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GRAP-IV till Dec 2, was an abject failure: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Lambasting the authorities over the high level of air pollution in the National Capital and surrounding areas, the Supreme Court on Thursday termed the implementation of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP-IV) measures as an "abject failure" saying GRAP-IV measures in Delhi will continue till Monday (December 2, 2024), except for schools and colleges. A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih noted that the Court Commissioners' report showed an "abject failure" on the part of authorities to control trucks and other inter-state vehicles' traffic into Delhi to implement GRAP-IV curbs in letter and spirit. Meanwhile, amid escalating pollution levels in Delhi, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has empowered member secretaries of pollution control bodies in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi to take legal action against project proponents and agencies for gross violations of pollution control norms at construction sites. "We make it clear that all GRAP IV measures except the measures which are modified in respect of the schools will continue to operate till Monday. In the meantime, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) will hold a meeting and come out with the suggestion about moving from GRAP IV to GRAP III



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

or GRAP II. We also make it clear that it is not necessary that all measures which are provided in GRAP IV should be dispensed with," the Bench said. The SC further clarified that the entry of all trucks, except those carrying essential goods or providing essential services and LNG/CNG/electric/BS-VI-fitted trucks, were banned in the National Capital as per GRAP-IV measures. The Court also said that the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) will meet and suggest easing the easing of GRAP IV norms to GRAP III or II on December 2. The Court also said that action against officials for 'serious lapse' in implementation of GRAP-IV measures needs to be expedited.

The SC also asked the CAQM to consider implementing a "combination" of GRAP IV and III measures in New Delhi, and the measures have to be put on record for discussion on the next date of hearing on Monday. The CAQM's submission that show cause notice has been issued to authorities, including the Delhi Police Commissioner, under Section 14 of the CAQM Act, 2021 was also taken into record. The SC said it expects replies to the notice by Monday (December 2, 2024). On the issue of action against officials for a "serious lapse" in ensuring the GRAP IV curbs, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati said notices have been issued to special commissioner

(traffic), additional chief secretary, transport commissioner, commissioner (MCD) seeking their explanation by December 2. The Bench said the action against officials needed to be expedited. Bhati said the AQI was in "manageable limits" and the court should consider relaxing the norms. The Bench took note of a media report related to Punjab wherein a land record officer and president of the Sangrur Block Patwari Union, reportedly admitted to advising farmers to burn stubble after 4 pm, to avoid satellite detection. "We are not sure of the correctness of this news but if it is correct it is very serious. The (Punjab) state officials cannot permit any farmer to take advantage of the fact that

at present activities are being detected which take place during a few hours of the day. The Punjab government should immediately issue instructions to all officers not to indulge in any such activities," the Bench said. In a recent meeting, the CAQM issued strict directions to strengthen the monitoring and enforcement of orders issued for air pollution control at construction and demolition sites. The CAQM said member secretaries of pollution control boards and committees in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi, as part of the statutory sub-committee on "Safeguarding and Enforcement", could take legal action against project proponents and agencies responsible for gross violations at construction sites, according to a statement. It also directed the officials to shut down non-compliant sites and recover environmental compensation charges. The CAQM also reviewed the implementation of the GRAP, which prescribes measures to tackle pollution based on air quality levels, and emphasised the need for strict enforcement. Meanwhile, pollution levels in Delhi marginally increased to 325 at 4 pm, maintaining the air quality within the 'very poor' category as the national capital recorded the season's coldest morning of the season on Thursday with the minimum temperature settling at 10.1 degrees Celsius, 0.2 notches below normal.

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Security personnel conduct investigation at the site after a blast was reported near a PVR at Prashant Vihar, in New Delhi. Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Blast in Prashant Vihar, near Crime Branch office

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A low intensity blast occurred on Thursday near the Crime Branch office and PVR cinemas in Prashant Vihar area in Delhi's Rohini, this explosion took place about 500 meters away from the Central Reserves Police Force (CRPF) school where a bigger blast had ripped through the boundary wall. However, even though the blast on Thursday was of lower intensity, a 28-year-old driver was injured. The blast was reported by people at around 11.47 am when the residents in the vicinity heard a loud explosion. While initially they assumed it to be a gas cylinder blast, on stepping out they saw a cloud white smoke rising from the area, which had a bad chemical smell. The victim who sustained minor injuries has been identified as Chetan Kushwaha, who was talking on a phone next to a three wheeler parked near to the place where the blast took place. Kushwaha was working

as a driver for Kalpana Sharma, who told The Pioneer that he was waiting for the three-wheeler to be repaired. "When we heard the loud blast, we all immediately came out of our homes and saw Chetan injured. He had bloody red eyes, an injury on his lips and his clothes also got soiled and hence we took him to the doctor immediately. We also made a PCR call and the police came in sometime," she said, adding that ever since she inhaled the smoke from the explosion, she has had trouble in her throat. Around the crime scene, white powder marks were seen on the street. His son also said that when he rushed to the spot, he saw a white stone-like substance there. Coincidentally, this blast took place on a day when former Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal was holding a press conference on "the deteriorating condition of law and order in the Capital". The explosion took place in

front of a sweet shop near a park in the same area where a strong blast ripped through a wall of a CRPF school on October 20. The spot was near to the Crime Branch office, Fun City mall, St. Margaret's Senior Secondary school, Bansi Sweet among other residential places. The entire area was cordoned off immediately after a bomb detection team, dog squad, Special Cell, Crime Branch and Delhi Fire Services reached the spot. White powder was recovered from the spot. However, a probe is underway to ascertain more details about the explosion, officials said. A senior police officer said film screenings were underway inside the multiplex at the time of the blast. Panic ensued among visitors and residents as smoke engulfed the area. A video showing a cloud of smoke around the multiplex emerged on social media following the incident. The distance between the PVR and blast site is a few meters.

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Jaishankar may speak on Bangladesh issue in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, on Thursday, briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue of attacks on Hindus and other minorities, recent arrest of a monk Chinmoy Krishna Das and vandalism of a temple in Chattogram district in Bangladesh. Jaishankar is likely to update both houses of Parliament on Friday regarding these issues. Meanwhile, India on Thursday said it is Bangladesh's responsibility to ensure safety of minorities including Hindus there and places of worship. Making this assertion in Parliament, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh condemned the recent attacks on minorities there and expressed deep concern over the escalating violence in Bangladesh since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina-led government. Responding to a question on the issue in Rajya Sabha, he said "Several incidents of desecration and damages to Hindu temples and deities in Bangladesh have been reported in the past few months. The Government of India has expressed its concerns about such incidents, including the attack on a Puja Mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka, and the theft at the Jeshoreswari Kali temple at Satkhira during Durga Puja 2024." The minister reiterated India's stance, urging Bangladesh to uphold the protection of life and liberty for all its citizens, especially minorities.

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Meet Priyanka Gandhi Vadra MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Holding up a copy of the Constitution, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday took oath as a Lok Sabha Member Parliament, to begin her journey as an elected representative of the people five years after she joined active politics. Dressed in a cream Kasavu saree from Kerala, Priyanka Gandhi rose to take oath amid cheers of 'Jodo Jodo, Bharat Jodo' from the Congress benches. Priyanka entered into Lok Sabha with her brother and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and other Congress MPs. The MP from Wayanad in Kerala held up a red and black bound copy of the Constitution, which Rahul Gandhi has been displaying at his public meetings, as she took her oath. She took the oath with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, her mother and Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chief Sonia Gandhi, husband Robert Vadra, son Raihan and daughter Miraya watching from the galleries. The 52-year-old, who joins her mother Sonia and brother Rahul as an MP in what is a rare instance of three members of a family together in Parliament, took affirmation in Hindi. Congress MPs earlier met at the CPP office in the Parliament premises where Priyanka Gandhi was greeted and congratulated by leaders. After taking oath, Priyanka completed the formalities and then shared a warm hug with Rahul Gandhi. She then went



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra takes oath as a Member of Parliament in the Lok Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament. PTI

and sat in the fourth row with fellow Congress MPs. Ravindra Chavan (Congress), who won the Nanded by-poll also took oath in Marathi in the name of God. The House was adjourned after the oaths as opposition members came to the Well of the House and raised slogans, demanding a discussion on the Adani issue and the Sambhal violence. As MPs exited the House, leaders made a beeline to congratulate Priyanka Gandhi and on the steps of the Makar Dwar. Congress MPs gathered as Rahul Gandhi clicked a photograph of Priyanka Gandhi with the Samvidhan Sadan in the background. "It will strengthen Rahul Gandhi, the party and the principles of the Constitution because we are fighting for that," she told reporters when asked about the impact of her entering Parliament. Asked about taking the oath holding up the Constitution, Priyanka Gandhi said it signifies that "nothing is above the Constitution for us and we will continue to fight for it".

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CCI directs probe against Google on real money gaming apps

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fair trade regulator CCI on Thursday ordered a probe against Google and its affiliates for alleged unfair business practices with respect to listing of real money gaming apps on Play Store. While passing the order, CCI said the "the Commission directs the Director General ('DG') to cause an investigation to be made into the matter under the provisions of Section 26(1) of the Act". The Commission also directed the DG to complete the investigation and submit a consolidated report within 60 days. The probe follows a complaint by Winzo Games, accusing Google of abusing its dominant position and unfairly favouring select gaming categories, thereby distorting competition. In its 24-page order, the regulator noted that the selective inclusion of DFS and Rummy apps gives them an undue competitive advantage. "Direct access to end-users via the dominant Play Store provides a significant edge to DFS and Rummy apps, potentially disadvantaging other RMG applications," the Commission said in its order. The CCI also flagged concerns regarding Google's side-loading warnings displayed when users attempt to download RMG apps. These warnings, Winzo claimed, tarnish its reputation and discourage potential users from accessing its app.

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ED team attacked during raid at Bijwasan farmhouse

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A team of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was attacked and one of their officials suffered injuries on Thursday morning after it arrived at a farmhouse as part of its investigation into a cyber fraud-linked money laundering case related to the UAE-based Pyypl payment aggregator. An FIR has been registered, and authorities are now working to track down the attackers. According to the officials, the incident took place at a farmhouse that was raided by ED team led by Suraj Yadav in the Bijwasan area which falls under the Kapashera police station in southwest Delhi. The official who suffered injuries in the attack was identified as an additional director of ED. According to police, the farmhouse belonged to a man named Ashok Kumar, a Chartered Accountant (CA). A picture of a broken chair, kept in the farmhouse, was shared by the ED on X. Shortly after the incident, the ED said in a statement that the searches were part of a money laundering investigation against "organised" cyber crimes like Phishing,



Broken furniture is seen inside the premises of a farmhouse at Bijwasan area where an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team allegedly attacked during searches in a cyber fraud linked money laundering case, in New Delhi. PTI

QR code cheating and part-time job fraud leading to duping of many people. The agency said it analysed these cases with the help of the Indian cyber crime coordination centre (I4C) and the

Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). "It was found that an organised network of CAs and crypto traders was at work. Around 15,000 mule accounts were used to layer proceeds of cyber crimes. Subsequently, debit and credit cards were obtained which were used to top up virtual accounts on Pyypl and funds were layered to buy crypto-currency," the ED said. It said "incriminating" material including multiple PAN cards, bank cheque books, passbooks, pen drives, credit and debit cards, seals and CPUs have been seized. "At one premises at Bijwasan, suspect Ashok Sharma and his brother assaulted an ED officer and managed to escape after causing hurt. An FIR is being filed. Searches are on," it said. Sources said that the Chartered Accountant had a connection with a cyber app fraud case and the network was being run by some Chartered Accountants (CAs). The accused fled the scene in the ensuing chaos. After the attack, local police were called to the spot immediately to control the situation and ensure the safety of the officials.

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Think before you like, share, follow 'bad-characters' online

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Liking, sharing, or following social media posts or profiles, associated with gangsters and criminals can now put you at risk, as the Delhi Police have intensified their monitoring of such online activities. According to police sources, the social media profiles of 'bad-character' elements will be continuously scanned to zero-in on them. In police terms, 'bad-character' elements are those who are arrested or apprehended multiple times for crimes they commit and were sent to jail

or correctional homes, but they again involve themselves in criminal activities. A senior police official said, "We have directed all the police stations and posts in different districts of Delhi to keep a strict vigil on the social media activities of 'bad-characters.'" He added that a list will be prepared of gangsters which these 'bad-characters' are following. "Police of all the 15 districts and all units like Special Cell, Crime Branch, Railways and Metro were asked to prepare a list of those criminals who are following any gangsters on social media, liking or

sharing their posts on social media to know their associations with the gangsters," he said. The officer further said that many of the 'bad-characters' were arrested in the past for posing pictures or videos with firearms on social media. "During their interrogation, we got to know that they are doing such activities to increase followers on their social media profiles," he said. Another officer said that the social media monitoring team of the Delhi Police will keep an eye on different profiles who are sharing

Indian players love the challenge of playing in Australia: Rohit Sharma

PTI ■ CANBERRA

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Thursday hosted a reception for the travelling Indian cricket team ahead of its two-day pink ball practice match against PM's XI here from November 30. The game will take place at the Manuka Oval serving as good preparation for the day-night Test in Adelaide from December 6. India recorded their biggest

win on Australia soil when they hammered the hosts by 295 runs in the opening game of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Perth. Following the protocol, India skipper Rohit Sharma introduced all his teammates to Albanese, who praised heroes of the first Test including Jasprit Bumrah and Virat Kohli. "Anthony Albanese @AlboMP Big challenge ahead for the PM's XI at Manuka Oval this week against an amazing Indian



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, centre, poses for a photograph with members of the Indian cricket team during a reception at Parliament House in Canberra, Thursday, November 28, 2024. AP/PTI

side," the Prime Minister posted on X after the meeting at the Australian parliament. The PM's XI led by Jack Edwards also called on Albanese. Rohit also addressed the parliament briefly. In his speech, he highlighted the rich history of bilateral relations between India and Australia including their shared love for cricket. He also said Indian players love the challenge of playing in Australia and enjoy exploring the country and its

culture. India clinched back to back series wins Down Under and Rohit said the team is looking to build on that success and entertain both Australian and Indian fans. Cricket diplomacy is an integral part of India-Australia relations. Albanese, with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, had met players of both teams during a Test in Ahmedabad last year when the Australian Prime Minister was in India on an official visit.

MP CM concludes UK leg of two-nation tour

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
BHOPAL/NEW DELHI

Concluding the UK leg of his two-nation visit to seek investment proposals for Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday said he was delighted to have secured significant investment offers in healthcare, industry, mining, the service sector, and agriculture.

During his visit to the Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG), Chief Minister Yadav emphasised that research and academic studies are truly meaningful when they benefit society. He noted that the state is also making strides in this direction under the new education policy.

"Empowering students to tackle future challenges is a fundamental requirement of today's education system," he remarked. Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Yadav visited Warwick University in London and interacted with subject matter experts. He noted that the WMG campus, established by Baron Sushanta Kumar Bhattacharyya, houses over



30,000 students. The essence of research here lies in integrating innovation, benefiting both industries and society. "Through such efforts, we can progress while serving humanity," he added.

CM Yadav underlined that Madhya Pradesh has immense potential for growth in the automotive sector. He announced plans to explore opportunities for youth from the state to gain expertise at WMG. He invited experts to train professionals in the state. Efforts will be made to affiliate universities and technical institutions in Madhya Pradesh with WMG to foster a

collaborative exchange of ideas and practices. Sharing insights from his interaction with students from India, the Chief Minister said that the diversity at Warwick University is a model worth replicating in Madhya Pradesh. "We aim to foster MoUs between universities here and those in Madhya Pradesh to implement similar models and set up research centres within industrial campuses for the greater benefit of all," he said.

He underscored the importance of collaborative research between universities and industrial groups, stating that univer-

sities should partner with suitable organisations to establish self-sufficient research centres on their campuses. The Chief Minister further discussed the implementation of global best practices in skill development and education in Madhya Pradesh, fostering exchange programmes for experts and students.

"I have come here as a flag-bearer of Sanatan culture. Universities and colleges are akin to Goddess Saraswati, and their benefits must reach humanity at large. While technology holds significance in this mechanised age, it must be guided by principles of righteousness. Sharing goodness globally ensures collective progress and welfare," he said.

Upon his arrival at WMG, the Dean greeted the Chief Minister with a bouquet. In return, Yadav honoured Prof Robin Clark with a Chandori stole as a token of respect for his outstanding contributions. During his visit, Yadav also visited the Swaminarayan Temple in London and met members of the Swaminarayan and ISKCON communities.

Nadda attacks AAP in Delhi for non-implementation of Central schemes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Thursday cited the Delhi High Court's sharp criticism of the Delhi government for not implementing the central government's Ayushman scheme to accuse the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of depriving the citizens of the national capital of the crucial health cover.

Nadda, who is also the BJP president, said on X, "It pains me immensely when States like Delhi have deprived its population by willfully not adopting it. The AAP govt has denied this crucial health cover from more than 6.5 lakh eligible families and all citizens of the age 70 years and above in Delhi."

"Now the Delhi High Court has also rapped the state govt for not implementing this people-centric scheme. It has validated our stand that democratic govt should adopt schemes that provide support and services to the masses irrespective



of political differences," he said, while sharing copy of a news report.

Nadda said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's progressive and citizen-centric leadership, India is implementing the "hugely popular scheme", Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, that provides free health cover of Rs 5 Lakh to each beneficiary family and now to all senior citizens of 70 years and above.

The Delhi High Court had on Wednesday expressed shock over the Delhi government reportedly not accepting financial aid through a Centre-

funded health scheme. A bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said it was "strange" that the Delhi government was not accepting Centre's aid when there was "no money" with it for its healthcare system. "You may have difference of opinion but in this case you are refusing aid... None of your machines are working. The machines have to work but you have no money actually," it said. CJ Manmohan went ahead to remark, "Today you are refusing Rs 5 lakh for the citizens. I am shocked."

Seven BJP MPs have moved the high court to direct the AAP government to implement the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMAY). The lawmakers in their PIL said Delhi was the only Union Territory where the beneficial healthcare scheme for the underprivileged was yet to be implemented. In the process, the underprivileged are getting deprived of the essential health coverage of Rs 5 lakh.

Court to pass verdict in Sajjan Kumar case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court is likely to deliver on Friday its verdict in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar. The case pertains to the alleged killings of two persons in Saraswati Vihar area during the anti-Sikh riots. Special Judge Kaveri Baweja had reserved the judgment after hearing final arguments in the case related to the killings of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh on November 1, 1984. Initially, an FIR was registered at Punjabi Bagh police station. Later, the case was investigated by a Special Investigation Team. On December 16, 2021, the court framed charges against Kumar for murder and several other offences. It has been alleged by the prosecution that the accused was leading a mob and upon his instigation, the gathering had burnt alive the two victims and had also damaged, destroyed and looted their household articles and other properties.

LG approves transfer of civil servants

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday approved the transfers and postings of 19 DANICS officers a day after Chief Minister Atishi approved the same following the concurrence of the National Capital Civil Services Authority (NCCSA). The list includes the name of 1996 batch DANICS officer Sanjeev Kumar who has been posted as Special Secretary in Administration Reforms, 2001 batch DANICS officer Vishwendra posted as Special Commissioner Transport and General Manager in Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC), 2001 batch DANICS officer S.S. Parihar posted as Special Secretary in Finance and Planning and 2007 batch DANICS officer Tanvir Ahmed posted as Deputy Commissioner of Excise.

NHAI directs field offices to mitigate impact of fog on highways

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

To counter reduced visibility due to foggy conditions on the National Highways during the winter season, NHAI field offices have been directed to take proactive mitigation measures to enhance visibility for the safety of National Highway users.

To enhance road safety during foggy conditions, mitigation measures have been classified under two heads of 'Engineering' and 'Safety Awareness' measures. The 'Engineering measures' include reinstalling missing/damaged road signs, rectifying faded or inadequate pavement markings, enhance visibility of safety devices by providing reflective markers, median markers, etc., providing transverse bar markings in habitations and accident-prone locations, providing solar blinkers on the median open-

ings and replacement of damaged hazard markers signs at diverging & merging locations. The 'Safety Awareness' measures underline incorporating steps to alert highway users of the reduced visibility conditions. These measures include use of Variable Message Signs (VMS) or electronic signages to display 'Foggy Weather Alerts' and speed limit messages, use of Public Address System warning commuters about driving speed limit of 30 km/hr in foggy areas, use of electronic billboards, radio, and social media for public service announcements as well as distribution of safety awareness pamphlets on Toll Plazas & Wayside Amenities during foggy conditions, installation of reflective tapes on full width of vehicles on the highways.

In addition, NHAI field offices have been directed to undertake night-time highway inspection on regular basis by team consist-

ing of NHAI officials, Independent Engineers, Concessionaire/Contractor to assess visibility on highway and identify locations for installing additional provisions as required. Also, Highway Patrol vehicles will be stationed near dense foggy stretches. The highway operation and maintenance team will carry red/green blinking baton for guiding traffic in case of accident and establish seamless collaboration with local law enforcement, ambulance services, and municipal authorities. NHAI team will also conduct joint drills with traffic police and exercises to ensure efficient coordination during fog-related emergencies.

Earlier, NHAI delegated financial powers for rectification of accident spots to its field officers and these can be utilised for providing engineering short term measures to enhance visibility during foggy weather and overall safety of road users

GRAP-IV till Dec 2, was an abject failure: SC

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The Air Quality Early Warning System said in a bulletin that while air quality will be in the "very poor" category till Saturday, it is further expected to worsen in the days after. The India Meteorological Department (IMD), meanwhile, said that a western disturbance is forecast is likely to influence India's northwestern regions in the coming days. IMD has also issued a yellow alert for Friday, warning people of a moderate to dense fog in the morning.

The Centre's Decision Support System (DSS) for Air Quality Management estimated that vehicular emissions contributed 21.61

per cent to Delhi's pollution on Thursday. Notably, there is a ban on entry of non-essential trucks from other states to Delhi and around four lakh vehicles are off the road due to stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan imposed in the Delhi-NCR. The contribution of the residential sector to air pollution is estimated to be 5.697 per cent, industries contributed 5.325 per cent, construction 3.175 per cent, energy sector 2.496 per cent, waste burning 2.144 per cent, road dust 1.616 per cent and others 1.624 per cent. The DSS provides daily estimates for vehicular emissions, while the data on stubble burning is typically available the following day.

Blast in Prashant Vihar...

From page 1

Hours after the blast, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi accused the Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government of failing to maintain law and order in the National Capital. According to the police sources, the Thursday morning explosion is similar to the blast that occurred outside the CRPF school's boundary wall in Prashant Vihar last month. "A similar kind of thick smoke was seen in the air in the October 20 explosion near the CRPF school. The white power was again recovered from the spot," a police officer said.

The Delhi Police, in a statement, said, "It was found that a very mild intensity explosion occurred near the wall of a small park. One individual suffered minor abrasion. He was instantly

taken to the BSA Hospital from where he was discharged after receiving first aid." However, locals also recalled the blast in CRPF school and said that this one has a very lower intensity comparatively. An eyewitness said that while the explosion was loud, except minor injuries nothing else was damaged. "My friend's car was parked just near the three-wheeler and no damage was reported," the 35 year old man said.

Another shopkeeper, who has his shop near the PVR, stated that these continuous blasts have turned what was once a safe place into an unsafe one. "It used to be a very safe place but I don't know what has happened that in the last two months the situation has changed. We are terrified because such incidents are happening frequently in this area," said 50 year old juice Mohar Singh.

Taj Mahal decays even as tourist revenue soars

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■
AGRA

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has turned the Taj Mahal, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, into a major revenue generator. Over the past three years, the ASI has earned Rs 91 Crore from ticket sales, while spending a mere Rs 9.41 Crore on its conservation, raising questions about its priorities.

According to data obtained through the Right to Information Act, between 2020-2021 and 2023-2024, the UNESCO World Heritage site generated Rs 91.23 Crore for the ASI. No other heritage site in India matches the revenue collected from the Taj Mahal. However, the disparity between earnings and expenditure has drawn criticism, with conservation efforts under scrutiny. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the ASI spent Rs 12 Crore on the Taj Mahal's preservation. Post-pandemic, despite a significant surge in tourist footfall, the expenditure has dropped to just Rs 9 crore, less than 10% of the revenue earned during the same period. The poor state of preservation became evident when plants were spotted growing on the main dome of the Taj Mahal two months ago. Photos of deteriorating stones at the Royal Gate, Shahi Masjid, Mehmankhana, and other structures went viral on social media throughout the year. Damage to intricate inlay work and stains caused by insect deposits along the Yamuna-facing walls have also marred the Taj Mahal's image.

During the three years before COVID-19, the ASI earned Rs 34.27 Crore from the Taj Mahal, spending Rs 12.37 Crore on its upkeep. The reduced post-pandemic expenditure raises concerns about the site's future, especially as tourist numbers continue to rise.



Rakesh Chauhan, President of the Hotel Association, pointed out the challenges faced by tourists, including long queues, limited amenities, and difficulties in obtaining tickets and shoe covers. "The revenue from the Taj Mahal should be reinvested to enhance tourist facilities and improve their overall experience," he said.

Prahlad Agrawal, President of the Agra Tourist Welfare Chamber, emphasised the need for better preservation and visitor amenities. "Increasing the number of wheelchairs and upgrading the museum can help disperse crowds," he suggested.

Shamshuddin, President of the Agra Approved Guides Association, added, "The sight of plants on the dome and crumbling stones tarnishes the Taj Mahal's reputation. Conservation and basic facilities need immediate attention to avoid long-term damage." Meanwhile, a Uzbek tourist, Murad, who visited the Taj Mahal with his elderly father, shared his frustration in a video after waiting over an hour to enter despite purchasing a Rs 1,300 ticket. He

demanded a separate queue for foreign visitors, a system that was previously in place. His video quickly went viral on social media, sparking debates about the ASI and CISF's management.

Murad, who has visited 72 countries, said, "India is my 73rd destination. The Taj Mahal is a marvel, but the entry process was exhausting for my elderly father." Previously, separate entry points for foreign tourists were available, but these have been discontinued despite the increased ticket prices.

Sandeep Arora, President of the Agra Tourism Development Foundation, criticised the disparity between ticket prices and facilities. "If tourists are paying higher prices, they deserve better amenities. Either provide equal services or standardise ticket rates," he argued.

CISF Commandant VK Dubey acknowledged the concerns. "Foreign tourists are advised to use the less crowded eastern gate. If separate queues for foreign visitors existed previously, we will review and consider reinstating this arrangement," he assured.

Mamata supports Center on Bangladesh

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA



Activists protest outside Bangladesh Deputy High Commission office in Kolkata, over the arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh. PTI

Chief Minister (CM) of West Bengal (WB), Mamata Banerjee, finally broke her silence on Bangladesh violence and the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das Prabhu, a monk of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) saying her party stood united with the Union government in that regard. "Bangladesh is a different country and we as a State have no jurisdiction in that regard. We have not supposed to interfere in their matters," the CM said adding she was "concerned" at what was happening in Bangladesh adding, "While we feel sorry inside, we follow the policies set by the Centre." The CM said that she had a talk with the ISKCON representatives on the matter. "I inquired about what had happened," she said in a guarded language. Her nephew and Trinamool Congress gener-

CCI directs probe against Google...

From page 1

Winzo also alleged that warnings on sideloading and payments were standard security measures aimed at safeguarding users. The regulator also found that Google's justifications for its pilot programme and advertising policies were inconsistent and ambiguous. "The long duration of Google's pilot programme, risks perpetuating the advantages conferred upon selected participants, such as DFS and Rummy apps. "This temporal extension amplifies the anti-competitive effects by ensuring these apps continue to enjoy preferential access and visibility, which other competitors are denied," the CCI noted.

Meet Priyanka Gandhi Vadra MP

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Priyanka Gandhi also met the Congress president after taking oath and took his blessings. Posting pictures of him blessing Priyanka Gandhi, Kharge said on X, "I am confident that Priyanka Gandhi will become a strong voice of the people of the country, especially women, in Parliament." Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi also expressed happiness over Priyanka Gandhi taking oath as an MP, saying "we are all proud". Sharing a photograph with his mother Sonia and Priyanka Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi posted in Hindi on his WhatsApp channel, "Of the people, by the people, for the people - Jai Hind."

Jaishankar may speak...

From page 1

"The Government has also called upon the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all minorities and their places of worship. The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, including minorities, rests with the Government of Bangladesh," Singh added.

In a related development, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) officials will brief the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs on the situation in Bangladesh on December 11, panel's chairperson Shashi Tharoor said on Thursday, expressing concern over the "troubling" developments in the neighbouring country. Asked whether the panel has sought a briefing from the MEA on the Bangladesh

situation, Tharoor said, "Yes, we have, we will be having a briefing on Bangladesh in a couple of weeks time on December 11. Next week, there are pending issues on which the foreign secretary will brief us on." Bangladesh's minority Hindus, which constitute only about eight per cent of the 170 million population, have faced over 200 attacks in 50-odd districts since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August five. Things took a turn for the worse this week after Hindu spiritual leader Das was arrested in a sedition case. He was later denied bail by a court, triggering protests by community members in various locations, including the capital Dhaka and the port city of Chattogram. Das was a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and was recently expelled.

ED team attacked during...

From page 1

Commenting on the incident, the Delhi Police in its statement said an information was received regarding manhandling an ED team at Bijwasan area. Kapashera Station House Officer (SHO) along with other staff reached the spot where the raid was being carried out. Two lady officers of the CRPF were also present in the raiding team of the ED.

According to the statement, Ashok Kumar Sharma, who is a chartered accountant (CA) by profession, owns the farm house. "Yash, who is a relative of Sharma, has been apprehended in connection with the attack and is being further interrogated," police in the statement said. It has been alleged that Sharma and Yash were allegedly involved in an attack on the ED team. Further investigations are on. Sources said the modus operandi involved layering funds through these accounts. Debit and credit cards linked to these accounts were used to transfer money to virtual accounts hosted by Pyypl, a UAE-based payment aggregator. The funds were then used to purchase cryptocurrency. According to ED, thousands of cyber crimes like phishing scams, QR code cheating and part-time job scams have been reported across the country. With the help of I4C and the Financial Intelligence Unit -



Collegium recommends Justice Manmohan Singh to SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium on Thursday recommended the appointment of Delhi High Court Chief Justice Manmohan as a judge of the Supreme Court. The decision was taken by the Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and also comprising Justices BR Gavai, Surya Kant, Hrishikesh Roy and Abhay S Oka. The Supreme Court is currently functioning with 32 judges as against its sanctioned strength of 34. Justice Manmohan has been serving as Chief Justice of Delhi High Court since September 2024. Before that, he served as its Acting Chief Justice since September 2023. He was born on December 17, 1962 and completed LLB from Delhi's Campus Law Centre in 1987. After more than two decades of practice as lawyer, Justice Manmohan was appointed as additional judge of the Delhi High Court on March 13, 2008 and was made permanent on December 17, 2009. His father, late Jagmohan was renowned bureaucrat, Union Minister and Governor of Jammu and Kashmir.

LG approves major changes in slum policy

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Eying on the upcoming Assembly polls and slum votes, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday approved major changes in slums and Jhuggi-Jhopri policy modifying it in situ rehabilitation including in terms of density relaxation, revised apportionment of land area for remunerative and non-remunerative component, Floor Area Ratio, clubbing of clusters for redevelopment spread across a radius of 0.05 kms. The modification, apart from providing right to dignified housing to the slum dwellers of the city, will also create affordable housing stock as well as commercial space for Delhi residents. As of September 2022, Delhi has 675 JJ clusters and an estimated population of about 21.6 lakh people. The decision to modify the slum and jj policy was taken at the meeting of the Delhi Development Authority on Thursday. After the approval,

the authority will send the proposal to Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs for further notification. According to DDA, the modification will allow make projects more viable and more players to come for in situ slum projects and thereby more houses to be built. In a bid to woo the slum dwellers in the upcoming assembly polls in Delhi, the leaders of ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the opposition BJP and the Congress are visiting the jhuggi clusters, meeting people and spending nights with them. AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal termed the BJP leaders visit as "jhuggi tourism". The AAP is hoping that Muslim and slum votes will help them to win the national capital while the Congress and BJP are hoping to dent AAP's vote bank. As per the modifications, an increased FAR of 500 has been allowed both for the residential as well as remunerative components in the

In-Situ Rehabilitation Projects on plots measuring 2000 sqm and above. This is a significant increase from 300 FAR to 500 FAR for the commercial component, while for the rehab component, FAR has been increased from 400 to 500. Under the new modifications, at least 40% of the total plot area will be utilized for residential purposes while the remaining area could be utilized for remunerative / commercial purposes. Further, any unutilized FAR in rehabilitation component, will also be allowed to be availed by the developers in the remunerative / commercial plot area. According to a statement issued by the authority, this decision will ensure more number of dwelling units for the slum dwellers as well as more commercial space to make the project financially viable for the developers. This will also ensure that 100 percent of the beneficiaries (slum dwellers) will be accommodated in-situ.

In terms of allowing clubbing of plots over an area spread over 05 kms, the developer will be able to redevelop a particular site only for the rehabilitation of the slum dwellers in modern multi-storey complexes, while the other site could be utilized exclusively for development of residential / commercial complexes for remunerative use by the developer. This initiative will provide eligible residents of informal JJ clusters with modern housing, along with essential public amenities. This comes as a major step towards social empowerment, as the programme offers ownership titles to residents, giving them a sense of security and stability. By upgrading housing and infrastructure, the In-Situ Slum Rehabilitation (ISR) programme supports the integration of slum dwellers into the formal urban fabric, contributing to social mobility and improving the overall quality of life for the urban poor.

Power demand in winter months expected to follow record-breaking summer's trend

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Power demand in winter months in Delhi is expected to follow the record-breaking summer's trend. During summer 2024, the Delhi reached an unprecedented peak power demand of 8656 MW, BSES in a press statement said here on Thursday.



Forecasts from SLDC (State Load Dispatch Centre) indicate that Delhi's peak power demand this winter could surpass 6300 MW, setting a new seasonal high. Last winter, the peak hit 5816 MW, marking the highest level recorded in the national capital. Within the BRPL and BYPL areas, winter peaks previously hit 2529 MW and 1210 MW, respectively, this winter, they are projected to exceed 2600 MW for BRPL and 1240 MW for BYPL. To deliver reliable power year-round, BSES discoms are focusing on strategic power planning, precise demand forecasting, and maintaining a robust distribution network. These measures are set to ensure consistent power availability for more than 50 lakh consumers covering two crore residents in South, West, East and Central Delhi during the coming winter months. To maintain a reliable and eco-friendly supply, BSES has secured over 2000 MW of renewable energy. This green power mix includes 840 MW of solar power, 546 MW of hydro power, 500 MW of wind energy, 40 MW of waste-to-energy, and over 180 MW from rooftop solar installations across Delhi's neighborhoods, sources said. With this diverse mix, up to 53% of BSES' peak winter power demand—expected to exceed 3900 MW—will be met through green energy. To ensure consistent power availability, BSES discoms are leveraging mechanisms like "Banking," "Power Exchange," and maintaining "Spinning Reserves." Sif demand unexpectedly spikes, BSES is prepared to secure short-term power from the exchange. Advanced load forecasting will also enhance reliability by ensuring demand is predicted

2.25 lakh applications submitted during SSR 2025: CEO Vaz

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Delhi Chief Electoral Officer Alice R Vaz said on Thursday that around 2.25 lakh applications were submitted during the Special Summary Revision (SSR) 2025, which aims to ensure a robust and accurate electoral roll. The claims and objections period, which commenced on October 29, 2024, concluded on November 28, 2024, as scheduled; however, the process will continue as part of the ongoing updates to maximise voter participation, an official statement of the CEO said. The SSR process involves updating the electoral roll through pre-revision and revision activities. "A healthy and accurate voter list is crucial to ensure that only eligible citizens can vote and to eliminate instances of bogus voting," Vaz said. As part of pre-revision activities, booth-level officers (BLOs) conducted a door-to-door verification from August 20, 2024, identifying 1.62 lakh cases of additions, deletions, and corrections, the statement said. This included verifying new voters turning 18 by October 1, 2025, removing entries of deceased or shifted voters, and addressing multiple entries, it added. Polling station rationalisation was also carried out, leading to the addition of 123 new polling locations and the removal of 53 outdated ones, ensuring improved accessibility for Delhi voters. The net increase of 70 locations reflects the

Election Commission's commitment to enhancing voter convenience, it said. According to the statement, special camps held on November 9-10 and November 23-24 witnessed high public participation, with approximately 45,000 forms submitted for additions, corrections, and deletions. The submitted claims and objections will be reviewed and finalised by December 24, 2024, it said. Meanwhile, citizens who missed the deadline can still file Form-6 for enrolment and other forms for updates via the Voter Helpline App, ECI's Voters' Portal, or voter centres, it added. CEO Vaz emphasised that voters must ensure they are enrolled in only one constituency and avoid multiple entries, as this is a punishable offence under the Representation of People Act, 1950. "In case any elector has permanently shifted or expired, any elector of that particular Assembly Constituency can file Form-7 objecting such entry in the electoral roll. After filing of Form-7, notices are issued to the Objector and the Objectee through speed post as per relevant guidelines of the ECI except registered death cases. If the Elector fails to respond, name is deleted from the electoral roll. ERO concerned is to follow the prescribed procedure laid down by the ECI before deletion of any name from the electoral roll and after giving sufficient opportunity to the elector concerned," it said.

CM Atishi accuses Centre of failing to maintain law and order in wake of blast

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Hours after a blast near HPVR Prashant Vihar in Rohini, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi accused the BJP-led central government of failing to maintain law and order in the national capital. In a press conference, CM Atishi condemned the blast, which she said was the second such incident in the last two months in the same locality. She claimed the situation indicated a larger breakdown in law enforcement and safety measures. "This is a breakdown of law and order in the national capital," Atishi said, referring to the similar blast near a CRPF school in the same area earlier this year. She also pointed fingers at Union Home Minister Amit Shah, accusing him of neglecting the safety of Delhiites. "The BJP and Home Minister Amit Shah are respon-



sible for this situation. They are failing in their only responsibility in the capital," she added, mentioning reports of extortion calls being made from areas near the home minister's residence. Earlier, addressing a press conference on law and order, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal

lashed out at the BJP over the deteriorating law and order situation in Delhi. Kejriwal raised questions aimed at Union home minister Amit Shah. "What's happening in Delhi? Would he agree that he is unable to manage Delhi? Who should the people of Delhi turn to for security? Do women feel safe in Delhi?" Kejriwal said. Kejriwal's comments came

amid growing concerns over safety, especially for women in the national capital. He cited reports of extortion threats, shootings, and rising public crimes, claiming that these had become an unfortunate norm under BJP's rule. According to Kejriwal, the atmosphere in Delhi is one of fear and insecurity. Women feel unsafe stepping out after 7pm, and parents are increasingly worried about their daughters going to college," he said. Kejriwal further expressed his frustration at the lack of action from the central government, particularly in addressing crimes and providing a sense of safety to residents. His remarks come just months before the Delhi assembly elections, where AAP and BJP are already at odds over issues of governance and law enforcement.

1. Under the provisions of the Electricity Act, 2003, Delhi Electricity Reform Act, 2000 to the extent applicable, Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (Hon'ble DERC or the Hon'ble Commission) (Business Plan) Regulations, 2023, DERC (Business Plan) Regulations, 2019, DERC (Business Plan) Regulations, 2017 and DERC (Terms and Conditions for Determination of Tariff) Regulations, 2017 issued by DERC vide Order dated 31/01/2017, DERC (Terms and Conditions for Determination of Wheeling Tariff and Retail Supply Tariff) Regulations, 2011 issued by the Hon'ble Commission vide Order dated 02/12/2011, DERC Order dated 22/10/2014 for extension of Multi year Tariff (MYT) Regulations 2011 by one year for FY 2015-16 and DERC (Terms and Conditions for Determination of Wheeling Tariff and Retail Supply Tariff) Regulations, 2007 dated 30/05/2007 applicable to erstwhile MYT Period for FY 2007-08 to FY 2011-12, BSES Yamuna Power Limited (hereinafter referred to as 'BYPL') has filed Petition for approval of True up of expenses upto FY 2022-23 and Annual Revenue Requirement (ARR) & Tariff for FY 2024-25 before the Hon'ble Commission. The salient features of the Petition (being Petition No. 16/2024) filed by BYPL and admitted by the Hon'ble Commission vide its Order dated 07/06/2024 are tabulated below:

2. Salient Features:

| Sr. No. | Particulars | UoM | FY 2022-23 | FY 2024-25 | FY 2024-25 |
|---------|---|---------|------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | (Actual) | (Projected as per BPR 2019) | (Projected as per BPR 2023) |
| A | Energy Input | MU | 7,501.1 | 7,955 | 7,955 |
| B | Energy Billed | MU | 6,958.3 | 7,355 | 7,355 |
| C | Distribution Loss for the year | % | 7.24% | 7.54% | 7.54% |
| D | Net Power Purchase Cost (including Transmission charges) | ₹ Crore | 4,403.4 | 4,670.2 | 4,670.2 |
| E | O&M Expenses | ₹ Crore | 830.2 | 928.2 | 528.1 |
| F | Additional O&M Expenses | ₹ Crore | 143.7 | 278.2 | 474.1 |
| G | Claim pursuant to Hon'ble APTEL Judgment dated 31/08/2021 | ₹ Crore | - | 105.8 | 105.8 |
| H | Depreciation | ₹ Crore | 195.8 | 233.0 | 233.0 |
| I | Return on Capital Employed (ROCE) | ₹ Crore | 415.2 | 511.4 | 473.7 |
| J | Less: Non-Tariff Income | ₹ Crore | 104.9 | 104.9 | 104.9 |
| K | Less: Income from Open Access | ₹ Crore | 22.9 | - | - |
| L | Add: Carrying Cost | ₹ Crore | 280.2 | - | - |
| M | Aggregate Revenue Requirement [M=(Sum of (D to I)-J-K+L)] | ₹ Crore | 6,140.6 | 6,622.0 | 6,380.1 |
| N | Revenue available at existing tariff | ₹ Crore | 5,641.2 | 4,807.7 | 4,807.7 |
| O | Less: Distribution Loss Target Incentive | ₹ Crore | 35.3 | - | - |
| P | Less: Collection Efficiency Target Incentive | ₹ Crore | 62.3 | - | - |
| Q | Less: Incentive on Surplus Power Sale Rate | ₹ Crore | 13.6 | - | - |
| R | Net Revenue Available (R=N-O-P-Q) | ₹ Crore | 5,530.0 | 4,807.7 | 4,807.7 |
| S | Net Revenue (Gap)/Surplus (S=R-M) | ₹ Crore | (610.6) | (1,814.3) | (1,572.5) |

3. Capitalisation

| Sr.No. | Particulars | UoM | FY 2022-23 | FY 2024-25 |
|--------|----------------------|---------|------------|------------|
| A | Gross Capitalization | ₹ Crore | 289.3 | 522.0* |

*Gross amount including consumer contribution for deposit works

4. Revenue Gap proposed to be recovered through Tariff Hike during FY 2024-25

| Sr. No. | Particulars | UoM | FY 2024-25 (as per BPR 2019) | FY 2024-25 (as per BPR 2023) |
|---------|---|---------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| A | Annual Revenue Requirement | ₹ Crore | 6,622.0 | 6,380.1 |
| B | Revenue at existing tariff | ₹ Crore | 4,807.7 | 4,807.7 |
| C | Revenue (Gap)/Surplus (C=B-A) | ₹ Crore | (1,814.3) | (1,572.5) |
| D | Less: Revenue Gap on account of Power Purchase cost proposed to be recovered through PPAC | ₹ Crore | (1,355.9) | (1,355.9) |
| E | Net Revenue Gap proposed to be recovered through cost reflective Tariff (C-D) | ₹ Crore | (458.4) | (216.6) |

- 5. Tariff Rationalisation measures proposed**
- Implementation of Regulation-130, Regulation-131 and Regulation-132 of the DERC (Terms and Conditions for Determination of Tariff) Regulations, 2017.
 - Time bound recovery of Regulatory Assets/ Revenue Gap.
 - Recovery of Tariff Entitlements arising out of various Judgment of Hon'ble Supreme Court/ Hon'ble Tribunal/ Hon'ble Commission through a separate surcharge.
 - Removal of Capping and allowance of short term purchase in PPAC.
 - Cross Subsidy as per National Tariff Policy, 2016.
 - Revision of Security Deposit on 2-months average Billing.
 - Lead plus Lag metering for high voltage consumers.
 - High Charges on Sanctioned Load/ Contract Demand or MDI (whichever is higher) for Domestic Consumers.
 - Surcharge on Excess load for Domestic Consumers.
 - Review of Time of Day Tariff.
 - Tariff for EV Charging Stations to be in parity with other SERCs.
 - Different TOD regime for EV charging stations.
 - Delivery of E-bill to all Consumers.
 - Collection of nominal fees for certain services.
 - Collection Charges to be provided on collection of Pension Trust Surcharge.
 - Proposal of Green Tariff option for Consumers.

6. Performance of BYPL during FY 2022-23

| Sr. No. | Performance Standard | Hon'ble Commission Target for Standards of Performance | % Achieved during FY 2022-23 |
|---------|---|--|------------------------------|
| 1. | Power Supply Failure | | |
| (i) | Continuous power failure affecting individual consumer and group of consumer upto 100 connected at Low voltage supply, excluding the failure where distribution transformer requires replacement. | 95% | 99.0% |
| (ii) | Continuous power failure affecting more than 100 consumers connected at Low voltage supply excluding the failure where distribution transformer requires replacement. | 95% | 96.0% |
| (iii) | Continuous power supply failure requiring replacement of distribution transformer. | 95% | 100.0% |
| (iv) | Continuous power failure affecting consumers connected through High Voltage Distribution System (HVDS) and not covered under (i) & (ii) above | 95% | 100.0% |
| (v) | Continuous scheduled power outages | 95% | 100.0% |
| (vi) | Replacement of burnt meter or stolen Meter | 95% | 98.0% |
| 2. | Period of Scheduled Outage | | |
| (i) | Maximum duration in a single stretch | 95% | 100.0% |
| (ii) | Restoration of supply by 6:00 PM | 95% | 100.0% |
| (iii) | Faults in street light maintained by the licensee | 90% | 99.0% |
| 3. | Reliability Indices | | |
| (i) | Percentage billing mistakes | Shall not exceed 0.2% | 0.01% |

7. Augmentation of Distribution Network during FY 2022-23

| Sr. No. | Particulars | UoM | Additions during FY 2022-23 |
|---------|-------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| (i) | No. of Power Transformers | Nos. | 2 |
| (ii) | EHV Capacity | MVA | 59 |
| (iii) | Shunt Capacitors | MVar | 7.2 |
| (iv) | No. of Distribution Transformers* | Nos. | 29 |
| (v) | Distribution Transformer Capacity** | MVA | 62.4 |
| (vi) | No. of 11 kV Feeders | Nos. | 10 |
| (vii) | Length of 11 kV Cables | ckms. | 83.6 |
| (viii) | No. of LT Feeders | Nos. | 547 |
| (ix) | Length of LT Lines laid | ckms. | 150.1 |

*Excludes HVDS DT (Nos.) added during FY 2022-23
**Includes HVDS DT Capacity (MVA) added during FY 2022-23

- 8. Peak Demand of BYPL - Peak Load of 1752 MW was met during FY 2022-23.**
9. In accordance with the provisions of the DERC Comprehensive (Conduct of Business) Regulations, 2001 notified by the Hon'ble Commission, the consumers and stakeholders are requested to submit the comments/suggestions on the above Petition. The comments/suggestions may be sent to the Secretary of the Hon'ble Commission at the following address latest by 16/12/2024 or date of Public Hearing whichever is later. The comments/suggestions may be submitted personally or by post or e-mail to the Hon'ble Commission at the details mentioned below:
- THE SECRETARY**
DELHI ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION
Viniyamak Bhawan, C-Block, Shivalik, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110 017.
Email id: secyderc@nic.in Telefax: 011-41080417
10. The Hon'ble Commission may hold a Public Hearing (virtually/ in person) with the stakeholders; and, the date of hearing may be notified separately.
11. The complete Petition can be downloaded from the website of the Hon'ble Commission (www.derc.gov.in) and the website of the BYPL <http://www.bsesdelhi.com>. A soft copy of the Petition may be obtained in CD on payment of ₹25/- per CD or a copy of the Petition may be purchased from the BYPL Head Office located at Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, New Delhi-110032 on working day till 16/12/2024 or date of Public Hearing, whichever is later, between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM on payment of ₹100/- either by cash or by Demand Draft/Pay Order in favour of "BSES Yamuna Power Limited" payable at New Delhi.

J and K, internal security, pro-Khalistan elements to figure at DGP, IGP's conference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Issues related to internal security, Jammu and Kashmir, pro-Khalistan elements and cyber crimes are likely to be discussed at the three-day conference of top police officers in the country beginning Friday in Bhubaneswar, officials said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval among others will attend the Directors General of Police (DGP) and Inspectors General of Police (IGP) conference where Maoist menace, challenges posed by AI tools and threats emanating from drones are also expected to be discussed. About 250 officers of DGP and IGP ranks will physically attend the conference while more than 200 others will

participate in it virtually. Many officers have been tasked with delivering presentations on specific subjects such as counter-terrorism, online fraud, cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, activities of pro-Khalistani groups and left wing extremism (LWE) among others, an official said. There will be detailed deliberations on how to face all these emerging internal security challenges. While the home minister will inaugurate the conference, the prime minister will be present on the remaining two days and deliver the concluding address on Sunday. The conference also provides an opportunity to identify tangible action points and monitor their progress, which is also presented before the prime minister every year. The conference is the culmination of extensive delibera-



tions involving police and intelligence officers from district, state and national levels on identified themes, the official said. Best practices from states and Union territories under each of the themes will be presented at the conference so that the states can learn from each other. Since 2014, the prime minister has taken a keen interest

in the DGP conference. Free flowing thematic discussions over breakfast, lunch and dinner have also been planned in this year's conference. This will provide an opportunity to the senior police officials to share their views and recommendations with the prime minister on key policing and internal security issues affecting the country. Till 2013, the annual meet was

held in New Delhi. The following year, after the Modi government came to power, it was decided to hold the event, organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB), outside the national capital. Accordingly, the conference was organised at Guwahati in 2014, Dhordo in Rann of Kutch in 2015, National Police Academy, Hyderabad in 2016;

BSF Academy, Tekanpur in 2017; Kevadiya in 2018; IISER, Pune in 2019; Police Headquarters, Lucknow in 2021; National Agricultural Science Complex in Pusa, Delhi in 2023 and Jaipur in 2024. Continuing with this tradition, the conference is being organised in Bhubaneswar this time. Number of business sessions and topics has increased significantly, with a focus on improving policing in the service of the people. Before 2014, the deliberations largely focused on national security matters. Since 2014, these conferences have a twin focus on national security as well as core policing issues, including prevention and detection of crime, community policing, law and order and improving the police's image, among others, another official said. Earlier, the conference was

Delhi-centric with officers coming together only for the meet. Residing on the same premises over two to three days has served to build a heightened sense of unity among officers of all cadres and organisations since 2014, the official added. Direct interaction of the police's top brass with the head of government has resulted in a convergence of views on crucial challenges faced by the country and the emergence of doable recommendations, the official further said. In the past few years, the topics have been selected after detailed discussions with the highest echelons of the police service. Once selected, several interactions on presentations are held before committees of DGPs to encourage participation and incorporate ideas from the field and from younger officers.

As a result, all presentations are now broad-based, content-intensive and carry a set of cogent and actionable recommendations. Since 2015, detailed follow-up of recommendations of past conferences has become the norm and is the topic of the first business session which is attended by the prime minister and the home minister, the official said. Recommendations are tracked closely by the conference secretariat, led by the IB with the help of nodal officers in the states. Decisions made in the past few conferences brought in significant policy changes, leading to improvement of policing, including setting higher standards for effective policing in rural and urban areas and improved methods of modern policing based on smart parameters, the official added.

LS extends tenure for Waqf Bill Joint Committee amid Opp walkout

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday adopted a resolution to extend the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill till the last day of the Budget session of Parliament next year. Committee Chairman and BJP leader Jagdambika Pal moved the resolution in the Lok Sabha, which approved it with a voice vote. The parliamentary panel's meetings have become a virtual battleground between the opposition and the ruling party members, who have been vociferously debating the changes to the Waqf Bill proposed by the Government. On Wednesday, the opposition members of the committee staged a walkout and slammed Pal for asserting that the panel's draft report was ready. Pal and the BJP members of the committee then reached out to opposition members and indicated their willingness to press for an extension



of the committee's deadline of November 29 to submit its report to the Lok Sabha. The Lok Sabha had constituted the committee on August 8 and asked to submit its report on the last day of the first week of the Winter session, which is on Friday. Following the last meeting of the committee on November 21, Pal had said its draft report is ready. He indicated that the committee's consultation with stakeholders is over and its members will now discuss the report and suggest changes, if any, before it is adopted. The opposition

members took strong exception to this stand in Wednesday's meeting and soon stormed out. They claimed that Birla had assured them that its tenure would be extended. Opposition parties have stridently criticised the amendments proposed by the bill in the existing Waqf Act, alleging they violate the religious rights of Muslims. The ruling BJP has asserted that the amendments will bring transparency in the functioning of the waqf boards and make them accountable.

LeT member extradited from Rwanda in CBI, NIA, Interpol op

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Rwanda extradited to India on Thursday a member of Pakistan-based terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) facing an Interpol Red Notice in an operation coordinated by the NIA and the CBI. Salman Rehman Khan, a member of the internationally proscribed terrorist organisation, had assisted in providing arms, ammunition and explosives to further terrorist activities in Bengaluru, officials said. "The Global Operations Centre of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has closely coordinated with the NIA and Interpol National Central Bureau - Kigali for the return to India from Rwanda of Salman Rehman Khan, wanted by the NIA for terror-related offences," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had lodged a case in 2023 related to criminal conspiracy to spread terror in Bengaluru, they said. An FIR was also registered at Hebbal Police Station, Bengaluru.



Khan, who was previously imprisoned in a POCSO case (2018-2022), had allegedly facilitated the collection and distribution of explosives for other terror accused after being radicalised and recruited during his incarceration by T Naseer, a life convict in a terror case, according to the NIA probe. Naseer had allegedly orchestrated the radicalisation and subsequent criminal activities to further LeT operations in the coun-

try besides plotting his escape en route to the court from the prison, the agency said. When the terror module was busted, Khan escaped from the country, it said. NIA chargesheeted him in stringent anti-terror law and Indian Penal Code and court declared him a fugitive," it said. "The CBI on request of the NIA had got a Red Notice issued against the subject from Interpol on August 2, 2024. It was circulated to all

law enforcement agencies globally for tracking of the wanted criminal," the CBI statement said. Based on the Red Notice, he was apprehended by authorities in Kigali, Rwanda. The information was passed on to the CBI which is the designated agency for coordination of Interpol affairs in India and the NIA. After legal proceedings, he was extradited to India. "He was returned to India on

28.11.2024 by a security team from NIA," the CBI statement said. The return of Khan comes soon after similar operations in coordination with Interpol wherein two accused -- one wanted by the CBI and another by the Kerala Police -- were brought back from Saudi Arabia. Barkat Ali Khan, who had an Interpol Red Notice, was wanted in a 2012 case of rioting and use of explosive substances. He was brought back from Saudi Arabia on November 14. Raihan Arabikkalalarikkal, who also had an Interpol Red Notice against him and was wanted by police in Pattambi, Kerala for committing rape and sexual offences against a minor, was brought from Saudi Arabia on November 10. "The CBI, as National Central Bureau for Interpol in India, coordinates closely with all Law Enforcement Agencies in India for cooperation over Interpol channels. Since 2021, as many as 100 wanted criminals, including 26 this year, have been returned to India through coordination via Interpol channels," the statement said.

Over a third of children under five enrolled in anganwadis are stunted: Government data



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Painting a worrying picture, the latest government data shows that over a third of children under five enrolled in anganwadis— childcare centers—are stunted, a condition that signals long-term nutritional deficiencies and developmental setbacks. The findings, shared by Union Women and Child Development Minister of State Savitri Thakur in response to a Rajya Sabha query, paint an alarming status of children's health across the country. As of the latest figures, 7.54 crore children under five years old are enrolled in anganwadis and registered on the Poshan Tracker, a digital platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) to monitor nutritional outcomes and ensure effective delivery of services. Out of these children, 7.31 crore were assessed for growth parameters, revealing that 38.9 per cent are stunted, 17 per cent are underweight, and 5.2 per cent are wasted. Stunting, wasting, and being underweight are all forms of malnutrition, which indicate serious deficiencies in a child's nutrition, leading to long-term health and developmental issues. The statistics are equally concerning for a broader age group of children aged 0-6 years. With a projected population of

16.1 crore children in this category in 2021, around 8.82 crore are enrolled in anganwadis. Growth measurements taken for 8.55 crore children in this group show that 37 per cent are stunted and 17% are underweight. The findings indicate the enduring problem of child malnutrition in India, which is primarily linked to an imbalance in energy and nutrient intake. Malnutrition can lead to developmental delays, weakened immune systems, and increased vulnerability to diseases, thereby impeding a child's overall well-being and future potential. The Poshan Tracker plays a crucial role in tracking and improving these outcomes, aiming to ensure that children receive the necessary nutritional support to thrive. However, the high incidence of stunting, underweight, and wasting among India's young children indicates that significant efforts are still needed to address the root causes of malnutrition, which include poverty, lack of access to nutritious food, and insufficient healthcare resource. A child is considered stunted if their height is below the recommended level for their age. A child is considered wasted if their weight is below the recommended level for their height while a child is considered underweight if their weight is below the recommended level for their age.

Survey of Ajmer Sharif: CPI(M) seeks SC's intervention

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) on Thursday sought Supreme Court's immediate intervention on a local court in Ajmer's decision to entertain a petition seeking a survey of the Ajmer Sharif shrine. Terming the local court's decision as unwarranted and without legal standing, the CPI(M) polit bureau said that the decision goes against the provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which decrees that no legal dispute can be raised on a religious place that existed prior to August 15, 1947. A local court in Ajmer on Wednesday directed that notices be issued to the dar-gah committee, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs



and the Archaeological Survey of India in a civil suit claiming there was a Shiva temple in the shrine of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti. The suit, filed in September, sought directions to start worship at the site. "The decision of a civil court in Ajmer, Rajasthan, to entertain a petition seeking a survey of the Ajmer Sharif dargah to ascertain if there was a temple beneath it is unwarranted and has no legal standing. It goes against the provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which decrees that no legal dispute can be raised on a religious place that existed prior to August 15, 1947. "The violation of this Act has already resulted in the flawed decision with regard to the

survey of the masjid in Sambhal that has led to violence and the death of five persons," said CPI(M) in a statement. The notice came days after four people were killed in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal in violence following a local court ordering a survey of a Mughal-era shrine, which petitioners said was built after destroying an old temple. The Left party also said that the Supreme Court must immediately intervene to put an end to such legal proceedings, in line with the Places of Worship Act, which the apex court itself had upheld in its 2019 Ayodhya judgment. The Places of Worship Act states that the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, must be maintained.

More than 1.12 crore public grievances redressed in past five years using Govt portal: Jitendra Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

More than 1.12 crore public grievances were redressed in the last five years, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. These complaints were raised on the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) portal -- pggportal.Gov.In. "A total of 1,12,30,957 grievances were redressed from 2020-2024 and an annual all-time high of 23,24,323 grievances have been redressed on CPGRAMS portal from January-October, 2024," he said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. The average resolution time has come down from 28 days in 2019 to 13 days in 2024, Singh said. The government has adopted the 10-step reforms of CPGRAMS to make grievance redressal timely, meaningful and accessible and mapped



103,183 grievance officers on the CPGRAMS portal. "This helped bring down the pendency in the Government of India to its lowest level of 54,339 public grievances as on 31 October 2024," the minister said. The government also issued comprehensive guidelines for effective redressal of public grievances on August 23, 2024. These guidelines envisage integration of various public grievance platforms, creation of dedicated grievance cells in ministries/departments, appointment of experienced

and competent nodal officers, emphasis on root cause analysis of grievances and action on feedback, strengthening escalation processes by appointing appellate authorities, grievance closure guidelines with further reduction in the upper limit of resolution time from 30 days to 21 days, he said. To enhance the outreach of CPGRAMS for rural and underprivileged population, the government has collaborated with common service centres to make it easier for citizens to file grievances, Singh said.

India-Russia Working Group on Military Cooperation holds fourth meet in Moscow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and Russia reviewed the entire gamut of their defence ties in the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Military Cooperation under the India - Russia Inter Governmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) in Moscow, defence ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the meeting marked a significant milestone in advancing the long standing Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The meeting was co-chaired by Lieutenant General JP Mathew, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff representing India and Lieutenant General Dylevsky Igor Nikolaevich, Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces.



The Working Group emphasised the importance of continued knowledge-sharing and collaboration in areas of strategic interest. It also agreed upon expanding joint exercises to further solidifying the operational synergy between the two forces. Both nations have conducted numerous joint exercises across land, air and sea domains. Exercises such as INDRA, AVIA INDRA and INDRA NAVY, have served as vital platforms for sharing best practices, refining joint

operational tactics drills and procedures, and deepening mutual understanding. The Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership was signed in 2000, which was elevated to the level of Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership in 2010. The Working Group, a crucial forum for India-Russia defence cooperation, provides a platform to assess existing military engagements and identified new areas for collaboration to address evolving security challenges.

Opposition MLAs occupy treasury benches in Bihar Assembly in protest



Members of the Opposition were protesting the delay in deciding their petition with the Speaker on disqualification of MLAs who deflected. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI
Tensions flared in Bihar assembly on Thursday when an opposition MLA threatened to sit in the seat reserved for the chief minister, sparking outrage from the chair. The incident prompted Speaker Nand Kishor Yadav to call the marshals and warn the RJD legislator with eviction, before adjourning the proceedings till 2 pm. Trouble started after the Question Hour, when CM Nitish Kumar left the House. Senior RJD leader Alok Mehta

rose in his chair to raise an objection over rebel MLAs of his party occupying seats on the ruling side. "There should be proper seating arrangements. If people take their seats at will, it would lead to chaos," Mehta said, even as other opposition MLAs from the RJD, Congress and three Left parties hollered and stormed the well. The Speaker was taken aback by the outbursts and he told the opposition members that nothing that they said will go on record unless they went back to their seats. He looked alarmed when Maner MLA Bhai Virendra

stood in front of the CM's seat and posed as if he was going to sit down. "Don't do this. It would lead to serious consequences," the Speaker said, even as he summoned the marshals, but chose to adjourn the House instead of ordering the eviction of the MLA. Leader of the opposition Tejashwi Yadav had a quick word with the Speaker inside the latter's chamber before he told the media, "Our grouse is against the Speaker's inability to decide our petition seeking disqualification of all MLAs who defected earlier this year." Notably, at least seven MLAs,

five of the RJD and two of the Congress, had crossed over to the NDA in the budget session. Yadav said allowing these MLAs to sit on the ruling side was 'arbitrary (ektarfa)' and claimed that the Speaker has given an assurance that the grievance would soon be looked into. When Bhai Virendra was approached by journalists with queries, he said, "I only wanted to prove a point. My intention was to warn and not occupy that seat. The Speaker must either disqualify the rebels or direct them to take a seat on the other side."

Hemant Soren takes oath as Jharkhand CM



Governor Santosh Gangwar greets Chief Minister Hemant Soren after he took oath as Chief Minister of Jharkhand. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Hemant Soren took oath as the 14th chief minister of Jharkhand in a grand ceremony here on Thursday, amid the presence of a galaxy of INDIA bloc leaders. The 49-year-old tribal leader was sworn in as the chief minister by Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar. The governor administered the oath of office and secrecy to Soren at a function held in Morabadi ground in Ranchi, where Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal were present. Prior to taking the oath, Soren,

donning a white kurta, pyjama and 'Nehru jacket', met JMM president and his father Shibu Soren. This is the fourth stint of the JMM leader as the chief minister of Jharkhand. Hemant Soren retained the Barhait seat by defeating BJP's Gamlivel Hembrom by a margin of 39,791 votes in the recent assembly polls. The JMM-led alliance stormed to victory, securing 56 seats in the 81-member Jharkhand assembly, while the BJP-led NDA managed 24 constituencies. Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, CPI(M)Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Bihar's Leader of Opposition Tejashwi Yadav were among the political leaders who attended the swearing-in ceremony.

Tribal troupes, attired in traditional dresses, danced to the tune of 'dhol and nagara' at the venue, amid tight security arrangements. Schools in Ranchi remained closed on Thursday in view of the swearing-in of the Hemant Soren government. Hours before taking the oath, Soren took to X, asserting that unity is the biggest weapon of people of the state, who can "neither be divided nor silenced". In an apparent attack on the BJP-led central government, Soren also said whenever "they try to silence us", the revolution grows louder. The JMM achieved its highest-ever tally in the elections, winning 34 of the 43 seats it contested. The Congress secured 16, RJD four, and CPI(M)L managed two constituencies in the INDIA bloc.

Security heightened ahead of Friday prayers in Sambhal

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Sambhal district administration has implemented stringent security measures for Friday prayers following the recent violence during a survey at Jama Masjid. District Magistrate Dr Rajendra Pansiya has issued an order deploying magistrates at key locations across the district to ensure peace and prevent any untoward incidents. In the urban areas, 18 critical points have been identified for magistrate deployment. The district administration has issued strict directives to ensure effective monitoring of security arrangements. Dr. Pansiya emphasised that no unauthorised gatherings would be tolerated, and violators would face strict action. He also warned against provocative activities or attempts to spread rumors, stating that immediate steps would be taken to counter such acts and penalize those responsible. Police authorities have assured complete preparedness to handle any situation. All administrative officers and police personnel will remain on duty during Friday prayers to ensure the safety and security of the public. Meanwhile, the Chandrosi Court, where hearings related to the Jama Masjid survey case are taking place, is under drone surveillance as part of the heightened security measures.

Kerala finishes survey of unrecognised schools

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The survey of unrecognised schools in Kerala has been completed, and further measures are set to follow in the coming weeks, General Education Minister V Sivankutty said on Thursday. Preliminary findings indicate that there are 827 unrecognised institutions that remain outside the formal education system, the minister said in a statement. He added that further actions on this matter would be initiated soon. "A meeting has been convened by the chief minister to discuss the issue, and a list of schools

along with available details will be handed over to him," Sivankutty said. He emphasised that no activities negatively impacting the physical or mental well-being of students, such as body-shaming, should be tolerated by teachers or school authorities. "Similarly, issues such as demanding payment of transportation fees or any other charges should not be addressed in classrooms in the presence of other students. Teachers and school authorities should directly communicate these matters to parents, as most of them now have access to mobile phones," Sivankutty said. He also stated that no student

should be excluded from school excursions for financial reasons. "Guidelines concerning school trips and personal celebrations should be implemented immediately. The Director of Public Education has been tasked with submitting a report on the measures taken in this regard within a week," the minister said. Stating that school excursions are often reduced to mere recreational trips, with some schools charging exorbitant amounts and causing financial strain on economically disadvantaged students, he said such excursions should be organised in a way that is accessible to all students.

Manipur schools, colleges reopen from November 28

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The Manipur government on Thursday announced that classes in schools and colleges in Imphal Valley districts and Jiribam would resume from November 28 after a hiatus of 13 days. Educational institutes in these districts have remained closed since November 16 after the dead bodies of three women and three children in Jiribam were recovered from the Jiri and Barak rivers in Manipur and Assam respectively. An order issued by the Directorate of Education-Schools said, "Normal classes will resume for all schools of

the state, government, government aided, private and central schools from November 29." The government educational institutions or government-aided colleges under the Higher and Technical Education Department, including state universities, will resume classes with effect from Friday, a separate order said. Violence escalated in Manipur after three women and three children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam after a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11.

Judiciary short of over 5,000 judges: Govt in RS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
The subordinate and district courts face shortage of over 5,000 judges, while the 25 high courts have collective vacancies of over 360, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday. In a written reply, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal also said the Supreme Court, with a sanctioned strength of 34 judges, including the chief justice of India, has two vacancies. Following the retirement of Justice D Y Chandrachud as the CJI and Justice Hima Kohli earlier, the top court has two vacancies. The minister also said that amid divergence of view among states and high courts, there is no forward movement in the creation of an all-India judicial service. He said as on November 21, the lower judiciary had a shortage of 5,245 judicial officers while the HCs were short of 364 judges. The sanctioned strength of the 25



Members in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter session of Parliament. PTI

HCs is 1,114 judges. Responding to a sub question, Meghwal noted that Article 312 of the Constitution provides for the establishment of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS), which will not include any post inferior to that of a district judge. The constitutional provision enables creation of the AIJS at district judge level. A comprehensive proposal was formulated for the constitution of an AIJS and it was approved by the Committee of Secretaries in November 2012. The views of the states and the

HCs were sought on the proposal, which were divergent. Later, it was decided to leave it open to the respective HCs to evolve appropriate methods within the existing system to fill up the vacancies for appointment of district judges expeditiously. However, no progress was made in the matter. In view of the existing divergence of opinion amongst the major stakeholders, at present, there is no consensus on the proposal for setting up an All India Judicial Service," he said.

Parliament continues to witness disruption across both houses over Opposition demands

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
Parliament logjam continued for the third day on Thursday with both the houses adjourned for the day amid opposition protests over the violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur and the Adani issue. In the Lok Sabha, Opposition members were in the Well of the House raising slogans demanding action against the perpetrators of the violence in Sambhal during a survey being carried out in a mosque. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju flayed the protests saying, "I condemn the attempts by the Congress and its allies in disrupting the House proceedings." He said the opposition members were protesting despite the government

agreeing to their demands for extension of the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill and debate in the House on certain issues. However, as the opposition protests continued TDP member Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the chair, adjourned the proceedings for the day. Earlier, the Lok Sabha adopted a resolution granting extension to the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill till the last day of the Budget session next year. The House also witnessed disruptions during the Question Hour, soon after two Congress leaders -- Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Ravindra Chavan -- took oath as members of the Lok Sabha. The opposition has been pressing for discussions on

allegations of irregularities against the Adani Group and Sambhal violence. Proceedings of the Rajya Sabha were washed out for the third day in a row after opposition MPs created uproar over the Adani issue and the violence in Manipur and Sambhal. The proceedings of the Upper House were adjourned within minutes after it met at 12 noon, following one adjournment soon after 11 am. The appeals made by Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar to maintain decorum and allow the Question Hour to function went unheeded as the opposition members continued with their protests. The chairman said Wednesday marked a historic milestone -- the beginning of the final quarter-century before our

Constitution turns 100 -- and lamented that the House members missed the opportunity to engage in a productive dialogue. "This was a moment for our House of Elders, guided by the spirit of nationalism, to send a powerful message of hope to 1.4 billion Indians, reaffirming our commitment to their dreams and our journey towards 'Viksit Bharat at 2247'," he said. "Yet, with deep regret, I must say we missed this historic opportunity. Where there should have been productive dialogue echoing the collective aspirations of our nation. We fell short of our people's expectations," he lamented. Dhankhar said this chamber is more than just a House of Debate. It is where our national spirit finds its voice and where the destiny of our

great nation takes shape, he said. "Parliamentary disruption is not a remedy but a malady that weakens the very foundation of our democracy. The sanctity of this house demands debate, not discord; dialogue, not disruption," he said as opposition members continued with sloganeering and protests. The chairman said, "When we deviate from constructive discussion, we fail to honour the trust of millions who look to us as the guardians of their democratic aspirations. "I urge you all to embrace the spirit of meaningful dialogue. Let us return to our tradition of thoughtful discussion and deliberation. In this spirit, I request your cooperation in proceeding with today's agenda," he urged the protesting members.

HRERA warns realty cos to file annual reports

PARNESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM
In view of the repeated non-compliance of mandatory submission of the annual report of the real estate projects under construction, the Haryana Real Estate Regulatory Authority (Herera), Gurugram, has now warned the city promoters to file the same within 30 days to avoid penalties. The Authority said this is unfortunate that many of the real estate promoters have not yet submitted annual reports of

their individual projects, and whom the Authority is now sending show cause notices informing them to submit the same within 30 days to avoid penalties. The Authority order said that non-filing of the annual report of the under-construction projects is a serious violation of the Act 2016, and the Authority views it seriously and therefore such promoters have been show caused as to why not a penalty of Rs 5 lakh be imposed on a promoter who fails to file the same in 30 days from the date of

issuing of the show cause notice. Further, the Authority informed that a penalty of Rs 10,000 -- for every subsequent day in addition to the Rs 5 Lakh will be levied on a real estate promoter, who fails to file the annual report within 60 days from the date of issuing of the show cause notices. As per the law, real estate promoters are mandatorily required to submit the annual reports of the projects under construction failing which there are strictest provisions of penalties in the Act.

Power struggle breaks out in MahaYuti after Shinde bows out



TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI
After Eknath Shinde stepped aside and let the BJP's central leadership decide on its chief ministerial choice, a power struggle broke out within the ruling MahaYuti over the allocation of key portfolios like Home, Finance, Revenue and Urban development in the impending State Cabinet. Apart from the key portfolios like Home, Finance, Revenue and Urban development, there will be a lot of bargaining among the MahaYuti constituents over other important portfolios like

Agriculture, Industries, Water Resources, Forests, Rural Development and Energy. On its part, the BJP will not easily let go of portfolios like the Home, Finance and Urban Development. In the earlier Cabinet, chief Minister Eknath Shinde held the Urban Development portfolio, while deputy chief ministers Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar held the state Home and Finance portfolios respectively. Given that the BJP's Devendra Fadnavis will in all likelihood be the next chief minister of Maharashtra, the power-sharing formula will remain

more or less the same -- there will be a chief minister and two deputy chief ministers in the new government. While Fadnavis will be at the helm of affairs, Shinde and Ajit Pawar will be his two deputies. On his part, Fadnavis -- who is set to take over the reins of the state from Shinde -- sought not to speak much on chief ministerial choice. "You will soon get an answer (as to who will be the next chief minister). All senior members of MahaYuti will meet and decide." Talking to media persons separately, Ajit Pawar, who is

the NCP President, said that the formation of new government will take place during the weekend. "We are meeting tomorrow to decide who would become the CM. I think the swearing in would happen either on November 30 or December 1" Since the Maharashtra Assembly comprises 288 members, there can be a maximum of 43 ministers in the State Cabinet -- a number that accounts for 15 percent of total members in the lower House of the State Legislature. In the new Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, the BJP

has a strength of 132 MLAs, followed by 57 MLAs belonging to the Shinde-led Shiv Sena and 41 to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP. In the normal course, the BJP can get 21 ministerial berths, while the Shinde Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led can have 12 and 10 ministers respectively in the new State Cabinet. In the outgoing Eknath Shinde-led State Cabinet, there were only Cabinet ministers, as the chief minister had resisted from appointing Ministers of State in his Cabinet. In the previous Shinde Cabinet, there were 29 ministers -- all

Cabinet-ranked ones. The Shinde Cabinet consisted of 10 ministers each from the Shiv Sena and BJP, while the NCP had nine ministers. The 29 ministers included chief minister Shinde and his two deputies -- Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar. However, given that the MahaYuti has got absolute mandate, the chief minister-to-be in the new government will give representation to all the regions in the state -- Mumbai-Konkan, Western Maharashtra, North Maharashtra, Marathwada and Vidarbha.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

One nation, one subscription

While heralded as a potential game-changer for academia, the ONOS has ignited intense debate among scholars and researchers

In the series of 'one nation' comes yet another addition and this time it is about subscription of academic journals. The Indian government's recent approval of the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme has sparked considerable debate within academic and research communities. Touted as a transformative step for Indian academia, the scheme seeks to centralise access to academic journals and publications for higher education and research institutions across the country. While the initiative promises benefits such as cost efficiency and wider access to resources, concerns about its implementation, implications for academic freedom and necessity remain significant. Under the ONOS scheme, managed by the Information and Library Network (INFLIB-NET), over 6,300 institutions will have access to 13,000 e-journals from 30 major international publishers through a unified digital portal. With a budget allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for its first three years, the government aims to empower approximately 1.8 crore students, researchers and faculty members. This move could enhance India's standing in the global research ecosystem, reducing resource disparities across institutions. The ONOS scheme could democratise access to academic knowledge.

Smaller institutions, often constrained by limited budgets, could benefit immensely from comprehensive access to high-quality publications. Students and researchers in remote or underfunded regions may now have the same access as those in premier institutions, fostering equity in education and research. Centralising subscriptions could also significantly reduce costs. A unified portal ensures that these resources are optimised, potentially freeing budgets for other academic priorities. This could encourage more efficient and effective research practices. Despite its potential benefits, the ONOS scheme has raised several concerns. One major issue is the lack of clarity on how journals will be selected. Academic needs are diverse, varying by discipline, institution and research focus. Centralising the decision-making process risks overlooking specific requirements, leading to an inadequate or unbalanced collection of resources. Critics argue that the government could limit access to publications or perspectives it disagrees with, thereby influencing academic discourse. Another critique is that the scheme might disrupt established systems that currently work well. Many institutions already have mechanisms to access journals through collaborations, institutional networks like the Developing Library Network (DELNET), and platforms like JSTOR. Moreover, the scheme's centralised approach risks reducing the autonomy of academic institutions. Faculty members, who currently play a significant role in determining which journals their institutions need, might find themselves sidelined. This loss of autonomy could hinder academic innovation and responsiveness to emerging research trends. It would be hasty to implement the scheme which has advantages for sure, but the concerns of academicians must be addressed.

PICTALK



Visitors at the Istanbul stall on the last day of the India International Trade Fair, in New Delhi

PTI

Unpaid care workers: The neglected workforce

These workers, predominantly women, form the invisible backbone of families and communities, shouldering critical responsibilities without recognition or compensation

Unpaid care workers play a crucial yet often overlooked role in sustaining families and communities. These individuals, typically family members and predominantly women, take on essential caregiving and household tasks without formal salaries or wages. Their contributions range from managing daily domestic duties to supporting vulnerable family members and even volunteering in community-based activities. Despite the significant value they provide, their work remains largely unrecognised, unregulated, and uncompensated, often leaving them economically insecure and lacking social protections.

This group includes several key roles. Household caregivers provide daily care for children, elderly relatives, or family members with disabilities, handling tasks like cooking, cleaning and offering emotional support. Childcare providers, especially in low-income families, often include mothers or grandmothers who look after young children, offering informal education and



supervision. In some communities, individuals volunteer for communal care tasks such as organising child care or assisting with health-related services out of a sense of responsibility rather than financial motivation. Family health caregivers manage tasks such as administering medication, assisting with mobility, and caring for chronically ill relatives. In rural areas, unpaid care work often extends to agricultural labor, including farming, collecting water, and gathering firewood, which are essential for household survival but remain uncompensated.

The economic contributions of unpaid care work are immense, supporting families and enabling formal economic activities by ensuring the wellbeing of individuals. However, the lack of formal recognition and compensation leaves these workers vulnerable to financial instability and limits access to social protections. A related but distinct category includes 'Anganwadi' workers, who occupy a middle ground between unpaid and paid care work. Employed under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, they receive a modest honorari-

um rather than a formal wage. This compensation is often irregular, lacks benefits like retirement or health insurance and fails to provide the stability of formal employment. Consequently, while Anganwadi workers are technically paid, their financial insecurity mirrors the challenges faced by unpaid care workers. Despite their critical contributions to the care economy, Anganwadi workers remain undervalued and undercompensated. Many are forced to take on additional jobs to make ends meet. Their situation highlights the broader societal neglect of care work, where contributions—paid or unpaid—are undervalued and often relegated to the margins of economic discourse. Addressing these issues requires recognising care work's essential role in social and economic systems and implementing policies that ensure fair compensation and protection for all care workers.

(The writer is Secretary, Indian Trade Union Congress (INTUC); views are personal)



SHAHNAZ RAFIQUE

Countering China's African influence

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Nigeria highlights India's bid to rejuvenate ties with the African nation and counter China's growing influence through partnerships



PARUL CHANDRA

A little over two months after China's assiduous wooing of Nigeria, India sought to do the same during PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to the African nation. The prime ministerial visit, coming after a gap of 17 years, should inject fresh momentum into bilateral ties. It should also, hopefully, help a bit in countering Beijing's growing influence in Nigeria, a country with whom India has enjoyed close and robust ties for decades but now finds itself in competition with China.

While India and Nigeria have 'a strategic partnership', the African nation and China elevated their ties to 'a comprehensive strategic partnership' this year. The courting of Nigeria as well as dozens of other African countries was done bilaterally as well collectively at the ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in early September in Beijing. These summits have been held regularly since the first one in 2006, with one even being held virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. India, however, has floundered in not being able to organise an African summit since the last one in 2015, ostensibly due to the pandemic and geopolitical tensions, but amounts to a lack of strategic foresight.

China is making deeper inroads into the African continent for both strategic as well as economic reasons. Strategically, it can project itself as a geopolitical force countering arch foe US. Moreover, strengthening its foothold in the world's second most populous continent comes with the lucrative advantage of having access to the huge market as well as the rich mineral resources there. For many cash-strapped African nations, China has been a pivotal lender of loans for much-needed infrastructure construction, but it comes with the perils of running up huge debts.

Africa is a vital part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with 53 nations having signed onto the endeavour that India views with deep suspicion given Beijing's hegemonic intentions. Under the BRI, China is assist-



ing Nigeria in its connectivity efforts by building railway lines and a deep sea port in Lagos.

China is also Nigeria's biggest bilateral lender and the two sides decided to forge close economic ties when Chinese President Xi Jinping and Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu met in Beijing ahead of the FOCAC Summit. It's in the backdrop of all this that PM Modi's recent visit to Nigeria assumes even greater significance. While he made it clear that India gives "high priority" to its strategic partnership with Nigeria, the visit yielded only three pacts - on survey cooperation, cooperation in customs matters and culture exchange programmes.

India will have to do some real heavy lifting in the coming years if the 14 areas of bilateral cooperation identified in the joint statement are to come to fruition. Among these are the Bilateral Investment Treaty, the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty and the Agreement on repurposed Line of Credits. India's outreach to Nigeria at the highest level was required given that Africa's most populous nation enjoys much heft in the region and beyond. It's a founding member of the



AFRICA IS A VITAL PART OF CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI), WITH 53 NATIONS HAVING SIGNED ONTO THE ENDEAVOUR THAT INDIA VIEWS WITH DEEP SUSPICION GIVEN BEIJING'S HEGEMONIC INTENTIONS

African Union (AU), which India helped bring into the G-20's fold last year. Nigeria is now also a BRICS partner state. The country is also a member of OPEC, with President Tinubu also being the current chair of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). A fresh push to boost bilateral trade and investments by Indian companies in Nigeria is imperative.

There are already over 200 Indian companies in the manufacturing sector with investments worth \$27 billion in Nigeria. While India remains among the top 5 trading partners of Nigeria, bilateral trade unfortunately decreased to \$7.89 billion in 2023-24 from \$14.95 billion in 2021-22. This is attributed to a reduction in Indian oil imports from Nigeria as it chose to import oil from Russia, taking advantage of the cheaper rates being offered due to the conflict with Ukraine.

With the joint statement with Nigeria talking about India's willingness to go in for long-term contracts for crude and LNG purchases, bilateral trade might pick up once again. Significantly, India has also evinced interest in investing in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. Terrorism and piracy also

figured as areas of cooperation in the joint statement. Nigeria for many years has been battling the Islamic radical group Boko Haram, which has also been attacking oil and gas infrastructure in the country. India, interestingly, has offered technical know-how on security for pipelines in Nigeria.

Maritime domain cooperation is also of crucial importance to combat piracy. Nigeria abuts the Gulf of Guinea through which passes crucial sea lanes for transporting crude oil. India had deployed at least two warships, INS Sumedha in 2023 and INS Tarkash in 2022, in the piracy-prone Gulf of Guinea. With Chinese vessels on the prowl across the oceans, these deployments were not without strategic significance.

Overall, India needs to move and move fast, delivering on its promises made during PM Modi's visit to Nigeria. It has no time to lose in majorly upscaling its traditional robust ties with African nations, especially with China increasingly grabbing strategic space in the continent. The writer is a senior journalist who writes on foreign affairs. (The writer is a senior journalist who writes on strategic affairs; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SIDHU SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The former cricketer and commentator Navjot Singh Sidhu, whose wife is suffering from cancer has come out with propaganda on social media that neem leaves, lemon juice, turmeric, and cinnamon helped cure his wife's breast cancer and started advocating it as a simple remedy for those who have been suffering from it. As a celebrity, Sidhu should have advised the people to ensure good health with a periodical medical checkup since the dreaded disease affects lakhs every year in India. His irresponsible statement, while taking into account the false claims that celebrities used to promote wrong products by endorsing commercials for their self-promotion, as well as to claim the fat check, calls for a stringent warning. Sidhu's experience on his wife's issue shouldn't deviate people who are already suffering and availing treatment in their case.

Tall claims in social media need strong rebuttal with penalisation for their unemotional behaviour. In 2019 the BJP leader Pragma Singh Thakur had similarly claimed that Gau Mutra (cow urine) had cured her of cancer, whereas she was operated on for tumour removal in 2008 at JJ Hospital in Mumbai as reported by Dr Rajput. When the flashback runs like this, Sidhu's claim at these advanced medical times has been thoroughly misled while the global research has not yet found anything concrete to counter cancer to date is the reality. Controlling the growth and extending longevity by itself can be considered to be a miracle and we can only seek blessings for the safe health of Sidhu's wife and thousands in the need of this hour.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

MINORITIES RAISE CONCERNS

Madam — Minorities are making so much noise ever since the NDA came to power for the third time running. They could not digest the defeat of the forces working against the government. Enjoying all benefits as an Indian citizen while still blaming the government is the order of the

Protecting mental health of Children



Australia will ban children from using social media with a minimum age limit as high as 16 to get kids off their devices and onto the footy fields. The initiative is taken to make kids play in the grounds and experience the loss and victory in the field and have real experiences with real people and teammates

day. Without knowing the ins and outs of the political formula, they pass hate comments against the government. They get solace by abusing the government after losing the elections in Maharashtra. The myth of the model minority is based in stereotypes. It perpetuates a narrative in which they want to get prominence. In reality, the twenty-first century has so far been one of bewildering change accompanied by the destruction of certainties, among them that of the inevitable rise of human rights. It is clear that gains that were once thought permanent can quickly be lost. A real danger of lack of certainty is that the resultant fear leads to a backlash, which is likely to be directed against those seen as a threat or who are easily used as scapegoats.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

GANGA UNSAFE FOR BATHING

Madam —The water in the holy Ganga is unsuitable for bathing. A few days ago, an exasperated Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi of the National Green Tribunal, while hearing a case related to the tributaries Assi and Varuna, told the Varanasi District

Magistrate to "just put up a sign" and "make it clear the Ganga here isn't for a holy splash." The river flows for about 2500 kilometres from the southern great Himalayas before it empties into the Bay of Bengal. The Namami Gange Programme (NGP), launched in 2014-15 to cleanse the Ganga and its tributaries, was originally scheduled to be completed by March 2021. It has now been extended until March 2026. The Central Government has released ₹16,012 crore from FY2014-15 until October 2023 under the NGP-I of ₹20,000 crore and NGP-II of ₹22,500 crore. In the 30 years prior to the launch of the NGP, various governments had spent ₹4000 crore to clean the river. Despite spending more than ₹20,000 crore, the water in the Ganga is still not clean enough to take a dip. One is compelled to conclude the NGP is equally polluted with corruption and inefficiency.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TRUMP 2.0: STEEP TARIFFS ON CARDS

Trump's policies are likely to create ripples across economies, including India



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The fireworks have started, even before people across the globe have ushered in Christmas and New Year's festivities. The Trump presidency 2.0 could be a game changer, potentially recalibrating several global geopolitical and economic partnerships. First, the Biden era days of strategic partnership with nations worldwide would be replaced with a more transactional approach which President Trump in his second stint is likely to institutionalise. Even before taking charge, President-elect Donald Trump has vociferously spelt out his tariff-based external affairs policy.

He had during campaigning talked about imposing nearly 60 per cent tariffs on China imports. Recently he has said that one of the first executive orders, he is likely to sign after assuming office on January 20, would be to impose tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China imports. Of course, the caveat is, unless, they stop sending illegal immigrants and ban drugs across to the US. Donald Trump knows his tariff-based foreign policy approach has bipartisan support among Democrats and Republicans. It feeds well into his Made in America, local job creation narrative which catapulted him back to the White House in a non-consecutive term. India is overseeing this space, as it knows very well that even though the first tariff bullets may not be fired at India, eventually many will. Mr Trump has already spoken about India's high tariffs in his election rallies and notwithstanding the amount of good, the Indian IT services sector has done for the US, he needs to send home hard messages. The only saving grace in the upcoming US-India bilateral relationship, under President Trump 2.0 would be the personal equation, the



president-elect has with Prime Minister Modi. Knowing each other for a long period and having observed each other's style of governing, can be an initial advantage but not a long-term solution. Key Indian trade interlocutors are in high demand, especially those who have been in government during Trump's first presidency.

At some point in time, the issue of tariffs would come up in the bilateral conversations, where hard-nosed negotiations may be required. India and US under the Biden administration managed to establish a formal institutional framework for settling trade and tariff issues in the form of a Trade Policy Forum (TPF). The TPF platform provides trade representatives from the US and India to meet regularly to discuss and find solutions to mutual areas of concern. To be sure the TPF mechanism existed even under the Trump administration, but with one meeting and a new Indian government under Prime Minister Modi (with less focus on trade and external affairs policy), it served little purpose. Chances are, given Donald Trump's style of functioning, the TPF may be relegated to the background and several transactional bilateral meetings would be formatted to, minimise the friction in the trade relations.

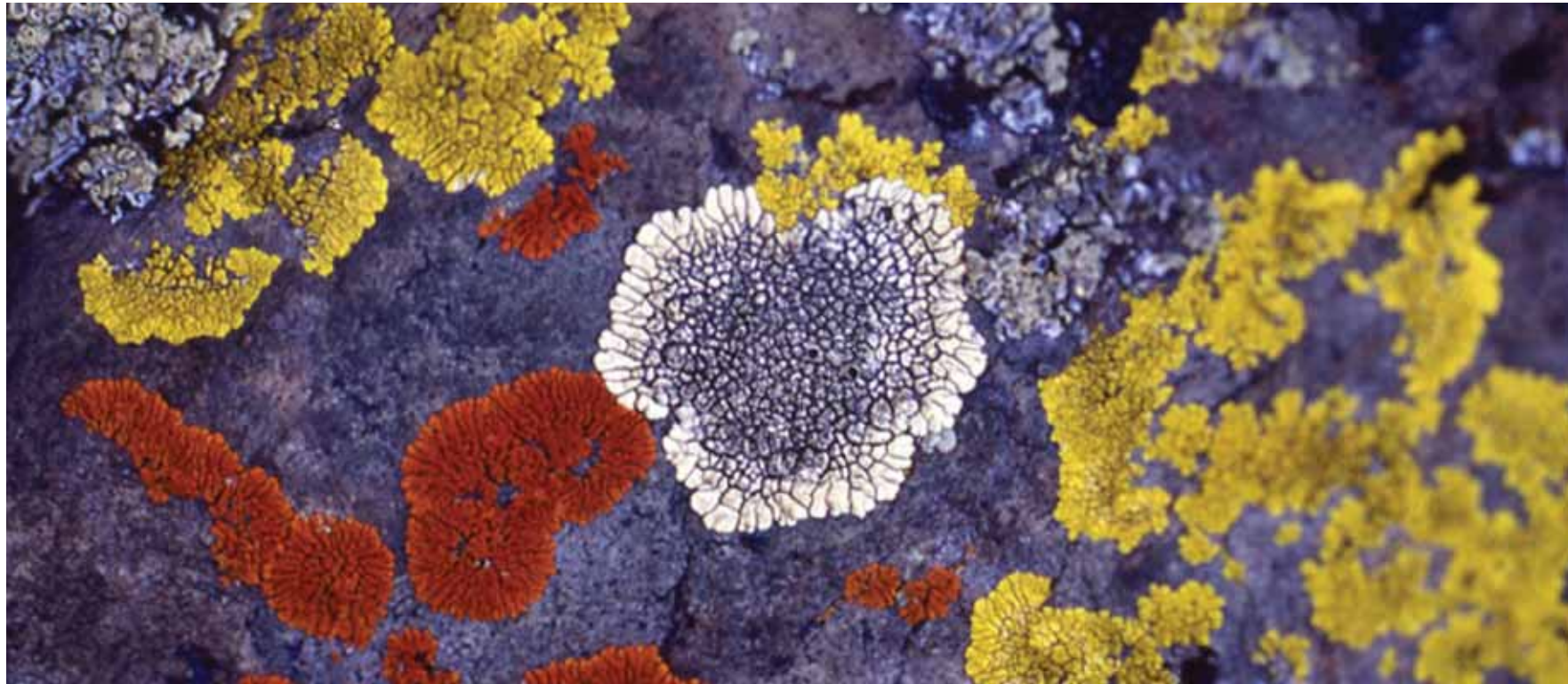
It may be worth noting that India has a trade surplus with the US, a point Mr Trump will keep in mind to extract his side of the deal. Meanwhile, the expected tightening of the trade environment between the US and China would have a significant impact on the global economy. China would have to find newer markets to push some of the goods, which could be too expensive to export to the US. India and its neighbouring nations would have to brace up. Prices of items in the US, most of which are imported from China could add an extra burden on household budgets, which in turn could push rate hikes.

These global headwinds will shape, the narratives for a long time to come. It could have an inflationary impact on global oil prices and growth of the several global economies. India's Reserve Bank has already cautioned that the slowdown in the global economy, protectionism, and tariffs are three key factors that will shape India's economy next year. It would be another tightrope with clever hands of the juggler on rope which can carry India for the next few years.

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

Climate change and Lichens: The tiny titans of nature

Lichens, the silent guardians of our ecosystem, are under threat from climate change and need to be saved, write BKP SINHA and ARVIND KUMAR JHA



Vibrant patches of colour adorning some tree trunks and rocks may draw your attention as you move in the forest. Although they appear as mere stains or growths; they are intricate organisms called lichens, a product of a mutualistic alliance between fungus and algae. Making it a unique creation of nature, the fungus absorbs water and nutrients from the air while an organic compound is generated by the photosynthetic partner. Thus while fungi build a house; its algal partner supplies food as the breadwinner. Similarly, if fungi did not provide a secure structure, the algae would die homeless in harsh places.

The absence of cuticles and roots and their direct reliance on the atmosphere for nutrients, however, makes lichens highly vulnerable to pollutants. Found in a variety of shapes and colours, ranging from delicate leafy structures to crusty patches, they thrive in diverse habitats, from rocky mountainsides to rain forests and deserts. They can grow on soil, humus, stones, rocks, bricks, plaster, leaves, tree trunks, decaying wood and even on glass. Overtly so simple and insignificant in the face of the dominant bias of human beings that often considers a forest just as an assemblage of trees and vegetation mix, lichens play an extremely vital role in ecosystems. Lichens are known to play a crucial role in soil formation, breaking down rocks through biogeochemical and biochemical weathering and creating nutrient-rich soil paving the way for other plants to grow. They produce unique compounds with potential medicinal properties, such as antibiotics and antifungals. They are used in medicine, food, fodder, perfume, spices, and dyes. Researchers are exploring these compounds to develop new drugs and sustainable materials. By understanding the adaptations and biochemical properties of lichens, one can unlock new possibilities and contribute to a more sustainable future. Lichens can survive at extreme temperatures and altitudes in which no creatures can survive. One can see more lichen on



LICHENS ARE KNOWN TO PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SOIL FORMATION, BREAKING DOWN ROCKS THROUGH BIOGEOCHEMICAL AND BIOCHEMICAL WEATHERING AND CREATING NUTRIENT-RICH SOIL PAVING THE WAY FOR OTHER PLANTS TO GROW

the edge of the forest than deep in the forest. They will be lesser near the towns as the air quality deteriorates. Many lichens are incredibly sensitive to air pollution, particularly due to sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, as also to the level of heavy metal pollution. All lichens, however, are not equally sensitive to air pollutants. Different lichen species exhibit different sensitivity to specific air pollutants. Consequently, lichens are well-suited as biological indicators for monitoring environmental quality.

More than seventeen thousand species of lichens are reported to cover around seven per cent of the world's surface. India, a land of diverse landscapes and climatic conditions, is home to rich biodiversity and harbours about 3,000 fascinating species of lichens. Some European countries like Germany, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia; considering lichen's response to pollution; have positioned them as bio-monitors and bio-indicators and included them in their air-pollution-related policy documents. Much of India's lichen diversity, however, remains relatively unexplored as regards their ecological significance and potential applications. Yet another crucial issue in the Indian context is the undervaluation of lichens in India.

When the diversion of forest land for rainforest purposes is proposed, the net present value (NPV) of the forest is calculated and the amount is recovered from the project proponents. Calculation of NPV does not consider the aspect of the immense value that lichens have from ecological as well as economic points of view. This is evident from the fact that the per hectare NPV of forests of Eco-class-I and Eco-class-II categories that have

forests of types Tropical Wet Evergreen / Semi-Evergreen / Moist-Deciduous / Littoral and Swamp have been assigned the same value. It is essential that realistic values are assigned to the forests of different types and the monetised value of lichens and their services are duly incorporated therein. Climate change has serious implications for the lichens. Higher temperatures can disrupt the delicate balance between the fungal and algal partners. Extreme heat can lead to desiccation and reduced growth rates. Altered rainfall patterns can affect the availability of water, which is crucial for lichen growth and reproduction. Further, climate change can exacerbate air pollution, harming lichens.

A rise in pollution load in the air breaks the lichen cell resulting in bleaching of the organism, and the same is followed by its demise. Again, acid rain, caused by releasing sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, can damage lichen tissues. Climate change-induced alterations in habitats may result in the loss of suitable environments for their growth while fragmentation of habitats can critically limit dispersal and gene flow. The importance of exploring the roles of different organisms involved in the complex eco-processes in the context of global changes cannot be overestimated.

In this context, lichen is increasingly being recognised globally as a bio-indicator of 'Global Change Drivers' that are seen as interconnected stressors like climate change, pollution, land use change, and loss of biodiversity contributing to large-scale environmental impacts. The mapping of epiphytic lichen diversity to assess ecological changes has emerged as a popular bio-moni-

toring approach in Europe and a European standard has been adopted under the Committee European d Normalisation (CEN) framework. It aims to provide Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure reliability, consistency and objectivity while simultaneously improving data quality and comparability across space and time.

Needless to say, it is high time that India, possessing almost eighteen per cent of the world's lichen species and being globally the third-highest air-polluted country only after Bangla Desh and Pakistan, prioritises her efforts in this direction. Detailed exploration and study of lichens can also yield many more useful species for an unexpectedly wide variety of ecological as well as human needs and pursuits including their widespread use as bio-prospecting agents.

An extremely valuable natural resource the lichens are, they are reportedly in a losing evolutionary race against climate change. A 2022 study reveals that it could need more than one million years to adjust to the ecological crisis created due to just one degree Celsius of warming.

With the unabated pace of global warming, lichens, considered one of the most unique and hardy species and a bio-monitoring tool, are facing the danger of getting obliterated from the face of our planet. Well, the next time you encounter a tree or rock adorned with colourful lichens, take a moment to appreciate these remarkable organisms. Let us work towards their conservation as their beauty and ecological significance make them an integral part of our natural world.

(The writers are Former PCCFs of UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)

Educate. Advocate. Act Now: Confronting antimicrobial resistance

Awareness is crucial to stop misuse of antibiotics to stop antimicrobial resistance and its harmful side-effects

As we observe 'World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) 2024' under the theme 'Educate. Advocate. Act Now', we are reminded of both the remarkable achievements of antimicrobial medicine and the escalating threat posed by antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This year's theme serves as a clarion call for individuals, healthcare providers and policymakers to unite in protecting these life-saving drugs. Through education, advocacy and immediate action, we can address the growing crisis and secure a healthier future for all.

Life Before Antibiotics: A Fragile Existence
For much of human history,



SANGEETA SHARMA

infections posed a dire threat to survival. Minor injuries, routine childbirth, or surgical procedures often led to fatal outcomes due to the lack of effective treatments. Ancient civilisations turned to natural remedies such as herbs, honey and garlic, but these measures were often inadequate. The concept of microbes and the role of hygiene were poorly understood, enabling infectious

diseases to spread rapidly with devastating results.

The Antibiotic Revolution: A New Era of Medicine
The discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming in 1928 marked a turning point in medical history. By the 1940s, penicillin was widely used to treat infections during World War II, saving countless lives. This success ushered in the "golden age" of antibiotics, spanning the 1940s to the 1960s, with groundbreaking drugs like streptomycin and tetracycline offering solutions to diseases once thought incurable.

These "miracle drugs" revolutionised healthcare, enabling complex surgeries, cancer therapies, and organ transplants that depended

on effective infection control. Antibiotics became synonymous with progress and hope, reshaping our approach to health and longevity.

AMR: A Global Crisis in the Making

While antimicrobials transformed healthcare, their misuse and overuse have driven the global crisis of antimicrobial resistance. Mismanagement of these drugs has undermined their effectiveness, allowing resistant strains of bacteria to flourish.

Misuse and Overuse : Antibiotics are frequently prescribed for conditions like viral infections (e.g., the common cold), where they have no effect. In agriculture, antimicrobials are



used excessively, often to promote animal growth rather than treat illness. This practice creates resistant bacteria that can transfer to humans through the food chain.

Underuse : Failing to complete prescribed antibiotic courses, skipping doses, or using leftover medications allows bacteria to survive and develop resistance.

Examples such as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) highlight the danger of resistance. Once easily treatable, infections like MRSA now require last-resort drugs, which are often more toxic, expensive, and less effective.

The Innovation Gap:

Despite the urgent need for new treatments, the development of antibiotics has stagnated. No new classes of antibiotics have been discovered in recent decades, leaving humanity vulnerable to resistant pathogens. Developing antibiotics is an expensive and time-consuming process and limited financial incentives deter pharmaceutical companies from pursuing research in

this field. As a result, existing drugs are our most critical line of defense, underscoring the need to use them responsibly.

Educate:

Public education is a powerful tool in combating AMR. Raising awareness about the proper use of antibiotics is crucial to reducing unnecessary prescriptions. Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections, not viruses. Simple practices, such as completing prescribed courses and avoiding sharing or stockpiling antibiotics, can significantly reduce resistance. Community outreach programs and health campaigns are essential in promoting a deeper understanding of AMR and fostering respon-

sible antimicrobial use.

Advocate: Governments, healthcare organisations, and advocacy groups play a pivotal role in addressing AMR. Policies that regulate antimicrobial use in agriculture, improve prescribing practices, and promote the use of diagnostics can help mitigate resistance. Antimicrobial Stewardship Programmes in hospitals encourage responsible antibiotic use, ensuring patients receive appropriate treatment while minimising unnecessary exposure.

(The writer is Neuropsychopharmacology Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences & President, DSPRUD; views are personal)

Dhaka High Court refuses to ban ISKCON in Bangladesh

PTI ■ DHAKA

The High Court on Thursday refused to ban ISKCON's activities in Bangladesh, a local newspaper reported days after a lawyer was killed in a clash between security personnel and supporters of a Hindu leader arrested on sedition charges. The lawyer had sought a ban from the high court on the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) after following some newspaper reports related to the organisation on Wednesday. The court had asked the attorney general to inform it about the steps taken by the government regarding ISKCON's recent activities, according to The Daily Star.

Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das, who was arrested this week, was earlier expelled from ISKCON. His arrest triggered clashes on Tuesday during which Advocate Saiful Islam, an assistant public prosecutor, was killed. When the High Court proceeded

ings started on Thursday, the attorney general's office placed the information sought by the court before the bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury, The Daily Star said. Additional Attorney General Aneek R Haque and Deputy Attorney General Asad Uddin informed the HC bench that three separate cases have been filed in connection with the murder of lawyer Saiful Islam Alif and ISKCON's activities, and 33 accused have been arrested in these cases. The bench then hoped that the government would remain cautious about protecting the law and order situation and lives and properties of the people of Bangladesh, the newspaper added. India on Tuesday noted with "deep concern" Das' arrest and denial of bail, and urged Dhaka to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all other minority groups. Separately, a group of Supreme Court lawyers sent a legal notice to Bangladesh

government on Wednesday seeking a ban on ISKCON describing it as a "radical organisation." The notice, sent by Al Mamun Russell on behalf of 10 lawyers, also demanded prosecution of those responsible for Advocate Islam's murder, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper said quoting the notice. "ISKCON has been operating in Bangladesh as a radical organisation, engaging in activities designed to provoke communal unrest," the notice alleged. Citing a book by former Bangladeshi intelligence officials, the notice alleges that ISKCON has been promoting religious events "with the intent of inciting sectarian violence," "imposing its beliefs on traditional Hindu communities," and forcibly recruiting members from lower Hindu castes, the newspaper said. Russell's notice was addressed to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Law and Justice, and the Inspector General of Police and called for an immedi-

Pakistan, China hold military level talks on counter-terrorism

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and China military officials held talks on counter-terrorism and regional security amid unease following the recent attacks on Chinese nationals. General Zhang Youxia, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) China and one of China's top military leaders, is visiting Pakistan along with a high-level delegation, according to a military statement. General Zhang held a one-on-one meeting with Army Chief Gen Asim Munir on Wednesday, followed by delegation-level discussions. According to the statement, the engagements focused on "matters of mutual interest, regional security dynamics, measures for regional stability, and enhancing bilateral defence cooperation." General Zhang spoke about Pakistan's ongoing counter-terrorism efforts, which remain a key topic of discussion between the two countries due to the rising frequency of attacks target-

ing Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. Newspaper Dawn reported that there have been media reports that Beijing is seeking a more proactive role in ensuring the safety of its citizens in Pakistan, but the Foreign Office has emphasised that counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries is based on mutual respect for each other's sovereignty. Under the regional stability head, the two sides exchanged views about the Indian role in the region and the developments in Afghanistan, particularly the presence of terrorist groups, Dawn added. The CMC vice chairman's visit follows a trip by Gen Li Qiaoming, commander of the People's Liberation Army Ground Forces, to Pakistan in late August. Additionally, over 300 Chinese troops arrived in Pakistan to take part in the joint China-Pakistan anti-terrorism exercise, Warrior-VIII, amid escalating militant attacks in the country. The opening ceremony for the drills was held on

Wednesday, a report posted on the Chinese Defence Ministry's official website said. Running until mid-December, the drills aim to enhance joint counter-terrorism operational capabilities. During the talks on Wednesday, General Munir highlighted the resilience of Pakistan-China relations, noting their ability to withstand shifts in international and regional dynamics. He expressed gratitude for China's unwavering support for Pakistan. General Zhang, in turn, praised Pakistan's dedication to the strategic partnership and reaffirmed China's commitment to strengthening the enduring bilateral relationship, the statement added. The two generals last met in Beijing in April 2023, where General Zhang pledged to deepen and expand practical cooperation, elevate military-to-military ties, and jointly safeguard the common interests of both countries while promoting regional peace and stability, reported Dawn. The ties between Pakistan and

China have come under strain as Chinese nationals have frequently come under attack from terrorists and separatist groups in different parts of the country. The talks and the drills follow this week's attack when at least 50 persons were killed and 20 injured when militants ambushed three vehicles in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Thursday. The attacks involving suicide bombers have been taking place despite Pakistan deploying over 30,000 security personnel to guard Chinese citizens in the country. Last month, two Chinese engineers were among those killed in a suicide bomb attack near Karachi airport drawing a strong reaction from the Chinese government over the security of their citizens in Pakistan. Separatist groups have targeted Chinese nationals working in Pakistan on several private projects and also those under the aegis of the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Attacks on minorities in B'desh: Indian-American body urges Biden, Trump to intervene

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

An influential Indian-American organisation has urged US President Joe Biden and President-elect Donald Trump to call on the government of Bangladesh to protect the minority Hindu community in the country. In separate letters to Biden and Trump, the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS) on Wednesday expressed grave concern over the escalating human rights violations against religious minorities in Bangladesh and the recent arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari. Bangladesh's minority Hindus have faced over 200 attacks, including those on their temples, since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August 5, according to the FIIDS. Das was arrested on Monday in a sedition case and later denied bail by a court, triggering protests by community members in various locations, including the capital Dhaka and the port city of

Chattogram. He was a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and was recently expelled. Calling for an independent inquiry into the violence against minorities, Khanderao Kand, President and Chief of Policy and Strategy, FIIDS requested Biden to urge Bangladesh Chief Advisor Yunus Mohammed to release Das, provide protection to minority communities and publicly commit to upholding secular principles. "Bangladesh's progress as a democratic and inclusive society depends on safeguarding the rights of all its citizens, including its most vulnerable populations. We trust that your leadership will champion these values and help restore hope for those who continue to face oppression and displacement," he said. In his letter to Trump, Kand said, "As the incoming leader of the free world, you have the unique opportunity to prioritise the protection of vulnerable communities and reinforce America's commitment to religious freedom and human

rights." He urged Trump to appeal to the interim government to ensure Das' release, safeguard ISKCON's operations and protect minority communities from further violence and encourage Bangladesh to reaffirm its secular constitution and hold free and fair elections to restore democratic governance. "I strongly condemn Bangladesh for its atrocities against minorities, the arrest of a Hindu monk and its shocking attempt to ban the humanitarian religious minority organisation, ISKCON, while ignoring jihadi extremist organisations," Kand told PTI. "Bangladesh is rapidly descending into a radicalised Islamic state, all under the watch of the US, the State Department, and the UN who must act now to restore democracy and protect minorities. I request not only President Biden but would urge President Trump and his transition team to give priority to restoration of peace and protect minorities in Bangladesh," he said. Instead of taking action against radical Islamist groups, the

Bangladeshi government has shockingly labelled ISKCON, a globally respected humanitarian organisation, a "religious fundamentalist organisation", Kand said. This baseless accusation, spearheaded by the attorney general, comes alongside a petition to ban ISKCON, which has fed millions worldwide, promoted interfaith harmony, and provided critical humanitarian aid in Bangladesh during disasters. Such a move undermines global religious tolerance and human rights, he said. In a social media post, popular African-American singer Mary Millben condemned the attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh. "The imprisonment of Chinmoy Krishna Das and the continued attacks against Hindus and other minorities by extremists in Bangladesh must be addressed now by world leaders. We must preserve religious freedom, and the safety of all people of faith globally," she said. Indian-American groups have held peaceful protests in various US cities against the arrest of Das.

Russian missile, drone attack targets Ukraine's energy infrastructure

AP ■ KYIV

Russia conducted a "massive" attack against Ukraine's energy infrastructure on Thursday, firing nearly 200 missiles and drones and leaving more than a million households without power, Ukrainian officials said. Russia's second major aerial attack on Ukraine's power grid in less than two weeks amplified fears that the Kremlin aims to cripple the country's power generation capacity before winter. "Attacks on energy facilities are happening all over Ukraine," Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said in a post on Facebook. He added that emergency power outages were implemented nationwide. In some regions, Kalibr cruise missiles with cluster munitions smashed into civilian targets, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, calling it "an insidious escalation." Cluster munitions release numerous small bombs over a wide area, making them dangerous to civilians both during and after an attack.

Ukrainian officials have warned recently that Russia was stockpiling cruise and ballistic missiles, presumably for another pre-winter aerial campaign against Ukraine's power grid. Ukrainian officials have in the past accused Russia of "weaponising winter." Around half of Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been destroyed during the almost three years of war with Russia, and rolling electricity blackouts are common. Kyiv's Western allies have sought to help Ukraine protect power generation with air defense systems and funds for rebuilding. Russia in previous years has targeted Ukraine's electricity generation, aiming to deny civilians critical heating and drinking water supplies during the bitter winter months and break Ukrainian spirits. The attacks also seek to hobble Ukraine's defense industry that is now producing missiles, drones and armoured vehicles, among other military assets. The war has been going in Russia's favour in recent months as its bigger army uses its advantages in manpower

and equipment to push Ukrainian forces backward in eastern areas, though its offensive has been slow and costly. Explosions were reported in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Rivne, Khmelnyskyi, Lutsk, and many other cities in central and western Ukraine. Zelenskyy urged Western countries to accelerate delivery of promised air defence weaponry. Ukrainian officials in the past have grumbled that military aid is slow to arrive. "Each such attack proves that air defense systems are needed now in Ukraine, where they save lives, and not at storage bases," Zelenskyy said on the Telegram messaging app. The head of Ukraine's presidential office, Andrii Yermak, said in a Telegram post that Russia had stockpiled missiles to strike Ukrainian infrastructure and wage war against civilians during the cold season. "They were helped by their crazy allies, including from North Korea," he wrote. Western governments and South Korea say North Korea in recent months has intensified its military support for

Russia. The head of the Lviv region in western Ukraine, Maksym Kozlytskyi, said the attack left more than half a million households without electricity. Over 280,000 households in the northwestern Rivne region were without electricity because of the attack, according to regional Gov. Oleksandr Koval. Running water supplies were also patchy in affected areas. Some schools in Rivne city switched to online classes. There were also strikes on the bordering Volyn region, where 215,000 households had no electricity, regional head Ivan Rudnytskyi said. All critical infrastructure that lost power was switched to generators. Energy infrastructure was also targeted in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region, local officials said. Air defences were activated there, and emergency power outages were introduced. Local officials ordered the opening of "points of invincibility" — shelter-type places where people can charge their phones and other electrical devices and get refreshments during blackouts.

Bangladesh seeks Hasina's trial in ICC

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh has sought to pursue deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's trial in the International Criminal Court even as she faced a trial in a domestic tribunal on charges of crimes against humanity, office of the interim government chief Muhammad Yunus said here on Thursday. "The Chief Adviser Yunus discussed the issue of Hasina's trial with International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim A Khan who called on him at his official Jamuna residence," an official of the chief adviser's press wing said. Hasina fled to India on August 5 following widespread protests against her Awami League-led government over a controversial job quota system. Three days later, Yunus, a Nobel laureate, took over as the Chief Adviser of the interim government. He said Yunus, during his meeting with Khan on Wednesday, told him that Bangladesh intends to pursue the charges against Hasina and her allies particularly on charges of carrying out "massacre" during the July-August mass uprising and enforced disappearances during the past 15 years of her rule.

Dozens of cases are now being processed at the Internal Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICT-BD) against Hasina, her cabinet colleagues, several of them being in jail or on the run at home and abroad while Dhaka sought Interpol help for her repatriation from India. Yunus, earlier, said his government would also seek her return from India to stand trial. The ICC prosecutor, however, said the international court would like to extend cooperation to ICT-BD, which by now, has issued an arrest warrant for Hasina and several top-ranking members of her Awami League party. According to the press wing, the duo during their discussion, also discussed the Rohingya crisis and humanitarian assistance for them, the Myanmar situation alongside the prosecution and accountability of atrocities during the July-August mass movement in Bangladesh. Khan informed Yunus that his office had formally sought an arrest warrant for Myanmar's military government chief Min Aung Hlaing for crimes against humanity regarding the treatment of Rohingyas.

Sheikh Hasina condemns arrest of Hindu spiritual leader, seeks release

PTI ■ DHAKA

Deposed prime minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina on Thursday condemned the arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das and said the leader must be released immediately. Das who was taken into custody earlier this week on sedition charges. "A top leader of the Sanatan religious community has been unjustly arrested, he must be released immediately," Hasina said in a statement. "A temple has been burnt in Chittagong. Previously, mosques, shrines, churches, monasteries and homes of the Ahmadiyya community were attacked, vandalised and looted and set on fire. Religious freedom and security of life and property of people of all communities should be ensured," the former prime minister said in the statement posted on Awami League's X account. Hasina fled to India on August 5 following widespread protests against her Awami League-led government over a controversial job quota system. Three days later, Yunus, a Nobel laureate, took over as the Chief Adviser of the interim government. Hindu minority groups have been frequently reporting atrocities against their community members in different parts of Bangladesh, even after Yunus took charge. There are also reports of the rise of extremist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and similar ideological extremist wings.

headed by the Sanatan religious community has been unjustly arrested, he must be released immediately," Hasina said in a statement. "A temple has been burnt in Chittagong. Previously, mosques, shrines, churches, monasteries and homes of the Ahmadiyya community were attacked, vandalised and looted and set on fire. Religious freedom and security of life and property of people of all communities should be ensured," the former prime minister said in the statement posted on Awami League's X account. Hasina fled to India on August 5 following widespread protests against her Awami League-led government over a controversial job quota system. Three days later, Yunus, a Nobel laureate, took over as the Chief Adviser of the interim government. Hindu minority groups have been frequently reporting atrocities against their community members in different parts of Bangladesh, even after Yunus took charge. There are also reports of the rise of extremist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami and similar ideological extremist wings.



Israeli police remove protesters blocking a main intersection in Jerusalem during a demonstration by relatives of hostages held by the Hamas militant group in the Gaza Strip and their supporters to call for a hostage release deal. AP/PTI

Thousands of Lebanese return home as Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire holds

AP ■ TYRE (LEBANON)

Thousands of Lebanese displaced by the war between Israel and Hezbollah militants returned home on Wednesday as a ceasefire took hold, driving cars stacked with personal belongings and defying warnings from Lebanese and Israeli troops to avoid some areas. If it endures, the ceasefire would end nearly 14 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which escalated in mid-September into all-out war and threatened to pull Hezbollah's patron, Iran, and Israel's closest ally, the United

States, into a broader conflagration. The deal does not address the war in Gaza, where Israeli strikes overnight on two schools-turned-shelters in Gaza City killed 11 people, including four children, according to hospital officials. Israel said one strike targeted a Hamas sniper and the other targeted militants hiding among civilians. The truce in Lebanon could give reprieve to the 1.2 million Lebanese displaced by the fighting and the tens of thousands of Israelis who fled their homes along the border. "They were a nasty and ugly 60

days," said Mohammed Kaafarani, 59, who was displaced from the Lebanese village of Bidias. "We reached a point where there was no place to hide." The US- and France-brokered deal, approved by Israel late Tuesday, calls for an initial two-month halt to fighting and requires Hezbollah to end its armed presence in southern Lebanon, while Israeli troops are to return to their side of the border. Thousands of additional Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers would deploy in the south, and an international panel

would monitor compliance. Israel says it reserves the right to strike Hezbollah should it violate the terms of the deal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said troops arrested four Hezbollah operatives, including a local commander, who had entered what it referred to as a restricted area. It said troops have been ordered to prevent people from returning to villages near the border. Israel is still fighting Hamas militants in Gaza in response to the group's cross-border raid into southern Israel on October 7, 2023. But President Joe Biden

on Tuesday said his administration would make another push in the coming days for a ceasefire there and the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas. Hezbollah supporters declare victory despite devastation: Israel can claim major victories in the war, including the killing of Hezbollah's top leader Hassan Nasrallah and most of its senior commanders, as well as the destruction of extensive militant infrastructure. A complex attack involving exploding pagers and walkie-talkies, widely attributed to Israel, appeared to show a remarkable

degree of penetration into the secretive militant group. The battered Hezbollah has lost much of the mystique it acquired by fighting Israel to a stalemate in the 2006 war. Yet the Shiite militant group still managed to put up heavy resistance, slowing Israel's advance while firing scores of rockets, missiles and drones across the border each day. "This is a moment of victory, pride and honour for us, the Shiite sect, and for all of Lebanon," said Hussein Sweidan, a resident returning to the port city of Tyre. Sporadic celebratory gunfire was heard at a main roundabout in the city, as drivers

honked their horns and residents cheered. Israel carried out heavy strikes until the ceasefire took hold, pounding targets in the already hard-hit southern suburbs of Beirut known as the Dahiyeh, where Hezbollah was headquartered. Residents returning to its rubble-strewn streets on Wednesday projected defiance. "We don't care about the rubble or destruction. We lost our livelihood, our properties, but it's OK, it will all come back," said Fatima Hanifa, evoking the rebuilding after the 2006 war. "It will be even more beautiful. And I say to Netanyahu that you

have lost, and lost, and lost because we are back and the others (Israelis) didn't come back." Other Lebanese are more critical of Hezbollah, accusing it of having dragged the economically devastated country into an unnecessary war on behalf of its patron, Iran. "They control us and we can't do anything about it. This war killed whoever it killed and now they're telling us it's a victory," said a young man who was returning from neighbouring Syria after being displaced from the eastern Bekaa province. He spoke on condition of anonymity, fearing retribution.

Canada is already examining tariffs on certain US items following Trump's threat

Canada is already examining possible retaliatory tariffs on certain items from the United States should President-elect Donald Trump follow through on his threat to impose sweeping tariffs on Canadian products, a senior official has said.

Many of the US products were chosen for their political rather than economic impact. For example, Canada imports USD 3 million worth of yogurt from the US annually and most comes from one plant in Wisconsin, home state of then-House Speaker Paul Ryan.

Trump made the threat Monday while railing against an influx of illegal migrants, even though the numbers at Canadian border pale in comparison to the southern border.

Canadian officials say lumping Canada in with Mexico is unfair but say they are happy to work with the Trump administration to lower the numbers from Canada.

Zuckerberg dines with Trump in Mar-a-Lago

Donald Trump dined on Wednesday with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg at the president-elect's Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, bringing together the Facebook founder and the former president who was once banned from that social network.

Stephen Miller, who has been appointed deputy chief of staff for Trump's second term, said Zuckerberg, like other business leaders, wants to support Trump's economic plans.

Trump was kicked off Facebook following the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol. The company restored his account in early 2023. During the 2024 campaign, Zuckerberg did not endorse a candidate for president.

Zuckerberg has since taken a more positive stance toward Trump. Earlier this year, he praised Trump's response to his first assassination attempt, calling it "badass."

US embassy in Pak issues security alert for Peshawar

The US Mission here has issued a security alert urging its citizens not to visit Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in northwest Pakistan until December 16 due to "security concerns."

The security alert titled "Threat to Serena Hotel, Peshawar" advising the US Mission personnel to avoid the said hotel in Peshawar, the capital of the province, was issued on Wednesday and advised caution with immediate effect.

"US citizens are encouraged to avoid the hotel and the area around the hotel during this period and reconsider travel plans," the statement read and reminded the US citizens to revisit the "Do Not Travel" advisory issued in September for the same province "due to terrorism."

The September 10 advisory lists the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 'Level 4' of the threat perception in the 'Do Not Travel' category. "Active terrorist and insurgent groups routinely conduct attacks against civilians, non-governmental organisations, government offices, and security forces."

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PUBLIC NOTICE: It is hereby informed to the General Public that I, Dr. Deepali Bhardwaj D/o D.S. Bhardwaj R/o 292, SFS, Hauz Khas, New Delhi have lost the Original/Provisional Allotment Letter No. 49213/AMOB 309 A02 dtd. 23.04.2014 issued by Jaiprakash Associates Ltd in respect of Unit No. AMOB309A02 in AMAN 3 project situated at Jaypee Greens, NOIDA on 26.11.2024.

PUBLIC NOTICE: It is to inform the public at large that Mrs. Rani had acquired Ground Floor without roof rights of Built up Property bearing Municipal No. 9957, area 84.5 sq. yds., situated at Gali No. 4, Sarai Rohila, Delhi vide Sale Deed Dt. 13.06.2024 executed by Mrs. Himanshu Aoria, Mrs. Sunita, Mr. Vishal Kumar, Mrs. Rajani and Mr. Ajay Jain and Now Mrs. Rani is the undisputed owner of the said property.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE: The Deputy Chief Engineer Const.-II, Shivaji bridge, Northern Railway, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites open E-Tender for the following work. Tender closing date: 20.12.2024 at 15:00 hrs.

NORTHERN RAILWAY OPEN TENDER NOTICE: The Director/Admin. Northern Railway Central Hospital, New Delhi-110055, for and on behalf of the President of India invites sealed open electronic-tenders for under noted work:-

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER: No. SSA-33/14/2024-TT-SS/1825165/2024 Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites tender through e-tendering process for supply of Kit of Hand Writing improvement and Calligraphy.

INVITING EOI FOR PURCHASING DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES: Notice No. Mech./DSL/Condemnation/2015/20 Vol-I Dated: 26-11-2024. The principal Chief Electrical Engineer of Electrical Department, N.F. Railway invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from prospective purchasers for purchase of 18 Nos. of WDG3A Diesel Locomotives.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority: Main Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in E-TENDER NOTICE: E-Tenders are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for following the jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned.

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY: Serving Customers With A Smile. THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD. SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX No. 0172-5041812,66 Notice Inviting Tender www.verka.coop

INVITING EOI FOR PURCHASING DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES OF DIESEL LOCO SHED: Notice No.: Mech./DSL/Condemnation/2015/20 Vol-I Dated: 25-11-2024. The principal Chief Electrical Engineer of Electrical Department, N.F. Railway invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from prospective purchasers for purchase of 09 Nos. of WDM3A Diesel Locomotives.

PARCEL HANDLING CONTRACT: GEM Bid Number: GEM/2024/B/5638483, Dated: 22-11-2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work. Item Category: Custom Bid for Services- Parcel Handling Contract at New Jalpaiguri Railway station. Estimated Bid Value: ₹40,26,323.76/-; EMD Amount: ₹80,550/-.

INDIAN OVERSEAS BANK: ROHINI BRANCH (1506) 101-110, 1ST FLOOR, R.G. COMPLEX, SECTOR-8, ROHINI DELHI - 110085, TEL : 011-27940673, 8925951506 (APPENDIX IV) POSSESSION NOTICE (for immovable property) (Under section 8(1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002)

NOTE: 1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in. 2. Contingendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY: 1. Equitable mortgage of the residential Flat entire ground floor without roof right, measuring 50 sq. yds out of the built up property bearing property no. S-3/46, Old No. D-1, Part of Kharsa No. 23, Old Mahabir Nagar, Gali No. 2, New Delhi in the name of Murlidhar S/o- Shri Ram Krishan Ray.

NSE, Meghalaya Government ink pact for youth in BFSI sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Thursday said it has collaborated with the Meghalaya government for a skill building program for the youth of the state in the BFSI sector. This project will enhance employability and self-employment opportunities in the Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) sector, NSE said in a statement. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the exchange with the support of the Meghalaya Government will implement the program to increase awareness, build skills and competencies in the BFSI across the state. "As India cements its position amongst the world's largest economies and continues its remarkable growth story, the



Northeast region stands poised to play a transformative role in this journey. Meghalaya is committed to being at the forefront of this

transformation. "Our collaboration with the NSE through their Student Skilling Program marks a significant step in empowering Meghalaya's youth in the BFSI sectors. By equipping our youth with financial knowledge and skills, we are investing in both their future and Meghalaya's prosperity," Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, said. This program aims to empower the youth of Meghalaya with essential skills and knowledge in the BFSI sector, bridging the skill gap and enhancing their employment opportunities for the future. "With financial literacy at the heart of NSE's mission, we aim to transform young people from job seekers into job creators," Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD and CEO at NSE, said.

Government collects ₹ 1.44 lakh crore in toll tax since 2000

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has collected Rs 1.44 lakh crore as toll tax at fee plazas presently operational under Public Private Partnerships (PPP) model on National Highways since December 2000, Parliament was informed on Thursday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said all user fee plazas on National Highways are established as per the provision of National Highway Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008 and the respective Concession Agreement. "Amount of 1.44 lakh crore rupees have been collected as

user fee at fee plazas presently operational under Public Private Partnerships (PPP) model on National Highways since December, 2000," he said. Replying to a separate question, Gadkari said the government has initiated the implementation of barrier-free tolling using available technology based electronic toll collection (ETC) system as an added facility along with FASTag. The minister said presently, Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) based tolling system is not operational anywhere on National Highways. However, he added that amendment to the NH Fee Rules, 2008 (dated Sep 9, 2024) has been made to enable GNSS-based tolling

system through On-Board Unit (OBU) and users of vehicles not fitted with a valid, functional Global Navigation Satellite System On-Board Unit shall have to pay a fee equivalent to two times of the user fee applicable for that category of vehicle at that fee plaza in case the GNSS based tolling is made operational. In the GNSS-based user fee collection system, toll charges shall be levied based on the actual distance travelled by a vehicle, on a National Highway or expressway in term of NH Fee Rules, 2008 and amendment thereof. Whereas, at present, the user fee is collected at the fee plaza depending on project influence length of respective fee plaza.

Generative AI will enhance effectiveness of tax functions: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Most of the CFOs as well as finance and tax leaders in India believe generative AI (GenAI) will significantly enhance the effectiveness of their tax functions, said a study on Thursday. Globally, 87 per cent of leaders echo this sentiment, underscoring GenAI's potential to revolutionize tax functions worldwide, said a EY Tax and Finance Operations (TFO) Survey 2024. Based on insights from 1,600 leaders across 32 countries and 18 industries, including 70 CFOs and tax leaders of leading Indian corporates, the global survey highlighted key challenges in the tax and finance domain. It said, "94 per cent of CFOs and finance and tax leaders in India believe generative AI (GenAI) will significantly

enhance the effectiveness of their tax functions a remarkable increase from just 19 per cent in 2023, highlighting a growing recognition of GenAI's potential in the tax landscape." The survey 2024 also showed that Indian tax leaders have already begun to make strides in their GenAI journey, with 14 per cent actively developing strategies, launching pilot projects, and exploring early-stage Gen AI applications. Another 47 per cent are in the exploratory phase, investigating and experimenting with GenAI's potential to enhance their operations, surpassing the global average of 40 per cent. Rahul Patni, Digital Tax Leader, EY India, said that GenAI is clearly emerging as an effective tool for tax professionals to transform their workspaces and



professional lives. Areas of application can range from AI assisted document reviews to data cleansing and drafting business deliverables for day-to-day matters. This will allow them to work more effectively, focus on strategic priorities, and make better decisions," Patni said. The survey further said 44

per cent of respondents in India (and 45 per cent globally) spend their time on routine tasks like data collection and tax return preparation, which Indian tax leaders believe should take not more than 20-25 per cent of their time, allowing for a greater focus on strategic initiatives. Jitesh Bansal, National Leader, Tax and Finance Operate, EY India, said that as regulatory and reporting burdens grow, tax and finance functions face increasing strain. "Tax teams in companies will need to step out of their comfort zones and start addressing newer problems around tax function strategy, processes, data quality, audit readiness and so on," Bansal said. In the context of shift in ways of working, the survey highlighted a trend of tax skills being complemented very well by data and technology skills.

Air India sees growth from domestic, short international flights in 2025



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India will see most of the air traffic growth coming from domestic and short-haul international operations in 2025 as more narrow-body planes are joining the fleet and legacy wide-body aircraft will be going for retrofit next year, the airline's chief Campbell Wilson said on Thursday. The Tata Group-owned airline, which has embarked on a five-year transformation journey, expects to have a fleet of 400 planes by 2027. Currently, the total fleet strength of Air India Group, including Air India Express, is around 300 aircraft. During a select media briefing, Wilson, who has been at the helm of Air India for more than two years, said the airline group has a domestic market share of around 29 per cent and 55 per cent on the metro to metro routes. On top 120 domestic routes, the market share is about 40 per cent, he said. According to him, the retrofit of legacy wide-body aircraft will start in early 2025. "We had hoped to start retrofit of 787s and 777s by now. Unfortunately, the global supply chains in some areas are still recovering and seats in particular are a challenge..."

Wilson said it will primarily come from domestic and short-haul international flights as most of the aircraft that are coming in are narrow-body ones. "We are also taking the aircraft for the retrofit programme. So, the number of wide-body aircraft available will shrink a little bit," he added. As part of Tata Group consolidating its airline business, Air India has merged Vistara with itself and AIX Connect has been integrated with Air India Express. The CEO and MD of Air India noted that there is a delay in getting all the 50 white tail aircraft, which were earlier expected to join the fleet by December this year. Out of the total 50 white tail Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, at least 35 have joined the fleet. These planes are being operated by Air India Express. "50 white tail aircraft, all of them were to come by December this year. They will stretch up to June next year and that in itself has a little bit of impact," Wilson said while responding to a query about delays due to issues at Boeing, including the recent strike. "It is not clear for how long the impact will be. Six months is reasonable for some aircraft," he said. Generally, white tail planes are those that were originally manufactured for a particular airline and later taken by another airline.

Rupee falls nine paise against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 84.49 (provisional) against US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a negative trend in domestic equities and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets. Forex traders said a mixed-to-weak tone in crude oil prices cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.45 and touched the lowest level of 84.50 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit ended the session at 84.49 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close. The rupee hit its lowest-ever closing level of 84.50 on November 21. On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated by 11 paise to close at 84.40 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand from importers.



However, overall weakness in crude oil prices and fresh FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. "US markets will remain closed today to observe the Thanksgiving Holiday. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 84.35 to Rs 84.70," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. According to traders, the latest Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes revealed a significant shift in the Federal Reserve's outlook. The Fed is likely to put downward pressure on short-term interest rates, reducing the appeal of dollar-denominated assets and contributing to the decline in the Dollar Index. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.25 per cent at 106.34. Brent crude, the global oil

Sensex tumbles nearly 1,200 points to slip below 80k

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to plunge nearly 1.50 per cent on Thursday, weighed down by intense selling in market heavyweights Infosys, RIL and HDFC Bank amid a mixed trend in global equities. The BSE benchmark Sensex slumped 1,190.34 points or 1.48 per cent to settle at 79,043.74. During the day, it tanked 1,315.16 points or 1.63 per cent to 78,918.92. The NSE Nifty tumbled 360.75 points or 1.49 per cent to 23,914.15. "Domestic markets took a breather after a strong start to the week. The overnight sell-off in the US market, driven by renewed uncertainty about the rate cut trajectory and rising geopolitical tension, led to a correction in heavyweight IT and consumer discretionary stocks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30-share Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra,



Infosys, HCL Technologies, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Titan, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries and Power Grid were among the laggards. On the other hand, State Bank of India was the only gainer. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading higher. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday. The decline in tech companies dragged major American indices lower. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7.78 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.49 per cent to USD 73.18 a barrel.

India actively engaged with 30 nations for mutual recognition agreements: CBIC Chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal on Thursday said India is actively pursuing negotiation for signing of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with customs authorities of about 30 countries. Mutual recognition agreements help ease overseas trade by avoiding dual certifications. It thus reduces compliance cost, simplifying compliance requirements by adhering to only one regulation and enhancing trade opportunities. India is proactively engaging with its trading partners to broaden and deepen the Authorised Economic



Operator (AEO) program. India has successfully signed MRAs with several key trading partners including the US, South Korea, UAE, Taiwan, Australia and Malaysia, he said. "Negotiations are ongoing with over 30 countries with promising progress and discussions with Japan and South Africa," he said while

commitment to digital and sustainable trade facilitation, as evidenced by improved performance in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission Asia Pacific's Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. India has also shown improvement in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, he said. In the era of an increasingly connected world, he said, the coming together of global fraternity is extremely crucial to foster trust, cooperation and Innovation. The AEO programme is central to this vision symbolising partnership between customs and businesses, he said, adding, it is built on mutual respect and a common goal of secure and efficient trade.

Finmin to review efficacy of windfall tax on crude oil, fuel exports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry would review the efficacy of windfall tax on the export of petrol, diesel and Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) as global crude oil prices have stabilised, sources said. Phenomenal profits made by some oil refiners on exporting fuel at the expense of domestic supplies had prompted the government to introduce an export tax on petrol, diesel and ATF in July 2022. The finance ministry is going to review the windfall tax and tax being mobilised out of this, sources said. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has already written to the Finance Ministry in this regard,

sources said. The government in September slashed the windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to 'nil' per tonne. The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) and is notified fortnightly based on average oil prices in two weeks. The last such revision took place effective August 31 when the windfall tax on crude petroleum was set at Rs 1,850 per tonne. The SAED on the export of diesel, petrol and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at 'nil' with effect from September 18. India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

INBRIEF

NEW DELHI: The Goa Pavilion is adjudged as the Gold Medal award for excellence in "Swachh Pavilion" displayed at the 43rd India International Trade Fair, 2024, which concluded at the iconic Pragati Maidan in New Delhi.



GNU OBSERVES CONSTITUTION DAY

AMRITSAR: Celebrating Constitution Day, the Department of Laws of Guru Nanak Dev University organized a Free Legal Aid Camp and a Guest Lecture titled "Constitutional Right to Justice in India: The Role and Impact of Lok Adalats." This event also marked the inauguration of the first issue of the department's new student magazine, a platform designed to reflect the creativity and voices of law students.



Veteran journalist Rajdeep Sardesai launched his latest book, *2024: The Election That Surprised India*, on Constitution Day at a packed auditorium in Teen Murti Bhavan. Non-fiction books dealing with politics and politicians generally evoke significant interest, especially when penned by a journalist with extensive experience in covering politics and elections. Sardesai's latest work was eagerly anticipated, and the wait proved worthwhile. The book offers a compelling exploration of one of India's most dramatic and unpredictable general elections, held just a few months ago.

This is Sardesai's third book on elections, following his analyses of the 2014 and 2019 general elections. In this new volume, he delves into the missteps of pollsters and pundits, who failed to predict the outcome accurately, and critiques the mainstream media for its perceived one-sided narratives. Sardesai examines why the BJP's "Char Sau Paar" campaign slogan, intended to project overwhelming confidence, failed to resonate with voters as expected. He also sheds light on Rahul Gandhi's Congress, which mounted a surprising comeback after years of setbacks.

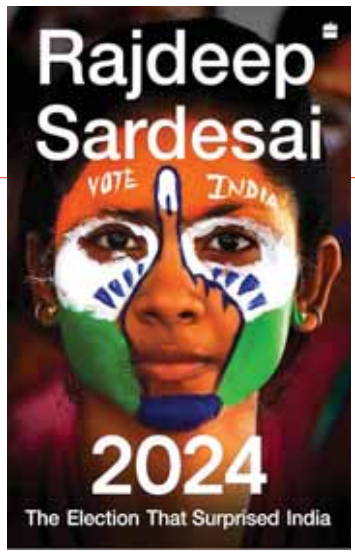
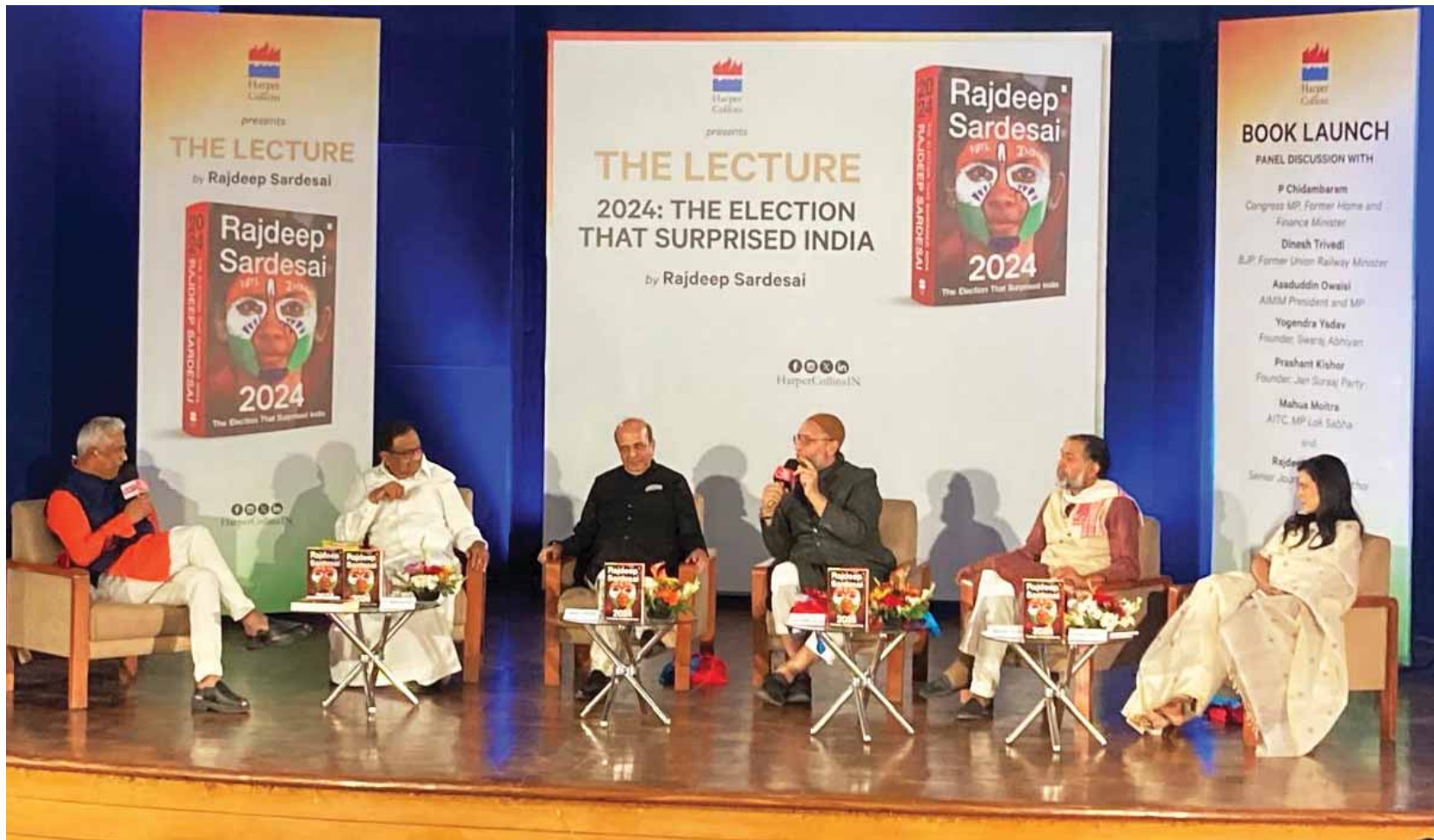
The narrative explores the operational strategies of the Modi-Shah political team, the role of enforcement agencies during the elections, and the controversies surrounding the fairness of the electoral process. Sardesai highlights the fierce battles in state elections and provides nuanced insights into who truly emerged victorious—and who faltered—in India's increasingly polarised political landscape.

In his characteristic unsparing and incisive style, Sardesai charts the dramatic changes in Indian politics over the last five years, offering readers an insider's perspective on the personalities, strategies, and events that defined the 2024 elections. Building on his bestselling accounts of the 2014 and 2019 elections, this book is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the shifting sands of power and politics in India. One may agree or disagree with his interpretation and insights, especially since he is not the same as he once was, but the book is a good read and definitely has a shelf life.

A LIVELY LAUNCH EVENT

The book launch was more than a literary occasion; it featured a panel discussion moderated by Sardesai himself, with luminaries from various political parties in attendance. The event, held in a packed auditorium, was marked by engaging debates that delved into the key questions surrounding the electoral verdict that stunned the nation.

The distinguished panel included prominent political figures such as P. Chidambaram, senior Congress leader; Mahua Moitra, the fiery Trinamool Congress MP; Dinesh Trivedi, former Railway Minister; and Asaduddin

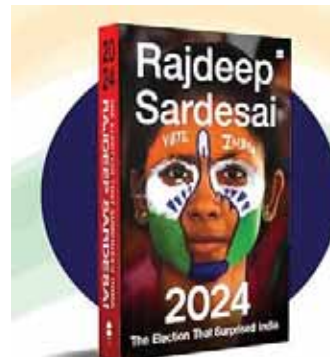


ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: 2024: The Election That Surprised India
by Rajdeep Sardesai
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹799

BOOK LAUNCH SPARKS INSIGHTFUL DEBATE

2024: The Election That Surprised India, the latest book by **RAJDEEP SARDESAI**, captures the myriad nuances of the recently held general elections, presenting an unflinching narrative of power, ambition, and the changing aspirations of the electorate, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Owaisi, leader of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM). True to expectations, the discussion was animated and insightful. Adding a unique twist, the panellists took playful potshots at Sardesai himself, "roasting" him in a rare and humorous turn of events. Sardesai, clad in an orange kurta (perhaps making a statement), took the jabs in stride with a smile and humour. On a more serious note, the discussion was refreshingly candid. P. Chidambaram painted a picture of optimism for the Congress, emphasising the growing disillusionment with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He highlighted issues such as unemployment, inflation, and the perceived erosion of democratic



RAJDEEP SARDESAI
ANSWERS THE BIGGEST QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIA'S MOST BRUISING AND POLARIZED POLITICAL ELECTION.

institutions, arguing that these factors could shift voter sentiment. Chidambaram asserted that the Congress was ready to lead the country back to a path of inclusive growth and

social justice. On the other hand, Mahua Moitra critiqued the centralisation of power under the BJP and the stifling of dissent. She warned that India's diversity was

under threat due to rising authoritarianism and religious polarisation. Moitra argued that regional parties like the TMC were better equipped to challenge the BJP's

dominance because they understood the electorate's pulse more effectively than the Delhi-centric political establishment. Asaduddin Owaisi was humorous yet thought-provoking, raising concerns about the marginalisation of Muslims and other minority communities under the current regime. He criticised the BJP's focus on religious polarisation, warning that it was detrimental to India's secular fabric. Owaisi also called for greater unity among Muslim voters and reiterated his party's commitment to representing marginalised voices while building alliances with like-minded regional players.

Yogendra Yadav, a psephologist-turned-politician, countered Dinesh Trivedi's assertion that there were no minorities in India and that "all are Indians." Yadav argued that while leveraging community votes was not new, the BJP had spearheaded campaigns that effectively rendered Muslims second-class citizens. Throughout the discussion, Sardesai kept the conversation dynamic, challenging panellists with incisive questions that encouraged them to think beyond the obvious.

The debate was intense, often bordering on contentious, as the political heavyweights offered divergent perspectives on the state of the nation. From discussions on the BJP's electoral strategies to the role of opposition unity, caste politics, and the influence of social media, the conversation reflected the multifaceted nature of Indian politics. The panellists, despite their differing ideological positions, agreed on one point: the 2024 elections marked a watershed moment in Indian politics and that the rightward shift in Indian politics is real and here to stay. While this shift might not be irreversible, it is the reality of the day, nevertheless!

November Reads!

By Rupa Publications



The Wife and the Dancing Girl
 By ANUJA CHANDRAMOULI
 (PRICE: ₹395, PAGES: 272)

In *The Wife and the Dancing Girl*, Anuja Chandramouli weaves a tale of searing passion and heartbreak inspired by Silapathikaram, the timeless Tamil classic by Ilango Adigal. This story explores the intricate love triangle between Kannagi, the devoted wife, Madhavi, the enchanting dancing girl, and the man they both loved fiercely. Through moments of breathtaking passion and harrowing despair, Kannagi and Madhavi navigate the depths of love and loss, armed with fragile hope and the bitter truth that exquisite pleasure often comes at the cost of endless pain. Chandramouli's retelling is both tender and tragic, delivering a romance that transcends time and leaves an indelible mark.

Unpolitically Correct: The Politics and Economics of Governance
 By SATYA MOHANTY
 (Price: ₹595, Pages: 232)

In *Unpolitically Correct*, Satya Mohanty, a former senior bureaucrat, delivers a provocative critique of India's governance and economic policies. With growing inequality and 1% of the population holding a disproportionate share of wealth, the book questions whether this disparity is inevitable or the result of a pro-rich policy bias. Challenging conventional beliefs, Mohanty examines issues like inequality, health, education, employment, and privatisation from a refreshingly radical perspective. He deconstructs the narratives of governments, media, and academia, exposing myths about wealth creators and economic progress. The book warns of the dangers posed by fiscal stress, economic slowdowns, and unchecked privatisation without ensuring efficiency and equity. Offering a bold and insightful perspective,

We've all heard the adage: never judge a book by its cover.

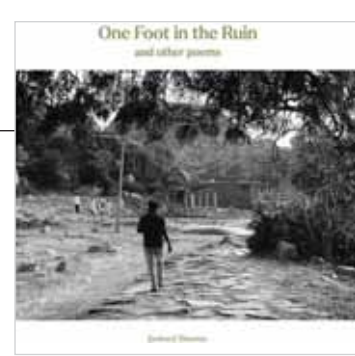
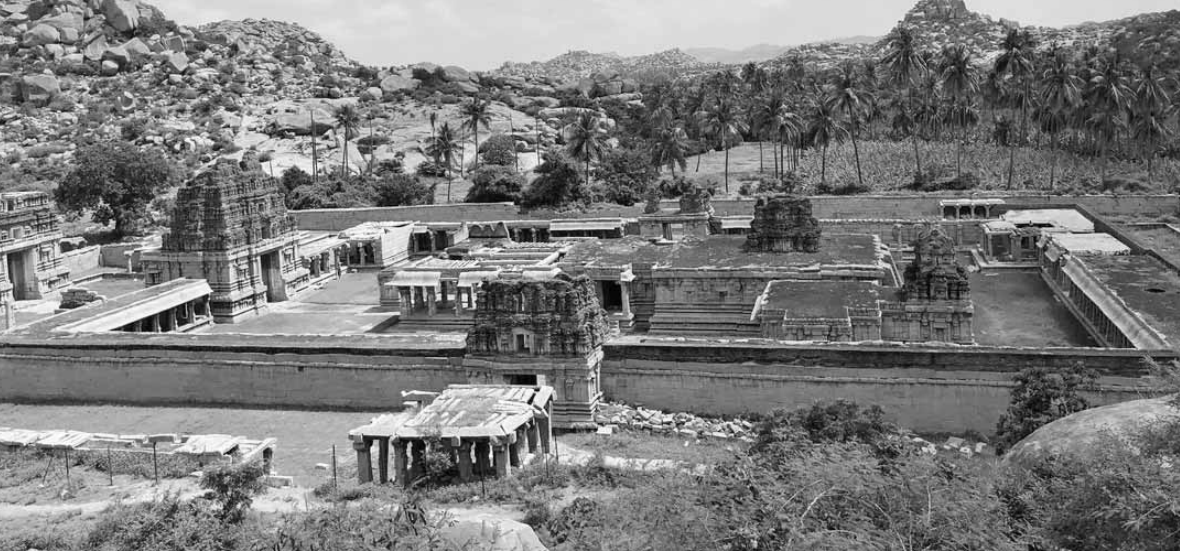
While this is sound advice, there are exceptions. *One Foot in the Ruin and Other Poems* by Janhwi Sharma is one such exception where the cover perfectly mirrors the book's essence. The image—a lone wayfarer treading an uneven, weathered path amidst ruins, with distant figures barely visible—evokes a sense of solitude and introspection. Towering hills frame the background, while trees and bushes border the ruins in the foreground. Rendered in shades of black, white, and grey, the photograph conjures an atmosphere steeped in history, timelessness, and philosophy. It invites the reader to reflect: What is life if not a journey, and what are we if not wayfarers navigating an unpredictable path? This evocative cover sets the tone for the meditative and poignant journey that unfolds within the book.

The title poem, "One Foot in the Ruin," found on page 166, epitomises this theme. Accompanied by a photograph of an abandoned street in Hampi, the poem reads:
*One foot in the ruins...
 I walk on the weather-beaten path
 setting one foot in the ruin
 I may wander
 wander aimlessly
 carelessly ceaselessly
 but never to get lost
 but maybe at times to
 find new paths, new goals
 embark on a new journey
 or simply to return home.*

Traditionally, ruins evoke somberness, loss, and mystery. Sharma, however, takes a refreshingly different approach. He portrays the ruins not as dead relics but as sites of exploration, learning, and renewal. The poet walks through them not to lose himself but to discover new meanings, new paths, and, ultimately, a way home. In these lines, Sharma shares a hopeful philosophy: life, no matter how unpredictable or transient, holds potential for growth and return. This hopeful outlook resonates in another short poem, "Silent Spaces," on page 41, paired with a photograph of the Red Fort's barracks in Delhi:
*Silent spaces
 haunting...
 filtering rays of hope
 for the ruin.*
 Here, Sharma's ruins filter light,

Whispers of Ruins

JANHWIJ SHARMA'S *One Foot in the Ruin and Other Poems* is a captivating blend of evocative photography and reflective poetry that explores the intersection of history, memory, and the human spirit, writes **SWATI PAL**



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: 'One foot in the ruin and other poems' - The poem book by Janhwi Sharma, Dev
Publisher: Dev
Price: ₹2,495 **Pages:** 218

offering glimpses of hope rather than despair. Similarly, in "Is There a Way" (p. 77), paired with a photograph from Fatehpur Sikri, the poet muses on the stories ruins whisper:
*Is there a way to hear the ruins
 still telling tales of its
 proud past with all
 moments it lived
 cherished and felt...
 Time feels alive
 within these ruins...
 all that will one day remain
 will be the ruins' whispering tales*

to those who could hear. Sharma's ability to hear and convey this "whispering tales" makes this collection profound. Of the book's five sections—North, West, Central, South, and East—each rooted in different regions of India, the Central section lingers in memory. For example, the poem "Excavated" (p. 159), paired with a photograph of Sarnath, explores time and its interplay with history:
*Unearthed remains brought to fore
 testaments of the era silent long back...
 Time unwinds and time unwraps
 bringing ruins to another life
 time now stands still...*
 Similarly, "In His Shelter" (p. 162), set against an image of a shrine in Hampi, reflects on the timeless pursuit of divine shelter:
*In perpetual obeisance
 prostrations before the divine
 seeking His shelter and blessings
 humbly forever...*
 Sharma's poems often delve beneath the surface of ruins to unearth

enduring values, faith, and hope. This sentiment finds expression in "Stones Speak" (p. 120), inspired by the Ellora Caves:

*Hewn out of rock/sculpted over
 time/lasting forever.
 Stones speak/louder than words/echoing
 memories/with ceaseless gaze.*
 The poet also captures spiritual and surreal elements, as in "The Other World" (p. 203), paired with an evocative photograph from Assam:
*Passage for the ultimate departure
 there is deathly silence around...
 one never dies as they say
 no need to ever mourn those who
 leave...*

Balanced against these profound reflections are moments of lightheartedness, as in "Craftsman's Prank" (p. 112), inspired by a seemingly purposeless carved handle on a wall at Adalaj Vav, Gujarat:
*Why is it there/I ponder
 what purpose does it serve/makes me
 think harder...
 Surely he is having a good laugh/even
 in his grave.*

This blend of spirituality, history, and human touch showcases Sharma's ability to see both the solemn and the whimsical in his subjects. Whether contemplating eternity or musing on a craftsman's playful detail, his poems bridge past and present, light and shadow, permanence and impermanence. The book's concluding poem, "Through the Ruin" (p. 32), paired with a photograph from Sarai Amanat Khan in Amritsar, encapsulates the collection's overarching message:
*Through the ruin...
 And I walk alone/framed through the
 ruin
 ravaged by time...
 And I walk ahead/through the voids of
 the ruin
 reaching the destination/where my
 future will be.*
 As we reflect on the book's title and its solemn promise, we find that *One Foot in the Ruin* does not burden readers with heaviness. Instead, it uplifts, offering hope and perspective. Sharma's work reminds us that ruins, like life, hold stories worth hearing and lessons worth cherishing. Both the poetry and photographs take readers on an evocative journey across India, making this book a treasure worth exploring.

Hybrid model for Champions Trophy not acceptable: PCB tells ICC

PTI ■ KARACHI
The Pakistan Cricket Board informed the International Cricket Council on Thursday that it will not accept the Hybrid model for the Champions Trophy, and asked the global governing body not to discuss the option in Friday's board meeting. The ICC has convened a meeting of the executive members virtually to resolve the scheduling imbroglio surrounding the marquee event after India's refusal to send the team across the border. "I can confirm that PCB has a few hours back told the ICC that a Hybrid Model is not acceptable to them," a source told PTI. The PCB has been rigid in its opposition to the hybrid model and had advised the ICC to look at other options to stage the Champions Trophy. The Pakistan board



maintained that having a Hybrid model would mean giving preferential treatment to India. "I can confirm initially the PCB had looked at the possibility of a Hybrid model on the condition that if India can't play in Pakistan, then in future there would be Hybrid models in all ICC events in India right until 2031 (ODI World Cup in India and Bangladesh) as Pakistan would not go and play in India," the source said.

Another source confirmed that PCB has also reminded the ICC to inform whether the BCCI had submitted a letter in writing from their government stating that clearance was not given to the Indian team to play in Pakistan. "Under ICC regulations if any team says its government is not allowing it to play in another nation on whatever grounds that board has to submit their government's directives in writing which we have not seen so far," the source said. He said the PCB had acknowledged the contribution of the BCCI and Indian market in ICC's income generation but reminded the ICC that as per numbers from the last few global events Pakistan also played a major part in ensuring the revenues through their matches against India. He said the ICC has yet to confirm the timing of the virtual meeting.



East Bengal seek first win of season in clash against NorthEast United

PTI ■ KOLKATA
NorthEast United have been on an unbelievable run recently, winning thrice and drawing once in their previous four encounters. Avoiding a defeat in Friday's clash will make it their longest-ever unbeaten sequence since going 11 matches without a loss from January-March 2021. East Bengal FC head coach Oscar Bruzon acknowledged that NorthEast United will play on the frontfoot in this fixture, but assured that the home team has done its homework properly. "I don't think NorthEast United FC is going to come here to neutralise our attacking power, but they are coming to try and score more goals themselves," Bruzon said. "That's what I know from what they have been doing in the last games with their frontline. We will try to play our best game, and win the match," he added. NorthEast United head coach Juan Pedro Benali mentioned that maintaining a fine balance between their offensive instincts and defensive discipline will be critical in this match. "Each game is a different story. We need to make big chances to score and at the same time make it equally difficult for them to do so. That's our objective, because we know we can score and that's a very important part (of our gameplay)," Benali said. Bottom-placed East Bengal BFC will make one more attempt to notch their first win of the season when they take on NorthEast United FC in their eighth match of the Indian Super League (ISL) season here on Friday. After losing six straight matches, East Bengal opened their account with a goalless draw against Mohammedan Sporting on November 9 in a Kolkata Derby. They will now want to take one step forward and clinch all three points in front of their home crowd at the Yuba Bharati Krirangan. The Highlanders, on the other hand, have been in an impressive form this season, as they are currently placed at third with 15 points from nine games, thanks to four wins and three draws. They have scored 21 goals, conceding only 15, and have lost merely once in their previous five matches. They trail the top-placed Bengaluru FC (20) by five points -- a gap they will be confident of bridging, given how they have been managing to put the pieces of their jigsaw together of late. The two sides have faced each other eight times, with NorthEast United and East Bengal FC emerging victorious in four and two matches respectively. A couple of fixtures have resulted in a draw.

India can reach top-50 of FIFA rankings in next 10 years: Mandaviya



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India can break into the top-50 in the FIFA rankings, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday, according to a release issued by All India Football Federation (AIFF). The top brass of the AIFF, including its president Kalyan Chaubey, met Mandaviya on Thursday to brief him on the existing AIFF-FIFA Academy in Odisha and the plan to build additional four such facilities in different zones. "An elaborate plan has to be chalked out and put in place for execution so that India can reach a FIFA ranking below 50 in the next ten years," Mandaviya was quoted as saying in the AIFF release. "India boasts one of the largest pools of young talent globally. The focus should be on grassroots, talent identification. They should be nurtured along with coach development which will be pivotal for the sports growth." The FIFA rankings began in 1992 and the Indian men's football team's best ranking has been 94, achieved in February 1996. The team has broken into the top-100 on a very few occasions. In the latest FIFA chart issued on Thursday, the Indian football team is ranked 127th, two spots down from the earlier October list. Japan, Iran, Korea and Australia, the regular Asian countries in the World Cup, are ranked at 15th,

18th, 23rd and 26th respectively in the latest rankings. After the meeting, which also discussed the importance of coach development, the minister assured the AIFF of all possible support for the development of the sport in India. "Rapid economic growth and an expanding middle class are reshaping attitudes towards sports. Parents are now encouraging children to balance academics with sports unlike earlier times," the minister pointed out. "The Government is committed to providing comprehensive support for sports development in India. Initiatives like new training centres and partnerships with international bodies will drive progress." Chaubey said the AIFF has presented a detailed plan to Mandaviya. "Given the size and population of a vast country like India, one AIFF-FIFA academy in Odisha is not enough. So, we proposed to have four more regional academies with the same technical supports from FIFA." "Presently in India, there are 25 fully professional clubs in the ISL and the I-League. In addition to that, there are 80 AIFF-accredited academies, all these teams are having under-13 age group category teams, the details have been presented to the ministry." FIFA Talent Development Scheme (TDS) Project Director Ged Roddy, who is currently on a visit to India, was also present at the meeting, along with AIFF Secretary General Anilkumar. The AIFF-FIFA Academy was launched in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, after a visit of world renowned coach Arsene Wenger, who is the FIFA Chief of Global Football Development.

Australia add uncapped all-rounder Beau Webster to squad as cover for Mitchell Marsh

PTI ■ SYDNEY
Australia have added uncapped all-rounder Beau Webster to their squad for the second Test against India as cover for Mitchell Marsh, whose fitness remains a concern. Marsh had pulled up "sore" following Australia's 295-run hammering in the series opener in Perth earlier this week. Webster, also a right-hand pace all-rounder like Marsh, has been the stand out performer in the Sheffield Shield over the past two years. The 30-year-old has collected 1788 runs including five hundreds and nine fifties. He starred in Tasmania's Sheffield Shield match against New South Wales earlier this week, striking a 61 and 49 besides taking five wickets.



He also impressed in the A series against India earlier this month, becoming the second highest run-getter for Australia A behind compatriot Nathan McSweeney, collecting 145 runs across four innings at an impressive average of 72.50. With the ball, he became the joint-leading wicket-taker alongside Brendan Doggett both taking seven scalps each. "To get a few runs and wickets (for Australia A) was pleasing against a strong Indian side," Webster was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au ahead of the announcement on Thursday. "Any time you're playing 'A' cricket, it's the one step below Test level, so it does hold you in good stead. To get the call

from 'Bails' (men's selection chair George Bailey) at the end of the NSW game was a really proud moment and I can't wait to get stuck in." Webster will join the Australian squad in Adelaide next week. "There's a tight turnaround between the Adelaide and Gabba Test so I think (I'm there) just to have some cover there for that middle-order role, whichever way they go," Webster added. Apart from his explosive batting, Webster has added seam-bowling to his abilities, a skill he added to his repertoire just four years ago. Despite the disappointing show in the series-opener, coach Andrew McDonald had asserted that there will be no changes in the home team for the pink ball Test in Adelaide, starting on December 6.

India to send 68-member team for Asia-Pacific Deaf Games



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
A 68-member Indian team will take part in the Asia-Pacific Deaf Games to be held in Kuala Lumpur from December 1 to 8. The tournament is at par with the Asian Games for individuals with speech and hearing impairment and also serves as a precursor to the Deaflympics, which will be held in Japan next year. The India will have representation in seven disciplines including athletics, badminton, chess, judo, table tennis, taekwondo and wrestling. A send-off ceremony was organised for the touring party by the Sports Authority

of India here at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium ahead of their departure on Friday. National camps were organised by SAI in Sonapat for wrestling and in the national capital for badminton and judo from November 15 to 30. The camps for chess, athletics and table tennis were held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, while the SAI regional centre in Lucknow conducted the taekwondo camp on the same dates. India's overall contingent is of 92 members including 24 coaches, support staff and officials and SAI has spent close to Rs 3 crore for travel, accommodation, training, equipment and team kits etc. The Asia-Pacific Games were held last in 2015 at Taiwan where Indian athletes won three gold and two silver medals. Among those who are expected to clinch medals include double Deaflympics gold medallist Abhinav Sharma, 2022 Deaflympics champion shuttler Jerlin Anika and Amit, who won the bronze in 86kg category wrestling. Chess has been included in the program for the first time. Mallika Handa will lead the seven-member Indian team.

Sri Lanka all out for record-low 42 in Durban cricket test

AP ■ DURBAN
Sri Lanka was bowled out by South Africa for 42 at Kingsmead on Thursday, its lowest total in test cricket. Sri Lanka's previous worst was 71 just over 20 years ago in Kandy against Pakistan. South Africa needed only 83 legal deliveries — 13.5 overs — to rout the Sri Lankans in their first innings. That's the lowest number of deliveries in 100 years. England routed South Africa in 75 balls in 1924. The 42 was also a record low for a test at Kingsmead, and the record low against South Africa, eclipsing New Zealand's 45 in 2013 in Cape Town. The pitch was considered batting friendly on day two of the first test, as South



Africa scored 111 runs in an extended morning session, resuming on 80-4 and being dismissed for 191. Kamindu Mendis top-scored with 13 in a Sri Lanka lineup which featured four ducks. Medium-pace Marco Jansen took a career-best 7-13 in 6.5 overs. Jansen was only the second player after Hugh Trumble of Australia, in 1904 against England, to take seven wickets inside seven overs of a test innings.

Mbappe needs 'support' Real Madrid coach Ancelotti says after 2-0 loss to Liverpool

AP ■ LIVERPOOL
Kylian Mbappe hoped his move to Real Madrid would finally end his wait to win the Champions League. That felt a long way off on Wednesday after a 2-0 defeat to Liverpool left the defending champion in danger of being eliminated from European club soccer's elite tournament at the first stage and in a fight just to make the playoffs for the next round. If Madrid does make an early exit, Mbappe may look back on a miserable night at Anfield where he was

humbled by a young defender and then missed a penalty that would have leveled the score. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said afterward the star forward was going through a "difficult moment" just months after he joined the record 15-time European champion. "We've got to give him our support and love and he will soon be fine," Ancelotti said as he faced multiple questions from Spanish reporters about Mbappe's form. "It could be lack of confidence maybe. Sometimes when moments in the game and things are not



working out, the idea is to keep things simple. Don't complicate things. "He's going through that moment now. You get through them. Don't blame him for missing a penalty. People miss penalties. We can't put too much grief on him for that." World Cup winner Mbappe looked a shadow of himself against a Liverpool team that leads the way in the Premier League and the Champions League this season. He was brought crashing down by a crunching tackle from 21-year-old right back Conor Bradley when

threatening to burst through on goal in the first half — sparking a huge cheer from the home crowd. And it got worse for Mbappe in the second half when he had the chance to make it 1-1 from the penalty spot after Alexis Mac Allister had given six-time European champion Liverpool the lead. But with Caoimhin Kelleher to beat, he saw his effort pushed away by Liverpool's back-up goalkeeper. Mbappe has scored nine goals in 18 appearances for Madrid since leaving Paris Saint-Germain as a free agent at the end of last season. But

he has only one goal in the Champions League for his new club, which has lost three of its five games in the revamped competition. "Things are not running for him. We've got to be patient. He is an extraordinary player — a fantastic player," Ancelotti said. Madrid is 24th in the new-look 36-team league phase of the competition. The top eight teams advance to the round of 16, while those ranked ninth to 24th go into a playoff. The Mbappe wasn't the only player to fail to score a penalty in the match, with