

## Opposition, Treasury benches agree to discuss Constitution



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, JP Nadda, and others during the screening of the film 'The Sabarmati Report', at the Parliament in New Delhi

**DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI**

After a week of acrimony with no business or discussions held ever since the Winter Session of Parliament started last week, the Opposition and Treasury benches on Monday are believed to have resolved to break the deadlock, and "work for smooth functioning," until a fresh provocation is bulldozed from either side.

On a day when a group of Parliamentarians, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, watched a special screening of the Bollywood movie 'The Sabarmati Report' in the Annex, leaders from both the sides came close to breaking the impasse in Parliament with a discussion on the

Constitution to mark its 75th year of adoption. The breakthrough came at a meeting of Speaker Om Birla with floor leaders of different parties. The Opposition parties had demanded discussions in both Houses of Parliament to mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly. Several Opposition leaders, who attended the meeting, also echoed similar sentiments. The Congress said that the Modi Government has accepted its request for a special two-day discussion on the Constitution and hopefully now it will "allow both Houses to function". The party alleged the Government does not want Parliament to function as it is "running away" from a discussion on issues such as Adani indictment, Sambhal violence and Manipur unrest.

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Kazhagam's (DMK) TR Bалу and Trinamool Congress' (TMC) Kalyan Banerjee among others besides Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and his deputy in the ministry Arjun Ram Meghwal. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju expressed confidence that both Houses will function smoothly from Tuesday. Sources said the Lok Sabha will take up the discussion on the Constitution to mark its 75th year of adoption on December 13 and 14, and the Rajya Sabha on December 16 and 17. Asked about the Opposition raising other issues such as Sambhal violence and Manipur, Rijiju said a decision will be taken in accordance with the rules. Congress said the Modi Government has accepted its request for a special two-day discussion on the Constitution and hopefully now it will "allow both Houses to function". The party alleged the Government does not want Parliament to function as it is "running away" from a discussion on issues such as Adani indictment, Sambhal violence and Manipur unrest.

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## NCR in GRAP IV grip till Dec 5

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

The ban on driving BS-3 petrol or a BS-4 diesel cars in Delhi will continue till Thursday, as the Supreme Court (SC) on Monday refused to relax restrictions under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) amid high levels of air quality index levels. The SC observed that despite the alarming air quality levels, there has been a lack of serious enforcement of measures outlined under GRAP Stage IV, which is triggered when air quality deteriorates to hazardous levels, and it will take a call on a proposal for relaxation by the Commission for Air Quality Management on Thursday. The SC stressed on finding a permanent solution to the issue of air pollution in the National Capital Region (NCR), saying a similar situation arose every year between October and December. It further directed the Delhi police to provide armed protection to those Court Commissioners who

wish to continue monitoring implementation of GRAP IV measures in Delhi-NCR. Notably, there was a slight improvement in Delhi's air quality for the second consecutive day on Monday, even as it remained of "poor" quality with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 280 in the morning. According to data provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the National Capital recorded an AQI of 285 on Sunday, an improvement to the "poor" category, and a welcome relief following 32 consecutive days of "very poor" and "severe" air quality (AQI above 400).

A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih further directed the chief secretaries of NCR states to appear before it through video-conferencing on December 5 to inform whether or not any subsistence allowance was paid to the construction workers who went without work owing to the restrictions.

## All is well in Maharashtra: BJP

**T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI**

After days of uncertainty, in the wake of it leading the MahaYuti to a spectacular victory in the Maharashtra Assembly polls, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) finally began to get its act together on Monday as it called its legislature party meeting on December 4 to elect its leader - ahead of the swearing-in ceremony scheduled to be held on the following day. Though the BJP has not yet formally announced its Chief Ministerial choice, party sources said that the party's central leadership has put a stamp of approval on the name of its senior leader and former CM Devendra Fadnavis for the top post in the state. At a meeting to be held at 10 am on December 4 in the Central Hall of the Maharashtra Vidhan Bhavan, Fadnavis will in all likelihood be elected as the BJP's Legislature Party (BJPLP) leader, paving the way for his being sworn in as the next CM of Maharashtra on December 5. The BJP's Parliamentary Board is sending former Gujarat CM and the party's in-charge for Punjab Vijay Rupani and Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as the central observers for the BJPLP meeting. After the BJPLP meeting, the leaders of the ruling MahaYuti, comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar), will call Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan, and formally stake claim to form a new government in the state. While confirming that the



The BJP's Parliamentary Board is sending former Gujarat CM Vijay Rupani and Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as central observers

BJPLP leader would be elected on December 4, Maharashtra party president Chandrashekar Bawankule announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be present at the swearing-in ceremony of the BJP-led MahaYuti government to be held at the historic Azad Maidan at 5 pm on December 5. The BJP is inviting prominent personalities from various walks of life for the swearing-in ceremony. Ahead of the swearing-in ceremony, Fadnavis, Eknath Shinde of the Shiv Sena (ES) and Ajit Pawar (AP) are likely to meet in the afternoon of December 4 to discuss and formalise the nitty-gritties of the new government. While the CM and two Deputy CMs will take oath of office and secrecy at the swearing-in ceremony, it remains to be seen as to how many ministers from the BJP, Shiv Sena (ES) and NCP (AP) will be sworn into the office at the December 5 event. Given that there are issues relating to the Cabinet portfolio allocations that

need to be sorted out among the MahaYuti constituents, the three leaders are expected to meet immediately after the swearing-in ceremony and formalise the ministry allocations. Since the Maharashtra Assembly comprises 288 members, there can be a maximum of 43 ministers in the State Cabinet, a number that accounts for 15 percent of total members in the lower House of the State Legislature. A struggle to grab key portfolios has begun among the MahaYuti constituents. The ministries like Home, Finance & Planning, Revenue and Urban development are the key portfolios in the State Cabinet. Apart from these four major portfolios, there will be a lot of bargaining among the MahaYuti constituents over other important portfolios like Agriculture, Industries, Water Resources, Forests, Rural Development, Energy, Public Health and Family Welfare, Women and Child Development and Excise.

## SC fumes after V Senthil Balaji returns to TN Cabinet



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

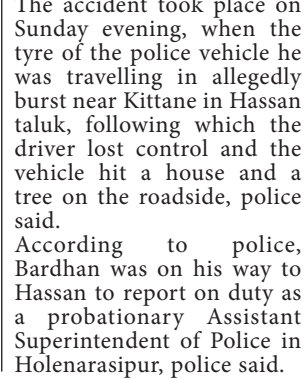
The Supreme Court on Monday expressed concern over reinstatement of DMK leader V Senthil Balaji as a Cabinet minister in Tamil Nadu, just days after it granted bail in the money laundering case related to the cash-for-job scam, and agreed to examine a plea raising apprehensions on independence of witnesses in the case. "We granted you bail and days after you go and become minister. Anybody will be bound to be under the impression that now with your position as a senior Cabinet minister, witnesses will be under pressure. What is going on?" A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih asked senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Balaji. The Bench, however, refused

to interfere with SC's September 26 order granting bail to Balaji on a plea filed by one of the complainants seeking its cancellation. The Bench made it clear it would not recall the order as the law laid down by the SC was benefitting several other persons. Justice Oka further said the court would not issue any notice in the matter but limit the scope of enquiry to whether the witnesses would be "under pressure" to depose in the case. "The apprehension is that considering the seriousness of allegations against the second respondent (Balaji) in the predicate offences, the witnesses may not be in the frame of mind to depose against the second respondent who is holding the position of Cabinet Minister. "This is the only aspect on which prima facie we are inclined to consider the application, and while making it clear that there is no reason to interfere with the judgement on merits and adjudication of the application remains confined to the aforesaid," the Bench wrote in its order. It then asked Balaji's counsel Ram Sankar to get instructions and posted the matter for further hearing on December 13.

## Tragic end to a promising life

**PNS ■ HASSAN (KARNATAKA)**

A young Indian Police Service (IPS) officer died in an accident while he was on his way to take up his first posting in Hassan district, police said on Monday. Harsh Bardhan, (26), was a 2023-batch IPS officer of the Karnataka cadre and hailed from Madhya Pradesh, they said.



The accident took place on Sunday evening, when the tyre of the police vehicle he was travelling in allegedly burst near Kittane in Hassan taluk, following which the driver lost control and the vehicle hit a house and a tree on the roadside, police said.

## AKAL TAKHT declares Badal a 'tankhaiya'



Sukhbir Singh Badal and other leaders of the previous SAD government during the hearing of 'tankhaiya' (guilty of religious misconduct) case by the Akal Takht

**PNS ■ CHANDIGARH**

The Sikh clergy at the Akal Takht on Monday pronounced 'tankhah' (religious punishment) for Sukhbir Singh Badal for the "mistakes" committed by the Shiromani Akali Dal and its Government in Punjab from 2007 to 2017, directing him to perform 'sewa' and clean utensils and shoes at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Pronouncing the order from the 'faseel' (podium) of the Akal Takht in Amritsar, Jathedar of the highest temporal seat of the Sikhs, Giani Raghbir Singh, also directed the working committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to accept the resignation of Sukhbir Badal as party chief, besides forming a committee to hold elections for the post of SAD president and office-bearers within six months. The Jathedar further announced to withdraw the title of 'Fakhr-e-Qaum' bestowed upon former Chief Minister late Parkash Singh Badal, father of Sukhbir Badal. The five Singh Sahibans (Sikh clergy) also pronounced religious punishment for other Sikh leaders who served as ministers in the Akali Cabinet during 2007 to 2017. Giani Raghbir Singh said Sukhbir Badal, who

was on a wheelchair because of a fractured leg, and rebel leader Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa have been asked to sit outside the Golden Temple dressed as 'sewadars' for one hour each for two days. They will also perform 'sewa' at Takht Kesgarh Sahib, Takht Damdama Sahib, Darbar Sahib at Muktsar and Fatehgarh Sahib for two days each. Both Sukhbir Badal and Sukhdev Dhindsa were asked to clean utensils and shoes of devotees at the Golden Temple for one hour, besides listening to 'kirtan'. Before the pronouncement of the edict, Sukhbir Badal admitted his mistakes, including pardoning Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in a 2007 blasphemy case during the SAD regime. The punishment came nearly three months after Sukhbir Badal was declared 'tankhaiya' (guilty of religious misconduct) by the Akal Takht. The Jathedar also directed Akali leaders Sucha Singh Langah, Hira Singh Gabria, Balwinder Singh Bhundar, Daljit Singh Cheema and Gulzar Singh Ranike to clean washrooms for one hour at the Golden Temple, and then clean utensils at the community kitchen after taking a bath. They will also listen to 'kirtan' for one hour, the Jathedar said. Other Akali leaders, including Bibi Jagir Kaur, Prem Singh Chandumajra, Surjit Singh Rakhra, Bikram Singh Majithia, Mahesh Inder Singh Grewal, Charanjit Singh Atwal, and Adesh Partap Singh Kairon, were also told to clean washrooms at the Golden Temple for one hour. The Jathedar had summoned the entire Akali Cabinet from 2007 to 2017, the party's core committee, and the 2015 internal committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. Badal was declared 'tankhaiya' after rebel party leaders, including Chandumajra, Kaur and others, appeared before the Akal Takht on July 1, and sought forgiveness for four "mistakes" during the SAD rule between 2007 and 2017, including failure to punish those responsible for the 2015 sacrilege incidents and pardoning Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in a 2007 blasphemy case.

## China making Pak Navy stronger: Admiral Tripathi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi on Monday said here Indian Navy is aware of "surprising growth" of the Pakistan Navy, that aims to become a 50-ship Navy in the next decade with the help of China. He also said Pakistan has chosen weapons over the welfare of its people. Making this assertion here, the Naval Chief said given the state of its economy, Pakistan is strengthening its Navy. "They have chosen weapons over the welfare of their people," he said and quipped "good luck to them." "We are aware of the surprising growth of the Pakistan Navy which aims to become a 50-ship Navy," he said. On China helping Pakistan boost its maritime prowess, the Navy Chief said it showed Beijing's interest in making that country militarily stronger. "Many Pakistan Navy warships and submarines are being built with Chinese support showing that China is interested in making Pakistan's Navy stronger," he said. "Their eight new submarines will have significant combat potential for the Pakistan Navy but we



Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi addresses a press conference, ahead of Navy Day

are fully aware of their capabilities. That is why we are tweaking our concepts to be able to tackle all threats from our neighbours," Admiral Tripathi added. On China's growing prowess, he said it has declared to have its rightful place and has resources to strive to become a world power. Once it does so, friction takes place with existing world powers and it is already being played out, the Navy Chief said, adding it will manifest in the Pacific region. As regards the Indian Ocean region, he said the Indian Navy is keeping a close watch.

## Delhi airport gears up for foggy days ahead

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

In a preemptive move foresees the fog this winter, the Delhi airport, for the first time, has made elaborate arrangements for passengers, by making provisions for dedicated enclosures for their comfort in case the travellers flight is delayed. Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), which operates and manages the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport with three (T1, T2, T3) terminals has set up special enclosures to accommodate passengers who shall be disembarked from flights delayed for over three hours to allow their faster return to board their

respective flights. According to DIAL, these enclosures will be located at the Bus Boarding Gates and certain aerobridges in Terminal 3, the transfer area in Terminal 2, and the bus boarding gate in Terminal 1. The facilities will serve both domestic and international passengers. The new plan will allow passengers to remain in a separate enclosure, saving time and reducing hassles for both flyers and airline staff. The government has relaxed the security protocols at airports to allow passengers of flights delayed by over three hours or canceled due to fog, weather or technical issues to disembark and return to the terminal.



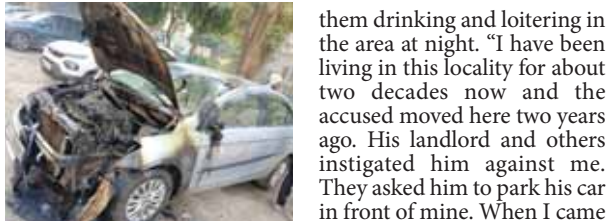
"Ranging from 250 to 450 square meters, these enclosures will be able to hold between 55 and 120 passengers at a time. They are intended to facilitate a security screening, allowing passengers to smoothly re-enter the terminal's Security Hold Area (SHA). These enclosures will have essential amenities like toilets and vending machines wherever feasible. The enclosures would only be utilized as a security processing area after which the passengers would enter the SHA which would

give the passengers access to all the facilities available there. Only airline staff escorting passengers from stranded flights would be permitted to enter the enclosures for security reasons", DIAL said in a statement. To maintain safety and security, CISF personnel will be stationed in the enclosures to screen passengers returning from delayed or stranded flights before they are allowed to join other screened passengers in the SHA. Additionally, personnel from the Private Security Agency (PSA) will verify the documents of passengers affected by the fog/weather or technical issues.

## Parking dispute fuels inferno

**SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI**

A routine parking dispute in Southeast Delhi's Lajpat Nagar erupted into a shocking act of arson, as a man's car was set ablaze, allegedly by his not-so-friendly neighbor. Police tracked down the 28-year-old suspect in Amethi, Uttar Pradesh, over 600 kilometers away from the National Capital. According to the victim, this fiery attack was just the culmination of a string of threats, and he believes that if he had been at the scene, his life would have been endangered as well. According to the victim, 48-year-old Ranjeet Singh, an Urdu poet, winner of a peace award from Pakistan, and the founder of cultural



organisation 'Jashn-e-Adab', the accused has been harassing and threatening him for over two years. Despite multiple complaints to police, the authorities used to release the accused, identified as Rahul Bhasin, on bail, Singh said. The issue came to a boil reportedly after some residents of the locality were not happy with Singh for complaining to the police over

them drinking and loitering in the area at night. "I have been living in this locality for about two decades now and the accused moved here two years ago. His landlord and others instigated him against me. They asked him to park his car in front of mine. When I came on July 13, my car slightly touched his car in the parking lot. However, his brother quickly resolved the issue with me and I even agreed to pay for any damage," Singh said. However, events took a turn for the worse after that when Bhasin damaged two of Singh's parked cars with rods. An FIR was registered following which he was arrested on August 14 but released on bail in two hours, he said.

# Global Skill Park is only world-class institute in Asia: Agarwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, youth are being trained in modern technology of skills under Skill India. Asia's only world-class Sant Shiromani Ravidas Global Skill Park was built with the cooperation of Singapore for training the youth. Here advanced technology training is given as per global standards. To get information about innovations and advanced trades in the field of skill development and training, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Vocational Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Uttar Pradesh, Kapil Dev Agarwal along with Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Skill Development

Employment, Gautam Tetwal held discussions with the officials of Sant Shiromani Ravidas Global Skill Park. Secretary of Skill Development and Employment Rajendran Raghuraj and officials gave detailed information about the functioning of GSP, courses, industry connect, admission process, post placement support and demand based skill training and innovations. Tetwal and Minister Agarwal visited the entire institute including the world class laboratories, class rooms, auditorium of GSP. Both the ministers reached the class room and interacted with the students. The students shared their teaching methods and experiences. Both the ministers motivated the students for continuous progress. Minister Agarwal met the students of UP receiving

training in GSP and got a group photo taken with everyone. The ministers emphasized that efforts will have to be enhanced to bring students to the Global Skill Park. Also, the need to train the students within the stipulated time frame as per the demand of various sectors of the industry was emphasized. Along with the placement of the students, instructions were given to include regular follow-up and post-placement monitoring in the priorities of the institute even after placement. UP Minister Agarwal said that this institute is the only world-class centre of its kind in Asia, which is giving a new direction to the lives of youth by imparting skill training as per global standards. Minister Agarwal said that students and faculty from

Uttar Pradesh will be regularly sent to GSP for training. He also enquired about the admission process and fees of GSP. UP Minister Agarwal also visited ITI Govindpura. He also invited Minister Tetwal and GSP staff for the Kumbh Mela to be held in Prayagraj in January. Tetwal said that this institute is a symbol of skill development of youth as well as their empowerment and self-reliance. He thanked Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav. He described it as a platform which is becoming a bridge between technical education and employment. Tetwal said that it is due to this cooperation that when I went to Ayodhya, the Skill Development Minister of Uttar Pradesh Agarwal also came on the same day. That is

when I requested Minister Agarwal to visit GSP. He gladly accepted my request and came here with his team. This meeting between the Skill Development Ministers of MP and UP is a new beginning of partnership in skill development between Central and North India. The ministers of both the states agreed that together new opportunities will be created for the youth. With enthusiasm among the students and hopes for the future, this day emerged as an inspiring example in the field of skill development. Secretary R Raghuraj said that this institute is providing training in various advanced trades as per the demand of the industry. Also, trainers from various industries also come here and obtain training in advanced trades.



Congress State President Jitu Patwari with Leader of the Opposition Umang Singhar during a press conference at PCC headquarters in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

## Forcible conversion incident comes to fore, Bajrang Dal files complaint

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The police detained four individuals, including a woman, from Amrai Sanjay Nagar in Bagh Sewania after allegations of forced religious conversions raised by Bajrang Dal activists. They were later released and notices have been issued to persons concerned. The incident, which created a significant uproar on Sunday, involved accusations of coercion against Shiv Kumar Jharkade, Rachna Goswami, Priyanka, and another individual. The police acted on a complaint lodged by Amit Kewat, a 27-year-old resident of Sanjay Nagar, who claimed that the accused were pressuring others to change their religion. Religious literature, pam-

**During interrogation, the accused denied the allegations, asserting that they were conducting a peaceful prayer meeting at their residence**

phlets, and boards with slogans were reportedly recovered from their possession. However, after issuing notices, the police released the detainees around 7 PM the same day. Bagh Sewania police station in-charge (TI) Amit Soni stated that since the alleged offense carries a punishment of less than seven years, the accused were not held in custody. He added that the police are investigating potential funding connections, including foreign links, associated with the accused. During interrogation, the accused denied

the allegations, asserting that they were conducting a peaceful prayer meeting at their residence and that no coercion was involved. "We only share the goodness of our religion and explain the purpose of life. People come to us voluntarily. The allegations of forced conversions are baseless," they said. In contrast, Bajrang Dal representative Munna Lal Sahu alleged that the group had targeted a local family by initially offering help with medical treatment for a child, followed by promises of better education and financial support. Sahu

claimed that the family was later pressured to convert, prompting them to approach the Bajrang Dal for help. Meanwhile, women who arrived at the Bagh Sewania police station to support the accused dismissed the allegations as unfounded. Geeta Bai, one of the women, said, "No one forced us. We go to Shiv Kumar's house willingly. When our children went astray and the police detained them, we paid hefty amounts to secure their release. Bajrang Dal didn't help us then. We have embraced God with full consciousness and will not turn back." The case has sparked debate, with both sides presenting contrasting narratives. Police investigations into the incident and any potential financial connections continue.

## Cong to hold Statewide protest, demand white paper on economy

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Accusing the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh of failing to deliver on its promises, the Congress has announced a statewide protest march and gherao the State Assembly on December 16. State Congress President Jitu Patwari, talking to mediapersons, alleged that the BJP government has neglected its promises made to the people, leading to increasing debts, atrocities against tribals, Dalits, minorities, and women. On the other hand, the government remains indifferent. Patwari criticized the state's worsening economic condition and demanded that the BJP government issue a white paper. "The current government is

defined by crime, debt, and corruption. Under Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's administration, corruption has no bounds, permeating from Vallabh Bhawan to the lowest levels of the administration," he stated. Patwari accused the BJP of deceiving every section of society. "Whether it was the promise to give Rs 3,000 to women, Rs 2,700 and Rs 3,100 as support prices for wheat and paddy to farmers, employment to the youth, or Rs 20,000 pensions to journalists over 60 years of age, the BJP has failed to deliver," Patwari said. To remind the government of its promises, the Congress will stage a massive march culminating in an Assembly gherao, for which preparations have already begun at district and block levels.

Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar criticized the Chief Minister, alleging that corruption and inefficiency characterize his administration. "Even the Chief Minister's own colleagues are exposing his failures. The boat he is sitting in is sinking," he remarked. Singhar also took a dig at the Chief Minister's recent visit to London, suggesting it appeared as though he was 'begging for the state.' He questioned why the state continues to rely on borrowing instead of strengthening its economy. Singhar highlighted pressing issues, including farmers struggling for fertilizers, increasing atrocities against women, harassment of tribals and Dalits, and corruption in the Jal Jeevan Mission, where villages still lack access to

clean drinking water. "Not a single promise from the BJP's manifesto has been fulfilled. From the streets to the Assembly, we will raise the voice of the people," Singhar declared. The Congress plans to launch a grassroots awareness campaign across villages and households to inform people about their rights. The protest march, scheduled to begin at 12 PM from Jawahar Chowk in Bhopal, will culminate at the Assembly. The protest will be led by State Congress President Jitu Patwari and Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar, focusing on the BJP's unfulfilled promises, rising corruption, crimes against marginalized communities, unemployment, and other critical issues impacting the state.



Survivor gas victims take out a torch rally on the 40th anniversary of gas disaster in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

## Discipline, curbing cyber crimes will be my priorities: Makwana

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Senior IPS officer Kailash Makwana, the newly appointed Director General of Police (DGP) of Madhya Pradesh, outlined his vision and priorities during his first media interaction after taking charge on Monday. A 1988 batch officer, Makwana emphasized discipline, curbing cybercrimes, and strict adherence to the rule of law as his foremost objectives. Makwana highlighted that preparations for Simhashta 2028, a major religious gathering, pose a significant challenge for the police force. He stressed leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to strengthen field operations and expanding the state's CCTV surveillance network to enhance security measures. Acknowledging the rising toll of road accidents, Makwana expressed deep concern over lives lost due to



engineering flaws and unsafe road conditions. "We will identify and address black spots and engineering defects on roads to mitigate accidents," he assured. The new DGP emphasized a robust crackdown on cybercrimes and drug trafficking. "Mass awareness campaigns will be launched to educate people about cybercrimes and safe use of social media," he said. The police will also prioritize awareness programs against human trafficking and crimes involving children, ensuring swift and effective action against perpetrators. Makwana underlined his commitment to fostering a more approachable and people-friendly police force. "We aim to build trust with the community while maintaining discipline and ensuring effective law enforcement," he said. Makwana has had a distin-

guished career and previously served as the Chairman of the MP Police Housing Corporation. Known for his integrity, he was the Director General of Lokayukta during the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government, where he expedited anti-corruption investigations by reopening long-pending cases. Makwana succeeded former DGP Sudhir Saxena, who retired on November 30, 2024. Saxena's tenure saw multiple transfers, including seven postings in just three and a half years, highlighting the challenges of leadership continuity in the state police. Makwana's tenure, which will conclude with his retirement in December 2025, will focus on transforming the police force through technology, crime prevention, and improved public outreach. His leadership is expected to lay the groundwork for Simhashta 2028 preparations and a more secure Madhya Pradesh.

## Ramp up cleanliness efforts to match survey standards: Narayan

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Municipal Commissioner Harendra Narayan, on Monday, instructed health officials and sanitation staff to heighten cleanliness in green belts, side and central verges, and all entry roads into the state capital. Narayan was inspecting cleanliness arrangements in the city. He advocated for an enhancement in sanitary conditions to meet the standards of the Swachh Survey 2024. He also visited public convenience centres and requested improvements in their appearance by carrying out necessary repairs and repainting of the utilities. The Bhopal Municipal Corporation (BMC) chief visited various areas of the city, including Link Road No. 01, Chetak Bridge, Anna Nagar, ITI Road, JK Road, Meenal Residency, Ayodhya Bypass, Bhanpur, Bhopal Memorial Over Bridge, Chhola Road, Hamidia Road, Jail Road, and others. He directed health department officials to ensure the prompt removal of waste from the main roads, side verges, and green belts. He also urged citizens and offi-

**Narayan directed health department officials to ensure the prompt removal of waste from the main roads, side verges, and green belts**

cialists to refrain from the practice of dumping garbage in green belts. Narayan emphasized that the side and central verges at the city's entry points should remain clean and tidy, so that citizens entering the city can experience the city's distinct identity. Narayan was accompanied by the Assistant Health Officer (AHO) of Zone 16 during the inspection, when he came across scattered dirt, garbage, and piles of waste in the side verges and green belts of Ayodhya Bypass, Bhanpur, Bhopal Memorial Over Bridge, and other areas. He gave strict instructions to improve the cleanliness of these areas and provide a better appearance. The Municipal Commissioner also gave strong instructions to focus particularly on cleanliness in Zones 12 and 16.

## WCR marks IRAS Day

PNS ■ JABALPUR

An Accounts Officer's Conference was organised by the Accounts Department of the West Central Railway Headquarters to mark Indian Railways Accounts Service (IRAS) Day. The conference, held under the chairmanship of the Principal Financial Advisor of PARE Manjit Kaur, was attended by Financial Advisor and Chief Accounts Officer Deepak Kumar Khairna and Arvind Sharma, along with all the accounts officers of West Central Railway. Budget reviews and progress discussions were held by the accounting units from all three divisions, both workshops, and construction accounting units of West Central Railway. An Indian Railways Accounts Service (IRAS) Day ceremony was also organised, with Alok Dave, retired General Manager/MCF/Rae Bareilly, as the chief guest. He shared insights with the officers on how to develop a positive mindset to reduce stress.

## Four booked for assault on power company employees in Sheopur

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Four people were booked on Monday for obstructing government work and assaulting Madhya Kshetra Vidyut Vitran Company (MKVVCL) employees in the Sheopur district of Madhya Pradesh. The accused, identified as Mohanlal and his three sons—Rajesh, Jagdish, and Ashok—misbehaved with company employees and assaulted them when they reached their premises to recover outstanding dues, said MKVVCL. According to the power distribution company, the Sheopur Circle's City Distribution Centre, under the management of Akshay Kumar Singh, along with General Manager Rajesh Saxena, Deputy General Manager Lavlesh Kumar Panika, and line staff, was conducting revenue recovery for overdue payments. During this process, the connections of a consumer, Mohanlal, with outstanding dues of Rs 44,948 and Rs 39,347 respectively, were disconnected, and the meter was seized. During this action,

the four assaulted and misbehaved with the company's officials and staff, threatening to kill them, thus obstructing government work. An FIR was later filed at the Sheopur Kotwali police station under sections 115(2), 296, 351(2), 3(5), 132, and 221 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) 2023. Police are investigating the matter. Taking a strong note of the rising incidents of assault and misbehaviour with field employees and officials of the electricity company, MKVVCL has now decided to lodge immediate FIRs against the wrongdoers. Such incidents undermine the morale of the electricity officers and employees, which is why all supervising officers in the company's jurisdiction have been instructed to handle cases of misbehaviour or assault against field officials and employees with the utmost seriousness. MVVCL Managing Director Kshitij Singhal has instructed that any cases of misbehaviour or assault on duty be treated as obstruction to government work and that immediate legal action should be taken.



BJP State General Secretary and MLA Bhagwan Das Sabnani addresses a party workers workshop under Sangathan Parv at BJP state headquarters in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

## 17-year-old student ends life by shooting in Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A 17-year-old student of shooting academy committed suicide by shooting himself with practice gun in Ratibad area of the state capital, on Sunday evening. The minor identified as Yatharth Raghuvanshi shot himself in the chest with a 12 bore shotgun after sitting on the sofa in the shooting academy. He pressed the trigger of the gun using his

foot. When the watchman heard the sound of the gunshot, he went and checked. He found the minor unconscious soaked in blood. On the information of the watchman, the police reached the spot and took the body in custody and sent it for postmortem. Today, after the postmortem at Hamidia Hospital, the family took the body to Ashok Nagar. The uncle of the deceased Yatharth, who came to Bhopal, has alleged that he had a dispute

with the seniors. We had asked him to complain about it to the coach. However, according to the police, a senior player had accused Yatharth of theft, due to which he was very upset. The deceased was the son of the sports officer of Ashok Nagar. Ratibad police station in-charge Ras Bihari Sharma said that the deceased Yatharth Raghuvanshi was a resident of Ashok Nagar. Yatharth was living in the shooting academy for the last two years.

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Ghats of Maa Narmada are Sanatan pilgrimages: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL Sants and the Saffron have their own speciality. Sants work to provide energy to society and thousands of lives by inspiring them to follow the right path.

mountains, and hills are a gift of nature to humans. We all need to make efforts to conserve it. We are proud of our culture and we should do so.

meets the Gulf of Khambhat. Maa Narmada travels a long journey throughout this route. Wherever it passes, it creates life.

Omkareshwar, Mahant Kailash Bharti of Mahanirvani Akhara Omkareshwar, Mahant Pranavanand Ji Saraswati of Markandeya Sanyas Ashram Omkareshwar and Brahmachari Ji Maharaj of Nijanand Dham Khachrod, Khandwa MLA Kanchan Tanve, Pandhana MLA Chhaya More, Mandhata MLA Narayan Patel, District Panchayat President Pinky Wankhede besides sants, public representatives, and officials were present during occasion.

to their villages and cities. Efforts to employ local people through the digital revolution will write a new chapter in the history of the Narmada River.



Muslim devotees return after offering Dua on the last day of four-day world's largest Muslim congregation Alami Tablighi Ijtema at Ghasipura, Emtkhedhi, near Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

Rains predicted in Bhopal after 48 hrs

Bhopal: Girwar of Shajapur recorded night temperature of 5.9 degree celsius which was lowest of the state on Sunday night while lakhs of people witnessed the largest Muslim congregation in the country recording Sunday night temperature at 8.5 degree celsius.

According to the Meteorological Department, Bhopal will also be affected by Western Disturbance in December. Due to this, the temperature may drop even during the day.

24-year-old woman shot dead by boyfriend at Chhatarpur

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL In a tragic incident on Friday afternoon, a 24-year-old woman was allegedly shot dead by her boyfriend at a rented house on Satai Road, Chhatarpur. The deceased, Bhavna Singh, and the accused, Sachin Yadav, had reportedly planned to end their lives together due to familial opposition to their three-year relationship.

bed upon their arrival. Her scooter was discovered parked outside the building. A team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) has been deployed to examine the scene, and police are actively investigating the case.

Adiguru is Sun of wisdom legacy: CM

Bhopal: Chief Minister Yadav said that Adiguru Shankaracharya spread the wonderful message of unity among the people. He played an important role in protecting the Sanatan Dharma tradition and spreading its principles globally.

Prayers for peace bring four-day Ijtema to a close

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL Tens of lakhs attended the concluding prayer programme that brought down the curtains on the four-day Aalmi Tablighi Ijtema in the state capital on Monday.

Elaborate traffic arrangements remained in place to facilitate the easy movement of vehicles to and from the venue

Organisers worked hard to keep the event free of single-use plastics and employed ingenious methods for water recycling and composting waste.

Vishwas Sarang, Mayor pay tribute to gas victims

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL The Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare and Bhopal (Narela) legislator, Vishwas Kailash Sarang paid a candlelight tribute to gas victims on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy on Monday.

Sarang was joined by Mayor Malti Rai, Dr Manisha Srivastava—the Acting Director of BMHRC, hospital staff, and students. Emotional tributes were paid to the deceased, and a two-minute silence was observed in honour of their struggle.

The minister recalled how he and his family were also trapped during that horrifying night and, like many others, had to leave their home. Meanwhile, the postal department said it would release a special cover marking 25 years of BMHRC on Tuesday.



Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare Vishwas Sarang and Mayor Malti Rai pay tribute to gas victims on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy on Monday.

Congress misleading people: Sarang

Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Cabinet Minister Vishwas Sarang on Monday, countering allegations made by State Congress President Jitu Patwari and Leader of Opposition Umang Singhar, dismissed their claims as baseless, labeling the press conference as an attempt to mislead the public with false narratives.

the Congress government's failures, such as the transfer industry and debt crisis during their tenure," Sarang said.

Survivors recall fateful night in Bhopal

ANKUSH SINGH ■ BHOPAL It was a night like none other that mankind had witnessed. Four decades on, survivors are still haunted by memories of that fateful night that saw Bhopal wake up to death, apathy, and infamy.

ward, but he died before he reached. His neck drooped lifelessly to one side. That image still haunts me." Even today, nearing 60, Mehfooz finds it difficult to forget that night.

behind to help others, risking his own life to save many. Jagdish Mane was on his late-night shift at Union Carbide when he concluded his duty around midnight. He then began to walk to his house.

Sun Life partners with IIT Indore

Indore: Sun Life Global Solutions (SLGS), the Global Capability Centre and microcosm of the global insurance and asset management leader Sun Life, has embarked on an innovative and historic partnership with IIT Indore. This partnership inked in a bid to drive innovation will encompass the application of new age technologies like AI/ML, data analytics and generative AI, especially in the field of insurance, including the improvement of risk appraisal, claim settlement and customer satisfaction.

Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.

Advertisement for Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd. including corporate office address, branch details, and a property for sale under provisions of SARFAESI Act, 2002 through private treaty.

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I, Deepa Ochani alias Dinika Kulchandani D/O Damodar Das Ochani W/O Mohit Kumar Kulchandani R/O Ward No. 27/38 Dharmshala ka Pass Jawahar Nagar Bichhiya Rewa Huzar, Rewa Madhya Pradesh-486001, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as Dinika Kulchandani PD(1004)C

ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, BHOPAL (An Institute of National Importance under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Govt. of India) Saket Nagar, Bhopal-462020, Madhya Pradesh, Tel: 0755-2982607/2985589 Email: info@aiimshbhopal.edu.in www.aiimshbhopal.edu.in No. ADM-2(4)/AIIMS/BPL/RC/Cont. Scin.-C/2024/11093 Dated: 02/12/2024 ADVERTISEMENT FOR ENGAGEMENT OF SCIENTIST-C ON PURELY CONTRACTUAL BASIS AT AIIMS BHOPAL ALL India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhopal an Institute of National Importance (INI) under Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India invites applications for engagement as Scientist-C on purely contractual basis. For details of essential eligibility criteria, terms and conditions of engagement, application form, application procedure etc, the detailed advertisement may be referred on the Institute's website- www.aiimshbhopal.edu.in Sd./ Deputy Director (Admin.) AIIMS Bhopal

# SC seeks EC's response on PIL against decision to increase number of voters per polling station

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Monday sought the Election Commission's response on a PIL challenging its decision to increase the maximum number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 at every polling station, saying no elector should be excluded.

While asking the poll panel to clarify its stand, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said, "We are concerned. No voter should be excluded."

The bench therefore directed senior advocate Maninder Singh, representing the poll

panel, to file a short affidavit explaining the rationale behind the decision to increase the number of voters per polling station.

"Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for the Election Commission, says on instruction that they will explain the position by way of a short affidavit. Let the affidavit be filed within a period of three weeks," said the bench.

Singh said the bench knew about the consistent allegations on EVMs, adding, "They will keep on coming. The polling has been happening like this since 2019 and political parties are being consulted before this in every con-



stituency." The senior lawyer said polling stations could have multiple polling booths and political parties were consulted in each constituency when the total number of voters was raised per EVM.

Singh further said voters were always permitted to cast their votes, even beyond the prescribed time. The bench, which will hear the matter on January 27, 2025, asked the EC to provide a copy of its affidavit to the petitioner before the next date of hearing.

The PIL, filed by Indu Prakash Singh, challenged two communications issued by the EC in August, increasing the number of voters per

polling station in each constituency across India.

The plea said the decision to increase the number of voters per polling booth was arbitrary and not based on any data. On October 24, the top court refused to issue any notice to the poll panel but allowed the petitioner to serve the copy to the standing counsel of the poll panel so that its stand on the issue is known.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the petitioner, contended that increasing the number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 would lead to the exclusion of underprivileged groups from the electoral process as an individual would take longer to

cast their franchise. He submitted longer queues and waiting time at the polling stations would dissuade voters from going to cast their votes.

The bench, however, said the poll panel wanted more participation and with the use of EVMs, it took a shorter time compared to ballot papers as the poll panel intended to considerably reduce the time taken to cast votes by increasing the number of EVMs at booths. The petitioner, however, said the poll panel's decision would impact voters during the assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand (since concluded) and Bihar and Delhi to be held in 2025.

## VHP holds protest against attack on Hindus in Bangladesh

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Monday held a demonstration here against alleged attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh and demanded that the United Nations intervene to stop the atrocities.

The protest at Jantar Mantar witnessed the participation of several people, who raised slogans demanding the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) also warned Bangladesh's interim government that if the atrocities against Hindus did not stop, the country could be divided into two.

VHP Delhi unit chief Kapil Khanna said the situation in Bangladesh was worrying. There is anger among the Hindus and they have come here to express their anger, he claimed.

"Atrocities are being committed against Hindus in Bangladesh and lakhs of Hindus have been displaced. Our sisters and daughters are being tortured," he said.

Mahant Naval Kishore Das, who also joined the protest, said, "Our sisters and daughters are being tortured, reli-



gious places are being demolished, and saints are being put in jail."

"Our message to everyone that the Hindus will not accept this," Das said.

VHP state secretary Surendra Gupta demanded the United Nations and international human rights organisations intervene and stop the atrocities.

He warned the government of Bangladesh that if the atrocities did not stop, Bangladesh could be divided into two.

The Hindus in Bangladesh constitute about eight per cent of the 170 million population.

There has been allegations of over 200 attacks on Hindus in 50-odd districts of Bangladesh since the fall of

Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5.

The ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) also held protest 'kirtans' at its Albert Road centre in Kolkata on Thursday and Friday, demanding the release of jailed Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das.

The religious body expressed concern over the plight of religious minorities in Bangladesh.

Das was arrested in a sedition case and was later denied bail by a court, triggering protests by community members in various locations, including the capital Dhaka and the port city of Chattogram.

## India set to experience milder winter with fewer coldwave days, says IMD



**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

India is set to experience a milder winter with fewer coldwave days, the weather office said on Monday and forecast above-normal minimum temperatures during the season.

The forecast of a relatively warmer winter came after the country experienced the second warmest November since 1901, with the average maximum temperature clocking 29.37 degrees Celsius -- 0.623 degree above the normal of 28.75 degrees for the season.

"During the upcoming winter season (December 2024 to February 2025), above-normal minimum temperatures

are likely over most parts of the country," Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told reporters here.

According to the forecast, the winter season was expected to witness fewer coldwave days than the normal of five to six. During the season, above-normal maximum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country, except most areas over south Peninsular India, where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely, he said.

"Normally, we see five to six coldwave days during December to February over the cold core zone, which

includes the northwest, central, east and northeast India. This year, we can expect two to four fewer coldwave days compared to average," Mohapatra said.

According to the IMD, a cold wave is considered if the minimum temperature (T-min) is less than the 10th percentile of the daily climatological value and the climatological daily T-min is less than 15 degrees Celsius. These conditions should be observed for three consecutive days for it to qualify as one coldwave event.

Mohapatra said the absence of western disturbances was the reason for a warmer November.

## Over 88 lakh houses delivered under PMAY-U: Govt tells RS

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

More than 88 lakh houses have been delivered to the beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban), the Rajya Sabha was informed on Monday.

In a written reply to a question, Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Tokhan Sahu said that over 1.18 crore houses have been sanctioned by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) till November 18.

The ministry has been supplementing the efforts of states and Union territories by providing central assistance under PMAY-U since June 25, 2015 to provide pucca houses in urban areas across the country, he said.

"Based on project proposals submitted by the State/UT Governments under PMAY-U, as on 18.11.2024, a total of 118.64 lakh houses have been sanctioned by the Ministry... and more than 88.02 lakh are completed/delivered to the beneficiaries. "The remaining houses are at different stages of construction," the



minister said in the written reply.

He said that learning from the experiences of PMAY-U, MoHUA has launched PMAY-U 2.0 'Housing for All' Mission with effect from September 1, 2024 for implementation in urban areas across the country to construct, purchase and rent 10 million houses by eligible beneficiaries at affordable cost through four verticals of the scheme.

These four verticals are Beneficiary Led Construction (BLC), Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP), Affordable Rental Housing (ARH) and Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS). As on date, 29 states and UTs have signed Memorandum of Agreement to implement PMAY-U 2.0.

## CPA can turn lethal for one in three people with lung diseases: Study

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Chronic pulmonary aspergillosis (CPA) -- a common fungal infection that claims 340,000 lives every year worldwide, can turn lethal for about 1 in three people with lung diseases, according to a study by researchers including from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi.

CPA, caused by exposure to airborne spores of the mould Aspergillus, causes gradual scarring of the lungs for months and years. It is a debilitating condition that causes severe tiredness, weight loss, breathlessness, and coughing up blood.

While exposure to



Aspergillus is harmless to most people, it may affect those with lung damage.

The international study of CPA is led by Professor David Denning from The University of Manchester and

published in the leading journal Lancet Infectious Diseases showed that around 32 per cent of people who have had prior damage from lung diseases will die after five years if they also get

infected by CPA. Nearly 15 per cent of people with CPA will die in the first year following other lung diseases.

Co-authors Dr Abinav Sengupta and Dr Animesh Ray from Delhi-based AIIMS examined the death rates in 8,778 patients described in the literature from all continents except Antarctica.

The international study including researchers from the University of Manchester, showed that CPA patients with prior tuberculosis (TB) had a lower overall 5-year mortality of 25 per cent.

However, they also found that patients with CPA end up being misdiagnosed as having TB, and then not treated with antifungal agents.

Treatment with antifungal

drugs or surgery is key to improving symptoms and also reducing the risk of death, the researchers said.

Though patients with TB tend to be younger, a multi-variable analysis showed prior TB was 24% less lethal than other lung conditions, even accounting for age, though the reason for the difference in outcome was not identified.

Being older than 60, having interstitial lung disease, current cancer and smoking-related lung disease carried worse outcomes, said the team.

Caused by exposure to airborne spores of the mould Aspergillus, it is harmless to most people, but not to those with lung damage, maintained the researchers.

## India's PRAGATI platform helped accelerate 340 infra projects across country, finds Oxford study



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

A unique digital governance platform in India, PRAGATI, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has transformed the delivery of the country's infrastructure projects, a study by Said Business School, University of Oxford, and the Gates Foundation has found.

Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) has driven accountability at the most senior level, and supported unprecedented federal and regional collaboration, accelerating 340 projects worth USD 205 billion across the country and cutting through decades of delays, the study noted. The findings were released on Monday at a symposium hosted by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bengaluru, which brought together leaders from academia and the public and private sectors to discuss how digital governance can transform infrastructure development.

Titled 'From Gridlock to Growth: How Leadership Enables India's PRAGATI Ecosystem to Power Progress', the case study noted that many of the 340 projects were anywhere from three to 20 years overdue.

This new model not only does away with layers of obfuscation, but introduces

an element of "naming and shaming" that compels officials to be directly answerable, the study has found.

"PRAGATI shows us it is essential for nations to cultivate an environment where top leadership is using technology to drive cross-collaboration and regular accountability reviews. This is particularly valuable for countries aiming to make infrastructure development a pillar of economic growth," said Soumitra Dutta, Peter Moores Dean and Professor of Management at University of Oxford.

"The transition towards such systems may require initial investment and cultural shifts, but the long-term benefits of more reliable infrastructure and public trust are immeasurable, delivering a ripple effect of efficiency and success in their development agenda," he added.

The case study has found that the ministries and departments are now more responsive to citizen grievances, knowing that their performance will be reviewed at the highest level and subjected to a data-driven analysis.

"In India's complex federal structure, fostering cooperation between the central government and states -- regardless of which political party is in power at the Centre or the states -- is crucial for effective governance. The relationship

between the central government and states has historically been marked by political tensions and competing priorities," the study noted.

"Different political parties often control different states, and partisan differences can easily derail important initiatives. Yet PRAGATI has emerged as a powerful demonstration of cooperative federalism in action -- showing how central and state governments can work together effectively regardless of political affiliations when focused on shared development goals," it added.

The case study has recommended that potential exists to further enhance the Team India approach through PRAGATI.

"This could be done by incorporating more state-specific issues in PRAGATI reviews, facilitating direct state-to-state cooperation through the platform, and leveraging data analytics to identify and promote successful state-level governance models nationally," it said.

"Additionally, it will be critical to ensure that state officials have the skills and resources they need to advance their infrastructure and social development goals. Ensuring equitable participation of all states, regardless of political affiliations, will also be an important focus," the study noted.

## Coupling happens without human intervention in more advanced LHB coaches: Vaishnav to RS

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav has informed the Rajya Sabha that more advanced LHB coaches, introduced by the railways in 1999-2000, are provided with centre buffer couplers in which coupling takes place without any manual intervention. He said this while providing information about various safety measures taken to prevent untoward incidents during coupling and decoupling of trains coaches.

Vaishnav responded to questions raised by MPs Priyanka Chaturvedi and Derek O'Brien regarding a recent case in which a railway employee lost his life after getting sandwiched between an engine and a coach while decoupling them.

They wanted to know if the government maintains any state-wise data of accidents and deaths caused during manual coupling of train coaches since 2019 and the measures taken by the government to prevent such acci-



dents.

"ICF coaches, designed and developed during the 1960s, were provided with screw coupling and side buffers, which require manual coupling of coaches. More advanced LHB coaches were introduced by Indian Railways (IR) in 1999-2000," Vaishnav said.

He added, "These LHB coaches are provided with Centre buffer couplers in which coupling takes place without any manual intervention. IR (Indian Railways) have taken up the replacement of ICF coaches by LHB coaches in a phased manner."

According to Vaishnav, from

2014 to 2024, 36,933 LHB coaches were manufactured as compared to 2337 from 2004 to 2014.

He further informed that advanced semi-automatic couplers have also been developed for use in Amrit Bharat and Vande Bharat trains. "These couplers also enable automatic coupling between coaches without any manual intervention. Induction training and refresher training at regular intervals is imparted to concerned field staff to avoid the possibility of any unfortunate incidences during coupling/decoupling/shunting etc," he said.

## CPI submits breach of privilege motion against Vaishnav to Rajya Sabha

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

CPI floor leader in Rajya Sabha P Sandosh Kumar on Monday submitted a breach of privilege motion against Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, accusing him of misleading the House by providing figures contradictory to the ministry's own data submitted earlier to the House.

According to a statement issued by the CPI, the ministry, in response to a question raised by CPI MP P P Suneer on safety of railway workers, provided the number of 65 deaths and 569 injuries from 2014-15 to 2023-24, a period of 10 years.

However, in an earlier reply in Rajya Sabha on December 8, 2023, the ministry said that 361 railway workers died due to train accidents during maintenance work on rail tracks in the last five years (from 2019-20 to 27.11.2023), the statement said. The CPI said the ministry's reply on Monday sharply contradict the figures

provided by it earlier in the Rajya Sabha.

The party said in a sub-question of the raised question, Suneer had asked for the zone-wise details of the "number of deaths and injuries involving railway personnel, including regular employees, contractual workers and outsourced workforce, during construction, maintenance, inspection or coupling of trains in the last three years".

"The ministry's reply of 65 deaths is in sharp contradiction to their own admission in the Rajya Sabha made in December 2023," the CPI said. It said according to the railway ministry's own data provided in the Rajya Sabha in response to unstarred question number 764 by A A Rahim, answered on December 8, 2023, the ministry gave the number of railway workers who died due to train accidents during maintenance work on railway tracks in the last five years (from 2019-20 to 27.11.2023) as 361.

# Hearing on Gyanvapi ASI survey petition deferred to December 10

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

On Monday, the Allahabad High Court deferred the hearing on a petition seeking an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) survey of the alleged wuzukhana area in the Gyanvapi mosque complex in Varanasi.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal's court, scheduled to hear the matter post-lunch, did not convene. The next hearing is now set for December 10 at 2 PM.

The petition requests an ASI survey of the wuzukhana (ablution) area of the Gyanvapi mosque to determine the religious character of the disputed site. During the previous hearing, Hindu side counsel Saurabh Tiwari argued that only an ASI survey could confirm the religious nature of the site. The Muslim side countered, pointing out the Supreme Court's directive to maintain the status quo. In response,



the Hindu side clarified that the Supreme Court's order only restricts the survey of the alleged Shivaling and not the entire wuzukhana area. On October 22, the High Court directed the Hindu side to specify the exact portion and area they sought to survey. Following this, the Hindu side submitted critical documents, photographs, and affidavits via e-filing. Copies of the affidavits were also

provided to all involved parties. The case remains a focal point of contention, with both sides presenting legal and historical arguments. The next hearing will determine whether an ASI survey of the disputed area can proceed amidst the ongoing legal tussle. **The case:** On December 18, 2023, the ASI handed over its survey findings on the Gyanvapi

mosque complex to the Varanasi district court. This move came after the completion of cleaning work in the Wuzukhana area, as directed by the Supreme Court. The Gyanvapi Mosque has been a topic of interest, with some believing it was built on the remains of the Kashi Vishwanath temple. Various petitions in different courts, including the Supreme Court, Allahabad High Court, and Varanasi District Court, have addressed different angles of this dispute. The legal tussle dates back to a 1991 petition filed in Varanasi, seeking the restoration of Gyanvapiland to the Kashi Vishwanath temple. The claim was that the mosque was constructed under the orders of Aurangzeb, who allegedly tore down a part of the temple in the 16th century. The ASI initiated the survey in August 2023, with several extensions granted for the final report.

# Opposition, BJP MPs debate over Bhagwat's population remarks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat expressed concern over declining population growth, BJP leaders welcomed his remarks while the Opposition asked where will additional resources come from in case of an increase. Food prices are high and the government has "failed" to create employment opportunities for people, they said. Speaking at an event in Nagpur on Sunday, Bhagwat highlighted the vital role of families and warned that according to population science, if a society's total fertility rate dips below 2.1, it could face extinction. BJP leader Manoj Tiwari said they are in national interest. "The RSS is a patriotic organisation. If Mohan Bhagwat ji has said something, then it would certainly be in the national interest. So this should be analysed positively," Tiwari told PTI outside Parliament. BJP MP from Meerut Arun Govil spoke on similar lines. "His ideas are in the national



interest. He is a mature person, if he has given this statement, it is for the good of the country and it must be right," he told PTI. Opposition leaders, however, questioned Bhagwat and the BJP over his remarks. Congress Lok Sabha MP from Katihar Tariq Anwar said Bhagwat's remarks were in contrast to what BJP leaders have been saying on the issue of population. "What he (Bhagwat) is saying

is contradictory because BJP leaders are saying the population should be controlled. They should clear these contradictions and the government should come out with a policy on population," he said. Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) MP Chandra Shekhar asked where will the additional resources to support an increased population come from. If managed properly, India's population is a useful resource, he said. "If we start

manufacturing, people will get employment. But the government has failed in this," he added. Congress Rajya Sabha MP Renuka Chowdhury said, "I respect Mohan Bhagwat ji, but what experience does he have of bringing up a child?" She further said, "Everything is adulterated, food prices are high and when they (children) grow up, they don't get employment. What do people need more children for?"

# BJP flays Rahul over his remarks on GDP growth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has flayed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on GDP growth rate decline and said his attempt to paint a picture of economic doom, with selective data and "half-truths", is not just misleading but reeks of a "childish" oversimplification of complex realities.

The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha had on Sunday expressed concern over India's GDP growth rate declining to its lowest in two years and said the country's economy cannot progress as a handful of billionaires accrue its benefits. He stressed that new thinking is required for India's economy and a new deal for businesses should be an important part of it.

Reacting sharply, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya wrote on X, "Your attempt to paint a picture of economic doom, with selective data and half-truths is not just misleading but reeks of 'Balak Buddha' -- a childish



oversimplification of complex realities". He said crying foul over a 5.4 per cent GDP growth rate by the Congress leader is "laughable when it is one of the highest globally." "Compare it to China (4.6%), the USA (2.8%) and the Euro Area (0.9%). Even in a challenging global environment, marked by geopolitical conflicts and supply chain disruptions, India's economy stands resilient, while others falter," Malviya said. "Is it too hard for you to grasp

that this isn't a local issue but a global economic phenomenon? Everyone has seen your track record, when India was counted amongst 'Fragile Five', inflation was in double digits," he added. The BJP leader said retail inflation increased a bit in October 2024, primarily due to weather-driven disruptions in vegetable supply. "But let us not forget, the average inflation rate has been 5 per cent since Modi government came to power in 2014, and never touched double digits," he

said. It is significantly lower than the 8.1 per cent annual average during the UPA era (2004-14) and was frequently in double digits between 2010-14, he added. "Perhaps you'd like to explain why inflation was in double-digits during those years, if you truly care about rising prices," Malviya asked Gandhi. The BJP leader said that Gandhi harps on a supposed unemployment crisis, but India has added 47 million jobs in the past few years, and the worker-population ratio (WPR) has improved to 58.2 per cent in FY 2024 from 56 per cent in FY 2023, driven by rising opportunities in both rural and urban India. The same WPR in 2013-14 was 49.9 per cent, he added. "Declining demand? Really? Domestic auto sales grew by 13.1% Y-o-Y during Apr-Oct 2024, FMCG sales show robust rural demand, and tractor sales have hit record highs. Affordable housing demand, as you point out, is part of an evolving market, but overall consumption trends remain strong. How

does this align with your alarmist rhetoric?" Malviya said. The BJP leader said the Indian rupee has remained one of the least volatile currencies globally and India's forex reserves stand tall at USD 684.8 billion, covering 11.8 months of imports "something your fear-mongering narrative conveniently ignores". India's economy isn't just growing, it is ascending, he said. The IMF projects that India will overtake Japan in 2025 to become the 4th largest economy globally, with a GDP of USD 4.34 trillion, he added. "But of course, why would you mention this when fear-mongering serves your agenda better?" Malviya asked Gandhi. "Your persistent doom-mongering is not just baseless but reflects an inability to acknowledge progress. You don't have to flaunt your ignorance at every opportunity. If you're so keen on playing Economist, at least do the basic homework, instead of recycling outdated talking points," he added.

# BJP serves party MLA Yatnal with show cause notice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

Days after he launched a month-long anti-Waqf march that apparently did not have the state unit's sanction, Karnataka BJP MLA and known Yediyurappa critic Basanagouda Patil Yatnal has been served with a show cause notice by the party for his "continuing tirade against the state level party leadership." BJP's Central Disciplinary Committee (CDC) has served the notice to the Vijayapura MLA and asked him to reply within 10 ten days. Calling the notice "fake", a defiant Yatnal said his commitment to the fight for Hindutva and against 'dynastic politics' will continue. "Your tirade against the state-level party leadership and your defiance of party directives and making public pronouncements and stance in contravention to party's official stand on all matters of political and public importance has been reported in media as well as by different



party forums," Om Pathak, CDC member secretary said in his show cause notice on December 1, which was shared with media on Monday. The party said it would proceed to take a final view on the matter if Yatnal fails to give a reply within the stipulated time. Yatnal is known as a strong critic of BJP veteran and former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa and his family, especially his son and the party's Karnataka chief B Y Vijayendra. He has often targeted them and demanded that the BJP central leadership check Yediyurappa's 'dynastic politics' for effective fight against the 'dynastic politics' of

Congress. "It is a matter of great concern that despite having been issued showcause notice several times in the past and your assurances of good conduct, the acts of indiscipline continue unabated," said Pathak. Noting his seniority and long-standing in the party, Pathak said the CDC took a lenient view on the explanations submitted by him in the past. Yatnal along with, few senior BJP leaders, including MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, Arvind Limbavali, Mahesh Kuntahalli, Madhu Bangarappa had taken out a month-long anti-Waqf march from Bidar to Chamarajanagar. The march started on November 25 and will conclude on December 25. The march is widely perceived as a show of strength by the anti-Vijayendra faction within the BJP. Yatnal has said the march was not directed against any individual but aimed at "protecting farmers, Sanatana Dharma, and Hindus from eviction notices issued by the state Waqf Board."

# Ajay Rai stopped from visiting Sambhal, Congress workers protest

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress President Ajay Rai, along with dozens of party leaders, attempted to visit Sambhal on Monday but was stopped by the police at the gate of the Congress office. Party workers, protesting against the police and administration, raised slogans and created a commotion. Two companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) were also deployed to manage the situation.

Tensions escalated as a minor scuffle broke out between Congress workers and the police. Ajay Rai sat on a dharna at the spot, demanding the lifting of restrictions. Addressing the media, Rai said, "Whenever the restrictions are removed, a Congress delegation will definitely visit Sambhal. We will investigate the situation independently and expose how the police and administration are presenting false investigation reports."

The Uttar Pradesh Police issued a notice to Rai, citing a district magistrate order under Section 163 BNS, which restricts entry to the area until December 10 to maintain public order. The notice urged Rai to "cooperate in the public interest" and postpone his visit to prevent any violation of the restriction. The Congress leadership had meticulously planned the visit. Senior party leaders spent Sunday night at the Congress office, and leaders from various parts of the state had arrived in Lucknow by Sunday evening to join the Monday morning convoy. Before setting out, Ajay Rai paid tribute at the Gandhi statue at the



Congress office. However, the police intervened as soon as they attempted to leave. The administration has imposed restrictions on visiting Sambhal until December 10 following recent violence during the survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid on November 24. Earlier, Samajwadi Party leaders, including the Leader of the Legislative Assembly and State President, were also barred from entering Sambhal. Even MPs like Iqra Hasan were denied entry. Congress planned the visit to meet the families of those affected by the violence. However, police had cordoned off the roads leading to the Congress office early Monday morning to prevent any movement. Congress leader Sachin Chaudhary also voiced his frustration, alleging police intimidation. "They are stopping us from visiting Sambhal. Is not it shameful that we cannot even check on the well-being of victims? We demand a CBI inquiry into the matter," Chaudhary said adding that police had been stationed outside his residence since morning.

Meanwhile, a three-member judicial commission investigating the November 24 violence has started its probe. The commission, led by retired High Court judge Devendra Kumar Arora, visited Sambhal on Sunday, along with member and former DGP AK Jain. Another member, retired Additional Chief Secretary Amit Mohan, could not join the visit. The team inspected areas around the Shahi Jama Masjid and interacted with members of the mosque committee. Moradabad Commissioner Anjaneya Kumar Singh stated that evidence is being collected against those responsible for the violence, and 400 individuals have been identified so far. Police Superintendent KK Vishnoi briefed the commission on the sequence of events and took them to key locations, including Nakhasa Tiraha and Hindupara Kheda. Officials demonstrated the routes taken by the crowd during the unrest. The inquiry team has pledged to ensure accountability for the violence and to address the grievances of the affected families.

# Haryana Govt transfers 44 IAS officers in major bureaucratic reshuffle

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a major bureaucratic reshuffle, the Haryana government has transferred 44 IAS officers with immediate effect. According to a government order dated December 1, 1990-batch officer Sumita Misra will be the new Home Secretary. Sumita Misra, Additional Chief Secretary (ACS), Medical Education and Research Department, has been posted as ACS, Home, Jails, Criminal Investigation and Administration of Justice Departments, relieving Anurag Rastogi of the charge. Rastogi will continue to hold the charge of ACS, Finance and Planning departments. He will hold additional charge of Financial Commissioner of Revenue and Disaster Management and Consolidation Department. Ashok Khemka, a 1991-batch officer who was ACS, Printing and Stationery Department, has been posted as ACS, Transport Department, relieving 1994-batch IPS officer Navdeep Virk of the charge. Khemka served as transport commissioner and secretary in the first term of the BJP government which was led by Manohar Lal Khattar. Last week, the Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini-led state government made some key appointments to his office and effected a major bureaucratic reshuffle, the order for which was issued on Sunday. The reshuffle had been on the cards since the Saini dispensation was sworn in on October 17. According to the order, Apoorva K Singh has been posted as ACS, Town and Country Planning and Urban Estates Department, and will



also hold the charge as ACS, Energy Department. Sudhir Rajpal, ACS, Health and Family Welfare Department, has also been given charge of Medical Education and Research, and Ayush departments. Anand Mohan Sharan has been given charge of Food and Civil Supplies Department in addition to the other departments he holds. Vineet Garg has been posted as ACS, Higher Education Department and Chairman of Haryana State Pollution Control Board. D Suresh, Resident Commissioner, Haryana Bhawan, New Delhi, will now also be Principal Secretary of Industries and Commerce Department. Rajeev Ranjan has been given the additional charge of Principal Secretary, Labour while Shyamala Mishra will be the new CEO of Faridabad Metropolitan Development Authority and Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority as well as Principal Secretary of Civil Aviation Department. Vijay Dahiya has been posted as Commissioner and Secretary of Printing and Stationery and Animal Husbandry departments. Ashima Brar, Secretary, Social Justice, Empowerment and Welfare of Scheduled Castes

and Backward Classes and Antyodaya (SEWA) Department, has been posted as Excise and Taxation Commissioner and Secretary, and Managing Director of Haryana Vidyut Prasaran Nigam Ltd. Amit Kumar Agrawal, Commissioner and Secretary, Development and Panchayats Department will also be the Commissioner and Secretary of departments of Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture, and Foreign Cooperation. Yashendra Singh has been posted as Director and Special Secretary of Medical Education and Research Department. Among other IAS officers, G Rajini Kaaanthan will be the new Transport Commissioner while Phool Chand Meena will be the new Commissioner of Ambala division. A Sreenivas has been posted as Commissioner of Hisar division and Anshaj Singh has been posted as Commissioner of Rohtak division, and Director General of Swarna Jayanti Haryana Institute for Fiscal Management. Yash Garg will be Commissioner of Food and Drugs Administration. Monica Malik has been given the additional charge of Managing Director of Haryana Women Development Corporation Ltd. Rajesh Joggal, Registrar, Cooperative Societies, Haryana, has been posted as Director and Special Secretary of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department in addition to his current duties. Haryana Human Rights Commission Secretary Narhari Singh Banger has been posted as Advisor and Special Secretary of Civil Aviation Department.

# Bihar Govt cancels community health officer recruitment exam



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Bihar government on Monday cancelled community health officer recruitment examinations after the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) of the state police detected widespread "irregularities and malpractices" during the online test at three centres here, an official said. The Bihar State Health Society, which conducted the test, said that new exam dates would be announced later. The examination was conducted at 12 online centres in Patna on Sunday. Police also arrested 37 people, including aspirants, owners and employees of the examination centres and IT managers, in connection with the case. Deputy Inspector General (EOU) Manavjit Singh Dhillon told reporters. Several electronic and digital devices, laptops, mobile phones, ATM and credit cards, and Aadhaar cards were recovered from the possession of the arrested people, the officer said. Acting on a tip-off, officials of EOU and Patna police jointly conduct-

ed raids at the three examination centres in Patna on Sunday, an official statement said. The online recruitment exam for community health officers, which started on Sunday, was also supposed to be held on Monday. "Officials found that employees of the examination centres provided unauthorised access to the computer system to a solver gang through proxy servers and remote viewing applications. Evidence collected from the spot revealed that the accused were solving the questions papers through online Computer Based Test (CBT) on a real-time basis," the statement issued by EOU said. Officials also found that owners of the examination centres, employees and private IT managers were involved in the irregularities during the exam, it said. A Pune-based IT firm was engaged in conducting the exam. "The examination has been cancelled and a special team has been formed to investigate the case and also arrest others who are part of the "solver gang", the DIG said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Musical chairs

While the BJP-led Mahayuti emerged victorious in Maharashtra, the post-election scenario has been anything but smooth

The Maharashtra Assembly elections have delivered a decisive yet politically tumultuous mandate. The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance scripted a powerful comeback in state Assembly elections by winning 230 seats in the 288-member House. Shinde's Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar's NCP also performed well. Sena won 57 while NCP won 41 seats. It was indeed a big disappointment for Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). The grand old party registered one of its worst performances in the state Assembly polls after it won only 16 seats. Sharad Pawar's NCP(SP) won just 10 seats, whereas Uddhav Thackeray's (UBT) won 20 seats. Despite this success, the post-election landscape has been anything but smooth, as a fierce tussle erupted between the two allies over the chief ministerial position. The post-election scenario has turned into a high-stakes political drama. Devendra Fadnavis, the BJP's chief minister candidate finally got the post as Eknath Shinde stepped aside and his son is likely to be deputy chief minister; allegedly on the pressure of the BJP central command. His leadership has been credited with delivering key infrastructure projects and steering the state through various challenges such as agrarian distress and urban expansion.

As the BJP's top leader in Maharashtra, Fadnavis was widely expected to retain the chief ministerial post. The Shiv Sena made significant contribution to the alliance's victory and wanted to retain the CM post for Eknath Shinde. But after days of negotiations he finally agreed to give way to Fadnavis while maintaining that his tenure saw exponential development in the state and he made it number one. The party has pointed out that its cadre worked tirelessly to mobilise grassroots support, especially in rural and semi-urban areas where the BJP's influence has traditionally been weaker. It is also understandable that the BJP should lead the government, citing the party's larger mandate but it will still need NCP and Shiv Sena support to remain in power. The impasse between the BJP and Shiv Sena created an air of uncertainty in Maharashtra's politics. As of now, Devendra Fadnavis appears poised to be the chief minister, backed by the BJP's central leadership. Though, for now the BJP has prevailed and got the plumb post for its man, make no mistake. Shinde's Shiv Sena is not very happy about it and knows once they are marginalised in the game the chances of their party splitting and merging with the BJP are rather high. It has happened in the past and could well be repeated in Maharashtra as well. It would be interesting to watch how Maharashtra politics shapes up. The decisions taken now, the composition of the cabinet and indeed the say Shinde has in the administration would not only shape Maharashtra's governance for the next five years but also redefine the dynamics of India's financial hub.

### PICTALK



Artists perform during the 35th Konark Dance Festival 2024, in Puri

# COP29: Stalemate on climate finance

The 29th annual Climate Summit in Azerbaijan reached an impasse as developed and developing nations remained divided over climate finance commitments



MANISH KUMAR SHRIVASTAVA

The negotiation process at the 29th annual Climate Summit (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan came to a halt as both developed and developing countries did not agree with the proposed quantum of climate finance, and its mobilisation approach. The COP29 Presidency had two quantitative targets before the negotiating countries. A USD 1.3 trillion of total annual climate investments in developing countries by 2035 and USD 250 billion of annual climate finance from developed to developing countries by 2035. These targets are to be met through a variety of sources and actors. While it is learnt informally that developed countries, after initial rejection, are willing to commit to USD 300 billion per year by 2035, developing countries rejected the Presidency proposal.

For them, the commitment is too little and too late. Against the estimated cost of about USD 7 trillion required to implement current Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), developing countries demand more than USD 1 trillion per year of public finance from developed countries. By 2035 the ambition of NDCs is likely to be revised upward twice and total implementation costs would increase substantially. In this context, the Presidency's proposal shatters any hopes of raising ambition consistent with the goal agreed at the Paris Agreement. The current policy commitments are likely to lead to a temperature rise of a minimum of 2.7 degrees Celsius compared to the aspiration target of 1.5 degrees Celsius. In a surprising departure, the proposed target of mobilising USD 1.3 trillion is to be achieved by 'all actors' instead of 'all Parties' to the UNFCCC. Since a COP decision cannot be binding on 'all actors', the target holds little value beyond a half-hearted appeal. The G77 and China rejected the Presidency proposal followed by a strong letter from the civil society organisations supporting the rejection. The COP29 may still deliver a decision keeping the negotiation process alive as the negotiations are in extended hours searching



for a political compromise. Yet, the position taken by the developed countries during COP29 is a concern for developing countries in the next rounds of negotiations. Outsourcing Responsibility The reluctance of developed countries to commit to new, additional and predictable climate finance is not new. At COP29, this reluctance turned into an aggressive posture, shifting the responsibility to mobilise commensurate finance primarily onto emerging economies and other actors. Throughout COP29, developed countries left no stone unturned to shift responsibility onto emerging economies, including China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. They pressed for emerging economies to be considered ineligible for receiving climate finance, except in the form of debt. Additionally, they suggested including emerging economies' domestic investments and climate-friendly South-South cooperation in accounting for climate finance, urging them to voluntarily contribute. Outside the negotiation process, a group of developed countries, including the UK and Australia, signed a pledge to have "no new unabated" coal-based power plants. This may

BY TRYING TO SHIFT THE BURDEN ON EMERGING ECONOMIES AND KEEPING THE INTERESTS AND NEEDS OF THE VULNERABLE POPULATIONS ON MARGIN, DEVELOPED COUNTRIES HAVE AGGRESSIVELY PUSHED TO OPEN THE NEGOTIATIONS ON EQUITY PRINCIPLES AT COP29

be a response to the ongoing energy crisis in some developed countries, indirectly pledging to continue using coal with expensive carbon capture and storage technologies, expecting emerging economies to do the same. Adaptation Marginalised The Second Needs Determination Report (NDR) by the UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (SCF) estimates that more than USD 200 billion per year of adaptation finance is needed till 2030. So far, adaptation has received little finance from non-public sources. Even if the developed countries agree to USD 300 billion per year by 2035 as some reports suggest, it will categorically leave the adaptation needs on the margins of global climate governance. On a parallel negotiation track on the Adaptation Fund, the USA and EU sparred with the Arab Group on the need to scale up mobilisation beyond USD 300 million. While the financial commitments to developing countries are likely to remain meagrely, the Global Goal on Adaptation negotiations expect the developing countries to develop, implement, track, and report their National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) commensurate with the projected tempera-

ture rise. Equity Under Siege The principle of equity and common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR&RC) is the soul of global climate governance through the UNFCCC. The primary responsibility of creating enabling conditions for an equitable transition to a climate-resilient and low-carbon world, including through means of implementation, rests with the developed countries. By trying to shift the burden on emerging economies and keeping the interests and needs of the vulnerable populations on margin, developed countries have aggressively pushed to open the negotiations on equity principles at COP29. Irrespective of the number finally agreed at the COP29, the intent made abundantly clear by developed countries is alarming. It can potentially make any discussion on the quantum of finance irrelevant. It will certainly leave the vast vulnerable population unprotected—a marker of an unequal world. (The writer is a Senior Fellow and Associate Director, Earth Science and Climate Change Division, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI); views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### TRUMP'S THREAT IS FOR REAL

Madam — This refers to the editorial, 'Trump's tariff threat'. Trump is an emotional activist. He decides his course based on his momentous decisions and emotions. Most of his decisions do not carry convincing logic or rationality. His earlier tenure had seen several such decisions, but none could help the people in terms of employment or faster economic recovery. Trump's challenges to finish the domination of China and the quixotic actions he took could not make anything tangible in the status. The Indian situation is vulnerable, with its export value being \$73 billion versus imports to the tune of \$119 billion. Any hostile imposition of tariffs will have serious adverse impacts on the balance of trade, which is already tilting against India's favour. Moreover, India needs political will and moral courage to face such a situation of Trump imposing tariff hurdles. As of now the leadership does not have such a shield. During the pandemic period, the US had placed orders for hydroxychloroquine with Indian manufacturers. But the Prime Minister banned the export of this medicine as it was recommended as one of the drugs to treat Covid. Having learnt this, Trump reacted sharply and said if India does not honour orders placed for this drug, the country will have to face the wrath. Immediately, without wasting any time, our Prime Minister revoked the ban and attended to the order. As known to all, the Republican Party is a party of the affluent in the US, Trump, being a Republican leader, would not have any sentiments in safeguarding the interests of the rich in America. He will go all out to re-establish the supremacy of America in terms of international affairs or the power of the US dollar. But he should realise that the world order is changing fast and undergoing sweeping changes in many respects. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

#### FADNAVIS WINS THE RACE

Madam — The selection of the Chief Minister of Maharashtra appears to be

#### Taj Mahal bears the brunt of pollution



The Taj Mahal, which is known for its stunning beauty, has suffered dramatically from the effects of air pollution over the years. Once a shimmering white monument, it now bears the marks of environmental degradation. This decline is primarily due to pollution from industrial activities and the increasing vehicle emissions in Agra, as well as the pollution of the Yamuna River, which runs behind this UNESCO World

Heritage site. Importantly, the toxic gas emanating from the Yamuna has been doing greater harm, and it is said to be the main culprit behind the discolouration of the Taj's glorious white marbles. For over two decades, various Indian research institutes have explored restoration methods to reverse the discolouration of the Taj and revive the monument to its past glory, but all their efforts proved unsuccessful. The 17th-century Mughal architecture, which is a symbol of India's rich history, needs swift and decisive action to get back its legendary lustre. Involving national and international experts can provide comprehensive solutions to safeguard this magnificent monument for future generations. Ranganathan Sivakumar | Urpakkam

ners, which doesn't augur well for the centre to justify their action. A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

#### PROTECT SEWER WORKERS

Madam — In India, the poor sewer system has dried the citizens' lives with spreading disease, stinks and even taking lives in the cleaning process. Over the last 15 years, across India, 1,288 sewer deaths have been recorded by the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis. Only in the capital city, Delhi, 95 deaths recorded so far. The desperate issue is yet not to halt; on the contrary, it is increasing dreadfully. In the era of access to technology and digital India, the government's failing to launch any well-designed resource to facilitate the way of cleaning is concerning; maybe, due to particular caste, the government is still giving the cold shoulder. It's not tolerable, at any cost. The authorities must address it and ensure the safety of citizens and cleaners. Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The power of touch: A sense that defines us

Touch is the first sense we develop and one that shapes our lives in profound ways. It connects us to each other, fostering love, compassion and resilience

We have read the story of five blind men and the elephant. Each man touched a part and described the animal differently. They would have correctly visualised the pachyderm if they also had sight. There is no denying that all five senses combined define how we live from birth to death.

The absence of any will make us feel incomplete. Touch is probably foremost. Scientists say touch is the first of the senses we develop. It is not a single feeling. It consists of several distinct sensations communicated to the brain through neurons in the skin. Touch plays an important role in shaping us. It also conveys compassion from one human to another.

My earliest memories were those of my parents, their friends, or elders from the extended family, patting and even pinching my cheeks. I do not remember patting the cheeks of my younger siblings, probably because they came in quick succession, within three years of my birth. However, the emotions of my parents holding me in



joy and pain alike will forever remain with me. I also recall the happy gurgling sounds of my younger cousins as I patted or tickled them. The feeling I had as I held my fiancé's hand while putting the engagement ring on her finger was different. It gave me a sense of love and belonging to someone for the rest of my life. We got married and in time had children. Touch was important to nurture and cherish our love for each other and the children. As we held our children close, I could visualise the bliss that my parents might have felt when they held me or my younger siblings. Touch plays an equally important role in grief due to

loss. We are so conditioned to the societal norms of engaging the bereaved in an almost endless conversation, that we often forget their need to sit quietly with their thoughts to contemplate the life lived together and mourn the loss. A warm hug is all that the grieving person needs at that moment. I also visit the temple, not often, but occasionally.

A sense of peace pervades me when the priest touches my forehead in blessing. We have heard about the power of healing only through the touch of a saint or even the statue of a revered person. It is the faith people have in the power of touch. It is not unusual to see people across the globe reaching out to their leaders or stars to touch them and shake hands with them. Leaders and stars also feel connected when they are physically close to people. Leaders from different countries, separated by geographies and language, are also seen hugging each other, indicating friendship and camaraderie. We see sportspersons hugging each other after an achieve-

ment. It motivates them to perform better. COVID left us feeling bereft of several human emotions. Many lost their lives away from their loved ones. Both, the dead and those who survived missed the familiar touch. There were unanswered questions in everyone's mind. We were afraid of the unknown future. We did not know if touch, the most elementary of our senses that defines our personality, would be a thing of the past for future generations. We faced the unthinkable feeling of living and dying in the sterile 'Don't Touch Me' environment of social distancing. Touch keeps us alive. It imparts within us the ability to love and be loved. Emily Dickinson wrote in one of her poems, almost two centuries earlier. "He touched me, so I live to know... And now, I'm different than before."

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



SANJAY CHANDRA



## FIRST COLUMN

### WORKPLACE GOSSIP: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

It thrives in organisational environments as a form of informal communication



SAKSHI SETHI

Workplace gossip is an enduring phenomenon in organisational environments, involving informal communication with others, often without their knowledge. While it is frequently dismissed as harmless chatter, workplace gossip can have profound implications for individuals, teams and organisational culture. It is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can serve as a bonding tool and provide informal channels of communication while on the other hand, it can breed mistrust, damage reputations and create a toxic work environment. Determining whether workplace gossip is harmless, or harmful depends on the nature, intent and consequences of the gossip.

The term stems from various psychological and organisational factors. Human curiosity and the desire for social connection often drive employees to share information, even if it is speculative. In many cases, gossip becomes a way to establish or strengthen bonds within a team. Another cause is ambiguity or lack of transparency in communication. Employees feel uncertain about organisational changes, leadership decisions, or colleagues' actions, and may resort to gossip to fill information gaps.

Moreover, competitive workplaces can foster gossip to gain leverage or influence perceptions. Though often vilified, gossip is not inherently negative. Looking at the positive perspective, it can foster social cohesion by creating shared narratives and providing an outlet for



employees to express concerns informally. It can also act as an informal feedback loop, alerting leadership to potential issues like toxic behaviours or dissatisfaction that may remain hidden. However, the negative consequences of workplace gossip often outweigh the positives. Gossip can damage reputations, lower morale and lead to feelings of mistrust and resentment.

Employees who are the targets of gossip may experience stress, anxiety and a decline in productivity. Additionally, pervasive gossip can erode an organisation's culture creating a hostile work environment where collaboration and trust are undermined. It is very often that stressful work environments, complaining about coworkers, personality clashes, or misunderstandings stem from unmet expectations and a lack of effective communication channels. It can exacerbate the urge to vent frustrations informally.

While airing grievances may feel like a release or an attempt to bond with others, it rarely resolves underlying issues. Instead, it creates a cycle of negativity. Organisations and leaders can adopt proactive strategies such as promoting open communication, fostering a positive work culture, leading by example and moreover empowering employees can be a few steps to mitigate the harmful effects of gossiping. Today the term gossiping isn't limited to celebrities and family reunions. When discussing the workplace, it has become a way not to take responsibility for any actions or reactions they create. By focusing on someone else, an individual can shift the focus from the circumstances. Complaining about colleagues behind their backs is a detrimental habit that harms relationships, morale, and workplace culture. By choosing direct, empathetic communication and focusing on solutions, employees can foster a more positive and productive environment. Eliminating backdoor complaints is not just about professionalism rather it is about creating a culture of mutual respect where everyone feels valued and heard.

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

# Reimagining governance in Punjab



A S MITTAL

Punjab must address longstanding bottlenecks and embrace digital transformation and foster public-private partnerships to create a model of excellence for the nation

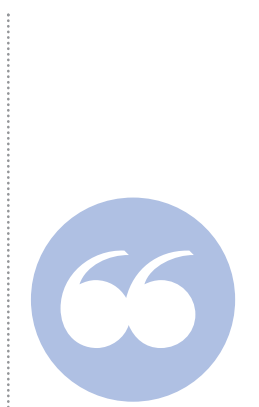
In a rapidly evolving world, governance demands agility, transparency, and citizen-centric solutions. Governments worldwide face the complex challenge of balancing bureaucratic structures with the need for efficiency and innovation. A case in point is the ambitious Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) in the United States, a high-profile initiative spearheaded by incoming President Donald Trump and the project led by entrepreneur leaders Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy. This bold move aims to revolutionise public administration through structural reforms and entrepreneurial strategies to enhance government efficacy and improve the delivery of citizen services. With its rich legacy and robust potential, Punjab stands at a similar crossroads, where embracing transformative models could redefine governance.

The Governance Landscape: Punjab, with its educated workforce, vibrant agricultural economy, and dynamic MSMEs, has made commendable strides in governance reforms. However, bottlenecks in service delivery, resource misallocation, and policy execution often impede progress. Despite notable efforts, the state lags in efficiency metrics compared to leaders like Kerala, which excels in health, education, and welfare schemes, and Tamil Nadu, which is highly efficient in infrastructure, industry, and public welfare, as highlighted by the NITI Aayog's Good Governance Index 2024. Punjab's governance challenges are compounded by the sheer scale of its administrative machinery—50 parent departments, 163 affiliated organisations, and over 75 administrative secretaries.

This labyrinthine structure creates hurdles for citizens seeking essential services. Introducing the Punjab Efficiency Commission (PEC): Punjab can adopt a model akin to DOGE by establishing a Punjab Efficiency Commission (PEC) to address these challenges. Headed by an apex officer, ideally, of Chief Secretary rank, the PEC would operate as a centralised authority reporting directly to the Chief Minister. Its mandate would be to synchronise key departmental goals, oversee human resource operations, ensure seamless policy execution, and implement data-driven governance frameworks. This institution would embody accountability, transparency, and innovation—hallmarks of good governance. Key Pillars of Reform:

**Accountability and Transparency:** In the US, agencies like the Government Accountability Office (GAO) ensure effective resource utilisation and transparency. Punjab could establish its own state-level accountability office under the PEC. This body would audit departmental performance, monitor public expenditure, and publish actionable reports to foster trust and combat inefficiency.

**Digital Transformation:** Punjab has made progress in digital governance, but much more can be achieved by studying global benchmarks. For instance, USA.gov serves as a one-stop portal for citizens that revolutionises



THE JOURNEY TOWARDS GOOD GOVERNANCE ISN'T MERELY ABOUT ADDRESSING INEFFICIENCIES—IT'S ABOUT SETTING BENCHMARKS FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW. WITH BOLD REFORMS, PUNJAB HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSITION FROM A RESOURCE-RICH STATE TO A GOVERNANCE POWERHOUSE

how people interact with their government, showcasing the vast potential of technology to improve efficiency. Punjab could develop a unified digital platform for licensing, tax filing, and grievance redressal services. A dedicated state-run mobile application could provide real-time updates on service requests, enhance accessibility, reduce delays, and track the progress of their cases in real time.

**Performance Metrics and Dashboards:** An essential aspect of U.S. government efficiency is using performance metrics to inform decision-making. For instance, The Obama-era Performance.gov tracked federal projects and outcomes, creating a culture of accountability. Punjab could develop a similar dashboard to monitor critical sectors like healthcare, education, agriculture, industry and infrastructure. By leveraging big data and analytics, policy decisions can be based on measurable outcomes, driving impactful governance rather than guesswork.

**Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** PPPs have proven transformative in infrastructure and service delivery. These partnerships, from highways to healthcare and education, allow the government to use private sector expertise and funding to improve services and reduce costs. A case study from the USA illustrates the success in Tennessee. The government implemented a data-driven budgeting model, saving millions of taxpayer dollars while improving service quality in education and healthcare.

Similarly, New York City's innovation office streamlined procurement processes, cutting costs by 30per cent. However,

Punjab has over 147 PPP projects worth Rs 60,000 crore in critical sectors like healthcare, education and infrastructure, leveraging private expertise for better resource management and infrastructure, accelerating projects through collaborative funding models. This model could be the key to unlocking sustained growth in the agriculture sector, partnering with tech companies for innovative farming solutions to monitor soil health, weather patterns, and crop performance can promote more sustainable practices and increase productivity.

**Investing in Human Capital:** A critical factor in the success of any government's efficiency efforts is its investment in human capital. Punjab must recognise that an empowered civil service is essential for good governance. The state can cultivate a workforce skilled in the latest management techniques, data analysis, and digital tools by establishing training academies or partnering with top institutions. This approach will enable the government to respond to the evolving challenges of governance and ensure that its public servants are accountable and well-equipped with the knowledge needed to drive meaningful change to perform their responsibilities effectively.

**Citizen Participation:** Finally, the US model of citizen participation in governance through public hearings and feedback mechanisms can be a valuable tool for Punjab. US citizens are encouraged to engage with the government, provide policy input, and hold officials accountable.

This fosters a sense of ownership and civic responsibility. However, the Punjab government has ini-

tiated 'Sarkar Tuhade Dwar' and 'Sarkar Vyapar Milni'. It must create more avenues for regular engagement with citizens to understand pain points and incorporate real-world insights into governance reforms. Punjab can bridge the gap between policymakers and citizens by making governance more inclusive and participatory, ensuring reforms resonate with public aspirations.

The way forward for a resurgent Punjab: Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's vision for a dynamic Punjab can materialise by embracing these transformative practices.

The Punjab Efficiency Commission, supported by robust technology, accountability frameworks, and participatory governance, can usher in a new era of efficiency and transparency. The journey towards good governance isn't merely about addressing inefficiencies—it's about setting benchmarks for others to follow. With bold reforms, Punjab has the potential to transition from a resource-rich state to a governance powerhouse, leading India's states in delivering citizen-centric solutions. The time to act is now. Punjab's future lies in its ability to reimagine governance, ensuring every citizen experiences the transformative power of efficient and inclusive administration.

*(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association (TMA); Views expressed are personal)*

# Breaking the stigma: Prioritising mental health for a happier, resilient future

Depression, anxiety and other mental health challenges must be taken seriously. They affect one in five people worldwide

Depression in mental health is a feeling of low, sad and unhappy. Which can lead to loss of appetite, loss of sleep, loss of interest, and negative thoughts. Mental health is about how we think, feel and cope with life's challenges. Just like we take care of our physical health, looking after our mental health is equally important. Parents play a key role in creating a happy, supportive, and understanding environment at home.

Mental health issues such as anxiety, fear and depression are common, and they can arise due to bullying, family conflicts, changes in school or life, academic stress, or even harsh punishments. These challenges can make children feel isolated, angry, or lose



RESHMA A SANGODKAR

focus on their studies. It's crucial to understand that seeking help from counsellors, therapists, or trusted adults like parents or teachers is a sign of strength, not weakness. Today, one in five people faces mental health challenges. Professional support, such as therapy, can significantly improve emotional wellbeing. Activities like yoga, sports,

and meditation are also effective for calming the mind and reducing stress. Additionally, practising mindfulness—focusing on the present moment—can help children feel more peaceful and focused. Good habits, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy food, and staying hydrated, support both mental and physical health. Engaging in enjoyable hobbies can boost happiness and reduce stress. Schools and families need to work together to provide children with positive environments, where they feel safe and supported. In our society, mental health issues are often overlooked, and stigma prevents many from seeking help. Depression in mental health is a feeling of low, sad and

unhappy. Which can lead to loss of appetite, loss of sleep, loss of interest and negative thoughts. World Mental Health Day is celebrated on October 10 every year. Many people are affected by depression in the world. Very common in today's world. Campaigns like World Mental Health Day aim to break these barriers and encourage open conversations. And encourages those affected to seek help from a Psychiatrist. Teachers should be trained to identify early signs of mental health problems in children and provide guidance. Parenting is also a key factor in shaping a child's mental health. Parents should avoid unhealthy comparisons and ensure their children feel emotionally secure. Building a

strong, friendly relationship with children helps them share their feelings without fear. Simple practices like mindfulness, meditation and breathing exercises can also help children and adults stay calm and focused. As Lord Buddha said,



strong, friendly relationship with children helps them share their feelings without fear. Simple practices like mindfulness,

meditation and breathing exercises can also help children and adults stay calm and focused. As Lord Buddha said,

"Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."

This profound phrase highlights the essence of mindfulness—focusing fully on the present and giving your complete attention to whatever you are doing. Mindfulness means being fully present in the moment, whether eating, studying, or walking. Meditation, on the other hand, is about dedicating time to relax the mind and focus on breathing. Both practices help reduce stress and improve sleep, allowing children to perform better in school and other activities. Engaging in activities like participating in marathons, running 5 kilometres, or setting personal fitness goals can help reduce depres-

sion and improve mental wellbeing. Yogic exercises like Surya namaskars help in boosting our prana level to stave off depression.

Welcoming an idol of Lord Buddha into your home or workplace, reading positive affirmations each morning, and offering gratitude to those around you and God are wonderful practices to keep the mind happy and at peace.

By creating supportive environments and normalising mental health discussions, we can ensure that children grow up to be emotionally strong, happy, and resilient individuals. The key is to break the stigma and make mental health a priority for everyone.

*(The writer is an author and freelance writer; views are personal)*

# 56 people killed in stampede following clashes at a Guinea soccer match

AP ■ CONARKY (GUINEA)

Fifty-six people were killed and several injured in a stampede at a soccer stadium in southern Guinea, following clashes between fans, Guinea's government said on Monday. Authorities are conducting an investigation to establish those responsible for the stampede on Sunday, Communications Minister Fana Soumah said in a statement read on national television. Among the victims are several children according to local media and a coalition of political parties. The stampede broke out on Sunday afternoon at the stadium in the city of Nzerekore

during the final of a local tournament between the Labe and Nzerekore teams in honour of Guinea's military leader, Mamadi Doumbouya, Guinea's Prime Minister Amadou Oury Bah said on the X platform. "During the stampede, victims were recorded," Bah said, without giving details. The regional authorities are working to restore calm in the area, he added. Local media reported that security forces tried to use tear gas (two words) to restore calm after the chaos that followed a disputed penalty. "This (the disputed penalty) angered supporters who threw stones. This is how the security services used tear gas," Media Guinea, a local news website,

reported. It said several of those killed were children while some of the injured being treated at a regional hospital are in critical condition. Videos that appeared to be from the scene showed fans in a section of the stadium shouting and protesting the refereeing before clashes broke out as people poured onto the field. People were running as they tried to escape from the stadium, many of them jumping the high fence. Videos also showed many people lying on the floor in what looked like a hospital as a crowd gathered nearby, some assisting the wounded. The National Alliance for Alternation and Democracy opposition coalition called for

an investigation. It said the tournament was organised to drum up support for the "illegal and inappropriate" political ambitions of the military leader. Guinea has been led by the military since soldiers ousted President Alpha Conde in 2021. It is one of a growing number of West African countries, including Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where the military has taken power and delayed a return to civilian rule. Doumbouya, who ousted the president three years ago, said he was preventing the country from slipping into chaos and chastised the previous government for broken promises. He has, however, been criticized for not meeting the expectations that he raised.

# ISLAND NATIONS FEAR RISING SEAS

## Landmark climate change case opens at top UN court

AP ■ THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)

The top United Nations court took up the largest case in its history on Monday, when it opened two weeks of hearings into what countries worldwide are legally required to do to combat climate change and help vulnerable nations fight its devastating impact. After years of lobbying by island nations who fear they could simply disappear under rising sea waters, the UN General Assembly asked the International Court of Justice last year for an opinion on "the obligations of States in respect of climate change." Any decision by the court would be non-binding advice and couldn't directly force wealthy nations into action to help struggling countries. Yet it would be more than just a powerful symbol since it could be the basis for other legal actions,

including domestic lawsuits. "We want the court to confirm that the conduct that has wrecked the climate is unlawful," Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, who is leading the legal team for the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, told The Associated Press. In the decade up to 2023, sea levels have risen by a global average of around 4.3 centimeters (1.7 inches), with parts of the Pacific rising higher still. The world has also warmed 1.3 degrees Celsius (2.3 Fahrenheit) since pre-industrial times because of the burning of fossil fuels. Vanuatu is one of a group of small states pushing for international legal intervention in the climate crisis. "We live on the front lines of climate change impact. We are witnesses to the destruction of our lands, our livelihoods, our culture and our human rights," Vanuatu's climate change envoy Ralph Regenvanu told

reporters ahead of the hearing. The Hague-based court will hear from 99 countries and more than a dozen intergovernmental organizations over two weeks. It's the largest lineup in the institution's nearly 80-year history. Last month at the United Nations' annual climate meeting, countries cobbled together an agreement on how rich countries can support poor countries in the face of climate disasters. Wealthy countries have agreed to pool together at least \$300 billion a year by 2035 but the total is short of the \$1.3 trillion that experts, and threatened nations, said is needed. "For our generation and for the Pacific Islands, the climate crisis is an existential threat. It is a matter of survival, and the world's biggest economies are not taking this crisis seriously. We need the ICJ to protect the rights of people at the front lines," said Vishal Prasad, of

Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change. Fifteen judges from around the world will seek to answer two questions: What are countries obliged to do under international law to protect the climate and environment from human-caused greenhouse gas emissions? And what are the legal consequences for governments where their acts, or lack of action, have significantly harmed the climate and environment? The second question makes particular reference to "small island developing States" likely to be hardest hit by climate change and to "members of the present and future generations affected by the adverse effects of climate change." The judges were even briefed on the science behind rising global temperatures by the UN's climate change body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ahead of the hearings.

# Taiwan's president visits East-West think tank as China criticises his Hawaii visit

AP ■ HONOLULU



Taiwan's president visited a US State Department-funded think tank and educational institution Sunday on the second day of a two-day visit to Hawaii that's part of a Pacific island tour that has already triggered criticism from Beijing. Lai Ching-te met and exchanged gifts with the president of the East-West Center, which is on the University of Hawaii's flagship Manoa campus. He spoke to an audience at the center but journalists were escorted out of a conference hall before he began speaking. China's Foreign Ministry said it "strongly condemned" US support for Lai's visit and had lodged a complaint with the US. It also denounced a newly announced US weapons sale to Taiwan, a self-governing island that China claims as its own territory. "China will closely monitor the situation's development, and take resolute and forceful measures to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said the statement.

Hawaii was Lai's first stop on a weeklong voyage that will later take him to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau. They account for three of the 12 countries that Taipei has formal diplomatic relations with. Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum, president of the East-West Center, said her institution is the perfect place for Lai to visit because it promotes relations among the United States, Asia and the Pacific. She said it's not unusual for leaders from around the world to come to Hawaii given the state's location and what makes it special.

"There is something about Hawaii that allows us to really take home to the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau. They account for three of the 12 countries that Taipei has formal diplomatic relations with. Suzanne Puanani Vares-Lum, president of the East-West Center, said her institution is the perfect place for Lai to visit because it promotes relations among the United States, Asia and the Pacific. She said it's not unusual for leaders from around the world to come to Hawaii given the state's location and what makes it special.

nance. Lai is also a physician by training and obtained a Master of Public Health degree from Harvard University. "Together, we extended a warm aloha to Lai and his delegation, highlighting Hawaii's shared values of resilience and collaboration with Taiwan," Green said in an Instagram post. Lai also posed for photos with Hawaii congressional representatives and state lawmakers at a dinner banquet with the Taiwanese American community. US Rep. Ed Case, a Democrat who represents Honolulu in Congress, said on social media that he told the audience that "our ties endured on shared values and interests to advance mutual goals and meet shared challenges." It is unclear whether Lai will meet with any senior officials from the Biden administration or anyone from the incoming Trump administration during his Hawaii stay. President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview with Bloomberg in July that Taiwan should pay for its defense. The island has purchased billions of dollars of defense weaponry from the US.

# Indians stranded at Kuwait airport depart for Manchester

PTI ■ KUWAIT CITY

Several Indian passengers of a Manchester-bound Gulf Air flight were stranded at the Kuwait airport for nearly 20 hours and flown out of the city to their destination on Monday morning. The Gulf Air flight from Bahrain to Manchester was diverted to Kuwait due to a technical glitch. Gulf Air GF5 took off from Bahrain at 2.05 am local time on December 1 but a snag forced the plane to land in Kuwait at 4:01 am, as per reports. With several passengers complaining that they had been stranded at the airport for many hours, the Indian embassy in Kuwait took up the matter with Gulf Air, according to social media posts. In a series of posts on X, the embassy said its team reached the airport to assist the passengers and coordinate with the airline. Passengers were accommodated in two airport lounges. Food and water were made available for the stranded passengers at the lounges, as per the embassy. "Gulf Air flight to Manchester finally departed at 0434 hours today carrying stranded Indian passengers among others. The embassy team was on the ground till the flight departed," the embassy said in a post. A stranded passenger, on Sunday, took to X, alleging that Indian passengers were left without help.

# Nepal govt accepts US\$ 20m grant assistance from China

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

The Nepal government has accepted projects worth USD 20 million as grant assistance from China ahead of Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli's first official visit to the country after assuming office for the fourth time. Minister for Information and Communication Prithvi Subba Gurung talking to media persons on Sunday said the Council of Ministers meeting wished for the success of the prime minister's China visit and also decided to accept projects worth USD 20 million equivalent to Nepalese Rs 2.70 billion as grant assistance from China. Besides, the Cabinet also decided to accept 300 million Chinese Yuan (USD 4.13 million approximately) equivalent to Nepalese Rs 5.60 billion worth projects proposed by the government of China, according to government spokesperson Gurung. During Oli's China visit, various projects including Tokha-Khahare Tunnel Road, Special Economic Zone

construction at Corala border point of Mustang, road construction at Kimathanka of Shankhuwasabha, feasibility study of railway line in Rasuwagadhi, expansion of Kathmandu Ring Road second phase, starting bone marrow service at Chitawan Cancel Hospital will be discussed, Gurung said. Oli on Monday embarked on a four-day official visit to China, his maiden trip to any neighbouring country in this term, during which he is scheduled to hold talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on various issues of mutual interest. Oli is visiting Beijing at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart Li Qiang, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs here said. With the visit, Oli broke with the usual practice by Nepali prime ministers making India their first destination in the neighbourhood after assuming charge, except former prime minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who visited China ahead of India in 2008.

# Biden pardons son Hunter despite previous pledges not to do so

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden pardoned son Hunter Sunday night, sparing him a possible prison sentence for federal felony gun and tax convictions and reversing his past promises not to use the extraordinary powers of the presidency for the benefit of his family members. The Democratic president had previously said he would not pardon his son or commute his sentence after his convictions in the two cases in Delaware and California. The move comes weeks before Hunter Biden was set to receive his punishment after his trial conviction in the gun case and guilty plea on tax charges, and less than two months before President-elect Donald Trump is set to return to the White House. It caps a long-running legal saga for the president's son, who publicly disclosed he was under federal investigation in December 2020 — a month after Joe Biden's 2020 victory.

In June, Biden categorically ruled out a pardon or commutation for his son, telling reporters as his son faced trial in the Delaware gun case, "I abide by the jury decision. I will do that and I will not pardon him." As recently as Nov 8, days after Trump's victory, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre ruled out a pardon or clemency for the younger Biden, saying, "We've been asked that question multiple times. Our answer stands, which is no." In a statement released Sunday evening, Biden said, "Today, I signed a pardon for my son Hunter, alleging that the prosecution of his son was politically motivated and a miscarriage of justice." "The charges in his cases came about only after several of my political opponents in Congress instigated them to attack me and oppose my election," Biden said. "No reasonable person who looks at the facts of Hunter's cases can reach any

other conclusion than Hunter was singled out only because he is my son." "I hope Americans will understand why a father and a President would come to this decision," Biden added, claiming he made the decision this weekend. The president had spent the Thanksgiving holiday in Nantucket, Massachusetts with Hunter and his family. Hunter was convicted in June in Delaware federal court of three felonies for purchasing a gun in 2018 when, prosecutors said, he lied on a federal form by claiming he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs. He was set to stand trial in September in the California case accusing him of failing to pay at least \$1.4 million in taxes. But he agreed to plead guilty to misdemeanor and felony charges in a surprise move hours after jury selection was set to begin. Hunter said he was pleading guilty in that case to spare his family more pain and embarrassment after the gun trial

aired salacious details about his struggles with a crack cocaine addiction. The tax charges carry up to 17 years behind bars and the gun charges are punishable by up to 25 years in prison, though federal sentencing guidelines were expected to call for far less time and it was possible he would avoid prison time entirely. Hunter Biden said in an emailed statement that he will never take for granted the relief granted to him and vowed to devote the life he has rebuilt "to helping those who are still sick and suffering." "I have admitted and taken responsibility for my mistakes during the darkest days of my addiction — mistakes that have been exploited to publicly humiliate and shame me and my family for political sport," the younger Biden said. A spokesperson for special counsel David Weiss, who brought the cases, did not respond to messages seeking comment Sunday night.



President Joe Biden accompanied by his son Hunter Biden and his grandson Beau leave a book store as they walk in downtown Nantucket Mass., recently.

AP/PTI

# Scroll less, connect more: New study shows how to make social media work for you

THE CONVERSATION ■ VANCOUVER

We all know using social media is considered bad for you. A high social media diet is linked to anxiety, depression and FOMO (the fear of missing out). Even internal research data from Meta, the company behind Instagram and Facebook, agrees. However, over the last decade, social media has become woven into the fabric of our daily lives. It's hard to imagine life without it. Young adults are especially vulnerable: 80 per cent of young adults use social media daily, spending close to three hours per day on it. For many, scrolling social media is the first thing they do when they wake up and the last thing before they go to bed. On the plus side, social media can also help people connect with

friends and family. This is especially true for people with minoritized or stigmatized identities: social media can help them find a community of similar others, who may live far away. So what should we do? Is the only answer for us to quit social media altogether? Or is it possible for us to learn how to use social media in smarter ways? A new study from our lab, the Promoting Equitable, Affirming Relationships Lab at the University of British Columbia, suggests that not only is it possible, but also, that using social media intentionally can actually improve well-being. The study's findings highlight the potential for social media to be a tool for good, rather than a source of stress. Multiple digital self-control tools like lockout mechanisms and timers exist to help us cut back on social

media, but we asked the question: what if simply using social media differently could maximise its positives and minimise its negatives in our lives? Using social media for maximum benefit: In our six-week study, 393 Canadian young adults with some mental health symptoms and concerns about social media's impact on their lives were split into three groups: A control group that continued their usual routines. An abstinence group asked to take a break from social media entirely. An educational programme group that was coached in intentional usage. The educational programme showed people how to avoid the downsides — like feeling pressured to look or act a certain way online — and instead focus on the good stuff.

To do this, we emphasised quality over quantity in social media interactions. Participants built a healthier online environment by muting or unfollowing accounts that triggered envy or negative self-comparisons, and by prioritizing close friendships. Rather than passively scrolling, they were encouraged to actively engage with friends by commenting or sending direct messages — a behaviour that tends to deepen meaningful connections while helping users feel more socially supported. We also asked all participants to track their screen time and tell us about their well-being. The study found that participants who took a break from social media or participated in an educational program on intentional social media use experienced

improvements in their mental health. Feeling less lonely: Our results are promising. Those who took a break felt fewer depression and anxiety symptoms, while those in the educational program felt less lonely and experienced less FOMO. Our educational programme also inadvertently impacted social media habits. Although participants in this program didn't cut back on their social media use as much as those in the abstinence group, they still reduced their screen time relative to the control group. We suspect that as they started to use social media more intentionally, they cut out the type of use that made them feel bad but increased or maintained the type of use that made them feel good. Stopping social comparisons: Both groups — those who took a

break and those who completed the educational program — showed a decrease in the tendency to compare themselves to others online. This is a big step since social comparison is often touted as the root of all evil stemming from social media use. Overall, both approaches reduced unhealthy social media habits and improved well-being. Using social media in an intentional, connected way might be just as beneficial, and potentially more sustainable for some, than quitting altogether. Our results suggest that with the right guidance, young adults can curate a more positive experience, using social media to support their mental health instead of detracting from it. Looking for genuine connections: At the Promoting Equitable, Affirming, Relationships Lab, we

research how young people form supportive and lasting relationships — both online and in-person. Part of what we do is to find out and understand how social media can be harnessed to help people find community. Conversely, we are looking at ways to avoid the potential negatives of the online sphere. While our study offers some solutions, the bigger question remains: How can we continue to foster supportive and authentic connections in an increasingly digital world? Bottom line? Social media is here to stay and we need to find the healthiest ways to live with it. Through our research, we hope to start a conversation about how we can make social media a tool for genuine connection, rather than a source of stress, for a healthier online experience.





# Government scraps windfall profit tax on domestic crude oil, export of fuels

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday scrapped 30-month old windfall profit tax on domestically-produced crude oil and on export of jet fuel (ATF), diesel and petrol following a decline in international oil prices.

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary tabled a notification in Rajya Sabha scrapping the levy on crude oil produced by firms like state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and exports of fuels done by companies like Reliance Industries Ltd.

The notification rescinded June 30, 2022 order and withdrew levy of special additional excise duty (SAED) on production of crude oil (which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel) and on export of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), diesel and petrol, he said.

Alongside, the road and infrastructure cess (RIC) levied on export of petrol and



diesel has also been withdrawn.

India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022 joining a growing number of nations that tax super normal profits of energy companies. At that time, export duties of Rs 6 per litre (USD 12 per barrel) each were levied on petrol and ATF and Rs 13 a litre (USD 26 a barrel) on diesel.

A Rs 23,250 per tonne (USD

40 per barrel) windfall profit tax on domestic crude production was also levied.

The tax rates were reviewed every fortnight based on average oil prices in the previous two weeks.

While the levy on export of petrol became nil in the very first fortnightly review that happened in mid-July 2022, the tax on diesel and ATF exports became nil in mid April 2023 but were back in

August that year. There has been no levy on export of ATF and diesel since March this year.

As far as crude oil is concerned, the levy fluctuated every fortnight. It was Rs 1,850 per tonne in August 31, 2024 and became nil in the next fortnightly review.

Now, the levies on both domestically produced crude oil and fuel exports have been

scrapped.

The government had garnered about Rs 25,000 crore from the levy in the first year of its implementation, Rs 13,000 crore in 2023-24 and Rs 6,000 crore this year.

Reliance Industries Ltd, which operates India's largest only-for-export oil refinery at Jamnagar in Gujarat, and Rosneft-backed Nayara Energy are primary exporters of fuel in the country.

The government levied tax on windfall profits made by oil producers on any price they get above a threshold of USD 75 per barrel.

The levy on fuel exports is based on cracks or margins that refiners earn on overseas shipments. These margins are primarily a difference between the international oil price realised and the cost.

The decision to scrap the levy follows softening in international oil prices. The basket of crude oil that India imports averaged USD 73.02 per barrel in November, down from USD 75.12 a

barrel in the previous month.

The import price was about USD 90 per barrel in April this year but has continued to slide in subsequent months. It fell to USD 73.69 per barrel in September but rose marginally in the following month.

Since its levy, the windfall profit tax has been a subject of controversy. While it initially sought to balance government revenue amid fluctuating oil prices, industry players argued that it negatively impacted profitability and disincentive production. For private and foreign players, it brought in an element of uncertainty in the fiscal regime.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas too had been lobbying for its removal for some time now.

While doing away with tax on domestically-produced crude oil will benefit ONGC and Oil India Ltd, the scrapping of levy on fuel exports would help Reliance and Nayara.



## SpiceJet to operate 100 Haj flights in 2025

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Domestic carrier SpiceJet on Monday said it has secured the rights to operate Haj flights in 2025 from four key cities in the country - Kolkata, Guwahati, Srinagar, and Gaya.

As part of its mandate, SpiceJet will operate over 100 special flights for Haj 2025, using a mix of narrow-body and wide-body aircraft, and is

expected to fly 18 per cent additional pilgrims (around 15,500) compared to this year, the airline said.

Haj has been a significant revenue generator for SpiceJet, and the airline expects to generate Rs 185 crore from these operations in 2025, it said.

During the previous Haj season, SpiceJet deployed two wide-body Airbus A340 aircraft, each with a seating capacity of 324 passengers, SpiceJet said.

## India's power consumption up five per cent to 125.44 Billion units in November



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption rose 5.14 per cent to 125.44 billion units (BU) in November as compared to the year-ago month.

In November 2023, power consumption was 119.30 GW, as per the government data. The highest supply in a day (peak power demand met) also rose marginally to 207.42 GW in November 2024 from 204.56 GW in the year-ago period.

The peak power demand touched an all-time high of about 250 GW in May this year. The previous all-time high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023. Earlier this year, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during the day and 225 GW during evening hours for May while 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW in the evening hours for June.

The ministry had also

estimated that peak power demand may hit 260 GW this summer.

Noting that November 2024 was the warmest in last four to five years as per official data, the experts opined that power demand as well as consumption showed subdued growth mainly due to slow onset of winters.

They further said that marginal rise in peak power demand in November also shows the effect of warmer-than-normal month, especially in Northern India where consumption of electricity rises due to use of heaters and geysers in winter due to dip in mercury.

However, they said that the demand for power and consumption will continue to be steady in the coming days due to good commercial and industrial activities as well as dip in the temperature.

## Commerce ministry reviewing India-US trade relations amid Trump statements



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce ministry is reviewing various aspects of India-US trade relations focusing on implications of statements made by US President-elect Donald Trump during his election campaign and after the results, an official said.

The official added that there are no irritants in the relations between the two countries that can lead to

discriminatory tariffs against India.

Trump, during his election campaign, has called India an "abuser" of import tariffs, a claim that echoed his October 2020 statement labelling India the "Tariff King".

Trump on Saturday also warned BRICS countries against any move to replace the US dollar and has sought a commitment from the nine-member group that includes India, Russia, China, and

Brazil.

In the wake of such statements, brainstorming is fundamental to discuss the trade relations as the US is the largest trading partner of India.

Trade experts have time and again stated that Trump's claim that India is an "abuser" of import tariffs is unfair as many nations including America protect their domestic industries by imposing high customs duties on certain products.

According to WTO's World Tariff Profiles 2023, the US also imposes high duties on items like dairy products (188 per cent), fruits and vegetables (132 per cent), coffee, tea, cocoa and spices (53 per cent), cereals and food preparations (193 per cent), oilseeds, fats and oils (164 per cent), beverages and tobacco (150 per cent), fish and fish products (35 per cent), minerals and metals (187 per

cent), and chemicals (56 per cent).

An expert said that if the US would seek a cut in customs duties for some of their products, India should also demand a similar reduction to get greater market access for domestic items.

The US was the largest trading partner of India in 2023-24. India's exports stood at USD 77.51 billion, while imports aggregated at USD 42.2 billion in the last fiscal.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has recently stated that the US President is a "friend of India" and India-US friendship will only continue to blossom and grow further.

India's trade relations with the US will continue to grow irrespective of the change in regime in America and according to the commerce ministry data, India's exports to the US jumped to USD 39.2 billion in October against

USD 21.46 billion in October 2015.

During 2001-23, at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR), India's exports to America rose by 10.48 per cent. In this period, the US imports from the world have grown by 4.76 per cent.

"The India-US economic integration is growing over the period of time and that is a good thing for us and I trust that it will continue to grow," the official said.

During April-October this fiscal, the country's exports to America rose by 6.31 per cent to USD 47.24 billion, while imports grew by 2.46 per cent to USD 26 billion.

Experts have also stated that Indian exporters may face high customs duties for goods like automobiles, textiles and pharmaceuticals, if the new US administration decides to pursue the 'America First' agenda.

## Coal production from captive, commercial mines rises 35 per cent to 112.65 MT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The coal production from captive and commercial mines rose 34.7 per cent to 112.65 million tonne in the April-November period of the ongoing fiscal.

The output of coal from captive and commercial mines was 83.60 MT in the year-ago period, the coal ministry said in a statement.

The total dispatch of coal from captive and commercial mines between April and November rose to 119.62 MT from 89.32 MT in the same period last financial year.

"In November 2024 alone, the total coal dispatch from these mines was 16.109 MT,

with a daily average dispatch of 0.537 MT, which is an increase of 27.6 per cent compared to the daily average of 0.421 MT in November 2023," the statement said.

The surge in coal production and dispatch reflects the government's vision for Viksit Bharat 2047.

By prioritising domestic energy capabilities and reducing import dependencies, the government is strategically advancing India's economic self-reliance, infrastructure development, and global competitiveness through transparent and innovative governance.

## Gold falls ₹200 to ₹79,200 per 10 grams

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices fell Rs 200 to Rs 79,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak trends in the international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 79,400 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver also plummeted Rs 2,200 to Rs 90,000 per kg due to reduced offtake by industrial units and coin makers. It had closed at Rs 92,200 per kg in the previous trading session.

Price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 200 to Rs 78,800 per 10 grams. The precious metal ended at Rs 79,000 per 10 grams on Friday. Meanwhile, in futures

trade on the MCX, gold contracts for December delivery fell Rs 478, or 0.63 per cent, to trade at Rs 75,896 per 10 grams.

Silver contracts for December delivery slumped Rs 574, or 0.65 per cent, to Rs 88,307 per kg. During the day, the white metal declined Rs 1,081, or 1.22 per cent, to hit an intraday low of Rs 87,800 per kg on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

Globally, Comex gold futures fell USD 23.50 per ounce, or 0.88 per cent, to USD 2,657.50 per ounce.

"Gold continued its downward trajectory, after hitting an intra-day low of USD 2,621 during the Asian session.

"The decline was driven by a

recovery seen in US dollar, fuelled by rising US Treasury bond yields and inflationary concerns tied to President-elect Donald Trump's proposed tariffs," Maneesh Sharma, AVP - Commodities & Currencies, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers, said.

According to Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, last week comex gold closed on a weaker note as safe-haven demand faded, following a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Also, concerns about persistent inflation have raised doubts about the pace of rate cuts next year, Chainwala said.

## India's potential GDP growth is in range of 6.5-7 per cent, says CEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's potential GDP growth is in the range of 6.5-7 per cent and the country should be able to achieve it on the back of things that we have done already in the last 10 years—whether it is in terms of augmenting the physical infrastructure or achieving financial inclusion."

Emphasising the investment areas, he said, "We all know about the issue of intermittency. The investment shouldn't focus on setting up solar power plants or wind energy plants as we need to take into consideration the increasing cost of recycling solar panel waste and wind turbine waste. That is an area to

invest in."

The other areas to invest in is the area of grid capabilities and technologies which will be able to withstand the intermittency of supplies from these renewable energy sources, he said. With 45 years remaining for India to meet its commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2070, he said about the complex challenge of balancing robust economic growth with the urgent need for environmental sustainability.

He also shared the current strategies and steps and urged for a collaborative approach.

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## Rupee drops 13 paise to all-time low of 84.73 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 13 paise to close at an all-time low of 84.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, on disappointing macroeconomic data and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets.

Forex traders said Asian currencies were down after Trump Rhetoric on BRICS currency, as the move may further strengthen the greenback.

President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday threatened a 100 per cent tariff on the BRIC bloc of nations if they act to undermine the US dollar.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.59 and touched the lowest level of 84.73 against the greenback during intraday trade.

The unit ended the session at an all-time low of 84.73

(provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 13 paise over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee plunged 13 paise to settle at a fresh all-time low of 84.60 against the US dollar.

Traders said disappointing macroeconomic data and persistent foreign fund outflows also dented investor sentiments.

India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a joint 11-month low of 56.5 in November, restricted by competitive conditions and inflationary pressures amid a softer increase in factory orders, a monthly survey said on Monday.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strong dollar and FII outflows.

A recovery in crude oil prices may also weigh on the rupee. Donald Trump's tariff threat may further strengthen the greenback," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mira

Asset Sharekhan.

However, positive domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels.

Traders may take cues from US ISM manufacturing PMI data, Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 84.50 to Rs 84.95.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.51 per cent at 106.27.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, surged 0.99 per cent to USD 72.59 per barrel in futures trade.

India's forex reserves dropped USD 1.31 billion to USD 656.582 billion for the week ended November 22, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Friday.

The reserves had dropped a record USD 17.761 billion to USD 657.892 billion in the previous reporting week ending November 15.

## Sensex, Nifty settle higher on buying in blue-chip stocks



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Monday amid buying in blue-chip stocks.

Reliance Industries, Infosys and HDFC Bank along with a firm trend in the US markets.

Recovering the early lost ground, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 445.29 points or 0.56 per cent to settle at 80,248.08. During the day, it hit a high of 80,337.82 and a low of 79,308.95.

The NSE Nifty surged 144.95 points or 0.60 per cent to 24,276.05.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, UltraTech Cement, JSW Steel, Adani Ports, Tech Mahindra, Titan, Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel and Reliance Industries were the biggest gainers.

NTPC, Hindustan Unilever, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank and Larsen & Toubro were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul settled lower while Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended higher.

European markets were trading mostly lower. US markets ended in the positive territory on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,383.55 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought equities worth Rs 5,723.34 crore.

India's economic growth slowed to a near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors as well as weak consumption, but the country continued to remain the fastest-growing large economy, data showed on Friday.

India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 11-month low of 56.5 in November, restricted by competitive conditions and inflationary pressures amid a softer increase in factory orders, a monthly survey said on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.85 per cent to USD 72.45 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark jumped 759.05 points or 0.96 per cent to settle at 79,802.79 on Friday. The Nifty climbed 216.95 points or 0.91 per cent to 24,131.10.

## INBRIEF

### TCS HIRED 106 GNDU STUDENTS

**AMARAVATI:** Directorate of Placement & Career Enhancement of Guru Nanak Dev University organized Campus Placement drive by Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) company for B.Tech. and MCA students of GNDU - Batch 2025. The company selected 106 students from these courses.



### GNDU STUDENTS EXCELLED IN INTER-UNIVERSITY YOUTH FAIRS



**AMRITSAR:** - In the Inter-University Youth Competitions being held at Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana, students of the Department of Visual and Performing Arts of Guru Nanak Dev University participated in the Var, Kavishri and Kali competitions.

### PSPCL RECEIVES 92 LAKH METRIC TONNES OF COAL

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Power and Public Works Minister Harbhajan Singh ETO announced on Saturday that the Punjab State Power Corporation (PSPCL) has achieved substantial savings of approximately Rs 1,000 crore due to the procurement of cheaper coal from the Pachwara coal mine.



# Max Verstappen wins Qatar Grand Prix

**AP ■ LUSAIL**  
From a smashed mirror and crashes to unusually severe penalties, there were plenty of hazards at the Qatar Grand Prix. Max Verstappen steered clear of them all to follow up his Formula 1 drivers' title with his ninth win of the year on Sunday. Lando Norris, Verstappen's closest title rival until he secured the championship last week in Las Vegas, was trying to overtake the Dutch driver for the lead until he was dropped to the back of the field by a penalty for failing to slow for yellow warning flags. Verstappen, who secured his fourth consecutive title in Las Vegas last week, has won two of the last three races but hadn't won in dry conditions since June. "It was a lot of fun out there," Verstappen said. "Very happy. It's been a while in the dry to be this competitive. Very proud of everyone within the team." Verstappen disposed of another

rival off the line, beating George Russell into the first corner. The Mercedes driver had been elevated to pole position in Verstappen's place after a contentious dispute in qualifying that got Verstappen a one-place penalty for driving too slowly. Charles Leclerc finished second for Ferrari and Norris' McLaren teammate Oscar Piastri was third. Penalties spark debate In a season of controversy over the rules and upheaval at the governing body, the stewards again played a crucial role. Norris had been chasing down Verstappen for the lead before his penalty. McLaren team principal Andrea Stella said Norris hadn't slowed down but argued the penalty was disproportionately harsh. "It's definitely material that the FIA should consider very seriously if we want fairness to be part of going racing in Formula 1," Stella said. "To me, it looks like somewhere there must be a book with a lot of



dust on the cover that was taken out. Let me see what it says, I apply this. Seems a little too simplistic." The stewards were busy, issuing a wide range of penalties for offenses like causing collisions, but also two for Lewis Hamilton for a false start and pit-lane speeding, and one for Russell, who was judged to have dropped too far back in a safety car period. Russell said later he didn't know "when or

how or why" he'd been penalized. The safety car came out three times, first for crashes at the back of the pack on the opening lap, then for debris from a smashed mirror, and again when Nico Hulkenberg's Haas ended up in the gravel. Constructors' title fight At one stage, it looked like McLaren could seal its first constructors' title since 1998 in Qatar as Norris and Piastri both eyed podium places. After Norris' penalty, Ferrari cut McLaren's lead from 30 points to 21 with Leclerc's second place and a solid sixth for Carlos Sainz Jr. After a puncture seemed to have wrecked his race. The constructors' title will now be decided at the final race of the season in Abu Dhabi next week. That's a boost to Ferrari's morale. "We knew it was going to be a very difficult weekend compared to the McLaren but we even managed to take some points away from them, so the fight will be all the way to the last race in Abu Dhabi next

week," Leclerc said. "It's going to be an exciting end to the year. Hopefully we can be strong but it's going to take everything we've got to seal the deal," Piastri said. Russell was fourth, ahead of Pierre Gasly continuing Alpine's recent good form, with Sainz sixth and Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso seventh. Zhou Guanyu picked up his and Sauber's first points in eighth, ahead of Kevin Magnussen for Haas in ninth and Norris 10th after having been dropped to 15th by the penalty. Hamilton and Sainz both picked up punctures shortly after a discarded wing mirror on the track was shattered by Valtteri Bottas' Sauber. Carbon fiber and glass were spread across the circuit, bringing out the safety car again, though it wasn't immediately clear if that or tire failure caused the punctures. It was a long, hard race for seven-time champion Hamilton, who finished 12th.



## Mbappé and Bellingham respond to unhappy fans with goals in Real Madrid's 2-0 win over Getafe

**AP ■ MADRID**  
Kylian Mbappé made some peace with Real Madrid's fans. Mbappé scored in Madrid's 2-0 win over Getafe in the Spanish league on Sunday to help ease the pressure on the France star. Mbappé, who has been criticized by some supporters because of his disappointing performances since joining the Spanish powerhouse this season, found the net in the 38th minute to seal Madrid's victory at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. Mbappé was coming off a lackluster outing — which included a missed penalty kick — against Liverpool in the Champions League on Wednesday. The Jude Bellingham, also the target of some fans' criticism for recent poor play, had put Madrid ahead at the Bernabeu by converting a 30th-minute penalty. He also assisted in Mbappé's goal — a well-placed low shot from outside the area. Mbappé had scored only once in the team's last six matches across all competitions, and twice in the last nine games. "He played very well, was active and was as dangerous as always," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "He scored and created opportunities. He was very active, it's what we want from him." Mbappé was still far from his best, and he did not take the penalty kick which was converted by Bellingham.

Another penalty — which was overturned by VAR — was also set to be taken by Rodrygo. "The order for the penalties is Mbappé and Vinicius Júnior, but without Vinicius, it was up to Bellingham and Mbappé to choose," Ancelotti said. The win moved Madrid within a point of league leader Barcelona, which lost 2-1 to Las Palmas on Saturday. Madrid, the defending champion, has a game in hand. Madrid was one point ahead of city rival Atletico Madrid, which won 5-0 at Valladolid on Saturday. Madrid has lost three of its five Champions League matches but has won three straight in the league to cut into Barcelona's lead. The Catalan club is winless in three consecutive league games. "Things have been going well in La Liga since the last defeat, but we can't get sidetracked because this is what Real Madrid demands," Madrid defender Antonio Rüdiger said. "We must continue and do better in the Champions League." Also Sunday, Villarreal drew 2-2 with visiting Girona after leading 2-0 and eventually conceding an equalizer seven minutes into stoppage time. Athletic Bilbao rallied to win 2-1 at Rayo Vallecano with a pair of second-half goals by Oihan Sancet, while Athletic's Basque rival Real Sociedad defeated Real Betis 2-0 at home.

## Edoardo Bove in medically induced coma after collapsing in Italian soccer game

**AP ■ FLORENCE**  
Fiorentina midfielder Edoardo Bove is in a medically induced coma after collapsing on the field during his team's Serie A match at home to Inter Milan, with the game abandoned shortly afterward. Bove's teammates immediately called for medical help and both sets of players surrounded the 22-year-old while he was being treated before he was swiftly stretchered off to an ambulance near the pitch and taken to Careggi Hospital in Florence on Sunday. "Fiorentina and the Careggi University Hospital announce that the footballer Edoardo Bove ... is currently under pharmacological sedation and hospitalized in intensive care," Fiorentina said in a statement. "The first cardiological and neurological tests performed have ruled out acute damage to the central nervous system and the cardio-respiratory system. Edoardo Bove will be re-evaluated in the next 24 hours."



Sky Italia reported that the player regained consciousness while he was in the ambulance and was managing to breathe on his own. Bove's parents and his girlfriend have arrived at the hospital along with Fiorentina coach Raffaele Palladino and most of his teammates, as well as club directors and the city's mayor. Fiorentina fans have also gathered outside the hospital and displayed a banner with the words: "Forza Edoardo, Florence is with you." Fiorentina president Rocco Comisso echoed that sentiment and the club said he and his family are in constant contact from the United States to support Bove and his family. "Forza Edoardo, we're with you," Comisso said. "You're a strong boy with a great character." More messages of support flooded in on social media from players and clubs. Inter midfielder Federico Dimarco, who was on the field at the time, wrote "Forza Edo, we are all with you and your family." The incident happened in the 16th minute of the match, with play stopped following a VAR check. Bove apparently bent down to tie the laces on his boot before he suddenly dropped to the ground. Fiorentina players were distraught on the field and were comforted by staff members as well as Inter players. Several were openly sobbing before the teams filed off the field. The Italian league match was immediately halted, before being abandoned. The score at the time of Bove's collapse was 0-0. Many at Fiorentina — as well as the fans — remember former captain Davide Astori, who was found dead in his hotel room in March 2018 before a match in Udine. It is the second incident this year of a player collapsing during a Serie A match. It happened to Roma defender Evan Ndicka during his team's match at Udinese in April. Bove is a product of the Roma youth academy and joined Fiorentina on loan in the off-season with the option to make the move permanent.



## World Chess Championship: Gukesh, Liren eye breakthrough after hat-trick of draws

**PTI ■ SINGAPORE**  
Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren will be aiming to break the deadlock after three consecutive draws when they square off in the seventh round of the World Chess Championship here on Tuesday, having stayed on equal footing for most part of the interesting showdown. Hailed as the favorite to win by many chess pundits, the 18-year-old Gukesh, who is the youngest ever challenger to the title, has not been able to really show his class and has often depended on the Chinese to play safe or make mistakes in decent positions. The two are currently locked at three points each. If game one was a wake up call for Gukesh after a loss with white pieces, the second game was a confidence-booster for the Indian as Liren barely did anything and allowed an easy draw. Gukesh won the third game but only after Liren miscalculated from what may have been a promising position. In the fourth game Gukesh played solidly again when Liren gave nothing away out of an irregular opening and it was again a draw. At this point, it was clear that Liren was banking on Gukesh to make mistakes. Game five saw Gukesh fighting for the initiative yet again and went too far as he came under threat in the resulting endgame. Liren yet again failed to spot them and it was another draw. The sixth game of many world championship matches have massive history and this time too, it was not disappointing for the fans.

In the last World championship, Liren had beaten Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia in the sixth game and back in 1972, Bobby Fischer had beaten Boris Spassky in what is a favourite of many chess fans across the world even today. Gukesh turned down an early draw wide repetition and was worse. However, the nature of the position remained complicated and Liren did not risk things in the queen and rook endgame that was the fourth draw of the match out of six games. As far as the openings go, Liren has chosen three different moves with his white pieces to start the game while Gukesh has stuck to a Classical approach using only King and Queen's pawn in the beginning. "I think so far it has been good I still can improve my play, there are lot more games, considering I was trailing after the first game I am happy to be here, it is too early," Gukesh remarked when asked if he was satisfied with his play thus far at the end of the sixth game. On Tuesday, the Indian will play with white. Going by the proceedings so far, things are not particularly clear and as of now, there are no favourites. Gukesh has been his general ambitious self while Liren has shown aggression only when necessary, often missing out on key moments. The next three games wherein Gukesh will play with two whites and a solo black is perhaps the best opportunity for the Indian to go ahead in the match and put pressure. Liren, so far, has been better in defending the opening positions and might like the trend to continue.

## Guardiola hits 'reset' with Manchester City floundering in Premier League

Manchester (England), Dec 2 (AP)  
For Pep Guardiola, the season starts now. Chastened. Relieved. Defiant. The Manchester City manager displayed a whole range of emotions after his latest ordeal at Anfield that plunged the out-of-sorts English champions to an unlikely low. Make that seven matches without a win for a team which, not so long ago, never lost. That's all in the past for Guardiola, though. "Reset," he said after a 2-0 loss to Liverpool in the Premier League on Sunday. "There's a feeling we start from here this season." How he intends to move on from the worst run of results in his managerial career remains to be seen. But, it all starts Wednesday with a home game against Nottingham Forest. "We are not used to this," Guardiola said. "Many, many things are happening. The teams are good and we can't handle it right now. I have to find the solution to be stable and solid.



"These players gave me a chance to lead maybe the best years of my life. All I can do is find a solution — in the right moment, the club will make the decision what is needed for this club to continue to be there." Was he referring to making signings in the January transfer window? City's fatigued and injury-ravaged squad sure needs some, especially in midfield. Or was he referring to his future? It's not the first time in recent days that Guardiola brought up how fragile his position could quickly become if City

keeps losing. Moments before walking down the tunnel after the final whistle at Anfield, Guardiola held up an outstretched hand and an extra finger as a retort to taunts by Liverpool fans. It was a nod to six Premier League titles he has won in eight full seasons at City. No. 7 doesn't look likely this season. Not with City already 11 points behind Liverpool. "Call me delusional or something like that," Guardiola said, "but I have the feeling we will try to build back our confidence to win games." Indeed, Guardiola said he was taking some belief from recent training sessions. From the return to fitness of some players, such as Ruben Dias, Nathan Ake, Jack Grealish and Jeremy Doku. Maybe, from a second-half display against Liverpool that, while hardly vintage City, at least showed some spirit and resolve, even if Liverpool appeared happy to play on the break and never looked troubled.

## Greenwood's late penalty helps Marseille beat Monaco 2-1 and move into second place

**AP ■ PARIS**  
Mason Greenwood's late penalty gave Marseille a 2-1 home win over Monaco and lifted the team over its rival into second place in the French league. Greenwood placed the ball into the bottom left corner in the 89th minute for his ninth league goal of the season on Sunday — level with Lille's Jonathan David and one behind Paris Saint-Germain's Bradley Barcola in the scoring charts. Marseille moved above Monaco on goal difference, with both sides seven points behind leader PSG. Monaco's defeat exposed shortcomings in coach Adi Hütter's young and talented yet error-prone team. Monaco lost 3-2 at home to Benfica in the Champions League

on Wednesday after leading that game 2-1 before conceding twice in the last six minutes. After going unbeaten in its first 11 games in all competitions this season, Hütter's erratic side has had four defeats in the past seven matches — including at home to strugglers Angers and away to Nice after again taking the lead. This time, Monaco scored first at Stade Velodrome when midfielder Aleksandr Golovin beat Gerónimo Rulli in the 41st minute with a slightly deflected strike after being set up by midfielder Denis Zakaria. Brazilian winger Luis Henrique equalized for Marseille in the 53rd with a header from forward Neal Maupay's cross. Earlier Sunday, Arnaud Nordin grabbed the equalizer in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time as rock-bottom Montpellier



earned a 2-2 home draw with Lille in an ill-tempered contest. Moments after Nordin's goal, a player from each side was sent off. The incident happened when

shoving from both sides. Montpellier midfielder Téji Savanier and TV images showed Cabella shoving his forearm into Savanier's face. Both players received a yellow card. A clumsy challenge from Jordan Ferri on Matias Fernandez-Pardo led to the first penalty, and David tucked it calmly into the left corner. Savanier's well-flighted corner from the right allowed defender Issiaga Sylla the chance to head the equalizer in the second minute of first-half stoppage time. Cabella argued with some home fans after being substituted midway through the second half and was asked to stop remonstrating by the fourth official. LACAZETTE HAT TRICK Veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette scored a hat trick as Lyon beat Nice 4-1 to move into

fifth place. Lacazette gave Lyon the lead and restored it later in the first half after midfielder Sofiane Diop had equalized for sixth-place Nice. Midfielder Jordan Veretout put Lyon 3-1 up before the break and Lacazette's penalty in the 70th put Lyon in total control. The 33-year-old Lacazette is in his second spell with Lyon, having spent five seasons in the Premier League with Arsenal, and now totals 190 goals for the club. Norway striker Joshua King and Vincent Sierrro scored in midtable Toulouse's 2-0 home win against Auxerre, and midfielder Himad Abdelli netted as Angers won 1-0 at Le Havre to move out of the relegation zone. PSG followed up its defeat against Bayern Munich with a tame 1-1 draw at home to struggling Nantes on Saturday.

# Bumrah will go down as one of the greatest pacers: Head

**PTI ■ ADELAIDE**

Australia batter Travis Head feels Jasprit Bumrah will go down as "one of the greatest fast bowlers to play the game" and said he'll proudly tell his grandchildren about the formidable challenge of facing the Indian pace maestro.

Bumrah reinforced his status as the best bowler in the world with a stunning performance in the opening Test in Perth which India won by 295 runs.

"Jasprit will go down as probably one of the greatest fast bowlers to play the game. I think we're finding that at the moment -- how challenging he can be, and it's nice to play against that," Head told reporters on Monday.

"It's gonna be nice to go back and look at your career and go tell the grandkids that you faced him. So not a bad series of playing with him. Hopefully I'll face a few more times, but he has been challenging," he added.

Bumrah, who was captaining the visiting side, led from the front with a match-haul of 8/72,

including several pivotal wickets, showcasing his exceptional form. His stellar performance was a testament to his remarkable consistency this year. Earlier this year, he was named Player-of-the-Series in the T20 World Cup, where he played a key role in India's title-winning campaign.

Head was the sole Australian batter to get a fifty in Perth as the top order comprising the likes of Steve Smith, Usman Khawaja and Marnus Labuschagne struggled but the explosive middle-order batter is certain his teammates won't be approaching him for tips. "They are not coming to me for batting tips, that's for sure. Everyone goes about it in different ways. We'll have a chat over the next three or four days."

"(Bumrah) is so unique, and that's with any of the bowlers, really. Every (batter) picks up different cues and goes about it in a different way."

The Australian squad reconvened on Monday after a short break. The two sides will now play a pink ball Test in Adelaide from Friday



at the same venue where India were all out for 36 in their previous visit in 2020. Recalling that match, Head said, "I remember that it was a quick test, so it was good. We got to enjoy all of the bits of Adelaide afterwards. "It'll be nice to do that again. Don't know if we can revisit. It wouldn't take very long to watch it. I don't think that will happen this week."

While India played a day-night pink-ball game against the Prime Ministers XI over the weekend, Australia last played a pink ball Test in January.

"It's been a long time since we played one (pink ball), India got another look at it last night. Everyone's well experienced enough, especially that team as well, that in your international level."

"I think you can accustomed to things pretty quickly. I don't think it'll take them long to be prepared for it, and same as us."

No divide in the team

Head asserted that there is no "divide" between Australia's struggling batting and the bowling unit. A possible rift within the team was suggested following a comment from Josh Hazlewood during the first Test.

"We hold high expectations for both sides (batting and bowling) and it's a very individualised sport," Head said.

"So batters, we want to hold our own - we know how good our bowlers have been for us in the past and they've got us out of

trouble a lot. As a batting group, we know that if we get enough runs on the board, we put ourselves in a great position.

"As a batter myself, I try to take a whole lot of pride in what I do, and knowing that if I can set it up for the big boys, that they can knock it down for us, so definitely no divide," Head said.

Australia have dealt with adversity well

Head backed the Australians to bounce back from their horror show in Perth.

"This team has dealt with adversity well. The small amount that we have had in the last three or four years, we have played well. "We've had some challenging times and a couple of challenging Tests last year. We didn't have a very good week. That's fine. But we have got four more opportunities to do it, we will crack on as we do, as we have done for the last few years.

"Over the last couple of years, there's a lot of teams that lost the first Test or gone down in the series and brought it back and played really well."



## We have found the right mix: Hardik Pandya

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya has expressed his delight at the way things panned out for them in the IPL mega auction in Jeddah and said the franchise has "found the right mix" of players.

The star all-rounder said they had a clear plan of having a blend of youth and experienced players.

"I was in touch with the table as well, exactly who we are going for, and I think we came out pretty well from the auction and how the team is looking," he said in an MI video posted on social media.

"We have found the right mix, which is experienced players, like Boulyt (Trent Boult) is back, Deepak Chahar, who has been around, and at the same time, young guns like Will Jacks, Robin Minz and Rickelton, who are fresh.

"So, I think we have done pretty well. We have covered all the bases."

Explaining the auction dynamics, Pandya admitted that while the entire process is thrilling, it is important to keep the emotions in check, especially while going for a particular player the team desperately needs.

"The auction dynamics are always tricky. When you are watching it live, it is very exciting, and the emotions are

always up and down because you want this player," he explained.

"But sometimes, you just lose. (So), it's very important to not be very emotional, and in the end, we have to create a whole team."

"Mumbai Indians has the facility to make them flourish"

MI bought quite a few uncapped young players -- Naman Dhir, Robin Minz, Vignesh Puthur, Arjun Tendulkar, Bevan John Jacobs, Venkata Satyanarayana Penmetsa, Raj Anand Bawa, Shrijith Krishnan and Ashwani Kumar.

Referring to these youngsters, Pandya urged them to work hard and said that MI possesses the best facilities to help them develop into top cricketers.

"My message to all the young guns who are joining Mumbai Indians this year is that if you are here, you have that spark, you have that talent, which the scouts have seen," he stated.

"They found me, they found Jasprit, they found Krunal, they found Tilak. They all eventually played for the country.

"All you have to do is show up, train, work hard, and the best part is that Mumbai Indians has the facility to make them flourish."

## Australia quashes rumours of divide in their camp ahead of pink ball Test

**PTI ■ ADELAIDE**

Australian big-hitter Travis Head on Monday asserted there is no "divide" between his team's struggling batters and its potent bowling attack as they geared up to bounce back in the pink-ball Test against India, starting here on December 6.

Australia suffered an embarrassing 295-run loss as their batters struggled to cope with the bouncy Perth pitch, managing just 104 & 238 in their two innings.

On day three of the Test, pacer Josh Hazlewood, who picked four wickets in first essay, made a comment that seemed to suggest frustration with the team's batters. Triggering speculation of tensions in the dressing room.

Head said there was no reason to doubt the dressing room dynamics.

"It can be put to bed. We hold high expectations for both sides (batting and bowling) and it's a very individualised sport," Head said.

"So batters, we want to hold our own - we know how good our bowlers have been for us in the



past and they've got us out of trouble a lot. As a batting group, we know that if we get enough runs on the board, we put ourselves in a great position.

"As a batter myself, I try to take a whole lot of pride in what I do, and knowing that if I can set it up for the big boys, that they can knock it down for us, so definitely no divide," he explained.

Hazlewood was questioned about Australia's approach to day four, given they were 12/3 in pursuit of 534.

"You probably have to ask one of the batters that question probably, I am sort of relaxing and trying to get a bit of treatment, and I am looking mostly to next Test," Hazlewood had said.

The Australian top-order comprising the likes of Usman Khawaja, Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne crumbled at Perth.

Labuschagne, in particular, has been woefully out of form and several former players have called for his exclusion from the side but Head backed him to get some big runs.

"Knowing Marnus, he would have worked on a few things over the last few days and it

would have been hard to probably keep him out of the nets," he said.

"No doubt over the next few days we'll see him working hard again. He's a guy that has played well over a long period of time. He would like some more runs -- so would everyone."

Trailing the five match series 0-1, Australia have their backs against the wall as the race for the World Test Championship final has also intensified.

However, Head backed his team to bounce back from the horror show in Perth.

"This team has dealt with adversity well. The small amount that we have had in the last three or four years, we have played well," he said.

"We didn't have a very good week. That's fine. But we have got four more opportunities to do it, we will crack on as we do, as we have done for the last few years.

"Over the last couple of years, there's a lot of teams that lost the first Test or gone down in the series and brought it back and played really well," he added.

## Rohit will either open or bat at No. 3, reckons Harbhajan

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Captain Rohit Sharma will either open or bat at number three in the Adelaide Test against Australia, reckoned former India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh on Monday while ruling out the possibility of a senior star coming in at number five or six.

KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal added a record 201 runs for the opening stand during the second innings of the Perth Test, which the visitors won by 295 runs with plenty of time left in the match.

"I don't see Rohit coming in at number five or six. Either Rohit will open with Yashasvi Jaiswal, with KL Rahul coming in at number three, or he will bat no later than number three," Harbhajan told PTI on the sidelines of the inauguration of the World Tennis League here.

"Number six for Rohit wouldn't be in best interest of the team. Your top four in batting order should be the four pillars and someone like Rohit at the top would only



add greater fillip."

The second Test, a day/night affair to be played with the pink ball, will begin at Adelaide Oval on Friday.

Harbhajan described the move to play Washington Sundar over R Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja in the series opener as a massive step.

"Washington had showed during the New Zealand series that he is ready to take over the mantle from Ashwin in coming days," the "Turbanator" said.

When asked if Ashwin's age is a factor, he said: "I don't think 38 is old. He is not a 58-year-old. But yes, after so many years, the shoulders do experience fatigue and wear and tear, so the zip can just be a bit less."

## India beat Japan by 211 runs in Under-19 Asia Cup

**PTI ■ SHARJAH**

Mohamed Amaan led from the front with an unbeaten century, while KP Karthikeya and opener Ayush Mhatre made fifties to hand India a comfortable 211-run victory over minnows Japan in the Under-19 Asia Cup here on Monday.

Amaan slammed an unbeaten 122 off just 118 balls, a knock studded with only seven boundaries, after India were invited to bat.

Besides Amaan, Karthikeya made 57 off 49 balls with the help of five fours and one six, while Mhatre's fiery 29-ball 54-run knock featured six boundaries and four hits over the fence.

C Andre Siddarth (38), Hardik Raj (25 not out), and Vaibhav Suryavanshi (23) also played useful knocks to help India post a mammoth 339 for 6 in their 50 overs.

Hugo Kelly (2/42) and Kiefer Yamamoto-Lake (2/84) took two wickets each for Japan.

It was an easy outing for the Indians, as they restricted Japan to 128 for 8, securing their first win in Group A.

However, the Indians will be a little disappointed, as they failed to bowl out Japan.



After picking up two wickets earlier in the day, Kelly returned as Japan's top-scorer with a gritty 50 off 111 balls. Charles Hinze remained unbeaten on 35.

For India, Karthikeya (2/21), Hardik Raj (2/9), and Chetan Sharma (2/14) shared six wickets between them.

India had lost to arch-rivals Pakistan by 43 runs in their tournament opener.

India will play United Arab Emirates in their final group game on Wednesday.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals, scheduled for December 6, with the final slated for December 8.

## Hosts India open against Hong Kong in 20th Asian Women's Handball Championship

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Hosts India will look to make a strong start when they face Hong Kong in their opening match of the 20th Asian Women's Handball Championship, which kicks off here on Tuesday.

India is hosting the tournament for the first time, and the 25-member squad, captained by Diksha Kumari, faces a tough challenge against some of Asia's top teams. India is placed in Group B alongside powerhouse Japan, Iran, and Hong Kong.

In addition to their opener against Hong Kong, India will take on Iran on December 4 and Japan on December 6 at the Indira Gandhi Arena here.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the semi-finals, with the top four securing spots in the 2025



World Women's Handball Championship.

As part of their preparation, the team underwent a rigorous training camp at the NCO SAI Centre in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, under head coach Sachin Chaudhary.

"Our focus in the training camp was on addressing the gaps from our previous outings and building a cohesive, unified team. We worked hard to strengthen our

## Women's Asian Champions Trophy win was important for India for LA 28 buildup, says Rani Rampal

**PTI ■ ROHTAK**

Former captain Rani Rampal believes the Asian Champions Trophy title was an important feat for the Indian women's hockey team as it kick started its preparation for the Los Angeles Olympics on a rousing note.

The Indian women's hockey team produced a dominant show to win its third Asian Champions Trophy title after struggling to win matches the entire year, which culminated in its failure to qualify for the Paris Games.

"The Asian Champions trophy win was very important for our women's hockey team in terms of buildup for 2028 LA Olympics. It's a good start. Under coach Harendra Singh

the team will do well," Rani told PTI.

The 29-year-old signed off her career as one of India's most decorated hockey players after leading the women's team to its best-ever finish at the Olympics -- a fourth show at the Tokyo Games in 2021.

She was roped in as the national coach for sub-junior women's team before she officially announced her retirement last month.

"My experience was great, learnt a lot while working with the sub juniors. They were young girls who were coming from similar background as me, it was easy to understand their issues and to guide them," Rani said.

"I told them 'if I can do it (be successful) then all of you can also do it.' They need



guidance and I tried to give that to them by sharing my experience with them," she said of her experience as coach.

The former striker will serve as a mentor for the Soorma Hockey Club in the upcoming Hockey India

League, which will also have a women's tournament for the first time.

Rani made her international debut in 2008 as a 14-year-old in the Olympic qualifiers. And the former captain knows the pressure a young athlete experiences. As a coach and mentor she hopes to help youngsters manage the burden of expectations.

"I am going to be a mentor for Soorma club so I will try my best to fulfil that role to the best of my abilities. There is a lot of pressure on young athletes to perform mentally and emotionally. So I will like to help them.

"Pressure is normal but I will try and tell them how to perform even under pressure. So I will try my best to share my experience and knowledge that I have gathered over the years with them," she said.

Asked if she aspires to coach the Indian women's team in the future, she said "One task at one time, I want to focus on the role I have for the next two months."

Hockey was among sports like badminton, wrestling and cricket that were axed from the official programme for the Commonwealth Games 2026 in Glasgow, Scotland, a decision that has left Rani disappointed.

"It is quite said hockey has been removed from the CWG because when hockey wins a medal it's not one but 18 medals. Imagine 18 players come from different places, villages. Even if they come from 8 different states they inspire so many children from those states.

"This tournament is good and the CGF (Commonwealth Games Federation) should think about the decision," she said.