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Delhi LG cracks whip on illegal immigrants

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena has issued instructions to District Magistrates and the Commissioner of Police to identify illegal immigrants in Delhi, and take action in coordination with the Central government. "Lieutenant Governor's attention has been drawn to reports on social media and other reliable sources that there is a sudden spurt in the number of illegal immigrants in Delhi. There is also a rise in encroachment by such people on public roads, footpaths, parks etc," stated an official letter from LG's office. The letter has been forwarded by the LG's Principal Secretary to the Chief Secretary of Delhi, Commissioner of Police, Commissioner of Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Chairman of New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC). A senior official from the MCD told The Pioneer that in light of the letter, a drive will be carried out to identify and evict such people from the land belonging to the MCD, and any illegal immigrants will be reported to the law enforcement agency. According to reports, at least 20,000 Rohingyas are registered in India with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, also known as the UN Refugee Agency) and an estimated 1,100 such people live in New Delhi, including at the Kalindi Kunj camp in South-east Delhi. Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, due early next year, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders in Delhi have been accusing the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of "patronising the Rohingyas and Bangladeshi living illegally in the city and gaining votes from them". The LG's letter also mentioned that many illegal migrants are being given various



FILE PHOTO

ID cards in Delhi, and this has the potential to impact electoral politics, "there are reports that efforts are underway for getting their identity documents such as Aadhar, Election Identity Card, etc, prepared on the basis of fake documents and adopting a manipulative process." It added that these documents are being claimed as citizenship documents by the illegal immigrants. "Election Identity Card, if issued to illegal immigrants, provides them the most powerful right of democracy i.e. Right to Vote in our country. Giving such rights to illegal immigrants cannot be accepted by any Indian Citizen and such moves can even be detrimental to National security," the letter stated. The letter added that the Chief Secretary may issue instructions to District Magistrates through Divisional Commissioner to exercise extra caution in verification of people applying for identity documents. "Separately, Commissioner Police may also issue instructions to field level officials to be extra vigilant

specially while undertaking inspections of squatters along road side and on vacant Government land," it stated, adding that Delhi Police shall conduct a special drive for one month for identification of illegal immigrants and take further action in coordination with central agencies. "All government agencies should also ensure that no unauthorised occupation of public places takes place anywhere in the city as directed by the Supreme Court of India," the letter read. Reacting to the LG's direction, Delhi BJP accused the AAP of viewing it through a political lens. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva stated that previously, encroachments on Delhi's footpaths and around parks were mostly done by hawkers, but in recent months, Resident Welfare Associations and trade organisations have consistently drawn attention to encroachments by Rohingyas and others, who have been settling along roadsides and in parks. "During this period, both small and large criminal incidents have occurred on the streets of Delhi, and in light of this, Delhi's

Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena has directed the Police Commissioner to take action. It is unfortunate that the AAP is politicising the serious issue of encroachments by Rohingyas and others, which is related to the security of Delhi and the BJP strongly condemns this," he said. Reacting to the letter by the LG, the AAP claimed that the BJP is merely using the issue of illegal immigrants for political gains. "A thorough investigation should be launched on how illegal immigrants are entering our country in the first place. For this, the direct responsibility lies with Amit Shah, and the Union Home Ministry," the party said in a statement. It asked that if there are illegal immigrants, how many are there? "This is a massive failure, and the lack of action on detentions highlights it further," they claimed. Further, Delhi's ruling party claimed that while on one hand, the BJP is granting citizenship to illegal immigrants, and on the other, it is staging a farce of an investigation. "The BJP must stop

this hypocrisy and put a rest to its dirty politics," the AAP said. On November 12, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided multiple locations in poll-bound Jharkhand, apart from West Bengal, in a money laundering investigation linked to alleged illegal infiltration of Bangladeshi nationals, official sources said. A total of 17 places were raided in the two neighbouring states by the Ranchi office of the federal probe agency, a day before the first phase of polling in Jharkhand. Visuals of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel positioned outside a hotel located on Bariatu Road in Ranchi and a resort in the city were captured by media teams as ED teams scoured for documents, ledger entries and financial records inside. It was in September that the ED had filed a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to probe an instance of alleged infiltration, and trafficking of some Bangladeshi women into Jharkhand leading to the generation of alleged slush funds. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders had also accused the State Government of aiding such infiltration leading to the altering of the demographic landscape of the tribal-dominated areas of Santal Pargana and Kolhan regions during the recent poll campaign. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday accused the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led coalition of converting Jharkhand into a 'dharma-shala' for Rohingyas and Bangladeshi infiltrators. Earlier this week, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had announced that a committee would be formed, if the BJP is voted to power in Jharkhand, to identify and drive out infiltrators from the state besides reclaiming land grabbed by them.



Representative Image

BCCI stumps PCB dream of Champions Trophy visiting POK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Friday strongly objected to Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) move to take the Champions Trophy for a tour of the disputed 'Pakistan Occupied Kashmir' (POK), prompting the global body International Cricket Council (ICC) to put the promotional event on hold. The tournament, last played in 2017, is already in limbo after the BCCI officially intimated ICC about the Indian cricket team's inability to travel to Pakistan. The PCB in return, as of now, has rejected the proposed 'Hybrid Model' with India playing its matches in Dubai. The schedule has also been put on hold and the new controversy could only make things ugly. It is learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Friday spoke to the top brass of the ICC and condemned this move by Pakistan and has urged the global body to take strong note. "The BCCI secretary, after it came to his notice, called up the ICC and was extremely critical of

PCB's move to conduct a Trophy tour of multiple cities which fall under Pakistan Occupied Kashmir," a senior BCCI official privy to the development said according to reports, adding, "He has urged the ICC to take strong action. As far as Islamabad is concerned, there is no issue but there can't be any Trophy tour to POK." The Trophy Tour is part of the global body's promotional campaign, involving visits to multiple cities as per discussions between the international body and the host country. However, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), without prior consultation with all stakeholders, announced on its official social media that the Trophy would be taken to Skardu, Murree, and Hunza, areas that fall under the disputed territory. "Get ready, Pakistan! The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 trophy tour kicks off in Islamabad on 16 November, also visiting scenic travel destinations like Skardu, Murree, Hunza and Muzaffarabad. Catch a glimpse of the trophy which Sarfaraz Ahmed lifted in 2017 at The Oval, from 16-24 November," the PCB tweeted.

IAF aircraft develops snag, PM stranded at Deoghar airport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was stranded in Jharkhand's Deoghar airport for nearly two hours on Friday after his special Indian Air Force (IAF) aircraft developed a snag, flew back to Delhi in another plane. PM Modi was supposed to return to New Delhi on the IAF plane after addressing a rally in Bihar's Jamui, around 80 km from Deoghar. Senior Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi too faced a two hour delay in the schedule due to a grounded helicopter close to the place where PM's craft was held. The PM visited Jamui to attend a function marking the 150th birth anniversary of tribal leader Birsa Munda, celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas.



"PM Modi left for Delhi from Deoghar in another special aircraft after his IAF plane developed a technical snag. The aircraft could not be rectified on time. The PM had to wait for more than two hours," Deoghar Deputy Commissioner Vishal Sagar said. While Modi waited for the issue to be resolved, the region's airspace was declared a "no-flying zone". Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was also caught in a similar situation in Godda, Jharkhand. Rahul's helicopter, which was supposed to take him back after addressing an election rally, was grounded for about two hours, prompting allegations from the Congress that the delay was politically motivated. "Our leader Rahul Gandhi's helicopter was not allowed to take off for about two hours, posing a grave threat to his life. This was a security lapse at the behest of the Centre," state minister Deepika Pandey Singh alleged. Congress also Friday complained to the Election Commission against the alleged grounding of Rahul Gandhi's helicopter in poll-bound Jharkhand and sought its urgent intervention in ensuring a level-playing field in poll campaigning.

AQI 817, Delhi is most polluted city in the world



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As air pollution crossed the red zone that prompting the Commission for Air Quality Management to invoke the stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) from Friday, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi Friday announced staggered timings for government offices in the city in a bid to tackle traffic congestion and reduce pollution levels in the National Capital. Under the new schedule, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) offices will operate from 8.30 am to 5 pm, Central Government offices from 9 am to 5.30 pm and Delhi Government offices from 10.00 am to 6.30 pm, Atishi said in a post on X. She said the move aims to ease vehicular traffic during peak hours. Revised office timings implemented as part of GRAP-III restrictions effective from Wednesday.

The air quality across several parts of Delhi remained in the "severe" category on Friday morning, with a thick layer of smog once again blanketing the National Capital Region, including Noida, Ghaziabad and Gurugram, which reduced visibility and disrupted both traffic and flight operations. According to IQAir, a Swiss company, PM2.5 concentration is currently 95.4 times the World Health Organization (WHO) annual PM2.5 guideline value. This has put Delhi on the list of world's most polluted city with AQI 817, followed by Pakistan's Lahore with AQI 802 recorded at 12.30 am. IQAir, a Swiss company, ranks major cities based on Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM2.5) data. While the AQI stood at an average 396 on Friday, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), AQI has touched 420

as of 9 am in the morning, marking the third consecutive day of severe pollution. Of the 39 monitoring stations in Delhi, 21 registered severe AQI levels, with four classified as 'severe plus'. The top five polluted areas in Delhi this morning are Jahangirpuri (with AQI 458), Bawana (455), Wazirpur (455), Rohini (452), and Punjabi Bagh (443), according to Central Pollution Control Board's Sameer App. However, the 24-hour overall air quality showed slight improvement compared to Thursday's AQI of 432. Drone footage captured from areas like AIIMS and Akshardham Temple highlighted the extent of smog, making even prominent landmarks barely visible. After a high level meeting with officials and all stakeholders, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai announced that an additional 106 cluster buses would ply in the city while metro trains would make 60 extra trips in view of GRAP-3 measures imposed due to worsening air quality. Emergency measures, such as artificial rain, will be considered if the air quality deteriorates further, the minister said, adding that he would Centre about it again. Private construction and demolition activities have been banned under GRAP III measures, he said.



Devotees take a holy dip in the 'sarovar' at the Golden Temple on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev PTI

700 Kg drugs seized off Gujarat coast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AHEMDABAD

In a joint operation, agencies on Friday seized about 700 kg of drugs and arrested eight Iranian nationals from Indian territorial waters off the Gujarat coast around Porbandar. The street value of the seized Methamphetamine, a synthetic recreational variety of narcotics, could be anywhere between Rs 2,500-3,500 Crore in the international market, said Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) officials. An operation codenamed 'Sagar Manthan- 4' was launched based on intelligence inputs to intercept an unregistered vessel, without an



NCB personnel after an operation in which they successfully dismantled an international drug trafficking cartel and seized approximately 700 kg of meth in Gujarat PTI

AIS (automatic identification system) or an electronic boat or ship-tracking indicator, that will be entering the Indian waters with drugs, the NCB said in a statement. The suspect vessel was identified and "interdicted" by the Navy by mobilising its maritime patrol assets (ships) and the seizure of the drugs and apprehensions took place on Friday, it said.

From Sarai Kale Khan to Birsa Munda Chowk, a historical journey

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Mediaeval era origin Sarai Kale Khan Chowk dating back to the 16-17 Century will now be called Birsa Munda chowk in a tribute to the tribal icon and freedom fighter. The renaming, on the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary, was announced on Friday by Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal. November 15 was declared 'Janjatiya Gaurav Divas' by the Central government in 2021. Sarai Kale Khan is one of the busiest areas of Delhi, particularly due to the Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) from where buses ferry travellers to destinations across north India. In the past, it was known as Moocho Waali Sarai

(Inn of Moustaches) because every man had long moustaches, which was a symbol of masculinity in those days. The renaming of the historic area, comes ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, and was announced by the minister on the occasion of the unveiling of a statue of Birsa Munda by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena at the Baansera Bamboo Park near Sarai Kale Khan inter-state bus terminus (ISBT) in south-east Delhi. President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several leaders also paid tributes to the great leader. Birsa Munda spearheaded a tribal movement that started in the



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Delhi Lt Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena, Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, BJP MPs Manoj Tiwari, Bansuri Swaraj, Kamajjeet Sehrawat and Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and others during the unveiling of a statue of freedom fighter Birsa Munda on his birth anniversary PTI

Bengal Presidency (now Jharkhand) in the late 19th century, making him an important figure in the history of the country's independence movement. Born in 1875 in present-day Jharkhand, Munda had challenged British rule and is credited with mobilising tribals against the empire. He died in British custody at a young age of 25 years. Munda, the hero of the Indian tribal freedom struggle, played a pivotal role in inspiring the tribal community of the Chotanagpur region to fight for their independence. He led the armed revolution known as "Ulgulan" (the rebellion) against British rule. He belonged to the Munda tribe in the Chhotanagpur Plateau area. He spearheaded an Indian tribal mass

movement that arose in the Bihar and Jharkhand belt in the early 19th Century, to protest British colonisation. Munda rallied the tribals to fight against the forceful land grabbing carried out by the British government, which would turn the tribals into bonded labourers, and force them to abject poverty. He influenced his people to realise the importance of owning their land and asserting their rights over it. He founded the faith of Birsait, a blend of animism and indigenous beliefs, which emphasised the worship of a single god. He became their leader and was given the nickname, 'Dharti Aba' or the father of the earth. He died on June 9, 1900, at age 25.

President honours Birsa Munda



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
 President Droupadi Murmu on Friday led the nation in paying tributes to tribal icon Birsa Munda on his birth anniversary which is observed as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas. The President, Vice President Jagdeep Dhanekar and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla offered floral tributes at the statue of Birsa Munda at the Prerna Sthal in Parliament complex. Rajya Sabha Deputy Chair Harivansh was also present. After the event, the leaders interacted with folk artists.

After the president left the venue, Dhanekar, who is also the Rajya Sabha chairperson, and Birla tried their hands on musical instruments, including drums. Since 2021, Birsa Munda's birth anniversary is being observed as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas to remember the sacrifices of unsung tribal heroes. Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi on Friday hailed tribal icon Birsa Munda on his birth anniversary and said he sacrificed everything to protect the honour and glory of the motherland. Born in 1875 in present-day Jharkhand, Munda had chal-

lenged British rule and is credited with mobilising tribals against the empire. He died in British custody at a young age of 25 years. "Bhagwan Birsa Munda ji sacrificed everything to protect the honour and glory of the motherland. My deepest respects to him on the auspicious occasion of his birth anniversary Janjatiya Gaurav Divas," PM Modi wrote in a social media post in Hindi. Modi also shared a video and audio montage on his tributes to Munda on various occasions. The PM visited Bihar's Jamui to commemorate Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, marking the com-

mencement of the 150th birth anniversary celebration of the tribal icon. Modi also greeted people on Jharkhand's foundation day. "Best wishes to all our brothers and sisters of Jharkhand on the foundation day of the state. This land, irrigated by the struggle and sacrifice of the tribal society, has always made the country proud. I wish that this state, full of natural resources, moves forward at a fast pace on the path of progress," the PM noted in a social media post. The state of Jharkhand officially came into being on Munda's birth anniversary in 2000.

PM greets nation on Guru Nanak Jayanti



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
 Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people on Guru Nanak Jayanti on Friday and wished that his teachings inspire people to further the spirit of compassion, kindness and humility. "Greetings on the auspicious occasion of Sri Guru Nanak Jayanti. May the teachings of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji inspire us to further the spirit of compassion, kindness and humility," Modi wrote on social media. "May it also motivate us to serve society and make our planet better," the post added.

ED siezes Rs 8.8 Crore from lottery king Santiago Martin



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
 The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday seized Rs 8.8 crore in cash from the corporate office of Chennai-based 'lottery king' Santiago Martin, officials said. Martin was the single biggest donor to political parties with over Rs 1,300 crore in now-

scrapped electoral bonds. The searches were carried out in multiple states as part of a money laundering investigation against the 'lottery king', officials said. The action comes after the Madras High Court recently allowed the ED to proceed against Martin as the Tamil Nadu Police had decided to close the predicate or primary FIR against him and a

few others and a lower court accepted this police plea. Officials said at least 20 premises linked to Martin, his son-in-law Aadhar Arjun and associates in Chennai and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Faridabad in Haryana, Ludhiana in Punjab and Kolkata in West Bengal were being searched as part of an action against his business.

ECI officials frisk bags of Amit Shah at Hingoli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
 In a development that sought to blunt the Opposition's criticism that the Election Commission of India (ECI) was targeting the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) leaders, a team

of ECI officials checked the bags of Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah, when he landed in a helicopter in the Hingoli district to address a rally in poll-bound Maharashtra. Posting a video clip on his handle on micro-blogging site "X", Shah wrote:

"Today, during my election campaign in Hingoli Assembly constituency of Maharashtra, my helicopter was inspected by Election Commission officials. BJP believes in fair elections and a healthy election system and follows all the rules made by the Honourable Election

Commission. We all must contribute to a healthy election system and perform our duties in keeping India as the strongest democracy in the world". Chief Election Officer (CEO) had clarified that the ECI was following the Standard Operating Procedures.

Rahul Gandhi alleges SEBI's Buch hand in glove with corporations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up his attack on Madhabi Puri Buch, chairperson of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, on Friday alleged that India's economic framework is being hollowed out from within by a "cartel of corporate giants", enabled by those meant to guard the country's interests. The former Congress chief said the Madhubi Buch scandal isn't just insider trading but is a revealing case of direct conflict of interest, where powerful regulators are entangled with the very corporations they're supposed to oversee. Rahul made the remarks in his post that accompanied a YouTube video, part of a series featuring him and Pawan Khera, Congress' media and publicity head, in which the two leaders discuss various conflicts of interest allegations



against Buch. There was no immediate reaction from Buch, who is facing conflict of interest allegations, on the video and the charges. However, previously the SEBI chief has dismissed allegations of any wrongdoing. In his post he said, "India's economic framework is being hollowed out from within by a cartel of corporate giants, enabled by those meant to guard the country's interests." This is not mere oversight but a coordinated scheme to exploit loopholes, distort regulations, and prioritise corporate profit over public interest, all while ordinary Indians pay the price,

Rahul said. In the over six-minute video, Khera briefs Rahul Gandhi about various conflict of interest allegations against Buch while travelling with him on a flight. Khera talks about how the Congress exposed the claim that Agora Advisory Pvt Ltd became immediately dormant upon Buch joining SEBI. She still holds a 99 per cent stake in it, and the company has actively provided consultancy and advisory services, including to Mahindra & Mahindra, Khera tells the senior leader in the video. He also tells Rahul Gandhi that Buch allegedly traded and also invested in Chinese funds. Rahul Gandhi also posted the video on X, and said, Buch Hai Toh Syndicate Safe Hai. Congress and the Opposition has been targeting the government over conflict of interest allegations against Buch and demanding that she be removed from the post.

Power minister inaugurates trilateral power flow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Manohar Lal Khattar, the Union Minister for Power and Housing and Urban Affairs, jointly inaugurated the power flow from Nepal to Bangladesh, along with Md. Fozul Kabir Khan, adviser, Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources, Government of Bangladesh and Dipak Khadka, Minister of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Government of Nepal, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) noted. It said the inauguration was done through a virtual event hosted by the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, Government of Nepal. This occasion marks the first trilateral power transaction which has been carried out through the Indian grid. The Government of India had announced its decision to facilitate the first trilateral power transaction from Nepal to Bangladesh, through Indian grid with an export of upto 40 MW of power during the visit of the former prime minister of Nepal, Puspaha Kamal Dahal Prachanda to India from May 31-June three. During the visit, both sides had expressed their commitment towards greater sub-regional cooperation, including in the energy sector, which would lead to increased inter-linkages between the economies for mutual benefit of all stakeholders. Subsequently, a tripartite power sales agreement signed on October 3 in Kathmandu.

DFCCI celebrates 19th foundation day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Thursday said the dedicated freight corridor is a very important infrastructure project of the Indian Railways, which has made a positive impact on the country's logistics sector. Congratulating the office bearers of Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India

Limited (DFCCIL) on the occasion of its 19th Foundation day, Vaishnaw said more than 350 goods trains are being operated on the corridor at present and this has improved the efficiency of logistics transportation in the country. "The timings of cargo transportation have been reduced to half as compared to earlier. The speed of freight trains has made significant improvement. In every way, the DFC

has played a crucial role to reduce the logistics cost in the country," Vaishnaw said in a video message that was played during the celebration at Bharat Mandapam here. Expressing hope that DFC would continue to serve the country, Vaishnaw said that a good integration has taken place in the network of the Indian Railways. "We have to take it further so that DFC can serve the country better," he added.

Rajya Sabha to consider private member bill to regulate independent media services

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A private member's Bill that seeks to provide for establishment of an independent authority for the regulation and licensing of media services in the country has been cleared for consideration by the Rajya Sabha, a bulletin of the House noted. The Indian Media Services (Regulation and Licensing) Bill, 2024, a private member's bill by CPI(M) MP V Sivadasan, provides for establishing an independent authority -- the Indian Board of Media Services -- for the regulation and licensing of media services "to facilitate development of free and inde-

pendent media services in the country". According to the bulletin, Ashwini Vaishnaw, minister for information and broadcasting, communicated to the Rajya Sabha secretary-general that the president has recommended the consideration of the Bill to the House. Private members' Bills involving expenditure from the exchequer require the President's permission through the ministry concerned on whether such bills can be considered by the House. The Indian Media Services (Regulation and Licensing) Bill says the Central government shall, within six months of the commencement of the Act, by



notification in the Official Gazette, establish for the purposes of the Act, an autonomous body to be known as the Indian Board for Media Services, to regulate the functioning of media services and foster free and independent media services in the country. It also says the Union government shall, after due appropri-

ation made by the Parliament by law on this behalf, make to the Board grants of such sums of money as the Union government may think fit for carrying out the purposes of the Act. In the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill, Sivadasan has argued independent media that plays an impartial role in the dissemination of news and information to the public at large is crucial for the functioning of a healthy democracy, and licensing powers being a monopoly in the hands of the Executive often results in a pliant media, as journalists will hesitate to criticise the ruling dispensation for fear of legal hazards.

Haryana BJP gears up for MCG polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Pandit Mohanlal Badoli, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Haryana said that the party is all set for the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) election, and with the help of welfare works, organisational strength and blessings of the public. Badoli was in the Gurugram's party office to attend the membership campaign on Friday. While attacking the Congress

party, he said that the public burst the balloon of Congress lies in the Assembly elections and now the lies of Congress will not work in any election. He said in 2019, 33 lakh primary members were made in the BJP, but this time the target is to make 50 lakh primary members in Haryana. "There are more than 20,000 booths in Haryana and the workers have been given the target of adding 250 new people to the party at every booth," he said.

He said that after one election, the BJP starts preparing for the next election. BJP will win any upcoming election. "MCG elections will be held soon and we will win every election with a clear majority," he added. During the elections, some people were upset and left the party; apart from this, some workers did anti-party work while being in the party. The organisation has full information about such people, and action will be initiated against

them. On the question of naming the medical college being built in Gurugram after Guru Nanak, the state president said that great men and patriots have worked for the society and the country. We are indebted to the great men. It is a matter of pride that the medical college is named after Guru Nanak. "Congress does not have a leader. Congress lacks policy, leadership and intentions. Congress will decline and BJP will move ahead," he said.

Jitendra Singh bats for private-public partnership to tackle Diabetes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Diabetes is too serious to be left solely to the medical professionals, Jitendra Singh, Union minister for earth sciences and science and technology, said as he advocated for increasing public-private partnership in the efforts to achieve truly optimal results. He made these remarks at the 52nd Annual Conference of the Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI), in collaboration with the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), which commenced on the occasion of World Diabetes Day on Thursday. The two-day conference brought together over 5,000 healthcare professionals, national and international

experts, and prominent speakers to discuss and address the growing diabetes epidemic in India, where more than 10 crore people are currently affected, according to the latest report from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). "Just as economics is too serious a subject to be left to economists alone, I believe we can say that diabetes is too serious to be left solely to the medical professionals. It is a much broader issue," Singh said. To tackle the epidemic of diabetes, there is a need for a collaborative effort which has to be extended beyond the practitioners of medicine, he said. The minister also said "As rightly pointed out, it's about breaking barriers and bridging gaps between individuals and patients, individuals and doc-

tors, individuals and families, individuals and society as well as between the private and public sectors." "I have been a strong advocate of increasing private-sector involvement in these efforts. It is only through such partnerships that we can achieve truly optimal results," he added. The conference also marked the announcement of a joint declaration by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) and RSSDI. This declaration underscores the global and regional commitment to diabetes awareness, prevention and treatment. Meanwhile, Dr B M Makkar, RSSDI president, said this declaration is a testament to the urgent need for collaborative efforts to tackle diabetes. "By working together with the IDF, we aim to ensure better access to care, promote educa-



tion, and reduce the risks associated with this disease. We believe that by uniting healthcare professionals, governments, and global organizations, we can significantly improve outcomes for those

affected by diabetes worldwide," he added. Another key aspect of the conference is the Doctors' Pledge or Doctor's Oath, with over 10,000 healthcare professionals from across India taking a

solemn oath to increase awareness of diabetes, advocate for early screenings, and promote healthier lifestyle choices. Dr Sanjay Agrawal, Diabetologist and Secretary General, RSSDI, said, "This

pledge is a vital part of our collective responsibility to make diabetes prevention a national priority. By educating people about early diagnosis and healthy living, we can make a significant difference in preventing the onset of diabetes and managing the condition more effectively. "Our professionals are committed to supporting the public with resources, education, and advocacy to ensure that diabetes is diagnosed early and effectively managed," he added. Dr Banshi Saboo, Chief Diabetologist and Chairman of Dia Care - Diabetes Care and Hormone Clinic, emphasized the urgency of addressing diabetes as a national priority cannot be overstated. "By focusing on prevention, early diagnosis, and patient education, we empower indi-

viduals to manage their health more proactively, ultimately reducing the burden of this epidemic on families and communities," Dr Sahoo said. The program also highlights nationwide activities led by doctors, including the A-Z Diabetes Awareness Activity campaign organized by RSSDI's Delhi chapter and the conference committee. The campaign was launched by RSSDI Delhi Chapter under the aegis of the 52nd National Annual Conference of RSSDI to spread awareness about diabetes, in which posters and flyers were made and distributed, disseminated online by thousands of doctors all over the country. It saw huge participation by doctors, including Dr Rajesh Kesari, a diabetologist, and benefited lakhs of people by creating awareness.

UPPSC announces new date for PCS prelims

Protests over RO-ARO exam continue

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission (UPPSC) has rescheduled the PCS (Preliminary) Examination for December 22, after intense student protests. However, agitation continues as students demand that the Review Officer-Assistant Review Officer (RO-ARO) examination also be conducted in a single day

and shift. The PCS prelims will be held in two shifts on the same day, with the first session from 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM and the second from 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM. Initially scheduled for December 7 and 8, the exam was postponed following demonstrations by students who sought a one-day exam schedule.

Deadline over RO-ARO exam schedule

Despite the announcement for PCS, a section of students remain dissatisfied as the commission has not provided clarity on the RO-ARO Preliminary Examination. Protesters stationed at Gate No. 2 of the UPPSC office have vowed to continue their demonstration until their demand for a single-day, sim-



gle-shift RO-ARO exam is met.

"The commission has assured fairness through a high-level committee, but we need a written commitment that the RO-ARO exam will be held in one shift," said one protester. UPPSC officials argue that conducting the RO-ARO exam in one shift is logistically challenging due to the high number of candidates—over 10.7 lakh registered for the exam. Strict government directives limit the use of private or substandard centers, allowing only government-approved venues within a 20-km radius of district headquarters.

Even with the inclusion of universities, medical colleges, engineering institutions, and other government facilities,

there are not enough centers to accommodate all candidates in a single shift.

As a solution, the UPPSC plans to conduct the RO-ARO exam over multiple days using a normalization process to ensure fairness in evaluation.

The decision has judicial backing: the Supreme Court upheld normalization in its January 2024 ruling in "Uttar Pradesh State and Others vs. Atul Kumar Dwivedi and Others".

Omkar Nath Singh, Under Secretary of UPPSC, stated that a committee has been formed to ensure the RO-ARO selection process is transparent and fair. "The committee will analyze all aspects and submit its report soon," he added.

Students remain unconvinced, arguing that normalization introduces discrepancies and diminishes fairness. "We initiated this protest to ensure that both exams are conducted on the same terms. While the PCS exam will now be held in one day, the commission's approach to RO-ARO remains unclear," said a student leader.

"The ongoing protests and the unresolved RO-ARO schedule underscore the broader challenges faced by the commission in balancing logistical feasibility with fairness and student expectations. For now, the stalemate continues, with students determined to press their demands until a resolution is reached," R K Mishra, a retired bureaucrat told this reporter.

Rajnath criticises Congress for their promise to conduct 'Caste Census'

PTI ■ RANCHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday criticised the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi for their promise to conduct a "caste census," accusing them of using the issue as a ploy to manipulate voters for political gain.

Speaking at a rally in Jharkhand's Mahagama, Singh challenged the Congress to come up with a concrete plan for distributing reservation benefits among the numerous castes and sub-castes in the country.

"In 2011, a socio-economic caste census was conducted, which revealed the presence of around 46 lakh castes, sub-castes, and gotras. According to the Ministry of Social Welfare, there are about 1,200 Scheduled Castes (SC), over 750 Scheduled Tribes (ST), and around 2,500 Other Backward Classes (OBCs). How will Congress manage the distribution of reservation quotas among all these groups?" Singh asked.

He further demanded that Congress present a clear blueprint for implementing such a system.

Singh also took a swipe at



Rahul Gandhi, saying, "He should answer how many castes reside in India. Politics should be about serving the people, not just forming a government."

He accused Congress of engaging in opportunistic politics, claiming that the party has historically ruined alliances with regional partners such as RJD in Bihar, JKNC in Jammu & Kashmir, and now it is the turn of DMK in Tamil Nadu. "Congress uses these alliances to attain power, but ultimately it harms its partners," he said.

On the subject of corruption, Singh alleged that the ruling JMM-Congress-RJD coalition in Jharkhand had engaged in widespread corruption, even

going as far as taking bribes for issuing death certificates.

He contrasted this with the BJP's record in the state, stating, "So far, 13 Chief Ministers have governed Jharkhand, but none of the three BJP CMs ever faced corruption charges or went to jail."

Singh expressed confidence in the BJP's prospects in the ongoing Jharkhand elections, predicting that the party would secure two-thirds of the 43 seats up for election in the first phase.

He pointed to a 3 per cent increase in voter turnout as an indicator of strong support for the NDA government in the state, signaling a stable and corru-

After 21 years, tribals plan to return to native place in Naxal-hit Abujhmad

PTI ■ RAIPUR

More than two decades after deserting their village due to Maoists, around 25 tribal families are planning to return to their native place in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district.

Nearly 100 members of these families had left their homes in Gaarpa village located in Abujhmad after Naxalite started targeting them in 2003.

They were then settled on the outskirts of Narayanpur town on a tract of government land, where they took up agriculture for livelihood.

Now, 21 years after their desertion, these families recently visited their native place and have been planning to resettle there after police set up a camp there to facilitate development works and ensure security for local population.

Abujhmad, bordering Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district, was considered a Maoist fortress until recently. On October 4, security forces scripted their most successful anti-insurgency operation in Chhattisgarh by gunning down 31 Naxalites during an encounter in the area.

"Leaving the ancestral land was never easy. We had no



option but to flee for the sake of our lives." 60-year-old Sukkuram Nureti told PTI.

Nureti's family was among the 25 families that left Gaarpa in April 2003. Nureti hails from the Abujhmaria community, a particularly vulnerable tribal group.

"Of the 80 families in the village, around 25 were followers of 'Gayatri Pariwar' and Naxalites objected to it. They threatened us with dire consequences if we did not quit following 'Gayatri Pariwar'. So we decided to leave the village," he said.

Nureti said they always wanted to return.

"Now it seems our dream will come true as a police camp has been set up and

things have started improving there," said Nureti, who has served as a member of Janpad panchayat in the past.

Nureti and others who had left the village visited Gaarpa last week and opened a Lord Shiv temple that had remained shut since 2003.

"We are planning to resettle in the village as we have our farmland and homes there," he said.

Making significant inroads into Abujhmad, the Chhattisgarh police have set up security camps in Gaarpa, Kasturmeta, Mastur, Irakbhathi, Mohanti and Horadi villages in the past eight months. The Gaarpa camp came up on October 22.

According to police, the strat-

egy of establishing these camps has pushed the Naxalites to a very limited area in the zone and facilitated development works in the region.

Security camps in remote and Naxal-hit areas will help thousands of villagers avail the benefits of development works and welfare measures through Niyad Nellannar schemes, Narayanpur Superintendent of Police Prabhakar Kumar said.

Under Niyad Nellannar, the state government has been undertaking development works in interior villages within a 5-km radius of security camps.

Tribals evicted by Naxals in villages around the newly set up camps have started returning to their homes, the SP said.

"Villagers who were earlier pressured by Naxals to oppose development projects are now demanding roads, mobile towers, health and schools. Positive results will be seen in the coming days due to the efforts of police and administration," he said.

With a combined security and development push, nearly half of Abujhmad now has road accessibility. There is a target of providing road connectivity through Mad to

Chhotethia (Narayanpur) and Maharashtra, he said.

"We will connect Narayanpur to Gadchiroli (Maharashtra) and Chhotethia within the next 18 months," the official said.

After the establishment of six security camps, Principal Secretary of Chhattisgarh's Panchayat and Rural Development Department Niharika Barika recently visited five villages of Abujhmad, marking the first such trip by a top bureaucrat to the region. She travelled over 60 km on a motorcycle and reviewed more than 30 development projects, an official here said.

Barika visited three Anganwadis, two schools, one health sub-centre and met grassroots development workers and flagged off bus service between Gaarpa and Narayanpur, he said.

Spread over about 4,000 sq km, Abujhmad had been a den of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist) as its dense forest served as a hideout for its leaders.

The rebels' activities in Abujhmad have declined in recent years due to the increased presence of security forces and development works being carried out in the region, officials said.

Cyber fraudsters dupe Minister's accountant of Rs 2.08 Crore

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident of cyber fraud, Ritesh Srivastava, the accountant of Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi, was duped of ₹2.08 crore by fraudsters impersonating the minister's son.

The incident occurred on Wednesday, sending shockwaves to Lucknow as top officials scrambled to investigate.

According to police, the fraudster used the picture of Minister Nandi's son as the WhatsApp display photo and sent a message to Ritesh Srivastava from an unknown number. The message claimed, "This is my new number. I am in an important



business meeting. Please transfer money immediately." Believing it to be genuine, Srivastava promptly transferred ₹2.08 crore in three transactions to the bank accounts provided in the message.

The scam came to light when Srivastava later confirmed with Nandi's son, only to learn that no such request was made. Realizing the fraud, the accountant informed authorities late on Wednesday night. The cyber police were alert-

ed around 11:30 PM, prompting swift action.

Senior officials were reportedly stunned by the audacity of the scam, given its connection to a high-profile cabinet minister.

The cyber police station in charge, Rajiv Tiwari, confirmed that efforts are underway to trace the culprits and recover the funds.

The investigation revealed that the fraudsters used bank accounts from ICICI, HDFC, and another unidentified bank for the transactions.

Cyber police have contacted the banks to freeze the accounts and retrieve transaction details.

Tiwari stated, "Emails have been sent to freeze the concerned accounts, and further details are being extracted to

identify the fraudsters." Minister Nand Gopal Gupta's office has yet to issue an official statement.

When contacted, his PRO assured that the minister would respond, but no clarification was received until the time of reporting.

This high-profile incident highlights the increasing threat of cyber fraud and the need for vigilance in financial transactions, even among individuals in influential positions.

Authorities have urged the public to double-check requests for money transfers, particularly those made over messaging apps, police official Tiwari said.

The investigation is ongoing, and updates will be shared as more details emerge.

Arunachal Governor underlines critical role of tribal communities in nation building

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Friday underlined the critical role of tribal communities in nation-building, emphasising the importance of mutual respect and recognition of their rights, culture, and self-governance.

Speaking at the fourth Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas here, which commemorates the birth anniversary of tribal leader Bhagwan Birsu Munda, the governor stressed that engaging tribal communities as active partners in development strengthens the nation by leveraging their resilience, knowledge, and unique strengths.

Parnaik praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for inclusive development and expressed confidence that this day would inspire citizens to contribute to the fields of education, health, employment, entrepreneurship, and livelihood opportunities for tribal communities.

He also highlighted the importance of technocrats and businesses in preserving tribal art, culture, heritage, languages, and dialects, ensuring these rich traditions are celebrated and sustained.

The governor elaborated on the vital role the tribal communities play in shaping the nation's identity. He noted that their preservation of cultural heritage, support for social cohesion, and contributions to economic and political processes enrich the country's diversity.

"Tribal communities maintain unique languages, customs, art, music, and sustainable practices, which not only add to India's cultural wealth but also offer innovative solutions in areas such as agriculture, medicine, and environmental conservation," he pointed out.

Parnaik added that Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas, initiated by Prime Minister Modi, hon-



societies in Arunachal Pradesh, including mutual support, respect for elders, and collective decision-making, foster unity and stability. "These principles are essential for building a harmonious and progressive society. Mechanisms like Kebang, used for conflict resolution within tribal groups, offer lessons for national peace-building frameworks," he added.

Despite their significant contributions, the governor acknowledged that many tribal communities continue to face challenges such as social discrimination, poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to education.

He stressed the need for inclusive policies, investments, and partnerships to address these issues, enabling tribal communities to further contribute to national progress. Parnaik also drew attention to the importance of highlighting and preserving tribal heritage.

He said that Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas provides an opportunity to celebrate traditional crafts, textiles, and art forms, which boosts economic opportunities for artisans and small businesses. By showcasing tribal culture, regions can attract tourism, generating economic benefits while promoting their unique identity.

Parnaik added that Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas, initiated by Prime Minister Modi, hon-

ours the sacrifices and contributions of tribal communities to India's freedom struggle and nation-building efforts.

For the first time since independence, the nation is recognising and celebrating the art, culture, and history of tribal societies on a large scale, he said.

The governor also paid tributes to Birsu Munda, a revered tribal leader from the Munda tribe of the Chhota Nagpur Plateau, describing him as a freedom fighter, people's leader, and national hero.

"Munda fought tirelessly for the rights of tribal communities, advocating for the preservation of their faith, culture, and traditions. He inspired his followers to reconnect with their roots and uphold tribal values, becoming a symbol of resilience and pride for tribal societies. His efforts during the British colonial era motivated many others to fight for their rights and freedom," Parnaik pointed out.

"Birsu Munda's vision and legacy remind us of the strength and spirit of India's tribal communities," Parnaik said, calling on people to honour the contributions of all tribal freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for India's independence.

The governor urged the people, particularly tribal communities, to actively participate in the nation-building process.

Scindia slams Congress for overlooking tribals' contribution in India's fight for independence

PTI ■ AGARTALA

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Friday criticised the Congress for overlooking the significant contributions of the tribal community in India's fight for independence.

Speaking at a programme marking the birth anniversary of tribal freedom fighter Birsu Munda, the DoNER and communications minister called the tribal leaders "heroes not only for the tribal community but for the entire nation."

"Birsu Munda fought a decisive battle against British rule and made the ultimate sacrifice for Bharat Mata. He is a hero to 140 crore people in India, not just the janajati (tribal) community," Scindia said, asserting that India's history would be incomplete without acknowledging the tribal contributions to the freedom struggle.

Taking aim at the Congress, Scindia claimed that the tribals were neglected under its rule and their historical con-



tributions were forgotten.

"When Congress was in power, the tribals were disconnected from the nation's growth, and their role in the freedom movement was ignored," he added.

The Union Minister praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for rectifying this historical injustice.

"A major change occurred in 2014 when Modi became Prime Minister. Modiji began giving due recognition to tribal leaders by making them ministers, governors, and public representatives," Scindia said.

The Minister highlighted the election of Droupadi Murmu,

India's first tribal President, as a significant milestone. "The Congress opposed her election, but the people supported Modi's choice, and Murmu became the President. Congress's opposition to her election was nothing more than an attempt to diminish the contribution of the tribal community," he alleged.

Scindia also praised Modi's initiatives for the welfare and development of tribals, noting the launch of the JANMAN Yojana with an outlay of Rs 24,000 crore, aimed at developing 12,000 tribal-dominated villages. "The PM visited Birsu Munda's birthplace and launched a comprehensive welfare programme for the janajati community," he said.

Under Modi's leadership, Scindia pointed out that the number of Eklavya Model Residential Schools had increased from 10 to 500, and one lakh houses had been built for the tribal community to ensure that no one remains without a roof.

First seaplane lands in Guwahati after taking flight from city

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

A seaplane landed at Pandu Ghat in Guwahati on Friday after a successful flight from the city airport, making it the first such plane to land in Assam.

The addition of seaplanes to the state's transport network is expected to boost connectivity and tourism, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"Earlier today, a sea plane successfully landed at Pandu Ghat on the banks of Brahmaputra, marking the first river landing in Eastern India, which will open new chapters of connectivity in a riverine state like Assam," Sarma said in a post on X.

"A dawn of new possibilities in the Tourism & Intercommunication of Assam. This morning, participated in an 'Amphibian Airplane' demonstration in Guwahati by M/s De Havilland Canada in collaboration with the Ministry of Civil Aviation,"

State Tourism Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, who took the flight, posted on the micro-blogging site.

Taking off from LGBI Airport and landing at Pandu Ghat, this brief yet remarkable journey showcased the immense potential of seaplanes in enhancing Assam's tourism, he said.

"I am optimistic that future collaborations will create unique experiences for tourists and further strengthen Assam's tourism sector," he added.

Talking to reporters at Pandu Ghat later, Baruah said, this is a special day for Assam.

"It is the first time that a seaplane has landed in our state," he said.

Almost all tourism sites of the state are located near water bodies, like Kaziranga, Umrangso, and Majuli. These can be connected by seaplanes, he added.

The minister said it will take six to 12 months to make the seaplanes operational.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Right to breathe

As Delhi air turns toxic, Delhiites face severe health risks; the capital needs long-term solutions, not knee-jerk reactions

Delhi's air quality has plummeted to hazardous levels, with the city's Air Quality Index (AQI) soaring to a staggering 428, marking the worst pollution levels in the country. As a result, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has announced the enforcement of stringent Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)-3 restrictions starting at 8 AM on Friday. On Thursday, the 24-hour AQI for the city reached 428, signaling a "severe" air quality category, which poses serious health risks to the population, especially children, the elderly and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions. The current AQI level of 428 puts Delhi in the "Severe" category, indicating that the air is dangerously polluted and immediate action is required to prevent further deterioration of public health. In response to the deteriorating air quality, the CAQM has imposed the following GRAP-3 restrictions to mitigate the pollution levels: All non-essential construction and demolition activities in Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR) are suspended to prevent dust and particulate matter from exacerbating the pollution. Vehicles that do not meet the latest emission norms are banned from the roads. Specifically, petrol vehicles that do not comply with BS-III (Bharat Stage III) standards and diesel vehicles that fall under BS-IV norms are prohibited from operating within Delhi and parts of NCR. These measures are expected to significantly reduce the amount of pollutants being emitted into the air, especially from construction sites and older vehicles, which are major contributors to air pollution. The current spike in pollution levels to a combination of factors. The calm winds and a sharp drop in temperature have trapped



pollutants in the air, preventing them from dispersing. The weather conditions have created a 'smog blanket' over the city, intensifying the effects of vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and the burning of crop stubble in neighbouring states. The Supreme Court of India has taken note of the deteriorating air quality and has scheduled a hearing on November 18 to discuss further enforcement measures. The court has emphasised that every citizen has the fundamental right to breathe clean air, as protected under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Delhi's pollution crisis has now drawn significant national and international attention. While the immediate focus is on enforcing short-term measures like the GRAP-3 restrictions, experts argue that lasting solutions require systemic changes, including stricter emissions standards, better waste management, and a push for cleaner public transportation options. As the city continues to grapple with the toxic smog, Delhi residents are urged to stay indoors as much as possible, avoid strenuous outdoor activities, and wear N95 masks to protect themselves from the harmful effects of the air pollution. In the coming days, it is hoped that both weather conditions and Govt interventions will bring some relief, but the long-term health of the city's residents depends on sustained efforts to curb the sources of pollution.

PICTALK



Devotees take a holy dip in the Ganga river at a ghat on the occasion of 'Kartik Purnima' festival, in Varanasi. PTI

US-Iran tensions: War clouds over West Asia



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

With regional stability hanging in the balance, the world watches anxiously as West Asia braces for the potential fallout of escalating hostilities

On July 3, 1988, the US Navy's USS Vincennes, in an act of brazen military overreach, shot down Iran Air Flight 655, a civilian airliner carrying 290 passengers, over the Persian Gulf. The Navy's justification—that this was an "unintentional error"—betrays the harsh reality: this was not a mistake, but rather an emblematic instance of Western indifference to the lives of those deemed expendable.

The Navy mistook a commercial flight for an enemy fighter jet, launching two surface-to-air missiles and killing all aboard. Yet, the US response was not to acknowledge a moral failing, but to double down on its denial, offering neither a genuine apology nor reparations to the victims' families. This tragedy was a grim reminder of the West's long-standing practice of dehumanising the peoples of West Asia in its relentless pursuit of geopolitical dominance. For the Iranian people, it was not merely a military blunder; it was a stark dismissal of their humanity, reinforcing the deeply entrenched belief in Western circles that the lives of those beyond its borders are, at best, collateral damage in the pursuit of power.

The echoes of this tragedy persist today, amplified by the volatile relationship between the US and Iran. Just days after Donald Trump's re-election, the US government claimed to have uncovered a plot by Iran to assassinate the president. Iran vehemently rejected these allegations, with Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi dismissing them as a "third-rate comedy" and accusing the US of fabricating a narrative to justify further aggression. Araqchi's derision—mocking the absurdity of an assassin "sitting in Iran and talking online to the FBI"—renewed the deep mistrust that defines the US-Iran relationship.

Now that Trump has secured a second term and will become the 47th President of the USA, it is clear that his foreign policy, especially towards Iran, could become far more aggressive, with disastrous consequences. His planned appointments of hawkish figures



— such as Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defence, Steven C Witkoff as Special Envoy on West Asia Affairs and Mike Huckabee as Ambassador to Israel — suggest that peace in the West Asia is more distant than ever. These choices reflect a growing alignment with Israel's interests, further inflaming tensions and laying the groundwork for a catastrophic conflict—one that could see a war against Iran as the ultimate culmination of decades of Western intervention.

This looming disaster cannot be divorced from the historical legacy of Western interference in West Asia. Iran's relationship with the West has been shaped by centuries of betrayal and manipulation. A defining moment in this fraught history was the CIA-backed coup of 1953, which ousted Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh after he sought to nationalise Iran's oil industry.

This act, orchestrated by Western powers, reinstated the Shah's brutal regime, sowing the seeds for the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This history of intervention, driven by oil and geopolitics, instilled a deep sense of betrayal in the Iranian consciousness—a sentiment that still defines Iran's foreign policy today. Divided along sectarian lines and often opportunistic in their foreign policy, Iran's

DIVIDED ALONG SECTARIAN LINES AND OFTEN OPPORTUNISTIC IN THEIR FOREIGN POLICY, IRAN'S NEIGHBOURS HAVE REPEATEDLY FAILED TO PUT REGIONAL UNITY AHEAD OF EXTERNAL PRESSURES

neighbours have repeatedly failed to put regional unity ahead of external pressures. Yet, the geopolitical manipulations that have shaped this region's history are part of a broader pattern: the West's refusal to recognise the sovereignty of nations it deems strategically irrelevant. The Iranian people have grown ever more resolute in their refusal to capitulate to external demands. This isolation, initially born of necessity, has also transformed into a profound existential struggle. In response, Iran has sought alliances with nations like China and Russia and forged relationships with non-state actors in the region. These alliances—born not of ideology, but of pragmatic necessity—have allowed Iran to exert regional influence, shifting the balance of power in ways the West never anticipated. In his first term, Trump used a two-pronged strategy to weaken Iran: connecting other Arab nations in favour of Israel through the Abraham Accords, a treaty engineered by his Jewish-origin son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and secondly, targeting key personalities who enabled Iran's influence in the region while funding efforts by Iranians living abroad working against Iran. In his second term, which could be more refined and sharpened by the experiences he earned in the last eight years—both in office and out-

side the White House—his actions could become far more unpredictable. Consequently, the potential for war against Iran is no longer a distant fear; it is a rapidly approaching reality. It would affirm the West's view that the lives of Iranians, like those across the Global South, are expendable in pursuit of geopolitical dominance, making this a war of choice, not necessity, with existential stakes for Iran. In this context, the responsibility to avoid war does not lie solely with the US or Iran, but with all the nations of the region, including those of the Arab world. Despite their differing beliefs, histories, and alliances, it is incumbent upon Arab nations to take a united stand against the spectre of war. The voices of Arab leaders, particularly those who have long been caught in the geopolitical crossfire of the US-Iran conflict, must strive in defence of regional peace and stability. Divisions must be set aside in favour of collective action that prioritises the preservation of life and sovereignty over ideological differences. The world, and particularly the nations of West Asia, must strive to find a path of diplomacy and dialogue, to avoid yet another destructive war that will further tear apart the very fabric of the region.

(The writer is a journalist and author; Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SIMPLIFY TAX SYSTEM

Madam — The article on simplifying tax structures presents an acceptable argument (14-11-24). The successive governments seem to be under utter confusion and all the changes are found to be further complicating the tax structure rather than making it simple to understand and comply with. GST is further a complicated one in every aspect. The government is not clear even in a matter like what is to be taxed. Essentials are taxed; condoms and bangles are exempted. Falling sick is taxed. Medicines, diagnostic devices and insurance premiums are taxed as if falling sick is a matter of comfort and luxury. Even in the case of direct tax, the government's sense of vengeance over the salaried section is clearly displayed. This section is earning money to spend and save. Both are good and help build a better economy of the country. But they are made to pay not less than 30 per cent as income tax besides GST on every spending. Besides forgoing a huge part of salary, they have to manage the hardships caused by untamed inflation also. There is no answer on the relevance of toll collections. A road is laid and its expenses are met with one year of toll collection. But collections are carried on for decades and they are never closed. It is this confusion in the mind of the government that drives earners to seek ways and means to avoid tax and accumulate black money. It is high time for the government to overhaul the entire tax system and make it people-friendly.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

STOP ILLEGAL DEMOLITIONS

Madam — The Supreme Court intervened that no government is allowed to rule with a bulldozer, by blazing the houses of the miscreants and culprits like this. The Supreme Court guidelines pace respect to the dreams of the home of every single individual, despite

Ensure doctors' safety



Violence against doctors and medical staff by patients' relatives is a serious issue that has been on the rise. Hospitals often deal with life-and-death situations, leading to heightened emotions; for example, when a patient's health condition worsens or dies, relatives may react violently out of grief and frustration. This can be avoided by informing the patient's condition when it wors-

ens, to prepare the relatives for the worst situation. Sometimes families believe that adequate and proper treatment was not provided, which can be cleared by informing them about the disease and line of treatment being provided. Clear and compassionate communication is crucial to satisfying and pacifying them. Some patients or their relatives may have mental health issues or be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which can lead to violent tendencies, which need to be noticed and taken care of by the attending medical staff. Overcrowded hospitals, long waiting times, and inadequate basic facilities add to the frustration of patients and their families, resulting in violence. Hence, a multifaceted approach is required to tackle violence against medical professionals in hospitals.

O Prasada Rao | Hyderabad

Wooden pallets: Turning timber into treasure

Circular economy practices are changing the future of wooden pallets, from innovative recycling methods to tech-driven solutions



JAY DEEPAK SHAH

Wooden pallets are indispensable in modern logistics, widely used to support the transportation and storage of goods across various industries, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), pharmaceuticals, automotive, chemicals and more. These durable platforms are designed to handle heavy loads and protect products during shipping, simplifying the process of storage and handling. The demand for wooden pallets is immense, with countries like India requiring an estimated 207.8 million units. With such extensive use, an important question arises: what happens to these pallets when they reach the end of their lifecycle? By giving new life to old pallets, industries can reduce waste, conserve resources, and promote economic growth while protecting the environment. There are numerous innovative ways to repurpose and recycle wooden pallets, which contribute to building a more sustainable and efficient supply chain.



One of the most effective ways to enhance sustainability in the wooden pallet industry is through repair and refurbishment. While pallets generally have a lifespan of 12 to 18 months, many can be used longer with regular maintenance. Instead of discarding damaged pallets, companies can inspect and repair them by replacing broken slats and restoring their structural integrity. This process helps conserve raw materials and lowers the carbon footprint associated with manufacturing new pallets. Adopting repair programmes also reduces the demand for fresh timber, which helps prevent deforestation and minimises waste. **Repurposing, Upcycling, and Recycling**

When wooden pallets are no longer fit for their primary purpose, they can still serve a wide range of functions through repurposing, upcycling, or recycling. Repurposing transforms discarded pallets into furniture, decor, or art, extending their lifespan and keeping them out of landfills. This also supports local economies by providing artisans with reclaimed wood to create unique, eco-friendly products. When repurposing or upcycling are no longer options, recycling can turn pallets into products like particleboard or mulch, which conserves resources and reduces the need for new timber. Together, these strategies help minimise waste and lower environmental impact, encouraging responsible use of resources. **Sustainable Sourcing as a Foundation for Circularity** To fully align with circular economy principles, the wood used in pallet manufacturing should be sustainably sourced. Certification programmes, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), play a

crucial role in ensuring responsible forest management. These certifications verify that forests are managed sustainably, protecting biodiversity, preventing illegal logging, and minimising environmental impact. **The Role of Technology in Enhancing Circularity** Technology is increasingly central to the transformation of wooden pallets, with advancements like the Internet of Things and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) improving pallet management. These technologies allow pallets to be embedded with sensors, which enable real-time tracking of location, condition, and usage. This visibility optimises inventory management and reduces losses. By tracking pallets through their entire lifecycle, businesses can maximise reuse, ensuring that pallets are returned, repaired, and repurposed efficiently. Such technology-driven strategies extend the lifespan of pallets, ensuring they remain in the supply chain as long as possible. *(The writer is CEO & MD at Jay Wood Industry; views are personal)*

that he was the been charged culprit under some legal allegations. So far, the UP government has been popularising itself with the Bulldozer Raaj. The use of bulldozers to demolish the house of the culprits, to give them a lesson, is turning into the way of governance in Uttar Pradesh. The demolishing of the houses and illegal land encroachment must be followed by a legal procedure of waving official legal notice at least 15 days prior and with full opportunity to appeal by the affected party. The move by the apex court will add more transparency to the justice mechanism, and this intervention by the judiciary will assist the innocent to save the sweet home from the red tape bureaucrats and political leaders, who many times hurt the innocent to show their political status and power.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

POLLUTION FROM WASTE

Madam — Instead of resolving environmental problems, Delhi's ambition to convert garbage into energy is creating

health risks. The factory is releasing harmful smoke and ash into the surrounding neighborhoods, despite its goal of reducing landfill waste through rubbish incineration. Significant pollution has resulted, exposing locals to dangerously high concentrations of heavy metals like lead, cadmium, manganese, and arsenic—up to 19 times higher than what the EPA recommends. Cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, as well as developmental hazards for children, are among the health effects. The absence of crucial safety measures at the plant is criticised by experts. Respiratory problems are common among the locals, and ash contamination has reached neighboring residences, schools, and parks. The intended "green" solution might make Delhi's pollution problem worse if regulatory action is not taken.

Divyansh Pal | Ujjain

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FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE AND FALL OF EGO

True success lies not in fame or power but in humility and understanding one's purpose of life



RAVI VALLURI

A challenging task or an idea normally releases endorphins, which stimulate the human mind to think out of the box, and when endowed with such an attitude, we scale high altitudes and reach the summit. But there is a flip side. We become attached to the product or the activity flow; consequently, the mind gets entrapped by the adulation. A vivacious model with gravitas, known for scorching the ramp, was chosen for a cinematic role. She executed the role with aplomb and was soon nominated for several awards and managed to win some of them, including the Best New Face award.

The actress was bestowed with several honours and in the process bagged prestigious roles. It was indeed a heady feeling. She was feted at various parties and became a celebrity overnight. However, there was no end to her avarice as her mind and body craved more attention. The "I, Me" syndrome dominated her mind and she spent hours before the mirror, taking selfies, adoring her ravishing beauty and success. At her peril, she ignored the alarm bells, the death knell knocking at her door. She got hooked on alcohol, money, drugs and sex. The talented artiste lost her equanimity, equipoise and equilibrium in a state of feverishness and in the process attracted opprobrium.

The meteoric rise of the artiste was short-lived and her obnoxious behaviour was not acceptable to the industry she was soon stripped of meaty roles and sure enough, lost power and fame. Tragedy struck



in a cruel form as her life was snuffed out at a tender age when she succumbed after a car crash in an inebriated state. Who was to be blamed for this irrational behaviour? False egos play havoc on human minds when the power of discrimination gets obfuscated in the razzmatazz and dazzle of "doership". The breed of such people extends among politicians, entrepreneurs and seekers as they are entrapped by doership and cannot let go and remain humble.

They focus on certain immediate outcomes and in the bargain, lose the plot and larger picture. In the political sphere too, parties become dependent on the success and megalomania of an individual and lose their core strengths of inner democracy and grassroots contact. The spiritual world is not spared either. Seekers, to begin with, tread the path with great courage and conviction and have immense faith in the Master and the path. They unflinchingly participate in sadhana, seva, Satsang, meditation and other activities of the organisation. The Master (Guru) in his magnanimity encourages all his followers. Some progress on the path and others fall aside as the rigour and regimen of spirituality are arduous and crammed with disturbances before the seeker obtains peace of mind. Soon the feverish mind of the seeker feels proximity to the Master and in the process, rubs fellow seekers the wrong way. Some seekers 'like' these photographs on Facebook to ingratiate themselves with those purportedly "close", in anticipation that it could act as a passport to have a glimpse of the Guru. A true spiritual leader or Master cautions the faithful not to be trapped in the quagmire of Guru Mandal. "Under the influence of false ego, one thinks himself to be the doer of activities, while all the activities are carried out by nature as a natural process," expounds Lord Krishna to Arjuna. A genuine seeker should realise that we are infinitesimal in this vast universe. Our acts and deeds, if truly positive and humble, will automatically draw us closer to the Guru and the Laws of the Universe.

(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)

Bangladesh: A nation's press under pressure



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Attacks on media houses and journalists continue notwithstanding the interim Govt's claim that it is committed to upholding media freedom

The media's independence is under severe attack in Bangladesh under the interim government headed by chief advisor Muhammad Yunus. The attack is two-pronged. One of these is directed against media houses and journalists perceived to have been supporters of the Awami League and the government when Sheikh Hasina headed both. The second targets non-aligned media establishments, editors and journalists, including those known for standing up to the Awami League government's repressive media regime. The objective is to pressure them into toeing the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement (ADSM) and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government.

Coming to media houses, eight channels were attacked on August 5, 2024, itself, when Sheikh Hasina left for India. Among them was Ekattor TV's office in Baridhara, Dhaka, which was vandalised and burnt down; also attacked on the same day in Dhaka were the premises of Samay TV, and ATN Bangla. On August 19, an armed mob attacked and severely damaged the establishment of East West Media group, which runs Kaler Kantha (Voice of the times) Bangladesh Pratidin (Bangladesh daily), both Bengali-language newspapers, Daily Sun, an English-language daily, News24BD, a television news channel, Radio Capital, a radio station, and Banglanews24, an online Bengali daily. The mob assaulted journalists, injured a woman journalist and harassed women employees.

As for journalists, according to Reporters Without Borders, a globally-respected international NGO headquartered in Paris, "baseless accusations of killing protesters have been brought against nearly 140 journalists. Twenty-five have been charged with 'crimes against humanity. Many of them have gone into hiding because they fear being arrested and jailed." A number of journalists have been arrested and jailed. Their ranks include Shakil Ahmed, former head of news at television channel Ekattor TV, and Farzana Rupa, its former chief correspondent, who were arrested from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, Dhaka, on August 21, 2024, when they were about to board a Turkish Airlines flight to Paris via Istanbul, along with their daughter. The two of them remain in prison, as do Mozammel Haque Babu, chief executive officer of Ekattor TV and Shyamal Datta, editor of Bhorer Kagaz (Paper at Dawn) who were arrested on September 15. In a letter emailed recently to Muhammad Yunus, Jodie Ginsburg, chief executive officer of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a respected NGO promoting press freedom and defending the rights of journalists worldwide, urged him to ensure, among other things, respect for the "procedural rights of four incarcerated pro-Awami League journalists: Farzana Rupa, Shakil Ahmed, Mozammel Babu and Shyamal Datta, including their right to a free trial." The arrests are hardly surprising. According to a report in the Dhaka Tribune dated September 19, 2024, the ADSM leader, Nahid Islam who, besides his other hats, is advisor in charge of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, thundered at a press conference on the previous day that the "instigators" of the July-August massacre



EIGHT CHANNELS WERE ATTACKED ON AUGUST 5, 2024, ITSELF, WHEN SHEIKH HASINA LEFT FOR INDIA. AMONG THEM WAS EKATTOR TV'S OFFICE IN BARIDHARA, DHAKA, WHICH WAS VANDALIZED AND BURNT DOWN; ALSO ATTACKED ON THE SAME DAY IN DHAKA WERE THE PREMISES OF SAMAY TV, AND ATN BANGLA

[of protesters] would be brought to justice no matter whether they identified themselves as journalists, writers and artists. Doubtless, the interim government was to decide as to who were to be brought to justice. Just two examples would show how utterly arbitrary and vindictive such decisions have been. The one is the continued incarceration of Shahriar Kabir, an internationally-respected human rights activist, champion of secular humanism, advocate of the bringing war criminals of 1971 to justice, author and journalist. The second is the arrest, on November 6, 2024, of the noted television actor, Shomi Kaiser, daughter of Shahidullah and Panna Kaiser. Shahidullah, a noted writer and journalist, disappeared after being abducted by Pakistani army personnel and their collaborators from the ranks of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and allied organisations like al-Badr, al-Shams and Razakars. His brother, Zaheer Raihan, also disappeared while looking for him. Panna Kaiser was an Awami League Member of Parliament (1996-2001) who worked in the area of youth welfare. Apart from arrests on false charges, the cancellation of accreditation cards, which has reached a total of 167 at the time of writing, is being used as a weapon against journalists. Such cards are important for identifying oneself as a journalist, and securing entry into restricted areas, government offices and meetings. Referring to the matter, Celia Mercier, Head of South Asia Office of Reporters Without Borders,

another globally-respected NGO whose mission is to act for freedom, pluralism and independence of journalism, and defend those who embody these ideals, has said, "The decision to rescind the accreditation cards of journalists considered close to the previous government is politically-motivated and punitive, and has the effect of intimidating the press. It encourages self-censorship and threatens the very existence of opposition media. This decision by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry [of Bangladesh] is incomprehensible, coming just a week after it took a positive step by establishing a mechanism for reporting cases of harassment against journalists. We urge the ministry to return to this more constructive path by establishing a regulated procedure for issuing and rescinding press cards, by ensuring that cases of harassment are examined impartially, and by putting a final stop to political reprisals against media professionals." As for pressures on independent media establishments, editors and journalists, the aim is to make them toe the line laid down by the young sparks dominating the ADSM, and rabidly anti-Awami League and fundamentalist Islamist elements in sections of the media and the interim government. The weapons are threats and harangues. At a meeting to discuss "Role of Media in Creating Fascist Narrative: A Review," Mahmudur Rahman, editor of Amar Desh (My Country) criticized two national newspapers, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, for their coverage and com-

mentary on Sheikh Mujib and Sheikh Hasina, suggesting that these outlets are paving the way for fascism by creating contrasting narratives. He further said that the media had fostered hatred towards Islam, misrepresented societal divisions, and perpetuated a narrative of eternal gratitude towards India for its role in Bangladesh's liberation. Significantly, Mahmudur Rahman said this in the presence of Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus' press secretary, Shafiqul Alam. Events like this have been creating a climate in which channels and publications, including the two of Bangladesh's leading paper which Rahman criticised, are sought to be put under compulsion to conform to the kind of reportage and comment the interim government expects of them. All this makes a mockery of the interim government's assertions that it is for the freedom of the press and its moves like the setting up of a commission for hearing allegations of harassment by journalists. An editorial in The Daily Star, dated November 7, 2024, delivered a damning indictment of the situation and the interim government's role when it said, "In our pursuit of a fair, anti-discriminatory Bangladesh, few values are as vital as press freedom. We are, therefore, concerned by the persistent intimidation, harassment, and censorship faced by journalists, which shows how the media landscape remains fraught with obstacles." *(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer; the views expressed are personal)*

Punjab by-elections: A Stage for dynastic politics, defections and defamatory rhetoric

In the run-up to the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024, political leaders seem to have sidestepped pro-people issues

Elections are usually a good opportunity for political leaders to make public statements and seek public feedback on their pro-people works and policies. But the scene in the Punjab Assembly by-elections 2024 eludes the expectation. Along with other states in India, there are by-elections in four Assembly constituencies of Punjab for which voting is to be held on November 20, 2024. In the absence of any public-interest manifestos, political parties rely on the 'candidate-winnability' supporting political apostasy and dynastic politics. Most political leaders in the campaign are relying on defamatory garrulous speeches and irresponsible false claims. The trust deficit of the people in politi-



SUKHDEV SINGH

cal parties and the confidence deficit in their leaders is so high that the oldest and traditionally strongest political party of the state, Shiromani Akali Dal, has preferred to not contest the elections. A conglomeration of its disgruntled leaders, the Akali Dal Reform Movement, is also out of the election contest. The contest is triangular among the ruling party in the state- Aam Aadmi Party, the ruling party

in the centre- Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress. In one constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a cousin of the Akali Dal chief and has been a minister in the Akali and the Congress governments. He has apostatised three political tastes before joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate left the Akali Dal shortly before the current by-elections. The Congress party candidate is the wife of the Congress State party president and a 2024-elected Member of Parliament. In another constituency, the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is the son of a 2024-elected Member of Parliament from the same party; the MP had defected

from the Congress just before the 2024 parliamentary elections to contest and win as an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, while the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has defected Shrimoni Akali Dal; he has been a minister in the SAD government. In the third constituency, the Congress party candidate is the wife of its party MP and a former Deputy Chief Minister. In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate is a former Akali MLA and the son of a Punjab Assembly speaker in the SAD government. In the fourth constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidate has been a former senior Vice-President of the Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee and a Congress MLA before deserting the Congress to join



the Bharatiya Janata Party, while the Aam Aadmi Party candidate is said to be a favourite of an MP and a former minister, ignoring its former district chief who is contesting as a rebel. The four vacancies arose because the MLAs in all four contested and won parliamentary elections held in June 2024. In three of the four, the

contesting candidates are the immediate family members of the 2024-elected MPs. As the family members of the MPs, they are assumed to be the 'winning' candidates because their mentors have already proved it by winning the Assembly and then parliamentary elections sequentially. The question arises whether the political parties do not have any other members from any other section of society who can be 'winning' candidates or if some leaders have turned electoral politics into a family monopoly aka 'nepotism', in which there is no room for other party workers, however sincere and hard-working they may be. The current situation is so ridiculous that these leaders

and the political parties criticize each other for dynastic politics, nepotism and party defection. Still, when the opportunity arises, they play the game and present their spouses, children and relatives as the only 'winning' candidates and strengthen political dynasticism justifying it in various ways. Claiming himself the next Chief Minister of the state during his campaign for the BJP candidate, a Government of India Minister compared the peasant leaders in protest with 'Talibans' and threatened action against them after the elections. Not only his threat is defamatory and against the spirit of a democracy, but also an unbecoming rambling coercing votes for the candidate of his party.

Addressing an election meeting in favour of an Aam Aadmi Party candidate, its supreme dubs the sitting Congress MP as "corrupt Randhawa" inviting defamatory threat from him. Further he charges him with 'dynastic politics' ignoring the similar practice by AAP in another constituency where he has campaigned for the candidate on the same day. Thus the Punjab 2024 By-elections are riddled with defecation, dynasticism, defamatory rhetoric, irresponsible rambling, bringing with it a sense of deterioration in democracy which both the people and political parties must address. *(The writer is retired professor, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar; views are personal)*

Trump vows to end Russia-Ukraine war

US President-elect Donald Trump has said his administration will focus on ending the Russia-Ukraine war, as he lamented the killing of people in the conflict.

"Russia and Ukraine's got to stop. I saw a report today. Thousands of people over the last three days were killed. Thousands and thousands of people were killed. They happened to be soldiers, but whether they're soldiers or they're people sitting in towns, we're going to work it," he said.

"It needs to be done in a way that doesn't encourage other US adversaries to try to illegally invade their neighbour's territory," said Curtis, who is currently a Senior Fellow and Director of the Indo-Pacific Security Programme at Center for a New American Security think-tank.

"I would just simply say that it needs to be done in a way that Russia faces some consequences for its actions," Curtis told PTI in an interview. It needs to be done in a way that Russia doesn't try to do the same thing two or three years down the line, she said.

Sri Lankan president's NPP secures parliamentary majority

Sri Lanka's National People's Power (NPP) secured a majority in parliament, according to official results announced by the election commission.

The NPP has received 6.8 million or 61 per cent of the votes counted, taking a commanding lead over its rivals. The party is on track to get a two-thirds majority as it is expected to add to its tally a bulk from the 29 seats, taking the party to the absolute majority of 150 seats in the 225-member assembly.

seats in Jaffna province, stunning the traditional Tamil parties which dominated the scene. No Sinhala majority parties have won Jaffna ever before. The grand old United National Party (UNP) had previously won an odd solitary seat in Jaffna.

party against the other has ended as people are embracing the NPP," Dissanayake, the NPP leader, said. The NPP under its original Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) violently opposed any attempt of power sharing—a key Tamil demand during the armed separatist campaign of the LTTE.

Downing Street apologises for menu 'mistake' at Diwali reception

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's office on Friday apologised for a "mistake" in the organisation of its Diwali reception at 10 Downing Street after some British Hindus objected to non-vegetarian food and alcohol being served at the gathering.

"He paid tribute to the huge contribution the British Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities make to our country and how the government is driven by the shared values of hard work, ambition and aspiration. A mistake was made in the organisation of the event," the spokesperson said.

"I feel it speaks poorly against the organisation of this year's event — with a disappointing lack of knowledge of the customs and traditions that many British citizens hold dear," reads her letter posted on social media.

"As a practising Hindu representing thousands of Hindus within my own constituency of Leicester East, I have been deeply saddened to hear that this year's festivities were overshadowed in the greatest Office of State by negativity, as a result of this oversight," said the first-time Tory member of Parliament elected in July from the city of Leicester.

The Opposition MP went on to offer her "assistance and guidance" to the Labour Party government for all future Hindu celebrations to ensure they are celebrated in a "respectful manner".

Seoul (AP): North Korea tested exploding drones designed to crash into targets and leader Kim Jong Un called for accelerating mass production of the weapons, state media said Friday.

N Korea tests exploding drones

The country's latest military demonstration came as the United States, South Korea and Japan engaged in combined military exercises involving advanced fighter jets and a US aircraft carrier in nearby international waters, in a display of their defense posture against North Korea.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency published photos of Kim talking with officials near at least two different types of unmanned aerial vehicles. They included those with X-shaped tails and wings that look similar to the ones the country disclosed in August, when Kim inspected another demonstration of drones that explode on impact.

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STATEMENT OF UNAUDITED STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE HALF YEAR ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024. (Rs. in crore except EPS). Table with columns for S. No., Particulars, Quarter Ended (30/09/2024, 30/06/2024, 30/09/2023), Half Year Ended (30/09/2024, 30/09/2023), and Year Ended (31/03/2024 Audited).

MY MONEY SECURITIES LTD. CIN: 167120DL1992PLC047890. Regd Office: 10-A, UNDERHILL LANE, CIVIL LINES, DELHI-110054. EXTRACT OF THE STANDALONE UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER & SIX MONTHS ENDED 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2024. Table with columns for S. No., Particulars, Quarter Ended (30/09/2024, 30/06/2024, 30/09/2023), Six Months Ended (30/09/2024, 30/09/2023), and Year Ended (31/03/2024 Audited).



The KNMA Theatre Festival offers a fresh take on theatre, exploring vulnerability and human connection. With productions like 'Love and Information,' it challenges traditional narratives and invites audiences to reflect on the complexities of identity and emotion, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Theatre is a mirror of the human condition." This timeless quote captures the essence of why we turn to the stage - to reflect on who we are, how we live and the world we inhabit. Theatre has the power to make us confront uncomfortable truths, question our beliefs and reimagine the possibilities of human connection. It's a place where vulnerability, in all its forms, becomes not just a theme, but the lens through which we view the world. At the inaugural *KNMA Theatre Festival*, I was reminded of this power in the most profound way. Held at the serene Sunder Nursery in New Delhi, the festival celebrated contemporary theatre and its ability to speak to the issues that matter most today. Curated by *Kirtana Kumar*, the festival's theme, *The Power of Vulnerability*, couldn't have been more fitting. It was a celebration of the delicate, yet potent, human experiences that shape us. From class and gender to sexuality and identity, the performances unearthed the quiet, often overlooked struggles that define our society. One of the most thought-provoking performances I experienced was *Love and Information*, a play that stripped back the complexities of modern life, revealing the raw emotions beneath. Presented by the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in association with Asakta Theatre, this production, directed by *Mohit Takalkar*, took

a unique approach to storytelling. Adapted from *Caryl Churchill's* original, *Love and Information* is a radical departure from traditional theatre, with no central characters and no linear plot. Instead, the play is made up of over fifty short scenes, each one fleeting and fragmented, much like the way we experience life today in an age of endless scrolling and information overload. The play delves into questions of how we make sense of our lives, how we connect with others and ultimately, how we love. In an era dominated by social media and constant connectivity, these questions seem more urgent than ever. As I sat in the audience, I couldn't help but reflect on the themes of the play, which mirrored the very nature of our times, alienation in the face of constant exposure, the erosion of privacy, and the blurring of boundaries between the self and the digital world. What struck me most about *Love and Information* was its non-linear structure. Each scene, often lasting only a few seconds, felt like a snapshot of a fleeting moment in time. There were no central characters to follow, no clear narrative to grasp, just a series of disconnected vignettes that came together to form a larger, more complex picture. It was as if we were channel-surfing through different lives, only catching a glimpse of each before moving on to the next. Yet, in this chaotic rush, the play's true message emerged: that in a world overflowing with data and distractions, it is our emotional connections that truly define us.



As I watched the actors move effortlessly between characters, it became clear how much we, as individuals, are shaped by the constant flow of information and the pressure to stay connected. Each actor brought something unique to their role, embodying the vulnerability of a generation struggling to balance their digital lives with their real-world emotions. Visually, the production was nothing short of stunning. The lighting design by *Vikrant Thakar* was minimalist yet powerful, shifting seamlessly to enhance the emotional tone of each scene. The sound design by *Anita Kushwaha* further amplified the experience, creating an atmosphere that was both intimate and intense. *Saurabh Bhalerao's* music punctuated the narrative, adding another layer of depth to the performance. *Love and Information* isn't just a play about the times we live in; it's a reflection of the human condition in a world overwhelmed by information. It speaks to the anxiety of living in an age where we are constantly flooded with



data but struggle to make genuine emotional connections. The rapid-fire scenes, with their fragmented glimpses into people's lives, forced me to reconsider the way we view love and information and the spaces in between. Theatre like this is what makes us sit up and pay attention, it forces us to question, to reflect and to confront the uncomfortable truths about the world around us. And that is precisely what the *KNMA Theatre Festival* set out to do. It didn't just offer performances; it created



a space for dialogue, for conversation and for collective reflection on the role of theatre in today's society. Beyond the performances, the festival also included a symposium, a workshop and lecture demonstrations that delved deeper into the themes of vulnerability in contemporary theatre. These discussions, led by scholars and practitioners like *Dr. Anuradha Kapur*, *Vivek Madan* and *Dr. Abhilash Pillai*, explored how the pandemic has shifted the landscape of theatre and how artists are grappling with new ways of telling stories in a post-pandemic world. The entire experience was a reminder of how theatre is a living, breathing entity, always evolving, always challenging us. The festival brought together artists, audiences, and scholars, all united by the belief that theatre is not just a form of entertainment, but a mirror to society, a space where we can reflect on who we are and who we want to become. Leaving the amphitheatre after *Love and Information*, I found myself contemplating the profound vulnerability at the heart of the play. It was a vulnerability that felt familiar, one that I recognised not only in the characters on stage but in myself. In a world that's increasingly disconnected, theatre offers a space to explore our shared humanity, to embrace the discomfort, the uncertainty, and, ultimately, the beauty of being human. *The KNMA Theatre Festival* was not just a showcase of performances, it was a celebration of the power of vulnerability, a theme that will continue to resonate with me long after the curtains have fallen.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

Cultural Legacy Brought Alive



BY TEAM VIVA

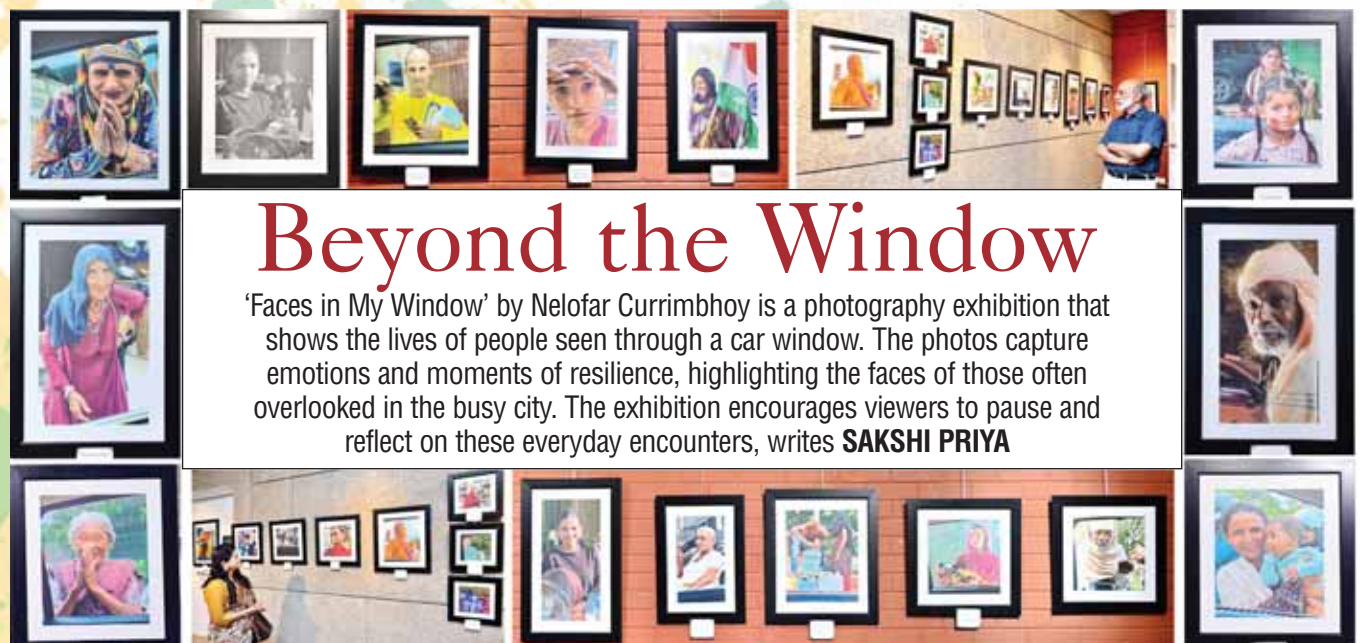
The dance drama Production - *Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram*, presented by the *Urvashi Dance Music Art & Cultural Society* in collaboration with the *Tapasaya Foundation*, beautifully combined three distinct Indian dance forms *Kathak*, *Chhau* and *Manipuri* to tell the epic story of Lord Ram. Directed by the renowned Kathak maestro *Dr. Rekha Mehra*, the performance offered a deeply emotional and artistic tribute to *Lord Rama's* virtues of courage, compassion, and integrity. *Kathak*, with its intricate footwork and expressive storytelling, formed the foundation of the performance. The dancers' graceful spins, precise footwork, and emotional expressions conveyed the key events in Ram's



life, from his exile to his victory over Ravana. The *Kathak* sequences captured Lord Ram's inner strength and resilience, drawing the audience into his journey.

Chhau, a dynamic and martial dance form, added a vibrant energy to the production. The fierce battle scenes, particularly Ram's confrontation with Ravana, were brought to life through powerful, swift movements and acrobatic leaps. The physicality of *Chhau* showcased Ram's warrior-like qualities, intensifying the dramatic moments of the story. *Manipuri*, with its flowing and graceful movements, provided a contrast to the more intense dances. The serene and spiritual quality of *Manipuri* was used to depict the divine connection between Lord Rama and Sita, with the delicate gestures and soft footwork creating a peaceful, almost ethereal atmosphere.

Choreographed by *Guru Ajay Bhatt* and *Aamrapali Bhandari*, the integration of these three dance styles was seamless, each adding its own unique layer to the narrative. The dancers, dressed in elaborate costumes used expressive hand gestures and facial expressions to embody the characters and deepen the emotional impact of the performance. Props such as the giant bow, peacock feathers and diya lighting added visual splendour and spiritual depth, making the production a truly immersive experience. The dance forms together captured the essence of *Lord Rama's* journey, creating a powerful and unforgettable performance that resonated deeply with the audience.



Beyond the Window

'Faces in My Window' by *Nelofar Currimbhoy* is a photography exhibition that shows the lives of people seen through a car window. The photos capture emotions and moments of resilience, highlighting the faces of those often overlooked in the busy city. The exhibition encourages viewers to pause and reflect on these everyday encounters, writes **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Have you ever noticed the faces that peer in through your car window as you drive through the bustling streets of the city? The faces of strangers who, for a fleeting moment, are so close to you yet often go unnoticed. Each face tells a story of joy, pain, resilience and survival. These moments, so easily overlooked in the rush of urban life, have been thoughtfully captured by *Nelofar Currimbhoy* in her exhibition *Faces in My Window*. The exhibition presents a powerful series of photographs taken from within *Currimbhoy's* car. Each image is framed through the glass of her window, offering an intimate yet distant view of the lives unfolding on the streets. The unique perspective

of capturing these moments from inside a car creates a sense of emotional proximity while maintaining a subtle boundary - one that allows the viewer to truly observe the raw emotions of the individuals, yet from a safe distance. One photograph features a young girl staring intently through the window of a car, her eyes full of curiosity, hope and perhaps a hint of longing, creating an intimate connection with the viewer. Another striking image captures a mother holding her child, both faces exuding a profound sense of care and resilience. There is also a powerful photograph of a man holding a bundle of flowers, his tired yet hopeful

expression reflecting the daily struggles of many who walk the streets. The series also includes an image of a young girl selling flowers, her face a mixture of innocence and determination as she tries to make a living amidst the chaos of the city. *Currimbhoy*, a multi-talented individual, author, theatre producer, philanthropist and now a sensitive photographer has long been dedicated to capturing the essence of life in her beloved country. Her passion for storytelling, whether through the written word or the lens of a camera, shines through in this exhibition. As a photographer, she is deeply attuned to the resilience of the human spirit, particularly those who live on the

fringes of society, yet continue to find strength and meaning in their daily lives. The faces captured in this exhibition reveal an astonishing range of emotions: grief, joy, defiance and longing, each one reflecting the survival instincts that define the human experience. *Faces in My Window* is an exhibition that calls to pause and acknowledge the lives of those who, though they may go unnoticed, are an integral part of the city's fabric. Through *Currimbhoy's* lens, we are reminded of the importance of empathy, understanding and the need to support those who are struggling to survive in a world that often overlooks them.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

My aim is to get back into T20 team: KL Rahul

PTI ■ PERTH

The beleaguered KL Rahul is seeking to use the next IPL as a vehicle to stage a comeback to the Indian T20 side as he wants to remain involved in all three formats of the game. The 32-year-old is in line to open the innings if skipper Rohit Sharma does not play in the first Test of the upcoming five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy series at Perth. Rahul's form has been a cause of concern for the Indian team as he was recently dropped for the last two Tests against New Zealand at home with Sarfaraz Khan replacing him. But the batter, who is pleased to watch when in full flow, remains unperturbed by his lean run of form. "My aim is to obviously get back into the T20 team. I've always wanted to be an all-format player, and that desire and drive haven't changed over the years. I want to still play for India in all three formats and have done that



for many years," Rahul told Star Sports. "I've been out of the T20 team for a while, and I know where

I stand as a player and what I need to do to get back. So, I look forward to this IPL season to give me that

platform to enjoy my cricket and play the way I want to," he added. Since 2022, he has scored 514

runs in Tests from 12 matches (21 innings) at an average of 25.7, having registered three half-centuries and a century. During the interaction, Rahul emphasised on always keeping the team ahead of his individual aspirations. "All of us as players want to play with freedom, and everyone would think that the way I batted, I'm enjoying playing that. But like I said, my thought process and motivation have always been team first. It doesn't matter what I want to do or what my natural game is. "We play a team sport. If I played tennis, it would be different; I could stick to saying, 'This is my natural game'. But in a team sport, it's very different. Each game, you'll have a different role and responsibility given to you to find a way to deliver for the team," he said. The Bengaluru man's last Test hundred was against South Africa at Centurion in December 2023 and since then made just two fifties in nine innings.

Prajnesh Gunneswaran announces retirement from professional tennis

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Asian Games bronze medal winner Prajnesh Gunneswaran on Friday announced his retirement from professional tennis. The 35-year-old Indian, who won singles bronze in the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games, wrote on his Instagram account: "Hanging up my racquet. Thank you." Gunneswaran, who rose to world No.75 in the ATP rankings in 2019, expressed his deep gratitude for being able to compete at the top level for several years. "As I write this, my heart swells with gratitude, pride, and a touch of nostalgia. Today, I step off the competitive tennis court for the last time. "For over three decades, this game has been my sanctuary, my greatest teacher, and my most faithful companion. From the first swing of my racquet to representing India on the grandest stages, the journey has been nothing short of extraordinary," he wrote. The Chennai-born player, who turned pro in 2010, finished with a singles record of 11-28 and a doubles record of 1-1. His highest doubles ranking was 248 which he attained in 2018. Gunneswaran also competed



in all four Grand Slams, bowing out in the opening round in all instances. The Australian Open was the only Slam in which he competed on multiple occasions -- 2019 and 2020. "Every drop of sweat, every victory, every setback - it's all woven into the fabric of who I am. Tennis taught me discipline, resilience, and the power of dreaming big," he further wrote in his post. "It gave me friendships that transcend borders and memories that will last a lifetime. It challenged me to dig deep, to grow, and to be better - not just as a player but as a human being," he noted. He had success in the ATP Challenger Tour and in ITF Futures Tour, possessing a record of 2-7 and 9-9

respectively in the singles category. He won only a title in the doubles -- Egypt F25, Sharm El Sheikh (ITF Futures Tour) -- in 2018 with his Egyptian partner Issam Haitham Taweel. Gunneswaran's biggest win against a top-20 player came in 2019 when he beat the then-18th-ranked Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia during the Indian Wells Masters in the second round. "To my coaches, teammates, and most of all, my family -- you have been my backbone. To my fans who cheered me on through the highs and lows - I'm deeply grateful. "And to the sport that gave me everything - I owe you my heart. Thank you, tennis, for the ride of a lifetime," he concluded.



Ajaz Patel, hero of New Zealand's clean sweep in India, dropped for England series

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Spinner Ajaz Patel, whose 11 wickets in the third Test against India this month helped New Zealand to an unprecedented clean sweep of that series, has been omitted from the Black Caps squad for the upcoming Test series against England. Patel had match figures of 11/160 as New Zealand won the third Test by 25 runs to become the first team to sweep India in a three-match Test series at home. The selectors have found no place for him in a 14-man squad named Friday for the three-Test series against England. Mitchell Santner, who took 13-157 in the second Test against India, is the only frontline spinner in the squad, though he will play only in the second and third Tests. "Mitch has performed superbly since his recall to the Test team last year and I am sure he will take a lot of confidence out of his match-winning performance in the Pune Test," selector Sam Wells said. Wells said it was difficult to leave out Patel but Santner had been preferred for his

recent form and all-round ability while Glenn Phillips provides another spin option. Patel has often been overlooked for Test series in New Zealand conditions. After taking 10/119 in an innings against India in 2021, he also was left out of the following home series against Bangladesh. In other squad features, Kane Williamson, who missed the India series with a groin injury, returns, but Tom Latham retains the captaincy, and uncapped all-rounder Nathan Harris has been called in. "Nathan is an exciting talent with a proven first-class record," Wells said. The opening Test at Christchurch begins on November 28. The second Test is scheduled for December 6 in Wellington and the third from December 14 in Hamilton. New Zealand squad for England Tests: Tom Latham (c), Tom Blundell, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nathan Smith, Tim Southee, Kane Williamson and Will Young.

Slovakia beats United States to advance in Billie Jean King Cup Finals, Japan defeats Romania

AP ■ MALAGA (SPAIN)

Ashlyn Krueger and Taylor Townsend saved six match points but ultimately lost the decisive doubles match as the United States was defeated 6-3, 3-6, 10-8 by Slovakia and was eliminated 2-1 in the first round of the Billie Jean King Cup Finals early Friday. Krueger and Townsend lost after rallying from 9-2 down in the third set against Tereza Mihalikova and Viktoria Hrucakova in a match that ended close to 1 a.m. In Spain. Townsend have given the U.S. the first point by defeating 17-year-old Renata Jamrichova 7-5 6-4, but Rebecca Sramkova evened the tie with a 6-2, 7-5 win over Danielle Collins in the second singles match. Slovakia will face Australia in the quarterfinals on Sunday. Japan reached the quarterfinals for the first time since 2013 after rallying to defeat Romania 2-1. Japan advanced when Eri Hozumi and Shuko Aoyama defeated Monica



Niculescu and Elena Ruse 6-1, 7-5 in the deciding doubles match. Ana Bogdan had put Romania ahead with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Nao Hibino in the first singles match of the day but Ena Shibahara pulled Japan level with a 6-4, 7-6 (2) victory over Jaqueline Cristian. Japan will face Italy in the quarterfinals. The first match between Japan and Romania had been moved back two hours because of a severe weather alert that was in effect in the Malaga region until early in the day.

The weather alert had already forced the opening meeting between Spain and Poland to be pushed back from Wednesday to Friday, when Germany is also facing Britain. The Billie Jean King Cup Finals is taking place about two weeks after a powerful storm caused flash floods that killed more than 200 people in the Valencia region, east of Malaga. The International Tennis Federation announced a donation to the Spanish Red Cross to support relief and recovery efforts in the region, and Spanish player Paula Badosa said she will donate half of her prize money to help the victims. Both the Billie Jean King Cup Finals and the Davis Cup Finals are taking place in the southern Spanish city, with the men's competition beginning next week, also at the Palacio de Deportes. It is the first time that the women's team tournament is taking place at the same venue as the Davis Cup and with overlapping dates. And for the second year in a row, it will offer equivalent prize money to the men's competition.



Snooker player Mark King banned for five years for fixing match, providing inside information

AP ■ SHEFFIELD (ENGLAND)

English snooker player Mark King was handed a five-year ban on Friday after being found guilty of match-fixing and providing inside information in the latest corruption scandal to blight the sport. The punishment for the 50-year-old King, who reached a career-high ranking of No. 11 in 2003, related to a match against Joe Perry at the Welsh Open played on Feb. 13 last year that was flagged following suspicious betting patterns. King was suspended by snooker's world governing body a month later and an independent disciplinary commission has ruled that he fixed the result of the match, while giving information to others about that match for betting purposes. He had denied the charges. His ban ends after March 17, 2028, and King was also ordered to pay more than 68,000 pounds (\$86,000) in

costs. King's suspension comes after Chinese players Liang Wenbo and Li Hang were handed lifetime bans from snooker last year for their role in a match-fixing scandal involving eight more of their countrymen. "I have known Mark King since he was very young, he is a very experienced player who has enjoyed great success, and I am deeply saddened to read the finding in this case," said Jason Ferguson, a former player who is now chairman of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association. "However, the integrity of this sport will always be our No. 1 priority." King had also been charged with fixing the outcome of a match against John Higgins played on Dec. 13, 2022, and for providing inside information on it. Those charges were dismissed. The governing body said Perry and Higgins were not accused of any misconduct related to the case.

France coach says Mbappé's dip in form is due to both psychological and physical reasons

AP ■ PARIS

France coach Didier Deschamps said that there are both physical and psychological reasons for Kylian Mbappé's rough patch of form. After France drew 0-0 with Israel in the Nations League, Deschamps was again asked about the reasons behind the Real Madrid striker's absence from his squad. "It's a fact that he is in a difficult situation," Deschamps told broadcaster TF1. "Obviously, he is going through a period which is not the happiest of his career."



Mbappé was not included in Deschamps' list for the match against Israel and a game in Italy later this week. Mbappé was also absent from the previous France gathering because of a minor thigh injury. This time he is not

injured. "He wanted to come," Deschamps said. "I think it's better for him (not to be selected) at the moment. Everybody can go through a difficult period. There is a physical element, and a

psychological one." Mbappé's performances have been below par in recent weeks after he joined Madrid from PSG this summer. He has one goal in his last seven club games and hasn't added to his 48 goals for France since June. Deschamps last week did not elaborate about his choice to do without Mbappé but said it was not related to recent reports in Swedish media that the former Paris Saint-Germain star was the subject of a rape investigation in Stockholm. Mbappé's representatives have rejected the reports as "false and irresponsible."

Messi, Vinicius have frustrating nights as Argentina loses, Brazil draws in World Cup qualifying

AP ■ ASUNCION (PARAGUAY)

Argentina's Lionel Messi and Brazil's Vinicius Junior had frustrating nights in South American World Cup qualifying. While Messi could not help his team avoid a 2-1 defeat at Paraguay, Vinicius Junior missed a second-half penalty as Brazil was held to a 1-1 draw at Venezuela on Thursday. Argentina will remain on the top of the 10-team round robin competition with a 22 points in 11 matches, Brazil is provisionally in third place in the standings with 17 points. Also on Thursday, Ecuador beat Bolivia 4-0. The Ecuadorians remain in fifth position with 16 points, while Bolivia is in eighth place with 12 points. The 11th round of South American World Cup qualifying will continue on Friday with second-place Colombia visiting Uruguay and the bottom two teams in the standings, Peru and Chile, facing off in Lima. Argentina played at Paraguay

with the hosts having banned local fans from wearing any Messi shirts in the home crowd. TV footage of the match in Asuncion showed that the vast majority of the local crowd was wearing Paraguay's red and white colours, with no Messi shirts visible in the local broadcasts. Messi had few opportunities to touch the ball during the first half, but saw Lautaro Martinez open the scoring in the 11th minute with a crossed shot. The goal was allowed after a video review. Paraguay scored the equalizer with a bicycle kick by Antonio Sanabria in the 19th minute, shortly after defender Gustavo Gomez hit the bar with a header. The hosts continued to apply pressure, and gave the Argentine star some heavy marking. Messi showed he was upset with Brazilian referee Anderson Daronco for not sending off Paraguay's Omar Alderete for his aggressive tackles. It was Alderete who scored



Paraguay's winner with a header in the 47th minute, which puts Paraguay back in contention for a spot in the next World Cup. "We came to a hard place where the national team always struggled," said Martinez. "We have to correct a lot of things we did wrong in this match, but generally speaking we are playing well. We are still in the lead, and we have to look forward." Vinicius Junior is still without a goal in six matches of World Cup qualifying. He had the chance to score a potential winner after he earned the penalty in the 67th minute but his low spot kick was saved by goalkeeper Rafael Romo and the Brazil forward then shot wide from the rebound. Brazil had the best chances in the first half, with Vinicius hitting the post once after dribbling three Venezuelans and shooting from the edge of the box. But it was Raphinha who opened the scoring from a free kick in the 43rd minute. Venezuela brought on 21-year-

old Telasco Segovia at half time and the substitution had an immediate effect as he equalised in the 46th minute with a powerful shot from the edge of the box. Venezuela went down to 10 men in the 89th minute after Alexander Gonzalez was sent off for hitting both Gabriel Martinelli and Vinicius Junior in the face. The irrigation system then came on two minutes before the final whistle at the Monumental Stadium in the city of Maturin, 500 kilometers (310 miles) west of the capital Caracas, which angered Brazil players. "When we don't win I leave the pitch a bit disappointed, we deserved to win this one," Raphinha said after the match. "But it is an important point playing away, we are working hard to win the next one at home." Ecuador beat Bolivia with goals by Enner Valencia (26th minute), Gonzalo Plata (28th and 49th) and Alan Minda (61st).