

IOC announces probe after bribery scandal

J GOPIKRISHNAN NEW DELHI

'The Pioneer fter expose on US firms L paid penalty of more than 300 per cent for bribery abroad including HAL, Indian Oil Corporation and Railways, the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) in a regulatory filing declared probe. Albemarle Corporation, global specialty chemicals supplier that develops and sells catalysts used in the operation of oil refineries was caught by US Department of Justice for bribing officials in IOC and refineries Indonesia and Vietnam.

Albemarle Corporation paid approximately USD 1.14 million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately USD 11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011," according to a US Department of Justice order dated September 28, 2023. Albemarle was caught for bribery by the US authorities in 2017 and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than USD 198 million to avoid prosecution.

In a filing to National and Bombay Stock Exchanges dated December 20, the IOC said it is "neither party to nor is there any allegation against the company in relation to the proceedings" in the US authorities. "However, the company has initiated an internal fact-finding review concerning the incident, which allegedly occurred in

010neer

US imposes over 300 per cent penalty on companies who bribed HAL, Railways, IOC



thoroughly understand the surrounding these allegations and determine the

facts

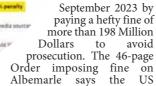
taken," IOC said.

to

appropriate steps to be

The state-owned firm said it has "always upheld and is steadfastly committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance, transparency and regulatory compliance across all jurisdictions of its operations". 'We assure our stakeholders, partners and employees that we are a law-abiding company, fully compliant with all laws," India's largest oil firm said in

the filing. "The Pioneer on December 16 reported that the US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Albemarle Corporation bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices and bribing of more than 63.5 million dollars. Albemarle is



supplying refining solutions to more than 700 refineries across the world and dealing with Indian Oil Corporation However the name of the (IOC) from 2009 to 2017. The 46 page order says Albermale started paying bribes to IOC officials to get it removed from the "Holiday List" in 2009.

"Albemarle paid approximately \$1.14 Million in commission to India intermediary company Indian Oil relating to Corporation business and obtained approximately \$11.14 million in profits on that business between 2009 and approximately said the Order. 2011," Albemarle was caught for bribery by US authorities in 2017 for 63.5 Million Dollars

more than 198 Million avoid prosecution. The 46-page imposing fine on the US company also engaged in corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery.

in

private refinery is not mentioned in the Order. The Pioneer also reported that another US firm Moog Inc was caught by US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for bribing in HAL and Indian Railways in 2020. As per the eight page order dated October 11 2024, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways and paid penalty of 1.68 Million Dollars to US Treasury to avoid prosecution. IT giant Oracle also paid penalty of 23 Million Dollars in September 2022 when caught for bribery of 6.8

Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey to bag contract. The SEC order detailing

The SEC order the bribery in HAL says in Number 2021, Moog November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official." As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways.

The September 27, 2022 dated Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways... One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer' available to potentially make

payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official. "A total of approximately

\$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10page order of Securities and Exchange Commission imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars



AAP opens registration for women, seniors aid at providing comprehensive

Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

medical care to senior citizens.

The program will offer free

medical treatment at both

government and private hospitals to all Delhi residents

aged 60 years and above who

possess a Delhi voter ID. With

no income-based restrictions,

the scheme is designed to

benefit over 25 lakh senior

Addressing a press conference, the former Chief Minister

stated. "Ever since we have

announced this scheme we are

getting numerous phone calls

regarding the commencement

of registration process for this

announcing that registration

will begin from tomorrow

"You don't need to stand in any

queues or waste your time. We

will come to your doorstep.

Across every area of Delhi

AAP has created thousands of

teams. These teams will come

to your home and will do

registration of all the women

of the house and give them a

registration card (Kejriwal

Kavach Card). For your

convenience we are sending

our teams door to door," he

Tođay, I am

citizens.

scheme.

itself."

added

STAFF REPORTER **E** NEW DELHI

 $S_{\rm fever\ and\ in\ a\ bid\ to\ retain}^{\rm tepping\ up\ the\ election}$ its core voter groups ahead of the high-octane Delhi assembly elections, AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced that the registration for the 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, which will provide monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in the city, and 'Sanjeevani Yojana', which will provide seniors over 60 access to free medical treatment at both private and government hospitals, will begin from

Monday. In its 2024-25 budget, the Delhi government had announced this scheme to provide Rs 1,000 per month to all women aged above 18. However, Kejriwal recently announced that the amount would be raised to Rs 2,100 if his party returns to power in the assembly elections, slated for February next year.

Further, countering the narrative around not implementing Center's 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' in Center's Delhi, the ruling party announced 'Sanjeevani Yojana' as a healthcare initiative aimed

students from **UP** stranded in jungle in dark PTI BAHRAICH (UP)

Over 100

Over 100 students and school staff accompanying them were left stranded for hours in the evening in the dense Katarniaghat forests in Uttar Pradesh while returning from an educational tour, officials said on Sunday.

The children, aged 14-18, were forced to endure harsh cold during their stay under the open sky without food, water or appropriate clothing for the chilly temperatures after school authorities defied warnings by locals to halt their journey at a safe place, they said.

There were 155 people in total, 130 of them children, they added. According to the district administration, the group from Gonda district had been on an educational tour organised by the New Standard Training Institute Dhanepur.

According to local social worker Jang Hindustani, the group first attempted to cross the Rupaidiha border to Nepal but was stopped because of border regulations. After being denied entry into Nepal, the managers redirected the buses towards the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, known for its dense forests and dangerous wildlife, including leopards,

tigers, and elephants. The buses traversed five forest checkpoints before reaching Amba village, deep inside the sanctuary

Continued on page 2

Continued on page 2





Three policemen sustained I minor injuries when a vehicle of former chief minister Vasundhara Raje's carcade overturned in an attempt hitting a to avoid





Sadhus of 'Panch Dashnam Avahan Akhara' take part in a religious procession called 'Peshwai', to reach the Mahakumbh ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Pravagrai

Tirumala eyes AI chatbot for pilgrim services

PTI TIRUPATI (ANDHRA PRADESH)

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams is considering automation and the introduction of an Artificial Intelligence chatbot to "enhance transparency and efficiency in pilgrim services" at the Sri Venkateswara Temple, an official said on Sunday. TTD Executive Officer J

Syamala Rao stated that the temple administration is exploring

technologies" to expedite accommodation, darshan, and

other services while improving overall transparency and efficiency. "To accelerate accommodation, darshan, and other services for the multitude of visiting pilgrims and to enhance transparency and efficiency, TTD is considering automation instead of manual operations. We are also exploring the introduction of an AI chatbot for pilgrim services," Rao said while addressing reporters at Annamaiah Bhavan in "futuristic Annamaiah

Tirumala.

According to the EO, TTD's ultimate goal is to "enrich the pilgrim experience while leveraging technology", all the while safeguarding "the spiritual and cultural sanctity" of Tirumala for future generations. Rao further noted that the temple administration is

aligning with Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's vision of blending "traditional aesthetics with modern functionality" in Tirumala's development.

exclusion from the parade last PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

n a surprise move, the proposal for Delhi's tableau for the Republic Day parade has been rejected by the The expert committee. committee, which responsible for selecting the tableaux for the parade, found Delhi's proposal lacking in theme, concept, design, and visual impact.

According to sources, the expert committee had shortlisted 15 States and Union Territories for the parade, but Delhi's proposal failed to impress the committee. The other two union territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, also failed to make the cut.

On the other hand, Punjab and West Bengal, which were absent from last year's parade, have made a comeback this year. The Aam Aadmi Party la's development. (AAP) had made a big issue Continued on page 2 out of Punjab and Delhi's

year, and it remains to be seen how the party will react to Delhi's exclusion this year. The Republic Day parade, Dewasi

which is held every year on January 26, is a showcase of India's cultural diversity and military might. The parade tableaux features from various states and union territories, which depict their unique culture, history, and achievements.

This year, 15 states and union condolence over his mother's territories will participate in the parade, including Bihar, death. "Seven policemen were travelling in the car. Some of Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar them have sustained minor Haveli, Goa, Jharkhand, injuries," Pali SP Chuna Ram Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, lat said. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Raje left for Mundara village of Pali district by road. A police Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. car which was escorting her The expert committee, which

between Bali and Kot Balivan overturned while trying to save is headed by a senior defense a bike rider. A BIP leader said official, ministry had evaluated the proposals from that his car was behind the car various states and union territories based on their which overturned thrice. He said he immediately got down theme, concept, design, and and helped in sending the visual impact. injured policemen to

Continued on page 2 | hospital.

motorcycle in Rajasthan's Pali district on Sunday, police said A day to remember for The accident occurred while Raje was on her way to meet former minister Otaram Indian womens' cricket to express her

PTI KUALA LUMPUR/ VADODARA

Opener G Trisha made a doughty fifty before the left-arm troika of Ayushi Shukla, Sonam Yadav and Parunika Sisodia spun web around Bangladesh batters as India scored a 41-run win to emerge champions in the inaugural Women's T20 U19 Asia Cup here on Sunday. Back home in Vadodara in

Guiarat, stylish opener Smriti Mandhana extended her purple patch with a classy 91 off 102 balls, propelling India to 314/9 in the first Women's ODI against the West Indies, here Sunday.

On a spongy pitch, Trisha's 52 off 47 balls (5x4, 2x6) guided India to 117 for seven, but Indian spinners cut through the Bangladesh line-up to bundle them out for 76 in 18.3 overs. The biggest partnership in Indian innings, in fact in the match itself, was between Trisha and her skipper Nikki Prasad - a 41-run alliance for the fourth wicket. of above criminal was found

India batters to be in the area of Jama struggled against pacer Farjana Easmin, who took four wickets. Despite that, India were restricted to a belowpar total, and Bangladesh seemed well on track for a win once they reached 44 for two in the seventh over. However, Ayushi (3/17), Sonam (2/13) and Parunika (2/12) took over from that point as Bangladesh lost remaining eight wickets for a mere 32 runs.

> Brief scores were shared as India's 117/7 in 20 overs (G Trisha 52; Farjana Easmin 4/32) while Bangladesh's 76 all out in 18.3 overs (Juairiya

3/17, Sonam Yadav 2/13, Parunika Sisodia 2/12).

Mandhana, who recorded a 50-plus score for the fifth time in as many innings, got the bulk of the runs in her 110-run stand alongside debutant Pratika Rawal (40 off 69).

The launch pad was provided by Mandhana for the middleorder to go big and that is what the likes of Harmanpreet Kaur (34 off 23), Harleen Deol (44 off 50), Richa Ghosh (26 off 12) and Jemimah Rodrigues (31 off 19) did to take India past 300.

After dropping hard-hitting Shafali Verma, India have tried multiple batters to open alongside Mandhana and on Sunday it was the turn of Delhi cricketer Pratika, who batted at a strike rate of 57.97. The 24-year-old was also dropped at mid-off when she was batting on three in the 10th over. Her four boundaries came on the leg-side as she employed the sweep multiple times.

Mandhana, at the other end, entertained the crowd with her trademark shots including a cover drive and pull. India changed gears after the arrival of fit-again skipper Harmanpreet who struck at close to 150 to give the innings a timely move on. The momentum was carried by Richa and Rodrigues who has been in top form of late. For the West Indies, the pick of the bowlers was left-arm spinner Zaida James who took five wickets for 45 runs in eight overs. India could have got a lot more in the death overs but the last three overs only yielded 20 runs with James picking three

wickets in the final over.

Loan scam kingpin Bilal Lone caught in Delhi, targeted CRPF officers

SAUMYA SHUKLA NEW DELHI

For years, 33 year old Bilal Ahmad Lone spun a web of deception, targeting those who dedicate their lives to the nation's security-para-military officers stationed in the sensitive regions of Jammu & Kashmir.

Armed with false promises of easy bank loans, Lone convinced these men to trust him, only to betray them with forged documents and fake deals. However, his endeavor came to an end when Delhi Police's Crime Branch, in a carefully orchestrated operation, tracked him down in the bustling streets of Jama Masjid on Saturday. The police recovered seven Debit Cards of ICICI Bank

issued in name of Central Reserves Police Force (CRPF) Personals from his possession,

along with a Lenovo laptop used to create fake documents, Realme phone used for communication, forged stamps, including those purported to be from the J&K Bank and other official agencies and fake documents and cheque books belonging to different banks.

A 'Detention Order' was also issued against him by the District Magistrate of Anantnag in Jammu & Kashmir in an order dated December 13 and the same has also been approved by Government of Jammu & Kashmir (Home Department), Civil

Secretariat, Jammu/Srinagar



on December 17. Lone, and two days hard ground hailing from Kupwara, Jammu work by the team, the location Kashmir, through his & schemes defrauded many officers, exploiting them to obtain loans in their names before disappearing with the money. He presented himself as a loan facilitator and preyed on para-military personnel who either

were looking to buy vehicles or secure personal loans. His fraudulent activities spanned several years, with 14 cases of cheating registered against him in various police stations across Jammu & Kashmir. The Crime Branch received intelligence from the Anantnag police in Jammu & Kashmir about Lone's possible whereabouts in Delhi. "On the

basis of technical surveillance

Masjid, Delhi. Accordingly, on December 21, the above team laid a trap at and around Jama Masjid Area and launched an operation to trace him out," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Vikram Singh said. After an intensive manhunt, the team finally succeeded to locate him and apprehended near Jama Masjid. ^{*}Înitially, he resisted and tried to create a scene but he was explained about the operation and detention order issued against him by the District Magistrate, Anantnag, Jammu & Kashmir.

Continued on page 2 | Ferdous 22; Ayushi Shukla





ISRO's to test Space seeds, debris capture and green propulsion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELH

Demonstration of seed germi-nation in outer space, a robotic arm to catch a tethered debris there, and testing of green propulsion systems are some of the experiments planned on the POEM-4 -- the fourth stage of ISRO's PSLV rocket that remains in orbit after launching a satellite The PSLV-C60 mission, slated for an yearend launch, is scheduled to place the twin satellites 'Chaser and Target' to demonstrate the space docking technologies that are crucial for building India's space station. The PSLV Orbital Experiment

Module (POEM) will carry 24 experiments -- 14 from various ISRO labs and 10 from private universities and start-ups -- to demonstrate various technologies in space.

ISRO plans to grow eight cowpea seeds from seed germination and plant sustenance until the two-leaf stage in a closed-box environment with active thermal control as part of the Compact Research Module for Orbital Plant Studies (CROPS) devel oped by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre

The Amity Plant Experimental Module in Space (APEMS), developed by Amity University, Mumbai, plans to study the growth of spinach in a microgravity environment. Two paral lel experiments will be carried out simultaneously -- one on POEM 4 in space and one on the ground at the university. The experi-ment's outcome will provide insights into how higher plants sense the direction of gravity and light.

The Debris Capture Robotic Manipulator, developed by VSSC, will demonstrate the capturing of tethered debris by a robotic manipulator using visual servoing and object motion prediction in the space environment. The robotic manipulator will be capable of capturing free-floating debris in future POEM missions.

Delhi's Republic

Day Tableau

Rejected, AAP

Slams Exclusion

PM Narendra Modi receives Kuwait's highest honour



PTI KUWAIT CITY

ruwait on Sunday conferred Kits highest honour - 'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' on Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his role in strengthening the good relations between the two countries.

Prime Minister Modi received the honour from Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah at the Bayan Palace here. "I am honoured to be conferred

the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah. I dedicate this honour to the people of India and to the strong friendship between India and Kuwait," Modi said in a post on

The 'Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer' is a knighthood order of Kuwait.

External Affairs Minister S said

Jaishankar said that the conferment of the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order on Prime Minister Modi is a proud moment for all Indians. The honour recognises Prime

Minister's steadfast commitment and leadership in strengthening linkages with the Gulf region. Also showcases the depth of India-Kuwait historic ties and people to people relations," he said in a post on X. In a release, the Ministry of External Affairs said the Prime Minister dedicated the award to the long-standing friendship between India and Kuwait, to the Indian community in Kuwait and to the 1.4 billion people of India. The conferment of the award

on this historic visit of a Prime Minister of India to Kuwait after 43 years added a special meaning to the occasion," it

In a post on X, Ministry of

External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described it as "a testament to the long-standing India-Kuwait friendship". The award was given to Prime Minister Modi for strengthening the good relations between the two nations, Kuwait's staterun news agency KUNA reported.

This is the 20th international honour given to PM Modi by a country, officials said. The award was instituted in

1974 and has since been conferred on select global leaders. It has been previously awarded to foreign leaders like Bill Clinton, Prince Charles and George Bush

Modi reached Kuwait on Saturday for a two-day visit. His visit is the first by an Indian Prime Minister to the Gulf nation in 43 years.

He received a ceremonial welcome and Guard of Honour at the Bayan Palace.

Modi had earlier received hon ours from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.

In November, Guyana and Dominica conferred their top awards on Prime Minister Modi for his contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic and his exceptional contributions to the global community and efforts in strengthening bilateral ties with the two Caribbean

nations. In the same month, Nigeria conferred its national award the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger - on Prime Minister Modi for his statesmanship and stellar contribution to fostering bilateral ties, making him the second foreign dignitary to receive the distinction.

CPI(M) slams rule change blocking access to election footage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

 $T_{demanded the immediate}^{he CPI(M) on Sunday}$ withdrawal of an election rule amendment preventing public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage. In a statement, the CPI(M) Politburo expressed its strong objection to the

amendment, restricting the access of political parties and candidates to electronic records, including video and other digital trails.

The Government tweaked the election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to check their misuse.

Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission (EC), the Union

law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the which questions the locus standi of the petitioner on the Conduct of Election Rules, conduct of the electoral 1961, to restrict the type of process, is specious. This approach completely excludes "papers" or documents open

to public inspection. The CPI(M) said these steps were initially introduced by the EC in consultation with political parties to ensure greater transparency, and described as "retrograde" the move to amend the rule.

Proper consultations were not carried out with political parties on the issue, it alleged. "Media reports suggest that the government held consul-tations with the Election Commission of India while drafting the new rules. However, the Election Commission's reported concurrence was not preceded by any consultation with political parties, contrary to the established

retrograde step," it said. The Politburo of the CPI(M), therefore, demands the immediate withdrawal of the proprecedents over the years," the CPI(M) said. posed amendments to the Conduct of Election Rules," it

"The government's argument, added.

Alleged J and K terrorist caught in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA NEW

joint team of West Bengal Aand Jammu and Kashmir Police on Sunday picked up an alleged terrorist linked to Tehreek e Mujahideen and Laskhar e Toiba.

His arrest comes three days from Murshidabad district. planning to move to Bangladesh via the Sunderbans, police sources said adding several incriminating documents and other electronic devices were recovered from him.

He had earlier been charged of a murder in the J and K, sources said. Munshi reportedly confessed to having visited Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan on several occasions with fake Pakistan passports, police said.

Earlier, in a joint operation, the Assam STF and the West Bengal STF on Thursday arrested two suspected mili-tants - Abbas Sheikh and Minarul Sheikh - in Murshidabad's Hariharpara, who were linked to another foreign national and 'handler'

Muhammad Shaad Radi who was allegedly living in India for the past 10 years --- reg-ularly slipping in and out to Bangladesh.

political parties' involvement

in the procedures to be fol-

lowed," the Left party said. The CPI(M) said its experi-

ence, particularly during the

Lok Sabha elections in

Tripura, showed that charges of rigging led to the examina-

tion of videographic records

within polling booths, ultimately resulting in repolls

being announced in almost

half the polling booths across

"In this era, where technolo-

gy is an integral part of the

electoral process, the gov-

ernment's move represents a

both constituencies.

They were reportedly work-ing towards recruiting moles in North Bengal beyond Malda with their eyes on the Chicken's neck area that connects the North East to the

rest of the country. The terror modules were planning to create communal tension in this part of the border by inciting people and had been appointing recruits," a senior police officer said adding

they were looking for other

terror moles involved in the

iob.

Over 100 Woman found dead in Delhi students from... STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI From page 1

Despite warnings from locals and authorities, the school staff insisted on continuing Around pm, the buses attempted to head towards Nepal again, but they were stopped from proceeding once more. The managers then decided to have the children sit in the open at Bichhiya railway station, located in the heart of the dense forest. With temperatures dropping, the children huddled together to shield themselves from the

A²²-year-old woman, who was missing from her residence a few days ago, was found dead in a hotel Paschim Vihar area. According to the police on Sunday, the woman went missing on December 14 and her family members filed a missing person report on December 16 at Ra Park Police Station. The cause of the woman's death remains unclear.

NDMC chairman awards winners at All India Winter Rose Show

0

DELHI

after two others were nabbed The police arrested Javed Munshi an Improvised Explosive Device expert and a weapons handler hailing from Jammu and Kashmir () and K). He was living with his relatives in Canning town in South 24 Parganas and was



"The committee had a tough task of selecting the best tableaux from among the many proposals received," said a defense ministry spokesperson. "The selected tableaux will showcase the rich cultural diversity and heritage of our country The rejection of Delhi's proposal is seen as a setback for the city, which has a rich

cultural heritage and a long history of participating in the Republic Day parade. "I want to ask them — why is

Delhi's tableau being excluded once again this year? Why are the people of Delhi being prevented from participating in the Republic Day celebrations," Kejriwal asked at a press conference.

Claiming that Delhi's tableau has been missing the cut for several years now, Kejriwal said, "What kind of politics is this? Why is there so much hatred towards Delhi and its people? If these leaders hold such animosity, why should the people of Delhi vote for them?"

cold. After receiving information about the stranded students, District Magistrate Monika

Rani ordered action. Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Sanjay Kumar, police and forest department officials, arrived at the site to provide food, set up bonfires, and ensure the safety of the children and staff, he said. SDM Sanjay Kumar confirmed that food was

arranged for everyone, and strict instructions were issued to prevent such incidents in the future. The children and staff were safely escorted back to Gonda around midnight, bringing an end to their

Tirumala eyes Al chatbot for pilgrim services

From page 1

He added that TTD aims to position the world's richest Hindu temple as a model pilgrimage center under its "Vision 2047", in alignment with the state government's Andhra-2047 Swarna initiative.

vision emphasises The development, planned environmental management, and heritage conservation in Tirumala, Rao said.



STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Chairman Keshav Chandra gave away the prizes to the best judged entries of All India Winter Rose Show held at India - Africa Friendship Rose Garden in Chanakyapuri. Chandra distributed the

prizes to the winners of the Rose Show in different 22 categories in the presence of the President of The Rose Society of India, Kuldeep Saddy.

The Rose Show displayed 92 Varieties of Roses in 198 capital city of India.

Sections & 22 classes with 1400 exhibits by more than 200 participants.

Before giving the prizes, Chandra welcomed all the participants of the Rose Show and congratulated all individuals and organizations for organizing such a beautiful show where people can come and witness around 92 varieties of roses in different categories divided on the basis of their nature. He appreciated the work of all experts who were the architects of this wonderful show in the heart of the

Massive fire engulfs ectronics manufacturing unit in Noida, no casualties

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

 $A_{the \ basement \ of \ an}^{massive \ fire \ broke \ out \ in}$ electronic equipment manufacturing company in electronic

According to the police, no casualties were reported in the incident, although goods worth crores of rupees were destroyed by the fire. "Information about the massive fire at the company located at A-113 in Sector 65 was received at 8 am, following which the fire department dispatched 17 vehicles to the spot," Deputy Commissioner of Police

(Zone II) Shakti Mohan Awasthi said.

basement of Shyam SDS Electronics Pvt. Ltd., situated in A Block, and quickly spread, engulfing the area in flames. "Upon receiving the information, seven fire tenders initially arrived at the scene. However, due to the intensity of the blaze, more fire tenders were called in," a senior police officer said. The blaze was contained after

five hours due to the efforts of

around 100 firefighters, he

said, adding that the total

damage is still being assessed.

Chief Fire Officer Pradeep

Kumar Choubey said the fire is suspected to have started due to sparks from the electrical equipment and the battery stored in the basement. "The batteries stored there were bursting intermittently due to the fire, which made extinguishing it more difficult," he added.

Kumar noted that, as it was Sunday and no employees were present in the company, there were no casualties. "The cause of the fire is still unknown, but fortunately, there have been no reports of casualties. However, property worth crores has been reduced to ashes," he said.

AAP opens registration for women, seniors aid

From page 1

The beneficiaries will need to show their voter identity cards, and all eligible women voters in Delhi will receive the benefits, he added. Kejriwal also announced that registration for the Sanjeevani Yoiana will start tomorrow, and elderly people will be registered at their homes by AĂP volunteers. He said, "Today, we are officially inaugurating these schemes. Tomorrow, we will begin visiting some areas and starting the registration process. Myself, Atishi Ji, and Manish Ji will personally go to some locations and help people register. After this, registration for these schemes will be opened across all of

Delhi."

ordeal

citizens could benefit from the 'Sanjeevani Yojana'. This is a big step, and I encourage Sharing a few snippets from the announcement, AAP National Convenor Arvind everyone to take full advantage of these schemes." Kejriwal posted on his 'X' handle (erstwhile Twitter), stating: "We recently 'The elderly people of Delhi will get the protection of Sanjeevani from their son announced 2 big schemes for the people of Delhi. 'Mahila Samman Yojana' and 'Sanjeevani Yojana'. From Kejriwal. Arvind registration of 'Sanjeevani Yojana' is starting in Delhi tomorrow our team will go from tomorrow. Be it a private or a government hospital, the door to door to register for these two schemes. To register elderly above 60 years of age will no longer have to worry for this, it is very important to about the cost of their have your Delhi voter card." have your Denn voter card. Expressing her delight, Chief Minister Atishi shared on her 'X' handle, stating: "I believe that around 35 to 40 lakh treatment because their son Arvind Kejriwal is with them," she stated.. In the run for the upcoming women may benefit from the Delhi elections, AAP is vying 'Mahila Samman Yojana'. for a third consecutive term, Similarly, I estimate that having won 62 out of 70 seats around 10 to 15 lakh senior in the last election.

Loan scam kingpin Bilal Lone caught in Delhi, targeted CRPF officers

From page 1

The

Then, he admitted that he was already aware about the the J&K authority and therefore, he was absconding and hiding himsel knowingly," the DCP added. himself Accordingly, he above accused was arrested under the provision of Section 35(1)(b)(ii)(j) of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023. Bilal Ahmad Lone is no ordinary conman. The police said that Bilal is no ordinary conman and has cheated a large number of people in Jammu & Kashmir by inducing them on pretext of getting them loan for purchasing of vehicles. "He

used to target the para-military personals posted in Jammu and nearby area. Most of the victims in the cases registered against him, are

in J&K. Either he used to obtain loan on the name of para-military officers or used to sell the vehicles to them which were taken by him on loan from bank by preparing forged No Objection forged No Objection Certificate (NOC) purported to be issued by the Bank," a senior police officer said. "Information of his arrest has been given to the concerned police station of Anantnag district, J&K. and teams of

para-military officials posted J&K Police are on the way to take the custody of accused person," the DCP said.

Sector 65 on Sunday.

The fire erupted in the



chhattisgarh 03

Imposter grabs Mahatari Vandan Yojana money

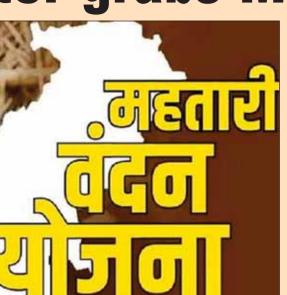
STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

A fraudster in Chhattisgarh opened an account in the name of actress Sunny Leone and managed to get thousands of rupees disbursed monthly under the state government's Mahatari Vandan Yojana.

Virendra Joshi of Talur village in Bastar district committed the fraud and illegally withdrew money into his bank account, a government statement said on Sunday.

Joshi provided bogus information of a beneficiary as Leone with husband's name as Johnny Sins in the form filled up under the scheme.

He fraudulently received



Rs 1,000 each between March and December 2024. After the incident came to

fore, Bastar Collector Haris S asked the officials to probe into the matter and register a cheating case against the fraudster. The Collector also ordered Joshi's bank account to be withheld to recover the amount. Also, action has been ordered against the Talur Anganwadi worker Vedmati Joshi and a supervisor. Under the scheme,

financial assistance of Rs 1,000 per month is given to married women directly in their bank accounts. Apart from married women, widowed, divorced, abandoned women are also eligible to avail the benefits of the scheme.

Congress alleges BJP is benefiting favourites through official scheme

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Congress on Sunday that the BJP government was using the Mahtari Vandan scheme to benefit its favourites.

Information came to light on Sunday that a man in Bastar was collecting the benefits of the scheme by registering as Bollywood actress Sunny Leone.



The Mahtari Vandan favourites in the name of money is going to BJP's Sunny Leone, he said.

Baij added that if a proper probe was conducted, more fraudsters might be revealed, collecting the benefits in the name of other actresses.

Meanwhile, BJP MLA Sushant Shukla said Mahtari Vandan was a revolutionary initiative aimed at giving economic independence to women. Congress leaders should stop spreading lies and baseless accusations, he said

Two IAS officers get new postings



STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government on Sunday Chhattisgarh gave fresh posting to two Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers here.

Amit Kataria (2004 batch) was posted as the Secretary,

Department of Public Health and Family Welfare as well as Medical Education, after his return from central government deputation, an SUKMA official order said. Mukesh Bansal (2005

batch) has been appointed the

Secretary to Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.





STAFF REPORTER The District Reserve Guard, Special Task Force, Central $S_{\mathrm{Sunday}}^{\mathrm{ecurity}}$ forces on Reserve Police Force and its CoBRA unit five Maoist memorials razed the Maoist in Sukma district in memorials at Gompuda Chhattisgarh. village.

Dy CM Sao opens 'Hamar Hatri'



STAFF REPORTER DURG

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao inaugurated the 'Hamar Hatri' set up by the Jeevika Self Help Group in Durg district on Sunday.

The Hatri offers unique collections of handicrafts, regional

clothing and other art from across Chhattisgarh.

Sao said this was the first

Hatri of Chhattisgarh, representing An

state. This work was a great gift for local artists, he said. There are many artists in Chhattisgarh who need encouragement, he said.

the entire art and culture of the

Farmers learn business, technical aspects of agriculture



STAFF REPORTER MAHASAMUND

programme. About 100 farmers in Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district learnt An Assistant Professor of agricultural economics, Dr. Mukesh Seth, gave a about the technical and detailed lecture on crop cost management and profit-loss business aspects of agriculture as part of the assessment. National Agricultural Development Scheme. They received guidance

on spinach seed production technology, onion cultivation, propagation of fruit plants, vegetable nursery management, jackfruit, lemon and sapota official communique said on Sunday that the scheme aims to strengthen farmers' efforts, reduce risks and cultivation, livestock feed promote agribusiness production, quail rearing entrepreneurship. They received the and poultry farming.

Many factors distort blood pressure readings: report AGENCIES

D lood pressure readings to skipped steps in measurement, such as sitting posture, arm positioning, recent caffeine intake, or talking during the process. These factors can produce readings higher or lower than normal, highlighting the need for precise procedures to assess cardiovascular health accurately. 'To make meaningful

improvements pertension correctly,

cardiovascular health, we feet on the ground, legs the University of Sydney need to screen and treat uncrossed, back straight, and University College and arms supported surface. The cuff should be even five minutes of daily physical activity, such as walking uphill or stair positioned over a bare arm at heart level, and distractions like talking or climbing, could significantly reduce blood using a phone should be avoided. pressure. Researchers estimate that replacing 20-The World Health Organisation reports that 1.28 billion adults 27 minutes of sedentary behavior with exercise can lead to clinically meaningful reductions in worldwide have hypertension, with 46% their unaware of blood pressure and reduce cardiovascular disease condition.

in that patients sit with both international study led by London suggested

training through a seven-

day training and tour



Glimpses of a mega health camp in Chhattisgarh's tribal-dominated Bastar district on Sunday as part of the National Urban Health Mission.

said Tammy Brady, a pediatric nephrologist at Johns Hopkins Children's Center, in an interview with The Wall Street Journal.

blood Accurate pressure readings are critical for preventing heart attacks, strokes, and other life-threatening conditions. Guidelines from the American Heart Association recommend

month, an Last incidence by 28%.

ASD was found to be

significantly higher among

males. It was almost double the

global prevalence among

females (508 per 100,000

Asia Pacific, including Japan, recorded the highest prevalence globally (1,560 per

While the high-income

females), the study showed.

First malaria vaccine shows promise amid rising cases

primarily

transmitted

Anopheles

through the bite of infected

mosquitoes. Symptoms can

AGENCIES

The first blood-stage malaria vaccine, vaccine, RH5.1/Matrix-M, has shown promise as a potential component in an evolving malaria vaccine strategy, according to a report.

The report by GlobalData, a data and analytics company, revealed that 11 other malaria vaccines are currently in Phase II development.

A recent study conducted by researchers in Burkina Faso and the UK found that RH5.1/Matrix-M is safe, effective, and highly immunogenic.

The double-blind, randomized, controlled Phase 2b trial involved 361 children aged 5 to 17 months. The findings demonstrated that RH5.1/Matrix-M is 55% effective against clinical

Malaria, a mosquito-borne disease caused by malaria when administered in a delayed third-dose regimen at 0, 1, and 5 Plasmodium protozoans, is months.

Moreover, the vaccine exhibited over 80% efficacy female against high levels of malaria parasites, suggesting its potential to prevent severe disease. The trial, published in The Lancet Infectious Diseases, also confirmed that RH5.1/Matrix-M was generally safe and well-tolerated, with no serious adverse events reported.

range from fever, chills, and headaches to severe manifestations such as confusion, seizures, and difficulty breathing. Despite progress, including some nations being certified as malaria-free, the disease remains a significant

"RH5.1/Matrix-M has burden, particularly in the World Health Organization's the potential to be the first (WHO) African Region, blood-stage malaria vaccine brought to market. This Kurdach noted. could serve as a vital addition to existing malaria vaccines Currently, only two malaria vaccines are WHOand offer an important prequalified second line of defense for recommended for use in children: GSK's Mosquirix those most at risk," said Kurdach, and Serum Institute of India's Stephanie Infectious Disease Analyst R21/Matrix-M. These vaccines target the early

at GlobalData.

sporozoite stage of the parasite to intercept infection. However, as immunity wanes over time, sporozoites can infect the liver and lead to blood-stage clinical malaria.

The development of a blood-stage malaria vaccine like RH5.1/Matrix-M could provide a critical second line of defense and potentially replace existing vaccines. "There are 11 other

malaria vaccines in Phase II development, including preerythrocytic and blood-stage vaccines from manufacturers such as BioNTech, GSK, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and Vac4All SAS," Kurdach said. and

However, she added, "No new malaria vaccines are currently in Phase III development or preregistration."

Autism a significant health burden in India: Study

AGENCIES

utism spectrum disorder Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a significant health burden in India, according to a study, published in The Lancet Psychiatry journal.

Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological and developmental disorder. The condition majorly affects how people interact, communicate, and behave with others.

The study, based on the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD) 2021, ranks autism among the top 10 causes of non-fatal health burden in youth under 20 years old.

The study showed that India had 708.1 case of ASD per 100, 000 persons in 2021. Of these, 483.7 were females, while 921.4 were males. About



140 per 100,000 persons suffered poor health and disability due to ASD in India in 2021.

Globally, an estimated 61.8 million people, or one in every 127 persons were autistic in 2021. The study also showed stark disparities based on gender.

At 1,065 cases per 100,000 100,000 people), Tropical Latin males, the global prevalence of America and Bangladesh reported the lowest number of ASD cases.

"The findings underscore the urgent need for early detection and sustained support for autistic individuals and their caregivers worldwide," said the researchers, while urging the need to prioritise resources for early detection of the disease.

The researchers also called for developing improved diagnostic tools, particularly for adults and those in low and middle-income countries with limited access to care, caregiver support, and services tailored to the evolving needs of autistic individuals across their lifespan.

Further, the team also highlighted the need to improve geographic data coverage and targeted interventions for comorbidities and mortality risks, such as

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Misleading advertisements: CCPA imposes \gtrless 2 lakh penalty on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study

PNS NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh for misleading advertisements on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study. The decision was taken to protect and promote the rights of consumers as a class and ensure that no false or misleading advertisement is made of any goods or services which contravenes the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

In view of the violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the CCPA, headed by Chief Commissioner, Nidhi Khare, and Commissioner Anupam Mishra has issued an Order against Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study for misleading advertisement regarding UPSC Civil Service Exam 2023.

Coaching Institutes and

online edtech platforms use pictures and names of successful candidates to influence

prospective aspirants (consumers), without disclosing the courses opted by such candidates or the fees paid by them & length of the course so attended.

The institute's ads claimed "13 students in the top 100", "28 students in the top 200", and 39 students in the top 200", and the UPSC CSE 2023, and prominently displayed successful candidates' names and photos, an official statement said.

The CCPA found that Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study Institute concealed important information about the courses taken by students it claimed had cleared the prestigious Indian Civil Services Exam (CSE) in its advertisements.

Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study prominently displayed suc-



cessful candidate's names & the information with respect pictures and simultaneously to the course opted by the said advertised various types of successful candidates in courses provided by them on UPSC Civil Service exam 2023 was not disclosed in the its official website. However,

abovementioned advertisement. The institute used terms like

"Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and "Students of Shubra Ranjan

IAS" in its advertisements and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Shubra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer, it added.

"Institute used terms such as Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and 'Students of Shubhra Ranjan IAS" in its advertisements and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Mrs. Shubhra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer. This constitutes a misrepresentation and unfair trade practice under Consumer Protection Act 2019, thereby misleading the public and potential students into believing that the services or guidance provided by them are directly associated with the credibility of an IAS officer. The Institute submitted that it was a clerical mistake, which is not tenable as the term Shubhra Ranjan IAS or @shubhraranjanias has been frequently used on its letterheads and in its advertise-

ments. Institute utilized deceptive practices to create a perception of exceptional quality and success. An advertisement should be truthful & honest representation of facts by making disclosures in such a manner that they are clear, prominent and extremely hard to miss for viewers to notice," the CCPA said.

The consumer regulator said the advertisements violated provisions of the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 related to misleading advertisements by "deliberately concealing important information"

The lack of proper disclosure about successful students' course details deprived consumers of making an informed choice while selecting coaching institutes, the CCPA said, asking Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study to discontinue the misleading ads. On November 22, CCPA

imposed a Rs 7 lakh penalty on Vajirao & Reddy Institute for misleading advertisements regarding the results of the UPSC CSE 2022. Vajirao & Reddy Institute in its advertisement claimed "617 selections out of 933 in UPSC CSE 2022" and "We are ranked at 1st position among the list of top UPSC Coaching Institutes in India". CCPA has so far issued 45 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading ads and imposed a penalty of Rs 63.60 lakh on 20 coaching institutes, directing them to discontinue the mis-

nation 04

leading advertisements. The Department Consumer Affairs, through the National Consumer Helpline, has successfully intervened at a pre-litigation stage to ensure justice for students and aspirants who enrolled for the UPSC Civil Services, IIT and other entrance examinations.

Dhankhar calls for accountability of lawmakers

PNS NEW DELH

Against the backdrop of Parliament witnessing poor productivity due to disruptions, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday called for accountability of lawmakers and said people would force them to think why they were sent to Parliament. He also said that for any democracy to succeed, expression and dialogue must go hand in hand with great responsibility on both sides. Dhankhar is the Rajya Sabha's ex-officio chairman.

Calling for accountability among parliamentarians, he said, "... Make no mistake, I am referring to parliamentarians. People have learned to take disorder as order. There is no sense of revulsion." Hopefully, people will write and their thoughts will move, the vice-president said, according to an official statement. "People will force you



to think, why did you go changed. And unless the rural there (Parliament)?" he said. landscape changes, we cannot Addressing awardees of the aspire to have a developed Chaudhary Charan Singh nation," he said. Awards - 2024, the vice-pres-For India to be a developed nation by 2047, people's ident said agriculture was the spine of rural development. income must increase eight-"Unless agriculture develops, the rural landscape cannot be fold that, he said, was a "daunting

Dhankhar also laid stress on the need for strengthening the village economy.

The greatest market we have is agricultural produce, yet farming communities are hardly involved with it. The farming sector must be prichallenge". oritised by governments for it

to become an engine of eco nomic development," he added. The Chaudhary Charan Singh Awards - 2024 were presented for contributions to agriculture, rural development and journalism. A statement by the Kisan Trust said the awards were present-ed on Saturday and the event was attended by Union ministers Dharmendra Prradhan and Jayant Chaudhary. Inaugurating the event on Saturday, Pradhan lauded Charan Singh's legacy that, he said, continued to inspire those working tirelessly for the uplift of India's farmers and rural communities. Union minister Chaudhary said the current policies of the

Narendra Modi government reflected the vision of Charan Singh. His vision on procurement prices, debt relief for farmers, land reforms and the uplift of landless people is still relevant, he said, according to the Kisan Trust.

Will SC conduct further inquiry, asks Surjewala after Pegasus spyware case verdict in US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

ongress general secretary Randeep Surjewala on Sunday claimed that the Pegasus spyware case verdict in the US proved how 300 WhatsApp numbers of Indians were targeted and asked if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment.

Surjewala shared a media Who is the constitutional authority? Who are the jourreport which said that, for the nalists? Who are the business first time, a court in the US had held Israel's NSO Group persons? What information liable for its intrusive spyware was retrieved by the BJP gov-Pegasus. "The Pegasus spyware ernment and agencies? How case verdict proves how 300 was it used - misused and to WhatsApp numbers of Indians what consequence?" the were targeted in the illegal spy-Congress leader asked. ware racket," Surjewala said in He also questioned if approa social media post. priate criminal cases would

He said it was time for the Narendra Modi government to answer who the 300 names targeted were. "Who are the two Union ministers? Who are



now be lodged against the

political executive or officers

in the present government

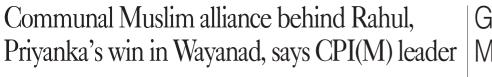
and the company owning NSO. "Will the Supreme Court

take note of the judgment of the US court in Meta v/s NSO? Will the Supreme Court proceed to make public the report of the Committee of Technical Experts on Pegasus Spyware, submitted to it in 2021-22?" Surjewala said.

Questioning if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment affirming the tar-geting of 1,400 WhatsApp numbers, including 300 from India, he asked, "Will the Supreme Court now ask Meta to submit to itself the 300 names to meet the ends of justice in the Pegasus case?"

'Shouldn't Facebook (now Meta) now have responsibility to release the names of 300 Indians targeted by Pegasus, considering WhatsApp and Facebook have the biggest subscriber base in India and they have 'duty of care and disclosure' to its clients in India?" the Congress leader asked.

NDA to contest 2025 Bihar Assembly polls under leadership of Nitish, Modi: Deputy CM



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

¬PI (M) Politburo member CA Vijayaraghavan's recent controversial remarks regard-Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from the Wayanad constituency have drawn sharp criticism from Congress and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leaders on Sunday. Congress leaders accused the senior CPI (M) leader of making the comments to "please" the Sangh Parivar, while their United Democratic Front (UDF) ally, the IUML, alleged that he was attempting to provoke majority communalism in society. During a party event in Wayanad on Saturday, Vijayaraghavan reportedly claimed that Rahul Gandhi secured victory in the highrange segment twice with the support of communal forces and that extremist elements were present at Priyanka Gandhi's campaign rallies. AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal strongly criticised Vijayaraghavan, accusing him of using "communal" lan-guage that even the Sangh Parivar might hesitate to employ against Rahul Gandhi. Venugopal also questioned whether the CPI (M)



cyber crime team of the A Gurugram police has arrested a Malaysian national for allegedly duping a man





shared the same opinion. "How can someone holding the position of a Politburo member of the CPI (M) speak in such a communal manner?" Venugopal asked. "This is part of a deal to please the BIP.

This is not just a CPI (M) statement—it is a BJP quo-tation aimed at crucifying Rahul Gandhi," he alleged. Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan echoed similar sentiments, charging the CPI (M) with pushing the same communal agenda propagated by the Sangh Parivar. "Post-Parliamentary elections, the CPI (M) is engaged in majority appeasement. This is an effort to gain favour with the Sangh Parivar and escape scrutiny from approach in Kerala."

central agencies," Satheesan told reporters in Kochi. He further alleged that only Vijayaraghavan would claim Priyanka Gandhi won the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat by over four lakh votes with the support of terrorists. IUML leaders P K Kunhalikutty and K M Shaji also condemned Vijayaraghavan's statements,

describing them as "cruel" and "baseless" "Claiming that Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi's victories were due to minority communalism is an attempt to stoke majority communalism," Kunhalikutty said, adding, "This mirrors the BJP's political tactics across India. The CPI (M) is experimenting with the same

of investing stock market, police said. Police said on Sunday that

they received a complaint regarding cheating of about Rs 2.81 crore for investing in the stock market. On the complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections in Police Station Cyber West, Gurugram. During the investigation, a

cyber crime police team led by Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime) nabbed the accused from Tamil Nadu on Friday.

The accused was identified as Mohammad Jameel bin Mohammad Iqbal a resident of Malaysia.

"During the probe, the inves-tigation team found that the mother of the accused is from Tamil Nadu and he is also married in Tamil Nadu, due to which he knew the Tamil language.

The above accused had come to India with another Malaysian partner, and he had taken the Indian SIM card used in committing the fraud from another accused, Devkaran.

Some other SIM cards pro-



vided by the accused have also been used in the fraud cases," Priyanshu Diwan,

ACP (cybercrime), said. Police then circulated a lookout notice against the

accused, and the accused had come to Tamil Nadu to attend a wedding ceremony, after which the accused was arrested by Gurugram nals Police. 04 accused have

already been arrested in this case, he said. The investigation team has recovered a Malaysia passport, an international driving license, a Malaysia identity card, a health card, a debit card, a Malaysia driving license, a mobile phone, a SIM card, a ring and foreign and Indian currency

from the possession of the accused.

Further action will be taken in the case as per the rules. The case is under investigation, he added.

Diwan said the Gurugram police cyber crime teams are constantly taking necessary action against cyber crimi-

It may be noted that the Gurugram police have recovered Rs 83.41 crores from 1,658 Cyber Fraudsters, including 22 bank officials from different banks, in just 11 months from January 2024 to 30 November 2024.

He said that the Gurugram police is closely working with other agencies and organisations to counter these frauds.



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

 $B_{\text{Minister and BJP leader}}^{\text{ihar Deputy Chief}}$ Samrat Choudhary said on Sunday said NDA will contest the assembly polls in Bihar next year under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

"There is no confusion," he said during a Press confer-ence at the BJP headquarters in the national Capital when asked to comment on speculation that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) could do a rethink on projecting Kumar as its leader in

the polls. He was responding to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent interview to a news channel in which he was

asked if the NDA could go to the polls in Bihar without declaring a chief ministerial candidate, like it recently did with great success in Maharashtra.

Shah, a former BJP president who is still regarded as the party's principal strategist, had replied after a pause, "We will sit together and decide. We will let you know after we have made a decision." The cryptic response had led to furious speculation that the BJP could insist on not projecting Kumar in the

2025 pólls. Dismissing the speculation, Choudhary said, "The NDA is working under the leadership of Nitish Kumar and Prime

Minister Narendra Modi in Bihar and we will continue to contest elections under the leadership of both leaders."

Modi Government's 'calibrated erosion' of EC's integrity: Kharge on election rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at the government for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents, alleging it is part of the Modi government's "systematic conspiracy" to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission.

Kharge also said the Modi government's "calibrated erosion" of the ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and democracy. The government has tweaked

electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse. Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection

While Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh indi-

an election rule to prevent cated the grand old party public inspection of certain would legally challenge the amendment, Lok Sabha MP and Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal said the poll panel had chosen opacity and a pro-government attitude in its dealings thus far.

Reacting to the development, Kharge said Modi government's audacious amendment in the Conduct of Election Rules is another assault in its systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission of India. "Earlier, they had removed the Chief Justice of



India from the Selection panel which appoints Election Commissioners, and now they have resorted to stonewall electoral information, even after a High Court order," he said in a statement.

Everytime the Congress party wrote to the ECI, regarding specific poll irregularities such as voter deletions and lack of transparency in EVMs, the ECI has responded in a condescending tone and chosen not to even acknowledge certain serious complaints, Kharge said. "This again proves that the ECI, even though it is a quasi-judicial

body, is not behaving independently," he said.

The Modi government's calibrated erosion of ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and Democracy and we will take every step to safeguard them," Kharge said.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as

nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election account statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered.

"CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the ECI to ensure a level playing field," a former ECI official explained.



Mohali building collapse: death toll rises to two, probe suggests adjacent plot digging led to incident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE CHANDIGARH\

The death toll in the Mohali building collapse climbed to two with the body of a 29-yearold man recovered from under the rubble on Sunday, even as a preliminary probe suggested that digging in an adjacent plot led to the incident.

The multi-storey building collapsed on Saturday evening in Sohana village of Punjabs Mohali district, with at least five people trapped under its rubble. Rescue efforts continued overnight to find possible survivors

Sub-Divisional Magistrate, Mohali, Damandeep Kaur said one male body was recovered during the ongoing rescue operation. He was identified Abhishek as Dhanwal from Ambala.

hailing

Earlier in the day, Abhishek's father told reporters at the site that his son, who used to visit a gym in the building, was missing and his phone was not reachable. Abhishek worked in the IT sector and used to live in a nearby area, his father said.

Earlier, a 20-year-old woman

Assam's forest cover shrinks by 83 square kilometre: **ISFR** report 2023

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE GUWAHATI

ssam's forest cover has Adecreased by over 83 sq km between 2021 and 2023, with the total area under forest and tree cover in the state now at 30,415.01 sq km, according to the India State of Forest Report

(ISFR) 2023. Minister Union for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupendra Yadav, had launched the report at the Forest Research Institute in Dehradun on Saturday, with a nationwide increase of 1,445 sq km in total forest and tree cover recorded since 2021.

The total forest area in this north eastern state is 28,313.55 sq km, which is 36.10 per cent of the state's total area, while area under tree cover is 10,718.28 sq km, bringing the total forest and



success to development

initiatives under the NDA

gress state president Nabam

Tuki acknowledged the defeat,

Con

government,

The

died in the incident on that, "A three-storey building Saturday evening. The woman collapsed yesterday. Himachal from rescue operation continued Pradesh, died after she was overnight. So far, two bodies have been recovered". The pulled out of the debris of the building also had a basement. building. She was rescued from the rubble in a critical Several excavators have been condition and was rushed to a pressed into service as part of hospital, but she succumbed the rescue operation. National Response Team to injuries. Police have booked Disaster (NDRF), Army, state rescue two building owners in the incident. Viraj S Tidke, teams have been working officiating deputy commissioner, said on Sunday since Saturday evening to address the crisis. Medical

along with teams, an ambulance, have also been deployed at the site since Saturday evening.

As the operation continued at the site, required equipment and machinery have been made available to the rescuers, in addition to those brought by the NDRF and Army. Preliminary information suggests that the building, which also had a gym, collapsed due to digging in an

adiacent plot

Mohali Senior Superintendent of Police Deepak Pareek told reporters at the site on Sunday that as per preliminary investigations the owner of the building, which collapsed, had a plot of land adjacent to it on which digging work to construct a basement was on construct a basement was on. 'However, no permission was taken and no concerned agency was informed about the unauthorised digging," Pareek said.

Leader of Opposition in Punjab Assembly Partap Singh Bajwa slammed the Mohali district administration over the incident. Bajwa, a senior Congress leader, who visited the site, told reporters that he has learnt that some structures have been built in the area in flagrant violation of rules.

"Accountability should be fixed in the matter. As head of administration, district personally, I hold the Deputy Commissioner responsible," said adding the he administration should take necessary measures to ensure such incidents are not repeated in the future.

Home Minister Amit Shah slams left parties for turning Tripura into backward state, credits BJP for bringing development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE DHALAI/TRIPURA

Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday hit out at Left parties for turning Tripura into a "backward" state during their 35-year rule and said it could witness progress only after the BJP assumed power in 2018.

Addressing a public meeting after visiting a village where displaced Bru tribals were rehabilitated, Shah said that Tripura remained behind on all parameters of development during the communist rule but is now moving forward on the path of progress.

"For 35 years, the communists ruled Tripura. The communists claimed that they worked for the welfare of the poor. The Congress also ruled Tripura for a considerable time. But the people of the state always remained poor. It was when the BJP came to power that Tripura could witness development," he said.

Shah said when he visited Tripura in 2017 as BJP president and stayed for five days, only 11 people took party membership. "Gradually we started our work. We worked hard and could oust the communists from power" after



toiling for years, he said. The home minister said during

the Left rule, just 2.5 per cent of the people used to get piped drinking water and now 85 per cent get potable water. Under the communist rule, there was no free foodgrains for the poor but now each person gets 5 kg rice and everyone is getting free treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh, he said.

Shah said investments have come to Tripura and people are getting free power and LPG connections. Now the school drop rate is less than 3 per cent while enrolment is 99 per cent, But during the Left rule it was very poor, he said.

Tripura is now peaceful following the signing of peace accords with insurgents. With the blessings of Maa Tripurasunderi, Tripura will be one of the most developed states in the country. Today, I am getting immense happiness," he said. Referring to the settlement of Bru refugees, the home minister said the BJP governments at the Centre and the state decided to rehabilitate 40,000 displaced people. "The Brus were living in sub-human conditions. But the Left government never took any action to improve their condition. Now we are addressing it and already 11 villages have been set up while one more is in the works," he

nation 05

said. Shah said the Brus are now getting all the freedoms enjoyed by any other Indian citizen. They now have an Aadhar card, they are enrolled in the voter list, they have ration cards and all these were

ensured by the Modi government, he said. He said the rehabilitated people were given Rs 1.5 lakh for the construction of their houses, Rs 4 lakh as fixed deposits and Rs 5000 for 24 months as monthly expresses. Bru migrants from three districts of Mizoram - Mamit,

26

ensure

Lunglei and Kolasib districts came to North Tripura district in 1997, 1998 and 2009 due to serious ethnic violence in Mizoram between Bru and Mizo communities.

ministers for its 28 districts to

oversee infrastructure and

welfare projects. Additionally,

secretaries for each district to

were

mentor

effective

bureaucrats

designated as

BJP secures third consecutive term in Arunachal Pradesh, wins 46 Assembly seats three, and the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) claimed two. PTI IITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh's political landscape underwent a major shift in 2024 as the BJP Three independents were also elected. The Congress suffered a secured a third consecutive devastating blow, winning just term, winning 46 out of 60 assembly seats in the simultaone of the 19 seats it contested. neous Lok Sabha and state While Chief Minister Pema elections. In addition to polit-Khandu credited the BJP's

ical developments, the state faced a dark chapter with disturbing revelations of widespread sex trafficking involving minors. The victory included 10

saying the party will continue to fight for the rights of the people. In the Lok Sabha uncontested wins, attributed to the party's focus on elections, the BJP secured development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's both parliamentary seats. Besides politics, the state faced leadership. Among its allies, the NPP retained five a dark chapter in 2024 with assembly seats, the NCP won revelations of widespread sex

trafficking involving minors. A major case surfaced in August when survivors bravely came forward to expose the exploitation. Police arrested nine people who allegedly operated the racket for years.

The Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (APSCPCR) intervened, recommending stringent action, including dismissing three government employees, among them a police officer, for their involvement.

Key suspects, Chaya Dulom, a health department worker, and her husband David Dulom, a water resources department surveyor, were accused of coercing young

girls into the sex trade. In the same month, an interstate trafficking ring was busted at Ziro in Lower Subansiri district, rescuing four victims, including two minors.

In May, police uncovered another trafficking network involving five minor girls from Dhemaji, Assam. This led to the arrest of 22 people, including traffickers and pimps. Protests against the proposed 12,500 MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) gained momentum throughout 2024, with indigenous communities in Siang and Upper Siang raising districts environmental and cultural concerns.

On October 5, hundreds of residents gathered in Geku village to oppose NHPC's ongoing surveys. NHPC identified three potential sites for the dam, sparking fears of displacement and loss of agricultural land.

Siang Indigenous Farmers (ŠIFF) Forum General Secretary Donggo Libang project, criticized the warning, "It will submerge paddy fields and strip locals of their land rights." Protests escalated after the Upper Siang district administration issued notices to government employees and village heads who joined the demonstrations.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)

approved investments worth Rs 3,689 crore for two hydropower projects in Shi Yomi district - the 186 MW Tato-I and the 240 MW Heo projects. These projects aim to strengthen Arunachal Pradesh's power supply and integrate it with the national grid. Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who oversees portfolio, the power announced plans for 11 major hydropower projects scheduled to commence between 2025 and 2027.

"These projects will secure the state's economic future by creating jobs and boosting power generation," Mein said. a bid to improve In governance, the stateappointed 10 guardian implementation of policies. After a four-year hiatus marred by controversy, the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) successfully conducted the prelims of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Combined Competitive

Examination (APPSCCE) on December 15 The 2020 examination had been tainted by a question paper leak scandal, leading to public outrage and erosion of trust.

Tigress on the move: Zeenat's journey from Odisha to West Bengal International drug syndicate busted: NCB

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA/BHUBANESWAR

□orest personnel are moni-**L** toring the movement of a tigress which strayed from Odisha's Similipal Reserve is curren Bengal's Purulia district. West Bengal's Chief Wildlife Warden Debal Roy informed the three-year-old tigress brought from Maharashtra to Similipal Reserve Forest is fitted with a radio collar and is currently located in the Bandwan area of Purulia district. It earlier crossed over to West Bengal from neighbouring Jharkhand and roamed around in Jhargram and Paschim Medinipur district, all parts of the forested 'Jangalmahal' belt. Asked about reports that another tigress from Similipal which had escaped around the same time and roamed around the forested corridor of three neighbouring states has already headed back to her old habitat, Roy said "We don't have information about two tigresses escaping from Simlipal and having strayed into West Bengal." "Whether you call her Zeenat or Jamuna, we have information about one tigress leaving Similipal, entering Jharkhand and now having



Claiming that tigress Zeenat, which walked into Jharkhand on the northern side of the PIONEER NEWS SERVICE Similipal, later moved into West Bengal forests on Friday. AHMEDABAD He said forest department personnel of both the states The Narcotics Control Bureau e tracking Zeenat through signals from her radio collar and efforts are underway to guide her back into Similipal. However, if the animal does not return to her habitation in the core area of the Similipal, Sunday. The accused conspired to the authorities may apply tranguilization as an alternative mode to bring her back, he said, adding that the three-year-old tigress Zeenat and two-and-half-year-old Jamuna were brought from Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Maharashtra with the goal of introducing a new gene pool to the tiger population. Jamuna was brought from Maharashtra on October 27, while Zeenat arrived on November 15 and was released into the wild on November 24. While Jamuna was roaming the Similipal landscape in good health, Zeenat walked into Zeenat Jharkhand and later to West said. Bengal forest which was Extensive connected through forests. Odisha Forest officials said that Zeenat was also in good health. on



km. The ISFR reported a decrease of forest and tree cover area by 83.92 sq km in the state. Altogether 4.07 per cent area

of the state's forest cover is under very dense forest (VDF), 12.45 per cent under moderately dense forest (MDF) and 19.58 per cent under open forest (OF), as per the report. Assam is among the five states which have shown maximum decrease of forest cover inside the recorded forest area (RFA)/ green wash (GW) category. Tripura has recorded the maximum decreased (116.90 sq km), followed by Telangana (105.87 sq km), Assam (86.66 (83.47 sq km), Andhra Pradesh (83.47 sq km) and Gujarat (61.22 sq km).

As per the report, between 2021 and 2023 MDF inside RFA/GW for Assam has decreased by 134.32 per cent and scrub by 18.41 per cent. However, VDF has gone up by 43.63 per cent, OF by 4.03 per cent and non-forest (NF) area by 105.07 per cent.

crossed over to our state for back into the reserve forest in Odisha. We are hopeful there the past three days. Our men is no man-animal conflict," are keeping a constant vigil on her movement," he said the senior state forest official He said forest personnel from

said. "The prey base is low in the Odisha are also working with their Bengal counterparts in areas where it is presently monitoring the movement of located. So, we hope she turns the big cat which has so far back to the reserve since there not shown any signs of aggression. The tigress had is more prey there," he said. Meanwhile, the authorities of covered not less than 50 km the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) on Sunday said that it after straying from Similipal in Odisha but such behaviour was not averse to putting the tigress under sedation in is normal for tigers who wander several kilometres in order to bring her back to the core area of the National Park. STR field director Prakash Chand Gogineni said "Tigress (Zeenat) is moving in West Bengal. The Odisha and West search of a new territory, another forest official said. "Probably the forest belt of neighbouring states, having similar habitat, became a Bengal forest departments are corridor for her and she is tracking and moving with it. It is fit and fine. Efforts are trying to set up a new territory. We are at work to drive her away to Similipal being made to bring it back by tranquilisation," Gogineni through the same route or if she is captured, release her said.

international drug syndicate with the seizure of two kg ketamine and arrested four persons, including three Nigerian nationals, the NCB said on

traffic ketamine from India to foreign countries through courier parcels, the NCB said in a release, detailing the significant crackdown of the organised drug organised drug crime operating from the Indian soil. The value of the seized contraband was not specified. Ketamine is a highly valued and sought after contraband in USA and also used as a "date rape" drug, the release said. The NCB Ahmedabad received an initial input on December 3 that nearly two kg of ketamine concealed in spice packets of various brands was being shipped to the US through courier agencies, it

technical surveillance coupled with human intel led the drug law enforcement agency to zero in a person, Adnan NARCOTICS CONTROL

Furniturewala, who once resided in Pune but later moved to the US, it said. It further came to light that Furniturewala was deported to India after being booked in three cases of drug trafficking in the US, the NCB said. While being in India, the accused was booked in another case under the Drugs and Substances Narcotic Psychotropic (NDPS) Act by the NCB Mumbai last year and was currently out on parole, it said. "In the present case, he was always a step ahead of authorities and continuously kept on changing his hideout and employed numerous tactics so as to dodge the agency," the release said.

"However, in a precisely executed operation that spanned through states of

arsenic exposure in the non-

Karnataka, he was tracked and finally arrested on December 8 from an apartment in Bellahalli area of Bengaluru, Karnataka," it stated. The probe further indicated the seized ketamine was supplied to him by a Nigerian

Guiarat, Maharashtra and

syndicate operating from Delhi and supplying contraband through courier agencies, the NCB said. "Concerted efforts by the agency led to the nabbing of Emmanuel Jenui Nurgelier Emmanuel Ifanyi Nwaobiora alias Mike along with his two associates Ekeleme Ahamefula Joseph and Emmanuel Osaja December 18 from on Mehrauli area of Delhi," it said. Further investigation was being carried out by the NCB's Ahmedabad zonal unit to find out the source of the contraband, the release said.

Police nab murder and drug accused from Nagpur multiplex during "Pushpa 2" screening

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NAGPUR

Moviegoers watching a late-night show of "Pushpa 2" at a multiplex in Maharashtra's Nagpur witnessed a real-life action scene as police stormed the cinema hall and arrested a man wanted in murder and drug cases.

The dramatic arrest of Vishal Meshram shortly after midnight on Thursday left the packed audience stunned, but police assured them that they could continue enjoying the movie as they nabbed the accused and took him away. Meshram was on the run for 10 months and was eventually tracked down after

police learnt about his interest in the recentlyreleased film, an official from Pachpaoli police station said on Sunday.

The gangster had 27 cases against him, including two of murder and drug trafficking, and was known for his violent tendencies, even attacking police in the past, he said.

Authorities had been pursuing him relentlessly, using cyber surveillance and tracking his movements in a new sports utility vehicle (SUV), the official said. After tracking him on Thursday, police deflated the vehicle's tyres outside the cinema hall, located in

prevent his escape, he said. When police personnel entered the hall during the movie's climax, Meshram was engrossed in the film.

The police surrounded him and made the arrest swiftly, giving him no chance to resist, the official said. Meshram is currently lodged in the Nagpur Central Jail and will soon be transferred to a prison in Nashik, the police said. "Pushpa 2: The Rule", the blockbuster movie starring Allu Arjun, is a sequel to 2021's Telugu film

"Pushpa: The Rise". It was released on December 5 with dubbed versions in Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, central part of the city, to Bengali and Malayalam.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE PATNA/KOLKATTA/NEW DELH

Centre has informed the National Green Tribunal (NGT) that West Bengal and Bihar are impacted the most by arsenic contamination of groundwater. The tribunal is hearing the issue of rice being susceptible to arsenic contamination because it absorbs more of the toxic semi-metallic element from water and soil. Earlier, it sought a reply from the Centre on it.

In an order dated December 16, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel noted Shrivastava that the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare had filed its reply after seeking inputs from the Indian



Council of Research (ICAR). Council Agricultural

"States of West Bengal and Bihar are reported to be most affected by arsenic contamination of groundwater irrigation by contaminated groundwater is the major route for arsenic entry into agricultural soil which ultimately leads to its entry

endemic population," it noted. The tribunal noted that, according to the reply, the distribution of arsenic content in plant parts generally followed the order of roots, stems and leaves. "The edible parts of leafy (spinach, fenugreek etc.) and underground vegetables (beet, radish etc.) contained much higher arsenic as compared to vegetables with fruit as edible into the food chain," the Centre said in its reply. There part (brinjal, beans, ladies' finger, tomato etc.). In general, can be a "significant build-up" fruit/grain of plants showed of the toxic element in rice as it less accumulation of arsenic is a water-intensive crop, the reply stated. "Transport of compared to root, stem and leaf," it noted. The reply also suggested various remedial arsenic-contaminated rice grain grown in arsenicmeasures to minimise the endemic areas to noneffect of arsenic in the soilplant system. These include endemic sites and consequent dietary intakes will also spread replacing water-intensive rice

varieties with other less waterintensive crops and relatively arsenic-tolerant rice varieties, growing non-edible and leguminous crops during the dry season in the hotspot areas, application of biochar (modified charcoal produced from burning biomass sources), and increased use of green manures and application of silicate fertilizers. The reply also suggested other remedial measures, such as storing arsenic-contaminated groundwater in ponds and subsequent dilution with rainwater along with conjunctive use of ground and surface water to dilute the arsenic content. The tribunal then impleaded the ICAR as a respondent and sought its response. It will hear the matter next on April 15.

Centre reveals West Bengal and Bihar as worst-hit by arsenic contamination of groundwater

RAIPUR | MONDAY | DECEMBER 23, 2024

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Outreach to Kuwait

With a focus on economic cooperation and cultural exchange, PM Modi's Kuwait visit strengthens the ties between the two nations

rime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a historic moment, as he became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit the Gulf nation in over four decades. The visit, at the invitation of Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, underscores a renewed commitment to strengthening the ties between India and Kuwait. With a focus on economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and mutual prosperity, the visit paves the way for a deepened strategic partnership. India and Kuwait share a relationship that dates back centuries, built on the foundations of trade and cultural exchanges. Over time, this bond has evolved into a robust partnership, encompassing energy, trade and people-to-people connections. Today, Kuwait is a significant energy supplier for India, while Indian expertise and manpower have become indispensable for Kuwait's development. Prime Minister Modi highlighted the enduring solidarity between the two nations, citing instances of mutual



support during times of distress. With over one million Indian expatriates residing in Kuwait, the Indian diaspora has played a crucial role in Kuwait's growth, contributing to various sectors including healthcare, engineering and education.

Addressing the expatriate community, Modi praised their efforts, stating, "Their energy, love, and unwavering connection to India are truly inspiring. Proud of their role in strengthening ties between our nations." The economic relationship between India and Kuwait is ripe for expansion. Kuwait, as a key energy supplier, holds strategic importance for India's energy security. Simultaneously, India, with its bur-

geoning market and investment opportunities, offers Kuwait an attractive destination for its sovereign wealth fund. During his discussions, PM Modi noted the shared aspirations of both nations: building a prosperous 'New Kuwait' and transforming India into a developed nation by 2047. By aligning these goals, the two countries can establish a partnership that drives mutual growth. Modi's visit was not limited to economic discussions; it also celebrated the cultural ties that bind the two nations. The Prime Minister met with individuals who have contributed to fostering Indo-Kuwaiti relations, including Abdullah Al-Baroun, a translator who brought Indian epics like the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' to Arabic-speaking audiences. As India and Kuwait look to the future, the visit has set the stage for a relationship that goes beyond traditional energy ties. The integration of India's technological expertise with Kuwait's developmental ambitions holds the promise of transformative progress. Furthermore, the strong presence of the Indian diaspora serves as a bridge, fostering deeper connections and mutual understanding. By strengthening this partnership, India and Kuwait are not only enriching their bilateral relationship but also contributing to stability and development in the region.



Guardians of nature: Saving the planet



RAJDEEP PATHAK

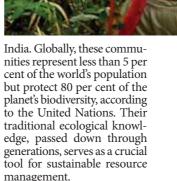
As the world grapples with the escalating impacts of climate change, the wisdom of indigenous communities shines as a vital resource for environmental preservation

he Role of Indigenous Knowledge Combating Climate Change: A Legacy of Hope The discourse on climate change dominated discussions at COP 2024, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, 2024. Rising global temperatures, depleting natural resources, and rampant environmental degradation have emphasised the urgency of adopting sustainable practices and advancing conservation efforts. Amid this pressing crisis, the role of indigenous communities in preserving the environment emerges as a beacon of hope.

Often referred to as the "guardians of nature," these communities have safeguarded ecosystems for centuries through their traditional knowledge, sustainable practices, and deep connection to the land. One exemplary figure embodying this harmonious relationship with nature was Padma Shri Tulsi Gowda. Known as the "Encyclopedia of the Forest" and affectionately called the "tree goddess" by her Halakki Vokkaliga tribe in Karnataka, Tulsi Gowda's life and work illustrate the profound impact of indigenous wisdom on environmental preservation. With an unwavering commitment to nature, she planted 30,000 saplings during her lifetime, nurturing them with meticulous care.

Tulsi Gowda passed away on December 16, 2024, at the age of 86, leaving behind an inspiring legacy of environmental stewardship.Growing up in poverty, Tulsi Gowda's love for plants and forests remained unparalleled. From an early age, she worked in plant nurseries, demonstrating extraordinary skill in nurturing saplings. Her unique ability to identify the 'mother tree" of any species exemplified her deep ecological understanding.

Tulsi Gowda herself believed, "It's not important how many plants you have planted; what



For instance, the Kayapo tribe in Brazil has successfully defended the Amazon rainforest from logging, mining, and industrial agriculture, preserving a vital carbon sink. Brazilian environmentalist and politician Dr. Marina Silva emphasised, "The Kayapo teach us that protecting forests is not just about climate, but about life itself."

Similarly, the Sámi people of Scandinavia maintain ecological balance in Arctic regions through sustainable reindeer herding practices. In New Zealand, the Maori concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) promotes a cultural commitment to environmental stewardship, influencing national policies.

The Ogiek of Kenya, through sustainable honey harvesting, continue to conserve the Mau Forest, a critical water catchment area. This echoes

of indigenous environmental stewardship. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, one of the earliest champions of conservation, exemplifies this ethos. Their sacrifice during the 1730 Khejarli Massacre, where 363 Bishnois gave their lives to protect sacred Khejri trees, remains a cornerstone of ecological movements. Similarly, the Dongria Kondh tribe of Odisha has valiantly defended the Niyamgiri Hills from destructive mining activities, preserving their sacred land and biodiversity. The Apatani tribe of

Arunachal Pradesh showcas-PREVENT es innovative sustainability through wet-rice cultivation and fish farming, while the DEFORESTATION, DREW INSPIRATION Soliga tribe of Karnataka safeguards the Biligiriranga Hills FROM THE BISHNOI'S using indigenous forest man-SACRIFICE. IN 2021, agement techniques. Such efforts have inspired broader A SIMILAR INITIATIVE environmental movements. The Chipko Movement of the SAVED OVER 500 1970s, where villagers in SACRED OAK TREES Uttarakhand hugged trees to prevent deforestation, drew IN JAAKHNI VILLAGE, inspiration from the Bishnoi's sacrifice. In 2021, a similar ini-UTTARAKHAND, tiative saved over 500 sacred oak trees in Jaakhni village, NEAR FORESTS Uttarakhand, near forests ded-DEDICATED TO THE icated to the local Goddess of

ronmental heritage. Despite their invaluable contributions, indigenous communities face significant challenges, including marginalisation, land dispossession, and exploitation. Empowering indigenous communities to take leadership roles in environmental management has already shown promising results. For example, joint forest management initiatives have demonstrated effective resource management and biodiversity conservation. Combining indigenous knowledge with modern scientific approaches can create innovative strategies for addressing environmental challenges. Practices like the Zuni tribe's waffle gardens in New Mexico, which conserve water in arid regions, exemplify the sophistication of indigenous ecological wisdom.

In an era of environmental crises, humanity must embrace the profound knowledge of indigenous communities to forge a sustainable future. Their traditions, deeply rooted in respect for nature, hold the key to restoring ecological balance. By integrating their wisdom into global conservation strategies, we can create a world that honors the delicate harmony between humanity and the natural world. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT OF THE **1970S, WHERE** VILLAGERS IN UTTARAKHAND HUGGED TREES TO

matters is now much care you ve taken of those saplings." The contribution of indigenous communities to environmental conservation extends far beyond

Wangari Maathai's belief tha "The future of our forests lies in the hands of those who understand them best indigenous communities."

LOCAL GODDESS OF JUSTICE

Justice From the hills of Uttarakhand to the sacred groves of Meghalaya, these movements highlight India's enduring envi-

A woman plucks aster flowers at an orchard, in Nadia

Challenges in CSR accounting: Pathways to meaningful impact



Implementing CSR initiatives effectively presents significant challenges, ranging from a lack of clear objectives to complexities in measuring their impact

Social orporate Responsibility (CSR) is a fundamental aspect of modern business strategy, reflecting a company's commitment to social equity, environmental sustainability and ethical practices.

In India, CSR became a legal requirement in 2013, and companies are now expected to integrate these principles into their operations. However, while CSR initiatives are vital for societal and environmental progress, accounting for them presents unique challenges that businesses must address to achieve compliance and maximise impact. Challenges in CSR Accounting:

1. Lack of Clear Objectives Many companies undertake CSR without clearly defined goals, resulting in misaligned initiatives that fail to resonate with stakeholders or address critical social issues. 2. Insufficient Stakeholder **Engagement:** CSR initiatives often overlook the input of key stakeholders such as employees, customers, and community members. For instance, a clothing brand may launch a sustainable fashion line without consult- Impact: Assessing the out-



ing suppliers or customers, leading to low adoption and minimal impact.

3. Limited Resources Smaller businesses face budget constraints and lack expertise to implement effective CSR programmes. A local coffee shop, for example, might abandon a recycling initiative due to insufficient funds for bins or awareness campaigns, missing the chance to enhance its brand. 4. Fund Utilisation Issues Companies often face compliance challenges regarding the disbursal of funds to implementing agencies. Under Section 135(5), mere fund transfer does not qualify as CSR spending unless the

implementing agency utilises the funds appropriately.

Companies must plan and monitor fund utilisation effectively 5. Difficulty in Measuring

comes of CSR initiatives is complex, as many lack standardised metrics to measure their social and environmental impact. For example, a manufacturing firm may struggle to quantify carbon emission reductions from a green energy project, making it harder to demonstrate success

PTI

6. Reputation Risks

Greenwashing or poorly executed initiatives can damage a company's credibility. For instance, a beverage company that markets itself as environmentally friendly while engaging in unsustainable practices risks losing consumer trust and suffering long-term reputational harm. Strategies to Overcome CSR Challenges

1. Define Clear Objectives Companies should set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals for their CSR initiatives. 2. Engage Stakeholders Early Regular engagement with stakeholders ensures CSR initiatives address their needs

and receive their support. 3. Start Small and Scale Up Small businesses can begin with low-cost, high-impact gain experience. A local restaurant might start with a composting programme and later adopt a broader sustainability plan, including local sourcing and reduced waste. 4. Utilise Metrics and Reporting: Establishing clear metrics allows companies to measure and report their CSR progress effectively. For instance, a tech firm could publish an annual report

projects and expand as they

detailing energy savings, employee participation, and community engagement outcomes. 5. Communicate Transparently: Openness about successes and challenges builds stakeholder

trust. Conclusion: Proactively addressing these issues helps businesses enhance their reputation, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and make meaningful societal contributions. Successful CSR initiatives ultimately benefit both companies and communities, driving sustainable growth.

(The writer is partner Audit and Corporate Tax, Bhuta Shah and Co.; views are personal)

LETTERS 10 THE EDITOR

SC CONDEMNS WITCHCRAFT PRACTICES Madam --Recently the Supreme Court reprimanded the Patna High Court for staying proceedings in a case involving the abuse of women accused of witchcraft, highlighting the issue as a violation of Constitutional values. The Court condemned the practice of witchcraft as rooted in superstition and patriarchal control, urging for protective measures and social change to combat such discrimination against vulnerable women. The Supreme Court took a strong stance against the victimisation of vulnerable women under the guise of witchcraft, calling it a "blot" on the constitutional spirit.

SC has rightly said that the incident that took place in the 21st century was shocking and underlined the failure of legislative, executive and judicial measures to protect vulnerable sections of society. In India, witchcraft allegations are often directed at women who are either widows or elderly. The Court has also observed that the incidents against women accused of witchcraft go against the spirit of the Constitution because they undermine dignity. SC has expressed shock at cases where women have been physically abused and directed in public over witchcraft allegations. The number of witchcraft-related cases reported to the NCRB has been increasing in recent years. The Prevention of Witch Practices Act in Jharkhand criminalises accusations of women as witches. Criminalisation and punishment of those involved in witch hunting is the most appropriate way to end superstition and harmful practices and provide redress to victims

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

DELHI NEEDS DEVELOPMENT

Madam—Apropos of the news 'BJP shortlists candidates for Delhi as manifesto campaign gains momentum' (Dec 21), it is a welcome sign and heartening that BJP prioritises and takes the lead to frame Sankalp Patra, as they call it a political manifesto, with public opinion. BJP has got over 40,000 suggestions, which shows public state, and per capita income is much high-

Dhaka takes anti-India stance



ndia's relations with Bangladesh are passing through a difficult phase after the Sheikh Hasina aovernment succumbed before violent protests led by students in the first week of August. All development after her fall is guite worrisome for New Delhi. No doubt it was a foregone conclusion that Dhaka will no longer follow a pro-India policy. But Bangladesh is hell-bent upon destroying the cordial and bilateral relations that New Delhi crafted with the Sheikh Hasina regime. The ouster of the liberal Sheikh Hasina regime has embold-

association with its manifesto. BJP has a large number of MLA aspirants, so the delay in the declaration of candidates is directly proportional to the number of candidates. The manifesto should target the new generation and focus on implementations of the New Education Policy 2000, which echoes in the Lt. Governor's initiative in Samvad@Rajnivas.

DDA, MCD and NDMC may be associated in setting up government libraries across Delhi for students and teachers. Traffic jam is the perennial issue for Delhiites, and it is easy to spot the trouble areas. Delhi needs more flyovers across Dwarka and East Delhi. The pollution in Delhi is also a serious concern, and antifogging machines need to be installed on major roads. The waste and garbage dumps, particularly in Gazipur Chowk and Janakpuri, deface and stink Delhi. Delhi Government needs to implement the plans. The beggar problem at road crossings is a nuisance. Illegal colonies and Bangladeshi and Rohingya immigrants are a big bane for Delhi. Delhi is not a poor

ened Jamat-e-Islami-led Islamic extremists who are now targeting not only religious minorities but also Sufi shrines and the press. Unfortunately, the Muhammad Yunus government is only interested in flaring up anti-India sentiments in the country instead of containing sectarian violence. The arrest of Hindumonk Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition charges shows its true colours.

Internationally too, Dhaka is interested in joining hands with anti-India forces, particularly China and Pakistan, and Yunus's second meeting with Shahbaz Sharif in the last four months. The anti-India approach of the Yunus government can be measured by a post of Yunus' close aide, Mahfuz Alam, in which he threatened to "annex" parts of India. Before Dhaka intends to go to Islamabad's way, it must not forget that New Delhi holds significant leverage over it in terms of both economy and geopolitics

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

er than in other states, so the freebies like free rations and electricity are not required, and the funds should be allocated to building the infrastructure of flyovers, schools, and hospitals.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE DEBATES

Madam — The parliamentarian should understand that they need to be more productive, constructive, and prolific during the start of the session of the houses. As the winter session of the 18th Lok Sabha ended with the least possible outcomes that Parliamentarians could deliver, causing a scuffle between the members themselves It should be the moral and fundamental duty to abide by the constitution to uphold the dignity of the Parliament houses and meant it for possible constructive discussion on each and every issue rather than politicising them on personal and party grounds.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

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FIRSTCOLUMN

MAKE A DIRECT CONNECT WITH GOD

Our approach to the Divine has been shackled by rituals, often muddling the true essence of spiritual connection



RAVI VALLURI

s a monolithic organisation, railway bureaucracy was once fossilised and adopted an ostrich-like approach while dealing with its Cinternal and external customers and also with rivals till it adopted technology in attracting passenger and freight segments.

This cardinal principle of competitive advantage and adaptability also applies in our relationship with religion, spirituality and almighty God. Humans have been prisoners to an outdated pedagogy while approaching God. The transaction between the Divine and the bhakta has been constrained as the transmission of knowledge and blessings have been clogged in drain pipes, as the seeker and the devout feels impotent and weak.

Can we recall two path-breaking movies from a few years back, OMG - Oh My God! and PK, wherein the relationship of humans and God was explored?

In OMG a petty trader, Kanji challenges the orthodoxy of the religious establishment by suing the Creator for the ruination of his business, much to the chagrin of the priestly and spiritual class. Similarly, PK- an alien who is marooned on planet Earth, as his spaceship leaves without him - questions various religious and spiritual institutions with his childlike curiosity, only to attract disapprobation.

If it was Lord Krishna's flute and discus in the case of Kanji, it became the symbolic wrong number in the case of PK to dispute the indurate thought processes of a shambolic order. A distraught PK was unable to connect with the Divine forms of various religious denominations and all his trials ended in a sandbox of wrong numbers. So, what is the right number? It is a Wi-Fi to God.



Let us for a split second assume that human beings and all the other manifestations of this grand design are like computers, smartphones or other electronic devices. Almighty God can be likened to the World Wide Web possessing the repository of knowledge, of course with the faculty of creation and destruction.

In the wired world all gizmos are connected to the internet through a Wi-Fi. Aberrations or disruptions in the communication do take place, when the battery power is low, or due to software glitches (this can be attributed to low prana levels). The intermediaries, in the form of the priestly class, astutely blame these muddles faced by the gizmos, either in the hands of God or lack of tapas by the seeker. For centuries across the world, as humans evolved from the inception as mere nature worshippers, to established religions, the febrile human mind has always been inquisitive about the acceptable and bizarre theories of existence. Almighty God in all his manifestations and myriad forms is approachable to bestow benedictions. However, tragically it is the gizmo (humans) and the channel (Wi-Fi) that have transfigured and remodeled since perhaps, the Big Bang! The Wi-Fi is symbolic of a direct connection with the Divine. A true bhakta does he require an emergency quota to board the heavenly train. There is no need to perform rituals, consult tarot card readers, visit places of worship out of fear, beseeching for mercy or boons. A chip is embedded in the DNA to ensure the divine communion which needs to be activated. The regular practice of yogic postures is essentially Hatha Yoga and a tonic for the physical body. The meditation that humans practice is to fortify and safeguard the comfort of our minds, but it is our true inner self, which pines for nourishment. The ordinary mortal today too can be in this state of spiritual reverie through the power of breath. This brings us closest to our inner self. This is the unalloyed Wi-Fi to connect with the Divine.

Slowdown in growth: Is it a temporary blip?



analys \$ 07

This temporary slowdown, attributed to reduced government spending, raises broader concerns about the structural challenges underpinning India's growth story



he GDP (gross domestic product) growth during the second quarter of the current financial year (FY) ending September 30, 2024, decelerated to 5.4 per cent down from 8.1 per cent achieved dur-

ing the corresponding period of FY 2023-24. It was the lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. It was even lower than the 6.7 per cent recorded during the first quarter of the current FY end-ing June 30, 2024.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman observed that deceleration was not a "systemic slowdown"; that it was a temporary blip caused by a reduction in government expenditure (courtesy, elections ended in the June quarter when many projects came to a standstill due to the model code of conduct). She exuded confidence that expansion during the third quarter would make up for the lost momentum. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) expects full-year GDP growth to be 6.5 - 7 per cent. Coming on top of growth of 8 per cent plus achieved during the pre-vious three consecutive years, 6.5 - 7 per cent during the current FY is indeed pressive. Even at this lower level, the Indian economy continues to be the fastest-growing in the world. Then, why should it worry us? Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; the remaining 30 per cent is driven by investment and export. Domestic consumption includes government consumption and private consumption. Likewise, investment consists of capital spent by the government and private investment. During the last five vears, the Central Government has done the heavy lifting especially when it comes to investment. An idea of this can be gauged from its budget outlay 2020-21: Rs 30.42 lakh crore; 2021-22: Ŕs 34.83 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 39.45 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 45.03 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 48.20 lakh crore. The Centre's capital spend during these years was 2020-21: Rs 4.39 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 5.54 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 7.50 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 10.01 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 11.11 lakh crore. The Central government has also been helping the states



UNION FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA SITHARAMAN **OBSERVED THAT** DECELERATION WAS NOT A **"SYSTEMIC** SLOWDOWN";

to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans.

During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current FY, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore. It has also given incentives to promote investment in the private sector. The mother of all incentives was a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 per cent to 35 per cent.

The Centre has also done its bit to give a boost to private consumption. In the budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman has given relief in personal income tax (PIT) of around Rs 17,500/- annually by changing the tax slabs under the New Income Tax regime and increasing in standard deduction by Rs 25,000/-. Less tax means higher disposable income in the hands of the people hence the scope for more spending. But, initiatives by the government alone can't ensure high growth on a sustainable basis. To achieve high sustainable growth, it is necessary to give a boost to private consumption. The dip to 5.4 per cent during the second quarter of the current FY when the decline in urban demand took a toll even as heavy lifting by the Centre was not available (due to elections) should serve as a warning signal. This brings us to a systemic problem that has hampered growth for decades. This has to do with inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent with ET Now at the recently held er than 30 per cent paid by the

Times Network India Economic Conclave, Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, of the 16th Finance Commission said: "The inequality in the sense of the top 1 per cent as a proportion of the bottom 5 percent, yes, that inequality has gone up". Thomas Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics (he is known for his groundbreaking research on economic inequality, wealth distribu-tion, and the dynamics of capitalism) says "the share of India's top 10 percent population is currently at 55-60 per cent". According to him, this should be 30-40 per cent. Whichever source one looks at, we can't wish away the fact that India is home to glaring inequalities in income distribution.

This, in turn, has to do with the manner in which fruits of development are shared amongst the people. Unambiguously, the sharing is unequal. According to an analysis of the financials of India's largest companies – those comprising the BSE 500 index - over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 Rs 1000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent. This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. A big slice of these profits has gone to the pockets of the shareholders of these firms. Thus, the aggregate dividend paid by them increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusuof India's GDP. In conversation ally high payout ratio - even high-

world's largest companies in America's S&P 500. Whether profits to the firms or high dividends to shareholders, it has been paid for or come at the cost of millions of others. Rs 1,000,000 crore profits of firms in the BSE 500 index during FY 2021-22 came at the cost of undermining the purchasing power of millions of consumers.

Likewise, the mammoth dividend fills the coffers of a few - the money that merely adds to their idle cash balances or is spent on a few luxury items - denying millions of workers decent income. The tendency to appropriate a disproportionate share of the proceeds of wealth generation by a few persons at the top can be seen even amongst the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who ape large enterprises when it comes to making payments to their workers.

The SMEs being employment intensive, a general belief is that giving a boost to them would help in creating more jobs hence, lead to a more equitable income distribution. But, their owners' paying less to workers militates against this objective.

(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)

THAT IT WAS A **TEMPORARY BLIP** CAUSED BY A **REDUCTION IN** GOVERNMENT **EXPENDITURE**

Even the millions of small and marginal farmers who by nature of their occupation play the role of owner as well as worker don't get to earn a good income as a handful of traders buy their crops at throwaway prices even as the minimum support price (MSP) notified by the government remains mostly on paper. When, the enterprise-owning class no matter which occupation it is in and the scale of its operation is intrinsically prone to sharing less with those who are at the receiving end, inequalities are inevitable. In such a scenario, how can we expect a big push to the demand needed for sustained growth?

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The allure and impact of Reels: A double-edged sword

In an age where digital connectivity reigns supreme, short-form content like reels has taken centre stage, captivating millions with its addictive allure

n today's digital era, people from all walks of life are Lincreasingly drawn to the virtual world, spending countless hours glued to their screens rather than engaging in real-world activities. Social media platforms, online gaming, and streaming services have created an engaging yet addictive digital ecosystem. Among these, reels have emerged as a dominant form of entertainment, captivating users with short, visually stimulating content that ranges from dance challenges and comedy skits to educational snippets and senseless videos. While initially sought as a break from daily routines, reels often trap users in an endless cycle of mindless scrolling that detracts from productivity and long-term goals.



GURDEEP KAUR

Reels are crafted with algorithms and driven by artificial intelligence to provide instant gratification. However, this seemingly harmless indulgence is contributing to a concerning decline in social and emotional wellbeing. The short bursts of content, typically lasting a few seconds to a minute, are often paired with

ters to maximise engagement. These features captivate both creators and viewers, fostering an obsession that has surpassed earlier trends like the dren. selfie craze

The statistics are staggering. In 2023, India had approximately 24 crore Instagram users, accounting for nearly 17 per cent of its population-the highest globally. Children as young as five years old are con-suming reels, while parents

take pride in showcasing their kids' talents online. Although reels highlight creativity and talent, they come with significant risks. Overexposure to adult themes, unsolicited criticism, and the pressure to perform for likes and shares can severely impact a child's self-esteem and emotional catchy music, effects, and fil- health. For parents, the drive

for online validation often overshadows the responsibility to provide age-appropriate environments for their chil-

The dopamine rush triggered by watching reels creates a cycle of instant gratification, making it difficult for users to focus on meaningful achievements that require sustained effort. The infinite scroll feature exacerbates this issue, leading to binge-watching that consumes valuable time and energy. For youth, who are particularly vulnerable, this translates to lost opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and building genuine relationships. **Reels and Social Dynamics**

The cultural impact of reels extends beyond individual habits, influencing societal



norms and behaviors. Content creators often sensationalise material to attract more viewers, blurring the lines between private and public domains. This trend has led to the normalisation of inappropriate content, including vulgarity, obscenity, and indecent practices, which are being readily adopted by impressionable audiences.

Incidents of cyberbullying, harassment, and social media-

driven disputes are on the rise. The dopamine-induced focus on short-term gratification undermines hard work and perseverance, fostering a culture of mediocrity. Youth, in particular, are losing precious productive years to the reel marathon, trading real-life interactions for virtual validation.

Physical and Cognitive Consequences

The overconsumption of reels is not only detrimental to mental health but also poses physical and cognitive risks. Prolonged screen time leads to issues such as poor concentration, memory deficits, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic or professional performance. Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are becoming more prevalent, exacerbated by sedentary habits encouraged by excessive reel consumption. Breaking the Cycle

and tech companies should collaborate to design features that promote responsible platform usage.

The Way Forward

They must be used responsibly to avoid their harmful consequences. Striking a balance between virtual and realworld experiences is essential for leading a fulfilling life. Individuals need meaningful relationships, emotional support, and real-life achievements to thrive.

By fostering awareness and adopting healthier digital habits, we can harness the ben-efits of technology without compromising our wellbeing. (The writer has an experience of 17 years of teaching the under graduate students of Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce; views are personal)

The effects are troubling.

Addressing the negative

impact of reels requires a collective effort. At an individual level, self-discipline is crucial. Setting clear limits on screen time and prioritising meaning-

ful activities can help break the cycle. Families play a pivotal role, as parents must lead by example, fostering environments that encourage "family time" and shared activities. Introducing hobbies and alternative forms of entertainment can also reduce reliance on digital distractions.

From a societal perspective, stringent regulations are necessary to monitor and control the type of content being created and shared. Governments

world 08



2 US Navy pilots shot down over Red Sea in apparent 'friendly fire' incident

AP DUBAI

wo US Navy pilots were shot down Sunday over

the Red Sea in an appar-ent "friendly fire" incident, the US military said, marking the most serious incident to threaten troops in over a year of America targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels. Both pilots were recovered

alive after ejecting from their stricken aircraft, with one suffering minor injuries. But the shootdown underlines just how dangerous the Red Sea corridor has become over the ongoing attacks on shipping by the Iranian-backed Houthis despite US and European mil-itary coalitions patrolling the area.

The US military had conducted airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthi rebels at the time, though the US military's Central Command did not elaborate on what their mis-sion was and did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press.

The F/A-18 shot down had just flown off the deck of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier, Central Command said. On December 15, Central

Command acknowledged the Truman had entered the Mideast, but hadn't specified that the carrier and its battle

group was in the Red Sea. "The guided missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, which is part of the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group, mistakenly fired on and hit the F/A-18," Central Command said in a statement.

From the military's description, the aircraft shot down was a two-seat F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet assigned to the "Red Rippers" of Strike Fighter Squadron 11 out of Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia. It wasn't immediately clear

how the Gettysburg could mistake an F/A-18 for an enemy aircraft or missile, particularly as ships in a battle group remain linked by both radar and radio communication. However, Central Command

said that warships and aircraft earlier shot down multiple Houthi drones and an anti-ship cruise missile launched by the rebels. Incoming hostile fire from the Houthis has given sailors just seconds to make decisions in the past. Since the Truman's arrival, the

US has stepped up its airstrikes targeting the Houthis and their missile fire into the Red Sea and the surrounding area.

However, the presence of an American warship group may spark renewed attacks from the rebels, like what the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower saw earlier this year. That deployment marked what the Navy described as its most intense combat since World War II. On Saturday night and early Sunday, US warplanes conducted airstrikes that shook

Sanaa, the capital of Yemen that the Houthis have held since 2014. Central Command described the strikes as targeting a "missile storage facility" and a "command-and-control facility,"

without elaborating. Houthi-controlled media reported strikes in both Sanaa and around the port city of Hodeida, without offering any casualty or damage information. In Sanaa, strikes appeared particularly targeted at a mountainside known to be home to military installations. The Houthis later acknowledged the aircraft being shot down in the Red Sea.

The Houthis have targeted

about 100 merchant vessels with missiles and drones since the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip started in October 2023 after Hamas' surprise attack on Israel that killed 1,200 people and saw 250 others taken hostage.

Israel's grinding offensive in Gaza has killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, local health officials say. The tally doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians combatants and civilians.

The Houthis have seized one vessel and sunk two in a campaign that has also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by separate US- and European-led coalitions in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets, which have also included Western military vessels. The rebels maintain that they target ships linked to Israel, the US or the United Kingdom to force an end to Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran.

The Houthis also have increas ingly targeted Israel itself with drones and missiles, resulting in retaliatory Israeli airstrikes.

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill at least 20

AP DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA)

Israeli strikes across the Gaza Strip overnight and into Sunday killed at least 20 peo-ple, including five children, Palestinian medical officials said.

Israeli authorities meanwhile allowed Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the leader of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land, to enter Gaza and cele-

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. A man and his wife were killed in a strike in the southern city of Khan Younis on Sunday, just after midnight, according to the nearby Nasser Hospital. A strike on a car in Gaza City killed two people, according to the Health Ministry. There was no immediate com-

ment from the military on

where the light is. This is one of the places where the light is," Pizzaballa said.

The buzz of Israeli drones circling overhead, a sound that has grown ubiquitous across Gaza during the war, could be heard throughout the Mass. The rare visit to Gaza by the Latin Patriarch came a day after Pope Francis had again criticized Israel's actions in Gaza. Holocaust, adamantly rejects such allegations. It says it has made great efforts to spare civilians and is only at war with Hamas, which it accuses of genocidal violence in the attack

that ignited the war. War grinds on as winter sets in: Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel in a surprise attack on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 peo-



Palestinians look at home destroyed by an Israeli strike late Saturday in Deir al-Balah

AP/PTI

ple, mostly civilians, and

abducting around 250. Around

100 hostages are still in Gaza,

at least a third of whom are

Israel's subsequent bombard ment and ground invasion have killed over 45,000 people

in Gaza, more than half of

them women and children

according to the Gaza Health

Ministry, which does not dis-

tinguish between fighters and

civilians in its count. The offensive has caused wide-

spread destruction and dis-placed some 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple

times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into squalid tent camps along the coast as the

cold, wet winter sets in

believed to be dead.

after ferry capsizes in Busira river

Thirty-eight people are confirmed dead, and over 100 remain missing in Congo after an overloaded ferry — full of people returning home for Christmas — capsized in the river Busira late on Friday night, according to local officials and eye-witnesses. The boat sank less than four days after another one in the northeast of the country capsized, killing 25.

Twenty people are confirmed to have been rescued so far. The boat was travelling in the north-

east of the Congo as part of a convoy of other vessels, and the passengers were primarily merchants returning home for

of Ingende, the ferry contained "more than 400 people because it made two ports, Ingende and Loolo, on the way to Boende, so there is reason to believe that there were more deaths".

38 dead, over 100 missing in Congo

Congolese officials have often warned against overloading and vowed to punish those violating safety measures for water transportation. However, in remote areas where most passengers come from, many cannot afford public transport for the few available roads.

At least 78 people drowned in October when an overloaded boat sank in the country's east while 80 lost their lives in a similar accident near Kinshasa in June. The latest accident prompted anger at

town of Mbandaka, the capital of the Equateur province where the ferry sank, said he condemned the authorities for not

properly handling the recent capsizings. "How can a ship navigate at night under the watchful eye of river service agents? And now we are recording over a hundred deaths," lamented Mr Bonina. The capsizing of overloaded boats is

also becoming increasingly frequent in this central African nation as more people are giving up the few available roads in favour of wooden vessels crumbling under the weight of passengers and their goods for security reasons.

The roads are often caught up in the deadly clashes between Congolese secu-Christmas, said Joseph Joseph Kangolingoli, the mayor of Ingende, the last town before the site of the accident. According to Ndolo Kaddy, a resident

brate a pre-Christmas Mass with members of the territory's small Christian community. A strike on a school housing displaced people in Gaza City killed at least eight people, including three children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The Civil Defense, first responders affiliated with the Hames run government the Hamas-run government, had earlier said four children were among those killed.

The Israeli military said it carried out a precise strike on Hamas militants sheltering there. A strike on a home in the cen-

tral city of Deir al-Balah late Saturday killed at least eight people, including three women and two children, according to

those strikes. Israel has continued to carry out daily strikes in Gaza more than 14 months into the war with Hamas. It says it only targets militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians, but the bombings frequently kill women and children.

Vatican envoy celebrates Mass with Gaza's Christians: Dozens of worshippers gath-ered in the Holy Family Church in Gaza City as Pizzaballa and other clergy celebrated Mass. A Christmas tree was decorated with golden ornaments and twinkling white lights, and altar boys wearing red and white robes held candles.

"For Christmas, we celebrate the light and we are wondering

Francis said Saturday that his envoy had been unable to enter the territory because of Israeli

bombing. "Yesterday children have been bombed. This is cruelty, this is not war," Francis said during his annual Christmas greetings at the Vatican.

The pope recently called for an investigation to determine if Israel's actions in Gaza constitute genocide, a conclusion later reached by Amnesty International and Human Watch. Rights The International Court of Justice is investigating genocide alle-gations brought against Israel by South Africa.

Israel, which was founded as a refuge for Jews after the Nazi

Pickup truck driver killed by cops in Texas

out of race to be Florida senator AP WASHINGTON whether she might be vying for a Senate seat. If Rubio is conara Trump, the daughter-infirmed, his replacement — who would be chosen by Republican Florida Governor Ron DeSantis would serve for two years until the next regularly scheduled election in 2026. Elected as RNC co-chair in March, Trump was a key player in the GOP retaking the White House and control of the Senate, while maintaining a narrow House majority. What she does next could shape Republican politics, given her elevated political profile and her ties to the incoming president. The idea of placing a Trump family member in the Senate had been backed by some Republicans, including Maye Musk, mother of Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, who The announcement comes Trump has named co-head of a group tasked with reducing federal spending and regulations during his second term as president.

Lara Trump drops | Donald Trump taps 'Apprentice' producer Mark Burnett as special envoy to UK

AP WEST PALM BEACH (US) Trump severed ties with NBC his biography and political But Trump has appounced a in 2015, the same year he rise. The show presented launched his first White House Trump Tower to tens of millions of people as a symbol of run. Inauguration Day on January The selection of Burnett con-20, including his former power and success before tinues Trump's trend of filling Trump launched his first camambassador to Germany Richard Grenell who he chose out his incoming administrapaign from the building's lobby. tion with people who have high-profile backgrounds in as envoy for special missions. 'Mark is known for creating and producing some of the That announcement joined television or politics, or both biggest shows in Television previous ones including Adam including his choice to be History," Trump wrote in his Boehler as special presidential defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, statement on Burnett, listing envoy for hostage affairs, and many of his biggest hits before a former co-host of "Fox and Keith Kellogg to serve as spe-Friends Weekend", and ex-teleadding, "most notably, 'The Apprentice" and noting that cial envoy for Ukraine and vision doctor and unsuccessful Russia. Trump also announced Burnett "has won 13 Emmy Awards!" Senate candidate in on December 2 that he was Pennsylvania, Mehmet Oz. picking billionaire investment banker Warren Stephens for the Trump's first campaign in 2016 Special envoys are usually was rocked by allegations about picked by presidents for the more standard role of US his conduct on "The world's traditional hotspots, ambassador to Britain. That Apprentice" and other appearincluding the Middle East might raise questions about ances during his association how a special UK envoy could where Trump has already said he would like Steven Witkoff to with NBC, notably in footage overlap duties, but the president-elect said in his statement in which he said he could sexfill the role. The United that Burnett "will work to ually assault women and get Kingdom, which has long enjoyed a "special relation-ship" with the US that makes it away with it because he was a enhance diplomatic relations, focusing on areas of mutual interest, including trade, invest-"star". Almost a decade after he left his one of Washington's strongest global allies, is not typically a candidate for such posts. reality TV role, Trump's televiment opportunities, and cultursion career remains central to al exchanges".

Llaw of President-elect Donald Trump, said on Saturday that she is removing herself from consideration to be a Florida senator — ending speculation that she could replace Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who has been tapped to be the incoming administration's secretary of state. "After an incredible amount of thought, contemplation, and encouragement from so many, I have decided to remove my name from consideration for the United States Senate," Lara Trump posted on X. Instead, she promised a "big announcement to share in January".

weeks after Trump announced that she was stepping down as co-chair of the Republican National Committee, a move which raised questions about $M_{\mathrm{producer}}^{\mathrm{ark}\ \mathrm{Burnett},\ \mathrm{the}\ \mathrm{power}}$ reintroduce Donald Trump to a national television audience with "The Apprentice", is being tapped by the president-elect as special envoy to the United Kingdom in his upcoming administration. "With a distinguished career in

television production and business, Mark brings a unique blend of diplomatic acumen and international recognition to this important role," Trump announced on Saturday.

Burnett, who was born in London, helped produce hits like "Survivor" and "The Voice", but is perhaps best known for teaming up with Trump for "The Apprentice", which first aired on NBC in 2004. Trump had been well-known in real estate and pop culture

circles for decades. But the show helped again make him a household name — though

ob will resonate with many, not

ing election defeat, Sunak

served as interim Opposition

leader before handing over the

reins to Kemi Badenoch as the

A fellow British Indian leader-

ship hopeful, Priti Patel, soon

returned to the frontbenches of

Parliament as shadow foreign

secretary in a House of

new Tory leader.

AP KILLEEN series of special envoy positions to several top loyalists ahead of

Apickup truck driver fleeing police careened through the doors of a JCPenney store in Texas and continued through a busy mall, injuring five people before he was fatally shot by officers, authorities said.

The truck crashed into the department store in Killeen, about 68 miles (109 kilometres) north of the state capital Austin around 5.30 pm Saturday and continued into the building, striking people as it went, Sgt. Bryan Washko of the Texas Department of Public Safety said in an evening news briefing.

Emergency medical services transported four victims from the mall to area hospitals and another travelled to a hospital separately. They ranged in age from 6 to 75 years old and their conditions were not immediately known, he said.

The chase began around 5 pm on Interstate 14 in Belton, about 20 miles (30 kilometres) from Killeen, after authorities received calls about an erratic driver in a black pickup, Ofelia Miramontez of the Killeen Police Department said.

The driver then pulled off the road and drove into the park-

ing lot of the mall. "The suspect drove through the doors and continued to drive through the JCPenney store, striking multiple people," Washko said.

'The trooper and the Killeen police officer continued on foot after this vehicle, which was driving through the store, actively running people over. He travelled several hundred vards."

Officers from the state public safety department, Killeen and three other law enforcement agencies "engaged in gunfire to eliminate this threat," Washko said.

Sunak exits Downing Street, successor Starmer revives hope for FTA with India

PTI 📕 LONDON

 ${
m T}$ he year earmarked for general elections in both India and the UK was destined to throw up many new scenarios on the political front. Among them was a decision to relaunch a "mutually beneficial" Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries.

Just as India's mammoth democratic exercise edged towards its phased conclusion in 2024, Britain's first Indian-origin prime minister Rishi Sunak surprised many within his own Conservative Party by calling an earlier-than-expected election on July 4 – exactly a month on from a third term win for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's National Democratic Alliance. This meant the FTA talks, hav-

ing entered their 14th round of intense negotiations, slipped

into a more uncertain phase until the new Labour Party-led government committed itself to deepening our bilateral ties". "We agreed to raise the ambition of our UK-India comprehensive strategic partnership... Crucially, this work will start with trade and investment, and I am pleased to say that we about modern Britain is just how "unremarkable" his agreed to relaunch Free Trade Agreement negotiations early in the new year," said newlymigrant roots were to the top elected British Prime Minister Keir Starmer after his first least a 1.8-million-strong meeting with Modi on the Indian diaspora. sidelines of the G20 Summit in Having resigned after the bruis-

Brazil last month. It mapped out a clearly defined landscape for the future of the India-UK trade ties, which official UK government statis-tics clock at GBP 42 billion a year in the 12 months to June 2024.

Sunak may not have succeeded in getting the FTA over the line, but, as he admitted in his Commons with a record of

nearly 30 parliamentarians of resignation speech at the doorstep of 10 Downing Street, Indian heritage – including British voters had given a "clear Lisa Nandy as Culture signal" in favour of change. Secretary and Seema Malhotra The 44-year-old leaves behind as immigration minister. quite the legacy despite presid-Under Malhotra, the UK introing over the Conservatives' worst electoral performance in history. His words that "one of the most remarkable things'

duced measures to curb rising migration, including giving an independent body more power to reduce reliance on foreign labour and expedite the return

of illegal immigrants. She has a tough task ahead of digitising the entire UK visas and immigration system, the deadline for which has been extended until March 2025. Indian students and professionals are among those impacted, even as their numbers began registering a steady decline

this year with the previous

government's clamp down on

accompanying spouses and

hiked minimum salary cut-offs. A simmering anti-immigration sentiment was behind a flurry of riots triggered by misinformation around the Welsh-born suspect behind a

girls in Southport, north-west meet skills requirements across different sectors

> It was against this backdrop that the BT Group, back in August, welcomed Bharti Global's acquisition of a significant stake in the British telecom major as "great vote of confidence". Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal

described the investment in an "iconic" British company as "significant milestone" for Bharti Enterprises.

Another Indian multinational, Tata Steel, also hit a major milestone as it shut down its furnaces at the UK's largest steelworks in Port Talbot, Wales, to transition towards greener steelmaking.

It came just before Tata Group icon Ratan Tata, behind setting the course for several cross-sector India-UK tie-ups, breathed his last in Mumbai on October Business and Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds led the tributes in the UK to "truly a titan of the business world and someone who played a huge role in shaping British industry"

The two-way flows were reflective across different areas beyond business and trade, especially over Diwali - celebrated widely across UK government corridors.

Starmer followed in the footsteps of his Hindu predecessor to light diyas on the doorstep of Downing Street but courted controversy when meat and alcohol were served during the festivity. "We understand the strength of feeling on this issue and so would apologise to the community and assure them it will not happen again," his spokesperson said.

The apology came just before Starmer met with Modi, who also raised the issue of longpending extradition requests including fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, who remains behind bars at Thameside, south-east London, after another failed bail attempt in May this year.

Sanjay Bhandari, a consultant in the defence sector wanted in India on alleged tax evasion and money laundering charges, won a High Court appeal against his extradition order which is to conclude in the new year Also expected in 2025 is King Charles III's return to Bengaluru for a wellness retreat where the 76-year-old monarch and wife Camilla made a private stopover in October on their way back from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa.

It came at the close of a tough year for the royals with Charles and his daughter-in-law, Kate Middleton, revealing their cancer diagnosis earlier. However they are both back on official duties following their treatment and looking ahead to a packed schedule in the new year. As 2024 comes to a close with both nations reaffirming their commitment to deepening trade, business, and cultural ties, 2025 holds promise for a stronger partnership and new opportunities on the global

UNITED KINGDOM fatal stabbing of three school-

England, at the end of July. While anti-racism activists turned out for large counterprotests, the issue of migration will continue to dominate the news agenda in the new year even as businesses struggle to

world 09



German authorities received tipoffs last year about suspect in **Christmas market attack**

AP MAGDEBURG (GERMANY)

erman authorities said Gthey received tipoffs last year about the suspect in a car attack at a Christmas market in Magdeburg as more details emerged on Sunday about the

chiatry and psychotherapy Authorities say he does not fit the usual profile of perpetrators of extremist attacks. He described himself as an ex-Muslim who was highly critical of Islam and in many posts on social media

Saudi Arabia in November 2023, which led authorities to launch "appropriate investiga-tive measures." "The man also tive measures published a huge number of posts on the internet. He also had contact with various authorities, made insults and

year. "This was taken seriously, like every other of the numerous tips," the office said. But it also noted that it is not an investigative authority and that it referred the information to the responsible authorities. It gave no other

which is about 130 kilometres west of Berlin, and beyond. The suspect was on Saturday evening brought before a judge, who behind closed doors ordered him to be kept in custody on allegations of murder and attempted murder. He is facing a possible indictment.

The horror triggered by yet another act of mass violence in Germany make it likely that

🗲 KIND ATTENTION

details given below:

Train No. 04145

ARR. DEP.

08:55

& General

ARR.

11:15

18:50

21:35

03.01.2025 to 28.02.2025

Train No. 04111

DEP.

06:00

11:20

28.02.2025 (except 28, 29 & 30.01.2025)

migration will remain a key issue as the country heads toward an early election on February 23. A deadly knife attack in Solingen in August pushed the issue to the top of the agenda, and led the gov-ernment of Chancellor Olaf Scholz to tighten border security measures. Right-wing figures from across Europe have criticised German authorities for having allowed high levels

RAIL PASSENGERS! =>

34

Trips

09:30

Trips

09:30

94

Trips

DEP.

13:55

06:30

94

Trips

DEP.

01:10

17:45

Train No. 04114

ARR.

Train No. 04112

ARR.

21:00

13:50

Train No. 04146

ARR. DEP.

19:40

of migration in the past and for what they see as security failures now.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who is known for a strong anti-migration position going back years, used the attack in Germany to lash out at the European Union's migration policies and described it as a "terrorist act." At an annual press conference in Budapest on Saturday, Orbán insisted that "there is no doubt that there is a link between the changed world in Western Europe, the migration that flows there, especial-

ist acts." Hungary, too."

ly illegal migration and terror-Orbán vowed to "fight back" against the EU migration policies and alleging without evidence that "Brussels wants Magdeburg to happen to

01455/01456 Pune-Mau JnPune 12 Kumbh Special Train Trips								
Train No	o. 01455	STATIONS 1		Train No	o. 01456			
ARR.	DEP.	♦	STATIUNS		ARR.	DEP.		
	10:10		Pune		15:45			
17:10 17:20 Varanasi 05:25 05:35								
22:00 Mau Jn 23:50								
	. 014EE			25		1 00 0005		

Days of run : 01455 Ex. Pune on 08, 16, 24.01.2025 & 06, 08, 21.02.202 and 01456 Ex. Mau Jn. on 09, 17, 25.01.2025 & 07, 09, 22.02.2025. Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General

Stoppages: Daund Chord Line, Ahmednagar, Belapur, Manmad Jn. Jalgaon Jn., Bhusaval Jn., Khandwa Jn., Talvadiya, Chhanera, Khirkiya, Harda, Banapura, Itarsi Jn., Pipariya, Narsinghpur, Jabalpur Jn., Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Shahganj Jn. & Azamgarh Stations.

		2 Dr. Ambedkar Nagar- ar Nagar Kumbh Specia		08 Trips		
Train No	o. 09371	STATIONS 1	Train No	09372		
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.		
	13:45	Dr. Ambedkar Nagar	05:30			
14:05	14:15	Varanasi	06:00	06:10		
19:15		Ballia		23:45		
Dave of run : 00271 Ex Dr. Ambedker Neger on 02.01.0005						

Days of run : 09371 Ex. Dr. Ambedkar Nagar on 22.01.2025 25.01.2025, 08.02.2025 & 22.02.2025 and 09372 Ex. Ballia or 23.01.2025.26.01.2025.09.02.2025 & 23.02.2025

Days of run : 04145 Ex. Subedarganj on every Thursday from Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General 02.01.2025 to 27.02.2025 and 04146 Delhi Jn. on every Friday from

Stoppages: Indore Jn., Ujjain Jn., Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina, Lalitpur, Virangana Laxmibai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Jaunpur Jn. Aunrihar Jn. & Ghazipur City Stations

01033/01034 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T.) - Mau Jn Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T.) Kumbh Special Train						
Train No	Train No. 01033					
ARR.	DEP.	STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.		
	11:30	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T.)	14:30			
17:10	17:20	Varanasi	05:25	05:35		
22:00 Mau Jn						

Days of run : 01033 Ex. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (T.) on 09, 17, 22, 25.01.2025 & 05, 22, 26.02.2025 and 01034 Ex. Mau Jn. on 10, 18, 23, 26.01.2025 & 06, 23, 27.02.2025

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper and General

Stoppages: Dadar, Thane, Kalyan Jn., Igatpuri, Nasik Road, Manmad Jn., Jalgaon Jn., Bhusaval Jn., Khandwa Jn., Talvadiya, Chhanera, Khirkiya, Harda, Banapura, Itarsi Jn., Pipariya, Narsinghpur, Jabalpur Jn., Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Shahganj Jn. & Azamgarh Stations.

09029		Vishvamitri-Ballia-Vish umbh Special Train	vamitri	02 Trips
Train No	o. 09029	L STATIONS †	Train No	. 09030
ARR.	DEP.	+ STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.
	08:35	Vishvamitri	10:05	
14:05	14:15	Varanasi	06:00	06:10
19:00		Ballia		23:30

Stoppages: Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road, Days of run: 09029 Ex. Vishvamitri on 17.02.2025 (Monday) and Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General



Candles, flowers and wreaths sit in front of the entrance to St. John's Church early Sunday, in Magdeburg, Germany, after a car drove into a crowd at a Christmas market on Friday. AP/PT

five people killed. Authorities have identified

the suspect as a Saudi doctor who arrived in Germany in 2006 and had received permanent residency. Police haven't publicly named the suspect, in line with privacy rules, but some German news outlets have identified him as Taleb A. and reported that he was a specialist in psy-

expressed support for the farright anti-immigrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party

He is being held in custody as authorities investigate him. The head of the Federal Criminal Police Office, Holger Münch, said in an interview on the German broadcaster

even threats. However, he was not known to have committed acts of violence," said Münch, whose office is the German

equivalent of the FBI. He said that the warnings, however, proved to be very unspecific. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees also said Sunday on X that it received a tipoff about the suspect in the late summer of last details.

Police in Magdeburg, the capital of the state of Saxony-Anhalt, said Sunday that those who died were four women aged 45, 52, 67 and 75, as well as a 9-year-old boy. Authorities said 200 people

were injured, including 41 in serious condition. They were being treated in multiple hospitals in Magdeburg,

Prominent Lebanese figure visits Syria, hoping for post-Assad reset in troubled relations

AP BEIRUT

Aprominent Lebanese politi-cian held talks on Sunday with the insurgent who led the overthrow of Syria's President Bashar Assad, with both expressing hope for a new era in relations between their countries.

Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was a longtime critic of Svria's involvement in Lebanon and blamed Assad's father, former President Hafez Assa assassination of his own father decades ago. He is the most prominent Lebanese politician to visit Syria since the Assad family's 54-year rule came to an end. He held talks with Ahmad al-Sharaa, formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani, who led the Sunni Islamist rebels who swept into Damascus earlier this month and forced the younger Assad from power. "We salute the Syrian people for their great victories and we salute you for your battle that you waged to get rid of oppression and tyranny that lasted over 50 years," said jumblatt, a key figure in Lebanon's Druze minority and the former leader of a leftist party. He expressed hope that Lebanese-Syrian relations "will return to normal?

किच्छा में नगला-लालपुर मार्ग के

कि॰मी॰ 8.636 से 9.636 कि॰मी॰

का टी०डब्लू०टी० द्वारा निर्माण एंव

सुदृढ़ीकरण का कार्य |

(स्वीकृति की प्रत्याशा में)

क्र.

सं

ZDF on Saturday that his office received a tipoff from

Jumblatt's father, Kamal, was Lebanese will be held accountkilled in 1977 in an ambush near able, and that fair trials will be a Syrian roadblock during Syria's held for those who committed military intervention in Lebanon's crimes against the Syrian people," Jumblatt said Iran's leader predicts trouble for

civil war. The younger Jumblatt was a critic of the Assads, though he briefly allied with them at one point to gain influence in Lebanon's ever-shifting political alignments.

young Syrians will resist the new "Syria was a source of concern government emerging after Assad's overthrow as he again and disturbance, and its interferaccused the United States and ence in Lebanese affairs was negative," al-Sharaa said, referring Israel of sowing chaos in the the Assad government country will no longer be a case of negative interference in Lebanon," he said, pledging that it would respect Lebanese sovereignty. Al-Sharaa also repeated longstanding allegations that Assad's government was behind the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Hezbollah. Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which was followed by other killings of prominent Lebanese critics of Assad. Last year, the United Nations closed an international tribunal investigating the assassination after it convicted three members of Lebanon's Hezbollah — an ally of Assad - in absentia. Hezbollah denied involvement in the massive February 14, 2005 bombing, which killed Hariri and 21 others "We hope that all those who resources, saying: "Now they committed crimes against the feel victory, the Americans, the

accompanied them."

मैं मंगल सिंह रावत पुल श्री कृपाल सिंह मूल निवासी ग्राम जमरिया पौडी गढवाल (उत्तराखण्ड व हाल निवासी राजनगर एक्सटेशन, गाजियाबाव (उ० प्र०) अपने पत्न अभिषेक रावत जो कसंगति एवं नशा करने का आदी होने के कारण हम . लिखित रूप में सभी सम्बन्ध तोड़ते हुए, घर से चला गया है से मैं तत्काल प्रभाव से अपना संबंध विच्छे करता हूँ तथा अपनी चल अचल संपति से भी उसे बेदखल करता हूँ। वह किसी भी व्यक्ति/संस्था व साथ किसी भी प्रकार के लेन-देन/व्यवहार या अन्य किसी भी कृत्य करेगा, के लिए वह/वे स्वर जिम्मेवार होंगे। उसके लिए मैं या मेरा परिवार किस भी तरह से जिम्मेवार नहीं रहेगा।

LASSIFIED

CHANGE OF NAME

I Hitherto Known As Akash

Deep Handa Alias Akash

Kapoor S/O B D Handa

Residing At Apt 501, A-8 Olive

County Sector - 5, Vasundhara

Ghaziabad - 201012 , Uttar

Pradesh, Have Changed My

सार्वजनिक सूचना

<u>THE PIONEER</u>

Stoppages: Prayagraj Rambag, Jhusi, Handia Khas, Gyanpur Road Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn.

Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh Jn., Mau Aimma Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations 04113/04114 Prayagraj Jn.-Prayagraj Jn. Unreserved Kumbh Special Ring Rail Train No. 04113 STATIONS ARR. DEP. 17:30 Prayagraj Jn

08:00 22:55 23:00 Jaunpur 01:05 07:45 ---Prayagraj Jn. ---Days of run : 04113/04114 Ex. Prayagraj Jn. from 10.01.2025 to

28.02.2025 (except 28, 29 & 30.01.2025)

Madhosingh, Banaras, Bhadohi, Janghai Jn., Mariahu, Zafarabad Jn., 09030 Ex. Ballia on 18.02.2025 (Tuesday) Shahganj Jn., Akbarpur, Goshainganj, Ayodhya, Ayodhya Cantt., Sultanpur, Maa Belha Devi Dham Pratapgarh Jn., Mau Aimma Phaphamau Jn. & Prayag Stations

Zionist regime and those who

Train No. 02417 Train No. 02418 STATIONS ARR. DEP. ARR. DEP. Subedarganj 21:35 19:40 08:55 Delhi Jn. ---Days of run : 02417 Ex. Subedarganj on every Friday & Saturday from 03.01.2025 to 28.02.2025 and 02418 Delhi Jn. on every Saturday 8

Sunday from 04.01.2025 to 01.03.2025 Composition: 1st AC cum 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC Economy Sleeper & General Stoppages: Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah, Tundla, & Aligarh Stations

04145/04146 Subedarganj - Delhi Jn. -Subedarganj SF Kumbh Special Train (Weekly)

STATIONS

Subedarganj

Delhi Jn

Composition: 1st AC, 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC Economy, Sleeper

STATIONS

Prayagraj Jn.

Jaunpur

Prayagraj Jn.

Days of run : 04111/04112 Ex. Prayagraj Jn. from 10.01.2025 to

Stoppages: Fatehpur, Govindpuri, Etawah, Tundla, & Aligarh Stations.

04111/04112 Prayagraj Jn. - Prayagraj Jn.

Unreserved Kumbh Special Ring Rail

02417/02418 Subedarganj - Delhi Jn. -Subedarganj SF Kumbh Special Train (Bi-Weekly)

KUMBH MELA SPECIAL TRAINS For the convenience of Rail Passengers during forthcoming KUMBH MELA-2025, Railways have decided to run the following Special trains as per the

Iran had provided crucial support to Assad throughout Syria's nearly 14-year civil war, which erupted after he launched a violent crackdown on a popular uprising. Syria had long served as a key conduit for Iranian aid to

new Syrian rulers: Separately,

Iran's supreme leader said that

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in an address on Sunday that the "young Syrian has nothing to lose" and suffers from insecurity following Assad's fall. What can he do? He should

stand with strong will against those who designed and those who implemented the insecurity," Khamenei said. "God willing, he will overcome them." He accused the United States and Israel of plotting against Assad's government in order to seize

Name And Shall Hereafter Be Known As Akash Kapoor. It Is Certified That I Have Complied With Other Legal Requirements In This Connection. PD(1128)A PUBLIC NOTICE , Kunal Bhatt, S/o Rakesh Kumar Bhatt esident of Flat No. 1208. Montova Tower

lahagun Mascot, Crossing Republic haziabad, above mentioned flat bought om Vaibhav Kumar Gupta (Son Lalit Mohar Gupta) and Shashi Gupta (Wife Lalit Mohan Gupta) on 22.05.2015 . The power of ttorney dated 10.03.2013 (original ocument) given by Vaibhav Kumar Gupta is actually lost somewhere. If anyone has any pjection regarding these documents then inform me within 7 days on my given Mobile No. Notify on 9911004142.

Yogesh Kumar (Advocate)

The public of the public at large that our uch Mahajan W/o. Sh. Praveen Mahajan anu h. Praveen Mahajan Si. Sh. Madan La tabaian are the 'Title Holders' in possession consolid Property Bearing Winder lat No. 200, Fourth & Fifth Floor (Duple) ne Delhi Co-operative Group Housin ociety Ltd., Plot No. 74, Ashirwa The Delhi Co-operative Group Housing Society Ltd., Plot No. 74, Ashirwad Apartments, I.P. Extension, Patparganj, New Delhi-110092 admeasuring 155.00 sq. mtrs.', hereinafter referred to as Schedule Property vide Sale Deed dated 5th October, 2011 duly registered as Regn. No. 16726, Book No. 1, Vol. No. 5764, pp. 104-114 on 07.10.2011 in the Office of the Sub Registrar – VIII. Geeta Colony, New Delhi. That the original document ie. 'Registration Related Detail Page' of Conveyance Deed dated 7th April, 2005 w.r.t. the Schedule Property has been lost' misplaced and is untraceable as on date, in lieu of which te Schedule Property has been lost/ misplace nd is untraceable as on date, in lieu of whic hormation Report dated19.12.2024bearin R No. 2415246/2024 has been filled with Dell olice by the Title Holders. This notice is thu sued to the Public at large, i.e. to an erson(s), Company(ies), Authority(ies ociety(ies), Organisation(s), Financic istitution(s), Bank(s), HUFs etc. having an pweldge.custdy or nossession of the above owledge, custody or possession of the aboventioned lost/ misplaced/ untraceable origin owledge nentioned lost/ misplaced/ untraceable original document or otherwise having any claims, gipts, title, interests, possession etc. in the Schedule Property, by way of Ownership, Succession, Inheritance, Sale, Mortgage, Exchange, Charge, Lien, Gift, Trust, Exchange, Charge, Lien, Gift, Trust, nuchersigned within 15 days from the date of this Publication, post expiration of which, any claim(s) or objection(s), if raised or received, shall be treated as null & void and as waived. Join Kashyap, Advocate Address:Chamber No.6, Block-Karkardoma Court New Delhi-110032, Contact No. +91 99716 26467

अधीक्षण अभियन्ता

				agraj Sanga erved Kumbl					66 Trips
1	Train No	o. 04210				Train No. 042			
ARR. DEP.			STATIONS		ARR.		DEP.		
1	11:15			Prayagraj Sangam			17:15		
	14:00			Jaunpur				1	4:15
1	Days of r	un : 04210	0 E)	Ex. Prayagraj Sangam and 04209 Ex. J					unpu
1	from 01.0	01.2025 to	10.	01.2025, 17.01	.2025 to 2	6.0	01.2025,	06.0	2.202
1	to 09.02.2	025 & 15.0	2.2	025 to 23.02.20	25				
1	Stoppages: Prayag, Phaphamau, Phulpur, Janghai & Ma						lariahi		
1	Stations.								
	08251/	08252 R	aig	garh JnVar	anasi-Ra	ai	garh Jn	ı.	02

I		ĸ	umon Special Tra	IN		Trips	
I	Train No. 08251		O CTATIONS	⊥ STATIONS ↑		Train No. 08252	
I	ARR.	DEP.	V STATIONS		ARR.	DEP.	
I		14:00	Raigarh Jn.		05:25		
I	10:00		Varanasi			10:50	

Days of run : 08251 Ex. Raigarh Jn. on 25.01.2025 (Saturday) and 08252 Ex. Varanasi on 27.01.2025 (Monday)

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper and General

Stoppages: Champa Jn., Bilaspur Jn., Pendra Road, Anuppur Jn. Shahdol Jn., Umaria, Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn., Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur and Chunar Jn. Stations

09031/	09031/09032 Udhna - Ghazipur City - Udhna Kumbh Special Train					04 Trips
Train No	o. 09031		⊥ STATIONS ↑			0.09032
ARR.	DEP.	♦	STATIONS		ARR.	DEP.
	06:40		Udhna		12:45	
14:05	14:15		Varanasi Jn.		06:00	06:10
18:05	5		Ghazipur City		00:30	

Days of run : 09031 Ex. Udhna on 17.01.2025 & 16.02.2025 and 09032 Ex. Ghazpur City on 19.01.2025 & 18.02.2025

composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General

Stoppages: Bharuch, Vishvamitri, Vadodara, Godhra, Dahod, Ratlam Nagda, Ujjain, Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina, Lalitpur, Virangana Lakshmibai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj, Mirzapur, Chunar, Jaunpur & Aunrihar Stations.

	09403/09404 Ahmedabad Jn Janghai - Ahmedabad Jn. Kumbh Special Train							
	Train No	o. 09403	L STATIONS †	Train No	o. 09404			
	ARR.	DEP.	+ STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.			
21:15		21:15	Ahmedabad Jn.	18:00				
03:00			Janghai		08:30			

Days of run: 09403 Ex. Ahmedabad Jn. on 09, 16, 21.01.2025 & 05, 14 15, 18, 19, 26.02.2025 and 09404 Ex. Janghai on 11, 18, 23.01.2025 & 07, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28.02.2025

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper & General.

Stoppages: Anand, Chhayapuri, Godhra, Dahod, Ratlam, Nagda Bhawani Mandi , Ramganj Mandi, Kota, Sawai Madhopur, Gangapur City, Bayana, Agra Fort, Tundla, Etawah, Govindpuri, Fatehpur Prayagraj Stations.

Stoppages: Vadodara Jn., Godhra Jn., Dahod, Ratlam Jn., Nagda Jn.. Ujjain Jn., Shujalpur, Sant Hirdaram Nagar, Vidisha, Ganj Basoda, Bina Lalitpur, Virangana Laxmibai Jhansi, Orai, Govindpuri, Fatehpur, Prayagraj Jn., Mirzapur, Chunar Jn., Jaunpur Jn., Aunrihar Jn. & Ghazipur City Stations.

		lalda Town-Prayagraj F umbh Special Train (Bi		
Train No	0. 03409	⊥ STATIONS ↑	Train No. 0341	
ARR.	DEP.	V STATIONS	ARR.	DEP.
	20:45	Malda Town	14:30	
13:45	13:50	Varanasi	22:00	22:10
17:15		Prayagraj Rambag		19:15

Days of run : 03409 Ex. Malda Town on every Thursday & Saturday from 02.01.2025 to 22.02.2025 and 03410 Ex. Prayagraj Rambag or every Friday & Sunday from 03.01.2025 to 23.02.2025

Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC & Sleeper & General

Stoppages: New Farakka Jn., Barharwa Jn., Sahibganj Jn., Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur, Sultanganj, Jamalpur Jn., Abhaipur, Kiul Jn., Mokameh, Barh, Bakhtiyarpur, Rajendra Nagar, Patna Jn., Danapur, Ara, Buxar Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Jn. & Banaras Stations

08791/08792 Durg-Varanasi-Durg Kumbh Special Train						02 Trips		
Train No	o. 08791		⊥ STATIONS ↑	Train No. 08792				
ARR. DEP.		STATIUNS		ARR.	DEP.			
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08253/08254 Bilaspur -Varanasi-Bilaspur Kumbh Special Train					
Train No	o. 08253	L STATIONS †	Train No. 0825		
ARR.	DEP.		ARR.	DEP.	
	08:15	Bilaspur Jn.	10:40		
10:00		Varanasi		10:50	

Days of run : 08253 Ex. Bilaspur Jn. on 22.02.2025 (Saturday) and 08254 Ex. Varanasi on 24.02.2025 (Monday) Composition: 2 Tier AC, 3 Tier AC, Sleeper and General Stoppages: Raipur Jn., Durg, Rajnandgaon, Gondia Jn., Balaghat Jn. Nainpur Jn., Jabalpur Jn., Katni Jn., Maihar, Satna Jn., Manikpur Jn. Prayagraj Chheoki, Mirzapur and Chunar Jn. Stations.

For any kind of information, passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App.



SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

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कार्यालय अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, चतुर्थ वृत्त,

लोक निर्माण विभाग, रूद्रपुर (ऊधमसिंह नगर)



Govt to infuse ₹500 Crore in IFCI to improve its financial health

PTI 📕 NEW DELHI

The government has decided to infuse Rs 500 crore capital in state-owned IFCI to improve its financial health ahead of the company's proposed restructuring and consolidation into a group.

With the infusion, the government of India's holding in the company is expected to further increase from existing 71.72 per cent as on September 2024.

The capital infusion plan for IFCI was approved through the passage of the first Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 in Lok Sabha last week

The Supplementary Demand for Grants for 2024-25 made an allocation for an additional amount of Rs 499.99 crore for 'Subscription to the Share Capital of Industrial Finance Corporation of India (IFCI). "Taking into account savings of Rs 50.07 crore available in the same section of the grant, the remaining amount of Rs 449.92 crore will be met from surrender of savings available in the capital section of Demand No.30-DEA and it will not entail any additional cash outgo," the Supplementary Demand for Grants said



issuance of equity shares to the government.

The Industrial Finance Corporation of India was set up by the government on July 1, 1948 as the first Development Financial Institution in the country.

In the second quarter ended September 2024, IFCI had booked a loss of Rs 22 crore and in the first half of FY24, a loss to the tune of Rs 170 crore.

Earlier this year, IFCI had raised Rs As part of the revival and 500 crore capital through the restructuring, the Department of

Financial Services (DFS), Ministry of Finance, last month in-principle approved 'Consolidation of IFCI Group which entails merger/amalgamation of IFCI and StockHolding Limited Corporation of India Limited and

other group companies. As per the proposal, StockHolding Corporation of India Ltd, IFCI Factors Ltd, IFCI Infrastructure Development Ltd and IIDL Realtors Ltd will merge with IFCI Ltd. Further, StockHolding Services Ltd,

IFCI Financial Services Ltd, IFIN Commodities Ltd and IFIN Credit Ltd will be merged into a single entity, which will be a direct subsidiary of the consolidated listed entity

entity. Additionally, StockHolding Document Management Services Ltd, StockHolding Securities IFSC Ltd, IFIN Securities Finance Ltd, IFCI Venture Capital Funds Ltd and MPCON Ltd shall be direct subsidiaries of the consolidated listed ontity, that is LFCI entity that is IFCI.

Established in 1948 as a statutory corporation, IFCI currently has many subsidiaries and joint ventures and associates under its fold. By the early 1990s, it was recognised

that there was a need for greater flexibility to respond to the changing financial system. It was also felt that IFCI should directly access the capital markets for its funding needs. It is with this objective that the constitution of IFCI was changed in 1993 from a statutory corporation to company under the Indian Companies Act, 1956.

Subsequently, the name of the company was also changed to 'IFCI Ltd' with effect from October 1999. However in 2015, the government again raised its stake in the firm to over 51 per cent, making it a public sector company.

FPIs pull out equities worth ₹976 Crore this week amid rising dollar

PTI 📕 NEW DELHI

A fter two weeks of buying, FPIs turned net sellers in Indian equities this week, with a net withdrawal of Rs 976 crore amid a strengthening US dollar and steady rise in US 10-year bond yields, impacting investor sentiment. Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) began the week on a positive note, investing Rs 3,126 crore in equities during the first two trading sessions (December 16-20).

However, the trend reversed in the latter half of the week, with FPIs offloading equities worth over Rs 4,102 crore in the subsequent three sessions. This resulted in an overall net outflow of Rs 976 crore during the week, data from National Securities Depository Limited showed.

this short-term Despite the reversal, broader December trend remains positive. FPIs have infused Rs 21,789 crore into Indian equities so far this month, reflecting continued confidence in India's economic growth potential and its

resilient markets. FPIs adopted a cautious approach due to the US Fed meeting and uncertainty about



its outcome and future policy direction, said Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India

While the Fed cut interest rates by 25 bps for the third time this year, it signalled fewer rate cuts in the future, dampening investor sentiment and triggering global market sell-offs, he added.

Additionally, factors like high valuations, weak corporate earnings for the September expectations quarter, of subdued results for December, rising inflation, slower GDP growth, and a depreciating rupee have further weighed on investor confidence, he noted. "Rising US dollar (dollar index

above 108) and steady increase in the US 10-year bond yields to 4.5 per cent contributed to the FPIs selling.

"India-specific issues like slowing growth concerns and flat corporate earnings in Q2 also contributed to the FPIs selling. The strength of the US economy, good corporate earnings growth, and strong dollar are factors favouring the US," VK Vijayakumar, Čhief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

FPI selling has brought down the prices of certain large-cap segments, such as banking, making valuations more attractive. Investors can take advantage of this market downturn to invest in quality large caps.

Front-running case: Sebi bans nine entities from Leather exports likely to grow by over 12 **Akasa Air expects** to add few more market, impounds illegal gains of over ₹21 Crore per cent to USD 5.3 bn this fiscal: CLE

PTI NEW DELHI

The country's leather and footwear exports are expected to grow by over 12 per cent to USD 5.3 billion in the current financial year on account of healthy demand in key global markets, CLE Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan has said.

He also said several global companies, including from the US, are showing keen interest in setting manufacturing bases India.

"Our exports were USD 4.69 billion in 2023-24, and this fiscal, we are expecting it to increase to USD 5.3 billion. Order books are good for the coming months," Jalan said, adding that "huge demand is coming from the US and UK"

exporters Indian are business exploring opportunities in Africa as well, he added.

He informed that the inter isive providing employment to about 42 lakh people. The sector has a total turnover of about USD 19 billion, which includes exports of USD 5 billion. "The sector has the potential



which includes the domestic finished leather," Jalan said. Talking about the sector, production of USD 25 billion and export turnover of USD Kanpur-based 13.7 billion," Jalan said. International Yadvendra Singh Sachan said He also requested the government that the that for Indian exports, the US and EU markets are roduction - Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) be recording healthy growth extended to the sector as it rates. will help achieve the USD 47 "I request the domestic billion export target and industry to work on increasing scale as it will create additional jobs for -8 lakh neor about 7 When asked about Budget expectations, he said the council has urged the finance ministry to consider removing export duty on wet blue and crust from 20 per cent at present. "We have also requested to



Markets regulator Sebi has uncovered a frontrunning scheme involving PNB MetLife India Insurance Company equity dealer Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight dealer other entities, who generated illegal gains of Rs 21.16 crore. The front-running by these entities continued for more than three years.

Sebi, through an interim order, prohibited Sachin Bakul Dagli and eight other entities from the securities market and impounded the unlawful gains made by them. In a statement on Sunday, PNB MetLife stated that it has fully cooperated with Sebi in the investigation and taken disciplinary action against the individual involved. "In line with our internal

was to ascertain whether the suspected entity(ies) had front-run the trades of Big Client in connivance with other entities, including dealers and/or fund managers, if any, and thereby violated the provisions of the SEBI's PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) rules and SEBI Act. The investigation period has been taken from January 1, Distributors Pvt. (WDPL) 2021, to July 19, 2024. In its and Pragnesh Sanghvi.



accessed confidential, nonpublic information about impending trade orders of PNB MetLife and Investec's institutional clients.

They used this information to make trading decisions and shared it with Sandeep Shambharkar, who executed front-running trades through the accounts of Dhanmata Realty Pvt. (DRPL), Worthy

investigation, Ssbi found that Directors of DRPL and most of the trading decisions WDPL, including Arpan Kirtikumar Shah, Kabita Saha, and Jignesh Nikulbhai Dabhi, were also involved in planes this fiscal PTI NEW DELHI

Unfair Trade Practices (PFUTP) Regulations, Regulations, resulting in unlawful profits. Trades were executed using non-public information shared via chat platforms. A Buy-Buy-Sell or Sell-Sell-Buy trading pattern was used to profit from market movements caused by large client trades.

"Altogether, 6,766 instances of such front-running trades were observed in the account of DRPL, WDPL and Pragnesh Sanghvi and resultantly, unlawful gains of Rs 21,15,78,005 were made by these entities," Sebi noted. The front-running activities

through the accounts of suspected entities DRPL, WDPL and Pragnesh Sanghvi have continued for a significantly long period of more than three years, it added. Accordingly, Sebi has restrained these entities "from buying, selling or dealing in securities, either directly or indirectly, in any manner further orders". Additionally, "an amount of Rs 21,15,78,005 being the total unlawful gains earned from the alleged front running activities, is impounded, jointly and severally" from the nine entities, the regulator said.

PTI NEW DELHI

framework,

Arguing

Development

Tndustry body CII has

proposed reforms in India's

Priority Sector Lending (PSL)

inclusion of emerging sectors

and high-impact sectors like

digital infrastructure, green

initiatives, healthcare, and

that

Institutions (DFIs) like SIDBI

and NaBFID (National Bank

for Financing Infrastructure

and Development) have their

roles cut out as they have

earmarked sectors to finance,

the chamber also suggested setting up of a high level committee to look at the

revision of PSL norms and

explore the need for any new

DFIs to cater to some of the

new and emerging sectors.

innovative manufacturing.

suggesting

current

Finance

 $A^{kasa\ Air\ is\ in\ continuous}_{discussions\ with\ Boeing} on\ aircraft\ deliveries\ and$ expects to add a few more planes to its fleet in the current fiscal ending March 2025, the airline's chief Vinay Dube has said. The carrier, which started flying in August 2022,

currently has a fleet of 26 Boeing 737 MAX planes and 200 aircraft are on order. In a recent interview to PTI, Dube said that 2024 has been a good year for the airline and

will continue to build on it in 2025On the service excellence we

have provided, I think consumers look at Akasa as being a kind and gentler airline, little more empathetic. We will continue to treat our travellers in a kind, gentle manner," he said and added that the airline also continues to make sure its employees fee loved respected. Earlier this month, some pilots flagged concerns about alleged training and safety issues, and the airline had rejected them as baseless and untrue. This year, the carrier has inducted 4 planes into its fleet.

processes, we have taken disciplinary action. PNB MetLife is committed to upholding the highest standards of corporate governance tr

to reach a total turnover of USD 47 billion by 2030, remove import duty on

shipments," he said. Sachan suggested that there is a need to brand Indian leather goods in the global and domestic markets. On challenges, he said the industry has to work on adequate skilled labour and design development.

urther

Growmore

Ltd MD

boost

and integrity," the statement noted.

Sebi had conducted an examination into the suspected front running of the trades undertaken by the Big Client, PNB Metlife Índia Insurance, by certain entities. The focus of the investigation

Metlife PNB were in delegated to Sachin Dagli for execution.

The regulator, in interim passed on Friday, noted that Sachin Bakul Dagli (equity dealer, PNB MetLife) and his brother Tejas Dagli (equity Investec) sales trader,

facilitating this scheme. This group colluded to create and execute a fraudulent front-running scheme, violating the SEBI Act and Prohibition of Fraudulent and

Mcap of top-10 most India has potential to be key sustainable CII seeks reforms in valued firms slumps aviation fuel producer, says IATA official India's priority sector ₹4.95 lakh Crore lending framework



PTI NEW DELH

The combined market valuation of all the top-10 most valued firms plunged Rs 4,95,061 crore last week, in line with a bearish trend in Tata equities, where Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries faced the sharpest erosion Last week, the BSE benchmark tanked 4,091.53 points or 4.98

per cent. The Indian equity market recorded its steepest weekly decline since June 2022, with the Nifty losing 4.77 per cent. The week began with the US Federal Reserve's

which announcement, significantly altered market sentiment

"Led by Chair Jerome Powell, the Federal Reserve revised its outlook to only two rate cuts in 2025 instead of the previously anticipated four. This shift in policy dampened market confidence," Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) slumped Rs 1,10,550.66 crore to Rs 15,08,036.97 crore. The valuation of Reliance tumbled Industries Rs to Rs 91,140.53 crore 16,32,004.17 crore. HDFC Bank's market

eroded valuation by Rs Rs 76,448.71 crore to 13,54,709.35 crore and that of Bharti Airtel tanked Rs 59,055.42 crore to Rs 8,98,786.98 crore.

The mcap of State Bank of India plunged Rs 43,909.13 crore to Rs 7,25,125.38 crore and that of ICICI Bank diminished by Rs 41,857.33 crore to Rs 9,07,449.04 crore. The valuation of Infosys plummeted Rs 32,300.2 crore to Rs 7,98,086.90 crore and that of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) fell by Rs 20,050.25 crore to Rs 5,69,819.04 crore. Hindustan Unilever's mcap declined by Rs 12,805.27 crore to Rs 5,48,617.81 crore and that of ITC went lower by Rs 6,943.5

crore to Rs 5,81,252.32 crore. In the ranking of the top-10 firms, Reliance Industries retained the most valued firm title followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, State Bank of India, ITC, LIC and Hindustan Unilever.

PTI GENEVA/NEW DELHI

India has the potential to be La key producer of sustainable aviation fuel by utilising its ethanol supplies and availability of lipids feedstocks like non-edible industrial oils, according to a senior official at the global airlines' grouping IATA.

With decarbonisation in focus, efforts are being made to reduce emissions and over the years, Indian carriers have operated some flights with a blend of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and traditional Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF). Hemant Mistry, Director of Net Zero Transition at the International Air Transport Association (IATA), said the ecosystem for SAF has developed but there is more work to be done.

"There are some very good opportunities for India right now. One is in terms of SAF feedstocks like agricultural waste... There is a growing understanding on what to do for SAF production. We are talking to a number of companies to understand how we can collaborate... Oil companies," Mistry told PTI in a recent interview in Geneva

International Air The Transport Association (IATA) represents around 340 airlines, including Indian carriers, that account for more



than 80 per cent of the global air traffic

"India, the third largest ethanol producer and consumer today, has the potential to emerge as a key SAF producer utilising its existing and advanced ethanol supplies.

"At IATA, we see sustainable, low-carbon-intensity ethanol as a promising feedstock to propel India's aviation sector growth," Mistry said.

This year, global SAF production is estimated at 1 million tonnes (1.3 billion litres), lower than the earlier projection of 1.5 million tonnes (1.9 billion litres) but higher than the volume of 0.5 million tonnes (600 million litres) recorded in 2023, according to IATA.

As the aviation sector pursues efforts ambitious for decarbonisation, IATA has

said SAF production growth is disappointingly slow. While noting that India is

poised to emerge as the world's third largest aviation market, Mistry said there is also the opportunity for the country to emerge as a SAF hub in the region.

nub in the region. "The position can be further strengthened by the early adoption of innovative global accounting practices where India's SAF supplies can cater to the global aviation market, a true mark of act local, think global" he noted global," he noted. India is one of the world'

fastest growing civil aviation markets and airlines are expanding their fleets as well as networks to cater to the rising traffic demand.

On mandating use of SAF, Mistry pointed out that the mandate is a work for scale but that can only come later.

"You can't have a mandate without technology maturity. That is a big risk

In 2025, IATA expects SAF production to touch 2.1 million tonnes (2.7 billion litres).

India has the availability of lipids feedstocks like nonedible industrial oils, animal fats and tallows where the supply chains are not well developed with limited supply for biodiesel production, Mistry said. The country's surplus annual

biomass availability is estimated to be more than 200 Mt.

based feedstock must be used for India's SAF value chains. These oily feedstocks can be utilised at existing refineries by ASTM-qualified HEFA coprocessing pathways, Mistry said. Consultancy Deloitte, in a report in October this year, said India has the potential to produce 8-10 million tonnes of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) by 2040, and investments worth USD 70-85 billion will be required to achieve the projected production.

On the priorities under the SAF umbrella, Mistry said it is question about more support to get the technologies to maturity and enable some sort of market development.

contributing to the socioeconomic growth underserved areas.

Despite its massive success, the PSL framework requires recalibration to relevant. This regular remain recalibration is essential to ensure that the financial resources are optimally distributed, in harmony with our vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, CII stated.

For instance, while agriculture contributes 14 per cent of the GDP today, its PSL allocation remains at 18 per cent, unchanged from when its GDP share exceeded 30 per cent.

Similarly, sectors like infrastructure and innovative manufacturing lack adequate PSL focus despite their potential to drive economic growth, the chamber pointed

Banerjee

"Sectors like

Priority Sector Lending is a policy tool aimed at ensuring out. Chandrajit remarked, that key sectors crucial to the nation's development receive agriculture have reduced adequate financial support. Mandated by the Reserve contribution to GDP from 30 per cent in 1990s to about 14 Bank of India (RBI), PSL per cent now. obligates banks to allocate a Hence, it is time that Priority Sector Lending (PSL) framework be reviewed every specified proportion of their loans to sectors such as agriculture, 3-4 years to align based on education, emerging priorities and PSL housing, and small

industries. The framework ensures equitable credit distribution,

allocations should be in line with GDP contributions and sectoral growth potential.

With multiple options available for road fleets, lipids-

the pioneer

SMART SNACKING FOR THE CHILLS

vivacity VPPDSS11

Mindful snacking can keep you satisfied, nourish your body, and help you avoid unhealthy choices if you embrace nutritious options like pecans to indulge wisely and guilt-free, writes **KAVITA** DEVGAN

inter is here, and so is the temptation to indulge in comforting treats! With the chilly weather encouraging cosy evenings and festive gatherings, snacking often takes center stage. But mindless munching, especially on unhealthy snacks, can derail your health and lead to unwanted weight gain. Instead of avoiding snacks altogether, the key is to snack smart and make choices that nourish your body while satisfying your cravings.

WHY SMART SNACKING MATTERS

Snacking isn't inherently bad—it's what and how you snack that matters. Smart snacking can fill nutritional gaps, keep hunger in check, and even prevent overeating during main meals. On the other hand, poor choices, like fried or sugary snacks, can add empty calories, lead to guilt, and make staying healthy during the season difficult.

SMART SNACKING RULES

PLAN YOUR SNACKS: Snacks aren't extras-they should be part of your daily meal plan. Choose nutrient-rich options that complement your meals. A great addition to your winter snack list is American pecans. Packed with over 19 vitamins and minerals, they're now easily available in India and are a nutritious, satisfying option. MIND PORTION SIZES:

Snacking isn't feasting. A proper snack should be small but fulfilling. For instance, 30 grams of pecans (about 19 halves) offer 200 calories, 3 grams of protein, and fibre to keep you satiated

SATISFY YOUR CRAVINGS THOUGHTFULLY: Identify what

sweet—and choose a healthier alternative. If you love crunchy snacks, roasted pecans are an excellent choice. They retain their nutritional profile and are rich in antioxidants, even after SNACK TO CURB HUNGER, NOT

BOREDOM: Snack mindfully when you're hungry, not out of habit or boredom. Avoid overindulging and you're craving-crunchy, salty, or balance high-calorie snacks with

roasting



lighter choices during other meals. A handful of pecans paired with fresh fruits can be a delicious and balanced winter snack.

BE PREPARED: Keep healthy snacks handy-store nuts in your bag, desk drawer, or even your car. Pecans are a fantastic non-perishable option for when hunger strikes unexpectedly. This way, you'll avoid grabbing unhealthy, convenient options.



□ Roasted pecans can be your go-to snack for cosy evenings. They're also perfect for hosting guests during winter celebrations.

Looking for gifting ideas? Ditch traditional sweets and consider gifting American pecans. They're healthy, innovative, and sure to be appreciated by health-conscious friends and family.

SIMPLE WAYS TO ROAST PECANS

BASIC ROAST □ Spread pecans evenly on a baking

sheet. □ Bake at 180°C for 7–10 minutes, stirring occasionally for even roasting. SPICED ROAST

□ Toss pecans with a mix of olive oil, paprika, and a pinch of salt. Roast at 180°C for 10 minutes for a

flavourful twist.

This winter, embrace mindful snacking by making smart choices like pecans. The author is a nutritionist and has

taken inputs from American Pecan



SPECTS OF THE ECOSYSTEMS THAT NEED TO BE PART OF THE GRID

Social norms and policies must achieve the following for a health-promoting eco-system.

Healthy Eating: Healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables in their raw forms (and cooked), cheap, nuts, seeds, pulses, whole grains, and healthy oils must be made safer, cheaper, and more readily available, accessible, and affordable across access points such as public transport, at the workplace, and in educational institutes.

Controlling portion sizes is critical. Large portions of unhealthy foods and beverages, especially at discounts, have been proven to push people to eat more.

SOLUTION TO POLLUTION

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO **COMBAT DISEASES**



By DR SHIFALIKA GOENKA

hronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and obesity are rapidly rising in India. The good news is that more than half of these conditions are preventable through actions taken through multi-sectoral policy action, simplified generic drug policies, community action, and empowered individuals.

The most potent ammunition to protect from chronic diseases is a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle consists of a diet rich in locally available and inexpensive fruits and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts, and seeds, with extreme moderation in salt and sugar, refined foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages. Additional steps include avoiding tobacco and alcohol. Exercise produces endorphins and is addictive. Leisure and physical activity should be part of everyone's life. All these require an empowered community, an enlightened individual, and an energetic polity.





Large servings, large plates, supersized meals, and bottomless drinks must be de-incentivised, and smaller portions must be incentivised. Children must be protected from unhealthy foods and beverage advertising onslaught. Also, targeting children by extolling children to persuade them into unhealthy behaviours, food, and beverages should not be allowed.

Eliminating trans fats and tobacco and decreasing artificial sugar and refined foods are universal goals from a scientific perspective.

The unorganised sector dominates the Indian food market and is pricesensitive. Lower taxes on healthy oils, higher taxes on unhealthy oils, and cheaper fresh fruits and vegetables will boost healthy food production and consumption.

Health Promoting Town Planning Critical to Healthier Communities

Scientific research shows that providing wide sidewalks, large parks, and green forests within a 0.5 km radius of every household improves health in many ways, including preventing more than 50 chronic diseases and improving mental health for the residents and families staying in the vicinity. Trees also act as natural filters, reducing air pollution and creating a healthier environment.

A study published in JACC Advances has shown that living in high-traffic, congested localities alongside highways increases the local population's blood pressure and chronic diseases. High air pollution is a public health crisis. Preventing air pollution should be a top priority across all ministries, as well as housing and development. High air pollution can shorten life- spans by 1.7 years and increase chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, lung diseases, and asthma, among those exposed to high levels of air pollution.

The holistic way to address the challenge of chronic diseases is to create a grid environment conducive to healthy eating and healthy living through multiple sectors. This leads to a healthy country, systems, societies, and happy people.

The author is the Deputy Director & Head, Health Promotion, Physical Activity & Obesity Prevention, Centre for Chronic Disease Control (CCDC)



By ARUN DUGGAL

elhi once again finds itself enveloped in a thick blanket of smog with AQI touching an AQI of 349 or 'very poor' category and hapless Delhites are turning to humorous memes for solace. One popular tweet went like this: "Time to give Delhi new namesi: Pollutyens Delhi, Haze Khas, Dhua Kuan and Chandni Choke."

Apart from the stress busting mirth, citizens of the Capital are hostage to an annualised feature when air pollution swerves between 'very poor to severe' levels as the winter sets in, leading to permanent health issues. Delhi has the unfortunate distinction of being the world's worst polluted capital city. The air is unbreathable, thanks to fully dispersed harmful pollutants - around 40% which comes from vehicular emissions. One survey pegs the financial losses to the Delhi NCR at a very conservative Rs 100 crore/day due to poor air quality.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

To be fair, the state government has tried its best. In 2001, it moved public transport to CNG as fuel, levied charges on commercial ICE vehicles, banned 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles and introduced the oddeven car numbers initiative The Delhi EV Policy was framed to encourage greater use of public transport and a viable supply-chain ecosystem through a combination of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives.

Initiatives like "Switch Delhi," unveiled in early 2021 to create mass awareness and the ongoing 'Red Light On, Gaadi Off' campaign are well intended. Yet, Delhiites continue to bear the brunt of pollution emanating from within and from nearby states.

DELHI STRUGGLES TO MEET EV TARGETS

Despite a target of 25% EVs in new vehicle registrations by 2023-24, Delhi could manage around 12% in the fiscal. While higher than other states, it's a poor record given the pollution levels. Even after compulsory scrapping of old diesel and petrol vehicles in 2021, the city still has 472 vehicles per 1,000 people. Between 2012- 2024, the share of personal vehicles registered was around 92%, but EV 4-wheelers, with just 3% share, have struggled to take off.

Regulatory action and financial incentives are inducing some growth in commercial EV segments, but this has to be accompanied by a parallel or superlative growth in personal EVs, to address the pollution crisis.

LOOK EAST, LOOK WEST

New Delhi can take a few cues from Norway and Nepal - countries that have notched up amazing results in pollution reduction and long-term environmental benefits with their commitments to EV adoption. Norway, a country with a population of 5.5 million and an oil and gas producer, has achieved a 35% reduction in C02 emissions since 2012, improving both air quality and public health. Oslo has the highest per capita number of EVs in the world due to a strict adoption target, generous tax rebates and strategic incentivisation of EV users. With EVs accounting for over 90% of its new car registrations, the world will have to scale up the EV adoption roughly as fast as Norway, if it must meet any net zero targets.

Closer home, EVs account for 50% of Nepal's overall vehicle sales (as of FY24) thanks to sustained incentives and low taxes amid a nationwide urgency to cut down energy imports. With nearly all its energy coming from renewable river-fed

hydroelectricity, Nepal is focusing on infrastructure development to support EV ownership.

REAL SOLUTION TO POLLUTION KEPT AT BAY

With the fast-growing economy creating higher disposable income for its huge middle-class, each passing year, the desire for personal mobility will always be on the rise. One perpetual casualty will be air quality. A Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) study in Delhi, Kanpur, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, and Mumbai categorically concludes that the transport sector will continue to emit most of the Nox, and around 50% of PM2.5 emissions in these cities, if we keep away from greener transportation.

Studies show that subsidies are not a magic bullet unless the switch to EV is made too good to ignore for a customer. Starting with attractive subsidies, customers can be lured by parking benefits, besides manufacturer-offered incentives for upgrades. Most importantly, a modern EV policy with a strong commitment to achieving targets from all authorities would comfort buyers in areas like charging infrastructure. Since many are not fully aware of the need to switch to EVs, regular campaigns must be undertaken. Big cities may pollute more, but smaller and emerging ones are not far behind; every year new towns in Tier 2 and Tier 3 India are making to the WHO's mostpolluted cities list. Unless there's collective will to fast-track EV adoption, Delhi's air pollution will always get tossed around in inter-state bickering and internal political rivalries with fewer solutions.

The author is the founder of Centre of Excellence for Research in Climate Change and Air Pollution, IIT Delhi



sports 12

Rohit should change his tactics, be more attacking batting at No. 6: Shastri

PTI MELBOURNE

tith skipper Rohit Sharma struggling to decipher a way to score runs in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, former India coach Ravi Shastri says the stylish batter should go in with a clear mindset, change his tactics, and attack the bowlers.

Rohit missed the opening Test Down Under to be with his family for the birth of his second child. He was expected to reclaim the opener's spot but KL Rahul's impressive 77 in India's win at Perth prompted a rejig of the batting order with Rohit moving down to No.6.

The change though has not been fruitful for Rohit as he has managed 10, 3 and 6 runs in the last three innings, while Rahul has encashed on the opportunity by notching up a fine 84 in the first innings at Brisbane in the third Test.

"I would like to see Rohit Sharma, his tactics change a bit because he can still be extremely dangerous at that number (six)," Shastri opined on ICC Review.

"I think he's got to be very clear in his mindset to go out there and take the attack to the opposition and not worry about anything the cricketer-turnedelse," commentator added.

Shastri felt Rohit should shun the defensive mindset.

The last thing you want is him to be in two minds whether to defend or attack. In his case, it should be attack. He picks up length quickly, he should take the opposition on at that number.

"Because if he gets away in the first 10-15 minutes, in any way, he's not got past that 15-20 minutes, half an hour. So why don't you play a natural game, go and take the attack to the opposition and take it from there?

Shastri felt it's the best way for



Rohit to get back into form and win games for India, adding that the best No.6 batters in the world are those who have the ability to counter-attack.

"I think that is his best way of not just coming back into form, winning a game for India as well. Because that number is a crucial number."

The best No.6s in the world are the guys who know how to have the ability to counter-attack. They read the situation well. Yes, if a lot of wickets have fallen, maybe for a little while. You might have to be circumspect, but the intent has to be far sooner than later.

"Especially when you have that kind of ability and especially when you open the batting for India and you have all the shots for Australian conditions.

Rohit had made his Test debut in 2013 at No. 6 position, marking the occasion with a century. Shastri backed Rahul to retain the opener's slot in the fourth Test following his two half-centuries so far in the five-Test series.

"I would have asked him (Rohit) to open in the last Test match (Brisbane) but then the way Rahul has batted, he was a joy to watch and the way he's batting, I believe he struck a purple patch," Shastri said.

"It could be a position he might just want to keep and enhance the way he's playing because his technique was faultless," said Shastri.

The former India captain said Rahul was currently at the top of his game and his confidence level

too was very high. "The way he left the ball, the way he allowed the ball to come onto the bat, some of his cover drives were as good as any played by anyone in world cricket at the moment. And so I think when there's that much confidence there, you know, let it be?



Wasn't looking to save the follow-on that day in Brisbane: Akash Deep

PTI MELBOURNE

Akash Deep and Jasprit Bumrah saved India the blushes during the Brisbane Test with a resolute 10th wicket partnership but the rookie pacer on Sunday said his focus was on wholesome contribution to the team rather than looking to "merely save the follow-on." With the Indian batters, barring KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, failing once again, the obstinate 47-run partnership between Bumrah and Akash took India past the follow-on mark during the Gabba Test, which ended in a draw. "We come to bat lower down

the order, so contributions of 20-25-30 runs are very valuable. My mindset is just

Joe Root returns to England's ODI squad for India tour, Champions Trophy

Veteran batter Joe Root's V return to 50-over format after more than a year headlined England's squad announcement for the ODI tour to India and the ICC Champions Trophy.

Root's previous assignment in the format was the 50-over World Cup held in India in

All-rounder and Test skipper Ben Stokes was not considered for selection as he has been recovering from a left hamstring injury sustained during the third Test against New Zealand

Seasoned batter Jos Buttler

(Melbourne) is very important for both the Women's players arrested over racist incident in Brazil soccer semifinal

Smith, whom he troubled no

PTI LONDON

2023.

earlier this month.

will lead the side, and the Lancashire man will also captain England in the T20I series against India, which precedes the ODIs. England will play five T20Is and three ODIs during the

teams. Akash did not feature in the playing XI for the first two Tests against Australia but made his way into the team for the third Test. The 28-year-old gave a good account himself, and was unlucky to miss out on the wicket of veteran batter Steve

"If you look at it, it's 50-50,

even though we were behind in the last match. But the

confidence we built on the last day, we still have that

confidence. So, I can say it's

50-50, and this Test match

AP SAO PAULO end. $F_{\text{players were arrested by}}^{\text{our River Plate women's}}$ The pacer, who is playing on foreign soil for the first time, Sao Paulo police and accused revealed tips from Bumrah helped



white ball tour to India. Leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed, who made his Test debut against India earlier this year, was included in the T20I squad

In-form Harry Brook will get another chance to play international bilateral cricket in India after pulling out of the Test series earlier this year due to personal reasons.

England ODI squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Joe Root, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.

England T20I squad: Jos Buttler (Captain), Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Ben Duckett, Jamie Overton, Jamie Smith, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Saqib Mahmood, Phil Salt, Mark Wood.

India vs England Schedule: T20I: 1st T20I: January 22, Eden Gardens, Kolkata. 2nd T20I: January 25, MA Chidambaram Stadium,

Chennai. 3rd T20I: January 28, Niranjan Shah Stadium, Rajkot.

4th T20I: January 31, MCA Stadium, Pune. 5th T20I: February

Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai ODIs: 1st ODI: February 6, VCA

Stadium, Nagpur. 2nd ODI: February 9. Barabati Stadium, Cuttack. 3rd ODI: February 12, Narendra Modi Stadium,

'The organisation reaffirms

its anti-racist stance and

emphasises that it will never

tolerate such incidents?

porting its player

would file a police report.

Ahmedabad.

Atletico Madrid stuns Barcelona 8 2-

AP MADRID

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone ran down the touchline in joy while Barcelona players sunk to the turf in dismay.

Super sub Alexander Sørloth struck again deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona and ensure Atletico will spend La Liga's short winter break on top of the table. Atletico's 12th straight win in all competitions lifted it three

points above Barcelona. Barcelona has only two wins in its last nine games and could find itself third on Sunday if Real Madrid beats Sevilla.

Simeone, coaching Atletico Grêmio said on X it was since winning at Barcelona for the first time

fashion in the 57th when he lobbed the goalkeeper but the ball came off the crossbar. Robert Lewandowski got to the rebound but sent it onto the head of Axel Witsel, who needed treatment.

Barcelona was made to rue its missed opportunities when Atletico levelled just three minutes later, partly thanks to a defensive blunder.

Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó tried to clear Julián Álvarez's cross but passed it straight to Rodrigo De Paul, who fired into the bottom right corner. Casadó put his hands to his head and dropped to his knees in dismay.

to contribute. I wasn't looking to save the follow-on that day; I was just looking not to get out. My mindset was this, God willing, we were able to save the followon," Akash told reporters here.

Akash smashed Pat Cummins for a four to avoid the follow-on as the Indian dressing room broke into celebrations on day four.

"When you save the match from such a situation, the entire team gets the confidence and our dressing room reflected just that. Everyone was having fun and enjoying?

Salvaging a draw after being on the brink of losing in Brisbane, the Indian team is now filled with confidence, feels Akash.

"This is my first time playing in Australia. Jassi bhai keeps on telling us things about how we can go about our job; it makes our job easy.' "He told me one thing,

'Don't get too excited. Just focus on your discipline. How you go about your job in Indian conditions, repeat

that here.' He told me just this? Short-pitched balls against Head: Akash

Travis Head continues to be a thorn in India's flesh. After being dismissed for 11 in his first innings of the series, he has gone on to score 89, 140 and 152 in his next three

outings. Obviously, he did not detail the plans, but hinted at a bouncer strategy against the left-hander.

of mak public Paulo's security told secretariat The Associated Press.

On Friday, a Brazil Ladies Cup soccer semifinal between Argentina's River Plate and Brazilian team Grêmio was stopped in the first half after River Plate's Candela Díaz was accused of making monkey gestures to a ball boy, according to broadcast footage and local media reports.

Díaz was detained along with teammates Juana Cangaro, Milagros Naiquen Diaz, and Camila Ayelen Duarte, the players' lawyer, Thais Sankari, told The AP. They remained in custody on Saturday. Sankari said the River Plate players reacted only after

being provoked. "We see in this decision a

Saturday.

field.

immediately

ban

great arbitrariness and the Brazilian judiciary's desire to send a message. They used the tournament final on this case for that purpose," Sunday. she said. The

After Díaz's gestures on Friday, the Grêmio players walked off in protest. The referee showed red cards to six River Plate players following an on-field fight and ended the match because there was no longer the minimum number of players required to continue.

The score was 1-1 but the

'We regret what happened and condemn discriminatory acts," the team said in the statement. Grêmio coach Thaissan Passos said her players told

her River Plate players had called them previously referee awarded the match to monkevs. "Incidents like this cannot Grêmio, which will play in

keep happening. How long will we keep pretending racism doesn't exist?" she told Brazil Ladies Cup banned River Plate from the local broadcaster SporTV. tournament for two years on Díaz has not commented

publicly

River Plate also condemned Tournament organizers said in a statement on Saturday the discriminatory gestures. that future editions will The club said in a statement on X it was "taking the appropriate disciplinary any participating team whose measures and will continue athletes or staff "engage in racist gestures on the playing working to eradicate such behavior.

"We finally did it," Atletico any goalkeeper Jan Oblak said. We are playing well, we started poorly but we knew our chances would come. And in the last minute came through. Sørloth Thanks to him we finally won here. He is the striker we needed."

> It was a much more impressive performance from Barcelona, which dominated for long periods and took a deserved lead in the 30th minute.

Pedri started and ended the move, playing a one-two with Gavi, and firing an angled shot into the bottom right corner. Raphinha almost doubled

Barcelona's lead in stunning

stoppage Nahuel Molina made a fantastic run to latch onto a through ball and cross in for Sørloth to fire into the back of the net.

Worse was to come for

Barcelona as, in the sixth

minute of

It was Sørloth's eighth goal of the season, five of them after

he's come off the bench. BILBAO'S UNBEATEN RUN Athletic Bilbao came from behind to beat Osasuna 2-1 and extend its unbeaten run to 14 matches and remain just

five points behind Atletico. Gorka Guruzeta and Alex Berenguer sealed the comeback win for fourthplaced Bilbao after Lucas Torro gave Osasuna a 25th-

minute lead at El Sadar. Guruzeta headed Bilbao level in the 31st and Berenguer struck the winner in the 74th. Mallorca won at Getafe 1-0

and moved up to fifth.

Manchester City crisis deepens after lossing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League

AP MANCHESTER

Manchester City's stunning slump deepened after losing to Aston Villa 2-1 in the Premier League.

Goals from Jhon Duran and Morgan Rogers at Villa Park consigned the four-time defending champion to a ninth defeat in 12 games in a season unravelling. Pep that is Guardiola's team has won just once during that run.

"We don't have a defense for the results. They are not good," Guardiola said

Third-placed Arsenal closed the gap on league leader Liverpool to three points with a 5-1 win at Crystal Palace, but has played two games more.

City dropped to sixth in the standings, nine points below Liverpool, and has played two games more. "It's about what I can do with my

people to get the results back and continue," Guardiola said. "If there is a moment that I cannot until February. Guardiola also lost overthink, it is right now. Try to

and give certainty to the team." TITLE HOPES FADING

After winning six titles in seven years and an unprecedented four in a row, City's remarkable fall shows little sign of stopping. Guardiola admitted last week he had not been good enough to turn his team's form around.

City was without a win in any of its last eight away games in all competitions. While it looks unlikely to win a fifth straight title, a place in the top four and Champions League qualification could also be in jeopardy after fourth-placed Nottingham Forest won at Brentford 2-0 to move four points clear of City.

Only once under Guardiola has City managed to win the title when losing six times in the league. That was in 2021, when it lost two of its last three games, having already been confirmed as the champion.

City lost nine times when Liverpool won the title in 2020, but its sixth defeat didn't come six times in his first season in be simple, stick to my principles English soccer in 2016-17 and



City finished third. The latest defeat could have been

even more emphatic from a many starts in the 16th minute dominant Villa, which moved up from Rogers' assist. Duran had a in the 65th.

goal disallowed for offside in the second half and Rogers hit the post before doubling Villa's lead

Phil Foden pulled a goal back for and Declan Rice also scored for City in stoppage time, but it wasn't enough to spark a late comeback.

'We have to stay positive, even though it's difficult, and we have to keep working hard," City striker Erling Haaland said. JESUS STREAK

It's five goals in a week for Gabriel Jesus against Crystal Palace. After scoring a hat trick in Arsenal's 3-2 comeback win against Palace in the English League Cup quarterfinals on Wednesday, the Brazil striker hit another two goals when the teams met again on Saturday. Going into Wednesday's game,

Jesus had only scored once for Arsenal since the end of January. Jesus struck twice in a frantic start at Selhurst Park. He opened the scoring in the sixth, with Ismaila Sarr leveling five minutes later. Jesus restored Arsenal's lead n the 14th and was denied back-toback hat tricks when hitting the post and then having another close range effort saved by Palace goalkeeper Dean Henderson. Kai Havertz, Gabriel Martinelli Arsenal.

FOREST FLYING HIGH

If City's demise is a surprise story of the season, so is Forest's rise. After battling relegation for much of last term, Forest is in contention to qualify for the Champions League and possibly more.

Facing a Brentford team that was unbeaten at home, goals from Ola Aina and Anthony Elanga secured another statement win on the road for Nuno Espirito Santo's side, having already won at Anfield and Old Trafford this vear.

ÍSAK TREBLE

Alexander Isak hit a hat trick in Newcastle's 4-0 win at Ipswich. The Sweden international, who has 10 goals in his last 11 games, wrapped up his treble inside 54 minutes at Portman Road, including one in the opening minute. Jacob Murphy also scored.

Brighton was 1-0 up at West Ham through Mats Wieffer, but Mohammed Kudus levelled for the draw.

to fifth. Duran scored his sixth goal in as