

HAZE STAYS, IDEAS FLOAT

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As the National Capital's air pollution crisis has reached an alarming level, with the Air Quality Index (AQI) consistently in the "severe plus" category on Tuesday, the Delhi government is now pressing for cloud seeding to artificially induce rain to dissipate the thick layer of smog, work from home facilities and considering bringing odd even scheme, that could help combat the worsening air quality. The Delhi government has also sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention in tackling the issue of air pollution.

Amid Delhi's worsening air quality, which has plunged into the "severe plus" category with an AQI consistently above 460, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai addressed a press conference accusing the Centre of not acting on their repeated request to allow artificial rain in the national capital. He said that he had written to Union government Bhupender Yadav for the fourth time seeking a joint meeting with stakeholders to get clearances for artificial rain to disperse Delhi's high pollution.

"Despite repeated requests through letters on August 30, October 10, and October 23, the Union Environment Minister has not taken cognisance of the situation or responded to the Delhi government's appeals," Rai said in his latest letter.

He alleged that despite repeated reminders and requests, the Centre was yet to call a meeting to discuss the



option. Rai said while the GRAP-IV restrictions are being enforced to tackle the alarming levels of pollution, the thick smog layer engulfing the city can only be broken by wind or rain.

In his letter, Rai proposed that this meeting include the Delhi Government, experts from IIT Kanpur who have conducted research on artificial rain, and key Central Government ministries such as the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Defence along with other relevant departments.

Artificial rain is needed in Delhi as an emergency measure to reduce pollution and help citizens at this juncture. While the Delhi Government is willing to initiate the emergency measure, it needs a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from Centre's Directorate

General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and Defence Ministry among other agencies.

"After consulting several experts, we believe the time has come to use artificial rain to break this layer of smog in Delhi," he said. "Delhi cannot get relief from pollution unless we break the smog layer. Cloud seeding can help mitigate the crisis and provide immediate relief to citizens," Rai said. Emphasising the urgency of the current situation, Rai said in his letter, "I request the Union Environment Minister to convene an emergency meeting with all stakeholders, including IIT Kanpur and relevant central agencies, to fast-track the clearances required for artificial rain."

This cloud seeding technique, which involves the aerial dispersion of salt particles like silver iodide or chloride into clouds to induce rain, is being

considered as a potential solution to the city's dire air quality issues. While the concept of cloud seeding is not new, its effectiveness in combating air pollution remains a subject of debate among experts. The method's success hinges on optimal atmospheric conditions, including adequate moisture and humidity in the clouds, and the presence of specific cloud types that grow vertically.

The high cost and uncertainty of outcomes also raise questions about the viability of this approach as a sustainable solution to air pollution. Additionally, concerns have been raised about the potential environmental impacts of altering natural processes through cloud seeding. Experts emphasise the need for more research to understand the long-term effects of this intervention and call for a multi-disciplinary

approach to policy formulation in this area. He also said that the government is in talks with experts to enforce emergency measures like odd-even and work-from-home options if the pollution levels in Delhi continue to remain in the severe-plus zone-above 450 in the coming days. Delhi is not new to the odd-even vehicle rationing scheme. First implemented in 2016, the AAP government's initiative aimed to control vehicular emissions in the city by only allowing private vehicles whose registration number ends with an odd number to ply on odd dates and even registration numbers to ply on even dates. Vehicles with registration numbers ending in even digits (0, 2, 4, 6, 8) are allowed on the roads on even dates, while those with registration numbers ending in odd digits (1, 3, 5, 7, 9) are permitted on odd dates.

"A decision on implementing work-from-home measures and the odd-even scheme will be taken soon to tackle the city's worsening air quality," Rai said. He said, "People, including children and senior citizens, are struggling to breathe and we deeply regret this situation." On the possibility of implementing work-from-home measures, Rai stated, "We will take a decision on this soon."

The minister added that the government has already imposed significant restrictions on vehicles under GRAP-IV. "We are analysing the impact of these measures. If the analysis shows a positive outcome, we will take further decisions accordingly," he said.



CJI asks judges to allow virtual hearings

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna on Tuesday said all judges have been asked to allow virtual hearings wherever possible in view of the severe pollution levels in the National Capital Region. As soon as the Bench comprising the CJI and Justice Sanjay Kumar assembled, lawyers, including Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) president Kapil Sibal, referred to the worsening pollution in Delhi and NCR and sought immediate measures to deal with it. "We have told all the judges to allow virtual hearings wherever possible," the CJI said.

The CJI, however, did not allow the submissions that the SC should go online and reiterated that the lawyers have the option to appear online. Sibal said a message is needed to be sent to other courts and tribunals in the national capital in this regard as the "pollution is getting out of control." He was supported by various lawyers that also included Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and Gopal Sankaranarayanan.

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On poll eve Vinod Tawde's 'cashgate'



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In what came as a major embarrassment for the ruling MahaYuti on the eve of the Maharashtra Assembly polls, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) national general secretary Vinod Tawde found himself in a fierce controversy over the alleged distribution of cash to some people, following the claims by Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) that it had caught him red-handed in the act.

The controversy erupted after BVA founder and six-time Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Vasai, Hitendra Thakur and his son Kshitij Thakur, a three-time MLA from Nalasopara, alleged that their party colleagues and workers had seen Tawde distributing money to people. They alleged that Tawde had arrived with Rs 5 Crore for giving it to BJP candidate Rajan Naik for distribution to people in Vasai-Virar area of Palghar district.

Cashing in on the allegations, leader of the Opposition in

Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi of the Congress singled out Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an attack "Modiji, from whose safe did these Rs 5 Crore come? Who looted the public's money and sent you in the tempo?," Rahul asked.

Congress general secretary in-charge of Maharashtra Ramesh Chennithala demanded the arrest of Tawde. A BJP general secretary, Tawde has been caught red-handed while distributing money in Vasai-Virar. The allegation against him is that Tawde distributed Rs 5 Crore among people on the eve of elections. That being the case, Tawde should be arrested immediately," Chennithala said.

The controversy broke out when BJP's Tawde had gone to the deluxe Le Vivanta Hotel at Virar (East). The BVA leaders alleged that he was carrying Rs 5 Crore cash, along with some 'diaries'. The drama that unfolded in the morning lasted for more than eight hours.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin likely to visit India soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely to visit India next year as part of a laid down structure between the two countries by their leaders, diplomatic sources said on Tuesday. The two sides are looking at the possibility of the visit but nothing has been finalised yet, they said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the Russian President to visit India when the two leaders held summit talks in Moscow in July. Prime Minister Modi visited Kazan in Russia last month to attend the BRICS summit. Earlier on Tuesday, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov in a video interaction with senior Indian Editors referred to the strong bilateral relationship between India and Russia, and added Putin's visit is on the cards. He did not give any specific dates or make a definitive announcement of the visit. The interaction was organised by the Russian state-owned Sputnik news agency.

"We are looking forward to the visit. The dates will be mutually worked out soon," Peskov said. "Specific dates of President Vladimir Putin's visit to India will soon be announced and Russia will begin preparing for it," he said.

"I hope soon we'll work out the precise dates of his visit... Of course, after two visits of Prime Minister Modi to Russia, now we have a visit of the President to India, so we're looking forward to it," he added.

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EAM meets Chinese counterpart

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/RIO DE JANEIRO

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi deliberated on the next steps in India-China ties at a meeting in Rio de Janeiro, in the first high-level engagement since the militaries of the two sides disengaged from Demchok and Depsang at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. The two leaders held the delegation-level talks on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro late on Monday.

The EAM said in a social media post both sides noted the progress in the recent disengagement of the border areas and exchanged views on the next steps in the bilateral ties. It is learnt that both sides are in the process of reviving various dialogue mechanisms including the special representatives talks on the boundary question as decided at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Russian city of Kazan last month.

Days after the two sides reached an agreement on October 21 on disengagement in Demchok and Depsang, Indian and Chinese militaries completed the process marking a virtual end to over four-year standoff in the two



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in a meeting with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro

friction points. The two sides also resumed patrolling activities in these areas after a gap of almost four-and-a-half years. "On the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio, met CPC Politburo member and FM Wang Yi of China," Jaishankar said, adding, "We noted the progress in the recent disengagement in the India-China border areas. And exchanged views on the next steps in our bilateral ties. "Also discussed the global situation."

In his opening remarks at the talks, Jaishankar referred to the meeting between PM Modi and President Xi on October 23 on the sidelines of

the BRICS summit. "In Kazan, our leaders reached a consensus on taking the next steps in our relationship, bearing in mind the understanding of October 21. I am glad to note that on the ground, the implementation of that understanding has proceeded as planned," he said.

"Our leaders have directed that the Foreign Ministers and the Special Representatives should meet at an early date. Some progress, some discussions have happened in that direction," he said. Jaishankar and Wang discussed the next steps in the meeting.

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End of the road for Himachal Bhawan?

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

The Himachal Pradesh High Court has ordered the attachment of Himachal Bhawan located in Delhi for the recovery of Rs 150 Crore owed by the state government to Seli Hydropower Electrical Company following an arbitration ruling in favour of the power firm.

Passing the order on Monday, a single-judge bench of Justice Ajay Mohan Goel said the company may take appropriate steps for the auction of Himachal Bhawan located in central Delhi's Mandi House area thereof.

Advocate General Anup Rattan said the Himachal Pradesh government has filed an appeal against the initial HC order and it is likely to come up for hearing this month. The case pertains to the 340 MW Seli Hydropower Electric Project on the Chenab River in Lahaul and Spiti district.

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Vintage cars not to be scrapped: LG

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the crackdown on vehicles falling under scrap years, vintage car aficionados heaved a sigh of relief as Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena came to their rescue, directing the Delhi Transport Department that there should be no coercive action on the registered vintage vehicles. However, this has come with a rider that they are not to be driven on roads or used for commercial purposes. There are around 10,000 registered vintage cars in India.

LG Saxena has directed that bona fide vintage vehicles will no longer face coercive action by the Transport Department and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). According to Raj Niwas, the LG has asked the Commissioner Transport and Commissioner (MCD) to ensure that their enforcement wings desist from coercive action in case of such bona fide vehicles.

Acting on a representation made by the Heritage Motoring Club of India, highlighting that their vehicles are being impounded by the authorities and requesting for clarificatory orders in this regard, the LG had asked his Secretariat to issue appropriate directions. The transport department's data shows there are 60,14,493 such vehicles in



Former Union Minister Vijay Goel with one his coveted vintage cars which he used to take out as part of the exhibition he started to mark the birthday of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Delhi. The enforcement teams of the Transport Department and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) impound diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years for scrapping. The Supreme Court in its order in 2019, banned plying of such end-of-life vehicles in Delhi.

"The LG has taken note of harassment being faced by the vintage car owners and directed the Transport and MCD to desist from impounding bona fide vintage vehicles for scrapping," said the note. The notification issued by

MoRTH on July 15, 2021, has enabled provision for the registration of vehicles that are 50 years old or more as vintage vehicles, the LG secretariat said.

Based on the notification of MoRTH, the Transport Department of Delhi government on December 2, 2021, ordered for allotment of common series "DLVA" "DLVA" for vintage vehicles. In further orders, the department specified the procedure for application and issuance of a certificate of registration as a vintage motor vehicle.

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"Put up a board, Ganga is not fit to bathe in," NGT to Varanasi DM

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ VARANASI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) expressed strong displeasure over the administration's failure to maintain the cleanliness of the Ganga in Varanasi. In a scathing rebuke, the tribunal even suggested that a board be put up on the banks of the river, stating that Ganga water in the city is not safe for bathing.

The reprimand came during a hearing regarding the slow progress of the restoration of Asi and Varuna, two important tributaries of the Ganges. The NGT bench, led by Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and Dr. A Santhil Vel, asked Varanasi District Magistrate (DM) S Rajlingam whether

the water of the Ganga in Varanasi was fit for drinking or bathing. When the DM remained silent, the tribunal remarked sharply, "If this is the case, why not place boards along the riverbank stating that the Ganga water in Varanasi is not suitable for bathing or drinking?" In response, DM Rajlingam said, "It's not within my jurisdiction. The District Magistrate acts in accordance with government directives."

The NGT bench, unimpressed by the DM's reply, reminded him of the considerable power vested in his office, urging him not to appear "helpless" in the face of the situation. The tribunal then directed the

government's advocate to submit an affidavit detailing the current status of the restoration of Asi and Varuna and the condition of the Ganga by the next hearing, which is scheduled for December 13.

This marks the second time in recent months that the NGT has expressed its dissatisfaction with the Varanasi administration's efforts. Three months ago, the tribunal imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on the DM for failing to comply with its orders concerning the Ganga's restoration.

During the hearing, petitioner Saurabh Tiwari highlighted that despite repeated meetings and official discussions, no tangible



progress had been made on the ground in terms of cleaning the Ganga and restoring the tributaries. The NGT was informed that the restoration of the Asi and Varuna rivers was moving at a slow pace, with 40 meetings having taken place, but no

visible work was evident. The bench questioned DM Rajlingam about his efforts since taking office in Varanasi in November 2022 and asked what measures had been implemented during his tenure. The tribunal also noted that the renovation of

the tributaries was meant to be completed within a 12-month deadline, set by the NGT in 2021. However, more than 33 months have passed, and the situation remains largely unchanged.

The government's lawyer, Bhanwar Pal Jadoun, presented the state's efforts, including the Pollution Control Board's initiatives to clean the Ganga. However, the bench found the explanations unsatisfactory, emphasizing the need for concrete actions.

The petition, filed on August 4, 2024, highlighted the slow progress of the restoration work for Asi and Varuna. The NGT had originally set a five-year deadline for the completion of the restoration

in 2021, but after over three years, little on-the-ground action has been seen.

The restoration process officially began after a meeting of the Supervisory and Execution Committees in November 2021, but as per the petitioner, the project remains confined to bureaucratic processes, with no substantial work visible in the river areas.

As the December 13 hearing approaches, all eyes are now on the state government and district administration to provide accountability for the lack of progress and to step up efforts to restore the Ganga and its tributaries, which are crucial for the ecological balance of the region.

Direct SP-BJP fight likely in UP bypolls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the first major political contest after the Lok Sabha elections, a direct clash is expected between the BJP and the Samajwadi Party in the by-elections to nine assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday. Congress, a major partner in the opposition bloc INDIA, is not contesting the bypolls and is supporting its partner, the Samajwadi Party.

The Bahujan Samaj Party, on the other hand, is contesting all nine seats independently.

While Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath led the BJP's charge with his 'batenge to katenge' (divided we fall) slogan, attempting to link Samajwadi Party leaders with 'organised crime and the mafia', SP president Akhilesh Yadav largely focused on 'uniting society' through his 'PDA' (Pichhde, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) formula, and criticised the alleged conflict between the 'double-engine' Central and state governments.



Buses parked at a distribution centre as security personnel and polling officials prepare to leave for poll duty on the eve of bypolls in Mirzapur district on Tuesday PTI

In a no-holds-barred attack, Akhilesh repeatedly claimed that those within the BJP are working to remove Yogi Adityanath from the post of chief minister.

The Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM has also fielded its candidates in Ghaziabad, Kundark, and Meerapur constituencies, while the Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) of Chandrashekhar has fielded candidates in all constituencies except Sisamau.

Ninety candidates are contesting the bypolls, with the maximum number of 14 candidates standing in the Ghaziabad assembly constituency, while the minimum number is five candidates each in Khair (SC) and Sisamau constituencies.

Although the results of the by-

polls will not have any direct impact on the 403-member UP Legislative Assembly, they will send a message to various political parties.

While the SP aims to increase its tally further in the House, the BJP and its ally RLD will try to consolidate their presence in the assembly.

At present, the BJP holds 251 seats in the assembly, followed by the SP with 105 seats. BJP allies Apna Dal (Sonelal) have 13 seats, RLD has eight, SBSP has six, and the NISHAD Party has five.

The Congress and Jansatta Dal Loktantrik each have two seats,

while the BSP holds one seat. This will be the first electoral test for the INDIA bloc as well as the NDA in the politically crucial state since the Lok Sabha elections.

Akhilesh on Tuesday urged voters to support his party. In a post on X, he said, "I would like to ask all my voters, especially the young farmers, to help. The administration can only create disturbances in the elections. I hope the administration will work to protect the rights to save the Constitution given by Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar."

BJP UP spokesperson Manish

Shukla on Tuesday took a dig at the Samajwadi Party, saying, "The Samajwadi Party is afraid of losing the bypolls. Akhilesh Yadav wants to escape responsibility by blaming the Election Commission for the defeat."

"Due to the fear of defeat, the SP is making childish demands from the Election Commission, such as that voter identity cards should not be checked. In the past, women wearing burqas have been caught engaging in fraudulent voting while disguised in burqas," Shukla said. He was referring to a recent letter written by SP UP unit chief

Shyam Lal Pal, in which he had requested the Election Commission to issue instructions that "on the day of polling, no police personnel should check the voter ID card of the voter."

Pal, citing the handbook for returning officers, stated that the voter IDs should be checked by the polling officer on polling day.

RLD spokesperson Ankur Saxena said his party was confident of retaining the Meerapur seat, while the NDA was poised to make a clean sweep by winning all the constituencies where bypolls are being held.

Components worth over ₹3.19 cr stolen from IT store of company

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Components worth over Rs 3.19 crore were stolen from the IT store of a company dealing in computers and software in the Sushant Golf City area of Lucknow.

The stolen items include crucial components such as RAM and processors, which rendered a large stock of personal computers inoperable.

The theft came to light after an internal check revealed that several computers in the store had been tampered with.

The company's authorised representative, Purnender Prabhakar Singh, filed a complaint after months of failed attempts to get the matter investigated by local police.

Despite submitting an online complaint to the Uttar Pradesh Police portal in April 2024 and an additional written request to the Sushant Golf City police station and the commissioner of police in August, no action was taken until Singh approached the court, which subsequently instructed the police to register the case.

According to Singh, during the Covid-19 pandemic, most employees of the company had worked remotely, leaving personal computers in the IT store

for safekeeping.

When offices reopened, the computers were returned to the employees' workstations. However, when the devices were powered on, it was discovered that none of them were functioning.

After several attempts to turn on the computers, a vendor was called to inspect the faulty devices. Upon further investigation, the vendor discovered that the personal computers were missing essential components such as RAM and processors—critical, expensive parts necessary for the computers to work.

The company's IT assets management team was then instructed to inspect the rest of the computers stored in the IT facility. This inspection revealed that almost all the computers had been tampered with, with a significant number of expensive parts missing.

A detailed audit report was created, identifying the missing items, which included 190 units of 16GB DDR4 RAM, three units of 4GB DDR3 RAM, 425 units of 8GB DDR4 RAM, and 699 units of i5 processors, among others. One i7 processor was also reported missing.

Singh reported that the financial loss due to the theft of these

components was estimated to be Rs 9 lakh.

However, the larger financial loss stemmed from the damage to the personal computers, which had become unusable without the stolen parts.

The total estimated loss for the damaged computers is Rs 3,19,93,240.

In his complaint, Singh explained that while the IT store was secured with digital locks and CCTV surveillance, the employees involved in the theft had knowledge of the blind spots in the security system. They allegedly removed the parts while transferring the computers from the workstations to the storage area, ensuring that their actions went undetected by the CCTV cameras.

Singh speculated that the theft could not have been carried out in a single day, given the large number of components missing. He suggested that the theft had been planned and executed over an extended period. He also named the employees who had access to the IT store and were believed to be involved in the theft. After the court's intervention, the local police have now registered a case and are conducting further investigations into the matter.

SP MP returns security, accuses police of intimidating voters

PTI ■ AMBEDKAR NAGAR

Samajwadi Party MP Lalji Verma returned his police security, accusing the administration of exhibiting bias and attempting to intimidate voters, a day before by-polls in the Katheri assembly constituency. "I have no trust in the local administration and police because they are working as BJP's agents," Verma, SP MP from Ambedkar Nagar said.

"They are exhibiting bias and attempting to intimidate voters, particularly those from backward communities and Muslims, discouraging them from casting their votes," he said.

Verma, in a letter to Ambedkar Nagar Superintendent of Police said, "You have offered to provide an additional gunner for my security. However, I do not need it. I am also letting the current gunner go because I have lost trust in the police," he added.

Verma's wife Shobhawati Verma is the Samajwadi party candidate for the seat that was left vacant after he became MP.

In the letter written he said, "In the assembly by-election, the way the police are harassing



supporters of the Samajwadi Party, pressuring them with red notices to abstain from voting, especially targeting Muslim, Yadav, and Kurmi communities, is harmful to a healthy democracy."

"I believed that you (the police chief) would check this harassment. However, instead of restraining it, you are intensifying it, causing minority voters to be extremely frightened and unable to vote," Verma said in his letter.

"I expect you to take action to check this police harassment so that people can vote fearlessly," he said.

Vedic-era sage conceptualised Ist aircraft, didn't get credit: Guv

Lucknow (PTI): Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel claimed Vedic-era sage Bharadwaj conceptualised the idea of an aircraft but said the credit for its invention has gone to the Wright Brothers.

Addressing a convocation function at a university, Patel said students should study ancient Indian texts to appreciate the unparalleled research and discoveries made by their ancestors.

"The sages and scholars of ancient India made remarkable discoveries and innovations that are benefiting the world even today," she was quoted as saying in a statement issued by Raj Bhavan.

Citing the example of Bharadwaj, the governor said, "He had conceptualised the idea of an aircraft, but the credit for its invention was given to another nation, and it is now recognised as the invention of the Wright Brothers."

She made the speech at the 9th convocation of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Language University in Lucknow on Monday.

Bharadwaj, a prominent 'rish' from the Vedic age, is mentioned in both the Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Orville and Wilbur Wright, together known as the Wright Brothers, are credited with flying the first self-propelled aircraft on December 17, 1903, in

North Carolina, USA. However, some BJP leaders have argued that the concept of a flying machine is demonstrated in the 'Pushpak Vimana' described in the Ramayana.

Interestingly, a research paper presented at the 102nd Indian Science Congress in 2015 claimed that Shivkar Bapuji Talpade had flown a flying machine over Chowpatty in 1895, eight years before the Wright Brothers.

The paper also claimed that aeroplanes existed in India 7,000 years ago and were capable of travelling between countries and even planets.

The paper, presented by a retired principal of a pilot training institute, attracted sharp criticism from some scientists who argued that it undermined the primacy of empirical evidence, which is the foundation of the 102-year-old Congress.

At the convocation, Patel urged universities to encourage students to delve into ancient Indian texts to appreciate the unparalleled research and discoveries made by their ancestors, and described these texts as "true treasure troves of wisdom."

Referring to the Rampur Raza Library, she highlighted its priceless collection of ancient books and artwork, some of which remain vibrant to this

day, the statement said.

The colours used in these illustrations, derived from natural vegetation, have not deteriorated over time, Patel said.

The governor also instructed universities to facilitate the study of these ancient texts and translate them into various languages to ensure this knowledge reaches a wider audience, the statement added.

She remarked that India, the land of Buddha, has always chosen the path of peace over conflict, and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country is achieving new milestones in education and research.

Patel further stated that with a population of 1.4 billion, India is being "skilfully" guided by the Prime Minister, whose policies have elevated the nation's stature on the global stage. The governor highlighted the substantial funds allocated for education in the current budget and urged universities to undertake projects in this direction and ensure that their benefits reach the students.

She also noted that the universities of Uttar Pradesh are performing well in national and international rankings. The universities' placements in the NAAC and NIRF rankings show that "even better results can be achieved with hard work," she added.



Vikrant Massey, whose film 'The Sabarmati Report' was recently released in theatres, met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at his residence in Lucknow on Tuesday

Retd govt officer duped in yet another 'digital arrest' fraud

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another incident involving 'digital arrest' scam, a retired officer from the Panchayati Raj department, Kamala Kant Mishra, was duped of Rs 19.5 lakh after the fraudsters intimidated him into believing he was involved in money laundering.

The incident unfolded on November 6, when Mishra, a resident of Thakurganj, received a call from a man claiming to be an officer. The caller told him that a fake account had been opened in Mishra's name at Canara Bank using his Aadhaar number, and that money laundered by a person named Naresh Goyal had been deposited in the account. When Mishra denied having any accounts at Canara Bank, the caller demanded that he provide details of all his bank accounts.

The fraudster then threatened him, stating that an arrest warrant had been issued in his name. The caller further warned Mishra that a senior officer would soon contact him.

Soon after, another call came through from a man who claimed to be from the Andheri East police station. This caller, who did not reveal his full identity, informed Mishra that the arrest warrant would soon be issued unless he complied with certain instructions. Mishra was told not to discuss the investigation with anyone.

Shortly after, Mishra received a WhatsApp video call from a man named Rajesh, who identified himself as an officer in charge of the case. He threatened Mishra with jail time unless he immediately

transferred money from his accounts to a Bandhan Bank account for a "money laundering investigation".

The scammer assured Mishra that the money would be returned once the investigation was completed and his innocence was proven.

Believing the fraudster's claims, Mishra transferred Rs 17.5 lakh from his SBI account to the Bandhan Bank account provided by the scammer on November 6.

Later that evening, another call came from a different number, with the fraudster again demanding money for Mishra's supposed bail. Feeling desperate and fearful, Mishra transferred Rs 95,000 to the fraudster's UPI ID.

The following day, the fraudsters continued their demands, and on November 7, they asked for an additional Rs 2 lakh to secure Mishra's

bail.

Mishra complied with these demands as well, transferring the requested amount over several days between November 7 and 12.

In total, the fraudsters managed to extort Rs 19.5 lakh from Mishra by keeping him under digital surveillance and threatening him with legal consequences. It was only after these repeated calls and transfers that Mishra realised he had been duped. He later filed a complaint with the police.

The cyber cell is now investigating the case, using details from the victim's accounts and mobile numbers to track down the fraudsters.

Cyber police station in-charge Brajesh Yadav confirmed that an FIR has been registered based on the victim's complaint and assured that the investigation is underway.

Fire breaks out in wine shop

Lucknow (PNS): A fire broke out in a wine shop located in the Chowk area at around 4 am on Tuesday. The fire was noticed by passersby who saw smoke billowing from the shop and immediately alerted the police.

Upon receiving the distress call, four fire engines from the Chowk fire station rushed to the scene and managed to bring the blaze under control. The fire was exacerbated when liquor bottles inside the shop cracked due to the heat, causing the flammable alcohol to spread the flames rapidly.

Firefighters worked for nearly an hour to contain the fire, preventing it from spreading to nearby shops. Had the fire not been controlled in time, it could have posed a serious threat to the surrounding business establishments.

The wine shop, located near Kamala Nehru Marg in Johri Mohalla, was filled with liquor bottles, which contributed to the intensity and speed of the fire. Police also arrived at the scene, and the cause of the fire is under investigation.

All schools in UP's NCR districts go online as pollution increases

Meerut (PTI): Schools in all eight districts of western Uttar Pradesh which are part of the National Capital Region (NCR) have been ordered to switch to online mode of classes in view of air pollution, officials said Tuesday. The districts where physical classes have been suspended are Meerut, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Baghpat, and Hapur (all six part of the Meerut Division) besides Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. The NCR comprises Delhi, 14 districts of Haryana, two districts of Rajasthan and eight of Uttar Pradesh. In UP it spans an area of 14,826 sq kilometres.

"All the schools in these districts have been directed by their administrations to switch to the online medium for classes because of the air pollution levels till further orders," Divisional Commissioner (Meerut) Selva Kumari J told PTI. "The suspension of physical classes can be extended depending on the weather conditions," the officer said. She said the guidelines of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) are also being implemented across the division. The GRAP is a comprehensive plan that outlines specific actions to be taken at different levels of air pollution, ranging from moderate to severe. These actions include measures like banning certain industrial activities, road rationing and traffic diversions for heavy vehicles, and controlling construction dust. The GRAP is invoked by Centre's Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in the NCR and adjoining areas. Depending on the air quality index and the guidelines categorised in GRAP, anti-pollution measures are being taken in these six districts accordingly," she added.

The DMs of all these districts have issued orders for suspension of physical classes and switching to online mode until further instructions.

Woman kidnaps 6-yr-old child of female partner

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident in the Para police station area, a woman allegedly kidnapped the 6-year-old daughter of her lesbian partner after becoming angry over the latter's decision to marry a man. The case has caused a stir in the community after the police successfully recovered the girl and arrested the accused, identified as Hasina from Jharkhand.

Hasina, who had been in a six-year-long relationship with her partner, reportedly kidnapped the child in an act of retaliation.

According to police, Hasina had moved to the city to work as a labourer and began living in the Para area, where she met her partner. The two formed a relationship, living together for several years. Their bond was not questioned by residents, as both women were seen together frequently without raising any suspicion.

The case came to light when Hasina's partner reported her 6-year-old daughter's sudden disappearance on Sunday morning. The girl, a resident of Ashrayeen Colony, had gone

to the shop to buy snacks at around 8:30 am but never returned.

After investigating the matter, the police received information from local residents who had seen the girl with Hasina.

The police traced the woman to her residence and arrested her on Monday morning. The child was safely recovered, and Hasina was taken into custody. During interrogation, Hasina confessed to kidnapping the child. She explained that she and the child's mother had been living together in a lesbian relationship for six years, with Hasina working to support the household while her partner took care of domestic duties. Hasina's partner had been previously married twice, while her own husband had abandoned her.

The two women had decided to live together after meeting. However, Hasina was angered when her partner recently informed her that she intended to marry a man.

Feeling betrayed, Hasina decided to kidnap the child in an attempt to force her partner to abandon the marriage plans. The police have now filed charges in the case, and the investigation is ongoing.

Redhakhol (ODISHA), DIST- SAMBALPUR

'e' Procurement NOTICE.

No. 2394 / NAC Dt. 11.2024
 Bid Identification No. RDL NAC-2/2024-25
 Tender ID- 2024_ORULB_107063

The Municipal Executive Officer on behalf of NAC Redhakhol invites tenders in Single Cover System. Bid documents consisting of specification the Schedule of Quantities and the set of terms and conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen the Govt. Website i.e. <https://tenders.odisha.gov.in>

1. Number of Civil works/Others : (20) numbers
 2. Estimated Costs : 0.84 lakhs to 109.41 lakhs
 3. Period of completion : As per NIT
 4. Date and time of availability of the bid documents in the portal : From 10.00 A.M. of 18.11.2024 to 04.00 PM of 02.12.2024
 5. Last Date/ Time for receipt of bids in the portal : 04.00 PM of 02.12.2024
 6. Bids will be opened on : 5.00 PM of Dt. 02.12.2024
 7. Name and address of the officer inviting bid: Executive Officer, NAC Redhakhol

Sd/-
 Executive Officer
 NAC Redhakhol

OIPR-13751100032425

2025 to be dedicated to unity, good governance, tribal pride: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday claimed that the year 2025 will be dedicated to Antyodaya to Sarvodaya, national unity, and good governance. He said that various events throughout the year would mark the 150th birth anniversary of Lord Birsa Munda and 'Iron Man' Sardar Patel, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's birth centenary, and 50 years of the Emergency. He also claimed that 2025 is the year to achieve the goal of 'zero poverty'.

The chief minister made these statements during a meeting with senior government officials on Tuesday to discuss upcoming programmes and provided necessary instructions for their implementation. He said that the year 2025 will be extremely significant. It would be celebrated as the Janjatiya Gaurav Varsh (Tribal Year) on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Birsa Munda, and it would also mark the 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Patel.

"We will celebrate the adoption of the Constitution and raise awareness about the completion of 50 years of the Emergency, the murder of democracy. The 300th birth anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar will also be observed this year. 2025 will also be the birth centenary year

of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and it will be the year to achieve the goal of zero poverty. The entire year will be dedicated to the themes of Antyodaya to Sarvodaya, national unity, and good governance. Various events will be organised throughout the year to commemorate these important occasions. The 'Amrit Mahotsav Year of the Constitution' will begin on November 26, 2024. To mark the occasion, the Preamble of the Constitution should be read, and an oath of allegiance to the Constitution should be taken across all government institutions, departments, offices, schools, and universities in Lucknow and other areas. Schools and colleges should organise activities like essay writing and debates. The Parliamentary Affairs department will act as the nodal department for this initiative. A detailed plan for year-long events should be released as soon as possible. Adityanath said that people from all over the world will visit the Prayagraj Kumbh," he elaborated, adding: "This is a great opportunity for the world to learn and understand India." A 'Constitution Gallery' based on the Indian Constitution should be set up at the Maha Kumbh 2025. This gallery will display discussions about the formation of the Constituent Assembly, the entire process of

drafting the Constitution, and related information through audio-visual presentations. The chief minister said that the double-engine government is working dedicatedly for the preservation of tribal culture and the welfare of tribal communities. A Tribal Museum has already been established in Imliya Koder, Balrampur, and two more museums are being set up by the Government of India. At the Maha Kumbh, a special gallery should be set up focusing on Birsa Munda, the tribal culture of the state, and the government's efforts in this regard, he added.

On the occasion of Atal's birth centenary, Atal Research Chairs and Good Governance Chairs should be established in universities. The Higher Education department should take the necessary actions for this, he added.

The Home department will serve as the nodal department for these activities. The 300th birth anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar should be celebrated on a large scale across the state, Yogi said, adding: "The new generation should be made aware of how Ahilyabai Ji revived Indian cultural consciousness during the time of invaders. Essay writing, debates, and seminars on Ahilyabai Ji's personality and achievements should also be organised in schools and colleges."

'India's first night safari in Lko in 2026'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the country's first night safari in Lucknow would become operational by December 2026. Chairing a high-level meeting at his official residence, the chief minister said that the safari, spread over 900 acres, would boast of a cafeteria, 7D theatre, auditorium, and ample parking space among other features.

"Lucknow's night safari will become a new destination for nature lovers globally," Yogi said, adding that the project is a major initiative of the state government and approval for its construction has been obtained from the Central Zoo Authority, New Delhi. After reviewing the presentation on the proposed Kukrail Night Safari Park and Zoo, he directed that both projects be completed by June 2026, according to an official statement.

He emphasised the need to develop a sustainable model for the economy of the night safari and zoo and instructed that 72 per cent of the area be developed with greenery and that the focus should be on solar



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath chairing a meeting with officials in Lucknow on Tuesday

energy projects. "Uttar Pradesh will gift the country its first night safari by December 2026. The construction of both the night and day safaris will take place in phases over 900 acres in Lucknow," the CM said, according to an official statement.

According to the statement, the night safari area will be developed with themed sections like Indian Walking Trail, Indian Foothill, Indian Wetland, Arid India and African Wetland. Tourists will be able to explore the night safari park via a 5.5 km

tramway and a 1.92 km pathway. The main attractions of the night safari will include the Asiatic lion, gharial, Bengal tiger, flying squirrel, leopard, hyena, and more, the statement said. A world-class wildlife hospital and rescue centre is also proposed as part of the

night safari project and 63 enclosures will be built in the zoo to be set up in the Kukrail forest area. Key attractions of the zoo will include sarus cranes, swamp deer, Himalayan bears, South African giraffes, African lions, and chimpanzees. The zoo will be developed with themed areas such as African Savanna, Incredible India, and Engineered Wetland, it stated. Yogi also expressed hope that once the project is complete, it will feature on the international tourism map, attracting foreign tourists as well. The project will also be connected to other tourist destinations in Lucknow. He instructed that the process of identifying animals, bringing them in, and setting up quarantine should begin immediately. The project will also include the development of an eco-tourism zone. He directed officials that proper arrangements be made for a quarantine centre, veterinary hospital, post-operation facilities, and an operation theatre. He also suggested that the 'Adventure Zone' should feature attractions like a zip line, Burma bridge, pedal boats, sky roller, and animal-themed kids' activities among others.

Industrial Corridor in Gkp to transform barren land into economic hub

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR

The barren land of Dhuriyapar in Gorakhpur is poised to transform into a thriving industrial hub. The proposed Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor, spanning 5,500 acres, is being developed into Purvanchal's largest industrial land bank. As part of this initiative, 500 acres of land across 17 villages have already been acquired. The corridor is envisioned as an electronics manufacturing cluster and a network for large-scale industries. Strategically connected to the Gorakhpur Link Expressway, it will also benefit from planned rail connectivity, positioning it as a key industrial hub in the region.

The Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority (GIDA) has expedited the procedural work to bring the Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor to life, in line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision. The first phase of this project will begin soon, with plans to acquire approximately 1,600 acres of land in the villages of Sakardeiya, Harpur, and Kashtakashi Nayak, of which 500 acres have already been acquired. The government has conceptualised the Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor as part of the Greater GIDA initiative, following the principle that

fertile lands yield crops, while barren lands should generate employment through industries. The 17 villages where land is being acquired largely consist of fallow, infertile land that was previously unproductive for farming. Now, this land is set to become a hub of industrial activity, bringing prosperity to farmers through significant monetary compensation. The corridor's blueprint has been finalised, inspired by the growing interest of domestic and international investors in Gorakhpur over the past seven years. Once approved by the government, the master plan will be implemented, turning barren land into a thriving industrial hub. Farmers will not only receive full value for their land but will also witness the barren fields transform into a source of employment and economic growth, symbolising the region's leap towards industrial development and prosperity. The industrial corridor is set to be developed in phases to become a major economic hub. As per the master plan, 32.04% of the area is designated for industrial use, 19.39% for residential purposes, 6.51% for public and semi-public (PSP) facilities, 4.21% for commercial activities, 15.70% for green and open spaces, 2.32% for mixed use, and 4.17% for transport infrastructure. GIDA Chief Executive Officer

(CEO) Anuj Malik stated that land acquisition for the project is progressing swiftly. "So far, 500 acres of land have been acquired, and efforts to secure the remaining parcels are ongoing," he said. Malik emphasised that once realised, the Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor will be a transformative project, positioning Dakshinanchal of Gorakhpur, including Dhuriyapar, as a key industrial hub. Previously considered a backward region, Dhuriyapar is now poised to be recognised as the gateway to Gorakhpur's new industrial frontier. With increasing interest from both domestic and international investors over the past seven years, the government is planning to incorporate Dhuriyapar into the Greater GIDA framework. This initiative will not only drive industrial growth but also create substantial employment opportunities, fostering economic prosperity and a brighter future for the region. The Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor is strategically located, offering excellent road and rail connectivity that will significantly benefit industries in the region. The area is directly connected to the Gorakhpur Link Expressway, ensuring seamless road transportation. Additionally, the proposed new rail line from Sahjanwa to Dohrihat will pass through

the corridor, making it a key logistical hub. To further support industrial operations, plans include provisions for separate railway sidings for large-scale industries. This will facilitate the efficient transportation of raw materials and finished goods, enhancing operational convenience and reducing costs. The Yogi government is taking significant steps to drive industrial development in Gorakhpur's Dakshinanchal region, particularly in Dhuriyapar. Part of the transformation has already begun, with Indian Oil setting up a compressed biogas plant in a section of the long-defunct sugar mill in Dhuriyapar. This initiative is just the beginning, as the proposed Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor is set to bring a complete makeover to the area. Once operational, the industrial corridor is expected to generate employment for over 10,000 people, creating a wave of economic activity. According to Malik, the Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor is already attracting substantial investments. The Adani Group and JK Group have each requested 65 and 50 acres of land, respectively, to establish cement factories within the Dhuriyapar Industrial Corridor. Additionally, several other industrial groups have expressed keen interest in investing in the area.

PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

In preparation for Maha Kumbh 2025, which is expected to draw over 45 crore devotees, a state-of-the-art control room is being constructed within the fair area to monitor and manage high-level meetings and coordinate strategies for the event. To be set up in seven days, the control room is being designed by a renowned Bollywood art director, known for his expertise in creating sets for major film productions. The control room will house teams of top officers, who will strategise and oversee all aspects of the event's operations. Mumbai-based art director and architect, Pawan Pandey, who is overseeing the project, has assured that the control room, equipped with special facilities, will be fully operational within just seven days. "The facility will enable swift monitoring of Maha Kumbh arrangements, ensuring a hassle-free experience for devotees from around the world and paving the way for a seamless and secure Maha Kumbh 2025," he stated. Additional Mela Adhikari Vivek Chaturvedi shared that the new control room for Maha Kumbh will host VIP meetings focused on essential arrangements for the devotees. The room will also include a conference hall and media blocks to ensure timely and accurate information reaches millions of people. Over 50 offi-

Control room to ensure seamless experience at Maha Kumbh 2025

Govt to hold conclave in Delhi

Lucknow (PNS): The Yogi Adityanath-led government has ramped up its efforts to ensure the success of the Maha Kumbh 2025. In a bid to elevate Uttar Pradesh's global standing, the event will not only celebrate the world's largest religious gathering but also position the state as a key player on the global tourism map. To showcase the cultural and spiritual heritage of Maha Kumbh, the Tourism department is organising a Maha Kumbh Conclave in New Delhi. This special event aims to engage dignitaries, VIPs, and international guests, inviting them to explore the essence of the Mahakumbh and the preparations underway

to host millions of devotees in 2025. The Mahakumbh Conclave will be held at a five-star hotel in Delhi, offering a unique experience for attendees. The event will provide an immersive journey into Uttar Pradesh's rich cultural offerings, the state's achievements under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and the vibrant folk art traditions that form an integral part of its cultural identity. The Mahakumbh is recognised as the largest religious and cultural gathering on Earth, drawing millions of pilgrims and visitors from across the world. As part of the lead-up to the grand event, the Uttar

Pradesh government is organising this immersive conclave to showcase the spiritual, cultural, and administrative prowess of the state. The conclave will feature several highlights, including 3D models and digital displays. Attendees will experience 3D models depicting iconic scenes such as the Triveni Sangam, Akshayvat, and Samudra Manthan—key elements of the Mahakumbh and Hindu mythology. Large LED screens will display animated stories about the Kumbh Mela, the lives of Naga Sadhus, and the ascetics of various Akharas, bringing the spiritual aspects of the festival to life.

4 students killed, another injured as bus hits bike

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Four students riding a bike were struck by a private bus, resulting in the deaths of three and leaving one seriously injured, in Jazampatti, located in the Magorra police station area of Mathura. The victims were students of Krishna Pyari Shukla College, and all were pursuing BSc in Agriculture. The students, who hailed from Bharatpur, were en route to their college when the accident occurred. According to police, the incident took place on Tuesday morning when the students were riding a bike near Jazampatti. The bus, coming from the opposite direction, collided with them, killing 20-year-old Ritesh, along with his colleagues Chetan and Mukul, all residents of Manpuria in Bayana, Bharatpur, on the spot. The fourth student, Ramkesh, sustained serious injuries and was rushed to the district hospital. His condition was deemed critical, and doctors referred him to Agra Medical College for further treatment. The bus driver fled the scene following the accident, and the police have since registered a case and launched a manhunt to apprehend him and seize the bus. The family of the deceased students arrived at the hospital and later visited the post-mortem house to identify the bodies. In another incident, a speeding car lost control and collided with a roadside tree, killing two youths and

leaving three others critically injured, in Bareilly's Devraniyan police station area on Tuesday. The five youths, all from Subhashnagar police station area, were on their way to Nanakmatta Gurudwara in Uttarakhand when the accident occurred. The car, travelling at high speed, crashed into a tree in the Devraniyan area, resulting in a devastating impact. Sunil Bajaj, a cycle trader, and Gaurav, a resident of Nekpur, died on the spot. Three others—Harpreet Singh Golu, the media in-charge of Subhashnagar Gurudwara, and his friends Aji and Prem Sahni—sustained injuries. Harpreet suffered a leg fracture, while the others are receiving treatment at a private medical college. The Devraniyan police have seized the vehicle and investigations are underway. Meanwhile, in a separate incident in Bareilly, a truck travelling from Shahjahanpur to Haryana collided with a stationary truck near the Bilwa Bridge in Bhojipura, resulting in the death of the truck driver and serious injuries to his helper. The deceased was identified as 28-year-old Ismail, a resident of Umdasar village in Shahjahanpur. He was driving the truck when it crashed into a parked truck on the highway. Ismail died instantly. His helper, who was seriously injured, was rushed to a private hospital for treatment. The police arrived at the scene, sent the body for post-mortem, while investigations are ongoing.

Trophy, mascot of school athletics event unveiled

Lucknow (PNS): State capital Lucknow is set to host a spectacular showcase of sporting talent as the 68th National School Athletics Under-17 Championship 2024 takes place from November 26 to 30. Organised by the Uttar Pradesh government, this event promises to be a major platform for discovering and nurturing young athletes from across the country. The Guru Gobind Singh Sports Complex will host this Mahakumbh of sports, bringing together skilled athletes from across India. In a ceremony held at Lok Bhavan on Tuesday, the championship's trophy and official mascot, 'Singha', were unveiled, marking the beginning of this highly anticipated event. Additional Chief Secretary (Secondary Education, Finance, and Home) Deepak Kumar said that the event would stand out for its exceptional planning and international standards. "The state has launched initiatives like the 'Sports for School' programme to boost the sports culture and is leveraging CSR funds and foreign expertise to provide coaching to budding athletes. "The championship will feature world-class equipment, and participating players from all states and union territories will enjoy top-tier facilities, including accommodation, meals, and transportation. As honoured guests, they will also receive gifts and tours of Uttar Pradesh's

iconic attractions, making this event an unforgettable experience for athletes from the state and beyond," Kumar said. The games will be conducted with complete transparency, ensuring winners are honoured purely on merit, he added. Kumar highlighted that 'Singha', inspired by the state's symbol 'Barasingha', represents the spirit of these games. Winners will be felicitated by legendary athletes, and the events will be live-streamed on YouTube for a wider audience. The 'Sports for School' programme has already engaged over 2.38 lakh students across Uttar Pradesh, including 18,500 from basic education, 12,000 from secondary education, and 2.08 lakh students from Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas in 733 schools. As part of this initiative, children are being encouraged to participate in sports with access to uniforms, equipment, proper coaching, and well-maintained grounds. Focus is also placed on training sports-oriented youth and teachers to enhance coaching standards. CSR initiatives are playing a pivotal role in nurturing talent, with support from international institutions, including agencies from Denmark and Sweden, to provide advanced football training. Promising young athletes are also receiving sponsorship and resources to help them excel.

Jilted lover shoots dead newly married woman, kills self

Lucknow (PNS): A jilted lover allegedly shot dead a newly married woman before taking his own life, in the Madafarpur market area under the Kodur police station in Pratapgarh early on Tuesday morning, police said. The woman, married just four days ago, had returned to her maternal home from her in-laws' house on Monday night, they said. As per reports, Jyoti Verma (22), a resident of Madafarpur market, had returned to her maternal home on Monday evening. As she stepped outside for some chores on Tuesday morning, the accused, who had been waiting for her, opened fire on her before fleeing the scene. Hearing the gunshot, her family members rushed outside to find her lying in a pool of blood. She was taken to a nearby hospital, and the local police were informed. However, she was pronounced dead upon arrival. The police identified the accused as Udayraj Verma (26), who was a resident of Pipri Khalsa in the Dilippur police station area of Pratapgarh. Local residents claimed that

Udayraj had been harassing Jyoti for several months, attempting to force her into marriage. Despite efforts by her family to resolve the matter, Udayraj persisted, prompting the family to marry her to another man just four days earlier. Enraged by this, Udayraj waited for Jyoti's return. Upon learning that she had come back to her maternal home on Monday night, he lay in wait for her. On Tuesday morning, as soon as he saw her, he shot her dead. After launching a manhunt for the accused, the police were stunned to discover his body just a few metres from Jyoti's house. It was revealed that after killing her, Udayraj had fled and later turned the gun on himself. A pistol, believed to be the weapon used in both shootings, was recovered near his body. Both bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination. Superintendent of Police Dr Anil Kumar visited the scene and confirmed that a case has been registered based on the family's complaint. He assured that all necessary legal actions are being taken.

AAP flays govt over fertilizer shortage

Lucknow (PNS): Aam Aadmi Party MP Sanjay Singh on Tuesday criticised the Yogi Adityanath government over the acute shortage of DAP (Diammonium Phosphate) and other fertilizers in Uttar Pradesh, accusing the government of neglecting farmers. Singh pointed out that while the ruling BJP spreads divisive slogans like "batenge to katenge" in other states, it fails to provide basic agricultural support in UP. He stated, "Farmers in UP are suffering from a severe shortage of fertilizers, and the government is doing nothing to address this crisis." Singh warned voters in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, where similar political rhetoric has been used, that electing such a government would result in dire consequences for farmers. He said, "If you elect them, you will be left struggling for every sack of fertilizer, just as farmers in Uttar Pradesh are now." He also highlighted the significant rise in fertilizer prices, which has made it even harder for farmers to access the supplies they need for their crops. Singh described the situation as a "gross failure" of the government, which has led to growing frustration among the farming community.

Sisamau bypoll: 275 parties leave for 48 polling centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR
For the peaceful and fair conduct of Sisamau assembly bypoll, 275 polling parties on Tuesday afternoon proceeded from Naubasta Galla Mandi for the 48 polling centres. One polling party consists of a presiding officer and three

polling officers. For counting of the votes, 27 tables have been arranged at the Naubasta Galla Mandi. Besides, nine field support teams were maintaining strict vigil on the movement of cash carrying vehicles and other systems in the city. It may be recalled that there are six candidates in the fray of Sisamau assembly constitu-

435 booths set up in Phulpur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A by-election will be held on the Phulpur assembly seat of Prayagraj on Wednesday. Apart from Bharatiya Janata Party's Deepak Patel and Samajwadi Party's Mujtaba Siddiqui, 12 candidates are in the fray. The polling parties reached their respective polling stations from Mundera Mandi on Tuesday. A total of 435 booths have been set up in the Phulpur assembly constituency where voting is to be held. Voting will be held from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm while the counting of votes will be held in Mundera Mandi on November 23. District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Mander has given clear instructions that there

will be a complete ban on carrying mobile phones to the booth, whether agents or voters will not be able to go inside with mobile phones. As many 1,740 polling personnel have been deployed for voting. Twelve highly sensitive booths have been made, which will be kept under special surveillance. Besides 10 model booths and one pink booth have been made. The district magistrate has also appealed to all voters of Phulpur assembly constituency to ensure their participation in this great festival of democracy by voting as much as possible in the 256-Phulpur Assembly by-election. Besides, necessary arrangements for voting have been made available at all booths.



all arrangements for the electricity, water, toilets and sanitation had been made at the Naubasta Galla Mandi. Polling parties had proceeded to their destination in time, he said. There were 271042 voters in the assembly, including 4921 first time voters. As many as 546 voters were above 90 years age, he informed.

INDIRA MARATHON

Yogesh & Sonika bag 1st position



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Yogesh of Hyderabad won the 39th All India Prize Money Indira Marathon Competition by bagging the first position in men's category. Kuldeep Singh of Bhadohi stood second and Nishant of Ghaziabad stood third. In the women's category, Sonika Agarwal of Haryana secured the first position in the marathon competition. Reenu Sindhu of Haryana stood second and Seema of Delhi stood third. The runners started the 42.2 kilometres race from Anand



Bhawan and reached Dandupur Bharat Petrol Pump via Swaraj Bhawan, Allahabad University, NCC Head Quarter, Maharishi Patanjali, Myohal Crossing, Dhobi Ghat Crossing, DIG Office Crossing, AG office crossing, Polo Ground crossing, Allahabad High Court, Hanuman Mandir Crossing, Medical Crossing, CMP Dot-pul, Bairhana, Naya Pul, Dandi and Chaka blocks. Then coming back from the same route, they ended their race at the finishing line built in Madan Mohan Malviya Stadium. Traffic was stopped on the marathon route. Flowers were showered on the runners of Indira Marathon at many places on the way. People cheered them by clapping. Divisional Commissioner of Prayagraj Vijay Vishwas Pant flagged it off at 6:30 am which ended after reaching Madan Mohan Malviya Stadium. A total of 290 runners participated in it. Army runners also took part in it. Kumari Reenu, the winner of Indira Marathon in 2023, also participated in it. Yogesh Sharma in the men's category and Sonika in the women's category stood first. At the same time, last time's

winner Reenu has secured second place this time. According to the organisers, 228 male and 60 female runners were included in the Indira Marathon. Apart from these, many other runners including Nadeem, Yogesh have entered the Indira Marathon. The winning players of Indira Marathon (men, women) was given first prize of ₹2 lakh, second prize of ₹1 lakh and third prize of ₹75,000. Apart from this, 11 consolation prizes of ₹10,000 per player was given in the women and men's categories totalling ₹9 lakh.

High-risk balloon pulmonary valvuloplasty performed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A successful high-risk balloon pulmonary valvuloplasty was performed on a 10-year-old girl with severe pulmonary stenosis in the Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) by a team of Department of Cardiology, Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) on Monday. The procedure was carried out by a team comprising Dr Dharmendra Jain, Dr Pratibha Rai, Dr Srasthi and Dr Arjun. The procedure was done under CM/PM fund relief. The case was particularly challenging due to the patient's critical condition, with oxygen saturation at 80 per cent and severe right ventricular dysfunction.

Post-procedure, the patient is stable and will be discharged after two days. After the joining of Dr Pratibha Rai (Pediatric cardiologist) from the past month, the Department of Cardiology has treated approximately 10 patients with congenital heart diseases. Head of the Department Prof Vikas Agrawal praised the team's efforts and announced that paediatric cardiology procedures will now be regularly available at IMS-BHU. Prof Siddharth Lakhotia, Head, Cardiac Surgery has expressed great happiness over the start of this much-needed facility. He said that children who earlier required open heart surgery for their defects in heart, can now be treated without any incision.

DM: Complete construction work by Dec

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Varanasi (PNS): Under the chairmanship of District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam, the construction works approved and being done in Varanasi district in the year 2023-24 under the MP Local Area Development Scheme were reviewed in the Collectorate Auditorium here on Monday. The DM, while instructing the officials of all the implementing agencies to complete the construction works with quality, said that whatever construction work is still incomplete, it should be completed by December. Under the MP Local Area Development Scheme, CC road, road interlocking, drains, tracks, ghats, libraries and other construction works are being done. Out of the total 715 projects approved under the scheme, work on 682 projects has been completed. CDO Himanshu Nagpal, Project Director and Assistant Engineer of DRDA, Executive Engineer of Rural Engineering department and other officers were present in the meeting.

New Kanpur City project: Farmers agree to sell about 2.1 hectares of land



KDA Secretary Abhay Kumar Pandey addressing the farmers.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Around 18 farmers have given consent to sell their about 2.1 hectares of land for the proposed New Kanpur City project at a meeting held at the Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) conference hall on Monday. The meeting was addressed by the Secretary Abhay Kumar Pandey and OSD/SDM Dr Ravi Pratap Singh. Farmers from Singhpur, Gangpur Chakbada, Hindupur and Sambharpur were present at the meeting.

OSD/SDM Dr Ravi Pratap Singh informed that farmers/builders who were hitherto not agreeable to sell their land had also given their consent after convincing them. Other unwilling farmers were given three days' time to confirm the sale of their land to KDA as, thereafter, the process for acquisition of their land would start under section 4 of rule 2016, and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013.

MLA inaugurates lab at PHC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Pindra MLA Dr Awadhesh Singh inaugurated the modern lab at the Primary Health Centre (PHC) Baragaon here on Tuesday. He himself got blood tested in the lab and directed that the testing services should continue so that the local people do not face any kind of problem. On this occasion, a mega camp was also organised to make Ayushman cards for people above 70 years of age. Ayushman cards were also distributed to the elderly people who came to the camp. He said that under this scheme, the elderly will be able to avail the facility of free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh by getting admitted to any registered hospital. He motivated the people present to make Ayushman cards themselves and appealed that the beneficiaries should make their Ayushman cards themselves from the mobile. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said that such camps will continue to be organised in the coming days, so that maximum number of elderly people can get



Pindra MLA Dr Awadhesh Singh inaugurating modern lab at PHC Badagaon in Varanasi on Tuesday.

benefit. He said that Android mobile users will be able to download this app from Play Store and iPhone users will be able to open it from HSTP site. Apart from this, such elderly people can now get their Ayushman card made through self-registration from Ayushman App or from Ayushman Mitras or

Panchayat Sahayaks in Jan Seva Kendras, Panchayat Secretariats or through CHOs, Kotdars and ASHA workers in Ayushman Arogya Mandirs. On the occasion Medical Officer in charge Dr Sher Mohammad, Dr Alok Singh and Senior Lab Technician KK Yadav, other employees and dignitaries were also present.

PMG: Buddha's principles can be adopted in all aspects of life



PMG Col Vinod Kumar releasing a special cover on Buddha at Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies Sarnath in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Postmaster General (PMG), Varanasi Region, Col Vinod Kumar released a special cover and cancellation on Dharmachakrapravartana Mudra of Buddha at a programme organised at Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS), Sarnath here on Monday. Addressing the programme, Col Vinod said the principles of Buddha can be adopted in all aspects of life. He said even in this age of science the middle path is relevant like excessive use of mobile causes mental and physical weakness but with decisive use, man acquires an infinite store of knowledge. He inspired the new generation to adopt the Buddha's middle path and orient themselves towards all-round development. He said it is our primary responsibility to pass on our knowledge to the next generation so that they can also become knowledge-oriented. The PMG appealed to the students of Gyan Dharma Chakra Vihar Inter College and CIHTS present in the programme to read good books and learn something new. He further said that India is known on the world stage as the country of Buddha. In fact, Buddha is the identity of India. Vice-Chancellor of CIHTS Prof

Wangchuk Dorjee Negi inspired everyone to dedicate themselves to the path shown by Buddha in their daily lives and stressed on attaining Nirvana that is rising above passion, hatred and attachment and acquiring the knowledge of Buddha's form. Eminent Hindi poetess and President's Award winner Dr Neerja Madhav said renunciation is the true beauty of life. Buddha has told humans to follow the middle path, away from excessive greed and luxury and extreme hard penance. Dr K Siri Sumedha Thero, Viharadhipati of Jambudweep Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, Sarnath, expressed his gratitude to the Postal department for issuing a special cover and cancellation on the Dharmachakrapravartana Mudra of Buddha. He called this day a holy day for the world, India, Sarnath and Buddhism. Assistant Superintendent and Archaeologist of ASI, Sarnath, Rajesh and Senior Superintendent of Post Office (Varanasi East Division) Rajiv Kumar, Assistant Directors Bhola Sah and MM Hussain, Senior Postmaster Rajiv and Assistant Superintendent Pallavi, Postal Inspector Aniket Ranjan were present in the programme.

1st successful embryo transfer of Sahiwal breed in BHU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The project running under Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) aims to conserve the elite indigenous cattle breeds, namely Gangatiri and Sahiwal, using assisted reproductive technologies (ART), including embryo transfer and surrogacy. This initiative is being carried out at the Faculty of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (FVAS), Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Rajiv Gandhi South Campus (RGSC), Banaras Hindu University (BHU), located in Barkachha (Mirzapur). A female Sahiwal calf from this initiative was born on Tuesday, marking a significant achievement in the project. This is the first successful embryo transfer of the Sahiwal breed at BHU, contributing to the conservation efforts of this valuable indigenous breed. The Sahiwal cow was inseminated with semen from a bull with a good pedigree, ensuring the transfer of high-quality genetic material. On February 25 last the embryos were successfully recov-

ered, with eight high-quality embryos of various stages (compact morula, early blastocyst, and expanded blastocyst) being obtained. These embryos were then transferred into synchronised surrogate cows. This work was carried out by a team of FVAS headed by Dr Manish Kumar (Principal Investigator) and Co-PI, Dr Kaustubh Kishor Saraf and Dr Ajeet Singh. Calf born is healthy and weighing 19.5 kg and dam is also healthy. PI Dr Manish Kumar and team planning to adopt newer, more advanced techniques like OPU-IVF-ET in the coming years with the support of the university, to further improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the assisted reproductive technologies. The success of this project to conserve the indigenous breed of cow will play a key role in the uplift of the economic status of the farmers of Vindhyan region. On this milestone achievement, Prof SVS Raju, Director of the Institute, Prof NK Singh Dean of the Faculty and Prof Amit Raj Gupta, Head In-Charge of the department congratulated the project team.

Railway employees awarded

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

During the weekly safety and punctuality review meeting on Tuesday, General Manager, North Central Railway (NCR), Upendra Chandra Joshi conferred awards to staff for their alertness and contribution towards safety in train operations in the presence of its PHODs. On the occasion six railway employees were conferred safety awards by the general manager. Besides, Principal Chief Tripnet Officer (PCPO), NCR, Anurag Tripathi, presented the certificate for first position secured by North Central Railway in the training programme from October 19 to 27 under National Learning Week amongst the Central government and state government offices of the entire nation to General Manager Upendra Chandra Joshi. It may be mentioned here that on November 14, Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension, Jitendra Singh on behalf of the Government of India, presented a certificate of commendation to PCPO Anurag Tripathi at a function organised at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. The awarded employees during the meeting include Gaurav Kumar, Station Master,



Sakteshgarh, Prayagraj division, Karan Kumar, train manager, New Kanpur/Prayagraj division, Manjeet Kumar Pandey, Station Master, Vindhychal/Prayagraj division, Sanjay Kumar, Trackman, Chitrakoot Dham Karvi/Jhansi division, Dhananjay Kumar, Track Maintainer, Agra Fort/Agra division, Jagdish and track maintainer, Kosi Kalan/Agra division, Track maintainer, Kosikalan/Agra division Jagdish, was conferred the Employee of the Month Award for October.

Dr Mudgal: Cornerstone of achieving green mobility lies with road users

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Climate Agenda, through its flagship initiative Harit Safar, hosted a Regional Convention on 'Decarbonising Urban Mobility: Collaborating for a Sustainable and Inclusive Future' and announced the Sustainable Urban Mobility Collective (SUMC) in Varanasi here on Tuesday. The launch of the SUMC marked a significant step toward fostering regional collaboration on urban mobility challenges in the Indo-Gangetic Plain. This region, heavily burdened by air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, urgently requires coordinated action. During the launch of SUMC, Founding Director of Climate Agenda Ekta Shekhar emphasised, "Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh hold immense potential to drive India's net-zero ambitions and meet the goals of the National Clean Air Programme. Cities in these states stand at a pivotal juncture where embracing clean urban mobility solutions can significantly curb urban emissions, transforming them into cleaner, healthier spaces for their residents. SUMC will be instrumental in advancing the electrification of public transportation, driving cross-sector collaboration and facilitating the shift toward cleaner and more sustainable urban mobility solutions." She further iterated, "While state and central governments are making commendable efforts, localised, evidence-based decision-making remains insufficient. Additionally, a holistic approach—integrating diverse modes of transport and



Regional convention on decarbonising urban mobility being held in Varanasi on Tuesday.

embedding inclusivity principles into transport infrastructure—is crucial for reimagining urban mobility effectively." Assistant Professor, IIT(BHU) Dr Abhisek Mudgal in a panel discussion, accentuated: "The cornerstone of achieving green mobility lies with road users. By embracing safe, eco-friendly and sustainable transportation practices, the path to decarbonisation becomes attainable. It is imperative to think globally while acting locally, as the onus of driving the sustainable transportation movement rests significantly on individuals." He further added, "Although numerous sustainable solutions exist, their success hinges on user commitment. Carbon dioxide remains a leading contributor to air pollution and mindful vehicle usage is essential to curb emissions. Factors such as ageing vehicles, reckless driving and traffic congestion exacerbate air quality issues. By adopting responsible driving habits and prioritising sustainability, road users can play a pivotal role in reducing environmental impact and fostering a cleaner, greener future." Chinatan Daftardar, Programme Head-Transport, WRI, in a panel discussion, highlighted: "The root of the problem lies in how we utilise vehicles. When fewer people occupy larger vehicular space on roads, pollution increases signif-

icantly. Opting for public transportation is crucial as its per-person emissions are considerably lower than private vehicles. Judicious vehicle usage can, therefore, play a pivotal role in tackling air pollution." He said: "Moreover, our road infrastructure is often poorly utilised. While footpaths cater to many pedestrians, they remain insufficient and roads fail to support sustainable practices like cycling for last-mile connectivity. A balanced approach to road design is essential, prioritising inclusive infrastructure that supports walking, cycling and public transportation." Rajendra Ravi, Founding Member, People's Resource Centre and Member of SUM Net India, in a panel discussion, underlined: "Infrastructure should be developed to meet the needs of people, not simply accommodate vehicles. The core issue lies with the decision-makers. Today, road designs prioritise large vehicles, a strategy that is neither sustainable nor practical." He cited an example: "Take Varanasi, for instance, where the roads were once designed to cater to rickshaws, but these workers are now nearly invisible. We are restricting the use of green transportation options like bicycles and tricycles, even though our roads are unsafe for such riders." Furthermore, he cited: "If we look at census data from six decades ago, we see that Delhi's roads were predominantly designed for cyclists, with vehicles accounting for only 11-12 per cent of road use. Today, this has been entirely reversed. To combat air pollution and mitigate the effects of climate change, we must embrace multi-modal and inclusive transportation systems."

Modi pays tributes to former PM Indira Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to former prime minister Indira Gandhi on her birth anniversary on Tuesday. Born on November 19, 1917, Indira Gandhi served as the prime minister from 1966 to 1977 and then again from 1980 until her assassination on October 31, 1984. "Tributes to our former Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi Ji on her birth anniversary," Modi said in a social media post. The Congress paid rich tributes to the former prime minister with Rahul Gandhi saying that it is from his grandmother that he learnt that real strength is to fearlessly walk on the path of national interest. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and



Rahul Gandhi paid floral tributes to Indira Gandhi at her memorial 'Shakti Sthal' here. Rahul Gandhi also paid floral tributes at the Indira Gandhi Memorial at 1, Safdarjung Road. Sharing a quote by Indira Gandhi in a social media post, Kharge said crores of Indians shall continue to draw inspiration from the life of the 'Iron Lady of India' for she was the epitome of lifelong

struggle, courage and dynamism leadership who selflessly contributed to nation building. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "My grandmother, Indira Gandhi ji always started her election campaign from Nandurbar in Maharashtra. She believed that the culture of the tribal society is the best and unique because it respects and protects nature."

Congress writes to President over deteriorating situation in Manipur

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Tuesday wrote to President Droupadi Murmu over the deteriorating situation in Manipur and has urged her immediate intervention to ensure that people of the state live peacefully in their homes with dignity. In his two-page letter to the President, party chief Mallikarjun Kharge highlighted the "failure" of the Manipur government and the Centre in ensuring law and order and the safety of people in Manipur for the last 18 months. Congress also took a swipe at the BJP over some MLAs of the ruling NDA skipping a meeting called by Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh, saying the writing on the wall is clear and asked whether Home Minister Amit Shah is reading it. Congress general secretary incharge communications Jairam Ramesh also asked how long will the



"excruciating agony" of the people of Manipur continue like this. Kharge said the violence in Manipur has taken more than 300 human lives, including women, children and even small babies. He said the "deteriorating law and order in Manipur has internally displaced nearly a lakh of human population rendering them homeless and forcing them to live in different relief camps". The agony of the people continues unabated, he said. "I consider that it has become constitutionally imperative on the part of yourself, Hon'ble

Madam, as the President of the Republic of India and the custodian of our Constitution to uphold the constitutional propriety and immediately intervene to ensure the protection of lives and properties of our own citizens in Manipur, as enshrined in the Constitution. "I am confident that, through your intervention of your esteemed Office, the people of Manipur will again live peacefully in their homes in security with dignity," Kharge wrote to the President. Later in the day Ramesh along with Manipur Congress chief K Meghachandra Singh, AICC in-charge of state Girish Chodankar, Inner Manipur MP A Bimol Ajojiam and former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Nabam Tuki met Kharge, apprising him of the situation in the violence-hit state and deliberated on ways to bring peace in the state. Ramesh said INDIA bloc would raise the issue in Parliament and take up this matter collectively.

ICG conducts 136th meet of Offshore Security Coordination Committee



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

All aspects of offshore security were reviewed on Tuesday during the 136th meeting of the Offshore Security Coordination Committee (OSCC) in Hyderabad, Indian Coast Guard (ICG) said here. Giving details, officials said ICG chief S Paramesh chaired the meeting which took stock of the preparedness and effectiveness of the security of India's offshore installations. The meeting was attended by members and participants from concerned ministries and agencies including

Indian Coast Guard, Indian Navy, IAF, ONGC, DGH, and DG Shipping. Addressing the committee, the ICG chief underlined the importance of energy security, and thus insisted on taking all possible measures to ensure security of the offshore assets. The Offshore Security Coordination Committee was constituted in 1978 to ensure effective functioning of offshore security arrangements. The committee has since then contributed effectively in framing policies and providing guidance and resolution to related issues.

Indian Navy rescues woman who suffered grievous injury

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A woman, who suffered a grievous injury after a speedboat collision in Mahanadi river near the Bali Yatra maritime trade fair ground in Odisha, has been rescued from the waters, the Navy said here on Tuesday. The Yatra celebrates the rich maritime history of Odisha. "While conducting reconnaissance for Bali Yatra 2024 preparations, the diving team, deployed by the Eastern Naval Command, observed the accident and promptly intervened," a spokesperson of the Navy said. The injured woman was rescued from the waters and carried over a kilometer to the nearest police help center using the 'buddy carry' technique. In armed forces parlance, a 'buddy carry' technique refers to a personnel carrying someone on his back in case of need. "With no ambulance available,

the team further transported her to SCB Medical College and Hospital, Cuttack, in an autorickshaw, ensuring she received timely medical care," the statement added. This timely rescue and subsequent action towards ensuring timely medical attention reflects the dedication and unwavering commitment of the Indian Navy towards service and public welfare, the naval force said. The week-long Bali Yatra festival started on November 15 and will continue till November 22 at Cuttack. "Bali Jatra (Voyage to Bali) celebrates the rich maritime history of Odisha and commemorates India's historical and civilisational links with Southeast Asia and wider Indo-Pacific that have evolved through the maritime journeys undertaken by the Indian seafarers over thousands of years," according to a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs on November 15.

Ceremony organised at Akashwani Rang Bhawan in remembrance of Debroy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A solemn ceremony was organized at Akashwani Rang Bhawan on Monday evening to remember the life and work of Padma Shri Bibek Debroy, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM), who passed on the November 1. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Dr P. K. Mishra remembered his old days while working with him on policies, discussing various issues of economy and how they could be addressed. The ceremony, drew wide participation from eminent economists, Sanskrit scholars, colleagues and public policy theorists and practitioners alike. Speaking at the function, Mishra said that Debroy was a formidable personality whose intellectual pursuits ranged from economic to Sanskrit literature to history and so on. He also mentioned that Debroy was always polite and very



understanding during his interactions with him when the latter was a member of the DPIO and subsequently chairman of the PM's Economic Advisory Council. Speaking on the occasion, Member (EAC-PM), Dr. Shamika Ravi noted that Bibek Debroy was like a mentor and a guide who always encouraged exploring new dimensions of work. Sanjiv Sanyal, Member (EAC-PM) fondly recalled his long conversations with Debroy and how he always supported independent thinking.

Recalling his impressive body of work on English translations of various Sanskrit epics, Prof. Shrinivasa Varakhedi, Vice Chancellor, Central Sanskrit University, informed that Debroy was the second person to translate the Ramayana and the Mahabharata from their original Sanskrit texts. Eminent economist, Dr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, spoke about the rich and varied legacy that Debroy leaves behind - whether it is his policy work or his work on the epics.

Indian Army successfully conducts HADR Exercise Sanyukt Vimochan 2024

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Army successfully conducted the Multilateral Annual Joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise, 'Sanyukt Vimochan 2024' at Ahmedabad and Porbandar on November 18-19. Army chief General Uday Shankar Dwivedi attended this significant event which showcased India's disaster response readiness. The inaugural event of the exercise at Ahmedabad featured a Table Top Exercise, focusing on the theme of 'Cyclone in Coastal Region of Gujarat,' army said here on Tuesday. Representatives from National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA), Meteorological Department and FICCI attended the event along with Indian Armed Forces officials.



The second day witnessed Multi-Agency Capability Demonstration held at Chowpatty Beach at Porbandar. The Multi-Agency Capability Demonstration featured various agencies practicing coordinated logistics, rapid response and effective disaster management strategies in a simulated cyclone scenario. This event highlighted the collaborative efforts of the Indian Army, Indian Navy, Indian Air Force, Indian Coast Guard, National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force and other Central and

State Agencies in addressing natural disasters. The demonstration started with Requisition for the Armed Forces from civil administration. Multi Agency reconnaissance surveillance was carried out of the affected area, post which personnel were inserted for carrying out rescue operations. Casualty evacuation was demonstrated with assistance from the assets fielded during the exercise. The demonstration culminated with 'Resuscitation and Rehabilitation' of affected citizens.

NABH inks pact with RSSDI to advance diabetes care in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH), a constituent body of Quality Council of India (QCI), on Tuesday inked a pact with the Research Society for the Study of Diabetes in India (RSSDI), to advance quality and consistency of diabetes care in India through the use of robust clinical and digital health standards. RSSDI is India's largest professional body representing over 12,000 diabetes care providers across the country.

According to a statement from the Government, the MoU will leverage the distinctive capabilities of NABH to drive national quality certification and accreditation programs and RSSDI's expertise in developing best practice clinical guidelines for diabetes management and research. "Accredited diabetes clinics will maintain high standards of care for diabetes treatment which also involves education, research, and guideline-directed care programs. These clinics will blend modern technology with personal care delivered by trained teams ensuring patients meet their



recommended target goals," as per the statement here. Under the MoU, NABH and RSSDI will collaborate closely to enhance NABH's Accreditation Standards for Allopathic Clinics for specific needs of diabetes care, and develop digital health standards for Clinic Management Systems (CMS) for better management of diabetes care. The RSSDI will actively promote certification of NABH's Allopathic Clinic Accreditation Standards across its member base, resulting in better and standardised diabetes care across the country, and help in

decreasing morbidity and complications resulting from diabetes. Emphasizing the need for quality at the foundational level, Rizwan Koita, Chairperson of NABH said, "Diabetes impacts over 250 million people across India, and better management of diabetes is critical for the overall healthcare ecosystem. NABH can play a key role in driving standardised care and evidence-based guidelines for diabetes management. We are also excited to roll-out digital health standards for clinics, which will enable use of the latest technologies by both doctors and patients."

Study links maternal exposure to chemicals in lotions, shampoos with asthma in kids



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

If you're pregnant or know someone who will be a mom and uses personal care products or cleansing items, it's important to be cautious. A recent study from Kumamoto University suggests that exposure to chemicals commonly found in items like lotions and shampoos, such as butylparaben, may increase the risk of asthma in your child. Analysing data from over 3,500 mother-child pairs, the research revealed that high levels of butylparaben and 4-nonylphenol—chemicals found in personal care and cleaning products—were associated with higher odds of asthma development. The research, thus highlights the need for pregnant women to be aware of potential chemical exposures given their impact on both maternal and child health. Notably, the effect of 4-nonylphenol was gender-specific, significantly affecting boys but not girls. "Boys born to mothers exposed to this chemical had 2.09 times higher odds of developing asthma, while no such association were observed in girls," said the study. The researchers have called for better understanding and regulation of chemical exposures during pregnancy to protect maternal and child health. Phenols, including parabens and alkylphenols, are widely used in consumer products

for their preservative and antimicrobial properties, noted the study. While their use is considered safe in small amounts, their potential as endocrine disruptors raises concerns about long-term health effects, such as the recent increase in allergic diseases such as asthma, particularly during sensitive periods like pregnancy. Led by Dr Shohei Kuraoka and his team at Southern Kyushu and Okinawa Unit Center of Japan Environment and Children's Study, researchers measured 24 types of phenols in urine samples collected from pregnant women. They then tracked the health of their children until the age of four. The findings highlight the importance of understanding how everyday chemical exposures might contribute to respiratory and allergic conditions in children. The study has shown implications on the health. "These results emphasise the need for careful evaluation of chemical exposure during pregnancy," said Dr Kuraoka. "Understanding these risks allows us to develop better guidelines to protect maternal and child health." While the study provides groundbreaking insights, the researchers acknowledged limitations, such as not measuring phenol levels in children directly. They said that future studies will aim to explore these mechanisms further and establish safe exposure thresholds.

Health Ministry joins hands with John Hopkins University to end TB among children below 15 years of age in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As India aims to eliminate TB by 2025, five years ahead of the global target, the Union Health Ministry and Johns Hopkins University have joined hands, accelerating efforts to end the infectious disease particularly among kids below 15 years old in the country. Johns Hopkins researchers launched the TB-Free Schools Initiative to address the increasing number of TB cases reported among children younger than 15 years in the country. The initiative, also in collaboration with the Serum Institute of India and AIIMS Gorakhpur, is based on the success of a cost-effective project in Himachal Pradesh. The pilot showed an 87 per cent reduction in TB cases in residential schools. The initiative will be rolled out to Pune and Satara in Maharashtra, Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, and Chennai in Tamil Nadu. It will focus on preventing, diagnosing, and treating active and latent cases of TB



among students. It will also provide linkage to care, education, and counselling. "Addressing childhood TB is critical for eliminating tuberculosis in India," said Dr. Urvashi B. Singh, Deputy Director General, Central Tuberculosis Division, Union Health Ministry. She noted that the initiatives will provide "cost-effective screening methods that can be deployed in schools nationwide". In addition, the JHU also launched an initiative to promote gender equality in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics,

and medicine in India. The initiative in partnership with the US Department of State will train and mentor 40 early-career women for senior roles in its pilot edition. "India is a place of tremendous talent and opportunity, and Johns Hopkins values its enduring collaborations in India and their impact. We are excited to launch these two initiatives that reflect our shared commitment to innovation and human flourishing," said Ronald J. Daniels, President, Johns Hopkins University. India has one of the largest populations of children under

15 in the world, and childhood TB accounts for an estimated 10% of all TB cases in the country. However, only 6% of reported TB cases are among children, according to the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP). According to the reports, children are particularly vulnerable to TB, with young children at higher risk of severe disease. It remains the leading cause of infectious disease death among children globally. In India, the case fatality rate for children under five with TB is 43%. Many childhood TB cases go unreported, especially since a significant number are diagnosed and treated by private practitioners, who often do not report cases to the government program. This lack of data makes it difficult to accurately assess the true burden of childhood TB in India, say health experts. The widespread pollution in many Indian cities further exacerbates the risk, as TB is an airborne disease, and poor air quality can increase exposure to the bacteria.

Rajnath Singh addresses Air Force Commanders' conference



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday here and exhorted IAF Commanders and senior officials of the Ministry of Defence to look at means to make the process of capability and capacity building more efficient and effective, in keeping with our national aims and aspirations. He made these assertions in his address at the ongoing Air Force Commanders' conference. The defence minister also commended the force for its dedication and professionalism in safeguarding the nation's sovereignty. He expressed confidence in the IAF's ability to adapt to evolving challenges. The conference was attended by Chief of Defence Staff

(CDS), General Anil Chauhan, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary (DDR&D) and Chairman DRDO Dr. Samir V. Kamat, Secretary (Defence Production) Sanjay Kumar and senior commanders of the Indian Air Force (IAF). The ongoing conference has witnessed in-depth discussions on key operational, administrative, and strategic issues. The apex leadership also interacted with the CDS, Chief of the Army Staff and Chief of the Naval Staff to foster synergy. This conference serves as a vital platform for the IAF's senior leadership to deliberate on current challenges and strategize future actions to maintain operational excellence and Atmanirbharta in defence capabilities.



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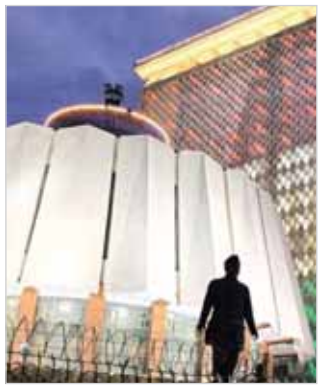
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Time for reckoning

Today Maharashtra will vote to decide its future leadership and political trajectory

Maharashtra, one of India's most politically significant states, votes for all 288 Assembly seats today. This election comes at a time of heightened political fragmentation and social unrest, making its outcome crucial for both state and national politics. A key issue in this election is the split within the Shiv Sena, a party long associated with Maharashtra's regional pride. The party is now divided into two factions: one led by Uddhav Thackeray, aligned with the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress, and the other by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, supported by the BJP. This division has significantly eroded the party's traditional voter base, creating uncertainty about its performance in this election. Adding to the complexity is the Maratha reservation demand. The Maratha community, constituting about 30 per cent of the state's population, is pushing for inclusion in the Other Backward



Classes (OBC) category to access job and educational quotas. Protests, led by figures like Manoj Jarange Patil, have brought this issue to the forefront, with the ruling BJP-Shiv Sena alliance attempting to address it through policy measures. However, the unresolved tensions could influence voter sentiment, especially in rural areas.

The BJP-led alliance faces further challenges from agrarian distress in regions like Vidarbha and Marathwada. Falling crop prices for key produce such as cotton and onions have caused financial strain on farmers, traditionally a significant voting bloc. The MVA has capitalised on this dissatisfaction,

highlighting the BJP's failure to protect Maharashtra's economic interests, including the recent relocation of major industrial projects to Gujarat. This election also reflects national-level dynamics. The results will test the BJP's ability to maintain its dominance amid growing opposition unity and could signal the strength of the Congress and its allies. A victory for the MVA might energise the national opposition, while a BJP win could consolidate its position. With a fragmented political landscape, Maharashtra's election promises to be closely contested. Its outcome will likely shape not only the state's future but also set the tone for national politics in the coming years. The political landscape of the state stands at a crossroads today. With a deeply fragmented Shiv Sena, intense debates over Maratha reservations, and agrarian distress weighing on rural voters, this election carries stakes far beyond the state's borders. The outcome would indeed be a pointer to the prowess of the BJP at the national level and the resilience of the INDI alliance. Besides the state is an economic powerhouse and whosoever rules the state also enjoys the support of corporate world to keep its momentum going.

PICTALK



Folk dancers perform during the celebration of the 297th foundation day of 'Pink City', Jaipur

Buddhas in the boardroom: How meditation can counter burnout

Meditation, once reserved for monks, is emerging as a transformative practice for professionals, helping them fight burnout

With increased screen time, back-to-back meetings and the constant scramble of the hustle culture, we need to consider - whether we are running the show, or just running. Workplace burnout is the price often paid for juggling high expectations, tight deadlines and the need to be available for work all the time - while disregarding personal health and wellbeing.



Understanding workplace burnout: Burnout is beyond the feeling of tiredness at the end of a busy day. It's a state of chronic physical and emotional exhaustion, coupled with detachment, cynicism and reduced performance. The WHO officially recognised burnout as an 'occupational phenomenon', signifying its critical impact on modern work-life. It affects mental clarity and emotional resilience and can even have physiological repercussions on heart health and sleep patterns.

Why meditation: Amid the workday, meditation offers an oasis - a moment to pause, reflect, and realign. The practice, often associated with

monks and mountain retreats, is now being rediscovered in the boardroom. The reason is simple: meditation fosters the ability to be present, grounded and conscious of one's thoughts and actions. Research has shown that regular meditation can alter brain activity, shifting it from the limbic system (responsible for our fight-or-flight responses) to the prefrontal cortex (the centre for rational thinking and calmness). This neurological shift translates to a greater sense of control over stress, enabling clearer decision-making and enhancing focus. Yoga emphasises how yogic, breathing and meditation techniques can lead to transformative wellbeing. Studies on Yoga have reported a positive impact on holistic wellbeing, with participants reporting reductions in anx-

iety, stress, and burnout by 72-82 per cent. This makes it an effective, research-backed solution for integrating meditation into workplace wellness.

Transforming work culture through yogic practices

The tangible benefits of meditation go beyond stress relief. In practice, this means a more focused team, resilient in the face of challenges, and more open to collaboration. Some organisations are already creating environments where wellness isn't a perk but a pillar of their work culture. We need Buddhas in the boardroom.

How meditation rewrites your life script: Meditation is more than sitting in silence; it's about training the mind to be resilient. Techniques such as deep breathing, guided protocols and visualisation help individuals develop a heightened state of non-judgemental awareness, balance emotions, and build a strong mental framework to manage stress effectively. One standout programme is YOI, which has garnered attention for its multifaceted approach to wellbeing. Imagine being able to handle feedback with-

out feeling criticised or meeting a deadline without feeling panic - meditation offers a gateway to equanimity. As game-changers in the corporate world, meditative practices build the mental stamina to bounce back from setbacks, maintain composure under pressure, and approach situations with a growth mindset.

Meditation at work

Meditation in the workplace doesn't require a meditation mat or a designated room; it just requires an integration of intention, emotion and awareness. Here are some strategies to help you get started: A few minutes of breathing or focusing on your senses can help reset your mental state. Begin your meetings with a minute of silence or guided breathing. It helps everyone clear their minds and be more present. As the world continues to spin, meditation serves as a reminder - that the power to pause and find a balance lies within.

(The writer is, mental health researcher and the founder of Yoga of Immortals; views are personal)



ISHAN SHIVANAND

West Bengal's lost opportunity

Tata Nano factory's relocation from West Bengal to Gujarat is a poignant reminder of how political myopia derailed a golden opportunity for Bengal's industrial revival



ANIRBAN GANGULY

In a moving tribute to late Ratan Tata, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the many dimensions of the industrial icon's personality that endeared him to the people. Pursuit of excellence and empathy were among the most dominant traits in late Ratan Tata leading him to pilot the Tata conglomerate towards greater heights of success and expansion. Under his two decades of stewardship, the Tata group witnessed a phenomenal spread of its global footprints and established itself as a vibrant brand.

Perhaps like many others from West Bengal, Ratan Tata's passing brought to my mind the Singur - Tata Nano factory episode. Those dark days of lost opportunities, signified a major recal, for the hope of an industrial regeneration in the state. A party and government which had, for over three decades patronised, militant trade unionism had suddenly decided to reverse that trend. It was ironic to see it clamour for investment in a feverish pitch after having presided over the de-industrialisation of the state.

The destruction of Bengal's once formidable industrial might is a map of the CPI(M) rise in the state. Howrah, once famed as the 'Sheffield of the east', turned into West Bengal's principal industrial graveyard under the communists. As early as the 1920s Dr Ambedkar had seen through and realised the often-duplicious approach of the communist-led trade-unionism. In the pages of his Bahishkrut Bharat he wrote how communists were 'trying to capture the labour movement in the country' and that 'the main aim behind the strike' was 'not to improve the economic conditions of workers but to train them for revolution'. He could foresee the cancer that was trying to claw into India's industrial entrails.

Let us recall how then West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu had sanctioned protests against the Metro Rail project. The communist-driven frenzied trade-unionism destroyed several iconic public undertakings such as the Haringhata Milk



Dairy, set up by Dr BC Roy had created a milk supply chain across the state while generating thousands of jobs. Much like Mamata Banerjee who has refused to enlist West Bengal in the Centre's flagship 'Aspirational District Project' and remains lukewarm to the 'Ekalavya Vidyalaya' scheme, Basu in 1986, had forbade the setting up of Navodaya Schools in the state. In 1974, three years before he came to power as Chief Minister, Basu had organised a relay protest in front of the Hongkong Bank regional office in Kolkata to stall the installation of computers. Yet ironically the same Jyoti Basu in 1994, commissioned Arthur Anderson, a multinational business consultant, to carry out a study of the chances of West Bengal's industrial revival based on foreign investment. But progress was halting, it lacked a roadmap.

Thus, when Ratan Tata decided to invest in the state it was a whiff of more than fresh air, it was a long-needed gush of wind for breathing fresh life into a dying industrial ethos. A hopeful Tata had then said that he had 'scanned the country and looked at various locations before deciding to locate this rather revolution-

MUCH LIKE MAMATA BANERJEE WHO HAS REFUSED TO ENLIST WEST BENGAL IN THE CENTRE'S FLAGSHIP 'ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICT PROJECT' AND REMAINS LUKEWARM TO THE 'EKALAVYA VIDYALAYA' SCHEME, BASU IN 1986, HAD FORBADE THE SETTING UP OF NAVODAYA SCHOOLS IN THE STATE

ary project which will give India's truly people's car here in Bengal. It announced a new chapter, a historic opportunity for Bengal's industrial rejuvenation. But that did not happen. Political selfishness, and one-upmanship between the ruling CPI(M) and the opposition Trinamool Congress, leading a blind political opposition to the proposal led to its grounding. In trying to bolster her flagging political prospects, Mamata Banerjee, despectively and deliberately jettisoned the project. Her political arrogance and self-centeredness led to its sinking. In her last fifteen years at the helm, the state has failed to recover from that mindless assault and pushback. An epic opportunity was lost, with a beleaguered Tata announcing his exit from the state due to political reasons. The people of West Bengal lost out. Their hopes of a possibilities-filled future receded in a mist of uncertainty. Both the ruling dispensation then and the opposition were responsible for pushing the state into a dark alley. The alley remains dark even to this day. Ratan Tata announced that he was shifting the car plant to Gujarat's Sanand. It was a plant that would eventually

grow into a mega 1100-acre unit. Narendra Modi was then Chief Minister of Gujarat. As Tata was announcing his exit from West Bengal, Modi texted him 'Welcome', leading to the proposed Nano factory shifting to Gujarat. Modi told Tata that the project was not only his, but ours. Later he had observed, in a lighter vein, that his one-rupee SMS had brought about a major boost to Gujarat's industrial prospects. Ratan Tata later said that he would forever remain grateful to Modi for placing faith in him and inviting him to Gujarat during those difficult days. The saga of the Singur-Tata Nano factory's shift to Gujarat is a saga of petty political squabbles, acute selfishness, arrogance and lack of true commitment to West Bengal's future and progress. That mindset and outlook among the ruling dispensation in the state still dominate. It has to be thrown overboard. Only then will West Bengal's industrial rejuvenation appear to be a possibility.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UKRAINE TO USE LONG-RANGE MISSILES

Madam - If this news is true that finally, US President Joe Biden has given the green signal to Ukraine to use long-range American missiles against Russia, then it is very good news for Ukraine. Because for the last one and a half years, Ukrainian President Zelensky was asking for permission to use these long-range weapons. Otherwise, this weapon will remain just a showpiece and one day Russia will capture it and then it will start using it to capture some third country.

This decision is also necessary because the Biden administration is now a guest for only two months. The president who will come after him, Trump, has already announced that he will stop giving any kind of help to Ukraine. The second big reason for Biden's change of heart seems to be that with the support of Russia, about 10 thousand combat soldiers of North Korea have taken up the front against Ukraine. In such a situation, Ukraine should have gotten this permission at all costs. The news of Biden's decision came after meetings with the leaders of South Korea, Japan and China in the last two days. The inclusion of North Korean troops was the main topic of the talks, which took place during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru. Europe was already ready to give permission. But America was not ready. It is said that American missiles will be able to hit up to 300 kilometers inside Russia at three times the speed of sound, which even Russia's anti-missile equipment will not be able to intercept.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

VIOLENCE ESCALATES IN MANIPUR

Madam - Apropos of the headlines on Manipur violence (November 18), the resurgence of violence in Manipur goes unabated. The violence and sabotage look beyond control. The MLAs and ministers of different political parties are being attacked and their houses are ransacked. The democratic fabric in Manipur has been destroyed by the extremists and irate

India tests hypersonic missile



India's hypersonic missile technology has received a shot in the arm after a long-range hypersonic missile was tested by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). With a range exceeding 1500 km, the missile is intended to carry wide-ranging payloads for all three services of the Indian armed forces. These indigenously developed missiles are special because they travel with a speed five

times that of sound at sea level, at approximately 6200 km per hour, and at a mile per second. Hypersonic missiles are extremely difficult to detect, making enemy radars high impossible to spot them before they are too close for comfort.

Their maneuverability and ability to fly at lower altitudes separate them from the ballistic missiles that follow a set path. Hypersonic missiles can also be partially projected into orbit via a glide vehicle through the fractional orbital bombardment system (FOBS) unlike the ballistic missiles, though the latter can travel faster. Till now, Russia, China and the United States possess full-fledged hypersonic capabilities, while Germany, France, Japan, Australia, Iran and Israel are on course to follow suit. India has, thus, joined the elite 'hypersonic group.' Kudros to ISRO for another feather in the cap.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

mobs. Education, health, development and civic administration are in peril. The elected government has turned dysfunctional and there are threats and possibilities of destabilising the state government. It is quite apparent that the efforts of peace in the first phase of violence have failed despite the newly elected state government post-violence.

Earlier, there were reports of missionaries inciting violence in the state. The Manipur violence has affected neighbouring states of Assam, Tripura and Nagaland. In fact, the Manipur violence has a secessionist motive and the disruptive and separatist forces behind the Manipur violence are based across the borders. It is, therefore, imperative that President Rule may be imposed in the state and the assembly may be suspended till normalcy returns and the political atmosphere is congenial for restoration of the assembly and the government. The Manipur mayhem should not be taken as political mileage by the opposition parties. The India-Myanmar border should be sealed with immediate effect,

though this is practically very difficult. Vinod Johri | Delhi

KAILASH GAHLOT QUITS AAP

Madam - Gahlot resigned from AAP, citing the party's shift from focusing on public welfare to prioritising political ambitions. In his resignation letter to AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal, Gahlot stated that instead of fighting for people's rights, the party had increasingly been focused on its own agenda. He also expressed dissatisfaction with controversies like the 'Sheeshmahal' row, questioning whether AAP still upheld its core identity as the party of the common man. AAP responded by alleging that Gahlot's resignation was influenced by pressure from central agencies investigating him, a claim Gahlot dismissed. The BJP believes that Gahlot's entry strengthens its position as it prepares to challenge AAP in the upcoming elections.

Akhilesh Krishnan | Vashi

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FIRST COLUMN

A DIET FOR PEACE:
KINDNESS OVER CRUELTY

The food we consume shapes not just our physical health but also our thoughts, actions and the world



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It has been rightly said that we are what we eat because the kind of food that we eat has a direct impact on how we think and therefore it's crucial to what we become finally. Recent studies made by modern medical science have suggested that the human body is not naturally designed to digest and assimilate non-vegetarian food. That is why today most medical practitioners recommend a healthy vegetarian diet to their patients who are suffering from lifestyle disorders. Along with scientific studies, individual researchers made all over the world have also clearly pointed out that when an animal is killed for meat, it experiences fear, anxiety and pain. Its hormonal secretions are then passed on to its consumers.

Such a diet is therefore unhealthy both for the body and the mind. In many religions, a non-vegetarian diet is strictly forbidden not just because it causes pain and suffering to other living creatures but also because it is the source of vicious thoughts and attitudes to its consumers. In other words, non-vegetarian food is a gateway to a non-vegetarian lifestyle, a way of living where vices dwell comfortably. One must understand that human cruelty towards animals is nothing but a way of inviting cruelty onto the self. Also, the current trend of mass consumption of flesh by human beings highlights the way we look at other living beings and our desire to subjugate them.



From a broader perspective, the mass consumption of non-vegetarian food is a way of heaping sin upon the human community. No peace marches, diplomatic dialogues and conferences can bring peace to the planet when we are burdening it with the desperate cries of hapless creatures. For what we sow, so shall we reap. It is so ironic that the largely meat-eating developed countries of the world have stringent laws when it comes to treating a pet and it is ensured that if the pet is hurt, the owner can even be imprisoned. However, in these very countries, millions of animals are killed every day for food and yet no one goes to jail. Isn't it surprising that so many animal lovers continue to be non-vegetarians because they are unable to connect with the cruelty that goes behind, in the making of such food? Even more surprising was a weird recommendation to find humane methods of animal slaughter made by some so-called animal sympathisers. But the contention here is what can be more inhuman than nourishing an animal to kill it one day. It is a breach of morality by all standards. What is more cruel than subjecting generations of animals to a life of stifling captivity that only leads them to a merciless end? And what is more cruel than killing animals in front of each other? While one is bleeding to death, the other watches in horror and waits for its turn. It is a great pity that even sympathetic humans are left with such little kindness that all they can think of is designing a better way to kill. It's high time that all of us should ask ourselves a question: why does our conscience need a rational argument, sanctioned by a research institute in the West, to realise that killing other living creatures is a form of cruelty?

Why do we need facts and figures to understand that cruelty can never be a bringer of any form of health - be it mind, body or the environment & bring peace and harmony to the world? Can't we realise that a heart that heaves no sigh at the sight of violence cannot be a source of compassion for other fellow men? So how do we expect people who do not nurture the feeling of kindness for other living beings to nurture feelings of brotherhood and forgiveness for their community? Aren't we just walking on one path while seeking another's destination? Just give it a thought and then decide whether to Kill or Heal. Learn to live above self when life is precious to all. Let there be the right to live for all & not just Human Rights, then only world peace will descend.

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

Delhi discoms in crisis:
Debt and regulatory gaps

UTTAM GUPTA

A convoluted tariff regime, under-recoveries, power theft, and unpaid subsidies are threatening the sustainability of the Delhi discoms



Delhi Government is looking at various options to address twin problems facing its three power distribution companies (discoms) namely BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), discom for South & West Delhi; BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) — discom for Central & East Delhi; and Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited or TPDDL - discom for North Delhi. These are (i) "Regulatory Assets" or RAs of Rs 27,200 crore lying in the books of these discoms; (ii) an equally staggering amount of Rs 26,500 crore they owe to power generation and transmission companies viz. Indraprastha Power Generation Co. Ltd (IPGCL), Pragati Power Corporation Limited (PPCL) and Delhi Transco Limited or DTL at the end of September 2024. The discoms are expected to sell electricity to the consumers at tariffs — duly approved by the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) — that are set in a manner such that the revenue generated from sale at these tariffs fully cover the power purchase cost plus the cost of wheeling and distribution. The requirement is mandatory under the Electricity Act, of 2003. But, this is rarely complied with.

Under a highly convoluted regime, the tariff charged from households (HHs) consuming up to 200 units a month is Rs 3 per unit which is just about half of the average cost leading to an under-recovery of Rs 3 per unit. Including levies adding to 44.6 per cent, the shortfall comes to Rs 4.3 per unit (3x1.446). For HHs consuming between 201 and 400 units, the tariff is Rs 4.5 per unit implying an under-recovery of Rs 1.5 per unit. Including the levies, this comes to Rs 2.2 per unit. These under-recoveries are cross-subsidised by charging more from industries and businesses for which the tariff can go up to a high of Rs 16 per unit.

The irony is that despite charging exorbitant rates from industries and businesses, a good slice of under-recoveries from HHs consuming less than 400 units a month remains uncovered. Additionally, the Delhi government doesn't want the latter to even pay the small tariff of Rs



THE IRONY IS THAT DESPITE CHARGING EXORBITANT RATES FROM INDUSTRIES AND BUSINESSES, A GOOD SLICE OF UNDER-RECOVERIES FROM HHS CONSUMING LESS THAN 400 UNITS A MONTH REMAINS UNCOVERED

3 per unit (courtesy, of Kejriwal's freebies). Thus, discoms are told not to raise any bill on HHs consuming up to 200 units even as HHs consuming up to 400 units get a flat deduction of Rs 800 per month from the bill amount. Though the government promises to reimburse them for these subsidies from the state budget, this promise is held more in breach. This increases discoms' losses which are compounded by large-scale power theft.

Where do RAs fit in? RAs are created when state electricity regulatory commissions (in this case, DERC) accept that the tariffs don't cover discoms' purchase costs but don't raise rates. The gap between the cost and revenue generated from sales at tariffs (albeit unrecovered) for supplied power, is booked by discom as receivable and classified as RA. This is contrary to the Electricity Act (2003) and the National Power Tariff Policy (NPTP) which says that "tariffs must reflect costs and regulatory assets should not be created". In December 2022, the Ministry of Power (MoP) even warned against creating a pile of RAs. But, all these regulations/warnings have fallen on deaf ears.

All losses incurred by discoms in Delhi during the last 11 years or so have been shown in their books as RAs. Regrettably, the RAs persist despite subsisting mechanisms to enable discoms to offset cost escalation by suitable increases in tariff. As per the order issued by MoP on November 9, 2021, discoms are allowed to impose a surcharge known as PPAC (Power Purchase Agreement Cost). Levied as a percentage of the 'total energy cost and fixed charge component' of the electricity bill, the surcharge is meant to compensate them for variations in the fuel and power procurement cost. Effective from July 2023, the DERC had last increased PPAC vide its order

dated June 22, 2023, by 9.42 per cent for BYPL, 6.39 per cent for BRPL and 2 per cent for TPDDL. The current PPACs for these discoms are 31.6 per cent, 27.08 per cent and 33 per cent respectively. Moreover, DERC has allowed discoms to levy a surcharge of eight per cent.

This is intended to plug any shortfall in revenue vis-à-vis the cost still left unplugged after collection of PPAC. Despite these two impositions, the discoms continue to report a substantial shortfall in their revenue from the sale of electricity which is manifest in cumulative monumental RAs of Rs 27,200 crore. It is a manifestation of several glaring pitfalls: (i) the Delhi government isn't reimbursing discoms for the subsidies they give to target consumers on its behalf; (ii) large-scale power theft continues unabated; (iii) discoms have been submitting inflated bills/claims and other financial wrongs; (iv) inefficiencies get full protection. Hesitant to sanction tariff hikes against these extra/unjustified costs, DERC chooses the easy option of putting all these under RAs.

The idea of creating RAs is flawed. When a discom petitions DERC to allow any cost increase in tariff, the latter can either reject or accept. In case of acceptance, it should take the process to its logical conclusion by sanctioning the requisite tariff hike and notifying it. It can't leave things hanging in the air by accepting but not 'approving' and 'notifying' the tariff hike. Unfortunately, this is what the DERC has been doing for over a decade. This has dangerous consequences.

First, once recorded in their books as RAs, discoms will leave no stone unturned in recovering the money say by getting sanction of a steep hike in tariff to make up for the entire cumulative deficit in revenue. Indeed, the matter had gone right up to the Supreme Court

(SC) which in an order given in early 2023 had directed the DERC to let discoms recover their RAs. This could lead to a 100 per cent hike in tariff.

So, the regulator decided to contest that order. Second, until such time the requisite tariff hike is actually sanctioned by the DERC, the RAs can't be treated as an asset. Hence, there remains every possibility of the loans taken from banks and financial institutions (FIs) for funding them becoming non-performing assets (NPAs). Moreover, the banks/FIs may not give more to discoms and their suppliers namely IPGCL/PPCL/DTL more loans. Third, the discoms can leverage the ambiguous classification (neither outright rejection of a claim for tariff hike nor approval) to present claims to the DERC which the latter may not be willing to accept.

This leads to substantial claims getting bogged down in legal disputes at the appeal level or in higher courts. To conclude, providing for RAs in the books of discoms is a bad practice. Apart from discoms, it also puts the power generators and transmission companies at serious risk. It can impair the balance sheet of banks and FIs who have given loans to them.

It could mean a steep hike in tariffs on supplies to industries/businesses besides HHs consuming more than 400 units a month. To cap it all, it provides a 'cover up' for financial irregularities and corruption. The practice must be shunned. As for the RAs already piled up, a thorough enquiry should be ordered to look into irregularities followed by recovery of money from those found guilty. The discoms should be 'unshackled' from the controls of the State government. If the latter wants to subsidize or provide free power to certain consumers, the money should be given to them directly.

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

Delhi's air quality crisis: Action taken for now, but long-term solutions are crucial
The city faces an urgent need for sustainable, long-term strategies to tackle pollution at its root

The air quality in Delhi has recently deteriorated to dangerously high levels. To address this issue swiftly and effectively, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has implemented Stage 4 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).

This stage involves measures such as restricting bus services, pausing construction work and mining activities, and transitioning primary school classes to online learning. Although these steps are crucial in addressing the current pollution issue promptly, they alone cannot effectively address the underlying factors contributing to air pollution in the long term. It is crucial to prioritise short-term solutions for relief; however, we must not



EILIA JAFAR

overlook the factors that contribute to pollution in the long term as well. One significant factor is the dust produced during construction activities. While the temporary suspension of construction operations following GRAP guidelines is a move in the right direction, it also underscores the urgency of implementing more environmentally friendly building

methods. Germany and Sweden serve as examples of nations that have successfully implemented construction practices.

For instance, Germany prioritises the use of low-carbon concrete, whereas Sweden focuses on promoting energy-efficient structures with improved insulation and solar innovations. India has the opportunity to implement strategies to minimise dust and emissions from construction activities and promote sustainable development.

The need for transformation in transportation is crucial to address the issue of pollution in Delhi caused by road dust and vehicle emissions. Although the metro system has advanced to some extent in Delhi, there are still areas

with connectivity that need attention.

Expanding the metro network and integrating buses can lead to a decrease in private car usage. Moreover, promoting the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) could play a role in reducing emissions. Providing benefits such as tax incentives, toll discounts, and even offering parking for EVs could potentially increase their attractiveness to commuters. Biking is becoming more popular as an eco-friendly option in Delhi; however, the city's infrastructure doesn't fully support it yet.

Although smart bikes are being introduced in some areas, which is a move forward, the absence of marked biking lanes and safety precautions deters many people from bik-



ing. Cities such as Copenhagen and Amsterdam serve as models for incorporating biking into urban environments. Delhi could take inspiration from its approach by investing in infrastructure for cyclists, such as bike lanes and bike-sharing services, to enhance the safety and convenience of cycling for its residents. Encouraging the use of sustainable building methods is crucial too!

Providing incentives for individuals who build energy-efficient houses or utilise eco-friendly materials could greatly support sustainability efforts in communities worldwide. Numerous nations offer tax advantages or financial aid to developers who embrace green building strategies. India could introduce perks like discounts on energy-saving devices, offers on solar panel setups, or financial assistance for homeowners undertaking eco-conscious improvements. These initiatives would not only lessen the burden on energy reserves but also encourage environmentally responsible construction practices.

Another helpful way to decrease the number of cars on the road is through carpooling initiatives, such as carpool

lanes and discounts for vehicles with passengers, which have proven effective in countries around the world. Introducing strategies in Delhi, such as designated carpool lanes or toll reductions for cars carrying two or more passengers, could play a role in alleviating traffic congestion and decreasing harmful emissions levels.

By implementing these measures, not only would pollution be reduced, but it would also enhance the daily commute experience for numerous residents in the area. The call for action is critical now.

The air pollution crisis in NCR intensified on November 17, 2024, as Delhi's average Air Quality Index (AQI) climbed to a hazardous 441 by 4 PM, classified as 'severe', up from

419 the previous day. The harmful pollutants are linked to health concerns, such as respiratory illnesses and cardiovascular diseases.

The Stage 4 actions outlined in the GRAP are crucial for providing relief; however, it is evident that a comprehensive long-term plan is essential to enhance the air quality in Delhi. By emphasising the enhancement of public transportation services, implementing infrastructure for cyclists, advocating for eco-friendly construction methods and encouraging carpooling, Delhi can strive to diminish pollution levels and establish a healthier and more sustainable environment for all residents.

(The writer is humanitarian and development professional; views are personal)

Maharashtra goes to polls, 4,136 candidates in the fray

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a most crucial contest that has the potential to alter the power dynamics in the country, more than 9.50 crore voters will go to polls in Maharashtra on Wednesday to decide on whether to re-elect the Bharatiya Janata Party-led MahaYuti government or usher the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) dispensation into power in a state that is ruled from the country's commercial capital. Given the complexities of the polls that will witness a fierce battle between the two major political formations, it remains to be seen as to whether the ruling MahaYuti or the Opposition MVA will reach the magic figure of 145 (out of the total 288 seats), a simple majority required for staking a claim to form the next government in Maharashtra. Both the ruling MahaYuti, comprising BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-headed Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Opposition MVA, comprising the Congress, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) and Sharad Pawar-headed NCP (SP), have claimed that they

would win anywhere from 170 to 180 seats to form a government in the state. Fresh from the BJP's stunning victory in Haryana, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had, during his campaigning, had pitched for the MahaYuti replicating the Haryana Assembly poll outcome in Maharashtra, a prospect that the Opposition MVA leaders have dismissed outright. In all, there are 4,136 candidates in the fray for 288 Assembly seats. The main battle is going between the ruling MahaYuti and MVA in the polls. There are also candidates from several smaller and Independents - many of whom are rebels from the six major parties which constitute MahaYuti and MVA. The BJP, which heads the ruling MahaYuti, is contesting 148 seats. Its allies, Eknath Shinde-Shiv Sena and Ajit Pawar-led NCP, are contesting 80 seats and 53 seats respectively. On the other hand, the Congress, which heads the MVA, is contesting 103 seats, while its allies, Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has fielded candidates in 89 constituencies and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP) is contesting 87

seats. The MVA has allotted the remaining six seats to its smaller allies. The Mayawati-led Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) fielded the largest number of 237 candidates followed by Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi from which 200 are in the race. The Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) is contesting 128 seats. Significantly enough, the BJP, is involved in direct fights with the Congress in at least 75 constituencies across the state. In Vidarbha alone, the two major parties are slugging out against each in as many as 36 out of the total 62 constituencies in the region. Given that the November 20 Assembly polls are being held in the backdrop of two major splits witnessed in the Shiv Sena and NCP in June 2022 and July 2023, there will be several direct fights between the feuding factions of the Shiv Sena and NCP. While the Shinde Shiv Sena will slug it out with the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena in as many as 39 seats. The feuding NCPs, one led by Ajit Pawar and another headed by Sharad Pawar himself,



Polling officials leave for their respective polling stations after collecting EVMs and other election materials from a distribution center on the eve of voting for the Maharashtra Assembly polls, in Mumbai

will take on each other in 36 constituencies. In Mumbai-Konkan belt where there are 75 seats, the fight is between the two Senas, with the Shiv Sena (ES) and Shiv Sena (UBT) locking horns in 27 of the 75 places, followed by BJP vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in 17 places, BJP vs Congress in 14 places and BJP vs NCP (SP) in five places and NCP (AP) vs NCP (SP) in five seats. In western Maharashtra where there are 58 seats, the two NCPs, led by Sharad Pawar and Ajit

Pawar are engaged in direct contests in 20 seats. On the other hand, BJP has engaged the NCP (SP) in 15 places followed by BJP vs Congress in 12 places, BJP vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in five places and Shiv Sena (ES) vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in five places. In north Maharashtra where there are 47 seats, the BJP and Congress are fighting against each other in six seats, followed by BJP vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in five places, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) Vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in five places, BJP Vs

NCP (SP) in four places and NCP (AP) Vs NCP (SP) in three places. In Marathwada where there are 46 seats, the Shinde Sena is battling it out against the Uddhav Sena in 11 constituencies followed by BJP Vs Congress in 10 places, BJP Vs NCP (SP) in seven places, NCP (SP) Vs NCP (AP) in seven places and BJP Vs Shiv Sena (UBT) in three seats. Key contests are being witnessed in Kopri-Pachpakhadi, where chief minister Eknath Shinde is taking on late Anand Dighe's nephew Kedar Dighe (Shiv Sena-UBT), Nagpur South West where deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis is pitted against Prafulla Gudadhe-Patil (Congress), Baramati where deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar (NCP) is battling out against his nephew Yugendra Pawar (NCP-SP), Worli where Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aadiya Thackeray is locked in a fierce fight with Milind Deora (Shinde Shiv Sena) and State BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule (BJP) is involved in a direct fight against Suresh Bhojar (Congress). The other key constituencies are: Sakoli (Nana Patole) Karad South (former CM Prithviraj Chavan, Congress), Yevla (Chaghan

Bhujbal, Ajit Pawar NCP), Vandre West (Ashish Shelar, BJP), Mahim (Amit Thackeray, MNS), Mankhurd Shivaji Nagar (Nawab Malik, Ajit Pawar NCP), Colaba (Speaker Rahul Narwekar, BJP), Kankavli (Nitesh Rane, BJP) and Kudal (Nilesh Rane, Shinde Sena). Meanwhile, the election authorities have made tight security arrangements across the state for Wednesday's Assembly polls. In Mumbai alone, more than 30,000 police personnel have been deployed on poll duty. In addition in Mumbai, five additional commissioners of police, 20 deputy commissioners of police, 83 assistant commissioners of police, more than 2,000 other police officers and 25,000 personnel have been deployed. Three Riot Control Platoons have been put on duty for the purpose of maintaining order. The traffic department has separately deployed 144 officers and more than 1,000 other personnel on security duty. More than 4,000 Home Guards have also been deployed and several personnel drawn from various central and state security forces have been assigned duties at critical locations.

Pishi or Bhaipo: That is the question in TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In what is being viewed as a faint sign of a war-of-succession, a section of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) have tossed up the idea of elevating Abhishek Banerjee the party general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP as the Deputy Chief Minister with the charge of Police Ministry. Former Minister and party MLA from Bharatpur in Murshidabad Humayun Kabir has courted controversy, demanding early coronation for Abhishek who is also the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. "No one lives in power for ever, Bidhan Roy too was a powerful politician... many others were there but none lived for ever... in view of this some decisions have to be taken... I think it is the right time to elevate Abhishek as the Deputy Chief Minister with additional charge of the

Police Ministry... which will not only make Mamata Didi's work easier but also help the police provide a better service to the people," Kabir who has often been known for his controversial remarks said. Apart from being the party general secretary the junior Banerjee is a sitting MP from Diamond Harbour constituency in South 24 Parganas district from where he won the parliamentary elections in 2024 by a record margin of about 7.5 lakh votes. Saying that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government in the Centre might not continue for long in which case the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance would come to power Kabir said, "the BJP Government will not last long and as INDIA Bloc will come to power Mamata Didi will get preoccupied in the national politics... for this the party should be ready

with Abhishek Banerjee to share her responsibility... so he must be made the Deputy Chief Minister," reminding how Marxist patriarch Jyoti Basu had left the Home Ministry for his successor Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. When asked as to whether his statement would not once again whip up the "old versus new" debate early this year forcing the Chief Minister to intervene to issue a whip against making any off the cuff remarks, Kabir said he was not saying anything against the Chief Minister. "Rather I have always gone on record saying that Mamata Banerjee is the best and most competent in the business in the entire country... there is no other politician to match her ability... which is why she will be busy in the Centre and for that the work in Bengal will be neglected... presently the Chief Minister works for 16-18 hours per day... for that Abhishek who has

proved his mettle both as an organiser and an administrator should be given to share her responsibility... also because this will give him an exposure," he said. When asked as to whether he would offer his suggestion in writing to the Chief Minister he said, "that I will decide... whether I will write or whether I will directly talk to the Chief Minister when I meet her in the Assembly." Senior Bengal minister Firhad Hakim came back sharply against Kabir saying there was no one who could match Mamata Banerjee. Party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh too said such issues should not be discussed outside the party in public. "There are certain issues which are not to be discussed in the public... there is no doubt that Abhishek is a capable person but it is for Mamata Banerjee to take decisions," he said.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and others after paying tribute to former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her birth anniversary, at the Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan, in New Delhi, Tuesday, November 19, 2024

On poll eve Vinod Tawde's 'cashgate'

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At one stage, Tawde was 'gheraoed' and pushed around by BVA workers. However, the situation came under control after Kshitij Thakur rushed there to control the crowds. At that time, BJP workers also gathered outside, along with the Nallasopara BJP candidate Rajan Naik. Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray said that "while BJP was making allegations of 'vote-jihad', what was actually happening is 'note-jihad'". On their part, the BJP leadership and Tawde denied the allegations. "I was conducting a meeting of party workers in Nallasopara (constituency) to discuss the model code of conduct on the day of polls like how EVMs are to be sealed, how to take

objection... they misunderstood," Tawde said. Offering to face the allegations against him, Tawde said, "The Election Commission must carry out a free and fair probe... I have been in politics for 40 years... Appa and Kshitij know me very well." Defending Tawde, state BJP President Chandrashekhar Bawankule said: "Tawde is the national general secretary and will persons in that position distribute money in this way? It should be considered. As the election has gone out of hand, the opposition is defaming the BJP and Tawde... the political opponents made a film, the opponents did media management. Tawde has fallen prey to conspiracy." Earlier, Hitendra Thakur,

while talking to media persons said, "Some BJP leaders informed me that party general secretary Tawde had come to Virar to disburse Rs 5 crore to influence voters... we have seen huge amounts of cash, diary entries, laptop", Sr Thakur, however, did not name the BJP leader who had tipped off Tawde's movement from Wada to Virar with the cash. "I thought a national leader like him would not stoop to such a trivial task. But I saw him here... you all saw what happened, how it happened and who all were there," Thakur said, as he demanded stern action against Tawde. It remains to be seen as to what impact that the controversy involving Tawde would have on Wednesday's polls in Virar-Vasari area and elsewhere in Maharashtra.

Russian President Vladimir Putin likely...

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Last month, Prime Minister Modi visited Russia's Kazan for the annual summit of the leaders of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group of nations. The two leaders held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the summit. Asked to comment on United States President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russia with US-supplied longer-range missiles, Peskov warned it will add fuel to the conflict and escalate the war. Peskov's comments came on a day when President Putin signed a revised nuclear doctrine declaring that a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power will be considered a joint attack on his country. Putin's endorsement of the new nuclear deterrent policy comes on the 1,000th day after he sent troops into Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022.

Vintage cars not to be...

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Delhi hosts several vintage car rallies, including the Statesman Vintage & Classic Car Rally and the 21 Gun Salute International Vintage Car Rally and Concours d'Elegance. Last year, Delhi resident Kaleem Khan's 1948 Humber Hawk III was seized by the state government citing its scrapping policy. Khan moved the court and later the Delhi High Court stayed the seizure of the car. It asked the Delhi government to clarify its stance on vintage vehicles. Earlier this year, the Delhi government issued guidelines for the "end-of-life" vehicles stating that their owners can get the cars released by paying a fine of Rs 10,000 and giving an undertaking that these will not be driven on city roads. The owners would also need to park the cars in a private space and not in public.

All-party meeting to be held on Sunday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has convened a customary all-party meeting on Sunday ahead of the Winter Session of Parliament. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said that the meet has been convened on November 24 morning "in view of the coming Winter session of Parliament" that begins on November 25 to conclude on December 20. To mark the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution, an event will be held in the Central Hall of Samvidhan Sadan or the old Parliament building. An all-

party meeting is convened by the government ahead of sessions to inform the opposition of its legislative agenda as well as to discuss issues which parties want to debate in Parliament. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, on Tuesday, reviewed arrangements and facilities in the Parliament House complex ahead of the Winter session beginning November 25. Birla inspected the Lok Sabha chamber, corridors, lobbies, waiting rooms, media facilities and other key areas, the Lok Sabha secretariat said. Birla noted that several significant events will be held in the Parliament House

complex during the session, including Samvidhan Diwas on November 26, death anniversary of Dr. B R Ambedkar on December 6, and the function to mark the anniversary of Parliament attack on December 13. The Speaker instructed all concerned to ensure that necessary arrangements are in place to facilitate the smooth conduct of proceedings, the Lok Sabha secretariat said. Birla also reviewed the security arrangements at the complex and instructed officials to maintain a balance between ensuring unhindered access for MPs and upholding the highest standards of security, it added.

EAM meets Chinese counterpart

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The EAM also noted the importance of India-China ties in his remarks. "First of all let me say it is very good to meet on the sidelines of the G20. We saw each other recently on the sidelines of the BRICS as you noted. "And our contribution to both platforms was notable in shaping the eventual outcomes," he said. "But it was a reminder to us of the importance of our two countries in international politics. It was also an equally significant testimony of why our bilateral relations are so important," he added. The Special Representative dialogue will be the next significant forward movement, sources said. India's Special Representative for the dialogue is National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval while the Chinese side

is headed at the talks by Foreign Minister Wang Yi. A statement by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said the two ministers recognised that the disengagement in our border areas had contributed to the maintenance of peace and tranquillity. The discussions focused on the next steps in India-China relations. It was agreed that a meeting of the Special Representatives and of the Foreign Secretary-Vice Minister mechanism will take place soon. Among the steps discussed were the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra pilgrimage, data sharing on trans-border rivers, direct flights between India and China and media exchanges. Foreign Minister Wang Yi concurred with EAM Jaishankar that India-China relations have particular salience in world politics. He

noted that our leaders had agreed in Kazan on the way forward. The two Ministers felt that it was imperative that the focus should be on stabilising ties, managing differences and taking the next steps. Meanwhile, after the completion of disengagement, Indian and the Chinese militaries are carrying out one round of patrolling each in Depsang and Demchok, sources said. At the same time, they said the two sides have maintained their deployment of troops along the LAC and the focus now will be on de-escalation of the overall situation. Each side currently has around 50,000 to 60,000 troops along the LAC in the region. Talks at multiple levels are underway towards de-escalation, the people said. After India and China reached the agreement on

October 21 for disengagement in Depsang and Demchok, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi said the Indian military is trying to restore "trust" and both sides will have to "reassure each other" to achieve this objective. Two days after the pact was sealed, PM Modi and President Xi held talks in the Russian city of Kazan. The two leaders endorsed the agreement on patrolling and disengagement and issued directions to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling attempts to normalise ties. In the nearly 50-minute meeting held on the sidelines of the BRICS summit, Modi underscored the importance of properly handling differences and disputes and not allowing them to disturb peace and tranquillity in border areas. The PM said

mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual sensitivity should remain the basis of the relations. India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas. In an address at an event on Saturday in New Delhi, Jaishankar said the disengagement part of the "problem" with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh has been put to rest and the focus should now be on de-escalation. It is "reasonable" to expect some improvement in the relations following the final round of disengagement, he said but hesitated to say that there could be a reset of ties. The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Lake area.

End of the road for Himachal Bhawan?

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The state government awarded the project to Seli Hydro Electric Power Company Limited/Moser Baer and issued the Letter of Allotment (LOA) on February 28, 2009, following which the firm deposited the upfront premium of Rs 64 Crore. However, the project did not materialise. The state government cancelled the LOA and ordered forfeiture of the upfront premium. The company challenged the decision before an arbitrator which ruled in its favour and asked the government to deposit the upfront premium with interest. After the state government did not comply with the order, the company filed a petition before the high court under Article 226. The court found merit in the petitioner's contention that the project had become technically and financially unviable and its prayer for withdrawing from it deserved to be allowed. The HC also upheld the decision of the arbitrator on January 13, 2023, and directed the government to

deposit the upfront premium with interest with the Registry. Due to the delay in payment, the amount has increased to Rs 150 Crore with the accumulation of seven per cent interest from the date of filing of the petition. The high court, in its Monday order, also directed the Principal Secretary (Power) to order a fact-finding inquiry to identify the officers responsible for the lapse and sought its report within 15 days before the next hearing on December 6. The BJP said it is a clear failure of the Congress government. "The state government is unable to defend itself and our prestigious properties like Himachal Bhawan located in Mandi House in Delhi are being attached which is a clear failure of the government," said Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Jai Ram Thakur. Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, however, dismissed criticism on the issue. "Depositing Rs 64 Crore is not a big thing for the state government but we are fighting a legal battle," he told media persons here.

CJI asks judges to allow virtual hearings

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The Solicitor General said the SC, as a matter of principle, should go virtual. "The way we are functioning today, if anybody wants to be online, they can go online," the CJI said. Sankaranarayanan said around 10,000 lawyers come to the Supreme Court daily using their own vehicles. He added lawyers' clerks also use personal vehicles often. "We will leave it to the lawyers concerned. We have given them that facility, whenever you want to appear virtually, you can," the CJI said. Sankaranarayanan said GRAP-IV restrictions are implemented in Delhi-NCR and there are no such specific instructions for courts in the city. "You have the option, you exercise that option. We have already said so. We will accommodate everyone," the CJI reiterated. On Monday, the SC took note of the fact that the Air Quality Index (AQI) entered into the 'severe plus' category and directed all Delhi-NCR states to immediately set up teams to strictly enforce anti-pollution GRAP IV restrictions, making it clear that the curbs will continue till further orders.

45 pro-democracy activists sentenced in Hong Kong's biggest national security case

AP ■ HONG KONG

Forty-five ex-lawmakers and activists were sentenced to four to 10 years in prison Tuesday in Hong Kong's biggest national security case under a Beijing-imposed law that crushed a once-thriving pro-democracy movement. They were prosecuted under the 2020 national security law for their roles in an unofficial primary election. Prosecutors said their aim was to paralyse Hong Kong's government and force the city's leader to resign by aiming to win a legislative majority and using it to block government budgets indiscriminately. The unofficial primary held in July 2020 drew 610,000 voters, and its winners had been expected to advance to the official election. Authorities postponed the official legislative election, however, citing public health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Legal scholar Benny Tai, whom the judges called the mastermind, received the longest sentence of 10 years. The judges said the sentences had been reduced for defendants who said they were unaware the plan was unlawful. However, the court said the

penalties were not reduced for Tai and former lawmaker Alvin Yeung because they are lawyers who were "absolutely adamant in pushing for the implementation of the scheme". In the judgment posted online, the judges wrote that Tai essentially "advocated for a revolution" by publishing a series of articles over a period of months that traced his thinking, even though in a letter seeking a shorter sentence Tai said the steps were "never intended to be used as blueprint for any political action". Two of the 47 original defendants were acquitted earlier this year. The rest either pleaded guilty or were found guilty of conspiracy to commit subversion. The judges said in their verdict that the activists' plans to effect change through the unofficial primary would have undermined the government's authority and created a constitutional crisis. The judges rejected the reasoning from some defendants that the scheme would never have materialised, stating that "all the participants had put in every endeavour to make it a success". The judges highlighted that a great deal of time, resources and money were devoted to the

organisation of the primary election. "When the Primary Election took place on the 10 and 11 July, no one had remotely mentioned the fact that Primary Election was no more than an academic exercise and that the Scheme was absolutely unattainable," the judgment read. "In order to succeed, the organisers and participants might have hurdles to overcome, that however was expected in every subversion case where efforts were made to overthrow or paralyse a government." Some of the defendants waived at their relatives in the courtroom after they were sentenced. Gwyneth Ho, a journalist-turned-activist who was jailed for seven years, said "our true crime for Beijing is that we were not content with playing along in manipulated elections" on her Facebook page. "We dared to confront the regime with the question: Will democracy ever be possible within such a structure? The answer was a complete crack-down on all fronts of society," she wrote. Chan Po-ying, wife of defendant Leung Kwok-hung, told reporters she wasn't shocked when she learned her husband

received a jail term of six years and nine months. She said they were trying to use some of the rights granted by the city's mini-constitution to pressure those who are in power to address the will of the people. "This is an unjust imprisonment. They shouldn't be kept in jail for one day," said Chan, also the chair of the League of Social Democrats, one of the city's remaining pro-democracy parties. Emilia Wong, the girlfriend of Ventus Lau, said his jail term was within her expectations. She said the sentencing was a "middle phase" of history and she could not see the end point at this moment, but she pledged to support Lau as best as she could. Philip Bowring, the husband of Claudia Mo, was relieved that the sentences were finally handed down. Observers said the trial illustrated how authorities suppressed dissent following huge anti-government protests in 2019, alongside media crackdowns and reduced public choice in elections. The drastic changes reflect how Beijing's promise to retain the former British colony's civil liberties for 50 years when it returned to China in 1997 is increasingly threadbare, they said.

Beijing and Hong Kong governments insisted the national security law was necessary for the city's stability. The sentencing drew criticism from foreign governments and human rights organisations. The US Consulate in Hong Kong said the US strongly condemned the sentences for the 45 pro-democracy advocates and former lawmakers. "The defendants were aggressively prosecuted and jailed for peacefully participating in normal political activity protected under Hong Kong's Basic Law," the statement said, referring to the city's mini-constitution. In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told reporters no one should be allowed to use democracy as a pretext to engage in unlawful activities and escape justice. Hong Kong Secretary for Security Chris Tang said in a news briefing that the sentences showed those committing national security crimes must be severely punished. The subversion case involved pro-democracy activists across the spectrum. They include Tai, former student leader Joshua Wong and former lawmakers. Wong was sentenced



Police officers stand guard outside the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts in Hong Kong on Tuesday. AP/PTI

to four years and eight months in jail. Young activist Owen Chow was given the second-longest jail term, seven years and nine months. Most of them have already been detained for more than three and a half years before the sentencing. The separations pained them and their families. More than 200 people stood in line in rain and winds Tuesday morning for a seat in the court, including one of the

acquitted defendants, Lee Yue-shun. Lee said he hoped members of the public would show they care about the court case. "The public's interpretation and understanding has a far-reaching impact on our society's future development," he said. Wei Siu-lik, a friend of convicted activist Clarisse Yeung, said she arrived at 4 am even though her leg was injured. "I wanted to let them know there are still many

coming here for them," she said. Thirty-one of the activists entered guilty pleas and had better chances of getting reduced sentences. The law authorises a range of sentences depending on the seriousness of the offence and the defendant's role in it, from under three years for the least serious to 10 years to life for people convicted of "grave" offences.

Foreign govts, rights groups criticise HK's sentencing

AP ■ HONG KONG

Forty-five prominent activists in Hong Kong were sentenced to jail for up to 10 years on Tuesday, sparking criticism from foreign governments and rights groups. The democracy advocates were among 47 people charged under a Beijing-imposed national security law in 2021 for their involvement in an unofficial primary election to pick opposition candidates. In the city's biggest national security case to date, they were accused of agreeing to veto government-proposed budgets indiscriminately after potentially securing a legislative majority to force a dissolution of the legislature and then the ouster of the city's leader. The case involved pro-democracy figures across the spectrum. Thirty-one of them pleaded guilty to the charge of conspiracy to commit subversion. Fourteen others were convicted following a long trial. Two were acquitted. **Australia:** Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said her

government was "gravely concerned" by the sentences for Australian citizen Gordon Ng and the other activists. Wong said Australia has expressed strong objections to the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities over the continuing broad application of national security legislation. **Taiwan:** Taiwan presidential office spokesperson Karen Kuo said democracy is not a crime and condemned the Chinese government for using what she called unjust procedures to suppress the political participation and freedom of speech of Hong Kong pro-democracy figures. The sentencing "not only breaks the promises of 50 years unchanged" and high degree of autonomy, but further proves that One Country, Two Systems is unfeasible," she said in a statement. When Hong Kong returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997, Beijing promised to retain its Western-style civil liberties for 50 years under the governing principle of "one country, two systems."

United States: The US Consulate in Hong Kong said the US strongly condemned the sentences, saying the defendants were aggressively prosecuted and jailed for participating in normal political activity protected under the city's mini-constitution. "We call on (Beijing) and Hong Kong authorities to cease politically motivated prosecutions of Hong Kong citizens and to immediately release all political prisoners and individuals jailed for their peaceful advocacy for rights and freedoms," it said in a statement. **Hong Kong's last British governor:** Hong Kong's last British governor, Chris Patten, said the sentencing was "not only an affront to the people of Hong Kong, but those who value rights and freedoms around the world" in a statement. He condemned the "sham" sentences, calling on the British government not to allow the results of the case to go unnoticed. He said the activists were an integral part of the city's pro-democracy movement.

Human Rights Watch: Human Rights Watch associate China director Maya Wang said, "running in an election and trying to win it is now a crime that can lead to a decade in prison in Hong Kong." Wang said the harsh sentences reflect how fast Hong Kong's civil liberties and judicial independence have nosedived in the past four years since the security law was introduced. **China:** Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said no one should be allowed to use democracy as a pretext to engage in unlawful activities and escape justice. Lin said certain Western countries ignored the fact that they maintain their own national security through judicial procedures while unreasonably criticising Hong Kong courts for "fairly implementing" the security law. "This severely violates and tramples on the spirit of the rule of law," he said at a news briefing. He said Beijing firmly opposes what he described as certain Western countries' interfer-

ence in China's internal affairs and their attempts to smear Hong Kong's rule of law. **European Union:** The European Union called the sentencing "another unprecedented blow" against the city's fundamental freedoms, democratic participation and pluralism. It said in a statement that it is deeply concerned about the politically motivated prosecution of the defendants for peaceful political activity. It said such activities should be legitimate in any political system that respects basic democratic principles. **Hong Kong:** Hong Kong Security Minister Chris Tang said the sentences reflected the severity of the offences. Tang said national security helps safeguard the city's prosperity, so his government takes any violations of the law seriously. "Different people may have different judgments about whether the sentencing is appropriate. But I think the important point is the rule of law," he said in a news briefing.

Putin signs doctrine that lowers threshold for using N-weapons

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday signed a revised nuclear doctrine declaring that a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power will be considered a joint attack on his country. Putin's endorsement of the new nuclear deterrent policy comes on the 1,000th day after he sent troops into Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022. It follows US President Joe Biden's decision to let Ukraine strike targets inside Russia with US-supplied longer-range missiles. The signing of the doctrine, which says that any massive aerial attack on Russia could trigger a nuclear response, reflects Putin's readiness to threaten use of the country's nuclear arsenal to force the West to back down as Moscow presses a slow-moving offensive in Ukraine.

Asked about whether the updated doctrine was deliberately issued on the heels of the US decision to ease restrictions on Ukraine using its longer-range missiles to strike Russia, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the document was published "in a timely manner" and that Putin instructed the government to update it earlier this year so that it is "in line with the current situation". Putin first announced changes in the nuclear doctrine in September, when he chaired a meeting discussing the proposed revisions. The new version of the document states that an attack against his country by a non-nuclear power with the "participation or support of a nuclear power" will be seen as their "joint attack on the Russian Federation". It doesn't specify whether such an attack would necessarily trigger a nuclear response. It mentions the

"uncertainty of scale, time and place of possible use of nuclear deterrent" among the key principles of the nuclear deterrence. At the same time, it spells out conditions for using nuclear weapons in greater detail compared to the previous version of the doctrine, noting they could be used in case of a massive air attack involving ballistic and cruise missiles, aircraft, drones and other flying vehicles. The wide formulation appears to significantly broaden the triggers for possible nuclear weapons use compared with the previous version of the document, which stated that Russia could tap its atomic arsenal if "reliable information is received about the launch of ballistic missiles targeting the territory of Russia or its allies". The revised doctrine envisages that Russia could use nuclear weapons in response to aggression against its ally Belarus.

US envoy pushes for truce in Lebanon

AP ■ BEIRUT

A United States envoy returned to Beirut on Tuesday, where Lebanese officials have tentatively welcomed a proposal for an Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire. There was no such optimism in the Gaza Strip, where the mass looting of aid trucks by armed men worsened an already severe food crisis. Amos Hochstein, the Biden administration's pointman on Israel and Lebanon, arrived as Hezbollah's allies in the Lebanese government said it had responded positively to the proposal, which would entail both the militants and Israeli ground forces withdrawing from a UN buffer zone in southern Lebanon. It's unclear how close they are to clinching an agreement. The buffer zone would be policed by thousands of additional UN peacekeepers and Lebanese troops. Israel has called for a stronger enforcement mechanism,

potentially including the ability to operate against any Hezbollah threats, something Lebanon is likely to oppose. In Gaza, meanwhile, the theft of nearly 100 trucks loaded with food and other humanitarian aid over the weekend sent prices soaring and caused shortages in central Gaza, where most of the population of 2.3 million people have fled and where hundreds of thousands are crammed into squalid tent camps. An even more severe hunger crisis is underway in the north, where Israel has been waging a week-long offensive that has killed hundreds of people and driven tens of thousands from their homes. Experts say a famine might already have set in there. **Food prices soar in central Gaza after looting:** On Monday, a crowd of people waited outside a shuttered bakery in the central city of Deir al-Balah. A woman who had been displaced from Gaza City, identifying herself as Umm

Shadi, said the price of flour had climbed to 400 shekels (over \$100) a bag, if it can even be found. Nora Muhanna, another woman displaced from Gaza City, said she was leaving empty-handed after waiting five hours for a bag of bread for her children. "From the beginning, there are no goods, and even if they are available, there is no money," she said. The United Nations said armed men stole food and other aid from 98 trucks over the weekend, the largest single incident of its kind since the start of the war. It did not say who was behind the theft. UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said the convoy of 109 trucks was instructed by the Israeli military to take an "alternative, unfamiliar route" after the aid was brought in through the Kerem Shalom crossing, and that the trucks were stolen near the crossing itself. Israel has long accused Hamas of stealing aid, allegations

denied by the militant group. Al-Aqsa TV, a media outlet operated by the militants, said Hamas-run security forces in Gaza had launched an operation against looters, killing 20 of them. The report implied that members of tribal groups near Rafah were behind the theft. The Hamas-run government had a police force of tens of thousands that maintained a high degree of public security before the war, but they have vanished from the streets in many areas after being targeted by Israeli strikes. Hamas says it has taken measures to prevent both looting and price-gouging in local markets. **Wars rage on in Biden administration's final months:** Hamas ignited the war in Gaza when its fighters stormed into Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Israel's retaliatory

offensive has killed over 43,800 Palestinians, more than half of them women and children, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish between civilians and combatants in their toll. The war has left much of the territory in ruins and forced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million to flee, often multiple times. Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel the day after the Hamas attack in what it said was solidarity with the Palestinians and Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group. Israel launched retaliatory airstrikes, and all-out war erupted in September. The fighting has left more than 3,500 dead in Lebanon and almost 15,000 wounded, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. It also displaced nearly 1.2 million, or a quarter of Lebanon's population. On the Israeli side, 87 soldiers and 50 civilians have been killed by rockets, drones and missiles.

Several students hurt by vehicle outside school in China

AP ■ TAIPEI

Numerous children were injured by a vehicle outside an elementary school in central China's Hunan province on Tuesday, reports said. Hours after the incident, the casualty count was unclear and authorities had yet to clarify if it was an accident or a deliberate attack. The incident follows a series of recent killings or attacks in China by people in vehicles or wielding knives. Students were arriving for classes around 8 am at Yong'an Elementary School in the city of Changde when a small white SUV drove into a crowd of children and adults, according to state media. Few details were released, reflecting China's reflexive inclination to suppress news about crime, protests and major accidents that could erode public confidence in the ruling Communist Party's self-

declared ability to maintain social order. Several adults were also injured, the official Xinhua News Agency said, adding that the driver was subdued by parents and security guards and some of the injured were immediately sent to the hospital. Police in the city's Dingcheng district, where the school is located, issued a statement saying no one had life-threatening injuries and identifying the driver as a 39-year-old man surnamed Huang, who was under detention. It said the incident was under investigation but gave no word on the cause or other details. Footage posted on Chinese social media showed the injured lying on the road while terrified students ran past the gate and inside the schoolhouse. Comments on Chinese internet sites reflected anger and frustra-

tion with recurring incidents of violence against citizens by those venting anger at society. While China has much lower rates of violence than many countries — personal gun ownership there is illegal — knifings and the use of homemade explosives still occur. Chinese schools have been subject to numerous attacks by people armed with knives or using vehicles as weapons. A stabbing attack at a vocational school in the eastern Chinese city of Wuxi on Saturday left eight people dead and 17 others injured. That came shortly after a man drove his car into people at a sports facility in the southern city of Zhuhai, leaving 35 people dead and 43 others injured. In September, three people were killed in a knife attack in a Shanghai supermarket, and 15 others were injured.

India says gender parity achieved across all levels of education, prioritising bridging pay gap

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India Tuesday said it has achieved gender parity across all levels of education and is now prioritising increasing women's workforce participation in non-conventional sectors and bridging gender pay gaps and the digital divide. Delivering the country statement at the UN Ministerial Conference on women empowerment here, Preetam B Yashwant, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, said India has worked on gender-responsive solutions to reduce "time poverty" of women such as clean cooking fuels, tap water

connections and construction of toilets. "Aligned to regional trends demonstrating reduced inequalities in education, today, I am happy to share that India has achieved gender parity across all levels of education. We have one of the highest proportions of women in STEM disciplines globally," he said. Yashwant said that India has adopted a multi-pronged approach to address the issues of women on a life-cycle continuum basis for their educational, social, economic and political empowerment. "From mitigation of gender poverty gap through saturation of green, gender-responsive

solutions that reduce women's time poverty such as clean cooking fuels, tap water connections, and construction of toilets, India has foregrounded large-scale policies that reduce women's drudgery, provide social protection, and enable their economic empowerment," he said. The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+30 Review began here on Tuesday, bringing together over 1,200 delegates from governments, civil society and youth groups, the private sector and academia to discuss progress and priority actions to support gender equality and women's empowerment.

Jointly organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and UN-Women, the three-day conference in Bangkok is being held ahead of next year's 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. "India's implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action draws from our constitutionally ordained principle of equality, and is inspired from our commitment to CEDAW. Guided by the vision of Women-led development, India has witnessed a paradigm shift in governance to ensure that

women lead the way as architects in the conceptualization, design and monitoring of the measures that shape our development trajectory," Yashwant said. "At the cusp of the timelines for Agenda 2030 and to achieve our vision of becoming a developed economy, another one of our key priorities is increasing women's workforce participation, including in non-conventional sectors," he added. The official said that going forward, the country has prioritised sustained interventions and streamlined effective implementation of laws on women's safety, including for domestic and public spaces

and workplaces, augmented investments in building affordable and quality women care homes infrastructure and increased focus on gender-just society including political empowerment and decision-making roles. "We are also focusing on bridging the gender pay gap, gender digital divide and better health, well-being and nutritional outcomes that has also been reflected in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration under India's G20 Presidency. "India's commitment to achieving gender equality is evidenced by over 218 per cent decadal increase in gender budgeting, with current year's

allocation worth USD 37 billion," he added. Yashwant noted that India has fast-tracked financial inclusion of women in less than a decade, and over 300 million women have bank accounts today. "Envisioning Self Help Groups as vehicles of change, today 100 million women are transforming the rural landscape economically, and taking greater leadership at the grassroots level. India has fast-tracked financial inclusion of women in less than a decade. Over 300 million women today have bank accounts under the world's largest financial inclusion programme," he said.

At the conference, ESCAP and UN Women also launched a new report Charting New Paths for Gender Equality and Empowerment "Asia-Pacific Regional Report on Beijing+30 Review". The report highlights the challenges ahead, but also forward-looking strategies and solutions under six thematic areas — poverty reduction and human capital development; shared prosperity and decent work; freedom from gender-based violence; meaningful participation and gender-responsive governance; peaceful and just societies; and gender and the environment.

Agriculture Minister sounds alarm on soil degradation, calls for urgent action

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday expressed concern over soil degradation affecting 30 per cent of India's land and stressed the need for urgent measures to maintain soil quality for sustainable farming. Addressing a global conference on soil through video conferencing, Chouhan said improving soil health is crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to zero hunger, climate action and life on land. "We are producing more than 330 million tonnes foodgrains annually and exporting worth USD 50 billion.



This success however comes with concerns, especially regarding soil health," the minister said. According to Chouhan,

exploitation of natural resources and wrong soil management practices. The minister highlighted various government initiatives, including the distribution of more than 220 million soil health cards to farmers and the promotion of micro irrigation, organic and natural farming methods. However, he emphasised that more focused efforts are needed, particularly in view of rising temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns and climate change challenges. A new programme on modern agriculture will soon be launched to bridge the gap between scientists and farmers, Chouhan added. Speaking at the event, Niti Aayog member Ramesh Chand questioned the

limited adoption of conservation agriculture and zero tillage methods in India and South Asia, despite their successful implementation in South American countries like Brazil and Argentina. While some NGOs and private companies are promoting regenerative agriculture and natural farming, these initiatives remain limited in scope, Chand told the conference, calling on the Indian Soil Scientists Society (ISSS) to spearhead larger-scale solutions. The conference was attended by ICAR Director General Himanshu Pathak, Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority Chairperson Trilochan Mohapatra, and ISSS President H Pathak.

FICCI reduces GST on EV batteries, charging services to boost affordability

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In order to keep EVs competitive there is a need to reduce GST on batteries and charging services, FICCI Electric Vehicle Committee Chair Sulajja Firodia Motwani said on Tuesday. Speaking at the sidelines of FICCI National Conference on EVs here, she also exhorted the need to enhance PM E-Drive corpus to support enhanced sales of EVs. "We would be making a recommendation to the GST council to rationalise the GST taxation on EV-related areas," Motwani said. Elaborating on the demands, she noted, "Currently the GST on charging services is still 18 per cent which we would request to bring down to 5 per cent so that charging becomes more affordable to the consumers." Secondly, the GST on batteries should also come down to 5 per cent, she added. "While EVs attract a GST of 5 per cent, GST on batteries is



18 per cent. The request is to reduce it to 5 per cent so that when consumers buy replacement batteries, it is more affordable," Motwani said. Meeting that these two reforms on GST will help a lot in making EVs more competitive for the consumers, she stated. While welcoming the PM E-Drive scheme, Motwani said that with rising demand there is a need to review the incentive amounts. "We believe that because the demand is growing, perhaps the incentive amounts have to be reviewed so that the budget under the PM E-Drive scheme

overall is enhanced to ensure that the total number of vehicles sold in the next two years are eligible for the incentive," she stated. She further said, "We do believe that PM E-Drive has great potential, and it will go a long way in further accelerating electric mobility." Motwani also emphasised that EVs should be part of priority sector lending. "We do believe there's a strong case to allow and to help having affordable financing for EVs that can make it more cost competitive for not just the classes, but for the masses," she said. FICCI President and Mahindra Group MD and CEO Anish Shah said electric four-wheelers currently have a 1.5 per cent penetration in India which indicates that "much work is needed". India has a history of leapfrogging other countries and the discussion shifts to the requirements for achieving this with EVs, he said.

Government addresses steel import issues amid rising concerns

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is working to address the issues related to steel imports, Union Steel Minister H D Kumaraswamy said on Tuesday. The industry has apprised the ministry and it is aware of the issue, Kumaraswamy told PTI on the sidelines of FICCI's Conference on 'Electric Vehicles - Accelerating E-mobility: Enablers and Imperative'. "Some issues are there. They (steel players) are telling some substandard material is getting imported from some countries. For that we are working," he said. Domestic steel players have been consistently raising their concerns over rising cheap steel imports from select nations, affecting their competitiveness. Steel imports have risen by nearly 50 per cent in the first six months of FY25

compared to the same period last year, with China being the largest contributor, BigMint CEO Dhruv Goel said. "This surge is primarily driven by increased Chinese steel exports due to slowing domestic demand there. China's exports are projected to surpass 100 million tonnes in 2024, the highest in eight years," he said. Additionally, Vietnam has contributed significant incremental volumes to India. Exports from Vietnam benefit from the free trade agreement, which exempts them from import duties, Goel noted. According to BigMint data, India's steel imports were at 5.51 million tonnes (MnT) in April-September 2024-25, higher from 3.66 MnT in the year-ago period. Imports from China have surged to 1.85 MnT during that period from 1.02 MnT in April-September period of financial year 2023-24.

CCPA to bring regulatory framework for diamond industry to protect consumers interest

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) will soon release guidelines on diamond sector to ensure explicit labelling and certification of all diamonds and prohibit the use of misleading terms in trade. The CCPA has organised a stakeholder consultation on consumer protection in the diamond sector to deliberate on the use of appropriate terminology for diamonds, an official statement said on Tuesday. The consultation, chaired by Nidhi Khare, Chief Commissioner, Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), brought together key industry stakeholders and experts. "The CCPA will soon release a robust framework to ensure transparency, accountability, and consumer protection across the diamond industry," the statement said. The meeting addressed critical concerns regarding



the lack of standardised terminology and inadequate disclosure practices in the diamond sector. "These gaps have resulted in consumer confusion and misleading practices, especially concerning the differentiation between natural diamonds and lab-grown diamonds," it pointed out. Industry consensus emphasised the need for ethical marketing practices and consistent terminology to enhance consumer protection.

"Comprehensive guidelines were proposed to mandate: Explicit labelling and certification of all diamonds, specifying their origin and production method; prohibition of misleading terms like 'natural' or 'genuine' for lab-grown products; accreditation systems to regulate and standardise diamond testing laboratories, curbing the rise of unregulated entities," the statement said. The consultation was a significant step toward building a transparent and

consumer-centric diamond market. During the consultation, the broad key aspects and prevailing Legal and Regulatory frameworks were discussed in detail. Citing an example, the CCPA said that The Legal Metrology Act, 2009, under Section 12, provides the unit of mass for diamonds, pearls, and precious stones as the carat (symbol: c), equivalent to 200 milligrams or one five-thousandth of a kilogram, ensuring standardised measurements for consistency in commercial transactions across the diamond industry. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Standard IS 15766:2007 mandates that the term "diamond" alone must exclusively refer to natural diamonds. Synthetic diamonds cannot be labelled as "diamond" without qualification and must be explicitly referred to as "synthetic diamonds," irrespective of the production method or

material used. To maintain market clarity, synthetic diamonds are also prohibited from being graded alongside natural diamonds. Under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, a robust legal framework to safeguard consumer interests by preventing unfair trade practices and ensuring transparent labelling in the diamond industry is provided. This prohibits misleading descriptions or omissions that may confuse consumers. Further, Central Board of Direct Taxes and Custom (CBIC) reinforced these measures, mandating the explicit declaration of whether a diamond is natural or lab-grown, and if lab-grown, the production method—Chemical Vapor Deposition (CVD), High Pressure High Temperature (HPHT), or others—must be specified to ensure transparency and accountability in the diamond sector.

'Her Comfort' campaign to promote menstrual health awareness

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ GURUGRAM

Artemis Health Sciences Foundation (AHSF), in partnership with Pinkishe Foundation, launched the 'Her Comfort' campaign to promote menstrual health awareness among adolescent girls in underserved areas of Gurugram. The initiative, launched at Govt. Senior Secondary School, Basai, aims to benefit 1,500 girls by providing hygiene kits and education to combat stigma and promote menstrual health. The kits include sanitary pads, undergarments, and educational materials for six months. Workshops will dispel myths and empower girls to manage their health confidently.

Coal India Ltd receives Green World Awards 2024



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vinay Ranjan, Director, Coal India Limited (CIL), on Monday received the Green World Awards 2024 during a much-awaited presentation ceremony at The Orangery, Kensington Palace, London today. The award was given by The Green Organisation, which began in 1994 and is an independent, non-political, non-profit environment group. Vinay Ranjan said that let's this moment inspire us all to take action, protect our environment, and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come. He thanked everyone who supported me on this incredible journey. The Certificate of Achievement was presented to Coal India Coal India Ltd in recognition of winning a Green World Award for their commitment to environment best practice. CIL, living up to its Corporate Citizen role is one of the largest spenders in the country under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Coal India as a corporate entity, it contributes to the country's economically and socially apart from its core role as energy provider.

Foreign portfolio investor Emerging India Focus Funds settles case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investor Emerging India Focus Funds has settled a case pertaining to the alleged violations of FPI rules with capital markets watchdog Sebi after paying Rs 64.35 lakh as settlement charges. In a corrigendum to its settlement order, Sebi on Tuesday said that the case concerns non-compliance with the 'fit and proper' criteria for the period from October 13, 2022, to April 11, 2023. The latest order came after the applicant filed an application with Sebi proposing to settle the proceedings initiated against it, "without admitting or denying the

findings of facts and conclusions of law" through a settlement order. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) initiated adjudication proceedings against the applicant and issued a show cause notice in February for the alleged violations of FPI Regulations and Intermediaries Regulations. Pending adjudication proceedings, Emerging India Focus Funds filed an application with Sebi and paid Rs 64.35 lakh on November 13 to settle the alleged violations. "In view of the acceptance of the settlement terms and the receipt of settlement amount- by Sebi, the instant adjudication proceedings initiated against applicant vide SCN (show cause notice) dated



February 29, 2024, is disposed of," Sebi said in its order passed on Monday. The SCN was issued to the applicant on account of revocation of license of its controlling shareholder - Emerging India Fund Management Ltd- by the Mauritius financial regulator Financial Services Commission

(FSC) after which the applicant was not in compliance with the 'fit and proper' criteria for the period from October 13, 2022 to April 11, 2023. Further, the applicant failed to forthwith inform Sebi and the Designated Depository Participant about the change in its eligibility status. EIFF replaced the controlling shareholder with a new fit and proper entity only in April 2023, sources said. Between April 2022 and April 2023, therefore, EIFF was in breach of Sebi regulations, and a show cause notice was duly served on them. This has now been duly settled. EIFF has only invested in mutual

funds in India since November 2021. Emerging India Focus Funds was named in the Hindenburg Research report, which which alleged that the fund was used to inflate the volume as well as price of the Adani Group companies. Sources close to the development said that the case that has been settled with Emerging India Focus Funds (EIFF) has nothing to do with the Adani or Hindenburg report related to enforcement actions undertaken by Sebi. Specifically, this case does not form a part of the 24 cases that were reported to the expert committee set up by the Supreme Court after the Hindenburg Report of January 2023.

IBL and BFIL sign MoU with Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

IndusInd Bank Limited (IBL) and Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited (BFIL) on Monday announced a collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA & FW), Government of India, to launch the Bharat Sanjeevani Krishi Utthan initiative. This initiative aims to support the government's flagship program, "Formation and Promotion of 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)" providing a robust framework to empower FPOs across the country. This collaboration has been driven through BFIL and IBL's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and aims to enhance agricultural productivity, promote

sustainable farming practices, and improve farmers' income consistently, across 11 states namely Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Commenting on this significant partnership, Mr. Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, Additional Secretary, MoA & FW, GoI, said, "BFIL and IBL's commitment to leveraging technology in agriculture is commendable. By utilizing IT solutions, providing project management support, and extending their expertise, BFIL& IBL are empowering farmers to make data-driven decisions and enhance their production practices, contributing to the growth and sustainability of the agricultural sector."

Indic Wisdom raises funds to boost wood-pressed oil production

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indic Wisdom, a Mumbai-based manufacturer of high-quality wood-pressed oils on Tuesday raised funds in a Pre-series A round primarily led by Rockstud Capital along with other investors. A significant rise in consumer awareness about their health and a shift in preference towards natural, nutrient-dense food products is driving the demand for cold-pressed oils. These oils, renowned for their high nutritional content, including essential vitamins, antioxidants, and fatty acids, offer a superior alternative to refined oils, which often undergo processing that can strip them of valuable nutrients. Indic Wisdom Pvt. Limited traces its inspiration to India's egalitarian culinary traditions. Growing up with the belief that food should be natural and shared, Prajakta Khare & Kaustubh Khare founded Indic Wisdom to contemporise that



civilisational wisdom and invested in manufacturing to produce goodness at scale. It is strategically positioned to capitalize on the burgeoning market for premium cold-pressed oils. Their comprehensive product range, encompassing cooking oils, multipurpose oils, and specialty oils, caters to the diverse needs and preferences of health-conscious consumers. The founders bring over two decades of combined experience in digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and onshore/offshore sales. Their expertise, honed through previous roles, is now

dedicated to a singular mission: to modernize India's ancient culinary traditions through continuous innovation and knowledge expansion. By doing so, they aim to create products that promote global well-being. Prajakta Khare, co-founder of Indic Wisdom, says, "With Indic Wisdom, we want to take India's timeless tradition of prasad - food that is pure, sustainable, and meant for everyone - to the world. We are doing this by incorporating modern production best practices and quality standards in traditional food production practices."

INBRIEF

POWERGRID ACQUIRES FOUR MAJOR ISTS PROJECTS

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID) has successfully acquired four Project Special Purpose Vehicles to execute Inter-State Transmission Projects related to transmission of renewable energy.



55TH FOUNDATION DAY OF GNDU



Guru Nanak Dev University has taken new steps in the field of higher education. On the occasion of the 500th birth anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji.

HITS OPENS ADMISSIONS FOR 2025-26

CHENNAI: Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, a NAAC A+ accredited institution renowned for academic and research excellence, has announced admissions for the academic year 2025-26. Alongside, the institution has unveiled a Rs. 5 crore merit-based scholarship initiative to support deserving students.



GNDU'S MECHANICAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATED IN SCIENCE FESTIVAL



AMRITSAR: The Department of Mechanical Engineering of Guru Nanak Dev University, participated in the Khalsa Science Festival, organized by the Society for Promotion of Science and Technology in India in collaboration with Khalsa College, Amritsar.

India beat Japan 2-0, to face China in final of women's ACT hockey

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

Defending champions India continued their unbeaten run and defeated Japan 2-0 to enter the final of the women's Asian Champions Trophy hockey tournament here on Tuesday. Vice-captain Navneet Kaur converted a penalty stroke in the 48th minute while Lalaremsiami struck from field play in the 56th minute for India, who had plenty of scoring chances including 13 penalty corners. India will face China, whom they defeated in the league stages, in the final on Wednesday. Earlier, China beat Malaysia 3-1 in the first semifinal. Malaysia will take on Japan in the third-fourth place match, while Korea finished fifth after beating Thailand

3-0 in the fifth-sixth place classification match. The Indians continued their attacking game and put on early pressure on the Japanese defence, just like the last league game. The play was mostly inside the Japanese half as the Indian defence was hardly tested. India had the first shot at the goal inside the initial five minutes. Skipper Salima Tete's attempt was thwarted by Japanese goalkeeper Yu Kudo. The Indians repeatedly penetrated the Japanese citadel and in the process secured two penalty corners in a span of two minutes but Kudo was alert under the bar to deny Navneet Kaur and Deepika. Three minutes into the second quarter, India secured three back-to-back



penalty corners but failed to find the back of the net. It was raining penalty corners for the hosts as they got back-to-back set pieces in the 21st minute but Kudo produced a brilliant save with her fully-stretched right leg to deny Deepika again. In the 24th minute, India earned a penalty corner followed by another in the next minute but failed to get past Japanese goalkeeper Kudo, as they also lacked in execution. A minute after the change of ends, India secured two penalty corners but wasted both. In the 35th minute, Kudo again denied Deepika from a set piece. In the 41st minute, Deepika stole the ball just outside the Japanese circle, but shot wide from a one-on-one situation with Kudo.

Seconds from the end of third quarter, Kudo once again pulled off a brilliant save to deny Uditia from another penalty corner. In the 47th minute, India secured their 12th penalty corner but failed to breach Kudo. But a minute later, India broke the deadlock through a penalty stroke earned by Deepika and Navneet made no mistake. The goal seemed to have rejuvenated the Indians as they scored a fine field goal in the 56th minute. Lalaremsiami slammed into the back of the Japanese goal after she was brilliantly set up by Sunelita Toppo's terrific run from the right flank. Japan got a penalty corner in the dying moments, but failed to get past a rock solid Indian defence.

Pulisic scores twice, US beats Jamaica 4-2 for 5-2 aggregate win in CONCACAF Nations League QF

AP ■ ST. LOUIS (US)

Christian Pulisic scored twice in the first half, Tim Weah got a goal in his return to the U.S. National team from a red card and the Americans beat Jamaica 4-2 for a 5-2 aggregate win in their CONCACAF Nations League quarterfinal. Playing their first competitive matches under coach Mauricio Pochettino, the United States advanced to a semifinal on March 20 at Inglewood, California. The Americans won the first three editions of the tournament. The U.S. also qualified for next year's CONCACAF Gold Cup, while Jamaica will have to play a qualifier. Pulisic put the U.S. Ahead in the 13th minute when he ran onto a long looping pass from Weston McKennie and kicked the ball past onrushing goalkeeper Andre Blake. Pulisic doubled the lead off a pass from McKennie that Tanner Tessmann dummied in the 33rd minute. Pulisic's



shot deflected in off Di'Shon Bernard for his 33rd international goal. Ricardo Pepi, who scored off a Pulisic pass in the opening leg in Kingston on Thursday, boosted the lead to 3-0 in the 42nd with his 13th goal, a right-foot shot from just outside the

penalty area. Demarai Gray scored the first of his two goals for Jamaica in the 53rd and Weah, who hit a post in the fourth minute, put the U.S. Ahead 4-1 in the 56th when he settled a pass from Yunus Musah and sent a shot just

under the crossbar for his seventh goal. Gray got his second goal in the 68th. Costa Rica took a 1-0 lead into its home match against Panama on Monday night. On Tuesday, Mexico is at home trying to overturn a 2-0 first-leg loss at Honduras and Canada is home with a 1-0 lead against Suriname. Weah started in place of injured Johnny Cardoso after completing a two-game suspension for a red card against Panama in the Copa America last summer. That was the only change made by Pochettino from the first leg. Defender Tim Ream, at 37 the oldest player on the roster, captained the Americans in his hometown of St. Louis. Jamaica coach Steve McLaren, a former England manager, told the media that star Michail Antonio wasn't available because he lost his passport and couldn't get a U.

Croatia, Denmark qualify for Nations League quarterfinals with draws

AP ■ MADRID

Denmark and Croatia completed the Nations League quarterfinals lineup after both sides secured draws. Denmark went 0-0 in Serbia, and Croatia came from behind to share 1-1 with visiting Portugal. They joined France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands in the last eight. The quarterfinals will be held from March 20-23. In Warsaw, Liverpool fullback Andy Robertson scored an injury time header to give Scotland a 2-1 win over Poland and send the host down into League B. Scotland has a playoff to secure its League A status. Northern Ireland will step up to League B after topping its group. Northern Ireland did slip a two-goal lead but drew in Luxembourg 2-2. Romania hammered Cyprus 4-1. San Marino will jump into Group C after beating Liechtenstein 3-1. Scotland wins again. After going nine matches without a win, Scotland appeared rejuvenated as a Robert Lewandowski-less Poland to League B. Scotland took just one point from its first four games in Group A1 but beat Croatia at home on Friday and was 1-0 up after three minutes in Warsaw. Billy Gilmour's threaded pass found Ben Doak, who rolled the ball to John McGinn to score his second goal in four days. Scotland hit the woodwork twice in the first half and its inability to open a greater lead almost cost it when Kamil Piatkowski lashed a stunning strike into the top corner of the net to equalize 14 minutes into the second period. However, Scotland pushed forward for a winner and Robertson headed the decider in the third minute of stoppage time. Croatia struggled. Croatia needed only a draw to secure qualification but it made the home fans in Split sweat before getting the point it needed against group winner Portugal.



With 32 minutes gone, João Felix brought down a superb 45-yard pass from Vitinha and slipped the ball under the advancing keeper to give the visitors the lead. When Andrej Kramaric hit the post and Josko Gvardiol had a 62nd minute goal ruled out for offside it looked like it might not be Croatia's night. But Manchester City's Gvardiol got the equalizer just a few minutes later and Croatia held on to take the second quarterfinal spot from Group A1. Spain beats Switzerland. There was little to play for in Tenerife, where Spain, top of Group A4, took on the already relegated Switzerland. Coach Luis de la Fuente offered a first start to Barcelona midfielder Marc Casadó and gave debuts to Samu and Aitor Paredes in a much-changed Spain side. But it was the two Bryans, Gil and Zaragoza, who got the goals that mattered for the European champions. Pedro's first half penalty was saved but Yeremi Pino converted to put Spain ahead. Joel Monteiro equalized for Switzerland after 63 minutes but Bryan Gil got Spain back in front five minutes later. Andi Zeqiri equalized again from the penalty spot with five minutes remaining but a stoppage time penalty from Bryan Zaragoza at the other end gave Spain all three points. Denmark draws in Serbia. In Leskovac, Serbia controlled most of the game against Denmark but could not get the goal it needed to progress from Group A4. Dušan Vlahovic was in fine form for the home side but the Danes held out to take second spot, eight points

behind winner Spain but two ahead of the Serbs, for which Strahinja Pavlovic was sent off near the end. Northern Ireland steps up. Northern Ireland finished on top of Group C3 even though it blew a 2-0 lead in Luxembourg. Isaac Price opened the scoring after 19 minutes and the Standard Liege midfielder set up Conor Bradley for the second five minutes into the second half. The opener was Northern Ireland's 100th under coach Michael O'Neill. However, even though the home side scored twice in the last 18 minutes, Northern Ireland ended its campaign with 11 points, two ahead of Bulgaria, which drew at home with Belarus 1-1. Luxembourg finished last. Romania and Kosovo win. Romania finished on top of Group C2 with a 4-1 win over Cyprus. Daniel Birligea put Romania ahead after two minutes and Razvan Marin scored twice before Florinel Coman made it four. Ioannis Pittas got Cyprus' goal and the Cypriots' Konstantinos Laifis was sent off 13 minutes from time. Kosovo beat Lithuania 1-0 with an early goal from Muharrem Jashari, who was also sent off on the stroke of halftime. Kosovo finished second, three points behind Romania, but an asterisk remains over the final placings following the abandonment of Friday's match between the teams in Bucharest. The Kosovo players alleged they were victims of pro-Serbian chants by the home fans and walked off the field in the final minute. UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings.

Mike Tyson-Jake Paul fight draws record betting for a combat sports event



AP ■ LAS VEGAS

Jake Paul's unanimous victory over former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson might have been disappointing from a competitive standpoint, but it drew record betting. BetMGM said the fight between the YouTube star and the 58-year-old Tyson, who showed his age by being a sitting target, was its most-bet boxing or mixed-martial arts fight. The sportsbook took three times the number of bets and four times the money of any combat sport in BetMGM's history. Craig Mucklow, vice president of trading at

Caesars Sportsbook, said the fight was on par with an NFL Monday night game. "We knew there would be tremendous interest in the fight, as the betting suggested it was a generational matchup in customer demographics," Mucklow said. "Those old enough to remember a prime Mike Tyson got to live the nostalgia one last time, while those not old enough to know Iron Mike were firmly on the Jake Paul side of the counter." DraftKings sports operations director Johnny Avello said the fight also was its most-bet boxing match. "The bettors were yearning

for Tyson to return to the ring even at 58 years old, and wanted to be a part of this moment with one of the icons of the sport," Avello said. "We'll see who Jake Paul fights next, but his matches have proven to create immense buzz and unprecedented action on our platforms." The amount of betting can't necessarily be used to draw a direct comparison with betting on big fights in the past since so many major bouts, including Tyson's biggest fights, occurred before sports betting was legalized beyond Nevada in 2018. It's still not legal in 38 states. But the fight at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, still drew an enormous handle. Most of the wagers at BetMGM Sportsbook were on proposition bets, with the most popular being on Tyson to prevail either by knockout, decision or a first-round KO. Though Paul was a -175 favorite, 67% of the tickets and 53% of the money at BetMGM was on Tyson. "Paul winning was a good outcome for the sportsbook," BetMGM senior trader Alex Rella said.



Bayern midfielder Palhinha faces weeks out after injury while with Portugal

AP ■ MUNICH

João Palhinha's year could be over early after the Bayern Munich midfielder was injured on Portugal duty. Palhinha will "be sidelined for the coming weeks" after he tore a muscle in his right adductor, part of the hip and thigh area, Bayern said on Tuesday. That kept Palhinha out of Portugal's 5-1 win over Poland in the Nations League on Friday and its 1-1 draw with Croatia on Monday. He is set to miss tough games for Bayern including hosting Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League next week, facing Borussia Dortmund in

the German Klassiker on Nov. 30, and taking on defending champion Bayer Leverkusen in the German Cup on Dec. 3. German media reported Palhinha was not expected to return until after the winter break. Bayern's last game before the break is Dec. 20. Bayern could have to rely on Leon Goretzka, who has been a fringe player this season, because coach Vincent Kompany's other preferred defensive midfielder, Aleksandar Pavlovic, has yet to return following surgery on a broken collarbone last month. Pavlovic has managed "some elements" of training with the rest of the team, Bayern said on Monday.

PGA Tour approves reduction to 100 players keeping cards off FedEx Cup list

AP ■ NEW YORK

The PGA Tour policy board have approved eligibility changes that eliminate 25 cards through the FedEx Cup in the first reduction of jobs since the all-exempt tour began in 1983. Starting in 2026, only the top 100 in the FedEx Cup are assured full status the following year. The board voted on proposals from the 16-member Player Advisory Council aimed at giving everyone who earns a full PGA Tour card a chance to get into enough tournaments to have a fair chance at keeping their cards. It also approved smaller field sizes — a maximum of 144 players, down from 156 —

for tournaments on one course with ample daylight hours. Another change was eliminating the four restricted sponsor exemptions, allocating them to what amounts to the alternate list. Open tournaments still get unrestricted sponsor exemptions (typically four) they can give to whomever they want. With changes not taking effect until 2026, that makes next year even more cutthroat with more than 170 players who have cards trying to finish in the top 100. "The PAC discussions were based on a number of guiding principles, including our belief that PGA Tour membership is the pinnacle of achievement in men's professional golf," said Adam Scott, a player

director on the policy board who also serve on the competitions subcommittee of the PAC. "The changes approved today will provide equitable playing opportunities for new young talent to be showcased, and positively refine the playing experience for our members." It will be tougher than ever to get a PGA Tour card. Along with players having to finish in the top 100 — tournament winners still get a two-year exemption — the tour will award only 20 cards to the Korn Ferry Tour, along with cards for the leading 10 players not already exempt on the European tour and five from Q-school. Players who came through the Korn Ferry and Europe



fall behind the top 100 and tournament winners in the priority list. Previously, they often had to go weeks at a time without a spot for them

to play. Up until the early 1980s, only the top 60 were exempt and everyone else had to go through qualifying. Because players

had a card that didn't guarantee starts, the PGA Tour switched to the all-exempt tour for the top 125 in 1983. That's been the

number ever since. It's the latest significant adjustment to the tour since the disruption of Saudi-backed LIV Golf, which began in June 2022. In the last two years, the tour has created \$20 million signature events with limited fields and a postseason for only the top 70 players. "The reality is that we're all playing under different circumstances than we were four years ago," PAC Chairman Camilo Villegas said in three weeks ago when the changes were proposed. "We had no competition. We were the best. All of a sudden we have competition and there are little shifts. The changes we're proposing make a better product. What does having a PGA Tour card mean?"

The tour also announced changes to the FedEx Cup points distribution that start in 2025, awarding more points to second place and decreasing points from 11th place and down. For signature events, the decrease starts after seventh place. Monday qualifying will offer four spots only to 144-man fields, reducing the number to two spots for 132-man fields and none when only 120 players are in the field. There also was the ongoing pace-of-play problem, which rules officials for years have argued was due primarily to too many players on the course. The field sizes would be 120 players before Daylight Savings Time, then up to 132 players and a maximum of 144 in the summer.

Australia have to leave Kohli alone, hope he doesn't bring the intensity: Shane Watson

PTI ■ PERTH

Former all-rounder Shane Watson has advised the Australian team to avoid getting into confrontations with Virat Kohli in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as he feels the intensity the celebrated Indian batter derives from provocations brings the best out of him.

Going through a lean run of form, Kohli has enjoyed great success in Australia in the past and will look to regain his touch in the five-match Test series, which gets underway on Friday at the Optus Stadium here.

Provoking the Indian batting mainstay has often proved to be counterproductive for the Australians, and Watson has experienced it himself.

"The one thing that I know of Virat is... Because the fire burns so brightly and deep inside him, the intensity he brings to every ball that he is engaged in a game has been superhuman," Watson was quoted as saying on the Willow Talk podcast.

"But, there have been in recent times where moments in this career that fire has started to go out because it is just so hard to maintain that intensity in every moment he is involved in a game.

"And, that is where Australia have to leave him alone and hope he doesn't bring the intensity -- nine out of 10 intensity -- to every ball."

Kohli has played 13 Tests in



Australia since 2011, amassing 1,352 runs at an average of 54.08, including six centuries and four fifties, with a top score of 169.

While this would be his fifth tour Down Under in the longest format, Kohli's best outing came during the

2014-15 series when he aggregated 692 runs in four Tests at an average of 86.50, including four hundreds and a half-century. These remarkable numbers are not lost on Watson. "We have seen that when he has had success in Australia, he is up

and above for everything in the middle. Every ball he is up for every single moment.

"You can see the fierce intensity that he brings, and if he gets that, then it shuts everything else out. That is when he is at his absolute best.

"If there is stuff happening around and that intensity is not there, that is when you will see the not-so-best version of Virat. So from an Australian perspective, let's hope we get to see that version of him," Watson said.

Kohli's performance in the red-ball format this year has been below par, managing just 250 runs in six Tests at an average of 22.72.

"Smith wasn't actually batting at his best as an opener."

When the discussion turned to Australian batting, Watson backed Steve Smith to bring the very best of him against the formidable Indian bowling attack.

Smith will be back at his usual number four slot after struggling as opener following the retirement of David Warner.

"Steve wanted to open. He was super keen to take up a new challenge. But, one thing with that opportunity he had was he wasn't actually batting at his best at that time," Watson noted.

"So, he got an opportunity to open, and Steve Smith at his very best would have made the most out of it because he just loves scoring runs, whether it is opening or at No. 4. You could see it a few times he got out when he was opening -- his game and his technique was a little bit off."

For the marquee series against fierce rivals India, the Australian selectors have picked 25-year-old uncapped Nathan McSweeney to open the innings alongside Usman Khawaja.



I've got nothing but respect for Virat, he's a champion: Lyon

PTI ■ PERTH

Virat Kohli has been struggling for form of late but veteran Australia spinner has nothing but respect for the Indian super star, who he says is a champion you can not write off.

Kohli has been enduring a lean patch over the past few months. In his last 60 Test innings, he has managed just two centuries and 11 half-centuries.

This year, he has averaged only 22.72 across six Tests, and in the three games against New Zealand, he could manage only 93 runs.

But Lyon remains wary of what Kohli could do in the five-match Test series beginning here on Friday.

"Overall, look at his record. You don't write off champions. I've got nothing but respect for Virat," Lyon was quoted as saying by cricket.Com.Au.

"I want to get him out, there's

no point in hiding behind that, but it's challenging. It's been pretty amazing competing against him for so many times.

"Him and Smithy (Steve Smith) are probably the best two batters in our last era of this last decade," said the 36-year-old off-spinner with 530 wickets from 129 Tests.

Lyon is one of the four members of the current squad who were part of Australia's last successful Test series against India in 2014-15.

India have won the last two series in Australia but they have come here after a shock 0-3 loss at home against New Zealand.

Lyon doesn't believe that India are vulnerable this time around. "They're dangerous all the time. They're a side full of superstars. They've got so much experience, but talented youth as well and you can never write off that," said Lyon, who took 22 wickets when Australia toured India in 2023.



Kane believes 2026 World Cup won't be his England swansong

AP ■ LONDON

Captain Harry Kane believes the 2026 World Cup will not be his last appearance for England.

There is increasing scrutiny about the 31-year-old Kane's future, even though he extended his all-time England scoring record to 69 goals in 103 appearances as Ireland was beaten 5-0 on Sunday at Wembley Stadium.

The Bayern Munich striker was surprisingly omitted from the 3-0 win against Greece last Thursday.

A statue and mural of Kane were unveiled on Monday at the east London home of his former youth team Ridgeway Rovers. The British Press Association asked him if the 2026 World Cup is his last shot at glory for England. "I

don't think so," he said.

"I think there's a perception when you get to your 30s that you're coming to an end, but for me I'm performing at the highest level I've ever performed and feel as good as I've ever felt, so it's about taking in the moment.

"I don't like to look too far ahead, and in my career I never have.

"The World Cup (in the U.S., Mexico and Canada) is going to be exciting. In America it will be an incredible occasion and ultimately it's about trying to win that, looking at where you are, where to improve and it will be no different in a couple of years."

Kane started playing at Ridgeway Rovers at age five, and liked his statue.

"It's pretty special to be honest, these are things I

didn't think of when I was young. It all began here and it was the building blocks of my career. This is a great inspiration for the boys and girls who play."

Asked what it will take for him to have a statue outside Wembley, alongside Bobby Moore, England's 1966 World Cup-winning captain, Kane said, "I think we need to win a major tournament.

"We've come close on a couple of occasions and the next step is for me and the other boys to win.

We have a new coach coming in March (Thomas Tuchel). He'll be great for us, he has vast experience in the big competitions, he'll bring a great energy to the team and he'll put his own stamp and identity on the way we play tactically.

Pant rejects Gavaskar's assessment, says did not leave DC due to disagreement over retention fee

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant on Tuesday rejected the legendary Sunil Gavaskar's assessment that the India wicketkeeper-batter left Delhi Capitals due to disagreement over his retention fee ahead of the mega auction of the Indian Premier League.

Pant, who captained Delhi Capitals last year after making a comeback from a horrific car accident, is among the marquee players who were not retained by their franchisees.

He is expected to be one of the most sought-after players when the auction takes place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on November 24 and 25.

"My retention wasn't about the money for sure that I can say," Pant wrote on X, responding to a broadcaster video showing Gavaskar talking about the auction dynamics.

Gavaskar said while he expects Delhi



Capitals to rope in Pant once again, he also wondered if there was a disagreement over the fee between the franchise and the player.

"The auction dynamics are completely different; we don't really know how it will go. But what I feel is that Delhi

would certainly want Rishabh Pant back in the squad," Gavaskar told Star Sports.

"Sometimes, when a player is to be retained, there is talk between the franchise and the player and franchise about the fees that are expected."

"As you can see, some of the players who

have been retained by the franchise, they've gone for more than say, what the No 1 retention fee deduction would be. Clearly I think, maybe there was some disagreement over there," he said.

Gavaskar said Delhi Capitals will have to look for a new captain as well if Pant is not there in the roster.

"My feeling is that Delhi would definitely want Pant back because they need a captain as well. If Rishabh Pant is not in their squad then they have to look for a new captain. My feeling is (that) Delhi would definitely go for Rishabh Pant," he said.

Pant, along with other former captains Shreyas Iyer (Kolkata Knight Riders) and KL Rahul (Lucknow Super Giants), is listed at a base price of Rs 2 crore each among marquee Indian players.

Pant has always been a part of the Delhi franchise since his IPL debut in 2016, scoring 3,284 runs at 35.31 with one century and 18 fifties in 111 matches.

India's confidence 'damaged' but Australia won't underestimate visitors: Labuschagne

PTI ■ PERTH

A shattering defeat to New Zealand on home soil would have caused a "little bit of damage" to India's confidence but Australia will not make the mistake of underestimating the visitors, said charismatic batter Marnus Labuschagne here on Tuesday.

The world No. 2 India are heading into the five-Test Border-Gavaskar series, starting here on Friday, following their whitewash at home, which ended their 12-year unbeaten run in their own backyard.

Australia's middle-order mainstay Labuschagne believes the loss to the Kiwis would have dented India's confidence.

"It's really hard to judge. They played in completely different conditions -- spinning conditions -- but having India come here off the back of a loss at home is something that's never happened before (in my career)," Labuschagne told the media.

"I think that is a good thing in terms of... They are probably a little bit lower on confidence, not coming off a Test victory, losing to New Zealand 3-0. I think that's going to do a little



bit of damage to their confidence."

However, Labuschagne insisted that Australia, who have lost each of their last four series to India both home and away, will have to guard against complacency.

"They're a quality line-up and they're one of the best teams in the world. So you can never underestimate a team like that," he said.

India staged an incredible comeback on their last Australia tour in 2020-21 to win 2-1, despite the absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli and injuries to several other frontline players along the way.

"That's what happened in 2021 -- the likes of (T) Natarajan played, (Mohammad) Siraj got his first crack in Australia, Washington Sundar played," Labuschagne recalled.

"They had all these guys that were probably a little bit new -- Shubman (Gill) played those couple of games (in the 2020-21 series) -- so there were new faces around," he added.

With India set to take the field without regular captain Rohit Sharma and No. 3 batter Gill in the first Test at the Optus Stadium here, Labuschagne said India have enough talent in their ranks to meet all challenges.

"They're a quality line-up and they've showed that over a period of time. You can't ever underestimate the depth of Indian cricket," he said.

Shastri confident 'world class' Jaiswal will return from Australia as a better batter

PTI ■ PERTH

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri is confident that the "already world class" Yashasvi Jaiswal will return from the Australian tour a significantly improved batter, no matter the challenges he encounters along the way.

Shastri said if Jaiswal can adapt to the challenging Perth pitch, known for its lively bounce, the young opener will play with freedom later on in the series.

"I think he'll be a better player when he leaves Australian shores. Already he's world class," Shastri said at a Fox Cricket event. "You saw what he did against England (and) just the freedom with which he plays.

"I think once he adapts to these conditions -- it's not going to be easy to adjust in Perth with that

bounce, no matter how talented you are. You have got to be prepared to do the hard yards.

"But if he can see that phase through, I think he'll entertain. He will love these pitches. He's someone who score pretty freely as well." Hailed as one of Indian cricket's brightest young talents, the 21-year-old made a dazzling start to his Test career.

He cemented his spot in the team with a stunning series performance against England earlier this year.

"He's come up the hard way, so you can see that hunger and passion, not just in his eyes, but when he's out there in the middle, fielding in the slips. He wants to be involved in the game."

Having led India to two series victories in Australia, Shastri knows firsthand that defeating



the Aussies on their home turf is no easy feat. "It's going to be tough," Shastri said.

"As I found out on my three tours here as a coach, you have to be at your best. Your A game has to come to the park very early if you want to catch Australia on the wrong foot.

"You don't want to give an inch. I think that is the only way. There is no other way you can play. You've got to, or you're not going to get an inch. "You have got to understand very early what to expect from the media as well, because they'll be behind the Australian team. But if you can get your boys to get out there and play as hard as it gets ready for some tough cricket and perform, the media will respect you."

"You will see Kohli firing in the start of the series"

Virat Kohli has been enduring a

lean patch across all formats in recent months, with just two centuries and 11 half-centuries in his last 60 Test innings.

However, despite these struggles, Kohli boasts a remarkable record in Australia.

Having toured Down Under four times, the right-hander averages an impressive 54.0, and Shastri has once again backed the veteran batter to excel in the upcoming series.

"You mellow with age, don't you? But I think at the start of the Test series, you might just see (Kohli) firing again. He needs to be, I'd like to see him (like that) again," Shastri was quoted as saying by news.Com.Au.

"In the face, that's Kohli. Come Australia, he'll get his juices going. It's (about) how he starts off, and for Australia, it's with Steve Smith."

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