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SPARRING STALLS SANSAD AGAIN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Lok Sabha passes Bill to amend Railway Laws

Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed a Bill to amend Railway laws with the Government insisting that it will not lead to the national carrier's privatisation. Responding to a debate on the Railway Amendment bill, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in the Lower House that a fake narrative was set afloat that the amendment would privatise railways. "The (Opposition) fake narrative on the Constitution has failed... Now this will also fall flat," he asserted. The Bill was passed by a voice vote after debate which could

demonstrations led by the Congress over the Adani issue. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi also offered the tricolour in the form of a card to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh when the latter was entering the main Parliament building. Rahul also met Speaker Om Birla and urged him to expunge remarks made by BJP MPs against him, and ensure the House functions smoothly. Addressing a joint Press conference by the INDIA Bloc leaders at the Constitution Club, Kharge alleged that Dhankhar is working as a government spokesperson and acting like a school headmaster, often sermonising experienced Opposition leaders and preventing them from speaking in the House. "The Rajya Sabha chairman's conduct has been contrary to the dignity of the post he holds. He targets Opposition leaders and often praises the government," Kharge said. "The Rajya Sabha chairman's conduct in the House has harmed the country's dignity. We have no hesitation in saying that the biggest disrupter in the Rajya Sabha is the chairman himself," Kharge said. The Congress chief said since 1952, no resolution has been brought against the vice president under Article 67 of the Constitution as those who held the post previously never indulged in politics and remained unbiased. He said the Opposition parties have nothing against Dhankhar, "but he left us with no option but to go ahead with the notice for his removal." **Continued on page 8**

Ensure manual sewer cleaning completely eradicated, says SC



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



Yellow alert, cold wave conditions in Delhi: IMD

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

For the first time after the shift in the season, Delhiites experienced winter chill as the minimum temperature dipped to the season's lowest on Wednesday at 4.9 degree celsius in Safdarjung station, dropping five degrees below normal this winter. There has been a three-degree celsius fall in the minimum temperature over Delhi-NCR during the past 24 hours. The Maximum and Minimum temperatures over Delhi are in the range of 20 to 23 degrees celsius and four to eight degrees Celsius respectively. According to data, the lowest minimum temperature during this period was recorded on December 6, 1987, at 4.1 degrees celsius. The IMD has issued a yellow alert, warning of similar cold wave conditions for the next two days. According to the data, in December 2023 and 2022, there were no cold wave days. However, November 2020 saw cold wave conditions with the minimum temperature plunging to 7.5 degrees Celsius. **Continued on page 8**



Protests continued for the second day over alleged vandalising of a replica of the Indian Constitution, in Parbhani, Maharashtra

Protests turn violent in Parbhani city

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

A day after a glass-encased replica of the Indian Constitution was vandalised by some miscreants near Dr. BR Ambedkar's statue located outside the local railway station, Parbhani city in Maharashtra erupted once again on Wednesday, as protesters resorted to large-scale violence, arson and stone-pelting, amid a bandh called by the Ambedkarite activists. The protests turned violent as an angry mob broke into the District Collector's office and went on a rampage, damaging furniture and window panes, while some protesters indulged in acts of arson and stone-pelting in the neighbourhood. Agitated mobs also hurled stones near

the district collector's office, while they set ablaze some vehicles, burnt tyres and garbage on the roads. Some of the violent protesters were seen moving around the place wielding sticks, rods and stones. The police burst tear-gas shells near the district collector's office to quell the irate protesters. The protesters set on fire a huge pile of PVC pipes kept in front of a shop. "The police fired tear-gas shells and dispersed the rioting mobs," Acting Superintendent of Police Yeshwant Kale said. Deputy Inspector General of Police Shahji Umap, who heads the Nanded Range, rushed to Parbhani to review and control the situation in Parbhani city. **Continued on page 8**

Want a drink in Delhi? Sarkari ID proof nikalo!

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's excise department has directed hotels, clubs and restaurants serving liquor to verify the age of their clients through hard copies of government-issued identity proofs after violations of the legal drinking age norm were detected. In Delhi, liquor is served only to persons aged 25 years and above. Delhi is now the only metropolitan city with a high drinking age, even in Mumbai, only hard liquor is barred for those under 25, while wine and beer is allowed at 21. In major global cities such as New York and London, the drinking age is 21 and 18 respectively. Interestingly, the voting age is 18, while the minimum age of marriage for women is 18 and for men it is 21 in India. The excise department of the Delhi government, during routine inspections by its teams in recent days, found customers younger than 25 years having alcohol at bars, clubs and restaurants. The inspections also revealed that some customers were consuming liquor pretending to have completed 25 years. Complaints were also received by the department that some excise licensees were serving liquor to underage persons, according to a circular issued by the excise department. As per the data of the excise department, there are around 1,100 HCR (hotel, club, restaurant) category premises in the city including nearly 700 restobars. The hotels and clubs with excise licence number around 165 and 50. Strangely most HCR violates the drinking age norms while serving liquor. Under the Delhi Excise Act, 2009, no person or



physical ID instead of virtual IDs shown on the mobile phones (except govt. portals for eg. Digilocker) to minimize the chances of verification of age through fake/edited digital IDs," read the circular. The legal drinking age was a lingering issue in Delhi as it was lower in the NCR cities of Nodia, Gurugram, Ghaziabad and Faridabad. Under the excise policy 2021-22, now scrapped, there was a plan to lower the legal drinking age to 21 years but it failed to materialise as the policy itself came under attack over allegations of corruption and violations of rules. Further, in pursuance of a campaign launched recently by Delhi to make the city drug-free in the next three years, the excise department has directed the licensees to take e-pledge on its official website and conspicuously display the certificate at the hotels, clubs and restaurants. The department has advised the licensees to create awareness among their staff and customers to cooperate in stopping drug abuse and stay away from its use to have a healthy life. "To curb the menace of drugs, it is decided to start a drive wherein all the existing licensees are requested to take e-pledge on the website www.pledge.mygov.in/fightagainstdrugs and generate the certificate and to display the same certificate in the restaurant at conspicuous place to be viewed easily by the public/customers visiting the Hotels/Clubs/Restaurant. Further, it is also advised to all the licensees to make aware all their staff and customers to consciously cooperate in stopping drug abuse and stay away from drugs to live a healthy life," a notification said.

When criminals forget to wear a mask...

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Using the advanced Facial Recognition System (FRS), the Delhi Police has arrested three people who secured a loan of Rs 75 lakh by mortgaging a property and preparing forged documents. The police arrested Pankaj Sachdeva alias Roshan Manchanda (61), who had fabricated his property documents and identification credentials to secure the loan. The arrest also exposed the involvement of two accomplices, Suhail Chauhan and Nitin Verma, who worked as freelance loan agents. According to the police, the case was registered in 2019 on the complaint of Harjinder Kaur Anand, a Bengaluru-based resident, who alleged that the property she purchased in 2011 at Rana Pratap Bagh in Northwest Delhi had been fraudulently mortgaged to a private bank for a loan of Rs 75 lakh. "The woman was shocked to learn about the fraud during a visit to the property in 2018 when neighbours reported suspicious activities and her son-in-law discovered a loan notice pasted on the property," Deputy



Commissioner of Police (northwest) Abhishek Dhania said. The officer further said that the fraudsters had prepared forged documents to mortgage the property and availed the loan subsequently diverting the funds to multiple accounts under fake identities. The gang specifically targeted long-vacant properties, creating a chain of fake documents to establish ownership. They then used these forged papers to secure loans from financial institutions. The funds were swiftly transferred to various accounts to avoid detection, making it difficult to trace the money trail, he said. **Continued on page 8**

Desi 'Jugaad' and more make it to a new dictionary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the country's youth march ahead in the fast changing digital era, 47 words like 'Blue carbon', 'Culturonomics', 'Digital nomad', '15-minute city' and 'Flox' have made it to a new dictionary acknowledging India's prowess. The dictionary is titled "India in Future Tense: 47 Words for 2047". Other words like 'Jugaad' and 'Gamification', part of everyday lingo or language in a country, have gained international recognition of sorts. This phenomenon came about following bright Indian young men and women studying and working in elite institutions and industry in Europe and United States over the last few

years. Interaction with peers from those countries has obviously led to these words slipping into daily usage while communicating and finding wide acceptance. The dictionary, which identifies the key trends that will be dominant when India turns 100 in 2047, aims to reflect values that will define the nation's journey: "inclusivity, sustainability, and technological advancement". It is brought out by the United Nations Foundation and the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). "It is designed to empower young minds with the knowledge and language needed to shape a sustainable and prosperous India by 2047. As we move forward, new nouns, verbs and phrases will be essential to describe our



living environment and evolving world," reads the description of the dictionary, which is a part of the initiative by the 'Next Generation India Fellows'. While 'Blue Carbon' is the carbon that is absorbed from the atmosphere and stored in the ocean, 'Culturonomics' is a portmanteau of culture and economics, which describes the global transmission of culture through varied entertainments such as entertainment, food, sports and more. Similarly, a 'Digital Nomad' is someone who uses digital technologies to work remotely while embracing a nomadic lifestyle, a '15-minute city' places all essential services within a 15-

minute radius of people residing anywhere in the city, whereas 'Flox' means a versatile, on-demand shared living space designed for remote workers, offering cutting-edge amenities that enhance well-being and efficiency. The other highlighted words in the dictionary include 'Gamification', 'Gender bonds', 'Heritage hubs', 'Jugaad', 'Longevity economy', 'Neuroqueer', 'Osmotic energy', 'Plastivore' and 'RoboCare'. "By bridging the gap between technical jargon and practical understanding, this dictionary makes complex concepts accessible and actionable for tomorrow's leaders. We believe that 'the only way to predict the future is to shape it,'" it explained.

PHIR BHI RAHENGI NISHANIYA...



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the members of Raj Kapoor's family, in New Delhi. The entire Kapoor family, including Ranbir Kapoor, Alia Bhatt, Neetu Singh, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Saif Ali Khan, Karisma Kapoor and others met Prime Minister Modi and invited him to the Raj Kapoor Film Festival to be organised to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of the legendary actor-filmmaker

Probe into death of judge's daughter hits roadblock

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the ongoing investigation into the death of Preeti Dwivedi, the daughter of a retired additional district judge in Lucknow, the statements of the deceased's children have not yet been recorded.

(Sector 12) on November 5. Her family accused her husband Ravindra Kumar Dwivedi of throwing her from the building, and he was arrested and jailed.

went to his house, a woman there blocked their entry, claiming Sarju was not present. The investigation revealed that after Preeti's death, Ravindra Kumar Dwivedi handed over the children to his brother Sarju Prasad Dwivedi, and cousin Ashwini Kumar Dwivedi.

Kumar refused to comply. Sarju Prasad later requested the committee on November 25 that he would directly present the children at a later date.

Youth barges into sis-in-law house, tries to rape her

Lucknow (PNS): A youth allegedly barged into his sister-in-law's house, tore her clothes, and attempted to rape her, police said on Wednesday.

Inspector, Krishna Nagar, said that a case has been registered based on the complaint and evidence. He added that the accused and the victim had a past dispute.

Sambhal police hold meeting with religious leaders on loudspeakers

Sambhal (PTI): Police on Wednesday held a meeting with representatives of different communities in which it was unanimously decided to remove loudspeakers installed outside religious places.

Chandra told reporters. Mufti Alam Raza Khan Noori, who attended the meeting, said that it was decided to follow the orders of the high court and the Supreme Court on loudspeakers.

The meeting was held over two weeks after Sambhal witnessed violence on November 24 during a court-ordered survey of the Mughal-era Shahi Jama Masjid in the city. Four people were killed and several were injured in the confrontation.

INDIA bloc ignoring interests of Muslims in Parliament: Azam

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Jailed Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan has accused the opposition bloc INDIA leadership of ignoring the interests of Muslims, particularly those in Rampur, in Parliament.

Parliament as strongly as the Sambhal violence. Azam Khan also asked the INDIA bloc to clarify its stance on the Muslims of Rampur. His statement was released on the official letterhead of Rampur's SP district president Ajay Sagar.

first successfully experimented in Rampur," Azam said from his jail cell. "The INDIA bloc has stood as a mute spectator to the destruction in Rampur and has seen the Muslim leadership being destroyed.

then they will be compelled to examine whether their right to vote should exist or not," Azam said in the written statement. Azam, 76, is lodged in Sitapur jail. He has been convicted in six criminal cases in the past 18 months.

FIR over threatening post targeting lawyer VS Jain

Sambhal (PTI): An FIR has been registered here on the complaint of Supreme Court lawyer Vishnu Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu side in a mosque-temple dispute in Sambhal district, against a person for allegedly issuing him a threat on social media platform 'X', police said on Wednesday.

insult with intent to provoke a breach of peace and 351(2) (Criminal intimidation), the SP said. Vishnu Shankar Jain and his father Hari Shankar Jain have represented the Hindu side in many cases related to places of worship, including the Gyanvapi Mosque-Kashi Vishwanath temple dispute.

Lucknow (PNS): Lucknow Development Authority on Wednesday announced a policy amendment for sealing properties. Defaulters can now avoid sealing by depositing a fixed amount and completing formalities under the Urban Housing Act. They must also file an affidavit promising compliance with regulations.

LDA announces to amend policy for sealing properties



NOTICE

I, Nisha, wife of Prateek Varshney, residing at 125/D Chandra Nagar, near Jiten Gas Agency, Lal Bangla, Kanpur-208007, have changed my name to Nisha Varshney for all future purposes.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Vivek Kumar to Vivek Kumar Gupta for all future purpose, Vivek Kumar Gupta S/o Prem Avtar Gupta R/o 948, Sarsaul Kanpur Nagar Tah.Narwal

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohan Behari to Mohan Behari Taneja S/o Shani Lal Taneja R/o Flat No 201 Harmony Villa 117/L/25 Kakadeo Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

My correct name is Vanshika Agrawal. D/O Amit Agrawal which is mentioned government records by mistake lic. My name is mentioned in policy no.233253797 as Vaishnavi Agrawal which is my house hold name in future, I will be known vanshika Agrawal - R/o Flat no-DHB,201 Anshal archid asiya (LKO) U.P. I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me.

NOTICE

Important Notice The original Sale Deed dated 04.08.1993 registered with Office of Sub Registrar Sitapur on 05.08.1993 at Book No. 1, Volume No. 260, Pages from 347 to 362 at Serial No. 1799 and original Sale Deed dated 18.12.2003 registered with Office of Sub Registrar Sitapur on 18.12.2003 at Book No. 1, Volume No. 1491, Pages from 299 to 326 at Serial No. 6476 & Original Sale Deed dated 20.03.2004 registered with Office of Sub Registrar Sitapur on 20.03.2004 at Book No. 1, Volume No. 1562, Pages from 239 to 250 at Serial No. 1025 fell somewhere between Mohalla Roti Godam Sitapur and Balraj Photostat Lalbagh Sitapur on 22.11.2024 at about 11.30 A.M. The information regarding loss of the said original Sale Deed No. 1799 dated 05.08.1993, original Sale Deed No. 6476 dated 18.12.2003 & original Sale Deed No. 1025 dated 20.03.2004 has been registered in the category of registration of lost of property on 23.11.2024 at Police Station Kotwali Nagar Sitapur on GD/SD/DD No. 0035, the absolute owner of the property mentioned in the said Sale Deed is Mr. Sanjay Singh Son of Late Raghunath Singh.

Clash at multiplex during movie screening

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A late-night screening of 'Pushpa 2' turned violent at a multiplex in Lucknow when a group of men clashed, creating chaos and panic among the audience. The incident, which took place on December 10, led to the arrest of six individuals after the altercation escalated into a physical fight.

audience. Upon arrival, Vikas Nagar police attempted to pacify both parties but were met with aggression. The situation quickly escalated, forcing the authorities to take the accused into custody to prevent further violence and maintain public peace.

six individuals involved in the fight to the Vikas Nagar police. Legal action was taken under sections 126 and 135 of the BNSS, and the accused were sent to judicial custody. Meanwhile, a former member of zila panchayat from Sultanpur district, who had come to attend a wedding in the Arjunganj area of Lucknow, was allegedly shot at during the intervening night of Monday and Tuesday.

police station, said he came to know about the incident through the media. An investigation is currently underway. Vijay's brother Bharat Pandey has been contacted. Initial information suggests that Vijay was partying with a few close friends when the dispute occurred. The bullet was fired from a licenced firearm, hitting Vijay directly in the shoulder, causing heavy bleeding. He was admitted to KGMU Trauma Centre in critical condition. Currently, Vijay's sister-in-law Kanchan Pandey is the district panchayat member from Baldirai, and Vijay is her representative. As of now, no formal complaint has been received from the victim's side. Bharat Pandey has been called in, and once further information is gathered, the investigation will continue.

Actress Sapna Singh's son found dead, 2 friends held

Bareilly (PTI): Actress Sapna Singh staged a protest in Bareilly after her 14-year-old son was found dead under suspicious circumstances, with police arresting his two friends over the case, officials said on Wednesday. She ended the protest on Tuesday after more than 90 minutes following the police's assurance that action would be taken. Her son Sagar Gangwar's two adult friends — identified as Anuj and Sunny — were arrested and sent to jail on Wednesday on charges of murder, the officials said.

been found. Viscera samples have been preserved for further examination," Circle Officer (Faridpur) Ashutosh Shivam said. Bhuta Police Station Inspector Sunil Kumar added, "Anuj and Sunny confessed during questioning that they had consumed drugs and alcohol with Sagar. The overdose caused Sagar to collapse. Panicking, they dragged his body to a field and left him there."

was conducted, treating it as an unidentified case. However, the Baradari police had registered a missing persons complaint filed by Om Prakash on December 7, an official said. Following the identification of the body, CCTV footage near the incident site showed Anuj and Sunny dragging Sagar. This led to their detention, the official added. The incident sparked protests in Sagar's village, with residents blocking the road and demanding a second post-mortem. Sapna Singh, known for her roles in TV programmes "Crime Patrol" and "Mati Ki Banno," returned from Mumbai on Tuesday to find her son dead.

Curtains on event aimed to unite country through languages

Lucknow (PNS): In a major initiative to preserve Indian languages and culture while strengthening the foundation for students' bright futures, the Uttar Pradesh government held 'Bharatiya Bhasha Utsav-2024' across the state from December 4 to 11. The week-long festival, which concluded on Wednesday, aimed to foster a deeper connection between children and the richness of Indian languages, celebrating the nation's vibrant cultural heritage. Centred around the theme 'Unity Through Languages', the event served as a platform to inspire children with the message of national unity while instilling a deep appreciation for mother tongues and regional languages.

ness, and self-confidence among children. Notably, the event provided an opportunity to connect with India's unique linguistic heritage and strengthen the bond of national unity. This festival marks a significant step in sowing the seeds of linguistic and cultural richness among the younger generation. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises the promotion of multilingual education. This policy focuses on making mother tongues and regional languages the medium of instruction, aiming to develop linguistic skills in students and encourage the benefits of multilingualism. The week-long event highlighted the importance and diversity of Indian languages, hosting an array of activities, workshops, and programmes to engage students meaningfully.

Woman who defrauded ex-IAS officer arrested

Lucknow (PNS): The Gomti Nagar police on Tuesday arrested a woman who, along with her husband, allegedly defrauded former Special Secretary Hari Prasad Singh of Rs one crore under the pretext of securing liquor shop contracts for him. The accused woman, Shakuntala Sharma, was arrested after her husband Rakesh Sharma had already been sent to jail for his role in the scam. Gomti Nagar Inspector Rajesh Kumar Tripathi confirmed that Shakuntala Sharma was caught on Tuesday for her involvement in the fraud. She and her husband had falsely claimed to have influential connections within the police, administration, and excise departments to deceive the former IAS officer. As per reports, Hari Prasad Singh, a retired IAS officer who

served as Special Secretary in the UP administration until his retirement in 2017, filed a complaint stating that Rakesh Sharma first approached him on May 2, 2024, in Patrakapuram. Rakesh, who claimed to be an old acquaintance and a former police officer, introduced himself, took Singh's contact details, and promised to meet him at his home. The very next day, Rakesh Sharma returned with his wife Shakuntala Sharma. The couple convinced the former IAS officer that they could help him secure the allotment of three liquor shops in Lucknow—two on Shahjanaf Road and one on Vrindavan Yojna, Rae Bareilly Road. An exchange for their supposed help in securing these contracts, they demanded a total of Rs one crore.

Liquor sellers press demands

Lucknow (PNS): Office-bearers of Liquor Sellers Welfare Association on Wednesday met the excise commissioner to present their demands. Media in-charge Devesh Jaiswal highlighted key proposals, including the renewal of the Excise Policy for 2025-26. He suggested fixing six-month quotas to provide relief to retail traders, who generate the most revenue. Jaiswal recommended a 45% quota for foreign liquor in the first six months and 55% in the latter half, as well as a 55% quota for beer in the first six months. He also requested a 20% margin on foreign liquor, beer, and country liquor to cover operational costs.

HDFC BANK POSSESSION NOTICE APPENDIX IV (RULE 8(1)) Whereas, the undersigned being the authorized officer of the HDFC Bank Ltd. under the Secularization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued demand notice dated 01.01.2024 calling upon the borrower(s) 1. M/s Taneesha Enterprises Through It's Proprietor Mrs. Rupashree Rai (Borrower) 2. Mrs. Rupashree Rai W/o Mr. Ashish Sharma (Co-Borrower) 3. Mrs. Usha Sharma W/o Mr. Shwasthraj Rai Sharma (Co-Borrower) 4. Mr. Shwasashraya Rai Sharma S/o Mr. Vishwanath Rai Sharma (Co-Borrower And Mortgagor) to pay the amount mentioned in the notice Rs. 48,56,457.00/- (Rupees Forty-Eight Lakh Fifty-Six Thousand Four Hundred And Fifty-Seven Only) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

Indian Bank (A Govt. of India Undertaking) POSSESSION NOTICE (for Immovable Property) [Under Rule-8 (1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002] Whereas, the undersigned being the authorised officer of the Indian Bank under the Secularisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3, 8 and 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice as detailed here in below calling upon the borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, SAMBALPUR Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sambalpur on behalf of Odisha State Rural Roads Agency invites Percentage (1/3) bids through e-Procurement from eligible class of experienced bidders for construction of Bridges including maintenance for 5 years under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana PMGSY-III, Batch-III of 2024-25.

Basti has become a model city: Yogi

PNS ■ BASTI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said that this land is sacred as the birthplace of Lord Ram, who taught that no matter how great or wealthy a person becomes, they are incomplete without expressing gratitude to their mother and motherland. The chief minister was addressing the 15th Foundation Day celebrations of Karma Devi Group in Basti.

He said, "While keeping the memories of their mother alive and fulfilling their duties towards the motherland, two brothers established the Karma Devi Group in their mother's name and a pharmacy college in their father's name, so that even poor students could receive quality and modern education." He mentioned that their goal was to inspire thousands of children to move forward on the path of hard work and live a life of dignity and self-reliance. He said that a person's self-reliance leads to the self-reliance of society and the nation.

Yogi urged people to stay focused and move forward positively. He shared that Basti has now become a model city. He noted that Tapasi Dham is the only religious site where a feast is held in memory of freedom fighters. Additionally, a Centre of Excellence, established in collaboration with Israel, has turned Basti into a leading hub for horticulture. He also discussed topics like local products, climate change, organic farming, natural agriculture, quality improvement, and stray cattle shelters, encouraging farmers to aim for success.

The chief minister honoured students and teachers for their outstanding achievements and



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the 15th Foundation Day celebrations of Karma Devi Group in Basti

laid the foundation stone for Omni Hospital and Trauma Centre with the press of a button. He also paid tribute to Saroj Singh and Devmangal Singh, recalling how Saroj Singh would visit the temple and predict that he would one day become the chief minister. He also mentioned that a person has five debts: towards their mother, father, teacher, motherland, and the gods. The way one can honour their memories and ideals in life is the true means of inspiration. ON Singh and Devmangal Singh's early lives were full of struggles. When Eastern Uttar Pradesh was facing a lack of resources, with no roads, elec-

tricity, clean drinking water, educational institutions, or employment opportunities, continuing their education without their mother's dedication was impossible. In 1981, Devmangal Singh (now deceased) became an IFS officer, and in 1983, ON Singh cleared the UP Public Service Commission exam and became an officer. The CM stated that the decisions that should have been made 50 years ago were delayed, forcing the youth here to migrate. The past governments dulled their talent and hindered the region's prosperity. "Had nursing, pharmacy, law colleges, BCA institutes, and good schools with CBSE

boards been established, and if hospitals and trauma centres had been set up in the private sector, the youth here would have excelled in every field across the country," he remarked. He further mentioned that those parents who made efforts saw their children progress, while those without resources saw their children fall behind. "Nursing is a field where, if good education is provided, placement is guaranteed. India's nursing and paramedic professionals are in demand worldwide," he added. Yogi said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, China let India down by not supply-

ing medicines. However, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India's pharmaceutical industry was revived, and medicines began to be produced locally, he pointed out. "This reduced dependence on other countries for essential medicines," he said. He mentioned that a Pharma Park is being developed in Uttar Pradesh, spanning 2,000 acres, to establish various pharmaceutical-related industries. In the first phase, work has already started in Bundelkhand, where industries are being set up, and production preparations are underway.

The CM emphasised that developed countries prioritise skills, technology, and hard work, which make individuals self-reliant. "PM Modi has set a vision for India to become a developed nation by 2047. The world is recognising India's importance, and Indian talent has proven its worth globally. Out of the world's top 100 companies, 20 are led by Indian CEOs. While technology has advanced significantly, India must embrace it while ensuring ethical and protective measures. A positive outlook can lead to great achievements, while negativity can hold back progress," the CM said.

He highlighted that when the government and society work together, the results are evident. He recalled how, two decades ago, farmers associated with the Munderwa sugar mill were brutally killed. Now, with a government focused on positive thinking, the sugar mill is operational again. "One government sold it, while another reopened it," Yogi said. He stressed that determination and willingness to act are more important than resources.

Remove encroachments on land of poor: CM to officials



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the Janata Darshan in Gorakhpur on Wednesday

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday directed the officials to remove encroachments on the land of the poor and take stringent legal action against the guilty, ensuring justice for the victims. He emphasised that land mafia and bullies, who exploit the weak, must not be spared under any circumstances. "With a zero-tolerance policy, the government is committed to ensuring strict legal action against such offenders and justice for all," he stated during the Janata Darshan held in front of Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhawan on the Gorakhnath temple premises. Notably, the chief minister instructed officials to take swift action in cases of land encroachment. He interacted with the

public seated in front of the Mahant Digvijaynath Smriti Bhawan in the temple complex, listening to each individual's concerns.

He referred their applications to the officials concerned, directing prompt and satisfactory resolutions. Assuring the people that the government is committed to addressing the issues of every victim, he emphasised that everyone would receive justice and their hardships would be alleviated. People from neighbouring districts also attended the Janata Darshan.

Several women raised concerns about land grabbing by the land mafia and criminals. In response, CM Yogi assured that the land mafia would be given a stern lesson, adding that no one would be allowed to displace the weak or poor as long

as he is in power. He instructed the administration and police officers present to identify those illegally occupying land and take strict legal action against them. Many people had come to the Janata Darshan with a request for financial assistance for treatment. CM Yogi assured them that the government would provide full help for treatment.

While forwarding their applications to the officers concerned, he instructed them to expedite the process of treatment estimation and make it available to the government. CM Yogi also directed that Ayushman cards be issued to all eligible individuals to ensure they face no difficulties in accessing treatment. Additionally, the chief minister gifted chocolates to children accompanying some women.

Nagvasuki Temple: A sacred blend of faith, history and renovation

PNS ■ MAHAKUMBH NAGAR

Nagvasuki Temple holds a significant place among the mythological temples of Prayagraj, combining both faith and history. Revered for its association with the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), the temple has recently undergone major renovations and beautification under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, in preparation for Maha Kumbh 2025.

Located on the banks of the Ganga in Prayagraj's Daraganj locality, the temple is a spiritual hub for devotees. It is believed that bathing in the holy waters of the Triveni Sangam, followed by a visit to the temple for darshan of Lord Nagvasuki, grants blessings, spiritual fulfilment, and freedom from life's obstacles.

Ancient scriptures, including the Skanda Purana, Padma Purana, Bhagavata Purana, and Mahabharata, highlight Lord Nagvasuki's crucial role during the Samudra Manthan.

As Mount Mandarachal served as the churning rod, Nagvasuki became the rope, enduring severe friction. Following Lord Vishnu's request, Nagvasuki rested in Prayag, where the holy Sangam healed his wounds.

Later, King Divodasa of Varanasi performed 'tapasya' (meditation) to bring Nagvasuki to Kashi. However, as Nagvasuki prepared to leave Prayag, the gods pleaded with him to remain. Nagvasuki then declared, "If I stay in Prayagraj, it must be mandatory for devotees to visit me after bathing in

the Sangam. On the fifth day of the Sawan month, I must be worshipped in all three worlds." The gods agreed to his terms. In response, Brahma's Manas Putra constructed a temple, and Nagvasuki was installed on the sacred north-western bank of the Sangam in Prayagraj. Another mythological story narrates that when the divine river Ganga descended to earth, her flow was so powerful that, even after passing through Lord Shiva's locks, it threatened to enter the netherworld. To control the flow, Nagvasuki used his hood to create the Bhogavati Tirtha. Shyam Lal Tripathi, the priest of Nagvasuki Temple, explained that in ancient times, a Bhogavati Tirtha Kund was located in the western part of the temple, though it has now disappeared.

It is believed that during floods, when Maa Ganga touches the steps of the temple, bathing at this ghat provides the same spiritual value as bathing in the Bhogavati Tirtha. The priest also shared that the Nag Pancharami festival originated from the conditions set by Lord Nagvasuki.

A grand fair is held at the temple on Nag Pancharami every year. It is believed that by offering a pair of silver snakes and seeking darshan of Lord Vasuki, devotees can achieve freedom from Kaal Sarpa Dosh. Special worship of Nag Vasuki is also performed on the fifth day of every month, with rituals like Rudrabhishek believed to remove obstacles from life. Asi Madhav, one of the 12 Madhavas of Prayagraj, was historically

Cyber police station to prevent online frauds

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): Ahead of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj in January, the Uttar Pradesh Police have established a cyber police station in the mela area to safeguard devotees from potential online scams, officials said on Wednesday.

Detailed plans have been made to protect devotees from cyber fraud, including threats from fake or dark websites and malicious activities on social media. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajesh Dwivedi said. As part of the security measures, a cyber police station has been established in the mela area. A dedicated team of top cyber experts and officers from across Uttar Pradesh has been formed to manage online security of the anticipated 45 crore devotees visiting Maha Kumbh, the officials said. These specialists will provide round-the-clock vigilance, ensuring a secure and seamless experience for pilgrims from India and abroad, they said. Maha Kumbh will begin on

associated with this temple. Under Yogi's leadership, a newly constructed temple for Asi Madhav was established, marking a significant occasion celebrated on Dev Uthani Ekadashi. Previously, MP Murlu Manohar Joshi had contributed to the restoration of the temple as well. The ongoing renovation

January 13 and conclude on February 26 on the occasion of Mahashivratri. Experienced officers from the state have already taken charge, and cyber experts are now in position, SSP Dwivedi said. Measures are in place to prevent any misuse of AI and social media platforms. Suspicious activities, such as fake links used by fraudsters, are being closely monitored and neutralised, he said. In a proactive move, the cyber security team has identified 44 suspicious websites and initiated action against them, the officials said. A dedicated helpline number, 1920, has been launched to provide information related to the event. Additionally, official government websites (with ".gov.in" in their domain) are being promoted for authentic information, they said. Devotees are encouraged to report fake websites to local police stations, where the cyber police will take immediate action, they said.

includes the beautification of the temple and its courtyard, aligned with the preparations for the Maha Kumbh. Efforts by the Uttar Pradesh government and the Tourism department aim to introduce younger generations to the temple's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

4-year-old girl kidnapped, raped; accused held

Lucknow (PNS): A four-year-old girl playing outside her house in the Islamnagar area in Budaun was allegedly kidnapped and raped by her neighbour, who was arrested on Wednesday, police said.

According to the girl's father, she was playing with other children outside the house on Tuesday afternoon and when he went to check on her later, she was missing, said Inspector Harendra Singh, in charge of the Islamnagar police station. The father initially thought the girl might have gone to a nearby house, Singh said, citing the complaint. "About an hour later, Pawan Kashyap (33), a resident of the neighbourhood, left the girl near the house and ran away. Seeing all this, the girl's grandmother called Pawan but he did not stop," Singh said. "The girl was crying and there was blood on her clothes. Fearing something untoward, the family immediately took her inside the house. There, when the mother asked the girl the reason for crying, she narrated her ordeal," Singh added. The family, along with some neighbours, then went out to search for Kashyap, but he had already fled.

The family then reported the incident to the local police station and an FIR was filed. Following the investigation, Kashyap was arrested on Wednesday, Singh said. The accused has been booked on charges of kidnapping and rape. The girl has been sent to the district hospital for medical examination and treatment and further legal proceedings in the case are underway, Singh said.

Power employees announce nationwide protest over privatisation of discoms

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers (NCCOEEE) has decided to organise a nationwide protest against the privatisation of power distribution companies in east and south Uttar Pradesh.

Protest meetings will be held across the country on December 13 and 19 to oppose privatisation. A 'panchayat' of power employees will be organised in Lucknow on December 22 and in Chandigarh on December 25 to protest against privatisation.

The NCCOEEE has decided that if any unilateral action is taken towards the privatisation of power distribution companies in Uttar Pradesh, without prior notice, all 27 lakh power

Protest meetings will be held across the country on December 13 and 19 to oppose privatisation

employees across the country will be forced to take to the streets on the same day, with nationwide protests. It was also decided that when action is initiated to hand over the electricity system of Chandigarh to a private company, a similar nationwide action will be taken on the same day. The NCCOEEE further decided that December 13 will be observed as Anti-Privatisation

Day by power employees across the country. On December 19, the martyrdom day of the great heroes of the Kakori revolution—Pandit Ram Prasad Bismil, Ashfaq Ullah Khan, and Thakur Roshan Singh—will be marked as "Save India of Martyrs' Dreams - Remove Privatisation" day, with meetings held at district and project headquarters across the country. The NCCOEEE also decided that a large 'Bijli Panchayat' will be organised in Lucknow on December 22 and another in Chandigarh on December 25. These panchayats will see participation from a large number of farmers and common consumers, alongside power employees, who will be informed about the consequences of privatisation of electricity for both consumers and employees.

UP poised to lead India in milk production

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh has claimed that the state is poised to lead the country in cow milk production. Currently, this distinction belongs to Rajasthan, with Uttar Pradesh holding the second position. According to recent data, the state has approximately 0.66 crore milch cows, producing 5.29 million tonnes of milk annually. Of this, 4.2 million tonnes of milk comes from mixed and indigenous breeds and 1.7 million tonnes from foreign breeds.

Milk from indigenous breeds is superior in quality due to the cows' natural adaptation to the Indian climate over thousands of years, making them easier to rear. Recognising this, the UP government has emphasised the conservation and promotion of indigenous cow

breeds. This focus will significantly boost with the establishment of veterinary colleges in Gorakhpur and Bhadohi. These institutions will serve as research hubs, benefiting cattle herders across Uttar Pradesh, particularly in Purvanchal.

The advancements in research are expected to enhance the productivity of indigenous cows, further strengthening Uttar Pradesh's standing in milk production. Currently, UP contributes 16% of the country's total milk production, leading in overall milk production and aiming to achieve the top spot in cow milk production as well. To this end, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath recently inspected the veterinary college under construction in Gorakhpur, providing directives to develop it as a model project.



He emphasised the need for adequate land reserves for animal housing, pastures, and the creation of a Gau Sarovar. The foundation stone for the Veterinary Science College in Tal Nauda, Gorakhpur, was laid by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on March 3 this year. Spread across 80 acres and being constructed in three phases with a budget exceeding Rs 350 crore, the project's first phase will cost Rs 277.31 crore and is expected to be completed by 2026.

Cows have always been an integral part of the traditions of Gorakshapeth, with the cowshed at Gorakhnath Temple in Gorakhpur standing as a testament to this legacy. Known for its rich collection of native cow breeds, this cowshed exemplifies the Peeth's commitment to cow protection.

As both the CM of Uttar Pradesh and the Peethadheeshwar of Gorakshapeth, Yogi Adityanath has prioritised cow protection and welfare. This includes initiatives such as rescuing stray cows, providing various incentives to cow herders, and ensuring regular vaccination, breed improvement, and productivity enhancement to maintain the health of these animals. If these efforts towards cow protection and promotion persist, Uttar Pradesh is poised to lead the nation in cow milk production.

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सार्वजनिक सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण की आवासीय/व्यवसायिक/रेंट/नजूल/इन्फ्लूएन्स ट्रेडर योजनाओं के निम्नलिखित आवेदकों द्वारा उनके नाम के सामने अंकित सम्पत्ति का हस्तान्तरण/नामांकन किये जाने हेतु प्राधिकरण में प्रार्थना-पत्र प्रस्तुत किया गया है :-

क्र.सं.	मूल आवेदी का नाम	भवन/मूखण्ड/प्लेट संख्या	योजना का नाम	मूच्य का दिनांक	मूल आवेदी के उत्तराधिकारी अथवा आवेदक का नाम	उत्तराधिकारी के पत्र में अनापत्ति कर्ताओं के नाम	मूल आवेदी के आवेदक के सम्बन्ध
1	श्री रघुराज सिंह राना	भवन संख्या-सी-12/11	पेपर मिल कालोनी	29.09.2017	श्री प्रदीप सिंह राना (वैधायक के अन्तर्गत पर)	-	पुत्र
2	श्री फतेह बहादुर सिंह	भवन संख्या-सी-24/8	पेपर मिल कालोनी	26.07.1996	1. श्री निगम कुमार सिंह 2. श्रीमती सार्वज्ञा विजय सिंह 3. श्रीमती आरती सिंह	-	पुत्र विवाहित पुत्री विवाहित पुत्री
3	रघु राम आसरे त्रिवेदी (मृतक)	मूखण्ड संख्या-45	एशवाग इन्फ्लूएन्स एरिया	19.04.2000	श्रीमती इन्दु त्रिवेदी पत्नी स्वयं योगेन्द्र त्रिवेदी	कुंठ पल्लवी त्रिवेदी	पुत्रव्यू
4	श्री शारदा ससन कंचन	भवन सं-UG-35 सेक्टर-जी, जानकीपुरम योजना, लखनऊ	जानकीपुरम	07.10.2005	श्री प्रम कंचन पुत्र श्री नीरज कंचन (मृतक का पुत्र)	1. श्री राकेश कंचन (पुत्र) 2. श्री नीरज कंचन (पुत्र) 3. श्री परमेश कंचन (पुत्र) 4. श्रीमती नीता कंचन (पुत्री)	अपोजीकृत वसीयतनामा /आप्त भूमि का दान वित्तेश के अन्तर्गत पर
5	श्रीमती विमला श्रीवास्तव (मृतक)	मूखण्ड संख्या-सी-46-ए	सेक्टर-बी, अलीगंज योजना, लखनऊ	10.05.2021	1. श्री विकास चन्द्र श्रीवास्तव 2. श्री आलोक श्रीवास्तव 3. श्री अरुण कुमार श्रीवास्तव 4. श्री प्रमोद श्रीवास्तव	शालिनी श्रीवास्तव	पुत्र पुत्र पुत्र पुत्र

उपरोक्त नामान्तरण के आवेदन के सम्बन्ध में यदि किसी भी व्यक्ति को कोई आपत्ति हो तो वह साक्ष्य सहित प्रकाशन तिथि से 30 दिनों के अन्दर अधोस्तारकर्ता के कार्यालय में प्राप्त करा दे। निर्धारित तिथि तक कोई आपत्ति प्राप्त न होने पर प्राधिकरण अभिलेखों में कॉलम-6 पर लिखित व्यक्ति का नाम दर्ज कर लिया जायेगा तथा उसके बाद किसी आपत्ति पर विचार नहीं किया जायेगा।

सचिव

SANGATHAN PARV-2024 OF BJP

Chaurasia's stress on consensus in organisational elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

State co-in charge of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Sanjeev Chaurasia said the BJP is not a 'Parivarvadi' party but a party which runs with a family feeling. He was addressing the meeting of party's election observers, district election officers and mandal election officers constituted for the organisational elections 2024 at the BJP regional office at Rohania here on Tuesday. He said the process of election of booth presidents has been completed in the ongoing organisational elections under the Sangathan Parv-2024 (Organisation Festival-2024) of BJP. "Physical verification of these booth presidents will be done on the upcoming December 12 and 13 along with this, they will be honoured by giving them a letter of felicitation sent by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and state BJP president Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary. Chaurasia said in the process of organisational elections, work has to be done on the basis of consensus. "It is possible to win every election with a strong structure of the booth. Therefore, active and dedicated people have to be connected in the organisational elections. The structure of an all-pervasive, all-touching and all-inclusive organisation has to be prepared in which representation of all sections is included", he added. State co-in charge said before the election of the Mandal president post, a meeting



State BJP co-in charge Sanjeev Chaurasia at a party meeting at Rohania office in Varanasi

should be held at the Mandal level from December 13 to 15. "Discuss the social equation of the Mandal in the meeting and then discuss the names of the workers who have the qualification of Mandal president", he said, adding that a panel of three names should be made from these names and its list should be handed over to the region. He said these names will be approved in the Kashi region meeting to be held in Lucknow on December 17. He added that the nomination of the selected names will be done on December 18 and on December 19, the names of the Mandal presidents will be announced in a harmonious environment and they will be felicitated.

Chaurasia said a person who has been the Mandal president in 2019 and thereafter in 2022 cannot become the Mandal chief again. "The maximum age limit for the post of Mandal president is 45 years," he informed, adding that only a person who has been an active member twice can become the Mandal president. He asked the party's election officials that at the time of selection of the Mandal president post, special attention should be paid to the social equation as well as the claim of women. He added after the election of Mandal presidents, the process of election of district president will begin. State BJP co-election officer Rajendra Tiwari said in the first phase of the

Organisation Festival, the process of booth formation was taken forward and now in the second phase, we are moving towards taking forward the process of Mandal formation and district formation. He said the centre of the final battle in democracy is the booth. Along with the formation of active booth presidents and active booth committees, we are now moving forward towards the process of organisational formation at the Mandal level. "We have to take forward the process of organisational election by taking forward the decision-making process on the basis of collectivity", Tiwari said. The welcome speech and vote of thanks was given by regional party president Dilip Patel. The programme was conducted by state co-convenor of Teachers' Cell Anil Srivastava. On the occasion Uttar Pradesh Minister Jaswant Singh Saini, state BJP general secretary Anup Gupta, MLC Ashwani Tyagi, former MP Subrat Pathak, Purushottam Khandelwal, Anamika Chaudhary, Ashok Chaurasia, Santosh Patel, Vidyaagar Rai, Nagendra Raghuvanshi, Rajesh Rajbhar, Dr Sudama Patel, regional media in charge Navratan Rathi, co-incharge Santosh Solapurkar, Naveen Kapoor, Akhand Pratap Singh, Jagdish Tripathi, Sanjay Sonkar, Suresh Singh, Atma Visheshwar, Madhukar Chitransh as well as district presidents of all 16 districts were prominently present.

CCRS conducts safety inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

After the completion of doubling and electrification of Prayagraj Rambagh-Jhusi (7.33 km) rail section of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) under Varanasi-Madhosingh-Prayagraj Railway Doubling Project, Chief Commissioner of Railway Safety (CCRS), New Delhi, Janak Kumar Garg conducted a safety inspection of this section and the newly constructed Major Bridge Number 111 on it on Wednesday. At the end of the inspection, he successfully completed the speed trial of the section at a speed of 70 kmph. On the occasion Chief Administrative Officer (Construction) Abhay Kumar Gupta, Divisional Railway Manager (Varanasi) Vineet



Kumar Srivastava, Executive Director (RVNL) Vikas Chandra, Chief Project Manager (RVNL) VK Agarwal along with senior officers and engineers of NER Headquarters Gorakhpur, Varanasi Division and Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL) were present. The CCRS started his inspection from Prayagraj Rambagh railway station where he discussed in detail the action plan with the

officials concerned regarding yard remodelling, station expansion, complete block working of the station as per the standard of electrified and doubled section, standard-II R of colour light signals, dual VDU system with route-setting operations, station panel and route relay electronic interlocking and various works related to yard remodeling. Thereafter, Garg left for inspection of Prayagraj Rambagh-Jhusi block section by motor trolley from line number 13 and conducted a thorough inspection, load test and formation test of open web type through girder at railway under bridge number 122. After this, he proceeded to inspect the block section by motor trolley and conducted safety inspection of 872 metre Daraganj side viaduct at the beginning of the newly constructed major bridge over the Ganga river, checked the sleeper spacing/fittings and measured the height of traction fittings and reached Major Bridge number 111 and thoroughly inspected 24 spans of 76.20 metres of the new 1,934.40 metres long broad gauge double line bridge over the Ganga river, open web steel girder design for strength and flexibility of the rail bridge.

Series of events being held to mark anniversary of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor's inauguration

PTI ■ VARANASI

A series of religious and cultural events are being held to mark the anniversary of the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2021. The celebrations began on December 10 and will continue until December 13. Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Vishwabhushan Mishra, said, "The grand and divine inauguration by the prime minister completed three years and a series of religious programmes began on December 10 to commemorate this milestone." He detailed

the events, saying, "On December 10, special classical rituals, including Panchmukhi Ganesh Ji worship, Saptachiranjivi invocation, Navagraha worship, and Maha Mrityunjaya Homa, were conducted at the Dhundhiraj Ganesh Temple near the corridor. The rituals were officiated by renowned scholars Vishweshwar Shastri Draid and Ganeshwar Shastri Draid." Further, a 'Maha Rudra Path' will be conducted in the temple premises on December 12. On December 13, all deities in the Kashi Vishwanath Dham will be ceremoniously anointed as per traditional scriptures. "A 'yajna' will be performed at 1 pm, pray-

ing for universal prosperity and victory of Sanatan Dharma," Mishra added. A Chaturveda recitation will also take place, running until the evening. Cultural performances will grace the temple courtyard on December 13, coinciding with the auspicious Pradosh Tithi. "The Shivarchanam Sandhya programme will feature renowned artists, including sitar maestro Devvrat Mishra, singer Neeraj Singh, and acclaimed bhajan and Bollywood singer Abhijit Ghoshal," Mishra noted. Additionally, a free eye check-up and treatment camp, organised in collaboration with Shankar Netralaya, will be held in the temple courtyard for the

temple trust priests and staff. Mishra emphasised the celebratory spirit, saying, "This is a time to honour the spiritual and cultural heritage of Kashi." Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham in Varanasi on December 13, 2021. Modi is also the Lok Sabha MP from Varanasi. The PM noted that earlier the temple area was only 3,000 square feet which has now enlarged to about five lakh square feet. "Now 50,000-75,000 devotees can visit the temple and temple premises. That is, first the 'darshan' and bath in Maa Ganga and from there directly to 'Vishwanath Dham'," he had said.

Min lays stone for road

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Fee and Registration Ravindra Jaiswal on Wednesday laid the foundation stone for the construction of a road to be built at a cost of ₹2.06 crore in Shri Vinaykashini Colony in Dithori Mahal Ward under his City North assembly constituency area here on Wednesday. Apart from this, the foundation stone was also laid for the construction of auto rickshaw corridor from Varanasi Junction (Cantt) railway station to Cantt Roadways in front of Varanasi Jn station. Directing the departmental

and implementing agency engineers present on the spot, the minister said the works for which the foundation stone has been laid during the day should be completed within three months by running a campaign on a war footing and with quality as per the standards. "Laxity will not be tolerated at any level in this", the minister warned, adding that the construction of this corridor will definitely provide relief from the jam in front of Varanasi Cantt station. Prominent among those present were Mayor Ashok Tiwari, Arvind Singh, corporator Sushil Gupta, Arvind Singh, Balram Kanaujia, BJP's Mandal president Shri Ratna Maurya, local corporators, mandal presidents and others.

10 rly employees felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ



General Manager of North Central Railway (NCR) Upendra Chandra Joshi felicitating 10 railway employees

General Manager of North Central Railway (NCR) Upendra Chandra Joshi felicitated 10 railway employees from Jhansi, Agra and Prayagraj divisions on NCR in the presence of Principal Chief Safety Officer JCS Bora and other principal heads of department of NCR for their excellent work towards safety. The awarded employees include Mukesh Kumar, Loco Pilot, DDU (Prayagraj division), Vicky Kumar Shahu, Assistant Loco Pilot, DDU, Raish Pal Singh, train manager, Panki Dham (Prayagraj division) Rajesh Kumar Meena, Kantewala, Rairu (Jhansi division), Jaswant Kumar, Junior Engineer/C&V/ Prayagraj (Prayagraj division), Rahul

Yadav, track maintainer, Panhai (Prayagraj division), Jaipal, track maintainer/ Firozabad (Prayagraj division), Harichand, trackman, Kosi Kalan (Agra division), Chand Mohammad, trackman, Agra (Agra division) and Anil Parihar, constable/Gwalior (Jhansi division). The awarded employees were given Rs 2,000 along with a certificate of appreciation. A special safety award, of employee of the month for the month of November was given to Anil Parihar who was awarded ₹3,000 and a certificate. KILLED: A 50-year-old man was killed by some persons after hitting him with a brick over a minor dispute on Nawab Yusuf Road under the Civil Lines police station area here late on Tuesday night.

SK Srivastava assumes charge as CORE GM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Sanjay Kumar Srivastava, a 1988 batch IRSE officer assumed charge as General Manager of Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE), Prayagraj, on Wednesday. Prior to assuming charge as GM, Srivastava was working as Principal Executive Director (Infra-1)/ ED (Track) at RDSO Lucknow since October 2021. Srivastava has held several important positions in Indian Railways, Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO), CORE, Kalyan Singh, said. Srivastava had worked as Divisional Railway Manager, Bikaner, from April 2019 to August 2021 and as Executive Director (Mobility), Railway Board from April 2015 to April 2019.

Minister: Extracurricular activities lead children to heights of success

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH and Food Safety and Drug Administration Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu', said the extracurricular activities like sports, drama, dance, singing etc take children to the heights of success. He was speaking as the chief guest in the concluding function of the five-day zone level competition of street play under the Kashi Sansad Sanskritik Pratiyogita at Shri Vallabh Vidyaapeeth Girls Inter College here on Tuesday. The programme began with the street play 'Mombatiya jalane se betiyon zinda nahi hoti' by students of Harishchandra PG College. After that certificates were distributed to all the winning participants by the minister. Addressing the children Dayalu said now this saying 'if one plays, his/her career will be ruined' has become old because the extracurricular activities like sports, drama, dance, singing etc are also taking children to the heights of success and this competition is such a



UP Minister Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' presenting a certificate to a winner of an event in Varanasi

programme of the Prime Minister through which children have got an opportunity to hone their talent. Encouraging the girls, he said that since the Vedic period, women of our country have been very strong and even today women are moving ahead in every field, whether it is sports, administration or politics, they are proving their dominance. Principal of the school Dr Mukta Pandey, said that the competition is providing a platform to the people of all ages to display their talent. School manager Sanjay Nagar, thanked the minister and said this school is always striving to hone the talent of girls and such competitions provide a good

opportunity for them. In the group competition of street play in the age group of 10 to 18, the team of Shri Vallabh Vidyaapeeth Girls Inter College got first place while the team of Shri Agrasen Girls Inter College finished second and the team of Harishchandra Boys Inter College was placed third. In the age group of 18 to 40, the team of Harishchandra PG College got first place while in the solo competition of street play, Tanu Girl of Shri Vallabh Vidyaapeeth Girls Inter College got first place and Harshit Kumar, a student of Harishchandra Boys' Inter College secured the second position. The programme was conducted by the senior lecturer Neelam Singh. The jury comprised Manjit Kaur, Savita Jaiswal and Pratibha Singh. The documentation work was done by Mridula Jaiswal, Kishwar Naheed and Vandana. The function was also attended by Praveen Kumar Gothi, Pankaj Singh, Gaurav Rathi, Dr Hardat Shukla, Santosh Saini, Dr Sudhir Tripathi, Saurabh Rai etc.

Gita Sandesh Rath Yatra taken out



The members of Srimad Bhagavad Gita Vedic Nyas distributing copies of Srimad Bhagavad Gita to people in Govind Nagar on Wednesday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The members of Srimad Bhagavad Gita Vedic Nyas organised Gita Jayanti celebrations in Govind Nagar on Wednesday. They formed a human chain from Chawla Market Chauraha to CTI Chauraha and distributed copies of Gita to people. On the occasion a Gita Sandesh Rath Yatra was also taken out from Chawla Market Chauraha. On the way dozens of traders and other people showered flowers on the chariot by offering aarti. The members also distributed copies of Srimad Bhagavad Gita free of cost to local shopkeepers and passers-by. The yatra ended at CTI Chauraha via main market. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Umesh Paliwal said Gita Jayanti is an important festival celebrated

every year to remember the preachings of Bhagavad Gita. Prominent persons present in the yatra were Kamal Trivedi, Surendra Gera, Vijendra Makkad, Prakash Vir Arya, corporator Navin Pandit, Rajiv Awasthi and Annu Malhotra. MAN FOUND HANGING: A man was found hanging from a mango tree behind a bank in Bhatta Kothi under Chaubepur police station area on Wednesday morning. On getting information police rushed to the spot and carried out a probe. Onkar Singh (40) of Bhatta Kothi had left his house on Tuesday evening and was found hanging from a mango tree on Wednesday morning. Police sent the body for autopsy. The SO said it appeared to be a case of suicide. His kin did not blame anybody for the incident. On the basis of autop-

sy report, further action would be initiated in the matter, he said. Meanwhile five people returning from a marriage party were injured when their car rammed into a truck from behind on the highway near Gujela village under Sajeti police station area late Tuesday night. On information of passers-by, police rushed to the spot and sent the injured to the Ghatampur community health centre (CHC). After the first aid, doctors referred them to Kanpur. Police have started a probe in the matter. Pradip Kumar (29) of Chakeri along with friends Sunil Kushwaha (30) of Geeta Nagar, Kanpur, Devendra Awasthi of Bindki, Nitesh Tewari (29) of Bindki, Pushpendra Singh (22) of Chirala under Sadh police station and Ravi Singh of Maharajpur had gone to Hamirpur to attend a marriage ceremony. When they were returning from there, their car suddenly rammed into a stationery truck from behind on the highway near Gujela village under Sajeti police station area causing serious injury to five people. Police sent them to the Ghatampur community health centre (CHC) by an ambulance from where after first aid doctors referred them to Kanpur district hospital. Sajeti Station Officer Kamlesh Rai said injured had been sent to hospital.

'Gita a spiritual beacon for entire world'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

On the auspicious occasion of 'Gita Jayanti' (Mokshada Ekadashi), the Department of Sanskrit at Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kidwai Nagar, under the directives of the CDC Director, CSJM University, organised several events on Wednesday with the active participation of students. These included the formation of a grand human chain, recitation of Gita 'shlokas', essay and chart competitions in Sanskrit on the theme "The Importance of the Srimad Bhagavad Gita." The event commenced with a human chain formation by students, conveying the profound teachings of Lord Krishna to inspire a meaningful life. This was followed by a collective recitation of Gita 'shlokas' in unison. The programme was inaugurated by Principal Professor Anju Choudhary, who offered floral tributes to the sacred text, Srimad Bhagavad Gita. In her address, she emphasised that the Gita is a spiritual beacon for the entire world, teaching the art of living. She said internalising the teachings of the Gita purifies the mind and intellect and paves the way for a joyous journey through life's challenges.



Chief guest Chandra Prakash Tripathi of Sanskrit Bharati addressing the faculty and students at MMV on Wednesday.

Chandra Prakash Tripathi, Provincial Minister of Sanskrit Bharati, Kanpur, who was the chief guest addressed the students, highlighting that the Gita encompasses an ocean of Lord Krishna's teachings, including knowledge, devotion, and action. He underscored the transformative power of the Gita, which can uplift a defeated and despondent individual, rekindling their strength and hope. Head of the Sanskrit Department, Professor Archana Srivastava, shared her thoughts on the greatness of the Gita, calling it a treasure of universal goodness and an excel-

lent scripture for character building. She likened the Gita to Kamadhenu, capable of resolving all problems and alleviating suffering, citing: "Gita sugita kartavya kim anyaih shastra vistaraih". Dr Pooja Srivastava in her address, remarked that the Gita cultivates tolerance and forgiveness. The students Prashanti, Dipali, Swetksha, Naina and Riya made significant contributions. Approximately 80 students participated enthusiastically in the programme. The participating students were awarded certificates in recognition of their efforts.

The other faculty members, including Mamta Gangwar, Pratibha Srivastava, Neeta Mishra, Mamta Dixit, Manisha Shukla, Rashmi Chaturvedi, Jyoti Kiran, Dr Dipali, Dr Nishi, Dr Saba, Dr Anamika Verma, and Dr Meera Tripathi, made invaluable contribution to the event. The support of Bhupesh Awasthi, President of Srimad Bhagavad Gita Vedic Trust, South Kanpur, and Rajendra Awasthi, General Secretary, was commendable. CSJMU ACHIEVES MILESTONE: The Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) has achieved a significant milestone by securing its place in the QS Sustainability Rankings 2025. This prestigious achievement highlights the university's commitment to environmental sustainability, social impact and good governance. In the global rankings, CSJMU is listed among the top 1501+ institutions worldwide, while securing the 59th position among 78 Indian institutions. The university performed notably in the Environmental Sustainability category, attaining a global rank of 683. Additionally, its focus on equality, governance and impact of education reflects its dedication to fostering inclusive and sustainable development. Speaking on this

remarkable achievement, Vice-Chancellor (V-C) Prof Vinay Kumar Pathak said, "This recognition is a testament to the university's relentless efforts towards achieving academic excellence while addressing global sustainability challenges. We are proud to contribute to the nation's higher education sector with a focus on holistic development." Prof Pathak also expressed heartfelt gratitude to Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Anandiben Patel, for her unwavering support and guidance. "Her constant encouragement has inspired us to scale greater heights in research, education, and societal contributions," he added. The QS Sustainability Rankings evaluate institutions across three key pillars: Environmental Impact, Social Impact and Governance. CSJMU's inclusion in these rankings underscores its commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligning with global efforts to address pressing challenges. The university has pledged to further its initiatives in environmental education, health and well-being, equality and employability. With this milestone, CSJMU strengthens its resolve to be a leader in sustainable and transformative education.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

George Soros is documented to have visited Fori Nehru and maintained "extended correspondence" with her and their association traces back to the time when B K Nehru served as India's ambassador to the United States, the party claimed. "This raises questions about the extent to which the Nehru-Gandhi family may have compromised India's strategic interests, over the decades, to benefit their extended family's financial and entrepreneurial pursuits, as well as the interests of the deep state, they have been aligned with," it said. The BJP also slammed the Congress over the decision of



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

Sambit Patra termed the opposition parties' notice for a "no-confidence motion" against Dhankhar and INDIA bloc's decision to move Supreme Court on the EVM issue as "painful and disturbing". "The Congress takes the issue of EVM to the Supreme Court again and again and returns defeated. Every time it tried to curse and drag the Election Commission, it faced embarrassment... Yet the Congress is going to move the Supreme Court on the issue," he said. This shows that Congress does not have "any respect" for the Constitution of India, he charged. Patra alleged that the Congress along with its allies in the opposition gave a notice for initiating a motion to remove Vice President Dhankhar "in a hurry" on Tuesday after the BJP raised,

both inside and outside Parliament, the issue of "Gandhi-Nehru family's link with George Soros and the conspiracy to destabilise the country taking fund from the George Soros Foundation". "Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi - the entire Nehru-Gandhi family - are involved in it," he claimed. The BJP leader said it is sad that the Congress has sought initiation of a "no-confidence motion" against Dhankhar who comes from a "humble background". "It's an insult to a farmer's son, a man who comes from a humble background," he said, adding, "And you (Congress) talk about caste?" Patra said the Congress and its allies have brought the notice against Dhankhar knowing very well that it will fall flat on the floor of the

House as they do not have enough numbers in their favour. However, the party has brought such a kind of notice for the first time in Rajya Sabha against its chairperson "just to insult the Jat community," he charged. "Jats are patriots. Jats have shed their blood for the freedom of Hindustan and for Hindustan. Today you are making such allegations against a Jat Vice President. Somewhere you are trying to defame him by saying that he is not doing his work properly," Patra said. "Let me tell you that a farmer's son, a Jat, never bows down. He will never bow down. And the respect of Jats will always remain intact and firm in India... Parliament will give a reply. People will give a reply," he added.

Secure messaging apps big challenge to counter online radicalisation: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The use of secured messaging applications like Signal, Telegram, Viber and the dark Web besides end-to-end encrypted WhatsApp by radical elements to connect with like-minded individuals is proving to be a "major challenge" for security agencies to counter online radicalisation, government said on Wednesday. Replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said as the extensive use of cyber technology is the main tool for propagating radical ideology, cyberspace is being monitored ceaselessly. The minister said at present, apart from state police, the NIA is investigating 67 cases relating to online radicalisation. In these cases, 325 accused have been arrested, 336 accused have been charge-sheeted and 63 accused have been convicted so far. "Cyber patrolling is done on a regular basis to identify and monitor such content and entities which are target-



ing gullible/depressed/alienated youth," the minister said. He said websites and accounts involved in communal and anti-India propaganda affecting the sovereignty and integrity of India are being identified and sent to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for action. During 2024, MeitY has issued directions for blocking

9845 URLs (which also include radical content) till October 2024, he said. "In addition, u/s 79(3) (b) of IT Act, 2000, Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), Ministry of Home Affairs, has also been authorised/designated as an agency to issue 'Take Down Notices' for intermediary/Platform to remove unlawful content," he said. Rai said regular meetings are

being held with all stakeholders and law enforcement agencies for sharing of information including inputs on radical organisations for collectively addressing multiple risk factors associated with radicalisation in a holistic and coordinated manner and to establish effective mechanisms and strategies to tackle radicalisation. "The use of more secured

messaging applications like Signal, Telegram, Viber and dark Web apart from WhatsApp with end-to-end encryption by radical elements to connect with other likeminded elements has proved to be a major challenge for security agencies in its efforts to counter radicalized individuals online," the minister said. He said the CBI, as National Central Bureau for India, continues to be engaged with INTERPOL for combating Online Radicalisation. "During the 90th INTERPOL General Assembly held in New Delhi from 18-21st October 2022, the INTERPOL unveiled the first ever Metaverse which is specifically designed for law enforcement worldwide," he said. Rai said in January 2024, the INTERPOL released a whitepaper on a law enforcement perspective on Metaverse and identified the issue of radicalisation, while noting that terrorists may exploit the Metaverse for online recruitment, radicalisation, training and indoctrination of individuals.

India evacuates 75 nationals from Syria after rebels overthrow Assad Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India evacuated 75 of its nationals from Syria two days after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government. The evacuation, coordinated by the embassies of India in Damascus and Beirut, was put into effect following an assessment of the security situation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "The Government of India today evacuated 75 Indian nationals from Syria, following recent developments in that country," it said in a late-night statement on Tuesday. "The evacuees included 44 'zairreen' from Jammu and Kashmir who were stranded at Saida Zainab. All Indian nationals have safely crossed over to Lebanon and will return by available commercial flights to India," it said. The MEA said the government accords the highest priority to the safety and security of Indian nationals



abroad. "Indian nationals remaining in Syria are advised to stay in touch with the Indian Embassy in Damascus," it said. "The government will continue to monitor the situation closely," the MEA added. The Syrian government collapsed on Sunday as the rebels seized control of the capital Damascus after capturing several other prominent cities and towns. Assad fled the country after the rebel group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

took control of Damascus, marking the end of his family's 50-year rule. Russian state media reported that Assad is in Moscow and will be given asylum. His nearly 14-year tenure was marked by civil war, bloodshed and brutal crackdown on his political opponents. The MEA on Monday said it is monitoring the unfolding developments in Syria and advocated a peaceful and inclusive Syrian-led political process going forward in that country.



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

CM Omar Abdullah Promises to Restore 'Darbar Move'

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has made significant progress in combating malaria with the number of estimated cases of infection dropping to 2 million in 2023, a 69% reduction from 6.4 million cases in 2017, according to the latest World Malaria Report by the World Health Organization (WHO), released Wednesday. Similarly, malaria deaths decreased by 68%, from 11,100 in 2017 to 3,500 in 2023, as per the report. As a result, India officially exited the WHO's High Burden to High Impact (HBHI) group in 2024, a key milestone in the country's efforts to reduce malaria, said the WHO. The HBHI initiative, aimed at

accelerating malaria elimination in countries with high malaria burdens, was launched in India in 2019, targeting four states: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal. Despite these advances, India still accounted for half of all estimated malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region in 2023. The region as a whole reported 4 million cases and 1.5% of global malaria deaths. P. vivax was responsible for over 48% of cases in the region. Over the course of the past two decades, malaria cases in South-East Asia have dropped by 82.4%, from 22.8 million in 2000, and incidence fell by 87%, from 17.7 to 2.3 cases per 1,000 population at risk.



A significant portion of this decrease was due to India, which saw a reduction of 17.7 million cases and a 93% decrease in incidence. India and Indonesia together accounted for about 88% of the malaria deaths in the region in 2023, though other countries like Bhutan and Timor-Leste reported zero malaria deaths since 2013 and 2015, respectively. Sri Lanka was certified malaria-free in 2016. The WHO also emphasised the continued need for accelerated efforts in malaria elimination, particularly in countries where malaria persists. Globally, the WHO reported that 2.2 billion cases and 12.7 million deaths have been averted since 2000, but malaria remains a significant health

challenge, particularly in the WHO African Region. In 2023, there were 263 million estimated malaria cases and 597,000 deaths worldwide. Saima Wazed, Regional Director WHO South-East Asia cautioned against any complacency, "We must not forget that the risk of malaria not only persists but could increase due to factors such as climate change. We must continue to do all we can to accelerate our progress against malaria." At the same time, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General added, "An expanded package of lifesaving tools now offers better protection against the disease, but stepped up investments and action in high burden countries are needed to curb the threat."

CENJOWS signs MoU with NDMA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant step towards bolstering India's disaster management capabilities, the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), the only tri-services think tank under HeadQuarter Integrated Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). The MoU was signed by Lt General Syed Ata Hasnain (Retired), Member, NDMA and Major General (Dr) Ashok Kumar (Retired), Director General of CENJOWS. The signing ceremony marked the beginning of a strategic partnership to address critical challenges in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response to develop the 'whole of the nation' approach, defence ministry said on Wednesday. The MoU outlines a framework for joint initiatives, including Collaborative Research:



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

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

PM Modi releases compendium on complete works of Subramania Bharati

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday released the compendium of complete works of great Tamil poet and freedom fighter Subramania Bharati and hailed his contributions, saying a personality like him comes once in centuries. Modi said Bharati's thoughts and intellectual brilliance continue to inspire people even today. The prime minister released the compendium at his 7, Lok Kalyan Marg residence. "Subramania Bharati Ji was a profound thinker dedicated to serving Maa Bharati. A personality like Subramania Bharati comes once in centuries. Subramania Bharati Ji's thoughts and intellectual brilliance continue to inspire us even today," Modi said as he paid homage to the great poet on his birth anniversary. The 23-volume set has been compiled and edited by Seeni Viswanathan and published by Alliance Publishers. It contains details of the editions, explanations, documents, back-



ground information and philosophical presentation, among others, of the writings of Bharati. "In our country, words are not considered mere expressions. We are part of a culture that talks about Shabda Brahma", talks about the infinite power of words," Modi said at the function. "My government with the intention of 'kartavya' has taken Subramania Bharati's contribution to the people," the prime minister said. He said there is a live connection between Bharati and him which is Kashi. "He came to attain

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Race for Delhi

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

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



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

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

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

PICTALK



Monkeys huddle together on a chilly day, in New Delhi

For Joe Biden it is family first

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



KALYANI SHANKAR

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

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

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



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

George Washington used the power to pardon some people. Presidents often use their pardon powers for friends and allies. A controversial case was former President Richard Nixon, who Gerald Ford pardoned on September 8, 1974. Nixon faced possible prosecution for the Watergate scandal.

In late 1992, President George H W Bush pardoned six men implicated in the Iran-contra affair, including former Defense Secretary Weinberger. Bill Clinton, who, despite stating he would not, pardoned his half-brother Roger for past cocaine charges. Similarly, Donald Trump pardoned his son-in-law Jared Kushner's father for tax evasion and for retaliating against a cooperating witness.

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



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

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

The case against Hunter Biden has spanned several years, involving allegations of tax crimes and gun fences. He was convicted in June and pleaded guilty to tax evasion in September. Biden said Hunter was 'selectively and unfairly prosecuted' and pointed out that the charges were politically motivated. The immediate impact of the pardon is that it makes it harder for Democrats to criticise Trump.

Also, it has given Trump a chance to pardon people charged with the January 6 events. Biden's change of heart after initially declaring he would not pardon Hunter had his reasons. One of them was his wife, who persuaded Biden to do so.

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SYRIAN REBELS CONQUER DAMASCUS

Madam — The manner in which Islamic rebels conquered Syria's capital Damascus and forced President Bashar al-Assad to flee the country is not only surprising, but it may also mark the start of a new era of uncertainty for West Asia as a whole. The excitement with which Syrians welcomed the opposition soldiers demonstrates that Bashar al-Assad has become even more unpopular. His disavowal stemmed from his brutal governance over Syria. Syria has been dealing with insecurity and upheaval for nearly 13 years. Iran has suffered a significant setback with the seizure of Syria by rebel forces. It is dubious that Iran will sit in peace after the demise of the administration it sponsored in Syria.

Even if the rebels win Syria without massive violence, the chances of durable peace are slim because Turkey wants to administer the country its way. Although India's economic ties with Syria have not grown significantly, both countries have joined forces in the battle against terror. Not only that, but Bashar al-Assad has always supported India about Kashmir. Syria has even stated that the elimination of Article 370 in Kashmir is a domestic matter for India and that any country has the right to take the necessary steps to safeguard its residents on its territory. It remains to be seen what kind and how much Syria's posture will alter considering the new circumstances. Indian-Turkish relations have recently improved. While its attitude on Kashmir has softened, India has not attempted to block Turkey's membership in BRICS.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

LEGACY OF SHAKTIKANTA DAS

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

Congress faces challenges



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

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

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

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

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

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

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

Vinod Johri | Jalandhar

RBI MOOTS FOR BETTER WAGES

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

Shreyanshi Jain | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Bridging the educational divide through computer-based testing

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

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



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

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

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

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

Empowering Through Certification: Educational centres play a pivotal role in fostering socioeconomic growth by equipping individuals with skills that lead to employment and entrepreneurship. Online learning initiatives and CBT offer equitable access to quality education, providing rural learners with opportunities comparable to their urban counterparts. CBT enhances these



MATHEW POYIADGI

Candidates can choose convenient testing locations and time slots, reducing stress and improving performance. This approach proved invaluable during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing individuals to take exams remotely. The 2023 Value of IT Certification Report underscores the tangible benefits of certifications: 35 per cent of Indian candidates experienced job promotions, while 37 per cent secured new opportunities within their industry, and 20 per cent transitioned to different fields.

Bridging Urban-Rural Disparities: The increasing availability of CBT centres in remote areas is a step toward addressing regional disparities in education and employment. These centres provide a pathway for individuals to upskill, earn recognised certifications, and improve their career prospects. As India continues to expand its CBT infrastructure, the nation moves closer to realising equitable educational opportunities and fostering inclusive socioeconomic growth. (The writer is Vice President EMEA and Asia, Pearson VUE; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT LIFE

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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

These days TV channels have become interested in the rebirth phenomenon. They are producing evidence from all over the world to confirm the same. Then, the Bhagavad-Geeta – the book of eternal wisdom is full of detailed information about us being souls. I will cite just one verse. 'Just as childhood, youth and old age are changes in the body of this soul, getting another body is a similar change. (2.93) And the ultimate confirmation is God saying it. Isn't He omniscient, who knows past, present and future also? Having convinced ourselves of this reality, let us see how we can prepare for a transfer or relocation from our present life. There are two main parts. The first one is getting mentally ready. Personally speaking, when the time came for me to go to the USA for higher

studies, I visualised how my life would change for the better in the coming years. I also realised that there will inevitably be many challenges in the new country. The second was to take with me whatever I could to make my life there as comfortable as possible. I took the necessary clothes and a little money, which was allowed at that time. But mainly it was my certificates and what I had learnt by that time. Similar preparations are required for the bodily change, though they are quite different in detail. The first one has to be the mental preparation for such a change. We should accept the fact that such a change is inevitable. And it can be a lot better than our present. Lord Krishna has assured, "Those who have begun their spiritual journey take birth in a family of pure and prosperous." (6.41) Therefore, it is essential that we do so too before our time comes to leave the present body. We must be in the shelter of God at that time by doing spiritual activities.



Surely, we must be following dharma in our activities as far as possible. We should be mainly in the mode of goodness, which is illuminating and free from diseases on account of purity. (14.6) We should be in control of bad emotions like lust, greed, anger, hate, etc. We should have accumulated a lot of good 'karmas' (acts) because this is all we are allowed to take with us. But we shouldn't put too much pressure on ourselves because we can make improvements gradually only. Whatever, we are presently doing, we should do it better. As the present determines the future, the present has to be safeguarded fully. Are we inclined to make the necessary preparations? We should get started right away at least mentally. It will be such a shame not to do so when we have time to do so. Those wanting to do so are encouraged by God; one will succeed.

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

Rebel forces oust Assad as Damascus falls



B K SINGH

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



PREETI BAJAJ

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

ness of the advantages of solar energy and its widespread adoption. The adoption rate remains relatively low.

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

The initial analysis of the survey data suggests that while

people are increasingly aware of alternatives to traditional energy sources, a majority of consumers in India face three primary challenges in their adoption: Accessibility, Skill shortage, and Perceived cost implication, as discovered in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research. For instance, over two-quarters of the respondents (54 per cent) in the 'Solar Spectrum of New India' research rate their knowledge about solar energy solutions as high, however, nearly a quarter of the respondents (24 per cent) say solar energy solutions are inaccessible to them.

In fact, according to the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), 59 per cent of respondents do not possess



even a basic understanding of solar energy. Therefore, while awareness is spreading, concerns linger about the accessibility of solar infrastructure. Another challenge that came to the fore, is the shortage of specialised skills in the solar energy sector.

The boost in the solar energy sector is facing a shortage of trained personnel for the effective implementation and maintenance of solar infra-

structure.

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

financial incentives, tax advantages, subsidies for solar power generation, net-metering regulations, basic customs duty, Production Linked Incentive (PLI), and the Aatmanirbhar campaign, perceived costs remain a significant deterrent for many individuals.

Thus, the Solar Spectrum of New India presents both challenges and opportunities on the path towards a sustainable energy future. By addressing issues of accessibility, skill shortages, and perceived costs, stakeholders can work together to accelerate solar adoption trends and pave the way for a brighter, cleaner future for India.

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

demand will be powered by increased industrial, economic, and domestic consumption activities throughout the country.

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

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

Babbar Khalsa behind bar bomb attack, claim Gurugram police



Police personnel investigate at the spot after a low-intensity explosion occurred outside a night club, in Gurugram.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI/GURUGRAM

Terror outfit Babbar Khalsa International's (BKI) involvement in a "crude bomb" attack on a Gurugram bar has come to light, officials said on Wednesday. This was revealed during the interrogation of a man who was arrested red-handed while hurling crude bombs outside the bar in the sector 29 market here, a senior police officer said. Sachin Taliyan (27), a native of Chhur village in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, has revealed during his interrogation that he is a henchman of designated terrorist Satwinder Singh alias Satinderjeet Singh alias Goldy Brar. A city court sent the accused to a seven-day police custody on Wednesday. Brar, a close aide of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, works for the

BKI. He collects funds for the outfit through extortion and by spreading terror, the accused has told his interrogators. Brar and Bishnoi want to establish their dominance in Gurugram and Chandigarh, the accused has said. Days after blasts at a bar owned by singer Badshah in Chandigarh, an explosion was reported outside two night-clubs in sector 29 here on Tuesday morning. Police sources said the Lawrence Bishnoi gang had called the club operators via WhatsApp about 13 days ago, demanding crores of rupees and a stake of up to 30 per cent in the business. After the club operators approached the police, cops were deployed at the sector 29 market, a senior officer said. The officer said they had inputs that the Brar and Bishnoi gangs would target Gurugram. "We

have been keeping a strict vigil. Clubs were alerted as well and we nabbed the accused while he was hurling crude bombs. We are questioning him," he added. An FIR has been filed on a complaint from Head Constable Anil of the crime unit, sector 17. The complainant has said he was on duty at the sector 29 market on Tuesday morning when there was an explosion on a grey Scooty that was parked in front of the Warehouse Club. A man was seen running and hurling another bomb on a signboard of the Human Club, the complainant has said, adding that the blasts triggered panic in the area. The accused, who was carrying a yellow and blue striped bag, was overpowered by the policemen deployed in the area. A country-made weapon, two "crude bombs" and a mobile phone were seized from his pos-

session. "The accused was saying loudly that he is Goldy Brar's man. They (the bar owners) did not listen to his boss and hence, had to face consequences," the head constable has said in his complaint. The FIR was lodged under sections 15, 16(1)(B), 18, 38 and 39 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, sections 324(4) and 61 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), sections 3 and 4 of the Explosive Substances Act and section 25(1) of the Arms Act at the Sector 29 police station. According to the police, the arrested accused has passed his Class-10 examination and is unemployed. He had come to Gurugram alone. Another suspect was also taken into custody by police but released later as his role was not established in the incident.



Touting at IGI airport tackled: 540 arrests, 254 vehicles seized

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport is witnessing rampant cases of touting especially with foreign nationals, a menace that damages India's reputation on the global stage and deters foreign tourism, with the arrest of 540 touts and the seizure of 254 vehicles this year significantly surpassing last year's figures of 264 arrests and 96 vehicle seizures. "In a determined effort to eradicate touting activities at IGI Airport, Delhi Police's IGI Airport Unit has launched an extensive and strategic crackdown, resulting in an unprecedented impact on passenger safety and airport operations. With the arrest of 540 touts and the seizure of 254 vehicles in 2024, compared to 264 arrests and 96 vehicle seizures in 2023, the IGI Airport Police has demonstrated a zero-tolerance policy toward touting," the police said in a statement. Touting, the act of coercing or deceiving passengers into using unauthorized services, has long been a persistent problem at IGI Airport. It involves touts misguiding travellers to use unauthorized taxis, accommodation services, or even shopping options. This deceptive practice not only compromises passenger safety but also tarnishes the airport's reputation, often leaving victims vulnerable to financial exploitation, harassment, and safety risks. Deputy Commissioner of Police (IGI) Usha Rangnani said,

"Touting at IGI Airport is a criminal offense under the Delhi Prevention of Touting & Malpractices against Tourist Act, and the police have demonstrated a zero-tolerance approach toward this illegal activity." Several cases in recent months have been reported at the Delhi airport where travellers including foreign nationals have been targeted especially at night by these people. In one incident, a foreign national arriving late at night was approached by a tout who falsely claimed that protests in Delhi had caused all hotels with public transport to shut down. The tout exploited the passenger's concerns and lured him into his trap, charging Rs. 98,700 under the pretense of arranging travel to Varanasi. The victim was later abandoned on the roadside. "Acting swiftly, the IGI Airport Police registered the complaint and launched a coordinated operation. Within 24 hours, they apprehended the four suspects involved, including the mastermind, Amit Malhotra. The police froze the suspects' bank accounts, ensuring the victim's money was recovered," the DCP said. She added that in another case, a foreign national was overcharged five times the standard taxi fare from IGI Airport to CR Park. The victim's friend lodged a complaint and within hours, the IGI Airport Police tracked down the offenders, Monu Bhati and Kamal, and arrested them. Moreover, earlier this year, a solo female traveler was targeted by

touts who misled her about hotel closures and attempted to coerce her into paying for "premium" services. Upon receiving her complaint, the IGI Airport Police arrested the offenders. The IGI Airport Police have also taken several proactive measures to combat touting. Specialized teams, including plainclothes officers, patrol the terminals, arrival areas, and parking zones around the clock. Further, enhanced foot and motorcycle patrols allow officers to navigate crowded areas and swiftly access remote parts of the airport, while collaborations with RAXA (Airport Security Group) and DIAL (Delhi International Airport Limited) have strengthened intelligence-sharing and operational coordination. Additionally, joint operations with traffic police target both touting activities and traffic violations. To further curb touting, the police rely on intelligence gathered through surveillance and public feedback. Their "Eyes and Ears" scheme has enabled the police to carry out targeted raids, reducing the freedom of touts to operate. In addition, preventive measures ensure that repeat offenders are continuously monitored and kept from returning to illegal activities. At the arrested touts belong to multiple states, highlighting the widespread nature of this issue including 373 from Delhi, 107 from Uttar Pradesh, 32 from Haryana, 11 from Bihar and others from Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.

Catholic body urges MPs to act against judge for hate speech

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) on Wednesday urged all Members of Parliament to support action against an Allahabad High Court judge, who has been at the centre of controversy for delivering "hate speech" at a VHP function. At the function organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on December 8, Justice Shekhar Yadav said the main aim of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) was to promote social harmony, gender equality, and secularism. A day later, videos of the judge speaking on provocative issues, including the law working according to the majority, were circulated widely on social media, drawing strong reactions from several quarters, including opposition leaders who labelled Justice Yadav's reported remarks as "hate speech" and "breach of judicial ethics". In a statement issued on Wednesday, CBCI, the apex body of Catholics in India, slammed Justice Yadav for his remarks that the country would function as per the wishes of the majority. "Article 14 of the Constitution says the state shall not deny any person equality before law or equal protection of law within the territory of India. Yet, a few days ago it was reported that a judge of the Allahabad High Court said during a programme inside the court premises that this country would function as per the wishes of the majority, which is the 'law,' CBCI said in the statement. "The comments were made during a function organised by an outfit that was reportedly responsible for communal violence in the past, according to some of the judicial commission reports," it added in a veiled reference to the VHP. Justice Yadav made the remarks at a provincial convention of VHP's legal cell and high court unit in the Allahabad High Court last Sunday. CBCI said the higher judiciary in India is entrusted with the duty to guard the Constitution, and judges are sworn in to uphold the Constitution and the laws sanctioned by it. "The 'truth' to be upheld by the judges is not 'the wishes of the majority', but the 'Dharma' as has been sanctioned by the Constitution and engraved in the motto of the Indian judiciary -- 'Yato Dharmastato Jayah'... One who does not have faith in our Constitution and its morality should have nothing to do with the judiciary, much less be a judge," the statement said.

Commemorative stamps issued by postal department to mark UNICEF@75

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications, Government of India, and UNICEF on Wednesday issued a commemorative postage stamp marking 75 years of UNICEF's partnership with India to realize the rights of children in India. The special postage stamp valued at Rs 10 creatively represents a mother and a child to symbolize UNICEF's mandate to

protect and promote every child's right to survive, thrive, and reach their full potential, especially the most vulnerable. A mandate that resulted in landmark progress in India led by the Government of India and supported by UNICEF. Colonel Akhilesh Pandey, Chief Postmaster General, Delhi Circle, Department of Posts in his address lauded the exemplary journey of UNICEF from 1949 till date and works of UNICEF in promoting and supporting

children and young people at risk, reaching every child in need and protecting children's rights to survive, thrive and reach their full potential. Addressing the gathering, Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator for India, said, "Today, the release of the U N I C E F @ 7 5 Commemorative Postage Stamp is a celebration of collaboration, shared values, and a commitment to the rights and futures of children—the very essence of progress.

Three-year-old killed in accident

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A three year old died after he was hit by a Gramin Seva tempo in southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj. According to the police on Tuesday, the accident occurred on Monday when they received a PCR call was received at Vasant Kunj North police station regarding a child, resident of Jhuggi JJ Bandhu Camp in Vasant Kunj, being declared dead during treatment in Fortis Hospital.

Yellow alert, cold wave conditions in Delhi

From page 1

The weather department advised to be careful while driving or outing through any transport and wear several layers of loose fitting, light weight; warm woolen clothing. They also advised people to cover your head, neck, hands and toes adequately as the majority of heat loss occurs through these body parts. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the minimum temperature in Palam was 6.2, a drop of 1.2 notches. A thin

layer of fog covered parts of Delhi and the morning chill persisted until around 9am. According to the IMD, smog and mist conditions, coupled with surface winds from the northwest at speeds of 8-10 kmph, contributed to the temperature drop. IMD said with the minimum recorded temperature now also being 5 degree below normal in Delhi, cold wave conditions have set in. The IMD defines a 'cold wave' as a minimum temperature less than or equal to 10 degree Celsius for plains when the temperature deviation is 4.5 to

6.4 degree Celsius. It can also be declared a cold wave based on actual minimum temperature, when the mercury drops to 4 degree Celsius or below. The last coldest day of this season was recorded on December 7, when the minimum plunged to 7.1 degrees Celsius, three degrees below the average. Historically, the all-time lowest of 0.0 degrees was recorded at the Safdarjung Observatory on December 27, 1930. Officials said the sudden temperature drop to northerly winds bringing cold air from

the Himalayas, thus amplifying the winter chill in the capital. The consistent fall in overnight temperatures is a cause for concern and the cold wave advisory, as per IMD criteria, remains in effect, highlighting the need for precautions. As temperature continues to remain in single digits in the national capital, homeless people have taken refuge at night shelters. At these shelters, they are provided with beds, blankets, food and first aid. Despite the drop in the mercury, the air quality in Delhi remained under the

"poor" category, with a thin layer of smog blanketing the city. As per data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the overall Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 199 as of 4 pm. While the AQI in Anand Vihar (218), Ashok Vihar (227), Dwarka (250) and IGI Airport (218) were under the "poor" category, areas like Aya Nagar (148), Burari Crossing (187) and Chandni Chowk (181) witnessed "moderate" levels. According to the CPCB, Ghaziabad recorded at 98, Noida 110, Gurugram 159 and Greater Noida at 146.

In its bulletin, IMD predicted cold wave conditions at isolated pockets over northwest and adjoining central India over the next few days. In its daily bulletin, the weather department noted that cold wave conditions were observed in isolated pockets over Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. The forecast further stated that ground frost conditions were recorded in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand.

Protests turn violent in Parbhani city

From page 1

Prohibitory orders have been issued in some of the affected areas of Parbhani district, while additional reinforcements have been rushed to the riot-affected areas to assist the local police. The protestors were demanding the arrest of a miscreant behind the vandalism of the replica of the Indian Constitution. Meanwhile, one Sopan Dattarao Pawar (45) was arrested in connection with the vandalism of the replica of the Indian Constitution. Immediately after the desecration of the replica of the Indian Constitution, Parbhani had witnessed violence on Tuesday. On Wednesday, violence broke out once again in Parbhani, while a bandh was observed in the Vasmat town in the neighbouring Hingoli district. The violence escalated after the protestors resorted to "rail-roko" at the Parbhani railway station and attacked the loco-pilot of the Nandigram Express. "The vandalism of the Constitution of India at Babasaheb's statue by casteist Maratha miscreants in Parbhani is absolutely very shameful to say the least. It is not the first time such a vandalism of Babasaheb's statue or symbol of Dalit

identity has happened," Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi founder-president and late Ambedkar's grandson Prakash Ambedkar wrote on micro-blogging site "X". "VBA Parbhani district karyakartas were the first to be on the scene and their protests led to the police filing an FIR and the arrest of one of the miscreants. I request everyone to maintain law and order. If all the miscreants are not arrested within the next 24 hours, consequences will follow," Ambedkar added. Former leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Vijay Wadettiwar said: "The situation got out of control in Parbhani as there was a lack of immediate action by the police. The government must give confidence to the people that the matter will not escalate further. I appeal to the Constitution lovers and the public to maintain their cool and cooperate with the masses". "The Maharashtra government is taking necessary action to ensure normalcy in Parbhani," Bharatiya Janata Party MLC Pravin Darekar said. Meanwhile, the police and district administration have appealed to the people not to lend credence to rumours and remain calm. As a precautionary measure, the police cut off the Internet in Parbhani city.

Sparring stalls Sansad again

From page 1

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader Tiruchi Siva said there is a blatant attack on the country's democracy in Parliament by the ruling BJP and added that Opposition members, including the Leader of Opposition, is not allowed to raise issues. Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Nadimul Haque said he agreed with Congress' stand. TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee slammed both ruling BJP and Congress over the repeated adjournments in Parliament, blaming them for the disruptions. Javed Ali Khan of

the Samajwadi Party (SP), said the Opposition has been totally made invisible in the Rajya Sabha. Rashtriya Janata Dal (Democratic) MP In Rajya Sabha Manoj Jha also said the Opposition has been "invisible" in Parliament. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said, "It seems that the chairman is not running Parliament but a circus. He eats up the time by speaking himself." No leaders from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) were present. Congress Deputy Leader in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi urged Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to examine the party's

complaint against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's "defamatory remarks" against Rahul Gandhi and remove them from the record. Dubey's remarks targeting Rahul Gandhi and seeking to link him to a US-based multi-billionaire, triggered uproar in the Lok Sabha, leading to adjournment of proceedings. The BJP alleged that the US-based investor, investigative media platform Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the Congress were trying to derail India's success story under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. Keeping up its offensive

against the Congress, the ruling party also alleged that the connection between US-based billionaire Soros and the Nehru-Gandhi family runs deep, extending beyond Sonia Gandhi's role as co-president of the Forum of Democratic Leaders - Asia Pacific (FDL-AP). Addressing a Press conference at the BJP headquarters, BJP MP and national spokesperson Sambit Patra termed the Opposition parties' notice for a "no-confidence motion" against Dhankar and INDIA Bloc's decision to move Supreme Court on the EVM issue as "painful and disturbing".

When criminals forget to...

From page 1

After years of evading capture, the Delhi Police deployed FRS technology to crack the case. During the investigation, a photograph from the bank account opening form linked to the fraudulent loan was processed through the FRS system. A 72 per cent match was found with an existing state dossier, revealing the suspect's true identity as Pankaj Sachdeva, a resident of Tagore Garden area. "Sachdeva had been using a fake name as Roshan Manchanda and had fabricated several identification documents, including a PAN card and

voter ID, to support his fraudulent activities. He was also linked to three other criminal cases involving forgery and cheating," said the DCP. Based on the FRS results, a team was formed to apprehend Sachdeva. A raid was conducted at his residence in Tagore Garden, where he was arrested. Upon interrogation, he disclosed the involvement of his accomplices Suhail Chauhan and Nitin Verma, who had facilitated the loan process and received Rs 18.4 lakh as beneficiaries. Both were subsequently arrested from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh and Faridabad in Haryana.

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

AP ■ SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Iran blames US, Israel for fall of Assad govt

AP ■ TEHRAN

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

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 29

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

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

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

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



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

Global chemical arms monitoring watchdog convenes meeting to discuss Syria situation

AP ■ THE HAQUE

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

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

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

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

Taliban refugee minister killed in Afghan blast

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

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

Aid to N Gaza blocked for last 2 months: UN

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

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

TikTok challenges Canadian government order to dissolve business in country

AP ■ OTTAWA

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

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

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

Trump mocks Justin Trudeau

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

PTI ■ LAHORE

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI



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

Delivering the address at the launch of Evolv, a platform supporting the holistic well-being of working women across various life stages, he highlighted the importance of mental health. "Many organisations focus on technical, managerial, and

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Global beverages major Coca-Cola has sold 40 per cent stake in its India bottling business Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCCBL) to Jubilant Bhartia Group. The Atlanta-headquartered firm is divesting bottling operations globally as part of its asset-light strategy. "This strategic investment represents an important milestone in our journey. Jubilant Bhartia Group's expertise, complements our strengths, ensuring that we continue delivering exceptional value to our stakeholders while driving innovation and sustainable progress," Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages CEO Juan Pablo Rodriguez said.

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Sanjay Malhotra takes charge as RBI's 26th Governor

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



October-November was matched by an equivalent amount of inflow by the domestic investors, like

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

INBRIEF

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

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

INSA HOLDS ANNUAL GENERAL BODY MEETING AT SRMIST

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

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

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

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

AP ■ ZURICH

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

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



The kingdom plans to spend tens of billion of dollars on projects related to the World Cup as part of the crown prince's sweeping

vision 2030 project that aims to modernize Saudi society and economy. At its core is spending on sports by the \$900 billion

sovereign wealth operation, the Public Investment Fund, which he oversees. Critics have called it "sportswashing" of the kingdom's

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

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



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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

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

Malaysian doubles coach Tan Kim Her returns for second stint

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Malaysian doubles specialist Tan Kim Her has reunited with star pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, starting his second stint at the Indian badminton landscape. The 53-year-old has been roped in by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) for a four-year term till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. "I am very happy to be back in India and get a chance to work with Satwik-Chirag and also the young and talented group of doubles players who have the potential to follow on the path of Satwik-Chirag," Tan said in a release. "I am looking forward to creating a bigger group of doubles combinations who can win tournaments at the world stage." Tan, who arrived in Hyderabad on Sunday, was India's doubles coach from 2015 to 2019 and was



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

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

next-generation players as we prepare for the 2028 Olympics," said BAI Secretary General Sanjay Mishra. "Finding the right coach took time, but we were determined to bring in those who can continue the development of our badminton stars and also work with a bigger group of players and help build a strong pipeline of talent for the future," he said. News of Tan's return has been doing the rounds since last month, but BAI had termed it "premature," saying nothing was concrete and the Malaysian was yet to accept the contract. In 2022, Tan was tipped to take over as doubles coach, but it didn't materialise. After returning to action following their heartbreaking quarter-final loss at the Paris Olympics, Satwik and Chirag had recorded a semifinal finish at the China Masters last month.



2027 Women's World Cup dates announced

AP ■ ZURICH

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

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

Shaurya Yadav stuns racing world

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

AP ■ GIRONA

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

India loses to Australia, suffer 0-3 whitewash

PTI ■ PERTH

Opener Smriti Mandhana's elegant century went in vain as India lost to Australia by 83 runs in the third Women's ODI to suffer a 0-3 series whitewash here on Wednesday.

Opting to field after winning the toss, India had Australia on the ropes at 78 for four before middle-order batter Annabel Sutherland's scintillating 95-ball 110, and brisk half-centuries from Ashleigh Gardner (50) and skipper Tahlia McGrath (56 not out), lifted the hosts to a competitive 298 for six in the allotted 50 overs at WACA.

In reply, India were bowled out for 215 in 45.1 overs.

In pursuit of a stiff target of 299, the stylish Mandhana anchored the innings beautifully during her 105 off 109 balls and as long as the southpaw was at the crease, the visitors were in with a chance.

However, her dismissal at a crucial juncture put paid to India's hopes of earning a consolation win.

The problem with the Indian innings was that the senior batter lacked support from the others after Alana King ended a 118-run partnership between Mandhana and Harleen Deol (39 off 64 balls) by dismissing the latter.

During her stay in the middle, Mandhana found the fence 14 times



and cleared it once, leading the team's recovery after the swashbuckling Richa Ghosh's (2) early departure.

Spin bowling all-rounder Gardner completed a fine match by taking five wickets for 30 runs after her contribution with the willow.

Besides Ghosh, captain Harmanpreet Kaur (12 off 22 balls)

and Jemimah Rodrigues (16 off 11 balls) failed with the bat, and it did not help India's cause.

Senior all-rounder Deepti Sharma too flopped, getting out for a duck. Earlier, Australia survived a stellar spell from India pacer Arundhati Reddy to post a challenging total in the final match of what has been a one-side series dominated

thoroughly by the formidable home team.

Sutherland led Australia's recovery after Reddy struck four times in quick succession for career-best figures in limited-overs cricket.

Having already lost the series, India opted to bowl at the iconic WACA ground but did not get the required breakthroughs in the first

powerplay with Phoebe Litchfield (25 off 33) and Georgia Voll (26 off 30) going strong.

However, Reddy, playing only her fifth ODI, changed the course of the game in one over by removing the openers in a space of four balls.

Unlike Renuka Thakur and Saima Thakor, Reddy got the ball to swing back from a fuller length which led to the fall of last match's centurion Voll, who saw her stumps disturbed.

Left-handed Litchfield was caught behind chasing an away swinger and all the momentum gained by Australia was suddenly lost.

Next to depart was star all-rounder Ellyse Perry who had no answer to a beauty from Reddy that held its line to hit the top of off-stump.

When Beth Mooney departed, Australia were reduced to 78 for four from 58 for no loss.

Sutherland and Gardner then showed the enviable depth of the Australian batting by sharing a 96-run stand for the fifth wicket.

Sutherland was the aggressor in the partnership and especially pounded the spinners, smashing two fours and a six off Deepti in the 40th over.

India's catching left a lot to be desired as they grassed three tough chances.

McGrath joined Sutherland in the 35th over and the duo pushed the score towards 300.



Entire Australian top-order is under pressure: Warner

PTI ■ BRISBANE

It's not just Usman Khawaja but the entire Australian top-order that is feeling the "pressure" despite the series-leveling win in Adelaide, reckons former opener David Warner.

While the under-fire Marnus Labuschagne found form with a resolute fifty, batting mainstay Steve Smith and rookie opener Nathan McSweeney continue to search for runs in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"I think the pressure is on all the top order, not just 'Uzzie', the former Australian left-hander was quoted saying by Fox Cricket.

Travis Head smashed a memorable hundred at home as Australia bounce back to level the five match series after a crushing loss in Perth.

"Travis came out and counter-punched and scored a brilliant hundred, and we know he's capable of doing it. But it's everyone else around supporting that," said Warner.

"It's not just one player in particular, it's the top six scoring bulk runs and making sure you're giving rest to the fast bowlers. It was a fast-paced Test in the first game, but this last one was Mitchell Starc at his best as usual with the pink ball.

"Come Brisbane, we need to see some big runs from the top order," he said about the third Test beginning here on Saturday.

McSweeney had a forgettable debut in Perth being trapped LBW by Jasprit Bumrah in both his innings for 10 and 0, while

in Adelaide he managed 49 runs.

Khawaja has 34 runs in the first two Tests and in his last 16 innings he has reached fifty only once.

Former skipper Smith is also in the middle of a woeful run, having scored 19 in his three innings of the series.

On McSweeney, Warner said: "He's had four of probably the five hardest jobs when it comes to an opening batsman, and I think he's handled it well," Warner said.

"We saw glimpses the other day of the intent that you show when you're scoring, and there are a lot of question marks around why they chose him, but the glimpses that you've seen, we now know why.

"He's got a good temperament, I like the way he sets up, and I think he's got a good future ahead of him. It's just this bowling attack from India is relentless if they bowl in partnerships."

On whether Sam Konstas should replace the struggling Khawaja, Warner said: "They would have picked him if they thought he was ready by now. That's up to the selectors."

There have also been talks about a Test comeback for gun all-rounder Glenn Maxwell but Warner feels the white ball specialist "doesn't deserve that opportunity."

"If you're not being picked for your Shield team, then why do you deserve it? You've got to actually want it, to want to play four-day cricket," Warner told CODE.



Gabba pitch to have traditional pace and bounce, says curator

PTI ■ BRISBANE

The pitch for the third Test between India and Australia at the Gabba is expected to have traditional pace and bounce considering the game is scheduled in the early part of the summer and not post Christmas.

India's famous win at the Gabba on their previous tour came when the game was scheduled in the second half of the series. A Rishabh Pant special ensured India a back-to-back series win Down Under with Australia left licking their wounds. It was the hosts' first loss at the venue since 1988.

Since then Australia have lost to the West Indies at the 'fortress' and no wonder the players prefer to play at the Gabba at the start of the summer and not at end of it.

"Different times of year definitely makes it different, it can be a slightly different pitch," Gabba curator David Sandurski was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au ahead of the third Test beginning Saturday.

"Pitches later in the season might have a bit more wear and tear while ones early in

the season usually are a bit fresher and might have a bit more in them.

"Generally speaking, we still prepare the pitch the exact same way every time to try and get the same good carry, pace and bounce that the Gabba is known for. We are just trying to make a traditional Gabba wicket like we do each year," he said.

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 following Australia's comprehensive win in the pink ball Test at Adelaide.

As many as 15 wickets fell on the opening day of a domestic pink ball game last month and the curator said the surface would be similar to that.

"The aim is to be similar to that wicket where there was a good balance between bat and ball. Hopefully there is a bit in it for everyone," Sandurski added.

Indian teams lands in Brisbane

The BCCI on Wednesday posted a video of the India players' arrival in Brisbane from Adelaide.

India won the opening Test in Perth by 295 runs before succumbing to the moving pink ball in Adelaide.

West Indies win ODI series against Bangladesh

AP ■ BASSETERRE

The West Indies won a one-day international series against Bangladesh for the first time in 10 years.

The West Indies shot out Bangladesh for 227 in 46 overs and strolled to 230-3 in 37 overs on Tuesday.

The host won the series with a game to spare.

"It's great to see the bowlers bounce back the way they did," captain Shai Hope said. "Gotta tick boxes and keep improving. We were clinical. We've been struggling to win series at home (so) hope to finish 3-0 now."

On the same pitch where the West Indies won by five wickets on Sunday, the par score was 300. But fast bowler Jayden Seales undercut Bangladesh with three wickets in the first powerplay. Seales returned to bag Mahmudullah for 62 in the 45th over and



and they rescued the innings.

While they were batting with increasing ambition, Bangladesh could dream of 270-280.

Mahmudullah reached a fifty off 84 balls, and Tanzim was closing on his when he was out caught and bowled by off-spinner Roston Chase.

Tanzim had 45 off 62 and the partnership reached 92 runs from 106 balls.

Mahmudullah was out in the next over for 62 off 92.

In the chase, Lewis was slower to get in a groove than King and was dropped on 28.

King and Lewis were both hit on the body in the 40s while attempting pulls at Nahid Rana.

King's eighth boundary brought up his fifty off 52 balls but Lewis was out for 49, to a tame caught and bowled by Rishad Hossain.

King's best shot was a six when he came down the track at Tanzim and sent the ball back over the medium-pace's head and rebounding off the roof.

He was eventually yorkered by Rana, out for 82 off 76 balls, including eight boundaries and three sixes.

He'd combined for 66 in eight overs with Carty, who would fall for 45 off 47 with victory just 31 more runs away.

Matthew Hayden advises Indian bowlers to target fourth, fifth stump

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Former Australia opener Matthew Hayden has advised the Indian bowlers to target the "fourth, fifth stump line" and make use of the natural bounce offered by the Gabba surface in the third Test of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy starting here on Saturday.

The five-match series is locked at 1-1 after Australia's emphatic win in the pink Test in Adelaide. India won the opener by 295 runs at Perth.

Hayden shared his views on how to dismiss the Australian batters at Gabba.

"India, when they do get a chance to bowl, they need to rely on hovering in that fourth, fifth stump line a bit more. And most importantly, they need to use their bounce," Hayden told Star Sports.



"It's a key arsenal as part of a fast bowling unit in Brisbane. The red ball will definitely be more familiar in terms of Test match cricket. Australia have the running with the pink ball, they won so much with it."

The 53-year-old left-hander asked the Indian batters to apply themselves in challenging conditions.

"India must bat better, they must bat for time. They must bat a day of Test match cricket. Under a day, unacceptable. Has to be in that 350 zone. India should bat first even if there are challenging conditions," Hayden said.

"Brisbane, different ball game! It's a home game, but it's actually a very good game for India as well because they've got memories of the last time they encountered Australia in the BGT."

Brook displaces Root at top of Test batter rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Charismatic England batter Joe Root's reign at the top of the ICC Test batting rankings ended on Wednesday with compatriot Harry Brook taking the No.1 spot, while India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and spinner Ravindra Jadeja held on to their top positions in the bowlers' and all-rounders' charts respectively in the longest format.

Brook, 25, overtook Root following his eighth Test century against New Zealand in Wellington last week, with the right-handed player now enjoying a slender one-point advantage over his more experienced teammate at the top of the latest ICC rankings.

Brook has a total of 898



rating points, one more than Root, and joins Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar with the equal 34th highest rating of all time for Test batters.

Root had held on to the top spot since July this year when he displaced former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson from the No.1 position.

Brook scored 123 and 55 in England's massive 323-run victory over New Zealand,

while Root had innings of 3 and 106 in the same Test.

"If you asked me, Brooky is by far and away the best player in the world at the minute," Root said following England's victory in Wellington.

"He has such an all-round game, he can absorb pressure, he can apply it, he can whack you over your head for six, he can scoop you over his head for six, he can smack spin, he can smack seam. He's so hard to bowl to."

Bumrah maintained his No.1 position at the top of the Test bowlers' rankings with 890 rating points. The Indian has some tough competition from South Africa quick Kagiso Rabada (856) and Australian pace bowler Josh Hazlewood (851).

Alcaraz has best of Nadal, Djokovic, Federer, but he can't do what they did: Agassi

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Legendary Andre Agassi said Carlos Alcaraz combines the best qualities of Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal but cautioned the tennis world against expecting the Spaniard to repeat the incredible feats of the 'Fab Three.'

Federer, Nadal and Djokovic have a combined tally of 66 Grand Slams and Alcaraz, 21, has so far bagged four majors.

"I'm not a genius and I don't have a crystal ball. What I can tell you is Alcaraz defends like Novak, has power and spin like Nadal and has hands and finesse like Federer," said Agassi during a talk session

during the Marathon Mindset at the TIE Global Summit.

Agassi, himself an eight-time Slam champion, then outlined the reason to not place a massive load of expectations on Alcaraz.

"Just because he has the best of all those three doesn't mean he can do what they did because there's so many other parts to the game, which mean decision-making, injuries, you know, luck," he said.

At 37, Djokovic too is closer to his retirement and Agassi said the Serbian will now find it even tougher to remain competitive in the absence of the retired Nadal and Federer.

"He's already done so much, so long, and it's hard to imagine

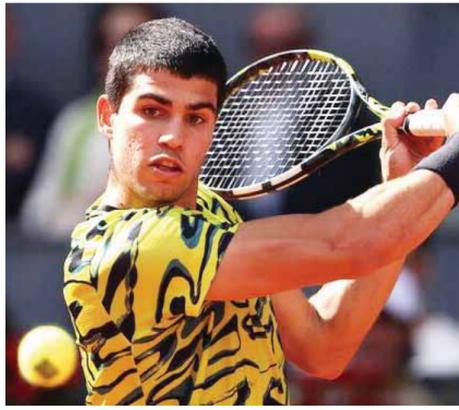
longer. I think he'll run out of the energy for it more than the capability of it, I would imagine.

"It cannot be easy, especially when the people you came to the dance with have left."

The American explained his thoughts further.

"When Pete (Sampras) retired, it was a blow to me. I set me back a little bit. It made me have to rediscover my inspirations on some level.

"And he's (Djokovic) lost the guys that he's made history with. So, it's probably emotionally going to get tougher and tougher quickly, but I would never bet against him. Bet against him at your own peril," said Agassi.



To prolong his career, Djokovic has hired former British player Andy Murray as his coach, and Agassi remained curious about the future of their alliance.

"They've been fierce rivals on court, and now Murray will be coaching Djokovic. Well, in any coaching student relationship, you need trust. Trust can take time.

"I think there's an asset to their history as competitors, but any success of a relationship is based on (9:07) complete buy-in."

Agassi backs American players

The 54-year-old from Las Vegas said the new generation of American players have the ability to bring the country

back to the top layers of the tennis world, like it was in the 80s and 90s.

"I was the first one to turn pro. I made (Michael) Chang, Pete, (Jim) Courier believe they could do it. And then Chang was the first one to win (Grand Slam), Pete believed that he could win, and made Courier believe that he could win, and then Courier said, well, I can not only win, I can be number one in the world.

"And I was saying, wait a second, what the hell about me? So we all helped each other in a lot of ways, and I think these Americans now are starting to prove to the other Americans that not only they can do it," he detailed.

Agassi also reminisced how he clawed back from a series of setbacks in life to find a second wind in the latter half of his career.

"I hit rock bottom probably at a time when people thought I was on top of the world. And then I just spiralled. I gave up on myself. But one thing that's good about rock bottom, you can bounce off something.

"So, I kind of recognized that, well, tennis wasn't my choice. So, I turned my attention towards helping kids that don't have choice or any hope. So, I forced myself to use tennis.

"I think that was an underlying inspiration and reason for me having a second chance at my career," he signed off.

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