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WORLD 8
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INSURGENTS ADVANCE TO
NEARBY PROVINCE

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TRUMP THREATENS BRICS MAHABHARAT BEGINS IN MAHARASHTRA



AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH (FL)

President-elect Donald Trump on Saturday threatened 100 per cent tariffs against a bloc of nine nations if they act to undermine the United States' dollar. His threat was directed at countries in the so-called BRIC alliance, which consists of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Turkey, Azerbaijan and Malaysia have applied to become members and several other countries have expressed interest in joining.

While the US dollar is by far the most-used currency in global business and has survived past challenges to its preeminence, members of the alliance and other developing nations say they are fed up with America's dominance of the global financial system. The dollar represents roughly 58 per cent of the world's foreign exchange reserves, according to the IMF and major commodities like oil are still primarily bought and sold using dollars. The dollar's dominance is threatened, however, with BRICS' growing share of GDP and the alliance's

intent to trade in non-dollar currencies - a process known as de-dollarisation. Trump, in a Truth Social post, said: "We require a commitment from these Countries that they will neither create a new BRICS Currency, nor back any other Currency to replace the mighty U.S. Dollar or, they will face 100% Tariffs, and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful U.S. Economy." At a summit of BRIC nations in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the US of "weaponising" the dollar and described it as a "big mistake."

"It's not us who refuse to use the dollar," Putin said at the time. "But if they don't let us work, what can we do? We are forced to search for alternatives." Russia has specifically pushed for the creation of a new payment system that would offer an alternative to the global bank messaging network, SWIFT, and allow Moscow to dodge Western sanctions and trade with partners. Trump said there is "no chance" BRICS will replace the US dollar in global trade and any country that tries to make that happen "should wave goodbye to America." Research shows that the US dollar's role as the primary global reserve currency is not threatened in the near future. An Atlantic Council model that assesses the dollar's place as the primary global reserve currency states the dollar is "secure in the near and medium term" and continues to dominate other currencies. Trump's latest tariff threat comes after he threatened to slap 25 per cent tariffs on everything imported from Mexico and Canada, and an additional 10 per cent tax on goods from China, as a way to force the countries to do more to halt the flow of illegal immigration and drugs into the US. He has since held a call with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, who said Thursday she is confident that a tariff war with the United States can be averted. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau returned home Saturday after meeting Trump, without assurances the president-elect will back away from threatened tariffs on Canada.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra's outgoing Chief Minister (CM) Eknath Shinde on Sunday said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will decide on the new CM and assured his full support while ruling out differences among Mahayuti allies over the government formation. Amid speculations that Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde might get the Deputy CM's post and Shiv Sena is keen on the Home portfolio, Shinde said the Mahayuti allies, BJP, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), and Shiv Sena, will decide the government formation through consensus. Notably, more than a week after the Mahayuti clinched a massive victory in Maharashtra polls with the BJP emerging as the single largest party with 132 seats, the new government is yet to be sworn in. BJP is moving cautiously as aspirations of its allies, especially Shiv Sena, are high after the massive poll victory. Interestingly, the BJP legislature party meeting to elect the leader, who will be the party's chief ministerial pick, is yet to be held, even though Shiv Sena and NCP allies have elected their respective leaders. The BJP has announced that the oath-taking ceremony of the new Mahayuti government will take place on December 5 evening at the Azad Maidan in south Mumbai and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend it. According to BJP sources, Devendra Fadnis, who has been CM twice and was Deputy CM in the last Eknath Shinde-led government, is the front-runner for the CM's post. A senior BJP leader said that the legislature party



meeting may be held on December 3 or 4. The Mahayuti constituents will jointly decide whether only the CM and Deputy CMs will take oath on December 5 or ministers will also be sworn in, a senior leader of the alliance said. Shinde had left for his native village in Satara district on Friday amid speculation that he was not happy with the way the new government was shaping up. He developed a high fever in his village. Talking to reporters in his village on Sunday before leaving for Mumbai, Shinde said that he has already talked about a decision on CM's post taken by the BJP leadership that will be acceptable to me and Shiv Sena and will have my full backing. On speculation that his son and Lok Sabha member Shrikant Shinde will be made a Deputy CM in the new government and

whether Shiv Sena has staked the claim for the home portfolio, Shinde replied, "Talks were on." "A meeting took place in Delhi last week with (Union home minister) Amit Shah, and now we three alliance partners will discuss the nitty-gritty of government formation," he said. Responding to a query on his health, the Shiv Sena leader said he was fine now and had come to his native village to get some rest. "I always come to my village. Why should there be any confusion when I made my stand clear last week," he added. Senior BJP leader Raosaheb Danve on Sunday told a news channel that the name of the chief minister has been finalised and a confirmation is awaited from the party leadership. NCP chief Ajit Pawar on Saturday said the chief minister will be from the BJP, while there will be deputy CMs from NCP and Shiv Sena headed by Shinde.

AAP and Congress turn arch rivals in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Delhi Congress president Devendra Yadav hinted that the party will go solo, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, on Sunday, announced that his party will not form an alliance with the Congress for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls, scheduled to take place in February. Kejriwal's statement comes despite both parties being a part of the Opposition INDIA Bloc and having contested the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi together earlier this year. However, their joint effort yielded no results, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning all Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. Responding to a query during a press conference, Kejriwal made it clear, saying, "There will be no alliance in Delhi." This development is significant, as it clears the way for a triangular contest in the Delhi Assembly polls, with the AAP, Congress, and BJP vying for power. Kejriwal's decision also comes on the back of major poll drubbing of the



Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra this month, which Congress is also a part of, drawing criticism from its allies. The INDIA Bloc has adopted a flexible approach, contesting elections jointly in some states while going solo in others. According to AAP insiders, Congress is a divided house in Delhi so there will not be any split in Muslim and Scheduled Caste voters. "Muslim will vote for AAP as they have no option. Similarly a large part of Scheduled Caste voters will vote for AAP. To further strengthen its vote bank, AAP



has inducted stalwarts of Congress," insiders say. Besides, the AAP strategy is focused on the Congress vote bank here. The AAP and Congress had also attempted to form an alliance ahead of the Haryana Assembly polls in October but failed to reach a seat-sharing agreement despite multiple rounds of talks. The Congress and AAP had contested the Lok Sabha Elections this year in Delhi in alliance with each other under the umbrella of the INDIA Bloc. Both parties had even campaigned for each

other. Kejriwal, who was then out on interim bail for the election campaigning, had also campaigned for the Congress and had sought votes for its Opposition party (in the Delhi Assembly). The AAP had contested on four seats while Congress contested in three seats out of seven parliamentary constituencies in Delhi. However, neither of the two parties could open their accounts, as the BJP swept all seven seats in the city. However, in contrast to Delhi, the AAP had contested all 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab on its own, ditching the Congress in the state. The AAP is in power in Punjab with a huge majority. In 2022 Assembly polls in Punjab, the Kejriwal-led party had swept the state winning 92 out of the 117 seats, dislodging Congress from power. Soon after Kejriwal's major announcement, the BJP took a "friendship with benefits" jibe at the AAP and Congress and underlined the loopholes in the Opposition unity in the state and at the national level.

Chinmoy Krishna Das' bail hearing on December 3



PTI ■ DHAKA

A court in Bangladesh has set December 3 as the date for the bail hearing of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das arrested last week on sedition charges, according to a media report. Tuesday's hearing will be conducted by Metropolitan Sessions Judge Mohammad Saiful Islam, according to Additional Deputy Commissioner Mofizur Rahman of the Chattogram Metropolitan Police. A Chattogram court official said that the date for the hearing had already been set but the announcement was delayed due to a boycott and work abstention by lawyers on Wednesday and Thursday. The hearing will

take place on December 3, bdnews24.Com reported. Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday for alleged sedition. He was denied bail and sent to jail by a Chattogram court on Tuesday, triggering protests by his supporters. A lawyer was killed during violence in Bangladesh's southeastern port city of Chattogram over his arrest. On October 30, a sedition case was filed against 19 people, including Das, at Chattogram's Kotwali Police Station, accusing them of disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag in Chattogram's New Market area during a rally of the Hindu community. Bangladesh's authorities on Thursday ordered freezing for 30 days the bank accounts of 17 people associated with International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), including its former member Das.



Waqf asked to provide property details

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has sought details from various State governments about the veracity and updated details of Waqf properties which, according to the Sachar committee, they had occupied in an unauthorised manner, sources said. The Parliamentary Committee, whose tenure has been extended by Lok Sabha till the last day of the next Budget Session, has also sought from the states details of the properties claimed by

Waqf boards exercising Section 40 of the Waqf Act. Section 40, an amendment effected during the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government's tenure in 2013, is one of the most hotly contested features of the existing law as it has given Waqf boards the power to decide if any property belongs to the Waqf or not. The proposed law, which has faced flack from opposition parties and various Muslim groups for its alleged attempts to interfere in religious matters, has sought to curb this power while making a slew of other changes in the existing Act.

DGP Conf focuses on national security challenges

PM Modi calls for 'Smart Policing' Special discussions held on coastal security, narcotics, cybercrime

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The three-day All India Conference of Directors General and Inspectors General of Police (DGPs-IGPs) concluded here on Sunday with a strong emphasis on enhancing the nation's internal security mechanisms. The event addressed critical issues, including drug trafficking, cyber threats and economic security, while charting a roadmap for future challenges. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah actively participated in the conference. Modi expressed his satisfaction over the social media.

Modi, addressing the conference, called for an expanded vision of "Smart Policing," urging law enforcement to become strategic, meticulous, adaptable, reliable and transparent. He highlighted the growing threats posed by digital frauds, cybercrime, and Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly the disruptive potential of deep fakes on social and familial relationships. He called on police forces to turn these challenges into opportunities by leveraging India's "double AI power"—Artificial Intelligence and Aspirational India. The conference saw attendance by DGPs and IGPs from all States and Union Territories



as well as heads of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Central Police Organisations (CPOs). According to official sources, the conference tackled pressing security concerns, including combating Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), strengthening coastal and maritime security, addressing narcotics smuggling and drug trafficking and countering cybercrimes and safeguarding economic interests. Additionally, participants reviewed the progress of imple-

menting new criminal laws and shared innovative policing practices to address current and emerging security challenges. The event was conducted under tight security following threats from Khalistani extremist groups. Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US-based extremist, had reportedly sent audio and email threats warning of disruptions, including a possible attack on the Bhubaneswar international airport on December 1. In response, the

Commissionerate Police, Odisha's Intelligence Wing, the Special Protection Group and other security agencies acted swiftly to ensure safety. Twin City Police Commissioner Suresh Devadatta Singh stated, "Amid potential threats, a foolproof security blanket was ensured during the event. All concerns were thoroughly investigated." The resolutions and strategies developed during the conference are expected to play a pivotal role in addressing India's evolving security needs.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi inaugurates the 35th Konark Festival at Konark on Sunday. The annual event will continue for five days.

Four flats in city apartment burgled Appointment of 250 radiographers soon

Cash, jewellery worth lakhs looted

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After a few days' lull, miscreants looted lakhs of rupees along with gold and silver jewellery from four flats of Vishal Garden apartment at Uttara Chhak under the Dhauri police station in Bhubaneswar on Saturday



night. Reports said that taking advantage of the absence of the flats' occupants, the looters broke open the doors and looted cash and other valuables, including jewellery. "When we had bought the flats, we thought it would be

safe for us. But after this burglary, we are not feeling safe anymore. The miscreants have targeted the flats which were locked for days as their occupants stay outside," said a flat owner in the apartment. "I stay here for six months

and spend the rest of the year outside. But after this incident, I don't feel it will be wise to go outside leaving my home at risk," he added. Echoing the same concern, another occupant of a flat in the apartment said, "We buy flats taking the safety and security of our parents into consideration as we work outside. But such incidents are posing a serious threat to the safety of the elders."

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a bid to boost the healthcare system in Odisha, Health Minister Mukesh Mahaling on Sunday announced that appointment letters would be soon issued to over 250 radiographers.

Mahaling noted the role of radiographers in handling advanced technology that is crucial for handling health conditions like cancer. "Com-



binning advanced radiography technology and skills will greatly improve healthcare systems," he stated.

The move aims to strengthen healthcare services ahead of the upcoming implementation of crucial State-

wide programmes including the Centre's flagship Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, AB-PMJAY.

Mahaling said the Health Department is gearing up for a large-scale awareness campaign against cervical cancer.

He also said the government is planning to organise health camps in schools and colleges to facilitate vaccination drives. Such camps will provide free vaccinations to

ensure accessibility for all. He noted that the risk of developing cervical cancer is particularly high among female teenagers in India.

"State healthcare schemes like Gopabandhu Arogya Yojana will be taken up alongside the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. Necessary allocations for the same have been done in the Budgets both at the Central and State levels," said Mahaling.

In Baranga

Man sets son, daughter-in-law on fire; held

Woman dies, hubby battling for life

PNS ■ CUTTACK

A man allegedly set his son and daughter-in-law on fire in over some family dispute at Barasingha village under the Baranga police station in Cuttack district.



set him on fire. Screaming in agony, Dinabandhu ran outside where his wife Sasmita tried to extinguish the fire in a bid to save him. Gobardhan then allegedly poured petrol on Sasmita and again on his son.

Hearing their screams, villagers rushed to their aid, following which the couple was rushed to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack with critical burn injuries.

"We do not know why he (Gobardhan) took this ex-

treme step. All of us were having dinner when we heard a commotion only to see that he was pouring petrol over his son. There were some issues regarding money though," stated Dinabandhu's grandmother. As per the last reports, Sasmita succumbed to her injuries and Dinabandhu remained in a critical condition. The Baranga police along with a forensic team started an investigation into the matter. Gobardhan was detained in connection with the incident.

BJP has failed to meet promises: Cong



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Congress on Sunday held a demonstration at PMG Square here during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the interest of Odisha. The protest was meant to bring to their notice the failure of the BJP to fulfil the promises made before the polls, said the Youth Congress.

The Congress has not made any statement regarding the ongoing DGP, IGP Conference. But the promises made during the election have not been fulfilled even after six months of the BJP coming to power in the State. Due to which the Youth Congress had opposed the Prime Minister and the Home Minister's visit, said Pradesh Youth Congress president Yasir Nawaj.

Referring to an earlier statement of BJP leader and Minister Prithviraj Harichandan against the Congress, Nawaj said, "While people are still dying in Odisha consuming mango kernels, Harichandan is blowing the trumpet of development. The infrastructures created during the Congress regime are being handed over by Prime Minister Modi to his favourite industrialist friends"

In Sambalpur

Class-X girl gives birth to baby girl

Sub-Collector orders probe

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR

A minor tribal girl, suspected to be impregnated by her boyfriend, has given birth to a baby girl at her house in the Naktideul area in Sambalpur district.

The girl is studying in Class-X, sources said.

While both the mother and the baby are safe and healthy, a probe has been launched into the impregnation of the girl. Preliminary sources revealed the girl was impregnated by a youth of the same village, supposedly her 'boyfriend'.

The matter came to the fore after the girl and the baby were admitted to the Naktideul Community Health Centre.

Questions remain about how the girl's pregnancy went unnoticed by both her family and the school authorities.

Even as the girl was pregnant, no school authorities complained about the matter. On the other hand, the parents of the girl were also silent about this.

Swinging into action, the Sub-Collector has served a show-cause notice to the headmaster of the school where the minor was studying.

"After coming to know about the matter, I immediately directed officials to launch a probe into the incident. I have also directed the CDPO to hospitalise the mother and the baby and take care of their wellbeing. Necessary steps will be taken after the preliminary probe," said Sub-Collector Rashmi Ranjan Mahanta.

Odisha Disability Conclave held in BBSR IIT BBS holds talk on Indian Knowledge System

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

VIEWES organised an Odisha Disability Conclave 2024 at the Odisha Association for the Blind (OAB) here on Sunday. The event aimed to bring policymakers, government officials, civil society bodies and media together to discuss effective implementation of disability rights laws and policies in Odisha.

The conclave was inaugurated by Sannyashi Behera, Deputy Secretary, SSEPD Department, Government of Odisha, in the presence of Kasturi Mohapatra, former State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs); Sushanta Panda, Additional Secretary, Cooperation Department; Premji Kumar Raul from Azim Premji Foundation; and Maheswar



Rout, President of OAB.

VIEWES executive director S Bheema Rao stated, "Odisha Disability Conclave 2024, a civil society initiative, provides a platform for policymakers, civil society organisations, media and academic institutions to discuss the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Odisha. It also showcases best practices empowering them."

Sannyashi Behera highlighted that according to the

2011 Census, Odisha had 11,44,902 differently-abled people, and this number is expected to rise in future censuses. He stressed the importance of ensuring basic needs like food, clothing and shelter for PWDs. Referring to the recent Supreme Court ruling that affirmed accessibility for disabled persons as a fundamental right, he said, "If this order is not implemented effectively, accessibility cannot truly be a fundamental right.

We must work collectively to ensure this."

Sushanta Panda said, "Awareness drives at the gram panchayat, block and district levels are essential to address the challenges faced by disabled individuals."

Kasturi Mohapatra praised the efforts of those working to ensure the rights of disabled individuals. She called for greater love, acceptance and respect for persons with disabilities.

Prof Mahadevan speaks

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar recently organised a talk titled "Treasure in the Wooden Box: Indian Knowledge Systems (Overview and Relevance)" by Prof B Mahadevan (Ex-Professor IIM Bangalore). Prof Mahadevan has 30 years of wide-ranging experience in teaching, research, consulting, and academic administration at Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) and other reputed institutions like IIT Delhi and XLRI, Jamshedpur.

The objective of the talk was to formally introduce the notion of India Knowledge System (IKS) and bring to the fore some snippets of IKS. It briefly



highlighted several notable contributions made by the Indian society in areas such as Mathematics, Astronomy, Town Planning, Metals and Metalworking, Health and Public Administration.

The presentation by Prof Mahadevan explored the IKS, showcasing its vast historical depth across various fields. He cited examples ranging from ancient mathematics and astronomy (including Diophantine equations and number systems) to architectural mar-

vels (like the Jaisalmer Fort and Konark Sun Temple) and metallurgical achievements (such as Wootz steel).

His talk also highlighted IKS' contributions to irrigation, water management and the construction of assembly halls. He also discussed the decline of IKS due to historical events and colonial policies, emphasising the need for its preservation and revival.

Prof Mahadevan said, "India is a nation with a long civilisational history with re-

corded history, cultural artefacts and evidence pointing to more than five millennia of existence. Despite a continuous onslaught of foreign invasions for more than a millennium, the knowledge practices developed by Indians had remained almost intact and were passed on "orally" down the generations. These can be collectively referred to as the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Despite having a rich repository of knowledge, these ideas have been ignored and sidelined consciously in the modern-day educational system in India. Arguably, this is because the educational policy under British rule chose to de-emphasise the indigenous knowledge system and, instead, crafted an alternative based on Western knowledge about 200 years ago. This has created a discontinuity in the Indian Knowledge System."

Constitutional morality

The spirit of democracy, celebrated and contemplated

As India marked the Constitution Day few days back, on November 26, we were reminded of the monumental vision of the Constitution's founding fathers who sought to weave the nation's diverse social, cultural and political threads into a cohesive democratic fabric. The day prompts reflection not only on the Constitution's text but on the ethos that animates it—constitutional morality. This principle, eloquently articulated by Dr BR Ambedkar, serves as a lodestar for governance, embodying ideals of justice, equality, liberty and fraternity.



S JYOTIRANJANA

While we proudly celebrated the milestones of our democratic journey, it is imperative to examine the evolving interpretation of Constitutional morality, a doctrine both celebrated for its progressivism and critiqued for its potential overreach. This introspection gains significance in the light of recent judicial pro-

nouncements and the ongoing discourse on its application.

Dr BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Constitution, introduced the concept of Constitutional morality during his Constituent Assembly speeches, cautioning against the perils of reducing democracy to a mechanical exercise of rights and procedures. Drawing from the insights of British historian George Grote, Ambedkar underscored that Constitutional morality must not only be ingrained in the functioning of state institutions but also cul-

tivated in the collective consciousness of society. For him, it was the "sine qua non" of a successful democracy. Ambedkar's warnings against the "grammar of anarchy" and his emphasis on social democracy resonate profoundly today. Political democracy, he argued, cannot thrive in isolation. Its vitality depends on the foundational principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, which form a trinity indivisible in purpose and execution. The Constitution Day is, therefore, a moment to recommit to this holistic vision and reflect on how far we have embraced Constitutional morality in practice.

Judiciary as the arbiter of Constitutional morality

The judiciary has played a pivotal role in nurturing Constitutional morality, particularly in instances where societal norms have clashed with Constitutional ideals. In landmark judgments such as Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018) and Joseph Shine v. Union of India

(2019), the Supreme Court underscored the primacy of Constitutional morality over public morality. These verdicts reaffirmed the Constitution's commitment to individual dignity and equality even in the face of entrenched social

CONTEMPORARIES

prejudices.

Ambedkar envisaged it as a shared societal ethos, balancing adherence to Constitutional principles with the liberty to critique and reform institutions. Today, however, the judiciary's interpretations often raise concerns about subjectivity and potential overreach.

The dichotomy of public and Constitutional morality

The tension between public morality and Constitutional morality has been a recurring theme in legal discourses. Public morality, shaped

by societal norms and majoritarian beliefs, frequently clashes with the Constitution's egalitarian ethos. For instance, in Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi (2009), the Delhi High Court upheld the dignity of the LGBTQ+ community

emphasising that public morality cannot outweigh Constitutional morality when fundamental rights are at stake. However, this dichotomy presents challenges. Who defines Constitutional morality? While Ambedkar advocated for a collective adherence to Constitutional ideals, the judiciary often assumes the mantle of its arbiter. This judicial centralisation risks alienating other democratic organs and raising questions about accountability. As former Attorney Gen-

eral KK Venugopal cautioned in the wake of the Sabarimala verdict, unbridled reliance on Constitutional morality could transform the judiciary into a "third chamber" of Parliament, potentially distorting the balance of power envisioned in the Constitution.

As we just celebrated the Constitution Day amidst these debates, it offers an opportunity to reaffirm the core principles of Constitutional morality while critically assessing its trajectory. Ambedkar's trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity must guide both the judiciary and society.

Constitutional morality, as envisioned by Ambedkar, is the compass that ensures this evolution remains anchored to justice, equality and liberty. However, this doctrine must remain dynamic and inclusive. As Ambedkar poignantly noted, democracy is not a "gift" but a continuous endeavour requiring vigilance and

collective effort. By aligning judicial interpretations with Ambedkar's holistic vision and fostering societal adherence to constitutional values, we can ensure that Constitutional morality remains a beacon guiding India's democratic journey.

As the nation continues to grapple with complex social, political and ethical challenges, we must pledge not only to uphold the letter of the Constitution but also to embody its spirit. For in doing so, we reaffirm our commitment to a democracy that is both robust in form and rich in substance.

(The writer is advocate, Orissa High Court, Additional Central Government Standing Counsel, Central Administrative Tribunal, Cuttack Bench, Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Law and Media Studies, SMC, KIIT DU and Consulting Editor- Legal Affairs & Public Policy, The Pioneer. Views are personal)

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Navy Day in Puri 15 warships, 40 aircrafts to display military might

PNS ■ PURI

Come December 4, Odisha for the first time will witness the valour of the Indian Navy as Puri is all set to host the Navy Day this year on Wednesday.

While the district administration is leaving no stones unturned for the Navy Day celebrations, a two-day full dress rehearsal started on Sunday ahead of the grand event.

The Navy Day celebrations will feature 15 warships and 40 aircrafts executing combat exhibitions for the first time in the State.

President Droupadi Murmu will attend the event. Naval personnel will perform daring combat demonstrations, including stealth opera-



tions by MARCOS commandos. The event will highlight the readiness and valour of the Indian Navy in safeguarding the nation.

INS Chilka's Commanding Officer B Deepak Anel said, "This is the first time it has been decided to demonstrate operations in Odisha. The preparations for the Navy Day celebrations had begun

months back. Ships, submarines, aircraft and various other marine commandos will be participating in the event. You will have a spectacular show."

According to an official release, "The Indian Navy will display a spectacular Operational Demonstration off the coast of Puri, showcasing the strength and versatility of its

naval fleet. This event is not only a tribute to India's rich maritime heritage but also an opportunity for the general public to witness first-hand the world of naval operations, a realm often hidden from public view."

Notably, the Navy Day is observed on December 4 to commemorate India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war.

In Sambalpur Scribe's bike stolen amid anti-crime drive

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

The Sambalpur police, currently conducting a special anti-crime drive against drugs and illegal gambling, are facing fresh criticism after a video journalist's bike was stolen in a crowded area under CCTV surveillance.

The incident occurred around 7:40 pm on Thursday near Sakhipada, a busy locality. The victim, journalist Badal Sendriya, had parked his bike in front of a bank near Brookhill School. CCTV footage revealed that the thief, pretending to be on a phone call, used a master key to unlock the bike and fled the scene within moments.

The brazenness of the theft has left the city stunned, especially as it happened in a bus-

ting area. "If a journalist's vehicle can be stolen in broad daylight, how can ordinary citizens feel safe?" asked a local resident.

Dhanupali Police Station has registered the case and launched an investigation, using the CCTV footage to identify the suspect. Despite the ongoing anti-crime drive, the incident has raised questions about police vigilance and the overall safety of the city.

The Sambalpur Superintendent of Police assured swift action. "We are reviewing the footage and deploying resources to catch the culprit," he said.

Citizens are now urging authorities to strengthen patrolling and surveillance in public areas to prevent further such incidents.

IN BRIEF

Bishoyi elevated as president of AISBOF

Bhubaneswar: Arun Kumar Bishoyi, general secretary of SBI Officer' Association, Bhubaneswar Circle, has been elevated to the position of president of All India State Bank Officers' Federation (AISBOF), representing more than one lakh offic-



ers nationwide. A veteran trade union leader since 1998, Bishoyi is dedicated to officers' welfare and his inclusive leadership. His elevation to the post of president reflects the trust and confidence placed in him by officers of the banking community across the country.

Chinmay Mission's Mahabharata discourses at Baripada

Baripada: Discourses on the 'Mahabharata', which were going on here for a week, concluded on Wednesday. The discourses were delivered in Hindi and the themes of the speeches centred on the various aspects of the "Shanti Parva" of the Mahabharata. The programme was organised by the local unit



of the Chinmay Mission. Noida-based Chinmay Mission veteran Swami Chidrupananda Saraswati addressed the gathering and inspired the audience to imbibe the great spirit of the great characters of the great epic Mahabharata. People in large numbers listened to the spiritual leader with rapt attention.

JSW Foundation distributes mosquito nets

Keonjhar: To prevent the spread of dengue and malaria, the JSW Foundation has initiated distribution of mosquito nets to all slums within the direct impact zones (DIZ) of its mines in Keonjhar district. The distribution of mosquito nets commenced in Barbil Ward No. 15 and later expanded to various DIZ locations. The foundation undertook this mission following a request from the Barbil Municipal Council. It was informed that altogether 2,000 mosquito nets would be distributed at all DIZs in the upcoming days.

BIPF reopens tailoring centre for women

Rayagada, November 30: The Banshidhar & Ila Panda Foundation (BIPF) has reopened a tailoring centre to benefit 25 young women from peripheral villages. The reopening cer-



emony was graced by distinguished guests including Dharmesh Goel, VP of BIPF, M. Srinivash, GM (Mech) of IMFA, Sameer Kumar Raut, DGM (HR & Admn) of IMFA, Radhasyam Panda, a renowned social worker and Director of Palli Vikash NGO, Swati Mohapatra, Manager (HR), BIPF.

600 CAs join 2-day nat'l conf in BBSR



Many vital issues discussed

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bhubaneswar branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India hosted "National CA Conference - 2024" on the theme "JAGRUTI-Arise, Awake, Achieve" on November 29 and 30 here.

The event was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Pravatī Parida in the presence of conference director and Central Council member, ICAI CA Sushil Kumar Goyal, vice chairman CA Mahendra Kumar Sahoo and secretary,

Bhubaneswar branch of EIRC of ICAI CA (Dr) Goutam Lenka. In her address, Parida highlighted the immense contribution of Chartered Accountants to India's progress. The conference featured a series of technical sessions on both days, focusing on diverse and contemporary topics such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Direct Taxes, and emerging professional opportunities etc.

More than 600 Chartered Accountants from all over the country attended the two-day event and witnessed a very knowledge intensive and interactive session.

In Brahmapur Thousands join Annual Feast of Mother Mary

PNS ■ BRAHMAMUR

Thousands of devotees from the Christian community gathered at the Queen of the Missions Cathedral here on Wednesday to celebrate the Annual Feast of Mother Mary, Queen of the Mission, marking an early start to the Christmas season.

Devotees from the State as well as neighbouring Andhra Pradesh thronged the century-old church near the Old Bus Stand area, Brahmapur to seek blessings from Mother Mary.

Father Sanjib Pradhan, the Church's priest, highlighted the cathedral's significance as a major pilgrimage site.

The daylong celebration fea-



tured sermons by bishops and priests, followed by an evening candlelight procession

through the Brahmapur city streets. Hundred of devotees, including women and children,

joined the procession, singing hymns dedicated to Jesus Christ and Mother Mary.

Also known as 'Candle Day,' the festival starts a nine-day 'Novena' featuring religious discourses and cultural programmes. "While the exact origins of the unique festival in Brahmapur remain unclear, it likely began with the church's establishment over a century ago," said Vincent Das.

Brahmapur SP Saravana Vivek M informed that adequate security arrangements were made with special attention to traffic management during the procession. "The celebration concluded peacefully with no untoward incident," he said.

Awareness camp on child rights held in JSpur

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

An awareness camp on sensitising officials on children's rights and provisions of the Juvenile Justice [Care and Protection of Children] Act was conducted here on Wednesday with an aim for greater coordination among different departments to help secure children their rights.

The awareness drive focused on child marriage, child labour, sexual abuse of children, etc which amounts to violation of children's rights. The stakeholders were urged to create a safe environment for children to grow to thrive.

The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act was jointly conducted by the Jagatsinghpur district administration, Child Protection Unit, district Social Welfare department and district police unit.



Child Welfare Committee, Cuttack chairperson Pramod Kumar Acharya attending the event as a resource person discussed several laws of Child rights and protection and held that today's children were

tomorrow's citizens and hence it was imperative to cherish them properly and called upon the officials to be proactive in implementing the law to prevent abuse of children.

Jagatsinghpur SP Bhabani Shankar Udgata, senior cops,

Sub collector Prasanta Kumar Tarai, district Social Welfare Officer Bishnu Priya Sethy, District Child Protection Officer Kanhu Charan Rout and DCPU legal cum probation officer Jagannath Mishra spoke.

Bargarh racket Firearms trader Akram arrested from Bihar

PNS ■ BARGARH

Police on Sunday arrested Mohammad Akram, who is the kingpin of a major firearms supply racket active in Bargarh district. A team of the Bargarh police arrested Akram with the help of their Bihar counterparts.

A few days back, the Bargarh police had busted a firearms deal and arrested five persons. As many as five pistols and 34 rounds of ammunition were seized during the operation in October.

The arrested firearm supplier Mohammed Akram was being interrogated by police to unearth further information about the network involved in the illegal firearm trade.

The police have intensified their efforts to tackle the ille-



gal arms trade, a concern that poses significant risks to safety and security. The previous arrests have been pivotal in identifying the supply lines and modus operandi of the arm smugglers..

"A case was registered with the Town police over illegal firearm deals. Cracking the case, a police team went to Bihar and arrested the mastermind of the illegal deal. Further probe is on and we will arrest all those who were involved in the deal," said Bargarh SP PS Meena.

TUs seek wage revision, clean water in Paradip

Submit memo to PPA Chairman

PNS ■ PARADIP

Representatives of trade unions affiliated with the 6 Ports and Harbours Federation submitted a memorandum to the Paradip Port Chairman, demanding immediate implementation of the new salary agreement and improved access to clean drinking water.

The unions expressed concern over delays by the Ministry of Shipping, Government of India, in implementing the salary revisions and releasing arrears, despite the agreement being finalized two months ago. They urged the Chairman to expedite the process and ensure fair compensation for port and dock employees.

Additionally, the unions raised serious concerns about



the pollution of water flowing through the Taladanda Canal, which serves as a primary water source for the region. A video clip provided to the Chairman highlighted the contamination caused by slum dwellers on the canal's northern bank, who use the canal for open defecation and dispose of household waste into it. Truck drivers and helpers along the main road

were also reported to contribute to the pollution, they said.

The unions further alleged that the drinking water supplied from the Balihara Water Reserve was unfit for consumption and requested the Chairman to explore alternatives, such as supplying water through pipes, similar to the pipeline system used by the local oil refinery.

The demand letter was presented by Paradip Port Workers' Union general secretary Nrusingh Charan Satpathy, executive president Anant Kumar Das, and vice president Gunanidhi Chowdhury to Port Chairman PL Haradhan. They emphasised the urgency of addressing these issues to ensure the well-being of the employees and residents in the area.

In Cuttack Crime Branch arrests Axis Bank manager for fraud

Accused cleaned off Rs 2.3 cr from customer's a/c

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Crime Branch on Saturday arrested a relationship manager of a branch of Axis Bank in Cuttack on the charge of committing a fraud of Rs 2.3 crore. The arrested was identified as Khirod Nayak.

Nayak was arrested based on the complaint filed by an elderly woman who had saving, current and OD accounts in the Badambadi branch of Axis Bank. After the death of her husband, the bank assigned Nayak as her relationship manager since she hadn't knowledge of any of the banking investment processes.

Crime Branch officials said Nayak regularly visited her residence as a privileged ac-



count holder and used her mobile phone to provide quarterly bank account statements.

At the request of Nayak, the customer diverted the saving accounts money to a fixed deposit to get more returns; and for that purpose, he obtained several signatures from her. The victim later came to know

about an OD loan and transfer of the amount to one Sumitra Khuntia's account only when she was intimidated by the loan department of the bank.

On inquiry with the bank, she found around Rs 2.3 crore had withdrawn from her fixed deposit account and several transactions were made from the account to the account of an unknown person.

From the bank details and other documents collected during the investigation, the Cyber Crime Unit of the Crime Branch identified the prime accused and arrested Khirod Nayak (39), a resident of Buxibazar in Cuttack.

During interrogation, it was ascertained that the accused has been a bank employee for the last 20 years and has been working with the Axis Bank

for the last six years. He developed good relationships with customers and gained their confidence in due course. He also opened some savings accounts to siphon off the cheated money.

"The accused took control of the access to the accounts by changing the registered mobile number, which was seized from his possession. From the account of the complainant, he transferred the amount to Sumitra Khuntia's account in HDFC and then from there it was transferred to his other accounts. On verification, it was ascertained that approximately Rs 1 crore has been utilised by the accused for buying insurance policies in the names of people who are under his confidence," the Crime Branch said in a release.

Ajmer Dargah Survey: Ex-bureaucrats ask PM Modi to check 'ideological assault'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after a local court ordered a survey of the Ajmer Sharif dargah, a group of former bureaucrats and diplomats has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking his intervention to halt all "illegal and pernicious" activities that are an "ideological assault" on India's civilisational heritage and pervert the idea of an inclusive country.

Stating that he alone can halt "all illegal, pernicious activities", the group has reminded Modi that he himself had sent "chadars" on the occasion of the annual Urs of the 12th-century saint, Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, as a homage to his message of peace and harmony.

The group of nearly half-a-dozen former bureaucrats and

diplomats, including former Delhi lieutenant governor Najeeb Jung, former high commissioner of India to the United Kingdom Shiv Mukherjee, former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi, former vice-chief of Army staff Lieutenant General Zameeruddin Shah and former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) deputy governor Ravi Vira Gupta, wrote to the prime minister on November 29 about unknown fringe groups claiming to represent Hindu interests and demanding archaeological surveys of medieval mosques and dargahs to prove the previous existence of temples at these sites.

"Despite the clear provisions of the Places of Worship Act, the courts too seem to respond to such demands with undue alacrity and



haste," they said. The contents of the letter were confirmed by two of the signatories to it.

"It appears unimaginable, for example, that a local court should order a survey on the 12th-century dargah of the Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti -- one of the most sacred Sufi sites in Asia not just for Muslims but for all Indians who are proud of our syncretic and pluralist traditions.

"The very thought that a mendicant saint, a fakir, who was an integral part of the Sufi/Bhakti movement unique to the Indian subcontinent and a paragon of compassion, tolerance and harmony, could have destroyed any temple to assert his authority is ridiculous," they wrote.

On November 27, a civil court in Ajmer issued notices to the

Ajmer Dargah committee, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), after a petition was filed by Vishnu Gupta, national president of the Hindu Sena, claiming that the dargah was originally a Shiva temple.

Successive prime ministers, including Modi, have sent "chadars" on the occasion of the annual Urs of the saint.

"An ideological assault on this uniquely syncretic site is an assault on our civilisational heritage and perverts the very idea of an inclusive India that you yourself seek to reinvigorate," the group wrote to the prime minister.

In the recent past, there have been calls for boycotting Muslim business establishments and eateries, non-renting of premises to Muslims

and unrestrained bulldozing of Muslim houses at the behest of chief ministers themselves, led by a ruthless local administration, the former diplomats added.

About 1.54 lakh establishments have been hit and lakhs rendered homeless or bereft of their places of business, they said, adding that in most cases, the affected parties are Muslims.

"There is immediate need for an interfaith meeting under your chairmanship where you as the prime minister of an inclusive Bharat should give out a message that India remains a land for all, where faiths have existed together and in harmony for centuries and that no sectarian forces will be permitted to disturb this uniquely pluralistic and diverse legacy," the former diplomats said.

SC to hear PIL challenging EC's decision to increase voter's count per polling booth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on December 2 a PIL challenging the Election Commission's decision to increase the maximum number of voters per polling station from 1,200 to 1,500. A bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar will take up the PIL filed by one Indu Prakash Singh, who has challenged two communications issued by the Election Commission in August 2024 increasing the number of voters per polling stations in each constituency across India.

Singh has contended that 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 Election Commission 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 it will take a longer time for an individual to cast their franchise. He had also submitted that longer queues at the polling station and longer waiting periods would dis-

suaude voters from going to cast their votes. The bench, however, said that the poll panel wants more and more people to vote and with the use of EVMs, it takes a shorter time compared to ballot papers. It said that the poll panel is trying to reduce the time taken to cast votes as much as possible by increasing the number of EVMs at booths. The petitioner has contended that the poll panel's decision

would impact the voters during the assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand (since concluded) and Bihar and Delhi to be held next year. Singh said that elections are normally held for 11 hours and it takes around 60 to 90 seconds to cast one vote, and therefore 660 to 490 persons can cast their vote in a day at one polling station with one EVM. Considering the average voting percentage to be 65.70 per cent, it is perceivable that a polling station prepared to accept 1,000 electors sees around 650 turn up. Singh's petition said that there are also booths where the elector turnout is in the range of 85-90 per cent. "In such a situation, about 20 per cent of voters will either end up standing in the queue beyond the voting hours or due to long waiting times, will abandon exercising their right to vote. Neither is acceptable in a progressive republic or a democracy," the PIL said.

Kolkata's RG Kar ex-principal helped two cartels procure hospital contracts: CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Former principal of Kolkata's RG Kar College and Hospital Sandip Ghosh allegedly helped two cartels in procuring hospital contracts, the agency has said in its recently filed chargesheet. The special court has taken the chargesheet on record but it is yet to take its cognisance because the West Bengal government has not provided sanction to prosecute Ghosh and other accused.

Ghosh had resigned as the principal of the state-run institute on August 12 in the aftermath of the rape and murder of a trainee doctor on its premises. The CBI has named Ghosh, former House Staff of the medical college Ashish Kumar Pandey, and businessmen Biplob Singha of Maa Tara Traders, Suman Hazra of Hazra Medical and Afsar Ali Khan of Eshan Cafe, in the



charge sheet. "This case was registered in compliance with the directions of Honble High Court at Calcutta relating to financial irregularities in RG Kar Medical College & Hospital at Kolkata," the CBI Spokesperson said. The CBI has alleged that Ghosh and Pandey appointed several doctors as house staff in violation of the rules, they said. Ghosh helped two cartels -- one run by Singha and

Hazra and the other by Khan -- in procuring several contracts of the hospital, the CBI has alleged in its chargesheet filed before a Special CBI court in Alipore. "On careful perusal, it manifested that sanction order of the competent authority not yet received. Accordingly, cognisance is not taken sans sanction. Let it be kept with the record," the Special Judge said. The Hospital hogged media attention when a trainee doc-

tor was found dead in the chest department auditorium on August 10. It surfaced that she was allegedly raped and killed by a civic volunteer Sanjay Roy in the intervening night of August 9-10. Ghosh was also under scanner in the case for alleged delay in the probe. In between, the Calcutta High Court ordered a probe into alleged financial irregularities in hospital during his tenure. The High Court order came on a petition by the former deputy superintendent of the facility, Akhtar Ali, who prayed for a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) into multiple counts of alleged financial misconduct at the institute during Gosh's tenure as its principal. Ghosh served as principal of RG Kar Medical College from February 2021 to September 2023. He was transferred from RG Kar in October last year but inexplicably returned to that position within a month.

Eight CAG reports pending with Delhi Govt for laying before Assembly, HC told



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Eight reports pertaining to Delhi are pending with the city government for laying before the Legislative Assembly in accordance with the GNCTD Act, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India has informed the Delhi High Court. The CAG has said according to the legal framework, the Delhi government has to place the audit reports submitted by it before the Assembly and it has in the past written to the principal secretary (finance), requesting him to do the same.

The authority made the submission in its response filed to a petition by city's opposition leaders seeking a direction to place CAG reports related to liquor duty, pollution and finance before the Assembly. "As per the records available with the Answering Respondent, eight reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India, pertaining to the NCT of Delhi, are pending with the Government of NCT of Delhi for laying before the Legislative Assembly in accordance with the provisions of section 48 of the Government of National Capital Territory Delhi Act, 1991," stated a short reply filed by the CAG and accountant general (audit) in the matter. "The Answering Respondent thus submits that as per Article 151(2) of the Constitution read with section 48 of the Government of

National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and with regulations ... Enjoins upon the GNCTD to place the audit reports submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the accounts of GNCTD in the Legislative Assembly of Delhi," it further said. The response informed that the reports from 2022 to 2024 pertain to finance audits, air pollution, "revenue, economic, social and general sector and PSUs", children in need of care and protection, liquor and public health. "Again, while forwarding Report No. 3 of 2024 of the CAG to the Principal Secretary (Finance) vide letter dated 19.09.2024, the Delhi Audit Office also reminded him about seven reports of CAG pending with Delhi government for laying them before the Legislative Assembly of the state," the reply said. The petition, which has been filed by Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan, is listed for hearing on Monday. The high court had, on October 29, issued notices to the Delhi government, the office of the Legislative Assembly speaker, the lieutenant governor (LG), the CAG and the accountant general (audit), Delhi and sought their responses to the peti-

tion. The plea has claimed that the 12 CAG reports from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022 are pending with Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, who also holds the finance portfolio. The plea has further alleged that despite the LG's repeated requests, these reports have not been sent to him for tabling the same before the Assembly. The petition, filed by advocates Neeraj and Satya Ranjan Swain, said the BJP MLAs had approached the chief minister, chief secretary and speaker in the past but no action has been taken. "Despite the LG's repeated requests and constitutional obligation, these reports were not sent to the LG and consequently, could not be tabled in the Delhi Legislative Assembly," it said. The plea has further alleged that a "deliberate suppression of vital information" not only violates democratic principles but also prevents a proper scrutiny of the government's action and expenditures, raising serious questions about its financial propriety, transparency and accountability. The petitioners, therefore, have sought directions to the finance department to send a proposal to the LG for "exercising his duties under Article 151(2) of the Constitution of India, 1950, Regulation 210(1) of the Regulations on Audit and Accounts, 2007 and section 48 of the Government of National Capital Territory Act, 1991".

Bofors: CBI to send LRs to the US seeking information from private detective

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI will soon send a judicial request to the United States seeking information from private investigator Michael Hershman who had expressed willingness to share with Indian agencies crucial details about the Rs 64-crore Bofors bribery scandal of the 1980s, officials said Sunday. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also informed a special court, which is hearing the agency's plea for further probe into the matter, about the developments. The process to send the Letters Rogatory (LR) was initiated in October this year, and it is expected to take around 90 days before the formal request is sent to the US, aimed at obtaining information to further investigate the alleged bribery case, the officials said.

A Letter Rogatory is a written request sent by the court of one country to the court of another country to obtain assistance in the investigation or prosecution of a criminal matter. While the Delhi High Court had exonerated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, a year later it quashed all charges against the remaining accused, including the Hinduja brothers, in the politically sensitive case. Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, the alleged middleman in the payoff case, was discharged in 2011 by a court which allowed the CBI to withdraw prosecution against him. The case involves allegations of a Rs 64-crore bribe in a Rs 1,437-crore deal with Swedish firm Bofors in the 1980s during the then Congress government for the supply of 400 155mm field howitzers, which



played a significant role in India's victory during the Kargil war. The case was closed in 2011. Hershman, head of the Fairfax Group, visited India in 2017 to attend a conference of private detectives. During his stay, he appeared on various platforms, alleging that the investigation into the scam was derailed by the Congress government and stated he was willing to share details with the CBI. The CBI took note of his claims in several interviews and announced in 2017 that

the matter would be investigated according to due process. The agency informed the special court that, following Hershman's revelations, it plans to reopen the investigation. The CBI had previously sent letters and reminders to US authorities on November 8, 2023, December 21, 2023, May 13, 2024, and August 14, 2024, but received no information, with the US authorities requesting additional time. The central agency has now opted to pursue the LR route, where a competent court sends a formal request for information to the relevant authorities in the US, subject to clearance from the Indian government. The CBI had registered the case in 1990, three years after a Swedish radio channel had alleged that bribes were paid by Bofors to politicians and defence officials of India to

clinch the deal. The allegations created a big scandal for the Rajiv Gandhi Government and have been used by rival parties to target the Congress. The CBI filed the chargesheets in 1999 and 2000. The Delhi High Court had exonerated Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, nearly 13 years after he was assassinated by LTTE in a suicide attack. In 2005, the High Court quashed all charges against the remaining accused noting that the CBI failed to prove that the money transferred by Bofors to various agents by Quattrocchi was meant to be paid as a bribe to public servants in India. The CBI appealed against the 2005 decision in apex court in 2018 but it was dismissed on the grounds of delay. The Supreme Court, however, allowed it to raise all the points in an appeal filed by advocate Ajay Aggarwal in 2005.

No change in migrant status of Kashmiri Pandit women marrying non-migrants: J-K HC

PTI ■ JAMMU

The High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh has observed that there will be no change in the migrant status of Kashmiri Pandit women even if they marry non-migrants, upholding a Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) order in favour of two women selected under PM employment package. The two women -- Seema Koul and Vishalni Koul -- had moved the high court in 2018 after their provisional selection to the post of legal assistant in the department of disaster management relief, rehabilitation and re-construction under the PM package for Kashmiri migrants in December 1, 2017 forfeited on the ground that they have lost their migrant status having married non-migrant persons. "One question of public importance that arises before this court is whether a woman who has been given a migrant status on account of the suffering endured by her and her fami-



ly on account of which they were forced to leave their home and hearth in the Kashmir Valley... could be discriminated and would stand to lose the said status only on account of fact that she had got married to a non-migrant? "Holding this would be going against the nature of human beings. Respondents herein, who are ladies and on account of no fault of theirs, had to leave their place of original residence in Kashmir Valley, cannot be expected to remain unmarried only to secure a job in the Kashmir Valley as a migrant," a division bench of Justices Atul Sreedharan and Mohammad Yousef Wani said in a seven-page order last month. It is also reasonable to

presume that because of the exodus, not every migrant woman would be in a position to find a match who himself was a migrant, it said. The court said in such a situation, to hold that the woman would lose her status as a migrant only because she, out of the natural urge of forming a family, had to marry a non-migrant on account of existing circumstances, would be grossly "discriminatory and militates" against the very concept of justice. "This discrimination becomes even more brazen where a male migrant continues to remain a migrant notwithstanding the fact that he has married a non-migrant. Such a situation has arisen only on account of patriarchy that prevails in the human race. However, in matters relating to employment under the State/UT, such discrimination cannot be countenanced," the court said, dismissing a writ petition filed by the Union Territory against the May 16 CAT order.

Society will perish if population growth rate goes below 2.1: Bhagwat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NAGPUR

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday stressed the importance of family and said if the population growth rate of a society goes below 2.1, then that society will perish by itself. Addressing a gathering at the 'Kathale Kul (clan) Sannelan' in Nagpur, he said "kutumb" (family) is part of the society and every family is a unit. "Decreasing population is a matter of concern because the Loksankhya Shastra says that if we go below 2.1, then that society perishes, no one will destroy it, it will perish by itself," he said. "The population policy of our country, which was decided around 1998 or 2002, says that the population growth rate should not be below 2.1," the RSS chief said. "We need more than two, that is three (as population growth



rate), that's what the population science says. This number is important because it (society) should survive," he said. "A decline in population is a matter of concern. Modern demographic studies indicate that when the population of a community falls below a fertility rate of 2.1, that society faces extinction. It does not need external threats to vanish; it disappears on its own. Many languages and societies have ceased to exist due to this. Therefore, our population must not fall below 2.1," said RSS Chief.

Cyclone Fengal weakens, life in Puducherry paralysed by rainfall, TN's Villupuram affected

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

After making landfall near Puducherry on November 30, Cyclone Fengal weakened on Sunday, but torrential downpour under its influence paralysed the union territory, with the Army stepping in to evacuate stranded persons in inundated streets. Old-timers recalled such a fury of nature was not witnessed in this tiny UT for the last three decades. Villupuram in neighbouring Tamil Nadu also suffered following heavy rains and inundation, with Chief Minister M K Stalin terming the rainfall in the district as 'unprecedented.' Operations at the Chennai airport, which had been suspended on Saturday, resumed past midnight but many flights suffered cancellations and delays initially, officials

said. However, later in the day, operations were normal. According to the latest update from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Cyclone Fengal has weakened into a deep depression. "The Cyclonic Storm FENGAL (pronounced as FEIN-JAL) over north coastal Tamil Nadu & Puducherry remained practically stationary during past 12 hours, weakened into a deep depression and lay centered at 1130 hours IST of today, the 1st December 2024 over the same region near latitude 12.0°N and longitude 79.8°E, close to Puducherry, about 30 km north of Cuddalore, 40 km east of Villupuram and 120 km south-southwest of Chennai," the weather office said in a post on X. It is likely to move westwards very slowly and weaken gradually into a depression over north Tamil

Nadu during the next 12 hours, it added. Normal life was crippled in Puducherry, as the union territory received 46 cm rainfall, bettering the previous best of 21 cm recorded on October 31, 2004. Cyclone Fengal triggered heavy rainfall, leading to inundation of all residential areas on the outskirts of boulevard limits. Trees were uprooted at various places under the impact of the cyclonic storm. Power outage was reported in most of the localities since 11 pm on Saturday. The Indian Army deployed its soldiers and boats and evacuated stranded people. According to a Defence release, about 200 people were rescued from three different locations in Puducherry, including Krishna Nagar. Many housing colonies were waterlogged and residents



could not step out of the dwellings for hours together. Two-wheelers and cars parked on roads partially submerged in rainwater that entered several houses here, residents said. All shops and business establishments remained closed and the government set up relief centers to accommodate people evacuated from low-lying areas. Main thoroughfares and arterial roads were waterlogged disrupting daily life. Farmlands with standing crops bore the brunt of the heavy rain. Transport services were hit and voluntary organisations like Pondicherry Heritage Round Table 167 volunteered to supplement the efforts of the government to supply food packets to people staying in relief camps. Meanwhile, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu CM Stalin briefed reporters about the cyclone

and its impact in the city and elsewhere. He pointed out that Villupuram had received heavy rainfall, with Mailam in the district recording 49 cm, followed by Nemmeli at 46 cm and Vanur (41 cm) in the last 24 hours. "Villupuram has received unprecedented rainfall and we are monitoring the situation," he said. With nearby Cuddalore also receiving copious rains, Deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin has been rushed to oversee the rescue and relief efforts in both districts, Stalin said. "The two districts are being monitored. We are going to request the Centre to depute a team to assess the damage in Villupuram, Cuddalore and Chengelpet," the CM said. As regards Chennai, he said that despite heavy rains in the city on Saturday, there was no inundation in many parts due

to the precautionary works and desilting activities. In north Chennai, water was cleared using large motors. About 1,700 motor pumps of different capacity were on standby. Of the 22 subways in Chennai, traffic movement was smooth in 21, while one was already closed due to railway work, Stalin said. A little over 1000 people have been accommodated in 32 camps and food and water was being provided to them. Further, till Sunday, 9.10 lakh food packets have been distributed, while food was being provided free of cost through state-run Amma canteens and this has benefited about 1.07 lakh persons, the CM said. Stalin earlier held a review meeting regarding the rain situation and the rescue and relief efforts of the Government.

Our fight is for spirit of our country: Priyanka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ WAYANAD

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday launched a scathing attack against the BJP-led Centre, saying that today the fight is against the force that is weakening the rights of the people and handing over them to a few "businessmen friends." Addressing a meeting in Mananthavady here, she said, "We are fighting against a force that is doing everything in its power to destroy the institutions upon which our country was built." "Today we are fighting for the spirit of our nation, for the soul of India." The Congress general secretary further said the fight was for the power and resources of this country to belong rightfully to its people. Recalling the massive landslide that hit the hill district on July 30, Priyanka said she has seen many tragedies. "And because of our professions, we go across India when there are tragedies, we meet people." "But seldom, do I see the



kind of pain and suffering that I saw when I came here. Nature's fury is concentrated in a small area. All the houses in that area were washed away, all the families were washed away, and all the livelihoods were washed away. And yet in the middle of this devastation, and the middle of the pain and suffering I saw with my own eyes the humanity of all of you." You did not ask religion, you did not ask caste, you just did whatever you could do to help those who are suffering," she said.

"The symbol of true values that India stands for lies here in Wayanad," she added. "I want each one of you to know that you are my responsibility. That I take your love with complete seriousness and it is my duty to fight for you to give you a better future in the next five years and ahead," she said adding that she came two days here to thank them all for the love and affection they have given to her. "But after this, my real work will begin and we will work together to resolve all the

issues that you are facing," Priyanka, who arrived for the first time in the hill district after being elected, said her first task is to start learning Malayalam. "Yesterday in one of these meetings, somebody from the crowd promised me that you are going to come back. "So I am promising that I will come so many times that you will get fed up with me" "So please get used to seeing me," she added. Responding to the queries from the crowd about whether she will stay here, Priyanka said, "I will definitely look into it." She said she would look for a nice place to stay here. In her address at Sulthan Bathery, the Congress MP alleged that the BJP-led union government politicized the massive landslides that hit Wayanad four months ago. "People who are in power should recognise that a great tragedy has taken place and not play politics with it. I personally also visited people who are suffering from very similar circumstances in Himachal Pradesh for about a year and a half. And there are also I saw that

because there was a Congress government in the state. The Centre was not sending the funds to rehabilitate those who are suffering. "Also, what the state government and the central government are dragging their feet and not doing what is required to help the victims," she alleged. According to the schedule, Priyanka will also address a similar gathering at Kalpetta. Priyanka, who is on a two-day Wayanad visit, accompanied by Rahul Gandhi, participated in public meetings at Mulkam in Thiruvambadi, Kaulai in Nikambur, Wandoor and Edavanna in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts which falls under the Wayanad Lok Sabha segment on Saturday. Priyanka had scored her maiden electoral victory by winning the Wayanad Lok Sabha bypoll with a huge margin of 4,10,931 votes, which is bigger than the lead her brother Rahul secured when he won from the constituency during the Lok Sabha general elections held early this year.

Deaths from AIDS in country came down by 79 per cent: Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ INDORE

Deaths from AIDS in the country came down by 79 per cent while HIV infections fell by 44 per cent in 2023 and the country is committed to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal of eradicating AIDS by 2030, Union Health Minister JP Nadda said on Sunday. He was speaking at a function here on the occasion of World AIDS Day. Nadda said the renewed IDS response measures of 'test and treat' and universal viral load testing will be endorsed and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act 2017 will be implemented in toto. India has worked out a formula of '95-95-95' in view of the target of eliminating AIDS by 2030, he added. "Ninety-five percent of the patients in the country should know that they are infected with HIV, 95 percent of the patients should get treatment and the 'viral load' of 95 percent of the patients should be



lessened by antiretroviral therapy medicines," he explained. At present, 81 per cent of patients know they are infected with HIV, 88 per cent patients are being given treatment and the viral load of 97 per cent patients has reduced, the Union minister informed. "In the year 2023, there has been 44 per cent reduction in new AIDS infections in the country, while AIDS-related deaths have reduced by 79 per cent," he said. Nadda said the current prevalence of AIDS is 0.70 percent globally, whereas in India it was 0.20 percent, adding that after a long battle against AIDS, a strong medical system has been developed in

the country to fight off this disease. The Union Health Minister said the Centre is providing AIDS medicines to patients free of cost and also giving medicine to people instantly after they test positive for HIV. Indian pharmaceutical companies were shipping the cheapest and most effective AIDS medicines to Africa, South Africa and Latin America, Nadda pointed out. "Youth should take precautions while getting tattooed. Today we are getting to know that people are suffering from AIDS after getting tattoos. I want to make youth aware of this danger," he said. The Union minister also urged people to set aside taboos associated with the disease and adopt a sensitive attitude towards those infected. It should be ensured that there is no discrimination against HIV infected people in employment and other areas, Nadda asserted. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav was also present at the function.

Mufti calls for united fight to counter polarisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti on Sunday asserted that the majority of Hindus in the country are are secular and called for a united fight against the forces trying to divide the people on religious lines, warning against a repeat of the 1947-like riots. "The situation in the country is not good. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, Sardar (Vallabhbhai) Patel, (B R) Ambedkar made this country home for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Gandhi even sacrificed his life for it," she said. "However, people are being pitted against each other (on the basis of religion) and I am afraid we are being pushed towards the 1947-like situation," Mehbooba, a former chief minister, said addressing a gathering of party workers here. Attacking BJP, she said the government has failed to provide jobs, education, good hospitals and roads to the people and is diverting the attention of the people by targeting mosques on the pretext of finding temples beneath. "This is exactly what is happening in the country. Four innocent youth were recently killed in Sambhal (UP) but who will speak for them. Anyone doing so will be put in jail like Umar Khalid who is behind the bars for the last four years. In the prevailing conditions, there is no one to listen," Mehbooba said. The PDP leader referred to a petition claiming that the Ajmer Sharif Dargah was built over a Shiva temple and said people of different faiths including Hindus and Sikhs visit the 800-year-old shrine which is a glaring example of "Ganga-Jamuni" culture. "They also want to dig up this shrine in search



of a temple... For how long will this continue?" she said. The PDP president said the people have to stand up to counter this otherwise what is the difference between Bangladesh and our country. "Our Hindu brothers are facing oppression in Bangladesh but if we do the same thing with minorities here (in India), then what is the difference? We have such a great country, known by the world over for its secular character," she said. Mehbooba said it was former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who helped Bangladesh to achieve independence. "Majority of Hindus in our country are secular and I have no doubt about this. We have to stand up to counter this emerging situation as we have to live together and there is no other way," she said. She also referred to the recent assembly results in the country and said "there is something wrong somewhere." One state was left deliberately so that the opposition cannot talk (on the fraud) and there is no doubt on it. Election commission is silent on the sharp rise in the poll percentage after the end of voting, she said. The voting stops at 6 pm and

we have 58 percent polling, which increases to 68 percent within the next three hours and becomes 70 percent before the start of counting, Mehbooba said. Praising Jammu for its secular character, the PDP president said people of all religions could be seen moving around and living in communal harmony unlike in Kashmir where mostly people belonging to one community are around or the security forces. "Jammu people have much more responsibility today, even if they had voted for one party (BJP) in the assembly elections to safeguard brotherhood and communal harmony," she said. Seeking support of the people for her party candidates during the panchayat and urban local body elections likely to be held next year, Mehbooba said J&K is run by half governments which is not a good thing for any region. "On one hand there is the NC-Congress government and on the other BJP which is ruling through Lt Governor. People should support the PDP in the upcoming elections to allow us to serve you better," she said.

Soren takes cognisance of stopping potato-laden vehicles on Bengal border

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Sunday took cognisance on "stopping" of potato-laden vehicles to Jharkhand on Bengal borders, allegedly restricting the supply to the state, an official statement said. The CM directed chief secretary Alka Tiwari to deal with the matter with immediate effect, it said. The West Bengal government has allegedly put restriction on interstate supply of the tuber since Thursday in a bid to maintain the stock and keep the price of potato under control in its state, according to a potato traders' association in West Bengal. On the CM's direction, Tiwari spoke to West Bengal chief secretary Manoj Pant over phone for disposal of the



matter, according to the official statement. "Pant has assured that a committee will be formed soon to sort out the issue of potato supply," it said. The price of potato has shot up by Rs 5 a kg in Jharkhand's retail market in the past two days after neighbouring West

Bengal reportedly restricted the supply of the tuber, according to an official. West Bengal meets 60 per cent of Jharkhand's potato demand round the year, while the rest of the demand is met by Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and local production.

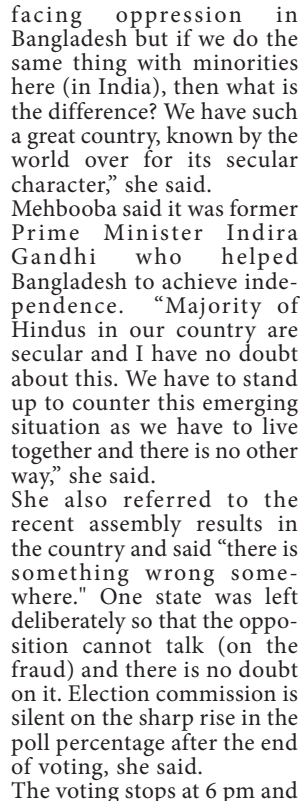
Around 50-55 trucks, each containing 20-22 tonne of potato, arrive in Jharkhand from West Bengal. Former president and advisor of West Bengal Progressive Potato Traders Association (WBPPTA), Bibhas Kumar Dey, on Saturday told PTI over phone, "The West Bengal police have increased vigilance on bordering areas in a bid to curb export of potatoes to other states. Hundreds of potato-laden trucks were sent back during these checks in the past three days. The move is causing a huge loss to traders." He said that they have demanded the West Bengal government to withdraw the restriction by Monday. "In a joint meeting of the WBPPTA and West Bengal Cold Storage Association on Saturday, we have decided that potatoes will not be

taken out from cold storages from Monday night, if restriction is not lifted," Dey said on Sunday. Jharkhand BJP president Babul Marandi on Saturday urged the newly elected Hemant Soren-led government to hold a talk with the West Bengal government to deal with the situation, as people of the state are already suffering with the rising prices of potatoes. Meanwhile, Potato traders of West Bengal threatened to go on strike from Tuesday if the state government does not lift restrictions on selling to other states. West Bengal recently re-imposed curbs on selling potatoes to neighbouring states in an effort to control the prices in the local markets. Potatoes are retailing at Rs 35-40 per kg in the local markets.

Ready to ban beef in Assam if Congress writes to me: CM Sarma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he was ready to ban beef in Assam if state Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah writes to him, seeking it. Responding to the allegation that BJP distributed beef to win the Muslim-dominated Samaguri, which was under Congress control for five consecutive terms, Sarma said he was happy that the opposition party raised the matter. "Samaguri was with Congress for 25 years. Congress losing a constituency like Samaguri by 27,000 votes (sic) is the biggest shame in its history. It is Congress's defeat more than BJP's win," he told reporters after a party meeting on Saturday. BJP's Diplu Ranjan Sarmah defeated Congress's Tanzil, son of party MP Rakibul Hussain, by 24,501 votes in a bypoll last month. "But amidst sadness, Rakibul Hussain said one good thing



that eating beef is wrong, isn't it? He said that it was wrong for Congress-BJP to win elections by offering beef to voters," the CM said when asked about the MP's reported comment. "I want to know if Congress was winning Samaguri by offering beef to voters. He knows Samaguri very well. Does it mean that Samaguri can be won by offering beef?" asked Sarma. Hussain, who won the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat this year by a record margin of over 10.12 lakh votes, was an MLA from Samaguri for five consecutive terms before becoming a parliamentarian. "I want to tell

Rakibul Hussain that beef should be banned as he himself said it is wrong. He only needs to give me in writing that neither BJP nor Congress should speak about beef, in fact, it should be banned in Assam. If we do that, all problems will be solved," Sarma said. The CM further said that he would write to the state Congress president about his stand on beef in the backdrop of Hussain's statement. "So, I will write to Bhupen Borah and ask him if he also advocates banning beef in line with Rakibul Hussain, and just inform me. I will ban beef completely in the next assembly (accordingly). Then BJP, AGP, CPM, nobody will be able to offer, and Hindus, Muslims and Christians all should stop eating beef, and all problems will be solved," he added. "I am happy that Rakibul Hussain has made this statement because at least one step has been taken. Now, the second step should be taken by Bhupen Borah," Sarma stressed.



that eating beef is wrong, isn't it? He said that it was wrong for Congress-BJP to win elections by offering beef to voters," the CM said when asked about the MP's reported comment. "I want to know if Congress was winning Samaguri by offering beef to voters. He knows Samaguri very well. Does it mean that Samaguri can be won by offering beef?" asked Sarma. Hussain, who won the Dhubri Lok Sabha seat this year by a record margin of over 10.12 lakh votes, was an MLA from Samaguri for five consecutive terms before becoming a parliamentarian. "I want to tell

Redefining Mahakumbh 2025 experience with Gram Tent City in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PRAYAGRAJ

Indian Railways has unveiled the Mahakumbh Gram Tent City to offer pilgrims a seamless blend of spirituality and modernity during the Mahakumbh in Prayagraj, scheduled for January-February 2025. As the most significant festival in Indian culture and spirituality, Mahakumbh attracts millions of devotees and tourists from around the globe. Preparations are underway on a mission mode to accommodate the immense influx of visitors expected next year. This innovative initiative, launched by IRCTC, ensures a comfortable and convenient experience for devotees, making it a standout feature of Mahakumbh 2025. Located strategically near the Bathing Ghats and key attractions, the Mahakumbh Gram Tent City offers state-of-the-art accommodations at an affordable rate of ₹6000 plus taxes per person per night, inclusive of breakfast. Designed with com-



fort, medical support and exceptional hospitality in mind, these premium tents stand out as one of the most refined accommodation options for the Mahakumbh. The Tent City features spacious accommodations, a dedicated dining area with sit-down facilities, and top-notch catering services. A special executive lounge on the city side complements the tents on the Arail side, catering to pilgrims on both banks of the river. Bookings for this unique experience have already begun, generating significant enthusiasm among devotees eager to combine spiritual immersion with world-class facilities.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trump's tariff threat

Trump risks alienating key partners, intensifying global economic tensions and accelerating efforts to bypass the dollar

Trump presidency is yet to begin but the president-elect has already spoken his mind on the US policy and it is not good news for the developing countries. US President-elect Donald Trump has issued a stern warning to the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and their expanding coalition—which seek to challenge the dominance of the US dollar. Trump's announcement of a potential 100 per cent tariff on these nations underscores the rising tensions across the globe as the BRICS bloc explores alternatives to the dollar. This move highlights the friction between the US and developing economies and could reshape global trade dynamics. It was widely expected that Trump would do everything possible to bail out the US out of debt and would not hesitate to take harsh measures against countries who are harming the US interests regardless of their friendship with the US. For decades, the US dollar has been the cornerstone of global commerce, widely used in trade and serving as the reserve currency for most nations. However, the BRICS coalition and other developing economies have expressed growing frustration over the disproportionate control that the US wields over the global financial system.

Nations within the BRICS bloc are already discussing plans for a new global currency or expanded use of their local currencies to reduce reliance on the dollar. There is no doubt that Trump's threat of 100 per cent tariffs on BRICS nations reflects a protectionist stance and his determination to defend US economic interests. But that is Trump for you, he doesn't mind taking tough decision even if the whole world is against him. Be it environment or trade or military expeditions

Trump is capable of taking decisions which might be frowned upon the world over. He has categorically said that any attempt to undermine the dollar's dominance would result in severe consequences, including exclusion from the US market. The big problem for developing nations is they depend upon the US market in a big way for their incomes and exporting revenue. Trump's approach reveals his readiness to employ punitive measures against both allies and rivals in the global south, regardless of their historical ties with the US. The implications of such tariffs would be profound, potentially disrupting trade flows, exacerbating economic tensions and alienating key developing nations. A 100 per cent tariff would significantly raise the cost of exporting goods to the US, impacting industries that rely on American consumers. For economies like Brazil and South Africa, which are heavily reliant on exports, this could lead to economic slowdown. But ironically Trump's threats may be counter-productive as many countries may further incentivise their search for alternatives to the dollar. Besides, Trump's headline stance may push developing countries closer together, fostering stronger ties within the BRICS bloc and beyond. Indeed raising tariff wall in today's world is not a good idea but then Trump has mind of his own.

PICTALK



Devotees attend 'Ganga Aarti' at Har Ki Pauri, in Haridwar

Unveiling transnational drug syndicate

The Coast Guard's drug seizure near Andaman islands underscores the ongoing challenge of tackling transnational syndicates engaged in illicit trafficking near the Indian coast

Heading to their motto of Vayam Rakshamah (We Protect), the Indian Coast Guard personnel executed a befitting operation in the Andaman and Nicobar waters to mark one of the largest drug busts in Indian maritime history. The haul of nearly 6000 kgs of the banned Methamphetamine near Barren Islands (150 km away from Port Blair) is estimated at around 36,000 crores in the international market. The picture-perfect operation was triggered by the presence of a suspicious trawler (Soe Wai Yan Htoo) in the Indian waters by a Coast Guard Dornier reconnaissance plane which then swooped down and asked the trawler to lower its speed, whilst informing the base. Soon enough, fast patrolling vessels of the Coast Guard were tasked to the place, and they towed the six Myanmar crew trawler to Port Blair, for further investigations. Ongoing interrogations reveal the presence of an unyielding, trained and secretive crew with the presence of a satellite phone that has all the hallmarks of a major and international drug syndicate. But for now, it marks the ever-vigil capabilities of the Indian Coast Guard in ensuring the integrity of our maritime borders and policing against transnational crime.

While the geographical location of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands naturally lends itself towards fructifying India's strategic "Look East" opportunity (as also dominates the sensitive and narrow Malacca Straits that facilitates 40% of global trade) – it is also in the crosshairs of Myanmar, the largest producer of illegal methamphetamine, which is then exported to markets in the US, Europe to Eastern countries. The restive Shan State of Myanmar (bordering China with an ethnic Han-Chinese populace and multiple insurgent groups widely believed to be supported by China) is also home to the infamous Cantonese Chinese drugs syndicate, Sam Gor (popularly known as 'The Company'). This notorious set-up is involved in global drug trafficking and is said to be in control of over 40 per



cent of Asian-Pacific trade in substances like methamphetamine, heroin, ketamine, fentanyl etc. This lucrative trade is believed to generate earnings up to a staggering \$8 billion, annually. Currently, it is believed to be headed by a Chinese gangster called Tse Chi Lop, who is also widely known by the moniker "El Chapo of Asia". Even though Tse Chi Lop is currently in custody and facing trials in Australia – his organisation Sam Gor and its affiliated operations are continuing, unabated. Ironically, he could have created such a vast drug infrastructure and empire in a region contiguous to the Chinese mainland, where the Chinese have many beholden armed militias, but he never got targeted or arrested by the Chinese authorities. Also strange is the fact that he never attempted to ship his produce towards the Chinese mainland, raising serious doubts if he were to have enjoyed some sort of official patronage from the Chinese authorities. Unsurprisingly, Tse Chi Lop's rise has not been marked by the usual stories of violence and gore of drug lords but by the unusual route of steady industrialisation and establishing well-maintained networks of key international



THIS LUCRATIVE TRADE IS BELIEVED TO GENERATE EARNINGS UP TO A STAGGERING \$8 BILLION, ANNUALLY. CURRENTLY, IT IS BELIEVED TO BE HEADED BY A CHINESE GANGSTER CALLED TSE CHI LOP, WHO IS ALSO WIDELY KNOWN BY THE MONIKER "EL CHAPO OF ASIA"

partnerships, which are impossible without some sort of sovereign backing. And the Chinese are the masters of asymmetric subterfuge in that they patronise proxies and bad elements, as long as they do the bidding of the Chinese government, and do not direct their illicit trade towards the Chinese mainland. While it is too early to confirm the exact hand behind the recent cache in the Andaman and Nicobar waters, the quantity/value of drugs involved, the location of the trawler arrest, and the nationality of the trawler crew, all point to origins that seem disconcertingly familiar. That the restive Myanmar mainland (with areas like Shan State that are 'no-go' zones to even the Myanmar military) is closer to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands than the Indian mainland, makes the threat real and perennial. It is a testy region given too much Chinese intrigues and ambitions – in fact, the Myanmar-owned Coco Coco Islands (barely 50 km from the northernmost tip of the Andaman Islands range) were believed to have had Chinese militaristic assets, but the same was never proved. The Chinese have planned substantial investments in Myanmar via its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which includes projects like the

China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) or even the development of the deep-sea port of Kyaukpyu, in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The Chinese have a vested interest in keeping their footprints in the region and it is not beyond them to oscillate from making pure investments in the Myanmar Government to patronizing rebel militias or even drug lords, towards its objectives in the region. India must safeguard its interests and strategic imperatives that beset its distant outpost in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Sadly, it is not the first and it wouldn't be the last such operation. Situational status suggests that this specific haul was destined for Thailand, which typically sees a surge around the onsetting festive season, but this too is in the realm of conjecture, as yet. And the real concern is not if this consignment was the handiwork of the Chinese Sam Gor gang (or of the El Mencho-run Jalisco New Generation Cartel), but of the murky linkages with the Chinese authorities, which is always a possibility. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)



BHOPINDER SINGH

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ENSURE MINORITY SAFETY

Madam — The fresh row of violence against the Hindu minorities once again began in Bangladesh, leading to an escalation of disturbance between Indo-Bangladesh relations. In an immediate response, the government of India has slammed the interim government run by Muhammad Yunus for not taking any action against Bangladeshi miscreants. The arrest and denial of bail by the Chittagong court to the Hindu monk and ISKCON priest Chinmoy Krishan Das has raised deep concerns about the safety and security of the Hindus in Bangladesh. The noted incidences of violence, arson, vandalism and desecration of the Hindu religious sites have stressed the whole matter. It is particularly disturbing to note that Hindus are not at all safe in Bangladesh, and the majority population there is not only opposing the minority but also nurturing anti-India feelings as a whole. So far, the anti-India sentiments are taking a sharp steep in many other countries in the last few days. First Canada took a stir against India by attacking Hindu temples and now Bangladesh is the new member in this chain. The democratic spirit had been killing down, and it is regrettable that Hindus are being targeted with brutality and animosity in both Canada as well as Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh must immediately step in to halt such violence against the Hindu minority. Every religion must be respected and equally treated with the values of the democratic spirit. Bangladesh must not forget that it was these Hindus only who fought hard for their liberation and freedom; any attack on the Hindu population residing in Bangladesh will be considered as an attack on their liberators.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S GDP GROWTH DIPS

Madam— India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth slumped to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in July-September, coming in much lower than the consensus estimates of 6.5 per cent. A "slug-

Suspense over Maharashtra CM



The delayed swearing-in of the Chief Minister in Maharashtra despite the thumping majority of Mahayuti is a cause of concern and raises very fundamental issues relating to government formation post-election. The highly ambitious leaders of political parties, though in the minority in the alliance, voted to power, stake claims on the Chief Minister post against demo-

cratic norms or turn to browbeating. The leader of the largest alliance partner ought to be sworn in as CM, but compromise is the new normal in the constitution of the ministries. Though this is not new, it is yet an unhealthy practice detrimental to the alliance in a larger perspective. Bihar CM Nitish Kumar having taken over as CM seven times on the same pattern in diagonally opposite RJD and BJP alliances is the stark example of how democracy runs at the root level. People give decisive mandates for governance, yet bypassing it is against the will of the people. If so, what is the sanctity of Abraham Lincoln's democratic principle 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people'?

Vinod Johri | Delhi

gish growth" in manufacturing and mining, along with a continued slow pace of government expenditure and weak private consumption, weighed on the economic growth, data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

The country's GDP growth was 6.7 per cent in the April-June quarter and 8.1 per cent in the year-ago period. The weaker-than-expected GDP growth raises concerns about the sustainability of economic recovery, particularly as key sectors like manufacturing and mining face challenges. Manufacturing growth decelerated significantly to 2.2 per cent, compared to 14.3 per cent in the same quarter last year and 7 per cent in the previous quarter. The electricity segment slowed to 3.3 per cent from 10.5 per cent year-on-year and 10.4 per cent sequentially. Financial, real estate, and professional services grew by 6.7 per cent, a slight improvement from 6.2 per cent a year earlier but below the 7.1 per cent recorded in the previous quarter. Public administration and other services, which include government spending, grew by 9.2 per cent, up from 7.7 per cent last year but

slightly lower than 9.5 per cent in Q1FY25. C K Ramani | Chennai

RESTRICTING HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT

Madam — Australia has passed a law restricting children's use of internet media. The Government of India is also moving in this direction, which is a welcome step. However, solely creating laws related to social media is not enough to fully protect children from its adverse effects. Laws are necessary, but they alone are not sufficient. To keep children safe, the collective role of parents, teachers, and society is crucial. Children need to be educated about digital literacy, encouraged to practice responsible online behaviour, manage their screen time effectively, and focus on positive content. Additionally, social media companies must ensure their platforms are safe for children. A comprehensive approach is the only effective solution to this problem.

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

From pages to people: Why writers need marketing to succeed

Writing a book is only half the battle. The other half — equally critical but often overlooked — is ensuring that it reaches its intended audience

As an author of seven books with a decent number of followers who swear by my work, I am still a largely unknown author. That's an anomaly, considering the long decades I have spent polishing my craft and bringing out the most distilled form of writing I am capable of. Beyond a loyal circle of readers who follow my work, much of the world remains unaware of what I have to offer. What did I lack? Not literary vivacity, but an appetite to market my writing in a way that would earn it a top spot among contemporaries. Just as we have conceived a negative perception of wealth and shunned any open display or accumulation of it as vulgar, we have slapped self-publicity also with some uncharitable notions.

It's often said that writers are inherently shy, reclusive beings who prefer the company of their thoughts and words over the glare of public attention. Most of us dream of creating something so profound that the world discovers it and celebrates it without our having to lift a finger to promote it. We yearn for our books to find



their way into readers' hands through serendipity rather than strategy. While this dream is undeniably romantic, the reality is far from it. In a world brimming with voices clamouring for attention, invisibility is not an option. It took me time to understand that sharing my work is not an act of self-indulgence; it is an act of respect toward my craft. It is not hubris to present our work to the world; it is our responsibility. To my fellow writers and artists, I offer this perspective: showcasing our work is not something we do solely for ourselves. It's a way of expressing gratitude for the skills we've been granted. It is an acknowledgement of the universe's generosity and an effort to give back by letting our words reach those who might find meaning and inspiration in them. Let's face it: the literary world

is saturated. Thousands of books are published every single day, each jostling for space in an overcrowded marketplace. Amid this din, how can anyone possibly stumble upon a book unless it's brought to their notice? By showcasing our work, we're not seeking undue attention; we're simply ensuring that our creation has a chance to be seen and appreciated. Once upon a time, good writing was the golden ticket for a writer. Today, social media has taken on the role with unparalleled reach and immediacy. While humility is an admirable trait, excessive shyness can hinder the reach of our work. Imagine a painter hiding their masterpiece in an attic or a singer performing only in an empty room. Writing, like any art, is meant for sharing. When we shy away from showcasing our creations, we deny our craft the audience it deserves. We owe it to ourselves and our readers to overcome this reluctance and step forward. By sharing our work, we're saying, "Thank you for this talent. Here is what I've made of it." It's not about vanity; it's about paying homage to the

creative force within us. Writing can often feel like a solitary pursuit, but it doesn't have to be. Social media offers us a unique opportunity to find our tribe — fellow writers, readers, and supporters who understand and appreciate our journey. These connections not only amplify our reach but also provide encouragement, feedback, and camaraderie that enrich our creative process. There's a lingering misconception that marketing diminishes the purity of art. But let's reframe this: promoting our work is not about shouting louder than everyone else; it's about ensuring that our voice is heard. It's about creating a bridge between us and our readers, a pathway for our stories to travel and touch lives. It's an act of service — to our art and to those it might inspire. So let us set aside our hesitations and embrace the stage that the digital age has offered us. In doing so, we ensure that our words, our art, and our essence leave a lasting impact on the world. (The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai; views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

LEARNING MUST GO ON

Learning opens the doors of possibilities, if it is stopped we are closing that door and impeding our own growth



SHAINY SHARMA

Learning is an essential and lifelong process. It is a cornerstone of human growth and evolution. However, beyond the mechanics of acquiring knowledge lies the nuanced art of learning - an approach that emphasises curiosity, creativity, adaptability and a passion for discovery.

Curiosity - the word says by itself is the fuel for lifelong learning. At its core, the art of learning involves more than the accumulation of facts and skills. It is a dynamic process that integrates intellectual, emotional and experiential dimensions. Learning becomes artful when it is purposeful, joyful and deeply connected to an individual's values and aspirations.

Unlike a rigid, standardised approach, the art of learning recognises that everyone has unique strengths, interests and ways of understanding the world. It encourages learners to embrace their individuality, explore diverse perspectives and find meaning in the learning process for knowledge doesn't only come from formal education or reading books rather it comes from life, conversations, experiences and unexpected encounters.

Individuals should stay open to new perspectives, whether from different cultures, professions or age groups. A growth mindset, as popularised by Carol Dweck, is the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work which contrasts with a fixed mindset that assumes that the abilities are static.

With a growth mindset, setbacks are often seen as learning opportunities rather than failures while challenges are embraced as part



of the learning process. No matter how much one knows, there's always room to grow. Staying humble, and being open to feedback, criticism and constructive input from others can help an individual improve and refine their understanding. Another important factor that enhances the art of learning is the art of passion. Learners who pursue subjects that resonate with their interests, enter a state of flow, where effort feels effortless, and the process becomes intrinsically rewarding.

Passion sustains motivation and fosters deeper engagement, leading to mastery. Surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals who prioritise learning, engaging in discussions, attending workshops or collaborating on projects challenges an individual to learn and grow.

There is no denying that the most brilliant minds ask questions that others may take for granted. One must cultivate a habit of asking 'Why' and 'How' and not just about abstract ideas but in everyday situations too for these questions push the boundaries of one's thinking and can lead to deeper insights. It is always when one embraces learning as a lifelong practice, that can one open oneself to a world of possibilities, ideas and opportunities for personal as well as professional transformation.

Understanding learning as art transforms it from a mundane task into a profound journey of self-exploration and mastery for developing a passion for learning that will never cease to grow.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Freebies: A winning strategy or economic pitfall?



UTTAM GUPTA

The growing trend of offering freebies in elections raises significant concerns about financial sustainability, governance and its impact on voters' mindset

A major factor contributing to the success of the respective political party in the just concluded elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand was freebies - an acronym for "something given free of charge" - particularly those targeted at women. In Maharashtra, the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance launched the Ladki Bahin cash benefit scheme that offered Rs 1,500 a month to every woman with a family income of less than Rs 2,50,000 annually, in the age bracket of 21 to 65 years.

The amount was subsequently increased to Rs 2,500 per month. In Jharkhand, under Mukhyamantri Maiyan Samman Yojna (MMSY) Hemant Soren's JMM-Congress-RJD government had initially promised to give Rs 1000 per month to all women in the age group 18-25 years. The amount was later increased to Rs 2500 per month.

The domineering role of freebies in winning elections is visible in almost every State Assembly election held since 2020 when former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal came up with this brand of politics followed by Punjab in 2022 where the Aam Aadmi Party or AAP promised depositing Rs 1000 per month in the account of every woman aged 18 or above. In Karnataka elections held in early 2023, Congress had promised five guarantees including the much trumpeted Gruha Lakshmi under which every woman head of a house gets Rs 2000 a month. In elections held later in 2023, in Madhya Pradesh, BJP promised Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli Behna Yojana; the amount to be gradually hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'.

In Odisha, under the Subhadra Yojana, the BJP gives eligible women Rs 10,000 per year, in two instalments of Rs 5,000 each. In future elections, expect all parties to offer such freebies. Already, in the budget for 2024-25, Delhi finance minister Atishi announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the AAP government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women above the age of 18 in the national capital. Now, Arvind Kejriwal has announced six Revdis (another name for freebies) including free power, free water, free education, free healthcare and pilgrimage for the elderly. Freebies win elections but these lead to a host of negative outcomes. The most damaging is the abetment to corruption.

The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognised policy or custom". The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognised policy nor is sanctioned in a court of law. It is blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely for gaining advantage in electoral politics. Such a corrupt practice is much worse than the one that involves



IN ODISHA, UNDER THE SUBHADRA YOJANA, THE BJP GIVES ELIGIBLE WOMEN RS 10,000 PER YEAR, IN TWO INSTALMENTS OF RS 5,000 EACH. IN FUTURE ELECTIONS, EXPECT ALL PARTIES TO OFFER SUCH FREEBIES

an individual candidate distributing cash using his own money to garner votes. Second, unlike 'normal' budget expenses which are planned and backed by well-orchestrated efforts to garner revenue, additional financial liabilities imposed by the freebies promised in the election manifesto affect the budgetary position of the State in a totally 'uncontrolled' and 'unplanned' manner. There being no corresponding revenue generation against this liability (this being unplanned), this will be at the cost of slashing other essential expenditures including development. Alternatively, this will result in additional borrowings and the resultant increase in debt to an unsustainable level. In Punjab, the freebies promised by AAP led to an additional expenditure of about Rs 20,000 crore per annum. Unable to foot the bill from its budget, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had to approach the Central government to help it raise around Rs 50,000 crore. In Delhi, giving Rs 1000 per month or Rs 12,000 annually to each woman above 18 years for a total of 6.7 million women would cost the exchequer Rs 8000 crore per annum. Already, the State government faces a fiscal deficit or FD - excess of total expenditure over total revenue - of Rs 18,000 crore during 2024-25 which is 80 per cent higher than the FD for 2023-24 at Rs 10,000 crore. This is despite a steep reduction of over 30 per cent in capital expenditure. The situation has come to

such a pass that CM Atishi has recently forwarded a request to the Centre seeking a loan of Rs 10,000 crore from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). In Karnataka, the five guarantees have punched a hole of over Rs 60,000 crore a year in the State budget leading to a doubling of its FD to over Rs 122,500 crore. The precariousness of the situation can be seen from a comment by the Deputy CM 'The government has no money to give to the MLAs for carrying out development work; courtesy the poll guarantees'. In MP, at the current rate of Rs 1250 per month to 12.5 million beneficiaries, the Ladli Behna Yojana costs the state exchequer about Rs 18,750 crore per annum. This will go up to Rs 45,000 crore per annum as the quantum of assistance eventually goes up to Rs 3,000 per month. In Maharashtra, the Ladki Bahin Scheme will dent the State exchequer by Rs 46,000 crore annually. Other states Jharkhand, Odisha etc are also feeling the pricks of promised freebies. Third, unlike a normal welfare scheme which has a sunset date, the freebies offered by winning parties have none. So, these will continue to be given 'eternally' - no matter which party rules - making perpetual holes in State budgets. Fourth, the money for freebies comes from taxpayers' pockets ('future' tax payers in case, the government borrows). When they know that taxes are used to give doles to all and sundry, it

may even trigger non-compliance amongst them. Finally, assured of financial help to meet most of their basic needs 'perpetually', the freebies cult is changing the mindset of people in a way that makes them complacent towards work. This undermines the very foundation of economic growth. Left to themselves, political parties will never shun freebies. Can the Supreme Court (SC) force them? In an order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs the Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors in July 2013, the SC had observed that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people. "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree." Yet, it held "The promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as 'corrupt practice' under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state Assembly". The SC hasn't changed its stance even as on January 25, 2022, hearing a PIL on 'freebies', it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue, budget for freebies is going above the regular Budget. This disturbs the level playing field". These exhortations won't help. It should direct the government to enact a law on curbing freebies. *(The writer is a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)*

Political stability: A catalyst for India's renewable energy ambitions

India is poised to play a pivotal role in the global transition to sustainable energy but it must have political will to sustain the momentum

Domestic political stability or lack of it can have a considerable impact on the development of renewable energy projects and investment in the sector. A stable government is always considered as a growth enabler whereas an unstable political landscape can derail the growth engine. With political stability, India now India forges ahead towards ambitious renewable energy ambitions. Recently, the issues surrounding climate financing and global emissions were once again at the forefront of the 29th Conference of Parties (COP29) in Baku. The Indian government was in a strong position to challenge developed nations on climate change, carbon emissions, and green energy investment



ARIF AGA

because of political stability and notable advancements in renewable energy generation. For any nation, socio-economic development depends on political stability which plays a role of catalyst. Especially for developing countries like India, where renewable energy projects demand huge investments, a stable government is much

needed. Political stability provides the long-term vision and policy continuity needed for large-scale renewable projects with long gestation periods. Political stability provides consistent policy and regulatory frameworks that favour and incentivize both domestic and international stakeholders to invest without fear of abrupt policy changes. With a decadal political stability and policy push, India has made significant progress and achieved a milestone of 200 gigawatts (GW) in non-fossil fuel capacity. However, it still faces gaps to meet the ambitious targets it has set for 2030: 319 GW in solar power and 110 GW in wind energy. As of October 2024, India's installed solar capacity stands at only 90.76 GW, and wind

capacity at 47.36 GW, highlighting a gap of over 200 GW that must be addressed within the next six years. Meeting these targets requires political stability to ensure consistent policies, reliable financing, and sustained foreign investments to fuel India's renewable ambitions. Since the Modi government took office in 2014, India introduced ambitious targets and policies aimed at expanding renewable energy capacity. Key initiatives include the National Solar Mission, which set the stage for India's solar capacity expansion, and the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhayan (PM-KUSUM), promoting solar energy adoption in rural areas. The Production Linked Incentive



(PLI) Scheme incentivized domestic manufacturing of solar panels and batteries, reducing reliance on imports and creating jobs. Additionally, the government's commitment to phasing down coal and setting a target of 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 reflects a strategic shift towards a sustainable energy mix, reinforcing investor confidence and

cementing India's role in the global renewable energy transition. Investors' confidence is the key. A stable government can attract foreign investments by creating a transparent, reliable business environment with minimal bureaucratic red tape. In contrast, political instability or uncertainty can lead to a fluctuating exchange rate, deter foreign direct investment (FDI), and increase project costs.

India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and renewable energy targets could be delayed if there are abrupt shifts in political agendas. Delays or changes in policy can lead to project uncertainty, forcing investors to reassess risks and potentially redirect funds to more stable markets. Indian states' thrust on renewable energy needs to be in sync with the Centre's policies and priorities. States with stable governments and favourable renewable policies attract more investments, while politically volatile states face challenges in attracting projects due to higher risks. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra are leading

states in the Renewable Energy sector and these states made significant progress with policy consistency. With political stability at national and state levels, India is expected to close the gap in its renewable energy targets soon and contribute meaningfully to global climate goals. Against the backdrop of the COP29 meeting and with political stability, further policy reforms and a robust regulatory framework would push both domestic and foreign investments in the sector. Hopefully, the country is all set to achieve its renewable energy ambitions and contribute to the global effort against climate change. *(The writer is director SgurrEnergy India; views are personal)*

Toll rises to 130 in Pak sectarian violence

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

The death toll from sectarian violence in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province surged to 130, with at least six people killed and eight injured on Sunday, as clashes in the volatile Kurram district continued for the eleventh consecutive day.

The clashes between Alizai and Bagan tribes in the district started on November 22, after an attack on a convoy of passenger vans near Parachinar in which 47 people were killed a day earlier. Several passengers who had sustained grave injuries succumbed later, raising the toll in the convoy killing to 57.

Police said the situation remained tense, and violence persists despite a recent ceasefire agreement between the Sunni and Shia groups. The six new deaths reported on

Sunday brought the death toll to 130, while the total number of injured rose to 186 after eight fresh injuries were reported. The 10-day truce brokered last week has been rendered ineffective by intermittent violence, which shows no signs of abating.

A high-powered delegation, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Secretary Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry and IGP Akhtar Hayat Gandapur, had also negotiated a ceasefire last weekend, but violence resumed shortly afterwards.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi earlier planned to dispatch members of the grand peace jirga (council of tribal leaders) from Kohat division to Kurram for engaging with leaders from both warring factions to negotiate peace.

Addressing a gathering of political leaders and tribal elders in Kohat on Sunday, he called for

strict action with public cooperation to make the region weapon-free through joint operations.

He said he was ready to go to Kurram and stay there for as many days as the jirga suggested to ensure peace in the region. "No other country or province will resolve our issues. We must take responsibility for improving the situation ourselves," he said.

Kundi announced an All-Parties Conference (APC) for peace and the province's rights and invited Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur to join it. The governor stressed the role of religious scholars in promoting peace, urging them to focus on unity.

Several other leaders addressed the gathering, putting aside their ideological differences on other issues.

The continued violence forced the closure of the main Peshawar-Parachinar Road for

travel, and commuting at the Pak-Afghan Kharachi border has also been suspended. The closure of the main arteries has created a scarcity of oil, food commodities and medicines in the region.

The Kurram region is also experiencing a communication blackout, with mobile and internet services suspended and educational institutions closed.

Police and other security forces personnel had been deployed in various parts of Lower Kurram, said Deputy Commissioner Javed Ullah Mehsud, adding that all-out efforts will be made for a truce in other areas today as well.

"We are hopeful for progress on a ceasefire and reopening of transport routes," he stated. Previous efforts to mediate peace, including a seven-day truce brokered by provincial officials in November have failed to hold.

After Aleppo, Syrian insurgents advance to nearby province

AP ■ BEIRUT

Thousands of Syrian insurgents took over most of Aleppo on Saturday, establishing positions in the country's largest city and controlling its airport before expanding their shock offensive to a nearby province. They faced little to no resistance from government troops, according to fighters and activists.

A war monitor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the insurgents led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham seized control of Aleppo International airport, the first international airport to be controlled by insurgents. The fighters claimed they seized the airport and posted pictures from there. Thousands of fighters also moved on, facing almost no opposition from government forces, to seize towns and villages in northern Hama, a province where they had a presence before being expelled by government troops in 2016. They claimed Saturday evening to have entered the city of Hama.

The insurgents, led by the Salafi jihadi group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and including Turkey-backed fighters, launched their shock offensive on Wednesday. They first staged a two-pronged attack in Aleppo and the Idlib countryside, entering Aleppo two days later and securing a strategic town that lies on the highway that links Syria's largest city to the capital and the coast.

By Saturday evening, they seized at least four towns in the central Hama province and claimed to have entered the provincial capital. The insurgents staged an attempt to reclaim areas they controlled in Hama in 2017 but failed.

The swift and surprise offensive is a huge embarrassment for Syria's President Bashar Assad and raises questions about his armed forces' preparedness. The insurgent offensive launched from their stronghold in the country's northwest appeared to have been planned for years. It also comes at a time when Assad's allies were preoccupied with their own conflicts.

In his first public comments since the start of the offensive, released by the state news agency Saturday evening, Assad said Syria will continue to "defend its stability and territorial integrity against terrorists and their supporters." He added that Syria is able to defeat them no matter how much their attacks intensify.

Turkey, a main backer of Syrian opposition groups, said its diplomatic efforts had failed to stop government attacks on opposition-held areas in recent weeks, which were in violation of a de-escalation agreement sponsored by Russia, Iran and Ankara. Turkish security officials said a limited offensive by the rebels was planned to stop government attacks and allow civilians to return, but the offensive expanded as Syrian government forces began to retreat from their positions.

Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has backed Syrian government forces since 2015, have been preoccupied with their own battles at home. A ceasefire in Hezbollah's two-month war with Israel took effect Wednesday, the same day that Syrian opposition factions announced their offensive. Israel has also escalated its attacks against Hezbollah and Iran-linked targets in Syria during the last 70 days.

Insurgents raise flags over the Aleppo citadel. Speaking from the heart of the city in Saadallah Aljabri square, opposition fighter Mohammad Al Abdo said it was his first time back in Aleppo in 13



Syria opposition fighters stand atop a captured Syrian army tank in the town of Maarat al-Numan, southwest from Aleppo, Syria. Thousands of Syrian insurgents have fanned out inside Syria's largest city Aleppo a day after storming it with little resistance from government troops.

Preparing a counterattack: Syria's armed forces said in a statement Saturday that to absorb the large attack on Aleppo and save lives, it redeployed troops and equipment and was preparing a counter-attack. The statement acknowledged that insurgents entered large parts of the city but said they have not established bases or checkpoints. Later on Saturday, the armed forces sought to dispel what it said were lies in reference to reports about its forces retreating or defecting, saying the general command was carrying out its duties in "combatting terrorist organizations."

The return of the insurgents to Aleppo was their first since 2016, following a grueling military

campaign in which Assad's forces were backed by Russia, Iran and its allied groups. The 2016 battle for Aleppo was a turning point in the war between Syrian government forces and rebel fighters after 2011 protests against Assad's rule turned into an all-out war. After appearing to be losing control of the country to the rebels, the Aleppo battle secured Assad's hold on strategic areas of Syria, with opposition factions and their foreign backers controlling areas on the periphery.

The lightning offensive threatened to reignite the country's civil war, which had been large-

ly in a stalemate for years. Late on Friday, witnesses said two airstrikes hit the edge of Aleppo city, targeting insurgent reinforcements and falling near residential areas. The Observatory said 20 fighters were killed.

Insurgents were filmed outside police headquarters, in the city center, and outside the Aleppo citadel, the medieval palace in the old city center, and one of the largest in the world. They tore down posters of Assad, stepping on some and burning others. The push into Aleppo followed weeks of simmering low-level violence, including government attacks on opposition-held areas.

The offensive came as Iran-linked groups, primarily

Former foreign minister Qureshi calls for national reconciliation in Pakistan

PTI ■ LAHORE

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party's deputy leader, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, has advocated for national reconciliation and national consensus to achieve political stability in the cash-strapped country amid tensions between his party and the ruling coalition.

Qureshi, the two-time former foreign minister, also demanded a meeting with party founder Imran Khan, who is lodged in Adiala Jail, so that he could present his point of view towards national reconciliation and national consensus, Dawn newspaper reported.

Both Khan and Qureshi are currently detained in jail. Qureshi, 68, was arrested in August last year under the Official Secrets Act for violating the secrecy of the official cable sent by the Pakistani embassy in the US to the foreign office when he was the foreign minister. Pakistan's Supreme Court ordered his

release from jail. However, he was re-arrested in December 2023 in another case. Talking to the media after his appearance in an anti-terrorism court in Lahore on Saturday, Qureshi hoped that politically astute people in all parties would play a role in a national dialogue since a ban on his party would only complicate the situation.

The remarks by the vice chairman of PTI came amid reports that the government had purportedly been deliberating a ban on the party and a governor's rule in the PTI-run Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province following violent clashes in Islamabad between security personnel and Imran Khan's supporters last week demanding his release.

Khan's party members crossed barricades and attempted to reach high-security D-Chowk in Islamabad, where a midnight crackdown resulted in four deaths and over 50 injuries. Qureshi cautioned that crush-

ing his party would not be in the interest of Pakistan and that the purported plan to impose the governor's rule in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was sheer absurdity.

He said political leadership had no idea about the consequences of such a decision. Qureshi said the federal government's consideration to impose the governor's rule in KP would be tantamount to desecrating the will of the people that gave a "two-thirds majority" to his party.

"I do hope that the politically savvy people in the PML-N will oppose the idea of imposing the governor's rule and warn their leadership that it will be a political and historical blunder," Qureshi said.

Referring to the tabling of a resolution in the Punjab Assembly seeking to ban his party, Qureshi thanked President Asif Ali Zardari's Pakistan People's Party for opposing the resolution. He also thanked different political

parties, including the JUI-F, the Jamaat-i-Islami, and the Balochistan National Party (BNP-Mengal) for opposing a similar resolution in the Balochistan Assembly.

Qureshi reiterated that imposing the governor's rule and proscribing PTI would hurt the federation.

"Can the government attain economic stability without political stability or achieve IMF (funding)," he asked while addressing Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb.

"You can attain stability through authoritarian rule but it will not be sustainable. You can get desired results through election engineering but will fail to get legitimacy," Qureshi cautioned the people at the helm of affairs.

Martin Raiser, the World Bank's Regional Vice-President for South Asia, recently said that Pakistan's economy is stuck in a low-growth trap with poor human development outcomes and increasing poverty.

NY City paying \$220m to Pak-owned hotel to house illegal immigrants

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The City of New York pays USD220 million to rent a hotel owned by the Government of Pakistan to house illegal immigrants, a report claimed on Saturday. Vivek Ramaswamy described the purported revelation as "Nuts."

"A taxpayer-funded hotel for illegal migrants is owned by the Pakistani government which means NYC taxpayers are effectively paying a foreign government to house illegals in our own country. This is nuts," Ramaswamy, a Republican, said in a social media post.

Ramaswamy along with Tesla Owner Elon Musk have been tasked by President-elect Donald Trump to improve government efficiency and remove wasteful expenditure under a Department of Government Efficiency built for the purpose.

The Indian American let out his outburst after author John LeFevre reported about it on X. "The city of New York pays \$220 million to rent the entire Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan to house illegal migrants," he said. The Roosevelt Hotel is owned by Pakistan International Airlines, a Pakistani government-owned airline.

"The hotel is owned by the government of Pakistan, and the deal was part of a \$1.1 billion IMF bailout package to help Pakistan avoid defaulting on their international debt," LeFevre said. "Prior to this sweetheart deal, the hotel had been closed since 2020, having long-struggled with occupancy and in dire need of renovation," he wrote.

Ireland's incumbent parties likely to hang on to power

AP ■ DUBLIN

Ireland's two long-dominant centre-right parties looked likely to form a new government as results came in from a fractured national election, though with a reduced vote share and complex coalition negotiations ahead.

As ballot-counting continued on Sunday, incumbent governing parties Fine Gael and Fianna Fail and left-of-centre opposition Sinn Fein were jostling to see which would win the most seats in the 174-seat Dail, the lower house of Ireland's parliament.

Sinn Fein, which aims to reunify the Republic of Ireland with the UK territory of Northern Ireland, lacks a clear path to power because the other two parties say they won't work with it, partly because of its historic ties with the Irish Republican Army during three decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

Outgoing Prime Minister Simon Harris of Fine Gael, Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin and Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald all won reelection to their parliamentary seats in results announced Saturday.

Ireland uses a complex system of proportional representation in which each of the country's 43 constituencies elects several lawmakers and voters rank

candidates in order of preference. As a result, it can take days for full results to be known.

"The people of Ireland have now spoken," Harris said. "We now have to work out exactly what they have said, and that is going to take a little bit of time."

Partial results from Friday's election showed electors spreading their votes widely among the big three, several smaller parties and an assortment of independent candidates, and any coalition will likely involve smaller parties or independents. The cost of living — especially Ireland's acute housing crisis — was a dominant topic in the three-week campaign, alongside immigration, which has become an emotive and challenging issue in a country of 5.4 million people long defined by emigration. If early results are borne out, Ireland may buck the global trend of incumbents being ousted by disgruntled voters after years of pandemic, international instability and cost-of-living pressures.

The outgoing government was led by the two parties that have dominated Irish politics for the past century. Fine Gael and Fianna Fail have similar policies, but are longtime rivals with origins on opposing sides of Ireland's 1920s civil war. After the 2020 election ended in a virtual dead heat, they formed a coalition.



A 42-meter-high candle which is an illuminated medieval tower shines in the historic city centre of Schlitz, Germany.

Plastic treaty talks draw to close with production limits still under debate

AP ■ BUSAN (SOUTH KOREA)

Negotiations on a treaty to end plastic pollution are drawing to a close Sunday as nations continue debating whether part of that should be putting limits on plastic production.

Negotiators spent all of Saturday trying to reach agreement behind closed doors, but the latest draft of the treaty, released Sunday afternoon, leaves the question to be settled in open session. It includes multiple options for several key sections.

For the most contentious of those — the proposal to limit

production — that includes a compromise that would set a target at a later conference and an option to drop the idea altogether. Every year, the world produces more than 400 million tons of new plastic. Plastic production could climb about 70 per cent by 2040 without policy changes.

The draft's options also include possible language to ban some plastic products that are single-use or contain toxic chemicals, as well as less stringent options. It would also require parties to the treaty to improve the design of plastic products so they don't release microplastics and can be recycled.

Countries could adopt these provisions or make changes when they meet later Sunday. Delegates from some countries say the new draft is too weak. Sam Adu-Kumi, lead negotiator for Ghana, said the draft is full of voluntary measures that won't end plastic pollution but the world needs a treaty that imposes obligations on all parties.

No treaty at all would be better than a weak one, Adu-Kumi added. Ghana's communities, bodies of water, drains and farmlands are choked with plastics, and dumping sites full of plastics are always on fire, he said.

"We are here for a legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution," he said in an interview. "So if we are here and we are getting a treaty that does not address the issues head on, then where are we heading towards? We are not getting anything that will solve the issue. We want a treaty that will be able to solve it. Otherwise we will go without it and come and fight another time."

At a news conference earlier in the day, Panama and Fiji said that if other nations won't join them in standing up for the ambition this treaty requires, they should "get out" of their way.

They were joined by representatives from Mexico, France, Rwanda and the European Union, who together said they would do everything possible in the final hours to push a treaty forward that will solve the crisis.

"We are already doing waste management efforts back home," said Sivadendra Michael, Fiji's secretary for the environment and climate change. "This treaty has to be bigger than all of us. It's about saving this planet. It's about saving humanity. And so that's why we are here, still having hope, pushing. And we will push right until the end, until the time we're supposed

to leave Busan." A growing number of countries said in Busan that they want to address the total amount of plastic produced on Earth. A senior member of the US delegation told The Associated Press on Saturday that the country supports having an article in the treaty that limits the world's supply of plastic.

But for some plastic-producing and oil and gas countries, that crosses a red line. They want a treaty that focuses on better management of plastic waste and recycling. Currently, for any proposal to make it into the treaty, every nation must agree to it. India, Saudi Arabia and

others have insisted that should remain the case. Some countries have sought to change the process so decisions can be made with a vote if consensus can't be reached, both during the negotiations and at future meetings about the treaty. But the draft doesn't include that as an option.

That's a huge omission because consensus decision-making has paralyzed the talks, said Erin Simon, an expert on plastics and packaging at the World Wildlife Fund.

"Not having a threat of a vote means each country has a veto card," she said. "They have no incentive to come up with a

plan and we've seen that time and time again in these negotiations." Rwanda's lead negotiator, Juliet Kabera, said there is still time to find common ground, but her country will only accept a treaty that has the strength, ambition and accountability to solve the crisis.

Ed Shepherd, representing the Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty, attended the news conference in support. The coalition includes about 270 businesses and financial institutions. He said businesses want global rules, and it's "clear we need to use less plastic."



Skincare in Winter



USE CALMING INGREDIENTS: When the skin gets too dry from cold winds and low humidity of the weather, prefer the application of ingredients that soothes the skin. These include *niacinamide, aloe vera, chamomile extract* etc. When the skin gets dehydrated and dry, it also gets extra sensitive and gets irritated easily. For dealing with this, avoid any product that has harsh chemicals or fragrances in



it or is alcohol based.

VISIT A WELL-QUALIFIED AND TRAINED DERMATOLOGIST: For everlasting hydrated skin in winters, you need a specialised dermatologist consultant who can well evaluate your skin needs and suggest tailored skincare regime as per your skin type and requirements. For extremely dry skin, your dermat may recommend hydrating facial treatments that infuse moisture into the deeper layers of the skin and is not just limited to the surface. These include *Hydra Facials, Collagen-boosting facials, oxygen infusion therapy* etc. The dry and dehydrated skin, due to loss of its protective barrier in winters, can be well dealt with proper management. Combat the winter skin challenges by using gentle cleansers, rich moisturizers, daily sunscreen application and adequate hydration to get a supple skin.

— The author is a MBBS, MD, Dermatologist and Founder of Akiya Aesthetics



PROTECTIVE SKINCARE MEASURES CAN HELP YOU TACKLE DRYNESS, DULLNESS, AND PREMATURE AGEING IN WINTERS, SAYS RUPIKA SINGH

With the dropping temperature and humidity in winter, the skin undergoes changes too and becomes dry and dull. Even it can have some sign of premature aging if not well cared for and so it deserves utmost attention. Naturally, the skin's sebum production lowers in winters, which is further exponentially increased by low humidity levels and chilly dry air.

SKINCARE TIPS FOR WINTER SEASON



BODY'S HYDRATION INSIDE OUT: When the weather outside is very chilly and the humidity levels drop, skin health gets affected as its protective barrier gets damaged and it loses its moisture. For retaining the skin's hydration, keep it hydrated both inside and out. Aim for at least 8-10 glasses of water each day to keep it glowy and supple. And to protect the skin from hot air indoors, probably due to the usage of heat systems, use a HEPA filter humidifier that keeps the surrounding air moist.

HYDRATING MOISTURIZER: Moisturizer functions to keep the skin's moisture locked in to refrain it from getting dry. Winters make the skin more prone to dryness, so prefer a rich moisturizer that has occlusive agents namely petrolatum, dimethicone or lanolin. *Shea Butter* or *hyaluronic acid* enriched creams also work wonders.



NOURISHING CLEANSER: Winter season needs proper cleansing to remove dirt, dust and other environmental

pollutants from the skin but one thing that needs to be taken care of is to prevent the skin from getting dry. So for this purpose, use a cleanser that is gentle and devoid of any strong chemicals that can be damaging to the skin's protective barrier. Preferably use cleansers enriched with hydrating compounds such as *glycerin, hyaluronic acid, ceramides* etc.

GENTLE EXFOLIATION: Skin needs exfoliation for maintaining its suppleness and radiance. This process removes the dead skin cells and enhances cell turnover to grow new well nourished cells. But in winters, exfoliation should be



limited to once a week and no harsh chemical agents should be used. Since chemical exfoliants are gentler on the skin than physical ones, prefer chemical exfoliants namely *alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs)* and *beta hydroxy acids (BHAs)*.

NEVER SKIP SUNSCREEN: Seemingly meaningless, winter days also necessitate the need of sunscreen as no matter the day may be cloudy, the harmful UV rays of the sun can penetrate through the clouds and reach your skin. Go for a broad spectrum sunscreen that has a minimum SPF of 30.



AVOCADO: NUTRITIOUS WINTER DELIGHT

By KAVITA DEVGAN

As the chill of winter sets in, our taste buds crave indulgent and hearty flavours to match the cozy season. Amidst the festive feasts and culinary celebrations, there's often a compromise on health. What if we tell you that there's a way to enjoy the richness of winter feasts without sacrificing nutrition. Enter the versatile and nutrient-packed *avocado*—a super food that can elevate your winter recipes while supporting your health. Known for its creamy texture and subtle flavour, the avocado is more than just a trendy ingredient. It's a powerhouse of essential nutrients, offering heart-healthy monounsaturated fats that help regulate cholesterol levels and promote cardiovascular health. Rich in vitamins such as E, C, B6, and minerals like potassium, avocados are a fantastic addition to a winter diet, ensuring you stay energised and nourished.



dullness are common. The fruit's high content of healthy fats and antioxidants like vitamin E ensures your skin stays hydrated and glowing despite the harsh weather.

WAYS TO USE AVOCADOS IN WINTER FEASTS

HEARTY AVOCADO SOUPS: Start your meal with a creamy avocado soup. Blend ripe avocados with warm vegetable stock, garlic, and a dash of cream for a comforting appetizer. For a twist, add roasted cumin or smoked paprika to infuse depth and warmth into your bowl.

AVOCADO-STUFFED BAKES: Use avocados as a stuffing base for bell peppers or mushrooms. Mix the avocado with quinoa, feta cheese, and herbs, and bake until golden. This dish is both filling and packed with nutrients, making it perfect for a cozy winter dinner.

AVOCADO IN DESSERTS:



Avocados aren't limited to savoury dishes. Their creamy consistency makes them an excellent ingredient for desserts. Try an avocado chocolate mousse by blending avocados with cocoa powder, honey, and a splash of vanilla. The result will be a decadent dessert that's guilt-free and loaded with healthy fats.

AVOCADO IN WINTER SALADS: Winter salads don't have to be boring. Toss avocado chunks with roasted root vegetables, nuts, and a zesty dressing of olive oil and lemon for a nutritious side dish that compliments any meal.

AVOCADO TOAST WITH A WINTER TWIST: Take your classic avocado toast to the next level by adding seasonal toppings like sautéed mushrooms, pomegranate seeds, or even spiced roasted nuts.

A Super food for the Festive Table—This winter, let avocados be the star of your festive table. They not only add a touch of elegance but also ensure you strike a balance between indulgence and health. Whether you're preparing a lavish dinner or a cozy brunch, avocados can seamlessly blend into your recipes, offering both flavour and nutrition.

The Green Ally for Your Wellness—The World Avocado Organisation champions the avocado as a perfect partner for a healthy lifestyle. By incorporating it into your winter menu, you're embracing a super food that caters to taste and well-being. This winter, let the humble avocado transform your culinary experience, proving that eating healthy doesn't mean compromising on flavour or festivity.

— The author is a nutritionist and has used resources from the World Avocado Organisation

17TH EDITION OF PHARMA EXPO CONCLUDES



The 17th edition of CPHI & PMEC India, organised by Informa Markets in India took place at the India Expo Centre, Greater Noida, Delhi-NCR. Over 50,000 global industry professionals, including key decision-makers, gathered to explore new partnerships and growth opportunities. The expo featured forward-thinking discussions on sustainability, digital transformation, and the future of pharma, with a special focus on empowering women in the industry. Photo: PNS



Sarvodaya Hospital, Faridabad achieved medical breakthrough by treating a 5-month-old baby for congenital hearing impairment making him the youngest in India to undergo a cochlear implant surgery. Photo: PNS

Sindhu, Lakshya clinch singles titles

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Top seeded Indians P V Sindhu and Lakshya Sen showcased their class and dominance to clinch the women's and men's singles titles, respectively, at the Syed Modi International badminton tournament here on Sunday.

Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist, ended her long title drought by outplaying China's world number 119 Wu Luo Yu 21-14, 21-16 to lift the trophy for the third time, having previously triumphed in 2017 and 2022. In the men's singles final, Lakshya, a 2021 World Championships bronze medallist, was at his dominant best as he demolished Singapore's Jia Heng Jason Teh 21-6, 21-7 in the title clash, displaying complete command over the match.

Sindhu's victory marks her return to the top of the podium after over two years, with her last title win coming at the Singapore Open in July 2022. The world number 18 also reached the finals of the Malaysia Masters Super 500 earlier this year.

Lakshya's win comes as a balm after a disappointing loss in the bronze-medal playoff at the Paris Olympics. The victory will undoubtedly boost his confidence ahead of the new season.

Indian badminton had more to celebrate on the day as the women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand clinched their maiden Super 300 title with a convincing 21-18, 21-11 win over China's Bao Li Jing and Li Qian.

The result made Treesa and Gayatri the first Indian women's doubles team to win the title at this tournament. The Commonwealth Games bronze medallists, who had



finished runners-up in 2022, went one step further this year with their solid performance.

In the men's doubles final, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K put up a valiant fight before going down 14-21, 21-19, 17-21 to China's Huang Di and Liu Yang in a marathon 71-minute clash.

Meanwhile, in the mixed doubles final, fifth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila started strong but couldn't sustain their momentum, losing 21-18, 14-21, 8-21 to Thailand's sixth-seeded pair of Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran.

Sindhu vs Wu

Sindhu was up 8-5 in the opening game and despite some resistance from Wu, the Indian managed to secure a two-point lead at 11-9. Sindhu changed gears after the break, surging to 15-10 and then kept a firm grip on the rallies to comfortably close out the opening game.

Sindhu opened strongly, racing to a 3-0 lead, but Wu quickly levelled the score and matched the Indian point-for-point till 10-10. The Chinese left-hander troubled Sindhu with precise drops, earning a slender 11-10 lead at the break.

After resumption, Sindhu shifted gears, drawing errors from Wu and regaining control with a 14-11 lead courtesy of a sharp straight smash. A bodyline smash further extended her lead to 15-11, as Wu misjudged the length on several occasions.

Sindhu's disguised forehand return at a crucial juncture brought her closer to victory, earning her four match points. She sealed the title with a powerful smash, capping off a dominant performance.

Lakshya vs Jia

Lakshya, 23, was in a hurry to wrap up the proceedings, storming to a massive 8-0 lead early in the first game. Lakshya's fast-paced game left Teh struggling, with the Singaporean committing a series of unforced errors.

Two aggressive returns helped Teh claim a couple of points, but Lakshya quickly regained control, securing seven game points at the interval. The Indian then won nine of the next 10 points to wrap up the first game in quick time.

Lakshya maintained his relentless attack in the second game, racing to a commanding 10-1 lead at the mid-game interval. Teh, demoralized and unable to match Lakshya's pace and precision, found himself on the backfoot throughout.

The Indian extended his lead to 15-5, and even when Teh tried to mount a comeback with a flurry of strokes, Lakshya's impeccable defense and fitness shone through.

At 16-7, the Indian showcased his versatility, mixing powerful down-the-line smashes with cross-court net shots to reach 20-7. The match ended with Teh sending a shot long, handing Lakshya his first Syed Modi International title.

ICC: Jay Shah takes over as new chairman

PTI ■ DUBAI

Indian cricket administrator Jay Shah on Sunday took charge as the chairman of the International Cricket Council (ICC) with an immediate goal of ending the impasse surrounding the Champions Trophy and a broader vision of making cricket a commercially viable Olympic sport.

The 36-year-old Shah, who headlined the BCCI as its secretary for the last five years, is the fifth Indian and the youngest ever to head the global cricket body.

He was the unanimous choice of the ICC's Board of Directors and replaced New Zealand attorney Greg Barclay, who didn't wish to continue for a third consecutive term.

Before Shah, businessman late Jagmohan Dalmiya, politician Sharad Pawar, lawyer Shashank Manohar and industrialist N Srinivasan have all headed the world cricket body.

Shah, the son of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, will have his task cut out as the



hosted by the Indian cricket board.

Now, as the head of the global body and with less than 100 days left for the tournament to begin, Shah will have to coordinate with both the PCB and his former colleagues at the BCCI for an "acceptable solution" in order to organise a hassle-free tournament.

India have already refused to travel to Pakistan as it hasn't received clearance from its government.

Shah didn't make any comment on the Champions Trophy while outlining his priorities for his term which included leveraging the sport's inclusion in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games as an opportunity and further accelerate the growth of the women's game.

"This is an exciting time for the sport as we prepare for the LA28 Olympic Games and work to make cricket more inclusive and engaging for fans worldwide," Shah said.

"We are at a critical juncture with the coexistence of multiple formats and the need to accelerate the growth of the women's game.

10-man Botafogo wins its first Copa Libertadores title

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Botafogo overcame playing with 10 men to win its first Copa Libertadores title after beating fellow Brazilian side Atletico Mineiro 3-1 in the final at Monumental de Nunez Stadium.

After just 30 seconds, midfielder Gregore, one of Botafogo's best players, hit the head of Fausto Vera with his foot and was given a straight red card on Saturday.

"It was so hard to have one less so early in a final. It was an unfortunate move," Botafogo defender Alexander Barboza said.

"But Gregore deserves this title as much as we do. We made history and that won't ever be erased."

Winger Luiz Henrique scored first in the 35th minute from close range, and was fouled for

the penalty shot converted by Alex Telles in the 44th.

Eduardo Vargas headed Mineiro's only goal in the 46th while Junior Santos, the top scorer in the Copa Libertadores with 10 goals, capped Botafogo's historic night with the third in injury time.

Brazil was assured of a sixth consecutive Copa Libertadores title and its 24th in history, just one less than Argentina.

It was also the third straight title for Rio de Janeiro clubs, after Fluminense in 2023 and Flamengo in 2022.

Botafogo, the last of the four big Rio clubs to win the Copa Libertadores, earned prize money of \$23 million and a spot in the Club World Cup in the United States next year.

Despite sensationally losing Gregore, Botafogo reset and Luiz Henrique scored the opener. Henrique surged on the right flank and crossed to Marlon Freitas, who took a shot that was deflected. Henrique was in the right place to strike through the legs of goalkeeper Ederson.

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TENDER CALL NOTICE NO: 26 /2024-25 DATED: 29.11.2024

Sealed Tenders are invited in single part bid basis from Vehicle Owners/ Travel Agencies/ individuals fulfilling the eligibility criteria as per the tender specification for the work as mentioned below.

Sl. No.	Description of Services	Cost of tender paper (Non-refundable) in Rs.	EMD in shape of DD/BC (Refundable) in Rs.	Period of availability of tender at OHPC website.	Last date & Time of receipt of Tender.	Date & Time of opening of bid.
01.	HIRING OF 01 (ONE) NUMBER OF (TUV 300 /BOLERO/SUMO GOLD/BERTIGA) VEHICLE WITH SINGLE DRIVER PROVISION FOR FOUR YEARS UNDER BHP, BALMELA.	Rs. 7080/- (Rupees Seven Thousand Eighty) only	Rs 22,300/-	04.12.2024 To 19.12.2024	11:00 Hrs of 19.12.2024	12:00 Hrs of 19.12.2024

For details of the tender documents, terms & conditions please visit our website www.ohpcld.com.
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1ST INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY CRICKET SERIES

2-5 December 2024

Organized Jointly By: &

India vs Australia

Venue: KIIT Cricket Stadium, Campus 13, Bhubaneswar

15TH KIIT INTERNATIONAL CHESS FESTIVAL - 2024

Organised by:

2-9 December, 2024

Venue: Viswanathan Anand International Chess Hall
KIIT, Bhubaneswar

CATEGORY 'A'
Open to All
2 - 9 Dec. 2024
Prize Money
Total **Rs 30,00,000/-**

CATEGORY 'B'
Below 1900
2 - 5 Dec. 2024
Prize Money
Total **Rs 15,00,000/-**

CATEGORY 'C'
Below 1700
6 - 9 Dec. 2024
Prize Money
Total **Rs 15,00,000/-**

HIGHLIGHTS

- Total 436 number of prizes - the highest in India.
- Prize fund of ₹60 Lakhs - the second-highest in the country and double last year's prize money.
- Players from 30+ countries are participating.
- 70+ International Title Holders expected to compete.
- A single festival hosting three international chess competitions simultaneously across A, B, and C categories - **1st time in India.**
- KIIT has produced 5+ Grand masters/ International Masters and 46 International Rated players to date.
- More than 1200 Participant expected to compete.
- Best Chess Venue named after legendary Chess Player Viswanathan Anand that hosted the 55th World Junior Chess Championship 2016 at KIIT University **first time in India.**
- The youngest player, aged 7, and the oldest player, aged 91, are participating in this Chess Festival

PRIZE MONEY
₹60 Lakhs

KIIT is only 27 years old as an institute (1997 - 2024) and 21 years old as a university

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