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Manipur volatile, HM monitoring state

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid escalating unrest in Manipur, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday cancelled all his rallies in poll-bound Maharashtra and returned to Delhi to hold a meeting to review the volatile situation.irate mobs set fire to the residences of three more Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) legislators, one of whom is a senior Minister, and also the home of a Congress MLA in various districts of Imphal Valley, even as security forces foiled the attempt of agitators to storm the ancestral residence of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh, officials said.

Later in the evening, the Home Minister held a meeting with senior security and intelligence officials, and reviewed the Manipur situation. Meanwhile, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) chief Anish Dayal Singh reached Imphal on Sunday, to monitor and coordinate the security operations in the region.

The fresh incidents of violent protests took place on Saturday night even as an indefinite curfew was clamped after people, agitated by the killing of three women and children each by militants in Jiribam district, attacked the residences of three state Ministers and six MLAs earlier on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the Manipur Government has requested the Centre to review and withdraw AFSPA from areas falling under the jurisdiction of six police stations in the State. The Centre has reimposed the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in Manipur's six police station areas, including violence-hit Jiribam.

Union Ministry of Home



Security personnel patrol in a sensitive area of Manipur. Search operations and area domination were conducted by security forces in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts of the state

Affairs had, on November 14, reimposed AFSPA in areas falling under Sekmai PS and Lamsang PS in Imphal West district, Lamlai in Imphal East, Moirang in Bishnupur, Leimakhong in Kangpokpi and Jiribam in Jiribam district. Enraged people torched the houses of PWD Minister Govindas Konthoujam at Ningthoukhong, Hiyanglam's BJP MLA Y Radheshyam at Langmeidong Bazar, Wangjing Tenthia's BJP MLA Paonam Brojen in Thoubal district and Khundrakpam's Congress MLA Th Lokeshwar in Imphal East district, the officials said. The legislators and their family members were not at home when the angry mob stormed their residential compounds, vandalised properties and set the houses on fire, police said, adding the houses were

NPP withdraws support to BJP

PTI ■ SHILLONG/IMPHAL

The National People's Party (NPP) on Sunday withdrew support to the BJP-led government in violence-hit Manipur, claiming that the N Biren Singh dispensation has "completely failed to resolve the crisis and restore normalcy" in the Northeastern state. The NPP has 7 MLAs in the 60-member Manipur assembly. In the last few days, the situation in Manipur further deteriorated and many more innocent lives have been lost

partially burnt in the incidents. Fire services rushed to the spots and doused the blaze before the flames engulfed the

and people in the state are "going through immense suffering", the NPP claimed in a letter to BJP chief J P Nadda. "We strongly feel that the Manipur state government under the leadership of Shri Biren Singh has completely failed to resolve the crisis and restore normalcy. Keeping the current situation in mind, the National People's Party has decided to withdraw its support to the Biren Singh government in the state of Manipur, with immediate effect," the letter said.

houses. On Saturday night, protesters also advanced towards Biren Singh's ancestral residence at

Luwangsangbam in Imphal East but were stopped short of 100-200 metres by security forces. Security personnel, including Assam Rifles, BSF and state forces, fired several rounds of tear gas shells, rubber bullets to disperse the protesters and foiled the attempt to damage Singh's house, officials said.

Later, protesters burnt tyres on the main road leading to Biren Singh's residence and piled iron roads to prevent vehicular movement. Protests continued till around 11 pm in Mantripukhri area, some 3-4 km from the CM's ancestral home. Many of the protesters had come in vehicles from other constituencies, and not from the Heingang Assembly seat, which the CM represented.

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Embarrassed by 'Sheesh Mahal', infighting Kailash Gahlot quits AAP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received a massive setback just months before the Delhi Assembly elections, as senior minister and veteran leader Kailash Gahlot, who had claimed to be Kejriwal's "Hanuman", on Sunday resigned from the primary membership of the party and the council of ministers, citing the 'sheesh mahal' controversy, and the party unnecessary fighting with the Centre for setting their own political agenda.

With this, four MLAs, including three ministers, have resigned from the AAP - Rajendra Pal Gautam joined the Congress in September, Patel Nagar and Chattarpur MLAs Raaj Kumar Anand and Kartar Singh Tanwar joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the Lok Sabha polls. Gahlot is the third minister of the AAP led Delhi government who quitted in the past one-and-a-half years.

In his resignation letter addressed to AAP's National Convener Arvind Kejriwal and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi, Gahlot also cited unfulfilled promises and recent controversies as reasons for stepping down. Gahlot has held key positions within the Delhi government, including the portfolios of Transport, Law, Information Technology, Administrative Reforms, and Women and Child Development.

Gahlot pointed to the "grave challenges" facing the party Gahlot, a prominent figure in the party, also took a jab at Kejriwal while flagging some



FILE PHOTO

"awkward" and "embarrassing" controversies like 'sheesh mahal', saying it makes everyone doubt if "we still believe in being the 'Aam Aadmi'". Gahlot's reference to the 'sheesh mahal' controversy comes against the backdrop of BJP leaders' charge that Kejriwal spent crores on lavish items and modern facilities at his former official residence at 6 Flagstaff Road. The BJP had dubbed Kejriwal's earlier residence as 'sheesh mahal'. Meanwhile, the AAP national convener refused to take a question on Gahlot's shock resignation at a press conference held at the party office hours after Gahlot's resignation and promptly turned the microphone towards MLA Durgesh Pathak, seated next to him. When pressed for his response, Kejriwal said with a smile, "You want an answer, right?" before Pathak began speaking. In fact, the former Chief Minister spoke soon after, criticised the BJP but did not mention Gahlot's exit.

Holding the BJP responsible, Pathak said Gahlot was being questioned and raided by Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Income Tax for months. "So he did not have a choice. But this makes it clear that BJP has lost the Delhi election. They have no issue, they are fighting on the basis of ED, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Income Tax and we are fighting on people's issues," he said.

Earlier, AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said Gahlot's resignation is a part of BJP's "dirty politics". "It's a "dirty political conspiracy of the BJP and it wants to win the Delhi Assembly polls by misusing the ED and CBI", he charged. On the other hand, the BJP was quick to respond to Gahlot's announcement. Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva welcomed Gahlot's resignation, saying he took a brave step. "Gahlot stepped down raising the same issues for which the BJP was protesting and fighting against Kejriwal and AAP."

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Communal clashes in Murshidabad puja pandal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

At least 50 people were injured and many houses were torched and shops vandalised after clashes broke out between members of two communities at Beldanga area of Murshidabad district in central Bengal, bordering Bangladesh. The injured include at least five women and many others from both the groups, sources said adding the entire area was tense though no new reports of clashes had come in till Sunday evening.

The incident took place late on Saturday night after members of one community resorted to stone-pelting as reports of alleged sacrilegious comments written on electrical light boards at a Kartik Puja pandal in ward number 10 became public. Kartik Puja is usually organised by women who want to become mothers.

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India successfully flight-tests long-range hypersonic missile



Flight trial of DRDO's long range hypersonic missile being successfully conducted at Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Island, off-the-coast of Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has joined the elite league of nations after it successfully flight-tested a long-range hypersonic missile off the coast of Odisha. Russia and China are the two other countries having this capability. The missile can strike targets at a range of more than 1,500

various payloads for ranges greater than 1,500 km, an official readout said. "India has achieved a major milestone by successfully conducting flight trial of long range hypersonic missile from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island, off-the-coast of Odisha," Rajnath Singh said in a social media post. "This is a historic moment and this significant achievement has put our country in the group of select nations having capabilities of such critical and advanced military technologies," he said.

Generally, the hypersonic missiles, capable of carrying conventional explosives or nuclear warheads, can fly in the range of five times the speed of sound (Mach 5 which is roughly 1,220 km) per hour at sea level. However, some advanced versions of hypersonic missiles can even fly at the speed of over 15 mach.

At present, Russia and China are way ahead in developing hypersonic missiles while the US is in the process of developing a range of such weapons under an ambitious programme. Several other countries, including France, Germany, Australia, Japan, Iran and Israel, are also pursuing projects to develop hypersonic-missile systems.

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GRAP Stage IV invoked in NCR

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As a thick blanket of smog continued to engulf Delhi, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) sub-committee has decided to implement Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) for Delhi-National Capital Region, that will come into effect from Monday at 8 am, owing to 'severe' air quality conditions which include complete halting of construction and demolition activities that generate dust and a ban on truck entry.

Additionally, the government can choose to impose Odd-Even restrictions. The Commission issued the order as Delhi's Air Quality Index



(AQI) worsened, reaching 457 at 8 pm. Due to unfavourable weather conditions and dense fog, visibility reduced to less than 50 metres in some parts of the National Capital, leading to disruptions in flights at

Stage IV was taken by the CAQM after meeting with all stakeholders on Sunday. According to the order, no trucks will be allowed into Delhi except for those carrying essential items or using clean fuel (LNG/CNG/BS-VI diesel/electric). Non-essential light commercial vehicles registered outside Delhi will also be prohibited, except for EVs and CNG and BS-VI diesel ones. Delhi-registered BS-IV or older diesel medium and heavy goods vehicles are banned, except for those in essential services, the Commission said in its order. The CAQM order will be applicable for the NCR.

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India accords high-priority to strategic partnership with Nigeria: PM Modi

PTI ■ ABUJA

India accords high priority to its strategic partnership with Nigeria and it will work towards boosting ties in a range of areas, including defence, energy and trade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during his talks with Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Sunday.

In his televised opening remarks at the meeting, Modi identified terrorism, separatism, piracy and drug trafficking as major challenges and said the two countries will continue to work together to deal with them. Modi arrived in Abuja early Sunday on the first trip to the country by an Indian prime minister after a gap of 17 years.

"We give high priority to our strategic partnership with Nigeria...I am confident that a new chapter in our ties will begin following our talks," the PM said. He also described the around 60,000-strong Indian expatriate community as a key pillar of India-Nigeria relations and thanked Tinubu for ensuring their welfare.

The PM also announced that India is sending 20 tonnes of relief supplies for Nigerian people hit by last month's floods. He also referred to the African Union becoming a permanent member of the G20 at the India-hosted summit of the grouping last year and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being received by the Nigerian delegates upon his arrival at the airport, in Abuja, Nigeria, Sunday, Nov. 17, 2024. Modi on Sunday arrived in Nigeria on the first leg of his three-nation visit at the invitation of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

described it as a significant outcome.

Before the delegation-level talks, PM Modi and Tinubu held a one-on-one meeting at the Presidential Villa. The PM was also accorded a ceremonial welcome. Both sides are likely to ink a number of agreements following the delegation-level talks. PM Modi is in Nigeria as part of a three-nation tour. From Abuja, he will travel to Brazil to attend the G20 summit. His last destination will be Guyana. The India-Nigeria ties were elevated to the status of a "strategic

partnership' during then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to the African nation in October 2007. Nigeria has been a close partner of India for over six decades.

New Delhi established its diplomatic House in Lagos in November 1958, two years before Nigeria became independent in 1960. The presence of a large Indian expatriate community of about 60,000, the largest in West Africa, adds value to the importance of the long-standing relationship between the two countries.

There are more than 200 Indian companies who have invested about USD 27 billion in all important manufacturing sectors and these companies are the second largest employers after the federal government, according to Indian officials. India has emerged as a development partner of Nigeria on two fronts, by offering developmental assistance through concessional loans (USD 100 million) and by offering capacity-building training programmes.

Modi Govt playing politics of discrimination, depriving Maharashtra youth of jobs: Priyanka

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra on Sunday charged that the Modi government was practising 'politics of discrimination' in matters relating to the development works during its rule for more than ten years now.

Addressing an election rally in the naxal-infested Gadchiroli district in Vidarbha region, Priyanka said that the Modi-led dispensation at the Centre had deprived youth in Maharashtra of jobs by diverting mega industrial projects to Gujarat.

"The Modi government has been unfair to the jobless youth in Maharashtra. Owing to diversion of big-ticket pro-

jects to Gujarat, Maharashtra is facing huge job losses. As a result, unemployment has shot up hugely in the state. As many as 2.50 lakh government posts remain vacant," Priyanka said.

Linking the suicides by youth in Maharashtra to lack of job opportunities, Priyanka said: "Maximum number of suicides by the youth are taking place in Maharashtra. This is because of the ruling BJP's failure to address the issue of unemployment". Averring that the Modi government was discriminatory in its approach towards Maharashtra, Priyanka said: "India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru set up many big educational institutions, factories, ports, dams, hospitals across

all states considering the overall interests of the country. The Congress governments in the past never practised favouritism or shown discrimination in matters of development".

Slamming Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders for their slogan "ek hain to safe hain" (if we are united, we are safe), Priyanka said: "In this country, the only one who is truly safe is Adani. The entire country knows that Adani is the only one who has access to the government coffers, while ordinary citizens are finding it difficult to make both ends meet".

Accusing the Modi government of gifting away airports, ports and some of the major

companies to Adani, Priyanka said: "The government should be focused on creating jobs for people across the country, not allocating national assets to one individual".

The Congress leader charged that there was a lack of accountability in governance in the country. "During the Congress rule, our leaders used to be accountable to the people. However, under the BJP, this accountability is gone. Ministers, chief ministers, and the prime minister have become unanswerable to the people.

When you demand accountability from them, the ruling political leaders divert attention from real issues and focus on polarising the society," Priyanka said.

J and K LG chairs security meet with DGP, Chief Secretary

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of activating the Border Winter management strategy across Jammu region aimed at foiling fresh infiltration bids from across the border, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha Sunday chaired a high-level security review meeting with the Director General of Jammu and Kashmir police and Chief Secretary Atal Dullo. Interestingly, Omar Abdulallah again remained conspicuous in



Sinha chaired a high-level security review meeting at the Jammu Convention centre, first after the shifting of the move offices in Jammu.

Communal clashes in Murshidabad...

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"We have detained a number of persons for committing mischief after some people engaged in clashes leading to injuries and some loss of properties," district Superintendent of Police Surya Pratap Yadav said. Senior officers had rushed to the area with large posse of police rapid action forces, said State DGP Rajiv Kumar while another senior official said that internet facilities had

been shut in the area "though no prohibitory orders have yet been issued considering the festivities." Some of the injured had been admitted at the Berhampore Medical College and Hospital, sources said.

The incident took place at a time when Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari alleged in Mumbai how Bengal had become a gateway of Rohingyas. "They are entering India through Bengal as the State Government is not giving land to the BSF for fencing," he said. Usually a peaceful area, parts of Murshidabad had witnessed communal tensions in May this year when two groups clashed at Rejinagar near Beldanga during the Ram Navami festival leading Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to blame a local monk from Bharat Sevashram Sangha a renowned socio-religious charitable organisation functioning from Kolkata for the riots. Naming a particular monk she said he was "behind the riots in

Rejinagar. If he intends to do politics, he should do it with a BJP symbol. He has said Trinamool agents will not be allowed to sit in the booth." Around the general elections an alleged provocative comment made by a local Trinamool Congress MLA Humayun Kabir threatening the BJP with dire consequences if they would not stop creating trouble too contributed oil to fire. Reminding the sordid fact that the Muslims constitute two-third of the population of Murshidabad district Kabir had said that he had the capacity of disposing of the entire BJP in Bhagirathi River in a matter of two hours. As per 2011 census Murshidabad Muslims constitute about 66.8 percent of the total population whereas Hindus amount to about 33 percent.

Recently an FIR was lodged against Bollywood star-turned-BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty after he warned, in a party meeting, that those who threatened to throw Hindus in Bhagirathi River better watch out. "We will take down four fruits from their trees if they pluck one fruit from ours," he warned.

Meanwhile, Adhir Chowdhury former Congress MP from Berhampore which is the headquarters of Murshidabad appealed to all to maintain peace and harmony. Praising the administration for taking timely steps he said that his party would cooperate with the police to restore peace in the area.

BJP holds first official meet of Election Management Committee, Election Manifesto Committee

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Sunday held the first official meetings of the Election Management Committee and the Election Manifesto Committee, formed by the party recently ahead of state assembly polls slated to be held early next year.

Additionally, the party also announced an 11-member 'Pradesh Aarop Patra' committee, led by Leader of Opposition in Delhi assembly Vijender Gupta, against the ruling party ahead of the state assembly polls slated to be held early next year. In a letter, the announcement stated, "On the instructions of Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva

for the Delhi assembly elections 2025, the committee formed for making a chargesheet against the failures of the Delhi government has been announced."

The list is headed by Gupta and includes the name of former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri, National Secretary of the party Manjinder Singh Risa, former Delhi MLA R.P.Singh, Former Mayor Aarti Mehra, Leader of Opposition in Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) Raja Iqbal Singh, Delhi BJP Vice President Kapil Mishra, Delhi BJP Secretary Harish Khurana, Delhi BJP's Mahila Morcha President Richa Pandey Mishra and senior party leader Gulshan Virmani and Sunita Kangda.

Embarrassed by 'Sheesh Mahal', infighting...

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His resignation proves that even the AAP leaders do not consider Kejriwal as an honest politician," Sachdeva said. Party leader Kapil Mishra welcomed the resignation and said that Gahlot's remarks in the letter to Kejriwal raise serious questions about the AAP and Delhi government.

Gahlot's resignation has been accepted by CM Atishi. His exit comes weeks after party Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal turned rebel, although she remains an MP from the party. The senior AAP leader's resignation comes at a time when the party is gearing up for the Delhi Assembly polls slated to be held in February next year. After Kejriwal stepped down, Gahlot was among the key contenders for the CM's post.

However, Kejriwal picked Atishi for the top job. Insiders say Kejriwal and his team was not happy with Gahlot for his close proximity with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena who nominated him to unfurl Tricolour at Chhatrasal stadium on Independence Day this year. Besides, on several occasions, the Delhi Cabinet took decisions without informing him. In his resignation, Gahlot said, "Another painful point has been the fact that instead of fighting for people's rights we have increasingly only been fighting for our own political agenda. This has severely crippled our ability to even deliver basic services to the people of Delhi. It is now obvious that real progress for Delhi cannot happen if the Delhi Government spends majority of its time fighting

with the Centre". Listing out the challenges that the party faces, Gahlot said: "I want to share with you that today the Aam Aadmi Party faces grave challenges. Challenges from within, to the very values that brought us together to AAP. Political ambitions have overtaken our commitment towards people, leaving many promises unfulfilled. Take for example the Yamuna, which we had promised to transform into a clean river, but never got around to doing it. Now the Yamuna River is perhaps even more polluted than ever before," the letter read.

Gahlot made it clear that his decision to step away from the party was motivated by his continued desire to serve the people of Delhi, but he felt that his commitment to the AAP's vision could no longer be reconciled with the party's

current direction. "I had started my political journey with the commitment to serve the people of Delhi and I want to continue doing that. Which is why, I find myself left with no option but to step away from AAP," Gahlot concluded.

In March, Gahlot was summoned by the ED in the Delhi excise policy case. However, this was before all AAP leaders and the accused in the case were granted bail. In 2018, several locations linked to Gahlot and his family members were raided by the Income Tax Department, alleging tax evasion worth several crores. Gahlot joined the AAP before the 2015 Assembly elections and won the Najafgarh seat by a thin margin of 1,550 votes. He would go on to win the seat again in 2020 by over 6,000 vote

Manipur volatile, HM...

From page 1

On Sunday morning, the situation remained calm but tense in all five districts of Imphal Valley, where an indefinite curfew has been imposed and internet services suspended following violent protests after the discovery of the bodies of six persons, three women and children each, allegedly abducted and killed by militants in Jiribam. Piles of burnt debris remained on the roads of state capital Imphal, a day after the violent protests.

Security forces have intensified patrolling in parts of Imphal and increased deployment at many of the residences of legislators which were attacked on Saturday as well as all major roads leading to the Capital town. On Saturday, agitators ransacked the houses of three legislators, including that of Biren Singh, son-in-law RK Imo, who is also a BJP MLA, and set their properties on fire

while security forces fired tear gas shells to disperse protesters in different parts of Imphal, police said. Among the ministers whose residences were stormed by the protesters are Sapam Ranjan, L Susindro Singh and Y Khemchand, an official said. Curfew was imposed for an indefinite period in Imphal East and West, Bishnupur, Thoubal and Kachhing districts of Imphal Valley "due to developing law and order situation", he said.

The state administration suspended internet services temporarily in seven districts in the wake of protesters storming the residences of state ministers and MLAs, another official said. Besides Imo, agitators also vandalised the properties of BJP legislator Sapam Kunjakesore and MLA Jyokishan Singh. They also gheraoed the houses of JD(U) MLA of Wangkhei seat, T Arun, and BJP legislator Karam Shyam of Langthabal.

India successfully flight-tests long-range hypersonic missile

From page 1

The Defence Ministry said the missile was tracked by various range systems, deployed in multiple domains. "The flight data obtained from down range ship stations confirmed the successful terminal manoeuvres and impact with high degree of accuracy," it said in the readout.

This missile has been indigenously developed by the laboratories of the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile complex, Hyderabad along with various other DRDO laboratories and industry partners.

Hypersonic missiles are weapons capable of travelling at speeds five times the speed of sound. Their range typically varies between 6,125 km/h (Mach 5) and

about 24,140 km/h (Mach 20). These speeds make them incredibly difficult to detect and intercept.

There are two primary types of hypersonic missiles--Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGVs) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles. HGVs are launched like ballistic missiles using a rocket booster. After reaching a certain altitude, the HGV separates from the booster and glides toward its target, manoeuvring in flight to avoid interception. Hypersonic Cruise Missiles use scramjet engines to sustain hypersonic speeds throughout their flight, flying at lower altitudes and also possessing manoeuvrability.

The development of hypersonic missiles is a significant achievement for

India, as it presents several challenges, including extreme heat generation, precise control and guidance systems, detection and tracking difficulties, and the need for effective interception systems. Hypersonic missiles have the potential to revolutionise warfare due to their speed, manoeuvrability, and range. They could significantly reduce response times and make traditional missile defence systems less effective. These missiles are typically launched using rockets. For glide vehicles, the rocket boosts the missile to a high altitude. Once at the desired altitude, the missile accelerates to hypersonic speeds. For cruise missiles, this is achieved using scramjet engines, which compress incoming air

before mixing it with fuel to create combustion at supersonic speeds. Unlike traditional ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles can manoeuvre during flight. This makes their trajectory unpredictable and complicates interception efforts. Glide vehicles, for instance, use aerodynamic lift to glide toward their targets, while cruise missiles use their engines to maintain speed and direction.

The high speed and manoeuvrability of hypersonic missiles allow them to strike targets with precision. They can carry conventional or nuclear warheads, making them versatile for different types of missions.

The flight-trial was carried out in the presence of senior scientists of DRDO and

officers of the armed forces. Chief of DRDO Samir V Kamat congratulated the team of DRDO which has actively contributed to this successful mission.

On November 12, DRDO conducted the maiden flight-test of Long Range Land Attack Cruise Missile (LRLACM) from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) in Chandipur off the coast of Odisha from a mobile articulated launcher.

During this test, all subsystems performed as per expectation and met the primary mission objectives. The missile performance was monitored by several range sensors like Radar, Electro Optical Tracking System and telemetry deployed by ITR at different locations to ensure complete coverage of the flight path.

The missile demonstrated its capability to perform various manoeuvres while flying at various altitudes and speeds. The missile is also equipped with advanced avionics and software to ensure better and reliable performance, the release said.

The flight-test of the hypersonic missile comes at a time when India is focusing on bolstering its combat capabilities against the backdrop of China's aggressive military muscle-flexing. In the last few years, India has been focusing on the development of next-generation weapon systems, such as drones, hypersonic missiles and equipment with the application of artificial intelligence. The DRDO has already developed a range of missiles, including "Prithvi", "Akash" and "Agni".

GRAP stage IV invoked in NCR

From page 1

All construction activities, including highways, roads, flyovers, power lines, pipelines and other public projects, have been suspended. The CAQM suggested online classes for the students of Classes six to nine, and Class 11. It also recommended that offices in the NCR work at 50 per cent capacity, with the rest working from home. Work-from-home options may be introduced for central government employees, CAQM said. The Central government may take appropriate decisions on permitting work from home for employees in their offices. State governments could also

decide to close colleges, limit non-essential commercial activities and implement odd-even vehicle rules, it said. The CAQM also advised children, elderly citizens and those with respiratory cardiovascular or other chronic diseases to avoid outdoor activities and stay indoors as much as possible. The Delhi government had already imposed GRAP Stage III restrictions on November 14 to curb pollution with junior school classes going online. Inter-state buses, besides EVs/CNG/BS-VI, private BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel vehicles have been banned in the Capital. Dense fog engulfed the capital city in the evening, reducing

the visibility. Palam airport recorded lowest visibility 500 m during 0830 to 0900 hours IST which improved thereafter becoming 600m at 0930 hours IST and it became 900m at 1230 IST. Safdarjung airport recorded lowest visibility 300m during 0700 hours to 0900 IST which improved thereafter becoming 400m at 0930 hours IST and it became 600m at 1230 IST.

According to reports, 250 flights were delayed while three were cancelled, according to Flightradar. Over 30 trains coming to New Delhi and Anand Vihar Railway stations have been delayed given the smog conditions. According to officials, the trains are

running late by two to nine hours. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday, a plea seeking enforcement of measures to curb air pollution in the National Capital. As per the cause list of November 18 uploaded on the Supreme Court website, a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih is slated to hear the plea.

Indian Biogas Association has suggested enforcement of the odd-even rule for four wheelers in Delhi NCR to check air pollution and encourage people to shift to electric vehicles or those based on compressed biogas (CBG) or natural gas. The Delhi Transport Department has impounded

2,234 coverage vehicles between October 1 and November 15 as part of an ongoing drive. According to official data, the seized vehicles include 260 diesel four-wheelers that are over 10 years old, alongside 1,156 petrol two-wheelers and 818 petrol three and four-wheelers, all older than 15 years.

Bahadurgarh in Haryana topped the list most polluted cities in India with an AQI of 445, followed by Delhi 441 as compared to 417 on Saturday. Bawana recorded the highest reading at 471, followed by Ashok Vihar and Jahangirpuri, both at 466. Mundka and Wazirpur also reported AQI levels of 463, indicating widespread

pollution across the city. The dense haze, caused by a mix of local pollution and the seasonal crop burning in neighbouring states, choked the city's skies, triggering widespread concerns over Delhi's ongoing battle with air pollution. Meanwhile, the Delhi airport took to its official handle to inform the flyers that low-visibility procedures are currently underway. "Low-visibility procedures are in progress at the Delhi airport. All flight operations are presently normal. Passengers are to contact the airline concerned for updated information," posted the handle on X.

Of the 35 monitoring stations, most reported 'severe' air

quality - Indira Gandhi International Airport (445), ITO (411), Anand Vihar (457), and Siri Fort (405), among others. The AQI level remained above 400 in most areas of Delhi, including Ashok Vihar (466), Aya Nagar (426), Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range (415), Dwarka Sector 8 (445), Dilshad Garden (448), Major Dhyan Chand Stadium (419), Mandir Marg (434), Najafgarh (402), Narela (444), Nehru Nagar (442), North Campus DU (427), NSIT, Dwarka (410), Okhla Phase 2 (409), Patparganj (439), Punjabi Bagh (442), Pusa (407), RK Puram (434), Rohini (449), Shadipur (457), Sonia Vihar (440), Vivek Vihar (454), and Wazirpur

(463). According to the Centre's Decision Support System for Air Quality Management, vehicular emissions contributed approximately 15.8 per cent to Delhi's pollution on Sunday. The system also reported that stubble burning was the main contributor to the capital's air pollution on Saturday, accounting for 25 per cent of the total pollution.

Noida and Gurugram recorded AQI levels of 308 and 307, respectively. Ghaziabad reached an AQI of 372, pointing to slight improvement from the prevailing conditions. Faridabad registered the lowest among the listed cities, with an AQI of 260.

BJP, Congress lash out at AAP over Gahlot's resignation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP and Congress on Sunday lashed out at the ruling party at the issue of the senior AAP leader and former Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot leaving the government over 'awkward' and 'embarrassing' controversies like 'sheeshmahal' while the AAP called it a 'dirty political conspiracy' of the BJP and said that it wants to win the Delhi Assembly polls by misusing the ED and CBI.

Attacking the AAP, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva in a press conference said, "Delhi government minister Kailash Gahlot, in the letter he has written while resigning from his ministerial post, has raised the issues of corruption in Arvind Kejriwal's Sheeshmahal building construction and Yamuna clean-

ing work, which demand answers from Kejriwal but he is trying to divert the topic but now the time has come for his departure." Stating that resignation in the political field is not a new thing, Sachdeva asserted that the questions asked by Gahlot are definitely shocking. "Kailash Gahlot has written some of the same issues while resigning, which shows that no Delhi resident who wants development of Delhi will be a partner in Arvind Kejriwal's corruption. Kejriwal, who has sworn on the heads of his children that he would not take government housing, should explain what is the compulsion that he not only committed corruption in housing but also wasted the money of the taxpayers of Delhi like water?" he said. He accused the AAP supremo



of throwing away the mike instead of answering the journalists when they asked him about the resignation of his 12-year-old colleague Kailash Gahlot. Union Minister Harsh Malhotra said that we all have just seen in the Mayor elections that eight councillors of AAP did cross voting without leaving his party.

"Rajkumar Anand and Kailash Gahlot have resigned being ministers, the biggest reason for this is the corruption within AAP and the dictatorial attitude of Arvind Kejriwal due to which AAP MLAs and councillors are feeling suffocated," he added, adding that the councillors, troubled by the allegations of corruption against the party, cross-voted in an attempt to elect a good mayor. Leader of the Opposition in

the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta called the resignation 'a clear sign of the party's disintegration and collapse'. "AAP's own leaders and ministers are dissatisfied with the working style of the party's leadership and are feeling suffocated within,"

said, "Gehlot himself has now acknowledged that the promises made by the party to the people of Delhi remain unfulfilled." The LoP declared that AAP's lies and corruption won't last much longer and accused Arvind Kejriwal's government of deceiving, exploiting, and looting the people of Delhi. He predicted that in the coming days, more senior leaders might follow Gehlot's example and abandon this sinking ship.

Calling AAP a sinking ship, he added that even the party's ministers have realized that the personal ambitions of some of its senior leaders have started to outweigh the party's stated objectives. Referring to the issues raised in Gehlot's resignation, Gupta

BJP's two-time former MLA Anil Jha joins AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP's Purvanchali leader and two-time former MLA from Kirari Anil Jha joined the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in the presence of party supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday. The development came a few hours after the AAP suffered a big blow as its Najafgarh MLA and Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot quit the party. Kejriwal welcomed Jha to the AAP at party headquarters near Mandi House and dubbed him as one of the "biggest" Purvanchali leaders in Delhi politics. He will boost the AAP not only in Kirari but all over the city, the AAP supremo said.



AAP's national convenor also hit out at the opposition (Congress and BJP) accusing both parties of serving injustice to the community. He further praised the AAP government for bringing development to the "illegal colonies" of the Purvanchali community. Party sources claimed that Jha could replace the sitting AAP MLA from Kirari, in the Delhi Assembly polls due in February.

The Kirari constituency, home to a large population from the Purvanchal region,

household," Jha added. Jha, a two-time BJP MLA from the Kirari Assembly constituency in North West Delhi, has joined the AAP, citing disillusionment with the saffron party's leadership and policies. Kejriwal alleged that while the AAP government built 10,000 km of roads and streets, laid 6800 km of sewer lines and provided piped water in 1,650 unauthorised colonies, "the BJP did nothing".

"I want to ask the BJP and its leader Amit Shah, why should Purvanchali people vote for the party. I challenge them to tell one thing they did for the Purvanchali people in Delhi. They promised the registry of properties in these colonies but not a single one could be done in five years," he said. Over the past decade, the Haryana-Punjabi dominated politics in Delhi have shifted towards the Purvanchali (eastern) voters, hailing from regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Active shooter of Neeraj Bawana gang apprehended



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested a 35 year old active shooter of the Neeraj Bawana gang involved in a double murder case. According to police on Sunday, the accused, identified as Raghu, was previously involved in 18 cases of murder, attempt to murder, carjacking, dacoity, robbery, arms act and was declared a proclaimed offender for evading court proceedings. A senior police officer said that the accused was apprehended from Sonipat on Saturday. The accused was involved in gang war in Delhi in 2014 and had been an active shooter since then.

Based on a tip-off a police team nabbed him from Sonipat in Haryana," Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Satish Kumar said. He added that during interrogation he told police that he studied upto 10th standard and started working as a farmer with his family. The officer added that in 2009, he committed his first murder

due to an old enmity in his native village in Hassanpur. "On August 24, 2014, residents of one of the posh localities of the capital city i.e. Subhash Place got chills with the sensational double murder in a gangwar between Neeraj Bawana Gang and Neetu Dabodia wherein multiple rounds were fired from both sides," a police officer said, adding that a case under section 302, 307, 120B and 34 IPC and 25/27 Arms Act at Subhash Place police station was registered.

Infant kidnapped from Safdarjung Hospital rescued from UP railway station

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A one-and-half-month-old infant, kidnapped from the Safdarjung Hospital in the national Capital, was rescued from Uttar Pradesh's Shahjahanpur railway station while two suspects in the case were apprehended. According to the police on Sunday, the rescue operation was carried out by the Delhi Police in collaboration with the Government Railway Police (GRP) and the Railway Protection Force (RPF). A senior police official said that prima facie, it looks like the kidnapping was done to keep the child with them, however the accused are not cooperating in the investigation and not giving clear answers.



Deputy Commissioner of Police (southwest) Akanksha Yadav said, "The complainant woman was at the Safdarjung Hospital on November 15 for kidney treatment of her husband when a woman engaged her in conversation, gained her trust and eventually took the child in her arms." She added that the woman then fled with a man in an auto-rickshaw, the officer said. Police said that an FIR under section 137(2) (kidnapping) of BNS was filed immediately at the Safdarjung Enclave Police Station and the investigation was taken up under the supervision of ACP Ranbir Singh.

"Teams were formed and sent to monitor all major bus stands and railway stations in Delhi-NCR," Additional DCP Yadav said. After analysing CCTV footage from Safdarjung Hospital, the woman was identified and tracked to the Anand Vihar Railway Station where the two suspects boarded the Bareilly-bound Sadbhavana Express, she said. "Although the suspects were in disguise, they were apprehended and the baby was rescued.

SC flags failure of agencies in implementing Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has flagged the "complete failure" of agencies in implementing the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 in the national capital and directed the chief secretary of the Delhi government to call a meeting of all stakeholders to discuss the issue. The top court observed it is a matter of immense importance that the 2016 Rules are implemented in their true letter and spirit in the capital city. "If we find that all other authorities do not come together and tell us the time-bound schedule for implementation of the 2016 Rules, the court may have to consider of passing harsh orders," a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih said in its order passed on November 11. The bench said, "We direct the chief secretary of the Delhi Government to call a meeting of all the stakehold-



ers, including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, to discuss the issue of implementation of the 2016 Rules. It said all stakeholders must come together and file a common report before the court laying down the time-lines for reporting compliance with the provisions of the 2016 Rules. The bench said the exercise of holding a meeting and coming out with a common response shall be completed

by December 13. "As we have been noticing in other cases also, the 2016 Rules have remained on paper. If in the territory of NCT of Delhi, there is a complete failure to implement the 2016 rules, one can imagine what must be happening in cities in other parts of the country," the bench said. It noted that on one hand, there was no implementation of the 2016 rules due to

which garbage or solid waste was being illegally stored in landfill sites which were prone to fires and, on the other hand, a large number of construction activities were going on which adds to generation of solid and construction wastes. "The Delhi government must come out with the figures for the daily generation of solid waste in the city while submitting the report," it said. The bench authorised the special secretary of the Delhi government's environment department to call officers concerned of the Centre for the meeting, if the involvement of any department of the Centre was required in the implementation of the 2016 Rules. "If the special secretary finds that any of the stakeholders are not cooperating, we permit him to move an application to this court to seek directions," the bench said and posted the matter for further hearing on December 16.

Man arrested for stealing 11 high-end bicycles in Dwarka

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 24 year old vagabond man has been arrested by the Delhi Police after he stole 11 high end bicycles for making his ends meet in north Dwarka area. The police told The Pioneer that despite the bikes he stole pricing between Rs 18,000 to Rs 32,000, he sold some of them for less than Rs 5,000 in desperation for money for food. "He used to sell some bikes by asking for Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 from the buyer and stating that he is in desperate need of money. He used to promise that he would return the money and take the bicycle back. These cycles are on the expensive side costing around 18,000 to 32,000," a senior police official said. The man, identified as Selvin Wilson, was in his teenage when his father, who works as



an ad hoc driver with a government agency, left his family and started living separately. To earn a living, the accused left his studies after 9th class from a government school and started work as a helper in office. However, in 2023 he lost that work also and about two months back after a quarrel at home with his mother, due to not having any work, he left

his home. He started living as a vagabond. After some time, he started stealing high-end bicycles and selling them to prospective buyers for food and his daily needs. Upon receiving a number of e-firs regarding the stealing of bicycles in the area, the police gathered a team and technical and manual efforts were being made. A senior police official said that every spot of

crime was being visited and CCTV coverage was being analysed to garner clues about criminals. "Previous offenders and listed criminals were being watched. From one of the spots, relevant CCTV coverage was discovered which was followed from point to point and the head route was followed. Specific features, like built, age, gait of the thief was observed accordingly. Beat staff and the Crack Team of the police station were sensitized. Efforts bore fruits in the form of apprehension of habitual bicycle lifters," he said. The accused was arrested when on area patrolling, a police team apprehended him near Park Sector-12 in Dwarka, with a stolen bicycle. While patrolling, they noticed a person on a bicycle coming towards them but sensing

police presence, he turned back and tried to flee. However, the police quickly acted and apprehended him. On enquiry, he revealed his name as Selvin Wilson and was unable to tell about the particulars and ownership of his bicycle. "On verification, the Bicycle was found stolen from Dwarka North police station, accordingly legal action was initiated and investigation taken up. During interrogation, the accused disclosed stealing a number of bicycles. He was taken into police custody and further eight stolen Bicycles were recovered at his instance," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh. He added that from his arrest 11 Cases of bicycle theft have been worked out and no previous cases have been registered against the 24 year old.

Woman dead, man injured after being hit by car in Uttam Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 64-year-old woman died and a man got injured after being hit by a car in south-west Delhi's Uttam Nagar area on Sunday morning. According to the police, they got information about the incident at around 6 am. "On Sunday at about 6:03 am a PCR call regarding an accident at Uttam Nagar terminal by one car was received. Police reached there and found that the injured had been taken to hospital," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh said. "While Kamlesh, a resident of Gupta Enclave, was admitted to Deen Dayal Upadhyay (DDU) Hospital, the unidentified injured man, in his 70s, was taken to Mata Chanan Devi Hospital," the officer said.



According to an eyewitness, the victims were crossing the road near Uttam Nagar Terminal when a vehicle, reportedly driven rashly, rammed into them. The vehicle, coming from the Janakpuri side, fled the scene immediately after the accident, the eyewitness said. Kamlesh succumbed to injuries during treatment while the unidentified man remains hospitalised in critical condition.

"We checked the CCTV footage which led to the identification of the offending vehicle, and the police have registered a case," he said. The body is being sent for post-mortem and further probe is underway, the officer said, adding that a case under section 281 (Rash driving) and 106(1) (Causing death of a person by negligence) of BNS has been registered.

Mumbai police makes new arrest in Baba Siddique murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai Crime Branch on Sunday arrested a Gujarat resident from Akola in Maharashtra in connection with the Baba Siddique murder case, taking the number of people held in the sensational assassination to 25, an official said.

Salmanbhai Iqbalbhai Vohra, a resident of Petlad in Gujarat's Anand district, was held from Balapur in Akola, some 565 kilometres from Mumbai, with the help of the police there, the Crime Branch official said. The 66-year-old NCP leader



was gunned down on October 12 near his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office in Bandra East's Nirmal Nagar area. "Vohra had opened a bank account in May this year and had provided financial support to Nareshkumar

Singh, brother of arrested accused Gurmil Singh, Rupesh Mohol and Harishkumar. He has also helped others connected to the crime," the official said. Gurmil Singh from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh resident Dharmaraj Kashyap were held from the spot immediately after the murder. The police recently got a major breakthrough in the case when it arrested alleged main shooter Shivkumar Gautam from Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh. Gautam, who was on the run since October 12, was held while trying to flee to Nepal, as per police.

PM praises 'The Sabarmati Report' movie

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday praised the film 'The Sabarmati Report', saying the "truth is coming out." "Well said. It is good that this truth is coming out, and that too in a way common people can see it. A fake narrative can persist only for a limited period of time. Eventually, the facts will always come out!" the prime minister said in a social media post. He made these assertions while replying to an social media user who had tagged him with a video of the trailer of the film, which released on Friday. 'The Sabarmati Report' is based on the

burning of S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express near Godhra station of Gujarat on February 27, 2002, in which 59 Hindu devotees returning from Ayodhya were burnt to death. The incident triggered riots in Gujarat that year. Dheeraj Sarna has directed "The Sabarmati Report", produced by Shobha Kapoor, Ektaa R Kapoor, Amul V Mohan and Anshul Mohan. The film features Vikrant Massey, Raashii Khanna and Ridhi Dogra. This is not the first time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised a film. In 2022, he praised Vivek Agnihotri's 'The Kashmir Files'.

Nadda repeats PM claims on Bangladeshis, infiltration in Jharkhand



PTI ■ RANCHI

J.P. Nadda, president of the BJP, on Sunday attacked the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led coalition government in Jharkhand, accusing it of sheltering Bangladeshi infiltrators in madrasas in the state and ensuring Aadhaar, voter ID card, gas connection, ration card and land for them. Nadda also hit out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi saying he wants to become champion of OBCs, but questioned how many OBC members were in Rajiv Gandhi Foundation and National Advisory Committee. "I have received an intelligence report just now. It says that Bangladeshi infiltrators are given shelter in madrasas here. Their Aadhaar, voter ID, gas connection and ration card are facilitated and then the Hemant Soren government ensures land for them.

"Hemant Soren looted jangle-jameen of Jharkhand, infiltration is rampant here. Infiltrators are marrying tribal women and grabbing their land. We will bring a legislation to ensure that their offspring is debarred from land. Only PM Modi-led BJP government can check infiltration," Nadda said while addressing a poll rally at Gomia in Bokaro district. He also termed the entire JMM-RJD-Congress as a kunba (family) of corrupt leaders and added that INDIA bloc leaders were either in jail or on bail. "Hemant Soren, who is out on bail, will again go to prison. He has indulged in Rs 5,000-crore mining scam, Rs 236-crore land scam, and several other scams," Nadda alleged. "The Hemant Soren government followed divide and rule policy and created unrest among people. Now it is time for their exit. We will be forming the government here," Nadda said.

He alleged that the Hemant Soren government betrayed people, looted state and promoted dynastic politics. "I say this with pride that there are 27 OBC ministers in PM Modi's cabinet," he said. PM Modi-led NDA government is bringing OBCs, tribals and SCs to the mainstream, he claimed. "The BJP-led government at the Centre spent Rs 19 lakh crore to augment infrastructure and will spend Rs 10 lakh crore more on it," he added. Nadda also said that under the Modi regime, agriculture budget increased by five times and India became the third-largest automobile manufacturer, second-largest steel maker, third-biggest market for toys and produces the world's most affordable drugs. He said five medical colleges were being set up in Jharkhand and PM Modi had allocated Rs 250 crore each for them.

Rahul urges PM to visit Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on Saturday termed the recent string of violent clashes and continuing bloodshed in Manipur "deeply disturbing", as he urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit the state and work towards restoring peace in the region. A day after the bodies of three out of six missing persons were fished out of a river in

Manipur, protesters on Saturday attacked the residences of three state ministers and six MLAs, prompting the government to clamp prohibitory orders in five districts for an indefinite period besides suspending internet services in parts of the state. In a post on X, Rahul Gandhi said the recent string of violent clashes and continuing bloodshed in Manipur is deeply disturbing. "After more than a year of

division and suffering, it was the hope of every Indian that the Central and state governments would make every effort at reconciliation and found a solution," the former Congress chief said. "I urge the PM once again to visit Manipur and work towards restoring peace and healing in the region," Gandhi said. In Imphal, angry protesters ransacked the houses of three legislators, including that of Chief Minister N Biren Singh's son-

in-law, and set their properties on fire even as the security forces fired tear gas shells to disperse the agitators. The Congress has been attacking the prime minister for not visiting Manipur, besides slamming the Centre for its handling of the situation in the ethnic strife-torn northeastern state. The violence between Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur has claimed more than 200 lives since May last year.

BJP claims cleanchit on 40 per cent commission barb

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

The BJP in Karnataka on Sunday claimed that the Lokayukta probe has cleared the party's previous government from 40 per cent commission charges, and that the allegations levelled by the Congress against it as completely false. The BJP leaders said that it is proved that the 40 per cent commission allegation was part of the Congress' "tool kit". During the 2023 Assembly polls, the then opposition Congress had used the Karnataka State Contractors' Association's allegations of 40 per cent commission charge as a major weapon to corner the then BJP government, which is said to be one among the factors that led to the saffron party's debacle in the election.

Three women drown to death in Mangalore

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Three young women, all in their early 20s, drowned on Sunday morning in the swimming pool of a beach resort in Someshwara Uchula near Mangalore where they were staying. The youngsters, Nishita (21), Parvathi (20) and Keerthana (21), all hailing from Mysuru, were playing in the swimming pool of the resort when tragedy struck leading to the mishap.

According to persons close to the Wa Beach Resort, where the incident occurred, one of the youngsters drowned in the water, and when another tried to rescue her, she too drowned, leading the third woman to enter the water. This incident reportedly occurred within a matter of minutes. The resort staff discovered the incident and raised the alarm. Visuals from the CCTV installed in the

resort recorded the incident showing the young women struggling in the water. A team led by Ullal police inspector HN Balakrishna has visited the scene and is conducting an investigation. Though the resort and police authorities claim that it was a mishap caused by the negligence, there are instances like young women getting killed in mysterious circumstances in Kerala and Karnataka.

In November 2021, Anjana Shajan (first runner-up in Miss Kerala championship) and Ansi Kabeer, a model, were killed in the wee hours of the day when the car they were travelling crashed against a two wheeler. Though the police had taken into custody the owner of the star hotel where the ladies had their dinner and entertainment, nothing has been heard since then.

Bhramo Samaj, RK Mission clash over property in Shimla, seven injured



PTI ■ SHIMLA

Seven people, including three police personnel were injured following a dispute between two Hindu groups here -- the Himalayan Brahma Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram -- in the heart of the state capital, police said on Sunday. The premises of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram, located within the Brahma Samaj property near the Vidhan Sabha was also damaged in the conflict, they said. The clash occurred after over a 100 people, including elderly women associated with the Himalayan Brahma Samaj, peacefully entered the ashram premises on Saturday evening to perform prayers. Sanjeev Kumar Gandhi Shimla superintendent of police (SP) said. The group wished to continue their prayers into the night, but the members of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram, who are in possession of the premises, objected, citing that they wished to close the ashram for the night, Gandhi said. Anticipating a possible takeover attempt, as there is an ongoing dispute over the ownership of the property reported worth crores, the ashram authorities called the police and administration for

assistance, said ashram office bearers. According to the SP, it was a sensitive issue as it involved religious sentiments, hence police and administration were present at the spot, to mediate and resolve the matter. However, when the Himalayan Brahma Samaj followers completed their prayers and agreed to leave on the condition that they will be allowed to perform prayers on Sunday, people gathered by the Ramakrishna Mission started pelting stones injuring seven people including three police personals, the SP said. Two FIRs have been registered against seven people including Sheetal Vyas, her husband ABVP leader Nitin Vyas, under sections 132 (assault against public servant discharging their duty), 121 (causing hurt to public servant), 221 (obstruction), 191 (unlawful assembly), 194 (2) (public fight disturbing peace) and 196 (2) (offence at place of worship) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the police said. Swami Tanmahimanand, secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashram, alleged that the property was handed over to the ashram by the Brahma Samaj for religious purposes and that the mission has been residing there since 2014.

Tanmahimanand said on Saturday, their gardener, who also looks after the ashram premises, and some union leaders held a conference in Kali Bari temple. Thereafter, they entered the ashram as devotees and performed puja, heard pravachan and when at 8:30 pm they wished to close the ashram, members of the Himalayan Brahma Samaj raised slogans of 'Jai Brahma, this is our temple and you have occupied it' and refused to vacate, he said. "Everyone has the right to perform puja but no one has the right to take possession of the ashram and our demand is that the people of Himalayan Brahma Samaj should vacate the temple (ashram)", he added. Swami Ram Rupanand, co-secretary of the ashram said that an attempt was made to forcefully take possession of the temple and alleged that the administration and police remained a mute spectator to the incident. He also demanded a CBI inquiry into the incident. Trustee, Himalayan Brahma Samaj, Shimla MR Sagroli said that a two-day Brahma Samaj conference was held in Shimla and their members from across the country wanted to visit the temple (ashram) and they should be allowed to access.

Delhi court grants exemption to Vikash Yadav from appearance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has granted exemption from personal appearance to Vikash Yadav, accused of attempting to kill alleged Khalistani terrorist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun in the USA, in a case of kidnapping and extortion lodged against him after he claimed threat to life. Special Judge Sumit Dass granted the exemption to Yadav for November 16 on an application moved by his lawyer, claiming that his personal details have been made public, putting his life at risk. The judge directed him to appear before the court on February 3, the next date of hearing. Yadav was arrested by the Special Cell of Delhi Police in December last year following a complaint by a Delhi-based businessman, accusing him of



extorting and kidnapping. A charge sheet was filed in March and Yadav was granted bail in April. Yadav, said to be a former RAW official, was named by the US in connection with the failed assassination attempt on Pannun.

published all over the world, exposing the applicant to serious threat to his life from nefarious elements." "The applicant is being hounded by continuous surveillance by inimical elements who are trying to trace the applicant at all possible places leaving no option for the applicant but to ensure his safety in confines. Threat to the life of the applicant is clear, present, grave, imminent and potential and physical appearance of applicant before the court is likely to lend an opportunity to annihilate the applicant," the application claimed. It claimed that even to appear through video conference was "extremely unsafe" as Yadav's location might be detected by use of electronic technology. The applicant is keen to earn his innocence through trial and is represented by his counsel, it claimed.

NGT asks UP to maintain Adi Ganga Gomti

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed authorities in Uttar Pradesh to take expeditious steps to tap untapped drains, besides taking all possible measures to maintain the riverine ecology of the Adi Ganga Gomti river in Jaunpur district. The green body was hearing a matter regarding the drying up of the river and its chemical pollution, which has caused the death of a large number of fish. In an order dated November eight, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Srivastava noted that a joint team of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board (UPPCB) and district authorities had inspected the river and submitted a report.

India's decarbonisation policies will impact global greenhouse gas emissions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A report by Climate Action Tracker 2020 has said that India's policy and programmes for decarbonising its cities will have a significant impact on global greenhouse gas emissions. Decarbonising the Indian Transport Sector Pathways and Policies, India's transport sector is responsible for 13.5 per cent of the country's energy-related CO2 emissions, with road transport accounting for 90 percent of the sector's final energy consumption. While transport emissions have been steadily increasing

in the backdrop of growing demand for Internal Combustion Engine, policy interventions, investments and initiatives by central and state governments is playing a pivotal role in enabling and expanding green public and private mobility in urban areas. These large-scale public initiatives to decarbonise cities and transport are supported by public, private and development sectors. Home to the world's largest population, India's action will significantly impact global emissions, especially around transport. The Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP), encompassing Uttar

Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, remains one of India's most polluted and climate-vulnerable regions. Decarbonising urban mobility here is crucial for addressing the dual crises of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. In this context, The Climate Agenda will be hosting first Regional Convention on Clean and Inclusive Urban Transport Systems that will focus on fostering equity and inclusivity in sustainable mobility solutions. It aims to spotlight the challenges faced by marginalized groups, such as women, children, and the elderly, while promoting their

active participation in shaping urban transport systems that cater to their needs. "The convention seeks to align with and support existing government initiatives like the Smart Cities Mission and FAME. By identifying unique regional challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and informal transit systems, the event aims to offer actionable solutions tailored to these states. With a focus on electrifying public transport fleets, the convention will present a roadmap to accelerate adoption and set the foundation for future

collaborations, ensuring that the region contributes significantly to India's climate goals while fostering sustainable urban growth" said Ekta Shekhar, Founding Director, The Climate Agenda. The convention will also be an opportunity to launch first-of-its kind collaborative platform with aim for knowledge-sharing, demand generation and joint action in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand in promoting the electrification of public transport, fostering collaboration across sectors, and supporting a transition to cleaner, more sustainable urban mobility solutions.

Ragging kills 18-year-old in Gujarat medical college

PTI ■ PATAN

An 18-year-old MBBS student of a medical college in Gujarat's Patan district died after allegedly being made to stand for three hours during ragging by his seniors, an official said Sunday. The college has started a probe into the incident which took place on Saturday. The deceased, who apparently fell unconscious after being made to stand for a long time, was a first year MBBS student at the college. The victim, Anil Methaniya, fell unconscious and died allegedly after being made to stand for three hours during ragging by his seniors at a hostel of the GMERS Medical College and Hospital at Dharpur in Patan on Saturday night, the college dean, Dr Hardik Shah, said. "The student was rushed to the hospital after he collapsed, and attempts to revive him failed and he was declared dead. His classmates said Methaniya died after being made to stand for three hours and introduce himself before seniors at the college hostel," Shah informed. He said the anti-ragging committee of the college has initiated a probe into the matter, and punitive measures will be taken against the senior students if they are found responsible for ragging. The student's body was sent for postmortem and a case of accidental death was registered, an official from Balasana police station said. A first-year medical student at the college said seven-eight senior students forced a group of juniors to stand for around three hours and introduce themselves one by one. "They forced us to keep standing and asked us not to get agitated. At last, a student, who was also standing with us, fell unconscious. We rushed him to a hospital where he died," he said on condition of anonymity. A cousin of Methaniya told reporters that the family was hopeful of getting justice from the college and government.

Politicians across party lines pay homage to Bal Thackeray



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Maharashtra chief minister Uddhav Thackeray were among the leaders who paid homage to Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray on his 12th death anniversary on Sunday. In his tribute, PM Modi said, "I pay homage to the great Balasaheb Thackeray Ji on his 12th death anniversary on Sunday. He was a visionary who championed the cause of Maharashtra's development and the empowerment of Marathi people. He was a firm believer in enhancing the pride of Indian culture and ethos. His bold voice and unwavering spirit continue to

inspire generations." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in a post on X, wrote, "Remembering Balasaheb Thackeray ji on his 12th death anniversary. My thoughts are with Uddhav Thackeray ji, Aditya and the entire Shiv Sena family." Others who paid tribute to Bal Thackeray, among the state's most charismatic politicians with a fanatical following, were Chief Minister (CM) Eknath Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis, NCP (SP) head Sharad Pawar, Mumbai Congress president Varsha Gaikwad and Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray. Pawar, in an online post, wrote, "Salutations to late

Balasaheb Thackeray, the founder of Shiv Sena party, satirist and politician who fought against the injustice to the Marathi people." Gaikwad said Balasaheb Thackeray ruled over Marathi minds and fought for justice, rights of the Marathi people throughout his life. Senior BJP leader Fadnis in his message said, "Humble tributes to Hinduhriday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray on his Smrutidina." Earlier, Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray and his wife Rashmi Thackeray visited the late stalwart's memorial at Shivaji Park in Mumbai and offered floral tributes. Several members of the two rival Sena factions also visited the memorial as a

mark of respect to Bal Thackeray. The Shiv Sena founder passed away on November 17, 2012 at his residence, Matoshree, in Mumbai after prolonged illness. The Shiv Sena split in 2022 after Shinde-led a rebellion against the party leadership, triggering the collapse of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government under Uddhav Thackeray. Shinde subsequently joined hands with the BJP to form government. The Election Commission of India later recognised the Shinde-led faction. However, both factions continue to engage in a bitter tussle to claim the legacy of Bal Thackeray, who championed Hindutva policy.

Jagannath temple alleges its land being encroached, illegally sold across state

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Sunday said strong action will be taken against all persons who made attempts to illegally encroach upon and sell land belonging to Lord Jagannath in Puri. The Jagannath temple in Puri owns around 60,426 acres of land spread across 24 districts in Odisha, besides 395 acres outside Odisha. The Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) on Saturday filed a complaint at Baseli Sahi police station in Puri alleging attempts are being made to sell land belonging to Lord Jagannath under Matitota mouza in Puri.

Speaking to media persons here, Harichandan said, "We will take strong action against all persons involved in the act. If any plot has been sold to some person, we will take stringent action against persons including seller, buyer, sub-registrar, who transferred the land." The government will not tolerate unauthorised sale of a single inch of land of Lord Jagannath in any circumstances, he assured. The temple administration has also initiated its move in this direction, the minister said. The government is mulling steps for settlement of Jagannath temple land available in Odisha and outside as per uniform policy

formulated in 2003, as maximum land parcels are under encroachment, he said, adding, "Through this move, a big corpus fund for the temple can be created." In a statement, SJTA chief administrator Arabinda Padhee has urged the district collector and SP to take immediate measures to stop the illegal sale attempt. The disputed property, registered under khata no 38, comprises 109 plots that are legally owned by the deity. The temple administration has cautioned the public against engaging in such illegal activities, warning that any attempts to transfer or encroach on temple property would lead to severe legal consequences.

Death toll rises to 11 in Jhansi hospital tragedy



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ JHANSI

Another rescued infant succumbed to death on Sunday. District Magistrate (DM) Avinash Kumar clarified that the death was not caused by burns. The aftermath of the devastating fire at the Special Newborn Care Unit (SNCU) of Maharani Laxmibai Government Medical College continues to unfold, with the death toll rising to 11. Autopsies conducted on the victims revealed that the infants were burned beyond recognition, with over 80% of their bodies affected. Three teams of two doctors each carried out the postmortems. Initially, seven bodies were sent for examination. Identification of three more infants was delayed due to the severity of burns. By Sunday, the remaining infants were identified, and their bodies were handed over to grieving families. DNA samples were collected from the charred remains to confirm identities and for use in any future disputes. The findings disclosed that the intense heat had exposed bones, and the infants died within minutes of the fire breaking out.

DM Avinash Kumar stated that 49 newborns were in the SNCU at the time of the fire, and 39 were rescued. However, earlier reports suggested 55 children were present, highlighting discrepancies in official accounts. The ward, designed to care for critically ill newborns with conditions such as jaundice and pneumonia, was reportedly operating at three times its capacity. Warmers and monitoring machines, essential for neonatal care, were running continuously. Experts noted that these devices require periodic breaks to prevent overheating, a safety protocol allegedly overlooked on the night of the incident. Questions abound over safety lapses and administrative negligence, as the heart-wrenching cries of grieving parents such as Rema Devi, whose first baby died, continue to echo through hospital corridors. "Let me see the face of my child," she wailed, encapsulating the anguish of a mother whose hopes were cruelly extinguished. While the hospital administration attributes the fire to a short circuit, the

exact cause remains under investigation. Preliminary findings suggest that excessive electrical load caused a short circuit, which ignited an oxygen concentrator and escalated the fire. However, officials have yet to provide a definitive explanation for the incident. Bereaved families have raised serious questions about overcrowding, safety lapses, and negligence by hospital staff. The tragedy has sparked widespread outrage, with many demanding strict action against those responsible. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak has ordered a three-tier investigation to determine accountability for the catastrophic fire. While the investigation initially involved Jhansi Divisional Commissioner Vimal Kumar Dubey, the government later transferred the responsibility to Director General of Medical and Health Department Kinjal Singh. The government's decision to alter the investigation committee has not been explained, but the findings from all three investigations are awaited to establish culpability.

Cops recover IEDs, foil plans to disrupt elections in Gadchiroli

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a joint operation, the Mumbai police and central security agencies foiled a purported attempt to disrupt the November 20 Assembly election in naxalite-infested Gadchiroli district of eastern Maharashtra, by recovering two improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Acting on a tip-off that a group of Maoists had planted some IEDs to blow up a crucial bridge along the Palakot River in Bhamragad tehsil of Gadchiroli district, a team of Bomb Detection and Disposal Squad rushed to the targeted area in an helicopter for an aerial survey. Subsequently, a joint team of Gadchiroli Police, a company of the Central Reserve Police Force and Border Security Force carried out an extensive search operation

and succeeded in locating the two IEDs, on the Palakot River bridge that links Bhamragad and Tadgaon. As the search team was preparing to neutralise the two deadly IEDs, one of them exploded, while the other one was controlled by the team. Police said that no one suffered injuries nor was there any damage to public property in the explosion. The search is now carrying out combing the areas to detect any more explosives that might have been planted there. The police said that the motive behind planting IEDs was either to create panic among the people or trigger actual explosions on election day. Following the recovery, security agencies have intensified patrolling in

many sensitive areas and are also taking other precautions such as keeping vigilance over naxal hiding areas in the forests and increasing security at critical public and private installations such as bridges, important roads and highways. The security agencies have chalked out elaborate plans to deploy adequate security personnel in three Maoist-infested constituencies of Gadchiroli, Armori and Aheri in Gadchiroli district, Chimur and Bramhapuri constituencies in the neighbouring Chandrapur district and Amgaon constituency in Gondia district to ensure smooth polling on November 20. These six Assembly constituencies have over the years been registering sizeable voter turnouts in the elections.

Punjab Governor GC Kataria pays tributes to martyrs

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Tributes were paid to the martyrs here on Sunday as a precursor to the eighth edition of Military Literature Festival (MLF), with Punjab Governor and UT Administrator Gulab Chand Kataria laying a wreath at the Chandigarh War Memorial here. General (Retd) VP Malik, former army chief, BS Dhanoa, former Indian Air Force chief and Lieutenant General (Retd) TS Shergill chairperson of the MLF association were also present on the occasion. A Bravehearts Ride motorcycle rally carrying the message of courage, sacrifice and patriotism was also organised in Chandigarh on

Sunday as part of the events connected with the MLF. The eighth edition of the MLF will be held in Chandigarh on November 30 and December 1. "We paid our tributes to the martyrs, who made supreme sacrifices for the motherland," Kataria told reporters after laying a wreath at the memorial. He said the valour of the bravehearts continues to inspire generations and exhorted the youth to embrace the noble path of serving the nation with the same courage and dedication shown by these heroes. Replying to a question, Kataria said even today the youth have a great fascination for the armed forces.

Railways plays cupid, creates special corridor to help a groom reach marriage

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Indian Railways proved that they are "with you ... for always," a genuine friend indeed. But for the timely intervention of the Indian Railways officials at Howrah Station, a prospective groom might have failed tying the nuptial knots. Upon receiving a message that the grooms' party comprising about 35 people, including women, old and children bound for Guwahati was arriving late at the Howrah Station from Mumbai in Gitanjali Express running and could miss the connecting train, which was about to leave the station, the Divisional Railway Manager

and the Chief Commercial Manager of the Eastern Railways swung into action, alerting the entire staff and issuing necessary directions. "It was nearly impossible for us to catch Saraighat Express, which was just about to leave. Our train was somewhere around the outer signal when the pilot was asked to hurry up. As our train rolled into the station, we found railway employees had created a special corridor for the groom's party. We managed to cross 15 platforms to catch the Saraighat Express," said one of the members of the groom's party while thanking the entire railway fraternity. Sensing trouble as the Gitanjali Express -scheduled

to reach Howrah at 1 pm on Friday - was running behind schedule and there was more chance of missing than catching the Guwahati bound train, Chandrasekhar Bag, a member of a wedding party, pleaded helplessness on X to Railway authorities. He tagged several top officials and even the Union railway minister. The Eastern Railways, in a post on X, said, "IR arranged to detain Saraighat Express at Howrah for a few minutes so that a marriage party with dulha; coming by Gitanjali Express and going to Guwahati can catch the train. The marriage party has expressed their thanks to Railways for this helping gesture."

Nagaland government to meet Center, after NSCN-IM threatens armed conflict

PTI ■ KOHIMA

With the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) (NSCN-IM) threatening to go back to jungles due to delay in the resolution of the Naga political dialogue with the Government of India (GoI), the Nagaland cabinet has decided to meet both negotiating parties at the earliest, official sources said on Sunday. A delegation of Nagaland cabinet led by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and his deputies TR Zeliang and Y Patton are scheduled to leave for Delhi on Monday to meet home minister Amit Shah to press for expediting the Naga political negotiations. In a statement, NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah has alleged that the Centre was deliberately refusing to honour the key provisions of

the historic agreement, specifically the recognition of the Naga national flag and constitution. Threatening violent armed conflict, the NSCN-IM on November 7 sought a third-party intervention to address the impasse over the Naga political issue. The group, which has maintained ceasefire since 1997, accused the Union government of betraying the Framework Agreement signed on August 3, 2015. In an interview with a news channel on Saturday, Zeliang had said that a cabinet meeting held during the day had deliberated on Muivah's statement and therefore decided to meet the Union home minister and also the NSCN-IM leadership. On NSCN-IM seeking third-party intervention, Zeliang had said that unless there is an understanding between



Sources also said that the state cabinet would also apprise the Union home minister about the decision of the September 12 consultative meeting of the state government with Naga tribal bodies and civil societies seeking appointment of a proper interlocutor and also to elevate the ongoing Naga political dialogue to ministerial level. "The House appealed to the GoI to elevate the ongoing dialogue and peace process to the highest political level by appointing an interlocutor of, who has the confidence and mandate of the government," the meeting had resolved. Former Governor of Nagaland, RN Ravi was the last interlocutor for the talks but after being shifted to Tamil Nadu, the Centre appointed AK Mishra only as a representative. The Centre has been holding negotiations with NSCN-IM

since 1997 after the ceasefire agreement and inked the Framework Agreement on August 3, 2015. It also started parallel talks with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups (WC NNPGs) in 2017 and signed the Agreed Position the same year. The then interlocutor Ravi had declared talks have concluded on October 30, 2019. However, the persistent demand of NSCN-IM of a separate flag and constitution for Nagas and integration of all Naga inhabited areas has not been accepted by the Centre, delaying the final solution. On the other hand, WC NNPGs, composed of seven Naga groups, have declared to accept whatever is possible for now and continue further negotiations for the remaining demand.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Left turn ho!

Anura Kumara Dissanayake's election triumph could prove to be a turning point for Sri Lanka's politics and South Asia

Sri Lanka has done it again. After electing Anura Kumara Dissanayake as President his left-leaning party has secured a majority in the parliament, which gives Anura a complete control over Sri Lanka. What is more startling is that his party has decimated the Tamil parties in the northern Sri Lanka, which was the stronghold of Tamil parties. This is indeed a stunning political shift. Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of Sri Lanka's National People's Power (NPP), has achieved a resounding victory in the country's parliamentary elections, winning 123 out of 225 seats in Sri Lanka's Parliament. This outcome, which comes barely two months after Dissanayake's election as President on September 21, marks a pivotal moment in the nation's political landscape and could have significant ramifications not only for Sri Lanka but also for the wider South Asian region. Dissanayake's rise to prominence is both unexpected and historic. His party, despite winning only 42 per cent of the presidential vote, has managed to galvanise a



broad cross-section of Sri Lankan society, particularly in regions where other political forces have traditionally held sway. His victory represents a rejection of the traditional political elites that have long governed the island since its independence in 1948, and it signifies the growing appeal of his platform advocating for economic revival and social justice. Notably, the NPP's win in the Jaffna district—a historically Tamil-majority area in the northern part of Sri Lanka—has surprised political pundits. For decades, Tamil ethnic parties have dominated this region, a legacy of the civil war (1983-2009) that left a deep divide between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese-majority government.

This victory in Jaffna is symbolic of a new approach to ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Traditionally, the Tamil population has been wary of Sinhalese-majority leaders, given the traumatic history of the civil conflict, where over 100,000 lives were lost according to conservative UN estimates. Dissanayake's success in these areas suggests that many Tamils are willing to embrace a new kind of leadership, one that offers economic promise and a path forward, beyond ethnic divisions. Dissanayake's victory carries significant implications for the future of Sri Lanka. First and foremost, his strong mandate gives him the political capital needed to implement his economic revival agenda, which is urgently needed as Sri Lanka grapples with economic instability and growing debt. Dissanayake has long advocated for Marxist economic policies, including land reforms, wealth redistribution and greater state control over key industries. If successful, his administration could lead to a reshaping of Sri Lanka's economy, potentially benefiting marginalised communities, including Tamils and other ethnic minorities. Dissanayake's popularity, especially among younger voters and ethnic minorities, suggests a growing demand for alternative political solutions. But can he live up to people's expectations, bring about radical changes and maintain ethnic harmony? That is the big question only time can tell!

PICTALK



Labourers thresh paddy at a field on the outskirts of Amritsar

The smog capital of India

As Delhi battles a toxic mix of seasonal stubble burning and local pollution sources, its residents are exposed to severe and potentially life-threatening health risks



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The National Capital Territory of Delhi, which is home to nearly 30 million people, has been grappling with dangerously high pollution levels for over two weeks. On Wednesday, November 13, 2024, the air quality index (AQI) across Delhi remained in the 'very poor' category, marking the 15th consecutive day when residents faced increased health risks from the polluted air. According to official data (the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, managed by the Central Government), this situation will likely persist for at least six days. In parallel, the city is also experiencing an unusually warm spell that defies typical seasonal trends, adding complexity to an already challenging situation for residents. This grim forecast highlights the role of unfavourable meteorological conditions that limit the dispersal of pollutants, essentially trapping them close to the ground. The AQI measures levels of harmful pollutants in the air, with a higher value indicating a greater concentration of pollutants. While an AQI between 300 and 400 is considered "very poor," levels above 400 are classified as "severe," meaning the pollution is severe enough to affect even healthy individuals.

The IMD has reported that the typical winter season may not arrive in Delhi as quickly as expected, thereby disrupting long-established weather patterns that typically bring cooler, less polluted air to the region. The dense fog mixed with thick smog has created a near-total obscurity, as citizens found themselves enveloped in a hazardous blend of pollutants and moisture resulting in keeping daytime temperatures lower than expected for this time of year — because of fog and smog — although overall temperatures remain warmer than the seasonal norm. This combination of high pollution and unusual weather patterns has compounded the health concerns for residents, particularly the elderly, children and those with respiratory ailments. Delhi's persistent air pollution crisis is fuelled by a combination of local and regional sources.



There are many contributors to this game, the primary being: vehicle emissions, industrial activities, construction dust, and the neighbouring states of Punjab and Haryana which engage in the seasonal burning of crop residue. The primary pollutant in Delhi's air, according to IQAir — a global air quality monitoring agency based in Switzerland — is PM2.5, a fine particulate matter that can penetrate deeply into the lungs. Earlier this month, parts of Delhi recorded Air Quality Index (AQI) levels as high as 1,133, placing them in the "hazardous" category. Prolonged exposure to such elevated PM2.5 levels poses serious health risks, including respiratory infections, asthma attacks and even heightened mortality rates among vulnerable populations. Warmer-than-normal temperatures hinder the ability of pollutants to disperse, as colder temperatures usually facilitate the movement of these particles away from the urban air layer. The combination of stagnant weather conditions, pollution, and warm temperatures has created a perfect whirlpool of the smog's persistence over Delhi, making it more difficult for the city to "breathe" as it would in cooler conditions. Health experts believe that exposure to high levels of pollution can lead to short-term



THE DENSE FOG MIXED WITH THICK SMOG HAS CREATED A NEAR-TOTAL OBSCURITY, AS CITIZENS FOUND THEMSELVES ENVELOPED IN A HAZARDOUS BLEND OF POLLUTANTS AND MOISTURE RESULTING IN KEEPING DAYTIME TEMPERATURES LOWER THAN EXPECTED

effects like coughing, throat irritation and chest tightness. In the long term, the risks increase substantially, with studies linking air pollution exposure to chronic respiratory diseases, lung cancer, heart disease, and even impacts on cognitive functions. Air pollution is a severe health crisis in India, causing between 1.2 million and 1.8 million premature deaths each year. The 7 million annual deaths from air pollution worldwide exceed those from COVID-19, as well as combined fatalities from war, homicide, car and plane accidents. Clean air is essential for human health, yet scientific studies continue to reveal new health risks linked to air pollution, including respiratory diseases, heart issues, stroke, and lung cancer, as well as emerging links to premature births, diabetes, and brain damage. Poor air quality can also worsen outcomes for COVID-19 by increasing vulnerability to respiratory illnesses. Dr David R Boyd, Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability, University of British Columbia, CA, Associate Professor in law, policy and Sustainability in his paper "The Human Rights to Breathe Clean Air" published in The National Library of Medicine (2019) necessitates the urgency for treating air pollution as a human rights issue and that "Air pollution on

today's scale, clearly violates the rights to life and health, the rights of the child and the right to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment" and that there is an urgent need to voice that the legal support of a human rights issue, since Dr David says that "The human rights perspective changes everything — because governments have clear, legally enforceable obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights. As Delhi battles yet another season of toxic air, the health and wellbeing of millions are at stake. The situation demands urgent and coordinated action from the government, industry, and residents (read citizens). Sustainable improvement requires systemic changes to reduce pollution at its source. While the road to a cleaner, healthier Delhi may be long, there is hope in ongoing technological and policy developments aimed at reducing pollution. As more people become aware of the critical importance of air quality, public support for environmental initiatives will continue to grow, fostering a collective movement toward cleaner air and a better quality of life for all Delhiites and others who visit to see the grandeur of the Capital City. When... It's in our hands! (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Smriti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INFANT LIVES LOST

Madam — The shocking fire accident in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) of Maharani Laxmibai Medical College in Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, in which at least 10 newborn babies died due to burns and suffocation and some still struggling for their lives, is really heart-wrenching. Just a few months back, a devastating fire in a newborn care unit of a children's hospital in Delhi had claimed the precious lives of infants. Lack of preparedness, readiness to tackle fire accidents, be it due to short circuit or any other sort and lack of awareness on what to do in case of such incidents make us victims to infernos. The death of these little innocent infants poses a big question: when are we really going to learn our lessons? Be it hospitals or hotels, movie halls or malls, people may not have the slightest bit of idea about the escape routes, layouts and other possible ways of escape in case of an inferno. Staff of the concerned establishments should be prepared to rescue or at least guide the guests to safety. Intensive care units and baby care units should definitely have safety arrangements so that such fire accidents can be prevented. Buildings should have a common way to exit that anyone, irrespective of age and gender, should be able to identify and escape immediately. Buildings should have proper fire and electricity safety devices and these must be checked occasionally. Staff, especially in sensitive places like hospitals, schools, and hotels, should take part in mock drills and be ever ready in case of emergency. Schools and colleges should include fire disaster management lessons in their physical education curriculum so that we can groom citizens who can face such emergencies boldly, wisely, and bravely and even help the weak and those who are very young.

M Pradyu | Kannur

BULLDOZER RULE ENDS

Madam — The spirit of the verdict should sensitise all the concerned. Bulldozing the structures of those who are branded as

Secure online transactions



The rapid growth of digital payments, from banking to shopping, has made everything done online nowadays; it has opened doors for scammers as they continue to evolve their methods to con people in newer ways. Cybercriminals are

employing new tricks to defraud individuals, like fake UPI transaction images, net banking fraud through emails, etc. And from common citizens to government officials, no one is untouched by these scammers. There are various things that we must do if we fall prey to such scammers, like contacting authorised customer care centers, reporting incidents immediately to the National Cyber Crime Helpline, documenting everything, keeping strong passwords, and staying informed through social media, etc. A strong and rigorous awareness campaign has to be started by the government of India so that these scammers do not have a free run & individuals are safe.

Bal Govind | Noida

DELHI POLLUTION CRISIS

Madam — The Delhi Chief Minister Atishi has directed all educational institutions, particularly the primary schools, to shift to online classes while going by the very high risk of AQI in the state. The Delhi civic authorities started implementing methods like sprinkling water with dust suppressants on roads, as well as mechanised sweeping that would help settle dust, which also came into effect. There is a ban on non-essential constructions in the world's most polluted capital. The air quality has worsened to the level that the image of the Taj Mahal appears to be a kind of ghost at the moment. The manmade calamity by worsening air conditions and the cleaning up of the image by the Delhi government's AAP has become like a war for them, which is symbolic of the party's election symbol, the 'Broom', to rebuild their unclean image nearing the elections along with other major issues.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Let us be comfortable with silence to discover inner self



ASHA IYER KUMAR

Silence is empowering, it not only gives peace but also strength and clarity. It invites us to reconnect with our inner calm, a solitude we often shun

I am writing this column from the quiet environs of an Alpine valley in Germany. The winter has set in, turning the skies grey and the air bleary. This small town in Bavaria withdraws into its living rooms as early as 4.30 pm when darkness falls and then there is only silence all around, made palpable by the dwindling traffic and people on the streets. For someone who is used to the non-stop noise of metropolitan Dubai, this silence is new and comforting.



there's often an instinctual drive to fill the void, a compulsion to keep the hum of interaction alive lest silence brings its "awkwardness" into the room. But I often wonder, is silence something to be avoided? Or is it, in fact, a sanctuary we have lost touch with, one that could lead us back to ourselves? I think of the times I have seen people—close friends, even strangers—grapple with the discomfort of a pause, reaching for words as if they were life preservers in a sea of quiet. We are, it seems, constantly seeking refuge in noise, hoping it will drown out whatever solitude and reflection might stir in us if given the chance. Silence is perceived as

emptiness, a fearful space, rather than a fertile ground for connection and self-discovery. We are conditioned to believe that engagement is strength and that silence, somehow, signals inadequacy.

To be quiet in conversation is almost seen as a failing; we are regarded as "shy" or "distant." Yet, silence has its richness, a subtle power that invites us into the fullness of presence, something words cannot always offer. In silence, we are called to listen, not only to others but also to our inner voice and perhaps that's where the unease begins. The quiet holds a mirror up to us, revealing what lies within when the outside world fades to a hush. Silence invites us to reconnect with an inner calm, a solitude we often shun. Instead of fearing what might emerge in the absence of chatter, we might learn to find comfort in simply being—without the compulsion to fill every moment with talk. In this way, silence is not a void; it is an invitation to pause, to settle our racing minds and to let the

dust of daily life drift gently to the ground. Consider, too, the depth that silence brings to relationships. When we share a moment of quiet with someone, we are not erasing the connection; we are deepening it.

It is in these pauses that we see each other most clearly, unfiltered by words, and held by the simple act of shared presence. Yet, our tendency to fear silence as awkward makes us miss the power of these moments—times when we could breathe alongside one another, unburdened by the need to perform or impress. It is time we learn to embrace silence not as an absence but as a presence—a steady, gentle force that grounds us when words have exhausted their role. For in those quiet spaces, we can find not just peace, but a reservoir of strength and clarity, one that restores rather than depletes, and brings solace to our weary souls.

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



FIRST COLUMN

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Servant leadership redefines leadership, emphasising the leader's role as a servant to their team



SAKSHI SETHI

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, the traditional top-down leadership model is often insufficient for addressing the challenges organisations and communities face. The concept of servant leadership approach which, prioritises service to others over self-interest, has emerged as a vital alternative for fostering trust, collaboration and sustainable success.

Servant leadership is grounded in a set of key principles such as empathy, awareness, commitment to growth, stewardship that distinguish it from traditional, top-down leadership models. Trust in leadership across industries is at an all-time low, exacerbated by scandals, corporate greed and exploitative practices. By putting people first, servant leaders create a foundation of reliability and authenticity that restores faith in leadership.

Nowadays modern employees seek more than just a paycheck. They want meaningful work, supportive environments and leaders who genuinely care about their growth and wellbeing. Servant leadership aligns with these expectations by fostering empowerment, empathy and commitment to growth. This approach helps organisations attract and retain top talent in competitive job markets. Servant Leadership has proven effective in various contexts, from corporate settings to community organisations. Companies like Southwest Airlines and Starbucks have integrated servant leadership into their management philosophies, resulting in loyal employees and strong customer relationships. In education, servant leadership fosters supportive environments where teachers and students thrive. Similarly, nonprofit organisations benefit from servant leaders who prioritise the needs of the communities they serve.



It is often believed that, in times of crisis, such as economic downturns or global pandemics, organisations with servant leaders are more likely to thrive as these leaders provide stability and reassurance to their teams; prioritise people over profits during tough times and even empower employees to adapt and innovate. In an era where businesses are held accountable for their societal and environmental impact, servant leadership helps organisations fulfill their social responsibilities. By focusing on stewardship and community building, servant leaders ensure that their organisations contribute positively to society.

While servant leadership offers numerous benefits, it is not without its challenges. Its emphasis on service, empathy and community-building can sometimes create complexities, especially in environments that demand rapid decision-making or highly competitive strategies. Undeniably, this approach is a compassionate and effective approach in many scenarios but is not a one-size-fits-all solution. To succeed, it must be carefully balanced with the demands of the organisation and tailored to the specific context in which it is applied. By placing the wellbeing and development of others at the forefront, servant leaders foster trust, collaboration and sustainable success. In an era where ethical leadership is more important than ever, adopting the principles of servant leadership can lead to profound, lasting impact not just within organisations, but in society as a whole. By serving first, leaders ultimately inspire and empower others to achieve their fullest potential.

In essence, servant leadership is about flipping the traditional power dynamic. Instead of a command-and-control approach, servant leaders focus on collaboration, ethical behaviour and the empowerment of others to create more effective and meaningful outcomes. In a world that increasingly demands empathy, collaboration and accountability, servant leadership is more than a philosophy it is a necessity.

(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)

Supreme Court strikes down 'bulldozer injustice'



K S TOMAR

By reinforcing legal safeguards, the Apex Court seeks to restore public trust in the justice system and ensure that no citizen is denied their constitutional rights

A historic Supreme Court verdict against "bulldozer justice" promises broad legal, social, and administrative impacts, addressing concerns around the unchecked, high-handed demolition of properties linked to criminal accusations. Such actions have often violated the fundamental tenets of the Indian Constitution. This ruling holds direct implications for BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Assam and the Delhi Municipal Corporation, which have been accused of misusing administrative powers to punish marginalised sections of society without due legal process.

The concept of "bulldozer justice" was notably invented by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, earning him the nickname "Bulldozer Baba" among supporters. The Court's verdict marks a setback to the UP government, though CM may not express regret for actions nullified by the ruling, which had previously jeopardised the constitutional guarantees afforded to all Indian citizens.

Social Implications Protection of Marginalised Communities: The ruling acknowledges that bulldozer justice has disproportionately impacted marginalised groups. By mandating due process, the Court aims to prevent biased or retaliatory actions against vulnerable communities, promoting equal treatment under the law. **Public Trust in the Rule of Law:** By condemning bulldozer justice, the Supreme Court seeks to rebuild public confidence in lawful governance, fostering trust that the state will not bypass legal safeguards to punish alleged offenders.

Awareness and Advocacy: This judgment may empower civil rights groups to challenge arbitrary demolitions, advocating for the rights of those affected by unilateral property destruction. **Administrative and Policy Impact:**

Reduced Arbitrary Actions: Administrative bodies may now face restrictions against immediate demolition practices that bypass judicial processes, holding them accountable to legal frameworks designed to protect against arbitrary punishment. This could encourage a fairer and more equitable application of laws. **Policy Revisions at the State Level:** States that have regularly employed demolitions as a form of "bulldozer justice" may need to revisit their policies, ensuring alignment with constitutional rights to property and due process. This could result in tighter guidelines and even statutory changes. **Limit on Executive Power:** The Court's disapproval of unilateral demolition reinforces the separation of powers, signaling that executive decisions must strictly adhere to legal boundaries.

Legal and Judicial Consequences Strengthened Due Process: The ruling reaffirms that demolitions must respect due process, requiring legal scrutiny rather than administrative discretion. This will likely lead to the implementation of judicial approval for demolition orders, protecting citizens' rights against arbitrary state actions.

Increased Judicial Oversight: The ruling could result in heightened court involvement in cases where demolitions serve as punitive responses to alleged crimes, particularly in cases involving minority or marginalised groups.

Pressure for National Guidelines: The Supreme Court suggested nationwide stan-



ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES MAY NOW FACE RESTRICTIONS AGAINST IMMEDIATE DEMOLITION PRACTICES THAT BYPASS JUDICIAL PROCESSES, HOLDING THEM ACCOUNTABLE TO LEGAL FRAMEWORKS DESIGNED TO PROTECT AGAINST ARBITRARY PUNISHMENT

dards for property demolitions related to criminal cases, which could formalise rules for state authorities to follow, reducing current ambiguities.

Supreme Court Guidelines on Demolitions Justices BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan made impactful assertions, noting that demolitions based solely on accusations violate fundamental rights. The Court emphasised the presumption of innocence and mandated a 15-day notice period, allowing tenants or owners time to challenge demolition orders or make necessary arrangements. This highlights the right to shelter under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution.

The Court warned that contempt proceedings could follow violations of these guidelines and responsible officials may face compensation liabilities for restitution. This ruling stemmed from controversial demolitions in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, alongside a Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind petition challenging demolitions in Delhi's Jahangirpuri in 2022. Data show that state laws on demolitions were often violated in Uttar Pradesh, a state pioneering "bulldozer justice."

The Uttar Pradesh Urban Planning and Development Act, 1973, requires a minimum 15-day notice before unauthorised structures can be removed, with a right to appeal. However, the 2022 demolitions, where structures were razed without due process, led to the Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind's petition to the Supreme Court. In another significant instance, former Chief Justice Chandrachud, before his retirement on November 9, and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra directed the Uttar Pradesh government

to pay Rs 25 lakh as compensation to a man whose home was demolished in 2019 for a road-widening project.

The Court expressed concern over state actions that could potentially use demolitions as selective reprisals, noting that citizens' voices must not be stifled by the threat of losing their homes. In Rajasthan, demolition laws under Section 245 of the Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009, require prior written notice detailing the grounds for eviction.

Following communal tensions in Udaipur, authorities issued a quick notice before demolishing a house on alleged forest land encroachment, contravening local law requirements for a reasonable response period. Section 91 of the Rajasthan Forest Act, 1953, restricts eviction orders to be issued only by a Tehsildar.

The Madhya Pradesh Municipalities Act, 1961, stipulates that any unauthorised building alteration or construction may be removed, but only after notice. However, this was ignored when a labourer's home was demolished immediately after his son's arrest, raising rights violation concerns.

Under the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, the commissioner can remove illegal structures but must give reasonable opportunity for owners to dispute the action.

The Jahangirpuri incident in 2022 highlighted the need for due process, intensifying scrutiny on such practices. In Haryana, demolitions are governed by Section 261 of the Haryana Municipal Corporation Act, 1994, which mandates a notice period with an opportunity to contest. However, after communal violence in Nuh

in 2023, authorities demolished over 440 structures, mostly affecting Muslim households. Although similar to Delhi's DMC Act, Haryana's compliance period is notably shorter—only three days, leaving owners little time for appeals.

Strengthening Accountability: The Supreme Court's new guidelines aim to check arbitrary demolitions and uphold legal protections, particularly for vulnerable tenants. These regulations emphasise that adequate notice, transparency, and due process must be integral to any demolition order. While state laws vary, adherence to these guidelines will be essential in ensuring that demolitions respect both legal and constitutional rights, strengthening administrative accountability.

A Fundamental Shift in the Justice System: The Supreme Court of India's recent ruling against "bulldozer justice" was a response to cases where properties of individuals accused of crimes, especially those involving communal violence, were demolished without legal due process.

The Court underscored that demolitions must be legally justified and cannot bypass established procedures. It criticised this practice for disproportionately impacting marginalised communities, violating human rights, and eroding public trust. In essence, this ruling reaffirms the constitutional right to due process, expected to curb the trend of using demolitions as extrajudicial punitive measures. The ruling marks a shift toward a justice system grounded in fairness, procedure, and accountability.

(The author is a political analyst and strategic affairs columnist; views are personal)

Tackling the epidemic of diabetes and hypertension: Urgent action needed

Lack of awareness and limited early screening make these two lifestyle diseases rampant

Diabetes and hypertension are two interconnected yet distinct chronic diseases that collectively strain public health. Both conditions share underlying risk factors, such as unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and high stress levels. They also frequently co-occur, accelerating the onset of severe complications and amplifying each other's impact.

Diabetes and hypertension significantly increase the risk for cardiovascular diseases, chronic kidney disease, stroke, and eye disorders, forming a "double-edged sword" for health. In particular, hypertension, when combined with diabetes, can increase the likelihood of heart disease and stroke. Management of these conditions in India is challeng-



PANKAJ BHARDWAJ

ing due to lack of awareness, inadequate early screening and inaction, particularly in rural and resource-poor areas. More than half a billion people are living with diabetes globally. This is only expected to more than double in the next 30 years, in almost every country, according to a Lancet study. When it comes to hypertension, over a billion people—

1 in every 4 men and 1 in 5 women—are living with this condition, which ranks as one of the leading causes of premature death worldwide. In addition to this, WHO states that more than 50 per cent of people with diabetes and about 46 per cent of adults living with hypertension don't even know about their condition.

It is safe to argue that lack of awareness is the biggest problem here. Both conditions have become the largest, silent, dual epidemics currently challenging India. The Cost of Inaction: Tertiary treatment for complications from advanced diabetes and hypertension—such as heart disease, kidney failure, or stroke—is exponentially more costly than primary health interventions. In 2024, reports from different

Insurance companies showed that the cost of a kidney transplant in public sector hospitals in India generally goes up to 6 lakhs.

This estimate is significantly lower than in private hospitals, which can go up to INR 15 lakhs or more, due to higher administrative and facility fees. Similarly, cardiac surgery can range anywhere between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 15 lakhs. In contrast, medication for diabetes and hypertension cost potentially up to only Rs 10,000 yearly, which is otherwise completely free of cost if obtained from a Government hospital.

Thus, investing in primary care interventions is far more cost-effective and sustainable than managing advanced complications. Reducing the



Burden: Encouraging people to take ownership of their health and get regular check-ups could prevent costly treatments.

One person's decision to monitor their blood pressure or blood sugar levels could save thousands in healthcare costs—covering medication, hospital beds and medical staff—funds that could otherwise be allocated to proactive community health services.

This alone could lead to a decrease in the incidence of severe complications, ultimately saving lives and reducing the overall societal cost.

A Path Forward: Our country needs to work on three fronts parallelly: first, increasing awareness campaigns, second, enhancing access to screenings and third, ensuring widespread support for affordable primary care.

Educating communities, especially in rural areas, about the importance of early detection can create a more health-conscious society that seeks intervention before these conditions spiral.

At the same time, the government's initiatives, such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes,

Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS), need robust on-the-ground implementation to reach every corner of the country. The National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke (NPCDCS) was launched in 2010 by the Government of India, as a game changer.

It aims to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through early diagnosis, management, and health promotion. The programme focuses on four major NCDs—cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and stroke—due to their high prevalence and impact on public health. It equips our communities to battle hypertension and dia-

betes through accessible screenings and preventive care. By catching issues early and promoting lifestyle change, we're not just treating diseases—we're transforming health outcomes and reclaiming years of productive life across India.

Conclusion: Addressing diabetes and hypertension isn't just a medical issue; it's a societal one. India's battle against these diseases demands the willingness of individuals to seek preventive care, awareness of the risks, and action by both govt and citizens to implement and utilise early detection programs. Only then can we mitigate these silent but pervasive epidemics and prevent a looming healthcare crisis.

(The author is a public health expert; views are personal)

Xi cautions US to 'make wise choice' to keep ties stable

AP ■ LIMA

China's leader Xi Jinping met for the last time with US President Joe Biden on Saturday but was already looking ahead to President-elect Donald Trump and his "America first" policies, saying Beijing "is ready to work with a new US administration".

"During their talks on the sidelines of the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, Xi cautioned that a stable China-US relationship was critical not only to the two nations but also the "future and destiny of humanity".

"Make the wise choice," he cautioned. "Keep exploring the right way for two major countries to get along well with each other."

Without mentioning Trump's name, Xi appeared to signal his concern that the incoming president's protectionist rhetoric on the campaign trail could send the US-China relationship into another valley.

"China is ready to work with a new US administration to maintain communication, expand cooperation and manage differences so as to strive for a steady transition of the China-US relationship for the benefit of the two peoples," Xi said through an interpreter.

Xi, who is firmly entrenched atop China's political hierarchy, spoke forcefully in his brief remarks before reporters. Biden, who is winding down more than 50 years of public service, talked in broader

brushstrokes about where the relationship has gone. He reflected not just on the past four years but the decades the two have known each other.

"We haven't always agreed, but our conversations have always been candid and always been frank. We've never kidded one another," Biden said. "These conversations prevent misunderstandings, and they ensure the competition between our two countries will not veer into conflict."

Biden urged Xi to dissuade North Korea from further deepening its support for Russia's war on Ukraine. The leaders, with top aides surrounding them, gathered around a long rectangle of tables in an expansive conference room at Lima's Defines Hotel and Conference Center. China "hosted" the meeting this year, after Xi and Biden met a year ago on the APEC sidelines in northern California, a gathering hosted by the US. They had much to discuss, including China's indirect support for Russia, human rights issues, technology and Taiwan, the self-ruled democracy that Beijing claims as its own. On artificial intelligence, the two agreed on the need to maintain human control over the decision to use nuclear weapons.

There's much uncertainty about what lies ahead in the US-China relationship under Trump, who campaigned promising to levy 60 per cent tariffs on Chinese imports. Already, many American com-

panies, including Nike and eyewear retailer Warby Parker, have been diversifying their sourcing away from China. Shoe brand Steve Madden says it plans to cut imports from China by as much as 45 per cent next year.

In a congratulatory message to Trump after his victory over Vice-President Kamala Harris, Xi called for the US and China to manage their differences and get along in a new era. In front of the cameras Saturday, Xi spoke to Biden — but it was unmistakable that his message was directed at Trump.

"In a major flourishing sci-tech revolution, neither decoupling nor supply chain disruption is a solution," Xi said. "Only mutual, beneficial cooperation can lead to common development. Small yard, high fence is not what a major country should pursue."

Biden administration officials would advise the Trump team that managing the intense competition with Beijing will likely be the most significant foreign policy challenge they will face, White House national security advisor Jake Sullivan said.

On Saturday, Sullivan said Biden had reinforced to Xi "that these next two months are a time of transition", and the president would like to pass it off "in stable terms" to the new administration.

Biden has viewed his relationship with Xi as among the most consequential on the international stage and put much effort into cultivating it. The two first got to know each other

on travels across the US and China when both were vice-presidents, interactions that both have said left a lasting impression. But the last four years have presented a steady stream of difficult moments.

The FBI this week offered new details of a federal investigation into Chinese government efforts to hack into US telecommunications networks. The initial findings have revealed a "broad and significant" cyberespionage campaign aimed at stealing information from Americans who work in government and politics. US intelligence officials also have assessed China has surged sales on Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine. Biden is looking for Xi to step up Chinese engagement to prevent an already dangerous moment with North Korea from further escalating. Biden, South Korean President Yoon Seok Yul and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba on Friday condemned North Korea leader Kim Jong Un's decision to send thousands of troops to help Moscow rezip Ukrainian forces who have seized territory in Russia's Kursk border region. Biden called it "dangerous and destabilising cooperation".

White House officials have expressed frustration with Beijing, which accounts for the vast majority of North Korea's trade, for not doing more to rein in Pyongyang.

Trump names fossil fuel executive Chris Wright as energy secretary

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump has selected Chris Wright, a campaign donor and fossil fuel executive, to serve as energy secretary in his upcoming, second administration.

CEO of Denver-based Liberty Energy, Wright is a vocal advocate of oil and gas development, including fracking, a key pillar of Trump's quest to achieve US "energy dominance" in the global market.

Wright has been one of the industry's loudest voices against efforts to fight climate change and could give fossil fuels a boost, including quick action to end a year-long pause on natural gas export approvals by the Biden administration.

Wright also has criticised what he calls a "top-down" approach to climate by liberal and left-wing groups and said the climate movement around the world is "collapsing under its own weight". Wright, who has never served in government, has written that more fossil fuel production is needed around the globe to lift people out of poverty.

Consideration of Wright to head the administration's energy department won support from influential conservatives, including oil and gas tycoon Harold Hamm.

Hamm, executive chairman of Oklahoma-based Continental Resources, a major shale oil company, is a longtime Trump supporter and advisor who played a key role on energy issues in Trump's first term.

Hamm helped organise an event at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in April where Trump



President-elect Donald Trump attends UFC 309 at Madison Square Garden, Saturday in New York, with Kid Rock, Donald Trump Jr., Dana White and Elon Musk. AP/PTI

reportedly asked industry leaders and lobbyists to donate USD 1 billion to Trump's campaign, with the expectation that Trump would curtail environmental regulations if reelected.

Mike Sommers, president of the American Petroleum Institute, the oil and gas industry's top lobbying group, said Wright's experience in the energy sector "gives him an important perspective that will inform his leadership" of the Energy Department. "We look forward to working with him once confirmed to bolster American geopolitical strength by lifting DOE's pause on LNG export permits and ensuring the open access of American energy for our allies around the

world," Sommers said. Jackie Wong, senior vice president for climate and energy at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, called Wright "a champion of dirty fossil fuels" and said his nomination to lead the Energy Department was "a disastrous mistake".

"The Energy Department should be doing all it can to develop and expand the energy sources of the 21st century, not trying to promote the dirty fuels of the last century," Wong said.

"Given the devastating impacts of climate-fueled disasters, DOE's core mission of researching and promoting cleaner energy solutions is more important now than

ever." The Energy Department is responsible for advancing energy, environmental and nuclear security of the US. The agency is in charge of maintaining the country's nuclear weapons, oversees 17 national research laboratories and approves natural gas exports, as well as ensuring environmental cleanup of the nation's nuclear weapons complex. It also promotes scientific and technological research.

Republican Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, who is expected to become chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said Trump promised bold choices for his Cabinet, and Wright's nomination delivers.

Young woman found murdered in car boot in UK

London (PTI): A 24-year-old woman believed to be of South Asian origin has been found murdered in a car boot in east London after a missing person inquiry was launched for her in the East Midlands region of England.

Northamptonshire Police named the victim as Harshita Brelia on Saturday night as the force launched a murder inquiry and appealed for information in the case.

Police said it had received a call on Wednesday regarding concerns for Harshita's welfare and officers were deployed to her home address at Skegness Walk in Corby, Northamptonshire.

After getting no answer, the police launched a missing person investigation and fast-track enquiries were made which led to the discovery of the victim's body inside the boot of a vehicle on Brisbane Road in the Ilford area of east London in the early hours of Thursday.

A post-mortem was conducted at Leicester Royal Infirmary on Friday which established the murder victim as Harshita Brelia, whose name indicates a South Asian heritage, but there is no further confirmation of her family background at this stage of the inquiry.

"First of all, I want to express my heartfelt condolences to everyone who loved Harshita Brelia," said Detective Chief Inspector Johnny Campbell, Senior Investigating Officer from the East Midlands Special Operations Major Crime Unit (EMSOU). "She was a young woman in her early 20s with her whole life ahead of her and it is absolutely tragic that her life has been cut short in this way. Detectives from EMSOU and Northamptonshire Police are working around the clock to establish the circumstances behind her death, including the exact location and timeframe in which it took place," he said.

Israeli strikes kill 12 people in Gaza



Residents and rescuers gather at the site of an Israeli airstrike that hit a building in central Beirut's Ras-el-Nabaa neighborhood, Lebanon, Sunday. AP

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip overnight killed 12 people, Palestinian medical officials said on Sunday. Israeli police meanwhile arrested three suspects after flares were fired at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's private residence in the coastal city of Caesarea. In Lebanon, Israeli warplanes pounded the southern suburb of Beirut after the military warned people to evacuate from several buildings. The Hezbollah militant group has a strong presence in the area, known as the Dahiyeh, and the strikes came as Lebanese officials are considering a United States-brokered cease-fire proposal. One of the strikes hit central Beirut for the first time in weeks.

Netanyahu and his family were not at the residence when two flares were fired at it overnight, and there were no injuries, authorities said. A drone launched by Hezbollah struck the residence last month, also when Netanyahu and his family were away. The police did not provide details about the suspects behind the flares, but officials pointed to domestic political critics of Netanyahu. Israel's largely cere-

monial president, Isaac Herzog, condemned the incident and warned against "an escalation of the violence in the public sphere". Netanyahu has faced months of mass protests over his handling of the hostage crisis unleashed by Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack into Israel, which ignited the ongoing war in Gaza. Critics blame Netanyahu for the security and intelligence failures that allowed the attack to happen and for not reaching a deal with Hamas to release scores of hostages still held inside Gaza. Israelis rallied again in the city of Tel Aviv on Saturday night to demand a cease-fire deal to return them. Israeli strikes killed six people in Nuseirat and another four in Bureij, two built-up refugee camps in central Gaza dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation. Another two people were killed in a strike on Gaza's main north-south highway, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah, which received all 12 bodies. The war between Israel and Hamas began after Palestinian militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing about 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducting 250 others. Around 100 hostages

Pope calls for investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute 'genocide'

Rome (AP): Pope Francis has called for an investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute genocide, according to excerpts released on Sunday from an upcoming new book ahead of the pontiff's jubilee year.

It's the first time that Francis has openly urged for an investigation of genocide allegations over Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip. In September, he said Israel's attacks in Gaza and Lebanon have been "immoral" and disproportionate, and that its military has gone beyond the rules of war. The book, by Hernan Reyes Alcaide and based on interviews with the Pope, is entitled "Hope never disappoints. Pilgrims towards a better world." It will be released on Tuesday ahead of the pope's 2025 jubilee. Francis' yearlong jubilee is expected to bring more than 30 million pilgrims to Rome to celebrate the Holy Year. "According to some experts, what is happening in Gaza has the characteristics of a genocide," the pope said in excerpts published Sunday by the Italian daily La Stampa.

"We should investigate carefully to determine whether it fits into the technical definition formulated by jurists and international bodies," he added.

Last year, Francis met separately with relatives of Israeli hostages in Gaza and Palestinians living through the war and set off a firestorm by using words that Vatican diplomats usually avoid: "terrorism" and, according to the Palestinians, "genocide".

Francis spoke at the time about the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians after his meetings, which were arranged before the Israeli-Hamas hostage deal and a temporary halt in fighting was announced. The pontiff, who last week also met with a delegation of Israeli hostages who were released and their families pressing the campaign to bring the remaining captives home had editorial control over the upcoming book.

The war started when the militant Hamas group attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and abducting 250 as hostages and taking them back to Gaza, where dozens still remain. Israel's subsequent yearlong military campaign has killed more than 43,000 people, according to Gaza health officials, whose count doesn't distinguish between civilians and fighters, though they say more than half of the dead are women and children.

are still inside Gaza, about a third of them believed to be dead. The Health Ministry in Gaza says around 43,800 Palestinians have been killed in the war. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but has said women and children make up more than half the fatalities. Around 90 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians have been displaced, and large areas of the territory have been flattened by Israeli bombardment and ground operations.

ISRAELI WARPLANES POUND S BEIRUT

The Israeli military posted evacuation warnings on X about an hour before the strikes on southern Beirut, which came early Sunday. Local media reported church bells ringing in and around the area to alert residents. There were no immediate reports of casualties. One of the strikes hit

a building in central Beirut belonging to the Arab socialist Baath party. It was the first strike in the central part of the city in weeks. An Associated Press photographer at the scene saw four lifeless bodies and four wounded people. People could be seen fleeing the neighbourhood after the strike, which came without warning. There was no immediate comment on the strike from the Israeli military. The Israeli military also renewed calls on Sunday for residents in over a dozen villages in southern Lebanon to flee as ground troops pushed farther north. Hezbollah began firing rockets, missiles and drones into Israel the day after Hamas' 2023 attack, drawing retaliatory airstrikes. The conflict steadily escalated and erupted into all-out war in September. Israeli forces invaded Lebanon on October 1. Hezbollah has continued to fire dozens of projectiles into

Israel each day and has expanded their range to the central part of the country. A rocket barrage on the northern city of Haifa on Saturday damaged a synagogue and wounded two civilians. More than 3,400 people have been killed in Lebanon, according to the country's Health Ministry, and over 1.2 million driven from their homes. It is not known how many of the dead are Hezbollah fighters. On the Israeli side, Hezbollah's aerial attacks have killed at least 76 people, including 31 soldiers, and caused some 60,000 people to flee from communities in the north.

Netanyahu ally wants to revive divisive plans to overhaul judiciary. Israeli Justice Minister Yariv Levin seized on the flare attack on Netanyahu's home to call for a revival of his plans to overhaul the Israeli judiciary, which had sparked months of mass protests before the war.

Trump takes break from making Cabinet picks

AP ■ PALM BEACH

President-elect Donald Trump is attending the UFC heavyweight championship clash at Madison Square Garden on Saturday night, combining two things close to his heart — fierce battles inside the octagon and New York City. After a year's delay, Stipe Miocic is getting his shot at a third heavyweight championship reign when he battles current champion Jon Jones at UFC 309.

Trump is a longtime UFC enthusiast and frequent attendee of major fights. He made promoting hypermasculine tones a signature of his latest, successful campaign for the White House — as he looked to further widen the gap among male voters between himself and his Democratic opponent, Vice-President Kamala Harris.

Trump and his top supporters embraced alpha-male terms and often accentuated them with vulgar and demeaning language. While campaigning, Trump appeared frequently on podcasts, gaming platforms, and with key supporters who described a vote for Trump as a way to demonstrate true manliness. Trump also spent three hours taping a podcast with Joe Rogan, who himself has spoken about hypermasculinity.

Harris failed to do a similar appearance with Rogan, citing scheduling conflicts. A return to Madison Square Garden means revisiting the place where a comedian caused an uproar at a Trump rally last month by likening Puerto Rico to a "floating island of garbage". Yet Trump continues to relish visits to New York, where he lived for decades, before moving to his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida.

Trump boarded his plane for the flight to New York accom-

panied by Robert F Kennedy Jr, his choice to lead the Department of Health and Human Services after his new administration begins on January 20.

Except for a day trip to Washington this week to meet for nearly two hours with President Joe Biden, and separately address House Republicans, Trump has been spending his time since his Election Day victory at Mar-a-Lago. The club has hosted galas and conservative events throughout the week.

Trump has been close to UFC President Dana White for more than two decades.

White hosted a 2001 UFC battle at Trump Taj Mahal, a former casino-hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and Trump has frequently attended UFC matches since — including during his 2024 campaign. Trump has turned up at fights recently with famous entourage, including White, musician Kid Rock and former Fox News Channel host Tucker Carlson.

In 2018, during Trump's first term, he and White starred in a UFC video where the then-president was called the "Combatant in Chief".

As Trump strengthened his grip on the national Republican Party over the last near-decade, White's personal political profile has grown exponentially. White spoke at the 2016 and 2020 Republican conventions, and when the party gathered in Milwaukee this past July.

He also addressed the crowd at Trump's Florida victory party in the wee hours of the morning after Election Day. "This is what happens when the machine comes after you," White said then. "What you've seen over the last several years, this is what it looks like — couldn't stop him. He keeps going forward. He doesn't quit."

COP29 week one ends in deadlock as divisions stall climate action progress

Baku (Azerbaijan) (PTI): The first week of the COP29 summit concluded in Baku without significant breakthroughs, as deep divisions between developed and developing nations stalled progress on key issues like climate finance, trade measures, and equitable responsibility for climate action.

India, representing the G-77/China and BASIC blocs, demanded accountability from wealthier countries on unmet financial commitments.

The G-77/China bloc reiterated the call for USD 1.3 trillion annually in climate finance, with an emphasis on grants and concessional funding to avoid

burdening vulnerable economies already grappling with the impacts of climate change.

"Loans make up nearly 70 per cent of climate finance provided so far. This is unacceptable and places undue pressure on developing economies," an Indian negotiator had asserted, urging developed nations to move away from debt-inducing mechanisms.

UN Executive Secretary Simon Stiell added to the urgency, urging G20 countries to take bolder action, warning that without it, no economy in the grouping would be spared from climate-driven economic losses.

However, his call for solidarity failed to resolve the deadlock.

Cosima Castle, of E3G's climate diplomacy team, acknowledged the challenges posed by geopolitical tensions but underscored the potential of the upcoming G20 Leaders' Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

E3G is an engineering and environmental consulting firm. "We're seeing strains everywhere, from the Middle East to Africa to Ukraine, yet there's collective resolve among many nations to work toward a deal," she said.

Castle pointed out that the G20 countries, responsible for 80

per cent of global emissions and 85 per cent of the world economy, hold the key to unlocking ambitious climate agreements.

The contentious issue of the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) also fuelled sharp exchanges. India and other developing nations criticised the measure for disproportionately penalising their economies, calling it a violation of equity principles and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "CBAM shifts the responsibility of climate action onto

nations with minimal historical emissions, undermining industrial growth in the developing world," warned a negotiator from Bolivia, echoing India's concerns.

Technology transfer emerged as another unresolved issue. Developing nations demanded a robust technology implementation programme supported by dedicated financial backing.

"Without equitable access to climate technologies, the promises of the Paris Agreement will remain unfulfilled," an Indian negotiator stated.

India also opposed any

attempts to impose external regulations on its climate targets, emphasising that mitigation efforts should align with Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and national sovereignty.

The BASIC bloc criticised developed nations for attempting to dilute their commitments under the Paris Agreement by shifting additional obligations onto emerging economies.

The BASIC countries include Brazil, South Africa, India, and China.

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Arab Group joined forces with India,

highlighting the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable populations and demanding scaled-up financial and technological support.

The negotiations in Baku have also highlighted the urgent need for a comprehensive climate finance package that addresses both mitigation and adaptation.

"The costs of inaction are far greater than the costs of action," Castle warned, adding that countries must come together not only for climate action but also for long-term economic stability.

South Africa, which will

assume the G20 presidency in 2025, is expected to play a crucial role in bridging the gap between developed and developing countries.

Gillian Hamilton, a civil society leader from South Africa, emphasised the country's commitment to debt relief and reforms in multilateral financial systems.

"South Africa has been closely working with the African Union to reflect the priorities of the Global South, focusing on equity and solidarity," she said, adding that the country's leadership would build on themes introduced by Brazil and India.

Russia launches fiercest attack on Ukraine's infrastructure

AP ■ KYIV

Russia on Sunday launched a massive drone and missile attack on Ukraine, described by officials as the largest over the past months, targeting energy infrastructure and killing civilians. The attack came as fears are mounting about Moscow's intentions to devastate Ukraine's power generation capacity ahead of the cold winter. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russia had launched a total of 120 missiles and 90 drones in a large-scale attack across Ukraine. Various types of drones were deployed, he said, including Iranian-made Shaheds as well as cruise, ballistic and aircraft-launched ballistic missiles. Ukrainian defences shot down 140 air targets, Zelenskyy said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app.

"The enemy's target was our energy infrastructure throughout Ukraine. Unfortunately, there is damage to objects from hits and falling debris. In Mykolaiv, as a result of a drone attack, two people were killed and six others were injured, including two children," Zelenskyy said. Two others were killed in the Odessa region, where the attack damaged energy infrastructure and disrupted power and water supplies, said local Gov. Oleh Kiper. The combined drone and missile attack was the most powerful in three months, according to the head of Kyiv's City Military Administration Serhii Popko. Russian strikes have hammered Ukraine's power infrastructure since Moscow's all-out invasion of its neighbour in February 2022, prompting repeated emergency power shutdowns and nationwide rolling blackouts. Ukrainian officials have routinely urged

Western allies to bolster the country's air defences to counter assaults and allow for repairs. Explosions were heard across Ukraine on Sunday, including in capital Kyiv, the key southern port of Odesa, as well as the country's west and central regions, according to local reports. The operational command of Poland's armed forces wrote on X that Polish and allied aircraft, including fighter jets, have been mobilised in Polish airspace because of the "massive" Russian attack on neighbouring Ukraine. The steps were aimed to provide safety in Poland's border areas, it said. One person was injured after the roof of a five-story residential building caught fire in Kyiv's historic centre, according to Popko. A thermal power plant operated by private energy company DTEK was "seriously damaged", the company said.



In this photo provided by the Ukrainian Emergency Service, emergency services personnel remove part of a Russian missile that hit an apartment house during massive missile attack in Kyiv, Ukraine, Sunday. AP/PTI

Latest typhoon lashes Philippines

Manila (Philippines) (AP): A powerful typhoon wrecked houses, caused towering tidal surges and forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee to emergency shelters as it cut across the northern Philippines on Sunday in the sixth major storm to hit the country in less than a month. Typhoon Man-yi slammed into the eastern island province of Catanduanes on Saturday night with sustained winds of up to 195 kilometers (125 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 240 kph (149 mph). The country's weather agency warned of a "potentially catastrophic and life-threatening situation" in provinces along its path. There were no immediate reports of casualties from the typhoon, which was forecast to blow northwestward on Sunday across northern Luzon, the archipelago's most populous region. The capital region of metropolitan Manila would likely be spared from a direct hit but was placed, along with outlying regions, under storm alerts and warned of dangerous coastal storm surges. "The rain was minimal, but the wind was very strong and had

this eerie howling sound," Roberto Monterola, a disaster-mitigation officer in Catanduanes, told The Associated Press by telephone. "Along a main boulevard here, the tidal surges went up to more than 7 meters (23 feet) near the seaside houses. It looked really scary." The entire province of Catanduanes had no power after the typhoon knocked down trees and electricity posts, and disaster-response teams were checking how many more houses were damaged in addition to those impacted by previous storms, he said. "We need tin roofs and other construction materials, aside from food. Villagers tell us here that they still haven't gotten up from the past storm and were pinned down again by this typhoon," Monterola said. Nearly half of the island province's 80,000 people were sheltering in evacuation centers. Catanduanes officials were so concerned as the typhoon approached that they threatened vulnerable villagers with arrest if they did not follow orders to evacuate to safer grounds. More than 750,000

people took refuge in emergency shelters, including churches and a shopping mall, due to Man-yi and two previous storms mostly in the northern Philippines, Assistant Secretary Cesar Idio of the Official of Civil Defense and other provincial officials said. The rare number of back-to-back storms and typhoons that lashed Luzon in just three weeks left more than 160 people dead, affected 9 million people and caused such extensive damage to residential communities, infrastructure and farmlands that the Philippines may have to import more rice, a staple food for most Filipinos. In an emergency meeting as Man-yi approached, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. asked his Cabinet and provincial officials to brace for "the worst-case scenario." At least 26 domestic airports and two international airports were briefly shut and inter-island ferry and cargo services were suspended due to rough seas, stranding thousands of passengers and commuters, according to the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippine and the coast guard.

Lanka's new Cabinet to be sworn in today

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka's new Cabinet will be sworn in on Monday in the presence of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, his media office said on Sunday. National People's Power led by Dissanayake swept the parliamentary elections held on Thursday by winning a two-thirds majority. It also dominated the Jaffna electoral district – the heartland of the nation's Tamil minority. "The swearing-in of the new Cabinet of the government will take place tomorrow (18) at 10:00 am at the Presidential Secretariat, in the presence of President @anuradissanayake, President's Media Division posted on X. The 10th Parliament is set to convene for its first session on November 21. According to Article 46 of the Constitution, the total number of Cabinet ministers is limited to 30. The number of deputy ministers shall not, in the aggregate, exceed 40. The NPP has been advocating

a smaller government to reduce costs for the public. Since the NPP won the presidential election in September, the government functioned with just 3 ministers, including the President. The NPP's victory in the parliamentary election has created many firsts and records. It received 61.56 per cent of the total votes counted. The previous best was 60.33 per cent by former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's party in the 2010 election. The NPP won the highest number of polling divisions, 152 out of 168, the previous best was Rajapaksa's 136. It also won the highest number of districts 21 out of 22, the previous best was 19 by Rajapaksa in 2010. It has the highest number of 159 parliamentary seats over Rajapaksa's 145 in 2020. Under the proportional representation system of elections, they became the first party to cross the 150 mark to gain a two-thirds absolute majority.

Senegal votes in election that will decide if prez can carry out reforms he promised

Dakar (Senegal)(AP): Polls opened in Senegal on Sunday for a parliamentary election that is set to determine if the country's newly elected president can carry out ambitious reforms. More than 7 million registered voters in the West African country are choosing 165 lawmakers in the national assembly, where the party of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye currently does not hold a majority. Faye, who was elected in March on an anti-establishment platform, says that has blocked him from executing the reforms he pledged during his campaign, including fighting corruption, reviewing fishing permits for foreign companies and securing a bigger share from the country's natural resources for the population. In September, he dissolved the opposition-led parliament, paving the way for a snap legislative election. His party is facing the Takkou Wallu opposition platform led by former President Macky Sall, alongside 39 other registered parties

and coalitions. Polls will close at 6 p.m (1800 GMT). The first provisional results are expected to be known by Monday morning, but the final count will only be published later during the week. Faye's political party, PASTEF, needs at least 83 seats in order to gain a majority in the assembly. Analysts say it has a high chance of securing that, given its popularity and Faye's margin of victory in the March presidential election. Faye, 44, was elected with 54 per cent in the first round, becoming Africa's youngest elected leader, less than two weeks after he was released from prison. His rise has reflected widespread frustration among Senegal's youth with the country's direction — a common sentiment across Africa, which has the world's youngest population and a number of leaders accused of clinging to power for decades. Over 60 per cent of Senegalese are under 25 and 90 per cent work in informal jobs. Senegal has been hit by skyrocketing

inflation in recent years, making it difficult for them to get by. The country is also a major source of irregular migration to Europe, with thousands leaving every year on rickety, artisanal fishing boats in search of economic opportunities. The campaign for the legislative election was marked by sporadic clashes between supporters of different parties. The headquarters of an opposition party were set on fire in the capital, Dakar, and clashes have erupted between supporters in central Senegal in recent weeks, the interior ministry said Monday. On Tuesday, Ousmane Sonko, the country's prime minister who helped catapult Faye to victory, denounced attacks against supporters of PASTEF in Dakar and other cities. "May each patriot they have attacked and injured be proportionally avenged. We will exercise our legitimate right to respond," he wrote on X, before back-peddalling and asking his supporters to remain peaceful in a speech later that day.



Miss Denmark Victoria Kjær Theilvig waves after winning the 73rd Miss Universe Beauty Pageant in Mexico City, on Saturday. AP/PTI

Sudha Murty praises son-in-law Rishi Sunak's 'good Indian cultural values'

London (PTI) Well-known author and Rajya Sabha MP Sudha Murty has spoken of her pride in son-in-law Rishi Sunak, a British citizen with "good Indian cultural values" imbibed from his parents' upbringing in the UK. Murty joined Sunak and her daughter Akshata Murty as the guest of honour at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's annual Diwali gala in London on Saturday evening. The parents of the British Indian former prime minister, Usha and Yashvir Sunak, were also in the audience as Bhavan UK students showcased a variety of Indian classical music and dance forms. "I always believe when you are abroad, your parents must do two things: one is good education, which gives you wings in return and you can fly anywhere and settle; the second is great culture, your origin which is Indian origin or roots which you can get at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan along with your

parents," said Murty, delivering her keynote address. "I want to congratulate Ushaji, my sambandhi and a good friend of mine, who gave her son Rishi Sunak, former prime minister, a great route to identify with the culture, making him a proud British citizen as well as [having] good Indian cultural values," she said. The philanthropist went on to appeal to the British Indian community to enable the work of Bhavan UK's cultural activities, "mentally, physically and financially." "You must send your children here to understand Indian culture because when you grow old you go towards your roots... that gap is addressed by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, so you have to help them in every way to survive," said the staunch supporter of the cultural centre over the years. Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, reflected upon Murty's writings which inspire readers to

be true to themselves because our "origin story matters" as he went on to trace the pan-Indian message of Diwali. "The Krishna story is relevant to Diwali in the south, just as the 'Ramayana' story and the return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya from Lanka is connected to the Diwali story of the north and the story of Kali Puja is connected with the story of Diwali in the east," he said. "Diwali connects up with the Sikh tradition, with the Jain and Buddhist traditions too. It tells us that light also means there is no such thing as a single certainty because in the light you recognise the diversity of the human condition, the diversity of everything we live with. So, in a world in which we spend our time fighting about certainties, it is a really good idea to look at Diwali as an opportunity to consider how so many things look differently in the light." Subhanu Saxena, chairman of

The Bhavan UK, and Executive Director Dr M.N. Nandakumara opened the event with Vedic chants as they highlighted the cultural centre's many achievements over the years as a centre of excellence in Indian arts, music, dance, Yoga and languages, offering over 120 classes across 23 different subject areas. Rishi Sunak and Akshata Murty presented mementoes to the team behind the centre's many activities since the 1970s. Its students and teachers showcased their Kuchipudi, Kathak and Bharatanatyam skills at the annual Diwali celebration as they appealed for donations from the British Indian community to enhance their summer school and scholarship offerings. "The Bhavan UK is a great organisation promoting Indian culture and deserves our full support," said NRI industrialist Lord Swraj Paul, one of the many supporters of the centre.

Pak religious body faces backlash over anti-VPN decree

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan's leading constitutional religious body came under severe criticism after it issued an edict terming the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to access blocked content on the internet as 'un-Islamic'. The unprecedented pro-claim by the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), which advises parliament on aligning legislation with Islamic teachings, enraged digital rights activists as well as some religious scholars. According to the Dawn newspaper, the CII chief Raghbir Naeemi said that using VPNs to access "immoral or illegal content" was against Sharia. In a social media statement on Saturday, Maulana Tariq Jameel, a prominent religious scholar, said if watching adult content or blasphemous material was an issue then mobile phones should be declared un-Islamic before labelling VPNs as such. Senator Allama Nasir Abbas, the chief of Shia organisation Majlis Wahdat Muslimimeen (MWM), said the country was being ruled by an "incompetent and corrupt elite" who were not even the true representatives of the people. "They make laws in such a way and are using decrees ... as per their whims," Senator Abbas added. Wahaj Siraj, the CEO of telecom company Nayatel, said technology has always been neutral and only its use or misuse made it 'Halal or Haram'. The issue of VPNs came to light after the Interior Ministry asked the Pakistan Telecom Authority, the electronic media watchdog, to take action against their illegal use as they were being used for terrorism. Nighat Dad, the executive director of the Digital Rights Foundation, said the action to block VPNs was "contradictory" to the rights of privacy granted in the Constitution.

Gold pocket watch from Titanic rescue sells for record price

London (AP): A gold pocket watch given to the ship captain who rescued 700 survivors from the Titanic sold at auction for nearly \$2 million, setting a record for memorabilia from the ship wreck. The 18-carat Tiffany & Co. watch was given by three women survivors to Capt. Arthur Rostron for diverting his passenger ship, the RMS Carpathia, to save them and others after the Titanic struck an iceberg and sank in the north Atlantic on its maiden voyage in 1912. Auctioneers Henry Aldridge and Son, who sold the watch to a private collector in the United States on Saturday for 1.56 million British pounds, said it's

the most paid for a piece of Titanic memorabilia. The price includes taxes and fees paid by the buyer. The watch was given to Rostron by the widow of John Jacob Astor, the richest man to die in the disaster, and the widows of two other wealthy businessmen who went down with the ship. Astor's pocket watch, which was on his body when it was recovered seven days after the ship sank, had previously set the record for the highest price paid for a Titanic keepsake, fetching nearly \$1.5 million (1.17 million pounds) from the same auction house in April. Auctioneer Andrew Aldridge said the fact that Titanic mem-

orabilia has set two records this year demonstrates the enduring fascination with the story and the value of the dwindling supply and high demand for ship artifacts. "Every man, woman and child had a story to tell, and those stories are told over a century later through the memorabilia," he said. Rostron was hailed a hero for his actions the night the Titanic sank and his crew was recognized for their bravery. The Carpathia was sailing from New York to the Mediterranean Sea when a radio operator heard a distress call from the Titanic in the early hours of April 15, 1912 and woke Rostron in his cabin. He turned

his boat around and headed at full steam toward the doomed vessel, navigating through ice bergs to get there. By the time the Carpathia arrived, the Titanic had sunk and 1,500 people perished. But the crew located 20 lifeboats and rescued more than 700 passengers and took them back to New York. Rostron was awarded the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal by President William Howard Taft and was later knighted by King George V. Madeleine Astor, who had been helped into a lifeboat by her husband, presented the watch to Rostron at a luncheon at her mansion on Fifth Avenue in New York.

Japanese troops will train with US, Aus forces as concerns over China grow

Canberra (AP): Japan will send troops for joint training with US Marines and Australian forces in northern Australia, the three defence ministers said on Sunday as they expressed concern about a spate of confrontations with China's increasingly assertive military. Australia's Acting Prime Minister Richard Marles hosted US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Japanese Defence Minister Nakatani Gen for talks in Darwin. The ministers announced trilateral amphibious training between Australia, Japan and the US Marine rotational force in northern Australia from 2025, beginning with Exercise Talisman Sabre. Australia will also join

Exercise Orient Shield in Japan for the first time next year. A joint statement reiterated "serious concern" about destabilising actions in the East and South China seas including "dangerous conduct" by the Chinese military against Philippine and other vessels from the region. China claims the South China Sea almost in its entirety. The ministers also urged the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. China claims self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and has stepped up military harassment with frequent drills around the island. Marles, who is also Australia's defence minister, said follow-

ing talks with his Japanese counterpart in September that both nations looked to ways to build greater familiarity between their forces. One of the "obvious opportunities" was for Japan to participate in activities during the US Marine rotation in Australia, he said Sunday. "Having a more forward-leaning opportunity for greater training with Japan and the US together is a really fantastic opportunity," he said. Asked if the increased military cooperation would anger Beijing, Marles said the decision was about building "the best relationships possible with like-minded countries, with our friends and with our allies."

Municipal corporations need to impose adequate user charges to provide better facilities: RBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Municipal corporations need to impose adequate user charges for essential services like water supply and sanitation, to boost non-tax revenues and provide quality public services, according to a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report.

The 'Report on Municipal Finances' delves into the fiscal position of 232 municipal corporations (MCs) from 2019-20 to 2023-24 (Budget Estimates), with a focus on the theme 'Own Sources of Revenue Generation in Municipal Corporations: Opportunities and Challenges'.

"MCs can significantly enhance them (non-tax revenues) by applying appropriate and adequate fees and user charges for essential services such as water supply, sanitation, and waste management while also ensuring seamless availability of high-quality public services," it said.

These measures, combined with more transparent and accountable governance practices, can contribute to bolstering the financial health of MCs, setting off a

virtuous cycle of better services for the public, stronger revenues and a continuous upgrade of the urban infrastructure, it said.

The major non-tax revenue sources include user charges, trade licensing fees, layout/building approval fees, development charges, betterment charges, sale and hire charges, market fees, slaughterhouse fees, parking fees, birth and death registration fees.

Sources of tax revenue, include property tax, vacant land tax, water benefit tax, advertisement tax, sewerage benefit tax, tax on animals, and taxes on carriages and carts.

"Non-tax sources are particularly important in the context of constraints on tax revenues. MCs in India earn 66.5 per cent of non-tax revenue from fees and user charges," the report said.

It noted that fees and user charges represent important sources of revenue for all civic bodies, particularly in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Tripura, where their share in own-source revenue outweighs that of property taxes.

This, the report said can be attributed to various factors, including a high degree of urbanisation, tourist destinations and the subsequent expansion in

supplies of essential municipal services such as water supply, waste management and transportation.

The report further said own sources of revenues (tax revenue, non-tax revenue, and other receipts) afford municipalities increased financial autonomy, stability, and enhanced capacity to strategise and execute urban development initiatives more efficiently and effectively.

Municipal corporations need to augment their own revenue sources for greater operational and financial flexibility. "By optimising property and water taxes, increasing non-tax revenues, and adopting transparent governance practices, urban local bodies can improve their finances," it said.

Leveraging technologies such as Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and digital payment systems can enhance property tax collections, it said.

Periodic revisions in water and drainage taxes, and fees and user charges, coupled with use of technology for plugging leakages, can also help improve their revenue collections, it added.

Enforce odd-even rule to encourage people to shift to natural gas or EV: IBA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Indian Biogas Association has suggested enforcement of the odd-even rule for four wheelers in Delhi NCR to check air pollution and encourage people to shift to electric vehicles or those based on compressed biogas (CBG) or natural gas.

Under the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) 4 (with air quality index of over 450) measures, odd/even rule for four wheelers is imposed. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has already imposed GRAP 3 measures with the air quality remaining in the "severe" category.

Taking with PTI in an interaction, Indian Biogas Association (IBA) Chairman Gaurav Kedia said, "We recommend implementing the Odd-Even Rule for Petrol and Diesel Vehicles in the coming months so that a good impact can be seen for the air pollution levels in Delhi, and subsidy on EVs and CNG/CBG vehicles, as this will compel the citizens to shift to greener fuel alternatives.

The air pollution situation in Delhi NCR worsens every winter, with the seasonal air quality index consistently remaining above the 300 mark. Delhi due to its the severely polluted AQI has received worldwide attention

as one of the most polluted cities on earth.

Crop residue burning, particularly of paddy straw, in neighbouring states is a major contributor to this scenario, but that's just a small piece of the bigger puzzle.

Kedia suggested that the government must focus on incentive schemes such as reduced charges on electricity bills, PNG connections, and LPG cylinders for houses that effectively segregate organic waste.

It would yield a double dividend: cleaner energy generation from green and leafy biomass collected for biogas plants and a significant reduction in landfill loads, he said.

The upcoming budget must provide substantial amount to fulfill target of segregating and processing at least 85 per cent of Delhi's waste in the next five years, he stated.

Organic waste remains one of the prime unmanaged pollution sources in Delhi,

filling up landfills. These overflowing sites continue to burn, emitting toxic fumes and significant amounts of methane gas, a potent greenhouse gas.

Delhi in 2023-24 generated about 11,342 tons of waste per day. As per the 2024 annual report on implementation of SWM (solid waste management) rules, 2016, 33.5 per cent of generated MSW (municipal solid waste) goes to landfill but an estimate by the association depicts the number to be around 35 per cent.

Of all the municipal solid wastes produced, around 40-60 per cent is organic in nature. It represents an untapped resource for generating clean energy through biogas production.

Kedia stated that there is a sense of urgency that no organic waste finds its way to the landfill sites and rather should be diverted into energy-generating biogas plants.

CNG retailers want price hike, government wants to see cost

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

City gas companies like Indraprastha Gas Ltd and Adani Total Gas Ltd are mulling an increase in CNG prices after supplies of cheaper input gas was cut for the second time in a month, but the government officials say the retailers must give a cost breakup to justify the hike.

The government, with effect from November 16, cut supplies of low-priced natural gas coming from old fields to city gas retailers by up to 20 per cent.

This reduction came on the back of a 21 per cent reduction on October 16.

City gas retailers IGL, which retails CNG in national capital and adjoining cities, Mahanagar Gas Ltd which does the same in Mumbai, and Adani Total Gas Ltd which operates in Gujarat and elsewhere, in regulatory filings flagged profitability concerns due to supply cut and hinted at price hike.

Officials in the ministry of petroleum and natural gas however are unimpressed as they feel the retailers operate on "hefty" margins and can easily absorb the additional cost they may have to incur on replacing the lost volumes with slightly higher priced gas from new wells or imported LNG.

"Take for instance IGL. It posted a net profit of Rs 1,748 crore on revenue of close to Rs 16,000 crore in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. That is a margin of 11 per cent. MGL had a profit of about Rs 1,300 crore on a revenue of Rs 7,000 crore. Which retailer earns that kind of margin?" a senior official asked.

Officials said the government is not against companies earning profits but if they want low-priced input (gas from old fields) then they should also declare the cost breakup of the final product (CNG).

"There cannot be a situation where you insist on getting low cost input but will not reveal the buildup to the final product price," another official said.

"The profitability numbers show they have been operating at huge margins. Indian Oil Corporation, which is also a retailer, had its best ever profit of Rs 39,617 crore on a revenue of Rs 8.71 lakh crore, implying a margin of 4.5 per cent."

Natural gas pumped from below the ground and from under the seabed from sites ranging from the Arabian Sea to Bay of Bengal within India is the raw material that is turned into CNG for sale to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households.

Production from legacy fields, called APM gas and whose price is regulated by the government to feed city gas retailers, has been falling by up to 5 per cent annually due to the natural decline that has set in. This has led to supply cuts to city gas retailers, officials said. While the input gas for piped cooking gas that households get is protected, the government has cut supply of raw material for CNG.

Gas from legacy fields used to meet 90 per cent of the demand for CNG in May 2023 and has progressively fallen.

Coal India arm NCL plans to relocate township having 600 MT of mineable coal underneath



PTI ■ SINGRAULI

Pradesh's Singrauli, which has 600 million tonnes of mineable coal underneath, company's CMD B Sairam said.

Talking to reporters here, Sairam said Morwa township in Singrauli, Madhya Pradesh, is spread across 927 hectares.

The project, which is quite huge, will have its own share of challenges as it will involve relocation of the entire Morwa township of Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL). "The good thing is that in this acquisition, the people are ready to relocate. So half of the problem is solved because the first resistance comes from the people only," the chairman and managing director (CMD) said.

Once people are ready, the only thing to decide is the rates of the compensation and the R&R benefits, he said.

For the last six months, NCL has been regularly negotiating with the people on resettlement.

"Based on the combination of past disbursements, the mandatory provisions and the call taken by the people residing in these areas and what is being given by the private commercial coal blocks coming up in the region, we have been able to reach a consensus and all the parameters of compensation and R&R are firmed up," he explained.

The CMD said the relocation of the township has to take place as one of its coal mines - Jayant block - is moving closer to this township and within another two years it will reach 500 metres of the residential area, which would

hinder the mining operations. The district administration is helping NCL on this and details of the first phase of R&R needs to be chalked out, he said, adding, "From May, we will start handing out its first compensation cheque."

The tenancy land of 572.5 hectares is to be vacated in the first phase, the CMD said.

According to the sources, the company is still working out the finer details of the plan that includes the financial implication.

The Morwa township R&R project will be huge and is likely to entail an estimated expenditure of more than Rs 20,000 crore.

The project will affect 30,000

families and will involve the relocation of 22,000 houses, structures.

The total area for which the relocation being planned is 927 hectares, including 205.8 hectares of forest land, 572.5 hectares of tenancy/private land, and 149.3 hectares of government land.

The company is planning to ramp up the capacity of Jayant coal mine from 30 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) to 35 MTPA by 2026-27.

The company is expecting a big jump in capex target in the coming fiscal year, the CMD said, adding that a chunk of its over Rs 4,000 crore capex will be spent on land compensation.

NCL's capex for the current fiscal year will be in the range of Rs 2,500-2,600 crore.

The PSU company produced 136.2 million tonnes of coal in 2023-24. The miniratna company under the Ministry of Coal is targeting production of 139 MT coal in the current fiscal year.

The company accounts for 14 per cent of the total coal produced in the country, contributing to 10 per cent of the country's total electricity generation.

The Singrauli-headquartered company operates through its 10 mechanised opencast mines across Singrauli and Sonbhadra districts of MP and UP, respectively.

Retail tomato prices declined 22.4 per cent month-on-month on improved supplies across the country, the Consumer Affairs Ministry said on Sunday.

The all-India average retail price of tomatoes stood at Rs 52.35 per kg on November 14, down from Rs 67.50 per kg on October 14, according to an official statement.

During the same period, modal wholesale prices at Delhi's Azadpur mandi witnessed a sharper decline of nearly 50 per cent to Rs 2,969 per quintal from Rs 5,883 per quintal, driven by increased arrivals.

Similar price corrections were reported from key markets like Pimpalgaon (Maharashtra), Madanapalle (Andhra Pradesh), and Kolar (Karnataka), the ministry said.

"Though arrivals have

Hyundai Motor India bets on CNG vehicles, sees accelerated demand

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Hyundai Motor India Ltd is betting big on CNG fuel option with sales of models equipped with the technology witnessing increasing demand across rural and urban markets in the country, according to a top company official.

The company, which currently offers CNG option in its three models - Grand i10 NIOS, AURA and EXTER - has seen an increase in contribution of the CNG models to its domestic sales to 11.4 per cent in FY24 from 9.1 per cent in FY22.

So far in the April-October period this fiscal, the contribution of CNG models to the company's domestic sales has risen to 12.8 per cent.

Its overall vehicle sales across different fuel options stood at 3.54 lakh units in the domestic market during the period.

"At present, India already has more than 7,000 CNG stations and aim is to have

approximately 17,500 CNG stations by 2030 which will further fuel the CNG demand," HMIL Whole-time Director and COO Tarun Garg said on the reasons behind the company's bullishness on CNG models.

With a view to increase CNG vehicle sales, HMIL introduced the 'Hy-CNG Duo' - with a dual-cylinder system offering ample boot space and higher fuel efficiency - in its EXTER and Grand i10 NIOS models.

"The introduction of Hy-CNG Duo is aimed to meet customer demands of providing ample space with high mileage and safety. This has helped us achieve the highest ever CNG penetration of 14.9 per cent

in October 2024. "Company-fitted CNG system with three years warranty assures maximum assurance for customers," he added.

The 'Hy-CNG Duo' is also equipped with an integrated ECU for faster and seamless shifting between petrol and CNG fuel options.

In October this year, HMIL had clocked 8,261 units of CNG models in domestic sales with CNG penetration in its compact car Grandi10 NIOS at 17.4 per cent, 39.7 per cent for mini SUV EXTER and 90.6 per cent for compact sedan AURA.

HMIL said it has also witnessed the penetration of CNG models grow from 8.8 per cent in FY22 to 10.7 per

cent in FY24 in the urban markets, and from 7.1 per cent in FY22 to 12.0 per cent in FY24 in rural markets.

As of October this fiscal, HMIL's urban penetration of CNG models stood at 12.3 per cent while it was at 14.3 per cent in the rural market.

The company's top three cities for CNG vehicle sales in the January to October period of 2024 were Pune, New Delhi and Ahmedabad, while in terms of states it was Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

HMIL is joining rivals Maruti Suzuki India and Tata Motors which have also focussed on enhancing sales of their CNG models.

In fact, Maruti Suzuki India has set a target of selling 6 lakh CNG vehicles in FY25, up from 4.89 lakh units in FY24.

Tata Motors' passenger vehicles segment has also witnessed increasing penetration of CNG vehicles in its overall portfolio in the first half of the fiscal to 21 per cent, up from 16 per cent in FY24.

Retail tomato prices drop 22.4 per cent on improved supplies: Government

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Retail tomato prices declined 22.4 per cent month-on-month on improved supplies across the country, the Consumer Affairs Ministry said on Sunday.

The all-India average retail price of tomatoes stood at Rs 52.35 per kg on November 14, down from Rs 67.50 per kg on October 14, according to an official statement.

During the same period, modal wholesale prices at Delhi's Azadpur mandi witnessed a sharper decline of nearly 50 per cent to Rs 2,969 per quintal from Rs 5,883 per quintal, driven by increased arrivals.

Similar price corrections were reported from key markets like Pimpalgaon (Maharashtra), Madanapalle (Andhra Pradesh), and Kolar (Karnataka), the ministry said.

"Though arrivals have

subsidised at major tomato centres in Madanapalle and Kolar, prices have eased due to seasonal supplies from Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat filling supply gaps nationwide," it added.

Favourable weather conditions have supported both crop growth and smooth supply chain movement from fields to consumers, the statement noted.

The country's tomato production is projected to increase 4 per cent to 213.20 lakh tonne in 2023-24. While tomatoes are grown year-round, production varies

seasonally across regions.

The ministry said adverse weather and logistics disruptions significantly impact prices due to the crop's high susceptibility and perishable nature.

The price surge during October 2024 was attributed to excessive and prolonged rains in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

October and November are the main sowing periods in major producing states.

Regular market availability is maintained due to the crop's short cultivation duration and multiple harvests, the ministry added.

Reliance Group establishes RGCC as part of its VISION 2030



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The core team of RGCC will include leaders of the group Sateesh Seth, Punit Garg, and K. Raja Gopal, who will collectively bring management expertise.

Both Sateesh Seth and Punit Garg have dedicated more than two decades to the group, serving in various leadership positions.

The establishment of RGCC aims to harness the in-house expertise of these seasoned leaders to support the Group's forward-looking growth initiatives and cultivate a new generation of leadership for future projects.

The RGCC will play a pivotal role in mentoring and developing emerging leaders, blending experience with

fresh talent to propel the group towards sustained growth.

A Reliance Group spokesperson said, "We are thrilled to introduce RGCC, a team of seasoned professionals with broad spectrum expertise. This strategic move aims to steer the Group's future growth by tapping into the vast experience of these leaders, will help navigate industry challenges and capitalize on new opportunities, drive innovation, and deliver exceptional value to our customers and stakeholders. We believe RGCC will be instrumental in shaping the next phase of our Group's success."

Dubai-based siblings to transfer jiohotstar.com domain to Reliance free of cost

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Dubai-based siblings Jainam and Jivika, the owners of jiohotstar.com domain, have decided to transfer it to Reliance "free of cost", resting speculations on social media platforms.

The story of the internet domain name, which grabbed a lot of attention on social media platforms in the recent past, ended with "seva and kindness", according to the duo.

The unique website ID was said to have been initially registered by a Delhi-based app developer last year amid speculation about the potential merger of Reliance Jio and Disney Hotstar.

Last month, the developer came up with the demand for funding his higher studies at the Cambridge

University in return of the domain's ownership transfer, days after Reliance Jio and The Walt Disney formally announced the merger of their media businesses.

Later, the Dubai-based siblings purchased jiohotstar.com domain from its registered owner.

According to industry observers, the domain was sold to Dubai-based siblings after Reliance declined his offer.

because we believe it could be useful for them. Whether or not they choose to use it is up to them," the message added.

PTI reached out to Reliance for its comment on the development but did not receive any response.

In their previous message, the siblings said they had received numerous offers, including some genuine ones offering significant amounts.

However, they had said that the domain was not for sale.

While announcing the "journey with jiohotstar.com is coming to an end", the duo said they are waiting for a draft from the Reliance legal team for the transfer.

"The Reliance IP legal team has contacted us. We have told them that the domain transfer will only

happen after the agreement is signed. They have asked us to visit Mumbai to sign the agreement," they said, expecting the agreement to be signed soon.

"As soon as this happens, we will transfer the domain and this website will come to an end," the message said.

Reliance had last week announced completion of the merger of its media assets with the India business of global media giant The Walt Disney, forming a joint venture worth around Rs 70,352 crore (USD 8.5 billion).

The JV will be one of the largest media and entertainment companies in India with a combined revenue of approximately Rs 26,000 crore and will be led by Nita Ambani as its chairperson.



Param Amrit offers luxurious Ayurvedic skin care products for holistic beauty and wellness, writes ABHI SINGHAL

REDEFINING SKINCARE NATURALLY

Skincare has been the talk of the town from quite a time now. From using normal soaps and moisturisers, to now being choosy due to thousands of brands typically using chemicals it's difficult to rely on the ones which are healthy for the skin. Some brands live up to the mark but the others are religiously rejected by the people.

From the days Ayurvedic products have come into the business, the trust of the people have been retained. *Param Amrit*, a luxurious skincare brand launched at the *Constitution Club of India* by *Nutan Kher* recently promises you the same.

Param Amrit is a luxurious skincare brand to revive the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda by integrating the transformative power of *Mantra Aushadhi*. Each product of *Param Amrit* is handcrafted and is a testament to holistic well-being, connecting mind, body, and soul. By merging ancient rituals with modern wellness aspirations, *Param Amrit* offers a range of Ayurvedic products that go beyond surface-level beauty, promoting spiritual and emotional rejuvenation.

The Ayurvedic products that have been launched are Soaps - *Abundance*, *Celestial*, *Divine Citrus*, *Divine Orchard*, *Enchanted*, *Fairy Dust*; Face Serums - *Kumkumadi Face Serum*, *Kumkumadi Gold Face Serum* and *Ghrhitamrit face cream*.

Talking to *Nutan Kher*, Founder of *Param Amrit* about the many Ayurvedic brands, people in the majority still going for brands that use chemicals and how does she think that *Param Amrit* can bring a change to people's choices? She said, "We believe the shift towards natural, Ayurveda-based products requires more than just awareness—it calls for trust-building, education, and tangible results. That is why despite the growing awareness around Ayurveda, many consumers continue to lean toward brands that use chemicals, driven by aggressive marketing and instant results. However, *Param Amrit* is dedicated to educating consumers about the holistic, restorative benefits of Ayurvedic ingredients and the importance of understanding what they're putting on their skin. We stand out by focusing not just on the purity of its ingredients but also on the



“THE AYURVEDIC PRODUCTS THAT HAVE BEEN LAUNCHED ARE SOAPS – ABUNDANCE, CELESTIAL, DIVINE CITRUS, DIVINE ORCHARD, ENCHANTED, FAIRY DUST; FACE SERUMS - KUMKUMADI FACE SERUM, KUMKUMADI GOLD FACE SERUM AND GHRITAMRIT FACE CREAM



deeply rooted Vedic processes that enhance their healing properties. Our products are carefully crafted using traditional methods, ensuring that each formulation retains its natural potency and effectiveness.

Moreover, we use high-quality, traditionally revered Ayurvedic ingredients in combination with modern testing to ensure efficacy, safety, and visible results.

We at *Param Amrit* offer the best of both worlds: effective skincare rooted in nature and Ayurveda, without the potential downsides of synthetic chemicals. Our products demonstrate how true wellness is a gradual journey that prioritises long-term health over quick fixes, we aim to shift consumer preferences. We are confident that once people experience the authentic, holistic benefits of our prioritised products, they will make more conscious, healthier choices for themselves and their families. Our mission is to make Ayurvedic skincare a primary choice for holistic beauty and wellness, shifting consumer perceptions to recognise the true, sustainable benefits of nature-based solutions."

On asking that does she (*Nutan Kher*) think that Ayurvedic products can lead the way, she explained, "Absolutely. The launch of *Param Amrit* will set a new standard in the skincare industry with more Ayurvedic products. This shift is timely and necessary as consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of what they put on their skin and the impact these choices have on their overall well-being. Ayurveda offers a comprehensive, time-tested approach to skincare that aligns perfectly with these values, emphasising balance, sustainability, and nurturing from within thus, reviving the age-old

wisdom of Ayurveda in a modern context. We believe that the authenticity and purity of Ayurvedic products like ours can pave the way for a more meaningful and conscious approach to skincare and self-care. In contrast to conventional skincare, which often uses chemicals for quick, surface-level results, Ayurveda prioritises understanding each individual's skin type, body constitution, and specific needs. Our goal is to help consumers make informed choices, empowering them to experience skincare that works in harmony with their natural biology. Our formulations, rooted in ancient wisdom, are developed using ethically sourced, high-quality herbs, and botanical extracts, blended with modern safety standards. By embracing this combination of ancient science and modern rigour, our brand shows that Ayurvedic skincare is not just an alternative but a reliable and effective choice for today's consumers. As people become more aware of the adverse effects of chemical-based products, there is a natural inclination towards embracing safer, nature-derived solutions. The market is ready for a resurgence of Ayurvedic products, and with *Param Amrit* leading by example in quality and efficacy, we are optimistic that Ayurveda can reclaim its rightful place in the mainstream, encouraging more people to choose natural, sustainable, and wellness-centric lifestyles."

With its roots in the time-tested wisdom of Ayurveda, *Param Amrit* will not just be a skincare brand; it is a movement towards conscious, holistic, and sustainable beauty. By blending ancient practices with modern aspirations, the brand promises to inspire a healthier, more mindful approach to skincare, leading the way for nature-based solutions in the modern world.



YOGA FOR STRESS RELIEF

BY JYOTI SINGH

In today's fast-paced world, stress is a constant companion for many, affecting both physical and mental well-being in New Delhi, offers yoga as a powerful remedy for stress relief. Yoga isn't just exercise; it's a way to reconnect with oneself, find calm amid chaos, and build resilience against daily stressors.

Understanding *Yoga's Role in Stress Relief*
Yoga is unique in its ability to address stress at multiple levels - physically, mentally, and emotionally. Yoga isn't merely about flexibility or strength; it's about achieving balance. Practicing yoga lowers cortisol levels, the primary stress hormone, helping practitioners experience a natural sense of calm and well-being. In addition to the physical benefits, yoga cultivates mindfulness and deep breathing, both essential tools for managing stress.

By focusing on breathing and bodily awareness, yoga trains the mind to stay grounded in the present moment, reducing anxiety and worry. This mindfulness aspect of yoga empowers individuals to manage stress more effectively, turning challenges into manageable experiences. Yoga can be a sanctuary - a place to find peace within yourself, no matter the external circumstances.

Effective Yoga Practices for Managing Stress

The combination of physical poses, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques tailored to relieve stress is recommended. Here are some practices especially effective:

PRANAYAMA (BREATHING TECHNIQUES)

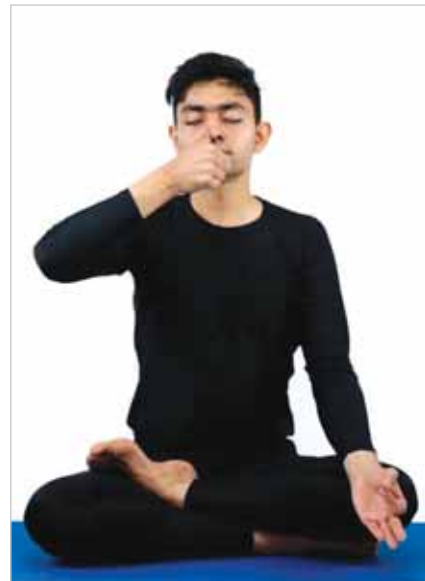
Pranayama, or controlled breathing, is one of the most effective tools for stress relief. Techniques like *Anulom Vilom* (Alternate Nostril Breathing) and *Bhramari* (Bee Breath) are ideal for calming the mind. *Anulom Vilom*, for example, involves breathing through alternate nostrils, which balances energy flow and reduces stress. *Bhramari*, on the other hand, involves creating a humming sound while exhaling, promoting a sense of tranquility and relieving mental tension.

BALASANA (CHILD'S POSE)

This restorative posture allows practitioners to rest and reset. By folding forward with arms extended or resting by the sides, the *Child's Pose* provides a gentle stretch for the back while calming the mind. It's an effective way to release built-up tension and focus on breathing, encouraging relaxation.

SUKHASANA WITH FORWARD BEND

Cross-legged with a forward fold stretches the spine and relaxes the nervous system. This position is simple yet effective for grounding



oneself and encouraging introspection, making it a valuable addition to a stress-relieving yoga routine.

SHAVASANA (CORPSE POSE)

Shavasana is the ultimate relaxation pose, allowing the body to rest and the mind to find calm. Practiced at the end of a session, it involves lying flat on one's back with the body relaxed and eyes closed. It is recommended that you do deep breathing during *Shavasana*, as it allows the nervous system to reset, enhancing relaxation and reducing stress levels.

The Science Behind Yoga & Stress Reduction

Studies confirm that yoga activates the parasympathetic nervous system, also known as the "rest and digest" mode, which is the body's natural counter to stress. Regular practice enhances this calming response, improving long-term stress management. Yoga builds resilience - it helps you create inner strength so that stress doesn't control you. Yoga is not only a coping mechanism but a preventive measure that enables individuals to handle life's challenges with greater ease.

Practicing Safely

For beginners, starting slowly and consulting an instructor to ensure poses are performed correctly. Practicing under guidance, especially when new to yoga, can enhance the benefits and minimize any discomfort. Sessions are tailored to meet individual needs, with a focus on safe and effective stress-relief practices.

Yoga offers a sanctuary from the pressures of daily life, helping individuals find inner peace and resilience. Anyone can incorporate these practices into their lives and experience the transformative effects of yoga for stress relief.

The author is the Founder and CEO of Sparsh Yog.



FIBRE - PACKED ALMONDS

The Australian almonds are your key to a healthier gut microbiome, writes KAVITA DEVGAN

Regardless of whether you're a professional athlete or simply interested in health and fitness, it's easy to integrate almonds into your routine. In fact, a regular 30-gram handful of *Australian almonds* contribute to heart health.

THE GUT BENEFITS OF ALMONDS

Interest in gut health has increased exponentially over recent years. Understanding what drives a healthy gut is still in its infancy, but current knowledge suggests a healthy gut is dependent on an abundant and diverse gut microbiota. Lower gut microbiota diversity is associated with a range of disorders and disease states, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and inflammatory bowel disease. The nutrients that we get from food, in particular fibre, phytochemicals (particularly flavonoids and polyphenols) and unsaturated fatty acids, can positively impact the gut micro biota. Almonds contain a unique nutrient package that includes all three, but what exactly is the evidence base for nuts and gut health?

Key insights you need to know:

- Gut health, and specifically micro biota balance and diversity, can influence overall health.
- Almonds are one of the few foods to



contain a unique package of fibre, phytochemicals and unsaturated fat, that can all positively affect the gut microbiota composition.

- There is established evidence that eating at least 1 large handful (>42g) of almonds daily has a positive effect on gut microbiota-both increasing beneficial bacteria

and decreasing potentially pathogenic types.

- Evidence suggests that long-term nut consumption may also decrease the risk of colorectal (and colon) cancer recurrence and death, and this link may be more apparent in women than men. Almonds contain the highest content of fibre, and one of

the highest amounts of phytochemicals, of all nuts.

About the research

A literature review investigating the relationship between nuts, specifically almonds, and gut health was conducted by *Nutrition Research Australia* (NRAUS). A review of the literature

was undertaken via the PUBMED database. Study types were limited to randomised controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies and *systematic literature reviews* (SLR). Targeted searches were also conducted in *Google Scholar* using key terms.

Research findings in a snapshot: THE GUT MICROBIOTA

A 2020 SLR and meta-analysis of nine RCTs found strong evidence that both *almonds* (5 studies) and *walnuts* (3 studies) can improve the gut microbiota. There was an absence of evidence for other nut types (8). Almonds had a dual effect, increasing the abundance of healthy short chain fatty acids producing bacteria, and decreasing potentially pathogenic bacteria.

In one study, even greater effects were found in children, where 42.5g and 85g of almonds per day over 3 weeks had a more pronounced effect on gut microbiota in four-year-old children compared with their parents.

Is the level of processing important?

Research has shown that whole and chopped almonds have a greater positive impact on the gut microbiota than almonds in butter form. This may be because approximately 50% of the fibre

content of almonds is found in the almond skin.

How are Almonds linked to GUT HEALTH?

Nuts are one of the few foods that provide a nutrient package of fibre, phytochemicals (flavonoids, flavanones and polyphenols) and unsaturated fatty acids, which may explain their strong beneficial effects on bacterial abundance and microbiota composition.

Fibre is well known to provide important fuel for colonic bacteria, and phytochemicals act like prebiotics, positively influencing the maintenance of healthy and diverse microbiota. Unsaturated fatty acids have been shown to have antimicrobial properties and also benefit gut microbiota composition.

Amounts and frequency

- One large handful (42g) of almonds or walnuts per day over 3-12 weeks had positive effects on the gut microbiota.
- Two or more handfuls (57g) of nuts per week were associated with a lower incidence of colorectal cancer recurrence and death.

The author is the Simone nutrition program ambassador of *Australian Almonds*.



India beat Japan 3-0 to top league stage

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

Defending champions India stormed into the semifinals of the Women's Asian Champions Trophy with an unbeaten record, defeating Japan 3-0 here on Sunday. Continuing her stellar form, star striker Deepika netted a quickfire brace from penalty corners in the final quarter to seal the victory, following vice-captain Navneet Kaur's opener in the 37th minute. With this win, India topped the league stage with maximum 15 points from five matches, ahead of Olympic silver medallists China (12 points). India will take on fourth-placed Japan in the semifinal on Tuesday, while China will play third-placed Malaysia in the other last-four game. Deepika, the tournament's leading scorer, now boasts 10 goals, including four field goals, five penalty corners, and one penalty stroke, underscoring her dominance. In the day's other matches, Malaysia beat Thailand 2-0, while China defeated South Korea by an identical margin. The Indians secured their



first scoring chance in the form of back-to-back penalty corners in the eighth minute but Deepika's flick from the second effort was brilliantly saved by Japanese goalkeeper Yu Kudo. India earned another penalty corner in the 13th minute but yet again wasted the chance. The Indians continued to dominate and secured their fourth penalty corner in the 25th minute but once again Kudo rose to the occasion and made three brilliant

saves to deny the hosts. A minute after the change of ends, Kudo again came to Japan's rescue to deny Deepika. India eventually broke the deadlock in the 37th minute through Navneet's brilliant reverse hit to the second post. Deepika's brilliance The Indians continued their domination and earned three back-to-back penalty corners in the 47th minute and star dragflicker Deepika finally found the back of the net with a powerful low dragflick to open her account. A minute later, the Indians secured another set piece and this time too Deepika struck again with a powerful flick into the top right corner, effectively sealing the match. Credit must also go to the Indian defence, led brilliantly by Udita and Sushila Chanu, as they didn't let the Japanese take a single shot at the Indian goal. Skipper Salima Tete, Neha and Sharmila Devi too were brilliant in the midfield, creating numerous chances for the forwardline with their runs and neat dribbling skills.



Swiatek leads Poland comeback over Czechs to set up BJK Cup semi against Paolini's Italy

AP ■ MALAGA (SPAIN)

Iga Swiatek won in singles Poland's 2-1 comeback against the Czech Republic in the Billie Jean King Cup. Poland will meet Italy in the semifinals after Jasmine Paolini likewise won her singles and doubles matches to lead Italy back for a 2-1 win over Japan. Marie Bouzkova beat Magdalena Frech 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 to give the Czech Republic a 1-0 lead on the indoor hard court in Malaga's Palacio del Deportes. The second-ranked Swiatek leveled the score after she held on for a 7-6 (7), 4-6, 7-5 win over Linda Noskova. The five-time Grand Slam winner then went back on the court after a short break to help Katarzyna Kawa beat Katerina Siniakova, the world's top-ranked doubles player, and Bouzkova 6-2, 6-4. "Let's enjoy this one. For sure it was an exhausting day and some really tough matches, but I am really happy we won that last one," Swiatek said. She added that she hadn't played doubles in three years and praised Kawa's well-placed passing shots in the doubles lane as key to victory. Swiatek showed no sign that she was worn down by the back-to-back matches that combined for 3 hours, 50

minutes of playing time. The Polish pair converted all four break chances and hit more winners, 29-18, than the Czechs. Poland is seeking its first title. The Czech Republic is an 11-time champion, second only to the United States' 18 titles. ITALY EYES SHOT AT CONSECUTIVE FINALS The fourth-ranked Paolini, a finalist at Wimbledon and the French Open, defeated Moyuka Uchijima 6-3, 6-4 to level the tie 1-1. She then helped Sara Errani beat Shuko Aoyama and Eri Hozumi 6-3, 6-4 to seal the quarterfinal win. Japan took the early lead when Ena Shibahara defeated Elisabetta Cocciaretto 3-6, 6-4, 6-4. Uchijima stole Paolini's first service game. But that was only a blip in an otherwise dominant showing by the Italian. Paolini broke Uchijima four times and hit 17 forehand winners to secure the straight-set victory. In doubles, the Italians broke the Japanese four times and made just 14 unforced errors to 23 by their rivals. "Japan is a tough cookie, as you say in English," Italy captain Tathiana Garbin said. "They played with a lot of courage so it was fun to watch this kind of level. My players, they played unbelievable doubles, so we made it.

West Indies chase down 219 to beat England by five wickets in 4th T20



AP ■ GROS ISLET (ST. LUCIA)

Shai Hope and Evin Lewis made half centuries in a rapid 136-run opening stand as the West Indies completed a record run chase to beat England by five wickets in the fourth Twenty20 international. Hope made 54 from 24 balls and Lewis made 68 from 31 balls, with seven sixes and four fours, in a partnership which lasted only 9.1 overs but enabled the West Indies to reach a winning target of 219 on Saturday. The West Indies' confident start was shaken when Lewis, Hope and Nicholas Pooran fell to consecutive balls in the 10th over. But captain Roston Chase put the innings back on track with 38 from 23 balls and Sherfane Rutherford competed the chase with successive sixes and an over to spare. There were 32 sixes in the match, 16 from each team. "We had to assess the

conditions. That's one thing we struggled with in the first three games in the power play," Hope said. "We've been losing some early wickets so the main thing was to try and understand what was the best remedy, to understand the conditions and come out of the power play on top." England already had won the five-match series after winning the first three matches by eight wickets, seven wickets and three wickets respectively. Every match in the series and in the previous three-match one-day series has been won by the team winning the toss. After being sent in, Phil Salt and Jacob Bethell who both have deep roots in the Caribbean made swift half centuries as England made 218-5 to equal the highest first innings total at the Darren Sammy Stadium. Bethell who was born and raised in Barbados made an unbeaten 62 from 32 balls

while Salt who was born in Wales but raised in Barbados made 55 from 35 balls at the top of the order. Will Jacks (25), Jos Buttler (38) and Sam Curran (24) also contributed to England's innings of 218-5. The West Indies made a speedy start in pursuit of that total. Hope reached his half century from 23 balls, the West Indies were 69-0 after the power play and their hundred came up in only 7.3 overs. Lewis was more watchful than Hope at first but when he began to hit out it was with enormous power. He reached his half century from 26 balls and the longest of his sixes traveled 105 meters. The century partnership between Hope and Lewis came from only 45 balls and they had looked impregnable until Lewis played an awkward shot to a ball from Rehan Ahmed which he skewed to Dan Mousley. Hope was run out next ball for the second time in consecutive matches and Pooran was bowled first ball as the West Indies slumped to 136-3. Powell restored some of the early momentum with his 38 before falling lbw to John Turner in his T20 debut. The West Indies needed 21 from the last three overs with five wickets in hand, then 15 from two. After edging towards the target in singles, Rutherford finally found the middle and blasted consecutive sixes from Mousley to clinch the win.

McGrath urges Australia to 'go hard' on emotional Kohli

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Pace legend Glenn McGrath feels Australia have the "ammunition" to target an "emotional" Virat Kohli, who will be under pressure if he gets off to a poor start at the five-match Test series for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, starting in Perth from November 22. India have won the last four Test series against Australia, including two Down Under. However, they head into the much-anticipated five-Test assignment on the back of a 0-3 series whitewash at the hands of New Zealand at home. "Without a doubt, especially after coming off a 3-0 loss



against New Zealand, you've got plenty of ammunition to back yourself up," Fox Cricket quoted McGrath as saying on 'CODE Sports'. "So put the pressure on them and see if they're up for it," he added. Kohli, who has been India's batting mainstay for over a

decade, has struggled with form in Test cricket recently. In the six matches he's played this year, he has averaged just a mere 22.72. With the injured Shubman Gill out of contention from the first Test and skipper Rohit Sharma's participation also in doubt, Kohli will feel the pressure of leading the batting line up. However, the 36-year-old has a penchant of eking out his best in Australia. Kohli has an impressive average of 54.08 in the four Australia tours he has been a part of. And McGrath warned that targeting Kohli aggressively could also lift him, especially if he manages to keep his emotions in check.

Need to be proactive against Ashwin, and not allow him to settle: Smith

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian batting talisman Steve Smith wants to adopt a proactive approach against Ravichandran Ashwin in the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Trophy to avoid his struggles against the Indian spinner during the 2020-21 series. Ashwin had nicked off Smith thrice during that rubber, and later in 2023 the Indian off-spinner dismissed the Aussie twice as he could only make 22 runs against his old foe. "I don't like getting out to off-spin in Australia. But he's also a very good bowler and he came in with some decent plans. There were a couple of occasions where he got on top of me," Smith told the Sydney Morning Herald. "But then I got on top of him at the SCG when I was a bit more proactive (Smith made 131 and 81 at Sydney). So, that's key for me. Just be proactive against him and not let him settle and bowl the way



he wants to," he added. Ashwin's Test bowling average stands at a modest 42.15 in Australia compared to his home average of 21.57. Smith hoped to land the first blow on the 38-year-old to gain an early upper hand in the five-match series, beginning at Perth from November 22.

The Tamil Nadu man recently said that he had worked out Smith after some initial struggles against him. "I think I've kind of figured out what he does or how he bats. I've had an edge over him. I've had the wood over him," Ashwin had told Channel Seven. But Smith did not read too much into it.

"Ashwin and I have had some good battles over the years. When you have five matches, if someone gets on top of another player, they could have 10 innings against them. "So, you're facing those mental challenges each game, and if it goes one way early, they will feel under pressure against that player. There's nowhere to hide in five games like there are in a two-game series," said the New South Wales man. The 35-year-old, who is 315 shy of 10,000 Test runs, will bat at his favoured No. 4 slot against India after opening the innings for four Tests earlier this year. It was not a successful experiment and Smith hoped to hit the ground running early from a position where he made runs at an average in excess of 60. It always makes your summer better when you start well. It gives you a lot of confidence. It's about not overthinking things. It's playing each ball as it comes and keeping it simple.

US Open runner-up Fritz back in another big final and faces Sinner again for ATP Finals crown

AP ■ TURIN (ITALY)

Taylor Fritz is starting to make reaching big finals a habit. He feels like he belongs among the very best players in tennis, too. The American followed his runner-up finish at the U.S. Open by beating Alexander Zverev 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (3) on Saturday to play for the trophy at the ATP Finals. "I have believed that I belong, that I'm one of the best players," Fritz said. "It's not results-based. It's more I can feel how I'm playing. This week is huge." In Sunday's final, Fritz will face top-ranked Jannik Sinner — the player he lost to in the U.S. Open final. Sinner also beat Fritz in straight sets in the group stage this week. Sinner advanced with a rapid 6-1, 6-2 win over Casper Ruud. Fritz became the first American finalist since James Blake lost the 2006 final to Roger Federer. The last American to win the elite eight-man event was Pete

Sampras, who beat Andre Agassi in 1999. "I trust my game and I trust my level and I don't feel nearly as uncomfortable in these situations anymore because I've been playing the top guys at big events a lot lately," Fritz said. "I'm getting more comfortable in the moment. I'm really, really confident in my game." Fritz upset after loss to Sinner. Fritz came away encouraged from his 6-4, 6-4 loss to Sinner on Tuesday. "I felt much more comfortable from the baseline. ... I had chances to break him in both sets," Fritz said. "He had an equal amount of chances, and he took his. He played the big points better than I did. It didn't feel anywhere near as one-sided as the Open." Sinner noted that Fritz "played a great match." "The difference was just a few points. Tomorrow will be very similar. ... But finals are always

different than group matches." Fritz trying to match Gauff. Fritz wins the trophy, it will mark an American sweep of the season-ending events after Coco Gauff won the WTA Finals last week. Fritz's run in New York made him the first American man to reach a Grand Slam singles final in 15 years. He's playing at the ATP Finals for the second time. On debut two years ago, he beat Rafael Nadal in his opener and made it to the semifinals, losing to Novak Djokovic. "It's awesome to come back and already go a step further," Fritz said. "I'm all about always trying to do better than the year before." At the start of the week, Fritz told The Associated Press his "career has always been a very steady progression and just improving a little bit each year." Fritz has Zverev's number. It was Fritz's fourth consecutive victory over Zverev, who replaced Carlos Alcaraz at No. 2 in the rankings



this week. "He's an uncomfortable player for me," Zverev said. "It's no secret." Fritz also beat Zverev at Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, plus the Laver Cup. Fritz will finish year at career high. Fritz was already assured of

finishing the year in the top five for the first time and he'll rise to a career-high No. 4 on Monday. Zverev has seen Fritz's improvement up close — especially on one key stroke: "His forehand used to break down quite a lot. ... I feel like the ratio is a lot more towards winners now." It was a matchup of big servers between the 6-foot-5 (1.96-meter) Fritz and the 6-foot-6 (1.98-meter) Zverev, and when Fritz broke Zverev for 4-2 in the first set, it marked the first time that Zverev lost a service game in four matches in Turin. Eventually, though, the match turned into a physical duel from the baseline. Fritz rallied from 0-40 and held his serve for 3-2 in the third after a nine-minute game full of long rallies — winning one such exchange that lasted 30 strokes. Fritz was then under pressure one service game after another but somehow managed to keep his

holding. Fritz got ahead early in the tiebreaker and finished Zverev off with an audacious inside-out forehand winner on his first match point. Fritz finished with 15 aces to Zverev's 10 in a match that last 2 hours, 20 minutes. "I felt like statistically and shot-wise, my level maybe was even higher than his until the important moments. That's where I kind of blew it," Zverev said. "This one will hurt more than the other few." Doping case hangs over Sinner. Sinner is playing at home for the first time since it was announced before his U.S. Open title that he tested positive in two separate drug tests this year. A decision to clear Sinner of wrongdoing was appealed by the World Anti-Doping Agency in September and a final ruling in the case is expected next year. Last year, Sinner lost the final to Djokovic, who withdrew injured this year.