Bangladesh election an "internal matter" and Beijing spoke in the same tone while the Western powers, including the United States have called for credible polls.

Iran executes 4 men for planning sabotage and links with Mossad

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran executed on Monday four men convicted of planning sabotage and alleged links with Israel's Mossad secret service, state media reported. The official IRNA news agency said the men were convicted of planning to target a factory in 2022 belonging to Iran's defense ministry and involved in missile and defense equipment in the central city of Isfahan. The operation was allegedly engineered by Mossad and the four were trained by the Israeli agency in an African country before entering Iran, it said.

The four were identified as Iranian nationals: Mohammad Faramarzi, Mohsen Mazloum, Vafa Azarbar and Pejman Fatehi. The execution was carried out after the country's

Supreme Court upheld their death sentences, handed down by another court in September. The report did not say how the death sentences were carried out, but in Iran it's usually by hanging.

In 2022, Iran said its intelligence agents had dismantled a group linked to Mossad that had allegedly planned terror operations inside Iran, arresting all members of the group and confiscating a large amount of weapons and explosives. Iran from time to time reports on arrests, trials and executions of its nationals for spying for Mossad and other Western intelligence services.

Late last month, Iran executed four people - three men and a woman - and sentenced several others to prison for having alleged links with Israel's

Mossad security service, local media reported. Earlier in December, another man was executed on charges of releasing classified information to Mossad. Iran and Israel have accused each other of spying and waging a shadow war for years. Israel views Iran as its greatest threat and has repeatedly threatened to take military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Iran denies it is seeking such weapons and has vowed a harsh response to any aggression. In 2020, Iran executed a man convicted of leaking information to the United States and Israel about a prominent Islamic Revolutionary Guard general, Qasim Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, who was killed by a US drone strike in January that year.

Head of a Saudi royal commission held for graft

Dubai (AP): The CEO overseeing Saudi Arabia's royal commission for its historic al-Ula site has been arrested on corruption and money-laundering charges over some USD 55 million in contracts, officials said. The charges target Amr bin Saleh Abdulrahman al-Madani in part over "illegally obtaining" contracts to benefit a private company he had interests in through a relative before joining the government, the kingdom's Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority said in a statement late Sunday. The contracts relate to the Kingdom Abdullah City for Atomic and Renewable Energy, the statement said. It said Al-Madani also recommended that private company for additional contracts through his work on the commission for al-Ula.

Rise and shine: Japanese moon probe back to work

AP ■ TOKYO

A Japanese moon explorer is up and running Monday after several tense days without the sunlight it needs to generate power. Japan's first lunar mission hit its target in a precision touchdown on Jan 20, but landed the wrong way up, leaving its solar panels unable to see the sun. But with the dawn of the lunar day, it appears that the probe has power.

After a last-minute engine failure caused the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, to make a rougher-than-planned landing, JAXA used battery power to gather as much data as possible about the touchdown and the probe's surroundings. The craft was then turned off to wait the sun to rise higher in the lunar sky in late January.

With power, SLIM has continued work to analyze the composition of olivine rocks on the lunar surface with its multi-band spectral camera, seeking clues about the Moon's origin and evolution, the agency said. Earlier observations suggest that the moon may have formed when the Earth hit another planet.

A black-and-white photo



posted by JAXA on social media showed the rocky lunar surface, including a rock the agency said it had named "Toy Poodle" after seeing it in initial

images. The probe is analyzing six rocks, all of which have been given the names of dog breeds. SLIM is expected to have enough sun to continue

operations for several earth days, possibly until Thursday. JAXA said it's not clear if the craft will work again after another severely cold lunar night. The SLIM landed about 55 metres (60 yards) away from its target, in between two craters near the Shioli crater, a region covered in volcanic rock. Previous moon missions have typically aimed for flat areas at least 10 km (6 miles) wide.

SLIM carried two autonomous probes, which were released just before touchdown, recording the landing, surroundings and other lunar data. The landing made Japan the world's fifth country to reach the moon surface, after the United States, the Soviet Union, China and India.

Somali pirates suspected of hijacking a SL fishing boat

AP ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's diplomats are talking with Somali authorities trying to ascertain the whereabouts of a fishing vessel and its six crewmembers suspected of being abducted by Somali pirates two days ago, officials said on Monday.

The apparent abduction came two weeks after Sri Lanka said it would join a US-led operation to protect merchant vessels sailing in the Red Sea against attacks by Yemen-based Houthi rebels. Other suspected hijackings in waters off Somalia have raised concern that Somali pirates have resumed activity, a decade after they caused chaos

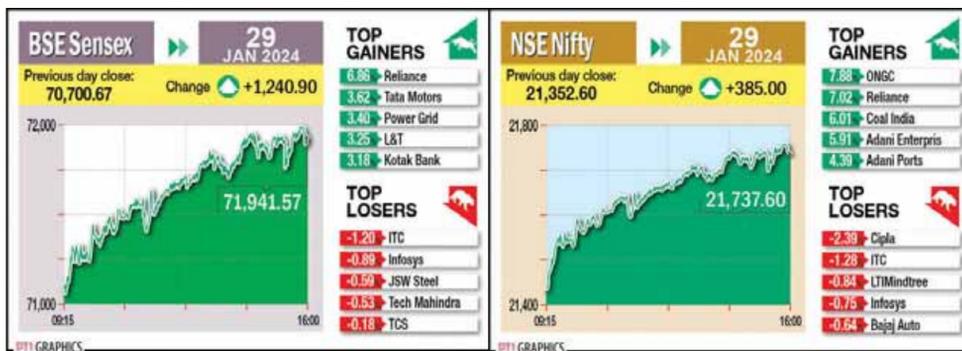
in international shipping. The hijacking of the Sri Lankan vessel occurred in international waters about 840 nautical miles (1,555 kilometers) east of Somalia, 1,100 nautical miles (2,040 kilometers) from Sri Lanka and north of Seychelles, according to Sri Lankan navy spokesman Capt Gayan Wickramasuriya. "So far, we have no communication with them or no details on the whereabouts of them," he said. The Sri Lankan foreign ministry said it was working to obtain the release of the fishermen. "Sri Lanka ambassadors in the African region have already established contacts with Somalian authorities to get the fishermen and

trawler released as soon as possible," ministry spokesman Niluka Kadurugamuwa said. On Saturday, an armed group arrived in an area where about 30 Sri Lankan vessels were fishing. Two to three armed men who had arrived in a 23-metre (75-foot) vessel boarded the fishing trawler, fired shots apparently to warn away the other fishing boats and took away the fishing trawler and the fishermen, said Susantha Kahawatta, a top official in the Fisheries Department, adding that all the details of the abduction were provided by fishermen in the other trawlers. The other fishermen identified the attackers as Somali.

Sensex, Nifty surge by two per cent

On rally in Reliance

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply on Monday, surging nearly 2 per cent, buoyed by robust buying in Reliance Industries and a rally in Asian markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,240.90 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at 71,941.57. During the day, it soared 1,309.55 points or 1.85 per cent to 72,010.22. The Nifty climbed 385 points or 1.80 per cent to 21,737.60. Among the Sensex firms, Reliance Industries jumped nearly 7 per cent, contributing the most to the rally in markets. Tata Motors, Power Grid, Larsen and Toubro, Kotak Mahindra Bank, NTPC, Titan and UltraTech Cement were the other major gainers. ITC, Infosys, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra and Tata Consultancy Services were the laggards.



“The domestic market underwent an upturn as the recent sell-off and positive Asian peers provided an opportunity to accumulate quality stocks. Despite premium valuations, confidence is upheld among investors due to the optimistic environment surrounding the interim budget and recent set of results aligning with forecasts. “Globally, the upcoming Fed policy stands out as a crucial factor.

While a rate cut by the FOMC is unlikely, investors will eagerly monitor their commentary to get cues on future rate paths,” said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 1.68 per cent and smallcap index rallied 1.03 per cent. Among the indices, energy jumped 5.29 per cent, oil & gas zoomed 4.94 per cent, power

(3.03 per cent), services (2.82 per cent), capital goods (2.13 per cent), industrials (2.17 per cent) and consumer durables (1.93 per cent). FMCG, IT and teck were the laggards. A total of 2,266 stocks advanced while 1,654 declined and 141 remained unchanged. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading

mostly lower. The US markets had ended on a mixed note on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.18 per cent to USD 83.40 a barrel. Markets were closed on Friday on account of Republic Day. On Thursday, the BSE benchmark declined 359.64 points or 0.51 per cent to settle at 70,700.67 points while the Nifty fell 101.35 points or 0.47 per cent to 21,352.60 points.

Munda launches framework to promote carbon market in agri sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda on Monday launched a framework to promote the Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM) in the farm sector and said this will encourage small and medium farmers to avail benefits of carbon credit. Introducing farmers to the carbon market will not only benefit them but also accelerate the adoption of environment-friendly agricultural practices, the minister said. He launched the ‘Framework for Voluntary Carbon Market in Agriculture Sector’ and ‘Accreditation Protocol of Agroforestry Nurseries’ here, according to an official statement. He requested cooperation from the ministries concerned of the Centre and the states and other organisations to promote the carbon market in the interest of farmers. “Global challenges like global warming are in front of all of us; hence we have to move



ahead with caution,” the minister said. Munda said the Accreditation Protocol of Agroforestry Nurseries will strengthen the institutional arrangements for the production and certification of planting material on a large scale to promote agroforestry in the country. He asked all the stakeholders to adopt the protocol so that quality planting material can provide assured returns. Munda said that the agriculture sector in the country is making

an important contribution to the economy and livelihood of crores of people. He said 54.6 per cent of the country's workforce is engaged in agriculture and allied sectors' activities. The share of the agriculture sector in GDP is 18.6 per cent, while the sown area is 139.3 million hectares. Agriculture Secretary Manoj Ahuja and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) Director General Himanshu Pathak were present at the function.



Gold imports rise 26.7 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), increased 26.7 per cent to USD 35.95 billion during the April-December of this fiscal due to healthy demand, according to government data. The imports stood at USD 28.4 billion during the same period a year ago. In December 2023, imports of the precious metal jumped by 156.5 per cent to USD 3 billion, as per the data released by the commerce ministry. Despite the increase in gold imports, the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) narrowed to USD 188.02 billion in the first three-quarters of this fiscal against USD 212.34 billion in April-December 2022. India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. The gems and jewellery exports during the period dipped by 16.16 per cent to USD 24.3 billion. India's current account deficit declined sharply to 1 per cent of the GDP or USD 8.3 billion in the second quarter of this financial year, mainly due to lower merchandise trade deficit and growth in services exports, according to RBI data released on December 26 last year. A current account deficit occurs when the value of goods and services imported and other payments exceeds the value of the export of goods and services and other receipts by a country in a particular period.

Government may set higher dividend target in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Having reaped rich dividends from the Reserve Bank in the current financial year, the government will be looking forward to receiving about Rs 70,000 crore from the central bank and the financial institutions (FIs) in the next financial year. In the interim Budget to be unveiled in the Lok Sabha on February 1 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, sources said, the government would peg receipts from dividends from financial institutions at much higher level than Rs 48,000 crore estimated for the current fiscal. The current financial year estimate has already exceeded the Budget target as RBI paid a dividend of Rs 87,416 crore. With public sector banks and financial institutions posting good quarterly numbers during the current financial year, the



dividend payout by them in the coming year would be higher compared to this year. So, it would be feasible to expect about Rs 70,000 crore as dividend payout from RBI and financial institutions in FY'25, sources said. The government had pegged a 17 per cent higher dividend at Rs 48,000 crore from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), public sector banks and finan-

cial institutions in 2023-24. However, this target was very much surpassed with the transfer of Rs 87,416 crore as surplus to the central government for 2022-23 by the Reserve Bank. During 2023-24, the Reserve Bank transferred a surplus of Rs 87,416.22 crore to the central government which is higher than both the amount transferred last year (Rs 30,307.45 crore) and the budgeted

amount under Dividend/Surplus transfer of Reserve Bank of India, Nationalised Banks and Financial Institutions in the Union Budget 2023-24 (Rs 48,000 crore). In the previous financial year, the government mobilised Rs 40,953 crore from RBI and public sector financial institutions. The higher dividend from banks and financial institutions, apart from higher tax mobilisation, would help achieve a fiscal deficit glide path. As per the fiscal consolidation roadmap, the government aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26 from an estimated 5.9 per cent of GDP in 2023-24. The government, as per the roadmap, is required to bring down the fiscal deficit to 5.4 per cent in the next financial year beginning April 1, 2024.



Sebi run NISM invites application for director post

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

National Institute of Securities Market (NISM), an educational initiative by markets regulator Sebi, has invited applications for filling up the position of director. The director of NISM is the Principal and Chief Executive Officer of the institute. Sebi-run NISM is one of the largest financial market certifying institutions. It runs numerous online and hybrid courses and certification programmes covering various critical market functions such as sales, advice, operations and compliance across financial market products such as equities, derivatives of equity, currency, interest rates and commodities, mutual funds and pensions. It is currently operating from campus on a 70-acre plot of land at Patalganga, about 60 kilometres from the Mumbai airport on the Mumbai-Pune Express Highway. According to a public notice uploaded on Sebi's website, the appointment of the director would be on a contract or deputation basis. Applicants are required to apply for the post by February 18, it added. The selected candidate will be appointed on contract or deputation initially for 3 years that can be extended up to 5 years. The candidate will be eligible for reappointment for, at most, another term of 3 years, extendable up to 5 years. The incumbent will demit the office on attaining the age of 70 years or at the end of the contract period, whichever is earlier.

The selected candidate will be paid as per the Seventh Central Pay Commission scale with basic pay ranging from Rs 1.82 lakh to Rs 2.24 lakh per month along with other perquisites and allowances. Additionally, the candidate can be offered a 'special pay' of up to Rs 1 lakh per month. The total annual maximum emoluments (CTC) of the director at NISM will be about Rs 67 lakh. Going by the notice, applicants need to have experience of at least 20 years in either of the domains — finance, economics, education capacity building, skill development, ed-tech, digital ecosystem — out of which at least 5 years of experience in leadership positions. In the backdrop of the enhanced focus of NISM on capacity building and skill development in the area of the securities market, it has restructured itself for greater synergy and focus to build the capacity of functionaries, professionals and participants of the securities market. In the context of the proposed shift from teaching to learning and a market ecosystem-driven approach, NISM is considering the possibilities of collaboration with other educational institutes or market infrastructure institutions or market participants to run programmes. “The candidate is required to submit his/her vision in the form of a statement of purpose along with his/her application explaining how he/she intends to meet the new outlook of NISM,” the notice mentioned.

Samsung to start making laptops in India



PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Korean electronics major Samsung plans to start manufacturing laptops at its Noida factory in India this year, a senior company official said on Monday. “Termining India as its important manufacturing base, Samsung Electronics President and Head of Mobile eXperience (MX) Business TM Roh told reporters here that the preparation for the laptop manufacturing is in progress in India. “We will start manufacturing laptops this year at the Noida factory. Preparations are already underway,” said the official, who is on an India visit. Roh said India is an important manufacturing base for the company, and it has received support at various levels from the state and central governments. The company will continue to cooperate with the government to strengthen manufacturing in India, he added. The company has recently launched its flagship Galaxy S24 series smartphone with a key focus on artificial intelligence capability in the device. Samsung has announced that it will also manufacture Galaxy S24 at its Noida factory. “Noida is a very important production base for Samsung. It is the second-largest base for Samsung. There may be some changes at the plant to optimise it as per the global demand, but what remains unchanged is the fact that it is an important base for us,” Roh said. The Noida plant has started making feature phones, smartphones, wearable, and tablets, and now the company will start manufacturing laptops this year.

GAIL net profit jumps 10 fold

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd on Monday reported a 10-fold jump in its third quarter net profit as all engines of its business — from gas transportation to marketing and petrochemicals — fired on all cylinders. Standalone net profit of the nation's largest gas transmission and marketing firm came at Rs 2,842.62 crore in October-December — the third quarter of the current fiscal year that started in April 2023 — as compared to Rs 245.73 crore earning a year back, the company said in a statement. The net profit was better than Rs 2,404.89 crore earning in the preceding quarter. This came on the back of pre-tax earnings from the gas transportation business jumping nearly three-fold to Rs 1,215.07 crore. Also, natural gas marketing saw a turnaround, posting



a pre-tax earning of Rs 1,880.42 crore as opposed to a loss of Rs 86.02 crore in October-December 2022. Petrochemicals business saw a turnaround with a small pre-tax profit of Rs 62 crore as against a loss of Rs 349 crore a year ago.

Revenue from operations was almost flat at Rs 34,253.52 crore. For the nine-month period ending December 31, the net profit jumped 42 per cent to Rs 6,659.51 crore on a revenue of Rs 98,303.61 crore. Profits were higher “mainly on

account of higher gas trading margin, increase in transmission volume and increase in transmission tariff”, the firm said. GAIL chairman and managing director Sandeep Kumar Gupta said during the quarter the physical performance has improved across all major business verticals and the petrochemical segment has turned profitable owing to plant efficiency, better capacity utilisation and other optimisation measures adopted. He further stated that the company has incurred a capex of Rs 6,583 crore during the period from April 2023 to December 2023, mainly on pipelines, petrochemicals and equity contribution to joint ventures. During the quarter, GAIL transported an average of 121.54 million standard cubic metres per day of natural gas against 120.31 mmscmd in the preceding quarter. Gas marketing volume stood at 98.14 mmscmd as against 96.96 mmscmd in the previous quarter.

BUSINESS BRIEF

VIT-AP UNIVERSITY GETS ISO CERTIFICATIONS
AMARAVATI: VIT-AP University received three internationally recognized certifications from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) viz ISO 21001: 2018 (Educational Quality Management System), ISO 50001: 2018 (Energy Management System), and ISO 14001: 2015 (Environmental Management System). In recognition of VIT-AP University commitment to maintaining the highest quality standards across its undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs, the certifications were formally presented to Vice Chancellor Dr. S.V. Kota Reddy and Registrar Dr. Jagadish Chandra M by M/s HYM International Certifications Pvt. Ltd, Hyderabad. These certifications underscore the university's dedication to excellence in educational quality, energy management, and environmental sustainability. Vice Chancellor Reddy expressed his satisfaction with the achievement, stating that this significant milestone is a result of the dedicated effort, enthusiasm, and support of the university management, faculty, and staff members.

SRM IST MANAGEMENT STUDENTS VISIT DUBAI
CHENNAI: Students of Masters of Business Administration, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Vadapalani campus, visited Dubai recently, as part of their educational visit to De Montfort University - UK, Dubai. While SRM IST was able to create an opportunity for the students to explore new markets at a global scale, the visit served as an opportunity for students to understand cultural differences. The students, who spent about a week in Dubai, benefitted immensely thanks to the exposure created by the visit to Dubai. It helped them to develop their cross-cultural communication abilities, broaden their views on global business trends and growing their professional networks. At the same time, SRM IST students received a chance to broaden their view on global business trends, apart from getting an opportunity to grow their professional networks.

‘Indian economy vibrant energy looking like a wow’

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Drawing from a viral meme, industrialist Kumar Mangalam Birla on Monday said the Indian economy's vibrant energy is “looking like a wow”. A deeply impactful pulse of confidence in the nation is palpable, the billionaire said in his new year message, adding that the meme captures the “unparalleled nature” of the moment. “The viral meme ‘just looking like a wow’ echoes the vibrant energy of the Indian economy and captures the unparalleled nature of this moment,” Birla said. India is striding forward with unwavering optimism even as large pockets of the world remain engulfed in pessimism, he added. “This is the dynamism and energy of a young country and ancient civilization that has



found its voice and footing,” Birla said, adding that he visited Puri and Rameswaram in 2023. The industrialist was also present at the consecration of the Ram Mandir last week. “There is a palpable sense that the country is on the move. India is awash with optimism,

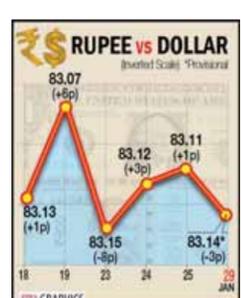
pride, and anticipation,” the billionaire said, crediting the government for the situation. Given the high optimism levels, the industrialist also made a pitch for creating what he termed as the “national confidence index” to gauge the same. The Chairman of diversified

Aditya Birla Group said their market capitalization jumped 40 per cent to over USD 90 billion in 2023, a year which also saw the consolidation of its manufacturing businesses. He also said that its consumer businesses are “on the brink of transformational growth”. The group's consumer businesses include finance, telecom and paints. Birla said even though people are writing the epitaph of globalization, it has a “powerful role to play”, and added that corporations like his have the unique potential to bridge divides of geopolitics, ideologies, and national identities. “Globalisation in its authentic form doesn't have to be a zero-sum game. And the model of globalisation that will always work is one that is founded on openness, mutual trust, and transparency,” he said.

Rupee falls 3 paise to close at 83.14 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 3 paise to 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as rising crude oil prices in international markets and dollar demand from importers dented investor sentiments. Forex traders said the rupee traded in a narrow range as the support from positive domestic equities was offset by persistent foreign fund outflows. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.14 against the US dollar. During the day, it witnessed an intraday high of 83.13 and a low of 83.15 against the American currency. The local unit finally settled at 83.14 (provisional) against the dollar, down by 3 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee rose 1 paise in a range-bound trade to close at 83.11 against the US dollar. Forex market was closed on



Friday on account of Republic Day. “The Indian rupee traded in a narrow range amid higher crude oil prices as the risk sentiment improved ahead of the Federal Reserve policy decision later this week. The geopolitical uncertainty and Fed stance on rate cuts will decide the direction of forex markets,” said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Sonam wins silver on ISSF World Cup debut

Gukesh finishes joint second in Masters



PTI ■ CAIRO
Debutant Sonam Maskar bagged a silver medal for India in the women's 10m air rifle event at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup here. Competing in her maiden World Cup, Sonam shot 252.1 in the eight-woman final, finishing 0.9 behind Germany's Anna Janssen at the Egypt International Olympic City Shooting range late on Sunday.

Poland's Aneta Stankiewicz took home the bronze. Earlier, Divyansh Singh Panwar had struck gold in the men's event with a world record score in the final. In other results, debutant Simranpreet Kaur Brar finished a creditable fifth in the women's 25m pistol event. The teenager, competing at this level for the first time in individual events, had earlier in the day, topped the qualification round with a score of 586, ahead of the likes of Germany's

reigning world champion Doreen Vennekamp and former Olympic champion Anna Korakaki of Greece, among others. Two other Indians in the fray could not make it to the top eight as Rhythm Sangwan shot 582 to finish ninth and Manu Bhaker ended 14th with a score of 580. Doreen and Anna won gold and silver respectively with scores of 39 and 37 in the final, while Hungary's Veronika clinched the bronze. India continue to top the sea-

son-opening World Cup stage with two gold and three silver medals in their kitty after three days of competition. Two Indians, Sonam and Nancy, had made the final after shooting 632.7 and 633.1 to finish the 60-shot qualification round in fifth and fourth spots respectively. Sonam, however, was strongest off the blocks in the 24-shot final, her 53.0 in the first five-shot series giving her the early lead. It was quite an unprecedented final, with the scores huddled

so close to each other that at the end of 10 shots, the difference between the leader Sonam and Nancy, who was placed eighth at that stage, was just 0.8. Anna took over the lead from Sonam after the 14th shot as, despite a 10.9 from Sonam on the 13th, Anna's consistent high 10s bore fruit. At one stage, it did look that it would be a double podium for India, but Poland's Stankiewicz pipped Nancy for bronze, while Sonam could not catch up with the experienced Janssen.

PTI ■ WIJK AAN ZEE (THE NETHERLANDS)

Grandmaster D Gukesh endured a heartbreak in the final tie-breaker against Wei Yi of China and had to be content with a joint second place finish at the Tata Steel Masters chess tournament here.

Indian Grandmaster Leon Luke Mendonca, however, won the challengers section, defeating compatriot Divya Deshmukh in the 13th and final round.

It was a full day of hard work for Gukesh as he had to win the 13th round game with black against Parham Maghsoodloo of Iran and then prove superior in three tie-break games against last year's winner Anish Giri to qualify for the final.

Once there, the Indian raised visions of winning the tournament but Wei Yi was simply better in the return game after drawing the first.

If Gukesh was a heartbreak, Mendonca remained pretty much in the shadows throughout the event in the company of big stalwarts.

Mendonca defeated Divya in another complicated game that could have swung either ways but the latter was the first to err as she went for a wrong capture in the middle game.

"I am very happy and relieved because it was not clear at all throughout the tournament whether I was close to winning or not. It was only before this round that I had a real chance. I also needed a lot of luck as well but mostly I am just relieved," said Mendonca after his win.

Mendonca scored 3/6 in the first half of the event and then went on to score 6.5/7 in the second half.

In addition to the title, Mendonca will also feature in the Masters section in 2025 and this is seen as a big breakthrough for the young Goa-based player, who became a Grandmaster during COVID after he was stuck in Europe. Earlier in the 13th round in the Masters, Gukesh won a very complex game with black pieces against Maghsoodloo.

Playing the Ragozine defense, Gukesh faced a difficult defense in the middle game when Maghsoodloo sacrificed a piece but the Indian was on his feat with the desired counter-active measures.

The end was sweet as Gukesh sacrificed a rook to seal the matter.

Vidit Gujrathi was outplayed by Wei Yi in another key game of final round. The Nasik-based player could not recover from a consistent onslaught.



Gukesh played an excellent tie-breaker against Giri after losing the first game with white. Coming back strongly to win the second, he was at his best in finding the right resources in crunch situations in the final game. Against Wei Yi, though, Gukesh squandered away, in what looked like a tangible position, and Wei Yi showed his tactical acumen to win his first title in the Masters event.

Results of final round of Masters (unless stated): Parham Maghsoodloo (IRI, 4.5) lost to D Gukesh (8.5); R Praggnanandhaa (7.5) drew with Alireza Firouza (FRA, 7.5); Wei Yi (CHN, 8.5) beat Vidit Gujrathi (7.5); Nodirbek Abdusattarov (UZB, 8.5) beat Alexander Donchenko; Ding Liren (CHN, 6) drew with Wenjun Ju (CHN, 4.5); Ian Nepomniachtchi (RUS, 6.5) drew with Jordan Van Foreest (NED, 4.5); Anish Giri (NED, 8.5) beat Max Warmerdam (NED, 4).

Tiebreak 1: D Gukesh beat Anish Giri 1-1, 1-0.

Tiebreak 2: Wei Yi beat Nodirbek Abdusattarov 1.5-0.5.

Tiebreak final: D Gukesh lost to Wei Yi 0.5-1.5. **Challengers:** Daniel Dardha (BEL, 9) beat Liam Vrolijk (NED, 5.5); Jaime Santos Latasa (ESP, 7); drew with Hans Moke Niemann (USA, 7); Erwin L'Ami (NED, 8.5) drew with Marc Andria Mariuzzi (FRA, 9); D Harika (5.5) beat Eline Roeters (NED, 2); Leon Luke Mendonca (9.5) beat Divya Deshmukh (4.5); Stefan Beukema (NED, 2.5) lost to A R Saleh Salem (UAE, 6.5); Anton Korobov (UKR, 8) beat Yilmaz Mustafa (TUR, 5).



Jangra wins intercontinental title in US

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra won the US-based National Boxing Association's intercontinental super featherweight title after defeating American Gerardo Esquivel at Toppenish City, Washington.

Undeclared in his professional career so far the 30-year-old, who trains under former Olympic silver-medallist Roy Jones Jr, dropped down from his previous 75kg weight class to compete for this title on Friday. "This victory is not just mine but of every person who has supported me throughout the journey. My coaches, family, fans etc. Stood with me. I dedicate this title to my country. I will try to continue achieving similar respect and titles for the country in the future also," Jangra said in a media release.

Before the win against Esquivel, Jangra, who made his professional boxing debut in 2021, registered knockout wins in four out of his six fights.

Jangra had a decent run in the amateur circuit as well and won a Commonwealth Games silver medal in the 2014 Glasgow edition. The National Boxing Association (NBA) is a Florida-based sanctioning body for professional bouts.

Shubhankar finishes tied 37, Olesen bags title

PTI ■ RAS AL KHAIMAH (UAE)

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma endured a mixed final round for a total card of 10-under and finished at tied 37 in a low-scoring Ras Al Khaimah Championship here on Monday.

In the last round, Sharma blazed through the opening part with five birdies in the first eight holes, but then cooled off for a round of 4-under 68.

Sharma was 5-under and he had three more birdies, but he dropped a bogey on ninth, a double bogey on 10th and another bogey on 17th, before finishing with a birdie on the



18th. Om Prakash Chauhan, the other Indian in the fray, missed the cut. Chauhan was playing his first

DP World Tour event since becoming a full member after topping the PGTI Order of Merit for 2023.

Thorbjorn Olesen led a 1-2 finish for Denmark as he claimed his eighth DP World Tour title in dominant fashion by six strokes.

The 34-year-old overcame a nervy start at Al Hamra Golf Club as he went on to card a five-under-par final round, finishing six strokes clear of compatriot Rasmus Hojgaard to win his second title in less than 12 months.

His four-stroke overnight lead over Hojgaard was slowly chipped away as he carded a double bogey on the second, cancelling out birdies on the first and third, with Hojgaard drawing level on 22-under par

after he carded four birdies on his opening seven holes.

But Hojgaard's momentum was halted after a bogey at the eighth, with Olesen striking a sublime five to set up a six-foot eagle putt, which he converted for a three-stroke swing and a three-shot lead at the turn.

He restored his advantage to four strokes after a birdie on the tenth and two further gains on the 14th and 18th saw him finish six points clear of Hojgaard, who carded a final round 69 for a 21-under par total.

Frederic Lacroix of France recorded a career-best result on the Tour, finishing one stroke further back on 20-under.



India maul Jamaica 13-0 to enter quarterfinals

PTI ■ MUSCAT

Maninder Singh struck four goals as India mauled Jamaica 13-0 in their third and final pool match to enter the quarterfinals of the FIH Hockey5s men's World Cup here on Monday.

Manjeet (5th, 24th), Raheel Mohammed (16th, 23rd) and Mandeep Mor (23rd, 27th) struck a brace each while Uttam Singh (5th), Rajbhar Pawan (9th) and Gurjot Singh (14th) were the other scorers.

India initiated the onslaught right from the start, with Maninder scoring two quick goals through precision shots. The early momentum continued as Uttam and Manjeet also contributed with one goal each,

propelling India to a commanding 4-0 lead within the first six minutes of the game.

Despite establishing a substantial lead, India maintained relentless pressure on Jamaica's defence with persistent attacks. Pawan and Gurjot capitalised on the opportunities as India entered the half-time break with an impressive 6-0 lead.

The second half mirrored the first, as India focused on ball possession and maintained an aggressive offensive strategy. That approach proved effective as Raheel, Mandeep, Manjeet and Maninder collectively scored numerous goals, securing India's dominant 13-0 win.

The Indian team had defeated Switzerland before losing to Egypt in its opening two Pool B matches on Sunday. However, the victory against Jamaica has confirmed India's quarterfinal berth.

Gaurav on Indian para badminton rise

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Para-sport is on the rise in India, as proved by its success during the Hangzhou Asian Games.

After athletics, para-badminton has also managed to make a great impression lately, bagging 21 medals in Hangzhou last year.

With many wondering what has led to such transformation of India's para-badminton, much of the credit goes to coach Gaurav Khanna, a Dronacharya awardee and now also a Padma Shri winner.

Born on December 11, 1975, Khanna, who was an avid badminton fan and wanted to become a player, suffered twin setbacks early in his career, losing his legs in a span of four years.

However, his dream did not end there as he followed his passion and stuck to badminton, guiding other athletes like him to take up the sport. Talking about his journey, Khanna

revealed the obstacles he faced, besides wanting to help differently-abled kids. "Following the operation (on the knee) in 1996, my professional career ended," he told PTI during an exclusive interaction. "After my first RPS (Rajasthan Police Service) posting in 1998, I came across some kids wearing implants. But, I was told that they were unsocial elements and were mainly involved in pick-pocketing. "Still, I talked to them (kids), learned sign language and even bought racquets for them."

Although he might have brought para-badminton into the limelight in the country with his passion and dedication, it was not an easy task.

He asserted that he had to start from scratch and build a strong grassroots level, while also thanking former Uttar Pradesh sports minister Chetan Chauhan for helping him out. "I realised that there was no proper or



solid grassroots system in Indian para-badminton. I called up everyone, began a camping system, and also played in sports college in Lucknow with the help of Chetan Chauhan," he said. But the challenge was still not over. Before building his own Paralympic house, Khanna struggled to set up his base, moving to a couple of places with

inadequate conditions, besides struggling to get proper accommodations for the differently-abled players.

"We started delivering performances despite the shabby conditions, and after we roped in some sponsors, we moved to another place," he said. "However, things were not smooth there either. We also faced issues in terms of accommodations and food from owners in rental accommodations."

The nightmare was over after he set up the Drona Paralympic House in Lucknow, which has now become the ultimate destination for para-badminton players.

His academy has already attracted over 800 medals through its talented and well-trained athletes, which also includes more than 200 golds.

"The journey was turbulent, but it's all well if the end is well. Somewhere, when you do something, you have to justify it to everyone," he added.

AP ■ ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

Congo knocked seven-time champion Egypt out of the Africa Cup of Nations with an 8-7 win on penalties after the teams finished 1-1 after extra time in the round-of-16 match.

Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed Abou Gabal struck the crossbar with his spot kick before Congo counterpart Lionel Mpsasi stepped up to send the Leopards into the quarterfinals.

Also known as Gabaski, Abou Gabal - whose saves almost won the title for Egypt in the last edition - was playing because regular goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy dislocated his shoulder in the team's final group game against Cape Verde.

It was the latest misfortune for Egypt, which lost Liverpool star Mohamed Salah to a hamstring injury during the 2-2 draw with Ghana in their second match. The Egyptian Football Association sacrificed a cow on

Thursday in an effort to change the team's luck. However, the Pharaohs' defense was caught out by a quick throw in for Congo's opening goal, scored by Meschack Elia in the 37th.

Mostafa Mohamed equalized from the penalty spot in first-half stoppage time. But extra time was needed between two teams that had failed to win any of their games so far.

It was the eighth consecutive Africa Cup match that Egypt failed to win in normal time including the previous tournament. Egypt finished the game with 10 players when defender Mohamed Hamdy was sent off in the first period of extra time with his second yellow card for a late challenge on Simon Banza.



In the shootout, Mohamed struck Egypt's second penalty to the right of the goal, but Congo's Arthur Masuaku reciprocated by sending his effort over and no other players missed until Abou Gabal did.

Congo will next face Guinea. **GUINEA STRIKES LATE** Mohamed Bayo scored in the eighth minute of stoppage time to send the National Elephants into the quarterfinals with a 1-0 win over 10-man Equatorial Guinea. The game was heading for extra time when Ibrahim Diakit crossed for Boya to finally break the deadlock with a header inside the near post.

It was effectively the last play of the game, which left the exhausted Equatoguinean players slumped on the field. A majority of the 36,340 fans in atten-

dance celebrated, mindful of Equatorial Guinea's 4-0 win over Ivory Coast in the previous match - a result that almost knocked the host nation out.

But the Guinea players and fans had their own reasons to celebrate. "It means a lot because we knew the historic nature that this match had. We knew that, by winning, it would be the first time since 1976 that we won a knockout game," said Guinea coach Kaba Diawara, who wiped away tears as he left the field and was applauded by journalists before the post-match news conference.

"We're proud. We've been working together for two years and we've grown together," Diawara said. "We managed to adapt, even if the manner wasn't the best. Last minute. But I said I

wanted us to win. And that's what we did."

Tournament top scorer Emilio Nsue missed a penalty in the 69th minute for Equatorial Guinea when his spot kick struck the right post. It maintained the game's zero shots on target up to that point.

The penalty was awarded through VAR for a foul by Guinea defender Sekou Sylla on Iban Salvador. Equatorial Guinea defender Federico Bikoro was shown a straight red card in the 55th for kicking Bayo while attempting a clearance.

Guinea star Serhou Guirassy made his entrance to a huge roar from the supporters shortly afterward. The Stuttgart forward's impact has been limited by a thigh injury sustained in a pre-tournament warmup.

"I think I can start the next game, but you have to ask the trainer," Guirassy told The Associated Press.

Mindset, technical changes imperative for India batters

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

After England tore the prediction books for an epochal 28-run victory here in the first Test, India now find themselves in a tight space, mentally and technically, ahead of the second match starting in four days in Visakhapatnam. The eternal optimists will trace a similarity in situation to England's tour to these shores three years ago. The Three Lions under Joe Root had consigned India to a massive 227-run defeat in Chennai, but after four days Virat Kohli's side entered the field a reinvigorated lot to level the series at the same Stadium at Chepauk. But comparisons must end there. On a Chidambaram Stadium pitch that deteriorated incredibly fast, India had the first-mover's advantage, piling a 329, which formed the core of the hosts' big win. Moreover, India had Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane and Rishabh Pant in the middle-order, all who could tackle spin effectively. None of these three will be in action in Visakhapatnam for

different reasons, while Shubman Gill and Shreyas Iyer, particularly the former, have not inspired much confidence against spinners either. The word from the coastal Andhra Pradesh town is that the pitch for the second Test might not be entirely different in nature from one used at the RGI Stadium here, and that put the onus squarely on the Indian batters to buckle their swash. The top brass is not exactly keen on an under-prepared pitch, the one we saw in Ahmedabad during the previous series when Axar Patel scythed through the visitors with an 11-wicket haul. The powers that be have understood the fragility of these set of Indians against spin, and a deck like that might backfire badly on them. So, it is imperative for the Indian batters to find their range against England spinners, who might also bring in off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who had reconnected with the rest of the team on Sunday after the visa mess. "I don't know what kind of pitch will be there (for the second Test). Whatever it is, they

SECOND TEST AGAINST ENGLAND



need to regroup quickly as England has smelled the blood. This England side is different from what we saw last time," a former India batter told PTI on conditions of anonymity. "Under Ben Stokes and Brendon McCullum, England have redefined the approach to Test cricket and they are a bold outfit mentally too, unafraid to take risks. It may bring in some bad results but it also gives them a higher chance of winning. "So, India cannot afford to take a step back in Vizag and allow them to build a 2-0 lead, from which it will be difficult to come back." India's failure was two-fold in Hyderabad. Veterans R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja in the company of Axar Patel failed to rattle England on a slow-turning pitch, allowing them to pile 420 in the second innings on the back of Ollie Pope's sensational 196. When their turn came to chase 231, the Indian batters surrendered to the guiles of left-arm spinner Tom Hartley in the second innings as the debutant walked away with seven wickets.

"The problem with many of these young batters is that they try to dominate spinners playing big hits. But they have to understand that working the ball around for singles or twos are also a way to impose yourself on spinners, a more risk-free method," the former India player said. "Dravid himself was a master at that, so was Laxman. In this side I can only see Kohli doing that despite his discomfort against left-arm spin. You need your wrists and feet against spinners on surfaces that suit them. You just can't sit back and try to play with hard hands," he added. Perhaps, he had Gill in his mind. In the first innings, the right-hander's patience seemed to have dried up during a 66-ball 23 and slapped Hartley against the spin to Ben Duckett at mid-wicket. In the second innings, Gill lasted just two balls as he pushed at Hartley with rigid hands to spoon a simple catch to Pope at silly point. "There is not enough time to change the whole mindset towards batting, but hopefully, they have learnt from their mistakes," he added.



Kohli spat at me, apologised after AB de Villiers confronted him: Elgar

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Former South Africa skipper Dean Elgar has claimed that star India batter Virat Kohli "spat at him" during a Test match and apologised two years later after being confronted by his Royal Challengers Bangalore teammate AB de Villiers. Elgar retired from international cricket after the conclusion of South Africa's two-Test series against India at home in December while standing-in for regular skipper Temba Bavuma. Without mentioning the series in which the incident took place, speculated to be South Africa's tour of India in 2015, Elgar agreed on a podcast that he had show-downs with Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin. "All the time," Elgar said on 'Banter with The Boys' podcast sitting alongside former South African all-rounder Chris Morris and rugby player Jean de Villiers. Elgar then said, "In India... Those wickets were jokes." "And I came into bat and I was actually like holding my own against Ashwin and what's his name Jajeja... ja-ja-jajeja, (Jajeja, said someone in the background) and Kohli, he like spat at me," Elgar said. "I said to him, 'if you do that, I'll f****g you with this bat,' Elgar claimed. "Did he understand that word?" asked the podcast host referring to the beeped out word. "Yes, he did because (AB) de Villiers was his teammate at RCB so he understood. I said 'if you do that, I'll absolutely knock you out,' Elgar claimed. The former South African opener said after



de Villiers found out about the incident, he took up the matter with his good friend and RCB teammate. Elgar did not specify when exactly de Villiers discussed the incident with Kohli. "Anyway, so, realised that de Villiers found out what he did and went up to him and said 'bud, why are you spitting at my teammate bud? That's not on' and two years later, he (Kohli) calls me aside playing (in) South Africa and said 'can we go have a drink at the end of the series?'" "I want to just apologise for my actions." Two years later in South Africa, he says he wants to apologise for what he did. We had

a drink, (the) punchline is we drank till 3 am in the morning. This is when he used to drink, now he is obviously converted a bit," Elgar added. When asked how was his experience playing his final Test for South Africa against the likes of Kohli and Ashwin, Elgar replied, "awesome." Kohli apparently did not celebrate after taking a catch off Elgar's bat in his final Test innings at Cape Town in December 2023 and hugged the South African as he returned to the pavilion. Kohli even gave one of his Test jerseys to the Proteas player.



Bumrah reprimanded for Code of Conduct breach in Hyderabad Test

PTI ■ DUBAI

India pacer Jasprit Bumrah has been reprimanded and handed a demerit point for deliberately stepping in England player Ollie Pope's way as he went for a run which led to "inappropriate physical contact" during the first Test at Hyderabad. Bumrah's offence is a Level 1 offence under the ICC code of conduct. In addition to the reprimand, one demerit point has also been added to Bumrah's disciplinary record as it was his first offence in a 24-month period. "The incident occurred in the 81st over of England's second innings, when Bumrah, after completing his follow through, deliberately stepped in Ollie

Pope's way as the batter went for a run, leading to inappropriate physical contact," the ICC said in a release. Bumrah was found to have breached Article 2.12 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel during an international match. Bumrah accepted the sanction proposed by match referee Richie Richardson and there was no need for a formal hearing. The on-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Chris Gaffaney, third umpire Marais Erasmus and fourth umpire Rohan Pandit levelled the charge against Bumrah. England defeated India by 28 runs on Sunday to go 1-0 up in the five-match series.

Saurashtra Cricket Association to conduct enquiry after liquor recovered from its U-23 cricketers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) on Monday decided to launch a disciplinary probe after liquor bottles were recovered from its U-23 cricketers while they were heading back to Rajkot from Chandigarh. As per SCA sources, the incident occurred on January 25 following Saurashtra's win over hosts Chandigarh in the CK

Nayudu Trophy. A sizeable amount of liquor was detected in the cargo area of the plane, which the cricketers were to board. The liquor was subsequently seized by authorities at the Chandigarh Airport. "There has been an alleged incident at Chandigarh that was brought to notice of Saurashtra Cricket Association," said the SCA in a statement. "The alleged incident is unfor-

tunate and intolerable. Ethics/Disciplinary Committee & Apex Council of Saurashtra Cricket Association to make in-depth examine of the incident and shall take proper disciplinary action," it added. As Gujarat is a dry state, one is not allowed to carry alcohol into the state. However, the state government issues permit to the visitors who can purchase alcohol from its dedicated outlets.

India announces 23 members squad



SAFF U-19 Women Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India head coach Shukla Dutta on Monday announced a 23-member squad for the upcoming SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, beginning in Dhaka on Friday. The Young Tigrisses will leave for Bangladesh on Tuesday before playing their opening fixture against Bhutan on February 2, followed by matches against Bangladesh (February 4) and Nepal (February 6). The final will take place on February 8, with all the matches happening at the BSS Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Dhaka. It will be India's fifth appearance in the competition and the second in the U-19 version. The last U-19 edition in 2021

saw the Indians finishing runners-up to hosts Bangladesh. India's only success in the event came in 2022 in the U-18 version when they beat Bangladesh as hosts. **INDIA'S U-19 SQUAD:** **Goalkeepers:** Khushi Kumari, Anika Devi Sharubam and Hempriya Seram. **Defenders:** Heena Khatun, Vikshit Bara, Sonibia Devi Irom, Juhli Singh and Nishima Kumari. **Midfielders:** Shivani Toppo, Lalita Boypai, Akhila Rajan, Rivka Ramji, Arina Devi Nameirakpam, Cindy Remruatpui Colney, Menaka Devi Lourembam, Sibani Devi Nongmeikapam and Thoibisana Chanu Toijam. **Forwards:** Babita Kumari, Nitu Linda, Sulanjana Raul, Neha and Pooja, Sahena TH.



Joseph may be saviour in purest form of cricket, says Steve

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Legendary Steve Waugh heaped rich praise on young sensation Shamar Joseph who bowled the West Indies to their first Test win in Australia in 27 years, calling him a 'saviour in the purest form of the game'. The 24-year-old Joseph, who made his debut in the first Test of the two-match series, ran through Australia with a spell of 11.5-0-68-7 to power Windies to a thrilling eight-run win at the Gabba, Brisbane, a traditional fortress of the hosts. The effort was even more special because Joseph, who not long ago worked as a security

guard, braved a toe injury to deliver a win for the ages for his team. "There is nothing like Test cricket and this man may be the saviour in the purest form of the game, (sic)" Waugh wrote on Instagram while sharing a picture of Joseph. "Cinderella stories are rare in sport but this was truly epic from a young man who has single-handedly reignited the passion of cricket followers in the Caribbean and all over the world," added one of Australia's most successful captains. In fact, while he was cleared of having not suffered a fracture to his toe after copping a blow

from a Mitchell Starc, Joseph had to take the field on the final day of the Test wearing teammate Zachary McCaskie's jersey after covering his name with a tape. Unclear of his participation, Joseph had not carried his whites to the ground. Meanwhile, former West Indies bowler and renowned commentator Ian Bishop termed the victory as the 'most remarkable Test win' yet. "What a remarkable moment for Shamar Joseph and West Indies cricket. The most remarkable Test win that I can put my mind on, given the context, (sic)" he wrote on X.

India slip to fifth spot in WTC rankings after Hyderabad loss

PTI ■ DUBAI

India have dropped to fifth behind Bangladesh in the World Test Championship standings after their shock 28-run defeat to England in the first Test in Hyderabad. India were briefly on top after drawing the two-Test series South Africa before being overtaken by Australia following their victory over Pakistan. Rohit Sharma's men have suffered in terms of accumulated percentage points, going down from 54.16 after the South Africa series to 43.33 currently. Chasing 231 for a win in the fourth innings, India were all out for 202 in the first Test in Hyderabad on Sunday. England's Tom Hartley (7/62) spun a web around the home team batters to cause a collapse. The rare defeat at home took Rohit Sharma's side down to fifth spot in the latest WTC rankings headed by Australia with 55 percentage points. India currently have 43.33 percentage points in



their kitty. Australia's sensational eight-run defeat to the West Indies in Brisbane on Sunday did not have much impact on them as they continued to lead the WTC rankings. South Africa, New Zealand and Bangladesh — all with 50 percentage points — are at second, third and fourth spots. Below India are Pakistan, West Indies, England and Sri Lanka. In the WTC 2023-2025 cycle, teams are fetching 12 points for a win, 4 for a draw and 6 for a tie.