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SELLOFF

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY NOVEMBER 22, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

www.dailypioneer.com

PUBLISHED FROM: DELHI | LUCKNOW | BHOPAL | BHUBANESWAR | RANCHI | RAIPUR | CHANDIGARH | DEHRADUN | HYDERABAD | VIJAYWADA



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

From 'severe' to 'very poor'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi's air quality saw a slight improvement on Thursday, moving from the 'severe' category to 'very poor'. The city had been experiencing hazardous air quality for several days. The Centre has announced staggered working timings for its employees in view of the severe air pollution here. Meanwhile, the restrictions imposed under the Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) which bans BS-3 and BS-4 diesel vehicles, has disrupted travel and transportation, particularly for those engaged in the wedding business. The National Capital emerged as the most polluted city in India, recording an average PM2.5 level of 243.3 micrograms per cubic metre air (µg/m³), with pollution surging by 19.5 per cent in week-on-week increase. The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), employees have also been asked to pool vehicles and use public transport to minimise vehicular pollution. These measures may be adopted by ministries/departments/organisations as per their functional requirements ensuring that it should not have an adverse impact on efficiency and productivity in any manner," the order read. The order said offices can be open from 9 am to 5.30 pm and 10 am to 6.30 pm. The move assumes significance as a body representing the Central Secretariat Service (CSS) officers had, on November 18, demanded work-from-home, staggered working hours and air purifiers in all office buildings to mitigate the health impact of the severe pollution levels. A thin blanket of smog continued to envelop the National Capital Region (NCR), including Delhi, Noida, Ghaziabad, and Gurugram. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Air Quality Index (AQI) in Delhi was recorded at 371. A data from AQICN.Org showed AQI of 569 at Delhi Institute of Tool Engineering and 479 at Satyawati College monitoring stations.

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ADANI ISSUE TO HEAT UP WINTER SESSION

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

A massive political storm erupted in India soon after Billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani was charged by United States prosecutors over his role in an alleged scheme to pay USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts. It may be a coincidence that some of the major controversies, including the latest one, and the ones that came before it such as 'Hindenburg, Pegasus, Soros' have surfaced just before the beginning of a Parliament session. This time, the Winter Session begins on Monday, with the Opposition announcing to raise the issue during the session while ruling

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) calling it preparation for another 'drama' to stall proceedings of yet another important Session.

While the BJP said all the states mentioned in the indictment were at that time ruled by Opposition parties, Congress led INDIA Bloc partners have demanded immediate arrest of Adani.

The Adani group has denied charges of paying bribes to secure favourable terms for solar power contracts, saying the allegations by US prosecutors are baseless and the conglomerate is compliant with all laws. It said all possible legal recourse will be sought.

According to agency reports from New York, United States prosecutors charged Adani and his nephew Sagar and other defendants for paying over USD 250 million in



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh address a press conference in New Delhi

bribes between 2020 and 2024 to Indian government officials to win solar energy contracts on terms that could potentially bring in more

than USD 2 billion in profit. This, they alleged, was concealed from the US banks and investors from whom the Adani group raised

billions of dollars for the project. US law allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets.

The indictment has thrown Adani Group in yet another financial trouble after it suffered a jolt by US short seller Hindenburg Research's damning fraud allegations.

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi demanded immediate arrest of Gautam Adani. Addressing a Press conference Rahul said it is now pretty clear and established in the US that the businessman has broken Indian as well as American laws. Rahul also demanded Adani's "protector" and SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch be removed from her post and a probe should be initiated.

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Ukraine says Russia launched intercontinental missile

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine says Russia launched an intercontinental ballistic missile overnight targeting Dnipro city in the central-east of the country, which, if confirmed, would be the first time Moscow has used such a missile in the war. In a statement Thursday on the Telegram messaging app, Ukraine's air force did not specify the exact type of missile, but said it was launched from Russia's Astrakhan region, which borders the Caspian Sea. It said an intercontinental ballistic missile was fired at Dnipro city along with eight other missiles, and that the Ukrainian military shot down six of them.



Two people were wounded as a result of the attack, and an industrial facility and a rehabilitation centre for people with disabilities were damaged, according to local officials. While the range of an ICBM would seem excessive for use against Ukraine, such missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads, and the use of one would serve as a chilling reminder of Russia's nuclear capability and a powerful message of potential

escalation. The attack comes two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a revised nuclear doctrine that formally lowers the threshold for the country's use of nuclear weapons. Ukraine on Tuesday fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles and reportedly fired UK-made Storm Shadows on Wednesday into Russia. The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement Thursday that its air defence systems shot down two British-made Storm Shadow missiles, six HIMARS rockets, and 67 drones. The announcement came in the ministry's daily roundup regarding the military actions in Ukraine.

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Set up courtroom in Tihar: SC on Yasin Malik case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Pointing out that "how can cross examination be done online," the Supreme Court on Thursday indicated that it may set up a courtroom inside Tihar Jail for the trial of Jammu and Kashmir separatist leader Yasin Malik in a kidnapping case. A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih was hearing a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) plea against the September 20, 2022 order of a Jammu trial court that directed Malik, serving life term in Tihar jail, to be produced before it physically to cross-examine the prosecution witnesses in the kidnapping case of Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of politician Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. Observing that even Ajmal Kasab was given fair trial, the bench, however, remarked, "How will cross-examination be done online? There is hardly any connectivity in Jammu... In our country, a fair trial was given even to Ajmal Kasab and legal assistance was given to him in the high court." The Bench told Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, to take instructions on the total number of witnesses in the case. Mehta pointed out security concerns and said Malik couldn't be taken to Jammu for the trial. The law officer accused Malik of "playing tricks" for having asked to appear personally and not engaging a lawyer.

Mehta said Malik was not an ordinary criminal and showed a purported photograph of Malik sharing the dais with terrorist Hafiz Saeed. The Supreme Court said it could order a trial to take place inside the jail besides asking the judge to come to the national capital for the proceedings. The Bench, however, noted all the accused had to be heard before it passes an order. Mehta said Malik physically appearing in the Supreme Court had raised security concerns previously. Later many jail officials faced suspension and notice for this goof up. The Bench said Malik could be allowed to appear virtually in the apex court proceedings and posted the matter on November 28. Malik, serving life sentence in a terror-funding case, was brought to the high-security apex court premises in a prison van escorted by armed security personnel without the court's permission. The CBI said Malik, the top leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, was a threat to national security and cannot be allowed to be taken outside the Tihar jail premises. On September 20, 2022, a special TADA court in Jammu directed Malik to be physically produced before it on the next hearing for him to cross-examine prosecution witnesses in the kidnapping case. The CBI challenged the trial court order before the Supreme Court as appeals in TADA cases are only heard by the top court.

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Pehle AAP... first candidates' list out

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is "fishing" in the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) waters for "strong candidates" before the 2025 Delhi election. The AAP on Thursday released its first list of 11 candidates including six turncoats who joined the party from Congress or the BJP, for the upcoming assembly polls in Delhi scheduled to take place in February next year. The AAP has denied a poll pass to three sitting Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and subsequent lists will show if they are accommodated in other seats. They are Kirari MLA Rituraj Jha, Seelampur legislator Abdul Rahman and Matiala MLA Gulab Singh Yadav. The development came after AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal chaired a meeting of the party's political affairs committee (PAC) at his residence in the national capital. While Brahm Singh Tanwar (Chhatarpur), Anil Jha (Kirari), BB Tyagi (Laxmi



Nagar) had recently quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and joined the AAP, Zubair Chaudhary (Seelampur), Veer Singh Dhangra (Seemapuri) and Somesh Shokeen (Matiala) joined the AAP after quitting the Congress. Sharing the list on X (formerly Twitter), the AAP posted: "First list of AAP candidates for Delhi Elections is OUT!! All the best to all the candidates. Phir laayenge Kejriwal (sic)." With a mix of experienced leaders and newcomers, AAP is preparing for a possible tough battle in the 2025 elections, aiming to retain its stronghold in the national capital.

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Post-poll posturing peaks in MY, MVA camps

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Two days ahead of the counting of votes in the Maharashtra, post-poll posturing began in both the ruling MahaYuti and Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) camps on Thursday, even as the both the parties started reaching out to the rebels and independents to rope in and boost their final winning tallies. While the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders began to clamour for its senior Devendra Fadnis being chosen as the Chief Minister if the MahaYuti gets a majority in the polls, which many BJP leaders claimed was a certainty. The Shinde Sena began pushing for the nomination of its president Eknath Shinde as the Chief Minister, a post he is currently holding.

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BORN TO BE WILD



Two Indian Rhinoceroses, also known as Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros, seen with flocks of Egrets and Common Mynas at the Kaziranga National Park, in Golaghat district

Patiala House Court puts Bikaner House in the dock

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A Patiala House Court in Delhi has directed the attachment of the Iconic Bikaner House after the Nokha municipal council in Rajasthan which owns the historic building failed to pay an arbitral award of Rs 50.31 lakh to Enviro Infra Engineers Private Limited. The court passed the order on an application seeking enforcement of the arbitral award passed by the arbitral tribunal in January 2020. Bikaner House was designed as the residence of the Rajput rulers of the princely state of Bikaner.



Bikaner House, in New Delhi, Thursday, Nov. 21, 2024. A Delhi court has directed the attachment of Bikaner House, which is owned by Nokha municipal council in Rajasthan, after it failed to pay arbitral award of ₹50.31 lakh to a company

the Archeological Survey of India, Bikaner House has been meticulously restored to its original form. It opened to the public on November 18, 2015. After the attachment order, the Nagar Palika of Nokha cannot transfer or liquidate the property by sale, gift or

otherwise. The court has directed the representative of the Nokha Nagar Palika to appear before the court on November 29, the next date of hearing. The Rajasthan government, meanwhile, said it will take immediate action in the matter.

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Band, baaja, baaraat, aur chor

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

You might have heard about wedding crashers, but those pale in comparison to this variation of unwanted guests: the infamous 'Band, Baaja, Baarat' gang is back. Gangmembers gate crash into usually high-profile wedding ceremonies in the city, not to eat free food but rather to steal valuables from unsuspecting guests. Recently this gang looted two lavish weddings in Delhi's Alipur and Chhatarpur's Maidan Garhi on November 12, and 17, respectively. Located about 800 km from Delhi, a specialised gang of wedding looters recruit from two villages: Kadiya and Gulkhedi in Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh where families send their young members to the gang on 'rent'. They are then trained to loot valuables from wedding parties without being noticed. According to police, 50-year-old Raj Kumar alias Raju, who is the 'gang coordinator', manages his operations remotely, sitting in a taxi outside the wedding venue, directing his band of thieves. "Known for the practice of 'renting' out families to criminal gangs, the residents



of Kadiya and Gulkhedi villages often enter into agreements known as 'Anubandh', where families receive financial compensation for sending their families to participate in theft operations," a senior police official said. The gang gives a 'crash course' to the young people so they can lift bags and steal valuables from the big fat weddings. "They use young recruits, trained to blend in at wedding functions, and are used to carry out

crimes without drawing any attention towards them. The practice is seen as a form of a social contract, where families from impoverished backgrounds are exploited by criminal elements for thefts at weddings, typically targeting the wealthy," he added. The officer also said that in previous instances, once an accused gets bail, they never turn up before the court for trial. "Thus, they have been declared

proclaimed offenders throughout India," he stated. However, the Delhi Police's Crime Branch finally busted the syndicate by arresting four members of the gang including Kumar, 30-year-old Mohit, 19-year-old Sumit, and 30-year-old Karan, near Ghitorni Metro Station, who were the primary perpetrators, executing the bag-lifting operations and stealing valuables from wedding guests. "After the thefts, Raj Kumar would distribute the stolen items among the gang members," another officer added. On the night of November 12, Sumit and Karan stole cash and valuables from two wedding ceremonies in Alipur, and on the night of November 17, they also stole a bag filled with cash and valuables from a wedding ceremony at a farmhouse in Maidan Garhi in Chhatarpur. "While they entered the ceremonies to commit the thefts, Raj Kumar and Mohit waited outside in a private taxi, keeping watch and giving them directions over mobile phones," the officer said, adding that they recovered five mobile phones along with 13 SIM cards being used for fake identity.

Crime Branch busts Gogi gang arms syndicate, 4 arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch on Thursday claimed to have busted an arms syndicate of Gogi gang by arresting four gang members and recovered thirteen sophisticated automatic pistols of .32 bore with two spare magazines, one revolver of .32 bore and thirty-four live cartridges. According to the police, they arrested a 22 year old Deepak Sharma alias Mandu, 21 year old Sagar Rana, 25 year old Deepak Mudgal alias Panchhi and 20 year old Veer Singh alias Aakash. The case had involvement of a national level shooter Himmat Deshwal, who used to supply cartridges to these gang members, acquired at a cheaper cost through sports quota, and was previously in Bhiwani jail. The Crime Branch has

now brought him here. A senior police official said that after direction from senior officers to locate the sympathizer, arms supplier and members of the active gangs, the police team was directed to focus on these sleeper gang members who are not involved in any criminal case but continue to help the gangster. He added that they did so by providing shelter to active/wanted gang members, by working as carrier of arms ammunitions and cash, by providing/giving vehicle to the active gang members, and other logistic support system. "Two arms suppliers of Gogi gang namely Deepak and Veer were identified, who used to receive illegal arms and ammunition and supplying from Bihar with the help of



one co-accused. They were further supplying arms to the Gogi gang members namely Sagar Rana and Deepak at the instance of gangsters who are lodged in jail," a senior officer said, adding that on interrogation, one co-accused Himmat Deshwal was also identified who is supplying ammunition to the gang members. The officer stated that a case under relevant sections of Arms Act was registered at Crime Branch police station in this regard. During the police interrogation, the accused revealed that they were getting directions from gangsters Kapil alias Kallu Khera, Deepak alias Boxer and Yogesh alias Tunda of Gogi Gang. "Kapil alias Kallu and Yogesh alias Tunda tasked them to help the shooter by provid-

ing/arranging pistols to shooters of gang, for their criminal activities. Kapil alias Kallu Khera is one of the kingpins/leaders of Gogi Gang. He arranged this second layer of sleeper cell of his gang who are continue to provide the arms ammunition to the shooters of this gang. They are getting ammunitions from Himmat Deshwal," a senior official said. Sharma, Mudgal and Aakash belong to village Khera Kalan while Sagar Rana hails from Khera Kalan in Delhi. "Aakash was found previously arrested in an Arms Act case registered at K.N Katju Marg police station," the officer added. Recently, the Delhi Police Crime Branch's Anti Extortion and Kidnapping Cell (AEKC) arrested a key member of an inter-state arms

smuggling network who allegedly supplied firearms in a huge quantity at the time of the Jahangirpuri violence. The accused, identified as Zulfikar Ali, was apprehended in connection with multiple cases of illegal firearms supply to notorious gangsters in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. On November 5, a team of the Crime Branch led by Inspector Priyanka under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police Sushil Kumar arrested one Salman aka Lala with an illegal firearm on a tip-off while he came to meet an associate in Sarai Kale Khan to commit a criminal act in a CNG station of the nearby area. According to the police, he was previously involved in six cases of Arms Act, snatching, burglary, and theft across Delhi.

BJP holds massive protest outside Kejriwal's residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP held a massive protest in front of the residence of former Chief Minister and AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal against the misuse of public funds in the construction of his earlier residence and using lavish equipment including gold plated toilet accessories in it. The party demanded a high level investigation. Meanwhile, police said they have detained some BJP leaders including Delhi unit president Virendra Sachdeva who took part in the protest and taken them to the Parliament Street police station, where they were later released after being warned. "No one is allowed to breach law and order situations," a senior police officer said. Scores of party workers and supporters raised slogans and questioned, "Kejriwal, give answers—how did you get so much money, and how did you decorate the 'Sheesh Mahal' bungalow?" Sachdeva stated, "From day one, we have been saying that this 'Sheesh Mahal' bungalow is the result of embezzlement of crores of rupees from the public's hard-earned money



and is a symbol of corruption. We have never heard of something as extravagant as a golden toilet seat before." He added, "When Arvind Kejriwal was allotted the house by the PWD, the inventory was recorded on a single page. However, today, eight pages are insufficient to document the items in this house. The golden toilet seat, golden washbasin, silver dinner set, carpets worth Rs 50 lakh, curtains worth Rs 8 lakh, expen-

sive stones, and even Bose speakers in all rooms and bathrooms were all installed by Kejriwal himself." He questioned the source of this luxurious equipment. "The people of Delhi are asking if the money for this bungalow came from the liquor scam, the water board scam, or from terrorist organizations accused of funding the AAP," the Delhi BJP Chief questioned, adding that in the coming days, the citizens of Delhi will hold him accountable. Sachdeva declared, "Arvind Kejriwal, with a mindset akin to royalty, can no longer claim to represent the common man with his tales of Rs 100 slippers and Rs 2 pens. His story will now be defined by the documents that expose his corruption." South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that Kejriwal built his lavish mansion without even getting the

required approvals for its blueprint and illegally cut down dozens of trees. "If someone in Delhi builds even a small house, they immediately receive notices and face demolition, but no rules were followed for Kejriwal's mansion," he said. Former Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot, who recently joined BJP, remarked that he had been with the AAP for the past ten years. He worked selflessly without any personal interest or greed, but the party is no longer the same AAP for which they all left their jobs to join a people's movement. "The current issue of protest was something he had mentioned in his resignation letter when he left the AAP. A person embroiled in such controversies over luxurious items in his residence should demonstrate moral responsibility and step down from his position," he said, adding that the issue of the protest was something he mentioned in his letter when he decided to leave the AAP. "If there is such a controversy over luxury items in someone's bungalow, they should show some morality and resign from their position," he said.

City witnesses dropping temperatures, Thursday night coldest so far at 10.2 degrees

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The people of Delhi have started to feel chills as the national Capital continues to experience dropping temperatures, with Thursday recording the season's coldest night so far at 10.2 degrees Celsius. People have started to take out their blazers and scarves as the city is witnessing temperatures dropping every day. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the night time temperature recorded on Wednesday was 11.2 degrees Celsius, while Tuesday night saw a low of 12.3 degrees Celsius, making them the second and third lowest of the season so far. During the same period last year, the temperature dropped to 10.6 degrees Celsius in 2023 and 11.5 degrees Celsius in 2022, according to the data. The city, covered in a blanket of fog and smitten by chilly wind, saw a maximum temperature of 27 degrees Celsius, 0.8 notches below the normal. The humidity levels fluctuated between 80 per cent and 64 per cent during the day, according to the weather



department. The IMD has forecast shallow fog for Friday, with the maximum and minimum temperatures expected to settle at 27 degrees Celsius and 10 degrees Celsius. According to the Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, there has been a slight fall in minimum temperatures over Delhi/NCR during the past 24 hours. "The Maximum and Minimum temperature over Delhi is in the range of 24 to 27 degrees Celsius and 8 to 12 degrees Celsius respectively. The maximum temperature was near normal and the minimum temperature was below normal by 1 to 2 degrees Celsius in most places over the region," the bulletin stated. It added that mainly shallow fog/smog conditions with predominant surface wind from northwest direction with wind speed reaching 6 to 10 kmph prevailed during day-time and calm wind during night time on Wednesday. "Shallow fog reported at Safdarjung airport during early morning today, Safdarjung airport recorded lowest visibility 600 m during 0700 hours to 0900 hours IST which improved thereafter becoming 700m at 0930 hours IST. Mainly smog conditions with wind speed less than 08 kmph southwest direction prevailed over the region in the forenoon today," it stated.

BJP, Congress attack AAP for not giving tickets to own leaders



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP and Congress on Thursday attacked the AAP for not giving tickets to its own leaders and said that the party is not confident on the performance of its MLAs amid the ruling party announcing the names of 11 candidates for the upcoming state assembly polls slated to be held early next year. The AAP announced its first list for the Assembly elections likely to be held early next year on Thursday, replacing three sitting MLAs and fielding six leaders who recently switched sides from rival parties. Claiming that the list reflects a lack of confidence within the ruling party, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said, "The first list doesn't name the chief minister, Cabinet ministers or the other prominent leaders who work closely with the government. If AAP wants to win with 'pawns', this list shows its likely fate in Delhi." He also claimed that internal rebellion in AAP would soon become evident to the voters of Delhi. Calling AAP a party in "decline", senior BJP legislator and Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Vijender Gupta, said in a post on X, "The Aam Aadmi Party is now on the verge of extinc-

tion. Today, AAP has a dearth of its own workers and has lost the trust of the public." As per the list, AAP has fielded Brahm Singh Tanwar from Chhatarpur, Anil Jha from Kirari and B B Tyagi from Laxmi Nagar. All three recently quit the BJP to join AAP. Similarly, former Congress leader Choudhary Zubair Ahmed has been fielded from Seelampur, while ex-MLAs Veer Singh Dhingan and Somesh Shokeen have been given tickets from Seemapuri and Matiala, respectively. The trio recently joined AAP from the Congress. Reacting the development, Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav said that the desperation of AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal was clearly evident from the list where three of the 11 candidates were recent Congress discards, and tickets have been given to them by replacing sitting AAP MLAs of Seelampur, Seemapuri and Matiala. "These changes of candidates by AAP were a clear admission that most of its MLAs were corrupt and did not do any work during their tenure," he said. Now with AAP taking the lead in releasing its first list of candidates, the political battle in poll-bound Delhi has officially commenced.

LG distributes appointment letters to 47 victims of 1984 anti-Sikh riots

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday distributed appointment letters to 47 victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots at Tilak Vihar in West Delhi, Raj Niwas said. It also said six additional such letters will be issued to nominated successors of those beneficiaries who had exceeded the age of service, during the interim period. This move comes after four decades of delay after, Saxena recently relaxed qualifications for recruitment of victims of the 1984 riots. This decision, pending for decades due to procedural delays and insen-

sitive red tape, has enabled a larger pool of candidates to secure employment, by becoming eligible for the same. Addressing people on the occasion in this colony, which primarily houses victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the LG declared that for the remaining 437 cases of applications for appointments were being verified and directed the Revenue Department to dispose these applications at the earliest. Saxena said this event, more than anything else was a moment of satisfaction since it has ultimately led to justice being delivered. He also



announced that the specific colony housing the Sikh riot victims, which was tragically called Vidhwa Colony (Widows' colony), will be renamed as per the recommendations of the local residents. It may be noted that various groups, public representatives, the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and a delegation of the victims themselves had met the LG last month and requested him to consider all eligible applicants, including those who may have aged out or passed away for recruitment. Following this, Saxena had directed the departments concerned to look into the issue

with empathy and suggest a way forward. Thereafter, he had approved the proposal for relaxing recruitment qualifications, observing that 1984 riots were a blot on Indian democracy. He had noted that given the significant trauma and hardship endured by the victims of the 1984 riots and the absence of relief for a few families for over the last 4 decades, a humanitarian view is needed. Though no relief can compensate for the loss of loved ones and mitigate the trauma faced by the families of the victims, it is imperative to take a compassionate view for well-being of these families and their economic stability.

EC approves appointment of IAS officer R Alice Vaz as CEO of Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday approved the appointment of senior IAS officer R Alice Vaz as the chief electoral officer (CEO) of Delhi, ahead of the assembly elections in the city due next February. Vaz, a 2005 batch IAS officer of the AGMUT cadre, is serving as secretary in Delhi's Directorate of Higher Education. She will replace P Krishnamurthy, who was appointed as Delhi CEO in August 2023. Last month, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of Krishnamurthy as the chairperson of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority. The Election Commission, in an order, said, "The Commission has approved the name of R Alice Vaz, IAS (AGMUT: 2005) for the appointment as the chief electoral officer, NCT of Delhi, in place of P Krishnamurthy, IAS.



Vaz, a resident of Tamil Nadu, has become an IAS officer from nurse. She graduated in nursing from MGR Medical, Chennai after which, she cleared the UPSC exams. So far she has held various posts across many states. Her first posting was in West Bengal, where she was posted in different districts. Then she stayed in Puducherry for a long time. In 2020, she was transferred to Delhi and has served as Labour Director under Delhi Government. Also, she served as Joint Secretary in Delhi Jal Board and was posted in the Higher and Technical Education department.

HC refuses to stay proceedings against Kejriwal in liquorgate money laundering scam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday refused to stay for now the proceedings against former CM and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to irregularities in the state Excise Policy 2021-22. Justice Manoj Kumar Ohri issued notice and sought the response of the Enforcement Directorate on a plea by the former Delhi chief minister challenging a trial court's order taking cognisance of a chargesheet in the case. The matter will be heard on December 20. Kejriwal sought setting aside of the trial court order and argued that cognisance of the chargesheet was taken by the special court in the absence of the required sanction for his prosecution as he was a public servant when the alleged offence was committed. However, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, submitted a sanction was obtained to prosecute Kejriwal and he would be filing an affidavit. Kejriwal's counsel said the relevant document was not sup-



plied to them along with the supplementary chargesheet and claimed there was no sanction at the time of filing of the final report. The AAP convenor's lawyer sought an early hearing after the court posted the hearing in January, 2025 and insisted an order on his plea for a stay on the proceedings be passed during the day owing to urgency. Mehta opposed the submission and sought to file a reply to the stay application, pointing out such an approach was unfair. He said this was a kind of "threat" on the part of the petitioner to carry the matter to the Supreme Court. Kejriwal's lawyer responded asking how could they "threat-

en anybody". The court, which said an early date was not possible as there was "enough load", posted the matter on December 20. Kejriwal's counsel also urged the high court to exempt the leader from appearing before the trial court, scheduled to hear the money laundering case on December 3. Justice Ohri remarked such a request could be made by the petitioner to the trial court and not before him. During the hearing, Kejriwal's counsel contended the seventh supplementary chargesheet filed by the ED naming Kejriwal as an accused was the "verbatim" repetition of the sixth supplementary chargesheet.

Rajnath Singh holds bilateral talks with US Secretary of Defence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and US on Thursday reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties during talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and US Secretary of Defence Lloyd J Austin on the sidelines of 11th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus at Vientiane, Laos. The two leaders commended the progress achieved by the India-US defence partnership, based on increased operational coordination, information-sharing, and industrial innovation, defence ministry said here.

Both sides recognised the remarkable progress made under the US-India Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap, including ongoing collaboration to advance priority co-production arrangements for jet engines, munitions, and ground mobility systems. Rajnath Singh recalled his recent productive and successful visit to the US in August 2024, wherein two important documents were concluded - the Security of Supplies Agreement (SOSA) and the Memorandum of Agreement regarding the deployment of Liaison Officers. Both sides welcomed ongoing efforts to deepen the



military partnership and interoperability to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific. Drawing attention to the successful QUAD Summit attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 21, 2024, Rajnath Singh emphasised the need for both sides to work together on the agreed deliverables including the new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), the first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission, and the launch of a Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network pilot project, to support civilian response to natural disasters more rapidly and efficiently across the Indo-Pacific region.

Both sides affirmed support to the growing defence innovation collaboration between the two governments, businesses, and academic institutions fostered by India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem, by providing them with more joint challenges, funding opportunities and visibility. Both leaders agreed to continue the momentum achieved in the last two and a half years through growing convergence to strategic interests and enhanced India-US defence cooperation. Rajnath Singh expressed gratitude to Secretary Austin for his enriching and lasting contribution for deepening and expanding India-US defence

partnership. In a social media post, Rajnath Singh termed Secretary Lloyd Austin as a great friend to India, whose contribution towards strengthening India-US defence partnership has been exemplary. He wished him very best in all his future endeavours. In addition to his meeting with US Secretary of Defence, Rajnath Singh met Minister of National Defence, Republic of Korea Kim Yong Hyun, Minister for Defence Industry and Capability Delivery of Australia Pat Conroy and Defence Minister of New Zealand Judith Collins on the sidelines of the ADMM-Plus on Thursday.

Number of hoax bomb threats to airlines have reduced: Civil Aviation Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Authorities have successfully handled the menace of hoax bomb calls to airlines and such calls have reduced. To a query about hoax bomb calls, Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlung Vualnam also said that authorities have tackled them successfully. He further said that procedures being adopted to deal with fog-related disruptions have been streamlined. A few weeks back, hundreds of flights had received bomb threat calls that later turned out to be hoaxes. These threats had significantly impacted flight operations of various domestic carriers. "Our security has tackled this (hoax bomb calls) and we have seen also that we have been successful. The numbers have now gone down and from the airport threat assessment committee also, the consultation process has been streamlined. They have been made more responsive, (for) quick response..." "We have successfully handled the hoax cases so that passengers and flights are not disrupted by hoax calls," Vualnam said. As part of preparations for the



fog season during which generally there are flight disruptions due to low visibility conditions, the secretary said airlines have been instructed to timely inform passengers about delays or cancellations. "We will be issuing fresh instructions to remind airlines and airports for the arrangements for passengers." "If there is any unavoidable delay in flights or cancellations, the procedures being adopted have been streamlined... BCAS has issued the circular and the drills are taking place. With this, there will be a better handling of fog season this year," he said. Other steps include allowing passengers to exit from an aircraft through an airport depart-

ment gate in case there is a long delay in operating the flight after boarding. In this regard, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) had issued a circular earlier this year. "Now, with the drills and the space being earmarked, it has been activated. It requires holding areas to be earmarked and all those things... It will be applicable everywhere (airports) but Delhi is the top priority because of the weather and the volume of people," the secretary said on the sidelines of an event in the national capital. On Wednesday, Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu held a review meeting with various stakeholders on fog preparedness.

Powergrid to revive crematoriums, graveyards in 658 villages under CSR scheme



PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

Under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scheme, Powergrid will revive crematoriums and graveyards in 658 villages of four districts of Haryana, Karnal, Panipat, Rewari and Kurukshetra, with an amount of about Rs 50 crore. For this, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Powergrid and the Development and Panchayat Department in the presence of the Haryana Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini in Gurugram on Thursday. The Chief Minister said that under the CSR scheme, corporate companies are making incomparable contributions in

the field of rural development, which is a commendable step towards social upliftment. Commerce, Industry, Forest and Environment Minister Rao Narbir Singh and Cooperation and Tourism Minister Dr Arvind Sharma were also present on this occasion. Chairman of Powergrid R.K. Tyagi said that an amount of Rs 49.94 crore will be spent for the revival of these crematoriums and graveyards. Under the MoU, boundary walls and paved roads will be constructed for all these 658 crematoriums and graveyards. Dr Jai Kishan Abir said that the population of these 658 villages is around 40 lakh. Rs 10.97 crore will be spent on the reconstruction of crema-

toriums and graveyards in 198 villages of Karnal district. Rs 18.46 crore will be spent on 237 villages in Kurukshetra district. Rs 5.15 crore in 106 villages of Panipat and Rs 15.37 crore in 117 villages of Rewari district. In Haryana, a CSR Board was constituted in November 2018, which was made Haryana State CSR Trust under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister in March 2021. "Development works worth Rs 750 crore have been done in the state under the Social Participation Program from November 2018 to March 2024. In the current financial year, development works worth Rs 350 crore will be done under this scheme," CM Saini said.

Opposition members demand tenure extension of Parliamentary Panel on Waqf

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition members on Thursday demanded extension of the tenure of the Joint Committee on Waqf Amendment Bill, contending that they need more time to study the changes to the draft legislation. At a meeting of the committee, Chairman and BJP member Jagdambika Pal announced that Thursday's meeting would be the last sitting of the panel and a draft report would be circulated to the members shortly. This led to protests by the Opposition members who resorted to sloganeering and some of them called Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and sought his intervention in the matter. The committee has been asked by the Lok Sabha to submit its report on the last day of the first week of the winter session of Parliament beginning Monday. The government has already listed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill for consideration and



passage in the Winter session after the report of the joint committee is presented to the Lok Sabha. In the past too, opposition members on the panel have accused Pal, a BJP MP, of doing the government's bidding. They had earlier even threatened to disassociate themselves with the panel's work. Their main concern was the frequent day-long meetings of the panel which did not allow them to prepare adequately and had accused Pal of "bulldozing proceedings" by not consulting them in picking whom to call to depose. Several opposition members of the committee had earlier too approached Speaker Birla against Pal.

Peaceful environment necessary for growth: Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday asserted that India's foreign policy emphasises respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity of nations and the primacy of dialogue over conflict and said as wars intensify, the world can learn from the country's age-old principles of harmony and coexistence. He also stressed the need for nations to focus on strategic security through strong defence capabilities and underlined that a peaceful environment is necessary for growth. "Noting that peace disruption or conflagration in any part of the globe has the potential to upset and unsettle growth, he



said a robust national security architecture based on a clear national security strategy is a precondition for achieving our developmental goals. Delivering a lecture at the National Defence College here on 'India's Core Values, Interests and Objectives', Dhankhar underlined that inclusive development, peace, and universal well-being, while nurturing the environment, is at the heart of Indian philosophy. He said India's core values for ages are the foundation of its identity and are premised on its civilisational ethos. In the present times, they are a blend of ancient wisdom and modernity aimed at fructifying people's aspirations. As the world's largest democ-

cracy, the vice president said, India celebrates its diversity with several official languages, multiple religions, and varied ethnicities canvassed under one constitution ensuring freedom and equality. In his address, Dhankhar said India's interests are driven by the welfare of its people and global peace while emphasising that the menace of terrorism and fundamentalism need to be combated in tandem and togetherness. Highlighting the nation's commitment to gender justice he said, "India is committed to gender justice, this being vital to economy and societal values, as also harmony. This has resulted in not only the empowerment of women, it has graduated to the next level of women-led growth."

New Tidel Park at Pattabiram to ensure IT development in northern TN

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The stage is all set for the formal launch of the Rs 330 crore Tidel Park at Pattabiram here to foster development of information technology in northern Tamil Nadu, the state government said on Thursday. The project established on an area of 11.41 acres in neighbouring Thiruvallur district will employ 5,000 to 6,000 people in the initial phase in the IT/ITeS sector. "The project aims to bring information technology development to the cities in the northern part of Tamil Nadu. The complex with a floor area of 5.57 lakh square feet and 21 floors, will be inaugurated on

November 22 by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu (M K Stalin)," a release here said. The building has all the necessary facilities for IT companies to function such as modern telecommunication facilities, uninterrupted high-voltage three-phase power connections and electrical drive facilities, elevators, sanitary facilities, fire safety, and building management facilities, CCTV cameras, 24x7 security, a restaurant, and a gymnasium. "The building will house 6,000 IT professionals and has been built according to green building guidelines," the release said. With the establishment of this new Tidel Park, the educated youth of the northern part of

Tamil Nadu, especially the surrounding districts including Thiruvallur, will get employment and the socio-economic status of these districts will improve, the release added. The chief minister will also issue orders for the allotment of sites in the park to various private IT companies during the opening ceremony. Also, Stalin would inaugurate the Precision Engineering and Technology Centre at SIDCO Industrial Estate, Thirumudivakkam, Kancheepuram district, which has been set up at an estimated cost of Rs 18.18 crore. Young engineers and college students would benefit from this project.

India's first indigenous antibiotic drug Nafithromycin for resistant infections launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a ground breaking step for India's biotechnology sector, Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh has formally launched the first indigenous antibiotic 'Nafithromycin' for resistant infections at an event here. The drug is now awaiting final approval from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) for manufacturing and public use, marking a major leap forward in India's fight against AMR. The antibiotic has been developed with the support of "Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council" (BIRAC), a unit of the Department of Biotechnology and has been brought to market under the trade name "Miqnaf" by pharma company "Wolkardt". It is the country's first indigenously developed antibiotic aimed at tackling Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). This innovation is designed to treat Community-Acquired Bacterial Pneumonia (CABP), a



severe illness caused by drug-resistant bacteria, which disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly as well as immune compromised hosts like Patients with Diabetes, Cancers etc, said the Minister, as per a statement here. Dr. Singh described the three-day treatment regimen of Nafithromycin as a game-changer in addressing drug-resistant pneumonia, a condition responsible for over two million deaths globally each year. India, which bears 23% of the

world's community pneumonia burden, faces challenges with existing treatments, including widespread resistance to drugs like azithromycin. The new antibiotic is said to be ten times more effective than current options and offers a safer, faster, and more tolerable solution for patients. Nafithromycin's efficacy stands out as it targets both typical and atypical pathogens, offering a potent solution where no new antibiotic in this class has been developed worldwide for over three decades.

Beyond its efficacy, Nafithromycin boasts superior safety and tolerability. The antibiotic has minimal gastrointestinal side effects, and remains unaffected by food, making it a versatile option for patients. The antibiotics marks a historic breakthrough as the first new antibiotic in its class to be developed globally in over 30 years. "This significant milestone comes at a time when antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing global health crisis, with few new drugs entering the pipeline," said the Minister. The development of Nafithromycin is a testament to India's scientific advancement, offering a much-needed solution to combat multi-drug-resistant pathogens. Its innovative design, targeting both typical and atypical organisms and its ability to overcome existing resistance mechanisms, positions it as a beacon of hope in the fight against AMR, with the potential to save countless lives worldwide.

MP Congress committee president faces ire from leaders after declaration of State executive body

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

The red carpet was rolled out but the tent wallah was summoned to take away the carpet that was brought in to greet senior Congress leaders invited for the MPCC executive meet, as none of them turned up. Madhya Pradesh Congress committee president Jitu Patwari continues to face the ire from senior party leaders and their camps after the State executive body was declared in first week of November. At least six leaders have already expressed their annoyance over inclusion of their names at lower posts and submitted resignations. After the announcement of a jumbo executive body, the first meeting of the new body was convened on Thursday, which met in the absence of all senior party leaders from Madhya Pradesh. Former chief ministers Kamal Nath and Digvijay Singh did not attend the meeting claiming that they had to attend a meeting in New Delhi, while



Leader of the Opposition on the State Assembly Umang Singhar cited the reason of being sick. Other senior leaders Jay Singh, Arun Yadav and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly Hemant Katore maintained distance with an excuse that it is a marriage season. Besides, Congress legislator from Bhopal Central also remained absent. Since, it was the first State

executive meeting, All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary and in-charge of Madhya Pradesh Bhanwar Jitendra Singh was present and he addressed the new member of the body. Notably, former chief minister Kamal Nath had remained absent from the campaigning in the Budhni and Vijaypur assembly by-elections in the State stating that he was sick. However, soon after the polling on November 13,

Nath celebrated his birthday at Bhopal and Chhindwara with a show of strength. When he was in Bhopal, Leader if the Opposition Umang Singhar had reached Chhindwara and thus he failed to meet Nath. Just the next day, on November 19, Jitu Patwari celebrated his birthday in Bhopal, but both Nath and Singhar maintained a distance from them, they did not even post their message on social media. While talking to media persons, Bhanwar Jitendra Singh said that those could not reach would attend the meeting through video conferencing. On the other hand, a local leader said that they have been informed that those senior leaders remained absent would attend the meet on second day, on Friday. Furthermore, two-term Congress legislator and son of senior party leaders Digvijay Singh, Jaivardhan Singh attended the Hindu yatra being taken out by Pandit Dheerendra Shastri at Bageshwar Dham in Chhatarpur district.

Centre deploys additional forces to quell Manipur violence

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Amid an escalation in violence in Manipur, eight companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) have reached the state capital Imphal, and these forces will be deployed in sensitive and fringe areas, an official said. These forces arrived in Imphal on Wednesday, a day after another batch of 11 companies of CAPF reached the state. "Four companies each of CRPF and BSF will be deployed in sensitive and fringe areas of the state," the official said. Of the CRPF companies, one belongs to the Mahila Battalion. The Centre recently announced that 50 fresh companies of CAPF would be deployed in Manipur. Violence has escalated in the



state as offices of the Congress and the BJP have been ransacked in the hill district of Jiribam last week. The incidents occurred after

Valley where an indefinite curfew has been clamped. Security forces also foiled the attempt of the agitators to storm the ancestral residence of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday evening. The violence escalated after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district after a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11. Bodies of those six were later found over the past few days. More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

mobs set fire to the residences of three BJP legislators, one of whom is a senior minister, and a Congress MLA in various districts of Imphal

VP M Venkaiah Naidu calls for revival of Indian roots and languages

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday stressed the need for going back to the roots of Indian culture and encouraging its languages. Speaking after inaugurating an exhibition here organised as part of LokManthan-2024, a colloquium of "nationalist thinkers", Naidu said there is a necessity that everyone should again start following "our traditions, culture and dressing". Asserting that 'Sanatana Dharma' is superior, Naidu said Hindu Dharma is so sacred that the people feed ants, snakes and worship trees and cattle also. "Please observe where we are going from there. The Englishmen came and invaded us. They not only looted us but took away our diamonds and other valuables. Not only that, they also



"robbed" some of our people's minds. That's the reason there are changes in us (with respect to practising culture and traditions) today," he said. He advised the youngsters to be friendly with nature. Naidu further emphasised the importance of practising yoga to become physically fit and mentally alert and pointed out that the ancient practice has no religion. On LokManthan, Naidu said

the underlying idea of this event is to decolonise the minds of Indians and to foster a sense of pride and commitment to Bharatiya intellectual discourse, culture, heritage, music and dance. "That is the purpose of this programme. It's a noble idea behind the programme," he said. Union Minister G Kishan Reddy was also present. President Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate LokManthan-

2024 on November 22. Organised by Prajna Pravah, an organisation of 'nation-first' intellectuals, researchers, and academicians, the event will feature debates on various topics as well as cultural programmes. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, and other dignitaries are also expected to attend the event to be held till November 24. Delegates from foreign countries, including groups that follow pre-Abrahamic traditions, will also participate and perform cultural dances and other exhibitions. The Yazidis, who faced attacks by ISIS, are also expected to attend the conference, the organisers said. LokManthan, a biennial event, was previously held in Bhopal, Ranchi, and Guwahati, starting in 2016.

Gujarat government declares 'The Sabarmati Report' film tax-free



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat BJP government has declared 'The Sabarmati Report' Hindi film, based on the Godhra train burning incident of 2002, as tax-free in the state, officials said on Thursday. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel took the decision after watching the movie at a multiplex here on Wednesday night, an official release said. Patel watched the film along with its producer Ekta Kapoor, veteran Bollywood star Jitendra, movie's actress

Riddhi Dogra and Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi, it said. "The chief minister has praised the movie and made it tax-free in Gujarat," the release said. Gujarat is the fifth BJP-ruled state to give tax-free status to the Vikrant Massey-starrer film, which released in theatres last week. Earlier this week, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh declared the movie as tax-free, which will effectively reduce its ticket prices. On February 27, 2002, 59 persons, mostly kar sevaks, were killed when a coach of the Sabarmati Express train was set afire near Godhra station in Gujarat, triggering widespread riots in the state. Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were among the leaders who had praised the movie.

Mob loots ₹ 1.68 Crore from Manipur MLA Kh Joykishan Singh's residence

PTI ■ IMPHAL

The mother of JD(U) MLA Kh Joykishan Singh in Manipur has lodged a complaint, alleging that Rs 18 lakh in cash and jewellery items worth Rs 1.5 crore were looted by a mob that vandalised the legislator's residence on November 16, police said on Thursday. Several items kept at the MLA's residence in West Imphal's Thangmeiband area for internally displaced people were also destroyed during the attack, a senior officer said. "The mother of Thangmeiband constituency legislator Kh Joykishan Singh filed a complaint with the Imphal Police Station that Rs 18 lakh in cash and several valuable items worth Rs



1.5 crore were looted and destroyed during a mob attack. An FIR has been registered," the police officer told PTI. The mob vandalised the residence of the legislator for about two hours on the November

16 evening, he said. Notably, the MLA was in Delhi due to medical treatment for one of his family members when the mob attacked his residence last week. An internally displaced person, staying in a relief camp set up at

Tombisana Higher Secondary School in Thangmeiband, a few meters away from the residence of Joykishan, said, "Vegetables like potatoes and onions, and other items such as winter clothes were kept for people like us.

All these materials were looted." "We urged the mob not to vandalise the residence of the MLA as several items meant for distribution among displaced people were kept there," Sanayai, a volunteer who manages the relief camp under the supervision of Joykishan, said. Lockers, electronics goods and furniture were vandalised, she claimed, adding that the mob attempted to take away three air conditioners but failed. Seven gas cylinders were also taken away by the mob, she claimed. Documents of internally displaced people were also destroyed during the attack, Sanayai said. The mob also pushed internally displaced people and one of the volunteers there was

injured after being beaten up, she claimed. Houses of several legislators in Manipur were vandalised as violence escalated last week after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district following a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11. Bodies of those six were later found over the past few days. More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

Assam Rifles, Mizoram Police seize banned tablets, heroin



PTI ■ AIZAWL

Assam Rifles in collaboration with Mizoram Police seized banned methamphetamine tablets and heroin worth over Rs 86 crore in two separate operations in Champhai district and two Myanmar nationals were arrested in one of these connections, an official statement said on Thursday. A joint team of Assam Rifles and state police launched an operation in a village on Wednesday after security forces received information about the movement of a suspicious consignment across the Tiau river along the India-Myanmar border. During the operation, the traffickers escaped from the spot but the consignment was seized, the Assam Rifles statement said. During the search, 28.52 kilograms of methamphetamine tablets worth Rs 85.56 crore were recovered, it said. Methamphetamine tablets, also called 'crazy drug', have been banned in India. In another operation in the district, a woman and a man, both residents of Myanmar, were arrested after 52-gram heroin worth Rs 39 lakh was seized from their possession, the statement said. One motorcycle used for transporting the narcotics substance was also seized, it added.

Haryana chief secretary oversees ₹ 58,274 Crore infrastructure projects



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Secretary Vivek Joshi on Thursday reviewed the progress of nine infrastructure projects currently underway in the state with an anticipated investment of Rs 58,274.05 crore. Reviewing the projects listed in the Project Monitoring Group (PMG) at a state-level

meeting here, Joshi held detailed discussions with the concerned deputy commissioners via video conferencing along with senior officials of NHAI, power, public works, health, and medical education departments. Expressing satisfaction over the progress of work, the chief secretary directed the concerned deputy commissioners to resolve the pending issues within the stipulated time frame, an official statement said. Reviewing the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway project, Joshi directed the Kaithal district administration to complete the possession of a 30-metre strip at Kharak Pandwa village in Kalayat by December-end. The four-lane greenfield project is being implemented under

the Bharatmala Pariyojana in Haryana, the statement said. Joshi also reviewed the construction of greenfield connectivity to the Jewar Airport from the DND-Faridabad-Ballabgarh Bypass KMP Link and directed the district administration of Faridabad "to remove the bottlenecks" within a month so that the project is completed expeditiously. Travel time will be reduced significantly for the traffic originating from south Delhi, Faridabad and Gurugram to Agra and beyond on completion of the project, the statement said. On land allotment for a 150-bed ESIC Hospital in Sonapat, the chief secretary directed the district administration to hold discussions with the Haryana State Industrial and

Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) and find a suitable piece of land at the earliest. Regarding the construction of a 100-bed ESIC Hospital in Hisar, officials informed Joshi that the letter for allotment of land for the hospital has been sent to the concerned authority. Citing encroachment on the land allotted for the construction an AIIMS at Majra in Rewari district, the concerned deputy commissioner informed the meeting that the Indian Railways has assured to clear the encroachment within 15 days. On the status of the Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor, the Yamunanagar deputy commissioner assured that the issue of land compensation will be resolved at the earliest.

Tragic bus accident in Jharkhand, seven killed and many injured as Patna-bound bus overturns

PTI ■ HAZARIBAG/JHARKHAND

At least seven people were killed and several others injured on Thursday after a Patna-bound bus with passengers on board overturned in Jharkhand's Hazaribag district, police said. The accident occurred near Gorhar Police Station area, around 50 km away from district headquarters, when the bus overturned while negotiating a sharp bend, a senior officer said. "Seven deaths have been confirmed so far. Some more people may be trapped in the bus," Hazaribag SP Arvind Kumar Singh told PTI. There were about 50 passengers on the bus which was going to Patna from Kolkata when the accident took place, another officer said.



Motichand Prasad, a passenger of the bus, said his wife Rajkumari Prasad was killed in the accident. "We were asleep when the accident occurred in the morning. We boarded the bus in Kolkata on Wednesday for Bihar," Prasad, a resident of Bihar's Gopalganj, said. Another passenger from Bihar Sharif Ganesh Kumar

said that the accident took place around 6 AM. "There were around 50 passengers on the bus. As the driver negotiated a sharp bend, he lost control over the bus and the vehicle overturned," Kumar said. A police official on the spot said that around 10 people of those injured in the accident are in critical condition.

Punjab by-elections see impressive 63.91 per cent voter turnout, Gidderbaha leads with 81.90 per cent

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

A voter turnout of around 63.91 per cent was recorded in the by-elections to Punjab's four assembly segments with the Gidderbaha segment recording the highest polling at 81.90 per cent, officials said on Thursday. Polling for the bypolls to the Gidderbaha, Dera Baba Nanak, Chabbewal (SC) and Barnala assembly segments took place on Wednesday. The by-elections were necessitated after the incumbent legislators were elected to the Lok Sabha. Of the 6.96 lakh eligible voters in these four assembly segments, 4.45 lakh voters, including 2.15 lakh women, cast their votes, according to officials. The Gidderbaha segment recorded 81.90 per cent polling, Dera Baba 64.01 per cent, Barnala 56.34



percent and Chabbewal 53.43 percent, they said. In the 2022 assembly polls, Gidderbaha had recorded 84.93 voter turnout, Dera Baba Nanak 73.70 percent, Barnala 71.45 percent and Chabbewal 71.19 percent. The main contesting political outfits in the bypolls were the Aam Aadmi Party, Congress and BJP. The Shiromani Akali Dal did not fight the elections.

Among the key contestants in the fray were former Punjab finance minister Manpreet Singh Badal, Kewal Singh Dhillon, Sohan Singh Thandal and Ravikaran Singh Kahlon (BJP), Amrita Warring and Jatinder Kaur (Congress), and Hardeep Singh Dimpy Dhillon and Ishank Kumar Chabbewal (AAP). Amrita Warring is the wife of the Congress Punjab chief and Ludhiana MP Amrinder Singh Raja Warring. Jatinder Kaur is the spouse of Gurdaspur MP and former deputy chief minister Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa. The AAP currently has 91 MLAs in the 117-member Punjab Assembly, while the Congress has 15. The Shiromani Akali Dal has three MLAs, BJP two and the Bahujan Samaj Party one.

ISRO and ASA strengthen ties with landmark agreement

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Thursday said it has signed an Implementation Agreement (IA) with Australian Space Agency (ASA) for further strengthening of cooperation in space activities between the two countries. The IA enables the Australian authorities to work with Indian authorities to ensure support for search and rescue of crew and recovery of crew module as part of a contingency plan for ascent phase that aborts near Australian waters, ISRO said. India and Australia are enduring strategic partners and both space agencies are working closely and are committed to explore current and future collaboration activities, it said.

ISRO has embarked on the Human Spaceflight "Gaganyaan" programme with an objective of demonstrating capability to carryout Low Earth Orbit in an Indian Crew Module with up to three crew members onboard, for up to three days and to safely recover the module. The IA enables the Australian authorities to work with Indian authorities to ensure support for search and rescue of crew and recovery of crew module as part of a contingency plan for ascent phase that aborts near Australian waters, ISRO said. India and Australia are enduring strategic partners and both space agencies are working closely and are committed to explore current and future collaboration activities, it said.

Kuki MLAs demand extension of AFSPA across Manipur to recover looted arms

PTI ■ IMPHAL/GUWAHATI

Manipur Assembly's 10 Kuki MLAs, including seven of the state's ruling BJP-led alliance, have demanded that AFSPA be extended to the entire state to recover looted arms. The Centre on November 14 reinforced the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Manipur's six police station areas, including the violence-hit Jiribam, with the Union Home Ministry asserting that the decision was taken given the "continuous volatile situation" there due to ethnic strife. In a joint statement, the 10 Kuki MLAs said, "The imposition of AFSPA as per orders dated 14 November, 2024 indeed needs immediate review to extend the Act in the remaining 13 police jurisdictions."

They asserted that AFSPA should be imposed in the entire state in order to facilitate the recovery of the "more than 6,000 sophisticated weapons" looted by Meiteis since May 3 last year as it is a long overdue action required to contain the violence. Ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis began on May 3, 2023, after a Tribal Solidarity March was organised in the state's hill districts to protest the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. More than 220 people have been killed in the violence since then. The central and state governments must take all necessary steps to restore peace and normalcy in Manipur by initiating political dialogue to bring lasting peace to the troubled region, according to the

statement of the Kuki legislators including five of the BJP and two of JD(U). The 10 tribal legislators also criticised the resolution adopted by the MLAs of the ruling BJP-led NDA in Manipur, calling for a "mass operation" against the Kuki militants responsible for killing three women and three children in Jiribam district within seven days. The Kuki legislators alleged that the resolution was "divisive, one-sided and communal". They also claimed that the resolution seeking the handing over of cases relating to the death of six civilians to NIA "smacks of a communalised state". "We recommend that all civilian killings from the 3rd of May, 2023, both in the valley and hills be handed over to the NIA," they added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Mending fences with China

Faced with a slowing economy and increasing geopolitical challenges, Beijing seems eager to seek a thaw with India

In a notable shift, the Chinese government has signalled its intent to recalibrate its ties with India following a series of disengagement measures along their disputed border. The thaw reflects both strategic considerations and economic imperatives as Beijing grapples with slowing economic growth and rising geopolitical challenges. After years of strained relations exacerbated by the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which resulted in casualties on both sides, the disengagement at friction points offers a moment to 'look into the future.' Chinese officials and business leaders have expressed optimism about a potential reset in ties, framing peace and stability as prerequisites for deeper bilateral engagement. China's economy has been under pressure from multiple fronts: sluggish growth, weakening consumer demand and the looming threat of escalating tariffs from the United States under Donald Trump's proposed policies. Beijing has already announced two rounds of monetary and fiscal stimulus packages, with a third expected soon, aiming to rejuvenate its domestic economy and strengthen trade ties with key partners like India. India, with its vast middle-class market and growing manufacturing sector, represents an attractive prospect for Chinese businesses.



Despite a persistent trade imbalance—India's imports from China stood at \$99.59 billion in 2023, dwarfing its exports of \$16.23 billion—there is scope for collaboration. Chinese businesses see opportunities in India's pharmaceuticals, services and burgeoning electric vehicle market. China's business leaders and scholars have called for a pragmatic approach that separates border issues from economic and cultural ties.

Influential figures in China's economic hubs—Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen—have emphasised the benefits of collaboration. Companies like Shanghai Pharmaceuticals and carmaker BYD have expressed interest in leveraging the Indian market, highlighting areas like healthcare and electric vehicles as promising fields for cooperation. While Beijing appears eager to reset relations, New Delhi's emphasis on resolving border disputes as a precondition for normalisation remains a sticking point. India is likely to continue leveraging its trade policies to address the trade deficit and ensure balanced economic ties. Additionally, mutual trust needs rebuilding after years of diplomatic and military stand-offs. Indeed, the disengagement along the border is a significant step toward restoring confidence between the two nations. If both sides prioritise dialogue and economic cooperation, the thaw could lead to a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship. China's acknowledgment of India's potential as a key trade and investment partner, coupled with India's focus on reducing its trade deficit and securing fair access to Chinese markets, could lay the foundation for a new era in Sino-Indian relations. Whatever the reasons behind China's willingness to engage in dialogue, this is an opportunity that must be fully seized.

PICTALK



A worker spreads 'Finger Fryums,' for drying under the sun at a factory on the outskirts of Agartala

PTI

Are taxpayers getting their money's worth?

From understaffed schools and ill-equipped hospitals to failing sanitation systems, taxpayers are left wondering: where is their money really going?

Each month, countless individuals contribute a significant portion of their earnings to the government, with the expectation that it will deliver essential services and build a nation worthy of our pride. Despite decades of commitments and the collection of hundreds of billions in taxes, numerous regions still suffer from shockingly inadequate basic infrastructure. Educational institutions lack adequate teaching personnel, public healthcare facilities consistently face shortages in supplies, and the sanitation system remains in its early developmental phase. What is the reason for this recurring issue? Is the hard-earned money of taxpayers truly being utilised efficiently, or is it time for citizens to demand more accountability? The irony lies in the fact that the middle-class sector shoulders the weight of taxes, yet they find themselves unable to reap the rewards of the services those taxes are intended to provide. Government schools are supposed to deliver affordable and quality education; however, many lack essential facilities like toilets,



adequate classrooms and dedicated teachers. Instead, middle-class families find themselves having to extend their budgets to enrol their children in private schools. Government hospitals, which are meant to provide free health care, are often overcrowded, dirty and severely lacking in staff. The middle class has ultimately turned away from these facilities, leading them to seek costly private care—where once more, their taxes and the expected refunds were meant to support them. Each year, governments amass billions in tax revenue, yet a significant portion frequently gets redirected to non-essential projects, bureaucratic inefficiencies, or, even more troubling, cor-

ruption. Extravagant government offices, regular overseas travel for officials and inadequately planned infrastructure initiatives consume resources that ought to be allocated to enhancing public services. Systemic leakages in public sector spending result in a significant portion of the allocated budget failing to reach those it was meant to benefit. It is not merely a matter of inefficiency; it represents a profound betrayal of public trust. Taxpayers deserve clarity and results. Therefore, it is essential for governments to create detailed spending breakdowns that enable citizens to follow the flow of their funds. It is essential for governments to reassess their spending priorities. Rather than focussing on grand symbolic infrastructure projects, efforts will be directed towards grassroots enhancements—cleaning hospitals, recruiting skilled teachers, and ensuring proper sanitation in every school. Technology can play a crucial role in monitoring advancements on extensive spreadsheets and digital platforms, highlighting areas that

require urgent focus. The key takeaway is the importance of civic engagement. People must insist on greater accountability from those they elect. Advocacy, community assessments, and exerting influence can indeed compel a government to establish fundamental infrastructure for the public. If the government disregards the opinions of the taxpayer, the collective voting strength and lobbying activities can convey a different kind of message. Public funds should serve as a means for advancing the nation, rather than being squandered on wasteful expenditures or corrupt practices. The true measure of a nation's greatness lies not in its towering skyscrapers or grand monuments, but in the care and support it provides to its people. Quality education, hygienic healthcare facilities, and essential sanitation are not privileges—they are basic entitlements. Now is the moment to hold the influential responsible for fulfilling their commitments.

(The author is a motivator and a freelance writer; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

The relationship between the Congress Party and the Adani Group is a masterclass in political hypocrisy. For all its vocal criticisms of the Adani-BJP nexus, Congress's historical and current actions tell a different story—one of close collaboration and mutual benefit. While Rahul Gandhi and his party present themselves as crusaders against crony capitalism, the truth is that Congress has been instrumental in the growth of the Adani empire. If anything, Congress's attacks on Adani only serve to highlight its duplicity.

Adani's early growth can be traced back to the 1990s when the Congress Party was in power. In 1993, under the Chimanbhai Patel-led Congress government in Gujarat, Adani was granted land at just 10 paise per square meter for his Mundra Port project. Further land allocations were made by Shanker Singh Vaghela, who was supported by the Congress Party. Interestingly, only about a third of Adani's total land acquisitions in Gujarat occurred during Modi's tenure as Chief Minister.

Despite Rahul Gandhi's relentless attacks on Adani, Congress-ruled states continue to roll out the red carpet for the conglomerate. In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's government has signed agreements with Adani for a massive 10,000 MW solar power project and handed over operational control of Jaipur International Airport.

In Chhattisgarh, Bhupesh Baghel's administration has approved Adani's role as a Mine Developer and Operator for coal blocks, while Himachal Pradesh's Congress Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu brokered a deal to reopen Adani-owned cement plants. These are not isolated incidents but part of a broader trend where Congress governments actively court the same group their leaders lambast at the national level. This two-faced approach isn't just political theatre—it's deeply cynical. The group's ability to



SYED ZAFAR ISLAM

Congress party's political opportunism

The glaring contradiction between Congress party's diatribes against Adani and its actions underscores a deeper issue of political expediency eroding its trust

deliver large-scale infrastructure projects, attract investments, and create jobs makes it indispensable to state governments, including those led by Congress. Yet, instead of owning this reality, Congress chooses to vilify Adani on the national stage, using him as a convenient punching bag to score political points against the BJP.

It's a strategy designed to mask its complicity while hoping voters don't notice the glaring contradictions. Rahul Gandhi, in particular, has made Adani the centerpiece of his attacks on Modi, framing the group as a beneficiary of crony capitalism. But his rhetoric collapses under scrutiny. Congress's historical and ongoing engagement with Adani exposes its attacks as hollow. If Congress truly believes Adani is emblematic of everything wrong with India's economic system, why does it continue to facilitate his projects in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh? Why does it refuse to acknowledge its role in Adani's rise, from land allocations in the 1990s to the financial wind-



THIS DUPLICITY ISN'T JUST BAD POLITICS; IT'S BAD FOR INDIA. CONGRESS'S SELECTIVE OUTRAGE OVER ADANI DISTRACTS FROM THE REAL ISSUES OF ECONOMIC CONCENTRATION AND REGULATORY CAPTURE

falls his group enjoyed during UPA rule?

The answer lies in political expediency. Adani Group's growth and expansion have not been limited to any single political party or government. The conglomerate has secured projects, investments, and approvals from governments led by Congress, regional parties, and other opposition parties across various states. But at the state level, where governance realities take precedence over rhetoric, the result is a schizophrenic approach that undermines whatever credibility Congress hopes to claim in its critique of crony capitalism.

This duplicity isn't just bad politics; it's bad for India. Congress's selective outrage over Adani distracts from the real issues of economic concentration and regulatory capture. While concerns about corporate influence on politics are valid and must be addressed, it is crucial to have a balanced and fact-based perspective on the issue. Worse, it perpetuates the very system it claims to oppose, enabling Adani's expansion while pre-

tending to stand against it. For Congress, the cost of this hypocrisy is more than just bad optics—it's a loss of trust. Voters are not blind to the contradictions between what Congress says and what it does. Rahul Gandhi's crusade against Adani might make for compelling headlines, but it rings hollow when Congress-ruled states continue to partner with the group. This gap between rhetoric and reality exposes Congress as a party more interested in political opportunism than principled opposition.

The people of India are wise enough to see through the opposition's double standards and political opportunism. They understand that the BJP government has always prioritised the nation's interests and has worked tirelessly to promote inclusive growth and development. We will continue to focus on our agenda of good governance, economic reforms, and social welfare, regardless of the opposition's baseless attacks and allegations.

(The writer is BJP national spokesperson; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GANGA UNSAFE FOR BATHING

Madam — The National Green Tribunal has ordered Varanasi DM to put up a board as the Ganga is not fit for bathing. It is unfortunate. Ganga is a lifeline to tens of millions of people who live in its basin and depend on it for their daily life. But in the recent years, the Ganga has become not suitable for drinking purposes and more pathetically for bathing too since it is severely polluted with human waste and industrial contaminants. Three quarters of sewage from the northern plains is discharged into the Ganga without treatment. The Central Pollution Control Board states that BOD levels should be less than 3 mg per litre for bathing, but in the Ganges, BOD levels can be up to 6.4 mg per litre.

Therefore, swimming in the river, which has high levels of harmful bacteria and toxic chemicals, can increase the chance of developing diseases like viral fever, nausea, typhoid, hepatitis, gastroenteritis and so on. The Ganga Action Plan was launched in 1985 with the aim of improving water quality through interception, diversion and treatment of domestic sewage and to prevent toxic and industrial chemical wastes from identified polluting units from entering the Ganga should be strictly implemented. The Namami Ganga project was launched in 2014 with the objective of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of the Ganga should be given life.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

BENGAL'S MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Madam — The article 'West Bengal's lost opportunity' (November 20), reshapes the genesis of Bengal's apathy for industry for decades and its doomed economy. The militancy of trade unionism under CPI(M) and TMC regimes has left Bengal de-industrialised for over five decades. CPI(M) and TMC are synonyms as the leftist cadre of CPI(M) has shifted en masse to TMC. Besides Tata Nano and Haringhata Dairy, the successive governments had opposed the Nuclear plant in

Winter smog chokes Delhi



The recurrent worsening of air quality in North India, particularly New Delhi, in the winter season is the cause for concern, which needs a comprehensive and long-lasting solution. This year the air quality index there reached 500 points, a severe plus range. Despite

the stubble burning being restricted, it has been frightening for one and all. The stubble burning in the fields of adjacent states has been considered a major contributing factor for the worsening of air quality there.

Apart from discouraging stubble burning, other measures like restricting the number of constructions, putting a cap on industrial emissions, and encouraging public transport should be implemented. Instead of passing the buck to the next, the centre and states should work in tandem to chalk out a comprehensive plan and implement it effectively. The authorities should involve the scientific community and include the people for better results. The public health, schools, transport, work and livelihood getting a halt with regularity every winter for decades in the capital region of India augurs no good at all.

DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

Haripur through violent agitations. In fact, the state governments and leadership of CPI(M) and TMC have been confrontational with Union Governments on setting up industries. The leftist agenda aims to weaken India and is subservient to the interests of China. The vote bank politics of CPI(M) and TMC have failed the state. Lakhs of youth have migrated to the other states for jobs.

The infrastructure of the state is in the worst condition and the political ecosystem thrives on violence. Therefore, alternative leadership outside CPI(M) and TMC has not emerged. Mamata Banerjee's leadership is more leftist than the Communist leadership of CPI(M) and CPI. Bengal is badly bruised on economy and GST and income tax collections are some of the poorest in the country with the size and population of the state. The successive governments of CPI and TMC have been oppressive, as evident from the recurrent violence in all Lok Sabha, Assembly, and Panchayat elections. A poor state with potential to be the most developed is very unfortunate for the

country. Bengali people deserve a better life and opportunity to grow.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

CASH CONTROVERSY

Madam — As Maharashtra hurtles toward a critical election, a political firestorm has engulfed the state, with BJP veteran Vinod Tawde and Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) leader Hitendra Thakur locked in a battle of accusations and counter-claims. Tawde, long embroiled in controversies and estranged from BJP heavyweight Devendra Fadnis, has found himself at the epicentre of fresh allegations of voter bribery. In Virar, BVA workers alleged that Tawde was caught red-handed with Rs 9.93 lakh in cash, sparking chaos. Thakur, claiming Tawde also possessed Rs 5 crore in cash and incriminating diaries listing names for monetary distribution, led the charge, insisting the BJP was attempting to buy its way to victory.

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

THE FRAGILE MIND AND OVERCOMING FEAR

understanding the causes of mental fragility and embracing methods of healing can help us fight fear



RAVI VALLURI

The cell rang and dropped from her hands. There was an agonising silence across continents. Her only son in the US, a brilliant student, committed suicide. Bill Maher writes, "Suicide is man's way of telling God: You can't fire me, I quit." But do brave men commit suicide? It appears to be a permanent solution to a transitory problem. Marcus Trescothick and Chetan Sharma come to mind. The former suffered from xenophobia in the subcontinent and Chetan Sharma after being hit for that last ball six at Sharjah by Javed Miandad lost his mojo and rhythm.

Fear, anxiety, emotional upheavals, unpleasant feelings, panic attacks and phobias are all symptomatic of a fragile and delicate mind. A fragmented mind is invariably a victim of irrational fear. Such an individual is unable to distinguish between what is logical and what is not. People harbouring fear suffer from panic attacks, sweaty palms, disturbed sleep, palpitation, shortness of breath, inability to remain calm, dry mouth and numbness of the feet and hands. A contributor to the magnification of fear is our pent-up emotions. These emotions are not based on a rational or scientific thinking pattern. We end up violently or irrationally reacting rather than responding in a coherent and clear-sighted manner. Humans should be prudent to ponder, that if left untreated this situation can become mourning regalia. A person can suffer from psychosomatic illnesses, loss of appetite, self-deprecatory behaviour or even schizophrenia. An element of fear is perhaps required, because then we can patrol our fences. Perhaps the only fearless people are sages and mentally deranged personalities! They are insulated from fear! The



brain is an organ and the mind is our intellect. It makes us aware and enhances the quality of consciousness. The mind is a movie theatre where the soap opera of our life is enacted. We play, rewind, and rerun an enormous number of movies. Thoughts are impacted by the kind of food we partake in (Tamasik, Rajasik, Sattvik), the company we keep and the amount of rest we take. The quality (guna) of food has a bearing on our disposition and approach to life.

Tamasik food makes us sluggish, Rajasik food makes us feverish or anxious in disposition and Sattvik food makes us feel calm. The first two lead us to fearful situations. If we are closeted with individuals who have a negative thought process, we imbibe such attributes and evince such a behavioural pattern. "Man is known by the company he keeps" is a very old adage and so is "man is born free but always is in chains". It is cardinal to have adequate physical and mental rest. If we are rested, then we are at peace and do not complain or quibble.

Then we are physically and mentally alert and high-yielding. In our minds, we need to keep space to just dump the garbage which disappears into the recycle bin, NEVER to APPEAR again. We need to pursue passions, and hobbies, indulge in sports, participate in extracurricular activities, avoid negative company, take up initiatives, practice meditation, keep the mind occupied, footslog on the treadmill, go for long walks, go for treks and read autobiographies of entrepreneurs and achievers. There are others who adopt the spiritual path by practising pranayama, learning yoga, undertaking the Art of Living course, or observing the breath through the Vipassana technique. To conquer fear, we need to log out of our comfort zone so that the virus of fear does not enter our operating system. And if nothing works out, the magic is to surrender to the Divine and feel grateful.

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

Dedicated bank for MSMEs to boost credit access

This new initiative seeks to bridge that gap and stimulate job creation and economic activity by providing MSMEs with the financial support they desperately need



A S MITTAL

The government plans to establish a dedicated bank to lend directly to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to enhance credit availability in this crucial sector. The industry has called for increased financial support, as current institutions like the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) primarily focus on refinancing loans rather than providing direct funding. In contrast, state financial and industrial development corporations do lend directly to MSMEs.

However, many, such as the Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation (PSIDC) and Punjab Finance Corporation (PFC), are experiencing funds crunch and have stopped credit flow. PSIDC gathered liabilities worth Rs 4700 crore, therefore, has not given any fresh loans to any company for the last 16 years. According to an Ernst&Young(EY) report, MSME credit penetration in India is only 14 per cent, significantly lower than in larger economies like the US and China, where the figures are 50 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. Indian MSMEs face a critical credit shortage of? 25 trillion, indicating a substantial untapped credit market. Increasing lending to MSMEs can stimulate economic activity and create jobs. The proposed establishment of a separate bank dedicated to the MSME sector would help address these direct credit shortages. However, the government needs to finalise various details, such as the bank's ownership structure, which may adopt a hybrid public-private partnership model. Although large banks operate in the sector, they often struggle to meet the unique needs of MSMEs.

Countries in Europe provide valuable lessons by grouping MSMEs with home loan customers, both considered small borrowers. If the government does not establish a new bank, SIDBI could be transformed into a full-fledged bank focused on direct lending to MSMEs instead of merely refinancing. SIDBI plays a vital role in financing India's MSMEs and is owned by a consortium that includes the government and major financial institutions. In 2023-24, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) supported the agricultural sector with a loan portfolio of Rs 6.68 lakh crore, with the agriculture sector contributing 18 per cent to the country's GDP. On the other hand, SIDBI had a refinancing loan portfolio of? 84,000 crore in FY 2023-24, with the MSME sector contributing 30 per cent to the GDP. For micro and small enterprises to grow, obtaining capital remains one of their most significant challenges.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has designated MSMEs as a priority sector and directed banks to allocate 40 per cent of the Adjusted Net Bank Credit (ANBC) to priority sectors, including MSMEs. However, a study by the RBI has found that most banks do not exceed 25 per cent for MSME credit. SIDBI's future growth depends on how effectively commercial banks fulfil their priority sector lending targets. A report by ICRA warns that if banks successfully meet their quotas, there could be a reduced need for SIDBI's refinancing services. Challenges: Despite the vital role MSMEs play in the country's economy, access to adequate, timely, and low-cost finance poses a significant hurdle to the sector's growth prospects. Limited credit history, insuf-



INCREASING LENDING TO MSMEs CAN STIMULATE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND CREATE JOBS. THE PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEPARATE BANK DEDICATED TO THE MSME SECTOR WOULD HELP ADDRESS THESE DIRECT CREDIT SHORTAGE

icient collateral, lack of knowledge about government support, and high borrowing costs complicate access to funding for MSMEs. Unlike large corporations, MSMEs often lack an established track record, making it challenging to secure loans from banks and other financial institutions. There are 64 million MSMEs in India, with 99 per cent classified as micro-enterprises. Despite global adversities, the sector has helped cushion the economy from shocks. In a nation marked by significant disparities between urban and rural areas, MSMEs contribute to the upliftment of less developed regions, thereby reducing regional imbalances and inequality. The sector provides over 110 million jobs, accounting for 23 per cent of the country's labour force, making it the second-largest employer in India after agriculture.

The importance of MSMEs to the Indian economy cannot be overstated. They drive innovation, generate employment, and contribute significantly to exports and GDP. By fostering entrepreneurship and supporting large-scale industrialisation, MSMEs play a pivotal role in reducing regional imbalances, uplifting economically weaker sections, and stimulating socio-economic development. Their adaptability and resilience make them indispensable in the face of economic adversities, ensuring the continuous dynamism of the Indian economy. With a contribution of 27 per cent to India's GDP, 38.4 per cent of total manufacturing output, and 45 per cent of the country's total exports, the MSME sector serves as the backbone of the economy.

Global Models to Emulate: However, the government has launched several initiatives to promote financing for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), including the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE), Pradhan Mantri

Mudra Yojana (PMMY), and Stand-Up India. While these efforts are commendable, the government must ensure awareness of and effective disbursement for these schemes so that more enterprises can benefit. Additionally, the private sector needs to step up and promote MSME financing.

Without public-private partnerships, alliances, and collaborations, MSME financing will continue to face challenges. One pressing issue is the introduction of interest subvention to address high borrowing costs, which range from 10 to 12 per cent. This creates an uneven playing field when compared to countries like China, where the borrowing rate is 3.1 per cent, the US at 4.37 per cent, and the European Union, which averages 5.1 per cent for MSMEs.

In the US, MSMEs can access funding through various federal and state programmes. The Small Business Administration (SBA) plays a vital role by offering loan guarantees and encouraging banks and other financial institutions to lend to small businesses. The Microloan Programmes provide capital for various business needs, including working capital, equipment purchases, and real estate acquisitions. Furthermore, the US government supports MSMEs through grants, venture capital initiatives, and state-specific funding programs tailored to local business environments. This diverse range of financial products ensures that MSMEs can find suitable funding options for their specific requirements.

In European Union countries, MSMEs benefit from robust financial support frameworks facilitated by institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF). These entities provide funding through intermediaries like banks and microfinance institutions, offering loans, guarantees, and equity

financing. The EU also promotes MSME funding through programs focused on the competitiveness of enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises, which emphasise innovation and competitiveness. In China, the government has implemented several measures to enhance MSMEs' access to finance through dedicated banks, such as the China Development Bank, which offers targeted lending. Local governments have established credit guarantee funds as well. Moreover, China's financial technology sector has significantly grown, with online lending platforms and digital financial services providing alternative funding sources for MSMEs.

Way Forward: The inherent challenges faced by MSMEs cannot be overlooked. It is essential to address the issues within the MSME sector that hinder financial accessibility. As recommended by the Parliamentary Committee on Finance, the comprehensive approaches in the US, EU, and China serve as valuable models for India to enhance its financing landscape for MSMEs, improve credit access, and make these enterprises globally competitive.

The government also proposed establishing a Merchant Credit Card (MCC) Scheme for traders and a Vyapar Credit Card (VCC) for micro-units, similar to the Kisan Credit Card (KCC). Under the Credit Guarantee Fund, a scheme to provide short-term loans with interest subvention is still awaited. There is still much work to be done to ensure that all MSMEs can access affordable and timely financing.

(The Author is vice-chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, vice-chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and president of Tractor and Mechanisation Association; Views expressed are personal)

India's gender gap in labour force participation: A missed opportunity

India must act swiftly to secure its digital future in an era where technological prowess is now essential for national security

A recent International Labour Organisation and Niti Aayog report shows that less than 50 per cent of women are in the labour force in India, compared to 80 per cent of men, and this proportion has not increased since 1990.

India is presently realising a demographic dividend, with the largest number of the young working population in the age group of 15-34. The above trend in women's labour market participation has serious implications for the economy, indicating a need for transition.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), presents a slightly optimistic



KAJLEEN KAUR

picture, where women's participation in the labour force has notably increased to 37 per cent from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18. Although growing, these figures are disgracefully low compared to 69 per cent in China and 57 per cent in Bangladesh. A similar comparison of female literacy rate in India with Sri Lanka, China, South Africa and Russia between 2011-2021

shows a remarkable growth from 59.28 per cent to 69 per cent for India, but it is way below all other countries where the figure is greater than 90 per cent, due to their dedicated efforts to female literacy.

The female labour supply traces a U-shaped curve to economic growth in many developed countries implying an initial fall in the supply with an increase in the GDP of the country, but later showing a positive trend. However, in India, this upward trend is not realised implying that economic growth has not generated adequate jobs for women.

According to the OECD report (2019), women in India spend on average 352

minutes a day on unpaid work as against 52 minutes by men. The division emphasises that a woman's "appropriate" role may be dominated by patriarchal structures, societal expectations, and traditional bias, and are restricted to caregivers and homemakers.

There is also a considerable gender-based wage gap of about INR 4,014. On average, men earn INR 12,048 per month while women earn INR 8,034, or about 33 per cent less than men.

This illustrates the stereotypes and gender biases that affect employment decisions, promotions, and wage negotiations. Recently, Indian policymakers and government have undertaken several initiatives and schemes



to raise the status of women with better access, eliminating barriers, and gender parity in the educational system.

Programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao, and the National Programme for Education of Girls at

Elementary Level (NPEGEL) aim to combat gender bias, guarantee inclusive education, and improve access to education for all.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) also introduced the "Udaan Scheme" in 2022 to encourage and facilitate female students to pursue higher education in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.

This is relevant as the Indian global compatibility centres (GCCs) show only 6.7 per cent of women in executive roles and 5.1 per cent in deep tech organisations. According to the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report 2023, India ranks 127 out of 146

countries in terms of gender parity, an improvement of eight places from 2022. The underutilised talents and unrealised potential and skills of women are crucial for redeeming the benefits of demographic dividend. A comprehensive strategy including education beyond secondary schooling with a focus on skill development can design a long-term employment-oriented development strategy, acting as a catalyst in achieving goals as set under United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

(Kajleen is an assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi University; Views are personal)

Adani Group MCAP plunges by Rs 2.19 Lakh Crore after bribery charges in US

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The combined market valuation of all 10 listed Adani group firms fell by Rs 2.19 lakh crore on Thursday, more than double of what the conglomerate lost when the US short seller Hindenburg brought out a damning report in January 2023. Shares of Adani group firms fell sharply as billionaire Gautam Adani was charged by US prosecutors for allegedly being part of a scheme to pay USD 265 million (about Rs 2,200 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts. The stock of the group's flagship firm, Adani Enterprises, plunged 22.61 per cent, Adani Energy Solutions tanked 20 per cent, Adani Green Energy plummeted 18.80 per cent, Adani Ports dived 13.53 per cent, Ambuja Cements cracked 11.98 per cent, and Adani Total Gas tumbled 10.40 per cent on the BSE. Shares of Adani Wilmar declined 9.98 per cent, Adani Power slumped 9.15 per cent, ACC fell 7.29 per cent, and NDTV dipped 0.06 per cent. Some of the group firms also hit their lowest trading permissible limit for the day during the day.



The combined market capitalisation (MCAP) of all 10 listed firms eroded by Rs 2,19,878.35 crore. In the equity market, the BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 422.59 points or 0.54 per cent to 77,155.79, and the NSE Nifty declined 168.60 points or 0.72 per cent to 23,349.90. "While the market is in the midst of a bear hug for the

past few weeks, today's fall can also be attributed to the news of Adani group facing bribery charges, which triggered a massive sell-off in its group stocks," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd. Adani, India's second-richest man, and seven others, including his nephew Sagar, have been charged with

paying bribes to unidentified officials of state governments in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha to buy expensive solar power, earning more than USD 2 billion over 20 years. Adani group on Thursday denied charges of paying bribes to secure favourable terms for power contracts, saying the allegations by US prosecutors are baseless and

the conglomerate is compliant with all laws. It said all possible legal recourse will be sought. "The allegations made by the US Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission against directors of Adani Green are baseless and denied," the group spokesperson said in a statement.

Sensex, Nifty tumble amid broad-based selloff

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled on Thursday amid a sharp fall in Adani group stocks after billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani was charged in the US for alleged bribery and fraud. Besides, unabated foreign fund outflows and weak trends in Asian and European peers also dragged benchmark indices lower. The BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 422.59 points or 0.54 per cent to settle at 77,155.79. During the day, it lost 775.65 points or 0.99 per cent to 76,802.73. The NSE Nifty slumped 168.60 points or 0.72 per cent to 23,349.90. From the 30-share Sensex pack, Adani Ports tumbled

over 13 per cent after Gautam Adani was charged by US prosecutors over his role in an alleged years-long scheme to pay USD 250 million bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts. All other Adani group stocks, including Adani Enterprises, Adani Energy Solutions, Adani Ports and Adani Green Energy, fell sharply by up to nearly 23 per cent. State Bank of India, NTPC, ITC, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance and Bajaj Finserv were also among the major laggards. In contrast, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement, HCL Technologies and Axis Bank were among the gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,411.73

crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The Indian stock markets were closed on Wednesday due to assembly elections in Maharashtra. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower, while Shanghai ended higher. European markets were trading in the negative territory. The US markets ended mostly in the positive zone. Global oil benchmark Brent crude jumped 1.13 per cent to USD 73.71 a barrel. Snapping its four days of decline, the BSE benchmark Sensex had climbed 239.37 points or 0.31 per cent to settle at 77,578.38 on Tuesday. The Nifty also bounced back on Tuesday after falling in the past seven trading days.

Domestic fleet to touch 1,400 in five years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vumlungmang Vualnam, civil aviation secretary, on Thursday said the number of planes with domestic airlines will increase to 1,400 in the next five years as he highlighted the growth potential of the country's aviation space. Currently, the fleet is around 800 aircraft and leading carriers, IndiGo and Air India, have placed significant plane orders.

At a function in the national Capital, the secretary also mentioned about the opportunities for women in the aviation sector, including in the drone segment. In the last 10 years, the number of airports has more than doubled from 74 to 157, Vualnam said. He also said the number of passengers has doubled to around 22 crore from 11 crore. The secretary was speaking at the 'Giving Wings to Dreams Awards 2024' hosted by

Women in Aviation India in collaboration with the civil aviation ministry. According to him, the Rs 120-crore Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was successful and that beneficiary companies have seen their overall turnover rise to Rs 1,400 crore. The first PLI scheme for drones, introduced in 2021 with an outlay of Rs 120 crore for three financial years starting from 2021-22, has ended.

Steelmakers need to collaborate with IISc and IITs: Minister



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Steel Minister HD Kumaraswamy has said that steelmakers need to collaborate with leading institutions such as the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) to create a globally-competitive and technologically-advanced steel industry. He said India's steel sector stands as the backbone of its industrial strength and a cornerstone of nation-building. "From skyscrapers to highways, railways to defence, steel powers our progress and fuels our ambitions," he said. Speaking on the occasion of the National Metallurgists Awards ceremony in Bengaluru on Wednesday, he said, "To create a globally-competitive and

technologically-advanced steel industry, our steelmakers need to collaborate with leading institutions like IISc and IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) for research." Specialty steel, Kumaraswamy said, is also a crucial sector where research and innovation is the need of the hour. The minister said that under the leadership Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is on a path towards becoming a USD five trillion economy, and steel will remain at the heart of this transformation, showcasing India's resilience and reinforcing its leadership on the global stage. "Yet, challenges persist - volatile markets, sustainability imperatives and the need for innovation," he noted.

Belrise Industries files papers to raise Rs 2,150 crore via IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automotive component maker Belrise Industries has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 2,150 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO is entirely a fresh issue of equity shares with no offer for sale (OFS) component, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company may consider raising up to Rs 430 crore through a pre-IPO placement. If this is carried out, the issue size will be reduced. As per the draft papers filed on Tuesday, the company intends to utilise proceeds worth Rs 1,618 crore for payment of debt. The company has a borrowing of Rs 2,463 crore in its books as of June 2024. Belrise Industries is an



automotive component manufacturing company based in India offering a diverse range of safety critical systems and other engineering solutions for two-wheelers, three-wheelers, four-wheelers, commercial vehicles and agri-vehicles. As of June 2024, it marketed its products both domestically and internationally, with operations extending to several markets, including Austria, Slovakia, the UK,

Japan and Thailand. The company has a long-standing relationship with customers, including prominent multinational OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) such as Bajaj Auto, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India, Hero MotoCorp, Jaguar Land Rover and Royal Enfield Motors. It has 15 manufacturing facilities in eight states as of June 30, 2024.

KS Murthy sworn in as new CAG



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former higher education secretary, K Sanjay Murthy, was sworn in as the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India by President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday. Murthy, a 1989 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Himachal Pradesh cadre, succeeds Girish Chandra Murmu. Murthy was named the new CAG by the Centre on Monday. Girish Chandra Murmu completed his tenure as the CAG on Wednesday.

KMF enters Delhi-NCR with competitive pricing on Nandini products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday launched the Karnataka Milk Federation's (KMF) Nandini brand milk products in the Delhi-NCR market, pricing them marginally lower than competitors to gain a foothold in the region. The cooperative will retail four cow milk variants, curd, and buttermilk from Friday, with competitive pricing that undercuts established players like Mother Dairy and Amul. Cow milk will be sold at Rs 56 per litre, full cream milk at Rs 67 per litre, standardised milk at Rs 61 per litre, toned milk at Rs 55 per litre, and curd at Rs 74 per kg. "We have surplus milk in the state. KMF along with Mandya Milk Union will market surplus milk of 3-4 lakh litres per day in Delhi-NCR," Siddaramaiah told reporters after launching the



products. The federation currently collects 100 lakh litres of milk

daily, with local consumption at 60 lakh litres, leaving a surplus of 40 lakh litres

for expansion into new markets. However, the Chief Minister

acknowledged the challenges of transporting milk over 2,500 km, which takes 50-54 hours. There is a need to find new markets for surplus milk and gradually the KMF should be able to sell 5-6 lakh litres per day in Delhi-NCR, he added. KMF Chairman LBP Bheemanaik assured that milk quality would be maintained during transit. The federation has already partnered with 40 dealers in the Delhi-NCR region to facilitate sales, he added. With a robust infrastructure of 26.76 lakh milk producers, 15,737 dairy cooperative societies, and 15 district milk unions, KMF has a turnover of Rs 25,000 crore and exports dairy products to over 25 countries. State Animal Husbandry Minister K Venkatesh and Agriculture Minister N Cheluvarayaswamy were present at the product launch.

INBRIEF

55TH FOUNDATION DAY CELEBRATIONS AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University is all set to celebrate its 55th Foundation Day on November 24, 2024 (Sunday), with a series of events lined up across various venues within the University Campus. Prof. Karanjeet Singh Kahlon, Registrar, said the highlight of the Foundation Day will be the Academic Lectures delivered by esteemed scholars, taking place at 11:00 AM in the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan Auditorium.

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY RE-POSTPONES EXAM SCHEDULE

AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University has announced the Re-postponement of all annual and semester (theory) examinations. These examinations were postponed on December 01 from November 20. But now due to administrative reasons, again, these examinations will be held on December 28, 2024 (Saturday).

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY ORGANISED PROF IS GROVER MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP AWARD

AMRATSAR: The Department of Botanical and Environmental Sciences of Guru Nanak Dev University organised Prof IS Grover Memorial Lectureship Award on November 13 which has been instituted under MoU between Guru Nanak Dev University and Dr. Avinash Kaur (Professor Retd.). She apprised that this award was instituted in the name of Late Prof. I.S. Grover, Founder Head, Department of Botany and Dean, Faculty of Life Sciences of the University, to pay tribute to all her teachers.



A YEAR OF POLITICAL RESURGENCE



In 2024, Donald Trump made a surprising return to the White House, defying expectations after his 2020 loss. His victory, alongside Modi's re-election, marked a pivotal moment in global politics, says **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

The year 2024 will be remembered by political historians for two major developments: the re-election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India for a third term and that of Donald Trump as President of the United States. Modi's victory was as expected, but Trump's victory, having lost his re-election bid in 2020, was not so certain. The left-leaning media had written off Trump after his 2020 defeat, and it is rare for a defeated president to stage a comeback. However, Trump, a master at making the impossible possible, won a landslide in the 2024 election, defeating the entire left-liberal establishment. He proved that hard work is often the key to success.

You may either love or loathe Trump, depending on your political views, but the truth is, he can never be ignored. He first became President in 2016 when the US economy was struggling, and the country's global image was tarnished. The infrastructure was in decline, and the US had become an industrial

wasteland. "My mission is to make America great again. We have to retrieve the lost ground and make the people happy and content," Trump declared during his campaign speeches.

Despite relentless attacks from Hillary Clinton, Trump held firm and focused on his mission. His dedication earned him significant support from voters. When he was declared the winner by a substantial margin, Washington and other major cities saw rioting by anti-Trump forces. The media quickly pointed the finger at Trump's followers for the unrest.

The period between 2016 and 2020 saw the US recover from economic stagnation and terrorism-related challenges. For Trump, America remained his top priority, and he aimed to keep the US out of foreign conflicts. His main goal was to ensure no more coffins with US soldiers' remains were returned from Asia and Africa. Under Trump, illegal immigration from Mexico and Latin America came to a halt, as he warned against job theft by outsiders. Drug trafficking from

Colombia and Mexico, which had been a major issue, was also reduced, strengthening the US social security system. Like a soldier guarding his nation's borders, Trump, at the helm of a major business empire, defended the social fabric of America. However, many in the US and abroad resented Trump's patriotism and worked to oust him from the White House. It seemed a foregone conclusion that Trump would easily win re-election in 2020.

However, overconfidence led to his defeat by a narrow margin. Bob Woodward, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, had predicted in his book *Rage* (2020) that Trump was likely to lose. Despite strong economic performance, record-low unemployment, and the US staying out of international conflicts, Trump lost due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Woodward claimed that Trump was warned about the virus as early as January 2020, but he ignored the threat and paid the price for his inaction.

Other factors also played a role. The 2020 election was marred by allegations



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: WAR
by Bob Woodward
Publisher: Simon & Schuster
Price: ₹999

of fraud, with many believing it was manipulated by Trump's rivals and hostile forces. Shiv Ayyadurai, an Indian-origin computer scientist credited with inventing email, raised concerns about the election's integrity. According to Ayyadurai, the mail-in ballots used in Arizona had mismatched signatures, which were overlooked by election officials. Despite Ayyadurai's efforts to prove these discrepancies, little attention was given to the alleged fraud. In his book *War*, Woodward examines Joe Biden's presidency and highlights three major failures during his four-year tenure. Biden's inability to deal with Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is central to the critique. Woodward argues that Biden's handling of the Ukraine crisis, in particular, was ineffective, and his approach to the Jewish state was also disappointing. The brutal 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, which resulted in widespread death and destruction, will remain a painful memory for humanity. Protests in India, where groups like

Hamas and Hezbollah have influence, added to the turmoil.

Woodward also reveals that US intelligence agencies had warned Biden in October 2021 about Putin's plans to attack Ukraine. Yet, Biden seemed reluctant to take decisive action. The cause for his hesitation may lie in his son Hunter Biden's involvement with Burisma, a major Ukrainian energy company, potentially jeopardising his ability to challenge Russia.

As I write this review, TV channels are reporting that President-elect Trump has issued a stern warning for all illegal immigrants to leave the US within two months. This is one of the promises he made during his campaign, and he seems determined to see it through. The Democrats and liberals have already expressed their opposition to this move. The next four years will be filled with action, and it will be fascinating to see how Trump's administration navigates issues like Iran, Hamas, West Asia, Russia, and Ukraine. Woodward will no doubt continue to provide in-depth coverage of these developments.

NEW RELEASE

Discover India Beyond the Metros

The High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam, H.E. Dato Paduka HJ Alaihuddin Mohd Taha, recently launched "India Beyond Metros: Dekho Apna Bharat", a travelogue by Varun Soni. The book highlights India's lesser-known Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, offering readers a fresh perspective on the country's hidden gems beyond the metropolitan hubs, writes SAKSHI PRIYA

"India Beyond Metros: Dekho Apna Bharat", authored by Varun Soni, is a captivating travelogue that takes readers on a journey through the lesser-known cities of India. In this, his fifth book, Soni explores around 50 Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities across the country, offering an in-depth look at small-town India and the vibrant culture that often goes unnoticed by mainstream tourism.

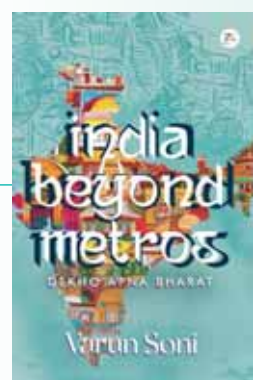
Unlike typical travel guides that focus on major metropolitan destinations such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, Soni's book highlights cities such as Jabalpur, Gorakhpur, Hubballi, Kollam, Rajkot, and others. These places, though not typically featured in popular travel literature, offer a wealth of untapped history, culture, and natural beauty. Each chapter of the book is dedicated to one city, providing practical insights on what to see, where to stay, how to get there, and even what to shop for.

The book fills a significant gap in Indian travel literature by encouraging people to venture beyond the typical tourist hotspots and explore the rich diversity of India's smaller towns and rural areas. It showcases the hidden gems of the Indian hinterland, offering readers a chance to experience



the authentic essence of Bharat (India).

At the launch event, the High Commissioner of Brunei Darussalam, H.E. Dato Paduka HJ Alaihuddin Mohd Taha, expressed his admiration for the book. At the book launch, He expressed his excitement, stating, "I am very glad to be here to launch a book on a topic that is a passion with me. After travelling across various parts of India, I can vouch that the hinterland has much more to offer than just the metropolitan areas. This book will serve as a helpful guide for those keen to explore these lesser-known regions." As an avid traveller, he shared his own experiences of exploring various regions of India, including Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Nagaland. He



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: India beyond metros
by Varun Soni
Publisher: ZORBA BOOKS
Price: ₹299
Pages: 172

highlighted that these lesser-explored areas of India offer a different, yet equally rich, experience compared to the well-known metropolitan cities. Author Varun Soni added, "It is time to look inward, into Bharat. This book highlights the hidden treasures in our smaller cities and towns, showcasing not only historical monuments but also the natural beauty that often goes unnoticed in mainstream travel guides." Soni, in his address, discussed the book's purpose of shedding light on the lesser-visited cities and towns of India. He spoke about the country's ancient civilisation, its countless monuments and temples, and the natural beauty found in these regions. Soni's aim with "India Beyond Metros: Dekho Apna Bharat" is to inspire readers to look inward and discover the treasures hidden in the smaller cities and villages that often go unnoticed.

Soni's literary career spans more than 15 years, with works that include books on celebrity homes, luxury resorts, and fiction. With this latest offering, he continues his mission to share the lesser-known aspects of India, bringing attention to the often-overlooked parts of the country that are full of untold stories and cultural richness.

A Spellbinding Adventure

Alexander Armstrong's 'Evenfall: The Golden Linnet', is a captivating fantasy adventure that whisks readers away to a world of magic and mystery. With stunning world-building, unforgettable characters, and a thrilling plot, Armstrong's novel is a must-read for fans of fantasy and storytelling alike, says ABHI SINGHAL

In *Evenfall: The Golden Linnet*, Alexander Armstrong crafts a mesmerising portal into a world of magic and the enduring power of storytelling. A tale of courage, friendship, and family in his debut novel is destined to become a modern fantasy classic which weaves ancient lore with the challenges of life.

The story centres on 13-year-old Sam, a relatable and sympathetic protagonist of the novel whose life has been marked by tragedy. Caring for his grieving, unwell father after his mother's untimely death, Sam grapples with the complexities of loss, love, and responsibility. His life takes a thrilling and dangerous turn when he discovers his hidden heritage as part of The Order of the Evening, a secret society devoted to protecting the world through storytelling.

Armstrong's plot is rich, combining elements of historical mystery with the fantastical quest for magical artefacts that makes it happen and sparks out curiosity. Sam's mission to uncover the truth about his parents and his destiny introduces readers to a lush, danger-laden world where trust is scarce, alliances are fragile, and malevolent forces threaten humanity. The inclusion of supporting characters like Sam's loyal friend Ish and the enigmatic Goz brings depth and warmth to the narrative.

Their camaraderie highlights the strength of friendship amid the gravest of challenges, providing



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: Evenfall: The Golden Linnet
by Alexander Armstrong
Publisher: Farshore
Price: ₹499
Pages: 352

balance to the story's darker themes. The vivid setting of Durham, steeped in British folklore and cultural heritage, serves in perfect for this battle between good and evil. Armstrong's talent for description shines as he immerses readers in both the modern cityscape and the mystical locations that form the heart of the Order's secrets. As a well-known TV and radio personality, Alexander Armstrong has a knack for storytelling that

translates seamlessly into his writing. Widely recognised as a comedian, quiz show host, and singer, Armstrong's foray into children's literature reveals another layer of his creative versatility. With a nod to the timeless appeal of authors like Philip Pullman and J.K. Rowling, Armstrong builds a world that feels both familiar and extraordinary.

At nearly 400 pages, the novel is a longer read, yet its pacing ensures readers remain hooked. Suspense builds steadily as Sam uncovers his latent powers, battles sinister forces, and learns that the fate of the world may rest in his hands. Tom Roberts' striking black-and-white illustrations further elevate the reading experience, giving visual depth to Armstrong's vivid prose.

What sets *Evenfall: The Golden Linnet* apart is its heart. Beneath the magic and danger lies a story about grief, hope, and the lengths we go to for those we love. The imperfections in Sam's relationships – with his friends, his father, and even himself – are portrayed with sensitivity, making his journey feel deeply authentic.

This debut novel, brimming with excitement and emotion, is an absolute treat for readers aged 10 and up. Whether you're a lifelong fantasy enthusiast or new to the genre, *Evenfall: The Golden Linnet* promises a compelling, immersive adventure – and with its final pages hinting at more to come, Alexander Armstrong's literary journey is one to watch.

It's going to get more attritional: Pat Cummins

PTI ■ PERTH
Australian captain Pat Cummins expects the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against arch-foes India to be more "attritional" as the two heavyweights of world cricket spar over five Test matches instead of the traditional four games. And given the enormity of the series, Cummins believes players would not have the time to be distracted by the IPL auction that would take place in Jeddah on Sunday, the third day of the match. The blockbuster series will be a survival of the fittest as Australia look to avenge successive losses on home soil when they go head-to-head from Friday. "The Border-Gavaskar Trophy has always been very tight every series, five Test-match series gets really attritional, it's a big one really," Cummins said at the pre-match press conference here on Thursday. Australia will be without their assistant coach Daniel Vettori, who was granted permission to leave the Perth Test and be at the two-day auction with his IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad. "Yeah, I think he is there in the auction. I don't think so (it will be a distraction). Dan has



blown over there, but he has been here for the whole prep. Done all the meetings, done all the chats, watching it. We came to know that anyway," Cummins said. "So, for the players, I don't think so. Most of these guys have been there in the auctions before. They know they can't really do anything. "You are a sitting duck and seeing whether you get selected or not. It doesn't... Doesn't make a difference to how we go about the first two days. It is not a distraction as far as I can see it," he added. The Australia captain admitted there will be pressure on the home team, especially after it lost the last four Test series against India, including the two humiliating reverses on own soil. "There will always be pressure when you are playing at home. India are a very talented side and it will be a good challenge. But we are not looking too far ahead," Cummins said. "It would be great to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. India are a great side but we are well prepared." The leading pacer also said that newcomer Nathan McSweeney should not try to imitate David Warner, the

legendary opener who retired from international cricket earlier this year. "He should play his natural game. He shouldn't try to imitate David Warner. That's not his game. As long as he makes the bowlers bowl again and again, that's his game," Cummins said of the man who is going to be handed his Test debut at Optus Stadium. Asked about India's talented all-rounder Nitish Reddy, Cummins said they shared the dressing room for IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad and praised the 21-year-old. "He is an impressive youngster. Didn't bowl much for SRH. He can swing the ball and is a really talented kid." Interestingly, both Australia and India will be led by fast bowling captains, a rarity in international cricket. While Cummins will lead Australia, Jasprit Bumrah will be in charge of the Indian team as regular skipper Rohit Sharma is currently on a paternity leave. "It should happen more (pacers leading teams)," Cummins said. In the past four series between the two teams, India have won on all four occasions, including back-to-back away Test series wins in 2018-19 and 2020-21.



We are not carrying baggage from New Zealand series, says Jasprit Bumrah

PTI ■ PERTH
India's stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah on Thursday insisted that his team is not carrying any baggage from the unprecedented 0-3 defeat at home against New Zealand as it embarks on a challenging Test series against fierce rivals Australia. The five-match Test series starts here on Friday. "When you win you start from zero but when you lose, then also you also start from zero. We are not carrying any baggage from India. Yes, we have our learnings from New Zealand series but those were different conditions and our results here have been different," said Bumrah, who is leading in the opening Test in the absence of Rohit Sharma, who is on paternity leave. Bumrah also said that the team has finalised its playing XI although he will reveal it only at the toss. "We have finalised our playing XI and you will get to know tomorrow morning before the start of the match," the skipper said.

Pujara backs KL Rahul at No. 3, believes Jaiswal can do a Warner



PTI ■ PERTH
Cheteshwar Pujara, who knows a thing or two about grinding the Australian attack in their den, on Thursday backed KL Rahul to bat at the vital number three slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, and said the swashbuckling Yashasvi Jaiswal is capable of doing what David Warner did in his prime. The five-match Test series begins here on Friday. "I don't know the batting order. I would prefer him (Rahul) at No. 3 because he has the experience to bat there," Pujara said in Star Sports press room. Rahul, however, is expected to open with youngster Yashasvi Jaiswal, while Karnataka's Devdutt Padikkal is being considered for No. 3 to maintain a left-right combination. "It seems the team is preferring Devdutt (Padikkal) at No. 3 for the left-right combination. He has batted at 5-6 and in the middle order. It will be easier to bat at No. 3 than opening. If he can bat at No. 3, it will be good." Pujara, currently sidelined from the Test set-up, praised Jaiswal and compared his batting with that of Australian great David Warner. "One of the most talented cricketers India has produced.... I'm very confident that going forward, he has a lot to prove. I know he will play a key role in this series if we have to win.



"His role would be one of the most important ones. He can play a role similar to what David Warner used to do for the Australian team. "Being an opener, he holds the key. He's mentally tough. He loves batting, hits a number of balls. He has a long way to go across the formats." Pujara said the youngsters must play with self-confidence and without the fear of failure. "I will tell them the first battle is a mental battle. Self-confidence and belief are needed to make runs in these conditions. When there is pace and bounce, there is a chance of the ball hitting the body. You have to come out of that fear," Pujara said. On tackling short-pitch deliveries in Australian conditions, Pujara said the batters will have to identify the deliveries they should leave. "As a batter, you need to understand your strengths. We often end up playing hook shots we aren't quite capable of. On Indian pitches, most short-pitched deliveries are below shoulder level. But in Australia, they're often above shoulder height. "As a batter, you need to identify which balls to leave and which to play. Those below the shoulders are the ones you can pull, but you need to be in control of the shot. Sometimes you leave the ball, and sometimes you pull. You can't have a set rule -- you just need to look at the ball

and play according to the situation. Be in the present moment," he said. **Kohli needs a start** Virat Kohli may be going through a lean patch but Pujara believes his past success in Australia will help him to turn things around. "There is a lot of expectation of him. The number of matches he's playing and the athlete Virat is, he doesn't get enough breaks in between. That is why sometimes, when you're not getting enough breaks, your body and confidence go down a bit. That's normal. "He has got some break. He's at a place where he likes to compete. If someone is having a go at him, he would like to give it back to the bowlers -- that's how he started his journey. "He has set high standards for himself. He has that awareness. He has been a leader and is probably the best in the circuit. He's aware of what's expected of him and how many runs he has to make." Under Kohli's captaincy on the 2017-18 tour of Australia, Pujara aggregated over 500 runs and played a significant role in India's historic Test series triumph. "I'm confident that once he gets going, he needs to spend some time in the game. He's capable of doing all things. Always leading from the front, it's about getting a 50-60-70. If he gets a hundred, then he will have a great series ahead," Pujara said of Kohli. "In every match, he is motivated, whatever the format. Definitely, he has worked on it. It's about getting that start and spending time at the crease." **Pant 2.0 a lot smarter** Rishabh Pant has been the architect of their epic triumph in the 2020-21 series, and the wicketkeeper-batter has returned after surviving a horrific car accident two years ago. Pujara feels the left-hander is a lot smarter now and will be one to watch out for. Australian bowlers struggle a bit to bowl to lefties. There's a different kind of enjoyment watching him. He's an attacking player who puts pressure on the bowlers. It becomes easy for me to play my natural game as they try to stop runs.

Spanish star Juan Mata joins ownership group of MLS expansion franchise San Diego FC

AP ■ SAN DIEGO
Spanish star and World Cup champion Juan Mata has joined the expansion San Diego FC's ownership group, making him the first active international soccer player to hold an ownership stake in Major League Soccer. Mata joins David Beckham as only the second international player to be involved in MLS ownership. "Joining San Diego FC as a partner is an exciting opportunity to help build something truly special in a city and league that are experiencing incredible growth," Mata said in a statement. He added that the commitment to the community by both the club and the Right to Dream



Academy "aligns perfectly with my own values. I look forward to contributing my experience and passion for the game and working alongside everyone here to build a club that inspires both on and off the pitch." He has been with the Western Sydney Wanderers of the Australian A-League since September. Mata has been a big name in international soccer for years. He won club honors in England, Spain, Turkey and Japan, and was a key player in the golden era of the Spanish men's national team which won the 2010 World Cup and the 2012 UEFA European Championship. A product of Real Madrid's youth academy, Mata began his professional

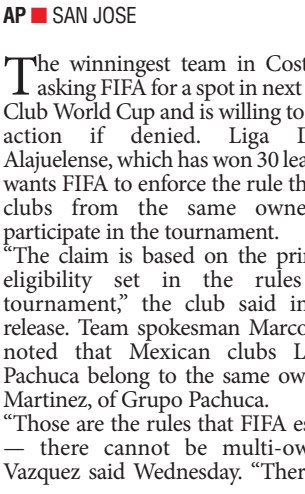
career with Real Madrid Castilla before transferring to Valencia CF in 2007, where he won the Copa del Rey the following year. Mata signed with Chelsea FC in 2011, where he was pivotal in helping the London club capture the UEFA Champions League, FA Cup, and UEFA Europa League titles, earning Chelsea's Player of the Year honors twice in that span. He joined Manchester United in 2014, winning the FA Cup, Europa League and EFL Cup in nine seasons. He joined Turkish side Galatasaray in 2022, where he celebrated his first league title, before signing with Japan's Vissel Kobe in 2023, where he won the league again. Mata founded the Common Goal initiative, pledging 1 per cent of his salary to social causes.

Liga Deportiva Alajuelense threatens FIFA with legal action in bid for spot at Club World Cup

AP ■ SAN JOSE
The winningest team in Costa Rica is asking FIFA for a spot in next summer's Club World Cup and is willing to take legal action if denied. Liga Deportiva Alajuelense, which has won 30 league titles, wants FIFA to enforce the rule that forbids clubs from the same ownership to participate in the tournament. "The claim is based on the principles of eligibility set in the rules of the tournament," the club said in a press release. Team spokesman Marco Vazquez noted that Mexican clubs Leon and Pachuca belong to the same owner, Jesus Martinez, of Grupo Pachuca. "Those are the rules that FIFA established -- there cannot be multi-ownership," Vazquez said Wednesday. "There are two

Spain, and they have all the details," Vazquez said of potential legal action. FIFA has not publicly reacted to the team's announcement and didn't immediately answer a request for comment. Alajuelense is the best-ranked team in Central America for the CONCACAF but 40th overall in the region. CONCACAF has four spots in the Club World Cup. The teams that qualified are: the Seattle Sounders, Monterrey, Leon and Pachuca. Lionel Messi's Inter Miami will participate as a guest of the host. All five clubs were announced for the Dec. 5 draw in Miami. In Mexico, besides Leon and Pachuca, there are another two companies that own two or more clubs in the first division. Grupo Caliente owns Tijuana and Queretaro, while Grupo Orlegi controls Atlas and Santos.

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Indian women's hockey team starts 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)
A new-look and much-fitter Indian women's hockey team started its 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey in the most perfect manner, producing a scintillating, unbeaten performance during its title-defending Asian Champions Trophy campaign here. It marked a resurrection of sorts for the side that had been left deflated after failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics this year. It marks a fresh beginning for the team and its seasoned coach Harendra Singh. Since taking over in April, Harendra's vision has been crystal clear -- to qualify for the 2028 Games. He always believed and emphasised that a successful ACT campaign will be the right start for the team's journey towards the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. And Harendra couldn't have asked for more from his wards. "I truly believe this victory will inspire more young girls to take up hockey and further elevate the sport in India. We are thrilled to be able to bring this win to our fans and our nation," said captain Salima Tete after the brilliant campaign. His primary focus since taking charge has been to improve the team's fitness, and fortitude and the Indian players performance in the just-concluded ACT was a testament to the fact that they have worked tremendously on these core areas and lived up to their coach's expectation. "While we celebrate this win, our focus remains on long-term goals. We are working hard every day, trusting the process, and staying dedicated to delivering our best in every tournament," Salima said.



"Our ultimate aim is to bring more laurels to India and make the country proud," she added. The Indians were impressive in most departments of the game and remained unbeaten in seven

matches, including the semifinal and final. What has been heartening for India was their ball transition from the backline to the opposition circle using both the flanks. The resolute show by the defense

line was also one of the hallmarks of India's performance as they conceded just two goals in seven games, while scoring as many as 29 themselves. Out of these 29 goals, 15 came from field efforts -- a heartening statistic --, 12 from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes. The ACT produced many stars for India, the prominent among them was 20-year-old young striker Deepika, who was the tournament's highest scorer with 11 goals to her name, including four from field play, six from penalty corners and one penalty stroke. In fact, five Indians were there in the top-10 scorers' list. Besides Deepika, Sangita Kumari (4 goals), Preeti Dubey (3), Navneet Kaur (3) and Lalrmsiami (3) were also impressive. Harendra worked extensively on the fitness of the players in the run up

to the tournament and it was clearly visible on the turf as the side played fast-paced, one-touch hockey throughout the tournament to trouble opponents, including reigning Olympic silver-medallists China whom they defeated 1-0 in the final to retain the title. If Deepika was a sensation upfront, vice-captain Navneet Kaur, Lalrmsiami and Neha were the fulcrum of India's midfield. Besides Deepika, young Sangita too was brilliant inside the circle, while Salima and 17-year-old Sunelita Toppo simply broke down the opposition defence with their dribbling skills and brilliant runs from the flanks. The defensive line was brilliantly held together by Udita, Sushila Chanu, Jyoti and Ishika Chaudhary. So good was their performance that Indian goalkeepers Savita Punia and Bichu Devi Kharibam were

hardly called into action in the tournament. But going forward, their is a vital area of concern for Harendra -- conversion rate from penalty corners. The statistics might show India scored 12 from penalty corners but the team's conversion rate was very poor. The Indians earned penalty corners aplenty in all the matches but lacked in execution and variation despite having as many as four options in the side in the form of Deepika, Udita, Navneet and Manisha Chauhan. But the future augurs well for the Indian team as the players look to gain much-needed exposure by rubbing shoulders with the best of the world in the first-ever four-team women's Hockey India League, starting in Ranchi on January 12 and finishing on January 26.