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**WORLD 9**  
IMRAN'S PARTY SUSPENDS  
PROTEST, AT LEAST FOUR  
DEAD IN CRACKDOWN

RAIPUR, THURSDAY NOVEMBER 28, 2024; PAGES 12 & 3

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

## Ekhnath Shinde surrenders to BJP

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

After three days of resistance to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's government formation plans in the state, a reconciled caretaker Chief Minister Ekhnath Shinde on Wednesday extended his full support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to take all decisions required for the formation of a new government in Maharashtra, thus paving for the anointment of Devendra Fadnis as the new CM. In what is being seen as a meek surrender before the Bharatiya Janata Party's central leadership, Shinde, at a hurriedly called news conference at his Thane residence "Shub-Deep", that he had made it clear to the BJP's top leaders that they could choose the Chief Minister and take decisions in all matters relating to the formation of a new government in Maharashtra. "I have spoken to both Modi ji and Amit bhai over phone. I have told them that there is not going to be any obstacle from my party's side. They can decide on the choice of Chief Minister, and take decisions necessary for the formation of a new government in Maharashtra... I will back them completely," Shinde said, seeking to put to rest all the speculation that he had serious reservations about Devendra Fadnis being appointed as the new Chief Minister of the state. Denying the speculation in the media that he was upset with the turn of events after the



Photo: PTI

Maharashtra Assembly polls that saw the BJP-led MahaYuti post a landslide victory, Shinde said: "I am not the one to get upset... Amhi radnare nahi, ladnare ahe' (we are not the ones who cry but we fight) For me CM means a common man... I work for the common people... I will continue to do so till the last drop of my blood." While evading a direct reply on whether he would accept the post of deputy Chief Minister under Fadnis or move to the Centre and accept a berth in the Union Cabinet, Shinde said: "Tomorrow... there is a meeting with Shah where all decisions will be taken." Expressing his satisfaction over two and a half years' tenure as the Chief Minister of the state, Shinde said: "I am satisfied with my tenure as the Chief Minister. For me no post is bigger than being a 'Ladki Bahu' (elder brother)

to all the Ladki Bahin (favourite sisters) in the state. I did not sit at home... I went to the homes of people. I worked for the people from the bottom of my heart." Acknowledging the feelings of his party activists who wanted to see him return as the Chief Minister, Shinde said: "There is nothing wrong in their feelings. I have worked hard, and they are simply expressing their support." Shinde's surrender came after his party workers came out with a slogan "Ekhnath hai toh safe hai" (If Ekhnath is there, then we are safe)" even as Shiv Sena workers performed pujas across temples of the state praying for one more term for him. However, the BJP's central leadership was in no mood to oblige Shinde. Having delayed his decision to let the BJP leadership have its way, Shinde not just blinked but he surrendered to Modi and

Shah, thus giving a free hand to the latter to decide on what they deemed fit in matters relating to the new government formation in the state. Meanwhile, Maharashtra BJP President Chandrashekhar Bawankule and senior party leader Sudhir Mungantiwar have welcomed Shinde's decision to give a free-hand to the BJP's central leadership to form a new government in the state. "Shinde's stand is to make the NDA stronger and strengthen the MahaYuti... I thank him for the stand he has taken... Shinde played a crucial role in strengthening the MahaYuti alliance as he was instrumental in reviving a slew of projects that were stalled by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government," Bawankule said. "I express gratitude to Shinde... today, he has cleared all issues... he has made it clear that all decisions relating to the government including the choice of Chief Minister will be taken by Modi and Shah... Shinde, Fadnis and Ajit Pawar will sit with them (Modi and Shah) and discuss various issues relating to the nature of the government, distribution of portfolios and appointment of district guardian ministers," Bawankule said. "In the BJP, every one of us wants Fadnis to become the Chief Minister. Even all those in the MahaYuti want to see Fadnis as the Chief Minister. On this, the leaders of all three constituents of MahaYuti will sit across and take a formal decision," he added.

## India welcomes Israel-Lebanon ceasefire



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India, on Wednesday, welcomed the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon and said it hoped that these developments will lead to "peace and stability" in the wider region. The ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon-based Hezbollah began early Wednesday morning. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah reached a ceasefire late Tuesday evening after months of deadly clashes that stemmed from the Israel-Gaza conflict but escalated in September this year, after several leaders of the Lebanese militant group were killed. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked outgoing United States' President Joe Biden for his "involvement in securing the ceasefire agreement". He told Biden in a call that he appreciated the US leader's "understanding that Israel will maintain its freedom of action in enforcing it", according to Netanyahu's office. Ahead of Israel's approval of the deal, Netanyahu said the "length of the ceasefire depends on what happens in Lebanon" and the truce would allow Israel to "intensify" pressure on Hamas and focus on the "Iranian threat". The Ministry of External

Affairs (MEA) said in a statement "We welcome the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon that has been announced. We have always called for de-escalation, restraint and return to the path of dialogue and diplomacy. We hope these developments will lead to peace and stability in the wider region." In early October, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had termed the conflict in West Asia as a cause of "great concern" and "deep worry", even as he had said that in a globalised world, a conflict anywhere actually creates problems everywhere. "Honestly today, whether it is the conflict in Ukraine or the conflict in the Middle East (West Asia), these are big factors of instability, big factors of concern", Jaishankar had said during an event here. Long-displaced residents of south Lebanon have begun to return to their homes amid celebrations hours after the ceasefire, the reports in international media said. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah reached a ceasefire after months of deadly clashes that stemmed from the Israel-Gaza conflict but escalated in September this year, after several leaders of the Lebanese militant group were killed. Continued on page 2



PHOTO: PTI

## Delhi AQI likely to go back to be 'severe'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A cold wind blew away the thick layer of haze that has covered the National Capital for over a week, and a bright sun shone through, on Wednesday. The Air Quality Index (AQI) has also dropped to 303 in the NCR, placing it in the "very poor" category for the fourth consecutive day, while Delhi recorded its second-coldest night of the season. The minimum temperature dipped to 10.4 degrees Celsius, 0.1 notch above normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which has also forecast a further drop to nine degrees Celsius at night. The coldest night of the season so far was recorded on November 21, when the temperature settled at 10.2 degrees Celsius. However, the overall AQI of Delhi improved compared to the previous 24-hour average of 396, data showed. Delhi's Air Quality Early Warning System (AQEWS), however, has forecast the air quality to be 'severe' by Thursday due to a drop in wind speed and a western disturbance influencing the meteorological conditions of the region. Two days after the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) issued an order asking schools in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) to conduct classes in hybrid mode, schools in Gurgaon have been devising ways to ensure classes are not disrupted ahead of board exams. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Air Quality Index (AQI) was 302 at 11 am. AQI real time data showed, PM2.5 concentration was stood currently 38.2 times the World Health Organization annual PM2.5 guideline value at the same time. Continued on page 2



## NSG to set up an independent hub in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

To cut down the response time in any adverse situation, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has accorded its formal approval to the proposal of permanently locating a component of the elite National Security Guards (NSG) in Jammu to counter any future terror threat emanating from across the border with Pakistan. At present NSG is setting up its units in Ayodhya, Pathankot and Kerala and they are expected to be operational soon by the end of this year. In addition, there are five regional hubs of NSG in Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai and Gandhinagar. These hubs were created after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. Continued on page 2

## Indian MPs condemn attack on minorities in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Members of Parliament (MP), cutting across party lines, on Wednesday, condemned attacks on Hindus and other minorities and arrest of Hindu Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh. Union minister Giriraj Singh said the attack on Hindus in Bangladesh reflects that the interim government of that country is in the "clutches of fundamentalists" and sought the intervention of the United Nations in the matter. Condemning the arrest of a Hindu leader in Bangladesh, he said such attacks are against humanity. "The caretaker 'Prime Minister' of Bangladesh is in the clutches of fundamentalists. The way Hindus are being attacked is against humanity. The United Nations should intervene in this matter," Singh told reporters in the Parliament complex. Bangladesh's interim government is headed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. Singh said the targeting of Hindus and arrest of religious leaders shows that



PHOTO: PTI

fundamentalists are dominating the Bangladesh interim government like in the case of Pakistan. The minister was asked about the arrest of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari in Bangladesh and the prevailing situation there. Bangladesh police had on Monday, arrested the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) monk from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport area in Dhaka while travelling to Chattogram. India on Tuesday noted with "deep concern" the arrest and denial of bail to the Hindu leader, and urged authorities in the neighbouring country to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all other minority groups. Several other MPs also condemned the attack on minorities in Bangladesh and sought the government's intervention. TMC MP Saugata Roy also condemned the incident and said it is a matter of concern that Hindus are being subjected to atrocities. "It should not happen. I condemn it. The government should actively intervene in the matter," he said. Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi said his party was worried over the situation in Bangladesh. BJP leader Samik Bhattacharya said it is unfortunate that the country is silent over atrocities being committed against minorities in Bangladesh. Continued on page 2

## Gautam Adani, nephew Sagar, not charged with US FCPA: AGEL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Green Energy (AGEL) on Wednesday clarified that the group's chairman Gautam Adani, his nephew Sagar Adani, the company's managing director Vneet Jaain have not been charged with the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). The clarification from AGEL came following reports that the trio have been charged with violations of the US FCPA. Adani Group founder and chairman Gautam Adani is the chairman of AGEL, while Sagar Adani is its executive director. Meanwhile, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has demanded his arrest after his indictment in the US and accused the government of protecting him. The reiteration by Rahul comes hours after the Adani Group said the billionaire and his nephew Sagar Adani have not been charged with any violations of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA). In response to the growing controversy over corruption allegations, AGEL stated in an exchange filing on November 27 that the reported charges against Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani, and senior executive Vneet



Jaain, as outlined by the US Department of Justice (DoJ), are "incorrect". In a filing with the stock exchanges, AGEL strongly refuted claims made by various media outlets suggesting that the executives were involved in violations of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), the company added. "Media reports stating that Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani, and Vneet Jaain have been charged with violations of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) are incorrect," the company said. The statement went on to clarify that these officials have not been named in the DoJ's indictment or in any civil complaint filed by the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). The indictment, which includes five charges, does not mention any Adani executives in connection with conspiracy to violate the FCPA or obstruct justice, said the statement. "These directors have been charged on three counts in the criminal indictment, namely (i) alleged securities fraud conspiracy, (ii) alleged wire fraud conspiracy, and (iii) alleged securities fraud," the filing said. "The Count One of the indictment, which refers to the corruption and bribery charges, only involves Ranjit Gupta, Cyril Cabanes, Saurabh Agarwal, Deepak Malhotra and Rupesh Agarwal of Azure Power and CDPQ (Caisse de depot et placement du Quebec - a Canadian institutional investor and Azure's largest shareholder). No Adani official has been named by

DoJ under this. However, flawed understanding of the DoJ indictment by various media-foreign as well as Indian-has led to incorrect and reckless reporting of Adani Directors of being charged with corruption and bribery under or of all five counts by the US DoJ and SEC," it said. "They have been charged with offences that are punishable with a monetary fine or penalty," the company said. The US Department of Justice's (US DoJ) indictment filed in a New York Court last week does not mention Gautam Adani, founder chairman of the ports-to-energy conglomerate, his nephew Sagar, or Vneet Jaain in any count related to conspiracy to violate the FCPA, Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), said in a stock exchange filing," it added. The AGEL is at the heart of the allegation of USD 265-million bribes being paid to Indian officials to secure solar power sale contracts that could bring in USD 2 billion of profits over a 20-year period to the firm. Gautam and Sagar also face a civil complaint over violation of sections of the Securities Act, and aiding and abetting Adani Green to violate the Act. Continued on page 2

## UP govt to recover damages from Sambhal accused

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government announced on Wednesday that individuals involved in the recent violence in Sambhal will be held accountable for damages to public property, with their posters prominently displayed in public areas. "This measure aims to identify and apprehend those responsible for the unrest, which claimed four lives and left several, including police personnel, injured," a senior official said. The violence erupted on Sunday in Sambhal's Kot Garvi area during a court-mandated survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid. The survey was initiated following a petition alleging that a Harihar temple once existed at the site. The situation escalated when a large crowd gathered near the mosque, chanting slogans and clashing with security personnel. Protesters set vehicles on fire and pelted stones, leading to widespread chaos. "The UP government is adopting a



firm stance against individuals involved in the Sambhal violence. Posters of stone pelters and miscreants will be displayed publicly, and recovery of damages will be sought. A reward may also be announced for information leading to their arrest," said an official spokesperson. The crackdown mirrors a similar initiative during the 2020 anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests, where posters of alleged vandals were displayed across various cities, including Lucknow. However, the move had drawn criticism and was later withdrawn following a court directive. In the aftermath of the Sambhal violence, police have arrested 25 individuals and filed seven FIRs, including one against Samajwadi Party (SP) Member Parliament (MP) Zia-ur-Rehman Barq and Sohail Iqbal, son of local SP MLA Iqbal Mehmood. Charges have also been filed against over 2,750 unidentified individuals. Superintendent of Police Krishna Kumar Vishnoi confirmed that the situation is now under control. "A magisterial inquiry is underway. Strict

action will be taken against those responsible for the unrest," he stated. Meanwhile, a copy of the FIR registered in connection with the Sambhal violence has revealed explosive details, naming Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Zia-ur-Rehman Barq as the main accused and SP MLAs son Suhail Iqbal as the second accused. In addition, a case has been lodged against 2,750 people, highlighting the scale of the unrest. The FIR alleges that SP MP Zia-ur-Rehman Barq incited the crowd to vitiate the communal atmosphere and gain political advantage. It also notes that Barq visited the Jama Masjid two days before the violence without administrative permission, which reportedly added fuel to the brewing tensions. The unrest began when a large crowd gathered at the Jama Masjid during the survey. Despite police efforts to pacify the situation, the mob refused to disperse and allegedly sought to disrupt the process. Continued on page 2

## Eklingnathji puts a divine pause in royal Mewar drama

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Vishvaraj Singh Mewar, the newly anointed titular head of the Mewar royal family, visited the Eklingnathji temple on Wednesday to complete mourning rites for his late father, Mahendra Singh Mewar, amid an ongoing dispute over access to Udaipur's City Palace for performing rituals. Vishvaraj Singh, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA, performed the rituals at the temple on Nathdwara Road to mark the end of the mourning period, which began after his father's death on November 10. To ensure a smooth visit, additional security arrangements were in place. A grand temple of Lord Bholenath is located at Kailashpuri, 22 kilometres away from the city. Eklingnathji is worshipped as the family deity of the Maharajas of Mewar. The City Palace area remains under prohibitory orders, imposed under Section 163 of the BNSS (formerly Section 144 of CrPC) and order. Tensions escalated earlier this week when Vishvaraj Singh was denied entry to the palace, where he had planned to offer prayers at a 'dhuni' (sacred fire) before heading to the temple.



Reacting to the violent clash that broke out between his supporters and representatives of the Udaipur City Palace on Monday night after he was blocked from entering the palace, Vishvaraj Singh said that the entire controversy was unnecessary. He said that it is a normal ritual for any royal family member to visit the Dhuni temple after the coronation. He added that it got unwanted attention because of the ban imposed on his visit. Continued on page 2

# HC expresses shock over Delhi rejecting Central aid

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday expressed shock over the AAP led Delhi government not accepting financial aid through a Centre-funded health scheme. A bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said it was strange that the Delhi government was not accepting Centre's aid when there was no money with it for its healthcare system. "You may have difference of opinion but in this case you are refusing aid. None of your machines are working.

The machines have to work but you have no money actually," it said. CJ Manmohan went ahead to remark, "Today you are refusing Rs 5 lakh for the citizens. I am shocked." Seven BJP MPs have moved the High Court to direct the AAP government to implement the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). The lawmakers, in their PIL, said Delhi was the only union territory where the beneficial healthcare scheme for the underprivileged was yet to be implemented, therefore, depriving them of the essential health coverage of

Rs 5 lakh. "I have been saying openly in court that you are virtually bankrupt..Your Health Minister and Health Secretary are not talking to each other. In that sort of a mess you are not accepting central aid," CJ Manmohan remarked further. The hearing has been posted on November 28 to enable the Delhi government standing counsel to go through the plea which he said seemed to be "misconceived". The High Court said the central scheme was just an aid being given to a particular segment of citizens and steps must be taken to iron out the



differences within the Delhi administration. It also expressed its anguish over the non-completion of several upcoming hospitals due to lack of funds with the city government. The court said it was getting petitions by legislators everyday with respect to their

grievances allegedly not being addressed which was "not good". The petitioners - Harsh Malhotra, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Praveen Khandelwal, Yogendra Chandolia, Manoj Tiwari, Kamaljeet Sehrawat and Bansuri Swaraj -- argued citizens in the national capital were facing a serious issue of high out-of-pocket health and medical expenses and several had resorted to borrowing or selling assets in a medical emergency. Swaraj appeared in court on behalf of the petitioners. "Of 36 states/UTs, 33 have implemented the scheme and at present the government of

Odisha is actively considering the implementation of the scheme. However, the scheme has not been implemented in NCT of Delhi uniquely and arbitrarily depriving the target beneficiaries of the easy and efficient access to a promised cover of Rs 5 lakh which would protect them from the catastrophic expenditure in secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation across a vast network of empanelled public and private hospitals," the petition claimed. The plea alleged that former Delhi Finance Minister Manish Sisodia in his budget

speech for FY 2020-2021, made a "categorical commitment" with respect to the implementation of the scheme but the promise was "arbitrarily and unreasonably" rendered ineffective. "It is evident that a power struggle exists between the government of the NCT of Delhi and the Central Government. Amid this conflict, respondent number 1 (Delhi government) has failed in its fundamental responsibility to ensure improved public health infrastructure, including hospitals and dispensaries, for the citizens," it added.

## Railway property worth Rs 313 Crore damaged in five years: Govt



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Railway properties worth Rs 313 crore were damaged due to several train accidents in the past five years, the government informed the Lok Sabha on Wednesday. "Total cost of damages to railway property such as rolling stock and tracks etc, in consecutive train accidents during the past five years (from April 2019 to March 2024) have been assessed as Rs 313 crore," Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in a written reply. The minister was responding to questions on the total financial loss incurred by the government due to train accidents

raised by five MPs -- S Venkatesan, K Subbarayan, PC Gaddigoudar, Selvaraj V and Balwant Baswant Wankhade - from different political parties. Responding to questions regarding the number of victims who had availed of insurance through e-tickets, Vaishnaw said 22 claims were registered under the Optional Travel Insurance Scheme during the period from November 1, 2019, to October 31, 2024. "No death claims were registered during the period from 01.11.2019 to 31.10.2024 with any of the insurance companies under Optional Travel Insurance Scheme," he added. The ministry launched the

scheme on September 1, 2016, for passengers who booked e-tickets at a premium of Rs 0.92 per passenger. However, to promote digital/cashless transactions, it was made free of cost from December 10, 2016, to all confirmed/RAC passengers buying online tickets from IRCTC. Vaishnaw said passengers directly filled their nomination on the websites of insurance agencies and settled the claims directly with them. "As a consequence of various safety measures taken over the years, there has been a steep decline in the number of accidents. Consequential train accidents have reduced from 135 in 2014-15 to 40 in 2023-24," Vaishnaw added.

## LG directs DDA to dispose pending PM-UDAY applications

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Vinai Kumar Saxena has directed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) to proactively undertake the disposal of pending Pradhan Mantri - Unauthorised Colonies in Delhi Awas Yojana (PM-UDAY) applications, as also registration and subsequent disposal of new applications for regularisation of residences in unauthorised colonies of the city in a mission mode. In a communiqué to DDA and Chief Secretary of Delhi, Saxena has also desired that the 22 DANICS and three IAS probationers under training may also be deputed to assume leadership role of quick disposal in these camps. Based on the feedback received by him in several of his visits to the unauthorised colonies, wherein people apprised him of their concerns and red tape involved in the regularisation process, Saxena chaired a meeting on Wednesday to review the progress of the PM-UDAY Scheme. Thereafter, upon his directions, the DDA has been asked by the LG Secretariat to organize Special Camps in unauthorised colonies over the next one month beginning from November 30 to December 31, to solve the problems of the people and facilitate on spot regularisation in a flexible and

humane manner. The 10 camps will be organised in various unauthorised colonies that include Sant Nagar, Burari, Mukundpur, Ganesh Nagar, Pandav Nagar, Nilothi, Sangam Vihar, Nangloi, Baprola, Budh Vihar, Khirki Extension and Najafgarh. Saxena has directed for each of these camps to have a Single Window Clearance Mode with facilitation for documentation, uploading documents on the portal, scrutiny, notarization and other ancillary activities along with on the spot disposal. "Area Tehsildars and SDMs will also be present in these camps for resolving revenue related matters. 22 DANICS and three IAS probationers under training will also be deputed to assume leadership role of quick disposal in these camps. 122 PM-UDAY Mitras will be deployed for an outreach at each of these locations, to meet the applicants ahead of the camps and during the camps to provide them information and facilitation," Raj Niwas said in a statement. A Social media campaign including messaging on Whatsapp groups will be launched immediately with the help of RWAs to inform applicants about the schedule of the camps to ensure maximum participation. "All the 10 camps should have identical lay outs for facilitation centres, help desks, disposal of applications and back office support," Raj Niwas said.

## Construction labourers protest GRAP

**STAFF REPORTER ■**  
NEW DELHI

Hundreds of construction workers staged a protest near the Delhi Lieutenant Governor's office in Civil Lines on Wednesday, demanding compensation for the income loss they have suffered due to the ongoing ban on construction activities under GRAP. They also submitted a memorandum to the LG office and the Labor Department, expressing their concerns and requesting action on their demands. The protest was organised by the Building Workers Union, which is affiliated with the All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICTU). During the protest, workers highlighted the impact of the construction ban on their



livelihoods after the implementation of GRAP restrictions on November 18. The protesters marched through the streets from the Sushruta Trauma Centre towards the LG Office, raising anti-establishment slogans and carrying posters with messages such as "Stop attacking the livelihood of workers" and "We demand

daily minimum wage, fair compensation for all construction workers". They were stopped by the police from proceeding towards the Raj Niwas. The union demanded an increase in daily compensation rates to Rs 783 for unskilled workers, Rs 868 for skilled workers and Rs 954 for highly skilled workers.

## Indian MPs condemn attack...

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"Hindus, Buddhists, Chakmas, and members of other religious and ethnic groups are being tortured in Bangladesh. Many temples and other religious places have been destroyed. Women are being married off forcefully. Illegal and forceful conversions are happening... All of this is happening but it is unfortunate that the entire country is silent on this issue," Bhattacharya said. The Congress expressed deep concern over the "atmosphere of insecurity" being faced by

religious minorities in Bangladesh and the arrest of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das. In a statement, Chairman of the party's Media and Publicity Department Pawan Khara said, "The Indian National Congress expects the government of India to prevail upon the Bangladesh government to take necessary steps and ensure security of life and property of minorities in the country." "The Indian National Congress expresses its deep concern at the atmosphere of insecurity being faced by

religious minorities in Bangladesh. The arrest of the ISCKON monk is the latest example," he said. A lawyer was killed on Tuesday during clashes between security personnel and followers of Das, who was denied bail and sent to jail by a court in the port city of Chattogram in Bangladesh in a sedition case. Das, the spokesperson for Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka a day earlier.

## Eklingnath puts divine pause...

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"There are no legal or social factors that stop me from visiting the temple. Dhuni is a holy place blessed by the presence of our ancestors. People visit this place with faith and respect," he added. Vishvaraj Singh Mewar dismissed allegations that they were trespassing the temples as baseless. He also questioned the inaction of the administration against those who pelted stones. The refusal followed two public notices published by Arvind Singh Mewar, the younger brother of Mahendra Singh Mewar and chairman of the Shree Eklingji Trust. The notices stated that entry to the palace and the temple on November 25 would be restricted to those authorised by the trust. However, his uncle Arvind Singh Mewar through his

lawyer got two public notices published in Arvind Singh Mewar, the younger brother of Mahendra Singh Mewar, is the chairman and managing trustee of the trust. The City Palace is also under his control. After the notices appeared, policemen were deployed at the entry gate of the palace. When Vishvaraj Singh was denied entry, violent protests erupted following which the district administration appointed a receiver on Monday night for the controversial portion of the Palace where 'Dhuni' is situated. After this, Vishvaraj Singh returned to his residence without performing the ritual. The stalemate between Vishvaraj and Arvind Singh Mewar's family continued yesterday with Vishvaraj and Arvind Singh Mewar's son

Lakshyaraj Singh targeting each other without naming. Lakshyaraj Singh told the media last night that endangering the lives of people in the name of ritual was not wrong. He alleged that some people on government posts were mounting pressure on administration for their vested interest and were trying to forcefully enter his house. Lakshyaraj Singh suggested that if someone wants to seek entry; he should go to the court. However, he said that Eklingnathji temple is open to the public and anyone can go there. Negotiations are continuing for facilitating Vishvaraj Singh's entry to the palace for 'dhuni' darshan. SP Yogesh Goyal said that some senior officers have arrived in Udaipur to resolve the matter.

## Gautam Adani, nephew Sagar, not charged...

**From page 1**

Former Attorney General and senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi backed Adani Group's claims saying in his assessment there are five charges or counts and Adani and his aides have not been charged under Count 1 or 5 which deal with allegations of 'conspiracy to violate the FCPA' and 'conspiracy to obstruct justice' respectively. He said the indictment, equivalent to a chargesheet filed in an Indian court, does not name a single person who was paid a bribe. Senior advocate and BJP MP Mahesh Jethmalani, also spoke with the media on the US charges against Adani and said that given the nature of the indictment, the sketchy evidence and some very important circumstances, this seems to be a "hatchet job". "It is obvious now that part of the Democratic deep state

apparatus... There are two deep states in America, the Republican deep state and the Democratic deep state. The Democratic deep state has, for some reasons after 2023, turned extremely hostile towards the present government. Coming to the indictment itself, first of all no offence is alleged in the indictment against any of the Adanis or Adani Green," he said. Adani Group companies have lost about USD 54 billion in market capitalisation since the US indictment. Also, international credit rating agencies, including Moody's and Fitch, have downgraded their outlook on several Adani firms. These downgrades are based on anticipated increased capital costs and weakened access to funding due to the legal challenges. Another fallout was AGEL cancelling a USD

600 million debt raising through green bonds despite it being subscribed over three times. Speaking to reporters outside Parliament, Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, said when hundreds of people are arrested on "tiny" charges in the country, why is Adani not in jail? "You think the Adanis are going to accept the charges. Which world are you living in? Obviously, he is going to deny the charges," Gandhi said when asked about the denial of charges by the Adani Group. "The point is he has to be arrested. As we have said, hundreds of people are being arrested on tiny charges and the gentleman has been indicted in the United States for thousands of crores. He should be in jail... The government is protecting him," the former Congress chief said.

## India welcomes Israel-Lebanon... UP govt to recover damages from...

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The ceasefire deal that has commenced will be carried out over 60 days, with both Israeli forces and Hezbollah militants withdrawing from southern Lebanon. The deal comes after nearly 14 months of fighting and has been brokered by the US and France. While US President Joe Biden said the deal is designed to provide a permanent end to the conflict, Israeli ministers insisted Israel would resume strikes on Lebanon if Hezbollah breached the terms of the ceasefire. While the deal does not affect Israel's ongoing war with Hamas in Gaza, the ceasefire would bring an end to nearly 14 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

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Sub-inspector Nishant Malik and his team rushed to Nakhasa intersection, where the mob had gathered. Around 12:35 pm, the situation escalated as the mob attacked the police. Armed with sticks and bricks, they vandalized CCTV cameras, set a government motorcycle and a private Bullet bike on fire, and even attempted to snatch pistols from the police. The FIR mentions that while Sub-inspector Malik managed to secure his weapon, the mob looted its magazine along with ten 9mm bullets. The FIR further states that voices from the crowd shouted slogans such as, "We will not allow the survey in the mosque. Snatch their weapons, set them on fire, and kill them. No one should escape."

## NSG to set up an independent hub in Jammu

**From page 1**

The proposal to set up an independent NSG hub in the Jammu region was in the pipeline for a long time, official sources said. According to these official sources, the proposal was mooted ahead of the annual conduct of the Amarnath yatra during one of the security review meetings with the officials of the Ministry of Home Affairs last year. While discussing the spike in terror attacks in the region a suggestion was made to permanently deploy a component of the NSG in Jammu city to avoid unwarranted delay in rushing elite NSG commandos, especially in case of any hostage crisis. The NSG commandos, inducted during anti-terror

operations on several occasions in the past, returned to their base in Gurgaon. This time the final approval has come in the wake of the recent spike in terror attacks in the region. Last month, the NSG team was deployed in the Akhnora area where a group of Pakistani terrorists were holed up inside a religious place. Anticipating a hostage crisis in the built-up area the NSG teams were rushed to the encounter site to neutralize them to prevent any collateral damage. According to official sources, the Jammu and Kashmir police have also reviewed its anti-terror plan on the advice of the Union Home Ministry. A fresh security audit of the vital installations, high-value targets, and sensitive places was done recently where the

requirement of the NSG team was projected as part of a back-up plan by the police authorities. The teams of the Special Operations Group of Jammu and Kashmir police and the NSG will work in close coordination to neutralise the terrorists during anti-terror operations. According to a recent assessment of the intelligence agencies, eight out of 10 districts of the Jammu region witnessed targeted attacks on the security forces this year in which 45 people have been killed, including 18 security personnel, 14 civilians, and 13 terrorists. Security forces continue to carry out massive search operations to track down the fingerprints of foreign terrorists behind these lethal attacks on security personnel and civilians.

## Delhi AQI likely to go back to be 'severe'

**From page 1**

Mundka reported the highest AQI at 443, followed by Rohini and Vivek Vihar at 432 each. Anand Vihar recorded an AQI of 431, while Jahangirpuri stood at 422. Other severely affected areas included Sonia Vihar at 425, Shalidpur at 423, and Punjabi Bagh at 413. Alipur (416), Narela (415), and Ashok Vihar (420) also saw AQI levels firmly in the 'severe' range, further highlighting the dire situation. The neighbouring NCR cities have experienced a slight dip, with Faridabad recording an AQI of 184, Gurugram at 160, and Noida at 257. The AQI had peaked at 419 on November 20, with subsequent readings of 371 the following day, 393 on Friday, 412 on Saturday and

318 on Sunday. An AQI between 301 and 400 is classified as "very poor" while levels above 400 are considered "severe". The primary pollutants remained PM2.5 and PM10, with PM2.5 levels at 122 µg/m on Wednesday, down from 143 µg/m the previous day, and PM10 levels at 219 µg/m, also lower than the 325 µg/m recorded on Tuesday. The Centre's Decision Support System (DSS) for Air Quality Management estimated that vehicular emissions contributed 23.436 per cent to Delhi's pollution on Wednesday. Notably, there is a ban on entry of non essential trucks from other states to Delhi and around four lakh vehicles are off the road due to stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan imposed in the Delhi-NCR. The contribution of the

residential sector to air pollution is estimated to be 6.043 percent, industries contributed 5.438 percent, construction 3.492 percent, energy sector 2.351 percent, waste burning 2.276 percent, road dust 1.754 percent and others 1.624 percent. The DSS provides daily estimates for vehicular emissions, while the data on stubble burning is typically available the following day. A group of students and their parents held a protest near Parliament, urging political leaders to address the problem of Delhi's deteriorating air quality. The protesters gathered under a "Saanson Ke Liye Sansad Chalao" banner. "We are deeply worried about how we will provide clean air to our children and the next generation if the situation continues to worsen," one of

the parents at the protest said. Among the protesters was nine-year-old Meera Purnima Vutts. She said, "My father and I cough constantly due to the pollution. Some of my other family members are also experiencing health issues because of it." Bhavreen Kandhari, an environmentalist present at the protest, stressed the severity of the issue. The protesters raised placards with messages of "Save Our Children's Lungs", "My Right to Breathe", and "Act on Air Pollution Now" to emphasise the urgency of the situation. Meanwhile, authorities intensified their action against violations of anti-pollution norms, a day after the Supreme Court slammed the Delhi government and police for a "serious lapse" in implementing the restrictions

under the fourth stage of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). A senior police officer said the number of teams deployed to ensure the implementation of the restrictions has been increased, particularly in the border areas. The city police, in coordination with teams from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), transport department and civil defence volunteers, are conducting thorough vehicle checks at the border checkpoints. Another officer mentioned that the local police is working alongside the traffic police to enforce traffic regulations, with challans being issued to violators. Under the stage IV of the GRAP, the entry of trucks, except for those run on CNG, electric and BS-VI diesel, is banned in Delhi.



# Parliament Winter Session: Both Houses adjourned amid protests over Adani, Sambhal violence

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Proceedings in both houses of Parliament were adjourned for the day on Wednesday amid opposition protests over the Adani controversy and violence in Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh. Opposition members trooped to the Well of the House in Lok Sabha raising slogans as soon as the House met again at 12 noon. BJP member Dilip Saikia, who was in the chair, adjourned the proceedings for the day after parliamentary papers were laid on the table. Earlier, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla had taken up the Question Hour when the House proceedings for the day commenced at 11 am.

However, he adjourned the proceedings amid sloganeering by the opposition members. The Opposition members wanted to discuss the Adani controversy and the recent violence in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal. The Adani Group said on Wednesday that Gautam Adani, and his nephew Sagar have not been charged with any violation of the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) in the indictment that authorities filed in the New York court in an alleged bribery case. In the Rajya Sabha, protests by opposition members led to adjournment for the day without transacting any substantial business. The uproar started after Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar



rejected 18 notices under a rule of the House to suspend scheduled business to take up issues including the demand for a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into the Adani issue. The proceedings were briefly adjourned due to opposition protest and when the House re-assembled at 11.30 AM, there were identical scenes. This prompted Chairman Dhankhar to adjourn the proceedings for the day, saying the "House is not in order". The notices related to the demand for the "constitution of a JPC to investigate the alleged misconduct, including corruption, bribery, financial irregularities of the Adani Group in connivance with other authorities", violence in Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh and "rising" incidents of crime

in the national capital. "Upper House needs to reflect and follow well-established traditions that ruling of the Chair requires reference and not cause differences. I have, in detail, given reasons why, in these situations, notices are not being accepted," Dhankhar said while rejecting the notices under Rule 267 of the House. The Chairman also said for the last 30 years, the House has reflected a consensual approach with reference to Rule 267 every time. "As I have reiterated on several occasions, I thought it wise to bestow focused attention given the situation that we are entering the last quarter of the century of adoption of the Constitution of India," he said. He emphasised that the

House needs to reflect and follow well-established traditions that a ruling of the Chair requires "deference and not (be a) cause of differences." While rejecting the notices, Dhankhar also stressed that there will be occasions to raise these issues in accordance with rules. Earlier, the Chairman extended birthday greetings to Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya, Wanweiroy Khariukhi and Dharmshila Gupta, all Members of Rajya Sabha. On Monday also, the first day of the Winter Session, the Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned for the day during the morning session itself as the opposition insisted on raising the issues related to the Adani Group. There was no sitting of the House on Tuesday.

## Defence Secretary to inaugurate 11th edition of ICG's SAREX-24 in Kochi

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh will inaugurate the two-day 11th edition of Indian Coast Guard's National Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise and Workshop (SAREX-24) under the aegis of National Maritime Search and Rescue Board in Kochi starting Thursday, defence ministry said here on Wednesday. Giving details, officials said Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Director General S Paramesh, who is also the National Maritime Search and Rescue Coordinating Authority, will be among the dignitaries attending the event. The theme will be 'Enhancing Search and Rescue Capabilities through Regional Collaboration'. It signifies ICG's commitment to provide succor during large-scale contingencies regardless of location, nationality or circumstances in the Indian Search and Rescue Region and beyond. The first day of the event will feature various programmes, including table-top exercise, workshop & seminars involving participation of senior officials from government agencies, Ministries and Armed Forces, various stakeholders and foreign delegates.



On the second day, the sea exercise involving two large scale contingencies will be carried out off the Kochi coast with participation of ships and aircraft of ICG, Navy, Indian Air Force, Passenger Vessel and Tug from Cochin Port Authority and boats from the Customs. The first contingency will simulate distress onboard a passenger vessel having 500 passengers onboard, while the second scenario will depict ditching of civil aircraft with 200 passengers. The response matrix in the sea exercise will involve various methods to evacuate distressed passengers, wherein the advent of new-age technology using satellite-aided distress beacons,

## Viksit Bharat dream hinges on quality education in schools: UN's Sharp

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Highlighting the immense potential of India's students as catalysts for change, United Nations (UN) resident coordinator in the country Shombi Sharp has said the dream of 'Viksit Bharat' hinges on ensuring that children in school receive not only quality education but are also sensitised to becoming "responsible model citizens of tomorrow". United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on Wednesday released a statement on its 'RiseUp4Peace' educational initiative that is focused on engaging and empowering young people to "resist negative influences, emerging vulnerabilities and risky behaviours". The UN Resident Coordinator for India highlighted the immense potential of "India's 265.2 million students as catalysts for change", emphasising the importance of quality and values-driven education in shaping inclusive and peaceful societies, it said. "The dream of 'Viksit Bharat', as articulated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, hinges on ensuring that children in school receive not only quality education but are also sensitised to become responsible model citizens of



tomorrow," he was quoted as saying in the statement. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 both recognise the need to nurture responsible citizens who can contribute to peace and harmony in an increasingly complex world. But this ambition goes beyond the traditional scope of education -- it requires "reimagining educational interventions in classrooms, schools and communities", the UNODC said. In several bustling classrooms

across India, there is a "powerful movement" quietly taking shape -- one that champions peace, lawfulness and inclusion through education. At the heart of this movement are not just the policy-makers, educators or institutions, but young people who stand as the most crucial catalysts of change, the statement said. Emphasising the initiative's relevance and impact, over 70 policy-makers, educators and young champions ideated and charted a roadmap for fostering peace, inclusion and lawfulness in education -- as envi-

sioned in NEP 2020 and NCF 2023 -- at a 'RiseUp4Peace' policy consultation convened by India's apex curriculum body, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and UNODC South Asia in New Delhi. Working in mixed groups, policy-makers, educators and students exchanged practical insights on curriculum integration, good practices and new ideas as well as the way forward. Key insights shared by educators emphasised the importance of a holistic

approach to education. Launched this year, the cross-cutting collaborative initiative has engaged over 30,000 stakeholders across 14 states and Union Territories (UTs) through participatory capacity building of educators, co-creation of school-led initiatives and activity-based learning of students. 'RiseUp4Peace' has spurred innovative interventions blending arts, technology and sports to empower students with the support of a diverse set of partners -- public, private and rural schools, NCERT, DERT Meghalaya, Raipur Police and educator and youth groups, the statement said. NCERT Joint Director Amarendra Prasad Behera urged educators to actively build capacities and develop values-driven modules to transform education. "NEP 2020 and NCF 2023 envision education as a bridge to a more just and peaceful society. Such collaborations transform vision into action," he said. The consultation reinforced the call for a whole-of-society approach to education, with policy-makers, educators and students as equal partners in creating a roadmap to promote transformative education for attaining the Sustainable Development Goals.

## Govt launches Bal Vivah Mukht Bharat campaign

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Government on Wednesday launched the Bal-Vivah Mukht Bharat campaign, urging states and Union territories to create specific action plans with the goal of reducing child marriage rates to below 5% by 2029. This initiative comes in response to the ongoing concern that, despite successfully preventing nearly 2 lakh child marriages in the past year, one in five girls in India is still married before the legal age of 18. Such practices are not only a serious human rights violation but are also a criminal offense under Indian law. Launched by Union Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi, the Bal-Vivah Mukht Bharat Abhiyan will focus on the seven high-burden states -- West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Tripura, Assam, and Andhra Pradesh -- and nearly 300 high-burden districts where child marriage rates are high



as compared to the national average. A key feature of the initiative is the launch of the Child Marriage Free Bharat portal, a platform to raise awareness, report cases, and monitor progress. "Child marriage is a significant challenge before us and is a practice that limits the potential of millions of girls. In our country today, one in every five girls is married before the age of 18. Child marriage is one of the most severe forms of human rights violations and is also a criminal offense under the law," Devi said. She added that while laws like the Prevention of Child Marriage Act are instrumental, "we must also focus on raising awareness because legislation alone cannot eradicate this issue". "Figures also reveal that nearly 2 lakh child marriages have been prevented in a single year. Additionally, a United Nations report states that the most significant global decline in child marriage rates has been observed in South Asian countries, with India playing a crucial role in this achievement," she said. The Bal Vivah Mukht Bharat campaign seeks to engage

multiple stakeholders in a collective effort to eliminate child marriage. The minister credited schemes like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Samagra Shiksha, and the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana for improving girls' access to education and ensuring their financial future. "With the introduction of the National Education Policy, 2020, and scholarships for disadvantaged groups, we are creating opportunities for girls to realize their potential," she said. "Patriarchal norms continue to pose challenges, but interventions like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao have proven effective in shifting societal mindsets. With consistent efforts, we can create an enabling environment for our girls," she said. Despite the progress, the minister cautioned that there is no room for complacency. "We cannot stop until India is completely free of child marriages," she said, calling for active participation from citizens.

## ICF manufacturing high-speed train sets having 280 Kmph speed: Vaishnav

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Integral Coach Factory, Chennai, in collaboration with BEML, is designing and manufacturing high-speed train sets that will have a design speed of 280 kmph, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav told Parliament on Wednesday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, Vaishnav said following the success of Vande Bharat trains under the "Make in India" initiative, the Indian Railways (IR) has now taken up designing and manufacturing of high-speed train sets. "The manufacturing cost is approximately Rs 28 crore per car (excluding taxes), which is highly competitive compared with other train sets," he said, replying to questions raised by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs Sudhir Gupta and Ananta Nayak. "The design and manufacturing of high-speed train sets is a complex and technology-intensive process," the

minister added. He also highlighted the major technical aspects, such as the design and manufacturing of the aerodynamic, airtight car body, design and manufacturing of electrics including propulsion for high-speed application, weight optimisation of the train sets and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) of the trains. "The train sets will have chair cars with best-in-class features, such as aerodynamic exteriors, sealed gangways, automatic doors, optimum climatic conditions inside compartments for passenger comfort, CCTV, mobile-charging facilities, optimum lighting, fire safety equipment etc.," Vaishnav said. He added that the completion of the project can be reasonably ascertained after the finalisation of the detailed design. The minister also provided an update on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail (MAHSR) project, under execution with technical and financial assistance from Japan, and said so far, 336 km of pier construction, 331 km of pier construction, 260 km of girder casting and 225 km of girder launching have been completed. "The work of the undersea tunnel (approximately 21 km) has also started," he added. The 508-km-long MAHSR project will have 12 stations planned at Mumbai, Thane, Virar, Boisar, Vapi, Bilimora, Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Ahmedabad and Sabarmati and the entire land (1,389.5 Ha) required for it has been acquired, the railway minister said.



## Terror-gangster syndicate case: NIA raids nine locations across multiple States

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Wednesday conducted searches at nine locations in multiple states as part of a probe into a conspiracy by terror outfits to smuggle arms and ammunition into the country, according to an official statement. NIA teams searched the premises of suspects in the "terror-gangster syndicate case" in Palwal, Faridabad and Gurugram districts of Haryana, Jalandhar district of Punjab, and Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, it said.

A host of incriminating materials, including mobiles/digital devices, banking transactions and property-related documents, were seized during the searches, the statement issued by the probe agency said. "In a massive crackdown in the terror-gangster nexus case, the NIA on Wednesday conducted extensive searches at premises linked with associates of Davinder Bamba syndicate at nine locations in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh," it said. Bamba, a notorious gangster, was killed in a police encounter in 2016, officials said. The Bamba gang members are

considered rivals of jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and his associates, they said. Wednesday's searches were part of the NIA's continuous crackdown on terror outfits engaged in criminal conspiracies to smuggle terrorist hardware, such as arms, ammunition, narcotics, explosives, etc into India, the probe agency said. NIA investigations in the case, registered on the directions of the Ministry of Home Affairs, further show large-scale attempts by these organisations and terrorists to raise funds for carrying out terror acts on Indian soil, it said.

## Need to make existing laws more stringent to curb vulgar content on social media: Vaishnav

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Union minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Wednesday said there is a need to make existing laws more stringent to curb vulgar content on social media platforms. Speaking in Lok Sabha, the Information and Broadcasting Minister said the Parliamentary Standing Committee should take up the issue and also called for a consensus to frame more strict laws in this regard. Earlier, there were editorial checks and it was decided whether something was right or wrong, but those checks have ended. Today, social media is a platform for the freedom of press but it is uncon-



trolled and there is vulgar content, the minister said during the Question Hour. There is a need to make existing laws more stringent to curb vulgar content on social media platforms, Vaishnav

said amid din in the House. He was responding to questions by BJP member Arun Govil about existing mechanisms to check the illegal telecast of vulgar and sex-related content through social media

platforms and whether the government proposes to make the existing laws more stringent keeping in view the fact that the said laws are "not much effective to stop misuse of these platforms". The government has notified Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules, 2021) under the Information Technology Act, 2000. It provides for a code of ethics for publishers of online curated content (OTT platforms) and that OTT platforms put in place adequate safeguards for restricting age-inappropriate content for children. In a written reply, Vaishnav said the ministry blocked 18

OTT platforms for publishing obscene and vulgar content. So far as the content on intermediary platforms like YouTube and Facebook is concerned, IT Rules, 2021 cast certain obligations on such platforms. These platforms need to make reasonable efforts by themselves and to cause the user of their computer resource to not host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, etc. Knowingly and intentionally any information which is obscene, pornographic, paedophilic, invasive of another's privacy, including bodily privacy, insulting or harassing on the basis of gender, racially or ethnically objectionable, or that is harmful to child, he said.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## A glimmer of hope

While the ceasefire offers a reprieve from conflict, its durability is not guaranteed, a lasting resolution still remains elusive

In a significant development for West Asia, Israel and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group operating in Lebanon, have agreed to a ceasefire after months of intense conflict. The agreement, brokered with the intervention of the United States and France, comes into effect at midnight Israeli time on November 27. It is being hailed as a potential step toward de-escalation in the region, but its success and long-term implications remain uncertain. The ceasefire agreement aims to restore calm along the volatile Israel-Lebanon border. It mandates that Hezbollah and other armed groups in Lebanon halt all offensive operations against Israel. In return, Israel will refrain from military actions targeting Lebanon. A key aspect of the deal is the acknowledgement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which calls for the disarmament of militias and the exclusive authority of Lebanese state forces in the southern region. Israel has also agreed to withdraw its forces from positions south of the Blue Line within 60 days, provided the terms are upheld.



This ceasefire does not mean that Israeli forces are back to barracks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has emphasised the need to focus on Iran. Israel agreed to truce as there were logistical challenges, including delays in weapons and munitions deliveries, which necessitated a pause to replenish stocks and prepare for future operations. The ceasefire comes amid a broader context of regional instability. The war between Israel and Hamas, which erupted in October 2023 after a brutal terrorist attack on Israeli civilians, has already claimed tens of thousands of lives. There is no let up in Israel's attacks on Gaza where the human crisis is getting worse. The fighting extended to Israel's northern border when Hezbollah escalated its attacks, prompting Israel to retaliate. While the ceasefire offers a glimmer of hope, challenges loom large. The success of the agreement depends on its strict implementation, particularly the disarmament of militias in Lebanon. The Lebanese government, already struggling with economic and political crises, will face immense pressure to assert its authority over Hezbollah, a deeply entrenched and well-armed organisation. Whatever the reasons for this truce but it definitely gives peace a chance. The agreement's implications for regional peace are profound. If upheld, it could reduce tensions along Israel's northern border, allowing displaced civilians to return home and facilitating humanitarian relief in affected areas. For Lebanon, the deal could bolster its sovereignty by curbing the influence of armed non-state actors, potentially paving the way for greater stability. However, unresolved issues, including the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict and tensions with Iran, continue to pose risks to lasting peace. The role of the US, France, and UNIFIL will be critical to ensuring compliance and rebuilding trust.

### PICTALK



A flock of whistling ducks fly at the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, in Morigaon

## Why band-aid solutions fail to fix Delhi pollution



KALYANI SHANKAR

Despite court orders, government promises, and short-term measures like vehicle restrictions and artificial rain, Delhi's air quality remains perilously poor

Why do the residents of Delhi experience pollution every year while the ruling class blames it on stubble burning in the neighbouring states of Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh? Can't they find a permanent solution instead of debating who will pay for the burning machines and other related expenses? The air pollution levels in Delhi are eight times higher than the WHO's prescribed limits. It has reached a level where the judiciary, executive, and parliament blame each other, and the severe pollution level continues. Returning from a month-long holiday in the US, I was immediately struck by the urgency of the pollution crisis as I landed in Delhi, past midnight this week.

The dark skies, sheets of dust, heat, and difficulty in breathing welcomed me as a stark reminder and a pressing call to action. The pollution levels in Delhi have soared to their highest this week. It has reached hazardous levels, causing state officials to limit movement and revive plans to stimulate artificial rain to clear toxins. This forced the schools and offices to close due to cloaking the city in thick brown smog and demanded immediate action. The number of respiratory diseases in children and older adults is rising, along with other health issues. In cold winters in the north, smog covers the area every year and traps harmful pollutants from fires, construction, and factories. This issue worsens when farmers burn their fields after harvesting rice to prepare for new crops. The same or even worse scenario unfolds yearly, reaching alarming levels over time. Citizens feel helpless while politicians engage in a blame game. As a result, the public endures poor air quality, which seriously threatens their health. Affluent individuals often escape to warmer destinations during winter, but children and older people suffer the most. Many schools have closed, and residents have been advised to



stay indoors. Construction work has been halted, and the government is considering implementing an odd-even vehicle use policy to control pollution. While this is a step in the right direction, the severity of the crisis requires effective solutions without further delays. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, the World Health Organization, and other monitoring agencies, Delhi's air quality index (AQI) ranges between 1,200 and 1,500. India's AQI is classified as poor when it exceeds 200, very poor when it exceeds 300, and severe or hazardous when it exceeds 400. The recommended AQI limit is between 0 and 100. This alarming situation discourages international travellers and members of the Indian diaspora from planning their annual visits. The government and politicians are well aware of the root cause of the problem but play the blame game. The Supreme Court has ordered the government to address pollution. In the past, it has even led efforts to improve air quality in Delhi. It has set rules about which vehicles can operate in the city, ordered the relocation of many factories that pollute the air, and closed businesses to reduce emissions. The court also



IN COLD WINTERS IN THE NORTH, SMOG COVERS THE AREA EVERY YEAR AND TRAPS HARMFUL POLLUTANTS FROM FIRES, CONSTRUCTION, AND FACTORIES. THIS ISSUE WORSENS WHEN FARMERS BURN THEIR FIELDS AFTER HARVESTING RICE TO PREPARE FOR NEW CROPS

pushed the government to take action. The fault lies in the implementation. Last month, the Supreme Court ruled that clean air is a fundamental human right. It ordered both the central government and state authorities to take immediate action. However, most measures, such as vehicle restrictions, industrial regulations, and public awareness campaigns, must be more effective in preventing deteriorating air quality. Critics question how effective the court's decisions are and accuse the judiciary of interfering in executive matters. In its 2024 manifesto, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi did not include promises to reduce pollution, unlike previous ones. Instead, the manifesto focused on the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and ways to cut pollution. APP highlighted the need for citizen involvement and plans to use electric buses to control pollution. Now that it has reached an alarming stage, the Centre and the state governments must take a balanced approach concerning Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, which are the real culprits. Every winter, smoke from farm fires engulfs Delhi and covers the Delhi skies.

Farmers resort to burning as it is the cheapest method of clearing their fields. The state governments demand that the Centre provide funds to assist farmers in reducing smoke emissions, but the issue persists yearly. Meanwhile, politics also plays its role. The BJP governs the Centre, while AAP rules Delhi and Punjab. The Congress remains an onlooker. This attitude does not help implement an effective plan. The experts say it's high time half-measures were shunned, and comprehensive solutions are implemented. For instance, GRAP-III must be upgraded to GRAP-IV, facilitating the enforcement of the odd-even rule. The election to the Delhi Assembly is around the corner. People must make it an election issue. In the meantime, residents of Delhi should consider quick solutions to combat pollution, such as wearing masks, indoor air-purifying plants, and the affluent using air purifiers, taking steam baths, eating healthy foods, and ensuring proper ventilation in their homes. The citizens must also assist authorities in any efforts to help control pollution. (The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### UNITY OVER DIVISION

Madam — Some political parties that do not have any people oriented policies or programmes in their agenda are using the communal platform to whip the religious sentiments to gain votes and capture power. The campaign during the last general election has seen an open spread of communal hate, which was not the predominant issue in the minds of the people. Nowhere were the people's issues, like employment, livelihood plights, or healthcare concerns, discussed or debated. That is why the people also had reacted vehemently by not giving a brutal majority to any party. The message that people are not interested in communal concerns is given repeatedly and still some forces are bent upon thriving in politics only with the help of programmes of spreading hate among communities and keeping the flame of communal hate alive. Leaving issues like employment, inflation, declining real wages, and growing costs of healthcare and education made the privilege of the affluent to be attended to with priority and more sincerity. Divisive agendas and programmes may shine in the initial stage and then lose their tempo, as witnessed all over. Such clashes help the rulers to divert the attention of the people from their mistakes and misdeeds. Even in countries ruled under theocratic principles, clashes among groups of the same religion are seen to be the perennial ones rather than giving peace to the people. In a country like India, even if one religion is allowed to dominate, the groups thriving on promoting the cause of their caste will gain further momentum to plunge the nation into a lasting socio-economic crisis. As available laws are not efficient enough to deal with such anti-people political parties and social outfits, it is the responsibility of the people to keep them at a distance. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

#### SAVE FORESTS

Madam—Planting a tree and protecting it till it grows has been considered a

### EVM: Allegations are baseless



The Supreme Court decisively rejected a petition calling for the reintroduction of ballot papers in elections, highlighting the baseless nature of opposition allegations against Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). The court's remarks came after the petitioner argued that EVMs were vulnerable to manipulation, citing claims by various politicians, including Andhra Pradesh leaders Chandrababu Naidu and Jagan Mohan Reddy, as well as Elon Musk. The court pointed out that

these same politicians never raised concerns about EVMs when they won elections. "When you win, EVMs are fine; when you lose, EVMs are tampered." Meanwhile, opposition parties, led by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, continued to push for the return of ballot papers, with Kharge criticising the use of EVMs and demanding a campaign similar to the Bharat Jodo Yatra for their abolition. Kharge's repeated attacks on EVMs reflect the ongoing narrative within opposition circles, where EVM tampering is blamed for electoral losses. The SC's firm stance serves as a rebuke to the opposition's recurring narrative of EVM tampering, emphasising that such claims are opportunistic and lack substantiation. The opposition's continued attack on EVMs seems more like an excuse for poor performance than a genuine concern for electoral fairness. N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

#### OLI CHOOSES BEIJING

Madam — Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli broke the usual ritual of visiting New Delhi first by choosing Beijing. Like the Maldives' President, Nepal's Prime Minister appears to be a pro-Chinese supporter. We all know how notorious China is for pushing countries like Nepal into debt. After Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Maldives, seeing Nepal follow the same path makes India worried. If Nepal signs the BRI execution treaty, it would pose a significant threat to India. Though our relations with China are improving, we all know it is merely a diplomatic friendship that could turn into animosity at any time. In the diplomatic world, no one is a genuine friend or ally to any country—everyone prioritises their own benefit. India needs to remain cautious, especially as it is being surrounded by countries drowning in China's debts. Priya Thakur | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Aruna Vasudev: A tribute to the mother figure of Asian cinema

She leaves behind a profound legacy, having nurtured and inspired many. Though she is no longer among us, her influence continues to guide and motivate



SANTANU GANGULY

In 1999, I first discovered the Cinefan Asian Film Festival. Excited, I headed to the India Habitat Centre (IHC) to collect a pass, only to learn that the festival was open to all. I couldn't believe my ears. Being new to Delhi, I had assumed that everything came at a price, but this experience proved me wrong. During the festival, I came to know Aruna Vasudev, the Festival Director. I also met filmmakers and critics from around the world, making it an unforgettable experience. The following year, I eagerly awaited the festival and even took seven days of leave from work to immerse myself in films. My journalist friends noticed my dedication and shared it with Aruna Vasudev. They told her about a boy from West Delhi who traveled daily, spending mornings to midnight watching films out of sheer love for cinema. That year, I managed to watch 37 out of the 42 films screened, missing a few only because I attended seminars. Aruna di, as I later called her, was impressed but quizzed me about the films to ensure I had truly seen them. I passed her test.



At the closing ceremony, in the presence of luminaries like Sharmila Tagore, Buddhadeb Dasgupta, Rituparno Ghosh, and Nandita Das, she mentioned my name on stage. She highlighted my passion and dedication, asking me to stand so the audience could see me. Afterward, she invited me to the closing dinner. During our conversation, she asked what I did for a living. When I replied, she told me, "Forget footwear; you are meant for film." I expressed my willingness to leave my job if she could offer me an opportunity. She laughed and said, "Stay in touch; I'll let you know." I took her words to heart and kept reminding her of her promise whenever we met. Finally, in 2003, she asked me to join her team. Although she initially wanted me to start in January, I requested a

delay due to my sister's wedding. From February 1, 2003, until the end of her life, Aruna Vasudev became much more than a mentor. She was my friend, philosopher, guide, guru, and godmother. When I joined her team, I initially addressed her as "Madam." One day, she suggested I call her "Aruna di," as others did. From then on, she was Aruna di not only to me but also to my family. My work involved assisting her with the prestigious Cinefan Quarterly and the Cinefan Film Festival. During this time, she taught me much more than cinema-etiquette, communication skills, and the importance of being a good human being. One memorable instance was when she was busy on a call, and another call came through. Indicating she wasn't available, I conveyed that she was out of the country. Later, she gently corrected me, teaching that honesty in such situations was essential. Transforming a shy, lower-middle-class boy from a Bengali-medium school into someone comfortable in

Delhi's elite circles wasn't easy. Yet, she patiently guided me every step of the way. Aruna di's support was unwavering. When I asked if I was meeting her expectations, she replied that being able to pursue one's dream and earn a living from it was a rare blessing. Once, after just three months on the job, I noticed an unexpected salary increase. The accountant revealed that Aruna di was so pleased with my work that she had decided to raise it. This generosity stood in stark contrast to my earlier job in a footwear company, where long hours of grueling work brought only meager raises. Her faith in me was a source of strength. Despite occasional resentment from colleagues about the trust she placed in me, she always defended her decisions. She was my rock in both professional and personal challenges. When my mother met her, she said, "Though I gave birth to him, you have raised him." Touched by those words, Aruna di was moved to tears. (The writer is a Delhi based Film Festival curator; views expressed are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## A MINDFUL HEART FOR A MINDFUL LIFE

By integrating modern science with spiritual wisdom, it is essential for holistic healing



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

*To be kind is more important than to be right. Many times what people need is not a brilliant mind that speaks but a special heart that listens... F. Scott Fitzgerald*

We humans are blessed with only one heart which lasts us as long as we live. Alternatively, we live till the heart lasts. In that sense, the heart is the lifeline of the human body. Anatomically, it is a vital organ that supplies blood to the whole body. Symbolically, it is equated with the most powerful emotions of the human soul i.e. love as well as with instinct, interest and deep feelings. Hence it won't be wrong to say that the heart rules our life. But, today the same very heart has indeed become a matter of great concern as alarming statistics tell us how vulnerable it is to the onset of countless disorders, thanks to our modern lifestyle and polluted environment. Concerns over the health of the heart have led to an explosion of research to find ways to boost its longevity and smooth functionality. However, when all efforts to preserve the heart fail we even have an option to replace it. Isn't it great? But still, the figures in health reports don't seem to tell a happy story about the effectiveness of these developments because today we have an ever-growing number of people who are suffering or facing the risk of heart disease.

According to the eternal law of spirituality, everything in this material world grows old, decays and gets assimilated into its original elemental form. Similarly, everything in nature is getting recycled as energy is in constant flux. So, as souls, we all get a new body at every birth. However, the elements that constitute a body are the same old matter.



In that sense, everything in the world is old material packaged as new. Hence, with every consecutive birth, we as souls get a recycled body and hence a recycled heart. We get a new body only when we first come down from the soul world because we are pure and are entitled to get the best of the available resources at the time when we enter this world. Having said the above, we must not forget the fact that there was indeed a time when we all had a brand-new heart.

Yeah! Time was indeed called the 'Golden Age' when all the human souls and the elements of nature were pristine and pure. Everyone is perfect and purest there and so everything they had, including their body, was also perfect. There was no need for them to take care of their heart. The heart was so robust and healthy that it supported the body for a long and healthy life. However, today we all live in total contrast to the golden age i.e. Iron Age and there is hardly any human being in this world today who is free from any physical ailment, be it wealthy or poor, all are suffering from some or the other disease that is linked to unhealthy lifestyle and ecological degradation. In the present age, everyone's mind is beset with weak and negative thoughts which are the biggest hindrance to living a healthy & happy life. Throughout our lives, we never understand that the root cause of all diseases is our wrong actions. It's a proven fact that we get punished for our wrong deeds. Therefore it is very important to realize that all diseases have their origin in wrong thoughts and actions.

Today, medical science has accepted that along with a healthy lifestyle, meditation too can promote a healthy heart, as it helps regulate the heart's functioning by controlling negative thoughts that induce stress-related hormones in the body leading to harmful effects. By purifying the soul of bad 'sanskaras' (personality traits) like anger, fear, hatred and ego, it cures the root cause of disease and leads to holistic healing. Therefore to have a healthy heart, apart from a healthy lifestyle, it is essential to be a good-hearted person and to feed the mind with a healthy diet of pure thoughts and feelings.

*(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)*

## Bridging the gender gap in skills and opportunities



DINESH SOOD

The beauty and wellness sector is emerging as a transformative force, equipping women with essential skills and providing financial sustainability



Despite various initiatives, a significant gender gap persists in learning and earning opportunities between men and women. Skill development can be a transformative force, enhancing women's professional growth and economic independence. By acquiring skills, women can access broader job opportunities, empowering them socially and economically.

A survey titled "Women's Economic Empowerment," conducted in 2023-24 by the Indian Statistical Institute Delhi, explores women's skill development and employment landscape. It reveals that 7 out of 10 women lack economic independence. India ranks 142nd out of 146 countries in the Global Women's Economic Participation and Opportunities Index. Women in India contribute only 17 per cent to the GDP, which is less than half the global average. Their economic participation is essential for sustainable development, gender equality, and poverty reduction.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), integrating 68 million more women into the workforce by 2025 could potentially increase India's GDP by USD 0.7 trillion. The World Bank also reports that including 50 per cent of women in the workforce could boost India's GDP growth by 1.5 percentage points.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) states that India's Women's Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) was about 32.8 per cent in 2023, while it was 67.2 per cent for men. Women are primarily found in specific sectors such as agriculture (73.2 per cent), education (44.1 per cent), and health-care and beauty-wellness (31.4 per cent). An estimated 7.5 crore women are expected to join the workforce in the coming decade. To ensure that this vital human resource—nearly half of the country's workforce—is effectively utilised and contributes at least 25 per cent to national economic growth, the government must prioritise skill development for women's empowerment.

In addition to these gaps, prevalent gender stereotypes affect skill acquisition. Women generally pursue skills in beauty and wellness, textiles, clerical work, and healthcare. The DP-WEW study indicates that 30.2 per cent of skilled women aged 18 to 35 primar-



TO ENSURE THAT THIS VITAL HUMAN RESOURCE—NEARLY HALF OF THE COUNTRY'S WORKFORCE—IS EFFECTIVELY UTILISED AND CONTRIBUTES AT LEAST 25 PER CENT TO NATIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH, THE GOVERNMENT MUST PRIORITISE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

ily acquire skills in the beauty and wellness sector, followed by 21.5 per cent in tailoring. The beauty and wellness sector is one of the most significant forces driving women's empowerment in India today.

The industry's rapid growth, the accessibility of skill development, the increasing number of women entering the workforce and entrepreneurship, and the rise of women in leadership roles all contribute to fostering a more equitable society. In India, the beauty and wellness sector is rapidly advancing women's empowerment by providing substantial employment to approximately 12.3 million people, of whom 66 per cent are women.

This workforce includes individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and educated families. According to a 2023 report by Technavio, the beauty and personal care industry in India is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.5 per cent from 2021, reaching a market value of over \$20 billion and creating employment opportunities for around 20.3 million people. Promoting female entrepreneurship in India is crucial, as participation is low, with only one in five entrepreneurs being women.

The beauty and wellness sector offers women significant employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to actively promote skill development, entrepreneurship, and self-employment in this sector through targeted training initiatives, entrepreneurship education, and financial support, enabling women to enhance their professional growth. India's beauty and wellness industry has low entry barriers for women looking to become entrepreneurs.

Many women have capitalised on this sector to establish their businesses, empowering them to take control of their financial futures and

influence the industry's direction. Over 30 per cent of beauty and wellness businesses in India are now owned by women, ranging from small beauty parlours to large spa chains and wellness centres. By building businesses in this sector, women create financial independence and contribute to economic growth. Entrepreneurship fosters leadership skills, self-reliance, and resilience, making women more visible and influential economically.

Government initiatives and private institutions have been instrumental in equipping women with the necessary tools for success in the industry. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, has played a vital role in training women for careers in beauty and wellness. Initiatives like The Beauty and Wellness Sector Skill Council (BWSSC) provide certifications and skill development courses to millions of women nationwide.

According to the BWSSC, nearly 2 million women have been trained through skill development programs in beauty and wellness in India, significantly enhancing women's employability and career growth.

Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), has spent over two decades empowering 250,000 women in tier 2 cities and suburban areas with valuable skills in beauty and wellness. This initiative has helped bridge geographical disparities and enhanced their career prospects, enabling them to pursue diverse roles in the industry. The hybrid mode of training also boosts their chances for professional advancement, addressing various challenges and reducing the gender employment gap.

Beyond financial and professional empowerment, the beauty and well-

ness sector boosts women's self-esteem and confidence. In a society where women's appearances have often been scrutinised, the beauty industry allows women to express themselves, feel more self-assured, and engage actively in both social and professional spheres. Women are increasingly taking on leadership roles within this industry, driving trends and shaping its future. According to FICCI's 2021 report on the beauty and wellness sector, women hold significant leadership positions in major beauty brands and represent 50-60 per cent of senior management in several top companies.

As women advance to leadership roles, they influence industry trends, promote diversity and inclusivity, and help break down gender norms. Their leadership inspires the next generation of women to pursue prominent roles, further advancing gender equality in the workforce. With a growing focus on sustainability in the beauty and wellness sector, women have opportunities to lead initiatives that promote environmental awareness and social responsibility.

Many women in this field are focused on business growth and actively cultivating sustainable and ethical practices that positively impact society. By offering women financial independence, career advancement opportunities, and self-expression platforms, the beauty and wellness sector is reshaping the future for women in India. This sector's economic, social, and psychological benefits pave the way for a new generation of women contributing to India's growth trajectory.

*(The writer is co-founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner of the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and a network Member of India International Skills Centres, an initiative of Gol; the views expressed are personal)*

## Reviving the spirit of peace: A call to action for a divided world

As the voices of peacemakers grow faint and their initiatives struggle for survival, the urgency to reignite hope and unity has never been greater

This is my story. As a child, I often heard harrowing tales of emotional and physical trauma, turmoil, displacement, and violence from my family elders—stories of what they endured during Partition. They spoke of their flight from Rawalpindi and how, as refugees, they rebuilt their lives and made Delhi their home.

Listening to these sagas of resilience, courage, and the indomitable human spirit, I was reminded of the philosopher George Santayana's warning: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Tragically, we have done just that—forgetting the lessons of the past and repeating the same mistakes,



APS MALHOTRA

over and over again. Thirty-seven years after Partition, another tragedy unfolded. A so-called "big tree" fell, and the reverberations shook Delhi to its core. What followed was a horrific bloodbath: gross attempts at ethnic cleansing, as thousands of innocent people were butchered in the nation's capital within hours. Law enforcement turned a

blind eye. Places of worship were desecrated. Homes were looted, ransacked, and burned. Women were violated, and men were hunted like wild animals.

In those dark and desperate times, when it seemed as though humanity had been consumed by madness, there were still beacons of hope. Veterans like the late Kuldeep Nayar stood steadfast, risking their safety to uphold the ideals of peace. Stories of individuals and groups lighting candles, distributing sweets and roses at the Attari-Wagah border, and praying for harmony between two estranged nations filled me with admiration and hope. I longed to join them—to move from being a passive

observer to an active participant in this peace movement.

But it remained a dream for decades. Finally, some years ago, the opportunity came during a visit to Amritsar for a seminar. By sheer luck, I was given a VIP pass to witness the Beating Retreat Ceremony at the Attari-Wagah border.

I was thrilled beyond words. That day, under a gentle winter sun, I took my seat near the massive gate where the ceremony unfolds. It was a spectacle to behold—smartly dressed soldiers marching in perfect sync on both sides of the border. The crowd was electric, brimming with patriotic fervor, singing Bollywood songs, and soaking in the



festive 'pind da mela' atmosphere.

But as dusk fell and the ceremony ended, a sense of disappointment crept in. The cold wind seemed to mirror

my mood. None of the scenes I had dreamed of since childhood were there. There were no doves soaring freely across the man-made divide, no warm embraces or

gestures of reconciliation—only the stark reality of a deeply entrenched divide.

That day, I walked away with nothing but the wistful reveries of a peacenik. Now, as I approach the close of my 56th year, my concern for the future has grown. The peacemakers—the dreamers who championed harmony and understanding—are fading, their initiatives struggling to survive. A way forward must be found, and urgently. The solution lies within each of us, but it will take collective effort to revive the peace offensive.

If we fail to act, we risk losing this fight entirely. And history, as well as future generations, will not forgive us.

The path to peace is fraught with challenges, but it is one we must tread with urgency and determination. The fading voices of peacemakers must be reignited, their efforts revitalised, for the sake of a shared future. If we fail to come together now—to heal divisions, foster understanding, and embrace humanity's collective strength—the dream of harmony will wither away. The responsibility lies with each of us to ensure this does not happen. Let us act before it is too late, for history will not absolve us, and future generations will inherit the consequences of our inaction. Peace cannot wait.

*(The writer is an author and blogger; views are personal)*

# Peace deal designed for permanent cessation of hostilities: Biden

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden has announced that Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have accepted a US-brokered peace deal that is designed to be a "permanent cessation" of hostilities between the two sides. As part of the ceasefire, Israel will gradually withdraw its troops from Lebanon over the next 60 days, Biden said in his address to the nation from the White House on Tuesday, shortly after Israel's Security Cabinet approved the accord. According to reports, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented to the Security Cabinet the agreement aimed at ending months-long fighting between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah which was ignited by the Gaza conflict and has killed and displaced thousands. Biden said he spoke with Netanyahu and Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati. "I'm pleased to announce that their governments have accepted the United States' proposal to end the devastating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. I want to thank President Macron of France for his part-

nership in reaching this moment," he said. "I've directed my team to work with the governments of Israel and Lebanon to forge a ceasefire to bring the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah to a close. "Under the deal reached today, effective at 4:00 a.m. tomorrow local time, the fighting across the Lebanese-Israeli border will end. This is designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities," he said. Biden said what is left of Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations will not be allowed to threaten the security of Israel again. "Over the next 60 days, the Lebanese Army and the State Security Forces will deploy and take control of their own territory once again. Hezbollah terrorist infrastructure in southern Lebanon will not be allowed to be rebuilt," he said. "Over the next 60 days, Israel will gradually withdraw its remaining forces and civilians on both sides will soon be able to safely return to their communities and begin to rebuild their homes, their schools, their farms, their businesses,

and their very lives," he added. Describing the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah as the deadliest in decades, Biden said lasting security for the people of the two countries cannot be achieved only on the battlefield. "Israel must be bold in turning tactical gains against Iran and its proxies into a coherent strategy that secures Israel's long-term safety and advances a broader peace and prosperity in the region," he said. In New York, UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the ceasefire announcement and hoped that this would put an end to the violence, destruction and suffering the people of Israel and Lebanon have been experiencing. UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert echoed similar sentiments. "This agreement marks the starting point of a critical process, anchored in the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), to restore the safety and security that civilians on both sides of the Blue Line deserve," she said. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer described the accord

as a good deal for Israel and the region. It shows that when terrorists are beaten back both militarily and through dogged diplomacy, the likelihood of peace increases, he said. "Hezbollah said they would never give up as long as there was fighting in Gaza, but today's ceasefire agreement should show Hamas they are as isolated as ever. "Now, Hamas must release all the remaining hostages and come to a negotiated ceasefire. Carrying on their failed strategy will lead only to further suffering and SENSELESS bloodshed in Gaza. Hamas must recognise that there's no future without a strong and secure state of Israel," Schumer said. "The Israel-Hezbollah ceasefire agreement also provides an enforcement mechanism to help ensure Hezbollah remains weakened and allows displaced Lebanese and Israeli civilians to return to their homes," he said. "I applaud the Biden administration for this agreement and for continuing to work to negotiate a ceasefire and the return of all the hostages in Gaza," he said.

# Trump team claims credit for truce deal brokered by Biden govt

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration kept President-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration closely apprised of its efforts to broker the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hezbollah that is slated to go into effect early Wednesday, according to the outgoing Democratic administration. Trump's team, meanwhile, was quick to spike the football and claim credit for the rare spot of good news for a Democratic administration that's been dragged down by the grinding Mideast conflict. "Everyone is coming to the table because of President Trump," Florida Rep. Mike Waltz, Trump's choice for his national security adviser, said in a post on X on Tuesday, shortly before the Israel Cabinet signed off on the agreement. "His resounding victory sent a clear message to the rest of the world that chaos won't be tolerated. I'm glad to see concrete steps towards deescalation in the Middle East." The Biden administration's reported coordination with Trump's team on its efforts to forge the ceasefire in Lebanon is

perhaps the highest-profile example of cooperation in what's been a sometimes choppy transition period. Trump's transition team just on Tuesday reached a required agreement with President Joe Biden's White House that will allow transition staff to coordinate with the existing federal workforce before Trump takes office on Jan. 20. There has been some coordination on high levels between the outgoing Biden and incoming Trump teams, including talks between Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Waltz. Biden in Rose Garden remarks on Tuesday cheered the ceasefire agreement as a critical step that he hoped could be the catalyst for a broader peace in the Mideast, which has been shaken by nearly 14 months of war following Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. "This is designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities," Biden said. "What is left of Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations will not be allowed — I emphasise, will not be allowed — to threaten the security of Israel again." White House officials are now

hopeful that a calm in Lebanon will reinvalidate a multi-country effort at finding an endgame to the devastating war in Gaza, where Hamas is still holding dozens of hostages and the conflict is more intractable. Biden said the US, as well as Israel, will engage in talks in the coming days with officials from Egypt, Qatar and Turkey to try to get Gaza talks back on track. But during Biden's moment of success in a conflict that has roiled his reputation at home and abroad, the specter of the incoming Trump administration loomed large. Trump's senior national security team was briefed by the Biden administration as negotiations unfolded and finally came to a conclusion on Tuesday, according to a senior Biden administration official. The official, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity on a call organised by the White House, added that the incoming Trump administration officials were not directly involved in the talks, but that it was important that they knew "what we were negotiating and what the commitments were". Trump's team and allies, mean-

while, said there was no doubt that the prospect of the Republican president returning to power pushed both sides to get the agreement done. Waltz, in addition to giving Trump credit for the ceasefire deal coming together, added a warning to Iran, Hezbollah's chief financial backer. "But let's be clear: The Iran Regime is the root cause of the chaos; terror that has been unleashed across the region. We will not tolerate the status quo of their support for terrorism," Waltz said in his post. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, also gave a shoutout to the incoming administration, while giving a nod to Biden's team. "I appreciate the hard work of the Biden Administration, supported by President Trump, to make this ceasefire a reality," Graham said in a statement. Richard Goldberg, a senior adviser at the Washington group Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, said the moment magnifies that Iran — which he said would have needed to approve of Hezbollah agreeing to the ceasefire — is carefully weighing what lays ahead with Trump.

# As peace holds, Lebanese begin streaming south to their homes

AP ■ BEIRUT

A ceasefire between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah appeared to be holding Wednesday, as residents in cars heaped with belongings streamed back toward southern Lebanon despite warnings from the Israeli and Lebanese military that they stay away from certain areas. If it holds, the ceasefire would bring an end to nearly 14 months of fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, which escalated in mid-September into all-out war and threatened to pull Hezbollah's patron Iran and Israel into a broader conflagration. It could give some reprieve to the 1.2 million Lebanese displaced by the fighting and the tens of thousands of Israelis who fled their homes along the border with Lebanon. The US- and France-brokered deal, approved by Israel late Tuesday, calls for an initial two-month halt to fighting and requires Hezbollah to end its armed presence in southern

Lebanon, while Israeli troops are to return to their side of the border. Thousands of additional Lebanese troops and UN peacekeepers would deploy in the south, and an international panel headed by the United States would monitor compliance. Hours before the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon took effect, Israel launched broad strikes that shook the Lebanese capital Beirut and a volley of rockets from Hezbollah set off air raid sirens across a large swath of northern Israel. But after the ceasefire took effect early Wednesday, quiet appeared to take hold, prompting waves of Lebanese to head home. Israel's Arabic military spokesperson Avichay Adraee warned displaced Lebanese not to return to their villages in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese military asked displaced returning to southern Lebanon to avoid frontline villages and towns near the border where Israeli troops are still present until they withdraw.



But some videos circulating on social media show displaced Lebanese defying these calls and returning to villages in the south near the coastal city of Tyre. Israeli troops were still present in parts of

southern Lebanon after Israel launched a ground invasion in October. On the highway linking Beirut with south Lebanon, thousands of people drove south with their belongings and mattresses tied on top of their cars. Traffic was gridlocked at the northern entrance of the port city of Sidon. Residents will return to vast destruction wrought by the Israeli military during its campaign, which flattened villages where the military said it found vast weapons caches and infrastructure it says was meant to launch an Oct 7-style attack on northern Israel. More than 3,760 people have been killed by Israeli fire in Lebanon the past 13 months, many of them civilians, according to Lebanese health officials. Hezbollah emerges from the war battered and bloodied, with the reputation it built by fighting Israel to a stalemate in the 2006 war tarnished. Yet its fighters still managed to put up heavy resistance on the ground, slowing Israel's advance while continuing to fire scores of rockets, missiles and drones across the border each day. "This is a moment of victory, pride and honor for us, the Shia sect, and for all of Lebanon," said Hussein

Swaidan, a resident returning to Tyre in southern Lebanon, who said he saw the ceasefire as a victory for Hezbollah. Sporadic celebratory gunfire was heard at a main roundabout in the city, as people returning honked the horns of cars and residents cheered. Some Israelis are concerned the deal doesn't go far enough. In Israel, the mood was far more subdued, with displaced Israelis concerned that the deal did not go far enough to rein in Hezbollah and that it did not address Gaza and the hostages still held there. "I think it is still not safe to return to our homes because Hezbollah is still close to us," said Eliyahu Maman, an Israeli displaced from the northern Israeli city of Kyriat Shmona, which is not far from the border with Lebanon and was hit hard by the months of fighting. The fighting killed more than 70 people in Israel, more than half civilians, as well as dozens of Israeli soldiers fighting in southern

Lebanon. A significant return of the displaced to their communities, many of which have suffered extensive damage from rocket fire, could take months. But Israel can claim major victories in the war, including the killing of Hezbollah's top leader Hassan Nasrallah and most of its senior commanders, as well as the destruction of extensive militant infrastructure. A complex attack involving exploding paggers and walkie-talkies, widely attributed to Israel, appeared to show a remarkable degree of penetration of the secretive militant group. The kinds of massive, long-range rocket barrages that many Israelis had feared before the war never fully materialised, either because they were destroyed by Israeli strikes or Hezbollah held them in reserve. Hezbollah also failed to launch any ground attacks across the border, despite evidence presented by the Israeli military that it had invested heavily in preparing for such operations.

# Philippine police file complaints against V-P Sara Duterte, aides

AP ■ MANILA

Philippine police officials on Wednesday filed criminal complaints against Vice President Sara Duterte and her security staff for allegedly assaulting and disobeying orders from authorities in a recent altercation in Congress. The criminal complaints filed by the Quezon City police were separate from any legal action may arise after she publicly threatened to have President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., his wife and the House of Representatives speaker assassinated if she were killed herself in an unspecified plot. She has not provided details of that plot. The Marcos administration's legal offensive against Duterte, her father and their allies is a critical juncture in a conflict that has seethed in the last two years between the two most powerful families in the Philippines. The Department of Justice said it was also looking into potentially seditious remarks by Marcos's successor and the

vice president's father, Rodrigo Duterte, who said in a news conference that the civilian government would only listen if the military would voice concerns about corruption and irregularities under the Marcos administration. "There is a fractured governance... It is only the military who can correct it," the former president told a news conference Monday night. He said he was not agitating the military to rise against Marcos but only reaffirming the real situation in the Philippines. Still, justice officials said an investigation into the former president's remarks would proceed. The criminal complaints for assaulting, disobeying and grave coercion against police authorities were filed against the vice president and her security and other aides before state prosecutors, a police statement said. Such crimes are punishable by a jail term and a fine. The complaints were set off by a chaotic squabble over the weekend in the House of

Representatives where the vice president's chief of staff, Zuleika Lopez, has been temporarily detained. Lopez has been accused by legislators of obstructing and not cooperating with a congressional inquiry into alleged misuse of confidential and intelligence funds by the offices of the vice president and education secretary when Sara Duterte headed it under the Marcos administration. At one point, authorities were ordered to transfer Lopez to a women's prison outside Congress, causing her to become agitated. The vice president and her staff intervened to oppose the order and Lopez was eventually moved to a government hospital, where she remains confined. "The rule of law is fundamental to our democratic system. No one, regardless of his position, should be above accountability," national police chief Gen. Rommel Francisco Marbil said of the criminal complaints against the vice president and her aides.

# Trump signs MoU with WH for next phase of transition

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with President Joe Biden's White House on the next phase of his transition so that the new administration and its team are ready from day one, the incoming chief of staff Susie Wiles has said. Unlike in the past, the transition team will not use government buildings or technology provided by the General Services Administration (GSA) and will operate as a self-sufficient organisation. It will also raise funds for the transition expenses, Wiles said on Tuesday. Trump will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, 2025. "After completing the selection process of his incoming Cabinet, President-elect Trump is entering the next phase of his administration's transition by executing a Memorandum of Understanding with

President Joe Biden's White House," Wiles said. "This engagement allows our intended Cabinet nominees to begin critical preparations, including the deployment of landing teams to every department and agency, and complete the orderly transition of power," she said. According to the MoU, the transition will not utilise taxpayers' funding for costs related to it, which is consistent with Trump's commitment to save taxpayers' hard-earned money. It will not use government buildings or technology provided by the GSA and will operate as a self-sufficient organisation. This organisational autonomy means a streamlined process that guarantees the Trump administration is ready from day one. The transition already has existing security and information protections built in, which means it will not require additional government and bureaucratic oversight, the MoU stated.

"The transition has an existing Ethics Plan for those involved, which will meet the requirements for personnel to seamlessly move into the Trump Administration. Pursuant to the Transition Enhancement Act, that Ethics Plan will be posted to the website of the General Services Administration website. "The Transition landing teams will quickly integrate directly into federal agencies and departments with access to documents and policy sharing. Per the agreement, the Transition will discontinue the landing team members to the Biden Administration," it added. "The agreement dictates that the Trump-Vance Transition will utilise private funding, again, providing cost savings to American taxpayers. Donors to the Transition will be disclosed to the public. Consistent with Transition policy already in place, the Transition will not accept foreign donations," the Trump team said.

# Malaysian court drops one of the graft cases against Najib Razak

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

A Malaysian court on Wednesday dropped charges against jailed former Prime Minister Najib Razak over criminal breach of trust linked to the multibillion-dollar looting of a state fund. Najib had already been convicted in his first graft case tied to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad state fund, or 1MDB, scandal and began serving time in 2022 after losing his final appeal in his first graft case. But he faces other graft trials including Wednesday's case in which he was jointly charged with ex-treasurer chief Irwan Serigar Abdullah with six counts of misappropriating 6.6 billion ringgit (\$1.5 billion) in public funds. The money was intended as 1MDB's settlement payment to Abu Dhabi's International Petroleum Investment Company. The Kuala Lumpur High Court discharged the pair after ruling

that procedural delays and prosecutors' failure to hand over key documents were unfair to the defence, said Najib's lawyer, Muhammad Farhan. A discharge doesn't mean an acquittal as prosecutors reserve the right to revive charges against them, he said. "The decision today was based on the non-disclosure of critical documents, six years after the initial charges were brought up, which are relevant to our client's defence preparation. Therefore the court correctly exercised its jurisdiction to discharge our client of the charges," Farhan said. Najib set up 1MDB shortly after taking power in 2009. Investigators allege more than \$4.5 billion was stolen from the fund and laundered by his associates to finance Hollywood films and extravagant purchases. The scandal upended Najib's government and he was defeated in the 2018 election.

# ISKCON Bangladesh urges Yunus-led govt to promote 'peaceful coexistence' for Hindus

PTI ■ DHAKA

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) has urged the Bangladesh authorities to promote "peaceful coexistence" for Hindus in the country as it "strongly" denounced the recent arrest of the prominent community leader Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari. Das, the spokesperson for Bangladesh Sammilita Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday as he was about to fly to Chattogram to join a rally. He was denied bail and sent to

jail by the Chattogram's Sixth Metropolitan Magistrate court in a sedition case on Tuesday. In a statement on Tuesday, ISKCON Bangladesh General Secretary Charu Chandra Das Brahmachari said, "We express our serious concern and strongly denounce the recent arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das... We also condemn the subsequent violence and attacks against Sanatanis in various regions of Bangladesh." "We urge the government authorities to promote peaceful coexistence for the Sanatani community," he said. Underlining that Bangladesh is "our birthplace and ancestral

home," the statement urged the interim government of Bangladesh led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus "to ensure justice for all and to allow every citizen to practice their religion freely in accordance with their beliefs and conscience." The statement said Das has been a vocal advocate for the protection of minority groups in Bangladesh and it is essential to uphold his right to free speech and to support his efforts to encourage others to defend this right. "Ensuring justice and fair treatment for him is crucial," it said, adding that Das and the

Sanatam community deserve justice as citizens of Bangladesh and any form of discrimination against them must not be tolerated. Das was also a member of the ISKCON, which recently expelled him. ISKCON Bangladesh demanded that the Bangladesh government must identify and hold accountable those responsible for the attacks on the Sanatani community; protect the civil rights of Das and other Hindu members; and implement immediate and effective measures to maintain peace and harmony among all communities in the country.

# Bill passed in Australia to ban young children from social media

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a bill that would ban children younger than 16 years old from social media, leaving it to the Senate to finalise the world-first law. The major parties backed the bill that would make platforms including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (USD 33 million) for systemic failures to prevent young children from holding accounts. The legislation was passed with 102 votes in favour to 13

against. If the bill becomes law this week, the platforms would have one year to work out how to implement the age restrictions before the penalties are enforced. Opposition lawmaker Dan Tehan told Parliament the government had agreed to accept amendments in the Senate that would bolster privacy protections. Platforms would not be allowed to compel users to provide government-issued identity documents including passports or driver's licenses. The platforms also could not demand digital identification through a government system.

"Will it be perfect? No. But is any law perfect? No, it's not. But if it helps, even if it helps in just the smallest of ways, it will make a huge difference to people's lives," Tehan told Parliament. Communications Minister Michelle Rowland said the Senate would debate the bill later Wednesday. The major parties' support all but guarantees the legislation will be passed by the Senate where no party holds a majority of seats. Lawmakers who were not aligned with either the government or the opposition were most critical of the legislation during debate on Tuesday and

Wednesday. Criticisms include that the legislation had been rushed through Parliament without adequate scrutiny, would not work, would create privacy risks for users of all ages and would take away parents' authority to decide what's best for their children. Critics also argue the ban would isolate children, deprive them of positive aspects of social media, drive children to the dark web, make children too young for social media reluctant to report harms they encountered and take away incentives for platforms to make online spaces safer.





# IT hiring expected to grow by 10-12 per cent in next six months: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

IT services hiring is expected to grow 10-12 per cent in the next six months following rapid evolution of technology which is reshaping industries and economies worldwide, a report said on Wednesday.

Emerging technologies such as Generative AI, Deep Tech, and Quantum Computing emerge are set to create over a million jobs by 2030, the report by business services provider Qness Corp said.

The report revealed that demand for talent across Global Capability Centres (GCCs) and Cybersecurity during the second quarter (July-September) sequentially surged across the country by 71 per cent and 58 per cent, respectively, compared to the previous quarter. This report is based on data from the first two-quarters of FY25 from Qness IT Staffing's operations that analyses the evolving aggregate tech hiring demand and related insights to give leaders a clear understanding of what the talent market looks like.

"India, with its burgeoning tech talent pool and innovative spirit, is at the forefront of this digital revolution. Therefore, IT services



hiring will grow 10-12 per cent in the next 6 months," Qness IT Staffing CEO Kapil Joshi said.

According to the IT Staffing Quarterly Digital Skills Report Q2FY25 report, 79 per cent of the aggregate demand emerged from the top five skill suites, including Development, ERP, Testing, Networking and Data Science. In addition to these functional skill suites, there was a rapid increase in specialized roles and skills related to

Java (30 per cent), cybersecurity (20 per cent), and DevOps (25 per cent) between the first quarter and second quarter of FY25, it said.

Meanwhile, the report also found that in the second quarter of FY25, technology talent demand saw a distinct trend across various IT Services firms leading by 37 per cent, followed by Hi-Tech (11 per cent), Consulting (11 per cent), Manufacturing (9 per cent) and BFSI (8 per cent) firms.

The report revealed that GCCs have emerged as the powerhouse of tech hiring in India during the second quarter of FY25, driven by a robust demand for skills in roles such as AI/ML, Analytics, Cybersecurity, Cloud, and DevOps, which have applications across various sectors.

When it comes to geographies, the report found that the tech landscape in the country is experiencing a boom, with Bengaluru emerging as the undisputed leader. A staggering 62 per cent of hiring requests flow through this region, followed by the West (14 per cent), North (8 per cent), and East (0.4 per cent), said the report.

After Bengaluru, the city-wise landscape in demand sharing is followed by Hyderabad (43.5 per cent) and Pune (10 per cent), it added.

Further, the report revealed that there has been a surge in talent demand across various cities due to the expansion of GCCs in India. These companies focus on hiring skilled professionals from fields like e engineering, IT, finance, and analytics, which has led to firms looking for hiring from the talent pools of tier II and III cities, it added.

# India has taken robust measures to regulate fintech industry: Finance ministry official

PTI ■ INDORE

Concrete steps have been taken to regulate the fintech industry in India as per the Financial Action Task Force's recommendations to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing, a central government official said on Wednesday.

India is among the few countries that are working on FATF recommendations to regulate the fintech industry, said Vivek Agrawal, additional secretary (department of revenue), ministry of finance, during the ongoing 41st plenary meeting of the Eurasian Group in Indore.

FATF leads global action to tackle money laundering, terrorist and proliferation financing.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has also issued separate guidelines to regulate payment aggregators and payment gateways, he said.

Agrawal is attending the five-day EAG meeting as the head of the India delegation. He is also the director of the financial intelligence unit (FIU) in India.

He said it is now mandatory for virtual asset service



providers (VASPs) in the country to register themselves with the FIU.

"The development of financial technology is crucial for the growth of digital payment systems, but especially in view of the threats of money laundering and terrorist financing, the development of this technology has its own challenges as misuse of technology can lead to criminals committing cybercrimes and financial frauds anonymously," he said.

The finance ministry official said India's fintech industry is currently leading the world. "We want regulation to be done in such a way that it does not hamper the growth

of the industry, enhances ease of doing business and the country remains a global hub of digital technology," he said.

Before briefing the media, Agrawal attended a workshop organised by EAG and Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG). Chairman EAG at the workshop on 'Innovation Finance', Yury Chikhanchin, and APG co-chair Mitsutoshi Kajikawa also attended.

According to officials, about 200 foreign and 60 Indian delegates are participating in the EAG meeting, which will go on till November 29. These include representatives from the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, he said.

# Chennai to see around 450 Global Capability Centres by 2030: CBRE



Chennai is estimated to have around 450 Global Capability Centres (GCCs) by 2030 as against 250 centres now because of supply of premium office space and availability of skilled talent, according to CBRE.

Real estate consultant CBRE on Wednesday released a report titled, 'Tamil Nadu: The Epicentre of Capability and Innovation Leadership', highlighting Chennai's rising prominence as a key destination for GCCs and its expanding commercial real estate landscape.

"Over the years, Chennai has solidified its position as a preferred hub for global corporates, which accounts for 11 per cent of India's current GCC talent. The city currently hosts 250+ GCC units, which is expected to reach around 450-460 units by 2030," CBRE said.

Chennai's robust infrastructure, proactive state government policies, and quality office development are aligned to meet the needs of global

corporates, it added.

Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO - India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE, said, "As the world embraces digital transformation, GCCs have emerged as strategic drivers of India's exponential growth."

Initially attracted by cost advantages, GCCs in India now leverage the country's deep pool of skilled talent and vibrant startup ecosystem, he added.

"Tamil Nadu presents a compelling proposition for businesses seeking to establish or expand their global operations. The state, with its attractive policy incentives, strong talent pool, robust corporate ecosystem, and abundant quality office space, has solidified its position as a preferred destination for these GCCs," Magazine said.

Chennai is India's fifth-largest office market, with 90+ million square feet of office stock as of September 2024. Total office stock in the city is expected to surpass 100 million square feet by 2026.

Commenting on the report, Angad Bedi, CMD of construction and realty firm BCD Group, said, "India's position as a technology outsourcing hub has been further elevated with the rise of the GCC ecosystem in the country as enterprises aim to tap into the wide talent pool, robust technology developed and its use case globally."

This proliferation of GCCs has been primarily led by Chennai's proactive policies attracting enterprises from across the world along with the availability of a world-class commercial real estate infrastructure, Bedi added.

According to CBRE, the city houses about 250 GCCs that employ 150,000+ professionals, contributing about 11 per cent of India's total GCC talent pool.

Strategic policies like the Tamil Nadu Startup and Innovation Policy 2023 and R&D Policy 2022 enhance its attractiveness, the consultant said.

Chennai is ranked third in GCC leasing activity in India after Bengaluru and Hyderabad during the period from January 2022-September 2024.

The city has witnessed GCC office absorption increasing from 1.4 million square feet in 2022 to 2.3 million square feet in the first nine months of 2024.

US firms accounted for 67 per cent of GCC setups between January 2022 and September 2024.

The consultant projected that GCCs would lease around 3-3.2 million sq ft of office space in 2025 in Chennai.

# Pocket FM losses narrow 21 per cent to ₹165 Crore in FY24, says on track to achieve profitability

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Audio entertainment platform Pocket FM narrowed global losses by 21 per cent to Rs 165 crore in FY24 and said it is inching "closer to profitability".

The company had posted Rs 208 crore losses in the previous financial year.

The company's global revenue came in at Rs 1,052 crore in FY24, registering a multifold jump from Rs 176 crore in FY23, the company said in a statement.

The company has a strong foothold in the US and India and has recently forayed into Europe and Latin America.

About 70 per cent of the Bengaluru-headquartered firm's revenue comes from

the US, about 20 per cent from India, and 10 per cent from the rest of the world.

"As Pocket FM inches closer to profitability and strengthens its global presence, its unwavering focus on innovation, disciplined growth, and operational efficiency continues to set new benchmarks in the entertainment industry. The company's vision of creating immersive, scalable, and profitable entertainment experiences remains on a clear upward trajectory," the statement said.

Pocket FM's microtransaction-led subscription revenue increased from Rs 160 crore in FY23 to Rs 935 crore in



FY24, it further said.

Pocket FM has a freemium and microtransaction model. In the microtransaction model, listeners can pay only for the episode/series to which they want to listen. The freemium model allows the consumer to explore and hear a few minutes of any series for free.

The company's advertising revenue grew from Rs 12.5

crore in FY23 to Rs 89.34 crore in FY24.

Offering more than 75,000 audio series, Pocket FM has a global community of over 200 million listeners.

"This growth reflects our relentless efforts to redefine the entertainment landscape. With a sharp focus on leveraging AI, we are not only enhancing operational efficiency but also creating smarter processes that optimise content delivery and monetisation. Our vision remains clear: to establish Pocket FM as a global entertainment platform that consistently pushes the boundaries of content experiences," Pocket FM CFO Anurag Sharma said.

# Airfares have moderated in 2024 relative to 2023, says Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has said airfares have moderated in 2024 compared to 2023 and notably, a decline in air ticket prices was observed in various routes during festival seasons.

Amid concerns in certain quarters that air ticket prices are ruling high, Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol told Rajya Sabha that airfares are not subject to regulation by the government and airlines have the flexibility to determine their airfares based on their operational needs while adhering to existing rules.

"The government generally refrains from regulating airfares to maintain market competitiveness, however, it remains vigilant, and the government intervenes to shift capacity from one sector to another to prevent exorbitant pricing to ensure passenger comfort and welfare," he said in a written reply on November 25.

Airfares are dynamic and is a function of demand and supply.

With continuous engagement with airlines & Online Ticketing Agents (OTAs) and keeping a watch on the movement of airfares by the government, Mohol said airfares have moderated in 2024 relative to 2023.

"The airlines have also been sensitised to ensure reasonability while fixing the airfares and to keep passengers' interest in mind," he added.

# Govt says e-Daakhil portal rolled out across India; to soon launch e-Jagriti

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday said the 'e-Daakhil portal' -- an inexpensive, speedy and hassle-free mechanism for filing consumer complaints -- has been rolled out successfully in all states and union territories.

The government is also working for launch of e-Jagriti, which will further streamline case filing, tracking, and management, ensuring a hassle-free experience for consumers and other stakeholders, it said.

In a statement, the consumer affairs ministry said with the recent launch of e-Daakhil portal in Ladakh, the online platform is now accessible to consumers pan-India.

The e-Daakhil, launched on September 7, 2020, is an innovative online platform



designed to streamline the consumer grievance redressal process, providing an efficient and convenient way for consumers to approach the relevant consumer forum, dispensing the need to travel and be physically present to file their grievances.

Currently, 2,81,024 users have registered

on the e-Daakhil portal, and 1,98,725 cases have been filed. Out of this, 38,453 cases have been disposed of.

"With its nationwide reach, it is set to revolutionize the consumer rights landscape in India," the ministry said.

Any consumer or advocate can sign up on the e-Daakhil platform with the required authentication by receiving an OTP on their registered mobile phone or an activation link on their registered e-mail address. They can then move on with filing a complaint.

Through the portal, aggrieved consumers can submit complaints to consumer commissions online, to pay the appropriate fees and track the progress of the case.

The government remains committed to continuously improving and expanding the platform to meet the evolving needs of consumers, it said.

# Icra revises down volume growth forecast for cement industry to 4-5 per cent for FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rating agency Icra has revised down its volume growth forecast for the cement industry to 4-5 per cent at 445-450 million tonne for the current fiscal on account of sluggish construction activity.

In July this year, Icra had forecast a year-on-year volume growth of 7-8 per cent, expecting a better pick-up in demand in the second half.

However, Icra has now revised its projection "on account of slower-than-expected ramp-up in construction activity across the housing and infrastructure sectors, post the General Elections," a statement said.

Besides, on a YoY basis, the operating profit margins declined by 375 basis points to 12 per cent in Q2 FY2025 and by 192 bps to 14 per cent in H1 FY2025 as prices remained under pressure due to muted demand and oversupply.



In the first half of FY25 all-India cement volumes witnessed a muted rise of 2 per cent YoY to 212 million tonne on account of the slowdown in construction activity in Q1 during the elections, followed by the ample monsoon rainfall in Q2.

"The likely improvement in farm cash flows, backed by healthy monsoons, an upbeat kharif output and elevated replenishment levels of reservoirs supporting the rabi

crop sowings, are expected to boost the rural consumption in H2, which should aid the cement demand for the rural housing segment," it said.

Moreover, sustained healthy demand for urban housing should support the pick-up in cement volumes from the housing segment. The infrastructure segment is also likely to witness greater traction in H2, supported by an increase in government spending on infrastructure projects.

"The government gross capex spend in H1 FY2025 remained subdued at Rs 4 lakh crore, against the revised Budget Estimate of Rs 11.1 lakh crore for the full year FY2025. The substantial headroom for the GoI's capital spending in H2 FY2025 to meet the FY2025 revised BE, is likely to provide a fillip to construction activity and aid in supporting the allied input sectors like cement," it said.

Besides volume, the cement industry is also facing a decline in actual realisation due to lower prices prevalent into the sector.

"The cement prices remained under pressure, declining by 10 per cent YoY to Rs 330 per bag in H1 FY2025 due to muted demand and oversupply in the market. While the lower sales realisations were partially offset by moderation in costs of coal and pet coke, which eased by 38 per cent and 13 per cent YoY in H1 FY2025, respectively," it said.

Icra estimates the cement industry's capacity addition to be at 70-75 million tonne during FY25-26, of which 33-37 million MTPA is expected to be clinker capacity and remaining grinding capacity.

"Around 33-35 million MT capacity is likely to be added in FY2025 (FY2024: 32 million MT), while 37-39 million MT addition is expected in FY2026," it said.

The eastern and southern regions are projected to lead the expansion during FY2025-FY2026 with a combined addition of 38-40 million MT capacity, equally split between the two regions.

Icra estimated overcapacity utilisation to remain moderate at 71 per cent in FY25 on an expanded base, improving from 70 per cent in FY24.

According to the Cement Manufacturers' Association (CMA), the apex body of large cement plants in India, India's installed cement capacity is 690 MT.

# India-Russia trade hits USD 66bn in 2024; target of USD 100bn by 2030 on track: Russian envoy

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A senior Russian diplomat on Wednesday said bilateral trade between the two countries has reached a record USD 66 billion in 2024, marking a fivefold increase over the past five years, with a 9 per cent rise in the first eight months of this year.

The envoy said Russia and India are on track to achieve the ambitious USD 100 billion trade target by 2030, bolstered by expanding collaborations and diversified trade opportunities.

"The recent dialogues between leaders of both countries on the possibilities of diversifying the trade basket and increasing the volume of investments in multiple sectors make the target of USD 100 billion by 2030 an achievable one," said Maxim V. Kozlov, Russian Consul General in Kolkata, at an interactive session with members of the Bharat Chamber of Commerce (BCC).

"India and Russia are more than strategic partners; we are



all-weather friends. Our bond is built on mutual trust and shared interests, making the growth of our economic ties both natural and enduring," Kozlov added.

Key sectors identified for enhanced cooperation include railways, pharmaceuticals, information technology, aviation, and cybersecurity.

Officials also highlighted emerging opportunities for Indian businesses in Russia, particularly after the withdrawal of Western brands following the Ukraine conflict.

BCC, in a statement, said Kozlov also emphasised the need to deepen collaboration in critical areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI),

robotics, urban development, and critical metals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel, which are essential for next-generation industries.

"The goal is to move beyond raw material trade and emerge as global leaders in technology-driven sectors," he added.

BCC senior vice-president Naresh Pachisia requested Kozlov to initiate the setting up of a trade desk at the Russian Federation in Kolkata, given the emerging trade and investment developments.

"This will play a pivotal role in facilitating business networks between Indian businesses and their Russian counterparts," he added.

# Gavaskar credits Kohli's stance adjustment for success in Perth

PTI ■ PERTH

Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar feels a subtle adjustment to his batting stance in the second innings of the Perth Test helped Virat Kohli neutralise the Australian attack and rediscover his vintage form.

Kohli arrived in Australia after a lean run of form across formats in recent months. His struggles against spin on turning tracks raised doubts about his spot in the team.

However, he silenced his detractors by scoring his 30th Test ton in the first Test at Perth. It was his first hundred after the 121 against the West Indies at Port of Spain in July 2023.

"His body was completely relaxed when he came into bat in the second innings. In the first innings, because of the fact that India had lost two wickets early, he would have also been under pressure," Gavaskar said on Star Sports. "In that second innings, you could sense apart from chang-

ing that stance, I think he also got his legs, which were maybe just a little bit wider at the start. Just a little bit, maybe I'm thinking too much, but that little thing might have given him that height he wanted. Well, in Australia, on the bouncer pitches, you need that edge.

"I liked that mid-wicket boundary that he hit off Hazlewood. That, to me, was not the easiest of shots. A straight drive is a little easier because your stance is like that, but just to open up a little bit and play that - that was all magic."

Having gotten out on 5 in the first innings, Kohli brought all his technical expertise into play while dealing with the vagaries of variable bounce in the second essay as Australian bowlers desperately tried the off-stump line, short ball tactic and even attacking the line of stump to get the veteran batter out.

Former Australian cricketer Matthew Hayden also commented on Kohli's stance



adjustments in the second innings, saying the move to be more upright on a pitch where variable bounce was present

worked for Kohli.

"It's a very good point because the reverse can be said also to someone touring

to India and having to lower their stance. I know I certainly did that. But being able to be a little more upright

means that your head position has to stay on top of the bounce so that it starts to work in your favour.

"I said right from the start that I actually liked his move, batting in more line with the ball. I thought that was a good strategy. I think he loves to play like that, and we saw some classic cases where he just eased the ball through mid-wicket. But you can't do that from outside off stump, so getting into the line, I thought, was important."

"The other little adjustment that you mentioned, being a little more upright, so he could stay on top of the bounce, was also really important. If you're getting closer to the ball like he was -- another thing, I think, was probably playing the ball later."

"When he's not in his best form, he goes quite hard, feeling for the ball. He wants to feel the ball on the bat, particularly on the front foot. But he just seemed to give himself a little more time and be a little softer."

Gavaskar compared Kohli's recent struggles to the time when tennis legends like Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal

and Novak Djokovic went without a title.

"I said in commentary that Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, and Rafa Nadal, they are title winners. If they lose in the semi-finals, people say, 'Oh, they're not in form.' Anybody else getting into the semi-finals, you would say, 'Oh, what a wonderful performance.'"

"Similarly, with Virat Kohli, because everybody is so used to him scoring so many hundreds quite regularly, when he doesn't score 100, even if he's getting 70-80 -- which a lot of guys will be very happy to get -- people say, 'Look, he's not scoring runs.' And that is the reason why there was that feeling. 'But then again, Indian fans, they're greedy fans. They're not going to be happy with their idol scoring only 60-70s. They want their icons, their idols, to score hundreds, and that is the reason there was this little talk about, 'Oh, he hasn't got a hundred since July 2023.' July 2023 is just about a year ago," he added.

## Syed Modi International: Sindhu, Lakshya storm into second round

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Top seeds PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen advanced to the second round of the women's and men's singles respectively at the Syed Modi International Super 300 badminton tournament after registering straight-game victories here on Wednesday.

Two-time Olympic medallist Sindhu defeated rising shuttler Anmol Kharb 21-17, 21-15, while Lakshya, 2021 world championships bronze medallist, powered past Malaysian qualifier Sholeh Aidil 21-12, 21-12 in another match.

Sindhu, who is returning to the tournament after a two-year hiatus, will face compatriot Ira Sharma, who triumphed over Deepshikha Singh 21-13, 21-19 in her opening match.

"I'm happy to be back here after two years. I couldn't play last year because of injury, but it feels great to be playing on home soil again," Sindhu said after her win.

"I was playing against Anmol for the first time, and she did well. We've played together in the Asian Team Championships before, so I was confident. It was my first match, and I made some mistakes, but overall I'm happy



with my performance." Lakshya will next face either Ravi or Israel's Daniil Dubovenko.

"It's always great to play in front of the home crowd. I've competed here in the past, but right now, I'm focusing on my next match. My goal is to do well in the BWF tournaments and at the World Championships," said Lakshya, the 2022 Commonwealth Games champion.

In the men's singles, third seed Kiran George, eighth seed Ayush Shetty, and Meiraba Luwang Maisnam also progressed to the second round.

In the women's singles, second seed Malvika Bansod,

fifth seed Anupama Upadhyaya, Isharani Baruah, Devika Sihag, Unnati Hooda, Tasnim Mir and Shriyanshi Valishetty all advanced to the next stage.

Malvika defeated Wiktorija Dabczynska 21-16, 21-7, while Anupama overcame Azerbaijan's Keisha Fatimah Azzahra 19-21, 22-20, 21-15. Hooda, meanwhile, beat Thailand's Thamonwan Nithiittikrai 21-12, 21-16.

In the men's singles, Kiran George triumphed over Alap Mishra 21-12, 23-21; Ayush Shetty outlasted Raghu Mariswamy 21-18, 15-21, 21-16; and Meiraba Luwang Maisnam defeated Thailand's Saran Jamsri 14-21, 21-19, 21-10.

## Cricket is religion in India but not roadblock for other sports: Coe

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

World Athletics boss Sebastian Coe is quite aware that cricket is nothing short of "religion" in India but he feels it shouldn't be viewed as a "roadblock" for other sports, which can challenge its dominance by producing trailblazers like javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra to capture the public imagination.

Coe, one of the candidates for next year's International Olympic Committee (IOC) presidential elections, has been in the country for the past two days, meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya among others to discuss the growth potential of Indian sports.

Expressing faith in the country's potential to become a powerhouse, the four-time Olympic medal-winning former middle distance runner said, "When you have an Indian athlete winning Olympic titles and world championships, then you are in good shape."

"When you have athletes of the calibre and high profile of Neeraj, then you can actually mount a very good challenge to other sports. And look, we know the national religion is cricket," he stated in a telephonic interview with PTI on Wednesday.

"It's really important that India have athletes that capture the



imagination of the public, ultimately the broadcasters. And Neeraj does both," added Coe, the 68-year-old Coe said.

"You have to live with what you have to live with. And you can't just sit there saying, well, India, the cricket or football or rugby or wherever these sports are really strong. You sort of give up, you don't."

"You have to be more innovative, more creative. The sporting landscape is very competitive. Cricket is a very dominant sport in India. I watch it all the time," said the long-time administrator, whose grandfather was an Indian (hotlier Sardari Lal Malhotra).

"Dialogue with PM a private conversation" India's Olympic performance at this year's Paris Games was underwhelming for a billion-strong country with six medals, none of them being gold.

track and field teams in the UK that we've had for many years," the 68-year-old Coe said.

"You have to live with what you have to live with. And you can't just sit there saying, well, India, the cricket or football or rugby or wherever these sports are really strong. You sort of give up, you don't."

"You have to be more innovative, more creative. The sporting landscape is very competitive. Cricket is a very dominant sport in India. I watch it all the time," said the long-time administrator, whose grandfather was an Indian (hotlier Sardari Lal Malhotra).

## Bayern Munich fans protest against PSG president Al-Khelaifi

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich fans protested against Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser Al-Khelaifi during the teams' Champions League match.

The supporters in Bayern's stadium's Südkurve held up several banners making clear their opposition to the Qatari businessman during the first half of Bayern's 1-0 win.

One banner showed Al-Khelaifi's face with a line over it, another accused him of being "plutocratic" with an expletive, and more banners read: "Minister, club owner, TV rights holder, UEFA ExCo member & ECA chairman all in one?"

The 51-year-old Al-Khelaifi is



unpopular among the Bayern fans for his influence on European soccer as chairman of the European Club Association, Qatar Sports Investments — the owner of PSG — and the Qatari state-owned beIN media group. He also joined UEFA's executive committee in 2019.

Al-Khelaifi has long drawn scrutiny for apparent conflicts of interest because of his various roles. The ECA has a big influence on shaping the Champions League's playing format and commercial strategy, while beIN is one of the competition's major broadcast partners.

In 2022, UEFA left Al-Khelaifi unpunished despite finding PSG guilty of misconduct for confrontations with match officials after losing in the Champions League. There were heated scenes involving Al-Khelaifi and then-PSG sporting director Leonardo after a defeat to Real Madrid.

UEFA sanctioned Leonardo but did not cite Al-Khelaifi in its disciplinary statement, nor did it say why.

Al-Khelaifi, a former tennis professional, is a longtime friend of Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, an International Olympic Committee member who is influential in global sports.

Bayern fans had long protest-

ed against their own club's sponsorship deals with Qatar, which was accused of human rights abuses before it hosted the 2022 World Cup. The fans eventually got their way last year when Bayern's long-running sponsorship deal with Qatar Airways was not renewed.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper reported at the time that the decision came from Qatar. Sheikh Tamim was reportedly unhappy with the Bayern fans' constant criticism and the club's failure to distance itself from their protests.

Kim Min-jae's first-half header was enough for Bayern's victory, its seventh straight without conceding across all competitions.

## I want to prolong England career: Stokes' reason for skipping IPL mega auction

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

England Test captain Ben Stokes said he opted out of the recent IPL mega auction to prolong his international career, and focus on some important assignments such as the Ashes.

The newly-framed IPL rule disallow a player to enter the mini auction if he was not registered for the mega auction. A total of 52 English players went under the hammer in the auction held at Jeddah, Saudi Arabia recently.

"There's no hiding behind the fact that I'm at the back-end of my career. It's about looking at what I've got ahead and making the decision that is right for



me to be able to prolong my career as long as possible," Stokes told BBC ahead of England's first Test against New Zealand, starting here from Thursday.

"There is just so much cricket. I want to be wearing this England shirt for as long as I can," he added.

In the past, Stokes has played

for Chennai Super Kings, Rajasthan Royals and Rising Pune Supergiant, for whom he was the most valuable player in 2017.

Stokes was bought by the erstwhile Pune outfit for Rs 14.5 crore ahead of IPL 2027. "It is about prioritising games and when I do play - obviously I'm in South Africa this year - so it's about looking at what I've got ahead," he said.

"Looking after my body and looking after myself as much as I can is key to that," said the 32-year-old.

The Durham man will head to South Africa for a series at the end of England's trip to New Zealand before starting preparations for next year's Ashes.

## Phillip Hughes remembered on 10th death anniversary as Abbott gets teary-eyed

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Sean Abbott was seen wiping away tears as family and friends paid tribute to the late Australian cricketer Phillip Hughes on Wednesday to mark the 10-year anniversary of his tragic death after being struck on the neck while batting.

Abbott bowled the fatal delivery that struck Hughes during a Sheffield Shield match between New South Wales and South Australia in 2014 at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

NSW players consoled Abbott as they stood for an emotional tribute, including observing a minute's silence, before the start of play on day four of their Sheffield Shield match against Tasmania at the SCG.

Hughes, who played 26 Tests,

25 ODIs and one T20I for Australia, lost his life three days before his 26th birthday.

Players in the Sheffield Shield have been wearing black armbands in matches since Saturday as a tribute to Hughes.

"Today marks the 10-year anniversary of the passing of our treasured son and brother, Phillip Joel Hughes," the family said in its message.

"Phillip was a loving, humorous and an infectious person to be around."

According to reports in local media, Abbott was consulted in advance about whether he would be comfortable with a match being scheduled on the anniversary of one of the most saddest moments in Australian sports.

The family further said, "He always aimed to make those



around him smile and enjoy the little things in life, where his beautiful smile would come to life. He shined bright even in the tough times, which is a testament to who he was as a person, and we loved everything about him.

Cricket Australia had planned in advance a series of initiatives to mark the 10th anniversary of Hughes' death including a tribute before the start of the second Test between India and Australia at the Adelaide Oval scheduled from December 6-10.

"Phillip, the small-town country boy, became an Australian Test, One-Day and Twenty-20 cricketer, where he

played on the toughest pitches around the globe, alongside the toughest of cricketers on the world stage, but never forgot where he came from and who helped along the way," the family said in the message.

"He was a unique individual that took risky and adventurous strides to conquer the dreams he set for himself to become test baggy green number 408.

"He played cricket for all the right reasons and had the ability to take it all in his stride. He loved being a part of a team and representing Australia for the game he loved so deeply."

Cricket Australia, which has produced a special documentary on him, will broadcast it ahead of the second Test between India and Australia, as part of a two-

week commemorative programme. Batting on 63, Hughes collapsed before receiving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and was subsequently taken to Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital, where he underwent surgery and was placed in an induced coma.

# Lewandowski joins Ronaldo and Messi in Champions League 100-goal club

AP ■ ROME

Robert Lewandowski joined Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi as the only players in Champions League history with 100 or more goals. But Erling Haaland is on a faster pace than anyone by boosting his total to 46 goals at age 24 on Tuesday. Still, Haaland's brace wasn't enough for Manchester City in a 3-3 draw with Feyenoord that extended the Premier League champion's winless streak to six matches. Lewandowski's early penalty kick started Barcelona off to a 3-0 win over previously unbeaten Brest to move into second place in the new single-league format. The Poland striker added goal No. 101 in second-half stoppage time. Ronaldo leads the all-time scoring list with 140 goals and Messi is next with 129. But neither Ronaldo nor Messi play in the Champions League anymore following moves to Saudi Arabia and the United States, respectively. "It's a nice number,"

Lewandowski said. "In the past I didn't think I could score more than 100 goals in the Champions League. I'm in good company alongside Cristiano and Messi."

The 36-year-old Lewandowski required 125 matches to reach the century mark, two more than Messi (123) and 12 fewer than Ronaldo (137). Barcelona also got a second-half score from Dani Olmo. The top eight finishers in the standings advance directly to the round of 16 in March. Teams ranked ninth to 24th go into a knockout playoffs round in February, while the bottom 12 teams are eliminated.

Haaland converted a first-half penalty to eclipse Messi as the youngest player to reach 45 goals and then scored City's third after the break to raise his total to 46 goals in 44 games. Ilkay Gundogan had City's second.

But then Feyenoord struck back with goals from Anis



Hadj Moussa, Santiago Gimenez and David Hancko. Inter Milan beat Leipzig 1-0 with an own goal to move atop the standings with 13 points, one more than

Barcelona and Liverpool, which faces Real Madrid on Wednesday. The Serie A champion is the only club that hasn't conceded a goal. Bayern Munich beat Paris

Saint-Germain 1-0 — the same score from the 2020 final between the two teams. PSG ended with 10 men and remained in the elimination zone. The French powerhouse

has struggled in Europe after Kylian Mbappe's move to Real Madrid. Kim Min-jae's first-half header was enough for Bayern, especially after

Ousmane Dembelé was sent off in the 56th with his second yellow.

Atalanta moved within two points of the lead with a 6-1 win at Young Boys. Charles De Ketelaere scored two and assisted on three other goals for Atalanta.

Also, Arsenal kept red-hot striker Viktor Gyokeres quiet in a 5-1 win over Sporting Lisbon; and Germany star Florian Wirtz scored two goals and was involved in two more as Bayer Leverkusen boosted its chances of finishing in the top eight with a 5-0 rout of Salzburg.

AC Milan followed up its win at Real Madrid with a 3-2 victory at last-place Slovan Bratislava in an early match.

Christian Pulisic put the seven-time champion ahead midway through the first half by finishing off a counterattack.

Then Rafael Leao restored the Rossoneri's advantage after Tigran Barseghyan had equalized for Bratislava and Tammy Abraham quickly

added another. Nino Marcelli scored with a long-range strike in the 88th for Bratislava, which ended with 10 men.

Bratislava has lost all five of its matches. Argentina World Cup winner Julian Alvarez scored twice and Atletico Madrid routed Sparta Prague 6-0 in the other early game.

Alvarez scored with a free kick 15 minutes in and Marcos Llorente added a long-range strike before the break.

Alvarez finished off a counterattack early in the second half after being set up by substitute Antoine Griezmann, who then marked his 100th Champions League game by getting on the scoresheet himself.

Angel Correa added a late brace for Atletico, which earned its biggest away win in Europe.

Atletico beat Paris Saint-Germain in the previous round and extended its winning streak across all competitions to six matches.

## Aus selectors reject call to include out-of-form batters in PM's XI

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian selectors have decided against sending any out-of-form national team batters to play for the Prime Minister's XI against India in Canberra, following the hammering in the Perth Test.

Hosts Australia were handed a 295-run bashing by India in the series opener of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy earlier this week and following the disappointing performance, the pressure is intensifying on the top order ahead of the second Test against India in Adelaide on December 6.

The likes of Marnus Labuschagne (2, 3) and Steve Smith (0, 17) struggled against India and many, including former captain Maichael Clarke, feel the duo, along with reserve batter Josh Inglis, could benefit from the two-day pink-ball warm-up game.

However, the Australian think tank has denied thinking on those lines.

"This was partly because time at home was considered important for the players, and also because the Australian camp do not want to give the Indian brains trust another look at any of their Test batters before the five-match series resumes,"



according to a report in the 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

Head coach Andrew McDonald has also insisted that sending any player for the match in Canberra hasn't "crossed their minds".

"No, that hasn't crossed our minds. We feel that with the long summer ahead, the prep we've got in place — albeit we've extended that by a day in Adelaide — we'll be well prepared, as we were leading into the first Test," McDonald said.

"No, we were thinking about Test one. You always look to get a positive start to the summer — it's not like you're focusing on Test match five in terms of where you want to be then. Banking wins is critical, and we've got our work cut out as to how we turn that around."

"Match one was our primary focus, and you saw that in the way that we prepared players. We gave up on some international games for certain players, we went through

Shield, so we felt the preparation this summer was probably more extensive than previous summers."

"We were comfortable, and the preparation is not an excuse for the performance." The PM's XI usually comprises youngsters. The two-day pink-ball fixture will feature the likes of batters Sam Konstas and Matt Renshaw and pacer Scott Boland.

"The PM's XI match is a great opportunity for up-and-coming players to play alongside

some older heads against a super-strong Indian side," Albanese said.

"I'm confident Jack Edwards' PM's XI team will show how to best play these incredibly impressive Indian bowlers, and I'm equally confident that Pat Cummins' Australian team will turn things around in Adelaide," he added.

Inglis and Labuschagne are set to join the team in Adelaide when they reconvene on Monday, but it's likely that the latter will keep his place in the top six, thanks to his strong track record in day night Tests.

"The key for us is getting back to the way we want to play and the way we know that we can play. We're not going to sit there and say, 'We lost by X amount of runs, what does that mean for the next Test match?'" McDonald said. "It's about how we want to play, the plans we want to put in place, the execution in and around that, and the personnel to do that. We've got a bit of work to do in terms of coming out of this game, and we'll work through that over the next week."

"I think the gap has come at a good stage — it gives us a bit of space. The boys will go home, get into a bit of work back home, and we'll reconvene next Monday," he added.

## West Indies end 2-year losing streak at home with 201-run win over Bangladesh

AP ■ NORTH SOUND (ANTIGUA)

Alzarri Joseph took two wickets in the first session on the fifth day as West Indies wrapped up a 201-run win over Bangladesh in Antigua in the first match of the two-Test series.

Bangladesh lasted less than seven overs on Tuesday as the West Indies sealed their first home Test win in over two years. Joseph (2-32) dismissed Hasan Mahmud (0), before ending Jaker Ali's stand on 31.

That left Bangladesh on 129-9, and Joseph then sent a fierce bouncer into the shoulder of Shoriful Islam. Shoriful attempted to continue, but lasted just eight balls before he was forced to retire hurt, ensuring Bangladesh's innings came to an end and giving the home side victory.

It was the first time the West Indies had won a test at home since they beat Bangladesh in June 2022, ending a four-match winless streak. The West Indies scored 450-9 declared in their first innings and 152 in the second. Bangladesh had 269-9 declared



in its first innings and finished with 132.

Justin Greaves was named player of the match for his test-defining 115 not out, his maiden test century. His innings helped the Caribbean team recover from 253 for six in the first innings.

"Helping the team succeed and winning a test match is something I take pride in," Greaves said.

"I'm happy with my performance, but winning the match

means even more to me." West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite said Greaves' rescue mission changed the course of the contest.

"I think the way we batted in the first innings to post 450 runs was brilliant, especially considering day one in Antigua typically favours fast bowlers," he said.

"Our approach, with key half-centuries and Justin's century, put us in a position to dominate the test match."

## Beating top players reinforces belief that we can be world No. 1: Treesa

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Buoyed by the World Tour Finals qualification, Indian women's doubles player Treesa Jolly now dreams of bagging a major title, and said victories over top players have reinforced her belief of achieving the world No. 1 ranking along with Gayatri Gopichand.

Treesa and Gayatri, ranked 16th in the world, are the only Indians set to compete in the prestigious event in China next month.

"One of our dreams is to win the Super 500, 750 BWF World Tour events. We've been waiting for that title for a long time, and I believe it will happen," Treesa told PTI.

In 2022 and 2023, Treesa and Gayatri reached the semifinals of the All England Championships, a Super 1000 event, and they also made it to the semifinals of the Singapore Open Super 750 this year.

"We're taking it one step at a time. Right now, our focus is on the Syed Modi

tournament. After that, we'll shift our focus to the World Tour Finals," said Treesa.

The Indians were runners-up in the Syed Modi tournament in 2022, and in the same year they also clinched the Odisha Open.

"Ultimately, our goal is to improve our ranking and move into the top 10, or even the top 5. Currently, we're ranked 16th, but the priority is to perform well in every match and every tournament."

The Commonwealth Games bronze medalists have delivered some big wins, including a crucial victory over the 2022 All England champions Nami Matsuyama and Chiharu Shida of Japan in the semifinals of the Badminton Asia Team Championships, helping India grab the title.

"Whenever we lose a match, we analyse what went wrong, plan our sessions carefully, and stay focused on the upcoming match. We always give 100% effort," Treesa explained.

"Playing against top-ranked players



helps us understand how to approach those kinds of matches. We learn a lot, and I truly believe there's a lot to gain from those experiences."

"This year, we managed to beat players ranked No. 2 and No. 6 in the world, which has been a huge confidence booster. Beating top-ranked players reinforces our belief that we can reach the top, even No. 1, with right practice and dedication. Every time we win against such players, our confidence grows stronger."

The pair, who started playing together after the Covid-19 pandemic, credits their back-to-back semifinal finishes for building self-belief. "We just paired up

and started playing without overthinking it. Gradually, we started getting results, and before we knew it, we were at the All England," said Treesa, who hails from Cherupuzha in Kerala.

"That first All England was incredible. We were so excited—it was surreal to play in a tournament we had only seen on TV. We didn't focus on the result, just played our game, and somehow, we made it to the semifinals."

"By the second All England, we were better prepared. Reaching the semifinals again showed us how close we were to the finals. Those performances boosted our confidence and made us realise that we can do this," she added.

Reflecting on their journey, Treesa emphasized the importance of remaining in the arc of improvement.

"We've improved a lot, but there's still work to do. Every aspect of our game needs attention—whether it's the backcourt or other areas. We need to strengthen both our strong points and address our weak spots," she said.

## Sable must go for high-altitude training, can train with me if he wants: Ezekiel Kemboi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

One of the greatest steeplechase runners of all time, Ezekiel Kemboi, has invited Avinash Sable for sessions with him at his base and advised the Indian star to undergo high-altitude training in places such as Kenya and Ethiopia to build endurance.

Kemboi has two Olympic medals and four World Championship titles under his belt.

Sable finished 11th in the Men's 3000m steeplechase final of the Paris Olympics. "I think the Indian guy Sable, the steeplechaser, the boy is still young. He still has a lot of time.



What I want him to do is to have some motivation for himself. To have a vision, to have a target. To target what comes in a year, like world championship, Olympics," Kemboi said.

"I also want to request if it could be possible for him to go to Africa... Kenya or in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for some intense training which will

focus on building up his endurance so that he gets more power while running." Kemboi told PTI Videos in an exclusive interview on the sidelines of Ekamra Sports Literature festival here.

The legendary athlete is optimistic about Sable's future but emphasised that the Indian should focus on strategic training.

"Just go for high-altitude training... Because we have the best altitude for training in the regions of Kenya and Ethiopia for his body system to adapt to endurance. Because speed is just something easy to achieve, what matters most in athletics is endurance," he said.

He also requested Sable and other athletes to come to Kenya and train under him.

"My request to the Indian athletes, they are welcome in Kenya anytime especially the steeplechase guy Sable (Avinash), he can come to Kenya. I will offer him my service for free, free accommodation, and good training. I am always available for anyone who wants my assistance," said Kemboi. He attributed Kenya and Ethiopia's dominance in long-distance and middle-distance running to their unique climatic conditions and said the conditions in India are not best suited for preparing for these events.

**DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL**  
Government of India, Ministry of Finance, Department of Finance Services, (Banking Division)  
797-II, Shanti Kunj, South Civil Lines, Jabalpur 482001 (M.P.)  
**Case No.:RC 471/2018 in O.A. No.956/2017**  
**CANARA BANK VS M/S CHITRAKOT GAS AGENCY**  
**E-AUCTION NO. 307/2024**

Under mentioned properties will be sold by on line e-auction through website <http://www.bankeauctions.com> for recovery of a sum of **Rs.23,55,050.00 (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Fifty Five Thousand Fifty only)** payable by you/him in respect of Recovery Certificate in O.A. No. 956/2017 issued by the Presiding Officer, Debts Recovery Tribunal, Jabalpur with interest at 12.00% p.a. with simple interest from 31-10-2017 and costs payable as per recovery Certificate till realization.

**Date and Time of E-auction: 30-12-2024 Between 12.00 Hours and 13.00 hours.**  
**SPECIFICATION OF THE PROPERTIES PUT FOR SALE**

Residential property on House No. 15, at part of Khasra No. 433/3, P.H. No. 113, Maharashtra Valmiki Ward No. 28, Avanti Vihar, Mouza- Telibandha, Near Aarang Road, Tehsil and District- Raipur (C.G.) area admeasuring 1053 sq.ft., property in the name of **Sanjay Kumar s/o Shri Durga Prasad**  
**Upset Price : Rs. 40,00,000.00 (Rupees Forty Lakhs only)**

**CONDITIONS OF SALE**

1. Intending bidders must hold a valid digital signature certificate. For details contact M/s. C-1 India Pvt. Ltd., website: <https://www.bankeauctions.com>; Helpline No. 0124-4302020/21/22/23/24, for help a bidder in e-auction contact to Mr. Mithalesh Kumar on Mob. No. 7080804466, E-mail id: [mpcg@c1india.com](mailto:mpcg@c1india.com) or E-Mail id: [support@bankeauctions.com](mailto:support@bankeauctions.com)  
2. Intending bidders are advised to go through website: <https://www.bankeauctions.com> for auction bid form and details, terms and conditions of sale before submitting their bids.  
3. Bids should be submitted only online in the prescribed form along with a copy of identity document as an attachment to the bid form (refer detailed terms and conditions). Bidder should satisfy them self with regard to correctness, measurement, encumbrances etc by their own sources (Govt. Office) also later on DRT will not be responsible for this. 4. 10% of the upset price i.e. EMD/Bid price **Rs.4,00,000.00 (Rupees Four Lakhs only)** must be remitted towards EMD through RTGS/NEFT/Money Transfer to the credit of Account No. 5692799461 in the name of Recovery Officer, E-auction account, DRT Jabalpur with **CENTRAL BANK OF INDIA, DHOIGHAT BRANCH, JABALPUR. (IFSC Code:CBIN0281618)** and the remittance must be clearly mentioned in the bid form.. 5. Bids should be submitted on or before 17.00 Hours on 27-12-2024 online. 6. A copy of the bid form along with its enclosure submitted online should be sent to Recovery Officer, DRT, Jabalpur, 797-II ShantiKunj, South Civil Lines, Jabalpur so as to reach at the earliest. 7. Online bidding will commence from the highest bid quoted among the bids and the minimum increase for each bid will be **Rs.40,000.00 (Rupees Forty Thousand only)**. In case of bid received before closure of Auction window, there shall be an automatic extension of 5 minutes in Auction time by the system. 8. The refund of EMD of the unsuccessful bidders will be remitted to the same account from which the payment has been made and no inquiry in this regard will be entertained. After deposit of EMD by intending bidder they cannot withdraw the EMD amount until they are declared as "Unsuccessful bidder" otherwise the amount will be forfeited. 9. In the case of immovable property listed in the schedule below, the successful bidder shall remit 25% of the bid amount (less EMD) on the next day on declaration, if the sale is knocked down in his/her favour, through RTGS/NEFT/Money Transfer to the Account No. 5692799461 mentioned in SL. No. 4 and in default of such deposit, the property shall forthwith be put up again and resold and amount deposited as EMD will be forfeited. 10. The successful bidder shall remit balance 75% of the sale amount along with percentage of 1% of sale amount plus Rs.10/- for each property separately within 15 days of auction, to the Account No. 5692799461 mentioned at SL. No. 4 through RTGS/NEFT/Money Transfer, exclusive of such day, or if the 15th day be a Sunday or other holiday, then on the first office working day after 15th day. In default of payment within the period mentioned above, the property shall be resold after the issue of a fresh proclamation of sale. The deposit will be forfeited to the Government and the defaulting purchaser shall forfeit all claims to the property or to any part of the sum for which it may subsequently be sold. 11. Property will be sold "As is Where is and No Complaint basis". 12. The properties can be inspected on 23-12-2024 between 12.00 hours and 16.00 hours. 13. Properties will not be sold below the upset price. 14. Recovery Officer have the absolute right to accept or reject the bid or postpone/cancel the sale without assigning any reason. 15. Intending bidders are advised to peruse copies of the title deed available with the **Shri Ranjan Kumar Pani, Chief Manager, Mob. No. 9140476074**, and also check the identity and correctness of the property details and encumbrances etc from their own sources also. DRT will not be responsible for correctness etc. 16. Details regarding e-Auction shall be obtained from M/s. C-1 India Pvt. Ltd., website: <https://www.bankeauctions.com>; Helpline No. 0124-4302020/21/22/23/24, for help a bidder in e-auction contact to Mr. Mithalesh Kumar on Mob. No. 7080804466; E-mail id: [mpcg@c1india.com](mailto:mpcg@c1india.com) or E-Mail id: [support@www.bankeauctions.com](mailto:support@www.bankeauctions.com)  
17. Further property details if any required shall be obtained from **Shri Ranjan Kumar Pani, Chief Manager, Mob. No. 9140476074**. 18. The bidders may participate in the e-auction by quoting / bidding from their own offices / places of their choice. Internet connectivity shall have to be ensured by each bidder himself. DRT/ Bank / Service Provider shall not be held responsible for the internet connectivity, network problems, system crash down, Power failure etc.  
**Place: Jabalpur**  
**Date: 18-11-2024**

**Vaatsalya Kumar**  
Recovery Officer