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WORLD 8
AFTER ALEPPO, SYRIAN
INSURGENTS ADVANCE TO
NEARBY PROVINCE

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TRUMP THREATENS BRICS MAHABHARAT BEGINS IN MAHARASHTRA



AP ■ WEST PALM BEACH (FL)

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

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



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

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

AAP and Congress turn arch rivals in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Chinmoy Krishna Das' bail hearing on December 3



PTI ■ DHAKA

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

take place on December 3, bdnnews24.Com reported. Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday for alleged sedition. He was denied bail and sent to jail by a Chattogram court on Tuesday, triggering protests by his supporters. A lawyer was killed during violence in Bangladesh's southeastern port city of Chattogram over his arrest. On October 30, a sedition case was filed against 19 people, including Das, at Chattogram's Kotwali Police Station, accusing them of disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag in Chattogram's New Market area during a rally of the Hindu community. Bangladesh's authorities on Thursday ordered freezing for 30 days the bank accounts of 17 people associated with International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), including its former member Das.



Waqf asked to provide property details

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

DELHI AND DRUGS TO PART WAYS THIS DECADE, PROMISES LG

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The National Capital is witnessing a staggering increase in the circulation of illicit drugs. In 2024 so far, Delhi has witnessed over 6,000 per cent rise in cocaine seizures while more than 7,000 per cent rise in charas in comparison to 2023, reflecting on the increased mobility of drug traffickers in the city. During the current year till November 15, Delhi Police has arrested 1,520 Narco-offenders in 1,121 NDPS (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985,) cases. It has recovered about 1293.3 kgs of cocaine in the given period as compared to 21.14 kgs of the drugs recovered in 2023, including the recent big seizure of Rs 7,000 Crores worth of cocaine in October. In comparison to 2023 when only 0.684 kgs of Charas was recovered, the police seized 50.5 kgs this year till November 15, a police officer said, adding that 73.3 kgs of heroin, 4257.3 kgs of Ganja, 103.7 kgs of Opium, and 80.5 kgs of poppy head were also recovered. In light of Delhi witnessing such a

surge in drugs and to prevent the public from falling in this trap, the Delhi Police on Sunday launched a 'One-Month Comprehensive Campaign as a Pilot Project' with the vision to eradicate drugs from the city within three years. With the campaign in action, the Delhi Police on Sunday claimed to have recovered Rs 3 Crore worth of Charas and dismantled an international drug syndicate involved in smuggling drugs worth crores into the country using the dark web, cryptocurrency and fake documents with the arrest of its mastermind. In the first instance of a sustained effort in making the city drug free, Delhi Police's Crime Branch dismantled a narco-syndicate indulged in supplying Charas with the arrest of five key operatives including three Nepal nationals. The syndicate was indulged in supply of drugs from Nepal and Kasol, Himachal Pradesh to Delhi-NCR. A senior police official said that on November 20, a tip off was received regarding supply of Charas by a Nepal national in the Majnu ka Tila area, to a local drug



trafficker Mohd. Jameel. Accordingly, a raid was conducted and two persons namely 32-year-old Prem Thapa and 35-year-old Mohd Jameel were arrested, while they were dealing in Charas in a local area and 1192 grams of Charas classified as a commercial quantity under the NDPS Act was recovered from them. The investigation led to the arrest of three more traffickers including Ganga, who was indulged in supplying Charas at Sangam Vihar,

Wazirabad. She was nabbed with 712 grams of Charas and later on, 13,766 Kg Charas was recovered from her bed room of her house. Ankit Buddha alias Thakren was also arrested, who was arrested from Kasol in Himachal Pradesh and is the main source who used to provide Charas to Prem Thapa. Police also arrested Pradeep Kumar, who used to buy Charas from Prem Thapa and supply it to drug addicts of Faridabad and Ballabgarh. In the second instance,

the police nabbed mastermind Lokesh Dhingra on Friday, whose syndicate imported 48 kg of marijuana worth Rs 20-25 crore in over three months, strategically avoiding detection of commercial quantities of the contraband. According to the police, the illegally acquired assets worth Rs 1.5 Crore were also seized. Police started tailing members of the gang after a parcel containing 1.5 kg of hydroponic marijuana valued at Rs 1 Crore was seized at the RK Puram post office on October 18. More searches led to additional seizures worth Rs 2 Crore in transit. An FIR was registered under the NDPS Act, police said. "The mastermind Lokesh Dhingra alias Loka and his associates, Vivek and Mansher Singh fled after the initial seizures. Vivek was arrested in November 2023 after returning from Thailand. Dhingra and Singh were traced to a Gurugram flat owned by one woman who was arrested for harbouring the fugitives," Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime branch) Satish Kumar said, adding that the syndicate used fake SIM cards, privacy tools and

suppliers, to curb drug trafficking involvement." Police will also involve hostel wardens, school principals, and university administrators to prevent drug-related incidents on their premises. "The LG also directed to give away handsome Cash Rewards to the general public for providing information related to "Drug Trafficking", with the assurance to keep his name secret. He emphasized upon leveraging various platforms like print/visual media, social media, radio, and DTC buses/public transport to enhance public awareness," a police officer said. In the campaign, police will also collaborate with celebrities, influencers, NGOs, and community leaders to help ensure that the message resonates across all sections of society. All departments have been directed to appoint a Nodal Officer of the rank of Deputy Secretary or above, with clearly defined responsibilities. Further, all stakeholders will submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) by January 5, 2025, detailing the quantifiable outcomes of the December 2024 campaign.

fake IDs to avoid detection, distributing contraband in Noida and Gurugram. Dhingra, a habitual offender, has been detained and sent to jail, he said. The ninth State Level Committee meeting of National Narcotics Coordination Portal (NCORD), was convened on November 20, at Delhi Secretariat. Subsequently, a review meeting was held on November 26, at Raj Niwas, Delhi, under the chairmanship of the LG where he emphasized upon inter-departmental coordination, timely reporting, and strict compliance with directives for making Delhi drug free in three years. In the campaign, they have decided that they will focus on "targeted locations for surveys, awareness programs, and raids including 200 hostels, 200 schools, 50 colleges, 200 pan shops, 200 pharmacy shops, 200 bars/pubs/clubs/restaurants, all shelter homes, all railway stations, three ISBTs, and other public places. It was also decided that there will be random checks on auto-rickshaws, taxi drivers, Courier/Parcel services, and e-Commerce Company(ies)

'Double-engine Govt' working for overall development in Haryana: CM Saini

PNS ■ KATHAL/CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday said that the double-engine government has been consistently working for the development of all sections of society in the State. By following the path shown by the great leaders and saints, the Government has aimed to make Haryana 'Shikshit, Swasth, Surakshit aur Swavalambi' (Educated, Healthy, Safe, and Self-reliant). The State Government is continually taking steps for the welfare and upliftment of all sections with the spirit of Haryana Ek-Haryanvi Ek, Saini added.

To propagate the teachings and messages of saints and great personalities to the masses, the State Government celebrated Maharaja Shoor Saini Jayanti with great grandeur in Kathal. This programme was part of the State government's plan of celebrating anniversaries of saints and great men under the Sant-Mahapurush Vichar Samman and Prasar Yojana.

Saini, paying tributes, said that Maharaja Shoor was a very valiant and virtuous king. "Everyone in his kingdom enjoyed equal rights. The region around Mathura was named Shoor Saini Pradesh after him. The history of the Saini community is ancient and glorious," he said.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said that the state government has pledged to provide scholarships to students of Haryana belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled Castes (SC), who are pursuing medical and engineering education in any government college across India. To fulfill this commitment, a portal will be launched in the academic session 2025-26 to grant full scholarships to all SC and OBC students.



Through this portal, these students can register themselves if they are studying in any government medical or engineering college in the country, said Saini.

He said that the government has also given 27 percent reservation to backward classes in educational institutions and jobs. Furthermore, children of families with an annual income of up to Rs three lakhs are eligible for loans up to Rs 15 lakhs for pursuing education in India and Rs 20 lakhs for studies abroad at an annual interest rate of four percent.

Saini said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government is progressing with the spirit of 'Sabka Saath-Sabka Vikas-Sabka Vishwas-Sabka Prayas'. The welfare and upliftment of the poor remain their core commitment. Empowering the underprivileged is true social justice. In this direction, the present state government has increased the income limit for the creamy layer of backward classes from Rs six lakh to Rs eight lakh annually. Reservation has been provided to Backward Class-B in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, with five percent reservation for the sarpanch post and 50 percent reservation for other posts based on population.

is merely spreading falsehoods and creating confusion among the people. While Congress managed to seize power in Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka,

and Telangana through lies, their governments did not benefit anyone, and the truth behind their lies has been exposed," said Saini.

PM to launch Bima Sakhi Yojana from Panipat on Dec 9

Chandigarh: Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be launching the Bima Sakhi Yojana from Panipat on December 9. Around one lakh women from the state are expected to participate in the program. Duties have been assigned at the booth level across the state, and at least 25 women from each booth will attend the event. Bima Sakhi Yojana inauguration programme will be no less than a mahakumbh, Saini added, while interacting with the media persons in Ladwa.

He said that the people of Haryana have paved the way for development by electing the BJP Government for a third consecutive term. The government is ensuring equitable development across all sectors while fulfilling public aspirations. He said that the repair and re-carpeting work of roads are being carried out at a quick pace, and execution of development projects in the state is being done more swiftly.

The Chief Minister said that on November 28, the Governor had inaugurated the International Gita Mahotsav (IGM) and the main events of the IGM will be held from December 5 to December 11. Lakhs of devotees are expected to attend the IGM and comprehensive arrangements have been made by the government and the Kurukshetra Development Board (KDB). Sant Sammelan, a global recitation of the Gita by 18,000 students, the International Gita Seminar, and cultural programs are the key attractions of IGM this year.

The Chief Minister said that the BJP's state-wide membership campaign was launched a month ago. Under this campaign, a target has been set to enroll 50 lakh new members in the state. Duties have been assigned to all booth-level office bearers to achieve this target, he said.

Farmers to March Towards Delhi on Dec 6, Renewing Demand for Legal MSP Guarantee

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Amid mounting frustration over stalled talks with the Central Government, farmers under the banners of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) are set to intensify their agitation by marching on foot to Delhi on December 6. The decision came after nearly 10 months of protests at Punjab's Shambhu and Khanauri border points, where farmers have been camping since February 13 to demand a legal guarantee on the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

Sarwan Singh Pandher, a key farmer leader heading Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, announced the decision to initiate march at a press conference in Chandigarh on Sunday, emphasizing the peaceful and determined nature of the movement. The march, set to begin at the Shambhu border, will proceed in phases, with the first jatha (group) led by prominent leaders Satnam Singh Pannu, Surinder Singh Chautala, Surjit Singh Phul, and Baljinder Singh. Covering key points like Ambala, Mohra Grain Market, Khanpur Jattan, and Pipli, the group will walk daily from 9 am to 5 pm, resting on roadsides overnight. The farmers will carry essential supplies for their journey, emphasizing the peaceful nature of their protest. Pandher said that the number of participants in the initial group would be disclosed soon.

Frustration with Stalled Talks

The Centre's silence has fueled resentment among the protesting farmers, who accused the BJP-led Central Government of neglecting their demands. The earlier talks, led by Union Ministers Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal, and Nityanand Rai, ended inconclusively and abruptly on February 18. Pandher criticized the government for

proposing temporary MSP measures that farmers rejected outright. "Contract farming is unacceptable to us. We demand a permanent, legal guarantee on MSP," Pandher asserted. The farmers' frustrations are compounded by rising costs, making MSP guarantees critical for their livelihoods.

"The Centre has not held talks since February 18, and it seems they are running away from their responsibility," he said, pointing that the farmers had rejected the Central Government's earlier proposal of a five-year MSP framework, demanding instead a permanent, legally backed mechanism to protect their livelihood.

Leaders from farmer unions across the country are also mobilizing. While Punjab farmers march to Delhi, their counterparts in Kerala, Uttarakhand, and Tamil Nadu will march to their respective state assemblies to amplify the call for farmer-friendly policies.

Long-Standing Grievances

Farmers' demands extend beyond MSP. They seek a waiver on farm loans, pensions for agricultural workers, withdrawal of police cases, and justice for victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence. They also demand the reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, fair compensation for families of farmers who lost their lives during earlier protests, and a halt to rising electricity tariffs.

The agitation has taken a toll on its participants. Jagjit Singh Dallewal, a prominent SKM leader, has been on a fast unto death at Khanauri since November 26 — the day he was detained by the police from Shambhu protest site. Released a day before, his deteriorating health has intensified the farmers' resolve. Nearly 70 volunteers stand guard around Dallewal, reflecting the movement's growing concern for its leaders.

Dallewal's detention by Punjab Police has drawn crit-

icism, with leaders accusing the AAP-led Punjab government of aligning with central authorities to suppress the movement. Despite his release, Dallewal continues his protest in custody, underscoring the gravity and resolve of the farmers' demands.

March Preparations

The march is meticulously planned. Farmer leaders have coordinated with six state unions to organize logistical support, including food through langars, security management, and volunteer mobilization. The protest leaders have vowed to maintain discipline and ensure the march remains peaceful. Women farmers have also stepped into leadership roles, adding a powerful dimension to the movement.

The December 6 march is not just about MSP; it is a larger battle for the survival of Indian agriculture, say protest leaders. Farmers argued that their agitation is a fight to secure the future of farming and to resist policies they perceive as exploitative. "We only ask for fairness," said Pandher, adding, "The government must engage in genuine dialogue and address the plight of farmers. They cannot continue to evade responsibility."

The first phase of the march is expected to culminate in Delhi, where thousands of farmers aim to present their case to the government. With Parliament in session, farmer leaders hope to bring national attention back to their issues, leveraging the momentum of their unified efforts across states.

Earlier this year, farmers attempted to march towards Delhi on February 13 and February 21, but were blocked by heavy police deployment on various points bordering Punjab and Haryana. Their resilience echoes the massive protests of 2020-21, which led to the repeal of three controversial farm laws.

Punjab CM Reiterates Commitment to Youth Empowerment at PAU Youth Festival

PNS ■ LUDHIANA

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday reaffirmed his government's dedication to empowering the youth, emphasizing their vital role in the socio-economic progress of the state. Speaking at the inter-zonal youth festival at Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), Mann underscored the government's commitment to transforming youth into active partners in state development.

Mann, addressing a vibrant crowd, acknowledged the immense potential of Punjab's youth, saying, "These youngsters possess inherent qualities to excel in every field, and it is the government's responsibility to harness this talent." He likened the youth to planes ready for takeoff and promised to provide them with the necessary support to reach their goals. "I won't rest until our students achieve their desired success," he assured.

The Chief Minister expressed pride in being part of such youth festivals, recalling his own college days when these festivals shaped his personality and helped him excel both as an artist and politician. He urged the youth to use these platforms for holistic development, emphasizing that success isn't just about winning but about staying grounded and working relentlessly towards more achievements.

Mann shared his personal journey, revealing that despite his father's aspirations for him to excel academically, he followed his passion for art and culture, ultimately finding success. "I urge you all to value your teachers, friends, and loved ones who help you along the way," he said.

In his speech, Mann also acknowledged the need for youth to contribute to the state's growth, calling upon them to support the government's vision of making

Punjab a frontrunner in the global arena. He stressed that his government is fully committed to the welfare and development of the youth, with ample funding and resources dedicated to this cause.

Notably, the Chief Minister also delighted the audience by reciting the iconic Punjabi poem "Maghda Rahin Ve Surja Kammian De Vehr" by Sant Ram Udaasi. The performance, an impromptu request from the students, had the crowd in raptures.

Reiterating the government's focus on youth development, Mann emphasized that, unlike his predecessors, his administration prioritizes youth welfare, attending events like these to ensure that no opportunity is missed for their growth. His call for the youth to stay humble, yet ambitious, resonated deeply with the audience, reinforcing the transformative potential of the state's young population.

Cong MLA Khaira pushes for law to restrict non-Punjabis from settling in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Congress MLA from Bholath Sukhpal Singh Khaira on Sunday urged the Punjab Government to introduce a law that would prevent non-Punjabis from permanently settling in the State, citing growing demographic concerns and rising instances of crime. Khaira's Private Member Bill, introduced on January 23, 2023, sought to introduce legislation similar to the Himachal Pradesh Tenancy and Land Reforms Act, 1972, which bars non-agriculturists from purchasing agricultural land. Khaira, who also served as the former Leader of the Opposition, has raised alarm over the increasing influx of non-Punjab residents and its implications on the state's identity and law and order. In a letter to Punjab Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kulvir Singh Sandhwan, Khaira argued that Punjab's demographic makeup is rapidly changing, with large numbers of

people from other states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and even Bangladesh, settling in urban and rural areas. These migrants are reportedly buying land, setting up businesses, and taking up government jobs, which, according to Khaira, is contributing to a growing sense of frustration among locals.

"We are not against people coming to Punjab for livelihood, but they should fulfill legal conditions like those in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Gujarat. These states have laws to protect the interests of their indigenous populations," Khaira said, emphasizing that such laws are necessary to prevent the marginalization of Punjabis.

Khaira also pointed out disturbing demographic shifts in areas like Jagatpura village in Mohali, where non-Punjab voters have outnumbered local Punjab voters by a large margin. This, he warned, could lead to the loss of Punjab's cultural and linguistic identity.

BSF Shares List of 136 Drone-Traffickers with Punjab Police to Curb Smuggling

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a significant move to counter cross-border drug smuggling, the Border Security Force (BSF) has handed over to Punjab Police a list of 136 drug traffickers who are reportedly using drones for illegal activities along the Punjab border. The action, taken under the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (PIT-NDPS) Act, aims to enable the Punjab Police to apprehend the perpetrators involved in this growing menace.

The smugglers, mainly based in Pakistan, are exploiting low-cost drones to bypass the anti-drone technology set up along the Indo-Pakistan international border. These drones are used to smuggle drugs and sophisticated weapons into India, capitalizing on the reduced visibility during winter months, particularly due to thick fog. The BSF has highlighted that this seasonal condition is being increasingly exploited by traffickers to evade detection.

BSF's Inspector General (Punjab Frontier) Atul Fulzale said: "The reduced visibility during the winter, coupled with fog, offers smugglers a tactical advantage. Drones are now being used more frequently to carry out smuggling activities, including the transport of drugs and weapons. We have shared the list of 136 smugglers with the Punjab Police to facilitate preventive arrests and curb these illegal activities."

This year has seen a dramatic rise in drone seizures by the BSF. A total of 270 drones have been intercepted along the Punjab border in 2023, a stark increase from the 107 drones seized last year and just 21 in 2022. These drone interceptions have resulted in the confiscation of 254 kilograms of heroin, a marked decrease compared to the 440 kilograms seized in 2022, but still significant. In addition to drugs, 37 arms and 409 rounds of ammunition have been seized. The BSF has also neutralized three intruders, who were shot down while attempting to cross the border.

Cultural Spectacle at National Crafts Mela: Folk Dances, Wadkar Duo Steal the Show

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The third day of the 14th Chandigarh National Crafts Mela at Kalagram turned into a cultural extravaganza, showcasing the rich diversity of Indian folk dances and music. Organized jointly by the North Zone Cultural Centre (NZCC), Union Ministry of Culture, and Chandigarh Administration, this year's Mela brought in a record-breaking crowd, transforming Kalagram into a hub of vibrant colours, rhythms, and melodies.

Sunday, a holiday, saw families, music lovers, and art enthusiasts flocking to the venue to enjoy the splendid performances of folk dances from across India. The Mela's unique attraction was its vivid representation of regional culture through dance, which not only entertained but also educated the audience about the varied traditions of India. The morning and evening sessions featured a dazzling array of performances, including Giddha from Punjab, Bihu from Assam, Haryanvi Behrupiyas, Baajigar — the acrobatic dance forms of Punjab, and the graceful Kathak from Rajasthan.

The traditional folk dances



of Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sikkim, alongside the spectacular Kachhi Ghodi of Rajasthan and 'Nagada and Been Jogis of Haryana, kept the audience enthralled. The performers, dressed in colourful traditional costumes, showcased graceful steps, high-energy moves, and intricate footwork. The crowd cheered and clapped along, thoroughly enjoying the exuberance of each dance form. The children, in particular, were excited to meet the performers and capture selfies with them, making for unforgettable memories.

The Punjab village, one of the most popular spots at the Mela, evoked nostalgia for the

rural lifestyle of yesteryears. It displayed quaint spinning wheels, traditional copper and bronze kitchenware, and rustic agricultural tools like ploughs and hand-driven chakkis. Women dressed in bright salwar-kameez, with colourful dupatta fluttering in the air, recreated daily rural life as they carried earthen pots from the village well. These scenes, often captured by visitors, brought the village charm alive and allowed everyone to experience a piece of India's cultural past. The terracotta sculptures of animals, horses, and elephants along with intricate wooden carvings produced by artisans during workshops added to the venue's appeal.

Artisans from all corners of

the country also had their stalls set up, where they displayed their craftsmanship. Visitors could find everything from designer crockery and wools to intricate woolen shawls, carpets, rugs, handwoven fabrics, and traditional attire such as Patiala juttis and designer sarees. The wide variety of handcrafted items allowed visitors to explore the true artistry of India.

The food court at the Mela was another highlight of the event, offering a delightful gastronomic experience for food lovers. Visitors could savour the diverse flavours of regional cuisines from Maharashtra, Bihar, Sikkim, Punjab, Haryana, Awadh, Hyderabad, Gujarat, and more. Traditional sweets, spicy chaats, and savoury snacks kept everyone's taste buds tingling. The food stalls served as a gathering spot for people to relax and enjoy authentic regional dishes in a lively setting.

As the evening descended, the atmosphere at the Mela shifted to one of musical enchantment. The legendary Bollywood playback singers Suresh Wadkar and his wife Padma Wadkar graced the stage with their soulful renditions. Their performance was

a tribute to the golden era of Bollywood music, as they crooned timeless hits such as "Tumse mil kar na jaane kyon", "Megha re megha re", and "Meri kismet mein tu nahin shayad". Their melodious voices filled the air, and the audience was transported to a different era of music. The couple even honoured the audience's requests by singing their favourite songs, leaving everyone mesmerized.

For many, the Mela was a journey down memory lane, with the performance of Suresh Wadkar being a highlight. Speaking about his deep connection to Chandigarh, he recalled his early days when he performed at the Tagore Theatre as a teenager. "I remember the overwhelming response I received from the audience. It was a defining moment in my career," he shared.

The Mela will continue until December 8, and the coming days promise even more performances and cultural showcases. On December 2, Punjabi singer Kulwinder Billa, a crowd favorite, will take the stage, ensuring that the Mela continues to delight its visitors with diverse and engaging performances.

BRIEFS

GURUGRAM WILL SEE MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN NEXT SIX MONTHS: MINISTER

Gurugram: Haryana Industry and Commerce Minister Rao Narbir Singh on Sunday said that Gurugram district will witness major development in the next six months. Addressing an event, the Minister, who also holds the Environment portfolio said: "Whatever expectations the citizens have regarding the development projects, they will be fulfilled... Due to the government's welfare policies and the meaningful changes brought in the lives of the common people, the BJP Government got more votes this time in Haryana."

19K PONDS TO BE RENOVATED IN HARYANA

Chandigarh: Haryana Development and Panchayat Minister Krishan Lal Panwar on Sunday said that the plans have been made for the renovation of more than 19,000 ponds across the State. Panwar, after attending felicitation ceremony in Poothar village, Panipat, organized in honour of Kargil Martyr Havildar Vijay, said that the government aims to provide employment to two lakh youth in the coming years. E-libraries will be set up in 1,000 villages, and gyms will be opened for the youth in rural areas, he said, adding that cultural centers for women will be opened in more than 6,500 villages and around 1,000 centers will be ready by next year as the work on this initiative has already begun.

IPA POLO SEASON KICKS OFF AT CHANDIGARH POLO CLUB



Chandigarh: The Indian Polo Association (IPA) officially launched its polo season at the Chandigarh Polo Club, Khuda Lahora, on Sunday. The season was inaugurated by UT Deputy Commissioner Nishant Kumar Yadav (IAS) with IPA and club officials in attendance. This year's highlight is the prestigious Maharaja Ranjit Singh Trophy, featuring top teams from renowned clubs and defense services, including 61 Cavalry, Army Service Corps, and Indian Navy. The competition, running from December 1-7, also includes the Zorawar Singh Cup to promote youth involvement in polo. Chandigarh is hosting these official IPA events for the first time, with a second season scheduled for March 30-April 5 next year. Eight teams, divided into two pools, are vying for the titles. The final matches will take place on December 7.

BJP TO LAUNCH STATEWIDE PROTESTS ON CONG GOVT'S SECOND ANNIVERSARY

Shimla: BJP on Sunday announced a series of protests across Himachal Pradesh from December 7, targeting the Congress Government as it completes two years in office. The protests aim to highlight issues such as corruption, nepotism, financial mismanagement, and alleged governance failures. A BJP delegation will also submit a memorandum to the Governor in Shimla, outlining Congress Government's "failures". Leader of Opposition Jairam Thakur, former Union Minister Anurag Thakur, and BJP state president Rajiv Bindal will spearhead the movement by addressing gatherings across the state's four parliamentary constituencies "exposing" alleged corruption, record-high loans, and what it terms as the "closure of welfare schemes. The BJP will also hold a 'Maha Dharna', in Shimla on December 10, bringing together supporters from eight assembly constituencies.

HARYANA'S 334 STUDENTS APPEARED IN RIMC ENTRANCE EXAM

Chandigarh: Sainik and Ardh Sainik Welfare Department, Haryana, has conducted RIMC Entrance Examination for the term commencing July 2025 on Sunday at Government PG College for Women, Sector 14, Panchkula. The examination was conducted in a fair, smooth and transparent manner, 334 students of Haryana State have appeared in the said examination. The Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehradun was established in 1922 with the primary aim of providing quality all round education to Indian boys and girls so that RIMC could provide more Indian Officers for the Indianization of the Indian Army.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



known. Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the petitioner, contended that increasing the number of voters from 1,200 to 1,500 would lead to the exclusion of underprivileged groups from the electoral process as it will take a longer time for an individual to cast their franchise. He had also submitted that longer queues at the polling station and longer waiting periods would dis-

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

Ghosh had resigned as the principal of the state-run institute on August 12 in the aftermath of the rape and murder of a trainee doctor on its premises.

The CBI has named Ghosh, former House Staff of the medical college Ashish Kumar Pandey, and businessmen Biplob Singha of Maa Tara Traders, Suman Hazra of Hazra Medical and Afsar Ali Khan of Eshan Cafe, in the



charge sheet. "This case was registered in compliance with the directions of Honble High Court at Calcutta relating to financial irregularities in RG Kar Medical College & Hospital at Kolkata," the CBI Spokesperson said.

The CBI has alleged that Ghosh and Pandey appointed several doctors as house staff in violation of the rules, they said. Ghosh helped two cartels -- one run by Singha and

Hazra and the other by Khan -- in procuring several contracts of the hospital, the CBI has alleged in its chargesheet filed before a Special CBI court in Alipore.

"On careful perusal, it manifested that sanction order of the competent authority not yet received. Accordingly, cognisance is not taken sans sanction. Let it be kept with the record," the Special Judge said. The Hospital hogged media attention when a trainee doc-

tor was found dead in the chest department auditorium on August 10. It surfaced that she was allegedly raped and killed by a civic volunteer Sanjay Roy in the intervening night of August 9-10. Ghosh was also under scanner in the case for alleged delay in the probe. In between, the Calcutta High Court ordered a probe into alleged financial irregularities in hospital during his tenure.

The High Court order came on a petition by the former deputy superintendent of the facility, Akhtar Ali, who prayed for a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) into multiple counts of alleged financial misconduct at the institute during Gosh's tenure as its principal.

Ghosh served as principal of RG Kar Medical College from February 2021 to September 2023. He was transferred from RG Kar in October last year but inexplicably returned to that position within a month.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"The Answering Respondent thus submits that as per Article 151(2) of the Constitution read with section 48 of the Government of

National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 and with regulations ... Enjoins upon the GNCTD to place the audit reports submitted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on the accounts of GNCTD in the Legislative Assembly of Delhi," it further said.

The response informed that the reports from 2022 to 2024 pertain to finance audits, air pollution, "revenue, economic, social and general sector and PSUs", children in need of care and protection, liquor and public health.

"Again, while forwarding Report No. 3 of 2024 of the CAG to the Principal Secretary (Finance) vide letter dated 19.09.2024, the Delhi Audit Office also reminded him about seven reports of CAG pending with Delhi government for laying them before the Legislative Assembly of the state," the reply said.

The petition, which has been filed by Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLAs Mohan Singh Bisht, Om Prakash Sharma, Ajay Kumar Mahawar, Abhay Verma, Anil Kumar Bajpai and Jitendra Mahajan, is listed for hearing on Monday.

The high court had, on October 29, issued notices to the Delhi government, the office of the Legislative Assembly speaker, the lieutenant governor (LG), the CAG and the accountant general (audit), Delhi and sought their responses to the peti-

tion. The plea has claimed that the 12 CAG reports from 2017-2018 to 2021-2022 are pending with Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, who also holds the finance portfolio. The plea has further alleged that despite the LG's repeated requests, these reports have not been sent to him for tabling the same before the Assembly.

The petition, filed by advocates Neeraj and Satya Ranjan Swain, said the BJP MLAs had approached the chief minister, chief secretary and speaker in the past but no action has been taken.

"Despite the LG's repeated requests and constitutional obligation, these reports were not sent to the LG and consequently, could not be tabled in the Delhi Legislative Assembly," it said.

The plea has further alleged that a "deliberate suppression of vital information" not only violates democratic principles but also prevents a proper scrutiny of the government's action and expenditures, raising serious questions about its financial propriety, transparency and accountability.

The petitioners, therefore, have sought directions to the finance department to send a proposal to the LG for "exercising his duties under Article 151(2) of the Constitution of India, 1950, Regulation 210(1) of the Regulations on Audit and Accounts, 2007 and section 48 of the Government of National Capital Territory Act, 1991".

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI will soon send a judicial request to the United States seeking information from private investigator Michael Hershman who had expressed willingness to share with Indian agencies crucial details about the Rs 64-crore Bofors bribery scandal of the 1980s, officials said Sunday.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also informed a special court, which is hearing the agency's plea for further probe into the matter, about the developments.

The process to send the Letters Rogatory (LR) was initiated in October this year, and it is expected to take around 90 days before the formal request is sent to the US, aimed at obtaining information to further investigate the alleged bribery case, the officials said.

A Letter Rogatory is a written request sent by the court of one country to the court of another country to obtain assistance in the investigation or prosecution of a criminal matter.

While the Delhi High Court had exonerated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, a year later it quashed all charges against the remaining accused, including the Hinduja brothers, in the politically sensitive case.

Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, the alleged middleman in the payoff case, was discharged in 2011 by a court which allowed the CBI to withdraw prosecution against him.

The case involves allegations of a Rs 64-crore bribe in a Rs 1,437-crore deal with Swedish firm Bofors in the 1980s during the then Congress government for the supply of 400 155mm field howitzers, which



played a significant role in India's victory during the Kargil war. The case was closed in 2011.

Hershman, head of the Fairfax Group, visited India in 2017 to attend a conference of private detectives. During his stay, he appeared on various platforms, alleging that the investigation into the scam was derailed by the Congress government and stated he was willing to share details with the CBI.

The CBI took note of his claims in several interviews and announced in 2017 that

the matter would be investigated according to due process.

The agency informed the special court that, following Hershman's revelations, it plans to reopen the investigation.

The CBI had previously sent letters and reminders to US authorities on November 8, 2023, December 21, 2023, May 13, 2024, and August 14, 2024, but received no information, with the US authorities requesting additional time.

The central agency has now opted to pursue the LR route, where a competent court sends a formal request for information to the relevant authorities in the US, subject to clearance from the Indian government.

The CBI had registered the case in 1990, three years after a Swedish radio channel had alleged that bribes were paid by Bofors to politicians and defence officials of India to

clinch the deal. The allegations created a big scandal for the Rajiv Gandhi Government and have been used by rival parties to target the Congress.

The CBI filed the chargesheets in 1999 and 2000. The Delhi High Court had exonerated Rajiv Gandhi in 2004, nearly 13 years after he was assassinated by LTTE in a suicide attack. In 2005, the High Court quashed all charges against the remaining accused noting that the CBI failed to prove that the money transferred by Bofors to various agents by Quattrocchi was meant to be paid as a bribe to public servants in India.

The CBI appealed against the 2005 decision in apex court in 2018 but it was dismissed on the grounds of delay. The Supreme Court, however, allowed it to raise all the points in an appeal filed by advocate Ajay Aggarwal in 2005.

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

PTI ■ JAMMU

The High Court of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh has observed that there will be no change in the migrant status of Kashmiri Pandit women even if they marry non-migrants, upholding a Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) order in favour of two women selected under PM employment package.

The two women -- Seema Koul and Vishalni Koul -- had moved the high court in 2018 after their provisional selection to the post of legal assistant in the department of disaster management relief, rehabilitation and re-construction under the PM package for Kashmiri migrants in December 1, 2017 forfeited on the ground that they have lost their migrant status having married non-migrant persons.

"One question of public importance that arises before this court is whether a woman who has been given a migrant status on account of the suffering endured by her and her fami-



ly on account of which they were forced to leave their home and hearth in the Kashmir Valley... could be discriminated and would stand to lose the said status only on account of fact that she had got married to a non-migrant?"

"Holding this would be going against the nature of human beings. Respondents herein, who are ladies and on account of no fault of theirs, had to leave their place of original residence in Kashmir Valley, cannot be expected to remain unmarried only to secure a job in the Kashmir Valley as a migrant," a division bench of Justices Atul Sreedharan and Mohammad Yusuf Wani said in a seven-page order last month. It is also reasonable to

presume that because of the exodus, not every migrant woman would be in a position to find a match who himself was a migrant, it said.

The court said in such a situation, to hold that the woman would lose her status as a migrant only because she, out of the natural urge of forming a family, had to marry a non-migrant on account of existing circumstances, would be grossly "discriminatory and militates" against the very concept of justice.

"This discrimination becomes even more brazen where a male migrant continues to remain a migrant notwithstanding the fact that he has married a non-migrant. Such a situation has arisen only on account of patriarchy that prevails in the human race. However, in matters relating to employment under the State/UT, such discrimination cannot be countenanced," the court said, dismissing a writ petition filed by the Union Territory against the May 16 CAT order.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NAGPUR

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday stressed the importance of family and said if the population growth rate of a society goes below 2.1, then that society will perish by itself. Addressing a gathering at the 'Kathale Kul (clan) Sannelan' in Nagpur, he said "kutumb" (family) is part of the society and every family is a unit.

"Decreasing population is a matter of concern because the Loksankhya Shastra says that if we go below 2.1, then that society perishes, no one will destroy it, it will perish by itself," he said.

"The population policy of our country, which was decided around 1998 or 2002, says that the population growth rate should not be below 2.1," the RSS chief said.

"We need more than two, that is three (as population growth



rate), that's what the population science says. This number is important because it (society) should survive," he said.

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

Our fight is for spirit of our country: Priyanka

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ WAYANAD

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



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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ INDORE

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



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

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

Mufti calls for united fight to counter polarisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

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



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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

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



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

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

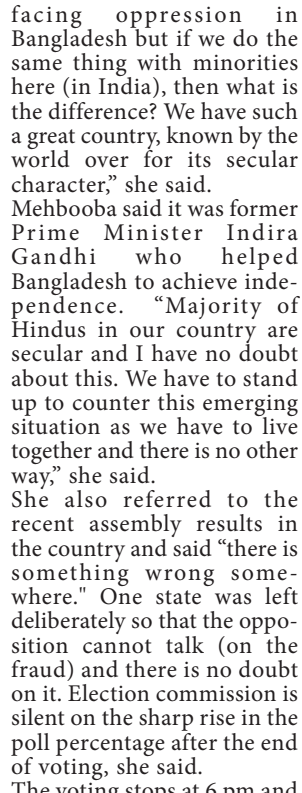
Around 50-55 trucks, each containing 20-22 tonne of potato, arrive in Jharkhand from West Bengal. Former president and advisor of West Bengal Progressive Potato Traders Association (WBPPTA), Bibhas Kumar Dey, on Saturday told PTI over phone, "The West Bengal police have increased vigilance on bordering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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GUWAHATI

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



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

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



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Redefining Mahakumbh 2025 experience with Gram Tent City in Prayagraj

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PRAYAGRAJ

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



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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trump's tariff threat

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

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

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

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

PICTALK



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

Unveiling transnational drug syndicate

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Suspense over Maharashtra CM



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

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

Vinod Johri | Delhi

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

RESTRICTING HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT

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

R K Jain | Barwani

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

ENSURE MINORITY SAFETY

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

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S GDP GROWTH DIPS

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

From pages to people: Why writers need marketing to succeed

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

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

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



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

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

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



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

LEARNING MUST GO ON

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



SHAINY SHARMA

Learning is an essential and lifelong process. It is a cornerstone of human growth and evolution. However, beyond the mechanics of acquiring knowledge lies the nuanced art of learning - an approach that emphasises curiosity, creativity, adaptability and a passion for discovery. Curiosity - the word says by itself is the fuel for lifelong learning. At its core, the art of learning involves more than the accumulation of facts and skills. It is a dynamic process that integrates intellectual, emotional and experiential dimensions. Learning becomes artful when it is purposeful, joyful and deeply connected to an individual's values and aspirations. Unlike a rigid, standardised approach, the art of learning recognises that everyone has unique strengths, interests and ways of understanding the world. It encourages learners to embrace their individuality, explore diverse perspectives and find meaning in the learning process for knowledge doesn't only come from formal education or reading books rather it comes from life, conversations, experiences and unexpected encounters. Individuals should stay open to new perspectives, whether from different cultures, professions or age groups. A growth mindset, as popularised by Carol Dweck, is the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work which contrasts with a fixed mindset that assumes that the abilities are static. With a growth mindset, setbacks are often seen as learning opportunities rather than failures while challenges are embraced as part



of the learning process. No matter how much one knows, there's always room to grow. Staying humble, and being open to feedback, criticism and constructive input from others can help an individual improve and refine their understanding. Another important factor that enhances the art of learning is the art of passion. Learners who pursue subjects that resonate with their interests, enter a state of flow, where effort feels effortless, and the process becomes intrinsically rewarding. Passion sustains motivation and fosters deeper engagement, leading to mastery. Surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals who prioritise learning, engaging in discussions, attending workshops or collaborating on projects challenges an individual to learn and grow. There is no denying that the most brilliant minds ask questions that others may take for granted. One must cultivate a habit of asking 'Why' and 'How' and not just about abstract ideas but in everyday situations too for these questions push the boundaries of one's thinking and can lead to deeper insights. It is always when one embraces learning as a lifelong practice, that can one open oneself to a world of possibilities, ideas and opportunities for personal as well as professional transformation. Understanding learning as art transforms it from a mundane task into a profound journey of self-exploration and mastery for developing a passion for learning that will never cease to grow. *(The writer is an educator; views are personal)*

Freebies: A winning strategy or economic pitfall?



UTTAM GUPTA

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

A major factor contributing to the success of the respective political party in the just concluded elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand was freebies - an acronym for "something given free of charge" - particularly those targeted at women. In Maharashtra, the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance launched the Ladki Bahin cash benefit scheme that offered Rs 1,500 a month to every woman with a family income of less than Rs 2,50,000 annually, in the age bracket of 21 to 65 years. The amount was subsequently increased to Rs 2,500 per month. In Jharkhand, under Mukhyamantri Maiyan Samman Yojna (MMSY) Hemant Soren's JMM-Congress-RJD government had initially promised to give Rs 1000 per month to all women in the age group 18-25 years. The amount was later increased to Rs 2500 per month. The domineering role of freebies in winning elections is visible in almost every State Assembly election held since 2020 when former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal came up with this brand of politics followed by Punjab in 2022 where the Aam Aadmi Party or AAP promised depositing Rs 1000 per month in the account of every woman aged 18 or above. In Karnataka elections held in early 2023, Congress had promised five guarantees including the much trumpeted Gruha Lakshmi under which every woman head of a house gets Rs 2000 a month. In elections held later in 2023, in Madhya Pradesh, BJP promised Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli Behna Yojana; the amount to be gradually hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'. In Odisha, under the Subhadra Yojana, the BJP gives eligible women Rs 10,000 per year, in two instalments of Rs 5,000 each. In future elections, expect all parties to offer such freebies. Already, in the budget for 2024-25, Delhi finance minister Atishi announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY) under which, the AAP government will give Rs 1000 per month to all the women above the age of 18 in the national capital. Now, Arvind Kejriwal has announced six Revdis (another name for freebies) including free power, free water, free education, free healthcare and pilgrimage for the elderly. Freebies win elections but these lead to a host of negative outcomes. The most damaging is the abetment to corruption. The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognised policy or custom". The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognised policy nor is sanctioned in a court of law. It is blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely for gaining advantage in electoral politics. Such a corrupt practice is much worse than the one that involves



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



ARIF AGA

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Toll rises to 130 in Pak sectarian violence

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After Aleppo, Syrian insurgents advance to nearby province

AP ■ BEIRUT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lebanon's Hezbollah, which has backed Syrian government forces since 2015, have been preoccupied with their own battles at home. A ceasefire in Hezbollah's two-month war with Israel took effect Wednesday, the same day that Syrian opposition factions announced their offensive. Israel has also escalated its attacks against Hezbollah and Iran-linked targets in Syria during the last 70 days. Insurgents raise flags over the Aleppo citadel. Speaking from the heart of the city in Saadallah Aljabri square, opposition fighter Mohammad Al Abdo said it was his first time back in Aleppo in 13

years, when his older brother was killed at the start of the war. "God willing, the rest of Aleppo province will be liberated" from government forces, he said.

There was light traffic in the city center on Saturday. Opposition fighters fired in the air in celebration but there was no sign of clashes or government troops present. Journalists in the city filmed soldiers captured by the insurgents and the bodies of others killed in battle.

Abdulkafi Alhamdo, a teacher who fled Aleppo in 2016 and returned Friday night after hearing the insurgents were inside, described "mixed feelings of pain, sadness and old memories."



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The offensive came as Iran-linked groups, primarily

Former foreign minister Qureshi calls for national reconciliation in Pakistan

PTI ■ LAHORE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

Ireland's incumbent parties likely to hang on to power

AP ■ DUBLIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Partial results from Friday's election showed electors spreading their votes widely among the big three, several smaller parties and an assortment of independent candidates, and any coalition will likely involve smaller parties or independents. The cost of living — especially Ireland's acute housing crisis — was a dominant topic in the three-week campaign, alongside immigration, which has become an emotive and challenging issue in a country of 5.4 million people long defined by emigration. If early results are borne out, Ireland may buck the global trend of incumbents being ousted by disgruntled voters after years of pandemic, international instability and cost-of-living pressures. The outgoing government was led by the two parties that have dominated Irish politics for the past century. Fine Gael and Fianna Fail have similar policies, but are longtime rivals with origins on opposing sides of Ireland's 1920s civil war. After the 2020 election ended in a virtual dead heat, they formed a coalition.

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

AP ■ BUSAN (SOUTH KOREA)

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

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

For the most contentious of those — the proposal to limit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to leave Busan."

A growing number of countries said in Busan that they want to address the total amount of plastic produced on Earth. A senior member of the US delegation told The Associated Press on Saturday that the country supports having an article in the treaty that limits the world's supply of plastic. But for some plastic-producing and oil and gas countries, that crosses a red line. They want a treaty that focuses on better management of plastic waste and recycling. Currently, for any proposal to make it into the treaty, every nation must agree to it. India, Saudi Arabia and

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

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

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

plan and we've seen that time and time again in these negotiations."

Rwanda's lead negotiator, Juliet Kabera, said there is still time to find common ground, but her country will only accept a treaty that has the strength, ambition and accountability to solve the crisis.

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

Dhaka HC acquits Khaleda Zia's son, all others in 2004 case

PTI ■ DHAKA
The High Court here on Sunday scrapped the lower court's verdict and acquitted all accused, including former Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman and former state minister Lutfozzaman Babar, in a 2004 grenade attack in ousted premier Sheikh Hasina's rally. The High Court annulled the trial court verdict and acquitted all convicts including Tarique Rahman, a spokesman for the attorney general's office said. Rahman, 57, is the acting chairman of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Two cases — one for murder and another under the Explosives Act — were filed after a grenade attack on an Awami League rally at

Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka left 24 people dead and nearly 300 injured. The HC bench of Justice AKM Asaduzzaman and Justice Syed Enayet Hossain acquitted all 49 accused and observed that the trial court's verdict in the cases was "illegal." The High Court's verdict comes after the bench heard the death references and appeals related to the cases filed over the attack. The trial court had delivered the judgement based on a confession by Mufti Abdul Hannan, the top leader of the banned Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami (HuJI) militant outfit who was accused in the case. Hannan has been executed in connection with another case. The High Court said the confessional statement had no evidential value as it was taken on

force and not examined properly by the magistrate concerned. On November 21, the bench kept the death references (trial court documents for confirmation of death sentences) and the appeals filed by the convicted accused in the cases as curia advisari vult (meaning the verdict will be delivered any day) after it concluded a hearing on those matters. During the hearing on the death references and appeals, the defence lawyers for the accused requested the High Court to scrap the trial court verdict as there was no specific allegation against them. Nineteen others, including Rahman, now in London, were given life imprisonment and 11 were handed different terms in prison.

Oli to discuss reviva of BRI projects with China

PTI ■ BEIJING
Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli will travel to China on Monday on a four-day visit during which the two sides were expected to discuss a new plan to revive the BRI projects, which failed to materialise even after seven years they were signed with much fanfare. Oli will pay an official visit to China from December 2-5, during which Chinese President Xi Jinping will meet him. Premier Li Qiang and other officials will hold talks with him, Foreign Ministry spokesman Mao Ning said here on Friday. "Oli has visited China twice as Nepal's Prime Minister and made important contributions to advancing the growth of China-Nepal relations," Mao said, acknowledging his efforts to forge closer ties with Beijing, including signing a transit treaty to reduce dependence on

India for his landlocked country. "The two countries' leaders will have in-depth exchanges of views on deepening our traditional friendship, expanding Belt and Road cooperation and exchanges and cooperation in various fields, as well as international and regional issues of mutual interest," she said. Oli, regarded as a pro-China leader, heads a coalition government consisting of his Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and the Nepali Congress, which seeks balanced ties with China and India. Oli will be breaking with the usual practice of Nepali prime ministers making India their first destination in the neighbourhood after assuming charge, amid media reports that he did not get an invitation from New Delhi. Nepalese Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba from the Nepali Congress visited India

after assuming office and held extensive talks with her Indian counterpart S Jaishankar. The focus of Oli's visit was to revive the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects signed between the two countries in 2017, according to media reports from Nepal. Kathmandu was an early signatory to BRI in South Asia. But significantly not a single project under the BRI has been implemented so far, according to a report in Nepal daily, The Kathmandu Post. The BRI is a mega connectivity project that connects China with Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe. Both sides are now preparing to sign the second framework, an extended version of the cooperation document that explicitly focuses on seeking grants from China to fund the projects identified therein, the newspaper reported. Projects likely to be signed during Oli's visit included road

projects forming part of the Koshi Corridor, which aims to connect Nepal with Shigatse in Tibet, the report said. It is to be seen whether the two sides will decide on going ahead with the Railway project connecting the two countries through the Himalayan mountains which was estimated to cost over USD three billion considering Nepal's decision to take loans from China. China funded the feasibility study but wants Nepal to share the costs. Ahead of his visit, Oli said he will not seek Chinese loans amid concerns about a debt trap and added that Kathmandu will seek grants instead. Foreign Minister Deuba visited China last week and held extensive talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in the Chinese city of Chengdu, sharing Nepal's perspective on the revival of the BRI projects. After she met with Wang, she returned to Kathmandu to

brief Oli and will accompany him during his visit. "We signed the BRI framework in 2017 and whatever assistance and support we receive from China now is in the periphery of the BRI. Things have not moved beyond that," Deuba told the media on her return from Chengdu on Saturday. "Mainly, we are focused on projects related to connectivity and cross-border infrastructure. The two parties agreed on a modality of future cooperation under the BRI framework," the Post quoted her as saying. "In my meeting with Wang, I have made it clear that we are not in a position to take loans to fund the projects. They listened to our concerns carefully," she said. "Our debt is now 41 per cent of the GDP, which is alarming," she said. "The private sector can take loans but the government is not in a position to do so," a Post report quoted her as saying.

Georgia protests: Over 40 hospitalised

AP ■ TBILISI
A third night of protests in the Georgian capital against the government's decision to suspend negotiations to join the European Union left 44 people hospitalised after police deployed water cannons and tear gas, officials said Sunday. Tens of thousands of demonstrators gathered outside the parliament Saturday night, throwing stones and setting off fireworks. An effigy of the founder of the governing Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili — a shadowy billionaire who made his fortune in Russia — was burned in front of the legislature. Georgia's Interior Ministry said Sunday that 27 protesters, 16 police and one media worker were hospitalised. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze warned that "any violation of the law will be met with the full rigor of the law." "Neither will those politicians who hide in their offices and sacrifice members of their violent groups to severe punishment escape responsibility," he said at a briefing Sunday. He said it wasn't true that Georgia's European integration had been halted. "The only thing we have rejected is the shameful and offensive black-

mail, which was, in fact, a significant obstacle to our country's European integration." On Saturday, he said that unspecified "foreign entities" wished to see the "Ukrainization" of Georgia with a "Maidan-style scenario" — a reference to Ukraine's 2014 Maidan revolution that ousted Ukraine's Moscow-friendly president and unleashed a decade of momentous change for Ukraine, eventually leading to its current war with Russia. Kobakhidze also dismissed the US State Department's statement Saturday that it was suspending its strategic partnership with Georgia. The statement condemned Georgia's decision to halt its efforts toward EU accession. "You can see that the outgoing administration is trying to leave the new administration with as difficult a legacy as possible. They are doing this regarding Ukraine, and now also concerning Georgia," Kobakhidze said of the US. "This will not have any fundamental significance. We will wait for the new administration and discuss everything with them." The ruling Georgian Dream party's disputed victory in the

Oct. 26 parliamentary election, which was widely seen as a referendum on Georgia's aspirations to join the EU, has sparked major demonstrations and led to an opposition boycott of parliament. The opposition has said that the vote was rigged with the help of Russia. Georgia's former imperial master, with Moscow hoping to keep Tbilisi in its orbit. Speaking to The Associated Press on Saturday, Georgia's pro-Western President Salome Zourabichvili said that her country was becoming a "quasi-Russian" state and that Georgian Dream controlled the major institutions. "We are not demanding a revolution. We are asking for new elections, but in conditions that will ensure that the will of the people will not be misrepresented or stolen again," Zourabichvili said. "Georgia has been always resisting Russian influence and will not accept having its vote stolen and its destiny stolen." The government's announcement that it was suspending negotiations to join the EU came hours after the European Parliament adopted a resolution criticizing last month's vote as neither free nor fair. It

said the election represented another manifestation of Georgia's continued democratic backsliding "for which the ruling Georgian Dream party is fully responsible." The EU granted Georgia candidate status in December 2023 on condition that it meet the bloc's recommendations, but put its accession on hold and cut financial support earlier this year after the passage of a "foreign influence" law widely seen as a blow to democratic freedoms. EU lawmakers urged a rerun of the parliamentary vote within a year under thorough international supervision and by an independent election administration. They also called on the EU to impose sanctions and limit formal contacts with the Georgian government. The Georgian prime minister denounced what he described as a "cascade of insults" from EU politicians and said that "the ill-wishers of our country have turned the European Parliament into a blunt weapon of blackmail against Georgia, which is a great disgrace for the European Union." Kobakhidze also said Georgia would reject any budgetary grants from the EU until the end of 2028.

UN halting aid deliveries through main Gaza crossing, says route dangerous

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)
The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said Sunday it is halting aid deliveries through the main cargo crossing into Gaza because of the threat of armed gangs who have looted recent convoys. The decision could worsen the humanitarian crisis in Gaza as the cold, rainy winter sets in, with hundreds of thousands of people living in squalid tent camps and reliant on international food aid. Experts were already warning of famine in the territory's north, which Israeli forces have almost completely isolated since early October. Philippe Lazzarini, the head of UNRWA, the main aid provider in Gaza, said the route leading to the Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel is too dangerous on the Gaza side. Armed men looted nearly 100 trucks traveling on the route in mid-November, and he said gangs stole a smaller shipment on Saturday. Israeli strikes kill at least six people, including children. Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least six people overnight, including two young

children who died in the tent where their family was sheltering, medical officials said Sunday. The strike in the Muwasi area, a sprawling tent camp housing hundreds of thousands of displaced people, also wounded the children's mother and their sibling, according to the nearby Nasser Hospital. An Associated Press reporter at the hospital saw the bodies. A separate strike in the southern city of Rafah, on the border with Egypt, killed four men, according to hospital records. The Israeli military said it was not aware of strikes in either location. Israel says it only targets militants and tries to avoid harming civilians, but its daily strikes across Gaza often kill women and children. In a separate development, a projectile fired by Iran-backed Houthis rebels in Yemen set off air raid sirens in central Israel. The Israeli military said it intercepted the projectile before it entered Israeli territory. Former defense minister accuses Israel of war crimes. A former top Israeli general and defense minister has accused the government of ethnic cleansing

in northern Gaza, where Israeli forces have been waging the latest in a series of offensives against Hamas since early October. The army has sealed off the northern towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahiya, and the Jabaliya refugee camp, and allowed almost no humanitarian aid to enter. Tens of thousands of people have fled, while the United Nations estimates up to 75,000 remain and experts have warned of famine. Moshe Yaalon, who served as defense minister under Benjamin Netanyahu before quitting in 2016 and emerging as a fierce critic of the prime minister, said the current far-right government is determined to "occupy, to annex, to ethnically cleanse." Pressed by an interviewer with a local news outlet on Saturday, he said: "There is no Beit Lahiya. No Beit Hanoun. (They are) operating now in Jabaliya, and (they) are actually cleaning the territory of Arabs." Yaalon doubled down on the remarks Sunday in an interview with Israeli radio, saying "war crimes are being committed here." Netanyahu's Likud party criticized his earlier remarks, accus-

ing him of making "false statements" that are "a prize for the International Criminal Court and the camp of Israel haters." The ICC has issued arrest warrants against Netanyahu, another former defense minister, Yoav Gallant, and a Hamas commander, accusing them of crimes against humanity. The International Court of Justice is investigating allegations of genocide against Israel. Israel rejects the allegations and says both courts are biased against it. No end in sight to Gaza war despite ceasefire with Hezbollah. The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostages. Some 100 captives are still being held inside Gaza, around two-thirds of whom are believed to be alive. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 44,000 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were combatants. Israel says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Canadian news publishers sue OpenAI over copyright infringement

AP ■ OTTAWA
A coalition of Canadian news publishers, including The Canadian Press, Torstar, Globe and Mail, Postmedia and CBC/Radio-Canada, has filed a lawsuit against OpenAI for using news content to train its ChatGPT generative artificial intelligence system. The outlets said in a joint statement on Friday that OpenAI regularly breaches copyright by scraping large amounts of content from Canadian media.

"OpenAI is capitalising and profiting from the use of this content, without getting permission or compensating content owners," the statement said. The publishers argue that OpenAI practices undermine the hundreds of millions of dollars invested in journalism, and that content is protected by copyright. "News media companies welcome technological innovations. However, all participants must follow the law, and any use of intellectual property must be

on fair terms," the statement said. Generative AI can create text, images, videos and computer code based on a simple prompt, but the systems must first study vast amounts of existing content. OpenAI said in a statement that its models are trained on publicly available data. It said they are "grounded in fair use and related international copyright principles that are fair for creators and support innovation." The company said it collaborates "closely with news publishers, including

in the display, attribution and links to their content in ChatGPT search" and offers outlets "easy ways to opt-out should they so desire." This is the first such case in Canada, though numerous lawsuits are underway in the United States, including a case by the New York Times against OpenAI and Microsoft. Some news organizations have chosen to collaborate rather than fight with OpenAI by signing deals to get compensated for sharing news content that can be used to train its AI systems.

Taiwan's president arrives in Hawaii for 2-day stop in US as part of South Pacific visit

AP ■ HONOLULU
Taiwan's president Lai Ching-te arrived Saturday in Hawaii to begin a two-day transit in the US as part of a trip to the South Pacific, his first since assuming office. The stopover in Hawaii and one planned for the territory of Guam have drawn fierce criticism from Beijing, which claims Taiwan as its own territory and objects to official exchanges between the self-ruled democracy and the US, the island's biggest backer and military provider. There were no high-ranking US or Hawaii state officials to greet Lai at the Honolulu hotel where supporters cheered in Mandarin, some waving Taiwanese flags. He visited Hawaii's leading museum of natural history and Native Hawaiian culture, Bishop Museum. Later, he was expected to attend a banquet with supporters. Lai is on a weeklong trip to visit the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and Palau — three

diplomatic allies of the self-governed island in the Pacific. Though Taiwan retains strong contacts with dozens of other nations, it has only 12 formal diplomatic allies. Bishop Museum CEO Dee Jay Mailer presented Lai with a red lei hulu, or feather garland, made by master featherwork artist Kawika Lum-Nelmida. Lai gave Mailer a headdress, made by Paiwan Indigenous people of Taiwan, and neck and shoulder decorative pieces made by Atayal Indigenous people, also of Taiwan. Lai's visit shows that Taiwan and the United States have a very strong relationship, said Arthur Chen, the president of the Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce of North America. He flew to Hawaii from his home near Dallas to welcome the president to the US. Chen said he understood the US has its own foreign policy but he said Lai should be treated as a head of state during his stay. Taiwan and the US share common values like a belief in

democracy and human rights, Chen said. "So we should help each other," he said. Lai didn't make any public remarks at his initial engagements in Hawaii, but spoke before his departure from Taiwan. "I want to use the values of democracy, peace, and prosperity to continue to expand our cooperation with our allies, to deepen our partnership and let the world see Taiwan not just as a model of democracy, but a vital power in promoting the world's peace and stability, and prosperous development," he said at Taoyuan International Airport. It is unclear whether Lai will meet with any members of the incoming US administration during his transit. President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview with Bloomberg in July that Taiwan should pay for its defense. The island has purchased billions of dollars of defense weaponry from the US.

FORM 6 (RE-PUBLISH) INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (Under Regulation 36A (1) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016)	
RELEVANT PARTICULARS	
1. Name of the corporate debtor along with PAN/ CIN/ LLP No.	SITI JIND DIGITAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS PRIVATE LIMITED, CIN No. U72200DL2010PTC2101071 PAN:AA8BG9539C
2. Address of the registered office	Registered Office: No-203, 2nd Floor, Phase-1, Prakash Tower LSC Ashok Vihar, Phase-1, North West Delhi, India 110052 Address for maintaining books of Accounts-478/11 Near Fire Brigade Station, Safidon Gate, Jind Haryana, India, 126102 http://sitiindia.lbc2016.net/
3. URL of website	The CD has no Land & Building and the majority of Plant & Machinery is located and Operations are run from: JIND-478/11 Near Fire Brigade Station, Safidon Gate, Jind Haryana, India, 126102
4. Details of place where majority of fixed assets are located	It has a digital Headend installed at Jind and is being considered to have been waived and/or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate) Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vashihi, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810063351
5. Installed capacity of main products/services	Details can be sought by sending a request to the Resolution Professional at sitiindigital.cirp@gmail.com
6. Quantity and value of main products/services sold in last financial year	Details can be sought by sending a request to the Resolution Professional at sitiindigital.cirp@gmail.com
7. Number of employees/workmen	Count of Employees on Payroll=8
8. Further details including last available financial statements (with schedules) of two years, lists of creditors, relevant dates for subsequent events of the process are available at:	Details can be sought by sending a request to the Resolution Professional at sitiindigital.cirp@gmail.com
9. Eligibility for resolution applicants under section 25(2)(h) of the Code is available at:	Details can be sought by sending a request to the Resolution Professional at sitiindigital.cirp@gmail.com
10. Last date for receipt of expression of interest	17.12.2024
11. Date of issue of provisional list of prospective resolution applicants	19.12.2024
12. Last date for submission of objections to provisional list	24.12.2024
13. Date of issue of final list of prospective resolution applicants	26.12.2024
14. Date of issue of information memorandum, evaluation matrix and request for resolution plans to prospective resolution applicants	28.12.2024
15. Last date for submission of resolution plans	27.01.2025
16. Process email id to submit EOI	Sitiindigital.cirp@gmail.com

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DIVISION, CUTTACK
MAHANADIBHAR, CUTTACK-753004**
Bid Identification No. rwsstc-05 /2023-24
The Superintending Engineer, RWS&S Division, Cuttack on behalf of Government of Odisha invites lump sum bid through e-procurement in double cover system according to norm of e-procurement.
1. Nature of work : PWS Schemes under RWS, Division, Cuttack.
2. No. of tenders : 1 Nos.
3. Tender Paper Cost : 10000/-
4. Viable till date : 15.12.24
5. Class of Contractor : "B" & "A" Class
6. Date and time of availability of bid document in portal : 11 hour of 06.12.24 to 17.12.24 up to 17 hours.
7. Date & time of seeking tender clarification : 16.12.24 up to 17 hours
8. Date & time of opening of tender : 18.12.24 at 11:30 Hours in the office of the Superintending Engineer, RWS&S Division, Cuttack
9. Time of completion : 9 months
10. The bidders have to participate in online bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website https://www.tendersorsisa.gov.in
Supervising Engineer
RWS&S Division, Cuttack
OIPR-26022/11/0006/2425

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my client Nagma Ram is in process to purchase the Property bearing No. 10/53, area measuring 100 sq. yds., out of Khesa No. 13, 13m, situated at Village Kankardoms, in the block of Bhandar, Village Mirzapur, Distt. State, Colony No. 110032 (availing loan from DCB Bank) from Abhishek Sharma, having acquired the said property by virtue of Will dated 09/27/2008 (Doc No. 492), executed by Rajni Sharma. Later, Rajni Sharma expired on 17/2/2019 and leaving behind Abhishek Sharma as her only legal heir. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 15 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate) Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vashihi, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810063351

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my client Rashmi Ghosh is in process to purchase the Residential UGF without roof rights built on Property bearing No. E-71/72, area measuring 123.88 sq. yds., situated at double storey, Ramesh Nagar, New Delhi-110015 from Mrs. Jaspreet Kaur, whereas he acquired the said property vide Sale Deed dated 10.04.2024 (Doc No. 6468), executed by Mr. Hitesh Sobhrajn, whereas Hitesh Sobhrajn acquired the same vide Relinquishment Deed dated 27.11.2020 executed by Mrs. Neelam Keshava, Mrs. Heeramma, Mrs. Sheela Kishor, Mrs. Kanta Jethani, Mr. Mahesh Kumar for self and as attorney of Mr. Chandan Kheman and Mrs. Nandani Sahani, Mrs. Neeru Tejchandani, Mrs. Shobha Sobhrajn and Mrs. Manisha Sobhrajn. All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned. Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate) Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower Sec-4, Vashihi, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9810063351

Indian Overseas Bank
NHPB BRANCH
(Address, NHPB, Complex, Sec-33, Faridabad (Haryana) Pincode - 121003
Phone No. 0129-2254402 & Email Id: job1501@iob.in)
SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE (for immovable property) [(Rule 8(1))]
Whereas The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Indian Overseas Bank, NHPB Branch, Faridabad, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and 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 11/06/2024 calling upon the borrowers M/s. Prem Machine Tools Plot No-101, Road No. 5(w), Soroopur Industrial Area, Faridabad and its Proprietor Mr. Rakesh Kumar Sharma and guarantor /Mortgagor Mrs. Kusum Sharma & Mr. Chander Prakash Sharma having residential address at Jeevan Nagar, Gauchi, Soroopur, Ballabgarh, Faridabad, Haryana, 121004 (hereinafter referred as 'borrowers') to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs. 29,22,314.46 (Twenty Nine Lakh Twenty Two Thousand, Three Hundred Fourteen and Forty Six Paise) as on 27-11-2024 with further interest at contractual rates and rests, charges etc till date of realization within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.
(1) The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers and the public in 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 this 30th Day of November 2024.
(2) The borrowers in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of Indian Overseas Bank for an amount of Rs. 29,22,314.46 (Twenty Nine Lakh Twenty Two Thousand, Three Hundred Fourteen and Forty Six Paise) as on 30.11.2024 with interest thereon at contractual rates & rests as agreed, charges etc., from the aforesaid date mentioned in the demand notice till date of payment less repayments, if any, made after issuance of Demand Notice. The dues payable as on the date of taking possession is Rs. 29,22,314.46 (Twenty Nine Lakh Twenty Two Thousand, Three Hundred Fourteen and Forty Six Paise) payable with further interest at contractual rates & rests, charges etc., till date of payment.
(3) The borrowers attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of the Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available to them, to redeem the secured assets.
DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY
Residential land & building on plot MCF No-285, presently MCF No. 384 (Old MCF No- 456 & Earlier plot No. 51 & 52), Jeevan Nagar, Teshil Ballabgarh, District - Faridabad, Haryana, owned by Mrs. Kusum Sharma w/o Mr. Rakesh Kumar Sharma measuring 100 sq.yds.
All part and parcel of the property consisting of plot MCF No- 285, (Old MCF No.456 & earlier plot no 51 & 52), Kharsa No-61/1/1 (6-19), Jeevan Nagar, Teshil- Ballabgarh, District-Faridabad, Mauza- Gauchi, Haryana Owned by Mrs. Kusum Sharma w/o Mr. Rakesh Kumar Sharma. Land and building area measuring 100 Sq.yards.
Bounded :
On the North by - Plot No. 286
On the South by - Plot No. 284
On the East by - Road
On the West by - Gali
Dated: 30.11.2024
Place: Faridabad
Sd/- Authorised Officer
Indian Overseas Bank

RBI may continue status quo on interest rate: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The RBI is likely to keep the benchmark interest rate unchanged for one more time in its bilateral monetary policy review later in the week as inflation has breached its upper tolerance limit and may also moderate the growth forecast given the disappointing second quarter GDP numbers, experts say.
Reserve Bank Governor-headed six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled to meet on December 4 to 6, 2024. The decision of the rate-setting panel will be announced on December 6 by Governor Shaktikanta Das.
It was widely anticipated that the RBI would start reducing the benchmark interest rates soon but the central bank will have little option this time around as the latest print of retail inflation is above 6 per cent.

The Reserve Bank has kept the repo or short-term lending rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent since February 2023 and experts think some easing could only be possible in February.
Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda said given the rather uncertain global environment and the possible impact on inflation and the fact that currently inflation has been averaging close to 5.9 per cent in the last two months, a status quo on repo rate will be the logical outcome from the policy.
"There would be a change in RBI projections for both inflation and GDP as inflation has been higher so far than the RBI forecast for Q3 and GDP growth has come much below expectations in Q2. It would hence be of interest to see what the projections this time are," Sabnavis said.
India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the September quarter of this



fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors, but the country continued to remain the fastest-growing large economy, as per government data released on Friday.
Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist and Head - Research & Outreach, ICRA, said that with the CPI

committee's expectations.
"At the same time, we anticipate that the MPC will moderate its growth forecast for FY2025 next week. A February 2025 rate cut may be forthcoming if the next two inflation prints recede," Nayar added.
The government has tasked the RBI to ensure that consumer price index (CPI) based retail inflation stays at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on the either side.
The central bank last hiked the repo rate to 6.5 per cent in February 2023 and since then it has held the rate at the same level. The RBI kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent in its last bi-monthly review (October) also amid risks from higher food inflation.
On expectations from MPC, Dhruv Agarwala, CEO, and PropTiger.Com opined that the Reserve Bank faces the challenging task of striking a fine

balance between boosting GDP growth and containing inflation.
"Initially, the sharp rise in inflation seemed to rule out the possibility of a rate cut. However, with growth deceleration becoming a pressing concern, the RBI may still consider a rate cut in the upcoming policy meeting, despite mounting inflationary pressures and a persistently challenging global environment," he said.
Upasna Bhardwaj, Chief Economist, Kotak Mahindra Bank said that the sharply lower than expected GDP figures reflect the highly disappointing corporate earnings data. The manufacturing sector appears to have taken the maximum beating.
"The high-frequency data suggests that festive linked revival in activity may provide a marginally better 2H growth figure but overall GDP growth for FY25 is going to be around 100 bps lower than RBI's estimate of

7.2 per cent. Despite the sharp slowdown in GDP growth we maintain our view of a pause by the RBI... Given elevated inflation and uncertain global environment," Bhardwaj added.
In its October policy, the RBI had projected real GDP growth for 2024-25 at 7.2 per cent with Q2 at 7 per cent; Q3 at 7.4 per cent; and Q4 at 7.4 per cent.
Sanjay Bhutani, Director, Medical Technology Association of India (MTAI) said: "In light of these competing priorities, the Monetary Policy Committee may adopt a wait-and-watch approach for now and hence, we expect it to maintain a status quo stance."
In an off-cycle meeting in May 2022, the MPC raised the policy rate by 40 basis points and it was followed by rate hikes of varying sizes, in the subsequent meetings till February 2023. The repo rate was raised by 250 basis points cumulatively between May 2022 and February 2023.

FPIs' selling spree continues in November at ₹21,612 Crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Foreign investors pulled out Rs 21,612 crore (USD 2.56 billion) from the Indian equity market in November, mainly due to the rising US bond yields, strengthening dollar and expectation of a slowdown in the domestic economy.
While the sell-off continues, the quantum of net outflow significantly reduced compared to October, when FPIs recorded a massive withdrawal of Rs 94,017 crore (USD 11.2 billion).
With the latest pull out, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have experienced total net outflow of Rs 15,019 crore in 2024 so far.
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.
According to the data, FPIs recorded a net outflow of Rs 21,612 crore in November.

ended November 29, due to decisive victory of the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance in the Maharashtra Assembly elections. The resulting political stability appears to have strengthened investor confidence, Srivastava said.
Another factor that contributed to this buying activity is the rebalancing of MSCI's key indices, which added few select Indian stocks in its index. Further, a glimmer of hope for ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon may have also positively influenced market sentiment, particularly from a geopolitical standpoint, he added.
A perplexing feature of the recent FPI activity is their highly erratic nature. For instance, during November 23-25, FPIs were buyers, however, in the next two days they again turned massive sellers having sold equity worth Rs 16,139 crore, V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Global trends, macroeconomic data, RBI's interest rate decision key factors for markets this week: Analysts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Trading sentiment in the equity market this week will be guided by global trends, foreign fund movement, macroeconomic data announcements and RBI's interest rate decision, analysts said.
The monthly auto sales data announcement would also be tracked by investors this week.
"Looking ahead, markets are likely to react to the disappointing GDP growth of 5.4 pc on Monday. The upcoming RBI policy will be crucial, with both the interest rate decision and commentary being key focus areas.
"On the global front, geopolitical tensions, particularly the Russia-Ukraine situation, remains a concern. Important macroeconomic data such as manufacturing PMI from India, the US, and China, along with US jobs data and



Fed Chair Jerome Powell's speech, will also influence market sentiment," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.
India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors as well as weak consumption, but the country continued to remain

the fastest-growing large economy, data showed on Friday.
The Indian equity market ended the last week on a positive note after experiencing significant volatility.
"The outlook for the market will be guided by the major domestic and global economic data such as India's manufacturing PMI, services PMI, interest rate decision, US S&P global composite PMI, manufacturing PMI, services PMI, non-farm payrolls and initial jobless claims," Palka Arora Chopra, Director, Master Capital Services Ltd, said.
Last week, BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 685.68 points or 0.86 per cent and NSE Nifty climbed 223.85 points or 0.93 per cent.
"Participants will first react to the GDP data released post-market on Friday. The primary focus will be on the RBI monetary policy review. Additionally, high-frequency indicators such as auto sales, along with manufacturing and services PMI data, are expected to provide further market direction. Foreign inflows will also remain in focus as a major driver of sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.
Movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and rupee-dollar trend would also dictate market trends, analysts said.

Petrol, diesel sales rebound on festival demand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's petrol and diesel consumption soared in November as the festive season reversed a fall in demand witnessed in previous months, preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Friday.
While petrol sales had shown a year-on-year increase, diesel has been a laggard since monsoon and November was the first month that saw positive growth in consumption.
Petrol sales of three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, soared 8.3 per cent to 3.1 million tonnes in November compared to 2.86 million tonnes of consumption in the same



month last year. Diesel demand was up 5.9 per cent to 7.2 million tonnes. Petrol and diesel sales have been tepid during the monsoon months as rains reduced vehicular movement and demand for the

agriculture sector. Petrol demand however soared once rains eased but diesel consumption lagged year-on-year.
Month-on-month petrol sales were up 4.7 per cent when compared to 2.96 million tonnes of consumption in October. Diesel demand was almost 11 per cent more than 6.5 million tonnes of consumption in October. Diesel is India's most consumed fuel, accounting for almost 40 per cent of all petroleum product consumption. The transport sector accounts for 70 per cent of all diesel sales in the country. It is also the predominant fuel used in agriculture sectors, including in harvesters and tractors.
Consumption of petrol during November was 16.5 per cent more than in November 2022, and 33.5 per cent more than in Covid-marred November 2020. Diesel demand was 1.8 per cent lower than November 2022, but 8.5 per cent compared to November

2020. Jet fuel (ATF) sales rose 3.6 per cent year-on-year to 650,900 tonnes during November 2024. This was 2.3 per cent higher month-on-month when compared with 636,100 tonnes of fuel sold in October.
Like petrol and diesel, ATF demand too is now firmly above pre-Covid levels. ATF consumption was 11.3 per cent more than in November 2022, and 1.9 per cent more than in November 2020.
Cooking gas LPG sales were up 7.3 per cent year-on-year at 2.76 million tonnes in November 2024. LPG consumption was 6.3 per cent higher than in November 2022, and 19.9 per cent more than in November 2020.

Coal production rises 7.2 per cent in Nov, dispatches up by nearly 4 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India's overall coal production rose by 7.2 per cent to 90.62 million tonnes (MT) in November compared to 84.52 MT in the same month of last year, the coal ministry said in a statement on Sunday.
The coal output in the April-November period of the current fiscal rose by 6.21 per cent to 628.03 MT over 591.32 MT in the year-ago period, according to provisional figures.
Coal production from captive and other entities rose to 17.13 MT in November against 12.44 MT in November 2023.
"Additionally, coal dispatches



in November 2024 showed steady improvement, reaching 85.22 MT (provisional), up from 82.07 MT in November 2023, reflecting a growth of 3.85 per cent," it said.
Cumulatively, coal dispatches up to November this fiscal rose to 657.75 MT, compared to 623.78 MT during the same period in the previous fiscal year.
The coal ministry said that it remains committed to meeting the nation's energy requirements by focusing on increasing production, improving dispatch efficiency, and ensuring seamless coal availability across the country.

FDI inflows jump 45 per cent to USD 29.79 bn in Apr-Sep 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Foreign direct investment in India rose by 45 per cent year-on-year to USD 29.79 billion in April-September this fiscal on healthy inflows in services, computer, telecom and pharma sectors, according to government data.
FDI inflows were at USD 20.5 billion in April-September 2023-24.
In the July-September quarter, the inflows grew by about 43 per cent year-on-year to USD 13.6 billion against USD 9.52 billion in the same quarter last fiscal.
The foreign direct investment in India was up 47.8 per cent to USD 16.17 billion in the April-June quarter.
Total FDI, which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital, grew by 28 per cent to USD 42.1 billion during the first half of this fiscal from USD 33.12 billion in April-September 2023-24, the Department for Promotion of Industry and



Internal Trade (DPIIT) data showed.
During the April-September period this financial year, FDI equity inflows rose from major countries, including Mauritius (USD 5.34 billion against USD 2.95 billion), Singapore (USD 7.53 billion against USD 5.22 billion), the US (USD 2.57 billion against USD 2 billion), the Netherlands (USD 3.58 billion against USD 1.92 billion), the UAE (USD 3.47 billion against USD 1.1 billion), Cayman Islands (USD 235 million against USD 145 million) and Cyprus (USD 808

Security Leadership Summit 2024 Explores the Future of Security in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The 19th Security Leadership Summit, hosted by Central Association of Private Security Industry (CAPSI) and Association of Private Detectives and Investigators (APDI), commenced at PHD House, New Delhi, bringing together prominent leaders, policymakers, and industry experts to envision the future of security in India. The two-day summit, themed "Surakshit Bharat - Viksit Bharat 2047", highlights the integration of advanced technologies with security strategies to create a safer and more developed nation by 2047.
Day one featured esteemed guests, including Gen (Dr.) V.K. Singh (Retd), Former Union Minister, and Lt. Gen M.U. Nair, National Cyber Security Coordinator. Gen Singh unveiled CAPSI's

Surakshit Bharat - Viksit Bharat Vision 2047 document, emphasizing the need for technology-driven internal security frameworks. Lt. Gen Nair shared insights on leveraging AI and drones for national security. Key discussions revolved around drone technology, cybersecurity, AI in security services, women's safety, and collaboration between private security and law enforcement. Renowned speakers such as Dr. Satya Pal Singh, former Union Minister, and international experts like Mike LaCorte and Ambassador Sylvester Okere provided diverse perspectives.
Kunwar Vikram Singh, CAPSI Chairman, announced a groundbreaking initiative to train one lakh drone warriors under DGCA guidelines. "This summit reinforces our commitment to ensuring safety and progress for all," he stated.

Huge import opportunities for UK apparel firms in India: AEPC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) on Sunday said huge import opportunities are there for British apparel firms in India and they should participate in large numbers in the upcoming mega textile show here next year.
Bharat Tex 2025 will be held here from February 14-17, 2025, at Bharat Mandapam and from February 12-15 next year at the India Expo Centre and Mart in Greater Noida.
Companies will showcase the entire textile value chain, with a special focus on key sectors such as Handicrafts, Apparel Machinery, Chemicals, and Dyes.
AEPC Chairman Sudhir Sekhri said that the UK is a global fashion hub and the sixth largest importer of apparel, with a total import value of USD 20.27 billion in 2023.
"India, with its robust textile and apparel sector, has long



been a trusted partner for the UK. In the past year (2023) alone, India's exports to the UK reached USD 1.2 billion, securing a 6.14 per cent share of the UK's textile and apparel market," he said.
Exports of ready-made garments to the UK during April-October 2024-25 rose by 9.4 per cent, Sekhri added.
To attract British participation, the council has organized the Bharat Tex Roadshow in London from November 27 to 29.
Sekhri also said that at Bharat Tex 2025, UK brands such as Marks & Spencer, Primark, Next, Charles Tyrwhitt, Burberry, Dunhill, Clarks, and JW Anderson already source high-quality products from India.
Fast-fashion leaders like Primark, Asos, and Boohoo also turn to India for innovative solutions that align with their commitment to quality and sustainability. "These are the values that will take centre stage at Bharat Tex 2025, as we highlight India's advancements in eco-friendly materials, closed-loop manufacturing, and waste management principles that strongly resonate with the UK's commitment to a sustainable future," he said.



Skincare in Winter



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



it or is alcohol based.

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

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



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

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

SKINCARE TIPS FOR WINTER SEASON



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

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



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

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

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



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

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



AVOCADO: NUTRITIOUS WINTER DELIGHT

By KAVITA DEVGAN

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



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

WAYS TO USE AVOCADOS IN WINTER FEASTS

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

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

AVOCADO IN DESSERTS:



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

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

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

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

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

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

17TH EDITION OF PHARMA EXPO CONCLUDES



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



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

Sindhu, Lakshya clinch singles titles

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

Sindhu's victory marks her



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

In the men's doubles final, Pruthvi Krishnamurthy Roy and Sai Pratheek K put up a valiant fight before going

down 14-21, 21-19, 17-21 to China's Huang Di and Liu Yang in a marathon 71-minute clash.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Jamshedpur FC, Mohammedan SC look to resurrect campaigns in ISL

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Mohammedan SC and Jamshedpur FC will look to resurrect their respective campaigns when they face off in their Indian Super League clash here on Monday.

With three defeats in a row, Jamshedpur FC are going through a slump in form. They are placed ninth in the league table with 12 points from eight ties, with four wins and as many defeats.

In their three-match losing streak, Jamshedpur FC have conceded three goals at least in each game which is a worrying sign.

The last time the club endured a forgettable run was between October and December 2023 when they lost four games on the trot. Jamshedpur FC need to work on their accuracy they have recorded a passing accuracy of 57.4 per cent in the opposition's half this season. Their overall passing accuracy of 67 per cent also demands more work from the players.

Mohammedan FC, on the other hand, are in the 12th spot in the ISL points table with only one victory and two draws so far in the season.

In their last outing, Mohammedan FC appeared to be turning their fortunes around when they took an early lead against Bengaluru FC.

While an eighth-minute strike by Cesar Manzoki put them in the driver's seat, it was after the 82nd minute in the contest when Sunil Chhetri scored a brace to break Mohammedan FC's hearts.

Mohammedan FC has scored on four occasions this ISL, which is the joint-lowest tally for any side after as many games in their debut ISL season, tied with Jamshedpur.

While the Black and White Brigade does have a formidable frontline, the team needs to supplement their strengths unflinchingly to net more goals.

The club has also been at the receiving end of the supreme aerial prowess of their opponents in this season, having conceded five headed goals, which is the most by any side this season.

Jamshedpur head coach Khalid Jamil admitted that the team needs to uplift its performance to get the desired results.

ICC: Jay Shah takes over as new chairman

PTI ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

Shah, the son of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, will have his task cut out as the ICC looks to find an acceptable solution to implement the 'Hybrid Model' for the Champions Trophy originally scheduled in Pakistan.



As of now, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to accept the 'Hybrid Model' under which India play their matches in Dubai. But the PCB also wants the same courtesy to be accorded to Pakistan in all four ICC tournaments till 2031, which will be co-hosted or singularly hosted by the Indian cricket board.

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

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

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

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

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

"Cricket holds immense potential globally, and I look forward to working closely with the ICC team and Member countries to seize these opportunities and take the sport to new heights."

Shah acknowledged Barclay's contributions to the ICC over the last four years.

"I would also like to thank Greg Barclay for his leadership in the role for the past four years and the milestones achieved during that period," he said.



Barcelona loses at home for the first time this season

AP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona lost at home for the first time this season when the Liga leader was stunned by Las Palmas 2-1.

Sandro Ramirez and Fábio Silva scored for the Canary Islands club on either side of Raphinha's equaliser to give Las Palmas its first win at Barcelona in more than 50 years on Saturday.

Barcelona played superbly in the first three months under new coach Hansi Flick and was flying high after convincing victories over Real Madrid in the domestic competition and Bayern Munich in the Champions League. It had won all eight of its home games.

But it has gone three rounds of La Liga without a win. Before Las Palmas, it fell at Real Sociedad 1-0 and drew at Celta Vigo 2-2 after squandering a two-goal lead in the final minutes.

The dropped points mean Madrid, despite its own troubles, especially in the Champions League, can move ahead of Barcelona in La Liga. It trails Barcelona by four points with two games in hand.

"I don't care about scoring, I care about winning," Raphinha said after his standout performance was unable to end Barcelona's slump.

"We have to take a hard look at what we are doing wrong. We have slipped in our form and are letting games get away from us. We have our next game on Tuesday (at Mallorca), and we need to turn this around so we can win the league."

Atletico Madrid was only two points behind Barcelona in second place — and with the same number of games played — after Antoine Griezmann scored a gem of a goal in a 5-0 demolition of last-placed Valladolid.

History for Las Palmas Las Palmas savored its first victory at Barcelona since the 1971-72 season and just its third victory at the Catalan club overall. The other visits by the modest side that wears all yellow uniforms to Barcelona have ended in 34 defeats and three draws.

"We are thrilled because we have made history," Sandro said.

10-man Botafogo wins its first Copa Libertadores title

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

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

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

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

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

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



the penalty shot converted by Alex Telles in the 44th. Eduardo Vargas headed Mineiro's only goal in the 46th while Junior Santos, the top scorer in the Copa Libertadores with 10 goals, capped Botafogo's historic night with the third in injury time.

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

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

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

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

Henrique and Ederson met again near the end of the first half when the striker surprised the keeper on the edge of the box. A penalty was given after a video review and left back Telles calmly slotted the ball home.

Mineiro came back with a more aggressive formation in the second half and was rewarded when veteran Hulk took a corner kick and Vargas, who replaced midfielder Gustavo Scarpa during the break, didn't even need to jump to score with his head.

World Chess Championship: Gukesh holds Liren with black pieces to remain level on points

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian challenger D Gukesh held defending champion Ding Liren of China to a draw with black pieces in an intense sixth game of the World Chess Championship to remain level on points here Sunday.

The third draw in a row left both players on an identical tally of 3 points apiece, still shy of 4.5 more points in order to win the championship.

The two players signed peace after 46 moves. It was the fourth draw of the match.

It remains to be seen what strategy the players would opt for as the match moves towards the half-way mark.

The 32-year-old Liren had won the opening game while the 18-year-old Gukesh had emerged victorious in the third game.

The second, fourth and fifth games had ended in draws.

With eight games still remaining in the 14-round match, the battle will resume after the second rest day on Monday. If the scores are tied after the eight games, there is an extra day for tie-break games of shorter duration to decide the next world champion.

Gukesh later said he did not feel any real danger during the sixth game.

"I knew this position till Rb8 (Black's 16th move) and even though I did not know (the next) I thought maybe I am slightly worse but it should be really hard to convert it with white because you cannot push the queen side pawns easily and I always have play on his king."

"I wasn't really that worried at any point," Gukesh said in the post-game conference.

Asked about the rationale behind his decision to avoid repetition early, Gukesh said, "May be I am slightly worse, although I was not even sure about it, but with open files I thought I will have counter play."

"I thought since he's going for a repetition I will just play for a few more moves and see, obviously it was not playing for a win or anything."

Liren seemed to be gaining in confidence with each passing game even though he was written-off by most of the top players in the world.

Playing with white pieces, Liren for once solved all his opening problems without much ado as he went for the super-solid London system with his third white in the match and blitzed out the first 20 moves, conceding a mere seven minutes on the clock.

In the process though, all the



Knights and Bishops had changed hands, leading to a Queen and Rook endgame with equal pawns. Liren explained the reason behind his choice of opening.

"In the last world championship match (against Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi), I had played the same opening and won a nice game, I wanted to repeat the opening," he said.

Gukesh used up a little over 50 minutes in the first part of the game, giving Liren a 45-minute lead on the clock for the first time in the match. However, on the 20th move, Gukesh chose a dynamic continuation that required deep calculation as well as superior judgement.

Liren thought for a long time, spending all his extra time, and

slight advantage for white following Gukesh's decision but the nature of the position remained complicated enough for both sides to have counter play.

Liren had to regain his composure as he was expecting Gukesh to repeat and he decided not to be over-aggressive in the heavy-pieces endgame.

Gukesh eventually went for the trade of the Queens when he may have been slightly worse but Liren just took a draw exchanging off a crucial king rook pawn after which the Indian had no other way than to repeat the position.

According to English Grandmaster David Howell, the official commentator, "Ding missed his big opportunity with Queens on the board."

The Chinese was again pressing with Gukesh's refusal to draw early but it was indeed a great fight in the sixth game that lasted till move 46.

World Championship toughest event in chess: Gukesh Asked to compare the world championship with other strong events, Gukesh said, "It's probably the toughest event in chess, obviously there is more at stake but other than that it's just a very interesting and long match against a very strong opponent, and at the end of the day we are still playing chess."

"It has been good so far, I still can improve my play, there are a lot more games, considering I was trailing after the first game I am happy to be here, it is too early," Gukesh remarked when asked if he was satisfied with his play thus far.

When asked who among the past world champions were their inspiration, Liren named (Veselin) Topalov and (Magnus) Carlsen while Gukesh mentioned the names of Viswanathan Anand, (Bobby) Fischer and Carlsen.

The Moves: 1.D4 Nf6 2.Bf4 d5 3.E3 e6 4.Nf3 c5 5.C3 Bd6 6.Bb5+ Nc6 7.Bxc6+ bxc6 8.Bxd6 Qxd6 9.Qa4 0-0 10.Qa3 Ne4 11.Nfd2 e5 12.Nxe4 dxe4 13.Qxc5 Qg6 14.Nd2 Qxg2 15.0-0-0 Qxf2 16.Dxe5 Rb8 17.Nc4 Be6 18.Rd2 Qf3 19.Re1 Bxc4 20.Qxc4 Qf5 21.Qxc6 Qxe5 22.Qd5 Qe7 23.Qd6 Qg5 24.Qd5 Qe7 25.Qd6 Qg5 26.Qd5 Qh4 27.Red1 g6 28.Qe5 Rb8 29.Qb3 Qh5 30.Qf4 Qa5 31.A3 Qb5 32.Rd4 Qe2 33.R1d2 Qf3 34.Kc2 Qxf4 35.Exf4 f5 36.H4 e3 37.Re2 Re7 38.Kd3 Rf8 39.H5 gxh5 40.Rd5 h4 41.Rxf5 Rd7+ 42.Kc2 Kg7 43.Rg2+ Kh8 44.Re2 Kg7 45.Rg2+ Kh8 46.Re2 Kg7. Game drawn.