

In Gahirmatha Forest Dept fails to rein in illegal fishing by trawlers

Even as Olive Ridley turtle carcasses found at Lanch Khola
RAJESH BEHERA
KENDRAPADA

If the Gahirmatha rookery of Olive Ridley sea turtles is stated to be the largest rookery it also happened to be the biggest graveyard of turtles in past years. The beaches instead of being beacons of new life have turned into a mass graveyard due to illegal fishing by the fishermen, who come in giant trawlers for

catching fish. If sources are to be believed carcasses of Olive Ridley sea turtles were spotted in the beach of Lanch Khola under the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary. The turtles are killed when they are trapped and get entangled in the nets of mechanized fishing vessels during the mating season which starts from December to March. Hundreds of endangered Olive Ridelys were mercilessly killed every year after they get entangled with the fishing nets of the mechanised trawlers.



Though the State Forest Department has prohibited fishing 20 km off the sea coast, but the illegal fishing is going on in the prohibited zone as the Forest Department has failed to drive away the fishermen

from catching fish. The reason behind the failure in prohibiting the illegal fishing is said to be the nexus between some of the forest staff and the fishers. ACF of Bhitarkanika National Park, Gagan Bihari Mallick, during a turtle awareness camp at Sasanpeta informed that not less than 20 VHF sets were illegally installed at the adjoining villages of Gahirmatha forest. The family members used them to pass messages to the fishers about patrolling. As a result, the forest personnel failed to intercept the trawlers at

Gahirmatha. When contacted, Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary Ranger Pradosh Moharana stated that as the locals share the information about the movement of forest personnel to the trawlers, by installing VHF's illegally, so the patrolling team often fail to intercept the trawlers and return empty handed. Rubbishing report of sighting of turtle carcasses in the ongoing turtle season, Moharana stated not a single carcass of sea turtle was spotted at the beaches of Gahirmatha.

In Ganjan Organic goods factory gutted in fire mishap



Raw materials worth Rs 1 cr destroyed
PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR

A massive fire engulfed an organic goods factory in the Kodala area of Ganjam district on Wednesday, destroying all the stored materials. The blaze swept across the Tej Agro Factory owned by one Jagannath Sahu on the main road of Kodala near Khallikote. The fire completely gutted the factory and raw materials worth over Rs 1 crore. On being informed, Fire Service personnel from Kodala rushed to the spot and managed to control the blaze after two hours. The incident occurred be-

tween 4 am and 5 am and was suspected to have been caused by an electric short circuit. Raw materials for soft drinks, cakes and bread and some machinery parts were also destroyed in the fire, added sources. The damage assessment was being conducted and a probe was on to ascertain the exact cause of the fire. In a related incident, vast stocks of hay caught fire also in Ganjam district on Wednesday morning. Reports of this incident were received from Dhunkapada village under Polasara tehsil. The reports said a massive pile of haystacks belonging to two local farmers was allegedly set on fire by some unknown miscreants.

In Rourkela 2 die, 2 hurt hit by train at level-crossing

Two persons died and two others were critically injured after being hit by a goods train at the Kalunga railway crossing in Rourkela on Tuesday night. The accident took place at around 10 pm when four youths were crossing the railway tracks on two separate motorbikes, unaware of an incoming goods train. While two of them died on the spot, two others were critically injured. The Brahmani Tarang police and the Government Railway Police (GRP) reached the

spot and shifted the injured to a nearby private hospital. Visuals from the site showed mangled remains of the two motorcycles, displaying the severity of the accident. All the victims worked at Kalunga. One of the deceased hailed from Jharkhand and the other was from Assam. Meanwhile, the GRP has started an investigation into the incident. Reports stated that locals have warned of protests, citing longstanding demands for an over-bridge at the busy Kalunga railway crossing to which the authorities have turned a deaf ear.

Rayagada herbal healer Sandriya feted

Sandriya Puala, renowned herbalist of Kundam village under Danglodi gram panchayat under Rayagada block, has been honoured with "Indigenous Honour" for his remarkable contribution in the field of traditional medicine. To present the award on behalf of Rayagada Adivasi Mahasangha, tribal social worker and Vice-Principal of ABSKP Degree College, Gunupur Bijay Kumar Melaka and Associate Axis Bank Security Officer and social worker Kameshwar Bidika felicitated Sandria. Sandriya has served thousands of people for a long time. Even though he is 80 years old, he is neither tired nor arrogant. He gladly receives as



much as people pay. Patients with broken legs come to him from different parts of Odisha and neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and recovered. However, the herbal doctor, who has been treating people for many years, has not been provided a house by the State government. A father of two, Sandriya has four grandchildren and an elderly wife.

Public hearing for Subarnarekha Port peaceful

Project work expected to gather momentum
SIBDAS KUNDU ■ BALESWAR

A public hearing for the proposed Subarnarekha Port under Baliapal block was held at Makar Padia under Dagara gram panchayat recently. The hearing was chaired by Additional District Magistrate Sudhakar Nayak while Regional Pollution Control Board Officer (Baleswar) Manmohan Murmu was present. The hearing witnessed participation from hundreds of residents from nearby GPs, who shared their opinions on the port. Members of the Bhitamati Surakhya Committee as well as Subarnarekha Development Council were also



present and voiced their concerns. It was by and large peaceful with no reported untoward incident although members of Bhitamati Surakhya Committee opposed the port alleging that they would lose fertile land which is significant for paddy, betel vine, fish and cashew nut. "The port's development predominantly involves re-

CUO Prof to be feted with Bagdevi Samman

The Keshab-Subhadra Foundation has announced the selection of Prof Narasingha Charan Panda, an eminent Sanskrit scholar, for the prestigious Bagdevi Samman-2024.



The recognition honours his remarkable contributions to the preservation and promotion of Sanskrit, as well as his dedicated efforts to spread its knowledge beyond India. Prof Panda's illustrious career spans decades of teaching and research. He has served as a Professor at the Central University of Odisha, where he is currently the Dean of the School of Languages, Professor in the Department of San-

skrit, and acting Registrar. He has also held significant positions, including acting Vice-Chancellor and acting Finance Officer of the university. Prof Panda's academic journey includes noteworthy tenures at Banaras Hindu University and Panjab University, earning him widespread admiration. His contributions abroad are equally commendable, with four years of service as a Professor in Thailand and Mauritius, where he showcased exceptional expertise in Sanskrit scholarship. The scholar has received numerous accolades for his dedication to Sanskrit, including the prestigious Sanskrita Mahamahopadhyaya Award. L Prof Panda will be honoured with the Bagdevi Samman-2024 on January 19 at a ceremony in Puri.

ENDIACon: Diabetes conf ends at B'pur



With presentation of 40 papers, participation of 400 docs
KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMPUR
The ENDIACon-2024, a State level conference addressing various aspects of diabetes and endocrinology was inaugurated here on Saturday. The conference was organized by Dr Sunil Kumar Kota, Consultant Endocrinologist from Swasthya Sadan, Brahmampur in association with PG Department of General Medicine, MKCG Medical College and IMA (Indian Medical Association), Brahmampur.

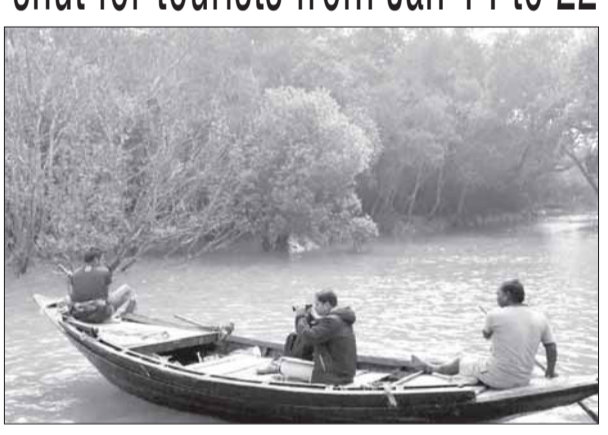
DMET (Director of Medical Education and Training) Dr Santosh Kumar Mishra graced the event as chief guest for the inaugural ceremony while Dean and Principal, MKCG Medical College Dr Suchitra Dash, president, IMA Brahmampur Dr Banka Bihari Das and senior Professor in Medicine Dr Lalit Kumar Meher joined the event as guests of honour. All the guests in their address unanimously opined that prevalence of diabetes is in upswing across the globe including India. Therefore periodic update of the doctors involved in care of people. Simultaneously they requested the doctors to reach out

to people in distress in form of education and proper management of the deadly disease. Dr LK Meher thanked Dr Kota and Dr Nihar Sahoo for their tremendous efforts in organizing the kind of scientific event for doctors from south Odisha in greater interest of the public. DMET Dr Mishra requested Dr Kota to continue with his educational activities for doctors and general public alike. There were a total of 40 deliberations on different aspects of diabetes and endocrinology by academic experts from across Odisha. All total 400 doctors had registered their names for the two-day long event.

Croc count B'kanika to remain shut for tourists from Jan 14 to 22

RAJESH BEHERA
KENDRAPADA

The Bhitarkanika National Park will remain close for a period of eight days for tourists from coming January 14 to 22 next as the Forest department is going to carry out the status survey of estuarine crocodiles. As a result, the park is going to remain close during the stipulated period for the tourists, said Rajnagar Mangrove (Forest) and wildlife Division DFO Gopinath Sudarshan Jadav. He added that the ban on tourists' entry is meant to facilitate the census operation smoothly in a tranquil atmosphere. The head count drive of salt water crocodile will be organised under the supervision of Dr Sudhakar Kar. The entire day and night census operation will be monitored and supervised by a technical expert, deputated from the Wildlife Headquarters. The enumerators, will be assisted by trained local for-



est staff. The survey will cover the Bhitarkanika river system besides innumerable creeks, water inlets and nullahs where the reptiles are found abundantly. The salt water crocodile, being amphibious in nature, can be counted directly both on land, while basking on the river bed, and on water surfaces while floating. During day time crocodiles basking on land are easier to count and their size class can be estimated easily and accurately. At night, crocodiles less than 6 feet floating on water or resting on land can be counted by using a spot light and catch-

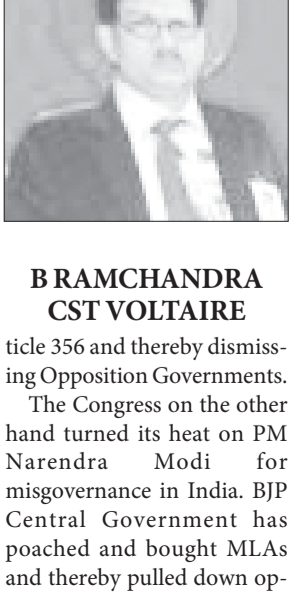
Debate on Constitution

Sadly, no MP bated for mixed PR poll model in India

The Parliament of India has debated on the working of the Constitution of India from December 13 to Dec 17. The ruling NDA (National Democratic Alliance) led by BJP launched a scathing attack on the Congress party that ruled India for several decades single handedly or in coalition with other like-minded parties for amending the Constitution for its vested interest. The BJP MPs have mainly castigated the Congress for imposing Emergency on June 25, 1975 and imprisoning most of the Opposition leaders till the same was revoked on March 21, 1977. They have also criticized the Congress for abusing and misusing the provisions contained under Ar-

position governments in the States of Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra etc, the party alleged. In the opinion of the Freethought Party of India (FPI) these arguments and counter arguments are of no use. As long as India is having the unfair and unjust First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system of election, Constitution of India would be subjected to unethical manoeuvring and the political institutions of India like the office of the Governor, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the Central agencies like the ED, CBI and Income Tax would continue to be misused and manipulated for the benefit of the ruling party or coalition of parties in power. We must do away with political injustice from the soil of India. In the April-June Election to the 18th Lok Sabha certain parties have been grossly over-represented while many others have been under-represented. Here is one case of blatant injustice. Odisha is having 21 Members in the Lok Sabha. Congress has got 1 MP. The BJP has got 20 MPs. The BJD has zero representation in the Lok Sabha even though 1, 23, 84, 900 voters voted in favour of BJD led by Naveen Patnaik. The party must have got a minimum of 7 seats as it has polled 37.53% of votes in the 2024 General Elections. The BJP that has polled 45.34% (1, 49, 62,200) of votes should have got maximum 10 seats. But against 10 seats it has got 20 seats. Is it not a case of gross Political Injustice? Congress led by Mallikarjun Kharge polled 12.52% (41, 31, 600) votes and it should have got a minimum of 2 seats. It has got only 1. It has been under-represented. This should not be the case. This is the main reason why there is so much of ill-governance throughout India. The system of election must be replaced in toto by the German or New Zealand Model of Mixed PR System of Election. Sadly, no MP of any party has raised this vital point in the Parliament debating on the working of the Constitution. (Voltaire is general secretary, Freethought Party of India)

BRAMCHANDRA CST VOLTAIRE
ticle 356 and thereby dismissing Opposition Governments. The Congress on the other hand turned its heat on PM Narendra Modi for misgovernance in India. BJP Central Government has poached and bought MLAs and thereby pulled down op-





FIRST COLUMN

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

By embracing spiritual self-reflection and cultivating positivity, we can rise above turmoil



RAJYOGI BRAHM KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Nowadays there seems to be a crisis, disappointment and conflict of duality at every step of life. How do we deal with this? How do we prevent the self from becoming pessimistic or disheartened? Today the great modern disease of human consciousness is all about looking outward to find means to derive happiness without examining the inner self, values, attitudes and motives; relying and depending more on the external signals and hoping for the best. However, in practicality, life cannot be created with such hopes, as there are no shortcuts to achieving happiness. In today's world, no individual and nothing can create a permanent state of wellbeing within us, as it is our prerogative and responsibility. The external factors can contribute, guide and inspire us but ultimately our life is what we make out of it.

True happiness or a lack of it does not come from external things but from what is inside oneself. For example, money is not the means to happiness nor is it the cause of one's unhappiness. In reality, it is our attitudes and values that determine the use or misuse of external instruments, whether that is money, a person, an event or an object. A life that has value and is worthy of living is only possible when there is a reflective examination through which there can be illuminating change. So, to reorientate our consciousness, we would require a consciousness based on self-knowledge i.e the knowledge of the spiritual self which creates self-respect and positivity, enabling us to gain the right perspective on life which in turn would help us to deal with any kind of negativity in a balanced and less painful way. Accordingly, with positivity, we



experience inner strength to cope with external issues affecting the sense of balance in our lives. When we are more positive towards ourselves, obviously we express the same attitude towards others and in all situations. Inner strength also comes when we interact with others in such a way that love, peace and happiness are honestly expressed and experienced.

The pivotal point is "honesty" because there cannot be a sense of fulfillment through falsehood, imitation or duality expressed through attitude. Hence the need of the hour is to live a life based on "Eternal Spiritual Principles" that would allow us to keep a positive attitude towards the self and others, thereby making our life joyful rather than conflicting or a bundle of confusion. Spirituality is not a system or technique of worship or ritual, it is in essence, knowing how to lead a life and through this knowing there is happiness. A spiritual person has found that spark of eternal reference within, which gives him or her not only deep contentment but also a sense of purpose. The first prerequisite for spirituality is a life that functions appropriately and thinks and cares about one's self in the most decent way. Thinking and caring about one's self inappropriately creates too much dependence on others, too many needs, too many demands, too much possessiveness.

So the right way to proceed is to first examine oneself and then acknowledge the positive and the negative traits within us. By doing so, we get the courage to change whatever needs to be transformed without any kind of fear and, without pretence. The basis of successful change for betterment is to understand the attitudes, feelings and motives that drive us for the change by accepting the original positivity of the self, the immortal goodness of the soul. It is this goodness of the self that forms the foundation of our dignity as human beings. The expression of this original goodness in our life is what is called 'divinity' which makes us truly human. So let us awaken the expression of the divine within us to live a fulfilling joyful life amidst all the chaos & crisis around.

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

Education: From Kothari Commission to NEP-2020



J S RAJPUT

The educators and policymakers are called upon to transcend ideological divides and lead India toward inclusive progress and innovation



The most comprehensive initiative in education in post-independence India was the report of the National Commission on Education, usually referred to as the Kothari Commission. It submitted its report entitled "Education for National Development" on June 29, 1968. The first two sentences say it all: "The destiny of India is now being shaped in its classrooms. This, we believe, is no rhetoric." It was this report that led to the first national education policy of 1968. For the first time, science and mathematics became compulsory for both boys and girls up to tenth standard!

Yes, it was generally believed that only boys could handle the tough subjects of science and mathematics, and girls could opt for lighter options of spinning weaving, home science; and the like! The compulsory study of science and math was resisted and opposed as being unjust and unfair to girls! This one change transformed the lives of millions of girls and has brought global accolades to the Indian advancements in the world of science, technology, ICT and space research. Policies once formulated and formalised deserve support in vigilant implementation, persistent monitoring, and scrutiny based on their relevance 'in the great enterprise of national reconstruction'. India today has great challenges ahead, both national as well as global.

It has the manpower and enough experience to confront these successfully. In the third decade of the 21st century, it's the quality of education and skill acquisition that would equip India shall remain its prime contributory tool against every challenge. The content and process of education shall have to specifically equip itself against nurtured negativity, increasing mutual distrust and ballooning bitterness in public life. Solutions shall certainly not emerge from those that thrive only on negativity and are ill-equipped to see light and positivity around them.



THE CONTENT AND PROCESS OF EDUCATION SHALL HAVE TO SPECIFICALLY EQUIP ITSELF AGAINST NURTURED NEGATIVITY, INCREASING MUTUAL DISTRUST, AND BALLOONING BITTERNESS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Who must come forward and accept responsibility to normalise such an unacceptable socio-cultural environment? Why not ask the Gandhiji? Once, before independence, one Dr Mote posed a query to Mahatma Gandhi: what he thought was the greatest problem facing his country! The expected answer could have been, in those days, related to slavery, poverty, illiteracy, ill health, or in the social context.

While narrating it in his Gandhi Katha, Narayan Desai tells the audience: that the answer was the 'callousness of the intellectuals!' Narayan Desai Goes ahead: "Give it a thought. If we stand by and watch the poor blaming their poverty on fate, Gandhi is relevant today. If we can see the callousness of the intellectuals, then Gandhi is relevant today. What are the problems according to intellectuals?"

"Why X or Y has become Vice-Chancellor and not me! They think only of this and are unaware of other social issues". Their concerns for critical social, cultural, social cohesion and religious amity are minimal.

One's obvious inference would be that solutions to major national concerns shall - and must - emerge from institutions and the educated and the learned responsible for attaining their stated objectives. It includes the dilapidated structures running Sarkari schools, much sought-after private schools, and the universities. It also includes the glittering campuses of national institutions that have brought international repute to our educational enterprise.

So, mainly it points out to teachers; from primary schools to

professors of the universities, and researchers working in institutions of science, technology, psychology, social sciences and every other area.

One wishes each one of them recalls the assessment of Gandhi shuns away the dreaded callousness and strives to create centres of dialogue and discussions on improving the life and living standards of our people, particularly the 'last man in the line' who was so dear to the Mahatma! At first glance, the existing climate makes such a transformation rather impossible!

Despite all the odds, sincere attempts must be launched to create institutional think tanks with open boundaries that provide for healthy academic, scholarly and intellectual deliberations, not constrained but individual ideological affiliations. For an academic, who shapes the lives of numerous individuals, it is the well-being of others that must precede his own!

And this is no rhetoric or a cliché in the Indian context and culture. For a broad-minded person, this becomes a must, an integral part of his thought and action and hence, an achievable premise.

This is the main task of every teacher preparation institution, from where it shall percolate to schools via teachers trained there, and then to the establishment and the society. After the education policies of 1968, 1986 and 1992, and a gap of around three decades, another policy formulation comes before the nation in the shape of the National Education Policy; NEP-2020. It has been under implementation for the last four years. Having

been associated with the implementation and also policy formulations, one could venture to infer that the NEP-2020 was prepared with unprecedented enthusiasm from teachers, scholars academics institutions, organisations and individuals.

As the process was long overdue and rightly very extensive, it inspired active participation from practically every section of society. Unfortunately, its implementation stands hampered in certain states on grounds that may not necessarily be academic.

India has a developed well-knit interactive system of the national and state-level bodies and institutions that have learnt over the years how to arrive at a national consensus in the sectors of education and teacher education. This institutional strength of consultation, collaboration and cohesion need not be diluted in cases where the union and state governments belong to different ideological affiliations.

Intellectuals in education and research must convincingly internalize that they are making the future of individuals and creating the future of India. No one else is destined and better placed than them to reconstruct India. The moment each one of them expands his horizons, thinks holistically, and takes a long-term view, the road ahead would emerge very clearly; how to proceed individually and also collectively to sed the intellectual callousness and lead the nation on the right path.

(Professor Rajput works in education, social cohesion and religious amity. He is Atal fellow with the PMML, New Delhi; views expressed are personal)

Guarding digital India: The urgent need for cybersecurity in a rapidly evolving digital space

India has the potential to lead the world in cybersecurity innovation, but achieving this requires more than technological solutions

In the fast-evolving digital landscape of India, a silent battle is being fought—not with traditional weapons but through malicious code, complex algorithms, and increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks. As the country embraces its "Digital India" initiative, the rise of cyber threats demands immediate attention. Protecting the digital future requires strong cybersecurity frameworks, skilled professionals, and widespread public awareness. The call for "Digital Guards" or "Cyber Warriors" has never been more urgent.



VINAY PATHAK

2023, this number soared to an alarming 1.32 million—a twentyfold increase that exposes critical national vulnerabilities. Globally, the situation is no less concerning. Operations like INTERPOL and AFRIPOL's 2024 Operation Serengeti, which arrested over 1,000 cybercriminals across 19 African nations, underscore the scale of the problem. These operations identified over 35,000 victims and uncovered

financial losses nearing \$193 million, demonstrating the global reach and devastating impact of cybercrime. Phishing remains a primary weapon for cybercriminals, accounting for 22 per cent of all incidents. These attacks manipulate victims into revealing sensitive information or downloading malicious software. Credential theft, responsible for 16 per cent of incidents, further exposes individuals and organisations to system breaches, financial fraud, and corporate espionage. Emerging threats like mobile app malware are amplifying risks. For instance, 15 SpyLoan malware apps on Google Play, downloaded over 8 million times, went beyond data theft to harass and extort victims, underscoring cybercriminals'

growing ingenuity. The economic toll of these attacks is devastating. About 65 per cent of Indian enterprises have been forced to pay ransoms to recover critical data, with average demands reaching \$4.8 million. Recovery costs add another \$1.35 million per incident, straining even large corporations. Smaller businesses, lacking resources for robust cybersecurity measures, are particularly vulnerable. This systemic vulnerability has been termed the "cybersecurity poverty line," where approximately 60 per cent of Indian companies lack the infrastructure and expertise to defend themselves against cyber threats. High-traffic online shopping periods, such as Black Friday and Cyber Monday, are prime



targets for cybercriminals. During these events, fraudsters employ phishing scams, fake e-commerce websites, and malware to exploit consumers and businesses alike. Recent high-profile incidents highlight these vulnerabilities. In November 2024, a ransomware attack on Blue Yonder disrupted Starbucks' operations, forcing a return to manual processes. Similarly, McLeod Russel's system com-

promise sent shockwaves through the corporate sector, emphasising the interconnectedness of digital systems and the widespread disruptions that a single attack can cause. India's cybersecurity preparedness is worryingly insufficient. Only 4 per cent of Indian enterprises have robust infrastructure capable of withstanding advanced attacks. This shortfall is a national security concern, as cyberattacks transcend corporate interests, threatening essential services and critical infrastructure.

Initiatives like the Cyber Challenge 2024, a joint effort by the Delhi Police and CyberPeace Foundation, offer hope. This programme engages developers, engineers, and cybersecurity experts to

craft innovative solutions using cutting-edge technologies such as AI, blockchain, and quantum computing. Collaboration with institutions like DRDO, MeITY, and the National Forensic Science University underscores the comprehensive approach needed to address these challenges. Experts emphasise that cybersecurity must move beyond being an IT department's responsibility to become a core component of every organization's strategy. This shift involves continuous employee training, regular security audits, investments in advanced technologies, and fostering a culture of vigilance. Drawing inspiration from global models like the European Union's GDPR, India could implement strin-

gent cybersecurity standards, offering subsidies for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to invest in security measures and penalising negligence in cyber protection. As digital transformation accelerates across sectors such as finance, healthcare, education, and government services, robust cybersecurity is no longer optional—it is a fundamental necessity. The path forward demands a collaborative effort. Government agencies, private enterprises, educational institutions, and cybersecurity professionals must unite to build a resilient digital ecosystem.

(The writer is Assistant Professor Indian institute of information technology sonapat Haryana; views are personal)

Trump says India charges lot of tariff, threatens to impose reciprocal tax

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President-elect Donald Trump has said that India charges "a lot" of tariff, reiterating his intention to impose reciprocal tariffs in retaliation for what New Delhi will impose on the import of certain American products.



Trump made these remarks on Tuesday and also said that India and Brazil were among countries that impose high tariffs on certain US products.

In 2019, Trump has repeatedly claimed that India is a "tariff king" and imposes "tremendously high" tariffs on American products.

"The world reciprocal is important because if somebody charges us — India, we don't have to talk about our own — if India charges us 100 per cent, do we charge them nothing for the same?" Trump said.

claimed that India imposes the highest tariffs on foreign products. But they do it with a smile. "Perhaps the most important element of my plan to make America extraordinarily wealthy again is reciprocity. It's a word that's very important in my plan because we generally don't charge tariffs. I started that process, it was so great, with the vans and the small trucks, etc," Trump had said Thursday in October.

Leaving India-US ties in a very good place, expect continuity in Trump era: Biden admin

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The outgoing Biden administration said it was leaving the India-US relationship "in a very strong place", and exuded confidence that it will continue to have bipartisan support during the Donald Trump presidency as well.

International Space Station in partnership with NASA next year. "We are quite confident that we'll be handing the bilateral relationship off to the incoming Trump team at its strongest possible apex, with key support from stakeholders in the industry, in technology, in finance and defence. As we were here today, it was inspirational to see the manifestations of engagement between the United States and India in critical endeavours associated with space," Campbell said.

relationship is without challenges, we believe that we are leaving this partnership in a very strong place as we prepare to pass the baton to the incoming team," Finer said.

ments and engagements with the incoming team their desire to continue there. I do not think the ambition, though, for the US-India relationship stops there. You are going to see a variety of areas of continuing activity," the official said.

tration official said that the Biden Administration has found the QUAD to be an extremely valuable format, including at the head-of-state level, befitting relationships that are as consequential as those among the four countries involved.

Sunita Williams' return delayed till late March

AP ■ CAPE CANAVERAL

NASA's two stuck astronauts just got their space mission extended again. That means they won't be back on Earth until spring, 10 months after rocketing into orbit on Boeing's Starliner capsule.

Hundreds of N Korean troops killed in Ukrainian battles

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A couple hundred North Korean troops fighting alongside Russian forces against Ukraine have been killed or wounded during battle in the Kursk border region, a senior military official said Tuesday.

send as much military aid as possible to Ukraine before President-elect Donald Trump takes over. But a senior defense official told reporters Tuesday that the Defense Department may not be able to send all of the remaining USD 5.6 billion in Pentagon weapons and equipment stocks intended for Ukraine before Jan. 20, when Trump is sworn in.

provide weapons to Ukraine until Jan. 20, there may well be funds remaining that will be available for the incoming Trump administration to spend.

B'desh HC commutes ULFA leader's death sentence

PTI ■ DHAKA

A Bangladeshi High Court on Wednesday commuted the death sentence of ULFA leader Paresch Barua, who was sentenced to death after a trial in absentia — now assumed to be living in China — and sentenced him to life imprisonment and acquitted a former junior minister and five others in a 2004 case of attempted smuggling of weapons to the separatist outfit in northeast India.

The two-member High Court bench commuted the punishment of ULFA leader Paresch Barua, who was sentenced to death after a trial in absentia — now assumed to be living in China — and sentenced him to life imprisonment, said a government attorney at the bench.

Hoque, former additional secretary of industries ministry Nurul Amin and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Motiur Rahman Nizami.

Battered by regional tensions and energy crisis, Iran's rial hits record low

AP ■ TEHRAN

The Iranian rial on Wednesday fell its lowest level in history, losing more than 10% of its value since Donald Trump won the US presidential election in November and signalling new challenges for Tehran as it remains locked in the wars raging in the Middle East.

flooded the market with more hard currencies as an attempt to improve the rate. In an interview with state television Tuesday night, Central Bank Gov. Mohammad Reza Farzin said that the supply of foreign currency would increase and the exchange rate would be stabilised.

energy crisis exacerbated by harsh winter conditions. The crisis follows a summer of blackouts and is now compounded by severe cold, snow and air pollution.

America from the accord in 2018, sparking years of tensions between the countries that persist today.



Masoud Pezeshkian was sworn in and began his term, the rate was 584,000 to \$1. Trump unilaterally withdrew

Tensions still remain high between the nations, 45 years after the 1979 US Embassy takeover and the 444-day hostage crisis that followed. Before the revolution, the rial traded at 70 for \$1.

Iran remains deeply involved in the Middle East conflicts that have roiled the region, with its allies battered — including the militant groups and fighters of its self-described "axis of resistance," such as Palestinian Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

'Confident of weathering challenges to India-US ties arising from indictments'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The outgoing Biden administration on Tuesday exuded confidence that India and the US will be able to "weather" the challenges to their relationship that arose after two recent indictments — one related to a Sikh separatist and the other to an Indian billionaire.

being involved in a plan to kill a Sikh separatist leader Gurbatwant Singh Pannun. The other indictment charges Indian billionaire Gautam Adani of corruption.

we've had the deepest possible appropriate consultation between the two sides, and I'm confident that we will be able to weather this appropriately," said the official.



President Joe Biden and grandson Beau walk to Marine One to depart from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington. AP/PTI

Biden admin makes it easier for US companies to hire foreign workers with H-1B visas

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The outgoing Biden administration has relaxed rules for H-1B visas that will make it easier for American companies to hire foreign workers with special skills and facilitate a smoother transition from F-1 student visas to H-1B visas, a move that is likely to benefit thousands of Indian tech professionals.

Security (DHS) on Tuesday, aims to provide greater flexibility to employers and workers by modernising the definition and criteria for special positions and nonprofit and governmental research organisations that are exempt from the annual statutory limit on H-1B visas.

avoid disruptions in lawful status and employment authorisation for students holding F-1 visas. It also will allow US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to process applications more quickly for most individuals who had previously been approved for an H-1B visa.

Vinicius Júnior and Aitana Bonmati win FIFA best player of the year awards

AP ■ DOHA
Real Madrid star Vinicius Júnior finally got his hands on a big global player award on Tuesday. Vinicius was named the men's player of the year at the FIFA's "The Best" awards, where Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati continued to clean up in the prizes for women's soccer. The 24-year-old Vinicius was so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest. This time Rodri ended up second to Vinicius by five points. The Brazil forward was at the FIFA ceremony to collect his award having travelled to Doha on Monday with Madrid for the Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca. "I don't even know where to begin," Vinicius said in Portuguese. "It was so far away that it seemed impossible to get

here. I was a kid who only played football barefoot on the streets of São Gonçalo, close to poverty and crime. "Getting here is something very important to me. I'm doing it for many children who think that everything is impossible and who think they can't get here." Vinicius echoed those sentiments in an Instagram post, where he took a thinly-disguised dig at presumably the Ballon d'Or voters — journalists from the top 100 countries in the FIFA rankings. "Today I am writing to that boy who saw so many idols lift this trophy... Your time has come," he wrote. "Or rather, my time has come. The time to say... Yes, I am the best player in the world and I fought hard for it. "They tried and still try to invalidate me, to diminish me. But they are not prepared. No one is going to tell me who I should fight for, how I should behave." Vinicius has been subjected to racist abuse in Spain and at one point earlier this year said he was "losing my desire to play" but



added "I'll keep fighting." Bonmati won the award for best women's player of the year



making it back-to-back prizes at FIFA's version of the older and more prestigious Ballon d'Or prize. The 26-year-old Spain midfielder has won the Ballon d'Or for two

straight years, and won the Spanish league, Spanish cup and Champions League with Barcelona in 2024. "I am grateful to receive this award. As I always say, this is a team effort," Bonmati said. "It was a great year, very difficult to repeat. I am grateful to the people who help me to be better every day, from the club, to my teammates, who always help me to be better." FIFA said the award winners were decided by an "equally weighted voting system" by fans, the current captains and coaches of all national teams, and media representatives. There was an 11-player shortlist for both awards, with the contenders selected based on their performances from Aug. 21, 2023, to Aug. 10, 2024. Vinicius had the best season of his career, scoring 24 goals in 39 appearances for Madrid and helping the Spanish team to a record-extending 15th European Cup — and his second Champions League trophy.

He also netted in the final, becoming the youngest player to score in two Champions League finals. Madrid teammate Jude Bellingham was third, ahead of Dani Carvajal and Lamine Yamal, with Lionel Messi — who had won the award the previous two years — sixth. Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was named best men's coach, and United States coach Emma Hayes took the women's prize. Hayes steered the USWNT to Olympic gold in Paris in August. Their shotstopper, Alyssa Naeher, was given the women's goalkeeper award. Aston Villa and Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez won the men's prize for the second straight year. Alejandro Garnacho won the FIFA Puskás Award for the best goal, for his sensational overhead strike for Manchester United against Everton in November 2023. Marta won the award that is named after her — the inaugural FIFA Marta Award — for her goal for Brazil against Jamaica in June.



Six teams pick 48 players in draft for World Pickleball League

PTI ■ MUMBAI
A total of 48 players were picked by six franchises in the player draft for the inaugural edition of the World Pickleball League which will be held here next month. While the players draft consisted of 75 players from 20 countries, the tournament will feature men and women players from 14 countries including India, Japan, Spain, South Korea, Australia and the United Kingdom. The WBPL, which works closely with All Indian Pickleball Association (AIPA), is co-founded by former Indian tennis players Gaurav Natekar and Arati Ponnappa Natekar and will be held from January 24 to February 2. The six franchises in the tournament will represent Chennai, Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Delhi. The owners were guided by the league during the player draft here on Wednesday. "To ensure that the draft process was smooth, fair and transparent, we curated a special in-house software that consisted of all the necessary information about the players," Natekar said. "We wanted to pick some of the best players across the globe and have a combination of players who are experienced as well as new, young talent. We also wanted to give our Indian players a chance to shine so we had mandated each team that one player should be from India in each team," Natekar told PTI. A total of eight players will be in each team including four men and as many women including a mandatory Indian

India to face Pakistan in opening match of inaugural Kho Kho World Cup on Jan 13

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Hosts India will face arch rivals Pakistan in the opening match of the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup on January 13, the organisers announced on Wednesday. As many as 24 countries have confirmed their participation in the week-long event (January 13-19), which will be organised at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in the national capital and at the Noida Indoor Stadium. "The league matches will start on January 13. There will be an opening ceremony on that day and after that the most exciting match of the season, the match between India and Pakistan men's teams will be played," Kho Kho World Cup CEO Vikram Dev Dogra said during a media interaction. "Thereafter, on 14th, 15th and 16th January, the remaining league matches will carry on, following which the



quarterfinals will be held on January 17 and semifinals on January 18 and final on January 19." The tournament will see 21 men's and 20 women's teams competing for the top prizes. Dogra said the national camp for 60 men and 60 women is currently underway at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, and the Indian teams for the event will be selected from among these players. Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) chairman of the tournament's organising committee, Sudhanshu Mittal announced that Bollywood megastar Salman Khan will be the brand ambassador of the World Cup. "I am announcing with pride that the brand ambassador of the event will be Salman Khan," Mittal said. "I am proud to be associated with the first-ever Kho Kho World Cup 2025. This is not just a tournament — it's a tribute to India's soil, spirit, and strength. All of us,

including me, have played Kho Kho at one point in our lives," Khan said in a message. "It is a sport with non-stop action and relentless spirit that has already captured the global attention. Let's come together and celebrate the soul of Kho Kho on the global stage," he added. USA, England, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil are among the teams that have confirmed their participation in the tournament. The event will take place in a league-cum-knockout format, for both men and women. Among Asian countries, Indonesia will send only their women's team while all other nations will send both their men and women's squads. Mittal had said that 615 players and 125 support staff will take part in the event. Each team will comprise 15 players, one coach, one manager and international technical officials.



India look to make all-round amends against West Indies

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI
India will look to make amends in all areas and counter the West Indies' power game when the two teams face off in the decider of the women's T20I series on Thursday, with regular skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's participation still shrouded in uncertainty. A comprehensive 49-run win in the series opener helped India extend their domination in the format to nine consecutive victories but West Indies crushed the hosts by nine wickets to level the terms in the second game. The manner in which West Indies cruised to win with 26 balls and nine wickets to spare, hitting a total of 27 fours and two sixes, the visitors left India scrambling for answers. None of the Indian bowlers could pose any threat as heavy dew made their job only tougher. On their part, the West Indies used the conditions to their benefit. They send the balls to the ropes more times rather than attempting to hit sixes which also worked in their favour. The conditions aren't expected to change much in a day's time but India will be required to change a lot in terms of their collective batting and bowling, aside from concerns over the availability of Kaur. Kaur didn't take part in India's fielding innings in the first match last Sunday and missed the second on Tuesday owing to a "niggle in her knee." Her unavailability for the series decider will certainly

India waiting on Harmanpreet's fitness update: Smriti Mandhana

PTI ■ NAVI MUMBAI
Harmanpreet Kaur's participation in India Women's T20I series decider here on Thursday is under doubt after the regular captain was sidelined from the second match having suffered a niggle in her knee during the first game. Smriti Mandhana, who stood in for Kaur as the West Indies levelled the series 1-1 on Tuesday, said the team is awaiting update on Kaur's availability for the third match. "Harman's fitness, (the) BCCI medical team is observing on day-to-day basis. They'll be at a better place to answer that question. I think we'll have to wait for the update from their side," Mandhana told media after India's crushing nine-wicket loss here on Tuesday. Kaur, who turned up for practice here last Saturday with her knee strapped, scored 13 not out in India's big total of 195/4 but she did not take the field in the series-opener here. "Harmanpreet Kaur sustained a niggle in her knee while batting during the first T20I against West Indies. Hence, she remains unavailable for selection for the second T20I. The BCCI Medical Team is monitoring her progress," the team issued a statement ahead of the second T20I



here. Mandhana, meanwhile, brushed aside any concerns regarding her after she copped a blow to her hand towards the end of the second match. "I think (the) finger is fine now. Just that initial impact, where you think that 'oh, it can be wrong', but it's all good now," Mandhana said. Mandhana, who struck a 41-ball 62 to lead India's charge, said her side did not bowl enough dot balls to put pressure on the free-flowing West Indies batters. "We did try everything to stop them. But Hayley (Matthews) is definitely a quality

player. The executions were not at the mark," she said after her counterpart Matthews hit a 47-ball 85. "As a as a bowling unit, our execution can be better. The only way we can get them out is to put pressure by dot balls. We couldn't do that, even in the start or maybe even after six overs. We couldn't create a lot of dot balls and the pressure was never there." "As a bowling unit we did give a lot of width," Mandhana added. Windies skipper Matthews hailed West Indies' nine-wicket win as a "massive feat." "I think that's our first win against India, as far as I remember probably since (the) 2016 World Cup here, so that's a massive feat for us. However, we feel like it's just the beginning. These are the kind of performances we want to be consistent with," she said. Matthews, who cracked 17 fours in her knock in a brutal display of power-hitting, emphasised on hitting boundaries for a long innings. "T20 cricket is a game where it's probably very boundary oriented. Anytime you are scoring 80 plus, you're probably going to have a lot of boundaries. It's quite motivating coming down here after the first game especially, and being able to level the series one all," she added.

Will await with interest India's bid for 2029 World Championships: WA chief Coe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
World Athletics President Sebastian Coe says his organisation will "await with interest" India's expected bid for the 2029 World Championships but indicated that there will be tough competition from other countries to get the hosting right of the showpiece. The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) is set to formally express its interest to host the 2029 World Championships when the process is launched in the next few months, in line with the country's plan to stage a series of high-profile events to mount a serious bid for the 2036 Olympics. "The 2029 World Championships, look, we will await with interest (India's

expected bid). I have to tell you, we've got a lot of interest in those Championships already, and the process will open shortly," Coe replied to a PTI question during a virtual conference with the global media. It was in December last year when the AFI first revealed its intention to bid for the 2029 World Championships. The bidding process is expected to start in January-February 2025 along with the publication of a time-line. World Athletics is expected to announce the host city in 2026. Distance running powerhouse Kenya has also declared its interest to host the 2029 World Championships while Britain, which staged the showpiece



"I had a very good discussion with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and actually was comforted by the recognition that sport, particularly athletics, is probably the most or one of the most accessible sports," Coe said about his discussion with PM Modi. "He (PM Modi) sees (it) as a very key element in the

growth and development of healthy communities, particularly among young people, both mentally and physically. And that was in large part the discussion. "I have to say that I spend a lot of time talking to senior politicians and political leaders. I've rarely found such a commitment to that concept. I was very pleased to hear that commitment." Coe, who is one of the frontrunners to become International Olympic Committee president in the March 2025 elections, said Indian athletics is moving ahead in the right direction, with javelin superstar Neeraj Chopra's achievements being the key to its growth. "AFI chief Adille Sumariwalla is a very

ambitious federation president. We will continue to have good dialogue with India, both at governmental level and certainly at federation level. "And yes, Indian athletics is moving in the right direction. And it's not unhelpful that Neeraj (Chopra) is there on the scene, just reminding people that there is occasionally an alternative to cricket." A few days back, the AFI announced that India will host its maiden World Athletics Continental Tour event -- a bronze level meet -- on August 10 in Bhubaneswar, and Coe said he is delighted with the development. 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. "While I was in Mumbai just recently, I received a letter of intent for the Under 20 World Championships in 2028. "I know Bhubaneswar well. It's a city that staged successful Asian Championships (in 2017). And it's a city that has a commitment to sport and legacy. So, that's a good thing," said Coe, who had attended the Asian Championships in 2017. The host city for the 2028 World U20 Championships will be announced by September next year.

