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INSIDE

WORLD 8

REBELS TRY TO BRING NORMALCY AS SYRIANS VOW TO SPEAK UP

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US imposes over 300 per cent penalty on companies who bribed HAL, Railways, IOC

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

With controversies raging on the United States Department of Justice indicting Adani Group for bribing 265 Million Dollars to multiple solar energy companies in India, recent orders from the American authorities, shows that many US firms which gave the bribes in India and other countries, have settled the case by paying more than 300 per cent penalty to avoid prosecution. The US-based research and design firm Moog Inc was caught for bribery of more than half-a-Million Dollars to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Indian Railways settled their case with US Securities and Exchange Commission by paying more than 1.68 Million Dollars. The IT giant Oracle Corporation, caught for charges of corrupt practices and bribery of more than

6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, and organisations in United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Turkey, settled the case by paying a fine of 23 Million Dollars to the US Treasury as per the orders of US Securities and Exchange Commission. US-based chemical manufacturing company Albemarle Corporation was caught by the US Department of Justice for bribing Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 million dollars to avoid prosecution. As per the orders on October 11, 2024, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Moog Inc through its Indian subsidiary Moog Motion Controls Private Limited (MMCP) bribed officials in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), South Central

Railway and Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) under the Ministry of Railways to bag contracts. "In August 2020, shortly after engaging Agent A, Moog brand was added to the supplier list for an upcoming South Central Railway (SCR) tender notice... then tender notice listed Moog, along with one additional supplier for potential supplier for a specific part in the SCR tender..." In September 2020, Moog Inc's India subsidiary MMCP won the SCR contract for \$34,323. In April 2022, Agent A invoiced MMCP for "commission charges," which several MMCP employees knew included the improper payments to Government officials to eliminate competition and win contract awards. The payments were falsely recorded as legitimate contractor services," says the SEC Order, adding that 10% was the

bribe commission in the Railways contract. The SEC order detailing bribery in HAL says in November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official." As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways. The US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Albemarle Corporation bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices and bribing of more than 63.5 million dollars. Albemarle is supplying refining solutions to more than 700 refineries across the world and dealing with Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) from 2009

THE PUNISHED

- Moog Inc caught for bribery of over a half a Million Dollars in HAL, Railways settled the case with United States Securities and Exchange Commission by paying a penalty of more than 1.68 Million Dollars.
- Oracle Corporation, caught for bribery of more than 6.8 Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey, settled the case by paying a penalty of 23 Million Dollars.
- Albemarle Corporation caught for bribery in Indian Oil Corporation & companies in Indonesia & Vietnam for more than 63.5 Million Dollars settled the case by paying a penalty of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution.

"Albemarle paid approximately \$1.14 Million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately \$11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," said the Order. Albemarle was caught for bribery by US authorities in 2017 for 63.5 Million Dollars and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution. The 46-page Order imposing fine on Albemarle says the US company also engaged in corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery. However the name of the private refinery is not mentioned in the Order. The September 27, 2022 dated Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged

in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with a transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways..." One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer" available to potentially make payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official. "A total of approximately \$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10-page order of Securities and Exchange Commission imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars.



MARCH 9, 1951-DEC 15, 2024

The tabla falls silent, Ustad Zakir Hussain passes away at 73

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain passed away in the United States on Sunday. He was 73. Hussain was admitted to the ICU of a San Francisco hospital with heart related problems, his friend and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia had told PTI earlier on Sunday. Hussain is hailed as the maestro who took the tabla to the global stage. He had been having blood pressure issues, added Hussain's manager Nirmala Bachani. The eldest son of legendary tabla player Allah Rakha, Hussain followed in the footsteps of his father, becoming a marquee name in India and across the world. Hussain has received five Grammy Awards in his career, including three at the 66th Grammy Awards earlier this year. In his career spanning six decades, the musician has worked with several renowned international and Indian artists, but it was his 1973 musical project with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar, and percussionist TH 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together Indian classical and elements of jazz in a fusion hitherto unknown. The percussionist, one of India's most celebrated classical musicians, received the Padma Shri in 1988, the Padma Bhushan in 2002, and the Padma Vibhushan in 2023.

Now Omar chips away at India Bloc

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

There seem to be further cracks developing in the Congress-led Opposition INDIA Bloc, as Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and head of National Conference Omar Abdullah on Sunday categorically rejected the grand old party's crying over Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) after losing elections. Omar is one of the important ally of the INDIA Bloc and his resentment against Congress comes within one week which saw other constituents like Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC), Lalu Yadav-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) echoed similar views and called for Congress must rethink and give up its Big brother attitude after the party had dismal performance in the just concluded



Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and J & K where the party was outshined by their principle ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), respectively. "When you get a hundred plus members of Parliament using the same EVMs, and

you celebrate that as sort of a victory for your party, you can't then a few months later turn around and say... We don't like these EVMs because now the election results aren't going the way we would like them to," Abdullah, currently in Delhi, said. The J & K CM said political parties should not contest elections if they do not trust the voting mechanism. "If you have problems with the EVMs, then you should be consistent in those problems," he said. Going against the INDIA Bloc thought process, Omar also reiterated his stand for the New Parliament Building and the upcoming massive Central Vista. "Central Vista project is a good idea to develop in the Lutynys and I also have read out my mind for a new Parliament building as the old one has outlived," he said.

BJP has no CM face, says poll ready Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With a couple of months left for the Delhi Assembly polls, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) released its fourth, and final, list of 38 candidates on Sunday. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal will contest from New Delhi constituency for the fourth consecutive time, while Delhi Chief Minister Atishi has been fielded from Kalkaji for the second time. In the fourth list, a total of 38 candidates have been announced, of which 36 are sitting MLAs. The AAP has now released names of its candidates for all 70 seats in the Delhi Assembly. The party has, so far, dropped 19 sitting MLAs. The party has given a chance to two new names- Ramesh Pehalwan from Kasturba Nagar and Nares Balyan's wife Pooja Balyan. The upcoming polls are expected to be a litmus test for the party's governance model and its appeal to the electorate. Besides Kejriwal's bid for New Delhi, where he has won since 2013 the AAP faces



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

significant competition. The Congress has fielded former Member of Parliament Sandeep Dikshit, son of Sheila Dikshit, the city's longest-serving chief minister while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to field former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, son of former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma who was denied a ticket for the Lok Sabha polls.

In State 10 places' temperatures below 10 degree

BBSR 13 deg; Similipal park 3 deg

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State continued to shiver under cold wave conditions due to a sharp drop in night temperatures. As many as 10 places experienced temperatures below 10 degree Celsius on Saturday night. While Jharsuguda and Rourkela had a minimum temperature of 6.8 degree each, Phulbani and Daringbadi experienced 8.5 degree each. Angul and Keonjhar recorded temperatures of 9 degree and 9.2 degree, respectively. It was followed by Sundargarh and Bhawanipatna with 9.4 degree each. Residents in the twin cities of Cuttack and Bhubaneswar are also experiencing severe cold as the

minimum temperature has dropped considerably. While Bhubaneswar registered a minimum temperature of 13 degree, Cuttack recorded 11.5 degree. As per the prediction by the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here, the minimum temperature in most parts of the State is likely to fall further in the coming days. While skies are likely to remain clear, the chill is expected to deepen further. The bone-chilling cold has disrupted normal life across the State. Despite the late onset of winter, temperatures have declined steadily, intensifying the cold conditions significantly in a short span of time. Notably, the Similipal National Park in Mayurbhanj district recorded the lowest temperature of the season this year as it plummeted to 3 degree Celsius on Sunday.

Devendra Fadanvis expands Maha Cabinet

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In the first-ever expansion of this ministry undertaken by him ten days after he and two Deputy Chief Ministers were sworn in, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadanvis on Sunday inducted 39 ministers, including 33 ranked ones, into his Cabinet, while he dropped 10 senior MahaYuti leaders, including BJP's Sudhir Mungantiwar and Nationalist Congress Party NCP (Ajit Pawar) leader Chhagan Bhujbal, from it. In a swearing-in ceremony held at Raj Bhavan in Nagpur for the second time since 1981, Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered oath of office to the 39 ministers, including six Ministers of State, ahead of the start of the Winter Session of the Maharashtra Legislature on Monday. Interestingly enough, as many as 25 new faces found place in the Devendra Fadanvis Cabinet. Late BJP leader Gopinath Munde's daughter Pankaja Munde, who has made a comeback as a State minister for the second time in her career, is among the four women ministers in the State Cabinet. With the induction of 39 ministers, the total number of ministers in the State Cabinet has gone up to 42, which is one less than the stipulated 43-member ministry which accounts for 15 percent of total



Maharashtra Governor CP Radhakrishnan, Chief Minister Devendra Fadanvis, Deputy Chief Ministers Ajit Pawar and Eknath Shinde and others during the swearing-in ceremony of cabinet ministers amid State Cabinet expansion, at Raj Bhavan, in Nagpur

288 members in the State Assembly. Of the 39 ministers inducted into the State Cabinet, 19 are from the BJP, 11 from the Shiv Sena and 9 from the NCP (AP). Apart from Mungantiwar and Bhujbal, eight other senior leaders from the MahaYuti, comprising Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (AP), who have been dropped from the Fadanvis Cabinet are Vijay Kumar Gavit, Suresh Khade, Tanaji Sawant, Adul Sattar, Deepal Kesarkar, Dilip Walse-Patil, Anil Patil and Sanjay Bansode. What has come as a big surprise is the induction of 25 ministerial faces who were not in the earlier government include Chandrashekhar Bawankule, Ganesh Naik, Pankaja Munde, Ashish Shelar, Jaikumar Rawal,, Nitesh Rane (all from the BJP), Pratap Sarnaik, Sanjay

Odisha Vision 2036 & 2047 3 lakh citizens' inputs received by govt

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government has received 3 lakh citizens' inputs through email and WhatsApp for its 'Odisha Vision 2036 and 2047' initiative and via the dedicated Odisha Vision website from India and abroad. This remarkable public engagement solidifies Odisha's position as a leader in participatory governance with a shared mission to build a Viksit Odisha for a Viksit Bharat, said Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, thanking all contributors on Sunday. "Thank you for coming forward with valued inputs for shaping Odisha's future," said Majhi. For the first time in India, Odisha has leveraged Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to meticulously review and analyse citizens' suggestions, ensuring that every voice is considered and the best ideas are incorporated into the State's strategic roadmap. This innovative step underscores Odisha's commitment to utilise cutting-edge technol-



ogy for enhancing citizen-driven policymaking, said the Chief Minister. Deputy Chief Ministers Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and Pravatī Parida also expressed their sincere appreciation, emphasising the power of collective effort in realising the vision of a prosperous Odisha. The Odisha Vision Citizen Engagement Platform has received the inputs from diverse stakeholders, including students, professionals, government officials, organisations and eminent personalities. These contributions span 17 transformative thematic areas, which would serve as the foundation for the State's sustainable and inclusive growth.

Politics intensifies as CBI summons Sethi

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Political debates escalated on Sunday following the summons by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to senior Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Bishnupada Sethi in connection with a high-profile bribe case. Congress leader Jayadev Jena questioned the effectiveness of CBI's summons, expressing his doubts about any immediate consequential action. People of the State may

see the probe process decelerate in the coming days, he speculated. "Bishnupada Sethi is a senior IAS officer. The CBI action which is being heard against him will gradually slow down, as it appears to me. The incidents (corruption cases) that occurred in the past days during previous BJD-led government were later neutralised by the BJP and the Narendra Modi government," Jena told mediapersons. The Biju Janata Dal (BJD)

pointed out that Vigilance measures were actively being taken against corrupt officials during the Naveen Patnaik-led government. The party suggested that the so-called 'double engine' government could lead to beneficial results. "Earlier, you might have seen that the BJD-led government had suspended a senior IAS officer (former ORHDC Managing Director Vinod Kumar) over corruption charges. We also accept the principle of 'zero tolerance' towards corruption," BJD

leader Sudhir Kumar Samal said in his reaction. "However, such cases should be disposed of as early as possible and there should be no Tarikh Ke Baad Tarikh (date after date) like Hindi films," he remarked. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on its part, affirmed its position on corruption, vowing stringent actions against any bureaucrats involved. Emphasising a 'zero-tolerance' policy, the ruling party remarked that corrupt practices would not be condoned,

irrespective of whether they are committed by political leaders or officials. "Previous government ruled Odisha for the last 24 years and corruption reached its height during that time," Bhubaneswar-Ekamra BJP legislator Babu Singh said. "Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi earlier announced that no one will be spared. Rather, the corrupt persons (be it officials, politicians, or party workers) will find their places behind bars," Babu Singh asserted.



Pigeons through the front of the Jagannath Temple in Puri in the cold winter morning on Sunday. Photo: Ranjan Ganguly

On city outskirts 4 duplex houses targeted by burglars

Jewellery and cash worth lakhs looted

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Four unoccupied duplex houses in City Home Duplex under the Pahala police station were targeted by burglars, who decamped with jewellery and cash worth over Rs 20 lakh.

The loot was suspected to have occurred in the wee hours of December 10.

The miscreants entered the properties by scaling the



boundary walls and forcing their way through the main entrance doors. Once inside, they dismantled metal wardrobes and safes to loot all valuables, including cash and

jewellery. To avoid identification, the burglars cut the CCTV cables set up in the rooms.

One of the victims said, "I suspect that the loot hap-

pened between the night of December 9 and the morning of December 10. I checked the CCTV footage on the night of December 9 at around 11 pm and everything appeared fine. However, in the morning, the CCTV displayed 'device offline', which I initially thought was a network issue. The burglars entered by jumping over the boundary wall and broke the main entrance door. They looted ornaments and cash worth nearly Rs 20 lakh." Police have launched an investigation into the crime based on the CCTV footages.

Cuttack college girl gang-rape NHRC seeks ATR from Police Commissioner

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has sought an action-taken report (ATR) within four weeks from the Twin City Commissioner of Police on the gang-rape and blackmailing of a college girl in Cuttack.

The NHRC issued the direction on December 9 acting on a complaint filed by Kendrapada-based rights activist Sagar Jena.

The complainant alleged that the victim girl had gone to a café in Cuttack's Puri Ghat area to celebrate her birthday

with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend, with the help of the owner of the café owner, captured their intimate moments.

Later, her boyfriend and his four friends used the videos and raped the girl repeatedly by blackmailing her. The victim later knocked at the doors of the Badambadi police station. Acting on the FIR, the police arrested six persons, including the boyfriend of the victim and the café owner.

The complainant Jena demanded strict action against the accused and a compensation of Rs 10 lakh for the victim.

CRUT orders probe into Mo Bus fire



PNS ■ CUTTACK

A day after a Mo Bus caught fire in Cuttack at Khapurja Square, the Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) on Sunday began a probe into the incident.

CRUT Managing Director Thirumala Naik along with General Manager Sanjay Biswal and other senior officials visited the spot to take stock of the situation and have begun the probe.

At about 9:30 to 10 pm on Saturday, the Mo Bus abruptly burst into flames at the busy Khapurja-Madhupatna Chhak road. Fortunately, no casualties were reported.

The CRUT has deployed a

fact-finding committee headed by the Deputy Commissioner of Transport to inquire into the incident while stationing a technical team at the site for preliminary investigation.

The probe team is comprised of a Motor Vehicle Inspector, CRUT's Manager of Operations and Depot and the bus operator. While the exact cause of the fire is currently under investigation, the preliminary indications suggested a possible electrical fault.

Passengers and shopkeepers nearby had pointed out the fire from the bus engine before it was completely engulfed by flames. Firefighters arrived at the scene and extinguished the fire.

Police ban Chinese manja in kites in Cuttack



Warn strict action against sellers

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Commissionerate police have imposed a ban on Chinese 'manja' used as strings in kites in Cuttack city. The cops have warned of stringent action against those who would sell Chinese manja and fly such kites. The Orissa High Court has also issued a directive to impose restrictions on the sale of Chinese manja.

Cuttack DCP Jagmohan Meena said the IICs of all the police stations in Cuttack have been directed to arrest the traders who are illegally selling Chinese manja.

"We have conducted meetings with the IICs of all the police stations in the city. Earlier, the High Court issued an order to put restrictions on the illegal use of Chinese manja. The district administration also issued an order last year to ban the use of Chinese manja," said Meena.

"The Chinese manja is quite dangerous and it can injure human beings, animals and birds," he added.

Notably, despite a ban on the Chinese manja, plastic threads and threads coated with fine glass particles continue to be sold at different places in the city, especially during kite-flying competitions.

'NH over Chilika will be detrimental to its ecosystem'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Chilika Lake, the largest coastal lagoon of Asia and second largest in the world, is considered a unique and ecologically significant brackish water wetland with captivating beauty. The lake is characterised with high species diversity and productivity and is an internationally-recognised Ramsar site since 1981.

This wetland serves as a critical habitat for the migratory birds, brackish water fish, marine life and several threatened species. The lake's ecological importance and socio-economic relevance make it a vital resource for the people living around it. Their life and livelihood are deeply intertwined with the resources of the lake.

However, the lake is currently confronting several environmental and socioeconomic challenges that threaten its ecological integrity and the livelihoods of the communities dependent on it.



Now, the decision to construct the coastal highway (NH-516A) connecting Gopalpur-Satpadapassing through Krushnaprasad within Chilika will add further to the misery of the lake ecosystem and its biodiversity by way of increased air, water and noise pollution and detrimental impacts on the lake ecosystem.

Such opinions were expressed by the panellists of a discussion organised by the Orissa Environmental Society (OES) on the theme 'Preservation of Chilika Lake Ecosystem' on Sunday. The session was presided over by OES president Dr Sundara Narayana Patro.

Describing the Chilika's

ecological characteristics, OES working president Dr Jaya Krushna Panigrahi explained how various human interventions are enhancing stress on the lake ecosystem that impart detrimental impacts on biodiversity, specifically fish, birds and Irrawaddy dolphins.

Former Odisha Works Department EIC Er Manoranjan Mishra narrated how damages to the lake can be minimised during bridge construction works by adopting various eco-friendly technologies.

SPCB scientist Dr Debasis Mahapatro opined that the benthic fauna and sea grass of the lake would be impacted furthermore if the road comes into existence. Former

advisor to MOEFCC Dr VP Upadhyay stated that thorough environmental impact studies need to be carried out before implementation of the project. Centurion University Professor Dr Siba Prasad Parida opined that migrating birds and dolphins would adapt to the situation if damages by construction works are minimal.

Dr Patro in his presidential remarks stressed on sustainability by maintaining a balance between development and eco-restoration measures. Speakers suggested that a path connecting Rambha-Balugaon-Tangi-Bhusandpur-Satpara would be the best alternative to save the lake from further degradation.

In State Cong runs sans party chief for 6 months now

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

Six months have passed since the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections concluded in Odisha. Shortly after the polls, Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Sarat Pattanayak resigned from his post, leaving a leadership vacuum yet to be filled by the All India Congress Committee (AICC).

Leaving a crucial post like the PCC president vacant for an extended period is not new for Congress in Odisha. However, the present delay has been unusually long.

Names like Bhakta Charan Das, Shrikant Jena, Mohammed Moquim, Rama Chandra Khuntia and Jayadev

Jena have surfaced as potential contenders, sparking intense lobbying among hopeful leaders.

A retrospective look at the Congress's 24-year journey in Odisha paints a grim picture. After its 2000 electoral defeat to the Biju Janata Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJD-BJP) alliance, the grand old party has struggled to stage a comeback or signal its seriousness in State politics. Consequently, it has consistently underperformed in elections and failed to challenge the ruling BJD or BJP effectively.

In the Lok Sabha elections held early this year, the Congress got only one of the 21 seats. The Assembly polls held simultaneously with Lok

Sabha saw the party just improving its tally to 14 from nine it had got in 2019.

Rahul Gandhi, considered the party's foremost leader at the national level, has seemingly paid scant attention to Odisha's political landscape. His occasional visits, often around election seasons, have done little to revitalise the party's prospects.

"As panchayat and urban elections approach, the BJP and the BJD are gearing them up, but the Congress must accelerate its preparations to stay relevant. Otherwise, it risks slipping further into political obscurity, much like the Left parties in the State," observes political analyst Professor Dr Kishore Chandra Swain.

Redraw ECoR's frontiers to offset Waltair loss

Bring all important stations in Odisha with SECR, SER to ECoR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With the Waltair Division of East Coast Railway going to the new South Coast Railway, there is now widespread talk about injustice to Odisha. The matter is important enough to warrant a detailed and dispassionate analysis. Minister's assurance that railway lines within Odisha under the Waltair Division would remain under the East Coast Railway, however, does not address the issue fully.

While it is good that the South Coast Railway would have jurisdiction over the all-important 445 km long Kottavals -Kiraandul line only up to Araku and thereafter the new Rayagada Division of the East Coast Railway would have control over the line up to the Odisha border and East Coast Railway would also have full control over the Nuapara-Gunupur line including Nuapara junction, the real impact of the loss of Waltair on the East Coast Railway has not been adequately addressed.

Waltair provided robust infrastructure support for the operational efficiency of the East Coast Zonal Railway. Its massive loco-sheds-

both Diesel and Electric-and other facilities made the East Coast perform extraordinarily well. It is another matter that the Waltair Division earned millions as revenue as well which would not now be available to East Coast Railway. The crux of the issue, however, is the deleterious effect Waltair's loss would have on the operational viability of the East Coast Railway. The issue therefore is not simple enough that can be addressed fully by having a new Division at Rayagada. This largesse means little, though it is absolutely essential that the Rayagada Division builds its infrastructure quickly and adequately.

We need to look at the ex-

isting boundaries of the East Coast Railway and remedy the historical wrongs that still continue.

The principle adopted for Waltair Division that it would have jurisdiction on the KK line up to Araku, should as well be followed for East Coast Railway with reference to South Eastern and South East Central Railways. As of now, important commercial centres like Belpahar, and Brajarajnagar are with the South East Central Railway, and all-important stations like Jharsuguda, Rourkela, Bandomunda, Barbil, Baleswar, Bhadrak, Baripada continue with South Eastern Railway. It is absolutely necessary that all railway lines in Baleswar, Bhadrak,

Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, and Keonjhar are brought under the East Coast Railway. Such a reorganisation would address the issue of loss of infrastructure facility at Waltair by having an almost similar facility at Bandomunda and, would, to some extent, even address the issue of revenue loss.

The other important issue relates to the administrative restructuring of the revamped East Coast Railway. There should be two more Divisions - at Baripada and Rourkela--to manage both the existing lines and the routes in the pipeline. The reorganised East Coast Railway should also have a Loco shed at Rayagada to compensate for the loss of Waltair.

How rights of farmers violated by modern farming

Day by day there have been increasing demands for using organic products. In those organic product lists we mostly find vegetables, fruits, roots or grains. However, these products are costlier than other similar products which all people cannot afford. So it brings disparity among people with regard to quality of food, consumption along with health risks.

Once upon a time, these products were a part of our life and they were indigenous. Due to low productivity and a lack of preparedness to face natural calamities, farmers were not equipped to supply the agricultural products in accordance to the needs of the society. It is pertinent to mention here that, in the 1960s our country was



SITAKANTA TRIPATHY

batling for tackling starvation related deaths and meeting the challenges of food crisis. The then Prime Minister Lalbahadur Shastri tried to enhance the capacities of

farmers to meet the challenges of a food crisis. The clarion call of him was 'Jay Jawan and Jay Kishan'. Due to the untimely death of Shastriji, his dream was unfulfilled. When Indira Gandhi came to power, she tried to enhance the productivity of the soil to meet the same challenge of food crisis. Finally, with the technical support of MS Swaminathan, Gandhi agreed to implement the Green Revolution mechanism in our country. Though it was able to fulfil the immediate food security needs of the country, it was unable to bring social justice and judicious use of land in the long run.

It is apparent that, while taking care of one dimension of human rights, the other dimensions were neglected.

The Green Revolution was a government sponsored programme for the modernisation of agriculture. The mechanisms were mostly based on providing high yielding variety (HYV) seeds along with inorganic fertilisers, pesticides and other mechanical inputs to the farmers. For this purpose, the areas of assured irrigation were mostly targeted and focused on the cultivation of wheat and rice. As a result, only certain regions such as the Punjab, western UP, coastal Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Tamil Nadu were benefited in the first phase of the Green Revolution. While the farmers were fighting for getting the Minimum Support Price in its true sense, it is difficult for medium, small and marginal farmers to af-

ford expensive agricultural inputs. They are also unable to avail government subsidies due to various legal, political and economic reasons.

So it has been a factor responsible for developing the process of 'differentiation' by which rich farmers grew richer and many of the poor stagnated or grew poorer. On the other hand, due to declining employment of daily wage workers, they lost their bargaining power.

Introduction of new machines brought displacement among different service caste groups which encouraged rural-urban migration. For generations, the farmers who have extensive traditional and indigenous knowledge about the quality of lands, seeds, fertilisers and pesticides which were devel-

oped over centuries by them, have been lost in advent of hybrid, high-yielding, and genetically modified varieties of seeds. These have been promoted by the names of more productive and scientific over the years. The conflicts between traditional and modern knowledge system is also reflected in the form of 'contract farming' systems where the hegemony of MNCs is continued in the name of farmers' financial security. In this 'contract farming' system, the company decides which crops ought to be cultivated and provided different agricultural inputs starting from seeds to fertiliser, pesticides, machines and working capital to the farmers. In return, the farmers are compelled to sell their products at a pre-determined fixed price which are

much less than the market price. The above instances show how the human rights of the farmers and agricultural workers are violated in the name of scientific and contract farming.

In view of the above negative environmental, economic, health and social impacts of modern methods of cultivation that have been followed since 1970s, a number of social scientists, doctors, and farmers' movement groups have been recommending a U-turn to the use of indigenous and organic seeds, fertilisers, pesticides along with methods of cultivation. Many believe that hybrid varieties are less healthy and against the principles of human rights.

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Revive Aska mill, restore livelihoods in Ganjam

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

The iconic Aska Cooperative Sugar Industries Limited (ACSIL) has been facing several tough challenges. Established in 1956 and operational since 1963, the mill once symbolized economic prosperity, processing over 1,90,000 tonnes of sugarcane annually and providing stable livelihoods to hundreds of workers and farmers. However, its decline over the years has left the region grappling with uncertainty, as sugarcane processing has dropped to a mere 49,000 tons annually, and operations are now limited to

just two months a year.

Farmers who relied on sugarcane cultivation are turning to other crops like paddy, citing labour shortages, delayed payments, and wildlife threats. Sugarcane farming, with its 10-month cultivation cycle, is no longer viable compared to paddy, which offers quicker returns. The high cost of fertilizers and pesticides has only added to the woes. The dwindling supply of sugarcane has severely impacted the mill's productivity, compounding its operational challenges.

ACSIL Managing Director Dr Sushant Kumar Panda re-

vealed that the industry is burdened with Rs 22 crore debt from the Sugar Development Fund and Rs 42 crore unpaid water taxes. Monthly repayments of Rs 50 lakh have further strained its financial health, making daily operations increasingly difficult.

Meanwhile, the 500-strong workforce is demoralized, dealing with delayed salaries and limited benefits. The bottling unit, which operates year-round, struggles to remain profitable, and the distillery unit has been non-operational this year.

ACSIL chairman Rabindra Kumar Panda said, "Strate-

gies are developed and plans made to revive the mill but the main workforce is never involved in the decision-making process. Be it the farmers or workers, who have been there and done it all—they are left out. The task force members may not understand the local issues as much as those who are directly working for the mill. The task force should visit Aska and interact with our farmers to grasp the ground realities. A one-size-fits-all approach won't work."

To revive the ACSIL, the State government has proposed several measures, in-

cluding a Rs 1,000 per ton subsidy for sugarcane farmers, a Rs 50 crore modernization fund, and a Rs 200 crore ethanol plant. Plans to set up a second bottling unit and a cardboard manufacturing facility are also on the table to diversify operations and boost revenues. Additionally, proposals for debt waivers or restructuring, as well as increasing the price of country liquor from Rs 60 to Rs 70 per bottle, aim to improve the mill's financial outlook.

The establishment of an ethanol plant is particularly promising, as it could unlock new revenue streams and

create employment opportunities. However, the success of the revival plan hinges on several factors. Active farmer participation is essential to increase sugarcane supply, and timely subsidies will play a crucial role in encouraging cultivation. Modernizing the mill's infrastructure, effectively managing its debts, and ensuring competitive pricing for sugar and related products are equally critical.

As the sugarcane harvesting season approaches in January, all eyes are on the State government and the mill's management.

1 dies, 10 injured as bus overturns in Bhadrak



PNS ■ BHADRAK

A passerby was killed and more than 10 passengers were injured as a bus overturned near Tilo along Bhadrak-Anandpur road on Sunday.

As per reports, the bus was on its way to Bant from Bhadrak when the driver lost his balance over the wheel near Talapada village and overturned at around 7.30 am.

The vehicle unfortunately hit a person on the Tilo area, who was passing nearby leading to his death on the spot.

Locals rushed to the spot and immediately carried out a rescue operation. The injured were admitted to the nearby hospitals. Some of

them were shifted to Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

Upon being informed, local police also reached the spot and started an investigation into the incident.

As per eyewitnesses, the bus was moving at a high speed and as a result, the driver lost control of the vehicle. Local residents rushed to the spot after hearing a massive sound from the spot of the accident and rescued the passengers. Till the last report came in, the rescue operation was underway and it was suspected that a few more persons were still stuck under the overturned vehicle.

In Salepur 30 injured as Jatra party gate collapses



PNS ■ CUTTACK

More than 30 persons, including children, women and elderly persons, were injured when the entry gate of a Jatra (opera) party collapsed at Raisunguda under Salepur block in Cuttack district on Saturday night.

The injured were admitted to nearby hospitals. As many as 20 of the injured were rushed to the Salepur Community Health Centre. Later, six of them were shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack as their conditions deteriorated.

As per reports, the Jatra party was performing at Shani ground in the area since

Friday. The first day went smoothly. The tragedy struck on the second day when people in large numbers were at the same time entering through the entry gate before the start of the play. The heavy iron gate collapsed on the spectators, leaving as many as 30 persons injured.

Following the development, local residents, police and Fire Service personnel rescued the injured and rushed them to hospitals. Some victims are still undergoing treatment in critical conditions.

The play was stopped following the accident. The Salepur police have started an investigation into the incident.

Woman's murder in Cuttack dist Police arrest woman's husband, 2 others

Crime fallout of extramarital affair

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Commissionerate police on Sunday cracked the mysterious murder of a woman at Kandarpur in Cuttack district by arresting three persons within just 30 hours of the crime.

The crime was fallout of a longstanding marital dispute and alleged extramarital affair, according to the police.

The blood-soaked body of the woman had been found on December 13 near the Kathajodi riverbed on the outskirts of Cuttack.

Since no 'missing persons' report had been filed, police were initially unable to identify the victim. However, a crucial clue, a tailoring stitching number discovered at the crime scene led investigators to Gujarat, where a UPI payment linked to the stitching

order revealed critical details.

The Gujarat police gave vital leads as one of the accused could be identified and caught. Shortly after, another associate from Cuttack, a relative of the main accused, was apprehended. The main accused, the husband of the victim, was traced to Mahakalpada in Kendrapada district and arrested.

Police confirmed that the crime was pre-planned, in which there was a calculated conspiracy to murder the victim.

"The murder case presented significant challenges due to the lack of leads. Remarkably, the accused was identified early in the investigation and he later confessed to the crime," Commissioner of Police S Dev Datta Singh said.

He further said that despite the initial difficulties, the swift identification and confession of the accused played a crucial role in solving the case.

5-day K'put Parab's valedictory fest kicks off

CM Majhi along with other dignitaries joins inaugural day

NISHAN PATTANAİK ■ KORAPUT

The five-day-long valedictory celebration of Parab Koraput 2024, featuring over hundreds of artists from across India, was opened by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi in presence of all MLAs of Koraput district and the Nabarangpur MP.

Chief Minister Majhi tasted Koraput coffee, gave autograph to children, inaugurated different development stalls, media exhibition, Coffee Book and released a souvenir of Parab-2024. Majhi highlighted the tourism potential of Koraput along with its paddy, millets, coffee and potato.

The CM also announced financial packages for development of different tourism places in the district and also announced that funds would not be a constraint for the de-



velopment of Jagannath Sagar, Deomali and Raniduduma in Jeypore.

Collector (Koraput) Keerthi Vasav V announced that this year's theme revolves around tribal culture and Koraput coffee, with the event's stage and venue designed to reflect these themes. "We anticipate a surge in tourist arrivals during the mega celebrations," he added.

The festival promises a wide array of attractions. The high-

lights include an exhibition of agricultural equipment and the five-day Pallishree Mela, which will showcase handicrafts and provide a platform for women self-help groups to sell their products.

The Parab-2024 began on October 27 at Dudhari and has already been celebrated across panchayat, block, and district levels, culminating in the grand finale.

This year, the festival scaled new heights with performance

from throughout the country with singers from Bollywood and Ollywood performing on stage. Each evening, the festival arena transforms into a vibrant hub where the age-old traditions of Odisha's tribes come alive through art, music, and dance. The pulsating performances by local artists reflect the rich tapestry of tribal heritage, captivating both domestic and international tourists who flock to witness the spectacle.

In Athagarh BJD MLA taunts Mohan govt; his office razed

Building built illegally on gochar land

DINESH DAS ■ ATHAGARH

The local administration here razed a single storey building of about 1,500 sqft at Balipur under Gurudijhatia police station area, which was built illegally and used by the BJD. The action is stated to be retaliation to the challenge of Athagarh BJD MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain in the Assembly recently that the Mohan government can't take any step against the corruption of the BJD leaders and workers.

Notably, the building had been built and used by former Athagarh block Chairman and husband of the present Athagarh block Chairman Ranjan Kumar Acharya on a gochar land for the last 10 years. All BJD party works of the area used to be performed



in the building like distribution of land pattas, old-age allowance, Awas Yojana cheque etc by Athagarh MLA Swain. During BJD regime in the State, no action was taken by the local administration even after repeated complaints on the matter to the Athagarh Tehsildar.

However, three days back Athagarh MLA Ranendra Pratap Swain dared Mohan Majhi-led BJP government in

the Assembly to take appropriate action against the BJD people for corruption. With a bit of sarcasm, Swain said "Your (Mohan government) hair will turn grey but you can't do anything against the BJD leaders."

As a sharp response to MLA Swain, the local administration demolished the BJD building at Balipur on Saturday with the help of JCB ma-

chine on the order of the Athagarh Sub Collector with the escort of Athagarh tehsildar as Magistrate and four platoons of police force led by SDPOs of Athagarh and Tangi-Choudwar. A case was also registered against Acharya, an aide of MLA Swain. Most of the people of the area have expressed joy over the drive of the administration.

At Koraput Parab fest Cong MLA, BJP MP spar over lake renovation funds

CM intervenes

PNS ■ BHAWANIPATNA

A tense exchange of words unfolded between Congress leader and Jeypore MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati and Nabarangpur MP Balabhadra Majhi during the inauguration of the 'Koraput Parab' festival on Saturday. The situation was diffused only after the intervention of Chief Minister Mohan Majhi.

The altercation occurred as various dignitaries took to the stage to make their speeches. MLA Bahinipati presented several demands advocating for them as needs of the



Koraput district. Later, MP Majhi went to the stage and countered Bahinipati over the slow progress in the restoration funds for Jagannath Sagar in Jeypore.

Following MP Majhi's remarks, MLA Bahinipati became visibly agitated, prompting Chief Minister Majhi to step forward to mitigate the tension. The Chief Minister

assured the audience that the government efforts would indeed support the restoration of Jagannath lake, which helped ease the confrontation.

"Maybe, he was given false information. He has understood now and admitted that the Jagannath Sagar requires immediate renovation. I also personally requested the Chief Minister to sanction around Rs 40-50 crore for the renovation work," Bahinipati said.

"Jagannath Sagar is one of the largest lakes of Odisha. It requires renovation. First, we will conduct a DPR and then, necessary funds will be sanctioned accordingly," CM Majhi stated.

Rs 260 cr earmarked for B'kanika conservation: Union Min

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA

With an aim to conserve the rich bio diversity of Bhitarkanika National Park, the Central government has earmarked a sum of Rs 260 crore.

While addressing a question from Kendrapada MP Baijayant Panda in Lok Sabha on Monday, Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) Minister (Bhupender Yadav) stated this.

MP Panda, in his personal X handle wrote, "The Union Government is committed to conserving Bhitarkanika National Park in Kendrapada district and its unique ecosys-

tem. Over Rs 260 crore has been allocated for various wildlife and mangrove conservation projects in Odisha. In response to my question, the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change highlighted the launch of the MISHTI programme, which aims to restore and promote mangroves to enhance the sustainability of coastal habitats."

An area measuring around 145 square km, which includes forest lands, rivers, creeks, estuary and backwaters, was declared as Bhitarkanika National Park in 1998 under the Wild Life (Protection) Act,

1972. It was declared a Ramsar site in 2002.

The Minister said funds have been allocated under different schemes /projects from financial year 2020-21 to 2024-25 for protection and conservation of wildlife of Bhitarkanika and its habitat including for mangrove conservation in Kendrapada.

A sum of Rs 512.13 lakh has been allocated for development of wildlife habitats, a sum of Rs 487.87 lakh for conservation and management of mangroves and a sum of Rs 1,643.63 lakh has been funded for eco-system restoration and mangrove plantation along with livelihood activities

under "Enhancing climate Resilience of India's Coastal Communities (ECRICC) Project.

Besides, the Government of India also launched the Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) programme to restore and promote mangroves as unique, natural ecosystem and for preserving and enhancing the sustainability of the coastal habitats in 2023. An amount of Rs 70.27 lakh has been released to the State of Odisha for undertaking activities under the programme in four identified districts, including Kendrapada, the Minister informed.

In Dhenkanal SHG women get Rs 9L-loan notice from bank

After their A/Cs closed 7 yrs back

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

Several women belonging to three SHGs (Self-Help Groups) from Gangijodi village under Tumusingha Police Station in Dhenkanal district filed a police complaint on Saturday alleging that they received a loan notice for Rs 9 lakh from their bank despite closing their accounts seven years ago.

According to the allegations, the three SHGs were formed in 2015, and the women had opened accounts in the local branch of the Bank of Baroda. These accounts were reportedly closed in 2017.

However, the women claimed that loans were issued against these accounts in 2019, and notices for the same were sent out to them recently by the bank which stated that a total loan of Rs 9 lakh (Rs 3

lakh against each account) has been issued.

In their FIR, the women questioned how loans could be granted after the accounts were closed at least seven years ago and demanded a probe into the matter.

"We had opened three accounts in 2015 but had closed them in 2017 owing to some personal issues, but a loan of Rs 3 lakh from each account was issued in 2019 for which the bank issued us a notice," alleged Sanjubala, a woman member of one of the SHGs.

"Someone has taken a loan in our names without our notice or consent. We do not know how to repay them as we have no means," added another complainant.

Meanwhile, the authorities have launched an investigation into the issue. However, no official response has been received from either the bank authorities or the police regarding the matter.

Lawyers, activists call for extending POSH Act to political parties

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Legal experts and activists have voiced the urgent need to bring political parties under the ambit of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, known as the POSH Act, citing the need for gender equality and accountability. The reaction comes after the Supreme Court on Monday disposed of a plea seeking direction to political parties to follow the procedure for the protection of women in the workplace under the 2013 POSH Act.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Manmohan asked the petitioner to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with a representation for the application of the POSH Act. Sonal Mattoo, a lawyer and director of NGO Helping Hands, called for a shift in perspective, urging political parties to focus on the spirit of the law rather than its technical definition.

"The problem is they're looking at the letter of the law as opposed to the spirit of the law. If you look at the letter of the law, yes, you will struggle with who is the employer... But if you look at the spirit of the law, it's very easy to implement as every political party has a disciplinary committee," she told PTI.

Similarly, she said, this is a group of people who are entrusted with ensuring that



decorum is followed and no member does anything that brings disrepute to the party.

"Similarly, they can set up a committee that also looks at the behaviour related to inappropriate conduct of party workers and people within the party. So, if you look at the letter of the law and you look at who is the employer, you will struggle.

"But if you look at other bodies within political parties that look at discipline and other conduct or misconduct, it's very easy to create a similar pattern in terms of ensuring appropriate conduct with women colleagues that work with them I think the whole idea is to look at the spirit, rather than the letter of the law," Mattoo said.

However, prominent lawyer Shilpi Jain expressed concerns over the internal committees' independence, given the immense power wielded

by politicians.

"An internal committee funded by a political group will lack teeth. For such bodies to function effectively, independence and courage are essential. Unfortunately, given the misuse of power by many politicians, achieving this remains a challenge," she told PTI.

Jain added that courts are better positioned to handle cases of sexual harassment involving politicians, given the inherent biases internal mechanisms might face. Activists argue that addressing harassment within political parties will set a precedent for improving gender equality across society.

Shabnam Hashmi, founder of NGO Anhad, called it a "progressive" move. "Politicians are expected to lead by example. If they continue to ignore gender equality, it sends the wrong mes-

sage to society. Establishing such mechanisms in political parties will bring gradual but important changes, just as we saw with women asserting themselves after the implementation of 33 per cent reservation in panchayats," she told PTI.

Yogita Bhayana, anti-rape activist and founder of People Against Rape in India (PARI) criticised the "irony" of Parliament exempting itself from a law it enacted.

"If an institution with more than 10 members is required to implement POSH, why are political parties excluded? Parliament itself brought in this law. Their inability to enforce it internally reflects their reluctance to confront harassment within their ranks," she told PTI.

Bhayana also pointed out the larger issue of poor implementation of the POSH Act across various sectors, stating, "We need a framework that is not only expansive but also effective in its enforcement." The legal definition of "workplace" under the POSH Act complicates its application to political parties.

A 2022 Kerala High Court ruling stated that political parties do not have a conventional employer-employee relationship and cannot be mandated to set up Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs).

This ambiguity, combined with the decentralised and informal nature of political party structures, has often

been cited as a reason for non-compliance. Still, many experts believe this should not prevent political parties from taking proactive steps.

"The lack of a traditional workplace structure cannot be an excuse. Political parties must adapt and lead by example," Hashmi emphasised.

She added that even minimal initial progress would pave the way for systemic change in the long run. Lawyers and activists have also highlighted how extending the POSH Act to political parties could improve the participation of women in politics.

Additionally, extending the Act's provisions would address the vulnerability of women working in political settings, who often find themselves in informal roles without clear channels for grievance redressal.

"These women face unique challenges because they are not officially employed. This makes them more vulnerable to harassment, and it's why political parties must implement systems to protect them," Bhayana noted.

While legal experts warn of challenges in implementation, activists stress that this is an opportunity to hold political parties accountable.

"This is not just about legal compliance but about sending a strong message that politics is not above the law," Hashmi said.

PM Modi invokes Nehru to distract nation's attention from his own failures, claims Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



The Congress hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, alleging that defamation of Jawaharlal Nehru and minimum democratic governance was his model. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said PM Modi has an "obsession" with Nehru as he invokes the country's first prime minister to distract the nation's attention from his "own failures" and current challenges on which he maintains a "complete silence".

The Congress attack on the prime minister came a day after Modi attacked the party during the debate on the 'Glorious 75-year journey of India's Constitution'. "It was the famous French philosopher Voltaire who had first said that if God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him. For our self-anointed divinity -- if Nehru had not existed -- it would have been necessary to invent him," Ramesh said.

The Congress leader asked what would the prime minister do without Nehru, for whom he has a pathological obsession. "Nehru is necessary to distract the nation's attention from his own failures. Nehru is necessary to divert the nation's attention from current challenges on which he maintains a complete silence," Ramesh said. He also said that Nehru was necessary to deny the nation's many achievements before May 2014.

In another post on X, Ramesh said, "In his rant in the Lok Sabha yesterday, the PM attacked Nehru on the First Amendment to the Constitution of India -- which was carried out with effect from June 18th, 1951." Explaining why this amendment was brought, the Congress leader said, it was carried out for three reasons. "One, to deal with communal propaganda at a most sensitive time. Two, to protect Zamindari abolition laws that were being struck down by the courts. Three, to protect reservations in education and employment for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and OBCs that had been rejected by the courts" he said.

A select committee, in which Nehru, Rajagopalchari, and Ambedkar were among the members, examined the Bill in detail, Ramesh said, noting that even after the panel tabled its report, Nehru listened to his critics and modified his stance.

"Earlier on July 3, 1950, Sardar Patel had written to Nehru on the need for restrictions on freedom of speech, expressing his frustration with people like Syama Prasad Mookerjee. This letter reveals that Sardar Patel himself would have supported the First Amendment had he been alive.

"Granville Austin's masterly Working a Democratic Constitution tells the full story of the amendments carried out till 1980. It is too much to expect of MAs in Entire Political Science or his cheerleaders to have read it?" Ramesh posed while sharing the letter in his X post. Prime Minister Modi Saturday accused the Congress of repeatedly mutilating the Constitution, having "tasted blood" in its "greed" for power, as he asserted that his government's policies and decisions since 2014 have been aimed at boosting India's strength and unity in line with the vision of the Constitution.

Hakim asks Muslims to outnumber Hindus, TMC backs him

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress has stood up for its senior Minister Firhad Hakim for calling upon the 'minorities' to grow and outnumber the 'majority' community so that "one day we can not only become majority but even more than majority."

Though the opposition parties have vehemently opposed Hakim who has still not explained his statement senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said that "he is being misinterpreted by some people why a majority of them have understood the real meaning of what he has said." Holding the bat for Hakim -

-- who apart from being a senior Cabinet Minister is also the Mayor of Kolkata -- Ghosh said that "what he meant is that the minorities (read Muslims) through their effort will one day contribute immensely in the uplift of the society and nation building... which is a fairly good statement and needs no censor."

Hakim while delivering a speech in a social gathering said "while in Bengal, we are 33 per cent in the entire country we are 17 per cent which is why we are called a minority... But we don't want to be called minorities," adding to a big round of applause that "we can become not only majority but even bigger than that if we have the

mercy of Allah."

Though he said that the minorities should work hand-in-hand with the other communities for the cause of nation building he clearly inspired them to achieve the majority status so that "we can wield so much power we don't have to hold candlelight marches for justice ... and that so that our voices are automatically heard, and calls for justice answered."

Curiously there was no comment on the issue from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee whose office remained as silent as it was when Hakim during an earlier occasion asked the members of his community to work for a situation when "all those who



'unblessed' have not received the mercy (rehmat) of Allah will one day be enfolded in our path." Referring to Hakim's remarks

as "dangerous" Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said, "some minority people have been asking the minority people to labour

hard to get better government jobs including those of judges etc but this mentality is quite dangerous ... if they become 50 per cent or more then the Constitution will stop working ... like in Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan ... they will unleash the Sharia laws."

Bengal BJP president and Union Minister Sukanto Majumdar said that Hakim's speech "smacked of Abrahamic religious trends." "They wanted to occupy a region and make it as their religion liked it to be" Majumdar said wondering why the Chief Minister who was talking big on Bangladesh a few days ago was silent on Hakim's statements.

Another senior BJP leader Sajal Ghosh said that the Muslims can walk Hakim's talk by replicating the Great Calcutta killings of 1946 or by allowing mass infiltration from Bangladesh which his Chief Minister is doing for vote bank politics and third by subscribing to another TMC minister Siddiqullah Chowdhury who recently asked the Muslims to follow "he hum do humare chaar" (four children for every couple) plan ... a time has come for the people to reply to this." While BN Chakrabarty a famed political analyst wondered "why I did not die before having to encounter such a statement," the Left tended to look into it through

a "larger conspiracy angle." Condemning Hakim's statement CPI(M) central committee member Sujana Chakrabarty said that it was a part of bigger ploy to polarize the people of Bengal. "They do not want the secular fabric of Bengal to stay ... so he has made this remark ... I don't think this statement has been made without the nod of RSS because such kind of statements will benefit them and the BJP the most in the present scenario ... Firhad Hakim is not a minnow of a politician not to understand the political implication of this statement in the elections ... it is clear that he has been making such statements as per some instructions."

Want RS to debate Constitution if BJP does not disrupt: TMC's Derek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Party Leader Derek O'Brien said on Sunday his party wants the House to run and the debate on the Constitution to be taken up "if the BJP does not disrupt Parliament". Blaming the ruling BJP for disruptions after the Upper House last week witnessed multiple adjournments and heated exchanges involving the opposition, treasury benches and the Chair, the TMC leader said they wanted people's issues to be discussed.

After the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha is set to take up on Monday a debate on 75 years of the Constitution in the backdrop of a proposed no-trust motion against Vice President



and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar by Opposition parties which have submitted a notice for it. The debate on the Constitution has been the key demand of the opposition for the Winter Session of Parliament. Multiple adjournments over the Adani row, Soros issue and the no-trust notice had marred the proceedings of the House last week.

Asked about the debate scheduled to be taken in the House for Monday, O'Brien said, "We

want Parliament to run, we want to raise issues affecting people." "If the BJP does not disrupt Parliament again, we will take up the debate on the Constitution and expose them," O'Brien told reporters on Sunday. According to sources, 10-11 MPs will participate in the debate, and speak for 3-4 minutes each. They said it would also showcase the "diversity" of their party.

The MPs will highlight the essence of ten keywords from the Preamble of the Constitution, speaking on themes like equality, justice, sovereignty, independence, democracy and socialism. The TMC has 12 MPs in the Rajya Sabha. However, MP Sukhendu Shekhar Roy has been sidelined for his criticism of the party during the RG Kar protests.

Minister Sonowal launches Jalvahak scheme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

The Union government on Sunday launched the 'Jalvahak' scheme to incentivise cargo movement via inland waterways, marking a major step towards promoting sustainable and cost-effective transportation across National Waterways 1 (Ganga), 2 (Brahmaputra), and 16 (Barak river). Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off three cargo ships and inaugurated the fixed scheduled service of vessels. He said the scheme aims to unlock the trade potential of inland waterways while reducing logistics costs and decongesting road and rail networks. Under the scheme, cargo own-



ers transporting goods over distances exceeding 300 km via waterways will receive up to 35 per cent reimbursement on operating costs. The scheme will remain valid for three years and is designed to optimise supply chains for major shipping companies, freight

forwarders, and trade bodies. The scheme is jointly implemented by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) and Inland & Coastal Shipping Ltd (ICSL), a subsidiary of the Shipping Corporation of India. The cargo promotion scheme is

projected to facilitate a modal shift of 800 million tonne-kilometres with an estimated investment of Rs 95.4 crore by 2027, a statement said.

The fixed-schedule sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi and Kolkata-Pandu (Guwahati) routes, demonstrating the readiness of waterways for efficient and eco-friendly cargo transportation.

"The Jalvahak scheme incentivises long-haul cargo transport and ensures timely delivery through regular freight services. This initiative provides a positive economic value proposition to trade while advancing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transformation via transportation," Sonowal said. Sonowal flagged off three vessels - MV Trishul carrying

1,500 tonnes of cement to Guwahati via the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route, MV Aai with 1,000 tonnes of gypsum to Patna for a cement company and MV Homi Bhabha transporting 200 tonnes of coal to Varanasi.

Highlighting the sector's growth, Sonowal said cargo volumes on national waterways have increased from 18.07 million tonnes in 2013-14 to 132.89 million tonnes in 2023-24, registering over 700 per cent growth. He added that the government aims to achieve 200 million tonnes by 2030 and 500 million tonnes by 2047. Union Minister of State for shipping Shantanu Thakur told the media that there is no concern in bilateral trade despite ongoing Bangladesh unrest and government has been keeping a close watch.

Assam govt mulling to provide pulses, sugar through ration cards to stabilise price: Himanta

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam government is mulling to provide pulses and sugar through ration cards to help stabilise the prices of these items whenever there is a spike, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. During the day, Sarma launched the first phase of distribution of new ration cards, covering 49 newly delimited assembly constituencies.

The chief minister, who participated in a launch programme covering Jalukbari and Central Guwahati constituencies, affirmed the government's commitment to working for an inclusive society. "Today, HCM Dr. @himantabiswa inaugurated the first phase of new ration card distribution in 49 newly designated assembly con-

stituencies, reaffirming the government's commitment to uplifting vulnerable sections of society," the chief minister's office (CMO) said in a post on X.

It said that by December, each beneficiary will receive 5 kg of free rice, ensuring food security for those in need.

"HCM emphasised that the collective support and cooperation will continue to inspire the government's efforts to build a prosperous and inclusive society for all," the CMO added.

Speaking to reporters later, Sarma said the state government had decided in September to provide new ration cards to 20 lakh beneficiaries.

"Today we are giving new ration cards to 7 lakh beneficiaries. Hopefully by December 28, about 18-19 lakh new beneficiaries will be covered," he said.



With the ration cards now linked to Aadhaar numbers, other benefits such as medical insurance and subsidised LPG

cylinders, are also provided through it, with the ration cards to gradually become a 'family identity document',

the CM said. Sarma said the government is discussing the idea of providing pulses and sugar through

ration cards when the prices of these items increase, as it will help in price stabilisation. "I have asked our department

minister Kaushik Rai to tour other states which have implemented it. We haven't tried it in Assam so far," he said, adding that states like Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have been doing it.

Speaking on 'One Nation One Ration Card' (ONORC), Sarma said, "It is an innovation of our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The net result of the initiative is that if a particular family lives in two places within or outside the state, ration can be divided and drawn."

"It is through an Aadhaar-enabled, centrally governed portal and Assam is a part of it," he added. Sarma, in a post on X, added, "Our Govt is driven by the principles of Antyodaya, where special emphasis is given to the needs of the poor and marginalised." "Karishma Kashyap is among

the 40 divyang brothers & sisters who have been given ration cards today assuring them of free healthcare and foodgrains," he said, sharing a photograph of the wheelchair-bound beneficiary receiving the ration card.

The chief minister said the distribution of ration cards is part of the government's '12 days of development' initiative, which will benefit 12 lakh people. He said that in Assam, beneficiaries can avail of multiple benefits through ration card, which includes free foodgrains, free healthcare, subsidised LPG, assistance under Orunodoi scheme and free insurance. "In this phase of extending ration cards to the people, another ~20 lakh people will be covered, encompassing 2/3rd of the state's population in this social security net," Sarma added.

Home Minister Amit Shah urges naxals to surrender, promises rehabilitation as government responsibility

PTI ■
JAGDALPUR/CHHATTISGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday appealed to Naxals to join the mainstream, or else they will have to face the strong action of security forces. He said the rehabilitation of the surrendered Naxals is the responsibility of the government. Addressing a sporting event - 'Bastar Olympics' - in Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur, Shah also said the country would be free of Maoists by March 2026. "I appeal to Naxals, please come forward. Give up arms, surrender and join the mainstream. Your rehabilitation is our responsibility," he said. He said if the Maoists do not listen to the appeal of surrender, they will be crushed by the security forces. "Chhattisgarh Police is



committed to fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's resolve to make India Naxal-free by March 31, 2026," he said. The Union home minister said the Chhattisgarh government's rehabilitation policy is the best in the country. "If you surrender and join the mainstream, you will

contribute for the development of Chhattisgarh and India," he said. Shah said when the Congress was in power in Chhattisgarh before the BJP assumed charge a year ago, the action against the Maoists became slow. "But after our government came to power in Chhattisgarh, action against

the extremists speeded up resulting in killings of 287 Naxals in last one year, arrest of 992 Naxals and surrender of 836 others," he said. Shah said since the Modi government assumed charge, there has been a 73 per cent reduction in the casualties in security forces and 70 per cent decline in civilians' deaths.

"If Naxalism ends in Bastar (Chhattisgarh), it will attract more tourists than Kashmir due to its natural beauty," he said. He further said those who know the process of change taking place within the society also know that it is not limited to only 1.5 lakh people participating in the Bastar Olympics. "Everyone is saying that Bastar is changing. I assure you that when I will come to the 2026 Bastar Olympics, I will say that Bastar has changed," he said, adding that this change has been initiated by the Bastar Olympics. The Union home minister said this event will write a new saga of development of Bastar in the coming days and will become a strong basis for the complete eradication of Naxalism. He also said many development works are being done, through which Naxalism is being defeated.

Intense debates expected as UP Vidhan Sabha winter session begins today

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
LUCKNOW

The winter session of the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha is set to commence on Monday, lasting four days during which the government plans to table 10 key ordinances approved by the working committee. Though the winter session will be brief, the political atmosphere is expected to be intense. The Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress have announced plans to confront the government on sensitive issues such as the Bahraich riots and Sambhal violence. They also intend to raise concerns over the by-election process, accusing the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of misusing administrative machinery. Meanwhile, the BJP, emboldened by its recent electoral success, is prepared to counter the opposition's charges. The ruling party is likely to highlight its achievements, including the Prayagraj Kumbh preparations and the



first anniversary of the Pran Pratishtha ceremony at the Ram Jannabhoomi temple in Ayodhya. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may use the assembly platform to address allegations raised by Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in the Lok Sabha. His government's victory chant "Batenge toh kateng" is expected to resonate within the House as a symbol of BJP's dominance. SP Deputy Legislative Party Leader Kamal Akhtar said that a meeting for SP MLAs was held on Sunday evening while party president

Akhilesh Yadav will hold another meeting on December 17 to finalize the party's stand on key issues, including law and order, healthcare services, and the electricity privatization policy. The Congress party is also gearing up for a robust debate. Senior leaders have vowed to expose what they describe as "appeasement politics" and "policy failures" of the Yogi government. As the winter session unfolds, fiery debates and legislative maneuvering are expected to dominate proceedings. While the government will push for swift passage of the ordinances, the opposition aims to put the administration on the back foot through pointed questions and public-interest motions. The coming days will determine whether legislative business can move ahead or whether political drama will overshadow this crucial session in the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha.

Travellers beware, Kerala roads are graveyards



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Four more lives were lost in Kerala's Pathanamthitta district on early Sunday morning as a speeding car crashed into a bus carrying Sabarimala pilgrims. Nikhil and Anu, newly married couple who were returning home after a honeymoon trip to Malaysia and their fathers Mathai Eapen and Biju George respectively died on the spot. Nikhil and Anu who had got married on 30th November were returning after their Malaysian trip and their parents had picked them up from the international airport at Thiruvananthapuram. The accident occurred hardly seven kilometers from their residence. This is the latest of the series of mishaps which shocked the people in the State as it was on Thursday four girls were crushed to death in Palakkad by a speeding lorry. Two days prior to the Palakkad accident, six students of Government Medical College, Alappuzha

died while the car in which they were traveling lost control and had a head-on collision with a bus. Over the years, Kerala roads have graduated into graveyards. Travellers coming to Kerala from North India are advised to be doubly cautious while undertaking journeys in the roads. The State administration blames the Centre for every accidents even of the roads belong to the State Express Highways, said officials of State transport department. Just two days before the death of the medics, five migrant workers from Tamil Nadu were run over by a speeding truck in Thrissur. "All these deaths were gruesome and there were many factors that contributed to these accidents," said Upendra Narayanan, advisor to the Road Safety Committee of Kerala Government. He told The Pioneer that enforcement system of road safety rules were weak in the State which is facing shortage of cops to monitor movement of vehicles.

More than 4,000 persons get killed in Kerala roads every year, according to the State Crime Records Bureau. "There are drivers related issues, and lack of road safety and etiquettes," said Narayanan. Only accidents in which four or more persons get killed are reported by the media in the State while fatal accidents are the order of the day. Speeding tipper trucks engaged in construction works are playing havoc in Kerala roads, according to P Venu Gopal, a former Group Captain in IAF. "The boulders for construction works are brought to the State from neighboring Tamil Nadu. The owners of the tipper trucks make the drivers go for as many trips as possible to make fast bucks even at the cost of other people's lives," said Narayanan, who was a race driver for an international brand SUV. Most of the accidents occur in the wee hours of the day underscoring the fact that drivers of the ill fated vehicles were not trained to drive during the odd hours. "Liquor too plays a major role in these mishaps. Above all, the Kerala Government should give extra care in the construction of roads, especially those with curves and bends," said Narayanan. The chief minister and highways minister have expressed shock and sorrow over the accidents which mark the closure of the topic till the next accident happens.

Economic boon: Maha Kumbh 2025 promises spiritual and financial revival

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
PRAYAGRAJ

Mahakumbh Mela 2025 is set to be more than just a spiritual event; it promises to be a major economic driver for Uttar Pradesh. Historical records from the 1882 Kumbh Mela show that the event cost Rs 20,228 to organize while generating Rs 49,840 in revenue, resulting in a net profit of Rs 29,612. This legacy of economic gain continues, with the upcoming Mahakumbh expected to generate Rs 25,000 crore in revenue for the state. Covering approximately 4,000 hectares, the Mahakumbh is projected to attract 40-45 crore pilgrims, making it the largest religious gathering in the world. The event's estimated budget stands at Rs 6,382 crore, with Rs 5,600 crore already allocated for event management and infrastructure development. In comparison, the government had spent Rs 3,700 crore in the 2019 Kumbh Mela. "Mahakumbh 2025 is not just a spiritual gathering; it's a massive economic engine," said Manoj Kumar Singh, Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh. "Our focus is on enhancing infrastructure, tourism, and job creation while ensuring a seamless experience for pilgrims." KV Raju, economic advisor to the UP government, claims that with an expected crowd of 45 crore pilgrims,



Mahakumbh could generate no less than Rs 2 lakh crore. Advisor to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and former IAS officer Awanish Awasthi provided an economic projection: "The worth of this financial activity could be an understatement of the actual figure. If one pilgrim spends Rs 8,000 during Mahakumbh, the total could surpass Rs 3.2 lakh crore based on the expected footfall." Experts, however, caution that the state's net economic benefit may be difficult to gauge, as much of the financial activity will occur in the informal sector, involving small transactions like renting boats, transportation, and street food. Still, individuals engaged in these services are likely to see significant gains. The event's economic impact extends beyond Prayagraj, benefiting nearby religious hubs like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Mathura, and Vindhyavasini Dham, creating thousands of new jobs. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department reports that preparations for the event

have already provided employment to 45,000 families. Local vendors and service providers are equally optimistic. Rajesh Tiwari, a street food vendor in Prayagraj, said, "The Mahakumbh is a blessing for small businesses like mine. We earn what we typically make in six months during this event." Similarly, Ramesh Kumar, a boat operator on the Ganga, shared his excitement: "With millions of tourists expected, our income will multiply. We are also receiving special training to enhance our services." The government is actively training service providers, including tour guides, street vendors, and drivers, through specialized programs conducted by the Manavara Tourism Management Agency in Lucknow and Prayagraj. "This training will improve our skills and help us provide better services to tourists," said Neha Mishra, a trainee

tour guide. In a first, the temporary tent city at the Mahakumbh will be visible on Google Maps, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed between Google representatives and the Mahakumbh Mela Authority. "We are committed to using technology to improve the pilgrimage experience," said an official from the authority. Infrastructure development is at the heart of the preparations. Major projects completed include a six-lane bridge over the Ganga and a Rs 275-crore four-lane railway overbridge, aimed at improving connectivity and easing traffic flow. Even after Mahakumbh 2025 concludes, Prayagraj is expected to remain a tourism hotspot. "We believe that the infrastructure and global visibility created during the event will drive tourism for years," said a senior tourism official. Common people also see this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "I have attended several Kumbh Melas, but this time, it feels like the entire world will be watching," said Meera Devi, a pilgrim from Bihar. "We come for spiritual fulfillment, but we can see how it benefits the locals as well." Mahakumbh 2025 promises not just spiritual enrichment but also lasting economic prosperity, creating a sustainable legacy for Uttar Pradesh and its people.

Bangladeshi Mukti Jodhas to attend Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata

PIONEER NEWS SERVICES ■
KOLKATA

A small delegation of Mukti Jodhas from Bangladesh will arrive in the city on Sunday evening for the Vijay Diwas celebrations on Monday, which will be attended by West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, a Defence official said. Bangladesh delegation comprising Mukti Jodhas, who were part of the guerrilla resistance force in East Pakistan opposing the Pakistan rule there, and serving officers of the Bangladesh Armed Forces attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations held by the Indian Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata every year. A small delegation of Mukti Jodhas will attend the Vijay Diwas celebrations in Kolkata on December 16, which marks Indian Armed Forces' historic victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war, the Defence official said. He, however, did not give details of the size of the delegation of the Mukti Jodhas. Governor C V Ananda Bose will attend the wreath-laying ceremony in the morning at Eastern Command headquarter Fort William, said the official. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will attend the military tattoo, a display by the Armed Forces, in the afternoon at the Military Training Centre here, to honour the indomitable spirit of the 1971 war heroes defeating the Pakistani armed forces that led to the creation of Bangladesh. The Defence official said that war veterans of the Indian Armed Forces who had taken part in the 1971 war will be attending the events on December 16, the day on which Pakistan's Eastern Army surrendered at Dhaka in 1971. The Eastern Army Command, which is headquartered at Fort William here, will hold a series of programmes on Vijay Diwas to mark the historic victory of the Indian Armed Forces

Man arrested for Parbhani violence dies in police custody: sparks call for Maharashtra bandh

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a disturbing incident, a 35-year-old man - who was arrested for his alleged involvement in the violence that took place at Parbhani last week over the vandalism of the replica of Indian Constitution - died in police custody on Sunday, prompting the Republican Sena call for a "Maharashtra bandh" on Monday. The deceased - Somnath Veyankat Suryawanshi - died

at Parbhani district civil hospital where he had been rushed from the Parbhani jail after he complained of chest pain. Suryawanshi, who used to work as a labourer in Pune district, had come to meet his family members at Parbhani on Wednesday when mobs protesting against the desecration of the replica of Indian constitution resorted to large-scale violence, arson and stone-pelting, amid a bandh called by the Ambedkarite activists.

He was placed under arrest with the police in connection with the incidents of violence. He hailed from the Wadar community. The incident sent shock waves through the Ambedkarite circles. Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) founder-president Prakash Ambedkar and his brother and Republican Sena founder Anandraj Ambedkar came down heavily on the police for the circumstances leading to the death of

Suryawanshi. Prakash Ambedkar, who is the grandson of late B. R. Ambedkar said: "The custodial death of Somnath Suryawanshi - a Bhim Sainik belonging to the Wadar community - in Parbhani is gut wrenching, sickening and intolerable to say the least. What is more intolerable that his death happened in judicial custody despite his bail application being approved." "Since his death happened in

judicial custody, our lawyers will be urging the Court that the post-mortem (CT scan, MRI, forensic and pathological) examination takes place in a government hospital which has a forensic department, and that the post-mortem is filmed and undertaken by both the forensic and pathology department," the VBA founder-president said. "Many Ambedkarite people were arrested after the Parbhani accident.

It is a shocking incident for Bhim Sainik. There should be immediate action against the concerned police personnel," Anandraj Ambedkar said. Anandraj, who is the president of the Republican Sena, called for a bandh across Maharashtra to demand among other things adequate compensation for the family of the deceased, withdrawal of all cases against the Republican activists who staged protests

at Parbhani on December 11 against the vandalism of the replica of the Indian Constitution. It may be recalled that a glass-encased replica of the Indian Constitution was vandalised by some miscreants near Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's statue located outside the local railway station, protesters resorted to large-scale violence, arson and stone-pelting, amid a bandh called by the Ambedkarite activists.

Mayawati slams Congress, Samajwadi Party on reservations, backs 'one nation, one election' bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
LUCKNOW

BSP chief Mayawati on Sunday attacked the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, saying they should not speak on reservations as they colluded in opposing legislation giving quota in promotions to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) when the Congress-led UPA was in power. Addressing a press conference, she also backed the Centre's bills on 'one nation, one election', stressing it will reduce expenses and ensure public

welfare works continue uninterrupted. She urged other parties to also support the measure. Mayawati demanded that reservations for SC, ST and OBC be included in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent any tampering. Central and state laws listed in the Ninth Schedule are exempt from judicial review. During the discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha, the ruling side and the opposition, especially the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, to woo Dalit and OBC voters, have said a lot of "baseless" things about reservation issue in which

there is "not even an iota of truth", she told reporters. "And it would have been better if these two parties (Congress, SP) had remained silent on this issue in Parliament, because during the time of the Congress party's government at the Centre and with the connivance of this party, SP had strongly opposed the Constitutional Amendment Bill related to reservations in promotion of SC and ST communities. "This bill was torn and thrown away by SP in the Parliament itself and... Is still pending in the Parliament," she lamented.

Father of Bengaluru techie who died of suicide demands justice, refuses to immersed ashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
PATNA

The father of Bengaluru techie Atul Subhash, who died by suicide recently, on Sunday called for strict punishment for those who "harassed" his son, asserting that his ashes will not be immersed till justice is served. Subhash, 34, was found hanging in his house at Bengaluru's Munnekolalu on December 9. He left behind lengthy videos and notes, blaming his wife and in-laws for driving him to suicide through "false" cases and "persistent torture". "I thank the Karnataka Police for arresting them (Subhash's estranged wife and in-laws). All



those who harassed my son should be punished so that he gets justice, and his soul rests in peace. I will not immerse the ashes of my son till we get justice," Pawan Kumar told the media. "My son was being harassed and tortured for money, and humiliated by his

wife... I request Prime Minister Narendra Modi and all concerned... please give us justice," he said. Subhash's estranged wife Nikita Singhania was arrested in Gurugram, Haryana, while her mother Nisha Singhania and brother Anurag Singhania were picked up from Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, police said on Sunday. Kumar also sought the custody of his four-year-old grandson. "My son was broken from inside... Even after torture by his wife and in-laws, he didn't tell anyone about it. His suicide note also mentioned that his parents be given custody of his child," Kumar said. He said Subhash had also received a maintenance order for his son, amounting to Rs

40,000 per month. "She (Subhash's estranged wife) filed several false cases against us and my son. Strict action must be taken against all those who mentally tortured my son," Kumar said. Bikas Kumar, the brother of Subhash, also spoke to mediapersons in Samastipur, demanding that the "false cases" registered against them be withdrawn. "The others behind this incident should also be arrested. We will not get justice till all false cases registered against us are withdrawn. We will not immerse the ashes of my brother till we get justice. Our fight will continue," he asserted. "I am equally concerned about my nephew (son of Subhash).

His safety is a matter of serious concern for us. We have not seen him in recent photographs. I want to know his whereabouts through the media. We want his custody as early as possible," added Bikas Kumar. Earlier in the day, Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara said Subhash's wife, mother-in-law and brother-in-law have been apprehended and are in judicial custody. The investigation will follow. Addressing reporters in Bengaluru, Parameshwara said, "He (Subhash) had left behind about a 40-page death note and he has raised several issues, most importantly about the misuse of provisions in the law that were meant for protection of women."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Modi's mantra

PM Modi's resolutions give roadmap for progress but its realisation requires collaborative efforts from the government and civil society

During the Constitution debate in the Lok Sabha on December 13, Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated 11 resolutions to guide India's future development. These resolutions, inspired by the spirit of the Constitution, aim to address critical aspects of governance, societal values and national development. PM Modi emphasised the need for citizens and government officials to uphold their duties. This aligns with the Constitution's emphasis on Fundamental Duties, but its implementation requires widespread public awareness and institutional accountability. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development through his vision of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." While significant progress has been made in sectors like infrastructure and digital access, challenges like regional disparities and social inequality persist. Addressing these requires targeted policy interventions and efficient resource allocation. Corruption, which undermines public trust and economic efficiency, was also highlighted by PM Modi, who called for societal rejection of corruption. His stance complements ongoing measures like digital transparency and anti-corruption legislation. However, robust enforcement mechanisms and judicial efficiency are essential for achieving this goal. Fostering respect for laws and traditions was another critical resolution aimed at strengthening social cohesion. This requires not only stricter enforcement of laws but also cultural campaigns to educate citizens about the value of India's legal and cultural heritage.



In a similar vein, PM Modi's call to instill pride in India's heritage seeks to dismantle colonial-era mindsets. This involves promoting indigenous knowledge systems, decolonising education curricula and celebrating India's achievements globally. Modi also stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and avoiding its exploitation for political gains. This underscores the need for political integrity and constructive discourse in legislative processes. Another pivotal resolution was the preservation of reservations without introducing religion-based quotas. PM Modi's emphasis on the importance of maintaining the status quo while opposing religion-based reservations. Balancing social justice with meritocracy remains a contentious issue, necessitating careful policy considerations to address evolving societal needs. The mantra of "development of the country through the development of states" underscores the importance of cooperative federalism. Strengthening state capacities and ensuring equitable resource distribution are critical for this resolution's success. The feasibility of these resolutions hinges on several factors such as upholding duties and require active citizen engagement. Effective implementation of these resolutions largely depends on robust institutions and governance mechanisms and efficient use of resources by the government itself along with a civil society which is alert and aware.

PICTALK



A woman protects her child from cold during a foggy winter morning, in Nadia

A forgotten crisis amid global turmoil



SUDHIR HINDWAN

In a world dominated by geopolitical rivalries, economic uncertainties and environmental degradation, food security concerns are relegated to background

World politics today faces a myriad of challenges, including cyber fraud, widespread corruption, transnational terrorism, and the relentless use of weapons of mass destruction in regional conflicts such as the West Asian crises and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war. These issues are compounded by a refugee crisis of enormous proportions, environmental degradation, and the growing frequency of natural disasters. Among these pressing concerns, food security remains a critical yet often overlooked challenge that affects nations worldwide.

Food security, as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations at the 1996 Rome World Food Summit, exists when "all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." This definition underscores the importance of not only physical availability but also economic access to food, emphasising both quantity and nutritional quality.

According to the FAO's Food Insecurity Scale, over half of the population in low-income countries lives under food-insecure conditions, with about one-third facing severe crises. Globally, approximately 789 million people lack adequate food, and this number rises to an alarming 2.4 billion when micronutrient deficiencies are considered. Food security issues can be categorised into two broad areas: quantity and quality. These challenges encompass five key dimensions: food availability, price volatility, inclusive access, proper utilisation, and stability. Price volatility, particularly in low-income countries, exacerbates food insecurity as most people lack the resources to access nutrient-rich food.

Recognising the severity of global food insecurity, the United Nations included food security among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 2015 '2030 Agenda'. The second SDG aims to "end hunger, achieve food security and



improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture." Complementary goals, such as SDG 6 ("Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all") and SDG 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"), further emphasize the need for sustainable practices in achieving food security. Governments worldwide have been urged to align their food and agriculture policies with these goals to ensure their populations receive adequate, nutritious food in a sustainable manner. Food insecurity leads to numerous problems at both household and societal levels. Household food insecurity, for instance, has been linked to suboptimal sleep patterns and reduced immunity against diseases.

To address these issues, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to safe and nutritious food access during the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. This commitment was encapsulated in the 'Future We Want' document. The conference also saw the launch of the 'Zero Hunger Challenge' (ZHC) by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, aiming to eliminate hunger and malnutrition globally by 2030. A cornerstone of the ZHC is the goal to make "all food systems sustainable," encompassing clean

ACCORDING TO THE FAO'S FOOD INSECURITY SCALE, OVER HALF OF THE POPULATION IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES LIVES UNDER FOOD-INSECURE CONDITIONS, WITH ABOUT ONE-THIRD FACING SEVERE CRISES

water, sustainable energy, responsible food consumption and production, and climate action—achievable through national policies and international cooperation. The 1987 Brundtland Report, titled Our Common Future, defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." India, since its independence in 1947, has made significant strides in building food security by establishing agricultural institutions such as the Indian Agricultural Research Institute under the guidance of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Advancements in genetic engineering and biotechnology hold promise for addressing agricultural challenges, improving food quality, and increasing global food availability. However, concerns persist about biosafety risks posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Proper handling, transfer, and disposal of these organisms, as recommended by global institutions like the World Bank, are critical to ensuring safety. The world is currently mired in geopolitical rivalries, with nations prioritising dominance over addressing pressing issues such as hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and

unemployment. Biotechnology, if harnessed effectively, can address these challenges by creating opportunities for producing higher-quality food, reducing pollution, generating jobs, and fostering economic growth. This, in turn, could promote international cooperation and reduce global tensions, paving the way for peace. Investments in research and development can yield innovative solutions to hunger, malnutrition and food adulteration, transforming biotechnology into a force for global good.

However, two major apprehensions regarding biotechnology persist. First, it may deepen the divide between developed and developing nations. Second, globalisation could threaten the survival of indigenous food industries. Despite these concerns, the potential benefits of biotechnology in transforming global food and energy systems into a philanthropic movement cannot be overlooked. Food security initiatives must rise above geopolitical rivalries, embracing inclusivity and shared responsibilities. India, with its emphasis on inclusive diplomacy, has the potential to play a pivotal role in this endeavor.

(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav Award, is a professor, HOD, and an expert on strategic affairs. Views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION

Madam — It will be the most precious gift to the nation amidst political anarchy and election extravaganza. The people will be stupendously relieved by single elections for multiple reasons. The Model Code of Conduct stalls development projects and decision-making of the governments. The alleged sale of party tickets, defections by politicians, experimenting with the disruptive agendas, noisy debates on TV channels, spoiling harmony in the country, poll violence, foreign interference, the game of opinion and exit polls losing credibility, betting on elections, saving billions of rupees for the government on election machinery including deployment staff and police forces, huge resource mobilisation by the political parties, and people's contribution for multiple elections, etc., are a few to quote in favour of one nation, one election. The former President, Ram Nath Kovind's recommendation of holding municipal elections along with the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections should also be considered by the Union Government in the next phase.

It may also be contemplated by the government that those candidates who lose elections in parliamentary or Assembly elections and are rejected by the people should not get entry in the Rajya Sabha and legislative councils where only elected representatives are allowed to vote. In fact, the state assemblies don't need legislative councils. The number of Lok Sabha and state assembly seats should be optimally increased so that there is wider and appropriate representation of people. There should be a dedicated cadre of the Civil Services for elections. It will facilitate the continuity of updating electoral rolls, EVM maintenance, election reforms as and when required, create a data bank and an archive on elections, training, delimitation, dedicated teamwork to contest election-related litigation, and work on a constitutional framework for elections-related issues.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

SC says no survey of worship places



By halting the surveys of places of worship, the Supreme Court's recent order bars all courts nationwide from registering fresh suits or issuing any interim or final orders, including those permitting surveys in ongoing cases concerning existing structures, until the validity of the Places of Worship Act 1991 is decided. SC's order means that in pending suits such as those pertaining to the Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi mosque and Krishna Janmabhoomi-Ildgah dis-

putes, courts cannot pass any effective or final orders. The order is timely and a welcome move. The 1991 Act was enacted to prevent conflicts that may arise from disputes with historical ties and to protect the equality of faiths, a constitutional value.

The Act also prohibits converting a place of worship to a different denomination or section and mandates that history and its wrongs should not be used to oppress the present and future. But recently many petitioners have approached lower courts as well as the Supreme Court against the 1991 Act, alleging that the law has created an arbitrary and irrational retrospective cut-off date of August 15, 1947, for maintaining the character of the places of worship.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

REFORMING INDIAN JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Madam — The Indian judicial system has long struggled with the issue of delayed justice, raising concerns about its credibility and effectiveness. The principle that "delayed justice is equivalent to injustice" emphasises the importance of timely and accessible justice. The backlog of cases, complex procedures, and delays in decision-making have caused significant mental, social, and moral harm to victims and society at large. Currently, around 44 million cases are pending in district courts, 6.1 million in high courts, and over 82,000 in the Supreme Court. This backlog has led to questions about the system's efficiency, impacting not just the legal system but also the democratic fabric of the country. The Nirbhaya case highlights the detrimental effects of delayed justice, eroding public trust in the system. To address these issues, the central government has introduced judicial reforms, including three new criminal laws aimed at improving timeliness, transparency, and efficiency. These reforms introduce fixed time limits for

resolving cases and create a framework for expediting the disposal of long-pending cases, offering relief to victims and ensuring justice.

R K Jain | Barwani

GUKESH DEFEATS DING LIREN

Madam — Carrying on chess dominance, hitting Gukesh displayed a high level and proved that he is not second in the FIDE World Championship 2024 in style. India's D Gukesh achieved the landmark in a crucial game and in a cliffhanger manner, beating titleholder China's Ding Liren in the 14th and last game of the FIDE World Chess Championship 2024 in a clinical way. India's D Gukesh masters moves and makes them in a calculative way. He played to a plan to eat humble pie. The 18-year-old had Gukesh play a great game of chess. Three cheers for golden boy Gukesh.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Beyond the screen: The hidden truths of our social media lives

Social media is a tool to make life more connected and interesting, it is not a measure to judge worth and success of family and friends

Ever since social media sneaked into our lives, we have made it a shelf to display our lives' wares. We paint our digital walls with milestones, memories, smiles, and sorrows. It's a vibrant collage of life's varied hues, yet what we post is often a curated version of reality. The smiles are brighter, the love is deeper, the vacations are grander, and the heartbreaks are more dramatic. But behind this veneer of filtered perfection, the raw and unfiltered truth often lurks quietly, hidden from the world's gaze.



seeking validation? No, I was trying to reassure myself. I was reminding myself that happiness exists, that moments of beauty and joy still punctuate my life. Those posts were not deceit; they were lifelines. Glimpses of joy that I clung to as I navigated the storm within. And in sharing those moments, I was also hoping to pass on slivers of hope to others who might be fighting unseen battles. This is the duality of social media.

The laughter we see might be tears in disguise. The grand celebrations could be cloaked in anxiety. The tears shed publicly may be crafted for effect. What appears authentic can be artifice; what looks carefree can be layered with burdens. This is why we should not judge others based on what we see on their profiles. Why do people disguise their struggles and pre-

sent happy pictures? It's not necessarily deceit or a desire to mislead others. Sometimes, it's a way of keeping hope alive. When life's challenges weigh heavily, projecting happiness can feel like a self-fulfilling prophecy. By sharing joy, even when it feels out of reach, we try to manifest it. We tell ourselves that happiness is not an illusion—it's around the corner and within our grasp. We also do it for others. Social media can be a dark and overwhelming place filled with negativity, comparison, and distressing news. By sharing moments of beauty, love and humour, we offer small doses of positivity to those who might need them. But here lies the trap. When we view others' lives through the glossy lens of social media, we risk falling into the pit of comparison. We measure our own lives against the seemingly perfect lives of others and wonder where we went wrong.

We feel envious, resentful, or inadequate. But this comparison is unfair—because it's based on incomplete information. What you see on social media is a highlight reel, not a documentary. To compare your behind-the-scenes reality to someone else's carefully chosen highlights is to set yourself up for needless suffering. So, how should we approach social media with clarity and kindness? First, partake in others' happiness without envy. Celebrate their joys as you would want them to celebrate yours.

Let their happiness be a reminder that good things are possible, even if they haven't yet arrived in your life. Second, lend support in difficult times without judgment. If someone shares their struggles, resist the urge to undermine or dismiss them. Behind their words could be a pain far deeper than what they've expressed. Offer empathy, not assumptions. Be the steady presence that reminds them they're not alone. Finally, take social media for what it is—a tool to make life more connected, more interesting and occasionally more fun. It's not a measure of worth, success, or happiness.

(The author is a columnist and writing coach based in Dubai. Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

BRIDGING DIVIDES IN THE WORKPLACE

This growing divide can hinder teamwork, erode trust and undermine organisational effectiveness



SAKSHI SETHI

With the advent of the 21st generation, the division of people into sharply opposing groups has increasingly infiltrated workplaces, reflecting the broader societal divides in politics, culture and values. In professional settings, it is often referred to as polarisation and can hinder collaboration, damage relationships, and undermine organisational effectiveness. Addressing workplace polarisation requires proactive leadership, open communication, and an emphasis on shared goals. Polarisation often stems from various sources such as divergent personal values where the employees bring their political, cultural and social identities into the workplace.

Differences in beliefs particularly on sensitive issues such as gender, race and political ideologies lead to conflicts. On the other hand, media coverage, political campaigns, or social movements heighten tensions among employees with differing viewpoints. A lack of open dialogue within teams fosters echo chambers, where employees interact only with like-minded individuals, reinforcing biases and misunderstandings. Also, differences in work styles, priorities and values between generations can create friction. Younger employees may prioritise social activism, while older colleagues might value traditional workplace norms.

The impact of this kind of polarisation on organisational health and employee wellbeing can be significant. It can hamper teamwork, as employees will become less willing to cooperate with those holding opposing views which will stifle innovation and productivity. Disagreements on personal or political issues can also lead to distrust among colleagues, creating a toxic work environment. Employees who feel alienated or marginalised due to their beliefs may seek opportunities elsewhere, result-



ing in talent loss. Workplace conflicts rooted in polarisation can lead to stress, burnout and decreased job satisfaction.

By encouraging respectful conversations that allow employees to express their perspectives without fear of judgment; by implementing structured initiatives, such as facilitated discussions or conflict resolution workshops; by emphasising organisational objectives that unite employees and by highlighting common ground, such as shared values or team missions, can be a few measures that can reduce the focus on divisive issues and can help bridge divides. Last but not least that play a crucial role in setting the tone for workplace interactions is that of the leader. There is no denying that inclusive leaders model respectful behaviour, encourage diverse viewpoints, and mediate conflicts effectively. Developing guidelines that outline acceptable workplace behaviour, particularly concerning discussions on sensitive topics; making policies that promote mutual respect while preserving freedom of expression or taking initiatives such as team-building exercises, mentorship programs, or cross-department projects can help reduce silos and foster connections between employees with differing viewpoints. Undoubtedly an organisation's culture significantly influences how polarisation manifests and is addressed. A culture that values respect, inclusivity, and open-mindedness can mitigate the effects of polarization.

Conversely, a culture that tolerates favouritism or discrimination can exacerbate divisions. Leaders must prioritise cultivating a culture where employees feel valued and heard, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds. Workplace polarisation reflects the broader societal divides but has unique challenges and opportunities within professional settings. While it risks collaboration, trust, and productivity, it can also catalyse growth if managed effectively. By fostering a culture of respect, promoting open dialogue, and emphasising shared goals, organisations can navigate polarisation and create environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

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

Syria's collapse: Foreign meddling and economic ruin



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As allies like Iran pressured Assad for reforms, and Western nations explored conditional sanctions relief, Syria became a battleground of competing geopolitical manoeuvring



By the end of November, the situation in Syria was dire. Government forces were on the brink of exhaustion, stretched thin by an economic crisis that spiralled out of control. Soldiers earned a paltry \$7 a month, with even high-ranking officers receiving only \$40. This was in blunt contrast to militia fighters funded by external powers, who earned up to \$2,000 monthly. This glaring disparity revealed not just economic fault lines but the extent of foreign intervention sustaining these militias. Meanwhile, protests erupted across Suwayda province, historically a stronghold of Assad support, highlighting widespread famine, collapsing services, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound. Discontent was palpable, threatening to upend the regime's fragile grasp on power.

Iran, Syria's long-time ally, reportedly pressured Assad to address these challenges. Tehran's warnings accentuated the erosion of public trust and a crumbling economy, urging decisive action. Yet Assad seemed increasingly aloof, allegedly seeking new alliances with Gulf nations, hoping these relationships would secure his future. By December, reports emerged that the United States and the United Arab Emirates were considering lifting sanctions on Assad—but only if he severed ties with Iran and halted arms transfers to Hezbollah. This diplomatic manoeuvre was a calculated strategy to weaken Assad's regime further. Relief from Caesar sanctions was an unlikely prospect given Washington's decade-long effort to dismantle the Assad family rule. The outcome was preordained: Assad was isolated, and the geopolitical chessboard advanced. The trajectory of Assad's downfall mirrors a broader pattern in Western foreign policy. Leaders once celebrated as reformers—from Saddam Hussein to Muammar Gaddafi—are vilified when their geopolitical utility wanes. Assad, who was once lauded for fostering coexistence among Syria's religious and ethnic groups, became the West's pariah.

In 2010, Syria was a stable nation, ranked seventh on *The New York Times*'s "31 best places to visit." Assad met with Queen Elizabeth, hosted Nancy Pelosi, and welcomed Pope John Paul II. Yet the West's affection was



BY DECEMBER, REPORTS EMERGED THAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES WERE CONSIDERING LIFTING SANCTIONS ON ASSAD—BUT ONLY IF HE SEVERED TIES WITH IRAN AND HALTED ARMS TRANSFERS TO HEZBOLLAH. THIS DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRE WAS A CALCULATED STRATEGY TO WEAKEN ASSAD'S REGIME FURTHER

short-lived. As geopolitical calculations shifted, Assad's regime was recast as the antithesis of democracy, paving the way for intervention. The Syrian conflict was never just a civil war. It was a proxy war fueled by external actors. Over 100,000 jihadists were funnelled into Syria, backed by a coalition of nations. The United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar allegedly provided financial and logistical support. Turkey and Jordan facilitated arms shipments and fighter transport. Western media amplified anti-Assad narratives, while the UK-backed White Helmets shaped public perceptions. Each player pursued its agenda, yet all converged on a singular goal: regime change. The motivations driving this coalition were diverse. The United States and Israel sought regional hegemony, neutralising perceived threats while advancing the Greater Israel project. Qatar's pipeline ambitions clashed with Assad's preference for an Iranian alternative, further entrenching divisions.

These dynamics turned Syria into a battleground for competing interests, with devastating consequences for its people. By late 2013, the influx of foreign fighters intensified. Western nations grappled with their citizens joining extremist groups in Syria. The UK reported approximately 600 fighters, while France contributed around 1,200. Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden also faced significant outflows. However, the greatest contributions came from West Asia and North Africa, with Tunisia leading at 3,000 fighters, followed by Saudi Arabia at 2,500.

Russia's involvement, particularly from regions like Chechnya, underscored the conflict's global reach. The arms supply chain further exacerbated the war. Gulf states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia allegedly supplied weapons, supported by over 160 military cargo flights.

These arms, transported through Turkey and Jordan, sustained rebel factions. European nations, such as Croatia, indirectly contributed by routing surplus weapons through Jordan. This complex web of arms smuggling empowered extremist groups, further destabilising Syria. Western hypocrisy was stark. While denouncing Assad's regime, the United States supported "moderate rebels" aligned with Al Qaeda and ISIS. Declassified documents revealed this duplicity. In 2012, General Michael Flynn's memo to the Pentagon warned that the opposition included jihadist factions. Similarly, Hillary Clinton's advisor, Jake Sullivan, acknowledged in an email that "Al Qaeda is on our side in Syria." The West's support for these groups undercut its claims of promoting democracy, revealing a strategy rooted in destabilisation. Atrocity propaganda became a central tool in the anti-Assad narrative. Staged chemical attacks, amplified by the White Helmets, justified military intervention.

Western media perpetuated these fabrications, obscuring the reality on the ground. Idlib province, under "rebel" control, became a dystopian preview of Syria's potential future: public executions, forced veiling of women, and sectarian slogans. This grim reality highlighted the consequences of regime change. Operation Timber Sycamore, the CIA's covert programme, exemplified Western duplicity. Billions of dollars in weapons were funnelled to extremist factions, prolonging the war.

The irony was stark: the West, claiming to combat terrorism, empowered the very groups destabilising the region. Syria's devastation became a witness to the destructive nature of interventionist policies. Syria's collapse parallels other Western interventions. Iraq's 2003 invasion, justified by the false pretext of weapons of mass destruc-

tion, left the nation in tatters. Libya, once Africa's wealthiest country, descended into anarchy following Gaddafi's overthrow—these interventions, framed as humanitarian missions, unleashed chaos, empowering extremist factions and creating power vacuums. The broader motivations behind these actions lie in geopolitics.

Syria's strategic location, its role as a buffer between Iran and Israel, and its proximity to oil-rich regions made it a prime target. The West's desire to reshape the region's political structure has driven decades of intervention, often with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, allies like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, despite their human rights abuses, remain central to Western strategy, exposing the moral bankruptcy of interventionist policies. Syria's tragedy is a miniature of a global pattern. The collapse of nations like Iraq, Libya, and Syria reflects a broader system where sovereignty is sacrificed for strategic interests. Foreign interventions, far from promoting democracy or stability, have left legacies of destruction, displacement, and despair.

The narrative of "humanitarian intervention" serves as a veneer, masking the true motives of power and greed. As the 50th anniversary of Iran's 1979 revolution approaches in 2029, the stakes are higher than ever. Iran's defiance of Western hegemony remains a critical factor in the region's future. The forces shaping West Asia—Israel, Turkey, and Western powers—are poised to challenge Iran's resilience.

Syria's collapse serves as both a warning and a call to scrutinise the ethics of intervention. The legacy of these actions is clear: a world shaped by greed, ambition, and the devastating cost of unchecked power.

(The writer is a senior journalist and a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

Can INDIA bloc resolve its leadership disputes and put to rest its internal strife

With Mamata vying for the leadership of the INDIA bloc supported by a number constituents, chances of the bloc succumbing to internal disputes are high

The INDIA bloc, a coalition of 26 ideologically diverse parties, was created to counter the BJP's electoral dominance. In the 2024 general elections, the bloc achieved a significant milestone, reducing the BJP's tally to below 240 seats. However, this success has been tempered by internal discord, which now threatens the alliance's fragile unity.

A key figure in this unfolding drama is Mamata Banerjee, the dynamic leader of the Trinamool Congress (TMC). Her aspirations for leadership within the coalition have both galvanised and fractured its members. Mamata Banerjee's National Ambitions Mamata Banerjee's bid for prominence within the INDIA bloc stems from her desire to extend her



K S TOMAR

influence beyond West Bengal and play a decisive role in shaping national politics. Her assertive style has invigorated some allies but has alienated others, exposing the persistent challenge of reconciling regional ambitions with a unified national strategy. Earlier, Banerjee proposed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge as the bloc's chairperson, a strategic move to diminish

the influence of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, one of the coalition's key architects. This proposal, supported by leaders like Akhilesh Yadav and Arvind Kejriwal, showcased Banerjee's ability to consolidate support. However, her growing clout has sparked unease among other leaders. For instance, Lalu Prasad Yadav, a staunch Congress ally, appears to be rethinking his loyalties. Such dynamics highlight the alliance's precarious balance and the potential for further fractures. Lessons from the Past: UPA2 The INDIA bloc's current challenges echo the struggles faced by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA2) during its tenure. In 2012, Mamata Banerjee's dramatic exit from the UPA over policy disagree-

ments underscored the inherent instability of coalition politics. Scandals and policy paralysis plagued UPA2, eroding its credibility and paving the way for Narendra Modi's rise. As Banerjee's ambitions take center stage, the INDIA bloc risks repeating history. If it fails to address its internal contradictions, it could suffer the same fate as UPA2, jeopardising its ability to present a united front against the BJP. BJP's Advantage Amid Opposition Discord The BJP stands to benefit from the INDIA bloc's internal strife. While Banerjee wields considerable influence in West Bengal, Congress retains a broader national presence. A fragmented opposition could split anti-BJP votes, a scenario that would play into the



saffron party's hands. Recent BJP gains in Maharashtra and Haryana underscore the bloc's challenges, particularly for Congress, which has struggled to maintain dominance in key states. Seat-sharing disputes within the bloc further illustrate its lack of strategic coherence. For instance, the Aam Aadmi Party's unilateral candidate announcements in Delhi and Haryana have fueled tensions,

revealing the alliance's inability to present a united strategy. **Mamata vs Congress:** Mamata Banerjee's leadership ambitions pose a paradox for Congress. Her energy and charisma could revitalise the bloc, but her assertiveness risks overshadowing Congress's central role. This tension is particularly pronounced in states like West Bengal and Kerala, where Congress directly competes with the TMC and the Left. Seat-sharing negotiations in overlapping constituencies could exacerbate divisions, straining the alliance further. For Congress, retaining relevance within the INDIA bloc will require a delicate balancing act: accommodating Banerjee's influence without

compromising its identity. **Key Challenges for the INDIA Bloc:** The alliance faces several hurdles that could determine its survival. **Leadership Struggles:** The lack of consensus on a prime ministerial candidate risks deepening divisions. **Unified Campaign Narrative:** A focus on governance, economic policies, and social justice can resonate with voters more effectively than personal rivalries. **Effective Coordination:** Mechanisms for conflict resolution and decision-making must be strengthened. **Balancing Regional and National Goals:** Respecting regional aspirations while pursuing a cohesive national agenda is critical. **A Test of Political Maturity:**

Mamata Banerjee's ambitions underscore her political acumen and the complexities of coalition politics. While her leadership could energise the INDIA bloc, it also risks deepening divisions. Navigating this intricate web of regional and national aspirations will test the bloc's political maturity. The upcoming state elections and the 2029 general elections will be pivotal in determining whether the INDIA bloc can overcome its internal strife and emerge as a credible alternative to the BJP. Resolving leadership disputes, crafting a compelling narrative, and presenting a unified front are critical to its success.

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

Rebels try to bring normalcy as Syrians vow to speak up

AP ■ DAMASCUS

The new head of security arrived at Damascus' international airport with his men, a bearded fighter who marched with other rebels across Syria to the capital. The few maintenance staff who showed up for work huddled around Maj Hamza al-Ahmed, eager for answers about what happens next. They unloaded all their complaints, pent up for years during the rule of President Bashar Assad, which now, inconceivably, is over. They told him they were denied promotions and perks funneled to pro-Assad favorites, that bosses threatened them with prison for working too slowly. They warned him of hardcore Assad supporters among the airport staff, ready to return whenever the facility reopens. As al-Ahmed tried to reassure them, Osama Najm, an engineer, confessed: "This is the first time we talk." This was the first week of Syria's transformation after Assad's unexpected fall. Rebels, suddenly in charge, met a population bursting with emotions: excitement at new freedoms; grief over years of repression; and hopes, expectations and worries about the future. Some were overwhelmed to the point of tears.

The transition has been surprisingly smooth. Reports of reprisals, revenge killings and sectarian violence have been minimal. Looting and destruction have been quickly contained, insurgent fighters disciplined. On Saturday, people went about their lives as usual in the capital, Damascus. Only a single van of fighters was seen. There are a million ways it could go wrong. The country is broken and isolated after five decades of Assad family rule. Families have been torn apart by war, former prisoners are traumatized by the brutalities they suffered, tens of thousands of detainees remain missing. The economy is wrecked, poverty is widespread, inflation and unemployment are high. Corruption seeps through daily life. But in this moment of flux, many are ready to feel out the way ahead. At the airport, al-Ahmed told the staffers: "The new path will have challenges, but that is why we have said Syria is for all and we all have to cooperate." The rebels have so far said all the right things, Najm said. "But we will not be silent about anything wrong again." **Idlib comes to Damascus:** At a torched police station, pictures of Assad were torn down and files destroyed after insurgents entered the city Dec. 8.

All Assad-era police and security personnel have vanished. On Saturday, the building was staffed by 10 men serving in the police force of the rebels' de facto "salvation government," which for years governed the rebel enclave of Idlib in Syria's northwest. The rebel policemen watch over the station, dealing with reports of petty thefts and street scuffles. One woman complains that her neighbors sabotaged her power supply. A policeman tells her to wait for courts to start operating again. "It will take a year to solve problems," he mumbled. The rebels sought to bring order in Damascus by replicating the structure of its governance in Idlib. But there is a problem of scale. One of the policemen estimates the number of rebel police at only around 4,000; half are based in Idlib and the rest are tasked with maintaining security in Damascus and elsewhere. Some experts estimate the insurgents' total fighting force at around 20,000. Most of the bearded fighters hail from conservative, provincial areas. Many are hardline Islamists. The main insurgent force, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, has renounced its al-Qaida past, and its leaders are working to reassure Syria's religious and ethnic communities that the

future will be pluralist and tolerant. Syrians remain suspicious. "The people we see on the streets, they don't represent us," said Hani Zia, a Damascus resident. He was concerned by the few reports of attacks on minorities and revenge killings. "We should be fearful." Some restaurants have resumed openly serving alcohol, others more discreetly to test the mood. At a sidewalk café in the historic Old City's Christian quarter, men were drinking beer when a fighter patrol passed by. The men turned to each other, uncertain, but the fighters did nothing. When a man waving a gun harassed a liquor store elsewhere in the Old City, the rebel police arrested him, one policeman said. Salem Hajjo, a theater teacher who participated in the 2011 protests, said he doesn't agree with the rebels' Islamist views, but is impressed at their experience in running their own affairs. And he expects to have a voice in the new Syria. "We have never been this at ease," he said. "The fear is gone. The rest is up to us." **The fighters make a concerted effort to reassure:** On the night after Assad's fall, gunmen roamed the streets, celebrating victory with deafening gunfire. Some security agency buildings were torched. The public stayed

indoors. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham moved to impose order. It ordered a nighttime curfew for three days. It banned celebratory gunfire and moved fighters to protect properties. After a day, people began to emerge. Tens of thousands went to Assad's prisons to search for loved ones, mingling with rebels, some of whom were also searching. Amid celebrations, gunmen invited children to hop up on their armored vehicles, and posed for photos with women, some with their hair uncovered. Pro-revolution songs blared from cars. The transitional government urged people to return to work. The insurgents deployed men to act as traffic police. Volunteers picked up trash, since municipal workers haven't returned to their jobs. Officials say they want to reopen the airport as soon as possible and this week maintenance crews inspected a handful of planes on the tarmac. Cleaners removed trash, wrecked furniture and merchandise. One cleaner, who identified himself only as Murad, said he earns the equivalent of \$15 a month and has six children to feed, including one with a disability. He dreams of getting a mobile phone.

Sheikh Hasina involved in enforced disappearance: B'desh commission

PTI ■ DHAKA

An inquiry commission set up by the interim government in Bangladesh has said that it found evidence implicating deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and top-ranking military and police officials from her regime in alleged incidents of enforced disappearance. The five-member Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances submitted an interim report titled "Unfolding the Truth" to Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on Saturday. The commission estimated that there would be more than 3,500 enforced disappearances. "The commission has found evidence of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's involvement as the instructor in the incidents of enforced disappearance," the press wing of the office of Chief Adviser said in a statement on Saturday night. It said the deposed premier's defence adviser Major General (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre and sacked Major General Ziaul Ahsanand senior police officers Monirul Islam and Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid and several other senior officials were found to be involved in those incidents. The ex-military and police officers are on the run, mostly believed to be abroad since the ouster of Hasina's Awami

League regime on August 5 following a student-led uprising. According to the statement, retired Supreme Court judge Mainul Islam Chowdhury, the chairman of the commission, told Yunus that during investigations they found a "systematic design" that allowed incidents of enforced disappearances to go undetected. "Individuals carrying out enforced disappearance or extrajudicial killing (even) lacked knowledge about victims," Chowdhury said. The report said the police's elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which draws men from the Army, Navy, Air Force, regular police and other law enforcement agencies had collaborated with each other to pick up, torture and keep victims in detention and deliberately segmented the operations. The commission simultaneously proposed the abolition of the RAB alongside scrapping or thoroughly amending the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009. Rights activist and commission member Sajjad Hossain said they recorded 1,676 complaints of enforced disappearances and, so far, have examined 758 of them. Of these, 200 people or 27 per cent of the victims never returned while those who returned were mostly shown on records as arrested. Besides the chairman, the commission comprises Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli, rights activist Nur Khan, private

BRAC University teacher Nabila Idris and rights activist Sajjad Hossain. At a press conference earlier, the commission announced that they had found eight secret detention centres in Dhaka and its outskirts. The panel chairman on Saturday informed Yunus that they would deliver another interim report in March and would require at least another year to complete the scrutiny of all allegations they had received. "You are doing a really very important job. We are ready to give you all kinds of support that you need," Yunus was quoted as saying. TV channels and social media carried interviews with several victims of the alleged enforced disappearance, including former military officers and opposition activists who were active in opposing Hasina's regime. While receiving the report yesterday, Yunus said he would visit some of the joint interrogation cells and secret detention centres as he wanted first-hand knowledge about the sufferings of the victims. The report called for the creation of a new law criminalising enforced disappearances. Commission members also told the government to repeal laws under the Armed Police Battalions Ordinance that grants law enforcers indemnity for acts done in "good faith".

Constitution will be amended with consensus of all: Nepal minister

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's Minister for Home Affairs Ramesh Lekhak on Sunday said a consensus of all political parties will be ensured to amend the Constitution, a media report said. Lekhak, speaking at a press meet, stressed on the need for the Constitution amendment for strengthening the federal democratic republic. The Himalayan Times newspaper reported. "The preliminary dialogue on this issue has commenced. But the constitution amendment will not be determined by two political parties," he said. Lekhak said that the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN UML), the largest parties in Parliament, had decided to form the incumbent coalition government to promote stabil-

ity, prevent corruption, strengthen good governance and economic activities and accelerate the pace of development. The minister further said that the existing political alliance between the NC and CPN (UML) has no issues and it will continue until the next general election. Responding to a question about the arrest of opposition leader Rabi Lamichhane, he claimed that the government is highly aware of the guarantee of human rights for each citizen. He added that the government has no feeling of "revenge" against Lamichhane, the chair of Rastriya Swatantra Party, as the current investigation against him is a legal issue. Meanwhile, Nepali Congress spokesperson Prakash Sharan Mahat advised the government to seek and accept foreign loans only on the need-basis as

it has been very challenging for the country to repay loans taken after Covid-19. In July, KP Sharma Oli was sworn in as Nepal's Prime Minister for the fourth time to lead a new coalition government. The leader of Nepal's largest communist party was appointed as prime minister by President Ram Chandra Paudel to lead the coalition government with Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in Parliament, apart from other smaller parties. Oli, 72, succeeded Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost the vote of confidence in the House of Representatives (HoR), leading to the formation of the new government. Nepal has faced frequent political turmoil as the country has seen 14 governments in the past 16 years after the Republican system was introduced.

Pope Francis' makes 1st papal visit to France's Corsica awash in expressions of popular piety

AP ■ AJACCIO

Pope Francis on the first papal visit ever to the French island of Corsica on Sunday called for a dynamic form of laicism, promoting the kind of popular piety that distinguishes the Mediterranean island from secular France as a bridge between religious and civic society. Speaking at the close of a Mediterranean conference on popular piety, Pope Francis, as he is called in Corsican, described a concept of secularism "that is not static and fixed, but evolving and dynamic," that can adapt to "unforeseen situations" and promote cooperation "between civil and ecclesiastical authorities." The pontiff said that expressions of popular piety, including processions, communal prayer of the Holy Rosary, "can nurture constructive citizenship" on the part of Christians. At the same time, he warned against such manifestations being seen only in terms of folklore, or even superstition. During off-the-cuff remarks, the pope relayed his experience attending a festival in northern Argentina before his pontificate where he witnessed the importance of popular piety for the faithful "that seeks a healthy complicity." The visit to Corsica's capital Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, is one of the briefest of his papacy beyond Italy's borders, just about nine hours on the ground, including a 40-minute visit with French President Emmanuel Macron. Francis was joined on the dais by the bishop of Ajaccio,



Pope Francis delivers the Angelus prayer inside the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption of Ajaccio on the occasion of his one-day visit in the French island of Corsica on Sunday. AP/PTI

Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo, who organized the conference that brought together some 400 participants from Spain, Sicily, Sardinia and southern France. The two-day meeting examined expressions of faith that often occur outside formal liturgies, such as processions and pilgrimages. Often specific to the places where they are practised, popular piety in Corsica includes the cult of the Virgin Mary, known locally as the "Maddunuccia," which protected the island from the plague in 1656 when it was still under Genoa. Corsica stands out from the rest of secularized France as a particularly devout region, with 92 confraternities, or lay associa-

tions dedicated to works of charity or piety, with over 4,000 members. "It means that there is a beautiful, mature, adult and responsible collaboration between civil authorities, mayors, deputies, senators, officials and religious authorities," Ajaccio Cardinal Francois-Xavier Bustillo told The Associated Press ahead of the visit. "There is no hostility between the two. And that is a very positive aspect because in Corsica there is no ideological hostility." The visit was awash in signs of popular piety. The pope was greeted by children in traditional garb and was continually serenaded by bands, choruses and singing troupes that are central to Corsican culture

from the airport, to the motorcade route, convention center and cathedral. Thousands stood along the roadside to greet the pontiff and more waved from windows. René Colombani traveled with 2,000 others by ship from northern Corsica to Ajaccio, on the western coast, to see the pope. "It is an event that we will not see again in several years. It may be the only time that the pope will come to Corsica. And since we wanted to be a part of it, we have come a long way," Colombani said. The island, which Genoa ceded to France in 1768, is located closer to the Italian mainland than France. From the conference, the pope traveled to the 17th-century

cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta to meet with clergy, stopping along the way at the statue of the Maddunuccia. Francis will later celebrate Mass at the Place d'Austerlitz park, where it is said Napoleon played as a child. Around 7,000 faithful are expected. He will meet privately with Macron at the airport before departing for the 50-minute flight back to Rome. They are expected to talk about the world's crisis, including wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, and environment and climate-related issues, Macron's office said. The pontiff pointedly did not make the trip to Paris earlier this month for the pomp surrounding the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral following the devastating 2019 fire. The visit to Corsica seems far more suited to Francis' priorities than a grand cathedral reopening, emphasizing the "church of the peripheries." It is Francis' third trip to France, each time avoiding Paris and the protocols that a state visit entails. He visited the port of Marseille in 2023, on an overnight visit to participate in an annual summit of Mediterranean bishops, and went to Strasbourg in 2014 to address the European Parliament and Council of Europe. Corsica is home to more than 340,000 people and has been part of France since 1768. But the island has also seen independence violence and has an influential nationalist movement, and last year Macron proposed granting it limited autonomy.

Pakistanis celebrate Raj Kapoor's 100th birth anniversary

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistani cultural enthusiasts and film lovers gathered at the iconic Kapoor House in Peshawar on Saturday to celebrate the 100th birth anniversary of legendary Bollywood filmmaker and actor Raj Kapoor. A highlight of the event, reinforcing the significance of Peshawar's ties to cinematic history, was the cutting of a cake to mark the birth centenary of Kapoor — one of the most influential figures of Indian cinema. Participants also welcomed the World Bank's announcement to allocate Rs 100 million each for the restoration of the ancestral homes of Raj Kapoor and fellow Bollywood legend Dilip Kumar. Both homes, located near the famous Qissa Khawani Bazaar, are celebrated as symbols of Peshawar's deep ties to Indian cinema. The gathering, jointly organized by the Cultural Heritage Council (CHC) and the Directorate of Archaeology Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, called for larger-scale events to commemorate the legacy of Kapoor. The attendees emphasized Kapoor's connection to Pakistan, where he was born in Peshawar's Dhaki Nalbandi, and praised his enduring influence on cinema. Muhammad Hussain Haideri,

Secretary of the Pak-Iran Trade and Investment Council, was the chief guest of the event. Born on December 14, 1924, Kapoor was the son of stalwart actor Prithviraj Kapoor. He made classics like "Awaraz", "Barsaat", "Shree 420", "Sangam" and "Mera Naam Joker" during his illustrious 40-year career. He died in 1988. Ibrahim Zia, a renowned writer and researcher on the Indian film industry who has extensively studied film legends with roots in Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, presented rare photographs of Raj Kapoor from his childhood and early adolescence years in Peshawar. He also shared insights into the actor's illustrious career, starting in the 1940s. Zia highlighted Kapoor's versatility across genres, from romance and comedy to tragedy, which solidified his status as the "Greatest Showman of Indian Cinema". The Kapoor House stands near the ancestral homes of Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan, connecting two generations of Indian film legends to Peshawar. Dilip Kumar, celebrated for his naturalistic acting, and Shah Rukh Khan, a modern-day Bollywood superstar, further underscore the city's historical contribution to Indian cinema.

Cyclone Chido leaves 11 dead

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

At least 11 people have died after Cyclone Chido caused devastating damage in the French territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, France's Interior Ministry said Sunday. The ministry said it was proving difficult to get a precise tally of the dead and injured amid fears the death toll will increase. A hospital in Mayotte reported that nine people were in critical condition in the hospital and 246 others were injured. The tropical cyclone blew through the southeastern Indian Ocean, also affecting the nearby islands of Comoros and Madagascar. Mayotte was directly in the path of the cyclone and suffered extensive damage on Saturday, officials said. The prefect of Mayotte said it was the worst cyclone to hit Mayotte in 90 years. French Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau said Saturday night after an emergency meeting in Paris that there were fears that the death toll in Mayotte "will be high." Chido brought winds in excess of 220 kph, according to the French weather service, ripping metal roofs off houses and destroying many small structures in Mayotte, which has a population of just over 300,000 spread over two main islands about 800 kilometres off Africa's east coast. In some parts, entire neighbourhoods were flattened, while local residents reported many trees had been uprooted and boats had been flipped or sunk.

Trump appoints Richard Grenell to serve as special missions envoy

AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH

President-elect Donald Trump announced Saturday that he's picked longtime foreign policy adviser Richard Grenell to serve as an envoy for special missions, tasking him with helping the incoming administration deal with some of the toughest foreign policy challenges. Grenell served as ambassador to Germany during Trump's first administration, special presidential envoy for Serbia and Kosovo peace negotiations, and did a stint as acting director of national intelligence. He was also a contender to serve as secretary of state, but Trump opted to nominate Florida Sen. Marco Rubio. "Ric will work in some of the hottest spots around the World, including Venezuela and North Korea," Trump said in a posting on his social media platform, Truth Social, announcing

the appointment. Grenell during Trump's first term developed a reputation for employing a sometimes contentious approach to diplomacy that rankled allies and the foreign policy establishment in Washington. But his style was appreciated by the president-elect who sees value in blunt talk with allies. Grenell remained close to Trump after he left office in 2021, serving at times as a key adviser on foreign policy. He was in the room when Trump met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in September. Grenell has advocated for a peace deal that would preserve Ukraine's territory while still allowing for "autonomous regions" where Russia could remain in control. He's also advised against expanding NATO to include Ukraine, saying — as Trump has — that the alliance shouldn't grow until current members

meet the alliance's defense spending targets. Members of the transatlantic alliance have committed for years to spending 2% of their GDP on defense, but several countries still fall short of the target. He was an early supporter of Trump's 2024 campaign and held multiple events for the Republican nominee focused on economics and national security. Speaking at the Republican National Convention, Grenell echoed Trump's mantra that "it's time to put America first" on the global stage and argued that China and Russia saw President Joe Biden's administration as weak. Trump raised concerns during the 2024 campaign when he said he would not defend NATO members that failed to meet defense spending targets, and warned he would "encourage" Russia "to do whatever the hell they want" to alliance countries that he

considered "delinquent." Grenell has downplayed Trump's criticisms of NATO and said the only talk of leaving the alliance altogether "was really from the media." "What we're saying is, don't come to the wedding without a gift," Grenell said. Grenell was part of the Trump campaign's outreach to Arab American voters in Michigan, where the president-elect made gains with a traditionally Democratic constituency despite his history of banning immigration from several majority-Muslim countries. Grenell orchestrated pro-Trump events with Arab American voters, like a May meeting held in Troy, Michigan. A US spokesman at the United Nations during the George W. Bush administration, Grenell, like many other Republicans, has his own history of criticizing Trump before embracing him.

Once an adviser to GOP moderates like 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney and a supporter of gay marriage, Grenell, who is openly gay, deleted social media posts blasting Trump as "reckless" and "dangerous" once the former reality TV star became the Republican nominee in 2016. Trump also announced Saturday that he's appointing Devin Nunes, the chief executive officer of the president-elect's Truth Social platform, to head a presidential advisory board that will keep tabs on the U.S. intelligence community. Nunes will continue leading Trump Media & Technology Group. Trump is the company's largest shareholder. The former California lawmaker chaired the House Intelligence Committee and was one of Trump's closest allies in Congress during the president-elect's first term.

South Korean leaders seek calm after Yoon is impeached

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's opposition leader offered Sunday to work with the government to ease the political tumult as officials sought to reassure allies and markets, a day after the opposition-controlled parliament voted to impeach conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol over a short-lived attempt to impose martial law. Liberal Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung, whose party holds a majority in the National Assembly, urged the Constitutional Court to rule swiftly on Yoon's impeachment and proposed a special council for policy cooperation between the government and parliament. Yoon's powers have been suspended until the court decides whether to remove him from office or reinstate him. If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days. Lee, who has led a fierce political offensive against Yoon's embattled government, is seen as the frontrunner to replace him. He lost the 2022 presidential election to Yoon by a razor-

thin margin. He told a televised news conference that a swift court ruling would be the only way to "minimise national confusion and the suffering of people." The court will meet to discuss the case Monday, and has up to 180 days to rule. But observers say that a court ruling could come faster. In the case of parliamentary impeachments of past presidents — Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016 — the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park. Lee also proposed a national council where the government and the National Assembly would work together to stabilise state affairs, and said his party won't seek to impeach Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a Yoon appointee who's now serving as acting president. "The Democratic Party will actively cooperate with all parties to stabilise state affairs and restore international trust," Lee said. "The National Assembly and government will work together to quickly resolve the crisis that has swept

across the Republic of Korea." It's unclear if Lee's proposed council will be realised. In a meeting with the parliament speaker, who touched upon Lee's idea, Han said he will closely cooperate and communicate with the National Assembly but didn't specifically say whether the government intends to join the council. Kwon Seong-dong, floor leader of the ruling People Power Party, separately criticised Lee's proposal, saying that it's "not right" for the opposition party acting like the ruling party. Kwon, a Yoon loyalist, said that his party will use existing PPP-government dialogue channels "to continue to assume responsibility as the governing party until the end of President Yoon's term." The Democratic Party has already used its parliamentary majority to impeach the justice minister and the chief of the national police over the martial law decree, and had previously said it was also considering impeaching the prime minister. Upon assuming his role as acting leader, Han ordered the military to bolster its security



South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung speaks during a press conference on removal of President Yoon Suk Yeol from office, at the party office at the National Assembly building in Seoul on Sunday. AP/PTI

posture to prevent North Korea from launching provocations. He also asked the foreign minister to inform other countries that South Korea's major external policies will remain unchanged, and the finance minister to work to minimise potential negative impacts on

the economy from the political turmoil. On Sunday, Han had a phone call with US President Joe Biden, discussing the political situation in South Korea and regional security challenges including North Korea's nuclear programme.

Biden expressed his appreciation for the resiliency of democracy in South Korea and reaffirmed "the ironclad commitment" of the United States, according to both governments. Yoon's December 3 imposition of martial law, the first of

its kind in more than four decades, lasted only six hours, but has caused massive political tumult, halted diplomatic activities and rattled financial markets. Yoon was forced to lift his decree after parliament unanimously voted to overturn it. Yoon sent hundreds of troops and police officers to the parliament in an effort to stop the vote, but they withdrew after the parliament rejected Yoon's decree. No major violence occurred. Opposition parties have accused Yoon of rebellion, saying a president in South Korea is allowed to declare martial law only during wartime or similar emergencies and would have no right to suspend parliament's operations even in those cases. Yoon has rejected the charges and vowed to "fight to the end." He said the deployment of troops to parliament was aimed at issuing a warning to the Democratic Party, which he called an "anti-state force" that abused its control of parliament by holding up the government's budget bill for next year and repeatedly pushing to impeach top officials.

Law enforcement institutions are investigating Yoon and others involved in the martial law case over possible rebellion and other allegations. They've arrested Yoon's defence minister and police chief and two other high-level figures. Yoon has immunity from most criminal prosecution as president, but that doesn't extend to allegations of rebellion or treason. He's been banned from leaving South Korea, but observers doubt that authorities will detain him because of the potential for clashes with his presidential security service. South Korean media reported that prosecutors asked Yoon to appear at a prosecution office for questioning on Sunday but he refused to do so. The reports said prosecutors plan to ask him to appear again. Repeated calls to a prosecutors' office in Seoul were unanswered. Lee called for authorities to speed up their probes and said that an independent investigation by a special prosecutor should be launched as soon as possible. Last week, the National Assembly passed a law calling for such an investigation.

Alleged Chinese spy got close to senior British royal, met former PMs

PTI ■ LONDON

The scandal surrounding an alleged Chinese spy who managed to gain access to Buckingham Palace as a "close confidant" of Prince Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles III, intensified on Sunday as it emerged that he also met former prime ministers David Cameron and Theresa May. While Cameron and May distanced themselves from any knowledge of his espionage links, the row involving the businessman, known only as "H6" for legal reasons, continues to dominate the headlines after a tribunal judge noted that he had an "unusual" degree of trust from the senior royal. Earlier, Andrew, the Duke of York, said in a statement that he had "ceased all contact" with the alleged spy.

"David Cameron was leader of the Conservative Party for over a decade and PM for six years. He met thousands of people during that time at hundreds of functions and events. We don't have any further information about this individual," a source close to Cameron, now Lord Cameron, was quoted as saying by 'Sky News'. Meanwhile, a spokesperson for Theresa May said "as such, she doesn't remember when or where this particular photograph was taken or the man in question". The revelations come after it emerged earlier this week that H6 had been barred from entering the UK due to national security risks. A Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) went on to hear in July that the man was invited to Prince Andrew's birthday party in 2020 and was told by a royal aide that he

could act on the Duke's behalf when dealing with potential investors in China. According to SIAC case details, H6 was first excluded from entering the country in 2023 over national security fears by Suella Braverman, who was then home secretary. In July last year, the Home Office said H6 was considered to have engaged in "covert and deceptive activity" on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party. H6 denied the allegations and appealed that decision in the SIAC, which ruled against him on Thursday. In a statement, Prince Andrew's office said the Duke had met the man "through official channels" and there was "nothing of a sensitive nature ever discussed". The Chinese Embassy in the UK has denied the espionage allegations, saying "some individuals in the UK are always

eager to fabricate baseless 'spy' stories targeting China". "Their purpose is to smear China and disrupt normal exchanges between Chinese and British personnel," a spokesperson said. However, former Tory Cabinet minister Gillian Keegan said on Sunday that the UK should "always be vigilant", and it is "surprising that people are surprised" by China's activities because security advice has been given to people visiting China going back 30 years. "They are the biggest strategic threat we have. They're a much bigger strategic threat than Russia," she said. UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper laid out the Labour government's stance as ensuring that the country's security and intelligence agencies are "continually vigilant for any threat to UK national security".

Bolivia holds divisive popular vote for its top judges, offering lessons for region

AP ■ LA PAZ

Campaigning for Sunday's judicial election may be strictly forbidden, but look closer on the streets of Bolivia's capital, La Paz, and you'll find that some candidates have sneakily plastered their faces on packs of corn puffs and others have slipped subtle slogans into official voting manuals. After all, it's a popular vote, and even a bit of PR can work wonders when voters know nothing about the dozens of names on their sprawling ballot papers. Bolivia is the only country in the world that holds elections for top judicial posts. Soon Mexico will, too, after former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador pushed through a highly contentious overhaul of the justice system in the face of mass protests. As Bolivia's ex-President Evo Morales did when remaking the judiciary in 2009, López Obrador has championed the overhaul as a way to purge the corrupt elite and boost democracy. But apathetic Bolivian voters say the elections have had the opposite effect, turning their courts from neutral arbiters

into political prizes. "I'll flip a coin," said 25-year-old architecture student Marisol Nogales when asked how she would vote on Sunday. It's never easy to find supporters of Bolivia's system of electing judges, which, over a decade ago, replaced a nomination system rooted in qualifications and training. Across the world, academics, investors and judges have warned that judicial elections can cement the dominance of the ruling party and gut checks and balances. And across Latin America, from El Salvador to Honduras, experts have characterised politicised judiciaries as profound threats to democracy. In Bolivia, even senior judicial officials struggle to sound positive when asked to defend the election. "It should be a calm, easy and simple process, but it has become very litigious, very controversial," Francisco Vargas, the vice president of Bolivia's electoral tribunal, told The Associated Press from the court in central La Paz. This year in Bolivia, experts find it even harder than usual to praise the system. With the posts up for grabs every six

years, Sunday's vote was supposed to take place in late 2023. But as the deadline approached last year, the Constitutional Court — packed with allies of President Luis Arce — suddenly intervened to push the vote back a year, escalating his power struggle with his former mentor and current rival, Morales, over who will lead their long-dominant leftist party into Bolivia's 2025 presidential election. Both understand that whoever wins over the Constitutional Court ensures their own political survival. Arce cited the paralysis of their divided party in justifying the vote's delay. Morales' loyalists, who hold a majority in Congress and would have determined the shortlist of judicial candidates, accused Arce of illegally extending the mandates of friendly judges for fear of losing influence over the courts. "What happened was disorder, the kind that can lead us to a greater conflict," said Iván Lima, the former Minister of Justice. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights criticized the postponement of elections,

raising alarm about its "potential to undermine the effective functioning of the Bolivian justice system." Now, after many attempts to derail and further delay the vote, it is finally moving ahead Sunday. But there's a wrinkle: It's a partial election. Only four out of nine seats on the powerful Constitutional Court are up for grabs. The other five — the majority of sitting judges, as it happens — will stay in their posts. "The judges have turned the Constitutional Court into a sort of super power," said Bolivian political analyst Paul Coca. Sunday marks the third time that Bolivia has held judicial elections. If the past two rounds under then-President Morales, in 2011 and 2017, are any indication, turnout will be low. Both times, the majority of Bolivians, outraged or simply baffled by the notion of endorsing unknown judges pre-selected by Morales' allies with little transparency, voted null or blank. Critics questioned the legitimacy of the elected judges. But they nonetheless shaped the evolution of Bolivian democracy.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa CM says talks with Taliban govt only solution for peace in region

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Chief Minister of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday said negotiations with the incumbent Taliban government in Afghanistan is the only solution for maintaining peace and security in the region. The firebrand leader of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said if the world could recognise the Taliban government in Kabul, "then we should also talk with them for the sake of peace and security in the region." "Our province has the longest border with Afghanistan and we face the most severe consequences. In provincial and federal apex committee meetings, I have discussed initiating talks with Afghanistan," he said. The federal government claims it will negotiate with Afghanistan but they have not taken any concrete steps so far, the leader said. "We are managing this long border with the sacrifices of our people. Our police and security forces are giving their lives

for peace. We are victims of terrorism but are ensuring it does not spread further," Gandapur stated. "Several terrorists have been neutralised in the southern districts over the past few months. We are fiercely combating terrorists," he added. Gandapur claimed that the law and order situation was completely stable during the tenure of Khan's government from 2018 to 2022, however, it deteriorated after the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) government came to power in the wake of the no confidence motion in 2022. "Institutions have been tasked with dismantling PTI instead of focusing on other responsibilities. When I took office, the situation was dire, but my focus is on improving it," he said. The PTI leader claimed that the performance of his government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is best compared to other provinces. "We have met the IMF target, which no other province has achieved so far," he said. "No one has made as many sacrifices for democracy and true

freedom as we have," the chief minister said. Recently, Gandapur warned of launching more protests against the federal government to secure the release of the jailed former premier. "We will continue launching attacks like the battle of Panipat. We will conquer if demands are not met," Gandapur told reporters referring to a historic battle in the subcontinent. "We have launched just five

attacks and will continue to launch the rest," he said while referring to the PTI's march on November 24 in Islamabad to demand the release of Khan. Khan's party launched a protest on November 24 after he issued a "final call", demanding the restoration of his party's electoral mandate, the release of detained party members, and the reversal of the 26th Amendment which he said had strengthened a "dictatorial regime".

PUBLIC NOTICE

General public is hereby informed that I, **W Sunil Kumar S/o Sardar Rajinder Singh. A/sro filing application in L&DO for substitution/mutation of the property No 3/146 Ramesh Nagar, West Delhi-110015.** Contact no: 9599355076 in the name of Sunil Kumar on the grounds of Will. If there are any objection/claims from the general public in this application, the same shall be communicated to L&DO with supporting documents through registered post or by visiting L&DO at Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi or through an email at ldo@nic.in within 30 days of publication of this notice.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I Kamlesh Dua W/o, Shyam Lal Dua R/O. H. No. A-2, Gali No. 1, Bihari Colony, Shahdara, Delhi 110032 Have Changed My Name To Mamta Dua For All Purposes. PD(1085)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public at large is hereby notified that my client Mrs. Paramjit Kaur W/o Late Mr. Balvinder Singh R/O Flat No. A-3, UGF, Vidhya Apartment, Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj, Delhi-110070 has separated and severed all relations with her daughter-in-law namely Reeta Majumdar due to her bad and disobedient behavior and Granddaughter namely Simit Saini. My client has disowned and disinherited both of them from claiming any right, title and interest, etc. in any of her movable and immovable properties. Anybody dealing with them in any respect will be doing so at his/her own risk and responsibility and my client shall not be responsible or accountable in any manner whatsoever. Karandeep Singh (Advocate) D(6885/2017)

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that KG Health and Fitness Pvt. Ltd. is the sole and exclusive owner of the Kris Gethin Gyms brand in India. We hereby clarify that Kris Gethin Gyms does not have any authorised franchisee or operation in South Extension, New Delhi. Any individual or entity claiming to represent or operate a Kris Gethin Gym at this location is acting without authorization and is misrepresenting the brand KG Health and Fitness Pvt. Ltd. shall not be held responsible for any loss, damage, or inconvenience caused to the public by such unauthorised use of the Kris Gethin Gyms name. For official inquiries or to verify authorized locations, please contact us.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public that a Will of Late Shri Doboom Tulku was executed and registered at Gurugram, Haryana, Will Reg. No. 1062 dated 05.12.2023. According to the aforesaid Will, Agricultural Land Comprised in Rect. No. 30, Killa No. 2/3(4-0), 3/8(0), 2/2(4-0), 19/2(2-11), 23 Min West [4-19] total measuring 23 Kanal 10 Marla Salam situated in the revenue estate of Village Sakatpur, Tehsil & District Gurugram, Haryana [herein referred to as the said land] belonged to the aforesaid deceased. Now this public notice is to clarify that as per revenue records, the said land belonged to Ven. Lama Doboom Tulku and that Ven. Lama Doboom Tulku and Doboom Tulku are the same person. It is also clarified that as per revenue records, Agricultural Land Comprised in Rectangle No. 21 Killa No. 19/2/2 (2-9), 22/2/2 (4-0), 23/1/2 (4-16), Rectangle No. 30 Killa No. 2/3 (4-0), 3 (8-0) total Rakba 23 Kanal 5 Marla situated in the revenue estate of Village Sakatpur, Tehsil & District Gurugram, Haryana [herein referred to as the said land] belonged to the aforesaid deceased. If any one has any objection or concern regarding the same, he or she may contact the undersigned for the same within 30 days of this public notice. ADVOCATE MANUL MITTRA P/6747/2018 DISTRICT AND SESSION COURT, GURUGRAM

Union Bank of India

POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)

Whereas The undersigned being the authorised officer of Union Bank of India, NOIDA MAIN BRANCH (Brahmaputra Complex, Sector 29, Noida -201301) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement Security Interest (Second) Act, 2002 (Act No. 54 of 2002) land in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 30.09.2024 calling upon the borrowers M/s. M. Techno, Proprietor and guarantor Mr. Pramod Kumar, Guarantor- M/s. Krishna Kumar, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 74,09,278.07 (Rupees Seventy Four Lakhs, Nine thousand, two hundred Seventy Eight and Seven Paise only) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public to general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him / her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with rule 8 of the said rules on the 10th day of the December year 2024. The borrower n particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the Union Bank of India for an amount Rs. 74,09,278.07 and interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to the borrower to redeem the secured assets.

Description of Immovable Property

All that part of the residential property bearing No. DDA LIG Flat No 65A, Ground Floor, Pocket A 2, Mayapuri Phase III, Delhi 110096 measuring 463 00 Sq. Feet in the name of Shri Pramod Kumar and Smt. Krishna Kumar Bounded: On the North by Road On the South by flat no 65 B On the East by corridor and Flat No 66 A On the west by Flat No 59 A Date: 15.12.2024 Place: Noida

Authorised Officer For UNION Bank OF INDIA

5 heroin traffickers return to Australia from Indonesia

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Five Australians who had spent almost 20 years in Indonesian prisons for heroin trafficking returned to Australia on Sunday under a deal struck between the two governments, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said. The governments confirmed weeks ago that negotiations were underway for Matthew Norman, Scott Rush, Martin Stephens, Si Yi Chen, and Michael Czujag to be returned to Australia. Their return on Sunday was shrouded in secrecy. There was uncertainty about whether they could potentially serve out their life sentences in Australian prisons. However, Albanese confirmed in a statement Sunday the men

returned to Australia as free citizens. He also thanked Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto for the men's release. "Australia respects Indonesia's sovereignty and legal processes and we appreciate Indonesia's compassionate consideration of this matter," Albanese said. The five were among a gang of nine Australian smugglers arrested in the Indonesian tourist island of Bali in 2005 as they attempted to fly with heroin strapped to their bodies to Australia. Two convicted ring-leaders of the Bali Nine, Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran, were executed by a firing squad in 2015, causing a diplomatic furore between neighbours Indonesia and Australia.

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DEMAND NOTICE
Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited (PCHFL) under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to PCHFL, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to PCHFL by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Property address
(LC No. 13100001900 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Indira Lal (Borrower) Nisha Diwan (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 264384 /- (₹ Two lakh Sixty Four Thousand Three Hundred Eighty Four Only) NPA (03-08-2024)	Municipal No. 232A, Plot No. 254(New), Second Floor, L.H. 5 Gali No. 8, Padam Nagar Near Sai Mandir, Kishan Ganj North Delhi, New Delhi - 110007
(LC No. 2490000777 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Vikas Bhatt (Borrower) Geeta Bhatt (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 990169 /- (₹ Nine lakh Ninety Thousand One Hundred Sixty Nine Only) NPA (09-06-2024)	Plot No. G-1/1081, Upper Ground Floor Kharsa No.-292, Village Chandrawali Alias Madga Sarai Park, Shahdara West Delhi New Delhi - 110032
(LC No. 13100000851 of Delhi - Pitampura Branch) Ram Pramod (Borrower) Nand Kishor (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1633325 /- (₹ Sixteen lakh Thirty Three Thousand Three Hundred Twenty Five Only) NPA (08-11-2024)	Flat No. 601,6th Floor, Jupiter Tower The Alien Court, Plot No. Gh- C-3/1 Industrial Area Tronica City Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh -201011
(LC No. 1410000625 of Karnal Branch) Amit Kumar (Borrower) Asha (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1778538 /- (₹ Seventeen lakh Seventy Eight Thousand Five Hundred Thirty Eight Only) NPA (08-11-2024)	Khewat No. 35, Khata No. 37, Vill 35/72/2 40 22/2, Vila Rakhs Naji, NEAR BEHIND NAVTEEN SCHOOL MOHA Sonapat New Delhi Delhi :-110040
(LC No. 19000001745 of Ghaziabad Branch) Gulshan Kumar (Borrower) Hemlata (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 3084037 /- (₹ Thirty lakh Eighty Four Thousand Three Hundred Seventy Seven Only) NPA (08-11-2024)	Quarater No- 39, Second Floor, Block- 13, Jheel Road, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh
(LC No. 20000036204 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) MOHD SULEMAN (Borrower) Ibrahim Suleman (Co Borrower 1) Mamoona Suleman (Co Borrower 2)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1560840 /- (₹ Fifteen lakh Sixty Thousand Eight Hundred Forty Only) NPA (08-11-2024)	FL/HAT No.6-201, FLOOR No. 2ND FLOOR, PLOT No. TOWER-G, EARTH COPIA, SECTOR. 112, VILLAGE. GURGAON GURGAON Gurgaon Haryana - 122001
(LC No. 18100000359 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Sandeep Arora (Borrower) Anu Nagpal (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 364101 /- (₹ Three lakh Sixty Four Thousand One Hundred One Only) NPA (08-11-2024)	Flat No. 304 3rd Floor Tower 8B Type A Srs Palm Homes Sector 7 Palwal Faridabad Haryana :- 121102
(LC No. BLSA0001AA36 of Delhi Branch) Surendra Kumar Chauhan (Borrower) Hemlata (Co Borrower 1) Ankit Chauhan (Co Borrower 2)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 2098143.64 /- (₹ Twenty lakh Ninety Eight Thousand One Hundred Forty Three Only and Sixty Four Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	Property Bearing No.248/43, Entire Building, Old Lal Dora (1908-1909) Fruit Mandi Asadpur And Adars Hospital, Near Chand Masjid, Village Sarai Pipal Thala Delhi North West Delhi-110088
(LC No. M0167812 of Delhi Branch) Surendra Kumar Chauhan (Borrower) Hemlata (Co Borrower 1) Ankit Chauhan (Co Borrower 2)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 4285954 /- (₹ Forty Two lakh Eighty Five Thousand Nine Hundred Fifty Four Only) NPA (03-11-2024)	Property Bearing No.248/43, Entire Building, Old Lal Dora (1908-1909) Fruit Mandi Asadpur And Adars Hospital, Near Chand Masjid, Village Sarai Pipal Thala Delhi North West Delhi-110088
(LC No. HLSA0002AAA of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Irfan Ahmad (Borrower) Anjum Ara (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 398424.26 /- (₹ Three lakh Ninety Eight Thousand Four Hundred Twenty Four Only and Twenty Six Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	Plot No. B-102, Ground Floor, Rear RHS, Kharsa No.1308, Pargana Loni, Ghaziabad-201102, Uttar Pradesh
(LC No. HLSA0002AAATU of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Irfan Ahmad (Borrower) Anjum Ara (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1825038.2 /- (₹ One lakh Eighty Two Thousand Five Hundred Eighty Only and Thirty Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	Plot No. B-102, Ground Floor, Rear RHS, Kharsa No.1308, Pargana Loni, Ghaziabad-201102, Uttar Pradesh
(LC No. HLSA0002F87D of Noida Branch) Rahul (Borrower) Sheela (Co Borrower 1) Vikram (Co Borrower 2)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 2734220.4 /- (₹ Twenty seven lakh Thirty Four Thousand Two Hundred Twenty Only and Forty Paise) NPA (03-10-2024)	Flat No.301, Second Floor Front Side Without Roof Right, Property No.27, out of Kharsa No. 235, Devi Charitable Hospital Village Nawada, West Delhi 110059
(LC No. HLSA0002F87DU of Noida Branch) Rahul (Borrower) Sheela (Co Borrower 1) Vikram (Co Borrower 2)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1425912.62 /- (₹ Fourteen lakh Twenty Five Thousand Nine Hundred Twenty Only and Sixty Two Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	Flat No.301, Second Floor Front Side Without Roof Right, Property No.27, out of Kharsa No. 235, Devi Charitable Hospital Village Nawada, West Delhi 110059
(LC No. M0191054 of Delhi - Dwarka Branch) Jagmohan Singh (Borrower) Bhooop Singh (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 2672007.28 /- (₹ Twenty Six lakh Seventy Thousand Two Hundred Seven Only and Twenty Eight Paise) NPA (03-11-2024)	15,Ews, 2nd floor, Block- 8, Sector-12, This Ram Prastha, Vill- Maharajapur, Loni, Ghaziabad-201011, Uttar Pradesh
(LC No. BLSA0001245 of Delhi Branch) Upendra Malhotra (Borrower) Sita Devi (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1859946 /- (₹ Eighteen lakh Fifty Nine Thousand Nine Hundred Forty Six Only) NPA (03-11-2024)	H. No. X 1460, 3rd floor, Flat No.03, Gali No.04, Near Adars Hospital, Gandoli Nagar, East Delhi-110033
(LC No. M0099596 of Gurgaon Branch) Rakesh Kumar Gupta (Borrower) SAPANA (Co Borrower 1)	18-11-2024 / ₹ 1083207 /- (₹ Ten lakh Eighty Three Thousand Eight Hundred Twenty Seven Only) NPA (03-11-2024)	Flat G/3, Ground Floor, Plot C 212, Kharsa 4208 & 429, Sadullabad paragona Loni, Near Power House Ghaziabad Uttar Pradesh 201010

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to PCHFL as aforesaid, PCHFL shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of PCHFL. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.

Date: 16 - 12 - 2024 Place: Delhi
Piramal Capital & Housing Finance Limited

FPIs make a strong comeback to Indian equities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors have made a strong comeback to Indian equities with a net investment of Rs 22,766 crore in the first two weeks of December driven by expectations of rate cut by the US Federal Reserve.

This revival follows significant outflows in the preceding months, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pulling out a net Rs 21,612 crore in November and a massive Rs 94,017 crore in October – the worst monthly outflow on record. Interestingly, September had marked a nine-month high for FPI inflows, with a net investment of Rs 57,724 crore, highlighting the volatility in foreign investment trends.

Looking ahead, the flow of foreign investments into Indian equity markets will hinge on several key factors. These include the policies implemented under Donald Trump's presidency, the prevailing inflation and interest rate environment, and the evolving geopolitical landscape,



Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Additionally, the third-quarter earnings performance of Indian companies and the country's progress on the economic growth front will play a crucial role in shaping investor sentiment and influencing foreign inflows, he added.

investment of Rs 22,766 crore in this month (till December 13). This was driven by expectations of a US Federal Reserve rate cut. A shift toward monetary easing has improved global liquidity, drawing capital into emerging markets like India. These inflows reflect sustained interest in India as a growth market, Karthick Jonagadia, smallcase Manager and Founder of Quantace Research, said. Also, the Reserve Bank of India

(RBI) enhanced liquidity by lowering the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) that boosted investors' sentiment, Vipul Bhowar, Senior Director - Listed Investments at Waterfield Advisors, said.

Additionally, India's Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation dropped to 5.48 per cent in November from 6.21 per cent in October, enhancing investor confidence and raising hopes for potential monetary policy easing by the RBI, he added.

Even though FPIs have turned buyers in December, they have been large sellers too on certain days. This indicates that at higher levels, they may again turn sellers since Indian valuations continue to be relatively high compared to other markets, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The rising dollar is another concern which might prompt FPIs to sell at higher levels, he added. On the other hand, FPIs invested Rs 4,814 crore in the debt general limit and pulled out Rs 666 crore from the debt Voluntary Retention Route (VRR) during the period under review. So far this year, FPIs have invested Rs 1.1 lakh crore in the debt market.

Coal imports up 4 per cent at 162 MT in Apr-Oct period

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's coal import positions during the festive month of the current financial year compared to 155.87 MT in the year-ago period.

Coal imports in October dropped by 14.4 per cent to 21.84 MT compared to 25.54 MT in the corresponding month of the previous fiscal, according to data compiled by mjunction services, a B2B e-commerce platform.

Of the total imports in October, non-coking coal imports stood at 13.49 MT against 18.82 MT imported in October last fiscal. Coking coal imports stood at 4.45 MT, against 4.31 MT imported in October last financial year.

In September, non-coking coal imports were 13.24 MT and coking coal at 3.39 MT. "There was a modest increase



(month-on-month) in non-coking coal volumes in October as buyers took fresh positions during the festive month, and ahead of the winter season. Going forward, demand is likely to be moderate due to the anticipated growth in domestic supply during the fourth quarter (Q4)," mjunction MD & CEO Vinaya Varma said. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy had recently

urged the steel sector to reduce dependence on imported coal and make the required changes in technology.

The minister had said that the import of coal should be reduced in a phased manner. The steel industry uses coking coal.

The minister had also expressed hopes that the coal production target of 1,080 million tonnes for the current fiscal year would be met.

Markets to be guided by US Fed interest rate decision, WPI inflation, global trends: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The US Fed interest rate decision, inflation data and FIIs are the key factors that are expected to drive stock markets this week, analysts said.

Also, global trends will also be tracked by investors for further cues, they added.

"The Indian stock market's future trajectory will be influenced by a blend of global and domestic factors. Global trends, particularly the performance of US markets and the Fed's monetary policy decision, will play a significant role. Additionally, domestic economic indicators like inflation, will shape the



market sentiment," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said. The flow of foreign and domestic institutional

investments will also be a key driver, he said. Gour further said the rupee's exchange rate and crude oil prices will be critical determinants of market

direction. From the domestic macroeconomic data announcement, WPI inflation will be in focus on Monday.

"The key focus will be on the US Federal Reserve meeting, where a 25 basis point rate cut is already factored in. The Fed's commentary on future rate policy will hold significant importance," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark jumped 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent. Investors will watch out for the domestic WPI inflation to be released on Monday, an expert said.

Five of top-10 most valued firms together add ₹1.13 lakh Crore in market valuation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five of the 10 most valued firms added Rs 1,13,117.17 crore to their total market valuation last week with Bharti Airtel stealing the show.

While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank and Infosys were the gainers, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), ITC and Hindustan Unilever took a hit in their valuations. Last week, the BSE benchmark gained 623.07 points or 0.76 per cent and the Nifty advanced 90.5 points or 0.36 per cent.

The market valuation of Bharti Airtel surged by Rs



47,836.6 crore to Rs 9,57,842.40 crore. Infosys added Rs 31,826.97 crore to its valuation at Rs 8,30,387.10 crore. HDFC Bank's valuation rose by Rs 11,887.78 crore to Rs 14,31,158.06 crore and that of ICICI Bank increased by Rs 11,760.8 crore to Rs 9,49,306.37 crore. The market capitalisation

(mcap) of TCS climbed Rs 9,805.02 crore to Rs 16,18,587.63 crore.

However, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 52,031.98 crore to Rs 17,23,144.70 crore.

The valuation of LIC tumbled Rs 32,067.73 crore and that of Hindustan Unilever slumped Rs 22,250.63 crore to Rs 5,61,423.08 crore. The mcap of State Bank of India dropped Rs 2,052.66 crore to Rs 7,69,034.51 crore and that of ITC by Rs 1,376.19 crore to Rs 5,88,195.82 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, LIC, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

India seeks strong WTO subsidy rules for high seas fishing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has pitched at the WTO for stricter regulations on subsidies granted by countries that are engaged in high seas fishing activities, an official said.

Highlighting the stark disparity, an Indian document submitted at the World Trade Organization (WTO) has noted that it provides a modest USD 35 per fisher annually, compared to subsidies as high as USD 76,000 per fisher per year in some European nations.

India also suggested that historical subsidisers should seek permission of the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for grant of subsidies in future.

The country has made these remarks in the meetings of the Negotiating Group on Rules (Fisheries subsidies), which are going on in Geneva.

"India has pitched for strong disciplines for historical fisheries subsidisers which are engaged in distant water fishing (200 nautical miles from sea shore) and has asked for a moratorium on subsidies at the present level for 25 years," the official said. On these demands, India was supported by countries like Indonesia and other developing countries, the official added.

"Blaming India for stalling the decision at the GC (General Council) is merely an excuse and a tactic to push for weak disciplines, allowing business as usual to continue," the official said adding WTO members engaged in distant water fishing should stop providing any kind of subsidies for 25 years as they provide significantly higher support measures and are indiscriminately exploiting the fisheries resources. The General Council is the WTO's highest-level decision-making body in Geneva, meeting regularly to carry out the functions of the WTO.

It has representatives (usually ambassadors or equivalent) from all member governments and has the authority to act on behalf of the Ministerial Conference. India has also called for adopting a 'per capita distribution of subsidies' criteria to address concerns over overfishing and capacity under the WTO framework, according to the document.

Airlines are price takers, they do not have influence on prices they pay: IATA Chief Economist



PTI ■ GENEVA

Airlines are price takers as they do not have an influence on the prices they pay, IATA Chief Economist Marie Owens Thomsen has said and highlighted that carriers' need to diversify their revenues is complicated by slim profit margins as well as weak balance sheets.

In a fast-growing aviation market like India where the air traffic demand is on the rise, there are persistent concerns about airfare trajectory and suggestions from various quarters to make air tickets more affordable. Discussing overall airfares and the costs of airlines, Thomsen said airlines do not have any influence on the prices they pay.

"There are too few aircraft manufacturers and oil companies. Whatever supplies we are looking at upstream, we are price takers and downstream, we have the

hyper competitive environment where all customers can see all fares from all airlines at all times. So, we always compete in price," she told PTI in an interview in Geneva earlier this week. Thomsen, who is the Chief Economist and Senior Vice President for Sustainability, said as airlines are price takers upstream and downstream, it leaves them with very little in the middle. A study published in November by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) showed that airfares have risen at a slower pace than consumer prices (measured by the Consumer Price Index, CPI) over the past decade. "This indicates that air ticket prices have not fully kept up with inflation, especially in comparison to jet fuel costs, which have significantly outpaced consumer inflation," the study said. Currently, jet fuel accounts for around 30 per cent of

airlines' operating costs. To a question on whether there can be more transparency in pricing of air tickets, Thomsen argued that if airlines were profiteering, the per passenger profit would have been much higher.

"When you have high ticket prices and low airline profits, then the money is going somewhere else," she said, pointing out that a third and a 50 per cent of the airline industry's costs are administrative costs.

"The rest (of the costs) is actually for services of flying people or cargo," Thomsen noted.

As per IATA's latest outlook for 2025, airlines are projected to have a net profit of USD 1.8 per passenger while the overall net profit expected to be USD 3.6 billion.

"You can have a lot of activity and a big market and make no profit because your cost base is too high. Lot of them come from various types of regulatory fees and charges levied on airlines," Thomsen pointed out.

According to her, there is a need for revenue diversification by airlines but the situation is complicated by slim profit margins and weak balance sheets most airlines suffer from.

IATA represents around 340 airlines globally, including Indian carriers. The member airlines account for more than 80 per cent of the global air traffic.

India's import of Russian oil drops in Nov on shrinking discounts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's import of Russian crude oil dropped in November to its lowest level since June 2022 but the Kremlin continues to be the biggest source of oil for India, according to a monthly tracker report of a European think tank.

India became the second biggest buyer of Russian crude oil since Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022, with purchases rising from less than one per cent of the total oil imported to almost 40 per cent of the country's total oil purchases.

The rise was primarily because the Russian crude oil was available at a discount to other internationally traded oil due to the price cap and the European nations shunning purchases from Moscow.

"India's imports of Russian crude oil dropped by a massive 55 per cent in November - the lowest figure since June 2022," the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said its latest report.

Russia remained India's top oil supplier, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"China has bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (6 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent)," CREA said without giving absolute numbers.

In November, there was a 17 per cent month-on-month



increase in the discount on Russia's Urals grade crude oil to an average of USD 6.01 per barrel compared to Brent crude oil. The discount on the ESPO grade narrowed by a massive 15 per cent and was traded at an average discount of USD 3.88 per barrel while that on the Sokol blend narrowed by 2 per cent to USD 6.65 per barrel, it said.

Russia predominantly sells ESPO and Sokol grades of crude oil to India. Besides crude oil, India bought smaller quantities of coal from Russia.

"From December 5, 2022 until the end of November 2024, China purchased 46 per cent of all Russia's coal exports - India (17 per cent), Turkey (11 per cent), South Korea (10 per cent), and Taiwan (5 per cent) round off the top five buyers list," according to CREA.

All fossil fuels taken together, "India dropped to third in the list of largest buyers of Russian fossil fuels in November,

contributing 17 per cent (EUR 2.1 billion) to Russia's monthly export earnings from its top five importers. There was a significant 22 per cent drop in Russian revenues from crude oil exports to India in November," it said.

While there was an 11 per cent month-on-month decline in the total volume of India's imports of crude oil in November, Russian volumes suffered the most, dropping by a massive 55 per cent.

India imports more than 85 per cent of its crude oil, which is refined into fuels like petrol and diesel refineries. In an attempt to restrict funds for Russia's war machine, The Group of Seven (G7) rich nations, the European Union and Australia put an embargo on Russian crude and introduced a USD 60 per barrel price cap in December 2022. Over the next 12 months, the price cap and embargo had a significant impact on revenues, and

forced Russia to find new markets and ways to transport its oil.

Russia did this by offering deep discounts on its Urals grade crude.

"It has been two years since the imposition of the price cap. CREA estimates that in this period, the sanctions have forced Russia to drop the price of Urals by an estimated 15 per cent. Since the sanctions, Russia has lost an estimated EUR 14.6 billion in revenues from Urals grade crude exports," the report said.

In the second year of the sanctions, CREA estimates that sanctions impacted Russian Urals crude revenues by 10 per cent resulting in losses of EUR 4 billion.

This impact was felt heavily for the first half of 2024 when Russian revenues were hit by EUR 2.5 billion.

"The price cap has had an impact but has failed to live up to its potential. A lack of enforcement and desire to lower the price cap has meant Russia has found a way to circumvent the cap and find new markets as time has gone by, especially in the second year of the sanctions," it said.

In the first year of the sanctions Russia was losing, on an average, 23 per cent of its Urals crude export revenues every month due to the price cap and embargo. This figure has fallen sharply to a mere monthly average of 9 per cent in the second year of the cap.

Auto Expo to see highest-ever participation of vehicle manufacturers: SIAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming edition of Auto Expo will see participation of 34 vehicle manufacturers, the largest number of participants till date, since the first edition of the marquee event in 1986.

The Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) would be organising the 17th edition of Auto Expo, "The Motor Show", under the aegis of the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 from January 17-22 at Bharat

Mandapam, in partnership with ACMA and CII.

"Around 34 vehicle manufacturers would be participating at the exhibition and showcasing technologies with respect to multiple powertrains," SIAM Director General Rajesh Menon told PTI.

It is the highest-ever participation in the history of the event so far, he added. Automakers participating in the event include Tata Motors, Maruti Suzuki, Mahindra & Mahindra,



Toyota Kirloskar Motor, Hyundai Motor India, Kia

Motor India, JSW MG Motor and Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, he stated.

Luxury carmakers like BMW, Mercedes, Porsche India, and BYD would also be showcasing their products during the event.

In the two-wheeler segment, there would be participation from TVS Motor Company, Bajaj Auto, Hero MotoCorp, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India, Suzuki Motorcycle, and India Yamaha.

Similarly, Volvo Eicher

Commercial Vehicles, Ashok Leyland, JBM and Cummins India would be participating in the event.

Menon said some of the pure EV players like Ather Energy, TI Clean Mobility, Eka Mobility, Ola Electric and Vinfast would also be participating this time in the Auto Expo.

SIAM would also be setting up separate thematic pavilions on decarbonisation, circularity, electrification and road safety at the Expo.

The Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 will be held between January 17 and 22 next year at Bharat Mandapam, Yashobhoomi (India International Convention and Expo Centre) Dwarka, and India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida, simultaneously. The last edition of the Auto Expo was held from January 11-18, 2023, at the India Expo Mart, Greater Noida.

The inaugural Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2024 was held from February 1-3.



Rajgopal Swaminathan won awards in six categories for his contributions in multi discipline field viz Adtech, Martech, Digttech, Sales and Execution etc pertaining to the organisations like Amazon Pay, Upstox, Aditya Birla, PhonePe, StockMarket and Angel One at the prestigious FINIXX SUMMIT & AWARDS in Mumbai on Friday night.



BRIDGING AYURVEDA AND MODERN WELLNESS

BIO RESURGE WELLNESS IS A BLEND OF ANCIENT AYURVEDIC THERAPIES AND CONTEMPORARY WELLNESS PRACTICES DESIGNED TO REJUVENATE MIND, BODY, AND SOUL, WRITES ABHI SINGHAL

In a world where the pace of life grows faster and stressors more complex, the fusion of ancient Ayurvedic healing with modern wellness practices offers a profound and timely solution. Rooted in the timeless principles of balance, prevention, and natural healing, Ayurveda provides a foundation for holistic well-being. When paired with cutting-edge advancements like Ayurvedic therapies, mindfulness techniques, nutritional science, and fitness innovations, this blend not only bridges centuries of knowledge but also caters to the unique challenges of contemporary living. Together, they empower individuals to reclaim their health, offering a sustainable approach to physical, mental, and emotional harmony. For the same has *Bio Resurge Wellness* is a destination for holistic well-being has entered into the game to provide solution to the people. Designed as a sanctuary for those seeking physical and mental balance, *Bio Resurge Wellness* offers a curated selection of therapies aimed at rejuvenating the body, calming the mind, and promoting long-term vitality. Among their signature treatments are *Shirodhara*, *Abhyangam*, *Nasya*, and other time-honoured Ayurvedic therapies, each tailored to individual



needs for optimal healing. The therapies give a soothing and a calm experience making them feel comfortable. *Abhyangam*, which basically means a massage that, can be given in two ways. One is *Sarvanga Abhyangam*, which is basically full body massage, and the next is *Ekanga Abhyangam*, which is basically done on a particular part of the body. The wellness centre also offers *Janu Vasti*, a therapy that stands for staying to him. The purpose of the *vasti* is making sure that the selected area for the therapy gets a constant amount of heat, temperature, which is basically needed to counter the disorders. *Vasti* can be done at any part of the body. It's not just limited to the knees. Offering a range of signature Ayurvedic treatments designed to promote relaxation, healing, and rejuvenation another one is *Shirodhara*, a deeply calming therapy

that helps reduce stress, clear the mind, and improve mental clarity by continuous dropping of oil on your head that makes you feel deep sleep and major relief in stress and sleep disorders. For respiratory health, *Nasya* therapy clears the sinuses and supports mental focus, while *Elakizhi* and *Podikizhi*, herbal poultice treatments offer relief from pain, inflammation, and muscle stiffness, making them ideal for conditions like arthritis and sciatica. "There is a pressing need for a reliable, high-end health facility, one that is accessible to everyone and delivers effective results from day one. This facility will offer modern, proven Ayurvedic treatments with no side effects, transforming well-being by making wellness both easily accessible and readily available," said *Sonal Rathi*, Co-Founder of *Bio Resurge Wellness*. The holistic wellness centre offers a

Panchakarma that is five actions or five treatments. It is a set of Ayurvedic detoxification procedures. At *Bio Resurge Wellness* Centre, individuals can undergo these traditional Ayurvedic detoxification and rejuvenation therapies under the guidance of experienced practitioners and therapists. *Panchakarma* therapies aim to balance the doshas (bioenergies) in the body (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*) and remove accumulated toxins (*ama*) through a series of treatments that include preliminary therapies (*Purvakarma*) like oil massages (*abhyanga*), steam therapy (*swedana*), and herbal treatments to prepare the body for the main detoxification therapies, and main therapies. The main *Panchakarma* treatments involve five primary procedures provided by the wellness centre are *Vamana* (Therapeutic Vomiting), *Nasya* (Nasal administration of medicated oils), *Raktamokshana* (Bloodletting), *Virechana* (Purgation) and *Basti* (Enema). With its comprehensive range of therapies blending ancient Ayurvedic wisdom with modern wellness practices, *Bio Resurge Wellness* serves as a beacon for those seeking a transformative and rejuvenating journey.



GUILT-FREE CHRISTMAS RECIPES

By TEAM VIVA

The holiday season is synonymous with indulgence, but who says festive treats can't be both delicious and healthy? This Christmas, we've curated four mouth-watering recipes that bring the joy of the season while keeping nutrition in mind. From crispy rolls to decadent chocolate delights, these recipes are perfect for health-conscious foodies looking to celebrate without compromise.

Each recipe promises to surprise your guests with its unique flavours and thoughtful ingredients. Let this season be one of joyous celebrations and mindful indulgence.

APPLE AND PECAN DONUTS BY CHEF AJAY ON BEHALF OF AMERICAN PECAN



Ingredients: □ A handful of American Pecans □ Apples □ 250 gm dark chocolate □ Peanut butter
Instructions:
□ Dry roast the American Pecans, coarsely chop them, and set aside.
□ Cut apples into thick, round slices and remove the centre to create donut-shaped slices.
□ Melt the dark chocolate in a microwave or double boiler.
□ Dip each apple slice into the melted chocolate, ensuring it's evenly coated.
□ Drizzle peanut butter over the chocolate-coated apple slices and sprinkle with chopped roasted pecans.
□ Place the prepared slices in the refrigerator to set.
□ These treats can be stored in the fridge for 1-2 days. Enjoy!



NO-SUGAR ENERGY BOOSTER CARROT WALNUT MILKSHAKE BY CHEF MEGHNAON BEHALF OF CHILEAN WALNUTS

This milkshake is a wholesome and delicious option for Christmas mornings or as a healthy snack during the holidays. Packed with the natural sweetness of dates and the goodness of carrots and walnuts, it's the perfect festive energy drink!

Ingredients: □ 6-7 walnuts □ 6 soaked seedless dates (along with the soaking water) □ 1 medium-sized grated carrot □ 2 cardamoms (or a pinch of cinnamon or dry ginger powder for a festive twist) □ 2 cups of milk
Method:
□ Prepare the Base: In a blender, combine walnuts, soaked dates, grated carrot, and cardamom powder. Blend until a smooth paste forms.
□ Mix with Milk: Add the paste to 2 cups of milk and blend again until creamy and frothy.
□ Serve with Style: Pour the milkshake into glasses and garnish with a sprinkle of grated carrot and a few walnut pieces for a festive touch.
This nutritious milkshake can be enjoyed at any time of the day, but it's especially satisfying as a quick, energy-packed Christmas breakfast.

AVOCADO AND LIME CHRISTMAS CAKE BY CHEF BRISTI ON BEHALF OF WORLD AVOCADO ORGANISATION

Serving: 8-10 people
Ingredients: □ 300g cream cheese □ 300ml liquid cream □ 2 avocados □ 2 limes □ 200g sugar □ 3 teaspoons gelatine powder □ 250g biscuits □ 100g butter □ Topping options □ Rosemary sprigs □ Redcurrants □ Christmas sprinkles
Equipment: Cake mould
Instructions:
□ Crush the biscuits; add the melted butter and mix.
□ Cover the base of the mould with the biscuit dough.
□ Hydrate the gelatine in water and set aside.
□ Grate the limes and squeeze.
□ Peel the avocados and scoop out the flesh.
□ Mix the cream cheese and sugar until creamy.
□ Add the avocado, lime juice and lime zest and beat until smooth.



□ Heat the gelatine in the microwave until dissolved.
□ Add the cream and gelatine to the cream cheese and mix until well blended.
□ Pour over the biscuit base.
□ Place in the fridge for a few hours until firm.
□ Remove from the mould and decorate to taste.

CHOCOLATE CAKE WITH PRUNES BY CHEF VIJAY ON BEHALF OF CHILEAN PRUNES



Ingredients: □ 2 cups heavy cream □ 2 cups powdered sugar □ 1/2 cup cocoa powder □ 2 1/4 cups superfine blanched almond flour □ 1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons sweet rice flour □ 2 1/4 cups whole milk □ 6 large eggs □ 5 soft Prunes, roughly chopped □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 1/2 tablespoons sugar □ 2 tablespoons salted butter, melted and cooled, plus more for pan □ 1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract □ 3/4 teaspoon coarse kosher salt □ Optional garnishes: toasted slivered almonds, chopped dark chocolate, cocoa powder
Preparation:
Chocolate Cream Filling: □ Whip thick cream to stiff peaks in a standing mixer. □ Sift powdered sugar and cocoa, then fold into whipped cream until fully combined. □ Prepare up to 2 days in advance and refrigerate.
Crepes: □ Set up a cooling rack with parchment paper nearby. □ Blend all crepe ingredients in a high-speed blender for 30 seconds; let rest for 5 minutes. □ Heat a 10-inch nonstick pan over medium-low heat, brush with butter, and pour 1/3 cup batter into the center. □ Tilt the pan to spread batter evenly. Cook for 1.5 minutes until bubbles form and edges lighten. □ Loosen edges with a spatula, flip, and cook the other side for 1 minute. □ Transfer to the rack. Repeat to make 16 crepes.
Assembly:
□ Layer a crepe on a plate, spread 2-3 tbsp chocolate cream, and repeat until all crepes are stacked.
□ Top the final crepe with remaining cream, smoothing it into peaks and valleys.
□ Chill for 15 minutes. Decorate with toppings like almonds, dark chocolate, or cocoa powder before serving.



Yoga for Pregnancy Journey

By JYOTI SINGH

Pregnancy is a transformative journey filled with joy, anticipation, and physical changes. For many expecting mothers, yoga offers a gentle, supportive way to stay active, alleviate discomfort, and connect with their growing baby.

YOGA IS IDEAL DURING PREGNANCY
Yoga is uniquely suited for pregnant women because it combines gentle movement, breathing techniques, and mindfulness, which cater to the evolving needs of an expecting mother.



PHYSICAL BENEFITS
□ Strength and Flexibility: Prenatal yoga helps strengthen the core and pelvic floor muscles, which play a crucial role during childbirth and postpartum recovery.
□ Improved Posture: As the baby grows, the added weight can strain the lower back. Yoga postures improve alignment and relieve discomfort in the back, hips, and legs.
□ Enhanced Circulation: Gentle yoga sequences boost blood flow, reducing swelling and promoting overall health for both mother and baby.
EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING:
□ Stress Relief: Deep breathing and mindfulness practices help calm the mind, reduce anxiety, and combat pregnancy-related mood swings.
□ Connection with the Baby: Yoga fosters a deeper bond with the baby by encouraging mindful breathing and self-awareness.
□ Better Sleep: Many women find it easier to rest and sleep after practicing yoga, which is essential during pregnancy.
RECOMMENDED YOGA POSES FOR PREGNANT WOMEN
The author suggests a range of gentle, safe yoga poses that promote strength, relaxation, and

comfort throughout pregnancy:
Cat-Cow Pose (Marjaryasana-Bitilasana): This pose improves spinal mobility and alleviates back pain. By alternating between arching and rounding the back, expecting mothers can ease tension in the lower back and pelvis.
Bound Angle Pose (Baddha Konasana): Sitting with the soles of the feet pressed together and knees gently opening outward helps stretch the inner thighs and hips, preparing the body for childbirth.
Wide-Legged Child's Pose (Balasana): A variation of Child's Pose, this posture provides relaxation and stretches the hips, lower back, and thighs. It's also an excellent pose for calming the mind.
Side-Lying Shavasana (Rest Pose): Lying on the left side with a pillow under the head and between the knees promotes deep relaxation and improves circulation.
Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing): This breathing technique balances energy, reduces stress, and enhances oxygen flow that is beneficial for both the mother and baby.
SAFETY TIPS FOR PRACTICING YOGA DURING PREGNANCY
□ Consult a Doctor: Always get medical clearance before starting yoga.
□ Avoid Intense Poses: Skip deep backbends, twists, or poses that involve lying flat on the back after the first trimester.
□ Use Props: Props like cushions, bolsters, and blocks can provide additional support and comfort.
□ Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated during practice.
EMBRACE THE JOURNEY
Yoga during pregnancy is more than just physical exercise, it's a holistic practice that nurtures the mind, body, and soul. With expert guidance from practitioners, expecting mothers can navigate pregnancy with confidence, strength, and serenity.
— The author is the Founder and CEO of Sparsh Yog

Head dominates Indian attack for back-to-back centuries

PTI ■ BRISBANE

India's nemesis Travis Head smashed his second hundred in as many games to help Australia gain a distinct advantage in the third Test here on Sunday. Australia, who were put under pressure by India in the morning session, gathered 130 runs in the afternoon without the loss of a wicket. Head (103 batting off 118) made the difference in Adelaide and his successive hundred took the hosts to 234 for three at tea on day two. Returning to form, Steve Smith (65 batting off 149) stood solid at the other end as the duo shared an unbeaten 159-run stand for the fourth wicket. The southpaw, who made a match-winning 140 in the previous Test, once again



lorded over the Indian bowlers who ran out of ideas against him. Even the field placements were questionable with the visitors having a deep point and deep square leg early in Head's innings, allowing the explosive batter pace his innings. The short balls were attempted when Head was well set and he duly put them away with disdain. His unconquered effort comprised 13 fours. Akash Deep bowled well, especially to Smith, but could not get a breakthrough. Struggling for runs, Smith reverted to his trademark exaggerated shuffle, to keep the Indians at bay. He found it tough to get going initially before gaining the confidence to go for horizontal bat shots. Earlier, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah extended his dominance over the Australian openers before Nitish Reddy got into the act to leave the visitors at 104 for three at lunch. Despite the pressure exerted by the Indian pacer, Australia were able to muster 76 runs in the session. With the majority of day one lost due to rain, play started half an hour earlier than scheduled time and it did not take long for Bumrah what he has done thus far in the series. Resuming at 28 for no loss, Australia lost Usman Khawaja (21 off 54) in the fourth over of the day when Bumrah had him caught behind with a ball that straightened slightly to take a faint outside edge. It was the third time Bumrah had got rid of the left-handed opener in the series. In the following over, Bumrah sent back Nathan McSweeney (9 off 49) for the fourth time in three Tests, drawing a thick outside edge from an angle that travelled fast to Virat Kohli at second slip. India were able to maintain pressure after the early breakthroughs with under pressure Smith and Marnus Labuschagne (12 off 55) looking to occupy the crease. Smith, batting with a different stance for the third time in as many games, was tested by the Indian pacers repeatedly as they tried to target his stumps. Akash Deep and Mohammed Siraj did a pose a few questions to both Smith and Labuschagne but could not get the desired results. Reddy, who got the ball to swing, ended Labuschagne's vigil in the 34th over of the innings. The India all-rounder drew the Australian number three to drive off a full ball and Labuschagne took the bait only to be caught by Kohli at second slip, leaving Australia at 75 for three. Two overs later, there was a major scare in the Indian camp as Siraj walked off the field after feeling discomfort in his left leg in the middle of his over. He was seen holding his left knee but returned to the field much to India's relief. The injury scare came after Siraj and Labuschagne shared a light moment as the Indian pacer walked towards the batter to swap the bails only for them to be swapped back. Runs started flowing with in-form Head joining Smith in the middle. His cover drive off Bumrah was easily the shot of the morning.



New Zealand leads England by 340 runs in the 3rd test

AP ■ HAMILTON

New Zealand showed off its presumptive new ball attack as it took control of the third test against England on the second day Sunday. Matt Henry and Will O'Rourke shared seven wickets as New Zealand bowled out England for 143 in a session and a half to take a 205-run first innings lead. O'Rourke then had to bat for the second time in the day as nightwatchman when Will Young was out for 60 within 20 minutes of the close. He couldn't last to stumps at which New Zealand was 136-3, having increased its lead to 340. Kane Williamson completed his 38th half century just before the close and was 50 not and Rachin Ravindra was 2. Henry and O'Rourke likely will become New Zealand's new ball attack when Tim Southee retires at the end of this, his 107th test. They previewed that partnership Sunday as Henry took 4-48 and O'Rourke took 3-33 in an outstanding New Zealand bowling performance. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner took 3-7 including the wickets of Ollie Pope and Ben Stokes after leading a defiant last wicket stand with O'Rourke which occupied the first hour of the day until New Zealand's last wicket fell at 347. O'Rourke, a classic No. 11 with only 13 runs in nine

Money isn't the reason I play chess: Gukesh on being 'new multi-millionaire'

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The "multi-millionaire" tag does "mean a lot" to new world champion D Gukesh but he doesn't play the game for material gains but for that unbridled joy, which he has been able to retain since the time a chess board used to be the "coolest toy" for him. Gukesh, the 18-year-old from Chennai, is now richer by Rs 11.45 crore which he will receive from FIDE as prize money for beating Ding Liren of China in the final. Gukesh's father Rajnikanth gave up his career as an ENT surgeon to accompany his son on the circuit while mother Padmakumari, who is a microbiologist, became the sole earner of the family. Asked what exactly does being a multi-millionaire mean to him, Gukesh said, "It means a lot. When I got into chess, we (as a family) had to make some hard decisions. My parents had gone through financial and emotional hardships. Now, we are more comfortable and parents don't need to think about those



things," Gukesh told FIDE in an interview. "Personally, money isn't the reason I play chess," he said. He always tries to remember why he started playing the game when he got his first chess board. "I am still the kid who loves chess. It used to be the coolest toy," the reticent world champion explained. For him, his parents mean the world. Gukesh's dad doubles up as his manager by taking care of all the off-board activities and allowing him to concentrate on the game, while his mother is the emotional and spiritual pillar of strength. "She (mother) still says, I will be happy to know that you are a great chess player but I would be happier to hear that you are a greater person," Gukesh said. Still in his teens, Gukesh feels that as a student of the game, the more he learns about chess, the more aware he will become of how little he knows. "Even the greatest of players make a lot of mistakes. Even though technology is so advanced, there is still a lot to learn about chess. I strongly

believe that the more you learn something, more you realise that you don't know that thing. "Whenever I am on the chess board, I feel I learn something new. It's a process of unlimited beauty. Journey and Destination both are "important". The process of the journey is very important but for Gukesh, it is even more important to be clear about the destination. "For example, I played a beautiful game and lost, I will feel sad. And if I win despite not playing a great game, I will be happy. I tend to look at the result," he said. Desire to win is more than the fear of losing. The quality of games in the final was found to be pretty drab by experts but Gukesh doesn't believe that his desire to win is trumped by fear of losing. "My desire to win is stronger than the fear of losing," he said, while expressing a bit of surprise as to how Liren easily agreed to a draw in the second game.



India needs to get better with old ball between overs 50-80, accepts bowling coach Morkel

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Bowling coach Morne Morkel on Sunday accepted that Indian bowlers failed to execute plans against Australian century-maker Travis Head and exhorted them to tidy up their act with the old ball between overs 50 and 80. Head and fellow centurion Steve Smith helped the hosts to clobber 171 runs in 31 overs in the third session on the second day of the third Test here, adding to a wicketless post-lunch segment. Australia closed the day at a highly satisfying 405 for seven. "First of all, we can say he's (Head) in pretty good form. But I think for us with the ball, if you look at it from overs 50 to 80, even in the last game, is where we fall short, leaking (runs) a little bit. So, that's one area I think we need to get better at," Morkel said in the post-day press conference. Morkel said the Indian bowlers could not sustain the momentum after taking three wickets in the morning session. "First up with the ball this morning, we were pretty good, at 3 for 70, but took nothing away from two world-class players, Smith we know, he's a guy who also can bat long and score runs. They (Smith and Head) put a partnership there and put us under pressure with a softer ball. It's definitely an area that we need to focus on, maybe deeper in the innings. Yes, we've got the game plans, but are we executing those game plans with a softer ball from both ends? That's something we need to get better at," getting added. The former South African quick explained the pre-set plan against Head, though it eventually fell flat on its back. "Our plan going into this game was to bowl a little bit more over the wicket, a straighter line. We felt he played it quite nicely in Adelaide when we came around (the wicket). The margins to him are just so small and like I said, once he's in, what is the best way for the team and for you (is) to maybe slow down the scoring rate because you know he's going to be aggressive. "The best way (of controlling Head) is bringing a little bit of control into the game and like I said, from over 50 with that softer ball, that's where we're leaking (runs). When Head comes on straight, the pitch kind of feels to (be favourable) a side," he added. "I'm not taking anything away from that, but it is a venue where getting used to bowling the right length and trusting that, it does take a bit of time." Pacer Jasprit Bumrah singlehandedly shepherded India's bowling with a fifer and Morkel did not read too much into the rather underwhelming efforts of the other seamers Mohammed Siraj and luck-less Akash Deep.

Siraj is getting stick from 'saints' of Australian cricket, writes sarcastic Sunil Gavaskar

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar has lashed out the double standards of the Australian cricket pundits for their criticism of Mohammed Siraj's aggressive send-off to Travis Head in the Day/Night Test in Adelaide. Siraj and Head were at loggerheads after the Indian pacer got the Australian centurion bowled and gave him a send-off. While Head said that Siraj's reaction was uncalled for, the Indian pacer on his part countered that the southpaw never said "well bowled" which he claimed to have told the media. ICC warned Head and Siraj was fined 20 percent of his match fee but what has irked Gavaskar is the holier than thou attitude of some former Australian players. "Siraj is getting the stick from all the "saints" in Australian cricket who, of course, were known for their



impeccable behaviour on the field. It may have incensed Australian fans that Siraj's fiery send-off was directed at Head, who scored a magnificent century and was also the local boy" Gavaskar wrote in his column for

Sydney Morning Herald. Gavaskar took a dig at the double standards about how the same people support boorish behaviour from their own. "But the same people will cheer if an Aussie quick gives a similar send-off to an English batter during next summer's Ashes. "There were some suggestions in the media that the Australians should get back to being the mongrels they once were. So, do mongrels simply purr, or do they bark, too?" He was however surprised at Siraj's outburst considering that IPL had lessened the animosity among players. "Siraj's outburst was surprising because if the Indian Premier League has done one thing, apart from making Aussie cricketers and coaches millionaires, it has also taken away to a huge extent the animosity that previously existed in the game."

India to host maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event on August 10 next year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event - a bronze level global meet - in Bhubaneswar on August 10 next year, the national federation said on Sunday. The announcement was made by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) while releasing the competition calendar for 2025. The Continental Tour is an annual series of track and field competitions held under the aegis of World Athletics and it forms the second tier of international one-day meetings after the prestigious Diamond League. "The Continental Tour will be a good opportunity for the Indian team to showcase their potential on home ground before the World Championships in September," AFI President Adile Sumariwalla said. The meet will be a chance for Indian athletes to earn world ranking points (category C) in home conditions for the 2025 World Championships to be held in Tokyo from September 13-21. The bronze level Tour meet is below the gold and silver levels. This will be the first global athletics meet to be hosted by India after the



international permit meets, held in the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s. India has also hosted World Half Marathon Championships in 2004 in New Delhi. "This will be the first time and most prestigious global athletics event after the permit meets in the 80s and 90s and the World Half Marathon in 2004. This is a big achievement and will help athletics grow in the country," an AFI official told PTI. He said that India is also likely to host a "big" global level javelin meet next year. "We are trying for a big global javelin event and hoping to get it," he added. Riding on Olympic gold and silver medallist Neeraj Chopra's success, India is emerging as a global javelin powerhouse in the world. Currently, the country has more than half a dozen javelin throwers who can throw more than 80m. A World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze Level Meet can only be held in a facility which has a minimum sitting capacity of 3000 with a minimum class 2 certified track with six lanes. The equipment to be used will have to be World Athletics-certified. There will have to be fully automatic timing obtained from a Photo Finish System, two clocks, two electronic infield boards and minimum one video screen. The warm up area will have to be adequate for all disciplines. The Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar is one of the best facilities in the country and it has hosted several national championships and the Asian Championships in 2017 during which it had earned praise from the current World Athletics President Sebastian Coe. To host a Continental Bronze Level Meet, the organisers shall provide

adequate medical and emergency services on site, including ambulance service, and minor stitching; physiotherapy facilities at the stadium and at the Athletes' hotel. A minimum of five dope tests must be conducted at the event and samples shall be collected in strict accordance with World Athletics Anti-Doping Regulations using qualified doping control personnel. Samples shall be shipped to and analysed by a WADA-accredited laboratory. The organisers must stage a minimum of 12 events, with minimum five per gender including at least one jumping and one throwing event. They shall make every effort to stage the main programme within two and a half consecutive hours. The participating athletes will have to be kept at a minimum three-star hotel and a total prize money purse of USD 25,000 must be offered for the meeting. Regarding the 2025 calendar, the season will start with the National Cross Country championships on January 12. The national race walking competition will be organised on April 19 in Chandigarh. The Senior National Federation Cup is scheduled for April 21-24 in Panchkula, Haryana, and will act as a qualification event for the Asian Athletic Championships to be held from May 27 to May 31 in Korea. The National Inter-State Senior Championships will be held from August 20 to 24 in Chennai, while the National Open Championships will be organised either in Pune or Bengaluru from September 27 to 30. The AFI president said elite Indian race walkers will not compete in the Asian Race Walking competition in Nomi, Japan in March as the main focus will be the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo. "The core group of Indian race walkers clocked a good time in March but aren't able to repeat the performance later in the season," Sumariwalla explained. "Since the main focus in 2025 is the global competition in September, we have decided not to send the elite team to Japan in March." The national team will also compete in international events to prepare for the World Athletics World Championships from September 13-21, the AFI president said. "The AFI has also introduced regional competition from next year to give more exposure to athletes on the fringes. The regional competitions will commence from April." The AFI's flagship event - National Inter-District Athletics Meet (NIDJAM) - will take place in February.