

**OPINION 6**

**THE CANNONBALLS OF POLITICAL WARFARE**

**WORLD 8**

**UK PM CONDEMNS IRAN'S MISSILE ATTACKS ON ISRAEL**

**MONEY 10**

**AIR INDIA UPDATES CABIN CREW POLICIES, ALLOWANCES**

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**ALCARAZ RALLIES PAST SINNER TO WIN CHINA OPEN**  
11 SPORTS

## 500 kg cocaine worth ₹5,000 crore bust in Delhi

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi Police has made one of the biggest drug busts ever seen in the city, seize over 562 kilograms of cocaine and 40 kg of Hydroponic Marijuana, estimated to be worth around Rs 5640 crore, transported to the national capital by an international module. According to the Delhi Police, four people have been arrested from South Delhi's Mahipalpur Extension area by the Special Cell on Tuesday and the consignment was confiscated. "The busted drugs are worth Rs 5640 crore in the international market," a police officer said, adding this seizure is one of the largest drug busts in the national capital. The price of recovered Cocaine in international market is

10 crore per kg and Hydroponic Marijuana is 50 lakh per kg. Authorities suspect an international drug syndicate reportedly run by Afghan nationals stands behind the trafficking. Special Cell team had been working for over two months based on a tip-off which led to the bust as the drug was supposed to be distributed in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) as their demand is high during the festive season. Delhi Police Special Cell is probing the Narcoterror angle. Additional Commissioner (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwaha said that Tushar Goyal (40) of Vasant Enclave and his associates Himanshu (40), of Suleiman Nagar, Kirari,

Aurangzeb Siddiqui (23) of Vasant Gaon (He is originally from village Choti Rar, Deoria UP) and their receiver Bharat Kumar Jain (48) (from Kurla West, Mumbai) were apprehended from Mahipalpur Extension in South West Delhi by the Special Cell of Delhi Police after working on a tip off. According to police, main kingpin and handler of Tushar of this drug cartel identified so far is operating from a Middle East country. He was the main distributor in Delhi. The true extent and reach of the nexus is still being probed. Police said Tushar is the Indian handler who used to receive and store the consignment, and Aurangzeb and Himanshu distributed the drugs. Aurangzeb, who hails from Uttar Pradesh, was



Tushar's long-time driver who joined the syndicate. The fourth person, Bharat Jain, came from Kurla, Mumbai, to receive a consignment of 15 kg cocaine and distribute it in Mumbai, said the Delhi Police.

The remaining drugs were seized inside the godown in the publication factory owned by the main accused Tushar Goyal. The raid was conducted at his publishing factory by the Special Cell of Delhi police on Tuesday

night, with all four accused present at the location. Kushwaha revealed that 15 kg of the seized cocaine was found in the personal possession of Goyal, Himanshu and Aurangzeb. He said the seizure is one of the biggest by the force in the national capital. Though he did not give a cumulative figure for the drugs seized, he claimed the cost of cocaine is Rs 10 crore per kg and Thai marijuana around Rs 40-50 lakh per kg. If one goes by this calculation, the seized cocaine is worth Rs 5,620 crore. He said there was no angle of narco-terror at this moment but they were investigating all angles. According to police, the drugs came from South America, via the Middle East, and the marijuana came from Thailand to

India. They were then transported from various states to Delhi. The incident follows the recent arrest of two Afghan men, Hashimi Mohammad Waris and Abdul Nayib, who were apprehended in Tilak Nagar with 400 grams of heroin and 160 grams of cocaine. Waris has been living in India on refugee status since January 2020. He was previously employed at a chemist shop in Vikaspuri. Waris allegedly got involved in drug trafficking after a friend approached him to assist with deliveries for various consignments in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). As per reports, the compensation was approximately \$100 per delivery for Waris.

## West Asia regional conflict escalates



People take cover on the side of the road as a siren sounds a warning of incoming missiles fired from Iran on a freeway in Shoresheh, between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel

**AGENCIES/PTI ■ JERUSALEM/ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)**

The Israeli military has announced its first combat death since launching ground operations in Lebanon this week. The military said on Wednesday that a 22-year-old in a commando brigade was killed in combat in Lebanon. Israeli ground troops have carried out incursions into Lebanon against Hezbollah, and Tehran fired a barrage of ballistic missiles on Israel late Tuesday. Israeli police said on Wednesday that a total of seven people were killed in a shooting attack in Tel Aviv on Tuesday evening minutes before the Iranian missile barrage. Two Palestinian men from the Israeli-occupied West Bank town of Hebron opened fire in the Jaffa neighborhood

of Tel Aviv, including shooting directly into a light rail carriage crowded with passengers that was stopped at a station. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei slammed the presence of American and European nations in the Middle East in his first remarks since Tehran fired a barrage of ballistic missiles at Israel. Khamenei said on Wednesday that their presence is a source of "conflicts, wars, concerns and enmities" but made no mention of the missile attack the night before. "Regional nations can manage themselves and ... They will live together in peace," Khamenei was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency. He said Iran is hopeful of getting "rid of the enemies' evil" and also urged Western

nations to "cut their badness." Iran has long seen the US troop presence on its doorstep as a threat and demanded their evacuation from neighboring Iraq and elsewhere in the region. The escalation on multiple fronts has raised fears of a wider war in the Middle East that could draw in Iran - which backs Hezbollah and Hamas - as well as the United States, which has rushed military assets to the region in support of Israel. Hezbollah, widely seen as the most powerful armed group in the region, said its fighters clashed with Israeli troops in two places inside Lebanon near the border. The Israeli military said ground forces backed by airstrikes had killed militants in "close-range engagements" without saying where.

### India calls for restraint, says MEA

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

India, in its first reaction to fresh escalation of tensions in West Asia, on Wednesday expressed concern and called for restraint by all sides cautioning the conflict must not take a wider regional dimension. These comments came a day after Iran fired around 200 missiles into Israel in response to Israel's killing of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and other commanders of the militant outfit. New Delhi said it is deeply concerned over the escalating security situation in West Asia and called for addressing all issues through "dialogue and diplomacy." "We are deeply concerned at the escalation of the security situation in West Asia and we reiterate our call for restraint by all concerned and protection of civilians," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "It is important that the conflict does not take a wider regional dimension and we urge that all issues be addressed through dialogue and diplomacy," it said in a statement. Meanwhile, in the wake of the escalating tensions in West Asia, India on Wednesday advised its citizens to avoid all non-essential travel to Iran.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Jharkhand BJP President Babul Marandi and others during the party's Parivartan Mahasabha, in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, Wednesday

## PM raises concern over Adivasi, Hindu decimation in Jharkhand

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HAZARIBAG**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday cautioned that the population of Hindus and Adivasis in Jharkhand is declining and accused the JMM-led coalition Government of engaging in dangerous "vote bank politics" by supporting infiltrators at the expense of the state's identity, culture, and heritage. He asserted that it was time to "throw such forces out" to protect "mat, beti, roti" (land, daughter, bread). "The time is ripe for 'Parivartan' (change) in Jharkhand to safeguard 'beti, mat, roti' and combat corruption. The JMM-led coalition is playing a dangerous game, jeopardising the identity, culture, and traditions of the people while patronising infiltrators," Modi said. He was addressing the concluding programme of the BJP's Parivartan Yatra, which covered approximately 5,400 km across all 81 Assembly

segments of Jharkhand where the Assembly elections are due later this year. Modi alleged that the JMM-led coalition is being run by people who want to wipe out Jharkhand's identity, culture and heritage. "JMM and their masters in Congress want to turn the tribal community in Jharkhand into a minority. They have always betrayed tribal society and can never see them progressing," the PM said. He charged the ruling coalition with creating a new vote bank in the State in order to continue being in power. Modi said, "They want to sacrifice Jharkhand to gain power. Santhal Pargana is testimony to this dangerous gameplan where tribal population is on the decline while that of Bangladeshi infiltrators is on the rise. Do you accept this change in Jharkhand's demography and decline in population of Hindus and tribals?" He alleged that infiltrators are grabbing the land of the tribal people and targeting their

daughters. "The situation has come to such a pass that while the High Court is expressing concerns over this, the government is filing an affidavit to deny infiltration," the Prime Minister said. He also criticised the coalition for allegedly being insensitive, citing the deaths of several aspirants during recruitment drives for excise constables. Modi also attacked the Congress and the RJD, allies of the JMM. "Tribal icons in the country were ignored. Congress wiped out the identity of tribals to protect the identity of one family. Congress never gave any importance to tribal communities which contributed significantly to the fight for Independence," he said. Training his guns at Congress, Modi said it named all schemes, roads and buildings after members of a single family. Such dynastic thinking has caused much harm to the nation, he said.



Pune: Wreckage of a helicopter after it crashed at Bavdhan area in Pune district, Wednesday, Oct. 2, 2024. Two persons are feared killed

### Fire in chopper mishap kills three

**PNS ■ PUNE/PATNA**

In two separate incidents, two pilots and an engineer were killed after a helicopter belonging to a private aviation company crashed and caught fire in Maharashtra's Pune district on Wednesday morning, an Indian Air Force helicopter made an emergency landing in Muzaffarpur district of Bihar on Wednesday after it developed a snag. In the first incident which reported casualty, the helicopter belonging to the Delhi-based Heritage Aviation took off from the Oxford County Golf Course helipad here and was heading to Juhu in Mumbai when it crashed at 7.40 am, police said. The incident took place near a hilly terrain in Bavdhan area, which is close to the golf course, according to police. "Three persons have died in the helicopter crash. Our teams along with fire department vehicles have reached the spot," Pimpri Chinchwad Commissioner of Police Vinaykumar Choubey said.

### CM leaves for Delhi for investors' summit

Target of Rs 5 lakh-crore investments in next 5 yrs

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday left on a two-day tour to New Delhi to hold one-to-one discussions with investors. Besides, Majhi would attend an investors' summit and request various corporate houses to come and invest in the State.

Notably, the Make in Odisha Conclave 2025 is scheduled to be held on January 28 and 29. Discussions would be held with investors to primarily invest in sectors like IT, chemicals and petrochemicals and food processing.

The State Government has a target to attract investments of Rs 5 lakh crore in the coming five years, the CM said. In the last 100 days, investments worth Rs 45,000 crore have come to the State, he pointed out. The Chief Minister during his Delhi tour would be accompanied by the Industries Minister and departmental officials.

## Security audit for med institutions in WB

**SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA**

Under immense pressure post RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case and subsequent attacks on doctors in a number of medical colleges the Mamata Banerjee Government has formed a high powered committee to conduct "security audit" in the State-run medical colleges and hospitals. The seven-member team is led by former State Director General of Police Surajit Karpurakayastha. Purakayastha will lead a team comprising senior officials like Col Nevendera Paul Singh, Joint Commissioner of Kolkata Police; Joy Biswas, DIG of West Bengal Police; Pushpa, Kolkata



Members of Bengal Junior Doctors' Front and others take part in a mega rally on 'Mahalaya' to demand justice for the alleged sexual assault and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Kolkata, Wednesday

Police Deputy Commissioner; Affairs Department; and Khalid Qaisar, Joint Secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department. The high-powered team is commissioned against the backdrop of an

unprecedented groundswell of public outrage against an alleged "all pervading threat culture" — in most Government departments including Health — throughout the State the Bengal. The Committee is tasked with evaluation of security measures in the medical colleges and hospitals so as to find out ways to improve the security set up so that the doctors can work in a safe environment and public is benefited by the health facilities provided by the Government, members of the team said adding the report will have to be submitted within two months.

## Low pressure likely around Oct 4

Rain, thunder-storm predicted in State

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

People are apprehensive whether the fresh low pressure likely to form over the North Bay of Bengal and the neighbourhood around October 4 would intensify into a depression or a cyclonic storm

India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra on Wednesday said a trough runs from the cyclonic circulation over southeast Bangladesh and its neighbourhood to the north Andaman Sea across the Myanmar coast. Under its influence, a low-pressure area is likely to form over the North Bay of Bengal and the neighbourhood

around October 4. However, the IMD has not made any forecast regarding the low pressure intensifying into a depression or a cyclonic storm. The Regional Office of the IMD here said that on Thursday thunderstorm with lightning is very likely to occur in the districts of Nuapada, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada,

Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati. On Friday, thunderstorm with lightning is very likely to occur in the districts of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Angul and Dhenkanal, said the IMD issuing a Yellow warning.

## BHARAT PAYS TRIBUTE TO BAPU



President Droupadi Murmu pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his birth anniversary, at Rajghat in New Delhi, Wednesday

Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

# Miscreants rape woman after loot in city apartment

The three accused arrested by police

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate police have arrested three persons for allegedly raping a woman after looting her apartment in the Maitri Vihar area in Bhubaneswar on Sunday night.

The woman was with her two-year-old daughter when the burglars entered into her apartment and committed the heinous crime.

The 27-year-old woman was asleep along with her daughter when the two miscreants



entered and stole some gold jewellery and a mobile phone.

A third person accompanying them kept vigil outside.

After finding that no male member was present in the

house, the burglars held the woman at knife-point and raped her in front of her daughter. They threatened to kill her daughter if she screamed for help.

The matter came to the fore after the victim lodged an FIR with the Maitri Vihar police on Tuesday. The incident has sent shockwaves, pointing at the poor security in the apartments. A case of rape and loot has been registered.

As the apartment complex did not have any CCTV camera, police are trying to collect the CCTV footage from nearby areas. Sources said a special squad is investigating the incident.



Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi speaks at the State-level Gandhi Jayanti celebrations at Telengapentha in Cuttack district on Wednesday. He said Gandhiji had described Odisha as "the land of my love".

## Nagarika Samaja hails Majhi govt's steps

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Rajya Nagarika Samaja has congratulated Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and his government for their spectacular achievement within 100 days of assuming power. The new BJP government has not only fulfilled the party's poll promises but also has set a new path for taking Odisha to the No.1 State level by 2036 when Odisha shall complete 100 years of its formation, said a press release by the Nagarika Samaja here.

Nagarika Samaja adviser, industrialist and BJP leader Peeyush Mohanty described Majhi and his ministry as visionary and committed. He lauded the key steps of the government like passing the biggest-ever State Budget, opening the Jagannath Temple's four doors and Ratna Bhandar and allotting a corpus fund, allotting funds for development of Odia Asmita,



opening CM's public grievance cell, launching of Subhadra scheme through Prime Minister Narendra Modi, opening new govt employment avenues for youths, and so on.

As an industrialist, he felt the Majhi government is working on a system by which many local start-ups, MSMEs shall be created and Odias shall get employment and business.

Nagarika Samaja president Prakash Rath said the Majhi regime has become a "people's government" to improve the living condition and dignity of the Odias. The government is all set to procure paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal.

# Naveen accuses BJP of winning power through lies

BJP counters with allegations of BJD's 'corruption', 'nepotism'

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJD president Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday accused the BJP of misleading voters to win power in the State.

Speaking at the launch of the BJD's Padayatra in Bhubaneswar, Patnaik claimed the BJP's rise in Odisha was built on false promises made during their election campaign.

"The BJD stands with the people," he said, adding that service and self-respect are the party's guiding principles while development remains its identity. Patnaik also reflected on the achievements of his government over the past 24 years, including significant improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, educa-



tion and overall economic stability.

Under his administration, Patnaik claimed, Odisha saw a dramatic reduction in poverty, dropping from 70 per cent in 2000 to just 10 per cent today. He also emphasised the State's rising per capita income, arguing that Odisha has outpaced several other States where the BJP holds power under "double engine" governance.

Patnaik accused the BJP government of renaming several key welfare programs initiated under his tenure such as the Biju Swasthya



Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) while failing to deliver on major promises. "You can change names and colours, but you cannot change history," he remarked. Patnaik questioned the status of BJP's campaign promises, asking, "Are People getting 300 units of free electricity? Have women received Rs 50,000 as promised under the Subhadra Yojana?"

Patnaik further criticised the BJP for its inability to control rising prices and ensure women's safety even in police stations. "They may win elections with lies, but they cannot win the hearts of the people,"

he observed. Responding to Patnaik's allegations, BJP State vice-president Biranchi Tripathy hit back, accusing the BJD of corruption and nepotism during its rule.

"Naveen Patnaik is yet to come to terms with the BJP's victory," Tripathy stated, arguing that the BJP's win was a result of the people rejecting BJD's 'misrule'.

Tripathy pointed to the success of BJP-led welfare schemes, noting that over 25 lakh women have already benefited from the Subhadra Yojana, and that the Gopabandhu Swasthya Suraksha Yojana would soon provide healthcare benefits to nearly one crore families. He reassured that the BJP remains committed to fulfilling its promises, having already implemented several welfare programmes within its first 100 days in office.

"People gave Naveenbabu 24 years, but they now trust the BJP to deliver," Tripathy concluded.

## Rs 2.75 cr for Habisyalis in Puri

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government has granted Rs 2.75 crore for Habisyalis in Puri during the month of Kartik.

Besides, elaborate arrangements are being made as hundreds of Habisyalis have started landing in Puri to observe the holy Kartik Brata, a month-long ritual.

Apart from secure accommodation, all kinds of facilities and support would be provided to the Habisyalis throughout the month. Arrangements have also been made for free food (Mahaprasad), transportation to and from the Srimandir and the healthcare facilities for them.

Special programmes and Kirtans have also been scheduled for the Habisyalis.

Every year, thousands of widows and elderly women from across the State congregate in Puri and observe Kartika Brata by worshipping the Tulsi plant and visiting the Jagannath Temple.

## Ganja smuggler's killing in K'mal

2 cops axed, 3 Home Guards terminated by SP

PNS ■ PHULBANI

The Kandhamal Superintendent of Police on Wednesday suspended two police personnel and terminated three Home Guards for their alleged involvement in the killing of a ganja 'smuggler' in the district.

The five cops have been accused of chasing the deceased Jyestha Bandaki and mowing him down under their four-wheeler.

Subsequently, they dumped his body in Danganamu Ghat under the Gochapada police station and fled away with his money, ganja and liquor that he was smuggling.

Jyestha's family members have brought serious allegations against the cops, who were on duty on the fateful day.

After media reports, the Kandhamal SP suspended Sub-Inspector Ajit Kumar Behera and Constable Ramchandra Nayak. The three Home Guards Abhiram Mahanand, Jagabandhu Kanhar and Ratnakar Nayak have been terminated from service.

Kandhamal Additional SP Balabhadra Deep said, "We are waiting for the postmortem report. We have done the crime scene recreation. A forensic team and the RTO have scru-

tinised the vehicle to find any evidence."

According to sources, Jyestha was a ganja smuggler from Boudh and was smuggling contraband from Kandhamal on his two-wheeler. He along with his friend was smuggling ganja when a police van chased them.

The police van then hit Jyestha's two-wheeler, leaving him badly injured. His friend managed to escape while the cops allegedly assaulted Jyestha, who was already injured, leading to his death. His body was subsequently dumped in a forest in Danganamu Ghat, Jyestha's family members alleged.

# Massive jam on NH-49 in Mayurbhanj

Restrictions imposed on heavy vehicles' movement

PNS ■ BARIPADA

The district administration on Tuesday imposed restrictions on the movement of heavy vehicles to resolve the massive traffic jam on National Highway-49 in Bangriposi Ghat in Mayurbhanj district.

The restrictions were clamped from 6 am and would continue till further order.

According to sources, the



Bangriposi and Bisoi police have been directed to deploy three trucks on the poorly maintained NH-49 had resulted in severe traffic conges-

tion leaving many truckers stranded for four days while keeping the highway out of bounds for pedestrians.

The congestion extended up to 17 km on the highway. The incident came to light when a netizen shared videos on micro-blogging site X the long queues of heavy vehicles at Maa Dwarseni Ghat.

The situation went from bad to worse due to the delay in arrival of crane at the location for restoration work, which was further hampered by deposition of rocks at various spots following blasts at 10 turns on the ghat road.

# India may not achieve 100% female literacy by 2030

Though women's education can ensure country's fast development and make it a superpower



LIZA DAS

It is through education that both men and women shall be able to achieve their democratic rights. Education to a girl child is of importance for her development. But girls in many societies of the world including India have been discriminated against in education. To achieve gender equality in education, the UN has placed inclusive and equitable quality education in Goal-4 of UNSDG-2030.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already given a clarion call under the scheme, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" in 2015. In spite of governmental efforts, the girls are not able to access education in our country at par with the boys due to various socio-economic bottlenecks that includes lack of awareness of

parents.

To collect data on education nationally, two primary systems are used such as the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) and the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). The Union government says that 13.79 crore boys are annually enrolled in schools, compared to 12.73 crore girls (46.8%). At preschool and kindergarten levels, girls make up

same percentage. This number rises to 47.8 percent in primary schools and peaks at 48.3 percent in upper primary or elementary schools (Classes 6 to 8). However, the gap widens at the secondary school level (Classes 9 and 10), with only 47.9 percent of enrolled children being girls. At the higher secondary level (Classes 11 and 12), the gap narrows again with 48.3 percent of girls enrolled compared to the total enrolment. Dropout by girls is registered at higher secondary level. Many girl students drop out after high school study.

The Right to Education has been recognized since 1948 in the world. Many nations have acknowledged the right to free and compulsory primary education for children. Some have even gone further to encourage free secondary education. This right has been elaborated to cater both quality and equity education. India has been implementing Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act since 2009 (RTE act). This Act has been a great legal intervention in enhancing the access of girl chil-

dren to primary education (Std-1 to 8) with MDM component under the NFSA.

Education to women equips them with the fundamental understanding of nutrition, health and family planning. They get exposed to a variety of choices of life. Women's education results in improved reproductive health, family health and reduction in child mortality rate. Recent studies have shown that, girls who go through their primary and secondary education tend to marry at a later age, thus breaking the tradition of child marriage. Researchers have shown that educated women are expected to be more conscious of the significance of population -control and health issues. Education improves the access to nutrition-related information, child nurturing practices, and how to effectively diagnose diseases. Parents, especially the mothers should be made aware of this health aspect of education for girls.

One of the major causes of poverty is illiteracy. It is an evil that is eating up the family system and the society. Poverty can only be eradi-

cated through education especially through education of girls. Educated mothers can not only bring good income to home as skilled workers but also can do better economic management of the family. As mothers, they shall be also able to give good education to their children. Employment of women can lead to reduction in domestic violence against them and increase in their autonomy. Presently large percentage of women are unskilled and work in unorganized sector like agriculture, getting unequal and low wages. Therefore education and skilling should be considered as poverty eradication tool for women.

At a conference in Burkina Faso on the elimination of discrimination, education was described as an opportunity for women's empowerment. It was observed that illiteracy rates were high among poor women living in Burkina Faso.

In many communities, women are still viewed primarily as caretakers thus denied access to education and are confined to a living under the shadows of men. In some regions and culture, social practices

even compel women to cover their faces in the presence of men, symbolising the deep-rooted gender inequalities. Real progress requires not just legal reforms, but also a profound shift in attitudes, empowering women to break free from traditional roles and participate fully in all spheres of life.

It is not that the fruits of education have not been eaten by women of all sections of the country after seven decades of national independence. While the USA has not got a woman President yet, we have got one woman Prime Minister and two women Presidents so far. Women are there in Legislative bodies, bureaucracy, defence, science and technology, health care, universities, business and so on. But the fruits of education have not reached to the women of certain unprivileged social groups and the poor of the country in spite of repeated up-gradation of the National Education Policy and programmes. It was only in 2009 we promulgated the RTE Act. It does not appear that the nation can have cent-percent women literacy by 2030 as set by UNSDG-

2030. But the government and society have to lurch specific approaches in this direction of achieving cent percent literacy for the women at the earliest.

There are four important stakeholders such as the government, the schools and colleges, the society and the family of girl children. The Union and the State governments should identify specific regions and social groups like the SCs, the STs, minorities, the migrant labourer habitats, the hilly regions and so on where there is low access of girl children to education and work out special plans. It needs inter-departmental coordination at the district and block level. The education institutions should provide favourable eco-system to the girl children and maintain real-time data. The society including the local self government institutions must make awareness drives. Last but not the least, the educationally-inhibited families should be motivated. Only by educating the women, can India become a super power in the world. (Mob: 7735900825)

# Meet discusses issues concerning S Odisha dev

By host of outfits, intellectuals  
**RAJEEV RATHAN**  
BRAHMAMPUR

Social organisations and intellectuals of the silk city held in a meeting here on Sunday expressing their serious concern over deliberate and continuous negligence of both State and Union Governments on all-round development of south Odisha in general and the educational and commercial hub- Brahmapur city in particular.

The members held lack of strong leadership quality, government negligence and its step motherly attitude, coordination between different organisations and awareness of the general public responsible for the current miserable plight of the region. Known



social worker and organiser of the meeting SK Sabat presided over the meeting.

An array of genuine issues and long standing problems of the region that was discussed threadbare in the meeting include immediate sanction of an all-weather state-of-the-art green field airport to ensure air connectivity from Brahmapur to major cities of India; development of rail connectivity in south Odisha with more direct trains from Berhampur to other cities like Pune, Raipur, New Delhi; one

more Vande Bharat train from Brahmapur to Puri; development of Port; establishment of 2nd AIIMs at Brahmapur and provision of all modern infrastructure including filling up of all vacant posts of doctors in MKCG and City Hospitals; provision of better infrastructure for both Khallikote Unitary University and Berhampur University; construction of coastal corridor from Digha to Gopalpur; rail connectivity to Phulbani; establishment of cold storage at Brahmapur;

development of different tourist destinations of Ganjam and construction of indoor stadium etc.

The members decided to soon prepare a blue print and organise a wider conclave of more intellectuals and elected representatives and discuss the issues with the Central and State Governments, said organiser of the meeting Sushant Kumar Sabat.

Convenor E Tejeswar Rao delivered welcome address. Among others, Bighneswar Sahu; Suresh Tripathy, Namita Rani Rout, Puspanjali Mahapatra, Jagannath Rao, Saktidhar Rajguru, Rajendra Panda, A Rath, Subrat Kumar Sahu, Ranjan Sahu, Bhismacharya Choudhury, Asoak Dalai, Manoj Mahapatra, Mahendra Behera, Pranab Panda and KN Senapati, among others.

# After builder breaches guidelines Home buyer who lodges plaint harassed in Baleswar

Alleges he was misbehaved by Sub-Collector-cum-SPA  
**SIBDAS KUNDU** ■ BALESWAR

Buyers who booked their flats with a builder alleged that the latter was flouting guidelines and their concerns were not addressed by the Sub-Collector who is the Special Planning Authority (SPA) of the project.

One aggrieved buyer, Ashok Kumar Bera alleged he was severely humiliated and maltreated by the Sub Collector cum SPA Baleswar during the latter's on-site visit for a verification on Saturday.

He said that he apprised the matter to the district Collector with an anticipation that

his grievance would be addressed.

According to Bera, he booked a 3BHK flat at Jagyaseni Apartment, Padhuapanda in the Baleswar town in the name of his spouse and as per the agreement, the flat was to be handed over by March 2023.

Surprisingly, later he and other buyers could learn that the builder was having approval for 2BHK flats only over two plots. "Immediately we brought the illegality to the notice of the then Sub Collector cum SPA MK Chauhan. The SPA issued three letters on March 21, May 15 and July 1, 2023 to the builder and asked him to submit a revised plan for the 3 BHK (20) flats constructed over three plots

aggregating 33.2 decimal of land. The builder submitted a revised plan of area of 24.2 decimal of land instead of 33.2 decimal and the SPA (Sub Collector) carried out a ground inquiry and rejected the plan in December 2023.

However, the present Sub Collector PA Rajshirkey approved the plan which was rejected by his predecessor. "We approached the district Collector and the ADM and on their interventions on March 23, 2024, a joint verification was carried out. Following which the approval was revoked on April 25, 2024 and the builder was always trying to get the plan passed," said Bera who is an employee with the LIC.

"On Saturday when Sub Collector Shirkey again came

for a joint verification, I and others were waiting near the construction site. Shirkey not only rebuked me showing his position and power but also humiliated me by asking me to leave the site at once. His behavior towards me was unbecoming and extremely rude although I said that I am representing my wife who booked the flat. It was a mental shock from me and I need redressal of the issues," said Bera.

He further alleged, "On the leftover land after construction of our flats, the builder had assured us of a community hall, landscape greenery and safety water tank and other facilities. But we are learning that the builder wants to construct 8 more flats curtailing our facilities."

# Amway celebrates Nat'l Nutrition Month

**PNS** ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Amway India celebrated the National Nutrition Month with targeted interventions across the country. Aligning with the theme of the year "Nutritious Diets for Everyone", the initiative focused on building understanding around the importance of diet that meets the daily nutrition needs.



ets, Morning Nutrition for starting the day right, need-based nutrition recommendations backed by quality products and healthy cooking tips, the month-long initiatives aimed to equip distributors with the knowledge and tools to help themselves and their customers make informed dietary choices and build lasting, health-promoting habits.

The Amway India engaged 30,000 distributors and customers nationwide.

Amway India Managing Director Rajneesh Chopra stated, "As nutritional chal-

enges continue to rise, it is imperative to make balanced nutrition accessible and practical for all. A recent report from the Indian Council for Medical Research highlighted that unhealthy diets contribute to 56.4% of the disease burden in India. With growing lifestyle diseases and evolving consumer needs, prioritising nutrition has become crucial for individuals seeking optimal wellbeing."

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# In Koraput No bridge, villagers carry body in swollen river

**PNS** ■ KORAPUT

The residents of Bagepadar village under Dasamantapur block in Koraput district were forced to carry the dead body of a person wading through a swollen river to reach the crematorium ground on Tuesday due to the absence of a bridge over the river.

As there is no permanent bridge over the Muran river, the villagers had no option but to carry the body by entering



the river, which was in spate, to go to the other side to reach the crematorium.

The villagers alleged that they are facing several problems in their day-to-day communication, especially in the rainy season, due to the absence of a permanent bridge over the river. They pointed out that recently, a woman died as she could not be provided urgent medical care due to the communication problems.

# Tale of two schools baring serious crisis in rural edu

One runs from goat shed in M'ghanj; other from bldg on verge of collapse in Boudh  
**PNS** ■ BHUBANESWAR

This is a tale of two schools in rural areas, where their deplorable conditions expose the serious crisis in rural education in Odisha.

One school is in Mayurbhanj district where students read in an unhygienic goat shed in absence of a school building and the other is in Boudh where about 126 students have to study in a dilapidated class room with its asbestos roof leaking during rains.

The students of Thakarsahi Government Primary School in Kaptipada block in Mayurbhanj district are forced to attend classes in a goat shed due to the lack of proper infrastructure for 14 years.



fracture, the goat shed is the only option. The students are forced to study in one corner with goats bleating on the other side. The goats can be seen jumping around and eating the books of the students, with a filthy smell of urine everywhere.

Interestingly, the goats are tied to the tables and chairs of the school teacher, bleating all the while. Not just one or two years, this has been the condi-

tion for the last 14 years. With no school building in the village, teachers are conducting classes in the goat shed.

A school building, sanctioned by the Odisha government, has been lying incomplete due to the negligence of the contractor and the concerned officials. Despite repeated complaints, officials are least concerned about the future of the students.

With no other option, a

kind-hearted local has given permission to run the school in his goat shed.

"We cannot even drive away the goats while the students study because it is his goat shed. So, the students are forced to study in the presence of the animals. It can be managed during summer, but during rainy days, we have to keep the goats here," said the teacher Rabindra Mahakud.

"We have appraised the of-

ficials concerned. But, they are only giving fake promises," he added.

When contacted, Kaptipada BDO confessed that he was well aware of the situation and promised to take appropriate actions in the completion of the school building.

"The school building is incomplete due to the ongoing rain and road connectivity problems to the village. They have assured to complete it as soon as the rain stops. I'm trying my best to do something in this regard," the BDO said.

Similar is the plight of students of Bilaspur Upper Primary School in Boudh district. The school building, made of asbestos roof, is on the verge of collapse, with severe leakage during the rains. Students attend classes putting their lives at risk as the dilapidated school building may collapse anytime soon.

Accommodating 126 students from Class I to VIII, the school exposes the serious crisis in rural education in Odisha.

# INBEF nat'l conf elects office-bearers

Dr Reddy as president, Dr Khuntia as working president  
**PNS** ■ BHUBANESWAR

INTUC-affiliated Indian National Bank Employees' Federation (INBEF) in its national conference held at Indore on September 28-29 unanimously elected INTUC president Dr G Sanjeeva Reddy as the president and Dr Rama Chandra Khuntia as the working president of Indian National Bank Employees Federation. Om Prakash Sharma was elected as the general secretary, Iswar Prutum as



treasurer and Bijaya Kumar as joint treasurer.

Dr Khuntia, presided over the joint inaugural session of INBEF, Central Bank Officers Congress and Central Bank Employees Union and also the delegate session.

While addressing the delegates Dr Khuntia said that Indian labour will never allow the Government to privatize bank, LIC and GIC as the Government sponsor banks

are the pillars of our economy. Joint effort could be made for better service and working of banking system, he said.

But banks have written off loans worth Rs 9.9 lakh crore in last five financial years which is not acceptable, said Dr Khuntia. Shyam Sunder Yadav, secretary INTUC, attended the meeting as chief guest.

The joint conference passed a resolution at the end.

# In Bargarh Lovers found hanging from tree

**PNS** ■ BARGARH

A lover couple were found hanging from a tree in the Bindhyavasini hill under Bheden block of Bargarh district on Wednesday.

The deceased were residents of Saraspali village under Bheden block. However, it was yet to be ascertained whether the deceased committed suicide or there was any other reason behind their death. Get-

ting information, a police team reached the spot and started an investigation after sending the bodies for postmortem.

The deceased girl had been reported missing from her home since Tuesday evening.

# A landmark judgement on child pornography

The Just Rights for Children Alliance, a collection of five NGOs that work in unison against child trafficking and sexual exploitation, had filed an appeal before the Supreme Court against a Madras High Court order quashing criminal charges against a young man, Harish, who was booked by the NCRB for viewing and storing video clips featuring children being exploited for sexual acts. The High Court ruled that mere possession or storage of any pornographic material was not an offence under the POCSO Act 2012. It further said that S67B of the IT Act only made transmission, publication or creation of material depicting children an offence, but mere watching or downloading child pornography in the private domain was not punishable. The Supreme Court held that the High Court decision is erroneous and egregious and proceeds to explain the scope of the various offences under S15 of POCSO Act which had been amended to penalise various acts relating to child sexual abuse material.



**SATYA NARAYAN MISHRA**

address the urgent need for a comprehensive law to protect children from sexual abuses. It also noted how the IPC did not distinguish between an adult and child victim and the procedure was not child-friendly. The Supreme Court has brought out how S 15(1) of POCSO Act makes failure to delete or destroy pornographic material with intention to transmit liable to a fine. Similarly, S 15(3) envisages that storage or possession for commercial purpose is punishable with an imprisonment of three years. Writing this landmark judgement

on behalf of CJI Chandrachud and himself, Justice Pardiwala has invoked the concept of 'constructive possession', as per which storage of such material is an 'inchoate offence', a criminal act done in preparation for further offence. For Justice Pardiwala, mensrea (intent) is to be gathered from actus reus (action) of possessing the material but not deleting or reporting it. The court referred to S 30 of POCSO Act, as per which the special court shall presume that the accused had a culpable mindset. The burden is on the accused to show that he was not guilty. The Supreme Court notes that the culpable mental state is what the High Court should have considered. It also ruled that S 79, which gives safe harbour to intermediaries from any liability, does not apply to child pornography.

The court then proceeds to bring out how the impact of victimisation and abuse of children is profound, inflicting lasting physical and emotional trauma on the child. The court considers that the term child pornography is a misnomer that fails to capture the full extent of the crime. The court considers that

the term Child Sexual Exploitative & Abuse Material (CSEAM) would more accurately reflect the reality that those images and videos which are not only pornographic but are records of incidents, 'where the child has either been sexually exploited or abused or where an abuse of the children has been portrayed through any self-generated visual depiction'. Both the use of CSEAM and the act of child sexual abuse share a common, malevolent intent; the exploitation and degradation of the child for the sexual gratification of the abuser. The creation of such material is not a passive act as per the court but a deliberate one, 'where the abuser intentionally engages in the exploitation of a child, knowing full well the harm it causes'.

The court then underlines the importance of sex education and tries to debunk the misconception that sex education encourages promiscuity and irresponsible behaviour among youths. Research has shown that sex education actually delays the onset of sexual activity and promotes safer practices. Padmini Iyer's book "70 years of

Sex Education" (2015) brings out how young adults turn to internet where they have access to unmonitored and unfiltered information that can plant the seeds for unhealthy sex behaviour. Effective sex education encompasses a wide range of topics, including consent, healthy relationship, gender equality and respect for diversity. S 43 of POCSO Act obligates the state to make wide publicity. The Supreme Court has observed that it does not end with just spreading awareness.

The court has suggested that the Ministry of Women & Child Welfare should amend the POCSO Act by substituting child pornography with CSEAM to reflect on the reality of such offences. Implementing comprehensive sex education programs that include information about the legal and ethical ramifications of child pornography can deter potential abuse. Providing support service to the victims and rehabilitation programmes for the offenders is essential. The court has suggested that an expert committee be constituted to come up with comprehensive recommendation. According to the National Centre

for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), India accounts for the maximum number of online child sexual imagery in the world followed by Thailand. It may be recalled that a committee under Jairam Ramesh was constituted to examine the critical issue of pornography on social media and its impact on children and society. The committee had made 40 recommendations in 2020 including creating a central body to whom online platforms can report IP addresses of those searching for child porn. It suggested formulation of new laws to combat child pornography and social media intermediaries being more responsible.

Digital technology has significantly impacted the production and dissemination of CSEAM. The internet, smart phones and file-sharing platforms have made it easier for offenders to create, access and distribute such content across borders. End-to-end encryption and anonymising tools can make it challenging for law enforcement agencies to detect and investigate these crimes. However, technology also enables new

method for identifying victims, tracing offenders and blocking CSEAM. Collaboration between technology companies, governments and NGOs is crucial to leverage technology effectively in combating the exploitation of children online. Technology companies must develop and implement advanced algorithms and AI systems capable of detecting and removing CSEAM from their platform. The government has banned child pornography but is yet to set up a dedicated agency to investigate cases of those who view, distribute and create it.

The Supreme Court's judgement by clarifying the concept of constructive possession about the exact import of S 15 of POCSO Act, supplanting child pornography with a more overarching concept of CSEAM has reminded the state about its overarching Constitutional responsibility of making special provision for children (Article 15) and to protect children against exploitation (Article 39(f)).

(Prof Misra teaches Constitutional Law)

# Modi celebrates a decade of Swachh Bharat Mission



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday hailed the Swachh Bharat Mission as the largest and most successful people's movement of the 21st century, emphasising its impact on public health and wellbeing. Addressing an event to mark 10 years of the mission, Modi said that mass participation has transformed the campaign into a new path to prosperity for India. "You all made the Swachh Bharat Mission a success," the prime minister said while noting that over 28 crore people took part in more than 27 lakh events organised in just 15 days during the 'Sewa Pakhwada'. He said chief ministers, ministers, and other representatives played key roles in this national effort and underlined that

"continuous efforts can only lead to a clean India." During the event, the prime minister inaugurated projects worth around Rs 10,000 crore under the Swachh Bharat and AMRUT 2.0 missions which include water and sewage treatment plants across several states. "When people talk about 21st-century India even after 1,000 years, they will definitely remember the Swachh Bharat Mission," Modi said, emphasising the lasting legacy of the cleanliness campaign. The prime minister also criticised previous governments for neglecting basic sanitation. "They never considered dirt and lack of toilets as national issues. It was like they made dirt a part of their lives," he said. He said those who used Mahatma Gandhi for political benefits and vote bank have now forgotten his

subject of interest. He said that filth and lack of toilets were never considered as a national issue. As a result, said the prime minister, there were no discussions about it in society and lack of cleanliness became a part of life. He also recalled facing criticism after raising this issue from the ramparts of the Red Fort. "The first job of a prime minister is to make the lives of the common man easy. I talked about toilets and sanitary pads, and today, we see the results," he said. The prime minister highlighted that more than 60 per cent of the population was forced to defecate in the open a decade ago, which he called as an insult to Dalits, backward classes and tribal communities, and a major source of inconvenience for women. Modi noted the "sufferings of mothers, sisters and

daughters due to the lack of toilets" and also pointed out the threats to their health and safety. He said that the filth caused by open defecation had endangered the lives of children and was a major cause of child mortality. He also cited studies and reports that underline the positive outcomes of the mission. An international study has shown that the Swachh Bharat Mission is saving the lives of 60,000 to 70,000 children annually, while a UNICEF report indicates that over 90 per cent of women feel safer due to the construction of household toilets, he said. Additionally, the World Health Organization has credited the mission with saving 300,000 lives between 2014 and 2019 by reducing deaths from diarrhoea, Modi added. The prime minister also noted a shift in attitudes toward sanitation workers, stating that the Swachh Bharat Mission has brought them respect and pride. "Cleanliness is not just a one-day task but a lifelong value," he said, urging citizens to pass on the value of cleanliness from generation to generation and treat their surroundings with the same care as places of worship. Modi said steps have been taken to eliminate the problems arising from manual cleaning of septic tanks and informed that the government is working together with private and public sectors in this regard. To mark the landmark day, Modi also went to a school to take part in a cleanliness drive along with girl students.

# Leaders pay tribute to Gandhi, Shastri on their birth anniversaries

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leaders including its president Malliarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and India's second prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on their birth anniversary. "On behalf of all citizens, I pay my humble tribute to the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi on his 155th birth anniversary," President Murmu said in a social media post. In another post, she said Shastri presented highest ideals of simplicity, honesty and patriotism throughout his life. "On the birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, I pay my humble tribute to him," she said. "Shastri ji presented the highest ideals of simplicity, honesty and patriotism throughout his life. Under his strong leadership, India achieved economic, strategic and other successes. Let us take inspiration from his life and pledge to build a strong India," President Murmu said in the post in Hindi. In his tributes, Prime Minister Modi said in a social media post the revered Babu's life and ideals based on truth, harmony and equality would always be an inspiration for the country's people. Gandhi, hailed as the father of the nation, steadfastly followed the principles of truth and non-violence, inspiring generations of politicians and activists around the world. Modi also paid homage to India's second prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. He dedicated his life to the



country's soldiers, farmers and pride, Modi said of Shastri, who raised the slogan of "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" and whose simplicity and honesty earned him wide respect. The prime minister joined President Droupadi Murmu and several other dignitaries in visiting the memorials of Gandhi and Shastri in the national capital this morning to pay homage to them. Later, Modi attended a cleanliness drive along with some school students to mark the 10th anniversary of Swachhata Bharat campaign, which was launched in 2014 on the birth anniversary of Gandhi, who put a great emphasis on cleanliness all his life. The prime minister urged everyone to be part of such a drive in their surroundings, saying such an initiative will strengthen the resolve for a clean India. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi paid rich tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. While Rahul Gandhi said the Mahatma was not just an individual but a way of living and thinking, Kharge said they are following his ideas as

they are being challenged today. "Bapu has taught me that if we want to live, we should live without fear - we should walk on the path of truth, love, compassion and harmony while uniting everyone," Rahul Gandhi said. "Gandhi ji was not just an individual, he was a way of living and thinking," the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha said in a post in Hindi. He also paid floral tributes at Mahatma Gandhi's memorial at Rajghat in the morning. Former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi and Kharge also attended a function in the central hall of Parliament where they paid floral tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. Speaker Om Birla and other BJP leaders, including union minister and BJP President JP Nadda, were present at the function. Kharge said the thoughts and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, who showed the path of peace to the entire world with the highest values of truth, non-violence and satyagraha, the architect of the Indian freedom struggle, are always inspiring for us. "Today, we are facing the

challenge to his ideas by following the principles of Bapu. Best wishes to all the countrymen on Gandhi Jayanti," Kharge said in a social media post. The Congress also remembered former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on his birth anniversary and former Congress leader K Kamaraj on his death anniversary. Rahul Gandhi said Shastri will be remembered for his simplicity and Kamaraj for his humility, dedication, and visionary policies for the upliftment of the marginalised and the empowerment of the underprivileged. Congress leader K C Venugopal and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also paid tributes to Mahatma Gandhi. "Bapu's life and his teachings serve as our lodestar today more than ever. At a time when the forces of hatred, lies and violence are trying their best to destroy India, the message of Satya and Ahimsa is our guiding principle. This Gandhi Jayanti, we renew our pledge to walk in his footsteps," Venugopal said in a social media post.



# Global leaders, celebrities worldwide applaud India's sanitation revolution

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Several noted Indian and global personalities, including Ratan Tata and Bill Gates, on Wednesday lauded India's success in improving sanitation with the Swachh Bharat Mission under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Actors Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Alia Bhatt also urged citizens to actively participate in the Swachh Bharat campaign as they marked the 10th anniversary of the cleanliness initiative. They noted that the programme, which completed its 10th year on Wednesday, has significantly transformed India through improved sanitation and cleanliness. WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus praised Modi and commended the efforts of his government, highlighting the significant strides made by the country in achieving sustainable development goals through this "transformative" initiative, which mobilises communities to promote a cleaner and healthier nation. Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates said India made huge strides in improving sanitation and hygiene under Modi's leadership. Its approach has served a model in community-driven programmes, he said, highlighting its "amazing" impact especially on the poor and women by mobilising people. The prime minister shared on social media posts by these personalities. World Bank

president Ajay Banga said the programme has significantly transformed India through improved sanitation, achieving a remarkable milestone under Modi's "visionary" leadership. Asian Development Bank president Masatsugu Asakawa commended Modi for spearheading the Mission, lauding it as a transformational campaign. The Asian Development Bank is proud to have partnered with India on this visionary initiative from the very start, he said. Tata Trusts chairman Ratan Tata said the cleanliness campaign has benefited millions, especially in the rural India, and congratulated Modi on its success. Spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar said the programme has brought people's focus on cleanliness. "Today, I'm talking to you not as an actor but as a mother, who wants the best for her children. And Swachh Bharat mission is a mission where every family should participate," said Kareena, adding that every Indian should honour Gandhi's dream of a clean India. Saif said, "For us, it is not just about keeping our surroundings clean, it is about showing our kids that a healthy environment is a foundation for a happy life." National Award-winning actor-director R Madhavan said the impact and results of Swachh Bharat have been outstanding. Actors Manushi Chhillar, Tisca Chopra and music composer Shankar Mahadevan also shared messages on the occasion.

# Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata to receive urban radar networks for enhanced weather forecasting

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Three metropolitan cities -- Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata -- will soon get urban radar networks for better weather forecast on the lines of a similar network unveiled for Mumbai last month, officials said on Wednesday. The Ministry of Earth Sciences launched four X-band weather radars in Mumbai last month, taking the total number of such monitoring systems in the financial capital to six

covering an area of nearly 50,000 sq km together. "We plan to extend similar coverage in the other three metros -- Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata within the next one year," M Ravichandran, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said. Under Mission Mausam, the government plans to install 50 doppler weather radars across the country to strengthen weather forecasting services. The urban radar network will provide real-time data every five minutes by

detecting clouds which bring extreme rainfall as well as thunderstorms. The data from the radars will be integrated, and eventually offer a real-time view of weather systems developing in and around Mumbai. The launch of the urban radar network has made Mumbai the country's most monitored city for understanding evolving weather systems. At present, Mumbai has two doppler weather radars. Last month, the government approved Mission Mausam with a budget outlay

of Rs 2,000 crore to make the country 'weather-ready and climate-smart' by developing cutting edge weather surveillance technologies and systems. The mission aims to establish 50 doppler weather radars, 60 radiosonde/radio wind stations, 100 disdrometers, 10 wind profilers, 25 radiometers, one urban testbed, one process testbed, one ocean research station and 10 marine automatic weather stations with upper air observation.



# PM greets on Mahalaya ahead of Durga Puja

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday greeted people on the occasion of Mahalaya, which is observed before the start of Durga Puja. He said in a social media post, "Shubho Mahalaya! As Durga Puja approaches, we pray that hope, goodness and positivity shall always prevail. May Maa Durga always bless us with happiness, strength and good health." The devout believe that Goddess Durga begins her descent from her abode in Mount Kailash to the Earth on this day.

# Government allows non forest departments to tackle disaster prevention in forests

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Union Environment Ministry has issued new guidelines allowing other government departments to carry out forestry activities during emergencies such as forest fires, particularly when state forest departments lack the necessary expertise. However, the Union Environment Ministry in the guidelines made it clear that the forest's legal status will remain unchanged, and any structures created will continue to belong to the forest department. The guidelines detail steps that can be taken to prevent or manage natural disasters in



forest areas and are aligned with the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980. It permits actions such as establishing fire lines and constructing soil and water conservation structures like check dams and pipelines during natural disasters. The aim is to protect wildlife, human lives, and

property. This decision follows a request from Uttarakhand's chief secretary, highlighting the need for effective measures against frequent forest fires. As per the guidelines, under such circumstances, the state forest department may authorize other government departments to undertake

these activities, provided they align with approved plans and receive prior permission. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) must oversee and approve the design of any interventions, ensuring no harm comes to the ecosystem, with tree cutting generally prohibited except for necessary pruning. The letter also called for mock drills to prepare forest staff before the fire season and requested permission for government departments to conduct soil and water conservation work in forest areas. The issue was discussed in a meeting of the ministry's Forest Advisory Committee on August 27.

The activities include establishing and maintaining fire lines and building structures for soil and water conservation, such as check dams, water tanks, trenches, and pipelines. However, the ministry said: "Under exceptional circumstances and non-availability of technical expertise, the state forest department, with a view to avert the natural disaster by ensuring efficient and effective preparatory works, may allow the other government departments to undertake the implementation of forestry activities for soil and water conservation activities in the forest area."

# Congress calls for urgent peace dialogue amid West Asia tensions

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

With tensions escalating in West Asia, the Congress on Wednesday said there is "fierce urgency" for peace and dialogue in the region engulfed by a deepening cycle of violence. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the world's conscience needs to be reawakened by the forces of reconciliation amid escalating hostilities in West Asia. "Thanks to an initiative taken by the Congress-led UPA Government, since 2007 the United Nations observes October 2nd as the International Day of Non-Violence," he said in a social



media post. "The Indian National Congress recalls this in the midst of an alarming escalation of remorseless hostilities in West Asia. This is imposing an unacceptable

humanitarian price on thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women and children. There is a fierce urgency for peace and dialogue in the region that is now engulfed by a deepening cycle of violence and counter-violence," he said. "The world's conscience seems to have been dulled by the forces of revenge. It needs to be reawakened by the forces of reconciliation," Ramesh said. Tensions have escalated in West Asia after Iran fired around 200 missiles into Israel in response to Israel's killing of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah and other commanders of the militant outfit.

# Rahul Gandhi: Empower athletes, not politicians

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said India cannot achieve its true potential of sports till a system is put in place that directly supports players and makes sports persons in-charge of various sports bodies instead of politicians. "No money, no game" - this is the reality for most athletes in India today. Met a group of players from Haryana and across the country and listened to their problems," the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said in a social media post in Hindi. He also shared a seven-minute video of his conversation with



players in poll-bound Haryana. "Unless we bring in a system that directly supports sports persons, and puts sports persons in charge instead of politicians in sports associations, India cannot achieve its true potential,"

Gandhi said. "India has immense talent - only transparency, fairness and access to all necessary facilities will ensure that every promising player benefits equally," he said in his post. "Completely disappointed with the system, struggling with lack of basic facilities like diet, rest and training, these youth are also losing hope and confidence - this is a bigger loss for India than missing out on Olympic Glory," he said. In the video he shared, Rahul Gandhi is seen listening to problems of sports persons from Haryana. He also took a dig at politicians holding positions in sports bodies, including that of cricket and judo.

# Congress urges Haryana voters to oust BJP in upcoming elections

PNS  
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

The Congress on Wednesday asked the voters of Haryana to oust the BJP in the October 5 polls, saying this is a fight against "injustice and untruth" and also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging he is the leader of those who break trust and an expert in telling lies. Urging the people of Haryana not to fall for BJP's poll promises, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge claimed the party has failed to fulfil commitments made to voters in the past. At an election rally at Badhra in Haryana's Charkhi Dadri, Kharge targeted the BJP over several issues, including demands for debt waiver and legal guarantee on MSP from farmers, and claimed people have made up their mind to bring the Congress to power in the state. "It is Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri's birth anniversary today. Mahatma Gandhi taught us truth and non-violence. I don't want to say this - how much truth and how much lies those in power speak," he said. "Modi ji toh bharosa todne wala ka bhi sardar hai (Modi is the leader of those who break trust). His numerous lies, promises, you know about them," he said in the presence of former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and former Jammu and Kashmir Governor Satya Pal Malik. Addressing a public meeting in Julana to campaign for Congress candidate from the constituency and Olympic



wrestler Vinesh Phogat, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra attacked the BJP-led government in the state over employment, the Agniveer military recruitment scheme and farmers' welfare among other issues and also alleged that the ruling party "betrayed" people at every stage. Referring to the wrestlers' protest last year, she said injustice was done to Vinesh and her companions. In Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna gave the message of Bhagavad Gita and said whenever injustice takes place in the world, the voice of truth and justice will rise, she said. Priyanka Gandhi told the gathering that an "opportunity has come again, similar to the battle of Kurukshetra and the fight against the British rule. There is no difference," she said. "Today, this is your fight against injustice, untruth and the wicked ('dushton'). You will have to stand up, you will have to look within yourself and see what is happening," she added. Meanwhile, her brother and

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi shared a seven-minute video of his conversation with sports persons in Haryana and said India cannot achieve its true potential in sports till a system is put in place that directly supports players and makes them in-charge of various sports bodies instead of politicians. In the video, he is seen listening to problems of sports persons from Haryana. The Congress is contesting in 89 of the total 90 assembly seats leaving the Bhiwani segment for INDIA bloc ally CPI-M. In his speech, Kharge while referring to Congress's poll promises in Haryana said the party has given seven guarantees in its manifesto including Rs 2,000 per month for women and told Hooda, who was standing behind him, "You will have to keep my honour". Congress has not named its chief ministerial candidate, but Hooda is a frontrunner for the post. Invoking Lal Bahadur Shastri's "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan"

slogan, he said the BJP doesn't "know about jawans or kisans". "They only know the RSS' agenda. No one is a farmer in the RSS or BJP. This is why they don't understand the pain of the farmers. They help people like Adani-Ambani and not farmers. They don't give MSP guarantee, but Modi waives Rs 16 lakh crore debt of the rich," he said and also criticised the Agnipath military recruitment scheme. Keep such people at bay, Kharge said. He also fired a fresh salvo at the BJP after his "will not die till Modi is ousted" remarks. "I had gone to Jammu and Kashmir and felt dizzy for a while. There I said till the time we oust the BJP from power, till that time I won't breathe my last. But they played it up so much, they taunted me by saying may he live for 125 years and see 'Viksit Bharat'," he said. "Pehle to ye dekho, aapke log dekhn ke liye zinda rahege ya nahi rahege, wahan toh Congress aake baithne wali hai" (first, you see whether your people will be alive or not to see it, The Congress is about to sit in power)," he said. Kharge said Modi made so many promises during the past 10 years including "putting Rs 15 lakh in everyone's bank account and giving two crore jobs to youth each year, but everyone knows the fate of these promises". The Congress president said the BJP is saying during the polls in Haryana that they will give five lakh jobs, whereas they did not fill over 1.60 lakh vacant posts.

# Maharashtra Government launches inquiry into Akshay Shinde encounter death

T N RAGHUNATHA  
MUMBAI

After stinging observations made by the Bombay High Court and fierce criticism by the Opposition Maha Vikas Agadi (MVA), the BJP-led MahaYuti government has set up a Commission of Inquiry into the "encounter killing" of Akshay Shinde, the prime accused in the Badlapur nursery school children sexual assault case. Justice Dilip Bhosale (Retd), former Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court, has been appointed as head of the judicial inquiry - set up under section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to look into the circumstances leading to the alleged encounter death of Shinde on September 23. The Inquiry Commission has been asked to submit its report to the Maharashtra government within three months from the date of its appointment. Akshay Shinde -- key accused in the sensational Badlapur child sexual assault -- was shot dead at a point blank range while he was being taken from Badlapur to Thane in a van for investigation in another case. As per the terms of the reference given to it, the Inquiry Commission will probe the sequence of events leading to the death of Shinde that took place at Mumbra Bypass, Thane on September 23 leading to the exchange of fire between accused and the police team that was escorting him to Thane on September 23. It will fix responsibility for the incident. The Commission will look



into whether the steps taken by the police in handling the aforesaid situation were appropriate and suggest short term and long term measures to be taken by the Police in order to avoid reoccurrence of such incident. Narrating the incident, the notification issued by the Home department said: "...an incident occurred at Mumbra Bypass, Thane on 23rd September 2024, wherein there was an exchange of fire between one accused person named Akshay Shinde, and the accompanying police escort arty, resulting into injuries to both, the accused and one police officer. The accused Shri Akshay Shinde was taken to the hospital for treatment where he was declared dead on arrival...". At hearing held on September 25, a HC bench of Justice Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan had questioned the version put out by the police Shinde was shot by the police in self

defence. Justice Chavan said "it is hard to believe" that a man of slight build as Akshay Shinde could be overpowered by the four policemen when he turned violent and pulled the slide back on a 9 mm pistol for firing which "requires strength". It may be recalled that two nursery girls -- aged four and six years -- were sexually abused allegedly by sweepers Shinde when they in the washroom of the kindergarten school run by Adarsh Vidya Prasarak Sanstha (AVPS) on August 13 for using the toilet there. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Thane police that investigated the case has filed a charge-sheet in the case before the special Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act court in Kalyan. The incident caused a major public uproar in the state and always as other parts of the state. The Opposition MVA -- comprising Congress, Uddhav Thackeray-headed

Shiv Sena (UBT) and Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) -- had demanded a judicial probe into the suspicious circumstances leading to the accused Shinde's death in a police van. At a hearing held on October 1, the Bombay High Court pulled up the Maharashtra Police SIT for its failure to arrest two trustees of the Badlapur school where two minor girls were allegedly raped in August -- with the prime accused Akshay A. Shinde was shot dead in a police encounter on September 23. A division bench comprising Justice Revati Mohite-Dere and Justice Prithviraj Chavan was hearing a suo-motu PIL into the alleged sexual assault on the two nursery girls, aged 3 and 5 years at the Badlapur-based nursery school. In a related development, a single-judge bench of Justice Rajesh Laddha rejected the anticipatory bail applications of the school trust's Chairman and Secretary who are on the run since the incident and after the Trust was superseded as per the state government orders. "Considering that the (2) victims are minors, the trauma they have endured will have profound impact on their adolescent years, leaving long lasting and irreparable psychological scars. The applicants (Trustees) hold important positions in the school... There are chances that they may tamper with the evidence and pressurize the witnesses who are employees of the school," Justice Laddha said while rejecting the anticipatory bail applications made by the Chairman and the secretary.



## Modi wishes Netanyahu, Jewish community on Rosh Hashanah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday greeted his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu and the Jewish community on their new year. He said in a social media post, "Best wishes on Rosh Hashanah to my friend PM @netanyahu, the people of Israel and the Jewish community across the world. May the new year bring peace, hope and good health in everyone's life. Shana Tova!"

# Two Indian navy officers set sail on historic global expedition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
PANAJI

Two women officers of the Indian Navy - Lt Commander Dilna K and Lt Commander Roopa A - on Wednesday embarked from Goa on a challenging expedition to circumnavigate the globe covering 21,600 nautical miles over eight months. Flaggng off their journey, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi said the two women officers represent an India which defies societal dogmas and aspires to explore new frontiers and the expedition will also contribute towards progressing national scientific research. "The two officers are expected to return to Goa in May 2025. The voyage was flagged off from the Naval Ocean Sailing Node, INS Mandovi near Panaji, as both the officers sailed on the Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Tarini. Chief of the Southern Naval Command Vice Admiral V Srinivas and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.



"Addressing a gathering, Admiral Tripathi said the 'Navika Sagar Parikrama' will contribute towards progressing national scientific research in collaboration with the National Institute of Oceanography (CSIR-NIO) in Goa for a study on marine micro-plastics and ferrous content across the seas. "It will also contribute with the Wildlife Institute of India for an exploration on megafauna or large sea mammals, Sagar Defence (start up) for their drones that promise spectacular visuals of the voyage, and Defence Food Research Laboratory towards providing customised precooked Indian meals so

added. "At a time, when our nation is once again taking to the seas on its transformational journey to be Viksit Bharat, this edition of Navika Sagar Parikrama embodies the indomitable spirit of Sashakt and Saksham India," he said. "Talking to reporters after the ceremony, Admiral Tripathi said it is a proud moment for everyone in the Indian navy that the two sailors will be demonstrating their skills, sense of adventure, fearlessness and focus and ability to fight the tough situations. "Indian Navy would be monitoring their adventure. We wish them all the best as they commence their journey today," he said. The adventurous journey will take the two women officers through some of the most treacherous waters, including the perilous passage around the three great capes -- Cape Leeuwin, Cape Horn and Cape of Good Hope, he said. There are only two crew members but the mission is one to fly high the Indian flag, Admiral Tripathi said.

# Liquor worth ₹8.20 crores, narcotics, cash seized in Gurgaon

PARVESH SHARMA  
GURGAON

After the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct, so far Rs 8.20 crores of illegal liquor, narcotics and cash have been seized in Gurugram district. District Election Officer and Deputy Commissioner Gurgaon Nishant Kumar Yadav said the administration is in active mode to maintain law and order in the district before the upcoming polling on October 5 for the Haryana Assembly Elections. He informed that 12 flying squad teams of the district administration and the police have now seized cash, illegal liquor, narcotics and other materials worth Rs 8.20 crores "The seized items include cash worth Rs 5.80 crore, 28,000 liters of illegal liquor worth Rs 1 crore, drugs and other valuables worth about Rs 1.28 crores," Yadav said. He said that action will be taken against carrying more than 50,000 cash during the Model Code of Conduct. "To maintain law and order



and conduct peaceful polling during the Assembly General Elections, cash and illegal liquor along with other material that can influence the elections are being monitored at the district borders," Yadav asserted. The district administration is fully alert in view of the assembly elections. "Various FST teams, administration and police are checking border area roads namely Khedki Toll Plaza, KMP Toll Plaza at Panchgaon, MCD Toll Plaza on Delhi-

Gurgaon border, Ghamdoj Toll, Kapasada Border and Bandhwadi Toll by setting up checkpoints each so that cash, illegal liquor and other items can be confiscated," Yadav added. Earlier the police had disclosed that around 399 people were arrested and 26351.805 litres of liquor worth over Rs 95.43 lakh has been seized from them with the period of 16 September to 29 September and around 359 case were registered after imposition of the poll code.

# Polarisation in Kerala over CM Vijayan's gold smuggling remarks

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN  
KOCHI

A statement made by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in a press meet held on 21st September where he disclosed details about the seizure of smuggled gold and hawala money from Malappuram district has polarized Kerala community on communal lines and that too after a fortnight. In a media interaction on 21st September, Chief Minister Vijayan had said that out of the 147 kg smuggled gold seized in the State during the last three years Malappuram district accounted for 124.47 kg yellow metal. He also said that the district accounted for Rs 87.22 crore out of the Rs 122.5 crore hawala cash seized during the same period. Vijayan's answers were in response to the independent MLA P V Anvar's allegation that the police as well as a senior official of the chief minister's office were hand in gloves in tormenting those who brought gold when they



returned home from West Asian countries. What the chief minister told a daily known more as the English version of CPI(M)'s mouthpiece 'Deshabhimani' on 29th September at New Delhi was that the money generated out of gold smuggling and hawala transaction was being used for anti-national activities. Interestingly, Vijayan did not name any political party or communities as accused in the illegal activities. Within 24 hours of the Chennai daily publishing the

interview with Vijayan, the press secretary to the chief minister issued a release stating that the interview has been distorted by the reporter and the paper had put words into his mouth. The newspaper, the honcho of which is described as a close confidante of the Marxist bosses, issued a correction stating that some sentences that were not part of the interview were added in the published version at the request of the PR person who helped arrange the interview, "We unreservedly apologies

for this serious error of judgment on the part of the reporter and the lack of editorial oversight in this instance," said the newspaper in its columns on Wednesday. Political and cultural Kerala sees this as part of appeasing the Muslim community. The Muslim League and various Islamist outfits had come out strongly against the chief minister's disclosures on gold smuggling and hawala deals. "Their approach itself is shocking as what the chief minister told the media was based on data he might have sourced from official sources. It is surprising to hear the statement made by Anvar and others that the chief minister had hurt the sentiments of Muslims in Malappuram district," said Valsan Thillankeri, top RSS leader in Kerala. Valsan pointed out that Malappuram district which has a population of 45 lakh out of which nearly 20 per cent belong to Hindu community while the Muslims constitute 75 per

cent. How come the Muslims claim monopoly over gold smuggling and hawala transaction, asked Valsan. Anvar, an Islamist politician who had succeeded in infiltrating into the inner coterie of the chief minister's office and residence, had alleged that P Sasi, Vijayan's political secretary as a criminal. Vijayan had said that Sasi was a role model for all Marxists and he does not need any good service entry from anybody. Interestingly, no mainstream media in the State had reported about the data about gold and hawala transaction furnished by the chief minister during his 21st September press meet. But Governor Arif Mohammed Khan told reporters at Kozhikode on Wednesday that it was mandatory on the part of the chief minister to inform Raj Bhavan about the gold smuggling and hawala deals since these were issues concerning national security.

# Gurgaon to webcast polling stations for peaceful voting

PARVESH SHARMA  
GURGAON

To conduct peaceful voting in Gurgaon assembly elections, all 1507 polling stations of the district will be webcasted by installing CCTV cameras. For this, a district level control room will be set up in the auditorium of the Mini Secretariat complex. Deputy Commissioner and District Election Officer of Gurgaon, Nishant Kumar Yadav said that on October 5, voting will be held from 7 am to 6 pm at 1507 polling stations in Badshahpur, Sohna, Gurgaon and Pataudi assembly constituencies of the district. For this purpose, CCTV cameras will be installed at the polling stations, which will be webcasted. Yadav said that there are 257 critical booths in the district,

where two cameras will be installed to record the inside and outside activities. If any person tries to disrupt the voting system, it will be recorded in CCTV and strict action will be taken immediately. "Three more booths have been added in Badshahpur assembly constituency with the permission of the Election Commission. Now there are 521 booths here. Apart from this, there are 435 booths in Gurgaon assembly, 292 in Sohna and 259 in Pataudi. Election officers of all four assembly constituencies can also view any booth through webcasting in their control rooms," Yadav said. Apart from this, to ensure peaceful voting here in Gurgaon district the Gurgaon police have placed full security arrangements which includes the deployment of

security personnel as 257 polling premises marked critical. Police said they have deployed 4,800 police personnel and home guards and half a section of central paramilitary forces in addition to the 10 companies of paramilitary forces, home guards, special police officers (SPOs) and 6,000 personnel of the Gurugram. "Salutes in plain clothes have been deployed to keep a close tab on illegal activity during the elections, which includes tracking illegal cash transactions, distribution of liquor, or any other items suspected of the voters," police said. Over 14 lakh people are eligible to exercise their franchise in the upcoming elections of the Gurgaon district's four assembly constituencies, where polling will be held on October 5.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## West Asia on edge

Iran-Israel conflict escalates amid missile strikes and global concerns. It is high time to de-escalate the tension

The fragile peace in West Asia has once again been shattered as Iran launched a missile barrage against Israel, intensifying fears of a broader conflict in the region. On Tuesday night, Iran fired 181 ballistic missiles, forcing nearly 10 million Israelis into bomb shelters as the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) scrambled to intercept the attack. While the Iron Dome and Arrow defence systems managed to neutralise most of the missiles, some projectiles penetrated Israel's defences, causing minor damage. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately condemned the assault, calling it a 'big mistake' by Iran. He warned that Tehran would face severe consequences, though stopping short of declaring a full-scale war. This marked Iran's second missile strike against Israel this year, following a similar offensive in April. Iranian officials claimed that the missile salvo was in retaliation for the recent killings of senior Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, targeted in Israeli military operations.



The missile strike has drawn immediate international reactions, with the United States issuing a stern warning to Iran. US President Joe Biden has assured military support for a joint response to any further aggression from Iran. However, the involvement of the US in the conflict could further destabilise the already volatile region, raising concerns of potential Iranian retaliation not just against Israel but also against US military interests in the region. Add to this the entry of Russia and China into the conflict. Meanwhile the humanitarian crisis is escalating, with hundreds of thousands displaced across Lebanon

and Gaza. As the death toll rises, regional stability is being tested, with fears that Iraq and Jordan, both geographically close to the conflict, could be drawn into the violence. The global community is urging de-escalation, with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres leading calls for an immediate ceasefire. While diplomatic efforts continue, the possibility of a long-lasting peace seems distant, with both Israel and Iran preparing for further confrontations. The time is running out for the peace in the region and the world. As it would not be long before both Russia and China also join the war should the US and the West get involved any deeper. The path to de-escalation lies in concerted diplomatic engagement by major global powers, especially the US, Russia, and European nations. In this scenario India could play a crucial role which has a neutral stance and is friends with both Russia and the US and also Israel and Iran. Indeed, the immediate focus should be on creating humanitarian corridors for civilians caught in the conflict zones and ensuring that aid reaches those affected by the violence in Lebanon, Gaza and Israel. Establishing a no-fly zone and enforcing a temporary halt in military operations could create a conducive environment for peace talks.

### PICTALK



Mahatma Gandhi's statue, decorated with flower on his birth anniversary, in New Delhi

# The cannonballs of political warfare

Tirupati 'laddu' issue has sparked nationwide outrage, raising questions about the delicate balance between religion, politics and faith



KALYANI SHANKAR

When controversy and suspicion surround an innocuous sweet like Srivari Laddu sold by the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam, it does not stop there. It has gone much further in the past week and become a political weapon for Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu to beat his predecessor, Jagan Mohan Reddy. Other political parties like the Congress and the BJP use it to their advantage. Some see it as a religious issue. Some others see it as a food quality issue. The spiritual leaders claim that laddu is divine food and that contaminated laddus should not be offered to the deity.

The political row surrounding the laddu highlights the delicate balance between politics, religion, food quality, and the public. The delicious laddus are made in pure ghee with sugar, cardamom, raisins, cashews and gram flour. Fourteen tons of cow ghee were used daily to make laddu prasadam in a modernised kitchen. They are first offered to god and distributed to the devotees as the divine 'prasad'. The laddus also bring Rs 500 crores annually by selling them to the devotees. Naidu seized the laddu controversy to attack Jagan. He accused the Reddy government of allowing contaminated laddu with beef fat in the ghee as prasad.

He raised it at a celebration of the Modi government completing 100 days in his third term. TDP is part of the Coalition government at the Centre. Laddu came into focus in the sixties and seventies also. At that time, there were concerns about adding Dalda vanaspati, a vegetable fat, to the ghee. Shipments with this added fat were rejected, and the suppliers were blocked. In another case, there was a dispute between two Vaishnavite groups about the tilak on Lord Venkateswara. The two groups apply different types of tilaks to Venkateswara's forehead. The top court ruled that both tilaks should be used, fifteen days each in a month. The TDP won the Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections in June. Reddy's YSRCP was



trounced. After winning the Assembly election, TDP used the laddu issue as Naidu, claiming that the Jagan government's cost-cutting measures led to the purchase of low-quality ghee, compromising the quality of the Tirumala Laddu. Naidu accused Jagan of neglect of Hindu religious practices during his regime. Significantly, Jagan and his late father and Chief Minister, Rajashekar Reddy, are Christians. Reddy has refuted the allegations, claiming it was politically motivated. Jagan has complained to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that Chandrababu was trying to settle political scores against him. The YSRCP also criticised Naidu and performed the purification ceremony. Jagan was denied permission to enter the temple for any penance. The laddu controversy has been blown out of proportion in the past week. Jagan did not find support from the other parties. Even Jagan's sister Sharmila joined the Congress and became the Andhra Pradesh unit chief. She has taken the issue to the Andhra Pradesh governor and seeks a CBI inquiry. Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister, Naidu's



THE LADDU CONTROVERSY HAS ALSO LED TO DEMANDS THAT TEMPLES BE FREED FROM STATE CONTROL. THIS HAS COME UP NOW AND THEN. BUT NO GOVERNMENT WANTS TO LET GO OF THEIR MASSIVE TEMPLES

coalition partner, and a famous movie star, Pavan Kalyan, is taking up the issue on religious grounds. He has gone on an 11-day penance claiming the corrupted ghee was a grave offence. While Naidu plays the political card, Kalyan plays the religious card, saying Sanathana Dharma should be protected. The laddu controversy has spread widely when the media, public figures and some Political leaders have questioned the quality of laddus. It has sparked nationwide outrage among seers and devotees. Unsurprisingly, other organisations like the VHP, a sister organisation of the BJP, the Ayodhya seers and other religious institutions have demanded a thorough enquiry. The Ayodhya and Puri Jagannath priests have sent their prasad for quality check-up. The laddu controversy has also led to demands that temples be freed from State control. This has come up now and then. But no government wants to let go of their massive temples for free. On the legal side, Surjit Singh Yadav, President of Hindu Sena Samiti, has taken the issue to the Supreme Court, demand-

ing a special Investigation team to go into the issue. The State government has also set up a committee. The Centre has asked the State to send a report. Meanwhile, the TTD tried to contain the damage. It conducted a purification ritual and assured the devotees that laddus were not contaminated. The issue is evolving and may take longer to resolve now that it has gone to court. It suits Babu and Modi to keep the issue burning. However, such a sensitive issue could go out of control and become a law and order problem if not checked. The longer it remains, the more the risk of religious sensitivity looming. The controversy shows the need to balance politics, food and religion. Political and religious leaders must carefully consider how different segments of society will perceive their actions regarding spiritual matters. When faith is politicised, it becomes susceptible. Politicians must be vigilant not to make it an emotional issue. In any case, we must wait to see what the Supreme Court does as it has the final word.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Dada Saheb Phalke for Mithun Da



Propos to 'Dadasaheb Phalke finally acknowledge Mrigayaa actor' published on October 1. Gouranga Chakraborty aka Mithun Da was born in Barisal, Bangladesh. He

has had his share of struggle when he had to sleep on Bombay pavements with a hungry stomach in his early life. He even assisted yesteryear's dancing sensation Helen. He is the only actor to be awarded a National award for his debut film and later he won two more National awards. He also holds a black belt in martial arts. Today it is common for chiseled body actors to flaunt their six or eight packs, but it was Mithun Chakraborty who started this trend. His super hit film 'Disco Dancer' not only became a hit movie in India but has a cult following in the former USSR, Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. A Limca Book of Records in his name, 19 movies released in 1989, is still unbroken. His rise to the top is indeed a testament that one can fulfil his dreams. He truly deserves this esteemed honour.

Bal Govind | Noida

are sunk several feet deep have much affected the groundwater resource. The open wells, which tap the top shallow aquifer, can help preserve rainwater. This is a traditional method followed immediately after the rains during winter. The groundwater source is in two discontinuous layers: one, the top or shallow aquifer comprising water-bearing rocks like sandstone, and two, sand and gravel and the deeper aquifer. These two are separated by hard rocks. The top aquifer is fed with water from the rain that percolates. Based on the geology of the area, some of these aquifers could, in fact, have more water than those below, experts say. But how big are the aquifers beneath us, and what is their storage capacity? Well, it is for the respective state water boards to find answers to these complex questions.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

#### PARENTING IN DIGITAL AGE

Madam — It refers to 'The challenges of parenting in the age of technology' (October 1). The pressures of parenting have become overwhelming in the past two

decades, especially in this new age of technology. While countless resources, both books and online guides, offer seemingly perfect solutions, none can fully deal with each child's unique needs. The communication barriers of gadgets introduced in this era are disrupting the natural flow of interaction. As Freud proposed social responsibilities, along with the implications of rewards and punishments, this can profoundly impact mental health, particularly in today's highly competitive environment. Not only teens, but parents these days feel compelled to showcase their children on social media as stars of extracurriculars and academics, often succumbing to the added pressure of 'helicopter parenting', which can lead to more harmful methods of discipline. The harsh reality is that the extreme consequences of strict parenting can lead to perilous consequences, proving that striking a balance is the key to avoiding such tragedies.

Shaswat Jena | Ghaziabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The battle over CPI(M) leader M M Lawrence's final journey

The Kerala High Court now holds the fate of his remains as the ideological clash within his family raises larger questions about faith and political ideology

One may apologise for seeing some similarities between the 1983 movie *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* (directed by Kundan Shah) and the demise of CPI(M) leader M M Lawrence last month. *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron* was immortalised by the black humour associated with Indian politics and a splendid show by Satish Shah who perfected his role as the dead body of D'Mello. It has been more than a fortnight since Lawrence (95) breathed his last. But his dead body has become a subject of litigation and it is waiting for a verdict from the Kerala High Court as his younger daughter Asha Lawrence challenged the decision of the late leader's son M L Sajeewan to hand over the mortal remains to Government Medical College, Ernakulam, for the MBBS students for studies. Sajeewan, a Kerala Government lawyer, claims that his late father did not believe in any religion and had left word with him to donate the body to the MCH students. But Asha released the wedding pictures of Lawrence which were held in a church and which was being



solemnised by a Catholic priest. She also argues that her elder sister Suja and her husband were evangelists working in West Asia to free the sinners from their sins. When it was time for the relatives, friends and well-wishers of Lawrence to bid 'Lal Salam', a scuffle broke out between the deceased leader's son, daughter, and son-in-law on one side and Asha on the other side. Asha and her son Milan Joseph wanted the mortal remains to be interred as per Catholic rites in a cemetery where they had buried their mother. Following a plea by Asha, the High Court asked the Medical College authorities to take possession of the body, and keep it in the mortuary till a final decision is made on the issue. When it was time for

the body to be removed to the MCH, a sobbing Asha fell on the coffin and started weeping uncontrollably saying that she would not allow her father's body to be left to the students to dissect and mutilate. The relations of Sajeewan physically assaulted Asha and her son Milan alleging them to be RSS agents. Sajeewan alleges that the RSS and other Sangh Parivar 'elements' were behind the showdown. A CPI(M) leader claimed that Communists across the world hand over their bodies to medical colleges as they do not believe in religious rites. But bodies of EMS Namboodiripattu, E K Nayanar, CPI(M) state boss Kodiyeri Balakrishnan and A K Gopalan were consigned to flames as per Hindu rites. In contrast, the body of T V Thomas was interred at a special cemetery meant for comrades. Even E K Imbichi Bawa, a former Marxist minister, was buried as per Islamic rituals in a grave after the recital of Quranic verses and Janazah. The new age leaders in the CPI(M) like Elamaram Kareem (Kareemikka), A A Rahim MP and K T Jaleel, may have to take immediate

decisions regarding their last journey. Archie Brown (author of *The Rise and Fall of Communism*) has stated that the downfall of Communism began with it turning into a religion. The life sketch of Castro says that his mortal remain was consigned to flames and the ashes were interred in the Santa Ifigenia Cemetery. If the Communist parties make it mandatory that the dead bodies of all comrades be handed over to medical colleges for teaching purposes, our medical students stand to benefit. Devika, a second-year MBBS student in a famous Government Medical College in Chennai says that only postgraduate and final semester students get the chance to dissect dead bodies because of shortage of bodies. According to George Orwell, the Communist parties have a unique rule: all are equal but some are more equal. Hence the leaders and their close family members may get a reprieve from the scalpel of wannabe doctors.

(The writer is South India bureau chief with the Pioneer; views are personal)



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

#### SC SLAMS NAIDU OVER TIRUPATI LADDU

Madam — The Supreme Court not only addressed the Tirupati laddu controversy, asserting that religious matters should remain separate from politics, but also admonished Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu for publicly alleging without basis that adulterated ghee was used to make laddus at Tirumala Tirupati temple, causing distress among devotees. The bench of Justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan questioned the State and Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams (TTD) for proof and discussed the potential transfer of the investigation to an independent agency, seeking assistance from the solicitor general. Though the SC observed that politics should be kept out of the issue of faith, how to keep God out of politics? At the Ram Mandir inauguration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was doing Aarti. In Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud's house PM Modi was doing Ganapati Puja while CJI was only standing by. People want to know why PM Modi was invited to the CJI house if God is to be kept out of politics. No doubt Naidu's allegation about animal fat seems to be a simple political allegation. Very rightly, the top court questioned whether there was any material with the CM to conclude definitively that animal fat had been used to prepare laddus at the Hindu shrine in Andhra Pradesh, where Lord Venkateswara is worshipped. However, the fake story by Chandrababu Naidu is nothing but to take revenge against his predecessor YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, because he jailed him? But he did not even think it would hurt crores of Hindu devotees.

Bidyut K Chatterjee | Faridabad

#### IMPROVING URBAN WATER RESOURCES

Madam — Apropos the article, 'Revive shallow aquifers for urban water woes in India', published on October 1. Aquifers can be a useful and permanent solution to improve groundwater levels across the country during the summer. Bore wells that



## FIRST COLUMN

### TRAITS OF A TRUE LEADER

The impact of servant leadership on a team or organisation brings about profound transformation



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

The concept of servant leadership is an interesting and refreshing approach to leadership in the competitive corporate environment of the present day. In this style of leadership, the focus is on empowering individuals within the team to grow and excel in their careers, fostering a culture of success and personal development. Servant leadership is a strong force in building teams that are high-performing, loyal, and motivated. At its essence, servant leadership revolves around genuine concern and care for individuals. It's not about seeking popularity or seeking approval. Creating the right atmosphere is crucial for everyone to thrive.

A true leader understands that their success is intertwined with the success of those they serve. Small gestures can have a big impact on the team. Whether it's a thank-you note, lending an ear, or offering a helping hand during tough times, these actions can make a difference. Creating a culture that values humility, acknowledges mistakes, and respects diverse perspectives fosters an atmosphere of respect and openness. When leaders prioritise the well-being of their members in their leadership, they earn loyalty through a genuine concern for their people rather than relying on their authority or instilling fear. Only then will they likely go the extra mile when they sense genuine care and understanding on a deeper level. Loyalty is not something that can be demanded, but rather something that can be earned through consistent and authentic action.

A manager or supervisor who truly appreciates the hard work of their team members goes beyond just words and takes action, offering



growth opportunities, publicly recognising achievements, and providing support during challenging times. This fosters a positive atmosphere, resulting in members who are more motivated and dedicated to the group. Inspiring leaders foster a strong sense of camaraderie and purpose within their teams by instilling a deep sense of belonging to the vision. They create a sense of collective purpose while ensuring that every individual feels included in the task at hand. This will ignite a fire within the team members, driving them to reach new heights of productivity and effectiveness. Leaders who prioritise the success of the team over personal recognition are more effective at inspiring and rallying people.

By doing so, a powerful chain reaction is set in motion: It fosters a spirit of collaboration and cooperation. We thrive on collaboration, celebrating achievements as a team, and fearlessly tackling obstacles together. Contrary to what many believe, the foundation of strong and influential leadership lies in humility and compassion. Leaders who embrace a servant mindset are not afraid to get their hands dirty and collaborate with their team members. They understand that true power comes from empowering others, rather than simply exerting authority.

The impact of servant leadership on a team or organisation runs deep and brings about profound transformation. The servant leader places a high emphasis on the growth and success of their members, using actions that instill a strong sense of loyalty, dedication, and motivation. Acts of kindness, modesty, and generosity are not signs of weakness but powerful tools for creating strong and cohesive teams. In a world where leadership is often seen as a display of power, servant leaders demonstrate that true strength lies in selflessly serving others.

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

# Navigating the new safety norms for heavy industry



A S MITTAL

The manufacturing landscape in India is set for a seismic shift as the Ministry of Heavy Industry rolls out the 'Machinery and Electrical Equipment Safety Regulation 2024'

The manufacturing industry is already grappling with a complex web of regulations, and a new stringent regulation has been added to the mix. Recently, The Ministry of Heavy Industry has introduced the 'Machinery and Electrical Equipment Safety Regulation 2024' to ensure that safety practices in India align with global standards. While these new standards aim to enhance safety and compliance, they are expected to significantly impact Indian manufacturers, primarily micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which previously also complied with over 400 regulations. The new regulation will impact over 50,000 types of machinery, including industrial equipment like pumps, compressors, cranes, and transformers. Manufacturers must adhere to stringent safety requirements set by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). However, many Indian manufacturers, particularly MSMEs, may struggle to meet these new standards within the given one-year deadline (August 2025), as they often operate with limited resources. Under the new machinery safety standards, all manufacturers must register with the BIS and obtain a BIS standard mark or certificate of conformity. Compliance will be governed by three distinct safety standards: Type A, B, and C. Type A standards are general safety guidelines for all machinery. At the same time, Type B covers generic safety requirements, and Type C standards are machine-specific safety guidelines.

While the regulation does not apply to machinery exclusively manufactured for export, most companies produce goods for domestic and export markets, making BIS certification necessary for their entire product range. The requirement for prior BIS approval for both production and imports could create bottlenecks in production and impact the availability of essential machinery and equipment. Fiscal and Technical Burden: The new machinery safety standards will impose a significant financial burden on MSMEs. Compliance costs vary widely, ranging from Rs 50,000 to Rs 5 lakh, depending on the type and complexity of the machinery. These costs cover certification, safety upgrades, risk assessments, employee training, and the technical requirements to bring machinery up to standard.

Many MSMEs operate within thin margins, and these costs may lead to closure for some businesses. In addition to financial challenges, many smaller firms need help with a technological gap, as they may need access to advanced machinery or technology that complies with the new standards. Retrofitting existing equipment or purchasing new machinery will require a significant investment, which may be out of reach for smaller businesses. Furthermore, MSMEs often need a more skilled workforce to implement the necessary safety measures, which can strain already tight budgets. Another major challenge is the complexity of the regulations themselves. The technical language used in the order is complex for smaller firms to navigate, and the lack of detailed implementation guidelines from BIS has only added to the confusion. MSMEs, which frequently operate with



MANY MSMEs OPERATE WITHIN THIN MARGINS, AND THESE COSTS MAY LEAD TO CLOSURE FOR SOME BUSINESSES. IN ADDITION TO FINANCIAL CHALLENGES, MANY SMALLER FIRMS NEED HELP WITH A TECHNOLOGICAL GAP, AS THEY MAY NEED ADVANCED MACHINERY OR TECHNOLOGY THAT COMPLIES WITH THE NEW STANDARDS

limited administrative resources, struggle to understand how to comply with these multi-layered standards. More precise instructions would enable many firms to proceed with the necessary upgrades. Impact: This regulation will have a significant effect. India's machinery and electrical equipment imports, totalling \$25 billion in FY2024, could face delays as companies await BIS approval. With 39.1 per cent of these imports originating from China, delays could worsen supply chain bottlenecks, further slowing industrial growth.

Domestic manufacturers catering to the local and export markets must successfully navigate the new compliance landscape, which adds to the regulatory burden on an already stressed sector. While machinery intended for export is not subject to the regulation, most manufacturers produce goods for both domestic and international markets. This means that even businesses focused on exports will need BIS certification for their entire product line. Consequently, the exemption offers limited relief, and manufacturers must adhere to the same safety standards. Challenges in Implementation: Adopting a phased approach to implementation is imperative to address these challenges.

The current one-year compliance timeline is unequivocally inadequate, particularly for MSMEs that lack the financial and technical resources to meet stringent safety standards. Extending the deadline to afford MSMEs more time to adapt is not just a preference but a necessity. A three-year timeline for meeting Type A standards and an addi-

tional five years to comply with Type B and C standards is not just a suggestion but a requirement. This approach aligns with the phased regulatory models in other countries, such as the European Union, where industries are routinely allocated five to seven years to transition to new safety standards. Furthermore, implementing the standards in phases based on the machinery's complexity and risk level is not just a recommendation but a mandate. This approach allows firms to prioritise safety upgrades without jeopardising their operations. For example, enforcing horizontal safety standards (Type A) followed by vertical (Type B and C) standards as businesses gain the technical and financial capacity to comply is not just an option but a necessity.

The medical devices industry in India provides a practical example, where voluntary registration was initially encouraged, followed by mandatory standards based on the risk level of the device. This model is not just a suggestion but a blueprint that could be adapted for the machinery sector, providing a more manageable path toward compliance.

The Way Forward: Government support is crucial in helping MSMEs meet the new safety standards. Financial assistance, such as subsidies or low-interest loans, must help smaller firms afford the necessary upgrades to their machinery. Additionally, the government must conduct awareness campaigns and training programs to educate businesses on the importance of these regulations. It is imperative to establish a dedicated helpdesk to guide MSMEs through the certification process,

alleviating confusion and streamlining compliance efforts. MSMEs often lack the expertise needed to navigate such complex regulations, and without access to trained consultants, many businesses will struggle to meet compliance requirements. Here, industry associations can and must play a pivotal role. By negotiating bulk certification agreements, conducting training sessions, and providing technical guidance to MSMEs, these associations are ideally placed to bridge the gap between government regulations and industry readiness, ensuring a smoother transition for smaller firms. Certifying technical professionals who can assist in implementing these standards is essential. The Machinery and Electrical Equipment Safety Regulation-2024 represents a necessary step toward improving manufacturing safety in India. However, the challenges facing MSMEs in complying with these new regulations are substantial. Therefore, a phased approach to implementation, combined with targeted government support, is crucial to ensure that the benefits of these new regulations are fully realised without unduly burdening the MSMEs, the backbone of Indian manufacturing.

*(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association (TMA); Views expressed are personal)*

# Navigating opportunities and challenges in a shifting energy landscape

The Adani Group finds itself at a critical juncture as Bangladesh gears up to renegotiate the Power Purchase Agreement

The energy market dynamics, particularly in rapidly growing economies like India, present unique opportunities for merchant and untied capacities. For the Adani Group, one of India's largest conglomerates with a substantial footprint in the energy sector, the current Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Bangladesh is both an opportunity and a potential challenge. With growing voices within Bangladesh calling for the renegotiation of the PPA, the landscape is shifting, presenting both risks and advantages for Adani. Background of the Agreement The PPA between Adani and Bangladesh was established to enhance energy security for a nation facing persistent power shortages and increas-



SURYA SARATHI RAY

ing electricity demands. Under this agreement, Adani constructed a dedicated 1,600 MW power plant in the Godda district of Jharkhand, specifically to supply electricity to Bangladesh. The \$2 billion project, including essential transmission infrastructure, was fully commissioned in June 2023 and now meets approximately 7-10 per cent of Bangladesh's base load demand, particularly serving

the northern regions of the country.

**Current Challenges** Recent criticisms from Bangladeshi media allege that Adani is selling power at exorbitant rates. In response, Adani has referenced government data to assert that its electricity is indeed the cheapest compared to other similar fuel-based power plants. However, Bangladesh is facing a significant financial crunch, with over \$800 million owed to Adani for power supplied. Despite this outstanding debt, Adani has continued its supply but finds the situation increasingly untenable, given its obligations to lenders and suppliers. This growing receivable issue threatens to affect Adani's credit profile, potentially raising the cost of funds

across its operations. In a significant policy shift, the Indian government recently allowed power plants exporting electricity to connect to the national grid. This move could be advantageous for Adani Power, as it opens up the domestic market for the Godda plant, which is currently not integrated with the Indian grid. Adani remains committed to honoring its contract with Bangladesh while also requesting the early settlement of outstanding dues. If Bangladesh fails to meet its payment obligations or decides to terminate the PPA, Adani can pivot its focus towards sales within India.

**Economic Considerations** One of the main economic factors influencing this scenario is the disparity in electricity



rates between India and Bangladesh. The Indian power market has seen a marked increase in electricity prices driven by robust economic growth. By redirecting power supplies to India, Adani could take advantage of these higher rates, thus boosting profitability. Recent trends indicate that peak power prices have reached around Rs 10/kWh for extended periods, a figure

likely to rise due to heightened demand for coal-based power. The cost of coal, crucial for power generation, is influenced by global market fluctuations. While the Godda plant operates on imported coal, its proximity to India's coal reserves allows for reduced logistical costs, further enhancing Adani's operational efficiency.

Given this context, Adani stands to benefit significantly from redirecting its power supply to the Indian market, rather than continuing to fulfill its obligations under the existing PPA with Bangladesh. **Regulatory Environment** The Indian government's focus on self-reliance and energy security has created a favorable environment for domestic power producers. Initiatives

like "Atmanirbhar Bharat" and "Make in India" seek to reduce import dependency and promote local production and consumption. In line with these national priorities, Adani could leverage its resources to address India's escalating energy demands effectively. The National Electricity Plan forecasts that India's peak power demand will surge from 203 GW in FY22 to 277 GW by FY27, and further to 366 GW by FY32. This growth implies the need for an additional 80 GW of coal-based capacity by FY32. With its existing 1.6 GW capacity at the Godda plant, Adani is well-positioned to play a pivotal role in meeting this demand.

**Navigating Future Decisions** While the potential benefits of terminating the PPA are com-

prising, such a move carries inherent risks. Breaking an international agreement could lead to diplomatic consequences and adversely affect Adani's global reputation. Nevertheless, if the Bangladesh government were to initiate a renegotiation or termination of the agreement, Adani would likely find itself in a more advantageous position, allowing it to pivot toward the lucrative Indian market without the constraints of the PPA. The company must balance its commitment to the agreement while remaining agile enough to capitalise on emerging market conditions in India, ensuring its long-term growth and sustainability in the energy sector.

*(The writer is a financial journalist; views are personal)*

# UK PM condemns Iran's missile attacks on Israel

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has condemned Iran's missile attacks against Israel as he embarked on a tour to Brussels on Wednesday, where the issue will feature high on the agenda during his talks with European Union (EU) leaders. Starmer spoke to Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu to express the UK's "steadfast commitment" to Israeli security and the protection of civilians, adding that the UK stands with Israel and its "right to self-defence".

He also made phone calls to French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to discuss the serious risk of regional escalation and the "urgent need for de-escalation, with all parties needing to show restraint".

"I utterly condemn this attempt by the Iranian regime to harm innocent Israelis, to escalate this incredibly dangerous situation and push the region ever closer to the brink," said Starmer in a televised address from 10 Downing Street in London on Tuesday night.

"We stand with Israel, and we recognise her right to self-defence in the face of this aggression," he said. He called on Iran to "stop these attacks," saying it had "menaced the Middle East



Demonstrators celebrate Iran's missile strike against Israel during a gathering in front of the British Embassy in Tehran, Iran, Tuesday. AP/PTI

for far too long." "I am deeply concerned that the region is on the brink, and I'm deeply concerned about the risk of miscalculation," he added. Earlier, Downing Street said that Iran's attack on Israel began

during the leaders' conversation in which Starmer expressed the UK's support for Israeli security. "During the call (with Netanyahu), the Prime Minister also underlined the importance of a ceasefire in Lebanon to

allow space for a political solution in line with UNSC Resolution 1701. The Prime Minister also raised the situation in Gaza and the importance of a ceasefire and action to bring home the hostages," Downing

Street said. On Tuesday, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said it had launched missiles in retaliation for recent attacks that killed the leaders of the Hezbollah and Hamas militant groups, as well as a senior Iranian commander. Israel said most of the 180 missiles fired were intercepted. UK forces were also involved in supporting Israel, with Defence Secretary John Healey saying British forces had "played their part in attempts to prevent further escalation", without giving more details. "I completely condemn Iran's attack against Israel. British forces have this evening (Tuesday) played their part in attempts to prevent further escalation in the Middle East," Healey said. "I want to thank all British personnel involved in the operation for their courage and professionalism. The UK stands fully behind Israel's right to defend its country and its people against threats," he said. While Healey will make his way to Cyprus to visit British personnel stationed there, Starmer will be in Brussels for his pre-planned meeting with EU leaders. Besides the escalating situation between Israel and Iran, he is scheduled to continue his drive to improve the UK's relationship with the EU. Downing Street said he wants to set out his determination to move beyond Brexit and make

the UK's relationship with the EU work for the British people, focused on delivering a broad-based security pact, securing our borders and tackling barriers to trade. In a statement ahead of the tour, Starmer said: "The UK is undeniably stronger when it works in lockstep with its closest international partners. This has never been more important - with war, conflict and insecurity all knocking on Europe's door. "We will only be able to tackle these challenges by putting our collective weight behind them, which is why I am so determined to put the Brexit years behind us and establish a more pragmatic and mature relationship with the European Union. "Better cooperation with the EU will deliver the benefits the British people deserve - securing our borders, keeping us safe and boosting economic growth." He has meetings scheduled with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel and President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola. The central message would be to reiterate the importance of like-minded countries cooperating more closely on areas of shared interest at a time of wars in Ukraine and West Asia, as well as the rise of smuggling gangs trafficking people across Europe.

# Houthi rebels seek gains from ongoing Middle East conflict

AP ■ CAIRO

In the days since Israel intensified its campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon, including the strike that killed the militant group's leader Hassan Nasrallah, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels have been quick to show they are an important player in the complex conflicts convulsing the Middle East. In a brazen attack on Saturday, the Houthis fired a ballistic missile at Israel's main airport as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was arriving back from New York, where he had addressed the United Nations. On Monday, they threatened "escalating military operations" to target Israel after apparently shooting down a U.S. military drone flying over Yemen.

And on Tuesday, an explosive-loaded drone crashed into one ship in the Red Sea as a missile exploded against another, the British military and private security officials said, the latest in the Houthis' assaults on commercial shipping in the key waterway. The salvo of Houthi attacks has again drawn attention to the Yemeni rebels and raised questions about their goals and strategies. Who are the Houthis and why are they in this fight? The rebels, armed by Iran, seized most of Yemen's north and its capital, Sanaa, a decade ago, pushing the country's internationally recognized government into exile. A Saudi-led coalition backing Yemen's government entered the war in 2015 and the Houthis have since been fighting what has become a long-running but now largely stalemated civil war in Yemen. However, when the Israel-Hamas war erupted in the Gaza Strip a year ago, the Houthis began targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor - part of a campaign they say aims at pressuring Israel and the West over the war. Analysts and observers say a widening conflict could boost the Houthi militarily and expand their already outsized role across the region - despite retaliatory strikes by Israel, the United States and the United Kingdom. Ahmed Nagi, a senior Yemen analyst at the Crisis Group, says that before

the war in Gaza, the Houthis were seen as an often-forgotten and less-prominent faction in an axis that includes Iran, Syria's government forces, Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Palestinian Hamas and other groups in the region.

That changed when the Houthis began hitting ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden making their way to the Suez Canal, suddenly posing a much wider threat. "Over the past year, the Houthis have taken center stage," Nagi said. After Hamas attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, Israel responded with a blistering offensive on the Gaza Strip, a coastal enclave run by the Palestinian militant group. Israel's retaliatory invasion of Gaza has killed more than 41,000 Palestinians and wounded more than 95,000, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between civilians and militants in its count but says that over half of those killed are women and children. The toll the war has taken and the extent of Gaza's destruction have shocked the world. Meanwhile, the Houthis see the Yemenis' prevailing solidarity with Palestinians as a useful tool for recruiting new fighters and swelling their ranks, Nagi said.

In June, the Houthis unveiled a new, solid-fuel missile in their arsenal that resembles aspects of one earlier one displayed by Iran, which Tehran described as flying at hypersonic speed. The rebels fired their new "Palestine" missile - complete with a war-head painted like a Palestinian keffiyeh checkered scarf - at the southern port of Eilat in Israel, setting off air raid sirens but causing no damage or injuries. The extent of the Houthis' actions was a surprise to some, mainly because of their limited resources and Yemen's own costly civil war. Nagi described their strategy as one of "gradual escalation" towards Israel. As their prominence grows, the Houthis - who have for years relied on portable missile launchers and hit-and-run tactics - will likely be eager to get their hands on more advanced weapons, he added.

# After pushing on Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire, Biden administration shifts its message

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration says there is a significant difference between Israeli actions that have expanded its war against the Iranian-backed militant groups Hamas and Hezbollah and Iran's retaliatory missile attack against Israel, which it condemned as escalatory. In carefully calibrated remarks, officials across the administration are defending the surge in attacks by Israel against Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon, while still pressing for peace and vowing retribution after Iran fired about 200 ballistic missiles at Israel on Tuesday.

President Joe Biden praised the U.S. and Israel militaries for defeating the barrage and warned, "Make no mistake, the United States is fully, fully supportive of Israel."

Secretary of State Antony Blinken called the Iranian missile attack "totally unacceptable, and the entire world should condemn it."

There was little criticism that Israel may have provoked Iran's assault. "Obviously, this is a significant escalation by Iran," national security adviser Jake Sullivan said.

Just a week after calling urgently for an immediate cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah to avoid the possibility of all-out war in the Middle East, the administration has shifted its message as Israel presses ahead with ground incursions in Lebanon following a massive airstrike Friday in Beirut that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Abbas Nilforoushan.

U.S. officials stress that they have repeatedly come out in support of Israel's right to defend itself and that any change in their language only

reflects evolving conditions on the ground. And, officials say the administration's goal - a cease-fire - has remained constant.

The U.S. has been quick to praise and defend Israel for a series of recent strikes killing Hezbollah leaders. In contrast to its repeated criticism of Israel's war in Gaza that has killed civilians, the U.S. has taken a different tack on strikes that targeted Nasrallah and others but also may have killed innocent people.

At the Pentagon, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder made it clear that while the U.S. is still "laser focused" on preventing a wider conflict in the Middle East, he carved out broad leeway for Israel to keep going after Hezbollah to protect itself.

"We understand and support Israel's right to defend itself against Hezbollah," Ryder said. "We understand that part of that is dismantling some of the attack infrastructure that Hezbollah has built along the border."

He said the U.S. is going to consult with Israel as it conducts limited operations against Hezbollah positions along the border "that can be used to threaten Israeli citizens." The goal, he said, is to allow citizens on both sides of the border to return to their homes.

Part of the ongoing discussions that the U.S. will have with Israel, Ryder said, will focus on making sure there's an understanding about potential "mission creep" that could lead to tensions to escalate even further. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Tuesday that Israel's targeting of senior Hamas and Hezbollah leaders as well as its initiation of ground incursions into Lebanon are justified because they were done in self-defence.

# 2 predawn blasts around Israeli Embassy in Copenhagen, no injuries reported

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

Police in the Danish capital said two predawn explosions took place Wednesday in the vicinity of the Israeli Embassy in Copenhagen, prompting the nearby Jewish school to close for the day.

Police said no one had been injured and they were investigating whether there was a link between the blasts at around 3:20 a.m. (local time) and the Israeli diplomatic mission, which is close to several other embassies.

They declined to say whether anyone had been arrested. Heavily armed officers, search dogs and forensic teams were inspecting the area which had been cordoned off.

Copenhagen's Jewish school, Carolineskolten, which is just down the street from the embassy, was already due to close on Thursday and Friday for the Jewish New Year hol-



idays, Michael Rachlin, a spokesperson for Denmark's Jewish community told The Associated Press. There will also be extra security around the main synagogue in downtown Copenhagen, the Jewish community said in a statement. Community chairman Henrik Goldstein wrote that he "would like to encourage people to be aware when moving in public spaces."

anything about a motive. On Tuesday night, the area around the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm was also closed off after a loud bang was reported. Police later announced that findings from the scene indicated that the embassy was hit by bullets. No one has been arrested, they said.

Swedish broadcaster TV4 said that a weapon and an empty shell casing had been found at or near the embassy. Sweden's domestic security agency told the AP that it was not conducting a preliminary investigation and referred to the ordinary police.

"It is true that the police have made findings at the Israeli embassy (in Stockholm), but we will not go into detail about what these findings are, police spokeswoman Rebecca Landberg told the AP, citing pre-investigation confidentiality.

# Trump, Harris campaigns claim victories after VP debate

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Trump and Harris campaigns have claimed victories in the vice-presidential debate as their running mates, Senator J D Vance and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, battled fiercely in a live televised debate wherein they tried to convince their fellow Americans to support, vote and elect them.

But unlike the presidential debate, this one lacked high-clash moments.

The only vice-presidential debate was hosted by CBS News in New York. As the two vice-presidential candidates concluded the 90-minute debate, Walz patted Vance on the side of his arm, and Vance gave Walz a pat on the back. Usha, wife of the US Senator from Ohio gave Vance a warm hug. Vance then introduced Usha to the moderators. "Thank you guys for hosting," he said. The Walzes also chat-



ted with the moderators. "I think it was a good debate. The public got to see a contrast, and I think the ending sums it up. The democracy issue is important," Walz told reporters after the couple picked pepperoni pizza from Justino's pizza in the city.

"Senator (J D) Vance unequivocally won tonight's debate in dominating fashion. It was the best debate performance from any Vice-Presidential candi-



date in history," Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita, from the Trump Campaign said soon after the conclusion of the debate in New York.

"Senator Vance spoke the truth, eloquently prosecuted the case against Kamala Harris' failed record, and effectively held Governor Tim Walz accountable for his lies on behalf of the Harris-Biden Administration," they claimed. But the Harris Campaign

thought otherwise. "Tonight, Governor Walz showed exactly why Vice President Harris picked him: he is a leader who cares about the issues that matter most to the American people. In the debate, Americans got to see a real contrast: a straight talker focused on sharing real solutions, and a slick politician who spent the whole night defending Donald Trump's division and failures," Harris-Walz Campaign Chair Jen O'Malley Dillon.

"On every single issue - the economy, health care, foreign policy, reproductive freedom, gun violence - Governor Walz won. He spoke passionately about the Vice President's vision for a new way forward for the country. And in what was the most critical moment of the entire debate, which came in its final exchange, he stood up for our Constitution, while Vance admitted he'd put Trump ahead of the country,"

she said. According to Dillon, Walz showed once again that he would be an experienced governing partner on day one for Vice President Harris as they worked together to deliver for working families. And he showed that he continues to be a powerful force on the campaign trail, holding Vance accountable while sounding the alarm on Trump's Project 2025 agenda, she said.

"The choice facing the American people in November was on full display tonight: between charting a new way forward or going backwards. Vice President Harris believes that the American people deserve to see her and Trump on the debate stage one more time. She will be in Atlanta on October 23 - Donald Trump should step up and face the voters," Dillon said.

However, according to the Trump Campaign, Vance perfectly articulated the Trump-Vance vision to make America

safe again with their plan to launch the largest mass deportation operation in history; to make America strong again with peace through a strong foreign policy agenda; and to make America wealthy again by cutting taxes, unleashing American energy dominance, and ending inflation.

"Tonight, Senator Vance proved why President Trump chose him as his running mate. Together, they make the strongest and most dynamic presidential ticket ever, and they are going to win on November 5," said Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita in a statement issued by the Trump Campaign. Following the debate, Nourbese Flint, President of All In Action Fund in a statement alleged that Donald Trump orchestrated the largest rollback of abortion access in 50 years and has continued to promote dangerous, untrue rhetoric about life-saving care.

# Trump rallies in Wisconsin's Democratic stronghold ahead of VP debate

Wisconsin (AP): Former president Donald Trump spent more than an hour ahead of Tuesday night's vice-presidential debate campaigning in a Democratic county that is crucial to Kamala Harris' hopes for winning the key battleground state of Wisconsin. Republican Trump appeared at a manufacturing facility in Waukegan, a suburb of Wisconsin's capital city of Madison in the Democratic stronghold of Dane County. Trump had never campaigned in Dane County nor visited as president. In an event advertised as economic-themed, Trump bounced from subject to subject, also taking on Democratic

nominee Harris on issues, including foreign policy, crime and immigration, while intermittently pivoting to criticism of outgoing President Joe Biden.

"I'm asking every citizen to join me in launching sort of a new golden age for America," Trump told hundreds inside Dane Manufacturing, a metal fabricator that has a long history of hosting Republican candidates and officeholders. Trump also could not pass up a job at former president Jimmy Carter on the Georgia Democrat's 100th birthday.

With hollow praise, Trump declared the one-term Carter "the happiest man" because he "is considered a brilliant pres-

ident" compared to Biden. Trump did not note Carter's birthday, nor his status as the longest-living former president.

Later on Tuesday, Trump was to hold an event at a museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city and home to the state's largest number of Democratic voters and second-largest number of Republicans. His appearance there was also meant to give him reach into the city's conservative suburbs, a part of Wisconsin where his support has softened but where he must do well to win. In Milwaukee, Trump was slated to speak in a small auditorium at a science museum

along Lake Michigan's lakefront. His event was not open to the public and his audience was to consist only of news media. Last Saturday, he held a rally in western Wisconsin where he blamed Harris for crimes committed by people in the country illegally. Both of his planned stops were ahead of Tuesday's debate in New York between Trump's running mate JD Vance, a senator from Ohio, and Democratic vice-presidential nominee Tim Walz, the governor of Minnesota. Dane County, the location of Trump's first stop, is Wisconsin's fastest-growing county and an economic engine for the state, fueled by jobs in the health care and tech industries.

# Chinese dancers, children perform during Gandhi Jayanti celebrations

PTI ■ BEIJING

Gandhi Jayanti was celebrated on Wednesday at China's sprawling Chaoyang Park with local school children reciting his teachings in Mandarin and an Odissi dance was performed by Beijing-based dancers on his favourite bhajan. Beijing's picturesque Chaoyang Park where Gandhi's statue, sculpted by famous Chinese sculptor Prof. Yuan Xikun, was installed in 2005 came alive with recitation of his teachings in Mandarin by a group of Chinese school children. It was followed by a graceful

Odissi dance performance on 'Vaishnav Jan To' by noted Beijing-based Odissi dancer Zhang Jinghui and her troupe. The Indian community came together to stage a play, "Ahimsa: The Gandhi Way", directed and written by Ketke Thakar and Ayushi Sugandhi respectively. Pradeep Kumar Rawat, besides Chinese Ambassador to Maldives, Dr Fazeel Najeed, Beijing-based Indian diaspora and local admirers of Gandhiji paid floral tributes to the widely-admired statue.

Rawat in his speech conveyed his deep appreciation to Prof. Yuan Xikun for creating the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, the

first statue in the Chaoyang Park honouring great leaders of the world.

He also recalled Prof Yuan mentioning to him that he is deeply inspired by the vision of Gandhiji. The installation of the Gandhi statue in the Chinese capital has its own political significance as Gandhiji and the founder of the People's Republic of China (PRC) Mao Zedong headed their respective national liberation movements with contrasting ideologies. While India became independent from British rule in 1947, the People's Republic of China (PRC) headed by Mao was formed in 1949. "Gandhiji was

not just a leader of the Indian independence movement; he was a visionary who championed the values of truth, non-violence, and social justice. It is only fitting that Gandhiji's birthday is observed worldwide as the International Day of Non-Violence," Rawat said in his speech. Prof Yuan could not attend the event as he was unwell. In his speech read in absentia, Prof Yuan said for the last several years the Indian Embassy officials and the members of the Indian community gathered at the statue of Gandhiji Jayanti to pay tribute to the "saint" by laying flowers and reciting his teachings.



# Sharif accuses Imran of dividing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa & Punjab

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday accused Imran Khan, the imprisoned leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, of attempting to create a rift between the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Speaking at a ceremony in Lahore, Sharif, 74, directly addressed Khan, saying, "You want to provoke a clash between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. You are behaving like the invaders from central Asia who used to attack Punjab in ancient times. Instead of inciting the people of the province to invade Punjab, you should focus on serving them. Sharif criticised Khan's failed promises, adding, "Those who follow you blindly like sheep and goat should ask you where the five million houses you promised during your tenure are." Khan, 71, has been imprisoned since August last year in multiple legal cases. His party has been staging protests demanding his release and claiming that the government

should adhere to the constitution and the independence of the judiciary. Sharif also lambasted Khan's poor governance, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where his party is currently in power. "His performance was zero and despite his party's government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they fail to meet the expectations of the people. Their only focus is on protests and street riots," Sharif said. Referring to Khan's statements during the 2014 sit-in, Sharif recalled, "He said he would drag me out with a noose around my neck. Such arrogance! Learn humility and fear God. You reap what you sow." The three-time former premier added that elements like Khan should be dealt with firmly. Sharif also criticised the five-judge bench of the Supreme Court which disqualified him as premier in 2017. "Five judges, led by Saqib Nisar, removed a prime minister of 250 million people because I didn't take a salary of 10,000 dirhams from my son. What a grave injustice! I

still have Saqib Nisar's leaked audio where he says, 'We have to put Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz in jail and bring Imran Khan to power.' And what did he accomplish? Nothing. I was working, the country was progressing, so why did you have to remove me and what you achieved," he said. Recalling his meeting with Khan in 2014, Sharif said, "I went to Bani Gala and had a one-hour meeting with him. He agreed not to launch any agitation against my government but then he went to London. When he returned, he started the sit-in. What did those sit-ins achieve?" Sharif also expressed disappointment with the establishment, stating that despite his good work, he was not treated fairly by the state. He questioned why he was removed from office three times without being allowed to complete his tenure. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader also criticised the people of the country for not standing up for him when he was unjustly removed despite his service to

the nation. "How can an elected prime minister of 250 million people be ousted? Proud and dignified nations ask such questions. It pains me to think about why this happened to someone who was working for Pakistan. If you do not take notice of such injustices, Pakistan's situation will remain the same." Indirectly addressing the military establishment, Sharif said, "If parliamentarians had been allowed to work, no one in the country would be without a house today." Pakistan's Punjab government on Tuesday imposed a ban on all forms of public gatherings in several districts citing "terror threats", a day after Khan gave a protest call to prevent a constitutional amendment which he claimed would undermine the judiciary. Khan on Monday called for country-wide protests for the "independence of the judiciary" after his party claimed the government was planning to bring an amendment to increase the retirement age of judges and fix the tenure of the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

# PM Ishiba vows to push a strong defence under Japan-US alliance

AP ■ TOKYO

Japan's new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba pledged to stick to the vital Japan-US alliance while calling for it to be more equitable after he took office on Tuesday, vowing to tackle a slow economy and regain public trust before an upcoming election. Shigeru Ishiba replaced Fumio Kishida, who stepped down to pave the way for a fresh leader after scandals dogged his government. In a show of Japan's respect to its most important ally, the US, Ishiba spoke by telephone with President Joe Biden early on Wednesday and told reporters he reassured Biden of his plan to further strengthen the Japan-US alliance that Biden and Kishida have significantly elevated. His new Cabinet emphasises defence and a majority of its members, including Ishiba himself, are unaffiliated with factions led and controlled by Liberal Democratic Party heavyweights, and none is from the late Shinzo Abe's faction that has been linked to

damaging misconduct. Speaking to reporters at the prime minister's office for the first time following a palace ceremony, Ishiba called for stronger military cooperation with like-minded partners. He has been vocal about his wish to form a NATO-like alliance in the region. He said that one of his policy's main goals was to protect Japan as "the security environment surrounding us is the toughest since the end of World War II". Ishiba renewed his proposal of a more equal Japan-US security alliance, including joint management of US bases in Japan and having Japanese bases in the US, which would require changes to a bilateral forces agreement. He called the current alliance "asymmetrical". "The measure would contribute to further strengthening the Japan-US alliance," Ishiba said. "I've advocated the idea for more than 20 years and obviously it's not going to happen suddenly just because I became prime minister." He also said he hadn't

assigned the matter to his Cabinet as an urgent task. "But I will not give up and will steadily work on it." He said on Wednesday that he did not raise the issue on his call with Biden but would find the chance to do so later. Ishiba said he told Biden that he will strengthen Kishida's defence and diplomatic policies while bolstering networks that include South Korea and other like-minded countries. Japan's national security strategy adopted by Kishida's government in 2022 calls for accelerating a Japanese military buildup. Ishiba earlier said he would call for a snap election on October 27 and named former environment minister Shinjiro Koizumi to head the party's election task force. On Tuesday, he said he intended to dissolve the lower house on October 9 so his new administration could obtain "the people's verdict" as soon as possible. During Tuesday's parliament session, opposition leaders criticised Ishiba for announcing such a plan before even becoming prime minister and allowing

only several days for his policies to be examined and discussed before a national election. They delayed the vote required to approve his new post for about half an hour, despite not having the power to affect it, signalling a rocky beginning for Ishiba. Ishiba appointed several ministers who voted for him in the party leadership poll, including two former defence ministers with whom he had worked closely — Takeshi Iwaya as foreign minister and Gen Nakatani as defence chief. He retained Kishida's top confidante, Yoshimasa Hayashi, as chief Cabinet secretary and appointed Katsunobu Kato as finance minister. Only two of the 19 ministers are women — actor-turned-lawmaker Junko Mihara as children's policy minister and Toshiko Abe as education minister. The government is under pressure to increase the number of women in public office. Women now account for only 10 per cent of the lower house, placing Japan near the bottom of global gender-equality rankings.

# Vuhledar's fall reflects Ukraine's wartime struggles

AP ■ KYIV

The fall of a front-line town nestled atop a tactically significant hill is unlikely to change the course of Ukraine's war against Russia. But the loss underscores Kyiv's worsening position, in part the result of firm Western red lines, military officials and analysts said. Vuhledar, a town Ukrainian forces fought tooth and nail to keep for two years, is the latest urban settlement to fall to the Russians. It follows a vicious summer campaign along the eastern front that saw Kyiv cede several thousand square kilometers (miles) of territory. Ukraine's military said they were withdrawing their troops from Vuhledar to "protect the military personnel and equipment" in a statement on Wednesday. Vuhledar's fall is a microcosm of Ukraine's predicament in this chapter of the nearly three-year war. It reflects the US's refusal to grant Ukraine permission to strike targets deep inside Russian territory, preventing Kyiv from degrading Moscow's capabilities.



In this photo released by Russian Defense Ministry Press Service on Wednesday, Russian soldiers attend combat training for assault units at an undisclosed location in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia's dominance of the skies allows it to develop and advance devastating aerial glide bombs for which Ukraine has no effective response, while a controversial mobilisation drive has failed to produce a new class of Ukrainian fighters capable of holding the line. The Ukrainians' retreat from the town comes after a much-anticipated visit by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the US last week. The Biden administration so far has refused Kyiv's request to use Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, to strike Russian airfields and other key targets, and Zelenskyy's "victory plan" was dismissed by some as more of a wish list than a plan of action. In the meantime, Russian fighter jets continued to drop aeri-

al bombs on Vuhledar, which precipitated the retreat, soldiers there said. "The Russians' main tactic was to encircle us from the flanks, and they did this constantly for six to seven months with constant aerial attacks — due to this tactic they managed to exhaust our resources, because we don't have as much as they have," said Arsenii Prylipka, the head of the press office of the 72nd Brigade, which had been defending Vuhledar since August 2022. After two years of failed attempts to capture Vuhledar, Russian forces switched tactics earlier this year. The town's pre-war population of 14,000 dwindled to less than 100 during the heat of the fighting. Russian soldiers began mounting sophisticated attacks from

the north and southern flanks, powered by superior electronic warfare capabilities and an array of infantrymen on motorcycles, artillery fire, drones and aerial glide bombs. Moscow suffered heavy casualties. Ukrainians have been pressuring the US to relax restrictions on the use of Western weapons to strike targets deep inside Russia. Lawmakers said they expected a green light from the US months ago, but it didn't come: The Biden administration refused to waver on this red line. It has meant that Russian command and control centres, logistics hubs and airfields from which Russian fighter jets carry deadly aerial glide bombs, are out of reach of Ukrainian forces. Average,

Vuhledar became impossible. That scenario unfolded this week. "The Russians searched for weak spots in our defences, a constant probe to find routes to penetrate the town and as they advanced they tried to destroy the entire town. All the time we are under fire," said Prylipka. Vuhledar served as a defensive stronghold, a fortress town atop a hill surrounded by open fields and near two major roads. From there, Ukrainian soldiers were able to observe approaching Russian forces at a distance. From that vantage point, it was easy to coordinate counter-attacks. That advantage now falls to Russian forces. While tactically significant, Vuhledar isn't a crucial logistics hub for Kyiv, and Russian forces already controlled most of the main roads through the town before capturing it, the US-based Institute for the Study of War said. Ukraine's access to other critical supply lines remains intact. The capture of Vuhledar is part of Moscow's pursuit of the strategic logistics hub of Pokrovsk, just 30 kilometers (19 miles) north. Its fall would severely compromise Ukrainian defences. The next step for Russian forces will be to drive Ukrainian forces out of the nearby city of Kurakhove. "This line is interconnected and the enemy will not be able to enter Pokrovsk and come close to Pokrovsk unless it can drive our troops out of Kurakhove," said Ivan Tymochko, chairman of the Council of Reservists of Ukraine's ground forces. "Otherwise, (the Russians) would have exposed their fronts to the flanks and would have received a serious blow to the side." "On the other hand, the enemy understands that if it does not take Kurakhove, it will not be able to seriously influence the course of events around Vuhledar," he added.

# Nepal issues fresh alert for rainfall after floods, kill over 240

Kathmandu (PTI): The government of Nepal issued a new alert for heavy rainfall on Wednesday, following days of relentless downpours that have triggered widespread floods and landslides, leaving more than 240 people dead across the Himalayan nation. Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak directed authorities and disaster management agencies to remain on high alert as weather forecasts predict heavy rainfall in the Koshi and Bagmati provinces, as well as in the Kathmandu Valley, through Wednesday and Thursday. The warning came after the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology flagged potential risks of further downpours in parts of the two provinces. Lekhak urged the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), chief district officers, and local governments to caution against possible risk of disasters. The ministry also appealed to the public to remain on alert and be prepared to mitigate the potential risks of heavy rainfall and its consequences. "I have directed the chief district officers of Koshi and Bagmati province and chiefs of all security agencies in the disaster-prone provinces to remain on alert," Lekhak said. Noting the conditions of major highways and roads due to rain-triggered landslides and floods, Lekhak urged travellers to be careful while travelling as the risk remained high. Home Ministry spokesperson Rishiram Tiwari said 13,071 people have so far been rescued from the flood-hit areas.

# Pope opens 2nd phase of big reform project

Women's role in Church tops agenda

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis opened the second phase of his big Catholic reform project on Wednesday, with widespread calls for women to take up more positions of responsibility in the church topping the agenda but ordained ministry still ruled out. Francis presided over an opening Mass in St. Peter's Square with the 368 bishops and laypeople who will meet behind closed doors for the next three weeks to discuss the future of the church and how to make it more responsive to the needs of Catholics today. Several of the most contentious issues are officially off the table, after they encountered resistance and objections during the first session of the synod, or meeting, last year. They include ministering to LGBTQ+ Catholics and allowing women to serve as deacons. Francis has entrusted these topics to 10 study groups that are working in parallel to the synod, raising questions about what exactly will come out of the gathering when it concludes October 26 with a final set of proposals for Francis to consider. Francis launched the reform process in 2021 to put in practice his goal of creating a church that is more inclusive, humble and welcoming, where ordinary Catholics have a greater say in decision making than the all-male priestly hierarchy. The process, and the two-year canvassing of rank-and-file Catholics that informed it, sparked both hopes and fears that real change was afoot. In his marching orders on Wednesday, Francis urged delegates to leave aside their long-held and self-

interested positions and truly listen to one another to "give life to something new". "Otherwise, we will end up locking ourselves into dialogues among the deaf, where participants seek to advance their own causes or agendas without listening to others and, above all, without listening to the voice of the Lord," he said in his homily. The first phase of the synod process ended last year by concluding it was "urgent" to guarantee fuller participation by women in church governance positions, and calling for theological and pastoral research to continue about allowing women to be deacons. Deacons perform many of the same functions as priests, such as presiding over baptisms, weddings and funerals, but they cannot celebrate Mass. Advocates say allowing women to be deacons would help offset the Catholic priest shortage and address longstanding complaints that women have a second-class status in the church; barred from the priesthood yet responsible for the lion's share of the work educating the young, caring for the sick and passing the faith onto next generations. Opponents say ordaining women to the diaconate would signal the start of a slippery slope toward ordaining women to the priesthood. The Catholic Church reserves the priesthood for men, saying Christ chose only men as his 12 apostles.



President Claudia Sheinbaum waves to supporters in the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square, during a rally on her inauguration day, Tuesday.

# Thai police seek negligence charges for school bus fire that killed 23

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thai police on Wednesday said they were investigating whether the school bus fire that killed 23 young students and teachers in suburban Bangkok was caused by negligence after filing initial charges against the driver. The fire on the bus carrying six teachers and 39 elementary and junior high school students on Tuesday spread so quickly many were unable to escape. The driver, Saman Chanput, was arrested several hours later and charged with reckless driving causing deaths and injuries, failing to stop to help others and failing to report the accident, police said. Authorities were investigating if the fire might be caused by negligence from both the driver and the bus company, and will press charges against all parties responsible, acting police chief Kitrat Phanphet told a news conference. While an initial investigation suggested that the driver was

not speeding, police found 11 natural gas canisters inside the bus that had a permit to install only six, Kitrat said. Police have not officially concluded the cause of the fire, but they said the driver told investigators he was driving normally until the bus lost balance at its front tire, hit another car and scraped a concrete highway barrier. The sparks from the friction might have caught on the highly flammable gas canisters and ignited the blaze, police said. Kitrat said the fact that the driver did not immediately stop after feeling the bus was losing balance could be grounds for negligence. The inspection of the bus found that its emergency exit could be opened, but it wasn't clear if it worked properly, said chief of police forensics Trairong Phiwpan. He also said they did not find any window breakers. In an interview with public broadcaster Thai PBS, bus company owner Songwit Chinnaboot said the vehicle was inspected for safety twice

a year as required and that the gas cylinders had passed safety standards. The families of the victims were driven from Uthai Thani, the northern province where the bus departed from on a school trip, to Bangkok to provide DNA samples for the identification process.

**ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**  
E-Tender Notice No.: Mech-LMG-ET-09-2024-25, Dated: 01-10-2024; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Name of work:** Annual Maintenance Contract of 140 T Gottwald Diesel Crane's SLI system at New Guwahati for a period of three years. **Tender Value:** ₹20,53,854,96/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹41,100/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 13:00 hrs. and opening at 16:00 hrs. on 23-10-2024. For details please visit in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
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**ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT**  
E-Tender Notice No.: Mech-LMG-ET-06-2024-25, Dated: 30-09-2024; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Name of work:** Annual Maintenance Contract for 140 T Gottwald Diesel Crane's SLI system at Badarpur for a period of three years. **Tender Value:** ₹23,36,347/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹46,700/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 13:00 hrs. and opening at 16:00 hrs. on 22-10-2024. For details please visit in website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
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**CHANGE OF NAME**  
I, Shweta Johar, D/o Badley Nagar, R/o G-80/2, Shaheed Ram, Chikamberpur, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh-201006, have changed my name from Shweta Johar to Shweta Aaliya Mansuri for all future purposes.  
PD(818)C  
I, Puneet Badial S/o Nirmal Singh R/o RZ-31/1, First Floor, Indra Park Extn., East Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 have changed my minor son's name to Navneet Badial age 13 yrs. (DOB 01/10/2011) from Navneet Singh for all future purposes. Purposes vide affidavit no. IN-DL63866164415403W.  
PD(819)C  
**THANKSGIVING**  
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.  
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.  
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.  
Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.  
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Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.  
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# Air India updates cabin crew policies, allowances

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Air India is introducing a revised policy for the cabin crew members of domestic and international flights, wherein certain sections of the members will have to share rooms during layovers, according to a source.

The revised policy will also be applicable for Air India Express, which has merged AIX Connect with itself.

Among other changes, the source in the know said the allowances for cabin crew of international flights will be increased from USD 75-125 bracket to USD 85-135 bracket.

There is no change in the allowances for the cabin crew of domestic flights.

An airline spokesperson said that with the merger of Air India and Vistara formalising, there is a need to



harmonise these policies for employees of both the organisations.

"As part of that exercise, we have communicated the changes applicable to Air India employees. The revised compensation and benefits

continue to be competitive and benchmarked to industry standards," the spokesperson told PTI in a statement.

Under the revised policy, cabin crew members, excluding in-flight managers

and executives, will have to share rooms during layovers, the source said. In-flight managers and executives are generally senior people with at least 8-9 years of experience. While room sharing for

cabin crew is already there at Air India Express and Vistara, this will be the first time such a practice will be introduced at the Tata Group-owned loss-making Air India.

The changes in the policy also comes against the backdrop of a section of Air India Express cabin crew members seeking redressal of their HR issues under the labour law. The case is in progress before the Central Labour Commissioner.

Meanwhile, the Air India spokesperson also mentioned about the airline introducing a performance-linked compensation and benefits policy for all employees in April 2023.

The merger of AIX Connect with Air India Express was completed on October 1 while the integration of Vistara with Air India will be completed next month.

# India plans to promote Made in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is discussing a proposal to formulate a scheme for the 'Made in India' label with a view to promote brand India in the global markets, an official said.

The official said that a high-level committee is examining the details of the scheme. The objective is to create a strong brand identity for India, similar to how 'made in Japan' or 'made in Switzerland' evokes about specific images and qualities.

"That we want for India also," the official said, adding for instance, "when we think of Switzerland, we often think of their watches, chocolates, and banking systems."

"We are having discussions on how we can do that. Do we make this scheme for specific sectors like textiles, where we have strength in that. So we are looking into such things," the official added. According to experts, quality consciousness is key to promote Brand India.

The Government at present has India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF) to promote and create international awareness about the 'made in India' label in overseas markets and to facilitate dissemination of knowledge of Indian products and services. It is a trust established by the Department of Commerce. Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggested that India's branding



strategy should focus on three pillars brand high quality products; improve product quality for less than best products, do not focus on branding; and actions to improve product quality.

"India can take several actions to naturally improve its branding. Consistent product quality and reliability should be a priority. For instance, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has gained global trust through its production of high-quality generic drugs. To protect this reputation, India must enforce strict actions against substandard suppliers. For example, between 1990 and 2010, China quietly became the largest contract manufacturer of electronics like TVs and refrigerators without pushing its firms to focus on branding. Once confident in its product quality, China then aggressively promoted its brands," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. He also said that India could establish a unified brand called 'India Quality Product' that signals excellence and reliability.

# Conflict in West Asia threatens Indian exports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The escalation of conflict in the West Asian region is expected to push already high logistics costs besides hurting trade in sectors such as oil, electronics and agriculture, according to exporters.

They said that insurance costs for exports to the countries directly involved in the war could also go up, which will impact Indian exporters' working capital.

Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) stated that the conflict is already hurting India's trade with countries like Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) said the Iran-Israel conflict has the potential to significantly impact world trade and the global economy in several ways.

"Iran is a key player in the oil

market. Any escalation in conflict could disrupt oil supplies, leading to higher prices, which would impact global economies, especially those reliant on oil imports. Oil prices have already moved up by USD 4 per barrel," FIEO DG Ajay Sahai said. Expressing concerns, he said increased tensions could destabilize the Middle East, affecting trade routes like the Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant portion of the world's oil passes.

"Disruptions could lead to higher shipping costs and delays. Many global supply chains depend on the stability of the Middle East. Conflict could disrupt transportation and logistics, affecting industries ranging from electronics to agriculture," Sahai said.

Further, if the western world would put sanctions or trade restrictions, it would further



complicate the global trade dynamics, he said adding "overall, the conflict could lead to increased volatility in global markets".

Hand Tool Association Chairman S C Ralhan said orders to these countries will be on hold and gradually it will be "very risky and difficult" to do trade in this region. "Insurance costs will go up or

even we may not get any insurance cover in that region," Ralhan said. During January-July 2024, India's trade with countries directly impacted by the conflict has faced significant challenges.

"Exports to Israel dropped sharply by 63.5 per cent, Jordan saw a 38.5 per cent decline due to spillover effects,

and Lebanon experienced a 6.8 per cent decrease," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava has said.

The Israel-Hamas war, which erupted in October 2023, has now extended to Lebanon, Syria, and is indirectly impacting Jordan and Iran.

Key regional players like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar have thus far remained uninvolved in the conflict.

India's exports to Israel stood at USD 639 million during April-July this fiscal. It was USD 4.52 billion in 2023-24. Imports from Israel were USD 469.44 million during the first four months of this fiscal. It was USD 2 billion in 2023-24.

India's exports to Iran stood at USD 538.57 million during April-July this fiscal. It was USD 1.22 billion in 2023-24. Imports from Iran were USD 140.69 million during the first four months of this fiscal. It

was USD 625.14 million in 2023-24.

Similarly, the country's exports to Jordan stood at USD 228.56 million during April-July this fiscal. It was USD 1.46 billion in 2023-24. Imports from Jordan were USD 699.28 million during the first four months of this fiscal. It was USD 1.4 billion in 2023-24.

India's exports to Lebanon stood at USD 116.86 million during April-July this fiscal. It was USD 344.91 million in 2023-24. Imports from that country were USD 39 million during the first four months of this fiscal. It was USD 113 million in 2023-24.

India's major items of exports to West Asian countries include basmati rice, man-made yarn, fabrics, gems and jewellery, cotton yarn, and fabrics.

India is Israel's second-largest trading partner in Asia.

# SBI plans 600 new branches nationwide during FY25



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to open 600 branches across the country in the current financial year in a bid to tap business opportunities in emerging areas including large residential townships.

"We have strong branch expansion plans... This would be mainly focused on emerging areas. A lot of residential colonies are not covered by us. Around 600 branches is something we are planning in the current year," SBI Chairman C S Setty told PTI in an interview.

The country's biggest lender opened 137 branches last fiscal. Of the total, 59 rural branches were inaugurated.

SBI has a network of 22,542 branches across the country as of March 2024. Apart from branch presence, SBI has 65,000 ATMs and 85,000 business correspondents.

"We serve about 50 crore customers and we take pride in saying that we are the banker to every Indian, and, more importantly, to every Indian family," he said.

He also said it would be his endeavour to transform SBI into the best bank, the most valued bank not only from a shareholder point of view but from the point of view of every stakeholder who deals with SBI.

"It could be my customers, it could be our shareholders, it could be the larger ecosystem -- the society, the institutional framework all the

stakeholders should be saying that this is the best bank to deal with," he added.

In a bid to attract depositors, State Bank of India is contemplating to come out with innovative products including a combo product of recurring deposit and SIP.

With the economy progressing, he said, customers are becoming financially more aware and demanding, and have started looking for innovative investment instruments.

"Obviously, nobody wants to put everything in a risky asset or a speculative asset... Banking products will always be part of the basket. So, we are trying to bring products which will appeal to them," he said.

"We are trying to bring innovation in some of the conventional products like recurring deposit, which is actually a conventional SIP... Maybe, we can combine both fixed deposit/recurring deposit and SIP, a combo product that could be digitally accessible," he said.

Besides, he said, the bank has undertaken a massive outreach programme for the deposit mobilisation. "As I said, for us, deposit mobilisation is a franchisee job. We have the largest number of physical outlets across the country. We are leveraging our huge physical reach by initiating outreach programmes where customers are contacted. Today, the effort on part of SBI is to reach out to every customer both existing as well as new customers," he said.

# Coal India plans to lease old washeries

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Coal India Ltd is exploring options to monetise its four old washeries by leasing out those assets and plans to bundle lease contracts with long-term coal supply agreements. The move aims at optimising asset utilisation.

"We are exploring the monetisation of four old washeries," Coal India Ltd (CIL) said in a report.

The company which accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal output is diversifying its portfolio by setting up a non-coking coal washery at Ib Valley, Lakhanpur in Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) one of the subsidiaries of CIL.

The public sector enterprise commissioned the operation of Madhuband Washery having 5 million tonnes of annual capacity during 2023-24 to further enhance coking coal beneficiation capacity.

The company is also setting up three new washeries in Bharat Coking Coal Ltd

(BCCCL) another arm of CIL with a total throughput capacity of seven million tonnes per annum. Besides, five coking coal washeries with a total capacity of 14.5 million tonnes per annum are being set up in Central Coalfields Ltd (CCL). CCL is also an arm of CIL. Currently, CIL operates 12 coal washeries with a combined operable washing capacity of 29.35 million tonnes per annum.

Among these, 10 are dedicated to coking coal, while the remaining two handle non-coking coal, with operable capacities of 18.35 million tonnes per annum and 11 million tonnes per annum, respectively. In 2023-24, the total washed coal production from the existing coking coal washers amounted to approximately 2.26 million tonnes (MT), marking a 4.8 per cent growth year on year.

The company has an ambitious coal production target of one billion tonnes by 2025-26.



# Royal Enfield's sales rise

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Motorcycle maker Royal Enfield on Wednesday said its total wholesales increased 11 per cent year-on-year to 86,978 units in September.

The company had dispatched 78,580 units in September 2023. In the domestic market, dispatches increased 7 per cent year on year to 79,326 units from 74,261 units in the year-ago period, Royal Enfield said in a statement. Exports increased from 4,319

units in September last year to 7,652 units last month.

"We have registered steady growth in the month of September owing to our recent launches.

The 2024 Classic 350 has continued to solidify its iconic status and popularity among riders and has been performing well," Royal Enfield CEO B Govindarajan said.

As the company continues to innovate and deliver pure motorcycling experience, the momentum will only accelerate, he added.

# Air India to use 'AI2' prefix for Vistara flights post-merger

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India on Wednesday said flights operated with Vistara aircraft will have numbers starting with the prefix 'AI2' after the merger next month while Vistara's planes, crew and service will continue to operate as before. The Tata Group-owned full service carrier also emphasised that the Vistara experience will remain post merger.

The merger of Vistara -- a joint venture between Tatas and Singapore Airlines -- with Air India is scheduled for November 12 that will mark a major consolidation in the Indian aviation space after the integration of AIX Connect with Air India Express.

There are concerns in certain quarters on whether Vistara passengers will continue to get the same services like now, post merger as Air India, which is in the transformation phase, has been facing certain service issues in recent times.

An Air India spokesperson on Wednesday said the teams of Air India and Vistara have



been working hard for over a year to ensure that the merger of the legal and regulated entities is seamless for both customers and staff.

"Though the legal entities and Air Operator Certificates will become one on 12 November, the Vistara experience will remain.

"Vistara aircraft, crew and service will continue to operate as before, but with AI2XXX flight numbers bookable via airindia.Com," the spokesperson said in a statement to PTI.

Air India's airline code is 'AI' and that of Vistara is 'UK'. The latter will fly into the sunset after the merger. Among other elements, Vistara's catering is being extended to Air India.

# Stock brokers to offer UPI-based fund blocking account to investors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Starting February 1, qualified stock brokers will have to either offer the facility of trading in the secondary market using the UPI-based block mechanism to their clients, similar to the ASBA facility, or a three-in-one trading account facility, a move that will empower investors.

Qualified Stock Brokers (QSBs) must offer one of these two options, in addition to the current mode of trading.

A three-in-one trading account combines a savings account, a demat account, and a trading account into a single integrated solution. In this case, the clients would have their funds in their bank account, earning interest on the cash balances.



transparency, interest earnings and ease of making payments at a time when UPI payments are witnessing significant growth," Rahul Jain, CFO, NTT DATA Payment Services India, said. Additionally, the move will improve fund management and further enhance investors' convenience, allowing them to create a payment mandate by blocking funds for trading which will

safeguard their amount from misuse, he added.

On Monday, Sebi's board approved a proposal whereby, in addition to the current mode of trading, the QSBs shall provide either the facility of trading supported by blocked amount in the secondary market (cash segment) using UPI block mechanism (ASBA-like facility for the secondary market) or the 3-in-1 trading

account facility, with effect from February 1, 2025.

In the UPI block mechanism, clients can trade in the secondary market based on blocked funds in their bank accounts, instead of transferring the funds upfront to the trading member.

Clients of the QSBs will have the option, to either continue with the existing facility of trading by transferring funds to trading members or opt for the new facility.

Trading members (TM) are classified as QSBs based on factors such as the size and scale of their operations, including the number of active clients, the total assets held by clients with the TM, the end-of-day margin of all clients, and the trading volume of the TM. Being designated as a QSB, brings with it enhanced responsibilities and obligations.

# Diljit, Coldplay concerts drive travel surge: Report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Upcoming concerts of British band Coldplay in Mumbai and Indian singer Diljit Dosaanjh in Chandigarh and other cities triggered a travel rush by fans, leading to over 300 per cent surge in flight bookings, online travel agency ixigo said in a report on Wednesday.

The Grammy award-winning band Coldplay is scheduled to perform at Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium during January 18-21 as part of its 'Music of the Spheres' world tour.

Punjabi singing sensation Diljit Dosaanjh will perform at a live concert in Chandigarh in December this year as part of his DIL-UMINATI India tour. The country is witnessing a



surge in travel bookings as fans flock to see these two live performances, said the ixigo report, adding that the platform has observed a sharp rise in flight, train, and bus bookings and searches to key concert cities.

Mumbai has experienced a staggering 350 per cent year-on-year (YoY) increase in flight bookings, said the report. Chandigarh, one of the

destinations for the DIL-UMINATI India tour, has seen a 300 per cent YoY surge in flight bookings, it said.

Other DIL-UMINATI concert cities like Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Indore have also recorded an average 100 per cent YoY growth in flight bookings on their respective event dates.

"We've observed a significant shift in Indian travellers' preferences, with more people willing to spend on experiences like music concerts and festivals. The passion for live performances is driving fans to travel, and this surge in bookings across flights, trains, and buses shows how music tourism is becoming a major force in the country," ixigo Group CEO Alok Bajpai said.

# BBF appoints Anup Gupta as chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bombay Stock Exchange Brokers' Forum (BBF) on Wednesday said it has appointed Anup Gupta as the chairman, succeeding Kishor Kansagra.

The appointment has been effected from September 30, the Forum said in a statement. Gupta, who is a director of Sykes & Ray Equities (I) Ltd, brings extensive financial expertise, including M&A, corporate finance, and derivatives. The Forum represents over 650 securities broking firms in India and actively contributes to regulatory policy. It also engages globally through affiliations with international financial bodies and focuses on professional development and investor education.

# INDIA ADD FIVE MORE GOLD MEDALS IN ISSF JUNIOR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Divanshi and Mukesh Nelavalli clinched gold medals in their respective women's and men's 25m pistol as India added another five gold medals on day four of the ISSF Junior World Championship in Lima, Peru.

The added haul took India's overall tally to 14 with the country's shooters claiming 10 gold, one silver and three bronze medals so far in the competition.

USA (10) and Italy (8) are placed second and third respectively.

Divanshi shot a score of 35 to pip Italian Cristina Magnani by two points in the final as France's Heloise Fourre was third.

Divanshi bagged another gold on the fourth day as she teamed up with Tejaswini and Vibhuti Bhatia to win the junior women's 25m pistol team with a combined tally of 1711 ahead of Czechia and Germany.

Divanshi had a tough road to winning the gold medal after missing seven of her first 15



targets in the final, which put her in sixth position initially. However, Divanshi staged a fine recovery to hit 16 of her next 20 to move up to second with three more series of five shots remaining in the 10-series final.

The silver-winning Magnani, who had led from the beginning, found herself tied

with Divanshi on 31-hits after the ninth series as the Indian nailed a four when it mattered most, while the Italian missed three.

France's Heloise Fourre, who had piped Divanshi to second after the eighth series, had to settle for bronze after missing three shots in the ninth series. In the 10th and final series,

Divanshi repeated her four-hits score from the ninth series to seal the deal, as the Italian went down missing three targets yet again.

Earlier in the day, Divanshi reached the final by finishing fifth in qualification with a score of 577 over the precision and rapid-fire rounds of 30-shots each.

Tejaswini (569) was 13th, Vibhuti (565) was 22nd and Naamya Kapoor was 40th with 552.

Nelavalli also added two more golds to take his tally to three for the championship so far. He picked up the junior men's 25m Pistol gold with a score of 585, putting him two ahead of compatriot Suraj Sharma, who won India's first silver of the competition. Nelavalli, Sharma and Pradhymn Singh (561) combined to snatch the team gold in the event from Poland, whose tally of 1726 fell three short of India's. Italy was third.

India's fifth gold of day four came in the junior men's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) team competition, when Shourya Saini, Vedant Nitin Waghmare and Parikshit Singh Brar tallied 1753 to equal the junior world record in the elimination round to win gold. Norway was five points behind in second while Sweden were a further two behind in third. Shourya then made it to the final, finishing seventh in the qualification round, with a score of 583 over the three positions. He finished seventh eventually.



## Alcaraz rallies past Sinner to win China Open

AP ■ BEIJING

Carlos Alcaraz won seven straight points in the decisive tiebreaker to beat top-ranked Jannik Sinner 6-7 (6), 6-4, 7-6 (3) and win the China Open on Wednesday, extending his recent mastery over his biggest rival — who is dealing with an ongoing doping case.

The third-ranked Alcaraz has now won all three of his meetings with Sinner this year, having also come out on top in semifinals at Indian Wells and the French Open. Alcaraz also ended Sinner's winning streak at 14 matches and denied the Italian three straight titles after trophies in Cincinnati and at the U.S. Open. Sinner, who was the defending champion in Beijing, had to

refocus after the World Anti-Doping Agency announced on Saturday that it was appealing a decision to clear him of wrongdoing following two positive steroid tests. Alcaraz wasted a 5-2 lead in the first set and also let Sinner get back in the third after leading 4-2 before eventually edging it out after also falling behind 3-0 in the final-set tiebreaker. Sinner and Alcaraz have accounted for all four Grand Slam titles this year between them — evenly split at two each: Sinner won the Australian Open and the U.S. Open while Alcaraz won the French Open and Wimbledon. Alcaraz improved to 6-4 in his career against Sinner after their 10th meeting in what has become tennis' top rivalry following the 60 matches between Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic. WADA is seeking a ban of one to two years for Sinner in a case that might not be resolved before Sinner begins the defense of his Australian Open title in January. Sinner tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March but was not banned in a decision by an independent tribunal announced by the International Tennis Integrity Agency in August because the ITIA determined he was not to blame. Sinner's accepted explanation was that the banned performance-enhancer entered his system unintentionally through a massage from his physiotherapist, who had used a spray containing the steroid to treat his own cut finger.



## Sergio Lobera hunts 10th win against Kerala Blasters as Tuskers visit Odisha FC

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha FC would look to build a winning momentum after their previous match success when they host Kerala Blasters FC in their Indian Super League outing here on Thursday. OFC is coming after beating Jamshedpur FC 2-1, its opening win of the season, whereas Kerala settled for a 1-1 draw versus NorthEast United FC in Guwahati.



confidence that his team is heading in the right direction. He said his team will play to its strengths in the upcoming games. "I'm not happy, but I'm not extremely unhappy either. We can do much better. We are still solid and taking points," he noted. "It's just the beginning, and I feel we will become better eventually. I think we are on the right track." The two sides have clashed against each other on 23 occasions in the tournament, with Kerala winning nine times, and Odisha prevailing in seven, while seven outings resulted in a draw. The Blasters' Noah Sadaoui has so far netted four goals versus the Juggernauts — his highest tally versus a single team in the ISL. OFC's duo of Roy Krishna and Diego Mauricio have both scored seven goals against the Tuskers — the joint-highest by any player versus the team.

## Dortmund scores 7 while Barcelona MAN CITY AND ARSENAL ALL WIN IN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

AP ■ LONDON

Karim Adeyemi starred as Borussia Dortmund ran riot against Celtic while Barcelona and Manchester City claimed their first wins in the restructured Champions League.

Adeyemi scored a first-half hat trick as Dortmund routed Celtic 7-1 at home. It was the second big win from a German team in the competition after Bayern Munich's 9-2 bashing of Dinamo Zagreb in the first matchday.

Robert Lewandowski got Barcelona off the mark as the Spanish giant eased to a 5-0 home win over Swiss team Young Boys, while his former teammate Ilkay Gundogan got City off to a 4-0 win at Slovan Bratislava. Erling Haaland scored his 42nd goal in his 41st Champions League game. City was held 0-0 by Inter Milan in their opening game, while Barca responded to its 2-1 loss at Monaco, the team's first defeat under new coach Hansi Flick.

Mikel Arteta's Arsenal outclassed his former team Paris Saint-Germain in a 2-0 win with Kai Havertz and

Bukayo Saka scoring in the first half for the Gunners. PSG coach Luis Enrique's gamble on leaving Ousmane Dembélé out did not pay off.

Arteta enjoyed a successful 18-month loan spell at PSG while still he was still a teenager at Barcelona. Though the Dortmund team appears to have adapted to the new competition format very well — last season's beaten finalist has 10 goals from two games after starting with a 3-0 win over Club Brugge — its fans made their opposition to the reforms clear with a huge tifo slamming UEFA.

This season UEFA changed the structure of Europe's premier competition to add four more teams. The group stage was scrapped for a league system with each of the now 36 participating teams playing eight opponents once in a first phase of the competition. UEFA claimed the changes would ensure more evenly matched games, but Tuesday's results — the big wins for Barca, City and Dortmund — appear to belie that claim.

There were more big wins Tuesday with Inter Milan defeating Red Star Belgrade 4-

0, and tournament debutant Brest routing Salzburg 4-0 away for its second win in as many games in Europe's premier competition.

Iran forward Mehdi Taremi struck a penalty past Israel and Red Star goalkeeper Omri Glazer and set up two more goals for Inter hours after his country launched a barrage of missiles at Israel.

Senegalese forward Abdallah Sima netted twice for Brest to take his tally to three goals in two games after he scored in the French team's tournament-opening 2-1 win over Austrian champion Sturm Graz. Also Tuesday, Bayer Leverkusen defeated AC Milan 1-0 in Germany thanks a well-worked move finished by Victor Boniface. Daniel Braganca scored late to earn Sporting Lisbon a 1-1 draw at PSV Eindhoven. Kaan Kairinen's brilliant free kick was enough for Prague to draw 1-1 at Stuttgart. Stuttgart fans displayed a huge choreography saying "Back in Europe" behind one of the goals. It was the German team's first Champions League match at home since a 1-1 draw with Barcelona in February 2010.

## Sabalenka beats Keys at China Open and equals her career best win streak

AP ■ BEIJING

Second-ranked Aryna Sabalenka matched her career-best 15 straight wins after beating Madison Keys 6-4, 6-3 to advance to the quarterfinals of the China Open on Wednesday. The three-time Grand Slam winner started her streak with a title at Cincinnati in August and continued with a run to the championship at the U.S. Open last month. She also won the Australian Open earlier in the year. Her previous streak of 15 was achieved across the 2020-21 seasons. "When you're able to sacrifice a lot and you're able to work hard and you're able to get these wins, that's the best feeling," Sabalenka said. "You're just living your best life. You're excited to play your matches. You're excited to face

whatever fight you going to face." The Belarusian has won 30 of 31 sets played during her current streak, dropping only one set to Ekaterina Alexandrova in the third round of the U.S. Open.

That form guide quickly played out on Wednesday as Sabalenka broke the No. 24-ranked Keys in the third game of the first set and then dominated on serve throughout an efficient 65-minute outing, which improved her head-to-head record against the American to 4-1. The 26-year-old Belarusian only lost five points on her first serve in the match and was able to save both break points against her, despite Keys making 22 winners against 10 unforced errors. Sabalenka will play Karolina



Muchova in the quarterfinals after the Czech player routed Cristina Bucsa 6-2, 6-0. Paris Olympics gold medalist Zheng Qinwen played a night match against Amanda Anisimova. Later Wednesday, top-ranked Jannik Sinner will play rival Carlos Alcaraz in the men's final. Sinner and Alcaraz have

accounted for all four Grand Slam titles this year between them. Alcaraz leads the head-to-head series 5-4 — including wins at both their meetings this year in semifinals at Indian Wells and the French Open. The 23-year-old Italian hasn't appeared distracted by the World Anti-Doping Agency announcing Saturday it was seeking a ban of one to two years for the U.S. Open champion, who tested positive twice for an anabolic steroid in March.

SHANGHAI MASTERS: French veteran Gael Monfils eased through to the second round of the Shanghai Masters with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over Damir Dzumhur. The 38-year-old Monfils will play the 22nd-seeded Argentine Sebastian Baez next. Arthur Rinderknech also advanced with a 6-4, 7-6 (5) win over American Reilly Opelka, while Botanic van de Zandschulp of the Netherlands defeated Pablo Carreno Busta 7-6 (5), 6-2. Also, Alexandre Muller rallied from a set down for a 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 victory over Italian Luca Nardi.

## Kartik buoyed by SAI and IGU's encouragement for young golfers

PTI ■ GOTEMBA (JAPAN)

"It is like a reunion with a lot of friends," says Kartik Singh, who is just 14 years old but is ready to battle it out for the title with several of his pals in his second start at the Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships.

The 2024 Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships (AAC) gets underway on Thursday at the Taiheiyu Club here with the amazing Mount Fuji in the backdrop.

In the year since he became the youngest ever to make the cut in the 2023 AAC in Melbourne, Kartik is ready to contend for one of the biggest amateur events in the world. In the last 12 months, he has played almost 12-15 international events in a dozen countries. "I have played in a lot of places, learnt

a lot in golf and made many friends all over the world," he says.

"I have learnt a lot in the last one year. I have been playing with most of the top juniors in the world and have seen a lot of events and courses," said Kartik ahead of the 2024 AAC. Kartik is one of the four Indian players who have been sent by the Indian Golf Union for the event. He is the highest-ranked Indian amateur at 171.

Earlier this year, Kartik was invited for a special week-long camp at the AAC Academy at the Taiheiyu Club here. However, he had to miss it because he was in the middle of his busiest season. He is also aware of the opportunities that can come his way with the inclusion of golf at the Olympics in 2016.

"The Indian Golf Union helped me get into TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme). The government is keen on sports and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) has been supportive. Now, with their support and IGU's backing I can go to more events. They are now willing to give all we want. The President of the IGU (Brijinder Singh) walked with us even during practice round," said Kartik. "That encourages us a lot."

"Since I came here (Gotemba), I have played the long course twice." He has scoped out the course well and is ready to show that his growth chart in golf is rising exponentially. The players feel the driveways are tighter here and fairing is going to be important. The greens look great but could be



soft. Then there are a lot of undulations... It is up-and-down at places and downhill putts will be fast. "I have played some of the best events like the AAC last year, won once in Asia (Singapore Juniors), the R&A Junior Open — where I was sixth —, the Junior PGA, the Junior Players — where I was third —, and recently I played on the Internationals Team in the Junior Presidents Cup," added a confident Kartik. "Playing such big events and seeing the world's top junior players, I have learnt a lot." Kartik is one of the six players, who played at the Junior Presidents Cup in Canada last month. "They (six players) are all very good. I have played many events with them. We talk and learn," he said and then with a smile adds, "Now, I have

friends all over the world." Kartik, who made the cut and finished T-57 last year, leads the Indian challenge, which includes debutant Rakshit Dahiya, Krishnav Nikhil Chopra — playing his third AAC — and Vedant Sirohi, who is making a second appearance. In the first round on Thursday, Sirohi will be the first among Indians to start as he plays with Bowen Chai of China and Ingtawan Wangrungruchaisri of Thailand. Dahiya is grouped with Qawi Aslimon of Brunei and Junee Choi of Korea. On the other side of the course, Chopra plays from the 10th tee with Zaqian Fang of China and Robby Turnbull of New Zealand, while Kartik Singh goes out with Rayhan Latief of Indonesia and Ryan Ang of Singapore.

# RIVALRY AIM TO END AUSTRALIA'S DOMINANCE IN T20 WORLD CUP

PTI ■ DUBAI

The likes of India, England and South Africa will strive to end Australia's unrivalled dominance in the Women's T20 World Cup, beginning with a double header in Sharjah on Thursday. Bangladesh will take on Scotland in the tournament opener in an afternoon fixture followed by a clash between Asian teams Pakistan and Sri Lanka later in the day at Sharjah. Political unrest in Bangladesh forced the International Cricket Council to shift the 10-team event to the UAE back in August. **AUSTRALIA THE TEAM TO BEAT AGAIN:** Australia will be the team to beat once again, having won the last three editions and overall six out of the nine editions staged thus far. England, India and South Africa have repeatedly shown that the Australian fortress can be breached but when it comes to World Cup events, the team from Down Under remains invincible. With Meg Lanning walking

into the sunset following the triumph in South Africa about 18 months ago, Alyssa Healy has been handed captaincy to maintain Australia's supremacy in global events. Healy would like to lead from the front but if she is not able to, she can rely on the squad full of match winners including Ellyse Perry, Ashleigh Gardner and Grace Harris. Witnessing the pace duo of Tayla Vlaeminck and Darcie Brown in operation will also be exciting. Australia have been clubbed in Group A alongside India, Pakistan, New Zealand and Sri Lanka while Group B has England, South Africa, West Indies, Bangladesh and Scotland. Top two teams from each group qualify for the semifinals. **ENGLAND SHOW OMINOUS FORM AHEAD OF WORLD CUP:** England, who won the inaugural edition in 2009 before losing three finals to Australia, will take a lot of confidence from the series win against their main rival during the Women's Ashes last year. The pitches in the UAE are



expected to favour the spinners, bringing England's trump card Sophie Ecclestone into play. She will be supported by Sarah Glenn and Charlie Dean. Veteran Nat-Sciver Brunt will provide the X-factor in the batting department. Opener Maia Bouchier will be one of the World Cup debutants to watch out for. England will be supremely confident about their chances this time around, having whitewashed Pakistan and New Zealand in the summer. **CAN INDIA GO ALL THE WAY THIS TIME?:** Another team who always challenges Australia but has hitherto not been able to cross the final hurdle is India. The Harmanpreet-Kaur led side has lost two big T20 finals to Australia - the Commonwealth Games in 2022 and T20 World Cup in 2020. India go into the event having not got a lot of game time following their surprising loss to Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup final. The team has worked extensively on its fitness and fielding, hoping it will make a big difference to its World Cup campaign. The conditions could favour a

spin-heavy India. In the batting department, the onus will be on openers Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana while Harmanpreet and Richa Ghosh will be expected to hit the sixes in the middle and death overs. Harmanpreet, who has led the team since the 2018 T20 World Cup, will be under tremendous pressure this time around as another loss could bring an end to her captaincy tenure. South Africa look to go one better after memorable run at home. South Africa rode a wave of home support to make their maiden World Cup final last year. Tasting defeat to Australia in the showpiece in Cape Town, the Proteas have been busy in their preparations to do one better. The side, now led by Laura Wolvaardt, got its revenge over the reigning champions in Canberra at the beginning of the year. However, South Africa lost that series and also went on to lose to Sri Lanka. The South African women have drawn series with Bangladesh, India, New Zealand before victory came over Pakistan earlier this month.



## With Australia, you can't afford to make mistakes: Mandhana

PTI ■ DUBAI

There are no shortcuts to beating Australia and every team has to give its best if it aspires to overcome the six-time world champions, said India vice-captain Smriti Mandhana ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup which begins here on Thursday. Australia's dominance in the global showpiece has been unrivalled with the team winning the last three editions of the tournament. With charismatic former skipper Meg Lanning calling it a day following the victory in South Africa about 18 months ago, Alyssa Healy has taken over the captaincy as Australia aim to maintain their dominance in global events. "Every game in the World Cup is important, and you have to give your 100 per cent in each one. New Zealand and

Sri Lanka are strong teams, but with Australia, you know you can't afford to make mistakes," said Mandhana as India gear up to take on New Zealand in a Group A match here on Friday. "You have to bring your best game on that particular day to get the better of them. There's always excitement when facing Australia because they're such a good team, and beating them is a great challenge," added the India vice-captain. She added that the clash against Pakistan always brings out a lot of passionate response from the players. The arch-rival will lock horns here on October 6. "I think the India-Pakistan rivalry is more about the emotions of the fans than anything else. It's not like the players don't talk to each other; it's the emotions from both nations that make it so intense," Mandhana said.

"For me, every World Cup match is special, and we put the same amount of effort into each game. But there's definitely a lot of emotion attached to the India-Pakistan games," said the veteran of 141 T20Is. Mandhana said that playing Pakistan in the afternoon heat of Dubai would be a challenge and that her team had a couple of sessions lined up to acclimatise to the conditions. "The afternoon game is going to be a challenge due to the heat, but when you play for India, there are no excuses. You have to prepare well, and I think we have a couple of afternoon sessions lined up to help us get used to the conditions. "By the time we face Pakistan, I'm sure we'll be ready. Mentally, we need to stay strong and keep pushing, staying hydrated is key," she said.

## Bumrah regains top spot in ICC Test rankings, Jaiswal jumps to spot 3

PTI ■ DUBAI

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is back at the summit of the ICC Test bowling rankings following his match haul of six wickets in the second Test against Bangladesh in Kanpur. The 30-year-old replaced his India team-mate Ravichandran Ashwin - Player of the Series against Bangladesh - at the top of the chart. Spinner Ravindra Jadeja maintained his sixth place, while fellow spinner Kuldeep Yadav stayed in 16th. In batting, Player of the Match from the Kanpur Test, Yashasvi Jaiswal, moved to a career-high third position



after just 11 Tests. Jaiswal played scintillating knocks of 72 and 51 and helped India win the rain-marred match by seven wickets. With 792 rating points, the 22-year-old is behind second-placed Kane Williamson (829) and Joe Root (899).

Also, veteran Indian batter Virat Kohli is back in the top 10, gaining six places to rise to the sixth position after knocks of 47 and 29 in Kanpur. Rishabh Pant, too, remained in the top 10, dropping three spots to ninth, with skipper Rohit Sharma and Shubman

Gill on 15th and 16th, respectively. As for the all-rounders, there has been no significant change in the rankings, with Jadeja holding the top spot, followed by Ashwin at second and Axar Patel at seventh. In team rankings, India were in the second spot with 120 rating points, separated from leader Australia by four points, while England remained in the third place with 108 points. Meanwhile, the Indians continued to rule the World Test Championship (WTC) table, having a point percentage of 74.24% after 11 fixtures, above second-placed Australia (62.50% in 12 Tests).



## Sumit Nagal crashes out in first round of Shanghai Masters

PTI ■ SHANGHAI

Indian tennis ace Sumit Nagal's campaign in the Shanghai Masters ended in a first-round exit after he suffered a 6-3, 6-3 defeat to China's Wu Yibing here on Wednesday. The 27-year-old, who has been in the news recently due to his dispute with the All India Tennis Association (AITA) regarding his participation in the Davis Cup fixture against Sweden, went down in straight sets leading to his second straight first-round elimination. In August, he had crashed out of the US Open in the first round after losing to Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands. Nagal, who had been battling a back injury, was accused of demanding an annual fee of USD 50,000 by the AITA to represent India in the Davis Cup tie but the country's top singles player defended himself, saying it is "standard practice" for athletes across the world to be paid for their services. Nagal had opted out of the recent Davis Cup tie against Sweden, citing a back strain that also forced him out of the US Open men's doubles competition last month. This was Nagal's first event on the ATP Tour since his first-round exit from the US Open.

## Tim Southee quits New Zealand captaincy

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Tim Southee has stepped down from the New Zealand captaincy ahead of the three-Test series against India and Tom Latham has been appointed in the veteran pacer's place. Southee captained New Zealand in 14 Tests in which the Kiwis won six, lost six and drew two. "I've always tried to put the team first throughout my career and I believe this decision is the best for the team," said Southee in a New Zealand Cricket statement. "I believe the way I can best serve the team moving forward is focusing on my performances on the field and getting back to my best, to continue taking wickets and helping New Zealand win Test matches." The 35-year-old right-arm pacer has so far played 102 Tests alongside 161 ODIs and 126 T20Is. With 382 wickets, he is the second-highest wicket-taker for the Kiwis after legendary Richard Hadlee



(431). "I will, as I've always done, continue to support my teammates, especially the exciting young bowlers making their way on the international stage. "I wish Tom all the best in the role and he knows I'll be there to support him on his journey, as he has done for me over the years," said Southee. New Zealand head coach Gary Stead said

Southee took the decision in the best interests of the team. "Tim's a fantastic player and a very good leader who is held in high regard by the players and support staff." "He's been a great servant of New Zealand Cricket over nearly 17 years playing on the international stage, and I'd like to acknowledge his humility in stepping down from the role as Test captain. "It's not easy giving up something you love, but Tim is a true team-man and he's made the decision with the team's best interests at heart. He's one of our greatest ever players and we still very much see him playing a part in our Test side moving forward." Southee took over as New Zealand captain after Kane Williamson stepped down from the role in December 2022. Currently on tour of the subcontinent, New Zealand have played a two-Test series in Sri Lanka while their one-off Test against Afghanistan in Noida was washed out.

## Dwindling black soil resources force UPCA to look beyond Unnao

PTI ■ KANPUR

For years, the UPCA has procured black soil from Unnao to prepare pitches at the Green Park Stadium but the natural resource is vanishing fast in that city, leaving the state cricket association worried. Not only the high-quality resource is dwindling in Unnao - about 25km from Kanpur - the quality of the available soil has also suffered considerable degradation. The soil with more than 50 per cent of clay particles is suitable for preparing a cricket pitch. The Green Park stadium hosts about 150 matches on nine pitches in a season and that requires renovation in the off-season. According to UPCA pitch curator Shiv Kumar, the soil requirement in each season is 1200 cubic feet. "In my entire career, we have used soil only from Unnao. What worries me now is that Unnao is not left with much of that natural resource. We can manage two more years with the available stock and before it finishes, we need to identify a new area," Shiv Kumar told PTI. "The soil has almost finished in that area and the quality we are getting now is not up to the mark."



UPCA procures black soil from a pond in Unnao and a village called 'Kali Mitti'. The agricultural fields in that area are the biggest source of soil but the years of digging means the resource is emptying. Explaining the phenomenon, the UPCA curator said that the main content of soil is clay. "The main particle in the soil is clay. It's such a small particle, about 0.002

microns. It takes about 30-40 years for the soil to convert into clay in a pond. Then there is sand, gravel, and other things. Soil with 50-60 per cent clay presence is considered good." Shiv Kumar said earlier the good-quality soil was available just one foot below the top of the field but it's not the case anymore due to the consistent digging over the years. "The curators have started to

understand the soil with which they work. So, the selection of soils has also changed, not in our place but everywhere with BCCI's education programme. "Earlier we just used whatever was available and just watered and rolled the pitch. No one knew about the roots of the grass. No one knew about the compaction potential of the roller. "Now we are checking the moisture, temperature, how much water is to be kept and how much compaction should be given. We can see good cricket only if the pitch is made using a scientific method," he said. UPCA is now looking at places like Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to get soil. "They have high-clay fields. There is good clay in MP also. We will see something from there. It can be an issue when we have to make new pitches, if we do not find a place nearby." UPCA hosts about 150 matches, including age group, Ranji, first class, local league, and trials, in a single season. It takes about 45 days to prepare a pitch from start to finish. A few pitches require renovation/top-up, after being used three times. "Like in January, we will have to do some repair work because a few pitches would have hosted matches. But for that, we will need soil from the same family, which means soil from the exact place from which the pitch was prepared in the beginning. "We can't use soil from a different family because the content would be different," added Shiv, who is a science graduate.

## PCB could appoint separate captains in all three formats

PTI ■ KARACHI

Pakistan could have separate cricket captains in all three formats, given the heavy schedule of the side and the pressure it could put on one white-ball skipper, according to sources. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) was expected to hand over Babar Azam ODI captaincy as well for the upcoming white-ball matches, but the charismatic batter tendered his resignation around midnight on Wednesday to focus on his batting. Insiders suggest that it would not be easy for white-ball head coach, Gary Kirsten or the selection committee to appoint the next captain in the shorter formats.

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E-Mail I.D. - [espwcuttack@gmail.com](mailto:espwcuttack@gmail.com)  
Tel./ Fax No. (0671)-2304128

**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER  
CUTTACK (R&B) DIVISION NO.1: CUTTACK**

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- Nature of work :- **Road works**
- Class of Contractor :- **"C" & "B"**
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(Er.P.K. Majhi)  
Superintending Engineer,  
Cuttack (R&B) Division No.1

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