

ADANI ISSUE TO HEAT UP WINTER SESSION

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

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

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) calling it preparation for another 'drama' to stall proceedings of yet another important Session. While the BJP said all the states mentioned in the indictment were at that time ruled by Opposition parties, Congress led INDIA Bloc partners have demanded immediate arrest of Adani. The Adani group has denied charges of paying bribes to secure favourable terms for solar power contracts, saying the allegations by US prosecutors are baseless and the conglomerate is compliant with all laws. It said all possible legal recourse will be sought. According to agency reports from New York, United States prosecutors charged Adani and his nephew Sagar and other defendants for paying over USD 250 million in



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

billions of dollars for the project. US law allows pursuing foreign corruption allegations if they involve certain links to American investors or markets. The indictment has thrown Adani Group in yet another financial trouble after it suffered a jolt by US short seller Hindenburg Research's damning fraud allegations. Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi demanded immediate arrest of Gautam Adani. Addressing a Press conference Rahul said it is now pretty clear and established in the US that the businessman has broken Indian as well as American laws. Rahul also demanded Adani's "protector" and SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch be removed from her post and a probe should be initiated.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

From 'severe' to 'very poor'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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Set up courtroom in Tihar: SC on Yasin Malik case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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Ukraine says Russia launched intercontinental missile

AP ■ KYIV

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



Two people were wounded as a result of the attack, and an industrial facility and a rehabilitation centre for people with disabilities were damaged, according to local officials. While the range of an ICBM would seem excessive for use against Ukraine, such missiles are designed to carry nuclear warheads, and the use of one would serve as a chilling reminder of Russia's nuclear capability and a powerful message of potential escalation. The attack comes two days after Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a revised nuclear doctrine that formally lowers the threshold for the country's use of nuclear weapons. Ukraine on Tuesday fired several American-supplied longer-range missiles and reportedly fired UK-made Storm Shadows on Wednesday into Russia. The Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement Thursday that its air defence systems shot down two British-made Storm Shadow missiles, six HIMARS rockets, and 67 drones. The announcement came in the ministry's daily roundup regarding the military actions in Ukraine.

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Pehle AAP... first candidates' list out

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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Post-poll posturing peaks in MY, MVA camps

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

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BORN TO BE WILD



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

Patiala House Court puts Bikaner House in the dock

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Patiala House Court in Delhi has directed the attachment of the Iconic Bikaner House after the Nokha municipal council in Rajasthan which owns the historic building failed to pay an arbitral award of Rs 50.31 lakh to Enviro Infra Engineers Private Limited. The court passed the order on an application seeking enforcement of the arbitral award passed by the arbitral tribunal in January 2020. Bikaner House was designed as the residence of the Rajput rulers of the princely state of Bikaner. Bikaner House was built during the rule of Maharaja Ganga Singh, Maharaja of princely state of Bikaner (1887 to 1943 AD). Categorized as a Grade II heritage building by



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

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

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

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Band, baaja, baaraat, aur chor

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

At 276, city AQI reaches 'poor' level

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The AQI levels in the city reached "poor" level at 276 following an increase in pollution. The decrease in temperature, coupled with low wind speeds, caused a slow dispersal of pollutants, resulting in the formation of a haze. Since morning, the city experienced mixed smoggy conditions. A city scientist explained that emissions occurring at ground level, whether from vehicles or homes, were preventing the dispersion of suspended dust particles, causing the concentration near the ground to rise.

The continuous movement of traffic added to the pollution levels. Also, when the temperature drops, condensation of moisture occurs, leading to the formation of smog. Only strong sunlight can clear the

smog," he said. Prof Naveen Arora from the Environmental department at BBAU noted that these conditions have been worsening every year. He explained that after the monsoon, wind speeds slow down and fog formation occurs as the temperature drops. "In these foggy conditions, vehicular emissions, industrial pollutants, and the residual burning of crops become trapped in the fog because it is dense and near the surface of the Earth, forming smog. This can appear as haze, and the condition persists at least until December, when there are not enough winds to disperse it. When the winds return in January, they push it out," he said. Prof Shikha, head of the department, stated that haze and air pollution caused by fog

and smog have become significant environmental and public health concerns worldwide. "These phenomena, though distinct in origin and composition, collectively contribute to poor air quality, reduced visibility, and adverse health effects. Haze is a visible atmospheric condition marked by the suspension of tiny particles in the air, leading to reduced clarity and brightness." Regarding fog-enhanced haze, she said that in areas with high pollution levels, fog droplets can absorb and interact with airborne pollutants, such as sulfates and nitrates, intensifying the haze. She also discussed smog-driven haze, stating that chemical reactions in smog release fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and ground-level ozone, which scatter sunlight and reduce visibility.

She added that exposure to smog and haze can lead to asthma, bronchitis, and other respiratory ailments. "Fine particles in smog are linked to an increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. Prolonged exposure to polluted air may contribute to chronic diseases and a reduced life expectancy," she said. She further pointed out, "Fog and smog are not merely atmospheric conditions but are increasingly linked to severe environmental and health challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach involving governments, industries, and individuals. By adopting sustainable practices and policies, it is possible to mitigate their impact and pave the way for a cleaner, healthier environment. Morning walks should be avoided, and regular water

sprinkling should be ensured. The AQI in some parts of Lucknow has reached values around 210-390, indicating poor air quality that poses health risks, especially for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions. Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh stated that in response to the increasing pollution levels in the city, several measures have been implemented. "Water sprinkling is being carried out, construction sites are being checked for the coverage of construction materials, we are utilising all available horticultural resources in the city, and we are managing 100% solid waste collection. As per the instructions of the Central government, we have switched to cold fogging," he said.

Youth abducted, forced to transfer cryptocurrency

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A youth, willing to sell his cryptocurrency and convert it to INR, was allegedly abducted by some accused from outside their meeting venue and was forced to transfer all his crypto for free in the Gomti Nagar police station area, police said. The victim, Faisal Sheikh from Mulayam Nagar in the Chinhat police station area, works in crypto trading. "I had told my previously known friend Afzal that I wanted to sell crypto. Afzal told me that he had a friend named Ankit, who also works in crypto trading and would buy my crypto," the victim explained. He said he, along with his brother Sheikh Mohammad Baid Rashid and a friend, reached the location provided by Afzal to sell the crypto to Ankit.

"Ankit was already there when I reached there, and I met him. After talking about crypto trading, he told me to transfer 20 cryptos to his account first so he could check whether they were legitimate. After I transferred 20 cryptos to his account and he decided to buy them, he called another friend, saying that the crypto was genuine, and that they should bring the money. After a while, about four or five people arrived with him and began beating us. They forcibly made us sit in their car while continuing to beat us. They drove towards Ambedkar Park Marine Drive, where they freed my brother and my friend, but kept me in the car and took me to Sultanpur Road via the 1090 intersection. They parked the car near Indira Dam, and after continuing to beat me, they forcibly transferred the cryptocurrency from my account to theirs," he alleged. The victim claimed the accused forcibly took his password and transferred 16,000 USDT to their account. "Ankit, while dropping me off from his car, threatened me, saying that if I informed the police, he would kill me," the victim added.

Five killed as bus rams into truck



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A five-month-old baby and a woman were among the five people killed in a collision between a truck and a double-decker bus on the Yamuna Expressway in Aligarh on Wednesday night, the police said.

Fifteen others were injured in the accident that took place when the bus was heading from Delhi towards Azamgarh and rammed into the truck from behind. The impact was such that the bus was shattered and trapped the passengers inside. The incident occurred in the Tappal police station area of Aligarh, after which the police rushed the injured to the hospital for treatment, Circle Officer of Khair, Varun Kumar, said. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has taken cog-

nizance of the road accident that took place in Aligarh district. The chief minister has expressed condolences to the bereaved families of the deceased. He has also instructed the district administration officials to provide proper treatment to the injured. He also wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. "In the Tappal police station area, upon receiving information about an accident on Wednesday night, the police immediately reached the spot and carried out rescue operations, sending the injured to the hospital for treatment. The bodies of five deceased were sent for post-mortem. Legal proceedings have been initiated. Traffic is functioning smoothly, and the situation at the spot is peaceful," Aligarh Police said in an X post on Thursday.

Youth found hanging in hotel room, girlfriend unconscious

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A youth was found hanging in a hotel room in the Para police station area, while his alleged girlfriend was discovered lying unconscious on Thursday, police said. The youth died, whereas the girl, who allegedly had an overdose of sleeping pills, survived, they said. She was admitted to hospital by the police. Friends searching for them informed their families and the police. The young man's body was sent for post-mortem, while the girl received medical

treatment. It emerged that the youth's friends found the room locked and him unresponsive. The hotel staff used a master key to unlock the door, capturing the scene on video before the police arrived. The young man's family alleged that his girlfriend was blackmailing him. They claimed that Abhishek Verma (25), a resident of Para Doctor Kheda, was engaged to another girl, with the wedding planned for December. Upon learning of this, the girl reportedly began blackmailing him, leading to his distress and eventual death.

Abhishek and the girl in question had checked into the hotel on Wednesday afternoon. When he did not return home, his family tried to contact him, but his phone was switched off. During their search, friends located his bike parked outside the hotel. Upon inquiring at the hotel, staff revealed that he was staying with his girlfriend. When the room's door remained unopened, the staff used the master key to gain access. Inside, the young man was found hanging from the ceiling fan, while the girl was unconscious on the bed.

Govt to recruit 7 HEW personnel in each dist

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government is making significant strides in the realm of women's empowerment in Uttar Pradesh. With initiatives like the Hub for Empowerment of Women (HEW) and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY), the government is focusing on making women self-reliant and empowering them socially and economically. To ensure the successful implementation of these schemes, the recruitment process for seven personnel at the district level will be initiated across the state, with a target completion within the next month. These schemes prioritise women's health, nutrition, and economic empowerment, opening new opportunities for social and economic transformation in the state.

The state government is committed to bringing about positive changes in women's lives by effectively implementing the HEW and PMMVY programmes. Following the new guidelines set by the Government of India in 2022, UP has ensured the operation of service centres in every district, providing women with information on health, education and employment. The HEW initiative aims to strengthen the process of informing women about both state and national-level schemes, raising awareness about their rights, and ensuring they receive the benefits of government programmes. Personnel at the HEW centres are also being trained on crucial topics such as skill development, gender equality and domestic violence prevention, further empowering women across the state. Under the HEW scheme, seven personnel will be recruited at the district level. To ensure transparency in the implementation of these schemes, the Yogi government has adopted an outsourcing process for the recruitment of HEW and PMMVY staff. Priority will be

given to those who have worked under the previous Mahila Shakti Kendra Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, based on their qualifications and eligibility. The recruitment process will be carried out through the GEM portal to prevent any irregularities in appointments. Additionally, the payment for the work of these personnel will be made at the district level. Notably, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) has been implemented in the state from 2017 to 2024 with the support of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. From March 2024, the scheme is being run by the Child Development Services and Nutrition Department. The aim of this scheme is to provide financial assistance to pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers to support their nutrition and health.

Through the PMMVY scheme, women are provided with financial assistance of Rs 5,000 in three instalments. This scheme has benefited millions of women, helping meet their nutritional needs. The Yogi government has ensured transparency and efficiency in the implementation of this scheme, ensuring that every beneficiary receives its benefits. Due to the Yogi government's commitment, these schemes are being effectively implemented. Special attention is being given to maintaining continuity and quality by prioritising personnel who have worked under the Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK) scheme. Furthermore, the government aims to complete the recruitment process for personnel through service provider agencies within just one month in the current financial year. In addition to these schemes, the government's efforts for empowerment of women also include initiatives like establishing skill development centres, ensuring a safe environment for women, and providing them with opportunities for self-employment.

Three injured in soil collapse at house under construction

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Three workers were critically injured after being buried under soil during land excavation work in the basement of an under-construction house in Rajendra Nagar under the Naka Hindola police station area on Thursday. It has yet to be ascertained whether permission for the land excavation in the basement had been sought from the relevant authorities. Upon receiving the information, local residents and police officers arrived at the scene and began the rescue operation. After considerable effort, the three workers were extricated from the debris and swiftly transported to Balrampur Hospital. The workers were trapped due to a soil collapse during basement excavation. Eyewitnesses were seen pulling the workers out from the rubble. Preliminary inquiries suggest that unsafe excavation practices in the basement may have been the cause of the accident.

The police are questioning the contractor and the landlord in connection with the case. Reports indicate that the workers were buried several feet beneath a pile of soil. A female labourer, Janki, said that the accident occurred while they were digging the soil. She explained that there were eight workers in total digging the basement. "The pit was several feet deep. During this, the soil collapsed from one side. I was on the edge and was saved, but Phulmati, Saroj, and Dayalu were buried under the soil," she said. Following the incident, the workers and nearby residents managed to pull all three from the pile of soil. Saroj and Phulmati were unconscious. All three were rushed to Balrampur Hospital, where they are receiving treatment. It was later revealed that the workers were not provided with safety equipment. Preparations are being made to take action against those responsible.

DGAFMS pays tributes to war heroes

Lucknow (PNS): The first woman to hold the position of Director General of the Armed Forces Medical Services (DGAFMS), Vice Admiral Arti Sarin (surgeon), arrived at the Army Medical Corps Centre & College in Lucknow on a two-day visit on Thursday. She paid tribute to the war heroes at the cenotaph in the war memorial 'Shradhdhanjali' at the AMC Centre & College. She was accompanied by Lt Gen Shivinder Singh, Commandant of the AMC Centre and College, and the Officer In Charge (OIC) Records of AMC. Vice Admiral Arti Sarin also addressed the troops in a Special Sainik Sammelan, where she emphasised the importance of delivering high-quality healthcare services with commitment, zeal, and dedication, both during peace and wartime. The flag officer has an impressive background, with an MD in Radiodiagnosis from the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC) in Pune, as well as a Diplomate from the National Board in Radiation Oncology from the Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai.

Third edition of KLF kicks off today

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The third edition of the Koshala Literature Festival (KLF), promising to captivate audiences with its unique blend of literature, music, art, and culture, will kick off at the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) on Friday. The advisory board of the Koshala Literature Festival, organised by the Perspective Cultural Foundation, includes Pushpesh Pant (patron), Amitabh Singh Baghel (founding festival director), Prashant Kumar Singh (founder and patron), and Anshu Khanna (advisor). The 2024 edition of KLF Awadh offers an exciting lineup of events, featuring thought-provoking panel discussions, immersive storytelling sessions, and soul-stirring musical performances. Bringing together authors, historians, poets, musicians, digital creators, and artists, the festival will honour Awadh's rich cultural legacy and its impact on both Indian and global literature.

Police recruitment exam: Case against four for using solvers

Lucknow (PNS): Four people, including a woman, allegedly used solvers to take their exams for the post of sub-inspector in the police recruitment exam and got selected in this way. It was exposed when the high-level committee of the Police Recruitment Board investigated the matter. Inspector Satyendra Kumar, posted at the Police Recruitment and Promotion Board, has lodged an FIR against the four accused at Huseanganj police station. It was alleged that candidate Gaurav Kumar, a resident of Manti Basi, Aligarh, participated in the recruitment examination on November 13, 2021. Gaurav's examination centre was in Jankipuram Vistar. After Gaurav was selected for the post of sub-inspector, he was sent for training. Meanwhile, a writ petition, Sandeep Parihar and 28 others vs. State of UP and others, was filed in the High Court regarding the recruitment examination. As per the instructions of the High Court, Lucknow Bench, a high-level committee was constituted at the recruitment board level, and an investigation was initiated. Biometrics taken at the time of

the examination were found to be different. During the investigation, the biometrics taken at the time of the board-level and online written examination of Gaurav Kumar were found to be different. It was discovered that Gaurav, who was undergoing training to become a sub-inspector, had not participated in the online written examination himself. He had arranged for a solver to sit in his place. Similarly, Malti, a resident of Etah, had an online exam on November 17, 2021 at the SPS Infotech Shri Pratap Singh Mahavidyalaya on Hathras Road, Agra. However, Malti also had a solver sit in her place. In addition, Nirbhay Singh Jadaun, from Bulandshahr, had an online exam on November 20, 2021 at Yash Infotech Online Examination Centre in Sikandra, Agra. Nirbhay had also arranged for a solver to sit in his place. At the same time, Rohit Kumar, a candidate from Shanti Kunj, Rohta Road, Meerut, was also found guilty of having a solver sit the exam for him. Rohit was due to appear for the exam on November 27, 2021 at Chhatra Shakti Info Solution, Kursi Road.

CITYBRIEFS

BBAU PROF HONOURED

Prof Naveen Kumar Arora from the Department of Environmental Science at Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University was honoured by the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan at the International Conference on Ecology, Environment, and Sustainable Development 2024. The award was presented by the International Strategic Centre for Agri-Food Development, a key organisation under the Ministry of Agriculture of Uzbekistan, in recognition of Prof Arora's contributions to environmental sustainability. He has been working for years on environmental restoration and land rehabilitation in collaboration with Uzbekistan's National University and National Research University.

FOUNDERS' DAY

The 32nd Founders' Day celebrations at Seth MR Jaipuria School, Gomti Nagar, marked a significant milestone in the institution's legacy. Held on Thursday, the Senior Founders' Day showcased the exceptional talents of the students in various fields, including creative arts, science, literature, and cultural excellence. The chief guest was by BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi,

who spoke about the achievements of India, highlighting Jagdish Chandra Bose's contributions to radio science. Also present was school's chairperson Sharad Jaipuria, and vice-chairperson of The Integral Education Society Anjali Jaipuria.

SIKANDAR KA MUQADDAR

Actors Tamannaah Bhatia and Avinash Tiwary visited Lucknow on Thursday to promote their upcoming Netflix film 'Sikandar Ka Muqaddar'. Known for its cultural heritage and love for cinema, Lucknow provided the perfect backdrop for the film's promotion. Tamannaah expressed her excitement, saying, "Lucknow has always held a special place in my heart, and sharing the story of 'Sikandar Ka Muqaddar' here feels incredibly special. This movie is not just a thrilling narrative; it's an emotional rollercoaster that keeps you questioning reality until the very end. I can't wait for the audience to experience this masterpiece by Neeraj Pandey." Avinash Tiwary also shared his thoughts, saying, "Shooting for the film was an unforgettable experience. Visiting Lucknow, with its timeless charm, feels like a celebration of the movie itself."

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

Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC09792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chelpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

Notice under Section 13 (2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co-borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

| Sr No. | Loan Account No. | Type of Loan | Name of borrowers and co-borrowers | Section 13 (2) Notice Date | Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice |
|--------|------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | 47185598 | HOME LOAN | 1. ANIL KUMAR 2. NIKITA ANIL KUMAR | 17.08.2024 | 20,62,062.80/- |

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF RESIDENTIAL RCC FLAT NO. 101, FIRST FLOOR, ADMEASURING 51.28 SQ. MTR., PREMISES NO. 118/371, ADMEASURING 408.76 SQ. MTR., KAUSHALPURI, KANPUR NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH - 208012, AND, BOUNDED AS: BOUNDARIES OF FLAT: EAST: PREMISES CONSTRUCTED ON FLAT NO. 160, WEST: 10 FT. LANE, NORTH: PREMISES NO.118/372, SOUTH: FLAT NO. 102 BOUNDARIES OF PREMISES: EAST: PREMISES CONSTRUCTED ON PLOT NO. 160, WEST: 10 FT. LANE, NORTH: PREMISES NO.118/372, SOUTH: PREMISES NO.118/370

| Sr No. | Loan Account No. | Type of Loan | Name of borrowers and co-borrowers | Section 13 (2) Notice Date | Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice |
|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 2 | 23105310 & 33925037 | LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY | 1. SUNITA GUPTA, 2. ANKIT GUPTA 3. RAKESH KUMAR GUPTA | 29.12.2023 | 28,54,011.62/- |

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF HOUSE NO.47/126, LAND AREA 50.17 SQ. MTRS. I.E. 60 SQ. YDS., AND TOTAL COVERED AREA 52 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED AT HATIYA, KANPUR NAGAR, UTTAR PRADESH-208001, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: 4 FEET GALI AND HOUSE NO.47/89, WEST: HOUSE NO. 47/124, NORTH: HOUSE NO. 47/125, SOUTH: HOUSE NO. 47/123

| Sr No. | Loan Account No. | Type of Loan | Name of borrowers and co-borrowers | Section 13 (2) Notice Date | Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice |
|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 3 | 20853706 & 34417438 | LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY | 1.TAIBA TANNERS PROP. SYED MOHD ASIF BAQAI, 2.MR. SYED MOHD ASIF BAQAI 4.MRS. SAMEERA SHOIB | 31.07.2024 | 49,63,288.71/- |

PROPERTY ADDRESS : ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF THE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY BEARING FLAT NO. 705, 7TH FLOOR, PREMISES NO. 14/ 138, 14/ 143, 14/ 144, 14/ 144 A & 14/ 144B, ADMEASURING 73.056 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED AT CHUNNIGANJ, KANPUR NAGAR, DISTT-KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH- 208003, AND, BOUNDED AS: EAST: FLAT NO. 706 WEST: OPEN LAND, NORTH: OPEN LAND, SOUTH: FLAT NO. 703

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Sd/-
Authorized Officer
Date : 22.11.2024
Place : UTTAR PRADESH
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

SP alleges rigging, BJP hits back

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Thursday alleged that rigging and administrative bias were the order of the day during voting in the by-elections to nine assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh, claims dismissed by the BJP which accused the opposition of pursuing politics of "arrogance and negativity". SP president Akhilesh Yadav took to X to claim that despite the BJP's efforts, the opposition alliance has secured a moral victory. He congratulated the alliance's supporters, party workers, and media for their efforts, stating, "This election was a battle of 90 per cent of the state's population against the BJP, who denied the unity, dignity, and rights of the PDA." He added that the people's spirit remained steadfast, despite the BJP's "negative" tactics and the "autocratic" government. Senior SP leader Shivpal Singh Yadav also expressed confidence in the party's victory, claiming that it would secure five to six seats despite what he

described as dishonest efforts by the ruling BJP and its use of administrative support. He warned that when the INDIA bloc assumes power in 2027, strict action would be taken against the officials involved in assisting the BJP. SP's general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav made more severe allegations of election rigging, accusing the BJP of using district officials and police to manipulate the vote. In a post on X, he claimed the by-election was "between the Samajwadi Party and the district police, not between the SP and BJP". He claimed that voters, particularly from the Muslim community, were intimidated and prevented from voting at gunpoint in areas like Meerapur, Kundarki, Sisamau, and Katehari. Ram Gopal Yadav called for the by-election results to be annulled and re-polling conducted under the supervision of paramilitary forces, citing concerns over the administration's conduct. In response to the opposition's

claims, Uttar Pradesh's Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya dismissed the SP's accusations. He took to X to target Akhilesh Yadav and his ally, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, accusing them of fostering politics of arrogance and negativity. Maurya asserted that the public would reject their claims, stressing that the country needed development, not "allegations and counter-allegations". He emphasised that the BJP remained committed to serving

UP BYPOLLS

the people under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. BJP candidate from Ghaziabad, Sanjeev Sharma, also expressed confidence in his victory, claiming a margin of 50,000 votes. He told PTI that after casting his vote, he felt relaxed and looked forward to celebrating his anticipated win with party supporters ahead of counting. Meanwhile, Azad Samaj Party MP Chandrashekhar Azad

accused the BJP government of misusing its administrative machinery in a manner never seen before. He said the by-election was a matter of prestige for Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, stressing that the BJP's performance in this election would be closely scrutinised by the party's leadership in Delhi. Voting for the nine assembly seats - Meerapur, Kundarki, Sisamau, Katehari, Phulpur, Majhawan, Ghaziabad, Karhal and Khair, took place on November 20. Counting will be done on November 23. In the 2022 assembly elections, the SP had secured victory in Sisamau, Katehari, Karhal, and Kundarki, while the BJP won in Phulpur, Ghaziabad, Majhawan, and Khair. The Meerapur seat was won by the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), part of the NDA.

SP DEMANDS REPOLLING Meanwhile, the SP on Thursday handed over a memorandum to the Election Commission demanding repolling in 52 booths of Meerapur and arrest of a

policeman who took out a revolver and threatened the voters. SP state president Shyam Lal Pal gave the memorandum to Uttar Pradesh's chief electoral officer here, a party statement said. The SP has demanded that repoll should be held at 52 polling booths in the Meerapur assembly constituency. It also demanded the arrest of SHO, Kakaroli, Rajiv Sharma, who, the party alleged, threatened to kill the voters by pointing a revolver at them to prevent them from voting, it said. The services of Sharma should be terminated and all the other guilty police personnel including Inspector Bablu Kumar, H N Singh, SHO Qutubsher, Inspector Mahavir Chauhan, Women Police Station In-charge Sangeeta Chauhan, SI Anil Kumar Tomar, Sunil Kasana, Dharmendra Kumar and Inspector Bulandshahr Premchandra Sharma should be suspended with immediate effect, it demanded. The bypolls on nine seats of the state were held on Wednesday.

UP Police constable recruitment written exam results declared

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The results of the written examination for the largest constable recruitment in the history of Uttar Pradesh have been announced. Conducted under the guidance of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the examination emphasised transparency, fairness and strict adherence to the reservation policy. Based on merit, approximately two and a half times the number of available posts — 1,74,316 candidates — have been declared eligible for the next stage. The selected candidates will now proceed to the next phase, which includes record verification and a physical standard test. This stage of the selection process is scheduled to take place in the third week of December. Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board Chairman Rajeev Krishna stated that all candi-

dates who achieved the same cut-off marks in the written examination for Direct Recruitment-2023 to the posts of Constable (Civil Police) have been included in the merit list for the next stage. "The list of eligible candidates for document verification and the physical standard test (DV/PST) has been published on the Board's official website, (<https://upppbb.gov.in/>). Candidates can check their results using their registration number or exam roll number," he added. The chairman further informed that the document verification and physical standard test (DV/PST) are scheduled for the third week of December. Candidates who qualify in this stage will then participate in the physical efficiency test (PET), which is set to take place in the third week of January 2025. The UPP Recruitment and Promotion Board congratulated all successful candidates and

urged them to regularly visit the official website for updates related to the selection process. Krishna stated that the selection board had invited objections from candidates by publishing the question papers and answer keys for all 10 shifts of the examination on its official website between September 11 and September 19. "All objections received through various channels were meticulously reviewed, and opinions were sought from a panel of subject experts as necessary. After the completion of the written examination, the process of scanning the OMR answer sheets was conducted under strict security measures. Security personnel and CCTV cameras were deployed, and 24/7 live monitoring was ensured throughout the process. Additionally, the normalisation of candidates' marks was carried out in line with the provisions outlined in the recruitment notification," he added.

Tech, govt schemes, pvt sector driving sustainable dev: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

At the Partnership Conclave held in Uttar Pradesh, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the pivotal role of technology, government schemes and private sector collaboration in driving sustainable development and advancing the agriculture sector. The event, organised in partnership with the World Bank and the Gates Foundation, saw participation from representatives of several national and international institutions. Highlighting the state's challenges and accomplishments, Chief Minister Yogi underscored ongoing efforts to integrate farmers and the agriculture sector with cutting-edge technologies and modern resources. He showcased the state government's transformative achievements in recent years, noting that Uttar Pradesh's farmers are now empowered through initiatives like solar panel installations, which have also positioned the state as a robust energy hub. One of the state's landmark successes, according to

PARTNERSHIP CONCLAVE

Chief Minister Yogi, has been the eradication of encephalitis, a disease once deemed a 'cause of death' in Uttar Pradesh. He said, "Before 2017, the disease claimed the lives of 1,500 to 2,000 children annually. However, through the combined efforts of the state government and organisations like World Health Organisation, the Gates Foundation and UNICEF, encephalitis was completely eradicated within three years." Chief Minister Yogi attributed this achievement to effective governance, the use of technology and active public participation, emphasising that the state has now eliminated deaths from encephalitis. The chief minister highlighted that Uttar Pradesh possesses the most fertile land and abundant water resources in the country, offering immense potential for growth in the agricultural sector. He noted that the state is home to 89 Krishi Vigyan Kendras and six agricultural universities, which play a pivotal role in empow-

ering farmers and introducing them to advanced technologies. He said, "Solar panels have been provided to approximately one lakh farmers, effectively addressing irrigation and electricity challenges. Additionally, the state government has implemented significant measures to ensure affordable electricity for farmers." Chief Minister Yogi emphasised that the adoption of modern technologies is essential for achieving the desired growth in agriculture. He stressed the importance of awareness campaigns and extension programmes to ensure technology reaches farmers effectively. Demonstrations through Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Centres of Excellence should be conducted to showcase the transformative impact of new technologies on farming practices, he added. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasised the need for collaboration between government initiatives and private

sector participation to drive significant advancements in agriculture. He noted that only through such partnerships can agricultural productivity be enhanced by 3-4 times. To this end, the private sector is being actively encouraged to contribute to the state's development, he added. The chief minister highlighted the government's priorities, including timely provision of quality seeds to farmers, efficient utilisation of water resources, and the promotion of agriculture-focused startups. He underscored that well-crafted schemes, coupled with their effective implementation, have the potential to bring transformative changes to the agricultural landscape. Expressing gratitude to the Gates Foundation, World Bank and other international organisations, the chief minister acknowledged their expertise and support in accelerating Uttar Pradesh's progress. He stated that such partnerships form the cornerstone of the state's development efforts, paving the way for a brighter future for farmers and the people of Uttar Pradesh.

'The Sabarmati Report' to be tax-free in UP: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attended the screening of film "The Sabarmati Report" at a city mall on Thursday. He praised the team for their efforts in "bringing the truth about the Godhra incident" to light. "This is a film every Indian must watch to understand the true story behind the Godhra incident," CM Yogi stated, announcing that the movie would be made tax-free in UP. "The people of the country have the right to know about the acts that were carried out to create animosity in society and political instability against the nation and its governments," he said. He emphasised the need not only to identify but also to expose those who are conspiring against the nation for political gain. Praising the filmmakers, Yogi said, "The film's team has fulfilled its responsibility to uncover the truth, and through this film, an effort has been made to present the real truth on a large scale to the nation." Stating that the matter is deeply connected to Aardhya, Yogi paid tribute to all the Ram



CM Yogi Adityanath with actors Vikrant Massey and Raashii Khanna at a cinema hall to watch the film 'The Sabarmati Report', in Lucknow on Thursday. PTI

devotees who lost their lives in the incident. He urged the public to watch the film. He was accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, Mayor Sushma Kharakwal, former minister Mahendra Singh, and several public representatives and government officials.

The film's lead actor Vikrant Massey and other members of the team were also present. "The Sabarmati Report" is a Bollywood drama based on a true incident, directed by Ranjan Chandel. Besides Massey, the film stars Rashi Khanna and Riddhi Dogra in lead roles.

'Recruitment via outsourcing conspiracy against PDA

Lucknow (PTI): Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday said providing jobs was not on the BJP government's agenda, and added that recruitment to government posts via outsourcing was an "economic conspiracy" against marginalised people. Yadav shared on social media platform X a newspaper clipping and an advertisement that said the posts of Tehsildar, Naib Tehsildar, Revenue Inspector and Lekhpal were being filled through outsourcing. This was a move to snatch the constitutional right of job reservation, he said in a post on X. "It would be better if the BJP outsources the entire government" so that all its commissions come from one place. By doing this, the BJP will not have to take the great trouble of giving a small number of jobs while ending reservations under its pretext," he posted in Hindi. "We have always been saying, we are repeating it again today; jobs are not on the agenda of the BJP," he said. The SP chief further said outsourcing is an economic conspiracy against the PDA -- "Pichhde (backwards), Dalit and Alpsankhyak (minorities).

Bhim Army chief meets Azam at Sitapur Jail, flags ill health

Sitapur (PTI): Bhim Army chief and Azad Samaj Party-Kanshiram MP Chandrashekhar Azad on Thursday met jailed senior Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Azam Khan and urged the state government to pay attention to Khan's deteriorating health. He met Khan, who is a former state minister, at the Sitapur District Jail. Speaking to reporters after the meeting that lasted for about an hour, Azad said that Khan is not keeping well, and added that the government should pay attention to this matter. He said, "Giving such a big punishment for a minor crime like stealing goats shows the government's ill will." "It is not right to harass your political rivals like this because future generations are involved in this and they will have to pay the price for such political atrocities," the MP from Nagina seat added. Accusing the government of rigging the by-elections held on nine assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh on Wednesday, Azad said, "The government misused its administrative machinery in a way that was never seen before."

Adani brought shame to country: Sanjay Singh

Lucknow (PNS): Aam Aadmi Party MP and in-charge of party in UP, Sanjay Singh, said industrialist Gautam Adani had brought shame to the country as a US court had issued a warrant against him and his nephew for paying a bribe to obtain a green energy contract. He said Adani was a good friend of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Sanjay Singh alleged that Narendra Modi put pressure on state governments to buy expensive electricity from Adani Green Energy to benefit "his friend Adani". The AAP leader alleged that Adani tried to sell expensive electricity in Delhi like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, but the then Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, did not allow it. "Had the Bharatiya Janata Party been in power in Delhi, Delhiites would also be getting expensive electricity," Sanjay Singh alleged.

He said the people of Delhi also had to be careful that if by mistake BJP came to power in Delhi, they too would get electricity at high tariff. Singh demanded that this matter should be investigated under the supervision of the Supreme Court, He said Modi should be questioned, and Gautam Adani and Sagar Adani, who gave the bribe and the officials who took the bribe, should be arrested. A spokesman of the Adani group said the allegations made by the US Department of Justice and the US Securities and Exchange Commission against directors of Adani Green are "baseless and denied". As stated by the US Department of Justice itself, "the charges in the indictment are allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty," he said, adding that All possible legal recourse would be sought.

Govt prioritises rehabilitation of older children

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government organised a state-level conference on Thursday as part of Adoption Awareness Month-2024, focusing on rehabilitating older children and providing them with a new direction in life. The event took place at the Mars Auditorium of Indira Gandhi Pratishthan here. Minister of State for Women and Child Development Savitri Thakur represented the Government of India as the chief guest at the conclave. Uttar Pradesh's Minister for Women Welfare, Child Development, and Nutrition Baby Rani Maurya highlighted the Yogi government's initiatives and achievements in rehabilitating children in need. The conference, jointly organised by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA), and the Uttar Pradesh Women and Child Development Department, aimed to raise awareness about adoption and

underscore the importance of providing older children with nurturing homes and brighter futures. Savitri Thakur along with Baby Rani Maurya and State Commission of Women Chairperson Babita Chauhan shared their views on the theme 'Rehabilitating Older Children through Care and Nurturing'. The main goal of the event was to raise awareness among the public about adopting children who are either orphaned or lack family support, as well as to educate people on the legal process of foster care. The speakers emphasised the importance of sensitivity and acceptance in society for rehabilitating such children and giving them a sense of belonging. During the conclave, Savitri Thakur highlighted that with the support of the Uttar Pradesh government, stakeholders and prospective adoptive parents had come together in Lucknow. She discussed adoption experiences with families and deliberated with stakeholders on the legal aspects of the adoption

process. Addressing the media, she stated that the campaign's focus this year is on children aged six years and above, who often face challenges in finding adoptive families. For such children, the foster care system offers an alternative, providing temporary family care for those classified as 'no visitation' or belonging to the 'unfit guardians/parents' category. This approach aims to ensure these children receive a safe and nurturing environment until a permanent solution is found. During the conclave, Baby Rani Maurya emphasised that child protection remains a top priority for the Yogi government. She highlighted the government's proactive role in ensuring the safety, protection and overall well-being of children in the state. Babita Singh Chauhan stressed the importance of placing children in adoptive families that provide a familiar cultural, linguistic and social environment to minimise challenges and foster a sense of belonging.

The event honoured adoptive parents who had welcomed children through the Caring Portal. Recognized for their inspiring contributions were couples like Gurpreet Singh and Navneet Grewal, Mohd Arif Khan and Deepti Singh, Virendra and Sharmila Pal, and single parent Dr Rachna Bharti. Each shared their heartfelt experiences. Additionally, Dr Shahnaz, who adopted a child through the foster care system, shared her inspiring journey. The programme featured the presentation of 'Kilkarian' — a collection of inspiring adoption stories — and vibrant cultural performances by children. Highlights included a spirited dance by young children and a group performance by adolescent girls showcasing the life of Rani Laxmibai. An exhibition of handmade products crafted by children received significant appreciation from attendees, further celebrating their creativity and potential. Notably, November is observed as National Adoption

Awareness Month every year by the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development. This year, the special campaign took place in Lucknow, drawing attention to the importance of adoption and the welfare of children in need of a family. The event was graced by several prominent figures, including Savitri Thakur, Baby Rani Maurya, and state minister Pratibha Shukla. Also present were Babita Chauhan, State Commission for Women's vice-chairperson Aparna Yadav, Ministry of Women and Child Development Secretary Anil Malik and Principal Secretary (Women and Child Development) Leena Johri. The event brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including the chairperson and members of the State Child Welfare Committee, Medical department officials, UNICEF representatives, child helpline members, district child protection units, care institutions, and specialised adoption agencies.

Garlic prices to stabilise as UP boosts local production

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh is poised to witness a significant boost in local garlic production. This increase is expected to stabilise demand and supply, keeping market prices under control. The move is likely to curb the smuggling of garlic from China. India, a major garlic exporter, offers promising opportunities for farmers in Uttar Pradesh. Recognising this potential, the Yogi Adityanath government has prioritised strengthening agricultural infrastructure. The state has already developed world-class expressways to facilitate better connectivity for agricultural trade. To further empower farmers

and horticulturists, the government is establishing an export hub near Jewar international airport. This initiative aims to streamline garlic exports and support the agricultural sector in reaching global markets. It is worth noting that onions and garlic complement each other, both playing an equally important role in enhancing the flavour of food. However, when it comes to medicinal properties, garlic surpasses onion. Despite this, garlic often receives less attention compared to onion. Occasionally, garlic grabs headlines, particularly when the price of local varieties skyrockets, leading to the smuggling of Chinese garlic. This year, garlic prices hit a

record high of Rs 400 per kilogram. To ensure that rising garlic prices do not affect the common man's access to flavourful food, the Yogi government is promoting garlic cultivation through a special initiative under the Integrated Horticulture Development Mission. Under the scheme, the estimated cost per hectare for garlic farming has been set at Rs 30,000. Farmers will receive a subsidy of up to Rs 12,000 per hectare, covering 40 per cent of the cost. The plan aims to expand garlic cultivation across an additional 10,000 hectares. Since quality seeds contribute about 25 per cent to crop productivity, the government has

decided to provide seeds to farmers through the National Horticulture Research and Development Foundation, New Delhi. Farmers can avail of the scheme for a minimum of 0.2 hectares and a maximum of 4.0 hectares of garlic farming. The price of seeds has been fixed between Rs 370 and Rs 390 per kilogram. Farmers in Uttar Pradesh can avail themselves of the garlic farming scheme on a first-come, first-served basis. Interested farmers must contact their district horticulture office or register online at the official website: <http://dbt.uphorticulture.in>. Traditionally, garlic farming in Uttar Pradesh was concentrat-

ed in districts bordering Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. However, the government has expanded the scope to 45 districts, including Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Ghaziabad, Bareilly, Moradabad, Agra, Mathura, Mainpuri, Hathras, Kanpur, Etawah, Kannauj, Lucknow, Unnao, Sitapur, Rae Bareilly, Barabanki, Sultanpur, Prayagraj, Kaushambi, Pratapgarh, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Siddharth Nagar, Ballia, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Banda, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Chitrakoot, Mahoba, Lalitpur, Mirzapur, Sonhadra, Bhadohi, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Ayodhya

and Farrukhabad. The scheme will be funded jointly by the Central government (60 per cent) and the state government (40 per cent). Garlic is typically sown from late October to November, with its leaves becoming usable within two to three weeks for making chutney or seasoning. The mature bulbs can be stored properly for year-round use or processed into pickles and paste. Notably, garlic is renowned for its antibacterial and antifungal properties, helping fight infections and prevent oxidative damage in the body. As a rich source of antioxidants, it is known to reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's dis-

ease. Packed with nutrients like Vitamin C, Vitamin B6, manganese and selenium, garlic enhances immunity. Its sulfur compounds improve blood circulation, reduce the risk of heart disease and play a vital role in hair health. Additionally, its anti-inflammatory properties provide relief from joint pain and swelling. The increasing interest in garlic farming among Indian farmers is evident from its production growth over the past 25 years, rising fourfold from 2.1 lakh tons to 68.34 lakh tons. India is the second-largest exporter of garlic globally, shipping it to countries such as Indonesia, the United States, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brazil.

Ministers: Resolve problems of entrepreneurs immediately

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Forest and Environment Dr Arun Kumar and Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Fee and Registration Ravindra Jaiswal directed the Forest department officials for the immediate resolution of the problems of entrepreneurs related to the Environment department and UP Pollution Control Board. The two ministers specifically emphasised that in accordance with the intention of the government, entrepreneurs should get smooth and well-organised facilities in every condition.

The two ministers were holding a meeting with entrepreneurs at Circuit House here on Wednesday evening. Speaking on the occasion, Ravindra Jaiswal said the intention of the government is that entrepreneurs should get easy and well-organised facilities in all circumstances. For this purpose, he said the forest minister himself came to Varanasi and after being present among the entrepreneurs, became aware of their problems and directed them to resolve them by holding a meeting with the entrepreneurs and departmental officials.

The entrepreneurs demanded that the government should ensure the system by setting up STP in industrial areas, to manage the waste smoothly and to stop third party impact on industrial units. The entrepreneurs also said that they are facing a lot of problems due to the EPR portal not being operated smoothly and laid emphasis



UP Ministers Dr Arun Kumar and Ravindra Jaiswal holding a meeting with entrepreneurs in Varanasi

on making it smooth as well as getting rid of it. Demanding simplification of the process of issuing environmental NOC, they said due to the delay in it they had to face a lot of problems.

In reply, Jaiswal directed the officers concerned to ensure the arrangement for quick resolution of the problem of STP from industrial areas. In the meeting, a demand was made to arrange two vehicles and two supervisors from Ramna STP for Ramnagar Industrial Area so that the problem can be solved. The entrepreneurs laid special emphasis on ensuring a common STP system to solve the sewer problem of industrial areas. Special emphasis was also laid on water conservation. While directing the officers of the Pollution department, Jaiswal said simplification of rules should be ensured so that the entrepreneurs did not face any kind of problem. In the meeting, the entrepreneur

organisations suggested that the Pollution department should get the units inspected every five years. They also demanded that the units should not be harassed unnecessarily in the name of inspection and laid emphasis on amendment in the determination of fees of units in the Pollution department.

The office-bearers of the Brick Kiln Association said 235 brick kilns in the district are running without the NOCs of the Pollution department, while 175 brick kilns which are running with licences have to face a lot of problems. They said 9,000 brick kilns are being operated in the entire state without obtaining licences. Forest Minister Dr Arun Kumar said action will be taken against brick kilns operating without obtaining licences. He assured to ensure solution of entrepreneurs' problems on priority and stressed on departmental offi-

cers to behave in a friendly manner with entrepreneurs. Dr Arun Kumar also directed the Zila Panchayat officers to ensure waste management in industrial area soon. He informed that arrangements are being made to regularise brick kilns registered before the year 2012. He directed departmental officers, including Municipal Corporation, to ensure necessary arrangements to reduce pollution. He said subsidy will be arranged to encourage CNG vehicles. The system of investigation will be effective to stop vehicles spreading pollution. He said that the government is committed to serving the people and the solution of entrepreneurs' problems will be ensured on priority under all circumstances. MLA Saurobh Srivastava besides office-bearers of entrepreneur organisations and entrepreneurs, were prominently present in the meeting.

Emphasis on increasing role of technical skills, awareness in field of agriculture

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Director General, CSIR and Secretary, DSIR, Ministry of Science and Technology, GOI, New Delhi Dr N Kalaiselvi emphasised on the increasing role of technical skills and awareness in area of agriculture. She was delivering a guest lecture organised by the Department of Dairy Science and Food Technology, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) on enhancement of skill development in food technology and their allied area on Thursday. The lecture themed 'General awareness: How to enhance technical skills and abilities in the area of agriculture' focused on addressing critical challenges and opportunities in the field of agriculture. Dr Kalaiselvi, the first woman Director General of CSIR, discussed the importance of newer technologies as the cutting-edge tool for increasing the production and reducing the agricultural wastage. She also mentioned that India is a land of immense diversity with rich traditions, customs and practices and the two

prominent aspects that define India's identity are its Indian culture and agriculture. She shed the light on both the cultural heritage of India and its agricultural practices, their significance, interconnection and how they continue to evolve.

The welcome address was given by the head of department Prof Anil Kumar Chauhan and conducted by Dr Amrita Poonia. The vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Arvind. The students and faculty members were present during the lecture.

TRAINING SESSION: The Banaras Hindu University (BHU), through its Staff Development Cell (SDC), recently conducted a training session on the Service Regulations and Guidelines for Government Employees, with a focus on the Central Civil Services (CCS) Conduct Rules, 1964 and related disciplinary matters. The session aimed to provide university staff with an understanding of how these rules apply in various contexts. The training sought to enhance awareness of the CCS Conduct Rules, 1964, which

are important for maintaining discipline and ensuring proper functioning within government services. These rules outline the conduct expected of government employees, covering both their professional and personal responsibilities.

SDC BHU coordinator Prof SK Dubey, initiating the session, highlighted the significance of such training programmes. He noted that these sessions not only help employees stay informed about their rights and responsibilities but also support the development of professional conduct. He encouraged staff participation and suggested that multiple sessions could be organised to facilitate ongoing learning.

The session was led by deputy registrar A Velu, who provided an overview of the CCS Conduct Rules, 1964, including their history, objectives and practical applications. The discussion covered key aspects such as integrity, honesty, efficiency and restrictions on activities like political participation and involvement in business without prior approval. Participants gained

a clearer understanding of the disciplinary issues that may arise from violations of these rules, with an emphasis on maintaining integrity and high ethical standards in professional conduct. The importance of adhering to these guidelines was stressed as violations can lead to disciplinary actions, including termination of employment.

Through initiatives like this, BHU continues to prioritise staff development and aims to equip its employees with the knowledge needed to navigate government service regulations. The SDC remains committed to organising similar training programmes to support the development of a knowledgeable and disciplined workforce. The training session was well-received, with participants expressing interest in further sessions on the CCS Conduct Rules. Many suggested extending the duration for more in-depth learning. The examples shared by Velu were noted as helpful and the session was considered informative and beneficial in enhancing understanding of service rules and regulations.

Role of AI in diagnosing and treating melanoma explored

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The pre-conference workshop of ISMSCON- 2024, organised by the Department of Statistics at Seminar complex, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), featured two sessions with distinguished speakers. The programme commenced with a welcome by Prof Brijesh

Pratap Singh (organising secretary), who greeted both the delegates.

In the first session, Dr Faizan Danish delivered an engaging talk on 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in medical sciences', with a focus on Melanoma, a type of skin cancer that originates in melanocytes. He explored the role of AI in diagnosing

and treating melanoma, highlighting its transformative potential in the medical field. The second session was led by Prof SN Dwivedi. He delivered an informative session on 'Statistics in Evidence-Based Clinical Practice'. His discussion provided a deep dive into the application of statistical methods in clinical

settings, emphasising how data-driven approaches enhance the effectiveness and reliability of medical treatments. Both sessions were highly explanatory, offering valuable insights into the intersection of technology, statistics and medicine, and were well-received by the participants.

'Indian Railways witnessing a revolutionary phase'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Regional Performance Review Meeting- 2024 organised by the Vigilance Directorate, Railway Board, commenced at Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) here on Thursday. This opening event of two-day meeting was presided over by the Principal Executive Director (Vigilance),

Railway Board, DK Singh. Senior officials from two regional railways, North Eastern Railway (NER) and East Central Railway (ECR), along with three major production units CORE, RDSD, and BLW participated in it. The meeting began with a warm welcome by BLW's Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) Ankur Chandra. In his keynote address, BLW General Manager (GM) NP Singh highlighted the transformative phase Indian Railways is undergoing. He remarked, "Indian Railways is witnessing a revolutionary phase with significant advancements in safety, capacity expansion, station redevelopment and passenger amenities. In this context, the role of vigilance must evolve to align with modern challenges." On the occasion the GM launched BLW's vigilance bulletin 'Prabodh'.

This publication aims to inspire railway employees toward vigilance awareness and impartiality, marking a significant step in fostering transparency and integrity. Singh encouraged officials to take courageous and fair decisions while maintaining integrity. He urged the Vigilance department to expedite the resolution of pending cases and foster a fear-free environment to enable

employees to work confidently. The GM also commended the success of the recently organised Vigilance Awareness Week. As part of the campaign, BLW conducted awareness programmes for

school children and the public, emphasising the importance of honesty and integrity. Singh described children as the 'future of the nation' and stressed that instilling the values of integrity at an early age would significantly contribute to building a strong and prosperous India. The meeting included deliberations between the Railway Board, regional railways and production units on resolving pending cases, improving performance and implementing systemic reforms. The event was coordinated by BLW's Deputy Chief Vigilance Officer Dharmendra Kumar ensuring its smooth execution.

Swarnaprashan of 189 SAM children done

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Swarnaprashan of 189 severely acute malnourished (SAM) children of Anganwadi in Varanasi was done at Government Ayurvedic Medical College Chowkghat here on Thursday. Swarnaprashan will increase the immunity of children and they will get rid of malnutrition soon. In Swarnaprashan, a mixture is prepared from Swarna Bhasm Brahmi Ghrita and honey under the supervision of specialist doctors. While reviewing malnutrition in the meeting of the District Nutrition Committee held last month, the district magistrate discussed with the regional ayurvedic and unani officer the contribution of AYUSH medical system in eliminating malnutrition. Regional Ayurvedic

and Unani Officer Dr Saroj Shankar Ram said by giving Swarnaprashan to malnourished children, their immunity increases rapidly and they get rid of malnutrition soon. District Programme Officer DK Singh said that Swarnaprashan is done every month in Pushya Nakshatra and as Pushya Nakshatra was on November 21, so Swarnaprashan was organised by making preparations in advance. At present, there are a total of 467 children in Varanasi in the SAM category, out of which 189 children from urban areas were given Swarnaprashan. The remaining children from rural areas will be given Swarnaprashan on December 18 in Pushya Nakshatra next month. Special cooperation was received from the Principal of Ayurvedic Medical College Dr Shashi Singh in the event.

Light thrown on employee efficiency

Varanasi (PNS): The three-day International Conference on Metamorphosis of HR Width (IC-MHRW 2024) concluded at the Faculty of Commerce (FOC), BHU on Thursday. Dean, FOC BHU Prof HK Singh, welcomed the chief guest and chairman of TVRLS Prof TV Rao and guest of honour and president of National Institute of Personnel Management Dr MH Raja. FOC Dean Prof HK Singh said professional management, responsible accounting and corporate ethics are essential for making India developed. Head of the Faculty of Commerce, DU, Prof Ajay Kumar Singh, advised the Ministry of AYUSH, Yoga and the service sector to be more active in order

to make India a Vishwaguru. Prof Rameshwar S Ture of IIM Kashipur threw light on employee efficiency, public sector profitability and social responsibility discharge. Convener Prof SC Das presented the main theme of the conference. On the second day Prof HK Singh and Prof SC Das welcomed the guests. Prof Amilan Bhushan, Prof Amitabh Dev Kodwani and Dr Saji Mathew were invited as keynote speakers for three different sessions. The themes for the three tracks were Employees and Organisational Development (E & OD), Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE & I) and Emerging Trends in Organisational Behaviour (OB) & Human Resources (HR) respectively.

Youth dies in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A youth died when his bike collided head on with another motorcycle in Rura of Kanpur Dehat late on Wednesday night. Another bike rider also sustained serious injury in the incident. Both the injured youths were taken to Rura community health centre (CHC) from where after the first aid they were referred to the district hospital where one of them succumbed to his injury. The kin of another injured youth took him to Kanpur for better treatment. Reports said that Vikas alias Shalu (25) of Baijupurwa, Kashipur, was a truck driver. Late Wednesday night, after parking the truck near Chiraura when he was returning to Baijupurwa village on bike the speeding motorcycle coming from the opposite direction collided with him near a degree college in Rura. Apart from Shalu alias Vikas, another bike-rider Babban Senger also sustained serious injury in the incident. Meanwhile, kin of Babban took him to Kanpur for better treatment. Vikas succumbed to his injury at the district hospital. Rura outpost incharge Rakesh Singh said on the complaint of deceased's father-in-law, an FIR had been lodged in this connection.

Revision of photo electoral rolls from tomorrow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, at present the work of revision of assembly photo electoral rolls on the basis of eligibility date January 1, 2025, is in progress from October 29. According to the schedule set by the Commission, the date of special campaign has been fixed on November 23 (Saturday) and November 24 (Sunday).

On this date, all the booth level officers (BLOs) will be available at their respective polling stations from 10 am to 4 pm and will receive claims/objections Form-6, 6A, 7 and 8.

Giving this information here on Thursday, Additional District Magistrate (Administration)/Deputy District Election Officer Vipin Kumar said on the day of the special campaign, the booths will be visited by the District Election Officer (DEO), Deputy District Election Officer (DyDEO), all electoral registration officers (EROs) and assistant electoral registration officers

(AEROs) and supervisory officers. "If any BLO is found absent during the visit, legal action will be taken against him under the relevant sections of the Representation of the People Act. On the campaign days, all the educational institutions/offices and other institutions of the district where polling stations are established will remain open", the DyDEO said.

Vipin Kumar appealed to the general public that those who have completed or are completing 18 years of age on January 1, 2025, and whose names have not yet been registered in the voter lists, can appear at their polling stations on the said dates and fill Form-6 for inclusion of their names in the electoral rolls, Form-7 for deletion of any entry from the voter lists and Form-8 for rectifying any entry, getting duplicate voter identity card made, change of places and can apply online themselves through BLOs or by downloading Voter Helpline App (VHA) on the Commission's website <https://voters.eci.gov.in> or on their mobile.

Children display models at science exhibition



Children displaying their models at the science exhibition on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Poonam Public School organised science exhibition 'Pahal' on Thursday. Children showcased their talent by displaying models on DNA, Earth Satellite, Chandrayaan-3, nature conservation, water harvesting, harm to people from pollution, self-driven robot, buzzer game,

hydraulic game, water treatment, hydraulic power plant etc. and stole the show. Guardians were all praise for the efforts of their children. Manager Poonam Srivastava said the objective for organising the exhibition was to spread awareness among the children and recognise their talent. Students who presented their models were Sejal Tewari,

Aradhya Tewari, Shreya Saini, Kritika, Ananya, Lekanshi, Pranvi, Aradhya and Shivanshi Yadav. Apart from the school manager Poonam Srivastava, others who coordinated for the event included Dharmendra Srivastava, secretary Anand, teachers Ritu Pandey, Kanchan, Priyanka, Suman, Madhu, Abhay, Neha, Sarita and Puja. A large number of dignitaries were also present.

ARRESTED: A wanted criminal, carrying a cash reward of ₹25,000, was arrested by the police following an encounter near Sunderpur Gajen under Rura police station area of Kanpur Dehat on Thursday morning. He was involved in a loot in Murliapur village. Police recovered a bike, one country-made pistol and two live cartridges from him. During exchange of firing, he sustained bullet injury in his right leg and was sent to CHC from where after first aid he was referred to the district hospital.

Man dies under mysterious circumstances

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A 50-year-old man Rambabu Bind, of Urda Sarai village under Sarai Inayat police station area here died under mysterious circumstances on Thursday. His family members alleged that Rambabu was murdered by some unidentified miscreants. Police sent the body for postmortem and is investigating the matter. According to a report, when the villagers saw Rambabu Bind lying on the bank of a pond behind the house, they picked him up and brought him home. The family members informed the police that Rambabu was murdered. His family members are inconsolable.

Sarai Inayat Station House Officer (SHO) Sanjay Prasad Gupta said the body had been sent for an autopsy and the exact reason behind the death could be clear only after the post-mortem report comes.

Eco-friendly & affordable housing solution unveiled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

NTPC Limited has unveiled its innovative eco-friendly and affordable housing solution, 'Sukh' Eco-house, at the ongoing India International Trade Fair (IITF) 2024 at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi. The eco-houses utilise approximately 80 per cent ash and ash-based products from thermal power plants in their construction, offering a revolutionary approach to rural housing and showcasing the company's commitment to sustainability and zero-carbon emissions. Built with innovative interlocking wall blocks made from ash, these structures do not require any sand, cement, steel, or mortar, significantly reducing costs and construction time.

The use of ash-based building material in these eco-houses eliminates the requirement of cement and natural aggregates, leading to lower carbon emission and prevention of topsoil erosion. A typical house, spanning 30 square meters and featuring a drawing room, bedroom,



'Sukh' Eco-house constructed and displayed by NTPC at its pavilion near Hall No.1 at IITF.

kitchen, and toilet, can be constructed for just ₹1,50,000 in a span of 15-20 days. This method ensures durability, as demonstrated by its resilience to diverse weather conditions, including rain, storms, and high winds, for over two years. Moreover, the houses achieve a remarkable 75 per cent

reduction in carbon emissions compared to conventional construction methods. From the foundation to the roof, and even the window and door frames, the entire structure is built using ash-based materials. The design allows the house to be dismantled and re-erected with

minimal damage, adding to its practicality and longevity. The eco-houses align with the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), providing a scalable and eco-friendly model for affordable rural housing. By addressing waste management and promoting the reuse of industrial byproducts, NTPC's initiative paves the way for sustainable construction practices. Besides these eco-houses can also be powered by solar energy, thereby strengthening India's Net Zero commitments.

At IITF 2024, NTPC proudly exhibits transformative housing solution which highlights NTPC's efforts to foster a sustainable future through green construction practices. Visitors can explore how the company is repurposing ash, a byproduct of thermal power generation, into cost-effective, resilient housing materials. The India International Trade Fair serves as a platform for NTPC to showcase its innovative solutions, reaffirming its role in driving sustainable development.

Rajnath Singh holds bilateral talks with US Secretary of Defence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Authorities have successfully handled the menace of hoax bomb calls to airlines and such calls have reduced. To a query about hoax bomb calls, Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlung Vualnam also said that authorities have tackled them successfully. He further said that procedures being adopted to deal with fog-related disruptions have been streamlined.



A few weeks back, hundreds of flights had received bomb threat calls that later turned out to be hoaxes. These threats had significantly impacted flight operations of various domestic carriers. "Our security have tackled this (hoax bomb calls) and we have seen also that we have been successful. The numbers have now gone down and from the airport threat assessment committee also, the consultation process has been streamlined. They have been made more responsive, (for) quick response..."

fog season during which generally there are flight disruptions due to low visibility conditions, the secretary said airlines have been instructed to timely inform passengers about delays or cancellations. "We will be issuing fresh instructions to remind airlines and airports for the arrangements for passengers".

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

"If there is any unavoidable delay in flights or cancellations, the procedures being adopted have been streamlined... BCAS has issued the circular and the drills are taking place. With this, there will be a better handling of fog season this year," he said.

On Wednesday, Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu held a review meeting with various stakeholders on fog preparedness.

"We have successfully handled the hoax cases so that passengers and flights are not disrupted by hoax calls," Vualnam said.

As part of preparations for the

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



PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

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

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

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

Opposition members demand tenure extension of Parliamentary Panel on Waqf

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition members on Thursday demanded extension of the tenure of the Joint Committee on Waqf Amendment Bill, contending that they need more time to study the changes to the draft legislation.



At a meeting of the committee, Chairman and BJP member Jagdamba Pal announced that Thursday's meeting would be the last sitting of the panel and a draft report would be circulated to the members shortly.

This led to protests by the Opposition members who resorted to sloganeering and some of them called Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and sought his intervention in the matter. The committee has been asked by the Lok Sabha to submit its report on the last day of the first week of the winter session of Parliament beginning Monday. The government has already listed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill for consideration and

passage in the Winter session "after the report of the joint committee is presented to the Lok Sabha".

In the past too, opposition members on the panel have accused Pal, a BJP MP, of doing the government's bidding. They had earlier even threatened to disassociate themselves with the panel's work.

Their main concern was the frequent day-long meetings of the panel which did not allow them to prepare adequately and had accused Pal of "bulldozing proceedings" by not consulting them in picking on whom to call to depose. Several opposition members of the committee had earlier too approached Speaker Birla against Pal.

Peaceful environment necessary for growth: Dhankhar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



Noting that peace disruption or conflagration in any part of the globe has the potential to upset and unsettle growth, he

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

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

November 22 by the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu (M K Stalin)," a release here said. The building has all the necessary facilities for IT companies to function such as modern telecommunication facilities, uninterrupted high-voltage three-phase power connections and electrical drive facilities, elevators, sanitary facilities, fire safety, and building management facilities, CCTV cameras, 24X7 security, a restaurant, and a gymnasium. "The building will house 6,000 IT professionals and has been built according to green building guidelines," the release said. With the establishment of this new Tidel Park, the educated youth of the northern part of

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

Beyond its efficacy, Nafithromycin boasts superior safety and tolerability. The antibiotic has minimal gastrointestinal side effects, no significant drug interactions, and remains unaffected by food, making it a versatile option for patients. The antibiotics marks a historic breakthrough as the first new antibiotic in its class to be developed globally in over 30 years. "This significant milestone comes at a time when antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing global health crisis, with few new drugs entering the pipeline," said the Minister. The development of Nafithromycin is a testament to India's scientific advancement, offering a much-needed solution to combat multi-drug-resistant pathogens. Its innovative design, targeting both typical and atypical organisms and its ability to overcome existing resistance mechanisms, positions it as a beacon of hope in the fight against AMR, with the potential to save countless lives worldwide.

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

GIRISH SHARMA ■ BHOPAL

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



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

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Mending fences with China

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

In a notable shift, the Chinese government has signalled its intent to recalibrate its ties with India following a series of disengagement measures along their disputed border. The thaw reflects both strategic considerations and economic imperatives as Beijing grapples with slowing economic growth and rising geopolitical challenges. After years of strained relations exacerbated by the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which resulted in casualties on both sides, the disengagement at friction points offers a moment to 'look into the future.'



Chinese officials and business leaders have expressed optimism about a potential reset in ties, framing peace and stability as prerequisites for deeper bilateral engagement. China's economy has been under pressure from multiple fronts: sluggish growth, weakening consumer demand and the looming threat of escalating tariffs from the United States under Donald Trump's proposed policies.

Beijing has already announced two rounds of monetary and fiscal stimulus packages, with a third expected soon, aiming to rejuvenate its domestic economy and strengthen trade ties with key partners like India. India, with its vast middle-class market and growing manufacturing sector, represents an attractive prospect for Chinese businesses.

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

Companies like Shanghai Pharmaceuticals and carmaker BYD have expressed interest in leveraging the Indian market, highlighting areas like healthcare and electric vehicles as promising fields for cooperation.

While Beijing appears eager to reset relations, New Delhi's emphasis on resolving border disputes as a precondition for normalisation remains a sticking point. India is likely to continue leveraging its trade policies to address the trade deficit and ensure balanced economic ties. Additionally, mutual trust needs rebuilding after years of diplomatic and military stand-offs. Indeed, the disengagement along the border is a significant step toward restoring confidence between the two nations.

If both sides prioritise dialogue and economic cooperation, the thaw could lead to a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship. China's acknowledgment of India's potential as a key trade and investment partner, coupled with India's focus on reducing its trade deficit and securing fair access to Chinese markets, could lay the foundation for a new era in Sino-Indian relations. Whatever the reasons behind China's willingness to engage in dialogue, this is an opportunity that must be fully seized.

PICTALK



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

Are taxpayers getting their money's worth?

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

Each month, countless individuals contribute a significant portion of their earnings to the government, with the expectation that it will deliver essential services and build a nation worthy of our pride. Despite decades of commitments and the collection of hundreds of billions in taxes, numerous regions still suffer from shockingly inadequate basic infrastructure. Educational institutions lack adequate classrooms and dedicated teachers. Instead, middle-class families find themselves having to extend their budgets to enrol their children in private schools.



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

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

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

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



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

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Congress party's political opportunism

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



SYED ZAFAR ISLAM

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

falls his group enjoyed during UPA rule? The answer lies in political expediency. Adani Group's growth and expansion have not been limited to any single political party or government. The conglomerate has secured projects, investments, and approvals from governments led by Congress, regional parties, and other opposition parties across various states. But at the state level, where governance realities take precedence over rhetoric, the result is a schizophrenic approach that undermines whatever credibility Congress hopes to claim in its critique of crony capitalism. This duplicity isn't just bad politics; it's bad for India. Congress's selective outrage over Adani distracts from the real issues of economic concentration and regulatory capture. While concerns about corporate influence on politics are valid and must be addressed, it is crucial to have a balanced and fact-based perspective on the issue. Worse, it perpetuates the very system it claims to oppose, enabling Adani's expansion while pre-

tending to stand against it. For Congress, the cost of this hypocrisy is more than just bad optics—it's a loss of trust. Voters are not blind to the contradictions between what Congress says and what it does. Rahul Gandhi's crusade against Adani might make for compelling headlines, but it rings hollow when Congress-ruled states continue to partner with the group. This gap between rhetoric and reality exposes Congress as a party more interested in political opportunism than principled opposition. The people of India are wise enough to see through the opposition's double standards and political opportunism. They understand that the BJP government has always prioritised the nation's interests and has worked tirelessly to promote inclusive growth and development. We will continue to focus on our agenda of good governance, economic reforms, and social welfare, regardless of the opposition's baseless attacks and allegations. (The writer is BJP national spokesperson; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

GANGA UNSAFE FOR BATHING

Madam — The National Green Tribunal has ordered Varanasi DM to put up a board as the Ganga is not fit for bathing. It is unfortunate. Ganga is a lifeline to tens of millions of people who live in its basin and depend on it for their daily life. But in the recent years, the Ganga has become not suitable for drinking purposes and more pathetically for bathing too since it is severely polluted with human waste and industrial contaminants. Three quarters of sewage from the northern plains is discharged into the Ganga without treatment. The Central Pollution Control Board states that BOD levels should be less than 3 mg per litre for bathing, but in the Ganges, BOD levels can be up to 6.4 mg per litre. Therefore, swimming in the river, which has high levels of harmful bacteria and toxic chemicals, can increase the chance of developing diseases like viral fever, nausea, typhoid, hepatitis, gastroenteritis and so on. The Ganga Action Plan was launched in 1985 with the aim of improving water quality through interception, diversion and treatment of domestic sewage and to prevent toxic and industrial chemical wastes from identified polluting units from entering the Ganga should be strictly implemented. The Namami Ganga project was launched in 2014 with the objective of effective abatement of pollution, conservation and rejuvenation of the Ganga should be given life.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

BENGAL'S MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

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

Winter smog chokes Delhi



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

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

DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

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

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

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

Vinod Johri | Delhi

CASH CONTROVERSY

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

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

THE FRAGILE MIND AND OVERCOMING FEAR

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



RAVI VALLURI

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

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



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

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

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

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

Dedicated bank for MSMEs to boost credit access



A S MITTAL

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

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

However, many, such as the Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation (PSIDC) and Punjab Finance Corporation (PFC), are experiencing funds crunch and have stopped credit flow. PSIDC gathered liabilities worth Rs 4700 crore, therefore, has not given any fresh loans to any company for the last 16 years. According to an Ernst&Young(EY) report, MSME credit penetration in India is only 14 per cent, significantly lower than in larger economies like the US and China, where the figures are 50 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively. Indian MSMEs face a critical credit shortage of 25 trillion, indicating a substantial untapped credit market. Increasing lending to MSMEs can stimulate economic activity and create jobs. The proposed establishment of a separate bank dedicated to the MSME sector would help address these direct credit shortages. However, the government needs to finalise various details, such as the bank's ownership structure, which may adopt a hybrid public-private partnership model. Although large banks operate in the sector, they often struggle to meet the unique needs of MSMEs. Countries in Europe provide valuable lessons by grouping MSMEs with home loan customers, both considered small borrowers. If the government does not establish a new bank, SIDBI could be transformed into a full-fledged bank focused on direct lending to MSMEs instead of merely refinancing. SIDBI plays a vital role in financing India's MSMEs and is owned by a consortium that includes the government and major financial institutions. In 2023-24, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) supported the agricultural sector with a loan portfolio of Rs 6.68 lakh crore, with the agriculture sector contributing 18 per cent to the country's GDP. On the other hand, SIDBI had a refinancing loan portfolio of 84,000 crore in FY 2023-24, with the MSME sector contributing 30 per cent to the GDP. For micro and small enterprises to grow, obtaining capital remains one of their most significant challenges.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India is presently realising a demographic dividend, with the largest number of the young working population in the age group of 15-34. The above trend in women's labour market participation has serious implications for the economy, indicating a need for transition. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MoSPI), presents a slightly optimistic



KAJLEEN KAUR

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

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

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

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

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

There is also a considerable gender-based wage gap of about INR 4,014. On average, men earn INR 12,048 per month while women earn INR 8,034, or about 33 per cent less than men. This illustrates the stereotypes and gender biases that affect employment decisions, promotions, and wage negotiations. Recently, Indian policymakers and government have undertaken several initiatives and schemes



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

High voter turn-out, raises candidates' hopes

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a development that may have a bearing on the poll outcome, Maharashtra recorded an estimated 65.02 per cent of voting in the Assembly elections when the polling ended on Wednesday evening, marking more than 3.58 per cent increase in the final polling of the 2019 State Assembly polls. As per the update put out by the Election Commission of India (ECI) at 11.30 pm on Wednesday, an estimated 65.02 per cent of 9.7 crore voters exercised their franchise when the polling ended. The ECI had reported earlier that 58.22 per cent of voters had exercised their rights till 5 pm. The 65.02 per cent of final polling is more than 61.44 per cent polling witnessed in the Maharashtra Assembly polls. Expressing his happiness over the increased polling percentage,

Deputy Chief Minister and senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Devendra Fadnis said: "The increase in the voter turnout will benefit the BJP and our partners. The percentage of voting increased due to pro-incumbency and the feeling of affinity that voters have for the government. Also, it cannot be ignored that the rise in the turnout of women voters was possibly due to the Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana". Officials said that the final polling percentage reported at 11.30 pm was provisional and it may undergo minor revisions until the ECI finalises the polling percentage. "The same (polling percentages) will be updated by the field level officers as the remaining parties will keep returning and updated figures will be available Assembly constituency and district-wise live at the Voter turnout APP," ECI said in a press release issued late in the



night. Incidentally, Maharashtra on Wednesday witnessed the highest-ever voter turn-out in 30 years. The state had recorded a higher turnout in 1995, with 71.7 per cent. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Maharashtra had recorded 61.33 per cent of votes. Reports emanating from different parts of the state suggest that the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS) workers played a crucial role in bringing a sizeable number of reluctant voters, an indication that the increased voter-turnout will benefit the BJP-led MahaYuti. Similarly, there is a large turn-out of voters in the constituencies affected by the urban apathy can be evidenced from the fact that Mumbai city recorded a low turn-out of 52.07, followed by Mumbai suburban (55.77), Thane (56.05) and Pune (60.70). Lamenting the poor turn-out in urban areas of Maharashtra, the ECI had said on Thursday evening: "Despite a range of measures by the Commission for ease of voting, and motivational campaigns, urban voters in the state continued their dismal record of low participation in cities like Mumbai, Pune and Thane". The exact impact of increased voter turn-out will be known when the votes are counted on Saturday.

Army to probe allegations of torture in Kishtwar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Following allegations of the use of brutal force against the civilians reportedly detained for questioning in connection with the movement of terrorists in the higher reaches of Kishtwar, the Indian Army, on Thursday, said an investigation is being launched to ascertain the facts in the matter. Nagrota-based White Knight Corps stated in a post on X, "Based on specific intelligence of the move of a group of terrorists in the Kishtwar Sector, an operation was launched by the Rashtriya Rifles on 20 November 2024. There are some reports on the alleged ill-treatment of civilians during the conduct of the operation. An investigation is being launched to ascertain the facts. Necessary follow-up action will be ensured. Further moves of the group of terrorists are being monitored".

According to ground reports, at least four civilians were called for questioning at the Chas camp of Mughal Maidan tehsil in Kishtwar district on Wednesday. When these individuals failed to return home until late evening, their families decided to visit the army camp to ask about their whereabouts. Before the families could reach the camp, these four civilians were released. According to some of the videos circulated on social media platforms, the civilians were in bad shape with marks of brutal injuries on their person.

Post-poll posturing peaks in MY, MVA camps

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Queried about the Chief Ministerial candidate within the MY, State BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule said: "Our workers want Fadnis to be the chief minister. Similarly the Shiv Sena feels it should be Shinde or for that matter NCP workers want Ajit Pawar as chief minister...once the results are out the BJP high command and the leaderships of the other parties would take a call." Shiv Sena spokesperson Sanjay Shirsat said that his party was all for Shinde returning as the chief minister. "We feel Shinde should be the chief minister once again," he said. Responding to a question on the nomination of the CM candidate, Fadnis - who is the number one aspirant for the CM's post, said: "After the results are out, the leaders of MahaYuti constituents will sit across and decide on the chief ministerial candidate".

However, Congress' Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar said that the MVA partner that bags the highest number of seats "will be a natural claimant to the post of CM". On state Congress president Nana Patole's suggestion that there will be a Congress-led government in the state, Raut said: "The Congress high command has said that if he is becoming the CM, then Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi should announce it...After we sit together, we will sit across and confirm if Nana Patole has made a suggestion that there should be a Congress-led government in the state and whether Nana Patole has the Congress high command's backing." Notwithstanding the confidence of a comfortable majority being expressed by the ruling MahaYuti leaders, the MVA leaders said that out of 288 seats, they would cross 160 seats. "The MVA

will win anywhere from 160 to 165 seats in the polls," Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said. "Together with the help of our allies and smaller parties like the PWP, Samajwadi Party and the Left parties. The MVA expects to cross the majority mark. There will be a stable government in the state. I can say this very confidently," Raut said. In a related development, Congress general secretary Ramesh Chennithala has called a meeting of party leaders on Friday. He will also confabulate with the MVA leaders. Congress Legislature Party leader Balasaheb Thorat and state NCP president Jayant Patil are reaching out to the rebels from the respective parties. "We will need the help of rebels in case we fall short of numbers. That's why our leaders are contacting the rebels so that their support can be enlisted formally on Saturday," a senior Congress leader said.

'Digital arrest' gang nabbed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has arrested three members of "digital arrest gang" who cheated a woman of Rs 2 lakh by putting her under so-called 'digital detention'. According to the police, the accused have been identified as Tasim Ahmad (31), Aman Sharma (29), and Dharmesh Chandulal Soni (48). "The complainant, who works as a graphic designer with a MNC, filed a Digital Arrest/ Financial fraud complaint to which she inadvertently became a part of. On September 29, she received a call in the name of FedEx Courier Services about a suspicious parcel registered in her name and Aadhar number," a senior police official said, adding that as per the caller the parcel contained illegal items including drugs. The officer said based on the woman's complaint a team nabbed three people on October 28.

Centre deploys addl forces to quell Manipur violence

PTI ■ IMPHAL

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



ransacked in the hill district of Jiribam last week. The incidents occurred after mobs set fire to the residences of three BJP legislators, one of whom is a senior minister, and a Congress MLA in various districts of Imphal Valley where an indefinite curfew has been clamped. Security forces also foiled the attempt of the agitators to storm the ancestral residence of Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Saturday evening. The violence escalated after three women and three

children belonging to the Meitei community had gone missing from a relief camp in Jiribam district after a gunfight between security forces and suspected Kuki-Zo militants that resulted in the deaths of 10 insurgents on November 11. Bodies of those six were later found over the past few days. More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May last year.

Set up courtroom in Tihar...

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Rubaiya was abducted near Lal Ded Hospital in Srinagar on December 8, 1989 and freed five days later after the then BJP-backed V P Singh government at the Centre released five terrorists in exchange. Mufti, who now lives in Tamil Nadu, is a prosecution witness of the CBI, which took over the case in early 1990s. Malik is lodged in Tihar jail after he was sentenced by a special NIA court in May, 2023 in a terror-funding case.

From 'severe' to 'very poor'

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According to IQAir, PM2.5 concentration is currently 47.8 times the World Health Organization annual PM2.5 guideline value. Visibility at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport dropped, leading to flight disruptions. According to Flightradar, 97 flights have been delayed and 3 cancelled till now. According to the CPCB, in 12 areas of Delhi, the AQI level remained between 400 and 500. It was 408 in Alipur,

405 in Anand Vihar, 414 in Ashok Vihar, 418 in Bawana, 401 in Dwarka Sector 8, 435 in Jahangirpuri, 413 in Mundka, 411 in Nehru Nagar, 407 in Punjabi Bagh, 407 in Rohini, 412 in Shadipur, and Wazirpur remains at 436 level. Whereas in 26 areas of the National Capital, the AQI level remained above 300 and between 400. It was 369 in Aya Nagar, 339 in Chandni Chowk, 343 in Mathura Road, 368 in Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range, 360 in DTU, 370 in IGI

Airport, 341 in Dilshad Garden, 365 in ITO, 354 in Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. At Lodhi Road the air pollution level was 335, Major Dhyanchand Stadium 372 and Mahendra Marg 365. The levels were 366 in Najafgarh, 395 in Narela, 356 in North Campus DU, 365 in NSIT Dwarka, 389 in Okhla Phase 2, 381 in Patparganj, 365 in Pusha, 389 in RK Puram, 373 in Siri Fort, and 394 in Sonia Vihar. While Travel agencies report a sharp rise in demand for BS-6 and CNG vehicles,

including cars like Ertiga, Innova, and traveller buses, as they scramble to meet commitments made before the ban. "The wedding season has added to the pressure. Many vehicles were pre-booked months in advance, and with this sudden ban, we had to scramble to adjust," said a travel agency owner. "We are struggling to arrange new vehicles, the petrol, CNG, and BS-6 compliant ones, as weddings and transportation needs are being heavily affected," he added. Another

travel agency owner highlighted the growing challenges. Another travel agency owner said that this is the peak wedding season, and many families plan destination weddings or large gatherings requiring bulk bookings and they are finding it difficult to arrange vehicles. According to the Air Quality Analysis Report by Respires Living Sciences, which analysed PM2.5 levels across 281 Indian cities from November 3 to 16, Delhi was ranked last, holding position 281.

Ukraine says Russia launched intercontinental...

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The statement didn't say when or where exactly it happened or what the missiles were targeting. This is not Moscow's first public announcement of the shooting down of Storm Shadow missiles, as Russia earlier reported downing some over the annexed Crimean Peninsula. The developments come as the war has taken on a growing international dimension with the arrival of North Korean troops to help Russia on the battlefield - a development that US officials said prompted the United States President Joe Biden's policy shift on allowing Ukraine to fire longer-range US missiles into Russia. The Kremlin responded with threats to escalate further. Putin has previously warned the US and other NATO allies that allowing Ukraine to use Western-supplied longer-range weapons to hit Russian territory would mean that Russia and NATO are at war. And the new doctrine allows for a potential nuclear response by Moscow even to a conventional attack on Russia by any nation that is supported by a nuclear power. While the doctrine envisions a possible nuclear response by Russia to a conventional strike, it is formulated broadly to avoid a firm commitment to use nuclear weapons.

Adani issue to heat up Winter Session

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Opposition members Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM), Trinamool Congress (TMC), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), National Conference (NC), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Shiv Sena (Uddhav), said the Narendra Modi government "cannot hide behind smokescreen anymore" and demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the matter. Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Ek hain to safe hain' slogan, Rahul said as long as the PM and Adani are together, "they are safe" in India. He said he will raise the issue during the Winter session of Parliament beginning Monday and the entire opposition is together on the matter. Rahul, who has been constantly attacking Adani

accusing him of 'using his proximity to the PM,' said criminality and corruption are two different issues. "But if Adani is working under due process, we don't have a problem. It is up to the government to investigate," Rahul said. Asked about some states ruled by non-BJP parties being named by the US prosecutors, Rahul said wherever this happened irrespective of the party in power there should be an investigation. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said a comprehensive Joint Parliament Committee probe into all aspects of the Adani group's functioning, including its investments in foreign countries should be initiated. The BJP dubbed Rahul Gandhi's attack on the Prime Minister as a part of his long-running efforts to target its leader, and noted that none of

the four states (Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Odisha) named in American courts had a BJP government. BJP spokesperson and Lok Sabha MP Sambit Patra made it clear that as far as allegations against the Adani group are concerned it is for the company to issue a clarification and defend itself. "Law will take its own course and if Adani is corrupt, then why are the Congress governments seeking investment from his company," BJP sought to know at a Press conference. The US authorities also charged three former employees of a large Canadian pension fund, CDPQ, in connection with the alleged scheme, saying they obstructed an investigation into the bribes by deleting emails and agreeing to provide false

information to the US government. The CDPQ, which invests in infrastructure projects, is a shareholder in Adani companies. Commenting on the development, Adani spokesperson pointed to a US Department of Justice statement that said "the charges in the indictment are allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty". "The Adani Group has always upheld and is steadfastly committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance, transparency and regulatory compliance across all jurisdictions of its operations. We assure our stakeholders, partners and employees that we are a law-abiding organisation, fully compliant with all laws," the spokesperson added.

Patiala House Court puts Bikaner House...

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In its five-page order, District Judge (Commercial Court) Vidya Prakash, noted that the 2020 arbitral award in favour of Enviro Infra Engineers Private Limited has attained finality after an appeal preferred by the Nagar Palika was dismissed earlier this year. "Keeping in view the aforesaid facts and circumstances and the fact that the JD had failed to comply with the direction for furnishing affidavit of their assets despite grant of repeated opportunities, Court while agreeing with the submissions made on behalf of DH, finds it a fit case for issuance of warrants of attachment against immovable property of JD i.e. Bikaner House, New Delhi". "Accordingly, issue warrants of attachment of immovable

property of JD i.e. Bikaner House, New Delhi situated within territorial jurisdiction of this Court on taking requisite steps by DH, in accordance with the provisions contained in Order XXI Rule 54 CPC, which shall state that the judgement debtor (JD) is prohibited from transferring or charging the property in any way, and all persons from taking any benefit from such transfer or charge and shall further require the JD to attend this Court on the next date to be so fixed by this Court, in order to take notice of the date to be fixed for settling the terms of the proclamation of sale, returnable for next date," reads the order. In an order passed on September 18, the judge had noted the non-compliance of the court's directions. In 1911, during the grand

ceremonies of the Delhi Durbar, King George V announced that the Capital of British India was to be moved from Calcutta to Delhi. The intention was to create a grand imperial presence in historic Delhi. While in use as a royal residence, the ground floor hosted the reception suites, private rooms and guest rooms, while the zenana, or women's quarters, was on the first floor. Its present form still reflects the regal grandeur and taste of its original patrons. Around the time of Indian Independence in 1947, Bikaner House was the venue for many important meetings between Indian royal families, who deliberated their futures. This was where they considered the accession policy that would allow them to formally join independent India.

Pehle AAP... first candidates' list out

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As a shrewd politician, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal realized that people will not vote to his party on his name or the politics of perceptions due to corruption charges leveled against him. He needs strong candidates to counter anti-incumbency in more than 30 seats. The game plan could see sitting MLAs dropped to counter the anti-incumbency factor. "Many of those chosen have a

proven track record of working tirelessly for their communities, addressing issues such as healthcare, education, and public amenities. Despite facing electoral setbacks in the past, these candidates have maintained a strong presence on the ground, demonstrating their commitment to public service over personal ambition," the AAP said in a statement. Kejriwal has already reiterated his party's six free 'revris' to Delhi,

electricity, water, education, health pilgrimage and bus travel to women. Delhi AAP convener Gopal Rai said the eight seats the party failed to win in 2020 were prioritised while finalising the candidates as it wants to have an all-round campaign in those constituencies. "The names of 11 candidates have been finalised. Most of these seats are those where the MLA is not from AAP currently," Rai said.

Brahma Singh Tanwar will contest from Chhatrapur, Anil Jha will be AAP candidate from Kiradi. Deepak Singla will contest in Vishwas Nagar and Sarita Singh in Rohtas Nagar. BB Tyagi has been named AAP candidate in Laxmi Nagar and Ram Singh Zubair in Badarpur. Zubair Chaudhary will be AAP's candidate from Seelampur and Veer Singh Dhingnan will contest in Seemapuri. Gaurav Sharma will contest in Ghonda and

Manoj Tyagi has been picked as candidate in Karawal Nagar. Somesh Shaukeen will be AAP's candidate from Matiala. Both Tanwar and Jha are former BJP legislators and switched to the AAP this year. BB Tyagi, too, is a former BJP leader and a two-time councillor of Municipal Corporation of Delhi. Deepak Singla is a senior party leader who lost to the BJP's Om Prakash Sharma in Vishwas Nagar last time.

Sarita Singh heads the AAP's student wing, Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti, and a former MLA from Rohtas Nagar. Ram Singh Netaji is a two-time MLA from Badarpur and Zubair Chaudhary is the son of five-time Seelampur MLA and Congress leader Mateen Ahmed. Veer Singh Dhingnan, earlier with the Congress, is a three-time MLA from Seemapuri. Gaurav Sharma is AAP's national joint secretary for organisation building and

Manoj Tyagi is a former councillor. Somesh Shaukeen, too, is a former Congress MLA who switched to the AAP this year. The last Delhi Assembly elections were held in February 2020, where the AAP won a decisive victory, securing 62 out of 70 seats. The BJP managed only 8 seats, and Congress failed to open its account. Arvind Kejriwal became the Chief Minister. However, Kejriwal's tenure faced major challenges. In

March 2024, he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a money laundering investigation related to the cancelled Delhi excise policy. He was later arrested by the CBI in June 2024, making him the first sitting CM to be arrested. Kejriwal's legal battle continued until September, when the Supreme Court granted him bail after his plea was supported by the Delhi High Court.

Israel-Hamas war death toll passes 44k

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

The death toll in the Gaza Strip from the 13-month-old war between Israel and Hamas has surpassed 44,000, local health officials said Thursday. The Gaza Health Ministry does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count, but it has said that more than half of the fatalities are women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. The Health Ministry said 44,056 people have been killed and 104,268 wounded since the start of the war. It has said the real toll is higher because thousands of bodies are buried under rubble or in areas that medics cannot access. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, at least a third of whom are believed to be dead. Most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

ICC issues arrest warrants for Netanyahu

The Hague (AP): The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants on Thursday for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister and Hamas officials, accusing them of war crimes and crimes against humanity over the war in Gaza and the October 2023 attacks that triggered Israel's offensive in the Palestinian territory. The decision turns Netanyahu and the others into internationally wanted suspects and is likely to further isolate them and complicate efforts to negotiate a cease-fire to end the 13-month conflict. But its practical implications could be limited since Israel and its major ally, the United States, are not members of the court and several of the Hamas officials have been subsequently killed in the conflict. Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders have condemned ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan's request for warrants as disgraceful and antisemitic.

US President Joe Biden also blasted the prosecutor and expressed support for Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas. Hamas also slammed the request. "The Chamber considered that there are reasonable grounds to believe that both individuals intentionally and knowingly deprived the civilian population in Gaza of objects indispensable to their survival, including food, water, and medicine and medical supplies, as well as fuel and electricity," the three-judge panel wrote in its unanimous decision to issue warrants for Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant. The court also issued a warrant for the arrest of Mohammed Deif, one of the leaders of Hamas. The ICC chief prosecutor had also sought warrants for two other senior Hamas figures, Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh, but they were both killed in the conflict. The Israeli Foreign Ministry said in September that it had

submitted two legal briefs challenging the ICC's jurisdiction and arguing that the court did not provide Israel the opportunity to investigate the allegations itself before requesting the warrants. "No other democracy with an independent and respected legal system like that which exists in Israel has been treated in this prejudicial manner by the Prosecutor," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Oren Marmorstein wrote on X. He said Israel remained "steadfast in its commitment to the rule of law and justice" and would continue to protect its citizens against militancy. The ICC is a court of last resort that only prosecutes cases when domestic law enforcement authorities cannot or will not investigate. Israel is not a member state of the court. The country has struggled to investigate itself in the past, rights groups say. Despite the warrants, none of the suspects is likely to face judges in The Hague any time soon.

The court itself has no police to enforce warrants, instead relying on cooperation from its member states. Even so, the threat of arrest could make it difficult for Netanyahu and Gallant to travel abroad, although Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is wanted on an ICC warrant for alleged war crimes in Ukraine, recently showed he could still visit an ally when he traveled to Mongolia, one of the court's member states, and was not arrested. Khan sought warrants in May, accusing Netanyahu and Gallant of crimes including murder, intentionally attacking civilians, and persecution. In a statement at the time, Khan alleged that Israel "has intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival" by closing border crossings into the territory and restricting essential supplies including food and medicine.



Smoke rises after an Israeli airstrike on Dahiyeh, in the southern suburb of Beirut, Lebanon, Thursday.

AP/PTI

Aus tourist dies after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos, raising toll to four

AP ■ VIENTIANE

An Australian teenager died after drinking tainted alcohol in Laos in what Australia's prime minister on Thursday called every parent's nightmare. An American and two Danish tourists also died, officials said after reports that multiple people had been sickened in town popular with backpackers. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told Parliament that 19-year-old Bianca Jones had died after being evacuated from Vang Vieng, Laos for treatment in a Thai hospital. Her friend, also 19, remains hospitalised in neighbouring Thailand. "This is every parent's very worst fear and a nightmare that no one should have to endure," Albanese said. "We also take this moment to say that we're thinking of Bianca's friend

Holly Bowles who is fighting for her life." They are believed to have consumed drinks tainted with methanol, which is sometimes added to mixed-drinks at disreputable bars as a cheaper alternative to ethanol, but can cause severe poisoning or death. Telephone numbers listed for Laos' Health Ministry did not work and police refused to comment on the incident. Australia said "several foreign nationals" had also been victims of methanol poisoning. The US State Department confirmed that an American had also died in Vang Vieng, and Denmark's Foreign Ministry said two of its citizens had also died in "the incident in Laos," but neither would comment directly on a link to the methanol poisoning that killed Jones. Shaun Bowles told reporters outside Bangkok

Hospital on Wednesday that his daughter remained in critical condition and on life support. "We just like to thank everyone from back home for all of the support and love that we're receiving," he said. "But we'd also like the people to appreciate right now, we just need privacy so we can spend as much time as we can with Holly." In a statement to the Melbourne Herald Sun newspaper, Jones' family asked for privacy in their grief. "She was surrounded by love, and we are comforted by the knowledge that her incredible spirit touched so many lives during her time with us," the family wrote. "We want to express our deepest gratitude for the overwhelming support, love, and prayers we've received from across Australia." The US State Department said local authorities were investi-

gating the case and were responsible for providing any details, and that the US was providing consular assistance. "We offer our sincerest condolences to the family on their loss," the State Department said in an emailed statement to The Associated Press. Landlocked Laos is one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations and a popular tourist destination. Vang Vieng is particularly popular among backpackers seeking partying and adventure sports. Details on the alcohol poisoning began trickling out about a week after the two Australian women fell ill on Nov 13 following a night out drinking with a group in the remote town. Thai authorities confirmed that Jones had died by "brain swelling due to high levels of methanol found in her system".

COP29 produces streamlined climate finance draft, but key issues remain

PTI ■ BAKU (AZERBAIJAN)

After an all-nighter, a draft text on the new climate finance package for the developing world finally dropped Thursday morning — shrunk from 25 pages to 10, but the major sticking points remain. With less than two days left for the UN climate conference to close, negotiators face a gargantuan task to hammer it out. A quick glance at the text shows developed countries are still dodging a key question: How much climate finance are they ready to give developing countries every year starting in 2025? This has led to significant frustration among developing countries, who have repeatedly said they need at least USD 1.3 trillion to tackle the escalating challenges. "The revised draft text, while more streamlined, presents a spectrum of options — some good, some bad, and some out-

right ugly," said Harjeet Singh, a climate activist and Global Engagement Director for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. He said it acknowledges the need for public funds from developed countries but dodges the key question of how much finance is needed, shifting the burden onto developing countries to raise more domestic funds. The veteran COP watcher also said the text fails to set clear financial targets for mitigation, adaptation, and losses and damages from climate impacts — areas with growing needs and limited resources. "A real, just transition from fossil fuels requires strong public finance, not empty promises," Singh said. Vaibhav Chaturvedi from Delhi-based think tank Council on Energy, Environment and Water said it is great that the structure is streamlined, but there is no high-level number from the developed world.

'Failure is not an option'

Baku (PTI): UN climate chief Simon Stiell on Thursday issued a strong call for global unity and ambition to secure a groundbreaking finance goal to support climate action in the developing world, saying, "Failure is not an option." As negotiators raced against time to resolve outstanding issues related to the critical objective of COP29, Stiell said a major push was needed to bring discussions to the finishing line. "It might jeopardise both near-term action, and ambition in the preparation of the new national climate action plans, with potential devastating impacts as irreversible tipping points are getting closer," he said. On draft climate finance text released earlier in the morning, the UN climate chief said that

despite areas of convergence, significant differences remain. "A surge in finance is essential: To ensure all parties can deliver new national plans aligned with 1.5 degrees — as they must," he said. Stiell warned that delays at COP29 could complicate the road to COP30 in Brazil next year. "This COP must deliver justice in the face of climate catastrophe," he urged. Stiell asked countries to come together, soften hard lines, and navigate a path through their differences. "Keep your eyes on the bigger picture. Never forget what is at stake," he said. The COP29 presidency issued a draft text on the new climate finance package for the developing world on Thursday morning. It has shrunk from 25 pages to 10, but the major sticking points remain.

Witness: Separated from family before they froze to death

Fergus Falls (AP): An Indian national who survived a treacherous trek across the US-Canada border in blizzard conditions testified that he got separated from a family of four shortly before they froze to death. Yash Patel took the stand on Wednesday on the third day of the trial of Indian national Harshkumar Ramanlal Patel, 29, and Steve Shand, 50, of Florida. Prosecutors say they put financial profit over human life when they attempted to smuggle Indian migrants across the border into Minnesota over a five-week period in December 2021 and January 2022. They say Patel ran part of the smuggling scheme and recruited Shand as a driver. Both men have pleaded not guilty to four counts related to human smuggling. Federal prosecutors say a family of four — 39-year-old Jagdish Patel; his wife, Vaishaliben, who was in her mid-30s; their 11-year-old daughter, Vihangi; and 3-year-old son, Dharmik — froze to death on January 19, 2022.

Australia's parl considers legislation banning social media for under 16s

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's communications minister introduced a world-first law into Parliament on Thursday that would ban children under 16 from social media, saying online safety was one of parents' toughest challenges. Michelle Rowland said TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram were among the platforms that would face fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$33 million) for systemic failures to prevent young children from holding accounts. "This bill seeks to set a new normative value in society that accessing social media is not the defining feature of growing up in Australia," Rowland told Parliament. "There is wide acknowledgement that something must be done in the immediate term to help prevent young teens and children from being exposed to streams of content unfiltered and infinite," she added. X owner Elon Musk warned

that Australia intended to go further, posting on his platform: "Seems like a backdoor way to control access to the Internet by all Australians." The bill has wide political support. After it becomes law, the platforms would have one year to work out how to implement the age restriction. "For too many young Australians, social media can be harmful," Rowland said. "Almost two-thirds of 14- to 17-year-olds Australians have viewed extremely harmful content online including drug abuse, suicide or self-harm as well as violent material. One quarter have been exposed to content promoting unsafe eating habits." Government research found that 95% of Australian caregivers find online safety to be one of their "toughest parenting challenges," she said. Social media had a social responsibility and could do better in addressing harms on their platforms, she added. "This is about protecting young people, not punishing or isolat-

ing them, and letting parents know that we're in their corner when it comes to supporting their children's health and well-being," Rowland said. Child welfare and internet experts have raised concerns about the ban, including isolating 14- and 15-year-olds from their already established online social networks. Rowland said there would not be age restrictions placed on messaging services, online games or platforms that substantially support the health and education of users. "We are not saying risks don't exist on messaging apps or online gaming. While users can still be exposed to harmful content by other users, they do not face the same algorithmic curation of content and psychological manipulation to encourage near-endless engagement," she said. The government announced last week that a consortium led by British company Age Check Certification Scheme has been contracted to examine various technologies to estimate and verify ages.

US allies discuss AI safety as Trump's pledge to undo Biden's policy looms

AP ■ SAN FRANCISCO

President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to repeal President Joe Biden's signature artificial intelligence policy when he returns to the White House for a second term. What that actually means for the future of AI technology remains to be seen. Among those who could use some clarity are the government scientists and AI experts from multiple countries gathering in San Francisco this week to deliberate on AI safety measures. Hosted by the Biden administration, officials from a number of US allies — among them Australia, Canada, Japan, Kenya, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the 27-nation European Union — began meeting Wednesday in the California city that's a commercial hub for AI development. Their agenda addresses topics such as how to better detect and combat a flood of AI-generated deepfakes fueling fraud, harmful

impersonation and sexual abuse. It's the first such meeting since world leaders agreed at an AI summit in South Korea in May to build a network of publicly backed safety institutes to advance research and testing of the technology. "We have a choice," said US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo to the crowd of officials, academics and private-sector attendees on Wednesday. "We are the ones developing this technology. You are the ones developing this technology. We can decide what it looks like." Like other speakers, Raimondo addressed the opportunities and risks of AI — including "the possibility of human extinction" and asked why would we allow that? "Why would we choose to allow AI to replace us? Why would we choose to allow the deployment of AI that will cause widespread unemployment and societal disruption that goes along with it? Why would we compromise our global security?" she

said. "We shouldn't. In fact, I would argue we have an obligation to keep our eyes at every step wide open to those risks and prevent them from happening. And let's not let our ambition blind us and allow us to sleepwalk into our own undoing." Hong Yuen Poon, deputy secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Digital Development and Information, said that a "helping-one-another mindset is important" between countries when it comes to AI safety, including with "developing countries which may not have the full resources" to study it. Biden signed a sweeping AI executive order last year and this year formed the new AI Safety Institute at the National Institute for Standards and Technology, which is part of the Commerce Department. Trump promised in his presidential campaign platform to "repeal Joe Biden's dangerous Executive Order that hinders AI Innovation, and imposes

Radical Leftwing ideas on the development of this technology." But he hasn't made clear what about the order he dislikes or what he'd do about the AI Safety Institute. Trump's transition team didn't respond to emails this week seeking comment. Addressing concerns about slowing down innovation, Raimondo said she wanted to make it clear that the US AI Safety Institute is not a regulator and also "not in the business of stifling innovation." "But here's the thing. Safety is good for innovation. Safety breeds trust. Trust speeds adoption. Adoption leads to more innovation," she said. Tech industry groups — backed by companies including Amazon, Google, Meta and Microsoft — are mostly pleased with the AI safety approach of Biden's Commerce Department, which has focused on setting voluntary standards. They have pushed for Congress to preserve the new agency and codify its work into law.



Volkswagen employees demonstrate in front of the Volkswagen Arena in Wolfsburg during the wage negotiations between Volkswagen and IG Metall, Tuesday.

US regulators push to break up Google, demand Chrome sale

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US regulators want a federal judge to break up Google to prevent the company from continuing to squash competition through its dominant search engine after a court found it had maintained an abusive monopoly over the past decade. The proposed breakup floated in a 23-page document filed late Wednesday by the US Department of Justice calls for sweeping punishments that would include a sale of Google's industry-leading Chrome web browser and impose restrictions to prevent Android from favouring its own search engine. A sale of Chrome "will permanently stop Google's control of this critical search access point

and allow rival search engines the ability to access the browser that for many users is a gateway to the internet," Justice Department lawyers argued in their filing. Although regulators stopped short of demanding Google sell Android too, they asserted the judge should make it clear the company could still be required to divest its smartphone operating system if its oversight committee continues to see evidence of misconduct. The broad scope of the recommended penalties underscores how severely regulators operating under President Joe Biden's administration believe Google should be punished following an August ruling by US District Judge Amit Mehta that branded the company as a monopolist.

The Justice Department decision-makers who will inherit the case after President-elect Donald Trump takes office next year might not be as strident. The Washington, DC court hearings on Google's punishment are scheduled to begin in April and Mehta is aiming to issue his final decision before Labour Day. If Mehta embraces the government's recommendations, Google would be forced to sell its 16-year-old Chrome browser within six months of the final ruling. But the company certainly would appeal any punishment, potentially prolonging a legal tussle that has dragged on for more than four years. Besides seeking a Chrome spinoff and a coralling of the Android software, the Justice

Department wants the judge to ban Google from forging multimillion-dollar deals to lock in its dominant search engine as the default option on Apple's iPhone and other devices. It would also ban Google from favouring its own services, such as YouTube or its recently-launched artificial intelligence platform, Gemini. Regulators also want Google to license the search index data it collects from people's queries to its rivals, giving them a better chance at competing with the tech giant. On the commercial side of its search engine, Google would be required to provide more transparency into how it sets the prices that advertisers pay to be listed near the top of some targeted search results. Kent Walker, Google's chief

legal officer, lashed out at the Justice Department for pursuing "a radical interventionist agenda that would harm Americans and America's global technology." In a blog post, Walker warned the "overly broad proposal" would threaten personal privacy while undermining Google's early leadership in artificial intelligence, "perhaps the most important innovation of our time." Wary of Google's increasing use of artificial intelligence in its search results, regulators also advised Mehta to ensure websites will be able to shield their content from Google's AI training techniques. The measures, if they are ordered, threaten to upend a business expected to generate more than \$300 billion in revenue this year.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

US regulators seek to break up Google, force sale of Chrome browser

AP ■ WASHINGTON

US regulators want a federal judge to break up Google to prevent the company from continuing to squash competition through its dominant search engine after a court found it had maintained an abusive monopoly over the past decade. The proposed breakup floated in a 23-page document filed late Wednesday by the US Department of Justice calls for sweeping punishments that would include a sale of Google's industry-leading Chrome web browser and impose restrictions to prevent Android from favouring its own search engine.

Aiming to issue his final decision before the Labour Day. If Mehta embraces the government's recommendations, Google would be forced to sell its 16-year-old Chrome browser within six months of the final ruling. But the company certainly would appeal any punishment, potentially prolonging a legal tussle, which has dragged on for more than four years. Besides seeking a Chrome spinoff and a coralling of the Android software, the justice department wants the judge to ban Google from forging multibillion-dollar deals to lock in its dominant search engine as the default option on Apple's iPhone and other devices. It would also ban Google from favouring its own services, such as YouTube or its recently-launched artificial intelligence platform, Gemini. Regulators also want Google to license the search index data it collects from people's queries to its rivals, giving them a better chance at competing with the tech giant. On the commercial side of its search engine, Google would be required to provide more transparency into how it sets the prices that advertisers pay to be listed near the top of some targeted search results. Kent Walker, Google's chief legal officer, lashed out at the justice department for pursuing "a radical interventionist agenda that would harm Americans and America's global technology."

AI training techniques. The measures, if they are ordered, threaten to upend a business expected to generate more than \$300 billion in revenue this year. "The playing field is not level because of Google's conduct, and Google's quality reflects the ill-gotten gains of an advantage illegally acquired," the Justice Department asserted in its recommendations. "The remedy must close this gap and deprive Google of these advantages." It's still possible that the Justice Department could ease off attempts to break up Google, especially if Trump takes the widely expected step of replacing Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter, who was appointed by Biden to oversee the agency's antitrust division. Although the case targeting Google was originally filed during the final months of Trump's first term in office, Kanter oversaw the high-profile trial that culminated in Mehta's ruling against Google. Working in tandem with Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan, Kanter took a get-tough stance against Big Tech that triggered other attempted crackdowns on industry powerhouses such as Apple and discouraged many business deals from getting done during the past four years. Trump recently expressed concerns that a breakup might destroy Google but didn't elaborate on alternative penalties he might have in mind. "What you can do without breaking it up is make sure it's more fair," Trump said last month. Matt Gaetz, the former Republican congressman that Trump nominated to be the next US Attorney General, has previously called for the breakup of Big Tech companies. Gaetz faces a tough confirmation hearing.

Domestic fleet to touch 1,400 in five years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Steelmakers need to collaborate with IISc and IITs: Minister



PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

KS Murthy sworn in as new CAG



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

KMF enters Delhi-NCR with competitive pricing on Nandini products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



products. The federation currently collects 100 lakh litres of milk

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

for expansion into new markets. However, the Chief Minister

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

INBRIEF

55TH FOUNDATION DAY CELEBRATIONS AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

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



GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY RE-POSTPONES EXAM SCHEDULE

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

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY ORGANISED PROF IS GROVER MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP AWARD

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



A YEAR OF POLITICAL RESURGENCE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



ABOUT THE BOOK

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

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

Hamas and Hezbollah have influence, added to the turmoil.

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

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

NEW RELEASE

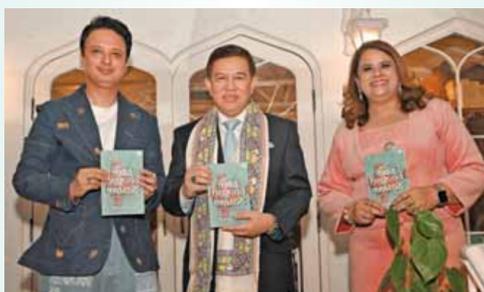
Discover India Beyond the Metros

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

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

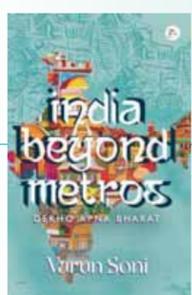
Unlike typical travel guides that focus on major metropolitan destinations such as Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, Soni's book highlights cities such as Jabalpur, Gorakhpur, Hubballi, Kollam, Rajkot, and others. These places, though not typically featured in popular travel literature, offer a wealth of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

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



the authentic essence of Bharat (India).

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



ABOUT THE BOOK

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

highlighted that these lesser-explored areas of India offer a different, yet equally rich, experience compared to the well-known metropolitan cities. Author Varun Soni added, "It is time to look inward, into Bharat. This book highlights the hidden treasures in our smaller cities and towns, showcasing not only historical monuments but also the natural beauty that often goes unnoticed in mainstream travel guides." Soni, in his address, discussed the book's purpose of shedding light on the lesser-visited cities and towns of India. He spoke about the country's ancient civilisation, its countless monuments and temples, and the natural beauty found in these regions. Soni's aim with "India Beyond Metros: Dekho Apna Bharat" is to inspire readers to look inward and discover the treasures hidden in the smaller cities and villages that often go unnoticed. Soni's literary career spans more than 15 years, with works that include books on celebrity homes, luxury resorts, and fiction. With this latest offering, he continues his mission to share the lesser-known aspects of India, bringing attention to the often-overlooked parts of the country that are full of untold stories and cultural richness.

A Spellbinding Adventure

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

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

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

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

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



ABOUT THE BOOK

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

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

As a well-known TV and radio personality, Alexander Armstrong has a knack for storytelling that

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

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

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

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

It's going to get more attritional: Pat Cummins

PTI ■ PERTH

Australian captain Pat Cummins expects the Border-Gavaskar Trophy against arch-foes India to be more "attritional" as the two heavyweights of world cricket spar over five Test matches instead of the traditional four games. And given the enormity of the series, Cummins believes players would not have the time to be distracted by the IPL auction that would take place in Jeddah on Sunday, the third day of the match. The blockbuster series will be a survival of the fittest as Australia look to avenge successive losses on home soil when they go head-to-head from Friday.

"The Border-Gavaskar Trophy has always been very tight every series, five Test-match series gets really attritional, it's a big one really," Cummins said at the pre-match press conference here on Thursday.

Australia will be without their assistant coach Daniel Vettori, who was granted permission to leave the Perth Test and be at the two-day auction with his IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad.

"Yeah, I think he is there in the auction. I don't think so (it will be a distraction). Dan has



flown over there, but he has been here for the whole prep. Done all the meetings, done all the chats, watching it. We came to know that anyway," Cummins said.

"So, for the players, I don't think so. Most of these guys have been there in the auctions before. They know

they can't really do anything. "You are a sitting duck and seeing whether you get selected or not. It doesn't... Doesn't make a difference to how we go about the first two days. It is not a distraction as far as I can see it," he added.

The Australia captain admitted there will be

pressure on the home team, especially after it lost the last four Test series against India, including the two humiliating reverses on own soil.

"There will always be pressure when you are playing at home. India are a very talented side and it will be a good challenge. But we are

not looking too far ahead," Cummins said. "It would be great to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. India are a great side but we are well prepared."

The leading pacer also said that newcomer Nathan McSweeney should not try to imitate David Warner, the

legendary opener who retired from international cricket earlier this year. "He should play his natural game. He shouldn't try to imitate David Warner. That's not his game. As long as he makes the bowlers bowl again and again, that's his game," Cummins said of the man who is going to be handed his Test debut at Optus Stadium. Asked about India's talented all-rounder Nitish Reddy, Cummins said they shared the dressing room for IPL franchise SunRisers Hyderabad and praised the 21-year-old.

"He is an impressive youngster. Didn't bowl much for SRH. He can swing the ball and is a really talented kid."



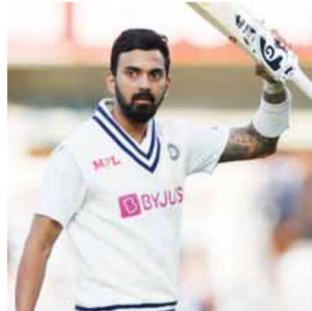
We are not carrying baggage from New Zealand series, says Jasprit Bumrah

PTI ■ PERTH

India's stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah on Thursday insisted that his team is not carrying any baggage from the unprecedented 0-3 defeat at home against New Zealand as it embarks on a challenging Test series against fierce rivals Australia. The five-match Test series starts here on Friday.

baggage from India. Yes, we have our learnings from New Zealand series but those were different conditions and our results here have been different," said Bumrah, who is leading in the opening Test in the absence of Rohit Sharma, who is on paternity leave. Bumrah also said that the team has finalised its playing XI although he will reveal it only at the toss. "We have finalised our playing XI and you will get to know tomorrow morning before the start of the match," the skipper said.

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



PTI ■ PERTH

Cheteshwar Pujara, who knows a thing or two about grinding the Australian attack in their den, on Thursday backed KL Rahul to bat at the vital number three slot in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, and said the swashbuckling Yashasvi Jaiswal is capable of doing what David Warner did in his prime. The five-match Test series begins here on Friday.



PTI ■ PERTH

"His role would be one of the most important ones. He can play a role similar to what David Warner used to do for the Australian team. "Being an opener, he holds the key. He's mentally tough. He loves batting, hits a number of balls. He has a long way to go across the formats." Pujara said the youngsters must play with self-confidence and without the fear of failure.

"I will tell them the first battle is a mental battle. Self-confidence and belief are needed to make runs in these conditions. When there is pace and bounce, there is a chance of the ball hitting the body. You have to come out of that fear," Pujara said. On tackling short-pitch deliveries in Australian conditions, Pujara said the batters will have to identify the deliveries they should leave.

and play according to the situation. Be in the present moment," he said. **Kohli needs a start** Virat Kohli may be going through a lean patch but Pujara believes his past success in Australia will help him to turn things around. "There is a lot of expectation of him. The number of matches he's playing and the athlete Virat is, he doesn't get enough breaks in between. That is why sometimes, when you're not getting enough breaks, your body and confidence go down a bit. That's normal. "He has got some break. He's at a place where he likes to compete. If someone is having a go at him, he would like to give it back to the bowlers -- that's how he started his journey. "He has set high standards for himself. He has that awareness. He has been a leader and is probably the best in the circuit. He's aware of what's expected of him and how many runs he has to make." Under Kohli's captaincy on the 2017-18 tour of Australia, Pujara aggregated over 500 runs and played a significant role in India's historic Test series triumph. "I'm confident that once he gets going, he needs to spend some time in the game. He's capable of doing all things. Always leading from the front, it's about getting a 50-60-70. If he gets a hundred, then he will have a great series ahead," Pujara said of Kohli. "In every match, he is motivated, whatever the format. Definitely, he has worked on it. It's about getting that start and spending time at the crease."

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

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



Academy "aligns perfectly with my own values. I look forward to contributing my experience and passion for the game and working alongside everyone here to build a club that inspires both on and off the pitch." He has been with the Western Sydney Wanderers of the Australian A-League since September.

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

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

AP ■ SAN JOSE

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



Mexican clubs from the same owner and the rulebook is clear. What we are asking is to review what FIFA itself established." The FIFA-run competition has been expanded from seven teams to 32 and will be staged in the United States from June to July next year. "We hired a law firm in

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

Indian women's hockey team starts 2028 LA Olympics' qualification journey

PTI ■ RAJGIR (BIHAR)

A new-look and much-fitter Indian women's hockey team started its 2028 Los Angeles Olympics' qualification journey in the most perfect manner, producing a scintillating, unbeaten performance during its title-defending Asian Champions Trophy campaign here. It marked a resurrection of sorts for the side that had been left deflated after failing to qualify for the Paris Olympics this year. It marks a fresh beginning for the team and its seasoned coach Harendra Singh. Since taking over in April, Harendra's vision has been crystal clear -- to qualify for the 2028 Games.

He always believed and emphasised that a successful ACT campaign will be the right start for the team's journey towards the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. And Harendra couldn't have asked for more from his wards. "I truly believe this victory will inspire more young girls to take up hockey and further elevate the sport in India. We are thrilled to be able to bring this win to our fans and our nation," said captain Salima Tete after the brilliant campaign. His primary focus since taking charge has been to improve the team's fitness, and fortitude and the Indian players performance in the just-concluded ACT was a testament to the fact that they



have worked tremendously on these core areas and lived upto their coach's expectation. "While we celebrate this win, our focus remains on long-term goals. We are working hard every day, trusting the process, and staying dedicated to delivering our best in every

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

the semifinal and final. What has been heartening for India was their ball transition from the backline to the opposition circle using both the flanks. The resolute show by the defensive line was also one of the hallmarks of India's performance as they conceded just two goals in seven games, while scoring as many as 29 themselves. Out of these 29 goals, 15 came from field efforts -- a heartening statistic --, 12 from penalty corners and two from penalty strokes. The ACT produced many stars for India, the prominent among them was 20-year-old young striker Deepika, who was the tournament's highest scorer with 11 goals to her name, including four from field play, six from penalty corners and one penalty

stroke. In fact, five Indians were there in the top-10 scorers' list. Besides Deepika, Sangita Kumari (4 goals), Preeti Dubey (3), Navneet Kaur (3) and Lalrnsiami (3) were also impressive. Harendra worked extensively on the fitness of the players in the run up to the tournament and it was clearly visible on the turf as the side played fast-paced, one-touch hockey throughout the tournament to trouble opponents, including reigning Olympic silver-medallists China whom they defeated 1-0 in the final to retain the title. If Deepika was a sensation upfront, vice-captain Navneet Kaur, Lalrnsiami and Neha were the fulcrum of India's midfield. Besides Deepika, young

Sangita too was brilliant inside the circle, while Salima and 17-year-old Sunelita Toppo simply broke down the opposition defence with their dribbling skills and brilliant runs from the flanks. The defensive line was brilliantly held together by Udit, Sushila Chanu, Jyoti and Ishika Chaudhary. So good was their performance that Indian goalkeepers Savita Punia and Bichu Devi Kharibam were hardly called into action in the tournament.

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