



the pioneer

Established 1865 LUCKNOW, WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 6, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

www.dailypioneer.com

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

INSIDE

SPORTS 11 CHENNAI GRAND MASTERS: TOP RANKED ERIGAISSI TO FACE GUJARATHI IN OPENING ROUND



Another encounter, high alert winter in Kashmir

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Eight consecutive incidents of terrorist violence in a gap of 20 days in Kashmir valley, after the formation of the Omar Abdullah government, have sent alarm bells ringing in the entire security grid to gear up for the long winter ahead.

The pattern of strikes also shows a disturbing trend as the terrorist handlers picked up dormant and least expected areas to target the security forces. The terrorist handlers have also shifted their focus from the Jammu region back to Kashmir valley to drive a wedge between the newly elected popular government and the security establishment.

Recently, when Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha chaired a meeting of the Unified command headquarters in the aftermath of a dastardly attack on the construction workers in the Gagangir area of Sonamarg newly elected Chief Minister Omar Abdullah remained conspicuous by his absence.

The selection of targets and timing of these attacks suggested the terrorist handlers wanted to demonstrate their capabilities to strike at will despite the huge presence of security forces in the hinterland. Two days after the grenade attack hit the shoppers in the busy 'Sunday market' near the TRC centre in Srinagar, a group of heavily armed terrorists were trapped by the security forces in the Kaitsan forest area of Bandipora on Tuesday.

The security forces launched the operation on receipt of credible inputs about the presence of terrorists in the area. Till the time



FILE-PHOTO

of filing the report, the security forces had established contact with the terrorists and heavy exchange of firing was going on in the area. Srinagar-based Chinar Corps posted on X, "Based on specific intelligence input regarding the presence of terrorists in the general area of Kaitsan forest, a Joint Operation was launched by the Indian Army, Jammu and Kashmir

Police and CRPF in the general area Chuntawadi Kaitsan, Bandipora. Contact was established and a firefight ensued. Operation is in progress." However, unconfirmed reports claimed one terrorist was neutralised in the ongoing operations in the area. Additional troops were also rushed in to plug the gaps to prevent the escape of

terrorists pinned down in the thickly forested area of Kaitsan.

Meanwhile, Sinha warned on Tuesday that the houses of those providing shelter to terrorists would be razed to the ground as he asked people to stand up against the perpetrators of terror. He also said if security forces, the Union Territory administration and people come together, then terrorism could be eliminated from the region in a year.

I have directed the forces not to harm any innocent but the culprits will not be spared. If anyone provides shelter to terrorists, then his house will be razed to the ground. There will be no compromise on it," the LG said at a function in north Kashmir's Baramulla district.

In a veiled reference to some of the politicians vocal on the issue, Sinha said some people make statements that atrocities are being committed on those providing shelter to terrorists. "However, this is not an atrocity, but a demand for justice and such justice will continue," he added. Sinha said some people are trying to disrupt the peace in Jammu and Kashmir. "Our neighbour is trying, but it does not worry us. It is the people here who are doing it on its directions (that is a cause of concern). It is not just the job of the security forces and the administration but the people as well to identify such people," he said. He added that if the forces, administration and people come together, then "it (terrorism) will not remain here for more than a year. But if the people give them shelter and then say we are doing injustice to them, then that is not right."

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We have upheld validity of UP Madrasa Law: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to Madrasas in Uttar Pradesh, the Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the constitutional validity of the 2004 Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Law, and set aside an Allahabad High Court verdict quashing it on the ground that it was violative of the principle of secularism. However, the Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud with Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra set aside provisions of the Act which empowers the Madarsa Board to prescribe course of instructions and text books for higher education - 'kamil' (postgraduate course) and 'fazil' (junior research programme). The SC held that these particular provisions are in violation of the University Grants Commission Act (UGC Act). The Bench said that the High Court erred in holding that the law was violative of the principle of secularism. "We have upheld the validity of the UP madrasa law and moreover a statute can be struck down only if the State lacks the legislative competence," CJI Chandrachud said while pronouncing the verdict. The order came as a big relief

to teachers and students of UP Madrasas as the High Court had ordered closure of the seminaries and relocation of students to other schools in the state. On March 22, the High Court declared the Act as "unconstitutional" and violative of the principle of secularism, and asked the State Government to accommodate madrasa students in the formal schooling system. In a breather for about 17 lakh Madrasa students, the SC stayed the HC order on April 5.

The three Judge Bench of the SC said the legislative scheme of the law was to standardise the level of education being prescribed in Madrasas. The bench heard a battery of lawyers including senior advocates Abhishek Manu Singhvi, P Chidambaram, Mukul Rohatgi, representing petitioners against the HC verdict. The SC said that a law can be struck down for violation of fundamental rights under part III of the Constitution or on grounds of legislative competence but not for violation of basic structure. "Statute can be struck down only for violation of part III or legislative competence and not for violating basic structure."

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Who will be the next POTUS?

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A presidential campaign marked by upheaval and rancour approached its finale on Election Day as Americans decided whether to send Donald Trump back to the White House or elevate Kamala Harris to the Oval Office.

Polls opened across the nation on Tuesday morning as voters faced a stark choice between two candidates who have offered drastically different temperaments and visions for the world's largest economy and dominant military power.

Harris, the Democratic vice president, stands to be the first female president if elected. She has promised to work across the aisle to tackle economic worries and other issues without radically departing from the course set by President Joe Biden. Trump, the Republican former president, has vowed to replace thousands of federal workers with loyalists, impose sweeping tariffs on allies and foes alike, and stage the largest deportation operation in US history. The two candidates spent the waning hours of the campaign overlapping in Pennsylvania, the biggest battleground state. They were trying to energise their bases as well as Americans still on the fence or debating whether to vote at all.

"It's important, it's my civic duty and it's important that I vote for myself and I vote for the democracy and the country which I supported for 22 years of my life," said Ron Kessler, 54, an Air Force veteran from Pennsylvania who said he was voting for just the second time.

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States cannot takeover all private properties: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a majority 7:2 ruling, the Supreme Court on Tuesday held that states are not empowered under the Constitution to take over all privately-owned resources for distribution to serve the "common good". A nine-judge bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, however, said states can stake claim over private properties in certain cases. Justice BV Nagarathna partially disagreed with the majority judgement penned by the CJI, while Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia dissented on all aspects.

The majority verdict pronounced by the CJI Chandrachud overruled Justice Krishna Iyer's five-decade-old ruling that all privately owned resources can be acquired by the State for distribution under Article 39(b) of the Constitution.

"We hold that not every resource owned by an individual can be considered a material resource of a community only because it meets the qualifier of material needs," said the majority of the judges led by CJI, supported by six Judges. The SC held that for a privately-owned property to qualify as a material resource of the community, it must meet certain tests first.

While reading her decision, Justice Nagarathna said she had concurred with the CJI-led majority on certain issues and wrote some opinions in response to Justice Dhulia's judgement. "How does ownership and control of material resources privately owned transform into material resources of the community for distribution as best to sub serve the common good. This is the crux of my judgement," Justice Nagarathna said.

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Speeding DTC bus mows down Delhi Policeman, IT student

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Two days after two traffic policemen on duty were dragged on the bonnet of a car, two persons, including a Delhi Police constable, who was on a night patrolling duty, and a B.Tech student died in a gruesome incident after a Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) bus mowed them down on Monday night, near the Monastery Market in North Delhi due to over speeding.

The horror unfolded around 10.15 pm when a green DTC bus went out of control, climbing a pavement outside the Monastery Market on Ring road, and subsequently hitting a billboard pole. The impact of the collision was such that it knocked the billboard off from its base. The bus then hit a pedestrian and an on duty police constable of Civil Lines police station.

The vehicle finally came to a halt when it crossed the road, and crashed into a road divider. The crime scene revealed the severity of the disturbing accident with the



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

fallen pole, blood spilled on the road and the damaged bus that stood stranded in the middle of the road till it was towed in the late afternoon. "The green DTC bus, operating on the route from Sarai Kale Khan to Nand Nagari via ISBT, developed some technical snag. Around 10.38 pm, the Police Control Room (PCR) received multiple calls claiming that the bus had swerved off the road near the Monastery Market, causing extensive damage and leaving two people critically injured," Deputy Commissioner of

Police (North) Raja Banthia stated. However, according to the police sources, the bus was speeding when the incident occurred, and a blood sample of the driver has been sent to test if he was under the influence of alcohol. The accident claimed two lives including that of the young Delhi Police Constable Victor, a resident of Nagaland, and had joined the service in 2019. He was posted at Civil Lines police station from June 2023. He was on his PCR motorcycle when the accident occurred.

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'Batenge toh katenge' V/s 'Judenge toh jeetenge'

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

With just days remaining until the November 20 Uttar Pradesh Assembly by-elections, the political sparring over slogans has intensified. Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav recently criticised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "batenge toh katenge" remark, calling it "the worst slogan in history". In response, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya accused the SP of supporting "jihadis" to secure votes.

The issue has drawn comments from leaders across the political spectrum, including Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, who weighed in on the escalating rhetoric. Political analysts suggest that while the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is appealing to religious sentiments, the SP aims to shift the focus toward caste-based solidarity through its PDA (backward, Dalit, and minority) framework. Maurya took to social media platform X, alleging that the SP's true agenda was to appease Muslims and "support jihadis" for vote-



bank politics. "SP's politics of dividing society through fronts like 'love jihad', 'land jihad', and 'vote jihad' reveals Akhilesh Yadav's so-called harmony claims," he posted. Maurya questioned if this was the PDA that Yadav promoted, declaring, "SP's true character and face have been exposed."

Meanwhile, a poster outside the SP office has reignited the debate. Displayed on Saturday night, it reads, "Mathadhis will divide and cut... PDA will unite and win," implying the SP's commitment to uniting marginalised communities against division. This follows Maurya's own statement urging voters to align with the

BSP, dismissing the SP-BJP slogan battle as a distraction from real issues.

The slogan originated when Adityanath introduced "batenge toh katenge" (if you divide, you will be cut off) during the Haryana elections, later endorsed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the line "Ek hain toh safe hain" (if we are united, we are safe). Some attribute this messaging to the BJP's recent success in Haryana. In response, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav took to social media with the counter-slogan "judenge toh jeetenge" (if we unite, we will win), emphasising positive politics. "In the interest of society, the Chief Minister should rethink

his negative outlook and consider changing his advisors," Yadav wrote, urging Adityanath to adopt a more inclusive approach. He added, "A good leader nurtures positive thoughts and keeps both his sleeves and arms open."

Yadav further commented on the role of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the by-elections, suggesting that its entry has unsettled both the BJP and SP, as both parties attempt to shift public focus with competing posters. Yadav stated, "Instead of divisive slogans, what is truly needed is a commitment to unity - if we join with the BSP, we will progress and remain safe."

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Collapse at Bullet Train site kills worker, injured three

PTI ■ ANAND (GUJ)

One worker died as a temporary structure collapsed at a construction site on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train corridor in Gujarat's Anand district on Tuesday evening, officials said. The incident took place at Vasad village, said Superintendent of Police (SP) Gaurav Jasani. "Preliminary information suggests that four workers were trapped

between concrete blocks, two of them have been rescued. One of the workers died in hospital," he added. A temporary structure of steel and concrete blocks being used for well foundation work fell down, said an official of the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL) which is executing the project. The site is near the Mahi river near Vadodara, and a rescue operation was being carried out using cranes and excavators, he added.

IOA sends 'Letter of Intent' to host 2036 Olympics in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has submitted a 'Letter of Intent', expressing the country's desire to host the 2036 Olympic and Paralympic Games, to the International Olympic Committee's Future Host Commission, taking the first concrete step in an ambitious plan. The letter was submitted on October 1, according to a source in the sports ministry. "This monumental opportunity could bring substantial benefits, fostering economic growth, social progress, and youth empowerment across the country," the source added. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had first talked about his government's aspiration to host the 2036 Olympics last year. A decision on the host will not be taken before the IOC elections next year and India will also have



to face competition from several other nations like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, who are positioning themselves as strong contenders to host the sporting spectacle. India's plan has been backed by current IOC head Thomas Bach. The last time India hosted an international multi-sport extravaganza was the 2010 Commonwealth Games here. But for the 2036 Olympics, Ahmedabad is being seen as a front-runner to be the host city. India's top sports administrators, including IOA President PT Usha,

were at the Paris Olympics earlier this year to lobby for the country. It is also learnt that India would be pushing for the inclusion of indigenous disciplines like Yoga, Kho Kho and Kabaddi if the bid is successful.

The Sports Authority of India's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) has even presented a detailed report on the measures needed for a successful bid to new sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya. In this document, MOC has identified six disciplines, including Yoga, Kho Kho, Kabaddi, Chess, T20 cricket and Squash for inclusion in the Games if the country gets to host the quadrennial extravaganza.

However, the IOA is also mired in controversy owing to a tug of war between Usha and the body's Executive Council, which has steadfastly refused to ratify the appointment of her choice for the CEO's position, Raghuram Iyer.

Legendary folk singer Sharda Sinha critical

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noted folk singer Sharda Sinha has been admitted to Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) following a health complication, the hospital said on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is monitoring her condition and has prayed for her speedy recovery, it stated. Sinha, 72, is a noted Indian folk and classical singer, hailing from Bihar. The Padma Bhushan awardee is known for her folk songs in Bhojpuri and Maithili.

"Noted folk singer, Smt. Sharda Sinha is admitted in AIIMS, New Delhi for treatment," AIIMS-Delhi said in a social media post, adding "Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji is continuously monitoring her condition and is in direct contact with the treating doctors. He has conveyed his prayers for her good health and speedy recovery through the treating team."

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Chhath Puja begins with *nahai-khai*

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The four-day Chhath Puja began with 'nahai-khai' on Tuesday.

President of the All India Bhojpuri Samaj, Prabhunath Rai, said that nahai-khai denotes cleanliness and hygiene from "ghar to ghats". "Chhath Mahaparva is the worship of Lord Surya. In this puja, women pray for the longevity of their husbands and sons. Lord Surya is the real God, and by worshipping him, a person becomes healthy and energetic. This puja has been practised since ancient times. It is clear in this puja that special care must be taken regarding cleanliness," he said.

He explained that Chhath Puja began on Tuesday with eating and bathing. Kharna will be celebrated on Wednesday (November 6), the main puja and 'arghya' will be offered on November 7. The 'arghya' will be offered to the rising Sun on November 8.

Rai stated that all senior officials from the Lucknow Municipal Corporation and Lucknow Development Authority, including Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh, visited the Laxman Mela ghats on Tuesday to review cleanliness and other security arrangements.

He mentioned that at the Chhath Puja Ghat, Laxman Mela grounds, grand lighting arrangements have been made along the banks of the Gomti River so that there are no issues with people coming and going. The police administration has set up a one-way directional route, allowing people to enter from one side and, after performing the puja, exit from the other side.

Steamers will be available on the Gomti river, and the water police have been deployed to ensure that no untoward incidents occur. Divers will also be present.

"Various officials have already visited the ghats to inspect the preparations," he said. He also stated that security

DM takes stock of arrangements

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In view of Chhath Puja (November 7, District Magistrate Surya Pal Gangwar inspected the Laxman Mela ground on Tuesday. He emphasised that the entire focus of all officials should be on the preparations for Chhath Puja.

He stated that the municipal commissioner, additional district magistrates, all additional city magistrates, and all zonal officers had been deployed for this task.

He mentioned that in preparation for Chhath Puja, instructions had been given to ensure cleanliness and to make arrangements for road lighting, high masts, parking, ramps, etc.

He noted that in addition to cleaning the ghats, the Irrigation department was removing moss and hyacinth from the water.

He also directed the Lucknow Municipal Corporation to sprinkle water on the dusty grounds to ease the movement of women who will be present at the ghats to offer prayers to the setting Sun.

The district magistrate inspected the ghat and reviewed the cleanliness and security arrangements there.

He also instructed that an adequate number of boats and arrangements have been tightened, especially for the safety of women. Over 200,000 people are expected to visit the ghats. "The community is large, but many others prefer to perform the puja at home," Rai noted. Kamlesh Dubey, a member of the Bhojpuri community, explained that in 'nahai-khai', they clean their homes. "All rooms are thoroughly cleaned, with special attention given to the puja room, where no one else is allowed to enter, as all the puja samagri is placed



divers be stationed at the ghats to handle any emergency situations. Arrangements for ambulances were also ensured at all the ghats. Regarding the cleaning of the ghats, the district magistrate instructed that skimmers be installed at all ghats to ensure the water is clean.

He added that special efforts were being made to clean the water in time for Chhath Puja, with double nets being installed near the ghats.

The district magistrate issued further directions to ensure a public address system and

proper barricading at all ghats, particularly where the water is deep, so that no loss of life occurs.

The district magistrate also directed the municipal corporation to arrange for mobile toilets and ensure cleanliness near the ghats. Additionally, he instructed that changing rooms for women be set up at the ghats.

The chief medical officer was directed to deploy a team of doctors at all the ghats to manage any emergency situations.

The district magistrate also said that magistrates and police

officers had been assigned duty at all the ghats to maintain security. He further said that special attention must be given to the provision of drinking water and cleanliness at all the ghats.

Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh, Additional District Magistrate (East) Amit Kumar, officials from the Lucknow Municipal Corporation, Lucknow Development Authority, Irrigation department, and other relevant departmental officers were present during the inspection.

human life.

Poonam Dubey, a resident of the city who belongs to the Bhojpuri community, said that during 'nahai-khai', devotees take a head bath followed by a meal of bottle gourd and potato cooked in pure ghee.

"The next day, which is Kharna, we observe a fast until the evening, when we eat kheer made from sugarcane juice. On the day of Chhath Puja, we observe a fast without water until the morning of the following day," she explained.

Police yet to get leads in elderly priest's murder

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After the alleged murder of an elderly priest in the Dubagga police station area on Sunday night, the police are yet to obtain any leads regarding the identity of the killers.

Harisharan Maharaj (75) aka Ram Sharan Shukla was allegedly murdered at his home in Maura Khera village in Dubagga on Sunday night. The police suspect the involvement of a close friend in the murder of the priest. The incident came to light when the victim's wife switched on a torch and found him lying on the ground. The police have ruled out robbery as a motive following their initial investigation.

The police suspect that a family or property dispute may be behind the murder of the priest. As per reports, Harisharan Maharaj aka Ram Sharan Shukla was found lying in a blood-soaked state in his home in the Maura Khera village, Dubagga, on Sunday night.

The killers had entered the house with the clear intention of murdering him, as there was no sign of theft or robbery, the police said. His wife, who had been staying at her daughter's house in the same locality, became alarmed after hearing the sound of people jumping onto the tin roof of their house. Fearing something untoward, she quickly went to her husband's home.

When she switched on the torchlight on her mobile, she discovered the tragedy.

Family members said that the priest, who was also a 'katha vachak' died on the spot, while the police claimed he passed away while being taken to KGMU Trauma Centre. His son alleged that the police

were twisting the narrative regarding the entry of assailants into the house and the subsequent murder.

"This is why the case was registered under weaker sections," he said.

While the police maintain that the murder stemmed from a property and family dispute, the family members reject this theory, asserting that someone known to the victim was involved.

His wife Ramshri told reporters that after feeding him dinner, she had gone to her daughter Rajni's house next door. The roofs of both houses are connected. Ramshri heard the sound of people jumping on the tin roof of her house. Her daughter raised an alarm, suspecting a thief had entered the house. Ramshri called her husband but received no response.

She then locked the gate of the house and went to her husband's portion. When she reached the door, it was bolted from the inside, and there was still no response. Looking through the grill with the help of her mobile's torch, she saw her husband lying on the floor. She called her son Umashankar and informed him about the incident. Soon, the sons and the police arrived at the scene. The police did not allow anyone to enter the house.

When Umashankar entered, he found his father lying in a pool of blood, with apparent signs that his head had been crushed.

Ramshri denied any connection to robbery or longstanding enmity behind the incident.

She said that, like every evening, when he asked for food, she promised to serve it on time. He didn't keep anything of significant value in the house except

for his worship materials and books. "If there was anything, it would have been some money for dakshina (donations) kept in his books," she said.

She suspected the involvement of an acquaintance in the murder, suggesting that someone may have targeted the house, hoping to find a large sum of money, and then killed him out of fear of being recognised.

Harisharan, originally from Mall, owned five houses in Lucknow. His three sons—Vijay Shankar, Dev Shankar, and Jaishankar—live together in one house in Saatganj Wazirbagh.

His fourth son Umashankar and fifth son Ramlakhan live in separate houses near the Thakurganj Mari Maata Temple.

Harisharan lived in one of the two houses in Maura Khera Shiv City, with his wife living next door with their daughter Rajni and son-in-law.

ADCP (West) Vishwajeet Srivastava said that there is a possibility that someone close to the priest may have been involved in the murder.

"There is no evidence of robbery or theft. The mobile phone and valuables were found safe in the house. The killers seem to have entered the house with the intention of murder. We are investigating all possible motives, including family disputes, property issues, and robbery," he said.

There is also speculation in the area that Harisharan had another wife, with whom he had three children. The police are gathering information from the relatives in this regard, but the family has strongly denied the existence of a second marriage or any property-related disputes.

UPPSC announces dates for PCS prelims

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Authorities of the UP Public Service Commission (UPPSC) decided that the Combined State/Senior Subordinate Service (prelims) Examination-2024, commonly called PCS (Pre), will be held in 41 districts of the state on December 7 and 8, 2024. The exam will be held in two sessions: the first session from 9.30 am to 11.30 am and the second session from 2.30 pm to 4.30 pm.

The Commission took this step in view of the number and capacity of examination centres sent by the centre determination committees of all the districts of the state not being available as per the appropriate standard in relation to the number of candidates despite every possible effort.

In addition to this, the exam for Review Officer/Assistant Review Officer etc (prelims) Examination-2023 will be conducted on December 22 and December 23. This exam will be conducted in the first shift from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm and in the second shift from 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm, and on December 23, from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm in various districts of the state.

Engineer duped of ₹3.5L on job pretext

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A civil engineer was allegedly duped of Rs 3.5 lakh in the name of a job in the Vikas Nagar police station area. The alleged fraudsters took the money from him under the guise of securing him a position as a surveyor at NCERT. They had opened an office in the Aliganj Mama Crossing area, but when the victim visited the location, he found the office locked. The victim's father lodged a complaint at the CM's office, following which a case was registered against the accused at Vikas Nagar police station. The police are currently investigating the matter.

According to reports, the victim, Aman Nawaz, a civil engineer from Premnagar, Bareilly, had been working with the

Ramganga Nagar Awasiya Yojana, where he met a tractor driver named Alok Pandey. Pandey told Aman that he could secure him a job as a surveyor in Bareilly through NCERT. "You're working for such a low salary. I can get you a better job, as I have good connections with NCERT officers," the fraudster allegedly told the victim, playing on his emotions.

Pandey claimed that Aman would need to pay Rs 3.5 lakh in two instalments for the job. He also mentioned that the office handling the job formalities was located near Aliganj Mama Crossing.

Aman's father, following his son's insistence, went to the office at Mama Crossing in May 2023, where he met Pawan Pandey, Sarvesh Pandey, Ajay Kumar, and

Chandra Shekhar Kumar, all of whom were said to be involved in the job placement. The fraudsters promised to secure Aman a position as a surveyor at NCERT in Bareilly, valid until the age of 58, with the job renewed every five years. They further stated that Rs 3.5 lakh would need to be paid in instalments for the job.

The accused told Aman's father that an advance of Rs 50,000 would be required, and Rs 1.25 lakh would be due upon receiving a stationery kit.

Following this, Aman transferred Rs 50,000 online to Pradeep Pandey as an advance. On the day the stationery kit was delivered, Rs 1.15 lakh in cash was handed over. Subsequently, the fraudsters sent an appointment letter for the job via mobile phone, claiming to be from Sarvesh

Pandey, supervisor at NCERT. Upon receiving the appointment letter, Aman sent the remaining money to the fraudsters online. In total, Rs 3.5 lakh was paid to the accused. After receiving the appointment letter, Aman began his work in July 2023, visiting schools to collect data, which he sent to Krishkant, the supervisor under the All India Programme Survey at NCERT. However, despite working, Aman did not receive any salary. When he enquired about his payment, the concerned individuals kept assuring him that his salary would be released soon. By the evening of July 26, 2024, all the accused's mobile numbers were switched off. Following a complaint, Vikas Nagar police have registered an FIR, and the matter is under investigation.

Youth in live-in relationship found hanging

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A young man living in a live-in relationship with a woman in Lucknow allegedly hanged himself to death. The incident came to light when his live-in partner called and informed the family. The deceased's father alleged that he was murdered.

On Monday morning, the body of Sparsh Gupta (25) was found hanging from a noose in a room at a house in Sushant Golf City police station area.

His female friend informed his father about the incident. The father alleged that his son had left home and was living in Lucknow with his female friend. Sparsh's kin suspected the woman's role in the incident.

The deceased had been in a relationship with the said woman for a year and a half. The body was found hanging in Sushant Golf City's Saryu Enclave on Monday morning. Meanwhile, a woman has accused a man of marrying her while concealing the fact that

he was already married, and of swindling Rs 12 lakh from her in the Krishna Nagar police station area, police said on Tuesday.

In her complaint, the victim stated that she met the prime accused, Ajay Tiwari, through a matrimonial website. Gradually, their friendship deepened, and two years ago, they got married. However, soon after the marriage, Ajay demanded Rs 12 lakh from her, citing business needs as the reason. Trusting her husband, the

woman gave him the money. According to the victim, Ajay suddenly disappeared after taking the money. On August 15, she received a call from a woman who introduced herself as Ajay's first wife Sheela.

The woman threatened to kill the victim if she did not leave Ajay.

The Krishna Nagar police have registered a case of fraud, threat, and conspiracy against Ajay Tiwari and four other members of his family in connection with this incident.

CITY BRIEFS



EXPRESSIONS

Students participated in various competitions with enthusiasm and at St Francis' College on the second day of annual festival, 'Expressions'. In monoacting, the first prize was won by Advay Ojha of St Francis' College, second by Falak Khan of St Monica's School and Ginni Sehgal from Mount Carmel College. The third prize was won by Navika Singh of St Fidelis College. In the quiz competition, the first prize was won by Army Public School, SP Marg, second by St Francis' College and third by St Claire's College.

5.8% increase in vehicles in city since last year

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The number of registered vehicles in the city has increased by 5.8 per cent since last year, according to the IITR post-monsoon report released recently.

A senior scientist from the IITR explained that the registered vehicle inventory for Lucknow city and other primary information were collected from the RTO (Regional Transport Office) as of March 31, 2024. Based on the vehicular inventory, a 5.8% increase in registered vehicle numbers was observed in the city from the previous year (2022-23). The total number of CNG and electric buses operated by UPSRTC in the city is 55 and 146 respectively by 2024.

The city has also recorded continuous growth in the number of e-vehicles over the years. The number of multi-articulated vehicles has increased from 7,879 in 2022-23 to 8,233 in 2023-24. Light commercial vehicles have increased from 4,074 to 4,685,

buses from 5,076 to 5,362, taxis from 63,648 to 64,569, light motor vehicles from 11,240 to 22,426, two-wheelers from 2,012,795 to 2,098,522, cars from 544,698 to 599,023, tractors from 30,899 to 32,783, and trailers from 2,174 to 2,307. The total number of vehicles has increased from 2,816,293 to 2,979,734. Autorickshaws have increased by 88 per cent, tempo taxis by 71.8 per cent, buses by 17.2 per

IITR REPORT

cent, school buses by 0.4 per cent, private cars by 19 per cent, and electric vehicles by 51 per cent. Various oil and gas companies have provided data on the total number of fuel outlets (petrol, diesel, and CNG) in Lucknow, which stand at 173.

It was found that the consumption of petrol, diesel, and CNG increased by 99.8%, 85.7%, and 141.5% respectively, while LPG consumption decreased by 78.1% in 2023-24. "Dominant sources of poor air quality in the city include traffic emissions, construction and demolition activities (buildings, flyovers, elevated roads, new roads), waste burning, cooking fuel combustion, road dust entrainment, etc. Despite

air pollution abatement measures in the city and the enforcement of BS-VI compliant vehicles, CNG, and e-vehicles nationwide, air pollution levels in the city continue to exceed national standards, presenting a significant challenge for policymakers. The installation of proper traffic signals to control vehicle movements has also been taken up by the authorities. However, the idling of vehicles, as well as traffic jams at multiple signals, has further affected air quality. Additionally, the increase in urban population and economic activities has led to higher demands for open cooking and street food stalls, which in turn have contributed to increased cooking combustion-related emissions in the ambient air," he said.

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL MANAGER,
WATCO DIVISION, PURI, ODISHA
Phone: 06752-223447 / E-Mail: eephpuri@gmail.com

INVITATIONS FOR BIDS (IFB)
Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice
Bid Identification No. 15 of 2024-25 Dated. 04.11.24.

1. Name of the Work: - Operation and maintenance of STP, P7 & Septage Treatment Plant under WATCO Sub-Division, Puri.
2. Estimated Cost: - Rs 160.96 Lakhs
3. Period of Completion: - 24 Months
4. Date and time of availability of bid documents in the portal :- 08.11.2024 (11.00AM) to 21.11.2024 (5.00P.M)
5. Last Date / Time for receipt of bids in the Portal :- 5.00P.M of 21.11.2024
6. Date and time of opening of bids:- 12.30 P.M of 22.11.2024
7. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid :- General Manager, WATCO Division, Puri
Phone: 06752-223447, Fax: 06752-223447, E-Mail: eephpuri@gmail.com
8. The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only.

General Manager, (WATCO, PURI)

'Jharkhand govt protecting mafia, fostering corruption'

PNS ■ RANCHI/LUCKNOW

In a fiery campaign rally on Tuesday in Jharkhand's Koderma, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched a scathing attack on the JMM-led coalition government in the state, accusing it of fostering corruption and protecting mafia activities and allowing infiltration. Adityanath urged voters to bring the BJP to power, promising a crackdown akin to that in Uttar Pradesh.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at an election rally in Jharkhand on Tuesday

"The JMM-led coalition is patronising the mafia in sectors such as land, sand, forest, mining, and liquor. Like UP, bring the BJP to power in Jharkhand to bulldoze the mafia," the CM said. At another rally in Jamshedpur, Adityanath accused the JMM of allowing Bangladeshi infiltrators into the state, claiming they are involved in "love jihad" and "land jihad". He also alleged a conspiracy to change Jharkhand's demography and said, "The growing Rohingya infiltration in Jharkhand is changing the state's demography. If this continues, those who are blocking processions today may not allow the sound of bells and conches in homes tomorrow. Unite under BJP's leadership, ensure a safe Ram Navami Yatra, and protect your traditions. History has shown that whenever we are divided along

caste, regional, or linguistic lines, we have suffered greatly," he added. Yogi urged the people to assert their strength, suggesting that if they stand united, "stone-pelting would clear the roads for you" and 'Bajrangji Pataka' would proudly wave on every home". Appealing to the people of Jharkhand to resist divisions based on caste, region, and language, CM Yogi Adityanath remarked, "Those who divide in such ways are the same people who will not stand by you in times of crisis. Since 1947, Congress has inflicted wounds on the country; RJD

did the same in Bihar, and JMM in Jharkhand. Adityanath didn't spare the Congress, accusing the party of obstructing the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. "Ram Lalla now sits in that temple after 500 years. The consecration has paved the way for Mathura and other temples," he said, emphasising the BJP's commitment to religious and national pride. He contrasted this with the BJP's governance. Highlighting PM Modi's leadership, Yogi said: "PM Modi abrogated Article 370 from Kashmir. Under his regime, nations like Pakistan now claim

India is a threat, and Chinese forces have been pushed back." Adityanath appealed to voters to bring a "double-engine government" for rapid development. He cited the BJP's victory in Haryana as a testament to the party's governance, where it won 48 of 90 seats. The UP chief minister campaigned for BJP candidates Neera Yadav (Koderma) and Amit Yadav (Barkatha), reinforcing the BJP's promise of development, security, and good governance. Jharkhand's assembly elections are scheduled for November 13 and 20, with counting on November 23

'Bhishma Cube' to deal with medical emergencies

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Yogi Adityanath government has planned comprehensive emergency response measures for Maha Kumbh 2025 by introducing the groundbreaking 'Bhishma Cube' mobile hospital.

For the first time in Maha Kumbh, this state-of-the-art medical unit, which was previously deployed during the Ram temple prana pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024, will be on site to enhance emergency preparedness. According to Joint Director of Medical Health in Prayagraj, Dr VK Mishra, each Bhishma Cube (Battlefield Health Information System for Medical Services) can treat up to 200 individuals simultaneously, offering a range of facilities, including surgical capabilities, diagnostic tools and comprehensive patient care. Built to be robust, waterproof and lightweight, these units provide immediate treatment capabilities and leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics for real-time coordination, monitoring and efficient medical management.

Dr Mishra said, "Bhishma Cube can be transported by hand, bicycle or drone and can even be airdropped from aircraft in critical situations. Remarkably, the unit can be fully operational within 12 minutes of deployment. Jointly developed and rigorously tested by the Indian Air Force, Indian healthcare institutions and defence technology experts, the Bhishma Cube exemplifies cutting-edge innovation in mobile healthcare." During his visit to Ukraine in August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented Bhishma Cube units to President Volodymyr Zelensky, underscoring its value in global emergency response.

MAHA KUMBH 2025

2.71L saplings to be planted

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's clear directives to position Prayagraj as a model of cleanliness for Maha Kumbh 2025, extensive collaborative efforts are underway to make the event a benchmark in environmental protection.

The Forest department, municipal corporation and Prayagraj Development Authority are running a mega plantation drive across the region. Under the campaign, 2,71,000 saplings are being planted, to enhance the green cover. All departments of the Kumbh Mela administration are working together to create a grand, clean and green atmosphere for the Maha Kumbh by keeping areas free of polythene and developing green zones all over. According to Prayagraj's Divisional Forest Officer Arvind Kumar, the Forest department plans to plant 1.49 lakh saplings as part of this campaign, with a budget of Rs 29 crore. This includes planting 87,000 saplings on 20 hectares in Saraswati Hitech City, focusing on the vegetable block with a mix of small and large plants.

The Forest department is also planting saplings along the roads throughout the district. Intensive planting is being done on 18 main roads leading into the city, with 50,000 saplings of trees like Kadamba, Neem and Amaltash being planted along both sides.

The Prayagraj Municipal Corporation and Prayagraj Development Authority are responsible for creating green belts in the city, with this work expected to be completed by the end of November.

FACE RECOGNITION CAMERAS TO BOOST SAFETY AT RLY STATIONS

In its efforts to make Maha Kumbh 2025 not only a grand event but also a safe one, the Uttar Pradesh government is enhancing security across both the Mela grounds and Prayagraj's railway stations.

With approximately 10 crore people expected to travel by train for Maha Kumbh, the railway authorities are implementing comprehensive security measures.

For the first time, Prayagraj Railway Division will install face recognition cameras alongside CCTVs at railway stations specifically for Maha Kumbh. These face recognition cameras, powered by AI, will be instrumental in monitoring suspicious activities and identifying potential troublemakers.

According to Prayagraj Railway Division PRO Amit Singh stated, these face recognition cameras use AI technology to recognise faces, making it possible to identify suspects even in crowded areas. This capability helps control suspicious activities or potential stampede situations before they escalate. The cameras can swiftly detect unusual incidents, allowing immediate responses to prevent accidents.

He added that for Maha Kumbh, approximately 650 CCTV cameras and 100 face recognition cameras will be installed at railway stations for the first time. Surveillance will cover routes, shelters and platforms at all nine railway stations in Prayagraj city. The security setup will be in place by the end of December, with all equipment operational by January, well ahead of the Maha Kumbh's commencement.

Rahul attends meeting, lays foundation for road construction in Rae Bareilly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday attended a meeting of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA), inaugurated a beautification project and laid the foundation stone for the construction of roads in his parliamentary constituency here in Uttar Pradesh. Gandhi, who maintained a distance with the media during his visit, later said in a post on Facebook that the people of Rae Bareilly told him about their problems with full authority. On the way to Rae Bareilly, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha paid obeisance at a Hanuman temple at Churwa and met party workers. Soon after his arrival in Rae Bareilly, Gandhi inaugurated a beautification project undertaken by the municipal corporation in Rae Bareilly at the Degree College intersection. Subsequently, the Congress leader later laid the foundation stone for road-construction projects under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and then attended the DISHA meet-

ing. The meeting focused on various public welfare issues, including schemes such as MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and others, officials said. Gandhi presided over the meeting with administrative officials. A blueprint for the development of the district was prepared at the meeting and central schemes were reviewed. This was Gandhi's first meeting with local officials since becoming an MP. According to the Union Ministry for Rural Development, DISHAs were formed to ensure better coordination among members of Parliament, state legislatures and local governments. Gandhi left for Lucknow after the meeting. In his Facebook post in Hindi, the Congress leader said: "No matter how old my relationship with Rae Bareilly is, it deepens every time I visit the place. All the people of the area have given me a lot of love and told me about their problems with full authority." "As an MP, while presiding over the first DISHA committee meeting of Rae Bareilly, I discussed the problems and progress of the entire

area with all the public representatives and officials. I also unveiled the newly-constructed Shaheed Chowk and roads," he said. "Rae Bareilly has honoured me by making me their voice — I am always eager to ensure their prosperity, fulfil their needs and solve their problems," he added. Asked about Gandhi's visit, Amethi MP Kishori Lal Sharma said central schemes of 52 departments were reviewed at the DISHA meeting, in which representatives of all the parties and block heads were also present. Later, Uttar Pradesh minister Dinesh Pratap Singh showed a poster to reporters. In the poster, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader took potshots at Gandhi for spending less time in his constituency. "It has been more than six months, the MP (Gandhi) has not spent a night in his constituency," he said. "In the last six months, (Gandhi spent) only five hours. Then in five years, it will be 50 hours. It means in five years, only two days?" the poster, titled "Raebareilly ke Rahulji", said, requesting the Congress leader to spend a night in his constituency.

School principal shot dead in Moradabad

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A fortnight after the sensational killing of a college principal in Bhadohi, yet another principal was allegedly shot dead while on his way to school in the Majhola police station area of Moradabad district on Tuesday morning. In a similar modus operandi, this incident was carried out by two assailants riding a motorcycle. As per reports, Sababul Hasan, who was the principal at a private school, was walking to his workplace from his house. Suddenly, two bike-borne accused appeared. The one sitting behind the rider allegedly shot the principal in the head, causing him to fall to the ground. The entire incident was captured on CCTV footage from a nearby camera. The attack took place just a few metres from the school. After the shooting, the area was thrown into chaos. Local residents rushed the principal to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him dead upon arrival. Upon receiving information about the murder, the police reached the scene and cordoned off the area. Senior police officers, along with a forensic team, began their investigation. The police have formed several teams to

identify and apprehend the attackers. SP, City, Ranvijay Singh confirmed that the incident occurred at approximately 8 am on Tuesday. Principal Sababul was on foot, heading to school from his home, when the assailants attacked. After the shooting, the culprits fled the scene. The police have intensified their investigation based on the CCTV footage and are optimistic about making arrests soon. The school where the victim worked is owned by senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader Shammi Bhatnagar. It has also emerged that a case had been filed against Sababul Hasan a few days prior to the attack. A family had accused the principal of mistreating a student, and the police are looking into this angle as part of their investigation. It is worth noting that on October 29, Yogendra Bahadur Singh, the principal of National Inter College in Bhadohi district, was also shot dead by unidentified bike-borne assailants while he was on his way to college in his car. The attackers had also punctured the tyres of his vehicle. Singh was taken to the hospital in critical condition, where he was later declared dead.

Effective advocacy helps govt strengthen prosecution efforts

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Under its zero-tolerance policy towards crime, the Uttar Pradesh government is not only apprehending criminals but also ensuring they face proper justice by strengthening prosecution efforts in court through effective advocacy. Over 80,000 criminals have been brought to justice so far, thanks to robust advocacy, with modern technology playing a crucial role. The prosecution department has made significant strides in securing convictions by utilising tools such as video conferencing, e-reporting systems, mafia management system monitoring, the e-office system, and the e-prosecution portal. The prosecution department is now using video conferencing to record statements from police officers, government employees, and other officials directly at their place of residence or workplace, in accordance with the Indian Civil Code-2023. This approach has streamlined both administrative and police systems, while also saving government time and resources. As of October 17, the department has recorded testimony

from 4,450 police officers and government witnesses via video conferencing. This initiative, which has been implemented across five districts in just four months, has already saved Rs 15 lakh, with projected annual savings expected to reach Rs 7 crore. Moreover, this technology-driven approach has accelerated the prosecution process, ensuring quicker convictions and enhanced witness security. The prosecution department has also gathered strong evidence against criminals through its e-reporting system, which uses data analytics. A data profile for each case is now created and recorded in the computer system, eliminating errors and ambiguities. In addition, the review of prosecution-related work has become more efficient through an app that is connected to the CM Dashboard (Darpan 2.0). This system has made high-level reviews of various cases much easier. The day-to-day progress and proceedings of cases related to the identified mafia are being closely supervised through the mafia management system monitoring app

at the directorate level. The directorate has adopted a 100% paperless system, ensuring timely proceedings through the e-office system. Furthermore, in the first phase, a target has been set to connect 18 regional additional director prosecution offices and 18 joint director prosecution offices to the e-office system within the next three months. The directorate is continuously feeding data related to judicial proceedings through the e-prosecution portal. To date, data for more than 75 lakh judicial proceedings has been entered into the portal as of September 2024. In addition, Uttar Pradesh has maintained its position as the top state in the country for feeding data into the e-prosecution portal for the past three years—2021, 2022, and 2023. Special training is being provided to officers and employees to improve their advocacy skills and ensure criminals are punished effectively. This training includes guidance on the use of new technical equipment and software, increasing the capacity of prosecution officers to perform their responsibilities more accurately and effectively.

Akhilesh takes potshot at govt over new rules for appointment of DGP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, on Tuesday, took a jibe at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after the state cabinet approved new rules for the appointment of the director general of police. With the enforcement of the new 'Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh Selection and Appointment Rules, 2024, the approval of the Union Home Ministry will not be needed for the appointment of the new DGP. Under the new rules, the selection and appointment of the state's police chief will be done by a committee chaired by a retired judge of the High Court. "I have heard that arrangements are being made to grant a senior official a permanent position and extend his tenure by two years. The question is, will those making this arrangement themselves be around for two years? Could this be an attempt to take control from Delhi into their own hands?" "Delhi vs Lucknow 2.0," the SP chief said in a post on X while responding to the UP government's new guidelines for selection and appointment of the DGP. "The policy requires a nomination committee headed by a retired

judge of the High Court to appoint the police chief in the state. It also establishes a minimum tenure of two years for the DGP. The Uttar Pradesh government has approved a new set of rules giving itself the authority to appoint the DGP at the state level. Seeking the approval of the Union Public Service Commission for the appointment will no longer be required. In a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh Selection and Appointment Rules, 2024 was approved. As per the new manual, the DGP will be appointed only when there are at least six months left in the officer's service. To be eligible for selection, candidates must have six months of service remaining on the date of creation of the vacancy and only those officers who are currently serving as DG at Level 16 of the Pay Matrix will be considered for the new role. The next UP assembly elections are due in March 2027, nearly two years from now. The Samajwadi Party, which gave a noteworthy performance in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, is hoping to continue the winning streak in the 2027 assembly polls.

UP bags top spot in Veergatha Project 4.0

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh has claimed the nation's top spot in the Veergatha Project 4.0, demonstrating exceptional achievement with over 45 lakh student nominations. Uttar Pradesh has surpassed Delhi, which once celebrated its achievements but now ranks second in this year's project standings. With this achievement, UP has set a new standard in the Veergatha Project, not only enhancing students' respect for bravery but also fostering their creativity and motivation. Through this effort in the field of education, the state has achieved the nomination target of 45,24,559 students. UP has surpassed last year's nomination of 39 lakh in the Veergatha Project 3.0, marking an increase of 6,24,559 this year. The data for this year indicates that every district has contributed to this increase in participation, making this success possible. In the Veergatha Project 4.0, Delhi secured the second position with 18,08,556 nominations, and Bihar the third position with 13,91,187 nominations. Uttar Pradesh

achieved this accomplishment with 27,16,003 more nominations than Delhi and 31,33,372 more nominations than Bihar. The data indicates that this year's enrolment is the highest ever, with all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh recording more enrolments compared to the previous year. Under the leadership of the Yogi Adityanath government, the state has not only set a new record by increasing participation across all its districts this year, but has also successfully established a distinct identity in the fields of bravery and inspiration nationwide. According to the latest data, 18 districts of UP have secured positions among the 50 districts with the highest participation in the country. The leading districts in Uttar Pradesh include Pilibhit (2,92,756), Bulandshahr (2,68,852), Sant Kabir Nagar (2,35,934), Lakhimpur Kheri (1,32,414), Siddharthnagar (1,24,950), Hardoi (1,22,973) and Lucknow (1,19,908). Additionally, Maharajganj (1,14,227), Prayagraj (1,12,041), and Varanasi (1,04,460) also made it to the

list of the top 50 districts in the country. The presence of UP is further reinforced by Chitrakoot (95,583), Sambhal (92,953), Unnao (89,358), Deoria (83,292), Bijnor (82,300), Rampur (79,180), Kanpur Dehat (78,641) and Muzaffarnagar (69,086) participation. Minister of State for Basic Education (Independent Charge) Sandeep Singh stated that online nomination for the Veergatha Project 4.0 took place from September 16 to October 31, 2024. Students from classes 1 to 12 were invited to participate in creative activities based on bravery award winners, including poetry, essays, storytelling, painting and video competitions. This success was achieved through the participation of all schools across the state. The Veergatha Project is a joint initiative of the Defence Ministry and the Union Education Ministry, launched in 2021 under the Gallantry Awards Portal (GAP). Its primary aim is to connect students with the inspiring stories of brave soldiers from the armed forces.

Mayawati hails SC verdict on madrasas, private properties

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati, on Tuesday, said the Supreme Court's verdict on the madrasa law in Uttar Pradesh would end the controversy over education imparted in such institutes and the uncertainty surrounding them. In view of the decision of the Supreme Court, there is a possibility of madrasas getting recognition, especially in Uttar Pradesh, and stability in their smooth functioning, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said. In a post on X in Hindi, the BSP supremo said, "Welcoming the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court today declaring the UP Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004 as valid and constitutional. This will surely end the controversy over madrasa education in UP and the uncertainty of thousands of madrasas." "Its proper implementation is essential," she added. The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madrasa Education Law, 2004 and set aside an Allahabad High Court verdict quashing it on the grounds of being violative of the principle of secularism. The BSP chief also welcomed the Supreme Court's decision on private properties. "The decision of the 9-judge bench of the Supreme Court to not consider every private property as a part of community property under Article 39 (B) of the Constitution and to prevent its acquisition is also welcome," the former chief minister of UP said. Until now the government had the right to



acquire all private properties for the common good. In a majority 7:2 ruling, the Supreme Court held that states are not empowered under the Constitution to take over all privately-owned resources for distribution to serve the "common good". Meanwhile, the BSP released the list of its star campaigners on Tuesday for the by-elections to be held on nine seats of the UP assembly. It includes 40 names, including BSP supremo Mayawati and Satish Chandra Mishra. These 'maharathis' will campaign for the victory of BSP in the by-elections. By-elections are to be held for Ghaziabad, Mirpur, Kundarki, Khair, Karhal, Sismau, Phulpur, Katehari, Majhawan constituencies of UP assembly. Voting for these seats was earlier scheduled on November 13. But, on Monday, the Election Commission of India extended the date of voting on all these seats by a week. Now voting will be held on these nine seats on November 20. The BSP is contesting all these seats on its own.

Man kills wife, 3 children in Kashi, found dead in village



District Magistrate S Rajalingam visiting the murder site in Bhelupur area of Varanasi

Police investigating the crime scene on Tuesday. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In a shocking incident, a man allegedly killed his wife and three wards in Bhadaini area under the Bhelupur police station here on Tuesday. Later, the body of accused was found in his own semi-furnished house about 10 kilometres away from here. The 45-year-old businessman shot dead his wife and three children and fled from the house. The incident is said to have taken place on Monday night. However, it came to the light on Tuesday morning as the neighbours thought that the sound of firing was of fire-crackers due to the festivals of Diwali and Chhath. About 10-12 hours after this sensational murder of four persons information came that the body of

accused Rajendra Gupta was found in a village in Rohania police station area. The police had reached the spot to investigate the matter, last reports received here said. Rajendra Gupta's body was found in a semi-constructed house in Mirapur Lathia. After receiving the information about the murder of four persons, the police of Bhelupur police station along with forensic experts and dog squad reached the spot. Rajendra Gupta lived there along with his wife Neetu (42), daughter Gaurangi (16) and sons Navnendra (20) and Subendra (15) in the street in front of the power house in Bhadaini. According to reports, the incident came into the light when maid reached the house on Tuesday morning and then

the neighbours informed the police about it. When the police went to Rajendra's house, Neetu was lying dead in a pool of blood along with her three children. However, Rajendra was missing from home. Prima facie, it has come to light that Rajendra was in contact with a 'tantrik'. According to some tenants Rajendra was influenced by a 'tantrik' who told the latter that his wife and children were an obstacle in his progress and that's why Rajendra killed his wife and children. Later, the police started searching for the *tantrik* along with Rajendra whose body was found later. According to the police, Rajendra's criminal history is being investigated. On getting information

Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agarwal and District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam along with other officers reached there. According to some tenants, Rajendra was the operator of a country liquor shop and also owned many houses. His elder son was an engineer working in a multinational company in Bengaluru while other children (daughter and a younger son) are studying in a leading English-medium school. After sending the bodies for the post-mortem examination, the police has intensified investigation and questioning the neighbours and relatives to gather more information. Along with interrogation of local people, Bhelupur police are also investigating the criminal history of Rajendra Gupta.

Chhath fervour grips Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The four-day famous Dala Chhath festival began in the holy city of Kashi with religious fervour on Tuesday with the 'Nahay Khay' (bathing and eating) event. Crowds of women were seen in different markets to purchase sugar canes, various types of fruits and other articles. Besides, efforts are going on in full swing to make the ghats of Ganga and Varuna rivers clean. Despite all efforts of the administration, many Ganga ghats still look dirty as large amount of silt was collected there due to the flood in the river earlier. Meanwhile, a good number of women reached various ghats to take a holy dip in the sacred water of the Ganga river before starting preparations for the festival. The tough 36-hour long 'nirjal vrat' will start on Wednesday after 'Kharana'. Chhath-related articles were seen being sold on the roadside at various places in almost all the main markets, including Sagra, Lanka, Luxa, Godowlia, Chetganj, Maidagin, Jagatganj, trans-Ganga Ramnagar, Parao etc and many places in the trans-Varuna areas, including Shivpur, Bhojubar, Orderly Bazar, Pandeypur, Pahadia and Sarnath. In recent times, the festival has become very popular in the city as it is seen that lakhs of people turn up at ghats during the puja. According to information, in view of the high sale of fruits during the festival, hundreds of trucks of apples and bananas reached Pahadia Mandi, the biggest fruit market of



Women purchasing articles on the first day of Chhath in Varanasi on Tuesday.

Purvanchal (eastern Uttar Pradesh), a day ago. However, the prices of various fruits have jumped up sharply by 20 to 30 per cent. Besides, efforts are also going on in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) to make Surya Sarovar ready for the festival. As the first 'arghya' of the Chhath Puja will be offered to Surya Bhagwan at the sunset on November 7 while second and last on the next day at the time of sunrise which will mark the end of the festival, the local administration has made elaborate security and other arrangements both in the mid-stream of Ganga, its 88-odd ghats and adjoining areas where several traffic restrictions will be imposed from Thursday afternoon to late Friday morning hours. In view of Chhath festival, 45 motor-boats of Water Police, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and PAC flood relief team will patrol in the Ganga from Samne Ghat to Namoo Ghat and towards Ramnagar on November 7 evening and

November 8 morning. More than 800 policemen will be deployed on the Ganga ghats. Besides, Nagar Nigam has started preparations for barricading at famous ghats to control the crowd. The district administration has instructed the boatmen to board the passengers on boats with life jackets and keep other life saving equipment. Commissioner of Police (CP) Mohit Agarwal directed the DCPs of all three zones (Kashi, Varuna and Gomti) of the Varanasi Commissionerate to make proper security arrangements from ghats to ponds. He also instructed the police stations to remain in touch with the local divers and ask the volunteers of puja committees to keep their identity cards. To keep a watch on anti-social elements Anti-Romeo squad will be deployed at crowded places and police personnel in civil dress to keep a vigil on pickpockets and hooligans. **MEMORANDUM:** The workers of Samajwadi Party (SP) expressed their displeasure at

the Nagar Nigam for not completing the cleaning of Ganga ghats and kunds (ponds) till now though Dala Chhath Puja festival already began. Under the leadership of former city president of SP Vishnu Sharma, the party workers met Additional Municipal Commissioner Dushyant Maurya in his Nagar Nigam office here on Tuesday and handed over a memorandum. Sharma claimed that only a few days are left for the Dala Chhath 'arghya' and Dev Deepawali but in the name of cleanliness, only ghats are being cleaned in the files of Nagar Nigam. Most of the ghats of Kashi are covered with silt, he said. While demanding an increase in the number of changing rooms on the ghats, lighting arrangements and temporary toilets, he said due to the ghats and ponds not being cleaned till now, fasting women will have to face difficulty at the place of worship. The additional municipal commissioner assured that the team of departmental officers is continuously visiting the ghats and ponds and the work is being done on a war footing. Wherever work is left, the major ghats and ponds of Kashi will be cleaned in two days at any cost, the officer promised. City president of Mahila Sabha Bina Singh, city chief of Yuva Jan Sabha Rahul Gupta, city president of Lohia Vahini Sandeep Mishra, former corporator Prashant Singh 'Pinku', Durga Yadav, state secretary of Yuva Jan Sabha Ajay Yadav, Firoz Khan, Amit Kumar Chaudhary, Pankaj Jaiswal, Altah Khan etc.

Nag Nathaiya celebrated with traditional gaiety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Internationally famous Nag Nathaiya was celebrated at Tulsi Ghat with traditional gaiety and great enthusiasm here on Tuesday afternoon. Thousands of devotees, including women and children, watched the rare scene of Lord Krishna setting the hoods of Kaliya Naag. It was the moment when entire area at Tulsi Ghat and adjoining ghats echoed with the slogans in favour of Lord Krishna and Har Har Mahadev. The festival of Nag Nathaiya began around 4 pm with Lord Krishna playing ball with his 'sakhas' (friends). During it the ball fell into Kalia Dah and 'sakhas' insisted on taking it back. Along the river at Tulsi Ghat, a tree of Kadamba was installed. When the *sakhas* continued insisting on taking the ball back, Lord Krishna climbed on the kadamba tree by saying 'lehu gend main lyawat jai'. Meanwhile, the Vyas team filled the atmosphere with Naradiya tune 'Yah kahi Natwar Madan Gopala kudi pare jal mein Nandlala' and Lord Krishna jumped into Kalya Dah (river). Lord Krishna went into deep



Nag Nathaiya 'leela' being held at Tulsi Ghat in Varanasi on Tuesday.

jai and Har Har Mahadev. The scene when Lord Krishna appeared from the deep water on the hoods of Naag, was rare and devotees watched unblinkingly and the entire atmosphere turned devotional at Tulsi Ghat for a while. Mahant of Sankat Mochan Mandir Prof Vishambhar Nath Mishra garlanded Lord Krishna. Royal head of Banaras Estate Kunwar Anant Narayan Singh presented *ginni* (coin) as per tradition. According to Prof Mishra, Goswami Tulsidas started this festival over 450 years ago and since then it is celebrated each year. Elaborate security arrangement was made to ensure peaceful celebration and also avoid any untoward incident. Not only Tulsi Ghat but also adjoining ghats were crowded with devotees in thousands. According to Prof Mishra, for this famous festival one green kadamba tree is brought from a forest area near Sankatmochan temple and to compensate for the same, 100 trees are planted there every year. Mayor Ashok Tiwari and several other dignitaries were present.

water. The devotees watching the scene forgot that it was *leela*. Tulsi Ghat has turned into Braj and devotees as Brajwasis for a while. But after a few minutes, Lord Krishna appeared while dancing on the hoods of Kalya Naag and the entire place was echoed with slogans like Bhagvan Krishna ki

Split skin grafting successful

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A 75-year-old resident of Nihalapur was suffering from flesh-eating bacteria disease for two months. While undergoing treatment at a hospital in Pandeypur, about 20 per cent of the skin on his left leg had rotted. For its treatment, he was referred to New Delhi where he had to undergo plastic surgery. Due to his poor financial condition, he was unable to get treatment. He was successfully treated at the Community Health Centre (CHC) Gangapur (Pindra) by split skin grafting method. This information was given by CHC Gangapur surgeon Dr Shrikant Patel here on Monday. Dr Patel, who did the skin grafting, said skin grafting is a surgical procedure, in which the skin of a damaged part of the body is replaced with healthy skin. In this procedure, healthy skin is taken from any other part of the body such as buttocks, thighs and upper arms. The place from where healthy skin is taken is called 'donor site' and the place where the skin is applied is called 'recipient site'. The piece of healthy skin taken out to apply on the damaged skin is called 'graft' and when the graft is obtained, it is called 'autograft'. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said efforts are being made to provide better medical services at all the CHCs of the district and under this the skin grafting

surgery done at CHC Gangapur is an excellent initiative. He praised the entire medical team, including the Superintendent of Gangapur CHC and congratulated them for successfully doing skin grafting. **SCHOLARSHIP:** Ayushi Singh, daughter of Dr Satish Kumar Singh, Senior Professor at the Department of Soil Science & Agricultural Chemistry, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), has been awarded the prestigious International Postgraduate Award (IIPA) by the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Sydney, Australia. The scholarship will support Ayushi as she will pursue a 3.5-year PhD in Public Health and Community Medicine at UNSW, covering her tuition fees and providing a living stipend. Ayushi, a alumna of BHU, completed her BSc (Hons) in Physics, Mathematics and Statistics in 2017 and her MSc in Statistics in 2019 from the Institute of Science, BHU. She later earned an M Phil in Public Health from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, in 2022. Her professional experience includes working as a Consultant at the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai. Currently, she serves as an Operational Research and Data Analyst in the International Health Division at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, New Delhi.

Security guard dies under mysterious circumstances

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A security guard died under mysterious circumstances in a mall under Kotwali police station area on Tuesday. Police took the body into possession and carried out a probe in the matter. According to reports, the guard died after he suddenly slipped and fell from the third floor of the mall. The incident took place in front of gate number 6. He was identified as Brijbhan Yadav (45). Colleagues informed that the guard was under mental stress following differences with wife. Police sent the body for an autopsy. Meanwhile a contract lineman was charred to death in a powerful explosion on the pole of an HT line while repairing a fault near Gulab Vatika in Rajpur town of Kanpur Dehat on Tuesday morning. He was identified as Manoj alias Ahibaran Singh (40). Reports said that when he had climbed the pole, the power supply was suspended. But suddenly the supply was restored and a powerful explosion occurred killing the lineman. SDM Sikandra SN Shukla and CO Sanjay Kumar along with force from many police stations rushed to the spot.

NDRF DIG: Teams deployed with safety equipment



NDRF personnel in Varanasi keeping a watch in view of Chhath puja

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The 11th Battalion of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has geared up all safety and proper health arrangements for the festival of Dala Chhath, especially the two 'argya' events to be held at sunset on November 7 and at sunrise on November 8. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of NDRF Manoj Kumar Sharma said that teams have been deployed on the Ganga river in Varanasi with safety equipment, water ambulances and divers. He said that the NDRF personnel will be deployed at Ganga ghats and ponds to take care of the medical facilities and security of Chhath devotees. According to him, each team will have 25 to 30 NDRF personnel. They have been

deployed at all major ghats with life saving equipment, rescue motor boat, water ambulance, life jacket, lifebuoy, divers, paramedical, oxygen cylinder and other necessary rescue equipment. All security arrangements are being made in coordination with the district administration. The NDRF DIG said that apart from the Ganga river, a team will also be deployed for the safety of devotees at Surya Sarovar of Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW). Apart from this, NDRF teams have also been deployed in Chandauli. NDRF personnel will also be ready at the 11-NDRF Headquarters at Sanskritik Sankul, Maqbool Alam Road here for emergency in the areas around Varanasi. NDRF teams are already continuously patrolling the Ganga river.

Initiative to provide soft skills training to police personnel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The IIT Allahabad has launched a groundbreaking initiative to provide soft skills training to police personnel in preparation for the upcoming Kumbh Mela in 2025 in collaboration with IG office, Prayagraj. This programme aims to equip law enforcement officers with essential communication, interpersonal and leadership skills to effectively manage large crowds and ensure a safe and successful event. Notably, IIT-A was contacted by Prem Kumar Gautam, IG (Prayagraj Range) in connection to support for IT services and also for the Soft Skill and Behavioural training proposed to be conducted for most of the police personnel of different designations i.e. additional SP, inspectors, sub-inspectors, head constables etc. proposed to be posted in Kumbh Mela duty. This training session is aimed to enrich and enhance the following managerial aspects in accordance with the upcoming Kumbh 2025. Director, IIT-A, Prof Mukul Sharad Sutaone, said the collaboration between IIT-A and the police department for the soft skill training programme signi-

fies a strategic partnership aimed at enhancing the capabilities of law enforcement personnel. The shared objective is to equip police officers with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle the complexities of the Kumbh Mela with professionalism and efficiency. In a dynamic and high-pressure environment like the Kumbh Mela, effective communication and conflict resolution skills are crucial for police officers. By providing soft skill training, IIT-A aims to enhance the capabilities of law enforcement personnel, improve community relations, and ensure a smooth and efficient management of the event. A team has been constituted which will be supervised and overseen by Prof OP Vyas, Professor (IT), IIT-A. The team including the domain experts had imparted the training on Tuesday at Mela Pandal where hundreds of police personnel were trained by a team consisting of Prof Vyas and Prof Neena Kohli. Prof Vyas said the team members would focus on stress management techniques for the ground duty personnel from police to stay calm under pressure, enabling proactive decision-making in critical sit-

uations. He said all the police personnel involved in the Kumbh Mela must be trained in proper body language, maintaining calm and respectful behaviour and demonstrating emotional intelligence when interacting with the public. Communication with the general public, particularly women, children and the elderly, should be handled with sensitivity and a humanitarian approach to address their specific needs during the Mela. Special attention should be given to effective communication with foreign nationals from around the world, ensuring that they feel welcomed and respected. **INSPECTION:** In view of the Maha Kumbh, the work of widening the roads is being done here. The responsibility of widening the roads in the city has been given to the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA). So far, the work of 12 roads has been completed by it. Divisional Commissioner (DC) Vijay Vishwas Pant inspected various works of widening the roads and their beautification where irregularities were seen in construction works. The DC gave strict instructions to the chief engineer of PDA to take action against the officers

concerned. The DC started the inspection of the construction work going on for the Maha Kumbh from IERT (Telarganj) to Apron Crossing. The DC also inspected the work being done on the High Court Road where the road construction work towards the water tank was found to be slow. **YOUTH SUCCUMBS TO INJURIES:** A 25-year-old youth who had sustained critical injuries after being hit with an unidentified vehicle in Udaipur police station of Pratapgarh breathed his last while undergoing treatment on Monday night. Brijesh of Ramkharwa of Udaipur police station area, was going to his sister's house in Dhanapur, Amethi around 10 pm on October 16. He was lying injured on the roadside after being hit by an unknown vehicle near Deori Bazaar. The policemen on patrol at night saw him and informed the family members about the incident through his mobile. The family was getting him treated in Lucknow where he died on Monday night. Meanwhile a 40-year-old man committed suicide by hanging himself in Deha village under Karchana police station of Yamunanagar here.

Two youths killed in road mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Two youths were killed while another was injured in a road accident in Sidirpur market of Kunda, Pratapgarh. They fell on the road along with the bike after being hit by a dumper carrying soil. Two youths died while the condition of another youth accompanying them is said to be critical. Kishori Lal (30) of Loharan Ka Purwa Samsapur village of Hathiganj police station area, was going to Khidirpur market on a bike with Lovelesh Gautam (20) and Arun Kumar Golu (19) of Saroj village around 3:30 pm on Tuesday. The accident occurred as soon as they reached in front of Bahadurpur village. With the help of people around, the police sent all injured to the community health centre (CHC) where the doctor declared Kishori Lal dead. As the condition of Lovelesh and Arun was critical they were referred to the Swaroop Rani Nehru Hospital, Prayagraj. Here, Lovelesh was also declared dead. Inspector Nandlal Singh said on receiving complaint, a report will be registered and action will be taken.

Goldiee Masale organises lucky draw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Shubham Goldiee Masale Pvt Ltd organised the 'Goldiee Varshik Duj Vikreta Sammelan' with fanfare in Prayagraj on Monday. Managing Director Sudeep Goenka along with Joint Magistrate Anubhav Singh inaugurated the programme by Ganesh Puja and lighting the lamp. Addressing the distributors and sellers, Managing Director Sudeep Goenka, while extending Diwali greetings to them, said this was the 33rd year when Goldiee had consecutively been organising the meet and prize distribution ceremony, the credit of which solely goes to local sellers. General Manager (Sales) Alok



Seth explained about the 'Rishte Pyar Ke Pidhiyon Se' prize scheme in detail and the number of many prestigious awards won by the group. On the occasion company launched the new product 'Goldiee Double Engine' detergent powder and cake with tagline 'Rishton Mein Laye Double Chamak'. A lucky draw organised on the occasion carried total 251 prizes, including five motorcycles and five LEDs.

The motorcycle winners include: Raju Kirana (Saidabad); Shree Chandra Kirana (Jhusi); Shree Balaji Kirana (Ram Bahawan); Ramesh Kirana (Koroon) and Shubham Kirana (Phoolpur). Sales Manager Anil Arya conducted the proceedings. Local distributor Dinesh Kesarwani of M/s Kesarwani Agencies welcomed the guests. Arvind Sharma, Manoj Verma and Mohit Gaud were also present.

Awareness session organised for students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Kidwai Nagar, under the Mission Shakti 5.0 campaign headed by Dr Saba Yunus organised an awareness session for students on the topic 'Good touch and bad touch' on Tuesday. She emphasised that it is essential in today's times to educate children, especially girls, about good and bad touch in advance. Dr Vandana Sharma and Dr Rashmi Chaturvedi were also

present at this event. **CASH, JEWELLERY STOLEN:** Cash and jewellery worth lakhs of rupees were stolen from a locked house in Ghatampur police station area. The incident came to light when the tenant returned. He informed the landlord and police about the incident. Ghatampur inspector Dhananjay Kumar Pandey said a probe was on in the matter. On receipt of complaint, further action would be initiated, he said.

Congress accuses PM Modi of lowering discourse, claims BJP losing in Maharashtra and Jharkhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Tuesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lowering the level of discourse during the election campaign and claimed it showed that the BJP was losing assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. After alleging that the INDIA bloc will snatch the "magalsutra" in his Lok Sabha campaign speeches, Modi has stooped to calling the opposition alliance "ghuspaithiya bandhan" (an alliance of infiltrators) and claiming it will "snatch daughters and food" in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, the party said. Congress leader Pawan Khera stated that it is unbecoming of a prime minister to use language similar to that of a "cheap villain from a C-grade Hindi film" and he should uphold the dignity of



his office. Taking a dig, he also asked if Modi was criticising Home Minister Amit Shah's work by claiming that infiltrators had free rein in Jharkhand. "The level of the prime minister's language in electioneering is falling very fast. In Lok Sabha polls, while fearing defeat, he sought to divide society by spewing venom among communities. They did not get enough votes and today they are running a coalition government," he said. "In the Lok Sabha elections, it started with buffalo, mutton, fish, mangalsutra, Muslim, and by the time it came to Jharkhand elections, it has reached to daughter and bread. He used to say INDIA people will take away your daughters and mangalsutra and is now running a government in alliance with other partners," Khera said in a post in Hindi on X. In a video message also posted on X, the Congress

leader claimed the BJP's prospects are even worse in Jharkhand and Maharashtra and "they know they are losing". "He is now again talking of 'ghuspaithiya' sarkar, that it will snatch your daughters and food. But, border security is under them as he has been in government for over 10 years. Who is giving this certificate to the BSF, the Home Minister, Rajnath Singh or are you criticising your foreign policy," Khera alleged. The Congress spokesperson wondered if the prime minister is publicly criticising Home Minister Amit Shah with such statements. "Whatever their differences, he should improve his language. Such language and dialogues are not befitting of the prime minister's post," he said. "Such dialogues are spoken by a cheap villain of a C-grade Hindi film and do not behave him. You must

improve upon your language," he said. Accusing the prime minister of having "lost personal respect", Khera said, "At least maintain the respect and reputation of the position you hold." "Please maintain this 'maryada' (decorum) in the leftover time you have, please keep that in mind," the chairman of the media and publicity department of the Congress said. Prime Minister Modi on Monday launched a no-holds-barred attack on the JMM-led coalition in Jharkhand, labelling it a 'ghuspaithiya bandhan' (infiltrators' alliance) for "supporting Bangladeshi infiltrators". "Appeasement politics has reached its zenith in Jharkhand where the JMM-led coalition is busy supporting Bangladeshi infiltrators. If this continues, the state's tribal population will shrink.

India to launch European Space Agency's Proba-3 mission in December

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



India will launch the European Space Agency's Proba-3 mission early next month from the spaceport at Sriharikota, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said here on Tuesday. He said the two satellites that are part of the Proba-3 mission to study the Sun were brought to Sriharikota on Tuesday morning for integration with ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). "Proba-3 mission of the European Space Agency will be launched by a PSLV rocket from Sriharikota in the first week of December," Singh said at the Indian Space Conclave organised by the Indian Space Association. The mission is likely to be launched on December 4. The two Proba-3 spacecraft will be launched together by the PSLV-XL launcher and placed in the highly elliptical orbit which will ascend to 60,000 km away from Earth

before coming as low as just 600 km. This high orbit is required because the pair of spacecraft will perform their active formation flying for a planned six hours at a time around their maximum altitude, where Earth's gravitational pull will be diminished, as will the amount of propellant needed to fine-tune their positions. Proba-3's two satellites will enable sustained views of the Sun's faint surrounding atmosphere, or corona, that has previously only been

visible for a few brief moments during solar eclipses viewed from the Earth. To achieve this the shadow being cast between the spacecraft must remain in a precise position, which means they must fly autonomously in formation to an accuracy of a single millimetre - about the thickness of an average fingernail. This is the first time that an ESA mission is being launched from India since the original Proba-1 Earth-observing mission in 2001.

SC junks plea against quashing of LOC issued to ex-house help of Sushant Singh Rajput

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed the Centre's appeal against an order that quashed a look out circular (LOC) issued to the former house help of late actor Sushant Singh Rajput. A bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan dismissed the appeal noting no one had appeared in the case when the matter came up for hearing. "We do not find any merit in the appeal," held the bench. An LOC is issued by investigating agencies to ensure the accused persons do not flee the country. The Centre had challenged



the April 10 Bombay High Court order quashing the LOC issued by the CBI against one Samuel Miranda. The high court had observed the LOC had been issued on the basis of the registration of the FIR and said there was no apprehension of the

petitioner evading arrest or being unavailable for the trial. "Nothing was brought to our notice in the LOC, reflecting the 'reason' for issuing of the LOC, except registration of an FIR and setting out the gist of the FIR. Neither has anything been brought on record for continuance of the LOC not has the respondent number one, the CBI, placed before us any subsequent request for continuation/renewal of the LOC, after the expiry of one year," the high court noted. "The CBI was further stated to have neither filed a charge-sheet nor a closure report. It is not in dispute that the petitioner has joined the investigation and has co-

operated with the same," said the high court. Miranda, before the high court, claimed that the LOC was issued as against him in 2020 and the police were yet to file a report. He said the look out circular couldn't be issued indefinitely, particularly when he had co-operated with the investigation and attended the CBI office when summoned. "Keeping the LOC pending for over 3.5 years, has infringed the petitioner's right to travel abroad, and clearly violates his fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution India, to travel freely," said Miranda.



President Droupadi Murmu, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Union Minister of Law & Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal and Justice BR Gavai release of three publications of the Supreme Court, at Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre (RBCC) PTI

ICG convenes 26th National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan meeting



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) convened the 26th National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP) meeting here on Tuesday chaired by Director General Paramesh Sivamani, Chairperson NOSDCP. The meeting saw the participation of approximately 80 delegates from various ministries, central and state governments, ports, and oil handling agencies, Coast Guard said. The gathering focused on reviewing the nation's preparedness to respond effectively to oil spill contingencies in Indian waters. As India is on track to become the world's third-largest economy, the volume of oil imports via shipping is also rising. This increase, alongside the movement of chemicals and other hazardous materials, presents significant risks to India's maritime zones, extensive coastline, coastal populations, marine ecosystems, and tourism industries. Ensuring robust preparedness among the Central Coordinating Agency, coastal states, ports, and other stakeholders is crucial for protecting our marine environment from potential oil spills.

Assam CM questions Sonia Gandhi's nationality amid citizenship row



PTI ■ PALONGHA/ASSAM

Hitting out at the Congress for questioning the legitimacy of the citizenship of a BJP by-poll candidate in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that questions can also be raised on the nationality of the opposition party's top leader Sonia Gandhi. The Congress in its campaigning for Dholai constituency has cast doubts about the citizenship of BJP candidate Nihar Ranjan Das. Addressing a rally here while campaigning for Das, Sarma said, "If you (Congress) call Nihar Ranjan 'Bangladeshi', I will also call Sonia Gandhi 'Italian'. If you think I am afraid of Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi, let me tell you I am not."

Sarma maintained that Bengali Hindu residents of present Barak Valley of Assam were dwellers of what is now Bangladesh as it was the same country prior to Partition. He blamed the Congress for creating the problems for Bengali-Hindus of Barak Valley, who had to move to present-day Assam following Partition of the country due to atrocities on religious minorities there. Sarma also held the grand old party responsible for the Partition of India in 1947. "Had you not bifurcated Bharat, atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh would not have happened," the chief minister asserted. "Hindus are facing atrocities even now (in Bangladesh). We can see this on television and social media. But you (Congress) cannot raise these issues. Congress was formed to play only negative politics," the CM added. Sarma had addressed another campaign rally under Dholai constituency earlier in the day.

Union Minister launches 'Tulip' digital platform to empower marginalised artisans

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Virendra Kumar, on Tuesday inaugurated a new digital platform 'Tulip' aimed at improving market access for artisans from marginalised communities, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), safai karmacharis, persons with disabilities, and minority groups. The platform was launched under the guidance of the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC) and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, at the 15-days Shilp Samagam Mela at Dilli Haat beginning Tuesday. It offers visitors a vibrant display of traditional

handicrafts, skill demonstrations and an opportunity to support artisan communities directly. Speaking at the launch of Tulip, the Union minister emphasised the government's commitment to fostering financial independence among India's traditional craft workers. It seeks to connect India's skilled artisans with both domestic and global markets, promoting financial independence and empowering traditional craft workers. "Our aim is to bring people from the marginalised communities, including SCs and safai karmacharis, into the mainstream. We are working towards their empowerment, making them aatmanirbhar (self-reliant)," he said, adding the ministry's effort is to provide a platform like this to accelerate their progress.

Kumar highlighted the inclusive intent behind Tulip, describing it as "a step in line with 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas, Sabka Vishwas', an inclusive development model. Kumar also announced plans to expand the initiative further, aiming to identify artisans in "every corner" of the country and link them to the digital marketplace. Artisans interested in joining Tulip can register through the platform for more comprehensive access to new markets, while additional support is available through NBCFDC's helpline, he said. Tulip is designed to address key challenges faced by artisans, particularly the involvement of intermediaries, by facilitating direct sales and ensuring fair compensation for their work, a senior official said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has disbursed the first installment of the 15th Finance Commission grants for 2024-25 to rural local bodies in Haryana, Tripura, and Mizoram, as per the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj. In particular, Haryana has received untied grants totaling Rs. 194.867 crores. This amount will be allocated to 18 eligible district panchayats, 139 block panchayats, and 5,911 gram panchayats across the state. Untied grants are utilised by RLBs for location-specific needs, except for salaries and other establishment costs. Tied grants are used for basic services such as sanitation, maintaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and the supply of drinking water, rainwater harvesting and water recycling. For Tripura, untied grants totalling Rs 31.40 crore and tied grants of Rs 47.10 crore



have been released for all 1,260 rural local bodies (RLBs), including traditional local bodies, 40 block advisory committees and 587 village committees. Mizoram received untied and tied grants of Rs 14.20 crore and Rs 21.30 crore, respectively. These funds have been disbursed to all 834 village councils, including those in Autonomous District Council areas, it said. The Ministry said the Finance Commission grants aim to make the Panchayati Raj Institutions and RLBs more capable, accountable, and self-reliant. "Aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas', this initiative supports inclusive growth and participatory democracy, vital for the development of the country," it added. The Centre, through the Panchayati Raj Ministry and the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation), recommends the release of 15th Finance Commission grants to states for Rural Local Bodies, which are then released by the Ministry of Finance, the statement said adding that the allocated grants are released in two installments in a financial year.

NITI Aayog launches 'Jal Utsav' festival to promote water conservation and sustainability

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government's premier think tank, NITI Aayog will be launching a fortnight long 'Jal Utsav' festival starting Wednesday to create awareness and sensitivity towards water management, conservation and sustainability. Jal Utsav which comes amid an ongoing global and national water crisis will be implemented in 20 Aspirational Districts/Blocks between November 6-24, 2024 in partnership with National Jal Jeevan Mission, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Union Ministry of Jal Shakti. The Festival is being launched across 20 states, envisages community participation in preservation and protection of water resources. "It seeks to instil a sense of responsibility towards efficient water use among households and water management among utilities



and agencies. In this initiative, school students are being enrolled in water management activities, empowering them to act as catalysts for change within their families and communities," said a Government statement here. The event will be launched with 'Jal Bandhan' - the symbolic tying of sacred thread on water assets by eminent personalities and local leaders. They would also launch 'Fact Sheets on Jal Sampada (water assets)' of

their respective blocks and districts. Besides, discussing the plan for the departmental activities in the fortnight, people would also take the 'Jal Utsav Oath' resolving to maintain and protect the water resources ensuring judicious and sustainable use. Through this pledge, communities are being encouraged to abide by the 5Rs: Respect, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recharge while using water. The subsequent days of the Jal Utsav fortnight will include cleaning of Jal Sampada assets; celebrating Jal Sanchay Diwas; encouraging teachers to lead through creating water management awareness through stories, experiments and visits to water bodies and also by training the students on water quality testing using field test kits (FTKs). Students will be given exposure visits to water supply and treatment plants

for greater awareness about water management; organizing Jal Utsav Run or marathon; planting of trees under 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' at Jal Sampada premises are also the activities planned for the fortnight. People for skill development under 'Nal Jal Mitra' initiative of Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation will also be enrolled during the Jal Utsav. Self-help Groups (SHGs) and ASHA workers are also being included in this festival for sensitisation and capacity building. The campaign is inspired by the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who proposed the idea of Jal Utsav during the 3rd Chief Secretaries Conference in December 2023. The festival aims to create a collective responsibility toward preserving water resources and ensuring their sustainable management, as per the statement.

Climate driven changes in Ganga plains: DST Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Tracing vegetation patterns in the Ganga plain from palaeoclimate records with the help of pollen and multi-proxy studies, a team of Indian scientists have shown how climate-driven vegetation changes played a crucial role in shaping human history in the Indian subcontinent over the last 2000 years. Besides using pollen extracted from sediment cores taken from Sarsapukhra Lake in Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh, as well as other multiproxy analyses, the scientists from Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences (BSIP), an autonomous research institute under the Department of Science and Technology (DST), also employed the Earth System Paleoclimate Simulation (ESPS) model to reconstruct monsoon patterns over the past two millennia. The study's findings show that alternating periods of warm and cold temperatures, such as the

explored paleoclimatic clues to better understand historical climate dynamics, particularly in relation to the Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM). The study has been published in the journal Catena. By identifying crops more suited to the changing climate, agricultural practices can be adapted to maintain productivity and ensure the stability of the GDP. This proactive approach could help mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture, ensuring food security and economic resilience in the future, said the researchers.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cowardly attack

The temple attack in Canada raises concerns over the safety and rights of the Indian diaspora in Canada

The recent attack on the Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton, Canada, has once again brought to light the tense diplomatic situation between India and Canada, with both nations navigating an increasingly complex web of domestic and international issues. The incident, marked by violent clashes involving pro-Khalistani extremists outside the temple, was swiftly condemned by both Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, the response from each leader underscores the stark differences in their approach, further straining bilateral ties. Prime Minister Modi's condemnation of the attack was resolute and pointed. Taking to social media, he expressed his disappointment over the attack, calling it a "deliberate" act against Hindu religious sentiments and stressing that "such acts of violence will never weaken India's resolve." PM Modi did not hold back from calling on the Canadian government to ensure justice and uphold the rule of law, sending a clear message that India expects Ottawa to take decisive action to protect its diaspora.



While Trudeau also condemned the temple attack, his statement notably avoided any direct mention of the pro-Khalistani extremists involved. This omission reflects a recurring issue in Trudeau's handling of India-related tensions within Canada, where a vocal pro-Khalistani community has been implicated in acts perceived as hostile by India. Trudeau's hesitance to directly address this faction has been a persistent irritant in India-Canada relations, amplifying concerns in New Delhi about Ottawa's stance on issues impacting Indian diaspora and the wider Hindu community in Canada.

The attack also comes at a time when broader diplomatic relations between the two countries are under significant strain, with recent allegations and counter-allegations creating a sense of mutual mistrust. Last September, Trudeau alleged that India might have been involved in the death of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a known Khalistani activist, who was killed under mysterious circumstances in Canada. Although the Canadian Prime Minister has yet to provide concrete evidence for this claim, the accusation has deepened divisions between the two nations, prompting India to refute any such involvement and criticise the Canadian government's stance. Modi's recent comments have also touched on an additional point of contention: the alleged surveillance of Indian consular staff in Canada. This has not only raised security concerns but has also highlighted the increasing difficulty Indian diplomats face within Canadian borders. The presence of surveillance, paired with incidents like the temple attack, fuels a perception that pro-Khalistani extremists are becoming emboldened, even as Trudeau's administration appears reluctant to fully confront these groups. With each new incident — whether it be a temple attack or allegations of state-backed assassination plots — the divide only seems to grow wider, testing the resilience of both countries' commitments to a constructive relationship.

PICTALK



A girl collects newly plucked saffron flowers during the harvesting season, in Pulwama

India's tribute to the architect of unity



ANIRBAN GANGULY

In a historic tribute to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Government has announced sesquicentennial celebration to honour Patel's unyielding legacy in unifying India

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has announced that to honour Sardar Patel's 'monumental contributions', to commemorate, his 'enduring legacy as the visionary behind the establishment of one of the world's most robust democracies and his pivotal role in unifying India from Kashmir to Lakshwadeep' which 'remains indelible', the government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, will celebrate his sesquicentennial from 2024 to 2026.

After the nationwide movement to erect the Statue of Unity, this is another watershed occasion, when the legacy of Sardar Patel would be commemorated and cherished. This honour was long due and is richly deserved. The Sardar's centenary in 1975, was a given a short-shrift. It was deliberate. The Indira-led Congress, busy enforcing an unethical and draconian 'Emergency', had little time to commemorate Sardar Patel.

A commemoration would have certainly raised hard questions. Moreover, could Sardar's democratic legacy be commemorated, with the entire Opposition, minus the crooning communists, behind bars? One of Patel's foremost biographers, Rajmohan Gandhi, writing in 1991, spoke of how acknowledgements in the case of Nehru were 'fulsome' and in the case of Gandhi 'dutiful', but in the case of Patel, were 'niggardly'. Speaking of the Nehru centenary celebrations in 1989, Gandhi writes, that it 'found expression on a thousand billboards, in commemorative TV serials, in festivals and in numerous other platforms'. While Patel's centenary on October 31, 1975, four months after Emergency was clamped, 'was by contrast, wholly neglected by official India and the rest of the Establishment.'

In a long interview with Harry Hodson, British economist and editor, Patel's shadow and trouble-shooter-in-chief, VP Menon, recalled a day when the usually tolerant and absorbing Patel chose to talk back to Nehru. 'You think you made the Congress?', he snapped, 'We are all co-builders in it. You think I want your posi-



tion? If that was the case, I would not have resigned my Presidency and asked Gandhiji that you should take over. I told him that I would stand down.' 'There was rare emotion in the Sardar's voice,' writes Narayani Basu in her biography of Menon citing that particularly acerbic encounter. The post Sardar Patel Congress was made to believe that it was Nehru alone who made it and therefore only he and his political progeny were worthy of commemoration and remembrance. VP was saddened to 'see that under the veil of idealism and greatness Nehru wrapped himself in, there existed a vindictive and petty man.' For someone who saw Patel so closely for many intense years, VP told Hodson, how Sardar 'died as a very, very bitter and sad man', and 'Panditji should never have treated him the way he did.' That propensity of negating Patel and his contribution to our national march percolated through Nehru's dynasty and the Congress that he shepherded post-Patel. In his biographical opus, LK Advani has rightly described the Congress's dégringolade, after Patel, arguing that 'after Sardar Patel passed away, there was no one left in the Congress Party to counterbalance Nehru's negative views on various important issues.' As an



PATEL'S BIOGRAPHER RAJMOHAN GANDHI ARGUES THAT 'IN THE POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT SELECTION OF AMBEDKAR AND MOOKERJEE, PATEL'S WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THE DECISIVE ROLE'

acolyte of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee and belonging to his intellectual and political lineage, the occasion of Sardar Patel's sesquicentennial commemoration also brings to my mind the special bond that they shared in free India's first cabinet.

Patel's biographer Rajmohan Gandhi argues that 'in the politically significant selection of Ambedkar and Mookerjee, Patel's was undoubtedly the decisive role.' While Sardar had his eyes on Babasaheb Ambedkar from the 'summer of 1946', Dr Mookerjee, who then represented the Hindu Mahasabha, had earned Sardar's plaudits by calling for and advocating the partition of Bengal in March 1947 and 'by refusing to join an abortive bid for a united and independent sovereign Bengal that Sarat Bose and the then Muslim League premier of Bengal, mastermind of the bloody 1946 'Direct Action', H S Suhrawardy, had floated. It was a clever ploy by Suhrawardy to try and wean away the whole of Bengal from India and to toss it eventually into his master Jinnah's Pakistan cauldron.

Both, Dr Mookerjee's bold advocacy and Sardar Patel's support to his demand, saved Bengal and ensured that a portion of it remained an integral part of India. It was a moment,

like a few more to follow in the coming years, in which both Sardar Patel and Dr Mookerjee worked closely.

In his voluminous memoirs, 'Living an Era', veteran Congressman DP Mishra, recalls that, when Suhrawardy realised his nefarious plan of snatching away Bengal was falling through, 'he took to making veiled threats about Calcutta being destroyed as a result of communal warfare' and told Mountbatten that he 'feared serious riots and damage' in Calcutta and 'wanted six-months joint control' of the city.

Mishra writes that when Mountbatten sought Patel's reaction to the proposal, Patel replied, 'not even for six hours.' These are all worth remembering, commemorating and revisiting.

The nationwide Statue of Unity movement from 2013 to 2014, the humongous mission of erecting and unveiling the Statue of Unity, and the commemoration of 'Rashtriya Ekta Diwas', have all been milestones in the last decade. A long and deliberately neglected legacy is being mainstreamed.

(The author is chairman of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation and National Executive Committee member of the BJP; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AVOID RELIGIOUS POLITICS

Madam — This refers to the editorial dated 4-11-24. The students' movement that started against 30 per cent reservation announced for the Mukti Bahini martyrs was only a spark and all those who were waiting for an opportunity to throw out the dictatorial regime and the religious fundamentalists joined hands with the agitating students and made the situation worse, ultimately forcing the government head to flee the country. But during the course of the movement, students were pushed behind and the religious fundamentalists took the dominating role and used the agitating students to push forward their tactical goals. The demands of the students were, after all, ending the reservation, but subsequently it took political and religious turns plunging the country into further social and economic crisis. History is clear with its message. Wherever religion and religious heads are allowed to dominate the agenda it leads to dictatorship and ends up with chaotic scenes on the social and economic front. Religion is an innate affair and politics is a public affair. Mixing these incongruent ingredients will have its inevitable and serious adverse effects. It is the responsibility of every citizen to keep religion and religious fundamentalists at a distance to ensure them not to indulge in politics.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

ELECTION DRAMA CONTINUES

Madam — As the 2024 US presidential elections gather momentum, we must be perplexed at the nation's free-wheeling ethos in its various forms. Tirades and misinformation are freely used by parties. While it takes the Supreme Court to reveal funds received by our political parties but not the nexus to a specific donor, Elon Musk, the US multimillionaire, openly donates millions to the Trump campaign, and even censures anti-Trump tweets on his X outlet. States in the US have their own laws on elections that cover not only voting procedure but their

Violence against Indians in Canada



The deplorable violence at the Hindu Sabha Mandir in Brampton has laid bare Canada's inept handling of a sensitive situation. This is a new low for the Justin Trudeau government, which has been recklessly burning bridges with India following the murder of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The allegation that the police targeted Hindu devotees and tried to protect Khalistani supporters has added fuel to the fire. Canadian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister David Morrison's allegation that Home Minister Amit

Shah ordered a campaign of violence, intimidation and intelligence-gathering targeting Sikh separatists in that country has raised India's hackles. Khalistanis' anti-India protests have put them on a collision course with Indian-origin Canadian citizens who wear the Tricolour on their sleeve. Canada, which proudly regards itself as a peace-loving land of opportunities, needs to deal firmly with those who threaten communal harmony and public order.

It must crack down on troublemakers and rabble-rousers, no matter which community they belong to. Allowing the misuse of Canadian territory to spew venom against India — all in the name of freedom of expression — is undermining the Trudeau government's diplomatic and democratic credentials. Meanwhile, Trudeau owes an explanation for letting anti-India elements have their way with impunity.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Washington

counting too.

They are seldom bound by the Federal Election Commission, whose remit to call the elections has long been usurped by the media. The dominance of the fifth estate in the US seems to be a wart that has come to be its beauty spot. The irony is that Donald Trump, who lost to Biden by 7 million votes in 2020, has not conceded his defeat even today. And despite all these aberrations, the outcome is keenly awaited globally. Transparency is a virtue in US politics, embellished by no-holds-barred campaigns and a media splurge in millions of dollars.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

SHINDE'S WINNING STRATEGY

Madam — It is an advantage for Shinde Sena, as they have had a whip hand in providing a clean administration for over 30 months and won the hearts of the people. Moreover, the bow and arrow symbol he inherited as the real Sena is a magic wand for victory. He is carrying our government schemes to reach out to the people in the best way possible and

it is a victory sign for success. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde launched Shiv Sena's campaign for the upcoming Assembly elections with promises of affordable housing for the poor, increasing the monthly installment of the Ladki Bahin Yojana and making Mumbai slum-free.

In the past two years, we have worked to give to people but those who were in power in Mumbai for 25 years did nothing but corruption and scams. They indulged in Rs 3,500 crore corruption in various spheres. The road for victory is well laid with CM also provided updates on the welfare programme, including the increased insurance coverage of Rs 5 lakh under the Mahatma Phule Jan Arogya Yojana, targeted support for youth employment with the 'Ladka Bhau Yojana', and expanded access to free higher education for girls statewide. It is indeed a win-win situation.

Jayanthy Maniam | Vashi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A robust EV Infra can support sustainable mobility



HITESH GUPTA

As India races toward a sustainable mobility future, electric vehicles have emerged as key drivers in reducing emissions and lowering fossil fuel dependence

Sustainable mobility is the future of transportation, focusing on reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and minimising harmful emissions. In this context, Electric Vehicles (EVs) have emerged as a game-changer, offering lower emissions and a reduced carbon footprint compared to traditional gasoline vehicles. Governments worldwide are encouraging the adoption of EVs to address climate change, and India is no exception.

India's Push for Electric Mobility:

The Indian government has laid out ambitious targets to boost the adoption of EVs, with policies and incentives underlining its commitment. In July 2023, NITI Aayog set a clear roadmap, aligning with the national goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. The targets are impressive: 30 per cent EV penetration in private cars; 70 per cent in commercial vehicles; 40 per cent in buses 80 per cent for both two- and three-wheelers. India's EV market has seen tremendous growth, with EV registrations increasing eleven-fold, from 1.3 million in 2018 to



over 15 million in 2023. This momentum is further fueled by the Government's aim to make 100 per cent of EV production local, contributing to both sustainability and economic growth. Challenges in EV Charging Infrastructure While EV adoption is on the rise, India's progress is hindered by gaps in charging infrastructure. Sustainable EV infrastructure, especially charging stations, is critical to supporting the EV ecosystem. However, several challenges remain: **Unequal Distribution of Charging Stations:** Most of India's 1,742 charging stations are located in urban areas, leaving rural regions underserved.

Limited Grid Capacity: Although EVs will only account for 1.3% to 4.8% of India's overall electricity demand by 2030, managing

peak demand and ensuring grid stability remain key issues.

Technological Constraints: Current charging methods, including conductive, inductive, and battery swapping, all present unique challenges in cost, efficiency, and scalability.

Regulatory and Policy Barriers: Compared to global EV leaders like Singapore, India's regulatory framework is still evolving, and better coordination between the government and private sector is essential to build a robust charging infrastructure. To achieve its EV goals, India needs to significantly expand and upgrade its EV charging network. Sustainable EV infrastructure in both urban and rural areas is essential for widespread adoption. Here are key strategies for success:

Expansion to Rural Areas: Addressing the rural-urban disparity with solar-powered and mobile charging stations can help bring sustainable mobility to remote regions. **Partnerships:** Public-private partnerships will be crucial in scaling up the infrastructure. Stakeholders such as

automakers, technology companies, and the government must work together to establish a reliable and accessible network of charging points.

Technological Innovations: Standardizing charging systems and investing in advanced technologies like smart grids and energy storage solutions can make EV infrastructure more efficient and user-friendly.

Supportive Policies: Financial incentives, tax breaks, and clearer regulations on EV infrastructure development can help catalyze faster growth in the sector. As India continues its journey toward sustainable mobility, developing a robust EV charging infrastructure is critical to ensuring the success of its electric mobility mission. With the government's ambitious targets and contributions from key players, India is poised to make substantial progress in transforming its transportation sector. With collective effort, India can achieve its vision of a greener, cleaner future while fostering economic growth.

(The author is CTO & Co-Founder, Park+, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

LIFE BEYOND THE GRAVE

Rebirth is not only a source of spiritual continuity but also a foundation for the pursuit of higher consciousness



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Every time we see death or attend a funeral, we experience something like cemetery-induced reclusion which makes our mind & body numb. This makes us question the very purpose of our life. We start thinking that if death is the be-all and end-all of it-all, and it can kill anyone, anytime, then why should we bother about doing good deeds and fear punishment for our sins? There are mainly two kinds of people who have two different beliefs in this regard.

The first kind of people believe in the rebirth of human beings and strongly feel that the account of our good and bad deeds will be settled on the day of judgment when the dead rise from their graves, and then there are the second kinds of people who not only believe that human souls are reborn, but they also feel that humans transmigrate into 8.4 million species before getting a human birth again. However, there is very little knowledge about the third kind of people who believe that human souls take rebirth and are always in the human body.

Let us suppose that humans are not reborn. In that case what reason would there be to perform good deeds and desist from bad ones? Also, if there were no rebirth there would be no fear of punishment for one's bad deeds either, and little to stop people from doing as they pleased as long as they could evade the law. We should understand that if there is no future after death, people would also not amass wealth right up to their death, or build houses in their old age.

These efforts would be futile, in the absence of rebirth. Thus, our hopes



of eternal prosperity and happiness, desire to earn merit by performing good deeds, fear of punishment in future births and feelings of eternal love and patriotism, would not arise at all if rebirth were not a reality. According to Hindu Mythology, a soul never dies, it is the body that dies & immediately after death, the soul changes body as we change clothes. With modern techniques like Past Life Regression, there are lots of cases around us where we see a child claiming to be experiencing visions of his/her previous births. Many of these cases have been verified by experts and psychologists who have recorded the testimonies of people recalling their previous birth and then cross-checked the facts with official records and the people mentioned by them.

Another simple fact that points to the reality of rebirth is that a soul cannot function without a body. If there were no rebirth, where does the soul go after a person has died? As human beings, nearly all our interactions are with fellow humans. Thus, we create karmic accounts with humans, to which we have to take birth in human form again. The analogy of the seed also illustrates this point. Just as a mango seed brings forth a mango tree, which then produces mangoes, which again provide mango seeds, the human soul possesses human qualities, feelings and experiences, and is the seed of human life. Hence it cannot function in any other living creature's body. Scepticism about the existence of souls and facts like rebirth is widespread because of the lack of an experience of soul consciousness. Such an experience requires spiritual effort for which one has to focus the mind and the intellect inward and then contemplate on it in silence. Slowly one begins to sense the existence of a sentient entity within, which is the soul. Such an experience, repeated over time, brings soul-consciousness, or the belief that one is a soul. It is this experience of reality that removes the shroud of ignorance from all other facts of the subtle world of souls, which we usually dismiss in disbelief for lack of material proof. So let us practice remaining in soul consciousness and enjoy being an enlightened soul without any botheration.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & a popular columnist; views are personal)

Punjab's MSMEs: Poised to compete on the global stage



A S MITTAL

With tailored state-specific export policies and enhanced trade routes, Punjab's MSMEs are poised to overcome geographical disadvantages and harness lucrative global markets

In a decisive step to enhance industrial growth in Punjab, the NITI Aayog in partnership with the Punjab Government, has sought feedback from stakeholders to explore the potential of MSMEs as a driver of export growth. This initiative is essential for identifying and promptly resolving industry challenges. To meet the objective of boosting Punjab's exports, MSMEs must be equipped with a comprehensive State Export Promotion Policy, linking them to sustainable growth and significant employment generation.

Exports are a fundamental pillar of a state's development, and a strategic geographical location is vital for ensuring global competitiveness and job creation factors for robust economic growth. For instance, Haryana once a barren expanse, has emerged as one of the top five states for export value, thanks to its advantageous proximity to the National Capital Region (NCR). Currently, Haryana outpaces Punjab with five times more exports. Coastal states with access to seaports are a step ahead in engaging in international trade, while landlocked regions like Punjab endure higher trade costs and transit challenges. It is unacceptable that policymakers have not prioritised Punjab's geographical disadvantages as a landlocked border state. The remoteness from seaports, inadequate connectivity, and frequent protests have created significant barriers to investment, resulting in a concerning decline in the industrial sector—a crisis that Punjab can no longer afford to ignore. The non-competitive environment for Punjab's MSMEs, stemming from their distance from seaports, must be addressed head-on.

These challenges are surmountable, and it is crucial to focus on empowering Punjab's vital MSMEs, which have the potential to become an "Export Engine" and deserve a fair platform to compete on equal terms. According to NITI Aayog's latest Export Preparedness Index (EPI), Punjab ranks a disappointing 10th with a score of 58.95, while Haryana leads in 5th place with a score of 63.65. Notably, Gujarat has the highest number of districts among the top 25 in the country for export share (54 per cent), followed by Maharashtra with five districts, Haryana with one, and Punjab with none—only a meagre 2 per cent of the country's exports.

Therefore, it is essential for Punjab to actively engage in export promotion initiatives for every potential MSME to dramatically increase its export figures. Why a State-Specific Policy Needed: The Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) for 2023-2028 has set an ambitious target of achieving \$2 trillion in exports by 2030. However, with 766 districts across the country, it is unacceptable that only 43 cities designated as centres of export excellence receive crucial financial incentives for global market surveys, brand promotions, warehouse establishment, and zero customs duty on capital goods for export-oriented production.

This glaring disparity in the distribution of incentives underscores the urgent need for a more inclusive, state-specific policy. The current focus on a handful of "Towns of Export Excellence" severely undermines the principles of 'One District, One Product' and 'Sabka Saath,



WHILE INDIA CURRENTLY LAGS BEHIND CHINA IN BICYCLE EXPORTS, WE HAVE A CLEAR AND COMPELLING OPPORTUNITY TO ELEVATE OUR GLOBAL EXPORT TARGETS BY AT LEAST 10 PER CENT OVER THE NEXT TWO TO THREE YEARS, PARTICULARLY IN UNTAPPED MARKETS IN THE US, EUROPE, AND AFRICA

Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas.' Punjab must decisively shift towards 'Industries of Export Excellence' (IEE). This strategy will empower the identification and promotion of key sectors, such as textiles and apparel, bicycles, auto parts, tractors, engineering goods, hand and machine tools, sports goods, footwear, and leather products.

Furthermore, the Foreign Trade Policy is resolutely committed to enhancing decentralised export promotion. The introduction of districts as export hubs is a non-negotiable strategy within the MSMEs Export Promotion Policy. This initiative will systematically identify potential export products and services in every district, establishing institutional mechanisms for their promotion—a critical step toward realising the policy's objectives. Every district in Punjab possesses significant untapped potential.

It is essential to identify additional districts for bolstering export operations, aligning with the imperative 'Vocal for Local' and 'Make in India' initiatives. India's vision of transforming each district into an export hub demands the active engagement of MSMEs from all districts. The time for action is now. MSMEs Export Potential: Punjab boasts an impressive 14.65 lakh MSMEs, which are the backbone of the state's industrial growth and are primed for global expansion.

These MSMEs are powerful hubs, excelling in industries such as textiles and apparel, bicycles, hosiery, tractors, automobile components, hand tools, machine tools, sports goods, engineering goods, footwear, and leather goods. They constitute a staggering 99.7 per cent of all MSMEs in the region, employing 65 per cent of the industrial workforce and generating 78 per cent of the state's total industrial output. These industrial clusters possess immense poten-

tial and can be fostered further. Ludhiana stands as a powerhouse, ranking first (Rs 20,140 Crore export business) among the top ten exporting districts with an export business valued at Rs 55,844 Crore for 2023-24. It leads the nation by producing 92 per cent of India's bicycle parts and 75 per cent of all bicycles, commanding an 80 per cent share in bicycle exports from India.

While India currently lags behind China in bicycle exports, we have a clear and compelling opportunity to elevate our global export targets by at least 10 per cent over the next two to three years, particularly in untapped markets in the US, Europe, and Africa. As the foremost producer of blended yarn and hosiery, Ludhiana holds its ground as the second-largest producer of polyester silk, fibre, and cotton yarn. It dominates woollen knitwear (95 per cent) and hosiery (65 per cent) exports, showcasing unparalleled strength in the global market. While China captures a commanding 37 per cent share in textiles apparel and hosiery, India needs to aggressively increase its mere 5% share in the worldwide market. The opportunity for growth is vast, particularly in lucrative export markets such as the USA, UAE, UK, Germany, France, and Australia.

In the farm equipment sector, Punjab is a force to be reckoned with, hosting one-third of the total original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and standing as the leading tractor manufacturer. With a commanding 34.3 per cent share in exports, Sonalika IITL stands as the largest tractor exporter (Rs 3000 Cr) in 2023-24. Despite India's current 2.2 per cent share in the global market, the potential for over 2 lakh tractors to be exported in the next 2-3 years to burgeoning markets such as Brazil, Argentina, Turkey, SAARC, and African nations is undeniable. Jalandhar dominates the sports goods sector,

producing 45 per cent of the nation's total and contributing to 75 per cent of the country's sports goods exports. While China currently leads with a 42.2 per cent share, India's scant 0.56 per cent share of global exports highlights the tremendous untapped potential for growth. The time is ripe for Punjab to seize lucrative opportunities in markets like the USA, UK, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, South Africa, Colombia, and Argentina, and make a formidable mark on the global stage. The Way Forward: To enhance the competitive edge of MSMEs in foreign trade, it's crucial to allow the flow of bilateral trade from Punjab through the Wagah Border of Pakistan to Middle Eastern countries, CIS nations, Europe, and the US. Establishing a Directorate of Exports in the state is vital for aligning the state and central government's export promotion policies.

One of the most pressing issues is the high borrowing cost of 10-12 per cent. It is essential to introduce interest subvention to create a level playing field for MSMEs, especially when compared to leading global players like China (3.1 per cent), Vietnam (4.5 per cent), Malaysia (3 per cent), and Thailand (3 per cent). Competitive and efficient logistics are foundational for export growth. Therefore, policy-backed support for state-owned wagons in landlocked border states like Punjab is essential.

This will help alleviate the burden of over-freight and provide a more equitable environment for driving export growth.

The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association (TMA); Views expressed are personal.

How mobile video conferencing is bridging the digital divide in Bihar

The Bihar Government has taken a bold step toward real-time governance with the launch of a mobile outdoor video conferencing system

In a time when digital communication is essential for efficient government, resolving infrastructural and geographic obstacles is vital to making decisions in real time. This need is especially acute in large states like Bihar, where there are major connectivity challenges due to the expansive rural environment.

To narrow this gap, a major project was started by Bihar State Electronics Development Corporation (BELTRON) along with Millenium Automation as a system integrator, to establish a mobile outdoor video conferencing system that would improve communication challenges and enhance the state's governance. Because of this initiative, the administra-



VARINDER SINGH JAWANDA

tion can now function smoothly throughout Bihar by introducing an inventive, stronger video conferencing system.

Improving Governance With the use of the new outdoor video conferencing technology, authorities in Bihar can now hold virtual meetings and communicate with other officials directly from almost anywhere in the

state. This technology allows government officials to communicate in real-time, independent of their actual location, providing a much-needed degree of flexibility. This solution's robust, continuous connectivity and high-quality video streaming facilitate quicker decision-making, effective governance, and a more open line of contact with rural residents.

Recognising the Challenge In places remote from urban networks, ensuring reliable, fast communication was crucial but challenging. To prevent interruptions, a smooth interface between the new mobile video conferencing system and the Bihar State Wide Area Network (BSWAN) was required.

Sustaining steady uptime was essential since government communications are so vital. To maintain system functionality and quickly address any technological problems, comprehensive maintenance assistance was also necessary, guaranteeing dependability and continuity throughout the state.

A Comprehensive Solution With portable video conferencing devices that have high-quality audio and video components in cases that are easy to move, a specially designed solution was developed to meet these demands. Even in remote locations, the system's smooth integration with the current Bihar State Wide Area Network (BSWAN) guaranteed reliable service quality.



Advanced networking equipment allowed for seamless data transfer, particularly in areas with limited bandwidth. Disruptions during crucial meetings were minimised by optimising bandwidth in locations far away. Prompt technical assistance, and on-site maintenance guaranteed continuous strong system operation across the state. Key Outcomes of the Project

This initiative empowered Bihar's government to conduct mobile, outdoor video conferences statewide, enabling officials to make real-time decisions from any location, thus streamlining operations and improving emergency response.

As a technological advancement, it highlights how mobile technology can bridge the digital divide, aligning with the "Digital India" vision by enhancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

With scalability for future needs, the system can expand into public services and disaster management, offering a sustainable, resilient model for evolving governance demands, and setting an inspiring precedent for other

states. Future Prospects and Potential for Growth. This outdoor video conferencing solution has the potential to revolutionise governance in Bihar and other similar states. As Bihar continues to advance, the system can be further expanded to incorporate additional features and applications, including new e-governance initiatives. Emerging technologies like IoT, advanced bandwidth optimisation, and real-time analytics are being explored to enhance communication efficiency even further. The success of this project opens doors for expansion into other government sectors, allowing more departments to benefit from mobile video conferencing. In conclusion, this outdoor video

conferencing initiative has enabled the Bihar government to communicate and make decisions effectively, regardless of officials' physical locations.

It has solved an immediate challenge while laying the foundation for future technological advancements in government communication. By bridging the digital divide, this solution is enhancing governance in Bihar, helping to build a more inclusive, connected, and prosperous state. The collaboration with BELTRON demonstrates that strategic digital initiatives can empower state governments to deliver on the promise of accessible, efficient governance for all.

(The writer is CEO at MAPL World; views are personal)

MVA to launch campaign for Maharashtra Assembly polls in Mumbai today

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Senior Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi will join NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray when the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) launches its campaign for the Maharashtra Assembly polls at MMRDA grounds at Bandra-Kurla Complex (BKC) in north-central Mumbai on Wednesday evening. At the joint MVA rally, the Congress – which is spear-

heading the three party grand Opposition front – will release its guarantees to the people across the state for the Assembly polls. Apart from Kharge, Rahul, Pawar and Uddhav, State MVA leaders like Nana Patole, Balasaheb Thorat, Vijay Wadetiwar (all Congress), Jayant Patil of the NCP (SP) and Sanjay Raut of the Shiv Sena (UBT) will address. Earlier on Wednesday, Kharge and Rahul will kick-start the Congress' campaign at a "Samvidhan Sanman Sabha" organised at 1 pm in Nagpur. In a related development,

after the deadline for withdrawal of nominations, a clear picture of the Assembly poll scenario has emerged. After 980 candidates withdrew their nominations before the expiry of the deadline for withdrawal of nominations on Monday evening, there are now 8,272 candidates for a total 288 Assembly seats for which the elections will be held on November 20. From the ruling MahaYuti, the key constituent BJP is contesting 152 seats, while the Eknath Shinde has fielded candidates in 85 constituencies and the Ajit Pawar-led



NCP is contesting 54 seats. From its quota, the BJP has given one seat each to its partners -- Republican Party of India (Athawale), Yuva Swabhimani Party, Rashtriya

Samaj Paksha, and Jansurajya Paksha. These four parties are contesting 1 seat each while the BJP is fighting in 148 constituencies. From the Opposition MVA side, the Congress is contesting 101 seats, while it is supporting one independent candidate in Kolhapur North. Its allies Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) have fielded candidates in 92 and 87 constituencies respectively. The MVA has allotted seven seats to smaller parties. Not happy with the smaller number of seats allotted to

them, the Samajwadi Party is contesting eight seats, while the Peasants and Workers' Party (PWP) has fielded candidates in four constituencies. Meanwhile, the Maharashtra Congress rubbished the speculation about a media ban on the Samvidhan Sanman Sannam being organised in Nagpur on Wednesday. "Claims of a media ban in the event are false and are part of rumours being spread by the Bharatiya Janata Party. Following the teachings of the Sangh and their habit of frequent falsehoods, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra

Fadnavis has spoken blatant lies," Maharashtra Congress' chief spokesperson Atul Londhe said. "Following the teachings of the Sangh and their habit of frequent falsehoods, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis has spoken blatant lies," Londhe said. "The live feed of the Samvidhan Sanman Sannam will be available to the media through Congress's social media handles and YouTube, so the media should not believe these rumours spread by the BJP," Londhe added.

Leaders condemn attack on Hindu temple in Canada

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday condemned the attack on a temple in Canada's Brampton and urged the Centre to take up the issue with the Canadian government to prevent such incidents in the future. Protesters carrying Khalistani flags clashed with people at the Hindu temple on Sunday. "I strongly condemn the incident. I also demand from the government of India to speak to the Canadian government over this issue in order to prevent such incidents in future," Mann told reporters in Bathinda. He said the Canadian government must ensure exemplary action against the perpetrators of this heinous crime so that it acts as a deterrent for others in future. He said many Punjabis consider Canada as their second home and nobody wants such a violent incident to take place there. "Canada is the second home of millions of Punjabis who have settled there and carved a niche for themselves," he said.

He said ties with Canada must remain cordial. It is unfortunate that politics of divisiveness and hatred has spread its tentacles in Canada, said Mann. Punjabis pray for welfare of all and are votary of peace due to which they are loved across the globe, he said. With their rare qualities of hard work and resilience Punjabis have carved a niche for themselves in the entire world, said Mann. India has said it remains "deeply concerned" about the safety and security of its nationals in Canada. India-Canada ties remain deeply troubled over the North American country's alleged support to Khalistani separatists and its accusation of India's involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen who has been designated a terrorist by India. Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) working president Balwinder Singh Bhundar also condemned the incident and appealed to people of Indian origin to defeat conspiracies to divide them on communal lines. Bhundar called upon the Canadian government to ensure all places of religious worship were secure from such acts of

violence. In a statement, Bhundar said, "attempts are afoot to divide Sikhs and Hindus in Canada on communal lines. This is against the teachings of our Guru Sahiban who have preached the concept of 'sarbat da bhala' (welfare of all)." "The SAD has always stood for communal harmony and has also made numerous sacrifices to uphold this principle. It is a votary of Hindu-Sikh 'bhaichara' and has ensured impeccable peace and communal harmony during its successive terms in government in Punjab." He appealed to people from both communities in Canada to recognize their common roots and exercise utmost restraint and maintain communal harmony at this critical juncture. Bhundar also appealed to the Canadian government to ensure safety of all persons of Indian origin as well as safety of their places of worship. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday condemned the attack on a Hindu temple in Canada, saying it is unacceptable and such incidents

are a direct assault on the values of peace, respect and unity. Sawant also urged the Canadian government to take immediate action to ensure the safety and security of all religious communities within its borders. The incident occurred on Sunday in Canada's Brampton city, where protesters carrying Khalistani flags clashed with people at the Hindu Sabha temple on Sunday and disrupted a consular event co-organised by the temple authorities and the Indian Consulate. The development comes as India-Canada ties remain deeply troubled over the North American country's alleged support to Khalistani separatists and its accusation of India's involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen who has been designated a terrorist by India. In the post on X, CM Sawant said, "The recent, targeted attack on the Hindu temple and its devotees is not only deeply concerning but also entirely unacceptable. Such incidents represent a direct assault on the values of peace, respect and unity that

form the foundation of any civilised society." "We call upon the Canadian Government to take immediate, decisive action to ensure the safety and security of all religious communities within its borders," he added. Describing the attack on a Hindu temple in Canada as "more than an isolated incident", Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said the incident pained him deeply and expressed hope that the Canadian government would take necessary steps to ensure the safety of Hindu community there. In a social media post on Monday night, Kalyan said Hindus are a global minority, and as such, they receive little attention, little solidarity, and are easily targeted. Every act of hatred, every instance of abuse against them is a blow to all who cherish humanity and peace. "It pains me deeply to see our Hindu brothers and sisters enduring persecution, violence, and unimaginable suffering in places like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and recently, Bangladesh.

Polish paraglider stranded in Kangra rescued

PTI ■ Dharamshala

The Polish paraglider stranded in Dhauladhar hills in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh after a mid-air collision with another paraglider on Sunday was safely rescued on Tuesday, officials said. The paraglider had got stranded in Dhauladhar hills on Sunday after colliding with another paraglider mid-air. The attempt to rescue him on Monday by using a chopper had failed due to tough terrain. "The free flier paraglider from Poland, Andrew Babinski, has been safely air-lifted and admitted to Vivekananda Hospital Palampur," Bajinath Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) D C Thakur told PTI. Babinski sustained serious injuries but is out of danger, he added. Meanwhile, the Tuesday task for paragliders in the Paragliding World Cup 2024

being organised in Bir Billing in Kangra district was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions. The technical committee had initially set a 148-kilometre course for Tuesday and all pilots successfully took off from Billing at the designated window time. However, deteriorating visibility and unfavourable weather conditions forced the organisers to call the pilots back, prioritising their safety, the organisers said. According to the statement from the spokesperson of the Billing Paragliding Association, all the participants landed safely at the designated Bir landing site, and Tuesday task was subsequently cancelled. The eight-day Paragliding World Cup 2024 commenced on November 2 and 94 paragliders including seven women from 26 countries are participating in the event.

States cannot takeover all private properties...

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"The enquiry about the resource in question falls under Article 39(b) must be contest specific and subject to a non exhaustive list of factors such as nature of resource, the characteristics, the impact of the resource on well being of community, the scarcity of resource and consequences of such a resource being concentrated in the hands of private players, the public trust doctrine evolved by this court may also help identify resources which fall under ambit of material resource of a community," said the majority judgement, written by CJJ. Justice Dhulia in his dissent said it is the parliament's prerogative to see how to control and distribute material resources. "What and when do the 'privately owned resources' come within the definition of 'material resources' is not for this Court to declare. This is not required. The key factor is whether such resources would subserve common good. Clearly the acquisition, ownership or even control of every privately owned resource will not subserve common good. Yet at this stage we cannot come out

with a catalogue of do's and don'ts. We must leave this exercise to the wisdom of the legislatures," he concluded. Justice Nagarathna expressed strong reservations over Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud criticising former Supreme Court judges, including Justice VR Krishna Iyer, for their views on whether private property can be taken over by the State to subserve the common good. "I say that the institution of the Supreme Court of India is greater than individual judges, who are only a part of it at different stages of history of this great Country! Therefore, I do not concur with the observations of the learned Chief Justice in the proposed judgement," said Justice Nagarathna. In a separate opinion, Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia also joined Justice Nagarathna in disapproving the harsh criticism of the Krishna Iyer doctrine in the majority judgement. The nine-Judge Bench verdict arose in the context of the two conflicting views taken by the SC in 1978, in cases which dealt with the nationalisation of road transport services.

Kerala legislator, Catholic Church lambast Waqf Board demands

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
KOCHI

The Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) are hunting with the hounds and running with the hares in the Waqf Board issue, according to Kerala's seven time legislator P C George. Deepika, the Catholic Church's mouthpiece too blasted the Congress and the CPI(M) for condemning the Waqf Board Bill 2024. Speaking to *The Pioneer*, George, a top BJP leader in

the State, said that while the UDF and the LDF paid lip service to the 600 families of Cherai-Munampam coastal village who face eviction from the land where they have been staying for generations, both the fronts have shied away from asking the Waqf Board to withdraw their claim over the disputed land. "This is not a disputed land and it belongs to the fishermen community who bought it from the previous owner. The CPI (M) and the Congress led fronts got a resolution passed in the

legislative assembly condemning the Waqf Board (Amendment) Bill 2024 and both these political parties oppose the topic being discussed by the Joint Parliamentary Committee," said George, who was the chief whip of the UDF during the tenure of the Oommen Chandi Government. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has convened a meeting on November 16 to discuss the issues born out of the Waqf Board demand that the entire coastal village is Waqf property and

there was no question of it taking a step backward. Even V Abdurehiman, minister for Waqf has stated that the land belonged to the Waqf Board. "This is part of political Islam and there are no other words to describe the double standard of the Marxists and the Congress," said George who is touring the coastal belt of Ernakulam interacting with the victims facing the eviction. Interestingly, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has asked his

revenue officials to withdraw all changes made in the title deeds of land owned by Vijayapura farmers and transfer the same to Waqf Board. "But this is a ploy by the Congress government as the State is set to go for by-poll on November 13 in the assembly constituencies of Shiggaon, sandur and Channapattana. Once the by-poll is over it would be back to square one," said BJP leader Chandra Kant. In a major development, Deepika, the mouthpiece of Catholic community in its

editorial on Tuesday lambasted the Congress Government that ruled the Centre and the CPI(M) for their "unreasonable and unjustifiable" stands that empowered the Waqf Board to claim rights on properties which were not owned by them. "Until the Waqf Board (Amendment) Bill 2024 is legislated, people in other communities would not be able to sleep peacefully," said the editorial which extended its full support to the Government move to amend the Waqf Law.

We have upheld validity...

From page 1

The High Court erred in holding that statute had to be struck down for violating basic structure," said the SC verdict, adding that the object of the Act is to protect the rights of minorities which is in tune with the State's positive obligation. "The legislative scheme for the Act is to standardise the level of education being prescribed in the madrasas. The Madarsa Act does not interfere with the day to day working of the madrasas. It is to protect the rights of minorities in the State of Uttar Pradesh and is consistent with positive obligation of the State which ensures the students to pass out and earn a decent living," the SC held. The Uttar

Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004 had defined Madarsa education as including education in Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Islamic studies, philosophy and other branches of learning as may be specified by the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education. The stated object of the 2004 Act was to empower the Madrasa Education Board by overseeing the functioning of Madrasas. The Act was challenged on the ground that it goes against the principle of secularism. It was also argued that it fails to provide quality compulsory education up to the age of 14 years/Class-VIII, as is mandatorily required to be provided under Article 21A of the Constitution of India.

Another encounter, 'high alert'...

From page 1

Asking the people of Jammu and Kashmir to stand up against terror, Sinha asked the gathering whether anyone has the right to kill those who work to improve connectivity in the region. He was referring to the October 20 killings of a local doctor and six non-local labourers by terrorists at a tunnel construction site in the Gagangir area of Ganderbal district. "If people do not stand up against such elements, this scenario will never change. I think those who only issue statements for formality are worse than them (terrorists)," the LG said.

Speeding DTC bus mows down Delhi Policeman, IT student

From page 1

The shocking incident also led to the death of a 23-year-old Satyapriya, who was currently residing in Haryana's Gurugram. "He is a B.Tech student studying in Kanpur. He came here to go shopping," a police officer said. "Constable Victor was on night patrolling duty and left the police station at 9.45 pm. He was riding the PCR motorcycle when the accident took place. After being hit by the bus, he was rushed to Paramanand Hospital in Civil Lines, where doctors declared him dead. Victor sustained

multiple severe injuries on his head, neck and face," Banthia said. The bus driver has been identified as 57-year-old Vinod Kumar, a resident of Ghazipur, who has been taken into custody. "He did not sustain any injuries in the accident. He has been employed with the DTC as a driver since 2010," police said. An officer added that there were no passengers onboard the bus at the time of the incident except for a DTC duty officer as the vehicle had reported a breakdown. "Efforts are underway to establish his identity," he added.

'Batenge to katenge'...

From page 1

In recent days, the city has seen a surge in political hoardings and posters reinforcing these rival slogans. Notably, a hoarding appeared outside the SP office proclaiming "27 ke Sattadhish," a reference to political power dynamics in the upcoming 2027 elections. Adityanath's slogan "bantoge to katoge" has also sparked responses from Yadav, including his slogan, "judenge toh jeetenge," which has begun to appear on hoardings around the city. As the election date draws closer, these symbolic slogans have become central to campaign strategies, capturing the intensity of the political discourse leading up to the by-elections.

Who will be the next POTUS?

From page 1

Harris and Trump entered Election Day focused on seven battleground states, five of them carried by Trump in 2016 before flipping to Biden in 2020: the "blue wall" of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin as well as Arizona and Georgia. Nevada and North Carolina, which Democrats and Republicans respectively carried in the last two elections, also were closely contested. The closeness of the race and the number of states in play raised the likelihood that once again a victor might not be known on election night. There was one early harbinger from the New Hampshire hamlet of Dixville Notch, which by tradition votes after midnight on Election Day. Dixville Notch split between Trump and Harris, with three votes for each. In the 2020 presidential race it took four days to declare a winner. Regardless, Trump has baselessly

claimed that if he lost, it would be due to fraud. Harris' campaign was preparing for him to try to declare victory before a winner is known on Tuesday night or to try to contest the result if she wins. Four years ago, Trump launched an effort to overturn the voters' will that ended in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol. Trump planned to vote in his adopted home state of Florida on Tuesday, then spend the day at his Mar-a-Lago estate in advance of a party at a nearby convention centre. Harris already voted by mail in her home state of California. She'll have a watch party at her alma mater, Howard University in Washington. Each candidate would take the country into new terrain. Harris, 60, would be the first woman, Black woman and person of South Asian descent to serve as president. She also would be the first sitting vice president to win the White House in 32 years. A victory would cap a whirlwind campaign unlike any

other in American history. Harris ascended to the top of the Democratic ticket less than four months ago after Biden, facing massive pressure from his party after a disastrous debate performance, ended his reelection bid. Trump, 78, would be the oldest president ever elected. He would also be the first defeated president in 132 years to win another term in the White House, and the first person convicted of a felony to take over the Oval Office. Having left Washington abandoned by some allies after January 6, Trump defeated younger rivals in the Republican primary and consolidated the support of longtime allies and harsh critics within his party. He survived an assassination attempt by millimetres at a July rally. Secret Service agents foiled a second attempt in September. A victory for Trump would affirm that enough voters put aside warnings from many of Trump's

former aides or instead prioritised concerns about Biden and Harris' stewardship of the economy or the US-Mexico border. It would all but ensure he avoids going to prison after being found guilty of his role in hiding hush-money payments to an adult film actress during his first run for president in 2016. His sentencing in that case could occur later this month. And upon taking office, Trump could end the federal investigation into his effort to overturn the 2020 election results. The election has huge stakes for America and the world. The potential turbulence of a second Trump term has been magnified by his embrace of the Republican Party's far right and his disregard for long-held democratic norms. Trump has used harsh rhetoric against Harris and other Democrats, calling them "demonic," and has suggested military action against people he calls "enemies from within." Harris, pointing to the warnings of Trump's

former aides, has labelled him a "fascist" and blamed Trump for putting women's lives in danger by nominating three of the justices who overturned Roe v. Wade. In the closing hours of the campaign, she tried to strike a more positive tone and went the entire last day Monday without saying her Republican opponent's name. Heading into Election Day, federal, state and local officials expressed confidence in the integrity of the nation's election systems. They nonetheless were braced to contend with what they say is an unprecedented level of foreign disinformation - particularly from Russia and Iran - as well as the possibility of physical violence or cyberattacks. Both sides have armies of lawyers in anticipation of legal challenges on and after Election Day. And law enforcement agencies nationwide are on high alert for potential violence. The outcome of the race was being closely watched around

the world, with the future of American support for Ukraine, US fidelity to its global alliances and the nation's commitment to stand up to autocrats hanging in the balance. Harris has vowed to continue backing Kyiv's defence against Russia's full-scale 2022 invasion. Trump has sharply criticised Ukraine, praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and suggested he would encourage Russia to attack NATO allies of the US that Trump considers delinquent. Voters nationwide also were deciding thousands of other races that will decide everything from control of Congress to state ballot measures on abortion access. More than 82 million people voted early - shy of the record set during the 2020 pandemic, when Trump encouraged Republicans to stick to voting on Election Day. This time, he urged his voters to lock down their ballots in advance and they complied in droves.

Legendary folk singer Sharda Sinha critical

From page 1

Her son Anshuman Singh said Sinha's condition remains critical. "Doctors are concerned as my mother continues to be on a ventilator. There are fake news reports of her death circulating on social media. But she is fighting for her life. Doctors are also trying their best. "We pray that she comes out of this. This is a difficult time, please pray for us," Singh said in a live video shared on Sinha's official YouTube channel on Tuesday. Last week, Dr Rima Dada, professor in-charge of AIIMS media cell, had said Sinha was placed on oxygen support following a health complication due to cancer. The singer has been suffering from multiple myeloma since 2017, Dr Dada had said.

Israeli strikes kill 30 in Gaza

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli strikes killed at least 30 people overnight in Gaza, according to Palestinian health officials. Strikes early Tuesday killed 10 people in the Gaza Strip, including four children and two women, and a strike late Monday on the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahya killed at least 20 people, including eight women and six children. Israel has been waging a massive offensive in northern Gaza — which was already the most isolated and heavily destroyed part of the territory — for nearly a month.

Despite growing pressure from the United States and others in the international community for a cease-fire in Gaza and Lebanon, intensified Israeli strikes against the Hezbollah militant group are expanding beyond Lebanon's border areas. Israel is also fighting a seemingly endless war against Hamas in northern Gaza.

Since the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah erupted in 2023, at least 3,000 people

have been killed and some 13,500 wounded in Lebanon, the Health Ministry reports. More than a year of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza has killed more than 43,000 people, Palestinian health officials say. They do not distinguish between civilians and combatants, but say more than half of those killed were women and children. The war began after Palestinian militants stormed into Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducting 250 others.

The Lebanese Red Cross will try again to remove bodies from a strike site: The Lebanese Red Cross will send another convoy Tuesday to Wata al-Khiam in southern Lebanon to search for and remove the bodies of 15 people killed in an Israeli airstrike, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said. Paramedics accessed the site of the strike two days prior and removed five other bodies, but needed to return with larger vehicles to remove the rubble.

The NNA said the deployment is in coordination with the United Nations peacekeeping mission in southern Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, which is the usual procedure. The Red Cross did not immediately comment on the news, but expressed concern in recent weeks over several instances where Israel has struck in or close to areas where they have deployed paramedics to search for wounded people and casualties. The Israeli military said it issued warnings to the residents there in late October to evacuate ahead of strikes on Hezbollah militant targets, and told ambulances to avoid the area.

Israeli forces kill 3 in the occupied West Bank: Palestinian officials say Israeli forces have killed three people in the occupied West Bank. Two were killed in an airstrike early Tuesday near the northern city of Jenin, a flashpoint for Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years. A third person was shot in the village of Tamoun, according to the

Palestinian Health Ministry. The Israeli military said it called in an airstrike on a militant cell near Jenin. There was no immediate comment on the shooting.

Israeli forces have carried out near-daily military raids in the West Bank since Hamas' October 7 attack out of the Gaza Strip triggered the Israel-Hamas war. The Health Ministry says at least 767 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank since then. Most appear to have been militants killed in battles with Israeli forces, but the dead also include civilian bystanders and people killed during protests. Israel says the raids are aimed at dismantling Hamas in the West Bank and preventing attacks. Palestinians have carried out dozens of stabbing, shooting and car-ramming attacks against Israelis since the start of the war.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, and the Palestinians want it to form the main part of their future state.

Elon Musk's USD 1 million-a-day voter sweepstakes can proceed, says judge

AP ■ PHILADELPHIA

The USD 1 million-a-day voter sweepstakes that Elon Musk's political action committee is hosting in swing states can continue through Tuesday's presidential election, a Pennsylvania judge ruled Monday.

Common Pleas Court Judge Angelo Foglietta — ruling after Musk's lawyers said the winners are not chosen by chance — did not immediately give a reason for the ruling.

Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner had called the sweepstakes a scam that violates state election law and asked that it be shut down.

The winners of the sweepstakes did not win by chance but are instead paid spokespersons for the group, Musk's lawyers said in court Monday.

Musk lawyer Chris Gober said the final two recipients before Tuesday's presidential election will be in Arizona on Monday

and Michigan on Tuesday. "The USD 1 million recipients are not chosen by chance," Gober said Monday. "We know exactly who will be announced as the USD 1 million recipient today and tomorrow."

Chris Young, the director of America PAC, testified that the recipients are vetted ahead of time, to "feel out their personality, (and) make sure they were someone whose values aligned" with the group.

The disclosures prompted a lawyer for District Attorney Larry Krasner to call the effort a "scam" that is "designed to actually influence a national election."

Musk's lawyers, in closing arguments, called it "core political speech" given that participants sign a petition endorsing the US Constitution. They said Krasner's legal bid to shut down the sweepstakes under Pennsylvania law was moot because there would be no more Pennsylvania winners before the programme ends Tuesday.

Krasner believes the giveaways violates state election law and contradict what Musk promised when he announced them during an appearance with Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's campaign in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on October 19.

"We're going to be awarding a million dollars randomly to people who have signed the petition every day from now until the election," Musk vowed.

Young also acknowledged that the PAC made the recipients sign nondisclosure agreements. "They couldn't really reveal the truth about how they got the money, right?" asked Krasner lawyer John Summers.

"Sounds right," Young said.

In an October 20 social media post shown in court, Musk said anyone signing the petition had "a daily chance of winning USD 1M!"

Summers grilled him on Musk's

use of both the words "chance" and "randomly," prompting Young, who also serves as the PAC's treasurer, to concede the latter was not "the word I would have selected."

Young said the winners knew they would be called on stage but not specifically that they would win the money.

Musk did not attend the hearing. He has committed more than USD 70 million to the super PAC to help Trump and other Republicans win in November.

"This was all a political marketing masquerading as a lottery," Krasner testified Monday morning. "That's what it is. A grift." Lawyers for Musk and the PAC said they do not plan to extend the lottery beyond Tuesday.

Krasner said the first three winners, starting on October 19, came from Pennsylvania in the days leading up to the state's October 21 voter registration deadline.

US gives Israel 'fail' grade on improving aid to Gaza so far

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is stepping up criticism of Israel for not doing enough to improve humanitarian conditions in Gaza as a 30-day deadline looms for Israeli officials to meet certain requirements or risk potential restrictions on military assistance.

The administration also is condemning recent violence against Palestinians in the West Bank by extremist Jewish settlers and says those responsible must be held to account.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller on Monday gave Israel a "fail" grade in terms of meeting the conditions for an improvement in aid deliveries to Gaza laid out in a letter last month to senior Israeli officials by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin.

He said there were still roughly nine days until the deadline expires, but that limited progress thus far has been insufficient. "As of today, the situation has not significantly turned around," Miller told reporters. "We have

seen an increase in some measurements. But if you look at the stipulated recommendations in the letter, those have not been met."

A day before the election, the Biden administration called out its close ally, with support for Israel a key issue for many voters and the humanitarian crisis for Palestinians also a factor for many in the race.

Former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris have been competing for Muslim and Arab American voters and Jewish voters in battleground states like Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Among other conditions, Austin and Blinken's letter from mid-October said that Israel must allow in a minimum of 350 trucks a day carrying desperately needed food and other supplies for Palestinians besieged by more than a year of war between Israel and Hamas. By the end of October, an average of just 71 trucks a day were entering Gaza, according to the latest UN figures.

"The results are not good enough today," Miller said. "They certain-

ly do not have a pass. ... They have failed to implement all the things that that we recommended. Now, that said, we are not at the end of the 30-day period."

He would not say when asked what the US would do when the deadline comes up next week, just that "we will follow the law."

Similarly, Austin has been reinforcing "how important it is to ensure that humanitarian assistance can flow and flow faster into Gaza" in calls with his Israeli counterpart, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, told reporters Monday.

The Israeli military body in charge of humanitarian aid to Gaza, known as COGAT, said it had evacuated 72 patients from hospitals in northern Gaza to other medical facilities Monday and had brought medical supplies as well as fuel, food, water and units of blood.

The head of UNICEF, the UN agency for children, said over the weekend that "the entire Palestinian population in North Gaza, especially children, is at imminent risk of dying from disease, famine, and the ongoing bombardments."

Canadian cop suspended for attending pro-Khalistan protest outside Hindu temple

PTI ■ OTTAWA

A Canadian police officer has been suspended for participating in a pro-Khalistan protest outside the Hindu Sabha temple in Brampton, according to a media report.

On Sunday, protesters carrying Khalistani flags clashed with people at the Hindu temple and disrupted a consular event co-organised by the temple authorities and the Indian Consulate.

There were unverified videos circulating on social media about the protest. The videos appeared to show demonstrators holding banners in support of Khalistan, as reported by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The Peel Police is "aware of a video circulating on social media which shows an off-duty Peel Police officer involved in a demonstration," said Media Relations Officer Richard Chin in an email to CBC News.

"This officer has since been suspended in accordance with the Community Safety and

Policing Act," he said. "We are investigating the circumstances in totality depicted in the video and are unable to provide further information until such time that this investigation is complete."

Peel police previously said three people have been charged after violence erupted as Indian consular officials visited the Hindu Sabha Mandir temple Sunday. Videos circulating on social media show demonstrators holding banners in support of Khalistan, the CBC report added.

Later in the day, demonstrators made their way to the Westwood Mall in neighbouring Mississauga, according to the World Sikh Organisation of Canada.

A short time after, a third protest was held outside the Malton gurdwara, a Sikh place of worship on Airport Road in Mississauga, the report added. "Although these demonstrations occurred at three different locations, they appear to be related to one another."

Over three dozen Indian Americans in fray for state legislatures, local bodies

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Over three dozen Indian Americans are running for local bodies and state legislatures across the country reflecting the growing interest among this small ethnic community to be part of political mainstream.

"If you are not at the table, you are on the menu," Indian American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi comments at various Indian American gatherings motivating and encouraging community members to run for elections at all levels.

Probably the largest number of Indian Americans running for local offices are in the state of California, which sends two members to the House of Representatives — Ro Khanna and Dr Ami Bera — in addition to Vice President Kamala Harris whose mother was from India.

Those include Adlah Chisti who is running for County Supervisor for District 11, Aliya Chisti for City College Board San Francisco, Darshana Patel for State Assembly, Nicole Fernandez for San Mateo City

Council, Nithya Raman for Los Angeles City Council, Richa Awasthi for Foster City Council and Sukhdeep Kaur for Emeryville City Council.

Tara Sreekrishnan is seeking to enter California's State Assembly from District 26 in Silicon Valley.

With close to 900,000 Indian Americans residents, California boasts the largest Indian American population in the entire country.

Michigan is a presidential battleground, with elections decided by merely 10,000 votes.

Dr Ajay Raman, is running for Oakland County Commissioner for District 14; while Anil Kumar and Ranjeev Puri are running for the Michigan State House.

Indian Americans are a crucial part of Arizona's growth and diversity. Priya Sundareshan is running for the State Senate in Arizona and Ravi Shah is running for School Board. In Pennsylvania, Anand Patek, Anna Thomas, and Arvind Venkat are running for State House, while Nikil Saval is seeking to enter the State Senate.

In Illinois, Anusha Thotakura is running for school board and Nabeel Syed for State House. Elected Ashwin Ramaswamy would be the youngest ever elected to the Georgia State Senate. Of late he has been subject to racial and hate attacks by his opponents.

In Ohio, Chantel Raghu is running for County Commissioner and Pavan Parikh for County Clerk of Courts, while in Virginia Danny Avula is running for Mayor of Richmond.

In New York, Jeremy Cooney and Manita Sanghvi are running for State Senate while Zohran Mamdani is seeking to enter the State Assembly.

Indian Americans running for local offices in Texas are Ashika Ganguly for City Council, Karthik Soora (State Senate), Nabil Shike (County Constable), Ramesh Premkumar (City Council), Ravi Sandill (Judge), Salman Bhojani (State House), Shekhar Sinha (State House), Sherine Thomas (Judge), Suleman Lalani (State House) and Sumbel Zeb as County Appraisals Court.

N Korea fires multiple missiles towards sea ahead of US election

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Tuesday fired multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward its eastern sea, the South Korean military said, as the country continued its weapons demonstrations hours before the US presidential election.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff didn't immediately specify the number of missiles detected or how far they flew. Japan's Defence Ministry said the missiles were believed to have already landed at sea and there were no immediate reports of damage.

The launches came days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a flight test of the country's newest intercontinental ballistic missile designed to reach the US mainland.

In response to that launch, the United States flew a long-range B-1B bomber in a trilateral drill with South Korea and Japan on Sunday in a show of force. That drew condemnation from Kim's powerful sister, who on Tuesday accused North Korea's rivals

of raising tensions with "aggressive and adventurist military threats."

South Korean officials have said that North Korea was likely to dial up its military displays around the US presidential election to command the attention of Washington. South Korea's military intelligence agency said last week that North Korea has also likely completed preparations for its seventh nuclear test.

Outside officials and analysts say North Korea eventually hopes to use an expanded nuclear arsenal as leverage to win concessions such as sanctions relief after a new US president is elected.

There are widespread views that Kim would prefer a win by Republican candidate Donald Trump, with whom he engaged in high-stakes nuclear diplomacy in 2018-19, seeing him as a more likely counterpart to give him what he wants than Democratic candidate Kamala Harris.

During campaigning, Trump boasted about his personal ties with Kim, while Harris said she won't "cozy up to tyrants and

dictators like Kim Jong Un who are rooting for Trump."

North Korean state media claimed last week that the Hwasong-19 it tested on October 31 was "the world's strongest" ICBM, but experts say the solid-fuel missile was too big to be useful in a war situation. Experts say North Korea has yet to acquire some critical technologies to build a functioning ICBM, such as ensuring that the warhead survives the harsh conditions of atmospheric re-entry.

Tensions between the Koreas are at their highest point in years as Kim has repeatedly flaunted his expanding nuclear weapon and missile programmes, while reportedly providing Russia with munitions and troops to support President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine.

According to the US, South Korean and Ukrainian intelligence assessments, North Korea is estimated to have sent 10,000 and 12,000 troops to Russia. If they start fighting against Ukraine forces, it would mark North Korea's first participation in a large-

scale conflict since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

On Monday, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters that as many as 10,000 North Korean soldiers were in Russia's Kursk region near Ukraine's border and preparing to join Moscow's fight against Ukraine in the coming days. That's up from the 8,000 troops that the US government mentioned Thursday.

After a meeting in Seoul on Monday, South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell expressed "deep concern" over the possibility that Russia might transfer nuclear or ballistic missile-related technology to the North in exchange for its arms and military personnel.

Such transfers would "jeopardize the international non-proliferation efforts and threaten peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and across the globe," they said, while calling on North Korea and Russia to immediately withdraw the North's troops from Russia.

S Korea fines Meta \$15 m for illegally collecting information on Facebook users

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea's privacy watchdog on Tuesday fined social media company Meta 21.6 billion won (\$15 million) for illegally collecting sensitive personal information from Facebook users, including data about their political views and sexual orientation, and sharing it with thousands of advertisers.

It was the latest in a series of penalties against Meta by South Korean authorities in recent years as they increase their scrutiny of how the company, which also owns Instagram and WhatsApp, handles private information.

Following a four-year investigation, South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission concluded that Meta unlawfully collected sensitive information about around 980,000 Facebook users, including their religion, political views and whether they were in same-sex unions, from July 2018 to March 2022.

It said the company shared the data with around 4,000 adver-

tisers.

South Korea's privacy law provides strict protection for information related to personal beliefs, political views and sexual behavior, and bars companies from processing or using such data without the specific consent of the person involved.

The commission said Meta amassed sensitive information by analyzing the pages the Facebook users liked or the advertisements they clicked on.

The company categorized ads to identify users interested in themes such as specific religions, same-sex and transgender issues, and issues related to North Korean escapes, said Lee Eun Jung, a director at the commission who led the investigation on Meta.

"While Meta collected this sensitive information and used it for individualized services, they made only vague mentions of this use in their data policy and did not obtain specific consent," Lee said.

Lee also said Meta put the privacy of Facebook users at risk by failing to implement basic

The commission said Meta amassed sensitive information by analyzing the pages the Facebook users liked or the advertisements they clicked on.

security measures such as removing or blocking inactive pages. As a result, hackers were able to use inactive pages to forge identities and request password resets for the accounts of other Facebook users. Meta approved these requests without proper verification, which resulted in data breaches affecting at least 10 South Korean Facebook users, Lee said.

In September, European regulators hit Meta with over \$100 million in fines for a 2019 security lapse in which user passwords were temporarily exposed in an unencrypted form.

Meta's South Korean office said it would "carefully review" the commission's decision, but didn't immediately provide more comment.

In 2022, the commission fined Google and Meta a combined 100 billion won (\$72 million) for tracking consumers' online behavior without their consent and using their data for targeted advertisements, in the biggest penalties ever imposed in South Korea for privacy law violations.

The commission said then that the two companies didn't clearly inform users or obtain their consent to collect data about them as they used other websites or services outside their own platforms. It ordered the companies to provide an "easy and clear" consent process to give people more control over whether to share information about what they do online.

The commission also hit Meta with a 6.7 billion won (\$4.8 million) fine in 2020 for providing personal information about its users to third parties without consent.

Living the American dream: A challenging journey for Indian immigrants

PTI ■ NEW JERSEY

The pursuit of living an American dream isn't always as shiny as it looks from outside for the Indian immigrants. While navigating the complex US immigration system, it can be fraught with obstacles.

The path to permanent residency and citizenship can be long, uncertain, and emotionally taxing, often putting a strain on personal and professional lives.

For many people, the H-1B visa is a conundrum. While a popular route for skilled Indian

workers, it comes with its own set of challenges as it has a limited availability. The annual cap on H-1B visas means that many qualified applicants are left out due to the lottery system.

Ajeet who came to this country realised that the H1B route wasn't meant for him. He calls the US immigration system "broken".

"I call this the broken immigration system. India is such a large country and we are given the same seven per cent quota as any other small country. How is it fair? I figured the H1B system is a lottery system and

it won't work for me."

He chose to start a business and sponsor his own visa. He runs a fast casual Indian restaurant that he says serves healthy Indian food at a very fast pace.

As a young woman full of dreams, Meeta Damani came to the US from India about 20 years ago. For several years, she couldn't work in the country and stayed as a dependent.

This period traumatised her and she went into depression. "I went through a terrible depression and then I decided to make a documentary on the issue to tell this story through that. They didn't allow depen-

dents on H4 work back then and even now it is very sketchy. I think what is needed is a permanent solution to the H4 issue, what we have as of now is just an executive order and anyone tomorrow can change it," she said.

Spouses and children of H-1B visa holders face their own set of challenges. Many dependent visa holders are not allowed to work, leading to financial strain and loss of professional identity.

Children on dependent visas may face obstacles in pursuing higher education or finding employment after turning 21.

Rahaal has been in the US for the last 14 years now. Due to delays in the naturalisation process, her 17-year-old daughter runs the risk of "aging out" in a few months.

"I have been here on a dependent H4 visa. My daughter is turning 18 this month and she will go to college next year. She has to let go of a lot of opportunities because of this. She is aging out and if our citizenship status doesn't change until she turns 21, she runs the risk of being sent back to India," Rahaal said.

For Indian immigrants, the path to permanent residency or

green card is particularly daunting. Due to per-country limits, Indian nationals can face wait times of 50 years or more for employment-based green cards.

Sonal Sharma has been working as an immigration lawyer for 10 years in the New Jersey area. She says she gets to see such desperate situations with her clients caught in the immigration conundrum.

"There are a lot of stories I come across. One of them I can remember is when a principal H1B member passed away and the dependents didn't know what to do then. They sudden-

ly had no place to call home. It is a sad situation", Sharma said. She feels that the backlogs and the long wait for green cards is causing people to lose so many opportunities. There is a lot of uncertainty with this system for immigrants. Priya, a marketing professional, is also a social media influencer who along with her husband talks about immigration issues in the US. They are very popular among youngsters and other Indians who seek solutions to their immigration issues.

"Everyone's story is very unique when you come here. But what we have learnt is that if you

have the right spirit, you can navigate things. The point really is why should we be putting in so much effort into it. It shouldn't be this difficult," Priya said.

The combination of H-1B limitations, dependent visa restrictions, and the endless green card backlog creates a perfect environment of challenges that can be deeply disturbing.

The American dream is not unattainable but the path to it is more arduous than anticipated. Most people would hope that the complex system is eased out for them to attain certainty in their goals.

Project taken up to restore 4,500 hectares of degraded mangroves in Sundarbans

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A private sector-supported project has been taken up to restore 4,500 hectares of degraded mangroves in West Bengal's Sundarbans, an official said on Tuesday. The programme also seeks to create sustainable economic opportunities for villages in the Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove ecosystem. Senior officials of project partners EcoAct and Meensou India are currently on a visit to the restoration sites and engaging with communities in the South 24 Parganas district of the state. The project is being implemented under the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) programme which is the world's most widely used greenhouse gas (GHG) crediting scheme. "The Sundari Mangroves Project to restore 4,500 hectares of degraded mangroves in India's Sundarbans and it demonstrates how carbon finance can drive effective climate action when it genuinely empowers local communities. By ensuring benefits flow directly to communities, we are seeing how private sector support can create real



opportunities for those who depend on these ecosystems," Stephane Tromilin, Head of Project Development at EcoAct, said. Other companies should also consider investing in this project as part of their sustainability strategies, Tromilin said. "For generations, our families are dependent on these mangroves for our survival - for fishing, for protection from storms, for our daily needs. But we have watched them disappear year after year," said Swapan Maity, member of Dhablat Panchayat and Secretary of Chemaguri

Byasaik Samity. He expressed hope that this project would help them restore what they are losing, create jobs and protect their homes. The project is expected to create local employment opportunities over its 20-year duration. While the restoration is guided by scientific protocols, community members are involved in implementation and monitoring, with equal opportunities for men and women in the region. Communities also retain decision-making power over how project benefits are

reinvested in their local development priorities, officials said. "Our role has been limited to support local communities in realizing their vision for mangrove restoration. Their traditional knowledge and daily engagement with these ecosystems make them the most qualified stewards of this project," said Soumya Darshan Pradhan, CEO & MD of Meensou India. Meensou develops carbon offset and credit projects focusing on social capacity building, economic growth, equitable wealth distribution, and environmental protection.

The restoration effort will help revitalise crucial habitats for the iconic Royal Bengal Tiger and protect over 1,400 other species that call the Sundarbans their home. Through the planting of 19 native mangrove species, the project aims to strengthen the ecosystem's natural resilience, protecting thousands of homes from erosion and extreme weather events, officials said. "The recent cyclone (Dana) in West Bengal is a stark reminder of our region's vulnerability to climate-related disasters," said Rajkumar Jana, a teacher at Chowraee Jana Kalyan High School. A global assessment by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) found that half of the world's mangrove ecosystems are at risk of collapse. There is nearly 20 per cent classified as "Endangered" or "Critically Endangered." The India State of Forest Report 2021, revealed that the very dense mangrove cover in the Sundarbans has shrunk to 994 sq km in 2021, down from 1,038 sq km in 2011, a 4.23 per cent decrease over a decade, which the report described as worrying.

Government launches Phase II of subsidised wheat flour, rice sale under 'Bharat brand'



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday launched phase-II retail sales of wheat flour and rice under the Bharat brand at subsidised rates to provide relief to consumers from high prices. Wheat flour (atta) will be sold at Rs 30 per kg and rice at Rs 34 per kg in 5kg and 10kg packets through cooperatives NCCF, Nafed and Kendriya Bhandar and e-commerce platforms. "This is a temporary intervention to provide relief to consumers," Food Minister Pralhad Joshi said after flagging off the mobile vans of these cooperatives. The government has allocated 3.69 lakh tonne of wheat and 2.91 lakh tonne of rice from the Food

Corporation of India (FCI) for the phase-2 retail intervention under the Price Stabilisation Fund. "This intervention will continue till the allocated stock gets exhausted. If more (is) required, we have enough stock and will allocate again," Joshi said. Under the new pricing structure, wheat flour will be available in 5kg and 10kg packs at Rs 30 per kg, while rice will be sold at Rs 34 per kg -- a slight increase from Phase-I rates of Rs 27.5 and Rs 29 per kg, respectively. Addressing concerns over lower rice sales in Phase I, Joshi emphasised that the government's objective wasn't business-oriented. "Our motto is to give relief to consumers and control prices in the market," he said,

adding that the government would consider introducing smaller pack sizes if demanded. The minister also called for a study to understand price firmness despite surplus rice stocks, though maintaining those prices were "largely under control", with only slight fluctuations in normal quality varieties. The previous phase, from October 2023 to June 30, 2024, saw the distribution of 15.20 lakh tonne of wheat flour and 14.58 lakh tonne of rice. On future allocations, Joshi assured adequate stocks for continued intervention if required. Minister of State for Food BL Verma and Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra were also present at the event.

Finance ministry initiates 4th phase of consolidation of RRBs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to achieve operational efficiency and cost rationalisation, the Finance Ministry has initiated the fourth round of consolidation for Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) and the number of such banks is likely to come down to 28 from 43 at present. As per the roadmap prepared by the Finance Ministry, 15 RRBs operating in various states would be merged. Among states that will see consolidation of RRBs include Andhra Pradesh, which has the maximum number of RRBs (4), Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal (3 each), and Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan (2 each). In the case of Telangana, the amalgamation of RRBs will be subject to bifurcation of assets and liabilities of Andhra Pradesh Gramena Vikas Bank (APGVB) between APGVB and Telangana Gramena Bank. "Given the rural expansion of RRBs and agro-climatic or geographical ethos and in order to retain the USP of RRBs viz the closeness to communities, it is the felt need to embark on further consolidation of RRBs towards the goal of 'One State-One RRB' so as to derive the benefit of scale efficiency and cost rationalisation," Department of Financial Services said in a communication to head of



state-owned banks. A road map has been prepared in consultation with NABARD for further consolidation which will bring down the number of RRBs to 28 from 43, it said. The Department of Financial Services has sought comments from the chiefs of sponsor banks of RRBs by November 20. The Centre had initiated structural consolidation of RRBs in 2004-05 which resulted in reduction of such institutions from 196 to 43 till 2020-21 through 3 phases of amalgamation. These banks were formed under the RRB Act, 1976, with an objective to provide credit and other facilities to small farmers, agricultural labourers and artisans in rural areas. The Act was amended in 2015 whereby such banks were permitted to raise capital from sources other than the Centre, states and

sponsor banks. Currently, the Centre holds 50 per cent in RRBs, while 35 per cent and 15 per cent are with the concerned sponsor banks and state governments, respectively. Even after stake dilution, the shareholding of the Centre and the sponsor public sector banks together cannot fall below 51 per cent, according to the amended Act. Earlier in June, two bank unions -- AIBOC and AIBEA -- had demanded the merger of RRBs with their respective Sponsor Banks to ensure overall efficiency and viability of the banking sector. The merger of RRBs with their sponsor banks will be a seamless technological transition, the All India Bank Officers' Confederation (AIBOC) and All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) said in a letter addressed to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Swiggy seeks valuation of USD 11.3 Billion; IPO to open on Wednesday

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food delivery and quick-commerce major Swiggy, which is coming out with its initial public offering (IPO) on Wednesday, is seeking a valuation of about USD 11.3 billion. The Bengaluru-based company is aiming to garner Rs 11,327 crore from the IPO, which will comprise a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 4,499 crore along with an offer for sale (OFS) of Rs 6,828 crore. Swiggy has set a price band of Rs 371 to Rs 390 per share for its maiden public issue. The issue will open for public subscription on November 6 and conclude on November 8. Speaking about the pricing, Swiggy Food MarketPlace CEO Rohit Kapoor said, "We feel we have priced it right and we are looking forward to the next few days."



The valuation of Swiggy has been pegged at about USD 11.3 billion (about Rs 95,000 crore) at the upper price band. Rival Zomato, which went public in July 2021, has a market valuation of Rs 2.13 lakh crore. "Our pricing is in the range of Rs 371-390 which corresponds to a value of about USD 11.3 billion roughly. It is not exact because it depends on where the issue actually clears at the end of the day," Kapoor told PTI in an interview. Asked about media reports regarding slashing the valuation of Swiggy, Kapoor

clarified that there has been no lowering of valuation as the real value of the company is determined when the transaction actually happens. "This is all speculation in the media on what the value is. So the fact of the matter is, the value has not gone up or down. The value is exactly where it is supposed to be... I just want to set clearly on record that there has been no lowering of valuation per se. There was a discovery process and at the end of it, this is the price that we collectively feel very good about," he added. The issue comes amid a series of IPOs in the recent past, including South Korean car maker Hyundai's mega Rs 28,000-crore issue. Swiggy, founded in 2014, posted a loss of Rs 611 crore in the quarter ended June 2024, narrowing from Rs 564 crore in the same period last year.

Tenders floated to buy organic cow dung in Himachal

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Tenders have been floated for buying organic cow dung at Rs 3 per kg, and the successful bidders will also provide bags, transportation and stocking facilities, State Agriculture Minister Chander Kumar said on Tuesday. With a thrust on organic farming, hi-tech techniques will be used in agriculture to increase farmers' income, he said, adding that the monthly income of a farm family should be between Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 to sustain agriculture. The Congress party had promised to buy cow dung at Rs 2 per kg before the last assembly polls, but we do not wish to buy raw cow dung and would purchase organic cow dung for Rs 3 per Kg, he told PTI. Organic cow dung is a natural and nutrient-rich fertiliser



that can be used to improve soil health and plant growth. "Tenders have been floated for buying organic cow dung for Rs 3 per kg, and the company entrusted with the task would provide bags, fill and seal them besides providing transportation and stocking facility and would be paid Rs 4-5 per kg," he noted. The stocking of cow dung will also be done in Himachal Pradesh State Co-operative Marketing & Consumers Federation Ltd (HIMFED) godowns, and the deputy directors in all districts have been directed to bring in use the defunct agri farms, the minister said.

Will discuss impact of delayed paddy procurement with Agriculture Minister: Pralhad Joshi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Food Minister Pralhad Joshi on Tuesday said he will discuss with his agriculture counterpart the likely impact of delayed paddy procurement in Punjab on wheat sowing even as he assured farmers that the government will purchase every single grain" brought to mandis. As the delay raises concerns about increased stubble burning by farmers rushing to clear fields before mid-November wheat sowing, Joshi said procurement remains the immediate



priority. "Now our priority is procurement. Stubble burning and wheat sowing is looked after by the ministry of agriculture," Joshi told reporters at the launch of Phase-II of wheat flour and rice under Bharat brand at a subsidised rate. "We will look into that aspect also. At present our priority is procurement. My major concern is farmers should not be worried at this moment," the minister said. On whether delayed wheat sowing could affect production, Joshi said: "I don't have details. In next

two-three days, I will meet agriculture minister. It is equally concerned to me as we distribute wheat through PDS." The minister said paddy procurement in Punjab has gathered pace, with single-day lifting reaching 6.29 lakh tonne on November 4 compared to 5.34 lakh tonne in the year-ago period. Total procurement has touched 98.42 lakh tonne so far against 119 lakh tonne last year. The shortfall of 20-28 lakh tonne was due to rains, he explained. The Centre remains committed to procuring the targeted 184 lakh tonne in the

ongoing 2024-25 marketing season, he added. "We will procure every single grain brought to mandis by the farmers," Joshi asserted. The government is purchasing 'A' grade paddy at the minimum support price of Rs 2,320 per quintal. It has already transferred Rs 20,557 crore as MSP payment through DBT to 5.38 lakh farmers. Asked about industry's demand to raise sugar's minimum support price, the minister said: "Their request is with the ministry. We will take a decision at an appropriate time."

IRFC records its highest-ever quarterly revenue at ₹6,900.20 Crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Railway Finance Corporation Limited ("IRFC" or the "Company"), 'Mini-Ratna' Schedule-A Public sector enterprise under the administrative control of the Ministry of Railways, Government of India, holds a prominent position as the dedicated financing arm of the Indian Railways. IRFC registered with RBI as non-deposit taking Non-Banking Finance Company (NBFC), and Infrastructure Financing Company (IFC), has reported its unaudited financial results (Standalone) for the 2nd Quarter and Half Year ended 30th September 2024. During the period ending 30th September 2024, Company reported PAT at Rs. 3189.47 crore vis-a-vis Rs.



3095.86 crore reported in corresponding period in the previous year. The company posted profit growth of 4.41% for Q2 FY 2024-25 at Rs. 1612.65 crore vis-a-vis Rs. 1544.58 crore reported in Q2 FY 2023-24. The total income for the six-month ended 30th September 2024 grew by 1.70% and stands at Rs 13666.22 Crore as against Rs. 13437.91 Crore reported in corresponding period of the previous year. The total income for Q2 FY 2024-25 also grew by 2.04% and stands at Rs. 6900.20

Crore as against Rs. 6762.18 Crore reported in Q2 FY 2023-24. Net worth at the end of six-month period ended 30th September 2024, stands at Rs. 51464.12 crore up by 9.77%, as against Rs. 46883.22 crore reported in six-month ended 30th September 2023. The Assets Under Management (AUM) to end of six-month ended 30th September 2024, stands at Rs.462282.62 crore. The Earning Per Share of the company is at Rs. 2.44 for the six-month period ended 30th

September 2024 and your Company is consistently paying dividends and declared Rs 0.80 /share (at dividend rate 8%) Interim dividend for FY 24-25. Manoj Kumar Dubey, Chairman & Managing Director, IRFC, stated that IRFC will not only strengthen the financial ecosystem for Railway Infrastructure projects but is also making all efforts to diversify its lending portfolio as per current mandate into sectors with backward and forward linkage with Indian Railways. Further, IRFC has Sanctioned Rs 700 Crore funding under finance lease model to NTPC Limited (National Thermal Power Corporation) for 20 BOBR Rakes under the General-Purpose Wagon Investment Scheme (GPWIS) of the Ministry of Railways.

Paras Health recognised among India's top hospitals

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Paras Health has received prominent recognition in the Times Lifestyle Survey 2024. Paras Hospitals in Gurugram ranked 4th nationally in Orthopedics among hospitals across India, a significant endorsement of Paras Health's commitment to delivering specialised, patient-centered care. Within the North Region, the Gurugram facility also earned the 3rd rank in Orthopedics and the top position in Faridabad & Gurugram City—a testament to the trust and reputation it has built in the field of musculoskeletal health. This national survey, conducted by Avance Insights Pvt Ltd, independently evaluated hospitals and clinics across



India in various lifestyle specialties, reaffirming Paras Health's prominent role in delivering exceptional, specialised care across Northern India. In the IVF and Fertility category, Paras Hospitals, Gurugram ranked 2nd in the North Region for multi-specialty hospitals, while securing the 1st position in Faridabad & Gurugram. This recognition reflects

Paras Health's dedication to providing reliable, quality gynaecology care and helping families on their journeys with compassionate medical support. In the category of Plastic Surgery: National Hospitals, Paras Hospitals, Sector-22, Panchkula, proudly secured the 6th rank, positioning it among the country's top healthcare institutions in this specialty.

IDFC FIRST Bank offer a real-time tracking service

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IDFC FIRST Bank has become the first Indian bank to offer a real-time tracking service, in association with Swift, for money sent abroad. This is available on the bank's award winning Mobile Application and Internet Banking platforms. This marks a significant milestone in the Indian banking industry, demonstrating the Bank's commitment to delivering seamless and efficient banking solutions, reiterating its "Customer First" approach. Customers in India are used to digital payments through UPI or IMPS with real-time status updates and traceability on digital platforms.

TOP RANKED ERIGAISSI TO FACE GUJARATHI IN OPENING ROUND

PTI ■ CHENNAI

World No. 4 Indian chess grandmaster and top seed Arjun Erigaisi will open his Chennai Grand Masters campaign against compatriot Vidit Gujarathi, starting here on Tuesday. Erigaisi will play for the first time in India after crossing the historic 2800 ELO ranking mark when he takes the board. The eight-player strong classical event will see Aravindh Chithambaram take on Iranian Amin Tabatabaei, Vachier-Lagrave Maxime will face Maghsoodloo Parham and American Grandmaster Levon Aronian will play Alexey Sarana in the opening round.

The second edition of the seven round competition will also feature a Challengers event featuring female players for the first time.

Organised by MGD1 with ChessBase India, and sponsored by the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu, the tournament will be held at the 1,100-seat Anna Centenary Library.

The event will also feature two Indian women — Harika Dronavalli and Vaishali Rameshbabu. The Challengers participants,



CHENNAI GRAND MASTERS

will fight for a prize pool of Rs 20 lakh, with the winner taking home Rs six lakh and a direct berth in the Masters next year. In the Challenger category,

Vaishali will take on Mendonca Leon Luke while Harika will play Pranav V. In the other two matches, Raunak Sadhwani will face off

against Karthikeyan Murali while Pranesh M will play Abhimanyu Puranik. The Challengers event, which is introduced for this year, will

give Indian prodigies the chance to compete in top-level tournaments. D Gukesh had won the inaugural edition last year but

will miss this year's competition as he is preparing for the world championships title against Ding Liren of China.



Paris Olympics displaced nearly 20,000 people, local associations say

AP ■ PARIS

Nearly 20,000 people were forcibly displaced in the lead-up to the Paris Olympics from tent camps or shelters in the Paris region, a coalition of more than 100 community groups said Monday. In its report, the group Le Revers de la Médaille, which translates as "the other side of the medal", claimed that 19,526 people were displaced from informal housing between April 2023 and September 2024 as part of what it calls "social cleansing" by authorities. The report notes that some people were evicted multiple times and, as a result, may be counted more than once.

As the city prepared to host millions of spectators for the Games, facilities and infrastructure underwent significant renovation, which the report alleges included the eviction of migrants and squatters from visible locations near event venues. Paul Alauzy, spokesperson for Le Revers de la Médaille, claimed that there is direct evidence linking these displacements to Olympic preparations.

"There are images, internal government documents, and eviction orders explicitly referencing the Olympics as justification," Alauzy said on Monday. The group's data highlights a surge in eviction operations - 260 between April 2023 and Sept 2024 - up 41% from the same period in 2021-2022.

The report also notes that over 4,500 minors were among those displaced. French officials did not immediately respond to the group's estimate. The city imposed exceptionally strict security measures for the Games and notably the unprecedented opening ceremony all along the Seine River, which required a double-checked process and a QR code to attend.

In August, Marc Guillaume, the prefect for the Ile-de-France region, which encompasses Paris, stated in a radio interview that eviction rates had not increased due to the Olympics and that every displaced individual was offered alternative housing. French President Emmanuel Macron also addressed the issue in August, claiming that France had successfully created a social legacy linked to the Olympics.

"I'm not forgetting that we have succeeded in creating a social legacy for the Olympic Games, with more than 200 marginalised people who used to live on the streets around the venues now having a permanent home," Macron said at a conference on Aug 12, the day following the Olympics closing ceremony.

In its report, the coalition is now advocating for a reevaluation of the Olympic hosting model, proposing a permanent site for future editions and more sustainable practices to mitigate the risk of displacements.



Harry Wilson scores twice in injury time to give Fulham 2-1 win over Brentford

AP ■ LONDON

Substitute Harry Wilson Scored twice in added time as Fulham rallied for a 2-1 home win over Brentford in the Premier League. Wilson came on in the 82nd minute and equalized in the second minute of injury time by meeting a cross from Adama Traore and, with his back toward the goal, flicking the ball inside the far post. He then netted the winner four minutes later with a stooping header from another cross from Antonee Robinson as Fulham was finally rewarded for its attacking play. Fulham had only been behind for 113 minutes in the league all season and controlled most of the early action, only for Brentford to take the lead in the 24th against the run of play. Sloppy play in midfield by Fulham gave the visitors

possession and German midfielder Vitaly Janelt let fly with a shot from almost 30 meters out that flew inside Bernd Leno's left-hand post. Marco Silva's Fulham side pushed forward but never looked like scoring until Wilson's late double. The win lifts Fulham into ninth place in the league table while Brentford remains in 13th. "It's emotionally very tough right now," said Brentford coach Thomas Frank. "When you're leading in the 92nd minute, it's tough for us to even have a draw - and then we lose it." "On the day, Fulham were better but we showed a lot of resilience and defending. I thought that could give us the win but then there was an unbelievable touch from Wilson where 99 times out of 100 it doesn't go in.

Neymar picks up another injury in second game back from ACL tear

AP ■ RIYADH

Neymar picked up another injury in just his second game since returning from a 12-month absence as Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal defeated Esteghlal of Iran 3-0 in the AFC Champions League Elite. The Brazilian has only recently recovered from a torn ACL and came off the bench in Riyadh after 58 minutes. However, the 32 year-old forward had to come off with three minutes remaining, having seemed to pull up after stretching his leg out for the ball in the penalty area. Neymar has time to recover before his next game, however,



as he is not registered for the team's matches in the Saudi Pro League and the next fixture in the AFC competition is on Nov. 25. Aleksandar Mitrovic scored a

hat trick for Al-Hilal, the four-time Asian champion which has now won all four games in the group stage. All three goals from the Serbian came from close range.

He opened the scoring after 15 minutes, added a second just after the half-hour mark and then completed his hat trick with 16 minutes remaining. Al-Hilal remains top of the 12-team group, where the top eight will advance to the Round of 16. It is above Saudi Arabian rival Al-Ahli on goal difference after the team from Jeddah thrashed Al-Shorta of Iraq 5-1 with former Liverpool forward Roberto Firmino scoring twice in the first half. Earlier, Al-Wasl of the United Arab Emirates drew 1-1 with Qatar's Al-Sadd and the game between Persepolis of Iran and Al-Gharafa of Qatar ended in the same scoreline.

ISL: FC Goa look to carry forward new-found confidence against in-form Punjab FC

PTI ■ MARGAO

Back to winning ways, hosts BFC Goa will look to carry forward their new-found confidence and scale up the ladder when they take on Punjab FC in an Indian Super League match here on Wednesday. Both the teams are confident following their recent results. While FC Goa defeated Bengaluru FC 3-0 in their previous outing, PFC have won five of their last six matches. The Punjab side is placed third on the points table with 12 points from five fixtures, while FC Goa are ranked seventh, having accumulated nine points from seven games.

The Gaurs have found the back of the net on 12 occasions from inside the 18-yard box this season — most such strikes by any side this season — with Armando Sadiku (6) and Borja Herrera (4) scoring most of the goals. For Punjab FC, they should be wary of their backline, which has not been entirely sturdy this season. Against BFC, FC Goa forced 16 high turnovers (winning the ball back within 40 metres of the opposition's goal) — the most by any side in the ISL this season. Consequently, Punjab FC will have to be a well-oiled machine and fast-paced when it comes to passing, besides also



ensuring that the Goans don't dominate possession. Punjab FC have been on a

tremendous run lately, with their only loss so far this season coming last month

against The Blues. While their vibrant forward line has played a prominent role to their success lately, they also need a well-coordinated performance from other departments. Punjab FC have had three big chances per game — the highest by any side in the ISL — with eight of their nine goals this season coming from these opportunities, exhibiting the swiftness of the forward line. The Gaurs have been dominant against Punjab FC in ISL, remaining unbeaten with one win and a draw in their last two face-offs. FC Goa head coach Manolo Marquez affirmed that his players must stay positive

regardless of the result. "In my experience as a coach, you cannot be too negative or pessimistic if the team doesn't do well. Obviously, you can be angry, but I don't see much difference between the top teams and the teams below (in the table)," Marquez said. On the other hand, Punjab FC head coach Panagiotis Dilmperis admitted that he is wary of FC Goa's style of play, but was confident of his team's performance. "We will not adapt to them (FC Goa's playing style). We will press them to adapt to us. We don't care how they play other teams. We only care how other teams play against us," Dilmperis said.

Jhingan returns, Yadwad earns maiden call-up in India probables for Malaysia football friendly



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Seasoned defender Sandesh Jhingan, sidelined with a knee injury since January, is set for a comeback as he was on Tuesday named in a 26-member probables list for India's friendly match against Malaysia on November 18 in Hyderabad. The FC Goa center-back sustained an injury to his right knee during the first half of India's game against Syria in the Asian Cup, forcing him out of the tournament. Now fully recovered, his return is expected to strengthen India's defence.

The 23-year-old Goa-born forward has caught the attention of Marquez with a goal and two assists in seven

appearances for Chennaiyin FC in the ISL. He was roped in by Chennaiyin FC last year after a standout performance for FC Bengaluru United in the 2022-23 I-League 2, where he scored 13 goals from 11 matches. Farukh Choudhary, Yadwad's senior teammate, has also retained his spot in the squad. Additionally, Mohun Bagan's Anirudh Thapa and Lalengmawia Ralte (Apua) made it to the probables' list after missing out of the 23-member squad that travelled to Vietnam for an international friendly on October 12. In their last match on October 12, India managed a 1-1 draw against Vietnam.

Goalkeepers: Amrinder Singh, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and Vishal Kaith. Defenders: Aakash Sangwan, Anwar Ali, Asish Rai, Chinglensana Singh Konsham, Hmingthanmawia Ralte, Mehtab Singh, Rahul Bheke, Roshan Singh Naorem and Sandesh Jhingan. Midfielders: Anirudh Thapa, Brandon Fernandes, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Jithin MS, Lalengmawia Ralte, Liston Colaco, Suresh Singh Wangjam and Viben Mohanan. Forwards: Edmund Lalrindika, Irfan Yadwad, Farukh Choudhary, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Manvir Singh and Vikram Partap Singh.

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Delhi, Karnataka, Bengal earn wins in Senior Men's National Hockey Championship

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Delhi, Karnataka, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh registered dominating wins on the second day of the Senior Men's National Hockey Championship here on Tuesday. Delhi hammered Jammu & Kashmir 6-0 in a Pool F match, thanks to goals from Nitesh (34th, 58th), Bharat (3rd), Govind Singh Bisht (14th), Mukul Sharma (21st) and Vikas Upadhyay (23rd). In Pool D, Karnataka ran over Chandigarh 5-1. For Karnataka, Mohammed Raheel Mauseen (41st, 48th)

struck a brace while Surya NM (10th), Bharat Mahalingappa Kurtakoti (19th) and Manjeet (59th) scored a goal each. In another Pool D match, Uttarakhand secured a 5-0 win over Tripura following a walkover. In Pool H, Bengal routed Assam 10-0 with Raushan Kumar (10th, 12th, 30th) scoring a hat-trick. Captain Rajendra Oram (4th, 58th), Avoy Ekka (19th), Alsem Lakra (20th), Milan Saha (31st), Sunil Jojo (41st) and Nitish Neupane (48th) are the other goal scorers. Andhra Pradesh decimated Andaman & Nicobar 13-0 in

Pool C, with Lekalla Hitesh Rao (13th, 15th, 21st, 41st, 48th, 55th, 56th) scoring seven times. Rayudu Veera (5th), Harsha Kamal Teja (6th), Galla Siva Pramod (30th), Tatiparthi Aron Saroj (33rd), Maddimeni Rajesh (38th) and Venu Gorela Gopal (49th) scored a goal each. Meanwhile, hosts Tamil Nadu managed a 2-2 draw against Madhya Pradesh in their Pool C game. Love Kumar Kanojia (35th) and Akshay Dubey (42nd) scored for MP, while Selvaraj Kanagaraj (42nd) and Shanmugavel S (53rd) found the net for TN.

Aussie quick Boland looks to keep KL Rahul under pressure ahead of Border-Gavaskar Trophy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australian pacer Scott Boland wants to extend the barren run of KL Rahul and keep him under pressure ahead of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy when he faces the Indian batter in the four-day A-Team match here on Thursday. Rahul along with wicketkeeper batter Dhruv Jurel flew early to Australia, and will appear for India A in the second four-day game at the MCG. "I was lucky to bowl to him in a Test over in India a couple of years ago but it'll be nice to play against him in our backyard," Boland was quoted saying by ESPNCricinfo. Rahul made a hundred on his



debut tour to Australia in 2015, a 110 at Sydney, but his overall performance Down Under remains scratchy, evidenced by an average of 20.77 across four Tests. Boland wants to heap more misery on the 32-year-old. "He's a world-class player but someone I think we can get on top of pretty early and hopefully stay on top of him for the majority of the summer," said Boland. Rahul was dropped from India's eleven after the first Test against New Zealand at Bengaluru where he made 0 and 12. It was a continuation of his modest run since cracking a hundred against South Africa at Centurion in December 2023. Since then, he made just two

hundreds across nine innings against SA, England, Bangladesh and New Zealand. But the Bengaluru man could return to the eleven if skipper Rohit Sharma skips the first Test against the Aussies at Perth, starting from November 22, owing to personal reasons. Boland also remained cautious about the impact of India's recent 0-3 whitewash at home by the Kiwis. The 35-year-old said India has enough experience to make a comeback. "There's so much more bounce here, more seam. The way they'll structure their team (in Australia) will be completely different to what you see over in India," he noted.



Harmanpreet Kaur rises to ninth, Smriti Mandhana remains fourth in women's ODI rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India captain Harmanpreet Kaur climbed to the joint ninth spot while opener Smriti Mandhana remained fourth in the latest ICC Women's ODI rankings, released here on Tuesday. Kaur, who played an important part in her team's six-wicket victory over New Zealand in the third ODI of their ICC Women's Championship series in Ahmedabad, had slipped three slots after the first two matches. However, her 59 not out off 63 balls pushed her back into the top 10. Left-hander Mandhana, who won the player of the match award for her knock of 100, added 23 rating points to reach a tally of 728, just five less than Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu in the list led by Natalie Sciver-Brunet of England with 760 rating points. Wicketkeeper Yastika Bhatia moved up from 48th to 45th after chipping in with 35 runs, while for New Zealand, Brooke Halliday's knock of 86

lifted her 12 spots to 24th position and Georgia Plimmer's 39 runs took her from 85th to 74th position. In the bowling chart, seasoned spinner Deepti Sharma gained important rating points after helping India win the series 2-1. Deepti, who had already attained a career-high 687 rating points last week while consolidating her second place among bowlers, added 16 more to reach 703 rating points after her haul of 3/39 to hold on to the second spot. England's left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone enjoys a huge lead at the top with 770 rating points. India pacer Renuka Singh was up four places to 32nd while Saima Thakor (up 20 places to joint-77th) and Priya Mishra (up six places to 83rd) also progressed. India are placed in third position in the ICC Women's Championship standings with 25 points while New Zealand are sixth with 20 from 21. Australia and England are at the top with 28 points each, from 18 and 21 matches, respectively.

Drubbing at the hands of NZ might awaken sleeping giant India, feels Hazlewood

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian pacer Josh Hazlewood believes India's confidence would have been shaken by the shocking series loss to New Zealand, but the "sleeping giant" can mount a strong comeback in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy starting later this month. India suffered a humiliating series whitewash after losing the third match by 25 runs to New Zealand in Mumbai on Sunday, the first time in their Test history, which goes back to

1933. "It might awaken a sleeping giant, so to speak. We'll see that when they come out," Hazlewood told 'Sydney Morning Herald'. Not only did the drubbing at home mark one of the darkest moments in India's Test cricket history, it has also significantly impacted the Rohit Sharma-led side's chances of qualifying for next year's World Test Championship (WTC) final. Three back-to-back losses meant that India have lost their top spot to



Australia in the WTC standings. India are now faced with a tough task to win four of their five matches against Australia to qualify for their third consecutive WTC final without relying on external results. "It's obviously better than losing 3-0 than winning 3-0, easily. The confidence might have taken a bit of a hit. A lot of them have been out here, but there are a few batters who haven't, so they'll be a bit unsure of what to expect," Hazlewood said. "I don't think you can read too much

into it. The results are obviously good for us in a way." Hazlewood, who is a part of Australia's three-pronged pace attack along with Mitchell Starc and skipper Pat Cummins, lauded his Trans-Tasman rivals for achieving something no other team has been able to do. "Credit to the Kiwi boys. They played outstanding cricket. To win 3-0 in India is unbelievable. It's hard enough to win one game there, let alone every match of the series," Hazlewood said.



Indian boxer Mandeep Jangra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian professional boxer Mandeep Jangra won the World Boxing Federation's super featherweight world title after defeating Britain's Conor McIntosh in the Cayman Islands. The 31-year-old, who trains under former Olympic silver medallist Roy Jones Jr and has faced only one defeat in his professional career so far, had the upper hand in most rounds. He delivered powerful punches from the outset, maintaining his stamina throughout the 10 rounds, while the British boxer struggled to keep pace. Conor did try to make a comeback, but Jangra continued to maintain the upper hand in most rounds. "This is one of the biggest victories of my career. I am thankful to my sponsor Nash Built Construction, Chief Coach Roy Jones, Assistant Coach Asa Beard and Angel,"

Jangra said in a media release. "I have worked hard for years to achieve this. It is a matter of pride for me that I could bring glory to the country." The Haryana boxer, who made his professional boxing debut in 2021, hopes the title will inspire more Indian pugilists to turn professional. "I think this title will open the way for other boxers of the country and they will also decide to make a career in professional boxing. "Our boxers are good and there is no dearth of talent in them. If they get good promoters and managers, they can also become world champions," Jangra added. Jangra has won 11 out of his 12 fights in his pro career with seven being knockout victories. He had a decent run in the amateur circuit as well and won a Commonwealth Games silver medal in the 2014 Glasgow edition.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi SG Pipers will play Visakhapatnam franchise, Gonasika in the opening match of the men's competition of the revamped Hockey India League, starting December 28 in Rourkela. The franchise-based tournament is set to return after a hiatus of seven years in a new look with the event being organised for both men and women co-currently. While the men's competition will feature eight teams, the women's event will be played in Ranchi among four teams. The men's HIL will be conducted in two phases, with the opening phase witnessing all the eight sides playing against each other once

Delhi SG Pipers to play Gonasika in opening match of men's HIL on December 28

between December 28 and January 18. The second phase starts on January 19, where the eight teams will be clubbed into two groups of four each. While Pool A will feature Delhi SG Pipers, Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Soorma Hockey Club, and Vedanta Kalinga Lancers; Pool B consists of Gonasika, Hyderabad Toofans, Tamil Nadu Dragons and UP Rudras. Each team in phase 2 will compete against each other in their respective pools, with the



top four teams advancing to the semifinals, scheduled to be held on January 31. The third phase play-off and the final will be played on February 1. The women's HIL competition, to be conducted for the first time, will start on January 12 in Ranchi. In the women's tournament all four teams — Delhi SG Pipers, Odisha Warriors Shraichi Rarh Bengal Tigers and Soorma Hockey Club — will play against each other in two instances. The opening contest will be

between Delhi SG Pipers and Odisha Warriors. Following the league stage, the top two teams will progress to the final scheduled for February 1. "Both men and women teams will also play one of their matches at an alternate venue to bring HIL excitement to fans in multiple locations," the organisers said in a media release. Commenting on HIL's return, Hockey India president and HIL Governing Committee chairperson, Dilip Tirkey said: "We are thrilled to reintroduce the HIL after a seven-year hiatus. "This season promises high-calibre matches and intense competition, showcasing the best of Indian and international hockey talent."

In conversation with ACC to revive Afro-Asia Cup after nearly two decades: ACA chair Mukuhani

PTI ■ BENONI (SOUTH AFRICA)

The Africa Cricket Association (ACA) has started dialogue with the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) and other stakeholders to revive the once popular Afro-Asia Cup, a common meeting ground for players from the two continents, after nearly two decades. The Afro-Asia Cup has had only two editions to date -- 2005 in South Africa (draw) and 2007 in India (won by Asia).

A third edition of the event was scheduled to be held in Kenya in 2009 but it never happened. "The Afro-Asia Cup, apart from the cricket, brings the much-needed financial input to the organisation, and the appetite is huge from both ends," ACA interim chairman Tavengwa Mukuhani, who is also Zimbabwe Cricket Chair, was quoted as saying by ESPNCricinfo. This tournament event gives players from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh a unique chance to be in

the same team. "We have had conversations with our counterparts within the Asia Cricket Council, and obviously our African contingents, they want the Afro-Asia Cup to be revived," said Mukuhani. The ACC is yet to make any response on the matter. The 2005 Asia squad was captained by then Pakistan skipper Inzamam-ul-Haq and featured the likes of Rahul Dravid, Ashish Nehra and Anil Kumble. The 2007 Asia XI included MS Dhoni,

Sourav Ganguly, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Yuvraj Singh, Virender Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar while Mohammed Asif, Mohammed Yousuf and Shoaib Akhtar represented Pakistan. ACA PLANNING IPL-STYLE LEAGUE: The ACA is also pondering over conducting the Africa Premier League, a mini version of the Indian Premier League (IPL). While the concept is still in the planning stages, ACA CEO Cassim Suliman said details will emerge once

the required approval is received from the respective African cricketing boards. "It's the mini vision of the IPL. So, we're taking that concept of the IPL and driving that concept to ensure that everybody benefits in that aspect," he revealed. "But the board will decide exactly who's hosting and from there, we'll take it to them from there. "It's going to be like the IPL format, but with a lower status and then we'll grow it from there," he added.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Currently, Agni Chopra's First-Class average stands at a box office 99.06 and it has attracted as much, may be even more, attention as some of the biggest Bollywood chartbusters his father has produced. In only nine games since his debut in the Ranji Trophy Plate league for Mizoram earlier this year, Agni, son of Bollywood filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra and film critic Anupama Chopra, has garnered 1585 runs with eight hundreds and four fifties. The beginning of this filmy sequence started in January this year when he debuted with a 166 against Sikkim at Nadiad, and from there on Agni has not stopped scoring runs in tons, literally. This season the 26-year-old left-hander has started from where he left and has already scored 218 and 238 against Arunachal and Manipur.

Agni Chopra's dream: Playing Ranji Elite division after big start with Mizoram in Plate League

So, what is the secret of his run rush? "It's all about hunger, right?" Agni told PTI in an exclusive interview. "Before this season started, I discussed it with my coach Khushpreet (Singh). The only thing he told me was, 'forget about the runs, you just have to focus on one thing - don't get out.'" "So I've not thought about anything else. My second goal was to score double hundreds because last year I didn't score a single double hundred," said Agni, adding that specific work on his fitness has also helped him pile up big scores. His domination of bowlers, which has seen his average touching Bradmanesque-

levels, has come in the Plate League so far, and Agni nourishes the dream of getting into Elite League with Mizoram. "I don't think too far into the future. Of course, in terms of the larger picture, I would love to be picked in the Duleep Trophy, or India A, to play in the IPL, to hopefully, one day, represent India," he said. "For me what works best is (when) I always focus on the next game. I don't even think about the second game. I only think about what's next because in order to play for India, I have to do well in the next game." But for it, Agni knows that, he will have to play in the Elite



segment of the Ranji Trophy. "I would love to represent an Elite division team, then maybe play for IPL and India. But to do those things, I have to play well at the level I'm playing right now and to do that, I also have to score runs in the next game. So, I genuinely think about only the next game," he said. Agni realises that he has to shoulder a major share of responsibility of carrying Mizoram into the Elite round. "Our Mizoram team's collective goal is to qualify for the Elite division. The goal is for us to finish on top and qualify... Then I'll be able to play in the Elite division against the top level of bowlers," he said.

"Even last year, that was our goal but unfortunately, we fell short. We lost in the semifinals; we were one game away. If we had won, we would have qualified and I would have been playing there this year itself," he continued. "That's what I think my personal and team-wise goal is." For cricketers, on-field success and scrutiny go hand in hand and more so in case of those who have famous parents. Agni has a simple way of tackling the situation. "I just think it is funny. I genuinely don't even take it seriously. There is my circle of people whose opinions I value

and whose opinions I trust," he said. "Off the field, (it) is my parents and my sister. Anything related to off the field, I'll defer to them. They don't give me advice about cricket too much. I mean, I don't tell my dad how to make movies and he doesn't tell me how to play cricket," he said. "Khushpreet Singh, my coach, is my number one guy on and off the field. Shubman (Gill) is a close friend and with him, also on the field and off the field, we have discussions," he said. Agni had to endure disappointment during last year's IPL auction, but he hopes for better tidings in the upcoming mega auction. "Everybody wants to be a part of that, play in the IPL. A lot of the work that I have put in is with that in mind as well and that's a big motivating factor is to play in the IPL," said Agni, who idolises Yuvraj Singh and Brian Lara.

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