



Terror targets Srinagar civilians



Security personnel cordon off the area after a grenade attack by terrorists, in Srinagar, Sunday

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the first session of the newly elected legislative Assembly on November 4, one of the highly guarded and busiest streets of Srinagar city near the Tourist Reception Centre (TRC) was hit by a grenade attack in which at least 11 civilians were injured on Sunday. The grenade attack took place less than 24 hours after one foreign terrorist identified as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Commander Usman Lashkari was eliminated by the joint team of security forces during an eight-hour gunfight in the Khanyar area of Srinagar city on Saturday. After these two back-to-back strikes, the security grid has been

alerted in Srinagar as the newly elected legislators will be attending the five-day-long maiden assembly session of the legislative Assembly. A large number of shoppers were present for the weekly 'Sunday market' at the time of the grenade attack. All the injured were rushed to the nearby Sri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS) hospital for treatment. According to initial reports, the attackers missed the target as they intended to hit the security personnel deployed in the area to inflict maximum injuries. According to hospital records civilians between the age group of 16 to 55 years were left injured in the attack. The explosion caused panic in the area and sent shoppers scrambling for cover. The security personnel also laid a tight cordon

and carried out random searches in the area to nab the attackers. The Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha spoke to DGP, Nalin Prabhat and senior officials of the security agencies on the grenade attack in Srinagar. He directed the security officials for an effective and forceful response to punish the terrorists and their associates. The Lieutenant Governor reaffirmed the government's resolve not to allow terrorist elements to succeed in their nefarious designs. "Terrorists targeting our citizens will have to pay a very heavy price for their actions. You have full freedom to crush terror outfits and leave no stone unturned to complete this mission," the Lieutenant Governor told the senior security officials. The Lieutenant Governor wished speedy recovery of those injured

and directed that district administration should extend all possible assistance. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also reacted to the second incident of terrorist violence in Srinagar. He said the security apparatus must do everything possible to end this spurt of attacks. "The last few days have been dominated by headlines of attacks & encounters in parts of the valley. Today's news of a grenade attack on innocent shoppers at the 'Sunday market' in Srinagar is deeply disturbing. There can be no justification for targeting innocent civilians. The security apparatus must do everything possible to end this spurt of attacks at the earliest so that people can go about their lives without any fear" Omar posted on X (earlier Twitter).



IT grad arrested for sending death threats to UP CM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai police have arrested a 24-year-old woman for allegedly giving a death threat to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, an official said on Sunday. The woman, identified as Fatima Khan, who has done BSc in Information Technology, resided in Ulhasnagar area of neighbouring Thane district of Maharashtra with her family members. Her father is into timber business, the official said. The woman is well qualified but is mentally unstable, the police said. The Mumbai traffic police's WhatsApp number on Saturday received a message from an unknown number threatening that if Adityanath did not resign from the CM's post within 10 days, then he would be killed like NCP leader Baba Siddique, the official said. During the probe, the police found Khan had sent the message, he said. The Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) in a combined operation with the Ulhasnagar police traced the woman and apprehended her, the official said. Further investigation was on into the matter, the official added. The police are on alert as Adityanath is likely to come to Maharashtra for campaigning for the November 20 state assembly polls, as per officials. Former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique was shot dead in Mumbai's Bandra area on October 12.



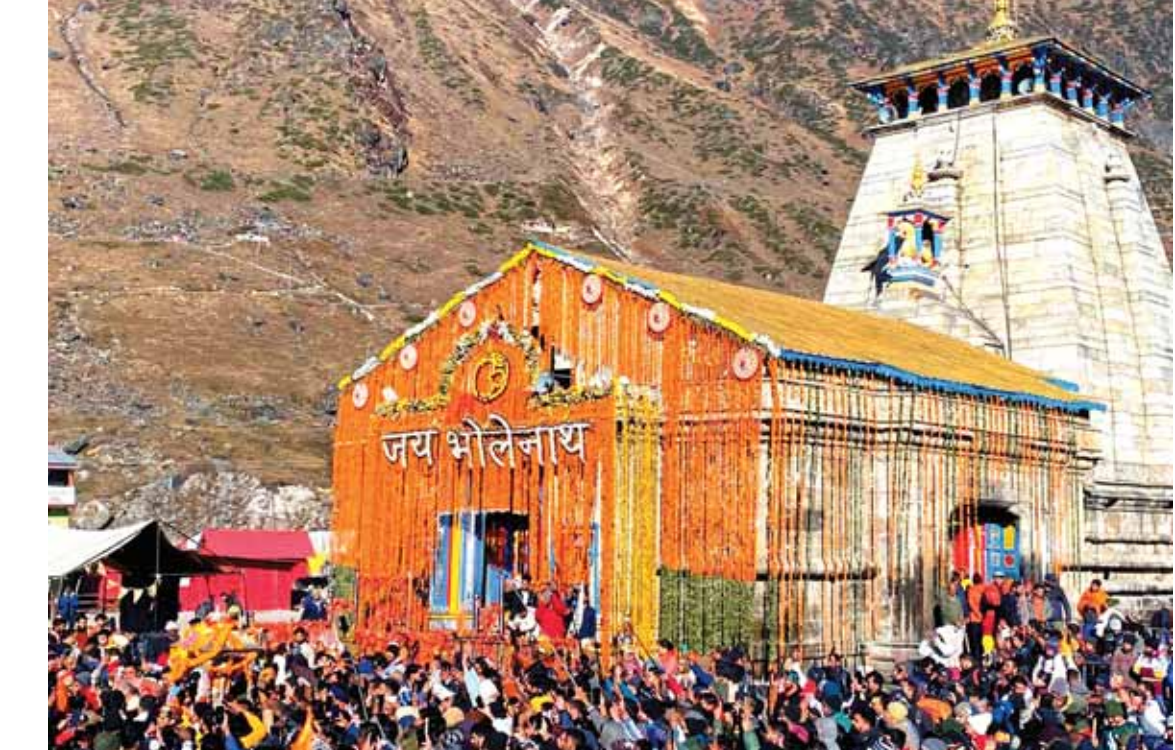
Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Congratulations, Delhi AQI is 500

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A thick layer of smog engulfed the National Capital on Sunday, and the Air Quality Index (AQI) continued to deteriorate, crossing the 500 mark, two days after Diwali. The government may soon consider banning BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers, dust suppression measures, and forbid all non-essential construction activities. In areas like Shahdara and Anand Vihar, the AQI remained above 500 after 11.30 am on Sunday. The air pollution level lies in the alarming 'hazardous' category (above AQI 400) in most parts of the capital, with PM2.5 levels over 59.6 times more threatening than the World Health Organisation's (WHO) prescribed limit. An average AQI stood in the "very poor" category at 382 in Delhi. A day before, it had been slightly worse at 339 but did not slip into the 'severe' level as forecast because of favourable atmospheric conditions such as warmer temperatures and strong winds. According to weather analysts, it is likely that wind speed will drop further and, therefore, worsen the pollutants status. Local factors, including construction activities, heavy

KEDARNATH DHAM DOORS CLOSED FOR WINTER



Devotees participate in the closure ceremony of the Kedarnath Dham door, in Rudrapur district, Sunday. The shrine remains closed for nearly six months each year during the winter season

Historical humiliation for Team India



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The fortress had been breached already. On Sunday, it just crumbled to the ground with the Indian dressing room sitting stone-faced, trying to process a fall so spectacular that nobody saw it coming. For the first time in their Test history, which goes back to 1933, the 'Tigers' at home had been whitewashed in a series of three or more games. The humiliation was inflicted by New Zealand, a side that landed here after being thrashed 0-2 by a Sri Lankan team that is in transition. The Black Caps were also without their

biggest batting star -- Kane Williamson, thanks to injury. Yet, it was a full-strength India that looked confused and short of preparation throughout a rubber they were expected to win and win comfortably at that. The 25-run loss in the third Test in front of a buzzing Wankhede crowd, that just a few months ago feted a T20 world champion Indian side, was a stunning reminder of how fortunes swing wildly in sport. Having already conceded the series 0-2, the Indians should have been able to pull one back. It wasn't an unfair expectation, the chase was a mere 147 runs but it was on a track



Retired DSP, others attacked by neighbours

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Two unruly sisters attacked a former Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of Uttar Pradesh, and his family members with a knife, injured a Delhi Police officer on duty, and dragged a two-wheeler for over half a kilometre with their car, while trying to flee arrest in East Delhi's Vasundhara Enclave area. All hell broke loose in the wee hours of Saturday when the 74-year-old former DSP Ashok Sharma, who is also a cancer patient, asked the two women, namely 21-year-old Charvi Jain and 23-year-old Bhavya Jain to stop honking repeatedly in the society. They both have been arrested.

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Youth Power on Display: Candidate's Kids Turn Campaigners in a Close Political Battle

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Gidderbaha is no stranger to high-stakes political drama. But this time, the closely-watched assembly constituency is seeing a twist that's capturing everyone's attention. In a fierce electoral battle between big names such as BJP candidate and former Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal, Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring's wife Amrita, and AAP's ex-Akali leader Hardeep Singh 'Dimpy' Dhillon, it's not just the candidates in the fray — their children have rolled up their sleeves to become campaign warriors, eager to see their parents claim victory.

With youthful energy and unwavering loyalty, these young campaigners are going door-to-door, rallying local support with a fresh appeal. Amrita Warring's daughter Ekam, Dimpy Dhillon's daughter Anu Sandhu, and Manpreet Badal's son Arjun are all out on the streets, speaking directly to the voters, and using their connections to create a buzz. Dressed in campaign gear and fueled by family pride, they have taken on a significant role in the campaign, demonstrating a passion that many seasoned political operatives would envy. For these young campaigners, the election is more than just a political battle; it's a personal mission, a platform to champion their parents' causes and dreams for the people of Gidderbaha.

Ekam Warring, Amrita's daughter, is particularly vocal about her admiration for her mother, and her approach has been to highlight women's issues and social welfare. "My mother has always inspired me. Watching her work tirelessly for the people has made me want to do the same," Ekam shared. With her brother Aman, she visits neighborhoods, talking to locals, spreading their mother's vision of inclusivity and change. The Warring family campaign team believed that women's empowerment, a priority in Amrita's agenda, resonated strongly with local women, creating a connection that Ekam is adept at

nurturing. Anu Sandhu, married and residing in Fazilka, is another young face bringing her father Dimpy Dhillon's message to the masses. Spending most of her time in Gidderbaha, Anu has emphasized her father's deep local roots. "My father is the only deserving candidate because he is truly from Gidderbaha," she said. AAP's campaign here has capitalized on the promise of development projects, and with Anu's presence, they are reinforcing the commitment to these local initiatives. Anu's brothers, Pavi and Abhay Dhillon, are also actively involved, tirelessly engaging with voters to push for a fresh wave of progress under AAP.

For Arjun Badal, standing by his father Manpreet Badal in the political arena is almost second nature. Having rallied support for his father, a seasoned five-time MLA, in previous campaigns, Arjun is no stranger to the hustle and strategy of elections. This time, however, he's stepping into the fray with renewed intensity, bringing a bold, outspoken approach that's sparking energy among voters and adding a fiery edge to his father's campaign.

Arjun has adopted a more direct, assertive approach, often taking aim at rival Raja Warring during his public addresses. In a recent gathering in Doda village, Arjun openly challenged Warring's track record, calling on BJP supporters to work fearlessly. "Many don't know the real face of Raja Warring," he remarked. "If he doesn't change his ways, I'll be the first to expose him." With his fearless demeanour and fiery speeches, Arjun has electrified the BJP's campaign, appealing to both seasoned BJP loyalists and younger voters seeking a change from established names.

This new generation of campaigners is certainly adding a unique flavour to the Gidderbaha by-election, turning it into a more dynamic and energized contest. For voters, the involvement of these young adults symbolized a shift in campaign strategy, making it

feel less scripted and more heartfelt. In the days leading up to the election, it remains to be seen how effective this youthful enthusiasm will be in turning the tide in favour of any candidate.

Whether it's the progressive vision pushed by Ekam, the local pride emphasized by Anu, or the confrontational rhetoric of Arjun, these young campaigners have proven that they are not merely shadows of their politician parents but influential voices capable of shaping the future political landscape. As Gidderbaha's voters prepare to make their choice, the political fervor brought on by these next-gen leaders could be the edge needed for their parents to secure the coveted assembly seat.

ECI Clears Way for ETT Recruitment in Punjab

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has approved the Punjab Government's request to resume the ongoing recruitment process for Elementary Teacher Training (ETT) positions in the Education Department. The move allows the allocation of stations to proceed, with appointment letters scheduled for issuance after November 13. Beginning Monday, the Department will restart work on finalizing placements.

Currently, recruitment drives for 2,364 and 5,994 ETT positions were underway but had been stalled due to the model code of conduct imposed with by-elections. After a formal request by the State Government to the Election Commission, permission was granted to continue the recruitment process. The government aims to expedite the procedure to ensure timely placements in schools across Punjab.

The ETT exam date has also been announced, with the examination set for July 28, 2024. The Punjab Education Recruitment Board has released the syllabus, guiding thousands of aspiring teachers vying for 5,994 primary teacher training positions in government schools across the State.

CM Mann Intensifies Campaign in Dera Baba Nanak

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann ramped up the election momentum for Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) candidate Gurdeep Singh Randhawa in Dera Baba Nanak on Sunday, launching a sharp attack on the opposition leaders. Addressing a packed gathering, Mann rallied support for Randhawa, promising a new era of transparency and progress. He also paid a visit to Kalanaur's historic Shiv Temple, reinforcing his call for integrity in politics.

Mann wasted no time in targeting Congress heavy-weight Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, alleging a history of corruption and unfulfilled promises. "These leaders have looted Punjab... (Sukhjinder) Randhawa amassed wealth stretching from Gurdaspur to Amritsar, and I have the files to prove it," he said, while further criticizing Congress's ineffective leadership, accusing them of registering false cases against the locals and failing to deliver on development.

The Chief Minister also took aim at former PWD Minister and senior Congress leader Pratap Singh Bajwa, blaming him for the excessive toll plazas dotting the state's roads. "Since taking office, I have shut down 16 toll plazas, saving Punjabis over Rs 62 lakh every day," Mann declared, adding, "Our government is for the people, not for political profiteering."

In highlighting AAP's accomplishments, Mann cited sweeping reforms, including free electricity bills for 90 percent of households and transparent job placements for over 45,000 youth. "Unlike previous administrations where bribes were a norm, we've created fair opportunities. Our 'One MLA, One Pension' policy has saved the state millions," he added.

AAP candidate Gurdeep Randhawa also addressed the gathering, branding the Randhawa family as symbols of "hooliganism" in Dera Baba Nanak. He accused Sukhjinder Randhawa's wife and Congress candidate Jatinder Kaur of

bringing her way through local elections, claiming the upcoming by-election as a pivotal moment for change.

"Together, we'll usher in an era free of corruption and injustice," Mann concluded, urging voters to elect Randhawa and break free from the grip of traditional power brokers.

Amrita Warring Pledges Gidderbaha Victory Against AAP's 'Manipulations'

In a historic bid, Amrita Warring, the first woman candidate from Gidderbaha, on Sunday declared her campaign "a milestone for women's empowerment," aiming to end the "manipulative tactics" of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the upcoming by-elections. Addressing an energized gathering, Amrita said that her candidacy symbolizes a victory for Gidderbaha's women, poised to reshape Punjab's political landscape. "This is not just my victory but a victory for every woman in Gidderbaha," Amrita announced. "We've seen the AAP exploit power in the recent panchayat elections, and now they're attempting the same tactics in these by-elections. But this time, we will not allow them to succeed," she added.

Amrita condemned AAP's unkept promises, including the unfulfilled commitment of Rs 1,000 to Punjab's women. She accused the ruling party of intimidating locals, defacing Congress posters, and attempting to sway public sentiment through underhanded means. "This government has lost the trust of its people... Our response will be through our votes, not by stooping to their tactics," she said.

Warring emphasized the importance of a transparent campaign, relying on the support of Gidderbaha's people rather than "political games". Touring key villages, including Hari Ke Kalan and Kauni, she was met with strong local support. "Gidderbaha will set a powerful precedent for 2027, proving that we stand with leaders who respect their promises and people," she affirmed.

Punjab Police Mobilizes to Combat Stubble Burning with Community Engagement, Proactive Measures

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

As Punjab's lush fields transform from harvest to preparation for the upcoming planting season, the state grapples with the persistent environmental challenge of stubble burning. In a groundbreaking initiative, Punjab Police are taking decisive action to mitigate this yearly crisis by actively engaging with farmers, educating them on sustainable practices, and even virtually dousing flames in the fields. From Moga to Batala, and Ferozepur to Faridkot, police are stepping beyond traditional roles, demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship that transcends law enforcement.

In Batala, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Suhail Qasim Mir leads a comprehensive campaign that combines education, community outreach, and on-the-ground intervention. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, the Batala Police have forged strong partnerships with local farmers and community leaders to combat the practice of stubble burning. This initiative has yielded significant results; between September 21 and October 31, 2024, only 135 instances of stubble burning were recorded in the joint areas of Gurdaspur and Batala — a dramatic decline from the 818 incidents logged in 2023.

The proactive approach of the Batala Police is evident in their dual focus on enforcement and education. They have filed 44 FIRs and levied fines amounting to Rs 1.05 lakhs against offenders, but their efforts extend far beyond punitive measures. Officers have been seen actively extinguishing fires, showcasing their hands-on commitment to preserving the environment. "Our objective is to educate and inform," said SSP Mir. "The decrease in stubble burning incidents reflects a positive response from the farming community, who are increasingly aware of the environmental consequences of their actions," he added.

Throughout the state, similar initiatives are being mirrored in other districts. Faridkot

Police are conducting field-based awareness sessions, directly engaging with farmers about the adverse effects of stubble burning on both health and the environment. "These meetings are vital for cultivating a sense of responsibility among our farmers," explained a Faridkot Police spokesperson. "We are encouraging sustainable practices that benefit our communities and the ecosystem alike."

In Fazilka, police have reached out to farmers in grain markets, ensuring that crucial information is readily accessible. This proactive outreach aimed at instilling a sense of urgency regarding the need for change and to foster dialogue around alternative methods of crop residue management.

As stubble fires ignite across the countryside, the visible presence of police personnel acts as both a deterrent and a source of reassurance for the community. To further enhance their efforts, the formation of Field Surveillance Teams (FSTs) has been instrumental in monitoring high-risk areas and swiftly responding to incidents. These teams are not only identifying fire-prone locations but also promoting a culture of collective responsibility.

The momentum is shifting in Punjab, where the fight against stubble burning is increasingly viewed as a shared endeavor. SSP Mir's vision for Batala extended beyond immediate enforcement; he aimed at sustaining ongoing dialogues with farmers and Kisan Unions to explore viable alternatives to burning, such as modern technology and eco-friendly methods of managing crop residue.

As this campaign unfolds, the emphasis remains clear: Punjab Police are not merely enforcers but partners in fostering a sustainable agricultural future. "The progress we are witnessing is just the beginning," SSP Mir remarked, adding, "With the continued support of our farmers and community leaders, we can protect our agricultural heritage while ensuring a healthier environment for future generations."

Punjab's Farm Fires Cross 4k

Punjab has crossed the 4,000-mark in farm fire incidents, with 216 new cases reported on Sunday alone, according to the Punjab Remote Sensing Centre. This brings the total number of farm fires recorded from September 15 to November 3, this year, to 4,132. While significantly lower than the 12,813 cases reported during the same period in 2023, the persistent stubble burning remains a pressing issue, especially for pollution in neighbouring Delhi.

The ongoing paddy harvest has driven a rise in stubble-burning cases as farmers seek rapid field clearance to sow wheat. The highest number of cases for this season was recorded on November 1 — a day after Diwali celebrations — with 587 incidents.

Out of the total 351 residue-burning incidents detected across six states on Sunday, Punjab reported the highest number at 216, signaling a continuing challenge for authorities aiming to reduce air pollution from agricultural fires. In particular, Sangrur emerged as the district with the highest number of recent cases, logging 59 incidents on Sunday alone. In terms of cumulative numbers, Amritsar leads with 600 cases this season, followed by Tarn Taran with 563 and Sangrur with 552.

Despite these surges, Punjab has made strides in reducing overall farm fire incidents, registering a 26 percent drop from the previous year's numbers. The government has been ramping up efforts to educate farmers on alternative residue management practices and has increased subsidies for stubble management equipment. However, the gap between awareness and adoption remains substantial.

Environmental experts warn that without a comprehensive shift in agricultural practices, stubble burning will continue to contribute to seasonal pollution spikes in northern India. The state government's commitment to finding long-term solutions is being tested as it navigates the balance between supporting farmers and safeguarding air quality.

Punjab farmers already acquire over 14k CRM machines against sanctioned 21,958

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

To enhance effective crop residue management, Punjab Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department has sanctioned 21,958 Crop Residue Management (CRM) machines. This year alone, farmers have procured 14,587 machines, contributing to a total of over 145,000 machines since 2018.

Punjab Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian on Sunday announced that the Super Seeder has emerged as the most popular CRM machine, with 9,010 units sold. Other notable machines include the Zero Till Drill (1,383 units), RMB Plough (627), Baler (595), and Rake (590). Additionally, 620 Customer Hiring Centres (CHCs) have been established

Notices Issued to Officials over Stubble Burning Incidents

Moga Deputy Commissioner Vishesh Sarangal has adopted a zero-tolerance approach, issuing show cause notices to various officials, including nodal officers, cluster officers, and SHO-level personnel. This comes in response to 105 reported stubble burning cases, with 87 confirmed incidents, leading to FIRs against 61 individuals and fines totaling Rs 1,72,500. Among those receiving notices are Moga SDM Sarangpreet Singh Aujla, Baghapurana SDM Beant Singh Sidhu, and several others. Legal action is underway against nodal officer Pargatjeet Singh for negligence, with potential penalties of up to Rs one crore or five years

Moga DC Takes Action:

in prison. DC Sarangal emphasized the district's commitment to curbing stubble burning following directives from the National Green Tribunal. Active monitoring teams are deployed across villages, supported by a comprehensive awareness campaign educating farmers on sustainable practices. Punjab Government has distributed 7,401 subsidized agricultural machines to assist with stubble management. With 146 nodal officers supervised by 23 cluster officers monitoring compliance, Moga's administration has set up control rooms at the sub-division level to facilitate rapid responses to fire incidents and support farmers in accessing stubble management resources. Strict action will be enforced against violators, including fines and red entries in land records.

27 IAS officers transferred in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a major administrative reshuffle, Haryana Government on Sunday transferred as many as 27 IAS officers with immediate effect. IAS officer CG Rajini Kaanthan who was posted as Director General, Industries and Commerce, Secretary to Government, Industries and Commerce Department, and Director General, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, has been made Secretary to the Government, Finance Department.

Another significant transfer is that of Shakti Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Jhajjar, who will now take on the role of Managing Director, Haryana State Federation of Cooperative Sugar Mills. Rajesh Joggal, Deputy Commissioner, Kurukshetra, has been posted as

Registrar, Cooperative Societies while Yash Garg, who was posted as deputy DC, Panchkula and Chief Administrator Shri Mata Mansa Devi Shrine Board Panchkula has been made now Director Industries and Commerce Haryana and Special Secretary to Government Haryana, Industries and Commerce Department and Director, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

IAS officer Ashok Kumar Garg, who was earlier posted as Commissioner MC, Manesar, has been made District Municipal Commissioner, Gurugram while Rajesh Joggal has been posted as Registrar, Cooperative Societies, Haryana. IAS officer Dharendra Khadgata has been posted as Special Secretary to Government Haryana, Environment, Forests and Wildlife Department and Deputy Commissioner, Rohtak while Dharmender Singh as Rohtak Municipal Commissioner and Special Secretary to Government, Haryana.

IAS officer Ajay Kumar has been posted as DC, Gurugram and Chief Administrator, Shri Mata Sheela Devi Shrine Board, Gurugram while Pradeep Dahiya as DC, Jhajjar. Munish Sharma has been made DC, Charkhi Dabri while Anish Yadav as DC, Hisar. Monika Gupta has been made DC, Panchkula and Chief Administrator Shri Mata Mansa Devi Shrine Board Panchkula while Prashant Panwar as DC, Nuh. Preeti has been made DC, Kaithal while Neha Singh as DC, Kurukshetra.

gically positioned at market places. NPK is a balanced fertilizer providing all essential nutrients and is recommended as an effective substitute for DAP, the officer said. Moreover, the Rabi season officially commenced from October 1, marking a pivotal moment for Haryana's agricultural sector. With targets set, wheat is projected to be sown across an impressive 25 lakh hectares, while oil seed crops will cover a substantial 10 lakh hectares.

No shortage of DAP fertilizer in State: Haryana CM Saini

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, reviewing the availability of DAP fertilizer with the senior officers of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department on Sunday, made it clear that there is no shortage of DAP in the State and there is no need to panic buying among farmers.

Saini said that in October 2023 during the Rabi season, the total consumption of DAP was 1,19,470 Metric Tons (MT), whereas the consumption in October 2024 is 1,14,000 MT. The availability of the DAP in the state is 24,000 MT as on Sunday and rike planning has been done for daily infusion of DAP for the farmers.

The Chief Minister further said that during the 2023 Rabi season, a total of 72,697 MT was consumed in November. As a result of the State Government's efforts, the Centre has allocated 1,10,000 MT of DAP fertilizer for the month of November, of which 41,600 MT has been planned on the rake movement for the first week of November and another 40,000 MT for the second week and will taper to another 20,000 MT in the third week of November 2024.

Meanwhile, an official spokesperson informed that the rake planning for DAP has been prepared. Bhiwani, Dadri, Rohtak, Mahendergarh, Karnal,

Panipat, Kurukshetra and Jind would receive rakes on November 3, Hisar, Fatehabad, Kurukshetra, Jhajjar, Sonapat and Rohtak on November 4, Kurukshetra, Yamunanagar, Karnal, Hisar, Sirsa and Jind on November 5, Ambala, Kurukshetra, Panchkula and Yamunanagar on November 6 and Palwal, Nuh, Faridabad and Gurugram would receive rakes on the November 7.

The Government assured that all the districts are being covered. There will be no shortage of DAP, and there is no need for panic buying. The CM has consistently been in touch with Union Minister JP Nadda to ensure timely supply of the allocated fertilizer to the State.

An official of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Department said that the farmers have utilized 1.15 lakh MT DAP fertilizer in October this year compared to 1.19 lakh MT during the corresponding period last year. "This year, the Centre allocated 85,000 MT DAP to the state in October against the promise of 1.10 LMT supply. However, the state already had 24,500 MT DAP fertilizer. That way, the state has no shortage of DAP fertilizer and the farmers need not to worry," he added.

Haryana has received a substantial supply of 60,000 MT of NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium), with 29,000 already distributed to farmers and the remaining stock strate-

gically positioned at market places. NPK is a balanced fertilizer providing all essential nutrients and is recommended as an effective substitute for DAP, the officer said.

Moreover, the Rabi season officially commenced from October 1, marking a pivotal moment for Haryana's agricultural sector. With targets set, wheat is projected to be sown across an impressive 25 lakh hectares, while oil seed crops will cover a substantial 10 lakh hectares.

About 80 percent of oil seed crop sowing has already been completed, and wheat sowing is progressing at a brisk pace. The farmers who have sown mustard this season have been desperate for the supply of DAP fertilizer. At several places, the police were called to control the crowd of farmers who had gathered in front of the offices of cooperative societies for the fertilizer.

With the wheat season also beginning in the state, the Haryana Government has made its preparations for the supply of Urea fertilizer too. This season, the projected total consumption of Urea stands at 11LMT and the state already boasts a robust inventory of 4.26 lakh MT of the fertilizer. Urea is India's most widely used fertilizer, with its consumption or sales rising from 26.7 million tonnes (MT) to 35.7 MT between 2009-10 and 2022-23, said sources in the Department.

Abhaya: Breaking the Silence... Compilation of 27 fearless expressions by female voices

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The anthology, Edited by senior journalist Soni Sangwan --Abhaya: Breaking the Silence... by Creative Crows is a unique collection of essays, stories, and poems by 27 diverse and powerful female voices.

This anthology, amplifying the voices of everyday women with extraordinary experiences, will be launched at the AWWA Literature Festival ABHIVYAKTI 4, in Chandigarh, early next month. Abhaya is an unfiltered exploration of the challenges, triumphs, and insights of women in today's workplace, blending prose, poetry, fiction, and even illustrations. The range is vast and compelling, with topics spanning personal stories and analyses to parenting boys, overcoming burnout, and exploring sleep therapy as a self-care tool.

Readers will find it anything but boring, with each piece offering a fresh perspective



and a genuine voice straight from the heart. Most contributors who, although they are not professional writers but real women, share their authentic experiences. Their collective message is loud and clear: zero tolerance for gender

bias and discrimination. Abhaya is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and strength of women navigating their paths in a complex world.

Abhaya is fearless, like a sapling, ready to burst from its cocoon of silence into the poetry of a full-blown tree. This is a compilation of 27 such fearless expressions. Abhaya, Breaking the Silence, is a collection of gasps and involuntary cries. These are recollections of repressed hurt and affronts, stories of survival,

essays of perseverance, and spontaneous poetry from silenced voices. The women writers speak out about various forms and degrees of sexual harassment that they or someone they know has had to live through. These are voices of early insights and old wisdom, of arrows of chaos jutting out of deceptive calm, and of the baffling contradictions of familiar people and places.

This is a tribute to the woman's spirit that continues being an exemplary mother, sister, wife, friend and daughter despite the frequent indignities she suffers. The contributors are from all walks of life: doctors, scientists, journalists, poets, homemakers, management professionals, educationists, and academicians. The aim of the anthology is to generate awareness. Truth is, for crimes against women to stop, we must sensitise our sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands with the right stories, and nurture in our daughters bold defiance.

ED targets cyber fraud in 'digital arrest' scams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urges people to guard against the menace of 'digital' arrests, probe agencies said they are taking action against this category of cyber crime with the ED filing a charge sheet in one such case and the IAC issuing a fresh advisory. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued a statement on Saturday, saying it filed a prosecution complaint before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Bengaluru last month against eight accused who allegedly "lured" common people through "fake" IPO allotments and stock market investments through fraudulent apps.

"Probe found that a huge network of cyber scams in India, involving fake stock market investments and digital arrest schemes executed primarily through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. Known as 'pig-butcher' scams, stock market investment scams entice victims with promises of high returns, using fake websites and misleading WhatsApp groups that appear connected to reputable financial firms," the Enforcement Directorate said.

Scammers, it said, establish credibility through fake ads and fabricated success stories, ultimately leading victims to invest significant amounts. The ED said some victims of this scam were "manipulated" under the guise of a fake arrest (digital arrest) by the



Customs and the CBI, ultimately making them transfer huge funds to various shell or dummy companies under fake "fund regularisation process." It said 'digital' arrest scams involve fraudsters posing as law enforcement officials, intimidating victims into transferring their savings by fabricating scenarios that suggest illegal involvement of the victim, the federal agency said. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) issued a public advisory on Sunday asking people to "Beware of Digital Arrests" reminding that "those making video calls are not police, CBI, Customs officials or judges". They are cyber criminals, the organisation that functions under the Union home ministry said. The advisory asked people to not fall for these "tricks" and report such crimes "immediately" by calling the national cybercrime helpline 1930 or logging at the portal

www.Cybercrime.Gov.In. Prime Minister Modi during his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' radio address on October 27 flagged the issue of fraudsters targeting people with 'digital' arrests and urged people to adopt the mantra of "stop, think and take action" when faced with such a scam, asserting that these steps will provide digital security to them. The ED said it booked a money laundering case into this crime after studying multiple police FIRs and it arrested eight persons, also named as accused in its charge sheet filed on October 10, named Charan Raj C, Kiran S K, Shashi Kumar M, Sachin M, Tamilarasan, Prakash R, Ajith R and Aravindan and 24 related companies. All the arrested persons are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. This cyber crime case involves proceeds of crimes to the tune of Rs 159 crore and the court has taken cognisance of the ED charge

sheet on October 29, it said. The ED said fraudsters, in order to perpetrate this fraud, obtained hundreds of SIM cards which were either linked to the bank accounts of shell companies or were utilised to create WhatsApp accounts. "The anonymity afforded by these untraceable SIMs allow scammers to defraud victims with a reduced risk of immediate detection. The scammers created 24 shell companies in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and some other states to facilitate the acquisition and laundering of proceeds from cybercrimes," it said. These shell companies, registered mainly at the addresses of coworking spaces (where no actual business presence exists), have used fake bank statements in filings before Registrar of Companies as proof of commencement of business of these companies. Scammers operated through "mule" accounts to transfer

the funds and the proceeds are ultimately converted into cryptocurrency and transferred abroad, the ED probe found. One of the accused, Charan Raj C, played a "key" role in this scheme by recruiting individuals for directorships and managing bank account openings. Shashi Kumar M assisted in "incorporating" several shell companies which became instrumental in collecting and integrating proceeds of crime into the banking system. Kiran S K, linked to several shell companies as per the ED, had connections with bank accounts of multiple shell entities created by overseas scammers, who submitted fake documents to incorporate these companies. Sachin M, a Director in several firms, "admitted" to assisting overseas scammers in recruiting dummy directors and facilitating bank accounts, being "well aware" of their illegality, according to the agency. Tamilarasan played a "significant" role in facilitating these activities, collaborating with both Indian and overseas scammers and he "assisted" in opening bank accounts for shell companies. Like Cyberforest Technologies Pvt. Ltd., and "knowingly" continued these operations despite of knowledge of their connection to cybercrime, the agency said. The ED said it has "incriminating" evidence like chequebooks and communication records to say that these individuals participated in a syndicate that laundered proceeds from cyber frauds across India.

Commission's tenure extended to examine SC status for converts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has extended by a year the tenure of a commission established to examine whether Scheduled Castes (SC) status can be granted to individuals who have converted to religions other than Sikhism and Buddhism. This decision, formalised through a notification dated November one, comes as the Commission, initially set to conclude its work on October 10 sought additional time to finalise its report. The Commission of Inquiry

was constituted on October six, 2022, under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952. The inquiry also covers related concerns regarding social justice, rights, and the possible extension of reserved status to converts from religions not traditionally

included in SC classifications, such as Christianity and Islam. Headed by former Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan, the Commission has been engaging with stakeholders, including sociologists, historians, and representatives from affected communities, to better understand the nuances of caste identity in the context of religious conversion, officials said. According to the latest notification, the Commission is now required to submit its report by October 10, 2025.

PM Modi congratulates Duma Boko as Botswana's President



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Democratic Change (UDC), was declared Botswana's sixth president last week. In a social media post, Modi said, "Congratulations @duma_boko on your election as the President of Botswana. Best wishes for a successful tenure." "Look forward to working closely with you to further strengthen our bilateral ties," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated Duma Boko on being elected as the president of Botswana and said he looks forward to working closely with him to further strengthen bilateral ties. Duma Boko, the presidential candidate of the Umbrella for



No forward movement on four names reiterated by Collegium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There has been no forward movement on the names reiterated by the Supreme Court Collegium headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud for appointment as high court judges as he demits office as the chief justice of India on November 10. The collegium had in January 2023 reiterated the names of advocates Saurabh Kirpal for elevation as a judge of the Delhi High Court, R John Satyan as judge of the Madras HC, and Amitesh Banerjee and Sakya Sen as judges of the Calcutta High Court. The top court collegium had also reiterated the name of Somasekhar Sundaresan, also an advocate, as judge of the Bombay High Court in January 2023. In November that year, he was elevated as a judge of the Bombay HC. People aware of the procedure to appoint high court and Supreme Court judges said the files relating to Kirpal, Satyan, Banerjee and Sen are still pending with the government. In January 2023, the Supreme Court collegium had for the second time reiterated the names of Banerjee and Sen for appointment as judges of the Calcutta High Court "expeditiously", saying it was not open for the government to repeatedly send back the same proposal. Advocate Banerjee is the son of former apex court judge Justice U C Banerjee, who headed a commission which in 2006 ruled out conspiracy angle in the 2002 Sabaramati Express fire tragedy at Godhra that killed 58 'kar sevaks'. Advocate Sen is the son of Justice Shyamal Sen, who was elevated as a permanent judge of the Calcutta High Court in February 1986 and later became the chief justice of the Allahabad High Court. Justice Sen also served as the Governor of West Bengal from May 1999 to December 1999. Besides reiterating the names of Banerjee and Sen, the three-judge Collegium had also reiterated the names of senior advocate Kirpal as a judge of the Delhi High Court, advocate Sathan as judge of Madras High Court and advocate Somasekhar Sundaresan as a judge of the Bombay High Court. Justice Sanjiv Khanna will take over as the next CJI on November 11, a day after Justice Chandrachud demits office and will have a tenure of a little over six months. He will retire on May 13, 2025 on attaining the age of 65 years.

Doctors call for sleep screening to reduce truck accidents

PTI ■ INDORE

A group of doctors has advocated the need for "sleep screening" of truck drivers to bring down road accidents by at least 43 per cent. The risk of road accidents is rising due to lack of sleep among truck drivers, Dr Rajesh Swarnkar, president of South East Asian Academy of Sleep Medicine, told PTI on Sunday. "Keeping this in mind, the regional transport offices (RTOs) must ask truck drivers to fill up a form every two years with their body mass index (BMI) as well as details like whether they like to sleep during the day or whether they snore at night. The analysis of their replies and medical examinations can tell us if truck drivers have sleep apnea or any other related illness," Dr Swarnkar informed. If truck drivers sleep for seven to eight hours in a day. The risk of road accidents can be brought down by 43 per cent, he said. Driver Dharmendra Sharma, who was about to commence a long journey from Transport Nagar here, said he manages to get just two to four hours of sleep per day, which turns him lethargic and also affects his concentration. Several other drivers said traffic jams, queues at toll plazas and the pressure of on-time delivery of goods are also causing sleeplessness. "We can't sleep by the road since we fear someone may steal diesel, spare parts or goods," one of them added. Speaking on the issue, CL Mukati, chairman of National RTO and Traffic Committee of All-India Motor Transport Congress, an umbrella body of truckers, said the idea of sleep screening was a very good one. "The transport department should authorise hospitals to conduct regular health check-ups and sleep screening of truck drivers. If a driver is found to be suffering from any sleep-related disease as per the test, then he should be treated free of cost. If the government wants, our organisation can provide funds for this," Mukati said. Moreover, the working hours of drivers should be fixed and the government should build rest houses for truck drivers every 200 kilometres on the highways, he added.

Foreign Secretary to brief Parliament on India-Canada relations, China ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri is likely to brief the Parliamentary panel on external affairs on Wednesday on the India-Canada ties, which have taken a hit after Canadian officials accused Indian government functionaries of ordering the murder pro-Khalistani terrorist Harjeet Singh Nijjar. Misri is also likely to brief the parliamentary panel on the recent upswing in India's ties with China following the agreement to resume patrolling at friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. India's relationship with Canada has taken a hit after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau linked top Indian officials to the murder of Nijjar, a charge rubbished by New Delhi. Canada's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister David Morrison had alleged on Tuesday that Home Minister Amit Shah ordered a



campaign of violence, intimidation and intelligence-gathering targeting Sikh separatists inside Canada, a charge dismissed as "absurd and baseless" by India. India has been maintaining that the main issue between the two countries is that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistan elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity. India had withdrawn its High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Verma after the security officials there named him as a "person of interest" in the investigation in Nijjar's murder case. India had also expelled six Canadian diplomats, including acting

High Commissioner Stewart Ross Wheeler on October 14. On October 25, Misri had briefed the Parliamentary panel on the Israel-Palestine conflict and asserted that India favoured a two-state solution to the issue. India has supported a negotiated two-state solution, towards establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable state of Palestine within secure and recognised borders, living side by side in peace with Israel. The Parliamentary panel on External Affairs, chaired by former union minister Shashi Tharoor, is examining the demand for grants of the External Affairs Ministry.

Someone might see weakness, she'll see strength, that is my sister: RaGa champions sister Priyanka

PTI ■ WAYANAD

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who held a joint meeting with his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra here as part of the campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha bypoll, on Sunday refrained from criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others but spoke more about the family and his sister, who is the party candidate in Wayanad. He said Priyanka, during her speech, had already spoken about PM Modi. "And, anyway, she has already mentioned Mr. Modi and we all bored of him. Then why mention him twice," Rahul Gandhi said during the meeting. Priyanka, who spoke earlier, accused PM Modi of favoring big business interests over the well-being of the people. "In this meeting, I have a choice in front of me to either give a political message or a speech I would give to my family members. I would rather speak to you like I speak to my family. I would like to give a speech more about the candidate herself,"



Rahul Gandhi said addressing the rally. My sister has always been a campaigner. She never stood for election. That should tell you something about her character, he said. Sharing their nostalgic memories of childhood when they competed with each other using the cameras gifted by their father (late Rajiv Gandhi) for capturing the best photograph, he said, "I still don't remember who won the competition.. Ok.. She (Priyanka) is now saying that I won." He said Priyanka had travelled a long distance from

the little girl taking the photographs. "She understands that the beauty is that everyone has millions and millions of labels, every single person is unique, everything is unique someone might see weakness, she'll see strength that is my sister," the Leader of Opposition said. Rahul Gandhi also said that Priyanka can do more roles than him. The by-election for Wayanad LS seat became necessary after Rahul Gandhi, who won the Lok Sabha polls from there and Rae Bareilly constituency, decided to vacate Wayanad.

Odisha CM addresses Mahanadi water dispute, highlights development projects in Bolangir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESHWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday said his Government is concerned about the Mahanadi water dispute with neighbouring Chhattisgarh. Majhi said he has already held discussions with his Chhattisgarh counterpart Vishnu Deo Sai twice on the Mahanadi water dispute. While replying to a media query in Bolangir, Majhi said the State Government is conscious about the issue and giving it all importance. "Discussion on the Mahanadi issue is going on and I personally held discussions with the Chhattisgarh chief minister twice during courtesy meetings," said Majhi, who is in charge of the Water Resources Department. The CM further said that the state government is also giving emphasis on expediting the proposed barrages, dam projects on Mahanadi river in Odisha. Majhi, who was on a two-day visit to Bolangir district for the first time after becoming the Chief Minister of Odisha, alleged that the previous BJD government had neglected the district even though there



was no dearth of strong political leadership in Bolangir. During the press conference, he said that 83 development projects worth Rs 890 crore have been either inaugurated or foundation stone was laid in Bolangir district on Saturday. The foundation stone of the Upper Lanth irrigation project in Belpara block of the district was laid by the CM on Saturday. The upper Lanth irrigation project is proposed across river Lanth, a tributary of Tel river. The project after completion will provide irrigation to 15,000 acres of land in 25 villages and 38,000 farmers of Belpada will benefit from it, he said. Among the projects inaugurated by Majhi included a Sub-Divisional Hospital (SDH) and a dialysis centre at Patnagarh and Titlagarh.

He also laid the foundation stone of a bypass road for Patnagarh town. Majhi said Bolangir district will be developed as one of the best districts in the state as the BJP government has been taking several initiatives for the development of the district. Deputy Chief Minister K V Singh Deo who hails from Bolangir district will review the projects every month for its timely completion, he said. Odisha alleges that it does not receive sufficient water from the Mahanadi river during non-monsoon months as Chhattisgarh obstructs the flow of the water by constructing barrages upstream. The previous Naveen Patnaik had moved the Supreme Court in this matter in 2016. The Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal was constituted in 2018, following orders of the Supreme Court.



Goa to showcase regenerative and spiritual tourism at World Travel Mart in London

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa will participate in the upcoming World Travel Mart in London and highlight regenerative and spiritual tourism in the coastal state and the exposition of the relics of St Francis Xavier, an official said on Sunday. The three-day event from November 5 to 7 will bring together industry leaders from around the globe, offering Goa a prime opportunity to present its distinctive tourism experiences and innovative sustainable travel initiatives on an international platform, a spokesperson from the tourism department said. "The Goa tourism pavilion

will offer a vivid showcase of the state's vibrant festivals, adventure pursuits, heritage traditions, and tranquil beaches that together shape its unique identity as a travel destination," he said. State Tourism Director Suneel Anchipaka said the highlight of this year's participation is the concept of regenerative tourism, a step beyond sustainability that focuses on actively revitalising and enhancing Goa's natural and cultural treasures. "The display will feature initiatives like hinterland tourism, preservation of heritage sites, wellness tourism centred around Ayurveda, and Goa's

emerging prominence as a destination for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and wedding events," he said. These initiatives aim to benefit local communities and ensure that the environment is preserved for future generations, he said. Anchipaka said the pavilion will also present the Ekadasha Teertha Circuit, a spiritual exploration of the 11 historic temples in Goa. "The exposition of St Francis Xavier will also be one of the highlights. The exposition will be held from November 21 to January 5, 2025, at Old Goa," he said.

BJP to implement UCC in Jharkhand, keeping tribals out of its ambit: Home Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday announced that the BJP will implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in Jharkhand if voted to power in the state, but would keep tribals out of its ambit.

Shah, while releasing the saffron party's manifesto, 'Sankalp Patra', for the upcoming assembly elections in Jharkhand, announced that a Displacement Commission would be formed to ensure the rehabilitation of people displaced by industries and mines in the state. Elections to the 81-member assembly in the state will take place in two phases on November 13 and 20, and votes will be counted on November 23.

"Our government will introduce UCC in Jharkhand but tribals will be kept out of its ambit. Hemant Soren and the JMM government are spreading false propaganda that UCC will impact tribal rights, culture and relevant legislation, which is totally baseless as they will be kept out of its ambit," Shah said in Ranchi. He said though UCC



would be implemented, it will ensure that tribal rights are not impacted. "The BJP, if voted to power in Jharkhand, will deliberate on the Sarna religious code issue, and take appropriate decisions," he said. Shah said the saffron party, if voted to power, will create five lakh employment opportunities, including 2.87 lakh government jobs, in Jharkhand. The Home Minister said that BJP will bring in a law to take back land from infiltrators in Jharkhand and identify and deport the illegal immigrants. He claimed that 'Mati, Beti, Roti' (land, daughter and food) were under threat from the illegal immigrants and the BJP would provide security to the indigenous people. The local administrations encourage infiltration in West Bengal and

Jharkhand, Shah alleged. "Crimes against women rose by 29 per cent during the five year tenure of corrupt and insensitive Hemant Soren government, while rape cases saw an increase of 42 per cent during the period," Shah alleged. He accused the JMM-led government of patronising infiltrators, while claiming that the tribal population was dwindling in the state and demography was changing fast. Shah promised that the BJP will bring in a stringent law to take back land from infiltrators in Jharkhand as well as to drive them out. He announced 'Operation Suraksha', promising to end human trafficking in Jharkhand by 2027, besides the elimination of Naxalism from the state in the next two years. Shah said voters will have to

choose between the "corrupt JMM government that patronises infiltrators" and the BJP which doesn't allow anyone to cross the border illegally. "Hindus are under attack and appeasement is at its peak. Jharkhand is the most corrupt state in the country," he alleged. There will be CBI and SIT probes into "paper leaks" in competitive exams in Jharkhand and culprits will be put behind the bars, he said. The manifesto provides that Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission-Combined Graduate Level (JSSC-CGL) Competitive Exam will be cancelled and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) will investigate the previous CGL exams and all major paper leak cases. Besides, it promises to make Jharkhand the hub of eco-tourism in the country. "We will set up 10 new medical colleges in the state. We will increase the coverage under Ayushman Bharat Jeevan Dhara Yojana from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh for elderly persons aged over 70 years. We will increase the number of beds in primary health centres and community health centres by 25,000," he

added. Shah promised that the poor in the state will be provided with houses if the BJP comes to power in the Jharkhand. A total of 21 lakh houses will be constructed under PM Awas Yojna, while elderly, widows and persons with disabilities will get Rs 2,500 as monthly pension, he added. Under the Matritva Suraksha Yojna, every pregnant woman will be given six nutrition kits and assistance of Rs 21,000, while free education will be provided from "KG to PG" to girls from poor and backward communities, he said. "Hemant Soren is sitting on the lap of Congress and RJD. He is asking for Rs 1.36 lakh-crore coal dues from the Centre. I want to make it clear that the UPA government gave only Rs 84,000 crore grant-in-aid between 2004 and 2014 whereas Prime Minister Modi gave Rs 3.08 lakh-crore from 2014-2024 in addition to funds for infrastructure and rail development," Shah claimed. He said the BJP government will construct 25,000 km of highways and expand rail network to connect every district headquarters with Ranchi.

Tanuj Puniya appointed state president of Scheduled Castes cell to mobilise dalit

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a strategic move aimed at uniting Dalit youth, the Congress party has appointed Tanuj Puniya, the Member of Parliament from Barabanki, as the new state president of the Scheduled Castes cell. The party plans to cultivate a renewed culture of resistance against incidents of Dalit oppression. To facilitate this, Congress is preparing to establish vigilance teams at the village panchayat level, enabling immediate reporting of any incidents of oppression to the state headquarters. The party is actively working to forge alliances among Dalit, backward, and minority communities. Following a modest success in the recent Lok Sabha elections, Congress is now focusing its efforts on the upcoming 2027 assembly elections. Sushil Pasi, the former state president of the Scheduled Castes Department, has been appointed as the national secretary and given the responsibility of co-in-charge for Bihar. After successfully engaging the

Pasi community, the party has devised a strategy to connect with the Harijan community. After deliberations on various candidates, senior party leaders have turned their attention to Tanuj Puniya. His appointment is seen as a way to send a positive message to his community while leveraging his youth appeal to attract Dalit youth from other castes. Furthermore, as an MP, Puniya will be able to raise issues related to Dalit oppression in the Lok Sabha, applying pressure on officials to address these matters. His status as an MP is also expected to enhance his ability to connect with a broader youth audience. This initiative will serve as a litmus test for the Congress party in 2027. After his appointment, Tanuj Puniya expressed his desire for any incidents of Dalit oppression in villages to be reported immediately to the state headquarters. He noted that many incidents are often suppressed locally for various reasons. To combat this, the Scheduled Castes cell plans to set up vigilance teams in every village to monitor and report

incidents of oppression. Depending on the situation, a team from the state headquarters will be dispatched to the site of the incident for an on-ground assessment. The findings will not only be submitted to the government but also made public, which is expected to enhance trust in the party and reduce instances of oppression. Puniya also announced plans to conduct training programs to disseminate the ideas of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, ensuring that young people are aware of their rights and duties as outlined in the Constitution. The newly appointed state president of the Scheduled Castes Department, Tanuj Puniya, brings a wealth of organizational experience. He is the son of PL Puniya, a former Rajya Sabha member who transitioned from the All India Administrative Service to politics. After earning an IIT degree, Tanuj stepped into the political arena to carry forward his father's legacy. Following a setback in the assembly elections, he successfully contested the Lok Sabha elections from Barabanki in 2024.

Kedarnath temple closes for winters amid Vedic rituals



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ DEHRADUN

The portals of Kedarnath temple were closed on Sunday for the winters amid Vedic rituals, with over 18,000 pilgrims thronging the Himalayan temple to witness the closure ceremony. An elaborate ceremony preceding the closure of the temple gates began at 4 am and the portals were closed at 8.30 am. Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) media in-charge Harish Gaur said. More than 18,000 pilgrims thronged the Himalayan temple to witness the closure ceremony, he said. During the whole of the yatra season more than 16.5 lakh pilgrims visited Kedarnath to offer prayers, BKTC chairman Ajendra Ajay said. Located at a height of more than 11,000 ft in the Garhwal Himalayas, Kedarnath is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas situated in different parts of the country. A popular pilgrimage destination visited by lakhs of pilgrims each year the temple doors are closed during winter when it remains covered in snow.

BJP unanimously elects Sunil Sharma as leader of legislative party

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

At the head of the beginning of the maiden Assembly session of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly in Srinagar on Monday, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) Sunday unanimously elected Sunil Sharma as the leader of the legislative party. The House will meet after a gap of more than six years on Monday, with the last session held in early 2018, a year before the reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories. Stringent security measures have been put in place for the assembly session. 47-year-old Sharma, who won from the Padder Nagseni Assembly constituency in Kishtwar, is set to assume the role of the leader of the opposition for the first time in the legislative assembly. Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and BJP General Secretary Tarun Chugh were appointed central observers by the BJP's parliamentary board to elect the leader of the legislature party. Interacting with the media persons in Srinagar Sunil Sharma said, the BJP is set to play the role of a constructive opposition in the Assembly. Sharma said he is grateful to the party's central and state leadership for giving him this responsibility. "With the help, experience, and blessings of my MLA colleagues, I will discharge



my duties. Keeping in mind the party policies and aspirations of the people, we will be the voice of the people in the assembly and outside as well," he said. Asked about his priorities in the assembly, Sharma said, "I have just been appointed. The battle will start tomorrow. We have to see where the enemy is hiding and we will attack accordingly." Meanwhile, the party has announced its leader Narinder Singh will be the candidate for the post of deputy speaker in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly. On the other hand, Veteran National Conference leader and seven-time MLA from Charar-e-Sharif Abdul Rahim Rather is likely to become the first speaker of the legislative assembly of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. According to the provisional calendar for the session issued by the Assembly Secretariat, the House will elect the speaker in the first sitting on Monday.

BJP's Madhya Pradesh unit chief Vishnu Dutt Sharma's future uncertain

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

Political circles in Madhya Pradesh are rife with speculation, with many asking if Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state unit chief Vishnu Dutt Sharma will get another term as the provincial chief, even as party functionaries refuse to divulge details, saying the mystery will be unravelled this December. Incumbent state president of the BJP, Vishnuddin Sharma, has almost completed five years in office, while according to BJP constitution, the tenure of a state chief is only three years. Though the party has provided two-year extensions in certain circumstances. As per the party constitution, a leader can be state president for two consecutive terms, and there are strong possibilities of Sharma being re-elected after he goes through the election process. However, the fact is that since 2006, the state unit presidents have either been Brahmins or Thakurs. In 2006, the trend started when Satyanarayan Jatia took over as state president for nine months, succeeding Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Since then, those who have remained in this top party position in Madhya Pradesh are Narendra Singh Tomar (two terms), Prabhat Jha, Nandkumar Singh



Chouhan, and Rakesh Singh. Political observers feel that when state assembly or Lok Sabha elections are not near, the party might decide to elect a Dalit leader for the post. Sources claimed that as per the constitution, the state president is elected through an election process, but there have also been instances when the BJP Central Command has replaced old faces with new ones, based on prevailing political circumstances. The process for the organizational election of the Bharatiya Janata Party has commenced, and the entire process is scheduled for completion by the end of December. At present, the process of making active members has

Two succumb to burns in Kasaragod temple firecracker explosion



PNS ■ KOCHI

Two persons who had suffered more than 40 per cent burns in the firecracker explosion in a temple in Kasaragod district on 29th October succumbed to their injuries on Sunday, according to the district administration. The deceased have been identified as 38-year-old Sandeep, an autorickshaw driver who had suffered 45 per cent burns and Ratheesh, a barber who had suffered more than 60 per cent burns in the firecracker explosion. Ratheesh was on life support system and the end came early Sunday morning. A total of 154 persons were injured in the blast out of which 98 are still undergoing treatment in various hospitals in the districts of Mangalore (Karnataka), Kannur, Kozhikode and Kasaragod. Firecrackers worth Rs 24,000 were stored in a room near the temple where a Theyyam (a traditional ritual common

in the districts of Kannur and Kasaragod) festival was taking place. The mishap occurred when the crackers were burst at a distance of hardly 2 meters from the shed where the explosives were stored. The police team investigating the case said that the crackers were burst in violation of the safety rules and guidelines prescribed by the explosive authorities. The Kasaragod district police have registered a case against the festival committee members under sections 288, 125 (a), 125 (b), 3(5) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, 3(a) and 6 of the Explosive Substances Act which pertain to negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance, act endangering life or personal safety of others, acts performed rashly, or negligently that endanger human life or personal safety and acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention.

Maha Congress seeks ban on cotton imports, asks CCI to purchase produce at guaranteed price

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid reports about the import of 22 lakh bales of cotton and the consequent concerns about the potential fall in the prices of the domestic cotton, the Maharashtra Congress has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to impose immediate ban on the import of cotton and direct the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) to purchase cotton at the guaranteed price. In a letter written to the Prime Minister in the run-up to the November 20 State Assembly polls, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole said that despite Maharashtra - which is home to over 40 lakh cotton farmers, having produced substantial cotton this year, the reports of the country importing 22 lakh of cotton had sparked concerns among the cotton farmers about the potential fall in the domestic cotton prices. "This import, combined with 11 lakh unsold bales held by the Cotton Corporation of

India (CCI), threatens to destabilise the cotton market and undermine the livelihood of farmers of Maharashtra," Patole stated. Patole said that currently, the cotton was being sold anywhere from Rs 6,500 and Rs 6,600 per quintal, which is below the Minimum Support Price (MSP), of Rs 7,122 per quintal of cotton. He said that owing to this low market price, farmers had so far chosen not to sell their produce, in the hope of a better price in the near future. "However, the impending import of 22 lakh bales threatens to lower demand for locally produced cotton, suppressing prices further and negating any chance of an increase, the State Congress chief said. "Maharashtra produces approx. 80 lakh bales of cotton every year. A fresh influx of 22 lakh bales, i.e., over one-fourth of the overall cotton produced in our state, will create severe market imbalance and destabilise the cotton economy of

Maharashtra," Patole said. Explaining the gravity of the situation, Patole said that the cotton farmers were already vulnerable, facing challenges from low prices, high input costs due to 12 to 18 percent of GST imposition on agricultural inputs and unseasonal rains. "Maharashtra has faced severe crop damage, with over 19 lakh hectares being damaged due to the retreating monsoon and unseasonal storms. The compensation announced by the Centre remains on paper, while the PM Fasal Bima Yojana only serves to fill the coffers of the insurance companies," he said. The State Congress chief said that in the current precarious situation, "the Centre's failure to curb huge amounts of cotton imports, despite CCI's existing stockpile of 11 lakh unsold bales, shows that the Centre is more concerned about traders' profit margins over the survival of the hardworking farmers of Maharashtra".

Incidents of rape and murder plague Bengal, five rapes in three days

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal continued to quickly escalate the ladder towards becoming what the Opposition and sociologists called - a "rape capital" of India with sexual offences against women, particularly the minors taking place almost on a daily basis. Even a sustained three-month 'apolitical' movement bringing life in Kolkata and Siliguri almost to a standstill seemed to have failed to knock sense in the police administration and the criminals, the critics say. "Bengal is fast turning out to be a rape capital of India ... the criminals are confident that there is nothing that the police can do to them because the top political leadership is backing them," said Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Manoranjan Byapari. Cut to North 24 Parganas. On Saturday, a man was arrested for raping a nine-year-old girl in Gaighata area of the district. Local BJP MLA Subrata Thakur said, "The family members of the accused along

with the local Trinamool Congress leaders are threatening the victim's family." The local TMC leader Prasenjit Ghosh denied such charges. Shift to North Bengal. Friday's incident at Gaighata took place within 24 hours of another minor girl being raped in a similar manner at Kumargram in Alipurduar district. The girl was abducted and raped in a nearby forest while she was bathing in a river. The culprit was arrested on Saturday, police SP Y Raghuvangshi said. The Kumargram incident followed a rape and murder that took place at Falakata a few miles away in the same district where a toddler was raped and murdered on Thursday by two persons one of who - a 42-year-old man - was lynched by the locals while his accomplice was subsequently arrested, sources said. The local people had been staging a Kolkata-like movement, blocking roads for the past two days in demand of justice for the

victim. Back to South Bengal. A similar incident took place at Domkal in Murshidabad district a middle-aged person was on Saturday arrested on charges of raping a seven-year-old minor girl. Locals said the reportedly to be the grand uncle of the victim lured her with chocolates inside his room and there raped her on Thursday night. A similar report was reported from nearby Burdwan district where a school girl was raped on Saturday sources said. Domkal happened a within hours of a newlywed woman being snatched away from her husband and gangraped in the wee hours of Friday under an overpass at Kalyanai in Nadia district. Four accused, all auto drivers have been arrested in that connection. The successive incidents took place within a few weeks of a rape and murder 10-year-old girl taking place at Mahishmari village in Kultali off Joynagar in South 24 Parganas district. The locals went on a rampage soon after the incident torched the local

police station alleging the police refused to act on time when the parents reported the incident. A similar incident took place the next week a few miles away at Gosaba where a 60-year-old man raped a minor and was subsequently arrested while both the incidents. The back-to-back incidents took place last month almost within a week of a many being lynched at Patashpur village in East Midnapore for raping and poisoning to death a housewife, sources said. Alleging police inaction the angry neighbours dragged the alleged culprit out of his house and clubbed him to death, police said. With the frequent incidents of rape - in some places accompanied with murder - taking place in the backdrop of a sustained movement post the rape and murder of a postgraduate lady doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital the sociologists have joined the opposition politicians in condemning the lackadaisical approach of the

Government in dealing with such crimes. "Where the Government and the police administration itself takes sides of the criminals by shielding them as we have seen in the case of RG Kar what do you expect from the local police men ... they are afraid of conducting arrests because they would not know which criminal is a TMC man or who has whose hands behind ... so we have been consistently demanding the resignation of the State's Police Minister who is also the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee," said Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari. Central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty said that "where the police acts in a partisan manner the people not only lose faith in them but also the criminals get encouraged ... these rapes are an aftermath of that encouragement" Congress' Adhir Chowdhury said, "the way the incidents of lynching are taking place we may see more such incidents after rape because the people are fast losing faith in the police," he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bangladesh protests

Protests erupt in Bangladesh as international voices express concern over escalating human rights crisis

Tens of thousands of minority Hindus in Bangladesh took to the streets on Friday, demanding immediate protection from ongoing violence and harassment following the recent political upheaval. The protests, primarily held in the southeastern city of Chattogram, saw around 30,000 Hindus gather, raising slogans for justice and security. The demonstrations were heavily guarded by police and military personnel, as Hindu community leaders urged the interim Government to intervene amid rising attacks on their community. The protests follow a series of reported attacks against the Hindu minority, which has been particularly vulnerable since the overthrow of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's secular government in August. After Hasina's departure, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was appointed to lead an Interim Government, which has faced criticism for its alleged inability to maintain order and protect minority groups. The influential Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council claims that over 2,000 attacks on Hindus have occurred since August, a period marked by escalating violence from hard-line Islamist groups. Hindus represent approximately 8 per cent of Bangladesh's population of nearly 170 million, while the Muslim majority makes up around 91 per cent. Despite being a significant minority, Hindu communities say they are inadequately protected and often targeted amid political and social instability. The unrest has also affected other groups; reports indicate that supporters of Hasina's Awami League party and its ally, the Jatiya Party, have faced violence as well. The recent spike in violence has sparked international concern. United Nations human rights officials, along with



global advocacy groups, have voiced alarm over the human rights situation in Bangladesh under the Interim Government. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern over the attacks, while US President Joe Biden's administration announced that it is monitoring the situation closely. Adding his voice to the chorus, former US President and current presidential candidate Donald Trump condemned the "barbaric violence" targeting Hindus, Christians, and other minorities, describing Bangladesh as "in a total state of chaos." The Hindu activists who have been rallying since August are pressing the Government with a list of eight key demands which include the establishment of a minority protection law, the creation of a dedicated ministry for minority affairs, and a specialised tribunal to address and prosecute incidents of violence against minorities. Friday's protest in Chattogram was partly fuelled by recent sedition charges filed against 19 Hindu community leaders. As Bangladesh continues to grapple with political and religious tensions, minority communities remain on edge. With increasing international attention and escalating domestic demands for protection and justice, the Interim Government must restore peace and address the rights and safety of its minority groups, else there is a clear danger of it plunging into anarchy and eventually into a civil war.

PICTALK



About 1001 food items offered at the Akshardham Temple during the 'Annakut' festival, in Jaipur

America decides: Will Kamala make history



KALYANI SHANKAR

While polls show Harris narrowly leading, Trump's momentum and attacks on Harris, alongside economic concerns, keep the outcome unpredictable

The upcoming election for the White House is of immense significance, as it will determine the next tenant of the White House and shape the future of the United States. Whether America will get its first woman president or a second Donald Trump term is a debate going on among not only the politicians but also the public. A week before the November 5 presidential polls, election fever hit the country hard. However, there is a possibility that knowing the final result may take a few more dates. Narrow victories in a handful of swing states will likely determine who gets the top job. Polls and prediction markets are signalling a Republican sweep in the election.

As the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, and the Democrat nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris, wrap up their campaigns, the potential impact of this election on the future of the United States cannot be overstated.

It is no surprise that the campaign has been not only highly negative but also personal, with Trump attacking his rival, hitting her below the belt and calling her "dumb." While the reports claim that the fight is very tight, with Trump leading now and Kamala making up her lead, the suspense will continue for a few more days, even after the election date. The Electoral College is the system that decides presidential elections: A candidate must secure at least 270 votes - allocated by state based on the outcome of their respective vote - to win the White House. Although certification sabotage has not yet resulted in such an extensive delay, many attempts have been made before. County election boards generally have no legal authority to investigate any allegations of fraud or irregularities. Tight races in crucial battleground states in 2020 and an increase in mail-in voting amid the COVID pandemic saw prolonged vote counts. That helped fuel unfounded claims of election malfeasance pushed by Trump and his allies. State election law provides other checks and safeguards through which suspected



irregularities can be adjudicated. These mechanisms are designed to resolve disputes. Extended delays in county-level certification could run against deadlines for certifying statewide results. According to the Associated Press, the winner will likely not be projected for days. However, states and the whole election results are typically "called" long before final votes are counted. In 2020, President Joe Biden won. The result was called for four days after November 3, when Pennsylvania's result was confirmed. The state gave Biden 20 electoral college votes, taking over the 270 required to win. In 2016, Hillary Clinton conceded to Trump the morning after the election. With the presidential contest in the final countdown and Harris and Trump maligning the opponent, the vice president has called Trump dangerous. Harris insists she's doing both - establishing a contrast with Trump and laying out her agenda on the economy, immigration and more. She says "It's either Donald Trump in there, stewing over his enemies list, or me working for you, checking off my to-do list." Trump is relentless in attack-



IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN NOT ONLY HIGHLY NEGATIVE BUT ALSO PERSONAL, WITH TRUMP ATTACKING HIS RIVAL, HITTING HER BELOW THE BELT AND CALLING HER "DUMB"

ing Harris, sometimes in crude terms. His core strategy has been to tie Harris to voters' frustrations with the Biden administration. According to the latest reports, Harris leads Trump by four points, 51 per cent-47 per cent, in an ABC/Ipsos of likely voters released Sunday. This is up slightly from her 50 per cent-48 per cent edge in early October. Meanwhile, a CBS/YouGov survey out Sunday shows Harris up 50 per cent-49 per cent, a shift from the vice president's 51 per cent-48 per cent lead in mid-October. According to FiveThirtyEight's election forecast, Trump is favoured to win 54 times out of 100, compared to 46 for Harris. As for the campaign spending, Harris routed Trump in fundraising for their official campaigns in September by pulling in \$222 million compared to the Republican's \$63 million. Those numbers are down from the same period in 2020 when Biden raised \$281 million and Trump raised \$81 million. Harris was able to spend a lot on TV ads. According to the Wesleyan Media Project, the Harris campaign has also dramatically outspent Trump in

digital advertising and dominated cable and radio advertising advertising, which tracks campaign advertising spending. The economy and inflation remain prominent concerns, with 90 per cent and 85 per cent of registered voters calling them highly important in their votes, respectively. Harris' campaign insists she's doing both - establishing a contrast with Trump and laying out her agenda on the economy, immigration and more. As she said in Georgia earlier this week: "It's either Donald Trump in there, stewing over his enemies list, or me working for you, checking off my to-do list." The economy and inflation remain prominent concerns, with 90 per cent and 85 per cent of registered voters calling these highly important in their vote. The problem for Kamala Harris is that she is a woman of Asian descent. Despite being a highly developed country, people are shying away from electing a woman. Hillary Clinton tried hard, but she could not win the presidency. Let us see if Kamala is successful. (The writer is a popular columnist, currently in the US; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S BANGLADESH CONCERN

Madam - Former President Donald Trump vowed to protect Hindu Americans from the radical left's anti-religion agenda, pledged to strengthen US-India relations, and condemned violence against minorities in Bangladesh. Donald Trump extended greetings and pledged to safeguard the interests of Hindu (may be forgotten that Sikh, Jain and Buddhists also followed Deepawali) Americans, vowing to shield them from what he described as the "anti-religion agenda of the radical left."

This is for the first time that Trump has addressed the crisis in Bangladesh, where reports indicate that hundreds of Hindus were killed during protests in July and August. He contrasted his approach to that of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, whom he accused of ignoring the plight of Hindus both globally and in America.

Actually, this is not the love of Trump towards Hindus and minorities. This is just a political stunt with a view to lure the Indian population (a significant number in the United States now and very much capable of swinging the outcome of this tightly balanced election of 2024) in the US to vote for him in the Presidential election and nothing else. He is not that generous towards Indians as he is attempting to show. By nature, Trump is a bit of a dictator and is against the people migrating to the United States from various other countries. He terms migrated people as "Garbage". Whatsoever, we should not want to forget that it was the US (read CIA) who purported the coup along with ISI to destabilise the region. US has always been and will be doing these things in future. Hence, don't take his love for Hindus seriously.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

ERIGAI'S NATURAL GAME

Madam - Ever had so many Indian chess players shine on international circuit simultaneously like the present bunch of

Adieu Bibek Debroy!



Bibek Debroy, a name that needs no introduction for him; for the people of our country, to relate and recognise him as a public personality. From handling the India's PM Economic Advisory Council (EAC) to contributing in India's erstwhile Planning Commission i.e. Niti Aayog policy making, Debroy had left an indelible mark of contribution on India's intellectual and policy making landscape. His passing away at the age of

69 is a huge loss of our nation. He was truly a man of wide ranging interests, be that in Economics or Sanskrit, English or Puranas; his variety of interests into scholarly, put him at the epitome of the versatility in multi-discipline. His books, columns, and other translation works of Indian Vedas and Puranas into English had been an intellectual gift to all the Indian nationals from time to time. His sad demise is a huge loss of India's economic, cultural and scholar landscape. He put his knowledge and experience at the best use for his country holistic development. His visionary contribution to public policy, administration, literature and economics will keep on serving as a guide and bearing as torch for the next generation.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

extremely talented youngsters. The exploits of R Praggnanandhaa are too well-known to need reiteration. Gukesh Dommaraju is on the brink of making history as he prepares himself to square off with Ding Liren in the World Chess Championship final in little less than a month. Meanwhile, Arjun Erigaisi has achieved the stupendous feat of reaching 2800 Elo points in the FIDE live rating, becoming only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand and the sixteenth player in the world to do so. Only French Grand Master Alireza Firouzja—at 18—reached there earlier than the Indian GM. Erigaisi has joined the elite club of Magnus Carlsen, Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kramnik and Ding Liren among others. Known as a risky player, Erigaisi relishes the "accusation" as he feels top level chess needs some serious risk taking. Without his natural style of attacking game, the 21-year-old would not have broken into the top five of world chess at such a young age. The razor sharp player's new approach of not bothering

about records and ratings but concentrating on the game at hand appears to have paid him rich dividends. High energy and incredible motivation have driven him thus far, and the top rated Indian is all set to conquer new heights in chess.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

US SANCTIONS ON INDIAN COMPANIES

Madam - The current US sanctions against Indian firms raise major worries about Indian vital posture. Should India reconsider its trading links with countries participating in the Russian defence supply lines? How can governments better educate firms on how to adhere to global sanctions in order to avoid future repercussions? On top of that, what steps would be executed to protect Indian enterprises caught up in geopolitical tensions? Addressing these issues is critical for protecting national interests amidst developing global conflicts.

Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Art and literature: An imperative than a choice for students

Embracing art and literature is an investment in their mental wellbeing tomorrow—an invaluable asset for their future life

Many decades ago, when I opted to take literature in college, at a time when many of my peers chose science, people raised their brows. It was believed to be the choice of the mediocre, a subject that didn't need much of an intellect or dedication. It was where students who didn't secure a seat in prime areas finally settled. Art and literature weren't considered durable then. Neither is it given much weightage now by parents.

Creative pursuits are still categorised as hobbies, and they get sidelined as children reach higher grades or enter college. Why? Because art is not sustainable. It is not lucrative. It doesn't build careers as easily as a degree in science, technology or accounting does. There still may be some truth in that contention prompting parents to wean off their children from extracurricular activities as the race to the future heats up. But the role of creative activities in providing our children with a respite from the stress of career-building cannot be undermined. At a time when they are grappling with the chal-



lenges of higher education, what might bring them respite from their anxieties are artistic endeavours. It is often in the lines of a sketch or the verses of a poem that children find a voice beyond words—a silent yet powerful release of their inner thoughts and emotions. In a world that measures success by exams and marks, these activities provide a refuge, where the mind is free to wander, explore, and create without boundaries. Studies have consistently shown that students who engage in painting, writing, music, dance or theatre experience lower stress levels than those who do not. These activities act as a counterbalance to the rigid schedules and deadlines that studies impose, allowing children to unwind and channel their

energies into something entirely their own. One of the often overlooked merits of art and literature is the development of emotional intelligence. When children immerse themselves in stories, they begin to understand complex emotions, both their own and those of others. A novel might teach empathy, while a piece of music might mirror feelings they struggle to articulate. These moments foster self-awareness, which is critical in today's fast-paced world where young people are grappling with social pressures and academic demands. These creative pursuits don't just make children more empathetic; they also teach them to become aware of their inner world—a skill that will serve them well beyond the walls of a classroom. In those moments when they feel overwhelmed, they can turn to the comfort of a favourite book, the joy of drawing, or the calm of journaling. It becomes a personal ritual, a way to recharge and refresh, like finding shelter from the storm within the pages of a story or the hues of a canvas. Extracurricular

activities such as dance, music, fine art and creative writing are not mere pastimes; they are crucibles where life skills are forged. Problem-solving, adaptability, and innovation—all essential skills in adulthood—find their roots in these pursuits. Children learn patience through practice, resilience through failure, and confidence through expression, creating a sturdy foundation that will support them through life's inevitable challenges. Parents and educators must recognise the role these activities play in a child's mental and emotional development. Fostering a balanced approach between academics and extracurricular interests can create resilient individuals who are not only high achievers but also happy, healthy humans. As life's pressures mount, these creative expressions transform into anchors, grounding us in times of stress and rekindling the joy we may have set aside in the haste of growing up.

(The author is a columnist and children's writing coach based in Dubai; Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

FINDING STILLNESS AMIDST A FLOOD OF THOUGHTS

A journey toward tranquillity begins by learning to simply "be" in the present moment



RAVI VALLURI

Sometime back I had written a piece on "Mind Management" and received certain queries about the generation of multiple thoughts and the acceptance by people that the mind was not at ease. It was frightening and troubling that several people of various age groups were plagued by all kinds of negative thoughts. People were troubled by thoughts arising during the whole day and particularly at night time. Thoughts arising at bedtime reside with us and seep deep into our consciousness and the following morning we are again troubled by those very thoughts and are not like fresh dew on petals. The Ashtavakra Gita says that "all action resides in the mind" and this is further corroborated by modern science. Modern science amplifies that there is no difference in the activity of the mind; whether you slap someone or merely think of slapping someone. It is the brain's limbic system, which is where motor control gets expressed. Just thinking of slapping someone activates all muscles that would be employed to undertake that specific action. On average, we are bombarded by 60 thousand thoughts a day. And we seem to have no control over them.

These thoughts arise on account of our memory bank (past impressions and Karma), the company we keep, past and current experiences and also the food that we partake in. According to the Ashtavakra Gita, enlightenment occurs only when we live in our hearts. The heart is synonymous with a point of inflexion where there is no past or future. There is only one present. Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says that "the present moment is inevitable". And this state is true enlightenment. How does one reach that state of



"present moment"? Before dwelling on some techniques, let us witness a few stories. Two Buddhist monks were riding cycles and were on their way to meet a Zen Master. Monk one described the number of trees, clouds, wafts of cold breeze striking his cheek, mountains, beautiful blue sky, fruits plucked on the way, and village folk he encountered among others before meeting the Zen Master.

The second monk in all trepidation, meekly replied that he only cycled to meet the Zen Master. Immediately, the Master proclaimed the second monk to be the next Zen Master. Why? Because he was only cycling! He was in the present moment. Yet another Buddhist story. Two Buddhist monks were travelling through a dense forest. On their way, they came across a naked woman. The older one removed his apparel clothed the bare woman carried her across the river and left her on the other side of the bank.

The younger monk was greatly troubled by this act of his senior. He kept chiding the senior monk, literally accusing him of what he perceived as an act of sacrilege. The older one just smiled and remarked that he carried the lady across the river and left her there, while the other monk was still carrying the lady in his mind. Practising pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, yoga, undertaking vigorous exercise, pursuing hobbies, contemplating, praying, observing nature and just being a spectator or a witness will also help a seeker and those with troubled minds to live in the present moment. Confucius says, "Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

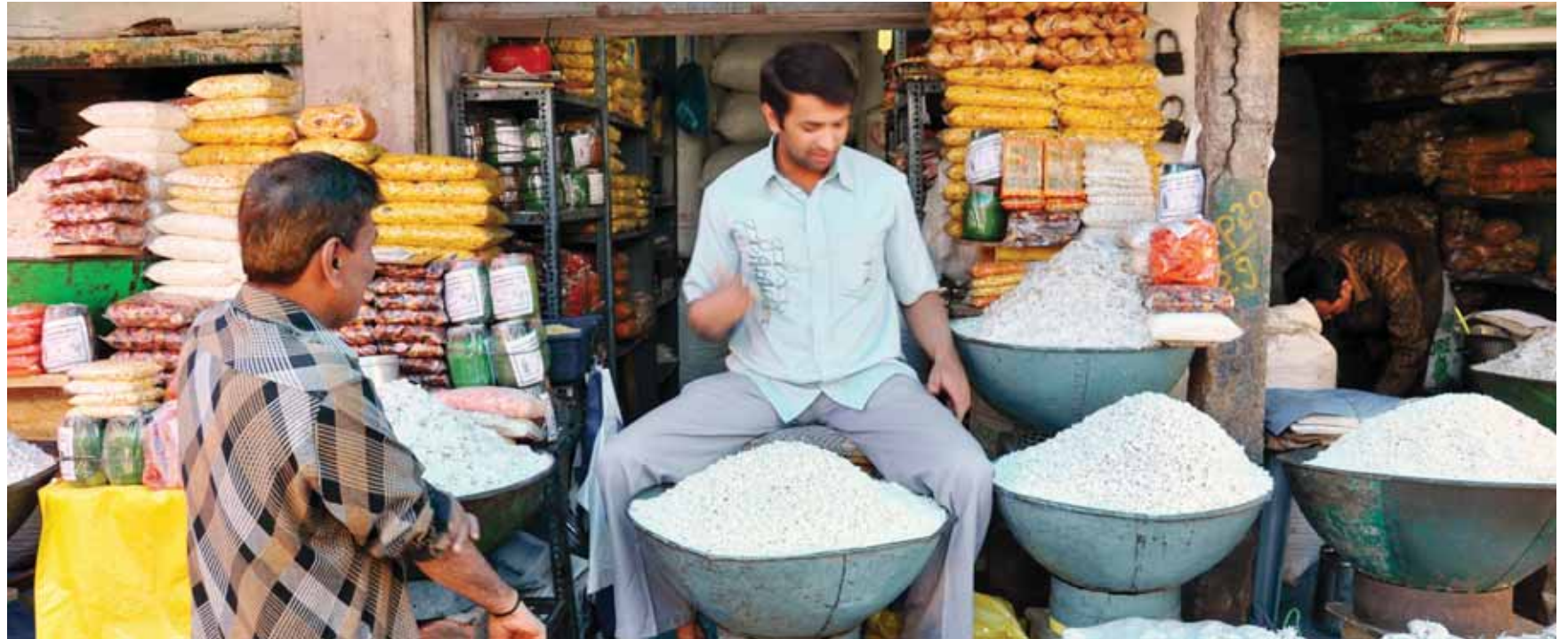
(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Food subsidy reforms: Can Govt tackle mounting costs



UTTAM GUPTA

Timely disbursement of funds to FCI would go a long way to streamline the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, which provides free food grains to the people



The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has released Rs 97,000 crore towards food subsidy expenses in the first half of the current financial year (FY) to the Food Corporation of India (FCI). This is over two-thirds of the required fund support of Rs 147,000 crore to FCI during the current FY. The MoF is expected to release the balance amount by December 31, 2024. Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), the Centre asks the FCI and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and distribute it to around 820 million people for free. Under the Scheme, each beneficiary gets 5 kg of food per month. The entire cost i.e. MSP paid to farmers plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) is reimbursed to the FCI/other state agencies as a subsidy. The money comes from the Union Budget's allocation for 'food subsidy'.

The FCI conducts the bulk of the food procurement, handling and distribution operations on behalf of the Centre. At Rs 147,000 crore, it gets around 72 per cent of the total food subsidy Rs 205,250 crore being the budget estimate (BE) for 2024-25. The government is duty-bound to make timely payments to FCI to enable the latter to conduct its operations 'smoothly' and 'effectively'.

What is so special about the current FY? In the past, thanks to inadequate budgetary allocations (often prompted by the compulsion to keep the fiscal deficit - excess of total expenditure over total receipts - under check), the government's payments to FCI had fallen short, forcing the latter to take recourse to working capital from banks to sustain operations. To bridge cash-flow mismatch, the extant arrangements provided for the FCI to avail a short-term loan with a tenure of 90 days up to Rs 75,000 crore at any given point in time.

This led to an increase in subsidy as interest cost on loans taken from designated banks (the interest rate ranges between 6.98 per cent to 7.36 per cent per annum) had to be reimbursed to the FCI. The gap between budget allocation and actual requirements used to be so huge that cash



IN THE PAST, THANKS TO INADEQUATE BUDGETARY ALLOCATIONS, THE GOVERNMENT'S PAYMENTS TO FCI HAD FALLEN SHORT, FORCING THE LATTER TO TAKE RECOURSE TO WORKING CAPITAL FROM BANKS TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS

credit limits sanctioned by the banks proved to be inadequate. This prompted the FCI to even borrow funds from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The NSSF is a public account (established on April 1, 1999) where all deposits received under National Saving Schemes are credited. All withdrawals by depositors are made out of the accumulations in this Fund. Normally, the government is not expected to use the NSSF to meet its revenue expenditure and expenses on food subsidy fall in this category. Yet, it encouraged the FCI to encroach on the Fund to plug the shortfall in its receipts. When the FCI started taking loans from NSSF in FY 2016-17, the Centre had committed to release the subsidy arrears to enable FCI to pay back the loans in subsequent years. But, that was not to be as subsidy arrears kept mounting, and FCI continued borrowing increasingly from NSSF. At the end of 2018-19, FCI's cumulative borrowing from NSSF was Rs 200,000 crore. This continued into 2019-20 on a much larger scale. In that year's budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had kept the BE for food subsidy at Rs 184,000 crore and drastically reduced it to Rs 109,000 crore in the revised estimate (RE) just because she wanted to keep the FD close to the target. Against this, the requirement being Rs 219,000 crore, the shortfall of Rs 110,000 crore was made up by FCI borrowing from NSSF. In the budget for 2020-21, she kept BE at Rs 116,000 crore against the requirement of Rs 137,000 crore. TV Somanathan, the then expenditure secretary, saw nothing wrong in the above practice arguing that borrowings by FCI were against the assets it held in the form of food stocks. The argument was flawed since loans

were taken against subsidy receivable from the Centre. In the case of wheat, for instance, on every kilo sold under the National Food Security (NFSA), the subsidy was Rs 23 (MSP plus HDC of Rs 25 minus Rs 2 being the price paid by the beneficiary). The loan was given against this amount promised by the Centre. This liability couldn't be adjusted against the food stock, which, on giving to the NFSA beneficiary would fetch only Rs 2. The Secretary further argued that keeping these borrowings off the Centre's balance sheet would prevent crowding out, and help the private sector borrow from the market at a lower interest cost. This needed to be weighed against erosion in the credibility of fiscal consolidation, which is inevitable when a strict liability of the Centre is kept off its balance sheet. A wrong can't be justified simply because the honest course of reflecting the liability in the Union budget would lead to problems for private firms. The government recognised the flaw in the above approach even as Sitharaman made a course correction while presenting the budget for FY 2021-22. In the RE for FY 2020-21, she provided for a massive allocation of Rs 529,000 crore. That amount included Rs 462,000 crore towards payment of subsidy to the FCI against a claim of Rs 216,000 crore by the latter. The excess amount was used by the FCI to extinguish all its accumulated liabilities to the NSSF. During 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24, the government stayed on course with allocation for food subsidy at Rs 372,000 crore, Rs 287,000 crore, and Rs 211,394 crore respectively adequate to fully cover the requirement. As for payments to the FCI, during 2021-22, the subsidy received was Rs 208,000 crore against the claim of Rs 207,000

crore. During 2022-23, the amount received was Rs 200,000 crore against the claim of Rs 204,000 crore. During 2023-24, the FCI received Rs 139,000 crore against the claim of Rs 133,000 crore.

During the current FY, having already received 2/3rd of its likely annual requirement, Rs 147,000 crore, during the first half, the FCI is expected to receive the balance 1/3rd by December 31, 2024. It receives the money almost round the clock, meaning it doesn't have to resort to short-term credit even from banks (forget NSSF), as its operational expenses are fully met from timely reimbursement of subsidy dues by the Centre. From the Centre's perspective, all its liabilities regarding food subsidies are 'fully' reflected in the budget for any given FY. The government no longer indulges in window dressing, no carryover of subsidy dues, and the process is fully 'transparent'. Moreover, there is no interest cost boost to subsidy payments as the FCI need not borrow. But the unsustainable increase in food subsidies continues to haunt us.

This has to do with 'universal' coverage of PMGKAY (820 million beneficiaries and at least 100 million waiting to be included as per an order of the Supreme Court), promise to give them 'free' food eternally, purchase of 'unlimited' quantum of food from farmers at MSP resulting in high stocks with FCI (at 44 million ton, its stock of rice as on October 1, 2024 is over three times the requirement) and associated high carrying cost, reimbursement of cost to FCI on 'actual' basis and pilferage of subsidized food. Addressing these maladies calls for major reforms in the Scheme. Can Modi bite the bullet?

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

AI enabled technologies: The game changer in spinal cord injury care

Spinal cord injury care has yet to receive the focused attention it deserves from the government

In the realm of spinal cord injury (SCI) care, recent advancements in enabling technologies are revolutionising treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care. These innovations are all set to redefine the quality of life for SCI patients. The International Spine and Spinal Injuries Conference (ISSICON) 2024, organised recently in New Delhi by Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute and the Spinal Cord Society, highlighted this potential by bringing together over 600 participants, including national and international experts, all focused on advancing SCI care.

Experts discussed the transformative role of technologies like the role of Exoscope, Robotic surgery, Neurorehabilitation



H S CHHABRA

tools, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is evident that these enabling technologies are going to be the game changer in SCI care. Unlike in previous decades, where survival was the primary focus, today's innovations allow for the enhancement of function, mobility, and independence, shifting our approach from survival to empowerment and

functionality. Visibility and precision are paramount in spinal microsurgery. The ability to maintain a clear view of the surgical area with magnification is crucial, as it allows surgeons to operate with accuracy while providing adequate illumination.

Traditionally, microscopes have been the gold standard in such complex procedures, offering the depth of field and lighting necessary to navigate intricate anatomical structures. However, the limitations of traditional microscopes—primarily the fixed head position required for prolonged periods—often lead to neck and back strain for surgeons. Unlike traditional microscopes, exoscopes are equipped with high-definition cameras and 3D viewing

screens, allowing surgeons to view a magnified 3D image on a large screen rather than through an eyepiece. This shift not only alleviates physical strain but also enhances ergonomic comfort, which can be transformative for procedures requiring extended focus.

The exoscope's ability to provide improved illumination and 3D visualisation allows for sustained precision, minimising fatigue and supporting a higher level of surgical performance over prolonged periods. Moreover, it offers seamless integration with digital systems, assisting with documentation and enabling real-time collaboration with other specialists. Remote access to the exoscope's 3D feed allows for consultations with experts out-



side the operating room, which is particularly valuable in teaching hospitals and cases that require multidisciplinary input. By reducing the physical toll on surgeons and offering digital connectivity, the exoscope is paving the way for better, more collaborative care in spinal surgery. The inclusion of AI in spinal surgery is another game-changer, with the potential to reshape the field by allowing for data-driven insights and

more precise treatment planning. Through AI, vast amounts of patient data can be analysed to identify optimal surgical approaches and predict complications.

Such AI insights combined with robotic precision could minimise human error and variability in outcomes, enhancing both surgical efficiency and patient safety. Currently, robotic systems are already being used in spinal procedures, aiding in the precise placement of screws, rods, and other implants. With AI-driven data analytics, robotic assistance could reach new levels of effectiveness. AI systems could improve preoperative planning based on large datasets, enabling more accurate hardware placements and efficient decision-making. This

technology can analyse past surgeries to predict potential complications and suggest the most effective treatment paths, offering a personalised, data-backed approach to surgical care. Furthermore, AI-driven analytics have the potential to predict patient outcomes based on prior cases, guiding surgeons on probable recovery trajectories and aiding patient consultations. ISSICON 2024's workshops reflected this commitment to enabling technologies by providing participants with hands-on experience in emerging techniques, such as robotic and navigation-assisted spine surgery and robotic-assisted rehabilitation. The conference was aligned with the World Health Organisation's Rehabilitation 2030 initiative, reinforcing a

global commitment to improving access to advanced rehabilitation services, particularly in underserved areas. To ensure the longevity of these innovations, ISSICON 2024 is developing eight position statements, created through pre-conference deliberations and expert discussions, to serve as guidelines for SCI care. The Spinal Cord Society has been advocating for a National Spinal Care Program that addresses the rising needs in spinal injury care and back pain management.

(Dr H S Chhabra is president of the Spinal Cord Society, director of Spine & Rehabilitation Services at the Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, and Chairman of the ISSICON 2024 Organizing Committee; views are personal)

Khamenei threatens Israel, US with 'a crushing response'

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's supreme leader on Saturday threatened Israel and the US with "a crushing response" over attacks on Iran and its allies. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei spoke as Iranian officials are increasingly threatening to launch yet another strike against Israel after its October 26 attack on the Islamic Republic that targeted military bases and other locations and killed at least five people. Any further attacks from either side could engulf the wider Middle East, already teetering over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and Israel's ground invasion of Lebanon, into a wider regional conflict just ahead of the US presidential election this Tuesday. "The enemies, whether the Zionist regime or the United States of America, will definitely receive a crushing response to what they are doing to Iran and the Iranian nation and to the resistance front," Khamenei said in video released by Iranian state media. The supreme leader did not elaborate on the timing of the threatened attack, nor the scope. The US military operates on bases throughout the Middle East, with some troops now manning a Terminal High

Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, battery in Israel. The USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier likely is in the Arabian Sea, while Pentagon press secretary Maj Gen Pat Ryder said Friday that more destroyers, fighter squadrons, tankers and B-52 long-range bombers would be coming to the region to deter Iran and its militant allies. Early Sunday, the US military's Central Command said B-52s from Minot Air Force Base's 5th Bomb Wing arrived in the Middle East, without elaborating. The 85-year-old Khamenei had struck a more cautious approach in earlier remarks, saying officials would weigh Iran's response and that Israel's attack "should not be exaggerated nor downplayed." Iran has launched two major direct attacks on Israel, in April and October. But efforts by Iran to downplay the Israeli attack faltered as satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press showed damage to military bases near Tehran linked to the country's ballistic missile program, as well as at a Revolutionary Guard base used in satellite launches. Iran's allies, called the "Axis of Resistance" by Tehran, also have been severely hurt by ongoing Israeli attacks, partic-



ularly Lebanon's Hezbollah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Iran long has used those groups as both an asymmetrical way to attack Israel and as a shield against a direct assault. Some analysts believe those groups want Iran to do more to back them militarily. Iran, however, has been dealing with its own problems at home, as its economy struggles under the weight of international sanctions and it has faced years of widespread, multiple protests. After Khamenei's speech, the Iranian rial fell to

691,500 against the dollar, near an all-time low. It had been 32,000 rials to the dollar when Tehran reached its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Gen Mohammad Ali Naini, a spokesman for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard which controls the ballistic missiles needed to target Israel, gave an interview published by the semiofficial Fars news agency just before Khamenei's remarks were released. In it, he warned Iran's response "will be wise, powerful and beyond the enemy's comprehension." "The leaders of the Zionist regime should look out from the windows of their bedrooms and protect their criminal pilots within their small territory," he warned. Israeli air force pilots appear to have used air-launched ballistic missiles in the Oct. 26 attack. Khamenei on Saturday met with university students to mark Students Day, which commemorates a Nov. 4, 1978, incident in which Iranian soldiers opened fire on students protesting the rule of the shah at Tehran University. The shooting killed and wounded several students and further escalated the tensions consuming Iran at the time that eventually led to the shah fleeing the country and the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Israel 'struck' Gaza clinic during polio campaign; army denies

AP ■ CAIRO

Palestinian officials say an Israeli drone strike on a clinic in northern Gaza where children were being vaccinated for polio wounded six people, including four children. The Israeli military denied responsibility. The alleged strike occurred Saturday in northern Gaza, which has been encircled by Israeli forces and largely isolated for the past year. Israel has been carrying out another offensive there in recent weeks that has killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands. It was not possible to resolve the conflicting accounts. Israeli forces have repeatedly raided hospitals in Gaza over the course of the war, saying Hamas uses them for militant purposes, allegations denied by Palestinian health officials. Lt Col Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesman, said that "contrary to the claims, an initial review determined that the (Israeli military) did not strike in the area at the specified time." A scaled-down campaign to administer a second

dose of the polio vaccine began Saturday in parts of northern Gaza. It had been postponed from October 23 due to lack of access, Israeli bombings and mass evacuation orders, and the lack of assurances for humanitarian pauses, a UN statement said. The administration of the first dose was carried out in September across the Gaza Strip, including areas of northern Gaza that are now completely sealed off. Health officials said the campaign's first round, and the administration of the second dose across central and southern Gaza, were successful. At least 100,000 people have been forced to evacuate from areas of north Gaza toward Gaza City in the past few weeks, but around 15,000 children under the age of 10 remain in northern towns, including Jabaliya, Beit Lahiya and Beit Hanoun, which are inaccessible, according to the UN. The final phase of the polio vaccination campaign had aimed to reach

an estimated 119,000 children in the north with a second dose of oral polio vaccine, the agencies said, but "achieving this target is now unlikely due to access constraints." They say 90 per cent of children in every community must be vaccinated to prevent the spread of the disease. The campaign was launched after the first polio case was reported in Gaza in 25 years — a 10-month-old boy, now paralyzed in the leg. The World Health Organisation said the presence of a paralysis case indicates there could be hundreds more who have been infected but aren't showing symptoms. The war began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Israel's offensive has killed over 43,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities, who do not say how many were combatants but say more than half were women and children.

Iranian-American held in Iran: US

AP ■ DUBAI

An Iranian-American journalist who once worked for a US government-funded broadcaster is believed to have been detained by Iran for months now, authorities said Sunday, further raising the stakes as Tehran threatens to retaliate over an Israeli attack on the country. The imprisonment of Reza Valizadeh, acknowledged to The Associated Press by the US State Department, came as Iran marked the 45th anniversary of the American Embassy takeover and hostage crisis on Sunday. It also followed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threatening both Israel and the US the day before with "a crushing response" as long-range B-52 bombers reached the Middle East in an attempt to deter Tehran. Valizadeh had worked for Radio Farda, an outlet under Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty that's overseen by the US Agency for Global Media. In February, he wrote on the social platform X that his family members had been detained in an effort to see him return to Iran. In August, Valizadeh apparently posted two mes-

sages suggesting he had returned to Iran despite Radio Farda being viewed by Iran's theocracy as a hostile outlet. "I arrived in Tehran on March 6, 2024. Before that, I had unfinished negotiations with the (Revolutionary Guard's) intelligence department," the message read in part. "Eventually I came back to my country after 13 years without any security guarantee, even a verbal one." Valizadeh added the name of a man who he claimed belonged to Iran's Intelligence Ministry. The AP could not verify if the person worked for the ministry. Rumors have been circulating for weeks that Valizadeh had been detained. The Human Rights Activists News Agency, which monitors cases in Iran, said that he had been detained on arrival to the country earlier this year, but later released. He was then rearrested and sent to Evin prison, where he now faces a case in Iran's Revolutionary Court, which routinely holds closed-door hearings in which defendants in face secret evidence, the agency reported. Valizadeh had faced arrest in 2007 as well, it said. The State Department told the AP that it was "aware of reports

that this dual US-Iranian citizen has been arrested in Iran" when asked about Valizadeh. "We are working with our Swiss partners who serve as the protecting power for the United States in Iran to gather more information about this case," the State Department said. "Iran routinely imprisons US citizens and other countries' citizens unjustly for political purposes. This practice is cruel and contrary to international law." Iran has not acknowledged detaining Valizadeh. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Voice of America, another US government-funded media outlet overseen by the Agency for Global Media, first reported the State Department was acknowledging Valizadeh's detention in Iran. Since the 1979 U.S. Embassy crisis, which saw dozens of hostages released after 444 days in captivity, Iran has used prisoners with Western ties as bargaining chips in negotiations with the world. In September 2023, five Americans detained for years in Iran were freed in exchange for five Iranians in US custody and for USD 6 billion in frozen

Iranian assets to be released by South Korea. Valizadeh is the first American known to be detained by Iran in the time since. Meanwhile, Iranian state television aired footage Sunday of different cities across the country marking the anniversary of the embassy takeover. Gen Hossein Salami, the head of the Guard, also spoke in Tehran, where he repeated a pledge made the day before by Khamenei. "The resistance front and Iran will equip itself with whatever necessary to confront and defeat the enemy," he said, referring to the militant groups like Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah backed by Tehran. In Tehran, thousands at the gate of the former US Embassy chanted "Death to America" and "Death to Israel." Some burned flags of the countries and effigies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They also carried images of killed top figures of Iran's allied militant groups including Lebanese Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Palestinian Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar. The crowd in the state-organized rallies chanted they were ready to defend the Palestinians.

Millions of Americans seal their choices in early voting

New York (PTI): The 42 Broadway in New York is an important address in this election season in the US. This is the office of the Board of Elections. Michael Ryan, executive director, and his deputy Vincent Ignizio are upbeat about the figures that the early voting has drawn for the city. On the first day, about 140,000 votes were cast in the early voting. "We don't want to pat ourselves on the back but we are upbeat about this. New York has already created a record in early voting and it is still on," says Ryan. Across the United States, tens of millions of voters have already cast their ballots. According to the data from the University of Florida's Election Lab tracker, more than 68 million Americans have already voted. Across the nation, voters are taking advantage of the flexibility offered by early voting options, whether through mail-in ballots or in-person polling sites. This trend allows voters to avoid potential issues such as inclement weather, long queues, or unforeseen scheduling conflicts on election day. Ryan feels that several factors played a role in ensuring the positive trend in early voting, at least for New York City (NYC). "In 2020 less than 100 polling stations were set up for early voting. This year the number is almost 50 per cent more than that," says Ryan. An early voting station has been set up at the John Jay College in the Manhattan area of NYC. The station is packed with voters coming in and casting their ballots days ahead of the main election day on November 5. Suzan, the coordinator of the station, feels the early voting process is witnessing a very positive response.

Harris appears on 'Saturday Night Live' as mirror image of Rudolph

AP ■ NEW YORK

Vice President Kamala Harris made a surprise appearance on "Saturday Night Live" in the final days before the election, playing herself as the mirror-image double of Maya Rudolph's version of her in the show's cold open. The first lines the candidate spoke as she sat across from Rudolph, their outfits identical, was drowned out by cheers from the audience. "It is nice to see you Kamala," Harris told Rudolph with a broad grin she kept throughout the sketch. "And I'm just here to remind you, you got this." In sync, the two said supporters need to "Keep Kamala and carry-on-ala," declared that they share each other's "belief in the promise of America," and delivered the signature "Live from New York it's Saturday night!" Harris made the surprise trip to New York City with the election looming, briefly stepping away from the battleground states where she's been furiously campaigning in favor of

NBC's iconic sketch comedy show, where she was hoping to generate buzz and appeal to a nationwide audience. Harris came to New York on Air Force Two after an early evening campaign stop Saturday in Charlotte, North Carolina. She was scheduled to head to Detroit, but once in the air, aides said she'd be making an unscheduled stop and the plane landed at LaGuardia Airport. Harris arrived at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in Manhattan, where "SNL" tapes, shortly after 8 p.m., enough time for a quick rehearsal before the show airs live at 11:30 pm. It is the final "SNL" episode before Election Day on Tuesday. The visit wasn't previously announced and an official familiar with Harris' planning only officially confirmed it for reporters traveling with the vice president moments before the live airing began. The official insisted on anonymity to discuss plans before they were made public. Harris departed immediately after the opening segment. She told reporters, "It was fun!" as

she boarded the plane to leave New York. Host John Mulaney and musical guest Chappell Roan shifted the show away from politics. Neither addressed the election. Mulaney, the standup comic and former "SNL" writer, hosted for the sixth time and talked about his kids with wife Olivia Munn, Catholicism, and his stint in rehab. Some expected Roan, the 26-year-old singer who has become a major star in recent months, to make a political statement in her first appearance on the show. She has previously been harshly critical of the Democratic party and declined to endorse Harris, though Roan has said several times she plans to vote for her. But she played it straight, or as straight as the wildly theatrical performer gets. She sang her hit "Pink Pony Club," on an all-pink set bathed in pink light. Senator Tim Kaine also made a surprise appearance, in a game-show sketch where the gag was that no one remembered him despite his being Hillary Clinton's running mate in 2016.

Germany allocates 20 mn euros to Pakistan for forest protection project

Islamabad (PTI): Germany will provide 20 million euros to Pakistan for the second phase of a project aimed at the protection and sustainable management of forests in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, according to a media report on Sunday. An agreement for financial support for the 'Billion Tree Afforestation Support Project' (BTASP) was signed in Islamabad on Saturday between Pakistan Economic Affairs Secretary Dr Kazim Niaz and Director of German Development Bank KfW, Esther Gravenkotter. The first phase of BTASP is already under implementation in partnership with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Climate Change, Forestry, Environment and Wildlife Department, the Dawn newspaper reported. It will support the protection and sustainable management of forests in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The project will focus on new plantations on 10,000 hectares, capacity building of forest departments, and developing a management information system. The project will support nature-based livelihood generation geared to alleviate poverty. It will promote women's economic empowerment and participation in decision-making processes, according to the report. Pakistan is among the nations considered most vulnerable to climatic changes despite being among the countries contributing least to environmental pollution. The country faced massive rains and floods in 2022, which, officials said, were caused by climatic changes.

Trump to rally backers every day until election in North Carolina

Gastonia (AP): Donald Trump will rally supporters in North Carolina every day until Tuesday's election, a flurry of late activity in the only swing state that he won in both his 2016 and 2020 campaigns. Even as Trump looks to expand the electoral map and project strength with trips to New Mexico and Virginia, two Democratic states not widely viewed as competitive, he is putting considerable time into North Carolina, which last backed a Democrat for president in 2008. The former president's path to the 270 electoral votes needed to capture the presidency gets significantly more complicated if he loses North Carolina. The fast-growing Southern state gave Trump his smallest margin of victory — 1.3 percentage points — over Democrat Joe Biden four years ago. Trump campaigned in Gastonia, west of Charlotte, and Greensboro on Saturday, with a stop in Salem, Virginia, in between. He will be in the eastern city of Kinston on Sunday and in Raleigh on Monday. Those four rallies will bring his total events in North Carolina since Oct. 1 to nine. His running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, has been in the state six times during the same period, most recently on Friday.

Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump's Democratic rival, also was in North Carolina on Saturday for a concert and rally in Charlotte. Her campaign has not announced any other travel to the state before Election Day, though she's sending her husband, second gentleman Doug Emhoff, to Greenville on Monday. The extensive damage from Hurricane Helene across western North Carolina has created a dose of uncertainty about the state of play here. Flooding destroyed homes and displaced residents in several counties, including the liberal state of Asheville and the conservative rural areas surrounding it.

When you think about the competition the US has been having with China, when you think about the actions that Russia is taking which are at odds with the interests of the US and its allies, India is really the most important country for the US to continue to build the relationship in terms of its sheer size, economic activities," he said. Makhija said it is very important that the next US president understands that India is a very crucial partner for the US in many ways. "When it comes to global priorities like our defence, tackling global issues like climate change. The US and India can lead the way if they work together. So we need a president who recognises that and Kamala Harris is that person," he said.

Trump and Harris crisscross key states in last 50 hours

PTI ■ WASHINGTON Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris and her Republican rival former president Donald Trump are leaving nothing to chance in the last 50 hours before closing of the polls, making a passionate appeal to their countrymen to support and send them to the White House. "We will win," Vice President Harris told thousands of her cheering supporters in Wisconsin urging them it's time to turn a page and bring in a new generation of leadership in America. She was campaigning in Wisconsin and North Carolina

on Saturday. She plans to make closing arguments in Michigan, Georgia and Pennsylvania on Sunday and Monday. Trump, 78, chose Virginia for campaigning on Saturday. Addressing thousands of his supporters in Salem, the former president promised to bring in a new era of peace and prosperity in the country. He continued to charge Harris of being a liberal Left radical. Over the next two days, Trump has a hectic schedule in the battleground states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia and North Carolina. To win, a candidate needs 272 electoral college votes. According to respectable

272town.com, Harris is assured of 226 electoral votes and Trump of 219. While Harris needs 44 additional electoral college votes to reach the magic figure of 272, Trump requires 51. Both the candidates have multiple pathways to victory running through the seven battleground states of Arizona, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia. Political pundits believe that Pennsylvania (with 19 electoral college votes) and Michigan (15 electoral college votes) are now the ground zero. Latest polls indicate that it's too close to call in both Michigan and Pennsylvania.

from our community was here in the US. Who wants to turn back the clock on fundamental rights," he said. "Their (Trump camp's) belief is that the country is supposed to be a specific demographic region. We think America is an idea, we think America is an idea that anyone can succeed no matter who you are," Makhija said. "This is the decision that we are making which is — do we have a country which is pluralistic, that is welcoming, that is inclusive or do we think it should be exclusive and really meant to serve a particular demographic?" he said. "I think Kamala Harris represents the future that is more inclusive, that will be welcoming and lives up to the ideals that our country truly was founded on," Makhija added.

'India-US partnership most important globally for future'

PTI ■ PHILADELPHIA

The India-US partnership is the most important engagement globally and the cooperation will flourish further if Kamala Harris becomes the US president as she recognises the significance of the relationship, prominent Indian-origin Democratic leader Neil Makhija has said. In an exclusive interview with PTI, the young leader, considered to be close to Harris, also came down very hard on former president Donald Trump for his immigration policy that has triggered some concerns among immigrant communities in the US, including Indian-Americans. On the India-US partnership, Makhija said it is the most important relationship for the future.

Makhija called Trump a threat to democracy. "He is engaging in the same kind of behaviour we have seen in some of the darkest moments in world history where leaders have scapegoated those individuals and communities that do not even have the right to vote," he said. Makhija is presently serving as Montgomery County Commissioner and Chair of the Board of Elections. He is the first Indian American Commissioner elected in the history of Pennsylvania and many Democrats believe that the young leader could be in Harris' cabinet if she wins the election. "You can see that he (Trump) is blaming all of the country's problems on immigrants and it is not real, it is not realistic, it is simply aimed at inflaming tensions and driving divisions

among people who live here in the US," he said. "Unfortunately history does repeat itself. Hopefully, the people of our country recognise what happened in the past and we avoid a similar fate in the future," he added. In his campaign speeches, Trump promised a radical shift to tighten Washington's immigration policy and vowed to stage the "largest deportation operation in American history" if he is reelected. The Republican leader has even resolved to end birthright citizenship for the children of immigrants living in the US illegally, triggering concerns among various diaspora communities including from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Makhija also appeared to hold the Republican Party responsi-

ble for not increasing the cap on H1B visas for Indians. "Kamala Harris was the sponsor of a bill to fix that issue of



Indian-origin Democratic leader Neil Makhija

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REACTION TO NORTH KOREA'S MISSILE TEST

US flies long-range bomber in drill with S Korea, Japan

AP ■ SEOUL

The United States flew a long-range bomber in a trilateral drill with South Korea and Japan on Sunday in response to North Korea's recent test-firing of a new intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the US mainland, South Korea's military said.

North Korea on Thursday tested the newly developed Hwasong-19 ICBM, which flew higher and stayed in the air longer than any other missile it has fired. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called it "an appropriate military action" to cope with external security threats posed by its rivals. On Sunday, the US flew the B-1B bomber to train with South Korean and Japanese fighter jets near the Korean Peninsula, demonstrating the three countries' firm resolve and readiness to respond to North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile programs, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The trilateral aerial training was the second by South Korea, the US and Japan this year, the statement said. The US often responds to major North Korean missile tests with temporary deployments of some of its powerful military assets



On Sunday, the US flew the B-1B bomber (file photo) to train with South Korean and Japanese fighter jets near the Korean Peninsula, demonstrating the three countries' firm resolve and readiness to respond to North Korea

such as long-range bombers, aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines to and near the Korean Peninsula. North Korea typically responds angrily to such US actions, calling them part of a US-led plot to invade the North and performing additional weapons tests. The US has flown the B-1B bomber over or near the Korean Peninsula four times this year, according to South

Korea's military. A B-1B is capable of carrying a large conventional weapons payload. Thursday's Hwasong-19 test, North Korea's first ICBM test-firing in almost a year, showed progress in North Korea's missile program. But many experts say North Korea still has some technological issues to master to acquire functioning ICBMs that can deliver nuclear strikes on the US mainland. The experts say the Hwasong-19

shown in North Korea's state media photos and videos looked too big to be useful in a war. The ICBM test was seen as an effort to grab American attention ahead of the US presidential election this week and respond to international condemnation of North Korea's reported dispatch of thousands of troops to Russia to support its war against Ukraine, observers say.

200 families separated by US-Mexico border reunite

Ciudad Juarez (Mexico): Nearly 200 families gathered Saturday along a stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border for heartfelt but brief reunions with loved ones they had not seen for years because they live in opposite countries. Tears flowed and people embraced as Mexican families were allowed to reunite for a few minutes at the border with relatives who migrated to the US. Adults and children passed over the Rio Grande to meet with their loved ones. This year, the annual event organized by an immigrant rights advocacy group happened three days before the US presidential election, whose monthslong campaigns have focused heavily on immigration and border security. It also took place under increased security, according to the Network in Defense of the Rights of Migrants.

"We did not have barbed wire, we did not have so many soldiers deployed in our community," said Fernando Garcia, the organization's director, highlighting the border security changes that the border has seen since the reunions began last decade. "The barbed wire had to be opened so that the families could have this event." Garcia said he expects migration into the US to continue regardless of who wins Tuesday's election. Family reunions, he said, will continue, too.

Crashing waves, night of terror in Spain village



A general view of an area affected by floods in Chiva, Spain

AP ■ CHIVA

Irene Cuevas will never forget the sound of the waves crashing below her apartment's balcony. If only there had been a flash of lightning in the darkness to let her glimpse what sounded like a roaring sea. "It was a constant fear because we didn't have light to see by," Cuevas told The Associated Press. "We could hear the roar of the waves, which was unbelievable. The street was completely flooded and we were hoping for some lightning so that we could at least see what situation we were in. It was all waves, currents everywhere. "We have that sound of the waves burned in our memory." The devastating flash floods in eastern Spain this week that claimed over 200 lives and destroyed countless homes and livelihoods also seared a scar of terror in many survivors. Cuevas, a 48-year-old embryologist, is a resident of Chiva, a village perched on a hill about 30 kilometres from Valencia city, whose southern outskirts were likewise ravaged by the floods on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Chiva got more rain in eight hours than the town had experienced in the preceding 20 months. Cuevas was at home and saw how the gorge dividing her village suddenly overflowed with rushing water. The tsunami-like wall of water claimed at least seven lives in Chiva, home to some 16,000 people, and the search goes on for more missing, either in col-

lapsed houses or in the gorge. "It was terrifying because that night it began to rain and the water began to overflow the gorge and started carrying away cars and trees," Cuevas said. "The underpasses of the bridges started to clog with debris, and the water started to flow through the entire village." The gorge, called the "Barranco de Chiva," is normally dry, but it is fed into by several other runoff gorges and channels water to vineyards below. The huge storm sent a blast of water that knocked down two of the four bridges crossing the gorge, while a third was left unsafe to cross. The sides of the gorge were eaten out, bringing down a sidewalk and several houses and tearing holes in others. Cuevas, who moved to Chiva when she got married 18 years ago, lives one street over from the buildings bordering the gorge. She and other people living in her apartment building helped several neighbours from the building in front when they feared it would come down. The neighbours said their building trembled from the force of the water. Cuevas and her fellow residents helped tie ropes or cords across the street so that the people on the other side could hang on as they waded through the rushing water. They then made it up the stairs and some 20 people spent a sleepless night in her second-floor apartment and the apartment above. Amparo Cerda, Cuevas' upstairs neighbour, described herself as traumatised by her

memories of the fury of the waves and the sound of "doors exploding" from the water's force. It was as if their building had become a ship lost in a storm at sea in the pitch black night. "There were waves in the gorge, waves in the street below where the water came in the other direction and ran into the water coming from the gorge," Cuevas said. "So right here, at this corner, just where the houses hit down, the two currents hit and produced terrifying waves." "When the daylight came we could see the damage," Cuevas said. "We saw all the houses that had disappeared and there was a feeling of impotence because you didn't know where to start looking for people." Five days have passed since that night of terror, and in Chiva and other localities, such as Paiporta, Barrio de la Torre, and Massanassa, citizens and volunteers are pitching in to clean up the mountains of debris and the thick brown layers of mud left by the water. Five thousand more soldiers are arriving in the area this weekend to help the 2,500 already deployed. Thousands of police officers have also been sent in. But for now it is the people themselves still leading the way. "Now we need to clean up and try to get back to normal because there are more rains forecast for the weekend, and that won't help," Cuevas said. "We are trying to get everything ready for when the rains come back. Because they will."

More Indian women seeking employment in S Arabia: Official

Riyadh (PTI): Indians represent the second-largest expatriate community in Saudi Arabia and "welcoming conditions" for women are increasing the kingdom's appeal for Indian women seeking meaningful employment here, according to the country's human resources and social development ministry.

Official figures show that as of 2024, over 2.4 million Indian workers reside in the kingdom, with 1.64 million in the private sector and 785,000 in domestic work. Bangladesh has the highest number of expat workers at 2.69 million. A spokesperson in the ministry said Indian workers, including women, play a vital role in Saudi Arabia's labour market, comprising a substantial portion of the expatriate workforce.

"Comprehensive reforms, expanded workplace support, and investments in skills development create welcoming conditions for women from diverse backgrounds," the spokesperson said. "Improved infrastructure, including women-only transportation and childcare support, further enhances the appeal for Indian women seeking meaningful employment, enabling them to contribute to the kingdom's growth while pursuing their professional and personal aspirations," the spokesperson told PTI. Asked about some instances of Indians being duped by agents and touts in India on employment opportunities in Saudi

Arabia, he said Saudi Arabia is dedicated to upholding international labour standards and has implemented substantial labour reforms to protect workers' rights. "To further support these efforts, Saudi Arabia has established bilateral agreements with various countries, including India, to ensure the protection of workers during recruitment, focusing on information exchange, joint investigations, and capacity-building to combat forced labour," he said. The Musaned and Qiwa platforms allow workers to file complaints regarding wages, contract terms, or mistreatment, ensuring that these concerns are addressed and, where necessary, legal action is taken, he added.

On the over 11,000 lawsuits involving Indian workers this year, the spokesperson said the first stage of consideration of labour disputes between the worker and the employer is the mediation process conducted to resolve the dispute and try to reach an amicable resolution acceptable to both parties if possible or refer the case to the labour court. Elaborating on the working conditions for women, he said that Saudi Arabia's advancements in supporting female employment position the country as a conducive environment for success. The spokesperson said that efforts by the ministry to support and empower women in the workforce have led to an unprecedented reduction in female unemployment in the kingdom.

Moldovans cast votes in decisive presidential runoff

AP ■ MOLDOVA

Moldovans cast votes in a decisive presidential runoff Sunday that pits pro-Western incumbent Maia Sandu against a Russia-friendly opponent, as ongoing claims of voter fraud and intimidation threaten democracy in the European Union candidate country. In the first round held October 20, Sandu obtained 42 per cent of the ballot but failed to win an outright majority. She is facing Alexandru Stoloianu, a former prosecutor general, who outperformed polls in the first round with almost 26 per cent of the vote. Polling stations will close at 9

pm (1900 GMT). By 1 pm, 850,000 people — almost 30 per cent of eligible voters — had cast ballots, according to the Central Electoral Commission. A poll released by research company iData indicates a tight race that leans toward a narrow Sandu victory, an outcome that might rely on Moldova's large diaspora. The presidential role carries significant powers in areas such as foreign policy and national security and has a four-year term. Moldova's diaspora played a key role in a nationwide referendum also held on October 20, when a narrow majority of 50.35 per cent voted to secure Moldova's path toward EU

membership. But the results of the ballots including Sunday's vote have been overshadowed by allegations of a major vote-buying scheme and voter intimidation. Instead of winning the overwhelming support that Sandu had hoped, the results in both races exposed Moldova's judiciary as unable to adequately protect the democratic process. Moldova's Prime Minister Dorin Recean said Friday that people throughout the country were receiving "anonymous death threats via phone calls" in what he called "an extreme attack" to scare voters in the former Soviet republic, which has a population of about 2.5 million people.

Lawmakers vetting European Union chief's new team

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Five months after the European Union lurched to the political right, the influence of nationalist and populist parties will go on public display in Brussels on Monday when lawmakers vet the proposed new members of the EU's increasingly powerful executive branch. Over five days of hearings, the EU parliamentarians will grill 26 top officials — nominated by their national governments — to establish whether they are suitable to lead the next European Commission on policies like agriculture, trade, economic affairs, health or migration. The commission is the only EU body with the power to draft laws which, once passed by the Parliament and the council of

member states, apply in all 27 countries of the bloc. They cover everything from water quality to data protection to competition policy. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen assembled her new-look executive in September, seeking to balance sensitive political, geographical and gender concerns within a team that will lead the European project for the next five years. The vast majority of the would-be commissioners come from the right of the political spectrum, mostly the European People's Party (EPP), a conservative EU-wide political family that counts von der Leyen as a member and is the biggest in the parliament. That should make things easier for her. Despite that advantage, the EPP has already worked with hard-

right groups — including Italian Premier Georgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy, which has neo-fascist roots, and stridently nationalist lawmakers from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's ruling Fidesz — to secure majorities in the European Parliament. Other pro-European parties were weakened in the June 6-9 EU elections and von der Leyen can operate without them. The second-biggest group — the center-left Socialists and Democrats — seems ready to rubber-stamp her team. Its leaders say it does not have a "kill list" of nominees that it intends to remove. The commission is akin to a government cabinet, with commissioners instead of ministers. But it proposes laws that influence all aspects of the lives of

around 450 million people in the 27 countries that make up the world's biggest trading bloc. Von der Leyen is the boss of more than 33,000 employees. The commission handles trade talks, sealing agreements with EU partners in the outside world and managing disputes at the World Trade Organisation. It's also a powerful competition watchdog, whose influence has been felt by tech giants like Apple, Google and Meta. Von der Leyen's power is growing. Her team led the European drive to secure COVID-19 vaccines, and whipped up a massive rescue package to help Europe's economies cope with the cost of trying to stop the pandemic spreading. It also helped the EU weather the energy crisis sparked by Russia's

war on Ukraine. This is von der Leyen's second term. More than half the nominees — 14 of them, compared to 10 last time — are from EPP parties, like her. Ten of them are women. Von der Leyen, a German, is keeping Europe's other major powers France, Italy and Spain close by her side. To the disappointment of mainstream parties, she has penciled in Meloni ally Raffaele Fitto as a new executive vice president — one of five — to oversee "cohesion policy," which helps finance infrastructure projects with a big slice of the EU's massive budget. Former French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne was made a VP and secured the industry portfolio. Spanish Socialist Teresa Ribera, another VP, has a powerful post

combining the transition toward a green economy and competition policies. Former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas will be von der Leyen's foreign policy chief. Ultimately, though, they will all answer to the president. Nominees are questioned for three hours by the leaders of committees and senior lawmakers most closely linked to their portfolios. The nominees must demonstrate general competence, a commitment to Europe, independence, and good communications skills. Immediately after, an evaluation is made behind closed doors. Candidates must win a two-thirds majority vote. If they fall short, lawmakers can ask additional questions in writing or request a further 90-minute grilling.

Chinese scholars highlight Ramayan's footprints in China buried in Buddhist texts

PTI ■ BEIJING

China has had footprints of the stories of Ramayana cloaked in Buddhist scriptures for centuries, scholars here have said, bringing to the fore perhaps for the first time, the influence of Hinduism in the country's checkered history. At a symposium on "Ramayana - A Timeless Guide" organised by the Indian Embassy here on Saturday, a host of Chinese scholars associated with longstanding research on religious influences, made candid presentations tracing the historical routes through which Ramayana reached China and its influence on Chinese art and literature.

"As a classic intertwining the religious and the secular world, the influence of Ramayana has grown ever more significantly through cross-cultural transmission," Dr Jiang Jingkui, Professor and Dean of the

Institute for International and Area Studies of Tsinghua University said. "China, too, has absorbed elements of this epic, which not only left traces in Chinese (majority) Han culture but was also reinterpreted and given new meaning in Chinese Xizang (Tibetan) culture," he said. China officially refers to Tibet as Xizang. "This cultural migration and adaptation demonstrate the openness and flexibility of Ramayana as a classic and worldly text," Jiang said. The earliest content related to Ramayana in China was introduced into the Han cultural sphere, primarily through Buddhist scriptures, he said. While it was not fully incorporated as a complete work into the Han cultural sphere, parts of the epic were incorporated into Buddhist scriptures, he said, citing Chinese translations of Buddhist scripts in which "key figures such as Dasharatha

and Hanuman were noted as Buddhist characters." "A famous example is that Hanuman was transformed into a Monkey King who obeyed Buddhist teachings, blending into classic Buddhist moral narratives," Jiang said. The Monkey King with human characteristics called Sun Wukong, has remained forages in the best-loved and most enduring Chinese literature and folklore. In his presentation, Pro Liu Jian of the National Institute of International Strategies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said many Chinese scholars agree that Sun Wukong can be traced to Hanuman, though some scholars say he is a "domestic product". "Chinese scholars generally agree that the image of Sun Wukong comes from that of Hanuman. Therefore, Sun Wukong is not a domestic product, but a character from India," he asserted. Speaking on



the topic 'Footsteps of Ram in China', Prof Qiu Yonghui, Chief expert and Deputy Director of China Centre for South Asian Studies of Sichuan University, in her presentation displayed photos of a wide variety of different Hindu deities in the museum Quanzhou, in China's Fujian province. She even showed a photo of a Buddhist temple managed by a Hindu priest. "It was primarily through

Buddhism that Indian culture took its stronghold in China. This is the reason why in the history of Sino-Indian cultural relations, Hinduism occupies a negligible position," she said. "Multifaceted Indian culture — both Buddhist and non-Buddhist — made its mark on Chinese soil," she added. Jiang, in his speech also recalled how the famous seventh-century Chinese scholar Xuanzang who visited India, studied at

Nalanda University and brought back a host of Buddhist scriptures providing detailed accounts of Ramayana stories he heard during his pilgrimage. "However, due to the Hindu background of Ramayana and the predominance of Buddhism in China, the text was neither fully translated nor widely circulated within Han culture," he said. The first Chinese translation of Ramayana from Sanskrit was done by Ji Xianlin in 1980. Ji's translation was a "significant breakthrough for Chinese academia, providing Chinese readers with access to an Indian literary classic and establishing a new bridge for Sino-Indian cultural exchange," Jiang said. Ji dedicated nearly a decade to translating this vast work of twenty-four thousand verses, and his version has become a cornerstone for the study of Ramayana in China, he said. Jiang added that Ramayana has a more extensive and long-

standing history of influence in Tibet, where it was first introduced during the period of the Tubo Kingdom. Through literary works and theatrical performances, Ramayana has not only become a subject of in-depth study among Tibetan scholars but has also gained widespread popularity among common people in Tibet. "This demonstrates the powerful vitality of Ramayana as a cross-cultural classic," he said. "Ramayana is not only an epic but also a profound exposition of the ideal personality and ideal society. Through the actions and words of Rama, as well as the establishment of the 'Ram Rajya', the epic presents multiple dimensions of the concept of 'Adarsh' (ideal) in Indian culture," he said. In his address, Indian Ambassador to China Pradeep Kumar Rawat said Ramayana is believed to be the oldest poetic work of human civilisation.

"While the historians have not come to a definite conclusion about the time period when the Ramayana was written, there is astronomy-based research finding that date Ramayana to about 7th Century BC," he said. "The Ramayana has also transcended geographical boundaries, adapting itself to seamlessly merging into local cultural tapestry, while maintaining its core values," he added.



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Mcap of most valued firms jumps, State Bank, ICICI Bank top gainers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of 6 of the top-10 most-valued firms surged Rs 1,07,366.05 crore last week, with State Bank of India and ICICI Bank becoming the biggest gainers.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE conducted a one-hour special 'Muhurat Trading' session on the occasion of Diwali on November 1, marking the start of the new Samvat 2081. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 321.83 points, or 0.40 per cent.

While Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, ITC, Hindustan Unilever, and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) were the gainers, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, and Infosys faced erosion from their market valuation.



The valuation of State Bank of India jumped Rs 36,100.09 crore to Rs 7,32,755.93 crore. ICICI Bank added Rs 25,775.58 crore to Rs

9,10,686.85 crore in its market valuation. LIC's valuation surged Rs 16,887.74 crore to Rs 5,88,509.41 crore and that of

Reliance Industries soared Rs 15,393.45 crore to Rs 18,12,120.05 crore. ITC added Rs 10,671.63 crore, taking its market capitalisation (mcap) to Rs 6,13,662.96 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 2,537.56 crore to Rs 5,96,408.50 crore. However, the mcap of Infosys tanked Rs 38,054.43 crore to Rs 7,31,442.18 crore and that of Bharti Airtel slumped Rs 27,299.54 crore to Rs 9,20,299.35 crore.

The valuation of TCS eroded Rs 26,231.13 crore to Rs 14,41,952.60 crore. The mcap of HDFC Bank declined Rs 3,662.78 crore to Rs 13,26,076.65 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valuable firm of the country followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Infosys, ITC, Hindustan Unilever and LIC.

SEBI proposes to allow InvITs, REITs, SM REITs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has proposed allowing Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), Small and Medium REITs (SM REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) to use interest rate derivatives for hedging risk.

Also, the regulator has suggested approving locked-in units for REITs and InvITs to be transferred among sponsors and their groups, similar to rules for promoters in listed companies, to help sponsors manage their holdings without compromising "skin in the game".

Additionally, Sebi has suggested permitting fixed deposits to be considered as cash equivalents when calculating leverage for REITs and InvITs, clarifying credit rating requirements for REIT and InvIT borrowings, and setting a timeline for filling vacancies on their boards and expanding the asset base for REITs and SM REITs.

The regulator has also proposed to permit REITs to invest in liquid mutual funds. It has suggested measures to facilitate ease of doing business for REITs and InvITs, along with investors' protection.

According to its consultation paper, Sebi is considering allowing REITs and InvITs to hedge against interest rate fluctuations by using derivatives like interest rate swaps.

This could help stabilise cash flows, reduce risks, and protect unitholder interests, especially for long-term infrastructure projects.

It is also proposed to define "Common Infrastructure" for REIT regulations. To enhance business flexibility for REITs, it has been proposed to clarify that facilities like power plants, heating/cooling systems, water treatment, and waste treatment plants -- serving one or more REIT assets -- will qualify as "common infrastructure" under REIT rules. This applies even if these



facilities are not located within a single project due to their technical requirements. These facilities should supply and be used exclusively by REIT assets. For power plants, however, any excess power can be sold to the state utility/grid as per regulations, with any credits or payments going towards the benefit of REIT assets.

To improve transparency, it has been proposed to amend the governance norms for quarterly reporting of InvITs. Currently, quarterly results for the investment manager and its business segments are presented to the investment manager's board, but there is no direct requirement for InvITs to report their performance.

The proposed amendment would clarify that quarterly results should specifically reflect the performance of the InvITs themselves, not just the investment managers. This change aligns InvIT regulations with REIT regulations, where the focus is on the quarterly results of the REIT itself.

Also, it has been suggested to align the composition of NRCs in REIT and InvIT managers with listed companies under the LODR regulations.

Currently, all NRC members for REITs and InvITs must be independent directors. The proposal allows a mix of independent and non-executive directors, similar to listed companies.

To enhance investors' protection, Sebi has suggested reviewing conditions for InvITs to borrow beyond the 49 per cent limit, assessing REIT investments in unlisted equity shares and outlining the roles and responsibilities of trustees for REITs, InvITs, and SM REITs.

FMCG firms worry over high inflation, hint price hike

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading FMCG companies reported a decline in margins in the September quarter on account of higher input costs and food inflation, which ultimately slowed down the pace of urban consumption.

Rising prices of commodity inputs such as palm oil, coffee and cocoa were also accentuated and some FMCG firms have hinted at a price hike.

HUL, Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL), Marico, ITC, and Tata Consumer Products Ltd (TCPL) have expressed concerns over squeezing urban consumption, which according to industry experts forms 65-68 per cent of FMCG total sales.

"We think this is a short-term hit and we will recover the margins through judicious price increase and stabilising of costs," said GCPL Managing Director and CEO Sudhir Sitapati in a Q2 earning statement.

GCPL, makers of Cinthol, Godrej No 1, HIT had a steady quarter given the



headwinds of oil costs and tough consumer demand in India and its standalone EBITDA margin was lower, caused entirely by high inflation in palm oil.

The rural markets, which were earlier lagging behind, continued their growth journey ahead of urban. Besides, FMCG players reported growth from premium products and from sales through quick-commerce channels.

Another FMCG maker Dabur India also said the demand environment was challenging in the September quarter marked by "high food inflation and a resultant

squeeze in urban demand." The maker of Dabur Chyawanprash, Pudinhara and Real juice reported a decline of 17.65 per cent in its consolidated net profit to Rs 417.52 crore and revenue from operations slipped 5.46 per cent to Rs 3,028.59 crore.

Recently, Nestle India Chairman & Managing Director Suresh Narayanan also raised concerns over decline and said "middle segment" is under pressure as high food inflation continues to cripple household budgets. "It is extremely clear that the market is facing muted demand. The growth in F&B sector, which used to be in

double digits a couple of quarters ago, is now down to 1.5-2 per cent," he said.

Over the rise of food inflation, Narayanan said there is a "sharp uptick" in prices of fruits and vegetables and oil prices.

"This could lead to an increase in prices if raw material costs become unmanageable for companies. We are ourselves facing a difficult situation as far as coffee and cocoa prices are concerned," he said.

Nestle India, which owns brands such as Maggi, Kit Kat, and Nescafe also reported a marginal decline of 0.94 per cent and its domestic sales growth was at 1.2 per cent.

Narayanan also pointed out that tier-1 and below towns and rural also seem to be reasonably stable. However, "pressure points" are coming from mega cities and metros. TCPL MD & CEO Sunil D'Souza also said urban has softened and has an impact on consumer spending in urban areas.

"My hypothesis is probably food inflation is higher than what we think it is and the impact is far higher," said

D'Souza in the earnings call for the September quarter. HUL CEO & MD Rohit Jawa said the market volume growth trajectory remained muted in this quarter. At an MAT (moving annual total) level, total FMCG volume growth has slowed down slightly in recent months.

"The pattern is quite clear that urban growth has trended down in the recent quarters or quarter and rural has continued to grow gradually and has now for the past few quarters been ahead of urban, and also continues to be ahead of urban this time," Jawa said in an earnings call.

HUL, which owns power brands such as Surf, Rin, Lux, Pond's, Lifebuoy, Lakme, Brooke Bond, Lipton and Horlicks, reported a 2.33 per cent decline in consolidated net profit.

Similarly, Marico also reported "rural growing at 2x the pace of urban" on a year-on-year basis. It also reported "higher input costs in the core portfolios". Though it already had price hikes in the coconut oil portfolio and a favourable reversal in the pricing cycle in Safalo oils.

Magicpin slashes platform fee to Rs 5 per delivery



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hyperlocal e-commerce platform magicpin has slashed platform charges to Rs 5 per delivery, half of the fee set by its competitors, a top company official said on Sunday.

Around two weeks back, Zomato and Swiggy raised platform fees in the range of 42-67 per cent per delivery. Magicpin founder and CEO Anshoo Sharma, on social

media platform X, announced the reduction in platform fees applicable for deliveries during the present calendar year.

"We can find a balance towards the welfare of our delivery heroes and our customers during festive seasons. Hence, here is a magicpin promise to let more people enjoy the festive season. Magicpin's platform fees slashed by 50 per cent of

competition to Rs 5 only for the rest of the year," Sharma said.

He said there will be no fee hike on food delivery for the rest of the year 2024.

Zomato increased the platform fee from Rs 7 to Rs 10, which will be charged to customers besides the delivery fee per order.

Swiggy followed suit and raised the platform fee to Rs 10 from Rs 6 it charged earlier.

Before Diwali, Magicpin was levying a platform fee of Rs 7, which it has slashed by about 29 per cent, following which it has recorded a two-fold jump in order on a year-over-year basis.

"This Diwali, we went against the current trend and took some hard platform pricing decisions.

Result: More than Half a Million orders, Love and Support received during the long festive weekend! This is 2X of what we did last year," Sharma said in a post on X.

Microsoft sees strong momentum in AI spending in India, aims to empower two million with AI skills

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Microsoft does not see any slowdown in technology spends in India, the company's India and South Asia President, Puneet Chandok said, asserting that "a lot of momentum" is building up on AI with buzz around 'Copilot' and rise in number of use cases across industries in this market that the software maker counts as among its fastest-growing regions.

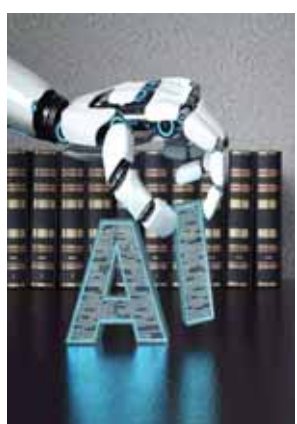
In an interview to PTI, Chandok said the general perception around AI has shifted from skepticism to optimism, and now to real impact on the ground, with emergence of "real, interesting use cases". Microsoft's AI assistant 'Copilot' has become a "verb" for artificial intelligence, he observed.

The Redmond, Washington-based company is constantly looking at areas it needs to invest in, he said, describing India as among the fastest-growing regions globally for Microsoft and a "real opportunity to make a dent" with technology and innovation.

Noting that technologies that change the world have to be built responsibly, Chandok emphasised that Microsoft is fully committed to ensuring compliance with all the regulatory requirements, and with new evolving frameworks.

"Copilot has become the verb for AI. We are truly becoming 'Copilot' to India's transformation, which I'm really excited about," Chandok said.

Microsoft is working towards its mission of making AI a reality for everyone in India. Microsoft is "much more than



a technology business in India", Chandok said, adding, "we truly want to be a force that moves India and South Asia forward".

It is pertinent to mention that Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella during his visit to the country in February this year had affirmed the company's commitment to supporting India's transformation into an AI-first nation -- in terms of skilled AI workforce and AI infusion across sectors and industries. The Microsoft global honcho had announced that the company will provide 2 million people in India with AI skilling opportunities.

"...The ADVANTA(I)GE INDIA program that we launched, where we're going to train 2 million people in India over the next two years on AI... That is on its way... The other one, (is where) 75,000 women developers in India will be trained and certified as part of Microsoft's 'Code Without Barriers' program, which is really exciting. We just launched the Microsoft Micro Degree in AI with the Ministry of Skill Development, as part of our commitment to enhancing

digital skills across India," Chandok said.

Chandok believes that India is among the most-exciting markets globally for all technology companies, and for Microsoft.

"It is also one of the fastest-growing markets for Microsoft, one of the fastest-growing regions across the world, and that is the reason you are seeing a lot of commitment, a lot of investments, and a lot of impact," he said.

The company is bringing the concept of 'One Microsoft' together in India.

"We have got massive capabilities in India. IDC, which is a development centre, cloud plus AI, Microsoft Research has a massive presence in India, and marks one of the largest presence outside the US. We're bringing all of those capabilities together for our customers and working truly as 'one Microsoft' to make sure that the AI-for-everyone mission in India, is a reality," he said.

The company's India outlook is backed by strong traction it sees on demand and supply sides, as also the on-ground impact.

"From a demand perspective, more than 7,000 listed companies are in India... A massive runway... Third largest startup ecosystem in the world. So we're excited about that 60 million-plus small and medium businesses. So that is a real opportunity from a demand perspective.

"On the supply side, if I look at GitHub, India is just behind the US, and close to 15 million developers in India are now on GitHub. We will overtake the US in the next two or three years," he said,

referring to the Microsoft-owned software development platform.

Citing estimates to back the company's optimism about the region, he said one is six AI researchers or AI developers in the world come from India.

"There's a recent study which said every fourth employee that will get added to the workforce in the next 10 years will come from India. So I think just the impact that we have on the world is incredibly important," he said.

The Microsoft India leader said AI conversations need to shift from challenges to real opportunities, given that the India market offers transformative opportunities across sectors.

Citing an example of just how AI is making a difference in India, he said, given that a sizable population here does not speak English, AI is helping drive local language push.

"...So it is reducing the digital divide, which is a fascinating opportunity," he said.

Chandok, however, pointed out that technologies that change the world must be built responsibly, and emphasised that Microsoft is fully committed to ensuring compliance with all the regulatory frameworks.

The regulatory conversations, across the globe, are pushing all tech companies, including Microsoft, to re-emphasise and reinforce the commitments on safeguarding data, privacy, transparency, removing biases.

He said 'security' has to be built by design, and can "never be an afterthought". "It is job number one, security is above everything else.

India sees significant gains in export competitiveness across key sectors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's export competitiveness has witnessed healthy gains in multiple sectors particularly petroleum, gemstones, agrochemicals and sugar during the last five years, as these segments have increased their share in global trade, according to the commerce ministry data.

The other sectors where the share of India's exports has increased during 2018 and 2023 are electrical goods, pneumatic tyres, taps and valves, and semiconductor devices.

The ministry data analysis showed that petroleum exports rose to USD 84.96 billion in 2023, with India's market share surging to 12.59 per cent last year from 6.45 per cent in 2018, positioning it as the second-largest global exporter. It was ranked fifth in 2018.

In the precious and semi-precious stones segment, the country's share in global shipments has soared to 36.53 per cent last year from 16.27 per cent in 2018. It has propelled the country to the top position in the category, with exports reaching USD 1.52 billion in 2023 from USD 0.26 billion in 2018.

It was at the second spot in 2018. Similarly, in cane or beet sugar, the country's outbound shipments have more than quadrupled to USD 3.72 billion from USD 0.93 billion in 2018.

India has achieved tremendous growth in the export of cane or beet sugar, with its global market share increasing from 4.17 per cent in 2018 to 12.21 per cent in



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

2023. "As the world's second-largest exporter of sugar, India's success can be attributed to both favourable agricultural policies and its strong production base.

The country has capitalised on the growing global demand for sugar, especially in regions like Southeast Asia and Africa," an official said. India's share of the global market for insecticides and fungicides has also shown healthy improvement.

The country increased its global share from 8.52 per cent in 2018 to 10.85 per cent in 2023, with exports reaching USD 4.32 billion.

India's ability to meet international agricultural and environmental standards and its emphasis on innovation in agrochemicals have led to this improvement, the official said. India is now the third-largest exporter globally against the 5th position in 2018, the data showed. Further, the country's position

in the global market for rubber pneumatic tyres has also strengthened, with exports growing to USD 2.66 billion in 2023 from USD 1.82 billion in 2018.

India now holds a 3.31 per cent share of the global market, up from 2.34 per cent in 2018, and the country has moved up to the eighth position globally from 13th in 2018, indicating the rising demand for Indian-manufactured tyres, particularly in emerging markets.

The data also showed that exports of semiconductor devices have increased from a mere USD 0.16 billion in 2018 to USD 1.91 billion in 2023, with the country's share in the world market rising to 1.4 per cent, and the country now ranks ninth globally compared to 25th in 2018. This underscores India's potential to become a key player in the global semiconductor supply chain.

Lower sales realisation hit margins of cement makers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Major cement manufacturers reported a decline in margins in the September quarter, mainly on account of lower prices, leading to lower sales realisation.

Barring three leading cement producers UltraTech Cement, Ambuja Cement, and Dalmia Bharat other smaller players, including Nuvoco Vistas Corp, JK Cement, Birla Corporation, and Heidelberg Cement, reported a decline in topline and sales volume in the second quarter of the current fiscal year.

Industry observers said the increase in sales volume of UltraTech and Ambuja Cements is mainly due to the several acquisitions by both companies that consolidated their position further in the industry.

The industry also faced challenges such as extended monsoon, floods, and a slow pickup in government demand, cumulatively leading towards a weak demand.

Power, fuel, and other costs, however, largely remained stable for the industry. The all-India average cement price was around Rs 348 per 50 kg bag in June 2024. It decreased 11 per cent year-on-year to Rs 330 per bag in September, though it increased 2 per cent on a month-on-month basis. In the first half of FY25, cement prices declined 10 per cent year-on-year to Rs 330 per bag. A year earlier, the average prices stood at Rs 365 per bag and Rs 375 per bag in FY23, according to an Icrs report.



CELEBRATING LORD DHANWANTRI, THE GOD OF MEDICINE

IMA-AYUS celebrates Dhanwantari Day, honours pioneers in traditional Indian medicine promoting Ayurveda, writes ABHI SINGHAL

With historical roots in the Indian subcontinent, Ayurveda is an alternative medicine system which has always been pushed to heights for desi and better recovery. The theory and practice of Ayurveda is heavily practised throughout India majorly with the help of Ayurvedic medicines. The IMA-AYUS is an organisation working for the betterment of the integrated system of medicine from the past 12 years.

IMA-AYUS has been organising Lord Dhanwantri Jayanti every year to celebrate Lord Dhanwantri, god of medicine, the founder of Ayurveda, and an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The organisation celebrates the day as a tribute to Lord Dhanwantri and honouring pioneers in traditional Indian medicine.

The event was graced by K. K. Sharma, Founder and Managing Director of AIMIL Pharmaceuticals, as the Guest of Honour, bringing his invaluable support for traditional Indian medicine. AIMIL is a science-driven Ayurveda company producing herbal and Ayurvedic healthcare products promoting Ayurveda for 40 years.

In his keynote speech, Dr. R.S. Chouhan, Patron of IMA - AYUS, reaffirmed the association's commitment to the advancement of Indian medicine and supporting the fraternity's betterment. Dr. Chouhan spoke about the association's role in promoting the rich heritage of Ayurveda, Unani, and other traditional medical systems, underscoring their significance in contemporary healthcare.

The event was inaugurated by Ram Niwas Goyal, Hon'ble Speaker of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha, who addressed the audience and emphasised on how the Indian system of medicine is vital for future health and wellness in the country. The event had sessions

explaining Ayurveda and its impact deeply to the audience. The organisation unveiled its monthly magazine *Souvenir 2024*, with all the yearly events that take place within the organisation.

Students from Ayurvedic & Unani Tibbia College Delhi, School of Unani Medical Education and Research, Jamia Hamdard Delhi, Gaur Brahmin Ayurvedic College Rohtak Haryana, Shri Krishna Ayush

University Kurukshetra, Divya Jyoti Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Modi Nagar, Ghaziabad (U.P.) and more were facilitated as promising students in the field of Ayurveda and Unani.

In conversation with Dr Raman Khanna

Dr Raman Khanna, B.A.M.S and medical practitioner from the past 41 years is the the National General Secretary IMA-AYUS. He joined the organisation in 1988, it's year of formation. He is dedicated to his career as a doctor and to promote Ayurveda. He talked about Ayurveda, it's incorporation in daily life and the history of Lord Dhanwantari Jayanti. Excerpts

What is the history of the Lord Dhanwantri Jayanti celebrated by IMA-AYUS?

Integrated Medical association IMA(Ayus) has been celebrating Dhanwantari Diwas for the last 38 years to honor Lord Dhanwantari, who is regarded as the God of Ayurveda and health. Celebrated on Dhanteras, this day recognizes the contributions of traditional medicine and promotes awareness about Ayurvedic practices. It serves as a platform to emphasize holistic health, wellness, and the importance of integrating ancient healing traditions into modern healthcare.

Why do you organise this event every year in the field of Ayurveda?

All the practitioners of Ayurveda worship Bhagwan Dhanwantri because he is considered the god of Ayurveda and the divine physician. In Hindu tradition, Dhanwantri is believed to have emerged from the ocean during the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan) carrying the nectar of immortality (amrita) and the knowledge of healing. His association with health and wellness makes him a central figure in Ayurvedic practices, symbolizing the holistic approach to healing and the importance of balance in life. Worshipping Dhanwantri is a way for practitioners to seek blessings for health, knowledge, and the successful practice of Ayurveda.

How do you think this event inspires medical practitioners and students to pursue Ayurveda?

Yes, the Celebration of Dhanwantri Diwas serves as a significant source of inspiration for AYUS practitioners and students. It honors Lord Dhanwantri, regarded as the deity of Ayurveda, highlighting the importance of this ancient healing system. This celebration can motivate practitioners and students to deepen their commitment to Ayurveda, emphasizing its potential for enhancing human wellness. It also fosters a sense of community and encourages the exploration of traditional knowledge in contemporary health practices.

Do you think incorporating Ayurveda in daily wellness can help you?

Incorporating Ayurveda into daily wellness routines can be beneficial for many people, as it promotes balance through diet, lifestyle, and natural remedies. Ayurveda, a holistic system of medicine from India, emphasises a personalised approach based on your unique constitution (or "dosha")—Vata, Pitta, or Kapha. It's built around the idea of maintaining health by harmonising mind, body, and spirit. Here are some

ways it can support daily wellness:

Dietary Balance: Ayurveda suggests foods suited to your dosha to promote digestion and energy. For example, grounding, warming foods are advised for the Vata dosha, while cooling foods benefit the Pitta type.

Daily Routines: Ayurveda encourages routines that support natural rhythms, like waking up early, oil pulling, and self-massage (Abhyanga). These can promote better sleep, circulation, and stress management.

Stress and Mental Health: Ayurveda includes mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises (pranayama) to reduce stress and increase mental clarity.

Natural Remedies: Using herbal remedies tailored to your dosha and needs (like turmeric for inflammation or ashwagandha for stress) can provide gentle, plant-based support.

Many find that following Ayurvedic principles helps them feel more in tune with their body, improves digestion, and enhances overall well-being. However, it's important to consult an Ayurvedic practitioner, especially if you're new to it, to ensure the practices align with your health needs.



DEBUNKING POPULAR NUTRITION MYTHS



BY DR WAJIHA MEHTAB

In today's world, nutrition information is everywhere—from social media influencers to fitness gurus, all are offering dietary advice. But with so much information, how do we separate fact from fiction? Unfortunately, many popular nutrition myths continue to spread, often leading to confusion and unhealthy choices. As a registered dietitian, it's important to set the record straight with science-backed facts. There are some most persistent nutrition myths circulating today that should be debunked.

MYTH 1

Carbs Are the Enemy

Fact: Carbohydrates have been vilified by many diets, but they're not inherently bad. In fact, carbohydrates are your body's primary energy source. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes are all excellent sources of healthy carbs that provide essential nutrients like fiber, vitamins, and minerals. The key is to focus on complex carbs rather than refined sugars. It's not about eliminating carbs but choosing the right ones.

MYTH 2

Eating Fat Makes You Fat

Fact: The idea that fat automatically leads to weight gain is outdated. Healthy fats, such as those found in avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil, play a vital role in your body. They help absorb fat-soluble vitamins, support brain function, and even aid in satiety, making you feel fuller for longer. The type of fat you consume matters more than the amount—trans fats and excessive saturated fats can be harmful, while unsaturated fats are essential for good health.

MYTH 3

A Detox Diet Will Cleanse Your Body

Fact: Detox diets are one of the most popular trends, but the science doesn't back them up. Your body has its own natural detoxification systems—primarily the liver, kidneys, and digestive tract. No special juice, cleanse, or supplement is needed to "flush out toxins." Instead of relying on expensive detoxes, focus on a well-balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fiber, and water to support your body's natural detox processes.

MYTH 4

Gluten-Free Is Always Healthier

Fact: Going gluten-free is medically necessary for people with celiac disease or gluten intolerance, but for the general population, there's no evidence that a gluten-free diet is inherently healthier. In fact, many gluten-free processed foods are lower in fiber and higher in sugar and fat to compensate for the texture and taste of missing gluten. Unless you have a medical reason, there's no need to avoid gluten. Whole grains like wheat, barley, and rye are nutritious and offer many health benefits.

MYTH 5

Late-Night Eating Causes Weight Gain

Fact: Weight gain is more about what and how much you eat overall than the specific time of day. While late-night snacking can sometimes lead to overeating, particularly of less healthy, high-calorie foods, it's the excess calories that contribute to weight gain—not the timing. If you're hungry in the evening, opt for a light, balanced snack like yogurt or a handful of nuts, rather than worrying about the clock.

MYTH 6

You Need to Eat Small, Frequent Meals to Boost Metabolism

Fact: The idea that eating every few hours boosts your metabolism is a common misconception. The reality is that the number



of meals you eat has little to do with your metabolic rate. What matters most is the total number of calories consumed and the quality of those calories. Whether you prefer three meals a day or six smaller ones, the key is to eat a balanced, nutrient-dense diet that meets your body's needs.

MYTH 7

You Should Only Eat Egg Whites

Fact: For years, eggs were demonized because of their cholesterol content, and many people opted for egg whites to avoid fat and calories. However, research now shows that dietary cholesterol has a minimal impact on blood cholesterol for most people. The yolk is actually packed with essential nutrients, including vitamins D and B12, choline, and healthy fats. Eating the whole egg provides a nutritious and filling meal, so there's no need to skip the yolk.

MYTH 8

You Need Supplements to Be Healthy

Fact: While some people may benefit from specific supplements (e.g., vitamin D, B12 for vegans, or folic acid during pregnancy), most people can meet their nutritional needs through a well-balanced diet. Whole foods provide a complex mix of nutrients that work together in ways supplements can't replicate. Over-reliance on supplements can lead to nutrient imbalances or toxicity. Always consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new supplements.

MYTH 9

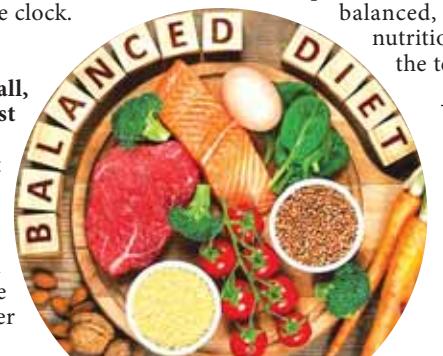
You Can Spot-Reduce Fat

Fact: Unfortunately, spot-reducing fat, such as targeting belly fat through crunches or specific exercises, is not possible. When you lose fat, it happens across your entire body, not just one specific area. The best approach for fat loss is a combination of regular exercise (both cardio and strength training) and a balanced, calorie-controlled diet.

CONCLUSION

Trust the Science

It's easy to be swayed by the latest diet trends or celebrity-endorsed health tips, but it's essential to approach nutrition with a critical eye. Rather than falling for myths and misinformation, trust the science and rely on credible sources, like registered dietitians, for guidance. Your health is too important to base on fads—balanced, evidence-based nutrition will always stand the test of time.



The author is MSc, PhD, Consultant Nutritionist, Founder & Director, Artisan Academy of Advanced Clinical Nutrition.

SheShield Conclave Concludes



SheShield Conclave, organised by Mediways Health Foundation in association with Inner Wheel District 301, concluded with impact. Held during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Conclave underscored an urgent message: breast cancer awareness and early detection are vital to securing a healthier, empowered India.

Non-performance of batters is worrying, we will strive to do something special in Australia: Rohit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The disastrous performance of star batters is certainly a cause of concern for India, admitted Rohit Sharma after a stunning reversal against New Zealand but the skipper promised that the team will fight to deliver something 'very very special' in Australia.

New Zealand went strength to strength in the series while hosts India could not bring their floundering campaign back on track and ended up suffering a rare and humiliating 0-3 whitewash. Rohit (91) and Virat Kohli (93) managed less than 200 runs across three Tests, a major reason for India's debacle.

"It's a cause of concern without a doubt. If the batters are not performing, that is a cause of concern," Rohit said.

"What is done, is done now. As a player, as a captain, as a team, we all have to look forward and see how we can correct what we didn't manage to achieve here. There is a good opportunity for us to go and do



something really, really special in Australia. We will focus on that."

India have already been displaced from the top of the World Test Championship table following the embarrassing result at home and it could hasten the impending transition for the Test side but Rohit preferred to look only at the immediate challenge of Australia tour.

"I don't think we can look that far ahead. I'm not going to look beyond Australia series. Australia series, for us is now very, very important. We will try and focus on that rather than thinking what happens after."

"A lot of our guys have been there before and a lot of the guys haven't been there before, which is why we are trying to go there a little early just to get used to the conditions."

Rohit said India will have to draw a lot of confidence from their last two series wins with the team set to

play five Tests Down Under for the first time ever.

"Australia is not an easy place to play cricket. But we can take a lot of confidence how we played in the last two series in Australia. In the back of my mind, we have to think like that," said Rohit.

Rohit, of late, has adopted an ultra aggressive and risky approach while batting, and it has resulted in him losing his wicket rather quickly.

He maintained that he has not lost faith in his defensive skills and his style of batting was more of an evolution process he chose for himself but promised to have a re-look into it.

"I haven't defended a lot in this series because I haven't been there to defend. Clearly I have to look at my own game and try and see what best I can do. When I go to bat, I always think how I can put the team in the best situation of the game."

"When the openers go in, they set the tone and sometimes you can fall on the other side of it as well. This series, I have fallen on the other side of it. But I don't see that I have lost faith in my defence."

Parthavi, Vanshika, Hemant win gold, Indian boxers return with 17 medals from U-19 World C'ships

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Parthavi Grewal, Vanshika Goswami and Hemant Sangwan punched their way to gold as Indian boxers made a strong impression, clinching a haul of 17 medals at the inaugural U-19 World Championships organised by World Boxing in Colorado, USA.

It was the female boxers who stole the show with as many as 10 of them standing on the podium at the age group tournament.

While Parthavi notched a dominant 5-0 win over Netherlands' Aaliyah Hoppema in the women's 65kg final Vanshika emerged victorious in the women's +80kg category against Germany's Victoria Gatt by Referee Stops Contest (RSC) one minute and 37 minutes on Saturday.

In the next bout, Hemant clinched India's sole gold medal in the men's category by securing a 4-1 split decision victory over the USA's Rishon Sims in the 90kg category.

Nisha (51kg), Supriya Devi Thokchom (54kg) and Kritika Wasan (80kg) lost their respective finals to sign off with silver medals.

This significant medal count was highlighted by the



contributions of 11 Khelo India Athletes (KIAs), of which eight are SAI National Centre of Excellence (NCOE) trainees.

The medallists also included three NCOE trainees who are non-KIAs, all training out of NCOE Rohtak.

Medal-winning Khelo India Athletes:

Boys - Sumit, Lakshay Rathi, Krrish Pal (all NCOE Rohtak), Aryan, Rishi Singh. Girls - Krisha Verma (NCOE Aurangabad), Chanchal Chaudhary (F48kg), Anjali Singh (F57kg), Vini (F60kg), Akansha Phalasal (all NCOE Rohtak), Supriya Devi.

Medal-winning NCOE Athletes: NCOE Rohtak - Parthavi, Vanshika (Gold), Chanchal, Nisha, Vini, Akansha, Kritika (Silver), Krrish Pal, Sumit, Lakshay Rathi (Bronze).

NCOE Aurangabad - Krisha Verma (Gold).

Overall medal winners: Gold: Krisha Verma (F75kg), Parthavi Grewal (F65kg), Vanshika Goswami (F+80KG), Hemant Sangwan (M90kg).

Silver: Nisha (F51kg), Supriya Devi Thokchom (F54kg), Kritika Wasan (F80kg), Chanchal Chaudhary (F48kg), Anjali Singh (F57kg), Vini (F60kg), Akansha Phalasal (F70kg), Rahul Kundu (M75kg).

Bronze: Rishi Singh (M50kg), Krrish Pal (M55kg), Sumit (M70kg), Aryan (M85kg), Lakshay Rathi (M90+kg).

Rashid ends tied 25th, Canadian Lee wins title in Jakarta

PTI ■ JAKARTA

Indian golfer Rashid Khan, who was tied third at the halfway stage, faltered in the last two rounds with 72-71 and finished tied 25th at the BNI Indonesian Masters here on Sunday.

Rashid (67-67-72-71) totalled 11-under as fellow Indian SSP Chawrasia (68) was T-41st at 7-under and the 2023 champion Gaganjeet Bhullar (72) was T-44th.

Canadian Richard T. Lee finally ended his long and frustrating seven-year wait for a third victory on the Asian Tour when he recorded a fine four-shot wire-to-wire win.

After dozens of opportunities to win again following his success at the 2017 Shinhan Donghae Open he was relieved to prevail at Royale Jakarta Golf Club after firing



a closing two-under-par 70 for a four-round total of 23-under.

Chinese Taipei's Chang Weilun and Phachara Khongwatmai from Thailand secured second place, after both carded 64s.

Zimbabwean Kieran Vincent finished fourth following a 67.

Lee was six in front at the start of day and in cruise control after lying seven ahead at the turn. A one-and-a-half-hour weather delay,

which began when he was on hole 10 failed to unsettle him. However, an unexpected double-bogey on the 16th, where he took two to get out of a greenside bunker and missed a six-foot bogey putt, led to some uncertainty.

It meant his lead was cut to four over Chang, who was in the clubhouse, but he steadied the ship with a brave five-foot putt for par on the next hole followed by a par on the last.

The victory continued a brilliant run of form as he was tied for second in last week's International Series Thailand, finished joint ninth in the Black Mountain Championship, and came home in 10th at the Yeangder TPC.

American John Catlin, who closed with a 69 here and was tied for sixth, leads the rankings.

Top teams compete for honours in 14th senior men's National Hockey Championship

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A total of 31 teams will fight for the top honours at the 14th edition of the Hockey India Senior Men National Championship set to begin here on Monday.

The 31 teams were divided into eight pools, and the tournament will conclude on November 16.

During the league stage, each team will play against every other side in their pool.

The top team from each pool will advance to the quarterfinals to be played on November 13, followed by semifinals on November 15, and the final and 3rd/4th place play-off match on November 16.

Pool A features defending champions Hockey Punjab along with Dadra & Nagar Haveli And Daman & Diu Hockey and Chhattisgarh Hockey.

Pool B includes Hockey Haryana, Telangana Hockey, Hockey Himachal, and



Hockey Mizoram, while Pool C comprises Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu, Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Andhra Pradesh, and Hockey Andaman & Nicobar.

Pool D consists of Hockey Karnataka, Hockey

Chandigarh, Hockey Uttarakhand, and Tripura Hockey.

In Pool E, Hockey Association of Odisha will compete with Le Puducherry Hockey, Hockey Rajasthan, and Hockey Arunachal,

while Pool F includes Uttar Pradesh Hockey, Delhi Hockey, Kerala Hockey, and Hockey Jammu and Kashmir.

Pool G consists of Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Maharashtra, Goans Hockey, and Hockey Gujarat, while

Pool H features Manipur Hockey, Hockey Bengal, Hockey Bihar, and Assam Hockey.

The tournament will open with a series of matches, including Uttar Pradesh Hockey vs Kerala Hockey and Hockey Karnataka vs Hockey Uttarakhand, among other exciting fixtures, setting the stage for a thrilling championship.

Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey expressed his enthusiasm for the upcoming tournament.

"We are delighted to host the 14th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship in Chennai, a city with a rich hockey legacy. This championship provides a platform for showcasing the best talent from across the country and is a key event in developing the future stars of Indian hockey. I wish all the teams the very best as they compete for top honours," Tirkey said.

Rio Takeda wins Toto Japan Classic after six sudden-death playoff holes for her first LPGA Tour win

AP ■ SHIGA

Rio Takeda of Japan won the LPGA's Toto Japan Classic on Sunday in a playoff that lasted six sudden-death holes, defeating Marina Alex of the United States.

It was Takeda's first victory on the LPGA Tour.

Takeda had a birdie on the par-5 18th hole, edging Alex with par.

The two were tied after 54 holes at 15-under 201. The tournament was restricted to 54 regulation holes after Saturday's third round was washed out by rain.

They were also even after the first five playoff holes in the sudden-death format, each with a birdie on the first playoff hole and pars on the next four holes. All of the playoff holes were par-5 - the 18th hole and the 13th.

Alex shot a 6-under 66 in the final round and Takeda shot 67.

Haeran Ryu of South Korea was one shot



behind after regulation with a 66. She finished at 14-under 202.

Hana Wakimoto of Japan, the leader after the first two rounds, slipped to a 1-over 73 and finished three strokes behind the leaders. She was also seeking

her first LPGA Tour win.

The Japan tournament concludes a four-event Asian swing for the LPGA Tour that included events in China, South Korea and Malaysia.

India slips to 2nd in WTC as Australia takes top spot

PTI ■ DUBAI

India lost their top position in the World Test Championship standings, slipping to second place after suffering an embarrassing home series defeat to New Zealand on Sunday.

India lost to New Zealand by 25 runs in the third and final Test in Mumbai resulting in a 0-3 whitewash, their first in a home Test series since South Africa's 2-0 win in 1999-2000. This was also for the first time India have been swept 0-3 in a home series.

It was India's fifth loss in the ongoing WTC cycle, causing a significant drop in their points percentage (PCT), which fell from 62.82 to 58.33.

India thus dropped to the second spot behind reigning champions Australia, who have regained the top spot



with a PCT of 62.50.

India are now scheduled to fly Down Under to play the five-match Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which has gained

more significance now as both teams will be vying for the top two spots.

India were considered favourites to win a majority

of their remaining matches in their quest for a third consecutive WTC final appearance.

However, to qualify for the final without depending on external results, they now must win four of their remaining five games -- a challenging task in Australia.

Australia, on the other hand, are in a better position as they need to win four of their remaining seven Tests.

New Zealand's historic series sweep in India has also bolstered their WTC final aspirations.

They have climbed to the fourth spot with a PCT of 54.55, while Sri Lanka occupy third place with a PCT of 55.56.

South Africa, currently fifth with a PCT of 54.17, also remain in contention for a top-two finish and a place in the next year's one-off Test at Lord's.

Silva scores in stoppage time, Atlanta rallies to beat Messi's Miami 2-1 to even playoff series

AP ■ ATLANTA

Xande Silva scored with about a minute to go in stoppage time shortly after a goal by Lionel Messi was waved off by a clear offside, giving ninth-seeded Atlanta United a 2-1 victory over Inter Miami and evening the best-of-three MLS playoff series at one game apiece.

Silva on Saturday blasted a right-footed shot into the top left corner to beat goalkeeper Drake Callender in the 94th minute. The Atlanta player celebrated by ripping off his shirt and dancing in front of the supporters section at Mercedes-Benz Stadium while the announced crowd of 68,455 cheered.

Messi had plenty of good scoring chances but only found the back of the net

with the flag raised for offside. Atlanta United took off the other way for Silva's game winner.

United rallied from a 1-0 halftime deficit, the result of a huge error by keeper Brad Guzan, to force a decisive game next Saturday in South Florida. Atlanta has a chance to pull off a major upset, having finishing a whopping 34 points behind Messi's star-studded squad, which had the best regular-season record in Major League Soccer.

Derrick Williams tied the



game in the 58th minute after a corner kick was turned away by the Herons. Pedro Amador sent a cross back into the box from long range and Williams dove to get a head on it, skipping it past Callender.

Guzan's blunder handed Miami the opening goal in the 40th minute.

After easily grabbing a cross into the box, Guzan went to boot the ball away - only to stumble and loose control with Miami's Federico Redondo running along beside him. Redondo sent

the free ball to David Martínez, who casually flicked it over four United defenders into the unguarded goal while Guzan looked on helplessly.

The 40-year-old keeper claimed he was interfered with by Redondo, but the replay clearly showed Guzan tripped himself up.

Messi misfired on at least three shots, going wide a couple of times before blasting one over the net in the 83rd with Miami pressing for the go-ahead goal. He walked away rubbing his

beard, clearly frustrated at his lack of accuracy.

In the 89th, United missed a prime chance to grab the lead when Saba Lobjanidze rocketed one off the crossbar. Redondo collected the ricochet, but fired it over the net. Silva made sure it didn't matter. Miami won the opening game of the series 2-1 at home.

UP NEXT

The winner of Game 3 will advance to the conference semifinals, facing the team that emerges from the Orlando-Charlotte series.