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

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Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

## Winter haze shrouds National Capital

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A bitter cold wave, and dense fog gripped Delhi-National Capital Region on Tuesday, with air quality plunging back into the 'severe' category and drastically reducing visibility across the city. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi stood at 433 while the minimum temperature was 5.9 degrees Celsius, two notches below normal while the maximum temperature settled at 24.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal. The AQI was expected to remain in the 'severe' category for the next two days. Of Delhi's 35 monitoring stations, 28 recorded the air quality in the 'severe' category, with some breaching the 450 mark that is classified as 'severe plus'. Monitoring stations in Mandir Marg, Jahangirpuri,

Narela, Nehru Nagar, Patparganj, Punjabi Bagh, Rohini, ITO, Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, DTU, Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, Mandir Marg, Pusa, Shadipur recorded the AQI in the 'severe' category. The AQI was in the 'severe plus' category in Alipur, Anand Vihar, Ashok Vihar, Bawana, Burari, CRRI Mathura Road, North Campus, Okhla Phase 2, Sirifort, Sonia Vihar and Vivek Vihar. According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), meteorological conditions are likely to be unfavourable for effective dispersion of pollutants. The major source of Delhi's pollution was vehicular emission, contributing 18.8 per cent of PM2.5. There was no contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution as the season is over in Punjab and Haryana. PM2.5 remained

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

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

place at Delhi airport. Flight operations remain normal. Passengers are advised to contact their airline for updated flight details," the airport administration posted on X. Meanwhile, Delhi-NCR schools on Tuesday switched to the hybrid mode of conducting classes following the re-imposition of anti-pollution measures under the Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). According to the revised GRAP schedule, classes for students in grades VI-IX and XI in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar must operate in hybrid mode (physical and online) under Stage IV. However, students of class X and XII have to attend school in-person.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Considering the plight of the hassled homebuyers, the Supreme Court on Tuesday asked the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) to submit a proposal for grievance redressal, and imposed Rs 5 lakh cost on it for failing to file a timely response. A Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar expressed dissatisfaction over the approach of GNIDA and said, "You are responsible for the mess. Of course, developers made money from the homebuyers. But that does not condone your acts." The Bench said it may order a CBI probe into the whole "mess" if the GNIDA did not come up with a plan to redress the grievances of the homebuyers. "You come up with a plan in 10 days... otherwise we will order a CBI investigation... You will have to ensure that interests of homebuyers are safeguarded. You are also part of the problem. You allowed this mess to be created," the CJ said. The Bench suggested the GNIDA to take over the entire land, develop the projects and give the flats to the homebuyers. Seeking a detailed affidavit from GNIDA, the Bench asked it to provide information including the date of allotment of the land and the date of execution of the lease deeds in favour of the private



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

company. Besides seeking a comprehensive proposal for the homebuyers, the Bench asked the GNIDA to give information on why the allotment of land was not cancelled when the developers violated the terms of the projects. Senior advocate Shob Alam, appearing for over 800 homebuyers, said a PSU was willing to develop the stalled projects and pay up the dues to GNIDA and others, and moreover, no creditors or investors would have to suffer haircuts. The top court was hearing about 12 appeals arising out of a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) judgment in relation to the insolvency proceedings of debt-ridden realty firm Earth Infrastructure. The NCLAT had declined a plea of a batch of homebuyers who challenged the NCLAT's approval of Alpha Corp Development's bid to acquire Earth Infrastructure. The NCLAT had on June 8, 2021, approved the resolution plan from Alpha Corp Development. The committee

of creditor of the Earth Infrastructure had voted in favour of Alpha Corp with a majority of 99 per cent. Due to the protracted legal battle, five housing projects, three in Greater Noida and two in Gurugram, of the realty firm are stalled leaving hundreds of homebuyers in the lurch. Earlier, Alpha Corp had said it would invest around Rs 900 crore to complete the three stalled projects of Earth Infrastructure that it acquired through the insolvency process at Greater Noida. The housing projects were launched between 2010 and 2012, but were not completed in the stipulated time period. Approximately 2,900 units were to be developed in these projects. Ananta by Alpha Corp (erstwhile Earth Copia), Sector 112, Gurugram, is a housing project launched in February 2011; Earth Sapphire Court, Greater Noida, is a commercial project launched in July 2010 and Earth Techone, located on Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida, is a mixed project launched in June 2012.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With controversies following the medical entrance exams every year, the Centre on Tuesday said the Education and Health Ministry is deliberating whether to conduct medical entrance exam NEET-UG offline, or in online mode, and a decision in this regard is expected soon. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has held two rounds of talks with the Union Health Minister JP Nadda in this regard. Currently, NEET-UG is conducted offline, wherein students have to solve multiple choice questions on an OMR sheet. The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is the largest entrance exam in the country in terms of the number of candidates appearing for the test. In 2024, a record over 14 lakh candidates took the exam. While NEET was under the scanner over several irregularities, including alleged leaks, UGC-NET was cancelled as the ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam had been compromised. Both matters are being probed by the CBI. Two other exams, CSIR-UGC NET and NEET PG - were cancelled at the last moment as a pre-emptive step. Pradhan also said the



Photo: PIB

National Testing Agency (NTA) will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025, instead focus only on higher education entrance tests. The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created. The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) medical entrance exam and a series of cancellations of others due to suspected leaks and other glitches. "The administrative ministry of NEET is the Health Ministry and hence we are in talks with them about whether NEET should be conducted in pen and paper mode or online mode. We have had two rounds of talks

with the Health Ministry led by JP Nadda. Whatever option will be considered best suited for conducting the exam, NTA is ready to undertake the exercise," Pradhan told a Special Press briefing on the current state on primary, secondary, higher and technical education in the country. The Minister said a decision in this regard is expected soon and the reforms will be implemented in the 2025 edition of the exam. "What will be NEET's methodology, what will be the protocol... A decision is expected soon. We will notify it soon," he added. The NTA conducts the NEET every year for admission into medical colleges. A total of 1,08,000 seats are available for the MBBS course. Of the seats available for the MBBS course, approximately 56,000 seats are in government

hospitals and about 52,000 are in private colleges. Admissions to undergraduate courses in Dentistry, Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha also utilise the results of the NEET for admission. The idea of switching to Computer Based Test (CBT) mode for NEET is not new and has been deliberated several times before. However, the push for the exam reforms came following the paper leak controversy earlier this year. In the line of fire over alleged irregularities in NEET and PhD entrance NET, the Centre had in July set up the panel to ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations by NTA. According to the high-level panel headed by former ISRO Chief R Radhakrishnan, multi-stage testing for NEET-UG could be a viable possibility that needs to be followed up. "An acceptable framework with thresholds and test objectives of scoring and ranking at each stage, and number of attempts etc. May be evolved," the panel has recommended in its report. A DIGI-EXAM system to check impersonation, multi-stage and multi-session testing, test centre allocation policy, setting up secured test centres in each district and mobile testing centres in rural and remote areas are among the recommendations made by the high-level panel.

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## An Imperial legacy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday disposed off a 16-year-old case relating the trademark of Delhi's iconic 'The Imperial' hotel after the members of Akoi family, who own and operate the hotel, reached a settlement. The settlement acknowledged that the trademark "Imperial" is jointly owned by Hardev Singh Akoi (50 per cent) and his brother Jasdev Singh Akoi's children, Raidev Singh Akoi (25 per cent), and Gobind Singh Akoi (25 per cent). "In terms of the settlement, the families of Hardev Singh Akoi and late Jasdev Singh Akoi admit/acknowledge that as on date, Hardev Singh Akoi [50%], Raidev Singh Akoi [25%] and Gobind Singh Akoi [25%] are the joint and exclusive owners of the trademark: Imperial and that no one will separately apply or have any rights in the trademark: Imperial or any other trade mark, trade name, copyright, whether registered or unregistered, identical or deceptively similar," said Justice Mini Pushkarna of Delhi High Court in the order. The Imperial, New Delhi, is a historic landmark that has witnessed significant events in India's history. Established in 1931, the hotel has been a favourite among dignitaries and celebrities alike. It was



founded by SBS Ranjit Singh, who passed it on to Rajdev Singh. Jasdev and Hardev were the children of Rajdev Singh. It was conceptualised in 1934 and officially opened in 1936 by Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India. During India's struggle for Independence, the hotel served as a meeting place for prominent leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The Round Table Conferences, crucial discussions between British and Indian leaders, were held there. Post-independence, the hotel continued to be a hub for political and social gatherings. The HC also found the settlement terms lawful and confirmed that no other disputes related to the trademark were pending. The parties agreed not to make individual applications for or claim rights in the trademark or any deceptively similar marks.

"It is submitted on behalf of the parties that during the pendency of the present proceedings, in order to maintain family peace, harmony and goodwill, all the family members have mutually agreed to settle the present suit amicably," read the order. The HC accepted the settlement, decreeing the suit based on the agreed terms. It directed that the application, containing the original signatures of all parties, be placed in the case file. The Court also instructed that a decree sheet be drawn up and canceled all pending hearings. The dispute concerns the trademark "Imperial" and its lion logo, which were considered symbols of a prestigious hotel's goodwill. Brothers Hardev Singh Akoi and Jasdev Singh Akoi, joint owners of the hotel, disagreed over certain alterations to the trademark and its use.

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## Second UP Supplementary budget tabled

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Khanna on Tuesday presented the second supplementary grant of Rs 17,865.72 crore for the current fiscal year (2024-25) in the state assembly. The second supplementary budget includes financial provision for new schemes worth Rs 790.49 crore. It accounts for 2.42% of the original budget of Rs 7,36,437.71 crore passed by the state assembly in February this year. Earlier, the state government had presented a supplementary budget of Rs 12,209.93 crore. With both supplementary grants combined, the total budget for the financial year 2024-25 now stands at Rs 7,66,513.36 crore. Highlighting the government's commitment to development, Finance Minister Suresh Khanna emphasised that the government prioritises progress and has the constitutional right to present supplementary budgets as needed through the assembly. He stated that the budget includes Rs 790.49 crore for new proposals and Rs 422.56 crore as the estimated Centre's share for various Central government schemes.

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## Rapper Badshah caught in the wrong lane



PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

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

It is being said that the singer's convoy, comprising three cars, was reportedly driving on the wrong side of the road and disobeyed traffic norms, this led to outrage on social media. However, it is being said that the vehicle did not belong to the rapper and was registered in the name of a youth from Panipat. After the post went viral, Gurugram traffic police took notice and issued a challan. "3 vehicles of Punjabi singer Karan Aujla's convoy are going on the wrong side towards Airia Mall, and the bouncers are also misbehaving with the people, but Gurugram police are sleeping," an X user wrote. To this, Gurugram police replied, "Challan has been generated on 16.12.2024 against wrong side driving according to MV Act." "A challan of Rs 15,500 has been issued against one vehicle remaining two of the convoy are being identified. Soon fines under the MV (Motor Vehicle) Act 2019 will be issued against them as well," said a traffic police officer on the condition of anonymity.

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## Omar Abdullah lays out a welcoming Wazwan

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's warm hospitality has become the talk of the town in the corridors of power in Jammu and Kashmir. Last week when the CM hosted members of civil society at his official residence in Jammu he not only threw open the gates of his residence for the common citizens, but also invited a team of Kashmiri Chefs (Wazas) to cook sumptuous Kashmiri Wazwan, a multi-course meal. It was after a long gap the guests at the official residence of the Chief Minister were treated with non-vegetarian food in Jammu. In addition to this, the newly elected CM



also hosted members of different delegations, resource persons heading different committees, and academicians, along with other prominent citizens at his residence. Post Abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, the gatherings at the Raj Bhawan hosted by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha were commonly served

only vegetarian meals/snacks. A famous local caterer was also engaged by the Union Territory (UT) administration to organize lavish dinners and luncheon meetings to suit the taste buds of guests from different walks of life. The famous cuisines of different neighboring states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh were also given preference. The traditional meat Kebabs and other non-vegetarian delicacies were replaced with Veg kebabs and other culinary delights on the regular menu. Sharing his experience of breaking bread in the company of the CM, an eminent citizen told The Pioneer, "All those who

attended the meeting were escorted by the Chief Minister himself inside the dining area where a lavish meal was served. Most interacted with almost everyone present there and gave them a patient hearing. In the past, he remained occupied with his ministerial colleagues and other VVIP guests. But this time we met a different version of Omar Abdullah. He was more polite, courteous, and accommodating". Former Chief Ministers Dr Farooq Abdullah, Mufti Mohd Sayeed, Gulam Nabi Azad, and Mehbooba Mufti were equally hospitable and frequently met guests at their residences to interact over lunch and dinner meetings.



NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that I evict my daughter Shiwani Singh from all my movable and immovable property due to her bad conduct.

NOTICE

In my passport my name written as Mohammad Aqib. Father's name Syed Aqil Ahmad & Mother's name Rubena Aqil which is wrong.

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम शेख समरीना बानो मो अंसार से बदलकर समरीना बानो रख लिया है।

सूचना

सूचित हो शायदी से पहले मेरा नाम सैय्यद समरीन अब्दुल सफी था। अब मेरा नाम सैय्यद समरीन W/o मो.कुचुरकान के नाम से ही जाना व पहचाना जाय।

NOTICE

In my passport my name written as Arseena Taiyab D/o Mohammad Taiyab. which is wrong. My correct name is Arshina Taiyab D/o Mohd Taiyab.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Dev raj to DEVRAJ KANDHANI to be known as DEVRAJ KANDHANI in all future references.

NOTICE

The general public has been informed that my real name is Manju. My date of birth is 01.01.1953. My name has been mistakenly written as Manju Singh in the Army recruitment records filed by my son Balwant Singh.

NOTICE

The general public has been informed that my name is Subash Chand Singh. My date of birth is 09.07.1957. Whereas in the Army recruitment records submitted by my son Balwant Singh, my name has been mistakenly written as Subhash Singh.



CHANGE OF NAME

I BEBI SINGH W/O DINESH SINGH R/O Tar-Vishunapur Semara Hardo Patti Kushinagar Uttar Pradesh-274401 changed my name to RANJANA DEVI.

PD(1093)A

Eve-teasers open fire, set house of rescuer ablaze

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a daring incident, two youths opened fire on a man after being reprimanded for eve-teasing in the Krishna Nagar police station area on Sunday evening.

bricks, fracturing his skull. As a crowd began to gather, the accused fled the scene, brandishing their weapons.

Kaiserbagh police station area. Passers-by intervened upon hearing the victim's screams and apprehended the accused.

injuries after being assaulted by two bike-borne youths in the PGI police station area on Monday night.

Retired constable loses ₹6.30 lakh in job fraud

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A retired head constable was duped of Rs 6.30 lakh by a fraudster who promised to secure a job for his son in the police department.

house in question belonged to a man named Dinesh, not to the accused. She filed a complaint at the police station, and Para police have registered an FIR and are investigating the case.

LDA VC inspects urban township

Lucknow (PNS): Vice-Chairman of Lucknow Development Authority Prathmesh Kumar on Tuesday conducted an inspection of the Mohana Road hi-tech urban township, where civil work has been underway for the past month.

Cop accused of pushing woman, resulting in death

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two days after the death of a woman in a brawl in the Narhi locality of Hazratganj, her son has accused a sub-inspector, who is the son of their neighbour, of pushing her down, leading to her fatal injuries.

began over a parking dispute. According to Saurabh, the issue involved a scooter that had been parked on the road.

get up again. My father Ramesh Singh and my mother Ramguni (55) came out after hearing the shouting and fighting.

53rd anniversary of Vijay Diwas

Lucknow (PNS): The Central Command of the Indian Army marked the 53rd anniversary of Vijay Diwas with a solemn wreath-laying ceremony at the Smritika War Memorial in Lucknow Cantonment.

Repertwahr fest to kick off tomorrow

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Repertwahr Festival is back for its 12th season, taking place from December 19 to 22 at Janeshwar Mishra Park.

carefully curated programme that honours India's rich artistic heritage while also showcasing cutting-edge contemporary performances.

Mahol stage will host stellar musical acts each evening, including Prateek Kuhad, a celebrated singer-songwriter known for his soulful melodies.

Stray tiger continues to remain elusive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The stray tiger in Rehmankhhera continued to evade capture and kept Forest department teams on high alert on Tuesday.



further monitor the situation, 12 additional camera traps have been installed in Rehmankhhera and other wildlife-prone areas.

Hurt in brawl, retired home guard dies

Lucknow (PNS): A retired home guard, injured in a land dispute in Lucknow 15 days ago, succumbed at a city hospital on Sunday.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The General Public is hereby notified that the Original registered sale deeds, in respect to Kharsa Land bearing no. 58,59,60,61,62,63,64,65,66,67,68kha, 69,70,71,72,73,74,78,79,182,211kha,213,214,218,219,220,221,222,223,224,225,226kha,228,229,230,231,231min., situated at Village Mojamnagar, Pargana & Tehsil Mohanlalaganj Distt Lucknow, and Kharsa No. 1, 3 and 3ka situated at Village Kabirpur, Pargana & Tehsil Mohanlalaganj Distt Lucknow, kept at the Headquarter's of M/s Sahu Land Developers Pvt Ltd / M/s Sahu Agencies Pvt Ltd, situated at B-46 J Park, Mahanagar Extension, Lucknow, have been completely gutted in fire accident on 30.10.2016.

Table with columns: S.No, Khasra No, Name of Owner, Area, Book No, Pages, Khand No, Serial No, Date of Registration, Remark, and a grid of deed details.

# Our govt recruited over 1.60L youths in edu sector: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday listed the achievements of his government in the education sector.

Addressing the concerns raised by SP MLAs Manoj Kumar Paras, Pooja, and Pankaj Patel, the chief minister acknowledged the importance and sensitivity of their issues but urged members to present facts while maintaining the decorum of the House.

The chief minister outlined the significant progress, stating, "Our government has successfully carried out more than 1.60 lakh recruitments in the education sector."

Yogi said that a new selection board, the Uttar Pradesh Education Service Selection Commission, has been formed to streamline recruitment across all education sectors, including basic, secondary, higher, technical, vocational, and medical education.

"The commission is advancing the recruitment process by obtaining requisitions from various departments. Our government has successfully made over 1.60 lakh recruitments in the Education department alone—positions that remained unfilled due to the mismanagement and ill intentions of the previous government," the CM said.

Addressing the challenge of unemployment faced by the country, the world, and Uttar Pradesh, the chief minister stated, "Uttar Pradesh is the youngest state globally. With a population of 25 crore, 56 to 60 per cent of the state's population comprises working-age youth. Our government has imple-



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath speaking in the state assembly on Tuesday

mented several initiatives with a focus on the youth of the state." He added, "In the last session, our government passed the Public Examination and Prevention of Unfair Means Act-2024 to effectively curb incidents of paper leaks. The youth of the state are now securing government jobs with honesty and transparency, with strict adherence to reservation rules."

He pointed out that the figures presented by some members were inaccurate. He stated, "As for recruitment of teachers for the Basic Education and Secondary Education Councils in Uttar Pradesh, appointment letters have been issued to 69,000 teachers, all of whom have been teaching in schools for the past four years. Previously, a recruitment process for 68,500 teachers was undertaken, but at that time, the NCTE did not recognise BED candidates as eligible for the

exam, and there were insufficient BTC-qualified candidates. As a result, only 42,000 teachers were recruited, and they are currently teaching in Basic Education Council schools. Appointment letters were issued to all of them."

Criticising previous governments for compromising the quality of education, Yogi said, "Shiksha Mitras were recruited as assistant teachers. The Hon'ble Supreme Court had ordered their dismissal and termination of services, yet the state government retained them on fixed honorariums. These Shiksha Mitras continue to work as before and were integrated into the recruitment process by providing them with weightage, in line with the intentions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court." He further added that the Secondary Education Selection Commission Board and the

Higher Education Selection Commission Board have successfully completed the recruitment process for more than 44,000 teachers. The CM stated that in the recruitment of 69,000 teachers, against 18,000 posts reserved under the 27% quota for backward castes, more than 32,200 youth from backward castes were appointed. Similarly, under the 21% reservation for Scheduled Castes, against 12,000 reserved posts, over 14,000 candidates were appointed. "This demonstrates that candidates who have excelled based on their ability and merit have also been considered under the general category. Out of the 34,500 posts reserved for the general category, only 20,000 candidates were recruited. These facts should serve as an eye-opener for those who attempt to create divisions in society for political gain," CM added.

# UP govt suppressing protest with house arrests: Congress

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee president Ajay Rai on Tuesday claimed that the Yogi Adityanath government is scared of the Congress's Vidhan Sabha siege plan and is threatening party leaders and workers through the police, preventing them from joining the protest.

"In most of the districts of the state, Congress workers are being prevented from joining the protest by being placed under house arrest, which is extremely shameful and a violation of democratic values," he alleged.

Rai stated that the UP government is crushing the voice of the common people by ignoring all democratic principles. "We Congress members want to warn them in clear words that the way they are harassing and stopping our Congress workers by using the police machinery regarding our Vidhan Sabha siege plan on Wednesday, the Congress party will strongly respond to this and will launch a state-wide

movement," Rai threatened. The UPCC chief said that the Congress workers are ready to take on the government over issues like its "dictatorial" attitude, unemployment, inflation, etc.

"No matter how many sharp barricades the government puts up to stop the Congress workers, we have now made up their minds to raise our voice against this misuse of the BJP," Rai said, adding that their protest on Wednesday will be historic. "We will besiege the Vidhan Sabha at any cost and work to bring the autocratic government of this state to its knees," Rai asserted.

Meanwhile, in Amethi, Congress district chief Pradeep Singhal claimed he, along with more than 100 party leaders and officials, was placed under house arrest. "All 17 block presidents, office-bearers, frontal organisation leaders, and committee members in the district have been placed under house arrest," he claimed on Tuesday.

Describing the police action as undemocratic and con-

dempnable, Singhal said, "Every citizen in a democracy has the right to speak out. The Congress is the voice of the people that this deaf and blind government is trying to suppress. When this government is afraid, it resorts to using the police."

Similar statements were made by the Lucknow district president Ved Prakash Tripathi and city president Amit Kumar 'Tyagi', whose house in Triveninagar was raided by the police and a notice was served on him.

The alleged house arrests followed an official notice issued under Section 168 (police to prevent cognisable offences) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita to the Congress's general secretary (organisation) Anil Yadav in Lucknow, warning of legal action against party workers for disrupting law and order.

The notice, issued by the Hussainganj police station, mentioned that a large group of Congress workers, led by Dinesh Kumar Singh, had proposed to march to the assembly

in Lucknow on Wednesday to protest against the government's policies.

"Tomorrow (Wednesday), we will gherao the Vidhan Sabha for justice for the victims of Sambhal, for the price of crops to farmers, and against unemployment. See how the dictatorial government wants to suppress our voice by issuing notices," Yadav said in a post on X, along with a picture of the police notice.

In Amethi, Singhal further accused the Yogi Adityanath government of stifling dissent, claiming the administration wanted to silence the truth.

"Congress workers planned to go to Lucknow to question the government about unemployment, rising prices, bulldozer actions, atrocities against women, and the poor state of law and order. But instead of answers, we are being put under house arrest," he said.

"This is tyranny and it shows the government's fear. We will not be intimidated. On December 18, we will ensure the people's voices reach the assembly," he added.

# Tethered drone deployed at Maha Kumbh

Mahakumbh Nagar (PNS): For the first time in Maha Kumbh, a tethered drone has been deployed to provide comprehensive aerial surveillance, ensuring unmatched security. This high-tech device, capable of capturing high-resolution images, videos, and sensor data, leaves no corner of Mahakumbh Nagar unmonitored.

Installed on the directives of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the state-of-the-art system is a major step towards safeguarding devotees.

Mahakumbh Nagar SSP Rajesh Dwivedi has appointed an expert team to oversee its operation. Calling it a unique and advanced security tool, he highlighted its ability to switch to alert mode within seconds. According to him, CM Yogi's vision is to make this year's Maha Kumbh truly unforgettable by upgrading the security infrastructure to the highest standards.

He said, "The tethered drone's secure data transmission ensures it captures every detail, big or small, from above, making it a cornerstone of the hi-tech security measures in place."

Tethered drone is serving as the 'third eye' for the Mahakumbh Nagar police, providing an unmatched level of surveillance. Positioned strategically, these devices

monitor the Sangam bank, crowded ghats, temples, and other significant locations, instantly alerting officers about any developments.

In addition to tethered drones, the police are overseeing the vast fair area with over 2,750 CCTV cameras, more than half of which are equipped with AI capabilities. According to SSP Rajesh Dwivedi, Mahakumbh Nagar is expected to welcome 45 crore devotees this year.

He added, "To maintain tight security and prevent any untoward incidents, officers are working diligently in alignment with CM Yogi Adityanath's vision."

# Yogi takes dig at Priyanka over Palestine bag

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday took a swipe at Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra over flaunting the bag with 'Palestine' inscribed on it. "A Congress leader was seen walking around the Parliament building premises carrying a Palestinian bag, while we are empowering our youth with employment opportunities in Israel, sending our youth to Israel for opportunities," he said.

The CM also urged the opposition parties not to oppose the government on every issue for the sake of opposition and develop an understanding of the various initiatives for the welfare schemes being run by the government for the poor.

"The government has taken several steps for the benefit

of the youth in Uttar Pradesh. If opposition members take the time to understand these policies and implement them in their constituencies, it will benefit the youth in their areas. Otherwise, they will meet the same fate as in Kundarki," Yogi said.

The chief minister emphasised advancing Uttar Pradesh on the path of development. Highlighting the upcoming Kumbh Mela, he called it a global showcase opportunity for the state, underscoring the need for a positive mindset and approach to ensure its success.

"Negativity must end. The opposition should avoid being persistently negative," he said.

"Criticising everything and only pointing out flaws is not the right approach. Adopt a positive mindset, move in

the right direction, and you will witness progress. But if you choose a path of negativity, you'll end up trapped, like being caught between a well and a pit," he added.

The CM urged the opposition members to bring up issues in the assembly, supported by facts. He said, "If you present your issues with proper facts, your respect and dignity will grow. Issues raised without facts or evidence are not useful."

Yogi shared updates regarding the state's youth making strides internationally, particularly in Israel. He mentioned that over 5,600 young people from Uttar Pradesh have gone to Israel for construction work, where they receive free accommodation and meals, along with an additional Rs 1.5 lakh. He also assured that these workers are fully protected with guaranteed security.

The CM noted that Israeli officials had recently visited and expressed interest in hiring more young people from Uttar Pradesh due to their excellent work ethic and skills.

"The world now recognises the strength of our youth's skills. When they send back the Rs 1.5 lakh they earn, they contribute directly to the development of our state," he said, urging the recognition of these young achievers.

Drawing attention to the state's economic progress, the CM said that in 1947, UP's per capita income was higher than the national average. However, by 2017, when his government came to power, UP's per capita income had dropped to one-third of the national average.

"Today, we have successfully doubled that figure, and I believe that within the next

five years, Uttar Pradesh's per capita income will surpass the national average once again," he added, pointing to the state's current growth rate as an indication of the positive trend.

He reiterated the state government's commitment to the welfare of its youth, stating that the government's intentions are clear and its policies are focused on empowering young people. He highlighted the success of the state's Skill Development Mission, which has already enrolled over 12 lakh youths, with more than 6 lakh securing jobs through the programme.

The Skill Development Mission is doing excellent work, and we are also focusing on global job mapping to explore employment opportunities for Uttar Pradesh's youth worldwide," CM Yogi said.

# 2 persons killed in Rampur

Lucknow PNS: In a sensational double murder in Rampur, a car workshop guard and a puncture mechanic were allegedly beaten to death in broad daylight on Tuesday. Farhad Ali (50), a resident of Ahmednagar Jagir hamlet in Rampur, and Tahir (45), a guard at a car workshop in the Civil Lines area, were attacked outside the workshop on Tuesday morning.

According to SP (City) Atul Srivastava, unidentified assailants used blunt objects to kill the victims and fled the scene unchallenged. Srivastava said the families of both victims had been contacted but could not provide any information about a possible motive or disputes that might have led to the murders. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination, and investigations are ongoing. The police are working to determine whether the crime was a case of robbery and

murder or if any personal enmity was involved. Officers are also reviewing CCTV footage to identify the perpetrators.

Meanwhile, in a separate incident in Shahjahanpur, a young woman was hacked to death allegedly by her brother-in-law on Tuesday morning. The incident occurred in the Sadar Bazaar area of Kotwali City, where Nikita alias Komal (23), a resident of Mohalla Lala Teli Bajariya, was allegedly killed by her brother-in-law Anshul Sharma, who slit her throat with a knife, police said. As per reports, the accused wanted his brother to marry Nikita, but she opposed the idea, leading to the fatal attack. Nikita's mother was away buying vegetables when the incident took place at around 11:30 am. Anshul allegedly entered the house and tried to coerce her into agreeing to the marriage. When she refused, he lost

his temper and attacked her with a knife. Police reached the scene and, after identifying the accused, raided his house and arrested him. A case has been registered, and the accused has been sent to jail.

**JK Cement**  
**J.K. Cement Limited**  
(CIN : L17220UP1994PLC017199)  
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**NOTICE**

Notice is hereby given that share Certificate No. 75336 vide folio No. 475134 for 200 Equity Shares bearing Distinctive No(s) 44107456 to 44107655 issued by the Company in the name of Vivek Agarwal are reported to be lost. Any objection for issuance of duplicate share certificate(s) must be filed with the Company within 15 days from the date of publication of this Notice, failing which duplicate share certificate(s) will be issued without incurring any liability by the Company for the said issue.

Place: Kanpur For J.K.Cement Ltd.  
Date : 17.12.2024 (Shambhu Singh)  
Company Secretary  
M.No. FCS 5836

# Criminals punished at unprecedented pace in state, minister tells House

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday contradicted the claims of the opposition parties over crimes against women, stating that the facts and figures cited by the opposition were incorrect. Replying to a question during the question hour, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna claimed that law and order in Uttar Pradesh is at its strongest under the Yogi government.

"In the last seven and a half years, there has been a significant decline in all categories of crime, including crimes against women. The state government has also been highly effective in ensuring criminals are punished," he stated. Khanna said that between January 1, 2024, and November 30, 2024, a total of 4,18,504 complaints were registered on the 1090 Women Power Line, out of which 4,09,912 complaints were resolved, achieving a resolution rate of 97.95%.

He added that action is underway to address the remaining 8,592 pending cases. The minister said that there has been a consistent decline in dowry death cases. "In 2017, as many as 2,524 cases of dowry deaths were reported. Between January 1 and October 31, 2024, the number of cases registered stands at 1,418. In 2023, as many as 2,061 such incidents were recorded," he noted.

Emphasising the government's efforts to strengthen prosecution and ensure swift convictions, Khanna said, "No government in the history of Uttar Pradesh has achieved this level of success in punishing criminals." Khanna tabled detailed data on convictions under the POCSO Act, stating: "In 2017, 415 people were punished, while the numbers increased

to 631 in 2018, 665 in 2019, and 535 in 2020. Significant progress was made in subsequent years with 1,230 convictions in 2021, 2,313 in 2022, and 2,841 in 2023. From January 1 to December 15 this year, 2,440 people have been successfully punished."

"Following the effective perusal of cases in court by the prosecution department, as many as 48 accused were awarded death sentences from July 1, 2023, to December 11, 2024. During this period, life imprisonment was awarded in 6,065 cases, 20 years and above in 1,046 cases, 15 to 19 years in 73 cases, 10 to 14 years in 3,610 cases, 5 to 9 years in 5,564 cases, and less than five years in 22,298 cases," he pointed out. Khanna stated that since the Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita came into effect from July this year, 29 individuals have been convicted under its provisions between January 1 and December 12. Citing NCRB data, he highlighted that as per the report available until 2022, a decline in crimes against women has been recorded across all categories. Uttar Pradesh ranks 24th in the country for rape cases, indicating that 23 states have a higher incidence than UP.

Further, Khanna pointed out that UP stands at 17th position in cases under Section 354. Apart from this, 245 murder cases were registered in 2016, whereas 175 cases were registered in 2022, 141 in 2023, and 126 cases were registered so far in 2024, reflecting a 48.57% decline.

"Similarly, dowry deaths have decreased by 16.68%, rape cases by 25.34%, and incidents of molestation by 14.31%," he added. Khanna also highlighted that 19 states report higher crime rates under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) than Uttar Pradesh.

# 3,213 Annapurna Bhawans completed in UP so far

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is supervising the construction of state-of-the-art Annapurna Bhawans across Uttar Pradesh to enhance food supply and ensure secure storage of essential goods.

These Bhawans are designed to make the public distribution system permanent and effective, ensuring the stability of ration shops despite changes in dealers. So far, 3,213 Annapurna Bhawans have been completed, while work is currently underway on an additional 1,630 Bhawans.

The Yogi government aims to develop these Annapurna Bhawans as multi-purpose centres in both rural and urban areas of the state. The facilities will help meet the everyday needs of residents while also contributing to the improvement of their social and economic conditions. These Bhawans are being constructed under MGNREGA and will not only serve as storage spaces for food grains but will also support the operation of fair-price shops. These Bhawans are being constructed on government land in gram panchayats and include facilities such as a hall, waiting room, and public services centre. In the financial year 2024-25, construction has started on over 2,800 new Bhawans. The aim of Annapurna Bhawans is to streamline the food grain supply process in both rural and urban areas. Previously, fair-price shops were often situated on narrow streets, causing difficulties for both food grain supply vehicles and customers.

With the development of these Bhawans, access for both supply vehicles and the general public has significantly improved.

Annapurna Bhawans will serve as more than just centres for food grain supply; they will also provide a range of public facilities. Two separate rooms are being constructed within a Bhawan, one to store government rations, while the other will house the common service centre (CSC).

The CSC will provide essential services such as issuing birth, death, income, and caste certificates. In addition, general stores and community service centres will operate in these Bhawans.

These centres will provide facilities for electricity bill payments, broadband access, affordable generic medicines, and the sale of everyday necessities. This initiative will ease the lives of people while also ensuring effective implementation of government schemes. State-of-the-art facilities are being integrated into the Annapurna Bhawans, including CCTV cameras and internet connectivity, ensuring both transparency and security. Supply inspectors have been instructed to identify suitable land for the construction of new Bhawans.

Once land selection is completed, construction will begin immediately. The Yogi government's goal is to transform all 80,000 fair-price shops into permanent, fully equipped Annapurna Bhawans. This initiative will enhance the food distribution system and ensure that people receive high-quality services.

**IDFC FIRST Bank Limited**  
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)  
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792  
Registered Office: KRM Towers, 8 Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai - 600031.  
TEL: +91 44 4564 4000 | FAX: +91 44 4564 4022.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
**GOLD AUCTION CUM INVITATION NOTICE**

The Below mentioned borrower has been issued notices to pay the outstanding amount towards the credit facility against Gold ornament availed by him from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited. Since the borrower has failed to repay the dues under the facility. We are constrained to conduct an auction of the pledged Gold ornaments on 27/12/2024. In the event any surplus amount is realized from this auction, the same will be returned to the concerned borrower and if there is any deficit post the auction, the balance amount shall be recovered from the borrower through appropriate legal proceedings. IDFC FIRST Bank has the authority to remove the following account from the auction without prior intimation. Further IDFC FIRST Bank reserves the right to change the Auction Date without any prior notice.

Loan Account Number	Customer Name	Branch Name
124280801	SHUBHAM SRIVASTAVA	ASHIYANA LUCKNOW
149544948	INITISH KUMAR	GOMTI NAGAR BRANCH

Auction will be conducted online through <https://egold.auctiontiger.net> on 27/12/2024 from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm. By way of this publication the concerned borrower are hereby given final notice and last opportunity to pay the facility recalled amount, with all interest and charges before the schedule auction date failing which the jewellery will be auctioned. Please note that, if the auction does not get completed on the same day due to time limit the bank will re auction the pledged gold ornaments within next 7 days on the same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to his legal heirs.

Date:18.12.2024 Place: LUCKNOW

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Loan Account Number	Customer Name	Branch Name
150644720	ABHISHEK KUMAR	ALIGARH SASNI GATE MBL
141890302	ABHISHEK KUMAR	ALIGARH SASNI GATE MBL

Auction will be conducted online through <https://egold.auctiontiger.net> on 27/12/2024 from 12:00 pm to 3:00 pm. By way of this publication the concerned borrower are hereby given final notice and last opportunity to pay the facility recalled amount, with all interest and charges before the schedule auction date failing which the jewellery will be auctioned. Please note that, if the auction does not get completed on the same day due to time limit the bank will re auction the pledged gold ornaments within next 7 days on the same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to his legal heirs.

Date:18.12.2024 Place: ALIGARH

# Strengthen security system in hospitals: CDO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A monthly review meeting of the District Health Committee Governing Body was organised in the Collectorate Auditorium here on Monday under the chairmanship of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal. In it the CDO directed the Health department officers concerned to strengthen the security system in district level hospitals. He also directed the officers to appoint selected 88 security guards at sensitive places of the hospital. In the meeting, it was decided to set up a liquid oxygen plant in Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay Government Hospital so that oxygen can be supplied to the



CDO Himanshu Nagpal reviewing progress of Health department schemes in Varanasi

high dependency unit (HDU) ward. "All controlling officers must send the appraisal of National Health Mission (NHM) personnel within five days. The protocol of cleanliness and sanitation should be ensured in the hospital premises and all the wards. No negli-

gence should be done in this work", he instructed, adding that records of services provided at CHCs/PHCs should be completed as per the standard and basic facilities in the wards and premises of all medical units should be completed as per the standard. The CDO stressed on 100 per cent achievement as per the target of prenatal checkup (ANC) and added that 100 per cent payment of beneficiaries of Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) should be completed on time. He instructed the department to withhold the salary of the Urban CHC Shivpur superintendent for not completing the payment of beneficiaries under JSY. "Vaccination of children must be completed on time. If any child is left out, then he must be tracked and immunised", Nagpal instructed. He expressed displeasure over less caesarean deliveries this year as compared to last year in CHC Hathi Bazar. He directed that if progress is not found next month, then the salary of

all medical superintendents should be stopped for the next month. In the meeting, a thorough review of National Child Health Programme, Family Welfare Programme, progress of Ayushman Card under Ayushman Bharat Scheme, regular vaccination and other programmes was done. Along with this, necessary guidelines were given. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary gave information about the progress of all the programmes and schemes. During this, superintendents of all district hospitals, in charge of community health centres/primary health centres (CHCs/PHCs) along with other medical officers, district programme officers etc were present.

# Man axes sister-in-law to death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A man axed his sister-in-law to death in Vijaykheda village under Saffipur Kotwali police station area of Unnao late Monday night. He also got burnt while trying to set the body afire in a field, situated 50 metres away from the house. On seeing their mother enveloped in flames, her children raised an alarm following which neighbours rushed to spot and extinguished the fire. On getting information police also reached the spot and carried out investigation. During raids, police caught the assailant in an encounter near Kodwakheda village turn. During the exchange of fire, the accused sustained bullet injury in his left leg and was arrested

by the police. According to a report received here, Meena (30), wife of Harish Chandra Pal of Vijaykheda was axed to death by her brother-in-law Rohit around 2.30 am on Monday. According to her husband, Meena had lodged a first information report (FIR) against Rohit alleging rape on November 2. The latter was sent to jail and released on bail on November 30. Station House Officer (SHO) Ajay Kumar Singh said on the complaint of the husband of the deceased, a first information report had been lodged against his brother for murder of Meena and the body had been sent for autopsy. In another incident a trailer driver was killed and four others were injured when his

uncontrolled vehicle, after hitting a tractor, overturned near Vaishno Mandir, Naramau, under Bithoor police station area late on Monday night. Police sent the injured to LLR (Hallett) hospital. After the incident, a massive jam prevailed for around two hours. The incident took place near GT Road service lane cut in Naramau when an empty tractor was coming towards the petrol pump from Kalyanpur. Suddenly a trailer laden with electricity poles hit the tractor from behind and overturned near Munna's house. Trailer driver Sunil (55) of Katri, Satti, Kanpur Dehat, was killed in the incident. His son Rohit (who was driving the trailer), tractor riders Dhruv, Neeraj and one other were injured.

# Breakthrough innovation in MFC technology

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Prof Neelam Srivastava, a faculty member from the Department of Physics (MMV), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), has been awarded a patent for the development of 'Low-Cost Electrolyte Membranes for Microbial Fuel Cell Applications, Synthesised by Complexing Starch (Wheat, Corn, and Rice) with Salt'. This breakthrough innovation, carried out in collaboration with Dr S Venkata Mohan, Chief Scientist at the CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) in Hyderabad, aims to revolutionise microbial fuel cell (MFC) technology. MFCs are increasingly used for wastewater treatment, including sewage and industrial effluents, as they not only treat pollutants but also generate electricity during the process. Prof Srivastava said, "Microbial fuel cells offer a sustainable method for wastewater treatment by harnessing the power of bacteria to

degrade organic matter, while simultaneously producing electricity. However, a significant barrier to scaling up the technology for real-world applications has been the high cost of the membrane material used in these systems. Currently, NAFION membranes are typically employed, but they are expensive and not environmentally friendly." The patented work of Prof Srivastava and her team focuses on replacing the costly NAFION membrane with a much more affordable and environmentally benign alternative. The novel membrane is synthesised by complexing starch from common grains such as wheat, corn, and rice with salt, resulting in a low-cost, biodegradable material that can perform effectively in microbial fuel cell applications. The new membrane has undergone rigorous testing for its microbial application by Dr S Venkata Mohan's team at CSIR-IICT in Hyderabad. Preliminary

results indicate that the membrane performs efficiently in the electrochemical processes of microbial fuel cells, showing promise for widespread use in real-world wastewater treatment and energy generation systems. This development holds significant promise for both environmental sustainability and cost reduction in wastewater treatment technologies. By lowering the cost of membranes, Prof Srivastava's innovation could make microbial fuel cells a more accessible and viable option for large-scale applications, especially in developing economies. Moreover, the use of biodegradable, non-toxic materials aligns with global efforts to reduce the environmental impact of industrial processes. The patent is hard work of research students Dr Manindra Kumar, Dr Jadhavi Kumar Chauhan, Madhavi Yadav of BHU and Dr Omprakash Sarkar and Dr A Nareesh Kumar of CSIR-IICT Hyderabad.

# Sanatan Yatra to reach Knp today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Sanatan Yatra being taken out by the Rashtriya Santan Sanskriti Sangh will reach Kanpur via Jhansi on December 18. After Ganga Aarti and Samoohik Mantra Jaap, the yatra will proceed for Lucknow via Unnao. The office-bearers of Santan Sanskriti Manch here have appealed people of all community to participate in the Yatra in large number for the unity in society. Addressing mediapersons here at a hotel in Shashtri Nagar on Tuesday, Rajesh Kumar said this grand Sanatan Yatra will arrive at Kanpur from Jhansi's Mukta Kashi Manch on December 18. After overnight stay at Panki, Ganga Aarti and joint chanting of



Office-bearers of Sanatan Sanskriti Manch addressing mediapersons on Tuesday.

mantras will be held on December 19. Thereafter, the Yatra will proceed for Lucknow via Unnao to hand over a memorandum, addressed to the President of India Draupadi Murmu, to the Governor Anandiben Patel. Rajvinder Kaur, Mathura Singh, Ramdhari, Manish Chaudhary, Rajendra Dubey, Rahul Chandel, Rishi Shukla, Purshottam Chauhan and Subodh Bajpai were present.

# Demand to increase electric buses

Varanasi (PNS): The youth of the city associated with the Harit Safar Abhiyan run by Climate Agenda submitted a memorandum to the DM through the latter's representatives here on Tuesday, advocating sustainable and inclusive travel in the city. They demanded that the number of electric buses in the city should be increased

to promote clean public transport and a separate path should be constructed for pedestrians and cyclists. Arpita Singh, Pawan Sonkar, Manjeet Kashyap, Arpit Kumar Tiwari, Neelmani Rai, Rizwan Ahmed, Anubhav Kashyap, Himanshu Singh, Ravi Shekhar, Prem Kumar Yadav, Rajesh Yadav and Sania were present in the delegation.

# Experts share views on mgmt and prevention of eye injuries

Varanasi (PNS): The Kashi Ophthal Traumacon-2024 was organised at the KN Uddupa Auditorium of Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) under the joint aegis of the Regional Institute of Ophthalmology (RIO, IMS-BHU) and the All India Eye Injury Association (Ocular Trauma Society of India), in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Ophthalmic Trauma Society here. This conference was the 16th annual convention of the All India Eye Injury Association, in which experts shared their views on the management and prevention of eye injuries. It was inaugurated by Prof Rupesh Agarwal of Singapore, who is the secretary of the International Society of Ocular Trauma. As the chief guest, Prof Agarwal emphasised the need to start nodal centres and fellowship courses for eye injuries. The guest of honour and IMS-BHU Director Prof SN Shankhar, Dean Prof Ashok Chaudhary, Trauma Centre

Incharge Prof Saurabh Singh, chief of RIO-BHU Prof VP Singh, Padma Shri Prof AK Grover (President OTSI) and Padma Shri Prof S Natarajan were also present to make the event special. A total of 235 participants attended this two-day conference. During it a total of 92 research papers and 42 faculty lectures related to management and prevention of eye injuries were presented in 12 sessions. The organising secretary of the conference and head of the Department of Ophthalmology, IMS-BHU, Prof RP Maurya informed that experts from Nepal, Singapore, Oman, and Colombia participated in this event. Prof Rohit Shiju, former President of the Ophthalmology Association of Nepal, discussed the management of eye injuries caused by animals (dog, bear, cow, etc). Prof Abdullah Almuzhani of Oman and Dr Paula of Colombia highlighted the modern management and prevention measures of eye injuries. Five faculty from

Singapore and six from Nepal made their presentations. During the conference, Prof Rupesh Agarwal of Singapore suggested that a poly trauma nodal centre for eye injuries should be established at BHU. He said that in the interest of the general public, a special centre and fellowship course should be started for eye trauma. On this recommendation, IMS-BHU Director and Trauma Centre In charge agreed and assured to establish the centre and start a fellowship course. Padma Shri Prof AK Grover said that he would give all possible help in this initiative. Organising chairperson and RIO (IMS-BHU) chief Prof VP Singh attributed the success of the conference to all the participants and organisers. Organising secretary Prof RP Maurya said this conference has provided new direction and perspectives in the field of eye injury management. It underlined the importance of global cooperation as well as sharing modern technologies and approaches in ophthalmology.

# Pledge to protect women, Constitution

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The torch and candle processions were taken out at several places in the city, including near BHU and district headquarters apart from Kerakatpur here on Monday evening in memory of the horrific 'Nirbhaya' incident that took place 12 years ago in the country's capital Delhi, which shook the whole country. An event titled 'Meri Raatein Meri Sadaq' was organised at BHU Gate (Lanka) here on Monday evening to increase sensitivity and awareness towards women's rights. The event was organised under the joint banner of Dakhal, All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA), All India Students' Association (AISA) and National Students' Union of India (NSUI). A group of BHU students and people from civil society participated in it and raised their voice against the increasing violence against women in the country. A meeting was held at the main gate of BHU Gate in which a discussion dedicated to women's freedom took place. Poems and revolutionary songs were sung. After that a torch procession was taken out from the BHU Gate through Ravidas Gate to the main gate of the university again. The speakers said if we look at the data of last 12 years, then cases of violence and rape against women have increased



and there is a long list of such incidents from Hathras, Unnao, Kathua, Bilkis Bano, RG Kar to IIT-BHU. The Union Home Ministry data says that in 2012, 68 women were raped every day which increased to 91 in just six years by 2018. The United Nations (Women) figures say that even in the country's capital Delhi, 95 per cent of women are feeling unsafe, they added. According to the data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 2023, rape incidents are happening every sixth day in Varanasi. According to these figures, in the year 2022, 46 children under the age of 18 were raped in this district, while 61 rape cases have been reported against women. The speakers said that today public places have to be made safe for women, to which they have equal rights. Himanshu Kumar, Jagriti Rahi, Indu,

'Nirbhaya', a torch procession was taken out at the district headquarters under the aegis of Lok Samiti, demanding safety of women. In this procession, women from many villages of Arazilne and Sewapuri blocks were also singing songs of freedom. The torch procession started from Shastri Ghat (Varuna Bridge) and reached Ambedkar Park via Golghar near District Court, where people lit lamps in front of the Ambedkar statue and pledged to protect women and the Constitution. Leading the procession, convener of Mahila Chetna Samiti Ranju Singh said often women are blamed for the violence against women. "Women or girls have the right to progress in every field and if they have to stay out of the house even at night due to work, then their safety should be ensured on roads, workplaces and public conveyances", she said. Social worker Himanshu Kumar alleged that oppression and exploitation of women increases in 'fascist' rule. Gandhian thinker Ramdheeraj Bhai, social worker Neeti and many others also expressed their views. The programme was conducted by Lok Samiti convener Nandlal Master while it was presided over by Poonam and Soni proposed the vote of thanks. Prominent among those present were Anita, Asha, Baby, Shivkumar, Seema, Mamta, Rambachan and Vallabh.

# UPSIDA to launch e-marketplace soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Uttar Pradesh State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) will soon launch e-marketplace in 155 industrial areas of the state to boost 'Make in UP'. Under the leadership of the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, UPSIDA is continuously working towards achieving the goal of making Uttar Pradesh a \$1 trillion economy. In this context the UPSIDA is set to revolutionise the industrial landscape of UP with the launch of India's first e-market platform for 50,000 industrial units across 155 industrial areas in the state. According to UPSIDA CEO Mayur Maheshwari, the platform will facilitate direct business-to-business transactions between UP-based industries, reducing reliance on external suppliers. By promoting local

sourcing and reducing logistics costs, the e-market will strengthen the state's economy. The digital platform will streamline procurement processes and improve transparency. He said the increased economic activity and industrial growth will lead to the creation of new jobs. The e-market will connect raw material suppliers, manufacturers and finished product sellers within the state. By leveraging digital technology, businesses can easily discover and connect with potential partners, leading to increased efficiency and cost savings. The UPSIDA estimates that this initiative will result in a significant reduction in logistics and warehousing costs, saving industries approximately ₹20,000 crore annually. Additionally, it is expected to increase GST revenue by 7-10 per cent. This e-market is a

significant step towards realising the vision of 'Make in UP', said Mayur Maheshwari, CEO of UPSIDA. By fostering a robust industrial ecosystem, we aim to make UP a global manufacturing hub. UPSIDA plans to launch the e-market platform in the next year. CEO Maheshwari said "This initiative will resolve a long-standing issue of mutual trade among industries. By connecting 50,000 industrial units through a single digital platform, we aim to boost UP's industrial ecosystem, generate new job opportunities and increase GST revenue. This is a landmark step for the state's industrial development. The Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) has taken a ground-breaking initiative to revolutionise the industrial landscape of the state. By intro-

ducing an e-marketplace, UPSIDA aims to integrate the 50,000 units spread across 17 sectors in the state. This e-marketplace will connect raw material-based clusters that run from east to west with finished product clusters that move from west to east." Through this initiative, businesses will be able to buy and sell goods directly with each other. This is expected to save UP's entrepreneurs approximately Rs 200 billion in logistics and warehousing costs. Additionally, there will be a 7-10 per cent increase in government revenue, including GST, due to enhanced economic activity within the state. The "Make in UP" e-marketplace is a visionary effort to integrate industries within the state, foster economic growth, and promote self-sufficiency. With this UP is set to emerge as a leading industrial hub.

# R Prasad adjudged the Man of the Match

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The final match of Bishop Stephen Memorial Cricket Tournament was played between Chapel of Brotherly Love (SHUATS) and St Peter's Church on the ground of Bishop Johnson School and College on behalf of Diocese of Lucknow. St Peter's Church won the toss and scored 163 runs in the stipulated 20 overs. Aman Lal,



who came to bat for St Peter's Church, scored 48 runs and Nitin Barkar 39 runs. Dinesh Lal, who came to bowl for Chapel of Brotherly Love, took 3 wickets, Srikant took 3 and Kamlesh and Shikhar took 2 wickets. Royal Prasad, who came to bowl for Chapel of Brotherly Love, played a fiery innings, scoring 49 runs and Kamlesh Lal scored 39 runs, thus achieving the target by losing 5 wickets in just 17 overs and won the trophy of the final

match. Royal Prasad was adjudged the Man of the Match for his excellent batting. Chief guest Bishop Morris Edgar Dan of the Diocese of Lucknow, gave the trophy to the winning team and also praised the sportsmanship of both the teams. Aman Dan, Abhishek Vyas, Sandeep Bijoy Ghosh, Charles Joseph Robert, Jyotsna Prasad, Gabriel Luther, Mudrit Srivastava, Sunil Verma, etc. were present on this occasion.

# Christmas Fun Fair 2024 organised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Girls' High School & College hosted its annual fete 'The Christmas Fun Fair 2024', a spectacular event dedicated to raising funds for the underprivileged. The day was a vibrant celebration of community spirit, blending fun and charity in perfect harmony. With an array of activities, food and games, the fete offered something for everyone while championing the noble cause of spreading joy and making a difference in the lives of those in need. The event commenced with the Lord's Prayer, followed by an inspiring welcome address by Principal Rev Dr V Eusebius, who introduced the fete and its attractions. The formal inauguration was marked by the ceremonial ribbon cutting performed by the principal along with the chief guest Alisha Agarwal, Secretary Rotary Royal. The Christmas



Fun Fair was organised in two slots, in the morning for the junior school students and in the afternoon for the rest of the students. The school ground transformed into a carnival of delight with children's laughter echoing through the air amid beautifully decorated stalls, brimming with creativity and charm, attracted students and visitors alike. The game stalls were equally captivat-

# TSH players excel

PNS)

The players of The Sports Hub (TSH) excelled in the National Karate Championship 2024 organised at Gurumata Gurdwara, Lal Bungalow here. This success was attributed to the modern facilities and world level training by experienced coaches at the TSH. The event was organised by the Pragon Marshal Art Association. In the Kata event, Riyan Ahmad, Mehar Bhattar and Aban Ahmad won the gold medal while Ansh Yadav bagged the silver medal. In Team Kata event also, Riyan Ahmad, Aban Ahmad and Mehar Bhattar clinched silver medal while in Open Kata, Riyan Ahmad again won gold medal. Players also performed well in Kumite event. Riyan Ahmad, Aditya Kumar, Anshuman Gupta, Vinshi Vaman, Parnika Gupta, Shekhar Mishra, Santana Kumari, Ansh Yadav, Shrishti and Kanupriya won gold medal while Jubair, Pranvi and Mehar Bhattar silver medal and Shailesh Gupta and Anshika Srivastava received bronze medal.

# Workshop held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, BHU organised a workshop on 'Biological and Socio-Cultural Determinants of Health and Well-Being' here on Tuesday. The event was graced by the distinguished psychologist, Prof Carol Diane Ryff from the USA, known globally for her groundbreaking work in the field of eudaimonic well-being. The workshop was made possible through the efforts of Dr Vandana Jain, a researcher from SDM College and Prof Ryff from India. Prof Ryff delivered an insightful session that focused on her current research. She highlighted how engaging with art and culture positively influences well-being.

# 2 commit suicide by jumping in front of train

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Two teenagers, including a girl, committed suicide by jumping in front of a train on the down line of the Delhi-Howrah railway track in Chilbila area of Meja. Sensation spread in the area after their mutilated bodies were found on the railway track on Monday evening. On the information of the railway police the police reached the spot and took the bodies in their possession and sent them to the city for postmortem examination. The deceased belonged to an area under Manda police station. On receiving information, Dighiya outpost in charge Baburam reached the spot along with the team. Police took the bodies into possession, identified them and informed the family members. On getting information, the family members of both the deceased reached the spot. In charge of Dighiya police post Baburam said the bodies have been sent for post-mortem and the matter is being investigated.

THEFT IN HOUSE: Thieves broke the lock of a closed house in Jaiswal Nagar Byohara under Industrial Area police station of Yamunanagar and decamped with gold, silver jewellery, cash, utensils, clothes and other items worth about Rs 20 lakh. When the family returned after the wedding ceremony they came to know about the incident and informed the police which reached the spot and investigated the matter. The CCTV footage of the surrounding area is being scanned. Sahib Lal Srivastava of Jaiswal Nagar Byohara Mohalla under Rampur police outpost under the Industrial Area police station had gone to Khaira village under Jigana police station of Mirzapur district on December 13 with his family to attend a wedding ceremony. When he returned he found the lock of the house broken. The thieves after breaking the lockers of three rooms and two cupboards made off with gold and silver jewellery of three daughters, Rs 3 lakh cash, utensils, clothes and other items. Saheb Lal told the police that there was a cousin's wedding in the village. The whole family had gone to attend it. He has given an application at the police station, police is investigating the matter. SHO Industrial Area police station Kunal Kumar Tiwari said further investigation in the matter is underway.

# Nadda attacks Congress for amending Constitution for its own benefit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



country. Nadda also accused the Congress of trying to bring in reservation based on religion. The Leader of the House said Ambedkar had clearly said that reservation should not be structured in the name of religion. His remarks were objected to by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who raised the issue

of reservation given by the Gujarat Government. Coming to Nadda's defence, Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "What Jairam Ramesh is saying now is wrong. What the Gujarat chief minister gave was on the basis of economic backwardness. Here it is mentioned religious minorities," she said, referring to a circular pur-

portedly issued by the DoPT under the then Congress-led government. She added that Ramesh is conflicting the two (reservations given by the Gujarat government and the DoPT circular) and misleading the House. BJP MP K Laxman who heads the party's OBC Morcha backed Sitharaman's claim.

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Odisha and Tamil Nadu into the central NAMASTE database is currently underway. The NAMASTE scheme, launched in 2023-24 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), aims to mecha-

nize sewer maintenance and eliminate the dangerous practice of manual scavenging. A total of 16,791 PPE kits and 43 Safety Devices Kits for Emergency Response Sanitation Units (ERSUs) have been distributed. Ayushman cards for health insurance have been issued to

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

country." "The High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, was constituted by the Government of India on 2nd September 2023, received over 21,500 responses, with 80% in favour of simultaneous elections. The responses came from all corners of the country, including Lakshadweep, Andaman and Nicobar, Nagaland, Dadra, and Nagar Haveli. The highest responses were received from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh", it said. According to the government, 47 political parties submitted their views. Of these, 32 parties supported simultaneous elections, citing benefits like resource optimization and social harmony. 15 parties raised concerns about potential anti-democratic effects and marginalization of regional parties. The Committee consulted Former Chief Justices of India, Former Election Commissioners, and legal experts. A majority supported the concept of simultaneous elections, emphasizing the waste of resources and socio-economic disruptions caused by frequent elections. The Committee proposed amendments to Articles 82A and 324A of the Indian Constitution to enable simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies. The Committee recommended implementing simultaneous elections in two phases: Phase 1: Synchronizing Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies elections. Phase 2: Synchronizing elections for Municipalities and Panchayats with Lok Sabha and State Legislative elections within 100 days.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

## ED conducts fresh searches against operatives of betting website

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

## Rajnath says DPSUs will carry forward modernisation, indigenisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A timely assurance

Sri Lanka assures New Delhi that it will not permit anybody to use its territory to threaten India's security

In what must come as music to the ears of the Indian government, the Sri Lankan President has said that his country will not allow anyone to use its territory to threaten India's security. This assurance comes at a time when China is aggressively pursuing 'Mission Indian Ocean' - which targets India. In a joint statement issued, Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake made Colombo's position clear during his dialogue with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi. This assurance is seen as a critical development in India-Sri Lanka relations, especially given China's use of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port for docking its naval surveillance and spy ships, including the ballistic missile tracking ship Yuan Wang 5. China's growing footprint in the Indian Ocean has raised red flags for New Delhi. The Hambantota Port, now under a 99-year lease to China following Sri Lanka's inability to service its debt, has become a hub for Chinese naval operations. Over the past two years, Beijing has stationed the Yuan Wang 5, a 25,000-tonne satellite and missile tracking ship, at Hambantota multiple times. This vessel, equipped with advanced tracking and communication systems, has been closely monitoring satellite and missile activities in the region, creating strategic challenges for India. In 2022, Sri Lanka briefly delayed the docking of Yuan Wang 5 following Indian concerns but eventually allowed the vessel to dock under the guise of 'replenishment.' Since then, Chinese surveillance ships have regularly patrolled the Indian Ocean, adding to India's apprehensions about Beijing's strategic intentions in the region. The agreement between India and Sri Lanka ensures that Sri Lankan territory, including its waters,



will not be used in any manner that could harm India's security or regional peace. This is a welcome relief for New Delhi, which views such commitments as crucial for maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean Region. This of course hasn't happened overnight. India's steadfast support for Sri Lanka during its economic crisis in 2022 has further solidified the bond between the two nations. President Dissanayake expressed gratitude for India's timely assistance, which was instrumental in stabilising Sri Lanka's economy during one of its most challenging periods. As far as China is concerned it has been courting Sri Lanka for the sole purpose of encircling India and getting a foothold in Indian Ocean. China's influence in Sri Lanka has grown significantly, particularly after Colombo defaulted on its \$1.7 billion loan for the Hambantota Port project. India has consistently raised concerns about the strategic implications of Chinese investments and activities in Sri Lanka. In this background the assurance of Sri Lankan president signals Sri Lanka's intent to balance its ties with both regional powers while safeguarding regional stability. The agreement also underscores Colombo's recognition of the importance of India's security and regional stability and paves the way for a stronger, more strategic India-Sri Lanka alliance in the years to come.

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### PICTALK



Tourists enjoy paragliding, in Manali

## Why reading and writing matter more in the age of AI

As AI grows increasingly sophisticated, our commitment to these skills will determine whether we remain active participants in innovation—or passive consumers

In an era increasingly defined by technological innovation, reading and writing—cornerstones of human intellect—are facing a profound transformation. While artificial intelligence (AI) bots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google Bard redefine the boundaries of information generation, the necessity of cultivating human literacy has never been more crucial. The transition from Neanderthals to modern humans (Homo sapiens) involved significant cognitive and cultural advancements, but Neanderthals themselves did not read or write. Reading and writing developed after modern humans became the dominant hominin species. These are not merely communication tools but exercises that keep our cognitive faculties sharp and resilient. When we read, our brains decode symbols, conjuring vivid images, emotions, and concepts. This intricate process activates the left temporal cortex, which is responsible for language processing, and strengthens neural connectivity. Studies



underscore that reading enhances memory, concentration, and analytical thinking. Engaging with diverse genres deepens empathy and broadens perspectives, fostering a nuanced understanding of the world. Writing, on the other hand, is an intellectual partner to reading. Crafting words—whether in a journal, essay, or story—requires us to organise thoughts, synthesise ideas, and express them clearly. This process activates the prefrontal cortex, the brain's hub for decision-making and problem-solving. Writing is more than an intellectual task; it is therapeutic. Research shows that expressive writing can alleviate stress, enhance mood,

and even bolster the immune system. The tactile act of writing also strengthens memory, embedding information deeply within our minds. Reading and writing foster neuroplasticity, enabling the brain to adapt and form new connections. They are antidotes to cognitive decline and shields against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Regular engagement with these skills cultivates intellectual independence, creativity, and emotional depth—uniquely human attributes. Yet, as AI bots revolutionise the way we consume and produce information, there is an alarming decline in human literacy. Tools like Book AI, which transforms any book into a conversational chatbot, exemplify AI's capacity to digest and reproduce complex information effortlessly. AI lacks the intrinsic human qualities of creativity, empathy, and ethical judgment. As AI literacy surges, the stagnation of human literacy risks creating a dangerous imbalance. Over-reliance on AI can diminish critical think-

ing and communication skills, weakening the very attributes that distinguish humans from machines. While the fear of displacement is understandable, the answer lies in shifting our perspective. AI is not an adversary but a powerful partner that can amplify human capabilities and drive innovation. Individuals can leverage their unique strengths to complement AI capabilities by prioritising the development of reading and writing skills. In an environment controlled by artificial intelligence, these abilities are necessary to navigate complicated concepts, understandably articulate them, and affirm human importance. The development of artificial intelligence highlights the significance of human expertise rather than diminishing it. By committing to studying throughout our lives, we can ensure that technology will not replace our humanity but rather improve it. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



BIJU DHARAMAPALAN

## Nepal embraces China's BRI

Nepal's deepening ties with China through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have set alarm bells ringing in New Delhi



PARUL CHANDRA

India has cause for extreme worry. In yet another indicator of China's growing sway over Nepal, the two are moving forward to implement Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the Himalayan nation. India is not only opposed to this in principle on grounds of sovereignty but also fears it will enable China to increase its already considerable inroads into Nepal.

If 2017 marked Nepal's initial step to coming on board the BRI with an MoU, the year 2024 marks a giant leap for the Himalayan nation in that direction. A framework agreement for cooperation on the BRI was signed during Nepalese PM K P Sharma Oli's visit to China in early December, apart from nine other pacts. With the strategically located Himalayan nation having become a hub for Great Powers contestation, the US too would be uneasy with the latest Beijing-Kathmandu tango. While the US had managed to get Nepal on board its own Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Compact to fund Kathmandu's power and transport infrastructure, the BRI seems far broader. Kathmandu is trying to play down the framework as just a continuation of the 2017 MoU. The framework, however, underlines Kathmandu and Beijing's renewed push for the BRI, an initiative on which New Delhi harbours deep suspicions for what it perceives as China's hegemonic ambitions through debt-trap diplomacy. Sovereignty is another major concern, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), another project under BRI, passing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

India is certainly worried about PM Oli-led Nepal once again moving into China's sphere of influence. The CPN-UML leader is widely seen as being pro-China, and bilateral ties with India were prickly during his previous stints as the PM. India has yet to host Oli since he took charge as PM in July



this year for the fourth time, with him first heading for Beijing, in a break from the tradition of visiting New Delhi. Also, showing scant regard for New Delhi's sensitivities, the Oli government recently allowed 220 Buddhist monks from China to travel to Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha even as the Nanhai Buddhism Shenzhen round-table was being held in Kathmandu. Oli delivered the inaugural address at this roundtable. There were also reports the China-appointed Panchen Lama would travel to Lumbini, though it did not eventually happen. The Oli government's encouragement of Beijing's concerted moves to claim Buddhism as a shared heritage will not go down well with New Delhi, which has been making its efforts to build on its shared Buddhist heritage with Nepal. Kathmandu's thrust on greater economic cooperation with Beijing – the BRI is part of this endeavour – would also whittle down India's influence over Nepal. The BRI framework agreement, incidentally, also envisages the opening of branches of Chinese banks and financial institutions in



WITH THE STRATEGICALLY LOCATED HIMALAYAN NATION HAVING BECOME A HUB FOR GREAT POWERS CONTESTATION, THE US TOO WOULD BE UNEASY WITH THE LATEST BEIJING-KATHMANDU TANGO

Nepal. India has traditionally had deep economic linkages with Nepal, nurtured in no small measure due to reasons of geography – the two neighbours share a long and porous 1,751-km-long border.

This, along with the landlocked nature of Nepal, has helped India become its largest trading partner. During the 2022-23 fiscal, bilateral trade was pegged at \$8.85 billion. This included \$8 billion of exports from India to Nepal, with \$840 million of exports in the reverse direction. As per the Nepal Rastra Bank, India's share in Nepal's trade accounted for 64.1% in 2022-23. PM Oli sees cooperation on BRI as a means to forge closer economic ties with China, with the framework agreement resolving to deepen the economic partnership by "injecting new momentum to trade, infrastructure and connectivity cooperation".

Not a single project under the BRI rubric has been executed in Nepal since the 2017 MoU. Nepal would be hoping that the 10 initial projects, including those meant to boost regional connectivity, will now see the light of day. India has its work cut out and should

ensure it does not come across as overbearing. India's approach in the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura border dispute, where New Delhi ignored Kathmandu's request for foreign secretary-level talks, is a case in point.

It led Oli, in his earlier stint as the PM, to cock a snook at New Delhi by changing his country's map showing the disputed territories as part of Nepal. Neither did New Delhi show respect due to a close neighbour when it decided to give a quiet burial to the joint 2018 Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report, which suggested that the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship be replaced with a new one? Nepal has also been unhappy with India's refusal to give overflight rights for aircraft using the Chinese-built Gautam Buddha International Airport in Lumbini.

India would do well to remember that its domineering approach only serves to alienate a close neighbour further and push it into China's ever-willing embrace. India should not lose sight of its strategic imperatives. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### INDIA STRUGGLES IN BRISBANE TEST

Madam — While Travis Head hits a century again in the Brisbane test, it was a surprising and grave omission of the crafty and successful off-spinner Washington Sundar for the third test at Gabba. While Sundar has been among the wickets in recent tests and also did well with the bat, the head coach and the out-of-form skipper Rohit Sharma couldn't realise the need for a quality off-spinner is a blunder at the moment. Missing for the quality off-spinner is mandatory when the Aussies have two solid left-handers, Travis Head and Alex Carey. When Head is the consistent match winner for the Aussies, leaving Washington Sundar out will prove costly for India in this test.

Whenever there were solid left-hand batters, the formulae of the Indian team in the past from the era of Skipper Ajit Wadekar used to play Erapalli Prasanna and S Venkatraghavan proved to be of great success. After Rohit won the toss and put the Aussies to bat first, the Aussies had scored 445, and now the pressure will be on the Indian batters, who may succumb to pressure again, as proved by losing the 4 top order for a paltry 51. After having won the first test under the standby skipper Jasprit Bumrah, Rohit Sharma seems to have not yet learnt the lesson that the composition of the right combinations is important to be in the match. Missing a clever off-spinner can never be an easy task for the team to come back once they lose the grip in the first innings, which is what's happening at present in Brisbane. Bumrah alone can't take the match away from the opponents; this needs to be realised by head coach Gautam Gambhir. By dropping down in the order, Skipper Rohit is unbeaten on zero, and Rahul, with 33 against his name, has been the only consolation for the fans while rain stopped play. Rain God can be the only saviour as it looks for the team to have a sigh of relief. Rohit and Kohli must take a voluntary exit rather than bring the morale down of the team at this juncture.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

#### Rural education needs reform



For a majority of Indian school children, especially from rural pockets, a feeling of uneasiness sets in when they hear something in English. They find it difficult to listen to and understand the English language. In a country like India, classes of mixed-ability

groups are a feature of every small village. While the teaching-learning process is done in the local language in rural villages, most of the competitive examinations are held in the English language. The rural atmosphere doesn't provide these students the opportunity to speak and learn English.

In fact, in many northern villages, English becomes the third language, with the local language and Hindi as the first and second languages, respectively. The policymakers have to bridge the urban-rural divide when it comes to English teaching. An English teacher, teaching in rural schools, has to come up with innovative strategies in the classrooms. Skilled and committed teachers need to be appointed at the primary level, and they should be upgraded and trained to meet the problems faced by the learners.

R Sivakumar | Gandhi Nagar

#### HEALTHCARE REFORMS FOR PUBLIC

Madam — If the AAP government has done one good thing for society by making Mohalla clinics, the BJP has done another by making Jan Aushadi chemist shops. One can now get a free consultation from the AAP clinic and get medicines at nearly one-fifth the rate from a Jan Aushadi shop, thereby catering to the health aspect of a common man. The prominent good work visible on the ground needs to be applauded for both. The belief that a drug in a normal chemist shop is better than the generic drug being sold by a Jan Aushadi shop (popularly known as 'Modi ki Dukaan' in Patiala) is a myth that can be best removed by the doctors to their patients depending on the degree of moral courage they have to refuse obligations of pharmaceutical companies and give priority to generic rather than tradenamed medicines to their patients. The fleeing private pharmacies need to be brought down to their knees in the interest of the public for their overinflated rates of medicines.

R S Narula | Patiala

#### PURCHASING POWER DECLINES

Madam — For the success of any economy, a vibrant market with sound and sustained demands is imperative, as production and market cannot flourish in a dry market. To vibrate the market, people's purchasing power should be increased by ensuring employment and a viable wage. The Indian economy is driven with an objective of enriching the rich, leaving the 81 crore poor in a lurch to manage sustaining life with 5 kgs of free rice per month. Even the small employed section is left without a reasonable increase in wage and faces the untamed inflation. The changes being pushed through in the name of labour reforms are going to pull down demands and create telling effects on the already volatile economy. Such a programme inevitably leads to dwindling demands. Course correction is inevitable to ensure bridging the gap between the poor and the affluent.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

## REDISCOVER HAPPINESS

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



RAVI VALLURI

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

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



be achieved independent of material success.

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

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

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

## Pesticides are poisoning the Punjab soil



AS MITTAL

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



It's time to face the disturbing truth about Punjab's agriculture—and it's a nightmare. In districts like Bathinda, Mansa, and Ludhiana, up to 60 per cent of farm soil samples are infested with toxic pesticide residues—including the deadly chemicals endosulfan and carbofuran—at levels far beyond what's even remotely safe. This isn't just a warning; it's a full-blown crisis, a ticking time bomb, the result of irresponsible, reckless pesticide and fertiliser abuse running rampant in our fields.

On World Soil Day—December 5th—we're forced to confront the cold reality of a rapidly disintegrating agriculture system, while the world's been talking about "Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, and Manage"! The consequences of this madness are devastating. Our once fertile land is transforming into a barren wasteland, and that's only the beginning. These toxic chemicals aren't just staying in the soil. They're seeping into our food chain—contaminating every bite we take and slowly poisoning us all. But it doesn't stop there. These toxic residues are embedding themselves into our very DNA, passing down a legacy of genetic mutations to our children and grandchildren.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) documents pesticide poisoning deaths only if they are registered as medico-legal cases, excluding countless instances of non-institutional exposure and chronic health effects. This data void impedes effective policymaking and perpetuates a lack of accountability among stakeholders. **Addressing Weak Grievance Mechanisms:** One of the most glaring deficiencies in India's pesticide regulation is the lack of accessible grievance redressal systems. Farmers and agricultural workers exposed to pesticides face prohibitive costs and lengthy procedures when seeking justice. Meanwhile, state governments can impose only temporary bans on hazardous pesticides, typically lasting 60 days, exposing vulnerable communities to ongoing risks.

**Personal Protective Equipment:** A

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

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

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

## India@2024: A resilient economy on the fast track to growth But challenges such as persistent inflation, a slowdown in the banking sector and environmental concerns continue to pose hurdles

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



KAJLEEN KAUR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

last year. In response, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reduced the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4 per cent in December to improve liquidity and stimulate credit growth. Qualitative indicators present a mixed picture. India climbed 14 ranks on the UNDP

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

ranking 176th out of 180 countries. Challenges such as air quality, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions demand urgent attention.

As India navigates these complexities, it is also undergoing key transitions. The US economy has entered a new phase, and India sees a shift in RBI leadership, with Sanjay Malhotra taking over as the 26th Governor after Shaktikanta Das's tenure. While the final assessment of FY2024-25 remains pending, India's growth story offers optimism for a brighter future and a strong foundation for the vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'.

(The writer is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi. Views expressed are personal)

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

alleged, referring to the insertion of Article 35A without parliamentary assent. Criticising the Congress for bringing in reservation on the basis of religion in two states ruled by it, Shah termed it "unconstitutional". "It is clearly stated in the Constitution that no reservation will be based on religion... They (Congress) do not want any welfare of OBCs, they want to give reservations to Muslims by increasing the limit of 50 per cent.

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

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

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



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

threatened to kill them. On this complaint, FIR number 441 was registered under the relevant sections in Police Station Shivaji Nagar, Gurugram. In relation to the incident, a person from the other side also told the police on December 15 that he was having a birthday party with his friends near Sohna Chowk. During this, he picked up a chair from near Jail Ki Roti

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

# An Imperial legacy

From page 1

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

# Will NEET-UG exam be conducted online soon?

From page 1

The panel recommended the introduction of a DIGI-EXAM system on the lines of DIGI-YATRA to ensure that only the candidate writing the exam joined the intended programme. The Education Minister also announced that NCERT textbooks for some classes will cost less from next year, and the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which currently prints five crore textbooks a year, is working to augment capacity to 15 crore from next year. Pradhan also informed that

the number of schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) had more than doubled, rising from 14,974 in 2014 to 30,415 in 2024. "Admissions, transfers and CBSE affiliation processes are now fully online. Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalayas and the CBSE are operating on 100 per cent e-office platforms. Schools offering vocational courses have risen from 960 in 2014 to 29,342 in 2024. Student enrolment in skill education has surged from 58,720 in 2014 to over 30.8 lakh in 2024," he said.

# Rapper Badshah caught in the wrong...

From page 1

Under the MV 2019, driving on the wrong side of the road is a punishable offence under Section 184 (dangerous driving) and Section 194D (wrong side on one-way roads). The penalty for the first offence includes a fine of Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 6 months. For repeat offences, the fine increases to Rs 10,000, with possible imprisonment of up to 2 years and license suspension. Repeat violators

may also face vehicle impoundment. Meanwhile, the Gurugram Traffic police have imposed challans amounting to Rs 10.28 Crores against 1.46 lakhs traffic offenders from January 2024 to November 2024 for wrong side driving, police said. Traffic police officials said that it is extremely worrying that people are openly flouting the traffic norms as wrong side driving can cause the life of several pedestrians and other motorists.

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

# Winter haze shrouds National...

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

tion linked index for payment of wages to the workers. Noting that the APBS has been made mandatory since January 1, 2024, it said that while accepting the gains of APBS, the "Committee is of the view that it is too early to make it mandatory as the problems relating to Aadhaar seeding still have not been resolved leading to exclusion of lakhs of workers." "The Committee, therefore, reiterates their earlier recommendation that APBS should not be made mandatory and alternative mechanisms should always operate side by side to ensure that the primary goal of MGNREGA to provide wages does not get defeated due to lack of proper implementation of technology," it said. "Taking up works under MGNREGA is a sort of last resort for many of the poor rural masses who do not have any other option of livelihood or job option to utilise but wages of such nominal nature sometime with delayed payment only discourage them and propel them to migrate

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

# UP supplementary budget tabled...

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Additionally, the budget also includes the contingency fund of Rs 30.48 crore. The finance minister stated that the supplementary budget will allocate funds to various departments based on their needs. Key allocations include Rs 8,587.27 crore for the Energy department, Rs 2,438.63 crore for the Finance department, Rs 1,592.28 crore for the Family Welfare department, and Rs 1,001 crore for the Animal Husbandry department. Additionally, Rs 805 crore has been allocated for the Public Works Department, Rs 515 crore for the Primary

Education department, Rs 505 crore for the Information department, Rs 454.01 crore for the Panchayati Raj department, and Rs 354.54 crore for the Medical Education and Training department. The UP government had presented its original budget in February this year, amounting to over Rs 7.36 lakh crore. Later, on July 30, a supplementary budget of Rs 12,209.93 crore was introduced. Now, five months later, the government has once again brought a second supplementary budget to accelerate development works. This budget was earlier approved during a cabinet meeting

chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday morning. A supplementary budget is a financial document presented by the government during a financial year when additional expenses are required beyond the initially approved budget. This budget is introduced to cover expenses that were not included in the estimated budget or have become necessary due to new circumstances. It is brought mid-year to allocate extra funds for any department or ministry's plans. The supplementary budget is presented along with an estimate of these additional expenditures.



# Russian general killed by bomb in Moscow

AP ■ MOSCOW

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

Lt. Gen. Igor Kirillov, the chief of the military's nuclear, biological and chemical protection forces, was killed as he left for his office. Kirillov's assistant also died in the attack. Kirillov, 54, was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine. On Monday, Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, opened a criminal investigation against him, accusing him of directing the use of banned chemical weapons. An official with the SBU said the agency was behind the attack. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to release the information, described Kirillov as a "war

criminal and an entirely legitimate target."

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in February 2022. In May, the US State Department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in World War I, against Ukrainian troops. Russia has denied using any chemical weapons in Ukraine and, in turn, has accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat. Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda. The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork.

Russia's top state investigative agency said it's investigating Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism, and officials in Moscow vowed to punish Ukraine. Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council chaired by President Vladimir Putin, described the attack as an attempt by Kyiv to distract public attention away from its military failures and vowed that its "senior military-political leadership will face inevitable retribution."

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ DHAKA

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

Victory Day or "Bijoy Dibosh" is commemorated every year on December 16 when the Pakistan military surrendered to Indian forces in 1971, bringing about the liberation of Bangladesh. Nazrul's comment was reposted by the office of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. Attaching a screenshot of Modi's post that paid tribute to Indian soldiers for their role in the historic victory in 1971, Nazrul wrote on Facebook in Bengali on Monday, "I strongly protest. December 16, 1971, marks Bangladesh's Victory

Day. India was merely an ally in this victory, nothing more." Yunus' Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam shared Nazrul's post. The Daily Star newspaper reported on Tuesday. Anti-Discrimination Student Movement Convener Hasnat Abdullah also criticised Modi's post.

Abdullah wrote on Facebook that this was Bangladesh's Liberation War and it was for the country's independence against Pakistan. He said Modi has claimed it was solely India's war and their achievement, disregarding Bangladesh's existence in their narrative. "When India claims this independence as their achievement, I see this as a threat to our independence, sovereignty and oneness. It's necessary for us to fight against this threat by India. We need to carry on this fight," he wrote.

Modi, in a post on X, had said, "Today, on Vijay Diwas, we honour the courage and sacrifices of the brave soldiers who contributed to India's historic victory in 1971. Their selfless dedication and unwavering resolve safeguarded our nation and brought glory to us. "This day is a tribute to their extraordinary valour and their unshakable spirit. Their sacrifices will forever inspire generations and remain deeply embedded in our nation's history."

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

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

India commemorates December 16 as Vijay Diwas when over 90,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered before the Indian Army, leading to the creation of Bangladesh. India had also backed Bengali guerrillas in the fight against Pakistan Army after West Pakistan's leadership refused to acknowledge the 1970 election victory of Mujibur Rahman's Awami League. President Droupadi Murmu and several Indian political leaders too had paid homage Monday to the heroes of the 1971 war. "A grateful nation remembers the ultimate sacrifice of our brave-hearts whose stories inspire every Indian and shall remain a source of national pride," Murmu said on X.

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

AP ■ PALM BEACH

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

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

at a wide-ranging news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort. "Why would they do that without asking me what I thought? I wouldn't have had him do that. I think it was a big mistake." Trump's withering criticism of the Biden administration's move comes as the Democratic administration aims to push every last dollar already designated for Ukraine out the door to help repel Russia's invasion before Trump takes office on Jan. 20, with future aid uncertain. But even as Biden tries to surge weaponry and other aid to Ukraine in his final five weeks in office, the moment underscored that it's Trump who holds the most significant influence over how Ukraine can use its US-provided arsenal in the long run. It's a critical piece of leverage he could use to try to follow through on his campaign pledge to bring

about a swift end to the conflict. Asked if he would consider reversing the Biden administration decision, Trump responded: "I might. I think it was a very stupid thing to do." The White House pushed back on Trump's criticism, noting that the decision was made after months of deliberations that started before last month's election. "All I can assure you is that in the conversations we've had with them since the election, and we've had at various levels, we have articulated to them the logic behind it, the thinking behind it, why we were doing it," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said of the current administration's coordination with the outgoing administration. Trump's relationship with Russian leader Vladimir Putin has been scrutinised since his

2016 campaign for president, when he called on Russia to find and make public missing emails deleted by Hillary Clinton, his Democratic opponent. Trump publicly sided with Putin over US intelligence officials on whether Russia had interfered in the 2016 election to help him, and Trump has praised the Russian leader and even called him "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine. Vice President-elect JD Vance has said that while the US has differences with Russia, it was counterproductive to approach Moscow as an enemy. Trump on Monday reiterated his call on both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin to negotiate an end to the war, calling the death and despair caused by the conflict "carnage."

## Australian state proposes ban on protests at places of worship

AP ■ MELBOURNE

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

Victoria Premier Jacinta Allan proposed the new laws after arsonists damaged a Melbourne synagogue this month and protestors kept fearful worshippers trapped inside a Sydney synagogue for three hours a week earlier. "That's not peaceful protest. It's menacing behaviour," Allan said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BEIJING

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

The death sentence of Li, former secretary of the ruling Communist Party working committee of the Hohhot economic and technological development zone, was initially issued in September 2022 and upheld on appeal in August 2024. Tuesday's execution followed the approval of the Supreme People's Court and was carried out by a court in Inner Mongolia, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

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

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

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

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

AP ■ ROME

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

Italian daily Corriere della Sera on Tuesday ran excerpts of "Hope: The Autobiography," written with Italian author Carlo Musso, which is being released in more than 80 countries next month. The New York Times ran other excerpts Tuesday, Francis' 88th birthday. In the Italian excerpts, Francis recalled his historic March 2021 trip to Iraq, the first ever by a pope. COVID-19 was still raging and security concerns were high, especially in Mosul. The devastated northern city had been the headquarters of Islamic State militants, whose horrific reign had largely emptied the region of its Christian



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

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

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

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

The book, originally planned to be published after Francis' death, is coming out at the start of the Vatican's big Holy Year, which Francis will officially inaugurate on Christmas Eve. According to Italian publisher Mondadori, "Hope" is the first autobiography ever published by a pope. Francis, however, has published other first-person, memoir-style books or book-length interviews with biographers and journalists, including "Life: My Story Through History," published earlier this year.

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

AP ■ KYIV

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Come Back Alive foundation supports troops with anything from military training to buying drones and electronic warfare to repel attacks. In the first year of the conflict, they raised more than 5.7 billion hryvnias (USD 184 million). So far in 2024, the figure is nearly 3.6 billion hryvnias (USD 89 million).

"Many people report a worsening financial situation, which limits their ability to contribute to supporting the military," said Oleh Karpenko, deputy director of the Come Back Alive Foundation.

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

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

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

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

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

"When aid from international partners decreases, it strongly demotivates Ukrainian society. People lose motivation to donate when they perceive a lack of willingness from partners to actively supply weapons." Staring up at the large monitors set up on either side of the stage in the form of the three diagonal line symbol of the 3rd Assault Brigade, 26-year-old Oksana Kalenchenko thinks that events like the concert are hugely important in continuing to generate support. "It's a reminder to somebody that there is a war going on in Ukraine, let's keep donating, let's keep doing everything we can," Kalenchenko said.

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

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



marking a new beginning of support of the government in promoting an equitable workplace, it said. Prasad emphasised the commitment of the government to a progressive workplace and mentioned that the decision by the Director General of Mines Safety to permit the deployment of women in all

shifts in mining in 2019 was a key step in the right direction. He also appreciated Tata Steel's effort in taking the lead as a responsible corporate house in promoting such a cause. Tata Steel vice president (raw material) D B Sundara Ramam said, "This all-women shift represents a landmark achievement not

only for the company but also for the Indian mining industry. It is a testament to the resilience and capability of women breaking stereotypes. It is also a reflection of our belief that diversity and inclusion are essential for driving innovation and operational excellence." He said the steelmaker will continue to create more opportunities for women, especially in the mining ecosystem. "This initiative marks a significant addition to the 100 glorious years of mining at Noamundi," he said. The journey began in 2019 with the launch of Tata Steel's flagship diversity initiative, "Women@Mines", making it the first company in India to deploy women in all shifts at its mines, following the Centre's landmark relaxation of the Mines Act, 1952, the statement said. The steelmaker had launched initiatives to recruit and train women from local

communities to operate heavy earth-moving machinery and participate in the mining ecosystem. The initiatives were met with overwhelming enthusiasm and women were deployed across roles such as dumper, shovel, dozer, grader, and drill operators, the company statement said. They underwent extensive training, including technical and operational skills, simulator sessions, safety protocols, and physical fitness, before joining the workforce in April 2022. Over 2,100 applications were received by the company and 24 operators were selected, according to the statement. In a groundbreaking move earlier this year, the authorities of the Noamundi Mine diversified its workforce by inducting nine transgender operators of heavy earth-moving machinery, reinforcing the steelmaker's commitment to inclusion and equality.

## UM Nitin Gadkari hails food delivery economy as key job creator, eyes 2.5 Crore employment by 2030



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

## CBDT launches campaign to intimate taxpayers on mismatch in ITR filed and AIS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

folios and contribute towards building a transparent financial ecosystem. The regulator noted that over a number of years, mutual fund investors sometimes lose track of their investments considering investments might have been made in physical form with bare minimum KYC details. The investments in open-ended mutual fund schemes may remain invested perpetually until and unless the investor/his nominee/legal heir approaches the concerned asset management company (AMC) for

redemption/transfer. Due to the non-availability of PAN, email ID or valid address, it is also possible that these MF folios may not appear in the unitholder's Consolidated Account Statement. Thus, inactivity in mutual fund folios could be on account of investors losing track of their investment, demise and such inactive folios may become susceptible to fraudulent redemptions. To address the concern, Sebi said, "The service platform is proposed to be developed by the RTAs to provide investors with a searchable database of inactive and/or unclaimed mutual fund

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

AP ■ LAUSANNE

World Cup winner Spain will chase a sweep of major women's soccer titles at the 2025 European Championship after drawing a group with Italy, Belgium and Portugal. A European title would complete the set for Spain women after winning the inaugural UEFA Nations League in February for coach Montse Tomé, who took over when the team and federation was in turmoil after the 2023 world title win in Sydney. Tomé is the only female coach in Spain's Euro 2025 group. Euro 2025 host Switzerland will open the 16-nation tournament against Norway on July 2 in Basel. The group also includes Iceland and Finland. The past two European champions, titleholder

England and Euro 2017 winner the Netherlands, landed in a strong group with top-seeded France and Wales. France and England reunite next July 5 in Zurich after coming through the same qualifying group, in which they traded away wins in a five-day spell and France finished on top of the standings. "We had some beautiful matches in May and June. It's a very good challenge," France coach Laurent Bonadei said. Germany, the record eight-time European champion, was drawn with Denmark, Poland and Sweden, the inaugural winner in 1984. Basel's St. Jakob Park stadium also will host the final on July 27. More than 700,000 tickets are publicly available for the 31 games being hosted in eight Swiss cities. Switzerland has the responsibility to continue the



momentum in European women's soccer after three successful major tournaments. France hosted the 2019 Women's World Cup, won by the United States; host England won the Euro 2022 final against Germany watched by more than 87,000 fans at Wembley Stadium; and Spain and England played for the 2023 world title at the first 32-team tournament, hosted by Australia and New Zealand. "For me it is the perfect moment for this tournament to come here," said retired Swiss great Lara Dickmann, a two-time Champions League winner with Lyon. "It will be a game-changer for us," Dickmann told The Associated Press. "It's going to be really important for the Swiss population but also for the Swiss media, Swiss politics, on any level that

takes part in football." Switzerland will start against Norway — which lost the 2023 World Cup opening game against New Zealand — one month after the same teams meet in a Nations League group that also includes Iceland. Switzerland coach Pia Sundhage said she aimed to field her best team in what will be a final competitive warmup for Euro 2025. "Confidence can take any team anywhere," said Sundhage, the Swedish veteran who led the U.S. to back-to-back Olympic titles in 2008 and 2012. England coach Sarina Wiegman has won the past two Euros titles, after leading her native Netherlands to the 2017 title, and suggested it will be an open and exciting tournament in Switzerland. "It's not just three or four countries" who can win, Wiegman said.

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

AP ■ DOHA

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



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

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

# Americans now paid to play in Ryder Cup

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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



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

includes direct payment for their services, a change not only in the amount but 40% of it without stipulation where it goes. The original deal in 1999 was \$200,000 for each player, with half of that going to a college golf program and the other half to a charity of the player's choice. For the Rome matches in 2023, the entire \$200,000 went to whatever charity or foundation the players chose. Rea noted in his letter to past Ryder Cup captains that it was similar to what the PGA Tour does for the Presidents Cup. The Presidents Cup changed from players choosing a charity to players and captains getting \$250,000 without stipulation starting in 2022. The PGA of America announced its decision in a statement on its social media channels. "The players and captains, past and present, are responsible for the Ryder Cup becoming the most special competition in golf and one of the most in-demand events on the international sports scene," the PGA said. "While no players asked to be compensated, the PGA of America Board of Directors has voted to increase the allocation to the members of the U.S. Ryder Cup team from \$200,000 to be directed to charities — a figure unchanged since 1999 — to \$500,000, with \$300,000 of that to be directed to the charity or charities of the players' choice. The balance is a stipend.

# Rohan Jaitley re-elected as DDCA president



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



were required to win. In 2020, Rohan was elected unopposed after Rajat Sharma resigned midway during his term. A year later, he defeated advocate Vikas Singh to claim a full three-year run. Rohan had the backing of former BCCI acting president CK Khanna, who is considered an influential figure in Delhi cricket as he controls more than 1,000 votes. Khanna's daughter Shikha Kumar (1,246 votes), defeated Rakesh Kumar Bansal (536) and Sudhir Kumar Agarwal (498) to claim the vice-president's post.

Ashok Sharma (893) became the secretary, while Harish Singla (1328) was elected for the treasurer's post and Amit Grover (1189) won the joint secretary position. All office-bearers are elected for a three-year term. Anand Verma (985), Manjit Singh (1050), Navdeep M (1034), Shyam Sharma (1165), Tushar Saigal (926), Vikas Katyal (1054), Vikram Kohli (939) claimed the directors' post, which goes to polls every year. A member of the 1983 World Cup-winning team Azad, who represents Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency for the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress party, had alleged corruption in the DDCA in the run up to the polls. He had alleged that the DDCA spent as much Rs 17.5 crore on installing floodlights when the much bigger Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad did the same for Rs 7.5 crore. He had also accused the incumbent DDCA administration of spending only a fraction of the approximately Rs 140 crore it received from the BCCI in the last financial year.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

AP ■ BOURNEMOUTH

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



"Credit to him, big moment, especially the reaction as well, I thought the boys were brilliant." Bournemouth forward Ryan Christie told broadcaster Sky. "And it was a moment of magic to get us level." There will be debate over the penalty decision and Christie lamented what he said was inconsistent decision-making from officials. "I thought it was harsh," Christie said. "I know his hand is high but he's so close to the ball. We didn't get one

last week against Ipswich from a similar scenario. "It's a bit frustrating because we dominated. But it's good to get a point in the end." The comeback was another example of Bournemouth's late resilience. The south coast side has picked up nine points from losing positions this season, better than everyone bar Aston Villa and Manchester City. Bournemouth climbed into sixth place, just two points behind Manchester City, while West Ham was 14th.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



sexual harassment of women wrestlers by former WFI head Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh was an apolitical one. But their fellow protestor and Rio Olympics bronze-winner Sakshi Malik sought to dispute that soon after they joined congress. She went on

to allege in her book that the duo's "greed" punctured their protest against Sharan Singh. Next generation affected by chaos. The likes of Anshu Malik and Antim Panghal, who were touted as the next big thing in

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ BRISBANE

**K**L Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja were determination personified as their fighting fifties helped India avoid the follow-on on the fourth day of the weather-hit third Test against a menacing Australia that seems meandering towards a draw.

Jadeja (77, 123b, 7x4, 1x6) and Rahul (84, 139, 8x4) were the heavy-lifters in India's 252 for nine when bad light forced an early close to the day.

Aspirant Bumrah (10) and Akash Deep (27), who showed appreciable gumption, are holding the fort for India.

The visitors trail Aussies by 193 runs. But they wouldn't mind that one bit as Australia will now have to bat again and forcing a result in three sessions looks an improbable target, considering the Brisbane weather pattern.

The city is bracing up for rain and a thunderstorm or two on Wednesday.

A quick word of appreciation is also required for No. 10 Bumrah

and No. 11 Akash Deep for knocking down the 33 runs required to go past the follow-on mark of 246.

The much-awaited moment came when Akash crunched Pat Cummins over gully for a boundary.

When these two joined forces, India were reeling at 213 for 9 after Jadeja was dismissed off a Cummins' snorter.

But while resuming from a wafer-thin overnight score of 51 for four, India needed someone to offer fight, and Rahul, India's standout batter in this series so far, did precisely that.

Rahul displayed admirable technical nous to withstand the stern test posed by the Australian bowlers to take the game deep into the day.

A nine toes down Rahul and an equally feisty Jadeja added 67 runs for the sixth wicket, and it was the first sign of India's fight.

There was a moment of massive fortune too for Rahul when Smith spilled a regulation catch at second slip off the first ball of the



day from Cummins. Rahul was on 33 then. A quick look upwards and a silent prayer showed how much he valued that

reprieve, which he exploited to the hilt, notching his 17th Test fifty. Once he woke up from a bit of morning haziness, Rahul looked a

class apart from the rest of his colleagues. The Aussies employed three slips and a gully, leaving the vast

expanse of the ground to play his favourite shot -- drive through the cover or in front of the point.

It was a dangerous proposition as there was enough movement and bounce for the Aussie pacers.

But Rahul was prudent enough to see through that ruse. He did not bring out that shot until the bowlers pitched the ball well up in his driving arc.

The Bengaluru man's sagacity shone in how he defended too -- all soft hands and playing close to the body.

Cummins tested him with that fifth stump line outside off, but Rahul either left the ball wisely or merely tucked his bat behind his pads.

However, a remarkable redemption catch by Smith at slip off Nathan Lyon ended his stay.

But Jadeja carried on and he added 53 runs for the seventh wicket with Nitish Reddy to keep India afloat.

The 36-year-old scored a good chunk of runs either down the ground or square of the wicket, enabling him to collect runs

without the risk of getting caught behind or in the cordon.

Jadeja brought up his 22nd fifty in Test cricket off 89 balls and the innings was also dotted with sweep shots that he effectively employed against off-spinner Lyon.

Nitish should also be patted for giving some solid company to Jadeja as batting for time was more important than the volume of runs considering the weather situation in this Test.

However, a slice of misfortune ended Nitish's stay as he dragged Cummins' climbing delivery back onto his stumps. Jadeja also soon departed while trying to farm the strike with Bumrah.

He looked to smash Cummins' rising delivery out of the ground but Mitchell Marsh settled nicely under the ball to give a heap of frayed nerves to Indian fans.

But Bumrah and Akash added 39 runs to put the smiles back on their faces, as Aussies dearly missed the metronomical Josh Hazlewood, who was ruled out of the series with a calf injury.



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

AP ■ HAMILTON

**C**aptain Ben Stokes was unable to bat because of a hamstring injury on Tuesday as England slumped to a 423-run loss to New Zealand before tea on the fourth day on the third cricket Test.

Stokes strained his left hamstring while bowling on the third day and could not take the field as England was bowled out for 234 as it chased an impossible target of 658 for victory.

New Zealand's winning margin matched its largest test win by runs of a 423-run win over Sri Lanka in 2018 and prevented England from completing a series whitewash. England had an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series after winning the first test by eight wickets and the second by 323 runs.

England resumed its second innings Tuesday at 18-2 after losing the wickets of Ben Duckett and Zak Crawley late on day three after New Zealand, leading by 204 on the first innings, was dismissed for 453.

Joe Root made 54 and Jacob Bethell 76 in a 104-run partnership for the third wicket which briefly fanned England's hopes that it might somehow endure for two full days to draw the match. But dogged perseverance is not a feature of England cricket in the "Bazball" quick-scoring era and instead it maintained a policy of all-out attack before the final wicket fell midway through the second session.

After lunch Gus Atkinson blasted 43 from 41 balls with seven fours and a six and Ollie Pope made 17 but wickets fell steadily and the result became inevitable.

"I think anytime you finish a series with a win when you've been behind is pleasing," New Zealand captain Tom Latham said. "We weren't at our best in those first two games but the way we came here on a wicket that was slightly different to the first couple and we adapted was very pleasing." New Zealand's win owed a great deal to the contribution of Mitchell Santner in the first innings who made 76 batting at No. 8 and worked with Matt Henry, Tim Southee and Will O'Rourke to add 116 runs for New Zealand's three wickets. That allowed New Zealand to reach 347 after losing the toss and being sent in.

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

**I**ndia's vice-captain Smriti Mandhana has surged three places to second in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings while climbing one spot to third among T20I batters, following her stellar displays against Australia and the West Indies.

The left-hander struck 105 in the final match of the series against Australia in Perth and 54 in the first game of the ongoing T20I rubber against the West Indies in Mumbai to headline the latest rankings update released here on Tuesday.

Mandhana is the lone Indian batter in the top 10 as her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur moved down two spots to 13th while Jemimah Rodrigues climbed six places to 15th and Harleen Deol moved up nine rungs to 64th Among bowlers, Deepti Sharma has slipped two spots



to five. India seam bowler Arundhati Reddy has shot up 48 places to 51st after a haul of four for 26 while Renuka Thakur has moved up from 28th to joint 26th. England opener Tammy Beaumont advanced two places to 11th after an unbeaten 65 helped clinch the South Africa series 2-1. Ashleigh Gardner has moved one place to 16th with a 50 in Perth, Tahlia McGrath has progressed from 32nd to 24th

with an unbeaten 56, and Annabell Sutherland is up 15 places to 29th after a match-winning 110. Gardner is also up two places to a career-best-equaling third position in the bowling rankings with a haul of five for 30 and has moved up from fourth to second in the all-rounders' list. Sutherland is in the top 20 of the bowling rankings.

Others to move up in this list include South Africa's Marizanne Kapp, who has gained two slots to reach fourth position after a haul of three for 24, and the England trio of Charlie Dean (up two places to seventh), Nat Sciver Brunt (up one place to 16th) and Lauren Bell (up four places to 21st). Kaur moves back into top 10 in the T20I rankings, Kaur is in the top 10 and Rodrigues has gained six slots to reach 15th position after a fine 73 against the West Indies. In the bowling rankings, Deepti has moved up two places to take the second position in the bowling rankings and Titas Sadhu is up to 52nd. For the West Indies, all-rounder Deandra Dottin has advanced 21 places to 59th after a half-century while Qiana Joseph (up 22 places to 65th among batters) and Karishma Ramharack (up six places to 20th among bowlers) are other notable gainers.

## Vettori admits Indian tailenders partnership foils Australia's plans

PTI ■ BRISBANE

**A**ustralia assistant coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a resilient partnership between Indian tailenders Jasprit Bumrah and Akash Deep foiled their plans to enforce a follow-on, while also defending the decision not to declare the home team's first innings in the third Test which seems heading towards a draw.

With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, it was the obstinate 39-run unbeaten partnership between Bumrah and Akash Deep that saved India the blushes as the tourists avoided a follow on a rain marred day four on Tuesday. "I think the only way to force the game was to force the follow-on," Vettori said at the post-day press conference.

"There was a desperation to get that final wicket. We thought we had a really good chance when Jadeja was dismissed, but it was a real fighting partnership from Bumrah and Deep.

"Unfortunately, just the amount of time that's been lost from the game has made it difficult," he added.

Akash Deep, making his debut in Australia, walked in to bat at 213 for 9, with India still needing 33 runs to avoid the follow-on that could have cost them the game. Alongside pace spearhead Bumrah, he guided India to 252 for 9, frustrating the home team.

Australia had ended day three on 405 for 7 but chose to bat, consuming a considerable amount of game time on a rain affected day four rather than declare their innings.

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

PTI ■ BRISBANE

**A**ustralia pacer Josh Hazlewood is likely to miss the remainder of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against India due to a right calf strain that he sustained during the ongoing third Test at the Gabba, Cricket Australia said on Tuesday.

The niggles have also ruled Hazlewood out of the Brisbane Test, weakening Australia's bowling attack. "Josh Hazlewood has sustained a right side calf strain which will prevent him from playing any further part in the Test match against India in Brisbane," Cricket



Australia said in an official statement. "He is likely to miss the remainder of the Test series." On Tuesday, the New South

Wales player bowled just one over before walking out of the field following a discussion with captain Pat Cummins, senior cricketer

Steven Smith and team physio Nick Jones. Hazlewood later underwent scans to ascertain the severity of the injury.

The 33-year-old had nicked off star India batter Virat Kohli on Monday, the third day of the match, with a fine delivery outside the off-stump.

Hazlewood made his return to the side for the third Test after missing the Pink Ball Test at Adelaide due to a side strain.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

**R**ohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are coping maximum criticism for being walking wickets during the ongoing Test series against Australia but even Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Rishabh Pant haven't shown the patience needed to survive Down Under, indicating a larger problem.

Patience is a virtue that one develops over time and Kohli had once showed how it's done during his golden phase between 2014 and 2019. KL Rahul, blessed with sound technique, has displayed that during the current series with scores of 77 and 84 in Perth and Brisbane.

In case of Jaiswal, save his second innings knock of 161 at Perth, a shuffle across the crease is making him a candidate for leg-before.

Gill loves to play on the rise outside the off-stump and away from his body and could be impatient when one bowls the stump and even for Pant, a compulsive stroke player, the ball that leaves him from five metre length with adequate bounce, is creating issues.

So, will head coach Gautam Gambhir and his deputy Abhishek Nayar, who is highly regarded in Mumbai cricket circuit for being a "Mind Coach and Life Coach rolled into one", do anything about it? A former India great, who didn't wish to be named, offered his perspective.

"Not all great players or players of repute happen to be great coaches. They might have done some incredible things as players and knew what to do and how to react during a particular situation," the veteran of 100-plus Tests said.

"But coaching is science and not many can tell why certain things need to be done. Even Gautam used to play with hard hands and dab towards slips in Australia and England.

"You can still work with younger guys but difficult to mould the older ones who don't get enough time to work on their game in a packed calendar," he added.

Watching the dismissals of especially Kohli in Australia, which seemed like a replay of previous ones, has led to growing concerns.

Everyone understands the technical flaw, but can anyone provide the corrective measures to break the rut? Rohit, barring the England tour in 2021, he does not really have a track record in SENA countries in Tests. But with Kohli, the problem of reaching for deliveries on and outside the off-stump has resurfaced



once again and has been a persistent issue for quite some time. Sanjay Manjrekar's tweet is worth taking note of. "I guess the time has come to scrutinise the role of a batting coach in the Indian team. Why major technical issues have remained unresolved for so long with certain Indian

batters?" he asked. Manjrekar's view raises questions on the role of Sanjay Bangar, Vikram Rathour, and now Nayar. Their official designation might be assistant coach, but they essentially are batting coaches.

Devang Gandhi, who was a touring selector between 2016-17 to 2020-21, had a

more nuanced take compared to the veteran India star.

"It would be very easy to target Nayar as a low hanging fruit or for that matter Gautam," Gandhi, who has coached the Delhi Ranji team and Bengal U-19, told PTI during a conversation.

"But they have just come into system. To discuss or nudge a player, first you need to be around for some time and once there is some kind of mutual trust between the two, you can offer him solutions. But at this level, it is more about the experienced player's own mental make-up."

So what is Kohli's problem? Gandhi, a former Test opener and an NCA Level-2 coach, believes it's all about his mental approach.

"If you watch his training videos that are available for public, I find him doing all the right things. During training

he is playing close to his body. But the moment it is the match situation, the hands are moving towards those channel deliveries like conditioned reflex or muscle memory," he explained.

Gandhi then blamed it on the rising T20 engagements.

"The moment his bat is away from the body, the bat-face will open up towards cover. Now this is a white ball problem of hitting through the line. In India the ball will hit the bottom of the bat but in Australia, it will towards the upper part.

"What solution can Gambhir or Nayar possibly give, apart from telling him to not play those deliveries?"

"After 30 Test hundreds, Virat doesn't need to be told that but at 36, does he have that patience to accept that now if he scores a hundred, it will be off 200 balls and not 140 like

earlier times? Can he bide those extra 60 balls?" Gandhi questioned.

Sachin Tendulkar's epic 241 in the 2004 New Year's Test in Sydney is often cited as a prime example of patience. He didn't hit a single cover drive until he scored his double hundred.

"It's about controlling the mind. You can be a sounding board for players like Tendulkar and Kohli but at this stage, you can't coach them. Coaching happens at junior level," Gandhi added. But can Gambhir or Nayar help Kohli find a solution?

"Of course, at some point, honest conversations are necessary. But first, they should ask him what his corrective options are and then offer their own if they have something different to contribute," Gandhi concluded.

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