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**WORLD 8**  
RUSSIAN GENERAL IGOR  
KIRILLOV KILLED BY  
BOMB IN MOSCOW



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Winter haze shrouds National Capital

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A bitter cold wave, and dense fog gripped Delhi-National Capital Region on Tuesday, with air quality plunging back into the 'severe' category and drastically reducing visibility across the city. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi stood at 433 while the minimum temperature was 5.9 degrees Celsius, two notches below normal while the maximum temperature settled at 24.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal. The AQI was expected to remain in the 'severe' category for the next two days.

Of Delhi's 35 monitoring stations, 28 recorded the air quality in the 'severe' category, with some breaching the 450 mark that is classified as 'severe plus'. Monitoring stations in Mandir Marg, Jahangirpuri,

Narela, Nehru Nagar, Patparganj, Punjabi Bagh, Rohini, ITO, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, DTU, Major Dhyana Chand National Stadium, Mandir Marg, Pusa, Shadipur recorded the AQI in the 'severe' category. The AQI was in the 'severe plus' category in Alipur, Anand Vihar, Ashok Vihar, Bawana, Burari, CRR I Mathura Road, North Campus, Okhla Phase 2, Sirifort, Sonia Vihar and Vivek Vihar. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), meteorological conditions are likely to be unfavourable for effective dispersion of pollutants.

The major source of Delhi's pollution was vehicular emission, contributing 18.8 per cent of PM2.5. There was no contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution and the season is over in Punjab and Haryana. PM2.5 remained

the primary pollutant, with levels recorded at 252 micrograms per cubic metre at 4 pm. Meanwhile, haze and cold wave conditions have caused severe disruption across the region. Thick fog enveloped various parts of the district, severely reduced visibility and created challenges for commuters. According to the IMD the national capital registered a minimum temperature of 4.5 degrees Celsius at 5.30 am, which later settled at an average of 5.9 degree Celsius. The temperature in certain areas of Delhi went even below 4.5 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature in Pusa was recorded at 3.5 degrees Celsius, while in Anjanagar, the minimum temperature was recorded at 4 degrees Celsius. At Najafgarh, the minimum temperature was

slightly higher, at 6.2 degrees Celsius. As temperatures dropped further and fog reduced visibility, the Delhi airport administration implemented low visibility procedures on Tuesday. Moderate fog reported at Safdarjung airport. Safdarjung airport recorded lowest visibility 350m at 8 am, which improved thereafter becoming 400m at 8.30 am. Palam airport recorded lowest visibility 600 m during 8 am hours to 9 am hours which improved thereafter becoming 700m at 9.30 am. However, the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) authority clarified that flight operations were not affected by the current conditions. A passenger advisory was issued, urging travelers to check with their respective airlines for the latest flight updates. "Low visibility procedures are in

place at Delhi airport. Flight operations remain normal. Passengers are advised to contact their airline for updated flight details," the airport administration posted on X.

Meanwhile, Delhi-NCR schools on Tuesday switched to the hybrid mode of conducting classes following the re-imposition of anti-pollution measures under the Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). According to the revised GRAP schedule, classes for students in grades VI-IX and XI in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddha Nagar must operate in hybrid mode (physical and online) under Stage IV. However, students of class X and XII have to attend school in-person.

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## You are responsible for the mess: SC tells Greater Noida Authority

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Considering the plight of the hassled homebuyers, the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) to submit a proposal for grievance redressal, and imposed Rs 5 lakh cost on it for failing to file a timely response.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar expressed dissatisfaction over the approach of GNIDA and said, "You are responsible for the mess. Of course, developers made money from the homebuyers. But that does not condone your acts."

The Bench said it may order a CBI probe into the whole "mess" if the GNIDA did not come up with a plan to redress the grievances of the homebuyers. "You come up with a plan in 10 days... otherwise we will order a CBI investigation... You will have to ensure that interests of homebuyers are safeguarded. You are also part of the problem. You allowed this mess to be created," the CJ said.

The Bench suggested the GNIDA to take over the entire land, develop the projects and give the flats to the homebuyers. Seeking a detailed affidavit from GNIDA, the Bench asked it to provide information including the date of allotment of the land and the date of execution of the lease deeds in favour of the private



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

company. Besides seeking a comprehensive proposal for the homebuyers, the Bench asked the GNIDA to give information on why the allotment of land was not cancelled when the developers violated the terms of the projects.

Senior advocate Shob Alam, appearing for over 800 homebuyers, said a PSU was willing to develop the stalled projects and pay up the dues to GNIDA and others, and moreover, no creditors or investors would have to suffer haircuts.

The top court was hearing about 12 appeals arising out of a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) judgment in relation to the insolvency proceedings of debt-ridden realty firm Earth Infrastructure.

The NCLAT had declined a plea of a batch of homebuyers who challenged the NCLT's approval of Alpha Corp Development's bid to acquire Earth Infrastructure. The NCLAT had on June 8, 2021, approved the resolution plan from Alpha Corp Development. The committee of creditor of the Earth Infrastructure had voted in favour of Alpha Corp with a majority of 99 per cent.

Due to the protracted legal battle, five housing projects, three in Greater Noida and two in Gurugram, of the realty firm are stalled leaving hundreds of homebuyers in the lurch. Earlier, Alpha Corp had said it would invest around Rs 900 crore to complete the three stalled projects of Earth Infrastructure that it acquired through the insolvency process at Greater Noida.

The housing projects were launched between 2010 and 2012, but were not completed in the stipulated time period. Approximately 2,900 units were to be developed in these projects. Ananta by Alpha Corp (erstwhile Earth Copia), Sector 112, Gurugram, is a housing project launched in February 2011; Earth Sapphire Court, Greater Noida, is a commercial project launched in July 2010 and Earth Techone, located on Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida, is a mixed project launched in June 2012.

## Will NEET-UG exam be conducted online soon?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With controversies following the medical entrance exams every year, the Centre on Tuesday said the Education and Health Ministry is deliberating whether to conduct medical entrance exam NEET-UG offline, or in online mode, and a decision in this regard is expected soon.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has held two rounds of talks with the Union Health Minister JP Nadda in this regard.



Photo: PIB

National Testing Agency (NTA) will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025, instead focus only on higher education entrance tests. The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created. The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) medical entrance exam and a series of cancellations of others due to suspected leaks and other glitches.

"The administrative ministry of NEET is the Health Ministry and hence we are in talks with them about whether NEET should be conducted in pen and paper mode or online mode. We have had two rounds of talks

with the Health Ministry led by JP Nadda. Whatever option will be considered best suited for conducting the exam, NTA is ready to undertake the exercise," Pradhan told a Special Press briefing on the current state on primary, secondary, higher and technical education in the country.

The Minister said a decision in this regard is expected soon and the reforms will be implemented in the 2025 edition of the exam. "What will be NEET's methodology, what will be the protocol...A decision is expected soon. We will notify it soon," he added.

The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for the MBBS course. Of the seats available for the MBBS course, approximately 56,000 seats are in government

hospitals and about 52,000 are in private colleges. Admissions to undergraduate courses in Dentistry, Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha also utilise the results of the NEET for admission.

The idea of switching to Computer Based Test (CBT) mode for NEET is not new and has been deliberated several times before. However, the push for the exam reforms came following the paper leak controversy earlier this year. In the line of fire over alleged irregularities in NEET and PhD entrance NET, the Centre had in July set up the panel to ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations by NTA.

According to the high-level panel headed by former ISRO Chief R Radhakrishnan, multi-stage testing for NEET-UG could be a viable possibility that needs to be followed up. "An acceptable framework with thresholds and test objectives of scoring and ranking at each stage, and number of attempts etc. May be evolved," the panel has recommended in its report.

A DIGI-EXAM system to check impersonation, multi-stage and multi-session testing, test centre allocation policy, setting up secured test centres in each district and mobile testing centres in rural and remote areas are among the recommendations made by the high-level panel.

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## An Imperial legacy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday disposed off a 16-year-old case relating to the trademark of Delhi's iconic 'The Imperial' hotel after the members of Akoi family, who own and operate the hotel, reached a settlement. The settlement acknowledged that the trademark "Imperial" is jointly owned by Hardev Singh Akoi (50 per cent) and his brother Jasdev Singh Akoi's children, Raidev Singh Akoi (25 per cent), and Gobind Singh Akoi (25 per cent).

"In terms of the settlement, the families of Hardev Singh Akoi and late Jasdev Singh Akoi admit/acknowledge that as on date, Hardev Singh Akoi [50%], Raidev Singh Akoi [25%] and Gobind Singh Akoi [25%] are the joint and exclusive owners of the trademark: Imperial and that no one will separately apply or have any rights in the trademark: Imperial or any other trade mark, trade name, copyright, whether registered or unregistered, identical or deceptively similar," said Justice Mini Pushkarna of Delhi High Court in the order.

The Imperial, New Delhi, is a historic landmark that has witnessed significant events in India's history. Established in 1931, the hotel has been a favourite among dignitaries and celebrities alike. It was



founded by SBS Ranjit Singh, who passed it on to Rajdev Singh. Jasdev and Hardev were the children of Rajdev Singh. It was conceptualised in 1934 and officially opened in 1936 by Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India.

During India's struggle for independence, the hotel served as a meeting place for prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The Round Table Conferences, crucial discussions between British and Indian leaders, were held there. Post-independence, the hotel continued to be a hub for political and social gatherings.

The HC also found the settlement terms lawful and confirmed that no other disputes related to the trademark were pending. The parties agreed not to make individual applications for or claim rights in the trademark or any deceptively similar marks.

"It is submitted on behalf of the parties that during the pendency of the present proceedings, in order to maintain family peace, harmony and goodwill, all the family members have mutually agreed to settle the present suit amicably," read the order.

The HC accepted the settlement, decreeing the suit based on the agreed terms. It directed that the application, containing the original signatures of all parties, be placed in the case file. The Court also instructed that a decree sheet be drawn up and canceled all pending hearings. The dispute concerns the trademark "Imperial" and its lion logo, which were considered symbols of a prestigious hotel's goodwill.

Brothers Hardev Singh Akoi and Jasdev Singh Akoi, joint owners of the hotel, disagreed over certain alterations to the trademark and its use.

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File photo: PTI

## Over 30 Delhi schools get bomb threats

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 30 schools in Delhi received bomb threats through e-mails on Tuesday, marking the second such alarming incident this week and the fifth within just nine days leaving students, staff, and authorities on edge in the National Capital.

According to police sources, more than 30 schools including The Indian School in South Delhi, Ambience Public School in Safdarjung Enclave, Dilshad Public School in Dilshad Garden and Crescent School in outer Delhi, reported that bomb threats were received by police authorities.

On Monday, around 20 schools including DPS RK Puram, Gyan Bharati School in Saket and Ryan International School in Vasant Kunj among others had received threat emails.

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## Rapper Badshah caught in the wrong lane



PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

The Gurugram Traffic police has issued a challan of Rs 15,500 against Bollywood rapper Badshah while en route to Punjabi singer Karan Aujla's concert in Gurugram for driving on the wrong side of the road. The singer was reportedly riding a Mahindra Thar to reach Karan Aujla's concert in Gurugram on December 15, of which he was a part.

It is being said that the singer's convoy, comprising three cars, was reportedly driving on the wrong side of the road and disobeyed traffic norms, this led to outrage on social media.

However, it is being said that the vehicle did not belong to the rapper and was registered in the name of a youth from Panipat. After the post went viral, Gurugram traffic police took notice and issued a challan.

"3 vehicles of Punjabi singer Karan Aujla's convoy are going on the wrong side towards Airia Mall, and the bouncers are also misbehaving with the people, but Gurugram police are sleeping," an X user wrote.

To this, Gurugram police replied, "Challan has been generated on 16.12.2024 against wrong side driving according to MV Act." "A challan of Rs 15,500 has been issued against one vehicle remaining two of the convoy are being identified. Soon fines under the MV (Motor Vehicle) Act 2019 will be issued against them as well," said a traffic police officer on the condition of anonymity.

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## Omar Abdullah lays out a welcoming Wazwan

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's warm hospitality has become the talk of the town in the corridors of power in Jammu and Kashmir. Last week when the CM hosted members of civil society at his official residence in Jammu he not only threw open the gates of his residence for the common citizens, but also invited a team of Kashmiri Chefs (Wazas) to cook sumptuous Kashmiri Wazwan, a multi-course meal.

It was after a long gap the guests at the official residence of the Chief Minister were treated with non-vegetarian food in Jammu. In addition to this, the newly elected CM



also hosted members of different delegations, resource persons heading different committees, and academicians, along with other prominent citizens at his residence.

Post Abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, the gatherings at the Raj Bhawan hosted by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha were commonly served

only vegetarian meals/snacks. A famous local caterer was also engaged by the Union Territory (UT) administration to organize lavish dinners and luncheon meetings to suit the taste buds of guests from different walks of life. The famous cuisines of different neighboring states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh were also given preference.

The traditional meat Kebabs and other non-vegetarian delicacies were replaced with Veg kebabs and other culinary delights on the regular menu.

Sharing his experience of breaking bread in the company of the CM, an eminent citizen told The Pioneer, "All those who

attended the meeting were escorted by the Chief Minister himself inside the dining area where a lavish meal was served. Omar interacted with almost everyone present there and gave them a patient hearing. In the past, he remained occupied with his ministerial colleagues and other VIP guests. But this time we met a different version of Omar Abdullah. He was more polite, courteous, and accommodating."

Former Chief Ministers Dr Farooq Abdullah, Mufti Mohd Sayeed, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and Mehbooba Mufti were equally hospitable and frequently met guests at their residences to interact over lunch and dinner meetings.

# Congress considered Constitution private fiefdom of one family, amended it to stay in power: Shah

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday attacked the Congress in the Rajya Sabha, saying the party treated the Constitution as the "private fiefdom" of one family and "played fraud" with Parliament. Concluding a two-day debate on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", Shah ripped into the Congress for its appeasement politics and claimed that the party wanted to breach the 50 per cent quota limit to provide reservation to Muslims. He also asked the Congress if it supported the Muslim personal law and alleged that the party never worked for the welfare of the backward classes. Shah asserted that the BJP has already brought in a common civil code, Uniform Civil Code, in Uttarakhand and will implement it in all states. He attacked the Congress for being a "sore loser" as it blamed



EVMS for its defeat in the assembly polls in Maharashtra and Haryana, saying the party should give up its canard against EVMS and shed its appeasement and dynastic politics as well as corruption to return to power. "In the last 75 years, the Congress played fraud in the name of the Constitution... They (Nehru-Gandhi family) considered not just the party as their private property, but also treated the Constitution as their 'private fiefdom,'" Shah

"But today, once again I say with responsibility in this House that as long as the BJP has even one MP, we will not allow reservation on the basis of religion," the home minister asserted. He said that in 1955, the Kaka Kalelkar Commission was formed to provide reservations to OBCs but the report was nowhere to be found. "Had the recommendations of the Kaka Kalelkar Commission been accepted, the Mandal Commission would not have been formed. In 1980, the recommendations of the Mandal Commission came out, but it was not implemented. It was implemented when the Congress was voted out in 1990," Shah said. He also alleged that the Congress amended the Constitution to remain in power and for its own benefit. The Union home minister accused the party of being anti-reservation and said it never worked for the benefit of the backward classes.

# Three arrested for vandalism, setting fire to vehicle at Sohna Chowk jail complex

**STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM**

The Gurugram police have arrested three people, including the Dhaba owner, and filed cross FIRs in connection with vandalism and setting fire to vehicles due to enmity of a fight near the Dhaba at the jail complex, Sohna Chowk, police said. The accused has been identified as Aniket a resident of village Khandsa, Gurugram, Hemant (Dhaba owner) and Mohit, both residents of Islampur, Gurugram. According to the police, on December 15, information was received at Police Station Shivaji Nagar, Gurugram, regarding a fight at Jail Ki Roti Boti Dhaba near Sohna Chowk, Gurugram. On receiving the information, the police team reached the spot where it was found that the injured person had gone to the hospital. The police team reached the hospital for further action but the injured person was not found in the hospital. Thereafter, on December 16,



a person filed a complaint at the Shivaji Nagar police station, he was eating food at Jail Ki Roti Boti Dhaba with Dhaba operator Hemant Sharma and his other friend on December 15. At the same time, some people were having a birthday party near a parked car. When he ordered food, those people abused him and started beating him. When his friends came to rescue him, those people also beat them and

Boti Dhaba to sit. During this, the Dhaba owner and his associates beat him up and when he left from there, they vandalized his auto and car and set an Eco car on fire. On this complaint, another FIR number, 442, was registered in Police Station Shivaji Nagar, Gurugram. During the investigation, police took action and arrested Aniket in FIR number 441 from Shivaji Nagar, Gurugram, on Monday. Later police also nabbed Hemant and Mohit. From the criminal record of the accused, it was found that 02 cases were registered against the accused, Aniket, under the Excise Act in Gurugram. "Police teams have been formed to arrest other accused in the above cases. Every possible effort is being made by the formed teams to arrest the accused involved in committing the crimes of the above cases. Investigation of the cases is going on," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said.

# One Nation One Election Bill sent to Parliamentary panel for wider consideration

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha was sent to Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for wider considerations and debates. The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Meghwal after a nearly 90-minute debate, followed by a division of votes. As many as 269 members voted in favour of the Bill and 198 against it. Home Minister Amit Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi favoured detailed discussion at every level on the 'one nation, one election' bill and wanted it to be referred to

a Joint Committee of Parliament. "When One Nation, One Election bills came up in Cabinet, PM Modi said these should be referred to the Joint Committee of Parliament. There should be a detailed discussion over it at every level," Shah said. Shah said the bill can be discussed in greater detail in the Joint Committee of Parliament. The report of the JPC will be approved by the Union Cabinet and the Bill can be discussed again in Parliament, he said. The Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha following a division of votes. The Union Territories Amendment Bill seeks to align the elections to the union territories

Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir with the Lok Sabha polls. Union Law Minister Arjun Meghwal also introduced The Union Territories Amendment Bill, which seeks to align elections in the Union territories of Puducherry, Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir with the Lok Sabha polls. He said the proposed bills did not attack the "basic structure doctrine, as claimed by the opposition". Principles such as judicial review, federal character of the Constitution, separation of powers, secular character, supremacy of the Constitution had not changed, Meghwal said, adding that the objections to the Bill were political in



nature. Congress member Manish Tewari opposed the introduction of the bills and termed the move an assault on the basic structure doctrine that stipulates certain features of the Constitution are beyond the amending power of Parliament. "One of the essential features is federalism and the structure of our democracy. The bills assault the basic structure of the Constitution and exceed the legislative competence of this House," Tewari, a former Union minister, said.

Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav said the measure to introduce "one nation, one election" by the BJP was an attempt to bring dictatorship in the country. Meghwal said he would move a resolution referring the Bills to a joint committee of Parliament. Earlier, Trinamool Congress member Kalyan Banerjee said the bills linked the tenure of state assemblies to that of the Lok Sabha, thus undermining the mandate of the people. "The state government is not subordinate to the central government or Parliament. The bills take away the autonomy of the state assembly. It is not an election reform but just the fulfilment of one gentleman's desire and dream," he said.

DMK member TR Baalu said, "The electors have the right to elect the government for five years and this right cannot be curtailed with simultaneous elections." The opposition members also objected to Speaker Om Birla's move to call the treasury benches to speak on the bills, leading to a heated debate. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the speaker had given a ruling to allow floor leaders of all parties to speak on the introduction of the bills. "You alone do not represent Parliament, every political party has a representation here," Rijiju said. BJP allies the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Shiv Sena extended "unwavering sup-

port" to the election reform measure. TDP member and Union minister Chandra Shekhar Pemmasani said "one nation, one election" would reduce expenditure on polls and enhance logistical efficiency. Shiv Sena member Shrikant Shinde hit out at the opposition, saying they were allergic to reforms. The DMK's Baalu and NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) member Supriya Sule favoured referring the bills to a parliamentary committee, if they could not be withdrawn. "This Bill is aimed at maximising political gain and convenience. This Bill will finish off regional parties," All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM) leader Asaduddin Owaisi said.

# An Imperial legacy

**From page 1**

Alleging unilateral changes by Jasdev Singh Akoi, Hardev Singh Akoi sought court intervention to maintain the trademark's integrity and prevent unauthorised use. The hotel was built by Sandhu Jat Jagirdar S.B.S. Ranjit Singh, son of R.B.S. Narain Singh, honoured by the British Raj, at the Coronation Durbar of 1911, when New Delhi was declared the new Capital of India. The hotel was officially opened in 1936 by Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India. Also present was his wife, Lady Willingdon, who chose the hotel's name and conferred its lion insignia upon it.

# Will NEET-UG exam be conducted online soon?

**From page 1**

The panel recommended the introduction of a DIGI-EXAM system on the lines of DIGI-YATRA to ensure that only the candidate writing the exam joined the intended programme. The Education Minister also announced that NCERT textbooks for some classes will cost less from next year, and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which currently prints five crore textbooks a year, is working to augment capacity to 15 crore from next year. Pradhan also informed that the number of schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had more than doubled, rising from 14,974 in 2014 to 30,415 in 2024. "Admissions, transfers and CBSE affiliation processes are now fully online. Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and the CBSE are operating on 100 per cent e-office platforms. Schools offering vocational courses have risen from 960 in 2014 to 29,342 in 2024. Student enrolment in skill education has surged from 58,720 in 2014 to over 30.8 lakh in 2024," he said.

# Rapper Badshah caught in the wrong...

**From page 1**

Under the MV 1919, driving on the wrong side of the road is a punishable offence under Section 184 (dangerous driving) and Section 194D (wrong side on one-way roads). The penalty for the first offence includes a fine of Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 6 months. For repeat offences, the fine increases to Rs 10,000, with possible imprisonment of up to 2 years and license suspension. Repeat violators

# LG Saxena attends 'Mass Drug Destruction' organised by Delhi Police

**STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI**

In line with its mission to achieve a "Drug-Free Delhi by the Year 2027," the Delhi Police organised a Mega Drug Destruction in the presence of Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Tuesday. According to the police, as of December 15, the Delhi Police has registered 1,714 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, leading to the arrest of 2,169 drug traffickers. Additionally, financial investigations have resulted in the seizure of assets worth Rs 3.13 crore, with another Rs 3 crore under final forfeiture. The police have initiated further action against 44 traffickers under the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988 (PIT-NDPS) Act. The Mega Drug Destruction event, held at Biotic Waste Solutions Pvt. Ltd., also saw the presence of the Commissioner of Police



Sanjay Arora. Over 10,601 kilograms of narcotics were destroyed, including Cannabis, Heroin, Cocaine, and MDMA, valued at Rs 1,682 crore on the international market. This follows previous destruction events where 2,888 kilograms in December 2022, 15,700 kilograms in June 2023, and 10,631 kilograms in February 2024 were safely disposed of. The Delhi Police is rigorously implementing the "Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan" and conducting raids on hostels, schools, colleges, and other public spaces. Public awareness and cooperation are crucial to this campaign, with cash rewards offered for information on drug trafficking. The department urges citizens to stay united in the fight for a drug-free city.

# Panel says ABPS for making payments under MGNREGS should not be made compulsory

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Rural Development Ministry's Aadhaar Based Payment Bridge System (ABPS) for making payments under MGNREGS should not be made compulsory, a Parliamentary Panel has recommended in a report tabled in Lok Sabha on Tuesday even as it also sought hiking the rate of wages paid under MGNREGS which were at present inadequate and not in consonance with the rising cost of living. The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj said alternative mechanisms should always operate to ensure that the primary goal of the scheme to provide wages does not get defeated due to lack of proper implementation of technology. The Committee also pulled up the government on low wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and recommended a better infla-

tion linked index for payment of wages to the workers. Noting that the APBS has been made mandatory since January 1, 2024, it said that while accepting the gains of APBS, the "Committee is of the view that it is too early to make it mandatory as the problems relating to Aadhaar seeding still have not been resolved leading to exclusion of lakhs of workers." "The Committee, therefore, reiterates their earlier recommendation that APBS should not be made mandatory and alternative mechanisms should always operate side by side to ensure that the primary goal of MGNREGA to provide wages does not get defeated due to lack of proper implementation of technology." The Committee also pulled up the government on low wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and recommended a better infla-

and seek work in areas giving better remuneration," the panel said. It said the panel has time and again urged the Department of Rural Development (DoRD) to increase the wage rates under MGNREGS by linking it to an index commensurate with national inflation, but the wage rates continue to remain stagnant on account. The panel also reiterated its recommendation for adoption of a much more economically viable method in identifying ways and means for the selection of an appropriate index commensurate with the inflationary trend. On the National Mobile Monitoring System (NMMS) app, a mobile and internet based platform, the panel said non-availability of smart phones, irregular power supply and lack of proper internet connectivity in various areas, the attendance of many MGNREGS workers is not getting recorded by the app. The Committee said this is leading to a delay in the payment of the wages.

# Winter haze shrouds National...

**From page 1**

Delhi Traffic Police has ramped up vehicle checks in the national capital and the bordering areas after the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) Stage IV was implemented here to curb the worsening air quality. According to a police source, 10 pickets will be installed at every district. These checkpoints will be responsible for imposing fines on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel vehicles for plying in the city. The IMD has issued a yellow alert forecasting moderate fog and cold wave conditions in isolated areas across Delhi for the next three days. The IMD said, "Mainly calm winds

prevailed over Delhi during the past 24 hours, bringing down visibility from 800 meters in shallow fog at Palam on Monday to 350 meters in moderate fog at Safdarjung on Tuesday morning." It added that moderate fog conditions (visibility between 200m and 500m) are likely to persist in Delhi over the next two days due to the expected prevalence of calm or easterly surface winds. The Centre's air quality panel for Delhi-NCR on Monday imposed the strictest Stage-IV curbs under the winter air pollution control plan, including a ban on all construction activities, as the region's air quality deteriorated to 'severe' due to unfavourable weather

conditions. Stage IV curbs under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for winters also include a ban on the entry of polluting trucks carrying non-essential goods into Delhi and mandatory shifting of school classes, except those for X and XII, to hybrid mode. While most of the Northern states are expected to experience a cold wave and dense fog, southern states like Tamil Nadu are expected to receive rainfall amid the weather change. IMD has warned that the cold wave will persist and affect Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir over the next two days. Similar conditions are expected in Rajasthan from December 17 to 20.

# Over 30 Delhi schools get bomb...

**From page 1**

According to police sources, the contents of the letters are similar to the previous one and it is suspected to be sent by the same sender. The e-mail threatens to blow up the school if they do not receive one Million Dollars. According to an official from the Delhi Fire Service (DFS), a call regarding a bomb threat was received from Crescent Public School in Saraswati Vihar. The official said that personnel from the fire department, local police, bomb detection team and dog squad conducted a search, but nothing suspicious was found so far. Some more schools have also received similar threat emails and checks are ongoing, the official added. However, schools in Delhi-NCR switched to hybrid

mode for conducting classes on Tuesday, following the re-imposition of anti-pollution measures under Stage-IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). Under the revised GRAP schedule, classes for students in grades 6-9 and 11 in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar must operate in hybrid mode (physical and online) under Stage-IV but students in classes 10 and 12 are required to attend school in person. On December 14, eight schools, including the same DPS RK Puram, had received a similar email, in which the sender threatened to carry out an explosion using "bomb vests."

Earlier, on December 13, about 30 schools received bomb threats via email, prompting a multi-agency search of their premises. At least 44 schools had received similar emails on December 9. The Delhi Police Special Cell had registered an FIR in connection with the threat mail to 44 schools and initiated an investigation. Meanwhile, on December 14, the police said that they have identified a private school student as being responsible for sending a bomb threat email to a school in Paschim Vihar. According to police, the student had sent the threat email to his own school, and after tracing the IP address, the police team traced his home. "Upon questioning, the child admitted to the act and was later counselled. He was let off with a warning to his parents to keep a watch on his behavior," a senior officer said.

## Increase in cable thefts on Delhi Metro despite surveillance

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Despite regular checks and surveillance at Delhi Metro stations and along its tracks, incidents of cable theft have increased, with 44 cases reported this year compared to 38 last year.

According to the data by Delhi Police, only 9 out of the 38 cases were solved last year and 12 people were arrested in connection with the thefts. However, this year, the police have managed to solve 22 out of the 44 cases and have arrested 53 individuals in these cases. The Delhi Police conducts regular patrolling of the metro tracks and performs checks at platforms, while metro staff also carry out routine surveillance on metro premises with the help of CCTV cameras, officials added.

A senior police officer suggested that cable thefts could be further prevented by improving CCTV coverage along the metro tracks and lighting up the stretches which mostly remain dark during night. Earlier this month, a gang of 11 individuals used tree branches to climb onto the elevated tracks between Moti Nagar and Kirti Nagar stations, where they stole 140 meters of signalling cable.

The theft caused a disruption of around six hours on the Delhi Metro's Blue Line, leading to significant inconvenience for commuters.

Four members of the gang have been arrested and searches are underway to apprehend the remaining suspects, police said.

In August, the Delhi Police wrote to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) to address security breaches and prevent suicide incidents on the premises.

The police asked DMRC to keep an eye on five key points -- installing CCTV cameras along the tracks, improving lighting in dark spots, trimming tree branches near metro station boundaries, increasing the number of guards at platforms and installing platform screen doors (PSDs) at stations. The Delhi Metro is secured by both the Delhi Police and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), which is deployed at stations for security checks.

## 31 offenders, six parole jumpers and 73 others arrested under NDPS Act

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested 31 proclaimed offenders, six parole jumpers and 73 individuals under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act under its 'Operation Crackdown' conducted in the southwest district of the national Capital from December 1 to 15. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said, "During the period from December 1, 2024, to December 15, 2024, the South-West District Police made significant progress in various law enforcement areas. A total of six parole jumpers were apprehended, and 31 persons on parole were arrested. Additionally, 13 absent BCs (Bail Cancellations) were traced and arrested."

He added that in matters related to the Excise Act, the district reported 63 cases, resulting in the arrest of 63 individuals. "A total of 20,832 quarters of illicit liquor and 264 beers were recovered, alongside six vehicles used in the transportation of these illicit goods," he added. Another senior police officer said that similarly, the district also dealt with 73 cases under the NDPS Act, leading to the arrest of 73 individuals. "The South-West District also made noteworthy progress in tackling various types of crime. Four individuals were arrested in connection with snatching incidents, with the recovery of two mobile phones, two purses, two Aadhaar cards, and one desi katta," he said. The officer stated that in robbery-related cases, seven individuals were arrested, with

recoveries including a mobile phone, a purse containing a PAN card, a country-made revolver with a live cartridge, a buttoned-activated knife, and a black purse containing Rs 1,900. "Additionally, seven individuals were arrested for auto-lifting, with recoveries of four motorcycles and one scooter. In burglary cases, the police arrested seven individuals and recovered a range of stolen items, including one almirah, one fridge, three LPG cylinders, one microwave oven, a computer printer, and various electronics like a Lenovo laptop, an iPad, earphones, two wristwatches, a 20-gram silver coin, a Bluetooth speaker, a silver chain, a gold chain, a silver katori, and a silver spoon," the DCP stated, adding that furthermore, Rs 6,290 in cash was also recovered. Choudhary stated that in gam-

bling-related activities, 97 individuals were arrested with stake money amounting to Rs 1,65,640, along with satta parchi. "The district also made significant strides in enforcing the Arms Act, arresting 46 individuals and seizing 22 firearms, including one USA-made pistol, 21 country-made pistols, 30 live cartridges, and 24 knives," he said. The DCP said that the district also successfully traced and reunited 10 missing minor children with their families. "Under the Immoral Traffic Prevention (ITP) Act, five girls were rescued from Munirka Village in Kishangarh, Delhi, and one broker was apprehended. Additionally, a decoy operation led to the recovery of ₹2,000, which was handed over by a decoy customer involved in an illegal transaction," he stated.

## Delhi mandates energy-efficient gadgets in government buildings

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to cut electricity consumption and save crores of rupees annually, the Delhi government on Tuesday mandated the use of energy-efficient appliances, including brushless DC motor (BLDC) fans, 5-star rated air conditioners, and other high-efficiency devices, across all government buildings. Chief Minister Atishi has approved the proposal, which will be sent to the Lieutenant Governor for final clearance. Sharing details about the initiative, she said, "Our government has prioritized energy efficiency by mandating the use of BLDC fans, 5-star rated air conditioners, and other energy-efficient devices in all government buildings."

"This step will not only reduce electricity consumption and bills but also contribute significantly to building a greener future. Delhi's initiative will serve as a model for the entire country, demonstrating how technological innovations and effective policies can drive ener-

gy conservation," she said. Further, she stated that our goal is to save electricity in government buildings through the use of energy-efficient appliances. "This decision will enable us to save crores of rupees annually while contributing to environmental sustainability and reducing carbon emissions," the senior AAP leader asserted. Government buildings are among the largest consumers of electricity in Delhi. Each year, Delhi government departments consume over 2000 million units of electricity, costing between Rs 8.50 and Rs 11.50 per unit. "This results in annual electricity bills exceeding Rs 1900 crore," Atishi stated.

Explaining how the initiative will save money, Atishi explained that advancements in technology have made several energy-saving options accessible. "While LED lights have already played a significant role in reducing electricity consumption, the focus is now shifting to fans and air conditioners," she said, adding that compared to

conventional fans, BLDC fans consume 40-45 watts less power, saving approximately 96 units of electricity per fan annually. "This translates to monetary savings of Rs 950 to Rs 1100 per fan each year," the Chief Minister said. She added, "5-Star Rated ACs save between 2800 and 3042 units of electricity annually compared to regular ACs, resulting in savings of Rs 27,000 to Rs 29,000 per AC each year." "The primary objective of this initiative is to curb the rising demand for electricity and promote energy efficiency. This summer, Delhi's peak electricity demand reached 8656 MW, a significant increase from 7438 MW the previous year," a statement by the party said. "Government buildings, being major electricity consumers, will play a key role in achieving these goals through the efficient use of energy-saving appliances. This step marks a critical contribution to addressing growing energy demands while fostering environmental sustainability," it added.



Hundreds of seagulls fly over the Yamuna River on a Tuesday morning.

Ranjan Dimri

## BJP gives ultimatum to AAP on tabling CAG reports



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Tuesday gave a 48-hour ultimatum to the AAP government to present the 14 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports in the state assembly, stating that these reports will be the final nail in the coffin of the ruling party.

Leader of Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta accused the Delhi government of deliberately suppressing 14 CAG reports. He alleged that the AAP government has repeatedly failed to table these reports in the assembly, despite persistent demands from the opposition and orders from the Lieutenant Governor, in an attempt to cover up its corruption and misdeeds.

Issuing an ultimatum, Gupta demanded the government convene a special session of the Delhi Assembly within 48 hours to table all 14 CAG reports. He further warned that if the government fails to do so, the BJP will approach the High Court once again to seek appropriate directions to compel the government to present the reports. "We will ensure that the government tables these reports at all costs," he asserted.

Addressing a press conference at the Delhi BJP office, Gupta remarked that the concealment and suppression of these CAG reports have exposed the government's wrongdoings. "This theft has been caught red-handed, and the government now stands completely exposed," he said, alleging that hiding the reports is a clear attempt to cover up large-scale corruption.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva also stated that statements from both the Delhi Government and Lieutenant Governor's lawyers confirmed that within two to three days, they would notify the Assembly Speaker to table all 14 CAG reports in the Assembly. "We hope that after these 14 CAG reports come to light, there will be no choice but for Atishi Marlena's government to recommend investigations against the previous Arvind Kejriwal government," he said, demanding that the Assembly Speaker convene a special session on Saturday solely to direct the Delhi Government to table all 14 CAG reports in the Assembly. "This special session must not have any other agenda," he added.



## LG expresses disappointment over garbage crisis

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has expressed grave disappointment over existing crisis of garbage lying in open on the roads in the city and lack of its disposal leading to sanitation and health issues, Raj Niwas said on Tuesday. Giving details, officials said following several representations by RWAs, MTAs, citizen groups and public representatives regarding garbage, Saxena had on Monday visited the Okhla landfill site. He expressed grave disappointment over the static and in many cases falling rate of bioremediation of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) at Okhla and other landfill sites in the city. Saxena, who had started personally monitoring the bioremediation measures, at the three landfill sites, after he took over in May, 2022, had led an exercise wherein MSW being disposed at a rate of 1.41 Lakh MT per month, had risen up to 6.5 Lakh MT by May, 2023 in a period of just one year.

It came to light during the visit that the average disposal which had gone up to about 22,000 MT per day, had come down to about 20,000 MT per day, while Saxena had envisaged a system wherein the disposal of MSW goes up to 10 Lakh MT per month i.e. over 33,000 MT per day. It may be noted that the LG had withdrawn himself from the exercise of supervising disposal of MSW in the city after the then Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal got the Supreme Court to stay the NGT Order that had appointed him the Chairperson of the High Level Committee

for cleaning and rejuvenation of river Yamuna, on 11.07.2023. The NGT had also appointed the LG as Chairperson of the High Level Committee to monitor the management and disposal of MSW, in Delhi, which in turn was also challenged by the AAP Government. However, despite the fact that there was no stay given by the Supreme Court in this matter, which remains pending, the LG had voluntarily taken a back seat in the matter of municipal solid waste, treating it as a matter of implication arising out of the stay by Supreme Court in the Yamuna matter. The LG was informed that the work of bioremediation have stopped as of now and was being carried out at the rate of about 4000-5000 MT per day till 28.11.2024 at Okhla, when the work was finally stopped, with tenders for a new concessionaire being finalized. It was also informed that the slowest pace of bioremediation was at the Ghazipur site. Saxena was also informed that the MCD aimed to dispose 20 Lakh MT of MSW at the three sites over the next one year and another 10 Lakh MT during the year after that. The LG asked the MCD to complete the process of disposing all the 30 Lakh MT of garbage in one single year, rather than spreading it over two years. He also asked for the land cleared of the garbage mounts to be levelled properly and scientifically, so as to make it usable for other purposes.

Several representations were received by the LG / LG Secretariat regarding the issue of garbage during the past few months, prompting the LG to call a meeting of officers last week and a visit to the site subsequently on Monday.

## Congress holds meeting of Assembly election candidates

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Bracing up its preparations for the Delhi assembly polls slated to be held early next year, the Delhi Congress on Tuesday held a meeting of all its 21 announced candidates where the party asked them to take the help and support of war rooms to get necessary information about their constituencies.

Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav, while introducing the first list of 21 Congress candidates at the state party office, said, "The Central leadership of the party picked capable, experienced leaders who will romp home with comfortable wins in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections as the voters have resolved to support the Congress, having lost their faith and trust in the AAP and the BJP, who gave corruption precedence over development and people's welfare over the past 10 years."

Yadav also thanked Lok Sabha MP Rahul Gandhi and Congress President and Rajya Sabha MP Mallikarjun Kharge for ensuring that the best candidates were picked in the first list for the Assembly elections. He said that the system for the Assembly election will be fully centralized as the candidates will be provided all the necessary information, help and

support by the War Room established at the DPCC office. "Delhi Congress has provided relevant documents regarding their respective constituencies to each candidate, which will be hugely beneficial to them for fully understanding the profile of their constituencies," he said, advising the candidates to closely interact with the voters and tell them about the works done by the previous Congress Government for the development of the Capital and the welfare of the people. "The War Room, headed by Satyavart Singh, with Sidharth Rau and Rajesh Garg as Co-Chairmen, will provide all the relevant information to the candidates while Jatinder Singh will be the co-ordinator of the administration. Senior leaders Dr Narendra Nath and Hari Shankar Gupta will co-ordinate between the candidates and the War Room," he added. All India Congress Committee (AICC) Delhi In-charge Qazi Mohammad Nizamuddin, AICC Secretary and in-charge of Delhi Sukhwinder Singh Dani, AICC Secretary in-charge of Delhi Danish Abrar and Chairman of the DPCC War Room Priyavart Singh were also present. Nizamuddin said that Rahul Gandhi and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge have given competent, experienced candidates in the first list, and they should use this opportunity to win the election, though times are difficult and a Congress win will greatly bolster the party. He assured the candidates that he would be always available to address any problem they face, as the party will ensure that the candidates have a smooth sailing in their election campaigns.

## Transport department seeks public feedback to reduce road congestion

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a move to address road congestion and improve travel time in the city, the Delhi Transport Department has invited suggestions and objections from the general public and other stakeholders.

In a public notice, the department has suggested reorganising inter-state bus operations by designating specific terminals for buses coming from different regions.

"Transport Department intends to obtain comments/inputs from the general public/other stakeholders for inter-state bus operations

(bus origin, picking up and dropping) from dedicated inter-state bus terminals," the notice read.

According to the notice, buses arriving from Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh, other northern states, and Nepal will originate and terminate at ISBT Kashmere Gate. Similarly, buses from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, and other eastern states will operate from ISBT Anand Vihar, while ISBT Sarai Kale Khan will cater to buses coming from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and other southern and western states. The department believes that this plan will help streamline

inter-state bus operations, minimise unnecessary vehicular movement across the city, and significantly reduce congestion on Delhi's roads. By channelling buses through dedicated terminals, the overall travel time for commuters is also expected to improve. "This would help reduce congestion on roads in NCT of Delhi and also reduce travel time," the notice read. The transport department has urged individuals, associations, and stakeholders to share their suggestions or objections regarding the proposal within 15 days of the notice. The feedback received during this period will be considered before finalising the plan.

## BJP holds 1,812 nukkad sabhas in one week, highlights AAP's failures

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Delhi assembly elections 2025, the Delhi BJP has organized 1,812 Nukkad Sabhas in one week to take its party's electoral narrative to the masses and highlight the failures of AAP Convenor and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's government in every street of the city. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Tuesday said that while traditionally the BJP organizes public meetings after formal announcements of elections and candidates, there is a new enthusiasm among the people of Delhi and BJP workers to uproot Arvind Kejriwal's inefficient and corrupt government. "This enthusiasm has encouraged us to kick-start the election campaign with Nukkad Sabhas

as soon as the election environment began," he said. Sachdeva mentioned that in every election, political parties set their narrative, and in this initial phase, BJP is highlighting the basic failures of the Kejriwal government. He said, "Under the leadership of the former Delhi BJP President Satish Upadhyay, the Nukkad Sabha committee is ensuring that the BJP's election narrative reaches every citizen." The Nukkad Sabha committee along with a team of 15 workers, organizes Sabhas daily at the Shakti Kendra level, targeting every three to four polling booths. "Almost every day, at least one Nukkad Sabha is held at the municipal ward level across Delhi," Upadhyay stated. He stated that between December 11 and December 17, BJP has conducted 1812 Nukkad

Sabhas, through which the failures of the Arvind Kejriwal government have been highlighted at the grassroots level across neighborhoods. He further explained that the party's election narrative department studies public expectations daily through surveys and social media. "Today, people are completely frustrated due to stalled development, pollution, weak healthcare and education systems, waterlogging, and drinking water crises, the former Delhi BJP chief said. According to Upadhyay, BJP leaders, including national office bearers, MPs, MLAs, and district officials, raise local issues through Nukkad Sabhas while linking them to Arvind Kejriwal's luxurious palace corruption and presenting the facts to the public.

# Nadda attacks Congress for amending Constitution for its own benefit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Leader of the House J P Nadda attacked the Congress on Tuesday for amending the Constitution for its own benefit and alleged that its past actions of "toppling governments" in states led to staggered polls, creating the necessity for 'One Nation One Election' bill. Participating in a debate in the Upper House on the "Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India", the BJP president accused the Congress of practising politics of appeasement and attempting to bring in religion-based reservations, a charge which was vociferously contested by the opposition party. Former prime minister and JD(S) leader H D Deve Gowda called upon Parliament to contemplate whether reservation should continue to be given on the basis of caste or it should be changed to economic criteria. The BJP president, meanwhile, also spoke about the Emergency, rejecting the

Congress' claim of having apologised for it. Nadda said if the Congress regrets the step, it should join in observing 'Samvidhan Hatya Divas' on June 25 next year, the 50th anniversary of the imposition of the Emergency. Nadda quoted B R Ambedkar to say "however good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad", and added that the "bad lot has interfered with the Constitution many times". On a day when two bills that lay down the mechanism to hold simultaneous elections were introduced in the Lok Sabha after a fiery debate, Nadda blamed the Congress for creating a situation that forced the government to take this step. "We have to bring the One Nation One Election bill because you toppled elected government in states, and elections had to be held," Nadda said. He targeted the Congress over issues ranging from Article 370 to triple talaq, and also accused it of not protecting the territorial integrity of the



country. Nadda also accused the Congress of trying to bring in reservation based on religion. The Leader of the House said Ambedkar had clearly said that reservation should not be structured in the name of religion. His remarks were objected by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who raised the issue of reservation given by the Gujarat Government. Coming to Nadda's defence, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "What Jairam Ramesh is saying now is wrong. What the Gujarat chief minister gave was on the basis of economic backwardness. Here it is mentioned religious minorities," she said, referring to a circular pur-

portedly issued by the DoPT under the then Congress-led government. She added that Ramesh is conflicting the two (reservations given by the Gujarat government and the DoPT circular) and misleading the House. BJP MP K Laxman who heads the party's OBC Morcha backed Sitharaman's claim. Countering Sitharaman, Ramesh said, "We (Congress) have never spoken about religion-based reservation", adding that wherever reservation has been given like in Karnataka it is on the basis of being socially and economically backward not on the basis of religion. Sitharaman responded to Ramesh, saying that he may come up with any number of clarifications but he is misleading the House on this point. Nadda also claimed that Ambedkar, during the debates of the Constituent Assembly, had said there was no need to include the words 'secular' and 'socialist' in the Preamble of the Constitution. Speaking on reservation, Deve Gowda said "The House itself has to apply its mind on what all happened in the past and whether we should give reservation only on the basis of poverty in this country," he said. People are suffering "even with the reservations that we have given in the past and it has not lifted the people who are still suffering for two-

square meals a day", he said. The former prime minister said the House should think over whether reservation should be continued to given on the same lines as in the past or "only who are suffering with most poverty" and whose living condition is bad should be given priority. "If the House thinks over and the leaders think over, this can be thought over by the prime minister (Narendra Modi) before taking any decision on the reservation," Deve Gowda said. He said the Constitution drafted by Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar has withstood the test of time. Meanwhile, Opposition members from TMC and CPI(M) on alleged that constitutional rights in Manipur had been suspended and slammed the BJP MPs for not raising the issue during the debate on the Constitution. Ram Nath Thakur, JD(U) leader and Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, said the government strives to implement the principles enshrined in the Constitution.

He congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi for giving Bharat Ratna to former prime ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Charan Singh as well as former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur, a champion of backward empowerment, among others, in 2023, asking who stopped the Congress-party from doing the same. Criticising the BJP for frequently taking jibes at the country's first prime minister, RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha said Jawaharlal Nehru is a symbol of parliamentary democracy against authoritarianism. In his speech, AAP's Ashok Kumar Mittal pointed out that at a time when Parliament is discussing the journey of the Constitution, a large number of people are not getting sufficient food, lakhs are searching for jobs and 40 per cent of the population do not own houses. He also stressed that despite all challenges, the Constitution has shown the way to the country and will keep doing so even in the next 1,000 years.

## 67 per cent of SSWs belong to SC category: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Exposing a significant disparity in the representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) within the workforce engaged in sewer and septic tank maintenance across India, official data has revealed that a staggering 67 per cent of sewer and septic tank workers (SSWs) in India belong to the Scheduled Caste category. These government data were made available in Parliament by Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale in a written response to a question in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. He said that out of 54,574 validated sewer and septic tank workers profiled under the 'National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem' (NAMASTE) scheme, 37,060 are from the SC category. The statistics further show that 15.73 per cent of the workers belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs),



8.31 per cent are from the Scheduled Tribes (STs), while only 8.05 per cent come from the General category. In total, 57,758 workers across 33 States and Union Territories have been profiled, out of which 54,574 have been validated. Data integration for states like

Odisha and Tamil Nadu into the central NAMASTE database is currently underway. The NAMASTE scheme, launched in 2023-24 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), aims to mechanise sewer maintenance and eliminate the dangerous practice of manual scavenging. A total of 16,791 PPE kits and 43 Safety Devices Kits for Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) have been distributed. Ayushman cards for health insurance have been issued to

13,604 beneficiaries. Capital subsidies totalling Rs 13.96 crore have been provided to 503 workers and their dependents for sanitation-related projects. An additional Rs 2.85 crore has been released to 226 beneficiaries from the manual scavenger category for alternate self-employment projects. To raise awareness on the hazards of unsafe cleaning practices, 837 workshops have been conducted since the scheme's launch. Efforts to mechanise sanitation work and reduce hazardous manual cleaning have also been prioritised. Under the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban (SBM-U) 2.0, MoHUA has sanctioned Rs. 371 crore to 26 states and UTs for the procurement of 2,585 desludging vehicles. Under the NAMASTE programme, the government profiled workers engaged in septic and sewer tank cleaning comprehensively and aims to fully mechanise sewer maintenance and eliminate fatalities linked to dangerous cleaning practices.

## ED restored properties worth Rs 22, 280 crore to victims, says FM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the Enforcement Directorate has restored properties worth Rs 22,280 crore to the victims or rightful claimants and asserted that the fight against economic offenders will continue unabated. Replying to a debate on the first batch of Supplementary Demands for Grants in the Lok Sabha, she said Rs 14,131.6 crore worth properties belonging to fugitive Vijay Mallya have been restored to public sector banks. As regards the Nirav Modi case, properties to the tune of Rs 1,052.58 crore have been restored to PSBs and private banks. In the Mehul Choksi case, properties worth Rs 2,565.90 crore have been attached and will be auctioned. In the National Spot Exchange Ltd (NSXL) case, Rs 17.47 crore worth properties were restored to the genuine



investors who were defrauded, said the Finance Minister. "On the PMLA, ED has successfully restored properties valued at least Rs 22,280 crore from major cases... We have not left anyone, even if they fled the country, we've gone after them. ED has collected this money and given back to the banks. "...So it is important to recognize that we have not left anybody (committing) economic offences. We are after them. We will be making sure that money, which has got to go back to banks, will

go back," Sitharaman said. With regard to foreign black money, the Minister said the Black Money Act of 2015 is actually having a deterrent effect on a lot of taxpayers and they come forward on their own to disclose their foreign assets. She said the number of taxpayers disclosing foreign assets has gone up to 2 lakh in 2024-25, from 60,467 in 2021-22. Under the Act, as of June 2024, demand of more than Rs 17,520 crore has been raised in 697 cases. Total 163 prosecutions have been launched.

## Concept of simultaneous polls not new in India: Minister

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

amid ruckus in Parliament over the One Nation One Election (ONOE) bill on Tuesday, the Ministry of Law and Justice said the concept of simultaneous elections is not a new idea in India. Sharing the details of ONOE, the minister said elections to the Lok Sabha and all State Legislative Assemblies were conducted simultaneously from 1951 to 1967 following the adoption of the Constitution. The first general elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1951-52, a practice that continued for three subsequent general elections in 1957, 1962, and 1967. The ministry said however, this cycle of synchronised elections was disrupted in 1968 and 1969 due to the premature dissolution of some State Legislative Assemblies. The Fourth Lok Sabha was also dissolved prematurely in 1970, with fresh elections held in 1971. Unlike the First, Second, and Third Lok Sabha, which completed their full five-year terms, the Fifth Lok Sabha's term was extended until 1977 under Article 352 because of the declaration of Emergency. Since then, only a few Lok Sabha terms have lasted the full five years, such as the Eighth, Tenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth. Others, including the Sixth, Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth, were dissolved early. "State Assemblies have faced similar disruptions over the years. Premature dissolutions and term extensions have become a recurring challenge. These developments have firmly disrupted the cycle of simultaneous elections, leading to the current pattern of staggered electoral schedules across the

## '990 transgenders rehabilitated through shelter homes in last three years'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

In last three years, 990 destitute transgender persons have been rehabilitated through garima grehs (Shelter homes) and as many as 725 were imparted skill development training. At the same time, 24,015 transgender persons have been issued identity certificates through the National Portal for Transgender persons, the Government informed Parliament on Tuesday. Additionally, Transgender Welfare Boards and Protection Cells have been set up in multiple states and union territories to address the welfare and security of the community. These efforts are

complemented by healthcare support through the Ayushman Bharat scheme, ensuring a more inclusive and supportive environment for transgender persons in India, said Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment BL Verma, in a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha. The Minister said that transgender welfare boards and Transgender Protection Cells have been set up in 19 and 12 States/UTs respectively for the welfare and security of the individuals from the community. The protection cells under Director General of Police aims to monitor cases of offences against transgender persons and to ensure timely



registration, investigation and prosecution of such offences, said the Minister. The TWBs have been set up in Rajasthan, Mizoram, Chandigarh, Andhra Pradesh, Pondicherry, Maharashtra, Kerala, Meghalaya, Manipur,

Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chandigarh, Andaman & Nicobar, Sikkim, Punjab, Mizoram, Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh. The Minister also informed that MoU with National Health Authority (NHA) for convergence with Ayushman Bharat scheme of NHA has been done for providing health facilities under Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna (PMJAY) scheme to transgender persons. Eighteen Garima Grehs, shelter homes for destitute transgender persons have been established in 15 States namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab,

Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (2 shelters) and Maharashtra (3). The main aim of Garima Greh is to provide shelter to transgender persons with basic amenities like food, medical care, and recreation facilities besides providing support for the capacity-building/skill development of the sector, added the Minister. The National Portal for Transgender Persons is an end-to-end online process where the applicant can apply for the TG certificate and also download the certificate after issue without any requirement to go to any office of issue. "This portal has more than 62 Lakh visitors and as of now, 24,015 certificates have been issued."

## ED conducts fresh searches against operatives of betting website

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate Tuesday said it has conducted fresh searches against the operatives of a betting website, owned by some Pakistani nationals, that also was involved in "illegal" broadcast of Men's T20 Cricket World Cup matches. The searches were undertaken by the federal agency between December 10-12 in Delhi, Mumbai and Pune in the case against the portal named 'Magicwin'. The ED's case, filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), is based on an FIR registered by the cyber crime unit of the Ahmedabad Police in Gujarat. Bank deposits worth Rs 30 lakh were frozen during the raids apart from seizure of "incriminating" documents, the



ED said in a statement. Magicwin, according to the agency, is a "betting website 'guised' as a gaming portal which is 'actually owned' by Pakistani nationals. The operations of this website are mostly handled by Indian nationals working or settling in Dubai, it said. "The betting games being shown on the website are originally played in the Philippines and other countries which allow betting activities," it said. However, as per the investigation, the same is "re-tecast" on Magicwin's website by copying

the APIs (application programming interface) of the original games. The agency said betting activities like deposits, placing of betting and withdrawal are "controlled" by the 'owners' of Magicwin. The ED claimed its probe found that that the money, deposited in the bank accounts by the players/bettors, was "diverted" through layers of "shell and mule" bank accounts and further the profit part of the owners were invested in crypto assets, withdrawn in cash or sent to Dubai through Hawala channels. The winning amounts of the players/bettors were transferred to their bank accounts through merchant accounts of various shell companies maintained with payment gateways. These amounts were also transferred to the player's bank account through domestic money transfer (DMT), it said.

## Rajnath says DPSUs will carry forward modernisation, indigenisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday here said new Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU) will carry forward modernisation, indigenisation and set new dimensions by incorporating world class technologies. He made this assertion during a meeting of Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The roles and functions of the new DPSUs, created post corporatisation of erstwhile Ordnance Factory Board, were deliberated upon during the meeting. The committee members were apprised on the financial figures, modernisation, capital expenditure, exports, new products developed and ongoing R&D projects, defence ministry said. The defence minister appreci-



ated the efforts taken by the new DPSUs in indigenisation of critical products, modernisation of production facilities and promotion of MSMEs. He appreciated the fact that post corporatisation, the new DPSUs have shown improvement in productivity and quality. There has been good progress in the sales and profit of these DPSUs in a very short span of time, he added. Rajnath exuded confidence that the new DPSUs will carry forward modernisation and indigenisation, and will set new

dimensions in quality, turnover, profitability and other financial parameters by incorporating world class technologies. "Our new DPSUs will make India 'Aatmanirbhar' in the field of defence production," he said. On the concerns and suggestions of some of the committee members on certain HR-related issues within the new DPSUs, the defence minister assured them that all issues emanating from the corporatisation of DPSUs are being addressed adequately in consultation with all the stakeholders. He appreciated the suggestions, and said that these would be examined for implementation. Minister of State for defence Sanjay Seth, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Secretary (Defence Production) Sanjeev Kumar and other senior officers of MoD were present in the meeting.

# PM slams Congress for water disputes

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on Tuesday hit out at the Congress, saying they talk big in the name of farmers but they neither do anything for them nor let others do anything. He also alleged the party encourages water disputes among states rather than resolving them, and said the delay in the implementation of the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) is a direct proof of the Congress' intention.

The ERCP envisages intra-basin transfer of water within the Chambal basin to provide water to 13 deficient districts of eastern Rajasthan.

"The Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) was delayed for so long by the Congress, this is also a direct proof of the Congress' intentions. They talk big in the name of farmers but they neither do anything themselves for the farmers nor let others do anything," Modi said.

He was addressing the 'Ek Varsh-Parinaam Utkarsh' event to mark the completion of the Rajasthan government's one year in office. He also inaugurated or laid the foundation stones for 24 projects related to energy, road, railways and water worth over Rs 46,300 crore.

The PM said the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal Link Project will provide irrigation as well as drinking water facility to 21 districts of Rajasthan and accelerate the development of both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

On various water disputes between states, he said while the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) policy is to promote dialogue, the Congress continues to fan water discords.

"The BJP's policy is of

dialogue, not of conflict. We believe in cooperation, not opposition. We believe in solutions, not disruption. Therefore, our government has approved and also expanded the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project. As soon as the BJP government was formed in MP and Rajasthan, an agreement was reached on the Parvati-Kalisindh-Chambal project," he said.

The PM noted that he had launched a big campaign to bring Narmada water to different parts of Gujarat when he was the chief minister, and charged the Congress and some NGOs adopted various tactics to stop it.

"The Congress never wants to reduce water problems. The water of our rivers used to flow to cross the borders, but our farmers did not get its benefits. Instead of finding a solution, the Congress continued to promote water disputes between states," he said.

PM Modi also said that the BJP is getting huge public support in different states where elections were held. "The nation has given the BJP the opportunity to serve the country for the third consecutive time in Lok Sabha. This did not happen in India in the last 60 years," he said.

"Today, the BJP's double engine governments are becoming a symbol of good governance. Whatever resolution the BJP takes, it makes honest efforts to fulfil it. Today, the people of the country are saying that BJP is the guarantee of good governance," he said, and lauded the work of Bhajanlal Sharma-led BJP government in the state.

"In the last one year, Bhajanlal ji and his entire team have worked very hard to give new momentum and direction to



PM Narendra Modi with Rajasthan CM Bhajanlal Sharma during the 'Ek Varsh-Parinaam Utkarsh' event. PTI

the development of Rajasthan. This first year has, in a way, laid a strong foundation for the many years to come," he said.

Modi said people blessed the BJP with the responsibility to serve Rajasthan for multiple terms and party did its best.

"Bhairon Singh Shekhawat laid a strong foundation of development in Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje took the legacy forward and now Bhajanlal Sharma's government is engaged in further enriching good governance. Its impact can be seen in one year," he said.

Modi said the Central government is constantly trying to improve the economic condition of villages and focusing on promoting every means of earning there.

Rajasthan has ample potential for solar energy and it can become the leading state in the sector, he said.

The PM said north India will get direct connectivity to Kandla from the Jamnagar-Amritsar Economic Corridor. "Rajasthan's transport sector will benefit. Big warehouses will be built and new job opportunities will be created," he said.

"The BJP makes honest efforts to fulfil every promise it makes. The BJP has been getting huge support in states. The country has given the party the opportunity to serve the country for the third time in a row in Lok Sabha," he said.

He also mentioned the victory of the party in Maharashtra and Haryana assembly elections, and bypolls in Rajasthan.

Talking about women empowerment, he said 10 crore women, including lakhs from Rajasthan, joined Self-Help Groups in the last decade. He also highlighted the government's women-specific programmes such as

the Lakhpati Didi scheme, Namoo Drone Didi Scheme and Bima Sakhi Scheme. The PM encouraged party workers to work towards water conservation and make people aware about it, saying the BJP is not just the biggest political party but a huge social movement.

CM Bhajanlal also addressed the meeting and highlighted the achievements of his government.

Union ministers C R Patil, Bhagirath Chaudhary, Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav, Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari and Prem Chand Bairwa and other leaders were also present in the programme.

Earlier, Modi reached the meeting venue in an open jeep, flanked on his left by the CM and BJP state president Madan Rathore on his right. The vehicle was escorted by a group of women carrying 'Kalash' on head.

# Fundamentalist group finds temple in Muslim majority area of Varanasi

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI

A temple has been discovered in the Muslim-majority Madanpura area of Varanasi. The temple, reportedly locked for the past decade and filled with soil, came to light after a social media post highlighted its existence. Members of a Hindu fundamentalist organisation visited the site and have called for the temple to be reopened.

The group learned about the temple through a social media post that read: "Attention: A Shiva temple lies closed in the lanes of Kashi. This temple is near house number D-31 in Madanpura." Upon visiting the location, the leader of the group found the temple locked, with soil accumulated inside. Local residents were unable to provide clear information about the temple's history or the reasons for its closure.

The group has appealed to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

Yogi Adityanath to intervene and facilitate the reopening of the temple. The organisation is also seeking clarification on who locked the temple and why. In response to the situation, police arrived at the scene to maintain order and persuaded the gathered members to disperse peacefully.

Members of the fundamentalist group, who discovered the existence of the temple via a social media post, now claim that it is mentioned in the Kashi Khand, an ancient text detailing the sacred geography of Varanasi. According to the group, the temple is identified as Siddheshwar, located south of Pushpadanteswar, with a nearby Siddhiteerth well. However, members of the group are clueless about the historical and cultural significance of the temple.

Gaurav Banswal, deputy commissioner of police for the Kashi Zone, stated that while the temple is indeed old and

currently locked, no one has been able to confirm ownership or provide details about its closure. The administration plans to conduct a site inspection to ascertain the facts and determine the appropriate course of action. In the meantime, police presence has been increased in the area as a precautionary measure.

The fundamentalist organisation which claims the temple is ancient, has been active in Varanasi, notably it has been involved in campaigns to remove statues of Sai Baba from temples in Varanasi, asserting that only traditional deities should be worshipped in the city's temples.

The local administration is expected to conduct a thorough inspection of the temple to verify its historical significance and assess the situation. Further actions will be based on the findings of this inspection and directives from higher authorities.

# Opposition walks out of Maharashtra Assembly over custodial death

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Opposition staged a walk out from the State Assembly after Speaker Rahul Narwekar refused to allow an immediate discussion on the recent custodial death of Sonnath Surevanshi at Parbhani and the alleged murder of sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh and slammed the Devendra Fadnavis government for human rights violations and police brutality.

On the second day of the ongoing winter session of State Legislature in Nagpur, several opposition leaders Nana Patole, Vijay Wadettiwar, Nitin Raut (all from Congress) and Sandeep Kshirsagar (Sharad Pawar-led NCP) expressed serious concern over the manner in which a Dalit youth died in police custody and the killing of a sarpanch in Beed district and demanded an immediate discussion on the issue.

Soon after the proceedings began in the House, Nana Patole raised the twin issues of custodial death of a Dalit youth in Parbhani and the killing of a sarpanch in Beed district, and asked the Speaker to suspend all the other work and hold discussion on the issue.

Opposition Members like Wadettiwar, Nitin Raut and Sandeep Kshirsagar joined Patole in his clamour for immediate discussion on the twin issues.

However, the Speaker declined to allow a discussion on the issue on Tuesday on the ground that it had already been decided to have a discussion under rule 101 on Wednesday considering the seriousness of the incident.

However, the Opposition members were not

happy with the Speaker's refused to allow immediate discussion on the issue. They walked out from the House in protest.

The gravity of the issue could be gauged from the fact even Namita Mundada, a ruling BJP MLA from Kej in Beed district also shared the Opposition's concern over the murder of a sarpanch from her Assembly constituency, contending that the incident had caused considerable anger among the people of the village where the murder had taken place in broad day-light.

She urged Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to take immediate action for the arrest of the accused behind the murder.

After walking out from the Assembly, the Opposition members staged a protest on the State Legislature premises.

Talking to media persons outside the House, Wadettiwar came down heavily on the Speaker for trying to silence the Opposition in the House.

"Despite our repeated pleas for a discussion on the issue, the Speaker refused to let us speak. This is a clear-cut attempt to stifle the voice of dissent from the Opposition and help the government to forsake accountability for its failures," he said.

Condemning the custodial death in Parbhani and killing of a sarpanch in Beed district, Raut said: "No one who has true faith in the Constitution can allow such police brutality and murder of a sarpanch. During Parbhani disturbances, innocent citizens, including children, were detained, beaten, and one of the arrested persons died in police custody. This exposes the government's failure to protect citizens"

# Yogi criticises Priyanka's bag contrasts with Indian labour in Israel

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath took a swipe at Congress leader and Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during the Winter Session of the state Assembly, criticising her for carrying a bag with Palestine written on it. He contrasted her action with the State government's efforts to send skilled youth from Uttar Pradesh to Israel for work.

"Yesterday, a Congress leader was seen roaming around with a Palestine bag, while we are sending the youth of Uttar Pradesh to Israel," CM Yogi remarked. He highlighted that over 5,600 youths from the state have gone to Israel for construction work, earning a monthly salary of Rs 1.5 Lakh along with free accommodation and food. He added that the Israeli ambassador had praised the skills of UP's youth and expressed interest in hiring more workers from the state.

The CM underscored the government's commitment to skill development, stating that more than 12 lakh youths in Uttar Pradesh have been trained under various programs.

The controversy erupted after Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was seen in Parliament on Monday carrying the bag. Responding to the criticism, she dismissed the remarks as patriarchal. "Who is going to decide what clothes I wear now? That's typical patriarchy. I will wear what I want," she told reporters.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) criticism gained traction as leaders such as Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Sharma accused the Gandhi family of promoting foreign thinking. Union Minister of State Banwari Lal Verma added, "Priyanka Gandhi came with a Palestine bag, she should carry an India bag instead."

Meanwhile, opposition leaders have rallied behind Priyanka Gandhi, defending her against what they termed an unnecessary controversy fueled by political motives.

# TMC leader highlights condition of Muslims in West Bengal, calls for qualitative development

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA and a former IPS officer Humayun Kabir has said that the condition of the Muslims particularly in West Bengal was worse than even the members of Scheduled Castes.

"I'm not a votary of quantitative growth. Rather, I favour qualitative development of Muslims. I think the condition of the Muslims particularly those in Bengal is not as it should have been. You have to visit their areas and look at the condition they live in to realise

their plight," said Kabir, a former deputy inspector general of the West Bengal Police, who joined the TMC ahead of the 2021 Assembly elections.

His statements come just amid a raging controversy over senior TMC minister and Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim's recent controversial remarks.

When asked to comment on Hakim's remarks Kabir said, "It is the qualitative development and not quantitative growth that matters. A family comprising the parents and two children can sustain in a better manner than a family with five children. But in any case the family has to have the wherewithal and the education to sustain itself. I don't dishonor what a rickshawalla or for that matter a vegetable vendor does but for me the large majority of Muslims can have better qualitative life if they have access to education and economic resources, which is not the case at present. So, I think the craving should be for a qualitative development rather than quantitative growth."

Kabir's statements could have

impact on the party's Muslim vote base which has been Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's electoral mainstay, worried insiders said.

On Kabir's anguish over the 'below par' quality of life that the Muslims of West Bengal led senior TMC leader Kunal Ghosh -- who had to clean a lot of mess left by Hakim a day before -- on Tuesday offered explanations comparing the condition of the life led by the Muslims in the past and the one they lead at present. Their lives had improved quite a bit from what it used to be even a decade ago, he said.



President Droupadi Murmu with a recipient during the first convocation of AIIMS Mangalagiri. PTI

# President highlights women's role in medicine at AIIMS convocation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AMARAVATI

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said the rising participation of women in the medical profession and their significant contributions demonstrate that India is becoming a truly developed society. Addressing the first convocation of AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) at Mangalagiri near here, she said relentless promotion of holistic health and ensuring health for all should be the guiding principle of every medical professional of this institute.

"The rising participation of women in the medical profession and their significant contributions demonstrate that we are becoming a truly developed society. This also highlighted the fact that given

opportunity, our daughters excel in every field," the President said.

The government has taken up several schemes, including Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme and made treatment accessible for those facing difficulties in accessing treatment, she said.

Along with the government, it is also the responsibility of a conscious society to ensure that no one should be left out of medical services due to financial or other reasons, Murmu stressed.

The President said Indian doctors, based on their talent and hard work, are in the forefront in the developed nations. She said people from other countries come to India to avail healthcare services.

India is developing into an important centre in affordable medical tourism on the world map, she said, adding doctors of the country play an important role in this regard.

She called upon young doctors to give priority to providing medical care and services to people living in rural, tribal and remote areas. Yogasan and Pranayam have also been accepted from the modern point of view in the context of holistic health care, she noted.

Andhra Pradesh Governor S Abdul Nazeer, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, Union Minister of State for Ayush (Independent Charge) Prataprao Jadhav, Andhra Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav and other dignitaries were present.

The foundation for AIIMS-Mangalagiri was laid in 2015 and the first batch of MBBS students were inducted on August 30, 2018, which passed out today.

# Protests in Kerala over man's death in wild elephant attack, locals demand action

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOCHI

Kuttampuzha, a forest-fringe village here, witnessed a protest by local people over the death of a man who was trampled to death by a wild elephant.

The deceased man, Eldose (40), a native of Knachery here, met with the tragic end on Monday night while he was walking home after reaching the area by a KSRTC bus in Urulanthanni in Kuttampuzha panchayat.

His disfigured body was later found by a local man. Local people said Eldose was a bachelor and the only

breadwinner of his family, comprising aged parents and a sister.

Angry villagers staged a protest in the area for hours on Monday night alleging the forest officials' lack of effective interventions to address the human-animal conflict.

They did not even allow the authorities to shift Eldose's body from the place till the wee hours of Tuesday, demanding adequate compensation to his family and a permanent solution to the increasing human-animal conflict.

District Collector Umesh and people's

representatives also had to face the heat of the villagers' protest. At one point, the Collector even had to request the angry people with folded hands to allow the shifting of the body to the hospital.

He later assured a compensation of Rs 10 lakh to the deceased man's family and announced a review meeting on December 27 to address various matters in this regard.

Meanwhile, forest officials began the digging of a trench to prevent wild animals from entering the village.

The post-mortem procedures of Eldose were completed on Tuesday morning, and the

body was kept at his house for the public to pay their homage.

A people's hartal was also organised in Kothamangalam and Kuttampuzha over the incident.

Both the state government and the opposition UDF described the death of the man as "unfortunate".

While Kerala Forest Minister A K Saseendran said the protest staged by local people could not be considered as unjustified, Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan said the human-animal conflict has been increasing in forest fringe areas of the state.

# BJP seeks clarity from BJD over MP's questions to President Murmu over Manipur, Sambhal, Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's ruling BJP on Tuesday sought a reply from BJD president Naveen Patnaik on his party MP Sulata Deo's statement in Rajya Sabha "targeting" President Droupadi Murmu.

Deo, while participating in the discussion on the 'Glorious journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India' in the Rajya Sabha on Monday had "targeted" Murmu, who hails from Odisha, BJP Odisha spokesperson Anil Biswal said.

"Honourable President is a daughter of Odisha. She has expressed her anguish over the Kar rape case. But why is she silent on Manipur which is on boil for over the last one-and-a-half years? Why is she silent on Sambhal? There have been 1,250 rapes in Odisha in the last six



BJD MP Sulata Deo questioned the President's silence over Manipur, Sambhal and rapes in Odisha. PTI

months. Where is the President? When will she break her silence? Is this what our Constitution teaches us?" Deo had said.

Reacting to Deo's statement in the Upper House of the Parliament, Biswal in a post

on X said: "The manner in which a BJD Rajya Sabha MP dragged President Droupadi Murmu into petty politics, is not acceptable. She is the pride of Odisha. But, the RS MP's statement has hurt the people of Odisha."

"The question arises whether this is the personal opinion of the concerned Rajya Sabha MP or does BJD chief Naveen Babu also agree with this opinion? If there is no consensus, then why is Naveen Babu silent?" Biswal asked.

Biswal also alleged that when the BJD was in power in the state, it had "insulted" the President by causing power cuts during her programmes. "Now, there is an attempt to insult her in the Rajya Sabha. This is not the ideal sign of a political party," the BJP spokesperson said.





## FIRST COLUMN

### REDISCOVER HAPPINESS

Happiness is a state of mind that transcends life's adversities



RAVI VALLURI

A couple first met in an estimable business school in India where they were conferred reputable degrees in management. The couple soon migrated to the land of El Dorado in search of greener pastures, seeking professional and economic security. They were a happy couple as the angels showered gargantuan benediction. Soon, a new dimension to their lives arrived in the form of angelic twins. When the twins turned six months old, it was time to visit the hometown of their parents. They were received by sentimental and misty-eyed grandparents.

The sojourn concluded the mother and twins were afloat on a flight back to their home. However, fate had other plans and a double whammy struck the family. The father never reached the airport as he was killed in a car crash on the way to the airport. The disconsolate woman became a mental wreck, her moments of happiness fastened only in her memory bank and the picture album. The alluring woman was transfigured into stone. A cousin empathised with her distraught mental state and robustly suggested that she undertake the Happiness Course of the Art of Living. After considerable blandishment and extensive persuasion, she enrolled for the course and deposited all her emotions and feelings while undergoing the unique rhythmic breathing technique of Sudarshan Kriya. Life need not be tragic if only we realise that happiness is a state of mind that can



be achieved independent of material success.

As per ancient Japanese mythology, the light from Tsukuyomi, the Shinto God of the moon could induce illusions and delusions. Hecate, the Greek Goddess of the dark moon bestowed visions, but also caused humans to be afflicted with insanity. The human body is made up of seventy per cent of water elements. Full moon water recharges the body, mind and spirit and bestows harmony on our thought processes. Therefore, practising the Full Moon Meditation has a consequential and noteworthy influence on the mind, whereby one is suffused with efficacious thoughts and purges nugatory ones. It was a cathartic experience for the young single mother to emerge from her traumatic experience by unflinchingly practising this technique. It is an established fact that the Sakyan prince, Siddhartha, upon attaining enlightenment on the full moon day metamorphosed into the Compassionate One, Gautama Buddha and made a prescient statement, "Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared." How does one define an efficacious emotion called happiness? Happiness is a state of well-being, jollity, blitheness and primarily to be contented in life. The amphitheatre of the mind is a veritable nuclear reactor, where waves of thoughts and emotions arise and subside. These in turn determine our happiness quotient and consequentially the quality of our lives.

There once lived a farmer, who grew apples. He perpetually grumbled that there was not adequate produce to sustain the family. Providentially, there was a spurt in production and apples grew in plenitude. Still dissatisfied, the farmer cavilled that he was now laden with gruelling work, apples were rotting and prices now plunged! Sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras has postulated certain cardinal principles to live harmoniously, encompassed in happiness. These are non-violence, truthfulness, no regrets, not accepting invectives or salutations hurled by people, physical cleanliness of the body, inner contentment, forbearance or penance, self-study or examination of the mind and development and finally love and surrender to the supreme cosmic force.

*(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)*

## Pesticides are poisoning the Punjab soil



AS MITTAL

Punjab's agriculture is facing a harrowing reality—its lifeblood, the soil, is being contaminated by toxic pesticide residues at alarmingly high levels



It's time to face the disturbing truth about Punjab's agriculture—and it's a nightmare. In districts like Bathinda, Mansa, and Ludhiana, up to 60 per cent of farm soil samples are infested with toxic pesticide residues—including the deadly chemicals endosulfan and carbofuran—at levels far beyond what's even remotely safe. This isn't just a warning; it's a full-blown crisis, a ticking time bomb, the result of irresponsible, reckless pesticide and fertiliser abuse running rampant in our fields. On World Soil Day—December 5th—we're forced to confront the cold reality of a rapidly disintegrating agriculture system, while the world's been talking about "Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, and Manage"! The consequences of this madness are devastating. Our once fertile land is transforming into a barren wasteland, and that's only the beginning. These toxic chemicals aren't just staying in the soil. They're seeping into our food chain—contaminating every bite we take and slowly poisoning us all. But it doesn't stop there. These toxic residues are embedding themselves into our very DNA, passing down a legacy of genetic mutations to our children and grandchildren.

We are breeding a future full of compromised health and genetic decay. This is a catastrophe that will echo across generations. We're not just destroying our present health; we're condemning our children to inherit the consequences of our stupidity and greed. The survival of future generations is at risk, and the clock is ticking—every moment of inaction is a moment closer to irreversible genetic damage. It's time to wake up, stop burying our heads in the sand, and confront this crisis head-on before it's too late for the survival of future generations.

**The Pesticide Management Bill, 2020:** India's regulatory framework for pesticides, established in 1968, is woefully outdated and incapable of addressing the modern-day challenges posed by the rampant overuse of agrochemicals. Although efforts to amend this framework have been ongoing since 2008, significant gaps remain in safeguarding farmers, consumers, and the environment. The legislation—still governed by the Insecticides Act of 1968 and the Insecticides Rules of 1971—requires comprehensive reforms to address the multifaceted risks associated with pesticide overuse. The Pesticide



**INDIA'S REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR PESTICIDES, ESTABLISHED IN 1968, IS WOEFULLY OUTDATED AND INCAPABLE OF ADDRESSING THE MODERN-DAY CHALLENGES POSED BY THE RAMPANT OVERUSE OF AGROCHEMICALS**

Management Bill (PMB) 2020 was introduced to replace outdated legislation, but critical concerns must be addressed. While the bill outlines pesticide registration and licensing procedures, it must protect farmers more adequately from hazardous exposure. Statistics from Pesticide Action Network (PAN) International paint a grim picture: approximately 11,000 deaths globally are attributed to accidental pesticide poisoning annually, with India accounting for a staggering 6,600 fatalities. These numbers highlight critical deficiencies in pesticide usage protocols and safety measures.

Farmers and rural communities often bear the brunt of chemical exposures, especially in agriculturally intensive regions. For instance, Punjab, which heavily depends on rice and wheat cultivation, reports alarming pesticide consumption rates. With an average usage of 77 kg/hectare, significantly above the national average of 62 kg/hectare, Punjab ranks third in India after UP and Maharashtra for pesticide consumption. A study by the Central Soil Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI) revealed that 6.74 million hectares of land in India are affected by salinity, a condition exacerbated by the overuse of agrochemicals. Persistent pesticide application has been found to reduce microbial biomass by 30-50 per cent, compromising soil fertility and diminishing the land's ability to provide essential nutrients to crops.

**A Call for Robust Regulation:** Pesticides—insecticides, fungicides, or herbicides—play a vital role in modern agriculture. However, their toxic nature necessitates stringent oversight throughout their lifecycle, from production to disposal. The current regulatory framework lacks provisions for periodic review of registered pesticides based on emerging toxicological data. This oversight exposes the public to significant health risks, particularly in a country where improper handling of pesticides is widespread.

**Training and Awareness:** A Neglected Imperative Over the past three decades, the indiscriminate use of pesticides has surged, often driven by aggressive marketing strategies that portray chemical inputs as indispensable for high crop yields.

The limited scale of training initiatives highlights the need for more current efforts. Between 1994-95 and 2021-22, the Plant Protection Department of Agriculture and Farming Welfare Ministry trained only 585,000 farmers in Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a dismal figure in a nation with over 150 million farmers. According to the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management, governments and industry stakeholders must provide comprehensive training and information to farmers and retailers. Yet, the implementation of these guidelines still needs to be more robust. Retailers often serve as farmers' sole point of contact, and in many cases, they disseminate misleading or incomplete information. Data Collection: Bridging Critical Gaps

The absence of robust data collection mechanisms further undermines India's regulatory ecosystem. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) documents pesticide poisoning deaths only if they are registered as medico-legal cases, excluding countless instances of non-institutional exposure and chronic health effects. This data void impedes effective policymaking and perpetuates a lack of accountability among stakeholders.

**Addressing Weak Grievance Mechanisms:** One of the most glaring deficiencies in India's pesticide regulation is the lack of accessible grievance redressal systems. Farmers and agricultural workers exposed to pesticides face prohibitive costs and lengthy procedures when seeking justice. Meanwhile, state governments can impose only temporary bans on hazardous pesticides, typically lasting 60 days, exposing vulnerable communities to ongoing risks.

**Personal Protective Equipment:** A

Forgotten Necessity The Pesticide Management Bill 2020 neglects the safety of small-scale farmers, who often lack access to affordable, climate-appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Farm workers face heightened health risks without mandatory provisions requiring them to supply adequate protective gear, especially in hot and humid agricultural regions. Labelling and Consumer Protection India's pesticide labelling standards fall short of both domestic and international norms. Safety information is frequently crammed into illegible leaflets, leaving farmers ill-informed about risks and proper usage.

Although the Consumer Protection Act theoretically covers farmers, legal recourse against manufacturers for misleading labels or substandard products is rarely pursued. The Way Forward India can no longer afford to ignore the human and environmental toll of unsafe pesticide practices. Establishing a robust, farmer-centric legal framework aligned with international standards is the only way forward to ensure safe and sustainable agriculture. A gradual shift towards agro-ecological farming methods that emphasise non-chemical pest management is imperative. The government must phase out hazardous pesticides and promote environmentally friendly alternatives to safeguard farmers' health and ensure consumer food safety. Addressing the gaps in the Pesticide Management Bill 2020 and adopting proactive measures, such as mandatory training and the provision of accurate information on pesticide usage and risks, are critical steps towards securing safe and healthier future generations.

*(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association. Views expressed are personal)*

## India@2024: A resilient economy on the fast track to growth

But challenges such as persistent inflation, a slowdown in the banking sector and environmental concerns continue to pose hurdles

India has firmly established itself as the fastest-growing economy among the G20 nations, with a projected GDP growth rate of 6.5 per cent-7 per cent for the fiscal year 2024-25. This remarkable trajectory underscores the nation's economic resilience and immense potential despite global challenges. The year 2024 presents a vivid picture of India's economic landscape, marked by notable achievements and emerging challenges.



KAJLEEN KAUR

One of the most significant indicators of progress is the substantial improvement in employment. The unemployment rate has decreased from 6 per cent in 2017 to an impressive 3.2 per cent in 2024, reflecting robust job creation across sectors. Foreign

direct investment (FDI) has also shown a dramatic surge, rising 45 per cent year-on-year to USD 29.79 billion in the first half of 2024-25, with key inflows in services, telecom, and pharmaceuticals. Complementing this momentum, India's foreign exchange reserves swelled to \$704.89 bil-

lion, driven by an \$87.6 billion increase this year alone. This growth includes a \$10.468 billion boost in foreign currency assets and a \$2 billion rise in gold reserves, which now stand at \$65.7 billion.

India's fintech sector continues to shine on the global stage, ranking as the third-largest fintech economy after the USA and the UK. The country also boasts the fourth-largest stock market in the world, with a market capitalisation of \$4.33 trillion, surpassing Hong Kong. A significant milestone in digital payments was achieved with the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which saw transaction values soar to an astounding Rs 200 trillion in 2024, compared to Rs 139 trillion in the previous year. India even showcased its

UPI prowess on a global stage, introducing the system at the Eiffel Tower in Paris as part of a digital payments agreement with France.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue collection also reached unprecedented levels, hitting Rs 2.10 lakh crore—a substantial 12.4 per cent increase from the previous year. This growth was driven by a robust 13.4 per cent rise in domestic transactions and an 8.3 per cent increase in imports, showcasing the strength of India's tax infrastructure.

Amid these promising figures, certain challenges continue to loom. Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), remains persistently high, exceeding 5 per cent. The banking sector has



witnessed a slowdown, with credit growth declining to 11 per cent in November 2024 from 20.6 per cent the previous year. Deposit growth also moderated, with banks adding Rs 13.8 lakh crore in deposits between April and November, compared to Rs 16.1 lakh crore during the same period

last year. In response, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4 per cent in December to improve liquidity and stimulate credit growth.

Qualitative indicators present a mixed picture. India climbed 14 ranks on the UNDP

Gender Inequality Index, highlighting significant strides in bridging the gender gap. It also improved its position on the Global Innovation Index, rising from 40th to 39th among 133 global economies, driven by entrepreneurial activity, vibrant startups, and successful public-private partnerships. The Human Development Report 2023-24 placed India at 134th among 193 countries, reflecting gains in life expectancy, education, and Gross National Income. However, no progress was seen in the Happiness Index, where India remains at 126th, largely due to dissatisfaction among older citizens, perceived discrimination, and poor health metrics. Moreover, India continues to struggle in environmental performance,

ranking 176th out of 180 countries. Challenges such as air quality, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions demand urgent attention. As India navigates these complexities, it is also undergoing key transitions. The US economy has entered a new phase, and India sees a shift in RBI leadership, with Sanjay Malhotra taking over as the 26th Governor after Shaktikanta Das's tenure. While the final assessment of FY2024-25 remains pending, India's growth story offers optimism for a brighter future and a strong foundation for the vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'. *(The writer is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi. Views expressed are personal)*

# Russian general killed by bomb in Moscow

AP ■ MOSCOW

A senior Russian general was killed Tuesday by a bomb hidden in a scooter outside his apartment building in Moscow, a day after Ukraine's security service levelled criminal charges against him. A Ukrainian official said the service carried out the attack.

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack.

Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons.

An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war

criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the US State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops.

Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat. Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda.

The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork.

Russia's top state investigative agency said it's investigating Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, described the attack as an attempt by Kyiv to distract public attention away from its military failures and vowed that its "senior military-political leadership will face inevitable retribution."

Over the past year, Russia has been on the front foot in the war in Ukraine, grinding deeper into the eastern region of Donetsk despite heavy losses. Ukraine tried to change the dynamic with an incursion into Russia's Kursk region, but it has continued to slowly lose ground on its own territory. Since Russia invaded, several prominent figures have been killed in targeted attacks believed to have been carried out by Ukraine.

Darya Dugina, a commentator on Russian TV channels and the daughter of Kremlin-linked nationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin, died in a



Investigators work at the place where Lt. General Igor Kirillov, the head of Russia's Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defence Forces and his assistant were killed by an explosive device planted close to a residential apartment's block in Moscow on Tuesday

AP/PTI

2022 car bombing that investigators suspected was aimed at her father.

Vladlen Tatarsky, a popular military blogger, died in April 2023, when a statuette given to him at a party in St. Petersburg exploded. A Russian woman, who said she presented the figurine on orders of a contact in Ukraine, was convicted in the case and handed a 27-year sentence.

In December 2023, Illia Kiva, a former pro-Moscow Ukrainian lawmaker who fled to Russia, was shot and killed near Moscow. The Ukrainian military intelligence lauded the killing, warning that other "traitors of Ukraine" would share the same fate.

On December 9, an explosive device was placed under a car in the Russian-occupied Ukrainian city of Donetsk, reportedly targeting Sergei Yevsyukov, the former head of the Olenivka Prison where dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war died in a missile strike in July 2022. One other was injured in the blast. Russian authorities said they detained a suspect in the attack.

# Bangladesh official belittles India's role in 1971 Liberation War

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh interim government's Law Adviser Asif Nazrul has criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's post on X commemorating Victory Day saying, "India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more."

Victory Day or "Bijoy Dibosh" is commemorated every year on December 16 when the Pakistan military surrendered to Indian forces in 1971, bringing about the liberation of Bangladesh.

Nazrul's comment was reposted by the office of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

A screenshot of Modi's post that paid tribute to Indian soldiers for their role in the historic victory in 1971, Nazrul wrote on Facebook in Bengali on Monday, "I strongly protest. December 16, 1971, marks Bangladesh's Victory

Day. India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more."

Yunus' Press Secretary Shaiful Alam shared Nazrul's post. The Daily Star newspaper reported on Tuesday.

Anti-Discrimination Student Movement Convener Hasnat Abdullah also criticised Modi's post.

Abdullah wrote on Facebook that this was Bangladesh's Liberation War and it was for the country's independence against Pakistan. He said Modi has claimed it was solely India's war and their achievement, disregarding Bangladesh's existence in their narrative.

"When India claims this independence as their achievement, I see this as a threat to our independence, sovereignty and oneness. It's necessary for us to fight against this threat by India. We need to carry on this fight," he wrote. Modi, in a post on X, had said,

"Today, on Vijay Diwas, we honour the courage and sacrifices of the brave soldiers who contributed to India's historic victory in 1971. Their selfless dedication and unwavering resolve safeguarded our nation and brought glory to us."

"This day is a tribute to their extraordinary valour and their unshakable spirit. Their sacrifices will forever inspire generations and remain deeply embedded in our nation's history."

Chief Adviser Yunus led Bangladesh Monday in marking the 54th Victory Day, his speech making no mention of founding leader Mujibur Rahman while calling deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's administration the "world's worst autocratic government". Rahman's daughter Hasina was ousted from power on August 5 after massive student-led protests against her Awami

League government.

There was also no mention of India's role in Yunus' address to the Nation on Bijoy Dibosh.

India commemorates December 16 as Vijay Diwas when over 90,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered before the Indian Army, leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

India had also backed Bengali guerrillas in the fight against Pakistan Army after West Pakistan's leadership refused to acknowledge the 1970 election victory of Mujibur Rahman's Awami League. President Droupadi Murmu and several Indian political leaders too had paid homage Monday to the heroes of the 1971 war.

"A grateful nation remembers the ultimate sacrifice of our brave-hearted whose stories inspire every Indian and shall remain a source of national pride," Murmu said on X.

# Trump says it was 'stupid' for Biden to let Ukraine use US weapons to strike deeper into Russia

AP ■ PALM BEACH

President-elect Donald Trump on Monday suggested that he may reverse President Joe Biden's recent decision to allow Ukrainian forces to use American long-range weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory. Trump called the decision made by Biden last month "stupid." He also expressed anger that his incoming administration was not consulted before Biden made the move. With the loosening of the restrictions, Biden gave Ukraine long-sought permission to use the Army Tactical Missile System provided by the US to strike Russian positions hundreds miles from its border.

"I don't think that should have been allowed, not when there's a possibility — certainly not just weeks before I take over," Trump said during

at a wide-ranging news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort. "Why would they do that without asking me what I thought? I wouldn't have had him do that. I think it was a big mistake."

Trump's withering criticism of the Biden administration's move comes as the Democratic administration aims to push every last dollar already designated for Ukraine out the door to help repel Russia's invasion before Trump takes office on Jan. 20, with future aid uncertain. But even as Biden tries to surge weaponry and other aid to Ukraine in his final five weeks in office, the moment underscored that it's Trump who holds the most significant influence over how Ukraine can use its US-provided arsenal in the long run. It's a critical piece of leverage he could use to try to follow through on his campaign pledge to bring

about a swift end to the conflict.

Asked if he would consider reversing the Biden administration decision, Trump responded: "I might. I think it was a very stupid thing to do."

The White House pushed back on Trump's criticism, noting that the decision was made after months of deliberations that started before last month's election. "All I can assure you is that in the conversations we've had with them since the election, and we've had at various levels, we have articulated to them the logic behind it, the thinking behind it, why we were doing it," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said of the current administration's coordination with the outgoing administration. Trump's relationship with Russian leader Vladimir Putin has been scrutinised since his

2016 campaign for president, when he called on Russia to find and make public missing emails deleted by Hillary Clinton, his Democratic opponent. Trump publicly sided with Putin over US intelligence officials on whether Russia had interfered in the 2016 election to help him, and Trump has praised the Russian leader and even called him "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine.

Vice President-elect JD Vance has said that while the US has differences with Russia, it was counterproductive to approach Moscow as an enemy.

Trump on Monday reiterated his call on both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate an end to the war, calling the death and despair caused by the conflict "car-nage."

# Australian state proposes ban on protests at places of worship

AP ■ MELBOURNE

An Australian state government on Tuesday proposed new restrictions on protesters in response to rising anti-semitism, including a ban on demonstrations outside places of worship.

Victoria Premier Jacinta Allan proposed the new laws after arsonists damaged a Melbourne synagogue this month and protesters kept fearful worshippers trapped inside a Sydney synagogue for three hours a week earlier.

"That's not peaceful protest. It's menacing behaviour," Allan said.

"Antisemitism is a cancer and we must leave no stone unturned to fight the evil of antisemitism, to fight the evil of this racism in all of its forms and also to continue to work to help heal our multicultural community, to help build on that social cohesion and continue to support our strong, united Victoria," she added. The new laws would protect the

right of people to "gather and pray free from fear, harassment and intimidation," her office said in a statement.

The proposed laws, which will be voted on by the state legislature early next year, would establish safe access areas around places of worship and prohibit disturbances of religious gatherings.

The laws would also ban protesters flying flags and displaying symbols of groups listed by Australia as terrorist organisations. Face masks used by protesters to conceal their identities and protect against capicum spray would also be banned.

Anti-Defamation Commission chair Dvir Abramovich, a leading opponent of antisemitism in Australia, welcomed the proposed law.

"Today, the Victorian government has declared war on hate and antisemitism — and it's about time," Abramovich said in a statement.

"Victoria has drawn a line in the sand and sent a thunderous

message to the hate-mongers, the graffiti cowards, the fire-bombers, and the social media trolls: Your days of terrorising our communities are over," he added.

The arson attack on Adass Israel Synagogue on December 6 marked an escalation in targeted assaults in Australia since the war between Israel and the militant Hamas group started over a year ago in the Gaza Strip. Authorities have declared it a terrorist act, which increases resources available to investigators.

A federal law passed in January banned the Nazi salute and the public display of Nazi symbols in response to growing antisemitism, and the government appointed special envoys this year to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Australia is an increasingly multicultural society. The latest census in 2021 found that Australians born overseas or with a parent born overseas formed a majority for the first time.

# China executes official involved in country's largest corruption case

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Tuesday executed Li Jianping, a former official in the north Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, who was convicted in the largest-ever corruption case in the country totalling to over USD 421 million.

The death sentence of Li, former secretary of the ruling Communist Party working committee of the Hohhot economic and technological development zone, was initially issued in September 2022 and upheld on appeal in August 2024.

Tuesday's execution followed the approval of the Supreme People's Court and was carried out by a court in Inner Mongolia, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Li, 64 was found guilty by an intermediate court earlier of embezzling a staggering three billion yuan (over USD 421 million) in illegal gains — the largest sum involved in a single corruption case in China's history, according to earlier reports in the Chinese official media. Since he came to power in 2012, Chinese President Xi Jinping made the anti-corruption campaign the main plank of his governance model.

Official media accounts say over a million party officials, including two defence ministers and dozens of military officials, were punished and prosecuted in the campaign.

In his speech delivered at the plenary session of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) in January this year, contents of which were released for the first time on Sunday by party theoretical magazine Qishu, 71-year-old Xi has called on cadres to confront corruption head-on so that interest groups cannot prey on the ruling Communist Party.

# Pope reveals apparent bombing plot during his 2021 visit to Iraq

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis turned 88 on Tuesday and marked the occasion with revelations that he almost didn't make it. According to excerpts of his upcoming autobiography, suicide bombers had planned to attack him during his 2021 visit to Iraq, but were killed before striking.

Italian daily Corriere della Sera on Tuesday ran excerpts of "Hope: The Autobiography," written with Italian author Carlo Musso, which is being released in more than 80 countries next month. The New York Times ran other excerpts Tuesday, Francis' 88th birthday.

In the Italian excerpts, Francis recalled his historic March 2021 trip to Iraq, the first ever by a pope. COVID-19 was still raging and security concerns were high, especially in Mosul. The devastated northern city had been the headquarters of Islamic State militants, whose horrific reign had largely emptied the region of its Christian



communities.

According to the book, British intelligence informed Iraqi police as soon as Francis arrived in Baghdad that a woman wearing explosives was heading toward Mosul and was planning to blow herself up during the papal visit. "And that a truck was heading there fast with the same intention," Francis says in the book. The visit went ahead as planned, albeit under tight security, and became one of the most poignant of all of Francis' foreign trips: Standing in the wreckage of a Mosul church,

Francis urged Iraq's Christians to forgive the injustices against them by Muslim extremists and to rebuild.

In the book, Francis said he later asked his Vatican security detail what became of the suicide bombers.

"The commander replied laconically They're no longer here," Francis writes. "Iraqi police had intercepted them and made them explode. This struck me as well: Even this is the poisonous fruit of war."

The book, originally planned to be published after Francis' death, is coming out at the start of the Vatican's big Holy Year, which Francis will officially inaugurate on Christmas Eve.

According to Italian publisher Mondadori, "Hope" is the first autobiography ever published by a pope. Francis, however, has published other first-person, memoir-style books or book-length interviews with biographers and journalists, including "Life: My Story Through History," published earlier this year.

# Grassroots funding for Ukraine's military declines as groups looks for creative ways to raise money

AP ■ KYIV

The concert took place in an old movie studio in Kyiv, the location kept secret until the final moment in case it was the target of a Russian attack. More than 1,000 soldiers and young people gathered to listen to the artists who joined forces with a military brigade in an innovative effort to raise funds for Ukraine's embattled troops. This was the first and only live performance of the charity album "Epoch," a collaboration between the 3rd Assault Brigade and eight Ukrainian bands.

The project's ambitious target is to raise 50 million hryvnias (about USD 1.2 million) to buy an M113 armoured personnel carrier to help get infantry to

the front and evacuate the wounded for medical treatment. Since it launched on streaming platforms a month ago, the initiative has raised 9 million hryvnias (around USD 214,000).

Grassroots fundraising for Ukrainian fighters dates back to 2014, the year Russia first annexed the southern region of Crimea and Moscow-backed separatists launched an uprising in eastern Ukraine. At that time, Ukraine's defence was made up of a regular army supported by volunteer battalions who weren't financially supported by Kyiv's government. Self-funding was critical.

Now, advertisements pasted along the sidewalk in Kyiv ask for donations to help fill financial gaps across the military. By

scanning a QR code, people can help buy anything from body warmers and drones to armoured cars for soldiers defending the nearly 1,000-kilometre front line.

But some charities are seeing a decline in individual donations in part because of the economic situation in the country. Oleksandr Borodyn, one of the project's organisers, says the idea for the collaboration came from the challenge of continuing to drum up funds to support troops as the war is on the cusp of marking a three-year milestone.

"To raise the same amount of money as at the beginning of the war, you need much more effort. That's why we came up with the idea that a musician could donate his or her art, and

that art would earn money for the army," said Borodyn, a press officer for the 3rd Assault Brigade. The initiative comes as US President Joe Biden is rushing out billions of dollars more in military aid before Washington's support for Kyiv's defences is thrown into question when Donald Trump takes office next month.

Monobank, one of the largest platforms to process donations, says that in the first 1,000 days of war, nearly 10.5 million unique users made donations totalling around 77 billion hryvnias (about USD 1.8 billion) to various fundraising organisations.

But some charity groups are finding that voluntary funding isn't what it was in the first year of the full-scale invasion. The

Come Back Alive foundation supports troops with anything from military training to buying drones and electronic warfare to repel attacks. In the first year of the conflict, they raised more than 5.7 billion hryvnias (USD 184 million). So far in 2024, the figure is nearly 3.6 billion hryvnias (USD 89 million). "Many people report a worsening financial situation, which limits their ability to contribute to supporting the military," said Oleh Karpenko, deputy director of the Come Back Alive Foundation.

Three years of war has had a devastating impact on Ukraine's economy. According to a World Bank report released in May, the number of Ukrainians living in poverty has grown by 1.8 million since

2020 to about 9 million, or 29 per cent of the population.

To help the most vulnerable, the government launched a winter support programme at the beginning of December and within days, around 6.5 million people had applied to receive the one off 1,000 hryvnia (USD 24) payment to help cover utilities, medical services and cell-phone costs.

According to Karpenko, local initiatives and smaller-scale fundraising efforts mean many people direct their contributions toward helping specific soldiers or military units they know personally. That reduces the amount received by larger organisations, which he says can promptly address urgent battlefield needs that the government can't meet.

"International support also plays a significant role in donation levels," Karpenko said.

"When aid from international partners decreases, it strongly demotivates Ukrainian society. People lose motivation to donate when they perceive a lack of willingness from partners to actively supply weapons." Staring up at the large monitors set up on either side of the stage in the form of the three diagonal line symbol of the 3rd Assault Brigade, 26-year-old Oksana Kalenchenko thinks that events like the concert are hugely important in continuing to generate support.

"It's a reminder to somebody that there is a war going on in Ukraine, let's keep donating, let's keep doing everything we can," Kalenchenko said.

The collaboration album features young artists from Ukraine's rock, rap and alternative scene, and many of the lyrics reflect events and the reality of living through the conflict.

"We want to show the reflection of contemporary artists to the situation in Ukraine, and in general to Ukraine at war ... That's why the project is called Epoch, because it is a transmission of the era we are living in," Borodyn said.

What also unites all the songs is language. Since the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, Ukrainian music has experienced somewhat of a revival with many artists shunning the traditional Russian pop scene that dominated the post-Soviet era.



Political strife erupts over South Korean court as it is set to determine fate of impeached Yoon

South Korea's acting leader vowed Tuesday to convey to the world that things are back to normal following parliament's impeachment of conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, but rival parties began squabbling over the mechanics of a court ruling to determine whether to formally unseat or reinstate him.

Yoon's impeachment is required to throw him out of office for good. Three of the court's nine justices are directly appointed by the president. Three others are nominated by the Supreme Court head and another three by the National Assembly, and their formal appointments by the president has widely been a formality.

chances to return to office, as it would only require a single justice rejecting the parliament impeachment. They note Cheong Hyungsik, one of the six justices, is a clear conservative who was directly appointed by Yoon.

Yoon faces allegations of rebellion and abuse of power over his martial law introduction. Investigative authorities want him to appear for questioning later this week, but officials at Yoon's office and residence on Monday refused to receive requests for his appearance.

Judge rejects Trump's bid to dismiss hush money conviction because of SC immunity

A judge Monday rejected a President-elect Donald Trump's bid to have his hush money conviction dismissed because of the U.S. Supreme Court's recent ruling on presidential immunity. But the case's overall future remains unclear.

Trump's lawyers then cited the Supreme Court opinion to argue that the hush money jury got some improper evidence, such as Trump's presidential financial disclosure form, testimony from some White House aides and social media posts made while he was in office.

Even if prosecutors had erroneously introduced evidence that could be challenged under an immunity claim, Merchan continued, "such error was harmless in light of the overwhelming evidence of guilt."

Trump communications director Steven Cheung on Monday directed Merchan's decision a "direct violation of the Supreme Court's decision on immunity, and other longstanding jurisprudence."

Taipei mayor urges China to lessen confrontation

The China-friendly mayor of Taiwan's capital, Taipei, on Tuesday called for less confrontation between the sides, even as Beijing continues to send warships and fighter jets to intimidate the self-governing island democracy.

China considers Taiwan part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, although economic ties between the sides — especially with China's financial hub of Shanghai — remain robust, with an emphasis on high-tech.

between the sides. China considers Taiwan part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, although economic ties between the sides — especially with China's financial hub of Shanghai — remain robust, with an emphasis on high-tech.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Nidhi Goyal, W/o Abhay Pandey, resident of F-7/7, third Floor, Arjun Marg, DLF City Phase 1, Sector 26, Gurugram, HR 122002, have changed my name from "Nidhi Neogi" to "Nidhi Goyal".

Be it known to all that my client, Sh. Sukdev Singh Gulati S/o Late S. Tara Singh Gulati R/o House No. 36, Third Floor, Road No. 64, West Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi-110026, have severed all relations & debarred/dismowned his son Sarabjot Singh Gulati and his daughter in law Lavisha Kaur Gulati from his all moveable and immovable property(s) due to their misconduct.

CONSULATE GENERAL OF INDIA, MILAN P.zza Paolo Ferrari, 08-20121 Milan, Italy Tel: (3902) 8057691, Fax: (3902) 72002226, Email: cons.mil@mea.gov.in

Public Notice Information is given to the general public at large that my client Mrs. Milan Devi w/o Mr. Rajender Saah who is the owner of Plot No. 2A, area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. i.e. 41.80, Part of Kharsa No. 124, situated at Village Jhijipur, Pagana & Tehsil Loni, District Ghazabad, U.P.

REBUILDING BRIDGE WORKS E-Tender Notice No. 110/W-2/APDJ Dated: 13-12-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. 35-AP-II-2024.

CORRIGENDUM - 1 AGAINST E-TENDER NOTICE NO. : KYQ-CDO-ETP-02-24-25; DATED: 30-11-2024

Public Notice Information is given to the general public at large that my client Mrs. Milan Devi w/o Mr. Rajender Saah who is the owner of Plot No. 2A, area measuring 50 Sq. Yds. i.e. 41.80, Part of Kharsa No. 124, situated at Village Jhijipur, Pagana & Tehsil Loni, District Ghazabad, U.P.

STATION DEVELOPMENT WORKS E-Tender Notice No. 113/W-2/APDJ Dated: 13-12-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. 29-AP-III-2024. Name of Work: At Dalgaoan (DLO) - Development of Goods Yard, Merchant Room, Goods office, Labour Rest Room, CCTV, Toilets, Water Dust Proof wall, alternative entry to Goods siding connecting road in connection with station development.

TRACK MAINTENANCE WORK AT KATHIHAR DIVISION E-Tender Notice No. KIR/Engg./52 of 2024 Dated: 11-12-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Tender No. 1. Brief Description of work: Track Maintenance work and other ancillary work for the period of 2 years under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Barsoi Jn.

SIGNAL & TELECOM WORKS IN KATHIHAR DIVISION Tender Notice No. N-2024-K-27. Date: 13-12-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Name of the Work : S&T work in connection with Upgradation of goods yard facilities like CCTV, lighting arrangement, circulating area development and drainage along with other ancillary works at Kathihar & Ranipatra. Tender Value: ₹60,08,577/- (60 Lakhs 8 Thousand 577 Rupees only). Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 06-01-2025.

Office of the Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh Email : sepwdpth@rediffmail.com

National Competitive E-Tender Notice The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works. All other information will be available online from date 23-12-2024 at 5.00 PM onward on website http://www.uktenders.gov.in

Table with 7 columns: Sl. No., Name of Work, Earnest Money (in Lac), Cost of Tender (in Rs.), Validity of Tender (day), Period of Completion (months), Contractor's Category of Registration. It lists three items for PD PWD Champawat.

MADHYA PRADESH JAL NIGAM (A Govt. of Madhya Pradesh Undertaking) "B" Arera Hills, Bhopal-462004 Ph. : 0755-2579034, 2579874, Fax : 0755-2579873, www.mpjalnigam.mp.gov.in

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER Madhya Pradesh Jal Nigam (MPJN) intends to engage Unified Agency for Supervision and Quality Control (SQC) & Third-Party Inspection (TPI) for Multi Village Drinking Water Supply Schemes (MVDWSS) under Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Madhya Pradesh on man-month basis through Quality and Cost Based Selection (QCBS) method.

Table with 7 columns: NIT No., Zone, PIU, Total Villages, PAC (Rs.), Total PAC (Rs.), Duration (months), EMD (Rs. Lakh), Document Fee (Rs.). It lists various zones and PIUs for water supply schemes.

Interested bidders can view/download/purchase the bid document online from M.P. Government E-Procurement Portal. Uploading of detailed bid documents of individual RFPs will be up to 24.12.2024. Bidding process dates mentioned as critical dates on M.P. Government E-Procurement Portal will be applicable. Corrigendum/Addendum in NIT, if any, would be published on portal only and not in newspapers.

Earthquake causes damage in Vanuatu

A powerful magnitude 7.3 earthquake struck just off the coast of Vanuatu on Tuesday, causing widespread destruction in the South Pacific island nation as the injured began arriving at a hospital and unconfirmed reports of casualties emerged.

offline due to power outages. Residents were urged to stay away from coastlines for at least 24 hours — and until tsunami and earthquake monitoring systems were operational once again. No confirmed reports of damage or casualties were provided, but accounts detailing widespread destruction filtered out on social media and in interviews.

LOST & FOUND

I, HEMLATA W/o LATE SH. SURYA MOHAN THAKUR have lost my original Share Certificate of FLAT NO.B-502, SWAMI DAYANAND CGHS LTD., PLOT NO.5, SECTOR-6, DWARKA, NEW DELHI, finder please contact: 9811558356

DRM (W), Katihar NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

DRM (W), Alipurduar Jn. NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

DRM (W), Alipurduar Jn. NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

DRM (W), Katihar NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

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DRM (W), Katihar NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

# Tata Steel introduces India's first all-women shift at Jharkhand iron mine

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Tata Steel has operationalised an all-women shift at its Noamundi iron mine in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district, an initiative introduced in the country for the first time, a company statement said. Women employees were engaged in all the mining activities of the shift, including heavy earth moving machinery, shovel, loader, drill and dozer operators, and shift supervision, it said. "This initiative, the first of its kind in India, underscores the company's unwavering commitment to creating an equitable workplace and empowering women in traditionally male-dominated industries," the steelmaker said in a statement on Monday.



Prasad emphasised the commitment of the government to a progressive workplace and mentioned that the decision by the Director General of Mines Safety to permit the deployment of women in all shifts in mining in 2019 was a key step in the right direction. He also appreciated Tata Steel's effort in taking the lead as a responsible corporate house in promoting such a cause. Tata Steel vice president (raw material) D B Sundara Ramam said, "This all-women shift represents a landmark achievement not

only for the company but also for the Indian mining industry. It is a testament to the resilience and capability of women breaking stereotypes. It is also a reflection of our belief that diversity and inclusion are essential for driving innovation and operational excellence." He said the steelmaker will continue to create more opportunities for women, especially in the mining ecosystem. "This initiative marks a significant addition to the 100 glorious years of mining at Noamundi," he said.

The journey began in 2019 with the launch of Tata Steel's flagship diversity initiative, "Women@Mines", making it the first company in India to deploy women in all shifts at its mines, following the Centre's landmark relaxation of the Mines Act, 1952, the statement said. The steelmaker had launched initiatives to recruit and train women from local communities to operate heavy earth-moving machinery and participate in the mining ecosystem. The initiatives were met with overwhelming enthusiasm and women were deployed across roles such as dumper, shovel, dozer, grader, and drill operators, the company statement said. They underwent extensive training, including technical and operational skills, simulator sessions, safety protocols, and physical fitness, before joining the workforce in April 2022. Over 2,100 applications were received by the company and 24 operators were selected, according to the statement. In a groundbreaking move earlier this year, the authorities of the Noamundi Mine diversified its workforce by inducting nine transgender operators of heavy earth-moving machinery, reinforcing the steelmaker's commitment to inclusion and equality.

# Union Minister Nitin Gadkari hails food delivery economy as key job creator



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday said the food delivery economy is very important for India as it generates large-scale employment. Addressing Zomato's 'Sustainability and Inclusivity: Role of the Platform Economy' conference, the Minister said that at present India has 77 lakh delivery workers and this number is likely to touch 2.5 crore by 2030. "Giving employment to 2.5

crore youths of this country is really a big thing for the country. The most important priority for all of us is to create jobs," he said. The minister also appreciated online food delivery platform Zomato for providing employment to a lot of unemployed youth of the country. He also expressed concerns about the number of road accidents and said the delivery boys have high chances of meeting accidents as they have to deliver the items in a limited time frame.

Gadkari said that in India, 45 accidents and 20 deaths take place per hour. The maximum lives lost are between the age bracket of 18 to 45. "The two-wheeler deaths are 80,000...and deaths due to non-usage of helmet is 55,000," he said. He further said 10,000 deaths take place due to driving on the wrong side. The Road accidents can be avoided by providing proper training, the minister said and congratulated Zomato for training 50,000 drivers.

# Bharti Global's acquisition of 24.5 per cent stake in BT approved by UK government

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK government has approved Bharti Global's acquisition of a 24.5 per cent stake in BT following a detailed national security assessment of the process since the Indian multinational and British telecom major announced the deal back in August. The Cabinet Office said its decision comes into force on Monday after an assurance that BT would set up a National Security Committee to oversee strategic work. The order noted that Bharti Televentures UK Limited acquired 24.5 per cent of the issued share capital of BT - 9.99 per cent on August 12, 2024, and 14.51 per cent on November 18, 2024. "Following a detailed national security assessment, the Chancellor of the Duchy

of Lancaster has made a Final Order pursuant to section 26 of the National Security and Investment Act 2021, which comes into force on 16 December 2024," the Cabinet Office said in a statement. "The Acquisition is a trigger event under section 8(8) of the Act. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has approved the Acquisition, on the basis that BT will establish a National Security Committee within BT to oversee strategic work that BT performs which has an impact on or is in respect of the national security of the United Kingdom," it said. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, which refers to Cabinet Office Minister Pat McFadden, stated that the final order is "necessary and proportionate" as it mitigates the risk to national security in relation to BT's role in supporting the UK

government's domestic and international initiatives in the telecommunications sector; ensuring the UK's cyber security; and acting as a strategic supplier of services to many parts of the UK government, including services which are in support of UK national security. Back in August, Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal had described his company's investment in an "iconic" British company as a "significant milestone" for Bharti Enterprises. The group said it hopes the investment will further help create new synergies in the telecom sector between India and the UK in the areas of artificial intelligence (AI) and 5G R&D and core engineering among others, "offering great potential to collaborate on industry best practices and emerging technologies".

# CBDT launches campaign to intimate taxpayers on mismatch in ITR filed and Annual Information Statement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The income tax department on Tuesday said it is sending SMS and emails to taxpayers and non-filers where it has identified mismatch between transactions reported in Annual Information Statement (AIS) and income disclosed in ITRs for the financial years 2023-24 and 2021-22. In a statement, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said it has launched an electronic campaign to assist taxpayers in resolving mismatches between the income and transactions reported in the AIS and those disclosed in Income Tax Returns (ITRs) for the financial years 2023-24 and 2021-22. This campaign also targets individuals who have taxable income or significant high-



value transactions reported in their AIS but have not filed ITRs for the respective years. The initiative is part of the implementation of the e-Verification Scheme, 2021. As part of this campaign, informational messages have been sent via SMS and email to taxpayers and non-filers where mismatches have been identified between transactions reported in AIS and ITRs filed. Annual Information Statement (AIS) is comprehensive view of information for a taxpayer.

Taxpayers can access AIS on the income tax department portal and provide feedback on information displayed in AIS. AIS shows both reported value and modified value (i.e. Value after considering taxpayer feedback). The CBDT said that the purpose of this campaign is to remind and guide individuals who may not have fully disclosed their income in their ITRs to take this opportunity to file revised or belated ITRs for FY 2023-24, the last date of which is December 31. For cases pertaining to FY 2021-22, taxpayers can file updated ITRs by the limitation date of March 31, 2025. Taxpayers can also provide their feedback, including disagreeing with the information reported in the AIS, through the AIS portal accessible via the e-filing website. Last month, the CBDT launched a campaign under which messages were sent to taxpayers who have not disclosed high-value foreign income or assets in their ITRs for AY 2024-25. These messages were intended for individuals identified through information received under bilateral and multilateral agreements, suggesting that they may hold foreign accounts or assets, or have received income from foreign jurisdictions.

# Sugar output down 17 per cent due to late start of factories

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sugar production declined 17 per cent to 61.39 lakh tonnes till December 15 of the current marketing year that started in October, mainly due to fall in output in Maharashtra, according to industry body ISMA. The production data excludes the diversion of sugar towards ethanol. Sugar production till December 15, 2024, in the current 2024-25 marketing year (October-September) reached 61.39 lakh tonnes as against 74.05 lakh tonnes in the corresponding period of the preceding year, Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) said in a statement. Notably, this year sugar factories in Karnataka started late by around 7-12 days while in another major state Maharashtra, mills started late by 15-20 days, as compared to last year. As per the data, sugar production in Uttar Pradesh increased to 23.04 lakh tonnes from 22.11 lakh tonnes. In Maharashtra, the output declined 16.78 lakh tonnes from 24.45 lakh tonnes. Karnataka saw a decline in sugar production to 13.85 lakh tonnes from 17.56 lakh tonnes. ISMA said that "this year sugar diversion towards ethanol is estimated to be higher at around 40 lakh tonnes against around 21.5 lakh tonnes diverted last year".

# Sebi mulls service platform for tracking inactive, unclaimed mutual fund folios

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Tuesday proposed developing a service platform for investors to trace inactive and unclaimed mutual fund (MF) folios. The proposed service platform called Mutual Fund Investment Tracing and Retrieval Assistant (MITR) would be developed by the Registrar and Transfer Agents (RTAs), Sebi said in its consultation paper. The proposed platform would encourage investors to search for forgotten MF investments, update KYC as per the current norms and



incorporate safeguards to reduce the risk of fraudulent redemptions. Additionally, it would lead to reduction in the unclaimed mutual fund

folios and contribute towards building a transparent financial ecosystem. The regulator noted that over a number of years, mutual fund investors sometimes lose track of their investments considering investments might have been made in physical form with bare minimum KYC details. The investments in open-ended growth option mutual fund schemes may remain invested perpetually until and unless the investor/his nominee/legal heir approaches the concerned asset management company for redemption/transfer. Due to the non-availability of PAN, email ID or valid address, it is also possible that these MF folios may not appear in the unitholder's Consolidated Account Statement. Thus, inactivity in mutual fund folios could be on account of investors losing track of their investment, demise and such inactive folios may become susceptible to fraudulent redemptions. To address the concern, Sebi said, "The service platform is proposed to be developed by the RTAs to provide investors with a searchable database of inactive and/or unclaimed mutual fund

folios at an industry level". The platform can be hosted jointly by the two Qualified RTAs - ComputerAge Management Services Ltd (CAMS) and KFin Technologies Ltd as agents of AMCs - and can be available through a link on the website of MF Central, AMCs, AMFI, the two QRTAs and Sebi. The QRTAs should be jointly and severally responsible for compliance with all the applicable regulations, including system audit and cyber security audit. Further, they should ensure that the platform complies with the guidelines for Business Continuity Plan

(BCP) and Disaster Recovery (DR). The regulator has defined inactive folios as those folios where the investor might have remained invested in an open-ended scheme and has either chosen not to redeem or simply might have lost track of the investment. Although, there is no consequence for those folios appearing in the platform where the unitholder is aware of the investment and has chosen to remain invested. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has sought public comments on the proposal till January 7.

# Gold jewellery consumption to grow 14-18 per cent in FY25 in value terms: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The domestic gold jewellery consumption in value terms is expected to continue its growth momentum in the current financial year and is likely to witness an on-year rise of 14-18 per cent, a report said on Tuesday. Rating agency Icr in a report said in FY25, gold jewellery consumption growth is pegged at 14-18 per cent in value terms, led by favourable realisations. In 2023-24, gold jewellery consumption growth had witnessed a growth of 18 per cent in 2023-24, primarily driven by realisations even as volume growth was subdued. According to the report, while gold prices were volatile, improving consumer sentiments and festive-led demand aided consumption growth in the recent months. Moreover, a sharp 900 bps cut in import duty in the Union Budget in July 2024, and consequent correction in gold prices for a brief period led to some pre-buying of jewellery as well as

realisations with gold prices rising by 14 per cent YoY, the report said, adding that the same trend is expected to continue this fiscal as well. So far in the current fiscal, the average gold price has risen by a sharp 25 per cent. There were occasional corrections in prices, once after the cut in customs duty in late July 2024 and then in November 2024, following the US elections and currency movements. The continuing uptick in the gold prices for the last seven quarters has been stimulated by the evolving global economic and geopolitical scenario, and rising investment demand for gold, it said. On the supply side, organised jewellers are expected to add 16-18 per cent to their existing retail network in FY25, said the report. Most large jewellers are opting for the franchise model to expand into new markets given the twin benefits of low capital expenditure and knowledge of the local market with the franchisee-partner, it stated.

bars and coins during the second quarter of FY25, which is generally a seasonally weak quarter, it said. This, coupled with higher number of auspicious and wedding days, and favourable monsoons aiding better rural output, is likely to help jewellery demand growth in H2 FY25, it added. The organised market is projected to record a healthy YoY expansion of 18-20 per cent in FY25. Planned store additions with focus on tier II and III cities, rising gold prices, shift in preferences towards branded jewellery and some likely pre-buying in the fourth quarter of FY25 on account of higher number of auspicious days in the first quarter of FY26 shall drive growth. "The customs duty cut is also expected to disincentivise unofficial imports, thus supporting the growth in organised trade," Icr Vice President and Sector Head - Corporate Ratings, Sujoy Saha said. Revenue growth for organised jewellery in FY24 had been supported by

# Reliance NU Suntech wins 930 megawatt solar project, 465 megawatt battery storage deal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Power on Tuesday said its arm Reliance NU Suntech has secured a solar project of 930 MW and 465 MW battery energy storage system (BESS) project from Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI). The project will see the second largest deployment of grid storage batteries at a single site in Asia, after China, a company statement said. According to the statement, Reliance Power subsidiary, Reliance NU Suntech Private Ltd (Reliance NU Suntech) received a Letter of Award from SECI for its proposed Solar 930 MW and 465 MW/1860 MWh BESS projects. The competitive tariff with an assured supply of peak power for 4 hours daily will be a relief for DISCOMs that have had to consistently buy power from the power exchanges during peak hours at the cap of Rs 10 per unit. Reliance NU Suntech won the 930 MW solar energy contract in an e-reverse auction held on December 9,

2024. As per the terms of the tender, Reliance NU Suntech will also install a minimum storage capacity of 465 MW/1,860 MWh charged by solar power. The company, among India's leading power generators, secured the largest individual allocation out of the five companies vying for a total quoted capacity of 2,000 MW of Inter State Transmission System (ISTS) connected solar power projects with 1,000 MW/4,000 MWh energy storage systems. SECI will enter into a power purchase agreement with Reliance NU Suntech for 25 years and the solar power procured will be sold to multiple discoms in India. Reliance NU Suntech will develop the project on a build-own-operate basis. Reliance Power Limited, part of the Reliance Group, is one of India's leading private sector power generation companies. The company has an operating portfolio of 5,300 MW, which includes 3,960 MW Sasan Power Ltd - the world's largest integrated coal-based power plant).

# Parliamentary panel urges government to implement legally binding MSP for farmers



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel on Tuesday recommended the government implement a legally binding minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce, arguing that such a measure could significantly reduce farmer suicides and provide crucial financial stability. The Standing Committee on Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food Processing, headed by Congress MP Charanjit Singh Channi, submitted a comprehensive report to Parliament highlighting the potential benefits of a legally guaranteed MSP. "The committee strongly

recommends that the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare declare a roadmap for implementing MSP as a legal guarantee at the earliest," the report stated. Currently, the government fixes MSP for 23 commodities based on the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) recommendations. The panel argued that a legally binding MSP would not only safeguard farmers' livelihoods but also promote rural economic growth and enhance national food security. The committee's key recommendations include: implementing a robust MSP system to mitigate farmer suicides, providing compensation to farmers for

managing crop residue, establishing a National Commission for Minimum Living Wages for Farm Labourers, introducing a debt waiver scheme for farmers and farm labourers, and renaming the agriculture department to include farm labourers. The committee emphasized that assured income through MSP would encourage farmers to invest in agricultural practices, potentially increasing productivity and sustainability. The panel also suggested the government provide a statement in Parliament after each crop season, detailing the number of farmers selling produce at MSP and the gap between MSP and market prices. It may be noted that a legal guarantee of MSP for agricultural produce was one of the key demands of protesting farmers in 2021 that forced the government to set up a committee on MSP to look into the matter.

# Spain drawn with Italy, Belgium and Portugal in Euro 2025 group

**AP ■ LAUSANNE**  
World Cup winner Spain will chase a sweep of major women's soccer titles at the 2025 European Championship after drawing a group with Italy, Belgium and Portugal. A European title would complete the set for Spain women after winning the inaugural UEFA Nations League in February for coach Montse Tomé, who took over when the team and federation was in turmoil after the 2023 world title win in Sydney. Tomé is the only female coach in Spain's Euro 2025 group. Euro 2025 host Switzerland will open the 16-nation tournament against Norway on July 2 in Basel. The group also includes Iceland and Finland. The past two European champions, titleholder England and Euro 2017 winner the Netherlands, landed in a strong group with top-seeded France and Wales. France and England reunite next July 5 in Zurich after coming through the same qualifying group, in which they traded away wins in a five-day spell and France finished on top of the standings. "We had some beautiful matches in May and June. It's a very good challenge," France coach Laurent Bonadei said. Germany, the record eight-time European champion, was drawn with Denmark, Poland and Sweden, the inaugural winner in 1984. Basel's St. Jakob Park stadium also will host the final on July 27. More than 700,000 tickets are publicly available for the 31 games being hosted in eight Swiss cities. Switzerland has the responsibility to continue the



momentum in European women's soccer after three successful major tournaments. France hosted the 2019 Women's World Cup, won by the United States; host England won the Euro 2022 final against Germany watched by more than 87,000 fans at Wembley Stadium; and Spain and England played for the 2023 world title at the first 32-team tournament, hosted by Australia and New Zealand. "For me it is the perfect moment for this tournament to come here," said retired Swiss great Lara Dickmann, a two-time Champions League winner with Lyon. "It will be a game-changer for us," Dickmann told The Associated Press. "It's going to be really important for the Swiss population but also for the Swiss media, Swiss politics, on any level that takes part in football." Switzerland will start against Norway — which lost the 2023 World Cup opening game against New Zealand — one month after the same teams meet in a Nations League group that also includes Iceland. Switzerland coach Pia Sundhage said she aimed to field her best team in what will be a final competitive warmup for Euro 2025. "Confidence can take any team anywhere," said Sundhage, the Swedish veteran who led the U.S. To back-to-back Olympic titles in 2008 and 2012. England coach Sarina Wiegman has won the past two Euros titles, after leading her native Netherlands to the 2017 title, and suggested it will be an open and exciting tournament in Switzerland. "It's not just three or four countries" who can win, Wiegman said.

## FIFA set to announce its top players in men's and women's soccer in 'The Best' awards

**AP ■ DOHA**  
Real Madrid star Vinicius Júnior is about to find out if he'll be finally getting his hands on a big global player award. FIFA's "The Best" awards take place on Tuesday, when the top men's and women's soccer players of 2024 will be announced based on voting by fans, the current captains and coaches of all national teams, and media representatives. It is FIFA's version of the older and more prestigious Ballon d'Or prize. Vinicius is on an 11-player shortlist for the best men's player, having been so disappointed to lose out to Manchester City midfielder Rodri for the Ballon d'Or in October that he and his Madrid team snubbed the ceremony in Paris in protest. The FIFA ceremony starts at



1700 GMT in Doha, where Madrid and Vinicius traveled on Monday for the Intercontinental Cup final against Pachuca. Rodri is also on the shortlist, along with Kylian Mbappé and Lionel Messi — last year's winner of the FIFA prize on a tiebreaker over Erling

Haaland. Barcelona playmaker Aitana Bonmati won the best women's player for 2023 and is seeking back-to-back FIFA prizes as one of four Spain players on the 16-woman shortlist. Bonmati has won the Ballon d'Or for two straight years, and won the Spanish league, Spanish cup and Champions League with Barcelona in 2024. The contenders have been selected based on their performances from Aug. 21, 2023, to Aug. 10, 2024. FIFA said the award winners have been decided by an "equally weighted voting system" between fans, the captains and coaches, and the media. The best men's and women's coaches and the best men's and women's goalkeepers will also be announced, along with the best men's and women's 11s and the Marta and Puskás Awards for the best goals in women's and men's soccer, respectively. Among those attending the gala dinner at the Aspire Academy in Doha will be FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

## Americans now paid to play in Ryder Cup

**AP ■ WASHINGTON**  
Americans will be paid to play in the Ryder Cup for the first time under a new PGA of America program that gives them a \$200,000 stipend and \$300,000 for them to distribute to charity. The \$500,000 directed to each of the 12 players and the captain is an increase from the \$200,000 — strictly for charity — that began when the pay-for-play issue first arose in 1999 ahead of the Brookline matches. U.S. Captain Keegan Bradley said in a text he would be giving his entire allocation to charity. "We added the \$200,000 stipend out of respect for the players... So the players could have a say in where the money goes. It's recognition for all the players have done for the Ryder Cup over the years," President Don Rea said in a letter to past Ryder Cup captains, noting the stipend



would be separate from what players get for expenses. The PGA of America board met in person last week and approved the payment scheme. "We've had so many meetings for a long time and it hasn't gone up since 1999. We're talking 25 years that it's been at \$200,000," Rea said in a telephone interview, adding that \$500,000 "seemed like the right place to land." "Everyone is appreciative of what the players are doing for the Ryder Cup." That appreciation now

The Presidents Cup changed from players choosing a charity to players and captains getting \$250,000 without stipulation starting in 2022. The PGA of America announced its decision in a statement on its social media channels. "The players and captains, past and present, are responsible for the Ryder Cup becoming the most special competition in golf and one of the most in-demand events on the international sports scene," the PGA said. "While no players asked to be compensated, the PGA of America Board of Directors has voted to increase the allocation to the members of the U.S. Ryder Cup team from \$200,000 to be directed to charities — a figure unchanged since 1999 — to \$500,000, with \$300,000 of that to be directed to the charity or charities of the players' choice. The balance is a stipend.

## Rohan Jaitley re-elected as DDCA president



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Incumbent Rohan Jaitley comfortably defeated former India cricketer and Lok Sabha MP Kirti Azad to be elected as the President of the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) for a third successive term. The 35-year-old Rohan, son of former Union Minister late Arun Jaitley, secured 1,577 votes compared to Azad's 777 in the race to the top position, which comes with a three-year term. His father had served as DDCA president for 14 years. As many as 2,413 votes were cast from among the 3748 members, and 1,207 votes

were required to win. In 2020, Rohan was elected unopposed after Rajat Sharma resigned midway during his term. A year later, he defeated advocate Vikas Singh to claim a full three-year term. Rohan had the backing of former BCCI acting president CK Khanna, who is considered an influential figure in Delhi cricket as he controls more than 1,000 votes. Khanna's daughter Shikha Kumar (1,246 votes), defeated Rakesh Kumar Bansal (536) and Sudhir Kumar Agarwal (498) to claim the vice-president's post. Ashok Sharma (893) became the secretary, while Harish Singla (1328) was elected for the treasurer's post and Amit Grover (1189) won the joint secretary position. All office-bearers are elected for a three-year term. Anand Verma (985), Manjit Singh (1050), Navdeep M (1034), Shyam Sharma (1165), Tushar Saigal (926), Vikas Katyal (1054), Vikram Kohli (939) claimed the directors' post, which goes to polls every year. A member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team Azad, who represents Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency for the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress party, had alleged corruption in the DDCA in the run up to the polls. He had alleged that the DDCA spent as much Rs 17.5 crore on installing floodlights when the much bigger Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad did the same for Rs 7.5 crore. He had also accused the incumbent DDCA administration of spending only a fraction of the approximately Rs 140 crore it received from the BCCI in the last financial year.



## Hockey India League announces free entry for matches in Rourkela and Ranchi

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Hockey India on Tuesday announced free entry for fans for both men's and women's matches of the Hockey India League to be played at Rourkela and Ranchi. The eight-team men's HIL in a new format will start on December 28 at Rourkela's Birsra Munda Stadium and will conclude on February 1, 2025. The women's edition comprising four teams will be held at Ranchi's Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Astro Turf Stadium from January 12-26. Additionally, HI said select

matches of both men's and women's categories will be held at alternate venues to "expand the league's reach." "By foregoing revenue from ticket sales, Hockey India aims to build a stronger connection between the sport and its passionate supporters, encouraging more people to experience the thrill of live hockey," HI said in a media release. HIL governing committee chairman Dilip Tirkey said, "By offering free tickets, we are ensuring that everyone, regardless of financial status, has the opportunity to experience live hockey at its best."

## West Ham share points with Bournemouth after late drama on England's south coast

**AP ■ BOURNEMOUTH**



Enes Ünal scored a superb free kick in the last minute of normal time to rescue a point for Bournemouth in a 1-1 home draw against West Ham in the Premier League. Both sides struggled to break down their opponent and goalkeepers made timely saves at each end. But in the 87th minute, just when it looked like a 0-0 draw was on the cards, West Ham took the lead thanks to a VAR-assisted penalty. After a video review, referee Chris Kavanagh adjudged the ball to have struck Tyler Adams' hand and Lucas Paqueta made no mistake from 12 meters. That would have been hard on Bournemouth, which enjoyed the better of the second half but came up against the man of the match in West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski. But in the 90th minute, Ünal curled a free kick into the top corner to give the Cherries a deserved share of the points.

"Credit to him, big moment, especially the reaction as well, I thought the boys were brilliant," Bournemouth forward Ryan Christie told broadcaster Sky. "And it was a moment of magic to get us level." There will be debate over the penalty decision and Christie lamented what he said was inconsistent decision-making from officials. "I thought it was harsh," Christie said. "I know his hand is high but he's so close to the ball. We didn't get one last week against Ipswich from a similar scenario. "It's a bit frustrating because we dominated. But it's good to get a point in the end." The comeback was another example of Bournemouth's late resilience. The south coast side has picked up nine points from losing positions this season, better than everyone bar Aston Villa and Manchester City. Bournemouth climbed into sixth place, just two points behind Manchester City, while West Ham was 14th.

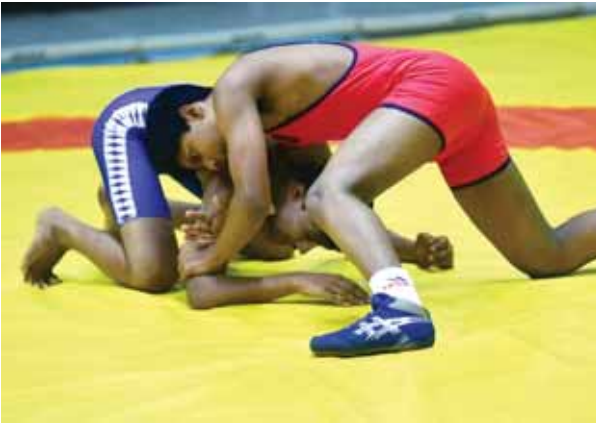
# A year of chaos and heartbreaks for Indian wrestling but not without hope for future

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

In an ideal world, politics and sport are not meant to be mixed. But then the world of Indian wrestling was far from ideal in 2024 with Vinesh Phogat's Olympic dejection and the never-ending administrative chaos pulling down a once flourishing sport. From the time when Wrestling Federation of India elections were held, exactly a year back, to the recent National Championships in Bengaluru, Indian wrestling has seemed like a rudderless ship. Not too long ago, wrestling had developed into a sport that promised unprecedented Olympic success but cut to Paris 2024, Aman Sehrawa's bronze medal was what saved the delegation the blushes

after Phogat's seemingly destined gold slipped through her grasp due to a cruel twist of fate. She was, for better or for worse, the most intriguing story of Indian wrestling this year. She punished herself to fight in a lower weight category after her preferred class was already booked for the Olympics, downed the then unbeaten Japanese legend Yui Susaki in her opening round in Paris and then ended up national champion for being 100gm overweight on the morning of the final. A day later, she gave up on her sporting career, declaring that the fight had left her. She wasn't done though. Following an emotionally overwhelming homecoming which included a custom-made gold medal from

Haryana's khap panchayats, Phogat joined the Congress party, fought the state assembly elections and managed to become an MLA in her maiden electoral outing from Julana constituency. She wasn't the only one in her fraternity who decided on politics as future. Bajrang Punia too joined the Congress but he did not get the same returns as Phogat. His position was that of a Kisan morcha head and his wrestling career was left stalled after coping a four-year ban for failure to submit dope samples during training camps. This was after he failed to qualify for Paris, a new low in the career of the celebrated grappler, who fetched a bronze in the Tokyo Games. The two maintained all along that their fight against alleged



sexual harassment of women wrestlers by former WFI head Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was an apolitical one. But their fellow protestor and Rio Olympics bronze-winner Sakshi Malik sought to dispute that soon after they joined congress. She went on to allege in her book that the duo's "greed" punctured their protest against Sharan Singh. Next generation affected by chaos The likes of Anshu Malik and Antim Panghal, who were touted as the next big thing in

Indian wrestling, cut a sorry figure in Paris but Aman carried forward the rich legacy of the Chhatrasal stadium by winning the men's freestyle 57kg bronze. It was a category which 2020 Tokyo Games silver-medallist Ravi Dahiya made his own. But Dahiya vanished from the scene due to spate of injuries that affected his form. The Tokyo campaign, which yielded two medals in wrestling, should have been the catalyst for better infrastructure and coaching for Indian wrestler. However, the developments in the last 24 months have prevented growth. The potential is still there and the biggest example was Indian U17 women team's world championship victory in Amman, Jordan in September.

The country had been aiming for a podium finish for long and the dream finally materialised this year. Out of 10 possible medals, India won eight medals, including five gold medal and one silver. Finishing ahead of powerhouse Japan and impressive Kazakhstan is no mean feat. However, the unending litigations have tied the hands of WFI which is now struggling to carry out day to day affairs of the body. The team led by Sanjay Singh, that won the elections, stands suspended by the Sports Ministry. The ground of suspension is announcing Nationals without following a 15-day notice period in December 2023. But the fact remains that if WFI had followed the notice period, wrestlers

would have lost a crucial year because by the time the 15-day period would have completed, year 2024 would have started. WFI was forced to withdraw the team from the senior World Championship owing to pending litigation by Sakshi and her wrestler husband Satyawart Kadian. Eventually after government's intervention a team was finally sent. No proper coaching camp has been organised in the last two years, the efforts to revive the Pro Wrestling League are on hold, grants and sponsorships have stopped, no foreign/personal coaches have been engaged and there is no planning to take the sport forward. If the situation could be summed up in a line, Indian wrestling is stagnant for now.

# Rahul, Jadeja fifties help India avoid follow-on in Brisbane Test

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja were determination personified as their fighting fifties helped India avoid the follow-on on the fourth day of the weather-hit third Test against a menacing Australia that seems meandering towards a draw. Jadeja (77, 123b, 7x4, 1x6) and Rahul (84, 139, 8x4) were the heavy-lifters in India's 252 for nine when bad light forced an early close to the day. Jasprit Bumrah (10) and Akash Deep (27), who showed appreciable gumption, are holding the fort for India. The visitors trail Aussies by 193 runs. But they wouldn't mind that one bit as Australia will now have to bat again and forcing a result in three sessions looks an improbable target, considering the Brisbane weather pattern. The city is bracing up for rain and a thunderstorm or two on Wednesday. A quick word of appreciation is also required for No. 10 Bumrah



and No. 11 Akash Deep for knocking down the 33 runs required to go past the follow-on mark of 246. The much-awaited moment came when Akash crunched Pat Cummins over gully for a boundary. When these two joined forces, India were reeling at 213 for 9 after Jadeja was dismissed off a Cummins' snorter. But while resuming from a wafer-thin overnight score of 51 for four, India needed someone to offer fight, and Rahul, India's standout batter in this series so far, did precisely that. Rahul displayed admirable technical nous to withstand the stern test posed by the Australian bowlers to take the game deep into the day. A nine toes down Rahul and an equally feisty Jadeja added 67 runs for the sixth wicket, and it was the first sign of India's fight. There was a moment of massive fortune too for Rahul when Smith spilled a regulation catch at second slip off the first ball of the

day from Cummins. Rahul was on 33 then. A quick look upwards and a silent prayer showed how much he valued that reprieve, which he exploited to the hilt, notching his 17th Test fifty. Once he woke up from a bit of morning haziness, Rahul looked a class apart from the rest of his colleagues. The Aussies employed three slips and a gully, leaving the vast expanse of the ground to play his favourite shot -- drive through the cover or in front of the point. It was a dangerous proposition as there was enough movement and bounce for the Aussie pacers. But Rahul was prudent enough to see through that ruse. He did not bring out that shot until the bowlers pitched the ball well up in his driving arc. The Bengaluru man's sagacity shone in how he defended too -- all soft hands and playing close to the body. Cummins tested him with that fifth stump line outside off, but Rahul either left the ball wisely or merely tucked his bat behind his pads. However, a remarkable redemption catch by Smith at slip off Nathan Lyon ended his stay. But Jadeja carried on and he added 53 runs for the seventh wicket with Nitish Reddy to keep India afloat. The 36-year-old scored a good chunk of runs either down the ground or square of the wicket, enabling him to collect runs

without the risk of getting caught behind or in the cordon. Jadeja brought up his 22nd fifty in Test cricket off 89 balls and the innings was also dotted with sweep shots that he effectively employed against off-spinner Lyon. Nitish should also be patted for giving some solid company to Jadeja as batting for time was more important than the volume of runs considering the weather situation in this Test. However, a slice of misfortune ended Nitish's stay as he dragged Cummins' climbing delivery back onto his stumps. Jadeja also soon departed while trying to farm the strike with Bumrah. He looked to smash Cummins' rising delivery out of the ground but Mitchell Marsh settled nicely under the ball to give a heap of frayed nerves to Indian fans. But Bumrah and Akash added 39 runs to put the smiles back on their faces, as Aussies dearly missed the metronomical Josh Hazlewood, who was ruled out of the series with a calf injury.



# New Zealand beat England by 423 runs in the 3rd test

**AP ■ HAMILTON**  
Captain Ben Stokes was unable to bat because of a hamstring injury on Tuesday as England slumped to a 423-run loss to New Zealand before tea on the fourth day on the third cricket Test. Stokes strained his left hamstring while bowling on the third day and could not take the field as England was bowled out for 234 as it chased an impossible target of 658 for victory. New Zealand's winning margin matched its largest test win by runs of a 423-run win over Sri Lanka in 2018 and prevented England from completing a series whitewash. England had an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first test by eight wickets and the second by 323 runs. "You can't fault any of the energies or efforts we put into this game, particularly in the field," Stokes said. "It's obviously not ideal to end the tour on this note but we've come here against a New Zealand team which is very strong and full of confidence after beating India in India 3-0. So to come here and lift that trophy at the end proves we played some very good cricket." England resumed its second innings Tuesday at 18-2 after losing the wickets of Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley late on day three after New Zealand, leading by 204 on the first innings, was dismissed for 453. Joe Root made 54 and Jacob Bethell 76 in a 104-run partnership for the third wicket which briefly fanned England's hopes that it might somehow endure for two full days to draw the match. But dogged perseverance is not a feature of England cricket in the "Bazball" quick-scoring era and instead it maintained a policy of all-out attack before the final wicket fell midway through the second session. After lunch Gus Atkinson blasted 43 from 41 balls with seven fours and a six and Ollie Pope made 17 but wickets fell steadily and the result became inevitable. "I think anytime you finish a series with a win when you've been behind is pleasing," New Zealand captain Tom Latham said. "We weren't at our best in those first two games but the way we came here on a wicket that was slightly different to the first couple and we adapted was very pleasing." New Zealand's win owed a great deal to the contribution of Mitchell Santner in the first innings who made 76 batting at No. 8 and worked with Matt Henry, Tim Southee and Will O'Rourke to add 116 runs for New Zealand's three wickets. That allowed New Zealand to reach 347 after losing the toss and being sent in. Santner's last-wicket stand with O'Rourke which lasted 77 minutes at the end of the first day and the start of the second was a display of resilience which had been missing from New Zealand's performances in the first two tests. Santner then took 3-7 while New Zealand's presumptive new-ball pairing of Henry and O'Rourke shared seven wickets as England was bowled out for 143 in a session and a half in its first innings. Southee has been the spearhead of New Zealand's attack for many years, mostly in combination with Trent Boult. But this was his 107th and final test before his retirement from international cricket and Boult no longer is contracted by New Zealand Cricket.

# Mandhana moves to top three in both ODI and T20I rankings

**PTI ■ DUBAI**  
India's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has surged three places to second in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings while climbing one spot to third among T20I batters, following her stellar displays against Australia and the West Indies. The left-hander struck 105 in the final match of the series against Australia in Perth and 54 in the first game of the ongoing T20I rubber against the West Indies in Mumbai to headline the latest rankings update released here on Tuesday. Mandhana is the lone Indian batter in the top 10 as her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur moved down two spots to 13th while Jemimah Rodrigues climbed six places to 15th and Harleen Deol moved up nine runs to 64th. Among bowlers, Deepti Sharma has slipped two spots to five. India seam bowler Arundhati Reddy has shot up 48 places to 51st after a haul of four for 26 while Renuka Thakur has moved up from 28th to joint 26th. England opener Tammy Beaumont advanced two places to 11th after an unbeaten 65 helped clinch the South Africa series 2-1. Ashleigh Gardner has moved up one place to 16th with a 50 in Perth, Tahlia McGrath has progressed from 32nd to 24th with an unbeaten 56, and Annabell Sutherland is up 15 places to 29th after a match-winning 110. Gardner is also up two places to a career-best-equaling third position in the bowling rankings with a haul of five for 30 and has moved up from fourth to second in the all-rounders' list. Sutherland is in the top 20 of the bowling rankings. Others to move up in this list include South Africa's Marizanne Kapp, who has gained two slots to reach fourth position after a haul of three for 24, and the England trio of Charlie Dean (up two places to seventh), Nat Sciver Brunt (up one place to 16th) and Lauren Bell (up four places to 21st). Kaur moves back into top 10 in the T20I rankings, Kaur is in the top 10 and Rodrigues has gained six slots to reach 15th position after a fine 73 against the West Indies. In the bowling rankings, Deepti has moved up two places to take the second position in the bowling rankings and Titas Sadhu is up to 52nd. For the West Indies, all-rounder Deandra Dottin has advanced 21 places to 59th after a half-century while Qiana Joseph (up 22 places to 65th among batters) and Karishma Ramharack (up six places to 20th among bowlers) are other notable gainers.



# Vettori admits Indian tailenders partnership foils Australia's plans

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
Australia assistant coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a resilient partnership between Indian tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep foiled their plans to enforce a follow-on, while also defending the decision not to declare the home team's first innings in the third Test which seems heading towards a draw. With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, it was the obstinate 39-run unbeaten partnership between Bumrah and Akash Deep that saved India the blushes as the tourists avoided a follow on a rain marred day four on Tuesday. "I think the only way to force the game was to force the follow-on," Vettori said at the post-day press conference. "There was a desperation to get that final wicket. We thought we had a really good chance when Jadeja was dismissed, but it was a real fighting partnership from Bumrah and Deep. "Unfortunately, just the amount of time that's been lost from the game has made it difficult," he added. Akash Deep, making his debut in Australia, walked in to bat at 213 for 9, with India still needing 33 runs to avoid the follow-on that could have cost them the game. Alongside pace spearhead Bumrah, he guided India to 252 for 9, frustrating the home team. Australia had ended day three on 405 for 7 but chose to bat, consuming a considerable amount of game time on a rain affected day four rather than declare their innings.

# Josh Hazlewood likely to miss Test series against India due to calf injury

**PTI ■ BRISBANE**  
Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood is likely to miss the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India due to a right calf strain that he sustained during the ongoing third Test at the Gabba, Cricket Australia said on Tuesday. The niggle has also ruled Hazlewood out of the Brisbane Test, weakening Australia's bowling attack. "Josh Hazlewood has sustained a right side calf strain which will prevent him from playing any further part in the Test match against India in Brisbane," Cricket Australia said in an official statement. "He is likely to miss the remainder of the Test series." On Tuesday, the New South Wales player bowled just one over before walking out of the field following a discussion with captain Pat Cummins, senior cricketer Steven Smith and team physio Nick Jones. Hazlewood later underwent scans to ascertain the severity of the injury. The 33-year-old had nicked off star India batter Virat Kohli on Monday, the third day of the match, with a fine delivery outside the off-stump. Hazlewood made his return to the side for the third Test after missing the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide due to a side strain. He had replaced fellow pacer Scot Boland, who played in the day-night Adelaide Test, in the Australia eleven for the ongoing Brisbane Test.



# Can 'Guru' Gambhir and Nayar offer cogent solutions to technical flaws in batters?

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are copping maximum criticism for being walking wickets during the ongoing Test series against Australia but even Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant haven't shown the patience needed to survive Down Under, indicating a larger problem. Patience is a virtue that one develops over time and Kohli had once showed how it's done during his golden phase between 2014 and 2019. KL Rahul, blessed with sound technique, has displayed that during the current series with scores of 77 and 84 in Perth and Brisbane. In case of Jaiswal, save his second innings knock of 161 at Perth, a shuffle across the crease is making him a candidate for leg-before.

Gill loves to play on the rise outside the off-stump and away from his body and could be impatient when one bowls the stump and even for Pant, a compulsive stroke player, the ball that leaves him from five metre length with adequate bounce, is creating issues. So, will head coach Gautam Gambhir and his deputy Abhishek Nayar, who is highly regarded in Mumbai cricket circuit for being a "Mind Coach and Life Coach rolled into one", do anything about it? A former India great, who didn't wish to be named, offered his perspective. "Not all great players or players of repute happen to be great coaches. They might have done some incredible things as players and knew what to do and how to react during a particular situation," the veteran of 100-plus Tests said.

"But coaching is science and not many can tell why certain things need to be done. Even Gautam used to play with hard hands and dab towards slips in Australia and England. "You can still work with younger guys but difficult to mould the older ones who don't get enough time to work on their game in a packed calendar," he added. Watching the dismissals of especially Kohli in Australia, which seemed like a replay of previous ones, has led to growing concerns. Everyone understands the technical flaw, but can anyone provide the corrective measures to break the rut? Rohit, barring the England tour in 2021, he does not really have a track record in SENA countries in Tests. But with Kohli, the problem of reaching for deliveries on and outside the off-stump has resurfaced



once again and has been a persistent issue for quite some time. Sanjay Manjrekar's tweet is worth taking note of. "I guess the time has come to scrutinise the role of a batting coach in the Indian team. Why major technical issues have remained unresolved for so long with certain Indian batters?" he asked. Manjrekar's view raises questions on the role of Sanjay Bangar, Vikram Rathour, and now Nayar. Their official designation might be assistant coach, but they essentially are batting coaches. Devang Gandhi, who was a touring selector between 2016-17 to 2020-21, had a

more nuanced take compared to the veteran India star. "It would be very easy to target Nayar as a low hanging fruit or for that matter Gautam," Gandhi, who has coached the Delhi Ranji team and Bengal U-19, told PTI during a conversation. "But they have just come into system. To discuss or nudge a player, first you need to be around for some time and once there is some kind of mutual trust between the two, you can offer him solutions. But at this level, it is more about the experienced player's own mental make-up." So what is Kohli's problem? Gandhi, a former Test opener and an NCA Level-2 coach, believes it's all about his mental approach. "If you watch his training videos that are available for public, I find him doing all the right things. During training

he is playing close to his body. But the moment it is the match situation, the hands are moving towards those channel deliveries like conditioned reflex or muscle memory," he explained. Gandhi then blamed it on the rising T20 engagements. "The moment his bat is away from the body, the bat-face will open up towards cover. Now this is a white ball problem of hitting through the line. In India the ball will hit the bottom of the bat but in Australia, it will towards the upper part. "What solution can Gambhir or Nayar possibly give, apart from telling him to not play those deliveries? "After 30 Test hundreds, Virat doesn't need to be told that but at 36, does he have that patience to accept that now if he scores a hundred, it will be off 200 balls and not 140 like earlier times? Can he bide those extra 60 balls?" Gandhi questioned. Sachin Tendulkar's epic 241 in the 2004 New Year's Test in Sydney is often cited as a prime example of patience. He didn't hit a single cover drive until he scored his double hundred. "It's about controlling the mind. You can be a sounding board for players like Tendulkar and Kohli but at this stage, you can't coach them. Coaching happens at junior level," Gandhi added. But can a Gambhir or Nayar help Kohli find a solution? "Of course, at some point, honest conversations are necessary. But first, they should ask him what his corrective options are and then offer their own if they have something different to contribute," Gandhi concluded.