

Keep priorities, aspirations of people in mind for preparing Budget: CM

CM, Finance Minister hold review meeting for State Budget 2024-25

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren today reviewed the preparations for Budget 2024-25 with officials in the Jharkhand Ministry. In the upcoming budget, the Chief Minister has instructed officers to focus and give special attention to other major issues in the state including infrastructure, education, sports, industry, health, agriculture, electricity, water, roads, housing scheme and pension amount under social security, scholarship to students studying in schools and colleges. State Finance

Minister Rameshwar Oraon was also present on this occasion. In the meeting, Chief Minister Hemant Soren asked the officials to prepare a better budget for the financial year 2024-25 keeping in mind the priorities and aspirations of all the people of Jharkhand. The Chief Minister said that the budget should focus on public welfare and all-round development. The Chief Minister said that strengthening the rural economy in the state is the priority of the state government, continuous work is being done in this regard. Jharkhand is also progressing

at a fast pace in many areas. Focusing on villages, agriculture, farmers and youth, work is being done to reach public welfare schemes to them. Emphasize on increasing the provisions for employment and self-employment in the budget. The state government is making action plans with the aim of further strengthening them in the coming times. The Chief Minister said that the provisions should be included in the Budget 2024-25 with foresight. Poor welfare is the aim of our government. We are moving ahead with the thought that the benefits of

state government schemes should reach the last person standing in the way of development. The Chief Minister told the officials that the budget for the financial year 2024-25 includes promotion of small and cottage industries in the state, provision for MGNREGA, increasing employment and self-employment, promotion of sports activities, improvement in women's health, improvement in children's nutrition. Instructions were given to make special provisions in all other important areas. The Chief Minister said that there is a need to

move forward with a new and positive thinking in the upcoming budget. In the meeting, State Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon, Chief Secretary L. Khyangte, Development Commissioner Avinash Kumar, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Vandana Dadel, Principal Secretary of the Finance Department Ajay Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Vinay Kumar Choubey, Planning and Secretary of Development Department Prashant Kumar and other officials were present.



Chief Minister Hemant Soren along with Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon holds a meeting with officials in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

India will become developed nation by 2047: Bauri

PNS : RANCHI

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged citizens to strive to make India a developed nation by 2047 when the country completes 100 years of independence, we all have to cooperate to make the dream a reality. Leader of Opposition Jharkhand Amar Kumar Bauri said these things in a program organized under the Vikas Bharat Abhiyan organized in the city on Monday.

Bauri said that whatever guarantee Prime Minister Narendra Modi gives to people, effort is taken to ensure that it is fulfilled. Development and change was seen in the country only after the year 2014. When the poor are getting a two-room permanent house on the terrace, a kitchen in it, 5 kg rice in the kitchen, gas stove, toilet, health insurance of 50000 for every person, tap water, electricity, good roads, and this is not only being given to any one class or caste. With the basic mantra of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas, the benefits of all these schemes are being given to every section of the country.

The Leader of Opposition said that Ayushman Bharat has now become the world's largest health insurance and all this has been possible due to the strong determination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said that Ram Lalla will be established in his sanctum



Opposition Party Leader Amar Kumar Bauri, Organization General Secretary Karmaveer Singh along with others during a programme in Ranchi on Monday. PNS

sanctum in Ayodhya on 22 January 2024. After a long battle of 500 years, Ram Lala will finally be established again in his grand temple on 22 January 2024. We all have to celebrate Diwali together on 22nd January and welcome Lord Shri Ram by lighting lamps in our homes and all the nearby temples.

In the program, Organization General Secretary Karmaveer Singh said that the objective of taking the car of developed India resolution and guarantee of Narendra Modi to every panchayat and every village is to reach those people who are not aware of the schemes of the Central Government or those people who are not aware of the Central Government's schemes. Those who have not received the benefits of government schemes can get proper information and their problems can be solved immediately.

He said that through this, information about all the pub-

lic welfare schemes of the Central Government will be available and the general public will also be able to take advantage of it.

During the program, he urged everyone to inform the nearby people who should get the benefits of any public welfare schemes of the Central Government. In the light of January 22, 2024, he said that it is a matter of pride for all of us that after a long fight of 500 years, Lord Shri Ram is finally coming out of the tent and getting established in his grand temple. We have to make this day memorable and everyone has to welcome Lord Shri Ram by lighting lamps in their homes.

In today's program, mainly State General Secretary of Bharatiya Janata Party Balkumud Sahay, Hatia MLA Naveen Jaiswal, State President of Bharatiya Janata Party Mahila Morcha Aarti, Mandal President, District President and others are present.

POLITICAL TEMPERATURE GOES UP AS GUV RETURNS FROM CHENNAI

PNS : RANCHI

Governor CP Radhakrishnan, who left Ranchi for Chennai on January 2 amid political turmoil, returned to Ranchi on January 7. The Governor had gone to Chennai late evening on January 2. Just a day after this, a meeting of ruling party MLAs was held. Here, State Chief Minister Hemant Soren is staying in Ranchi along with the MLAs and ministers of the alliance parties, so that any situation can be faced politically.

Now that the Governor has returned to Jharkhand, political turmoil may increase. There was a lot of speculation in the politics of Jharkhand regarding the 7th summons of ED and the resignation of Sarfaraz Ahmed from Gandey.

However, in the legisla-



ture party meeting, Chief Minister Hemant Soren had made it clear that he would not resign. After this many speculations came to an end. Before leaving for Chennai, the Governor had said that whoever does wrong will have to face consequences. This statement of the Governor is being taken seriously in political circles. The Election Commission's recommendation in the matter

of Office of Profit is in the Raj Bhavan. This envelope lying with the Governor also gives rise to many kinds of speculations. Now after the return of the Governor, Jharkhand's eyes are on Raj Bhavan.

On Sunday while returning back from Chennai, Governor CP Radhakrishnan did not talk to media persons and proceeded towards Raj Bhavan, greeting journalists while sitting in the

car. Journalists were also present at the main gate of Raj Bhavan, but could not talk. In Chennai, when asked by journalists about prohibition in Tamil Nadu, he said that he has always supported complete prohibition because the sales were exceeding the limit and it would have a bad impact on the future generations of Tamil society. He is against it.

If seen from a political point of view, the ruling party is calling for the by-election in Gandey within six months as a compulsion and demanding to hold it soon. In this regard, the JMM delegation has also submitted a memorandum to the Chief Electoral Officer. It has been said that the first session of the fifth Assembly started on January 6, 2020. The tenure of the fifth Jharkhand Assembly is till January 5,

2025. The ruling JMM and BJP have locked horns over holding by-elections on the Gandey Assembly seat in Jharkhand.

While the opposition BJP is against holding the by-election for the seat, the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) delegation, making a surprise move, on Friday met the Chief Electoral Officer in Ranchi and demanded immediate by-election on the seat.

The BJP cited that the by-election for the constituency could not happen since the whole tenure of the 5th Jharkhand Vidhan Sabha was nearing completion in less than a year. Gandey Assembly seat fell vacant recently on December 31 after the resignation of sitting JMM MLA Sarfaraz Ahmed.

Jharkhand Parents Association's efforts bear fruits

Students allowed to take examination on January 10

PNS : RANCHI

A delegation of Jharkhand Parents Association, led by state president Ajay Rai, met St Xavier's School, Doranda, Vice Principal, Ravi Bhushan Khess as the school principal was out.

Information about the entire matter was taken on the spot. Vice Principal Ravi Bhushan Khess said that some children who were continuously disobeying discipline were stopped from the examination, the school will not compromise on school discipline and positive support of parents should be given in this so that the future of the children can be secured and this This will be possible only with the cooperation of the school and parents in the work.

He said that the school has never had any intention of causing problems to the students, the management always tries to ensure that the examination results of its students are good so that their future can be made better.

President of Jharkhand Parents Association, Ajay Rai gave many positive suggestions for the good environment of the school, and he said that information about all the subjects related to the school should be given to the parents from time to time so that they can also know that their child is being educated in the right manner. Is he getting

education properly or not? Also, through this, proper coordination can be achieved between parents and school.

He said that there is a need to fix the problems being faced by the children of the junior class of the school so that they can remain disciplined from the beginning. Taking all the point wise suggestions of Ajay Rai very seriously, the school management has asked to take immediate initiative on this matter.

The Vice Principal said that the examination of class 10 students who were debarred from appearing for the pre-board examination will be held on January 10.

The delegation included Neeraj Bhatt, Vijay Singh, Mukesh Sahu etc.



EVM awareness campaign from Jan 10 to Feb 28 in State

PNS : RANCHI



Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand, K Ravi Kumar said that as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, an awareness campaign regarding EVMs and VVPAT will be conducted in the state from January 10 to February 28. The CEO said that in the recently conducted CAP survey, the fact had come to light that the level of awareness that should be there among the common people regarding EVMs and VVPAT was not as per expectations. Therefore, he has appealed

to the voters of the state as well as the public representatives and members of political parties to not only give wide publicity to this EVM awareness campaign but also take active participation.

He said that the said awareness camps are to be organized at the level of all the districts and all the subdivisions. Not only this, mobile demonstration vans will also go to all the booths in every district. He said that during this campaign, citizens will get detailed practical information about EVM machines, voting process, VVPAT etc.

PNS : RANCHI

A review meeting of matters related to Higher and Technical Education Department was organized by Deputy Commissioner Ranchi, Rahul Kumar Sinha here on Monday. In the meeting, Additional Collector Ranchi, Rajesh Kumar Barwar, L. R. D. C. Ranchi, Rajeev Kumar Singh, D.I.O. Ranchi and zonal officers- Namkum, Ranchi city, Kanke, Badgai, Budhmu, Angada and all concerned officers were present.

The DC, while reviewing the matters related to the Higher and Technical Education Department, took information about the current situation from all the officials concerned and gave several important guidelines and asked them to expedite all the related matters.

Sinha has asked for investigation in connection with the payment of the final bill for the second floor of Sabte Building and the second floor of Co-ordination Center of Science & Technology building located in Science City (presently the campus of Jharkhand Technological University), Namkum. On this, the DC, while giving instructions, told the Executive Engineer



Building Division-1 to complete the investigation regarding the payment soon.

While reviewing the requisition for 3-5 acres of additional land around the campus of JUT in Namkum for the office of State Higher Education Council and Jharkhand Science Technology and Innovation Council, the DC while directing the Zonal Officer Namkum said that as soon as possible Provide 3-5 acres of additional land around the JUT campus.

While reviewing the cases related to encroachment on the land identified and transferred for the Regional Science Center, Ranchi, located at Chiraudi Morabadi, the DC instructed

the Circle Officer Badgai to work as per the order of the Honorable High Court, Ranchi.

While giving instructions to Zonal Officer Badgain, Sinha said that while demarcating the additional land identified and transferred for upgrading Regional Science Center Ranchi and developing it as Science City, he was also asked to identify the encroachment in it.

While reviewing the status of requisition of land for the Government Engineering College by the DC, he instructed Circle Officer Kanke to make 50 acres of land available for the Government Engineering College.

While reviewing the requisition and reduction of land for the establishment and construction of Government Polytechnic Bundu, Sinha gave instructions to the Circle Officer Bundu and said that he was asked to give 10 acres of land for the Government Polytechnic Bundu.

The DC, while reviewing the land identified and transferred for Government Polytechnic, Ranchi and freeing it from encroachment, gave instructions to the concerned officer to complete the instructions.

In the course of review, Sinha checked the encroachment in the land marked for the construction of the proposed Ranchi University Ranchi campus at Chedi Manatu in Ranchi district and directed the concerned zonal officer to identify it and take the further process.

While reviewing, the DC gave instructions to Zonal Officer Angada to give 10 acres of land in Kanke area to Jharkhand State for Jharkhand State Open University, Ranchi.

As part of the review by Sinha, instructions were given to the concerned zonal officer to provide land to Central University Ranchi and identify non-Majurwa land for water supply.

Panchayat Secretariat volunteers' delegation meets Principal Secretary to CM

PNS : RANCHI

A delegation of State Level Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh met Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister Vinay Kumar Choubey and informed him about their demands. Positive talks were held with Chief Minister's Principal Secretary Vinay Kumar Choubey and the delegation of Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh to resolve the problems of the Sangh. As per the demands of the delegation, Choubey assured the delegation that the pending incentive amount of the members of Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh will be paid soon.

Also, as per the demand of the members of the Sangh, it was agreed that the help-desk operator to be selected in the Panchayat Secretariats should be selected from among the Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh of the respective Panchayats. It was also agreed in the meeting that the members of the Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh will do all the work which they are already doing at the Panchayat level, in this regard an order will be issued by the government.

On this occasion, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Vinay Kumar Choubey told the members of the Panchayat Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh that the State Government will definitely give positive consideration to all your reasonable demands. At present, he has appealed to all the Secretariat Swayamsevak Sangh members not to protest and to return to their work.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

Facile victory

Sheikh Hasina wins fourth term as Bangladesh PM, Opposition gives poll a miss

The just-concluded election in neighbouring Bangladesh, notable for yet another boycott by the Opposition, saw the Awami League emerging victorious and Sheikh Hasina securing a landmark fourth term as the Prime Minister. The poll, however, remains embroiled in controversy over allegations of lack of fairness levelled by the Khaleda Zia-led main Opposition, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The election was held against the backdrop of violence during the campaign. Though the Awami League secured 222 of the 300 seats, it is interesting to note that no party came second; the 'independents' --- Awami League's own candidates who were allowed to contest the poll to give it the semblance of a "competition" --- finished as runners-up. While 63 such 'independents' made it to the House, the third largest party in the country, the Jatiya Party, could win just 11 seats. It will be interesting to see who is anointed the official Opposition in Parliament. The fate of the poll was decided the day the BNP, the arch-rival of the Awami League, announced its decision to boycott the election. In her win, Hasina has defeated not only the Opposition but also democracy. However, it goes to her credit that Bangladesh has emerged as a strong economy and the abject poverty it once had has been considerably reduced. However, her Government has faced criticism for alleged human rights abuses and its crackdown on the Opposition. Hasina's career has been characterised by a mix of economic development initiatives and political dominance, and the Awami League has been in power since 2009.



A robust democratic system relies on a healthy Opposition to ensure checks and balances. The absence of a formidable Opposition can potentially impact the democratic fabric of Bangladesh, leading to concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of one political party. Hasina's supporters argue that her leadership has been pivotal in driving economic growth and social progress, justifying the measures taken to secure her victory. International observers and human rights organisations have, however, raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral proceedings. The Government's control over key institutions and the media has also been criticised for limiting the space for dissent. Back home, the victory of Hasina is good news as she is a known supporter of India and enjoys good rapport with the Indian Prime Minister. Bangladesh holds strategic importance for India due to shared historical, cultural and economic ties. The bilateral relationship has seen positive developments in recent years in areas such as trade, security and connectivity. Hasina's continued leadership is likely to maintain stability and foster cooperative endeavours between India and Bangladesh. For its part, India must convince her to allow space to the Opposition and let the democratic institutions run independently. It would be good for her and Bangladesh in the long run.

PICTALK



Devotees participate in a 'Ram Rath Yatra' ahead of the consecration ceremony of Ayodhya Ram temple, in Ranchi

Policy reforms crucial to make India a manufacturing hub

India requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort from the Government and industry players to become 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 \$1 trillion USD by 2030. [1] 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. 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.



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. **Trade Policies and 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. **Conclusion:** By implementing the suggested policy reforms, India can create an environment conducive to manufacturing growth, attract investments, and position itself as a key player in the global manufacturing landscape. 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 CEO of Jay Wood Industry, views are personal)



JAY SHAH

Will Modi magic work in the south?

Can the enormous popularity of Prime Minister Narendra Modi help the Bharatiya Janata Party achieve electoral success in the southern states?

The Party is seeking to gain more voters in the challenging southern region. Its presence is limited in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh. Since it has already peaked in the northern states, the BJP needs to secure more seats in the South. Last week, Modi began his election campaign for the 2024 elections in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Lakshadweep. He also inaugurated several multi-crore projects. The BJP has access to unlimited funds and has well-organised party workers on the ground. To achieve the Party's objective, 40 central ministers had been fielded in the South. In Telangana, the Bharatiya Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) has been present since its establishment in 2014 but recently lost the State to Congress. Kerala is ruled by Congress or Left-led fronts, while Tamil Nadu alternates between Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Karnataka, Janata Dal (Secular), Congress, and BJP have all had a turn in power. Several factors influence voters in the region. They include caste, money, power, ideology, cinema, and liquor. In Tamil Nadu, political figures such as CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi, MGR, and Jayalithaa have significantly influenced voters. In the past, N.T. Rama Rao played a crucial role in united Andhra Pradesh. However, the B.J.P. currently lacks prominent leaders in the southern states. With the passing of influential leaders like M Karunanidhi and Jayalithaa, the BJP is trying to fill the political void. The BJP won 29 of the 130 regional seats in the 2019 elections, including 25 in Karnataka and four in Telangana. However, the Party lost the state to the Congress in last year's assembly polls. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) was a significant ally of the BJP. However, they ended their alliance three months ago, and neither Party has attempted to reconcile since then.



The southern states of India are known for their unique cultures. One noticeable difference is the language divide between the North and South. While Hindi is the preferred language in the North, the South predominantly uses English and local languages. Dravidian Parties in Tamil Nadu oppose the use of Hindi and follow an atheistic ideology. On the other hand, Kerala has a robust communist presence and alternates between Left Front and Congress-led coalitions. The method of using population as a measure for constituency delimitation has led to the South feeling mistreated. This is because the population control measures implemented by Southern states have resulted in a decline in population compared to the North, leading to a sense of unfairness. As a result, the North, which has yet to enforce any population control measures, will be allocated more parliamentary constituencies than the South. A possible solution to address the delimitation issue is to consider changing the composition of the Rajya Sabha.



RELIGION IS NOT A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE IN SOUTH INDIA. THE BJP'S VIEWS ON CHRISTIAN CONVERSIONS OR HOSTILITY TOWARDS ISLAM HAVE YET TO GAIN ANY TRACTION IN THE REGION

This can be inspired by the US Senate's approach of guaranteeing equal representation of all states. However, this proposal could face resistance from bigger states in the US. Prime Minister Modi is attempting to change the perception that the BJP is not aligned with the culture of South India. The BJP must still reach a mutual understanding with Southern states. The opposition coalition, INDIA, controls most of the Southern States. They are determined to unseat Modi in 2024. The BJP has a strong focus on Hindutva, the construction of the Ayodhya Ram temple, and an anti-Muslim stance. However, these views may be less popular among voters in southern regions of India. The Opposition parties like DMK, AIADMK, TDP, and BRS hold dominant positions in their respective states. Specific communities such as Vanniyars, Thevurs, and Gounders have influential roles in Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka, Vokkaligas and Lingayats have influence, while Reddys and Kammas are rivals in Andhra Pradesh. However, Brahmins have lost

power. In Kerala, Communists opposed the rival Congress in the state, which is also a member of the INDIA coalition. In Telangana, K. Chandrababu Naidu, a Velama leader, held sway, but in 2023, Congress snatched the state. Religion is not a major political issue in South India. The BJP's views on Christian conversions or hostility towards Islam have yet to gain any traction in the region. The southern states have not experienced any religious conflicts. This is because the minorities have assimilated themselves with the local population. For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to gain success in South India, they need to adapt to the local cultural norms and political strategies. They must form alliances and regain the support of former partners. To achieve this, the BJP should revise its election strategy and develop a new narrative. Failing to do so will result in the opposition coalition INDIA becoming stronger and posing a significant threat to the BJP. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GOVERNOR CANNOT DISMISS MINISTER

Sir — A Governor is the Head of the State, and a Chief Minister is the Head of the Government. The governor is bound by the advice of the council of ministers headed by the Chief Minister. The Supreme Court has correctly observed that a Governor is not vested with powers to dismiss a minister. When the law and order of a state break down, making it impossible to run the government by the provisions of the Constitution, the Governor can recommend the President's rule in the state. During President's rule, the Governor rules the state on behalf of the President. All authorities vested in the hands of a Chief Minister are transferred to the Governor during this period. Essentially, during President's rule, the Governor assumes the role of a Chief Minister. While the Governor administers the oath of office to the Chief Minister, they have no authority to dismiss the Chief Minister or their ministers. Governors, the Attorney General the Council of Ministers, and the Prime Minister hold office at the pleasure of the President, and the Chief Minister and their Ministers hold office at the pleasure of the Governor. In practice, the President acts at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, and the Governor acts at the pleasure of the Chief Minister. The President and the Governors of states cannot withhold assent to a Bill. The Constitution does not grant any powers to the President to act unilaterally, even when the interest of the nation demands. While a Prime Minister cannot sign a Bill into law, the President cannot refuse to sign. The President or Governor can return the Bill with observations for reconsideration. The Supreme Court, in the case of Senthil Balaji, has ruled that a Governor cannot dismiss a minister. This ruling aligns exactly with the provisions of the Constitution. However, prima facie, the term "pleasure" appears perplexing. Both the Prime Minister and Chief Minister function when they enjoy the pleasure of the majority of the MPs and MLAs. K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

WORLD DAY OF WAR ORPHANS 2024



Every year on January 6th, the World Day of War Orphans is commemorated. The purpose of the day is to raise public awareness concerning children who have become orphans as a result of wars. The World Day of War Orphans spread information about their plight and emphasised the psychological, social, and physical obstacles that children experience as

they grow up it is clear that civilians in several nations around the globe have become victims of the war. Amongst them, the children are the silent victims. Millions of children have grown up in war zones, and ethnic strife with no families. The orphans are forced to not only look after themselves but their younger siblings too. Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza since October 7, the government's media office says. Thousands more are missing under the rubble amid relentless bombardment and it is sad. Many children lost their parents and lived in relief camps for survival. In conclusion, World Day of War Orphans 2024 is a day of both reflection and action. It's a day to stand in solidarity with those who have lost their families to war and to work towards a future where no child has to bear the scars of conflict. C K Subramaniam | Chennai

SHORTEST TEST MATCH

Sir — India defeated South Africa by 7 wickets in the second and last Test match, leveling the series 1-1. The bowlers dominated the match, which concluded in just two days. Bumrah and Siraj each took six wickets. With this, a new record has been set in Test cricket history. This is the shortest Test match in cricket history in terms of total balls played. The Cape Town Test concluded in just 642 balls (107 overs in total). India became the first Asian team to win a Test match against South Africa in Cape Town. This is a promising start for Team India in the new year. We hope this momentum continues and India will triumph in the T20 World Cup. Players should continue practicing, as the more they practice, the better they will perform. Mohammad Taufiq | Champaran

ALASKA EMERGENCY

Sir — The Alaska emergency is a new threat to the airline industry and poses imminent danger in mid-air. An Alaska Airlines flight traveling from Portland, Oregon, to

Ontario, California, had to make an emergency landing after a portion of the aircraft blew out mid-air. The aircraft reached approximately 16,000 feet about six minutes into the flight before beginning its descent. The jet had 174 passengers and six crew members aboard. In a statement provided to CBS News, Alaska Airlines said that Flight No. 1282 experienced an incident soon after departure and "landed safely back" in Portland, but it was a miraculous escape for the passengers on board. This type of aircraft comes equipped with a rear emergency exit door, mainly used by international airlines, and has a seat configuration that allows for more passengers on the plane. Most US airlines don't use that configuration and design the area to appear as a window from the inside of the aircraft. Somehow, the plane averted disaster, and the pilot deserves all credit. C K Ramani | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

A JEALOUS AND POSSESSIVE MIND

Human minds have fallen prey to the traits of jealousy, envy and possessiveness



RAVI VALLURI

There were twenty theatre enthusiasts of a college who participated in the audition for staging the annual college day play. All six roles were up for grabs, which included one female and five male characters.

As a safety valve, the well-feted and cerebral director handpicked one additional female lead and two male characters. The first choice was a female lead who was attractive, vivacious and bubbling with talent. She felt wretched sharing stage space with another plucky woman. Her covetous and jealous mind, instead of concentrating on the character and performance, kept plotting strategies to run down her perceived opponent, much to the consternation of the director. At his wife's end, the director opted for the alternative and assigned her to the lead role. The tempestuous woman burning with envy was clearly responsible for the loss.

Companies, countries and communities have all become wary of the material success of their 'competitors' and in the process compromise with their goals and objectives. Consequently, they resort to shortcuts in order to emerge triumphant and victorious. "You can be the moon and still be jealous of the stars," writes the American musician Garry Allen. The attribute of jealousy arises in an individual when the mind is possessive of certain belongings. Interestingly, envy in many also arises out of shortages. There can be a lack of aptitude, talent, resources, connections, opportunities, or because of unfavourable outcomes. Individuals subsumed by jealousy build walls of possessiveness and false security walls around their personalities. Such minds feel cheery about their possessions.



As per the epic, The Mahabharata, Karna was extremely jealous of Arjuna, which eventually proved to be his nemesis. The jealous and possessive mind is acquisitive by nature, taking both animate and inanimate objects for granted and getting attached to things like an addiction to alcohol or marijuana. For instance, in the case of the college theatre mentioned earlier, the more talented actress became fearful and was gripped with hatred and greed. Jealous and envious minds have become laboratories of antagonism that spew hatred. How do we overcome attributes such as jealousy, envy and possessiveness? At one end of the spectrum are organizations and authorities which need to take up this responsibility. This includes proper parenting, where children are brought up on ideals of inherent goodness, an effective educational system that imparts values as part of their pedagogy, governments that take up the responsibility of providing equal opportunities to the citizens and make an attempt to carve out an egalitarian system, and a society that addresses the core issues of humaneness amongst its citizenry. Vasudeva Kutumbakam is the net result.

This may appear altruistic but is an effort to restore some semblance of sanity in society, which otherwise is plagued by avarice and jealousy. The spiritual touch is an important colour in the rainbow of goodness. One can practice any faith, but we need to be tolerant of other peoples' points of view. Spirituality succeeds where religions draw the fault lines and wave red flags. Globalisation has made the world flat, but has resulted in an exponential increase in crass commercialization and human minds have fallen prey to the traits of jealousy, envy and possessiveness. The vicious tendencies of jealousy and possessiveness can be tackled by following the two-fold approach highlighted so that the chasm between individuals diminishes.

Manifest plainness, Embrace simplicity, Reduce selfishness, Have few desires — Lao Tzu

(Ravi Valluri is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Hiring based on skills is now a standard practice



DINESH SOOD

As India enters this transformative phase in hiring practices, both employers and job seekers need to embrace the opportunities presented by skills-based hiring



The job market in India is constantly changing, and we are now witnessing a significant shift towards skills-based hiring. The old-fashioned approach to hiring, which relied on academic qualifications and work experience, is giving way to a more dynamic method that prioritizes specific skills. The new skills-first approach enables professionals to explore unconventional career pathways and places greater emphasis on their abilities rather than their educational background. This shift reflects a wider recognition that skills, rather than just degrees, are the key to success in today's highly competitive job market.

A skills-first hiring approach gives priority to a candidate's practical abilities over traditional qualifications. This trend is growing rapidly in India as employers realize the value of diverse skill sets. It is relevant today because it provides equal opportunities for all, allowing talent to shine beyond academic labels. The advantages of this approach include a more inclusive job market and the ability to tap into hidden talent.

This approach values merit over formalities, enabling professionals from diverse backgrounds to contribute on a global scale. Every foreign job market has a specific skill shortage that they are looking to fill, and this approach helps to fill that gap. According to a report titled 'The State of Skills-Based Hiring 2023', 86 per cent of employees believe that they are more likely to secure their dream job when the hiring process includes skills-based hiring. The latest data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is alarming: a whopping 86% of individuals aged between 15 and 59 years have not received any form of vocational training. This is unacceptable! It is high time that we focus our efforts on converting this pool of individuals into skilled human capital.

The current trend in hiring prioritizes skills. Therefore, high schools and post-secondary education institutions must design their curriculum to focus on these skills. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 rightly emphasizes the need for standardized vocational training courses in high schools, with a range of experiences aimed at developing a bundle of skill competencies.

To achieve the goal set by the NEP of



THE LATEST DATA FROM THE PERIODIC LABOUR FORCE SURVEY (PLFS) IS ALARMING: A WHOPPING 86% OF INDIVIDUALS AGED BETWEEN 15 AND 59 YEARS HAVE NOT RECEIVED ANY FORM OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING

increasing the gross enrolment ratio in higher education, including vocational education, to 50% by 2035, further action is needed. This requires the addition of 3.5 crore new seats to higher education institutions (HEIs) and focusing on a flexible curriculum with creative combinations of subjects. We must integrate vocational education with mainstream education and allow for multiple entries and exits with appropriate certification. To provide our students with the best possible skills, it is imperative to establish Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) at par with the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs).

However, accurately assessing these skills may pose challenges. Nevertheless, the future outlook suggests continued growth, fostering innovation and adaptability in a workforce where skills, not just degrees, define success. This reflects a dynamic shift towards meritocracy in the evolving employment landscape. The growing integration of advanced technologies like generative AI, machine learning, cloud computing, and data science across these sectors drives the trend. As these technologies continue to propel business and alter business operations, the demand for upskilling in technology remains robust. Companies are increasingly seeking professionals with specific skills to fill key roles in areas such as valuation analysis, financial research, investor relations management, and risk analysis within this domain.

Skills-first hiring is a new approach that is dismantling traditional barriers to offer global work opportunities irrespective of educational background or regional certifications. For instance, a cyber security expert equipped with practical knowledge and certifications can now find doors opening abroad, as security needs transcend geograph-

ical confines.

IBM India has adopted a 'skill-first' approach where college degrees do not matter. In 2012, IBM implemented this approach in the US by removing the four-year college degree requirement from about 50% of its jobs. Ten years later, 29% of the present IBM US workforce in hardware, software, and consulting does not have a college degree. However, companies like Oracle had 100%, followed by Intel (94%), HP (92%), and Apple (90%). A study conducted between 2017 and 2022 showed that US employers reduced degree requirements for 46% of middle-skill positions and 31% of high-skill positions. Various studies highlight that for the job of software quality-assurance engineer, only 26% of Accenture's postings for the position contained a degree requirement.

The rise of skills-based hiring can be attributed to several factors, each contributing to a more comprehensive and efficient employment ecosystem. One of the key drivers is the fast-paced evolution of technology, which has made some skill sets obsolete while creating an insatiable demand for new ones. As industries digitize and automate, employers are looking for candidates who have the technical expertise required to navigate this new world.

Skills-based hiring is not only about technical prowess but also about fostering inclusivity in the workplace. By focusing on skills, employers can tap into a broader talent pool, breaking down barriers related to age, gender, or educational background. This approach enables individuals with non-traditional career trajectories to showcase their abilities, ultimately leading to a more diverse and innovative workforce. In a country as diverse as India, this inclusive hiring model is crucial for unlocking the full potential of the population. It allows for the recognition and utilisation of a rich tapestry of skills that may be over-

looked in a more rigid, qualification-centric system.

When individuals are hired based on their skills instead of solely on academic qualifications, there is a higher likelihood of job satisfaction and engagement. Employees who feel that their skills are valued are more likely to invest in their professional development, leading to a continuous improvement loop. This paradigm shift challenges the traditional notion that a candidate's potential is solely based on their educational background. It acknowledges that skills are dynamic, and the ability to learn and adapt is highly valued in today's fast-paced work environment.

As India transitions to this transformative phase in hiring practices, both employers and job seekers need to embrace the opportunities presented by skills-based hiring. Job seekers should focus on acquiring and showcasing relevant skills, whether through formal education, online courses, or on-the-job experience. Employers, on the other hand, should refine their recruitment processes to ensure that they identify and nurture the diverse talents that the Indian workforce has to offer.

In conclusion, skills-based hiring in India marks a pivotal moment in the country's employment landscape. It is a departure from traditional norms, a response to technological evolution, and a step toward a more inclusive and dynamic professional future. As India continues to embrace this shift, the workforce will be characterised not just by degrees but by a mosaic of skills that power innovation and drive success in an ever-changing global economy.

(The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres. Views expressed are personal)

Confronting cancer: Are we winning the war against it?

With the growing incidents of cancer, it is crucial for health authorities to prioritise early detection, cost-effective treatment and preventive measures

Cancer, often referred to as the "emperor of maladies," continues to be a formidable challenge for medical researchers and scientists worldwide. Despite significant advancements in the field of medicine and biomedical science, cancer remains a relentless adversary, and its burden is escalating rapidly in India. India is facing a mounting crisis, with alarming statistics indicating a surge in cancer cases and mortality rates. As we delve into the current scenario, it becomes evident that immediate action is imperative to strengthen cancer care infrastructure, improve early detection and enhance preventive measures. The cancer burden in India is reaching unprecedented levels.



BISHAL KUMAR SAHA

According to a recent report presented in Parliament, there were 14.61 lakh cancer cases detected in 2022, an increase of 35,000 cases from the previous year.

Even more concerning is the mortality rate, with 8.08 lakh patients succumbing to cancer in 2022 compared to 7.89 lakh in 2021. The projections estimate a staggering 29.8 million cancer patients in

India by 2025. These figures paint a bleak picture, sounding an alarm for both healthcare authorities and the general public. Despite improvements in cancer treatment, the incidence of cancer and mortality rates persistently rise in India. The country faces multiple challenges in combatting cancer effectively. The most prevalent types of cancer in India include breast, lung, colon, rectum and prostate cancer. Moreover, India has one of the highest mortality-to-incidence ratios for cancer globally, indicating a need for early detection and accessible treatment facilities.

The actual incidence of cancer in India could be significantly higher than the official figures, as highlighted by a

2022 study conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young (FICCI-EY). This suggests that the situation is more dire than what the statistics portray, making it all the more urgent to address this issue promptly.

One of the central issues contributing to the cancer crisis in India is the lack of easy access to specialized hospitals equipped with experienced oncologists and state-of-the-art machinery. Timely detection of the disease and affordable treatment are critical factors that need immediate attention.

The government must prioritize the establishment of cancer institutes and tertiary care centres to cater to the



growing demand for quality cancer care. While the public healthcare system is overburdened, private hospitals often provide treatments that are financially out of reach for many patients. Raising pub-

lic awareness about cancer detection and prevention is a key aspect of tackling this crisis effectively. Beyond the well-known risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol consumption, obesity and seden-

tary lifestyles, environmental factors also play a significant role in the rising disease burden. For instance, the consumption of processed and packaged foods with preservatives has been linked to cancer. Promoting healthy habits, including regular exercise, can be instrumental in reducing cancer risk.

Among women of reproductive age, breast and cervical cancers are the leading causes of cancer-related mortality. These cancers, however, are largely preventable through early screening and timely interventions. Public health campaigns aimed at encouraging regular screening and educating women about the importance of early detection can save many lives. Cancer continues to cast a

dark shadow over India's healthcare landscape.

As the cancer burden increases, it becomes vital for health authorities to focus on early detection, affordable treatment and preventive measures. The establishment of specialized hospitals coupled with heightened public awareness campaigns, can significantly alleviate the challenges posed by cancer. The time for action is now, as India must stand united in its fight against the dreaded emperor of maladies. Only through collective efforts, we can hope to turn the tide and provide a brighter future for cancer patients in the country.

(The writer studies at Delhi University and is a freelance writer, views are personal)

Blinken brings US push on post-war Gaza planning

AP ■ ABU DHABI
US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has opened his third day of meetings on an urgent Mideast diplomatic mission to prevent Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza from exploding into a broader regional conflict.

Blinken was meeting Monday with United Arab Emirates leader Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed before travelling to Saudi Arabia for talks with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman aimed at enlisting the key Arab leaders in a push to not only keep the war contained but also prepare for post-conflict Gaza's future.

With Sheikh Mohammed in Abu Dhabi Blinken "emphasised the importance of preventing further spread of the conflict and stressed continued US commitment to securing lasting regional peace that ensures Israel's security and advances the establishment of an independent Palestinian

state," the State Department said.

Blinken arrived in Abu Dhabi from similar meetings in Qatar, Jordan, Turkey and Greece, where he claimed at least modest success in his mission with pledges from those countries to consider contributing to the effort to plan for Gaza's reconstruction and governance once the fighting has ended.

Gaza has been decimated by three months of Israeli bombardments that have sparked anger around the world for the massive damage and huge number of civilian casualties. Financial and in-kind support from the UAE and Saudi Arabia will be essential to the success of any such plan and US officials said Blinken on his fourth trip to the region since the war began in October hoped to overcome initial Arab resistance to considering "day after" scenarios for Gaza.

Arab countries have been pressing for an immediate

cease-fire and an end to civilian deaths before discussing such plans.

But after his first meetings on his latest tour, Blinken said he had been speaking with officials about contributions they could make to post-war plans and about using their influence to tamp down resurgent fears that the conflict could expand and potentially draw in direct US involvement. "This is a conflict that could easily metastasize, causing even more insecurity and even more suffering," Blinken told reporters during a joint news conference in Doha with Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani.

"So from day one, among other priorities, we have been intensely focused on working to prevent the conflict from spreading," he said. "We share a commitment to ensure that the conflict does not expand." He said his talks had also included "not necessarily easy discussions" of what each country can do once the con-

flict is over "to provide the assurances and the incentives required to build a more secure and more stable, more peaceful future for the region."

"And my takeaway from the discussions so far, including here with our friends in Qatar, is that our partners are willing to have these difficult conversations and to make hard decisions. All of us feel a stake in forging the way forward," Blinken said.

Arab states have been highly critical of Israel's actions and have eschewed public support for long-term planning, arguing that the fighting must end before such discussions can begin. They have been demanding a cease-fire since mid-October as civilian casualties began to skyrocket.

After his talks with Blinken, Sheikh Mohammed called for an immediate cease-fire, saying the constant images of death and destruction in Gaza are de-sensitising people to the horrors of what is happening.

Israeli strike kills elite Hezbollah commander

AP ■ BEIRUT
An Israeli airstrike killed an elite Hezbollah commander in southern Lebanon on Monday, the latest in an escalating exchange of strikes along the border that have raised fears of another Mideast war even as the fighting in Gaza exacts a mounting toll on civilians. The strike on an SUV killed a commander in a secretive Hezbollah force that operates along the border, according to a Lebanese security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity according to regulations. Hezbollah identified the slain fighter as Wissam al-Tawil without providing details. He is the most senior militant in the armed group to have been killed since Hamas' October 7 attack into southern Israel triggered all-out war in Gaza and lower-intensity fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which has escalated since an Israeli strike killed a senior Hamas leader in Beirut last week.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who is back in the region this week, appears to be trying to head off a wider conflict.

Israel says it has largely wrapped up major operations in northern Gaza and is now focusing on the central region and the southern city of Khan Younis. Israeli officials have said the fighting will continue for many more months as the army seeks to dismantle Hamas and return scores of hostages taken during the militant group's October 7 attack that triggered the war.

The offensive has already killed over 23,000 Palestinians, devastated vast swathes of the Gaza Strip, displaced nearly 85 per cent of its population of 2.3 million and left a quarter of its residents facing starvation.



Al Jazeera journalist Wael Dahdouh holds the hand of his son Hamza, who also worked for Al Jazeera and who was killed in an Israeli airstrike in Rafah, Gaza Strip, Sunday. Dahdouh lost his wife, two other children and a grandson earlier in the war and was nearly killed himself.

in Deir al-Balah in recent days, saying it was too dangerous. That spread panic among people sheltering there, causing many to join the hundreds of thousands who have fled to the south of the besieged territory.

Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals, which are also struggling to treat dozens of people wounded each day in Israeli strikes. Only 13 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partially functioning, according to the UN humanitarian office.

Omar al-Darawi, an employee at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, said the facility has been struck multiple times in recent days. He said thousands of people left after the aid groups pulled out, and that patients have been concentrated on one floor so the remaining doctors can tend to them more easily.

"We have large numbers of wounded who can't move," he said. "They need special care, which is unavailable." More dead and wounded arrive each day as Israeli forces advance in central Gaza following heavy airstrikes. Gaza's Health Ministry said Monday that 249 Palestinians have been killed and 510 others were wounded across the territory in the last 24 hours. World Health Organisation staff who visited Sunday saw "sickening scenes of people of all ages being treated on blood-streaked

floors and in chaotic corridors," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the UN agency, said in a statement. "The bloodbath in Gaza must end."

DIRE CONDITIONS IN THE ISOLATED NORTH THE situation is even more dire in northern Gaza, which Israeli forces cut off from the rest of the territory in late October. Entire neighbourhoods have been demolished, and hundreds of thousands of people have fled, while those who remain face severe shortages of food and water. The WHO said late on Sunday it has not been able to deliver supplies to northern Gaza in 12 days.

Even there, Israel is still battling what it describes as pockets of militants.

An airstrike early on Sunday flattened a four-story home filled with displaced people in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, killing at least 70, including women and children, according to Mahmoud Bassal, a spokesman for Gaza's civil defence.

There was no immediate confirmation from the Health Ministry, which has struggled to maintain its operations in the north.

Search efforts were still underway on Monday.

The civil defense circulated a graphic video showing the aftermath of attack, with several bodies scattered among the rubble.

Sunak denies doubting Rwanda migrant scheme as chancellor

PTI ■ LONDON
British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has denied reports that he had doubts in the past over the deterrent effect of the country's Rwanda scheme, which will see illegal migrants deported to the East African nation while their asylum applications are processed.

A BBC report based on papers it has seen from two years ago claimed last week that Sunak was concerned about the cost of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda and wanted to limit the numbers initially in his role as chancellor under Boris Johnson's premiership.

On Sunday, he was questioned by the news channel about these documents when he admitted pushing back to ensure the value of taxpayer money but denied he had doubts over its deterrent effect.



"Just because someone's asking tough questions doesn't mean that they don't believe in the proposal," said Sunak.

"My job is to ask probing questions of every proposal that crosses my desk as chancellor.

Whether you have doubts about it or not, you shouldn't come to it with a preconceived notion that everything is fine when you're spending taxpayers' money... But to infer from

that that I don't believe in the scheme or the principle of deterrence is wrong. I was doing my job to get good value for money for taxpayers," he said. "I went through that process, funded this scheme with the (then) prime minister and as Prime Minister myself, as you can see, I've made sure that we have a similar deterrent working with Albania," he added, about an illegal migrant returns agreement with the south-east European country. The No. 10 documents referenced by the BBC were prepared in March 2022 as former prime minister Boris Johnson was trying to persuade Sunak - his chancellor - to sign off on more funding for the plan. This was shortly before the agreement with the Rwandan government to process migrants in the African country was signed.

US Defence secy remains hospitalised

Washington (AP): Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin remained in the hospital Sunday as more details emerged about key decision-makers, even President Joe Biden, being kept in the dark for days that the Pentagon chief had been in the intensive care unit at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The Pentagon's failure to disclose Austin's hospitalisation reflects a stunning lack of transparency about his illness, how serious it was and when he may be released. Such secrecy, at a time when the United States is juggling myriad national security crises, runs counter to normal practice with the president and other senior US officials and Cabinet members. A senior defence official said Deputy Secretary was not notified until Thursday that Austin had been hospitalised since January 1.

Boeing jetliner was restricted over warning light concern

Portland (US) (AP): The Boeing jetliner that suffered an inflight blowout over Oregon was not being used for flights to Hawaii after a warning light that could have indicated a pressurisation problem lit up on three different flights, a federal official said on Sunday.

Alaska Airlines decided to restrict the aircraft from long flights over water so the plane "could return very quickly to an airport" if the warning light reappeared, said Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

Homendy cautioned that the pressurisation light might be unrelated to Friday's incident in which a plug covering an unused exit door blew off the Boeing 737 Max 9 as it cruised about three miles (4.8 kilometres) over Oregon.

The warning light came on during three previous flights: on December 7, January 3 and January 4 - the day before the door plug broke off. Homendy said she didn't have all the details regarding the December 7 incident but specified the light came on during a flight on January 3 and on January 4 after the plane had landed.

The NTSB said the lost door plug was found on Sunday near Portland, Oregon, by a school teacher - for now, known only as Bob - who discovered it in his backyard and sent two photos to the safety board. Investigators will examine the plug, which is 26 by 48 inches (66 by 121 centimetres) and weighs 63 pounds (28.5 kilograms), for signs of how it broke free. Investigators will not have the benefit of hearing what was going on in the cockpit during the flight. The cockpit voice recorder - one of two so-called black boxes - recorded over the flight's sounds after two hours, Homendy said.

Japan quake renders thousands homeless

AP ■ WAJIMA
Thousands of people made homeless overnight are living in weariness and uncertainty on the western coast of Japan a week after a powerful earthquake left at least 168 dead and dozens missing. The rescue effort since the magnitude 7.6 New Year's Day quake has drawn thousands of troops, firefighters and police who picked through collapsed buildings Monday hoping to find survivors.

Authorities warned of the danger of landslides, exacerbated by a heavy snowfall, throughout the quake's epicentre on the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa prefecture. The landscape blanketed in fluffy white revealed burned and crumbled houses, ashen blocks of a city, highways with gaping holes and cracks.

The deaths included 70 people in Wajima, 70 in Suzu, 18 in Anamizu and the rest

were spread among four other towns. At least 323 people were still unaccounted for, a jump from some 100 earlier in the day as rescuers pour over a list of the region's population. Another 565 people were injured, and 1,390 homes were destroyed or seriously damaged.

A tsunami of several metres (feet) followed the initial major quake, adding to the damage. Aftershocks have continued daily. Japanese meteorological officials warned strong quakes could persist for another month. Their frequency, while gradually diminishing, remained high compared to past quakes, totalling more than 1,000. For the residents, recovery work has barely started. Shuji Yoshiura, a fisherman, said his boats were damaged and he could not go out on the sea.

Before the quake, Wajima was a tourist town with a shopping street offering

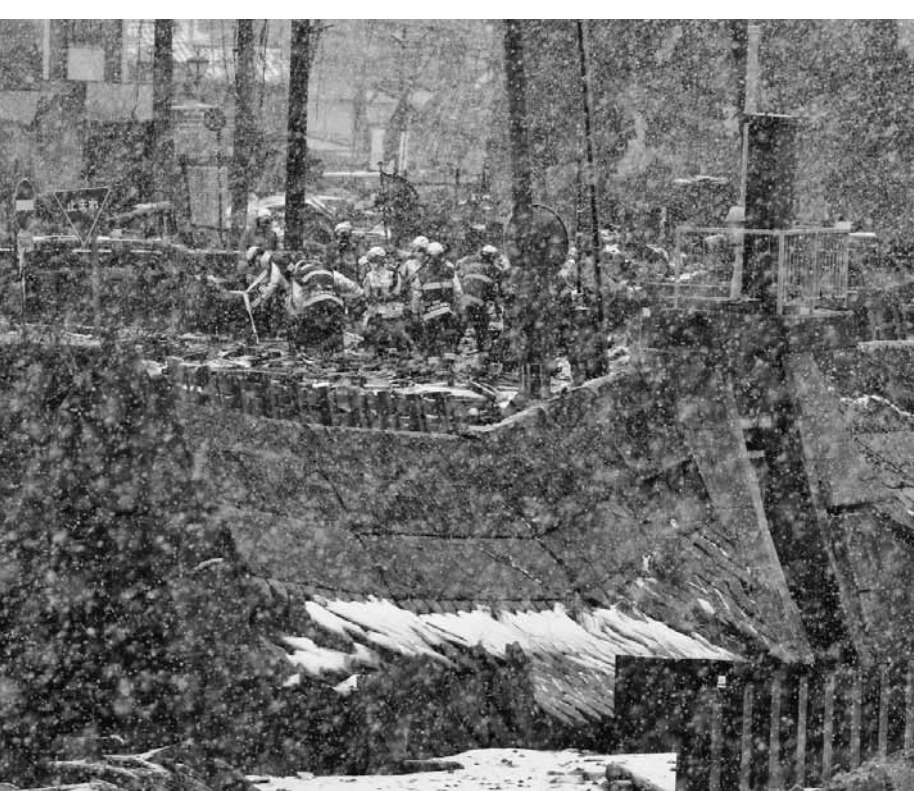
seafood and traditional crafts. Much of it was destroyed in the fires that broke out after the January 1 disaster.

Kentarō Mitsumori, who runs a corner grocery shop, slept in his car with his wife to guard against looting. Their store still stands but has no lock, electricity or running water. Everything sold out in three days. But he plans to close his business.

"Even if I manage to fix up the place, there just aren't going to be enough customers. I don't know how Wajima can survive," he said.

Nearly 30,000 people staying in schools, auditoriums and other evacuation centres worried about infections as cases of COVID-19 and other illnesses popped up.

In the shelters, people were still sleeping on cold floors. After initial help of a piece of bread and a cup of water for each person a day, more aid is allowing some facilities to begin serving hot

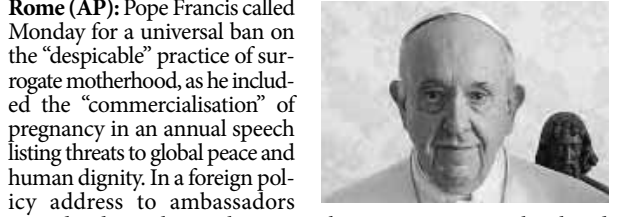


Firefighters search for missing people in the snow in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Sunday. Rescue teams worked through snow to deliver supplies to isolated hamlets Monday, a week after a powerful earthquake hit western Japan.

Pope calls for global ban on surrogacy

Rome (AP): Pope Francis called Monday for a universal ban on the "despicable" practice of surrogate motherhood, as he included the "commercialisation" of pregnancy in an annual speech listing threats to global peace and human dignity. In a foreign policy address to ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, Francis lamented that 2024 had dawned at a time in history in which peace is "increasingly threatened, weakened and in some part lost."

Citing Russia's war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, migration, climate crises and the "immoral" production of nuclear and conventional weapons, Francis delivered a lengthy laundry list of the ills afflicting humanity and the increasing violation of international humanitarian law that allows



them. But Francis also listed smaller-scale issues that he said were threats to peace and human dignity, including surrogacy. Francis said the life of the unborn child must be protected and not "suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking," "I consider despicable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs," he said.

N Korea's Kim turns 40

AP ■ SEOUL
North Korean leader Kim Jong Un turned 40 on Monday with no announced public celebrations at home, after he entered the new year with artillery barrages into the sea and vows to expand his nuclear arsenal.

Since taking power in late 2011, Kim, the third generation of his family to rule North Korea, is believed to have established an absolute leadership similar to his predecessors. But his birthday has yet to be officially celebrated, unlike his late father Kim Jong Il and grandfather Kim Il Sung.

Their birthdays are two of the North's biggest holidays and are marked with great fanfare, loyalty campaigns and sometimes massive military parades.

On Monday, North Korea's state news agency published a lengthy article extolling Kim's



guidance of major construction projects in the past decade. It also reported Kim visited a chicken farm with his daughter the previous day. But it made no mention of his birthday.

Some observers speculate Kim may think he's still relatively young or needs bigger achievements to hold such lavish birthday festivities. Others say the lack of a public birthday bash may be related to his concerns about attention to his late Japan-born mother.

Kim's headlong pursuit of a bigger nuclear arsenal has invited punishing US-led sanctions, which together with border closures during the pandemic were believed to have badly hurt the North's fragile economy. Kim has subsequently admitted policy failures as his vow that North Korea would "never have to tighten their belts again" remained unfulfilled. "For Kim, it's still probably politically burdensome to idolize himself as he's still young and hasn't accumulated much achievements," said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification. Kim Yeol Soo, an expert at South Korea's Korea Institute for Military Affairs, said it will likely take some time for his birthday to become an official holiday because elderly members of the North's ruling elite would still think he's too young.

Huge car rally planned in US to celebrate Ram Mandir consecration

New York (PTI): The Indian-American diaspora is gearing up to commemorate the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, with plans to hold car rallies in the US to celebrate the occasion.

The group "California Indians" is organising a special car rally on January 20 to celebrate "Bhagwan Shri Ram Ji's homecoming". The organisers said that more than 400 cars will join the rally that is expected to go from South Bay to the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. The organisers said in a press release that "Indians of Northern California are coming together to celebrate the biggest and proudest event in the modern

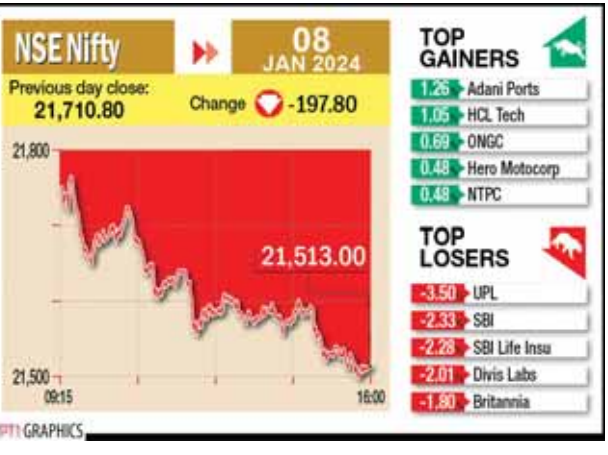
history of India." Local temples and diaspora organisations across the US are planning to hold special celebrations in the days leading up to January 22, when the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya will be inaugurated.

Car rallies have been held in Washington, Chicago and other US cities over the past several weeks.

Community leaders including Rohit Sharma, Mani Keeran, Param Desai, Daipayana Deb, Deepak Bajaj and Bimal Bhagwat are planning the California rally, the organisers said. "We cannot go to Ayodhya but Ram Ji is in our hearts and this is our contribution to his homecoming," the organisers said.

Sensex, Nifty tumble nearly 1 per cent on global weakness

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close with deep losses on Monday, snapping their two-day winning streak as investors pared exposure to banking, metal and FMCG stocks amid a weak trend in global markets. The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 670.93 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 71,355.22. During the day, it fell 725.11 points or 1 per cent to 71,301.04. The Nifty declined 197.80 points or 0.91 per cent to 21,513. "Nifty snapped a two-session rally to end lower after opening with marginal gains. Global stocks slipped on Monday ahead of a busy week of inflation and economic data and



dipped 0.36 per cent. Among the indices, FMCG fell 1.55 per cent, commodities declined 1.44 per cent, bankex (1.42 per cent), metal 1.40 per cent, financial services (1.05 per cent), telecommunication (0.93 per cent), IT (0.90 per cent) and tech (0.77 per cent). Power, realty and services were the gainers. "The market witnessed wide-spread selling as the euphoria over early rate cuts may diminish due to the better-than-expected non-farm payroll data

from the US and the consequent rise in the US 10-year yield. "In the near term, investors' trade positions will be more inclined towards the upcoming result season. While the outset may be tempered by lower expectations in the IT sector, the overall forecast for earnings growth remains optimistic, projecting double-digit figures," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.21 per cent to USD 77.81 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,696.86 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark jumped 178.58 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 72,026.15 on Friday. The Nifty climbed 52.20 points or 0.24 per cent to 21,710.80.

K-shaped recovery narrative flawed and prejudiced: SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The repeated argument that India witnessed a K-shaped recovery post-pandemic is "flawed, prejudiced, and ill-concocted," said a research report by SBI on Monday. According to the report, post-pandemic, households are reconfiguring their savings towards physical assets, including real estate, it said. "The oft-repeated conundrum debating a K-shaped recovery post-pandemic seems at best flawed, prejudiced, ill-concocted and fanning interests of select quarters to whom India's remarkable ascendance, signalling more the renaissance of the new global south, is quite unpalatable," the report said. K-shaped recovery reflects uneven recovery where certain sectors of the economy thrives while other sectors continue to decline or struggle to recover. It further said post-pandemic, there has been two-way shift between savings channelised into physical assets from financial assets in consonance with the global trend to take advantage of lower interest rates. However, it said, recent data

DGCA revises duty time limitations norms for flight crew, raises weekly rest periods to 48 hrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Aviation safety regulator DGCA on Monday came out with revised Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) norms for flight crew, entailing increased weekly rest periods to 48 hours, extension of night hours, and limiting the number of night landings to only two as against six earlier. These regulations have been instrumental in managing fatigue-related aviation safety risks for more than a decade now, an official statement said. Airlines are required to comply with the revised norms latest by June 1, it said. With a view to address and mitigate concerns on pilot fatigue through a data-driven approach, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) collected and analysed extensive numbers of pilot rosters, along with pilot fatigue reports submitted by airline operators, it said. Based on the study and analysis, some of the key areas inducing fatigue, such as maximum flight duty period, night duty, weekly rest period, flight duty period extension, among others, were identified, it said. The revised FDTL regulations have been formulated after extensive data analysis and feedback from various stakeholders, including airline operators, pilot associations and individuals, as per the statement. It also said the best practices in the world — FAA in the US, and EASA in the



European Union — have also been taken into consideration in amending the regulations, while keeping in mind the specific operating environment in India. The revised regulations mandate increased weekly rest periods from 36 hours to 48 hours for flight crew, thus ensuring sufficient time for recovery from cumulative fatigue, it said. Moreover, the definition of night has been amended and it now covers the period of 0000-0600 hours in the revised regulations vis-a-vis the period of 0000-0500 hours under the previous regulations. This enhancement of one hour during the early morning will ensure adequate rest and also align the night duty period, which encompasses Window of Circadian Low



ONGC starts oil production from delayed USD 5 billion deep-water project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State-controlled Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) has started oil production from its much-delayed flagship deep-sea project in Krishna Godavari basin in Bay of Bengal, helping reverse years of decline in output, the company said. ONGC has started producing from the Cluster-2 project in KG-DWN-98/2 block and will slowly ramp up output. Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said "first oil production commences from complex and difficult" block. He did not indicate the current output but said "production is expected to be 45,000 barrels per day and over 10 million standard cubic metres per day of gas". Cluster-2 oil production should have begun by November 2021 but was delayed because of the Covid pandemic. ONGC has hired floating vessel Armada Sterling-V, owned 70 per cent by SPOG (Shapoorji Pallonji Oil & Gas) and 30 per cent by Malaysia's Bumi Armada, for producing oil from below seabed. The FPSO (floating production, storage and offloading vessel), Armada Sterling-V, has been waiting to receive oil since January 2, 2023, after she was hooked up on December 27, 2022. ONGC previously set May 2023 as the first Cluster-2 oil deadline, extended to August 2023, September 2023, October 2023

India's coal import rises 11.7 per cent to 21 MT in Nov

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The country registered an 11.7 per cent rise in coal imports to 20.95 Million Tonnes (MT) in November as compared to the year-ago period. The country's coal imports in November 2022 was 18.75 MT, according to data compiled by B2B e-commerce company mjunction services. However, coal import in the April-November period of the current financial year dropped to 169.08 MT from 173.47 MT in the year-ago period. There was reduction in coal imports due to ample domestic supply and a slowdown in demand after the festive season in October, mjunction MD and CEO Vinaya Varma said. The demand for imported coal, he said, is likely to remain subdued in the coming months. Of the total import in November 2023, non-coking coal import was at 14.37 MT, against 11.88 MT in the same month the previous year. Coking coal import was at 4.23 MT, against 3.90 MT imported in November 2022. During the April-November period in 2023, non-coking coal import stood at 108.90 MT, lower than 116.28 MT imported during the same period in the previous fiscal. Coking coal import was at 37.97 MT during the April-November period, up against 36.64 MT recorded in the year-ago period.

Agri exports likely to double to USD 100 bn by 2030: Commerce Secretary

PTI ■ GREATER NOIDA
India's agriculture exports, which stood at over USD 50 billion at present, are expected to double by 2030 and reach USD 100 billion, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Monday. He said that the country is targeting USD 2 trillion worth of exports of goods and services by 2030. "I am very sure that this USD 50 billion exports of India today will see a doubling of our exports by 2030 to almost USD 100 billion," he said at the IndusFood Show 2024 here. This is the largest food and beverage show in South Asia. The secretary said that areas like the ready-to-eat food segment have huge potential to grow. He also urged the industry to focus on the technical standard requirements of importing countries. Inaugurating the show, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that this fiscal year, the country's agri exports will be more than last year's level of USD 53 billion, despite restrictions imposed on shipments of certain key commodities, including rice, wheat and sugar. Earlier, an official said that the export ban and restrictions on these commodities may hit exports of about USD 4-5 billion this fiscal. The government has prohibited exports of wheat and non-



Ramdas, Grand Hypermarket, Nesto, Mustafa, X5, Lulu, Almaya Group, and Spar, are also participating, he added. Goyal also said there is a need for large-scale food processing, product branding, and export focus to provide better value to farmers, generate employment, and enhance the country's earnings. He added that as many as 158 food and agri products have been granted Geographical Indications (GIs) tags, and 708 food items have been identified under the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative for their promotion. He urged the industry to focus on frozen, packaged, and ready-to-eat foods, encouraging skill development, university exchange programmes, and startups in the sector. The industry should also prioritise quality, nutrition, organic ingredients, and eco-friendly packaging, underscoring the significance of promoting food nutrition and sustainability, the minister said.

MF industry assets surge by ₹11 lakh crore in 2023, crosses ₹50 lakh crore mark

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
After a lackluster performance in 2022, the mutual fund industry saw a substantial rebound in 2023 with its asset base surging by nearly Rs 11 lakh crore, reaching over Rs 50 lakh crore-mark fuelled by an optimistic equity market, steady interest rates, and a robust economic expansion. The year 2023 has seen a substantial increase in overall inflow, data from the Association of Mutual Fund Industry (Amfi) showed on Monday. The inflow has pushed the assets under management (AUM) of the mutual fund industry by 27 per cent, adding Rs 10.9 lakh crore in 2023. This was way higher than the 5.7 per cent growth and Rs 2.65 lakh crore increase in AUM observed throughout 2022, as well as the nearly 22 per cent growth and close to Rs 7 lakh crore addition to the asset base in 2021. The asset base rose from Rs 39.88 lakh crore in 2022 to an all-time high of Rs 50.78 lakh crore in 2023, the data showed. The asset base stood at Rs 37.72 lakh crore at the end of December 2021 and Rs 31 lakh crore in December 2020.

Gold slips ₹250; silver slumps ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices slipped Rs 250 to Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a decline in precious metal prices internationally, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had settled at Rs 63,450 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver also slumped Rs 400 to Rs 76,300 per kilogram. In the previous trade, silver closed at Rs 76,700 per kg. In the futures trade on the MCX, the February contract of gold plunged Rs 355 to Rs 62,202 per 10 grams. Also, the March contract of silver tumbled Rs 415 to Rs 72,172 per kg on the bourse. In the overseas markets, both gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,029 per



ounce and USD 22.95 per ounce, respectively. "Following strong US labour market data which stoked investor anticipation that the Federal Reserve might delay interest rate cuts led to a decline in gold prices," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,029 per ounce, down by USD 16 from the previous close in the international markets. "Focus this week will be on the US Consumer Price Index (CPI) and Producer Price Index (PPI) data which could provide further clarity on the Fed's monetary policy interest rate path ahead," Navneet Damani, Senior VP of commodity research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

BUSINESS BRIEF

SRM GLOBAL HOSPITAL EXCELS IN SERVICE
CHENNAI: Being the Times Healthcare Achievers of 2023, SRM Global Hospitals, Kattankulathur serves its excellence on a scale of effective critical services and delivering salient features through world-class equipped amenities and patient care. The President of SRM Group of Companies, Dr. P. Sathyanarayan feels that the SRM Global Hospitals indulge in offering seamless compassion towards the art of healing medical ailments. The stupendous brand ambassadors of each speciality provide a legacy of healthcare services over the years. With immense pride, he introduced the miscellaneous crew of 4 cardiologists, 5+ gastroenterologists over a supported 15+ doctors for the emergency and critical care services onboard.



Mercedes-Benz lines up ₹200 cr investment, to launch over 12 products in 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz will invest Rs 200 crore in India this year on new products, manufacturing operations and digitisation, to strengthen its position after posting record sales of 17,408 units in 2023, a top company official said on Monday. Mercedes-Benz India will have more than 12 launches in 2024, including three electric vehicles, out of which half will be in the top end vehicle segment (TEV) and will be priced Rs 1.5 crore onwards. "This year marks a special year as we celebrate 30 years of Mercedes-Benz in India. We are going to invest Rs 200 crore more into our factory in Pune. This takes a total investment of Rs 3,000 crore in India now. So that's a strong statement of intent," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director & CEO Santosh Iyer told PTI in an interview.



These investments will be towards manufacturing operations, new product startups and digitisation of the manufacturing process, he added. In 2023, Iyer said, the company recorded its best-ever year in its history in India with sales of 17,408 units, a growth of 10 per cent. Mercedes-Benz India had posted its previous best-ever sales in 2022 when it clocked 15,822 units. On the outlook for 2024, Iyer said the company is looking for "double-digit" growth despite volatility in both supply and demand sides. Currently, the company's order bank stands at 3,000 units. On the product launch plan, Iyer said, "We are looking at 12-plus new car lines to be launched in '24 and 50 per cent of them will be in the top end vehicle segment. These will include three new electric vehicles." The TEV segment continues to drive aspiration for the brand, Iyer said, adding that three new EVs to be launched in 2024 will build up the company's EV portfolio. "EVs now comprise 4 per cent of our total sales and the segment witnessed a trebling of growth in 2023," he added.

