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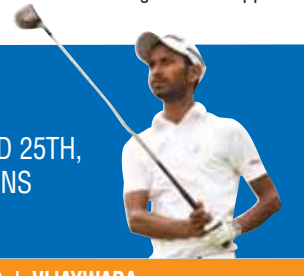
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INSIDE

SPORTS RASHID ENDS TIED 25TH, CANADIAN LEE WINS TITLE IN JAKARTA



Terror targets Srinagar civilians



Security personnel cordon off the area after a grenade attack by terrorists, in Srinagar, Sunday

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Head of the first session of the newly elected legislative Assembly on November 4, one of the highly guarded and busiest streets of Srinagar city near the Tourist Reception Centre (TRC) was hit by a grenade attack in which at least 11 civilians were injured on Sunday. The grenade attack took place less than 24 hours after one foreign terrorist identified as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) Commander Usman Lashkari was eliminated by the joint team of security forces during an eight-hour gunfight in the Khanyar area of Srinagar city on Saturday. After these two back-to-back strikes, the security grid has been

alerted in Srinagar as the newly elected legislators will be attending the five-day-long maiden assembly session of the legislative Assembly. A large number of shoppers were present for the weekly 'Sunday market' at the time of the grenade attack. All the injured were rushed to the nearby Sri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS) hospital for treatment. According to initial reports, the attackers missed the target as they intended to hit the security personnel deployed in the area to inflict maximum injuries. According to hospital records civilians between the age group of 16 to 55 years were left injured in the attack. The explosion caused panic in the area and sent shoppers scrambling for cover. The security personnel also laid a tight cordon

and carried out random searches in the area to nab the attackers. The Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha spoke to DGP, Nalin Prabhat and senior officials of the security agencies on the grenade attack in Srinagar. He directed the security officials for an effective and forceful response to punish the terrorists and their associates. The Lieutenant Governor reaffirmed the government's resolve not to allow terrorist elements to succeed in their nefarious designs. "Terrorists targeting our citizens will have to pay a very heavy price for their actions. You have full freedom to crush terror outfits and leave no stone unturned to complete this mission," the Lieutenant Governor told the senior security officials. The Lieutenant Governor wished speedy recovery of those injured

and directed that district administration should extend all possible assistance. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also reacted to the second incident of terrorist violence in Srinagar. He said the security apparatus must do everything possible to end this spurt of attacks. "The last few days have been dominated by headlines of attacks & encounters in parts of the valley. Today's news of a grenade attack on innocent shoppers at the 'Sunday market' in Srinagar is deeply disturbing. There can be no justification for targeting innocent civilians. The security apparatus must do everything possible to end this spurt of attacks at the earliest so that people can go about their lives without any fear" Omar posted on X (earlier Twitter).



IT grad arrested for sending death threats to UP CM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai police have arrested a 24-year-old woman for allegedly giving a death threat to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, an official said on Sunday. The woman, identified as Fatima Khan, who has done BSc in Information Technology, resided in Ulhasnagar area of neighbouring Thane district of Maharashtra with her family members. Her father is into timber business, the official said. The woman is well qualified but is mentally unstable, the police said. The Mumbai traffic police's WhatsApp number on Saturday received a message from an unknown number threatening that if Adityanath did not resign from the CM's post within 10 days, then he would be killed like NCP leader Baba Siddique, the official said. During the probe, the police found Khan had sent the message, he said. The Mumbai Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) in a combined operation with the Ulhasnagar police traced the woman and apprehended her, the official said. Further investigation was on into the matter, the official added. The police are on alert as Adityanath is likely to come to Maharashtra for campaigning for the November 20 state assembly polls, as per officials. Former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique was shot dead in Mumbai's Bandra area on October 12.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

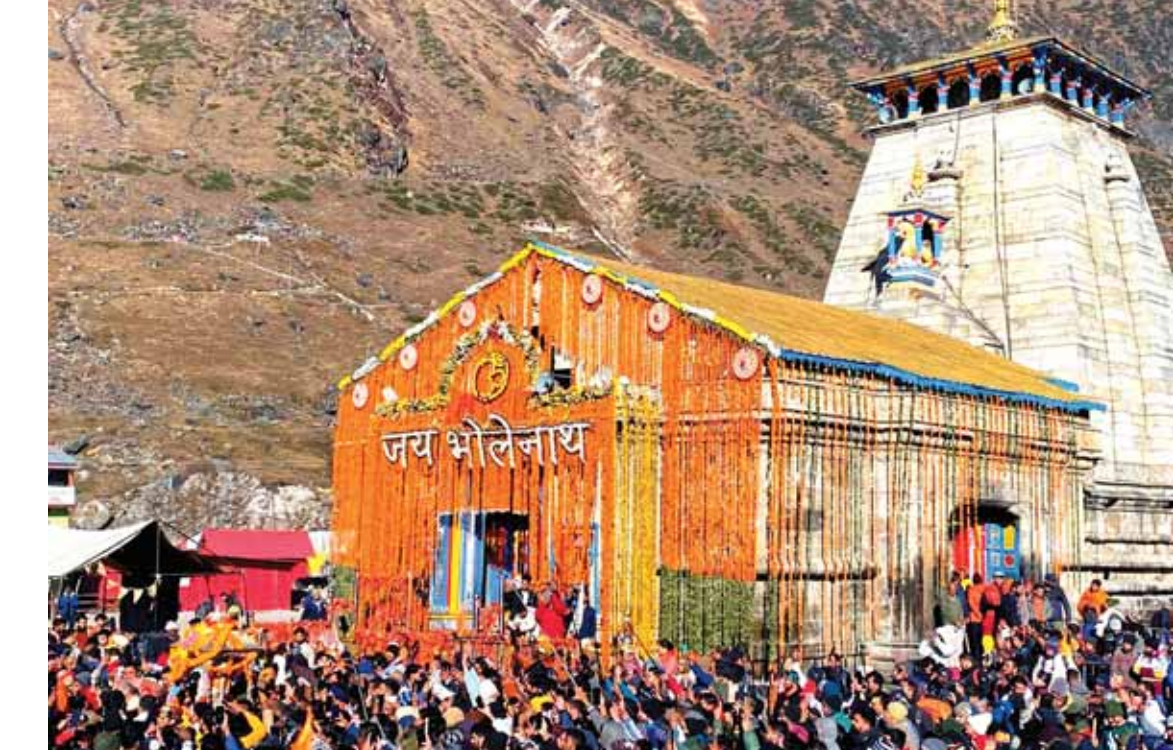
Congratulations, Delhi AQI is 500

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A thick layer of smog engulfed the National Capital on Sunday, and the Air Quality Index (AQI) continued to deteriorate, crossing the 500 mark, two days after Diwali. The government may soon consider banning BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers, dust suppression measures, and forbid all non-essential construction activities. In areas like Shahdara and Anand Vihar, the AQI remained above 500 after 11.30 am on Sunday. The air pollution level lies in the alarming 'hazardous' category (above AQI 400) in most parts of the capital, with PM2.5 levels over 59.6 times more threatening than the World Health Organisation's (WHO) prescribed limit. An average AQI stood in the "very poor" category at 382 in Delhi. A day before, it had been slightly worse at 339 but did not slip into the 'severe' level as forecast because of favourable atmospheric conditions such as warmer temperatures and strong winds. According to weather analysts, it is likely that wind speed will drop further and, therefore, worsen the pollutants status. Local factors, including construction activities, heavy

volumes of vehicles, and farm fires, aggravated the situation here. At present, the major contributors to PM2.5 pollution are local and regional sources. The transport sector is the most significant contributor at 12.24 per cent, as per the Decision Support System data by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM). While the residential sector contribution is 3.21 per cent, industries contributed (3.53 per cent), construction 1.67 per cent, energy sector 1.63 per cent, waste burning 1.49 per cent, and road dust 1.19 per cent. The IITM, in its six-day outlook Sunday, said that the air quality is likely to be in the 'very poor' or 'severe' category. It also stated, "Meteorological conditions are likely to be extremely unfavourable for dispersion of pollutants." The 24-hour average Particulate Matter (PM)2.5 and PM10 were 180.4 ug/m3 and 303.9 ug/m3, respectively, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) as of 1 pm on Sunday. The 24-hour averages of PM2.5 and PM10 pollutants are three times higher than the national prescribed standards of 60 ug/m3 and 100 ug/m3, respectively.

KEDARNATH DHAM DOORS CLOSED FOR WINTER



Devotees participate in the closure ceremony of the Kedarnath Dham door, in Rudrapur district, Sunday. The shrine remains closed for nearly six months each year during the winter season

Historical humiliation for Team India



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The fortress had been breached already. On Sunday, it just crumbled to the ground with the Indian dressing room sitting stone-faced, trying to process a fall so spectacular that nobody saw it coming. For the first time in their Test history, which goes back to 1933, the 'Tigers' at home had been whitewashed in a series of three or more games. The humiliation was inflicted by New Zealand, a side that landed here after being thrashed 0-2 by a Sri Lankan team that is in transition. The Black Caps were also without their

biggest batting star -- Kane Williamson, thanks to injury. Yet, it was a full-strength India that looked confused and short of preparation throughout a rubber they were expected to win and win comfortably at that. The 25-run loss in the third Test in front of a buzzing Wankhede crowd, that just a few months ago feted a T20 world champion Indian side, was a stunning reminder of how fortunes swing wildly in sport. Having already conceded the series 0-2, the Indians should have been able to pull one back. It wasn't an unfair expectation, the chase was a mere 147 runs but it was on a track

that looked like a minefield to the entire home line-up except Rishabh Pant (64). On Sunday, all Pant needed or wanted was for someone to hang in there. Nobody seemed capable. From Virat Kohli to skipper Rohit Sharma to Shubman Gill to Sarfaraz Khan, none looked to have learnt their lessons. Five key wickets were lost for a mere 16 runs at the start of an embarrassing collapse with the Jogeshwari's very own Ajaz Patel making them dance to his tunes for a haul of 11 wickets in the match. The left-arm spinner now has a staggering 25 Test wickets at the Wankhede in just two matches, making him the most successful overseas bowler at the venue after the great Ian Botham (22). "Something like this will be a very low point of my career and I take full responsibility for it. With the bat, I was not good enough," a desolate Rohit admitted in the post-match press conference struggling to explain clearly just what has gone so wrong with this team.



Retired DSP, others attacked by neighbours

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Two unruly sisters attacked a former Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) of Uttar Pradesh, and his family members with a knife, injured a Delhi Police officer on duty, and dragged a two-wheeler for over half a kilometre with their car, while trying to flee arrest in East Delhi's Vasundhara Enclave area. All hell broke loose in the wee hours of Saturday when the 74-year-old former DSP Ashok Sharma, who is also a cancer patient, asked the two women, namely 21-year-old Charvi Jain and 23-year-old Bhavya Jain to stop honking repeatedly in the society. They both have been arrested.

PATANJALI

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ED targets cyber fraud in 'digital arrest' scams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urges people to guard against the menace of 'digital' arrests, probe agencies said they are taking action against this category of cyber crime with the ED filing a charge sheet in one such case and the IAC issuing a fresh advisory. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued a statement on Saturday, saying it filed a prosecution complaint before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Bengaluru last month against eight accused who allegedly "lured" common people through "fake" IPO allotments and stock market investments through fraudulent apps. "Probe found that a huge network of cyber scams in India, involving fake stock market investments and digital arrest schemes executed primarily through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. Known as 'pig-butcher' scams, stock market investment scams entice victims with promises of high returns, using fake websites and misleading WhatsApp groups that appear connected to reputable financial firms," the Enforcement Directorate said. Scammers, it said, establish credibility through fake ads and fabricated success stories, ultimately leading victims to invest significant amounts. The ED said some victims of this scam were "manipulated" under the guise of a fake arrest (digital arrest) by the



Customs and the CBI, ultimately making them transfer huge funds to various shell or dummy companies under fake "fund regularisation process." It said 'digital' arrest scams involve fraudsters posing as law enforcement officials, intimidating victims into transferring their savings by fabricating scenarios that suggest illegal involvement of the victim, the federal agency said. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) issued a public advisory on Sunday asking people to "Beware of Digital Arrests" reminding that "those making video calls are not police, CBI, Customs officials or judges". They are cyber criminals, the organisation that functions under the Union home ministry said. The advisory asked people to not fall for these "tricks" and report such crimes "immediately" by calling the national cybercrime helpline 1930 or logging at the portal

www.Cybercrime.Gov.In. Prime Minister Modi during his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' radio address on October 27 flagged the issue of fraudsters targeting people with 'digital' arrests and urged people to adopt the mantra of "stop, think and take action" when faced with such a scam, asserting that these steps will provide digital security to them. The ED said it booked a money laundering case into this crime after studying multiple police FIRs and it arrested eight persons, also named as accused in its charge sheet filed on October 10, named Charan Raj C, Kiran S K, Shashi Kumar M, Sachin M, Tamilarasan, Prakash R, Ajith R and Aravindan and 24 related companies. All the arrested persons are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. This cyber crime case involves proceeds of crimes to the tune of Rs 159 crore and the court has taken cognisance of the ED charge

sheet on October 29, it said. The ED said fraudsters, in order to perpetrate this fraud, obtained hundreds of SIM cards which were either linked to the bank accounts of shell companies or were utilised to create WhatsApp accounts. "The anonymity afforded by these untraceable SIMs allow scammers to defraud victims with a reduced risk of immediate detection. The scammers created 24 shell companies in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and some other states to facilitate the acquisition and laundering of proceeds from cybercrimes," it said. These shell companies, registered mainly at the addresses of coworking spaces (where no actual business presence exists), have used fake bank statements in filings before Registrar of Companies as proof of commencement of business of these companies. Scammers operated through "mule" accounts to transfer

the funds and the proceeds are ultimately converted into cryptocurrency and transferred abroad, the ED probe found. One of the accused, Charan Raj C, played a "key" role in this scheme by recruiting individuals for directorships and managing bank account openings. Shashi Kumar M assisted in "incorporating" several shell companies which became instrumental in collecting and integrating proceeds of crime into the banking system. Kiran S K, linked to several shell companies as per the ED, had connections with bank accounts of multiple shell entities created by overseas scammers, who submitted fake documents to incorporate these companies. Sachin M, a Director in several firms, "admitted" to assisting overseas scammers in recruiting dummy directors and facilitating bank accounts, being "well aware" of their illegality, according to the agency. Tamilarasan played a "significant" role in facilitating these activities, collaborating with both Indian and overseas scammers and he "assisted" in opening bank accounts for shell companies. Like Cyberforest Technologies Pvt. Ltd., and "knowingly" continued these operations despite of knowledge of their connection to cybercrime, the agency said. The ED said it has "incriminating" evidence like chequebooks and communication records to say that these individuals participated in a syndicate that laundered proceeds from cyber frauds across India.

Commission's tenure extended to examine SC status for converts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has extended by a year the tenure of a commission established to examine whether Scheduled Castes (SC) status can be granted to individuals who have converted to religions other than Sikhism and Buddhism. This decision, formalised through a notification dated November one, comes as the Commission, initially set to conclude its work on October 10 sought additional time to finalise its report. The Commission of Inquiry

was constituted on October six, 2022, under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952. The inquiry also covers related concerns regarding social justice, rights, and the possible extension of reserved status to converts from religions not traditionally

included in SC classifications, such as Christianity and Islam. Headed by former Chief Justice of India K G Balakrishnan, the Commission has been engaging with stakeholders, including sociologists, historians, and representatives from affected communities, to better understand the nuances of caste identity in the context of religious conversion, officials said. According to the latest notification, the Commission is now required to submit its report by October 10, 2025.

PM Modi congratulates Duma Boko as Botswana's President



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Democratic Change (UDC), was declared Botswana's sixth president last week. In a social media post, Modi said, "Congratulations @duma_boko on your election as the President of Botswana. Best wishes for a successful tenure." "Look forward to working closely with you to further strengthen our bilateral ties," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday congratulated Duma Boko on being elected as the president of Botswana and said he looks forward to working closely with him to further strengthen bilateral ties. Duma Boko, the presidential candidate of the Umbrella for



No forward movement on four names reiterated by Collegium

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

There has been no forward movement on the names reiterated by the Supreme Court Collegium headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud for appointment as high court judges as he demits office as the chief justice of India on November 10. The collegium had in January 2023 reiterated the names of advocates Saurabh Kirpal for elevation as a judge of the Delhi High Court, R John Satyan as judge of the Madras HC, and Amitesh Banerjee and Sakya Sen as judges of the Calcutta High Court. The top court collegium had also reiterated the name of Somasekhar Sundaresan, also an advocate, as judge of the Bombay High Court in January 2023. In November that year, he was elevated as a judge of the Bombay HC. People aware of the procedure to appoint high court and Supreme Court judges said the files relating to Kirpal, Satyan, Banerjee and Sen are still pending with the government. In January 2023, the Supreme Court collegium had for the second time reiterated the names of Banerjee and Sen for appointment as judges of the Calcutta High Court "expeditiously", saying it was not open for the government to repeatedly send back the same proposal. Advocate Banerjee is the son of former apex court judge Justice U C Banerjee, who headed a commission which in 2006 ruled out conspiracy angle in the 2002 Sabaramati Express fire tragedy at Godhra that killed 58 'kar sevaks'. Advocate Sen is the son of Justice Shyamal Sen, who was elevated as a permanent judge of the Calcutta High Court in February 1986 and later became the chief justice of the Allahabad High Court. Justice Sen also served as the Governor of West Bengal from May 1999 to December 1999. Besides reiterating the names of Banerjee and Sen, the three-judge Collegium had also reiterated the names of senior advocate Kirpal as a judge of the Delhi High Court, advocate Sathan as judge of Madras High Court and advocate Somasekhar Sundaresan as a judge of the Bombay High Court. Justice Sanjiv Khanna will take over as the next CJI on November 11, a day after Justice Chandrachud demits office and will have a tenure of a little over six months. He will retire on May 13, 2025 on attaining the age of 65 years.

Doctors call for sleep screening to reduce truck accidents

PTI ■ INDORE

A group of doctors has advocated the need for "sleep screening" of truck drivers to bring down road accidents by at least 43 per cent. The risk of road accidents is rising due to lack of sleep among truck drivers, Dr Rajesh Swarnkar, president of South East Asian Academy of Sleep Medicine, told PTI on Sunday. "Keeping this in mind, the regional transport offices (RTOs) must ask truck drivers to fill up a form every two years with their body mass index (BMI) as well as details like whether they like to sleep during the day or whether they snore at night. The analysis of their replies and medical examinations can tell us if truck drivers have sleep apnea or any other related illness," Dr Swarnkar informed. If truck drivers sleep for seven to eight hours in a day. The risk of road accidents can be brought down by 43 per cent, he said. Driver Dharmendra Sharma, who was about to commence a long journey from Transport Nagar here, said he manages to get just two to four hours of sleep per day, which turns him lethargic and also affects his concentration. Several other drivers said traffic jams, queues at toll plazas and the pressure of on-time delivery of goods are also causing sleeplessness. "We can't sleep by the road since we fear someone may steal diesel, spare parts or goods," one of them added. Speaking on the issue, CL Mukati, chairman of National RTO and Traffic Committee of All-India Motor Transport Congress, an umbrella body of truckers, said the idea of sleep screening was a very good one. "The transport department should authorise hospitals to conduct regular health check-ups and sleep screening of truck drivers. If a driver is found to be suffering from any sleep-related disease as per the test, then he should be treated free of cost. If the government wants, our organisation can provide funds for this," Mukati said. Moreover, the working hours of drivers should be fixed and the government should build rest houses for truck drivers every 200 kilometres on the highways, he added.

Foreign Secretary to brief Parliament on India-Canada relations, China ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri is likely to brief the Parliamentary panel on external affairs on Wednesday on the India-Canada ties, which have taken a hit after Canadian officials accused Indian government functionaries of ordering the murder pro-Khalistani terrorist Harjeet Singh Nijjar. Misri is also likely to brief the parliamentary panel on the recent upswing in India's ties with China following the agreement to resume patrolling at friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. India's relationship with Canada has taken a hit after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau linked top Indian officials to the murder of Nijjar, a charge rubbished by New Delhi. Canada's Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister David Morrison had alleged on Tuesday that Home Minister Amit Shah ordered a



campaign of violence, intimidation and intelligence-gathering targeting Sikh separatists inside Canada, a charge dismissed as "absurd and baseless" by India. India has been maintaining that the main issue between the two countries is that of Canada giving space to pro-Khalistan elements operating from Canadian soil with impunity. India had withdrawn its High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Verma after the security officials there named him as a "person of interest" in the investigation in Nijjar's murder case. India had also expelled six Canadian diplomats, including acting

Someone might see weakness, she'll see strength, that is my sister: RaGa champions sister Priyanka

PTI ■ WAYANAD

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who held a joint meeting with his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra here as part of the campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha bypoll, on Sunday refrained from criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi and others but spoke more about the family and his sister, who is the party candidate in Wayanad. He said Priyanka, during her speech, had already spoken about PM Modi. "And, anyway, she has already mentioned Mr. Modi and we all bored of him. Then why mention him twice," Rahul Gandhi said during the meeting. Priyanka, who spoke earlier, accused PM Modi of favoring big business interests over the well-being of the people. "In this meeting, I have a choice in front of me to either give a political message or a speech I would give to my family members. I would rather speak to you like I speak to my family. I would like to give a speech more about the candidate herself,"



Rahul Gandhi said addressing the rally. My sister has always been a campaigner. She never stood for election. That should tell you something about her character, he said. Sharing their nostalgic memories of childhood when they competed with each other using the cameras gifted by their father (late Rajiv Gandhi) for capturing the best photograph, he said, "I still don't remember who won the competition.. Ok.. She (Priyanka) is now saying that I won." He said Priyanka had travelled a long distance from

the little girl taking the photographs. "She understands that the beauty is that everyone has millions and millions of labels, every single person is unique, everything is unique someone might see weakness, she'll see strength that is my sister," the Leader of Opposition said. Rahul Gandhi also said that Priyanka can do more roles than him. The by-election for Wayanad LS seat became necessary after Rahul Gandhi, who won the Lok Sabha polls from there and Rae Bareilly constituency, decided to vacate Wayanad.

Odisha CM addresses Mahanadi water dispute, highlights development projects in Bolangir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESHWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday said his Government is concerned about the Mahanadi water dispute with neighbouring Chhattisgarh. Majhi said he has already held discussions with his Chhattisgarh counterpart Vishnu Deo Sai twice on the Mahanadi water dispute. While replying to a media query in Bolangir, Majhi said the State Government is conscious about the issue and giving it all importance. "Discussion on the Mahanadi issue is going on and I personally held discussions with the Chhattisgarh chief minister twice during courtesy meetings," said Majhi, who is in charge of the Water Resources Department. The CM further said that the state government is also giving emphasis on expediting the proposed barrages, dam projects on Mahanadi river in Odisha. Majhi, who was on a two-day visit to Bolangir district for the first time after becoming the Chief Minister of Odisha, alleged that the previous BJD government had neglected the district even though there



was no dearth of strong political leadership in Bolangir. During the press conference, he said that 83 development projects worth Rs 890 crore have been either inaugurated or foundation stone was laid in Bolangir district on Saturday. The foundation stone of the Upper Lanth irrigation project in Belpara block of the district was laid by the CM on Saturday. The upper Lanth irrigation project is proposed across river Lanth, a tributary of Tel river. The project after completion will provide irrigation to 15,000 acres of land in 25 villages and 38,000 farmers of Belpada will benefit from it, he said. Among the projects inaugurated by Majhi included a Sub-Divisional Hospital (SDH) and a dialysis centre at Patnagarh and Titlagarh. He also laid the foundation stone of a bypass road for Patnagarh town. Majhi said Bolangir district will be developed as one of the best districts in the state as the BJP government has been taking several initiatives for the development of the district. Deputy Chief Minister K V Singh Deo who hails from Bolangir district will review the projects every month for its timely completion, he said. Odisha alleges that it does not receive sufficient water from the Mahanadi river during non-monsoon months as Chhattisgarh obstructs the flow of the water by constructing barrages upstream. The previous Naveen Patnaik had moved the Supreme Court in this matter in 2016. The Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal was constituted in 2018, following orders of the Supreme Court.



Goa to showcase regenerative and spiritual tourism at World Travel Mart in London

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa will participate in the upcoming World Travel Mart in London and highlight regenerative and spiritual tourism in the coastal state and the exposition of the relics of St Francis Xavier, an official said on Sunday. The three-day event from November 5 to 7 will bring together industry leaders from around the globe, offering Goa a prime opportunity to present its distinctive tourism experiences and innovative sustainable travel initiatives on an international platform, a spokesperson from the tourism department said. "The Goa tourism pavilion

will offer a vivid showcase of the state's vibrant festivals, adventure pursuits, heritage traditions, and tranquil beaches that together shape its unique identity as a travel destination," he said. State Tourism Director Suneel Anchipaka said the highlight of this year's participation is the concept of regenerative tourism, a step beyond sustainability that focuses on actively revitalising and enhancing Goa's natural and cultural treasures. "The display will feature initiatives like hinterland tourism, preservation of heritage sites, wellness tourism centred around Ayurveda, and Goa's

emerging prominence as a destination for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and wedding events," he said. These initiatives aim to benefit local communities and ensure that the environment is preserved for future generations, he said. Anchipaka said the pavilion will also present the Ekadasha Teertha Circuit, a spiritual exploration of the 11 historic temples in Goa. "The exposition of St Francis Xavier will also be one of the highlights. The exposition will be held from November 21 to January 5, 2025, at Old Goa," he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bangladesh protests

Protests erupt in Bangladesh as international voices express concern over escalating human rights crisis

Tens of thousands of minority Hindus in Bangladesh took to the streets on Friday, demanding immediate protection from ongoing violence and harassment following the recent political upheaval. The protests, primarily held in the southeastern city of Chattogram, saw around 30,000 Hindus gather, raising slogans for justice and security. The demonstrations were heavily guarded by police and military personnel, as Hindu community leaders urged the interim Government to intervene amid rising attacks on their community. The protests follow a series of reported attacks against the Hindu minority, which has been particularly vulnerable since the overthrow of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's secular government in August. After Hasina's departure, Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was appointed to lead an Interim Government, which has faced criticism for its alleged inability to maintain order and protect minority groups. The influential Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council claims that over 2,000 attacks on Hindus have occurred since August, a period marked by escalating violence from hard-line Islamist groups. Hindus represent approximately 8 per cent of Bangladesh's population of nearly 170 million, while the Muslim majority makes up around 91 per cent. Despite being a significant minority, Hindu communities say they are inadequately protected and often targeted amid political and social instability. The unrest has also affected other groups; reports indicate that supporters of Hasina's Awami League party and its ally, the Jatiya Party, have faced violence as well. The recent spike in violence has sparked international concern. United Nations human rights officials, along with



global advocacy groups, have voiced alarm over the human rights situation in Bangladesh under the Interim Government. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern over the attacks, while US President Joe Biden's administration announced that it is monitoring the situation closely. Adding his voice to the chorus, former US President and current presidential candidate Donald Trump condemned the "barbaric violence" targeting Hindus, Christians, and other minorities, describing Bangladesh as "in a total state of chaos." The Hindu activists who have been rallying since August are pressing the Government with a list of eight key demands which include the establishment of a minority protection law, the creation of a dedicated ministry for minority affairs, and a specialised tribunal to address and prosecute incidents of violence against minorities. Friday's protest in Chattogram was partly fuelled by recent sedition charges filed against 19 Hindu community leaders. As Bangladesh continues to grapple with political and religious tensions, minority communities remain on edge. With increasing international attention and escalating domestic demands for protection and justice, the Interim Government must restore peace and address the rights and safety of its minority groups, else there is a clear danger of it plunging into anarchy and eventually into a civil war.

PICTALK



About 1001 food items offered at the Akshardham Temple during the 'Annakut' festival, in Jaipur

America decides: Will Kamala make history



KALYANI SHANKAR

While polls show Harris narrowly leading, Trump's momentum and attacks on Harris, alongside economic concerns, keep the outcome unpredictable

The upcoming election for the White House is of immense significance, as it will determine the next tenant of the White House and shape the future of the United States. Whether America will get its first woman president or a second Donald Trump term is a debate going on among not only the politicians but also the public. A week before the November 5 presidential polls, election fever hit the country hard. However, there is a possibility that knowing the final result may take a few more dates. Narrow victories in a handful of swing states will likely determine who gets the top job. Polls and prediction markets are signalling a Republican sweep in the election.

As the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, and the Democrat nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris, wrap up their campaigns, the potential impact of this election on the future of the United States cannot be overstated.

It is no surprise that the campaign has been not only highly negative but also personal, with Trump attacking his rival, hitting her below the belt and calling her "dumb." While the reports claim that the fight is very tight, with Trump leading now and Kamala making up her lead, the suspense will continue for a few more days, even after the election date. The Electoral College is the system that decides presidential elections: A candidate must secure at least 270 votes - allocated by state based on the outcome of their respective vote - to win the White House. Although certification sabotage has not yet resulted in such an extensive delay, many attempts have been made before. County election boards generally have no legal authority to investigate any allegations of fraud or irregularities. Tight races in crucial battleground states in 2020 and an increase in mail-in voting amid the COVID pandemic saw prolonged vote counts. That helped fuel unfounded claims of election malfeasance pushed by Trump and his allies. State election law provides other checks and safeguards through which suspected



irregularities can be adjudicated. These mechanisms are designed to resolve disputes. Extended delays in county-level certification could run against deadlines for certifying statewide results. According to the Associated Press, the winner will likely not be projected for days. However, states and the whole election results are typically "called" long before final votes are counted. In 2020, President Joe Biden won. The result was called for four days after November 3, when Pennsylvania's result was confirmed. The state gave Biden 20 electoral college votes, taking over the 270 required to win. In 2016, Hillary Clinton conceded to Trump the morning after the election. With the presidential contest in the final countdown and Harris and Trump maligning the opponent, the vice president has called Trump dangerous. Harris insists she's doing both - establishing a contrast with Trump and laying out her agenda on the economy, immigration and more. She says "It's either Donald Trump in there, stewing over his enemies list, or me working for you, checking off my to-do list." Trump is relentless in attack-



IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN NOT ONLY HIGHLY NEGATIVE BUT ALSO PERSONAL, WITH TRUMP ATTACKING HIS RIVAL, HITTING HER BELOW THE BELT AND CALLING HER "DUMB"

ing Harris, sometimes in crude terms. His core strategy has been to tie Harris to voters' frustrations with the Biden administration. According to the latest reports, Harris leads Trump by four points, 51 per cent-47 per cent, in an ABC/Ipsos of likely voters released Sunday. This is up slightly from her 50 per cent-48 per cent edge in early October. Meanwhile, a CBS/YouGov survey out Sunday shows Harris up 50 per cent-49 per cent, a shift from the vice president's 51 per cent-48 per cent lead in mid-October. According to FiveThirtyEight's election forecast, Trump is favoured to win 54 times out of 100, compared to 46 for Harris. As for the campaign spending, Harris routed Trump in fundraising for their official campaigns in September by pulling in \$222 million compared to the Republican's \$63 million. Those numbers are down from the same period in 2020 when Biden raised \$281 million and Trump raised \$81 million. Harris was able to spend a lot on TV ads. According to the Wesleyan Media Project, the Harris campaign has also dramatically outspent Trump in

digital advertising and dominated cable and radio advertising advertising, which tracks campaign advertising spending. The economy and inflation remain prominent concerns, with 90 per cent and 85 per cent of registered voters calling them highly important in their votes, respectively. Harris' campaign insists she's doing both - establishing a contrast with Trump and laying out her agenda on the economy, immigration and more. As she said in Georgia earlier this week: "It's either Donald Trump in there, stewing over his enemies list, or me working for you, checking off my to-do list." The economy and inflation remain prominent concerns, with 90 per cent and 85 per cent of registered voters calling these highly important in their vote. The problem for Kamala Harris is that she is a woman of Asian descent. Despite being a highly developed country, people are shying away from electing a woman. Hillary Clinton tried hard, but she could not win the presidency. Let us see if Kamala is successful. (The writer is a popular columnist, currently in the US; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S BANGLADESH CONCERN

Madam - Former President Donald Trump vowed to protect Hindu Americans from the radical left's anti-religion agenda, pledged to strengthen US-India relations, and condemned violence against minorities in Bangladesh. Donald Trump extended greetings and pledged to safeguard the interests of Hindu (may be forgotten that Sikh, Jain and Buddhists also followed Deepawali) Americans, vowing to shield them from what he described as the "anti-religion agenda of the radical left."

This is for the first time that Trump has addressed the crisis in Bangladesh, where reports indicate that hundreds of Hindus were killed during protests in July and August. He contrasted his approach to that of President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, whom he accused of ignoring the plight of Hindus both globally and in America.

Actually, this is not the love of Trump towards Hindus and minorities. This is just a political stunt with a view to lure the Indian population (a significant number in the United States now and very much capable of swinging the outcome of this tightly balanced election of 2024) in the US to vote for him in the Presidential election and nothing else. He is not that generous towards Indians as he is attempting to show. By nature, Trump is a bit of a dictator and is against the people migrating to the United States from various other countries. He terms migrated people as "Garbage". Whatsoever, we should not want to forget that it was the US (read CIA) who purported the coup along with ISI to destabilise the region. US has always been and will be doing these things in future. Hence, don't take his love for Hindus seriously.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

ERIGAI'S NATURAL GAME

Madam - Ever had so many Indian chess players shine on international circuit simultaneously like the present bunch of

Adieu Bibek Debroy!



Bibek Debroy, a name that needs no introduction for him; for the people of our country, to relate and recognise him as a public personality. From handling the India's PM Economic Advisory Council (EAC) to contributing in India's erstwhile Planning Commission i.e. Niti Aayog policy making, Debroy had left an indelible mark of contribution on India's intellectual and policy making landscape. His passing away at the age of

69 is a huge loss of our nation. He was truly a man of wide ranging interests, be that in Economics or Sanskrit, English or Puranas; his variety of interests into scholarly, put him at the epitome of the versatility in multi-discipline. His books, columns, and other translation works of Indian Vedas and Puranas into English had been an intellectual gift to all the Indian nationals from time to time. His sad demise is a huge loss of India's economic, cultural and scholar landscape. He put his knowledge and experience at the best use for his country holistic development. His visionary contribution to public policy, administration, literature and economics will keep on serving as a guide and bearing as torch for the next generation.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

extremely talented youngsters. The exploits of R Praggnanandhaa are too well-known to need reiteration. Gukesh Dommaraju is on the brink of making history as he prepares himself to square off with Ding Liren in the World Chess Championship final in little less than a month. Meanwhile, Arjun Erigaisi has achieved the stupendous feat of reaching 2800 Elo points in the FIDE live rating, becoming only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand and the sixteenth player in the world to do so. Only French Grand Master Alireza Firouzja—at 18—reached there earlier than the Indian GM. Erigaisi has joined the elite club of Magnus Carlsen, Garry Kasparov, Vladimir Kramnik and Ding Liren among others. Known as a risky player, Erigaisi relishes the "accusation" as he feels top level chess needs some serious risk taking. Without his natural style of attacking game, the 21-year-old would not have broken into the top five of world chess at such a young age. The razor sharp player's new approach of not bothering

about records and ratings but concentrating on the game at hand appears to have paid him rich dividends. High energy and incredible motivation have driven him thus far, and the top rated Indian is all set to conquer new heights in chess.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

US SANCTIONS ON INDIAN COMPANIES

Madam - The current US sanctions against Indian firms raise major worries about Indian vital posture. Should India reconsider its trading links with countries participating in the Russian defence supply lines? How can governments better educate firms on how to adhere to global sanctions in order to avoid future repercussions? On top of that, what steps would be executed to protect Indian enterprises caught up in geopolitical tensions? Addressing these issues is critical for protecting national interests amidst developing global conflicts.

Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Art and literature: An imperative than a choice for students

Embracing art and literature is an investment in their mental wellbeing tomorrow—an invaluable asset for their future life

Many decades ago, when I opted to take literature in college, at a time when many of my peers chose science, people raised their brows. It was believed to be the choice of the mediocre, a subject that didn't need much of an intellect or dedication. It was where students who didn't secure a seat in prime areas finally settled. Art and literature weren't considered durable then. Neither is it given much weightage now by parents.

Creative pursuits are still categorised as hobbies, and they get sidelined as children reach higher grades or enter college. Why? Because art is not sustainable. It is not lucrative. It doesn't build careers as easily as a degree in science, technology or accounting does. There still may be some truth in that contention prompting parents to wean off their children from extracurricular activities as the race to the future heats up. But the role of creative activities in providing our children with a respite from the stress of career-building cannot be undermined. At a time when they are grappling with the chal-



lenges of higher education, what might bring them respite from their anxieties are artistic endeavours. It is often in the lines of a sketch or the verses of a poem that children find a voice beyond words—a silent yet powerful release of their inner thoughts and emotions. In a world that measures success by exams and marks, these activities provide a refuge, where the mind is free to wander, explore, and create without boundaries. Studies have consistently shown that students who engage in painting, writing, music, dance or theatre experience lower stress levels than those who do not. These activities act as a counterbalance to the rigid schedules and deadlines that studies impose, allowing children to unwind and channel their

energies into something entirely their own. One of the often overlooked merits of art and literature is the development of emotional intelligence. When children immerse themselves in stories, they begin to understand complex emotions, both their own and those of others. A novel might teach empathy, while a piece of music might mirror feelings they struggle to articulate. These moments foster self-awareness, which is critical in today's fast-paced world where young people are grappling with social pressures and academic demands. These creative pursuits don't just make children more empathetic; they also teach them to become aware of their inner world—a skill that will serve them well beyond the walls of a classroom. In those moments when they feel overwhelmed, they can turn to the comfort of a favourite book, the joy of drawing, or the calm of journaling. It becomes a personal ritual, a way to recharge and refresh, like finding shelter from the storm within the pages of a story or the hues of a canvas. Extracurricular

activities such as dance, music, fine art and creative writing are not mere pastimes; they are crucibles where life skills are forged. Problem-solving, adaptability, and innovation—all essential skills in adulthood—find their roots in these pursuits. Children learn patience through practice, resilience through failure, and confidence through expression, creating a sturdy foundation that will support them through life's inevitable challenges. Parents and educators must recognise the role these activities play in a child's mental and emotional development. Fostering a balanced approach between academics and extracurricular interests can create resilient individuals who are not only high achievers but also happy, healthy humans. As life's pressures mount, these creative expressions transform into anchors, grounding us in times of stress and rekindling the joy we may have set aside in the haste of growing up.

(The author is a columnist and children's writing coach based in Dubai; Views are personal)



ASHA IYER KUMAR



FIRST COLUMN

FINDING STILLNESS AMIDST A FLOOD OF THOUGHTS

A journey toward tranquillity begins by learning to simply "be" in the present moment



RAVI VALLURI

Sometime back I had written a piece on "Mind Management" and received certain queries about the generation of multiple thoughts and the acceptance by people that the mind was not at ease. It was frightening and troubling that several people of various age groups were plagued by all kinds of negative thoughts. People were troubled by thoughts arising during the whole day and particularly at night time. Thoughts arising at bedtime reside with us and seep deep into our consciousness and the following morning we are again troubled by those very thoughts and are not like fresh dew on petals. The Ashtavakra Gita says that "all action resides in the mind" and this is further corroborated by modern science. Modern science amplifies that there is no difference in the activity of the mind; whether you slap someone or merely think of slapping someone. It is the brain's limbic system, which is where motor control gets expressed. Just thinking of slapping someone activates all muscles that would be employed to undertake that specific action. On average, we are bombarded by 60 thousand thoughts a day. And we seem to have no control over them.

These thoughts arise on account of our memory bank (past impressions and Karma), the company we keep, past and current experiences and also the food that we partake in. According to the Ashtavakra Gita, enlightenment occurs only when we live in our hearts. The heart is synonymous with a point of inflexion where there is no past or future. There is only one present. Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says that "the present moment is inevitable". And this state is true enlightenment. How does one reach that state of



"present moment"? Before dwelling on some techniques, let us witness a few stories. Two Buddhist monks were riding cycles and were on their way to meet a Zen Master. Monk one described the number of trees, clouds, wafts of cold breeze striking his cheek, mountains, beautiful blue sky, fruits plucked on the way, and village folk he encountered among others before meeting the Zen Master.

The second monk in all trepidation, meekly replied that he only cycled to meet the Zen Master. Immediately, the Master proclaimed the second monk to be the next Zen Master. Why? Because he was only cycling! He was in the present moment. Yet another Buddhist story. Two Buddhist monks were travelling through a dense forest. On their way, they came across a naked woman. The older one removed his apparel clothed the bare woman carried her across the river and left her on the other side of the bank.

The younger monk was greatly troubled by this act of his senior. He kept chiding the senior monk, literally accusing him of what he perceived as an act of sacrilege. The older one just smiled and remarked that he carried the lady across the river and left her there, while the other monk was still carrying the lady in his mind. Practising pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, yoga, undertaking vigorous exercise, pursuing hobbies, contemplating, praying, observing nature and just being a spectator or a witness will also help a seeker and those with troubled minds to live in the present moment. Confucius says, "Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."

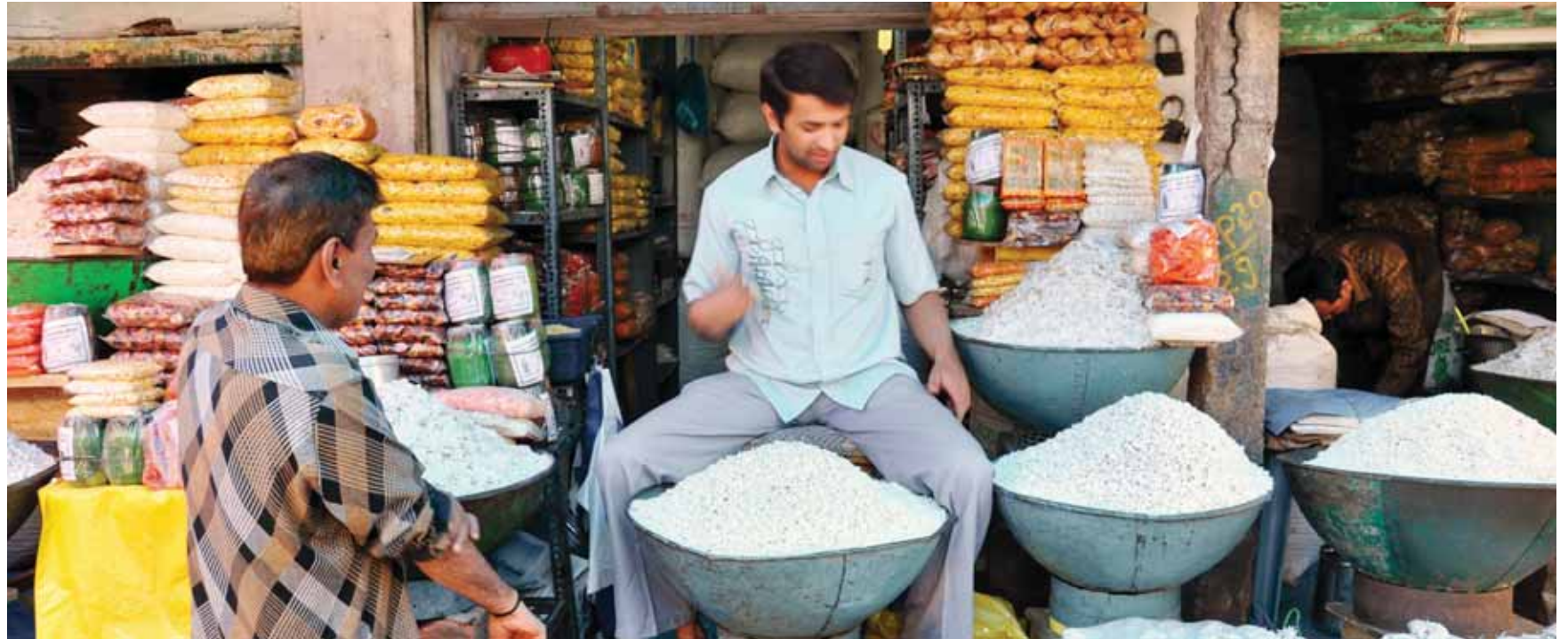
(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Food subsidy reforms: Can Govt tackle mounting costs



UTTAM GUPTA

Timely disbursement of funds to FCI would go a long way to streamline the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, which provides free food grains to the people



The Ministry of Finance (MoF) has released Rs 97,000 crore towards food subsidy expenses in the first half of the current financial year (FY) to the Food Corporation of India (FCI). This is over two-thirds of the required fund support of Rs 147,000 crore to FCI during the current FY. The MoF is expected to release the balance amount by December 31, 2024. Under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), the Centre asks the FCI and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and distribute it to around 820 million people for free. Under the Scheme, each beneficiary gets 5 kg of food per month. The entire cost i.e. MSP paid to farmers plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) is reimbursed to the FCI/other state agencies as a subsidy. The money comes from the Union Budget's allocation for 'food subsidy'.

The FCI conducts the bulk of the food procurement, handling and distribution operations on behalf of the Centre. At Rs 147,000 crore, it gets around 72 per cent of the total food subsidy Rs 205,250 crore being the budget estimate (BE) for 2024-25. The government is duty-bound to make timely payments to FCI to enable the latter to conduct its operations 'smoothly' and 'effectively'.

What is so special about the current FY? In the past, thanks to inadequate budgetary allocations (often prompted by the compulsion to keep the fiscal deficit - excess of total expenditure over total receipts - under check), the government's payments to FCI had fallen short, forcing the latter to take recourse to working capital from banks to sustain operations. To bridge cash-flow mismatch, the extant arrangements provided for the FCI to avail a short-term loan with a tenure of 90 days up to Rs 75,000 crore at any given point in time.

This led to an increase in subsidy as interest cost on loans taken from designated banks (the interest rate ranges between 6.98 per cent to 7.36 per cent per annum) had to be reimbursed to the FCI. The gap between budget allocation and actual requirements used to be so huge that cash-



IN THE PAST, THANKS TO INADEQUATE BUDGETARY ALLOCATIONS, THE GOVERNMENT'S PAYMENTS TO FCI HAD FALLEN SHORT, FORCING THE LATTER TO TAKE RECOURSE TO WORKING CAPITAL FROM BANKS TO SUSTAIN OPERATIONS

credit limits sanctioned by the banks proved to be inadequate. This prompted the FCI to even borrow funds from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). The NSSF is a public account (established on April 1, 1999) where all deposits received under National Saving Schemes are credited. All withdrawals by depositors are made out of the accumulations in this Fund. Normally, the government is not expected to use the NSSF to meet its revenue expenditure and expenses on food subsidy fall in this category. Yet, it encouraged the FCI to encroach on the Fund to plug the shortfall in its receipts. When the FCI started taking loans from NSSF in FY 2016-17, the Centre had committed to release the subsidy arrears to enable FCI to pay back the loans in subsequent years. But, that was not to be as subsidy arrears kept mounting, and FCI continued borrowing increasingly from NSSF. At the end of 2018-19, FCI's cumulative borrowing from NSSF was Rs 200,000 crore. This continued into 2019-20 on a much larger scale. In that year's budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had kept the BE for food subsidy at Rs 184,000 crore and drastically reduced it to Rs 109,000 crore in the revised estimate (RE) just because she wanted to keep the FD close to the target. Against this, the requirement being Rs 219,000 crore, the shortfall of Rs 110,000 crore was made up by FCI borrowing from NSSF. In the budget for 2020-21, she kept BE at Rs 116,000 crore against the requirement of Rs 137,000 crore. TV Somanathan, the then expenditure secretary, saw nothing wrong in the above practice arguing that borrowings by FCI were against the assets it held in the form of food stocks. The argument was flawed since loans

were taken against subsidy receivable from the Centre. In the case of wheat, for instance, on every kilo sold under the National Food Security (NFSA), the subsidy was Rs 23 (MSP plus HDC of Rs 25 minus Rs 2 being the price paid by the beneficiary). The loan was given against this amount promised by the Centre. This liability couldn't be adjusted against the food stock, which, on giving to the NFSA beneficiary would fetch only Rs 2. The Secretary further argued that keeping these borrowings off the Centre's balance sheet would prevent crowding out, and help the private sector borrow from the market at a lower interest cost. This needed to be weighed against erosion in the credibility of fiscal consolidation, which is inevitable when a strict liability of the Centre is kept off its balance sheet. A wrong can't be justified simply because the honest course of reflecting the liability in the Union budget would lead to problems for private firms. The government recognised the flaw in the above approach even as Sitharaman made a course correction while presenting the budget for FY 2021-22. In the RE for FY 2020-21, she provided for a massive allocation of Rs 529,000 crore. That amount included Rs 462,000 crore towards payment of subsidy to the FCI against a claim of Rs 216,000 crore by the latter. The excess amount was used by the FCI to extinguish all its accumulated liabilities to the NSSF. During 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24, the government stayed on course with allocation for food subsidy at Rs 372,000 crore, Rs 287,000 crore, and Rs 211,394 crore respectively adequate to fully cover the requirement. As for payments to the FCI, during 2021-22, the subsidy received was Rs 208,000 crore against the claim of Rs 207,000

crore. During 2022-23, the amount received was Rs 200,000 crore against the claim of Rs 204,000 crore. During 2023-24, the FCI received Rs 139,000 crore against the claim of Rs 133,000 crore.

During the current FY, having already received 2/3rd of its likely annual requirement, Rs 147,000 crore, during the first half, the FCI is expected to receive the balance 1/3rd by December 31, 2024. It receives the money almost round the clock, meaning it doesn't have to resort to short-term credit even from banks (forget NSSF), as its operational expenses are fully met from timely reimbursement of subsidy dues by the Centre. From the Centre's perspective, all its liabilities regarding food subsidies are 'fully' reflected in the budget for any given FY. The government no longer indulges in window dressing, no carryover of subsidy dues, and the process is fully 'transparent'. Moreover, there is no interest cost boost to subsidy payments as the FCI need not borrow. But the unsustainable increase in food subsidies continues to haunt us.

This has to do with 'universal' coverage of PMGKAY (820 million beneficiaries and at least 100 million waiting to be included as per an order of the Supreme Court), promise to give them 'free' food eternally, purchase of 'unlimited' quantum of food from farmers at MSP resulting in high stocks with FCI (at 44 million ton, its stock of rice as on October 1, 2024 is over three times the requirement) and associated high carrying cost, reimbursement of cost to FCI on 'actual' basis and pilferage of subsidized food. Addressing these maladies calls for major reforms in the Scheme. Can Modi bite the bullet?

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

AI enabled technologies: The game changer in spinal cord injury care

Spinal cord injury care has yet to receive the focused attention it deserves from the government

In the realm of spinal cord injury (SCI) care, recent advancements in enabling technologies are revolutionising treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care. These innovations are all set to redefine the quality of life for SCI patients. The International Spine and Spinal Injuries Conference (ISSICON) 2024, organised recently in New Delhi by Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute and the Spinal Cord Society, highlighted this potential by bringing together over 600 participants, including national and international experts, all focused on advancing SCI care.

Experts discussed the transformative role of technologies like the role of Exoscope, Robotic surgery, Neurorehabilitation



H S CHHABRA

tools, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is evident that these enabling technologies are going to be the game changer in SCI care. Unlike in previous decades, where survival was the primary focus, today's innovations allow for the enhancement of function, mobility, and independence, shifting our approach from survival to empowerment and

functionality. Visibility and precision are paramount in spinal microsurgery. The ability to maintain a clear view of the surgical area with magnification is crucial, as it allows surgeons to operate with accuracy while providing adequate illumination.

Traditionally, microscopes have been the gold standard in such complex procedures, offering the depth of field and lighting necessary to navigate intricate anatomical structures. However, the limitations of traditional microscopes—primarily the fixed head position required for prolonged periods—often lead to neck and back strain for surgeons. Unlike traditional microscopes, exoscopes are equipped with high-definition cameras and 3D viewing

screens, allowing surgeons to view a magnified 3D image on a large screen rather than through an eyepiece. This shift not only alleviates physical strain but also enhances ergonomic comfort, which can be transformative for procedures requiring extended focus.

The exoscope's ability to provide improved illumination and 3D visualisation allows for sustained precision, minimising fatigue and supporting a higher level of surgical performance over prolonged periods. Moreover, it offers seamless integration with digital systems, assisting with documentation and enabling real-time collaboration with other specialists. Remote access to the exoscope's 3D feed allows for consultations with experts out-



side the operating room, which is particularly valuable in teaching hospitals and cases that require multidisciplinary input. By reducing the physical toll on surgeons and offering digital connectivity, the exoscope is paving the way for better, more collaborative care in spinal surgery. The inclusion of AI in spinal surgery is another game-changer, with the potential to reshape the field by allowing for data-driven insights and

more precise treatment planning. Through AI, vast amounts of patient data can be analysed to identify optimal surgical approaches and predict complications.

Such AI insights combined with robotic precision could minimise human error and variability in outcomes, enhancing both surgical efficiency and patient safety. Currently, robotic systems are already being used in spinal procedures, aiding in the precise placement of screws, rods, and other implants. With AI-driven data analytics, robotic assistance could reach new levels of effectiveness. AI systems could improve preoperative planning based on large datasets, enabling more accurate hardware placements and efficient decision-making. This

technology can analyse past surgeries to predict potential complications and suggest the most effective treatment paths, offering a personalised, data-backed approach to surgical care. Furthermore, AI-driven analytics have the potential to predict patient outcomes based on prior cases, guiding surgeons on probable recovery trajectories and aiding patient consultations. ISSICON 2024's workshops reflected this commitment to enabling technologies by providing participants with hands-on experience in emerging techniques, such as robotic and navigation-assisted spine surgery and robotic-assisted rehabilitation. The conference was aligned with the World Health Organisation's Rehabilitation 2030 initiative, reinforcing a

global commitment to improving access to advanced rehabilitation services, particularly in underserved areas. To ensure the longevity of these innovations, ISSICON 2024 is developing eight position statements, created through pre-conference deliberations and expert discussions, to serve as guidelines for SCI care. The Spinal Cord Society has been advocating for a National Spinal Care Program that addresses the rising needs in spinal injury care and back pain management.

(Dr H S Chhabra is president of the Spinal Cord Society, director of Spine & Rehabilitation Services at the Sri Balaji Action Medical Institute, and Chairman of the ISSICON 2024 Organizing Committee; views are personal)



CELEBRATING LORD DHANWANTRI, THE GOD OF MEDICINE

IMA-AYUS celebrates Dhanwantari Day, honours pioneers in traditional Indian medicine promoting Ayurveda, writes ABHI SINGHAL

With historical roots in the Indian subcontinent, Ayurveda is an alternative medicine system which has always been pushed to heights for desi and better recovery. The theory and practice of Ayurveda is heavily practised throughout India majorly with the help of Ayurvedic medicines. The IMA-AYUS is an organisation working for the betterment of the integrated system of medicine from the past 12 years.

IMA-AYUS has been organising Lord Dhanwantri Jayanti every year to celebrate Lord Dhanwantri, god of medicine, the founder of Ayurveda, and an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The organisation celebrates the day as a tribute to Lord Dhanwantri and honouring pioneers in traditional Indian medicine.

The event was graced by K. K. Sharma, Founder and Managing Director of AIMIL Pharmaceuticals, as the Guest of Honour, bringing his invaluable support for traditional Indian medicine. AIMIL is a science-driven Ayurveda company producing herbal and Ayurvedic healthcare products promoting Ayurveda for 40 years.

In his keynote speech, Dr. R.S. Chouhan, Patron of IMA - AYUS, reaffirmed the association's commitment to the advancement of Indian medicine and supporting the fraternity's betterment. Dr. Chouhan spoke about the association's role in promoting the rich heritage of Ayurveda, Unani, and other traditional medical systems, underscoring their significance in contemporary healthcare.

The event was inaugurated by Ram Niwas Goyal, Hon'ble Speaker of the Delhi Vidhan Sabha, who addressed the audience and emphasised on how the Indian system of medicine is vital for future health and wellness in the country. The event had sessions

explaining Ayurveda and its impact deeply to the audience. The organisation unveiled its monthly magazine *Souvenir 2024*, with all the yearly events that take place within the organisation.

Students from Ayurvedic & Unani Tibbia College Delhi, School of Unani Medical Education and Research, Jamia Hamdard Delhi, Gaur Brahmin Ayurvedic College Rohtak Haryana, Shri Krishna Ayush

University Kurukshetra, Divya Jyoti Ayurvedic Medical College & Hospital, Modi Nagar, Ghaziabad (U.P.) and more were facilitated as promising students in the field of Ayurveda and Unani.

In conversation with Dr Raman Khanna

Dr Raman Khanna, B.A.M.S and medical practitioner from the past 41 years is the the National General Secretary IMA-AYUS. He joined the organisation in 1988, it's year of formation. He is dedicated to his career as a doctor and to promote Ayurveda. He talked about Ayurveda, it's incorporation in daily life and the history of Lord Dhanwantari Jayanti. Excerpts

What is the history of the Lord Dhanwantri Jayanti celebrated by IMA-AYUS?

Integrated Medical association IMA(Ayus) has been celebrating Dhanwantari Diwas for the last 38 years to honor Lord Dhanwantri, who is regarded as the God of Ayurveda and health. Celebrated on Dhanteras, this day recognizes the contributions of traditional medicine and promotes awareness about Ayurvedic practices. It serves as a platform to emphasize holistic health, wellness, and the importance of integrating ancient healing traditions into modern healthcare.

Why do you organise this event every year in the field of Ayurveda?

All the practitioners of Ayurveda worship Bhagwan Dhanwantri because he is considered the god of Ayurveda and the divine physician. In Hindu tradition, Dhanwantri is believed to have emerged from the ocean during the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan) carrying the nectar of immortality (amrita) and the knowledge of healing. His association with health and wellness makes him a central figure in Ayurvedic practices, symbolizing the holistic approach to healing and the importance of balance in life. Worshipping Dhanwantri is a way for practitioners to seek blessings for health, knowledge, and the successful practice of Ayurveda.

How do you think this event inspires medical practitioners and students to pursue Ayurveda?

Yes, the Celebration of Dhanwantri Diwas serves as a significant source of inspiration for AYUS practitioners and students. It honors Lord Dhanwantri, regarded as the deity of Ayurveda, highlighting the importance of this ancient healing system. This celebration can motivate practitioners and students to deepen their commitment to Ayurveda, emphasizing its potential for enhancing human wellness. It also fosters a sense of community and encourages the exploration of traditional knowledge in contemporary health practices.

Do you think incorporating Ayurveda in daily wellness can help you?

Incorporating Ayurveda into daily wellness routines can be beneficial for many people, as it promotes balance through diet, lifestyle, and natural remedies. Ayurveda, a holistic system of medicine from India, emphasises a personalised approach based on your unique constitution (or "dosha")—Vata, Pitta, or Kapha. It's built around the idea of maintaining health by harmonising mind, body, and spirit. Here are some

ways it can support daily wellness:

Dietary Balance: Ayurveda suggests foods suited to your dosha to promote digestion and energy. For example, grounding, warming foods are advised for the Vata dosha, while cooling foods benefit the Pitta type.

Daily Routines: Ayurveda encourages routines that support natural rhythms, like waking up early, oil pulling, and self-massage (Abhyanga). These can promote better sleep, circulation, and stress management.

Stress and Mental Health: Ayurveda includes mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises (pranayama) to reduce stress and increase mental clarity.

Natural Remedies: Using herbal remedies tailored to your dosha and needs (like turmeric for inflammation or ashwagandha for stress) can provide gentle, plant-based support.

Many find that following Ayurvedic principles helps them feel more in tune with their body, improves digestion, and enhances overall well-being. However, it's important to consult an Ayurvedic practitioner, especially if you're new to it, to ensure the practices align with your health needs.



DEBUNKING POPULAR NUTRITION MYTHS



BY DR WAJIHA MEHTAB

In today's world, nutrition information is everywhere—from social media influencers to fitness gurus, all are offering dietary advice. But with so much information, how do we separate fact from fiction? Unfortunately, many popular nutrition myths continue to spread, often leading to confusion and unhealthy choices. As a registered dietitian, it's important to set the record straight with science-backed facts. There are some most persistent nutrition myths circulating today that should be debunked.

MYTH 1

Carbs Are the Enemy

Fact: Carbohydrates have been vilified by many diets, but they're not inherently bad. In fact, carbohydrates are your body's primary energy source. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and legumes are all excellent sources of healthy carbs that provide essential nutrients like fiber, vitamins, and minerals. The key is to focus on complex carbs rather than refined sugars. It's not about eliminating carbs but choosing the right ones.

MYTH 2

Eating Fat Makes You Fat

Fact: The idea that fat automatically leads to weight gain is outdated. Healthy fats, such as those found in avocados, nuts, seeds, and olive oil, play a vital role in your body. They help absorb fat-soluble vitamins, support brain function, and even aid in satiety, making you feel fuller for longer. The type of fat you consume matters more than the amount—trans fats and excessive saturated fats can be harmful, while unsaturated fats are essential for good health.

MYTH 3

A Detox Diet Will Cleanse Your Body

Fact: Detox diets are one of the most popular trends, but the science doesn't back them up. Your body has its own natural detoxification systems—primarily the liver, kidneys, and digestive tract. No special juice, cleanse, or supplement is needed to "flush out toxins." Instead of relying on expensive detoxes, focus on a well-balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fiber, and water to support your body's natural detox processes.

MYTH 4

Gluten-Free Is Always Healthier

Fact: Going gluten-free is medically necessary for people with celiac disease or gluten intolerance, but for the general population, there's no evidence that a gluten-free diet is inherently healthier. In fact, many gluten-free processed foods are lower in fiber and higher in sugar and fat to compensate for the texture and taste of missing gluten. Unless you have a medical reason, there's no need to avoid gluten. Whole grains like wheat, barley, and rye are nutritious and offer many health benefits.

MYTH 5

Late-Night Eating Causes Weight Gain

Fact: Weight gain is more about what and how much you eat overall than the specific time of day. While late-night snacking can sometimes lead to overeating, particularly of less healthy, high-calorie foods, it's the excess calories that contribute to weight gain—not the timing. If you're hungry in the evening, opt for a light, balanced snack like yogurt or a handful of nuts, rather than worrying about the clock.

MYTH 6

You Need to Eat Small, Frequent Meals to Boost Metabolism

Fact: The idea that eating every few hours boosts your metabolism is a common misconception. The reality is that the number



of meals you eat has little to do with your metabolic rate. What matters most is the total number of calories consumed and the quality of those calories. Whether you prefer three meals a day or six smaller ones, the key is to eat a balanced, nutrient-dense diet that meets your body's needs.

MYTH 7

You Should Only Eat Egg Whites

Fact: For years, eggs were demonized because of their cholesterol content, and many people opted for egg whites to avoid fat and calories. However, research now shows that dietary cholesterol has a minimal impact on blood cholesterol for most people. The yolk is actually packed with essential nutrients, including vitamins D and B12, choline, and healthy fats. Eating the whole egg provides a nutritious and filling meal, so there's no need to skip the yolk.

MYTH 8

You Need Supplements to Be Healthy

Fact: While some people may benefit from specific supplements (e.g., vitamin D, B12 for vegans, or folic acid during pregnancy), most people can meet their nutritional needs through a well-balanced diet. Whole foods provide a complex mix of nutrients that work together in ways supplements can't replicate. Over-reliance on supplements can lead to nutrient imbalances or toxicity. Always consult with a healthcare professional before starting any new supplements.

MYTH 9

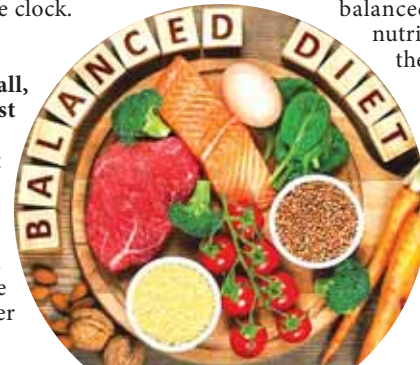
You Can Spot-Reduce Fat

Fact: Unfortunately, spot-reducing fat, such as targeting belly fat through crunches or specific exercises, is not possible. When you lose fat, it happens across your entire body, not just one specific area. The best approach for fat loss is a combination of regular exercise (both cardio and strength training) and a balanced, calorie-controlled diet.

CONCLUSION

Trust the Science

It's easy to be swayed by the latest diet trends or celebrity-endorsed health tips, but it's essential to approach nutrition with a critical eye. Rather than falling for myths and misinformation, trust the science and rely on credible sources, like registered dietitians, for guidance. Your health is too important to base on fads—balanced, evidence-based nutrition will always stand the test of time.



The author is MSc, PhD, Consultant Nutritionist, Founder & Director, Artisan Academy of Advanced Clinical Nutrition.

SheShield Conclave Concludes



SheShield Conclave, organised by Mediways Health Foundation in association with Inner Wheel District 301, concluded with impact. Held during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Conclave underscored an urgent message: breast cancer awareness and early detection are vital to securing a healthier, empowered India.

