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Photo: PTI

One Nation, One Election Bills in Parliament today

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Narendra Modi-led Government is likely to introduce two Bills in the Lok Sabha paving way for simultaneous elections 'One Nation, One Election', on Tuesday. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, the legislation seeks to synchronise elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and possibly local bodies. While the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill 2024, is to amend the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963, the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal will introduce the Bills in the Parliament. The BJP has issued a three-line whip to all its Lok Sabha MPs to be present in the

house on December 17, 2024. The Union Cabinet has already approved two Bills to facilitate simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, though the decision on local body polls has been deferred for now. According to the statement of objects and reasons of the Constitution ((One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024), the Bill proposes to insert a new article 82A (Simultaneous elections to the House of the People and all Legislative Assemblies) and to amend article 83 (Duration of Houses of Parliament), article 172 (Duration of State Legislatures) and article 327 (Power of Parliament to make provision with respect to elections to Legislatures). According to Section 2 sub clause 5 of the Constitution (129th) Amendment Bill, "If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the

elections to any Legislative Assembly cannot be conducted along with the general election to the House of the People, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date." The General Elections to the House of the People and all State Legislative Assemblies were held simultaneously in the years 1951-52, 1957, 1962 and 1967. However, due to premature dissolution of some Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969, the cycle of holding Polls simultaneously with the House of the People got disrupted. The Law Commission of India in its 170th report, on "Reform of the Electoral Laws", inter alia, suggested that holding separate elections for State Legislative Assemblies should be an exception rather than the rule.

Gear up NCR, GRAP-IV is back

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhi's average AQI rose to 399 at 9 Apm on Monday, and breached the 400 mark at 10 PM, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Monday invoked Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) to curb air pollution.

As a result, entry of truck traffic into Delhi (except for trucks carrying essential commodities/ providing essential services) banned. All LNG/CNG /Electric/BS-VI Diesel trucks shall however be permitted to enter Delhi and NCR. Light Commercial Vehicles registered outside Delhi, other than EVs/CNG/BS-VI diesel, can't enter Delhi, except those carrying essential commodities/ providing essential services.

Delhi-registered BS-IV and below diesel-operated medium and heavy goods vehicles will be prohibited from operating, except for those carrying essential services. The NCR State Governments/Delhi government will decide whether to permit 50 per cent of employees in Government, municipal, and private offices to work from home. All construction activities, including highways, roads, flyovers, power lines, pipelines and other public projects, have been suspended. Schools are closed. Employees are asked to work from home. Considering the steep rise in the AQI of Delhi owing to highly unfavourable meteorological conditions and absolute calm wind conditions, the CAQM Sub-Committee on GRAP called for an emergency meeting. The Sub-Committee decided to impose Stage-IV ('Severe+' Air Quality) of the GRAP schedule (issued on 13.12.2024) in the entire NCR, with immediate effect", the CAQM said in its order. The GRAP-IV is the highest level of restrictions and is intended to reduce the public health impact of hazardous air quality. "Considering the highly unfavourable meteorological conditions including calm winds and very low mixing height leading the AQI of Delhi into the higher end of the very poor category, the panel's sub-

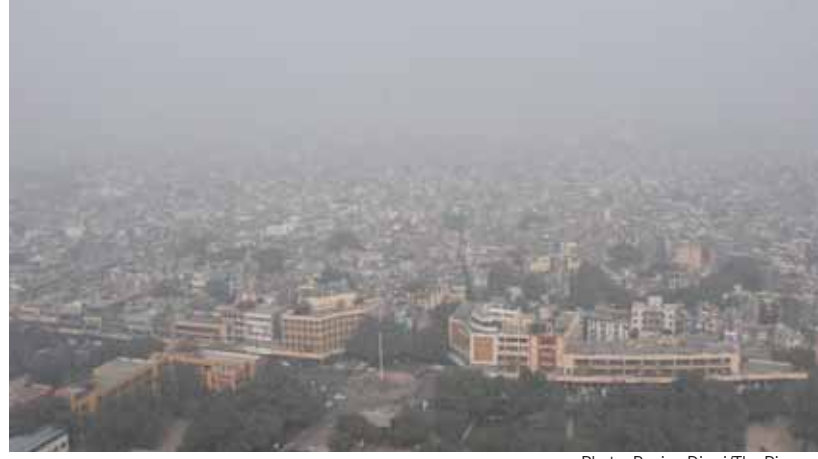


Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Coldwave conditions sweep across NCR

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Coldwave conditions swept several parts of the national Capital for a second consecutive day on Monday as the minimum temperature dropped to 4.5 degrees Celsius, four degrees below normal. This is the joint lowest minimum temperature so far this season after the city recorded 4.5 degree Celsius on December 12 as well. In the coming days, Delhi may witness a further increase in the coldwave with shallow fog in various parts due to calm winds and high humidity. In its weather bulletin, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has also issued a cold wave warning for certain states of northern India, including Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh, among other states that would persist till Saturday in Delhi and several other states. The temperature in certain areas of Delhi went even below 4.5 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature in Pusa was recorded at 3.5 degrees Celsius, while in Ayanagar, the minimum temperature was recorded at 4 degrees Celsius.



Yes. I am upset: Chhagan Bhujbal

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Making no bones about his displeasure over his exclusion from the Maharashtra Cabinet, a miffed The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-AP) leader and a popular Other Backward Classes (OBC) face in the State, Chhagan Bhujbal said on Monday that he would decide on his next move after talking to his constituents and members of a Phule organisation of which he is the president.

"Yes. I am upset... I may or may not have been given a ministerial post but Chhagan Bhujbal is not finished," Bhujbal said, when media persons button-holed him for comment on his exclusion from the State Cabinet. Talking to media persons on the first day of the Winter Session of the State Legislature in Nagpur, Bhujbal said, "I will take a call on my future course of action after consulting the people in the constituency and also the members of the Samata Parishad." Seventy-seven-year-old Bhujbal, who is an influential leader from OBC's Mali community, is the founder-president of the Akhil Bharatiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad.

Wanted to keep fighting but Russians evacuated him, says Assad

AP ■ DAMASCUS

Ousted Syrian leader Bashar Assad says he had no plans to leave the country after the fall of Damascus a week ago but the Russian military evacuated him after their base in western Syria came under attack.

The comments are the first by Assad since he was overthrown by insurgent groups. Assad said in a statement on his Facebook page that he left Damascus on the morning of December 8, hours after insurgents stormed the capital. He said he left in coordination with Russian allies to the Russian base in the coastal province of Latakia, where he planned to keep fighting. Assad said that after the Russian base came under attack by drones, the Russians decided to move him on the night of Dec 8 to Russia. "I did not leave the country as part of a plan as it was reported earlier," Assad said. "At no point during these events did I consider stepping down or seeking refuge nor was such proposal made by any individual or party," Assad said in the English text of his statement. "The only course of action was to continue fighting against the terrorist onslaught."

V FOR VICTORY



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pays homage at the National War Memorial on the occasion of Vijay Diwas, marking India's victory in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war. Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen Anil Chauhan, Chief of Army Staff Gen. Manoj Pande, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh are also seen

Priyanka's Palestine bag, sets cat among pigeons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a show of support for the people of Palestine, Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, on Monday, carried a bag to Parliament that had "Palestine" emblazoned on it. The Congress general secretary has been raising her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Priyanka was seen carrying a



Photo: PTI

handbag emblazoned with the word "Palestine" and Palestinian emblems, including a watermelon, seen as a symbol of Palestinian solidarity. "It is the moral responsibility of every right-thinking individual, including all those Israeli citizens who do not believe in hatred and violence, and every government in the world to condemn the Israeli government's genocidal actions and force them to stop," she had said in a post on X.

Why should the letter not be made public? BJP asks Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday asked former Congress president Sonia Gandhi to return the correspondences of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with a host of personalities, to the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library, saying the historical documents belonged to the country and were not anyone's personal property. Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP) and BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra cited reports of the PMML's deliberations on the issue to note that Nehru's correspondences with Edwina Mountbatten, wife of the last British Viceroy to India, and leaders Jayaprakash Narayan and Jagjivan Ram lay with the erstwhile Nehru Museum and Library Society, which returned them to Sonia Gandhi in 2008. Patra also raised the issue earlier in the day in the Lok Sabha during Question Hour when Union Culture Minister Gejendra Singh Shekhawat was replying to questions related to his ministry.

Not a single drop of blood to spill after Mar 31, 2026: Shah

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday reiterated the Centre's commitment to end Naxalism from Chhattisgarh by March 31, 2026 and said not a single drop of blood will be spilled thereafter. Shah was addressing families of martyred security personnel as well as civilians killed in Maoist attacks at Amar Vatika in Jagdalpur during his second day of visit to Chhattisgarh. Expressing condolences to the bereaved families, he reassured them full support of both the Centre and the state government. "The pain of losing your loved ones cannot go in vain and we stand firmly with you," Shah said. Commending the efforts of the Sai government in preserving the memories of the martyrs, Shah emphasised their sacrifices would never be forgotten. "In the past year, a large number of Maoists have been killed. Under the leadership of the Chhattisgarh government, commendable



action has been taken against Naxalites in the state with a very good strategy." He pledged that Maoism would be completely eradicated from the sacred land of Goddess Danteshwari. Shah also outlined the government's approach - encouraging Maoists to surrender, arresting those involved in violence, and taking firm action against those continuing to threaten lives. "Those who choose the path of violence will be given answer in their own language," he added. Shah praised the state government's initiative to dedicate one day of each week at the Inspector General of Police (IG) office to address the grievances of martyrs' families and suggested to expand this initiative to include district collectors as well to ensure a more holistic and comprehensive support system for the affected families. This was Shah's second visit to Bastar region in Chhattisgarh in two months. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai told the Maoist-affected families that in order to honour the memory of the martyrs, the government has planned to install statues of the martyred soldiers in their native villages.

Land grabbers must be dealt with iron hand: SC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday said, as it promised to "go deep to find the truth" on how a century-old building housing a public library at Karol Bagh was demolished. A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan was irked after being informed it was not the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) that demolished the building in 2018, but an official who had acted on an oral order. The SC was further displeased when it found no one from the Delhi Library Board was present to contest the case and no counsel was authorised to appear in the matter.

"Land grabbers must be dealt with iron hand," the Bench told senior advocate S Muralidhar, appearing for private firm Dimple Enterprise, which is the owner of the property and reportedly wanted to construct a commercial complex in place where once the building stood. Justice Surya Kant told Muralidhar, "We will go deep to find the truth. We will pass orders even without the petitioner (Delhi Library Board) contesting the case." The Bench added, "You (private firm M/s Dimple Enterprise) must have colluded with the MCD and library officials. You must have bribed them." The first Delhi Public Library was started by then Prime

Minister Jawaharlal Nehru near the old Delhi railway station in 1951. The Delhi Public Library, an autonomous body, is funded by the Ministry of Culture and has around 45 branches and mobile libraries in the National Capital. The Bench issued a show cause to the officials of Delhi Library Board why they were not appearing in the matter. It asked the MCD to file a better affidavit giving complete details of the property; who resided there and the current owner after terminating the affidavit filed by the civic body as "misleading". The Bench said it would enlarge the scope of its investigation to include the possibility of collusion of



library board officials with the private firm. Muralidhar said the dilapidated building, housing the public library, was a 100-year-old structure demolished by the MCD. He said there was no material on record to suggest collusion of any kind between the officials of library or MCD officials with the firm and there was no mention of any bribe being paid.

Justice Surya Kant read out the affidavit filed by the MCD and said the civic body had accepted it had no record of any demolition of the building whereas an official executive engineer acted on oral orders. "Mr Muralidhar, you know very well how these things work. It is surprising that you are defending the land mafias. Do you think that the MCD official acted on his own? He must have acted on the oral direction of the MCD commissioner. Within days of the order of the high court, the building was demolished without giving them space to approach the high courts for relief," Justice Surya Kant said. The judge went on to add, "Thankfully, on the first

hearing of the matter, the Bench comprising Justice (ret'd) M B Lokur ordered for status quo on the property." Denying any collusion, Muralidhar said the firm had nothing to do with the demolition exercise. The Bench posted the matter on January 8, 2025. On November 25, the SC came down heavily on the MCD for demolishing the building that housed a public library, without giving a chance to the affected party to seek relief, and said "there is no divine power which can wake you up". It had questioned how the civic body demolished the building that housed the library since 1954, without waiting for the parties to

approach the SC. The SC had noted that the Delhi High Court passed an order on September 10, 2018, in the matter and without even giving a breathing time to the tenants and other occupants of the building to approach the SC, the MCD demolished the building at around 8.30 am on September 18, 2018. The SC had further sought to know the "hidden circumstances" for which the MCD denied the party the right to approach it. The SC said its interim order of September 18, 2018, would continue till further orders. On September 18, 2018, the SC ordered that no portion of the property at Karol Bagh would be demolished.

LG seeks special Assembly session on CAG reports, informs Delhi HC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor (LG) on Monday informed the Delhi High Court that Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) reports related to liquor duty, pollution and finance were approved and he had asked for an immediate special sitting of the assembly. The LG's stand came on a petition by Delhi's opposition leaders seeking the CAG reports to be placed before the assembly by the state government as per the constitutional mandate. The additional affidavit filed on behalf of the LG, said the finance minister (Delhi chief minister) had caused an "unjustified delay"

in the matter, depriving the assembly and the general public of their right to scrutinise the executive actions of the government. "With an intent to ensure that there is no further delay, the hon'ble LG has promptly and expeditiously accorded his approval under Section 48 of the Government of NCT of Delhi Act, 1991 on December 13, 2024 itself (within less than 48 hours of the files having been received in the LG Office), so that further necessary steps may be taken by the respondent numbers 1 and 2 along with the office of the finance minister for laying all these 14 CAG Reports before the Legislative Assembly of Delhi in

the present session," it said. Justice Sanjeev Narula was informed by the counsel for the LG that 14 reports were received from the finance minister's office, after being kept pending "for an inordinate amount of time". She said since the session was recently adjourned sine-die, the speaker had the prerogative to "re-call" the assembly session. The assembly session was over on December 4. The affidavit further said, "The hon'ble Lt Governor, while returning all these CAG reports to chief minister with his approval under Section 48. Has directed that the special sitting of the legislative assembly of Delhi may be convened immediately in accordance with the assembly rules for laying these CAG report on the table of the legislative assembly of Delhi without further loss of time in order to ensure adherence to the constitutional mandate." The court observed the issue for which the petition was filed stood redressed and asked them to take appropriate recourse. "In light of the above, the grievance raised before the court for directing mandamus to respondent number 2 (finance ministry), stands redressed. In view of the above the present proceedings stand closed," ordered the court. The senior counsel appearing for the Delhi government said the

CAG reports would be forwarded to the speaker. The petition was filed by leader of opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta and BJP MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan. Earlier, Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG), Vinai Kumar Saxena has written to Chief Minister Atishi to convene a special sitting of the Legislative Assembly of Delhi immediately for laying the 14 pending CAG Reports on the Table of the House. Giving details, officials said Saxena has stressed that the session be convened without any

further loss of time to ensure adherence to the constitutional mandate. It may be noted that the session of the Delhi Legislative Assembly has not been prorogued as yet. All these 14 Reports that include "Performance Audit on Regulation and Supply of Liquor in Delhi", "Performance Audit on Prevention and Mitigation of Vehicular Air Pollution in Delhi", "Public Health Infrastructure and Management of Health Services", "Performance Audit Report on Functioning of Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC)", apart from Revenue, Expenditure and Financial Audits of the Government, pertain to the

period when Arvind Kejriwal was the Chief Minister of Delhi and have been lying pending since as long as an year and half in many instances. The LG has given his formal consent for tabling of all these Reports and the communication to this effect signed by the LG reads: "In pursuance of Section 48 of Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991, I, Vinai Kumar Saxena, Lieutenant Governor Delhi recommend placing a copy of Report No. _____ of _____ for the year ending _____ of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India relating to the Government of NCT of Delhi before the Legislative Assembly

of NCT of Delhi." Dealing with every report on a separate file, the LG has uniformly noted that, "The CAG reports are vital to assess the financial and administrative health of Government in a democratic set up. These Reports are the touchstone of transparency in governance. Adherence to the constitutional mandate of placing such reports on the Table of the Legislature from time to time expeditiously is an essential ingredient of a functional democracy to ensure full disclosure and to seek guidance of the Apex Legislative Body for taking course corrections where necessary."



A bulldozer being used to demolish unauthorised structures in Jahangirpuri earlier this year. PTI

AAP accuses BJP of razing slums, voter roll deletions

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after BJP leaders spent the night in Delhi's slums as part of an outreach programme ahead of the assembly elections, AAP on Monday accused the BJP of demolishing slums and deleting names of slum dwellers from electoral rolls. AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal has strongly criticized the BJP's efforts to deceive Jhuggi residents in the name of outreach, calling it a mere election stunt. Addressing the issue at an event on Monday, Arvind Kejriwal highlighted how BJP leaders, who are now visiting and sleeping in Jhuggis, have consistently ignored and harmed these communities over the past five years by demolishing numerous Jhuggis without concern for the affected families. Led by its Delhi unit chief Virendra Sachdeva, BJP leaders stayed overnight in 1,194 slum clusters across the national capital to connect with the slum dwellers and address their concerns. In a press conference, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi charged that the BJP leaders were visiting the slums, sharing

food and clicking pictures with the slum dwellers to show their concern. "However, I warn the slum dwellers to be wary of them (BJP leaders) because there are many examples that the slums they visit are demolished, like it happened in Sundar Nagri where they had gone a few months ago," she said. The senior AAP leader also alleged that the BJP leaders go to the slums and then get the names of slum dwellers deleted from voters' lists, citing the example of Shahdara's Ambedkar Basti. Ahead of elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly, due in February, the BJP has launched a massive outreach campaign to get a foothold in the city's slums, considered to be strongholds of the ruling AAP. "BJP leaders are directly communicating with the slum dwellers to better understand their lives. We have learned about their struggles and the upcoming BJP government will work through DUSIB (Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board) to improve their living conditions," Sachdeva said during his stay at Rajiv Camp in east Delhi's Krishna Market.

Kejriwal accuses BJP of failing women's safety at 'Mahila Adalat'



Delhi Chief Minister Atishi with Arvind Kejriwal and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav during the Mahila Adalat. Ranjan Dimri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Monday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Union government of failing in its responsibility to ensure women's safety and maintain law and order in the national capital while addressing a 'Mahila Adalat' event at Thyagaraj Stadium. The 'Mahila Adalat', held on the 12th anniversary of the 2012 Delhi gang rape that led to stricter anti-rape laws in the country, saw hundreds of women raising slogans like 'Nirbhaya Amar Rahe' and 'Mahila Shakti Zindabad'. Survivors of sexual assault shared their harrowing experiences at the event, with several breaking down while addressing the crowd. Addressing the crowd, the former Chief Minister claimed that unlike the BJP which does not treat women's safety as a

priority, his government has fulfilled all its promises. "Ten years ago, you gave me the responsibility to improve schools, hospitals, and water supply in Delhi, and I have done my work. But you gave the responsibility of security to BJP and Amit Shah, who has failed," Kejriwal said. "Delhi's women are not a vote bank for me; I see them as my sisters and mothers. I have done everything within my power to ensure their safety. Before AAP came to power, there were no CCTV cameras in the city. We installed CCTV cameras and appointed bus marshals to enhance people's security," Kejriwal added. Chief Minister Atishi highlighted the grim reality that, even 12 years after the Nirbhaya incident, women in Delhi continue to face harassment and violence. She pledged the AAP government's unwavering commitment to fight for women's security, holding the BJP

accountable for the alarming rise in crimes against women. She said, "Today is a dark day in the history of our country, and in the history of our city. On this day, December 16, the heart-wrenching, soul-shaking violence that happened to Delhi's daughter Nirbhaya took place." "When this painful tragedy occurred, we all took to the streets. We all fought with the resolve that such an incident would never happen again to the daughters of Delhi, to women anywhere," she added. A short video highlighting crime against women modelled after the television programme 'Aap Ki Adalat' was screened on the occasion, which accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of inaction on women's safety. Coming ahead of next year's Assembly elections in Delhi, the event was attended by INDIA bloc ally Akhilesh Yadav, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, and AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, among

others. Taking a dig at AAP chief and his personal aide Bibhav Kumar, Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal took to X and shared, "Sir, will you make Bibhav Kumar a judge in the Mahila Court?" Further, responding to Kejriwal's allegations, the BJP took a swipe at AAP, saying the party should first act on its MP Swati Maliwal's complaint of alleged harassment by Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar. The BJP also criticised AAP for inviting Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav for the 'Mahila Adalat', alleging that his father, the late Mulayam Singh Yadav, once defended those who commit crimes against woman. "Arvind Kejriwal, who established women's courts, should have delivered justice to Swati Maliwal by expelling Bibhav Kumar. Also, inviting Akhilesh Yadav for the 'Nirbhaya Day' programme is an insult to her memory," the BJP asked in a statement.



BJP slams Kejriwal on promises to auto drivers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to woo auto drivers, who are traditionally a vote bank of AAP, ahead of the state assembly polls, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Monday addressed more than 1000 auto drivers stating that AAP Convener Arvind Kejriwal has only cheated them by making promises to them for the last 10 years. Sachdeva flagged off the support rally of thousands of auto drivers from central and west district from the state office. While addressing the auto drivers, the senior BJP leader said, "There is a very large section of auto drivers in Delhi, they are the pulse of the whole Delhi, they roam around in the whole Delhi, talk and listen to the problems of the people but their problems are not heard." He added that in the last decade, former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has cheated them. "That is why we have made them aware today that it is BJP's responsibility to improve your livelihood. If BJP comes to power, it will improve the lives of all of you," he said. The Delhi BJP chief asserted

that only BJP can understand the problems of auto drivers because Kejriwal has forgotten the promises made to auto drivers in the last 10 years. "Kejriwal had promised that he will build hundreds of auto stands but till date auto drivers are waiting for it. Apart from putting a complete ban on auto seizure, he will also stop bribery in the transport department but today bribery is at its peak," he alleged. Taking a jibe at the AAP chief, Sachdeva said that he had talked about sending auto brokers to jail but Kejriwal himself went to jail by becoming a liquor broker. "Since elections are just around the corner, so many promises are being made but auto drivers are demanding an account of what was given to them in the last 10 years," he claimed. On this occasion, auto union leaders Rajendra Soni, Vinod Bhatia, Suraj Vaidya, Arif Mohammad, Rishipal, Rakesh Anand and Prarthana Kumari, Delhi BJP Vice President Rajkumar Bhatia and Corporation Councilor Sandeep Kapoor were also present.

Delhi Police enhances security for Christmas, New Year

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has intensified security arrangements and increased deployments across the city, particularly along its borders, ahead of Christmas and New Year celebrations, officials said on Monday. Over 2,500 police personnel are being deployed at Delhi's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to maintain law and order, a senior police officer said. "We have stepped-up security at more than 10 entry points from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh into the national capital," the officer added. Security has also been bolstered in Central and New Delhi areas, he said. Delhi, which shares borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and is close to Rajasthan, sees a significant influx of visitors from these states during the festive season. "We have directed the staff to intensify night patrolling. Additionally, hotels check-in will be scrutinised to know arrivals in the city. Hotel staffs have been asked to maintain a proper document record," the officer said.

Police arrest 415 criminals in 'Operation Crackdown' ahead of polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested 415 wanted criminals, including 81 proclaimed offenders, under its 'Operation Crackdown' conducted in the northwest district of the city from December 1 to 15. According to police officials on Monday, the operation, involving over 1,500 personnel, was aimed at curbing criminal activities and ensuring public safety ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) Abhishek Dhania said that the teams have arrested 81 proclaimed offenders and parole jumpers among those held. He said that the operation targeted those involved in theft, robbery, and other serious offenses. It led to the detention of 21 individuals linked to organised crime, including bootlegging, gambling, narcotics, and street crimes. "During the crackdown, 61 people were apprehended in drug trafficking cases and 53 juveniles wanted in various cases were detained, 18 of whom were involved in heinous crimes," the DCP said. Further, social media accounts of 67 juveniles were deactivated to curb the glorification of criminal activities through online platforms. "Additionally, 22 illegal



weapons and live cartridges were seized and 15 people were arrested. Preventive measures were taken against 81 individuals involved in arms act cases," Dhania said. The officer said the district police have investigated 44 cases of cyber fraud, arresting 31 people. Notably, fraudulent withdrawal of over Rs 9.5 lakh was prevented. He said that a special drive against smuggling and illegal liquor distribution led to the seizure of 8,545 litres of illicit liquor and the arrest of 127 individuals. The police took action in 107 gambling cases, arresting 127 people. The DCP said 55 people were arrested in 73 cases of snatching. Over 15,000 preventive arrests were made during this crackdown and 31 of 51 missing Bad Characters (BCs) were traced and arrested.

Kejriwal launches book on Delhi model, AAP governance

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP Convener and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday launched 'The Delhi Model', a book that details the 'transformative' governance of the AAP government. According to a statement, Kejriwal said the book is not just a governance framework but also the essence of the AAP's 'unique' approach to politics, solving fundamental issues that matter most to the common man. "The book offers an 'in-depth' examination of these reforms, combining data, stories, and a policy-driven perspective to showcase how the AAP government delivered on its promise of Vyavastha Parivartan, or systemic transformation, the statement read. "It represents not just the Delhi model of governance but also the AAP model of politics," Kejriwal said. "We have tried to solve the fundamental problems of people's daily lives. That's all it's very simple. People need education for their children, hospitals when they fall ill, some help from the government when inflation rises, free electricity, and free water. We have tried to solve these basic problems," the AAP national convener said.



The author of the book, Jasmine Shah, also a party member said, "This is a very special occasion: the launch of my first book. After writing just one book, I can tell you one thing — you need a really good reason to write a book." Kejriwal said there was a narrative back then that schools should be privatised and it was argued that some corporate groups would take over schools and run them for charity. He added that the whole bid was a "land scandal" because gov-

ernment schools were situated on prime land, right in the middle of Delhi. "So, what they would do with this land was unclear — they wouldn't necessarily improve the schools but instead, they would build something on that land," he said. He also claimed that earlier, elections were fought based on caste and religion, but when the party discussed its candidates for Delhi, it was the performance and not caste issue that went into consideration.

BJP likely to field fresh faces in Delhi polls, final list due

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP candidates' list for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, expected around last week of this month, is likely to have a significant number of fresh faces, party leaders said on Monday. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has announced its candidates on all the 70 constituencies for the polls due to be held in February next year. The Congress too has announced 21 candidates so far. "The final round of meetings on candidates selection by the national leadership is yet to take place. These meetings will be held after the Parliament session concludes on December 20," said a top functionary in Delhi BJP, adding the party may release the lists from the last week of this month. The BJP leaders said the process for candidates' selection was in an advanced stage and three probables on each constituency were already shortlisted. "This time chances are that the party will place bets on fresh faces, including women and youngsters, who have strong ground connect and reach among the people in the constituencies although they have yet not contested the elections," said another senior Delhi BJP leader. Those experienced party leaders, who have lost the elections twice or more may not be lucky

this time and a lot of scrutiny of those who lost in close contests in the previous polls is likely to happen this time, he added. "Winnability will be the prime factor with top leaders taking the final call with inputs from authentic feedback mechanisms like surveys and reports from the ground," he said. The BJP out of power in Delhi since 1998 is making all efforts to upstage the ruling AAP that has dominated the assembly elections since 2015. The AAP romped home winning 67 and 62 seats, respectively in the last two assembly polls in 2015 and 2020. Despite winning the Lok Sabha polls on all the seven constituencies in 2014, 2019 and 2024, the BJP has failed miserably to translate that success in the assembly polls. The party scraped through with just three seats in 2015 and eight seats in 2020. Some potential leaders, who crossed over to the BJP in recent months are likely to be seriously considered for election tickets. These include former Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, former Congress minister Raj Kumar Chauhan, Naseeb Singh, Neeraj Basoya and former AAP government ministers Kailash Gahlot and Raj Kumar Anand among others, the party leaders said. Sources claimed the election date is likely to be announced by mid-January and the voting could be held after February 10.

Ruckus in House over underweight gunny bags to farmers

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Congress members on Monday created ruckus in the Chhattisgarh Assembly over underweight gunny bags supplied to farmers and, dissatisfied with the Minister's answer, staged a walkout.

Leader of Opposition Charandas Mahant raised the issue of underweight gunny bags supplied to paddy growers selling their products and demanded a House committee probe into the matter.

The opposition alleged that there was corruption in the purchase of the gunny bags and said more than Rs 1,000 crores were spent to buy around 17 crore gunny bags.

Food Minister Dayaldas Baghel replied that the government had received a complaint that the gunny bags from Gaurishankar Jute Mill were given undue advantage. He also denied that farmers were upset over the issue.

The Minister also denied that the private jute mill was given undue advantage. He also denied that farmers were upset over the issue.

The Minister also ruled out setting up an enquiry into the matter.



Congress members on Monday created ruckus in the Chhattisgarh Assembly over underweight gunny bags supplied to farmers and, dissatisfied with the Minister's answer, staged a walkout.

'Divyang Bazaar' to generate employment for differently abled

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

Authorities in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district are gearing up to set up a 'Divyang Bazaar' to connect disabled people with employment, an official communique said on Monday.

Collector Awansh Sharan asked the Municipal Commission to pick an ideal spot for the bazaar and lay out an action plan.

The disabled people will be allotted space there to set up their businesses. They will also receive the benefits of welfare schemes aimed at uplifting the disabled.



Authorities in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district are gearing up to set up a 'Divyang Bazaar' to connect disabled people with employment, an official communique said on Monday.

MoUs inked to boost dairy, forest produce sectors

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government signed two MoUs on Monday to boost dairy and forest produce sectors in the state.

The government and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) signed an MoU for the development of the dairy sector.

The Chhattisgarh State Minor Forest Produce Cooperative Federation Ltd



The Chhattisgarh government signed two MoUs on Monday to boost dairy and forest produce sectors in the state.

signed another MoU with the National Cooperative Organics Ltd (NCOL) to develop the forest produce sector.

They were signed in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma.

Shah said Chhattisgarh had abundant natural wealth. The tribal communities will receive fair prices for forest produce through certification

and better marketing, he said. This will help empower the tribal community and boost their income, he said.

Sai said that through this agreement, the state will get the benefit of technical upgradation, professional experience and expertise of NDDB in the development of the dairy industry.

This will not only increase employment opportunities but will also strengthen the rural economy, Sai said.

13 Maoists arrested in Sukma

STAFF REPORTER ■ SUKMA

Thirteen Maoists, one carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh, were arrested and explosives seized from them in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Monday.

Of the 13, Madkam Baji Rao and five others were apprehended by the Central Reserve Police Force and police from a forest near Murkam village, Sukma Superintendent of Police



Thirteen Maoists, one carrying a reward of Rs 1 lakh, were arrested and explosives seized from them in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Monday.

Seven killed in road accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ BALOD

Seven persons including four women were killed on Monday when a sports utility vehicle (SUV) were in collision with a truck in Balod district in Chhattisgarh.

The accident took place around 12.30 am in Daundi area when the victims were returning from a family function, Balod Superintendent of Police Surjan Ram Bhagat said.

Of the 13 occupants of the SUV, six died on the spot and the others suffered serious injuries.

The injured, including five women, a man and a child, were taken to a community health centre and then shifted to the Rajnandgaon district hospital where one of them succumbed during treatment.



Seven persons including four women were killed on Monday when a sports utility vehicle (SUV) were in collision with a truck in Balod district in Chhattisgarh.

The deceased were identified as Durpat Prajapati (30), Yuvram Sahu (30), Sumitra Bai Kumbhkar (50), Manisha Kumbhkar (35), Sagun Bai Kumbhkar (50), Imla Bai (55) and Jignesh Kumbhkar (7).

Efforts are on to nab the truck driver who fled from the spot. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed profound grief over the incident.

Out-of-pocket expenditure data emphasised for health survey

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A state-level training conference in Raipur for the Household Consumption Survey on Health emphasised recording data on out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure and access to government-funded health insurance programmes.

The Raipur wing of the National Statistical Office organised the conference on Monday for the 80th round of the National Sample Survey.

Data on key indicators such as morbidity rates, hospitalisation rates and utilisation of public versus

The Raipur wing of the National Statistical Office organised the conference on Monday for the 80th round of the National Sample Survey.

The data provides insights that will help improve healthcare delivery, plan effective health interventions,

and improve medical care outcomes.

It enables policymakers to make informed decisions about resource allocation, identify gaps and inequities in access to healthcare, monitor and improve healthcare policies, and address the economic burden on households due to healthcare expenses.

SOUTH EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE
E-Tender Notice No. TRS-BIA-24-25 /OHE-IL-17
Name of Work: Provision of OHE High Voltage Power Supply (presence/absence) LED Indication System on inspection and testing lines at MEMU Car Shed, Bhalai.
Cost of the Work: ₹ 5,71,952/- (Rs. Five Lakhs Seventy One Thousand Nine Hundred Fifty Two Only). | **Bid Security/Earnest Money Deposit:** ₹ 11,500/- (Rs. Eleven Thousand Five Hundred Only). | **Completion Period of the Work:** 3 (Three) Months from the date of issue of Letter of Acceptance Date and Time of Closing of Tender: At 11:30 Hrs. on 10.01.2025. Website particulars and details of the Tender at: <http://www.ireps.gov.in> | **Divisional Electrical Engineer (MEMU), PR/RTS/FL/185 S.E.C.R. Bhalai** | **South East Central Railway** | **@secrail**

DEMAND NOTICE
 Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act) read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 (the said Rules). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 (1) of the said Rules, the Authorised Officer of IFL Home Finance Ltd (IFL HFL) (Formerly known as India Intoline Housing Finance Ltd.) has issued Demand Notices under section 13(2) of the said Act calling upon the Borrower(s) to repay the amount mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them. In connection with above, notice is hereby given, once again, to the Borrower(s) to pay within 60 days from the publication of this notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest from the date(s) of Demand Notice till the date of payment. The date of the Demand Notice, amount due as on date of Demand Notice and security offered towards repayment of loan amount are as under:

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date & Amount	Description of secured asset (immovable property)
Mrs. Alwena Mary, Mr. Ashwini Ramteke (Prospect No. IL10156979)	13/12/2024 Rs. 807100.00/- (Rupees Eight Lakh Seven Thousand One Hundred Only)	All That Piece And Parcel Of The Property Being: Plot No. 160, Kh. No. 15006/1 (part), Ph. No. 59, Swastik Smart City, Rm-Bhilai-3, Village Parsada, Teh. Patan, Dist. Durg, Chhattisgarh, 490042 Area Admeasuring (In Sq. Ft.): Property Type: Area, admeasuring Property Area: 985.00
Mr. Amarchand Paryani, Mrs. Komal Paryani, Satguru Garmits (Prospect No. IL10486256)	13/12/2024 Rs. 1682489.00/- (Rupees Sixteen Lakh Eighty Two Thousand Four Hundred and Eighty Nine Only)	All That Piece And Parcel Of The Property Being: Plot No. LG-294, Khasra No. 1327/2, Mouza Gram-Parsada, P.H. No. 59, R.N.M. Bhalai-3, Nagar Paika Kumbhar, Ward No. 16, Teh.-Patan, Durg, Chhattisgarh, 491111 AREA ADMEASURING (IN SQ. FT.): Property Type: Land, Area, Super Built Up Area, Built Up Area, Carpet Area Property Area: 581.00, 872.00, 895.00, 587.00

If the said Borrowers fail to make payment to IFL HFL as aforesaid, IFL HFL may proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the said Act, and the applicable Rules, inlity at the risks, costs and consequences of the Borrowers. For further details please contact to Authorised Officer at Branch Office: 1st Floor, Lal Ganga City Mart, Banjari Chowk, Opposite Hotel Amli Regency, Raipur, CG 492001/for Corporate Office: IFL Tower, Plot No. 98, Lodhgi Vihar, Ph-V Gurgaon, Haryana. Place: Raipur Date: 17.12.2024 Sd/- Authorised Officer, For IFL Home Finance Ltd

छत्तीसगढ़ शासन, जल संसाधन विभाग
कार्यालय मुख्य अभियंता, महानदी परियोजना, जल संसाधन विभाग, रायपुर (छ.ग.)
ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट निविदा सूचना
eProcurement Portal: <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in>
(प्रथम आमंत्रण)
सिस्टम निविदा क्र. 162739/निविदा सूचना क्र. 06/वे.ले.लि./2024-25
दि. 13.12.2024
निम्नलिखित कार्य के लिए दिनांक 03.01.2025 17:30 तक ऑन लाईन निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती है :-
कार्य का नाम - रायपुर जिले के महानदी परियोजना के अंतर्गत लवन शाखा नहर के खपराडीह माईनर, लांजा माईनर का रिमॉडलिंग, सी.सी. लाईनिंग एवं सट्टवर्स का पुनर्निर्माण / जीपीडार कार्य।
अनुमानित लागत - ₹. 270.20 लाख
(एस.ओ.आर. दिनांक 01.08.2010 से प्रचलित (यथा संशोधित दिनांक 22.08.2022 तक))
अन्य विवरण एवं विस्तृत निविदा छत्तीसगढ़ शासन की ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट वेब साइट <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> पर दिनांक 20.12.2024 समय 17.31 बजे से देखे तथा डाउनलोड किये जा सकते है।
समय: निविदा में भाग लेने हेतु ठेकेदारों को ई-प्रोक्योरमेंट वेबसाइट <https://eproc.cgstate.gov.in> पर नामांकित / पंजीयन तथा लोक निर्माण विभाग की एकीकृत पंजीयन प्रणाली के अंतर्गत ठेकेदार को उपयुक्त श्रेणी में पंजीयन कराना अनिवार्य है।
कार्यालय अभियंता
जल प्रबंध संभाग क्र. 2, बलौदाबाजार कुटे
मुख्य अभियंता महानदी परियोजना जल संसाधन विभाग, रायपुर, छ.ग.
G-242504595/3

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank
 Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, A/C Base Road, Opposite ST Depot, Prabhadevi, Mumbai-400025. Email: hqenquiry@icicibank.com
 CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com
 The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.
 Having failed to repay the amount, the Notice is issued to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken symbolic possession of the property described below, by exercising powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property. Any dealings with the property will be subject to charges of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower(s)/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs)	Name of Branch
1.	Shrimant Biswas/ Pratima Biswas/ 688 Sindhiya Nagar Infront Of Durga Pooja Ground Titurdih District- Durg Chhattisgarh Durg 491001/ LBDRG00003657605/ LBDRG00003657595	Plot No 27/26 B, Kh No.10, Village Titurdih, P.H. No.70, Sindhiyanagar, Tahasil And District Durg, Chhattisgarh, Durg Admeasuring An Area Of Area 52' 6 Ft X 55' Ft. Is 2887 Sq.ft./ Date Of Symbolic 12.12.2024	31-08-2024 Rs. 25,14,233.02/-	Durg

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/guarantor(s) is/are hereby issued a 30 day Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold after 30 days from the date of publishing this Notice, as per the provisions under Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.
 Date: December 17, 2024 Place: Durg
 Sincerely Authorised Signatory For ICICI Bank Ltd.

Motilal Oswal Home Finance Limited
 CIN Number :- U65923MH2013PLC248741 Corporate Office : Motilal Oswal Tower, Rahimtullah Sayani Road, Opposite ST Depot, Prabhadevi, Mumbai-400025. Email : hqenquiry@motilaloswal.com
PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION CUM SALE
E-Auction Sale Notice of 30 Days for Sale of Immovable Asset/s under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to rule 8 & 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
 Notice is hereby given to the public in general and to the borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors in particular, that the under mentioned property mortgaged to Motilal Oswal Home Finance Limited (Earlier Known as Aspire Home Finance Corporation Limited) will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", by way of "online e-auction" for recovery of dues and further interest, charges and costs etc. as detailed below in terms of the provisions of SARFAESI Act read with Rules 8 & 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 (through website motilaloswal.com) as per the details given below :-

Date and time of E-Auction Date: 23-01-2025 11:30 Am to 02:00 Pm (with unlimited extensions of 5 minute each)	Borrower(s)/Guarantor(s) / Loan Account	Demand Notice Date and Amount	Description of the Immovable property	Reserve Price, EMD
LAN: LXMORAIIPUR721 -220622798 BRANCH: RAIPUR BORROWER: JITENDRA ASHOK SEN CO-BORROWER: NIRMALA SEN	12-09-2023 For Rs: 1298807/- (Rupees Rupees Twelve Lakh Ninety Nine Thousand Eight Hundred Seven Only)	Part Of Khasra No. 154/39, New Khasra No. 154/288, Patwari Halika No. 101/29, Dr Radhakrishnan Ward No.22, (Kandika- 02), Parsahi Talab, Mouje- Birgaon, R.N.M. Dharasiva -1, Tehsil & Dist Raipur, Chhattisgarh 492001	Reserve Price: Rs.442458/- (Rupees Four Lakh Four Hundred & Fifty Eight Only) EMD: Rs. 44245/- (Rupees Forty Four Thousand Two Hundred & Forty Five Only) Last date of EMD Deposit: 22-01-2025	

Terms and Conditions of E-Auction: 1. The Auction is conducted as per the further Terms and Conditions of the Bid document and as per the procedure set out therein. Bidders may visit to the Web Portal : <https://www.auctionbazaar.com/> of our e-Auction Service Provider, M/s. ARCA EMART PRIVATE LIMITED for bidding information & support, the details of the secured asset put up for e-Auction and the Bid Form which will be submitted online. The interested buyers may go through the auction terms & conditions and process on the same portal and may contact to **Bhushan Moreshwarrao Pawar 8657956040 & Deepak Thakur 7045828073**, details available in the above mentioned Web Portal and may contact their Centralised Help Desk: + 91 83709 69696, E-mail ID: contact@auctionbazaar.com.
 Sd/- Authorised Officer Motilal Oswal Home Finance Limited (Earlier Known as Aspire Home Finance Corporation Limited) Place : Chhattisgarh Date : 17.12.2024

बैंक ऑफ महाराष्ट्र Bank of Maharashtra
JABALPUR ZONAL OFFICE, WRIGHT TOWN, JABALPUR PH: 0761-2480065,67,68
PUBLIC NOTICE FOR SALE
E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
 Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower/s and Guarantor/s that the below described immovable properties mortgaged/charged to the Bank of Maharashtra, the possession of which have been taken by the Authorised Officer of Bank of Maharashtra, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" and "WITHOUT RECOURSE BASIS" on 28.01.2025, for recovery of the balance due to the Bank of Maharashtra from the Borrower (s) and Guarantor(s) as mentioned in the table. Details of the Borrower/s and Guarantor/s, amount due, Short description of the immovable property and encumbrances known thereon, possession type, reserve price and the earnest money deposit are also given as under:-

Name & Address of Borrower / Guarantor	Outstanding Dues for Recovery of which Property are being sold	Description of properties	Type of Possession	Date of Auction	Reserve Price EMD Amount Bid Increase Amount
1) Branch - Asset Recovery Branch, Jabalpur Borrower/Guarantor: CHHABRA SALES 01 Jasvinderpal Singh Chhabra S/o Charan Singh Chhabra 02 Asmeet Singh Chhabra S/o Janvindra Singh Chhabra ADD - Maharana Pratap Chowk Jharabhata Raipur Road Bilaspur Ph 495001	Rs. 1,39,82,100/- (Rupees One crore thirty Nine lakh eighty two thousands One Hundred Only) + Unapplied interest on contractual rate w.e.f. 16.03.2022 + penal interest thereon and other charges and expenses	Land & building admeasuring area 900 sq feet situated at plot no 104 and 105, PH.no. 27, Mouja Parsada, Block Bilaspur Distt Bilaspur (C G) Land and building admeasuring area 1505 sq feet situated at khasra no 632/04, 633/04, PH no.40 Mouja Tifra Block Bilaspur Distt Bilaspur (C G) (Some area has been removed in over bridge construction)	Symbolic	28.01.2025	Rs.44,00,000/- Rs.4,40,000/- Rs.10000/- Rs.58,00,000/- Rs.5,80,000/- Rs.10000/-

Inspection of Properties by bidder: 23.01.2025 to 24.01.2025 between 11.00 a.m to 05.00 p.m
Last Date & Time for Submission of Bid application/KYC documents/EMD etc. 28.01.2025
Date & time of E-auction with auto extension for 5 minutes-28.01.2025 from 12.00 p.m to 04:00 p.m.
 The auction sale will be On-line E-Auction / Bidding through website <https://baanknet.com>, email: support.baanknet@psballiance.com, Mob. - 8291220220 The intending Bidders / Purchasers are requested to register on portal using their mobile number and email id. Please take note that the registration and KYC approval etc take 2-3 working days.
 For detail terms and conditions of sale please refer to the link provided in <https://bankofmaharashtra.in/asset-for-sales-search> and <https://baanknet.com>. Also prospective bidders may contact the authorized officials: **Shri Hariom Trivedi: 9405719723, Shri Ravi Verma: 9300955688, Shri Vishal Kanoje: 9822188704**
 Date: 17/12/2024
Authorised Officer, Bank of Maharashtra

ICICI Home Finance
 Corporate Office: ICICI Home Finance Company Limited ICICI HFC Tower, Andheri- Kurla Road, Andheri (East), Mumbai- 400059, India
 Branch Office: Crescent Plaza, Unit-H4, 2nd Floor, Near Swaroor, Talkies, Station Road, Durg, Chhattisgarh-491001
Notice for sale of immovable assets
(See proviso to rule 8(6))
Notice for sale of immovable assets
 E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.
 Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower/s and Guarantor/s that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the Possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd., will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", as per the brief particulars given hereunder:

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Legal Heirs, Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) Encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price/ Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Inspection	Date & Time of Auction	One Day Before Auction Date	SARFAESI Stage
1.	Tej Bahadur (Borrower) Chotu Khatlic (Co-Borrower) Joginder Sonkar (Guarantor) Loan Account No. NHDRC00001247576	Property is situated at Khasra No. 1229/2, Plot No. 05, P H No. 14/19, Ward No. 16, Chandra Nagar Kurud Nola, R) Bhalai, C.G. Pin Code- 491001.	Rs. 20,76,317/- Rs. 40,865/-	Rs. 4,06,645/- Rs. 40,865/-	December 27, 2024 11:00 AM to 03:00 PM	January 02, 2025 02:00 PM to 05:00 PM	January 02, 2025 before 05:00 PM	Physical Possession

The online auction will be conducted on website (URL Link-e-auctions.samil.in) of our auction agency Shriram Automall India Ltd. The Mortgagors/ notice are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till January 02, 2025 before 05:00 PM else these secured assets will be sold as per above schedule.
 The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) RTGS/ Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article on or before January 02, 2025 before 04:00 PM. The Prospective Bidder(s) must also submit signed copy of Registration Form & Bid Terms and Conditions form at ICICI Home Finance Company Limited Branch Office Address mentioned on top of the article on or before January 02, 2025 before 05:00 PM. Earnest Money Deposit Demand Draft (DD) should be from a Nationalized/Scheduled Bank in favor of "ICICI Home Finance Company Ltd. - Auction" payable at the branch office address mentioned on top of the article.
 All bidders must read and understand the terms and conditions of the auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact ICICI Home Finance Company Limited on 9920807300.
 The Authorized Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit <https://www.icicifhc.com>.
 Date: December 17, 2024 Place: Bhalai
 Authorized Officer, ICICI Home Finance Company Limited, CIN Number:- U65922MH1999PLC120106

PM Modi holds talks with Sri Lankan President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Sri Lanka on Monday here adopted a futuristic vision to expand their partnership, resolved to soon conclude a defence cooperation pact and decided to ramp up energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines. The decisions were taken during wide-ranging talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayaka. Modi said both sides decided to emphasise investment-led growth and connectivity for the India-Sri Lanka economic partnership, and it was decided that physical, digital and energy connectivity will be key pillars of the cooperation. Work will be done to establish electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines, Modi said, adding India will supply liquefied natural gas to the island nation's power plants. The prime minister also announced that a ferry service will be started between



Rameshwaram and Talaimanar to boost connectivity between the two nations.

"We both agree that our security interests are interconnected. We have decided to soon finalise the defence cooperation agreement. There has also been an agreement for cooperation on hydrography," Modi said. The vexed fishermen issue also figured in the talks. "We also discussed issues related to the livelihood of fishermen. We agree that we must proceed with a humanitarian approach

to this matter," Modi said. Referring to the Tamil issue, the Prime Minister said India hopes that the Sri Lankan government will fulfil the aspirations of the community. The prime minister also noted that India has so far provided Lines of Credit and grant assistance worth USD 5 billion to Sri Lanka. "We have cooperation in all 25 districts of Sri Lanka and selection of our projects is always based on priorities of our partner countries," he said.

Why Govt not acting against SEBI chief, asks Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday levelled conflict of interest allegations against the SEBI chairperson Madhabi Buch and claimed that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's "failure" to act decisively on it has not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the financial governance framework. Attacking the government over the Adani issue during the discussion on the supplementary demands for grants in Lok Sabha, Congress MP KC Venugopal said a joint parliamentary committee must probe the entire matter. He alleged it is a government "by Adani, of Adani, for Adani".

Venugopal said between 2017-2024, Buch allegedly received over Rs 16.4 crore from ICICI bank while serving as a Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) official regulating that bank. "This was five times her salary from SEBI, presenting a blatant conflict of interest," he said. She received rental income from entities linked to a firm under SEBI investigation, said Venugopal, who also heads the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).



"What does it mean sir, SEBI is investigating the company and the chairperson is renting out property to entity linked to that company," he said. Venugopal also alleged that the SEBI chairperson traded in securities worth of Rs 36.9 crore while holding access to unpublished price-sensitive information which he said was a direct violation of SEBI code of ethics. She failed to disclose assets in Singapore and the US between 2017-21 despite being obligated to do

so, Venugopal said. Despite these allegations, the finance minister neither initiated an independent inquiry nor has taken any disciplinary action, Venugopal said. "Inaction undermines the government's claim of transparency and commitment to investor confidence," he said. Posing questions to the Finance Minister, Venugopal asked why has the Finance Ministry not initiated any disciplinary and legal proceedings against the SEBI

chairperson despite clear evidence of conflicts of interest that undermines the integrity of the regulatory body. "Doesn't the finance minister take note, acknowledge and take responsibility for the damage to investor confidence, both domestic and foreign, due to the lack of timely action against SEBI chairperson?" he said. Can the Finance Minister clarify whether the government is willing to accept responsibility for the uncertainty and

volatility of stock market, stemming from the conflict of interest involving the SEBI chairperson, he said. What steps does the finance minister intend to take to ensure transparency and accountability in SEBI leadership especially in the light of the allegations, Venugopal asked. "Does the Ministry believe that retaining the chairperson under such circumstances send a wrong signal to India's commitment to corporate governance and regulatory transparency?" he said. "The Finance Minister's failure to act decisively not only tarnished the credibility of the government but also jeopardised the national financial governance framework. What is the complicit interest of the government and the SEBI chairperson?" Venugopal said. Why the Government is not taking any action, he asked. He alleged that the name of Adani group figured in stock manipulation and questioned how the SEBI chairperson can investigate that when "she is part of the scandal". He demanded that a JPC inquiry be initiated in the entire matter. In the country, 11 crore people are dependent on stock markets, most of them from middle income groups, he said.

Debate on Glorious Journey of 75 Years of Constitution of India: Treasury, Opp benches trade charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha on Monday saw treasury and opposition benches trading charges during the discussion on the 'Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India.' Initiating the debate, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Congress party carried out major amendments to the Constitution to brazenly help the "family" and the "dynasty". Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's letter on reservation to states and demanded an apology. The Upper House will debate on the issue on Monday and Tuesday. Sitharaman also termed the Congress party as "anti-women" for not passing the Women's Reservation Bill under pressure of its coalition partners. The senior BJP leader said the economic policies of the previous Congress governments for about 50 years did not strengthen the Indian economy. "Each time the Congress brazenly (amended Constitution)... Only to help the family, the dynasty... Kept

amending the Constitution," she said. Citing various amendments, including the 42nd Constitutional Amendment and one related to the Shah Bano case, the Finance Minister said none of the amendments passed the test of four criteria -- economic good, social intent, due process, and constitutional spirit. She said the amendments were not to strengthen democracy but to protect those in power and strengthen the family. In her speech, she said renowned lyricist Majrooh Sultanpuri and actor Balraj Sahni were both jailed in 1949. Congress' record of curtailing freedom of speech was not just confined to Sultanpuri and Sahni, she said and highlighted many more instances, including banning of a film called 'Kissa Kursi Ka' just because it questioned the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and her son. Sitharaman further said the spree of curtailing the freedom of expression and freedom of press had happened before 1949 and thereafter also during the Congress rule. The Minister said India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru adopted the Soviet Model and was carried forward by Indira Gandhi, but

the socialist model did not benefit India. She said the economic policies followed by the Congress governments for 50 years did not strengthen the economy. Referring to the women reservation in Parliament and state assemblies, Sitharaman said a bill regarding it was passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2008, but the ruling Congress did not take it to the Lok Sabha, as its alliance partners were not in favour of the legislation. She said Congress is "anti-women" as it did not pass the Women's Reservation Bill to save "Kursi" (power). Rajiv Gandhi had 426 members in Lok Sabha and 159 members in the Rajya Sabha, they did not have the conviction to pass the Women's Reservation Bill at that time. Very clearly, they have always been anti-women. Shah Bano case is a very clear example, she said. The Congress Party, she said passed the Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Divorce Act, 1986 which denied Muslim women their right to alimony. On the other hand, the Modi government brought the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' in the first session, which was held in the new building of the Parliament. On the contrary, she said her party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has always been



committed to women's reservation and increasing women participation in politics. "I myself am a beneficiary of this," the Finance Minister said. At the start of her speech, she paid homage to the 389 members of the Constituent Assembly, including 15 women, who took up the arduous challenge and prepared the Constitution for India in a very challenging environment. The Constitution of India "has stood the test of time," she said. "Today we are extremely proud of the way India's democracy is growing." Stating that India and its Constitution stands out in a separate league of its own, Sitharaman said post the second World War, over 50 countries had become independent

and they had their constitution written. While accusing Prime Minister Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Nehru, Kharge also charged the BJP leaders of indulging in 'bhakti' of Prime Minister Modi, asserting that it was leading the country towards dictatorship. The Congress President cited Nehru's speech in which he had said there was no elected government between 1947-1952 and the Congress had illegally amended the Constitution. Kharge said the first amendment was carried out by the Constituent Assembly members which included Syama Prasad Mookerjee and was undertaken to provide reservation to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, fix problems related to education,

employment and abolish Zamindari system. "I want to inform the House that the Supreme Court had rejected Madras state's decision on reservation." He said the other aspect of this amendment was to stop communal propaganda and Sardar Patel in a letter on July three, 1950 had suggested to Nehru that constitutional amendment was the only remedy for this problem. "Therefore, Nehru wrote a letter to chief ministers. This has been mentioned in PM's speech after twisting facts to defame Nehru for which he should apologise to the nation. This is my demand. If you twist the facts before the nation and attempt to defame, then you should apologise in this House and other House and before people of this country," Kharge said. He said the prime minister lives in past, not in present and it would have been better had he listed present achievements that strengthened democracy. Kharge claimed erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution. "In 1949, the entire country knew that RSS leaders opposed the Constitution because it was not based on Manusmriti. RSS mouthpiece Organiser in the edition of November 30, 1949 had written about it," he said.

Kharge said it is clear from debates of the Constituent Assembly that erstwhile leaders of RSS were against the Constitution. Those who hated the flag, Ashok Chakra and the Constitution are today giving lessons to us on the Constitution." He said even when many powerful countries were not practising universal adult franchise, women and all sections of societies in India were given the right to vote during the Congress regime through the Constitution. He said that government leaders cut-paste information and present them as per their convenience to twist facts. "Those who did not fight for the country, how will they know the importance of freedom, Constitution?" Kharge asked. BJP has been giving 'jumlas' and befooling people of the country and questioned promises made by Modi to pay Rs 15 lakh, he said adding people are still waiting for the money as well as two crore jobs and doubling of farmers' income. Kharge said that BJP is against reservation and that is why the party is against caste census. He further said the Congress government will implement women reservation faster than BJP. He also raised the issue of

Manipur, which is suffering from ethnic violence for the last one-and-half years. He said the prime minister travels everywhere but has no time to visit the strife-torn state. Some other Opposition MPs accused the government of attacking the federal structure and undermining constitutional bodies while claiming that an Emergency-like situation exists in the country. Debashish Samantary, whose party Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is not a part of either the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) or opposition's Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), alleged that Constitutional watchdogs have been converted into "pet-dogs". "What is the situation today, anyone can be sent to jail, chief ministers were put in jail, denied bail. There is definitely an Emergency in the country, I will say it openly," he said. Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Saket Gokhale alleged that justice is being denied to people under the NDA government and accused it of destroying the Constitution. He alleged that minorities are being subjected to "atrocities every day". DMK's Tiruchi Siva accused the Union government of undermining the federal structure of the country.

224 big dams in country over century old, Minister tells RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has 1,065 large dams that are between 50 and 100 years old while 224 are over a century old, the Union Jal Shakti Ministry said on Monday. There are a total of 6,138 constructed and 143 under-construction dams in the country. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti Raj Bhushan Choudhary said the government enacted the Dam Safety Act, 2021 to address the challenges posed by ageing dams and to prevent disasters arising from dam failures. He said dams, apart from serving irrigation and power generation purposes, play a significant role in mitigating floods. According to the National Register of Large Dams (NRLD-2023 edition), compiled jointly by the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) and CWC, there are 6,138 constructed and 143 under construction dams which aggregate to a total of 6,281 large dams. Of these numbers, only 224 dams are more than 100 years old and there are 1065 large dams which are 50 to 100 years old. Choudhary said the govern-



ment enacted the Dam Safety Act and is also implementing the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) Phase II and III, aimed at rehabilitating 736 dams across 19 states and three central agencies. After China and America, India ranks third in the world in terms of the number of dams. In August, the Government had told Parliament that at least 47 dams—38 commissioned and 9 under construction—have been identified by the Central Electricity Authority as potentially affected by Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) from glacial lakes in India. GLOF studies have been completed for 31 of these projects, the Government said. A glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is a type of outburst flood caused by the failure of a dam containing a glacial lake.

Delhi's groundwater resources heavily strained, says Jalshakti Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's groundwater resources are heavily strained, with the overall extraction rate at 99.13 per cent, categorised as "critical", while the situation in Bengaluru is even more alarming with the overall groundwater extraction rate at 150.84 per cent, the Union Jal Shakti ministry said on Monday. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Raj Bhushan Choudhary, said that while desalination technology using reject heat from nuclear reactors is operational at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, it is not widely applicable. Instead, the reverse osmosis (RO) membrane technology is deemed suitable for treating groundwater, the minister said. The government has also assessed groundwater dynamics in urban areas like Delhi and Bengaluru, but similar data for Mumbai is unavailable due to insufficient data collection. Delhi's groundwater resources are heavily strained, with the overall extraction rate at 99.13 per cent, which is categorised as "critical", Choudhary informed. Areas like Vasant Vihar, Mehrauli, and Saket are in



dire straits, recording extraction levels of 153.13 per cent, 117.9 per cent, and 116.31 per cent, respectively. Vasant Vihar topped the chart for overextraction, drawing more than 1.6 times the available resource, he said. The critical zones in Delhi include central and south regions like Karol Bagh (114.47 per cent), Chanakyapuri (131.45 per cent), and Dwarka (99.83 per cent). Shahdara and south-west districts also reported concerning levels, with overextraction exacerbating water stress. The situation in Bengaluru is even more alarming, with the overall groundwater extrac-

tion rate at 150.84 per cent, the minister said. Yelahanka emerged as the most stressed region, extracting over 225 per cent of its available groundwater resource. Other urban areas, including Bangalore North, East, and South, recorded over extraction rates exceeding 200 per cent. Bangalore City itself reported an extraction rate of 217.4 per cent. The minister also emphasised that advanced desalination and groundwater recharge technologies could play a role in water conservation, but their scalability is constrained by infrastructure and feasibility challenges.

Only 28 per cent of urban wastewater undergoes treatment in India: CSE report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Just 28 per cent of about 20,236 million liters per day urban wastewater generated in India undergoes treatment, leaving the remaining i.e. 72 per cent untreated and flowing into rivers, lakes, and land, a report by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has revealed. The largest gap in wastewater treatment is seen in states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Haryana. The untreated water not only causes environmental damage but also presents an opportunity to tackle India's growing urban water crisis due to rapid urbanization, industrial growth, population expansion, and climate change, says the report 'Waste to Worth: Managing India's urban water crisis through wastewater reuse'. It was released recently at a national workshop organized jointly by CSE and the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), under the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti. Speaking on the occasion, Sunita Narain, director general, CSE said: "India faces significant water scarcity challenges due to rapid urbanisation, industrial growth, population expansion – and most importantly – climate change. Wastewater reuse can be a key part of the strategy to address these concerns and promote



water circularity and sustainability." Rajiv Kumar Mital, director general, NMCG echoed similar views and said that "Using and disposing treated water, without harnessing its potential, means we are losing out on utilising an important resource. The challenge is to scale up and ensure that the work we do in this sector is impactful." The Jal Shakti Ministry has mandated that cities must recycle and reuse at least 20 per cent of the water they consume. The report also highlights good examples -- cases of states that have introduced policies to encourage treated wastewater reuse." Maharashtra, for instance, mandates industries in urban areas to use treated wastewater. Gujarat targets 100 per cent reuse with applications in agriculture and industry, and Tamil Nadu promotes reuse for industrial and urban greening projects. At the national level, the National Urban Sanitation

Policy (NUSP) and the Namami Gange Programme emphasise wastewater management and reuse as key components of water security initiatives. Cities like Nagpur, Bengaluru and Chennai have taken the lead in implementing wastewater reuse practices. Nagpur supplies treated wastewater to power plants, significantly reducing freshwater usage, while Bengaluru utilises it for agriculture, lake revival and groundwater recharge. Chennai has adopted treated wastewater for industrial applications, urban landscaping and groundwater recharge. While advancements in decentralised and cost-effective treatment technologies can address infrastructure deficits, the report also calls for public-private partnerships that can help mobilise investments for scaling up reuse projects, and capacity-building initiatives to improve awareness and acceptance among urban managers and communities.

Sambhal violence: Yogi accuses Opp of 'misleading' Assembly

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath fiercely defended his government's handling of the recent Sambhal violence during a charged assembly session, accusing the opposition of shedding "crocodile tears" while ignoring past communal killings involving Hindus.

"Since Independence, 209 Hindus have been killed in Sambhal during communal riots, but not a single opposition leader ever spoke out," Adityanath claimed, referencing historical riots that scarred the state.

Leader of Opposition Mata Prasad Pandey hit back, accusing the CM of evading

accountability. "Instead of answering the real issue, the Chief Minister has tried to mislead the House by dragging in unrelated historical events," Pandey said. He urged the government to focus on present challenges rather than deflecting responsibility through historical narratives.

Adityanath questioned why Hindu religious processions face restrictions in Muslim-majority areas, while Muslim processions proceed freely in Hindu-dominated regions. "This discrimination will not be tolerated," he declared, announcing a judicial inquiry into the Sambhal violence to uncover the facts.

Recalling past communal clashes, Adityanath listed violent incidents from the 1970s



in cities like Agra, Azamgarh, Gonda, Prayagraj, Meerut, and Pilibhit. He contrasted this with his administration's record, claiming a 97% reduction in communal riots under BJP rule, citing National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

"How can chanting 'Ram Ram,' a cultural tradition, be communal?" the CM asked, accusing the opposition of undermining India's religious heritage. He also cited historical texts like "Babar Nama" to assert that several mosques were built by demolishing temples, linking Friday prayers to recent violent clashes. "We have historical evidence supporting our claims," he asserted.

Backing the implementation of

a Uniform Civil Code, Adityanath argued that it reflects the people's will and accused the opposition of resisting court-backed reforms for vote-bank politics. "Our Constitution guarantees equality for all. Why should anyone oppose a law ensuring uniform personal rights?" he questioned.

Reaffirming his government's strict stance against violence, he promised harsh legal action against anyone found involved in riots. "We have zero tolerance for lawlessness," he said, pointing to video evidence showing rioters pelting stones and wielding weapons. "No culprit will escape justice," he added.

The Chief Minister framed recent electoral victories in

constituencies like Kundark and Phulpur as symbolic wins for "Sanatan Dharma" over divisive politics. He stressed that festivals such as Navratri and processions like Shobha Yatra are central to India's cultural identity.

Adityanath also warned the opposition against inciting communal tension through inflammatory speeches. "If anyone creates anarchy, they will face strict action under the law," he emphasized.

Concluding his speech, Adityanath pledged unwavering commitment to preserving India's religious heritage while maintaining law and order. "We will not allow history to repeat itself. Peace and justice will prevail in Uttar Pradesh," he affirmed.

Himachal Government exploring proposal to build underwater tunnel

PTI ■ BILASPUR (HP)

The Himachal Pradesh government is exploring a proposal for building an underwater tunnel in Gobind Sagar Lake to connect Bilaspur city to four-lane road between Kiratpur and Manali, said Technical Education Minister Rajesh Dharmani on Monday.

Interacting with a group of reporters here, he said the tunnel will be built from Luhn Maidaan to the four-lane road. If the plan becomes fruitful, it will not only prove to be a life-saver for Bilaspur city but will also be the first bridge in the country to be built inside a lake.

Govind Sagar Lake reservoir in Una and Bilaspur districts of Himachal Pradesh is about 56 km in length and 3 km in breadth.

After the construction of Kiratpur-Manali four-lane road, Bilaspur city has lost its connection with the main road. This has resulted in the slowing down of economic activities here. Construction of the bridge will also provide a new path to traders and industrialists.

The underwater tunnel bridge will not only connect the city



directly to the four-lane road but it will also become a centre of attraction for tourists. If there are possibilities of bridge construction, experts and consultants from Germany will be hired for the ambitious project, he said.

"The bridge will be constructed using Germany's advanced immersion tunnel technology and tunnel boring machine. In immersion tunnel technology, parts of the tunnel will be built on land and installed under the lake.

"It will be made safe and durable by digging below the lake bed with a tunnel boring machine," he said.

A team of experts will be formed to assess the possibilities of the project. If the plan is found to be feasible, it will be proposed for budget under the Setu Bharatam scheme of the central government. Several hundred crore rupees are estimated to be spent on the project, the minister said.

Keeping in mind the environmental balance, advanced and sustainable German technology will be used in this project which will write the story of the revival of Bilaspur, Dharmani. If this project comes to fruition, it will become an example not only for the state but also for the entire country, he added.

BPSC cancels its preliminary examination held at centre in Patna

PTI ■ PATNA

The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on Monday cancelled its preliminary examination held at one of the centres in Patna, where an official on duty died of heart attack following a ruckus created by "unruly" candidates on December 13.

The incident took place at the Babu Pariksha Parisar in Patna's Kumhrar locality, which was one of the more than 900 centres for the Combined (Preliminary) Competitive Examination (CCE). Nearly 5 lakh candidates appeared for the exam held for hiring people in Group A and B posts.

"The BPSC has decided to cancel its preliminary examination held at Babu Pariksha Parisar examination centre due to disruption created by a group of unruly aspirants as part of a conspiracy to disrupt the exam," BPSC Chairman Parmar Ravi Manubhai told reporters.

The Commission will soon announce a fresh date for the examination for that particular centre. Around 6,500 students, who had appeared for the exam on December 13, will be able to



write the papers again, he said. However, those who created trouble at the centre on Friday would be debarred, Manubhai said.

"The commission has identified 30-40 aspirants - who can be described as anti-social elements. They created disruption in the examination process at the centre. More such candidates are being identified by the police. They all will be debarred from appearing in the BPSC exam," the chairman said.

On the date of the exam, a group of candidates at Babu Pariksha Parisar stormed out of their examination halls, alleging that question papers were leaked on social media before the exam started.

A huge crowd had gathered outside the centre as well and the situation was brought under control through police

intervention. The Patna district administration on Sunday recommended slapping of murder charges on those who had tried to disrupt a recent examination.

Following the ruckus, an additional examination superintendent, Ram Iqbal Singh, died of cardiac arrest and a woman candidate fell unconscious.

The BPSC chairman on Monday said, "The CCE 70th preliminary examination was held in a single shift from noon to 2 pm. The examination was held in 912 centres across the state, and of those, free and fair exams were held in 911 centres," he said.

"CCTV footage of Babu Pariksha Parisar has revealed that some of the candidates snatched question papers from the invigilators and stormed out of the examination hall screaming that the paper had been leaked.

"Snatching question papers from invigilators and showing those to outsiders are tantamount to looting public property. Police action will be initiated against these persons who seem to have acted as a part of a conspiracy," Manubhai said.

Telangana Assembly adjourned without completing debate on tourism

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

amid sloganeering by opposition BRS MLAs against the Congress government, the Telangana Assembly was adjourned for the day on Monday without completing a debate on tourism policy.

When the House resumed after a tea break, Speaker G Prasad Kumar took up a short discussion on 'Telangana State Tourism Policy', but the opposition party members kept raising slogans against the Congress dispensation. Taking exception to the BRS legislators allegedly not following the rules and traditions of the House, Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu said the government is ready to respond to any issue raised by the opposition members.

The Speaker directed BRS MLAs to hand over the pamphlets to the marshals and disapproved of them raising slogans and displaying placards inside the House. Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao began his speech on Tourism sector, but the BRS MLAs continued to raise slogans. The Speaker promised to provide opportunity to BRS MLA T Harish Rao to speak and

urged the main opposition members to return to their seats. As the slogan shouting continued, he adjourned the House for the day. Addressing reporters after the adjournment of the House, BRS Working President K T Rama Rao hit out at the ruling Congress for not taking up debate on the arrest of "farmers" over the November 11 attack on government officials during a public hearing for land acquisition at Lagacharla village in Kodangal assembly segment, represented by CM A Revanth Reddy. Congress whip Adi Srinivas told media that the BRS was not sincere in raising people's issues in the Assembly and was only wasting the precious time of the House. The BRS is raising a hue and cry about the arrest of farmers in connection with the attack on government officials, but peasants were handcuffed during the previous BRS regime in Khammam, he alleged. Later, the BRS members held a protest at the assembly entrance in the legislature premises against the Congress government and held placards condemning a farmer being taken to hospital in handcuffs last week.

Miscreants target parked car over minor dispute under Shivaji Nagar Police Station

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Few miscreants targeted a parked car near an old jail complex over a minor dispute under the Shivaji Nagar police station area on Monday around 12.00 noon. The parked Maruti Eco car was set ablaze which was parked at old jail complex on Monday. However, in connection with the incident no complaint was filed in the matter. Meanwhile, the Gurugram police has started initial investigation into the matter.

After the incident, locals rushed to pacify fire but by then the car was completely engulfed in fire by the miscreants, however police is looking for the suspects who set ablaze vehicle in the area. It is being said that a minor fight that took place between the two groups on Sunday night of the area which was resulting in this incident. On Sunday night the miscreants had also broke widow pain of a swift car.

"A group of few suspects who arrived in the morning created a lot of ruckus and set the vehicle on fire. They also broke a



road side Dhaba and fled the spot," a police officer privy to the matter said. Meanwhile soon after the incident panic prevailed in the area on Monday after parked car was torched by miscreants damaging it badly. The victim however failed to pacify fire after he found that car was set ablaze. Police said they are investigating the matter.

"The investigation teams are scanning the CCTV camera

installed in the area which could help in revealing the details of the miscreants involved in the incident," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said. During the investigation, locals revealed car was torched due to a fight between two groups but they failed to disclose the motive behind the incident but they suspect that the fight broke out over on food at the Dhaba

on Sunday night. On Monday morning on receiving the information of fire police team reached the spot and along with the locals pacified and controlled the fire. The CCTV cameras at the squares and roundabouts would be investigated. Based on the details provided by the victim the case would be registered. The matter is underway.

Winter Session in MP Assembly begins with tributes to Tata, other departed leaders

PTI ■ BHOPAL

The Winter Session of the Madhya Pradesh assembly began on Monday with the House paying rich tributes to industrialist Ratan Tata, former Union ministers Natwar Singh and SM Krishna and other leaders who died recently. Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar administered oath to newly elected MLAs Kamlesh Pratap Shah from the Amarwada (ST) seat and Ramakant Bhargava from the Budhni constituency. Tomar later mentioned the deaths of industrialist Ratan Tata, former union ministers Prabhath Jha and others and recalled their contributions to the country and the state.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said Tata was a simple and decent man. He was not only a renowned industrialist but also a social worker and a nationalist who served humanity. Remembering Jha, Yadav said



the BJP leader was a man of the organisation and a renowned writer and journalist. He was a member of the Rajya Sabha, served as the state BJP president and was a good social worker.

He also paid rich tributes to Natwar Singh and SM Krishna and recalled their contributions. Yadav condoled the death of Baiga tribal artist and Padma Shri recipient Jodhaiya Bai, who passed away on Sunday. He said Jodhaiya Bai's creative works on clay and wood were exhibited in Milan and Paris. Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar paid tribute to Arif

Aqueel, saying the former minister was known for his simplicity and straightforwardness. He wore rubber slippers his entire life and served people without any discrimination. Speaking about Natwar Singh, Singhar said that as the external affairs minister, he took bilateral relations between nations to a new height and was a renowned diplomat.

The LoP lauded Ratan Tata's efforts in giving a new direction to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) sector and setting an example to show how an industrialist can serve society by forming different trusts to help weaker sections and

youth. The House also paid tribute to soldiers who lost their lives in a road accident in Sikkim and noted Saint Siyaram Baba, who passed away recently. A two-minute silence was observed as a mark of respect to the departed souls, following which the Speaker adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

After Question Hour, the Opposition Congress raised the issue of the shortage of fertilisers and problems faced by farmers across the state and sought a reply from the government.

The Speaker said the government would respond when the House takes up the matter for discussion. However, Congress members insisted on it and staged a walkout when the chair did not relent.

Later, State Urban Administration and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kailash Vijaywargiya moved a resolution to congratulate the Indian Army for its valour during the war that led to the creation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

Amid freezing cold, Ayodhya ensures special winter wear for Lord Ramlala

BISWAJEET BANERJEE/KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

Ayodhya is shivering under an intense cold wave, with temperatures plunging to a biting 3°C, six degrees below normal. As residents bundle up with layers of warm clothing, even Lord Ramlala at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple is being dressed in special woolen attire to shield Him from the harsh winter.

To combat the freezing temperatures, Ramlala will don a woolen dhoti made from Kullu wool and an Angavastru crafted from Ladakh's Pashmina wool. These meticulously designed garments were sent from Delhi and have already reached Ayodhya.

"The clothes have been designed with intricate patterns keeping in mind the sanctity and tradition," said Manish Tripathi, designer of Ramlala's attire. "As the cold intensifies, we will adjust the fabric and design accordingly."

Currently, Ramlala is adorned in a Pashmina shawl and silk garments. With winter tightening its grip, these new woolen outfits will provide additional warmth. Two Angavastras—one draped over His shoulder and the other in His hand—will also be made from fine Pashmina wool.

The temple priests are ensuring Ramlala's well-being with meticulous care. "Ramlala is treated like a child," said Santosh Kumar Tiwari, assis-



tant priest of the Ram Mandir. "In the morning, His Abhishek (ritual bath) is done with lukewarm water, and heaters have been installed in the sanctum sanctorum."

The deity's daily offerings also reflect winter's demands. Before the Mangala Aarti in the early morning, peda and dry fruits are offered. At 7:30 a.m., during the Shringar Aarti, fruits and more dry fruits are presented. Later, poha or desi ghee halwa is served at 9:00 a.m., followed by Rajbhog, a full meal including kheer, at noon.

After a mid-day rest, sweets and water are offered at 1:30 p.m. At 4:00 p.m., various snacks and coconut water or fruit juice are presented in turn.

Pilgrims visiting Ayodhya

expressed awe at the elaborate winter care arrangements for Ramlala. "It feels heartwarming to see how the Lord is being taken care of with so much devotion," said Poonam Sharma, a devotee from Kanpur. "This level of dedication makes us feel spiritually connected despite the cold."

Vijay Singh, a pilgrim from Varanasi, shared, "I have visited many temples, but the detailed care here during winter is unmatched. Seeing Ramlala wrapped in warm woolen clothes makes us feel He is among us as family."

Ayodhya has emerged as the coldest district in Uttar Pradesh over the past three days, with temperatures dipping below 5°C consistently.

On Friday-Saturday night, the mercury hit a freezing 3°C.

The Meteorological Department at Acharya Narendra Agricultural Technology University attributed the icy conditions to continuous snowfall in the Himalayas and the chilly western winds blowing across the plains. "This pattern is likely to persist for about a week," a department official said. "However, daytime sunshine will provide some relief."

Amid these frigid conditions, residents are relying on bonfires and heaters to stay warm. As the cold wave continues, Ayodhya's spiritual and human lives intertwine, reflecting resilience in the face of winter's icy grip.



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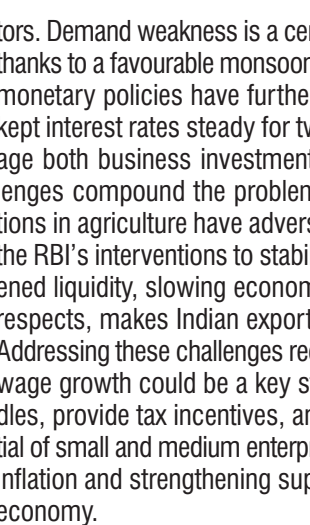
PAPER WITH PASSION

Economy slowing down

India, celebrated as the fastest-growing economy in the world, is showing signs of slowdown

India is facing a pivotal moment as it navigates a notable slowdown. Between July and September 2024, the country's GDP growth rate fell to 5.4 per cent, its lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. While this growth rate remains enviable compared to developed economies, it highlights significant structural challenges that could impede India's long-term economic ambitions. The implications of this slowdown are multifaceted. A decline in consumer demand and muted private investment have curtailed economic momentum. Sales of fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) have dropped, wage bills of publicly traded firms have shrunk, and urban spending has softened. In November alone, car sales plunged by 14 per cent, underscoring the waning strength of urban consumption. Rising inflation adds another layer of complexity. In October 2024, inflation surged to 6.2 per cent, exceeding the RBI's target ceiling of 4 per cent. Escalating food prices, driven by climate disruptions and inefficiencies in supply chains, have inflated costs across sectors, further squeezing disposable incomes.

The slowdown has also placed pressure on India's exports, which account for just 2 per cent of global goods trade. A stronger dollar and rising tariffs have eroded the competitiveness of Indian products in international markets. Compounding the issue is stagnant job creation, particularly in agriculture, manufacturing, and small-scale industries. Collectively, these factors are eroding confidence in India's growth narrative, despite the government's optimistic outlook. The roots of this economic deceleration lie in several factors. Demand weakness is a central issue. While rural demand remains relatively resilient thanks to a favourable monsoon, it alone cannot offset the broader slowdown. Restrictive monetary policies have further constrained growth. To combat inflation, the RBI has kept interest rates steady for two years, leading to high borrowing costs that discourage both business investment and consumer spending. Global and domestic challenges compound the problem. Slowing global demand and climate-related disruptions in agriculture have adversely affected exports and food production. Additionally, the RBI's interventions to stabilise the rupee by selling dollars have inadvertently tightened liquidity, slowing economic growth. A stronger rupee, while stabilising in some respects, makes Indian exports more expensive and less competitive internationally. Addressing these challenges requires targeted solutions. Boosting consumption through wage growth could be a key strategy. Policy measures that reduce bureaucratic hurdles, provide tax incentives, and simplify labour and land laws can unlock the potential of small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of the economy. Tackling inflation and strengthening supply chains will also play a critical role in stabilising the economy.



PICTALK



An artist paints a wall at Lodhi Road area, in New Delhi

South Asia: Two decades of turmoil



SANTHOSH MATHEW

December marks two pivotal anniversaries — Society intervention in Afghanistan and Kandhar Hijacking — that changed South Asia's geopolitics

December marks two pivotal anniversaries that significantly influenced South Asia's geopolitical landscape: 45 years since the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan and 25 years since the hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 from Kathmandu to Kandahar. Despite occurring two decades apart, these events underscore the fragility of South Asia and the profound influence of external powers and non-state actors in shaping the region's trajectory.

On December 24, 1979, Soviet troops entered Afghanistan to support the struggling communist regime in Kabul, led by Babrak Karmal. This intervention, ostensibly aimed at stabilising Afghanistan, set off a decade-long occupation and transformed the country into one of the Cold War's fiercest battlegrounds. The repercussions extended far beyond Afghanistan, triggering global, regional and internal upheavals that persist to this day. The Soviet invasion catalysed a chain of events that hastened the disintegration of the Soviet Union and radicalised South Asia. The mujahideen-fighters armed and financed by the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other allies-became a formidable force against the Soviets. This external patronage laid the groundwork for militant extremism, which would later engulf the region.

The Soviet intervention underscored Afghanistan's strategic importance as the fulcrum of great power politics. Pakistan emerged as a critical player, acting as a frontline state in the anti-Soviet effort.

Two decades later, on December 24, 1999, South Asia faced another defining moment when Indian Airlines Flight IC-814 was hijacked en route from Kathmandu to Delhi. Five armed men commandeered the aircraft, eventually forcing it to land in Kandahar, then under Taliban control. What ensued was a week-long standoff that exposed the vulnerabilities of regional counter-terrorism strategies and marked a turning point in how nations approached security and terrorism.



The Kandahar hijacking exposed the evolving nexus between terrorism and geopolitics in South Asia. The Taliban's willingness to shelter the hijackers highlighted its transition into a state sponsor of terrorism. For India, this incident was a stark reminder of the threats posed by cross-border terrorism, often enabled by Pakistan's support for extremist proxies in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The release of Masood Azhar not only emboldened groups like JeM but also underscored the growing influence of non-state actors in undermining regional stability.

Although the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking may seem unrelated, they are deeply interconnected in shaping South Asia's trajectory. The destabilisation of Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation created fertile ground for militancy, enabling the rise of networks that facilitated events like the Kandahar hijacking.

Pakistan's role as a key US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war empowered its military-intelligence complex, which later exploited jihadist networks to further strategic objectives in Kashmir and Afghanistan. These same networks became instrumental in orchestrating attacks against India, exemplified by the IC-814 hijacking.



ADDRESSING SOUTH ASIA'S FRACTURED SECURITY LANDSCAPE REQUIRES COLLECTIVE ACTION. COUNTRIES IN THE REGION MUST TRANSCEND HISTORICAL ANIMOSITIES TO COMBAT TERRORISM AND ADDRESS SHARED CHALLENGES LIKE EXTREMISM AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

Both events marked the ascendancy of non-state actors in South Asia's security dynamics.

The mujahideen's success against the Soviets emboldened militant groups across the region, while the Kandahar hijacking demonstrated their ability to exploit state vulnerabilities for political gains. The Kandahar episode underscored the inadequacy of India's counter-terrorism infrastructure at the time. It led to significant reforms, including the establishment of specialised counter-terrorism units like the National Security Guard (NSG) and the strengthening of aviation security protocols.

Pakistan's dual role in these episodes—as a US ally during the Soviet-Afghan war and as a sanctuary for groups like JeM—has perpetuated instability in the region. Its support for extremist proxies has strained relations with India and exacerbated internal security challenges.

Addressing South Asia's fractured security landscape requires collective action. Countries in the region must transcend historical animosities to combat terrorism and address shared challenges like extremism and socio-economic disparities. Both the Soviet intervention and the Kandahar hijacking highlight the need

for strong democratic institutions and accountable governance. Weak states are particularly susceptible to external manipulation and internal subversion, further destabilising the region.

The lessons from these pivotal episodes remain crucial as South Asia navigates the 21st century. The radicalisation fueling terrorism often stems from socio-economic deprivation. Investments in education, healthcare, and employment can help counter extremist ideologies. Strengthened regional cooperation and robust international partnerships are essential to addressing the complex interplay of geopolitics and terrorism.

Much like the Grand Trunk Road connecting distant regions and histories, these events remind us of the intersecting paths of interventionism and terrorism in shaping modern South Asia.

They were not mere crises but turning points that redefined the region's political, social, and economic trajectories. As South Asia confronts new challenges, the enduring lessons of these anniversaries emphasize the importance of resilience, cooperation, and proactive governance in securing a stable future.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEBATE ON CONSTITUTION

Madam — The two-day debate on the Constitution, which began on 13th December, has seen heated discussion on the historical and contemporary significance of the Constitution. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh initiated the debate, emphasising the collective efforts behind the creation of the Constitution. Though he accused Congress and Indira Gandhi for imposing an emergency and supersession of Supreme Court judges to charge Congress with violating constitutional principles, he lauded the progressive and transformative nature of the Constitution that allows individuals from humble backgrounds to rise to the highest positions of power in India. The newly elected MP, Priyanka Gandhi, an articulate and combative speaker, accused the government of undermining the constitutional promises of social, economic and political justice over the past decade. Without mentioning the name of Jawaharlal Nehru, she lauded his contribution in creating so many public sector as well as government firms. She also warned the present government that his role in the freedom struggle and Independent India could never be erased from Indian history. Concluding the debate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the role of women members of the constituent Assembly in making the Indian Constitution. He also hailed Indian democracy and reminded the journey of the Constitution.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

INDIA'S GDP RISES

Madam — Forbes India estimates India's GDP to be \$3.94 trillion in 2024. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India rose to the 11th largest economy in the world in seven decades of independence, but in just the last decade, India has risen to the 5th largest economy while addressing a gathering at the Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre after the inauguration of the Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit 2024. He attributed this growth

Tabla maestro Zakir Hussain passes away



The four-time Grammy Award winner, Indian tabla maestro and an innovative music fusion creator, Zakir Hussain is no more with us. The silence on his tabla is a huge loss for Hindustani classical music and jazz fusion. Zakir was truly an indelible gem in the world of music. The list of his national and international accolades is really long, as he had always made India proud with his tireless contribution in

taking Hindustani classical music to collaborate and fuse with world music. Like his father, Ustad Alha Rakha, Zakir always attempted to proceed to the legacy footprint of his father.

His tabla virtuoso legacy had been curated in the golden letters in the history of Indian music because of his glorious contribution to music. Taking an Indian, 18th-century membranophone percussion instrument (tabla) to the world stage is truly an incredible achievement, and history will credit this legendary maestro, Zakir Hussain, for his pertinacious contribution towards Hindustani classical music. He will always stay alive in our hearts and continue to inspire the upcoming generations of music and instrument lovers.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

to the exceptional efficiency of his government. Nevertheless, the story would be incomplete without a mention of the economic growth across different regions. Southern states, which occupy 19.34 per cent of India's land area and 20.76 per cent of its population, contributed about 30.5 per cent of the GDP. Western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, which together occupy 15.32 per cent of India's land area and 14.27 per cent of its population, added another 21.4 per cent.

On the contrary, the NDA-BJP-ruled states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, which cover 34.09 per cent of the area and have 38.95 per cent of the population, together contributed only 22.4 per cent to the GDP. This is despite the fact that the five BJP states received a significantly higher share of funds from the central divisible revenue pool. They received a 45.29 per cent share, whereas the five southern states got only 15.81 per cent. Further, according to the IMF World Economic Outlook

(October 2024), India is currently ranked 144th among 194 economies in terms of GDP (nominal) per capita at \$2698 at current prices. This suggests that the standard of living and quality of life in much of India improved at a snail's pace, even though the economy expanded rapidly.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

PM MODI SLAMS CONGRESS

Madam — Modi lambasted the first pravar as the killers of the constitution during the debate on the constitution in parliament. Right from Nehru's letter in 1951 to the state CM's, Indira's emergency, Rajiv's dealing with the Shah Bano case, and Rahul's tearing of an ordinance, Modi spoke the truth. It is a big blow to the Congress since they were at fault in their earlier tenure. It should introspect. Secondly, Modi has drawn up an 11-point Sankalp like the 20-point programme of Indira Gandhi.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Overcoming fear to unlock limitless possibilities

Embracing the unknown is essential for innovation, resilience and realising our true potential



SANJAY CHANDRA

Humans possess four basic emotions — happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Each has a unique place in our lives and shapes much of our responses to situations. The unknown is probably one entity that invokes all four emotions and spurs us into action. However, it is the fear of what we project onto the unknown that often paralyses us into inaction. Action is built into our psyche. We must necessarily move, even though we do not know the results of our endeavours. Instead of focusing on the happiness we will derive from success, we let this uncertainty bog us down. We procrastinate terrified of failure and refuse to take the next step.

This is an all too familiar phenomenon that we encounter every day of our lives. As we start going up the professional ladder, many of us follow time-tested formulae, handed down to us by predecessors. We hesitate to make decisions contrary to the established norms, even though such decisions may result in sub-



stantial gains, within the framework of certain acceptable risks. All our efforts are guided by that one decision in 10 which did not click. We do not look at the nine that did. We forget that as a child we had no fears when we started exploring the universe around us. We fell, as we tried to get on our two feet, but were encouraged, or even forced, to keep trying till we mastered the art of walking; or for that matter everything. We also forget that we were not scared to take up a job after college, even though we knew nothing about the work we had to do. We learned from our mistakes. The worst was that we failed the first time, and the best

was that we succeeded eventually. Ah! The joy of success! We forget that humans evolved due to an inherent desire to explore the unknown, without a care for failure or success. New worlds were found, and new inventions and scientific discoveries were made.

All because a few dared to venture into the unknown. We deny ourselves the endless new opportunities that each new day brings. It is not that we do not possess this spirit. It is just that generations of conditioning have made it dormant, till we are in a situation with our backs to the wall. Nowhere is it more in evidence, than in jugaad, the flexible approach to solve a problem innovatively when one has limited resources. In our personal lives, we are told to pursue our dreams but are often guided towards the more tried and safer options.

We do not even try to think of the endless possibilities and the heights that society can reach if everyone is encouraged not to fear the failure of the unknown, but

to think about success, and is free to follow his or her heart!

This is the contradiction that most of us from the earlier generation, specifically from the middle class, face when teaching the young. Fortunately for our race, the young of today are better prepared for the unknown with the availability of much better sources of information which were also created by a few who dared to dream.

We should teach the young to step out in the rain without an umbrella and get drenched. Let the sky be the roof. They should not regret that they might have led a better life if they had not feared the unknown. Esmeralda Santiago sums it up so well. "How can you know what you are capable of, if you do not embrace the unknown?"

(The writer is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator and strategy consultant. He conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. The views expressed are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

As remote work redefine workplaces, businesses are increasingly turning to employee monitoring



SHAINY SHARMA

In the modern workplace, the rise of remote and hybrid work has led to significant shifts in how businesses operate, manage and monitor their employees. Among the most controversial developments is the growing use of tattleware or brassware, the common nicknames of software applications that monitor employees' activities during work hours.

With the advent of normalised remote work, employer surveillance of workers has accelerated. Today, such tools can track a wide range of data, including keystrokes, mouse movements, screenshots, and even video or audio feeds from an employee's device. Not only this, but the much-advanced systems may also use artificial intelligence to analyse patterns, flag unproductive behaviour, or even detect potential security breaches. Employers claim these tools provide valuable insights into work habits, protect sensitive data, and improve overall efficiency. It allows businesses to track productivity metrics thereby ensuring that the employees meet deadlines and work efficiently, especially in remote setups where physical supervision is absent.

Also, such surveillance tools help prevent data breaches or intellectual property theft by monitoring unauthorised activities. Moreover, these wares provide evidence in disputes about working hours or performance, thereby offering an objective record of employee activity. When implemented transparently and ethically, these tools even foster accountability and help underperforming employees improve. Despite the above-mentioned benefits, the use of tattleware raises significant ethical concerns wherein the most



common one talked about is privacy. Employees believe that privacy is a fundamental right, and excessive surveillance can infringe upon it. A survey conducted recently found that nearly 78 per cent of employers use monitoring software to track employee performance or online activity.

When employees are monitored constantly, they often feel dehumanised, as though they are untrusted or reduced to mere data points resulting in eroding trust between employers and their teams, making it harder to foster collaboration and loyalty. Additionally, the psychological impact often leads them to stress, anxiety, and burnout. Employees may feel pressured to overwork or engage in performative productivity - appearing busy rather than genuinely contributing. Over time, this can harm creativity, innovation, and overall job satisfaction. Not only these, but the use of tattleware has also resulted in legal challenges, including claims of unpaid wages for work performed away from computers or intrusion upon privacy. Some employers face allegations of unfair labour practices if monitoring interferes with protected activities, such as union organising? To adhere to the challenges posed by tattleware, businesses must strive to balance productivity goals with respect for employees' rights. As rightly said transparency is the key to success.

Only when employees are informed about them being monitored, the necessities for the use of such tattleware or how the data will be used can help build trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility. As businesses navigate the complexities of remote and hybrid work, they must adopt a thoughtful and balanced approach to workplace monitoring. Only by prioritising transparency, fairness, and respect for individual rights, companies and business organisations can create an environment that values both productivity and human dignity.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Call for fast-tracking WTO agricultural negotiations



UTTAM GUPTA

In a recent WTO meeting, India urges prioritisation of issues, including a permanent solution for public stockholding and special safeguard mechanism



In a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) held in Geneva on December 4, 2024, India insisted that negotiations on unresolved/previously mandated issues in agriculture, including a permanent solution to public stockholding, special safeguard mechanism (SSM) and elimination of trade-distorting cotton subsidies by rich countries etc, be 'prioritised' and 'fast-tracked' by treating them as standalone issues instead of clubbing them with other issues.

The US, on the other hand, criticised the prioritisation of certain issues over others, stating that this was the primary cause of the longstanding stalemate in agriculture. India also rejected a new proposal presented by Guyana to advance agricultural negotiations ahead of the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14 tentatively scheduled to take place in Cameroon in 2026) by adopting a so-called 'non-traditional approach based on convergence'. India reiterated that any facilitator-led process should be 'consensus-based' and respect WTO's multilateral principles. It emphasised on Text-based negotiation (TBN). TBN refers to the process of working up the text of an agreement that all parties are willing to accept and sign. Negotiating parties may begin with a draft text prepared by the Chair of the particular committee dealing with the subject.

The draft is based on discussions amongst the member countries and is fine-tuned till all the nations are in agreement with it. This is in sharp contrast to a convergence-based approach that involves superimposition of non-multilateral trade regimes on the multilateral trading system (MTS). The theorists dealing with international trade in particular, WTO-related issues describe it as a process of 'gradually aligning different trade regimes, in particular preferential trade agreements (PTAs) and the MTS'. Others define convergence as requiring 'greater coherence between trade rules and policies, norms and standards in other areas of international cooperation'. Shorn of jargon, this is a well-orchestrated attempt by the developed countries - the US, the European



THE DRAFT IS BASED ON DISCUSSIONS AMONGST THE MEMBER COUNTRIES AND IS FINE-TUNED TILL ALL THE NATIONS ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH IT. THIS IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO A CONVERGENCE-BASED APPROACH THAT INVOLVES SUPER-IMPOSITION OF NON-MULTILATERAL TRADE

Union (EU), the UK, Australia, etc (they exercise disproportionately greater influence during actual confabulations at the WTO), set the agenda of meetings, float proposals more often through small countries such as Guyana and get away with what they want) to scuttle the standard practice of taking decisions by consensus where every member country has an equal voice.

Therefore, India has rejected this approach, rightly so. But, what happens to India's demand for 'prioritising' and 'fast-tracking' negotiations? In a meeting of the CoA held on October 2, 2023, in Geneva, the EU agreed to consider India's demand for a permanent solution to the public stock-holding (PSH) program for food security. Accordingly, India had urged WTO members to start TBN on the issue as soon as possible and get this deliberated at the WTO MC-13 slated to be held in Abu Dhabi from February 26-29, 2024. But, that was not to be. The Ministerial Conference ended in a deadlock. On the issue of finding a permanent solution to the (PSH) for food security, India's stance was vehemently opposed by the USA/EU. Earlier attempts by India also met with the same fate. At the Trade Policy Review (TPR) meeting held at WTO in January 2021, India insisted that the three issues should be taken up on a priority basis at the MC-12. But, in that Ministerial Conference held in Geneva on June 12-17, 2022, the issues were not even put on the table. The deadlock has existed for more than two decades despite India taking up these issues at WTO under what has come to be known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). Developed countries had junked DDA at MC-10 held in Nairobi (2015). On the most contentious issue of a permanent solution for PSH, a ray of hope emerged when in the WTO-General Council (GC) meeting in Geneva (July 31, 2014),

India insisted on a time-bound action plan on the subject matter to be executed before the end of 2014 co-terminus with approval of Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) - an area of great interest to developed countries. This was a good strategic move but it was abandoned mid-stream. In December 2014, even as the developed countries got away with the TFA, the developing countries got an "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found." Put simply, India had literally surrendered its right to secure a permanent solution; that it was "Ok" with "the benefit of peace clause."

What is the peace clause?
To understand this, let us look at the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the WTO. Under it, a developing country cannot give aggregate measurement support (AMS) - an acronym for subsidies - over 10 per cent of the value of its farm production.

The AMS includes "product-specific" subsidies and "non-product specific" subsidies on agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, seed, irrigation and power. The "product-specific" subsidy is the excess of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) paid to farmers over the External Reference Price (ERP) multiplied by the quantum of agri-produce. Whereas the MSP is taken for the relevant year, say, 2023-24, the ERP is the average of the global price prevailing during 1986-88 fixed in rupee terms. If the subsidy given by a developing country exceeds 10 per cent, it will be treated as a violation of its WTO commitment. This has been a major worry as India could face action in a situation of AMS exceeding the 10 per cent threshold. In this backdrop, the MC-9 in Bali (2013) had agreed to a "peace clause" under which "if a developing country gives AMS in excess of 10 per cent, no member will challenge this until 2017, when the WTO would look for a permanent

solution to address their food security concerns." It came with several riders such as submission of data on food procurement, stockholding, distribution and subsidies. These also include establishing that subsidies are not "trade distorting." Besides, programs implemented after 2013 are not covered under the ambit of the 'peace clause'. In December 2014, the WTO-GC modified the above decision to provide for "extension of the peace clause till a permanent solution was found". Unfortunately, India concurred with this modification. This took away the sanctity of the 2017 deadline by which time members were to find a permanent solution as per the MC-9 mandate. A decade since then, India is still looking for a solution! In regard to SSM - it allows members to temporarily raise tariffs beyond the "bound levels" (this is the maximum permissible duty that a member country can impose under a bound rate agreement) to counter surges in import or price drops. The 2015 MC-10 in Nairobi recognized that developing countries will have the right to take recourse to SSM as envisaged under the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration. That was at MC - 6 (December 2005). Since then, it has been almost two decades. Even now, these countries can't take recourse to SSM. They haven't also been able to prompt developed countries to eliminate their cotton subsidies. To conclude, despite the deft handling of negotiations at the WTO and representing the majority of the developing countries (India leads about 80 countries - the G33 including India, African, Caribbean and Pacific countries or ACP) so far, India hasn't succeeded in securing the intended outcomes. Given the intransigence of developed countries and their clout at WTO, there is little hope from the MC - 14.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Persisting Central Information Commission vacancies challenge transparency claims

Eight vacancies of Information Commissioners undermine the cause of transparency and accountability

Recently on December 10, Dr. Jitendra Singh, MoS (Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension) made a pitch for Vikashit Bharat, 2047 while addressing the 16th Annual Convention of Central Information Commission at Bharat Mandapam in Pragati Maidan. Ironically, it was the last date allowed by the Supreme Court for the central government to file a status report on the eight posts of Information Commissioners lying vacant out of a total of ten in the Central Information Commission (CIC) for the last year. It might be remembered in October 2023 Anjali Bhadrawaj had brought to the notice of the Supreme Court that whereas seven posts were already lying vacant in the



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

CIC, four incumbents were due to retire within a week. Sadly, the situation has worsened over the last year, notwithstanding the government's claim to transparency and accountability. At present, there are two Information Commissioners viz. Anandi Ramalingam and Vinod Kumar Tiwari in addition to Chief Information Commissioner viz. Heeralal

Samariya. As per the Pending Cases Report available on the website of CIC, there were a total of 3134 cases - comprising 2310 second appeals and 824 direct complaints with the Commission as of November 1, 2023.

A year later on November 1, 2024, the total number of pendency has risen to 20,437 - comprising 17,717 second appeals and 2,720 direct complaints. At the time of writing this piece, the total pendency clocked 22,957. This figure is not quite a compliment to the government's alleged commitment to transparency and accountability. A recent RTI application filed by Commodore Lokesh Batra (Retd) elicited the reply that 161 applications were received for filling eight vacancies in

CIC in response to the DoPT's advertisement dated August 14, 2024. Under Section 12 (3) of the RTI Act, 2005 the appointments are to be made by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister, and comprising the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha and another Union minister nominated by the Prime Minister. Filling these positions before the 16th Annual Convention on the RTI would have been a favourable gesture. However, the government did not prioritize the task. A second appeal from this columnist filed on September 13, 2023, is indicated at no 18162 in the list of pendency. The matter was transferred to IC Vinod Kumar Tiwari, after IC Ms. Saroj Punhani retired on November 11, 2023. The



high amount of pendency incentivizes the CPIOs/Appellate Authorities in the ministries/departments to display a cavalier attitude towards applications filed under the RTI Act, 2005. This columnist, however, was able to obtain the information through a fresh application. Though in both cases, the Appellate Authority within the division, who in an IAS officer colluded with the CPIO,

in one of his decisions he stated that the reason for denying information was that the file was under submission with the Joint Secretary. The columnist filed a third application under the RTI Act, 2005 asking the CPIO whether the Joint Secretary has been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information under the RTI Act, 2005. If the Joint Secretary had been 'exempted', the CPIO must produce the necessary official order, and further inform who else in the ministry had been similarly 'exempted'. Any claim that a Joint Secretary has been 'exempted' from the obligation to provide information would have become controversial for the government. It could have sullied the service record of the

officer attracting a minor if not major penalty for disregarding a Parliamentary statute. The RTI Act, 2005 provides no authority-wise 'exemption'. Exemption under Section 8 of the Act applies only to certain well-defined matters based on merit like security/diplomatic/trade secrets, matters expressly forbidden by court from publication, or cabinet papers etc. This time the CPIO quickly provided the information. The episode, however, underscores a few grievous lapses. First, had the Central Information Commission (CIC) been working at full strength, the second appeal would have been decided within a few months, and the delinquent CPIO might had to pay the monetary penalty for denying information.

Second, it underscores that Appellate Authorities, who are part of the department, actually help the CPIOs to suppress the information, where it is in their interest. Instead of this obligation, they can manipulate the CPIOs in other matters. The high amount of pendency in CIC could be attributed to the devious behaviour of the Appellate Authorities. The RTI Act, 2005 should have provision to penalize not just the CPIO but also the First Appellate Authority if the Information Commissioner declares him/her guilty of deliberate suppression of information.

(The writer is an author and an independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are his personal)

Yunus celebrates end of Hasina's 'autocratic govt'

No mention of Mujibur Rahman in his Victory Day address

PTI ■ DHAKA
Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus led Bangladesh Monday in marking the 54th Victory Day, his speech making no mention of founding leader Mujibur Rahman while calling deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's administration the "world's worst autocratic government". "Bijoy Dibosh" commemorates the Pakistan military's surrender to Indian forces and the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. "Bangabandhu" Mujibur Rahman is seen as the independence movement's iconic figure. His daughter Sheikh Hasina fled to India on August 5, after massive student-led protests against her government. Nobel laureate Yunus then took over as head of an interim government. In his televised address to the nation, Yunus indicated that elections might be held by

early 2026. "Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said. The country could not build on its achievements because of its own faults and, of late, a "monstrous autocratic government" had grabbed power, he said in an apparent reference to Hasina's Awami league government. He said the ouster of the "world's worst autocratic government" amid a mass upsurge added extra significance to the celebration this year. Yunus and Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin separately paid tributes to Liberation War martyrs at the National Memorial on the outskirts of the capital. "I recall the millions of martyrs including numerous children and juveniles, youths and the elderly people's sacrifices that made possible the achievement of our independence," he



said. His speech, however, made no mention of the political leadership in 1971 and of Mujibur Rahman -- a sharp departure from previous Victory Day addresses. Critics accuse his interim government of trying to erase

Mujibur Rahman's legacy. The authorities have earlier announced a decision to phase out the currency notes currently in circulation. The new ones will not carry Rahman's image. On Monday, Army bugles played the Last Post, commemorating those killed during the 1971 War. East Timor President Jose Ramos Horta accompanied Yunus at the celebrations. Deviating from tradition, Bangladesh did not stage a Victory Day Parade in the capital. "The army is currently engaged in activities across the country, and organising the parade requires advance preparation, which wasn't feasible this year," Liberation War Affairs Adviser Farook-e-Azam told the Daily Star newspaper. But he said the celebration would be inclusive for all with "Victory Fairs" across the country featuring art and craft

exhibits and agricultural product displays, and showcasing domestic goods. He said schools were hosting their own events as part of the festivities and cultural programmes would include the participation of children, women and men, making the celebration inclusive for all. "The shift in the celebration format aims to bring more active public involvement and create a festive atmosphere in every part of the country," Azam said. The liberation movement began when the West Pakistan leadership refused to hand over power to the Awami League in line with the 1970 election results. India backed Bengali guerrillas and dealt with mass migration of people from Bangladesh. Eight Indian military veterans of the Liberation War travelled to Dhaka this year to mark Victory Day. Similarly, eight

Bangladesh veterans were in Kolkata to join the Vijay Diwas celebrations. In his speech, Yunus indicated that elections would be held in 2025 or early 2026 after updating the voters' list. "From now on, the responsibility has been entrusted to them to start the process of forming the future government. They have started their preparations. They have a lot of work to do," he told a local news agency, referring to the Election Reforms Commission. "We have to make sure that the names of all those who have become eligible to vote in the last 15 years are included in the voters' list. This is a big task," he said. He said after the student the student uprising there is no room for making any mistakes. Many young people who were deprived of this right in the past will vote for the first time, he added.

Two killed on first day of anti-polio campaign in Pak

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

A polio worker and a police constable were shot dead in separate incidents in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday as the country began a week-long polio eradication campaign amid tight security. Unidentified assailants opened fire and killed a polio worker in Bannu district on the very first day of the anti-polio drive that commenced across Pakistan on Monday. The incident occurred in Kala Khel Masti Khan and the attackers managed to escape. Police stated that the deceased polio worker was on his way to duty when he was attacked. In a separate incident in Karak district, Constable Ishtiaq Ahmed, escorting a team of polio workers, was killed when unidentified motorcyclists opened fire. The assailants managed to escape. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attacks on polio teams in the province. A week-long polio eradication campaign across Pakistan began on Monday amid tight security to ensure its smooth sailing against the crippling disease that saw a surge this year with 63 cases reported so far. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Pakistan and Afghanistan remain the only countries where the paralyzing virus is still rampant. News agency AP reported that authorities deployed thousands of police officers to protect the health workers following intelligence reports that insurgents could target them. Citing health officials and authorities, AP said more than 200 polio workers and police assigned for their protection have been killed since the 1990s.

Amnesty: Serbia spying on political opponents, journalists

AP ■ BELGRADE

Serbia's secret service and police have been spying on journalists and opposition activists by installing a spyware on their mobile phones, Amnesty International said Monday. The watchdog's report, backed by testimonies of those who claim their phones have been hacked in recent months, says the spy software was used to unlock phones to capture covert screenshots and copy contact lists, which were then uploaded to a government-controlled server. The report titled "A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the Suppression of Civil Society in Serbia" said the Serbian police and the Security Information Agency (BIA) used the spyware to infect devices while their owners were detained or interviewed by police. "Our investigation reveals how Serbian authorities have deployed surveillance technology and digital repression tactics as instruments of wider state control and repression directed against civil society," said Dinushika Dissanayake, Amnesty International's deputy regional

director for Europe. Serbia's police did not respond to a request for comment by The Associated Press. Serbia's spy agency said on its website that it "works exclusively in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Serbia." "Therefore, we are not even able to comment on nonsensical allegations from their (Amnesty) text, just as we do not normally comment on similar content," BIA said. The Amnesty report comes as President Aleksandar Vucic is facing one of the biggest challenges to more than a decade of his increasingly autocratic rule, with widening anti-government protests that so far have been largely peaceful. Protests have been led by university students and opposition activists following the collapse last month of a concrete canopy at a railway station in the country's north that killed 15 people on Nov. 1. Many in Serbia believe rampant corruption and nepotism among state officials led to sloppy work on the building reconstruction, which was part of a wider railroad project with Chinese state companies. Vucic has accused Western intel-

ligence services, NGO groups and foreign media of conducting a "hybrid warfare" against him and his country by illegally financing the protests. The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, an NGO group, strongly condemned the authorities' misuse of digital technologies for surveillance and demanded an immediate, transparent and independent investigation into the allegations reported by Amnesty International. It also called for the prosecution of those responsible within the police and the Security and Information Agency. "In a country where civil protests are growing in scale, and discontent with the regime is becoming louder, these practices represent a direct attack on fundamental freedoms, including the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and the right of association," the group's statement said. Serbia, which formally seeks European Union membership, has been forging close ties with Russia and China, including their spy agencies in what officials said was a joint action against the so-called "coloured revolutions" -- street protests against repressive regimes.

12 Indians found dead at restaurant in Georgia

PTI ■ TBILISI

Twelve Indian nationals were found dead at a restaurant in Georgia's mountain resort of Gudauri, according to the Indian mission here. Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs said in a statement that no signs of injuries or signs of violence were detected in an initial inspection. All victims died from carbon monoxide poisoning, local media reported, citing police. The Indian mission in Tbilisi said that all 12 victims were Indian nationals. However, Georgia's internal affairs ministry statement said 11 were foreigners while one victim was its citizen. It added that the bodies of all victims, employees in the same Indian restaurant, were found in bedrooms on the second floor of the facility. "Mission has just learned about the death of 12 Indian nationals in Gudauri, Georgia. Deepest condolences to the bereaved families. Mission is in touch with the local authorities to get details of the Indian nationals who lost their lives. All possible assistance will be given," the Indian mission here said in a statement. The police started an investigation under Article 116 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which implies negligent manslaughter. According to the preliminary investigation, a power generator was placed in an indoor area, a closed space near the bedrooms, which was turned on, probably after the power supply was turned off on Friday night. A forensic medical examination has also been appointed to determine the "exact cause of death." Investigative actions are "actively" being carried out, with forensic-criminalistics working on the spot, and interviews of persons related to the case are being conducted.

'Death toll in Gaza Strip from Israel-Hamas war tops 45,000'

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

The death toll in the Gaza Strip from the 14-month war between Israel and Hamas militants has topped 45,000 people, Palestinian health officials said Monday, with 52 dead arriving at hospitals across the bombed-out strip over the past 24 hours. The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed more than 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. The Health Ministry said 45,028 people have been killed and 106,962 have been wounded since the start of the war. It has said the real toll is higher because thousands of bodies are still buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access. The latest war has been by far the deadliest round of fighting between Israel and Hamas, with the death toll now amounting to roughly 2 per cent of Gaza's entire prewar

population of about 2.3 million. Among the dead reported in the overall toll were 10 people, including a family of four, who were killed in an overnight Israeli strike in Gaza City, Palestinian medics said. The strike late Sunday hit a house in Gaza City's eastern Shijaiyah neighbourhood, according to the Health Ministry's emergency service. Rescuers recovered the bodies of 10 people from under the rubble, including those of two parents and their two children, it said. Israel claims Hamas is responsible for the civilian death toll because it operates from within civilian areas in the densely populated Gaza Strip. Rights groups and Palestinians say Israel has failed to take sufficient precautions to avoid civilian deaths. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Israel responded by heavy bombardment and a ground incur-

sion into the Palestinian enclave. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year. A separate strike on a school on Sunday in the southern city of Khan Younis killed at least 13 people, including six children and two women, according to Nasser Hospital where the bodies were taken. The hospital initially reported the strike had killed 16 people, but it later revised the death toll as the three other bodies had been from a separate strike that hit a house. The Israeli military said it had "conducted a precise strike on Hamas terrorists who were operating inside a command and control centre embedded within a compound" that had served as a school in Khan Younis. It did not provide evidence. In central Gaza's Nuseirat urban refugee camp, mourners gathered for the funeral of a Palestinian journalist working for the Qatari-based Al Jazeera

TV network who was killed Sunday in a strike on a point for Gaza's civil defence agency. They carried his body through the street from the hospital, his blue bulletproof vest resting atop. The strike also killed three civil defence workers, including the local head of the agency, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. The civil defence is Gaza's main rescue agency and operates under the Hamas-run government. Al Jazeera said Ahmad Baker Al-Louh, 39, had been covering rescue operations of a family wounded in an earlier bombing when he was killed. The International Federation of Journalists said last week that 104 journalists and media workers have been killed so far in 2024, with more than half of them perishing during the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. The group said that since the October 7, 2023, start of the war, at least 138 had been killed, including 55 Palestinian media professionals in the calendar year.

Japanese bank apologises over theft of millions of dollars from safe deposit boxes

AP ■ TOKYO

Japan's biggest bank apologised Monday for the alleged theft by an employee of more than 1 billion yen (USD 6.6 million) from customers' safe deposit boxes. The bank, formally known as Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Inc., said Monday that it was investigating and that verified thefts from about 20 of the 60 clients thought to have been affected amounted to 300 million yen (nearly USD 2 million). Compensation was being worked out, it said. The thefts occurred at two Tokyo branches of the bank, from April 2020 until the end of October this year, when the problem was discovered. MUFG's president and CEO

Junichi Hanzawa told reporters the female employee responsible for managing the safe deposit boxes and their keys is suspected of taking advantage of that position to steal cash and other valuables. "The case has undermined the customers' trust and confidence and shaken the very foundation of our banking business," Hanzawa said. He apologised for causing concern and trouble to MUFG clients. MUFG said the employee admitted taking the money and using it for investments and her personal purposes. She was fired and was cooperating with the bank's internal probe and a police investigation but has not yet been arrested. After news of the thefts sur-

passed, dozens more people came forward with claims of suspected losses that the bank is working to verify, it said. The MUFG case is the second recent one involving criminal activity at a major Japanese financial institution. In November, Nomura Holdings acknowledged that a former employee had been arrested on suspicion of robbery, attempted murder and arson targeting a client in Hiroshima. Asked about the MUFG thefts, the chief government spokesman said Monday that banking operations require high levels of trust and a sense of public service. The case was "extremely regrettable," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi.

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Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attends his trial on corruption charges at the district court in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Monday. AP/PTI

Popeye, Tintin enter public domain in 2025 along with novels from Faulkner, Hemingway

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Popeye can punch without permission and Tintin can roam freely starting in 2025. The two classic comic characters who first appeared in 1929 are among the intellectual properties becoming public domain in the United States on Jan 1. That means they can be used and repurposed without permission or payment to copyright holders. This year's crop of newly public artistic creations lacks the landmark vibes of last year's entrance of into the public domain of Mickey Mouse. But they include a deep well of canonical works whose 95-year copyright maximums will expire. And the Disney icon's public domain presence expands. "It's a move! There are a dozen new Mickey cartoons -- he speaks for the first time and dons the familiar white gloves,"

said Jennifer Jenkins, director of Duke's Center for the Study of the Public Domain. "There are masterpieces from Faulkner and Hemingway, the first sound films from Alfred Hitchcock, Cecil B. DeMille, and John Ford, and amazing music from Fats Waller, Cole Porter, and George Gershwin. Pretty exciting!" Here's a closer look at this year's crop. **Comics characters loom large:** Popeye the Sailor, with his bulging forearms, mealy-mouthed speech, and propensity for fistfights, was created by E.C. Segar and made his first appearance in the newspaper strip "Thimble Theater" in 1929, speaking his first words, "Ja think I'm a cowboy?" when asked if he was a sailor. What was supposed to be a one-off appearance became permanent, and the strip would be renamed "Popeye."

But as with Mickey Mouse last year and Winnie the Pooh in 2022, only the earliest version is free for reuse. The spinach that gave the sailor his super-strength was not there from the start, and is the kind of character element that could spawn legal disputes. And the animated shorts featuring his distinctive mumbly voice didn't begin until 1933 and remain under copyright. As does director Robert Altman's 1980 film, starring Robin Williams as Popeye and Shelley Duvall as his oft-fought-over sweetheart Olive Oyl. That movie was tepidly received initially. So was director Steven Spielberg's "Adventures of Tintin" in 2011. But the comics about the boy reporter that inspired it, the creation of Belgian artist Herge, were among the most popular in Europe for much of the 20th century. The simply drawn teen with

dots for eyes and bangs like an ocean wave first appeared in a supplement to the Belgian newspaper Le Vingtieme Siecle, and became a weekly feature. The comic also first appeared in the US in 1929. Its signature bright colors -- including Tintin's red hair -- didn't appear until years later, and could, like Popeye's spinach, be the subject of legal disputes. And in much of the world, Tintin won't become public property until 70 years after the 1983 death of his creator. **Books show American lit at its height:** The books becoming public this year read like the syllabus for an American literature seminar. "The Sound and the Fury," arguably William Faulkner's quintessential novel with its modernist stream-of-consciousness style, was a sensation after its publication despite being famously difficult for

readers. It uses multiple non-linear narratives to tell the story of a prominent family's ruin in the author's native Mississippi, and would help lead to Faulkner's Nobel Prize. And Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" joins his earlier "The Sun Also Rises" in the public domain. The partly autobiographical story of an ambulance driver in Italy during the First World War cemented Hemingway's status in the American literary canon. It has been frequently adapted for film, TV and radio, which can now be done without permission. John Steinbeck's first novel, "A Cup of Gold," from 1929, will also enter the public domain. The British novelist Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," an extended essay that would become a landmark in feminism from the modernist literary luminary, is also on the

list. Her novel "Mrs. Dalloway" is already in the US public domain. **Movie legends in the making:** While a host of truly major movies will become public in the coming decade, for now early works by major figures from the not-always-stellar early sound era will have to suffice. A decade before he would move to Hollywood and make films like "Psycho," and "Vertigo," Alfred Hitchcock made "Blackmail" in Britain. The film was begun as a silent but shifted to sound during production, resulting in two different versions, one of them the UK's -- and Hitchcock's -- first sound film. John Ford, whose later Westerns would put him among film's most vaunted directors, also made his first foray into sound with 1929's "The Black Watch," an adventure epic that includes Ford's

future chief collaborator John Wayne as a young extra. Cecil B DeMille, already a Hollywood bigwig through silents, made his first talkie with the melodrama "Dynamite." Groucho, Harpo and the other Marx Brothers had their first starring movie roles in 1929's "The Cocoanuts," a forerunner to future classics like "Animal Crackers" and "Duck Soup." "The Broadway Melody," the first sound film and the second film ever to win the Oscar for best picture -- known as "outstanding production" at the time -- will also become public, though it's often ranked among the worst of best picture winners. And after "Steamboat Willie" made the earliest Mickey Mouse public, a dozen more of his animations will get the same status, including "The Karnival Kid," where he spoke for the first time.

Music rings out the 20s: Songs from the last year of the Roaring Twenties are also about to become public property. Cole Porter's compositions "What Is This Thing Called Love?" and "Tiptoe Through the Tulips" are among the highlights, as is the jazz classic "Ain't Misbehavin'," written by Fats Waller and Harry Brooks. "Singin' in the Rain," which would later forever be associated with the 1952 Gene Kelly film, made its debut in the 1929 movie "The Hollywood Revue" and will now be public domain. Different laws regulate sound recordings, and those newly in the public domain date to 1924. They include a recording of "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" from future star and civil rights icon Marian Anderson, and "Rhapsody in Blue" performed by its composer George Gershwin.

Sensex falls 385 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday due to weak global cues amid caution ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision later this week. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57. During the day, it dropped 581.84 points or 0.70 per cent to 81,551.28. The NSE Nifty lost by 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25. From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Titan, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and JSW Steel were the biggest losers. On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra and Axis Bank were the gainers.



In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Friday. Meanwhile, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a three-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items. Foreign Institutional Investors

(FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,335.32 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.75 per cent to USD 73.91 a barrel. The BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 843.16 points or 1.04 per cent to settle at 82,133.12 on Friday. The Nifty climbed 219.60 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 24,768.30.

Rupee falls 9 paise to all-time low of 84.89 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated by 9 paise to close at an all-time low level of 84.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, dragged down by a negative trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said the Indian rupee declined on weak domestic markets and rising US bond yields. However, a soft US dollar cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.83 and touched 84.89 against the greenback during intraday trade. The unit finally ended the session 9 paise down at 84.89 (provisional) against the dollar. On Friday, the rupee rebounded from its all-time low level and settled with a gain of 8 paise at 84.80 against the US dollar. The unit's previous all-time low level was recorded on December 12 when it closed at 84.88 against dollar.



"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on rising odds of a rate cut by the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) and weak tone in the domestic

markets. Elevated crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. However, FII inflows and

cooling off of inflation may support the rupee at lower levels. On the domestic macroeconomic front, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items. Retail inflation declined in November to 5.48 per cent and came within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone mainly due to easing food prices, creating headroom for a rate cut at the central bank's rate-setting panel meeting under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra in February. "Traders may take cues from PMI and Empire State Manufacturing Index data from the US. Investors may watch out for the FOMC meeting decision later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.65 to 85.05," Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six

currencies, was trading marginally lower by 0.14 per cent at 106.85. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.78 per cent to USD 73.91 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the 30-share benchmark index Sensex closed lower by 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent at 81,748.57 points. The Nifty was down 100.05 points, or 0.4 per cent, to 24,668.25 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) purchased Rs 2,335.32 crore in the capital markets on net basis on Friday, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped by USD 3.235 billion to USD 654.857 billion for the week ended December 6, the RBI said on Friday. In the preceding week, the reserves had increased by USD 1.51 billion to USD 658.091 billion, ending a multi-week decline in the overall kitty.

Indian IT services hiring to remain low till growth momentum picks up by H2 FY26: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hiring in the Indian IT services industry is expected to remain low-key in the near term until the growth momentum picks up by H2 FY2026, according to ICRA. The formation of the new government in the US may create some policy uncertainty in the immediate term and thus will remain monitorable, it said. Lower discretionary tech spends by customers in key markets of the US and Europe, amid an uncertain macroeconomic environment, has led to moderation in demand for Indian IT services companies over the last 6-8 quarters. Factors such as lower employee attrition and a focus on increasing employee utilisation also contributed to the slowdown in hiring. "While there has been some recovery in Q2 FY2025, ICRA expects hiring to remain low in the near term until the growth momentum picks up by H2 FY2026," the agency said.



Moderation in demand coupled with the increase in utilisation of excess manpower added during FY2022-FY2023 exerted pressure on hiring by IT services companies through FY2024 and Q1 FY2025. Coupled with an increase in attrition levels, this also led to negative net employee addition for the seven quarters till Q1 FY2025 for ICRA's sample set companies, which includes HCL Technologies, Infosys, Tata Consultancy

Services, Tech Mahindra and Wipro Ltd. As Gen AI makes rapid inroads, all leading IT services companies are upskilling their employees as they explore AI-driven business opportunities. This is likely to lead to an overall moderation in fresh hiring, as compared to pre-Covid levels, it predicted. ICRA said that the impact of higher adoption of Generative AI (Gen AI) on improving employee productivity is

expected to be visible over the next few years. Average revenue in USD per employee for the sample set has largely been stable at around USD 50,000 over FY2020-FY2024. However, this metric will show steady improvement if assessed on revenue in rupee terms due to depreciation of the rupee against some key foreign currencies over this period. The last twelve-month (LTM) attrition rate had peaked at about 23 per cent during Q4 FY2022 and Q1 FY2023, led by significant hiring and subsequent demand-supply mismatch. However, it sequentially tapered with lower hiring by IT services companies amid moderation in demand in key markets of the US and Europe. The LTM attrition rate for ICRA's sample set companies started stabilising from Q3 FY2024 at about 13 per cent, much lower than the pre-pandemic level of about 18 per cent in Q1 FY2020 for the sample set companies.

Historic milestone: Delhi airport first in India to connect 150 destinations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Airport has achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first airport in India to connect 150 destinations and a preferred gateway for passengers. Thai AirAsia X has launched direct flights between Delhi and Bangkok-Don Mueang (DMK), marking the 150th destination connected to Delhi Airport. The route will operate with Airbus A330 aircraft at a 2x weekly frequency, increasing to 4x weekly by mid-January 2025. In a statement, Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) said it has become the first airport in the country to connect 150 destinations. Over the years, Delhi Airport has added more than 20 exclusive international destinations, including Phnom Penh, Bali Denpasar, Calgary, Montreal, Vancouver, Washington Dulles, Chicago O'Hare, Tokyo Haneda, etc. "Of all the long-haul destinations from India, 88 per cent of destinations are connected from Delhi and 56 per cent of



all long-haul weekly flights departing from India, operate from Delhi. "Almost 50 per cent (42 per cent to be precise) of long-haul passengers from India chose Delhi airport as their gateway," it said. The airport handles around 1,400 flight movements daily. "In the last decade, the airport has experienced a 100 per cent increase in transfer passengers, solidifying its position as

a leading transit hub in South Asia. Of all the long-haul destinations from India, 88 percent of destinations are connected from Delhi & 56 percent of all long-haul weekly flights departing from India, operate from Delhi. Almost 50 percent (42 percent to be precise) of long-haul passengers from India chose Delhi airport as their gateway," it added.

"This milestone of connecting 150 destinations is a testament to our unwavering commitment to enhancing global connectivity and providing world-class travel experiences. We are proud to lead India into a new era of aviation and remain dedicated to being a hub of choice for travelers worldwide," said Vidheh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO, Delhi International Airport Limited.

JNPA, DGS ink pact for skill training in Vadhvan region

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Leading container port JNPA on Monday said it has signed an initial pact with the shipping regulator DGS for providing skill development training to locals and project-affected people in the Vadhvan region, where a new greenfield port is coming up through selected Maritime Training Institutes (MTIs). The facility, being developed near Dahanu in Palghar district of Maharashtra at an investment of Rs 76,200 crore, is being developed by Vadhvan Port Project Ltd (VPPL), a special purpose vehicle formed by Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) holding a 74 per cent stake and Maharashtra Maritime Board owning the remaining 26 per cent. The pact between JNPA and the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) is aimed at empowering local candidates from the Vadhvan Port area by providing recognised mar-



itime qualifications in GP (General Purpose) Rating and certificate in maritime catering, enabling them to pursue careers as seafarers, the port operator said. Supported through JNPA's CSR funding, with an estimated cost of Rs 2-3 lakhs per candidate, the initiative will cover training fees, accommodation, and boarding, it said, adding collaborating with DG Shipping and MTIs, the program ensures high-quality training, including

shipboard experience, to create sustainable career pathways in the maritime sector while contributing to India's growing seafaring workforce. Besides this, another pact was signed between VPPL and the Dye Makers Association at Vadhvan to provide exclusive branding opportunities to the Association, it said. "The signing of important Memorandums of Understanding and the start of the Vadhvan Port skilling program represent an enor-

mous step in achieving our goal of inclusive growth and community empowerment. These programs are aimed at establishing long-term employment possibilities and promoting economic growth in the Vadhvan area, from giving youth skills as per their needs to providing branding, finance, and advanced training to dye manufacturers," said Unmesh Sharad Wagh, Chairman and Managing Director of JNPA and VPPL. The facility, once completed, is expected to create 1.2 million direct and indirect jobs. In addition to this, JNPA and VPPL will also be signing an MoU with Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth for developing and implementing an integrated agricultural and horticulture plan for the selected villages in Dahanu and Palghar taluka of Palghar district as a part of the welfare activities for locals in and around greenfield Vadhvan port project, it stat-

ed. JNPA also said a Fishermen's Compensation Policy is being designed to support the fishermen community aligning with the guidelines of the Maharashtra Government and funds to the tune of Rs 300 crore is allocated for the construction of two fishing harbours. To support dye makers, the port operator, in collaboration with the Union Bank of India, has proposed a cluster-specific scheme with a concessional rate of interest and an attractive interest subvention scheme to provide low-cost funding, enabling artisans to invest in better machinery and scale up their businesses. Additionally, initiatives will focus on technology upgradation through training programs on automation, AI, and advanced tools like AutoCAD and CNC machines to enhance productivity and competitiveness, it stated.

Concord Enviro Systems' IPO to open on Dec 19; fixes price band of Rs 665-701/share

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Concord Enviro Systems, an environmental engineering solutions firm, on Monday said it has set a price range of Rs 665-701 per share for its initial share-sale, which will open for public subscription on December 19. The initial share-sale is scheduled to close on December 23 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on December 18, the company announced. The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 175 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 46.41 lakh equity shares valued at Rs 325.33 crore, at the upper end of the price band, by promoters and an investor. Those selling shares in the OFS are, promoters -- Prayas Goel and Prarak Goel, promoter groups -- Namrata



Goel, Nidhi Goel and Pushpa Goel -- and investor AF Holdings. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be invested in Concord Enviro FZE (CEF) for setting up a new assembly unit for water treatment systems as well as its working capital requirement. Additionally, funds will be invested in Rochem Separation Systems (India) Private Ltd to expand its manufacturing facilities and support activities, payment of debt, technology and growth initiatives, working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes.

At the upper end of the price band, the company's market capitalisation has been pegged at Rs 1,450 crore. Half of the issue has been reserved for qualified institutional buyers, 35 for retail investors and the remaining 15 per cent for non-institutional investors. Concord Enviro Systems is an integrated solutions provider for industrial waste water reuse and zero liquid discharge solutions, with an in-house position across the value chain. The company's reach extends to diverse regions with exports to countries in North America, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors and Equirus Capital are the book running lead managers to the issue. The equity shares of the company are expected to be listed on December 27 on the NSE and BSE.

Project of Rs. 35.5 lakh sanctioned to GNDU's Assistant Professor

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

A research project has been sanctioned to Dr. Amanpreet Kaur, Assistant Professor (Contractual), Department of Mathematics, Guru Nanak Dev University to develop efficient estimators of population parameters of sensitive study character in survey sampling using randomized response technique. The project is sponsored by the Department of Science and Technology, under WISE PDF Scheme that has sanctioned Rs. 35.5 lakh to carry out the research work under the mentorship of Dr. Lovleen Kumar Grover, Associate Professor,

Department of Mathematics, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. Dr. Palwinder Singh, Dean Academic Affairs said that this research will help in the development of estimators for population parameters of sensitive variables that may be used for government policy making decisions. Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Karamjeet Singh congratulated on her achievement. Prof. Palwinder Singh, Dean Academic Affairs and Prof. K.S. Kahlon, Registrar also congratulated her. Dr. Amanpreet Kaur is thankful to the Vice Chancellor & other officials for providing the infrastructure and support.

GNDU Music Department pays tribute to Zakir Hussain

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

The Department of Visual and Performing Arts of the Guru Nanak Dev University organized a Tribute Ceremony on the occasion of the eternal departure of the World Renowned legendary Tabla Player of India, Ustad Zakir Hussain Khan Sahib. Dr. Rajesh Sharma, Head of the Department, while gaveling on the picture of late Ustad Zakir Hussain said that although Ustad Zakir Hussain Ji has left us physically but he will remain alive in the hearts and memories of every music lover due to his contribution to the field of music and giv-

ing a special place to Tabla playing as a solo Vadan. Along with this, he also motivated the students to move forward by learning and taking inspiration from the lives of these personalities. After this, the departmental faculty Dr. Murli Manohar, Sh. Siddhartha Chatterjee, Dr. Gavish, Dr. Harmeet Singh, Dr. Priyanka Arora, Dr. Ramandeep Kaur, S. Gunveer Singh and research scholars Satnam Singh, Hasandeep Singh, Krishan Singh and other students also paid their tributes to Ustad Zakir Hussain Ji and prayed that God may grant his soul a place in heaven.

WPI inflation declines to 3-month low of 1.89 pc on cheaper food, RBI may cut rate in Feb

PTI ■ NEW DELHI,

Wholesale price based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items, and experts predicted a 0.25 per cent interest rate cut by the RBI in the policy review in February. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 2.36 per cent in October 2024. It was 0.39 per cent in November, last year. In August, 2024, it was 1.25 per cent. As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.63 per cent in November, as against 13.54 per cent in October. The decline was led by a dip in vegetable inflation which stood at 28.57 per cent, as against 63.04 per cent in October.



Inflation in potato, however, continued to be high at 82.79 per cent, while in onion it fell sharply to 2.85 per cent in November. The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November, against a deflation of 5.79 per cent in October. In manufactured items, inflation was 2 per cent

in November, against 1.50 per cent in October. In a research note, Barclays said wholesale price inflation softened in November, on lower primary food inflation, which more than offset higher inflation seen in manufactured products. "December to date, global prices are up 0.7 per cent and

are likely to push December WPI inflation higher," Barclays said. As per the consumer price index data released last week, retail inflation moderated to 5.5 per cent in November, compared with 6.2 per cent in October. Barclays said this is within the monetary policy committee's (MPC) tolerance band of 2-6 per cent indicating that CPI inflation will be drifting closer to the 4 per cent target by March 2025. "We expect the MPC to cut the policy repo rate by 25bps in its February meeting. We are mindful of the almost new-looking MPC that will be in charge of this decision," Barclays said.

Manchester United stuns Manchester City with 2-1 win

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Amad Diallo struck a 90th-minute winner as Manchester United staged a stunning late comeback to beat Manchester City 2-1 in the Premier League. Four-time defending champion City led the Manchester derby 1-0 going into the 88th minute at the Etihad Stadium. But the game was turned round in dramatic fashion as Bruno Fernandes leveled from the penalty spot and Diallo sealed victory for United — prompting head coach Ruben Amorim to declare “something magic happened.”

“It was a very tough match but we believe until the end. We managed to score. We needed that win. It was important for us and for our fans,” Amorim said. City fans jeered at the final whistle as their once dominant team’s woeful run of form extended to one win and eight losses in 11 games. “I’m the boss, I’m the manager and I’m not good enough. It’s as

simple as that,” Guardiola said. It was a first derby victory for new United head coach Ruben Amorim, who led Sporting Lisbon to a 4-1 win against City in one of his last games in charge of the Portuguese club in November. But for a long time it looked like being a third-straight league loss for United after Josko Gvardiol’s headed goal in the 36th. Fernandes was guilty of missing the target when through on goal in the second half and United struggled to create chances against a City team that rarely looked like adding to its lead. But in a dramatic end to the match, Diallo raced after an underhit backpass from Matheus Nunes. Nunes then brought down the United forward in the box and referee Anthony Taylor pointed to the penalty spot. Fernandes made no mistake this time — sending Ederson the wrong way. Moments later, Diallo ran onto a long pass from Lisandro Martinez, flicked the ball high and past Ederson before rolling it



United is 13th and five points behind fifth-place City, which has seen its title defense unravel during its losing run.

“This is a big club and in a big club when you lose eight in 10 (11) something wrong is happening,” Guardiola said.

Chelsea, in second, closed the gap on Liverpool to two points after a 2-1 win against Brentford. It’s now seven straight wins in all competitions for Enzo Maresca’s team, which is unbeaten in 10. Its last league defeat was in October — a 2-1 loss to Liverpool. Marc Cucurella scored in the 43rd and Nicolas Jackson made it 2-0 in the 80th for his ninth goal of the season. Bryan Mbeumo scored for Brentford in the 90th and Cucurella was sent off for a second yellow card in added time. Chelsea is four points ahead of third-place Arsenal. Southampton fired manager Russell Martin after being routed 5-0 by Tottenham. Last-place Southampton is nine points from safety and appears to be heading straight back to the second tier after earning promotion to the top flight last season. The decision came on the same day as another relegation-

threatened team, Wolverhampton, fired head coach Gary O’Neil. Wolverhampton is second to last in 19th. Spurs scored all five goals against Southampton before halftime at St Mary’s Stadium, with James Maddison getting two. Son Heung-min, Dejan Kulusevski and Pape Sarr also scored. Tottenham moved up to 10th and is five points off the Champions League places. SARR DOUBLE Ismaila Sarr scored twice as Crystal Palace beat Brighton 3-1 in the Premier League on Sunday. The forward also provided an assist for Trevoh Chalobah in the win at the Amex Stadium, which lifted Palace four points clear of the relegation zone. Brighton is ninth and without a win in four matches. Palace went ahead in the 27th minute through Chalobah, and Sarr doubled the lead for the visitors in the 33rd. Sarr scored his second in the 82nd before Marc Guehi’s own-goal pulled one back for Brighton.

Kerala Blasters sack head coach Mikael Stahre

PTI ■ KOCHI

Kerala Blasters FC on Monday announced the termination of services of their head coach Mikael Stahre with immediate effect after a string of poor performances by the club in the ongoing Indian Super League. Assistant coaches Bjorn Westrom and Frederico Pereira Morais have also left the club, along with Stahre. “The club sincerely thanks Mikael, Bjorn, and Frederico for their contributions throughout their time with Kerala Blasters FC. We wish them nothing but success in their future endeavours,” the club said in a statement. “The new head coach will be announced in due course.” Till the new appointment is confirmed, reserve team head coach and head of youth development, Tomasz Tchorz, and assistant coach TG Purushothaman will take over the responsibility of managing the first team. The 49-year-old Stahre, appointed ahead of the current season, enjoyed a promising



start in the Durand Cup, but the Blasters suffered a last-minute elimination in the quarter-finals against rivals Bengaluru FC. However, Blasters’ ISL campaign under the Swede has been a challenging one. Kerala Blasters currently sit 10th in the table, with just three wins and two draws from their first 12 matches. They are on a three-match losing streak, managing only one win while losing six of their last seven games. Four of their seven defeats have come at home. In total, the Blasters played 16 matches under Stahre (including four non ISL matches), managing only five wins while suffering eight defeats.

‘Completely and utterly blindsided’: Gillespie slams PCB for lack of communication

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia pacer Jason Gillespie on Monday slammed the PCB, revealing that he stepped down as Pakistan’s Test head coach after being “completely and utterly blindsided” by the country’s cricket board. Gillespie, whose contract was set to expire in 2026, resigned last week and he expressed his frustration over the lack of communication, which led him to feel that the Pakistan Cricket Board no longer wanted him in the role. “There were certainly challenges. I went into the job eyes wide open, I want to make that really clear. I knew that, you know, Pakistan had cycled through a number of coaches in a pretty short space of time. “The straw that broke the camel’s back, I suppose, was, as a head coach, you like to have clear communication with your employer,” Gillespie told ABC Sport. “I was completely and utterly blindsided by a decision to not have a high-performance



coach,” he added. The PCB didn’t review the contract of Tim Nielsen, who was brought in on the recommendation of the former Aussie quick, as the high performance coach of the team. “Tim Nielsen was told that his services were no longer required and I had absolutely zero communication from anyone about that. “And I just thought after a number of other things that had gone on in the previous few months, that was probably the moment where I thought, ‘Well, I’m not

really sure if they actually want me to do this job or not.” Adding to Gillespie’s frustration was the fact that the feedback given to him regarding Nielsen and the team’s performance was positive. “I developed a really close relationship with the Test captain, Shan Masood, and felt we were certainly going in the right direction and things were going really well,” he said. “All the feedback that I’d got or the feedback the PCB got was just how effective, you

know, Tim had been in his role as well and the players were getting a lot out of him.” Gillespie guided Pakistan to a 2-1 win against England in October, after losing the first match by an innings and 47 runs. However after the loss in the first Test, he was informed that a new selection panel would be introduced, and he would not be a part of it. He felt his role as head coach was diminished and even suggested that he often didn’t know the team lineup until the day before a match. This lack of clarity and communication only deepened his frustration with the PCB’s handling of his position. “I felt I was basically hitting catches and that was about it on the morning of a game,” he said. “You want to be able to have clear communication with all stakeholders, with selectors, for instance, knowing what the team is as head coach well before the game, or before at least the day before the game,” he said.



Women’s Champions League to wrap up group stage

AP ■ LONDON

The competitive imbalance in women’s club soccer in Europe will be underscored this week in the final round of Champions League group-stage matches where little is on the line because of the dominance of the continent’s top teams. The eight teams advancing to the quarterfinals have already secured their spots with one round remaining: Lyon and Wolfsburg from Group A; Chelsea and Real Madrid from Group B; Bayern Munich and Arsenal from Group C; and Manchester City and Barcelona from Group D. All are either established clubs in the women’s game — especially Lyon and Wolfsburg, the winners of nine of the 10 Champions League titles from 2011-2020 — or huge European clubs in men’s soccer who have started to really pour money and extra focus into their women’s teams in recent years. Madrid’s women’s team, for example, was only founded in 2020. The only thing needing to be settled across Tuesday and Wednesday is which teams qualify in first place and which progress as group runners-up, though there might not be any huge benefit either way given the high standard of the teams going through. The qualified teams play each other this week, with only Group A fully decided as Lyon is guaranteed to finish in first place with Wolfsburg second.

The two meet in France on Tuesday. In Group B on the same night, second-place Madrid hosts first-place Chelsea and can jump above the English team with a win courtesy of a superior goal difference. On Wednesday, Arsenal hosts Bayern and is one point behind the visitors from Germany in Group C. Bayern just needs to avoid defeat to finish top. Also that night, Barcelona is at home to first-place Man City and must beat the English team by two goals or more to win Group D. Growing gap The lopsided results in the fifth round of games highlighted the gap between the so-called bigger and smaller clubs in the Champions League. The eight teams advancing to the knockout stage all won their games, scoring a combined 33 goals and conceding a combined three. On the same night, Chelsea, Lyon and Wolfsburg each scored six goals. Barcelona, the defending champion, has scored 23 goals in its five group games so far — including a 9-0 win over Hammarby and a 7-0 thrashing of St. Polten in its last two outings. Of the teams in third or last place in their groups, only one — Roma — has more than three points. The Champions League will expand next season to 18 teams in a single standings, with UEFA hoping for same uplift that the men’s Champions League has had since increasing to a 36-team league.

FIFA apologises to Ukraine for Crimea map error at 2026 World Cup draw



AP ■ ZURICH

FIFA apologised to the Ukrainian soccer federation for displaying a map during its World Cup qualifying draw that excluded Russia-occupied Crimea from the country’s territory. “We fully understand the delicate sensitivity of this matter and while the incident was unintentional, we sincerely regret any concern it may have caused,” FIFA’s chief member association officer, Elkhan Mammadov, wrote in a letter

published Sunday by the Ukrainian soccer body. Ukraine was one of 54 national teams included in the draw Friday in Zurich for European qualifying groups for the 2026 World Cup. Russia, which has been banned from FIFA competitions because of the military invasion of Ukraine, has illegally occupied Crimea since 2014. The peninsula was not colored as part of Ukrainian territory in a graphic broadcast during the draw event at FIFA headquarters.

“Are you OK, (at)FIFACOM?” Ukraine government spokesman Heorhii Tykhyi wrote Saturday in a post on the social media platform X, adding: “We fixed the map for you and expect a public apology.” Mammadov replied that the map was provided by an outside supplier and FIFA was reviewing how to “ensure such oversights do not recur in future.” Ukraine was drawn into a qualifying group with either France or Croatia, plus Iceland and Azerbaijan. The group winner will advance directly to the World Cup being hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, and the runner-up will enter a playoff in March 2026. FIFA and European soccer body UEFA banned Russian teams from international competitions February 2022, citing expected chaos because some European federations refuse to play games against Russia.

Edoardo Bove says he’s ‘feeling good’ as he recovers from on-field collapse

AP ■ FLORENCE

Fiorentina midfielder Edoardo Bove said he is “feeling good” and that the support he received from fans, teammates and opponents helped him recover after being placed in a medically induced coma. Bove collapsed on the field during a game against Inter Milan on Dec. 1. “It’s in moments like these that I understand how genuine this sport truly is and how, beyond the results, competition and rivalries, we are all connected,” Bove posted on Instagram on Monday in his first public comments since the incident. “Connected by a bond that, once created, grows stronger during challenging times becoming almost unbreakable. “I have experienced it firsthand in these last few days: the affection I’ve received, the warmth of the fans, the support from



teammates and opponents and the closeness of the ENTIRE football world gave me incredible strength and courage,” Bove added. “I felt surrounded by positive energy, which helped me stay calm and not feel the loneliness that often comes with situations like this.” The 22-year-old Bove was released from the hospital on Friday but won’t be able to play in Italy again if he needs a defibrillator for his heart. Playing with a defibrillator is

prohibited in Italy. But Bove could follow former Inter Milan midfielder Christian Eriksen, who resumed his career in the English Premier League after he went into cardiac arrest while playing for Denmark at the European Championship in 2021 and had a defibrillator implanted. “I’m feeling good and that’s the most important thing!” Bove said. “See you soon... On the pitch!”

It’s not just about chess, there’s lot of emotional pressure too: Gukesh on world title

PTI ■ CHENNAI

His history-scripting world title was not just a result of good strategy on the chess board, said Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh on Monday, crediting mental conditioning coach Paddy Upton for helping him tame the “emotional pressure” of competing at the biggest stage. The 18-year-old Gukesh, who defeated China’s Ding Liren to become the youngest ever owner of the world title, arrived here on Monday to a rousing welcome from enthusiastic fans and officials. “In a world championship, it’s not only about chess. There is a lot of mental and emotional pressure to deal with. Paddy’s

teachings helped me in that regard,” Gukesh said in a press meet organised by Velammal Vidyalaya, his childhood school. Upton, a renowned mental conditioning coach, worked with Gukesh in the run-up to and during the the 14-game marathon event in Singapore. “The suggestions and the conversations I have had with him, have been very important for me and my development as a player,” he said. Gukesh also detailed how his association started with the South African, who has the experience of working with the 2011 cricket World Cup-winning Indian cricket team and the national men’s hockey team that bagged a bronze at

the Paris Olympics. “Paddy has been a very important part of my team. After I won the Candidates (April), I asked Sandeep sir (Sandeep Singhal of Westbridge Capital) for a mental trainer,” Gukesh recalled. “He immediately put me in touch with Paddy Upton, who has a lot of experience working with high-performance athletes,” said the youngster. In an interview to PTI a day after Gukesh’s win, Upton had lauded the teenager’s “self-awareness.” “I think that’s the thing that’s really stood out, his ability to recognise his thoughts and manage his mind and his understanding of how to do



so,” Upton said. “...He is a world champion because he was able to manage himself and remain focused and stay in the game even though he’s 0-1 down

right from the beginning. So that really is a mark of a champion,” he had stated. Gukesh also thanked Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Deputy CM

Udhayanidhi Stalin for supporting him in his chess journey. “Definitely, there was a lot of support from the Tamil Nadu government. Honorable Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister invite me home and encourage me whenever I achieve something. “The Tamil Nadu government sponsored me during the Chennai Grandmasters last year. They made all the arrangements. That’s how I won the tournament and qualified for the Candidates. “If we get more support like this, I believe more chess players will come. I am very thankful to the Tamil Nadu government,” he said. Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great

Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title. Anand played a pivotal role in shaping the teenager at his academy here. Accidental chess player Gukesh’s father Dr Rajnikanth, who is an ENT surgeon by profession, said he encouraged his son to join chess sessions in the school as a hobby. “You have to have interest and hard work, otherwise nothing will happen. We did not plan to make him a chess player, but enrolled him in Velammal school chess class as part of the extra-curricular activity. “But we supported him once he showed interest and worked hard. As a parent, we tried to give him as much exposure as possible. That’s

what I can suggest to other parents as well. “We should try to give as much exposure as possible to what your children are interested in,” he added. Rajnikanth said Gukesh likes to continuously play in tournaments to ensure that he always remains in touch with the sport. “Some players play tournaments once in two months — one month preparation and next month playing in tournaments. As far as he (Gukesh) is concerned, games are his practice. “He learns from his losses and wins. If I don’t give him a tournament for a month, he becomes restless. That’s his choice,” he added.

Jasprit Bumrah defends struggling Indian team in Australia

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Jasprit Bumrah on Monday defended the struggling Indian team in Australia and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility. Having taken a seemingly erroneous call of bowling first in the third Test at the Gabba here, India conceded a huge first-innings total of 445 despite Bumrah returning 6/76. In response, the visitors were 51/4 on a rain-hit third day with questions being raised about batters' technique and the quality of bowling, save for Bumrah. "We don't, as a team, point fingers at each other and we don't want to get into that mindset where we are pointing fingers at each other that you should do this, you should do that," Bumrah told media after stumps when asked for his assessment of India's batting. "We, as a team, are going through a transition, new players are coming

here and it's not the easiest place to play cricket. Over here, it's a different atmosphere with this wicket being a different challenge so yeah, we are not looking at that." Bumrah, who leads the bowling chart in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with 18 wickets so far, defended the Indian attack amid chatter that he is not getting adequate support from fellow bowlers. "As a bowling unit, as I said, we are in transition so it's my job to help the others. I have played a little more than them so I am trying to help them," said the owner of 191 Test wickets in just 43 Tests. "Everyone will learn through it, will get better and eventually will find different ways so this is the journey that you'll have to go through," he added. Bumrah rejected suggestions that India's poor first innings scores were putting more pressure on the bowlers and on him. "We have 11 players, it's not like that. I don't look at it that I have to do extra (work). As I said, we are a new team, a lot of new players have



come into the side. We have to be considerate and give them that cushion that they will learn from experience," he said. "Nobody is born with all the experiences, nobody is born with all the skills. You keep learning, you keep finding new ways (and) you keep learning about your own game," he continued. The Indian vice-captain said he has enjoyed the challenge of bowling on different pitches in Australia. "I always find different challenges very interesting. Because in the Test match that we played in Perth, the wicket was different. (At) Adelaide (with the pink ball) (was) different, the wicket behaved differently, the ball behaved differently," he said. "Here it is a little different because the wicket is at a level and the run-up is low. In India we are not used to that," he explained. "Don't like whinging, don't take opinions seriously" Bumrah said his primary target on encountering a challenge is to tackle it instead of looking at

others to come up with the solutions. "I look at how do I solve it, what can I do in this scenario rather than whinging or complaining or looking at someone else or pointing fingers that I need this from this person," he said. Bumrah reiterated he wants to remain level-headed in dealing with success and failures and that he cannot carry the "baggage of expectations". "When I was a youngster, yes, maybe I used to take extra baggage of fans and opinions. But I don't take any opinions seriously," he said. "I look at myself. I look at answers what I have to do. I give it my absolute best. If I have given it my absolute best, I will accept the results. (But) I cannot carry someone else's energy or baggage that people are expecting me to do the heavy-lifting," he gave a peak into his mindset. "There will be days when I will not get wickets. Somebody else will do, so I will have to do a holding job," Bumrah added.



Marsh admits being nervous at gully, hails team's bowling on Day 3

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh on Monday conceded that fielding at gully makes him the "most nervous", particularly because of Cameron Green's excellent reputation in that position. Green is not playing in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy owing to a spine injury, but Marsh has stepped into that role with some degree of comfort, underlined by his flying catch to dismiss India batter Shubman Gill on day three of the Third Test here. "Yeah, I think since I've come back into the Test team, fielding at gully is probably when I feel the most nervous because Green is likely to go down as one of the best ever. If you drop one there, you're always compared to him," Marsh said during the post-day press conference. Marsh's brilliant catch off left-arm quick Mitchell Starc led to Gill's dismissal for one as India ended Day 3 on a precarious 51 for four. "Any time I can do something like that -- I probably didn't even need to dive, to be fair -- but I thought it had a bit of a moment, and it is a fun team. It's a great team to be a part of. So, yeah, I like fielding there, but honestly, being at square leg is just as good." Marsh was happy to see the hosts scoring 445 in their first

innings. "I think when you get sent in and you make 450, it's always positive, and then I guess you earn the right to attack, especially early with the ball. Like I said before, now it's just about how do we try and take 20 wickets. We've got six more to get, and then we just assess from there." Asked if they would enforce the follow-on, he said: "I think we've got six wickets to take first, but we know that we've got to take 20 wickets to try and win this Test and I guess all the conversations and all the planning will be, how do we do that." "So, hopefully the weather holds off, and then tomorrow it's just about coming in, having a crack, and see where we get to." After their humiliating defeat in the opening Test in Perth, Australia have been able to get on top of the Indian batters. "I think we bowled really well. Today was no different, and we've been able to take wickets with the new ball, albeit the second innings in Perth. "Our bowling attack has some great bowlers, and they're attacking, they look to take wickets all the time, and hopefully that can continue." Premier batter Virat Kohli once again fell prey to his longstanding vulnerability outside the off-stump, chasing a delivery pitched wide and edging it to the wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Mohammed Siraj bowling with a niggle

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday revealed that Mohammed Siraj has been bowling with a niggle and praised him for fighting through pain during the ongoing third Test against Australia here. Siraj claimed two wickets in his 23.2 overs in the first innings, and Bumrah, who once again emerged as the best bowler with figures of six for 76, credited his colleague for supporting the team despite the discomfort. "We (Siraj and I) have had conversations but this was the conversation he had with me before we came here (Brisbane). When we came here in Perth, as well as the last game, he looked in very good spirits," Bumrah told reporters after day three. "He was bowling well and he has picked up a fair few of the wickets. In this game, I will give him credit that he had a



little bit of a niggle but he still kept on bowling and still helped the team because he knew if he goes inside and he doesn't bowl, then that team will go under pressure. "So I think he has got a great attitude and he has got a fighter spirit that the team loves," he said. Siraj looked in discomfort when he clutched his hamstring after bowling the second ball of the 37th over of Australia's first innings. The physio was called onto the

field and Siraj then left the field as Akash Deep completed the over. The 30-year-old, however, returned to the field on Day 2 and ended up taking the wickets of Australia skipper Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon. "I personally love that as well, that he is up for a fight and he always gives it all for the team. So I think that is the biggest positive for any cricketer going forward. "That he gives it his absolute

best on the field. And even when he is not 100% fit, when he has got a niggle, he is still fighting for the team. So that is a great attitude." "Keep running in, keep having a smile on your face" Siraj has taken five and four wickets in the first two Tests in Perth and Adelaide but he has also been criticised for a lack of control over his lines and lengths, especially during the third Test, which allowed the Australian batters to get away early in their innings on Day 2. However, Bumrah has advised Siraj to just focus on the controllables. "Yes, in terms of wickets and all, some days you will bowl well, the wickets will come as I spoke to him before. And some days you will not bowl very well but the wickets will follow. So it's all money in the bank," Bumrah said. "That is the conversation that I have had with him. That you keep focusing on your stuff, things that you can control."



Gavaskar urges Virat Kohli to refrain from playing cover drive

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Monday urged India superstar Virat Kohli to draw inspiration from Sachin Tendulkar's monumental 241 against Australia in Sydney in 2004 and refrain from playing cover drive in order to end his persistent struggle against deliveries outside off-stump. On a rain-marred third day of the ongoing Brisbane Test, Kohli copped yet another failure when Josh Hazlewood had him caught behind for 3 as a struggling India ended at 51 for 4 when the stumps were drawn. Gavaskar said Kohli, who has scores of 5, 100 not out, 7, 11 and 3 so far on this tour, need not look beyond "his hero" Tendulkar, who responded with an exceptional 436-ball 241 including 33 fours at the SCG when he too was going through a similar phase of getting caught behind during the Australia tour of 2003-04. Tendulkar's knock, for which he batted more than 10 hours, is widely considered as one of his best-ever as the legendary batter curbed his instinct to drive and scored the majority of his runs on the on-side. "He (Kohli) only needs to

look at his hero, Sachin Tendulkar. The way in which he (Tendulkar) had kept his patience and control on his off-side game, scoring those 241 runs at Sydney," Gavaskar told Star Sports. "He did not play any shot on the off-side, or at least in the cover (region) because before that he was getting dismissed while attempting to play in covers. "The shots that he played were pretty much straight or on the on-side," he added. Gavaskar said Kohli, who has been caught behind the wickets thrice on this tour, must look to defend every single delivery in the channel of the off-stump and find other scoring areas like Tendulkar did. "Similarly, he (Kohli) should keep a control on his mind and on his game. If the ball is on the off-stump, (he should think that) I would defend it. I would not try to score off it," Gavaskar said. The legendary batter said Kohli should trust his bottom-hand play more than going for his drives in order to banish his troubles. "He has such a wonderful bottom hand play, with that he can play in that area, straight or towards midwicket," Gavaskar said.

Isa Guha calls Bumrah a 'primate', apologises for her remark later

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former England player and commentator Isa Guha, who referred to Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah as a "primate" during the third Test between India and Australia here, apologised for her racist remark on Monday. She said she was "deeply sorry" for choosing a wrong word to describe the India pacer's brilliant display with the ball. Guha made the comment in response to Brett Lee's praise of the Indian bowler after Bumrah dismissed both Australian openers on day two of the Test on Sunday. "Well, he's the MVP, isn't he? Most valuable primate, Jasprit Bumrah," Guha had said while commentating for Fox Cricket. "He is the one that's going to do all the talking for India, and why so much focus was on him in the buildup to this Test match, and whether he would be fit." The usage of the word "primate" by Guha caused a social media storm, as fans



admire greatly." Guha, who is of Indian heritage and has been in Fox Sports' broadcast team for several years, said there was no malice in her comments. "I'm an advocate for equality and someone who has spent their career thinking about inclusion and understanding in the game. "I was trying to frame the enormity of his achievement and I've chosen the wrong word. For that I am deeply sorry," she added. "As someone who is also ... of South Asian heritage, I hope people would recognise there was no other intention or malice there. I hope this doesn't overshadow what has been a great Test match so far and I look forward to seeing how it progresses. Once again, I am really, really sorry." Former India head coach Ravi Shastri, who sat next to Guha when she issued the apology, praised her for addressing the matter live on air. Former Australia wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist was also there.

Kane Williamson makes 156 as New Zealand sets a target of 658 for England

AP ■ HAMILTON

Kane Williamson made 156 as New Zealand amassed a lead of 657 runs before both England openers were dismissed to leave the hosts in a commanding position at the end of the third day of the third cricket test on Monday. To compound an already dismal day for the tourists, England captain Ben Stokes limped from the field with a recurrence of a hamstring injury. Williamson's 33rd test century was his seventh at Seddon Park and his fifth in consecutive tests on a home ground on which he averages more than 100. New Zealand finally was dismissed for 453 after leading by 204 on the first innings and in five overs before stumps England slumped to 18-2. Tim Southee bowled Ben Duckett (4) off an inside edge in the second over of the England innings as the opener charged the veteran seamer who is playing his final Test. Zac Crawley (5) was dismissed by Matt Henry for the sixth time in the series, trapped lbw one over

before stumps. Jacob Bethell 9 not out and Joe Root had yet to score were at the crease at the close. "Whenever you take a wicket for New Zealand it's special," said Southee who now has 390 test wickets. "Playing for New Zealand has been such a big part of my life and it's been such an honor to do what I've been able to do. "Hopefully the next couple of days will be a good couple of days but an emotional couple of days too." Stokes was bowling the second ball of his 13th over when, on his follow-through, he clutched at the hamstring of his left leg. He immediately walked from the field with his hand covering the lower half of his face on which was etched both pain and distress. Stokes suffered a serious injury to his left hamstring while playing in The Hundred in August for the Northern Superchargers against the Manchester Originals. He was on crutches for some time and forced to miss England's test series against Sri Lanka and the first test of the sub-series against Pakistan. Ollie Pope took over the captaincy in Stokes' absence. During his six-hour innings,



Williamson overtook South Africa's Graeme Smith to move up to 17th place on the list of leading test run-scorers six behind

another South African, Hashim Amla. He shared partnerships on Monday of 107 with Rachin

Ravindra (44) and 92 with Daryl Mitchell (60). His century came from 137 balls and his 150 from 196 balls, the third 50 from 59

runs as New Zealand stepped up its scoring towards an expected declaration. The entire first session on the third day was lost to rain and a damp outfield. Play resumed at 1.30 with New Zealand 136-3, Williamson 50 not out and Ravindra 2. Williamson scored fluently throughout the day, hitting 14 fours and a six in his century. He was typically powerful square of the wicket, particularly in his use of the cut shot. Ravindra was sometimes bogged down, at the start of the day when he added only a handful of runs in the first hour and later when he found his scoring options limited. At times England bowled to a 7-2 offside field which plugged some scoring zones. With wide gaps on the leg side, Ravindra tried to drag a ball from Matthew Potts outside his off stump through mid-wicket but edged it from the outside half of the bat to Brydon Carse at mid-off. Mitchell joined Williamson and batted with more urgency which seemed an indication of an impending declaration. He hit two sixes and seven fours in his 60

from 84 balls before holing out to Matthew Potts in the deep to give Jacob Bethell his first test wicket. New Zealand had a 500 run lead by 4.55pm on a day when play could go on until 7.30pm, under lights if necessary, because of the loss of the morning session. It led by 600 at 6.10pm but no declaration came. England took the second new ball after 93.4 overs when the lead was 604 and put in the hands of off-spinner Shoaib Bashir who took 2-170, the most expensive bowling figures against New Zealand. Mitchell Santner took 16 runs from the first over bowled by Joe Root and was out in the same over for 49. That brought Southee to the crease for his final innings in his 107th and last test, needing two sixes to become the fourth player after Stokes, England coach and former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum and Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist to hit 100 sixes in tests. He was welcomed by a guard of honor of England players but made only 2 as the New Zealand innings ended with wicketkeeper Tom Blundell 44 not out.