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WORLD 8
NEGOTIATORS GET CLOSER TO AGREEING ON PLASTIC POLLUTION TREATY



FILE PHOTO: PTI

Suspense + emotion = Maha potboiler

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

When everything appeared to be hunky-dory in the run-up to the formation of a new government in Maharashtra, things suddenly turned topsy-turvy in the state capital on Friday as Shiv Sena leader and caretaker Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, on his return from New Delhi, headed straight to his native place in Satara district, prompting the Bharatiya Janata Party-led MahaYuti to cancel a crucial meeting of its three leaders called to decide on the contours of the new government. On a day when the political situation became fluid resulting in the unexplained delay in the government formation in the state, the ruling BJP, which heads the MahaYuti that scored a landslide victory in the just-concluded Maharashtra Assembly, found itself in a limbo not knowing how to deal with Shinde and also with the emerging scenario within the party over the chief ministerial choice. Shinde, who had sprung a

nasty surprise on the then Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) by splitting the Shiv Sena and teaming up with the BJP to form a new government in the State in June 2022, set the cat among the pigeons by heading to his native village amid the efforts by the MahaYuti to form a new government in the State. Though it was not officially known as to what transpired at the joint meeting of the MahaYuti leaders, Fadnavis of the BJP, Shinde of the Shiv Sena (ES) and Ajit Pawar of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-AP) that Union Home Minister Amit Shah had convened at his New Delhi residence to formalise details of the government formation in the state, Mumbai experienced political tremors sparking speculations of all kind. While there was no official word as to why Shinde cancelled all his appointments after his return from the National Capital and left for his native village Dare in Satara district in western Maharashtra, it was also confirmed that he would take

up the post of deputy chief minister's in the new government. However, informed sources within the BJP said that Shinde was not averse to accepting the DCM's post provided the BJP gave him the all-important State Home Ministry, a portfolio that Fadnavis held in the previous MahaYuti government. Knowing Shinde's 'nuisance' value, the BJP is not ready to give the Home portfolio to the Shiv Sena (ES) president. "Maybe, the reason behind Shinde's sudden departure to his native place is to express his link over the denial of Home and a few other crucial portfolios in the State Cabinet," a senior Shinde Sena leader said. The swearing-ceremony of the MahaYuti government, which in the normal course was to take on December 2 (Monday) is understood to have been postponed to December 5, because of the sudden turbulence within the MahaYuti - caused by Shinde's sulker over denial of the Chief Minister's post and leadership issues that have surfaced within the BJP.

Meanwhile, the delay in the election of BJP's Legislature Party (BJPLP) leader has surprised many within the State political circles. In the normal course, Devendra Fadnavis, who was all along touted as the front-runner for the chief minister's post, should have been elected as the BJPLP leader by now. Though six days have passed since it led the MahaYuti to a historic victory in the polls, the BJPLP meeting has not taken place yet. Sources in the BJP attributed the delay to the holding of BJPLP meeting to the delay in the arrival of party's central observers in Mumbai. They said that the observers were arriving in Mumbai on Sunday. The delay has sparked speculation in the State political circles whether the JP Nadda-led party would spring a surprise like the one it did recently in Madhya Pradesh where it anointed Mohan Yadav, a leader from the Yadav OBC community, as the chief minister of that state in place of Shivraj Chauhan, more than two weeks after the Assembly poll outcome there. **Continued on page 2**

Judicial Commission to probe Sambhal violence

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

In a swift response to the recent violence in Sambhal, the Uttar Pradesh government has constituted a three-member judicial commission to investigate the incident. The decision was made on Thursday night, hours before the issue came up for in the Supreme Court. The commission will be chaired by retired High Court Judge DK Arora, with retired IAS officer Amit Mohan and retired IPS officer Arvind Kumar Jain serving as members. The team has been tasked with examining whether the violence was premeditated or a spontaneous occurrence. The inquiry will also delve into the role of individuals or groups suspected of instigating the unrest. In addition, the commission will scrutinise the actions taken by the police and local administration during and after the incident. The judicial panel has been directed to submit its findings within two months from the date of the notification, and will seek to uncover the reasons behind the violence. Should an extension to this period be required, it will need approval from the state government. Alongside identifying the causes of the violence, the commission will provide recommendations to prevent such incidents from recurring in the future. In a notification issued on November 28, the Governor highlighted the importance of a thorough and transparent investigation into the matter. This will ensure the public's trust in the judicial process and serve the greater interest of justice. **Continued on page 2**



A security official stands guard at Sambhal PTI

Delhi school gets hoax bomb threat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Panic gripped students and parents of a private school in Delhi's Rohini, a day after a low intensity blast occurred in an area located within one kilometre of the school, as it received a bomb threat via email on Friday morning. While the threat later turned out to be a hoax after a search was initiated on the school campus, the psychological impact on the public was visible as the area has been gripped in bomb blasts for over a month. Following the threat in Venkateshwar Global School in Rohini, school authorities sprung into action while informing the parents for early dispersal of the students and requested them to pick up their wards by 11 am. While some were sent in school buses, parents of the others rushed to pick their children, who waited anxiously in a designated area. A mother, Rati Awasthi, whose 12-year-old daughter studies in class VII, expressed her concerns regarding the safety of her children in light of the recent blasts in the city. "We are deeply concerned about the current situation in the city. How can we feel confident about our children's safety?" she questioned, adding that just a day before, a bomb blast occurred in Prashant Vihar, barely 1 kilometre away from the school, and today, the school itself has received a bomb threat. **Continued on page 2**

SC halts proceedings in Jama Masjid case, Chandausi survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed a Sambhal trial court to halt proceedings in the case over the Mughal-era Shahi Jama Masjid and its survey at Chandausi and asked the petitioner Masjid committee to approach Allahabad High Court. The Bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar emphasised the importance of maintaining peace in the Sambhal district and instructed that the report prepared by the court commissioner following the mosque survey be sealed and not opened until further orders, while directing the Uttar Pradesh Government to maintain peace and harmony in the violence-hit town. The Bench further directed the petition filed by the Shahi Jama Masjid Committee against the trial court's survey order be listed before the Allahabad High

Court within three working days. "We feel that the petitioner (mosque committee) must challenge the order dated November 19, 2024 in an appropriate forum. In the meantime, peace and harmony must be maintained. The Additional Solicitor General (KM Natraj appearing for the State Government) assures the same. We also observe that in case any revision petition /miscellaneous petition is preferred, the same would be listed within a period of three working days," the CJ wrote in the order. The order noted that the matter was fixed before the trial court on January 8, 2025 and said, "We hope and trust the trial court will not proceed with the matter till the matter is listed before the High Court. We clarify we have not expressed any opinion on the merits of the matter. We are not disposing of the present special leave petition. Re-list (it) in the week commencing January 6." **Continued on page 2**



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Delhi a "gangster capital", says Arvind Kejriwal

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Setting the tone for the upcoming high-octane Delhi Assembly polls, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Central government during an Assembly session. He called the city a "gangster capital", blaming the "deteriorating law and order situation". The first day of the session ended with AAP supremo slamming Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the increasing instances of extortion related firing at businessmen in the capital. Kejriwal expressed grave concern over the safety of Delhiites. "What is Amit Shah doing? Shootouts are happening openly on a daily basis. It feels like Delhi is run by gangs," he said while speaking during a discussion on the "rising crime rates and the law and order situation". Earlier, Speaker Ram Niwas Goel marshaled out Leader of Opposition Vijender Gupta who launched an offensive against Kejriwal during the discussion. The remaining BJP MLAs followed Gupta and walked out of the House. "Business people live in fear of extortion calls, followed by violent attacks on their shops or showrooms," he said, while reading out the various instances of such firing happening across various areas of Delhi. Kejriwal also questioned the activities of notorious gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, currently lodged in Sabarmati jail in Delhi, who is allegedly operating extortion rackets in Delhi and beyond. **Continued on page 2**

Tough decisions will have to be taken, Kharge tells CWC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jolted by the recent Assembly poll outcomes for the party, Congress leaders on Friday huddled up on its electoral defeats during which party chief Mallikarjun Kharge asserted that "tough decisions" will have to be taken to strengthen the organisation from the grassroots, accountability has to be fixed, and urged leaders to remain united and not speak publicly against each other. In his address at the Congress Working Committee meeting at the AICC headquarters, Kharge said he believes that the EVMs have made the electoral process "suspect" and stressed that it is the constitutional responsibility of the Election Commission to ensure free and fair elections in the country. Kharge said that due to the Congress' repeated defeats, "fascist forces" are making their roots deeper. "One by one they are also taking over the institutions of the state," he added. The meeting was chaired by Kharge and attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi and AICC general secretaries Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh, among others. While the Maha Vikas Aghadi, of which the Congress is a part, was



LoP in the Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with party President Mallikarjun Kharge and party leaders P Chidambaram, K C Venugopal, Ajay Maken and others during the Congress Working Committee meeting, at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi PTI

decimated in the polls in Maharashtra, the party's alliance led by the JMM scored a victory in Jharkhand. In Haryana, the Congress had suffered a shock defeat at the hands of the BJP. Kharge also hit out at internal bickering in the party, asserting that the lack of unity and statements against own party leaders harms the party a lot. "Unless we fight elections unitedly and stop making statements against each other, how will we be able to defeat our opponents politically?" the Congress president said. He also called for removing shortcomings in the party by learning lessons from the election results and said the party would have to evolve a strategy to effectively counter the "propaganda and misinformation" by its rivals. "Therefore, it is important that we strictly follow discipline. We have to remain

united under all circumstances. The party also has the weapon of disciplining. But we do not want to put our workers in any bondage. Therefore, everyone needs to think that a victory of the Congress party is our victory and a defeat is our defeat. Our strength lies in the strength of the party," the Congress president said while urging workers not to get dejected with poll results. He said the party will have to effect changes from the grassroots level to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) to strengthen the party. The AICC is the central decision-making Assembly of the party. Speaking on the Maharashtra and Haryana polls, Kharge said the Assembly poll results after a good outcome in Lok Sabha elections jolted the party. He said some "tough decisions" will have to be taken due to the "below expectation"

performance in state elections. Riding on its performance in the Lok Sabha polls, the Congress went into Assembly polls with new enthusiasm but the election results were not as per the party's expectations, the Congress chief said. "INDIA parties formed the government in 2 out of 4 states. But our performance was below expectations. This is a challenge for us in terms of the future," he said. "We need to immediately learn from the election results and correct all our weaknesses and shortcomings at the organisational level. These results are a message for us," he said. He noted that the mood was in the Congress' favour during the elections but pointed out that just the atmosphere being in its favour does not guarantee victory. **Continued on page 2**

Delhi... it is time to count your trees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

To check felling of trees in the National Capital, the Supreme Court (SC) on Friday highlighted the need for a census of trees and said it wanted to create an authority to supervise the work carried out by the tree officer. The Supreme Court also mulled conducting a tree census in 10,400 square-kilometre area of the Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ) in Uttar Pradesh and developing a mechanism to keep a vigil on illegal tree felling. A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih said the issue over the strict implementation of the provisions of the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994, required immediate attention. "Apart from tree census, that order we are going to pass, we also want to create an authority. That authority will verify whether the tree officer has done a proper job. Somebody has to supervise the permission granted," the Bench said. The Bench was hearing an application seeking to restrain the Delhi government from allowing felling of trees without the supreme court's permission. The first tree census in Delhi was conducted in December 2023. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) identified 2.50 lakh trees in 12 zones. The provisions of the 1994 Act, which provide for



preservation of trees in the NCT of Delhi, deals with the establishment and duties of the tree authority and appointment of a tree officer. During the hearing, the Bench asked the lawyers appearing in the matter to give suggestions on the basis of which the authority should be constituted. It observed that not only individual experts were required, but an institution had to be involved in this process also. "We always believe that in environment matters, harsh orders are warranted," the Bench noted. The Bench remarked that the lawyers appearing before it in matters related to preservation of environment and protection of trees were very cooperative and they have always taken a fair stand before the court. "We are grateful. Your lordships are doing it for our better future, our children's better future," Additional

Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati said. The court termed as very important the issue concerning strict implementation of the provisions of the 1994 Act. "To enable the counsel appearing for the parties to address us on the issue, we direct that the petition shall be listed on December 18," it said. One of the lawyers appearing in the matter referred to the notifications issued by the Delhi government in the past exempting any area or any species of trees from the provisions of the 1994 Act. "This power, for the interim, has to be curtailed. They cannot keep on issuing notifications under Section 29 (of the Act)," he said. Section 29 of the Act pertains to power of the government for exemption. While one lawyer boasted of there being a "lot of awareness" among people, another lamented the ground situation saying it was "as bad as it was" before claiming two trees had been felled inside the Supreme Court premises. The advocate said complaints on the tree helpline of the forest department elicited no response. "You place that complaint on record," the Bench said. On the tree census in Taj Trapezium Zone (TTZ), the Bench said apart from the tree census in the TTZ it wanted to develop the institutional mechanism. **Continued on page 2**

Yamuna Vatika, a green dream for a grey city

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Yamuna Vatika is an expansive green space spread across 450 acres of meticulously designed flower fields, flowering trees and gardens being developed by Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on the river floodplains, soon to be the largest of its kind in the city. It will help in mitigating pollution to an extent, and provide green lungs to Delhi. This initiative for greening Delhi, expected to be opened to the public in the next three weeks, has been helmed by Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, who has already steered green marvels like Baansera, Asita East,

Vaishnavi, Vasudev Ghat and the revitalised Roshanara Bagh and Nursery. Designed as a multi-activity green space, Yamuna Vatika will serve as a haven for nature lovers, families and fitness enthusiasts alike. The project is part of the restoration scheme of Yamuna floodplains and witnessed the plantation of 500 chinar and 500 cherry blossom saplings. The project will have a garden, jogging and cycling tracks, eco-friendly temporary structures for eateries, a bio-retention zone and a wetland with a viewing deck, among others. The flower fields at Yamuna Vatika will feature a triple-layered floral design, setting a



new benchmark in urban landscaping. With its vibrant hues and serene ambiance, this initiative aims to become the city's first dedicated 'Field of Flowers', adding to the ecological and aesthetic appeal of Delhi. Nearly 8,000 indigenous trees, including Gulmohar,



Amaltaas, Chinara and exotic species such as Cherry Blossom saplings, along with 10,000 bamboo have already been planted, contributing to the floodplains ecological rejuvenation. These vibrant trees will not only enhance the city's green cover but also offer a spectacular visual treat



to visitors at Yamuna Vatika. It also features four large water bodies, strategically integrated into its design to support water conservation as also holding water during flooding. In a bid to restore the ecology of the Yamuna floodplains and give breathable green

space to the people of East Delhi, the DDA has inaugurated the Asita East project near Laxmi Nagar. Asita East project is spread over 197 hectares of land, of which 90 hectares are with DDA and the remaining falls under the jurisdiction of the UP irrigation department. Vikas Marg forms the southern edge, Pushta Road, the eastern edge, and the Yamuna flows towards its west. The 90 hectares of land under the DDA, located adjacent to Vikas Marg, has been inaugurated and opened to people. 'Vaishnavi' park at Ashok Vihar-II is an area spread over 10 acres, developed by the DDA to promote urban green

spaces. There were tonnes of waste lying at the spot, and the locals were fed up with the poor condition of this place. The park features a diverse array of native and medicinal plants, along with walkways, waterbodies, fountains and lights to give an aesthetic look to the place. The LG's other project is Vasudev Ghat, located along the western bank of the Yamuna between Yamuna Ghat and Nigam Bodh Ghat. The ghat - the first in the city to be built by the DDA - was previously inaccessible due to a steep slope, was littered with garbage, and had 1.5-foot-deep silt deposits from the July floods of last year. **Continued on page 2**

Konkan Railway needs major replacements to ensure traffic safety, Railway Minister tells LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The infrastructure of Konkan Railway Corporation Limited has become more than 25 years old, requiring major renewal of capital assets to ensure safety of traffic, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav informed the Lok Sabha in a written reply

on Wednesday. Vaishnav said the infrastructure replacement requires major capital expenditure and the five shareholders of KRCL - Ministry of Railways, Government of Maharashtra, Government of Karnataka, Government of Goa and Government of Kerala - have been approached by the Ministry of Railways to contribute for capital expenditure or to relinquish their share in favour of the ministry. The minister replied to questions raised by BJP MP Kota Srinivas Poojary, who wanted to know the status of merger of Konkan Railway. "There are five shareholders in Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL) namely the Ministry of Railways, Government of Maharashtra, Government of Karnataka, Government of Goa and Government of Kerala," Vaishnav said. "The infrastructure of KRCL has become more than 25 years old, requiring major renewal/replacement of capital assets to ensure safety of traffic including doubling and rehabilitation of tunnels. This

requires major capital expenditure," he added. According to Vaishnav, to meet the capital expenditure, all the above shareholder state governments have been approached by the Ministry of Railways to contribute for capital expenditure in KRCL as per their share or to relinquish their share in favour of the Ministry of Railways.

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One year on: Silkyara rescue changed me, says tunneller Arnold Dix

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

"It's going to be ok". Someone had to say it, recalls tunneller Arnold Dix. And he did. The message of hope was desperately needed that day last November when he reached Silkyara in Uttarakhand where 41 workers had already been trapped in a tunnel for a week. There was little light at the end of the tunnel - metaphorically and literally. But his bold promise that the men inside the under-construction Silkyara Bend-Barkot tunnel would be safely rescued by Christmas instilled hope in the workers, their families, and virtually every Indian during those difficult days.

The mountains had literally collapsed on them on November 12 and they were rescued on November 28, after almost 17 gruelling days. As the entire nation watched with bated breath, Dix became the face of the rescue mission. "At Silkyara someone had to say, 'it's going to be ok'. Someone had to make everyone believe that we can do this because otherwise it will end how it always ends. They would have been dead," the president of the International Tunnelling and Underground Space Association told PTI.

"Normally, I am involved in recovering the bodies and learning the lessons of what has gone wrong. Silkyara was different, somehow I could feel it was different and we could do it," Dix said. One year after the miraculous feat, the Australia-based hero of the rescue operation, in India to mark the first anniversary of the mission, confessed that his assurance was more based on belief than his technical expertise.

The 60-year-old Australian was in Europe when he received a call from Indian officials informing him about how a portion of the under-construction 4.5 km Silkyara Bend-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand had collapsed, trapping 41 workers. Without delay, Dix, widely considered the world's leading expert on underground tunnelling, set off on a journey covering more than 6,400 km, travelling from Ljubljana, Slovenia's capital, to Mumbai, Delhi and then to Dehradun where a helicopter was waiting to take him to the site high up in the Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district.

By the time he arrived on November 19, the trapped workers had already endured a week of deprivation and fear, aware that the mountain could give way anytime. Dix inspected the tunnel and coordinated with different agencies, suggesting technical solutions to overcome challenges through the rubble. His approach was clear from the very beginning: "We should be soft, not hard; slow, not fast; and gentle." It was a classic case of 'man vs mountain', the reality far more challenging than expected, he said.

The original strategy for the multi-agency-led rescue mission was to use horizontal drilling, assisted by Dix, to evacuate the workers. However, as the operation neared its conclusion, the previously prohibited manual "rat-hole" mining method was used after augers (a device that drills holes into the ground) struggled to penetrate nearly 60 metres of rock threatening to trap the workers. "Around day 14 or 15, as we all know, everything had broken. The auger was broken, it ripped itself out of the ground, the casing was ripped apart and the auger itself was in pieces. Things were looking pretty grim. But I still felt that we would be okay, as long as we



can stay calm. I never mentioned any other time other than Christmas, because for me, time was an enemy. If we had rushed, we would have caused a catastrophe and probably we could have gotten hurt," he said. Eventually, the workers, under Dix's watchful eye, were extracted through a passage created by welded pipes that rescuers had previously pushed through the rock. When they emerged, safe and uninjured, Dix was on cloud nine - or on the top of Himalayas - for delivering on his promise that the workers would be home before Christmas.

What really helped Dix, who likes to call himself a "problem solver" and is also a flower farmer, truck driver and welder -- in those dire circumstances? It was clearly more than "just engineering", admitted the genial Aussie. He said his first point of call after he landed at ground zero was to the makeshift temple built by locals near the tunnel where he paid his respects to the deity.

"I discovered that some people believe the reason for the collapse was the demolition of a temple dedicated to the local deity for the tunnel work. And the gods were unhappy... I am a bit intuitive, so when I reached the spot, I thought paying my respect at the temporary temple outside the tunnel would be the right thing to do and I did that." The signs of divine intervention, even for a man of science, were simply too many to ignore, he said.

It seemed more than just a coincidence, for instance, that only weeks before the collapse, he had decided to visit some of the world's deepest mines, enduring extreme conditions in South Africa and other places, while carrying his rescue gear - something he usually never did. "By the time I got the call to go to Silkyara, I was in a really chilled zone and it was as if I had done a refresher course. I was relaxed and I was ready, I had all the gear. I felt an overwhelming sense that we could do this.

"Of course, I am arguably the most prominent guy in the world for such rescues but this wasn't about that. This wasn't just engineering. There was something else going on. This rescue has changed me. I am not sure what I am anymore. When I was up there doing the rescue, I felt connected to everything," he pointed out. As expected, he became an overnight celebrity after the rescue, with children in India dressing up as the friendly bearded Aussie for costume competitions. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese praised him for his outstanding work during the rescue operation.

"No one ever talks about the engineering people. So when I was told the PM has been saying nice things about me, I was worried that maybe I have had a mental breakdown or a rock has fallen on me. I think it was lovely that those congratulations came and that just highlights that we made the seemingly impossible possible," he said.

Increase spiritual purity to fight climate change: Sean Clarke

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■ KOCHI

The recently held Conference of Parties (COP29) in Baku, the capital city of Azerbaijan where global leaders assembled for brainstorming sessions to find out a solution to climate change which is progressing at a faster rate than previously anticipated with its impacts more widespread and severe than models initially projected were in for a surprise as an Indian scientist enlightened them about the potential and possibilities of the Vedas composed in the sub-continent.

Sean Clarke, who works with Maharshi Adhyatma Vishwavidyalaya's Spiritual Science Research Foundation in Goa presented his research findings during the Baku conclave. The findings of Clarke, formerly of Indian Navy, differed from mainstream scientific narrative. Clarke's research which was held under the guidance of Dr Jayant Athavale, head of Maharshi Adhyatma Vishwavidyalaya, has established with evidence that 98 per cent of the causes for climate change is due to the cyclical changes the Earth is currently transitioning through. Clarke said that only two per cent was due to human behavior.

Ancient Indian scriptures state that the Universe goes through cycles and mini cycles of Time (which has been described as Kaal). Depending on the upper or lower end of the cycle, there is a predominance of spiritual purity (Sattva) component or the Tama component (spiritual impurity). "The spiritual impurity or

Tama has a ubiquitous negative impact on the five Absolute cosmic principles of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether that control the environment and climate on earth. As a result the negatively affected Cosmic Principles get imbalanced and give rise to erratic weather patterns and natural disasters," said Sean Clarke. Dr S Kalyanaram, director, Saraswati Research Center, Chennai, said that our Rishis have provided remarkable insights into cosmic energy linking Aatman with Paramatman as a unified theory of consciousness. The splendor of Lord Kailas metaphor is mirrored by water dripping continuously on Shivalinga in every temple venerating the divine as water giver from the Himalayas," said Dr Kalyanaram. He pointed out that the dance of Nataraja was being celebrated in CERN Laboratory in Europe.

According to Clarke, when spiritual pollution reaches critical levels, nature strives to restore balance. "This restorative process often manifests through extreme weather events and natural forces. We have to increase spiritual purity in our lives," said Clarke. The MAV team measured with a Universal Aura Scanner the aura of water bottles collected from adjacent apartments in a residential colony in Mumbai. "Water bottle from the house where the residents practiced spirituality showed a positive aura while the one from the house that did not practice spirituality showed negative aura," he said. This is how human actions influence the environment," said Clarke.

TMC leader held with radioactive material, classified documents

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Bengal Police along with National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have recovered Californium, a highly radioactive substance worth Rs 17 Crore per gram, from the house of a district level Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Francis Ekka. His wife is a panchayat representative from Naxalbari area in Darjeeling district. Apart from the chemical, used in nuclear research, the police have also recovered some "sensitive documents pertaining to the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO).

The police have arrested Ekka and are investigating where he collected the material from and for what purpose it was being used. Whether Ekka has been a part of a larger espionage network or whether the materials

had been procured for the purpose of sabotage are being investigated, officials said. Ekka's wife Amrita is a member of local Panchayat Samiti. Ekka was arrested in the night intervening Tuesday and Wednesday. The man is being interrogated by the joint team of police and the Army, Kurseong Additional SP Abhishek Roy said, adding, the house from where it was recovered has been sealed. His neighbours said that Ekka who had recently travelled to Nepal was behaving in an unusual manner in the recent past. Expressing concern as to how such highly sensitive substance could be smuggled out or reach in the hands of common people RK Das, a former Air Force official said that the police should conduct more search operations and try to crack the racket "more so because it was discovered from a residential locality."

SBM reduced IMR: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

A study published in the Nature magazine this year has revealed that the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) has contributed significantly in reducing infant and under-five mortality rates across the country by saving 60,000 to 70,000 infant lives annually, Union Health Minister JP Nadda informed Parliament on Friday.

Suspense+emotion...

From page 1

Throughout the day, there was speculation within the state political circles that both Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were averse to making Fadnavis as the chief minister of Maharashtra once again. The names of Nitin Gadkari and Vinod Tawde were being discussed as possible replacements for Fadnavis, whom it was said would be made the BJP's next national president.

The stock of Tawde, owing to reported manoeuvres within the BJP, went down markedly, after he was allegedly found himself in a controversy over the alleged distribution of money in Vasai-Virar area a day prior to the State Assembly polls.

Given the prevailing political situation within the ruling MahaYuti, it will take some more days before the formation of a new government. While it is more or less settled that there would be a chief minister and two deputy chief ministers, the MahaYuti will have to work hard on the division of ministerial berths and portfolio allocations in the new government.

Delhi a "gangster capital", says Arvind Kejriwal

From page 1

"Who is Lawrence Bishnoi and is he protected by the BJP? Otherwise, how is he running these extortion rackets?" he asked, demanding accountability from the central government. The AAP leader accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of neglecting his responsibilities and warned that Delhi residents are losing faith in the authorities. "Amit Shah should wake up, otherwise, the people of Delhi will be left with no one to turn to for safety," he added. He also highlighted that the various crime cases, including the murder of a young constable of Delhi Police, is happening few

kilometers away from Shah's residence. He stated that while half of Delhi's governance is under the Delhi government, the responsibility for safety and security lies with the central government. "This is the responsibility of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. But law and order in Delhi has completely deteriorated, especially after Amit Shah became the Union Home Minister in 2019," the AAP chief added. Kejriwal's address on the first day of the last session of the five-year tenure of the Delhi Assembly on Friday comes amid heightened tensions following a low-intensity bomb blast in Rohini on Thursday.

Tough decisions will have...

From page 1

Noting that times have changed, Kharge said the ways of contesting elections have changed and the party will have to make its micro-communication strategy better than its opponents.

Kharge also asserted that the party cannot achieve success by following old methods. "You have to see what your political opponent is doing on a daily basis. We have to take decisions on time. Accountability has to be fixed," he said

Delhi school gets hoax bomb threat

From page 1

"As soon as I received the message from the school regarding the bomb threat, I went blank and immediately reached there," she said. She further said that she will be in constant fear even after sending her child to the school. "I cannot put his studies on hold but then such news scares me," Awasthi said. Police have launched an investigation into the matter, the officer said.

According to Delhi Fire Service (DFS), a bomb related call was received at around 11 am about an email threat from Venkateshwar Global School in Rohini, upon which a team of the DFS immediately reached the spot. "A fire brigade was dispatched to the spot along with a rescue team. The school administration evacuated the

school premises as a precautionary measure and nothing suspicious was found," an official of DFS added. Police, bomb disposal squad, dog squad, along with DFS personnel checked and searched the entire premises of the school. "It was a hoax. The source of the bomb threat is still being verified," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Rohini) Amit Goel. No suspicious object was found and the threat was declared a hoax, the officer added.

School authorities "Dear parents, because of an emergency (a threat email received by the school) there is an early dispersal of students being done. The buses and self-dispersal students will be allowed to leave the school at 11. The situation is well under

control. There's no need to panic," the statement read. Principal of VGS, Dr Namita Singhal said that the school received a bomb threat in its official email. "After we received the email, we dispersed all the students and staff," she said.

The threat came a day after a low-intensity explosion took place on Thursday morning in Rohini's Prashant Vihar area, leaving one person injured and triggering panic among residents. The blast took place in front of a sweet shop near a park, just around 500 metres away from a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) school where another high-intensity explosion, which remains unsolved, took place nearly 40 days ago. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police has registered an FIR regarding the explosion that

Yamuna Vatika, a green dream...

From page 1

The restored riverbank now has carved pavilions and lush greens with seasonal flower beds of tulip, and sadabahar, more than 2,000 native and naturalised trees, and 400,000 riverine grass saplings. The 145-metre ghat has three entrances with parking space for 150 cars, and 25 steps to descend to the river. A statue of "Maa Yamuna" has been installed here, along with a chhatra covering a 300kg metal bell sourced from Jalesar in Uttar Pradesh, which produces a unique vibration and sound when rung. LG's other pet project is the Baansera park, located near Sarai Kale Khan. Baansera, situated along the western banks of the Yamuna over an area of 28 acres, features over 15 varieties of 30,000 bamboo plants.

Roshanara Bagh is another project, spread over 57 acres, the 17th century Roshanara Bagh was a garden developed by the second daughter of emperor Shah Jahan and Begum Mumtaz Mahal. The original garden was designed and commissioned by the princess in the 1650s at the time Shahjahanabad was being built and the baradari at the centre of the garden now serves as her resting place. Poised to become one of Delhi's most sought-after green destinations, Yamuna Vatika stands as a testament to the LG's commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable urban development for the citizens of the capital. With its thoughtful design and ecological significance, this initiative reaffirms the vision of a greener, more sustainable Delhi.

Judicial Commission to probe Sambhal violence

From page 1

The inquiry is set to explore multiple facets of the incident, including the preparedness of local law enforcement and administrative bodies in handling the situation. Tensions in Sambhal had been mounting since November 19, when a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid was carried out following claims that a Harihar temple had once stood at the same location. On November 24, the protests escalated, leading to stone pelting, arson, and violent clashes with security forces. The outcome of this inquiry is anticipated to bring clarity and aid in maintaining

peace in the area moving forward, as well as provide crucial recommendations for the future. Meanwhile, Friday prayers at the mosque concluded peacefully, with no reports of disturbances from any part of Uttar Pradesh. Extensive security arrangements ensured calm, marking a significant moment after last week's violence in the region. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Moradabad Range, Muniraj, was present in Sambhal to oversee the situation. Police personnel monitored the area from rooftops to preempt any disruptions during the Friday prayers. Deputy Chief

Minister Brajesh Pathak assured strict enforcement of law and order. "The government respects the directives of the Supreme Court. A fair investigation will be conducted, and anyone found guilty of disturbing the peace will face stern action," he said. Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya criticised the Samajwadi Party (SP), accusing it of fuelling unrest. "We will not tolerate any attempt to disrupt harmony. If SP continues its tactics, it will lead to their downfall," he remarked. The Friday prayers at the Shahi Jama Masjid saw participation from prominent

local leaders, including Samajwadi Party MP Ziaur Rahman Birk's father and community leader Zafar Ali. Ali emphasized the importance of maintaining harmony. "We are committed to ensuring peace so that prayers can be offered without fear," he said. This marked the first Friday prayer since the violent clashes on November 24, which erupted following a court-ordered survey of the mosque. The government's prompt action, coupled with strict judicial oversight, is expected to ease tensions and pave the way for a fair resolution of the dispute.

SC halts proceedings in Jama Masjid case, Chandausi survey

From page 1

Earlier in the day, Sambhal court Civil Judge Aditya Singh directed the court-appointed commissioner Rakesh Singh Raghav to submit within 10 days the survey report on the mosque. Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi represented the mosque committee in the top court. At the outset, the CJ asked Ahmadi how a plea was moved straightaway in the Supreme Court against the impugned order of a district civil court and advised him to take the legal recourse in the High Court. Ahmadi submitted that the trial court's order had the potential to cause "great

mischief" and urged the top court to intervene. The bench, however, advised the committee to approach the high court under Article 227 of the Constitution, which provides supervisory powers over lower courts. "We may have some reservations on the order, but it is not amenable to Article 227? You have to approach the appropriate forum," the CJ observed. Expressing concern about community harmony, the CJ said, "Peace and harmony have to be maintained. We don't want anything to happen... We have to be absolutely, totally neutral and ensure nothing wrong is done." The Bench asked the State administration to set up

a peace committee having members from both the communities. ASG KM Nataraj assured the Bench of the state's commitment to maintain peace in the area. On November 19, a court of civil judge (senior division) of Sambhal passed an ex-parte order for a survey of the mosque by an advocate commissioner after taking note of a plea of the Hindu side that claimed the mosque was built by Mughal emperor Babur in 1526 after demolishing a temple. On November 24, violence gripped the area, post the order, snuffing out four lives. The management committee of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid moved the Supreme

Court on November 28, challenging the November 19 order of the district court directing survey of the Mughal-era mosque while seeking an ex-parte stay on the operation of the November 19 order passed by the civil judge. Tensions brewed in UP's Sambhal after November 19, when the court-ordered survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid was carried out following claims that a Harihar temple previously stood at the site. On November 24, protesters gathered near the mosque and clashed with the security personnel, leading to stone pelting and arson, leaving four dead and several injured.

Amit Shah on C'garh visit on December 7



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will arrive in Chhattisgarh on a day's visit on December 7. He will be accompanied with Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya.

Shah will participate in the Bastar Olympics in Jagdalpur. He will also take part in an event of Chhattisgarh Police where he will distribute Presidents Police Colour Medals.

He will also take part in an event of Chhattisgarh Police where he will distribute Presidents Police Colour Medals. This will be Shah's second visit to Chhattisgarh in four months.

SC sets aside Anwar Dhebar's bail plea



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR/NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday set aside the interim bail granted by the Chhattisgarh High Court to businessman Anwar Dhebar in a Rs 2,000 crore alleged liquor syndicate scam.

A.G. Masih passed the order based on the report of a medical board of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Raipur. The medical board found Dhebar has no significant medical ailments.

Sai govt conspiring to stay away from paddy procurement: Cong



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Congress on Friday said the Chhattisgarh government was not willing to complete the target of procuring 160 lakh tonnes of paddy from farmers this Kharif season.

The government has announced procuring 21 quintals of paddy per acre but was not doing so and giving another date for buying, Baij said.

away from paddy procurement. The government has announced procuring 21 quintals of paddy per acre but was not doing so and giving another date for buying, Baij said.

Environment-friendly habits emphasised to tackle climate change

STAFF REPORTER ■ NAVA RAIPUR

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief of Forest Force, V. Srinivas Rao, emphasised that everyone must embrace environment-friendly habits to tackle climate change.



The discussions focused on climate-resilient measures in sustainable housing and in the agriculture sectors as well as strategies made under APCC. A poster on air conditioner temperature regulation and a book on 100 success stories on climate change were released.

1,277 women benefit from Supraja scheme



STAFF REPORTER ■ DHAMTARI

As many as 1,277 pregnant women from 202 villages in Chhattisgarh's Dhamtari district have benefited from the Supraja scheme of the National Ayush Mission, an official communiqué said on Friday.

checks, infant development tests and health services to keep them physically and mentally healthy. They also receive Ayurvedic medicines, yoga and meditation training, as well as nutritious food.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER WATER SHIVNATH CIRCLE DURG (C.G.) e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE

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Four Maoists surrender STAFF REPORTER ■ DANTEWADA Gaurav Rai said. The reward money for his capture was Rs 1 lakh.

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Karnataka CM meets PM Modi, demands assistance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Friday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting rectification in short term farm loan limit, Rs 10,000 cr in financial support and urgent clearances for the Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir and Kalasa Bandhura projects.

In the meeting in Parliament complex, Siddaramaiah pressed for several key interventions focusing on critical areas, including agriculture, water resources and urban infrastructure. Deputy Chief Minister and Irrigation Minister D K Shivakumar, Energy Minister K J George and Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh accompanied the CM for the meeting. The chief minister highlighted that NABARD has drastically cut the Short Term Agricultural Credit Limit for Karnataka



from Rs 5,600 crore in 2023-24 to just Rs 2,340 crore in 2024-25, a 58 per cent reduction that could severely impact farmers' access to soft loans. "I request you to look into this and direct the Finance Ministry to rectify this situation so that farmers in Karnataka continue to receive soft agricultural loans," Siddaramaiah said in a representation made to the PM.

He requested Rs 5,300 crore for the Upper Bhadra Project, which promises to irrigate central Karnataka's drought-prone farmlands. The project has been pending since the 2023-24 Union Budget. He also pushed for clearances of two critical water projects - the Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir on the Kaveri river and the Kalasa Bandhura project on the Mahadayi river --

both awaiting approvals from the Jal Shakti and Environment Ministries.

Highlighting Bengaluru's status as a tech hub and top GDP contributor, the state requested special assistance for urban and public transportation. Additionally, Karnataka sought Rs 10,000 cr to develop infrastructure in 13 emerging city corporations.

On fiscal allocation, the CM complained of receiving an unfavourable deal from the 15th Finance Commission, which reduced its tax share by 1 per cent.

Siddaramaiah urged the government to provide compensation grants and ensure future finance commissions do not penalise states with significant tax contributions.

The Karnataka chief minister also met Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and congratulated her on being elected as an MP from Wayanad.

PM Modi to attend all India DGP, IGP conference in Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the all India conference of director generals/inspectors general of police in Bhubaneswar for two days starting Saturday. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said the three-day conference, which begins on Friday, will include deliberations on critical components of national security, including counter terrorism, Left Wing Extremism, coastal security, new criminal laws and narcotics. The President's Police Medal for distinguished service will also be awarded during the conference.

The conference will provide an interactive platform for senior police professionals and security administrators in the country to freely discuss and debate diverse national security-related issues besides various operational, infrastructural and welfare-related



problems faced by police, the statement said. Its deliberations will include formulation and sharing of professional practices and processes in tackling challenges relating to crime control, and law and order management, besides internal security threats. The statement noted Modi has encouraged organising the annual conference across the country since he assumed the office in 2014. The conference has so far

been held in Guwahati (Assam), Rann of Kachchh (Gujarat), Hyderabad (Telangana), Tekanpur (Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh), Statue of Unity (Kevadiya, Gujarat), Pune (Maharashtra), Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), New Delhi and Jaipur (Rajasthan), with its latest edition being held in the Odisha capital. Modi, the statement said, has always demonstrated a deep interest in the DGP Conference. It said, "The

prime minister not only listens attentively to all contributions but also fosters an environment of open and informal discussions, allowing for the emergence of new ideas.

This year, some unique features have also been added to the conference. The entire day is being effectively utilised starting from Yoga session, business session, break-out sessions and thematic dining tables.

"This will also provide senior police officials with a valuable opportunity to present their perspectives and suggestions to Modi on critical policing and internal security matters that impact the country, it said.

The conference will also be attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Principal Secretary to PM P K Mishra, National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, DGP of states and UTs and chiefs of central police organisations among others.

VHP announces two-day protest against 'atrocities' on religious minorities in Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Vishva Hindu Parishad has announced a two-day nationwide protest against the "atrocities" on religious minorities in Bangladesh starting Friday.

The VHP and the Bajrang Dal, along with all sects and segments of the Hindu society and those who believe in humanity, will take part in this protest to save the minorities and their human rights. VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said in a statement. Bansal said the neighbouring country was "playing in the hands of Islamic jihadist elements". He said the protest against the "repeated atrocities" against minorities in Bangladesh is scheduled for today and tomorrow, he said. "Let's all come and join for Human cause!! VHP nationwide protest to save minori-



ties in Bangladesh today," Bansal wrote in a social media post. Bangladesh's minority Hindus, which constitute only about eight per cent of the 170 million population, have faced over 200 attacks in 50-odd districts since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government on August five. Things took a turn for the worse this week after Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy

Krishna Das was arrested in a sedition case. He was later denied bail by a court, triggering protests by community members in various locations, including the capital Dhaka and the port city of Chattogram. India on Tuesday noted with "deep concern" the arrest and denial of bail to Das, urging the authorities in the neighbouring country to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all other minority groups.

Congress takes Maharashtra poll complaints to EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday raised with the Election Commission "serious and grave inconsistencies" which it said were being revealed in the data relating to the polling and counting processes for the recently concluded Maharashtra Assembly polls and sought an in-person hearing to present relevant evidence.

In a memorandum to the poll panel, AICC Maharashtra in-charge Ramesh Chennithala, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole and AICC general secretary Mukul Wasnik said "these glaring inconsistencies" which strike at the very root of a transparent, free and fair electoral system are not based on any biased motives or far-fetched presumptions but have been extracted from the information made publicly available by the Commission. Sharing the memorandum on social media, Congress gener-



al secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the leaders have raised serious issues which are being discussed in the public domain. They have asked the Election Commission (EC) for an in-person hearing to present the relevant evidence and raise constituency-wise issues as well, he said. In their memorandum, the Congress leaders said, "In fact, questions relating to Maharashtra's voter data have also been raised by a former

Chief Election Commissioner, hence we are bringing the same to the attention of this Commission." They flagged two issues of arbitrary deletion of voters and subsequent addition of over 10,000 voters in each constituency from the final voter lists as well as inexplicable increase in voting percentages from five per cent to the final voter percentage declared by the Commission at 11:30 pm on the day of polling on November 20. "In the days leading up to the

polling day, the Indian National Congress (INC) and its allies received several on ground-level reports about different means being adopted by the ruling regime to commit large scale electoral fraud across the Assembly Constituencies in Maharashtra," the memorandum said.

The Congress leaders said these included instances of arbitrary deletion of voters from the voter list and consequent insertion of roughly 10,000 voters per constituency across Maharashtra.

"With this exercise of unchecked and arbitrary deletion and consequent insertion of voters, the state of Maharashtra witnessed an unprecedented increase of an estimated 47 lakh voters being added to the electoral roll from between July 2024 - November 2024," the memorandum said. It is significant to note that out of the 50 Assembly constituencies where there was an average increase of 50,000 voters, the ruling regime and its

allies secured victory from 47 of these constituencies, the leaders argued.

"These data points on a prima facie reading, demonstrates that -- there has been a significant and inexplicable increase in the number of registered voters across the state of Maharashtra; and there has been an exercise of deletion and addition of names in voters lists; all of which have conventionally worked to the advantage of the incumbent government," the memorandum said. This issue was duly raised by the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance on October 19 before this Commission, he said.

"However, no cogent action was taken by this Commission on the Representation dated 19.10.2024 submitted by the MVA Alliance in this regard," the memorandum said. They urged the Commission to immediately undertake a thorough investigation and prepare a detailed report on the addition and deletion of voters in Maharashtra.

Interim Govt responsible for protecting minorities in Bangladesh: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External affairs minister S Jaishankar on Friday said the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government is responsible for protecting Bangladesh citizens, including its minorities.

He made this assertion in a statement in response to a question in the Lok Sabha about violence against minorities, including Hindus, in Bangladesh. Jaishankar said the government has seen several reports of incidents of violence against Hindus and other minorities since August 2024, when Sheikh Hasina was forced to flee Bangladesh. He added that reports of attacks on temples and puja mandaps also emerged during the recent Durga Puja festival in Bangladesh. "Government have taken a

serious note of these incidents and shared its concerns with the Government of Bangladesh," Jaishankar said in his reply.

The minister also said that the High Commission of India in Dhaka continues to monitor the situation related to the minorities in Bangladesh closely.

"The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens of Bangladesh, including minorities, rests with the Government of Bangladesh," he pointed out.

This statement comes amid protests and unrest in Bangladesh over the arrest of former priest of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) Bangladesh Chinmoy Krishna Das on sedition charges. Das is accused of hoisting a saffron flag above the Bangladesh



national flag during a rally in October. Several political leaders in India, including those in the opposition, have voiced concern over the arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das and issued an appeal to the Indian government to intervene in the matter. Former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina also backed Hindu monk, Chinmoy Krishna Das, saying he was "unjustly arrested" and must immediately be released.

Hasina has also called upon the Bangladesh government to protect religious and ethnic minorities that have braved violence since her ouster from power in August. Meanwhile, India on Friday said the interim government in Bangladesh must live up to its responsibility of protecting all minorities as it expressed serious concern over the "surge" of extremist rhetoric and increasing incidents of violence in the neighbouring country. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has consistently and strongly raised with the Bangladeshi government the threats and "targeted attacks" on Hindus and other minorities. "Our position on the matter is clear -- the interim government must live up to its responsibility of protecting all minorities," he said.

Jaiswal was replying to a question on the situation at his weekly media briefing.

"We are concerned at the surge of extremist rhetoric, increasing incidents of violence and provocation. These developments cannot be dismissed only as media exaggeration," he said. "We once again call upon Bangladesh to take all steps for the protection of minorities," he added. On the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das by Bangladeshi authorities, Jaiswal said India has noted that the legal process in the case is underway.

"As far as cases against individuals are concerned, we have noted that legal processes are underway," he said. "We expect that these processes will deal with the case in a just, fair and transparent manner, ensuring full respect for the legal rights of all concerned," he added.

Health Ministry declares snakebite cases as 'notifiable disease'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the ongoing public health concerns raised by snakebites across the States, the Union Ministry of Health has declared snakebite cases and fatalities as a "notifiable disease" in India.

According to Ministry data, approximately 50,000 deaths occur annually in India due to an estimated 3-4 million snakebites. This accounts for half of all global snakebite-related fatalities, although many cases remain significantly underreported.

"Snakebites pose a serious public health threat, leading to mortality, morbidity, and long-term disabilities in some instances. Certain groups, such as farmers and tribal populations, face a higher risk," stated Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava in a letter to the Health Secretaries of all states and Union Territories (UTs), said sources.

The letter urges all health facilities, both public and private (including medical colleges), to report all suspected and confirmed snakebite cases and fatalities in a standardized format.

The common krait, Indian cobra, Russell's viper, and saw-scaled viper are responsible for about 90 percent of snakebites in India. Although polyvalent anti-snake venom (ASV) - effective against these four species - works in 80 percent of cases, a shortage of trained healthcare personnel and proper facilities for snakebite treatment remains a significant concern.

Moreover, the lack of comprehensive data on the incidence, morbidity, mortality, socio-economic impact, and treatment patterns exacerbates the issue, the secretary said, added the sources. Health experts have repeat-



edly called for a national policy to address snakebite management and prevent snakebite envenomation (SBE), or death due to snakebite. A research team, including experts from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has proposed several measures, while Ministry officials are working on a blueprint for a national program to curb snakebite incidents in India. According to a recent national mortality survey, India witnessed 1.2 million snakebite deaths (averaging 58,000 annually) between 2000 and 2019 - an increase of around 8,000 deaths per year compared to previous estimates (2001-2003). Snakebites disproportionately affect children living in poor rural areas.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently included snakebites in its list of Neglected Tropical Diseases and launched a comprehensive Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming. There is also a need to establish a dedicated snakebite clinical research cum training centre (SRTC) and ensure that treatment is at the PHC level itself. SBE should be included in the

medical graduation (MBBS) curriculum and also during the internship of MBBS doctors, as per various studies. In March, the Health Ministry introduced the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Snakebite Envenoming (NAPSE) to address this pressing issue.

The plan aims to "reduce snakebite-related deaths by 50 percent by 2030," Srivastava said. The action plan outlines strategic components, as well as the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in snakebite management, control, and prevention. A central goal of NAPSE is to enhance surveillance of snakebite cases and fatalities across the country. Srivastava emphasized the importance of establishing a "robust surveillance system" to accurately monitor snakebite incidents and deaths, which will provide critical data to guide future interventions and assess their effectiveness. By improving surveillance, stakeholders will gain a better understanding of the true burden, high-risk areas, and contributing factors to snakebite deaths, ultimately leading to better clinical management and prevention strategies, Srivastava added.

Doctor-population ratio is 1:811 in India: Nadda informs LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The doctor-population ratio is 1:811 in the country which is better than the WHO standard of 1:1000, Union Health Minister J P Nadda informed the Lok Sabha on Friday.

As per information provided by the National Medical Commission (NMC), there are 13,86,145 allopathic doctors registered with the State Medical Councils and the National Medical Commission (NMC) as on November, 2024, he said.

"Assuming 80 per cent availability of registered allopathic doctors and around 6.14 lakh AYUSH doctors, the doctor-population ratio in the country is around 1:811 which is better than the WHO standard of 1:1000," Nadda said. The government has increased



the number of medical colleges and subsequently increased MBBS seats, he said. The minister said there is an increase of 102 per cent in the medical colleges from 387 before 2014 to 780 as of now. Further, there is an increase of 130 per cent in MBBS seats from 51,348 before 2014 to 1,18,137 as of now and an increase of 135 per cent in PG seats from 31,185 before 2014 to 73,157 as of now, he added. Listing the measures/steps taken by the government to

increase the doctor/medical professional in the country, Nadda said the Centrally Sponsored Scheme for establishment of new medical colleges by upgrading district/referral hospital under which 131 new medical colleges are already functional out of 157 approved medical colleges which includes 23 medical colleges in Rajasthan.

Under upgradation of government medical colleges by construction of Super Specialty Blocks of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSY) scheme, a total of 75 projects have been approved, of which 69 projects are complete, the minister informed. Under the Central Sector Scheme for setting up of new AIIMS, 22 AIIMS have been approved, said Nadda said, adding undergraduate courses have started in 19 of these.

Nearly 42 petitions filed in SC, various HCs on EVMs: Govt tells LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 42 petitions have been filed in the Supreme Court and various high courts questioning the electronic voting machines (EVMs), with the higher judiciary repeatedly holding that the machines are credible, reliable and tamper-proof, the government said in Lok Sabha on Friday.

Responding to a question on safeguards to prevent tampering or hacking of the machines, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said according to the Election Commission (EC), EVM is a standalone machine with no radio frequency communication capability, hence it cannot communicate through wireless, bluetooth and Wi-Fi. "The machine is electronically protected to prevent any tampering or manipulation. It



incorporates several technical security features such as one time programmable chip, unauthorised access detect module, advance encryption techniques, strong mutual authentication capability," the minister said in a written reply. After the Haryana assembly polls, Congress had questioned the reliability of the EVMs and had claimed that different levels of charging in the EVM battery gave different results. The EC had rejected the complaint, saying the Congress was raising "smoke of generic doubt" poll after poll.

Adjournment notices being used to disrupt proceedings: RS Chairperson

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday said adjournment notices under Rule 267 of the House are being weaponised as a mechanism of disruption before adjourning the proceedings till Monday amid Opposition parties protest over corruption allegations against the Adani Group, and other issues. Like in the previous sittings of the ongoing Winter Session, the House could not take up scheduled business on Friday as well and proceedings were adjourned within minutes of the assembly. Opposition MPs started the protest soon after the chairperson announced that he had received their 17 notices for suspension of scheduled business and take up issues related to corruption allegations against the Adani Group, violence in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal, and Manipur.

"...These issues have been raised repeatedly during the week with the result that we have already lost three working days. The days that should have been committed by us for public cause," Dhankhar said. The chairman said the loss of time, opportunity and question hour has given enormous setbacks to the people at large. "Now, I find honourable members and I call upon you for deep reflection. Rule 267 is being weaponised as a mechanism of disruption and disruption from our normal working. There are very senior members," he said. The statement led to further protests, with some opposition members raising slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Adani Group. Expressing deep anguish, Dhankhar said, "Our actions are not people-centric. They are to absolute public distaste, we are getting into irrelevance, people are ridiculing us, we



The Chairperson's statement in the House led to protests with slogans being raised against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Adani. PTI

have virtually become a laughing stock." Pramod Tiwari, Ranjeet Ranjan, and Vivek Tankha were among the Congress party MPs who had given notices for taking up discussion on the alleged corruption and wrongdoings against the Adani Group. John Brittas and AA Rahim of the CPI(M) were among the Rajya Sabha members who

sought discussion on the recent violence in Sambhal. Sanjay Singh of the AAP had given a notice to take up the issue of "rising" crime in the national capital, while his party colleague Raghav Chadha wanted a discussion on the alleged atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh and the arrest of Hindu spiritual leader Chinmoy Krishna Das.



Congress MPs protest during the ongoing Winter session of Parliament. PTI

Punjab MPs protest slow paddy procurement in state

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MPs from Punjab on Friday staged a protest in the Parliament complex against alleged delay in paddy procurement and fertiliser shortage, and demanded that the government compensate the farmers who were forced to sell their produce below the minimum support price (MSP). Congress MP from Ludhiana and the party's Punjab chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring blamed the BJP-led Union government and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab for the situation. "MPs from Punjab raised their voice for the farmers of Punjab, the situation they are facing. They even spent the night at Mandi on Diwali, and were forced to sell below the MSP," Warring told reporters

outside Parliament. "The central government should form a committee and probe those who bought crops below the MSP. Farmers should get the price as per the MSP," he said. Congress MP from Fatehgarh Sahib, Amar Singh said farmers were forced to sell their crops 8-10 per cent below the MSP. "This is the first time that paddy procurement is not being done properly. Farmers of Punjab had to wait for over a month, and were forced to sell it 8-10 per cent less than the MSP. "The government should compensate farmers, and make arrangements so that it is not repeated in the future," he said. Dharamvira Gandhi, the Congress MP from Patiala, added that the government should also announce a loan waiver for farmers of north

India. "The state and central governments have not taken steps to resolve issues faced by farmers in Punjab... the stores were not emptied, there is a labour problem which was not resolved, truckers' issues were not resolved, no processes were completed, and farmers were forced to spend days waiting to sell their produce, and were eventually forced to sell it at a lower price. "Loan waiver should be given to farmers of north India," he added. The MPs also staged a protest in the Parliament complex, displaying placards with slogans like "farmers in Punjab are not getting DAP fertiliser", "crop is being procured below MSP", and "worst procurement in 25 years". The MPs raised slogans against the Union and Punjab governments.

BJP criticise move to make Karnataka CM the VC of rural varsity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU

Opposition BJP on Friday condemned the government's move to make the chief minister the chancellor of the Karnataka State Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) University replacing the governor, terming it as an attempt to pollute the higher education system. State BJP president B Y Vijayendra said this attempt to cut down on the powers of the governor is a conspiracy to upset the constitutional system. The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday approved a bill, according to which the chief minister will be appointed as the chancellor, replacing the governor at the RDPR University in Gadag. The governor is the chancellor for all public universities in Karnataka. Governor Thawarchand Gehlot currently holds the post. "With a good intention that politics should not mix in education and as per the intent of the constitution, the Governor who is also the constitutional head of the state is the chancellor of the universities. But the government led by Siddaramaiah (CM), which is engaged in a series of corruption, by abusing its existing powers, is trying to pollute the higher education system," Vijayendra posted on "X". He said the government's move will allow "unnecessary political interference" in the field of rural development studies.

UK museum to return to Tamil Nadu idol bought in 1967

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHENNAI

The Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University, London, which purchased the Thirumangai Alwar bronze idol in 1967, has agreed to return the idol to Tamil Nadu after the state Idol Wing CID submitted evidence of the idol's trafficking from an ancient temple in Thanjavur district, the police said on Friday. In its recent communication to the Tamil Nadu Idol Wing CID police, the Oxford University has expressed its "commitment to repatriate" the idol said to be worth crores of rupees back to India, due to the wing's efforts, a release here said. "They have also promised to cover all costs associated with transferring the idol from London to India, ensuring that it can be returned to the temple for worship. This marks a significant step in the efforts to return stolen idols to their rightful places of origin," the release said. Efforts were on to bring this idol to Tamil Nadu within a month's time. Director General of Police Shankar Jwal, appreciated the exceptional work done by the Idol Wing CID in successfully



identifying and proving the provenance of the Thirumangai Alwar bronze idol and facilitating its repatriation process, the release added. The Oxford University's representative reviewed the evidence and testimonies provided by Deputy Superintendent of Police Chandrasekaran, which convincingly established the true origin of the Thirumangai Alwar bronze

idol. This led the representative to submit a detailed report to the University. After careful consideration, the Council of the University of Oxford accepted that the idol had been illegally removed from Sri Soundaraja Perumal temple. In addition to this success, the Idol Wing CID was continuing its sincere efforts to bring back the remaining three idols: Kaalinga Nartha Krishna, Vishnu, and Sridevi, that were also stolen along with Thirumangai Alwar idol from Sri Soundaraja Perumal temple in Kumbakonam, and are currently in museums in the United States. "The CID is working diligently to follow a similar process to ensure that these idols are repatriated to their rightful place, the Sri Soundaraja Perumal Temple in Kumbakonam, where they can once again be used for worship," the release further said. In 2020, the wing registered a case based on specific information regarding the theft of four valuable idols from the Soundararaja Perumal temple in Thanjavur district, between 1957 and 1967. These idols were

illegally sold by unknown idol traffickers and smuggled abroad. Through sustained efforts, the wing traced the smuggled idols to various museums abroad. The Thirumangai Alwar idol was found to have been purchased by the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University, London, in 1967. Investigation revealed that, at present, only replicas of these four idols were used for worship at the Sri Soundaraja Perumal temple, while the original idols remain in foreign museums. The investigating officers, under the guidance of IGP, Idol Wing CID, R Dhinakaran, and the direct supervision of Superintendent of Police, Idol Wing CID, R Sivakumar, have meticulously collected all scientific evidences regarding the provenance of the four stolen idols. "The officers compiled convincing and indisputable evidence and have sent it to the relevant authorities in the countries where these idols are currently located. This evidence is crucial in demonstrating the true origin of the idols, which had been smuggled abroad," the release stated.

90 medicines found below standard quality in October

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation found 56 drug samples tested in the central drug laboratories in October as not of standard quality--Not of Standard Quality (NSQ). Besides, the Union health ministry said on Friday, three drug samples picked by the Bihar Drugs Control Authority in October have been identified as spurious. They were manufactured by unauthorised and unknown manufacturers, using brand name owned by another company. "An investigation has been initiated into the matter," the ministry stated. "This action of identifying NSQ and spurious medicines is taken on regular basis in collaboration with state regulators to ensure that these drugs are identified and removed from the market," it stated. Identification of drug samples as NSQ is done based on failure of the drug sample in one or the other specified quality parameters. "The failure is specific to the drug products of the batch tested by the government laboratory and it does not warrant any concerns on the other drug products available in the market," the ministry clarified, 90 drug samples tested in October found not of standard quality, 34 drug samples tested by state drug regulators have also been identified as NSQ.

Jaipur, Raipur stadium have no NOC for ground water extraction

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was recently informed that the international cricket stadia in Jaipur and Raipur did not apply for no-objection certificates to extract groundwater despite repeated reminders. The Central Ground Water Authority's (CGWA) report therefore requested the tribunal to pass a suitable order, underscoring even the district magistrates concerned did not initiate any action against them. In May, the tribunal directed the CGWA and state GWAs to expeditiously decide the pending NOC applications by the cricket stadia. The directions were issued while hearing a plea against

the use of ground water for the maintenance of cricket stadia alleging they neither utilised the alternate sewage treatment plant (STP) water, nor installed rainwater harvesting systems for storing and replenishing the ground water. In a report dated November 20, the CGWA noted it had informed the green body that the BCCI provided a list of 26 stadia, of which 14 were regulated by the CGWA and the remaining by the SGWA. Among the 14 stadia, three -- Barabati Cricket Stadium in Cuttack, Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur and Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh International Stadium, in Raipur -- hadn't applied for the NOCs. Regarding the present status of NOCs, it said the Barabati

Stadium was issued the certificate on November 13. But the Jaipur and Raipur stadia did not apply for NOCs, it said. "Despite repeated reminders through letters and emails, the Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA) has not applied for NOC for the extraction of groundwater by Sawai Mansingh Cricket Stadium," the report said. It said the CGWA of the western region requested the district collector (DC) or district magistrate (DM) of Jaipur to take action against the stadium but "despite repeated reminders" no action was taken and on November 11, the authority directed the DC to seal the stadium's borewells and submit an action taken report by November 16.

Andaman drug smugglers called Indian contact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after the nearly 6,000 kg of methamphetamine were seized from a trawler in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, investigators found that the smugglers had made multiple calls to their contacts in South East Asian countries, including one person in north India, a top police officer said on Friday. They also entered navigational coordinates for Neil Island in South Andaman and Rangat in Middle Andaman into their systems. Andaman and Nicobar Police collaborated with the Indian Coast Guard to arrest six international narco cartel members of Burmese origin and seize their boat customised for Narco transhipment. Dhalilwal said, "Apart from making calls to people in South East Asian countries, the smugglers also contacted a person in North India. We have alerted the agencies concerned and are looking into details about this person." As part of the investigation, the police are trying to find out who bought the Starlink internet device the smugglers were using and its usage history, he said.

Birsa Munda's great grandson passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Tribal icon Birsa Munda's great-grandson Mangal Munda, who was undergoing treatment at a hospital here after being injured in a road accident, died of "cardiovascular failure" on Friday, an official of the health facility said. He was 45. Mangal Munda breathed his last at 12.30 am at the state's apex health facility - Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS). Birsa Munda's great grandson had sustained severe head injuries after he fell from the roof of a passenger vehicle in Jharkhand's Khunti district on November 25. "Birsa Munda's kin Mangal Munda died of cardiovascular failure around 12.30 am. He was on a ventilator after being critically injured. We tried our best to save him but failed," RIMS Medical Superintendent Dr Hiren Birua told PTI. Mangal Munda was referred to RIMS on Tuesday from Khunti's Sadar Hospital. Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed Munda's demise as a loss to Jharkhand tribal society. "I am deeply saddened by the demise of Mangal Munda Ji, a descendant of Lord Birsa Munda Ji. His demise is an



Jharkhand CM pays tribute to the mortal remains of Mangal Munda. PTI

irreparable loss for his family as well as the tribal society of Jharkhand. May God give strength to his family in this hour of grief," PM posted on X. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and Governor Santosh Gangwar also condoled the death of Mangal Munda. "I am deeply saddened by the news of the demise of Shri Mangal Munda Ji, a descendant of Lord Birsa Munda, who was undergoing treatment at RIMS. May Marang Buru (supreme tribal deity) grant peace to the departed soul and give strength to the bereaved family to bear this difficult time of grief," Soren posted on the microblogging site. He along with senior officials visited RIMS and met the family members of Munda. "Mangal Munda ji suffered

serious injuries. Doctors tried their best. We tried hard. We were keeping an eye on his treatment. We were ready to shift him to any other state if required but he was on a ventilator. We did not get time. We will extend all possible support to his family," Soren told reporters after placing a wreath on Munda's mortal remains. Gangwar, in a message on the social media site, said, "The news of the demise of Mangal Munda, a descendant of Dharti Aaba Bhagwan Birsa Munda is extremely sad. My deepest condolences to the bereaved family. May God give strength to the bereaved family to bear this sorrow." Meanwhile, the last rites of Mangal Munda are likely to be performed at his ancestral village Ulihatu, around 65 km from Jharkhand's capital Ranchi.

Festival of festivals, Hornbill to kickoff in Kisama on December 1

PTI ■ KOHIMA

The 25th edition of the 10-day-long Hornbill Festival in Nagaland is set to begin on December 1. This year, the festival will feature four country partners--Wales, the US, Japan, and Peru--along with two state partners, Sikkim and Telangana. Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along said at a press conference here on Friday. The festival is a flagship tourism event designed to promote, preserve and showcase the state's rich cultural heritage. The Hornbill Festival is held at the picturesque Naga Heritage Village in Kisama, 12 km from the state capital

on the Kohima-Imphal National Highway, with structures erected depicting the map of Nagaland. "The festival, which kicks off in just two days, will mark a significant milestone in Nagaland's history," the minister said. Known as the festival of festivals, the event attracts visitors from across the world to witness the state's vibrant traditions, food, arts and crafts, he said. These partners will participate in various events, including business roundtables, cultural exhibitions, and tourism promotions, he said. The inaugural ceremony will take place at 4 pm on December 1, in the presence



of the dignitaries of the partner countries as honoured guests, Governor La Ganesan as chief host and Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio

as host. The economic impact of the festival is expected to be significant, with the state government's investments reaching over Rs 100 crore for various infrastructure development and also upgrading the seating capacity of the main arena of the festival to 5,000 people with prefab structures, he said. As part of the 25th edition's celebrations, the Hornbill Parade will return, merging with the Kohima Night Bazaar for a vibrant carnival atmosphere on December 7, said the advisor to the chief minister Abu Metha. Multiple districts across Nagaland, including Dimapur, Wokha, and Zunheboto, will also host a variety of music and cultural events throughout the festival, he said. Metha said that the festival

generates around 200 crore in economic activity, benefiting local businesses, hoteliers, and even ecotourism efforts. Environmental sustainability is a key focus this year, with the government striving to make the festival a "green event," he said, adding that efforts to reduce plastic waste and promote eco-friendly practices are central to the festival's planning. When asked about the flow of IMFL at the main festival venue in Kisama despite Nagaland being a dry state, Minister Along said the government has allowed the sale of Indian-made liquor exclusively at Kisama during the event, adhering to the state's prohibition laws. With a budget of Rs 6.5 crore

for the 2024 edition, the Hornbill Festival is not only a celebration of Nagaland's culture but also a platform for global dialogue and economic opportunity, Along said. The festival, which began as a tourism initiative, now stands as a testament to the collective efforts of the Naga people, offering a chance to showcase their culture and hospitality to the world, said Metha. The 10-day music festival to be hosted by Task Force for Music & Arts will mark the evening celebrations of the Hornbill festival with bands and artists from the partnering countries and also famed Indian bands taking the stage, he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Unjust arrest

The arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das in Bangladesh underscores the persistent challenges faced by its religious minorities

The recent arrest of Chinmoy Krishna Das, a prominent Hindu monk and spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilit Sanatan Jagran Jote, has spotlighted the precarious situation of religious minorities in Bangladesh. Das, known for his advocacy on behalf of Hindu communities, was apprehended on sedition charges after a religious flag was reportedly hoisted above the Bangladeshi national flag during a rally in Chittagong. This incident has sparked heated debates, both domestically and internationally, about the treatment of minorities in Bangladesh and its implications for regional stability.

Chinmoy Krishna Das, a senior figure within ISKCON and leader of the 'Sanatan Jagaran Mancha,' has been vocal about the rights of Hindus in Bangladesh. His arrest follows an incident on October 25, when the ISKCON flag was placed above the Bangladeshi national flag at a protest. The act, perceived by authorities as a threat to national sovereignty, led to sedition charges under Bangladeshi law. While the government views the flag incident as an affront to national integrity, critics argue that the charges are politically motivated, aiming to suppress minority voices. Das and the 'Sanatan Jagaran Mancha' have articulated an eight-point agenda, emphasising structural reforms to protect minorities in Bangladesh. They are demanding a dedicated ministry for minority affairs and establishment of a tribunal to expedite justice for crimes against minorities and other safeguards for preserving their identity. Their demands reflect a long-standing plea for systemic changes to safeguard minority communities, which constitute approximately 10 per cent of Bangladesh's population. The arrest has triggered widespread criticism. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina condemned the government's action, calling for the monk's immediate release and emphasising the importance of religious freedom. The incident also drew attention to recent waves of violence against religious minorities, including the burning of a Hindu temple in Chittagong and attacks on other religious groups. This episode has exposed the interim government's struggle to maintain law and order, with opposition leaders accusing it of targeting minorities to divert attention from economic mismanagement and political instability. While New Delhi often raises concerns about the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh, it must tread cautiously to avoid exacerbating tensions. India's position must be consistent. While advocating for minority rights abroad, India must also reflect on its domestic challenges. Rising incidents of communal violence and rhetoric against minorities in India undermine its credibility on the global stage. By ensuring that its own minorities feel secure and respected, India can lead by example and strengthen its moral authority when engaging with Bangladesh. For Bangladesh, the way forward lies in embracing its pluralistic heritage and ensuring that all its citizens, regardless of faith, feel safe and valued. Only then can it achieve sustainable stability and international respect it deserves.



While efforts have been made to ensure safe passage by building over-bridges for elephants to cross railway lines, most elephants do not use them and cross roads and railway lines on foot. Not surprisingly, over 200 of them have perished in train accidents over the last 10 years. Their habitats being encroached upon, and movements under pressure, elephants are migrating to new areas abutting human settlements. Human-elephant conflicts have consequently increased steeply, with the number of people killed increasing from 457 in 2018-19 to 605 in 2022-23. Three hundred elephants have been killed in the last three years. They

PICTALK



Artist paints a wall as beautification drive ahead of the Rising Rajasthan event, in Jaipur

Save India's elephants from multiple threats



HIARNMAY KARLEKAR

Encroachments on migration corridors, poaching and deadly interactions with humans and infrastructure are creating a precarious future for these gentle giants

According to the report, "The Status of Elephants in India 2022-23", there has been a nearly 20 per cent decline in India's elephant population between 2017 and 2022. Authorities have dubbed the printed version, compiled by the Wildlife Institute of India, which is under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, as an interim report because census data from the country's north-eastern part have yet to be completed. The final report will be released by the end of June, 2025.

The final figures from the north-eastern part are unlikely to make a significant difference to the percentage of decline. This is because of the pattern of development in the region where, according to the report, elephant populations are scattered in a mosaic dominated by human habitations, tea plantations, mines, oil refineries and linear infrastructure (roads and railway lines), which makes their movements and lives precarious. Poaching for ivory is another menace.

More or less the same causes account for the challenges elephants face in other parts of the country. Not only are their habitats encroached upon, the 88 elephant corridors, through which the behemoths migrate for food and water, are encroached upon by human settlements and have railway lines and roads running across them.

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also suffer casualties as offshoots of wider human-animal conflict.

The killings are often done with appalling cruelty. On August 15, 2024, a cow elephant died in agony in Jhargram, West Bengal, after being pierced by a flaming spear by a band of about 35 men forming a "hulla" (loud noise) party—the nomenclature given to groups, armed with mashaals (flaming torches) and tasked by state forest departments with driving wild elephants away from human habitations. In this case, the party was reportedly mobilised by West Bengal's Forest department to chase away a herd of six elephants which had entered a human habitation and killed a senior citizen. The cow elephant continued to be hit even after she was wounded. Moving forward, dragging her hind feet and writhing in agony, she finally collapsed and died eight hours later despite the forest department's efforts to treat her.

A report by Jayashree Nandi and Joydeep Thakur in 'The Hindustan Times' dated August 20, 2024, quoted a representative of the Human & Environment Alliance League (HEAL), a Kolkata-based non-profit organisation, as saying, "Hulla drives happen in mob



WHILE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ENSURE SAFE PASSAGE BY BUILDING OVER-BRIDGES FOR ELEPHANTS TO CROSS RAILWAY LINES, MOST ELEPHANTS DO NOT USE THEM

situations... The elephants suffer emotional trauma because of these invasive measures, in addition to physical distress. There is an urgent need to completely stop the use of mashaals by state authorities to drive [out] elephants."

The report quoted an environmentalist, who had asked not to be named, as saying, that the whole idea behind having a hulla party was to chase elephants away by using light. "We know that animals are instinctively scared of fire. But we have seen in the past that hulla groups, employed by the forest department, are in [an] inebriated condition and resort to all kinds of horrific torture. Locals are extremely disturbed about this. Moreover, all corridors that can help these elephants escape are now encroached upon so conflict is rising."

Sometimes, death is a collateral development. On May 27, 2020, a pregnant elephant collapsed in Velliya river in Kerala's Palakkad district and died, after having stood there since May 25. According to the post-mortem report on the tragedy, the immediate cause of her death was drowning. On May 12, 2020, she had tried to eat a coconut that had been stuffed with explosives to kill wild boars that ate up crops.

The result was serious, incapacitating wounds in her oral cavity. "This," the post-mortem report continued, "resulted in excruciating pain and distress in the region and prevented the animal from taking food and water for nearly two weeks. Severe debility and weakness, in turn, resulted in a final collapse in water that led to drowning." According to a report by Sujit Bisoyi in 'The Indian Express' (dated November 18, 2024), three elephants, including a calf, died after falling into an electrified trap, laid by poachers for killing wild boars, in Odisha's Sambalpur district.

The question is: should wild boars be killed in this terrible way? The human-animal conflict is making demons out of people. Meanwhile, there is good news from across the border. Under the auspices of Four Paws, a global animal welfare organisation, Madhubala, an African elephant, was shifted on November 26, 2024, from the Karachi Zoo to Karachi Safari Park, to join her two sisters, Malika and Sonia, in open air. One hopes, brought from Africa when young, they live happily hereafter.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer; the views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

REMEMBERING PHILLIP HUGHES

Madam — A decade has passed since the tragic death of the Australian cricketer Phillip Hughes. The painful irony is that Hughes was killed by the very game that he loved most. As a thumb rule, cricket ought to provide entertainment to all of us. But, in Hughes' demise, the game dealt a severe blow to the cricketing fraternity, from which it could not come to terms till today.

Numbers 408 and 63 that denote Hughes' Test cap and the last runs scored by him, respectively, will ever remain a shadow bigger than his frame. As the cricket world pauses to reflect on Hughes' contributions and untimely loss, the commemorations that Cricket Australia is preparing to pay a heartfelt tribute to him, marking his 10th death anniversary, serve as a reminder of the unity and resilience within the cricketing community. Hughes' legacy continues to inspire players and fans alike, reinforcing the profound and lasting impact he had on Australian cricket. Perhaps the bulbs that bloom on the grass at the Sydney Cricket Ground every day are not snowdrops but are droplets of tears in memory of the deceased young Australian cricketer.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

PRIYANKA IN PARLIAMENT

Madam — History sometimes records the rarest of the rare incidence in its book and in Indian history, the Congress party is renowned for creating multiple such historic incidences. The Gandhi family has once again done something similar to having three members in the Parliament from one family only. After Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, the newest MP in the house, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is all set to begin her new league in the temple of Indian democracy, the Indian parliament. Initiating her spectacular victory this election from Wayanad with the huge margin of around four lakh votes, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is paving the way to represent the aspirations of Wayanad on the floor of Parliament itself. Her oath catch-

Ceasefire a huge respite for Lebanon



As propos to "Glimmer of Hope," published on November 28. The Lebanon ceasefire is definitely a huge respite. Over one million have been forced to flee their homes by Israeli military action and more than 3,500 citizens have been killed in Israeli attacks and

homes of tens of thousands have been destroyed. Though few people in Israel feel that this ceasefire would collapse as Netanyahu himself said that this is the time to give breathers to his forces and replenish stocks. The US and France will have to ensure that this ceasefire holds.

As of now, the Israeli army would remain in the southern part of Lebanon and adapt the wait-and-watch policy. Israel has eliminated the whole top leadership of Hezbollah and we should be hopeful that they do not backtrack. Lebanon should focus on rebuilding its battered infrastructure. It is a moment of cautious hope as peace has been elusive in this part of the world. Both parties should avoid provocations and prioritise the lives of civilians over the politics of war. The world would watch with bated breath.

Bal Govind | Noida

es the attention, as she holds the copy of the Constitution in her hand and takes the oath simultaneously.

Now, Priyanka Gandhi is also there, Rahul Gandhi, who is the current Leader of the Opposition from Congress, can represent the Opposition opinion more strongly. Priyanka can contribute the southern aspirations and perspective more explicitly due to her southern representation in the Parliament. Beginning the new political league at the parliament at the age of 52 needs strong zeal. She has taken the oath and become the Member of Parliament, we hope that she will be able to walk the talk and keep the Constitution at the epitome during her service period as MP.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

ONLINE SERVICES DISRUPTED

Madam — Since the afternoon of Thursday, November 28, people and companies using net banking and online services in the country have been facing problems. The OTP i.e. 'One Time Password,' that comes on the registered mobile number while making any transaction has start-

ed arriving very late. After which, on entering the OTP, a message comes that the 'One Time Password' has expired. This is happening because due to the new rules of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, i.e. TRAI, there has been a delay in receiving the One Time Password (OTP). TRAI claims that under this, they want to ensure that online users do not become victims of any kind of cyber fraud. But to prevent them from becoming victims of fraud, the work of people, institutions and companies has now come to a halt. Now we will have to go back to the manual era and for every transaction like NEFT, i.e. National Electronic Fund Transfer and RTGS, i.e. 'Real Time Gross Settlement' fund transfer work, we will have to stand in queues at the counters of banks. These transactions will not be possible on holidays. TRAI needs to reconsider its decision. This will start having an adverse effect on the business of billions of rupees every day.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Antimicrobial resistance: An invisible risk for women health



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

With AMR deaths projected to exceed 10 million annually by 2050, a gender-sensitive, intersectional approach is critical to tackling this silent epidemic

When antibiotics or antimicrobials, impactful the first few times, lose their efficacy as their intake increases, sometimes unthinkingly and unnecessarily, it indicates that the bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites it was being used to treat have become resistant to these drugs. Prevention and treatment of infections then become increasingly difficult and can lead to fatal consequences. While this antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is invisible, the people affected by it are not. In 2021, deaths linked to AMR numbered a staggering 4.7 million and approximately 1.5 million were directly caused by it. Worryingly, India has one of the world's highest AMR rates. Equally worrying is that the impacts of AMR are not the same for everyone. Since the drivers of AMR in India include lack of access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and limited access to healthcare facilities among others, AMR disproportionately affects certain groups compared with others. Thus, marginalised and vulnerable communities, espe-



cially women, face a higher risk of acquiring bacterial infections, including drug-resistant infections and AMR. It is a good fact that women face more barriers to accessing health information than men. Limited mobility prevents them from attending public health awareness events and learning about the safe use of antibiotics. Low levels of education lead to ignorance on the use and misuse of antibiotics not just for themselves, but for their children also. Studies have found that misuse of antibiotics while breastfeeding can contribute to the development of AMR, particularly in intestinal microbiota in a child, through breast milk transfer. They are more prone to seeking antibiotics to get better as fast as possible, to

work. Medicines used for self-medication are often purchased without prescriptions from unlicensed local shops as limited financial resources often dictate whether it is worth paying a visit to a health facility. It has been proven that treating viral infections with antibiotics, not buying the full course of treatment, interrupting treatment and sharing medicines can lead to an increased risk of AMR with the emergence of resistant strains of bacteria. Sexual orientation and associated sexual behaviours among individuals also contribute to the risks of acquiring AMR. Laws that criminalise homosexual relationships coupled with stigma are deterrents to health-seeking behaviour by key populations such as men having sex with men (MSM), lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer and other identities (LGBTQ+) individuals. This enhances their exposure to pathogens, such as an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and antimicrobial drug resistance. Gender-based violence also plays a significant role in AMR among women.

Multiple studies have shown that women, including married women, are at a higher risk than men of being exposed to STIs through sexual violence, having a spouse with multiple partners, male resistance to condom use and women's low ability to negotiate safe sex.

This increases women's risk of contracting STIs, particularly gonorrhoea, one of the most transmitted STIs which has the potential for drug resistance. The more frequent the UTIs, the greater the use of ciprofloxacin and the higher the risk of AMR. With the possibility of deaths associated with AMR rising to over 10 million annually by 2050, there is an urgent need to adopt a robust intersectional approach. Greater data disaggregated by sex, gender, disability, geographical location, occupation, sexual orientation and socio-economic status is urgently needed to implement policies to prevent AMR, especially among women, LGBTQ, people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups. (The author is a journalist writing on development and gender; views are personal)



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A holistic approach, encompassing administration, training and spiritual discipline, can transform sports



RAVI VALLURI

On your marks, set, go. The gunshot fired and the cauldron rose rambunctiously as Usain Bolt scorched the track, adding to his ever-growing tally of medals. Contrast this with Indian athletes. Why is our mind prepared for the also-ran? Indian athletes need to possess the single-minded pursuit, the talent, the eye and the mind of an Arjuna. He was a successful archer as he honed his skills and had immense faith in his Guru—Dronacharya and his sakha – Lord Krishna. He was rewarded by both. Lord Krishna blessed him with a divine vision to capture the SOHAM Swarup, the Vishwarup Darshan. Dronacharya equipped his favourite tutee by filling his arsenal with all the weaponry at his disposal. The elasticity, malleability and humility of Arjuna's mind enabled him to conquer his fears and his opponents, by fortuitously overcoming the cobwebs in his mind. Arjuna's mind was Ajatashatru and thus became his ally. True, the spirit and motto of the Olympics as coined by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894 was and is Citiuis, Altius, Fortius (Faster, Higher, Stronger), and one should play in the spirit of sportsmanship. But the drive to excel and stand at the podium is dismally missing. The passion to climb, not clamber to the podium, What makes the minds of those athletes tick, where we fail? We do not possess the wherewithal. Cricket remains the Holy Grail of the nation and these days it is the Indian Premier League that dominates our sporting arena. At one end of the spectrum is cricket and all other sports are at the other end. It is



a virtual denouncing of all other sports. Sakshi Malik, Olympic bronze medalist works with the Northern Railway and the first woman Olympic silver medalist, PV Sindhu's father is the sports officer of South-Central Railway. The mindsets of these women of substance were akin to Ajatashatru as they turned around gruelling situations into triumphant ones.

These mindsets indicate the indomitable spirit which should be embraced by all sportspersons. The mindset and approach of the Ministry of Sports need to be altered radically. The administration of this department needs a vigorous overhaul. Indian Railways and Indian Defence Forces should be actively involved in revamping the moribund organisation along with the participation of the private sector to provide an adequate corpus of funds through their Corporate Social Responsibility programme. However, doubts should not arise in the corners of the minds of the administrators. They should be willing to take the risks.

Their minds too should be flexible in approach and become Ajatashatru. Most sportspersons find relaxation with the latest gizmos and listening to music and in the entertainment industry. Perhaps it will be a profitable exercise to begin the rigorous schedule by practising yoga, and pranayama and then resume their normal routine. The day should end with the practice of *Sudarshan Kriya* and meditation. This will make the bodies and minds supple. Several East Asian countries and China follow a regimen of spiritual teachings like Vipassana to enhance the quality of performance of their athletes. China takes several pages from the works of Tsung Tzu to learn the craft of war to train the minds of their sportspersons. This dynamic approach produces champions. "Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is to the one who endures that the final victory comes," said Buddha. It is a matter of honour to climb the podium. Let us begin our preparations yesterday with earnestness and train our sportspersons to become truly Ajatashatru.

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

The Eastern challenge to Western supremacy



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

As alliances between Eastern nations grow stronger, the American-led global order faces an existential challenge—one that could redefine the world's balance of power



What if everything you've been told about global conflicts is a carefully crafted narrative, designed to obscure the true motives behind the wars shaping our world? What if the West, in its pursuit of global dominance, has been engineering not only conflicts but also economic crises to maintain an order that ensures its supremacy? From secret military operations to covert sabotage of vital infrastructure, the unsettling reality is far darker and more strategic than we're led to believe.

Take, for example, the US Space Force's secret X-37B spacecraft, a classified project performing manoeuvres unknown to the public. Officially seen as a technological marvel for testing new military systems, the X-37B reveals the West's obsession with space as the final frontier of warfare—a new realm for control, surveillance, and preparation for conflict beyond terrestrial borders. In Europe, Germany is quietly preparing for a war that might never be fought, but whose consequences will be felt across generations. The German government has begun drawing up plans for the construction and expansion of bunkers, turning buildings—metro stations, and underground car parks—into fortified shelters in case of conflict. The reasons for these preparations are not openly discussed, but anyone with a cursory knowledge of geopolitics can understand the strategic intent. At the heart of this is the fear of Russia, a fear that has taken root despite decades of diplomatic agreements and economic cooperation. But the true motive behind these moves, hidden beneath the veil of defence, is not just survival. It's about keeping Europe within the American orbit—controlling the narrative and preventing the rise of any bloc that might dare to challenge the order established in the aftermath of the Cold War. As the West tightens its grip on the war



ECONOMIC SANCTIONS, COVERT OPERATIONS, AND POLITICAL MANIPULATION ARE BUT TOOLS IN THE WEST'S ARSENAL, DEPLOYED TO DIVIDE AND CONQUER, ENSURING THAT PEACE BETWEEN CHINA, RUSSIA AND INDIA REMAINS AN UNTHINKABLE PROSPECT

in Ukraine, a much larger game is unfolding—one rooted in economic sabotage, echoing dark chapters from WWI and WWII. During WWI, the British naval blockade led to over 750,000 German deaths from starvation, while in WWII, both Axis and Allied powers exploited occupied economies.

The US used sanctions and trade embargoes to cripple Germany, Japan, and Italy, before later pushing the Marshall Plan to prevent Soviet expansion. WWII's hidden agenda was to establish a new global economic order, cemented by institutions like the IMF and World Bank. Today, the destruction of the Nord Stream pipelines, a symbol of the West's desperation, exemplifies the lengths to which the West will go to control European energy resources. While it harms the German public and European markets, the US and its allies benefit from the uncertainty and dependence on their energy exports. This isn't a mere accident; it's economic warfare to weaken Russia and prevent Germany from growing too independent.

A fragmented Europe is far easier to control than a self-sufficient one. But the true target of the West's fear is not merely Russia. It is the potential unity between China, India and Russia. These nations, once seen as geopolitical rivals, are now forging alliances that threaten to upend the balance of power in a way that the West cannot tolerate.

The prospect of India, the world's most populous country, rising to become the third-largest economy in the world in the next few years is a nightmare for the West. India, with its growing manufac-

turing sector, burgeoning technological innovation, and rapidly expanding middle class, represents an existential threat to the economic order that has been so carefully crafted by the West over the last century.

But there's something even more dangerous: the potential for India, China, and Russia to align themselves strategically, creating a bloc that could challenge the very foundations of the American-led global system. This is not mere conjecture. The relationship between these nations is growing stronger by the day, driven by mutual interests in trade, energy, and security.

India's role as a bridge between the East and West has already made it a key player in the global economy, and its rise is inevitable—unless, of course, the West can sabotage it. From the ongoing conflict with Pakistan to the subtle manoeuvring within India's border countries, the West's tactics are clear: prevent India from becoming too powerful, too independent. The rise of India would disrupt the existing order, unseating the US dollar's global dominance, challenging the West's monopoly over technological innovation, and upsetting the very structure of global trade.

For years, the West has maintained a delicate balance by keeping China, India, and Russia in a state of disunity, playing them off each other whenever possible. This disunity has been the foundation of Western power in the modern world, preventing the rise of any one nation that could unite the East and threaten the West's economic hegemony.

The more these nations grow closer, the more the West fears

losing its control over global affairs.

A united East is the ultimate nightmare, and the West will stop at nothing to ensure it never happens. Economic sanctions, covert operations, and political manipulation are but tools in the West's arsenal, deployed to divide and conquer, ensuring that peace between China, Russia, and India remains an unthinkable prospect. But what if India, China, and Russia do unite?

What if they form a powerful bloc, in addition to BRICS but similar to Five Eyes or AUKUS, one that can rival the economic and military might of the West? The very notion of peace in this region—the idea that these nations could cooperate, trade, and build mutual trust—strikes at the heart of Western strategy. Peace in the East is the West's greatest fear, and the possibility of such a peace emerging in the wake of current geopolitical turmoil is something the West cannot allow. It is the very foundation of the Western empire that stands on the brink of collapse, should this unity ever come to pass.

If unity is ensured, the East may finally break free from the chains of Western manipulation, and the world may look very different from how it does today. The question remains: can the West survive in a world where it no longer controls the narrative, the economy, or the very fate of nations? Only time will tell, but the signs are already clear—if the West doesn't change its course, it will be its actions that lead to its downfall.

(The writer is a journalist and author; Views expressed are personal)

Trump re-elected as the US President: Nationalism rises amid global shifts

His re-election is set to influence US immigration, trade and foreign policies while creating ripple effects across the globe

Donald Trump has been re-elected as President of the United States, defeating Kamala Harris in a closely watched election. His return to power has sparked global speculation about potential shifts in US economic and social policies. Trump's previous tenure was marked by transformative changes, and his "America First" doctrine remains central to his administration.



ASHWANI MAHAJAN

The Rise of Nationalism Globally, nationalism is surging amid challenges like globalisation, terrorism, religious extremism and economic upheaval. Trump's victory reflects this trend. During his first term, Trump emphasised reviving American manufacturing, limiting Chinese imports, and reform-

ing immigration policies to protect American jobs. His proposal to build a US-Mexico border wall became symbolic of his immigration stance. Trump also advocated reducing costly military interventions abroad and fostered a controversial friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, breaking traditional US-Russia dynamics. These policies resonated with a significant portion of the

electorate, reinforcing Trump's popularity. Nationalism is also gaining traction in Europe. Post-World War II liberalism and globalisation have given way to a nationalist wave, driven by economic concerns and fears of societal erosion. Britain's Brexit epitomised this shift, and several European nations, including Italy, Finland and Hungary, now have nationalist governments. Even traditionally liberal countries like Germany and France are witnessing growing influence from nationalist parties. Rising extremism, as seen in recent violent incidents in France and England, has further fueled public discontent with liberal immigration policies, rein-

forcing nationalist sentiments.

Implications of victory of Nationalism

Trump's win represents a significant setback for liberal ideologies, including Wokeism and leftist movements. His administration's emphasis on American nationalism underscores a rejection of policies perceived as prioritising minority appeasement or extremism. While Trump has praised the contributions of Hindus in America, he has also vowed to take a hardline stance against extremism, including deporting Muslim immigrants linked to groups like Hamas. The Biden administration's perceived support for liberal and leftist ideologies con-



trasts with Trump's firm nationalist agenda. His "America First" slogan signifies a broader rejection of extremism and a commitment to protecting US interests. This ideological divide is emblematic of a global realignment favoring nationalism.

Elon Musk's Role

Elon Musk, a billionaire industrialist, played a pivotal role in the elections. Musk, a former critic of Trump, became a vocal supporter due to his personal experiences with Wokeism, particularly involving his family. California's Woke-influenced education policies led to a gender transition for Musk's son, causing a rift within his family. Disillusioned, Musk resolved to challenge Wokeism. After acquiring Twitter (now X), Musk reinstated Trump's account and actively supported his campaign. Musk's actions symbolise a broader cultural battle against Woke ideologies, aligning with Trump's nationalist narrative.

Trump's Victory and Its Impact on India

Trump's presidency has significant implications for India. His tough stance on China aligns with India's interests, potentially encouraging global firms to view India as a manufacturing alternative. This could bolster India's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. However, Trump's protectionist policies, such as potential tariff hikes and restrictions on H-1B visas, might pose challenges for Indian exporters and IT firms. Trump's administration may also bring geopolitical benefits for India. Strengthening ties with both the US and Russia could enhance India's global positioning. While Trump's climate change stance might

hinder global environmental goals, his leadership could contribute to reducing extremism and terrorism, fostering stability.

Conclusion

Trump's re-election reflects a global shift toward nationalism, driven by dissatisfaction with liberal policies and rising concerns about extremism. His presidency promises significant changes in US domestic and foreign policies, emphasising economic protectionism, immigration reform, and geopolitical realignments. For India, Trump's leadership presents both opportunities and challenges, shaping its role in the evolving global landscape.

(The author is Professor, PGDAV College, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Negotiators get closer to agreeing on plastic pollution treaty

AP ■ BUSAN (SOUTH KOREA)

Negotiators working on a treaty to address the global crisis of plastic pollution inched closer to an agreement Friday, with more countries saying they want to address the total plastic on Earth. The most contentious issue of the talks is whether there will be a limit on the amount of plastic that companies are allowed to produce. Panama proposed text for the treaty to address plastic production on Thursday.

Juan Carlos Monterrey, head of Panama's delegation, said it's a compromise proposal to build

consensus because it does not include a numerical target or production cap. Instead, it says countries would adopt a global target at a later conference of the parties meeting.

Support for Panama's proposal quickly grew to over 100 countries. Some plastic-producing and oil and gas countries, including Saudi Arabia, vigorously oppose including plastic production in the treaty, calling it a red line. Russia's delegation has said if the world is serious about this treaty, negotiators must concentrate on provisions acceptable for all delegations.

On Friday afternoon, Luis Vayas



Valdivieso, the committee chair from Ecuador, issued a paper with draft treaty text, condensing the views expressed by negotiators during the week. The treaty article on production has Panama's proposal. The other option is to strike that article.

"This is great! This is great," Monterrey said as he read the document on his cellphone just after it was issued.

"It is a big show of force, of muscle, for those countries that are ambitious. And also this shows that consensus is still possible," he said in an interview.

Global plastics production is set to

reach 736 million tons by 2040, up 70% from 2020, without policy changes, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Environmental organizations demonstrated with signs outside the convention center Friday morning, demanding that negotiators show courage.

Negotiators began meeting Monday in Busan. They split into groups to consider text for treaty articles. By the midpoint of the negotiations, none had agreed to anything. They were having long discussions over topics where there's more agreement, such as the

need to manage plastic waste better. And they hadn't settled on some of the basics of the treaty, such as the scope and definitions. Valdivieso told them Wednesday night their progress was too slow and they had to speed up significantly.

The delegations will now discuss Valdivieso's paper and decide whether to agree to the articles. The meeting ends late Sunday or early Monday.

UN Environment Program Executive Director Inger Andersen said there's still enough time to land an agreement, "if we work hard."

Bangladesh freezes bank accounts of 17, including arrested leader

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's authorities have ordered freezing for 30 days the bank accounts of 17 people associated with ISKCON, including its former member Chinnmoy Krishna Das arrested this week on sedition charges, media reports said Friday.

The move comes after the Bangladesh High Court rejected a petition seeking a ban on International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), following the killing of a lawyer in a clash between the Hindu leader's supporters and security personnel.

The Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) sent these directives to different banks and financial institutions on Thursday, suspending all types of transactions related to these accounts for a month, newspaper Prothom Alo said.

The financial intelligence agency under the central Bangladesh Bank asked the banks and financial institutions to send information, including updated transaction statements of accounts related

all businesses owned by these 17 individuals, within the next three working days, it said.

On October 30, a sedition case was filed against 19 people, including Das, at Chattogram's Kotwali Police Station, accusing them of disrespecting Bangladesh's national flag in Chattogram's New Market area during a rally of the Hindu community.

Das, a spokesperson for the Bangladesh Sammilta Sanatani Jagran Jote, was arrested from Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Monday for alleged sedition. He was denied bail and sent to jail by a Chattogram court on Tuesday, triggering protests by his supporters.

On Tuesday, New Delhi expressed concern over the leader's arrest and denial of bail, and asked Bangladesh to ensure the safety of Hindus and other minorities.

Ousted Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina too has sought the priest's release. She also condemned the killing of the lawyer during the protests over his arrest.

ISKCON Bangladesh refuted allegations linking it to the lawyer's killing, saying the claims were baseless and part of a malicious campaign.

A spokesman of the attorney general's office said a two-member High Court bench that declined to ban the ISKCON activities in Bangladesh also said the intervention of the (High) court "at this time" as the State is carrying out its job. The Bench hoped that the government would remain cautious about protecting the law and order situation and the lives and properties of the people of Bangladesh.

Hindus — the community constituted about 22 per cent of Bangladesh's population during the 1971 Liberation War, now make up roughly 8 per cent — have been frequently reporting atrocities against their community members in different parts of Bangladesh.

There are also reports of the rise of extremist groups such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and similar ideological extremist wings.

Russian defence minister in N Korea for talks

AP ■ SEOUL

Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov arrived in North Korea on Friday for talks with North Korean military and political leaders as the countries deepen their cooperation over Russia's war in Ukraine.

In announcing the visit, Russia's Defence Ministry didn't say whom Belousov would meet or the purpose of the talks. North Korean state media didn't immediately confirm the visit.

Belousov, a former economist, replaced Sergei Shoigu as defence minister in May after Russian President Vladimir Putin started a fifth term in power.

Photos released by the Defense Ministry showed Belousov walking alongside North Korean Defense Minister No Kwang Chol on a red carpet at a Pyongyang airport. North Korean military officials were seen clapping under a banner that read, "Complete support and solidarity with the fighting Russian army and people."

Belousov noted after his arrival that military cooperation between the countries is expanding. He applauded a strategic partnership agree-



ment signed by Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un following their June meeting in Pyongyang, which he said is aimed at reducing tensions by maintaining a "balance of power" in the region and lowering the risk of war, including with nuclear weapons.

The June meeting demonstrated the "highest level of mutual trust" between the leaders, Belousov said, and "also the mutual desire of our countries to further expand mutually beneficial cooperation in a complex international environment".

North Korean Defence Minister No also praised the expanding cooperation

between the countries' militaries and reiterated North Korea's support for Russia's war in Ukraine, describing it as a "just struggle to protect the country's sovereign rights and security interests".

The visit comes days after South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol met with a Ukrainian delegation led by Defence Minister Rustem Umerov in the South Korean capital of Seoul and called for the two countries to formulate countermeasures in response to North Korea's dispatch of thousands of troops to Russia to help its fight against Ukraine.

Kim in recent months has prioritized relations with Russia as

he tries to break out of isolation and strengthen his international footing, embracing the idea of a "new Cold War".

The United States and its allies have said North Korea has sent more than 10,000 soldiers to Russia in recent weeks and that some of those troops were engaging in combat.

North Korea has also been accused of supplying artillery systems, missiles and other military equipment to Russia that may help Putin further extend an almost three-year war. There are also concerns in Seoul that North Korea, in exchange for its troops and arms supplies, could receive Russian technology transfers

that could improve its nuclear weapons and missile programmes.

Yoon's national security adviser, Shin Wonsik, said in a TV interview last week that Seoul believes that Russia has provided air defence missile systems to North Korea in exchange for sending its troops.

Shin said Russia also appears to have given economic assistance to North Korea and various military technologies, including those needed for the North's efforts to build a reliable space-based surveillance system, which Kim has stressed is crucial for enhancing the threat of nuclear-capable missiles targeting South Korea.

Historic debate on legalising assisted dying in England and Wales begins

AP ■ LONDON

British lawmakers started a historic debate Friday on a proposal to help terminally ill adults end their lives in England and Wales, an issue that has divided Parliament as well as the country at large.

It's the first time the House of Commons has had the opportunity to vote on legalising what some people call "assisted dying" while others term as "assisted suicide" in nearly a decade — and it looks like it will be a close result.

Under the proposed legislation, only those over 18 years old in England and Wales and who are expected to die within six months can request assisted dying. They must have the mental capacity to make a choice about the end of their life and will be required to make two separate declarations about their wish to die.

Ahead of the debate on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, around 180 lawmakers have indicated they will back the proposal, while about 150 have said they won't. The other 300 or so lawmakers have either yet to make up their mind or have not disclosed how they will vote.

The debate is set to be impassioned, touching on issues of ethics, grief, the law, religion, crime and money. Many lawmakers plan to recount personal experiences while others



Pro legal assisted dying supporters demonstrate in front of Parliament in London on Friday as British lawmakers started a historic debate on a proposed to help terminally ill adults end their lives in England and Wales. AP/PTI

will focus on the impact on the hard-pressed state-run National Health Service and how to safeguard the most vulnerable from being exploited. Around 160 members of parliament have indicated they would like to make a speech during the debate, but the speaker of the House of Commons, Lyndsay Hoyle, said it's unlikely that they all will have a chance to do so.

"Let's be clear, we're not talking about a choice between life or death, we are talking about giving dying people a choice about how to die," the bill's main sponsor, Kim Leadbeater, said in the opening speech in a

packed chamber.

As the debate started, supporters of both sides gathered outside Parliament.

The contentious bill would allow adults expected to have fewer than six months to live to request and be provided with help to end their life, subject to safeguards and protections. They would have to be capable of taking the fatal drugs themselves. Lawmakers, who have been holding emotional meetings with constituents and searching their souls, are due to debate the issue that crosses political lines.

Supporters say the law would provide dignity to the dying

and prevent unnecessary suffering, while ensuring there are enough safeguards to prevent those near the end of their lives from being coerced into taking their own life. Opponents say it would put vulnerable people at risk, fearing that some would be coerced to end their lives and that some elderly or disabled people may opt for death so they don't become a burden.

A vote in favour of the bill would send it to another round of hearings, where it will face further scrutiny and votes in both Houses of Parliament. If ultimately approved, any new law is unlikely to come into effect within the next two to three years.

A vote against it would kill it. It's the first time the House of Commons has debated an assisted dying bill since 2015, when a similar measure failed. Only around a third of the lawmakers from that parliament are still in office.

Although the current bill was proposed by a member of the ruling centre-left Labour Party, it is an open vote with no pressure from the government on supporting it.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has previously supported assisted dying, said the government will remain neutral and he wouldn't reveal how he would vote. Some members of his cabinet have said they will support the bill, while others are against it.

India re-elected to UN Peacebuilding Commission

PTI ■ NEW YORK

India has been re-elected to the UN Peacebuilding Commission for 2025-2026.

India's current term on the Commission was expiring on December 31.

"India has been re-elected to the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for 2025-2026. As a founding member and major contributor to @UNPeacekeeping, India is committed to continuing its engagement with the PBC to work towards global peace and stability," the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations said in a post on X on Thursday.

The Peacebuilding Commission is an intergovernmental advisory

body that supports peace efforts in conflict-affected countries and is a key addition to the capacity of the International Community in the broad peace agenda, according to its website.

The PBC is composed of 31 Member States, elected from the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. The top financial contributing countries and the top troop-contributing countries to the United Nations system are also members.

The Commission is mandated to bring together all relevant actors to marshal resources and to advise on and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery; to focus attention on the reconstruction

and institution-building efforts necessary for recovery from conflict and to support the development of integrated strategies in order to lay the foundation for sustainable development.

It is also mandated to provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the United Nations, to develop best practices, to help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery activities and to extend the period of attention given by the international community to post-conflict recovery, the Commission said.

The Commission also focuses on promoting an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to

peacebuilding, noting that security, development and human rights are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing; serving a bridging role among the principal organs and relevant entities of the United Nations by sharing advice on peacebuilding needs and priorities, in line with the respective competencies and responsibilities of these bodies.

India is among the largest contributors of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping.

It currently deploys about 6,000 military and police personnel to UN operations in Abyei, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, the Middle East, Somalia, South Sudan, and Western Sahara.

Survival rate of cuddly giant pandas goes up

PTI ■ BEIJING

The population of giant pandas endemic to China has increased to around 1,900 after their survival rate improved in captive breeding, according to official data.

The status of the rarest members of the bear family whose round faces, plump bodies, and signature markings evoke global admiration has been changed from endangered to vulnerable.

Chinese experts say the breeding of the giant pandas was the most difficult process.

"In the early days, the artificial breeding of giant pandas was a big problem. Throughout the 1980s, we only bred one baby

panda, which survived for two years," Li Desheng, chief expert at China Conservation and Research Centre for the Giant Panda, said.

But with technological and scientific advancements, artificial breeding at present is seeing significantly improved oestrus rate and panda cub survival rate, and pandas' average life expectancy has increased, Li told the state-run Xinhua news agency.

Official data show the wild giant panda population has grown from around 1,100 in the 1980s to nearly 1,900. The global captive population of giant pandas now stands at 757, Xinhua reported. The International Union for Conservation of



Nature has downgraded the giant panda's status from endangered to vulnerable. Sichuan, the venue of the conference, is home to the largest panda habitat in the world. Here, 1,387 pandas have been found in the wild, an increase of more than 50 per cent since the 1980s.

The cuddly pandas have also become a centre for China's soft power diplomacy as Beijing provides a few of them to countries

around the world for a specific period under the care of Chinese breeders in animal parks for public viewing.

Giant pandas in China are also enjoying enlarged wild habitats. In 2021, China officially designated five national parks, including the Giant Panda National Park, which covers parts of the provinces of Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu. Speaking at the Global Panda Partners 2024 opening ceremony on November 26, Guan Zhiou, head of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, said China formed a giant panda habitat protection system centred around the national park, with a total area of 2.58 million hectares.

Desertion threatens to starve Ukraine's forces at crucial time in its war with Russia

AP ■ KYIV

Desertion is starving the Ukrainian army of desperately needed manpower and crippling its battle plans at a crucial time in its war with Russia, which could put Kyiv at a clear disadvantage in future ceasefire talks.

Facing every imaginable shortage, tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops, tired and bereft, have walked away from combat and front-line positions to slide into anonymity, according to soldiers, lawyers and Ukrainian officials. Entire units have abandoned their posts, leaving defensive lines vulnerable and accelerating territorial losses, according to military commanders and soldiers.

Some take medical leave and never return, haunted by the

traumas of war and demoralized by bleak prospects for victory. Others clash with commanders and refuse to carry out orders, sometimes in the middle of firefights.

"This problem is critical," said Oleksandr Kovalenko, a Kyiv-based military analyst. "This is the third year of war, and this problem will only grow."

Although Moscow has also been dealing with desertions, Ukrainians going AWOL have laid bare deeply rooted problems bedeviling their military and how Kyiv is managing the war, from the flawed mobilization drive to the overstretching and hollowing out of front-line units. It comes as the US urges Ukraine to draft more troops, and allow for the conscription of those as young as 18.

The Associated Press spoke to

two deserters, three lawyers, and a dozen Ukrainian officials and military commanders. Officials and commanders spoke on condition of anonymity to divulge classified information, while one deserter did so because he feared prosecution.

"It is clear that now, frankly speaking, we have already squeezed the maximum out of our people," said an officer with the 72nd Brigade, who noted that desertion was one of the main reasons Ukraine lost the town of Vuhledar in October.

The troops who walk away: More than 100,000 soldiers have been charged under Ukraine's desertion laws since Russia invaded in February 2022, according to the country's General Prosecutor's Office. Nearly half have gone AWOL

in the last year alone, after Kyiv launched an aggressive and controversial mobilization drive that government officials and military commanders concede has largely failed.

It's a staggeringly high number by any measure, as there were an estimated 300,000 Ukrainian soldiers engaged in combat before the mobilization drive began. And the actual number of deserters may be much higher. One lawmaker with knowledge of military matters estimated it could be as high as 200,000.

Many deserters don't return after being granted medical leave. Bone-tired by the constancy of war, they are psychologically and emotionally scarred. They feel guilt about being unable to summon the will to fight, anger over how the

war effort is being led, and frustration that it seems unwinnable.

"Being quiet about a huge problem only harms our country," said Serhii Hnezdilov, one of few soldiers to speak publicly about his choice to desert. He was charged shortly after the AP interviewed him in September.

Another deserter said he initially left his infantry unit with permission because he needed surgery. By the time his leave was up, he couldn't bring himself to return.

He still has nightmares about the comrades he saw get killed. "The best way to explain it is imagining you are sitting under incoming fire and from their (Russian) side, it's 50 shells coming toward you, while from our side, it's just one. Then you

see how your friends are getting torn to pieces, and you realize that any second, it can happen to you," he said.

"Meanwhile guys (Ukrainian soldiers) 10 kilometers (6 miles) away order you on the radio: Go on, brace yourselves. Everything will be fine," he said.

Hnezdilov also left to seek medical help. Before undergoing surgery, he announced he was deserting. He said after five years of military service, he saw no hope of ever being demobilized, despite earlier promises by the country's leadership.

"If there's no end term (to military service), it turns into a prison — it becomes psychologically hard to find reasons to defend this country," Hnezdilov said.

A growing problem for Kyiv:

Desertion has turned battle plans into sand that slips through military commanders' fingertips.

The AP learned of cases in which defensive lines were severely compromised because entire units defied orders and abandoned their positions.

"Because of a lack of political will and poor management of troops, especially in the infantry, we certainly are not moving in a direction to properly defend the territories that we control now," Hnezdilov said.

Ukraine's military recorded a deficit of 4,000 troops on the front in September owing largely to deaths, injuries and desertions, according to a lawmaker. Most deserters were among recent recruits.

The head of one brigade's legal

service who is in charge of processing desertion cases and forwarding them to law enforcement said he's had many of them.

"The main thing is that they leave combat positions during hostilities and their comrades die because of it. We had several situations when units fled, small or large. They exposed their flanks, and the enemy came to these flanks and killed their brothers in arms, because those who stood on the positions did not know that there was no one else around," the official said.

That is how Vuhledar, a hilltop town that Ukraine defended for two years, was lost in a matter of weeks in October, said the 72nd Brigade officer, who was among the very last to withdraw.

Syria insurgents push their advance toward 2nd largest city Aleppo

Thousands of Syrian insurgents pushed on with their advances on government-held areas in the country's north-west, reaching the outskirts of Syria's second largest city Aleppo and wresting control of several strategic towns and villages along the way, activists and fighters said on Friday.

to the capital Damascus to avoid clashes, state-controlled media reported. Fighters also advanced on the town of Saraqab, in north-western Idlib province, a strategic area that would secure supply lines to Aleppo.

2019 agreement that de-escalated fighting in the area, which has been the last remaining opposition stronghold for years. State media reported airstrikes on insurgents' positions in Aleppo countryside.

itary campaign and a siege that lasted for weeks. The battle for Aleppo was a turning point in the war between Syrian government forces and rebel fighters since the 2011 protests against Bashar Assad's rule turned into an all-out war.

Ireland votes in close-run election

Ireland is voting on Friday in a parliamentary election that will decide the next government — and will show whether Ireland bucks the global trend of incumbents being ousted by disgruntled voters after years of pandemic, international instability and a cost-of-living pressures.

stunning breakthrough in the 2020 election, topping the popular vote, but was shut out of government because Fianna Fail and Fine Gael refused to work with it, citing its leftist policies and historic ties with militant group the Irish Republican Army during three decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

Under Ireland's system of proportional representation, each of the 43 constituencies elects multiple lawmakers, with voters ranking their preferences. That makes it relatively easy for smaller parties and independent candidates with a strong local following to gain seats.

After the 2020 election ended in a virtual dead heat they formed a coalition, agreeing to share Cabinet posts and take turns as taoiseach, or prime minister. Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin served as premier for the first half of the term and was replaced by Fine Gael's Leo Varadkar in December 2022. Varadkar unexpectedly stepped down in March, passing the job to current Taoiseach Simon Harris.

France's Macron calls 1944 killings of West African troops by French massacre

French President Emmanuel Macron on Thursday for the first time recognised the killing of West African soldiers by the French Army in 1944 as a massacre in a letter addressed to the Senegalese authorities.

Macron's move, on the eve of the 80th anniversary of the World War II killings in Thiaroye — a fishing village on the outskirts of the Senegalese capital of Dakar — comes as France's influence is declining in the region, with Paris losing its sway in the former French colonies in West Africa.

"It is also important to establish, as far as possible, the causes and facts that led to this tragedy," Macron added. "I have asked my services to inform me of the progress of the work of the committee for the Restoration of the Facts, which your government has decided to set up, under the direction of Professor Mamadou Diouf, whose eminence and qualities are recognised by all."

Public Notice regarding property rights and legal matters.

Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine. Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

Hiring of Chartered Accountant Firm. The Heartsong Condominium Association (Reg.No. HR/018/2018/03377).

Provision of Standby Power Transformers. E-Tender Notice No. RT_6 TRD_12_2022-23 Dated: 27-11-2024.

E-Tender Notice No. RT_6 TRD_12_2022-23 Dated: 27-11-2024. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:

General Secretary The Heartsong Condominium Association (Reg.No. HR/018/2018/03377).

Tender Notice Expression of Interest. The Heartsong Condominium Association (Reg.No. HR/018/2018/03377).

Public Notice. This is to inform the general public that the Bank of Baroda, SME Branch, 4th Floor, Parliament Street, New Delhi, intends to accept the undermentioned property standing in the name of 'M/s Fortune Syntax Pvt. Ltd.'

Govt. of Odisha Office of the Chief Construction Engineer Rural Works Circle, Keonjhar. eProcurement Notice for Building Work.

Govt. of Odisha Office of the Chief Construction Engineer Rural Works Circle, Keonjhar. eProcurement Notice for Building Work.

Public Notice. Known to all that my client Sh. Dharam Pal Goyal owner of the PORTION OF LHS OF BROADWAY SECOND FLOOR, PLOT NO. 58 AND 59, AREA 240 SQ.YDS., KHASRA NO. 42/1 & amp; 38/21, 42/1 AND 38/21/2, SITUATED VILLAGE NAGAFARH, DWARKA VIHAR KHASRA NO. 110043, NEW DELHI-110043.

Canara Bank RZ 5A Palam Vihar Sector 6, Dwarka New Delhi 110075. The under mentioned person are hereby informed that they have failed to pay off the liability in the loan account.

Parcel Handling Contract at Katihar Railway Station. Estimated Bid Value: ₹49,43,513.28/- EMD Amount: ₹98,900/- Bid End Date/Time at 16:00 hrs. and opening at 16:30 hrs. on 14-12-2024.

Public Notice. Notice is hereby given on behalf of ANKUR CIVILYAL, 22/02/2022 in SRV, New Delhi/Delhi, and Street No. HR-Block, area measuring 94.44 Sq. Meters, out of Kharsa No. 239/2, situated at Pal Pahadgar, M.B. Road, Delhi, from Mrs. Sunita Garg and her husband, Mr. Ajay Kumar Goel in respect of the Plot No. HR-52, area measuring 112.6 Sq. Yards i.e. 94.14 Sq. Meters, out of Kharsa No. 239/2, situated at 3609 in Plot No. 1 Volume No. 479-V on page No. 143-146 on dated 10.03.2005 in SRV New Delhi/Delhi.

ADITYA BIRLA CAPITAL PROTECTING INVESTING FINANCING ADVISING. Registered Office: Indian Rayon Compound, Veraval, Gujarat-362266. Branch Office: 2nd Floor, Vijaya Building, 17, Barakhamba Road, New Delhi-110001.

Public Notice. Re: Built-up Property bearing No. A-15, land area measuring 2300 sq. yds. approx., situated at Wazirpur Industrial Area, Wazirpur, Delhi-110052.

Public Notice. Re: Built-up Property bearing No. A-15, land area measuring 2300 sq. yds. approx., situated at Wazirpur Industrial Area, Wazirpur, Delhi-110052.

Public Notice. Re: Built-up Property bearing No. A-15, land area measuring 2300 sq. yds. approx., situated at Wazirpur Industrial Area, Wazirpur, Delhi-110052.

Paradip Port Authority. e-TENDER CALL NOTICE. Name of the work: Raising of NE-4 Siding inside Harbour area. Estimated Cost: Rs.5,81,34,662.17. Last Date & time of submission : 17.12.2024 up to 17:00 Hrs.

Public Notice. Notice is hereby given on behalf of MOHAN LAL who is owner of Residential Plot area measuring 22.02, 22.02, 22.02 in SRV, New Delhi/Delhi, and Street No. HR-Block, area measuring 94.44 Sq. Meters, out of Kharsa No. 239/2, situated at Pal Pahadgar, M.B. Road, Delhi, from Mrs. Sunita Garg and her husband, Mr. Ajay Kumar Goel in respect of the Plot No. HR-52, area measuring 112.6 Sq. Yards i.e. 94.14 Sq. Meters, out of Kharsa No. 239/2, situated at 3609 in Plot No. 1 Volume No. 479-V on page No. 143-146 on dated 10.03.2005 in SRV New Delhi/Delhi.

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REVISED E-AUCTION PROGRAMME FOR SALE OF RAILWAY SCRAP MATERIAL. One more additional E-Auction programme for sale of railway scrap materials under jurisdiction of Lumding for the month of December, 2024 has been fixed as under.

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GDP growth slows to two-year low of 5.4 per cent in Q2

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's economic growth slowed to near two-year low of 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of this fiscal due to poor performance of manufacturing and mining sectors, but the country continued to remain the fastest-growing large economy, data showed on Friday.

The gross domestic product (GDP) had expanded by 8.1 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2023-24 fiscal.

The previous low level of GDP growth at 4.3 per cent was recorded in the third quarter (October-December 2022) of financial year 2022-23.

However, India remained the fastest-growing major economy as China's GDP growth in the July-September quarter this year was at 4.6 per cent.

According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) data, the growth of agriculture sector GVA



(Gross Value Added) accelerated to 3.5 per cent in the latest July-September quarter from 1.7 per cent a year ago.

The GVA in the manufacturing sector slowed to 2.2 per cent in the second quarter of the current fiscal compared to an expansion of 14.3

per cent in the year-ago period.

As per the data, the output (GVA) in the 'mining and quarrying' contracted to 0.01 per cent in the second quarter against a growth of 11.1 per cent a year ago.

The expansion in financial, real estate and professional services'

GVA was 6.7 per cent, up from 6.2 per cent in the year-ago quarter.

Electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services grew by 3.3 per cent, slower than 10.5 per cent a year ago.

The construction sector recorded a growth of 7.7 per cent in the second quarter, down from 13.6 per cent year on year.

The growth in gross domestic product (GDP) during the April-June quarter of 2024-25 remained unchanged at 6.7 per cent.

"Real GDP or GDP at constant prices in Q2 of 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 44.10 lakh crore, against Rs 41.86 lakh crore in Q2 of 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 5.4 per cent," the NSO said in a statement.

Nominal GDP or GDP at current prices in Q2 of 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 76.60 lakh crore, against Rs 70.90 lakh crore in Q2 of 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 8.0 per cent, it added.

On half-yearly basis, the statement said the real GDP or GDP at

constant prices in April-September of 2024-25 (H1 FY25) is estimated at Rs 87.74 lakh crore, against Rs 82.77 lakh crore in the first half of 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 6 per cent.

Nominal GDP or GDP at current prices in H1, 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 153.91 lakh crore, against Rs 141.40 lakh crore in H1 of 2023-24, showing a growth rate of 8.9 per cent, it stated.

Meanwhile, the government data showed that the Centre's fiscal deficit at the end of the first seven months of the current financial year touched 46.5 per cent of the full-year target.

In absolute terms, the fiscal deficit - the gap between government's expenditure and revenue -- was at Rs 7,50,824 crore during April-October period, according to data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

The deficit stood at 45 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE) in the corresponding period of 2023-24.

Sensex rebounds 759 points, Nifty ends above 24,100

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex rallied 759 points while Nifty closed above 24,100 on Friday following buying in frontline stocks Bharti Airtel and Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 759.05 points or 0.96 per cent to settle at 79,802.79. During the day, it soared 880.16 points or 1.11 per cent to 79,923.90.

The NSE Nifty climbed 216.95 points or 0.91 per cent to 24,131.10.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports, Reliance Industries, Larsen & Toubro, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Titan and Tata Motors were the biggest gainers.

Power Grid, Nestle, State Bank of India and Infosys were the laggards.

Majority of Adani Group firms ended higher, with Adani Green Energy soaring 21.72 per cent and Adani Energy Solutions surging 15.56 per cent on the BSE.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.76 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.31 per cent.

"A large-cap-driven, broad-based rally ensued in the domestic market. The anticipated slowdown in India's Q2 GDP to 6.5% has already been reflected in Q2 corporate earnings, which the market appears to have discounted," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

Official data released after the market hours showed the Indian economy growing at a slower rate of 5.4 per cent in the July-September period of 2024-25 from 8.1 per cent in



the year-ago period.

Among sectoral indices, BSE healthcare jumped the most 2.05 per cent, followed by telecommunication (1.53 per cent), utilities (1.46 per cent), energy (1.09 per cent), commodities (1.04 per cent) and teck (1.02 per cent).

Realty emerged as the only laggard.

As many as 2,347 stocks advanced while 1,606 declined and 97 remained unchanged on the BSE.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 685.68 points or 0.86 per cent and the Nifty climbed 223.85 points or 0.93 per cent.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower.

European markets were trading lower. US markets were closed on Thursday for Thanksgiving.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 11,756.25 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.30 per cent to USD 73.06 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark slumped 1,190.34 points or 1.48 per cent to settle at 79,043.74 on Thursday. The Nifty tumbled 360.75 points or 1.49 per cent to 23,914.15.

Forex reserves drop USD 1.31 bn to USD 656.5 bn

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's forex reserves dropped USD 1.31 billion to USD 656.582 billion for the week ended November 22, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said.

The kitty had dropped a record USD 17.761 billion to USD 657.892 billion in the previous reporting week ending November 15.

The reserves, which had hit an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September, have been declining for multiple weeks, at a time when the rupee has also been under pressure.

For the week ended November 22, foreign currency assets - a major component of the reserves -- decreased USD 3.043 billion

to USD 566.791 billion, the data, which was released on Friday, showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves increased USD 1.828 billion to USD 67.573 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The special drawing rights (SDRs) were down USD 79 million to USD 17.985 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was also down USD 15 million to USD 4.232 billion in the reporting week, the RBI data showed.

Fiscal deficit at 46.5 per cent of full-year target at Oct-end: Govt data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre's fiscal deficit at the end of the first seven months of financial year 2024-25 touched 46.5 per cent of the full-year target, government data showed on Friday.

In absolute terms, the fiscal deficit -- the gap between government's expenditure and revenue -- was at Rs 7,50,824 crore during April-October period, according to data released by the Controller General of Accounts (CGA).

The deficit stood at 45 per cent of the Budget Estimates (BE) in the corresponding period of 2023-24.

In the Union Budget, the government projected to bring down the fiscal deficit



to 4.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the current 2024-25 financial year. The deficit was 5.6 per cent of the GDP in 2023-24.

In absolute terms, the government aims to contain the fiscal deficit at Rs 16,13,312 crore during the

current fiscal.

The revenue-expenditure data of the Union government for the first seven months of 2024-25 showed that the net tax revenue was about Rs 13 lakh crore or 50.5 per cent of budget estimate for the

current fiscal.

The net tax revenue collection was 55.9 per cent at September-end of 2023.

The central government's total expenditure in the seven months through October stood at Rs 24.7 lakh crore or 51.3 per cent of budget estimate. Expenditure was 53.2 per cent of budget estimate in the year-ago period.

Of the total expenditure, Rs 20 lakh crore was in the revenue account and Rs 4.66 lakh crore in the capital account.

Fiscal deficit is the difference between the total expenditure and revenue of the government. It is an indication of the total borrowing that is needed by the government.

Sentiments of realtors, financial institutions remain positive for future growth: Report



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Real estate developers and financial institutions are upbeat about growth potential of the realty sector for the six months ending March next year, according to Knight Frank and NAREDCO.

Real estate consultant Knight Frank and realtors' body NAREDCO on Friday released 'Real Estate Sentiment Index Q3 2024 (July-September 2024)', highlighting continued optimism in the realty sector.

There was a marginal dip in the current sentiment score, which stands at 64, down from 65 in the April-June period.

However, the future sentiment score improved to 67, up from 65 in the previous quarter, signalling rising confidence in the sector's growth over the

next six months.

The index captures the perceptions of supply-side stakeholders and financial institutions regarding the real estate sector, economic climate, and funding availability. A score of 50 indicates a neutral outlook; scores above 50 reflect positive sentiment, while those below 50 suggest a negative outlook.

Both current and future sentiment scores remain firmly in the positive zone, reflecting sustained trust in the industry's long-term potential, the report said.

In the residential market, Knight Frank said the optimism prevails as 62 per cent of respondents anticipate a rise in residential prices, while 40 per cent foresee increased sales, and 38 per cent expect market stability.

Similarly, the office market outlook is buoyant, with strong confidence in key parameters such as leasing, supply, and rents, underscoring stakeholder optimism for robust performance in the coming months.

NAREDCO President Hari Babu said the sentiment index "reflects the Indian real estate sector's resilience amidst global uncertainties."

"The RBI's GDP growth projection of 7.2 per cent for 2024-25 and the stable interest rate environment will further boost investor sentiment. As the sector continues to grow, its essential that we address the existing challenges and leverage opportunities for sustainable growth," he added.

Knight Frank India CMD Shishir Bajaj said strong demand in high-end residential sales and stable leasing in commercial spaces underscore the sector's steady performance.

"Developers, with improved sentiment this quarter, remain optimistic. Supported by stable economic fundamentals and favourable market dynamics, the sector is well-positioned for sustained growth and continued opportunities," he added.



Banks' credit to industry grows by eight per cent in October: RBI data

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Banks' credit to industry grew by 8 per cent in October 2024 compared to 4.8 per cent in the year-ago period, according to the RBI data released on Friday.

The Reserve Bank data also showed that credit to agriculture and allied activities registered a growth of 15.5 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) in October 2024, compared to 17.4 per cent seen in the same month of last year.

Among major industries, credit to 'chemicals and chemical products', 'petroleum, coal products and nuclear fuels', and 'all engineering' recorded a higher growth in October 2024 as compared to their respective growth rates a year ago.

Personal loans growth decelerated to 15.8 per cent (y-o-y) in October as compared to 18 per cent recorded a year ago, largely due to decline in growth

in 'other personal loans', 'vehicle loans' and 'credit card outstanding'.

However, 'housing' -- the largest constituent of personal loans segment -- recorded an accelerated growth on year.

RBI further said credit growth to services sector was at 14.1 per cent in October 2024 (20.4 per cent a year ago), primarily due to lower growth in credit to 'non-banking financial companies' (NBFCs) and trade segment. However, growth of credit to 'commercial real estate' accelerated in October 2024.

Non-food bank credit in October 2024 grew at 12.8 per cent, as compared to 15.5 per cent a year ago, RBI said.

Data on sectoral deployment of bank credit for October 2024 was collected from 41 select commercial banks, accounting for about 95 per cent of the total non-food credit deployed by all scheduled commercial banks.

Malaysian billionaire tycoon Ananda Krishnan dies at age 86

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ananda Krishnan, one of Malaysia's richest tycoons with a vast business empire including telecommunications, media, petroleum and real estate, has died. He was 86.

His investment holding company, Usaha Tegas, said he passed away peacefully on Thursday and that his family requested privacy. It didn't specify the cause of death.

"Ananda made significant contributions to nation-building and the corporate world. His philanthropic initiatives have touched many lives," it said in a statement.

Ananda was ranked Malaysia's sixth-richest man by Forbes with a net worth of USD 5.1 billion (22.6 billion ringgit).

Born April 1, 1938, Ananda was a graduate of Harvard Business School who started his career in oil trading before venturing into other sectors. He owned stakes in telecommunications firm Maxis, media company Astro, satellite services firm Measat and oil services provider Bumi Armada, among others.

Local media reported that



Ananda made most of his wealth during the 1980s and 1990s, making him closely associated with then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad.

He was a founding director of state oil firm Petronas, and the national Bernama news agency reported on Friday that he sold the idea of building the 88-story Petronas Twin Towers to Mahathir.

Ananda was instructed to lead its construction, transforming a horse racing track into the landmark and forever changing Kuala Lumpur's skyline.

Ananda donated to education, the arts, sports and humanitarian causes in Malaysia. The Edge newspaper reported that his fortunes took a hit in 2018

when Indian authorities linked him to a high-profile corruption scandal involving high-ranking government officials. Although arrest warrants were issued in India for him and his former deputy, Ralph Marshall, neither was apprehended or extradited to face charges.

Despite his success, Ananda avoided the limelight and shunned between Malaysia and France, where he resided with his wife, local media reported. His only son is a Buddhist monk in Thailand. His two daughters are not involved in his businesses.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim paid tribute to Ananda, saying his "contribution in the corporate world, philanthropy and society will definitely be remembered."

Exports of India's med-tech industry could reach USD 20 bn by 2030: CII

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's medical technology industry is expected to touch exports of up to USD 20 billion by 2030 but the sector needs more government incentives and further ease of doing business to accelerate overseas shipments, industry body CII said on Friday.

The production linked incentive (PLI) scheme for the medical technology sector currently available for select medical devices needs to be extended across products, while export incentives to 'reimburse hidden costs' need to be provided to manufacturers, CII Chairman National Medical Technology Forum Himanshu Baid told reporters here.

"Today, we are importing almost 60 to 70 per cent of our medical equipment which are needed in the country. Whereas, our manufacturing is still very low as around 30 per cent is only manufactured in the country. Our imports are far exceeding our exports. Our imports are almost USD 8 billion and our exports are close to USD 4 billion," he said.

However, Baid said, India has the best potential to grow this industry to the next level, taking advantage of the world adopting the 'China plus one' strategy to reduce import dependence on one particular country.

India is very well poised to take advantage of it on the back of the talent it has in terms of software, hardware

and low-cost of labour as compared to China.

On the export potential of the Indian medical technology industry, he said, "My expectation is that by 2030 India's exports can reach around USD 15 billion to USD 20 billion dollar and our imports would reduce from USD 8 billion to USD 3 billion-USD 4 billion."

In order to realise the potential, Baid said, "As an industry, we're also looking for some more ease of doing business, (removal of) overlapping regulations and certain areas where they have put in QCO orders, which is also impacting 'Make in India' and also exports."

Elaborating, he said the medical devices industry, which is currently governed under the Drugs and



Cosmetics Act that regulates the pharma sector, needs a separate regulator.

"We are part of the pharma regulation. Drugs and pharma and medical devices are seen under the same lens. We have the same regulator. Our industry's demand was to have a separate regulator,"

he said.

Asserting that medical device is a "very complex engineering industry" with electronic, mechanical and plastic parts with different standards, he said, it is "very different from pharma which is more about chemical and pharmacopeia with a defined

formulations".

On the quality control order (QCO) issue, he said at present suppliers of raw materials need to register with BIS and then only those products can be imported into the country.

"That is causing a lot of roadblocks for local industry to manufacture products in India....At one point, the government is saying 'Make in India' but the raw materials suppliers are small players, who don't have the wherewithal to go BIS and register themselves globally. So we are asking the government for exemption from QCO especially for med-tech industry," Baid said.

He also said in order to enhance exports, the PLI for the medical devices sector

needs to be extended to more products.

"Today 3,000 products are already regulated in India by CDSCO. We need PLI for almost the whole industry. When we say PLI should not be limited to very few products, the government should incentivise every manufacturing which is happening in the country to push for global markets," Baid asserted.

In the existing PLI scheme for the medical devices sectors, he said only 28 companies were allotted and there was a budget of Rs 3,400 crore and only 10 to 20 per cent of the fund have been utilised.

"The government has a surplus budget. Please use it for pushing more exports out of the country, more

manufacturing in the country. Can we enlarge the scope of the scheme to more and more products?" he asked.

Baid also said the remission of duties under the RoDTEP scheme by the Ministry of Commerce for exports needs to be enhanced to 2-2.5 per cent from the current range of 0.5 per cent and 0.7 per cent, stating it is "not enough".

"There are a lot of hidden costs, which are there in manufacturing in the country. What we are asking is for the government to reimburse those hidden costs. Maybe a 2-2.5 per cent incentive would be good enough to help us get through those hidden costs and be competitive," he added.



THE POWER OF UNSPOKEN CONNECTIONS

'Sumang: The Unison of Souls', was a powerful dance performance that explored human connections through movement, music and emotion. Curated by Suparna Singh and Mahima Satsangi and choreographed by Dr. Shovana Narayan, the production beautifully captured the bonds that unite us all, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



the divine unity explored in Alingan, the dance spoke to the depths of human interaction. In Sarvagya, the connection between teacher and disciple was honoured, and in the grand finale, Samagam, the interconnectedness of all beings was celebrated. Each act invited the audience to pause, to reflect on their own relationships and to recognise the deep bonds that unite us all, whether they are between friends, families, teachers, or the universal spirit that ties every soul together.

What made *Sumang* truly special was its ability to make each member of the audience feel personally connected to the story. The dance wasn't just something to watch; it was an invitation to feel, to remember, and to understand. For Mahima Satsangi and Suparna Singh, this production was not just about showcasing their craft; it was about celebrating the profound beauty of human connection and the transformative power of dance. It was about creating a space where everyone could come together, share in the experience, and feel part of something much bigger than themselves.

In the end, *Sumang* left an indelible mark, not just because of its stunning choreography or soulful music but because it reminded us of the profound connections that shape our lives. In a world where we are constantly moving and rushing, this performance paused time for just a moment, inviting the audience to remember the ties that truly matter. It was a celebration of humanity, of shared experiences and of the deep connections that go beyond words, leaving everyone who witnessed it with a sense of unity and belonging.

encompassing experience. The music didn't just accompany the dance; it gave voice to the unspeakable, carrying the audience through the highs and lows of the emotional journey unfolding on stage. The musicians played with such sensitivity that their instruments became characters in the story, each note from the Sarangi, Sarod, Sitar, Flute and Tabla

adding depth and texture to the dance. The performance was enhanced by the delicate lighting design of Sandeep Dutta, which shifted with every act, casting different moods across the stage, while the photography and video work by Innee Singh captured every moment with clarity and grace. Dr. Shovana Narayan, who has spent

decades exploring the spiritual and emotional depths of dance, shared her thoughts on the production. "As I watched *Sumang*, I was reminded of how dance can connect us on a level that words simply can't reach. This production is a tribute to the emotional and spiritual connections that make us human." Her words highlighted the essence of the

performance, a reminder that while we may struggle to put emotions into words, art has a way of expressing what we sometimes can't. The production unfolded in four acts, each exploring a different aspect of human connection. From the quiet intimacy of *Pratibimb*, which delved into the relationship between confidants, to

A Glimpse into Nature's Harmony



KAVITA CHOPRA DIKSHIT'S *Enchanted Forests*, curated by Jyoti A. Kathalia, offered a captivating journey into the beauty and fragility of forests, blending personal memories with a universal message of coexistence, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

The solo exhibition *Enchanted Forests* by Kavita Chopra Dikshit, curated by Jyoti A. Kathalia, was an evocative celebration of nature's abundance and its enduring relationship with humanity. Showcased through a series of oil-on-canvas works, the exhibition mesmerised viewers with its vibrant depictions of forests, drawing on the artist's personal memories and a deep sense of connection to the natural world. Kavita's upbringing in Gomia, Jharkhand, a town surrounded by dense forests, flowing rivers and rolling hills, was the heart of her inspiration. These landscapes, part of her childhood, found new life on her canvases. The paintings reflected a profound reverence for the environment, capturing the intricate interplay of life within the forests and the harmonious existence of the people who inhabit them. The exhibition was not just a showcase of art but a tribute to a way of life that is slowly being lost to modernity. Each piece in the collection



displayed Kavita's mastery of texture, light and emotion. Her use of layered greens, punctuated with earthy browns and vibrant bursts of light, created an almost tangible forest experience. The paintings seemed alive, evoking the sounds of rustling leaves, the whisper of winds through the trees and the unseen presence of wildlife. Viewers were transported to a world where nature reigned supreme, a world filled with an enchanting yet fragile beauty. What set Kavita's work apart was its ability to communicate on multiple levels. On the surface, the paintings were visually stunning, drawing admiration for their technical brilliance. Beneath that, however, lay a poignant narrative of

environmental concern. The forests on her canvases were not just idyllic landscapes; they were symbols of a delicate balance, a call to humanity to remember its roots and renew its commitment to preserving the natural world. The curation by Jyoti A. Kathalia played a crucial role in elevating the exhibition. Each painting was positioned to guide the viewer on a journey, not just through Kavita's memories but through an exploration of the universal connection between humanity and nature. The narrative was clear yet subtle, inviting contemplation rather than confrontation. Visitors left the exhibition not only enchanted but also introspective. Kavita's *Enchanted Forests* served as a reminder of the profound beauty of nature and the responsibility to protect it. Her work bridged the personal and the universal, offering a powerful reflection on the beauty of life and the pressing need for harmony between humans and their environment. PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

TEAM VIVA

The *India Art Festival* (IAF) once again transformed New Delhi's Constitution Club of India into a vibrant world for art lovers, celebrating the country's diverse artistic expressions. Stepping into the exhibition, you were immediately struck by a collection of colours, styles and stories, each artwork seemed to invite you into a world of its own. This year's festival not only showcased talent but captured the very essence of India's contemporary art scene, where tradition meets innovation.

The opening was marked by a symbolic lamp lighting ceremony, a gesture that set the stage for the festival's spirit of unity and creativity. Eminent figures like Prayag Shukla, Jatin Das and IAF Director Rajendra Patil were there to welcome guests, signalling the start of an event that would bring together over 450 artists and more than 3,500 artworks. It was a visual feast, an explosion of creativity that drew in everyone from art collectors to curious newcomers. The dual-pavilion setup, with one section devoted to established galleries and another for independent artists, created an inclusive atmosphere where every voice mattered. This year,



INSIDE THE ART MOVEMENT



renowned galleries like Delhi's Gallery Pioneer and Mumbai's Bouquet of Art Gallery shared space with emerging artists, each showcasing their unique perspectives. The festival's layout felt like a dialogue between the traditional and the contemporary, with seasoned collectors mingling alongside first-time visitors, all united by a

shared love for art. The sheer variety on display was astonishing, works ranged from vivid landscapes capturing India's rural heartland to modern abstractions exploring deep emotions. One could not help but be drawn to artists like Antra Shrivastava, whose expressive pieces captured human connection and Bharat Jain,

whose surreal and symbolic works left a lasting impression. There were also deeply spiritual portraits by Pratima Abhange that brought a sense of serenity to the festival's lively atmosphere. IAF was not limited to paintings alone. Sculptures, wildlife art and reimagined traditional works made the festival a rich visual journey. There was something for everyone, geometric modernism, delicate florals, symbolic representations and experimental art all came together to tell the multifaceted story of Indian creativity. What set this festival apart was its multi-sensory approach. The



daily screenings of *The Eternal Canvas*, a film tracing India's artistic evolution, added depth and context to the visual experience, while live performances by sitar maestro Uma Shankar and flautist Ritjeet Deepak filled the air with a soulful charm. It was more than an art festival; it was a cultural celebration, a reminder of how deeply art is worked into the fabric of India's identity. Leaving the festival, one couldn't help but be struck by the sense of community it created, a space where artists, collectors and the general public could engage directly and intimately with each other. The *India Art Festival* wasn't just about appreciating art; it was about experiencing it, connecting with it and seeing how it continues to evolve and inspire. For anyone passionate about art, it was an unmissable event that left a profound and lasting impression. PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

Gill returns to nets after thumb injury

PTI ■ CANBERRA

Shubman Gill returned to the India nets on Friday, showing enough signs of a full recovery from a thumb injury that ruled him out of the series opener against Australia in Perth.

Gill's absence was not felt in Perth as India won the game by 295 runs but considering his impressive run on the previous tour, the visitors need him at his best over the course of the five-match series.

The top-order batter was seen facing Yash Dayal and Akash Deep in the nets ahead of the pink-ball warm-up game against Australian PM's XI starting Saturday.

"I was just trying to get a feel to be honest, see how the injury is reacting, if any kind of soreness is there but it went much better than what I and Kamlesh bhai (Kamlesh Jain, physio) expected. Very happy with that," Gill said in a video posted by BCCI on X after the training session here.

Gill was naturally disappointed about getting injured ahead of the first Test but India's special



performance put him back in a positive frame of mind.

"Any ball when it hits the middle of the bat, the feeling that you get, that is the feeling I play for. When I got to know about my injury, first couple of days I was quite low and disappointed.

"Perth is the only venue we did not play last time around (2020-21). It is such an iconic venue. But the way we played at the end of it, I was very happy," the batter added.

In Gill's absence, Devdutt Padikkal came at number three for India but could not deliver.

However, it is not a given that Gill will return to his usual batting position as K L Rahul excelled as an opener in Perth in skipper Rohit Sharma's absence.

While Rohit is expected to open alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rahul could come in at three pushing Gill to number 5.

It remains to be seen if India experiment in the batting order in the warm-up game as all batters would be allowed a hit in the middle considering it is not a first-class game.

India look to make most of pink ball warm-up

PTI ■ CANBERRA

India would aim to figure out their batting combination for next week's day-night Test in Adelaide when they face Australia Prime Minister's XI in a two-day tour game at the Manuka Oval here from Saturday.

India have played four day-night Tests thus far with their only loss coming at Adelaide four years ago when they were bowled out for 36 before making a winning comeback in the four-match Test series.

The pink ball does a lot more compare to the red cherry, especially in the twilight period. Considering it is not a first-class game, majority of the Indian batters would like to get a feel of the ball in the middle.

Coming from their most dominant win in Australia in the opening Test in Perth, the Indian dressing room is in high spirits. However, the arrival of Rohit Sharma, who missed the first Test due to the birth of his second child and expected return of a fit again Shubman Gill will force the think tank to rejig the batting order for the match beginning December 6.

Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal are the designated openers but with the latter and K L Rahul excelling at the top in Perth, there is a case for the Indian skipper to drop himself down the order.

If that does happen, Gill's position will also need to be adjusted. India will have to make those calls in the practice game before reaching Adelaide with full clarity.

As it is only a two-day game, India would be hoping to get a lot more time with the bat than the ball. The likes of Sarfaraz Khan, who are unlikely to be considered unless there is an injury, would also be hoping for some game time.



Australia let Kohli roll on to a hundred in Perth: Allan Border

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Former Australia captain Allan Border has expressed his disappointment over the team's inability to contain Virat Kohli during the first Test in Perth and feels that can potentially cost the hosts the five-match series.

Kohli, who had not scored a Test century in 18 months, roared back to form with an unbeaten 100 in the second innings as India secured a thumping 295-run victory over the hosts.

"I was really disappointed in the way we let Kohli roll on to a hundred without much resistance," Border told SEN radio on Friday morning.

"We don't want this guy full of confidence for the rest of the series."

Border also questioned the tactics of skipper Pat Cummins, suggesting they



allowed Kohli to regain his rhythm after his struggles against New Zealand in the recent home series. Kohli's century marked his seventh on Australian soil.

Former opener Matthew Hayden also took aim at Cummins, criticising the field placements after Kohli's arrival in the middle.

"You can't cut a sucker an even break when a bloke is under pressure as he was. The field we actually finished with - two slips, no point, a man straight - it offered up the outside edge of his bat as well.

He found it a little more frustrating. When he got the bit between the teeth, it was too late.

Hayden also pointed to tactical lapses during India's earlier partnership, noting the delayed use of short-ball strategies.

"Jaiswal looked vulnerable against it. Maybe tiny things with Pat Cummins, the ability to think through these decisions. They were shell-shocked from the average batting performance (in the first innings) and as we see now, again, bombs are going," he said.

KL should continue to open with Jaiswal, Rohit can come in at 3: Pujara

PTI ■ CANBERRA

Cheteshwar Pujara wants K L Rahul to open the batting alongside Yashasvi Jaiswal in the second Test against Australia despite the arrival of skipper Rohit Sharma.

Rohit's absence in the series opener in Perth allowed India to move Rahul to the top of the order from the middle order.

Pujara, the rock of Indian batting on the previous two tours of Australia, feels the opening combination should not be tinkered with after a 295-run win in the series opener.

Jaiswal scored a memorable hundred while Rahul too was impressive, collecting 26 and 77 in the two innings in Perth.

"I think, for some reason if we can carry on with the same batting order, like KL and Yashasvi to open, Rohit could come in at three, and Shubman could come in at five," Pujara said in a chat with ESPNcricinfo.

"If Rohit wants to open, KL should bat at No. 3. Nothing later than that. I think he has

to bat top of the order, because it suits his game really well. I hope we don't tinker around with that."

Gill, who missed the first Test due to a thumb injury, is also expected to feature in the playing eleven in the day-night Test beginning December 6.

"Ideally No. 5 (for Gill). Because it allows him to come in at a time, even if we lose two wickets early, he is someone who can negotiate the new ball," Pujara said.

"But if he walks in after, say, 25 or 30 overs, he can play his natural game. And in case we lose the first three wickets early, Gill walks in and saves Rishabh Pant for the old ball. [Pant] doesn't have to face the new ball. I wouldn't want him to walk in to bat when the ball is hard and new," Pujara added.

Gill has opened the batting in Australia but has now moved down to number three.

India also play a two-day warm up game in Canberra ahead of the pink-ball Test in Adelaide.

Battle of Equals: Gukesh, Liren draw fourth round game; remain level on points in WC

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh and defending champion Ding Liren played out a mostly risk-free draw in the fourth round to remain level on points in the World Chess Championship battle here on Friday.

The two players signed peace after 42 moves, each repetition and are tied on two points each after four games of the 14-round showdown. The first to reach 7.5 points will be crowned the champion.

The 18-year-old Gukesh, who was playing with black on Friday, is the youngest ever challenger for the title and had won the third game on Wednesday.

"Towards the end, I had some chances to press better but with black this is all you can expect," Gukesh said after the game.

"I am just trying to make good moves," he added when asked about the



worked well, not so bad," he added.

With just 10 games remaining under the classical time control, Gukesh will have the advantage of playing white in the fifth game.

On Friday, Liren started with the bird's opening trying to take out on the queen's bishop early in the opening which was a clear indication that the Chinese wanted to fight the Indian on the skill rather than preparation.

Gukesh was up to the task in responding as he matched Liren move for move and the pieces traded hands leading to equality.

The players eventually reached rook and pawns endgame which was theoretically drawn and the split of a point was a just result.

Viswanathan Anand is so far the only Indian to have won the title, having claimed it five times in his career. The semi-retired legend made the ceremonial first move for Gukesh on Friday.

Guardiola urges Man City hierarchy to give him time to fix faltering team as Nadal visits

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has urged the Abu Dhabi hierarchy to give him the chance to revive his faltering team amid its staggering run of poor results, saying Friday he will not "run away" from the challenge.

City lost five games in a row before squandering a three-goal lead from the 75th minute to draw 3-3 with Feyenoord in the Champions League on Tuesday.

The longest winless streak in Guardiola's coaching career could be extended on Sunday when City plays away to Liverpool, which is in first place in the Premier League and the Champions League.

"It's not normal in the big clubs to do the results we have done, but what we have to do is accept it," Guardiola said. "For sure I want to stay here, I want to do it, but the moment I feel

I'm not positive for the club, another one will come.

"But, I want the opportunity to try. I don't want to run away. I want to be there. I want to rebuild the team. I ask for that challenge. I ask for this opportunity to do it. Because I feel it. I know what I want to do. I know what we need. I know what we have to do."

Guardiola, who has won the Premier League six times in his eight full seasons with City and the club's first Champions League title, said he is in regular communication with chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak. "He knows we are going to find a solution," Guardiola said. "In the circumstances that it doesn't happen, the club will take the solution, the decision, it has to take."

The Spanish coach said he deserved to be given time to turn things around. "I have it all on my shoulders. I want it," he said. "Here at the football

club you have to win — if you don't win, you'll be in trouble. I know that.

"People said, Oh, why is Pep not in trouble? Why is he not sacked? What we have done the last eight years is why we have this margin."

Guardiola played down talk of a "crisis" at City when asked by a reporter, but was unsure when the team would start winning again. After Liverpool, City plays seventh-place Nottingham Forest on Wednesday.

"We will be back — I know that," Guardiola said. "I don't know when that is the truth."

"We have to accept," he added, "that it is completely normal — maybe the exception was in the past, not what happened now. How we stand up again, this is the big success in life. It's how many times you stand up, again and again, and again, whatever happens. They are the greatest (people)."

MUTHOOT HOUSING FINANCE COMPANY LIMITED

Registered Office: TC NO. 14/2074-7, Muthoot Centre, Punnem Road, Thiruvananthapuram - 695 034, Corporate Office: 12/A/01, 13th floor, Parinee Crescendo, Plot No. C38 & C39, Bandra Kurla Complex-G block (East), Mumbai-400051 Email ID: authorised.officer@muthoot.com.

DEMAND NOTICE

Under Section 13 (2) of The Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

Whereas the undersigned is the Authorised officer of Muthoot Housing Finance Company Ltd. ("MHFL") under Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s), Co-Borrower(s), Guarantor(s) to discharge in full their liability to the Company by making payment of entire outstanding including up to date interest, cost and charges within 60 days from the date of respective Notices issued and the publication of the Notice as given below and as way of alternate service upon you. As security for due repayment of the loan, the following Secured Asset (s) have been mortgaged to MHFL by the said Borrower(s), Co-Borrower(s), Guarantor(s) respectively.

| Sr. No. | Name of Borrower/s & LAN | Date of NPA | Date of Demand notice | Total O/s Amount (Rs.) Future Interest Applicable |
|---------|---|-------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Loan Account No. 18600102423 & 18600104051 1.Nilam Soni, 2.Sangita Soni, 3.Niwasi Soni, 4.Padma Soni, 5.Krishna Soni | 29-Oct-2024 | 25-Nov-2024 | Rs.9,45,625.68/- (Rupees Nine Lakhs Forty Five Thousand Six Hundred Twenty Five And Paise Sixty Eight Only) & Rs.5,17,266.50/- (Rupees Five Lakhs Seventeen Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Six And Paise Fifty Only) As on 13-Nov-2024 |

Description of Secured Asset(s) /Immovable Property (ies) - ALL THAT PART AND PARCEL OF RESIDENTIAL PLOT ON PART OF KHASRA NO. 490/1, AREA ADMEASURING 630 SQUARE FEET, SITUATED IN MAUJA GOGAON, PH NO. 107, R.N.M RAI-PUR-1, WARD NO.2, RAMAKRISHNA WARD, BHSIL & DISTRICT RAIPUR CHHATTISGARH - 492011 BOUNDED BY: EAST: ROAD WEST: SELLER'S LAND NORTH: LAND OF DEEPAK SOUTH: LAND OF BHOJ RAJ

If the said Borrower, Co-Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s) fails to make payment to MHFL as aforesaid, MHFL shall be entitled to take possession of the secured asset mentioned above and shall take such other actions as are available to the Company in law, entirely at the risks, cost and consequences of the Borrowers.

The said Borrower(s), Co-Borrower(s) & Guarantor(s) are prohibited under the provision of sub section (13) of section 13 of SARFAESI Act to transfer the aforesaid Secured Asset(s), whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise referred to in the notice without prior consent of MHFL.

Place: Chattisgarh, Date : 30 November, 2024 Sd/- Authorised Officer - For Muthoot Housing Finance Company Limited

IIFL FINANCE

CIN: L67100MH1995PLC093797
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PUBLIC NOTICE OF E-AUCTION OF GOLD ORNAMENTS

It is hereby notified to all concerned borrower(s) in specific and the public, in general, that we, IIFL Finance Limited ("IIFL") are auctioning gold ornaments of defaulted customers who neither regularized their loans nor paid the outstanding amount despite being informed through registered auction notices and repeated reminders. Public auction of the gold ornaments pledged in the following loan accounts will be conducted online through **Shriam Automall India Limited** on their online auction platform <https://gold.samli.in> on **05.12.2024 between 02:00 PM to 05:00 PM**. Change in venue or date (if any) will be displayed at the auction center. If for any reason the E-Auction cannot be held on the date mentioned herein or the auction does not get completed on the same day, IIFL reserves the right to conduct or proceed with the auction on any subsequent date on the auction platform and/or auction center with same terms and conditions. The unauctioned gold ornaments shall be auctioned on subsequent working days after displaying the details on auction platform and/or auction center. In case the auction at Branch level fails, the same will be re auctioned on **16.12.2024** without any further notice at district level at the specified district centre. If for any reason, the district level auction cannot be held on the date mentioned herein or the auction does not get completed on the same day, IIFL reserves the right to conduct or proceed with the district level auction on any subsequent date with same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased, then all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to nominee/legal heir.

District Centre: **Bilaspur-Bus Stand Road - IIFL Gold Loan, Shop No. Od 1,2,3 - 1st Floor Chattisgarh Complex, Telephone Exchange Road, Opp. Hotel The Emerald, Bus Stand Road, Bilaspur Pin -495001 (Chattisgarh)**

Branch Name: **BILASPUR-BUS STAND ROAD, Taluka - Bilaspur.**
Gold Loan A/C No. : GL29318866, GL29678742, GL30025562, GL30370834, GL30377582, GL31241135, GL31248502, GL31897587, GL31981448, GL32027925, GL34239868, GL34282342.

Branch Name: **BILASPUR-SARKANDA GL, Taluka - Bilaspur.**
Gold Loan A/C No. : GL28342225, GL28963333, GL30271383, GL33464275.

The E-Auction shall be conducted on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis and IIFL does not make any representation or warranties regarding quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. The E-Auction process and the sale (if any) pursuant to such E-Auction shall be subject to terms and conditions as IIFL may at its sole discretion deem fit to impose. IIFL, at its absolute sole discretion, may either postpone or remove, any of accounts from auction list and any proceedings without prior notice and without assigning any reason therefor and to reject any or all the bids or offers without assigning any reason for the same. Details of defaulting borrower(s), pledged ornaments and other details have been displayed at the respective branch. The defaulter borrower(s) have an option to repay the entire dues including up to date interest and all applicable charges and close or regularize their loan account even after publication of this notice but in any case, till the date of auction, failing which the pledged gold ornaments will be sold and balance dues (if any) will be recovered with interest and costs. However, the defaulter loans which are closed or regularized on or after this publication, will have to bear the proportionate publication charge. Borrowers are requested to submit/update their latest bank account details to enable timely refund of excess auction proceeds, if any.

For detailed information, terms and conditions, contact the concerned branch office of IIFL Finance Limited.

Date: 30.11.2024
Place: BILASPURCGH

Sd/
AUTHORISED SIGNATORY
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PUBLIC NOTICE OF E-AUCTION OF GOLD ORNAMENTS

It is hereby notified to all concerned borrower(s) in specific and the public, in general, that we, IIFL Finance Limited ("IIFL") are auctioning gold ornaments of defaulted customers who neither regularized their loans nor paid the outstanding amount despite being informed through registered auction notices and repeated reminders. Public auction of the gold ornaments pledged in the following loan accounts will be conducted online through **Shriam Automall India Limited** on their online auction platform <https://gold.samli.in> on **05.12.2024 between 02:00 PM to 05:00 PM**. Change in venue or date (if any) will be displayed at the auction center. If for any reason the E-Auction cannot be held on the date mentioned herein or the auction does not get completed on the same day, IIFL reserves the right to conduct or proceed with the auction on any subsequent date on the auction platform and/or auction center with same terms and conditions. The unauctioned gold ornaments shall be auctioned on subsequent working days after displaying the details on auction platform and/or auction center. In case the auction at Branch level fails, the same will be re auctioned on **16.12.2024** without any further notice at district level at the specified district centre. If for any reason, the district level auction cannot be held on the date mentioned herein or the auction does not get completed on the same day, IIFL reserves the right to conduct or proceed with the district level auction on any subsequent date with same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased, then all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to nominee/legal heir.

District Centre: **Korba-Power House Road - IIFL Gold Loan, Ground Floor, Narmada Tower, Power House Road, Near Sonaliya Jewellers, Korba Pin -495677 (Chattisgarh).**

Branch Name: **KORBA-POWER HOUSE ROAD, Taluka - Korba.**
Gold Loan A/C No. : GL22864067, GL23136087, GL23154440, GL24433669, GL24597128, GL25985705, GL26136068, GL26928990, GL28196874, GL29400253, GL29947485, GL29954393, GL29989401, GL30179970, GL31384185, GL31663990, GL31676077, GL31954926, GL31961238, GL32237220, GL34234506, GL34237598.

The E-Auction shall be conducted on "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS" and "WHATEVER THERE IS" basis and IIFL does not make any representation or warranties regarding quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. The E-Auction process and the sale (if any) pursuant to such E-Auction shall be subject to terms and conditions as IIFL may at its sole discretion deem fit to impose. IIFL, at its absolute sole discretion, may either postpone or remove, any of accounts from auction list and any proceedings without prior notice and without assigning any reason therefor and to reject any or all the bids or offers without assigning any reason for the same. Details of defaulting borrower(s), pledged ornaments and other details have been displayed at the respective branch. The defaulter borrower(s) have an option to repay the entire dues including up to date interest and all applicable charges and close or regularize their loan account even after publication of this notice but in any case, till the date of auction, failing which the pledged gold ornaments will be sold and balance dues (if any) will be recovered with interest and costs. However, the defaulter loans which are closed or regularized on or after this publication, will have to bear the proportionate publication charge. Borrowers are requested to submit/update their latest bank account details to enable timely refund of excess auction proceeds, if any.

For detailed information, terms and conditions, contact the concerned branch office of IIFL Finance Limited.

Date: 30.11.2024
Place: KORBA

Sd/
AUTHORISED SIGNATORY
IIFL FINANCE LIMITED