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BHARAT RATNA: HONOURING
THE LEGACY OF JAN NAYAK**WORLD 9**
'UK HAS NO PLANS
FOR CONSCRIPTION'**MONEY 10**
SPACE INDUSTRY SEEKS LIBERAL
FDI POLICY, PLI IN BUDGET

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ON SPIN FOR
FIRST STRIKE
12 SPORTS

PM urges Ministers not to crowd Ayodhya

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI/AYODHYA

A day after a massive rush at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi advised all his Cabinet colleagues on Wednesday to refrain from visiting the holy city for now and to plan their pilgrimage from mid-February onwards. Besides, well-placed sources in the government and within the ruling party BJP told The Pioneer that each party parliamentary and party office bearer has been given a target to facilitate an Ayodhya visit for people within their constituency or jurisdiction, particularly for women and elderly Ram Bhakts.

Sources mentioned that during the Cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister suggested that, due to the heavy rush and to prevent inconvenience to the public caused by VIPs with protocols, Cabinet members should avoid visiting at this time. The Prime Minister's advisory came after devotees flocked to Ram Mandir in huge numbers a day after the praan pratishthaa ceremony on January 22.

The ministers will visit the Ram Mandir for darshan later from February onwards, sources said. Sources also mentioned that party MPs, as well as the entire Council of Ministers, will "facilitate" at least 2,500 people/devotees from their constituency for the Ayodhya pilgrimage.

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha polls likely to be held in April-May, the same pattern to enable a

ACCORD PRIORITY TO DEVOTEES



large number of visitors to Ayodhya could be replicated by the State ministers and leaders as well.

The Ram Temple at Ayodhya has been a major poll plank and included in the party's manifesto for the BJP for three decades, along with the abrogation of Article 370, and both processes have been completed.

This was the second time that the PM had to urge refraining from visiting Ayodhya, with the first instance occurring in December after he inaugurated several projects, including the airport and railway station.

On December 30, anticipating a large turnout, Modi had suggested that people, out of emotion, should refrain from

visiting Ayodhya on the praan pratishthaa day and instead plan their pilgrimage a couple of days later. In the Cabinet meeting held on Wednesday, Modi also inquired about the feedback from the public after the inauguration of the highly-awaited Ram mandir in Ayodhya.

An idol of the new Ram Lalla was consecrated at the Ayodhya

temple on Monday, with PM Modi leading the event. The ceremony was live-streamed across the country.

Addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting, Union Minister Anurag Thakur shared that the Union Cabinet congratulated PM Modi on the successful praan pratishthaa ceremony.

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INDIA Bloc speaks in confused tones

SAUGAR SENGUPTA/PNS ■
KOLKATA/NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday announced that her party will go solo in the forthcoming general elections. This announcement comes even as her Punjab counterpart and Aam Aadmi Party leader Bhagwant Mann expressed confidence that the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP will win "all" the Lok Sabha seats in the State. Both the TMC and the AAP have been major stakeholders in the seven-month-old Opposition coalition, INDIA bloc, led by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge as its chairman.

Interestingly, the main person who conceived the Opposition group, JDU president and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, in June 2023 after severing ties with longtime ally BJP, is now believed to be hobnobbing to return to the NDA fold. Putting an end to the ongoing consultations and seat-sharing meetings held by Congress with alliance partners, Mamata said, "There is no relationship with the Congress. There is no alliance in Bengal. Let the Congress contest in 300 seats and let the regional parties contest in the remaining seats. We will not tolerate interference in regard to those seats, and if anyone (read the Congress) causes any interference, then we will handle it



in our own way. We will go it alone in Bengal."

Similarly, Punjab Chief Minister said Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will win all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab in the 2024 general election. Dismissing the possibility of an alliance with the Congress party in the State, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said, "AAP is not going with them (Congress)."

"I have said it on several occasions that Punjab will become a hero in the country, and the AAP will win 13-0 in the 2024 Lok Sabha election," Mann said, talking to the media in Chandigarh after a Cabinet meeting. A visibly irked Mamata also rejected the friendship offer from Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, saying that she had not been contacted by anyone from the grand old party.

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Air India fined ₹1.1 crore for safety breaches

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a penalty of ₹1.10 crore on Air India after an airline employee alleged safety violations on flights operated on certain long-range terrain-critical routes, specifically regarding the operations of leased Boeing 777 planes to the US. This is the second time in a week that the regulator has penalised Air India. The DGCA had received a complaint from a former Air India pilot alleging that the airline operated Boeing 777 planes to the US without having the required emergency oxygen supply system.

A comprehensive investigation into the matter was carried out by the DGCA, which also issued a show-cause notice to the airline. "Since the operations of the leased aircraft were not in line with regulatory/OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) performance limits, the DGCA has initiated enforcement action and imposed a penalty of Rs 1.10 crore on Air India," the DGCA said in a release on Wednesday.

Reacting to the development, Air India stated that the raised issue had been thoroughly examined by the airline along with external experts. It was concluded that there was no compromise on safety whatsoever, the airline added. "We disagree with the order issued by the DGCA. The issues raised were thoroughly examined by Air India along with external experts, concluding that there was no compromise on safety whatsoever," Air India said.

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PM headed for mega projects launch in Bulandshahr

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address his first electoral rally scheduled in Bulandshahr on Thursday. Given that Varanasi is the home constituency of Prime Minister Modi, the decision to start the campaign from Bulandshahr has sparked speculation about the strategic reasoning behind this choice. The Prime Minister will launch development projects worth more than ₹19,100 crore, including the 173-km-long double-line electrified section between New Khurja and New Rewari on the dedicated freight corridor (DFC), by flagging off goods trains from the two stations. The rally in Bulandshahr will mark the beginning of the election campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and comes days after the praan pratishthaa of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

The BJP claims that around five lakh people will attend PM Modi's rally in Bulandshahr. Many in the BJP feel that Bulandshahr is also lucky for Narendra Modi, as the PM launched his campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls from this city.

Prime Minister Modi also intends to connect with voters and supporters in areas where the party faced challenges in the previous elections. The focus is on sharing the winning mantra and garnering support in a bid to secure victory in the contested



seats of western Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP, which swept Uttar Pradesh in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections by winning 71 out of 80 seats, saw, albeit inconsequential, a decline of nine seats in the 2019 general elections. Notably, the BJP holds eight out of 14 seats in western Uttar Pradesh, with defeats in six constituencies in 2019. With the upcoming 2024 elections, Prime Minister Modi aims to reverse this trend, particularly in the eight out of 14 seats the BJP currently holds in the region.

As Congress and the Samajwadi Party engage in seat-sharing talks for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the political landscape in Uttar Pradesh seems poised for an intriguing contest in the months to come.

On this occasion, PM Modi will launch development projects worth more than ₹19,100 crore, including the 173-km-long double-line electrified section between New Khurja and New Rewari on the dedicated freight corridor, by flagging off goods trains from the two stations.

Officials stated that this new DFC section is crucial as it establishes connectivity between the western and eastern freight corridors. The section is also noteworthy for its remarkable engineering feat, featuring a one-kilometre-long double-line rail tunnel with high-rise electrification, the first of its kind in the world. This tunnel is designed to seamlessly operate double-stack container trains.

The new DFC section is

expected to enhance the operation of passenger trains due to the shifting of goods trains onto the DFC track, they explained. The prime minister will also inaugurate the fourth rail line connecting Mathura-Palwal and Chhipiyana Buzurg-Dadri sections, along with multiple road development projects. These road projects, developed at a cumulative cost of more than ₹5,000 crore, will improve connectivity and contribute to the economic development of the region, they added.

Among other projects Modi will inaugurate is the Indian Oil's Tundla-Gawaria pipeline and an "integrated industrial township at Greater Noida" (IITGN), developed in line with the prime minister's vision of integrated planning and coordinated implementation of infrastructure connectivity projects under PM-GatiShakti. Built at a cost of ₹1,714 crore, the project is spread over 747 acres and is located near the intersection of the eastern and western dedicated freight corridors, with the Eastern Peripheral Expressway to the south and the Delhi-Howrah broad gauge railway line to the east. IITGN's strategic location ensures unparalleled connectivity, as other infrastructure for multi-modal connectivity is present in the vicinity of this project, officials said.

Centre allows mobile tower in forest to meet 4G target

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Environment Ministry is treading cautiously as it attempts to strike a balance between technological progress and the preservation of natural habitats. It has relaxed regulations for the installation of mobile towers in forest-protected areas, including national parks and wildlife habitats across the country. However, the core and critical wildlife areas of tiger homes are excluded.

This move aims to support the government's ambitious project, spearheading the extension of seamless 4G internet connectivity to 24,680 uncovered villages in the country. The project entails the construction of at least 16,464 telecom towers.

However, the approval for such construction in protected areas comes with conditions. Protected land can be allocated to a "user agency" only if no private or alternative revenue land is available.

In its recently issued guidelines, the Ministry also stipulates that the user agency must obtain an undertaking from the district magistrate confirming the unavailability of alternative land. A user agency refers to the entity proposing and overseeing the



construction and operation of the mobile tower. This entity could be a mobile network operator, government agency, or another party seeking permission for installation within a protected area.

Notably, no proposal for the installation of mobile towers in the core/critical tiger habitat, as notified under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, will be allowed.

The guidelines were formulated in response to a significant number of proposals from various States and Union Territories seeking approval from the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife under the Ministry. These proposals aimed at the installation of mobile towers and laying of Optical Fiber Cables inside national parks, sanctuaries, tiger reserves, and tiger corridors.

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Lakshadweep scripts a melodious story of hope

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Lakshadweep, a group of islands Arabian Sea, which witnessed anti-India protests for a couple of months by secessionist forces who were out to create a hub of narcotics trade, is back to normalcy and that too in style. The residents of the picturesque islands are busy driving the economy in full speed adding colour to the Blue Revolution conceived by the Centre.

Now it is time for agatti, arabianesis, koyas, sulci

palma and purushothamani to rejuvenate the lives of Lakshadweep population. What and who are these characters? That we will come to later in the story.

It all began last month with the two-day long tour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the islands where he interacted with the local residents, especially women. When the women shared with Prime Minister Modi how they are struggling to meet both ends, the latter explained to them about the potential of Pradhan Mantri Matsya



Sampada Yojana (PM MSY), a scheme to bring about the Blue Revolution through sustainable and responsible development.

The Prime Minister conferred with scientists of National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources, a unit under Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Dr UK Sarkar, director, ICAR, briefed the Prime Minister about the five varieties of ornamental shrimps developed by the Centre for Peninsular Marine Fish Genetic Resources.

"Captive breeding of these shrimps is an ideal profession for women because it needs care, skill and of course the motherly touch. Beautiful shrimps with unique colour and design patterns have been developed in captivity by our scientists and we handed them over to the women in Lakshadweep," said Dr UK Sarkar.

Dr TT Ajith Kumar, principal scientist and the chief architect of the project, said community aquaculture units, each with an investment of Rs 2.5 lakh and

minimum ten women fishers started functioning before the Prime Minister's flight reached New Delhi.

"There are 45 women fully engaged in breeding these unique shrimps which are a treat to the eyes. We have developed ornamental fish breeds and they command a good market," Ajith told The Pioneer. "The ornamental shrimps will go much higher places than the ornamental fish breeds and will add colour to the Blue Revolution," he added.

Continued on Page 8

REHEARSING FOR PERFECTION



Glimpses from the final rehearsal for Republic Day parade held in the city on Wednesday

Make seamless arrangements for Ram Lalla darshan: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In response to the overwhelming surge in devotees coming to Ayodhya Dham to witness the divine presence of Ram Lalla, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued comprehensive directives to ensure a seamless and gratifying experience of darshan of Lord Ram to every devotee.

With Ayodhya Dham expe-

riencing a significant influx of devotees from across the nation, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the collective responsibility to guarantee arrangements for their safety, convenience and unhindered darshan.

Following a thorough review with officials from Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust and the local administration, the chief minister asked officials to strengthen coordination between the local administration and the temple trust for effective crowd management.

"Queues along major paths should ensure an orderly flow, with special consideration for the elderly, children and women," he said and added that Ram bhajans should be played at a low volume on major roads in line with devotees' sentiments.

He also stressed that the administration should provide drinking water at various locations, wheelchairs for disabled

or elderly devotees, bonfires for cold weather, and jute matting on major paths. "Install plastic chairs for resting and maintain ongoing cleanliness throughout the city," he said.

"Arrange proper transportation facilities post-darshan, with focus on UP State Road Transport Corporation buses. Postpone additional bus operations to Ayodhya temporarily. Arrange buses and trains on routes with higher devotee concentrations," he said.

He said in the wake of Republic Day, strictly check acts of unruly elements that may insult religious sentiments. The chief secretary, DGP, additional chief secretary to the chief minister, principal secretary (transport) and principal secretary (urban development) will oversee necessary management for safety and convenience of devotees. Inter-state communication/contact with districts bordering Ayodhya and proactive communication for visits by dignitaries are also emphasised.

Lakhs of devotees brave chilling cold

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Despite the temperature plummeting to 2.9 degrees Celsius, the unyielding devotion of pilgrims continues to illuminate Ayodhya as lakhs of devotees turned up for darshan of Ram Lalla for the second consecutive day.

Senior official Jitendra Sonkar said that on the second day after Pran Pratishtha, over 2.5 lakh devotees had darshan of Ram Lalla on Wednesday.

"The process was made seamless as they (devotees) were made to pass through barricades. Resting areas were also made where the people were made to stand and seats were made available to elderly people," he said.

He said: "We understand the predicament of the devotees in the biting cold but their enthusiasm dwarfed the hardship they were facing."

Ramesh Mohan Shastri, a 62-year-old devotee from Chhattisgarh, shared his profound commitment, saying, "The cold weather does not deter us. The darshan has



given me new energy. I am energised."

Usha Mishra, another devotee, highlighted the patience and dedication of Ram devotees, saying, "Ram Bhakts have patience. They are ready to stand in line in this cold, just to have darshan of the 'Prabhu'."

The vibrancy of the scene is further enhanced by the presence of devotees, some barefoot, on the marble floor, braving the cold with unwavering faith.

Sanjay Singh, a member of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) deployed outside the temple, expressed his emotional

response to witnessing the devotion of the people. He said, "It is heartening to see such devotion. Elderly people, some mothers carrying their children, are patiently waiting in queue. The chant of 'Jai Sri Ram' is giving them the energy and power to move on."

Following the overwhelming crowd on the first day when over five lakh pilgrims had darshan, security measures were intensified on Wednesday as the crowd of devotees had gone out of control the previous day.

Reflecting on the security measures, Singh said, "Our primary concern is ensuring

the safety of the devotees. It's emotionally overwhelming to witness their devotion."

As a precautionary measure, the movement of inter-state buses through Ayodhya has been halted and no bus is being allowed to enter the city. Long-route buses now pass via the outer periphery of the city to maintain smooth traffic flow.

Barricading inside the temple premises has been strategically put in place to streamline the movement of devotees and prevent chaos.

A security official highlighted the organised arrangement, saying, "There was a queue outside the temple today. There was an atmosphere of chaos on Tuesday, but that is no more. Devotees are being sent to the sanctum sanctorum by forming groups."

In adherence to the strict instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, devotees are granted entry on to the Ram Janmabhoomi Path after thorough checks. To control the crowd, the police installed sturdy steel railings on Tuesday

night, ensuring a structured and safe passage for the devotees.

The detailed makeup of Ram Lalla, adorned in green clothes and a gold crown, adds a visual spectacle to devotion. Anticipating a continuous influx of devotees, Ram Lalla is scheduled to give darshan for 15 hours, from 7 am to 10 pm. At noon, the temple doors will briefly close for 15 minutes, for offering food to the deity and its aarti.

"The spectacle of devotion, resilience and meticulous arrangements continues to underscore the profound significance of the ongoing pilgrimage in Ayodhya, where the spirit of 'Jai Sri Ram' reverberates, providing devotees with the energy and power to persevere in the midst of the cold," said Sanjay Prasad, Home Secretary to UP government.

NOTICE

This is to Notify that Smt. Parvati Devi W/o Late Santosh Kumar Tiwari is absolute Owner of property situated at Arazi no 191 and 192, purchased Area 09 Bliswa, 1138.38 Sq Mtrs. Situated at vill. Rajpur, Tappa 84, Pargana Kantit, Tehsil Sadar, Distt Mirzapur. Original sale Deed no. 4546 Registered in the records of Sub Registrar Sadar, Distt. Mirzapur Which is Registered on 11.07.2013 At Book no 01, Khand no 5137, Page no 153 to 184 Document no 4546 Wants to Mortgage this property at Punjab National Bank, Civil Lines, Mirzapur. Any Person Claiming any Interest or title in the Property or Otherwise having any Objection can make Representation to the Bank within 7 days of this notice. Punjab National Bank, civil Lines, Mizapur

PUBLIC NOTICE

This public notice is being issued under the instruction of our clientess, Mrs. Nilima Gupta W/o Mr. Shyam Hari Gupta, resident of F-5/6, DLF City Phase-I, near Community Centre, Sikanderpur Ghosi, Gurgaon, Haryana-122002, who intends to purchase the property bearing no. A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Qutub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana, for a valuable consideration, owned and possessed by Mr. Vijay Kumar Khanna s/o Late Sh. R.P. Khanna, resident of A 301, Aurelia, Pan Card Club Road, Baner, Pune- 411045, for the sale of which he has entered into an Agreement to Sell with Mr. Toshank Dhinra S/o Narendar Dhinra, residing at 31A, Anubhav Apartment, Sector-13, Rohini, New Delhi- 110085 on 18th December, 2023 and Mr. Toshank Dhinra by virtue of the terms in his agreement has agreed to nominate his right under his agreement to sell thereby executed an agreement to sell with our clientess on 22nd January, 2024.

This public notice is being issued with a view to make certain that there is no encumbrance to the property bearing A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Qutub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana, accordingly, if any persons' has any right, title or interest in the above said property of any nature whatsoever, either through Shri Vijay Kumar Khanna or Mr. Toshank Dhinra, may feel free to submit their written objection or their claim over the property bearing no. A-10/22, situated in DLF Phase-I also known as DLF Qutub Enclave Complex, Gurugram, Haryana and any objection against the aforementioned agreement(s) to sell.

The objections, if any, along with the justifiable grounds, must be submitted in writing within twenty (20) days from the date of this publication to the undersigned at the following address:

Date: 25.01.2024
Place: New Delhi

N.P. Singh Associates
Advocates & Solicitors
G-3, L.G.F. South Extension,
Part-II, New Delhi- 110049
Cont. No.: 011-46020693, 46020694
E-mail: np.singhandassociates@gmail.com



सूचना

मेरे स्वामित्व के भवन सं० 88/28, प्रेमनगर चमनगंज, कानपुर नगर का मूल विक्रय सं० -192 सन् 1994 एवं 1850 सन् 1995 कहीं गिर गया है जिसका प्रयोग अवधिक होगा। मो. साकिब पुत्र अब्दुल अजीज नि०-98/135, नाजिरबाग कानपुर नगर

NOTICE

Be it known to all that I have changed my name as Madhu Bala instead of Madhu. In future I shall be known as Madhu Bala. Madhu Bala D/O Lt. Shri Mohan Lal R/O, Q.No. 34, type 3, GC- CRPF camp Bijnor Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Saira Bano to Saira Faiyaz Suriya. Now my name should be read, written, known, recognized and called only Saira Faiyaz Suriya. Saira Faiyaz Suriya w/o Faiyaz Farook Suriya B-767, Awaz Vikas Colony, Unnao.

NOTICE

It is informed to all the general public that my name is Sushil Kumar Bajpai S/O Prem Narain Bajpai which is mentioned in my Aadhar card, Pan card, Educational records, By mistake My name is mentioned as Sushil Bajpai in my son's high school mark certificate year 2022-23 (Roll No.23196608) Sushil Kumar Bajpai, Address K-394, Puliyu No.17, Yashoda Nagar, Kanpur-208011

सूचना

मेरे हार्डस्कूल अंक अनुक्रमिक-5200211 वर्ष 2004 के अंक पत्र सह प्रमाण पत्र एवं इण्टर मीडिएट अनुक्रमिक-5180693 वर्ष 2006 के अंक पत्र सह प्रमाण पत्र में पिता जी का नाम S.B. KATIYAR व माता जी का नाम PREETA KATIYAR अंकित हो गया है जोकि गलत है सही नाम मेरे पिताजी का SURYA BHANU KATIYAR व मेरी माता जी का सही नाम PRITA KATIYAR है। जोकि प्रत्येक जगह पेनकार्ड, आधार कार्ड, वोटर आईडी कार्ड पर अंकित है जो सही है। हेमन्त कटियार पुत्र सुर्य भानु कटियार निवासी मकान नं० एच-482 सत्यम विहार आवास विकास नं०1 कल्यानपुर, कानपुर नगर



NOTICE

मैंने अपना नाम SANA DILSHAD W/o GUFRANULLAH से बदलकर SANA GUFRAN W/o GUFRANULLAH रख लिया है भविष्य में मुझे इसी नाम से जाना पहचाना जाए ADDRESS - 187/180 RAM RAI KI SARAI JAJMAU KANPUR-208010

NOTICE

I have changed my name from ARUN BAJPAI to ARUN KUMAR BAJPAI S/O LALTA PRASAD BAJPAI In future I shall be Known as ARUN KUMAR BAJPAI S/O LALTA PRASAD BAJPAI 109/227 R K NAGAR, Kanpur UP

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Rajendra Agarwal to Rajender pal Agarwal. Rajender pal Agarwal S/O late Ram Kumar Agarwal R/O 112/208 Swaroop Nagar kanpur

NOTICE

Be informed that my son Mohammad Oman Khan and his wife Ayesha Khan have been completely evicted from their life and all movable and immovable property due to their bad conduct, behaviour, beating and disobedience. Now neither I nor any member of my family will have anything to do with any work done by him. (Mrs. Barbara Khan wife of Mohammad Adil Khan R/o- E-4/876, Vinay Khand, Gomti Nagar, Police Station-Gomti Nagar, Lucknow)

BJP launches 'Ayodhya Chalo' campaign

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the wake of the consecration of Ram Lalla, the Bharatiya Janata Party launched its 'Ayodhya Chalo' campaign on Wednesday and it is set to continue until March 25. Senior BJP leaders will lead nearly one lakh party workers to Ayodhya daily as part of this massive mobilisation effort.

Devotees from various parts of the country have already begun their pilgrimage to

Ayodhya for the 'darshan' of the newly-consecrated Ram temple. The BJP strategically aims to leverage the temple issue in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, with expectations that this religious sentiment will resonate positively among voters.

Sources indicate that the BJP is meticulously organising arrangements for 50,000 to one lakh workers to visit Ayodhya daily over the next two months. Each day, a senior BJP leader will make the journey to Ayodhya and pay a visit to the Ram tem-

ple. The party is in the process of compiling a list of leaders who will partake in this symbolic campaign, with BJP's national general secretaries and state in-charges entrusted with the responsibility.

Notably, during the consecration ceremony held on January 22, key BJP figures, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, party president JP Nadda, and chief ministers of BJP-ruled states, were notably absent.

Gyanvapi survey to be given to both sides: Varanasi court

PTI ■ VARANASI

A Varanasi court on Wednesday ruled that the ASI report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex survey will be given to both sides while making it clear that the report should not be made public, the counsel for the Hindu litigants said.

District Judge A K Vishvesh said both the Hindu and Muslim parties shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public, said Madan Mohan Yadav, the counsel for Hindu side.

Following a July 21 order of the district court, the ASI carried out the scientific survey of the Gyanvapi premises, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple here, to determine whether the mosque was constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple. The ASI had on January 3 urged the court not to make its

survey report in the Fast Track Court of Justice Prashant Singh after which the matter came in the district judge court who ordered to provide hard copies of the report to the parties.

On Wednesday, the Muslim side pleaded in the district court that the survey report should be with the parties and not be made public. On this, the court said while acquiring that report, the parties shall give an affidavit to keep the report with them and not make it public.

The survey was ordered by the court after the Hindu petitioners claimed the 17th-century mosque was constructed over a pre-existing temple. The ASI had submitted its survey report to the district court in a sealed cover on December 18.

The ASI had on January 3 urged the court not to make its

Gyanvapi complex survey report public for at least four more weeks, citing the December 19 judgment of the Allahabad High Court. ASI counsel Amit Shrivastava had told the district court that the high court had said in its order that, if necessary, the Civil Judge Senior Division Fast Track Court can order a survey of the Gyanvapi complex once again.

Therefore, if the survey report comes into the public domain now, a situation of contradiction may arise. Therefore, four weeks should be given to open the survey report and make it available to the parties, the counsel had said.

The high court had on December 19 dismissed several pleas from the Muslim side challenging the maintainability of a suit seeking restoration of a temple where the Gyanvapi mosque now stands in Varanasi.

Monkey enters Ram temple; beautiful incident, says Trust

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

A monkey entered the sanctum sanctorum of the new Ram temple in Ayodhya and left without creating any trouble, a "beautiful incident" shared by the temple Trust on social media. The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra

ing that it might drop the idol on the ground.

"But as soon as the policemen ran towards the monkey, it ran calmly towards the northern gate. Since the gate was closed, it moved towards the east and passed through the crowd of visitors and went out through the eastern gate without caus-



Trust said security personnel deployed there felt as if Lord Hanuman himself had come for a darshan of Ram Lalla, the child Ram deity consecrated at the temple on Monday.

The temple trust shared the incident, that took place on Tuesday night, on its official 'X' handle.

"A beautiful incident happened in Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple on Tuesday. At around 5.50 pm, a monkey entered the sanctum sanctorum through the southern gate and reached near the 'Utsav idol'. The security personnel posted outside ran towards the monkey think-

ing any trouble to anyone. The security personnel said that for them it is as if Hanuman ji himself had come to see Ram Lalla," the Trust posted on X, formerly Twitter. The old idol of Ram Lalla, which was earlier kept in a makeshift shrine, is now being referred to as 'Utsav idol'. It has also been placed in the sanctum sanctorum of the new Ram Lalla temple.

Lord Hanuman is regarded as a devout disciple of Lord Ram. The grand temple was opened to public on Tuesday, a day after the consecration ceremony led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

ODOP transforming UP: CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, emphasised the transformative role played by the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme in the context of Uttar Pradesh, and said that while during the previous regimes, UP's exports were worth Rs 86,000 crore, today the state was exporting ODOP items alone worth Rs 2 lakh crore. The ODOP scheme was launched in 2018.

Inaugurating the seventh Uttar Pradesh Day at Awadh Shilpgram here on Wednesday, the chief minister also highlighted the significance of Uttar Pradesh Foundation Day as a potent platform for realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision.

He further mentioned that 96 lakh micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) units were operational in the state, providing employment to 40 lakh people from Uttar Pradesh who returned

to the state during the COVID period. He pointed out that the government was extending a security insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh to MSME units in the state in case of accidents or disasters.

The chief minister also distributed Uttar Pradesh Gaurav Samman 2023-24 and launched the ODOP Mart Portal for e-marketing of ODOP scheme products.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath pointed out that the world recognised the potential of Uttar Pradesh through the International Trade Show organised in Noida last year that attracted more than 500 foreign buyers.

Chief Minister Yogi shared that on the third foundation day of the state, the government implemented a new apprenticeship scheme, resulting in the participation of lakhs of youth.

Reflecting on the state's economic condition before 2017, Yogi Adityanath acknowledged challenges such as salary payment issues, chaos and an identity crisis.

He remarked, "After 2017, when the double-engine government started functioning, a better security environment was created in the state. Today, the results are evident. The youth, entrepreneurs and businessmen of Uttar Pradesh no longer need to conceal their identity within the country."

He emphasised that Uttar Pradesh has fortified its economic position over the last seven years, witnessing improvements in infrastructure and connectivity.

Chief Minister Yogi pointed out that while in the past, during festivals, markets used to get flooded with substandard Chinese products, today those products have been replaced by ODOP scheme products from the state. People gift ODOP products crafted by entrepreneurs and artisans from our state.

The chief minister said that the country's cultural and philosophical heritage flowed through the state of UP and this was the reason that with a certain amount

of encouragement from the state government and the support of the Centre, Uttar Pradesh was making a special place in the country and the world. He added that UP, which was known as the heart of the country, has been the philosophical and cultural centre of the country since ancient times.

Expressing the significance of the seventh foundation day of the state, Chief Minister Yogi explained that it holds immense importance as Lord Ram has returned to his abode in Ayodhya, one of the Saptapuris, marking the end of his 500 years of exile. Therefore, the Foundation Day programme becomes a momentous occasion for the people of Uttar Pradesh, he added. On this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi also honoured Lucknow-based scientist Dr Ritu Karidhal Srivastava and Naveen Tiwari of Kanpur with the prestigious Uttar Pradesh Gaurav Samman.

Dr Ritu played an important

role in India's Chandrayaan Mission. She was the deputy operations director of this mission. Dr Ritu Srivastava has been working with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) since 1997.

Naveen Tiwari has established the largest independent mobile Ad tech platform in the world, connecting local businesses in Uttar Pradesh and India with national and international audiences. The lock screen software developed by his enterprise is actively featured on over 400 million smartphones worldwide.

As an entrepreneur, Naveen has not only expanded his presence to 26 countries, but has also played a significant role in elevating India's standing on the global stage. His initiatives have led to the direct employment of 3,000 individuals, while simultaneously providing indirect employment opportunities for thousands more.

On the sidelines of the event, cultural performances from diverse states were also held. The

stage came alive with vibrant folk dances performed by artistes from Gujarat, Jammu-Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Sikkim and Goa. Additionally, artistes from Bundelkhand, Awadh, Purvanchal and Braj region showcased their talents by presenting folk songs dedicated to Lord Ram.

The programme also featured soulful renditions of devotional music as part of Shri Ramotsav-2024, adding a spiritual dimension to the cultural celebration.

Prior to his address, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurated the Shilp Mela and exhibition based on the development schemes of various departments on the occasion of Uttar Pradesh Diwas. During this session, he engaged with entrepreneurs, gaining insights into their showcased products and acknowledging their efforts. He also honoured many people and distributed toolkits under Vishwakarma Shram Samman and ODOP toolkits.

Receiving UP Gaurav Samman a source of pride: Naveen Tiwari

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath awarded UP Gaurav Samman to Naveen Tiwari, founder and CEO of InMobi Group at the UP Diwas programme organised at the Awadh Shilpgram grounds. The award recognises Tiwari's exceptional entrepreneurial vision and outstanding achievements as a tech entrepreneur and acknowledges the role he has played in putting the Indian start-up sector on the global map.

"As a proud native of Kanpur, receiving Uttar Pradesh's highest civilian honour is an unimaginable source of pride for me. I extend my deepest gratitude to the state government, particularly to honourable Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, for the UP Gaurav Samman Award," Tiwari said.

"Having been raised on the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur campus surrounded by excellence, I was fuelled by a desire to showcase India's true potential for innovation, ingenuity and entrepreneurial prowess on the global stage. I am proud to say that we have achieved this with InMobi. Now, with the launch of Glance worldwide, and especially in highly advanced markets like the United States and Japan, I confidently assert that we have achieved this success yet again. It is our commitment to innovation that has not only placed us on the global map but has also led to this profound honour today," he added.

Tiwari's vision is to develop India as the next big hub for building tech products and consumer platforms for the world. He is the founder of InMobi, which became India's first unicorn in 2011. Under Tiwari's leadership, InMobi has grown from an SMS based search service to an AI-led advertising technology giant, spread across Europe, North and Latin America, Asia, Middle East and Australia. In 2019, Tewari founded his second unicorn Glance, a revolutionary AI-powered smart lock screen that has changed the way users engage with the internet. Over 230 million users across India, US, Japan, Indonesia, Latin America, etc. are now using Glance to discover the best in gaming, content, trends and multiple other experiences without even unlocking their phones, directly from the lock screen of their Android phones. Additionally, Tiwari has served as an inspiration to an entire generation of entrepreneurs and has extended his entrepreneurial endeavours to include investments in over 30 start-ups.



Traffic snarls were witnessed in several parts of the city due to the Republic Day rehearsal held on Wednesday

Maya hails Bharat Ratna to Karpoori Thakur ... demands same honour for Kanshi Ram

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Welcoming the announcement to confer Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian honour, on former chief minister of Bihar, Karpoori Thakur, Bahujan Samaj Party chief demanded the same honour for Kanshi Ram.

On social media site 'X', Mayawati wrote: "Nation, on his 100th birth anniversary today, I pay immense tribute to Jananayak Karpoori Thakur, who fought hard throughout his life to ensure a life of social justice and equality, especially for the most backward people, for their constitutional rights."

She further wrote, "He (Karpoori Thakur) was the chief minister of Bihar twice. The belated decision of the Central government to honour such a great personality, Karpoori Thakur, with Bharat Ratna is welcomed. Hearty congratulations and best wishes

to his family and all his followers for this highest civilian honour of the country."

The BSP chief demanded that in the same way, the contribution of BSP founder Kanshi Ram in making Dalits and other neglected people live with self-respect and make them stand on their feet, was historic and unforgettable and he too should be given Bharat Ratna as per the wishes of crores of people.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya said, "What a big difference there is between 1986 and 2024. The Congress governments did not honour the great man who should have been given the Bharat Ratna first. I thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for this. January 24 is also the centenary year of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur. Not only Bihar, he (Karpoori Thakur) was the chief minister of the entire country, especially of the

backward, deprived and poor," Maurya said.

The birth anniversary of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur was celebrated at Rashtriya Lok Dal office in Lucknow on Wednesday.

RLD national spokesperson Anil Dubey welcomed the decision to confer Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur and demanded the same honour for former prime minister Late Chaudhary Charan Singh.

"Like Thakur, Chaudhary Charan Singh also worked for the downtrodden class of society, workers, labourers, youths and farmers," he said.

Janata Dal (United) state convener Satyendra Patel and chief spokesman Diwakar Singh also hailed the Centre's decision to confer Bharat Ratna on Karpoori Thakur.

"He was a great advocate of social justice and worked for the Dalits, MBCs and SC/ST people all through his life," they said.

Gang looting purse, mobile phones busted, three held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of a youth, his live-in partner and their aide on Wednesday, the Gomti Nagar police claimed to have busted a gang which looted mobile phones and purses from women.

It surfaced that the accused had shifted to Lucknow to commit crime after the police in their home district Ghazipur started looking for them.

The accused were identified as Shivam Rai, his live-in partner Khushi Khatoun and their aide Himanshu Yadav, all of Ghazipur district. They were staying at a rented accommodation in Lucknow.

It was found that the house owner had not verified the identities and characters of the accused persons as per rule in Lucknow.

"We have imposed Section 144 of Criminal Procedure Code in Lucknow and the house owners letting out their rooms/flats/houses are required to get the tenants' identities verified. The accused arrested by Gomti Nagar police had criminal records at police stations in Ghazipur district but the fact remained under

the wraps as their landlord did not follow tenant verification process and so action would be taken against the landlord also," DCP (East) Ashish Srivastava said.

He said Khushi's father had filed a complaint with the police in Ghazipur district against Shivam, accusing him of eloping with his daughter.

"Khushi gave a statement in favour of Shivam before the police and in court and so no action was initiated against him by the Ghazipur police," the DCP explained. He said Shivam and Himanshu used to rob people using Khushi as a shield to protect themselves from police.

"They would give the looted item to Khushi who hid the goods and thus nothing was found on them in case of checking by police," he added.

He said the Gomti Nagar police started investigation after the purse of Ranjana Verma was snatched from her in the area in the recent past.

The police said the accused were arrested after scanning CCTV footage.

The police recovered a looted purse and three mobile phones from the accused.

Maid found hanging in PGI area

Lucknow: A 19-year-old girl working as a maid at a flat was found hanging in the servant quarters in PGI police station area on Tuesday morning.

Police registered a case on Wednesday and informed the family of the deceased. The police did not disclose the findings in the autopsy report.

The girl was a resident of Loni Katra locality of Barabanki and was found hanging around 7 am on Tuesday.

Fog, cold to continue

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Despite a sunny relief, the dense foggy conditions and cold weather will continue for the next three days in Lucknow. Mohammed Danish, senior scientist at MET department, said that in the morning hours, Lucknow would witness fog which would be followed by a sunny interlude but evenings would be cold.

He said Lucknow recorded a minimum of 6.5 degree Celsius on Wednesday. The coldest place in the state was Shahjahanpur with 4.6 degree Celsius temperature.

Danish further said that in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, there would be no sunny relief and they would witness cold day conditions.

"Lucknow is also facing cold day conditions because there is a departure of four degrees from normal in the maximum temperature recorded by the city," he said.

Danish said that the minimum temperature recorded in eastern and western Uttar

Pradesh would be 5-6 degrees Celsius and the maximum between 14-16 degree Celsius.

Meanwhile, Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Dr Roshan Jacob, in view of the severe cold wave conditions, carried out a surprise inspection of the night shelter in Vineet Khand of Gomti Nagar late at night to take stock of the facilities at night shelters built in the city. She instructed the officials concerned to ensure that there was no shortage of basic arrangements like adequate amount of blankets, lukewarm water for drinking, adequate amount of bedding and food etc. in all the night shelters of the city.

Instructions were also given to enter in the register the names of the people staying overnight in the register and to take special care of cleanliness. Blankets were distributed to the needy by the divisional commissioner.

She also inspected night shelters at Charbagh, Mithaiwala crossing and other places.

Maurya mocks consecration of Ram Lalla

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party general secretary Swami Prasad Maurya, often in headlines for his controversial statements, has now mocked the consecration of the Ram Lalla idol in Ayodhya.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi along with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath performed the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on January 22.

Swami Prasad Maurya said, "If a stone is given life and it can become alive, then why can't the dead walk?"

He said this while speaking from the stage in a programme organised on the eve of the birth centenary of Karpoori Thakur.

Maurya also said that "such drama is being staged to deflect the attention of the people from burning issues like unemployment and inflation".

He said President Droupadi Murmu also distanced herself from this (Pran Prathistha) programme despite being invited to it because she remembered her humiliation in Delhi.

The SP leader said that Lord Ram was being worshipped for thousands of years and crores of people had been worshipping him for thousands of years, so what was the need to consecrate him.

"In fact, if this was a religious ritual then all four Shankaracharyas would have been present in it," Maurya said.

A programme was organised by the Samajwadi Party on the eve of the birth centenary of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur at Lanka Maidan in Ghazipur. The chief guest was Swami Prasad Maurya and while speaking he raised questions on the consecration of Lord Ram's idol in Ayodhya.

Large number of projects under implementation in UP: Report

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh attracted over Rs 4,41,850 crore of new investment projects between 2018-19 and 2022-23 and completed projects worth Rs 2,65,765 crore, according to the just-concluded study.

While releasing the study conducted by the MSME Export Promotion Council along with the Confederation of Organic Food Producers and Marketing Agencies (COFI) on Wednesday, MSME EPC Chairman Dr DS Rawat (former secretary general of Assocham) said a large number of projects were under active implementation.

During these five financial years, the investment projects revived were worth Rs 38,800 crore as per the data available with the Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE), stated the study.

The study found that in 2022-23, the total investment projects outstanding were worth Rs 12,44,436 crore and those under implementation were worth Rs 8,47,445 crore. The study has stressed the need for setting up a high powered committee to expedite the implementation of the projects to avoid any cost escalation.

During the period of reporting, the investment projects by the private sector (2018-19 to 2022-23) were of Rs 2,17,420 crore and the completed projects were worth Rs 92,478 crore. While the total investment projects outstanding in 2022-23 were worth Rs 6,81,746 crore, the under implementation projects were of Rs 3,97,623 crore. In 2022-23, there has been a significant increase in the new investment projects by the private sector as against an investment of Rs 44,708 crore in 2021-22; it touched to Rs 89,750 crore.

There was a significant increase in the total credit by the banks during 2022-23. It was noted that the total bank credit was Rs 7,55,488 crore as against Rs 6,46,284 crore in 2021-22.

FORM NO. 5	
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL	
600/1, University Road, Near Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow (Area of Jurisdiction-Part of Uttar Pradesh)	
Summons for filing Reply & appearance by publication O.A. 942 OF 2023	
Summons to defendant under section 19(4) of the Recovery of the Debts due to the Banks and Financial Institutions Act, 1993 read with the rule 12 and 13 of the Debts Recovery Tribunal procedure, Rules, 1993	
ARYAVART BANKAPPLICANT BANK
M/S VERMA MOTORS & OTHERS	VERSUSDEFENDANTS
To,	
DEFENDANTS:-	
1. M/S VERMA MOTOR	(Borrower)
Through its Proprietor Sri. JAY KUMAR	
Add: First Floor, Jai Kumar Showroom, Achali Khera, Mohanlalganj, Lucknow, 227308.	
2. Sri. JAY KUMAR	(Borrower)
S/O Sri. Ram Kishor	
R/O Achali Khera, Mohanlalganj, Lucknow, 227308.	
3. Sri. SHIV MURTI	(Guarantor)
S/O Sri. Bajinath Verma	
R/O. Sarai Karora, Gosaiganj, Lucknow, 227125.	
In the above noted application, you are required to file reply in Paper Book form in two sets along with documents and affidavits personally or through your duly authorized agent or legal practitioner in this Tribunal, after serving copy of the same on the applicant or his counsel/duly authorized agent after publication of the summons and thereafter to appear before the tribunal on 16/07/2024 at 10.30 A.M, failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.	
REGISTRAR	
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL, LUCKNOW	

	बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda	Regional Office, Kanpur Metro Region: 118/330, 1st Floor, Gumti No. 5, Kaushalpur, Kanpur - 12
DEMAND NOTICE Branch : SSI-1, Sarvodaya Nagar, Kanpur		
Here by this is to inform that under named borrower has not repaid principal and interest thereon of the loan. Therefore the loan become NPA on below Dated . A notice under section 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 was issued at last known address, which was returned undelivered. Therefore we again inform to under named borrower/ Guarantor by this public notice to repay the loan amount due including interest and other expenses as mentioned in this notice within 60 days from the date of publication of this notice otherwise bank will take action u/section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act 2002.		
The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets, that after publication of public auction/inviting quotation/tender/ private treaty your right to redeem the secured assets will not be available.		
Name and Address of Borrower / Guarantor and Security agreement with brief description of securities/N.P.A. Date & Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice		
Borrower (1) : M/s Adarsh Interiors, Proprietor : Shri Jagdamaba Prasad Sharma S/o Late Ram Charan Sharma, Address : 117/46, Sarvodaya Nagar, Kanpur and also at I-2/168, Mini MIG, Awais Vikas No. 1, Panki Road Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar.		
N.P.A. Date : 28-12-2023 • Demand Notice Date : 29-12-2023		
Property (1) : Land and building situated at I-2/168, Mini MIG, Yojna No. 1, Panki Road Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Jagdamaba Prasad Sharma S/o Late Ram Charan Sharma, Area : 103.12 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : 18 Mtr. Road, South : I-2/200 House, East : I-2/167 House, West : I-2/169 House. O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 28,64,946.73 + Intt. + Others Charges		
Borrower (2) : Shri Jagdamaba Prasad Sharma S/o Late Ram Charan Sharma, R/o : 117/46, Sarvodaya Nagar, Kanpur and also at I-2/168, Mini MIG, Awais Vikas No. 1, Panki Road Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar. Guarantor : Shri Satyendra Kumar Kushwaha S/o Shri Pyare Lal, R/o : House No. 117/P/5, Flat No. 35, Kedarnath Apartment, Kakadeo, Kanpur.		
N.P.A. Date : 28-12-2023 • Demand Notice Date : 29-12-2023		
Property (2) : Land and building situated at I-2/168, Mini MIG, Yojna No. 1, Panki Road Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Jagdamaba Prasad Sharma S/o Late Ram Charan Sharma, Area : 103.12 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : 18 Mtr. Road, South : I-2/200 House, East : I-2/167 House, West : I-2/169 House. O/s Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 13,89,192.05 + Intt. + Others Charges		
Date : 25-01-2024		
Place : Kanpur Nagar		
Authorised Officer		

	Bandhan Bank	Regional Office: Netaji Marg, Nr. Mithakhali Six Roads, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad-6. Phone: + 91-79-26421671-75		
SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE				
NOTICE is hereby given under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorized Officer issued demand notice to the borrower(s) on the date mentioned against the account stated hereinafter calling upon them to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of said notice. The borrower(s) having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular the borrower(s) that the undersigned has taken the symbolic possession of the property described herein below under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said Rules on the date mentioned against the account. The borrower(s) in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of the Bank for the amounts, interest, costs and charges thereon. The borrowers' /mortgagors' attention is invited to the provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.				
Name of borrower(s) & Loan Account No.	Description of the property mortgaged (Secured Asset)	Date of Demand Notice	Date of Symbolic Possession Notice	O/s Amount as on date of Demand Notice
Mr. Raj Narayan Shukla Mr. Mausam Kumar 20007670000013	All that piece and parcel of the immovable property situated at Gata No. 460 Mini, Vill. Jaitupur, Pargana Tehsil Rae Bareilly, Taluka and Dist: Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh-229001 and bounded by: North: Plot of Poonam Rawat, East: Plot Station Master Rawat, West: Plot of Chote Lal, South: Raebareilly to Parsadepur Road	20.10.2023	20.01.2024	Rs. 19,04,561.44 (as on 30.09.2023)
Place: Raebareilly Date: 25/01/2024		Authorised Officer Bandhan Bank Limited		

UP has progressed very fast: Tiwari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Former UP Minister of State for Religious Affairs (Independent Charge) and MLA Dr Neelkanth Tiwari said Uttar Pradesh has progressed very fast on the path of development. He was speaking as the chief guest after inaugurating the main programme of the three-day 'UP Day' (January 24-26) at Namo Ghat here on Wednesday. The day was celebrated with full enthusiasm in the district.

Dr Tiwari highlighted the glorious history of UP, a great confluence of unique Ganga-Jamuni (communal harmony) culture and said it was a land of Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Baba Vishwanath, Kabir, Guru Ravidas and many others. Extending his hearty greetings to all the citizens on UP Foundation Day, he said UP is also the sacred 'janmaboomi' (birthplace) and 'karmaboomi' (land of work) of many saints, great personalities and freedom fighters. The former minister said the presence of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, the land of spiritual and cultural history of UP, has infused a new energy infused in the entire country, including the state. "I pray to Lord Ram for all-round development of the state and progress of the people of the state," he said adding that this theme the main theme of UP



MLA Dr Neelkanth Tiwari inaugurating the UP Day programme at Namo Ghat in Varanasi on Wednesday.

Day event is investment and employment. He said that since the year 2018, UP Day is being celebrated with full pride in the entire state and on this day the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has launched many major public welfare schemes. "Uttar Pradesh is the answer to all questions. The establishment of Ramrajya was conceptualised in UP with the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. UP was the state that gave biggest challenges to the British government as the spark of the 'First War of Independence' in 1857 erupted from UP itself ultimately forcing the British to

leave India," he said, adding that law and order has been strengthened, the goons and mafia have left the country and entrepreneurs are eager to set up industries in the state. Dr Tiwari said along with the state, industries are also being set up on a large scale in Kashi. "Ayodhya's Deepotsav started with 51,000 'diyas' but this time more than 21 lakh lamps were lit. The entire country is proud of the consecration of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya. Spirituality and culture are our heritage" he said and appealed to the people to preserve their pride. He said that soon UP

will become a state with one trillion dollar economy and India, a country of five trillion dollar economy. Chief Development Officer (CMO) Himanshu Nagpal, while welcoming the guests said that UP is a state with immense potential. "It is the most populous state of the entire country. Today UP has become a major tourism centre of the country. This state has come a long way on the path of development. Before UP Day next year, every person was asked to contribute in achieving the new targets of the state," he said. On the occasion Dr Tiwari gave cheque of

₹10 lakh each to Ankit Patel and Dwarika Gupta under the Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarozgar Yojana and Shivshankar Maurya under the Pradhan Mantri Srijan Rozgar Yojana and provided toolkits under the Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana to Jiyut Patel, Shiv Kumar, Ashok Kumar, Sarvesh Kumar Verma, Ganga Ram Vishwakarma etc.

On the occasion an exhibition based on public welfare schemes of the government, on the history of formation of Uttar Pradesh and products of different departments were also organised. The voters' oath was also administered to the people. Additional District Magistrate (City) Alok Verma, Deputy Director Agriculture, Basic Shiksha Adhikari and others were also present.

EXHIBITION: An exhibition related to photography was organised which was inaugurated on Wednesday by the dean of the faculty Dr Uttama Dixit, by garlanding the statue of Mahamana Malviya and lighting the lamp at the Mahamana Art Gallery in the Faculty of Visual Arts in the Banaras Hindu University (BHU). It was a part of a five-day photography workshop being organised in the Department of Applied Arts, Faculty of Visual Arts, BHU, from January 22 to 27.

No respite from foggy conditions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

There was no respite from dense foggy conditions here for the second consecutive day on Wednesday. No flights could landed at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babatpur, in the morning hours due to extremely low visibility. Several flights were cancelled while one of the two premier Vande Bharat Express trains, 22415/22416 was cancelled from both the destinations while the other 22435/22436 arrived almost six hours late. Foggy conditions also slowed down the wheels of the buses.

The other trains running hours behind schedule were the 12565 Swatantrata Senani Express and 12382 Poorva Express which were delayed by over 13 hours. The 15003 Chauri Chaura Express was delayed by more than six hours and more than a dozen others by one to five hours. The flights which were cancelled were 6E2235, VS8419 and SG389 from New Delhi, 6Y968 and 6E968 from Bengaluru. Shivering cold wave and dense fog forced the tourists to keep away from the internationally famous Ganga ghats, especially Assi, Kedar, Panchganga, Dashashwamedh and Namo Ghat which witnessed thin attendance of visitors during the morning hours.

KDA organises lottery for allotment of flats

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) organised lottery for allotment of under construction 1,152 flats in Shatabdi Nagar under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY-Urban) - Sabke Liye Awas' scheme on Wednesday. The lottery was organised at the Shatabdi Nagar stadium among the 4,663 eligible applicants. Likewise, the KDA will also organise the lottery for allotment of the remaining 1,542 flats in Jawaharpuram scheme among the 1,815 eligible applicants on January 27.

The construction of flats under these schemes was being carried out under the Prime Minister Housing Scheme (Urban) for the economically weaker section (EWS) people. The KDA had invited applications through advertisements in the past. After verification of the applicants by SUDA, the final list of eligible applicants participated in the lottery held on Wednesday and will also do so on January 27. The KDA has made arrangements for the seating, sound, electricity, refreshment, publicity etc. on the spot to facilitate the applicants, said the press release of PRO SB Rai.

Rally taken out on Girl Child Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

On National Girl Child Day, a public awareness rally was taken out from the office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in Durgakund on Wednesday. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary, along with five-year-old girl Anokhi Baranwal, flagged off the rally.

On the occasion important messages were given on female foeticide, 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao', gender equality, Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques

(PCPNDT) Act and Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act. The theme of this year's day was 'Digital Generation - Our Generation'. The CMO said National Girl Child Day has been celebrated every year on January 24 since 2008 with the aim of spreading awareness about the falling sex ratio of girls and removing the inequalities faced by them in the society. He said at present girls are achieving new success in various fields of the country like health, sports, education, industry, digital mission, space etc.

IFFCO MD visits Phulpur unit



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

IFFCO Managing Director Dr Uday Shanker Awasthi and his wife Rekha Awasthi were given a grand welcome on reaching IFFCO Phulpur unit. The guard of honour was given by the security guards at the IFFCO Guest House. The MD was welcomed by Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) Sanjay Kudesia and Rekha Awasthi by Vineeta Kudesia.

The MD also visited the office of IFFCO Employees' Union and IFFCO Officers' Association where he was welcomed by the officials of the

union and association.

During it General Managers Sanjay Vaish and MD Mishra, JGMs respectively Anita Mishra and AP Rajendran, PK Singh, Sanjay Bhandari, PK Patel, Ratnesk Kumar, Arvendra Kumar and SK Singh, HOD Human Resources Shambhu Shekhar, IFFCO Officers' Association president Anurag Tiwari and general secretary Swayam Prakash, IFFCO Employees Union president Pankaj Pandey, general secretary Vinay Yadav, PRO Sonu Tiwari and other officers and employees were present.

INTERACTION: As a run up to Republic Day an interaction with veterans of Prayagraj from all three services and their family members was organised here on Wednesday to honour their selfless devotion to the service and their sacrifice.

Air Marshal RGK Kapoor, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Central Air Command (CAC) and Dr Suneeta Kapoor, President Air Force Families Welfare Association (Regional) interacted with the veterans and their families and expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the veterans for their contribution to service.

The aim of the interaction was to reach out to the veterans to understand their concerns and to extend necessary support wherever required. During the interaction the Air Marshal also informed that as a part of 'Service at Doorstep' concept, SPARSH Service Centres have been established at all stations under the CAC addressing the issues in an effective manner.

'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme organised



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

On the occasion of National Girl Child Day, the Shakuntala Devi Rajya Siksha Sewa Sansthan organised the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme at the Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kidwai Nagar, on Wednesday. Principal Prof Anju Chaudhary, while welcoming the guests, said the main objective of the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme launched by the union government in 2015 was to protect girls and motivate them for higher education.

Oration, poetry and poster competitions were also organised and the participants were awarded the certificates by the

Shakuntala Devi Sansthan. Special guests Dr Arti Trivedi (state president), Piyyush Mishra (state vice president), Rashmi Shukla, Kajal Awasthi (state general secretary), Abhaya Trivedi (city president, Yuva Brigade), Dipti Sachan (district organisation secretary), Swati Bajpai (district secretary), Ruchi Mishra (district executive body member) were present. Prof Manisha Shukla anchored the programme. Prof Kalpana Srivastava, Prof Pratibha Srivastava, Prof Sangita Sitani, Prof Neeta Mishra, Prof Vandana Sharma, Prof Manisha Shukla, Prof Rashmi Chaturvedi and incharge of Discipline Committee Prof Mamta Gangwar were also present.

PM to address new voters today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi will address the new voters through virtual platform at the new voters' conference to be organised by Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) on Thursday. The BJYM will organise the conferences at 806 places in 403 assembly constituencies of Uttar Pradesh. The PM will also talk to some new voters. The conferences will be held at four places in each assembly segment of the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency. Total 20 conferences will be held in this parliamentary constituency of the PM. Giving this information at a press conference in Circuit House here on Wednesday, state BJYM vice-president and in-charge of Kashi region unit Ranjit Rai 'Bade', along with office-bearers of regional, district and city units of BJYM, said preparations have been completed for the new voters conferences to be held on January 25. For the purpose more than 25,000 new



voters have been contacted and their online registration has also been done. He said this is a historic programme of Yuva Morcha, youth wing of the BJP. Rai said it was on the strength of the youth that the BJP had achieved a huge majority in 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha and 2017 and 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections. "It was the youth who uprooted the Congress government and handed over the reins of power to Narendra Modi. Living up to the aspirations of the people under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, a wave of development was seen in the country and the state and all sections of the society were benefited equally without any discrimination," he said. Regional BJYM gen-

eral secretary Ashutosh Pal, regional treasurer, district in-charge Akhilendra Singh Sunny, district president Aman Sonkar, regional vice-president and city in-charge Ashutosh Singh and city president Rajat Jaiswal were also present.

Meanwhile, as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, since 2011 January 25 is celebrated as the National Voters' Day (NVD). In this sequence Thursday will be celebrated as the 14th National Voters' Day.

A district level voter awareness programme will be organised at Namo Ghat from 12 noon under the chairmanship of DM S Rajalingam. The chief guest will be Divisional Commissioner Kaushal Raj Sharma.

CPSIDA कार्यालय बरिष्ठ प्रबंधक (सि०), विद्युत सप्लाइ-प्रबन्ध, 3030 राज्य औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण, ए-1/4, लखनपुर, कानपुर 208024

सुनिश्चय

एतद्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि दिनांक 17.01.2024 को समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशित औद्योगिक क्षेत्र चोथ सेक्टर शांतिपुर एवं लखीपुर खोरी में सीटीडी की करा लाने के कार्य हेतु निविदा संख्या (2024_SIDC_881889_1) जो दिनांक 17.01.2024 से दिनांक 24.01.2024 तक अपलोड की जाती की एवं दिनांक 27.01.2024 को खोली जानी है, अप्रतिभार कार्यों से अब उक्त आमंत्रित निविदाओं में निविदा प्रारंभ अपलोड करने की अवधि दिनांक 31.01.2024 तक विस्तारित की जाती है। यह निविदाएं अब दिनांक 01.02.2024 को अपरिम 14.00 बजे खोली जायेंगी। शेष विवरण वे शी कार्यालय परीक्षी।

बरिष्ठ प्रबंधक (सि०), उपकरणऔद्योगिक, कानपुर

Mishap death

KANPUR (PNS): A middle-aged man was fatally knocked down by a speeding unidentified vehicle on Miyaganj-Sandila road under the Asiwani police station area of Unnao. He was identified as Anant, resident of Vinoba Nagar, Unnao.

Paush Purnima snan today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Paush Purnima snan will take place on Thursday. With this, the arrival of Kalpavasi will start in the Magh Mela area. More than 30 lakh devotees are expected to arrive on this bathing festival. The mela administration has prepared 10 bathing ghats for convenience of devotees. Police posts are constructed near the ghats. Magh Mela in-charge officer Dayanand Prasad said preparations for this bathing festival have been completed.

Night shelters have been made in three different places in the Mela area. In view of the Paush Purnima snan the railway administration banned the entry of passengers from Civil Lines side at Prayagraj Junction which will remain effective till 11:59 pm on Thursday.

During this period the arrangement for arrival from the city side and exit from the Civil Lines side will remain in force.

During the mela, special mela trains have been arranged for passengers by the railways.

DM: Focus on increasing polling in rural areas

CORRESPONDENT ■ JALAUIN

District Magistrate Rajesh Kumar Pandey said our target is 75 per cent polling in the district. He said the polling percentage is higher in the urban areas and the focus is to increase it in the rural areas.

He said a team of 10 officers has been formed at the booth level. They will go to the voters and motivate them to cast their

votes. A number of people have been identified who have already migrated from the rural areas and settled in other districts and after talking to them those who assured that they will cast their vote in other districts and their names were removed from the voters' list and the revised one was published.

The DM said 'nukkad natak' are regularly being organised to motivate people to vote.

Preparation to develop Boat Club on lines of Juhu Chowpatty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Now preparations are on to develop the Boat Club here on the lines of Juhu Chowpatty of Mumbai. For this a consensus has also been reached in the 26th meeting of the Boat Club Managing Committee. The rates of boats will be reduced here and tourists interested in boating will now be able to book their tours from various hotels.

To further develop the Boat Club in view of the tourists along with renovation

and development of an open air restaurant on the terrace, the surrounding ghat will also be beautified. While developing the club on the lines of Chowpatty, children's play area, water sports, various handicraft stalls, cultural activities and eating joints and vending zones will also be developed there. It has been agreed to start a grand water laser show on the ghat adjacent to the boat club.

A meeting of officials was held in this regard on Tuesday evening. Here along with action plan, it was also agreed

upon to prepare DPR.

Many important decisions were taken in the 26th meeting of the Boat Club Managing Committee under the chairmanship of Divisional Commissioner (DC) Vijay Vishwas Pant and in the presence of Mela Adhikari (Maha Kumbh) Vijay Kiran Anand, District Magistrate Navneet Chahal, Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) Vice-Chairman Arvind Kumar Chauhan and other officials concerned. Necessary discussion was held regarding the renovation of Boat Club.

Social protection camp held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The central and state governments together make provisions for certain social schemes. A two day social protection camp was held in the ART Centre, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) for awareness of PLHIV patients. Its inauguration was done by CMO Dr Sandeep Chaudhary, Director of Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) Prof SN Sankhwar, Prof Sangeeta Kansal, Dr Manasvi Chaudhary from Department of Medicine, BHU, DTO Dr Piyush Rai and nodal officer Dr Jaya Chakravarty by lighting the ceremonial lamp. The chief guest Dr Sandeep Chaudhary

said it is important that all social schemes are made available to all PLHIV.

Dr Jaya Chakravarty said sponsorship scheme of the Uttar Pradesh government which provides ₹4,000 for every child below 18 years who are HIV positive should be availed by all. Director Dr SN Sankhwar also spoke on the occasion. Dr Piyush Rai said all PLHIV will be able to access all the schemes. Dinesh Kumar Singh gave detailed information about all government schemes and how to access them. DLSA secretary Vijay Vishwakarma spoke about legal rights which can be availed by HIV persons, prisoners and to connect with the nearest DLSA.

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NOTICE U/S 13(2) OF SECURITISATION & RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT 2002 (HEREINAFTER CALLED 'ACT')

It is to bring to your notice that your loan account has been declared as NPA by secured creditor Shubham Housing Development Finance Company Limited having its registered office at 608 - 609 , 6th Floor, Block - C Ansal Imperial Tower, Community Center, Naraina Vihar, New Delhi - 110028. (herein after called 'SHDFCL') and you are liable to pay total outstanding against your loan to SHDFCL. You are also liable to pay future interest at the contractual rate on the aforesaid amount together with incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. Therefore, we hereby call upon you to discharge in full your liabilities to SHDFCL within 60 days from the date of this notice failing which SHDFCL will be empowered to exercise the power under Section 13(4) of the ACT. The details of borrowers and secured assets are as under:

S. No.	Loan Account No. Borrower's (s) Name	Applicant Address	Demand Notice Amount & Date	Secured Asset
1.	VRN 1406_023799, Nitesh Prasad, Nikesh Nirmal	Vill., Post Raghunathpur District Buxar Bihar -802101	Rs. 7,67,162/- & 20/01/2024	Arazi No 236 Mauza - Harishankarpur Pargana- Raihu Teh & Distt.- Chandauli Varanasi Uttar Pradesh - 232101
2.	OKAN170600000500651 & OKAN1904000005019365, Vishal Mishra, Shalini Mishra	519, Yashoda Nagar, South K Block, Near Ajay Traders, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh - 208011	Rs. 5,96,639/- & Rs. 4,75,272/- & 20/01/2024	Part Of House No. K - 519, Yashoda Nagar Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh - 208011
3.	OKAN1902000005017659, Ram Singh, Rama Kantil Yadav, Shubham Singh	2/39, Rama Devi Chauraha Patel Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh -208007	Rs. 16,49,734/- & 20/01/2024	House No. 164, Safipur Second, Kanpur Nagar Arzi No. 162 Mauja Safipur, Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh - 208011
4.	OALB19110000050024880, Sana Ulla, Mohd Sanu, Raju	13/5, Muir Road Near Regal Guest House, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh -211002	Rs. 6,31,542/- & 20/01/2024	Flat No.9, EWS (Ground Floor), Double storey, Katra Machhail Bazar Housing Scheme, Fakirey Ganj, Pargana & Tehsil- Sadar & Distt- Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh - 211002
5.	OLKW2011000005031704, Pushkar Arjun Kumar Tripathi, Pranav Dixit, Kadambini	1X660, MW BHEL Site Office Power House Pankaj, Kanpur Nagar Uttar Pradesh - 208020	Rs. 16,37,927/- & 20/01/2024	Part of Plot No.-30 Part of Kharsa No.-89 Raghunandan Kunj, Vill- Rasoolpur Kayastha, Pargana- Mahona, Tehsil- Bakshi Ka Talab, Distt- Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226203
6.	OLKO2204000005046299, Ravi Prakash Mishra, Kajal Tiwari	Mukkam Khijrabad, Post Banwari Pur, Khijra Bad Prathamik Vidyalay Sultanpur Uttar Pradesh - 228145	Rs. 13,61,424/- & 20/01/2024	Part of Plot No. 08, Gata No- 271 min Situated at Village Rasulpur, Kayastha, Pargana- Mahona, BKT District Lucknow Uttar Pradesh -226021
7.	OVNR22050000050047095, Rakshesh Kumar Pandey, Nirmala Pandey	Plot No. 542/1, Bhagwanpur Near Sunbeam Academy Varanasi Uttar Pradesh -221005	Rs. 13,31,106/- & 20/01/2024	Arazi No. 542/2, Mauza Bhagwanpur Pargana Dehat Amanat Tehsil Distt Varanasi Uttar Pradesh - 221003
8.	OKAN22080000050050229, Yogendra Dubey, Roshani Dubey	Katka Raniya Near Baniyan Factory Katka Kanpur Dehat Uttar Pradesh -209301	Rs. 10,95,984/- & 20/01/2024	Plot Situated at Part of Arazi No. 283 Kila Village Katka Tehsil Akbarpur Kanpur Dehat Uttar Pradesh - 209101
9.	OLK12110000050053756, Neelu Gupta (Legal Heirs Deceased Shri. Kaushal Kishor), Miss Ananya U/G Smt. Neelu Gupta (Legal Heirs Deceased Shri. Kaushal Kishor), Master Ankit U/G Smt. Neelu Gupta (Legal Heirs Deceased Shri. Kaushal Kishor), Miss. Aaradya U/G Smt. Neelu Gupta (Legal Heirs Deceased Shri. Kaushal Kishor) Neelu Gupta	356/340/1203, Alam Nagar Road, Near Batase Wali Gali Lucknow Uttar Pradesh - 226017	Rs. 5,48,654/- & 20/01/2024	A Plot on part of Kharsa No. 578, Situated at Village Bhuhar Tehsil and Distt.- Lucknow Uttar Pradesh - 226003

PLACE: GURGAON, DATE: 24-01-2024

AUTHORIZED OFFICER, SHUBHAM HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FINANCE COMPANY LTD.

PM calls NCC cadets, NSS volunteers Amrit Peedhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Republic Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with NCC cadets and NSS volunteers in the national Capital on Wednesday. “Your generation is called GenZ in your language. But I will call you Amrit Peedhi...” the PM told NCC, NSS cadres. Reiterating India’s resolve to become a developed nation by 2047, the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of the next 25 years for the future of India and the present generation. “It is the Government’s resolve to fulfill all the dreams of the Amrit Generation, create countless opportunities, and remove all obstacles in their paths”, the Prime Minister said. He stated that the discipline, focused mindset and coordination witnessed in today’s performance are also the basis for realising the dreams of Amrit Kaal.

The Prime Minister reiterated that ‘Nation First’ should be

the guiding principle of the Amrit Generation. The Prime Minister also told the young audience never to allow despair to set in their lives. Stressing the importance of every small contribution, PM Modi, stressed “Yahi Samay hai Sahi Samay hai, Ye Aapka Samay Hai - This is the right time, this is your time.”

Stressing the importance of the present moment, the Prime Minister asked the youth to impart strength to their resolve to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat. And to expand the horizon of knowledge so that Indian geniuses could give new direction to the world and gain new capabilities so that India could solve the world’s problems. He elaborated on the steps for creating new avenues for youth to realize their full potential and mentioned creating new opportunities in newly opened sectors. PM Modi gave examples of creating new opportunities in the space sector, push towards Ease of Doing Business, creating a private sector in the defence indus-



try, establishing the National Research Foundation and creating modern educational facilities to cater to the 21st century.

Mentioning the Government’s decision of Bharat Ratna for Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, PM Modi marked this as the government’s good fortune and underlined the need for the young generation of today to know about the great personality. The Prime Minister recalled his rise despite extreme poverty and social inequality as he became Chief Minister and always maintained his down-to-earth humility.

The Prime Minister also mentioned reforming the education system in India which allows attaining higher education in the mother tongue and not being bound to a particular stream or subject. Encouraging the youth to engage in research and innovation, the Prime Minister mentioned Atal Tinkering Labs which inspire creativity and innovation. He underlined that

the government has created new opportunities for girl students who want to make a career by joining the army. “Now, girl students can also be admitted to various Sainik schools”, the Prime Minister said urging them to move forward with full confidence. “Your efforts, your vision, your potential will take India to new heights”, he added.

Throwing light on his connections with NCC, the Prime Minister said that institutions like NCC, NSS or cultural camps make the youth aware of society and civic duties. He informed about the creation of another organization - ‘My Yuva Bharat’ and urged the youth to register as ‘My Bharat’ Volunteers.

During this Republic Day Celebration, the Prime Minister highlighted the multiple opportunities to witness multiple programs, visit various historical places and meet experts. “This will be an experience that you will remember for the rest of your life. Every year whenever you watch the

Republic Day parade, you will remember these days and you will also remember that I told you this”, Modi said. He also urged them to record their experiences and learnings from the Republic Day celebrations which can also be shared with the Prime Minister in writing or video recording on NaMo App. “Today’s young generation can stay connected with me continuously through the NaMo App”, PM Modi emphasized.

Concluding the address, the Prime Minister expressed belief and faith in the strength of the youth. He urged them to study hard, be a conscientious citizen, protect the environment, avoid bad habits and be proud of the nation’s heritage and culture. “You have my blessings, my best wishes”, PM Modi concluded. Union Minister of Defence, Shri Raj Nath Singh, Union Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, Shri Anurag Singh Thakur, and Union Ministers of Tribal Affairs, Shri Arjun Munda were present on the occasion among others.

PM to interact with young voters today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will speak to a large number of young voters on the National Voters Day on Thursday through a programme organised by the youth wing of the ruling BJP. Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) president Tejasvi Surya said that young voters played a key role in electing Modi as Prime Minister in 2014 and then his re-election in 2019.

“They are very enthusiastic for electing Modi ji as prime minister for a third term,” he told reporters, claiming that there have been unparalleled opportunities for youngsters in the BJP-led NDA government.

The unemployment rate is at an all-time low amid the

rapid pace of economic growth and huge boost to infrastructure which has directly and indirectly benefitted the youth in a big way, he said.

Surya said lakhs of young voters will virtually connect with the prime minister at nearly 5,000 places across the country.

It is historic as this is the first time a prime minister will be interacting with young voters at such a scale, he said, asserting that such an exercise will encourage their participation in elections and deepen the country’s democratic roots.

There are over seven crore voters in the 18-25 years group, he noted, adding that the government has brought numerous schemes and policies to help them, including by establishing many new IIMs, IITs and medical colleges.

I bow to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid heartfelt tributes to two-time Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, who has been named for the country’s highest civilian award Bharat Ratna, on the occasion of his 100th birth anniversary, acknowledging his significant contributions to social justice and unwavering commitment to the welfare of the people. Modi said Thakur’s relentless pursuit of social justice created a positive impact in people’s lives.

Sharing his write-up on the pioneering backward caste leader, Modi posted on X, “I bow to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur Ji on his birth centenary. On this special occasion, our Government has had the honour of conferring the Bharat Ratna on him. I’ve penned a few thoughts on his unparalleled impact on our society and polity.”

Overcoming numerous

obstacles, Thakur achieved a lot and worked for societal betterment, the prime minister said.

Thakur’s most significant contributions to India was perhaps his role in strengthening the affirmative action apparatus for the backward classes, with the hope that they were given the representation and opportunities they deserved, he said.

His decision was met with heavy opposition but he did not bow to any pressure and his policies laid the groundwork for a more inclusive society, where one’s birth did not determine one’s fate, the prime minister wrote in an article which appeared in many newspapers on Wednesday.

Modi said his government over the last 10 years has walked on Thakur’s path, bringing in schemes and policies that have brought transformative empowerment. The prime minister said, “He belonged to the most backward strata of society but he worked for all the people, He had no trace of bitter-



ness in him, which is what makes him truly great.”

He said the life of ‘Jan Nayak’, as Thakur came to be known as, revolved around the twin pillars of simplicity and social justice, and his simple lifestyle and humble nature resonated deeply with the common people till his last breath.

“Those who worked with him recall how he preferred to spend his own money for any personal matter, including his daughter’s wedding. During his tenure as Chief Minister of Bihar, a decision was taken to

build a colony for political leaders but he himself did not take any land or money for the same,” he said.

When Thakur passed away in 1988, several leaders went to his village to pay tributes and were moved to tears seeing the condition of his house, he noted. Looking at his torn kurta at an event to mark the birthday of socialist icon Jayaprakash Narayan in 1977, Chandrashekhar, another political stalwart, asked people to donate some money so that Thakur could buy a new kurta,

but the then Bihar chief minister donated the amount to the CM Relief Fund, he recalled.

Modi said social justice was most dear to Thakur and his political journey was marked by monumental efforts to create a society where resources were distributed fairly, and everyone, regardless of their social standing, had access to opportunities.

He took a distinctly anti-Congress line because he was convinced very early on that the Congress had deviated from its founding principles, Modi said.

Education was a subject very close to his heart and he worked throughout to improve education facilities for the poor, the prime minister said.

One of the biggest tragedies of our polity has been that barring a few leaders like Thakur, the call for social justice was restricted to being a political slogan, he said. Modi added, “Inspired by Karpoori Ji’s vision we implemented it as an effective governance model. I can say with confidence and pride that Jan Nayak Karpoori

Researchers find correlation between energy drink consumption, poor sleep



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Marketed as mental and physical pick-me-ups, energy drinks are popular with college students and young people in general. However, a significant correlation between the consumption of energy drinks and poor sleep quality, as well as insomnia, has been revealed in a large Norwegian study published in the journal BMJ Open.

The study, conducted among college students, found that the higher the frequency of energy drink consumption, the fewer hours of nightly sleep students experienced. Even occasional consumption, defined as 1-3 times a month, was linked to an increased risk of disturbed sleep.

Energy drinks contain an average caffeine content of 150 mg per liter, along with sugar, vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, said the study, drawing on over 53,000 participants aged 18 to 35 and indicated that daily consumption led to around half an hour less sleep than occasional or no consumption.

Both men and women who reported daily consumption experienced associations with waking after falling asleep, taking longer to fall asleep, and poorer sleep efficiency.

Insomnia was also more prevalent among those reporting daily consumption compared to occasional or no consumption.

Sex differences were noted in energy drink consumption patterns, with women more likely than men to report never or seldom consuming energy drinks. The study highlights a dose-response association, indicating that as energy drink consumption increased, so did the risk of sleep problems across various aspects, with the strongest associations found for short sleep duration.

The observational nature of the study conducted by researchers Siri Kaldenbach, Mari Hysing, A Strand and Borge Sivertsen from various top research institutes and Hospitals in Norway, means that causation cannot be definitively established, and reverse causality (poor sleep leading to energy drink consumption) could also be a factor. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that the frequency of energy drink consumption may be a modifiable risk factor for sleep issues among college and university students.

Concurring with the study observation, Ashim Sanyal, CEO of Consumer VOICE, a consumer rights organization working in the field of cardiovascular health for sever-

al years said that this should serve as yet another wakeup call for the Government and ensure a clear and interpretive Front of Packaging Labels (FOPL) so that a buyer knows what he/she is purchasing.

“Consumers have a right to make informed choices on the foods they eat. Having a simple Warning Label on packaged foods will help consumers identify foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt,” he said.

These products are clearly also root causes for NCDs affecting individuals across all age groups and regions.

According to Kavita Devgan, noted nutritionist and author, “Some so-called health/energy drinks for children actually fall under the dangerous HFSS (High Fat Salt Sugar) category and can lead to obesity, diabetes, and other related problems from an early age.

“Parents often introduce these sugary drinks to children as early as 2 years thinking that they will supplement the missing nutrition from their children’s diet.

But these sugar-laden drinks can add a lot of extra sugar to their diet and may increase the risk of lifestyle diseases among children. So parents must read the labels carefully before introducing any new packaged food in their child’s diet.”

Delhi needs neighbours aid to beat smog woes: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Amid the blame game between the national Capital and its neighbouring States over the issue of emitting pollution, a review carried out by the University of Surrey and regional Government officials in Delhi has said Delhi needs the help of its rural neighbours to finally beat its killer smog problem.

Professor Prashant Kumar, founding director of Global Centre for Clean Air Research (GCARE) at the University of Surrey, said: “Air pollution doesn’t respect city boundaries – and so it must be tackled at regional level. If cities like Delhi want to avoid the lethal smog seen in recent years, they’ll need neighbouring rural areas to help them.

“We know this approach



works – we’ve seen success in places like Mexico City and Los Angeles. By working together, we can tackle air pollution.”

In most Indian cities (60%), the air is over seven times more polluted than it should be. This has huge health implications. Some of this pollution comes from neighbouring rural areas – from crop burning, wood stoves, or power plants.

Yet measures to tackle urban smog usually ignore rural sources. Instead, they focus only on measures within the city limits – like boosting public transport or controlling pollution from industry and building sites.

The GCARE review “A critical review of managing air pol-

lution through airshed approach” published in ScienceDirect recommends tackling air pollution at a regional level instead. This means identifying the wider area where a city’s pollution is produced – its so-called “airshed”.

The organization has enlisted a slew of measures such as regional air quality plans should be drawn up – which has worked well in places like Mexico City and Los Angeles. “Smog forecasts” could be produced with better monitoring. Satellites could spot bonfires and other sources of pollution. Scientists could then predict how it would interact with weather conditions. “Airshed Councils” could help local, regional and federal agencies co-ordinate their efforts.

Dr Anwar Ali Khan, Senior Environmental Engineer on

the Delhi Pollution Control Committee, said, “Delhi’s neighbouring States have an important role to play in helping save lives in our city – and in their areas too. We need an action plan with a sound scientific basis, and we need better monitoring.

“This requires cities, governments and others to work together. A joined-up approach is the only way to defeat this deadly health hazard.”

Dr Mukesh Khare, Professor Emeritus of Civil Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, said, “A significant portion of air pollution stems from sources outside city limits, which requires a shift from city-specific to region-specific emission reduction targets. The establishment of an airshed will be a critical tool for effective air quality management and planning.”

Genetic markers linked to premature ageing reversed in children with diet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

A genetic marker linked to premature ageing was reversed in children with obesity during a six-month diet and exercise programme, according to a recent study led by the Stanford School of Medicine.

Children’s telomeres – protective molecular “caps” on the chromosomes – were longer during the weight management program, then were shorter again in the year after the program ended, the study found. The research has been published in Pediatric Obesity.

Like the solid segment at the end of a shoelace, telomeres protect the ends of chromosomes from fraying. In all people, telomeres gradually shorten with aging. Various conditions, including obesity, cause premature shortening of the telomeres.

The new study is the first to

link a behavioral eating and physical activity program for weight management in children with obesity to healthy changes in average telomere length. The discovery may help scientists understand how the biological benefits of losing weight, eating healthier and being more physically active occur. The findings also imply that telomere length may be a good marker for measuring the benefits of healthy dietary changes, physical activity and weight management, as changes in telomere length appeared to be somewhat independent of traditional markers such as body mass index.

“We saw that the recommended behaviors everyone knows about – eating fewer high-fat or high-sugar foods and fewer calories, increasing physical activity, and reducing screen time – can slow down biological ageing associated with obesity in children,” said the study’s senior author, Thomas

Robinson.

“It’s remarkable to see effects on the chromosomes with behavioral treatments,” he said.

Understanding how behavior changes to reduce obesity are biologically linked with other conditions such as heart disease and diabetes would help scientists understand how the process might be slowed or reversed.

“We know a lot about cardiovascular risk for adults, but for kids, we’ve just said ‘obesity is bad’ yet we don’t know, biologically, how cardiovascular risks linked to obesity start in children,” said the study’s lead author, David Rehkopf, ScD, associate professor of epidemiology and population health and of medicine. “To have this biological measure with a strong genetic component turn out to be changeable when we give kids resources to be healthier, especially over a short period of time, was very interesting and exciting,” Rehkopf said.

Murmu inaugurates Kaushal Bhawan



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday inaugurated Kaushal Bhawan – a new building of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship here. According to a statement here, the President visited the exhibition stalls set up by the beneficiaries of various initiatives of the Government such as PM Vishwakarma, PM JANMAN, Skill Acquisition and

Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and interacted with them.

The Kaushal Bhawan whose foundation stone was laid in March 2019 will provide office space for the Ministry as well as its associated organisations – the Directorate General of Training, the National Council for Vocational Education and Training and the National Skill Development Corporation.

Up, up and away!

The Indian stock exchange overtakes Hong Kong's, securing fourth place globally

In what must come as happy news for its economy, India's stock exchange has surpassed Hong Kong's to become the fourth largest global equity market. This accomplishment underscores India's economic resilience and its growing significance in financial arena. The surge of India's stock exchange to this reputable position is due to a confluence of factors. Foremost among these is the comprehensive economic reforms in recent years. Measures such as the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the establishment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) have created a business-friendly environment, fostering investor confidence. Simultaneously, India has witnessed a steady inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI), driven by initiatives like 'Make in India' and liberalised FDI norms. These efforts have positioned India as an attractive destination for global investors. Technological advancements have played a pivotal role in transforming the Indian stock market into a more accessible and efficient platform.



The widespread adoption of online trading platforms, mobile applications and other technological innovations have democratised investment, expanding the investor base. India's stock market has exhibited resilience during global economic challenges, navigating the uncertainties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. This ability to weather economic storms and rebound swiftly has reinforced investor confidence on both domestic and international fronts. The implications of India's stock exchange securing the fourth spot on the global stage are profound. This achievement is expected to attract increased foreign capital, stimulating economic growth, job creation and supporting infrastructure development. Furthermore, the higher global ranking enhances India's visibility and credibility as an investment destination. The thriving stock market has the potential to translate into capital appreciation for individuals and institutions, thereby potentially boosting consumer spending and overall economic activity. However, amid these positive developments, challenges such as market volatility, regulatory concerns and geopolitical factors must be accounted for. A responsive regulatory framework is crucial to ensuring the stability and integrity of financial markets. Unfortunately, many cases of insider trading and unscrupulous practices have come to light. The sad part is that SEBI, entrusted to safeguard investor interests and regulate the market, has often failed in controlling the frenzy which results in wiping away a sizeable amount of small investors' money. That is a concern to be addressed immediately and SEBI must be made more powerful to deal with unscrupulous brokers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, India's stock exchange securing the fourth position globally is a momentous achievement that reflects growing appeal for investors. As India continues to enact reforms, attract foreign investment, it is poised for sustained economic growth. Managing challenges proactively will be essential to ensuring the long-term stability and vibrancy of our markets.

and supporting infrastructure development. Furthermore, the higher global ranking enhances India's visibility and credibility as an investment destination. The thriving stock market has the potential to translate into capital appreciation for individuals and institutions, thereby potentially boosting consumer spending and overall economic activity. However, amid these positive developments, challenges such as market volatility, regulatory concerns and geopolitical factors must be accounted for. A responsive regulatory framework is crucial to ensuring the stability and integrity of financial markets. Unfortunately, many cases of insider trading and unscrupulous practices have come to light. The sad part is that SEBI, entrusted to safeguard investor interests and regulate the market, has often failed in controlling the frenzy which results in wiping away a sizeable amount of small investors' money. That is a concern to be addressed immediately and SEBI must be made more powerful to deal with unscrupulous brokers and entrepreneurs. Indeed, India's stock exchange securing the fourth position globally is a momentous achievement that reflects growing appeal for investors. As India continues to enact reforms, attract foreign investment, it is poised for sustained economic growth. Managing challenges proactively will be essential to ensuring the long-term stability and vibrancy of our markets.

PICTALK



Students in traditional Punjabi attire during the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day Parade 2024, in Amritsar PTI

Policy reforms needed to boost manufacturing

By creating an environment conducive to manufacturing, India can attract investments and become key player in the global manufacturing hub

With the swift expansion of India's manufacturing sector, the country is poised to become a leading global manufacturing force. Currently positioned among the top three preferred global manufacturing locations, India has the potential to boost its exports to an impressive USD one trillion by 2030. However, within the spectrum of various supply chains, the challenges and opportunities of Indian manufacturing are evident in the wooden pallet sector. To consolidate its position in the pallet industry, essential policy reforms are necessary for sustainable growth and global leadership. Indeed, critical policy changes are required for India to smoothly transition into a global manufacturing hub, ensuring enduring growth and competitiveness on the international stage. Infrastructure Development India needs to focus on developing robust infrastructure, including transportation, power, and telecommunications, to support the manufacturing sector. The government should invest in building modern industrial parks,



logistics hubs, and efficient transportation networks to reduce manufacturing costs and improve competitiveness.

Sustainable Manufacturing In the era of increasing environmental awareness, sustainable and eco-friendly manufacturing practices are becoming imperative. The government should encourage manufacturers to adopt green technologies and sustainable processes by providing incentives and enforcing regulations that promote environmental responsibility. This not only aligns with global trends but also enhances the reputation of Indian products in international markets.

Simplified Regulations The regulatory environment in India is complex, and businesses face bureaucratic hurdles. Streamlining regulations and creating a more business-

friendly environment will encourage investment and growth in the manufacturing sector. Implementing a single-window system for approvals, clearances, and licenses can facilitate ease of doing business. Skilled Labour Development India's education system needs to adapt to the changing needs of the economy by providing relevant skills training. Addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector is crucial for its growth. The government should focus on creating appropriate skill sets among the workforce to meet the demands of modern manufacturing.

Government schemes The government has introduced Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes to promote domestic manufacturing and increase India's share of global exports. These schemes encourage investments in manufacturing and provide incentives for various sectors, contributing to the growth of the manufacturing industry.

Foreign Investment India's trade policies and foreign investment regulations

play a significant role in attracting global manufacturers. The government should continue to focus on policies that promote domestic manufacturing, reduce import dependence, and encourage foreign investment in the manufacturing sector.

Tax Reforms A competitive and stable tax regime is essential for attracting investment. India needs to rationalise its tax structure, ensuring that it is transparent and predictable. Reducing corporate tax rates, providing incentives for research and development, and promoting innovation through tax breaks will encourage manufacturing companies to invest and operate in India. Becoming a global manufacturing hub requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the Indian government, industry players, and other stakeholders. The success of these reforms will not only boost the economy but also create employment opportunities and enhance India's standing in the world of international trade and commerce.

(The writer is an Industry expert, views are personal)



JAY SHAH

Bharat Ratna: Honouring the legacy of Jan Nayak

The Bharat Ratna, conferred posthumously to Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, gives a fitting tribute to his work and ideals

The celebration of Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur's birth centenary has been marked by a momentous announcement from the Indian government, bestowing upon him the prestigious Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award in the nation. Renowned for his relentless dedication to reshaping social justice, Karpoori Thakur has left an indelible mark on the lives of millions. His remarkable journey, from the marginalized barber community to the pinnacle of political leadership, is a testament to his unwavering commitment to social reform.

In the dynamic tapestry of Bihar's socialist movement, Karpoori Thakur's name resonated alongside stalwarts such as Ram Vilas Paswan, Sharad Yadav, and Chandrashekhar. Emerging from a disadvantaged background, he surmounted numerous obstacles to not only enhance his social standing but also to champion the cause of those on society's periphery. His enduring influence on the underprivileged persists, symbolizing mental fortitude for the backward society. The government's decision to posthumously honor Karpoori Thakur with the Bharat Ratna underscores the extraordinary legacy of this Bihar-born socialist leader. A statement from Rashtrapati Bhavan lauds him as a trailblazer of social justice and an inspirational figure in Indian politics. The award serves as a fitting tribute to his lifelong dedication to uplifting the deprived sections of society and his relentless pursuit of social justice. Karpoori Thakur's life was a testament to simplicity and social justice, pillars that defined his persona as the people's hero. From his unassuming lifestyle to his humility, he endeared himself to the common folk. Anecdotes abound, such as the incident with Chaudhary Charan Singh, where he refused personal gains even when offered a plot of land during his tenure as Chief Minister. In 1977, another instance showcased his simplicity when he joined party leaders in a torn kurta for a celebration in Patna. Despite offers for a new kurta, he



chose to donate the money to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund, embodying his selfless nature.

The Bharat Ratna announcement, made a day before his centenary, elevates Narendra Modi's standing among the Bihar and socialist public. Karpoori Thakur, a champion of social justice, envisioned a society where resources were equitably distributed, and opportunities were accessible to all, irrespective of social status.

His political journey, beginning in the 1950s, saw him win every election, reflecting the trust bestowed upon him by the people. Serving as Chief Minister from 1970 to 1971 and later from 1977 to 1979, he aligned himself with the working class, laborers, and small farmers. As the Education Minister, he championed the abolition of English in matriculation exams and focused on improving education facilities for the underprivileged. Participating in the Quit India Movement as a youth, Karpoori Thakur remained unwavering during the Emergency, earning praise from leaders like JP, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, and Charan Singh. His pivotal role in strengthening affirmative action for backward classes, despite strong opposition, laid the foundation for a more inclusive society. Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, hailing from the most back-



THE POSTHUMOUS CONFERRAL OF THE BHARAT RATNA UPON JAN NAYAK KARPOORI THAKUR STANDS AS A POIGNANT RECOGNITION OF A LEADER WHOSE LIFE WAS DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF THE MARGINALISED AND THE UPLIFTMENT OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

ward section of society, stands as a beacon of inclusivity and a true people's hero, making the Bharat Ratna bestowed upon him a fitting tribute to his monumental contributions to Indian society. The recognition posthumously bestowed upon him not only honors his memory but also serves as an inspiration for future generations to continue the pursuit of social justice and equality. As India reflects on the life and legacy of this exceptional leader, it is a reminder that the struggle for a just society is an ongoing journey, and the ideals championed by Karpoori Thakur still remain relevant. The posthumous conferral of the Bharat Ratna upon Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur stands as a poignant recognition of a leader whose life was dedicated to the service of the marginalized and the upliftment of the downtrodden. As we commemorate his birth centenary, this prestigious award serves as more than a tribute; it is a testament to the enduring impact of his vision for a just and inclusive society. Karpoori Thakur's legacy is multifaceted, embodying simplicity, humility, and an unwavering commitment to social justice. His journey from a humble background to the echelons of political leadership serves as an inspiration, proving that resilience and dedication can break through societal barriers. The government's decision to bestow the Bharat

Ratna upon him is not merely a recognition of past achievements but a call to contemporary and future leaders to emulate his principles. In a time when the pursuit of social justice remains a critical imperative, Karpoori Thakur's life provides a roadmap for leaders to navigate the complexities of governance with integrity and compassion. As Narendra Modi's government makes this historic announcement, it resonates not only with the people of Bihar but with the entire nation. It underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating leaders who prioritize the well-being of the most vulnerable in society. The Bharat Ratna for Karpoori Thakur is a bridge between the past and the present, connecting the ideals of a bygone era with the challenges and opportunities of today. In honouring Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur, India acknowledges the pivotal role he played in shaping a more inclusive society and encourages a new generation of leaders to champion his ideals. As the nation pays tribute to this true people's hero, the Bharat Ratna becomes a symbol not only of recognition but also a call to action, urging us all to carry forward the torch of social justice and equality in our ongoing pursuit of a more just and compassionate India.

(The writer is a senior journalist, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BAIL PROCESS DELAYS

Sir — Indian judiciary is known to move at a snail's pace. As much as bail is a matter of right it is equally important that the right is accorded expeditiously to individuals. In bail orders, there should not be undue delay in the orders of the court reaching the prison authorities. The Supreme Court has said that despite its repeated directives, High Courts are delaying adjudication of bail applications. With the exception of an intervening application, all bail matters have to be decided within two weeks of being filed and all anticipatory bail within six weeks, the top court has reiterated again recently.

This order came after an anticipatory bail application was kept pending for judgment for one year by a High Court after it was initially heard. Though bail is a temporary privilege by definition, the nonuniformity in its interpretation has, sometimes, led to chaos. Despite the sheer number of bail applications filed before them, High Courts should evolve a mechanism for their speedy disposal because Section 436 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) defines bailable offences and the underlying principle behind granting of bails by courts, as "personal liberty". Freedom and personal liberty are fundamental rights of a citizen as laid down by Article 21 of the Constitution.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

POLITICAL ALLEGATIONS

Sir — Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday said that the Union Home Minister once had termed the National People's Party (NPP) led Meghalaya government "the most corrupt" in the country but later allied with them. Addressing the public in Ri Bhoi district, Rahul Gandhi said, "Meghalaya is not ruled from here but from Delhi. This is not acceptable. The nation is facing the highest levels of unemployment in the last 40 years. Rahul Gandhi reiterated his attacks on Prime Minister Narendra

Coffee plantation in Odisha



The Odisha state cabinet has approved a coffee plantation for sustainable livelihood (CPSC) scheme with an outlay of 1,144 crore. Under this scheme, Coffee plantations in the state will be extended to one lakh from ten thousand acres. The scheme will be implemented in the six districts in the state. Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Keonjhar, and Gajapati will benefit from this scheme.

Additionally, women's Self-help groups will be involved in raising coffee nurseries which will benefit more than fifty thousand farm families in the region. Recently, Coffee has emerged as one of the major production from Odisha due to its agro-friendly climate and support from the state machinery.

The coffee produced in the state has already gained international recognition. Coffee is a profitable commercial crop because of its growing popularity in the market. Good quality coffee production on a large scale will make a scope for export to other countries. This scheme will encourage the tribal people of the area to engage in these activities and earn profits. This will boost the economy, tourism, and scientific education in these six districts. If distribution and marketing are done properly Odisha's coffee will spread more and get worldwide recognition through this initiative.

Deba Prasad Nayak | Dhenkanal

Modi for "not visiting Manipur" and said that the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party has destroyed the idea of Manipur. Politics of hatred and violence have torn the state apart.

Prime Minister after so many months has not bothered to visit Manipur. Is Manipur, not an Indian state? Congress leader said. Earlier in February last year, the Union Home Minister had said that the Meghalaya government was filling its coffers with poor people's money and said that it is the most corrupt government in the country. BJP and NPP were partners in the outgoing government but fought the assembly polls separately. After the Assembly poll results, the BJP came into coalition with the NPP by extending support. With this, it is a double standard game which is unfortunate.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM SUMMIT

Sir — The 'Back to Basics' strategy, embraced at the World Economic Forum

(WEF) summit in Davos, fell short with elaborate discussions and superficial intentions. Conversations about war-inflicted economic crisis barely captured the scenes. The looming threats of Greenwashing, market volatility, erosion of the tax base through havens, and other critical economic issues were largely neglected.

While the IMF anticipates a substantial economic downturn in 2024 alongside mounting debts, the Davos meeting appears devoid of any therapy. Furthermore, the persistent notion that 'Europe's problems are the world's problems' continues to resonate, disadvantaging the ailing Global South. Following a lacklustre COP28 and now the WEF, the desertification of multilateralism is paving the way for the return of Cold War-era bloc politics.

Abhisek Panil | Bhubaneswar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TO STAY BLESSED,
TAKE SHELTER IN GOD

Those who take shelter in God and have faith in him are under His protection



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Let us examine in detail some of them. Money is most sought after by almost one and all. Is it a shelter? Yes, it provides material objects, comforts in life, etc. But are these sufficient for quality of life? If they were, rich people would be peaceful, happy and secure. Are they? Because money cannot buy these. One has to go to God for them. One has to do spiritual activities to please God. This is the way the System works. Let us agree that money has an important role in our lives, but it cannot be our shelter. By the way, God can provide what we lack and provide security for what we have, if we remain in His shelter. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.22)The next most sought-after shelter is a sense of enjoyment like eating tasty food, watching something exciting, etc. These are fine if they are appropriate for our needs. (6.17) Otherwise, as the verse tells us our troubles will not reduce. Troubles there must be in this world, an impermanent place of miseries. (8.15) Rather our sufferings will increase manifold if we seek shelter in sex, considered the highest sense of pleasure. It must always be within the limit of dharma to be acceptable. (7.11) Then, there are many, who take shelter in work. They are called workaholics. A new addiction has arrived. These are our cell phones. People are forever checking it for messages, and information, and what happens? The Internet takes charge of us through provocative ads and promises of easy money. One corrupts and the other fools. It has become a pandemic, far from being a shelter.




Everyone is looking for security, beginning with a toddler. He gets it from his parents, especially from his mother. One can understand this, as this is nature's arrangement. But as we grow, we need to make the right choices. We don't; some of us seek from influential persons, and now bogus gurus. Everything has a price, but people generally don't seek it from God, where it is best available. Why? They are not prepared to pay its price, which is to surrender to the Almighty. If one does, troubles will come and go, because God will help. (18.58) Otherwise, they will take their time, as destined. Yes, many turn to God in distress. (7.16) God appreciates it also. (7.18) But again one has to deserve such help by pleasing God by spiritual acts. (18.65)But the modern man chooses to sleep over proper action. Sleeping pills have become quite common. Eat them and everything will be fine. Does it become? Seeking shelter in greed is a common refuge, fueled by the prevailing materialism that drives the pursuit of quick wealth. However, success is not solely determined by greed or hard work; destiny plays a crucial role. Even the poorest work diligently, challenging the notion that wealth is solely a result of effort. The human psyche often grapples with negative emotions such as anger and revenge, leading to a loss of inner peace. The alternative proposed is seeking refuge in God. Amidst life's uncertainties, relying on God's protection is advocated to avoid potential misfortunes. Actively seeking shelter from God instills confidence and invites abundant grace into one's life. Surrendering to God's guidance in the spiritual journey attracts positive fortune, transcending the challenges posed by human nature. Although the decision may contradict inherent tendencies, spiritual intelligence can overcome such resistance. Associating with spiritually wise individuals in satsang proves beneficial in navigating this transformative journey. Once embarked upon, the spiritual path becomes irreversible, guided by the munificence of God.


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

Combating the deepfake menace necessitates stern legal measures

Securing truth in the age of synthetic realities is more difficult than ever before. It must be curbed before it becomes unmanageable



SIDDHARTH MISHRA



BHAWNA SHARMA

opening frequently, it can be easily predicted that deepfake technology may achieve an unprecedented level of realism

Has the Non-Aligned Movement lost its plot?



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Acknowledging the paradoxical essence of the Non-Aligned Movement, let us openly recognise the recent assembly's inherent absurdity

Following the opulent Davos event, the World Economic Forum of Klaus Schwab, gathered by Western elites, scrutinized topics ranging from the implications of AI to the looming threat of mysterious Disease X, a surge of anti-Netanyahu sentiments emerged in Kampala. This sentiment was notably expressed by members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during their gathering. The choice of location held historical significance, situated around 53 kilometres from the site of Operation Entebbe, where Benjamin Netanyahu's brother tragically lost his life almost five decades ago. Over the years, Kampala and Entebbe have undergone transformative changes, witnessing the rise and fall of rulers. Yoweri Museveni, Africa's fourth-longest-serving head of state, now leads NAM, a leader with a complex history, having ousted the tyrannical regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote and faced serious accusations of crimes against humanity. The irony lies in Museveni now advocating for justice in Gaza and accountability against Israel, encapsulating the conflicting ideologies within NAM. Addressing the paradoxical nature of NAM, let's candidly acknowledge the absurdity of its recent gathering, which diverted attention from pressing global issues. While many member states grapple with internal conflicts and political chaos, the organization indulges in verbose deliberations. Though we are passing a moment of need, it is crucial to refrain from romanticizing historical achievements and confront current failures. Instead of lamenting only the plight of Palestinians, perhaps NAM should focus on alleviating the tangible struggles of its member countries. If they genuinely wanted to help Palestinians, redirecting financial resources towards essentials such as drinking water and medicine could have a more meaningful impact. Providing victims with necessities rather than holding conferences to indulge in rhetoric would be a more effective use of public funds, emphasizing the organization's responsibility and accountability. Despite its historical significance, the NAM finds itself in a state of decline, resembling a fading relic. Decades have passed since the departure of its original leaders, leaving the organization with waning influence. The current members show little intent to breathe new life into this slowly deteriorating entity. It is essential to grasp the reality that the heyday of NAM is long gone. The organization, which once played a pivotal role, now struggles for relevance. The lack of a cohesive vision and commitment among member countries hastens NAM's natural demise. The time has come for a critical reassessment of its purpose and the genuine dedication of member nations to its survival. The architects of the NAM were visionary leaders from Europe, Asia, and Africa, including Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru (India), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Sirimavo Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), and Sukarno (Indonesia). These eminent figures envisioned not only the destiny of the Third World and developing nations but also recognized the crucial role of international peace and security for humanity. Their collective insight emphasized that freedom from superpower rivalry, the cessation of colonialism and imperialism, and global peace required collaboration, not division. The founders aimed to shield newly inde-



pendent countries from the pressures of bloc politics. However, what began as a utopian dream evolved into a stagnant organization, a consequence of strategic missteps rather than a natural progression. This year's NAM conference in Uganda, like its predecessors, appeared incapable of achieving substantive outcomes beyond consuming time and resources ostensibly devoted to addressing political crises. It is undeniable that this floundering organization lacks a viable future, and the persistent squandering of public funds yields no palpable benefits for human development. Despite being recognized as the largest multi-state organization after the United Nations, the NAM's discussions on global challenges have been confined to mere oratory, lacking the capacity to resolve crises. The platform, once rooted in the Bandung Principles, has devolved into a sanctuary for vacuous communication, funded by the hard-earned money of citizens in member countries. Since the inception of NAM, the so-called third-world and developing countries have witnessed numerous military conflicts, often initiated and sustained without hindrance by the West and the Soviet Union. The territories of NAM member countries became pawns in the geopolitical objectives of these power blocs, with ruling elites aligning with either the Soviet or Western camps for political survival. Noteworthy conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, the Soviet-Afghan War, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the Bosnian War, the Rwandan genocide, the Kosovo War, the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Syrian civil war, and the Yemeni Civil War unfolded in the Global South. The NAM's failure to collectively and responsibly implement its principles contributed to this tragic legacy, as accountability and responsibility could have prevented such widespread suffering. Sadly, attempting to resuscitate a moribund enterprise inevitably invites chaos, yielding neither renewed hope nor the impactful contributions promised at its inception. This is the predicament in which the NAM finds itself, failing to live up to its proclaimed principles while catering to the interests of a privileged few. No amount of picturesque portrayal can conceal the stark reality, as the structure of NAM stands as a façade masking inherent falsehood and decay. During this year's conference, leaders reiterated the narrative of member states breaking free from colonialism but grappling with new forms of inequality and hegemony, conveniently neglecting the role of their own hegemonic politics and corruption in fostering these disparities. As discussed at the conference, in the era of globalization, leaders perceive economic concentrations, while the rest of the world sees mere markets or resources. The pandemic underscored the detachment of the smallest needs of these countries from distant production centres. However, amidst politically correct and universalist narratives that neglect traditions, the conference amounted to little more than eloquent words in a spurious sermon, devoid of constructive significance and laden with political hypocrisy. While the dream of a multipolar world is commendable, its realization remains elusive without collective agreement. Proposals for economic decentralization and regional production lack substance if member states, lacking capital management, persist in dependence on Western financial markets and facilitate capital outflow to Western countries through money laundering, rendering the pursuit of economic independence a delusion. Changing the global order necessitates both practical and sincere measures, including the establishment of regional economic hubs, resilient supply chains, predictable mobility, and reliable data flows. Person-centred policies promoting sustainable lifestyles and digital public infrastructure exemplify the potential benefits of technology. Prioritizing relationships while respecting sovereignty and ensuring viability, especially in addressing food, energy, and health security, as well as promoting women-led development, remains critical. However, since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the foundational principles of the Non-Aligned Nations were shattered. Attempts to recreate the movement faced a lack of consensus among member state leaders. Instead, these states formed selective ties to advance political goals, rendering the "non-aligned" policy a mere pseudo-vocabulary. Unfortunately, leaders within the movement engaged in arbitrary activities, using the platform to cover up abuses rather than addressing them. As the old world order gave way to a new multipolar reality post-Cold War, the NAM struggled to adapt to emerging dynamics. Instead of collectively facing the challenges, many leaders prioritized narrow political goals, hindering the movement's relevance in the changing world. Faced with the need to redefine its purpose and adapt to new challenges, the movement encountered various forms of sabotage and unrest. The failure to interpret challenges during this transitional period affected several organizations within the movement. Ironically, many leaders refuse to acknowledge the end of this history, preventing the birth of a redesigned and reinvented global order that could contribute to achieving a multipolar world. Consequently, the idea of a multipolar world remains but a day-dream.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka; views are personal)

- blurring the lines between real and synthetic. These incidents also reflect a major concern about the misuse of deepfake technologies in the spread of disinformation and misinformation that is directly hitting the informational security of society at large. In layperson's language, deepfakes are images or videos of a person's likeness or other related things that have been digitally altered in a bid to misrepresent what happened in reality such as facial expression manipulation, face morphing, face swap, face generation and full body puppetry. The synthetic media not only inflict individual harm but have a profound impact on organisations, governments, and society at large. The deleterious effects of deepfakes transcend mere personal

consequences, encompassing psychological, financial, and societal realms; they erode the trust that underpins organizations, sow doubt in the halls of justice, and may even threaten the foundations of democracies. Imagine a world where your carefully crafted reputation can be shattered in an instant by a fabricated video. Where companies become pawns in blackmail schemes orchestrated through manipulated footage. Where legal proceedings lose their legitimacy as the authenticity of evidence becomes suspect. This dystopian reality is no longer fiction; it's the chilling consequences of deepfakes. The IT Rules 2021 provides a complete list of prohibited content under rule 3(1)(b). Intermediaries are already

bound to act in case of removals, blocking, or complaints regarding any deepfake content posted on their platform. There are speculations that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology is soon to come up with new provisions under the IT Rules, 2021 to curb the prevalence of deepfakes. As per the author's understanding, to restrain the spread of deepfakes on the intermediary's platform, there are two ways in which IT Rules, 2021 may be amended. First, to define 'deepfake' and put it in the prohibited category of content under rule 3(1)(B) of the IT Rules, 2021. By doing this, automatically all the other due diligence requirements on intermediaries will apply in case of deepfakes as well. However, the

major consequences of deepfake, misinformation, and impersonation are already included in the prohibited category of the list. Deepfake is emerging as a service company. The increased demand for deepfakes has also led to the establishment of several companies that deliver deepfakes as a product or even online service. These services are intended for use by marketers to personalise videos, eliminating the need to record a video for each recipient. Essentially, these services make producing a deepfake video as easy as editing text. Hence, the most appropriate and effective way to restrain deepfake is to directly regulate these companies that provide such deepfake technology. Second, deepfake may be regulated under

the proposed Digital India Act by introducing a new class of online platforms, i.e., AI Synthesis Online Platforms (as the name may be called), and providing separate rules for their compliance. The proposed Digital India Act may include a few obligations for AI Synthesis Online Platforms. First, requiring them to ensure adherence to all the existing cyber and data protection legislation in India. Second, such online platforms, in order to ensure transparency, should provide information regarding the number of users of such platforms, their platform's management rules, adopted technologies, tools deployed, and any other relevant information. Third, they may be obliged to deploy technological tools for recognizing false and damaging information created using services of the platform, implement a real-identity information authentication system, and adopt a review mechanism of synthetic data. It should also be obligatory on such platforms to tag or label those contents that are generated by using deepfake technologies. In view of the rising deepfake incidents and the government's apparent concern for the same, it is probable that we may not have to wait long for the necessary regulations as well as the Digital India Act to come into existence.

(Siddhartha is Sr Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi and Bhawna is a techno-legal policy professional; views are personal)

ED grills NCP chief Pawar grandnephew for 11 hours

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) continued to question NCP chief Sharad Pawar's grand nephew and MLA Rohit Pawar for more than eleven hours till late on Wednesday night, in an alleged money laundering case relating to Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB) scam.

Thirty-eight-year-old Rohit Pawar -- who went into the ED office at around 10.30 am after seeking the blessings of NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and party's Working President and MP Supriya Sule at the nearby party office in south Mumbai -- had not stepped out of the investigation agency's office at 9.30 pm, sparking speculation about the possibility of his arrest in the case.

Earlier, a large number of the NCP workers, led by Supriya Sule, had gathered in front of the ED's office to cheer Jr Pawar and boost his morale ahead of his questioning by the ED. On his part, before entering the ED office, Rohit Pawar said: "I am carrying all the files



and documents that the agency had asked for. I will answer all the questions of ED and will support them. The ED officials are just doing their work, I don't have anything against them."

"I am ready to support the ED in every possible way. If these things are being done to put pressure on me, then they should realise that they are experimenting on the wrong person. I am not scared of anyone. I don't think they are going to arrest me but we will fight," Jr Pawar said.

Talking to media persons outside the ED office, Supriya said: "Satyameva jayate... Let the truth triumph".

Quoting the data provided in reply given in Lok Sabha, Supriya said: "As per the information by the Government through a reply given in Lok Sabha, 95% of cases of ICE meaning income tax, CBI and ED are on people who are in the Opposition parties... This is not something that I am alleging.. Investigation must be transparent and fair. I have full faith in the ED and I am sure they will hear Rohit's side."

Rohit Pawar, the CEO of Baramati Agro Ltd, against whom the Mumbai police registered an FIR in August 2019, faces purported money-laundering charges linked to Rs 25,000 crore MSCB loan dis-

bursal scam. The ED's charge is that he indulged in 'diversion of funds' to a company that made a bid to buy an ailing sugar cooperative factory.

On his part, Jr Pawar has consistently denied all the charges against him and said that he had not indulged in any wrongdoings as alleged by the police and ED, which had raided the company recently.

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders have come out in support of Rohit Pawar. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray said that there was no rule of law in the country and those who spoke against the government were implicated in false cases. "This is typical of an authoritarian regime that we have in India. Are we in India or someplace like Pakistan? We appeal to the judicial system to uphold the rule of the law," Aditya said.

MP Sanjay Raut came down heavily on the central investigation agency charging: "ED has become a branch of the Bharatiya Janata Party" which is targeting Opposition leaders in Maharashtra and other Opposition-ruled states in the country.

Yogi bid to check gun culture in Bulandshahr

PTI ■ BULANDSHAHR (UP)

Nearly 400 'tamancha'-wielding people in western Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district have been rendered ineligible for contesting the elections or Government jobs in the last three years courtesy their conviction under the Arms Act, 1959.

In the last three years, a total of 392 accused have been convicted by the local court under the stringent law, with their numbers rising from 49 in 2021 to 122 in 2022 and 221 in 2023, according to official data.

Those convicted have been jailed and also rendered ineligible for contesting the elections, getting Government jobs or tenders for contract works and cannot apply for passports or arms license, police officials said, citing provisions of the Arms Act.

Spread over 4,353 square kilometers with a population of over 35 lakh (2011 census), Bulandshahr is known for its rich agricultural land, sugarcane production, pottery works and historical sites like Buland Darwaza.

However, the district also infamously gained promi-

nence over the past few years due to the prevalence of illegal firearms, particularly single-shot pistols called "tamanchas" in the region.

The widely believed factors contributing to the proliferation of country-made arms in the region include porous borders with Haryana, historical land disputes and caste tensions leading to a culture of violence and self-defense.

The adjoining districts of Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad have been impacted by this 'tamancha culture' with suspects in several incidents of street crimes like snatching, assaults and robberies either belonging to Bulandshahr or procuring firearms from the district.

However, 2023 saw a significant rise in the convictions of those accused in cases lodged under the Arms Act, 1959, in Bulandshahr.

There were 49 cases and 49 accused in 2021, and 122 cases and 122 accused in 2022, while there were 221 cases and 221 accused in 2023. A total of 392 cases and 392 accused, who were convicted under the Arms Act by the local court, showed the official data accessed by PTI.

Second ED raid at Shahjehan house in Bengal yields nothing



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate officials secured by a large posse of central forces personnel and State police on Wednesday conducted raids at the house of Sheikh Shahjehan but returned almost barehanded. The raid was conducted in connection with the alleged Rs 10,000 crore ratio scam which has seen a number of TMC functionaries including former Bengal Food Minister Jyotipriya Mallick and a former municipal chairman Shankar Adhya from bordering town of Bongaon going to jail.

The ED officials had raided the same house of Shahjehan at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas but returned with bloody noses, fractured heads and damaged vehicles when thousands of local supporters of Shahjehan a TMC tough and district board member attacked them forcing the central team to abandon its raids. Subsequently the Calcutta High Court on whose orders the investigations are being carried out while reprimanding the police and the ED officials wondered whether they would find anything in subsequent raids. The TMC strongman who has since January 4 been have not surrendered before the law. "We have stuck a summons notice in his house asking him to appear before at ED office on January 29," an official said.

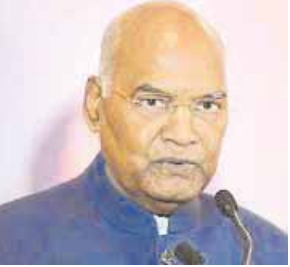
Simultaneous polls: Kovind holds fresh round of consultations with retired judges, industry body

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former president and head of the high-level committee on 'one nation, one election' Ram Nath Kovind has held fresh round of consultations on simultaneous polls with retired judges and industry leaders, an official statement said on Wednesday.

In his fourth round of consultations, Kovind met Justice Dilip Bhosale, former chief justice of Allahabad High Court, and Justice Rajendra Menon, former chief justice of the Delhi High Court, who gave their considered opinion on the subject, the statement said. "Initiating discussions with financial and economic experts, Kovind also held interactions with Ajay Singh, president of ASSOCHAM, and chairman and managing director of Spicejet airlines who was also accompanied by the Secretary General and Assistant Secretary general of ASSOCHAM," it said.

Singh put forth his views in detail on the economic advantages of holding simultaneous elections for the nation.



Earlier, Kovind had met Justice Munishwar Nath Bhandari, former chief justice of the Madras High Court, Justice Gorla Rohini, former chief justice of the Delhi High Court and former CEC Sushil Chandra. Separately, the committee has received nearly 21,000 suggestions from the public out of which 81 per cent "affirmed" the idea of simultaneous polls, an official statement had on Sunday said.

Suggestions were also invited from 46 political parties.

"Till date, suggestions have been received from 17 political parties," it had said.

Various opposition parties, including the Congress and the TMC, have opposed the idea of holding simultaneous polls.

Court disposes of FIR plea against Rahul for revealing identity of rape victim

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday disposed of a petition seeking registration of an FIR against Rahul Gandhi for revealing the identity of an alleged rape victim, after taking note of the submissions by the Congress leader, the city police and social media platform X that the post has been taken down.

Advocate Tarannum Cheema, representing Gandhi, told a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora that the tweet was withheld in India and has been taken down internationally.

The counsel for social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter), where the tweet was posted, also confirmed that Gandhi deleted the tweet which revealed the identity of the minor Dalit girl who was allegedly raped and murdered before being cremated in haste.

Delhi government standing counsel Santosh Kumar Tripathi, representing the Delhi Police, submitted a status report stating that an FIR was registered against Gandhi in 2021 and the investigation in is still going on.

He said unless the main

crime of rape was proven, the subsequent act of publishing the identity of an alleged victim does not become a crime, and investigation on the issue of revelation of the victim's identity by Gandhi was underway.

Disclosing the identity of a rape victim constitutes an offence under Section 228A of the Indian Penal Code and is punishable with imprisonment up to two years and fine.

In the post, which stands geoblocked by the social media platform, Gandhi had published a photograph with the parents of the nine-year-old girl who died under suspicious circumstances on August 1, 2021, with her parents alleging that she was raped, murdered and cremated by a crematorium's priest in southwest Delhi's Old Nangal village.

Following the post, Gandhi's account was suspended by the social media platform for some time but restored subsequently.

The court was hearing a 2021 petition by social activist Makarand Suresh Mhadlekar seeking registration of an FIR against Gandhi for revealing the identity of the victim.

Noting the submissions of the parties, the high court said

the prayers in the petition stand satisfied and disposed of the plea.

The court also noted the FIR was registered at the instance of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) registrar.

In response to the petition, the Delhi Police had said the plea had become infructuous after an investigation was ordered and the post made unavailable in India, and sought permission to file a status report in a sealed cover as it did not want to "scandalise" the matter.

Counsel for NCPCR had contended that the identity of a victim of sexual assault has to be protected from the moment the crime comes to light and that the protection does not come into force after the trial has concluded.

The counsel for the family of the child had objected to the discussion on the criminal case taking place in an open court.

The petitioner's lawyer had also opposed the police's stand, saying they failed to understand the seriousness of the matter and the identity of the child has to be protected even at the stage when allegations are being made.

NDA to organise Statewide padayatra in Kerala ahead of 2024 LS elections

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

As part of its groundwork for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Kerala is organising an extensive statewide foot march for a month from January 27.

The primary objective of the campaign is to seek support from the people in a state where opposition parties hold sway before Lok Sabha polls, party sources said here on Wednesday.

BJP president J P Nadda will inaugurate the march in Kasaragod district on January 27. The month-long campaign, led by BJP state chief K Surendran, is scheduled to commence from the Thalipadupu ground in the evening on the said date.

Titled "NDA Kerala Padayatra", the foot march would pass through Lok Sabha constituencies in various districts before culminating in Palakkad on February 27, a party statement said here.

Surendran would meet religious and social leaders and cultural icons during the journey and interact with the beneficiaries of various Central



schemes.

Besides Nadda, union ministers and national leaders will inaugurate the padayatra in various districts and address the gathering each day.

The padayatra would cover Kottayam, Alappuzha and Thiruvananthapuram constituencies on February 9, 10 and 12 respectively and Union Home Minister Amit Shah would inaugurate the march in the state capital, it said.

At least 25,000 people, including those who have made their mark in different fields, would take part in the march in each constituency.

Besides the exhibition of tableaux featuring various schemes implemented by the Narendra Modi government, the march would also witness

the release of the development document of the NDA, the statement added.

The march comes amid renewed enthusiasm among party workers, following two consecutive trips by PM Modi to the southern state where he held two massive road shows - one in Thrissur and another in Kochi -- early this month.

Addressing a conclave of women in Thrissur, Modi sounded the poll bugle for the saffron party in the state by highlighting the implementation of promises he had guaranteed.

Despite efforts since the 1980s, the BJP is yet to make significant inroads into the state's politics, which is dominated by the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-headed LDF.

Centre... Air India fined ₹1.1...

From Page 1

The construction of each mobile tower is estimated to require 0.02 hectares of land, equivalent to 200 square metres. To address potential concerns, the guidelines emphasise avoiding overlapping high radiation fields. New towers are cautioned against installation within a one-kilometer radius of existing towers. If new towers are deemed necessary, they must be erected with meticulous care and precautions to avoid obstructing bird flight paths and prevent an increase in combined radiations from all towers in the area, as per the guidelines.

Additionally, to ensure that mobile tower connectivity in protected areas is not misused by individuals violating forest and wildlife laws, such as poaching, the guidelines require the sharing of all call data records of suspected persons with relevant authorities.

The guidelines, signed by Rakesh Kumar Jagenia, Deputy Inspector General of Forests (WL) at the Ministry, also state that 'the location and frequencies of cell phone towers and other towers emitting EMR should be made available in the public domain. Location-wise GIS mapping of all cell phone towers should be maintained, which would, among other things, help monitor the population of birds and bees around the mobile towers and in and around protected areas.'

From Page 1

"We are studying the order in detail and will review the options available to us, including our right to appeal, as well as taking it up with the regulator."

According to the DGCA, the regulator conducted a detailed probe after receiving a voluntary safety report from an airline employee alleging safety violations on flights operated by Air India on certain long-range terrain-critical routes.

Since the investigation prima facie revealed non-compliance by the airline, the DGCA said a show cause notice was issued to Air India, it added. Specific details were not disclosed in the release. The DGCA analysed the airline's response to the show cause notice with respect to the laid-down stipulations under the relevant statutory provisions and the performance limits stipulated in critical documentations laid down by the OEM before taking the enforcement action, the release said. On October 29, 2023, the pilot, who had served as a B777 commander, complained about the airline's practice of not carrying the required system of emergency oxygen supply. At that time, sources had said the complaint was that Air India has been operating flights with leased B777 aircraft that carry a chemically-generated oxygen system which lasts around 12 minutes, and hence should not be used for the airline's direct flights to and from San

Francisco.

The airline must consider that, in the event of an emergency depressurisation situation, there should be sufficient oxygen supply for all crew and passengers for any period exceeding 12 minutes. According to the complaint, in the case of depressurisation, it is mandatory for the aircraft to descend to a flight altitude of 10,000 feet or lower. When flying over high mountainous terrain, which could be more than 9,000 to 10,000 feet, it might not be possible to descend to 10,000 feet within 12 minutes.

This is due to the requirement of maintaining a minimum flight altitude of more than 10,000 feet for more than 12 minutes to be clear of vast stretches of high mountainous terrain below, extending for hundreds of miles, as stated in the complaint.

"The matter in question is multi-dimensional and has already been examined by Air India and external experts. We will refrain from offering any comment on this specific case, but we wish to reiterate that the safety of our passengers and crew is our foremost priority, and there is no compromise on the same," an Air India spokesperson said on November 3 last year regarding the complaint.

Meanwhile, on January 17, the DGCA imposed a fine of Rs 30 lakh on Air India for lapses in rostering pilots for operating flights in low visibility conditions.

Lakshadweep scripts a melodious story of...

From Page 1

According to Dr Sarker, the captive breeding of ornamental shrimp has the potential to emerge as an alternative livelihood for people in the coastal communities. Ajith says the shrimp developed in Lakshadweep will be different from that bred in Gulf of Mannar. "In the course of time, the Lakshadweep and Gulf of Mannar breeds will emerge as global trademarks," said Ajith.

With the Union Government giving the green signal for an international airport at Kavaratti, the islanders' concern about marketing the shrimp stand was resolved. Praful Patel, administrator of the islands, who had to face the ire of a group of people when

he took charge in 2022, is a much relieved official now. Whatever he launched was met with suspicion. Even his efforts to make fresh and quality dairy products available to the residents were met with allegations that he was trying to saffronize the islands.

Agatti, arabianesis, koyas, sulci palma and purushothamani are shrimp varieties invented by Dr Ajith and his team of researchers.

The variety Koyas is a tribute to the sea faring population of the islands while purushothamani is the ICAR research scholar who lost his life mid-way through the research. The scenic islands will soon emerge as a hub of unique ornamental shrimps.

PM urges Ministers not to crowd ...

From Page 1

Sources said that while reading out the resolution adopted during the Cabinet meeting, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said that PM Modi fulfilled a centuries-old dream of the people. "The resolution stated, 'In 1947, the 'body' of the country gained independence, but its Pran Prathishta happened on January 22,'" Rajnath added.

Several thousand people, including top politicians, businessmen, sportspersons, and celebrities, were invited to the consecration ceremony. The invitees later had a darshan of the deity soon after the consecration

ceremony ended. For the general public, the doors of the temple opened on Tuesday morning, with nearly five lakh devotees visiting the temple on the first day.

Access for vehicles on specific roads leading to the temple has been temporarily suspended, requiring devotees to approach on foot. A comprehensive security plan, involving personnel from the UP Police, Rapid Action Force (RAF), and private security guards, has been implemented, with over 8,000 police officers assigned for crowd management in Ayodhya

over the last few days.

Uttar Pradesh DG Law and Order Prashant Kumar mentioned that crowd management has been improved, and devotees are being facilitated for darshan in a very structured way. "Several channels/queues have been arranged so that all visitors can spend time at the temple. At the same time, there is an appeal that people should be patient and not hurry or rush to the holy city, particularly the elderly and the divyangs. The administration and law & order have made elaborate arrangements for the pilgrims," Prashant Kumar told *The Pioneer*.

INDIA Bloc speaks...

From Page 1

Rahul had mentioned on Tuesday that he and his family enjoyed a good chemistry with Mamata and that "talks are on with her, and things will soon fall into place."

Denying any talks of an alliance with the Congress, the West Bengal CM said, "I had no discussions with the Congress or anyone else. We had given a proposal which they refused from the start. Since then, our party has decided that we will fight alone in West Bengal. It is the decision of the party members, and I have to accept it."

Mamata even criticised the Congress leadership for not inviting her to Rahul's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which has started from Manipur and will traverse through the breadth of the country, ending up in Maharashtra. She alleged, "They did not have the courtesy to invite me to the Nyay Yatra, which will pass through my State, despite the fact that TMC is a part of the INDIA alliance."

Interestingly, Rahul had earlier said that Mamata had indeed been invited to the Yatra. Apologising for some "occasional sparks that take place when some people from this side or that side make certain remarks," the top Congress leader mentioned on Tuesday that his party had "invited both Mamata ji and Nitish Kumar to join the (Congress) Nyay Yatra when it passes through Bengal and Bihar."

Keeping her post-poll options open, Mamata said

that she was very much a part of INDIA alliance and would consider her commitments after the elections. Later in the day, she suffered a minor head injury after her car was involved in an accident. She was returning from Burdwan to Kolkata by road.

On Monday, Mamata had alleged that despite her being a part of the INDIA alliance and despite the name being conceived by her, she received little importance in the meeting where "the Left leaders' advice is given more preference, and the proceedings are run by the CPI(M)."

The Left had already made it clear earlier that they would never go with the TMC. The West Bengal Chief Minister is reportedly angry with certain remarks made by Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury, who had been asking for an honorable alliance. According to sources, a majority of Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) members, including Chowdhury, had demanded 6-8 seats from the TMC, whereas Banerjee was not willing to spare the two - Behrampur and Malda South - presently being held by the Congress.

Reacting to Mamata's remarks, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh tried to do some damage control, expressing hope that things would be sorted out soon. He said, "Without TMC, the INDIA alliance cannot be thought of," adding, "Some way would emerge after discussions."

‘UK has no plans for conscription’

AP ■ LONDON

The UK government said on Wednesday it has no plans to introduce conscription, after the head of the British Army said a “citizen army” would be needed to fight a future war with a country like Russia. Chief of the General Staff Gen. Patrick Saunders said preparing for a potential land war would have to be a “whole-of-nation” undertaking. He praised European nations closer to Russia for “prudently laying the foundations for national mobilization.”

Saunders, who has long argued for more military spending and is due to leave his job this year, said that “within the next three years, it must be credible to talk of a British Army of 120,000.”

“But this is not enough,” he added during a speech at the International Armoured Vehicles conference in London. “Taking preparatory steps to enable placing our societies on a war footing when needed are now not merely desirable but essential.”

He said “Ukraine brutally illustrates that regular armies start wars; citizen armies win them.”

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s spokesman, Max Blain, said the government “has no intention” of introducing conscription.

“The British military has a proud tradition of being a voluntary force. There are no plans to change that,” he said. He added that “engaging in hypothetical wars” was “not

helpful.” Defence Secretary Grant Shapps has also used stark language about the threat to the UK. Last week he referred to Britain “moving from a post-war to pre-war world.” Despite that, the government has no plans to increase the size of the army from its current level of about 74,000 full-time troops, down from 102,000 in 2006. The government says it will increase military spending from just over 2 per cent of GDP to 2.5 per cent — still much less than at the height of the Cold War.

The British Army conscripted soldiers during World War I, and again during and after World War II, but it has been an all-volunteer force for most of its 364-year history.

Maldives oppn parties express concern about ‘anti-India stance’

PTI ■ MALE

Calling India as the “most long-standing ally,” the two main opposition parties in Maldives on Wednesday expressed concern about the government’s “anti-India stance.”

The open support by the two parties — the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and the Democrats — came a day after the Maldives government said a Chinese ship, equipped to carry research and surveys, will be docking at a Maldivian port after being permitted by the Male government to make a port call for replenishment.

The permission to allow the Chinese ship comes amid strained ties between India and Maldives after its recently-elected President Mohamed Muizzu made Beijing as his first port of call early this month soon after assuming office. Traditionally, New Delhi has been the first port of call for a Maldivian President.

“The current administration appears to be making a



In picture, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu during official talks in Beijing, earlier this month.

AP/PTI

stark pivot towards an anti-India stance. Both, the MDP and The Democrats believe alienating any development partner, and especially the country’s most long-standing ally will be extremely detrimental to the long-term development of the country,” the two

opposition parties said in their assessment on “the direction in foreign policy” of the Maldivian government.

“Consecutive governments of the country must be able to work with all development partners for the benefit of the people of the Maldives, as the

Maldives has traditionally done. Stability and security in the Indian Ocean is vital to the stability and security of the Maldives,” they told a joint news conference. MDP’s chairperson and former Minister Fayyaz Ismail and the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, MP

Ahmed Saleem, along with Democrats party president MP Hassan Latheef and the Parliamentary Group Leader, MP Ali Azim addressed a joint press conference to flag the issues. The two parties committed to work together on several governance-related issues and expressed concern on another set of issues including the foreign policy and lack of transparency.

The MPs of the two parties together hold 55 seats in the 87-member house. The joint statement was posted on the official websites of the two parties and their official X handles too.

The other issues of concern included a lack of transparency in the financial status of the state and the lack of transparency in the MOUs and Agreements that the Government is signing, especially, with foreign parties, although no country was named in the statement.

The opposition also criticised the attempts at censoring the media and meddling with the freedom of the press.

Building fire kills 39 people in China

PTI ■ BEIJING/ NANCHANG

At least 39 people were killed, nine injured and some others still trapped in a building fire in east China’s Jiangxi province on Wednesday, official media reported. The fire broke out at a street shop in Xinyu city, the local fire response emergency headquarters was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

At least 39 people were killed and nine others injured in the blaze, while some others are still trapped on the site, the report said. Videos circulating on social media showed a column of thick, dark smoke billowing from the building, and fire trucks and ambulances were at the scene of the accident.

The building where the fire broke out had internet cafes and training institutions, Central China Television reported.

The cause of the fire is unclear and an investigation is underway. Following the mishap, Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered steps to



curb repeated occurrences of such accidents and to protect people’s lives and property and social stability. Fatal fires in China are not uncommon due to lax enforcement of building and safety standards.

On Jan 20, at least 13 students were killed when a fire broke out in a school dormitory in central China’s Henan province. All the victims were third-grade students. In November last year, 26 people died after a large fire ripped through an office building in Luliang city in Shanxi province.

A hospital fire in Beijing last April claimed the lives of at least 29 people - mostly patients - and triggered an investigation which saw 12 people detained by police for questioning.

China working to de-escalate tensions in Red Sea

AP ■ BEIJING

China, the world’s biggest exporter, says it is deeply concerned about tensions in the Red Sea that have upended global trade by forcing many shippers to avoid the Suez Canal. China has been in “close communication with all parties concerned and making positive efforts to de-escalate the situation in which Iran-backed Houthi rebels have attacked international ships with missiles, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing on Wednesday.

China calls for a halt to the harassment and attacks on civilian ships and urges all relevant parties to avoid fanning flames in the area and jointly ensure the safety and security of the route in the Red Sea,” Wang said. Since November, the Iranian-backed Houthis have launched at least 34 attacks on shipping through the waterways leading up to Egypt’s Suez Canal, a vital route for energy and cargo coming from Asia and the Middle East onward to Europe.

The Houthis, a Shiite rebel group that has held Yemen’s capital Sanaa since 2014 and

been at war with a Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen’s exiled government since 2015, link their attacks to the Israel-Hamas war. However, the ships they’ve targeted increasingly have tenuous links to Israel — or none at all. “We are deeply concerned about the recent escalation of the Red Sea situation. The Red Sea is an important international trade route for goods and energy,” Wang said. Wang also referenced the Gaza conflict, linking it to the Red Sea tensions, saying, “The priority now is to end the fighting in Gaza as soon as possible to avoid further escalation and prevent the situation from getting out of control.”

“China is willing to work with all parties to cool down the situation and maintain security and stability in the Red Sea,” Wang said.

China exported more than \$3.5 trillion in good in 2022, the last year for which figures were available. That was about \$1.5 trillion more than the United States, the world’s No. 2 exporter. Some of the world’s largest container shipping companies and oil giant BP have been sending vessels on longer journeys around Africa that bypass the Red Sea. In response

to the growing impact on global trade, the United States and a host of other nations have created a new force to protect ships. At least 90% of the container ships that had been going through the Suez Canal are now rerouting around Africa and the Cape of Good Hope, according to Drewry, a maritime research consultancy.

The cost to ship a standard 40-foot container from China to northern Europe has jumped from \$1,500 to \$4,000, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany. But that is still far from the \$14,000 seen during the pandemic. The delays contributed to a 1.3% decline in world trade in December, reflecting goods stuck on ships rather than being offloaded in port. The US and its allies have been striking targets Washington has said are involved in the attacks against US forces in Iraq and Syria and were threatening US military and commercial vessels in the Red Sea. China has maintained close ties with Iran, largely based on investment and oil imports, and last year hosted talks resulting in the restoration of Tehran’s diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

Jerusalem (AP): Qatar, one of the world’s top exporters of liquified natural gas, warned Wednesday that its deliveries had been affected by ongoing attacks by Yemen’s Houthi rebels on shipping over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The statement by QatarEnergy came as an explosion struck near a ship Wednesday travelling through a crucial strait near Yemen, though no damage or injuries were reported, the British military said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but suspicion immediately fell on the Houthis.

Ships carrying liquified natural gas from Qatar had been delayed previously before heading through the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. That’s where the Houthi attacks have snarled shipping in a key route for Asia and the Middle East to ship cargo and energy to Europe.

Qatar, which has served as a key mediator between Hamas and Israel, has yet to see any of its ships attacked, however. A statement from its state-owned Qatar Energy producer said

that its “production continues uninterrupted, and our commitment to ensuring the reliable supply of LNG to our customers remains unwavering.” “While the ongoing developments in the Red Sea area may impact the scheduling of some deliveries as they take alternative routes, LNG shipments from Qatar are being managed with our valued buyers,” the statement said. The statement suggests QatarEnergy’s cargos now are travelling around Africa’s Cape of Good Hope, likely adding time to their trips. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, an organisation monitoring Mideast waterways overseen by the British military, reported a blast Wednesday near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen. The explosion happened some 100 metres (325 feet) from the vessel, but caused no damage and its crew is safe, the British said. The Houthis, who have been launching attacks on ships since November over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, did not immediately acknowledge the incident. The

US and the UK have launched rounds of airstrikes targeting suspected missile storage and launch sites used by the Houthis over the attacks.

EXPLOSION STRIKES NEAR SHIP

An explosion struck near a ship on Wednesday travelling through a crucial strait near Yemen, though no damage or injuries were reported, the British military said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, but suspicion immediately fell on Yemen’s Houthi rebels. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, an organisation monitoring Mideast waterways overseen by the British military, reported the blast happened near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen. The explosion happened some 100 metres from the vessel, but caused no damage and its crew is safe, the British said. The Houthis, who have been launching attacks on ships since November over Israel’s war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, did not immediately acknowledge the incident.

Fighting in Gaza leaves patients stranded

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli forces battled Palestinian militants Wednesday near the main hospital in Gaza’s second-largest city of Khan Younis, where medics said hundreds of patients and thousands of displaced people were unable to leave because of the fighting.

Israel has ordered residents to leave a swath of downtown Khan Younis that includes Nasser and two smaller hospitals as it pushes ahead with its 3-month-old offensive against Hamas. The United Nations humanitarian office said the area was home to 88,000 Palestinians and was hosting another 425,000 displaced by fighting elsewhere.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said its staff was trapped inside Nasser Hospital with some 850 patients and thousands of displaced people because the sur-

rounding roads were inaccessible or too dangerous. Nasser Hospital is one of only two hospitals in southern Gaza that can still treat critically ill patients, the group said. Gaza’s Health Ministry also said the hospital had been isolated.

“The Israeli military said its forces were battling militants inside Khan Younis after completing their encirclement of the city the day before. It said aircraft were striking targets as part of the operations there and had also targeted suspected militants in central and northern Gaza.

Thousands of people fled south from Khan Younis on Tuesday toward the town of Rafah. The UN says some 1.5 million people — around two-thirds of Gaza’s population — are crowded into shelters and tent camps in and around Rafah, which is on the border with Egypt. Even there, Palestinians have found little

safety, with Israel regularly carrying out strikes in and around the town. Palestinian witnesses said that in recent days Israeli soldiers and tanks had pushed into parts of Muwasi, a sandy area along the coast that Israel had declared a safe zone, where tens of thousands of people were living in tents without basic services.

In all, some 1.7 million people have been displaced within Gaza, according to the UN refugee agency. Most have fled from the north, where Israel’s air and ground offensive has reduced entire neighbourhoods to shelled-out wastelands, raising the question of whether residents will ever be able to return.

Gaza’s Health Ministry says the offensive has killed at least 25,490 people — the majority women and children — and wounded another 63,354. Its count does not dif-

ferentiate between civilians and combatants. UN officials have expressed fears that even more people could die from disease, with at least one-quarter of the population facing starvation. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to press ahead with the offensive until “complete victory” against Hamas, which started the war with its assault across the border on Oct 7, killing some 1,200 people and abducting another 250.

ISRAELI DIVISIONS OVER WAR AIMS

Netanyahu says Israel is also committed to returning the over 100 hostages that remain in captivity after most of the others were freed in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners during a November cease-fire. But many Israelis, including at least one member of Netanyahu’s War Cabinet, say that’s impossible

without reaching another agreement with Hamas. The militant group says it won’t release any more hostages until Israel ends its offensive. Families of the hostages are also calling for a deal, and have staged increasingly aggressive protests against Israel’s leaders, even interrupting a parliamentary committee meeting Monday.

BUFFER ZONE IN GAZA

Hamas was still attacking Israeli forces, even in some of the most devastated areas, and firing rockets into Israel. An attack Monday near the border killed 21 Israeli soldiers, the military’s biggest loss of life in a single attack since Oct 7.

Israeli media said the troops were working to create an informal buffer zone about a km (half a mile) wide along the border to prevent militants from attacking Israeli communities near Gaza.

Donald Trump wins New Hampshire Republican primary

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has defeated Indian-American politician Nikki Haley in the New Hampshire Republican primary, continuing his march toward the party’s presidential nomination and a possible final contest with President Joe Biden in the November 5 election. With three-quarters of the votes counted, Trump, 77, was leading 55 per cent to 44 per cent. Although only two states have voted so far, Trump’s victory in Tuesday’s primary underscored his dominance of the Republican Party.

The former president won a landslide in Iowa’s caucuses last week. Trump’s victory is remarkable, considering he faces 91 criminal charges, including those related to seeking to overturn the 2020 presidential election. But Haley, 52, the former South Carolina governor and ambassador to the United Nations, vowed to fight on, giving a feisty speech to supporters on Tuesday night in which she questioned the former president’s mental fitness and warned Republicans that renominating Trump would lead the party to defeat.

Speaking after the results, Haley - who campaigned hard in the state - congratulated Trump, saying he “earned it”. But she said the race was “far from over” with “dozens of states left to go”. “I’m a fighter, and I’m scrappy,” Haley, Trump’s last remaining rival in the Republican nomination race, said. Haley said when she started, there were 14 of them in the race, and she was polling at two per cent in the polls. “And now we’re the last one standing next to Donald Trump,” Haley said. “A Trump nomination is a Biden win and

a Kamala Harris presidency,” she said.

“And the next one is my sweet state of South Carolina,” she said. Haley is hoping a strong showing in South Carolina could propel her into the March 5 Super Tuesday contests. Trump said that Haley “had a very bad night” and was “doing a speech like she’d won” when she lost.

Trump called her “delusional”. “Who the hell was that imposter that went up on that stage that went before and claimed victory?” he asked.

Team Haley hit back almost immediately, describing his speech as a “furious and rumbling rant”.

Notably, Trump is the first non-incumbent Republican presidential candidate to win both the Iowa Caucus and the New Hampshire primary back-to-back. Trump is the only Republican candidate to have won the New Hampshire primary thrice.

“This is a decisive win for Donald Trump tonight,” former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy told Fox News in an interview. He said that Haley must withdraw from the race in favour of Trump.

In a statement, the Trump campaign asked Haley to drop out of the race. Haley does not have a path to victory. Instead, if Haley stays in the race, she will play an active role in advancing the re-election of Harris-Biden, it said. “Nikki Haley said she’s running to stop the re-election of Harris-Biden. Yet, without a viable path to victory, every day she stays in this race is another day she delivers to the Harris-Biden campaign,” said Taylor Budowich, CEO of Make America Great Again Inc.

Indian American couple convicted after forcing cousin to work at gas station

Washington (PTI): An Indian-origin Sikh couple has been found guilty of exploiting their cousin by compelling him to work extended hours at their store, subjecting him to physical abuse, threats, and confiscating his immigration documents, a US attorney has said. Harmanpreet Singh, 30, and Kulbir Kaur, 43, were found guilty of conspiracy to commit forced labour and other charges after the pair forced the victim, Singh’s cousin, to work at Singh’s North Chesterfield convenience store for little pay, the Department of Justice said in a statement on Monday.

According to court documents, the victim — who was a minor at the time — came to the US in 2018 after the couple promised to help him enrol in school. After arriving, Singh and Kaur took the boy’s immigration documents and immediately put him to work, prosecutors said. According to court documents, the victim was forced to sleep in an office inside the store for days at a time. He was denied access to food, and the couple also refused his requests to return to India and forced him to overstay his visa. Prosecutors said Singh also slapped and kicked the victim when he requested his immigration documents and tried to leave. On several occasions, Singh also threatened the victim with a gun when he tried to take a day off and leave the store. Prosecutors said the abuse and forced labour started in March 2018 and continued through May 2021. Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division said the Singh couple exploited the victim so they could keep him working for their profit.

US strikes three facilities in Iraq

Washington (AP): The US military struck three facilities in Iraq on Tuesday, targeting an Iranian-backed militia in retaliation for missile and drone attacks on American troops in Iraq and Syria over the past several days, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

The US strikes hit militia facilities in western Iraq, near the Syrian border, US Central Command said. “At President Biden’s direction, US military forces conducted necessary and proportionate strikes on three facilities used by the Iranian-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia group and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq,” Austin said in a statement. “These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against US and Coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias.”

N Korea appears to demolish ‘reunification arch’ as Kim turns against ties with South

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea appears to have torn down a huge arch in its capital that symbolized reconciliation with South Korea, a week after leader Kim Jong Un dismissed decades of hopes for peaceful reunification with the war-divided peninsula’s south, according to satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press on Wednesday. South Korea’s military also said Wednesday that North Korea fired several cruise missiles into waters off its western coast.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un last week described the Pyongyang monument as an “eyesore” and called for its removal while declaring that



the North was abandoning long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with South Korea and ordered a rewriting of the North’s constitution to define the South as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Satellite images from Planet Labs PBC appeared to show the destruction of Pyongyang’s

Monument to the Three Charters for National Reunification, also called the Arch of Reunification. An image Tuesday clearly showed the arch missing along a roadway.

Clouds and snow cover made it difficult to ascertain when North Korea tore down the monument, but it appeared to be within the last few days. NKNews, a website focused on North Korea, first reported on the satellite images.

The arch was a 30-metre (about 100-foot) tall structure that looked over a highway leading to the city of Kaesong near the border with South Korea. The cruise missile launches were North Korea’s second known launch event of

the year, following a January 14 test-firing of the country’s first solid-fuel intermediate range ballistic missile, which reflected its efforts to advance its line-up of weapons targeting US military bases in Japan and Guam. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said Wednesday that the US and South Korean militaries were analyzing the latest launches. It did not immediately confirm the exact number of missiles fired or their specific flight details.

“Our military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely coordinating with the United States while monitoring for further signs and activity from North Korea,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Space industry seeks liberal FDI policy, PLI scheme in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's nascent space sector has sought a liberal FDI policy on a par with the defence industry and production-linked incentive in the interim Budget that the government will present next week.

The industry body Indian Space Association (ISpA) has also sought GST exemption for satellites, launch vehicles and ground equipment manufacturing, lower tax rates for external commercial borrowings and reduction of satellite sector withholding tax from 10 per cent to two per cent, given the low profit margins.

"Our expectation is for enabling a more liberal FDI (foreign direct investment) policy in the space sector. As of now, even one per cent of FDI has to go through the government approval route and that takes

months and months," Awais Ahmed, founder and CEO of Pixxel, a Bengaluru-based start-up, told PTI.

"The defence sector has 74 per cent FDI through the automatic route. Beyond that, you have to go for the government route. At least matching what is there for the defence side would be really helpful in opening up the inflow of external capital for Indian space companies trying to scale up and build more things," Ahmed said.

He also sought a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for space manufacturing. "We need to catalyse and innovate more by having suppliers and folks building a variety of different things for space technology -- whether that is components, satellites, cameras, trackers. That would only be possible to innovate or accelerate through a PLI scheme that sort



of enables that to happen," Ahmed said.

ISpA also demanded a PLI scheme for space-grade components along the lines of a similar scheme for drones.

The industry body also wants the government to commit to procuring and adopting space tech solutions across

domains such as agriculture, disaster management. "Now, to propel this promising industry and drive innovation, it is crucial for the government for the development of a comprehensive regulatory framework and to address existing fiscal and taxation challenges," ISpA Director General Lt Gen (Retd)

AK Bhatt said.

The association has also sought reasonable spectrum usage charges (SUC) as percentage of adjusted gross revenue (AGR) for satellite services allocated non-auctioned spectrum under the new Telecommunications Act, 2023.

ISpA said satellite operators should be permitted 25 per cent depreciation on one-time fee and licence charges to optimise tax impact and capital subsidy on infrastructure investments with additional subsidy for facilities in remote areas to spur manufacturing capabilities, launch infrastructure advancement and downstream space offerings growth in India's private space industry.

IN-SPACe, the space sector regulator, has projected the country's space economy to increase to USD 44 billion by 2033.

Cabinet nod to ₹8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, sources said.

The adoption of gasification technology in India is expected to reduce the country's reliance on imports of natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential products.

The cabinet has given its go-ahead to Rs 8,500 crore incentive scheme for coal gasification projects, the sources said.

The government is targeting to gasify 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal by 2030.

In gasification process, coal is partially oxidised by air, oxygen, steam, or carbon dioxide under controlled conditions to produce a liquid fuel known as syngas. Syngas or synthesis gas can be used for power generation and to make methanol as well.



Sweden keen on ties with India on sustainability solutions in aviation

PTI ■ New Delhi

Keen for stronger ties with India, Sweden is looking for cooperation with the country on sustainability solutions in the aviation sector as well as on electrification efforts in the auto space. Besides, Sweden is hoping for the resumption of direct flight services with India, Johan Davidson, Sweden's State Secretary for Infrastructure and Housing, said.

In an interview to PTI, he said India is an important partner as it is also the world's fastest growing aviation market.

While noting that he is impressed by the country's extensive investments being made in airports and aviation for expansion, he said, "there is a lot of interest in Indian growth and new business opportunities for Swedish companies".

Sweden is a leading player in sustainable aviation. More than 80 Swedish companies are active in the sector, with expertise across the value chain and experience in implementing their solutions globally.

Davidson, who was on a brief visit to India last week, also said the country is "keen to cooperate on the sustainability front in aviation and electrification in the auto sector".

"We have a lot of good companies that can contribute to the green transition in the Indian aviation sector," he said.

To a query on air connectivity between India and Sweden, Davidson said it is hoping for the opening of new direct flight between the two countries.

"In Sweden, the largest group of people from abroad are Indians. We have some 60,000 plus Indians living in Sweden and most of them in Stockholm. A direct flight between India and Sweden would be a popular one, for tourism, business and exchange on a more frequent basis," he said. In the context of sustainability aspects in the aviation space, a key focus area is Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and Sweden is open for cooperation with Indian on that front too.

"Of course, we are open for that," Davidson said in response to a query on whether Sweden would like to be part of India's transition through SAF as and when it happens.



Government aiming to hike scrap share in steel making to 50pc by 2047

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The government is aiming to increase the share of scrap in steel making process to 50 per cent by 2047, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Wednesday.

The steel minister emphasised on usage of scrap in steel making as manufacturing the metal through scrap and other waste products is less polluting and termed it as a step "towards green steel initiative".

"As per our ministry's vision 2047 document, in the next 25 years, the percentage of scrap will be 50 per cent along with the balance 50 per cent as iron ore," Scindia said at the 11th International Material Recycling Conference in Kolkata.

Use of scrap not only reduces the use of natural resources but also cuts emission by 25 per cent in comparison to the primary route of steelmaking, the minister said addressing through a video message.

More scrap would be needed in the future to reduce emission and produce green steel and for this to happen there is a need for environment-friendly formal scrapping centres, Scindia added.

Today, around 25 million tonnes of scrap are produced in the country and around 5 million tonnes are imported, he said.

lion tonnes are imported, he said.

Besides, various waste byproducts generated during mining and steel making can also be effectively used in cement manufacturing, road construction and agriculture, the minister said.

Scindia further said, "Our steel sector is known as a hard to abate sector...With an emissions intensity of 2.55 tonne of CO2 per tonne of crude steel produced." At present, scrap contributes around 30-35 per cent to India's overall steel production, Sanjay Mehta, President, Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), said. "India has the potential to become a global leader in recycling, given its vast population and the increasing awareness of the importance of sustainability. The recycling industry in India has the potential to create jobs, reduce the impact of waste on the environment, and contribute to the country's economic growth," Mehta said.

Around 2,000 delegates from across 35 nations have attended the two-day conference which focuses on increasing usage of scrap to promote circular economy, help India achieve the net zero goals and minimising impact on the environment, Mehta said.

Sensex surges 690 points to reclaim 71K level

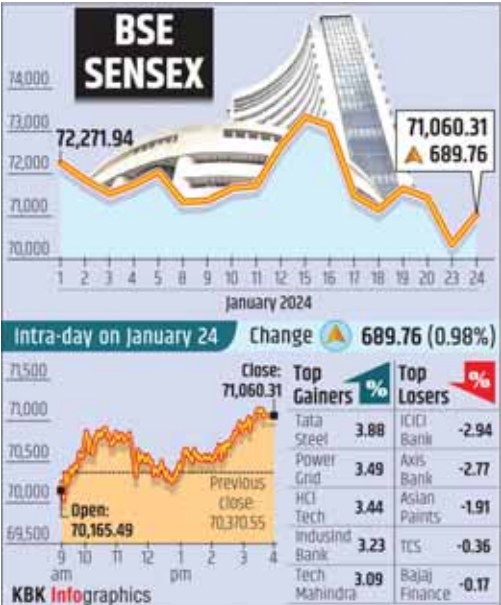
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by 1 per cent on Wednesday after sliding for the past two sessions, propelled by bargain hunting in metal, commodity and telecom stocks.

Trading through a patchy track in the opening session, the 30-share BSE Sensex gradually gained ground and jumped 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to settle at 71,060.31. The benchmark moved between an intra-day high of 71,149.61 and a low of 70,001.60. The broader NSE Nifty also closed 215.15 points or 1.01 per cent higher at 21,453.95.

Among the Sensex firms, majoring 3.77 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, which gained 3.62 per cent.

IndusInd Bank and PowerGrid closed with a gain of 3.60 and 3.34 per cent, respectively. Other gainers were Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Bajaj Finserv and Bharti Airtel, among others. On the other hand, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and TCS were the only laggards, sliding up



to 2.94 per cent. A total of 25 stocks of the 30-share benchmark settled in green, while 43 constituents of the NSE Nifty witnessed

gains.

Elsewhere in Asia, Japan's Nikkei 225 lost 0.80 per cent, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng gained sharply by 3.56 per cent. China's Shanghai Composite also ended 1.80 per cent higher.

European markets were higher on Wednesday, with Germany's DAX and CAC 40 of France gaining 1.00 per cent and 0.58 per cent. London's FTSE 100 rose 0.29 per cent.

In the US markets, the Dow closed 0.25 per cent lower on Tuesday, while the S&P 500 settled 0.29 per cent higher and tech-heavy Nasdaq closed the session 0.43 per cent higher.

Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading higher by 0.58 per cent to USD 80.01 per barrel on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Sensex fell 1,053.10 points or 1.47 per cent to settle at 70,370.55. Nifty also declined 330.15 points or 1.53 per cent to close at 21,241.65.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,115.39 crore, according to exchange data.

Gold falls ₹50; silver jumps ₹300

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices fell Rs 50 to Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 63,250 per 10 grams.

However, silver jumped Rs 300 to Rs 76,000 per kilogram while it had settled at Rs 75,700 per kilogram in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams, down by Rs 50, taking cues from the international market," Saamil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,026 per ounce, down



USD 2 from the previous close. However, silver was trading higher at USD 22.70 per ounce.

Gold was trading lower on Wednesday as traders remained cautious ahead of US macro data, including fourth-quarter GDP data due on Thursday, that could offer further insights into the trajectory of Federal Reserve's monetary policy approach, Gandhi added.

Bank credit expansion projected at 15 pc in FY24, 12 pc in FY25: Icra

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rating agency Icra on Wednesday revised upward its bank credit growth projection at 14.9-15.3 per cent this fiscal, but said the same will lose steam and grow at 12 per cent next fiscal.

At 14.9-15.3 per cent, the system level credit expansion in absolute terms will be Rs 20.4-20.9 lakh crore, it said, adding this will be the highest ever incremental bank credit growth and would surpass the previous high of Rs 18.2 lakh crore recorded in FY23 at a growth rate of 15.4 per cent. The agency had earlier estimated a 12.8-13 per cent credit demand for this fiscal.

However, citing the rising global headwinds and also the higher base coupled with the challenges in deposit mobilisation, the agency said it expects the rate of incremental credit expansion to slow down to Rs 19-20.5 lakh crore or 11.7-12.6 per cent in FY25. Weaker export demand in certain sectors,



softer commodity prices, and challenges in deposit mobilisation could temper bank credit growth in FY2025, it added.

Further, the agency estimates corporate bond issuances to reach Rs 9.6-9.9 lakh crore in FY24, crossing the record level of Rs 8.7 lakh crore in FY23.

Incremental bank credit growth touched nearly Rs 16.9 lakh crore in the first nine months of FY24 far outpacing the Rs 14.1 lakh crore expansion in the corresponding period last year. This was driven by the retail segment and non-bank finance companies, with annual growth of 33 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, as of November 18, 2023.

While incremental bank credit growth remained reasonably strong at Rs 6.1 lakh crore in Q3 and Rs 10.8 lakh crore in the first half of FY24, it was lower by Rs 1.3 lakh crore in December 2023 against Rs 2 lakh crore during December 2022.

According to Anil Gupta, a senior vice-president at the agency, the relative deceleration in bank credit expansion seen during December 2023 reflects the regulatory measures on increased risk-weights on loans extended to consumer credit and non-banking finance companies, apart from the tight liquidity conditions.



Tech Mahindra Q3 net falls 60 pc to ₹510 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Tech Mahindra on Wednesday reported a 60 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 510.4 crore in the three months ended December 2023.

The Mahindra group company had reported a net profit of Rs 1,296.6 crore in the year-ago period while the same was at Rs 493.9 crore in the quarter-ago period. Its overall revenue from operations declined 4.6 per cent to Rs 13,101 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year from Rs 13,734 crore in the same period a year ago.

There was a sharp decline in the operating profit, with the margin narrowing to 5.4 per cent from the 12 per cent in the year-ago period.

Shares of the company closed 3.09 per cent up at Rs 1,407.75 apiece on the BSE.

Rupee settles 2 paise higher at 83.13 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee stayed range-bound and settled 2 paise (provisional) higher at 83.13 against the US dollar on Wednesday.

Forex traders said the rupee is trading in a narrow range as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar supported the rupee while rising crude oil prices and foreign fund outflows capped gains.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.15 against the greenback. The unit oscillated between an intraday low of 83.16 and a high of 83.11 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.13 against the dollar, higher by 2 paise (provisional) from its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee had settled at 83.15 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as the US Dollar has softened ahead of PMI data and gains in the Japanese Yen. Markets expect PMI data to be better than the previous month's reading. However, concerns over the Red Sea region and elevated



crude oil prices may cap the sharp upside," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Traders may remain cautious ahead of PMI data from Germany, the Eurozone, the UK and the US today. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the US GDP and ECB monetary policy decision on Thursday. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 82.90 to Rs 83.50. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.48 per cent lower at 103.11 on Wednesday.

Yen on rising expectations that Bank of Japan may normalise its monetary policy in the coming months," Choudhary added.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.35 per cent to USD 79.83 per barrel.

On the domestic equity market front, Sensex advanced 689.76 points, or 0.98 per cent, to 71,060.31 points. The Nifty climbed 215.15 points, or 1.01 per cent, to 21,453.95 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 3,115.39 crore, according to exchange data.

1 lakh Fronx sold in record time: Maruti

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said its model Fronx has crossed the 1 lakh sales milestone in the domestic passenger vehicle segment in record time. The model has crossed the milestone in 10 months, setting a new industry benchmark, the car market leader said in a statement.

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) had introduced Fronx in the domestic market on April 24, 2023.

"Fronx was strategically added to our portfolio to address the growing demand for another compact SUV that blends distinctive design with a captivating driving experience," MSI Senior Executive Officer (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said.

The model has been instrumental in more than doubling the company's SUV segment share to 19.7 per cent last year from 10.4 per cent in 2022, he added.

MSI has also commenced exports of the Fronx for Latin America, the Middle East, and South-East Asian markets.

So far, the company has exported over 9,000 units of the model to these markets.



Burmans get CCI nod for 31.27 per cent additional stake in Religare

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Competition Commission of India has approved the acquisition of 31.27 per cent of additional stake in Religare Enterprises by four entities of Dabur India promoter Burman family, enabling them to become majority owners in the financial services firm.

The fair trade regulator allowed the four entities to acquire Religare's 5.27 per cent through stock market purchase and another 26 per cent through an open offer.

The four entities — Puraan Associates Pvt Ltd, M.B. Finnart Pvt Ltd, VIC Enterprises Pvt Ltd, and Milky Investment and Trading Company — are controlled by the Burman family, CCI said in a release on Tuesday.

"The proposed combination envisages the acquisition of 5.27% of the total issued and outstanding equity share capital of Religare

Enterprises Limited (Religare) through open market purchases, and an open offer for up to 26% of the Total Expanded Voting Share Capital of Religare... By Puraan Associates Private Limited, M.B. Finnart Private Limited, and VIC Enterprises Private Limited, Milky Investment and Trading Company," the CCI release said.

Religare is engaged in the financial services business through its subsidiaries and operating entities. The Burman family has investments across various sectors such as insurance and FMCG, among others.

As of December 2023, the Burman family's holding in Religare Enterprises stood at 21.17 per cent, according to the exchange data.

After acquisition of additional 31.27 per cent stakes through open offer as well as through purchase of shares in the open market, its ownership in Religare will surpass 52 per cent.

4 NATIONS HOCKEY TOURNEY IN SOUTH AFRICA

INDIA PLAY OUT 2-2 DRAW AGAINST FRANCE

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

The Indian men's hockey team failed to live up to its expectations after a bright start to draw 2-2 against France in its second game of the Four-Nation Tournament here on Wednesday. Mandeep Singh (8th minute) and Amit Rohidas (19th) scored for India, while France came back in the contest with goals from Timothee Clement and B Gaspard in the 37th and 59th minutes respectively.

The Indians had earlier defeated France 4-0 in their

tournament opener on Monday.

The match began with both the teams showcasing their defending prowess to hold off the opposition.

India broke the resistance with Mandeep scoring the first goal for his side.

Rohidas doubled India's lead early in the second quarter as they took control of the proceedings with a solid 2-0 lead.

France started showcasing urgency to get back to level terms, but the Indian defence managed to thwart their dangerous attacks.



But India's defence finally broke down in the 37th minute when Clement reduced the margin.

In the final quarter, both India and France made attacking moves in search of quick goals. It was heartbreak for India as, at the stroke of the final hooter, Gaspard scored the equaliser for France.

The week-long tournament features France, the Netherlands, India and hosts South Africa. India will take on South Africa in their third match on Friday, followed by a game against world No. 1 the Netherlands on Sunday.



Nagal gets direct entry into Bengaluru Open

AP ■ BENGALURU,

Sumit Nagal on Wednesday became the only Indian to earn a direct entry into the Bengaluru Open, an ATP Challenger tournament, to be held here from February 10.

Last week, Nagal scripted history as he became only the second Indian male player after Somdev Devvarman to advance to the second round of the Australian Open, after he defeated world no. 27 Alexander Bublik in his opener.

With the cut-off for the Bengaluru Open being at 257, the 137th-ranked Nagal will be among the 21 players from 11 countries to qualify for the main draw of the ATP 100 Challenger tournament.

"This edition is expected to be high on challenges, there are many strong contenders, making this edition more challenging and definitely exciting to watch. My journey continues, and I am enthusiastic about going back on court and making a lasting impact,"

Nagal, who won Bengaluru Open in 2017, said in a release.

France's Benjamin Bonze, at world no. 106, is the high-ranked player.

"With eight players ranked in the top 200, including four within the top 150, the level of tennis is such that distinguishing between players in the 100-200 range is challenging," said Priyank Kharge, chairman of the organising committee and a state minister.

The tournament is organised by the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSSTA) at the KSSTA Stadium.

Each of the last five editions, held between 2018 and 2023, have thrown different singles winners. In 2023, Australia's Max Purcell won the title while Aleksandar Vukic and Tseng Chun-hsin emerged winners in consecutive events in 2022. India's Prajnesh Gunneswaran won the trophy in 2018 while James Duckworth was the winner in 2020. The tournament was not held in 2019 and 2021.

Zverev ousts Alcaraz to move into Australian Open semis

AP ■ MELBOURNE (AUSTRALIA))

Alexander Zverev made no mistake with his second chance to close out a win over No. 2-ranked Carlos Alcaraz on Wednesday night and moved into an Australian Open semifinal against two-time finalist Daniil Medvedev.

The sixth-seeded Zverev was a up a break in the third set and missed a chance to serve it out but the Olympic champion didn't blink when he got another chance in the fourth, finishing off a 6-1, 6-3, 6-7 (2), 6-4 victory.

Alcaraz won Wimbledon last year and was the only player to beat 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic in a Grand Slam match in 2023. The 20-year-old Spaniard won't get the chance in Australia this time. It was Zverev's first win over a top-5 player at a Grand Slam, and the reward was a spot in the semis for the seventh time at a major.

Medvedev, a two-time finalist in Australia, outlasted ninth-seeded Hubert Hurkacz 7-6 (4), 2-6, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 to make it to the semifinals at Melbourne Park for the third time in four years. Djokovic will play Jannik Sinner in the other semifinal.

Zverev said he'd been taking some beatings from Medvedev recently but "maybe this will be it. Maybe this will be the place."

No. 12-seeded Zheng Qinwen and Ukrainian qualifier Dayana Yastremska won women's quarterfinals on Day 11 and will play their first Grand Slam semi when they meet after a night sleep.

The sixth-seeded Zverev was on top of Alcaraz early, getting 16 of his 18 first serves into play in the first set and winning the point on

all but two of them.

He got three set points when Alcaraz netted an attempted backhand drop shot and closed it out with an ace after 29 minutes.

In the second set, Alcaraz had break points in the sixth game but couldn't convert and Zverev took it away from him with two service breaks to lead 2-0.

The German was serving for the match at 5-3 in the third, just after midnight, when Alcaraz broke for the first time. Alcaraz got back to 5-5 when he chased a shot into the doubles alley and knocked a backhand down the line, beaming a big smile and shaking his racket in a gesture that suggested: "Hello, still here." He won the last seven points of the tiebreaker to make it 2-1, flashing a big smile after earning four set points when he chased a ball wide and hit a forehand passing shot.

After an exchange of service breaks to open the fourth, Zverev got another chance to close out the match after breaking in the ninth game.

After clinching the win, the Olympic gold medalist let out of a scream of relief and shook his arms in celebration at about 1:20 a.m. Local time.

Medvedev's celebration was more like a sigh of relief. He led 4-2 in the fourth set but No. 9 Hurkacz rallied to force a fifth and took it to a grueling four hours.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion took the decisive break in the seventh game of the fifth and held on for victory, capped with a drop shot. "I'm so destroyed right now," Medvedev, his hands clasped behind his head, said in his on-court interview.

Mani qualifies for main draw of WTT Star Contender Goa

PTI ■ MAPUSA (GOA)

Indian table tennis player Nithya Mani qualified for the main draw of the ongoing WTT Star Contender Goa after winning her final qualifying round match at the Peddem Indoor Stadium here on Wednesday.

Chennai-based Nithya won a nail-biting contest against England's Tin-Tin Ho 3-2 (11-7 6-11 5-11 11-9 11-7) in a women's singles qualifying Round 3 match to move into the main draw, scheduled to take place from Thursday.

In the women's singles category, Ayhika Mukherjee lost 1-3 (11-5 9-11 6-11 6-11) to Turkey's Sibel Altinkaya, while Spain's Sofia Zhang beat Diya Chitale 3-1 (11-5 6-11 14-12



11-0) in the qualifying round 3 to move into the main draw. Sutirtha Mukherjee went down 1-3 (8-11 7-11, 12-10 4-11) against Hanna Ryu in women's singles qualifying round 2 to exit the tournament.

In the men's singles category, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran lost 2-3 (7-11 11-7 6-11 11-7 8-11) against Vincent Picard of France in qualifying round 2 stage. Senegal's Ibrahima Diaw

then got the better of Manav Thakkar 3-0 (12-10 11-6 11-7) in the qualifying round 3.

Jeet Chandra and Payas Jain made their way into the main draw in the men's doubles category as they registered a comfortable 3-1 (11-13 11-7 12-10 11-4) win over compatriots Yashansh Malik and Abhinandh Pradhivadhi.

Sayali Wani and Taneesha Kotecha beat the India pair of Suhana Saini and Yashaswini Ghorpade 3-1 (9-11 11-9 11-6 11-6) in the women's doubles qualifying round 2 to reach the main draw.

In the mixed doubles category, Manush Shah and Diya Chitale overcame the challenge of Snehit Suravajula and Sreeja Akula 3-0 (11-4 11-3 11-8) in the qualifying round 2.

Do not think anyone will ever come close to Djokovic: Tomic

PTI ■ CHENNAI

With the Australian Open currently on, defending champion Novak Djokovic has once again been dubbed as a favourite to retain the title, and former world No. 17 Bernard Tomic of Australia firmly believes there will be no one to challenge the great Serbian.

Djokovic is the leading Grand Slam winner in the Open Era of tennis. He also has the chance of winning the most Grand Slam titles across eras, as another win would allow him to surpass the all-time record of Margaret Court.

Djokovic is eying his 25th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open.

Tomic, who has lost to

Djokovic on all six instances in the ATP circuit, dubbed him a "freak" and also the "G.O.A.T.", besides adding that to beat him, one has to play at the highest level at all times.

"I was lucky enough to beat Djokovic at the Hopman Cup 11 years ago (chuckles). He is a freak."

"You have no choice but to play at the highest level to beat him. And, if you lower your level even the slightest against him, you will lose," he told PTI in an exclusive interaction on the sidelines of an ongoing ITF event here.

"I firmly believe he will win the (ongoing) Australian Open. And if he does win, anything is possible. He can even touch the 30-Slams mark. He is the greatest of all time, for sure."

Tennis has mostly been



defined by the 'Big 3' era, which has been dominated by Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Djokovic. But, with the era on the verge of ending, it is likely to open the doors for other players to assert their dominance in Grand Slams.

Talking on the same, Tomic

admitted that the trio has raised the bar quite high for the sport in current date, besides terming the era as the "toughest".

However, he firmly believes there will be players coming up and dominating the circuit in about 10 years from now.

"Like it or not, everything goes forward in life. Time moves on, and different players come in. The era when I played about five years ago, as Federer, Nadal, Novak, and even Andy Murray were exchanging the top spot quite frequently, was probably the toughest era of tennis," Tomic said. "Guys like (Juan Martin) del Potro, (David) Ferrer, (Kei) Nishikori and (Jo-Wilfried) Tsonga -- a lot of players who could have won Grand Slams. Of course, they (Big 3) have changed the modern-day tennis and raised the bar quite high."

"Obviously, a lot of similar players are coming through now, like (Carlos) Alcaraz and (Jannik) Sinner. I hope they will win many more Grand Slams in the coming years, and about

10 years from now, we will definitely be here talking about them or some other players."

Although Tomic feels that Alcaraz of Spain and Sinner of Italy would be the next big thing in tennis, he warned that as long as Djokovic is around, others will have to wait for their share of success.

"Sinner is likely to win five or 10 Grand Slams; Alcaraz as well. But, with Novak around for at least two more years, it's always going to be tough for anyone other than him," he continued. "No, I don't think Novak is done yet, and no one has come close to him. I don't think anyone will ever come close to him in the next 10-15 years. Winning 20 Grand Slams itself will be a tedious task, and if he wins 30, it would be unreal."



Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Ashu Malik pulled off two raid points in dying seconds to help Dabang Delhi beat Haryana Steelers 35-32 in the Pro Kabaddi League contest here on Wednesday.

Vinay picked up three raid points as the Steelers took 4-2 lead in the fifth minute. However, Ashish and Vikrant effected brilliant tackles and helped Dabang Delhi take 6-5 lead soon after. Malik pulled off a brilliant raid as the Delhi side continued to forge ahead. Malik caught out Jaideep Dahiya and Yogesh tackled Ashish as Dabang inflicted the first all out of the match.

Siddharth Desai effected a raid and Rahul Sethpal tackled Manjeet, but the Delhi side still held a decent lead at 14-9.

Vishal Bhardwaj and Yogesh picked up tackle points in quick

succession as Dabang stayed ahead 15-10 in the 17th minute. The Steelers tackled Manjeet in the last few minutes of the first half, but the two teams went into the break with Delhi leading 18-13. Desai pulled off a double-point raid in the opening minutes of the second half and narrowed the gap between the two sides. The Steelers rode on the momentum and inflicted an all out to take 23-21 lead.

Desai continued to showcase brilliant form as the Steelers surged ahead 27-24 in the 30th minute. However, the Delhi side fought back and levelled the scores at 28-28. Desai effected a raid to help the Steelers inch ahead, but Malik pulled off a magnificent raid soon after and locked the scores at 31-31.

Malik then effected two brilliant raids in the dying seconds of the game and helped the Delhi side clinch a thrilling win in the end.

Kiran, Sen enter second round; Prannoy, Srikanth exit in Indonesia Masters

AP ■ JAKARTA

Lakshya Sen and Kiran George advanced to the second round but HS Prannoy and Kidambi Srikanth made early exits after suffering narrow losses in their respective opening matches at the Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No. 19 Sen, who is looking to qualify for the Paris Olympics, avenged his Malaysia Open first-round loss to China's Weng Hong Yang with a 24-22 21-15 win in his opening round match here.

The 23-year-old George, who had won Super 100 titles at 2022 Odisha Open and 2023 Denmark Masters, bounced back from an opening game reversal to eke out a 18-21 21-16 21-19 win over France's Toma Junior Popov in another opening round match.

George, also a product of Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy, had qualified for the main draw after registering twin wins on Tuesday.

Sen will now face either Malaysia Open champion Anders Antonsen of Denmark or Indonesia's Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo in the next round, while George will be pitted



against China's Lu Guang Zu. However, world no. 8 Prannoy, who had reached the semifinals at India Open Super 750 last week, lost to former world champion Loh Kean Yew of Singapore 18-21 21-19 10-21 in his opening round match. The 31-year-old Indian, who claimed maiden bronze medals at the Asian Games and

world championships last year, had lost in the first round at the Malaysia Open Super 1000 tournament as well.

For former world no. 1 Srikanth, it was yet another day when he had to return empty handed despite putting up a brave effort against Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia, ranked 10th. Srikanth, who is racing

against time to qualify for Paris, squandered an opening game advantage to lose 21-19 14-21 11-21 to Lee in a 54-minute clash to bow out of tournament. It was his second successive first-round loss of the season.

Sen was under pressure to perform following his miserable start to the new season which saw him make first-round exits in both the events he had participated so far.

His loss against compatriot Priyanshu Rajawat in the India Open had affected his Olympic qualification hopes as he needs to get inside top 16 by April end to make the cut for Paris Games.

On Wednesday, Sen watched his 7-3 lead evaporate as Weng dominated the proceedings to take a 19-12 advantage at one stage. But, Sen produced a rearguard action to pocket 12 of the next 15 points to leave his opponent behind.

After the change of sides, the battle for the first five points was a hard one before Sen marched to 11-6 at the break.

Weng fought bravely to make it 10-11 but it was all a Sen show after that as the Indian reeled off six straight points and held his fort to emerge victorious.



Ivory Coast fires Gasset as coach

AP ■ ABIDJAN (IVORY COAST)

Ivory Coast coach Jean-Louis Gasset has been fired despite the team still having a chance of qualifying for the Africa Cup of Nations knockout stage.

The Ivorian Football Federation (FIF) said Wednesday that it was terminating the contracts of the French coach and his assistant "for insufficient results in accordance to the contract of objectives they had with the FIF."

Former Ivory Coast midfielder Emerse Faé was to take charge of the team on an interim basis.

Ivory Coast is hosting the Africa Cup but failed to secure automatic qualification to the tournament's knockout stage when it was beaten 4-0 by Equatorial Guinea in its final

group game on Monday.

It left the Elephants with just three points from three group games and reliant on results in other groups to finish among the best four third-place finishers for a place in the pre-quarterfinals.

Equatorial Guinea finished top of Group A with seven points, ahead of Nigeria on goal difference.

Wednesday's final group games in Groups E and F were to determine whether the host nation could squeeze into the knockout stage.

Gasset reportedly tendered his resignation to the president of the FIF, Yacine Idriss Diallo, right after the loss to Equatorial Guinea.

The defeat prompted some irate Ivorian fans to vandalize commuter buses outside the stadium.

INDIA SPINBALL VS ENGLAND BAZBALL

Rohit men bank on spin for first strike

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

India's unalloyed dominance at home over the last 12 years will be put through its most unique examination till date when Rohit Sharma's side faces a trend-defying England in the first match of what promises to be a stirring five-Test series from Thursday.

No team has been as invincible as India at home since their 1-2 defeat against the Three Lions led by Alastair Cook in 2012, stitching together a bull run of 16 successive series wins, including seven series sweeps. If one further breaks down the stats, India have lost just three Tests out of 44 they played in their own backyard in this phase, and this is a power walk even beyond the all-conquering West Indies in the '80s or Australia of the turn of the century.

Several factors have contributed to this astonishing run over the last decade, including favourable pitches, bowlers



who knew how to exploit those tracks and batters who churned out runs like popcorn from a vending machine.

But two players have stood head and shoulders above the rest in these conquests — off-

spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja.

From Thursday, the Ash-Jaddu duet will be on show here at the RGI Stadium, where the pitch is expected to

turn and grip as the match moves towards its conclusion.

England already have a taste of what these two can do from their past visits here, and they will be worried, particularly about Ashwin.

The 37-year-old still retains the burning zest of a 17-year-old to keep improving his craft and since 2012, Ashwin has grabbed 283 wickets from 46 Tests averaging a shade over 19.



England frustration ends as rookie spinner Bashir gets visa

PTI ■ LONDON/HYDERABAD

England's Pakistan-origin off-spinner Shoaib Bashir was on Wednesday granted visa to play in the five-match Test series against India, ending a "frustrating" wait for the visiting side whose captain Ben Stokes felt "devastated" by the delay.

"Shoaib Bashir has now received his visa, and is due to travel to join up with the team in India this weekend. We're glad the situation has now been resolved," the England and Wales Cricket Board posted on its X (formerly Twitter) page on the eve of the first Test in Hyderabad.

The 20-year-old rookie, who plays for Somerset in the English county, was forced to head back to England from the team's Abu Dhabi training base after a prolonged wait for visa. His family is of Pakistani heritage but Bashir was born in Surrey.

The delay snowballed into a major controversy with a British government spokesperson demanding "fair" treatment for the youngster and Stokes hardly mincing words in expressing his outrage.

Bashir, who is a shock inclusion in the squad with a mediocre 10 wickets from just

six first-class games, was never in contention for a place in the squad for the opening Test. "When I first found the news out in Abu Dhabi, I did say we shouldn't fly until Bash gets his visa," Stokes said in the pre-match press conference on Wednesday.

"But that was a little bit tongue in cheek. I know it's a way bigger thing than doing that. That was probably just emotions around the whole thing. I'm pretty devastated that Bash has had to go through this," he added.

An unnamed British government spokesperson told ESPNcricinfo that it wasn't the first time that citizens of Pakistani heritage faced a delay in securing Indian visas.

"The specifics of this case are a matter for Shoaib Bashir and the Indian Government. But we absolutely expect India to treat British citizens fairly at all times in its visa process.

"We have previously raised the issues British citizens with Pakistani heritage experience applying for visas with the Indian High Commission in London," he said.

India have, so far, not commented on the matter.

Stokes hoped that Bashir would be able to join the squad by the end of this week.



It was a headache to decide between Axar and Kuldeep as third spinner: Rohit

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma on Wednesday admitted that the team management had a tough time making the third spinner choice between Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav for the opening Test against England but hinted that the former might just have made the final cut.

Behind Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, India are primed to pick a third spinner for the first Test against England, starting here from Thursday.

"If the wicket has bounce or if it doesn't have bounce, he (Kuldeep) still is a factor in those types of conditions because he's got superb variations. Obviously, he is a very mature bowler now from what he was a few years back," Rohit said in the pre-match press conference.

"He's not played a lot of Test cricket in India because of Ashwin and Jadeja. We've seen it in the past as well. With our middle-order (batting), in the past, a lot of us (batters) got an opportunity pretty late.

"But that's the reality of it, you can't hide away from it. But yes, he's a very tempting option," he added.

Although Rohit did not give away his final team for the match, he indicated that Axar might just be the one on the final team sheet.

He underlined the utility of

the left-arm spinner as an all-rounder, the strongest clue about the think tank's preference for this Test at least. He dispelled the notion that Axar packs similar abilities as Jadeja and, as such, he might slip down the pecking order.

"Axar, you know, with his all-round ability, gives us that batting depth. The consistency that he's shown, playing in these conditions in Test cricket, also is an important factor for us. "But it was a headache to decide who it is going to be for us. But I am not going to say who it is," said Rohit.

The 36-year-old also hoped that premier spinner Ashwin will deliver one more time in conditions familiar to him. "Ashwin, obviously, we know his class, we know his quality. Every time he plays the game for us, he tends to impress all of us by a notch (higher). We do appreciate that. "Every time he's gotten an opportunity, he's made sure to put the team ahead. He's shown it for a number of years now. So, yeah, I hope this series is no different for him, and he comes out and does what he does the best," said Rohit.

Ashwin is on the cusp of achieving twin milestones in his storied career.

The 37-year-old off-spinner is 10 wickets shy of the 500-wicket mark in Tests and he can also complete 100 career Test matches if he plays all the five Tests in the series.

Wood is an impact builder: Stokes

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday rated Mark Wood as an "impact builder" with high pace after they decided to enter the first Test against India, starting here from Thursday, with a solitary fast bowler and three spinners.

Wood was preferred over veteran James Anderson for this match, and Stokes said the Durham man's ability to touch 150 clicks tilted the scales in his favour.

"Obviously, what he brings

with his high pace...he is a real impact builder. Bowling the 90 mile an hour with a reversing ball is obviously going to be very difficult to play against.

He's another weapon which you can use out here with short, sharp spells, wanting him to be bowling as fast as he can and short periods. There're no worries about these long spells because that's how we're going to use him this week," said Stokes during his pre-match press meet here.

So, how did the team management handle the situation of



looking over a highly-experienced bowler like Anderson?

Stokes said Anderson has taken the whole episode quite professionally.

More intent expected from Indian batters against Ireland

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

U-19 World Cup

India's young turks would be aiming for a more proactive approach while batting when they take on Ireland in the second group league encounter of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Thursday. While India disposed off Bangladesh by 84 runs in what turned out to be an easier than expected opener, Ireland game will provide them with an opportunity to play differently before tougher opposition comes calling during the Super Six phase starting next week.

Ireland are coming into the game with a defeat against Bangladesh after beating min-

nnows USA in the opening game.

For India, more than battling the opposition, it will be about raising the bar for themselves and playing the 50-over game, keeping the modern approach in mind, compared to the early 1990s style of play.

The skipper Uday Saharan, who scored 64 and top scorer Adarsh Singh (76), had strike-rates of 79 and 68 respectively, which is slightly unacceptable in modern times.

That India had two terrific but vastly different left-arm

spinners Saumy Kumar Pandey and Musheer Khan doing a fantastic job for them meant coach Hrishikesh Kanitkar didn't have much to worry about.

One hopes that Saumy, easily the best bowler by a distance in the first game, doesn't have too much of a shoulder problem that forced him to take a temporary break in the first game in between his first and second spells. On a sluggish Bloemfontein track, Indian batters would need to rotate the strike better and also find more gaps in the Powerplay overs.

Maxwell needs to hold up his end of bargain: McDonald

PTI ■ BRISBANE



Glenn Maxwell is a vital cog in Australia's white-ball set up but he must "hold up his end of the bargain" after his "less than ideal" incident in Adelaide, said head coach Andrew McDonald.

Last week Maxwell was hospitalised in Adelaide after he got too drunk after attending a concert by 'Six and Out', the band featuring former Australian pacer Brett Lee and passed out.

He wasn't kept in the hospital for long and was discharged soon after and is now back in training.

"I've spoken to Glenn, had a

period of time and I suppose the lessons for him around that would be to take up his end of the bargain in that space and take care of himself."

Maxwell was rested for next month's three-match ODI series against the West Indies at home and he took the opportunity to attend a golf event in Adelaide before the incident took place.

"We want to see Glenn Maxwell playing cricket for the next three to four years for Australia. Can he get to the next World Cup in 2027 in South Africa? Who knows. But, he's a key player in our white-ball formats," McDonald said.

The 29-year-old Siraj has taken 68 wickets so far in 23 Tests since making his debut a little three years back in Australia. He said focussing on consistently hitting the right spot irrespective of the format and conditions has helped him in his career.

"I bowl with the new ball, so my line and length remain the same. I don't change things whether it's the white ball or the red ball. You have to bowl that length of five-six metres, because with the new ball, you have to pitch it up to get wickets," he said.

Roach sees plenty of promise in fellow fast bowler Shamar

AP ■ BRISBANE

West Indies veteran fast bowler Kemar Roach is predicting big things for the new guy on the team, 24-year-old fellow paceman Shamar Joseph.

Ahead of the second Test — a day-night match — that begins Thursday at the Gabba in Brisbane, the 35-year-old Roach has 267 Tests wickets, placing him fifth on the all-time list for the West Indies.

In 2009, on his first Test tour, Roach shattered Ricky Ponting's elbow with a blazing bouncer that forced Ponting to retire hurt from the match.

Joseph took 5-94 on debut in the first Test in Adelaide last week, including the wicket of Steve Smith with his first delivery. Australia won the first Test by 10 wickets in 2 1-2 days.

"The best advice I can give him is to build his own legacy and understand what you want from cricket," Roach said of

Joseph. "That's up to him to determine... If it's monetary, or if it's just stats and statistics or whatever. There's gonna be a lot of distractions and he's a hot commodity right now."

"The (Twenty20) franchises are a big distraction but guys still want to relish red-ball cricket. Test cricket is still in the hearts of West Indian cricketers at home. It's just about us to provide support around it."

Roach says the early signs from Joseph were all positive.

"He is a very confident young man and has shared a lot of information with me. We have a lot of conversations," Roach said.

"He has a good energy I love. I am happy to be around him and to be a part of his career at the start of it. Let's see how long and how good he can be at the end of it. He is destined to be good if he puts the work in."

Meanwhile, Australia opener Usman Khawaja has been

passed fit by Cricket Australia's medical team to play in Brisbane. And Travis Head is likely to play despite a recent positive COVID-19 test.

Khawaja was struck in the head by a West Indies bouncer during Friday's short run chase in Adelaide. The 37-year-old completed concussion assessments earlier this week, and has been approved to partner Steve Smith in Khawaja's home Gabba test.

"Khawaja was assessed again

today and has no symptoms of delayed concussion," a Cricket Australia spokesperson said.

After a match-winning century in Adelaide, Head subsequently contracted COVID-19 but Australia captain Pat Cummins said the 30-year-old was progressing well in his recovery. Head flew to Brisbane on Tuesday but decided to rest in the team hotel rather than join the Australian team for its late afternoon training session at the Gabba.

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