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THE EVOLVING LAND-SCAPE OF PHILANTHROPY

**WORLD 8**

ISRAELI DEFENCE MINISTER LAYS OUT VISION FOR NEXT PHASE OF GAZA WAR

**MONEY 10**

INDIAN ECONOMY OUTPERFORMING PEERS: UN

BHUBANESWAR, SATURDAY JANUARY 06, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4



# TMC goons tear into ED officials

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ SANDESHKHALI

Several Enforcement Directorate officials and members of the Central forces escorting them were grievously injured on Friday morning when they were attacked and chased away by around two thousand Trinamool Congress members armed with bamboos, brickbats, etc. The incident occurred at Sarberia village of Sandeshkhali Police Station in North 24 Parganas, about 73 km east of Kolkata. The officials had gone there to conduct raids on the properties of SK Sahjehan, a TMC strongman, to investigate his alleged role in the multi-crore ration scam. This scam has already led to the imprisonment of Jyotipriya Mallick, the Bengal Forest Minister, formerly in charge of the Food Ministry, last October.

"We were conducting raids at SK Sahjehan's house around 8 in the morning. As the CRPF men were breaking the locks, suddenly thousands of people, including women armed with sticks and bamboos, charged in from all directions. They pushed us around and then attacked us. Our vehicles were literally smashed, and we had to run in all directions for our dear lives," recounted an official. Among the injured was an assistant director-level official, according to sources, and the officials have been



One of the ED official injured in an assault by supporters of TMC leader Sheikh Sajahan during a raid at the latter's residence in North 24 Parganas on Friday PTI

admitted to a private facility in Kolkata. Locals reported that CRPF men had to beat a hasty retreat on the broken vehicles, while some of the ED men fled on auto-rickshaws and totos when hundreds of armed men charged at them menacingly. Some sought refuge in the local police outpost, while others rushed to the riverside and were ferried across on police boats, sources added. Apart from the attackers, some levelheaded people in the area privately praised the Central forces for showing utmost restraint in the melee. "God save us and many others... the Central forces acted very professionally by not opening fire. If they had done so, there would have been many casualties, and that could have led to mayhem in the area," said a local teacher who was going to his school in the morning. The planned nature of the

attack was further supported by reports that the fleeing officials were waylaid at Basanti Highway en route to Kolkata. "Their passage was blocked by trucks. They were pulled out of their vehicles and hit with bamboo sticks. I saw two of them getting hit on the head, and one was bleeding profusely. We were so afraid that we could not go to help," said a local shopkeeper, adding, "the bleeding officials were not even ready to go to the nearby health centre. They somehow managed to take auto-rickshaws." "What will you do when you are encircled by a thousand armed people from all sides in a distant land? It was a village, and many of us had to jump into the paddy fields to run to safety. We were running helter-skelter for some time. Are we doing national duty? Are we combat people, or are we dacoits?" an official said,

literally on the verge of breaking down. The raids were part of ED operations in 10 places, including the premises of TMC leader Shankhar Adhya in Bongaon and SK Sahjehan in North 24 Parganas. Their premises were reportedly being raided due to their alleged connections to the ration scam. It is also alleged that Adhya has been involved in money trading, and the agencies were looking into his possible role in money laundering related to recruitment and ration scams. Switching to Sandeshkhali, Union Minister of State for Home Nisith Pramanik, giving his first reaction to the incident, said, "It is the duty of the State police to provide security, but things work differently in Bengal where security forces are under regular attack." He said Friday's attack was not on the Central officials but "on the federal structure." He added, "The Centre has taken this matter very seriously, and we will inquire into it with all seriousness." Curiously, local TMC MLA Srikanto Mahato justified the mob attack, calling it "jano rosh (public anger)." He said, "How do the villagers know who has come? It could be dacoits; it could be thieves in uniform trying to break open the locks. So they thought that they should protect the house of their dear leader, and they ran to save his house."

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**SHRI NAVEEN PATNAIK**  
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Odisha

**6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2024, 7.30 PM**

OIPR-19004/13/0026/2324



# Hi-Tech Hosp blast High drama over identification of 'dead' Dilip Samantray

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a twist to the AC compressor explosion case at the Hi-Tech Medical College Hospital in Bhubaneswar, a victim who was undergoing treatment in the ICU claimed that he is actually Dilip Samantray, who was earlier declared dead in the mishap.

The identity of Dilip, a native of Jatni in Khordha district, has become a cause of confusion. Another victim, believed to be Jyotiranjana Mallik, came out of ICU on Thursday following treatment and claimed that he is actually Dilip Samantray, leaving the two families perplexed.

As per reports, the hospital declared Dilip Samantray dead on December 30 following the AC compressor blast during gas filling on December 29. There were four persons admitted to the hospital after the blast who worked for the AC repairing agency outsourced by the hospital.

A body which was almost completely charred in the blast was handed over to Dilip Samantray's family by the hospital on December 31 and the family performed his cremation. However, injured Jyotiranjana Mallik woke up from the ventilator on Thursday and claimed to be Dilip Samantray leading to confusion.

Hi-Tech hospital CEO Smita Padhi said, "All the four persons who were initially injured in the compressor blast are not the employees of the hospital. They are the staffs of an outsourcing agency. A staff of that outsourcing agency had identified the injured after the blast."

"A patient had died on December 30. We were told that he was Dilip Samantray. Following the procedure, we informed police. The family of the deceased identified the body and signed the inquest. Then, police performed all the required procedures before handing over of the body to their relatives," she claimed.

Out of the four, two are currently under treatment. One has been identified as Simanchal, and the other person is Jyoti Ranjan Mallik. Jyoti was on the ventilator. But after he came out of the ventilator, he claimed to be Dilip Samantray. While some people are convinced that he is in fact Dilip Samantray, his father claims he is Jyoti pointing to an identification mark on his leg. We are confused about who is who. So we have informed the police. They will know what to do next," Padhi added.

Asked about the hospital authorities' claims, AC repair agency's employee Sanjay Sahu said, "I knew three of them, not the fourth one. And I never identified them individually. It was utter chaos back then when the blast occurred. I just told the hospital authorities their names, did not tell them who is who. Even my mental condition was not right at that time."

Psychologist Amrit Pattajoshi who conducted the psychometric evaluation of the patient said, "When Dilip Samantray's body was handed over to his parents, he had already sustained 95-per cent burns. His face was abnormally swollen. Identifying him was not possible. But his family members were overly emotional. They might have mistaken the body as Dilip's."

"Being said that, Jyoti's family, particularly his father has been seeing him on the hospital bed from the last six days. They are sure that the man is in fact Jyoti. But when the ventilator was removed today, he claimed his name as Dilip Samantray. Sometimes when a patient receives trauma, stays in the ICU for a long time, they may become delirious because of psychosis," Pattajoshi said.

"But when we called Dilip's family to the hospital who are already mourning his death, the patient answered all the questions right. He even knows the answers which Jyoti can't possibly know," he added. Dilip's nephew Manoj Samantray, who had come to the hospital after being called by the authorities, said, "I addressed him as 'Mamu' and he replied to me exactly like my uncle Dilip Samantray. When we questioned him about his family, his wife, location of his in-laws and other things, he answered them accurately."

"When the hospital handed over the body to us on December 31, it was completely covered in polythene. The body was charred beyond recognition. As the hospital gave it to us saying he was Dilip; so, we believed them and performed his last rites. But I now see that my uncle Dilip Samantray is alive and well," Manoj Samantray said. It is particularly devastating for the Samantray family because Dilip's wife Sunita ended her life by hanging from a fan out of grief. She was depressed after hearing about her husband Dilip Samantray's death. She could not bear the grief anymore.

Notably, another injured person had succumbed while under treatment on Tuesday night. He was identified as Sritam Sahu.



Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday launched the District SDG Indicator Framework Odisha and the SDG Odisha website. Patnaik also released the department-wise Ready Reckoners, department-wise Convergence Matrices and Mastering Metadata in the Odisha SDG Indicator Framework 2.0 series. The CM said the SDGs emphasise the importance of inclusive and equitable development. In line with these goals, the policies of our government have been directed towards creating a level playing field for all sections of society and bring parity for every individual in opportunity for growth.

He pointed out that initiatives like Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, MAMATA, Mission Shakti, KALIA, Odisha Millets Mission, Laxmi, Empowerment and Livelihoods Improvement Programme for PVTGs, BASUDHA and many such other initiatives directly address the challenges highlighted by the SDGs.

He further said that these initiatives have paved the way for enhancing the quality of life for every citizen. Notably, the SDG has 17 goals and 169 targets which need to be achieved by 2030 for developing a perfectly equitable society. The district framework would target achievement of these goals at the district level with better monitoring process supported by standardised data.

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# Police to take Pahadi Gang on remand

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate police have prepared a plan to arrest the absconding members of the 'Pahadi Gang' which is involved in multiple loots in the capital city. Police on Wednesday had arrested eight members of the gang that used to clean up money from various UPI and bank accounts of people after stealing mobile phones in the city.

According to police, the gang used to operate in groups across the country in teams of 14 to 15 persons. They were also involved in multiple cases in Odisha as well. The gang's mastermind and the cyber experts who were working for the gang are still on the run.

Hence, police have prepared plans to nab the absconding members of the gang. Immediately after getting intelligence inputs, a team of the Commissionerate police would go out of the State to nab the culprits.

City DCP Prateek Singh said the persons, who have been arrested, would be taken into remand for interrogation. "The gang's mastermind is still on the run. The arrested persons' job was to steal mobile phones. The job of the gang's cyber experts was to clean up money from the bank accounts of the mobile phone owners. We will nab the members of their cyber team. We will take the arrested persons in remand to get more information. Whenever we get any intelligence inputs, we will go and nab them," said Singh.

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**MONEY 10**

INDIAN ECONOMY OUTPERFORMING PEERS: UN

BHUBANESWAR, SATURDAY JANUARY 06, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4



**Odisha's Development: Modi Government's Commitment**

"Indian Railways is a good example if one has to see how India is changing and how dreams can come true."  
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

Inauguration of  
**Nuagaon Road-Daspalla Section of Khurda Road-Balangir New Rail Line & Daspalla Railway Station Building**  
and  
Flagging off of  
**Extension of 4 Train Services to Daspalla**

**Benefits**

- Three line Station with Two looplines
- Two high-level platforms with Platform Shelters
- Foot Over Bridge connecting both platforms
- Circulating area with parking facility
- Long cherished demand of the region fulfilled
- Direct train connectivity to Puri, Bhubaneswar and Bhadrak
- Unconnected hinterland areas of the region will be benefited
- Boost to the Socio-Economic development of the region

by

**Ashwini Vaishnav**

Minister of Railways, Communications and Electronics & Information Technology, Govt. of India

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 | Time: 0930 hrs. | Venue: Daspalla Railway Station

All are cordially invited



**Indian Navy Daredevils dive in to rescue our citizens**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy's elite marine commandos on Friday successfully carried out an operation to intercept a hijacked merchant vessel and rescue several crew members, including at least 15 Indians. The Liberian-flagged vessel MV Lila Norfolk was hijacked off the coast of Somalia.

The Navy deployed a warship, maritime patrol aircraft, helicopters, P-8I, and long-range aircraft, along with Predator MQ9B drones following the incident involving MV Lila Norfolk. "All 21 crew members, including 15 Indians, onboard the vessel, were safely evacuated from the citadel," said Indian Navy's spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal.

"The sanitisation carried out by MARCOs commandos confirmed the absence of hijackers. The attempted hijacking by the pirates was likely abandoned following a forceful warning by the Indian Navy's maritime patrol aircraft regarding interception by naval warships," he added. Providing details of the rescue operation, Navy



officials mentioned that the Indian warship INS Chennai intercepted the hijacked ship around 3:15 pm on Friday and instructed the approximately five pirates to abandon the vessel. The Indian Navy Marine Commandos boarded the hijacked ship and commenced sanitisation. MV Lila Norfolk was hijacked late on Thursday near the coast of Somalia. The hijacking was reported by the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), a British military organisation that tracks movements of various vessels in strategic waterways. Following the incident, the Indian Navy deployed its

destroyer INS Chennai, and a Navy aircraft constantly tracked the hijacked ship. It was hijacked by pirates 300 nautical miles east of Somalia. The ship was sailing from Port Du Aco (Brazil) and was bound for Khalifa Bin Salman in Bahrain. The Indian Navy's maritime patrol aircraft overflew the vessel early Friday and established contact with the vessel, ascertaining the safety of the crew, officials said. "The Indian Navy remains committed to ensuring the safety of merchant shipping in the region along with international partners and friendly foreign countries," the spokesperson added. Last month, the Navy

deployed several warships into the sea to "maintain a deterrent presence" after a series of recent shipping attacks, including a drone attack near India's coast attributed to Iran by the United States. The latest attack comes at a time when many vessels have been rerouted from the Red Sea, where Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have conducted drone and missile attacks in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, amid Israel's conflict with Hamas. In the previous month, a drone attack targeted the MV Chem Pluto tanker 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) off the coast of India.



DSPL-514

**Chief Minister's Award**

to the Best Performing Banks in Priority Sector Lending

Category of Awards :

**Champion Bank for Farmers**

**Champion Bank for Small Entrepreneurs**

**Champion Bank for Women SHGs**



Cash Incentive for Each Category

FIRST PRIZE

₹5 Lakh

SECOND PRIZE

₹3 Lakh

THIRD PRIZE

₹2 Lakh

Finance Department



Chief Guest

**Shri Naveen Patnaik**  
Hon'ble Chief Minister, Odisha

Venue: Convention Centre, Lokaseva Bhawan  
6th January 2024, 5.00 PM



# Bandh in Rayagada over tribal warden's death

CBI probe demanded

PNS ■ RAYAGADA

vehicular traffic came to a grinding halt, streets wore a deserted look and government and private establishments shut down as the District Adivasi Mahasanga and members of BJP called a 12-hour bandh over the alleged murder of a physically-challenged tribal warden, Laxmi Majhi, in Rayagada district on Friday.

Seeking justice against torture and murder of tribal people,

the agitators demanded a CBI probe into not just the case of the warden but two other alleged murders of tribal leaders which took place in the district.

On December 21, a semi-nude body of Laxmi Majhi was recovered from hospital premises. Majhi, a resident of Naktiguda village in Tikiri panchayat of Kashipur block, was working as a warden at Maa Gruha in Chandrapur for the last five years. On the fateful day, she had left Maa Gruha at around 4 pm. Hours later, her fellow workers found her half-charred body and informed her family who alleged that she had

been murdered. Prior to that, tribal youth leaders Bhagirathi Mandangi and Purushottam Gamango were allegedly killed in December 2010 and December 2019, respectively.

Following Majhi's death, the Zilla Adivasi Mahasanga and later the BJP Mahila Morcha had staged protests alleging police inaction and announced a bandh on January 5. "It's been 16 days since Chandrapur warden Laxmi Majhi was found dead, but police and Crimbe Branch have not yet nabbed the accused. This is not an isolated case. First, BJD leader Bhagirathi Mandangi, then

Purushottam Gamango and now is the case of Majhi. There has been no headway in their death investigations. We want justice for these people and demand a CBI probe into the three murders," the protestors stated

On December 29, the Crime Branch had initiated its inquiry at the Maa Gruha, where Laxmi Majhi served as a warden. Initial findings indicated that Majhi, who was allegedly killed on December 21, might have been murdered elsewhere before her body was set on fire near Maa Gruha to erase crucial evidence.

## Pioneer impact

# K'jhar homeless old couple gets wheelchair

Also to be provided land

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Though late, the Keonjhar district administration has finally come to the rescue of the poor old couple living by the roadside in Keonjhar town after news on their miserable conditions was published in The Pioneer on November 18.

As a first step towards helping the poor family, on the Collector's public grievance hearing day on January 1, a wheel chair was provided to



Sukanti Naik (50), wife of Kailash Naik (60), who is physi-

cally handicapped and unable to walk without a stick due to

operation on her right knee. When we wanted to know from district Collector Ashish Thackray about constructing a house for the poor old couple, he said that their grievance has been sent to the concerned department and very soon, action will be taken to help the poor landless family as per the Government guidelines.

Meanwhile, former Treasury Officer Manmohan Patra has thanked the Collector for steps taken by the district administration and The Pioneer for highlighting the issue.

# In Balangir Minor girl raped, murdered

PNS ■ BALANGIR

Her family members made frantic searches all over the area and finally found her lying under a bush near a river. They took her to the Bhima Bhoi Medical College Hospital, where the doctors pronounced her dead. A case has been registered at the Saintala police station on the basis of her father's complaint.

Later, hundreds of locals gheraoed the Saintala police station demanding justice for the girl's family.

As per reports, the victim had gone out to attend nature's call at night. But she never returned home.

# In Keonjhar Man, daughter run over by truck

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Tension mounted in the Rugudi police station area of Keonjhar district on Friday when a man and his daughter were killed in a fatal road accident.

The deceased were identified as Ramsingh Munda (30) and his daughter Turi Munda (5) of Lasarda village under the Bolani police station. The

mishap occurred on the National Highway 520 near Rugudi police station, when they were returning to their village from Rugudi by a motorbike. A trailer ran over them, resulting in their death on the spot. Later, police rushed to the spot, seized both the vehicles and sent the dead bodies to a private hospital in Joda for postmortem.

# Artistic gymnastics meet Railways men, women's team win gold

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a spectacular display of athleticism and precision, Indian Railways emerged victorious in the Senior Artistic Gymnastics Championship held at the Kalinga Stadium here.

The team showcased exceptional skill and determination, securing team champion titles in both men's and women's categories, earning them well-deserved gold medals.



After 12 years, the men's artistic gymnastics team reclaimed their championship glory, finishing with a remarkable score of 293.00. The women's artistic gymnastics team showcased their prowess with a score of 182.60, reinforcing Indian Railways' dominance in the gymnastics arena.

Individual excellence shone through in the Vault Table event, with standout performances from notable athletes. Pranati Nayak, a Tokyo Olympian proudly representing Indian Railways, secured a gold medal while Deepa Karmakar, a Rio Olympian from Tripura,

clinched the silver, while Protistah Samanta of Indian Railways proudly earned the bronze.

Suvendra Kumar Patra was nominated as coach of Indian Railways team. The medal ceremony was graced by chief guests Ajay Kumar Samal, general secretary, East Coast Railway Sports Association (ECoRSA), Prakhar Gupta, Joint general secretary, ECoRSA and Ashoka Kumar Mishra, CPRO.

# Tusks seized, 2 poachers held in Anandpur

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

The Forest Department personnel of Anandpur Wildlife Division of Keonjhar district seized two elephant tusks and arrested two poachers from bordering Satkosia reserve forest area of Mayurbhanj district in this connection.

Based on a tip-off, the offi-

cial conducted a raid in Satkosia area under Thakurmunda police station limits and apprehended the two poachers. The accused were identified as Babuli Haiburu of Mahuldiha and Kalandi Sankhual of Sunduria.

The Forest Department inquired in detail about the tusks. It is suspected that the poachers collected the tusks

after killing the elephants from Similipal or Satkosia reserve forest area. Involvement of people outside the State in the tusk racket is not ruled out.

Divisional Forest Officer, Anandpur, Abhay Kumar Daleoi said, "The accused were forwarded to court. We are investigating in detail more about the involvement of any other poachers in the

incident and their link with others."

According to the sources, there are many elephants that have been reported dead in Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj district, with some of them having been allegedly killed by poachers. Many times, the Forest officials recovered the decomposed carcasses, days after their death.

# Child rights, safety awareness held in N'pada

AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA

An awareness programme on child rights and child protection was held by the Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC), Bhubaneswar, with the help of Child Fund Germany and BMZ Germany in the premises of Chakotia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA) at Michhapali under Komna block on Sunday.

Komna BDO Hitansu Samal and District Child Protection Officer Antarijyami Baliarsingh were the chief guest and guest of honour respectively. Member, Juvenile Justice Board Nivedita Samal, Member, District Child Welfare Committee Narayan



Joshi, Ahalya Pujari and Babita Mishra were also guests of honour. Police Sub Inspector, Gauri Shankar Mishra and Medical Officer Samya Ranjan Panda were also present.

The guests discussed about child rights, safety, nutritious food for children and how to stop the problem of child marriage and reduce children dropout rate in schools through better implementation of various Government

schemes available for children. Hundreds of children from 22 villages under four Gram Panchayats of Komna Block, members, Child Protection Committee and School Management Committee participated.

Children of the education center run by RDCC participated in games and various competitions like drawing, poetry, singing, general knowledge and music chair etc. Those who won were awarded certificates and prizes. Various cultural programmes were organised by the RCDC. Project Officer Pradeep Kumar Patra coordinated the events with the support of Ratnakar, Sudershan, Yudhisthir and Mansingh.

## PESA Regulations 2023

# Extend feedback deadline by 3 months: Forum

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The Indigenous People's Forum (IPF) expressed dissatisfaction over the Odisha Gram Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Regulations 2023 issued by the Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Department on Wednesday.

The regulations aim to modify several critical aspects, including reservations, ownership of forest produce, money lending control, land preservation, water bodies management, and land acquisition in the Scheduled Areas. The IPF flagged concerns

regarding the notice period and said that in the absence of public feedback, the draft will be treated as the final Gazette copy. It urged for an extended notice period to allow thorough public engagement.

Attended by representatives from Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Gajapati, Kandhamal and Ganjam districts, the meeting discussed the proposed regulations. While acknowledging the regulations' intention to foster governance and peace in Scheduled Areas, they stressed the importance of consulting the 62 distinct tribal groups in

Odisha. Each group possesses unique traditional governance systems, indicating the necessity for inclusive discussions to align the regulations with their perspectives and suggestions effectively.

The IPF also raised concerns regarding the alleged lack of dissemination of the notification through Brahmapur editions via print or electronic media. The representatives criticised the State Government for issuing the notification without prior consultations with the diverse tribal groups, thereby overlooking their varied traditional governance systems. Addition-

ally, they lamented the absence of tribal leaders in the consultation process and highlighted the inadequate discussions with tribal communities or the Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) during the regulation formulation.

Ultimately, the IPF strongly opposed the Odisha Gram Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Regulations 2023, deeming them incongruent with the Employment Act, 1996. They urged the State Government to extend the public comment deadline, originally set for January 9, by an additional three months until

July 9, 2024. Furthermore, they advocated for a comprehensive and inclusive formulation of Gram Panchayat (PESA) regulations, rooted in constitutional mandates and reflective of the social and cultural ethos of tribal communities.

"We urged the State Government through memorandum via Odisha Governor Raghubar Das, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and Navin Odisha Chairman VK Pandian to address these concerns to ensure equitable governance in Scheduled Areas," IPF convener Theophil Gomango said.

# 5T, Sarvodaya & Symbiotic Culture

Mahatma Gandhi's Sarvodaya is a doctrine that is based on economic development, social equality and social welfare. His Sarvodaya is a positive definition of an organised social order. Gandhi's revolutionary thought on Sarvodaya was born on a train journey in the year 1904. While travelling in train from Johannesburg to Durban, Gandhi got a book from his friend and associate Henry Polak. The book's name was "On to the Last" written by John Ruskin. The basic mantra of the book was a moral and righteous economy necessary for a prospered society. And the relationship between master and servant must be governed only by mutual respect and trust. Gandhi was so impressed and inspired by Ruskin's book that he could not sleep on the train that day. He thought to apply it in a real sense. Further, Gandhi translated the book in Gujarati and titled it Sarvodaya.

It is believed that Gandhi's favourite State was Odisha and Odisha also loved Gandhi's ideals. Gandhi's principles of non-violence and his "Talisman" philosophy are being used in the Odisha adminis-



ABASH PARIDA

trative sphere. Gandhi speaks of Talisman for the attainment of prosperity, which is necessary for both the general public and the head of State. Gandhi's Talismanic story goes like this: "I give you a shield. Whenever doubt creeps into your mind or pride consumes you, try it. It will relieve the crisis. Think of the face of the poorest woman or man you have ever seen. And ask yourself, how far will your work help them? How will you boost their self-esteem? How far can you help a starving person? These questions will clear your doubts. You will be empty of ego."

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's 5T (Transformative Initiative) is a

postmodern approach inspired by Gandhi's philosophy of "Sarvodaya". The 5T initiative is an umbrella term. It embraces all general principles, guidelines and practices related to development and social progress. The term "Sarvodaya" translates to "the welfare of all" in Sanskrit. It emphasizes the idea of comprehensive and inclusive development that addresses the welfare of all individuals in society. Its main objective is to provide social security to every individual especially at the grassroots level and to include them in the mainstream of development. By keeping these thoughts as the core principles of good governance, the foundations of modern transformational initiatives were laid in Odisha. Both Gandhi's Sarvodaya and Odisha's 5T have emphasized on key social elements such as social equality, inclusive development, community empowerment and non-violence. The elements in the 5T (transformational initiatives) are Transparency, Technology, Teamwork, Time and Transformation. These are key principles in good management and organisational processes.

Like Gandhi's Sarvodaya, Odisha's 5T ideal framework is an "oceanic circle" or sea cycle. It means there will be ever-widening, never-ascending circles. The circle keeps growing and it never shrinks. The thrust of this notion is 'Life will not



be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom". The centre of the circle is the individual. The same theme has been administered by the Odisha Government by including creative administrative programmes to create a realistic social system from health to housing, education to environment and technology to transportation.

A book titled "Symbiotic Culture" focusses about the widespread

application and practice of Sarvodaya. The book is written by Richard Flyer. The book focuses on Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. The core of the book is all about symbiotic culture. It refers to a society where mutu-

ally beneficial relationships and cooperation among people from different groups ranging from family to neighbourhood, nation and planet become the new norm. Human society is now moving into a new symbiotic era. It means a Culture to Connect.

Flyer has been associated with Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya Shramadana movement for the last 35 years. He sees modern Sarvodaya as a tradi-

tion of association and a culture of connectedness. Further, he added that whether it's Mahatma Gandhi's vision of a new society, Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mount, or Sri Lanka's Sarvodaya Shramadana movement founded by AT Ariyaratne, the main objective is to empower local communities from the grassroots.

The transformative initiatives for Odisha's development and progress are the frameworks for the new Sarvodaya or Flyer's notion of symbiotic culture. These measures are meticulously designed to address social inclusion and social inequality. Active collective participation of marginalised sections is emphasised in Odisha's 5T initiatives. As like new global culture to connect, a chain of connection between individual, community, group, village, administration and Government has been arranged by the Odisha Administration.

As mentioned earlier, a wide application of Sarvodaya is seen in Odisha, both at the governance and administrative levels. The motto of Naveen's Government is "good governance vouches for inclusiveness." So, the transformational ini-

tiatives have included infrastructure, education, healthcare, technology, poverty alleviation, rural development, women's empowerment and environmental sustainability in overall well-being. Odisha has a number of equality-based transformational initiatives such as Mamata Yojana, Mission Shakti, Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana and Madhu Babu Pension Yojana etc with a common goal, that is, the overall social welfare and collective development of the neglected, poor and grassroots people.

In the practical application of Sarvodaya-talisman story in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's people centric attitude and the visionary influence, value-based action and grassroots outreach of VK Pandian, the Chairman of 5T, have played an important role. The Niti Aayog of Government of India is confident about the future and application of 5T in Odisha. It is also mapping out how it can become a larger social landscape across the country. The soul of India is Sarvodaya and Sarvodaya is democracy.

(Dr Parida is an Associate Professor in Sociology,



# TMC Government continuation threat to national security: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday came down heavily on the Trinamool Congress over an incident of attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials in West Bengal, saying the continuation of the party's government under Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is a threat to national security. The ED officers were reportedly assaulted and their vehicles damaged allegedly by sup-

porters of TMC leader Sheikh Sajahan when they tried to raid his residence in North 24 Parganas district this morning in connection with a probe into the ration distribution scam. According to officials, the ED officers left their damaged vehicles and took auto rickshaws and two-wheelers to move out of Sandeshkhali. At least two of the officers suffered serious injuries and were taken to a hospital. Reacting sharply to the incident, BJP co-in-charge for polit-



ical affairs in West Bengal Amit Malviya wrote on X, "This is how lawless Bengal is." "Continuance of the TMC government in West Bengal is a national security threat," he said. Malviya said the team of ED and accompanying media was attacked when it raided the premises of block-level TMC leaders Sheikh and Shankar Adhya. State food minister Jyoti Priya Mallick has already been arrested in connection with the scam.

Hundreds of men and women gathered at the spot shouting slogans and attacked the officials, the BJP leader said, adding "Shahjahan Sheikh, in particular, is close to Abhishek Banerjee, nephew of CM Mamata Banerjee, who is also the Home Minister of Bengal." "It is likely that several of those who came out to attack the probe agency officials are illegal migrants, who have been patronised by the local TMC leaders, to serve as their vote bank," Malviya added.



Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar receives the Guard of Honour during the NCC Republic Day Camp 2024 in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

## Cadets are leaders of tomorrow: VP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday here lauded the role of National Cadet Corps (NCC) in channelizing the energy of youth into positivity and said the cadets are leaders of tomorrow and are the most vital stakeholders in the growth and rise of Bharat. Making these points while inaugurating the Republic Day NCC camp for this year, he also said the NCC instills punctuality, resilience, loyalty, and hard work that shape the cadets into active, productive citizens and the most valuable human resource of the country. Dhankhar said by their actions and conduct, NCC cadets exemplify "Unity in Diversity" adding the NCC ensures your organic growth as ambassadors for national awareness campaigns, fostering integration across cultural, religious, and geographical lines.

The Vice President said he was happy to note a pro-women change taking place very impactfully within the NCC. Now there is increasing female participation. "I had the occasion to witness it a while ago. During the upcoming Republic Day, female cadets will proudly march down the Kartavya Path in two exclusive contingents with two female bands," he said. Stating that NCC cadets are role models for the nation's youth, Dhankhar urged them to continue to conduct themselves with the highest dignity and discipline. "Even after NCC training, you must remember that the cadet spirit is eternal and lasting. You have to nurture it and it will blossom," he said. "I am confident that you all will continue to work with the same enthusiasm, valor, and dedication to make our Bharat, a larger democracy, a truly developed nation, and a world leader by 2047," Dhankhar said.

## Cabinet okays MoU to achieve net zero carbon emission in Railways

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Cabinet during a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday approved a MoU signed between India and USAID/India to help the Indian Railways achieve net-zero carbon emission by 2030. A press statement issued by the Indian Railways on Friday said the Cabinet was apprised of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/India on June 14, 2023. "The MoU provides a platform for Indian Railways to interact and share the latest developments and knowledge in the railway sector," it said. "The MoU facilitates utility modernisation, advanced energy solutions and systems, regional energy and market integration and private sector participation and engagement, training and seminars/workshops focusing on specific technology areas like renewable energy, energy efficiency and other interactions for knowledge sharing," said the note. According to the Indian Railways, it earlier worked with USAID/India for the deployment of rooftop solar systems across railway platforms. The MoU states that the Indian Railways and USAID/India will jointly work for long-term energy planning, including clean energy for the Indian Railways. They will develop an energy effi-



ciency policy and action plan for Indian Railways buildings and plan for clean energy procurement to achieve its net-zero vision. "Technical support for addressing regulatory and implementation barriers" and "bid design and bid management support for system-friendly, large-scale renewable procurement" are areas on which the two sides will work together. Besides, the MoU will focus on supporting the Indian Railways in the promotion of e-mobility and collaboratively hosting events, conferences, and capacity-building programmes in the identified areas. According to the Railways, the MoU will help reduce its dependence on imported fuel such as diesel and coal, among others. "Deployment of renewable energy plants will give fillip to renewable energy technology in the country. This will help in the development of the local ecosystem, which subsequently gives a boost to local product development," the statement said. "Technical assistance for the services under this MoU is intended to be provided by USAID under the SAREP initiative. This MoU is not an obligation of funds or a commitment of any kind, and it is non-binding. This does not involve any financial commitment from the Indian Railways," it added.

## Ready to extend all support: Modi to Kishida after Japan earthquake

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has written to his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida expressing India's solidarity with Japan and its people affected by the devastating earthquake on January 1. On Thursday, Modi wrote to Kishida that India values its relationship with Japan as a special strategic and global partner, and is ready to extend all possible assistance at this hour, sources said.

Around 90 people were killed when a 7.6 magnitude earthquake struck Japan's northernmost peninsula of Noto on Monday. The prime minister conveyed to his Japanese counterpart that he is "deeply anguished and concerned" over the earthquake and expressed "deepest condolence" to the families of those killed in the quake, the sources said. "I am deeply anguished and concerned to learn about the major earthquake that struck Japan on January 1," Modi said.



"I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families of those who lost their lives. We stand in solidarity with Japan and its people affected by the disaster," a source quoted Modi as writing to the Japanese prime minister. Japan's Kyodo news agency said on Friday the death toll in the quake rose to 92 with over 240 people still missing. It said authorities doubled the number of Self-Defence forces' personnel taking part in earthquake rescue operations to 4,600.

## Ramesh concerns on VVPATS require no clarifications: EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Dismissing Congress leader Jairam Ramesh's concerns on the VVPATS, the Election Commission on Friday said that it raised "no new assertions or reasonable and legitimate doubts which require further clarifications", adding the rules governing paper slips were introduced by the grand old party-led government in 2013. In a communication to Ramesh, the poll body also expressed "full faith in the use of the EVMs in the elections" and made it clear that literature in the public domain on EVM including the latest updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (85 Questions) answers all reasonable and

legitimate aspects of the use of EVMs adequately and comprehensively. "Rule 49A and 49M of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, governing VVPAT and handling of paper slips was introduced by INC (Indian National Congress) on 14th August, 2013," said the letter signed by Pramod Kumar Sharma, Principal Secretary in the Election Commission. Ramesh had written to the Election Commission on December 30 last year, requesting that a delegation of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) be given an appointment to put forth their views on the Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips. The opposition alliance



had at a meeting on December 19 voiced doubts about the integrity of functioning of the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and wanted the VVPAT slips to be handed over to the voters, who could drop it in a separate box. The opposition alliance had also demanded 100 per cent matching of the slips and the EVMs.

"The recent letter dated December 30, 2023, does not raise any unresponded issue on EVM/VVPAT," Sharma said. He said the letter dated December 30, 2023, said to be in sequence of the earlier letters "has no new assertions or reasonable and legitimate doubts which requires further clarifications".

The Commission also dubbed as "out of context" the references made to other countries and their Constitutional Courts about the use of the EVMs in the elections. "Based on the outcomes of the elections conducted using EVMs, legal framework, established jurisprudence, technical security and administrative safeguards, the Commission has full faith in the use of the EVMs in the elections," Sharma asserted. The poll body pointed out that political parties and candidates are associated at every stage of handling of the EVMs, starting from FLC, storage, movement, training, randomisation, commissioning, mock polls, start of poll, close of poll and counting. The

Commission said issues covering all aspects of the EVMs like non-tampering, non-hacking, micro controllers, end-to-end verifiability, legal provisions, counting, technical competency, manufacturing and source code have already been addressed by it. "It is stated that current EVMs in use in the Indian elections are compliant to the extant legal framework created and strengthened by the successive Union governments of the day and jurisprudence evolved over 40 years by the Constitutional Courts of India," the Commission said. Anything beyond the existing legal framework and established jurisprudence is beyond the singular domain of the Commission, it added.

## AI model can predict which Covid variant to cause wave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Which SARS-CoV-2 variants are likely to cause new waves of infection? You can now know them beforehand as scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the US have developed a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) model that can predict early before any variant which SARS-CoV-2 variants are likely to cause new waves of infection. Current models used to predict the dynamics of viral transmission do not predict variant-specific spread. The team led by Retsef Levi from MIT's Sloan School of Management studied what factors could shape the viral spread based on an analysis of 9 million SARS-CoV-2 genetic sequences collected by the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data (GISAID) from 30 countries, along with data on vaccination rates, infection rates, and other factors. The findings are published in the journal PNAS Nexus. The patterns that emerged from this analysis were used to build a Machine Learning-enabled risk assessment model. The model can detect 72.8 per cent of the variants in each country that will cause at least 1,000 cases per million people in the next three months after an observation period of only one week after detection. This predictive performance increases to 80.1 per cent after two weeks of observation.

## Fatigue in long-Covid due to muscle cells producing less energy: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) have uncovered evidence explaining why individuals with long Covid endure prolonged fatigue, discomfort, and pain after physical activity. The study, published in Nature Communications, examined 25 long Covid patients and 21 individuals who had recovered fully from Covid. The participants, all of whom were previously healthy and within working age, engaged in a short exercise on a bicycle. The results showed that, on average, those with long Covid had a reduced exercise capacity compared to healthy participants. The researchers looked at the blood and muscle tissue 1 week before the cycling test and 1 day after the test. The researchers discovered that the persistent fatigue in patients with long-Covid has a



biological cause, namely mitochondria in muscle cells that produce less energy than in healthy patients. "We're seeing clear changes in the muscles in these patients," said Michèle van Vugt, Professor of Internal Medicine at Amsterdam UMC. "We saw various abnormalities in the muscle tissue of the patients. At the cellular level, we saw that the mitochondria of the muscle, also known as the energy factories of the cell, function less well and that they produce less energy," said Rob Wüst, Assistant Professor at Department of Human Movement Sciences at the VU University. "So, the cause of the fatigue is really biological. The brain needs energy to think. Muscles need energy to move.

## India, Mauritius ink MoU to jointly develop small satellite

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Mauritius will jointly develop a small satellite which will be launched by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) early next year, the Union Cabinet was apprised on Friday. India and Mauritius had signed a MoU for development of a joint small satellite during the visit of Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan to Port Louis on November 1 last year. The MoU will help to establish a framework for cooperation between Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and Mauritius Research and Innovation Council (MRIC) on the development of a joint satellite as well as for cooperation on the use of the ground station in the island nation. "Some of the subsystems for the joint satellite will be taken up through the participation of Indian industries and would benefit the industry," an official statement said. The satellite realisation is proposed to be completed in 15 months time



frame, it said. The Union Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was apprised about the MoU. An official statement said the collaboration through the joint development of the satellite will help in further ensuring continuous support from the Mauritius government for the Indian ground station at Mauritius, which is critical for India's launch vehicle and satellite missions. In addition, the joint satellite building will also help in ensuring MRIC support from their ground station for ISRO's small satellite mission in future. The estimated cost for the joint satellite is Rs 20 crore, which will be borne by India.

Space cooperation between India and Mauritius dated back to 1986 when ISRO established a ground station in Mauritius for tracking and telemetry support for its launch vehicle and satellite missions. The current space cooperation is being governed by the country-level agreement signed in July 2009, which superseded the 1986 agreement. Based on the interest expressed by MRIC in jointly building a small satellite for Mauritius, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had requested ISRO to initiate discussions on realizing an India-Mauritius joint satellite. The MEA will provide funding for realisation, launch and operation of the joint satellite.

## NMC introduces post doctoral fellowship courses in medicine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a move aimed to promote research and clinical skill development among post-graduate students, the National Medical Commission (NMC) Regulations, 2018, the existing NEET-PG examination will continue till the proposed National Exit Test (NExT) becomes operational for the purpose of PG admission. The new regulations state that all post-graduate students will work as full-time resident doctors and for "reasonable working hours" and will be provided "reasonable time for rest" in a day. They will be permitted a minimum 20 days of casual leave per year and five days of academic leave per year. Subject to exigencies of work, post-graduate students will be allowed one weekly holiday, the new regulations said. "Earlier there was no written provision of leaves," Dr Oza said.

Board of the National Medical Commission (NMC) explained. As per the new regulations which have replaced the Postgraduate Medical Education (Amendment) Regulations, 2018, the existing NEET-PG examination will continue till the proposed National Exit Test (NExT) becomes operational for the purpose of PG admission. The new regulations state that all post-graduate students will work as full-time resident doctors and for "reasonable working hours" and will be provided "reasonable time for rest" in a day. They will be permitted a minimum 20 days of casual leave per year and five days of academic leave per year. Subject to exigencies of work, post-graduate students will be allowed one weekly holiday, the new regulations said. "Earlier there was no written provision of leaves," Dr Oza said.

## Overarching earth sciences scheme 'Prithvi Vigyan' gets Cabinet nod

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday approved "Prithvi Vigyan", an overarching initiative comprising five on-going sub-schemes related to earth sciences, at a cost of Rs 4,797 crore over a five-year period from 2021-26. The Union Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the proposal of the Ministry of Earth



Sciences to club the sub-schemes. The schemes are "Atmosphere and Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems and Services", "Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology", "Polar Science and Cryosphere Research", "Seismology and Geosciences" and "Research, Education, Training and Outreach". "The overarching scheme of 'Prithvi Vigyan' (PRITHVI) will enable

development of integrated multidisciplinary earth science research and innovative programmes across different MoES institutes," an official statement said. It said these integrated research and development efforts will help in addressing the grand challenges of weather and climate, ocean, cryosphere, seismological science and services and explore the living and non-living resources for their sus-

tainable harnessing. The objectives of the overarching "PRITHVI" scheme includes augmentation and sustenance of long-term observations of the atmosphere, ocean, geosphere, cryosphere and solid earth to record vital signs of the earth system and change, development of modelling systems for understanding and predicting weather, ocean and climate hazards, and understanding the science of cli-

mate change. It also includes exploration of polar and high seas regions of the earth towards discovery of new phenomena and resources, development of technology for exploration and sustainable harnessing of oceanic resources for societal applications, and translation of knowledge and insights from earth systems science into services for societal, environmental and economic benefit.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Divided they stand

### INDIA bloc fissures widen; can it fight the Lok Sabha elections together as an entity?

The INDIA bloc, considered a strong alliance to take on the BJP when it took shape, is now bogged down by serious internal problems. Cracks within are widening each passing day, with the Congress acting like the big boss and regional parties digging their heels in. To divert attention, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is going all out against the Modi Government, pointing out its failures. While the Government tries to play down his remarks, Kharge insists that it is using emotive subjects to distract citizens. The biggest problem for the INDIA bloc is the growing disagreement among its constituents. Varied political beliefs, interests and the desire to secure their own interests are causing these gaps to widen. Lately, there have been public fights on important policies, showing how fragile the alliance is. Even if the Congress chief is right about the Government using emotive issues (like the Ram temple) to shift focus from its failures, it won't be enough to keep the bloc together. Kharge says the ruling party is using sensitive topics to divert attention from serious issues like economic problems, unemployment and governance failures. While the INDIA bloc is together on these issues, the major problem causing divisions is finalising seat distribution and the formula for it in the upcoming general elections. Regional leaders are firm about pocketing more seats and not sharing their strongholds with national parties like the Congress. For the INDIA bloc to stay intact, three main issues need solving pronto: seat sharing, choosing a PM candidate, and agreeing on a common minimum programme.



Leaders also need to stop airing their grievances publicly without consulting others. It does not help when the TMC offers two seats to Congress, and AAP insists on fighting all 13 seats in Punjab. Also, naming Kharge as the PM candidate doesn't make sense until his party leaders agree. The common minimum programme is the least controversial, so that is where they should start, taking it step by step to form a united front against the NDA. Besides, they must also not forget why they formed the INDIA bloc in the first place. It was to dislodge the BJP from power as the ruling party is supposedly sending their leaders to jail, and intimidating them with ED and CBI raids. Ostensibly the whole Opposition came together as these parties were not given a fair chance in Parliament and several Opposition leaders were suspended on one pretext or the other. The INDIA bloc parties must realise they stand no chance against the BJP-led NDA if they fight separately. A divided vote will benefit only the BJP, considering PM Narendra Modi's charisma, as was evident in the recent Assembly elections. The choice is clear for them: fight together or face defeat. As the INDIA bloc deals with internal issues, finding a way forward means committing to open dialogue and compromise; otherwise, the election result is pretty much decided even before the polls are officially announced. Ego has no place in the scheme of things.

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### PICTALK



NCC cadets perform during the NCC Republic Day Camp 2024, in New Delhi

# The evolving landscape of philanthropy



VEERENDRA MISHRA

### Adapting to the evolving nature of philanthropy is imperative for creating a brighter future. Every contribution, irrespective of its size, has the potential to exert a profound impact

The importance of social sector trends lies in their ability to shape and guide the strategies and activities of organisations operating in the social and nonprofit sectors. As we step into 2024, it becomes imperative to anticipate and comprehend the emerging trends that are poised to shape the ethos of giving and altruism. Understanding social sector trends empowers organisations to make well-informed decisions. Leaders and decision-makers, armed with insights into the current landscape, can proactively anticipate challenges, identify opportunities, and formulate effective strategies to address the evolving needs of society. Recognising prevailing trends facilitates the judicious allocation of resources, allowing nonprofits and social enterprises to prioritise areas gaining significance. This ensures that limited resources are directed towards initiatives with the highest potential for positive impact. Social sector trends often mirror shifts in public attitudes, government policies, and funding priorities. Intimately connected to the needs and aspirations of communities, these trends enable organisations to engage with communities more effectively. This engagement fosters a deeper understanding of local challenges and preferences, enriching the context for impactful interventions. In essence, social sector trends act as barometers of societal needs and preferences. While we talk about social sector trends, human rights take centre stage, which serves not only as a catalyst for social change but also as a gauge of democratic governance, making them an integral indicator of societal transformation. Viewed through this lens, the imperative becomes the realisation of a societal shift where the full enjoyment and exercise of human rights prevail. Therefore, the critical task at hand is to usher in social change that ensures the robust realisation of human rights. Philanthropy, in its current state, is undergoing rapid evolution, and these trends are set to redefine the landscape, fostering a more impactful and meaning-



ful world. Digital Philanthropy: In an increasingly interconnected world, the rise of digital philanthropy is palpable. The fusion of technology and altruism facilitates seamless contributions through crowdfunding platforms, blockchain-driven transparency, and virtual reality experiences that enable donors to witness the direct impact of their contributions. Impact Investing Gains Momentum: The concept of "doing well by doing good" is set to become even more prevalent in 2024. Impact investing, combining financial returns with measurable social or environmental benefits, will attract socially conscious investors seeking both financial growth and positive global change. Decentralised Philanthropy: Blockchain technology continues to disrupt traditional philanthropy by introducing transparency and security. Decentralised Autonomous Organisations (DAOs) will empower communities to collaborate, make decisions, and allocate resources collectively, promoting democratic giving and trust. Personalised Philanthropy Journeys: Donors now demand more than transparency; they seek personalised experiences. Nonprofits will leverage AI and data analytics to tailor their communications, offering donors opportunities to engage in projects



DATA ANALYTICS WILL PLAY AN INCREASINGLY PIVOTAL ROLE IN PHILANTHROPIC DECISION-MAKING. DONORS AND ORGANISATIONS WILL USE DATA TO MEASURE IMPACT, REFINE STRATEGIES, AND OPTIMISE RESOURCE ALLOCATION

aligned with their passions and values. Circular Philanthropy and Sustainability: As environmental concerns grow, philanthropy will increasingly focus on sustainability and circular economies. Donors will fund projects promoting waste reduction, recycling, and eco-friendly initiatives, contributing to a greener future. Collaborative Philanthropic Ecosystems: Philanthropic organisations will foster greater collaboration in 2024. The focus will shift from competition to synergy as nonprofits, governments, corporations, and individuals work together to address complex global challenges. Philanthrocapitalism Evolves: The era of philanthrocapitalism will continue to evolve, blurring the line between the public and private sectors as mega-philanthropists strategically allocate vast resources, reshaping global social and economic systems. Virtual Reality for Empathy and Education: Virtual reality will be harnessed to cultivate empathy and awareness among donors. By immersing themselves in the stories of beneficiaries, donors will gain a deeper understanding of the issues they address, leading to more informed giving. Inclusive Giving and Diversity: Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) will be paramount in philanthropy. Organisations will prioritise diverse leader-

ship, foster inclusive practices, and fund projects addressing systemic inequalities to ensure philanthropy benefits all. Data-Driven Philanthropy: Data analytics will play an increasingly pivotal role in philanthropic decision-making. Donors and organisations will use data to measure impact, refine strategies, and optimise resource allocation. Organisations cognizant of these trends can customise their proposals to align with the interests and priorities of potential funders, thereby increasing their likelihood of securing essential financial support. In our interconnected world, social sector trends frequently transcend geographic boundaries. Grasping global trends empowers organisations to draw insights from international best practices, tailor successful models to local contexts, and actively participate in global dialogues addressing critical social issues. Embracing these changes and adapting to the evolving nature of philanthropy is imperative for creating a brighter future. Every contribution, irrespective of its size, possesses the potential to exert a profound impact. Remaining informed, engaged, and steadfast in supporting causes aligned with one's values ensures a collective commitment to positive social change. (The writer is the Director RACE Lab, Samvedna India, views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## The Vedic way of predicting weather and its anomalies



V N BAHUGUNA

### Atharva Veda gives a fascinating insight into understanding and predicting the weather, emphasising the importance of the purity of five elements

Medical experts have consistently asserted that the risk of heart disease significantly increases as the level of air pollution rises. Given the detrimental impact of air pollution on health, scientists conduct various types of research to shield society from this menace. What measures can a society, grappling with multiple problems, take to safeguard itself and create a healthy and conducive environment? How can scientific research contribute to supporting society? Certain activities such as vehicular traffic, industries, brick kilns, and similar operations cannot be halted permanently due to their crucial role in human life. In the contemporary era of advanced meteorological technology and sophisticated pollution monitoring systems, the ancient wisdom of Vedic knowledge emerges as a fascinating and often overlooked source of insights into weather patterns and environmental conditions. The Vedas, ancient Indian scriptures dating back thousands of years, encompass a wealth of information on var-



ious aspects of life, including agriculture, health, and the environment. This article delves into the Vedic forecast of weather and pollution, illuminating the intriguing intersections between traditional wisdom and contemporary challenges. The Vedas, especially the Atharva Veda, include references to atmospheric phenomena, celestial bodies, and the cyclical nature of seasons. The sages of ancient India were astute observers of nature, developing a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between the cosmos and the Earth. They acknowledged the influence of celestial bodies such as the sun, moon, and planets on weather patterns.

A pivotal concept in Vedic meteorology is the comprehension of the five elements (Pancha Bhoota) - earth, water, fire, air, and ether. The balance and interaction of these elements are believed to govern weather conditions. The movement of the sun, the moon, and the constellations was meticulously studied to predict changes in weather, including the onset of monsoons and the duration of seasons. The Vedas also emphasise the significance of environmental purity and the repercussions of disrupting the natural balance. Although pollution is not explicitly termed in ancient texts, indirect references are made through discussions on the sanctity of rivers, forests, and air. The concept of 'Pancha Maha Yagna' or the five great sacrifices underscores humans' duty to protect and preserve the environment as an offering to divine forces. The ancient seers advocated for sustainable practices and responsible living to avoid disturbing ecological harmony. The Vedas underscore the value of planting trees, conserving water, and treating

nature with reverence - principles remarkably relevant in today's context as we grapple with the consequences of environmental degradation and climate change. Just as rain eventually falls in other seasons, air pollution increases on specific days. Is the phenomenon of increasing and decreasing air pollution natural? Even in ancient mythological history, there are descriptions of an increase in air pollution, with smoke from industries or vehicles not being the reason. Therefore, regarding air pollution, predictions about increased Air Quality Index (AQI) levels can be made through Vedic science. Based on Vedic science, I have been making predictions about such natural events for many years. It is noteworthy that the basis of predictions in Vedic systems is purely mathematical. By knowing the correct weather forecast well in advance, society can exercise restraint and take steps to lower pollution levels. (The writer is a Vedic expert and astrologer, using Vedic knowledge to predict various aspects of weather; views are personal)

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BIRDS IN NATURE

Sir - We often overlook the significance of the small beings in our ecosystem that play a crucial role in balancing the environment. Birds, often considered a barometer for the planet's health, are commemorated on January 5 as National Birds Day to celebrate their special place in our hearts. Whether it's the woodpecker in your backyard or the common pigeons in the park, birds have always captivated us with fascination, love, and adoration. Regrettably, many birds today face endangerment or protection status, primarily due to habitat loss and illegal pet trade. Urbanisation, ecosystem degradation, infrastructural development, environmental pollutants, and climate change further contribute to their decline. Bird species are dwindling, and it is imperative that we take steps to save them. Birds act as 'ecosystem engineers,' serving as seed dispersers, pollinators, and scavengers. By planting more trees, reducing plastic use, and avoiding pesticides, we can create a bird-friendly environment by providing them with shelter and nesting areas. Let's extend our efforts by spreading awareness for these tiny creatures who form the backbone of our environment. Tashi Baheti | Ujjain

### PLAYING SOFT HINDUTVA POLITICS

Sir - The invitation to attend the inauguration of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya has brought much delight to the BJP, causing divisions not only within the parties affiliated with the INDIA alliance but also within individual parties like the Congress or Samajwadi Party. It has starkly exposed the moral bankruptcy of so-called "secular" parties (except CPM), whose principles seem to be discarded when electoral interests come into play. In a society where the majority religion holds sway in the national arena, these parties cannot afford to ignore the significant population intoxicated by rabid Hindutva if winning votes remains their

## Celebrating women-led films



The Kerala Story has emerged as the highest-grossing female-led film of 2023, chronicling the journey of an aspiring nurse coerced into extremism. The film addresses critical issues such as conservatism and the trafficking of women. The presence of women-led films successfully holding their ground in the predominantly male-dominated film industry is truly inspiring. In addition to The Kerala Story, films like Rocky aur Rani Ki Prem Kahani, featuring Alia

Bhatt as the female protagonist, challenge stereotypes and contribute to promoting feminism and gender equality among the masses. Likewise, web series such as Dahanu, Kaala Paani, Scoop, and Taali transcend the confines of the big screen, sparking conversations that defy stereotypes and foster a culture where everyone's voice is acknowledged and appreciated. The success of women-led films is not merely a triumph for creators; it represents a victory for audiences yearning for authentic stories. What is particularly noteworthy is how these movies extend their influence beyond mere entertainment, actively contributing to reshaping societal mindsets. By portraying the strength, resilience, and complexity of female characters, these films challenge prevailing beliefs and encourage a more inclusive perspective. They prompt viewers to question stereotypes, fostering a culture that embraces the rich diversity of human experiences. Gourja Soni | Delhi

sole concern. Hence, these parties are offering flimsy excuses to defend the indefensible. It is evident that the Congress is playing the card of "soft Hindutva." However, supporting the construction of a Ram Temple at the expense of a mosque, illegally destroyed at the alleged "Ram Janmabhoomi" spot, raises questions about sanity and morality. If the Congress cannot immediately reject the invitation, the term "Secularism" on the lips of party leaders might sound ironic henceforth. Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

### VERDICT ON SEBI OR ADANI?

Sir - The recent verdict by the Apex court in the Adani group of companies-related cases should not be seen as a cause for celebration for Adani but rather as a vote of confidence for SEBI. The verdict is based on technical aspects rather than merit, emphasising the limitations of the Apex court in interfering with SEBI's functioning.

The complaint should contain tangible evidence to prove SEBI's inefficiency or inability to investigate Adani's companies, allowing the Apex court to take a position as desired by the complainant. Therefore, the judgment should not be projected as a clean chit to the Adani group of companies. While SEBI's probe is taking an unreasonable amount of time, changes affecting the course of the investigation are occurring. This case highlights the need for more stringent provisions to monitor and control corporate companies, and organisations like SEBI should be more professional and transparent in their functioning. The government, despite promoting the 'Ease of doing business,' must ensure a balance by implementing net-like provisions to filter and make business activities safe. AG Rajmohan | Anantapur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

### QUALITY EDUCATION NEEDS QUALITY TEACHERS

Quality teachers and an inclusive curriculum are a must-have for good education



SAKSHI SETHI

In the words of Dan Rather, "The dream begins, most of the time, with a teacher who believes in you, who tugs and pushes and leads you to the next plateau, sometimes poking you with a sharp stick called truth."

Education forms the most important part of the life of an individual. The kind of education one receives largely depends upon the kind of teacher one has, especially in the early years of schooling. In today's scenario, teachers come in all types and sizes. Yet the downside of the quality of the Indian education system is generally acknowledged and is extremely worrisome. In recent research, it was found that around 45 million teachers are still needed to achieve quality education for everyone and everywhere.

Quality teachers ignite dreams, inspire actions and nurture greatness. They are also the guiding lights that fuel dreams, spark curiosity unlock the potential within every student and make a profound impact on many lives but looking at the current scenarios, the question that worries everyone is the education industry, especially the schools, are they lacking such quality teachers?

There is no denying the fact that teachers and coaches are major doors to the progress of any economy. They are very knowledgeable, humble, and confident and instill a love of learning on the contrary, this profession seems to be the last resort for school and work applicants in the current scenario. Today, many take this profession for want of anything else to do. Also, many quality teachers are not sticking around due to a lack of support, lack of professional development and difficult school culture and climate which is a cause of great concern for the authorities at large. The authorities at all levels need to appreciate the sacrifices of teachers be it standing in the classrooms for long hours, having to stay back after school hours and many more without getting any incentives instead of that. Apart from causing financial stress, this profession has even become a cause of mental health.



Great people can create some quality works, but quality teachers can produce thousands of great people as they are the masters of their craft. They set expectations for themselves as well as their students. It is important to remember that teachers with all sorts of qualities can be found in all colours, shapes and sizes. In the words of Jim Henson, "Kids don't remember what you try to teach them, they just remember what you are."

In a quality education system, teachers play a pivotal role as facilitators of knowledge and mentors, guiding students towards intellectual curiosity and a deeper understanding of subjects. Accessible and inclusive education ensures that all individuals, regardless of socio-economic background or other disparities, have the opportunity to unleash their full potential.

Investing in quality education is an investment in the future, laying the foundation for a more just, innovative, and prosperous society. As societies evolve, the emphasis on providing accessible, equitable, and excellent education remains essential for fostering a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

Remember, quality education starts with funding quality teachers, and funding quality teachers begins with quality funding of basic education. It is only quality education that is crucial to break the cycle of poverty and allow the children to create a better life for themselves as well as their families. Good infrastructure, quality teachers and an inclusive curriculum are and will always be the components of a well-organised basic educational structure.

*(The writer is an educator, views are personal)*

# Sri Lanka: Quest for reconciliation

Interestingly, in post-conflict nations, many feel truth commissions and reconciliation processes haven't effectively addressed systemic issues



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Appointing toothless commissions to investigate alleged crimes and conduct fact-finding is a recurring issue, with some commissions genuinely seeking the truth to implement comprehensive measures preventing recurrence, while others merely aim to buy time and conceal the truth. Regardless of intent, the plight of individuals remains unchanged until addressed, necessitating profound restructuring to mitigate the root causes behind violent social upheavals. Unfortunately, history has shown that democracy has not consistently triumphed. Politicians in post-conflict nations, the so-called liberal democracies, and most of their darling NGOs deliberately ignore democratically resolving the structural problems afflicting broken democracies, often treating victims as mere commodities.

Following nearly 15 years of persistent armed conflict, Sri Lanka has once again reached a pivotal moment with the introduction of a bill to establish the Commission for Truth, Unity, and Reconciliation, marking a significant stride forward. Though belated, this move is undeniably commendable. Against a backdrop of news stories sowing social phobia and fostering negativity among the general public, this development provides a glimmer of hope during precarious times.

The bill, presented as an act, outlines the establishment of the Commission for Truth, Unity, and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka, defining its powers and functions. It further emphasises the necessity of monitoring the implementation of the commission's recommendations to ensure accountability. Recognising truth-seeking as a fundamental right for all Sri Lankans, integral to their right to an effective remedy, the bill underscores the potential contributions of such mechanisms to national unity, peace, the rule of law, coexistence, equality with tolerance, respect for diversity, and reconciliation. The ultimate goal is to prevent disharmony and violence, securing the well-being of all Sri Lankans, including future generations.

The commitment extends to a national policy of truth-seeking and the advancement of national unity and reconciliation, reinforcing the State's assurance of freedom, equality, justice, fundamental human rights, and the independence of the judiciary as recognised under the Constitution. The Commission for Truth, Unity, and Reconciliation, to be headed by a chairperson and supported by established regional offices, shall be comprised of not fewer than seven and not more than twenty-one members.

According to the bill's stated objectives, the Commission is mandated to investigate, inquire, and provide recommendations regarding complaints, allegations, or reports related to damage or harm to persons or property; loss of life, or alleged human rights violations anywhere in Sri Lanka. These incidents must be connected to, or consequent to, the conflict in the Northern and Eastern Provinces during the period 1983 to 2009, or its aftermath. However, echoing the pattern of other commissions, it is underscored that the Commission's recommendations do not constitute a determination of civil or criminal liability for any individual.

This moment prompts me to reflect on the invaluable experiences I gained during my tenure at the Office of National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) as a communication consultant, under the distinguished



THE IRONY LIES IN THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF PEOPLE IN NUMEROUS POST-CONFLICT COUNTRIES THAT ESTABLISHED TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS, INCLUDING ARGENTINA, GUATEMALA, LIBERIA, RWANDA, SIERRA LEONE, PERU, NEPAL, AND EVEN THE MUCH-PRAISED SOUTH AFRICA

leadership of former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga. She, with whom we have shared a memorable time in addressing the most sensitive issue in the country, struggled with serious structural degeneration caused by the malpractices of those who wielded power. Her remarkable efforts to bridge ethnic divides in the country were a clear demonstration of her commitment to fostering unity. She never hesitated to acknowledge and categorize any wrong political decisions, whether made by her or even her immediate family members, which I find truly inspirational.

ONUR was established with noble aspirations of achieving lasting peace. However, amidst political uncertainty, the initiatives of this national institute plunged into the abyss of eclipse. In those days, ONUR undertook comprehensive initiatives, addressing issues beyond the surface. We not only engaged with Colombo-based NGOs, which were merely challenging the prevailing narrative that often prioritised a select few while neglecting those in remote areas, but ventured into the North and East. It was remarkable to witness former Tamil Tigers expressing confidence in the central government's efforts and the state administrative mechanism to rebuild and reunite their families—an aspect seldom highlighted. Among ONUR's key projects was Sahodara Pasal, where around a hundred students from various ethnicities, attending different schools, spent a week together in one place. At an event in Kandy, three female students, representing Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim backgrounds, stood united against the rain, sharing a single hijab as a symbol of strength and diversity. Despite initial misconceptions, these students developed bonds transcending ethnic lines, hugging and crying at the program's end, pledging lasting friendships. Unfortunately,

when I revisited ONUR three years later, the prioritisation of crucial social integration initiatives like Sahodara Pasal had waned. This neglect poses a risk of growing disparity and division, deviating from the path toward true unity and reconciliation.

The irony lies in the disillusionment of people in numerous post-conflict countries that established truth and reconciliation commissions, including Argentina, Guatemala, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Peru, Nepal, and even the much-praised South Africa. They harbour a collective sentiment that most truth commissions and reconciliation processes have failed to address their systemic issues. What prevails is an overarching politicisation, a malaise that transcends past truths and impedes their ability to break free. To truly escape their plight, they must depoliticise their tragic experiences, reclaim suppressed freedoms, and radically reshape their dismal reality. The key lies in inventing a new form of political solidarity that transcends national, ethnic, cultural, and religious identities—a bold move to build bridges over mass graves and ruins. Deep and thorough reconciliation alone cannot achieve this, as it inherently aligns with the status quo, perpetuating existing power relations and ideological deadlocks that bear the true responsibility for the tragedy. Victims seek more than reconciliation; they yearn for recognition of their tragic fate, a political cause to emerge from victimhood. Humanitarian assistance, spanning from necessities to weaponry, proves inadequate; genuine liberation arises not from aid but from unwavering political solidarity—a steadfast dedication to freeing them from a decade-long ordeal.

History paints a consistent narrative of conflicts as an inherent facet of human civilisation, profoundly shaping humanity's trajectory. Sri Lanka is not an exception. Svetlana

Alexievich aptly notes war's enigmatic hold on the human experience and its enduring impact on societies. Despite its monumental significance, there's a tendency to downplay the seriousness of war. The grim and daunting nature of conflicts may tempt us to avert our gaze, but avoidance doesn't diminish their historical weight. Wars have consistently redirected the course of human history, both by forging new pathways into the future and closing down others.

Recognising the transformative impact of conflicts underscores the paramount importance of reconciliation. More than a mere talk show or commodity, reconciliation embodies a profoundly humanistic approach to our daily life engagement. It acknowledges the intricate aftermath of war, emphasising the imperative for societies to unite, heal, and carve a path toward more harmonious coexistence. Prioritising reconciliation signifies a commitment to understanding the human dimensions of conflict, nurturing empathy, rebuilding trust, and ultimately striving for a future that transcends the scars of the past. In this light, reconciliation isn't just a historical necessity but an indispensable element in shaping a more compassionate and interconnected world.

Genuine reconciliation drives national consensus, inevitably guiding the nation toward steadfast national interests—the foundational principles of a truly national state. If our education system perpetuates religious and exclusivist ideologies, no matter how empathetic our discourse about victims of a conflict that ended 15 years ago, the seeds of hatred will persist, waiting to explode—an ominous lesson from history.

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

# Integrate technology solutions for effective HR management

The atmosphere within your workplace speaks volumes about your company. It is where employees sense their value, and this sentiment is reflected in the quality of their work

The mark of technology has transformed the dynamics of finance companies, with the dominance of tech-driven functions revolutionising elements of finance such as continuous accounting, market trading, real-time trends, interest rate swapping, forensic auditing, advanced analytics, and data quality.

According to recent industry forecasts, the Digital Investment market within India's Fintech sector is anticipated to expand at a rate of 13.73% between 2023 and 2027, culminating in a market volume reaching US\$66.46 billion by 2027.

The increasing demand for a technology-driven finance industry underscores the necessity of integrating tech-



NISHIT SOOD

nological support across every operational facet to deliver profitable outcomes for all stakeholders. Advancements like internet banking, mobile payments, peer-to-peer lending, robo-advisory services, and crypto-currencies have notably transformed the finance sector. However, the integration of technology in the finance industry does not diminish the vitality of the human factor that has been the foundation of the

industry for a long time. **Overlap of Operation & HR** Amid the rapid evolution of financial services, the importance of HR technology remains paramount. With the sector experiencing exceptional technological changes, HR leaders play a crucial role in fortifying your organisation's resilience and fostering growth in this dynamic landscape. The upheaval caused by digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic is not something that can be easily ignored. While your customers can execute one-tap payments, your HR department may struggle with tracking Excel sheets containing employees' payments. This scenario is just one among many challenges faced by Fintech's HR department.

Fintech companies are leveraging technology to increase efficiency and productivity, while HR departments are burdened with managing the personal information of 400-500 employees. This presents a critical business issue. According to a survey conducted by the global public relations firm Ketchum, 52% of employees in the financial services sector reported higher levels of burnout at work compared to pre-COVID-19 times. The innovative nature of the sector should not cast a shadow on the well-being of those working within the organisations. Your organisation's HR department must have on-demand access on any device, at any time, to support the workforce when needed. **Finance & Accounting**

HR departments can automate payroll processes, ensuring timely and hassle-free payments for everyone. This automation enables HR to dedicate more time to employee engagement, retention, and well-being. Beyond simply automating payrolls, the Fintech sector can also assist in managing employees' financial health. In an uncertain economic climate shadowed by the looming threat of inflation, Fintech HR solutions can empower your staff to gain better control over their finances. **Personal Development** Tech-driven HR in the Fintech sector can support the personal development of millennials and Gen-Z hires. Skilling and upskilling have become the ultimate goals of many

employees, with nurturing opportunities becoming a reason for retention too. Companies can provide training on utilising FinTech tools for personal and business purposes. FinTech HR offers workshops and sessions to teach employees using tools like budgeting apps, investment platforms, and online payment systems. This helps for better personal finance management and empowers staff to streamline processes, boosting workplace productivity. **Productivity & Management** HR automation plays a significant role here. Automation software enables HR managers to accurately manage logging and compensation for hundreds of employees, monitoring attendance in real-

time. Integrating a time-tracking tool with your HR or administrative payroll software streamlines the entire process and enhances transparency across departments. This integration tracks overtime, ensures compliance, and facilitates fair compensation, providing employees with the assurance of fair compensation for their work. **Employees' Data Protection** Data has become a new mining gem for the industry to dig into and analyse for profits. To protect the customers' data, extensive measures are taken. Let's talk about your employees' data. It is vital to put security measures in place to save internal data from any cyber breach. **Utilise Superior Solutions** Whatever industry or sector

it is, it is crucial to hire and retain the best for every HR department. Whether it is for scaling up the business or aligning the growth of the industry with the organisation, human resources are important. The atmosphere within your workplace speaks volumes as soon as you step through the door or engage with a team. It's where employees sense their value, and this sentiment reflects in the quality of their work. With businesses rapidly expanding, they automate routine tasks to allow HR teams to focus on nurturing employee relationships and enhancing their experiences. *(The writer is co-founder and chief flow officer at BYLD group; views are personal)*



# Israeli defence minister lays out vision for next phase of Gaza war

AP ■ RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israel's defence minister on Thursday laid out his vision for the next phase of the war in Gaza, describing how Israeli forces would shift to an apparently scaled-down "new combat approach" in northern Gaza, while continuing to fight Hamas in the south of the territory "for as long as necessary".

Ahead of a visit by the US secretary of state, Yoav Gallant also outlined a proposal for how Gaza would be run once Hamas is defeated, with Israel keeping security control while an undefined, Israeli-guided Palestinian body runs day-to-day administration, and the US and other countries oversee rebuilding.

Israel has come under heavy international pressure to spell out a post-war vision but so far has not done so. The issue is likely to be on the agenda in Secretary of State Antony Blinken's talks this weekend in Israel and other countries in the region. The United States has pressed Israel to shift to lower-intensity military operations in Gaza that more precisely target Hamas, after nearly three dev-

astating months of bombardment and ground assaults.

The vagueness of many of Gallant's provisions made it difficult to assess how much they mesh with the US calls.

The document issued by Gallant was titled a "vision for Phase 3" of the war, and Gallant's office said the phase had not yet begun. It also said the ideas were Gallant's and not official policy, which would have to be set by Israel's war and security cabinets.

Gallant, who is a member of both cabinets, may be aiming to put his personal plan before the Americans ahead of others in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition, which includes hard-right members likely to want a tougher approach.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed more than 22,400 people, more than two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants. Israel has vowed to destroy Hamas after its October 7 attack, in which militants killed some

1,200 people and abducted around 240 others.

Much of northern Gaza, which troops invaded two months ago, has been flattened beyond recognition.

Associated Press footage from Gaza City showed people wandering through a shattered landscape with large fields of broken concrete and splintered wood and streets lined with toppled buildings.

With the focus now in the south, Israeli forces are battling Hamas militants in the city of Khan Younis and in urban refugee camps in the centre of the territory.

Some 85 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million (23 lakh) people have been driven from their homes and squeezed into smaller slivers of the territory. Israel's siege of the territory has caused a humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population starving because not enough supplies are entering, according to the UN.

At the same time, airstrikes and shelling across Gaza continue to destroy houses, burying families taking shelter inside.

An Israeli strike on

Thursday flattened a home in Mawasi, a small rural strip on Gaza's southern coastline that Israel's military had declared a safe zone. The blast killed at least 12 people, Palestinian hospital officials said. The dead included a man and his wife, seven of their children and three other children ranging in age from five to 14, according to a list of the dead who arrived at Nasser Hospital in nearby Khan Younis.

There was no immediate response from Israel's military.

Gallant's statement underlined that the war would go on until Hamas' military and government capabilities are eliminated and the more than 100 hostages still in captivity are returned.

In the north, the statement said, forces will shift to a new approach that includes raids, destruction of tunnels, "air and ground activities and special operations". The aim would be "the erosion" of the remaining Hamas presence.

There was no word whether northern Gaza's population, which has almost entirely been driven south, would be allowed to return.

# Sri Lanka President backs India-mooted solution to Tamil community's demand

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday backed the India-mooted 13th Amendment as a solution to address the minority Tamil community's long-pending demand for political autonomy.

India has been pressing Sri Lanka to implement the 13th Amendment which was brought in after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1987. The 13A provides for the devolution of power to the Tamil community.

Addressing a group of professionals in Jaffna, the capital of the Tamil-dominated Northern Province, Wickremesinghe said the devolution of power shouldn't merely be a political concept but an economic reality.

The 13A became a part of Sri Lanka's constitution in 1987 through the direct intervention

of the then-Indian government led by prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

It created nine provincial councils for nine provinces with a temporary merger of the North and East which the Tamil minority claims is their traditional homeland.

"If we examine the provisions of the 13 Amendment, there is ample authority to establish a robust local economy. We pledge not to intervene in those affairs. I am encouraging you to take the initiative," Wickremesinghe said.

Presently, the Western Province is the sole region capable of substantial independent spending, while others are financially dependent on it, he said. "This situation warrants reconsideration. By utilising the powers within the 13th Amendment, each province can chart its course to development. It's time to put these pow-

ers into action," he said.

Wickremesinghe's willingness to grant full powers other than police to provinces was shot down by the powerful Buddhist clergy who claimed the move could endanger the unitary state of Sri Lanka.

An all-political party meeting called by Wickremesinghe last year to reach a consensus on implementing the 13A ended up in a stalemate.

"Take Japan, for instance, it is not a federal state yet various departments and regions are well developed...Look at the United Kingdom - Scotland and Wales have their own developed economies. Why can't we emulate such functioning regional economies," the president asked.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) which fought for a Tamil homeland for nearly 30 years had rejected the 13A.

They fought the Indian Army that was deployed as part of the Indo-Lanka Accord.

In 2013, the Tamils for the first time voted for their own chief minister for the North. The previous provincial elections were severely hampered by the LTTE's armed campaign.

The current Tamil political parties stay sceptical of the political will in the majority Sinhala south to fully implement the 13A.

The Tamils put forward their demand for autonomy since gaining independence from Britain in 1948 which from the mid-70s turned into a bloody armed conflict.

Over the years, the Sri Lankan government has been aggressive against Tamilian groups following its war with LTTE which collapsed in 2009 after the Sri Lankan Army killed its supreme leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.



A crane tries to remove the wreckage after the collision between two trains in West Java, Indonesia, on Friday. The trains collided on Indonesia's main island of Java on Friday, causing several carriages to buckle and overturn, officials said. AP/PTI

# Maldivian President Muizzu to visit China next week

PTI ■ BEIJING

Mohamed Muizzu, the new Maldivian President, will pay a state visit to China from January 8 to 12, the Chinese Foreign Ministry announced here on Friday.

Muizzu, who is seen as a pro-China politician, took oath as the eighth President of the Maldives after defeating the India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September.

Muizzu is visiting China at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said in a press release.

Muizzu's predecessors in the recent past visited India first, considering the wide-ranging bilateral ties and the Maldives' proximity to India, followed by China which has expanded its influence in the island nation by investing in major infrastructure projects there.

However, Muizzu chose Turkey as his first destination for a foreign visit soon after his election followed by the UAE where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP28) on December 1 and discussed the progress of the wide-ranging bilateral ties.

During the meeting, both leaders agreed to set up a core group to discuss the multi-dimensional relations and further deepen ties.

The meeting took place after Muizzu requested New Delhi to withdraw 77 Indian military personnel from the Maldives and decided to review more than 100 bilateral agreements between the two countries.

Earlier, Muizzu's government announced its plans to drop a hydrographic survey agreement with India.

Muizzu will be the second-highest politician to visit China in recent weeks.

The new Maldives Vice President Hussain Mohamed Latheef last month visited China, his first visit abroad, and took part in the China-sponsored China-Indian Ocean Region Development Cooperation Forum (CIORF) in Kunming.

During the meeting, he said cooperation in the Indian Ocean must include all countries in the region and avoid factionalism to bring about development among the ocean communities in the area.

Significantly, while praising Chinese infrastructure projects, Latheef made no mention of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) under which most of the Maldives' infrastructure projects were built.

The BRI is an ambitious plan initiated by President Xi in 2013 to develop new trade routes connecting China with the rest of the world via land and maritime networks to improve regional integration, increase trade and stimulate economic growth.

# Russia approves 2 candidates for ballot against Putin in March election

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia's national elections commission on Friday registered the first two candidates who will compete with President Vladimir Putin in the March election that Putin is all but certain to win.

The commission approved putting Leonid Slutsky of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party and Vladislav Davankov of the New People Party on the ballot for the March 15-17 vote.

Neither poses a significant challenge to Putin, who has dominated Russian politics since becoming president in 2000. Both candidates' parties are largely supportive in parliament of legislation backed by Putin's power-base United Russia party.

Slutsky, as head of the lower house of parliament's foreign affairs committee, has been a prominent backer of Kremlin foreign policy that is increasingly oppositional to the West. In the last presidential election in 2018, the party's candidate tallied less than 6 per cent of the vote.

Davankov is a deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, the Duma. His party was established in 2020 and holds 15 seats in the 450-member Duma.

The Communist Party has put forth Nikolai Kharitonov as its candidate, but the elections commission has not formally registered him. Kharitonov was the party's candidate in 2004, finishing a distant second to Putin.

A Russian politician calling for peace in Ukraine was rejected last month from the presidential ballot.

The elections commission refused to accept Yekaterina Duntsova's initial nomination by a group of supporters, citing errors in the paperwork, including spelling. The Supreme Court then rejected Duntsova's appeal against the commission's decision.

Putin is running as an independent, and his campaign headquarters, together with branches of the ruling United Russia party and a political coalition called the People's Front, have collected signatures in support of his candidacy. Under Russian law, independent candidates must be nominated by at least 500 supporters, and must also gather at least 3,00,000 signatures from 40 regions or more.

# Rival Koreas conduct provocative drills along tense sea boundary

AP ■ SEOUL

The rival Koreas fired artillery rounds into the sea as part of provocative drills along their disputed sea boundary on Friday, in violation of the fragile 2018 inter-Korean military agreement.

The firing exercises are expected to escalate tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Experts say North Korea will likely intensify a run of weapons tests and its warlike rhetoric ahead of South Korea's parliamentary elections in April and the US presidential election in November. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said North Korea fired 200 rounds in the waters north of their western sea boundary on Friday morning. It was North Korea's first front-line maritime firing exercise in about a year. Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon told a televised briefing that the North's artillery firing was "an act of provocation that threatens peace and heightens tensions on the Korean Peninsula." Lee said South Korea suffered no damage.

In a tit-for-tat step, South Korea had its troops on two border islands fire artillery rounds

south of the sea boundary later Friday, but North Korea's military didn't immediately respond. South Korea's Defense Ministry said the military will maintain a firm readiness to strongly punish any provocations by North Korea.

North Korea's state media haven't made any comments. Ahead of the South Korean drills, authorities blared broadcasts via street loudspeakers and sent text messages to residents on the five major border islands, asking them to evacuate to safe places. They worried North Korea could conduct a new round of firing training in response but lifted the evacuation order a few hours later as they detected no suspicious activities by the North's military, according to local officials.

The Koreas' poorly marked western sea boundary witnessed bloody naval clashes in 1999, 2002 and 2009. The North's alleged torpedoing of a South Korean warship killed 46 South Korean sailors in March 2010, and the North's artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island — one of the five border islands where the evacuation order was issued on Friday — killed four South Koreans in November

2010. The 2018 agreement requires the two Koreas to halt live-fire exercises and aerial surveillance in buffer and no-fly zones that they established along their border. But the deal is in danger of collapsing after both Koreas took steps to breach the accord amid bickering over the North's first successful military spy satellite launch in November.

South Korea resumed front-line aerial surveillance in protest at the North's satellite launch. North Korea responded that it would deploy powerful weapons at the border and won't abide by the 2018 deal any longer. South Korea later accused North Korea of restoring front-line guard posts that it had dismantled under the 2018 deal.

South Korea has previously accused North Korea of having already breached the deal numerous times with firing drills at the buffer zones, including one as recently as December 2022 off the Korean Peninsula's east coast. "North Korea is now in the stage of finding a justification for provocation after scrapping the 2018 military agreement," said Lee Sang Sook, a research professor at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and

National Security. "There is a possibility for North Korea to ramp up provocation steadily, so big and small provocations along the western sea boundary and the land border are expected this year." North Korean leader Kim Jong Un fired off fierce, derisive rhetoric against South Korea in a key ruling-party meeting at the end of December. He said South Korea must not be considered as a partner for reconciliation or unification, and ordered the military to use all available means — including nuclear weapons — to conquer South Korea in the event of a conflict.

Experts say Kim likely believes that a boosted military capability would increase his chances of wresting US concessions if former President Donald Trump is reelected in the US presidential election. Earlier Friday, North Korea's state media said Kim ordered authorities to increase production of mobile launch vehicles for missiles during a visit to a munitions factory. Kim said the role of the factory producing transport erector launchers, or TELs, is "very important" in bolstering North Korea's national defense because of a looming military showdown with its rivals.

PTI ■ NEW YORK

A 61-year-old Indian-origin medical biller has been arrested for stealing more than USD 1 million from doctors who provided medical care to injured workers in New York, according to the Attorney General's Office here.

Amrish Patel and his two companies — Medlink Services and Medlink Partners — were charged on Wednesday with 27 felony counts for the thefts they allegedly committed from January 2012 through January 2019, New York Attorney General Letitia James announced.

Patel and the companies were charged with one count of insurance fraud in the first degree, one count of grand larceny in the first degree, one count of grand larceny in the second degree, one count of grand larceny in the third degree, one count of scheme to defraud in the first degree, 11 counts of falsifying business records in the first degree and 11 counts of workers' compensation fraud.

He was released with electronic monitoring and a USD 100,000 bond, according to the New York Attorney

General's Office.

Patel, who provided billing services to a Brooklyn-based orthopaedic surgery practice, submitted falsified claim forms to the New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF) to steal at least USD 1.1 million in workers' compensation reimbursements for himself. "Doctors and health care professionals provide crucial care to our communities, and they rely on accurate and ethical billing to sustain these services and ensure our wellbeing," said Attorney General James.

"When money is illegally diverted away from doctors and providers, all New Yorkers suffer as a result. Fraud of any kind will never go unchecked in our state, and my office will continue to use every measure to hold accountable those who seek to cheat New Yorkers for personal gain. I thank our partners for their invaluable support and collaboration on this case," James.

"Fraud in any part of the workers' compensation system is detrimental to trust and hurts the entire system, including medical providers, carriers, businesses, and injured workers," said New York State Insurance Fund Executive

Director and CEO Gaurav Vasish.

"I am thankful for the collaboration of the Attorney General and Inspector General's offices on this investigation," Vasish.

"Workers' compensation fraud is not a victimless crime," said New York State Inspector General Lucy Lang.

"The defendant compromised the integrity of this crucial safety net when he took advantage of his trusted position to ensure accurate billing for medical providers and health insurers. I am grateful to the Office of the Attorney General and the New York State Insurance Fund for their partnership in rooting out this fraud."

Starting in 2011, Patel and his companies handled billing services for a Brooklyn-based orthopaedic surgery practice and were responsible for submitting billing for surgeries related to work-related injuries under the New York State Workers' Compensation Law.

Under the law, authorised providers are reimbursed for their treatment of injured workers by the insurance carrier for the employer.

# Survivors are found in homes smashed by Japan quake

AP ■ WAJIMA

A woman was pulled carefully from the rubble 72 hours after a series of powerful quakes started rattling Japan's western coast.

Despite rescue efforts, the death toll on Friday grew to at least 94 people, and the number of missing was lowered to 222 after it shot up the previous day.

An older man was found alive on Wednesday in a collapsed home in Suzu, one of the hardest-hit cities in Ishikawa Prefecture. His daughter called

out, "Dad, dad," as a flock of firefighters got him out on a stretcher, praising him for holding on for so long after Monday's 7.6 magnitude earthquake.

Others were forced to wait while rescuers searched for loved ones.

Ishikawa officials said 55 of those who died were in the city of Wajima and 23 were in Suzu, while the others were reported in five neighbouring towns. More than 460 people have been injured, at least 24 seriously.

The Earthquake Research

Institute at the University of Tokyo found that the sandy coastline in western Japan shifted by up to 250 metres seaward in some places.

The earthquakes set off a large fire in the town of Wajima, as well as tsunamis and landslides in the region. With some routes cut off by the destruction, curfews grew about communities in which water, food, blankets and medicine had yet to arrive.

The United States announced USD 100,000 in aid on Friday, including blankets, water and medical sup-

plies, and promised more help would come. Dodgers major leaguer Shohei Ohtani also announced aid for the Noto area, though he did not disclose the amount.

Thousands of Japanese troops have joined the effort to reach the hardest-hit spots on the Noto Peninsula, the centre of the quake, connected by a narrow land strip to the rest of the main island of Honshu.

Experts warned of disease and even death at the evacuation centres that now house about 34,000 people who lost their homes, many of them

older.

Masashi Tomari, a 67-year-old oyster farmer who lives in Anamizu city in Ishikawa, said it was tough sleeping on the floor with just one blanket. There was no heating until two stoves finally arrived Thursday — three days after the 7.6 quake struck.

"This is a terrible, cold place," he said.

Tomari felt at a loss thinking about his home, where broken glass and knocked over items littered the floor. It was pitch dark at night because the area was still out of power.

# Air safety experts search for voice data from plane debris in runway collision

Tokyo (AP): A team of transport safety officials searched for a voice recorder from the severely burned fuselage of a Japan Airlines plane on Friday, seeking crucial information on what caused a collision with a small coast guard plane on the runway at Tokyo's Haneda airport.

Meanwhile, JAL also started using heavy machinery to remove some of the debris for storage in a hangar to allow the runway to reopen.

Six experts from the Japan Transport Safety Board, walked through the mangled debris of the Airbus A350-900 that was lying on the run-

way searching for the voice data recorder.

JTSB experts have so far secured both the flight and voice data recorders from the coast guard's Bombardier Dash-8 and a flight data recorder from the JAL plane to find out what happened in the last few minutes before Tuesday's fatal collision.

All 379 occupants of JAL Flight 516 safely evacuated within 18 minutes of landing as the aircraft was engulfed in flames. The pilot of the coast guard plane also escaped, but its five other crewmembers were killed.



# Ukraine unleashes drones, missiles at Russian areas

AP ■ KYIV

Russian air defences downed dozens of Ukrainian drones in occupied Crimea and southern Russia on Friday, officials said, as Kyiv pressed its strategy of targeting the Moscow-annexed peninsula and taking the 22-month war well beyond Ukraine's borders.

Air raid sirens wailed in Sevastopol, the largest city in Crimea, and traffic was suspended for a second straight day on a bridge connecting the peninsula, which Moscow seized illegally a decade ago, with Russia's southern Krasnodar region. The span is a crucial supply link for Russia's war effort.

The Russian Defence Ministry said its defences intercepted 36 drones over Crimea and one over Krasnodar, part of an emerging pattern of intensified Ukrainian aerial attacks in recent days.

A Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missile also was destroyed over the northwestern part of the Black Sea, the ministry said.

The developments came after three people were injured Thursday night by other Ukrainian rocket and drone attacks on the Russian border city of Belgorod and the surrounding region, said Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov. On January 6, Ukrainian attacks on

Belgorod killed 25 people, officials there said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pledged to strike more targets on the Crimean Peninsula and inside Russian border regions this year. The goal is to unsettle Russians as President Vladimir Putin seeks another six years in power in a March 17 election.

Following a drone strike deep inside Russia last year, Zelenskyy said Ukraine had developed a weapon that can hit targets 700 kilometres away. He said last month Kyiv plans to produce 1 million drones, which have become a key battlefield weapon.

Other Ukrainian officials said it aims to manufacture this year more than 10,000 attack drones with a range of hundreds of kilometers, as well as more than 1,000 longer-range drones that can hit targets well behind the front line and inside Russia.

Both sides are raising the stakes of their long-range warfare as soldiers remain bogged down on the wintry battlefield. The UK Defence Ministry said on Friday that "ground combat has continued to be characterized by either a static front line or very gradual, local Russian advances in key sectors."

The Kremlin, meanwhile, has acquired ballistic missiles from North Korea and fired at

least one of them into Ukraine on December 30, the White House said Thursday, citing recently declassified US intelligence. It also is seeking close-range ballistic missiles from Iran, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said.

Ukraine said it stopped 21 out of 29 Russian Shahed drones launched late on Thursday and early on Friday. The assault injured two people, including a 14-year-old, and was the latest of almost daily Russian drone attacks in the new year.

Zelenskyy thanked Germany late on Thursday for a delivery of military aid, especially air defence materiel that he said "is timely and focused on our priorities."

Ukraine "should look to continue degrading Russia's ability to wage war by conducting an escalating campaign of airstrikes on targets far behind the front lines throughout occupied Ukraine and inside Russia itself," according to Mykola Bielieskov, a research fellow at Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies.

"This could include attacks on troop concentrations, military bases, and munitions stores along with logistical hubs and armament production facilities," he wrote in an assessment published by the Atlantic Council, a US think tank.

# Feb 8 polls could be a farce, doubts Imran

PTI ■ LONDON/ISLAMABAD

Raising serious doubts over whether the scheduled February 8 polls in Pakistan will be held, jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has reiterated his "engineered" removal from power in 2022 by the establishment "under pressure from America" and the lack of "level playing field" in the elections.

The charge in the write-up attributed to him in The Economist published on Thursday with the title 'Imran Khan warns that Pakistan elections could be a farce', has already been denied both by the Pakistan government and the US Department of State.

The write-up paints a scathing criticism of Pakistan's current political scenario even as it reiterates Khan's oft-repeated allegations and ends with the demand for "free and fair" elections for political stability and the need for reforms. He also claims that "with democracy under siege", Pakistan is "headed in the opposite direction."

Founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, 71-year-old Khan is incarcerated at the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, convicted in the Tishakhana corruption case and being tried under multiple other cases, including one under the Official Secrets Act

in connection with the May 9 violent protests by his supporters that damaged military installations across Pakistan.

His nomination has been rejected by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) as is the case with that of many other leaders of his party ahead of the February 8 general elections for both national and provincial assemblies.

While expressing fears that the election scheduled for February 8 may not take place at all, the article stated that even if they do, such polls would be a "disaster and a farce" since PTI is being denied its basic right to campaign.

"Whether elections happen or not, the manner in which I and my party have been targeted... has made one thing clear: the establishment — the army, security agencies, and the civil bureaucracy — is not prepared to provide any playing field at all, let alone a level one, for PTI," Khan wrote.

The PTI founder went on to describe in detail how his ouster in March-April 2022 was "engineered" under pressure from America, which he alleged, "was becoming agitated with my push for an independent foreign policy and my refusal to provide bases for its armed forces."

Khan also said he wanted to be a friend to all and not anyone's proxy for war, an opinion shaped by the huge losses

suffered by Pakistan, including the loss of 80,000 lives while collaborating with America's "war on terror."

He also described in detail the cipher case, how the caretaker governments are illegal as the elections were not held within 90 days, blamed the ECP for rejecting his nomination, hindering the party's internal elections, and also lodging cases against him and his party colleagues "simply for criticising the Commission."

Meanwhile, Khan's The Economist write-up went viral on social media and garnered a volley of reactions in Pakistan. Some PTI supporters also shared the Urdu translation, some shared screenshots — the original is behind a paywall — and some even went ahead with an audio-visual of Khan reading it out generated using AI.

Pakistan's leading daily The Dawn said, "While sources within the party were hesitant to comment on how the writing may have been relayed to the publication (in London) from inside prison, they insisted that the words were indeed those of Mr Khan."

It also said that some observers expressed doubts over whether the article was indeed by Khan, but many noted that the tone and content of the article was consistent with his views. Earlier, reacting to questions on



Pakistan elections, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said, "we want to see free and fair elections that are conducted in accordance with Pakistan's laws."

"It's not for the United States to dictate to Pakistan how it conducts — the exact specifics of how it conducts its election, but to make clear that we want to see those elections conducted in a free, fair, and peaceful manner that includes freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and ultimately a full, open, reliable, vibrant democratic process," Miller said on Thursday in Washington.

# China calls for peaceful coexistence with US

AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Friday that the United States and China must insist on peaceful coexistence and transcend their differences like they did when they established diplomatic relations 45 years ago this week.

Wang also promised that giant pandas would return to the US — and specifically California — by the end of the year.

"China-US cooperation is no longer a dispensable option for the two countries or even for the world, but a must-answer question that must be seriously addressed," he said.

Wang struck a largely conciliatory note at a lavish banquet marking the anniversary with 300 guests at a hall in the sprawl-

ing Diaoyutai state guest house complex in the Chinese capital.

The two countries are trying to navigate — and avoid a war — in what may be their most difficult waters since the US ended official ties with Taiwan and recognised the communist government in Beijing as the government of China on January 1, 1979.

China's rise as an economic and military power is challenging long-standing American leadership in the Asia region and globally.

"The world is currently undergoing profound changes unseen in a century," Wang said. "We must think about how to calibrate the direction of the large ship of China-US relations (and) avoid hidden reefs and dangerous shoals."

Both Wang and David Meale, the deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy, cited congratulatory letters exchanged by Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden on Monday's anniversary.

Meale, who spoke after Wang, said Biden expressed his commitment to managing the relationship responsibly and said he looked forward to building on the progress made by past leaders of the two countries.

Wang did criticise the use of "the big stick of sanctions" and engaging in power games, charges that China often levels at the United States. He denied that China seeks to supplant any other country and called on the US to respect China's development path and core interests.

# Pak SC reserves verdict in lifetime disqualification case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Friday reserved its judgment in the hearing of a key case that would settle the issue of lifetime disqualification of some leading politicians, including former prime ministers Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan.

The verdict is expected to determine once and for all the controversy around the period of disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) of the Constitution and the Elections Act 2017.

A 2018 judgment by a five-member bench of the apex court had declared that disqualification under Article 62(1)(f) was for life, but changes made in the Elections Act 2017 on June 26, 2023, by a coalition government led by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) restricted it to a five-year term only.

A seven-member bench, headed by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa, conducted the hearing on Friday.

During the hearing, the chief justice remarked that the Supreme Court verdict on lifetime disqualification and the amendments to the Elections Act 2017 could not co-exist. He also stated that discrepancies in the apex court's interpretation and the law could result in "confusion" in the upcoming general elections.

At the hearing's conclusion, the

chief justice said a short order would be issued without specifying a time for its announcement.

"We will try to come up with a shorter order as soon as possible. Probably not today, but it will be very soon, God willing," he said.

During the hearing, which spanned several days, the court heard many lawyers, garnering their views on the duration of disqualification.

The remarks made by the chief justice and some other judges indicated they were not comfortable with the lifelong ban on convicted politicians, the Pakistani media reported.

However, it was not clear if the limit of disqualification should be imposed through a court order or an amendment to the Constitution.

Most of the arguments were in favour of nullifying the concept of the lifelong ban and limiting it to a five-year term. However, the chief justice repeatedly said that he also wanted to hear arguments supporting lifelong disqualification and asked lawyers to come forward.

Sharif, former prime minister and also a frontrunner for the fourth term in the February 8 general elections, was disqualified in the Panama Papers case in 2017. His rival Imran Khan, who was disqualified in the Tishakhana corruption case last

year, also was hit by the same law.

However, Sharif got a kind of relief when his party-led government amended the election laws last year to limit the disqualification to five years, which allowed him to file nomination papers for the upcoming elections.

The controversy was not over as his candidature has been challenged as the interpretation of Article 62(1)(f) clashed with the changes made in the Elections Act 2017. The outcome of the hearing would decide the future for both Sharif and Khan, as well as many other politicians.

Seventy-four-year-old Sharif's case was final until the period of disqualification was reduced. However, 71-year-old Khan's disqualification has not attained finality, and his appeal against it is still pending.

Incarcerated Khan's nomination papers for the February 8 general elections were rejected on December 30 based on disqualification due to his conviction in the offence of "moral turpitude" in a corruption case and other reasons, a government official had reasoned.

Earlier, the issue came into the focus of the Supreme Court last month during the hearing of a petition of a politician from Dera Ghazi Khan, Badshah Khan Qaisarani, who was disqualified for producing a fake graduation degree.

# Pak Senate passes resolution seeking delay in elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Senate on Friday approved a resolution seeking a delay in the general election, citing cold weather and security concerns, increasing the political uncertainty ahead of the planned polls on February 8.

The resolution, tabled by independent Senator Dilawar Khan, received overwhelming support in the upper house of Pakistan's Parliament. However, Information Minister Murtaza Solangi and three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party opposed the move.

Senator Khan said that most areas of the country were currently experiencing harsh cold weather, so participation in elections in those areas was unmanageable.

Raising concerns about the security situation, he said the law and order situation was not good and added that politicians were being targeted, including an attack on Jamiat Ulama-Islam Fazl (JUI-F) chief Fazlur Rehman.

"Even security forces are being attacked in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (provinces)," he added.

The resolution was passed with only 14 lawmakers in attendance, according to the Dawn newspaper, despite clear orders by the Supreme Court to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to stick to its announcement to hold the elections on February 8.

The move by the Senate is expected to increase political and economic instability in the country. The Pakistan Stock Exchange reacted negatively to the resolution, and the share market immediately fell by more than 800 points.

# Biden to stress on democracy in campaign pitch

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden will kick off his 2024 pitch to voters on Friday, the day before the anniversary of the violent riot at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, by posing the question of whether democracy is still a "sacred cause" worth sacrificing for.

Biden believes the upcoming election is largely about that question, according to a Biden adviser who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the Democratic president's expected remarks.

Whether or not the nation agrees may end up a central question of the 2024 race.

The president will speak from near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, where George Washington and the Continental Army spent a bleak winter nearly 250 years ago.

And he'll talk about how Washington spoke to his army about democracy as a "sacred cause."

The January 6 attack was a vivid reminder of how that democracy can be tested, Biden is expected to say, according to the adviser.

At least nine people who were at the Capitol that day died during or after the rioting, including several officers who died of suicide, a woman who was shot and killed by police as she tried to break into the House chamber, and three other Trump supporters whom authorities said suffered medical emergencies.

Although the chaos of January 6 came down on members of both political parties, it is being remembered in a largely polarized fashion now, like other aspects of political life in a divided country.

Biden will characterise his predecessor as a serious threat to the nation's founding principles, arguing that Trump — who has built a commanding early lead in the Republican 2024 presidential primary — will seek to undermine US democracy should he win a second term.

Trump, who faces 91 criminal charges stemming from his efforts to overturn his loss to Biden and three other felony cases, argues that Biden and top Democrats are themselves seeking to undermine democracy by using the legal system to thwart the campaign of his chief rival.

In the days after the attack, 52 per cent of US adults said Trump bore a lot of responsibility for January 6, according to the Pew Research Center. By early 2022, that had declined to 43 per cent.

The number of Americans who said Trump bore no responsibility increased from 24 per cent in 2021 to 32 per cent in 2022.

# Brazil postpones visa requirements for US, Canada and Australia citizens to April

AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO

Brazil postponed for the second time the reintroduction of requirements to obtain tourist visas for citizens of the US, Australia and Canada, officials said.

Former president Jair Bolsonaro scrapped the visa requirements in 2019 to support the tourism industry, but the three countries continued to demand visas from Brazilians. The South American country requires visas from travellers based on principles of historical reciprocity and equal treatment.

The government initially postponed the visa implementation on October 1. President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in September then set January 10 as the new deadline. On Thursday night, Brazil's presidency said it would be postponed yet again till April 10. The statement said the government was still finalizing the new visa system and wanted to avoid implementing it close to the high season, mainly during the New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivities in February, which attract tens of thousands of tourists.

Lula reinstated the visa requirements after he took office one year ago. The countries in question initially included Japan, but the east Asian nation struck a deal with Brazilian authorities in September to ease travel provisions between the two, keeping its citizens off of the new list.

# Capitol riot, 3 years later: Hundreds of convictions, yet 1 major mystery unsolved

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Members of far-right extremist groups. Former police officers. An Olympic gold medalist swimmer. And active duty US Marines.

They are among the hundreds of people who have been convicted in the massive prosecution of the January 6, 2021 riot in the three years since the stunned nation watched the US Capitol attack unfold on live TV.

Washington's federal court system remains flooded with trials, guilty plea hearings and sentences stemming from what has become the largest criminal investigation in American history. And the hunt for suspects is far from over. "We cannot replace votes and deliberation with violence and intimidation," Matthew Graves, the US attorney for the District of Columbia, told reporters on Thursday.

Authorities are still working to identify more than 80 people wanted for acts of violence at the

Capitol. And they continue to regularly make new arrests, even as some January 6 defendants are being released from prison after completing their sentences.

The cases are playing out at the same courthouse where Donald Trump is scheduled to stand trial in March in the case accusing the former president of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss in the run-up to the Capitol attack.

Here's a look at where the cases against the January 6 defendants stand:

More than 1,230 people have been charged with federal crimes in the riot, ranging from misdemeanour offenses like trespassing to felonies like assaulting police officers and seditious conspiracy. Roughly 730 people have pleaded guilty to charges, while another roughly 170 have been convicted of at least one charge at a trial decided by a judge or a jury, according to an Associated Press database.

Only two defendants have been acquitted of all charges, and those were trials decided by a judge

rather than a jury.

About 750 people have been sentenced, with almost two-thirds receiving some time behind bars. Prison sentences have ranged from a few days of intermittent confinement to 22 years in prison. The longest sentence was handed down to Enrique Tarrio, the former Proud Boys national chairman who was convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors described as a plot to stop the transfer of power from Trump, a Republican, to Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Many rioters are already out of prison after completing their sentences, including some defendants who engaged in violence. Scott Fairlamb — a New Jersey man who punched a police officer during the riot and was the first January 6 defendant to be sentenced for assaulting law enforcement — was released from Bureau of Prisons' custody in June.

ALL EYES ON THE SUPREME COURT: Defense attorneys and prosecutors are close-

ly watching a case that will soon be heard by the US Supreme Court that could impact hundreds of January 6 defendants. The justices agreed last month to hear one rioter's challenge to prosecutors' use of the charge of obstruction of an official proceeding, which refers to the disruption of Congress' certification of Biden's 2020 presidential election victory over Trump.

More than 300 January 6 defendants have been charged with the obstruction offense, and so has Trump in the federal case brought by special counsel Jack Smith. Lawyers representing rioters have argued the charge was inappropriately brought against January 6 defendants.

The justices will hear arguments in March or April, with a decision expected by early summer. But their review of the obstruction charge is already having some impact on the January 6 prosecutions. At least two defendants have convinced judges to delay their sentences until after the Supreme Court rules on the matter.

# Greece unveils palace where Alexander the Great became king

AP ■ ANCIENT AIGAI (GREECE)

It was the largest building of classical Greece: the palace where Alexander the Great was proclaimed king before he launched a conquest that took him as far as modern-day Afghanistan.

The Palace of Aigai in northern Greece was fully reopened Friday following a 16-year renovation that cost more than 20 million Euros (USD 22 million) and included financial support from the European Union (EU).

It was built more than 2,300 years ago during the

reign of Alexander's father, Philip II, who had transformed the kingdom of Macedonia into a dominant military power of ancient Greece. Aigai was its royal capital.

"After many years of painstaking work, we can reveal the palace ... What we are doing today is an event of global importance," Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said at an inauguration event at the site Friday.

The palace contained column-rimmed courtyards, courts, places of worship, and spacious banquet halls, its floors decorated with patterned mar-

ble and intricate mosaics. The building covered a ground area of 15,000 square metres (1,600,000 square feet), a little under the area covered by the US Capitol building.

Shaped like two adjoining, unequally sized, square donuts, the Palace of Aigai was the administrative and spiritual centre of the kingdom. The palace remains and nearby royal tombs are a United Nations World Heritage Site at the area next to the modern village of Vergina. Like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, the marble columns were resurrected by fitting pieces of stone

unearthed in the ruins together with replica replacement parts.

Some 65 kilometres (40 miles) southwest of the port city of Thessaloniki, in northern Greece, Aigai drew international attention in the late 1970s during burial mound excavations in the area of rolling green hills with patches of wild poppies and daffodils.

The late Greek archaeologist Manolis Andronikos led the digs and discovered the royal tombs, recovering a gold casket and other gold artifacts as well as the bones widely believed to belong to Philip II. The discover-

ies revealed the sophistication of the ancient Macedonians, who had often been sidelined in historical accounts by attention on Athens.

Angeliki Kottaridi was still an archaeology student at university when she joined the project as a young assistant. She devoted her life's work to the excavations and decades later became the driving force behind the new museum at Aigai, which opened a year ago, and the palace restoration.

She retired on December 31 as head of the region's archaeological service and was

honoured at Friday's ceremony. "What you discover is stones scattered in the dirt, and pieces of mosaics here and there," Kottaridi told state television ahead of Friday's inauguration.

"Then you have to assemble things and that's the real joy of the researcher," Kottaridi said. "So when people ask me what makes me happy, I tell them it's not the moment something is revealed. It's the moment you realize you can take the knowledge one step further."

The renovated site will open to the public Sunday.



# Indian economy outperforming peers: UN

**PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS**  
India is projected to grow at 6.2 per cent in 2024, supported by robust domestic demand and strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors, the United Nations has said.  
The UN World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2024 report, launched here on Thursday, said that gross domestic product in South Asia is projected to increase by 5.2 per cent in 2024, driven by a robust expansion in India, which remains the fastest-growing large economy in the world.  
"Growth in India is projected to reach 6.2 per cent in 2024, slightly lower than the 6.3 per cent estimate for 2023, amid robust domestic demand and strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors," the report said.  
India's GDP is projected to increase to 6.6 per cent in 2025. The report notes that economic growth in India is projected to remain "strong" at 6.2 per cent this year mainly supported by resilient private consumption and strong public investment. While manufacturing and services sectors will continue to support the economy, erratic

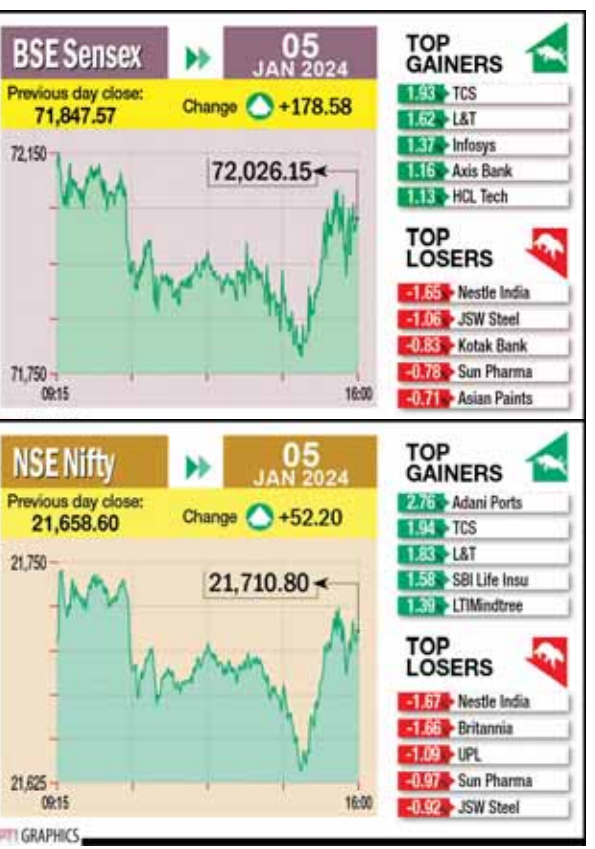
rainfall patterns will likely dampen agricultural output, it said. "Indian economy again outperformed its peers, not just this year but the last few years," Chief of the Global Economic Division Monitoring Branch, Economic Analysis and Policy Division (UN DESA) Hamid Rashid told reporters.  
He said that India's economic growth has consistently remained over six per cent and "we believe this will continue in 2024 and 2025 as well."  
Rashid noted that although inflation was relatively high for India, it didn't have to raise rates as much and inflation has come down quite a bit.  
"That has allowed the government to sustain the fiscal support that it needed," he said adding that "we didn't see significant fiscal adjustments or fiscal retrenchment in India."  
"Overall, domestic consumption is growing, household spending has grown, employment situation has improved quite a bit. So we are very optimistic about India's growth outlook in the near term," he said. In response to a question on factors holding back India's economic growth, Director of the Economic Analysis and Policy Division Shantanu Mukherjee



cited India's GDP growth rates of four years from 2022-2025 and said: "I'm not sure that 7.7%, 6.3%, 6.2% and 6.6% is exactly holding something back."  
"In a kind of abstract sense, one would run the risk of overheating an economy if you grew at much faster rates at the size and complexity of India," he said. Mukherjee noted that the Indian government has recently modified its tax collection systems and "those have also certainly helped and given a more stable playing field for businesses and other initiatives to progress."  
Highlighting risks facing the economy, he said some of those risks are more global in nature. "India still remains a very large-

tively stable. So any shock on those lines would boomerang through the economy," he said. Consumer price inflation in India is expected to decelerate from 5.7 per cent in 2023 to 4.5 per cent in 2024, staying within the two to six per cent medium-term inflation target range set by the Central Bank.  
"The risk of a surge in inflation in the coming months cannot be ruled out, however, as potential increases in commodity prices and the adverse impact of climate events on food prices could disrupt the pace of disinflation," the report said.  
The labour market situation in South Asia remained fragile in 2023 despite improvements in some countries.  
In India, labour market indicators improved over the year, with labour force participation increasing in August to its highest rate since the onset of the pandemic, the report said, citing the Reserve Bank of India. The unemployment rate averaged 7.1 per cent in September, the lowest value in a year, with unemployment in rural areas falling despite weaker monsoon rains. Youth unemployment rates declined significantly during the first quarter of 2023 to the lowest value since the pan-

dem, it said.  
The report also noted that the Reserve Bank of India has been cautious about opening the country's financial markets and has been implementing appropriate risk management systems.  
The UN said global economic growth is projected to slow from an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2023 to 2.4 per cent in 2024, trending below the pre-pandemic growth rate of three per cent.  
This latest forecast comes on the heels of global economic performance exceeding expectations in 2023. However, last year's stronger-than-expected GDP growth masked short-term risks and structural vulnerabilities, it said.  
The better-than-expected performance for 2023 is chiefly driven by several large economies, notably the US but also Brazil, India and Mexico, Mukherjee told reporters.  
The UN's flagship economic report presents a sombre economic outlook for the near term. Persistently high interest rates, further escalation of conflicts, sluggish international trade, and increasing climate disasters, pose significant challenges to global growth.



## Markets extend gains on foreign fund inflows

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Benchmark stock indices BSE Sensex and Nifty closed higher for a second straight day on Friday, following gains in IT, tech and capital goods shares amid fresh foreign capital inflows.  
After slipping briefly during the late afternoon trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex made a quick recovery and jumped 178.58 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 72,026.15. During the day, it soared 308.91 points or 0.42 per cent to 72,156.48.  
The Nifty climbed 52.20 points or 0.24 per cent to 21,710.80. On a weekly basis, the BSE benchmark declined 214.11 points or 0.29 per cent, and the Nifty dipped 20.6 points or 0.09 per cent.  
"Markets traded volatile and ended marginally higher amid mixed cues. After the initial uptick, the Nifty drifted gradually lower and oscillated in a range till the end."  
"Meanwhile, a mixed trend continued on the sectoral front wherein recovery in IT majors and follow-up buying in select heavyweights kept the indices occupied. The broader indices managed to edge higher for yet another session wherein small cap gained over half a per cent," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.  
Among the Sensex firms, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HCL Techno-

## Indian economy to grow 7.3%

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Indian economy is estimated to grow at 7.3 per cent in 2023-24 against 7.2 per cent in the previous fiscal, the National Statistical Office (NSO) said on Friday in its first advance estimates of national accounts.  
Releasing the first advance estimates of National Income for 2023-24, the NSO said, "Real GDP or GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated to attain a level of Rs 171.79 lakh crore, as against the Provisional Estimate of GDP for the year 2022-23 of Rs 160.06 lakh crore, released on 31st May 2023".  
According to a statement, the growth in real GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 7.3 per cent compared to 7.2 per cent in 2022-23.  
GDP at current prices in the year 2023-24 is estimated at Rs 296.58 lakh crore against the provisional estimate of GDP of Rs 272.41 lakh crore for the year 2022-23, released on May 31, 2023, it stated.  
The growth in nominal GDP during 2023-24 is estimated at 8.9 per cent against 16.1 per cent in 2022-23, it added.  
In December 2023, the RBI raised India's GDP growth rate estimate to 7 per cent for 2023-24 from its earlier projection of 6.5 per cent.

## India's forex reserves jump to \$623.2 bn

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
India's forex reserves jumped by USD 2.759 billion to USD 623.2 billion in the week ended December 29, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.  
In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had increased by USD 4.471 billion to USD 620.441 billion.  
In October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves took a hit as the central bank deployed the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments since last year.  
For the week ended December 29, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 1.869 billion to USD 551.615 billion, as per the data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).  
Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.  
Gold reserves were up by USD 853 million to USD 48.328 billion during the week, the RBI said.  
The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 38 million to USD 18.365 billion, the apex bank said.  
India's reserve position with the IMF was down by USD 2 million to USD 4.892 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed.



## Government to revamp SOPs for safe tunnel construction

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The government on Friday said it will revamp the standard operating procedures for tunnel construction after an expert panel found many shortcomings in the under-construction Silkyara tunnel, which collapsed in November last year, leaving 41 workers stranded for more than two weeks.  
At a press briefing, Road Transport and Highways Secretary Anurag Jain said the Silkyara tunnel project in Uttarakashi is still workable, and the government will not abandon it.  
An experts' panel to investigate the collapse of a portion of the under-construction Silkyara tunnel has pointed out many shortcomings in the project, he added.  
"Silkyara tunnel collapse se humne kaafi kuch seekha hai (We have learnt a lot from the collapse of the under-construction Silkyara tunnel)," he said.  
A total of 41 workers were trapped after a portion of the under-construction tunnel collapsed on November 12 and the workers were rescued on November 28.  
The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), on December 6, constituted a five-member committee to investigate the collapse of the tunnel.  
"The committee has suggested some changes in standard operating procedures (SOPs) of tunnel construction. Based on the committee's suggestion, we will change SOPs for tunnel construction to prevent the occurrence of Silkyara-like mishaps in the future," he added.

## Confident of achieving 13,814-km highway construction: Road Secy

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) is confident of achieving the highways construction target of 13,814 kilometres for the current fiscal, its secretary Anurag Jain said on Friday.  
Addressing a press conference, Jain further said the total length of national highways in India increased 60 per cent to 1,46,145 km till December 2023, from 91,287 km in 2014, since the Narendra Modi government came into power.  
"The pace of highway construction in 2023-24 so far has been better than last year, and we are confident of achieving the 13,814-km highway construction target during the current fiscal," he said.  
Up to December 31, 2023, the ministry has built 6,217 km of national highway, higher than last year's 5,774 km for the same period.  
According to him, the government is planning to award 10,000 km of national highway projects in 2023-24.  
Jain also said that the govern-

ment has asked companies to prepare detailed project reports (DPR) for unawarded identified projects to increase the pace of awarding in 2023-24.  
He said the total length of four-lanes and above national highways (NHs) increased by 2.5 times to 46,179 km in December 2023 from 18,387 km in 2014. While the total length of high-speed corridors in 2014 was 353 km, which increased to 3,913 km in 2023, the total length of less than 2-lane national highways decreased from 30 per cent (2014) to 10 per cent of national highway network in 2023.  
Jain also said the road ministry has constructed 6,217 km of national highways up to December in 2023-24.  
He noted that expenditure on the ministry's highways construction expenditure is expected to increase by 9.4 times to Rs 3.17 lakh crore in 2023 from Rs 3.17 lakh crore in 2023 from last year's 5,774 km for the same period.  
According to him, the government is planning to award 10,000 km of national highway projects in 2023-24.  
Jain also said that the govern-

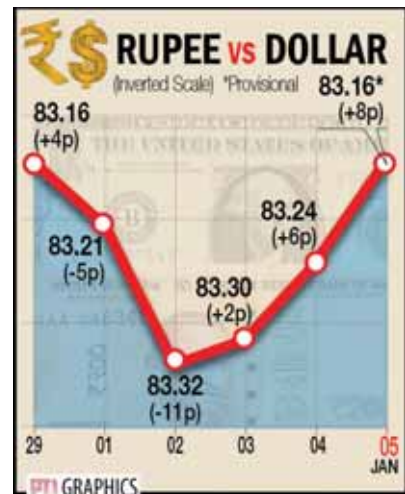
## RBI tightens norms for short term commercial papers

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
The Reserve Bank of India has tightened rules for the issuance of short term Commercial Papers (CPs) and Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs), with an initial maturity of up to one year.  
The new norms, which come into effect from April 1, involve six key changes.  
The tenor of such short term CPs cannot be less than seven days or exceed a year, while those of NCDs cannot be less than 90 days or more than one year, the RBI said.  
As per the revised norms, CPs and NCDs issued from April 1 onwards will have a minimum denomination of Rs 5 lakh and in multiples of Rs 5 lakh there-

## Rupee rises 8 paise

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
The rupee appreciated 8 paise to close at 83.16 against the US dollar on Friday, helped by a positive trend in domestic equities and fresh foreign capital inflows.  
However, rising crude oil prices in international markets and a strong greenback overseas restricted gains for the local unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened flat at 83.23 against the greenback.  
The rupee oscillated between an intra-day low of 83.24 and a high of 83.12 against the greenback and finally settled at 83.16, higher by 8 paise from its previous close of 83.24.  
"The Indian rupee remained the second-best performer among the Asian currencies following Chinese currencies. The dollar inflows and stable crude oil prices helped the rupee to buck the past two week's bearish trend," said Dilip Parmar, Research

Analyst at HDFC Securities. The expectations of a strong December US jobs report could temporarily reverse the soft-landing playbook, Parmar said.  
Traders will also closely watch India's 2024 growth forecast for next week's rupee directions, Parmar said, adding that from the level front, spot USD/INR has support at 83.10 and resistance at 83.35.  
Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.25 per cent lower at 102.68. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.90 per cent to USD 78.29 per barrel.  
On the domestic equity market front, Sensex surged 178.58 points, or 0.25 per cent, to settle at 72,026.15 points. The Nifty advanced 52.20 points, or 0.24 per cent, to 21,710.80 points.  
Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Thursday as they bought shares worth Rs 1,513.41 crore, according to exchange data.  
On the domestic macroeconomic front, the services sector growth in India rose to a three-month high in December supported by favourable economic conditions and positive demand trends.



## BUSINESS BRIEF

**NFL HAS STARTED THE AGRI-DRONE PILOT TRAINING OF THE FIRST BATCH OF 30 WOMEN FROM PUNJAB UNDER THE NAMO DRONE DIID SCHEME LAUNCHED BY PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI FROM DECEMBER 12**  
NFL has started the agri-drone pilot training of the first batch of 30 women from Punjab under the Nammo Drone Diid scheme launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from December 12.

**VIT-AP ORGANISES GLOBAL MEET AMARAVATI:** The School of Electronics Engineering of VIT-AP University hosted the 5th International Conference on Advances in Distributed Computing and Machine Learning on January 5 in the campus. The conference brought together over 200 participants, including research scholars, faculty members, and students, making it a resounding success. Distinguished conveners Umakanta Nanda and Ravindra Dhuli, spearheaded the conference with the support of general chairs Lakhan Dev Sharma and Rohit Lorenzo.

## Real estate opportunities in Ayodhya

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Real estate body NAREDCO on Friday said it plans to organise a builders' conference in Ayodhya to tap its commercial and residential opportunities as the holy city gears up to attract lakhs of tourists post inauguration of the Ram temple on January 22.  
National Real Estate Development Council (NAREDCO) National President G Hari Babu said there are opportunities to set up hotels, resorts and apartments in Ayodhya as the tourist flow will increase in the coming months.

## EV sales in India likely to grow

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Electric Vehicle (EV) sales in India is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 35 per cent with annual volumes likely to touch 27.2 million units by 2032, a report said on Friday.  
The report, 'India Electric Vehicle Market Overview 2023', by energy advisory, software and services firm, Customized Energy Solutions, also predicts a record-breaking sale of 1.7 million units in 2023.  
EV sale in India is projected to touch about 27.2 million units by 2032 and with a CAGR of 35 per cent from 2023-2032 under business-as-usual conditions, according to the report.  
The driving force behind this is a confluence of factors, including the availability of the FAME-II subsidy, which has proven to be a catalyst, with a substantial budget allocation of USD 1.2 billion assigned to subsidise various EV segments, it said.  
The central government's commitment to fostering an indigenous EV ecosystem is evident in the approval of a USD 3.5-billion Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the manufacturing of automobiles and auto components, thereby nurturing the development of the EV supply chain in the country, as per the report.  
Besides, state governments are actively supporting the segment through their various respective policies towards EV promotion

## Toyota hikes vehicle prices by up to 2.5%

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Friday said it has increased prices of its vehicles ranging from 0.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent on select models and variants with effect from January 1, 2024.  
This increase was necessitated to partially offset the rising input costs, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) said in a statement.  
The overall price adjustment has been moderated taking into account a minimum impact on customers, it added.  
Most of the passenger vehicle makers like Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai Motor India, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Honda, Volkswagen, Skoda Auto, Audi and BMW, had announced plans to increase the prices of their vehicles in January to offset the adverse impact of rising input and material costs.





# Olympic qualifiers do or die outing for us: Savita

PTI ■ RANCHI

The Asian Champions Trophy victory has boosted India's morale ahead of the Olympic Qualifiers, according to captain Savita, who expressed confidence in the side's experienced players to help the women's hockey team qualify for the Paris Games.



Eight countries, including hosts India, will be vying for top three spots when the Olympic qualifiers are held here from January 13 to 19 to book berths for the Paris Games in July-August.

"The team is motivated, particularly after winning the Asian Champions Trophy," Savita was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

"Our preparations have been earnest and the team consists of players who have played the Olympic Qualifiers in the past and understand very well the level of performance needed to make the cut.

This is a do-or-die outing for us and we are ready for the challenge." The top three teams will qualify for the Paris Games.

The teams in the fray include reigning Olympic silver medalists Germany, former Asian Games champions Japan, Chile and Czech Republic grouped in pool A, while hosts India are grouped in pool B along with United States, New Zealand and Italy.

"Every member of the team wants to participate in the Olympic Games. That is the ultimate dream and after arriving in Ranchi earlier this week, we have got some good training sessions in the ground," India vice-captain Nikki Pradhan said.

"There is a lot of excitement not just among the team members but among the hockey fans in Jharkhand who I am sure will turn up in large numbers to show their support for us," India will take on United States in their opening match on

January 13, followed by a match against New Zealand on January 14. After a day's rest, India will play Italy on January 16, while the semi-finals will be held on January 18 and the final on January 19.

# UWW wants IOA, WFI to cooperate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

United World Wrestling chief Nenad Lalovic wants all stakeholders, including the WFI and IOA, to co-operate so that Indian grapplers are not inconvenienced by uncertainty prevailing in the sport and can enter international competitions in the crucial Olympic year.

Still awaiting IOA confirmation ratifying elections

being the only one from India to have secured a Paris 2024 berth, while the others have disappointed because of lack of training camps and competitions for more than a year due to protests by Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik and Vinesh Phogat.

The three top wrestlers are demanding the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for allegedly sexually harassing women grapplers. "The WFI and the IOA are requested to cooperate so that the athletes are not prejudiced and are duly entered in interna-

tional UWW events under the same conditions as detailed in our suspension letter of August 23, 2023. We thank you for your attention and collaboration for the sake of all wrestlers in India," said the UWW president in his letter. UWW also said it was "well-informed" about the newly-elected WFI under Sanjay Singh and was waiting for IOA to confirm the results of the elections. "UWW has been well-informed of the results of the Wrestling Federation of India's elections held on December 21, 2023 under the supervision of a for-



# Top stars to feature as ITF event returns to Mandya

PTI ■ MANDYA (KARNATAKA)

Some of the top tennis talents, including India's Sasikumar Mukund, will be seen in action when an ITF event returns to the city after eight years through the Mandya Open, scheduled between January 7 and 14. The tournament, the first ITF event to be played here since May 2015, has attracted players from over 18 countries and offers a prize pool of USD 25000. Apart from Mukund, other top players on the acceptance list are: Eric Vanshelboim (Ukraine), Kris van Wyk (South Africa), Giles Hussey (Great Britain) and Thomas Fancutt (Australia). Local star SD Prajwal Dev from Mysore, who was recently included in India's Davis Cup team, is also among the five Indians to gain direct entry. KSLTA Secretary, Maheshwar Rao said: "It is our endeavour to develop and grow the sport of tennis across the state."

# 'Praggnanandhaa success inspiration for countless young Indians'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian chess prodigy R Praggnanandhaa has got a new admirer in business tycoon Gautam Adani, who on Thursday announced his decision to support the 18-year-old Grandmaster. Adani shared on 'X' a picture of his meeting with Praggnanandhaa as he described the Chennai-based chess star as an inspiration for countless young Indians to bring laurels for the country.



"It's a privilege to support Praggnanandhaa as he continues to win laurels in the world of chess and make India proud," Adani wrote. "His success is an inspiration to countless young Indians to believe that nothing is more gratifying than standing on the podium to celebrate our nation's greatness. "Praggnanandhaa represents

what India can and will be all about. I wish him all the very best." Praggnanandhaa is the fifth youngest Grandmaster ever, having attained the rank at the age of 12 in 2018. He won the

Xtracon Chess Open in Denmark in 2019, followed by the World Youth Championships in the U-18 category the same year. In December 2019, Praggnanandhaa attained 2,600

# Avani to lead Indian team at major golf events in Australia

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Talented golfer Avani Prashanth will lead a four-member Indian team, comprising two men and two women, at the prestigious Australian Masters of Amateur Championships and the Australian Amateurs this month. The 17-year-old Avani, who has decided to hold off her plans to turn pro for some time, will feature in both events alongside Heena Kang, while Sandeep Yadav and Rohit will play in the men's section.

The team will first feature in the annual Australian Masters of Amateur Championships from January 9-12 at the Southern Golf Club. A week later, the four Indians will play at the high-profile Australian Amateur Championship at the Yarra Yarra Golf Club and Keybrough Golf Club from January 16 to 19. Avani is the only Indian to be ranked in the Top-50 of the world and has represented the country numerous times and even won the Queen Sirikit Cup. She was fourth in the individual section of the World Amateur Team Championships in Abu Dhabi, besides winning a professional event, while being an amateur, in Europe. Heena, one of the two golf-playing sisters, Ceerat being the other, topped the domestic IGU Order of Merit for 2023 with a string of consistent performances and will wear India colours for the first time.

Among men, Rohit, who won twice last year in India and topped the IGU Order of Merit, and Sandeep Yadav, a consistent performer, will form the Indian team.

Rohit was also the runner-up at the 2023 All India Amateur Championships in Kolkata. Interestingly, Sandeep Yadav won the 2022 All India Amateurs, the Indian Golf Union's flagship event, which is more than 100 years old. "It is always an honour to play for India. I have had some good results in 2023 and my long term aim is pro golf, but right now these two events in Australia, which are very prestigious, are my focus," said Avani, a two-time All India Amateur winner. "I have a lot of big events coming up in 2024, and hopefully the results will be even better than 2023, which was a great year for me."

Heena, who like Avani is coached by Laurence Brotherhood from Leeds, UK, is hoping to make a mark in her international debut.

# Rybakina, Azarenka advance to Brisbane International semifinals

AP ■ BRISBANE

Second-seeded Elena Rybakina only needed to play seven games in her quarterfinal Friday to reach the final four at the Brisbane International. Two-time champion Victoria Azarenka had a tougher run, needing three sets, about 2 1/2 hours and joking about the prospect of having to wear protective headwear to advance 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 over 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko, the No. 3 seed.



Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, won the first set 6-1 before 11th-seeded Anastasia Potapova retired from their match with an abdominal injury. She'll next play either Linda Noskova or Mirra Andreeva. Azarenka, who won back-to-back Australian Open titles in 2012 and '13, clinched her victory in a tense match three games after Ostapenko's emotional outburst at chair umpire Julie Kerdjendie.

"With Jelena, sometimes you just have to put on a helmet and try to stay in there," Azarenka said. "She's an incredible player and a Grand Slam champion, and she's proved many times she can beat anybody on any given day. "The quality of tennis was incredible, so to be able to go through ... I'm very proud." Azarenka hit 16 aces, had only two double-faults and moved

well but struggled at times to handle Ostapenko's powerful groundstrokes in the second and third sets.

Ostapenko broke early in the third set with a backhand winner but wasn't able to consolidate as Azarenka broke back. When Azarenka lunged forward to retrieve a drop shot and won the point to hold for a 5-4 lead in the deciding set, Ostapenko questioned whether the ball had bounced twice. "You make so much mistakes" the Latvian player told the umpire. "I never want you on my match again. You ruin my matches."

Ostapenko lost the next two points but won four straight to hold serve and make it 5-5, before Azarenka went on a roll and won eight of the last nine points to reach the semifinals again. She'll face either top-seeded compatriot Aryna Sabalenka, the defending Australian Open champion, or fifth-seeded Daria Kasatkina. Rafael Nadal will be aiming to extend his comeback tournament from a year-long injury layoff when he meets Australian Jordan Thompson in a quarterfinal nightcap on Pat Rafter Arena.

The 22-time major winner has had straight-sets wins over Dominic Thiem and Jason Kubler in his first two competitive matches since the 2023 Australian Open.

# Theegala takes lead in PGA Tour season opener

PTI ■ MAUI (HAWAII)

Indian-American golfer Sahith Theegala got off to a flying start with a stunning 9-under 64 at The Sentry to lead the field on day 1 of the PGA Tour season-opener at the Par-73 Plantation course in Kapalua.



Touted as one of the rising stars, Theegala, playing the event for the second time, made 10 birdies, including six in a row from the turn, to begin his bid for a second PGA Tour title following his breakthrough win at the Fortinet Championship last September. Korea's Sungjae Im fired a stellar 8-under 65 to match his tournament low score at The Sentry as his 2024 PGA Tour campaign also got off to a great start. He was among the bunch lying tied second alongside reigning FedEx Cup champion Viktor Hovland, two-time major champion Collin Morikawa, a resurgent Jason Day and Camillo Villegas.

The 25-year-old Im, who has two top-10s and a T13 finish last year at The Sentry, had nine birdies on the day. Another Indian-American, Akshay Bhatia, who also had a breakthrough win in 2023 which earned him a spot in The Sentry, was lying T-25th with a round of 4-under 69. Im's compatriot Tom Kim sank an eagle and four birdies en route a 68, while debutant Byeong Hun An, also from Korea, pencilled down seven birdies against two bogeys for a joint 19th place. Si Woo Kim returned a 70 for T37, while eight-time PGA Tour winner Hideki Matsuyama carded a 71 for a tied-46th position.

Theegala, who came close to a win several times before snaring a title last year, when asked about the wait and how it had changed things for him, said, "Golf-wise, actually, it (Fortinet Championship win) really hasn't changed much. If anything, it's given me a little more validation. "As I progress in my young pro career, I realise I don't really need too much validation. It's just putting in the work and the results will come when they come. If not, work harder and just be patient. But it's something that nobody can take away and it's just a testament to all the work," he said. "You need a couple of good breaks along the way, and I got it there. Looking back, I'm always going to be able to look back on that win and just kind of how we went about our process, and just every little thing that went into that win is always going to be used as a positive. "If I'm struggling or doing really well, I can always look back at that and be like, 'alright, I kind of did this and that during that week', and that's something that's going to be big, I think, coming up, as I hopefully put myself in contention as

much as possible," he said. On his first round in Maui and what pleased him the most, he added, "Probably 12 (12th hole). Just because I hit a great drive, almost got... Just hit it in the greenside bunker there. Didn't hit a great bunker shot and I had a really gnarly 8- or 9-footer that I didn't know which way it was going to break, grain was going all over the place. "I just aimed it dead centre and tried to hit it hard and heeded that putt, and that settled me down a little bit more, because I knew 13, 14, 15 were very gettable too, so to make that putt was nice." The Sentry is the first event of the 2024 PGA Tour season. It is the first of eight Signature Events in 2024, which offers an increased purse size of \$20 million and 700 FedEx Cup points to the winner. Eligible players for The Sentry are tournament winners in 2023 and players who finished in the top-50 in the FedEx Cup Playoffs and Eligibility Points List.

# Pistorius released from prison on parole

AP ■ PRETORIA (SOUTH AFRICA)

South African athlete Oscar Pistorius has been released from prison on parole and is now at home, South Africa's Department of Corrections said Friday. The department gave no more details of Pistorius' release. The announcement came at around 8:30 a.m., indicating corrections officials had released the world-famous double-amputee Olympic runner from the Atteridgeville Correctional Center in the South African capital, Pretoria, in the early hours. Pistorius has served nearly nine years of his 13 years and five months murder sentence for killing girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp on Valentine's Day 2013. He was approved for parole in November. Serious offenders in South Africa are eligible for parole after serving at least half their sentence.

He was admitted into the system of Community Corrections and is now at home." Pistorius was expected to initially live at his uncle's mansion in the upscale Waterkloof suburb of Pretoria, and a police van was seen parked outside of that house. Department of Corrections officials had said Pistorius' release time would not be announced in advance and he would not be "paraded" because they hoped to keep him away from the media glare that has trailed him since he shot Steenkamp multiple times through a toilet door at his home in the predawn hours of Feb. 14, 2013. He will live under strict parole conditions until the remainder of his sentence expires in December 2029. Steenkamp's mother, June Steenkamp, said in a statement earlier Friday that she had accepted Pistorius' parole as part of South African law. "Has there been justice for Reeva? Has Oscar served

enough time? There can never be justice if your loved one is never coming back, and no amount of time served will bring Reeva back," June Steenkamp said. "We remain behind as the ones serving a life sentence." "With the release of Oscar Pistorius on parole, my only desire is that I will be allowed to live my last years in peace with my focus remaining on the Reeva Rebecca Steenkamp Foundation, to continue Reeva's legacy." The Department of Corrections has emphasized that the multiple Paralympic champion's release - like every other offender on parole - does not mean that he has served his time. Some of Pistorius' parole conditions include restrictions on when he's allowed to leave his home, a ban on consuming alcohol, and orders that he must attend programs on anger management and on violence against women. He will have to perform community service.



Pistorius will also have to regularly meet with parole officials at his home and at correctional services offices and will be subjected to unannounced visits by authorities. He is not allowed to leave the Waterkloof district without permission and is banned from speaking to the media until the end of his sentence. He could be sent back to

jail if he is in breach of any of his parole conditions. South Africa does not use tags or bracelets on paroled offenders so Pistorius will not wear any monitoring device, Department of Corrections officials said. But he will be constantly monitored by a department official and will have to inform the official of any major changes in his

life, such as if he wants to get a job or move to another house. Pistorius has maintained that he shot Steenkamp, a 29-year-old model and law graduate, by mistake. He testified that he believed Steenkamp was a dangerous intruder hiding in his bathroom and shot through the door with his licensed 9 mm pistol in self-defense. Prosecutors said he killed his girlfriend intentionally during a late-night argument. Steenkamp's family did not oppose his parole application in November, although June Steenkamp said in a victim statement submitted to the parole board that she didn't believe Pistorius had been fully rehabilitated and was still lying about the killing. Before the killing, Pistorius was held up as an inspiring role model after having had both of his legs amputated below the knee as a baby because of a congenital condition. He became a champion sprinter on his carbon-fiber running blades and

made history by competing at the 2012 London Olympics. But his murder trial destroyed his image. He was accused of being prone to angry outbursts and acting recklessly with guns, while witnesses testified about various altercations he had with others, including an argument in which he allegedly threatened to break a man's legs. Pistorius was first convicted of culpable homicide — a charge comparable to manslaughter — and sentenced to five years in prison for killing Steenkamp. After appeals by prosecutors, he was ultimately found guilty of murder and had his sentence increased, although that judgment by the Supreme Court of Appeal still didn't definitively rule that he knew it was Steenkamp behind the toilet door. Pistorius was first sent to prison in 2014, was released on house arrest in 2015 during an appeal and was sent back to prison in 2016. He was initially incarcerated at the maximum security Kgosi Mampuru II Prison in Pretoria but was moved to Atteridgeville early in his sentence because it is better suited to holding disabled prisoners.



# SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TURNED IT AROUND IN 2ND TEST: RAHUL

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

India didn't have "extra fire" in the lost opening Test against South Africa but a "mental shift" turned things around, said KL Rahul after the visitors won the second game to level the two-match rubber here.

India had lost the opening Test by an innings and 32 runs in Centurion but the team regrouped to secure a seven-wicket win against South Africa within two days to record a memorable draw here on Thursday.

"I think we weren't really 100 per cent during our last match in terms of batting or bowling. We were prepared, but that extra edge or extra fire was missing, credit to South Africa as well, that they didn't allow us to reach to that confidence," the 31-year-old told 'Star Sports'. Rahul lauded the team for recovering quickly from the setback.

"There was a little bit of change of the planning and attitude only. I mean we can't say that we weren't ready during the last Test match. We were ready but there



are situations where the opposition really blasts you out of the Test match or we are not used to it," Rahul said.

"Since last 4-5 years, we've been a team that's really competed and we have won series outside of India, so we weren't ready for it and it was a huge hit for us..." But it speaks volumes of how much we enjoy playing Test cricket and how much we value playing for our country and how much Test victories outside of India mean to us," he added.

India faced criticism for being ill-prepared after they were bowled out for 245 and 131 in the two innings in the first Test, while allowing South Africa to score 408 in their first essay. "...It was just a mental shift during the turnaround time of one day. We were more ready this time and we were ready for a fight. We wanted to get this win and just do our job really well."

Rahul, who scored a memorable hundred in the first Test, admitted that they were not at their best in Centurion. "They bowled us out very cheaply in both the innings. So, we were really happy that we could bounce off so well."



## Yashasvi: Rohit helps me maintain positive frame of mind

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Yashasvi Jaiswal has no qualms in admitting that the South Africa series was a challenging one and said it was India skipper Rohit Sharma, who helped him maintain a positive mindset.

Jaiswal managed only 50 runs in 4 innings on bouncy tracks at Supersport Park in Centurion and Newlands in Cape Town as the two-Test series ended in 1-1 draw.

"Rohit Sharma helps me maintain a positive frame of mind and we needed to score runs quickly against new ball," said Jaiswal after his quickfire 28 off 23 balls set the tone during India's chase of 79.

"I just wanted to give a good start and that was all there in my mind as we had to win the match. In last 3 innings and even in this knock, I had done the same thing."

The 22-year-old knows that he needs to make improvements with regards to tackling bounce and lateral movement off the surface. "Yes this tour has been a learning experience for me. Different environment and in every sense it has been an enjoyable experience. Learnt about improvements I need to make," Jaiswal said.

"The ball comes differently here

and I tried giving my all but I accept there were challenges. This experience will keep me in good stead as I am learning and would strive to improve during next series."

Jaiswal politely rebutted when asked if he would maintain his attacking style of batting in the upcoming Test series against England starting January 25 in Hyderabad.

"There's no particular style I want to adhere to and it's not that I have an attacking game only. I can change my game as per team's demands," he said.

"I would bat differently if it's first day and differently if it's final session and 70 runs needed. I try to change my game as per team's needs."

He gets regular tips from seniors like skipper Rohit and Virat Kohli about how to tweak his game as per situation, while coach Rahul Dravid spoke to him about specific technical aspects.

"Rahul sir told me in challenging conditions if you get beaten or get hit and still batting out there then you are doing well. How to leave deliveries from length, which deliveries to play," he said.

But what has been the best advice from coach? "Basically, he wants me to bat freely and always with a smile."

## Melbourne Stars keeper Harper hospitalised

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Big Bash League side Melbourne Stars wicket-keeper Sam Harper was hospitalised after taking a blow on the head during a training session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday. The 27-year-old was conscious and in a stable condition. He was taken to hospital in an ambulance and will undergo scans overnight. Harper's club said in a statement that they will provide updates about the player's health as and when they get the reports.

"Sam Harper was struck in the head whilst batting at training this evening at the MCG and subsequently taken to hospital in a stable condition.

"We ask that you respect his privacy at this time. The club will provide further updates when they come to hand," said Melbourne Stars in a statement. Harper was training ahead of the team's clash against Sydney Sixers when he was hit on the head while batting in the nets.

A report in ESPNcricinfo said the cricketer attempted to play a cross-bat shot and got hit on the chin, "with the ball lodging under the grill of his helmet, causing a severe cut near his throat."

The report added that Melbourne Stars immediately called off the training session.

In January, 2020, Harper had suffered a serious concussion in the BBL when he collided with Hobart Hurricanes' Nathan Ellis and had to be taken to hospital, said the report.

## Kohli, Jadeja to vie for Sobers Trophy

### Ashwin in race for ICC Test Cricketer of Year

PTI ■ DUBAI

Star batter Virat Kohli and premier all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja will vie for the ICC Men's Cricketer of the Year award, while ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin will be in the race for the Test Cricketer of the Year.

Kohli and Jadeja will have to contest for the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy against Australian captain Pat Cummins and his team-mate Travis Head. Ashwin will face competition from Head and his Australia teammate Usman Khawaja along with England senior batsman Joe Root, the ICC said on Friday.

Kohli made 2048 runs in 35

matches across Tests and ODIs in 2023, including the 50th one-day hundred to go past the iconic Sachin Tendulkar during the World Cup.

Jadeja amassed 613 runs and 66 wickets in 35 matches and the numbers contained his 22-wicket haul against Australia in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy early in the previous year. Cummins garnered 422 runs and 59 wickets in 24 matches and has also led the Australians to wins in the Ashes, WTC Final and in the ODI World Cup.

Head was in roaring form with the bat in 2023, evidenced by the 1698 runs in 31 matches that included hundreds in the WTC Final and the ODI World Cup final, and both the knocks were



produced against India. Meanwhile, Ashwin ended the year as the top Test bowler in the

ICC Rankings, taking 41 wickets at a striking average of 17.02 and recording the most five-

wicket hauls by anyone in Tests — four.

Root was at the forefront of England's success in Test cricket last year. He registered 787 runs in eight Tests, finishing the year with a strong average of 65.58.

Australia opener Khawaja topped the run-scoring charts in the longest format last year, amassing 1210 runs at an average of 52.60, which included three centuries.

Nominees for the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC Women's Cricketer of the Year: Chamari Athapaththu (Sri Lanka), Ashleigh Gardner (Australia), Beth Mooney (Australia), Nat Sciver-Brunt (England).

## Australia topple India as world number 1 Test side

PTI ■ DUBAI

Despite a seven-wicket win at Cape Town to draw their two-match series in South Africa, India were toppled from the top spot in ICC Test rankings by Australia on Friday.

Australia's impressive effort to take an unassailable 2-0 lead over Pakistan at home in the on-going three-match series has helped them move up in the rankings. The third match of that rubber is currently underway in Sydney.

"Australia's impressive run at home against Pakistan helped them take the crown of the No. 1 Test team once again, having last held the spot briefly following their WTC Final victory," the ICC stated in a release. In the previous update, India



had more points in their kitty despite being tied with Australia at 118 rating points each.

But the drawn series in South Africa meant India were leapfrogged by Australia.

"With India drawing their two-Test series against South Africa 1-1 and Australia recording two wins in as many matches against Pakistan, the Pat

Cummins-led side now top the Test rankings," the ICC said. "It's the latest feat in a year full of them for Australia, alongside their ICC World Test Championship Final victory and their ICC Men's Cricket World Cup triumph."

India, however, are placed at the top of the World Test Championship points table following their win at Newlands with 54.16 percentage points from four Tests that include two wins, one loss and a draw.

## Shreyas Iyer short ball problems remain a worry

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

Just before the start of the second Test in Cape Town, Shreyas Iyer straightaway walked outside the Newlands Stadium for throwdowns after arriving for an optional training session.

The two throwdown experts Nuwan Senaviratne — the southpaw side-arm — and Raghavendra, along with batting coach Vikram Rathour, were letting it rip from 18 yards.

The idea was to get the flashy Mumbaier match-ready for short balls which has been his problem across formats from the time he made his debut.

Few minutes into the session, he got one throwdown from 18 yards, short and mean into the body that kicked up

from length. It was more than 150 clicks due to the shorter distance traversed. The bat didn't come down in time and he was hit on the fleshy area between upper and lower abdomen. He threw his bat and was literally writhing in pain. He crouched for some time trying to breathe as the physio and other support staff joined to check on him.

**Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar**  
**Ph.D. Admission- January, 2024**  
 Online applications are invited for admission to Ph.D. January, 2024 in various courses latest by 17-01-2024. For details consult University website [www.gndu.ac.in](http://www.gndu.ac.in)  
 Director of Research  
 NA/12/21184/2023/31194 Dated CHD :- 1/5/2024

**AFFIDAVIT**  
 I, Sandeep Kumar Das, Sandip Das, S/o- Late Bijaya Kumar Das, C/o-Late Bansidhar Senapati, resident of Ward No-22, AT-Makarabag Sahi, Infront of Urban Cooperative Bank Ltd, P.O- Buxi Bazar, P.S-Dargha Bazar, Dist-Cuttack, Pin-753001, Odisha declare by this affidavit No-2523, dtd-21-10-2021 that now onwards, I shall be known as SANDEEP KUMAR DAS for all future purposes.

## Devdutt unbeaten 80 give Karnataka command over Punjab

PTI ■ HUBBALLI (KARNATAKA)

Pacer Vasuki Koushik's seven-wicket haul and an unbeaten fifty by Devdutt Padikkal helped Karnataka gain complete command over Punjab on the first day of their Group C Ranji Trophy match here Friday.

Koushik made good use of the conditions to grab seven for 41 that helped Karnataka bundle out Punjab for a paltry 152 for in their first innings.

In reply, the hosts reached 142 for 3 at close as Padikkal made an unbeaten 80 in as many balls with 14 hits to the fence. Padikkal added 76 runs for the second wicket with opener Ravikummar Samarath.

For Punjab, Nehal Wadhara offered a semblance of fight with 44 off 79 balls with seven

Mohammed (5/44) and Sandeep Warrier (4/57) took nine wickets among them as Tamil Nadu skittled Gujarat for an under-par 236 in their first innings.

Umang Kumar top-scored for Gujarat with 76 off 110 balls and he received good backing from Manan Hingrajia (65, 159 balls).

But none of the batters could convert the starts. Tamil Nadu are yet to start their first innings.

**Yuvraj powers Railways**  
 Pacer Yuvraj Singh grabbed five for 10 from 11.3 overs as Railways shot out Chandigarh for a meagre 96 and then reached 73 for no loss at close in the first innings as bad light often played a spoilsport.

**Paul shines for Tripura**  
 At Agartala, Sridam Paul made 112 off 162 balls and veteran batter Ganesh Satish chipped in with an unbeaten 59 off 129 balls as Tripura

reached a satisfactory 261 for 4 against Goa in their first innings at close.

### BRIEF SCORES:

**At Hubballi:** Punjab 152 all out in 46.5 overs (Nehal Wadhara 44, Mayank Markande 26 not out; Vasuki Koushik 7/41) vs Karnataka 142 for 3 in 33 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 80 not out, R Samarth 38).  
**At Valsad:** Gujarat 236 all out in 72.3 overs (Umang Kumar 76, Manan Hingrajia 65; M Mohammed 5/44, Sandeep Warrier 4/57) vs Tamil Nadu.  
**At Chandigarh:** Chandigarh 96 all out in 38.3 overs (Yuvraj Singh 5/10) vs Railways 73 for no loss in 16 overs (Shivam Chaudhary 45 not out, Vivek Singh 28 not out).  
**At Agartala:** Tripura 261 for 4 in 74 overs (Sridam Paul 112, Ganesh Satish 59 not out, Sudip Chatterjee 42; Lakshay Garg 2/48).

**AFFIDAVIT**  
 I, Smt. Mamini Panda, W/o Prakash Chandra Panda, resident of Samantra Sahi, Po/PS- Ganjam, District - Ganjam pin- 761026, Odisha declare by this affidavit no-630 dated 28 /12/2023 that, now onwards I shall be known as Mamini Prabha Panda for all future purposes.

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
 No. CE/PRO/ACCTS-32/23/04 dtd.03.01.2023  
**e-TENDER CALL NOTICE**  
 Name of the work: Providing concrete road from T76 Junction (MCHP) to new Flyover and repairing of Bitumen surface in front of MCHP Workshop inside Harbour area. Estimated cost: Rs.3,10,39,308.96. Last Date & time of submission : 23.01.2024 upto 17:00 Hrs. Refer our website for details: [eprocure.gov.in](http://eprocure.gov.in)/[eprocure.app](http://eprocure.app).  
 Sd/- Executive Engineer, PRD, PPA  
 PPA/PR/78/2023-2024 dtd.04.01.2024

**GOVT. OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**RURAL WORKS DIVISION, NUAPADA**  
 BID IDENTIFICATION NO. **RWNPD-11 (Online) of 2023-24**  
**"e" PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
 Bid documents consisting of Work, Estimate Cost, Cost of tender Paper, EMD / BID security, Time of Completion, Class of Contractor and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in Govt. website i.e. [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
 1. Name of the Work : Road works in the District of Nuapada as mentioned in DTCN  
 2. Total No of Works : 01 Nos.  
 3. Estimated Cost : Rs. 63.02 Lakhs  
 4. Period of Completion : 02 (two) Calendar Month  
 5. Other Details:  

| Procurement officer                                    | Bid Identification No.    | Availability of Tender online for bidding | Last date & time of Seeking tender identification | Date & Time of Opening of Bid  |
|--|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Nuapada | RWNPD-11/2023-24 (Online) | 08.01.2024 at 10.00 AM                    | 19.01.2024 up to 5.00 PM                          | 18.01.2024 upto 05.00 PM<br>20.01.2024 at 11.00 AM<br>Will be intimated later on |

 Further details can be seen from the website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
 OIPR-25050/11/0016/2324  
 Executive Engineer  
 Rural Works Division, Nuapada

**OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED-AREA COUNCIL, BANPUR**  
**E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE**  
 Bid Reference No: **E.O-N.A.C-BNR-07/2023-24**  
 Tender Call Notice No. **10 /Dt. 02.01.2024 /**  
 The Executive Officer on behalf of Banpur NAC invites percentage Bid through e-procurement in single cover system according to norm of e-procurement.  

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Type of Works  | : Civil construction works as in the D.T.C.N                        |
| 2. Total No. of works   | : 20.Nos.   |
| 3. Tender Amount Cost   | : Rs: 1110044.00 to Rs.2031157 .00                                  |
| 4. Period of Completion   | : 60 days   |
| 5. Date and time of availability of Bid Documents in the Portal | : From 10.00 A.M. of Dt. 05.01.2024 to 5.00 P.M. of Dt. 11.01.2024. |
| 6. Date & Time of Opening of Tender:                            | Dt 12.01.2024 at 11.00 A.M.   |

 Further amendments, corrigendum or other communication regarding this letter will be available only on <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in> and will not be published in print media.  
 Sd/- Executive Officer  
 Banpur NAC  
 OIPR-13177/11/0019/2324

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, JAJPUR AT JARAKA**  
**'E' PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO.RWD-II/JJPR-14 / 23-24 , DTD -**  

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Name of work            | : Building works in the District of Jajpur for the year 2023-24. |
| 2. Total No of Work        | : 2 nos. of works.   |
| 3. Estimated Cost(Approx.) | : As indicated against each work in the NIT                      |
| 4. Period of Completion    | : As indicated against each work in the NIT                      |
| 5. Class of contractors    | : As indicated against each work in the NIT                      |

**Other details as follows:**  
 a) Procurement officer : Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Jajpur at Jarak  
 b) Availability of tender online & submission of bid : 06.01.2024 at 11.30 AM to 16.01.2024 upto 5.00 PM  
 c) Last date & time of seeking of tender clarification : 16.01.2024 upto 2.00 PM  
 d) Opening of Tender : 17.01.2024 at 11.30 AM  
 Further details can be seen from the Govt. website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
 Executive Engineer  
 Rural Works Division-II  
 Jajpur at Jarak  
 OIPR-25080/11/0025/2324

**TN in control**  
 At Valsad, pacers M