OPINION 6

MASTERSTROKE OR

POLITICAL HARAKIRI?

WORLD 8

IMRAN, QURESHI SENTENCED

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KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN



RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA Late City Vol.34 Issue 30

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POLITICAL TURMOIL IN JHARKHAND

NEW DELHI/RANCHII

fter Bihar, it is now Jharkhand, neighbouring State, that is towards political uncertainty. On Tuesday, Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who was evading questioning by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), convened a meeting with his party leaders and ministers. His wife was also present, giving indications that Soren may hand over the baton to his family.

There is also speculation that Soren could be arrested by the ED if he appears before them for questioning on January 31. In Patna, former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday appeared before the ED for questioning in a moneylaundering case linked to the alleged land-for-jobs scam, a day after his father and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad appeared before it.

Soren ended the suspense over his whereabouts after he resurfaced in Jharkhand's capital Ranchi on Tuesday, after probe agency officials failed to locate him for 30 hours. reappearance of JMM chief comes amid frenetic political developments in Ranchi and

Travelling in his official car, Soren smiled and waved at the media persons amid intense speculation of his whereabouts.



Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren with JMM MLAs after paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary, in Ranchi, on

Soren chaired a closed-door meeting with MLAs and Ministers of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led ruling alliance and asked all the party MLAs and that of its alliance partners Congress and RJD to stay in the State capital in view of the political situation until further instructions.

instructions. Khiangte, and Director General Soren's wife, Kalpana Soren, was of Police Ajay Kumar Singh at the

also present amid a strong buzz that she could take up the reins of the Government if he is arrested. Earlier in the day, Governor CP who has Radhakrishnan repeatedly expressed displeasure over the "deteriorating law and order" in the State, called Chief Lalbiaktluanga Secretary

Raj Bhavan here to take stock of the situation. After the meeting, the DGP said, "Elaborate security arrangements have been made across the State to maintain law and order, including deployment additional an policemen.'

Prohibitory orders have also been clamped in key areas of Ranchi, including areas near the CM House, Raj Bhavan and ED office, from 10 am to 10 pm, officials

Demonstrations, rallies or meetings cannot be held in and

around these areas.
BJP MP Nishikant Dubey has claimed that Kalpana Soren may replace husband Hemant, and it's for this purpose only that the alliance MLAs have been instructed to remain in Ranchi. Dubey said Hemant has called all allied MLAs to reach Ranchi 'with their luggage.' In a post on X, Dubey queried how a man who is absconding will protect the people of the State.

"A big piece of advice to those who are doing wrong on the instructions of Chief Minister Hemant Soren: the CM is proving himself to be a fugitive, running from facing investigating agency. The man is facing insults in the country and abroad all day long. How will that man protect the officers or the people of the State?" he said.

Īn the 81-member Assembly, JMM has 30, Congress 16, RJD 1, while the Opposition BJP has 25, Jharkhand Vikas Morcha 3, All harkhand Students Union 2, and others 4.

ED officials had reached his Delhi address on Monday to question him in a money-laundering case but could not locate him. The chartered plane on which he traveled from Ranchi to Delhi is parked at Delhi airport.



RNI No. 53466/91, REGD. No. DL (C)-05/1219/2021-23 Posted at DRMS Delhi 6

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Pralhad Joshi Union Minister of State Arjun Ram Meghwal and others during an all-party meeting ahead of the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday

President seeks smooth Budget Session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Budget Session Parliament, the last of the present Lok Sabha, begins on Wednesday with President Droupadi Murmu addressing the President joint sitting of the Lower and Upper Houses, and the Government urging Opposition parties to cooperate in the smooth

conduct of the proceedings.
Union Finance Minister Nirmala
Sitharaman will present the
Interim Budget on Wednesday,
ahead of the Lok Sabha elections
likely to be held in April-May. The
new Government will present the
full Budget after it assumes office. full Budget after it assumes office. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said at the meeting of floor leaders of political parties in Parliament that Sitharaman will also present the Budget for Jammu and Kashmir, which is under the

17th Lok Sabha's brief session, set to conclude on February 9, was the President's Address, presentation of the Interim Budget, and the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address with a reply by Prime Minister Narendra

Joshi said the main agenda of the

Opposition leaders raised a host of issues during the meeting of floor leaders chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Congress leader K Suresh said the

party would raise the issue of unemployment, high inflation, agrarian distress, and the situation in ethnically violence-hit Manipur during the session."

Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay said the Finance Minister should include the pending dues to West Bengal on account of various Central schemes in the Interim Budget.

Continued on Page 2

Two Cobra

Commandos

among three

Naxal attack

At least three CRPF personnel, including two

warfare unit CoBRA, were

killed and 14 others injured in

an encounter with Naxalites

along the border of Sukma

and Bijapur districts of

Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, police said. Among the three slain personnel, two belonged

to the CoBRA's 201st battalion and one to the

The Commando Battalion for

Resolute Action (CoBRA) is

CRPF's 150th battalion.

killed in

PTI ■ RAIPUR

Severe cold wave grips north India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Abitter cold, brought on by a sharp dip in the temperature minimum across north India, compounded the woes of uters already by poor visibility. The bone-chilling cold disrupted daily life across States.

The 40-day harsh winter period, known as 'Chilla-i-Kalan,' ended on Tuesday with no snowfall in the plains of Kashmir and below-normal precipitation in the higher reaches of the valley. While there was light to moderate snowfall in the higher reaches at the fag-end of the 40-day period, most of the Chilla-i-Kalan, when the chances of snowfall are maximum and most frequent, remained dry. The valley witnessed a prolonged dry spell this winter, with no

snowfall in the plains. During the 40-day harsh winter period, a cold wave sweeps the region, and temperatures drop considerably, leading to the freezing of water bodies and water in supply pipes. The cold conditions continue in even after the culmination of 'Chilla-i-Kalan' with a 20-day 'Chilla-i-Khurd' (small cold) and a 10-day 'Chilla-i-Bachha' (baby cold).

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BJP thrashes AAP, Congress in Chandigarh Mayor Polls

RAJESH KUMAR DELHI/CHANDIGARH

In a major setback to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress, the BJP swept the Chandigarh Mayoral polls on Tuesday, retaining the three top posts in a setback to the AAP and the Congress which had contested the elections as

BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar defeated the AAP's Kuldeep

polling 16 votes against the 12 won by his rival. Eight votes were declared invalid. BJP nominees Kuljit Sandhu and Rajinder Sharma declared elected to the posts of senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor, respectively. AAP leader Raghav Chadha said they will approach the Puniah Court seeking fresh elections. The AAP has allied with the Congress for this civic poll defeated the AAP's Kuldeep pitched as the first real Kumar for the Mayor's post, electoral test of the INDIA



BJP's Manoj Sonkar being greeted by party councillors after he won the post of Mayor in the Chandigarh municipal corporation polls in Chandigarh

election in less than three months' time but the alliance failed to deliver.

The loss has further weakened the Opposition group, which is already on the edge of collapse after two of its biggest members — Mamata Trinamool d Nitich walked out. In Punjab, the AAP and the Congress have indicated that they are reluctant to contest the Lok

Sabha polls together even though they are both in the INDIA grouping. But they agreed to contest together in Mayoral elections in Chandigarh, the Union Territory that serves as the Capital of both Punjab and Harvana.

Banerjee's As part of the alliance in Kumar's Janata Dal (United) contested for the Mayor's post while the Congress fielded candidates for the two other posts.

Continued on Page 2

India saves Iran vessels from pirates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Indian Navy came to the rescue of an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel and rescued 19 crew members, including Pakistanis, after pirates attacked the ship. Coincidentally, it was the second such effort by the Indian Navy warship INS Sumitra in the last 36 hours in the east of Somalia. The first rescue also involved an Iranian fishing vessel, Iman, on Monday.

In a similar action, the Indian Navy responded to the hijacking of a Sri Lankan fishing vessel in collaboration with Seychelles defence forces and the Sri Lanka Navy, officials said here on Tuesday.



An anti-piracy operation by the Indian Navy's INS Sumitra, rescuing Fishing Vessel Al Naeemi and her Crew (19 Pakistani Nationals) from 11 Somali Pirates off the East Coast of Somalia

action was also undertaken off Somalia. Providing details, they said a hijacking incident was miles east of Mogadishu, reported onboard the Sri

Lankan-flagged multiday fishing trawler Lorenzo Putha 04 about 955 nautical Somalia. Three pirates had

boarded and hijacked the fishing trawler on January 27. The Indian Navy deployed INS Sharada to locate and intercept the hijacked fishing vessel.

Additionally, efficient operational coordination and efficient information sharing through the Sri Lanka and Seychelles International Liaison Officers at IFC IOR, New Delhi, resulted in the interception of the hijacked fishing vessel by SCGS Topaz in Seychelles EEZ on Monday.

three The surrendered to the Seychelles Coast Guard (SCG), and all six crew members are safe, and the vessel is being escorted to Mahe, Seychelles. Continued on Page 2

BJP walkathon yet to pick up steam

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN KOCHI

The walkathon led by K L Surendran, president of the Kerala BJP, which began in Kasaragod on January 27, is yet to garner any response from the State's electorate. The Pada Yatra (walkathon) serves as a prelude to the BJP's campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha election and revolves around the theme "Modi's Guarantee," a term coined by the Prime Minister during his visit to Thrissur on January 3.

The poor turnout at meetings addressed by Surendran highlights the fact that the Kerala BJP, without Prime Minister Narendra Modi,



the State. The public meeting took an unexpected turn on Monday evening when film actor Suresh Gopi, who addressed the Kannur stretch of the Yatra, announced that the Uniform Civil Code would be implemented immediately after the results of the 2024 polls are declared.



lacks significant support in Continued on Page 2

the elite jungle warfare unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The exchange of fire occurred near the Tekalgudem village when a joint team of security personnel was out on a search operation, Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said. On Monday, a new camp of security personnel was set up in Tekalgudem, a Maoist stronghold along the interdistrict border, around 450 km away from Raipur, he said. After setting up the camp, the personnel of the STF, District Reserve Guard and CoBRA, were carrying out a search in nearby Jonaguda-Aliguda villages when Naxals opened

Bharat pays tribute to the Father of the Nation

DEEPAKJ KUMAR JHA NEW DELHI

While the thoughts and vision of Mahatma Gandhi remain the wisdom for governance across the world, the paths he took around the globe are remnants that millions and millions of his followers cherish, particularly on the occasion of his martyrdom, observed as Martyrs' Day, as done on Tuesday.

One such memory from the past, rarely read or known about, is the place where Mahatma Gandhi, on August 16, 1908, led 3,000 Muslims, Hindus, and Christians outside the Hamidia Mosque at Johannesburg in South Africa, where they burned their passes — documents classified as "non-white" by the Government.



President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi on Martyrs' Day, observed to mark the death anniversary of the father of the nation, at Rajghat in New Delhi

The punitive action by the British the Tolstoy farm," said Anju, included imprisonment. The huge bonfire, lit in a cauldron, marked the first burning of passes in South Africa and the beginning of Gandhi's satyagraha, or passive resistance, campaign. The place has been built as "Truth" by senior IFS officer Anju Ranjan during her posting (2019-2023) as Consul General in South Africa and is now thronged by visitors who relive the places in South Africa where Gandhi spent his early years and transformed himself to lead India towards Independence four decades later. "I came to know about the importance of the venue where the passes were burnt by Gandhiji. With the help of locals, I managed to raise money for developing the Truth pillar as well as

currently serving as Deputy Director General, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), New Delhi.

The 2002 batch IFS officer was also instrumental in revamping and redeveloping the entire Tolstoy farm, including the library, among several other perspectives related to Gandhi. As per various reports, the entire area of historical importance was vandalised in the 1970s. Besides the revival of the Tolstoy farm in Johannesburg, Anju was instrumental in generating awareness, organising for 75 prominent Indian community members — a Gandhian trail (Tolstoy to Phoenix) for the first time to mark the places of Gandhian importance in South Africa.

snow

Ladakh prime sanctuary for endangered snow leopards

fire, he said.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

rndia is home to 718 Lendangered snow leopards, as revealed by a first-of-itsscientific kind survey spanning five years between 2019 and 2023 across the Himalayan range. The highaltitude region of Ladakh emerged as the prime sanctuary for the elusive majestic cats, boasting the highest number at 477 individuals.

State-wise population estimates further indicate 124 India leopards Uttarakhand, 51 in Himachal Tuesday. Continued on Page 2 | Pradesh, 36 in Arunachal



Continued on Page 2

BJP begins poll campaign in JK

¬he Jammu and Kashmir unit of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) Tuesday sounded the poll bugle by inaugurating six election offices for the five Parliamentary constituencies. In contrast, the main constituents of the INDIA alliance namely the National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party are yet to finalise their seat-sharing formula.

The core group of PDP that met under the chairmanship of Mehbooba Mufti on Monday brainstormed on the Lok Sabha elections, especially on the five

The JKPDP spokesperson in a press statement said that during the core group meeting, the PDP leaders reiterated their commitment to the unity of purpose and objectives under the banner of the INDIA alliance of which it's a part. On the other hand, JKNC lead-

ers Dr Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah are currently



performing a pilgrimage away from Jammu and Kashmir. In the Jammu region, the Congress party is out on the streets and organizing regular mass contact programs to regain its lost ground and build up a

BJP, which won two Lok Sabha seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls is eyeing at least three Lok Sabha seats to improve its tally. The party is expected to introduce some new faces in the poll arena to ensure the victory of all party candidates in the fray. J&K BJP Chief Ravinder Raina accompanied by a sitting par-

liamentarian Jugal Kishore Sharma inaugurated the office in the Bakshi Nagar area of

Addressing party workers on the occasion Raina said that from today onwards, all the activities for the upcoming Parliamentary elections will be coordinated through these offices. He, on the occasion, also e-inaugurated the rest of the five offices for the four Parliamentary constituencies of Udhampur, Srinagar, Baramulla, and Rajouri-Anantnag.

Raina announced similar election offices will be opened up in the 90 Assembly Constituencies

J&K BJP General Secretary

(Org.) Ashok Koul along with Veer Saraf and other leaders inaugurated the Parliamentary Election office in Anantnag. Union MoS Dr Jitendra Singh along with J&K BJP Chief Spokesperson Adv. Sunil Sethi and other leaders inaugurated the Parliamentary Election office in Udhampur.

seeing the same old mediocre

faces in the party who are incapable of thinking outside

the box." He dismissed the

notion that Christians are

likely to vote for the BJP, citing

the Manipur incident as a

stain on the goodwill enjoyed by the party. KT Paily, a

retired Railway official and

community leader, echoed

this sentiment, saying, "The

BJP has done nothing to

dispel the apprehensions in

our minds."
Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M)

general secretary and a figure

with a cult following,

disapproved of the BJP's

actions, including Prana

Pratishta. He said on Tuesday

that the BJP is consistently

against the Constitution of

prosecuted for polarising

and should

Ladakh prime...

CBI files

closure report

in Param Bir

T N RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI

Eight months after the Maharashtra Government

withdrew all the cases against

him, the Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) has filed a closure report in an eight-year-

old extortion case against the former Police Commissioner of

Thane and Mumbai Police

Param Bir Singh and others.

In a closure report filed before

the Chief Judicial Magistrate,

Thane Court, the CBI stated

that the facts and circum-

stances that emerged during

the investigations "do not sub-

stantiate the allegations or

disclose any incriminating

evidence for launching pros-

ecution against any of the

In its closure report, the CBI

provided a detailed report of its

deep investigations into the

case, plus all the documentary

evidence and list of 23 witnesses

therein as part of the closure

accused persons".

Singh case

From Page 1

The report, stemming from the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Programme spanning between 2019 and 2023, was released by Minister Union Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Bhupender

Yadav at the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) meeting Known as the 'Ghost of Mountains' for their elusive and mysterious nature, snow leopards have long been a symbol of the pristine and harsh landscapes they inhabit. The findings of this first-of-

its-kind survey not only shed

light on their endangered

status but also emphasise the

importance of preserving their

delicate habitats, being an indicator of the health of the Himalavan ecosystems in terms of climate change and biodiversity.

The comprehensive assessment of the survey spanning approximately 1,20,000 square kilometers across the trans-Himalayan region was led by The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), with the collaboration of all snow leopard range states, the Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, and WWF-India.

Prior to this study, the snow leopard's range in India was largely undefined, with significant portions of their habitat unexamined. However, recent surveys have expanded our knowledge, now covering preliminary information for 80 per cent of their range.

Opposition gains momentum in Maharashtra

In a boost to the Opposition unity ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) – which is the INDIA block in Maharashtra -has formally inducted the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (MVA) into its fold. Confirming the development,

VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar said here on Tuesday that he would join the seat-sharing talks for the Lok Sabha polls,

SAUGAR SENGUPTA

The so-called Indian National Democratic

Inclusive Alliance continued to

lose its glue in Bengal as there

was no sign of ice melting

between the Congress and the

Instead of accommodating

each other both the parties

continued to beat the other

down even as Chief Minister

Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday

Trinamool Congress.

Mamata holds road

show on Rahul route

It may be recalled that Ambedkar, who is the grandson of late B R Ambedkar had on January 25 rejected the invitation extended to it by the Opposition Maha Vikas Ághadi (MVA) for seat-sharing talks for the Lok Sabha polls. He had also accused Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee president Nana Patole asking him "not to play mind games" with the people of Maharashtra.

Subsequently, the Opposition

embarked on road shows on

routes that had earlier been

traversed by Congress leader

Rahul Gandhi who too drew

Looking right through the

repeated invites sent by the

Congress leadership to join

Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay

Yatra that was presently pass ing through her State Banerjee

walked about five km at

Islampur town in North

Bengal even as thousands of

Severe cold...

On the other hand, a day after

bright sunshine, dense fog shrouded Delhi and its

adjacent areas on Tuesday

amid the prevailing cold conditions as the minimum

temperature was recorded at

8.7 degrees Celsius while the

maximum temperature settled

at 21.4 degrees Celsius.

recorded the maximum

temperature at 13.4 degrees

Celsius, the lowest in the city.

At 5.30 am, visibility plummeted to a mere 50

meters, leading to cancellations

of at least 14 flights from Delhi

The inclement weather

resulted in the delay of 82

flights and the cancellation of

airport, officials said.

weather station

people followed her.

From Page 1

Jafarpur

massive crowd in his trail.

Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) - had sent him an olive branch and prevailed upon him to join its fold. After the reconciliation with him, the MVA, in its letterhead signed by state Congress President Nana Patole, his NCP counterpart Jayant Patil and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, sent a formal letter to

"The country is going through

try with a great democratic tradition is turning to dictatorship," the MVA stated in its let-

'People suspect in 2024 (Lok Sabha polls), if there is a different result in the country (and BJP comes to power again), this will probably be the last election. We know that the Maha Vikas Aghadi was established to change this situation and bring about change in the state and the country," the MVA said.

Ambedkar, inducting him in the

TMC seeks apology from BJP leader for misogynist remark

PNS KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on ■ Tuesday slammed the BJP demanding immediate apology from its leadership for its alleged "misogynist" remarks after Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar used "derogatory" remarks against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asking the people to "slap" her for ruining the state's education scenario.

five flights at arrivals, officials

Slamming the Chief Minister for pursuing a wrong education policy he allegedly told in a rally at Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas that "people should slap Mamata Banerjee and not the students" if they fail in their

Demanding apology from the State BJP president, Bengal Minister Shashi Panja said that "he is using derogatory words and provoking the public to slap Mamata Banerjee.

landing with a minimum visibility of up to 50 meters."

Delhi's Palam and Safdarjung

areas recorded visibility at just 50 metres Janpath Road,

BJP walkathon...

From Page 1

While the BJP in the State is a latecomer to the election campaign, facing a host of issues such as group rivalries (as per a party veteran, there are more groups in the Kerala BJP than leaders) and mutual mistrust among its leaders, Shobha Surendran (who is not related to Surendran) is kept away from the leadership hierarchy despite being active in party matters.

With 20 Lok Sabha seats in Kerala, the party's chances of winning even a single seat from this pool of 20 appear bleak due to the absence of effective leaders within the Kerala BJP. However, this has not deterred the State party in-charge, Prakash Javadekar,

from claiming that the BJP will secure at least five seats in the state. The BJP's best performance in the State to date was during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls when it secured 13 per cent of the votes. However, in the 2021 Assembly election, the Hindutva party faced a setback at the hands of the LDF and UDF, managing to secure less than 12 per cent of the votes. Despite Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ability to draw large crowds wherever he goes, it cannot be considered as support for the BJP in Kerala. The reality is that there are no State-level leaders in Kerala capable of translating Modi's popularity

Rajan Paul, a former executive engineer with the Kerala Government, expressed his frustration, saying, "We are

Hassan's demand came in the wake of demands to hand over the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi to the Hindu

Emerging from customary all-party meeting, Parliamentary Minister Joshi described the interaction as "very cordial" and said the Government

community.

Affairs

issue during the brief session.

did not have any legislative agenda for the Budget Session and its thrust would be on the President's Address, debate on the Motion of presentation of the Interim Budget, and the budget for Jammu and Kashmir.

have suggestions, but since this is the last session of the present will give them an opportunity in the next

Pawar, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur, and TDP's Jayadev Galla were among the leaders present at the meeting at the Parliament House complex.

the Rajya Sabha Pramod Tiwari, who represented the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun

issue of the "violent attack" on the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi in Assam

prevails in the country, he said, and accused the Central Government of misusing probe agencies such as the Bureau Central Investigation and Enforcement Directorate to target opposition leaders such as Jharkhand Chief

Tiwari said he raised these consulting after issues Opposition parties.

ahead of every session to convene a meeting where leaders of different parties highlight the issues they want to raise in Parliament, and the Government offers them a glimpse into its agenda and seeks their cooperation."

said. The departures were also significantly affected, with 222 flights getting delayed and nine being cancelled, noted Flightradar24. Owing to the dense layers of fog and the resulting low visibility, both flight and train operations have been affected. In a statement on X, Delhi Airport said, "While landings and take-offs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers requested to contact the airline concerned for updated information. inconvenience caused deeply regretted." Notably, the CAT III instrument is an anti-

fog landing system that helps planes land in low-visibility conditions, such as dense fog, snow, and rain. It allows for

Anand Vihar, Ridge, Mehrauli, Aruna Asaf Ali Marg, and Nirankari Colony were covered under a thick blanker of fog this morning. The Delhi airport also issued an advisory for passengers as several domestic and international flights were delayed owing to the fog conditions. Delhi got no sunlight as a thick and dreary fog, coupled with shivering winds, with a light drizzle adding to the chill on

Tuesday. Across the national capital, people on the streets were pictured huddling bonfires while commuters struggled in the face of the biting chill and poor visibility.

President for...

"It is unfortunate that a Chief Minister has to sit on a dharna to demand timely allocation of Central dues to the state," he said.

Samajwadi Party leader S T Hassan demanded steps to strengthen the Places of Worship Act that freezes the status of religious places of worship as they existed on

prohibits their conversion while ensuring maintenance of religious character.

Joshi said the Government session," Joshi said. president Sharad

Thanks, Congress Deputy Leader in

and the State Government's curbs on it.

An "unwritten dictatorship"

RJD supremo Lalu Prasad.

It is customary practice fourteen Meanwhile,

Session and their case privilege referred to committees, will return to attend Parliament's Budget session, with Joshi saying the Chairs in the two Houses have agreed to the Government's request to this a total of 146

suspended during the last

opposition MPs, 100 in Lok Sabha and the rest in Rajya Sabha, were suspended for bringing placards into the

disrupting parliamentary proceedings, transgressions by these 14 were considered more serious.

He, however, asserted that leaders of different parties who attended an all-party meeting ahead of the session were told that they should follow the decision that MPs should not bring any placards or similar materials inside chambers during the session or else the Chairs will

POLITICAL

From Page 1

The phones of several people part of his staff are switched off. His driver has also been questioned, but to no avail.

The agency seized Rs 36 lakh in cash and a Haryana registered BMW car under a name that the ED considers as 'benami,' and some 'incriminating' documents after it searched his house at 5/1 Shanti Niketan building in South Delhi on Monday and camped there for almost 13 hours to question him in a money-laundering case linked to an alleged land deal case of Jharkhand, but he was not found at his Delhi homes or at Iharkhand Bhavan in Delhi, Sources said the ED has informed state authorities and central security forces about the composition of its team that will move from its zonal office on Airport Road in Ranchi to Soren's camp office at his residence on January 31 before 1 pm, the sources said.

The questioning will continue from where it ended on January 20. About 16-17

questions were put across to on X, a large number of MLAs Soren, and his statement was and Ministers were seen recorded, in a written and audio-video format, under the Prevention Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the sources said. The ED investigators had spent about seven hours at the CM

residence that day."

Soren, having reached Ranchi on Tuesday, has informed the ED that he is ready to depose before them on Wednesday at his residence in the state capital around 1 pm. While expressing his readiness to cooperate, Soren asserted that the timing of the inquiry appears to be politically motivated, intending to disrupt the functioning of his Government. Soren's letter to the ED's Ranchi office stated, 'You are well aware that the Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly will be held between February 2 and 29, 2024, and the undersigned will be preoccupied with preparations for the same apart from other prior scheduled

official engagements. Soren reached his official residence here past midnight, the source said. In photographs and videos shared by the CMO

greeting Soren before taking part in the meeting. The CM's wife was also present in the meeting. development, the BJP started claiming that the Chief Minister was 'on the run.' State BJP chief Babulal Marandi also put out an advertisement, seeking information about Soren and announcing a cash prize of Rs 11,000 for credible

information. The ED has so far arrested 14 people in the case, including 2011-batch IAS officer Chhavi Ranjan, who served as the director of the state's Social Welfare Department and deputy commissioner of Ranchi. An employee of the Jharkhand land revenue department, Bhanu Prasad Prasad, was also arrested by the agency in the case. The ED investigation pertains to 'huge amounts of proceeds of crime generated by manipulation of official records by showing dummy sellers and purchasers in the guise of forged/bogus documents to acquire huge parcels of land having value in

Bharat pays...

From Page 1

Tolstoy Farm is situated in the southwestern corner of the Johannesburg municipal area, approximately 35 km from Johannesburg.
The name is derived as Gandhi was

inspired by the writings of Russian Leo Tolstoy, who advocated nonviolence as an appropriate response to aggression and foregrounded the need for equitable treatment of the poor and working class. Thus the farm was named Tolstoy Farm due to Gandhi and Kallenbach's deep admiration for Count Leo Tolstov. As CG Johannesburg, she also successfully handled the Vande Bharat flights and helped evacuate stranded Indians in South Africa during the Covid lockdown.

Ranjan used her Covid pandemic lockdown period to engage with the members of Mahatma Gandhi Remembrance Organisation (MGRO) in SA and worked for redeveloping and reliving the places associated with the journey of making of the Mahatma. Anju Ranjan was born in the

village - Patharia, District Chatra in Jharkhand, and is credited to be the first matriculate in her nondescri

IMD, the maximum temperatures were recorded as follows: Palam at 12.7 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 14.7 degrees Celsius, Ridge at 14.5 degrees Celsius, Ayanagar at 15 degrees Celsius, Narela at 13.7 degrees Celsius, Pusa at 14.2 degrees Celsius, Pitampura at 15 degrees Celsius, and SPS Mayur Vihar at 13.5 degrees Celsius. Similarly, the maximum temperatures were recorded in Gurugram at 13.7 degrees Celsius, CDO Ghaziabad at 13 degrees Celsius, and Noida at 14.2 degrees Celsius.

Night shelters in Delhi, designed to provide refuge for apital continues to experience severe cold day conditions with a mainly clear sky on Wednesday. According to the IMD, the maximum temperatures were recorded as follows: Palam at 12.7 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 14.7 degrees Celsius, Ridge at 14.5 degrees Celsius, Ay

India saves Iran vessels.

From Page 1

Giving details about the latest action involving the Iranian vessel, Navy officials said INS Sumitra deployed for anti-piracy and maritime security operations in the east of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, responding immediately to the distress call by vessel Al Naeemi.

In yet another successful anti-piracy operation off the East Coast of Somalia, INS Sumitra rescued the fishing vessel and its 19 crew members from 11 Somali pirates on Monday, Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said. "INS Sumitra, over the course of less

than 36 hours, through swift, persistent, and relentless efforts, has rescued two hijacked fishing vessels along with 36 crew (17 Iranian and 19 Pakistani) in the Southern Arabian Sea approximately 850 nautical miles West of Kochi," Madhwal said.

He said the Indian Navy has once again proved its commitment in the region to act against all maritime threats to ensure the safety of all mariners and

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said India's greater capability, the country's current interests, and reputation today justify that it actually helps in difficult situations, in reference to the Indian Navy's deployment of warships in the Red Sea region to deal with attacks on

merchant navy vessels. The Indian Navy has deployed 10 of its ships in the region, Jaishankar said, responding to a question during an interaction with students at the Indian Institute of Management Mumbai.

"India's greater capability, our own interest, and our reputation today warrant that we actually help out in difficult situations," he said. Jaishankar said there is a problem of piracy as well as drone attacks on merchant navy

ships in the Red Sea region.
"We will not be considered a responsible country if bad things are happening around our neighborhood, and we say I have got nothing to do with this. When you are in trouble, the neighbourhood will say the same," he said. Jaishankar said in the last 10 years, India has developed a very powerful narrative and pointed to the naval deployment in the Red Sea region. In this context, he also referred to India's response to earthquakes in Turkey and its assistance to various other countries, including providing vaccines during Covid-19.

BJP thrashes AAP, Congress in Mayor Polls

From Page 1

The BJP has 14 Councillors in the 35-member Chandigarh Municipal Corporation. The AAP has 13 Councillors and the Congress seven.

The Shiromani Akali Dal has one Councillor. After the loss, the AAP and the Congress hit out at the BJP

of the democratic system in the country and termed it black day for democracy while the BJP rubbished the allegations. The AAP and the Congress accused presiding officer Anil Masih of making some marks on the ballots during the counting, rendering them invalid. They argued that the "invalid" ballots tilt-

alleging "shameless capture"

ed the balance in the BJP candidate's favour. Congratulating his party unit for the victory, BJP chief JP Nadda said the defeat of the INDIA Bloc candidate in the Chandigarh mayoral polls has shown that neither their arithmetic is working nor their chemistry.

Commenting on the development, Nadda wrote on X, Congratulations to the Chandigarh BJP unit for winning the Mayor election." Under Prime Minister Narendra Mod's leadership, the Union Territories have witnessed "record development", the BJP chief said. That the INDI Alliance

fought their first electoral

battle and still lost to BJP

metic is working nor their

chemistry," Nadda said taking

a dig at the opposition unity.

While Kejriwal alleged the

BJP indulged in "hooligan-

ism" during the Chandigarh

shows that neither their arith-

is not who becomes Mayor but the country should not lose and the democracy should not lose. Mayors come and go, parties come and go,"

series of events during the election a "black day for democracy". Addressing a Press conference here, the AAP national con-

vener said the entire country saw what happened in the Chandigarh Mayoral polls. "It is a black day for democracv. Everyone saw how they stole votes and forcibly made their candidate win. The issue

"The AAP-Congress alliance had a clear majority and it was

Mayoral polls, and called the a straight election. Eight votes or 25 per cent of the total votes were declared invalid. What kind of election was this? The Mayoral poll result shows there is something wrong and at a large scale, they can go to any extent in national polls," he alleged. Kejriwal said the BJP-led Centre is "resorting" to extreme actions to target opposition leaders, breaking parties and toppling

> "Brazen, shameless capture of the democratic system. Declaring Opposition votes invalid to win the Mayor Election in Chandigarh shows that it is second nature for the

Governments.

BJP to override the democratic mandate," AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said in a post on X. "First they abruptly post-

poned the elections, and then devised a way to capture it. This is a warning for all those who are deluded into thinking that the Modi-led BJP will allow democracy to function if they win in 2024," he said. The polls, being held following the directions of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, assumes significance with Opposition INDIA Bloc members Congress and AAP joining hands to contest the elections.

Tight security arrangements

are in place for the Mayoral polls. Around 700 police personnel, along with those from paramilitary forces, have been deployed for maintaining law and order during the election at the municipal corporation building, officials said. In its January 24 order, the

High Court directed the Chandigarh administration to hold the Mayoral polls at 10 am on January 30. It also quashed the administration's January 18 order postponing the elections while holding it "unreasonable, unjustified and arbitrary".

The High Court had also directed that the Councillors who come to cast their votes

any supporters or security personnel belonging to any other State. The Chandigarh Police will ensure security to the Councillors, the court had said. Elections to the three posts are held every year during the

shall not be accompanied by

House's five-year term. The Congress had abstained from voting in 2022 and 2023, leading to the BJP's victory in the polls. The election of the Mayor is done through secret ballots. For this year's elections — the

third for this term — the Mayor's seat has been reserved for the Scheduled Caste category.

Boney Kapoor wins bid to develop film city in Jewar

ilmmaker Boney Kapoor and real estate developer Bhutani Infra's firm 'Bayview Projects' has emerged as the highest bidder for the development of the first phase of the proposed 1,000-acre film city near the upcoming Jewar airport in Uttar Pradesh. The entire project should be completed by 2028-29. The financial bid for the greenfield project was opened on Tuesday afternoon by the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), which functions under the Uttar Pradesh government and Bayview Projects won the contract.

"M/s Bayview Projects LLP (Boney Kapoor and Bhutani Group) will develop the International Film City in the Yamuna Expressway area after making the highest bid for the Film Čity," YEIDA said in a brief statement. The project site, close to the upcoming Noida airport, comprises commercial spaces covering 75 acres and industrial 155 acres. The selection of the concessionaire although remains to be approved by the state government before land is allotted to it for the development of the project, according to an official. Bayview Projects was competing against Super Cassettes Industries Private Limited (T-Supersonic Technobuild Private Limited (backed by film star Akshay

Kumar, Maddock Films, and others), and 4 Lions Films Private Limited (backed by filmmaker KC Bokadia and others) to develop the film city, considered a pet project of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

A meeting was held at the office of the Yamuna Expressway Authority on Saturday, when representatives of the four com-



panies made presentations on crucial aspects such as their timeline, concept and vision with regard to Film City.

The Film City is to be built in a public-private partnership and is envisaged in over 1,000

acres (230 acres in the first phase) of land along the Yamuna Expressway near The film city will come up in

YEIDA Sector-21, near the

upcoming Noida International

1 of the project, a total of 230 acres will be developed, which will include 75 acres (33%) of commercial and 155 acres (67 per cent) of industrial area. The Authority had issued a global

Airport in Jewar. Under Phase-

e-tender on September 29 to develop the film city on design, build, finance, operate and transfer (DBFOT) basis.

The first global tender for the film city was floated in November 2021. However, due to no response from the bidders, the Authority issued a second tender in October 2022. The deadline was extended to February 14, 2023, later to February 28, 2023, and then again to March 31, 2023, but no bid was received. As per the Detailed Project Report (DPR), the developer will have to pay Rs144 crore as security money before development begins at the site. The high-level committee, headed by UP chief secretary DS Mishra, has approved the DPR for the progress on this crucial project. The developer will get 90 years to develop this project spread on 1,000 acres in Sector 21 located in close proximity to Jewar airport

Properties geo tagging last date extended to February 29

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi has extended the last date of geo tagging of properties till February 29. Technical glitches have prevented many proper-ty taxpayers in Delhi from geotagging their properties by the MCD's January 31 deadline. It is estimated that only Only 95,000 out of the target of 1.5 million properties have been geotagged so far. Property owners have complained about glitches in the MCD's mobile app, especially for

iOS users "It has come to notice that a large number taxpayers using iPhone (iOS version) due to some technical glitches or due to some other reasons, property tax payers have not been able to geo-tag their properties by due date. This issue is being handled on priority and will soon be resolved. However, in view the difficulties faced, it has been decided to

extend the last date of geo-tagging of properties by taxpayer till 29 February 2024," the MCD said in a statement.

"If the taxpayers fail to geo-tag their property, they cannot avail the rebate on lumpsum payment of tax by 30 June, 2024 in the next financial year (2024-25). All property owners/occupiers, who have not geo-tagged their properties so far are requested to geotag their property by due date i.e. 29th February 2024," it added. Geotagging properties means digitally mapping a property with the geographic information system (ĞIS). This means that a property can be identified on a map with its unique and permanent latitude and longitude coordinates. To do this, property owners must download MCD's mobile app, and while present at their property, select the "current location" and link it with any unique property identification code (UPIC).



LG nod to extension of freezing administrative boundaries to June 30

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved the extension of the date to freeze boundaries of the administrative units to June 30, in view of the delayed Census-2021. A proposal of the Delhi government's revenue department to extend the date of freezing boundaries of administrative units from January 1 to June 30, for the purpose of census exercise has been approved, a note from Raj Niwas said on Tuesday.

The office of Registrar General India (ORGI), Ministry of Home Affairs, through its letter dated September 6, 2019 had requested the then chief secretary of Delhi to freeze the boundaries of the administrative units for the ensuing

December 31, 2019, it said. Accordingly, the LG had conveved his directions to the effect that the boundaries of the administrative units for census will be frozen from December 31, 2019.

"But due to the Covid-19 pan-

demic, Census-2021 was delayed, leading to an extension of the date of freezing the boundaries of administrative units," it said. The last extension up to January 1, 2024 was done through a letter of the revenue department on August 18 last year, after the LG's

As per rule 8 (iv) of Census Rules, 1990, the state governments and the Union Territory administrations will freeze the administrative boundaries of districts, tehsils, towns and such others entities, from the date to be intimated by the Census Commissioner, which will not be earlier than one year from the census reference date and till the completion of the census, the statement added. In March last year, the government notified certain amendcitizens to self-enumerate themselves in the Census and National Population Register (NPR). The development had led to speculation that the house-listing phase of the Census may begin last year

Crackdown on construction flouting norms amid pollution control curbs

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to curb air pollution in the national capital, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has taken sealing and demolition action against construction activities flouting the government norms. The civic agency, in a statement, said that is in no mood to give any respite to the unscrupulous builders and wrong-doers, with the motive to instill a sense of responsibility in the minds of denizens to honour the three major Statutes governing the construction activities in the Capital i.e. Master Plan-2021, Unified Building Bye-Laws-2016 and DMC Act-1957

"Since last 1-2 months, there have been intermittent phases of ban on construction and demolition activities, due to GRAP, to curb the pollution levels in the Capital. As soon as the phase was over, the agency has swung into action, by resuming its demolition and sealing actions against the unauthorized constructions in the Capital," the statement said adding that the corporation in its unequivocal terms steered the demolition and sealing actions, majorly targeting the illegal plotting/ colonization on agricultural land. The perpetuality of



any illegal construction, if noticed by the MCD is certainly going to be punished sternly in the days to come.

Providing the details regarding the ongoing action, the agency said that in spite of GRAP-III in force at various points of time in the month of January, MCD has taken 440 demolition actions, 85 sealing actions and 35 actions against illegal plotting / colonization, thus, getting the approximate 70 acres of area freed from illegal plotting / colonization.

"For last 2 days, further intensifying its actions, the civic body has taken as many as 31 demolition actions, 08 sealing actions and 04 actions against illegal plotting / colonization (approximate 07 acres of area freed) in various areas and colonies across the capital, i.e. Dera Mandi, Bhati, Said-ul-Azaib, Chattarpur, Burari, Jaitpur, Narela, etc. thus, getting the approximate 70 acres of area freed from illegal plotting colonization," it said.

The municipal body said that it was also being observed that the basic amenities i.e. electricity and water sometimes bolsters the illegal constructions activities, therefore, proper coordination has been made with the electricity power supplying companies and Delhi Jal Board to immediatedis-connect the electricity and water connections and communications have been sent to them in such cases.

'The prime target is the unauthorized constructions / illegal plotting / colonization / construction in unauthorized colonies at its nascent stage, to preclude any further scope of its further upcoming. The MCD strictly countenances the unauthorized constructions, and has been enforcing all regulations mandated under the DMC Act-1957 and utilizing its available infrastructures to raze down any such illegal construction," the statement said

Kejriwal approves 2 new sessions court to deal with deposit schemes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has approved a proposal to constitute two desgnated courts of the additional sessions judge in each judicial district of Delhi to deal with matters of unregulated deposit schemes. This has been done with the

concurrence of the chief justice of the Delhi High Court under section 8 of the Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act, 2019 passed by the Parliament of India. The same has been sent to the Lieutenant Governor (LG) for issuance of a notification in this regard. The Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes Act, 2019 is an Act to provide for a comprehensive mechanism to ban unregulated deposit schemes, other than deposits taken in the ordinary course of business. and to protect the interest of depositors and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. This has been done to protect the interest of the gullible depositors.

According to the Act, "deposit" means an amount of money received by way of an advance or loan or in any other form, by any deposit taker with a promise to return whether after a specified period or othor the form of a specified service, with or without any benefit in the form of interest, bonus, profit or in any other

But such deposit does not include amounts received as loan from a scheduled bank or



pany registered with the Reserve Bank of India or any Regional Financial Institutions or insurance companies; amounts received by an individual by way of loan from his relatives or amounts received by any firm by way of loan from the relatives of any of its partners; amounts received as credit by a buyer from a seller on the sale of any property, etc. From the date of commencement of the Act, no deposit taker shall, directly or indirectly, promote, operate, issue any advertisement soliciting participation or enrolment in or accept deposits in pursuance of an Unregulated Deposit

As per the Act, no court other than the designated court shall have jurisdiction in respect of any matter to which the proviwhen trying an offence under this Act, the designated court may try an offence, other than an offence under this Act, with which the accused may, under

Former UP Police chief house burgled, jewellery stolen **STAFF REPORTER** NOIDA the incident took place at his back to the Noida home on ter-in-law," the former IPS offi-

Thieves allegedly struck at the Noida home of former Uttar Narain Rai and took away jewellery, officials said on Tuesday. Police said they have lodged an FIR against the unidentified thieves and launched an investigation. The former director general of Uttar Pradesh Police said he was in Singapore when

"I'left for Singapore on my son and returned on January 29, 2024. My domestic help Santosh, who also lives with me in Noida, had also left for his village on December 7," Rai said in his complaint to the police on Monday. He added that Santosh came

home at Calypso Court in January 28, a day before his return, and informed him about the theft.

that the bed box was turned upside down inside the room of my son and daughter-in-law. Attempts were made to break a locker in the room but when it did not work, the thieves took away the locker that had jewellery belonging to my daughcer alleged.

Taking note of the complaint, the Noida Police have lodged an section 380 (theft) at the local Sector 126 police station.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Noida) Harish Chander said, "The complainant has been contacted and further investigation into the case is underway."

the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, be charged at the same trial. Woman who cheated Aerocity hotel had Rs 41

in her account: Police

Scheme.

Awoman who was recently arrested for cheating a luxury hotel in Delhi's Aerocity of around Rs 6 lakh had only Rs 41 in her account when she was nabbed, police said on Tuesday. They said the Andhra Pradesh-based woman's motive behind staying near the airport could not be ascertained so far.

According to a senior police officer, the Delhi police have written to its counterpart in Andhra Pradesh to know if they could provide her actual address and details about her family members.

The woman was interrogated and counselled by our experts but she was not cooperating with us. We asked her to show her bank account details but she failed to do so," another official said. He added that when the police checked her back account, they found it had only Rs 41 as the balance amount.

The woman, identified as Jhansi Rani Samuel, stayed in the Pullman Hotel located in Aerocity near the Delhi Airport for 15 days and allegedly made fraudulent transactions worth around Rs 5,88,176, the police said. The hotel staff told the police that she had produced a fake identity card of one Isha Dave at the hotel's spa facility and availed services worth Rs 2,11,708, the official said. The police said Samuel showed the hotel staff she was making the transactions on the ICICI Bank UPI app, but upon payment reconciliation, it was discovered that the bank had not received any payment. "It is suspected that the app she used was dubious,"

the official said. The official said the accused woman was not coop-

erating in the investigation. She initially told the police that she is a doctor and that her husband, too, is a doctor and lives in New York, however this information is also yet to be established,

Samuel was arrested by the Delhi police on January 13 following a PCR call by the hotel staff.

She was initially arrested for cheating but later Sections 419 (punishment for cheating by impersonation), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating) and 471 (using as genuine a forged document) of the IPC were added to the FIR, the official said.

Kejriwal gives nod to Delhi fifth old age home

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi will soon get its fifth old-age home with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal granting formal approval for it to become operational, an official statement on Tuesday said The old-age home is equipped with world-class facilities for destitute elderly residents, a statement from the chief min ister's office said.

The Delhi government's Social Welfare Department is present-ly running four old age homes. The construction of Delhi's fifth old-age home in Paschim Vihar is almost complete, the statement said, adding it is named 'Savitribai Phule Senior Citizen Home'. The old age home has a capacity to house 96 people. The chief minister has granted

the formal approval for the old age home to become opera-



tional and the file has been sent to the lieutenant governor (LG) for notification, the statement

Currently, Delhi has four operational old-age homes, providing accommodation for 505 elderly destitute residents. According to the statement, special attention has been given

to the conveniences for the

elderly in the construction of

this old-age home.

The residents of this home will be provided with free accommodation, meals, clothing and bedding.

Additionally, facilities like TV, radio and books will be available for entertainment of the elderly. The home will have a recreational centre for the elderly and their health will be well taken care of with the provision of doctors and physio-therapy, the statement added. The home consists of 50 wellventilated rooms with attached bathrooms and shower facili-ties. It will be open to impoverished, destitute and elderly individuals aged 60 years or older. Those who lack means for sustenance or have no one to care for them are eligible for

The statement said the admission to the home will be voluntary. Interested individuals need to apply with certain documents to the social security branch of the Social Welfare department at the main office under the deputy director or director (senior

citizen residence). Upon receiving the application, the director and welfare officer will conduct an assessment to determine if the applicant meets the eligibility criteria.

Traffic signage have been

Motorists are advised to follow the diversions and obey instructions of the traffic police, it added.

Chowk and vice versa (including place of function 4th Pusta Kartar Nagar in front of Yamuna Khadar)," the traffic advisory said.

placed at appropriate locations for guiding commuters and adequate traffic staff has been deployed to ensure

Delhi BJP seeks probe into MLAs poaching allegations Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

delegation of the Delhi BJP led by A delegation of the Felling, its president Virendra Sachdeva on Tuesday met the city police chief, seeking a probe into Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's allegation that the party was trying to poach AAP MLAs.

After meeting Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora at the Police Headquarters here, Sachdeva said Kejriwal was asked to prove his allegations but no one from the AAP has come forward with any evidence. This only shows that the charges levelled by the Delhi chief minister and his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders were "completely baseless", Sachdeva

demanded investigation into the Chief Minister's allegations and legal action against the AAP leaders who made the allegations including the Chief

Atishi and MLAs Durgesh Pathak and Dilip Pandey

week claimed that the Bharatiya Janata

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the BJP MLAs will also raise the issue in the Budget Session of the Assembly in February.

Traffic curbs on Bageshwar Dham religious events STAFF REPORTER ■ The event will be held at the for the stay of 20,000 visitors

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has imposed traffic restrictions and made special arrangements in Yamuna Khadar for a four-day_religious_programme of Bageshwar Dham seer Dhirendra Shastri, officials said on Tuesday

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari said in a press conference that the 'Hanumat Katha' to be recited by Dhirendra Shastri is expected to draw 8 lakh visitors.

DDA ground of Yamuna Khadar in northeast Delhi from Wednesday to Saturday, the officials said Tiwari said the organising

committee has completed all the preparations for the event. Tents have been erected over an area of 22 acres while a 30acre parking lot has also been

prepared. Massive security arrangements Katha, traffic movement will be restricted from Shastri Park have been put in place for the programme, he said. Arrangement has been made Pusta, 5th Pusta, Khajuri

attend the event," the MP said. A 'kalash yatra' will be taken out on January 31 in which 30,000 women are likely to participate, he added.

in tents with facilities like food

and public utilities. Around 8

lakh visitors are estimated to

red light to 2nd Pusta, 3rd

"Kalash Yatra will also be organised on Wednesday from 12 pm to 3 pm. In view of Ram

smooth and uninterrupted flow of traffic, it stated.

In the complaint letter, BJP has

Kejriwal and other AAP leaders last

Party (BJP) was trying to poach MLAs of the ruling party in Delhi 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. "It is an old habit of Kejriwal to level allegations against BJP leaders and then apologise. But this time we have decided to take action against him," Sachdeva said.

Neighbours need each other: Jaishankar on Maldives row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

s diplomatic tension simmers between India and Maldives, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said at the end of the day neighbours need each other. He also said "history and geography are very powerful forces. There is no escape from that," Jaishankar said in the back-drop of "India out" campaign in the island nation.

In another development, since the diplomatic spat erupted three weeks ago, from being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position, according to Maldives official data.

Amid a diplomatic row that Maldivian erupted after politicians posted derogatory remarks against Prime against Minister Narendra Modi, Iaishankar said that neighbours need each other. On the 'India out' campaign in

the Maldives, Jaishankar, during an interaction at IIM-Mumbai, said, "History and geography are very powerful forces. There is no escape from

His remarks came in the backdrop of Maldives backdrop of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu earlier urged the Indian government to withdraw its military personnel from the Maldives on or before March 15. This was a part of the 'India out' campaign by the Maldives amid a diplomatic row.

Besides, President Muizzu, considered pro-China, has been reviewing bilateral agreements signed with India by the previous regime in the island nation.

Meanwhile, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), an opposition party, has collected signatures needed to initiate a no-confidence motion to launch impeachment proceedings against Muizzu government.

impeachment motion is likely to be introduced in the Maldives parliament soon.

From being the top tourist group visiting Maldives, Indians have slipped to the fifth position in the last three weeks, amid a diplomatic row between New Delhi and Male, according to official data according to official data.

Official figures released by the Maldives Ministry of Tourism showed a notable drop in the number of Indian travellers visiting the island nation. Over 2 lakh Indians visited

Maldives annually in the last three years, the highest from any country post-COVID 19 pandemic, the data showed. However, the travel hotspot for Indians is now facing a backlash after three ministers from the Maldives cabinet made derogatory comments against Prime Minister Modi following his visit to Lakshadweep earlier this month. According to the statistics,

Maldives received over 1.74 lakh tourists till January 28 this year, of which only 13,989 were Indians. Russia topped the chart with 18,561 tourists from the country visiting Maldives, followed by Italy (18,111), China (16.529) and UK

(14,588). Germany is at the sixth spot followed by USA, Poland France, Switzerland.

Over 17 lakh tourists visited the island nation in 2023, of which maximum were Indians followed

(2,09,146)Russians Chinese (1,87,118).

The number of Indian visitors to Maldives was more than 2.4 lakh in 2022 and over 2.11 lakh in 2021. The Maldives was also one of the few countries open international

during the pandemic and nearly 63,000 Indians visited that country during that period In 2018, India was the fifth-

largest source of tourist arrivals

in the Maldives with 90,474 visitors. In 2019, India reached the second spot with 1.66 lakh Indians visiting that country.

Many netizens on social media claimed that they have

claimed that they have cancelled their scheduled trips to the Maldives because of the row, with the hashtag "Boycott Maldives" trending on X for several days this month. Joining the 'boycott campaign', EaseMyTrip, an online travel aggregator, had announced it has suspended all flight has suspended all flight bookings to the island nation

on its website "in solidarity" with India. Meanwhile, the government of the Maldives had suspended three of its deputy ministers after they criticised Modi for his post on X following his visit to Lakshadweep, inferring that

Union Territory as an alternative tourist destination to the Maldives. The Maldivian foreign ministry had said the government is aware of the 'derogatory remarks" made on social media platforms against foreign leaders and that their personal views do not represent the country's position.

it was an attempt to project the

Situated in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the Maldives is home to nearly 1,200 tiny coral islands that stretch along a length of 871 kilometres. From personalised spa treatments to adventure sports activities to world-class cuisine, the island nation offers myriad experiences, making it a great choice for visitors.
The beautiful beaches and the

island experience, coupled with affordable airfare that is even cheaper than the cost of travel to some Indian cities, have been a big draw for Indian tourists.



best marching contingent trophy to Delhi Police Women among the CAPF and others auxiliary forces in Judges Choice category, in New Delhi

REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

Delhi Police all women contingent gets best marching award

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

 $M_{\text{Ajay}}^{\text{inister of State for Defence}}$ here gave away the best marching contingents and tableaux awards for this year's Republic Day parade. Delhi Police women marching contingent bagged the best marching award amongst the paramilitary forces while the Sikh Regiment got the award in the services category. The colourful tableau of Odisha that showcased women empowerment in the state as well as its rich handicraft and the first prize among the tableaux showcased by various

Tuesday. Gujarat's tableau showcasing Dhordo tourism village has earned the first place in the people's choice category. Ministry's tableau Culture themed 'Bharat: Mother of Democracy' bagged the first prize among tableaux which were displayed by various ministries and departments during the ceremonial parade. Ministry of Home Affairs

states and UTs, officials said on

tableau depicting 'vibrant villages' has won the second

A total of 16 tableaux from states and Union territories, nine from central ministries and departments had rolled down the Kartavya Path during the grand celebrations which was graced President French Emmanuel Macron.

states and Union The territories which presented their tableaux included Arunachal Pradesh, Harvana, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra Andhra Pradesh, Ladakh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Uttar

Pradesh and Telangana. Three panels of judges were appointed for assessing the performance of Marching Contingents from three Marching Contingents from Central Police Forces (CAPF)/other auxiliary forces and tableaux from various States/Union Territories and Ministries/Departments.

RS chairman revokes suspension of 11 Opposition MPs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

r⊓he Rajya Sabha Privileges Committee on Tuesday held 11 suspended opposition MPs guilty of breach of privilege and contempt of the Council of States, but Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar revoked their suspension allowing them to attend the Budget session, sources said. In its report to the Rajya Sabha chairman a day before the session starts on Wednesday, the committee also recommended that the period of suspension already suffered by the members be treated as "sufficient punishment" for the transgression. The MPs held "guilty of breach

of privilege and contempt of the Council" of States are Jebi Mather Hisham, L Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar, G C Chandrashekhar, Binoy Viswam, Sandosh Kumar P, M Mohamed Abdulla, John Brittas and A A Rahim.

The committee presented the report to Dhankhar, taking note of the situation that the suspended members would not be able to attend the special address of President Droupadi Murmu to both Houses of Parliament, the first address in the new build-Wednesday.

The committee usually submits its recommendations to the House.

The sources said the chairman invoked the authority vested in him under the rules of procedure to revoke their suspension enabling the members to attend the special address by the president.

The matter of 11 MPs suspended by the chairman during the Winter session of Parliament were referred to the Privileges Committee

Prenatal exposure to air pollution can cause respiratory distress in newborns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Prenatal exposure to air pollution specifically fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2) increases the risk of severe respiratory distress in newborn babies, according to a study, thus revealing a better understanding of infant respiratory distress, the leading cause of admission in neonatal intensive care units and death among infants worldwide. Mothers' exposure to air

pollution while pregnant is known to be associated with adverse long-term respiratory issues, such as asthma, in their children. However, what we didn't know is that maternal exposure to air pollution could cause babies to suffer severe respiratory distress soon after

birth, said Chintan K Gandhi, assistant professor of pediatrics Penn State corresponding author of the paper, about the need to conduct the study. It is published in the journal journal Health Environmental Perspectives

To conduct their study, the researchers analyzed data from the Maternal-Infant Research on Environmental Chemicals (MIREC) Study led by Health Canada. The MIREC Study team estimated the women's exposures to PM2.5 and NO2 beginning three months prior to pregnancy through the end of the third trimester by using models based on satellite information and ground-level air quality monitoring devices. The MIREC team found that during the study period, the



women were exposed to PM2.5 concentrations ranging from 1.47 to 23.71 micrograms per cubic meter of air (?g/m3), with a median of 8.81 ?g/m3, and NO2 concentrations ranging from 1.72 to 53.10 parts per billion (ppb), with a

median of 18.02 ppb. To provide context, the U.S. Protection Environmental Agency provides standards for maximum annual exposures of 9.0 to 10.0 μg/m3 for PM2.5 and 53 ppb for NO2. However, Gandhi said, "There

really is no safe level of air pollution." Using data from the MIREC study, the team led by Penn State researchers examined associations between the mothers' exposure to air pollution and physiciandiagnosed respiratory distress in newborns. The examination extended beyond diagnosis to encompass the severity of respiratory distress, quantified by the necessity for oxygen, mechanical ventilation and

"This nuanced approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between maternal air pollution exposure and the varying degrees of respiratory observed distress newborns," Gandhi said.

systemic antibiotics in the

infants.

NMC bars medical college Profs from private practice during duty

In a move aimed to weed out **L**ghost faculty, the National Medical Commission (NMC) has barred the faculty in medical colleges from engaging in hours and made 75 per cent attendance mandatory for them The medical regulator issued the "Minimum Standard of Requirements for Postgraduate Courses-2023 (PGMSR-2023)" guidelines last week.

Faculty shall be full-time and shall not engage in private practice during college hours. It shall be mandatory to have at least 75 per cent attendance of the total working days for the required number of faculties," as per the guidelines.

It also stipulated that 80 per cent of hospital beds should be occupied throughout the year by patients requiring inpatient care and minimum 15 per cent of the total beds in the department imparting postgraduate training should be Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds/high dependency unit (HDU) beds exclusively of that department.

"Hospital building

individuals with diverse needs.

delivered on January 25th, 2024.

District Magistrates to submit an action

taken report in the matter within 90

days from the issue of the order

The direction came in response to a

petition filed by Dr Satendra Singh,

Coordinator, Enabling Unit, University

College of Medical Sciences, Delhi and

Member, Advisory Board, SCPD who

had pointed out that despite legal

NEW DELHI

conform to existing national or institutes started under

building norms and various local statutory regulations for hospitals taking consideration requirements of the hospital as a service provider. including administration, registration, records storage, out-patient and inpatient areas, operating theatres, ICU, radiology and laboratory services emergency areas, etc."

There shall be an increase in the faculty, infrastructure and other staff in subjects of radiodiagnosis, anaesthesia, pathology, microbiology, and biochemistry with the increase in the number of beds in the hospital. Also, there shall be an increase in the faculty and infrastructure, if workload in the department is more, the guidelines said. Post-graduate medical colleges

Section 3.1(iii) of PGMER-23 (Standalone post-graduate medical college/institute) will have minimum 220 beds and will compulsorily have the functional departments of biochemistry, pathology, microbiology, radio diagnosis, anaesthesiology (when there are surgical speciality). The institution shall have

adequate in-house laboratory and imaging facilities for training of post-graduate students, which should be fully run by the respective department.

There shall be digital data of records of investigations done in various departments and laboratories besides a wellequipped air-conditioned blood bank capable of providing component therapy, as per the guidelines.

Make all hospitals disabled friendly: DMs in Delhi told

UGC removes 'de-reservation' draft guidelines amid backlash

The University Grants Commission (UGC) on Tuesday removed from its website, the draft guidelines suggesting "de-reservation" of reserved posts if enough candidates from the SC, ST and OBC categories versy over the issue.

The commission chairman, M Jagadesh Kumar, however, said "the guidelines have been removed from the website as the time period for stakeholders to submit their feedback is over". A controversy erupted on Sunday over UGC's draft guidelines proposing that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and ÓBC candidates can be "declared unreserved" if enough candidates from these categories are not available, with the Congress terming it a conspiracy to do away with quota in higher education institutions. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan clarified that not a single post will be dereserved and there is no scope for ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

University Grants Commission

(UGC) Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar also made it clear that of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is 'going to be no such de-reserva-The draft guidelines have drawn

flak from several quarters. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the BJP is "only busy snatching the jobs of youths". The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) also staged a protest against the UGC chairman on

the issue on Monday. Stepping up an attack, the Congress on Monday demanded the dismissal of UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar over the draft guidelines for "dereservation" of posts in higher education institutions, with party leader Rahul Gandhi alleging it was a "conspiracy" to end the reservation given to SC, ST and OBC categories.

Pradhan, however, hit back at Gandhi saying his politics is completely based on lies.

India ranks 93 among 180 nations on corruption index

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

 $I^{
m ndia\ ranked\ 93\ out\ of\ 180}_{
m countries\ on\ the\ corruption}$ perceptions index for 2023 as its overall score remained largely unchanged, according to a Transparency International report. The index, which ranks 180

countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and business people, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. In 2023, India's overall score was 39 while in 2022, it was 40. India's rank in 2022 was 85.

"India (39) shows score fluctuations small enough that no firm conclusions can be drawn on any significant change. However, ahead of the elections, India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecommunication) bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights," the report

In South Asia, both Pakistan (133) and Sri Lanka (115) grapple with their respective debt burdens and ensuing political instability, it said.

"However, the two countries anti-corruption measures, the have strong judicial oversight, which is helping to keep the government in check. The Supreme Court of Pakistan strengthened citizens' right to information by expanding this right under Article 19A of its Constitution to previously restricted institutions," it said. The report said as Bangladesh (149) emerges from the least developed country (LDC) status, with economic growth supporting a continued reduction in poverty and improving living conditions, the flow of information on the public sector is hindered amidst an ongoing crackdown against the press Noting that China (76) has

headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption crackdown by punishing more than 3.7 million public officials for corruption over the last decade, the report said a closer study of the cases with guilty verdicts found that public officials often use corruption as a way to drive up their

income. However, the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the and association, the report long-term effectiveness of such said.

report said. The report said as the Asia

Pacific region faces a big 2024 election year, with people coming out to vote in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Solomon Islands, South Korea and Taiwan, the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) reveals another year of little to no meaningful progress towards curbing corruption.

"For five years in a row, the average ĆPI score for the region stagnates stubbornly at 45 out of a possible 100. Very few countries show sustained turnarounds that indicate significant changes in corruption levels and several historically at the top are slowly declining," it said. Seventy-one per cent of the countries across Asia and the

Pacific have a CPI score below the regional average score of 45 and the global average of 43 out of 100. These weak scores reflect the lack of delivery by elected officials on anticorruption agendas, together with crackdowns on organised civil society and attacks on freedoms of press, assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE mandates under concerned legislation and central programme Accessible India Campaign, the hospitals of Delhi The Delhi State Commissioner for Government remain inaccessible.

Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) The SCPD Mukherjee also took exception to the delay saying that has directed all District Magistrates despite several reminders in the past on across the national capital to ensure all hospitals under their jurisdiction to be various occasions, the authorities have made fully accessible for persons with disfailed to ensure such important abilities (PwDs) under a mission mode. institutions are friendly to the sector. The directive likely includes measures In his order, the SCPD further said, "All Directors/Medical Superintendents of to enhance physical accessibility, such as ramps, elevators, and other facilities all hospitals of GNCT of Delhi are that facilitate the movement and directed that each and every department/lab/other rooms/drinking comfort of PwDs. Additionally, it may involve training hospital staff to provide water/toilets etc. are made accessible for better assistance and support to persons with disabilities and action taken report be submitted to this Court SCPD Ranjan Mukherjee directed the within 90 days from the issue of this

> "Also, Engineer-in-Chief, Public Works Department (PWD) should direct all Executive Engineers of PWD that all out efforts be made with the concerned hospitals authorities to make each and every place of the hospitals accessible for persons with disabilities," says the

In his PIL, Dr Singh who is also a vocal



activist in the sector pointed out that even as the deadline to make all public places including hospitals accessible under the central flagship Accessible India Campaign by 15 June 2022 and despite the progressive legal mandate, the hospitals under Delhi Government remain inaccessible to PwDs including patients, faculty with disabilities, and staff with disabilities.

For instance, he pointed out at the Maulana Ajad Medical College (MAMC) Hospital, the auditorium is not accessible, reserved parking not close to the entrance, and the library

not being accessible. The BSA Hospital's Physiology department and academic block do not have a lift despite this medical college being the newest one to be built. Similarly, the GTB Hospital, of which

the petitioner is the nodal officer, has written multiple times to the Public Works Department to share access audits but it hasn't been done so. Moreover, the new hospital building at GTBH and other hospitals are under progress and they should follow the accessibility standard right from the beginning with the involvement of administrators or doctors with disabilities.

Singh further said that even though the Union Health Ministry has framed Accessibility Standards for Healthcare in 2022, the hospitals are slow to follow it in letter and spirit.

Responding to the order, Dr Singh said, the mission mode approach implies a targeted and time-bound strategy to expedite the process of making hospitals more accessible, emphasizing the urgency and importance of this initiative.

Koreans to visit Ram temple

ccording to Korean legend, a teenage princess from Ayodhya crossed the ocean in a boat some 2,000 years ago, sailed 4,500 kilometres to Korea and married King Kim Suro who founded the Gaya Kingdom in the north Asian country. The princess, Suriratna, then became Queen Heo Hwang-ok. The fable is hardly known in

India, nor is the fact that some 60 lakh people in South Korea, who consider themselves descendants of Suriratna, consider Ayodhya as their maternal home. It was therefore nat ural that many of them eagerly watched the Ram Temple consecration online from their homes on January 22.

And now they can't wait to visit Avodhya to see the grand new Ram temple complex up close. Many members of the Karak clan visit Ayodhya every year to pay tributes at the memorial of Queen Heo Hwang-ok at the Queen Heo Memorial Park, which was set up on the banks

er's home," said Kim Chil-su, the secretary general of the Central Karak Clan Society. He was among those who attended the January 22 'Pran

Many believe Ayodhya princess crossed the seas to marry king

temple, a few kilometres away from the Queen Heo Memorial

Spread over a 2,000 square metre area, the park features a meditation hall, pavilions dedicated to the queen and king,

pavilions are built in a typical Korean style with tiled sloping

'We visit Ayodhya every year to pay tributes at the memorial and this time we plan to go to the new Ram temple too. We watched the ceremony on-line watched the ceremony on-line and what a feeling it was. I haven't been to the old makeshift shrine but have read about the dispute," Yu-Jin Lee, who plans to travel with 22 others to the city in February, told PTI over phone from South

Queen Heo Hwang-ok is revered as the progenitor mother of the Gimhae Heo families, according to an ancient Korean history text, "Samguk Yusa". It states that the queen came to Korea in AD 48 from "Ayuta". She is still revered as the progenitor mother of the Gimhae Heo families of the Karak clan.

In a post on X, the South Korean embassy had also congratulated India for the consecration ceremony on January

Former Union Minister daughter in

law killed, son injured in car crash

pathways, a fountain, murals and audio video facilities. The symbolic importance for Korea-India relations based on the matrimonial link between Queen Sriratna (Heo Hwangok) from Ayodhya and King Kim Suro from Gaya (Korea) in 48 AD," it said.

In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Narendra Modi and former South Korean president Moon Jae-in signed an MoU for expansion of the memorial. South Korean First Lady Kim Jung-sook attended the inauguration of the beautification work in 2018. In 2019, commemorative Rs 25 and Rs 5 postage stamps for the queen were also issued by India. Indian diplomat N

diplomat Indian Parthasarathi, who served as ambassador to South Korea, also wrote a novel based on Suriratna's life, "The Legend of Ayodhya Princess in Korea. It was translated in the Korean language as "Bi Dan Hwang Hoo", or Silk Princess, and

published in Seoul. Later, the National Book Trust of India published a children's book based on the novel

Chitra Singh, aged around 55, died during treatment while Manvendra Singh (59), his son

Hamir Singh (25) and their driver were injured.

Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, former BJP

state president Satish Poonia, former chief min-

ister Ashok Gehlot and other leaders expressed

Expressing grief over the accident, Gehlot said posted on X, "I pray to God to give peace to the

departed soul and courage to the family."
Satish Poonia said the incident was shocking.

He condoled the demise of Chitra Singh and

Manvendra Singh, a former MP from Barmer, had quit the BJP and joined the Congress. He

also contested the 2018 assembly elections against then chief minister and BJP leader

Vasundhara Raje from Jhalrapatan constituen-

wished for a speedy recovery to the injured.

grief over the incident.

cy. He had lost the poll.

Manvendra Singh is out of danger, he said.

No political personality is ready to sail in sinking boat Congress: BJP

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Congress is a non-performing asset, a liability and a sinking boat, a senior BJP leader alleged on Tuesday and said no political party will asso-

said no political party will associate itself with it.

"The Congress had made attempts to create the INDIA alliance, but the Congress party has become a NPA (non-performing asset) in the country and has become a liability," former BJP MLC and party's incharge for Srinagar parliamentary constituency Surinder Ambardar said.

Justifying his assertion, Ambardar said West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee earlier decided to contest the Lok Kumar left

NDA.

'Congress is a sinking boat and no political personality is ready Lok Sabha constituency.

On Tuesday, the BJP inaugurated its election offices in all five constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir.

Ambardar said the BIP believes that election is the biggest festival in the country and is celebrating it by launching election

"We have created 38 departments for the elections and made 38 convenors and 38 coconvenors Those 38 departments vary

from election office to social media to strategic aspects and will touch all aspects of the election," he added The former MLC said the BJP is looking to win at least 330 seats on its own in the upcoming general elections.

"For the NDA, the score will be over 400 and Prime Minister

trick," he added. Meanwhile, the party's general



पेराई सत्र 2023—24 के अन्तर्गत उत्पादित लूज बैगास एवं अन् मग्री की आपूर्ति तथा जॉब कार्य हेतु, GST के अन्तर्गत पंजीकृत सक्षम ठेकेदार उत्तराखण्ड अधि० प्राप्ति (प्रोक्योरमेन्ट) नियमावली 2017 में निहित स, उत्तराखण्ड आधे० प्रााप्त (प्रावधारमन्द्र) नियमावला 2017 म ।नाहर प्रविधानों के अन्तर्गत दो निविदा प्रणाली (Two Bid System) के अन्तर्गत ई–निविदाये www.uktenders.gov.in पर आमंत्रित की जाती है www.uktenders.gov.in पर प्राप्त निविदा ही मान्य होगी, अन्य माध्यम से प्राप्त निवदा स्वीकार्य नहीं होंगी। आवश्यकता होने पर बैगास विक्रय हेत्



NOTICE is hereby given that the Extra-Ordinary General Meeting (EGM) of the members of OR Play India Limited will be held through Video Conferencing ("VC") / Other Audio-Visual means ('OAVM'") on Friday, February 23, 2024 at 10:30 A.M. to transact the Special Businesses, as set out in the Notice of EGM. The venue of the said meeting shall be deemed to be the Registered Office of the Company at Plot No.17,Roz-Ka-Meo Industrial Estate,

Tehsil-Nuh, District-Mewat, Haryana-122103. e EGM is being convened in compliance with the applicable provis 2013 and the rules made thereunder read with General Circular No. 14/2020 dated April 8 2020General Circular No. 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020, General Circular No. 22/2020 dated June 15,2020, General Circular No. 33/2020 dated September 28, 2020, General Circular

2021. General Circular No. 20/2021 dated December 8, 2021, General Circular No. 3/2022 dated May5, 2022, and General Circular No. 10/2022 dated December 28, 2022, (collectively "General Circulars") Issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (the MCA") and Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) vide its circular no. SEB/ HO/CFD/CMD1/ CIR/P/2020/79 dated May12,2020, circular no. SEBY HO/CFD/CMD 2/CIR/P/2021/11 dated January 15,2021, circular No. SEBV HO/ CFD/ CMD2/CIRY P/2022/ 62 dated May 13, 2022 and circular no. SEB/HO/CFD/PoD-2/CIR/2023/6 dated January 5, 2023, (collectively "SEBI Circulars") have permitted holding of EGM without physical presence of the members at the venue through Video Conferencing (VC) or Other Audio-Visual Means (OAVM).

receive User ID and password for e-voting:

Physical Please send ISR1, SH-13 and ISR-2(if signature not matched with company record to MAS Services Limited T-34 2nd Floor, Okhla Industrial Are, Phase-II,

www.okplay.in, website of the Stock Exchange where the shares of the Company are listed, i.e. BSE Limited at www.bseindia.com and on the website of National Securities Depository

Management and Administration) Rules, 2014, as amended and Regulation 44 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 and Secretarial Standard on General Meeting (SS-2), the Members are rovided with the facility to cast their votes on all resolutions as set forth in the Notice convening the EGM using electronic voting system (e-voting) provided by NSDL. The voting ights of Members shall be in proportion to the equity shares held by them in the paid-up

Thursday, 22nd February, 2024 at 5:00 P.M. (IST)

During this period, the Members may cast their vote electronically. The remote e-voting module shall be disabled by NSDL thereafter, Those Members, who shall be present in the EGM through VC/OAVM facility and had not cast their votes on the Resolutions through

The Members who have cast their votes by remote e-voting prior to the EGM may also attend articipate in the EGM through VC/OAVM but shall not be entitled to cast their votes again.

after the Notice has been sent electronically by the Company and holds shares as on the cut-off date; may obtain the login ID and password by sending a request to helpdesk at evoting@nsdl.co.in. However, if he/she is already registered with NSDL for remote e-voting he/she can use his/her existing User ID and password for casting the votes.

ww.evotingindia.nsdl.com, under help section or contact at toll free number 1800 1020 990/1800 224 430. In case of any grievances relating to e-voting, please contact at the

For OK Play India Limited

Ambardar said.

Sabha elections alone and then Bihar Chief Minister Nitish INDIA bloc and returned to the

to sail in it," the BJP leader told reporters after inaugurating the party's election office in Srinagar

Narendra Modi will score a hat-

secretary (organisation) for Jammu and Kashmir, Ashok Koul, said the INDIA bloc has broken away and many partners

नेगोशिऐसन H—1 (प्रथम उच्चतम) दरदाता से एवं अन्य कार्य/आपूर्ति हे। नेगोशिऐसन L—1 (न्यूनतम) दरदाता से किया जायेगा। विस्तृत सूचना मिल वं विसाइट www.kichhasugar.com पर भी उपलब्ध है। अधिशासी निदेशव



OK PLAY INDIA LIMITED CIN - L28219HR1988PLC030347

No.39/2020 dated December 31, 2020, General Circular No. 10/2021 dated June 23

Members may further note that in pursuance of above stated circulars, the Members can attend and participate in the EGM through VC/OAVM only. Detailed instructions for joining the EGM are provided in the Notice of EGM. The Company has sent the Notice convening EGM on Tuesday, 30 January, 2024 through electronic mode to the Members whose email addresses are registered with the Company and/ or Depositories in accordance with the Circular issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. As per the SEBI Circulars, no physical copies of the Notice of EGM will be sent to any Member. Members who have not yet registered their email addresses are requested to follow the process mentioned below for registering their email addresses to receive the Notice of the EGM electronically and to

New Delhi 110020

Please contact your Depositary Participant (DP) and register your email address as per the process advised by DP. Please also update your bank detail with your

DP for dividend payment by NACH if declared by company. Members may note that the Notice of the EGM is also available on the Company's website i.e.

Limited at www.evoting.nsdl.com in due course of time. The above information is being issued for the information and benefit of all the members of the Company and is in compliance with the MCA Circulars and the SEBI Circulars issued from time to time ursuant to the provisions of Section 108 of the Act and Rule 20 of the Companies

quity share capital of the Company as on Friday, February 16, 2024 ('cut-off date').

The remote e-voting period shall be available during the following period:

Commencement of remote e-voting Tuesday, 20th February, 2024 at 9:00 A.M. (IST) End of remote e-voting

remote e-voting and are otherwise not barred from doing so shall be eligible to vote through e voting system during the EGM.

Any person, who acquires shares of the Company and become a Member of the Company

In case of any queries of any queries pertaining to e-voting, members may refer to the Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQs") and the e-voting manual available at designated email ID, evoting@nsdl.co.in. Mr. Puneet Kumar Pandey, Practicing Company Secretary has been appointed as the Scrutinizer the remote e-voting process before/during

the EGM in a fair and transparent manner. The details of the EGM are available on the website of the Company at www.okplay.in NSDI at www.evoting.nsdl.com, BSE Limited at www.bseindia.com.

Place : Faridabac

Notes:

in the grand parade. The Culture Ministry's tableau, titled 'Bharat: Mother of Democracy, claimed the first prize among the tableaux presented by various ministries and departments. Adding to the accolades, the Ministry of Home Affairs tableau, which depicted 'vibrant villages,' secured the

second prize in this categolife across the country.

the presence of Chief Guest of the Parade, French President Macron. For selecting win-The winners were awarded at a ceremony held at Delhi ners in the people's choice category, the Government

ported onlookers to the picturesque landscapes of Dhordo, capturing the Territories that participated through the MyGov plat-**UDF** Opposition criticises



PTI THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Congress-led UDF opposition on Tuesday criticised in the Assembly the manner in which Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan read the government's policy address in the House and opposed the motion of vote of thanks to the Governor by terming it a "paradox".

The Left front too slammed Khan's brief reading out of the customary policy address by terming it as a 'comic play', but at the same time backed the vote of thanks to the Governor. Indian Union Muslim League MLA K P A Majeed questioned the need for a vote of thanks to the Governor who only briefly read the policy address. "What the Governor did was a farce. Now the Speaker will have to send a let-

Uproar in Rajasthan

The Rajasthan Assembly

I on Tuesday witnessed

uproar over the MoU on the

Eastern Rajasthan Canal

Project as the opposition

Congress raised slogans

expressing dissatisfaction with

the state government's state-

The proceedings of the House

had to be adjourned twice for

20 minutes each due to the

uproar by the Congress

PTI ■ JAIPUR

ment.

Assembly over MoU on ERCP

MLAs.

ter of thanks to him. Is it not

Governor policy address

Both fronts also used the discussion on the vote of thanks to lash out at each other on various issues, including the financial problems plaguing the state. While the LDF Governor.

LDF government was mired in corruption and the row between Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was a "drama" to hide such matters. They both are the two sides of the same coin," UDF MLA

M Vincent alleged. The UDF also alleged that there was nothing worth read-

Earlier on Sunday, a tripartite

MoU was signed between the

Centre and the Rajasthan and

Madhya Pradesh governments in New Delhi for preparing a

Detailed Project Report (DPR) of the Eastern

Rajasthan Canal Project

Responding to a discussion on

this issue, the Rajasthan gov-

ernment assured that the state

would get ample water as a

result of the agreement.

a paradox?" he asked

accused the opposition of not supporting its efforts to raise the state's problems before the central government, the UDF said that the Left front was hand-in-glove with the The opposition alleged that the

should be raised within a period of 15 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 15-day 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 15-day period by contacting Law Veritas:North (Advocates & Legal Consultants)at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Nolda, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s):+910120-3101683 / 4562809; e-mail: accounts@tvnorth.in Public Notice

Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that one Ms. Sonia Aggarwal W/o Mr. Kapil Aggarwal (hereinafter referred to as the said Mortgagers/Purchasers) have agreed to create mortgage in respect of the Property more particularly of my client PNB Housing Finance Ltd, 1st floor, H-1A/10, Sector-63, Noida - 201307.

The Seller Mr. Vinay Swaroop Srivastawa S/o Mr. RagnuveerSwaroop Srivastawa has lost/misplaced the Original Sale Deed executed by Mr. Harish Chand Goyal S/o Late Mr. Suraj Mai Goyal G/R holder of Mr. of Mr. Sale Deed executed by Mr. Harish Chand Goyal S/o Late Mr. Suraj Mai Goyal G/R holder of Mr. of Mr. Fardeepblarwal S/o Late Mr. Bhanwar Singh, registered on 14.10.2005 in the O/o Sub-Registrar Ghaziabad - 1a sper Book No. 1. Zild No. 6247 Page No. 385/420 & Document No. 6669 in respect of the Freehold Residential His Elat No. 303 on Second Floor without roof right, having its covered area 78.95 sc. mortgage and the second of the Colony Tehnal Colony Tehnial & Distt. Ghaziabad (U.P.) Any person having any claim against or in respect of the sale of the Colony Tehnial & Distt. Ghaziabad (U.P.) Any person having any claim against or in respect of the selection or any part thereof by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable or deposit of title deed or otherwise), girf, trust, inheritance, family possession, lease, sub-lease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, piedge, easement or otherwise howsover are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to me with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned herein below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim, if any, of such the date hereof, failing which the claim, if any, of such constitution of the property Freehold Residential HIG Flat No. 303 on Second Floor without roof right, having its covered area? Residential HIG Flat No. 303 on Second Floor without roof right, having its covered area? Residential HIG Flat No. 303 on Second Floor without roof right, having its covered area? Residential HIG Flat No. 303 on Second Floor with

the accident happened. Police said the driver, Narendra, apparently lost control of the car which skidded off the road and hit a cemented parapet on the vacant space between two elevated roads near Naugava.

Alwar Additional Superintendent of Police Tejpal singh said three the people were travelling in the SUV. They and their driver were rushed to a private hospital after the accident. Dr Vikrant Solanki of the hospital said that

Congress leader Manvendra Singh's wife was killed and the former MP and his son

were injured when their SUV met with an acci-

dent in Alwar on the Delhi-Mumbai

Expressway, officials said. Manvendra Singh, who is son of the late BJP stalwart and former

Union Minister Jaswant Singh, and his family

were on their way to Jaipur from Delhi when

कार्यालय नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश

Ph:0135-2430015.1800313529

संशोधित विज्ञप्ति /निविदा सूचना नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश के आई०एस०डब्ल्य०एम० प्लाट लालपानी कक्ष सं0–1 हेतु प्रोजेक्ट मैनेजमेन्ट कन्सन्टेंसी (पी०एम०सी०) के चयन हेतु इच्छुक अनुभवी, दक्ष, कम्पनी / फर्मों से 2 बिड सिस्टम (तकनीकी एवं वित्तीय) के अन्तर्गत दिनांक 01.02.2024 से 14.02.2024 तक ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है जो website-

www.uktenders.gov.in पर देखी जा सकती है।

पत्रांक :- 3593 / सा0प्र0 / 2023-24 दिनांक: 30.01.2024

(or Letters of Administration). Given under my hand and the seal of he Court this 20th day of December DEPUTY REGISTRAR HIGH COURT, ALLAHABAD

नगर निगम, ऋषिकेश INDIAN RAILWAYS GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR)

सहायक नगर आयक्त.

(RAILWAY BOARD) No. 2022/RS(WTA)-149/TENDER/532 New Delhi, dated 30/01/2024

TENDER CANCELLATION NOTICE Corrigendum No.14 to Tender No. WTA-532

Sub :- Tender No.WTA-532 due on 31.01.2024 for "Manufacturing cum Maintenance of 100 nos. of New Generation Energy Efficient Vande Bharat Trainsets with Concentrated Power System including upgradation of the Government Manufacturing Units & Trainset Depots."

t is hereby advised that the subject tender MAY BE TREATED AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RAILWAY STORES (RS)

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAILWAY BOARD), RAIL BHAWAN

RAISINA ROAD, NEW DELHI-110 001, Email- drsm@rb.railnet.gov.ir MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAILWAY BOARD), RAIL BHAWAN

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Delton Gables Limited Regd. Office: Delton House, 4801, Bharat Ram Road, 24 Daryaganj, New Delhi -110002 Website: www.deltoncables.com, E-mail: cs@deltoncables.com, CIN: L31300DL1964PLC004255

ı		ended	ended	ended
SI.		31.12.2023	31.12.2023	31.12.2022
No.	i di dodidio	Unaudited	Unaudited	Unaudited
1	Total income from operations (net)	10,967.46	26,907.65	6,768.83
2	Net Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and / or Extraordinary items)	342.56	828.30	191.86
3	Net Profit for the period before Tax (after Exceptional and / or Extraordinary items)	458.50	944.09	191.86
4	Net Profit for the period after Tax (after Exceptional and / or Extraordinary items)	373.89	834.49	157.34
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit for the period	371.87	837.47	153.79
	(after tax) and other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]			
6	Equity share capital (Face Value of Rs.10/- each)	864.00	864.00	864.00
7	Earning Per Share (before extraordinary items) (Face Value of ₹ 10/- each)			
	(a) Basic (Rs.)	4.33	9.66	1.82
l	(b) Diluted (Rs.)	4.33	9.66	1.82

STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER /NINE MONTHS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2023 (Rs. in lakh

1) The above is an extract of the detailed format of unaudited Quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 3 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly / Nine months Financia Results are available on the Stock Exchange website (www.bseindia.com) and on Company's website (www.deltoncables.com). The above results have been prepared in accordance with the principle and procedures of Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) as notified under The Companies (Indian Accounting Standards) Rules, 2015 as specified under Section 133 of the Companies Act, 2013. The above results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at their respective meetings he on Jan 30, 2024.

For and on behalf of the Board

(Managing Director (DIN : 00035916

Quarter Nine Months Quarter

Company Secretary & Compliance Officer

of Sarayu river in Ayodhya in 2001 in a partnership between the Uttar Pradesh government and the Gimhae city in South "Ayodhya is very special to us as we see it as our grandmothnew idol of Ram Lalla at the Odisha wins top prize for vibrant

Tableau at 75th Republic Day Parade ARCHANA JYOTI ■

Stealing the limelight dur-ing the 75th Republic Day parade here recently, Odisha's vibrant tableau, showcasing the resilience and strength of women intertwined with the state's exquisite handicrafts clinched the first prize in the

judge's choice category. A big umbrella on the Odisha tableau denoted the "wholehearted" support of the central and state governments to the artisans under the "Viksit Bharat" programme while the "War Horse of Konark Temple" symbolised Odisha's rapid progress in shaping a developed India.

Meanwhile, Gujarat secured the top spot in the people's choice category with its tableau highlighting the enchanting Dhordo tourism

village. The tableau trans-

essence of Gujarat's unique cultural and tourist attractions with the theme 'Dhordo: Global Identity of Gujarat's Border Tourism'.

Gujarat's Border Tourism. In the judge's category, Gujarat finished second while Tamil Nadu was ranked third. The Southern State highlighted the historical significance of the Kudavolai electoral system, which emerged during the 10th century Chola era and marked an early stride

marked an early stride towards democracy. On the other hand, in peo-

ple's choice category, Uttar Pradesh which showcased an artistic image of Ram Lalla whose new idol was recently consecrated at a grand temple in Ayodhya bagged the second position followed by Andhra Pradesh which clinched third place.

tableaux from states and Union territories, along with nine from central ministries and departments, rolled down the Kartavya Path dur-ing the grand celebrations in

ry. The tableau highlighted the diverse and thriving rural A total of 16 captivating

Emmanuel had conducted public voting

ing in the policy address in the first place and therefore, even if

the Governor had spent hours

reading the entire thing, it would

not have made a difference. On

Monday, senior CPI leader and

Chandrasekharan moved the

motion of vote of thanks to the

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that Mr. Ayush Magois the alloteed theIndependent Floor No. B-5/30, having Carpet area of 80.082 Sq. Mtrs. on First Floor, along with a Parking Space No. B-5/30 A/SFP1, at DLF Garden City Enclave, Phase-02, Sector-93, Grungram, Haryana.Agreement for Saledated 23.10.2023, wasexecuted by DLF Limited 'Promoter and Sagardutt Builders and developers Pvt Limited and Other'Owners' in favour of Ayush Mago in respect of said property. Above said Ayush Mago has misplaced the Original Allotment Letter and payment receipts issued by DLF Limited in favour offMr. Ayush Mago, Anyone who finds the above-mentioned documents, kindly handover the same to the Manager ofKotak Mahindra Bank Limited, Gurgaon Branch, Mr. Ayush Magoscurrently in the process of mortgaging the aforementioned floor with Kotak MahindraBankLimited. Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction health for sealed within expect with the process of mortgaging the stransaction health for sealed within expect of the sealed within expect of the

objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 15 days from

minister

former

Governor.

Be it know that my Client Sh. Subhash Chand S/o Late Sh. Ved Prakash. R/o H. No. E-74. Ground Floor, South Extension, Part-I, New Delhi has Disown/Debar his Children namely (1) Sh. Gaurav Gupta S/o Sh. Subhash Chand, R/o H. No. E-74. First Sh. Subhash Chand, R/O H. No. E-74. First Floor. South Extension, Part-I. New Delhi, (2) Sh. Gagan Gupta S/o Sh. Subhash Chand, presently residing at Sydney, Australia, & (3) Smt. Pooja Gupta D/o Sh. Subhash Chand from his Movable-Immovable/Assets, all Properties. Any person dealing with aforementioned (1) Mr. Gaurav Gupta. (2) Sh. Gagan Gupta and (3) Smt. Pooja Gupta shall do so a their own risk and responsibility. My and (3) Smt. Pooja Gupta Shah Go So G their own risk and responsibility. My Clients shall not be responsible for any ac Clients shall not be responsible for any act and deed of debarred person(S). Sanchit Gupta(Adv), Ch.No-742, Saket Court, New Delhi-17

> **COURT NOTICE** CITATION (BY ADVERTISEMENT) (Chapter XXX, Rule-21) IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT ALLAHABAD ORIGINAL JURISDICTION TESTAMENTARY AND INTESTATE JURISDICTION TESTAMENTARY

> > CASE NO. 67 OF 2023

IN THE MATTER OF THE GOODS OF Late Chhidda Singh son of Late Ramchandra Resident of Kavesth Ganwadi, Mohiuddinpur, Distric MeerutDeceased Dharmendra Kumar S/o Late Chhidda SinghPetitioner WHEREAS an application has bee nade by Dharmendra Kumar S/o Late Chhidda Singh R/o Kayesth, Ganwadi Mohiuddinpur, District Meerut for the probate of the will (or Letters of Administration to the estate) of Late Chhidda Singh deceased, who died at Kayesth, Ganwadi, District Meerut, Uttar Pradesh on 27.07.2016

AND WHEREAS, the 5th day of February, 2024 has been fixed for hearing of the said application. THIS CITATION is issued calling upon all persons claiming to have any interest to come and see the proceedings if hey think fit before the grant of probate

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA)

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Win some, lose some

Nitish switching sides leaves the INDIA bloc in confusion but limits his own bargaining power

n a move that did not leave many seasoned politicians flabbergasted, JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar has executed a somersault by rejoining the BJP alliance barely 18 months after he walked out of the NDA, spilling bad blood all around. Importantly, his latest move saw Nitish abandoning the plank of Opposition unity, which he was passionately championing until very recently. In fact, he was the de facto convener of the INDIA bloc, which has been cobbled together to take on the BJP's national might. As a prime mover of the INDIA bloc, Nitish's departure puts a cloud over the coalition's future, which may have to undergo a realignment, potentially impacting its cohesiveness and effectiveness. However, there is more to this development than meets the eye: While it certainly is a major setback for the Opposition, what with Mamata Banerjee and Bhagwant Mann already having announced to go it alone in their respective States of West Bengal and Punjab, it provides an obvious edge to

the BJP while straitjacketing Nitish from performing any more antics, at least till the Bihar Assembly elections next year.

The lack of communication between Bihar Chief Minister Nitish and his deputy, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, is said to have compounded their unease with each other. Matters did not help when Central agencies started questioning Tejashwi's mother and sister in the alleged land-for-jobs scam. The BJP's inclination towards a representative from an extremely backward caste or a prominent Other Backward Classes (OBC) group adds complexity to the situation. Nitish has the additional duty of ensuring that Bihar adds

handsomely to the NDA's kitty in the general elections. Nitish's decision to realign with the BJP has far-reaching consequences, influencing not only his political trajectory but also the future dynamics of the NDA and INDIA bloc. Interestingly, the Bihar developments coincide with Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entering the State. It is sure to have a dampening effect on the Congress' campaign and lower its confidence considerably. However, nothing can be said with finality about Nitish. It will all depend on the understanding he has with the BJP and how the latter treats him. His switch was ostensibly prompted by the treatment he received from his INDIA partners. During alliance meetings, clashes of aspirations and perceived attempts by the RJD to expand its influence within the JD(U) hint at a shifting power dynamic. Nitish's political somersault and his realignment with the BJP have unleashed a series of ripple effects that extend far beyond the borders of Bihar. The departure of this seasoned politician from the INDIA bloc has injected an element of uncertainty into the political equations, casting shadows over the future cohesion and effectiveness of the coalition. The nation observes closely as this strategic realignment unfolds, shaping the future contours of Indian politics.



Artistes perform during the presentation of the best tableau in the Republic Day parade, in New Delhi

Masterstroke or political Harakiri?

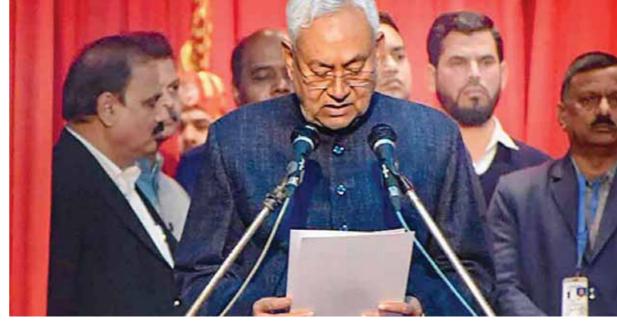


Nitish Kumar has rejoined forces with the BJP, cementing his reputation as a leader known for frequent shifts in political alliances for personal benefit

n Sunday, Bihar Chief Minister Kumar threw a bombshell by leaving the ruling Mahagathbandhan in Bihar and returning to the NDA. coalition. He also quit the opposition coalition which he had built eight months ago. This dismantling of the bloc has dealt a significant blow to the INDIA. bloc at the national level. They missed the slim chance of defeating the BJP. in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. It is worth exploring how Bihar's politics may affect the national landscape. Kumar's decision to return to the NDA. fold could benefit the BJP. but weaken the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD.) and Congress in Bihar. It could ultimately impact the opposition bloc at the national level. This BJP.- J.D. (U) partnership could improve the chances of the BJP. winning more seats in the upcoming 2024 general elections and help Modi achieve a hat trick.

The BJP. tried to break the opposition coalition and partner with the J.D. (U) alliance. The Party sees Nitish Kumar as a critical ally in Bihar and believes their partnership can win in the 2024 elections. Kumar has only 45 seats in the current Assembly, while the RJD. and BJP. have 78 and 79 seats, respectively. Despite this, Nitish managed to continue as the chief minister. Did the Congress party have a hand in Nitish Kumar's departure from the IN.D.I.A. opposition bloc? The reason behind this setback was the decision to sideline Nitish and promote Congress. Kumar accused the Party of being responsible for the failed alliance, arguing that the situation arose due to poor communication.

KC Tyagi of the Janata Dal-United (JDU) has levelled accusations against the Congress party that it conspired to dominate the Opposition bloc. On January 13th in Mumbai, the Chief (CPI-M) Sitaram Yechori proposed Nitish Kumar as the convener of the bloc. This sug gestion was supported by most of the other leaders present. However, Rahul Gandhi voiced his disagreement. Mamata Minister. However, the plan



Banerjee subsequently proposed the name of Congress chief Kharge as the coalition chief, a move Tyagi claims was part of a broader conspiracy. Tyagi stated that Nitish Kumar mobilised an alliance that united all non-Congress

However, it is now disintegrating. The situation in Punjab and Bihar is on the verge of collapse, and the coalition in West Bengal is also falling apart. Nitish confirmed that he left the INDIA. alliance because it didn't meet his expectations. He felt he was the only one working towards the coalition's goals. Although the partnership has brought together all non-Congress parties, the alliance disintegrated in West Bengal and almost collapsed in Bihar and Punjab.

There is also an untold story. Lalu Yadav, the leader of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), encouraged Nitish Kumar to form an opposition coalition at the national level to aim for the position of Prime Ministerial candidate. The purpose of this plan was to pave the way for Lalu Yadav's son to become the Chief

LALU YADAV, THE LEADER OF THE RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL (RJD), **ENCOURAGED NITISH** KUMAR TO FORM AN **OPPOSITION COALITION AT THE** NATIONAL LEVEL TO AIM FOR PRIME **MINISTERSHIP** failed when Mallikarjun Kharge was chosen as the leader of the new coalition. Consequently, Nitish Kumar sided with the (BJP.).

Kumar's credibility has been tarnished because of his unwavering desire to hold power, regardless of the repercussions. He has changed political allegiances several times, always for his benefit, and currently holds the title of Chief Minister

with the longest tenure.

Nitish's track record shows that after exploring other options in 2013, Nitish Kumar left the BJP and allied with the RJD. and Congress. After the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he aligned with the BJP. again and became the Chief Minister in 2020. However, two years later, Kumar left the BJP and formed a new government with the RJD. and Congress. Now he has dumped the RJD. That is why he is called Palti

Despite being an experienced politician, Nitish Kumar's frequent changes in stance have cost him the chance to be considered as a prime ministerial candidate for the opposition party, especially at

the age of 72. The BJP's dismantling of the INDIA. bloc may facilitate Prime Minister Modi to win his third term. In Bihar, mobilising OBC votes to achieve electoral success is imperative. In November 2023, Bihar increased the reservation for Scheduled Castes and Extremely Backward Castes. It is unclear how long the Nitish and the BJP partner-

They may work together until the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, but what will happen afterwards is uncertain. The Bharatiya Janata Party may support Nitish only until the Lok Sabha polls and their support could decrease afterwards-some question whether the alliance will continue until the 2025 Bihar Assembly polls. Nitish has shown that it's pos-

ship will last.

sible to retain power by using clever bargaining skills and winning a few seats, even if only 4% of the electorate belongs to their caste. But one thing is sure: Given Nitish's track record, there could be other flip-flops.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

A father's courageous tight against girl's sexual assault-



Despite threats and coercion, Ranjit, supported by his resilient daughter, pursued justice with unwavering courage

When Ranjit took on the might of the powerful in his tribal village in Ranchi district, Jharkhand, to pursue action against the rapists of his 13-year-old daughter, he didn't think he would get justice. But he was still determined to go ahead. So, even though the village mukhiya was unsupportive and the police inspector on duty refused to file an FIR, Ranjit didn't give up. He called up the Superintendent of police who came to the station to help him file the case under the POCSO Act, leading to the arrest of the three perpetrators.

Thereafter began the real battle. Pressure was mounted from all sides to compromise by offering money to withdraw the case and, marriage to one of the perpetrators. Threats were made to burn their home, kill Ranjit and cause other physical harm to the family. Somehow he braved the storm, riding on the extraordinary and unwavering courage of his daughter, (the sexual assault survivor), who stood firm in her fight for justice.

After a year of struggle, including withstanding

AM YOUR DAUGHTER humiliation in court from the

public prosecutor, Ranjit and his daughter were vindicated when the verdict came in their favour and the three were sentenced to 25 years of rigorous imprisonment.

In a country where rape is reported every 20 minutes and conviction rates are less than 30%, this success inspired filmmaker Nisha Pahuja to document Ranjit and his daughter's dogged fight for justice. To Kill A Tiger, which took eight years to film, has been nominated for the Best Documentary Feature for the 2024 Oscar awards

The survivor, who is now 20, went on to complete school. She hopes to show other survivors like her, that girls are not to blame for sexual assaults and that is why she

film. But had her father Ranjit not stood up for her, she may have remained just another statistic in crime records. Ranjit attributes his ability to withstand all pressures and to raise his voice for justice to the training he received through an intervention engaging men as responsible partners and caring fathers in the context of gender equality and child

Initiated by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) in Jharkhand in 2015, this program developed innovative ways to work with men and boys on issues of masculinities. Implemented in three districts in partnership with NGOs Srijan in Ranchi, Chotanagpur Sanskirtik Sangh (CSS) in Gumla and Sahyogini in Bokaro, the intervention was able to reduce gender differences in the burden of household and care work and, reduce gender disparities in education, according to an independent evaluation of the programme. Importantly, it reduced gender-based vio-

lence in families and villages engaged in the intervention. This assessment found posagreed to reveal her face in the itive mindset changes in atti-

tudes towards child marriage sexual harassment of women/girls and policing of sisters/daughters brothers/fathers. Male members of the program questioned their violent masculinities, began exercising less 'power over' their women relatives supported them more, and started challenging norms on masculinities. This initiative, coupled with

government and other NGO **DILAPIDATED POST OFFICES** interventions, has helped to change two important community norms. It now believes that investment in education, especially girls' education and an increase in age at marriage is necessary. Initiatives like these engaging men and boys have shown that the journey towards more gender-transformative masculinities is possible. What makes it imperative to scale such interventions urgently is the disturbing increase in the incidence of rape between 2020 and 2022. In Ranjit's Ranchi district, figures suggest that approximately every 1.75 days there

is an incident of rape. (The writer is a senior journalist; views expressed are

THE BEHAVIOUR OF BUREAUCRATS

Sir — The idea of bureaucrats embodying exemplary conduct for the public takes a blow when incidents like the Singrauli SDM episode surface. His act of having a female employee tie his shoelace in public triggered outrage, highlighting the stark contrast between expected behaviour and reality. The swift transfer in response to public outcry via social media underscores the need for greater accountability and sensitivity among those entrusted with positions of power.

Such blatant abuse of authority cannot be tolerated, especially in public spaces. Moving forward, the government must prioritize not only competence but also ethical conduct when selecting officials for crucial roles. Common courtesy and respect for basic human dignity should be non-negotiable, forming the bedrock of every bureaucrat's interaction with the public. Only then can we rebuild trust and pave the way for a government that truly serves its people.

N Mateeni | Mumbai

Sir — People are infuriated over the lackadaisical attitude of authorities towards improving the condition of the post offices in the country which has been lying in a dilapidated condition for a long. Residents have complained that even the name of the post office has not been displayed properly at most of the places. Moreover, the internet services fail to provide connectivity during peak hours. A member of the grievances redressal committee said higher authorities of the postal department had not shown any interest in improving the condition of the post office. The infrastructure of the post office needs to be improved.

There is a need to beautify the staff counters to give a neat and clean look to these counters. There is also a need to provide better seating arrangements. There was also a need to recruit more staff at the post offices. Retires invest their hard-earned

IMD completes 150 years

THE EDITOR



ecently, the Indian Meteorological Recently, the initial state of the partment (IMD) celebrated its 150th year of establishment and service to the nation. On this memorable occasion, the IMD has launched several initiatives, such as 'The Weather Analysis and Forecast Enabling System

(WAFES Framework of Climate Services (NFCS). Over the years, the IMD has been playing a significant role in weather forecasting and monsoon predictions. It plays a multidimensional role in the country's major affairs, conducting general elections, the launch of ISRO missions, and the growth of infrastructural and agricultural sectors.

The IMD faces a lot of challenges posed by changing climates and the ever-increasing demand for accurate and timely weather information. As the country navigates the complexities of its diverse weather patterns, perhaps the fusion of AI and traditional meteorological methods may well be the key to a more adaptive and efficient forecasting system, ultimately safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of the people of the country.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

disappointed without getting their hardearned money. It is high time to heed the fact that the residents living in pensioner's paradise are put to the test every time they go to pick up their monthly earnings. It is time to have better working conditions in Post Offices.

C K Subramaniam | Chennai

UGC DEGREE IN MARATHI

Sir — The University Grants Commission has taken major steps to provide degree and post-graduate education in other languages along with the Marathi language. Accordingly, a master's training program has been organized next month for professors to create educational materials. As a result of this, students will get a great opportunity to learn the local language in the coming academic years. Local language has been given priority in the national education policy. But the necessary educational materials are not available. As a result, many rural students are unable to study in the local language. Even during the three years of implementation of NEP, many money, wait for hours and then become course materials are not available in the

Marathi language. It will also be given. The support of the Indian Language Committee will be taken for this. Overall, this is good news in the background of the strangulation of the Marathi language going on in all areas. Today, children are not given education in their mother tongue in many places. If education is given in the mother tongue, children understand quickly and they understand anything immediately. Recently the volume of English has increased in all areas. In many places, Marathi schools are on the verge of closure. Even today, despite fulfilling all the conditions, the Marathi language does not get the status of the Abhijit language from the Centre. For that, it is necessary to try at all levels. Overall, it is necessary to give priority to Marathi in all fields. It is good news that Marathi is being included in degree and post-graduate education. It is expected to be implemented as soon as possible.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

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FIRST COLUMN

AHIMSA: THE PATH TO PEACEFUL EXISTENCE

Buddhism's essence lies in non-violence, compassion and enlightenment



Buddhism, founded by Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha, is a philosophy and way of life that all emphasis on the " as the Buddha, is a philosophy and way of life that places great emphasis on the alleviation of suffering and the pursuit of enlightenment. Central to the teachings of Buddhism is the principle of nonviolence, or "ahimsa," which holds a profound and essential role in shaping the ethical framework of this ancient spiritual tradition. The Essence of Non-Violence in Buddhism:

 Compassion and Interconnectedness: Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected and share a common desire for happiness while seeking to avoid suffering. Non-violence stems from the understanding that causing harm to others ultimately results in harm to oneself. Compassion, a key tenet of Buddhism, encourages followers to cultivate empathy and extend benevolence to all living beings.

• The First Precept: The Five Precepts form the ethical guidelines for Buddhist practitioners, with the first precept explicitly stating, "I undertake the precept to refrain from taking life." This foundational principle underscores the sanctity of all life and emphasizes the commitment to non-violence as a fundamental aspect of ethical conduct.

• Karma and Consequences: Buddhism teaches the concept of karma, the law of cause and effect. Engaging in violent or harmful actions generates negative karma, which can have repercussions in this life or future lives. By practicing non-violence, individuals seek to break the cycle of negative karma, promoting a path towards enlightenment and liberation from suffering.



 Mindfulness and Contemplation: Buddhist practices, such as mindfulness meditation, cultivate awareness and self-reflection. Non-violence is not only manifested in physical actions but also in the thoughts and intentions of individuals. By developing mindfulness, practitioners strive to eliminate harmful thoughts and cultivate a mindset of kind-

• Conflict Resolution: Non-violence plays a crucial role in conflict resolution within Buddhist communities. Rather than resorting to aggression or retaliation, followers are encouraged to seek peaceful solutions through dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation. This approach aligns with the Buddha's teachings on skillful means to address conflicts without causing harm.

• Example of the Buddha: The life of the Buddha serves as a profound example of non-violence. From his renunciation of the royal life to his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the Buddha consistently demonstrated compassion and refrained from causing harm to any being, even in the face of adversity.

Non-violence, deeply rooted in the core principles of Buddhism, is a guiding force that shapes the ethical conduct of its followers. Through the practice of compassion, mindfulness, and the observance of the Five Precepts, Buddhists strive to create a world free from violence and suffering. By embracing the philosophy of non-violence, individuals embark on a transformative journey towards personal well-being, social harmony, and the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

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

Drones can revolutionise the agriculture sector



The Government's inclination towards precision agriculture implies that drones are poised to become an integral component of cultivation practices



n Punjab, where drones remain associated mostly with dropping drugs and arms from Pakistan in border areas, now they are poised to gain a new skyline to revolutionise the agriculture sector.

Kiranpal Kaur of Sekha village in Barnala district, who has only completed her edu-cation up to class 10 and has never travelled in a plane, is now a trained drone pilot. She travels across the district to provide rental services for spraying fertilisers and pesticides and undertaking surveys to check for any crop damage in the fields. These Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are the cutting-edge solution for driving agriculture towards higher efficiency, sustainability and profitability.

To further empower rural women Self Help Groups (SHGs), the subsidised 'Namo Drone Didi' Scheme was launched in December last year with an outlay of Rs.1261 Crore for the period from 2024-25 to 2025-26. The scheme aims to equip and train at least 15,000 women SHGs. Kiranpal is among the first batch of 22 rural women SHGs in Punjab, out of 300 omen SHGs across the country, to be equipped with Kisan drones.

Potential: The market cost of a high-end drone that can perform multiple tasks is approximately Rs 15 lakh. However, the government has introduced subsidised schemes that offer subsidies of Rs 4-8 lakh on each drone and a 3% interest subvention on loans. This initiative is expected to have a significant impact on the Indian agriculture drone market, which is projected to grow at an annual average rate of over 25% from 2024 to 2028. Additionally, the global market for agricultural drones is expected to reach USD 4.7 billion by the end of 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 31.3% during the forecast period of 2024 to 2026. The increasing demand for agricultural drones, which have several applications such as field mapping, automated seeding, fertilizer sprayers, crop analysis, and imaging, is expected to propel market growth in the coming years.

The adoption of drone technology serves as an advanced decision support system

THE USE OF DRONES, **EQUIPPED WITH** HYPERSPECTRAL **IMAGING** TECHNOLOGY, HAS BROUGHT ABOUT A REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN HOW WE **PERCEIVE**

CROP HEALTH

that facilitates targeted intervention and reduces the wastage of critical resources such as water, chemicals, and fertilizers. The high-resolution imagery obtained from drones can provide valuable insights that enable targeted intervention and prevent the unnecessary application of treatments across the entire field. Moreover, drones can help convert the abstract concept of precision agriculture into multifaceted approaches through compelling data and actionable insights.

Remote sensing and monitoring: Effective monitoring of crop health is crucial for farmers to achieve maximum yield and profits. The use of drones equipped with hyper-spectral imaging technology has brought a revolutionary change in how we perceive crop health. In a recent study, it was revealed that drones can detect pest infestations up to 2 weeks earlier than traditional monitoring methods. This early detection can potentially save up to 30% of the narvest that might otherwise be lost. Precision crop management:

Finding a balance between agricultural production and environmental preservation is crucial. The excessive use of chemicals and water scarcity can lead to environmental degradation, which is a pressing concern that the agriculture sector must address.

Drones can play a vital role in solving these issues by accurately identifying areas that require water. By doing so, farmers can reduce water usage by approximately 25%, there-by promoting sustainable agricul-

Drones are not only useful for surveillance purposes, but when equipped with the right analytical capabilities, they can also provide actionable insights for real-time crop management. For example, by utilizing data collected and analyzed by drones, farmers can reduce fer-

by applying it only where needed. This is not only beneficial from a financial perspective but also contributes to sustainable agriculture that reduces environmental impact. Efficient field scouting: Given India's vast geographical expanse, monitoring remote or hard-to-reach farms is a unique challenge. Here, drones are an asset, reducing the hours of manual labour involved in field scouting to mere minutes. According to recent estimates, drones can cover 200 acres in just 30 minutes, offering timely and accurate data. It is valuable for smallholder farmers, who make up close to 68% of the Indian farming community, enabling them to act before a problem like a pest infestation becomes economically dam-

tilizer usage by an average of 26%

aging. This efficiency in field scouting allows farmers to stay ahead of potential issues, even in remote or less accessible parts of their farms. Instead of labour-intensive, timeconsuming manual inspections, drones provide a cost-effective and timely alternative. According to the estimates prepared by IFFCO, a

> utes to spray one acre. Data-driven decision-making: We are in an era where data-driven strategies are not the exception but the rule, and agriculture is keeping pace. Drones generate extensive datasets that offer an in-depth look into crop health, growth patterns, and other variables.

drone takes just around 8-10 min-

For example, a farmer can now optimise planting densities of sugarcane-based on drone-collected data, potentially increasing yields by up to 10%. Imagine a farmer in the heart of Punjab who can now use drone-acquired data to optimise planting densities, manage nutrients effectively, and plan their harvest with precision. Such data-driven decisions can lead to higher yields and, consequently, better profits.

Cost savings: In a sector where profit margins can be wafer-thin, drones serve as a cost-effective ally. Early detection of potential issues allows for timely and, therefore, less costly interventions. By helping farmers make data-backed decisions, drones help avert financial setbacks. By advising on agri-input use before visible crop issues occur, they can prevent the need for expensive interventions later during the crop

Weather forecasting: For a good yield, optimum weather remains crucial. Equipped with weather monitoring technology, drones can serve as weather stations in the sky, providing real-time data on the weather. This information is invaluable for planning farm operations and responding to changing weather patterns. In India, where monsoons can be a farmer's best friend or worst enemy, having up-to-theminute weather data is a gamechanger. It allows farmers to make informed decisions about when to plant, irrigate, or harvest, ultimately improving farm resilience.

Conclusion: The government's shows a growing affinity for precision agriculture suggests that drones are set to become an integral part of crop cultivation practices. By blending traditional farming expertise with advanced technology, farmers can anticipate a more optimistic and fruitful future. Moreover, the government can offset the 80% cost of drone adoption through significant savings on fertilizers and pesticides subsidies, as the use of drone technology leads to reduced consumption.

(The Author is vice-chairman of Sonalika Group and vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

Charting a course for India's maritime security

To strengthen its standing as a global leader in maritime security, it is imperative to adopt a robust Maritime Domain Awareness framework

¬he adoption of a robust Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) framework is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by maritime-dependent industries and nations worldwide. In order to demonstrate the necessary commitment towards the protection of marine infrastructure and maritime domains, India must strengthen its maritime security programmes by keeping the rapidly changing maritime geopolitics and emergence of diverse threats in attention. By prioritising research and development funding' and 'promoting international MDA partnerships,' India can position itself as the global leader in maritime security.

India's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) concepts



must undergo a significant transformation, shifting from traditional water surface-centric initiatives to embrace space-based monitoring and AI-driven Operational Technology (OT) systems. The focus on maritime security needs to extend beyond territorial limitations to encompass regional and global perspectives, recognizing the heightened competition in seas.

al role in maritime affairs, effective MDA models must be prioritized as a fundamental component of the maritime security outlook. This evolution is essential to proactively address emerging threats, enhance surveillance capabilities, and foster international collaboration in securing maritime interests.

In the context of multilateral Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) cooperation, the Maldives' geographical proximity to China's expansion goals and the rising maritime incidents underscore the critical need for vigilant maritime monitoring. Proactively addressing China's increasing influence in the South China Sea is imperative. Given its status as the largest stakeholder Ocean Region, India must take the lead in institutionalizing MDA.

Recognising the inadequacy of limited national capacity to protect vast water expanses, this necessitates fostering multilateral cooperation, promoting inclusivity, and leveraging sophisticated technologies. As one of the largest maritime operators strategically positioned in the region, India should formalize a framework for multilateral MDA cooperation involving relevant parties. This initiative can facilitate access to robust yet affordable MDA resources, while also fostering intelligence sharing and joint exercises to collectively address diverse maritime security challenges. India has demonstrated a

enhancing its Maritime resilience and effectiveness of Domain Awareness (MDA) capabilities, particularly in the aftermath of the "26/11" attacks. Notable initiatives, such as the National Marine Domain Awareness (NMDA) project and the collaboration with France on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) satellite constellation, highlight India's proactive efforts to create an integrated MDA network. To ensure a cohesive and successful MDA approach, there must be a focus on establishing a specialised coordination body, conducting regular audits, and evaluating past initiatives. Recognizing the dynamic nature of maritime threats, the involvement of multiple stakeholders and adaptability to evolving scenarios are empha-Given India's substantial glob- and the key actor in the Indian strong commitment to sized, contributing to the improve reaction and marine unmanned system security

the MDA framework.

Integrating current unmanned technology with human intelligence transforms marine security. India can lead maritime security by integrating these technology into marine plans faster. Real-time threat identification, thorough monitoring, vessel vetting, due diligence, and AI insights to optimise the MDA framework are required. Technology, especially AI, improves Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) for countries like India. For early threat detection, deliberate investments in cuttingedge surveillance and intelligence technology like ASVs, UAVs, and UUVs are necessary. Autonomous systems like ASVs, UAVs, and UUVs

security. Initiatives such as the National Command, Control, Communication, Intelligence (NC3I) network demonstrate the scope of MDA operations. Succinct and adaptable MDA is the result of periodic revisions in response to emerging threats and the active participation of experts from diverse disci-

plines. For autonomous system integration and preparation against emerging threats, a specialised task force, learning processes, and technology infrastructure updates are essential. It is imperative that collaborations be formed with academic institutions, research centres, and technological firms. Cybersecurity and interoperability assure MDA

and efficiency. Regular cybersecurity audits strengthen MDA systems against evolving cyber threats. India must modernise its technology and form new cybersecurity alliances to handle marine security issues. Since the "26/11" event, India's Navy and MDA have increased maritime security initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to securing the whole maritime domain. Recent successes in right-time detection and fast eradication of varied marine threats highlight MDA's naval operating concept evolution. Investment in naval personnel training and cutting-edge technology would help the Indian Navy meet MDA goals.

(The Author is working with an Independent Think Tank; views are personal)

Imran, Qureshi sentenced to 10-year prison term

Tailed former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan was sentenced to 10 years in prison by a special court on Tuesday for leaking state secrets, in a major blow to his bid to return to power in the February 8 general elec-

The decision to sentence Khan and ex-foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi was announced by special court Judge Abul Hasnat Zulqarnain during the hearing of the case held at the special court in Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi estab-lished under the stringent Official Secrets Act. The 71-yearold cricketer-turned-politician is already serving a three-year jail term after being convicted of cor-

Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) has faced numerous troubles starting with the denial of its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, Qureshi, 67, and a number of other party leaders. The controversy first emerged on March 27,



Gauhar Bano Qureshi, left, daughter, and Mehriene Qureshi, wife of Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a deputy leader of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan's 'Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf' party, speak with media following a special court decision, outside the Adiyala prison, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on Tuesday. A Pakistani court on Tuesday sentenced former Prime Minister Khan and one of his party deputy Qureshi to 10

month before his ouster in April 2022 — while addressing a public rally waved a letter before the crowd, claiming that it was a cipher from a foreign nation that had conspired with his political rivals to have his government

Khan did not reveal the contents of the letter nor did he mention the name of the nation it came from. But a few days later, he accused the US of conspiring against him and alleged that

South and Central Asia Affairs Donald Lu had sought his removal. The cipher was about former Pakistan ambassador to the US Asad Majeed's meeting with Lu. The case was filed against Khan and Qureshi on against Khan and Quresh on August 15 last year by the Federal Investigation Agency, which accused both of violating the secrecy laws while handling the cable sent by the Pakistan embassy in Washington in March 2022. The verdict comes nine days before the February 8 general elections, which the PTI is contesting amid a state crackdown and without an electoral

Both Imran and Qureshi have been in jail in the run-up to the elections. While Imran's candidature was rejected, Qureshi was cleared to run for an NA seat from Thar. But today's conviction means that both of them have been disqualified from contesting elections for the next five years, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Both Khan and Qureshi had pleaded not guilty to their involvement in the offence related to the alleged misuse of diplomatic cable for political

The PTI leaders confirmed the development by saying that it was a "sham case with no access to media or public."

"Legal team will challenge the decision in a higher court and hopefully will get this sentence suspended, given the poor proceedings of a case when Islamabad High Court had annulled proceedings twice, ordered access to media and public but on the contrary, access of legal team was denied, and a decision reached in a haste," the party said in WhatsApp message. God willing kaptaan and vice kaptaan will be back soon, and this sentence will be (thrown) in the dustbin in the appeal stage," the party said. This is Imran's second conviction as he was also convicted in the Toshakhana corruption case on August 5, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. It was Qureshi's first conviction.The Islamabad High Court had suspended his sentence. However, a division bench had later rejected Imran's petition seeking the

suspension of the conviction.

At today's hearing held in the Adiala Jail, Khan and Qureshi were given a questionnaire under Section 342 (power to examine the accused) of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

After Imran recorded his statement, the court asked him about the whereabouts of the cipher (diplomatic cable), to which the former prime minister replied: "I have said the same in my statement that I do not know. The cipher was in my office."The judge then sentenced the two leaders to 10 years in jail in the case. After announcing the verdict, the judge stepped out of the courtroom, at which Qureshi protested that his statement was not recorded. PTI leader Gohar Khan said that the special court judge had announced the verdict in haste, adding that proceedings were not being conducted in accordance with the law and the Constitution."He asked questions himself and the way our you cannot find any such examples in history," he said while speaking to the media outside the Islamabad High Court.

reporting. Meanwhile, fighting continued in the Gaza Strip,

even as talks inched forward on

a cease-fire to pause the war, which began when hundreds of

abducting about 250 others.

a blistering air, sea and ground

offensive that killed more than

Hamas-run territory. The ministry count does not distinguish

between fighters and noncom-

batants, but it says about two-

thirds of the dead are women

and minors. The conflict has

also levelled vast swaths of the

ticipated in the October 7

In response, Israel launched

Northern Ireland political party agrees to end 2-year boycott

AP ■ LONDON

Northern Ireland's largest British unionist party has agreed to end a boycott that left the region's people without a power-sharing administration for two years and rattled the foundations of the 25-year-old peace. The breakthrough could see the shuttered Belfast government restored within days. After a marathon latenight meeting, Democratic Unionist Party leader Jeffrey Donaldson said Tuesday that the party's executive had backed proposals to return to the government. He said agreements reached with the UK government in London "provide a basis for our party to nominate members to the Northern Ireland Executive, thus seeing the restoration of the locally elected institutions".

The breakthrough after months of inconclusive negotiations came after the UK government last week gave Northern Ireland politicians until Feb 8 to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly and the local government or face new elections. "All the conditions are in place for the Assembly to return," Northern Ireland Secretary Chris Heaton-Harris said. He said he would publish details of the UK government's new proposals on Wednesday, after briefing all of Northern Ireland's main

political parties.

The DUP walked out in February 2022 in a dispute over post-Brexit trade rules. Ever since, it has refused to return to the government with the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein. Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland's peace process, the administration must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists.

The walkout left Northern Ireland's 1.9 million people without a functioning administration to make key decisions as the cost of living soared and backlogs strained the creaking public health system. Amid mounting public frustration, teachers, nurses and other pub-

lic sector workers staged a 24hour strike this month calling on politicians to return to the government and give them a long-delayed pay raise. The British government has agreed to give Northern Ireland more than 3 billion pounds (\$3.8 billion) for its public services, but only if the executive in Belfast

gets back up and running. The political impasse in Northern Ireland stems from the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union and its borderless trading bloc after decades of membership. The DUP quit the government in opposition to new trade rules put in place after the UK left the EU in 2020 that imposed customs checks and other hurdles on goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK.

The checks were established to maintain an open border between the north and its EU neighbour, the Republic of Ireland — a key pillar of the peace process that ended decades of violence in Northern Ireland. The DUP, though, says the new east-west customs border undermines Northern Ireland's place in the

In February 2023, the UK and the EU agreed on a deal to ease customs checks and other hurdles for goods moving to Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK. But it was not enough for the DUP, which continued its government boycott. Donaldson said further measures agreed by the British government will "remove checks for goods moving within the UK and remaining in Northern Ireland and will end Northern Ireland automatically following future EU laws".

The DUP's decision faces opposition from some hardline unionists, who fiercely guard Northern Ireland's place in the UK and say even lighttouch post-Brexit checks create a de facto internal trade barrier. Dozens of protesters gathered outside the DUP meeting venue outside Belfast late Monday, waving placards saying, "Stop DUP sellout".

Philippines, Vietnam agree to cooperate on disputed SCS

an agreement Tuesday on preventing and managing incidents in the disputed South China Sea during Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s visit to Hanoi. Several countries, including the Philippines and Vietnam, are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over virtually the entire South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping, and high-seas face offs between Chinese and Philippine ships have intensified over the past year in the contested waters, fuelling fears of a wider conflict.

The Philippines and Vietnam agreed Tuesday to increase coordination on maritime issues and work to promote trust and confidence, the Philippine government said in a statement. They didn't release

Hanoi (Vietnam): The details about what actions they Philippines and Vietnam signed would take under the agreement. "Vietnam remains the sole strategic partner of the Philippines in the ASEAN region," Marcos said during a meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart, Vo Van Thuong, referring to the regional grouping of Southeast Asian nations.

He added that while maritime cooperation was the "foundation" for this partnership, relations between the two nations had expanded. The two countries also signed a deal on Tuesday for Vietnam to supply the Philippines with 1.5 million to 2 million metric tons (1.6 to 2.2 million US tons) of rice each year at affordable prices.

Vietnamese rice accounts for 85 per cent of imported rice in the Philippines and the two countries agreed to create a framework for ensuring stable

Israeli undercover forces kill 3 militants

Tsraeli forces disguised as civilian women and medical workers stormed a hospital on Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing three Palestinian militants in a dramatic raid that underscored how deadly violence has spilled into the territory from the war in Gaza. The Palestinian Health Ministry said Israeli forces opened fire inside the wards of the Ibn Sina Hospital in the town of Jenin. The ministry condemned the raid and called on the international community to pressure Israel's military to halt such operations in hospitals. A hospital spokesperson said there was no exchange of fire, indicating that it was a targeted killing. The military said the militants were using the hospital as a hideout, without providing evidence. It alleged that one of those targeted in the raid had transferred weapons and ammunition to others for a planned attack, purportedly inspired by the Hamas assault on southern Israel on October 7 that triggered the



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip, as seen from southern Israel on Tuesday.

Footage said to be security camera video from the hospital that circulated on social media showed about a dozen undercover forces, most of them armed, dressed as women with Muslim headscarves or hospital staff in scrubs or white doctor's

coats. One in a surgical mask carried a rifle in one arm and a folded wheelchair in the other. The forces were seen patting down one man who kneeled against a wall, his arms raised. The Associated Press has not independently verified the footage, but it is in line with its

tiny coastal enclave, displaced 85 per cent of its population, and pushed a quarter of residents to starvation. That humanitarian crisis may soon be exacerbated, the UN has warned, after several countries froze funding to the main aid provider to Palestinians in Gaza following Israeli claims that a dozen of its workers par-

entry points as well.China's state media have reported at Welcome in Sweden

 $F^{\rm rench\ President\ Emmanuel}_{\rm Macron\ was\ welcomed\ on}$ Tuesday with pomp and ceremony at the start of a two-day state visit to Sweden during which he will meet Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the Scandinavian country's monarch, King Carl XVI

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, were greeted by the king in the inner courtyard of the downtown Stockholm royal castle that is the official residence of the Swedish royals. There, Macron and Carl Gustaf reviewed members of the Grenadier Guards that had lined up.

Macron noted that it had been too long since a French president visited Sweden — the last time was in 2000, when Jacques Chirac traveled to the Scandinavian country. "My visit is therefore first and fore-

our partnership in the European Union, and as Sweden prepares to join NATO, our alliance," Macron said. Later Tuesday, Macron is to discuss the future of European security at a military academy in Stockholm, together with Kristersson and the king. Russia's war on Ukraine and Sweden's NATO application are likely to be on the table.

After more than a year of delays, Turkiye earlier this month completed its ratification of Sweden's bid to join NATO, meaning Hungary is now the last member of the military alliance not to have given its approval. All NATO countries must agree before a new member can join the alliance. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden and neighbouring Finland abandoned their traditional positions of military nonalignment

NATO's security umbrella. Finland joined the alliance last

On Wednesday, Macron and his wife are to travel to Malmo, Sweden's third largest city, in southern Sweden, where they will visit a European multidisciplinary research facility under construction and visit a company to discuss green technologies. At home, Macron's government faces angry farmers who have camped out around Paris. They demand better pay, fewer constraints and lower costs. On Monday, they encircled Paris with traffic-snarling barricades, using hundreds of tractors and hay bales to block highways leading to the capital. The French president initially was to travel to Sweden in late October, but the visit was postponed due to the Gaza war that began with Hamas' attack in southern Israel on October 7.

US, Chinese officials hold meeting in Bangkok: WH

Washington (PTI): US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi held more than 12 hours of meetings in Bangkok, the White House said Monday. "Over the weekend, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan held more than 12 hours of meetings in Bangkok with his counterpart from the People's Republic of China, Director Wang Yi," John Kirby, NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the White House told reporters at a news conference here.
"Sullivan and Director

Wang took stock of progress on key issues following the meeting between President (Joe) Biden and (Chinese) President Xi (Jinping) back in November. Now, that includes discussing efforts to resume military-to-military communication, which has occurred; addressing artificial intelligence safety and risks; and advancing bilateral counternarcotics cooperation," Kirby

In fact, the launch of a working group on counternarcotics will begin Tuesday in Beijing. The US delegation will be led by Deputy Homeland Security Advisor Jen Daskal.

"The two sides also held constructive discussions on global and regional issues, including those related to Russia's war against Ukraine; the Middle East, of course; the DPRK: the South China Sea: and Burma. And they also discussed cross-Strait issues," Kirby said. At a separate news confer-

ence with Secretary of State Antony Blinken, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed that the United States and other allies engage with China in dialogue on issues of mutual concern, like climate change and arms control.

China protests deportations of its students | Macron gets ceremonial

The Chinese government States over the treatment of Chinese arriving to study in America, saying some have been interrogated for hours, had their electronic devices checked and in some cases were forcibly deported from the country.Xie Feng, the Chinese ambassador in Washington, said dozens of Chinese holding valid visas have been denied entry over the past few months when returning to school from overseas travel or visiting relatives in China, according to a post on the Chinese Embassy web-"When they landed at the

airport, what awaited them was an eight-hour-long interrogation by officers who prohibited them from contacting their parents, made groundless accusations against them and even forcibly repatriated them and banned their entry," he said on Sunday at an event at



the embassy on student exchanges. "This is absolutely unacceptable."The protest comes as the US and China try to boost student and other exchanges to shore up their relations, which have turned confrontational in recent years over trade, technology, human rights and, more fundamentally, the future direction of the world.Nearly 290,000 Chinese students are in the US, about one-third of the foreign students in the country, according to the embassy post. China has more than 1.3 million students studying abroad, more than any other country, it said.

In a separate online statement, the Chinese Embassy said it had made "solemn representations" to the US government about the treatment of students arriving at Dulles airport in Washington, D.C. The statement reminded Chinese students to be cautious when entering through the airport.

It wasn't clear whether Xie's comments referenced cases only at Dulles or at other

least three cases since Chinese students lost their valid student visas, received a five-year entry ban and were repatriated following long hours of interrogations,

They were asked if their studies were financed by the Chinese government, if they were members of the Chinese Communist Party or its youth arm, and if their research was linked to the Chinese government, the Chinese military or key state laboratories. The students were headed to the National Cancer Institute, Yale University and the University

of Maryland respectively. At least eight Chinese entering the US with valid documents were repatriated since November, according to state media reports. The US Department of Homeland Security and the American Embassy in Beijing did not respond to requests for com-

Indian student who went missing at Purdue University confirmed dead

Washington (PTI): An Indian student pursuing a double major at the prestigious Purdue University in the US state of Indiana, who went missing on Sunday, has been confirmed dead, the university has said.

Tippecanoe County Coroner's Office officials were called around 11:30 a.m. on Sunday to 500 Allison Road in West Lafayette for a possible dead body. Upon arrival, a "college-aged male" was found deceased outside Maurice J. Zucrow Laboratories on Purdue's campus. Neel Acharya went missing on Sunday. "It is with great sadness that I inform you that one of our students Neel Acharya has passed away. The leadership in the Department of Computer Science expresses our profound sorrow for his passing. I am deeply saddened by his loss. My condolences go out to his friends family and all affected," Chris Clifton, interim head of the university's Computer Science Department, said in an email to the department on Monday. Clifton said Neel was a dri-

ven individual and academically talented. He pursued a double major in computer science and data science and was a John Martinson Honors College student. "He aspired to pursue numerous academic achievements and shared profound connections with friends. He was very proud of and cared deeply for his brothers at Triangle Fraternity. Neel could be counted on to reach out to others and make them feel included. He was an achiever and an includer, with

his: most notable qualities being genuine kindness and unwavering compassion," Clifton said. Clifton told the local Purdue Exponent newspaper that he received an email from the Office of the Dean of Students confirming Acharya's death."A deceased person was found that matched Neel's description and had Neel's ID on (him)," he said. Goury Acharya, the moth-

er of the dead student, in a post on X on Monday, said: "Our son Neel Acharya has been missing since yesterday January 28 (12:30 AM EST) He is studying at Purdue University in the US. He was last seen by the Uber driver who dropped him off at Purdue University. We are looking for any info on him. Please help us if you know anything.'

'Universe chants Jai Shree Ram' aerial banner enthrals Indian-Americans

Houston (PTI): "Universe Chants Jai Shree Ram" aerial banner across the US city of Houston enthralled Indian Americans as the excitement of the inauguration of the Ram Mandir continues to thrill the community members days after the spectacular ceremony in Ayodhya. After recent freeze and rain, devotees dressed in ethnic wear, waving saffron flags and chanting "Jai Shree Ram", gathered at the Gujrat Samaj of Houston and other venues on Sunday to watch the spectacle.

The pilot of the aircraft on which the banner was flown was also greeted by resounding chants of "Jai Shri Ram". The organisers spread the word about the first-of-its-kind aerial banner crossing across Houston on Sunday between 1-3 p.m. through a flier "Embracing the

Shri Ram". The devotees stayed glued to the sky across the city as the flier read: "Keep an eye on the sky and chant Jai Shri Ram when you see the plane in your area with the above message."Umang Mehta, the organiser of the aerial show, told PTI: "The project was designed to celebrate the opening of Shri Ram Temple after 500 years of long struggle of sacrifice and determination and send a refreshing message that resonated with members of the Hindu community in a captivating and unforgettable way." Besides being the first word heard from the moon, Houston earned another feather in the cap, with this aerial banner. It was an effective way to share our joy with the world,

as this is probably the first time

in history that an aerial banner

hailing Shri Ram was flown anywhere in the world," Dr Kusum Vyas, another organiser helping the project, said.

The aerial banner project was conceived by Umang Mehta and assisted by Dr. Kusum Vyas, Saurabh Shandilya, Achalesh Amar, and Anant Srivastava with support from the International Hindi Association (IHA)."The clear skies were lit up with Shri Ram chants, a proud divine moment, which amalgamated culture and Indian pride, on the occasion of Pran Pratishtha in Ayodhya," said Swapan Dhairyan, trustee IHA.

Capturing rare moments of the view, Saurabh Shandilya said: "The city experienced an enchanting view as the banner adorned the skies, contributing a cultural vibrancy to our diverse

Indian-origin couple convicted in UK

London (PTI): An Indian-origin couple in the UK, whose extradition was sought by India, has been convicted of exporting more than half a tonne of cocaine to Australia after an investigation found that they were behind a front company that had sent the drugs by plane under a cover load of metal toolboxes.

Arti Dhir, 59, and
Kavaljitsinh Raijada, 35, from

Hanwell in Ealing were identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) investigators after Australian Border Force intercepted the cocaine worth 57 million pounds upon its arrival in Sydney in May 2021, the agency said in a statement on Monday.

Maldives govt approaches SC over Pres impechment bid

 $E^{\text{ven as the main opposition}}_{\text{announced its plan to}}$ impeach Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the government has approached the Supreme Court over the recent amendment to Parliament's standing orders which makes the process of impeachment easier, according to media

reports on Tuesday.

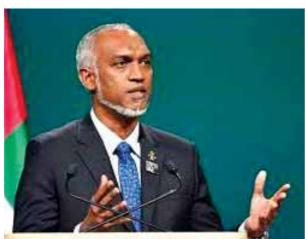
The Attorney General's
Office filed the case on Sunday, the same day when clashes broke out in the House between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers following differences over the approval of four members of his cabinet.

The main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, on Monday, had stalled President Mohamed Muizzu's

Soon after, the MDP had announced that it planned to submit a motion to impeach President Muizzu and that it already started gathering signatures for the same.

The three ministers were, however, re-appointed by Monday evening. The whole row about allowing or not of the three ministers started after seven lawmakers resigned from Parliament in November, to assume top positions in Muizzu's administration.

"But the Elections Commission decided against holding by-elections as the parliamentary elections are scheduled for this year," online news portal Sun.mv reported on Tuesday. Taking advantage of the situation, the main oppo-



amended Parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total

number of MPs, it said. Therefore, Parliament currently requires 54 votes to impeach President Muizzu, instead of the previous 58, as, according to the amendment to the standing orders, the total number of MPs is now 80,

instead of 87. Last week, the MDP and the Democrats announced an alliance to work together in the Parliament "to hold the government accountable." The MDP and Democrats, have 56 MPs between them; 43 MPs from MDP, and 13 from Democrats. They, therefore, have the power to impeach the president, if they wish," Sun.com said.

Attorney General Ahmed Usham told Sun.com on Tuesday afternoon that his office "filed the case with the Supreme Court on Sunday but the court has yet to register the case."On Monday, a lawmaker from MDP confirmed the party had gathered enough signatures to file an impeachment motion. But the party has not yet submitted it.

Pro-China Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incum-

in the presidential runoff held in September last year. On January 24, calling India the "most long-standing ally," the MDP and the Democrats expressed concern about the Muizzu government's "anti-India stance."

The Maldives' proximity to India, barely 70 nautical miles from the island of Minicov in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the mainland's western coast, and its location at the hub of commercial sea lanes running through the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) gives it significant strategic impor-

MDP QUESTIONS REINSTATION OF 3 MINS

A day after Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu re-appointed three members of approval during a vote in Parliament, the main opposition party on Tuesday said it is looking into the legality of his

Led by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which has the highest number of members, the Maldivian Parliament on Monday voted to deny approval to Housing Minister Ali Haidar Ahmed, Islamic Minister Mohamed Shaheem Ali Saeed and Attorney General Ahmed Usham, while Economic Minister Mohamed Spaed page 1987 Minister Mohamed Saeed narrowly survived the same fate. However, by evening, President Muizzu had reinstated all of

Ali Niyaz, a top MDP official, told Sun.mv that the reappointment of the three ministers was open to a huge legal debate. "We (the MDP party) are therefore seeking legal counsel to determine whether the president is authorised to make such a decision and also to decide the MDP's next move. "Our stand is clear. They do not have our approval. This stand hasn't changed," Niyaz was say-

The Maldivian Parliament has a total of 80 members. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has 45, followed by its ally The Democrats (DEM) with 13 members. Of the ruling coalition of PPM-PNC, the Progressive Party of the Maldives has 2 while the People's National Congress has 13 members.

There are three independents while the Jumhooree Party and the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA)

HK begins work on its own National Security Law

Hong Kong began public consultation on a local National Security Law on Tuesday, more than three years after Beijing imposed a similar law that has all but wiped out dissent in the semi-autonomous city. The new law could expand the government's ability to prosecute residents for offenses like collaborating with foreign forces to influence legislation or "publish misleading statements", and to close down civil society organisations.

Some of its provisions threaten criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, calls for the city to enact a national security law, but it's been delayed for decades because of widespread public opposition based on fears it would erode civil liberties. In 2003, an attempt to pass a version of the law sparked street protests that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved.

But the city's crackdown on political opposition likely clears the way for the bill to pass easily. Since 2020, many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists have been arrested, silenced or

society groups have been disbanded, and outspoken media outlets like Apple Daily and Stand News have been shut

The draft text will be written later based on input from public consultation, which will begin Tuesday and will end on February 28. But the city released a 110-page document Tuesday outlining its plans for the legislation.

City leader John Lee called the legislation a "constitutional responsibility".

'We shouldn't wait any longer," he said during a news conference. "The threats to national security, they are real. We have experienced all these threats. We have suffered from them badly."Both the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have hailed the previous National Security Law for restoring stability after the massive pro-democracy protests in

Lee said a local version is still necessary to keep Hong Kong safe against "potential sabotage" and "undercurrents that try to create troubles", in particular surviving ideas about Hong Kong independence. Lee also said that some foreign agents may still be active in

tries, including the UK, UK, and Singapore, have similar laws to safeguard security and Hong Kong would draw from them.
Critics worry authorities

will use a domestic national security law as another tool to crack down on dissidents, further eroding freedoms that were promised to the former British colony when it returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

The Beijing-imposed security law criminalised subversion, advocating secession, and collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs as well as terrorism, but did not cover all the offenses authorities wanted to target. Eric Lai, a research fellow at the Georgetown Centre for

Asian Law, said that the onemonth public consultation was shorter than the three months typical for important laws, saying it appeared to be "window dressing... Highlights of the package include a ban on "threatening

national security by collaborating with external forces to interfere in the affairs of our country or the HKSAR through improper means".

The document also suggested that colluding with an "external force" to publish a misintent of endangering national security could be considered an espionage offence.

It also bans inciting public officials to abandon the Basic Law or their allegiance to Hong Kong and China, expanding an existing law that only covered members of the police and other security forces.Lee promised that people could still criticise the Hong Kong government and express opinions, as long as they do not intend to endanger national security. The government has already muzzled most dissent using existing laws. Hundreds of people have been arrested under the 2020

Some 47 people were charged under the 2020 law for participating in an unofficial primary election, and two were convicted during the same time under an older sedition law for clapping in court and insulting a judge during a trial.

Lee said that the law will not provide for suspects to be transerred to mainland China for trial, unlike the 2020 law. Security chief Chris Tang

said the legislation would cover the use of computers and electronic systems to endanger national security, as well as disclosing state secrets and espionage, treason and sedition. The proposal includes an expanded definition of state secrets that covers the "economic and social development of Hong Kong," as well as defense and diplomatic activities. The leader of the city's largest pro-democracy party called for clar-ification about how the law will define state secrets. Democratic Party Chairman Lo Kin-hei asked if journalists could be liable when reporting on inside information from the government in the public inter-

The proposal also seeks to revise and update several existing laws covering treason, theft of state secrets and espionage Parts of the proposed law are to be applied beyond Hong Kong's borders. The government suggested it may use the new law to cancel the passports of fugitives overseas, citing a similar US law. Such laws could affect the many activists who went into exile fearing arrest. The Hong Kong police have offered bounties of 1 million Hong Kong dollars (USD 128,000) on at least 13 activists abroad, including former lawmakers Nathan Law and Ted Hui, who they accuse of colluding with external forces to impose sanctions on Hong Kong and China.

5 terrorists killed as Pak security officials thwart attack on Mach jail

t least five terrorists of a Abanned group were killed when Pakistani security forces thwarted at least three coordinated attacks with rockets and sophisticated weapons by militants on a high-security jail in the country's restive Balochistan province, authorities said on Tuesday.A senior police official said at least 15 rockets were fired at the Central Mach Jail on Monday night where some dangerous militants and death row prisoners have been incarcerated.Balochistan's caretaker Information Minister Jan Achakzai said the Pakistan Constabulary Balochistan acted swiftly to thwart the attacks during the night. "Five militants of the Balochistan Liberation Army were killed by security forces during the attack," he said."They fired rockets at the Mach jail building but couldn't hit the target," he added.

Unconfirmed reports said at least two policemen were killed while a truck driver was injured in the attack but there was no official confirmation of casualties or injuries. The rockets

were fired from nearby mountains and exploded in different areas of Mach town. After firing rockets, terror-

ists attacked a camp of the security forces near the central jail and also entered the Mach railway station. Announcements were then

made from loudspeakers for the people to remain indoors as the firing continued, the official

The Inspector General Prisons in Balochistan, Shuja Kasi, confirmed that rockets hit the walls of the residential colony of the Mach jail. "Mortar shells and rockets exploded close to the walls of the colony," he said, adding that no casualty was reported so far.

He said at present 800 prisoners were kept in Mach Jail, including some death-row pris-

The minister claimed the terrorists were affiliated with the Aslam Acho group, with the Majeed Brigade of the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) group later claiming responsibility for the attack. One security official said the gun battle between the heavily armed terrorists and forces had lasted

for a couple of hours before they fled into the surrounding mountains before daylight broke.

He said no damage was reported to any of the installations. The attack was an apparent retaliation for Pakistani strikes on what the country said were insurgent hideouts in Iran earlier in January.
The BLA threatened to

launch attacks on security forces in Balochistan and elsewhere following Pakistan's January 18 strikes on their camps in Iran that left at least nine persons

The strikes were made in response to an Iranian strike in Pakistan that appeared to target a different Baloch militant group with similar separatist goals. Pakistan's Balochistan

province, as well as Iran's neighbouring Sistan-Baluchistan province, have faced a low-level insurgency by Baloch nationalists for more than two decades. Although the government says it has quelled the insurgency, violence in the province has per-Iran and Pakistan share a

900-kilometer, largely lawless, border, across which smugglers and militants freely roam.

Ukraine's strikes on targets inside Russia expose Putin's claims

The wail of air raid sirens is **▲** commonplace in Belgorod, a Russian border city whose residents are on edge following a Ukrainian missile attack on a New Year's holiday weekend that left dozens of people dead and injured. A spectacular explosion rocked a huge fuel export terminal on the Baltic Sea southwest of St. Petersburg this month from a Ukrainian drone, forcing the energy company Novatek to suspend operations for several days.

Last week, an apparent drone attack in the Black Sea port of Tuapse in the southern Krasnodar region hit one of Russia's largest refineries and ignited a fire, while another big refinery in the Volga River city of Yaroslavl, north of Moscow came under attack early Monday, but officials said there was no damage. There also have been strikes on a gun-

region and arms producers and military facilities in the Bryansk, Smolensk and Tula regions.Attacks like these are dealing a heavy blow to President Vladimir Putin's attempts to reassure Russians that life in the country is largely untouched by the nearly 2year-old war. "Ukraine has increased its capacity to strike back against Russia," Michael Kofman, a military expert with the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent podcast.

"You see increased Ukrainian attacks against Russian critical infrastructure, retaliatory attacks against cities like Belgorod and greater strikes against Russian military base in Crimea," he said.

As Putin ramps up his campaign ahead of the presidential election in March, he wants to maintain an air of normalcy. But the increasingly frequent Ukrainian attacks

war on Russian soil, and there are other signs the conflict is increasingly challenging the Kremlin's tight control of the political scene. Thousands across Russia have signed petitions supporting the longshot presidential bid of liberal politician Boris Nadezhdin, who has made ending the war his main campaign issue. Wives of some soldiers rounded up in a partial mobilization in 2022 have pushed for their discharge. And despite a tight ban on protests, hundreds rallied in Bashkortostan province, clashing with police to protest the jailing of a local activist.

Certainly the December 30 strike on Belgorod marked a bloody escalation in the minds of many Russians. A barrage of missiles struck the city of 340,000, which is about 40 kilometers (25 miles) east of the Ukrainian border, on a holiday weekend when people

and watching New Year's festive ities. Officials said 25 people were killed, including five children, and over 100 were

Residents described seeing victims with horrific injuries and pools of blood staining the sidewalks. One resident told the RBC news outlet he saw a baby carriage hit by shrapnel the bloodied parents lying next to it. A drug store clerk said injured pedestrians ran into his pharmacy, seeking help.

"I'm seeing requests on social networks from people who write: We are scared, please help us get to a safe place!" said regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov, adding that several hundred people were evacuated, including over 1,000 children heading to camps in neighbouring regions. Holiday and religious festivities were muted or cancelled entire-

EU moves toward using profits from frozen Russian assets to help Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

 $E_{\text{have decided to approve an}}$ outline deal that would keep in reserve the profits from hundreds of billions of dollars in Russian central bank assets that have been frozen in retaliation for Moscow's war in Ukraine, an EU official said. The tentative agreement, reached late on Monday, still needs formal approval but is seen as a first step toward using some of the 200 billion euros (USD 216 billion) in Russian central bank assets in the EU to help Ukraine rebuild from Russian destruction.

The official, who asked not to be identified since the agreement was not yet legally ratified, said the bloc "would allow to start collecting the extraordinary revenues generated from the frozen assets ...

to support the reconstruction of Ukraine." How the proceeds will be used will be decided later, as the issue remains mired in legal and practical considerations.

There is urgency since Ukraine is struggling to make ends meet, and aid plans in the EU and the United States are being held back over political considerations including whether allies will continue helping Ukraine at the same pace as they did in the first two years of the war.

EU leaders will meet on Thursday hoping to approve a 50-billion-euro (USD 54 billion) support package for Ukraine over the solitary opposition of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

Even if using the unfrozen assets, which now go untapped, seems like a practical step to take, many fear that financial weaponisation could harm the standing of the EU in global financial markets.

Early this month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for a "strong" decision this year for the frozen assets in Western banks to "be directed towards defence against the Russian war and for reconstruction" of Ukraine.

The EU step late Monday paves the way if EU nations ever want to impose such measures. Group of Seven allies of Ukraine are still looking for an adequate legal framework to pursue the plan.

The US announced at the start of Russia's invasion that America and its allies had blocked access to more than USD 600 billion that Russia held outside its borders including roughly USD 300 billion in funds belonging to Russia's central bank.

Since then, the US and its allies have continued to impose rounds of targeted sanctions against companies and wealthy elites with ties to Russian President Vladimir

The World Bank's latest damage assessment of Ukraine, released in March 2023, estimates that costs for the nation's reconstruction and recovery will be USD 411 billion over the next 10 years, which includes needs for pub-

lic and private funds. Belgium, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union for the next six months, is now leading the talks on whether to seize

Belgium is also the country where most frozen Russian assets under sanctions are being held.

Russia's assets.

Indonesian police arrest 3 Mexicans after tourist hurt in armed robbery

Denpasar (Indonesia) (AP): Indonesian police said on Tuesday they have arrested three Mexicans for alleged robbery on the resort island of Bali that left a tourist from Turkiye badly wounded. The arrests were made Saturday at a villa in Ungasan village of Badung district in Bali where the Mexican men had been staying since December 7 as tourists, Bali Police spokesperson Jansen Avitus Panjaitan said.

The three men who were arrested and a fourth Mexican man broke into a villa near the popular tourist spot of Kuta last week after pointing their guns at a security guard and forcing him to surrender, Panjaitan said. The four men armed with

three guns sprayed bullets toward several guests who ran out of the villa for safety. The suspects stole US dollars and Indonesian currency worth about USD 5,900 from the villa, and shot a 39-year-old Turkish man in his stomach. left hand and left back chest, police said. The suspects planned the

robbery by preparing guns and surveilling the targeted villa, police said

Surveillance camera recordings and witness accounts led police to the four Mexican suspects, one who was still being sought and three who were paraded at the news conference wearing handcuffs and orange vests.



Supporters of Sri Lanka's main opposition shout slogans as police fire water cannons to disperse them during a protest rally against high taxes and increases in electricity and fuel charges, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Tuesday.

ChatGPT violated European privacy laws, Italy tells OpenAl

AP ITALY

Ttalian regulators said they told OpenAI that its ChatGPT artificial intelligence chatbot has violated European Union's stringent data privacy rules. The country's data protection authority, known as Garante, said on Monday that it notified San Francisco-based OpenAI of breaches of the EU rules, known as General Data Protection Regulation. The watchdog started investigating ChatGPT last year, when it temporarily banned within Italy the chatbot that can produce text, images and sound in response to users' questions.

Based on the results of its "fact-finding activity," the watchdog said it "concluded that the available evidence pointed to the existence of breaches of the provisions" in the EU privacy rules. OpenAI has 30 days to reply to the allegations. It didn't respond immedi-

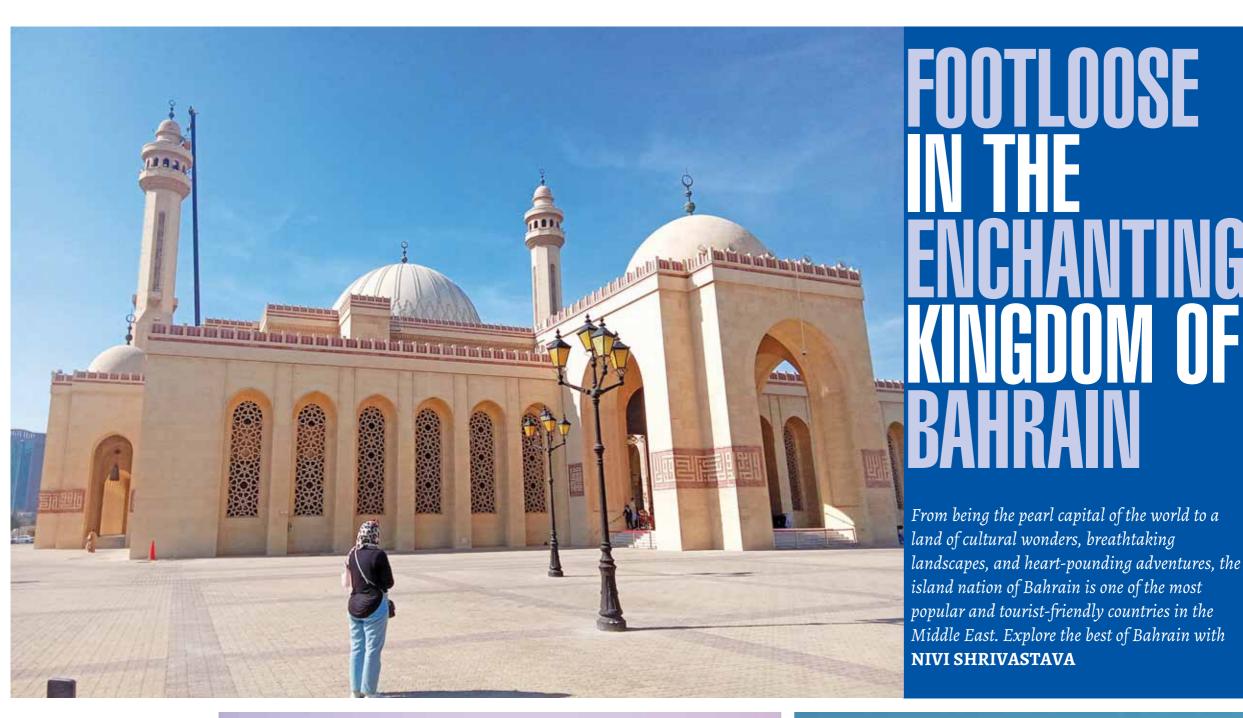
ately to a request for comment. The company said last year that it fulfilled a raft of conditions that the Garante demanded to get the ChatGPT ban lift-

The watchdog had imposed the ban after finding that some users' messages and payment information were exposed and because ChatGPT didn't have a system to verify users' ages, allowing children to get answers from the AI tool that were inappropriate for their age. It also questioned whether there was a legal basis for OpenAI to collect massive amounts of data used to train ChatGPT's algorithms and raised concerns that the system could sometimes

generate false information about The growing popularity of

generative AI systems like ChatGPT are also drawing increasing scrutiny from regulators on both sides of the Atlantic. The US Federal Trade

Commission opened an inquiry last week into the relationships between AI startups OpenAI and Anthropic and the tech giants that have bankrolled them — Amazon, Google and Microsoft. Competition regulators in the 27-nation EU and Britain, meanwhile, are also examining Microsoft's OpenAI investments. AI systems also face broader oversight in the EU, which is finalising its groundbreaking AI Act, the world's first comprehensive rulebook for artificial intelligence.



estled in the heart of the Middle East, the Kingdom of Bahrain stands as a jewel awaiting discovery by discerning travellers and luxury seekers. Blessed with a geographical location unlike any other in the region, this nation seamlessly blends natural wonders, opulent hospitality, vibrant shopping streets, and captivating landscapes. Brimming with rich Arabic culture, the Islamic kingdom gets the name from an Arabic term "al-Bahrayn," which translates to "the two seas." The blend of the two seas is a symbol of the Arabian Gulf and the freshwater springs that run beneath the sea, hinting at the unusual blend of saline and sweet waters surrounding the archipelago. My journey in Bahrain starts at the

iconic Ál Fateh Grand Mosque, a masterpiece of Islamic architecture that serves as a testament to the country's heritage. An usher at the entrance informs us to cover our heads with a traditional scarf and lends us a beautiful abaya (women's robe) as a sign of respect inside the holy mosque. As I stepped into the colossal prayer hall adorned with intricate calligraphy and mesmerizing chandeliers, a sense of serenity and bewilderment captured my attention. The mosque, with its stunning blend of modernity and tradition, is located in the heart of the capital city, Manama. Constructed in 1987, the Al Fateh Grand Mosque is named after Ahmed Al Fateh, the founder of Bahrain, and can accommodate over 7,000 worshippers.

PEARL OF THE GULF

hanks to the distinctive blend of geothermal springs and sea water, natural Bahraini pearls (locally known as dana) are famous for their superior quality. Renowned for its ethical pearl harvesting and fair trade practices by preserving the centuries-old industry, the exceptional brilliance of Bahraini pearls has been a constant throughout the ages, gaining international acclaim for their unparalleled brilliance, purity, and beauty. Our local guide Eman Ali informed us about the ancient connection of Bahrain with the Indian sub-continent. The historic nation was once the seat of the ancient Dilmun civilization from the late fourth millennium to 800 BC, and over the years it has etched its place in history as the epicenter of pearling, boasting a legacy that spans over 4,000 years. The artistry of pearl diving is still carefully preserved at the Bahrain Pearling Trail in the historic district of Muharraq, where you can find the best of glistening pearls that once adorned the crowns of kings and queens.

AN EXOTIC SEASCAPE

o experience the famous blend of seas first-hand, we decide to explore the exotic islands of Jarada with a super-modern motor boat. On a bright sunny day, we cruise along the coastline, reveling in the luxury of the sleek vessel cutting through the gentle waves to reach the secluded paradise. Here we are ready to snorkel in the pristine waters and swim with the vibrant underwater marine life. Schools of colorful fish dance around coral formations, creating a mesmerizing spectacle beneath the surface and we pick up the famous oysters to try our luck in finding the Bahraini pearls. Although, we weren't lucky enough to











find the precious pearls, the fresh catch of the day was served to us for lunch along with some delicious grilled food that our local chefs prepared on the island. For a nature enthusiast like me, the pristine beaches of Jarada Bahrain Island were the most unexpected exotic sight in the Gulf. The azure waters, soft sands, and vibrant sunsets are just perfect to indulge in a leisurely afternoon basking in the sun or go for an adventurous dive in the idyllic retreat.

THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES

Revving up the tempo, I couldn't have missed visiting the Bahrain International Circuit - home to the adrenaline-pumping Formula 1

my Bahrain odyssey was experiencing the roar of engines, the screech of tires, and the pulsating energy of the racing tracks. For those craving a taste of speed, the go-karting experience at the adjoining race circuit provides an exhilarating opportunity to channel their inner racer. Eager to try this one-of-a-kind activity, I went ahead with the go-karting race and donned professional racing gear for a pulsating driving experience. The moment I gripped the steering wheel of the sleek go-kart, I was transported into a world of speed and precision. As I stepped onto the track, the distinctive roar of engines reverberated around me, creating an atmosphere charged with excitement. With every twist and turn, I navigated

Grand Prix. A momentous addition to

the circuit feeling the rush of wind against my face and the roaring sound of the engine pumping up my adrenaline levels. Whether it was the sharp corners that demanded finesse or the straight stretches that begged for full throttle, each lap was worth every dime. The thrill of go-karting at this iconic venue was an experience to remember, and the track's layout, designed to challenge even the most seasoned drivers added an element of strategy and accomplishment. The Bahrain International Circuit's commitment to delivering a world-class motorsports experience was evident in every detail, from the well-maintained track to the state-of-the-art facilities that surrounded it. As I crossed the finish line, the elation of the experience lingered, leaving me with a newfound appreciation for the artistry of motorsports and it most definitely added a thrilling glimpse into the world of professional racing.

A BLEND OF NEW AND OLD

elving into Bahrain's storied past, a visit to the Bahrain Fort offered me a fascinating glimpse into the Dilmun civilization. In the carefully restored ancient ruins, with their labyrinthine passages and towering walls, one can still hear the whispering tales of a bygone era. As the sun set over the Arabian Gulf, the massive fort provided a captivating backdrop for contemplating the rich history of this island nation.

As we left the past behind and entered the vibrant shopping streets of Bahrain, the mood changed instantly. No visit to Bahrain would be complete without indulging in its luxurious markets and upscale malls. The Manama Souq, a bustling labyrinth of narrow alleys, enticed me with its aromatic spices, vibrant fabrics, and intricate handicrafts. Meanwhile, the city's modern malls, such as City Centre Bahrain and The Avenues, showcased a dazzling array of international brands, culinary delights, and entertainment options, offering a taste of Bahrain's cosmopolitan allure.

HURT F1 DREAM ENDED S0 QUICKLY: Nyck

Hurt that his dream of racing in Formula 1 ended "prematurely", Dutch racer Nyck de Vries is busy charting the next chapter of his life as the former champion returns to the Formula E series buzzing with positive

The 28-year-old was axed by F1 team AlphaTauri after just 10 races as he failed to score points in his rookie F1 season last year.

"Of course it hurts in a way to end your dream so quickly and prematurely but I have been able to reflect on it well," De Vries told PTI.

De Vries had entered F1 on the back of championship-winning stints in F2 and Formula

sarily in an easy situation and it didn't quite work out for various reasons. But pressure is relative, everyone experiences it. I'm thankful for the opportu-

"I see life as a journey, it was a chapter in my journey and now I continue my journey elsewhere. When a door closes it always opens a new one," he added.

After the F1 snub, the Dutch racer has returned to the familiar all-electric Formula E series, signing up with India's Mahindra Racing.

role, which meant there was more pressure on him to perform compared to other rookies.

"There was always pressure and I don't think I was necestard in the paddock, in the environment of the paddock of the paddo ment, to see if there was a spot available for me this season.

"Even though I took a bit of time out I also quickly focussed on building my program for this year. I'm very happy to be back in Formula E. I had a good break, good time off and now I'm full of positive energy," he added.

Though he won the 2021 Formula E world champi-onship, De Vries still has a lot to catch up on as the series has moved on from the Gen 2 to Gen 3 cars.

"It was almost like 14-15



months ago that I last drove the Formula E car and that was a Gen 2, I had a couple of brief experiences in a Gen 3 car but a lot has developed since then," he said.

De Vries finished 15th in the season-opening Mexico City race and also in the Diriyah E-Prix. Given Mahindra's strug-gle with reliability and efficiency with the Gen3 car, he has realistic expectations from this

"It's about managing expecta-tions. If people expect us to dominate this year they are dreaming. We collectively know where the team was at the end of last year.
"The hardware didn't really

change, that doesn't mean we can't make a lot of progress and improvements but we have to

"It's more about building process in the moment collecprocess in the moment collectively and getting ready for building a solid structure for the near future when things do change and we start to fight in front," he added.

Much to the disappointment of the Indian fans, the second edition of Hyderabad E Prix was schoduled to be held on

scheduled to be held on February 10 was cancelled by Formula E due to an alleged breach of contract by the new

Telangana government. "India is a big part of our (Mahindra) DNA. I would have been happy to meet our colleagues in India and hopefully make them proud in their home country. It wasn't meant to be this year but hopefully in the future we will get to do it."

eyes one more

PTI ■ PATTAYA (THAILAND)

India's Avani Prashanth is looking forward to a packed calendar over the next few weeks as she criss-crosses across the continent in search of golf glory at one of the world's best amateur events.

The 17-year-old Bengaluru golfer, who started 2024 with two weeks in Australia while getting close to winning at one occasion, is now all set to tee off at the Women's Amateur Asia Pacific (WAAP) golf. Avani will make her fourth

appearance at this event which carries extra significance, since the winner gets to seal a berth in three of the five women's Majors.

On her part, Avani feels this event owes her one good finish before she moves on in her career.

Avani was also thrilled for receiving a special invite to the Augusta National Women Amateur championships, which is held a week before the storied Masters at the Augusta National. Immediately after the 2024

WAAP, Avani will be off for the Kenya Ladies Open on the Ladies European Tour, wherein she finished in the top 10 last

The next on her schedule is another well-known amateur event, the Sage Valley Invitational.

She started 2024 with a runnerup finish at the Australian Masters of Amateurs and missed a top 10 by a whisker at the Australian Amateur Championships.

The focus for Avani and her fielded by the Indian Golf Union, is the WAAP.



Her teammates are Vidhatri Urs, Mannat Brar, Keerthana Rajeev Nair, Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang. They will tee off at the Siam Country Club. The team is accompanied by

former national champion

Vandana Agarwal. The top stars this week will include world No 4 Minsol Kim of Korea, Japan's Hinano Muguruma (22nd), Sayaka Teraoka (23rd), Mamika Shinchi (33rd), Rin Yoshida (38th) and defending champi-on from Thailand Eila Galitsky

India's Avani is 42nd and Rianne Malixi from the Philippines is 43rd.

While this is the fourth appearance at WAAP for Avani, it is the second time for Vidhatri and Mannat. The other three, Keerthana Rajeev Nair, Saanvi Somu and Heena Kang are making their debut at WAAP. together. We have also roomed ter Heena played at the WAAP in 2022 at the same course.

Vidhatri's cousin Pranavi Urs, now a pro on the LET, has also played at the WAAP in the past. Avani, coming off her ninehole practice round just before the rains arrived, said, "Somehow I have not managed to finish better than T-16."

Avani won the 2023 Queen Sirikit Individuals besides picking a title on a women's pro event in Europe. She has multiple top 10s on Ladies European Tour events.

"Many of these girls I have been playing with over the years are nere. We are all close to finishing with our amateur careers It is great to be here once again," she said.

'I have known Eila (Galitsky) since we were about nine. We played together in US Kids Golf, then at various other events. Now we will be playing at Sage Valley and ANWA

Avani added. "I also know others like Rianne

(Malixi), Minsol and many others. So it is great to see everyone here. It's a great event and I really want to do well maybe win it once, before I turn pro," she said.

PRIZES AND FIELD: The

prizes are considered as the very best in amateur golf for women. The winner gets starts at three major championships in 2024 — Women's Open, the Evian Championship and

Chevron Championship. In addition, the winner will get invitations to play in the 121st Women's Amateur Championship, Augusta National Women's Amateur Champion-ship, the Hana Financial Group

Championship and the Women's Australian Open. The field is made up of 90 play ers from 22 countries and only those in the World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR) list are eligible to play. The leading 50 the 36-hole cut and play the

Sneha Singh and Hitaashee Bakshi, who had finished in the top two in both the two earlier legs in the ongoing Women's Pro Golf Tour season, will be back for another shot at the third event which another shot at the third event which begins at Tollygunge Club here Wednesday. Sneha and Hitaashee were tied for second when amateur Nishna Patel won the opening leg. In the second leg, Sneha edged out Hitaashee, who finished runner-up. Sneha, winner of the 2023 Hero Order of Merit, has taken the early lead once again, with Hitaashee chasing her. It has been a good start for Hitaashee, who was injured last year. Besides finishing sec-

ond in the opening two legs, she won the Thailand Tour's LPGA Qualifying Tour, granting her access to pro tournaments in



Amandeep Drall, Ridhima Dilawari and Seher Atwal will be among the other lead-

ing contenders in the third leg.
Some of the other leading stars of Hero
WPGT are going to South Africa for the
Sunshine Ladies Tour starting next month, including Vani Kapoor, Tvesa Malik and Neha Tripathi. Besides, a few others like Amandeep and Seher will also be joining them for some events.

An interesting feature of both the events

held so far this season has been that at least the top three finishers have totalled underpar scores, underlining the tremendous improvement in the quality of women's golf

A total of 29 girls will tee off in the third leg, and the field includes two amateurs — Anaahat Bindra and Sinjini Mukherjee.

India lose to Netherlands in quarterfinals

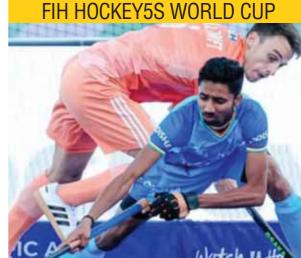
PTI MUSCAT

Mohammed Raheel's hat-trick went in vain as India suffered a 4-7 defeat to the Netherlands in the quarterfi-nals of the FIH Hockey55 Men's World Cup here on Tuesday. Apart from Raheel (1, 7, 25), Mandeep Mor (11') scored for

For the Netherlands, Sander de Wijn (4', 15'), and Alexander Schop (10', 26') scored a brace each, while Lucas Middendorp (12'), Jamie van Aart (13'), and Pepijn Reyenga (20') also found the net.

The match started on a promising for India as Raheel show-cased his skills with a remarkable field goal in the very first minute, setting the tone for an intense competition.

swiftly responded to India's sified their offensive strateearly lead, with de Wijn (4') lev-



elling the score. Undeterred by gies, leading to another goal by

Raheel.

Netherlands, demonstrating resilience, managed to equalise

once again, courtesy of a goal by Schop. The back-and-forth nature of

the match continued, with Mandeep reclaiming the lead for India

Nevertheless, the Netherlands countered with a rapid succes-sion of goals, as Middendorp and van Aart skifully found the back of the net, swinging the momentum in favour of the Netherlands.

Heading into half time, de Wijn delivered a crucial challenge goal, leaving India behind. The second half witnessed the Netherlands asserting their dominance, as Reyenga and Schop extended their lead.

Despite a valiant effort by Raheel, who scored again to complete his hat-trick, India fell against Kenya in the 5-8th place match later in the day

Divya alleges sexism by spectators at Tata Steel Masters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian chess player Divya Deshmukh has alleged that she endured sexist behaviour from spectators at the recently-concluded Tata Steel Masters in Wijk Aan Zee, Netherlands, saying they "focussed on irrelevant things like her hair, clothes and accent" during the tournament. The 18-year-old International Master from Nagpur, who won the Asian women's chess championship last year, shared a lengthy social media post calling out the misogyny that women players face routinely while elaborating on her unpleasant experience in Wijk Aan Zee.

"I have been wanting to address this for a while but was waiting for my tournament to be over. I got told and also myself noticed how women in chess are often just taken for granted by spectators," Deshmukh said.

"Most recent example of this on a personal level would be in this tournament, I played a few games which I felt were quite good and I was proud of them. "I got told by people how the audience was not even bothered with the game but instead focused on every single possible thing in the world: my clothes, hair, accent and every other irrelevant thing," she wrote in an Instagram post on Sunday.
Deshmukh finished 12th in the

Challengers section with a score of 4.5 at the Tata Steel Masters The teenager said while male players

were getting their share of spotlight purely for their game, the women were judged for aspects which had nothing to do with their ability on the chess



"I was quite upset to hear this and I think is the sad truth that people when women play chess they often overlook how good they actually are, the games they play and their strength," she said. "I was quite disappointed to see how

everything was discussed about in my interviews (by the audience) except my games, very few people paid attention to it and it is quite a sad

thing.
"I felt it was unfair in a way because

if I go to any guy's interview there would be way less judgement on a personal level, actual compliments about the game and the player," she asserted. Despite the progress made in women's sports in terms of pay scale, female athletes are still subjected to sexist behaviour and are often asked about their outfits.

Deshmukh said women players are under-appreciated in general and often endure hatred.

...Every irrelevant thing is focused on and hated on while guys would probably get away with the same things. I think women face this on a daily basis

and I'm barely 18.
"I have faced so much judgement including hatred over the years for things that don't even matter. I think women should start getting equal respect," she added.



Mumbai Open Tennis Championship to be held from February 5-11

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Players from 31 countries will take part in the Mumbai Open Tennis Championship to be held here from February 5 to 11 following a gap of six years.

The tournament will be played at the newly-laid tennis courts at the Cricket Club of India (Brabourne Stadium), which is organising the event along with the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA). The third edition of the Mumbai Open will feature three top 100 players in the singles and six top 100 players in the doubles event, which is a part of the WTA USD 125K

The qualifying matches will be played on February 3 and 4 whereas the main draw will

start from February 5. Kayla Day of the US, who won the 2016 US Open girls singles and currently world No 82, will lead the 32-player field, along with Japan's Nao Hibino, who

Tour singles titles. The former French Open semi-finalist Tamara Zidansek, ranked 97th, is the third player from top 100 in the singles. Ankita Raina is the only Indian confirmed in the singles main India's top-ranked doubles

player Prarthana Thombare and her Dutch partner Arianne Hartono have a direct entry into the doubles event. The wild cards for the tourna-

ment are expected to be announced soon. 'The WTA Mumbai Open has

attracted some big names and rising stars in the past, includ-

ing two-time Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, who won her first WTA USD125K title right here in Mumbai in 2017," said members of the organisin commit-tee Sanjay Khandare and Pravin Darade in a statement. Sabalenka had won the first edition of Mumbai Open in 2017 while Thailand's Luksika Kumkhum won the next in

Bhutia demands resignation of AIFF president Chaubey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ormer captain Bhaichung Bhutia on Tuesday demanded the resignation of All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey, holding him responsible for the "current mess" in the adminis-trative side of the game in the country, following the dismissal of Shaji Parabhakaran as secretary general.

Bhutia attended Tuesday's executive committee meeting of the AIFF called here to discuss the dismissal of Prabhakaran on November 7. Prabhakaran was not initially invited for the meeting but joined it virtually. "I told the executive committee members that Kalvan Chaubey and treasurer Kipa Ajay should also resign. Shaji Prabhakaran should not be made the only scapegoat. All three of them are equally

responsible for taking decisions without the approval of executive committee," Bhutia told PTI.

"All three of them were taking the decisions and If Shaji has to be removed, the president and treasurer should also be removed," said the legendary

there is politics in the sport, cutting out each other after little over one year of taking charge, it is not good. The national team has been left in the lurch during the Hangzhou Asian Games as well as in the Asian Cup where there was inadequate training time for the team."

Prabhakaran was removed as secretary general on November 7 for "breach of trust" but a single bench of the Delhi High Court had on December 8 ordered an interim stay on his Another source confirmed not committed any financial

"Indian football is in mess,



sacking.

In its latest order of January 19, the High Court pointed out that Prabhakaran was dismissed by the emergency committee of the AIFF whereas the federation's constitution provides that only the executive committee has the power to do Prabhakaran asked the executive committee members to explain what constituted the "breach of trust".

Bhutia's version and added that

"He (Prabhakaran) asked the executive committee to explain what constituted breach of trust on the basis of which he was dismissed. He said he had

for the AIFF and how can there be a reference to the emergency committee for my dismissal," the source said. "Prabhakaran also said that he would have, in any case, resigned because his relationship with the president was

said that there was no emer-

gency committee constituted

nearing breaking point."
AIFF vice president NA Haris
then intervened and said that the matter is sub-judice. Bhutia, who lost in the AIFF presidential poll in 2022, also

what constituted the "breach of trust" which led to Prabhakaran's dismissal. "I am an executive committee was the breach of trust Shaji

member but I don't know what had committed. I am not told nor briefed about it." Bhutia said that he proposed

said that he did not know the AIFF top brass.

> played its first match just a few Hangzhou. In the Asian Cup, the team was not given adequate training time?

irregularities or fraud. He also live streaming of the AIFF annual general or executive committee meetings for the sake of transparency.

"Nowadays, even the Supreme Court and High Court case hearings are streamed live, so what is the problem in doing the same for AIFF AGM or executive committee meetings. So, I proposed live streaming of AIFF meetings."
Talking about the Indian team's

group stage exit in the AFC Asian Cup in Doha, Bhutia said, "Asian Games and Asian Cup are the two most important tournaments for India and both were disasters, not due to players or coach but because of "In the Asian Games, the team

nours after landing in is the winner of three WTA

series.

Rohit is past his prime: Boycott

India missed Kohli in Hyderabad Test

PTI LONDON

Pormer England opener Geoffrey Boycott feels India skipper Rohit Sharma is "past his prime" and the hosts badly missed the peerless Virat Kohli in the series opener against England Hyderabad. Despite enjoying a strong position after the first innings, India lost by 28 runs against England in the first Test to trail 0-1 in the five-match series.

In the absence of Kohli, the onus was on Rohit to shoulder the responsibility in the batting department but he could only manage 24 and 39 in two innings as the Indian batting crumbled big time while chasing 231 on a fourth

day pitch.
And Boycott believes it is a golden chance for England to beat India in their own backyard after 12 years.

"This India team are ripe for

the taking and England have a golden chance to be the first side to topple them on their own patch for 12 years," Boycott wrote in his column

for 'The Daily Telegraph'.
"India badly miss Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja has a hamstring injury and will not play the second Test. Their captain Rohit Sharma is nearly 37 and past his best. He makes pretty cameos but has scored only two Test hundreds at home in four years. They are also weak in the field. They dropped Ollie Pope on 110 and that cost them 86 runs. It lost them the match." lost them the match."

The Indian spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, Jadeja and Axar Patel looked a pale shadow of themselves on a spin-friendly but not exactly dust-bowl of a Hyderabad

The English batters came out with a perfect tactical ploy, using sweeps and reverse



sweeps to great effect to counter the threat.

"England bamboozled India with their sweeps and reverse sweeps and to lose after taking a 190-run lead will be mind-blowing for India. It has never happened to them before on their own pitches where they thought they were invincible," Boycott wrote. India were dealt a big blow after the Hyderabad defeat as Jadeja and KL Rahul have been ruled out of the second Test starting Visakhapatnam

visakhapatnam on February 2, due to injuries. While Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury during play on Day 4 of the first Test, Rahul complained of pain in his right quadriceps.

Because of the balance that he brings into the playing, Jadeja's absence will be massive feels the legendary

"Jadeja is a huge blow. He is a great all-rounder, top bowler,

brilliant fielder and was their best batsman in the first Test. Kohli is their talisman. He is a magnificent batsman who averages 60 on Indian pitches but he also gives them great energy in the field. He is a big loss and England must make the most of it before he comes back for the third Test," Boycott wrote. He believes that England have India on the mat and could well be hosts' first series defeat in a dozen of years.

"Once in a while a team are in the right place at the right time to clinch a big series win and England could be in that position right now in India. Îndia are due a (series) defeat at home, the signs are good as they have lost Kohli, Jadeja, Mohammed Shami and Rishabh Pant and are playing opponents full of confidence after a remarkable win. England must take this rare opportunity," he further



Deepti rises to joint second among bowlers in T201 rankings

PTI DUBAI

India's Deepti Sharma rose one place to joint second while team-mate Renuka Singh also moved up a spot to 10th in the latest ICC women's T20I bowling rankings issued on Tuesday.

Deepti's rise was largely due to South Africa spinner Nonkululeko Mlaba dropping three places from earlier second to fifth after one wicket from two games against Australia

Similarly, Pakistan's Sadia Iqbal took the joint second spot with Deepti after moving up one place. England's Sarah Glenn was at fourth after rising a rung. England spinner Sophie Ecclestone maintained a healthy lead at the top of the

There was no change within the top 10 of the latest T20I rankings for all-rounders with Deepti retaining the fourth spot. Among batters, India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana remained at fourth to be the highest ranked Indian while Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma and Harmanpreet Kaur were unchanged at 13th, 16th

and 17th respectively. Australia's Beth Mooney overtook compatriot Tahlia McGrath at the top of the T20I rankings for batters after a splendid innings against South Africa, Mooney has already scored two half centuries in the shortest format of the game in 2024, with her most impressive recent knock coming when she scored a brilliant 72 not out from just 57 deliveries in a Player of the Match performance against South Africa in Canberra.

Selected spinners give us best opportunity to beat India: Stokes

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Long before debutant spinner Tom Hartley bowled England to a famous win in the first Test against India, skipper Ben Stokes had asserted that the tweakers picked for the series "rive us the best the series "give us the best opportunity" to humble the Asian giants in their own backyard.

glants in their own backyard.
Playing in his first Test, left-arm spinner Hartley picked up seven wickets in the Indian second innings to script a 28-run victory for the tourists, who gambled with a lone specialist pacer in Mark Wood in Hyderabad. "I think sometimes inexperience can be looked at into a inexperience can be looked at into a bit too much. There's no doubt that experience makes players feel more comfortable and settled, especially in this environment," Stokes said in an interview with 'JioCinema' when asked about his approach behind selecting spinners just before the start of the series opener.

He added: "But the spinners we've selected on this tour are ones we think will give us the best opportunity to beat India. For me, it's not just about the spinners but understanding the talent they have and allowing them to go out there and express that talent and giving them the platform and the best



possible opportunity to not worry about the outcome too much and focus on what cricket actually is." In the run-up to the five-match series, there was a bit of chatter around the visitors' inexperienced spin unit, but Stokes is not one to read

much into all these analysis "As a bowler, your job is to think about taking wickets. As a batsman, it's about going out there and scoring runs. Anything more than that is overcomplicating it. I'm just taking away that fear and anxiety around the outcome.

No team has beaten India in India since 2012, when England under

Alastair Cook emerged triumphant after losing the first Test, and that is not lost on Stokes. On the challenge of beating India in India, Stokes said, "India is a hard place to come and win a game, never mind a five-match series. It's been a mission for any team who've come here to turn over India. We understand that and respect that. "But again, it comes down to opportunity. We've got an amazing opportunity ahead of us. The squad we've picked from spinners to our seam bowlers to our batters, I think it's going to give us the best opportunity to win a series in India." Having led the country to some fines

wins since taking over Test captaincy from Joe Root, Stokes says he never aspired to be a leader.

"It's something I never had any aspirations to do or really thought about too much, to be honest. I never really had too much responsibility around captaining or anything, either in age-group cricket or any other

"I had a little taste of it with the Durham Academy. This opportunity presented itself to me and it was something I couldn't turn down. It's a role I have grown into, it's a role that I've really enjoyed.

"I love everything that comes with it, the responsibility of looking after people from different types of angles. Whether it be out in the field or away from the field. Understanding different individuals and personalities, because in a team sport, you have got a lot of people and not

me mature as a person.
When the discussion turned to 'bazball', he said the team tries to stay

everyone is the same. That's helped

awy from the term. "It's a phrase that was created by the media. Something that we try and stay away from. It just came from what we have managed to do over the last two years and how we've played.

Injuries to Rahul, Jadeja cause major selection headache

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Untimely injuries to Ravindra Jadeja and K L Rahul have given a major selection headache to India as they seek to bounce back in the second Test against England, following a rare defeat at home. Both Jadeja and Rahul were among India's main performers in the first innings of the Hyderabad Test before England turned the tables on the formidable hosts.

Jadeja sustained hamstring injury while going for a quick single during the Hyderabad Test while Rahul has complained of pain in his right quadriceps.

The duo's unavailability adds to the woes of the home side, which was clearly clearly stunned by England's 'Bazball' strategy. Jadeja, with his exceptional all-round abilities, makes himself almost irreplaceable and Rahul too has been among India's standout b roce the ODI and Test format since returning from a surgery in

September.

Virat Kohli remains unavailable due to personal reasons and after a shock reverse in the series opener, the management will be missing him even more in Visakhapatnam where the second Test begins on Friday. Rohit Sharma and Rahul Dravid have enough options to choose from with selectors adding three players to the squad --Sarfaraz Khan, Sourabh Kumar and Washington Sundar.

straightforward selection will be Rajat Patidar, who was also a part of the 15 in Hyderabad. He could take Rahul's place in the



middle-order Kuldeep Yadav replacing Jadeja as the third spinner alongside R Ashwin and Axar Patel.

Another option for India is to do what England did in the opener, play only one pacer for four spin choices. In that case, Mohammed Siraj could make way for Kuldeep and the team can accommodate either Sarfaraz Khan or Sarfaraz Khan or Washington to solidify the

left-arm spin like Jadeja and is a decent batter with a couple of first-class hundreds to his name, can be a dark horse in that race. The ACA-VDCA Stadium in Visakhapatnam has staged two Tests till date and the pitch is usually a batting friendly one at least in the first

Sourabh, who also bowls

innings. Batting first at the venue back in 2019, India had racked up 502 in the first innings against South Africa with Mayank Agarwal getting a double hundred and Rohit scoring a brisk 176 in his first innings as a Test opener. Spin legend Anil Kumble wrist spinner Kuldeep's presence in the

eleven will be helpful.

Will not be afraid to play all spin attack in Vizag: England coach

PTI VISAKHAPATNAM

Tom Hartley has not only ■ won the opening Test for England but more importantly dented the psyche of the Indian batters, who might have to face an all-spin attack in the second Test starting here on Friday.

England beat India by 28 runs in the opening Test with debutant Tom Hartley bagging seven in the second innings having gone for plenty in the McCullum is eagerly waiting

to have a look at the track and judge how it would behave. Although traditionally a highscoring ground, it has seen domination by the spinners

lately, deeming that the conditions are likely to suit the latter.

On the same note, McCullum warned that if the pitch indeed favours the spinners, the Three Lions would not be afraid to field an all-spin attack, hinting that uncapped spinner Shoaib Bashir, who missed out on Hyderabad due to visa delay, could be handed his debut. However senior most spinner Jack Leach's knee iniury will be a concern.

However in Hartley, Joe Root, Rehan Ahmed and Shoaib Bashir, he would still have four spinners and he can replace Mark Wood with an extra batter.

"If the wickets continue to spin



as much as what we saw in the first Test as the series goes on, look, we won't be afraid to play all spinners or a balance of what we've got," the former New Zealand skipper was quoted as saying to SEN Radio.

(Bashir), he was "Bash obviously with us during our

camp in Abu Dhabi, and he really impressed with his skill set. He fitted in seamlessly within the group, and he's a guy who's got an immense amount of enthusiasm, albeit at a young age and pretty limited in his first-class

experience. When he arrived, boys gave him a huge cheer, and he got to witness something pretty special with the fellas bowling us to a Test win. He comes into calculations for the next Test match," added McCullum. McCullum was all praise for

Stokes handled a relatively inexperienced spin attack with such ease.

the manner in which Ben

wickets in his debut Test, including mesmerising figures of seven for 62 in the second innings.

Although the 24-year-old was hammered for 131 in the first innings, especially by young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, he overcame the obstacles in the innings, subsequent McCullum believes that allowing him to play with freedom was a real sign of leadership from Stokes.

"He's only played a handful of first-class games and was probably a bit of a punt, selection-wise. But, we saw something in him that we thought would work over there, and he's a tough Hartley managed to grab nine character,"

for 35 (57 balls, 2 fours). He had two fifties on trot at the start of the

Saharan, nevertheless, did a fine job

tournament.

of consolidating the innings for his side, putting on 87 with Musheer which also happened to be the best stand for India in this game. However, Musheer's century and

Adarsh's contribution at the top

notwithstanding, India lost wickets in a flurry towards the end to fall short of breaching the 300-run mark, finishing at 295 for eight.

Brief scores: India U-19 295/8 in 50 overs (Adarsh Singh 52, Musheer Khan 131, Uday Saharan 35; Mason Clarke 4/64) beat New Zealand U-19 81 in 28.1 overs (Oscar Jackson 19; Raj Limbani 2/17, Saumy Pandey 4/19) by 214 runs.

India pummel New Zealand by 214

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

Musheer Khan's superlative showing in the ongoing ICC U-19 World Cup continued as his second hundred trampled New Zealand by 214 runs in a Super Six encounter here on Tuesday.

After India's top performer Musheer's 131 backed by opener Adarsh Singh's 52 powered India to a huge total of 295/8, left-arm spinner Saumy Kumar Pandey (4/19) and pacer Raj Limbani (2/17) ripped apart New Zealand's top order to bowl them out for a mere 81 in 28.1 over.

Limbani struck on the first and the fifth ball of New Zealand innings to ensure momentum remained India's way throughout.

India vice-captain Pandey finished with splendid figures of 10-2-19-4 as he knocked the stuffing out of Black Caps' chase.

Left reeling at 27/4 in the Powerplay, New Zealand could never really stage a comeback as Indian colts like every edition are looking favourites to win the tournament.

For New Zealand, it was their third heaviest defeat in terms of runs and also their third lowest total at the U-19 World Cup stage.

Earlier, Musheer flayed New Zealand attack with his second century of the ICC U-19 World Cup while opener Adarsh Singh struck 52 as India posted a stiff 296-run

On a perfect batting wicket here at



the Mangaung Oval, Musheer tore apart the Kiwis bowling line-up to become the first batter in the current competition to breach the 300-run mark, going past Pakistan's Shahzaib Khan with his stupendous

En route his 131, Musheer blasted 13 fours and three sixes off just 125 balls and once showed admirable temperament to up the ante just when it was required. Busy at the crease constantly, the

18-year-old Musheer motored on from one end unleashing strokes in all directions, while he began with an upper-cut for a four.

His innings was spruced with fine running between the wickets and ended in the death overs when he was looking to accelerate.

fine recovery job with a 77-run stand for the second wicket after an early blow for India. Adarsh took charge of attacking the bowlers as he looked good while

Musheer and Adarsh carried out a

the pull-shot with elan. It was only unfortunate that he failed to keep a drive in check when Zac Cumming (1/37) teased him with one outside off.

driving on the rise and also played

A thick edge off Adarsh's bat flew to Oliver Tewatiya at point in the 18th over, which ended the charge for the left-handed Indian opener who made 52 off 58 balls with six fours. There also was some

disappointment in store for India captain Uday Saharan who failed to convert his start and was dismissed

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