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SPARRING STALLS SANSAD AGAIN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Parliament continued to be a battle-field virtually for the political parties on eleventh consecutive day on Wednesday as both ruling and Opposition benches trade charges against each other blaming neither of them are allowing smooth functioning of the Winter Session. With a brief functioning of the Lok Sabha which passed a bill to amend Railway Laws, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) parties of the Treasury bench were at par with the Congress led Opposition INDIA Bloc in sloganeering in and out of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha causing disruptions in both the Houses which ultimately led to adjournment of the day. Congress-led INDIA Bloc and BJP soon after the adjournments held Presser to flag concerns over non functioning of the Winter Session. Parliament proceedings were washed out in the first week of the winter session starting November 25 due to protests by Opposition members demanding discussion on issues like the indictment of industrialist Gautam Adani in a United States court and Sambhal violence and since last week, the ruling BJP MPs have been raising the issue of alleged nexus between Soros and the Congress posing a threat to national security. While several Opposition members alleged Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar's "partisan" conduct which prompted them to move a



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi

note for his removal as vice president and accused him of being the "biggest disrupter" whose conduct in the House has harmed the country's dignity, BJP alleged Congress was attempting to "defame" Dhankhar and "insulting" the Jat community. Alleging that politics has taken precedence over rules in the Upper House of Parliament, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the chairman's conduct has been contrary to the dignity of the high post he holds. Several Opposition MPs greeted their BJP counterparts in Parliament premises with the tricolour in one hand and a red rose in the other, as they urged the ruling party to ensure that the House functions and all issues, including the Adani matter, are discussed. This is the latest in a series of unusual daily

Lok Sabha passes Bill to amend Railway Laws

Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed a Bill to amend Railway laws with the Government insisting that it will not lead to the national carrier's privatisation. Responding to a debate on the Railway Amendment bill, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in the Lower House that a fake narrative was set afloat that the amendment would privatise railways. "Their (Opposition) fake narrative on the Constitution has failed... Now this will also fall flat," he asserted. The Bill was passed by a voice vote after debate which could not be held earlier due to frequent disruptions of House proceedings during the last week. "A few members have said the Bill will lead to privatisation of railways, an attempt has been made to set a fake narrative. I want to appeal to them with all sincerity not to do this, their one fake narrative about the Constitution has already failed," Vaishnaw said. The Railways (Amendment) Bill 2024 which seeks to enhance the functioning and independence of the Railway Board was introduced in the Lok Sabha during the previous Parliament session.

demonstrations led by the Congress over the Adani issue. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi also offered the tricolour in the form of a card to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh when the latter was entering the main Parliament building. Rahul also met Speaker Om Birla and urged him to expunge remarks made by BJP MPs against him, and ensure the House functions smoothly. Addressing a joint Press conference by the INDIA Bloc leaders at the Constitution Club, Kharge alleged that Dhankhar is working as a government spokesperson and acting like a school headmaster, often sermonising experienced Opposition leaders and preventing them from speaking in the House. "The Rajya Sabha chairman's conduct has been contrary to the dignity of the post he holds. He targets Opposition leaders and often praises the government," Kharge said. "The Rajya Sabha chairman's conduct in the House has harmed the country's dignity. We have no hesitation in saying that the biggest disrupter in the Rajya Sabha is the chairman himself," Kharge said. The Congress chief said since 1952, no resolution has been brought against the vice president under Article 67 of the Constitution as those who held the post previously never indulged in politics and remained unbiased. He said the Opposition parties have nothing against Dhankhar, "but he left us with no option but to go ahead with the notice for his removal".

Ensure manual sewer cleaning completely eradicated, says SC



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that much needed to be done, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to file an action taken report on the compliance of its direction for ensuring manual sewer cleaning was completely eradicated in a phased manner. A Bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Aravind Kumar asked additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, to call a meeting of the Central Monitoring Committee with all the stakeholders within two weeks. The Committee reviews the implementation of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013 (MS Act, 2013). "The order passed by the court (in 2023) said that considering the development of technology, it was entirely possible to eradicate manual scavenging and employment of labour for sewer cleaning. This has not been done. From the report, it appears that much needs to be done," the Bench said. Senior advocate K Parameshwar, who is assisting the SC as Amicus Curiae, submitted that 40 deaths occurred due to sewer

cleaning and cleaning septic tanks in 2024 but no FIR was filed. He flagged most of the committees as mandated under the Act were not in place, and pointed out non-compliance of the laws. The matter would come up in January, 2025. Observing a large segment of India's population, involved in manual scavenging, had remained unheard and muted, in bondage and systematically trapped in inhumane conditions, the top court in 2023 directed the Centre and states to take appropriate measures, to ensure that manual sewer cleaning was completely eradicated in a phased manner. The SC had asked the Centre to issue guidelines and directions that any sewer-cleaning work outsourced or required to be done by, or through contractors or agencies, did not require individuals to enter sewers. The SC directed that Governments pay Rs 30 lakh compensation to the next of kin of those who died while cleaning sewers. It directed all States and Union Territories to make sure all departments, agencies and corporations ensured the guidelines framed by the Centre were incorporated in their guidelines. The SC had directed in the case of sewer victims suffering from disability, the minimum compensation won't be less than Rs 10 lakh. If the disability rendered the victim economically helpless, the compensation should not be less than Rs 20 lakh, it said.



Yellow alert, cold wave conditions in Delhi: IMD

RAJESH KUMAR N NEW DELHI

For the first time after the shift in the season, Delhiites experienced winter chill as the minimum temperature dipped to the season's lowest on Wednesday at 4.9 degree Celsius in Safdarjung station, dropping five degrees below normal this winter. There has been a three-degree Celsius fall in the minimum temperature over Delhi-NCR during the past 24 hours. The Maximum and Minimum temperatures over Delhi are in the range of 20 to 23 degrees Celsius and four to eight degrees Celsius respectively. According to data, the lowest minimum temperature during this period was recorded on December 6, 1987, at 4.1 degrees Celsius. The IMD has issued a yellow alert, warning of similar cold wave conditions for the next two days. According to the data, in December 2023 and 2022, there were no cold wave days. However, November 2020 saw cold wave conditions with the minimum temperature plunging to 7.5 degrees Celsius.

State to grow potato in 15,000 hectares

Says Deputy CM Singh Deo

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as West Bengal has stopped potato supply, Odisha Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo on Wednesday said the State Government has set a target to carry out potato farming in 15,023 hectares of agricultural land.

Speaking in the State Assembly, Singh Deo, who is in charge of Agriculture Department, said, "Steps were taken to increase potato production to 13.8 lakh metric tonnes in 2023-24. But this season, we have taken necessary measures to increase the production further."

"Necessary steps have been taken to increase potato production in Cuttack, Kandhamal, Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Koraput districts as they are the major tuber-growing districts. Khari potatoes are cultivated in districts like Koraput, Rayagada and Kandhamal," Singh Deo said.

The government has spent Rs 64 crore for potato farming in Rabi season and setting



up cold storages across the State to store the kitchen essential, he said.

Earlier, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Krushna Chandra Patra had made an explosive statement on potato crisis terming it as an artificial scarcity. "The artificial scarcity of potatoes was made to blemish the government. The West Bengal Chief Minister initially refused to continue the supply. However, she agreed to restore the supply later. I don't know why she is resorting to this kind of politics," Patra had said.

Earlier, the Minister had also said that Odisha would not make any requests to the West Bengal Government to supply the tuber.

Assembly session ends 16 days ahead of schedule

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Winter Session of the Odisha Assembly was adjourned sine die on Wednesday, 16 working days ahead of its scheduled conclusion.

Speaker Surama Padhy adjourned the House sine die for an indefinite period.

The session which had begun on November 26, was scheduled to continue till December 31. However, it ended with just 12 working days.

BJP MLA Ashok Mohanty said the House was adjourned sine die since there was no official work left.

BJD legislator Pradip Disari, however, claimed, "The BJP government closed the House out of fear. They ran away from the Assembly fearing the Opposition."

During the session, the House passed a total of three Bills, including the Appropriation Bill.



The session had begun on a stormy note on the very first day with the Opposition protesting against alleged non-payment of salaries to around 60,000 women supporting staffers under the 'Mission Shakti' scheme.

On the last day of the session, issues like the Centre's move to delink the Waltair Division from the East Coast Railway Zone also led to a war of words between the members of Treasury Bench and the Opposition. BJD member Ranendra Pratap Swain objected to the closing of the session before a discussion on the Odisha Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which was introduced in the House.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's statement on the alleged sale of government jobs during the previous BJD administration created a ruckus in the House.

Licences of 5 jewellery shops cancelled

For selling fake gold: Minister

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Five jewellery shops had to lose their licences, which were previously revoked after they were found to be selling counterfeit gold, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra said in the State Assembly on Wednesday.

According to sources, the shops are Ambika Jewellers in Kuchinda, Rajashree Jewellers in Kujang of Jagatsinghpur, Suna Chandi Jewellers in Puri, Radhakant Jewellers in Bargarh and Alankar Jewellers in Sambalpur.

During the 2022-23 fiscal, six cases were registered concerning measurement errors, resulting in fines totalling around Rs 2.35 lakh. In FY 2023-24, six cases were filed,

leading to fines of around Rs 1.55 Lakh. Four cases were initiated by November 2024 with fines amounting to Rs 48,000, the minister informed.

"The price of gold is skyrocketing day by day and has become unaffordable for poor people. If the government does not exercise its control over exorbitant hikes, how the poor people will get their daughters married?" an elderly woman Sabhapati Kar questioned.

Temperature to dip in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Several parts in the State are very much likely to witness a significant drop in night temperature during the next three days, said India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday.

According to the Regional Office of the IMD here, the mercury is expected to dip further by 2 to 4 degrees Celsius with interior regions of the

State reporting a significant drop in the temperature.

Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack, Jharsuguda, Kandhamal, Kalahandi, Khordha, and Sundargarh district are likely to experience light to moderate fog at a few locations, the IMD predicted.

The cloudy weather prevailing in the State is very much likely to change from Thursday with the skies remaining clear.

"While most parts of Odisha are likely to witness a dry condition, cloudy condition is very much likely to prevail in some regions in the coastal areas. Shallow to moderate fog condition is likely to be witnessed in Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Sundargarh, Jagatsinghpur, Khordha, Cuttack and Jharsuguda districts," said IMD Regional Director Manorama Mohanty.

Protesting nonpayment of salaries Mission Shakti women spend night on street

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

An unusual sight was witnessed at Lower PMG Square in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday night as thousands of women associated with the Mission Shakti programme refused to leave the protest site and slept on the road despite bone-chilling cold wave conditions.

On Monday, the women belonging to different cadres of the government's Mission Shakti programme began the protest over the alleged non-payment of salaries for the last nine months.

The second day saw the agitators carrying out mass demonstrations at Lower PMG



Square in the day before opting to spend the chilly winter nights on the road to draw the government's attention.

"I have a small child and an ailing father-in-law at home to cater to, but if the government

does not provide us with our salaries then how can we run our families? I cannot return home empty-handed," stated a protestor.

The demonstration is led by the All Odisha GPLF (Gram

Panchayat Level Federation), a coalition of six organisations including the MBK, Bank Mitra, Jeevika Sahayika, Krishi Mitra and Prani Mitra departments of Mission Shakti.

'BBSR TTS garbage to be processed in a month'

Says Minister after spot visit

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The processing of the huge amount of garbage dumped at the temporary transit station (TTS) near the Sainik School in Bhubaneswar would be completed within a month, said Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra on Wednesday.

He said treatment of the garbage is being done to reduce the stinking smell; and a permanent resolution of the matter would be done in the coming days when less amount of garbage would be stocked. "A meeting will be held un-



der the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Majhi to bring a permanent solution to the garbage issue in the area," said Mohapatra. Following the direction of the Chief Minister, Mohapatra visited the temporary transit station on the day and took stock of the garbage management.

Later, Mohapatra said that a contract has been signed by the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) to set up a biogas plant by using the garbage dumped in the area.

"The treatment process of the garbage has already started so that less amount of garbage will be kept here and

the stinking smell will be reduced to a great extent," said Mohapatra.

"Efforts are underway to process the available amount of waste within a month. Later, we will discuss a permanent solution with the Chief Minister. We will bring a permanent solution soon," he added.

Govt exempts Rs 4,097-cr power dues for 14 industries

Minister informs Assembly
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government has exempted electricity dues amounting to Rs 4097.67 crore for 14 industries under various schemes during the last 10 years, Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo told the State Assembly on Wednesday.

In reply to a question from Congress MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati, the Deputy CM, who is in charge of the energy department, said the electric-

ity duty for these 14 industries was waived since the financial year 2015-16 under schemes such as the Industrial Policy Resolution (IPR) and the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Policy.

He said the government exempted the highest electricity dues of Rs 3599.88 crore for Vedanta Ltd, Jharsuguda, under the SEZ Policy-2015 while the Central PSU Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL), Paradip, received an exemption of Rs 314.03 crore. The Angul-based Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) was granted

a waiver of Rs 103.16 crore.

Additionally, Singh Deo informed that the government has also exempted electricity dues (through rebate on interest for pending bills) amounting to Rs 1324.83 crore for 36 industries under the One-Time Settlement Scheme, 2022 of the Energy Department.

Under this scheme, the government waived electricity dues of Rs 550 crore for Rourkela Steel Plant; Rs 440 crore for IMFA, Choudwar; and Rs 203.91 crore for the Nalco, he said.

Among others, the power

bills of JSPL, Angul (Rs 35.76 crore), Aditya Aluminium, Sambalpur (Rs 17.79 crore), Tata Steel, Kalinganagar (Rs 16 crore) and Vedanta, Lanjigarh (Rs 10.13 crore) were also exempted, he informed.

Power dues worth Rs 1,096 crore are pending against 23 industries as of October this year, Singh Deo said.

The largest outstanding amount of Rs 285 crore is pending from Jindal India Thermal Power Ltd, Talcher followed by Visa Steel, Jajpur, which has not paid Rs 246 crore in electricity dues, he

stated. Besides, Dhenkanal-based GMR Kamalanga Energy, Maithan Ispat Nigam, Jajpur, and Shyam Metalics & Energy, Sambalpur have not paid power bills of Rs 179.35 crore, Rs 85.31 crore and Rs 83.25 crore, respectively.

Other industries with pending electricity dues include Oswal Chemicals and Fertilisers Ltd, Paradip (Rs 79.95 crore), AMNS, Paradip (Rs 56 crore), Bhaskar Steel & Ferro Alloys, Sundargarh (Rs 23.67 crore), and Yazdani Steel & Power Ltd, Jajpur (Rs 13.68 crore).

In Assembly MLA demands pension, better health coverage for scribes

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJD legislator Goutam Buddha Das on Wednesday raised the demand in the Odisha Assembly for pension and increased health coverage for journalists in the State.

Das said, "As I have worked as a journalist for more than 25 years, I personally know the problems faced by them. The previous BJD government had launched a health insurance scheme for the journalists and later enhanced the coverage from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh per year."

He demanded that the government raise journalists' health coverage to Rs 10 lakh per annum and include parents of the journalists under the scheme.

The government should also make a provision for an annual pass system for working journalists so that they can freely enter the State Secretariat for news coverage, he said.

At present, only accredited journalists are allowed into the secretariat, he said, adding, "The annual pass system has been stopped since the

outbreak of COVID pandemic."

Das also demanded that the government bring a law for the protection of working journalists and establishment of a press academy in the State.

Later, speaking to reporters outside the House, he said, "After retirement, journalists face a lot of hardship. The pension amount they receive from EPF (Employees' Provident Fund) is negligible. So, there is a need to make a provision of pension for them. I have demanded formation of a committee for this purpose."

Pay disparity 108 Ambulance staffs begin protest

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Employees of the 108 Ambulance service on Wednesday launched a State-wide strike alleging unfair pay and job loss, among other issues.

They said they are not provided equal pay for equal work as well as gratuity and other benefits.

They have decided to disable GPS tracking while continuing patient services as part of their protest strategy. It is feared that the GPS tracking feature may cause potential disruptions in emergency medical services.

Meanwhile, the impact of the agitation is already being felt in Angul district, where employees have escalated their

stir.

They alleged that they are facing job losses and pay disparity after a change in the company that manages the 108 Ambulance services. Additionally, a special relief package announced by the previous BJD government has also not been handed out to them yet.

"The new company fired 96 employees, who were leaders of the employee union, all across the state. Thus, our first demand is the restoration of their jobs," stated an employee.

The employees stated that the protest would continue with GPS systems remaining off until their grievances are addressed.

English can't replace mother tongue: CM

Indian Language Fest held
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

English can be a link language but not a substitute for the mother tongue, said Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi at a State-Level Indian Language Festival here on Wednesday.

Majhi said that nowadays children are not using English language as a medium of communication but as a fashion. And many students studying in English medium are not able to read Odia language. This is sad.

"English and Hindi can be a link language for us. But it can never be a substitute for our mother tongue. Therefore, the State Government has started working seriously on the use



of Odia language. There are strict orders to prepare official files in Odia language. File works in Odia language have also started in many departments," he said.

Indian languages are being celebrated on the birth anniversary of Tamil epic poet

Subramanya Bharathi. The theme of this year's Indian Language Festival is "Unity through Language".

The Chief Minister said that on his birth anniversary, we are celebrating Indian language as a State-wide festival. "It is not just a celebration but

a symbol of our culture and glory. Linguistic diversity is our greatest strength," he said.

Majhi said that although Bharathi has inspired Tamil literature with his talent, he has also inspired other Indian languages. He emphasised social reform through his literature.

Waltair Rly Divn issue rocks Assembly

BJD, BJP at loggerheads
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Opposition BJD and ruling BJP had a confrontation over the Waltair Railway Division in the Odisha Assembly on Wednesday.

BJD leader Ranendra Pratap Swain alleged that a conspiracy is being hatched to shift the Waltair Railway Division to Vijayawada and make it part of the South Central Railway Zone. Odisha would incur a loss of Rs 20,000 crore if this happens.

"The Centre has given a confidential record for the bifurcation of Waltair Division. Odisha will incur loss due to the bifurcation. They should provide the vision document and adequate compensation for Odisha. If Odisha incurs loss, we will raise the issue as Odias and as a regional party,"

said Swain.

However, in response, Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo refuted any such possibility. He said an inch of railway line from Odisha would not be shifted to any other State.

Singh Deo said Rs 23,000 crore has been sanctioned for the development of railways in Odisha and a tender of Rs 107 crore has been sanctioned to set up a special division of the Railways in Rayagada.

Singh Deo questioned why BJD MPs were silent when the UPA government was setting up the South Division.

"East Coast Railway will continue to have three divisions as per the existing situation. No loss of revenues for East Coast Railway will take place. Why BJD MPs were silent when the UPA government was setting up the South Division? Now only, they are creating a ruckus," he said.

'Set up pharma edu centre in Odisha'

Dharmendra urges Union Health Min
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has written to the Union Minister for Health, Family Welfare, Chemicals and Fertilisers Jagat Prakash Nadda to establish a National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) in Odisha.

Pradhan stated that there is a need to establish a NIPER in Odisha as it would significantly contribute to the growth of pharmaceutical and biotech sector in eastern India.

He further said that the Odisha Biotech Park in Bhubaneswar is the first park in eastern India where all the necessary facilities of water, electricity, effluent treatment and other facilities are available for the establishment of biotechnology industries and related service sectors.

This biotech park provides a favourable environment for the establishment of the NIPER. This would not only bridge educational and research gaps in medicine but also promote innovation and development of skilled manpower. As a result, India's global competitiveness in the pharmaceutical sector would increase, stated Pradhan.

Workshop at RD Women's Univ 'Coastal highway to pose threat to Chilika'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A workshop related to environment and Odisha coast was held at Rama Devi Women's University under the joint patronage of the Department of Biotechnology, Department of Political Science of the university and the Odisha Environment Congress.

Prof Binayak Rath, former Vice-Chancellor of Utkal University attended the workshop as the chief guest while RS University Vice-Chancellor Prof Aparajita Chowdhury was present.

Dr Rath discussed in detail



the challenges facing Odisha's coastal region and opined that the coastal highway will pose a threat to Chilika. As the keynote speaker, eminent environmentalist Prof Jayakrishna Panigrahi elaborated on how Odisha's environment and coastal people are being affected by climate change. Organizational secretary Odisha Environment Congress, Sudharsan Das, highlighted

the 14-year journey of Odisha Environment Congress and appealed to the students to fight against climate change.

Prof Manas Behera gave the welcome address and introduced the topic. Professor Sasmita Mohanty, Chairperson of the Undergraduate Council, delivered her speech on environmental protection. Odisha Environment Congress general secretary

Bhruhu Baxipatra discussed the role of the upcoming youth generation in environmental protection. Professor Raj Kumar Joshi expressed that coastal protection and environmental balance are important for the development of Odisha.

Prof Basant Behera proposed the vote of thanks. A large number of faculty and students of the university participated. The 15th session of Odisha Environment Congress will be held at Berhampur University on December 20, 21 and 22. This year's theme is Environment and Coast, it was revealed.

Elderly man found dead in city

Family alleges murder
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A dead body of an elderly man was found on Tuesday night in the Birabandha area under the Airfield police station of Bhubaneswar.

Getting information, a police team arrived at the spot, recovered the body and sent it to the Capital Hospital for postmortem.

The deceased, identified as Bauribandhu Behera, was a resident of the same locality. Sources stated that no injury marks were present on the

body. However, family members of the deceased suspected foul play and brought murder allegations.

An investigation was underway to determine the cause of death and identify those responsible. As per the last reports, police were examining CCTV's near the crime scene while also interrogating relatives and neighbours of the deceased.

Sources also added that the man lived with his family and had no known past enmity, deepening the question if it was an alleged murder or death by natural causes.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Expected as public servants, legislators are mostly extortion masters

Way back until the 1980s, top-rated legislators of Odisha and elsewhere used public transport for travel. They were allotted ordinary residential facilities a little better than what government head clerks were given. Most people around those days were seen bee-lining at residences of MPs and MLAs for a bus ticket to travel between Bhubaneswar and smaller towns in west and south Odisha. Just adjacent to the entry door of buses, the first row of two seats was invariably kept reserved for MPs/MLAs as they did not have the money to buy personal cars. That humane culture forced them to mingle with the masses and remain humble with the people. They did not dare to misbehave or bully with the less-privileged fellow beings. It was amusing then to see legislators begging for personal favours or benefits from wealthy business guys at most times only because their salary was pretty small though not beggarly.



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

Today, the situation has changed drastically. Sarpanches and lower panchayat-level functionaries ride expensive cars. They have long forgotten public transport vehicles of any kind, which they consider cattle class. Until the Janaki Ballav Patnaik regime came in place, political people including ministers and legislators were humble and highly approachable though a very few greedy and unscrupulous MPs made money surreptitiously by organising cooking gas and telephone connections for people who were frantic to grab these utilities out of turn. Those days, landline

telephones and gas connections at home were considered big status symbols. Children born after the 1990s would never know all this. Television was already there when they arrived. And those born in the new millennium would find 'the happy times of yore with so little' some kind of folklore or fairytale.

Wind forward to the present times to witness political guys and girls only with immeasurable wealth and money. 'No money' would indicate miserable status. MLAs and MPs who are essentially on a 'social work' mode, are screaming every now and then for fatter salaries, perks, countless material benefits and fat pensions. Most surprisingly, in the legislatures, where the ruling and non-ruling party members keep opposing each other acrimoniously in every debate with regard to public service, gang up as 'dear family members under one roof' to scream in tandem for raise in salaries and other monetary benefits. Incidentally now, they get princely sums of money to live and function like lords apart from bullying everyone

around because they are rich, powerful, larger than life and, therefore, invincible. They also get hefty pensions by having passed a favourable law to that effect. Shockingly, unlike other government servants who get a full pension only by serving the people until their sixtieth year of life, a full pension is granted to the MLAs and MPs after serving a negligible five-year period of throwing their weight around like fearless gangsters although a very few of the tribe behave decently with humility. More astonishingly, they have made themselves entitled to a full pension for each electoral term. So, if a political figure has been MLA twice and MP once, he gets three pensions all his life.

The people of India must know that the first President of India Dr Rajendra Prasad had recommended his pension be put to some public welfare fund. Even more notably, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri never accepted any salary. That money was given away to the national calamity fund. The salary of the Prime Minister

in 1947 was Rs 3,000 per month as per the Salaries and Allowances of Ministers Act. Other members of the Cabinet received Rs 2,000 per month, Ministers of State did Rs 1,000 per month, and Deputy Ministers only Rs 600 per month. In the same year, Chief Minister of Madras O. V. Rangaiah did not have a salary for himself as he was holding a high office in the Madras Presidency when India gained independence on August 15, 1947.

In India, most federal governments of today consider 500 rupees labour-wage per day is good enough for living with dignity. Some States give as less as 400 rupees. For non-agricultural workers, the high-wage States include Kerala - Rs 696.6; Jammu & Kashmir - Rs 517.9; Tamil Nadu - Rs 481.5; Haryana - Rs 451 per day. For the construction workers, the Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh wages are below the national average of Rs 393 per day. This amount of money is expected to cover absolute basic needs like food, shelter, transportation and

healthcare. So, logically, the people's representatives, being ground-level social workers in the truest spirit, need a little more than this amount of money because they are white-collared and devote most time to thinking and planning aloud and getting things done flawlessly. The highest Kerala wage per month works out to be a fairly decent amount of 21,000 rupees per month if only the labourer is employed every day. Double this amount is 42,000 rupees, which should be a princely salary for the MLAs. Apart from this, they can reimburse actual travel, office and secretarial help expenses. Other legitimate perks and allowances are also given to them based on the prevailing market dynamics. The final salary of MLAs of Odisha can, therefore, be frozen at 50,000 rupees considering the highest labour wage in India is two and half times lesser. Perks and other expenses as per actuals are fine. But all that needs to be scrutinised and audited and endorsed by the people on a regular basis. Key members in respec-

tive constituencies will merrily undertake the job.

An article in the Odia daily 'The Samaja' two days ago mentions that in 1923, under the British rule, law makers of Madras and Bombay Presidencies had appealed to the government to reduce their salaries to help save money for the poor. Inspired by that noble, patriotic gesture, the Bihar-Odisha legislators too had sought to have their salaries brought down significantly. However, the biggest problem today is that the legislators are allowed to make laws for their personal benefits too, which is a matter of shame. Even if they do, the act should pass public scrutiny. Unfortunately, the decent vocal members of the society keep mum; and the voiceless would not know ever what public wrongs are happening around them.

Therefore, whenever lawmakers across the country keep screaming for more personal benefits, the masses must agitate against them with frightening force and noise to expose them as mean, cheating servants.

'Polavaram to affect 1K families in Malkangiri'

Odisha can either go for protective embankments or for rehab: Union Min

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
Eight revenue villages, with 1,002 estimated project affected families in Malkangiri district are likely to be affected by submergence due to completion of PIP," Minister Choudhary said. He said the Polavaram irrigation project is being taken up as per the inter-State agreement between the States of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh (now Chhattisgarh) and Odisha dated 02.04.1980, and also as per the provisions of Godavari Water Dispute Tribunal (GWDIT) Award, 1980. Odisha can exercise option either for protective embank-

ments with adequate drainage arrangements to protect the lands and properties likely to be affected in their territories or for compensation (rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people from the affected villages) for the areas and properties going to be affected on the same pattern at the project cost, the Union Minister said. Further, provision of construction of protective embankment with suitable drainage arrangements for a total length of 30.20 km (12 km along Sileru river and 18.20 km along Sabari river) in Malkangiri district has been kept in the project, he informed. For resolution of concerns of Odisha raised which highlighted the apprehensions of

Odisha mainly on backwater study of PIP, extent of submergence in the State due to the project and also in compliance of the directions given by Supreme Court, the Union Minister said, several meetings have been held in Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Ministry of Jal Shakti and Central Water Commission with the officers of the stakeholder States including Odisha and steps were taken for seeking convergence on resolution of issues. In another reply to a question of MP Sasmit Patra, Choudhary said 648.05 hectares (ha) of land are likely to submerge in Odisha for the Polavaram project, of which 102.16 ha are forest land.

In Kakatpur 60-yr-old widow begs for only son's last rites!

PNS ■ KAKATPUR
Every father and mother have a dream that after their death, their children will give them funeral pyre and perform their last rites. But here is a case where a 60 years old widow is begging for some money to conduct the death rituals of her only son. The heart-wrenching incident occurred at Lataharan village under Kakatpur block of Puri district. The old widow Panchei is now going door to door in the village asking for alms because his only son Prafulla Malik died and she has to conduct the rituals. Panchei's husband Jalendra died two years ago. Her son



Prafulla went to Hyderabad a year ago to make some earnings but he met with an accident. Later, he returned home, seriously injured and lay bedridden. Finally, he died on December 3. The strangest thing is till date Panchei has not got any accommodation under Government housing schemes in Kakatpur or any other monetary help. She is getting only a paltry widow pension.

INBRIEF

Angul woman dies in elephant attack
Angul: A woman died after being attacked by an elephant in the Chhendipada forest area of Angul district on Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Mandiri Sahu, a resident of Patakumunda village. She was on her way to harvest paddy in a nearby field when the elephant chased and attacked her, leading to her death on the spot. Tension gripped the area with the villagers staging a sit-in against the Forest Department. The agitators demanded better safety measures to protect their lives and livelihoods from recurring elephant threats as well as adequate compensation for the deceased's family.

Shakti App to empower women launched
Bhubaneswar: In a landmark move to address Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Odisha has become the first State in India to use block-chain technology to strengthen support systems



for survivors. Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida launched the Shakti Application, a block-chain-powered multi-institution coordination system, during an event in Bhubaneswar.

JSpur rapist gets 20 yrs in jail
Jagatsinghpur: The Fast Track Court in Jagatsinghpur sentenced a youth to undergo 20 years imprisonment and pay a fine of Rs 35,000 after convicting him in rape of a 14-year-old girl. The convict was identified as Sagar Kumar Sahoo, hailing from the Raghunathpur area. He lured the victim girl by giving her chocolates to his residence and raped her there in 2021. A day after the incident, the victim girl's mother lodged an FIR at Raghunathpur police station narrating facts. The police picked up the accused and forwarded him to court. The court delivered its verdict on Monday after taking into account evidence and witnesses.

'Dialysis on Call' in Bhubaneswar
Bhubaneswar: NephroPlus, Asia's largest dialysis network, has introduced its "Dialysis on Call" services in Bhubaneswar, marking an important step in its mission to make high-quality dialysis more accessible and affordable. This expansion brings NephroPlus' renowned Dialysis on Call (DOC) service to the city, enabling patients to receive dialysis in the comfort and convenience of their own homes.

Odisha's Arunima tops CLAT 2025 PG exam

PNS ■ ROURKELA
Arunima Thakur of Rourkela secured the top rank (AIR-1) at the All-India level of the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT)-2025 PG examination, the results of which were declared recently. Arunima clinched the top rank with a percentile score of 99.993, becoming the highest scorer in India among about 15,000 students who undertook the examination. Bringing this major glory to Odisha, however, was not an easy feat as Arunima had gone through rigorous and dedicated preparations for the exam. She said that for the past year, she spent hours reading additional books beyond the syllabus to master legal studies and aptitude skills. "I focused especially on developing my reading skills by



reading newspapers and judgments for the entire year," she said. She pointed out that the question paper for the CLAT examination usually tends to be very lengthy with about 24 passages spread across 44 pages. As such, strong reading and assessment skills enable a candidate to swiftly read through and answer the paper within the two-hour duration. Arunima said she now aims to pursue legal studies and contribute to strengthening the legal system in the country through her efforts.

Rs 6-cr patrolling vessels lie defunct in G'matha

Sea surveillance during ongoing turtle season hit

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA
Sea worthy interceptor vessels worth Rs 6 crore are lying dysfunctional at Sasanpeta within Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary after developing technical snags three years back. As a result, sea surveillance has been affected in the ongoing turtle season at Gahirmatha which has started on November 1. The forest personnel are finding it hard to conduct surveillance following the modern technology-based interceptor vessels that went defunct. Though they umpteen times brought to the notice of the manufacturing company



to get the vessels repaired, it was of little avail. Notably, with an aim to provide security to the endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles by ensuring to curb down illegal trawl fishing at Gahirmatha during the turtle nesting season besides to engage in the national security works by restricting cross border activities via sea route, the State government in March 2016 had bought the two high speed interceptor vessels. Named as

Gahirmatha-I and Gahirmatha -II, the vessels were procured from Mumbai-based Mahindra Marine Limited at a cost of Rs 3 crore each. They are eco-friendly soundless fibre speed vessels equipped with foolproof safety mechanisms. But the Gahirmatha-1 inceptor vessel got technical snag four years back whereas the Gahirmatha -2 went defunct a year later. "As both the inceptor vessels' engines are manufactured

at Yanmar in Japan, the spare parts are not found in India. As a result, they could not be repaired," said Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary Ranger Pradosh Kumar Moharana. According to Moharana, a three-member team from Kharagpur -based IIT recently came to repair the engine. To make the vessels operational, they have suggested using local engines. Meanwhile, only one vessel "Olivia" is being used for patrolling in the ongoing turtle season.

Santali stall inaugurated at State Book Fair



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
A Santali stall by the Santali Saonhed Akhada was inaugurated at the 6th Odisha State Book Fair, now underway at the Exhibition Ground here, organised by the State Department of Odia Language, Literature, and Culture. The stall was inaugurated by former IRAS officer Udaynath Majhi, who paid floral tributes to the portrait of Pandit Raghunath Murmu. Present at the occasion were several notable personalities, including Santali Engineers

Welfare Association president Somnath Hansda, Adim Owar Jarpa president Karu Murmu, writers Rambai Hembram, Mangat Murmu, Kalicharan Hansda, Shankar Murmu and Lakshmi Murmu. Also in attendance were Saonhed Akhada president Malati Murmu, general secretary Kailash Chandra Baskey, vice president Suprabha Kisku, Gayatri Majhi, Surukuni Murmu, among others. The Santali stall features a wide range of resources, including syllabi and periodicals in the Santali (Ol Chiki) language.

After local admn fails Ganjam women face armed sand mafias head on

DGP's intervention prevents bloody confrontation

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
The women of Alladigaon village under the Purushottampur police station in Ganjam district have faced the armed sand mafias head-on displaying unity and courage when repeated complaints to rein them in with the authorities fell in deaf ears. As per sources, illegal sand mining has been going unabated in the Rushikulya river with the administration acting a mute spectator for a long time. The sand lifters have deployed huge machinery at Alladigaon and blocked the path ways of the villagers from the riverbank to the water pool. The perennial river water stock is the only source of sustenance for the villagers.



Though the villagers had already informed the local IIC, Superintendent of Police and the Collector, Ganjam since October 8 relating to the activities of the sand mafias in constructing a road to the water pool of the river, no action was taken by the district administration. In a latest face-off between the villagers, including women and the armed mafias, the latter by entering into the village river were threatening the villagers with dire consequences. When the district administration drew a blank, the villagers in-

formed in a Whatsapp message to DG of Police YB Khurania. The DG acted swiftly and rescued the villagers and the village women folk from the vicious tentacles of the armed sand mafias thereby preventing an imminent blood bath. The police also seized the vehicles engaged in sand lifting from the very spot. The news of DGP's prompt response has sent an air of jubilation not only among the villagers but also in the entire district of Ganjam. Intriguingly enough, the sand mafias have now turned their vengeful ire

against BJP leader and former Deputy Speaker Ram Chandra Panda, who incidentally belongs to the village. Panda had waged a relentless battle against the pollution of the Rushikulya river water by a chemical company. In this context, it is pertinent to mention here the rulings of the Supreme Court which hold that such activities like illegal rampant sand mining is "serious" and needs to be effectively dealt with. In a judgement delivered on 04/12/2024, the apex court had issued notices to States like Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh to provide facts and figures on such issues of illegal sand mining. Intellectuals and environmentalists of the district and the State wonder as to how such activities are rampant in almost all rivers of the State with the local administration virtually not being able to act against them!

2nd annual reunion of RUDRA'91 held



PNS ■ CUTTACK
The second annual reunion of the Post Graduate alumni of 1991 batch, RUDRA'91, was held at the Ravenshaw University on Sunday. Over 70 participants both male and female joined the programme. At the outset the members felicitated some faculty members of the university and promised to extend financial support to the poor and meritorious students. They shared

their memories of student time. A plantation programme was conducted on the occasion. Besides, vending umbrellas were distributed to the street vendors in the college square. Photo sessions and a grand party were held. Several members from outside Odisha and India witnessed the programme in virtual mode. Dukhishyam, Amiyabala, Jyotiranjana and Manoranjan among others nicely arranged the event.

In Baleswar Workshop focuses on horseshoe crab conservation

PNS ■ BALESWAR
It is important to sensitise the youth on conserving species of critical ecological and scientific value," said Earth Crusaders Organization (ECO), Bhubaneswar, founder and chairman Aurobindo Samal on the occasion of the World Wildlife Conservation Day observed on December 4 at Chandbali College, Bhadrak. On the sidelines of the event, a two-day workshop titled "Conservation of wildlife with special reference to Indian horseshoe crabs" was organised by the college in collaboration with Center for Research and Conservation of Indian Horseshoe Crabs (CRCIHSC), PG Department of Zoology and

PG Department of Biosciences and Biotechnology, Fakir Mohan University (FMU), Baleswar, Earth Crusaders Organization, Bhubaneswar, and Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. The workshop focused on addressing pressing wildlife conservation challenges, with an emphasis on the ancient and ecologically vital Indian horseshoe crab species found in the shores of Bhadrak and Baleswar. It brought together a diverse group of workers from the area including the conservationists, researchers, policymakers and students, aiming to foster innovative strategies for safeguarding wildlife with special reference to Indian horseshoe crabs. The event featured an emi-

nent panel of resource persons who shared their expertise and insights in the area of wildlife conservation. The chief guest on the occasion, Divisional Forest Officer, Bhadrak Soubhagya Kumar Sahu sensitised the audience about the wildlife resources near Bhadrak and conservation strategies adopted in wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and zoos across the State with reference to flora and fauna. Adjunct Professor, PG Department of Zoology, FMU, Prof Bisnu Prasad Dash deliberated on protecting the Indian horseshoe crabs population both by in-situ and ex-situ conservation strategies. Deputy Director of

CRCIHSC, FMU Dr Bharat Bhusan Patnaik emphasized the role of biotechnology and bioinformatics in bridging gaps in wildlife conservation and to tap the 'fitness traits' of the species. Apart from that, researchers and academicians from different institutes also featured their researches and findings aligned with conservation of wildlife resources. The knowledge of bird migration pattern, engagement of local communities and students of diverse disciplines, use of advanced tools and tags to monitor the species habitat, migration corridors, and to study different behavioural biology of wildlife animals were discussed.

No mandi for bulk sale Cotton doesn't fetch remunerative price in Boudh

MAHESH SATAPATHY ■ BOUDH
Cotton farmers in Boudh are facing a tough challenge due to lack of a cotton mandi, a wholesale market where farmers can sell their produce. As a result, they are forced to sell their cotton outside the district at low prices, despite its excellent quality. The situation is discouraging farmers and threatening the upcoming cotton seasons. Farmers in the region have successfully transitioned from paddy to cotton cultivation, producing high-quality cotton through their diligent efforts. The shift has showcased their resilience and adaptabil-



ity, demonstrating the potential for sustainable agricultural growth. The absence of a cotton mandi, however, is exacerbating the financial struggles of cotton farmers in Harbhanga, Boudh, and Kantamal blocks.

Cotton farmers are receiving only half of the fair market price for their crop. To address the issue, farmers are pinning their hopes on Kantamal MLA Kanhei Charan Dang and Boudh MLA Saroj Pradhan to resolve

the problem as soon as possible. To support the cotton farmers, establishing a cotton mandi in Boudh could provide a more stable market for their produce, enabling them to receive fair prices for their hard work.

Motion against VP only to divert attention from Soros issue: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday alleged that the Congress was attempting to "defame" Jagdeep Dhankhar and "insulting" the Jat community by initiating a motion to remove him from the Vice President's post only to deflect public attention from the Gandhi family's "links" with George Soros.

Keeping up its offensive against the Congress, the ruling party also alleged that the connection between US-based billionaire Soros and the Nehru-Gandhi family runs deep, extending beyond Sonia Gandhi's 'role' as co-president of the Forum of Democratic Leaders - Asia Pacific (FDL-AP).

"Fori Nehru, a Hungarian like Soros, was married to B K Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's

cousin, making her the aunt of Rahul Gandhi, former Congress President and Leader of the Opposition," the BJP said in a social media post.

George Soros is documented to have visited Fori Nehru and maintained "extended correspondence" with her and their association traces back to the time when B K Nehru served as India's ambassador to the United States, the party claimed.

"This raises questions about the extent to which the Nehru-Gandhi family may have compromised India's strategic interests, over the decades, to benefit their extended family's financial and entrepreneurial pursuits, as well as the interests of the deep state, they have been aligned with," it said.

The BJP also slammed the Congress over the decision of



the opposition INDIA bloc in Maharashtra to move the Supreme Court over allegations of manipulation of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the state assembly elections held recently, saying it shows they do not have any respect for the Constitution. Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, BJP MP and national spokesper-

son Sambit Patra termed the opposition parties' notice for a "no-confidence motion" against Dhankhar and INDIA bloc's decision to move Supreme Court on the EVM issue as "painful and disturbing".

"The Congress takes the issue of EVM to the Supreme Court again and again and returns defeated. Every time it tried to cause and drag the Election Commission, it faced embarrassment... Yet the Congress is going to move the Supreme Court on the issue," he said.

This shows that Congress does not have "any respect" for the Constitution of India, he charged.

Patra alleged that the Congress along with its allies in the opposition gave a notice for initiating a motion to remove Vice President Dhankhar "in a hurry" on Tuesday after the BJP raised,

both inside and outside Parliament, the issue of "Gandhi-Nehru family's link with George Soros and the conspiracy to destabilise the country taking fund from the George Soros Foundation", "Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi - the entire Nehru-Gandhi family - are involved in it," he claimed.

The BJP leader said it is sad that the Congress has sought initiation of a "no-confidence motion" against Dhankhar who comes from a "humble background".

"It's an insult to a farmer's son, a man who comes from a humble background," he said, adding, "And you (Congress) talk about caste?"

Patra said the Congress and its allies have brought the notice against Dhankhar knowing very well that it will fall flat on the floor of the

House as they do not have enough numbers in their favour.

However, the party has brought such a kind of notice for the first time in Rajya Sabha against its chairperson "just to insult the Jat community", he charged.

"Jats are patriots. Jats have shed their blood for the freedom of Hindustan and for Hindustan. Today you are making such allegations against a Jat Vice President. Somewhere you are trying to defame him by saying that he is not doing his work properly," Patra said.

"Let me tell you that a farmer's son, a Jat, never bows down. He will never bow down. And the respect of Jats will always remain intact and firm in India... Parliament will give a reply. People will give a reply," he added.

Secure messaging apps big challenge to counter online radicalisation: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The use of secured messaging applications like Signal, Telegram, Viber and the dark Web besides end-to-end encrypted WhatsApp by radical elements to connect with like-minded individuals is proving to be a "major challenge" for security agencies to counter online radicalisation, government said on Wednesday.

Replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said as the extensive use of cyber technology is the main tool for propagating radical ideology, cyberspace is being monitored ceaselessly.

The minister said at present, apart from state police, the NIA is investigating 67 cases relating to online radicalisation. In these cases, 325 accused have been arrested, 336 accused have been charge-sheeted and 63 accused have been convicted so far.

"Cyber patrolling is done on a regular basis to identify and monitor such content and entities which are target-



ing gullible/depressed/alienated youth," the minister said. He said websites and accounts involved in communal and anti-India propaganda affecting the sovereignty and integrity of India are being identified and sent to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for action.

During 2024, MeitY has issued directions for blocking

9845 URLs (which also include radical content) till October 2024, he said.

"In addition, u/s 79(3) (b) of IT Act, 2000, Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs, has also been authorised/designated as an agency to issue 'Take Down Notices' for intermediary/Platform to remove unlawful content," he said.

Rai said regular meetings are being held with all stakeholders and law enforcement agencies for sharing of information including inputs on radical organisations for collectively addressing multiple risk factors associated with radicalisation in a holistic and coordinated manner and to establish effective mechanisms and strategies to tackle radicalisation.

"The use of more secured messaging applications like Signal, Telegram, Viber and dark Web apart from WhatsApp with end-to-end encryption by radical elements to connect with other likeminded elements has proved to be a major challenge for security agencies in its efforts to counter radicalized individuals online," the minister said.

He said the CBI, as National Central Bureau for India, continues to be engaged with INTERPOL for combating Online Radicalisation.

"During the 90th INTERPOL General Assembly held in New Delhi from 18-21st October 2022, the INTERPOL unveiled the first ever Metaverse which is specifically designed for law enforcement worldwide," he said.

Rai said in January 2024, the INTERPOL released a whitepaper on a law enforcement perspective on Metaverse and identified the issue of radicalisation, while noting that terrorists may exploit the Metaverse for online recruitment, radicalisation, training and indoctrination of individuals.

India evacuates 75 nationals from Syria after rebels overthrow Assad Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India evacuated 75 of its nationals from Syria two days after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government.

The evacuation, coordinated by the embassies of India in Damascus and Beirut, was put into effect following an assessment of the security situation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"The Government of India today evacuated 75 Indian nationals from Syria, following recent developments in that country," it said in a late-night statement on Tuesday.

"The evacuees included 44 'zairren' from Jammu and Kashmir who were stranded at Saida Zainab. All Indian nationals have safely crossed over to Lebanon and will return by available commercial flights to India," it said.

The MEA said the government accords the highest priority to the safety and security of Indian nationals



abroad.

"Indian nationals remaining in Syria are advised to stay in touch with the Indian Embassy in Damascus," it said. "The government will continue to monitor the situation closely," the MEA added.

The Syrian government collapsed on Sunday as the rebels seized control of the capital Damascus after capturing several other prominent cities and towns. Assad fled the country after the rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) took control of Damascus, marking the end of his family's 50-year rule.

Russian state media reported that Assad is in Moscow and will be given asylum. His nearly 14-year tenure was marked by civil war, bloodshed and brutal crackdown on his political opponents.

The MEA on Monday said it is monitoring the unfolding developments in Syria and advocated a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process going forward in that country.

Azam Khan slams INDI Alliance, accuses it of ignoring Muslims

BISWAJEEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

Senior Samajwadi Party (SP) leader and former minister Azam Khan has sharply criticized the INDI alliance, accusing it of ignoring the concerns of Muslims.

He urged the alliance to raise the issue of crime and alleged destruction in Rampur in Parliament, just as it did with Sambhal.

"Sambhal was targeted only after the experiment in Rampur succeeded," Khan claimed. "The INDI alliance remained silent on this. If this continues, we will be compelled to reconsider the future of Muslims," he warned.

Azam Khan, currently lodged in Sitapur Jail, expressed his concerns through a letter handed to Rampur SP district president Ajay Sagar, who visited him. Sagar later released the contents of the letter to the public.

Khan accused the INDI alliance of working to eliminate Muslim leadership. "The alliance stood as a silent spectator while Rampur was destroyed. It must clarify its stance or we will be forced to reconsider our future," he wrote.

He further alleged that Muslims are being politically marginalized. "The Muslim vote has become meaningless. Their right to vote is being reduced to a tool for genocide. If this continues, we will have to decide whether retaining the right to vote is even worth it."

Khan criticized attempts to destroy religious sites by declaring them controversial. "Other communities cannot be wiped out under the guise of removing disputed places of worship. People conspire and feign sympathy," he said.

Azam Khan's political influence in Uttar Pradesh has been significant. He was



elected as an MLA 10 times and served as an MP once from Rampur. His wife, Tanzeen Fatima, also became an MLA, while his son, Abdullah Azam, was elected twice.

During the SP government, Khan wielded immense influence, rivaling even that of a Chief Minister. The state aircraft was often used to transport him to Rampur, which many considered a secondary seat of power.

However, his political dominance began to decline after 2017. His troubles escalated in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections when he made a controversial remark targeting bureaucrats at a rally in Rampur. "Don't fear these collectors and officers; they are just salaried employees. If Allah wills, I will make them clean my shoes after the elections," he reportedly said.

The remark triggered a wave of legal troubles. Investigations linked to land acquisition for Jauhar University led to over 100 cases being filed against Khan and his family. He was declared a land mafia, and both he and his wife were imprisoned.

The legal onslaught began when Anjaneya Kumar was the district magistrate in Rampur. Following complaints from farmers about alleged illegal land acquisitions for Jauhar University, the administration initiated inquiries that snowballed into multiple cases. Khan and his family have since faced prolonged legal battles and jail terms.

69 per cent reduction in malaria cases in India from 2017-2023: WHO report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India has made significant progress in combating malaria with the number of estimated cases of infection dropping to 2 million in 2023, a 69% reduction from 6.4 million cases in 2017, according to the latest World Malaria Report by the World Health Organization (WHO), released Wednesday.

Similarly, malaria deaths decreased by 68%, from 11,100 in 2017 to 3,500 in 2023, as per the report. As a result, India officially exited the WHO's High Burden to High Impact (HBHI) group in 2024, a key milestone in the country's efforts to reduce malaria, said the WHO.

The HBHI initiative, aimed at

accelerating malaria elimination in countries with high malaria burdens, was launched in India in 2019, targeting four states: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal.

Despite these advances, India still accounted for half of all estimated malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region in 2023. The region as a whole reported 4 million cases and 1.5% of global malaria deaths. P. vivax was responsible for over 48% of cases in the region.

Over the course of the past two decades, malaria cases in South-East Asia have dropped by 82.4%, from 22.8 million in 2000, and incidence fell by 87%, from 17.7 to 2.3 cases per 1,000 population at risk.



A significant portion of this decrease was due to India, which saw a reduction of 17.7 million cases and a 93% decrease in incidence.

India and Indonesia together accounted for about 88% of the malaria deaths in the region in 2023, though other countries like Bhutan and Timor-Leste reported zero malaria deaths since 2013 and 2015, respectively. Sri Lanka was certified malaria-free in 2016.

The WHO also emphasised the continued need for accelerated efforts in malaria elimination, particularly in countries where malaria persists. Globally, the WHO reported that 2.2 billion cases and 12.7 million deaths have been averted since 2000, but malaria remains a significant health

challenge, particularly in the WHO African Region. In 2023, there were 263 million estimated malaria cases and 597,000 deaths worldwide.

Saima Wazed, Regional Director WHO South-East Asia cautioned against any complacency. "We must not forget that the risk of malaria not only persists but could increase due to factors such as climate change. We must continue to do all we can to accelerate our progress against malaria." At the same time, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General added, "An expanded package of lifesaving tools now offers better protection against the disease, but stepped up investments and action in high burden countries are needed to curb the threat."

CENJOWS signs MoU with NDMA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In a significant step towards bolstering India's disaster management capabilities, the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), the only tri-services think tank under Headquarter Integrated Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

The MoU was signed by Lt General Syed Ata Hasnain (Retired), Member, NDMA and Major General (Dr) Ashok Kumar (Retired), Director General of CENJOWS. The signing ceremony marked the beginning of a strategic partnership to address critical challenges in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response to develop the 'whole of the nation' approach, defence ministry said on Wednesday.

The MoU outlines a framework for joint initiatives, including Collaborative Research:



Undertaking studies on disaster management, HADR operations, and disaster diplomacy to provide policy inputs to the Government of India. Capacity Building: Organizing seminars, workshops, and training programs for stakeholders, including armed forces personnel, NDMA officials, and other key agencies. Awareness Campaigns: Promoting disaster preparedness and risk mitigation through nationwide awareness initiatives. International Engagements: Facilitating global collabora-

tion on disaster management, aligning with India's foreign policy objectives. Speaking on the occasion, Major General (Dr) Ashok Kumar emphasized the importance of leveraging joint research to infuse development of actionable policy recommendations that enhance disaster resilience at both national and international levels. Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain, member NDMA highlighted the shared vision of both institutions to create a safer and more disaster-resilient India.

PM Modi releases compendium on complete works of Subramania Bharati

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday released the compendium of complete works of great Tamil poet and freedom fighter Subramania Bharati and hailed his contributions, saying a personality like him comes once in centuries.

Modi said Bharati's thoughts and intellectual brilliance continue to inspire people even today. The prime minister released the compendium at his 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence.

"Subramania Bharati Ji was a profound thinker dedicated to serving Maa Bharati. A personality like Subramania Bharati comes once in centuries. Subramania Bharati Ji's thoughts and intellectual brilliance continue to inspire us even today," Modi said as he paid homage to the great poet on his birth anniversary.

The 23-volume set has been compiled and edited by Seeni Viswanathan and published by Alliance Publishers. It contains details of the editions, explanations, documents, back-



ground information and philosophical presentation, among others, of the writings of Bharati. "In our country, words are not considered mere expressions. We are part of a culture that talks about 'Shabda Brahma', talks about the infinite power of words," Modi said at the function.

"My government with the intention of 'kartavya' has taken Subramania Bharati's contribution to the people," the prime minister said. He said there is a live connection between Bharati and him which is Kashi. "He came to attain

knowledge in Kashi and stayed back," Modi said. The Prime Minister represents Varanasi (Kashi) in the Lok Sabha. Modi hailed Bharati as a "visionary poet, writer, thinker, freedom fighter and social reformer". "His words ignited the flames of patriotism and revolution among countless people. His progressive ideals on equality and women's empowerment are equally inspiring," the prime minister said. The literary works of Mahakavi Bharati are a treasure of the Tamil language, Modi said.

UP cuts stubble-burning by over 50 per cent, boosts farmers' income



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has achieved remarkable progress in agriculture and environmental management by significantly reducing stubble-burning incidents over the past seven years. In 2017, the state reported 8,784 cases of stubble burning, a figure that dropped to just 3,996 in 2023, marking a decline of over 50%. This success is attributed to policy measures encouraging farmers to treat crop stubble as a valuable resource rather than waste, providing both economic benefits and environmental protection. Acting on Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directives, Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar

Singh recently reviewed the state's stubble management efforts. The review highlighted that Uttar Pradesh generates 2.096 crore metric tons of stubble annually, of which 34.44 lakh metric tons are used as fodder, while another 16.78 lakh metric tons are utilized in various industries. Additionally, 1.58 crore metric tons are managed through in-situ and ex-situ methods, helping to reduce pollution and improve air quality. The state government's initiatives have industrialized stubble usage, generating employment in rural areas and creating new revenue streams for farmers. Paddy straw is now used in the production of various products, turning agricultural

residue into a source of income. Simultaneously, the promotion of organic farming and the application of Leaf Cum Post Waste (LCV) have enhanced soil fertility, enabling farmers to access new markets and boost their earnings. Districts such as Maharajganj, Jhansi, Kushinagar, and Fatehpur have emerged as role models by implementing effective stubble management practices and conducting awareness campaigns. With a comprehensive approach that addresses both economic and environmental concerns, the Yogi government has successfully curbed pollution, strengthened the rural economy, and set a sustainable example for others to follow.

SM Krishna cremated with state honours



People pay their last respects as mortal remains of former union minister SM Krishna are being taken to his hometown, in Bengaluru. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MANDYA

Ex-Chief Minister of Karnataka and former External Affairs Minister S M Krishna was cremated on Wednesday with full state honours in his ancestral village Somanahalli in this district. The 92-year-old veteran politician, who had also served as the Maharashtra Governor, died at his residence in Bengaluru on Tuesday after prolonged illness. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy and Krishna's relative DK Shivakumar, Central and state ministers, several MLAs, MPs, opposition BJP and JD(S) leaders and top government officials in the

state were present during the final rites. Along with them, the pontiff of the Adi Chunchanagiri Math Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji along with others paid respect. Krishna's wife Prema, daughters Malavika and Shambhavi too paid their homage with teary eyes. The mortal remains of SMK, as Krishna was fondly addressed, was brought to the venue in a palanquin decorated with flowers. His body was wrapped in the Indian tricolour and decked with garlands. The police gave a gun salute to the departed leader. Amid chants of Vedic hymns by a team of priests, Krishna's grandson Amartya lit the pyre comprising 1,000 kg of sandalwood.

Mamata urges Center to protect Bangladesh minorities



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

With the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) repeatedly firing salvos at the West Bengal state government amid the Bangladesh crisis, Chief Minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee once again urged the Union government to take steps to protect minorities of the violence-hit country. "We want minorities in Bangladesh protected. The Union government must act. It should also bring back those who want to return to India," said Banerjee, who had earlier told the state

Assembly of her readiness to receive the persecuted Hindus of Bangladesh should they decide to migrate. She also said that the vested interests should stop posting fake videos if they were doing so. Banerjee had early this week said, "We will eat less and have one roti if required but we will host the distressed people who come to this side of the border," warning the Bangladesh leaders against issuing provocative slogans. Reacting to statements made by a senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader that they would lay their claims on Bengal, Bihar and Odisha which formed the parts of Nawab Siraj ud Daulah's kingdom, Banerjee said that those who were issuing provocative statements should stay calm and have mental rest. "I advise them mental peace and rest but I must remind them that we will not lick lollypops, when they will mount an attack on India," she said. Opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari too warned the warmongers from the other side of the border against making statements "that do not suit their capabilities."

PM's time wasted on elections, says Chauhan while pitching for 'One Nation, One Election'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Making a strong pitch for 'One nation, one election', Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday contended that frequent polls were creating hurdles in the nation's progress. Addressing an event in Kurukshetra as part of the ongoing International Gita festival, Chouhan said India is moving ahead rapidly under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A glorious, prosperous and powerful India is being built under the leadership of the PM. Soon, India will become the "Vishwa Guru" (world leader) in front of our eyes. There is no doubt about it, and the whole world knows it, he said. "But there is one hurdle in India's progress and development, which is frequent elections. Any other thing may be happening or not in the country, but election preparations continue for

twelve months all five years," he said. When Lok Sabha elections get over, Assembly elections come. Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra and Jharkhand are done, now Delhi Assembly polls are coming," Chouhan said. "Then there will be elections in Bihar and when we will deal with it, there will be another round of elections. All political parties prepare for elections all five years and in that public welfare works and development works get left behind," he said. "Chunav jeeetne ki chinta mein, sare dalon ke neta lage rehne hai (Leaders of all parties remain engaged in the race of winning the elections)," the Union minister said in the presence of Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini. "Now I am the agriculture minister, but if elections come, I remain engaged in election campaigning for three months continuously," he said. A lot of time of the PM, CM, ministers, MPs, MLAs, officers and other employees is wasted and all development works are

impacted, the minister charged. "Public welfare works are left behind," he said, while adding that expenditure is involved in conducting elections while poll expenses are also incurred by those contesting. "The Election Commission also spends, it is public money and then political parties also spend. How much time is wasted? Now, when elections will be held in other states, Nayab Saini ji (will go there for campaigning etc), the Haryana government officials will be put on duty (by the Election Commission) as observers. Your work here will be stalled for two-three months... (frequent polls). It obstructs our development," he said. Chouhan said frequent elections will keep taking place and therefore by amending the Constitution, all the assembly and Lok Sabha elections should be held together once in five years. "We must create public awareness for this," he said at the event attended by seers and students who gathered for the global recitation of the Bhagavad Gita.

National law school to offer three-year BA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Law School of India University, which has pioneered and developed an integrated five-year BA LLB (honours) degree that transformed Indian legal education, has now come up with a three-year (honours) BA course with an option of an additional fourth year. The first cohort of the programme will be admitted in July 2025, the NLSIU said. "We are looking to develop something that is responsive to 2025, but is completely different," the NLSIU Vice Chancellor Sudhir Krishnaswamy said at the launch of the programme. He said the university will teach the social sciences and humanities programme with a 'strong professional orientation'. "So we are very clear in our minds as we start that the BA degree is the only degree that a student will need. It's a terminal degree," he explained. "The BA programme is an organic development from 35 years of experience in offering the integrated 5-year BA LLB (Hons.) programme," the University said in a statement. According to the University, the course builds on existing faculty expertise that can be delivered without having to

develop an entirely new faculty. "The NLS BA (Hons.) programme has been developed by the University's Faculty Teams from August 2023 and was approved by the governing bodies earlier in 2024," it said. Before launching the programme, it had held an extensive stakeholder consultation with eminent academics and practitioners who advised on the curriculum. The BA programme is open to all candidates who have completed their higher secondary education, which means 10+2 or equivalent. The general category must have a minimum of 55 per cent aggregate marks while for the SC/ST category, the minimum aggregate marks is 45 per cent. Candidates in their final year of higher secondary education may also apply, provided they meet the academic criteria upon completion. An integral part of the curriculum is the opportunity to learn a selection of Indian languages. Further, the students will engage in hands-on learning through practice courses in emerging fields like Artificial Intelligence and machine learning, film-making, business consulting, user experience research, digital journalism, creative writing, entrepreneurship, policy advocacy and analysis.

PM Modi remembers ex-president Pranab Mukherjee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi remembered former President Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary on Wednesday. Calling him a statesman par excellence, Modi hailed him as an administrator and admired his contributions to the country's development. "Remembering Shri Pranab Mukherjee on his birth anniversary, Pranab Babu was a one-of-a-kind public figure—a statesman par excellence, a wonderful administrator and a repository of wisdom. His contributions to India's development are noteworthy. He was blessed with a unique ability to build consensus across the spectrum and this was due to his vast experience in governance and his deep understanding of India's culture as well as ethos. We will keep working to realise his vision for our nation," Prime Minister Modi wrote in a social media post.

Odisha exempts Rs 4097.67 Crore electricity dues for industries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has exempted electricity dues amounting to Rs 4097.67 crore for 14 industries under various schemes during the last 10 years, Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo told the Assembly on Wednesday. In a written reply to a question from senior Congress MLA Taraprasad Bahinipati, the Deputy CM, who is in charge of the energy department, said the electricity duty for these 14 industries was exempted since the financial year 2015-16 under schemes such as the Industrial Policy Resolution (IPR) and the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Policy. According to the statement submitted by Singh Deo, the Odisha government exempted the highest electricity dues of Rs 3599.88 crore for Vedanta Ltd, Jharsuguda, under the SEZ Policy-2015, while the central PSU, Indian Oil Corporation

Ltd (IOCL), Paradip, received an exemption of Rs 314.03 crore. Additionally, Angul-based Jindal Steel and Power Ltd (JSPL) was granted a waiver of Rs 103.16 crore in electricity duty. Apart from these exemptions, the Deputy CM further informed the House that the state government has also exempted electricity dues (through rebate on interest for pending bills) amounting to Rs 1324.83 crore for 36 industries under the One-Time Settlement Scheme, 2022 of the energy department. Under this scheme, the government waived electricity dues of Rs 550.12 crore for Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP), a unit of SAIL, Rs 440.12 crore for IMFA Ltd, Choudwar, and Rs 203.91 crore for the central PSU National Aluminium Company (Nalco), the Deputy CM said. Among others, the power bills of JSPL, Angul (Rs 35.76 crore), Aditya Aluminium Ltd,

Sambalpur (Rs 17.79 crore), Tata Steel Ltd, Kalinganagar (Rs 16 crore), and Vedanta Ltd, Lanjigarh (Rs 10.13 crore) were also exempted by the Odisha government, he informed. According to data provided by the engineer-in-chief-cum-principal chief electrical inspector, power dues worth Rs 1096.32 crore were pending against 23 industries as of October this year, Singh Deo added. The largest outstanding amount of Rs 285.02 crore is pending from Jindal India Thermal Power Ltd, Talcher in Angul district, followed by Visa Steel Ltd, Jajpur, which has not paid Rs 246 crore in electricity dues, he stated. Similarly, Dhenkanal-based GMR Kamalanga Energy Ltd, Maithan Ispat Nigam Ltd, Jajpur, and Shyam Metalics & Energy Ltd, Sambalpur have not paid power bills of Rs 179.35 crore, Rs 85.31 crore, and Rs 83.25 crore, respectively.



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah during an interaction with members of the civil society at his official residence. PTI

CM Omar Abdullah Promises to Restore 'Darbar Move'

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Striking a chord with the members of the civil society in Jammu, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Wednesday announced his government was committed to restoring the practice of the 'Darbar Move'. Omar made this announcement after attending a three-hour-long meeting with the members of the civil society in Jammu at his official residence. The meeting was attended by prominent citizens from different sections of the society. This is the second major policy decision in which the popular government has decided to reverse the decision of the Union Territory administration headed by Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Manoj Sinha. Soon after taking charge, the Omar government reversed the academic calendar in the Kashmir Valley by switching from the March session to the traditional November session in the winter zones of the Union Territory. Darbar Move is a bi-annual shifting of the Civil Secretariat and other offices of the state government from Jammu to

Srinagar in summer, and vice versa in winter. The practice was discontinued in November 2021. The practice, introduced by Dogra rulers nearly 150 years ago, was stopped by Lt Governor Manoj Sinha in June 2021, citing the administration's complete transition to e-office which could help save Rs 200 crore per year. However, the decision came up for sharp criticism from various quarters including the Jammu business community and politicians who termed the exercise as a bond between the two regions. Briefing media persons at his residence Omar maintained, "Darbar move is an issue which I fail to understand why it was not projected during campaigning for assembly polls. The issue gained momentum only after the election result although we have mentioned it in our manifesto and meetings," Abdullah said. "We assure you that the Darbar move will be restored. Jammu has its own importance and we will not allow its uniqueness to diminish," he told reporters.

Punjab farm leader Dallewal's fast enters 16th day over demands of MSP legal guarantee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab farm leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast unto death at the Khanauri border point to press the Union government to accept farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee on the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops, entered the 16th day on Wednesday. According to a farmer leader at Khanauri, Dallewal has lost more than 11 kg weight and his blood sugar levels are fluctuating. A team of doctors is monitoring his vital parameters. Farmers on Wednesday held prayers for the success of their agitation going on at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab

and Haryana in support of their various demands and for the good health of Dallewal. Farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) (SKM) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri since February 13, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces. The protesting farmers have formed a security ring around Dallewal to prevent authorities from removing him from the protest site. The Punjab Police had forcibly removed Dallewal from Khanauri on November 26, hours before he was going to start his fast unto death. Farmer leader Abhimanyu Kohar urged people to skip dinner on Thursday in



Farm leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal. PTI

support of Dallewal, who is 70-years-old. He also appealed to people to burn effigies of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Union government on December 13. Meanwhile, speaking on the farmers' protest, Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu reiterated his willingness to engage in dialogue with the protesters.

"Dialogue is the only way forward. I appeal to the farmers with folded hands to come forward for discussions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always been considerate of Punjab's farmers and already implemented significant MSP hikes," he said while talking to reporters in Patiala. Bittu also expressed concern over Dallewal's health. Punjab minister and the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) state unit chief Aman Arora urged the Union government to understand the intensity of the farmers' movement and hold talks with the protesters to resolve their issues. To a question on Bittu's statement, Arora said, "If you see his (Bittu) previous statements, this is a 360-

degree turnaround. Sometimes he uses bad language against farmers and sometimes, he says he is with them. "He (Bittu) should take the farmers in his vehicle and arrange a meeting between them and the prime minister. Nothing will happen by just making statements." Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher had said on Friday that there was no message from the Centre on holding talks and that the farmers would resume their foot march to Delhi on December 14. A group of 101 farmers under the banner of the SKM (Non-Political) and KMM made two attempts to enter Delhi on foot on December 6 and December 8. The farmers were not

allowed to proceed by security personnel in Haryana. The farmers had earlier attempted to march towards Delhi on February 13 and February 21 but were stopped by security forces deployed at the capital's border points. Besides a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops, the farmers are demanding a debt waiver, pension for farmers and farm labourers, no hike in the electricity tariff, withdrawal of police cases and "justice" for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence. Reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 and compensation to the families of the farmers who died during a previous agitation in 2020-21 are also part of their demands.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Race for Delhi

With the Delhi Assembly elections on the horizon, the political temperature in the capital is rising

As the Delhi Assembly Elections 2025 draw closer, the political landscape of the national capital is abuzz with activity. Major players—the incumbent Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Congress—are gearing up for what promises to be a fiercely contested battle. With 70 seats at stake, every party is refining its strategies to sway the electorate in its favour. The Aam Aadmi Party, led by Arvind Kejriwal, remains a dominant force in Delhi politics. In the 2020 elections, AAP swept the polls, securing 62 out of 70 seats, while the BJP managed only 8, and Congress failed to open its account. However, the 2025 elections present new challenges for the party, including anti-incumbency sentiments and a more aggressive opposition. One of the most intriguing aspects of AAP's strategy is the decision to field senior leader Manish Sisodia from the Jangpura constituency. Political analysts suggest this move reflects a calculated attempt by AAP to strengthen its presence in



South Delhi, which has traditionally been a mixed battleground. Sisodia's administrative acumen and popularity could be pivotal in securing a win in this crucial region.

Yet another aspect is Kejriwal's decision to go solo. Despite initial speculations about a possible alliance between AAP and Congress, Arvind Kejriwal has now said that AAP would have no electoral alliance with Congress. The strained relationship between the two parties, fueled by ideological differences and a history of rivalry, seems to have outweighed any potential advantages of a partnership. Additionally, AAP's leadership might perceive a tie-up with Congress as

a liability, given the latter's diminished presence in Delhi politics. But it also diminishes its own chances as vote split in this scenario is imminent. Congress has dedicated vote bank in Delhi and that could hurt AAP. On the other side, the BJP, aiming to reclaim its footing in Delhi, is expected to focus on its core voter base and polarising issues to galvanise support. The party has intensified its outreach efforts and is likely to emphasise nationalistic themes and the central government's achievements under Prime Minister Modi. However, its challenge remains breaking through AAP's stronghold on key urban constituencies. Congress faces an uphill battle as it tries to regain relevance in Delhi's political scene. The party's lack of significant organisational groundwork and leadership issues have kept it on the sidelines in recent years. However, Congress might attempt to consolidate minority vote and traditional voters to make a dent in the electoral outcome. The decision to avoid an alliance with Congress underscores AAP's confidence but also raises questions about its ability to counter a potentially consolidated opposition. As candidates hit the campaign trail, the capital is set to witness a clash of ideologies, promises and personalities. For now, all eyes are on the unfolding strategies as Delhi gears up for another defining electoral battle.

PICTALK



Monkeys huddle together on a chilly day, in New Delhi

For Joe Biden it is family first

Biden's decision to pardon his son is rooted in political and emotional complexities, with far-reaching implications for presidential clemency



KALYANI SHANKAR

Last week, Americans and people worldwide were stunned by the news that President Joe Biden pardoned his son, Hunter Biden. This clemency controversy was significant because Hunter Biden, a family member, contributed to the debate surrounding the pardon. The pardon ensures that Hunter will not be sentenced for his alleged crimes and will not go to prison.

The judges handling his cases will likely cancel the sentencing hearings scheduled for December 12 for the gun case and December 16 for the tax case. Also, the President is no longer running for office. He made his no-pardon pledge before dropping out of the June presidential race. Presidential pardons in the United States have often sparked controversy; however, some decisions—such as President Biden pardoning his son—have led to more criticism than others. Constitutionally, the President can grant pardons, a power previous presidents have used. Traditionally, US presidents dole out pardons as they leave office.

However, Joe Biden's 'complete and unconditional' pardon of his son adds a layer of complexity and public scrutiny to the issue, a historical context that is important for the public to understand. It is important to understand why Joe Biden acted as he did. Joe Biden has faced many difficulties in his life. He has faced significant personal challenges. He was caught between saving his son and the public criticism. Everyone knows that he is loyal to his family. His baby daughter and first wife died in a car accident, which also injured his sons, Beau and Hunter. Biden wanted Beau to become President, but Beau sadly died from brain cancer in 2015. This focus on the Biden family's struggles aims to create empathy from the public. According to the American media, Biden's second wife persuaded Joe to make a final decision. The public reaction to the Presidential pardon is both crit-



ical and supportive. While some think it is fair, others consider it not justified. This mixed reaction from the public, as well as from Biden's party colleagues, adds a layer of complexity to the issue. Presidents from both parties have used their pardon power, which has raised eyebrows.

George Washington used the power to pardon some people. Presidents often use their pardon powers for friends and allies. A controversial case was former President Richard Nixon, who Gerald Ford pardoned on September 8, 1974. Nixon faced possible prosecution for the Watergate scandal. In late 1992, President George H W Bush pardoned six men implicated in the Iran-contra affair, including former Defense Secretary Weinberger. Bill Clinton, who, despite stating he would not, pardoned his half-brother Roger for past cocaine charges. Similarly, Donald Trump pardoned his son-in-law Jared Kushner's father for tax evasion and for retaliating against a cooperating witness.

Both had already served their prison sentences. During the latter part of his first term, Trump issued pardons to various individuals who had engaged in wrongdoing. A relieved Hunter



THE PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PARDON IS BOTH CRITICAL AND SUPPORTIVE. WHILE SOME THINK IT IS FAIR, OTHERS CONSIDER IT NOT JUSTIFIED. THIS MIXED REACTION FROM THE PUBLIC, AS WELL AS FROM BIDEN'S PARTY COLLEAGUES, ADDS A LAYER OF COMPLEXITY TO THE ISSUE

said in a statement, "I have admitted and taken responsibility for my mistakes during the darkest days of my addiction — mistakes that have been exploited to publicly humiliate and shame me and my family for political sport."

The case against Hunter Biden has spanned several years, involving allegations of tax crimes and gun fences. He was convicted in June and pleaded guilty to tax evasion in September. Biden said Hunter was 'selectively and unfairly prosecuted' and pointed out that the charges were politically motivated. The immediate impact of the pardon is that it makes it harder for Democrats to criticise Trump. Also, it has given Trump a chance to pardon people charged with the January 6 events. Biden's change of heart after initially declaring he would not pardon Hunter had his reasons. One of them was his wife, who persuaded Biden to do so.

He stated Hunter was singled out only because Hunter was his son. President Biden has pardoned 25 individuals, none directly connected to him. Typically, presidents approve several clemency requests toward the end of the term. Still, The pardon "damages the public's trust in the presidency. President Bill

Clinton signed 140 pardons on January 20, 2001—his final day in office. Many lawmakers are worried about the potential bad precedent for the future.

One way of solving the problem could be to amend the Constitution. Still, it is a lengthy process, and neither party has the number to carry it through in Congress. The critics argue it could set a dangerous precedent and erode public trust in the justice system. Recent Supreme Court rulings have made it more difficult to charge a president for actions taken while in office.

They limit the avenues for holding a president accountable for any potential misuse of the pardon power. After Hunter's clemency, President Biden is considering granting broad pardons to protect his aides and officials. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stated that before leaving the White House, Biden plans to issue additional Pdonns.

However, in his second term, Trump declared he would pardon the 2021 clash in Congress while Biden took the oath. Trump must be careful before doling out Presidential pardons if they respect public opinion.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SYRIAN REBELS CONQUER DAMASCUS

Madam —The manner in which Islamic rebels conquered Syria's capital Damascus and forced President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country is not only surprising, but it may also mark the start of a new era of uncertainty for West Asia as a whole. The excitement with which Syrians welcomed the opposition soldiers demonstrates that Bashar al-Assad has become even more unpopular. His disfavour stemmed from his brutal governance over Syria. Syria has been dealing with insecurity and upheaval for nearly 13 years. Iran has suffered a significant setback with the seizure of Syria by rebel forces. It is dubious that Iran will sit in peace after the demise of the administration it sponsored in Syria. Even if the rebels win Syria without massive violence, the chances of durable peace are slim because Turkey wants to administer the country its way. Although India's economic ties with Syria have not grown significantly, both countries have joined forces in the battle against terror. Not only that, but Bashar al-Assad has always supported India about Kashmir. Syria has even stated that the elimination of Article 370 in Kashmir is a domestic matter for India and that any country has the right to take the necessary steps to safeguard its residents on its territory. It remains to be seen what kind and how much Syria's posture will alter considering the new circumstances. Indian-Turkish relations have recently improved. While its attitude on Kashmir has softened, India has not attempted to block Turkey's membership in BRICS.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

LEGACY OF SHAKTIKANTA DAS

Madam—The outgoing pro-reformist RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das leaves a legacy of stability and consistency in monetary policy in the most difficult and challenging times of COVID and geopolitical turbulence consequent upon the trade and tariff war of the US and China while the country is poised to be the third largest economy. The persuasive approach and preemptive policy decision-making with

Congress faces challenges



The knives are out in Opposition to INDIA block, especially after the drubbing suffered by the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi at the hands of the BJP-helmed Mahayuti in Maharashtra. The grand old party's poor show has dented its predominant position in India, prompting West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee to throw her hat into the ring. Dissatisfied with the bloc's functioning, Mamata has signalled her

intention to take charge of the alliance if given the opportunity. She has found support from NCP stalwart Sharad Pawar, who has called her a "prominent leader" of the nation.

It's apparent that Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, is losing ground as the face of INDIA. There are three Gandhis in Parliament now—with Priyanka being the latest entrant—but this dynastic milestone has not enthused the voters or Congress' allies. Though party president Mallikarjun Kharge is also the chairperson of the bloc, it is no secret that the Gandhi family is calling the shots. But this arrangement is strengthening neither the Congress nor INDIA. The Congress has no option but to pay heed to its partners. In case of no course correction, the alliance might implode sooner or later, leaving the field open for the BJP and PM Modi.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

immediate action marked the success story of the outgoing RBI Governor. Issuing perfunctory warnings and advisories was not his work culture.

The economic impact of demonetisation on trade and business was smoothly handled in his tenure. In such a vast country facing multiple challenges, the new RBI Governor faces the toughest test of the sustaining economy and people expect a daring chief banker who sails against the winds. The new incumbent Revenue Secretary, Sanjay Malhotra, as RBI Governor, knows his job well, as he is already at the helm of economic affairs and is fully conversant about how the economic policies of the government and RBI move and work at ground level. The new RBI Governor faces the trilemma of growth, inflation, and stabilisation of rupees while keeping banks' NPAs low, controlling the mis-selling of health and life insurance policies, maintaining FDI and FPI inflows, and managing the impacts of US-China confrontations. The new US President, Donald Trump, may also throw significant challenges on RBI's monetary policy and val-

uation of the rupee. Cryptocurrency is also one of the major concerns for RBI.

Vinod Johri | Jalandhar

RBI MOOTS FOR BETTER WAGES

Madam — The Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) to the Government of India has emphasised the need for better employee compensation growth, especially when India Inc is experiencing record profit growth. With the rising prices of education fees, medical fees, vegetables, grocery items, and daily necessities, there is a strong need to raise the compensation growth of employees, as their salary/wages are their primary source of living. This downfall in compensation growth is also affecting GDP growth, as employees are controlling their expenditures for survival. Government agencies need to address this issue by implementing policies that promote fair compensation practices for the overall well-being of India.

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Bridging the educational divide through computer-based testing

A successful classroom isn't just about books and resources; it's about creating an environment where students feel valued, heard and empowered to succeed



MATHEW POYIADGI

In populous and diverse countries like India, the educational landscape often mirrors the stark contrasts between urban and rural regions. Urban areas benefit from advanced infrastructure and access to extensive educational opportunities, while rural regions often struggle with limited resources and opportunities. This disparity significantly affects students in rural communities, restricting their career prospects and perpetuating cycles of poverty. However, innovative solutions like computer-based testing (CBT) hold the potential to bridge this divide, fostering enhanced employability and socioeconomic progress.



initiatives by enabling a broader range of courses and certifications, including technical skills like coding and data analysis and soft skills such as communication and leadership. Certifications that are nationally or globally recognised add value to individuals' skillsets, making them more competitive in the job market. As more people upskill and secure employment, communities experience economic upliftment. Educated individuals often share knowledge within their communities, creating a ripple effect that promotes continuous learning and development.

Addressing Skills Gaps: The demand for tech skills is on the rise globally. The World

Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2023 highlights that technology and IT roles constitute 16 of the top 100 rising jobs, reflecting the growing importance of tech-related expertise. Conversely, the Global Talent Shortage report by Manpower Group reveals a significant skills gap, with 77 per cent of employers struggling to find qualified talent. Bridging this gap is critical to meeting current and future market demands, particularly through IT and tech-focused courses.

According to Pearson VUE's 2023 Value of IT Certification Candidate Report, professionals who earned IT certifications gained confidence in their abilities, with 81 per cent feeling empowered to explore new job opportunities. Educational centres with CBT capabilities enable individuals in rural areas to acquire certifications that align with market needs, thereby promoting quality education and employability across the nation.

The Broad Reach of Computer-Based Testing: The flexible nature of CBT offers unique advantages over traditional testing methods.

Candidates can choose convenient testing locations and time slots, reducing stress and improving performance. This approach proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing individuals to take exams remotely. The 2023 Value of IT Certification Report underscores the tangible benefits of certifications: 35 per cent of Indian candidates experienced job promotions, while 37 per cent secured new opportunities within their industry, and 20 per cent transitioned to different fields. **Bridging Urban-Rural Disparities:** The increasing availability of CBT centres in remote areas is a step toward addressing regional disparities in education and employment. These centres provide a pathway for individuals to upskill, earn recognised certifications, and improve their career prospects. As India continues to expand its CBT infrastructure, the nation moves closer to realising equitable educational opportunities and fostering inclusive socioeconomic growth.

(The writer is Vice President EMEA and Asia, Pearson VUE; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LIFE

Our journey through birth and death is inevitable, we must therefore detach ourselves



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

We should do it because evidence is overwhelming that we are eternal souls. We are in a birth and death cycle getting different bodies life after life. What will you say about Shanti Devi's rebirth? She was born in Delhi but recalled details of her past life in Mathura. Her recollections were so compelling that Mahatma Gandhi got interested. He appointed a committee of 15 prominent persons to study the case. They took Shanti Devi to Mathura and she was able to recollect all the relevant details even though she had never been to Mathura in her present life. Dr Ian Stevenson, a leading authority on reincarnation, came to India to interview her. He wrote that at least 24 statements of her memories matched verifiable facts.

These days TV channels have become interested in the rebirth phenomenon. They are producing evidence from all over the world to confirm the same. Then, the Bhagavad-Geeta – the book of eternal wisdom is full of detailed information about us being souls. I will cite just one verse. "Just as childhood, youth and old age are changes in the body of this soul, getting another body is a similar change. (2.93) And the ultimate confirmation is God saying it. Isn't He omniscient, who knows past, present and future also?"

Having convinced ourselves of this reality, let us see how we can prepare for a transfer or relocation from our present life. There are two main parts. The first one is getting mentally ready. Personally speaking, when the time came for me to go to the USA for higher



studies, I visualised how my life would change for the better in the coming years. I also realised that there will inevitably be many challenges in the new country. The second was to take with me whatever I could to make my life there as comfortable as possible.

I took the necessary clothes and a little money, which was allowed at that time. But mainly it was my certificates and what I had learnt by that time. Similar preparations are required for the bodily change, though they are quite different in detail. The first one has to be the mental preparation for such a change. We should accept the fact that such a change is inevitable. And it can be a lot better than our present. Lord Krishna has assured, "Those who have begun their spiritual journey take birth in a family of pure and prosperous." (6.41) Therefore, it is essential that we do so too before our time comes to leave the present body. We must be in the shelter of God at that time by doing spiritual activities.

Surely, we must be following dharma in our activities as far as possible. We should be mainly in the mode of goodness, which is illuminating and free from diseases on account of purity. (14.6) We should be in control of bad emotions like lust, greed, anger, hate, etc. We should have accumulated a lot of good 'karmas' (acts) because this is all we are allowed to take with us.

But we shouldn't put too much pressure on ourselves because we can make improvements gradually only. Whatever, we are presently doing, we should do it better. As the present determines the future, the present has to be safeguarded fully. Are we inclined to make the necessary preparations? We should get started right away at least mentally. It will be such a shame not to do so when we have time to do so. Those wanting to do so are encouraged by God; one will succeed.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

Rebel forces oust Assad as Damascus falls



B K SINGH

The fall of Assad's regime signals a new chapter in Syria's tumultuous history, raising critical questions about the country's path to stability



Syrrian President Bashar al-Assad's government has been fighting rebel groups with the support of Russia, Iran, Lebanese and Hezbollah right from 2011. Within ten days of rebels getting control over northwestern city of Aleppo and further capturing Hama and Homs, the capital Damascus also fell under their control on December 8. President Assad along with his wife and three children fled the country before rebel forces could reach him. He has been granted asylum in Moscow. His younger brother was tipped to succeed his father as President, died in a road accident.

He was called back from London, where he was practising ophthalmologist, to succeed his father as President of Syria. In the initial months after taking over the Presidency in the year 2000 he was seen as a reformist and pro-people in sharp contrast to his father Hafez al-Assad's three-decade rule with iron hands. Once pro-democracy protests erupted in 2011, he followed the brutal tactics of his father to crush dissent. The conflict escalated into civil war and he was seen unleashing his military to blast opposition-held territories. All supporters of the Assad regime have considerably weakened their backing on account of the ongoing war they are engaged in.

Russian forces have a challenging battle in Ukraine. Owing to the high level of casualties of soldiers in the battle, Russia has withdrawn its forces from Syria partially and is even further recruiting foreign nationals in the force to keep the war going, which has already been continuing for a quarter to three years. Hamas's terror attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and Israel's response to Gaza opened several dimensions of the West Asia conflict.

Iran's supported terror groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Houthis in Yemen have denounced Palestinians suffering in Gaza on account of Israeli bombardment and it opened additional fronts for Israel in the conflict. This has also weakened Iran and Hezbollah to provide adequate support to Assad's regime. In addition, 13 years of Syrian civil war has exhausted the Syrian Army. Owing to the corruption in the bureaucratic and political circle of the Syrian government, and the series of Western sanctions, the economy



THE CONFLICT ESCALATED INTO CIVIL WAR AND HE WAS SEEN UNLEASHING HIS MILITARY TO BLAST OPPOSITION-HELD TERRITORIES. ALL SUPPORTERS OF THE ASSAD REGIME HAVE CONSIDERABLY WEAKENED THEIR BACKING ON ACCOUNT OF THE ONGOING WAR THEY ARE ENGAGED IN

has been hardly afloat. Further President Erdogan in Ankara, is facing the heat on account of three million Syrian migrants living in Turkey and more so because Syria dismisses his proposal for deportation of migrants alleging that his country has illegally occupied Syrian areas along the border.

There was an option for Assad to join the Arab League last year, but he did not accept making Arab nations also opposed to him. Earlier with the help of Iran and Russia, he had survived the Arab Spring Rebellion against him, which originated in Tunisia in 2011. The next question is about the future of Syria. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is a Sunni Islamist militant group, that played an important role in the Syrian civil war. It is this group that has led other rebel groups to occupy Damascus.

The US, UK and UN have designated it as a terrorist organisation. A bounty of \$10 million was on its chief Abu Mohammad al-Golani's head. UK has indicated lifting the ban on HTS if it delivers on promises like protecting minorities and people's rights. Turkey has backed some other rebel groups in the Syrian civil war, which do not have good ties with HTS. US-backed Kurdish YPG militia has established control in Syria's northeast, also known as the Kurdish democratic union party (PYD) does not enjoy good and workable relations with HTS. There are separate rebels in Syria's southwest.

It is quite difficult for all the groups to come together and be partners in Syria's new regime. 900 strong military men are maintained by the US in northeastern Syria. The US has maintained this presence in the name of countering ISIS, but its actual goal was the regime change in Syria. The US has now emerged clear winner. As rebels have asserted control over Syria and its capital Damascus, uncertainties remain about the future of the country.

The first day was marked by arsenals, looting of shops and banks, and emptying prisons followed by a night curfew, but the second day saw normalcy slowly returning to the capital and other cities. The main rebel commander al-Golani met Assad's PM Mohammad Jalali and Vice President Faisal Mekdad to install a transitional government in Syria. Further, Golani has announced publicly that they would bring out a list of government officials responsible for torturing the citizens.

In the meantime, there have been air strikes in Syria by Israeli, US and Turkey forces to protect each of their interests. Iran and Russia have suffered major setbacks with the fall of Assad's government. Both countries have lost their key allies. As Sunni Islamic groups are going to be in control of Syria, Iran a predominantly Shia population is more vulnerable to Israeli attacks. When rebel forces took control of Aleppo about a week earlier, both Iran and Russia could not extend adequate defence leading to the fall of even Damascus. Iran was exposed in recent Israeli direct attacks, and Hezbollah was also decimated, no significant support came from Assad. In recent months, Assad's Syria and Iran could not support each other when exigencies arose. Syria is the only state that had joined Iran's 'Axis of resistance' against the US and Israel.

The axis has become weak; even Hezbollah's downfall could not be prevented. Hezbollah has signed a ceasefire deal with Israel ahead of any Gaza deal. The action of the state of Iran and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to defend Assad did not go well with the people of Iran. It had political and economic costs. The fall of Assad sends a disturbing signal to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who now understands that the axis of resis-

tance can no longer protect the allies. Assad's fall has also emboldened opposition groups in Iran. Besides these, women are protesting for their rights.

All these may lead to regime change in Iran too. If the Supreme Leader realigns himself with the US by reviving/softening its stand on the 2015 nuclear deal, then regime change in Iran can be avoided. The last two weeks of violence that culminated in Assad's fleeing Syria, also saw the Shia population enthusiastically taking measures to secure the tomb of Sayyeda Zainab, the daughter of Hazrat Ali and Fatima and granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad. This holy site signifies great importance for Shia Muslims worldwide. To guarantee the security of this precious shrine, Shias from Iran, Iraq and Pakistan are also moving to Syria. The shrine is located in al-Sitt, south Damascus.

Since 1979 Iranian government has provided financial support for the management of the shrine. Several Shia scholars and celebrities are buried in the shrine and surrounding cemeteries. Since 2012 the town has been under attack from armed militants in neighboring Sunni towns. Many Shia families were driven out of their homes in southern Damascus.

Rockets landing on random places was quite common. Sunni Muslims comprise 74 per cent of Syria's population, whereas Shias are only 3 per cent. Shias hold quite a strong sentiment for the shrine; the issue can be a potential flash point between the two sects and would also determine the rivalry between rebel groups.

Will Syria's transition to democracy be smooth? It is possible only when different rebel groups learn to share power.

(The writer is Principal Chief Conservator of Forests-Head of Forest Force- Karnataka; views expressed are personal)

Empowering India's solar revolution: Navigating challenges and embracing opportunities

As energy demands are set to double by 2030, addressing these gaps is essential to transforming India's solar aspirations into reality

India has been declared as the third-largest energy-consuming country, thanks to the rising income and improving standards of living. In response to the escalating energy demand, India has set ambitious targets for solar energy capacity, aiming to reach 280 GW by 2030 (the highest among all renewable sources). And owing to the rise in awareness surrounding solar energy solutions, the country has achieved 70.10 GW of solar energy capacity by June 2023, which is 70.1 per cent of the target of 100 GW set in the year preceding. The rising awareness of solar solutions among consumers, particularly rooftop solar solutions, is a notable trend in the solar energy market. This trend has been driven by



PREETI BAJAJ

various factors, including technological advancements, innovation, digital revolution to unlock more of the sun's potential and support from the Central Government. Community leaders, particularly in rural and non-metro areas, have also emerged as crucial drivers in promoting the adoption of solar energy solutions. However, despite this awareness, a significant gap exists between the aware-

ness of the advantages of solar energy and its widespread adoption. The adoption rate remains relatively low. Reportedly, the country fell short of its renewable energy target for 2022 by 32 per cent, with an installed capacity of 119 GW compared to the target of 175 GW. Financial and cost considerations, geographical limitations, and perception issues further cause a challenge to solar energy adoption in India. To understand the potential consumers, Luminous initiated a large, nationwide survey to delve further into the perceptions, awareness, adoption, and challenges concerning solar energy among respondents in India. The initial analysis of the survey data suggests that while

people are increasingly aware of alternatives to traditional energy sources, a majority of consumers in India face three primary challenges in their adoption: Accessibility, Skill shortage, and Perceived cost implication, as discovered in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research. For instance, over two-quarters of the respondents (54 per cent) in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research rate their knowledge about solar energy solutions as high, however, nearly a quarter of the respondents (24 per cent) say solar energy solutions are inaccessible to them. In fact, according to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), 59 per cent of respondents do not possess



even a basic understanding of solar energy. Therefore, while awareness is spreading, concerns linger about the accessibility of solar infrastructure. Another challenge that came to the fore, is the shortage of specialised skills in the solar energy sector. The boost in the solar energy sector is facing a shortage of trained personnel for the effective implementation and maintenance of solar infra-

structure. According to the COO of the Skill Council of Green Jobs, there will be a requirement of 30,000 skill-certified human resources in the manufacturing segment by the end of FY 2024, and only 10,000 skill-certified jobs will be added by the end of this financial year. As per the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' survey data also, despite the acknowledgement of skill requirements, nearly half of the respondents (45 per cent) believe that skilled labour for implementing solar energy solutions is unavailable in their area, suggesting a mismatch between demand and supply of qualified personnel. While the government has introduced various policies and incentives to promote solar adoption- including

financial incentives, tax advantages, subsidies for solar power generation, net-metering regulations, basic customs duty, Production Linked Incentive (PLI), and the Aatmanirbhar campaign, perceived costs remain a significant deterrent for many individuals. Thus, the Solar Spectrum of New India presents both challenges and opportunities on the path towards a sustainable energy future. By addressing issues of accessibility, skill shortages, and perceived costs, stakeholders can work together to accelerate solar adoption trends and pave the way for a brighter, cleaner future for India.

It's also imperative because the demand for reliable power in urban and rural areas will double by 2030. This surge in

demand will be powered by increased industrial, economic, and domestic consumption activities throughout the country. Moreover, according to the National Electricity Plan, the projected all-India peak electricity demand and electrical energy requirement is 277.2 GW and 1,907.8 BUs for the year 2026-27 and 366.4 GW and 2,473.8 BUs for 2031-32, respectively. However, the absence of power line infrastructure and distribution utilities' lag in supplying power around the clock indicates the need for significant changes in existing energy infrastructure and the availability of alternate sources.

(The writer is MD & CEO of Luminous Power Technologies; views expressed are personal)

Ex-defense chief in South Korea tried to kill himself after being arrested over martial law

AP ■ SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA)

South Korea's previous defence minister was stopped from attempting suicide while in detention over last week's martial law declaration, officials said Wednesday, as President Yoon Suk Yeol's office resisted a police attempt to search the compound. The main liberal opposition Democratic Party plans to introduce a new motion to impeach Yoon for his December 3 declaration that imposed martial law in South Korea for the first time in more than four decades. Its first impeachment attempt failed after ruling party lawmakers boycotted the vote. The party said it plans to submit the new motion on Thursday to set up a vote on Saturday. Yoon's ill-conceived power grab has paralysed South Korean politics, frozen its foreign policy and rattled financial markets. On Wednesday, rival

North Korea's state media for the first time reported about the turmoil across the border, but the country hasn't showed any suspicious activities. Shin Yong Hae, commissioner general of the Korea Correctional Service, told lawmakers that former Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun tried to kill himself the previous night at a detention centre in Seoul. He said correctional officers stopped him and that he was in stable condition. Kim was arrested early Wednesday after a Seoul court approved a warrant for him on allegations of playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. Kim became the first person formally arrested over the martial law decree. Kim, one of Yoon's close associates, has been accused of recommending martial law to Yoon and sending troops to the National Assembly to block lawmakers from voting on it. Enough lawmakers eventually managed to enter a parliament chamber and they unanimously

rejected Yoon's decree, forcing the Cabinet to lift it before daybreak on December 4. Kim said in a statement on Tuesday that he "deeply apologises for causing significant anxiety" to the public. He said all responsibility for the martial law imposition rests with him and pleaded for leniency for soldiers deployed to enforce it. Prosecutors have up to 20 days to determine whether to indict Kim. **Yoon's office hampers search of presidential compound:** Later Wednesday, police detained National Police Agency Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho and Kim Bong-sik, head of Seoul's metropolitan police. They were accused of deploying police forces to parliament to block lawmakers from voting. The main focus of investigators is finding whether Yoon, Kim and others involved in imposing martial law committed rebellion. A conviction on the charge of rebellion carries a

maximum death sentence. South Korean police said they sent officers to search Yoon's office on Wednesday to look for any evidence related to the martial law introduction. But investigators failed to enter the office as of Wednesday evening, about six hours after their arrival, senior police officer Lee Ho-young said in parliament. Some observers earlier said that the presidential security service won't likely permit searches of Yoon's office, citing a law that prohibits searches of sites with state secrets without approval from those in charge of those areas. Yoon on Saturday apologised over the martial law decree, saying that he won't avoid legal or political responsibility for it. He said he would leave it to his party to chart a course through the country's political turmoil, "including matters related to my term in office."

The leader of Yoon's ruling party later vowed to arrange the president's stable exit from office, saying the party will coordinate with Cabinet members over state affairs and that Yoon will be sidelined from duties. The comments were criticised as unrealistic and unconstitutional, but caused widespread questions about who is in charge of South Korea and its military at a time of heightened tensions with North Korea. The Justice Ministry on Tuesday banned Yoon from leaving the country as he faces investigations. Vice Defense Minister Kim Seon Ho reiterated Wednesday that Yoon remains in charge of the military. But Yoon hasn't been involved in any major official activities since lifting martial law, except for accepting resignation offers by officials involved in the martial law case and appointing the head for the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. **A view from North Korea:** A Wednesday article from the North's state news agency reported about the South

Korean political chaos and protests triggered by Yoon's martial law decree. The report mostly attempted to explain the South Korean events, though it called Yoon "a traitor" and his military "gangsters." Many experts say North Korea is sensitive to the domestic spread of news on major anti-government protests in foreign countries, because its own people have no official access to international news and could be affected by such events. The US State Department said Monday that the US-South Korean alliance remains "iron-clad" and that Washington is committed to the peace and security of the Korean Peninsula. In his martial law announcement, the conservative Yoon stressed a need to rebuild the country by eliminating "shameless North Korea followers and anti-state forces," a reference to his liberal rivals who control parliament. Since taking office in 2022, Yoon has had near-constant friction with the

Democratic Party, which introduced motions to impeach some of his top officials and launched a political offensive over scandals involving Yoon and his wife. Opposition parties and many experts say the martial law decree was unconstitutional. They say a president is by law allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergency situations, but South Korea wasn't in such a predicament. They argue that deploying troops to seal the National Assembly to suspend its political activities amounted to rebellion because the constitution doesn't allow a president to use the military to suspend parliament in any situation. If Yoon is impeached, his presidential powers would be suspended until the Constitutional Court decides whether to restore his powers or remove him from office. If he is dismissed from office, a new presidential election would be required.

Iran blames US, Israel for fall of Assad govt

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei says the recent events in Syria, including the fall of its government, were part of a joint plan by the United States and Israel. "There should be no doubt that what has happened in Syria is the result of a joint American and Zionist plan," Khamenei said in a speech in Tehran on Wednesday that was broadcast on state TV. "We have evidence, and this evidence leaves no room for doubt." The Supreme leader added: "A neighbouring state of Syria has played a clear role in this matter, and it continues to do so. Everyone can see this." Khamenei also rejected speculation by analysts who have said that Iran will be weakened by the fall of Syrian President Bashar Assad's government. "Those ignorant analysts are unaware of the meaning of resistance. They think that if resistance weakens, Islamic Iran will also weaken. But I say, with the help and power of God — by the will of Almighty Allah — Iran is powerful and it will become even more powerful," he said.

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 29

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 29 people overnight and into Wednesday, including one that hit a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north, killing 19, according to Palestinian medical officials. The Israel-Hamas war has raged on with no end in sight, even after Israel reached a ceasefire with Lebanon's Hezbollah and attention shifted to the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Both the outgoing and incoming US administrations have said they hope to end the war before the inauguration but months of ceasefire talks have repeatedly stalled. The strike that killed 19 occurred in the northern town of Beit Lahya near the border with Israel, according to the nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital, which received the bodies. Hospital records show that a family of eight was among those killed, including four children, their parents and two grandparents. The hospital said another strike near its entrance on Wednesday killed a woman and her two children. Another strike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed at least seven people, according to the Awda Hospital. The dead included two children, their parents and three relatives, it said. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses militants of hiding among them, putting their lives in danger. Militants in central Gaza meanwhile fired four projectiles into Israel on Wednesday, two of which were intercepted, the

military said. The other two fell in open areas, and there were no reports of casualties. The military ordered the evacuation of a five-block area of the built-up Maghazi refugee camp in central Gaza, saying the rockets had been fired from there. The orders indicated that Israel would soon carry out strikes in the area. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people, including children and older adults. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to local health officials. They say women and children make up more than half the dead but do not distinguish between fighters and civilians in their count. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. Thousands more Palestinians have gone missing during the war, some after encounters with Israeli troops. Israel has been waging a renewed offensive against Hamas in Gaza's isolated and heavily destroyed north since early October. Troops have surrounded Beit Lahya, Beit Hanoun and the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, allowing in almost no humanitarian aid and ordering tens of thousands to flee to nearby Gaza City. Israeli officials have said the three communities are mostly deserted, but the United Nations humanitarian office said Tuesday that it believes around 65,000 to 75,000 people are still there, with little access to food, water, electricity or health care. Experts have

warned that the north may be experiencing famine. Sigrid Kaag, the senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters at the UN on Tuesday that civilians trying to survive all across Gaza face an "utterly devastating situation." She pointed to the breakdown in law and order and looting that has left the UN and many aid organisations unable to deliver food and other humanitarian essentials to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in need. Kaag said she and other UN officials keep repeatedly asking Israel for access for convoys to northern Gaza and elsewhere, to allow in commercial goods, to reopen the Rafah crossing from Egypt in the south, and to approve dual-use items. The Israeli military says it allows in enough humanitarian aid and blames UN agencies for not distributing it, saying large amounts of aid have accumulated just inside Gaza's borders. UN officials say Israeli restrictions, the breakdown of law and order and ongoing fighting make it difficult to access the aid and distribute it, and have repeatedly called for a ceasefire. The United States, Egypt and Qatar have been mediating talks between Israel and Hamas for nearly a year, and diplomats say those efforts have recently gained momentum. But Hamas has said it will not release the remaining hostages without an end to the war and a full withdrawal of Israeli troops. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged to continue the war until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages are returned and has said Israel will maintain a lasting military presence in some areas.



Suheil Harawi, centre, who spent 32 years in prison in Syria and returned to Lebanon after the government of Bashar Assad was toppled kisses his grandchildren at his home in Chekka, Lebanon. AP/PTI

Taliban refugee minister killed in Afghan blast

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

A suicide bombing in the Afghan capital on Wednesday killed the Taliban refugee minister and two others, Interior Ministry officials said. The explosion struck inside the ministry, killing Khalil Haqqani, the refugee minister, officials said. The officials provided no further details. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. Haqqani was the most high-profile casualty of a bombing in Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power three years ago. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blast. Khalil Haqqani is the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting interior minister who leads a powerful network within the Taliban. The Islamic State group's affiliate, a major rival of the ruling Taliban, has carried out previous attacks across Afghanistan. In early September, a suicide bomber in the southwestern Qala Bakhtiar neighbourhood in Kabul killed at least six people and wounding 13 others. IS had claimed responsibility for the attack.

Global chemical arms monitoring watchdog convenes meeting to discuss Syria situation

AP ■ THE HAQUE

The global chemical weapons watchdog will hold an emergency meeting on Thursday to discuss the situation in Syria over concerns about the country's stockpile of toxic chemicals. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons told Syria on Monday it is under obligations to comply with rules to safeguard and destroy dangerous substances, such as chlorine gas, after rebels entered the capital Damascus at the weekend and overthrew the regime of President Bashar Assad. The meeting was called by the organisations executive council to

discuss the current situation in Syria as well as the status of ongoing investigations in the country. Members of the ousted Syrian government plan to gradually transfer power to a new transitional cabinet headed by Mohammed al-Bashir, who reportedly headed the rebel alliance's "salvation government" in its southwest Syrian stronghold. Outgoing officials met for the first time Tuesday with al-Bashir, who told reporters that the transitional period would last until the beginning of March. Assad's regime denied using chemical weapons, but the OPCW has found evidence indicating their repeated use by Syria

in the country's grinding civil war. Earlier this year, it found the Islamic State group had used mustard gas against the town of Marea in 2015. The US has said it will recognise and support a new Syrian government that renounces terrorism, destroys chemical weapons stocks and protects the rights of minorities and women. "When it comes to this question of inspections and verifications, it is the responsibility of that organisation to conduct verification efforts under its mandate, not any of the member states or the United States or other states. That, the OPCW will do," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters in

Washington on Tuesday. Israel said it has carried out more than 350 strikes in Syria over the last 48 hours, hitting "most of the strategic weapons stockpiles" in the country to stop them from falling into the hands of extremists. The Israeli military acknowledged pushing into a buffer zone inside Syria but it remained unclear if Israeli soldiers had gone beyond that area, which was established more than 50 years ago. Israel denied that it was advancing on the Syrian capital of Damascus. The Kremlin said Sunday that Russia had granted political asylum to Assad, a decision made by President Vladimir Putin.

Aid to N Gaza blocked for last 2 months: UN

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Humanitarian aid to North Gaza, where Israel launched a ground offensive on October 6, has largely been blocked for the past 66 days, the United Nations has said. That has left between 65,000 and 75,000 Palestinians without access to food, water, electricity or health care, according to the world body. In the north, Israel has continued its siege on Beit Lahya, Beit Hanoun and Jabaliya with Palestinians living there largely denied aid, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, known as OCHA, said on Tuesday. Recently, it said, about 5,500 people were forcibly displaced from three schools in Beit Lahya to Gaza City. Adding to the food crisis, only four UN-supported bakeries are currently operating throughout the Gaza Strip, all of them in Gaza City, OCHA said. Sigrid Kaag, the senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told reporters after briefing the UN Security Council behind closed doors Tuesday afternoon that civilians trying to survive in Gaza face an "utterly devastating situation"

TikTok challenges Canadian government order to dissolve business in country

AP ■ OTTAWA

TikTok has challenged a Canadian government order to shut down the Chinese video-sharing app's business operations in the country that was imposed over national security concerns. The company said Tuesday that it filed an application for a judicial review with the Federal Court in Vancouver on December 5, which seeks to set aside the order for TikTok to wind-up and cease its business in Canada. The Canadian federal government last month announced it was ordering the dissolution of TikTok Technology Canada Inc. after a national security review of its Chinese parent company ByteDance Ltd. The government is not blocking access to the TikTok app, which will continue to be available to Canadians. TikTok said it has 14 million users in Canada, which is about a third of the population. It has offices in Toronto and Vancouver. The wildly popular platform is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that moved its headquarters to Singapore in

The Canadian federal government last month announced it was ordering the dissolution of TikTok Technology Canada Inc. after a national security review of its Chinese parent company ByteDance Ltd. 2020, but is under increasing pressure in the West. It's facing a possible ban in the US and intensifying scrutiny in Europe over issues including election influence campaigns allegedly coordinated by Moscow. TikTok argues in its court application, which was posted online, that Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne's decision was "unreasonable" and "driven by improper purposes." It says the order is "grossly disproportionate" and the national security review was "procedurally unfair." The review was carried out through the Investment Canada Act, which allows the

government to investigate foreign investment with potential to harm national security. Champagne said in a statement at the time that the government was taking action to address "specific national security risks," but did not elaborate. His office said in response to the filing that the government's decision was informed by a "thorough national security review and advice from Canada's security and intelligence community." TikTok said Champagne "failed to engage with TikTok Canada on the purported substance of the concerns" that led to the order. It argues the government ordered "measures that bear no rational connection to the national security risks it identifies" and that the reasons for the order "are unintelligible, fail to reveal a rational chain of analysis and are rife with logical fallacies." The platform says there were "less onerous" options than shutting down its Canadian business, which it said would eliminate hundreds of jobs, threaten business contracts and "cause the destruction of significant economic opportunities."

Trump mocks Justin Trudeau

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump took a jab at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on the social media platform Truth Social, describing him as the "Governor of Canada." Trudeau flew to Mar-a-Lago last week for a dinner with Trump to discuss the President-elect's warning to impose a 25 per cent tariff on Canada if its government failed to stop the flow of illegal immigrants and illicit drugs from the country into the United States. In a post on Truth Social mocking the Canadian prime minister, Trump said, "It was a pleasure to have dinner the other night with Governor Justin Trudeau of the Great State of Canada." During the dinner, when Trudeau said that such a tariff would destroy the Canadian economy, the President-elect reportedly told him to make Canada the 51st state of the United States. Trump repeated this in an interview with NBC News over the weekend and again in the post on Tuesday. "I look forward to seeing the Governor again soon so that we may continue our in depth talks on Tariffs and Trade, the results of which will be truly spectacular for all! DJT," Trump said in his post.

22 held, 150 booked for propagating against Pak Army on social media

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistani authorities have booked 150 suspects and arrested 22 of them, mostly belonging to Imran Khan's party, for allegedly propagating against the army on social media on the killings of the party workers in Islamabad on November 26, an official said on Wednesday. According to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), at least 12 party workers were killed and hundreds wounded when law enforcers opened fire on the protesters in Islamabad on November 26. It also claims that around 105 party workers have been missing since then. Following the incident, Khan's supporters started blaming the Pakistan Army for opening fire on the peaceful protesters. The Shehbaz Sharif-led government denied that the law enforcers opened fire on the protesters and pledged to take strict action against those propagating on social media. The government formed a special task force headed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) chief to NAB such elements.

Amnesty had sought a transparent investigation of the state's "deadly crackdown" to disperse PTI supporters from Islamabad's D-Chowk where they had gathered for the release of their leader Imran Khan. "Subsequently, the FIA cyber-crime wing booked some 150 suspects and arrested 22 social media activists across the country," an FIA officer said. He said that the FIA made 117 raids, mostly in Punjab, to arrest the suspects involved in the propaganda against the state institutions. The suspects (social media activists) have been booked under different sections of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Earlier, Amnesty International had demanded a transparent investigation of the state's "deadly crackdown" to dis-

perse PTI supporters from Islamabad's D-Chowk where they had gathered for the release of their incarcerated leader and former prime minister. More than 10,000 protesters surged into Islamabad on Nov 26, defying a ban on public gatherings and a lockdown to skirmish with 20,000 security forces enlisted to turn them back. As Khan supporters inched towards the heavily barricaded D-Chowk, the police and security forces used intense teargas shelling to disperse the protesters. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi had said the law enforcers had "bravely repulsed the protesters" without using firearms. Khan's party harshly criticised the interior minister for his statements and blamed him for the alleged violence against its supporters, claiming multiple deaths. Condemning the violence, Amnesty demanded a "prompt, thorough, impartial, effective and transparent investigation" into the deaths and injuries of protesters as well as the unlawful use of force, including lethal and less-lethal weapons, by security personnel.

Man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare's CEO shouts on way to courthouse, fights extradition

AP ■ ALTOONA (US)

The man charged with murder in the killing of the CEO of UnitedHealthcare made it clear he wasn't going to make things easy on authorities, shouting unintelligibly and writhing in the grip of sheriff's deputies as he was led into court and then objecting to being brought to New York to face trial.

"insult to the intelligence of the American people" while deputies pushed him inside a courthouse. A law enforcement bulletin obtained by The Associated Press said that at the time of his arrest, Mangione was carrying a handwritten document expressing anger with what he called "parasitic" health insurance companies and a disdain for corporate greed and power.

prosecutors said he was too dangerous to be released. He mostly stared straight ahead at the hearing, occasionally looking at papers, rocking in his chair or looking back at the gallery. "You can't rush to judgment in this case or any case," Dickey said afterward. "He's presumed innocent. Let's not forget that."

B'desh court rejects plea to advance hearing of Hindu monk's bail plea

PTI ■ DHAKA

A Bangladesh court Wednesday rejected a plea to advance the hearing of arrested Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das' bail petition in a sedition case, ruling that it would be heard as previously fixed on January 2.

official said. In his plea, Goshe said Das was arrested in a "false and fabricated case" while he had been suffering from diabetes, asthma and other issues. The lawyer, however, admitted that he did not go to the prison to obtain a signed power of attorney from Das.

monk, fearing threats and pressure from a "politically motivated lawyers' group". Das, a former ISKCON leader, was arrested at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on November 25. The next day, a court in Chattogram sent him to jail, rejecting his bail petition as he was accused of a sedition charge for allegedly disrespecting the country's flag.

PUBLIC NOTICE

I, Anil Kumar, Advocate, on behalf of Mr Purushendra Vijay Singh and Mrs. Anura Verma, states that they have lost the Original Sale deed dated 23.08.2023 executed by M/s Top Developers (P) Ltd., in favour of Smt. Kamla Banerjee, towards the Ground Floor of the Residential Property bearing No. H-1478, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi-110019.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Information is given to general public at large that Poppu Ram Sharma S/o Ram Swaroop who is aware purchasing the House No. 2951-A/16/G/F, having area measuring 14.89 Sq. Mts. Situated in Muga Sector-55, Housing Board Colony, Faridabad, Tehsil Bahadurgarh, Distt. Faridabad from Sunita Ram Chandra who was the owner of said property by virtue of Sale Deed dated 26.05.2014 (Doc. No. 5511) executed by Babita S/O Mahesh Chandra Gupta S/o Shivam Lal Gupta.

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public is hereby informed that my clients Mr. Vinod Kumar Sarda S/o Late Sh. Kishan Lal and Mamta Sarda W/o Vinod Kumar Sarda R/o N-95, C-6, Sector-5, Rohini, Delhi-110085, have severed connections and relations with their daughter namely Mrs. Shweta Sh. Shubham and also their daughter namely Mrs. Shweta Sh. Shubham and their share in their movable and immovable properties due to her ill conduct, bad behavior and habits with my clients. She is out of control of my clients and is always misbehaving with them.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Information is given to general public at large that Poppu Ram Sharma S/o Ram Swaroop who is aware purchasing the House No. 2951-A/16/G/F, having area measuring 14.89 Sq. Mts. Situated in Muga Sector-55, Housing Board Colony, Faridabad, Tehsil Bahadurgarh, Distt. Faridabad from Sunita Ram Chandra who was the owner of said property by virtue of Sale Deed dated 26.05.2014 (Doc. No. 5511) executed by Babita S/O Mahesh Chandra Gupta S/o Shivam Lal Gupta.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to all concerned that Mr. Mahipal Singh Negi S/o Late Shri Shri Singh Negi R/o Flat# 670, 1st Fl., Sec-37, Arun Vihar, Noida (U.P.), who is the original allottee of Flat#670, 1st Fl., Sec-37, Arun Vihar Noida (U.P.), had sold the said property on General power of attorney basis to the following person(s).

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GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, SAMBALPUR. e-Procurement No. 3525 /Date: 09.12.2024. Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur on behalf of Odisha State Rural Roads Agency invites Percentage (1/3) bids through e-Procurement from eligible class of experienced bidders for construction of Bridges including maintenance for 5 years under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana PMGSY-III, Batch-III of 2024-25.

PUBLIC NOTICE. This Notice is hereby given to general public that My client Mr. Javed Oureshi who claimed to be absolute and sole owner and in possession of the Residential House bearing No. 136-A/10, area measuring 110 sq. yards, Ward No. X, Chatta Lal Man, Darya, Cal. Delhi-110002, was the owner by virtue of Final Settlement Deed dated 16.10.2017, having Doc. No. 8331, & through GPA, ATS and Will, now they were approached All Smart Finance Bank Ltd., for financial assistance and therefore the property shall be mortgaged with the said Bank. Here by giving this public notice that if any person having any claim/objection regarding ownership and/or creating mortgage of the said property or any part of the said property in favour of All Smart Finance Bank Ltd., is/are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to undersigned with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned in publication of this notice, failing which any claim, if any, of such persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan against the said property and subsequent creation of Mortgage in respect of said property is/are hereby requested to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days at below address.

NCR LAW ASSOCIATES Advocates & Consultants A-98, Sector-9, New Vijay Nagar, Ghaziabad, (U.P.) 201009, MOB- 999826427, 9999721152

THE PIONEERS CLASSIFIED CHANGE OF NAME. I, Gajar Pal Singh Father of No.16016390A Hav Nitendra, R/o- 42, Rampur Moti, Dist- Meerut, U.P.- 250502, have changed my name from Gajar Pal Singh to Gajepal Singh, vide affidavit dated 11/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1052)C I, Naresh Kumar, Father of JC-472230X Sub Narendra Pal Singh, R/o- Vill+Po- Mahepa Jagir, Teh- Sikandrabad, Dist-Bulandshahr, U.P.- 203205, have changed my name from Naresh Kumar to Naresh Singh, vide affidavit dated 11/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1053)C I, Bimla Devi, Mother of JC-472230X Sub Narendra Pal Singh, R/o- Vill+Po- Mahepa Jagir, Teh- Sikandrabad, Dist-Bulandshahr, U.P.- 203205, have changed my name from Bimla Devi to Vimla devi, vide affidavit dated 11/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1054)C I, Sudesh Mother of No.16016390A Hav Nitendra, R/o- 42, Rampur Moti Distt- Meerut, U.P.- 250502, have changed my name from Sudesh to Suresh, vide affidavit dated 11/12/2024 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1055)C I, Sushma W/o- JC-470723A Hony Cpt Manoj Kumar, R/o-Vill+PO- Sadhaura, Teh-Bilaspur, Dist- Yamuna Nagar, Haryana- 133204, have changed my name from Sushma to Sushma Devi, vide affidavit dated 11/12/2024 before Notary Public.

PD(1056)C I, No.15823132N Hav Sumit Kumar, R/o- VPO- Jagsi, Teh-Gohana, Dist- Sonapat, Haryana - 131301, declare that in my service records, my father's name is erroneously recorded as Jagdish Chander whereas his correct name is Jagdish, which may be amended accordingly.

PD(1057)C I, No.15823132N Hav Sumit Kumar, R/o- VPO- Jagsi, Teh-Gohana, Dist- Sonapat, Haryana - 131301, declare that in my service records, my Mother's name is erroneously recorded as Sunita Devi, whereas her correct name is Sunita, which may be amended accordingly.

PUBLIC NOTICE. It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Vimlesh had acquired House area measuring 100 sq. yds., out of Kharsa No. 18/10, situated in the area of Village Jharoda Mazra, Burari Delhi abadi known as Gali No. 83, B-Block, Shiv Kuni, Sant Nagar, Burari Delhi vide Regd. Gift Deed dated 19.11.2024 executed by Mr. Vijay Pal Singh and Now Mrs. Vimlesh is the undisputed owner of the said property.

PUBLIC NOTICE. My wife Late Smt. Shahin Basu Majumdar booked a flat No. AR02101, Tower Anisto in SURETECH 34-Pavilion, situated at Plot. No. C-78, Sector-34, Noida-201301, Uttar Pradesh in her name, where I Sh. Prasun Kamti Basu Majumdar was the co-applicant. Now after her demise I have requested M/s SuperTech Ltd. to transfer the property in my name.

PUBLIC NOTICE. The Public at large is hereby notified on behalf of my clients Mr. Naresh Shokeen S/o Late Sri Nihal Shokeen and Mrs. Shashi Shokeen W/o Sh. Naresh Shokeen, both R/o H.No. A-1/156, Upper Ground Floor and 1st Floor, Paschim Vihar, New Delhi 110063, that my clients do hereby desist and disinherit their son Mr. Nikhil Shokeen S/o Mr. Naresh Shokeen and Daughter in Law Ms. Monika W/o Mr. Nikhil Shokeen, due to their misconduct, ill treatment, mental and physical torture, abuse, manhandling etc. they are, presently staying in above notified my clients house.

PUBLIC NOTICE. TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN. This is to certify that the purchaser has intended to purchase the Basement, Ground and First Floor of Property bearing House No. 16 National Park, Lajpat Nagar-IV from Mrs Anju Sethi wife of Late Shri Indrajit Sethi.

PUBLIC NOTICE. This is to inform the public that my client, Mr. Harshit Deveshwar is the owner of Property No. B-85-A, Plot no. 85, area measuring 627 sq. meters, out of Kharsa No. 30/10 situated at Village Dabri, authorised colony Dashrath Puri, Dabri Palam Road, Delhi-45, through Authorisation Slip dated 18.10.2024 Doc. No. 2024/16/1339 executed by POI through DDA in favour of Mr. Harshit Deveshwar in respect of Said Property.

PUBLIC NOTICE. It is to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Vimlesh had acquired House area measuring 100 sq. yds., out of Kharsa No. 18/10, situated in the area of Village Jharoda Mazra, Burari Delhi abadi known as Gali No. 83, B-Block, Shiv Kuni, Sant Nagar, Burari Delhi vide Regd. Gift Deed dated 19.11.2024 executed by Mr. Vijay Pal Singh and Now Mrs. Vimlesh is the undisputed owner of the said property.

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PUBLIC NOTICE. General public is hereby informed that Mrs. Kusum Lata Singh who Mr. Vinod Kumar Singh sold out the Residential Plot No. 77, area measuring 50 Sq. Yds., out of total area measuring 130 Sq. Yds., No. 150/49 Sq. Meters, out of Kharsa No. 174, situated at C.R. Railway colony, in the village Gindrapur, Sonara, Pargana & Taluk Dabri, District Gonda, Bihar, U.P., in Mrs. Bandana Singh W/o Mr. Sarabjit Kumar by virtue of Sale Deed dated 19.11.2024, regd. at D.O. No. 63882. The above said property is to be mortgaged & mortgaged with my client i.e. M/s. Tea Capital Housing Finance Ltd. and the Original Sale Deed dated 14.03.2014 regd. vide title No. 433, pertaining to the said property has been submitted and complaint, A.R. No.2024/000966750 dated 10/12/2024, was registered with U.P. Police.

PUBLIC NOTICE. My client Maya Ram Sharma S/o Late Sh. B. R. Sharma & Bimla Devi W/o Maya Ram Sharma both R/o A-25, A-Block, Street No. 2, East Vinod Nagar, Delhi-110091 have severed relations and debarred their son Ashish Kumar Sharma and his wife Neha Gaur from their movable and immovable properties due to their misconduct. My client will not be responsible for their acts in future.

CORRIGENDUM NO.1 DATED: 09-12-2024. Corrigendum for Tender Notice No.: N.B. HQ_2024-25, dt.: 22-11-2024 accepted under Tender No.: N. 8_HQ_PMS_KAVACH-2024-25 has been modified as under.

PUBLIC NOTICE. My wife Late Smt. Shahin Basu Majumdar booked a flat No. AR02101, Tower Anisto in SURETECH 34-Pavilion, situated at Plot. No. C-78, Sector-34, Noida-201301, Uttar Pradesh in her name, where I Sh. Prasun Kamti Basu Majumdar was the co-applicant. Now after her demise I have requested M/s SuperTech Ltd. to transfer the property in my name.

PUBLIC NOTICE. This is to inform the general public that DHP5-02, Emerald Hills, Sector-65, Gurugram-120218, has received in-principle approval from the Directorate of Town and Country Planning, Haryana for the upgradation of its Primary School site (1.029 acres) into a Senior Secondary School in Block-C of the Residential Planned Colony, Sector-62 & 65, Gurugram Manesar Urban Complex, developed by Emaar India Ltd.

PUBLIC NOTICE. Information is given to general public at large that Shubham Soaniki who is/are purchasing the Property bearing No. G68-89, Part-B, back side, area measuring 40 sq. yds., out of Kharsa No. 106/14, situated in the area of Village Palam, Delhi State, Delhi, (known known as in block-G, Gali No. 22, Raja Puri, Utiyan Nagar, New Delhi from Sh. Anand S/O Ram Prasad who was the owner by virtue of Notarized GPA, ATS & Will dated 03.03.2023 and the subject property is going to be mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. If Ram Prasad is alive and any person having any type of claim/right/title/interest over the said property is/are may inform undersigned within 07 days at below mentioned address.

E-AUCTION FOR CATERING UNITS AT A, B, C, D CATEGORY STATIONS OVER ALIPURDUAR DIVISION

E-Auction for catering units General Minor Unit (GMU) & Special Minor Unit (SMU) at A, B, C, D category stations over Alipurduar Division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days. 1826.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-1. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Tea Stall-1 at Altagram Railway Station, Provision of Tea Stall (catering services) on General Minor Unit (GMU) under unreserved category at Dhubri Railway Station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 20-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.50 hrs. of 20-12-2024.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-2. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Tea Stall-1 at Dhubpur Railway Station, Tea Stall-2 at Dinhat Railway Station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 23-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.50 hrs. of 23-12-2024.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-3. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Tea Stall-2 at Alipurduar Jn. Railway Station, Juice Bar/Fresh Fruit-2 at Alipurduar Jn station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 24-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.50 hrs. of 24-12-2024.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-4. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Juice Bar/Fresh Fruits at New Cooch Behar station, Tea Stall-2 at Kokrajhar station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 25-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 12.50 hrs. of 25-12-2024.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-5. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Tea Stall-4(snacks) at Jalpaiguri Road Railway Station, Tea Stall-4 at Binnaguri Railway Station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 26-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 13.50 hrs. of 26-12-2024.

Auction Catalogue No. C-470-AP-CATG-6. Table with columns: Seq No., Lot No./Category, Description. Includes items like Tea Stall-1 at Carron Railway Station, Tea Stall-2 at Dhubri Railway Station, etc.

Auction Start Date & Time: 11.00 hrs. of 27-12-2024. Auction Close Date & Time: 12.00 hrs. of 27-12-2024.

Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in. Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Alipurduar Jn. NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY Serving Customers With A Smile

Organisations must address employees' mental health issues says former IT official

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Organisations need to prioritise addressing employees' mental health issues, as only happy employees can perform their jobs with dedication, leading to exceptional results, said R Chandrasekaran, former Executive Vice Chairman of Cognizant. "Many tools and platforms are available to identify mental health issues. Organisations that address these challenges will benefit both individuals and the companies themselves," Chandrasekaran said while speaking at an event. Delivering the address at the launch of Ewolv, a platform supporting the holistic well-being of working women



across various life stages, he highlighted the importance of mental health. "Many organisations focus on technical, managerial, and

cross-functional skills, but they often miss the critical aspect of mental health, which forms the foundation for success," he stated.

The Ewolv platform, with its tailored solutions, aims to help organisations create inclusive environments where women can thrive both personally and professionally. Referring to reports of students allegedly committing suicide due to peer pressure, Chandrasekaran also the former Chairman of information technology industry body NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) pointed out that stress begins at a young age and persists in professional life. "All of us are familiar and have been part of various organisations and we all know what level of stress one endures as they build their career.

So, the most important thing we need to address is the stress aspect, mental health aspect," he said. He also emphasised that companies should assess employees' mental health alongside their professional skills. "Tools are available to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. Recognising and resolving stress-related issues early benefits everyone involved," he remarked. "Happier employees are key to a company's success, and organisations need to realise this. Employees who work with heart deliver outstanding results," he added. The event also featured the presentation of the Ewolv Awards 2024 to successful women from various sectors.

Centre further tightens wheat stock limit for wholesalers, retailers and processors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday further tightened wheat stock holding norms for wholesalers, small and big chain retailers, and processors to curb hoarding and check price rise. "As part of continuous efforts to moderate prices of wheat, the central government has decided to revise the wheat stock limit applicable until 31st March 2025," the food ministry said in a statement. According to the revised norms, wholesalers are now allowed to maintain wheat stock up to 1,000 tonne instead of 2,000 tonne, retailer can hold 5 tonne for each outlet instead of 10 tonne, while big chain retailer can hold 5 tonne for each outlet instead of 10 tonne earlier. Processors will be allowed to maintain 50 per cent instead of



60 per cent of their monthly installed capacity multiplied by the remaining months till April 2025. The stock limits on wheat were first imposed on June 24 and later revised to tighten the norms on September 9 in order to manage the overall food security and to prevent hoarding and unscrupulous speculation. The ministry said all wheat stocking entities are required to register on the wheat stock limit

(<https://evegoils.Nic.In/wsp/lo gin>) and update the stock position every Friday. If the stocks held by entities are higher than the prescribed limit, they should bring the quantity to the prescribed stock limits within 15 days of the issue of the notification. Any entity which is found to have not registered on the portal or violates the stock limits will be subject to suitable punitive action under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

Coca-Cola sells 40% stake in bottling arm HCCBL to Jubilant Bhartia Group



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Global beverages major Coca-Cola has sold 40 per cent stake in its India bottling business Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCCBL) to Jubilant Bhartia Group. Though the company has not disclosed the amount of the deal, some media reports have pegged it at around Rs 10,000 crore. "The Coca-Cola Company today announced that it has reached an agreement with Jubilant Bhartia Group, a multi-billion conglomerate with global presence in diverse sectors, to acquire 40 per cent stake in Hindustan Coca-Cola Holdings Pvt Ltd, the parent company of the largest Coca-Cola bottler in India, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd," a joint statement said. These changes and investment represent a significant milestone for Coca-Cola as the company continues to pursue its purpose to refresh the world and make a difference,

the statement said. Commenting on the development, Coca-Cola India President Sanket Ray said: "We welcome Jubilant Bhartia Group to the Coca-Cola System in India. With its diverse experience in various sectors, Jubilant brings decades of rich experience that will help accelerate the Coca-Cola system, enabling us to win in the market and provide greater value to local communities and consumers." India is the fifth largest market of Coca-Cola globally. The Atlanta-headquartered firm is divesting bottling operations globally as part of its asset-light strategy. "This strategic investment represents an important milestone in our journey. Jubilant Bhartia Group's expertise, complements our strengths, ensuring that we continue delivering exceptional value to our stakeholders while driving innovation and sustainable progress," Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages CEO Juan Pablo Rodriguez said.

India's EVs, ancillary industries may see ₹3.4 Lakh Crore investment by 2030: Colliers India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Domestic and foreign firms have announced a whopping Rs 3.4 lakh crore investment in India's electrical vehicles (EVs) and ancillary industries over the next five years, Colliers India on Wednesday said while expressing concern over "tardy progress" towards achieving the goal of 30 per cent electric mobility by 2030. Real estate consultant Colliers India on Wednesday released a report "EVs in India: Renewed Vigour in Electric Mobility", highlighting that an overall EV penetration rate in India stood at 8 per cent. It estimated sales of around 2 million (20 lakh) EVs in 2024. "Although the pace of EV adoption in the country has been commendable, it has not been as brisk as anticipated," the consultant pointed out. The report mentioned that individual companies across the EV landscape have announced plans to invest USD 40 billion (Rs 3,40,000 crore) in a phased manner till 2030. Out of this, USD 27 billion is planned for lithium-ion battery manufacturing and USD 9 billion for OE (Original Equipment) and EV manufacturing. When asked about the investments made in India's EVs and ancillary industries so far, the consultant said the data was unavailable. "The deployment of planned investments over the next 5-6 years can open up multiple real estate opportunities, especially in the industrial &



warehousing sector. Investments can potentially accelerate land acquisition and expedite setting up of EV and OE manufacturing units including lithium-ion batteries," the report said. Colliers India noted that India has set an ambitious target to achieve 30 per cent electric mobility with 80 million EVs on roads by 2030. "However, despite steady growth in sales volumes and focused government efforts, the progress has been tepid till now," it said. A current penetration rate of 8 per cent and total EV stock of just over 5 million, necessitates an exponential growth in EV adoption across categories over the next few years, the consultant said. Interestingly, the report mentioned that EV adoption has been the highest in 3-wheelers (predominantly e-rickshaws used for last-mile public commute), where operational expense reduction offsets higher one-time expenses upon purchase of EV variants. To expedite EV adoption in personal vehicles including 2 and 4-wheelers, further

impetus on domestic manufacturing should help in eliminating fixed costs of EV purchase, the report suggested. "Given the tardy progress and estimated 2 million annual EV sales in 2024, it is unlikely that we can witness an overall 6x growth in average annual sales from 2025-2030," Colliers said. However, focused demand and supply side measures can result in slightly delayed and eventual completion of set targets, it hoped. Apart from subsidies, tax incentives and domestic manufacturing impetus, the consultant said that quantum improvement in charging infrastructure can potentially drive EV sales across vehicle categories and expedite partial accomplishment of 2030 targets. Moreover, a multifold increase in EV sale volumes can be fast-tracked by the narrowing of the price differential between EV and Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) variants (currently 20-50 per cent across 2,3 & 4-wheelers and heavy vehicles), the report said.

ADB lowers India's GDP growth forecast to 6.5 per cent for FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday lowered India's economic growth forecast to 6.5 per cent for the current financial year from its earlier estimate of 7 per cent due to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand. The multilateral development bank has also lowered India's growth forecast for 2025-26 financial year. Changes in US trade, fiscal, and immigration policies could dent growth and add to inflation in developing Asia and the Pacific, according to the latest edition of Asian Development Outlook (ADO). The report also said Asia and the Pacific's economies are projected to grow 4.9 per cent in 2024, slightly below ADB's September forecast of 5 per cent. "India's outlook is adjusted downward from 7 per cent to 6.5 per cent for this year, and from 7.2 per cent to 7 per cent next year, due to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand," ADB said. Last week, the Reserve Bank also significantly lowered the growth projection for current fiscal year to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent earlier and hiked the inflation forecast to 4.8 per cent in view of slowdown in economic activity as well as stubborn food prices. India's GDP growth fell to a 7-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in July-September period of

current financial year 2024-25 as against RBI's own projection of 7 per cent. India's growth will remain robust, with the economy supported by higher agriculture output resulting from the summer (or kharif) crop season (which will also put downward pressure on food prices); continued resilience of the services sector; and lower-than-expected Brent crude prices in 2024 and 2025, ADB added. It further said strong forward-looking and labour market indicators, such as PMI for industry and services, urban labour force participation and Reserve Bank of India's industrial outlook, suggest that economic momentum will recover in the coming quarters. The report further said Southeast Asia's growth outlook has been raised to 4.7 per cent this year from a previous forecast of 4.5 per cent, driven by stronger manufacturing exports and public capital spending. The forecast for next year is unchanged at 4.7 per cent. The Manila-headquartered bank has kept the growth forecast for China unchanged at 4.8 per cent this year and 4.5 per cent next year. According to the report, Asia and the Pacific's economic growth will remain steady this year and next, but expected US policy changes under the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump are likely to affect the region's long-term outlook.

Reliance NU Suntech wins India's largest 930 MW solar project

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance NU Suntech, an arm of Reliance Power, has won country's single largest 930 MW solar project with 1,860 MWh battery energy storage system from SECI. The subsidiary has secured the solar with storage project in an e-reverse auction held by SECI on Monday, parent Reliance Power said in a statement. "Reliance NU Suntech has won 930 MW solar energy contract from SECI. This is the single largest project of solar and battery storage system in India," the company said. As per the terms of the tender, Reliance NU Suntech will also have to install a minimum storage capacity of 465 MW/1,860 MWh charged by solar power. An energy storage system of 465 MW/1,860 MWh means 465 MW of battery energy can provide power backup for four hours, giving a total output of 1,860 MW. Reliance NU Suntech has won the project at a tariff of Rs 3.53/kWh. The Letter of Award (LoA) is awaited from SECI. Reliance NU Suntech will develop the project on a build-own-operate basis and connect it to the interstate transmission system (ISTS) in compliance with Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) regulations for interconnection with the ISTS. SECI's Tranche XVII auction was for a total capacity of 2,000 MW of ISTS connected solar power projects with 1,000 MW/4,000 MWh energy storage systems. Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) is one of the nodal agencies to implement RE projects in India.

Sanjay Malhotra takes charge as RBI's 26th Governor

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday took charge as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Malhotra, a career bureaucrat, arrived at the central bank's headquarter this morning, where he was welcomed by senior RBI staffers. The central bank confirmed Malhotra's appointment through a post on the microblogging site "X" and also shared a few pictures. Malhotra, who recently served as the Revenue Secretary, signed the documents to take the charge of the important institution that performs a variety of roles. Deputy Governors Swaminathan J, M Rajeshwar Rao, and T Rabi Sankar were present when he assumed charge. Malhotra, an IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre comes at the helm of RBI at a very critical juncture, where growth and inflation balance has "unsettled" as per his predecessor Shaktikanta Das. GDP Growth declined to a seven-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in the September quarter while the October headline inflation was above the 6 per cent mark set for the central bank by the government. Analysts are expecting the RBI to cut interest rates at the forthcoming policy review in February, and are of the opinion that Malhotra's appointment "cements" the possibility.

SEBI to launch survey on risk awareness, increasing retail participation in capital marketing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Market regulator SEBI will conduct a pan India survey on how to bring more people into the capital market, create risk awareness and bridge the gaps in the ecosystem, a Sebi official said on Wednesday. Sebi whole time member Ananth Narayan G said that volatility in the Indian markets is low and USD 14 billion FPI outflow in



October-November was matched by an equivalent

amount of inflow by the domestic investors, like mutual funds. He, however, cautioned that there is no room for complacency. "While we celebrate the growth of domestic investors, it does not mean we do not need foreign investments. We need foreign investment. We have to ensure that we remain an attractive destination to draw in investment across the globe so that we can fund future growth,"

Narayan said at the CII Global Economic Policy Forum 2024. He also said that this inflow from retail and fresh investors should not be taken for granted. "We have to nurture the golden goose. We are worried about young people, many of them have not seen investment cycle or capital market downside (investing in market), Narayan said while

wondering that if there is adequate risk awareness. The regulator, he said, is working with AMFI, exchanges and clearing corporations to increase investor awareness. Narayan also said that Sebi will be launching a pan-India survey on how to bring more people into the capital market ecosystem. How to make them risk aware. And also, the gaps in the system and how to bridge the gap.

Maruti Suzuki eyes 8,000 overall service touchpoints by 2030-31



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Car market leader Maruti Suzuki India on Wednesday said it plans to increase its overall service network to 8,000 touchpoints by 2030-31, with an aim to reach closer to its customers. The company, which on Wednesday opened the 500th service touchpoint for its premium retail outlet NEXA, currently has 5,240 touchpoints across NEXA as well as ARENA - the mass market retail chain. "Our aim is to consistently deliver convenience and superior car ownership experience to our customers. One way is by reaching closer to our customers so that they

have assurance of finding a Maruti Suzuki service touchpoint nearby," Maruti Suzuki India MD & CEO, Hisashi Takeuchi said in a statement. He further said, "Going forward as we plan to substantially increase our annual production and sales, we will simultaneously strengthen our service network. Our plan is to expand our service network, including ARENA and NEXA service touchpoints, from about 5,240 to 8,000 by FY 2030-31." Maruti Suzuki opened its first NEXA service workshop in July 2017. Since then it has steadily expanded the touchpoints and added 90 such NEXA service touchpoints in 2023-24 alone, the highest in a year. So far this fiscal, the company has already added 78 new NEXA service touchpoints. The 500th NEXA service touchpoint milestone was reached in a span of 7 years and 5 months.

Need to blend commercial considerations with economic priorities, strategic needs: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday stressed that India Inc's commercial considerations should blend with the economy, nation's priorities and strategic needs. Asking the industry to "realign and reset" itself based on the lessons learnt in the last decade, Sitharaman said the supply chains should be widespread lest geopolitical risks disrupt it. "Economic and commercial considerations today will have to blend (with) economy and its priorities with politics and strategic needs," Sitharaman said at the CII Global Economic Policy Forum 2024 here. Outlining the priorities of the economy for the next decade, Sitharaman said the industry should work with small and medium enterprises to explore how they can support large units, while equally contributing to

job creation. "When we talk about restoring supply chains to frictionless supply chains, let's not forget it's not just economics, it's more than that... We have to build in our own decision making not just in economic sense but also in a political and strategic sense. "Supply chains will have to be restored but you would have to reset it, realign it, you will have to make sure that it is spread so much that it is not geopolitical or strategic risks will threaten our wellbeing," Sitharaman said. Learning from the last decade are that the country will have to now realign, and industry will have to realign itself not just on economic principles. Sitharaman said the attempt of both industry and governments everywhere should be to restore global calm and normalcy. There can nowhere be enough justifiable reason for skirmishes or war, she said.

"The global priority for this decade should be to restore normalcy. They are the main cause for disruptions in supply chain, inflation and other global challenges," the Minister said. Stating that the benefits of economic success will be spread properly only through technology, India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) and technology stack for agriculture have been democratised access. "Farmers are now able to access the global markets due to the advantage of technology. I'm sure that 'Agri Stack' will be the next big thing you will hear coming out of India," she added. "The world is facing challenges which are reflected in the economy," the Minister said. Industry will have to look at ways to adapt with newer challenges, she said, adding scale cannot be the only criteria.

INBRIEF

VIT-AP UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES GRAND 86TH BIRTHDAY OF CHANCELLOR DR. G. VISWANATHAN

AMARAVATI: On the occasion of the 86th birthday of VIT Founder and Chancellor, Dr. G. Viswanathan, VIT-AP University organized a blood donation camp in collaboration with Government General Hospital (GGH) Guntur.



INSA HOLDS ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING AT SRMIST



KATTANKULATHUR: The 90th Annual General Meeting of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA) witnessed the participation of top Scientists from India and a few experts from industries.

PROF. KARAMJEET SINGH JOINED AS NEW VICE CHANCELLOR OF GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University marked a significant milestone today as Prof. Karamjeet Singh, an eminent academician and founder Vice Chancellor of Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala formally assumed the position of Vice Chancellor.



FIFA prepares to give host of 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia

AP ■ ZURICH
Saudi Arabia will be confirmed by FIFA as host of the men's soccer 2034 World Cup on Wednesday, giving the oil-rich kingdom its biggest prize yet for massive spending on global sports driven by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The decision completes a mostly opaque 15-month bid process which FIFA president Gianni Infantino helped steer toward Saudi Arabia without a rival candidate, without taking questions, and which human rights groups warn will put the lives of migrant workers at risk. FIFA and Saudi officials say hosting the 2034 tournament can accelerate change, including more freedoms and rights for women. A fast-track path to victory was cleared last year by FIFA accepting a three-continent hosting plan for the 2030 World Cup led by Spain, Portugal and Morocco. That bid also will win Wednesday in a combined approval for the 2030 and 2034

tournament hosts by applause from more than 200 FIFA member federations in an online meeting hosted from Zurich by Infantino. It will kick off a decade of scrutiny on Saudi labor laws and treatment of workers mostly from South Asia needed to help build and upgrade 15 stadiums, plus hotels and transport networks ahead of the 104-game tournament. One of the stadiums is planned to be 350 meters (yards) above the ground in Neom — a futuristic city that does not yet exist — and another named for the crown prince is designed to be atop a 200-meter cliff near Riyadh. During the bid campaign, FIFA has accepted limited scrutiny of Saudi Arabia's human rights record that was widely criticized this year at the United Nations. Saudi and international rights groups and activists warned FIFA it has not learned the lessons of Qatar's much-criticized preparations to host the 2022 World Cup.



The kingdom plans to spend tens of billion of dollars on projects related to the World Cup as part of the crown prince's sweeping Vision 2030 project that aims to modernize Saudi society and economy. At its core is spending on sports by the \$900 billion sovereign wealth operation, the Public Investment Fund, which he oversees. Critics have called it "sportswashing" of the kingdom's

reputation. The prince, known as MBS, has built close working ties to Infantino since 2017 — aligning with the organizer of sport's most-watched event rather than directly confronting the established system as it did with the disruptive LIV Golf project. The result for Saudi Arabia and FIFA has been smooth progress toward the win Wednesday with limited pushback from soccer officials, though some from women international players. The steady flow of Saudi cash into international soccer is set to increase. FIFA created a new and higher World Cup sponsor category for state oil firm Aramco, and Saudi funding is set to underwrite the 2025 Club World Cup in the United States that is a pet project for Infantino. North American soccer body CONCACAF signed a multi-year deal with PIF, Saudi stadiums host Super Cup games for Italy and Spain, and nearly 50 FIFA member federations have signed

working agreements with Saudi counterparts. Lavish spending by PIF-owned Saudi clubs in the past two years buying and paying players — including Cristiano Ronaldo, Neymar, Karim Benzema and Sadio Mané — put hundreds of millions of dollars into European soccer. That influence could be key in talks to agree which months to play the 2034 World Cup. The November-December slot taken by Qatar in 2022 to avoid extreme midsummer heat is complicated in 2034 by the holy month of Ramadan through mid-December and Riyadh hosting the multi-sport Asian Games. Still, January 2034 could be an option — and likely better for European clubs and leagues — after the International Olympic Committee said it saw few issues in clashing with the Salt Lake Winter Games opening Feb. 10, 2034. The IOC also has a major commercial deal with Saudi Arabia, to host the new Esports Olympics.



Vandana Katariya hopes Women's HIL will boost confidence, talent flow

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Star Indian forward Vandana Katariya believes the inaugural Women's Hockey India League will strengthen the talent flow to the national team, besides offering the players a never-before opportunity to "mingle with international players." Returning after a seven-year hiatus, the league, to be held from December 28 to February 5, will feature a women's competition for the first time. "As everyone can see in the previous editions, the men's team got a chance to mingle with international players, raise their confidence levels and it has helped the team immensely and they are getting medals on a consistent basis now," Vandana said in an HIL release. "I expect the same effect when the Women's HIL begins with four teams this year. This will be a good opportunity for players who could not make the cut for the National Camp to showcase their potential and grow under different coaches. "It will also help strengthen the conveyor belt of talent coming into the Indian women's hockey team." A veteran of 317 matches with 158 goals, the 32-year-old will lead the forward line of Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers in the inaugural edition. "When the HIL was running

for the men, I used to watch those matches and dream that I would one day play in a league like this. I cannot believe it is a reality now and we are just over a month away from starting the league," said Vandana, who was bought by the Bengal franchise for Rs 10.5 lakh at the HIL auction. "The women's team is looking at it as an opportunity to showcase potential. Playing with the best players in the world will undoubtedly improve our performance and confidence," she added. In addition to Vandana, Bengal Tigers have a strong Indian core comprising Udita, Lalremsiami, Beauty Dungdung, Mahima Choudhary and Sushila Chanu. Vandana will also share the dressing room with Olympic bronze medallist Fiona Crackles and Grace Stewart, a three-time Olympian from Australia. They also have a few young Indian prospects on the team like Jyothi Eudala, Mumuni Das and Lalrinpuii. "The Women's HIL is a chance for me to show my capabilities so that I can maintain my place in the Indian Team but as a forward, I will concentrate equally on building good chemistry with all the players in the team. "The League is also bound to take a few players out of their shells and make them more comfortable," she added.

Malaysian doubles coach Tan Kim Her returns for second stint

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Malaysian doubles specialist Tan Kim Her has been roped in by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) for a four-year term till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. "I am very happy to be back in India and get a chance to work with Satwik-Chirag and also the young and talented group of doubles players who have the potential to follow on the path of Satwik-Chirag," Tan said in a release. "I am looking forward to creating a bigger group of doubles combinations who can win tournaments at the world stage." Tan, who arrived in Hyderabad on Sunday, was India's doubles coach from 2015 to 2019 and was



instrumental in bringing Satwik and Chirag together before the 2016 Olympics. He will take over the reins from Denmark's Mathias Boe, who guided Satwik and Chirag to many highs, including attaining the world number 1 status, winning an Asian Games gold, and securing a World Championships bronze. However, the pair faced heartbreaks in two Olympics

— Tokyo and Paris. In his second stint, Tan, who had taken up an offer from Japan's badminton association in 2019, will "focus on developing strong doubles partnerships and bench strength ahead of the 2026 Asian Games and 2028 Los Angeles Olympics." "We had been looking for quality foreign coaches who could work with our current top players and also guide our



2027 Women's World Cup dates announced

AP ■ ZURICH
The 2027 Women's World Cup in Brazil will be played from June 24 to July 25. FIFA, soccer's international governing body, announced the dates Tuesday. Thirty-two teams will participate in the Women's World Cup, which is being played in South America for the first time. Brazil has one of CONMEBOL's three spots as host. UEFA has the largest number of slots with 11, followed by AFC with six, CAF

and CONCACAF with four apiece and OFC with one. The other spots will be determined via playoff. Spain is the defending champion, having won the 2023 Women's World Cup jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand. FIFA is expected to announce the Brazilian host cities and stadiums for the tournament next year. Twelve bids were submitted, including many of the stadiums that hosted games for the men's World Cup in 2014.

Shaurya Yadav stuns racing world

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
A 13-year-old Shaurya Yadav from Sarfabad village in Noida has attracted nationwide attention with his outstanding performance in the Red Rabbit Racers Championship held at Pink Falcon, Jaipur, Rajasthan. The Pink Falcon Red Rabbit Racers Championship saw participation from 40 competitors, most of whom were over 20 years old. Shaurya was the youngest driver in this competition, but his talent and courage placed him at the forefront. The championship was held in four rounds—Qualifying, Heat, Semifinals, and Finals. In the semifinals, Shaurya secured first place with the best lap time of 23.8 seconds, surpassing everyone. His remarkable performance in the finals astonished everyone. Although he couldn't claim the title, reaching the finals and competing among champions at such a young age is nothing short of a victory. Shaurya's achievement has not



only made him proud but also given his family and Sarfabad village a reason to celebrate. His performance serves as an inspiration for young athletes, demonstrating that hard work and confidence can overcome even the greatest challenges. Shaurya Yadav's achievement has become a source of inspiration for the youth of Sarfabad village. Shaurya's family has a historic and prestigious background. His great-grandfather was a freedom fighter who contributed to the country's independence. His grandfather, the late Shyam Singh Yadav, was a prominent

figure of his time and served as a village head and district council member, dedicated to public service. Shaurya's mother, Varsha Yadav, is currently the District Panchayat President from Badaun, known for her leadership and service. His father, Jitendra Yadav, is a former MLC and a senior BJP leader who has played a significant role in politics. With this glorious family legacy, Shaurya Yadav stepped into the world of sports and, through his hard work and determination, brought recognition not only to his family but also to his entire village. Shaurya Yadav has proven with his hard work and dedication that age is just a number. While Sarfabad was earlier famous for wrestling, Shaurya has now brought recognition to the village in the field of racing. Shaurya's success has taken him to new heights. In the coming times, he will showcase his talent on national and international platforms, making India proud.

Liverpool still perfect in Champions League with 1-0 win over Girona

AP ■ GIRONA
Mohamed Salah scored a second-half penalty to maintain Liverpool's perfect Champions League record in a 1-0 win over Girona. A sixth straight win kept the Merseyside club at the top of the revamped 36-team league stage — five points clear of second place Inter Milan. Girona was 30th with just one win from six games. Salah struck from the spot in the 63rd minute in Spain. It was his 16th goal of the season in 22 appearances overall. Dinamo Zagreb drew 0-0 with Celtic and both teams remain in the playoff positions. Liverpool's outstanding start to the campaign goes on top of Arne Slot's team also on top of the Premier League. Former Manchester United midfielder Donny van de Beek handed Salah the



chance to fire the visitors ahead with a clumsy tackle from behind on Luis Diaz in the box. Salah stepped up to convert the penalty and Girona goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga went the wrong way. Liverpool's two remaining games are against Lille at home and PSV Eindhoven away in January. U.S. International Christian

Pulicic is the only player to have scored against Liverpool in this season's Champions League in a 3-1 loss for Milan in September. Six-time European Cup winner Liverpool is looking like the team to beat in the Champions League this season after big wins against Real Madrid and German champion Bayer Leverkusen last month.

Not taking a break after Olympics left me emotionally drained: Tanisha Crasto

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Tanisha Crasto described her turbulent Olympic debut in Paris as a period of heartbreak, admitting she made the "mistake" of not taking a break afterward, but said reuniting with Ashwini Ponnappa with a renewed approach led to their triumph at the Guwahati Masters. Tanisha and her seasoned partner Ashwini, who endured three lopsided losses on the trot to make a stage exit in Paris, bounced back to put up a dominant performance and defend their Guwahati Masters Super 100 title on Sunday. "It's been a tough transition after the Olympics for everyone, including me and Didi (Ashwini). I made the

mistake of not taking a break, and it left me emotionally drained. But Didi took a huge break, and when we reunited, we focused on enjoying the game," the 21-year-old told PTI Videos. "We decided not to think about results, just to go out there and enjoy ourselves. And when we did that, the results followed." The Paris Olympics was a challenging chapter for Tanisha and all other Indian shuttlers as India returned without a medal for the first time in 12 years. "It hurts because you're there, representing your country, and when things don't go your way, it's tough to process... I didn't take a break after the Olympics, thinking it would help me snap out of it. But as a person, I was a

mess, dealing with insane emotions", she said. For her 35-year-old partner Ashwini, the Olympics marked an emotional turning point as well, as she announced that the 2024 Olympics was her last ever. "We cried together during an interview, and even the interviewer was moved to tears," Tanisha recalled. "It was a mix of emotions, but it strengthened our bond", she added. Tanisha also had a runners-up finish along side her mixed doubles partner Dhruv Kapila going down to Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampra in a tough three-game battle at the Syed Modi International Super 300 event in Lucknow earlier this month. "We had a very tough draw



since the first match. For Dhruv (Kapila), who was recovering from an ankle tear, to pull through until the finals and defeat good pairs is something I'm really proud of." "They (Dechapol and Supissara) really caught us off guard in the final two games. And they really changed the whole game. "And Dechapol being a very, very experienced player, he's won a number of titles. I think he really managed the pressure of the game. And he really controlled the game very well in the second and third. "Could we have won? Yes, 100 per cent. Did we do enough in the second and third games? No. But I'm proud of how we played overall, especially

considering Dhruv's injury," she said. As 2024 wraps up, Tanisha is already setting her sights on the challenges of 2025. "Our first big goal is the Malaysia Super 1000, and we're going all in... Ashwini and I are likely to be seeded, so it's an important start to the year." The youngster shared her dream of doing well at the marquee events like the All England Championships, World Championships, and the 2026 Asian Games. "I think every tournament is something that we really wish to do something great... We're really eyeing out for the All England, the World Championships, and also the Asian Games in 2026. So these are the bigger goals as of now," she signed off.

