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BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY OCTOBER 31, 2024, PAGES 12 ₹4

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Disengagement complete at LAC

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

Troop disengagement process at two friction points in Depsang Valley and Demchok at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh is complete. Patrolling by India and China will commence soon as agreed upon between the two countries. The two sides will exchange sweets on Thursday on the occasion of Diwali. Giving this information here on Wednesday, sources said the local commanders of the level of Brigadier from both the sides will continue their talks. The two officials will decide on patrolling modalities in the two areas, they said. India on October 21 announced that the two countries have reached an agreement on patrolling. Sources said that verification post-disengagement is in progress and patrolling modalities are to be decided



REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

between ground commanders. On October 25, sources here said the disengagement process was likely to get completed by October 28-29. The agreement framework was signed first at the diplomatic level and then military-level talks took place, they had said, adding the nitty-gritty of the agreement was worked on during the Corps Commander-level talks which were signed last week. Adhering to agreements between the two sides, Indian troops then began to pull back equipment to rear locations in these areas. The process follows the agreement firmed up between the two countries on patrolling and disengagement of troops along the LAC in eastern Ladakh, a major breakthrough to end the over four-year standoff.

Ties between the two Asian countries had nosedived following a fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. Sources earlier said the areas and patrolling status were expected to be moved back to pre-April 2020 level. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on October 21 had said in New Delhi the agreement was finalised following negotiations over the past several weeks and that it would lead to a resolution of the issues that arose in 2020. On October 23, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping endorsed the agreement on patrolling and disengagement along the LAC in eastern Ladakh during their bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan in Russia.

Delhi's 'Anywhere Registration Policy' will end touts' careers!

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has approved a policy titled 'Anywhere Registration Policy', with this the sale and purchase of properties in the National Capital can be registered at any sub-registrar's office. The move will help the thousands who have to visit Sub-Registrar Offices, at different locations, and is also aimed at curbing corruption and harassment. Under the policy, buyers can now take an online appointment at any of the 22 Sub-Registrar Offices, across the National Capital for their property registration. They do not have to physically visit any sub registrar office to register the sale/purchase deed of their properties. The policy will save people from long queues for property registration, thus promoting transparency to help curb corruption. Traditionally, to buy or sell property in Delhi, people need to visit a designated Sub-Registrar Office. Whether it's a property transaction or registering the property through other means, one has to go to the Sub-Registrar Office. However, this process often led to challenges, including long waiting lines and delays in booking appointments at certain offices, while others remained underutilised.



number of applicants. The Delhi government recently appointed joint sub-registrars at six of its most crowded offices to ease the rush. Explaining this, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi said that the 'Anywhere Registration' policy is being introduced to resolve these problems. "Under this policy, anyone seeking property registration can go to any sub-registrar office in Delhi. Residents will no longer be limited to just one designated office for property registration," Atishi added. The government has received a number of complaints and suggestions to improve the functioning of the sub registrar office which is one of the major departments to contribute to the state's financial health. One complaint was that in some sub-registrar offices, there were long queues and consequently, it takes a long time to book an appointment, whereas in some other offices, there were no excessive crowds. Another complaint was that corruption was prevalent in many sub-registrar offices. There are middlemen outside the offices, who demand money from people wanting to register their property. People were often forced to pay these middlemen to get their registrations done in these offices. The move will also increase transparency, since if officials in a certain office demand bribes, people will have the choice to go to other offices. The 22 Sub-Registrar Office in Delhi register over 20 different types of documents, including sale deeds, lease, conveyance deeds, power of attorneys, and all other documents that need to be compulsorily registered under law. Each year, the 22 sub-registrars together register around 3.5 lakh to 4 lakh documents.

Why did Punjab cops give 'studio' to Lawrence?



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

In a scathing remark, the Punjab and Haryana High Court said that police officers in Punjab provided a studio-like facility to gangster Lawrence Bishnoi to facilitate his interview with a news channel. A Bench of Justices Anupinder Singh Grewal and Lapita Banerji made the remark while hearing a suo motu matter related to inmates' use of mobile phones within jail premises. The High Court ordered further probe, rejecting the report of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and directed the Director General of Police (DGP) to file an affidavit in this regard.

"The police officers allowed the criminal to use electronic devices and provided a studio like facility to conduct the interview which tends to glorify crime with the potential to facilitate other crimes including extortion by the criminal and his associates. Involvement of the police officers may suggest receipt of illegal gratification from the criminal or his associates and constitute offences under Prevention of Corruption Act. Therefore, the case requires further investigation," the Court said in an order dated October 28. The Bench made the remarks while questioning the SIT's decision to file a cancellation report in a case related to the interview given by Bishnoi. The gangster is facing charges in the murder of Punjabi singer Shubdeep Singh Sidhu alias Sidhu Moosewala. His interview was telecast by a news channel in March 2023. In the interview with ABP News, he said he knew about the murder plot.

Rash and drunk drivers may lose their licences soon

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to tackle problems regarding road safety and discourage habitual offenders, the Delhi Traffic Police has written to the Secretary of the Delhi Transport Department to cancel the driving licences of owners of vehicles, which have had three violations relating to dangerous driving and drink and driving or more than five relating to normal challans. This comes in the light of a recently released Delhi road crash report of 2023, which revealed that a pedestrian or a motorist travelling on the roads of the National Capital are among the most prone to road fatalities as data reveals that they constitute 43 and 38 per cent of such casualties respectively. "In 2023, 622 pedestrians died in 618 fatal crashes caused by all types of vehicles as compared to 629 pedestrian deaths in 2022. The maximum pedestrian casualties were caused due to car, jeep and taxis which have increased to 76 this year compared to 69 in 2022," the report read. It also revealed that two-wheeler riders have emerged as second most fatal crash-prone victims. "The



above figure shows 538 fatal crashes of two-wheelers in 2023 as compared to 539 in 2022. These two-wheelers were the worst hit by Heavy Vehicles (HTVs) (89) followed by Car/Jeep/Taxis (66) in 2023," it stated. According to the report, prepared by the traffic police and released by Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora, the number of deaths in road crashes has however decreased from 1,264 in 2022 to 1257 in 2023 despite the increase in the number of vehicle registrations. Moreover, the number of drivers booked under traffic violation has increased from 4,38,052 in 2022 to 6,39,097 in the Year 2023.

Ajay Chaudhary, Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) said, "The efforts of the Delhi Traffic Police have led to a total reduction in road crash deaths in Delhi by 20 per cent over the last decade. Continuing our efforts to save lives, we have now increased focus on more pedestrian centric traffic management." In the report, traffic Police have also identified 10 black spots which includes ISBT Kashmere Gate, Mukarba Chowk, Libaspur bus stand, Kashmere Gate Chowk, Burari Chowk, Britannia Chowk, Bhalswa Chowk, Wazirpur Depot, Mori Gate and Gandhi Vihar bus stand. Further, the report mentioned the 10 roads that recorded ten or more deaths last year are NH-8, Kanjhawala Road, NH-24, Patel Road and Pankha Road among others. The traffic department added that keeping the festival and increasing air quality index in mind 4,000 personnels will be deployed on the roads of Delhi which includes 400 home guards. Moreover, 72 cranes will be deployed to remove or tow away vehicles and 150 motorcycles to regulate the flow of traffic will also be present in the coming months.

DADLS-44

ପବିତ୍ର ଦୀପାବଳି - ୨୦୨୪ ଉପଲକ୍ଷେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ରାଜ୍ୟପାଳଙ୍କ ବାର୍ତ୍ତା

ଦୀପାବଳି ପର୍ବ ଆମ ସମୃଦ୍ଧ ସାଂସ୍କୃତିକ ଅସ୍ଥିତା ଓ ଆଧ୍ୟାତ୍ମିକତାର ପ୍ରମୁଖ ଅଂଶ ଓ ଅଙ୍ଗ । ଐତିହ୍ୟର ଆବାହନ ଓ ଭବିଷ୍ୟତର ପଥ ନିର୍ମାଣର ମହାନ ଅବସର ।

ଆଲୋକର ପର୍ବ ପବିତ୍ର ଦୀପାବଳିର ଶୁଭ ଅବସରରେ ମୁଁ ରାଜ୍ୟବାସୀ ଭାଇଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ଆତ୍ମିକ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା ଓ ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ ଜଣାଇବା ସହ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କର ପୁଣ୍ୟ, ଶାନ୍ତି ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧି କାମନା କରୁଛି ।

(ରଘୁବର ଦାସ)

OIPR-15001/13/0251/2425

ପବିତ୍ର ଦୀପାବଳି ଅବସରରେ ମାନ୍ୟବର ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀଙ୍କ ଶୁଭେଚ୍ଛା

ଆଲୋକ ଓ ଆନନ୍ଦର ପର୍ବ ଦୀପାବଳି ଅବସରରେ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ସମସ୍ତ ଭାଇଭଉଣୀମାନଙ୍କୁ ମୋର ଅଭିନନ୍ଦନ । ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କ ଜୀବନରେ ଅଜ୍ଞାନ ଓ ଦୁଃଖର ଅନ୍ଧକାର ଦୂର ହୋଇ ଜ୍ଞାନ ଓ ସମୃଦ୍ଧିର ଆଲୋକ ବିଛୁରିତ ହେଉ ।

ଆମର ଅଭିଳାଷିତ ବିକଶିତ ଓଡ଼ିଶା ଗଠନ ପାଇଁ ଆସନ୍ତୁ, ସମସ୍ତେ ସଂକଳ୍ପବଦ୍ଧ ହୋଇ କାମ କରିବା ଏବଂ ଓଡ଼ିଶାର ଗୌରବକୁ ନୂତନ ଶିଖରରେ ପହଞ୍ଚାଇବା ।

(ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ)
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

Pharmacist held for killing wife in BBSR 'Officers distributed BJD tickets during polls'

2 girlfriends also held for crime

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Commissionerate police on Wednesday arrested a man for allegedly killing his wife with the help of his two girlfriends by administering excess anaesthesia in the Bharatpur area in Bhubaneswar.



administered anaesthesia to his wife on October 27 causing her death. Following her death, the accused took her to the Capital Hospital and tried to give it a

report and subsequent investigation by a scientific team revealed that the death was caused due to administration of excessive anaesthesia. "Suspecting foul play, we contacted the doctor who performed the post-mortem of the deceased. After getting sufficient evidence that it was not an unnatural death, we started interrogating the accused. During the questioning, he divulged the entire crime," city DCP Pinak Mishra said. "He (accused) confessed

that he forcibly administered anaesthesia. This is a preliminary investigation. A dedicated team is investing the case and if required the main accused will be taken on remand and a scene recreation will be carried out," Mishra said. The DCP added, "The accused has an extramarital affair which led to a fissure in the relation between the couple. As I have already said the investigation is in the preliminary stage, and more details will emerge as the probe progresses."

Pranab Prakash backstabbed me: Ex-MLA Sunanda Das

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A day after resigning from the BJD, former Bari MLA Sunanda Das on Wednesday brought some explosive allegations against the Naveen Patnaik-led party. Sunanda alleged that she was sidelined by the BJD and even denied a ticket in 2024 even though she had dedicatedly worked for the people of her constituency after winning the election on the party ticket in 2019.

"In 2019, I had won by 4,600 votes. I strengthened the party in my constituency. Despite all my efforts and hard work, my ticket was cancelled in 2024. Later, VK Pandian called me to Naveen Niwas and asked me to focus on Kantabanji where CM Naveen Patnaik was contesting from. Despite my ticket being cancelled, I worked diligently for the party. However, I was time and again sidelined by the party and not invited to party meetings. It forced me to quit the party," said Sunanda. Accusing the party of tricking her during the 2024 elections, she alleged, "They

tricked me into meeting party leaders and engaged me in other activities so that I could not get the slightest of clue that my ticket would be cancelled, lest I might have joined some other party. They even promised me that my ticket was confirmed." While initially refusing to take names, Sunanda accused BJD's former organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das and leader Biswa Ranjan Mallick of sabotaging her relationship with the conch party. "Mallick was in BJP and

stab me. I'm sure he is behind cancelling my ticket," she alleged. "Despite making big promises in his father Ashok Das' name, he did not keep his promise. I was never involved in any anti-party activities or said anything against him (Pranab Prakash Das). I never lobbied or requested anyone to become the MLA, rather they wanted to get rid of Debasis Nayak and hence brought me to the party," she claimed. She further alleged that officers were distributing BJD tickets. "We (ticket aspirants) were told to meet DS Kutey and Ashish Singh for party tickets. I had also met them for the purpose." On the BJD's defeat in the elections, Sunanda said, "I believe in Lord Jagannath and the Mahaprabhu gave them punishment for playing with good people who gave everything to the party. Like me, many other leaders had worked day and night for the party but were later sidelined. If CM Naveen Patnaik had himself selected the candidates and distributed the tickets, he would have become the CM again." No comment could be obtained from Pranab Prakash Das or the BJD over the allegations of Sunanda Das.



fighting against me. But they brought him to BJD and harassed me. All the projects in Bari were divided between him and me. Even though I was the MLA, I only had two Zilla Parishads while he was given five," she further alleged. "They had directed the district Collector not to listen to any of my complaints or my supporters. I had to go through unimaginable mental torture because of all this. When I approached him (), he stated that he was Ashok Das' son and would never back-

Ragging incidents escalate at MKCG

Authorities vow strict action after complaint filed

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR

The Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati (MKCG) Medical College has been at the centre of a severe ragging controversy, with reports of escalating harassment by senior students on junior colleagues. For over ten days, alleged incidents of physical and psychological abuse have been reported, raising serious concerns about campus safety and hostel management. According to sources, groups of senior students often numbering over 50



would gather on the hostel rooftop late at night, forcibly bringing junior students to the roof where they were subjected to repeated bowing and slapping. The ordeal reportedly would extend to the early morning hours, and some seniors were said to be under the influence of alcohol during the confrontations. Attempts by juniors to resist were allegedly met with

Professor Suchitra Das. "It's deeply troubling that such incidents have occurred on campus, and we will ensure a thorough investigation. Strict action will be taken against those involved," stated Professor Das, expressing her commitment to addressing the issue. She confirmed that the student's family had submitted a detailed complaint regarding the harassment faced. Despite the establishment of an anti-ragging cell and a recent meeting held following a National Medical Council (NMC) directive, students reported feeling intimidated and unwilling to speak openly about their experiences during individual interviews with the cell. "Nobody dared to open up, fearing further retaliation,"

shared a student who attended the meeting. As part of the investigation, statements are being gathered, and efforts are underway to determine why the hostel administration, particularly the warden, failed to detect and prevent the abuse. The administration is facing mounting criticism for not implementing stronger preventive measures against ragging. With promises of strict measures and accountability, the authorities are under pressure to restore student safety and confidence. The MKCG administration has reiterated that they will not tolerate such misconduct and will work to ensure a safe environment for all students on campus.

Rs 6.28-cr investment fraud Odisha Crime Branch arrests 24 accused

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Crime Branch has busted the Rs 6.28-crore 'Kotak Investment Club' cyber fraud syndicate and arrested as many as 24 persons in connection with the case. According to sources, the cyber fraudsters had created a WhatsApp group named Kotak Investment Club and duped gullible investors to the tune of Rs 6.28 crore by promising higher returns. After receiving money from the investors, the fraudsters used to remove them from the WhatsApp group and withdraw the looted money

within two to three days by transferring the amount to over 100 other bank accounts. Acting on the complaint lodged by a victim, the Crime Branch began a probe and formed seven teams to crack the inter-State cyber fraud racket. The teams arrested nine accused from Tamil Nadu, eight from Gujarat and seven from Rajasthan. Crime Branch ADG Vinaytosh Mishra said, "The arrested persons are not the kingpins. They can be termed as foot-soldiers. After duping people, the kingpin of the cyber fraud used to distribute the money to the accounts of

HC rules in favour of schools' merger decision

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Orissa High Court has ruled in favour of the State Government's decision for merger of schools having less than 20 students. A Division Bench of Chief Justice Chakradhari Sharan Singh and Justice MS Raman gave the judgment after hearing both sides. The School and Mass Education Department issued a notification for merger of nearly 16,000 schools on March 11, 2020. As per the notification, all the schools with less than 20 students were to be merged with bigger schools in nearby areas. The move was undertaken with an effort to improve the student-teacher ratio with

additional better infrastructure facilities, better academic environment, and better facilities. However, at least 168 petitions had challenged the move on the ground that it violated the Odisha Right to Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, 2010. Following the petitions, Justice BR Sarangi quashed the notification on May 4, 2021, following which the government filed an appeal against it. Chief Justice Singh and Justice Raman had then issued an interim stay on the single judge's order. Finally, the Division Bench has ruled in favour of the merger of the schools for improved learning and teaching with reduced burden on teachers.

CM announces Rs 6L each for victims' kin

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday announced compensation of Rs 6 lakh each for the family members of the two Odia labourers who died in the metro tunnel construction accident in Patna in Bihar on Monday night. The Chief Minister also expressed deep grief over the unfortunate death of the labourers. The deceased were identified as Manoj Behera of Gochhabari village in Gania block and Bijay Behera of Kadua village of Nayagarh district. Notably, at least three workers were killed and four others sustained serious injuries during the construction of an underground tunnel for the Patna Metro. The incident occurred near the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Mor on Ashok Rajpath.

In city Cook stabbed to death over fish curry

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A cook at a restaurant in Damana Square in Bhubaneswar was allegedly killed by a fellow staff following a petty fight over fish curry on Tuesday. The deceased was identified as Pitambar Jena of Sorada in Ganjam district. As per the allegations, the accused first hacked the cook with a fish knife and tried to hide his body to conceal evidence. On being informed, the Chandrasekharpur police detained the accused and launched a further probe into the incident.

According to sources, Jena and the accused were working in the restaurant named 'Hotel Maa Taradei' at Damana Square. At night, the accused fought with Jena after the latter denied him fish curry for dinner. Things took a violent turn when accused allegedly took a knife and stabbed Jena to death. The incident spread outrage in the area as relatives and family members of the deceased took to the streets in Damana. "He was working in the restaurant for the last 15 years. We are not sure if they had any previous enmity or were drunk. All we want is justice," said a relative of the deceased.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

No one is sure BJD will regain lost glory



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

The whole world knows that the BJD lost elections only because of arrogant overconfidence. Quite a few rogues materialised from here and there, became advisors and ate up the grey matter of the top decision makers,

particularly VK Pandian, who had risen to be the most trusted lieutenant of Naveen Patnaik in over a decade. Bureaucrats guide politicians everywhere in the world. But the political masters never demonstrate this fact in public nor behave as subordinate animals. Naveen's rabid dislike for rank politicians is a well-known fact, of which his bureaucratic lieutenants took enormous advantage. Twenty-four years of uninterrupted power enjoyment had turned Naveen unwisely complacent. He began imagining from 2019 that he was unbeatable. VK, for all his loyal acts across a decade, had kept Naveen happy by persuading him to believe that no matter whether or not Naveen mingled with the masses, votes would drop in the BJD box as people could not imagine any other political figure who could come close to the boss who was looked upon

as a messiah quite from the beginning. But unfortunately in the closing year of the fifth tenure, VK, having been fleeced by a few self-proclaimed poll pundits, thought it right to keep boss sitting at home snugly so as to run the bureaucracy and the political gang at his will though with the noble intention of turning the State the best region in country on all scores. It is also not untrue that under the stewardship of Naveen, much good was happening to the delight of the masses. Innumerable public welfares were brought in place including hospitals, stadiums and temple corridors of the impossible kind apart from countless schemes for the poor. Fortunately for the BJD, the arrival of Naveen as boss also witnessed an unprecedented boom in mining business. Pyari Mohapatra, the first big advisor and guide to Naveen on all

fronts, had not capitalised so much as VK and his close team did after 2014. The State as well as the BJD made most of this heavenly situation and extracted immeasurable gains. VK is an extremely hardworking and well-intentioned person who is kind of a workaholic. His day starts at 3:30 am and he retires to bed around 10 pm. He figured out that Naveen was an easy-going guy keen only to see everything good happening to people around so as to win the public trust. After Pyari severed the BJD's ties with the BJP in 2009 and won elections massively, Naveen began to imagine he was a political star whose radiance was for always. The masses of course did adore him limitlessly. They considered him a much 'larger-than-life' 'saviour character' who would pull Odisha out of poverty and misery of all kinds. Naveen had also tossed out a

number of political rogues to make masses believe he was the cleanest of all that have ever ruled Odisha. That is how Naveen assumed the proportions of a uniquely incomparable politician among the masses. As he is unmarried and without an immediate family of his own, people trusted him all the more. Until 2019, everything about the BJD was so good. But when the corona virus invaded humanity and the people were forced to live in isolation without doing anything physical socially, the world systems became dysfunctional for nearly two long years. Naveen, being too precious for the masses, was kept away from public glare to avoid infection. But the biggest pity is that he never came back amid the masses even after the deadly virus was tamed with vaccines and perfect healthcare measures.

Naveen was kept behind the curtains for good, but his most trusted lieutenant VK Pandian, working from behind the curtain, took over charge of both the bureaucracy and political affairs and came in full public glare by way of a proxy of Naveen's. When eyebrows were raised by the detractors, Naveen clearly signalled to the public that VK was carrying out his instructions for public purpose. Thus, 2023-24 was a typical year of bureaucrat-controlled administration under the stewardship of VK. No political biggie was able to meet Naveen to discuss critical state issues to determine ways and means to solve problems of the people. Many bureaucrats too lost access to the boss as VK guarded Naveen to keep him safe from mental pressure as he was not keeping so well health-wise. VK cannot be

wholly responsible for this deplorable state. Naveen was insistent that he be kept out of the ordinary issues. So, as absolute power maddens any human being, VK too began calling all shots in all departments. The worst thing his advisors taught him was to incorporate a vague 5T department as if the tenets were not integral parts of any domain. Ultimately, 5T only brought about the fall of BJD. VK was tipped by Naveen to take over as successor. And therefore, VK became boss and flew around everywhere to show he alone mattered probably because his sycophantic associates told him that people were crazy to see him as the next Chief Minister. VK resigned job and became a full-time politician believing he had no match or enemy. He ignored all political colleagues and made solo acts rather arrogantly to cause the most unexpected fall of BJD. He had put horrible fellows in charge of party media management. To add to the woe, a street-grade guy was sent to Rajya Sabha who is only able to scream 'Jai Jagannath' and pour out crap in the august House much to the embarrassment of the members. VK and team too ignored quite a few worthy members and gave tickets to least respected people including one defamed actress to fight in Bari of Jajpur district. All this made the masses lose faith in VK. The public ire was so intense as to eventually see Naveen fall from grace. The people of Odisha did not vote for the BJP; they only discarded an arrogant party that indulged in excesses of all that enrages the masses. The people have just begun missing Naveen for strange reasons.

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In Sundargarh 5 including 3 women hacked to death

Extramarital affair suspected as motive

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH
Five people, including three women, were killed in a violent clash between two groups in Karamdihi under the Sadar police station in Sundargarh district on Tuesday night.
An extramarital affair was

suspected to be the reason behind the incident.
According to sources, a nomad group from Maharashtra's Wardha has been staying in Karamdihi for the last several months. The people from the group often set up their tents in the villages and sold various products to earn a livelihood.
A person named Abinash Pawar also belonged to the group and stayed with his wife and son. According to the al-

legations, Abinash's wife developed an extramarital affair and eloped with her lover. Following this, Pawar brought home a woman from another nomadic group, leading to a rift between the two groups.
At late night, Pawar's group was asleep when the other group allegedly attacked them with sharp-edged weapons and killed five people and leaving four others including Pawar injured.
After the brutal attack, the

'perpetrators' allegedly kidnapped Abinash's second wife and two children before fleeing the spot.
On being informed, Western Range DIG Brijesh Ray, the Sundargarh SP and Sadar SDPO rushed to the village and assessed the situation.
"As soon as we were informed, we rushed to the spot and cordoned off the entire village. Five persons including three women have been killed. Four injured are currently un-

dergoing treatment at the DHH. During the probe, we came to know that four persons entered the village with sharp-edged weapons and attacked everyone," said the DIG.
"We have alerted neighbouring Jharsuguda and Sambalpur police to check key points at bus-stands, railway stations and other places. A scientific team has been pressed to collect evidence. We will soon arrest the culprits," he added.

'Op Kuchi' in S Odisha: Cops achieve breakthrough

But concerns over Mao activities in some districts back again

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR
The Odisha Police marked a notable achievement last Friday (October 25) in a joint operation named "Operation Kuchi" to curb Maoist activities in south Odisha. During the encounter, police forces, along with trained security personnel, clashed with Maoist cadres. While several Maoists were killed in the confrontation, others managed to escape, abandoning a large cache of weapons and Maoist

paraphernalia.
The successful seizure of these materials underscored the commitment of Odisha's law enforcement agencies to tackle insurgency.
According to Brahmampur DIG Dr Sarthak Sadangi, the police are carefully documenting the confiscated items, including sophisticated weaponry such as AK-47s and locally modified rocket launchers. There are ongoing discussions about obtaining necessary permissions to destroy the live ammunition seized to prevent misuse.
However, while the operation highlights a successful milestone, it also intensifies concern for the police as Maoist influence remains active across various



districts. Districts like Boudh, Kandhamal and several areas bordering Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have seen heightened Maoist activities over recent months. Intelligence suggests Maoists might be mobilizing towards Odisha in response to the

upcoming Assembly elections in the country, scheduled in two phases on November 13 and 20. This concern has led to heightened surveillance and intensified combing operations along the Odisha border.
Additional intelligence is also being gathered to map the insurgents' network. Reports reveal that the police have collected 47 pieces of crucial data related to the Maoist groups. The Odisha Police, in collaboration with neighbouring States, is piecing together intelligence to analyze these data points. Meanwhile, cross-border collaboration with police forces from Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand has been initiated to monitor the movements of the ultras and intercept insurgent plans.
Underscoring the importance of inter-State coordination, DIG Dr Sadangi said, "Our collaboration with neighbouring States is vital. We are pooling intelligence to mitigate the threat of Maoist resurgence."

'Run for Unity' held at Paradip Port

PNS ■ PARADIP
The Paradip Port Authority (PPA) on Tuesday conducted "Run for Unity" as a buildup to the Rashtriya Ekta Diwas (National Unity Day) ahead of the 148th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on October 31.
Prime Minister Modi had recently announced that this year, due to Deepawali, the "Run for Unity" may be held on October 29. He had urged people to participate in it to promote unity and fitness.
PPA Chairman PL Haranadh while addressing the gathering, highlighted Sardar Patel's vision of a united India and called for an inclusive,



prosperous and harmonious country. He urged all employees to follow the same resolve and put their best efforts forward to take the Paradip Port to newer heights in coming times.
Haranadh flagged off the "Run for Unity" comprising officers, employees, CISF personnel, sports trainees of GKS, students of the Paradeep College and Orissa Maritime Academy.

Brahmin Samaj holds meet at P'khemundi

PNS ■ PARLAKHEMUNDI
A get-together of the Brahmin Samaj was held at Bada Radhakant temple here recently.
Presided over by Basant Kumar Panda, the event also witnessed participation of Chaitanya Maharaj as speaker and Aswini Padhi and Bhagabat Padhi as guests of honor.
The speakers underlined the need to strengthen the role of Brahmin community, as Brahmins have a pivotal role in society.
Among others, Rupesh



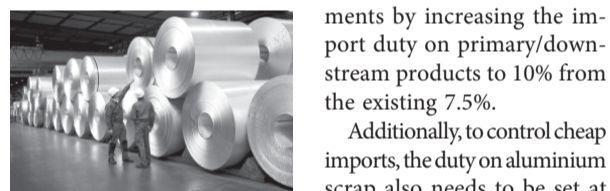
Kumar Sahu, Abhimanyu Panda, Ganesh Panda and Ramachandra Mishra spoke.
It was decided to hold next meeting on November 10. Rajendra Rath coordinated the programme.

Budget 2025 Aluminium producers seek fresh investments in sector

Also urge Govt to contain imports, rationalise duties

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Given that aluminium is a strategic metal with extensive usage in defence, aerospace and sunrise sectors of renewables, electric vehicles, power transmission and sustainable infrastructure, it is paramount for India to be self-sufficient in aluminium production, said The Aluminium Association of India (AAI), the apex body representing the top aluminium producers within India.
Recently, the AAI submitted its pre-budget representation to the Department for Promotion of Industry and

Internal Trade (DPIIT) under Ministry of Commerce, Government of India.
It also batted for encouraging fresh investments in aluminium sector and initiatives from the Union Government to safeguard the industry from surging imports.
Over the past couple of years, imports of primary aluminium have doubled while there has also been a significant surge in low-quality scrap and downstream products, especially from China. The industry members have highlighted that the influx of imports in the domestic market is a deterrent to making new investments in the sector, even when India has all the necessary ingredients to emerge as



a global aluminium hub.
According to them, the primary reason for the surge in imports is the low import duties on primary/downstream products and a prevalent duty difference between primary goods and scrap in aluminium. This is unlike other key non-ferrous metals, where the duty for scrap and primary aluminium is at par.
The AAI requested the Central Government to help ensure the nation's self-sufficiency and attract new invest-

ments by increasing the import duty on primary/downstream products to 10% from the existing 7.5%.
Additionally, to control cheap imports, the duty on aluminium scrap also needs to be set at 7.5%, at par with other aluminium products. This measure would encourage the recycling of domestic scrap and limit the influx of low-quality foreign scrap, helping strengthen the circular economy. Presently, the industry incurs around 17% of its cost of production in taxes, levies, and regulatory compliance charges. To ease this burden, the AAI has proposed an urgent rationalizing of duties on crucial raw materials.
The domestic aluminium industry's existing investments

Resentment as Baladevjew Rath Yatra funds slashed

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA
Strong resentment is brewing among the servitors, devotees and members of Baladevjew Endowment Trust Board against the State Government's step-motherly attitude towards the Car Festival of Baladevjew temple.
For the 2025 Car Festival of the Lord Baladevjew, the State Government has slashed the budget by 50% by sanctioning only Rs 5 lakh. The budget for the event used to be Rs 10 lakh.
The Car festival at the Tualshi Khetra is said to be the second largest after the Rath Yatra of Puri. Both the Sri Gundicha and Bahuda

yatras are observed for two days here each while elsewhere, including in Puri, they are only a one-day affair.
For the devout Hindus, Tulasi Kshetra is as sacred as Sri Kshetra in Puri, Ekamra Kshetra in Bhubaneswar, Viraja Kshetra in Jajpur and Arka Kshetra in Konark. Even, the rites and rituals of Lord Baladevjew temple is similar to Puri's Jagannath temple.
According to Balabhadra Patri, the Executive Officer of Baladevjew Endowment Trust Board, the Board had submitted an estimated Rs 40 lakh for the upcoming Rath Yatra of Baladevjew temple at Ichhapur. But the Mohan Majhi Government has reduced the budget to Rs 5 lakh only.

DSO demands sweeping reforms in edu sector

Stages demo at RDC, Brahmampur

PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR
A demonstration was held in front of the Southern Revenue Divisional Commissioner's office by the All India Democratic Students Organisation (AIDSO) demanding sweeping reforms across the education sector on Tuesday.
They demanded an immediate halt to fee increases and the filling of vacant positions for teachers, lecturers and

other essential staff across educational institutions, including Khallikote University. Protesters also called for the restoration of autonomy for government universities and the waiver of fees for students in cyclone-affected regions. Additionally, they pushed for the reopening of all closed government primary schools across Odisha.
The demonstrators voiced their opposition to the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, criticizing its impact on the educational landscape. They demanded the abolition of unscientific CBME (Competency-Based

Medical Education) practices, the medical exams and the four-year degree courses. Calls were also made for the cancellation of university name registration fees for MBBS students, elimination of irregularities in examination processes and regular research fellowships without discrimination among research scholars.
Further demands emphasised the allocation of 10 percent of the central budget and 30 percent of the State budget toward education, 3 percent of GDP for research funding, and the guarantee of safe environ-

ments for students and women on and off-campus. There were also calls to remove unscientific ideas, obscenities, and distorted history from textbooks and to restore the inclusion of significant figures from the Renaissance and freedom struggle.
Moreover, the protestors urged the government to start direct student union elections, provide free bus passes, and guarantee employment opportunities for students. The gathering also drew attention to social issues, seeking action against the spread of alcohol, narcotics and AIDS in Ganjam district.

OCS successful from JSW Paradip E-Learning Centre

PNS ■ PARADIP
The JSW Foundation's E-Learning and Personality Development Centre for youth at Nuagaon, Paradip in Jagatsinghpur district has come out with its first successful candidate in Odisha Civil Services Examinations the result of which was declared recently.
Saroj Kumar Behera, is a native of Gadakujang GP under Ersama tehsil of Jagatsinghpur district where the proposed mega steel plant is to come up along with in two other GPs namely Nuagaon and Thinkia. Saroj was preparing for Odisha Civil Services exam after registration at the e-learning centre under the guidance of IAS Gurukul which manages the e-learning centre with the

special guidance of chief faculty Suraj Mishra, who happens to be a former civil servant.
"I am thankful to the JSW Foundation for honing my skill at the preparation stages in civil service exams. Under his support, the special guidance by OPSC former Chairman Brigadier LC Patnaik at the viva voce round and daily e-provisioning of current affairs material by the mentors of e-learning and personality development centre was really very much helpful to crack the civil services exam. This kind of facility at our local level provides a good opportunity to our hundreds of local educated unemployed youth to prove their merit in various government jobs and in corporates."

to sharpen their preparations up to the winning mark in job selection, Saroj added.
E-learning and personality development centre at Nuagaon is a pilot project to empower the youth in the project villages and now students from other periphery villages are joining in this model centre of excellence. Many students have scored good marks in many other exams conducted by Government of Odisha recruitment organisations including OSSSC and OSSC etc under the active guidance of CSR team of JSW Foundation Paradip. The centre which commenced on October 1, 2023 to fulfil the ambitions of meritorious youth in the JSW Utkal Steel periphery areas has been a role model in CSR initiatives.

SALCF, Brahmampur holds annual conf

PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR
The South Asian Literature and Cultural Forum (SALCF), Brahmampur, in association with Kabisurya Baladev Vigyan Mahavidyalaya, Kabisuryanagar, hosted its Annual National Conference on Resistance Discourse in South Asian Writing.
The two-day event, held at St. Vincent Retreat, Gopalpur on Sea, Odisha, commenced on October 26.
Vice Chancellor, GM University, Prof N Nagaraju graced the inaugural



session as chief guest, while Professor of English, Tezpur University Prof Bijaya K Danta, delivered the keynote address on "Telling Resistance in subcontinental India (1820- 2020). The Power and Illusion of Dissent".
Former Professor of English, Brahmampur University Prof E

Raja Rao chaired the session.
Distinguished dignitaries on the dais included Emeritus Professor, Sambalpur University, Prof Kalidas Mishra, secretary, SALCF Dr Amulya K Tripathy and Principal, KBVM, Kabisuryanagar K Puurushottam. The occasion also saw the unveiling of Dr Bibhuti Bhusan Chaudhary's book, "Arthatah". Dr Bhagawan Tripathy proposed the vote of thanks.
The conference featured presentation from over 60 scholars across India. In the evening, a poetry recitation ceremony showcased renowned Odia poets, including Bipin Nayak, Bhawani Pattajoshi, Bhagairathi Mishra, Pradip Kumar Panda, Kedar Mishra, Preetidhara Samal, K Shyambabu Dora and Rabindra Swain reciting their poems. Kalidas Mishra moderated the programme.

NDRF Mundali holds Vig Week

PNS ■ ATHAGARH
The 03 Battalion NDRF Mundali organised an integrity pledge ceremony as part of the Vigilance Awareness Week 2024. The theme of this year was "Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity".
The event witnessed the participation of 133 NDRF

personnel, underscoring the commitment to integrity within the organisation.
The ceremony was attended by key figures, including Second-in-Command Vardhaman Mishra, Chief Medical Officer Dr Naveen Kumar, Deputy Commandant Kanhaiya Yogi and Senior Medical Officer Litan Biswas. Together, they led the pledge, reinforcing the importance of ethical conduct in service to the nation.
The event took place at the parade ground of the NDRF campus.



Rajnath Singh to inaugurate Museum of Valour, Sardar Patel statue in Tawang, celebrate Diwali with soldiers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ITANAGAR

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will visit Tawang district in Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday to inaugurate the Museum of Valour dedicated to Major Ralengnao Bob Khathing and unveil a statue of Bharat Ratna Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in the border district. He will also celebrate Diwali with soldiers stationed along the India-China border. Army Chief General Uppendra Dwivedi will also be present. Manipur Chief Minister N

Biren Singh will also join the event. Sharing the information on social media, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu welcomed both Rajnath Singh and the Manipur Chief Minister to the state. "The inauguration of Major Ralengnao Bob Khathing Museum of Valour and unveiling of Desh Ka Vallabh, the statue of Bharat Ratna Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at Tawang, by him in the august presence of Hon'ble Manipur CM Shri @NBirenSingh ji and other dignitaries will be cherished by

us for ages to come," Khandu posted in the micro-blogging site. "The heroic deed of Major Ralengnao Bob Khathing, who bravely led an expedition in February 1951 to bring the Indian administration to Tawang, has no parallel in human history. What 'Iron Man' Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel did as India's first Home Minister by integrating several princely states into the country leaves us forever indebted to him. I on behalf of the people of Arunachal Pradesh heartily welcome Hon Defence Minister Shri @rajnathsingh ji



on the pious land of dawn-lit mountains," the chief minister said. The two monuments dedicated to two great and brave souls will always remind us of their critical contributions to our country's integrity and sovereignty, the chief minister said in another social media post. Set against the backdrop of the eastern Himalayas, Tawang has long symbolised India's commitment to securing its borders. Rajnath's visit comes at a time when India and China reached a breakthrough in patrolling along the Line of Actual Control (LAC)

in Eastern Ladakh. Meanwhile, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, will be in Andaman and Nicobar to participate in festivities with soldiers deployed there. Navy chief, Admiral Dinesh Tripathi, will celebrate with naval troops in Gujarat's Porbandar, while Air Chief Marshal AP Singh will celebrate with soldiers in Jammu and Kashmir. The tradition of celebrating Diwali with troops was started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he came to office. In his first Diwali as prime minister, Modi visited Siachen,

while the following year, he was in Punjab's Amritsar. In 2016, 2017 and 2018, he went to Hiamchal Pradesh's Kinnaur, Gurez sector (Jammu and Kashmir) and Harsil in Uttarakhand, respectively. In 2019, the prime minister was again in Jammu and Kashmir, as he celebrated the festival with jawans in Rajouri. Next year, he was in Rajasthan's Longewala and in 2021, he was back in Jammu and Kashmir (Nowshera). He spent the next two Diwalis with troops in Ladakh's Kargil and Lepcha, Himachal Pradesh respectively.

Scheme launched to train 2.37 lakh young volunteers across country as first responders to disaster relief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan has launched a special scheme to train 2.37 lakh young volunteers in 315 districts across the country as the first responders to disaster preparedness and response. The 'Yuva Apada Mitra Scheme' was launched at the 20th formation day function of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) here on Monday, an official release said. According to the plan, under the 'Yuva Apada Mitra Scheme', 2,37,326 young volunteers from the youth organisations such as National Cadet Corps (NCC), Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS), Bharat Scouts & Guides (BS&G) and National Service Scheme (NSS) will be trained in 315 districts of 28 states as a first responders to



disaster preparedness and response. Besides, 1,300 trainers will also be prepared under the up-scaling of 'Aapda Mitra Scheme' with an estimated total cost of Rs 469.53 crore. The theme of the formation day event was 'Empowering Communities for Disaster Risk Reduction through Awareness for Behavioral Change'. During the event,

the union home secretary launched seven guidelines, SOP and handbook on disaster management. In his address, he urged the Himalayan and Northeastern Region (NER) states to put up their projects on Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in consultation with respective stakeholders according to national programme on GLOF, the release said.

Congress seeks immediate probe into deaths of seven elephants in MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The death of seven elephants in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve has sparked outrage, with Congress leader Jairam Ramesh calling it "absolutely shocking". He has sought an immediate probe into the mortalities stating that this loss represents about 10 per cent of the reserve's elephant population. The Congress general secretary in-charge communications said, "The news from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve that seven elephants have died while two or three more are critical, is absolutely shocking." "This wipes out some 10 per cent of the elephant population in the reserve at one go. A full inquiry must take place immediately and preventive measures must be instituted," the former environment minister said on X, tagging Environment Minister



Bhupender Yadav. According to reports, State Forest Minister Ramniwas Rawat has ordered a Special Investigation Team probe, while officials are investigating potential causes, including the consumption of Kodo millet. The situation remains critical, with three more elephants in serious condition. A forest official said three more elephants have died in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh's Umaria district, taking the toll to seven. "The condition of three other tuskars was serious," the official said.

Madhya Pradesh's Forest Minister Ramniwas Rawat has ordered a probe by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the death of the tuskars and asked officials to ensure strict action against culprits. BTR's deputy director Prakash Kumar Verma said prime facie, the elephants seemed to have died after consuming Kodo millet, but the exact cause will be known after the autopsy. Four wild elephants were found dead in the BTR on Tuesday while four others, part of the same herd of 13 tuskars, were found ill during routine patrolling, officials earlier said. Verma on Wednesday said so far seven elephants have died. They were part of the herd of 13 pachyderms, he informed. The condition of three other jumbos was serious and they were being treated, while the BTR teams were monitoring the movement of remaining elephants that were part of the herd, he added.

Apologise to country: BJP to Congress after EC rejects Haryana irregularities charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday asked the Congress to introspect and apologise to the country after the Election Commission (EC) rejected its allegation of irregularities in the just-concluded Haryana assembly polls as "frivolous and unfounded". In a strongly-worded letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the poll panel on Tuesday dismissed the party's allegations of irregularities in Haryana polls and said it was raising "the smoke of a generic doubt" about the credibility of an entire electoral outcome like it did in the past. Such "frivolous and unfounded" doubts have the potential of creating "turbulence" when crucial steps like polling and counting

are in live play, a time when both public and political parties' anxiousness is peaking, the EC had said. Attacking the Congress over the issue, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said, "In 1,642 pages, the Election Commission has given a detailed reply to the Congress over its baseless and preposterous allegations. The party stands completely exposed now. It does not have faith in any of the democratic systems and is ready to go to any extent to weaken the systems in India." In the manner the Congress is trying to "demean" the dignity of the Constitutional bodies, it is not just ridiculous but suspicious, he charged. "Hence, after the Election Commission's reply, the Congress should apologise to the country and introspect," the BJP spokesperson added.

India accounts for 26 per cent of global TB burden: WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India's ambitious goal to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) by 2025, five years ahead of the global target, appears challenging with a new World Health Organization's (WHO) report pointing out that India accounts for 26% of the global TB burden, the highest among 30 high-burden countries. As per the Global Tuberculosis Report 2024, globally, TB also emerged as the leading infectious disease killer in 2023, surpassing COVID-19. The WHO reported about 8.2 million new cases of TB, marking the highest incidence since monitoring began in 1995. While India led the list was followed by Indonesia, China, the Philippines, and Pakistan. This also represents a notable



increase from 7.5 million reported in 2022. The top infectious disease was found to be most common among men (55 per cent). Women accounted for more than 30 per cent, while 12 per cent were children and young adolescents. "The fact that TB still kills and sickens so many people is

an outrage, when we have the tools to prevent it, detect it and treat it," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, in the report. He called on countries to "make good on the concrete commitments they have made to expand the use of those tools, and to end TB". The report identifies five key

risk factors for TB: undernutrition, HIV infection, alcohol use disorders, smoking, and diabetes, stressing the need for multisectoral action to address these issues. The report said, MDR-TB poses a significant obstacle. Despite treatment success rates reaching 68%, only 44% of those estimated to have MDR-TB were diagnosed and treated in 2023. "Of the 400 000 people estimated to have developed MDR/RR-TB, only 44 per cent were diagnosed and treated in 2023," the report said. The complexities involved in managing these cases make eradication efforts more difficult. While the coverage of TB preventive treatment has been sustained for people living with HIV, multidrug-resistant TB remains a public health crisis. The report calls for increased

funding for TB research and sustained efforts to improve treatment success rates for multidrug-resistant TB, which have reached 68%. "Critical determinants like poverty and GDP per capita also require coordinated multisectoral action," said the report, while calling for increased funding for TB research. On the positive front, meanwhile, the report noted a decline in the gap between the estimated number of new TB cases and those reported. It narrowed to about 2.7 million, down from Covid pandemic levels of around 4 million in 2020 and 2021. In March 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had made a commitment to eliminate TB from India by 2025, as the rest of the world aimed to achieve the TB-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets by 2030.

Diwali an opportunity to help deprived and needy: President Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu Wednesday greeted citizens on the eve of Diwali and said the festival is also an opportunity to help the deprived and needy and share happiness with them. On the auspicious occasion of Diwali, "we should illuminate our conscience, adopt virtues of love and compassion, and promote social harmony", she said. This festival is also an opportunity to help the deprived and needy, and share "our happiness with them", the President said in a message issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Diwali is a festival of happiness and enthusiasm, she said. "This festival symbolises the victory of knowledge over



ignorance and good over evil. Various communities in India and abroad celebrate this festival with great zeal," President Murmu said, adding that this festival also kindles hope for a brighter future. "Let us be proud of the glori-

ous heritage of India. With faith in goodness, let us celebrate a pollution-free Diwali and pledge to build a healthy, prosperous and responsible society," she said while extending Diwali greetings to all Indians living in the country and abroad.

Centre's panel on exam reforms mull reduced outsourcing, online exams

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Minimising outsourcing of staff and examination centres, holding maximum entrance examinations online and capping the number of attempts in major entrances are among the measures being contemplated by a high-level panel set up by the Centre to review functioning of National Testing Agency (NTA). The Centre had on October 21 sought two weeks time from the Supreme Court to submit the final report of the panel led by former ISRO chief R Radhakrishnan. "The report is almost ready. Several recommendations are being made to streamline the functioning of NTA and the conduct of major entrance exams in the country," a source said. Among the recommendations that the panel is likely to make are reducing offline exams or opting for hybrid exams where switching to online mode completely is not feasible; capping the number of attempts in major exams including medical entrance NEET and reducing the role of outsourced staff and centres to ensure sanctity of exams is not affected. "The panel held 22 meetings to address the complexities involved in conducting such large-scale exams, the risks and the security measures.



The panel had also sought suggestions from stakeholders including students and parents and took into account over 37000 suggestions received," the source said. In the line of fire over alleged irregularities in the medical entrance examination NEET and PhD entrance NET, the Centre had in July set up the panel to ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations by NTA. While NEET was under the scanner over several irregularities, including alleged leaks, UGC-NET was cancelled as the ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam had been compromised. Both matters are being probed by the CBI. Two other exams - CSIR-UGC NET and NEET PG - were cancelled at the last moment as a pre-emptive step. The panel also includes for-

mer AIIMS Delhi director Randeep Guleria, Central University of Hyderabad Vice-Chancellor B J Rao, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Civil Engineering at IIT Madras K Ramamurthy, People Strong co-founder and Karmayogi Bharat board member Pankaj Bansal, IIT Delhi Dean of Student Affairs Aditya Mittal and MoE Joint Secretary Govind Jaiswal. The committee was also tasked with examining the existing security protocols related to the setting of the papers and other processes for various examinations and making recommendations to enhance the robustness of the system. The panel had also opted two IIT Kanpur academicians as members - Amey Karkare, professor of Computer Science and Engineering and Debapriya Roy, assistant professor.

Scientists develop luminescent ink with advanced security features

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Scientists at the Institute of Nano Science and Technology (INST) have developed a groundbreaking luminescent ink with advanced security features to combat counterfeiting in currency, certificates, branded goods and medicines among a few others. The INST is an autonomous Department of Science and Technology (DST) under the Union Science and Technology Ministry. Counterfeiting is a growing problem worldwide and researchers are trying to find unique ways to prevent it. Luminescent properties of rare earth ions and the characteristic emissions of bismuth have long been known. However, this is a first of its kind security ink based on luminescent nanoparticles with rare earth doping, enabling excitation dependent luminescence (Under both UV and NIR light it gives Visible emission). By utilising rare earth ions and bismuth, this ink emits different colors under specific light wavelengths—vibrant blue, pink, and orange-red—making it difficult to duplicate, said a statement from the DST.



"Its unique properties allow for clear verification of authenticity in currency, certificates, medicines, and branded products. This innovative solution promises to enhance product integrity and consumer trust, providing a powerful tool against counterfeiting." The ink can overcome the limitations of current covert tags, which are security features usually visible only under UV light and can be easily duplicated. "Specifically, the ink appears vibrant blue under 365 nm light, pink under 395 nm light, and orange-red under 980 nm near-infrared (NIR) light and remains effective under a range of light, temperature, and humidity conditions," said the statement. The luminescent nanomaterial was synthesised using a simple co-precipitation

method at 120°C. After synthesis, the nanomaterials were dispersed into commercially available PVC ink using sonication (process of dispersing nanoparticles into solvent by applying sound energy). This mixture was then used to create patterns and letters through a screen-printing technique. These printed patterns, when exposed to different wavelengths of light, clearly showed the desired colour changes, proving the effectiveness of the ink, said the statement. By combining rare earth ions with well-known luminescent properties and bismuth with characteristic emissions, the team was able to enhance the encryption and decryption capabilities of the ink, improving its security potential.

Autonomous vessel to sail 1,500 km from Mumbai to Tuticorin



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to showcase the technological advancements achieved through innovation led by startups, the Indian Navy launched Sagarmala Parikrama on Wednesday, navy said here. Giving details, officials said Matangi- an Autonomous Surface Vessel developed by Sagar Defence Engineering was flagged off by Defence Minister Rajna Singh here during the Plenary Session of Swavlamban 2024 at Bharat Mandapam. The sea transit from Mumbai to Tuticorin spans a distance of 850 nautical miles or 1500 kilometers. During the transit Matangi will proceed in

Autonomous mode without human intervention, using the indigenously developed 'navigation and collision avoidance software'. Matangi has successfully completed the first leg of the Autonomous mode transit from Mumbai to Karwar covering about 600 km (350 nm) passage at night. Nearly 1,000 km more are to go to Tuticorin for the expedition, they added. Startup's and MSMEs lead the way to successful development and validation of niche technology embodying the spirit of Swavlamban 2024. Strength and power through innovation and indigenization to make science, technology and innovation a revolutionary idea in the country is the objective.

Assam CM reconsiders plan to cut down century-old trees for flyover

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Amidst ongoing public outcry, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the government will reconsider its plan to fell dozens of century-old trees in Guwahati to make way for a flyover.

On Tuesday, prominent personalities and residents criticised the BJP-led government for planning to chop around 25 trees-some as old as 200 years-along the banks of Dighalipukhuri tank for the project. The protests continued on Wednesday, with college students, citizens, and local leaders gathering at Dighalipukhuri to voice their concerns.

"I want to assure you that the government is deeply committed to preserving our city's heritage and environment while advancing infrastructure. In constructing the flyovers from Dighalipukhuri to Noonmati, we are sincerely working to protect the old trees in the area. I urge all stakeholders to allow the Public Works Department a few days to explore an alternative proposal and



assess its feasibility," Sarma said in a post on X. The government is constructing a four-lane 5.05 km long flyover, the longest in the city, from Dighalipukhuri to Noonmati at a cost of Rs 852.68 crore. It is scheduled to be operational by 2026. People hit the streets on Tuesday and protested the government's move to cut the trees on the banks of the iconic pond for the ongoing construction of the flyover. Later, they submitted a petition to the Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court and requested him to take suo

motu cognisance of the matter, which is very important for the welfare of the environment. At night, hundreds of people, including singers, actors and students of Cotton University, held a vigil in the area to prevent the administration from cutting the trees. "Following the public protest during the day, we formed a group called 'Save Dighalipukhuri'. We will hold this night vigil till the High Court takes a decision on the PIL," SPI state secretary Sangita Das said. Netizens also took to social

media to criticise the government's decision, highlighting the trees' importance as habitats for numerous resident and migratory birds. "It's a good sign that there is a lot of anger among people against the government's stubborn decision to cut down trees. However, if this protest does not translate into votes, it will yield no results," eminent neurosurgeon Navanil Barua said on Facebook. The government may yield to public pressure or "high profile protests" in Guwahati, but it will not change its destructive character, he added. "Where there is little or no protest, such irrational acts will continue," said Barua, also a renowned political commentator. Bollywood playback singer Papon, who hails from Assam, expressed his dismay over the loss of heritage, saying, "If we prioritise building the 'new' at the expense of the old, then it will become a historically very young place. Beautiful cities worldwide are celebrated for their greenery and historic

architecture, yet here we are losing trees that are over 150 years old in the name of 'development.' "Because of my love for trees, I have been constantly hurt for years when I see century old trees being brought down to widen roads etc. In the past I have gone to ask the law, only to be told that, apparently development comes before environment!" he said on Facebook. BJP MLA Mrinal Saikia applauded the public outcry against the government's move and said when a tree is cut in a rural area, another grows, but the same never happens in urban areas. "I don't know whether it is right or wrong to cut trees for the sake of human development... But personally I am happy that some foresighted people are coming out to protest against cutting down of trees in #Dighalipukhuri, #Guwahati, #Assam," he posted on X. According to an RTI reply, the Public Works Department, which is looked after by Sarma, stated that the authorities have decided to go ahead with uprooting the trees surrounding the historic

Dighalipukhuri without carrying out any environmental impact assessment and public hearing. As per popular legend, the Dighalipukhuri was constructed by King Bhagadatta, who led the Kauryas in the Battle of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata, during the 'swayamvar' of his daughter Bhanumati. Historically, the pond was used by the Ahoms as a naval dockyard, especially during the 1671 'Battle of Saraighat' on Brahmaputra. Its access to Brahmaputra was eventually closed during colonial times. The connecting portion was further filled, on which the Circuit House was built and later the Gauhati High Court came up. Besides, several other landmark structures like the state museum, district library, Rabindra Bhawan, Reserve Bank of India, a part of Cotton College (first college of Northeast), Handique Girls' College (first women's college of NE), Nabin Chandra Bordoloi Hall and district courts.

EC exposed their lies on election rigging: Haryana CM



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH

The Congress' lies have been exposed and its attempts to undermine the election process thwarted, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said here on Wednesday, a day after the Election Commission(EC)rejected allegations of rigging in the Haryana Assembly polls. The EC on Tuesday rejected Congress' allegations of irregularities in the conduct of the polls, saying the party was raising "the smoke of a generic doubt" like it did in the past. "...The Hon'ble Election Commission has exposed that lie of Congress," Saini told reporters on the sidelines of the 'Rashtriya Ekta Diwas' oath-taking ceremony at the

Haryana Civil Secretariat. Saini said in the run-up to the polls he maintained that the Congress was not visible anywhere on the ground, even though its leaders claimed there was a "Congress wave". "They looted the country, indulged in corruption, and scams in the country, they made people stand in queues for days just to get a gas cylinder," he said. On Tuesday, in a strongly-worded letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, the poll panel said such "frivolous and unfounded" doubts have the potential of creating "turbulence" when crucial steps like polling and counting are in live play and political parties' anxiousness is peaking.

Assam CM slams Jharkhand Government for inaction against Congress minister's derogatory remarks

PTI ■ BAHARAGORA/JHARKHAND

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday slammed the JMM-led government in Jharkhand for failing to take action against Congress minister Irfan Ansari over his alleged derogatory remarks about BJP leader Sita Soren. Sarma claimed that the government hesitated to act against Ansari due to concerns about angering infiltrators. Speaking at a mahila sammanan in Baharagora, where he sought votes for BJP candidate Dineshanand Goswami, Sarma said, "Recently, Congress minister



Irfan Ansari made derogatory remarks against Sita Soren, the sister-in-law of chief minister Hemant Soren, but yet no action has been taken because it might upset infiltrators." Sita Soren and Ansari are both contesting from Jamtara seat. The National Commission

for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) also took cognisance of Ansari's remarks and issued a notice to Jharkhand government, seeking a report on the matter. Sarma, who is the BJP's election co-in-charge, said Bangladesh infiltrators have been entering the state every day. "They are occupying lands and posts of mukhiyas by marrying tribal girls here. Jharkhand politics is gradually going into the hands of infiltrators but the JMM government is doing nothing against them," Sarma said. He alleged that infiltrators have ruined the social fabric of Santhal Paraganas.

He vowed that if the BJP comes to power in Jharkhand, infiltrators would be chased away. The Assam CM also criticised the JMM government for not fulfilling promises made during the 2019 elections, including providing 5 lakh jobs. He pledged that a BJP government would offer jobs, sell LPG cylinders at Rs 500 with two free per year, build 21 lakh houses for the poor, and provide Rs 2,100 to women under the Gogo Didi Yojana. Elections for the 81-member assembly will be held in two phases on November 13 and 20, with counting scheduled for November 23.

Jan Surraaj founder urges people to stop voting for 'jaat and bhaat'

PTI ■ RAMGARH/BIHAR

Jan Surraaj founder Prashant Kishor on Wednesday urged the people of Bihar to give up supporting political parties in the name of 'jaat' (caste) and 'bhaat' (free ration), blaming the voting behaviour for the state's chronic backwardness. Kishor, the political strategist-turned-activist, came out with the catchy rhyme at a rally in the Ramgarh assembly segment where a by-poll is scheduled next month. The IPAC founder, who has worked with political leaders of all hues in a professional capacity, claimed that his home state has been given a raw deal by successive regimes in Bihar as also the Narendra Modi government

at the Centre. "Lalu and Nitish kept the whole of Bihar trapped in 'jaat' for 35 years. For the past 10 years, Modi has been short-changing you in exchange for five kgs of bhaat. You must stop voting for 'jaat' and 'bhaat' if you want a better future for yourself and your children," Kishor said at the rally. Kishor, whose fledgling party hopes to hold its own in Ramgarh which the RJD wants to retain and the BJP is trying to wrest back, also asked the people not to vote for the saffron party "which has made clear it will back Nitish Kumar for another term in office after assembly polls due next year." "Nitish Kumar has replaced

the terror of criminals during the Lalu era with the terror of an unbridled bureaucracy. The ongoing land survey has led to turmoil. People are also witnessing excessive bills for electricity and disconnections without warning ever since the smart pre-paid meters have been made mandatory. "If you support BJP, it will strengthen the hands of Nitish and your woes will continue", alleged the Jan Surraaj founder which is contesting all four assembly seats of Bihar where by-polls will take place on November 13. Besides Ramgarh, by-elections will be held in Imamganj, Belaganj and Tarari assembly constituencies.

Odisha police cracks down on interstate cyber fraud



PTI ■ CUTTACK/ODISHA

The crime branch of Odisha Police arrested 24 interstate cyber fraudsters in connection with the cheating of a corporate employee who lost Rs 6.28 crore. The Additional Director General (ADG) of crime branch, Vinaytosh Mishra, said police froze Rs 16.85 lakh from the suspects' bank accounts and returned Rs 6.8 lakh to the victim. According to the complaint, the victim was added to a fraudulent WhatsApp group and lured into investing a large sum for promised high returns. Following the complaint, seven teams were formed to probe the interstate fraud ring. The police teams arrested nine accused from Tamil Nadu, eight from Gujarat and seven from Rajasthan, Mishra said. Speaking about the modus operandi of the fraudsters, the crime branch officer said that the arrested people are not the real kingpins. They may be termed foot soldiers of a major syndicate that cheats people. The victim was initially given shares worth Rs 19 each, which quickly inflated to Rs 110, raising the fund value to Rs 25 crore, Mishra said. When the complainant wanted to withdraw the money, the group admin allowed him to withdraw Rs 23 crore on August 21, 2024. When he made an attempt to withdraw his funds, he was removed from that WhatsApp group and the application used for transactions was deactivated. From the bank details and other documents collected during the investigation, the police identified 24 accused people from three states, Mishra said. "As of date the team has apprehended nine accused persons from Tamil Nadu, eight accused from Gujarat and seven from Rajasthan," he said adding that six of the accused were produced before a court on October 28 and 11 will be produced before a court on Wednesday. Another seven accused are being brought to Odisha from Rajasthan on transit remand, he said, adding that the investigation is in progress.

Belgian paraglider killed in mid-air collision

PTI ■ SHIMLA

A Belgian paraglider was killed after colliding mid-air with another paraglider in Bir-Billing while they were practising for the upcoming Paragliding World Cup 2024 in the Himachal Pradesh town, police said on Wednesday. The accident took place on Tuesday when the two paragliders took off separately. Feyarets' body has been spotted but is yet to be recovered from the forest. The other paraglider, who suffered injuries and has been taken to hospital, got entangled in the trees and was rescued. His nationality is yet to be ascertained, police officials said. Feyarets, known only by one name, was a free flying paraglider in his mid-sixties, they said.



This is not the first time tragedy has struck the famed slopes of Bir-Billing. In October last year, Polish paraglider Andrez died during a solo flight from Bir-Billing. Kangra Superintendent of Police Shalini Agnihotri said police has directed authorities to register paragliders, adhere to designated routes and ensure they don't fly over military areas.

"A proposal to install special towers in high mountains to pinpoint the crash sites in case of accidents is in the pipeline," said Avinash Negi, director of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (ABVIMAS) in Manali. The November 2-9 World Cup will see participation from 130 paragliders from 50 countries.

BJP MP urges JPC chief to hear out Karnataka farmers' in land dispute with Waqf Board

PTI ■ BENGALURU

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya has requested Chairperson of Joint Parliamentary Committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2024 Jagdambika Pal to invite farmers from Karnataka's Vijayapura district as witnesses to discuss their land disputes with Waqf Board. The Lok Sabha member from Bengaluru South, who is a member of the Committee, recalled his recent meeting with a delegation of farmers from the district and other areas in the vicinity. "These farmers, who have cultivated their lands for nearly a century, maintain records dating back to the



1920s and 1930s. In recent months, however, many of them have been served notices declaring their lands as Waqf property,

without any accompanying evidence or explanation. The scale of these claims is substantial, with nearly 1,500 acres being designated as Waqf property in their village alone," he alleged in his letter to Pal. According to him, the farmers claimed that apart from being served notices, changes have been made in the RTC (Record of Rights, Tenancy and Crops), 'pahani' and mutation registers for some of the land parcels without following the due process of law. "I, therefore, request that you invite the delegation of affected farmers to appear as witnesses before the Committee. Their testimony will provide

valuable insights into the local implications of the proposed amendments and the pressing issues faced by the farming community in this regard," the letter stated. Surya also requested Pal to visit the affected regions in Karnataka to receive complaints and grievances and also have a public hearing with the farmers adversely impacted by the Waqf Board's action. Following allegations by a section of farmers from Vijayapura district that their lands were marked as Waqf properties, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said none of them will be evicted, and notices issued to them will be withdrawn.

UP prepares for Maha Kumbh 2025, 500 projects underway for 42-day mega event

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Authorities are racing against time to put things in place before the 2025 Maha Kumbh - the 42-day mega religious event - unfolds in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj on the banks of the Ganga with the first 'shahi snan' being held on Makar Sankranti or January 14. About 500 projects of central and state governments involving various departments, 15 of them from Uttar Pradesh alone, are at different stages of completion, officials said. During his October 6 visit to Prayagraj, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had announced extension of the project-completion deadline by 15 days to December 15, ostensibly to make up for extended rainfall and higher-than-normal water levels of the Ganga. Usually during the Kumbh Mela, the water level of the Ganges is about 10,000 cusecs to facilitate devotees and saints from across the globe to take the holy dip in



the holy river. "However, when the chief minister had visited Prayagraj on October 6, the water level of the Ganges was about 1.25 lakh cusecs. The water level has now started receding and this has helped speed up various projects," an official associated with various

Kumbh projects said. "Usually the water level of Ganga starts receding around September 15. This time, however, it happened a month late," Kumbh Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand told reporters while expressing confidence that all the projects would be completed within the

deadline. "The size and budget of the Maha Kumbh this time is almost three times that of the 2013 Maha Kumbh," another official said. According to officials, the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, Indian Institute of Information Technology Prayagraj and

Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology have also been roped in for providing inputs for various Kumbh Mela projects. While officials appear confident of completing Kumbh projects in time, there are complaints of even road widening projects getting delayed. "Widening of the road from Bairhaha crossing to the CMP Dot bridge is necessary. This work has been pending since the last Kumbh (2019)," Colonelganj Corporator Anand Ghildiyal said. "Widening of other roads leading to the Maha Kumbh area from Prayagraj railway junction - Leader Road and from Johnsonganj crossing to the station too - haven't been completed. If these are not completed in time, the devotees may have to face difficulties," he added. Anand, the Kumbh Mela Adhikari, said that the entire Kumbh Mela will be set up in an area of more than 4,000 hectares. "The Mela area will be

divided into 25 administrative sectors for efficient crowd management. Apart from this, 2,300 CCTV cameras are being installed." Officials said that about 99 temporary parking spaces and 1.5 lakh toilets are being set up in the fair area. The Public Works Department is constructing 30 pontoon bridges on the Ganga, they said. Gupta, superintending engineer (Kumbh Mela) of the Electricity Department, said 67,000 LED lights and 2,000 solar hybrid lights are being installed for the first time in the Mela area. An Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam official said that the department is laying down 1,249 km of pipeline to ensure drinking water supply in the entire fair area. About 200 water ATMs and 85 water pumps would be installed in the area. Regional Manager of Uttar Pradesh State Transport Corporation Manoj Kumar

Trivedi said that about 7,000 buses would operate for the Kumbh Mela while another 550 shuttle buses would operate from the Kumbh Mela area to the surrounding areas. Similarly, the Railways has made preparations to run 825 trains especially when the Kumbh traffic peaks during bathing rituals. Divisional Railway Manager Himanshu Badoni said that there is a plan to run 825 trains on peak days during the fair. These would be short distance (up to 200 km) trains. Besides, the North Central Railway has approved running 400 trains for long distance. Badoni said that a toll free number - 18004199139 - will be operational from November 1 to enable passengers to get information about different facilities in Kumbh Mela area in their native language. Officials requesting anonymity said that the Maha Kumbh would cost over Rs 6,000 crore to the government.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Traffic mayhem

On the eve of Diwali, Delhiites found themselves stranded for hours as traffic jams clogged major roads

Diwali is the biggest festival in Delhi. It is awaited eagerly by one and all. While the festivities galore it is also during this time, the Delhiites suffer the most; high pollution levels and traffic jams dampen the festive spirit. On the eve of Diwali, thousands of commuters in Delhi found themselves trapped in an unending traffic nightmare. With the festive season in full swing, the city's roads, particularly around popular market areas, became scenes of frustration as vehicles moved at a snail's pace, leaving commuters stranded for hours. Despite pre-announced traffic measures by Delhi Police, congestion overwhelmed key roads, with frustrated citizens questioning the effectiveness of traffic management efforts. Heavy traffic jams were reported across several areas, including the DND flyway, Ashram Marg, and Sarai Kale Khan, stretching into congested points such as Karol Bagh, Taimur Nagar-Maharani Bagh Road, Punjabi Bagh, and Badarpur Mehrauli Road. As the festive rush built up on



Dhanteras, shoppers headed to market areas in droves. Many took to social media to share images and videos of the gridlocked streets, sparking discussions about the city's recurring traffic woes. In a bid to curb the chaos, Delhi Police had announced intensified road checks, anti-encroachment drives and measures aimed at keeping traffic flowing smoothly. Additionally, non-essential vehicles were restricted from entering the capital, and shoppers were instructed to park only in designated areas.

Despite these efforts, the measures seemed insufficient against the overwhelming crowd of festival shoppers. Sarojini Nagar, Sadar Bazar, and Khan

Market saw an enormous influx, leaving shop owners struggling to manage both security and traffic. In some areas, the traffic snarls dampened the Diwali spirit. Ironically, the unexpected security measures, intended to reduce congestion, left sections of the market unusually empty on Dhanteras. As commuters endured bumper-to-bumper delays, voices of discontent grew louder and many people vent their spleen on social media. With Diwali celebrations continuing, these issues are likely to persist. Despite attempts to bolster security and traffic regulation, the administration's efforts seem to have fallen way short, leaving commuters to bear the brunt of another chaotic festive season on Delhi's streets. The traffic jams reflect poorly on the administrations capability to handle it. No denying that more cars are on the roads and given the limited capacity of roads, traffic jams cannot be completely eliminated. But having said that it is also true that the preparedness to deal with such a scenario were inadequate. At places there was no traffic police personnel to control the traffic and many signal lights reportedly did not work. We actively campaigned to bring this issue to the attention of relevant departments through a series of reports well in advance, right before the festive season began. Yet, as always, complacency prevailed.

PICTALK



Artists dance on the Rampath ahead of Deepotsav celebrations, in Ayodhya

'Trophyisation' of weapon platforms

In the propaganda war, the symbolic power of "trophy" weapons extends far beyond the battlefield, reshaping the narratives of geopolitical rivalries



BHOPINDER SINGH

If Ukrainians made a public spectacle of captured Russian weaponry, the Russians did likewise in flaunting captured Western military hardware, from the American M1 Abrams tank, German Leopard tank or the British Husky tactical support vehicle etc., in a public park. The symbolism supports the Russian narrative that the 'West/NATO is attacking Russia, and yet the Russians are triumphing. However, the ground truth is more complex as the Russians had invaded Ukraine and the war status is a stalemate at best, as the envisaged '10-day operation' has gone on for over a year and a half. Such displays are common across militaries, and they understandably do not sit well with the other side.

Now, the Chinese have got riled over similar symbolism as the US Navy plans to exhibit a warplane, albeit of its own, that harks back to the 2001 Hainan Island incident that involved a midair collision of a Signal Intelligence aircraft i.e., EP-3E Aries II of the UN Navy, and a Chinese Air Force F-8 fighter plane. Flying over the tense and disputed South China Seas, the US plane had taken off from its Kadena Air Base in Japan and was intercepted by two F-8 fighters midway between the Hainan Islands and Paracel Islands. Whilst making aggressive passes, one of the Chinese fighter planes collided with the American plane and the Chinese fighter plane broke.

The Chinese fighter pilot's body was never recovered. The damaged American plane along with its 24 crew members made an emergency landing at China's Hainan Airbase without authorization and its crew were detained. There was a counterclaim by the Chinese that the American plane had deliberately hit the Chinese fighter plane, but it was never substantiated, even though the Chinese had the data from the flight recorders of both planes. 10 days of hectic diplomatic parleys ensued with each side blaming the other for provocation and unreasonable conduct.



China insisted on the illegality of the American plane's presence claiming the region to be part of its exclusive economic zone as per the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS)—whereas the Americans claimed patrolling rights under its right of Freedom of Navigation. But embarrassing delays in securing the release of American crew were publicly distracting from the more pressing foreign policy issue of launching the 'War on Terror' for the then US President, George Bush, in Afghanistan, following 9/11.

A due 'letter of the two sorries' (for the death of the Chinese fighter pilot and unauthorized landing) from the American side led the same to be conveniently interpreted as a 'letter of apology' by the Chinese media, and the same led to the release of American crew and the return of the disassembled aircraft. 23 years later, the Americans are bringing back the same plane i.e., EP-3E Aries II, at its Pima Air & Space Museum in Tucson, Arizona, for public display. The 'trophyisation' will be accompanied by a backstory explaining its significance in a historic incident that was fraught with risks of further escalation, for public consumption. The Chinese fear an American



THERE WAS A COUNTERCLAIM BY THE CHINESE THAT THE AMERICAN PLANE HAD DELIBERATELY HIT THE CHINESE FIGHTER PLANE, BUT IT WAS NEVER SUBSTANTIATED, EVEN THOUGH THE CHINESE HAD THE DATA FROM THE FLIGHT RECORDERS OF BOTH PLANES

narrative of 'capitulation' that paints the Chinese reaction in a dim light, even though it had the American plane and its 24 crew members, on its soil. As a riled Chinese social media commentator reacted, "It is not 2001. Wake up! It's 2024" — as if to suggest that the Chinese PLA was no minnow any longer, and it would give a befitting reply.

The unofficial mouthpiece of the Chinese regime i.e., Global Times, captured the reactionary mood in China, "Chinese people saw the incident as a painful memory for the nation and the reported plan to display the US warplane at a sensitive moment when China-US relations are delicate and face uncertainties, is like 'rubbing salt into the wound' and reflects an unfriendly stance by the US toward China". However, the situation in the choppy South China Seas has not changed much with the Chinese belligerence continuing and growing by the day, and with the Americans still conducting reconnaissance air sorties and naval exercises to counter the same.

Countries like Taiwan, Japan and most recently Philippines, are in the direct line of competing territorial claims, against China. Symbolism with the conceptualisation of con-

cepts like QUAD (Quadrilateral of Sino-wary, Japan, US, Australia and India) or Naval Exercises are part of vital international optics and narrative building. In a dictatorial country like China where propaganda has been elevated to a fine art, Beijing understands the power of public perception, hence its discomfort with the re-positing of the Hainan incident, entailing the return of EP-3E Aries II in public imagination.

The Chinese pipedream would like the new US exhibit to include, "calls from China and other countries worldwide to end US reconnaissance operations near their borders", but as the most encroaching, expansionist, and coercive neighbour — it would know better than to expect the American exhibit to be kind towards China's propaganda position. With many famous defections of fighter pilots towards 'enemy' countries (especially from China to Taiwan), the 'trophyisation' of weapon platforms is an old hat, and in that context, the thin-skinned and hyper-reaction by the Chinese recently is churlish.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Revisit West Asia policy



The editorial on the looming war clouds in West Asia (Oct 28) should resonate more deeply with India than with other nations, given India's critical stakes in the region. For decades, attacks and counterattacks in West Asia have been common, but the current wave of violent escalations and genocides on both sides has far-reaching implications globally. India, in par-

cular, faces a dilemma. The current administration leans ideologically toward supporting Israel, despite India's historical support for the Palestinian cause. Additionally, India benefits from affordable crude oil sourced from Russia, although these savings are primarily enjoyed by select private players in the oil sector rather than reaching the public. However, as tensions intensify, potentially drawing in the US and Russia, nations worldwide may find themselves compelled to align with one side. This situation could pressure the government to prioritize ideological support for Israel or risk trade disruptions that could affect India's economic stability—already challenged by an unfavorable trade balance. India, surrounded by a region of strained relations, cannot afford isolation in such turbulent times. It is essential for prudence to prevail.

AG Rajmohan | Anantpur

them easy targets.

These foreign-based numbers make tracing the criminals more challenging. While the Digital India initiative launched in 2015 has successfully propelled the nation toward digital empowerment, it has also exposed more citizens to cybercrime. This calls for increased caution, particularly among the elderly and those less familiar with digital technology. Only by staying vigilant can we protect ourselves from these evolving digital threats.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

RISING CASES OF STROKES AMONG YOUNG

Madam — Countries worldwide are making significant investments to position themselves at the forefront of the semiconductor industry, with India setting aside \$11 billion and considering an additional \$5-10 billion. These are sizable figures, particularly when compared to the relatively lower investment in labor-intensive industries like leather and handicrafts. But what is the government's ultimate goal with such a massive investment? Is it to establish a base

for a larger electronics sector, or to support the expanding automobile supply chain? Unfortunately, the government's response has been unclear and less than satisfactory, with an emphasis on promoting "aatmanirbharta" or self-reliance. However, self-reliance may not be entirely practical given the complex nature of global supply chains. Reducing dependence on allied nations like South Korea and Taiwan may not be necessary; rather, the focus could be on lessening reliance on China. A key challenge for the government in implementing this plan will be securing a skilled workforce. A more strategic approach would be to target specific, scalable segments of the supply chain, such as fabrication, design, assembly, and packaging. Instead of focusing solely on self-reliance, India should aim to establish itself as a key player in the global semiconductor supply chain, maximizing the impact of this significant investment.

Pratyush Tiwari | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The benefits and reality of organic food choices

From freshly harvested crops to packaged foods, the organic label now commands a premium price; is it for real or just a sales gimmick

In recent years, a remarkable trend has emerged, with organic products now prominently displayed on supermarket shelves and featured on packaging across the board. It encompasses everything from freshly harvested crops to essential packaged goods. And, given that the organic brand will cost significantly more, people are questioning if it is worth it. Organic foods offer health, aetiology, and environmental benefits. This type of food is promoted as a more wholesome and righteous option. The concept is straightforward: reduce pesticide use, eliminate synthetic fertilisers, and avoid genetically modified organisms. For numerous individuals, opting for cleaner and more organically cultivated produce justifies the expense. And yet, aren't we, in our way, being chipped away at our true worth as customers?



Years ago, before the rise of industrial farming, vegetables like ladyfingers (okra) were a lot less predictable. We often found worms inside, an unpleasant but

natural reminder of the environment in which they grew. These "flaws" assured us that the produce was authentic, untouched by synthetic chemicals. Fast forward to today, and the produce is picture-perfect, but the trade-off has been significant.

Our vegetables, once vibrant and full of flavour, are now coated in pesticides that strip them of their natural essence. We've all noticed it: the tomatoes don't taste like they used to, and a bell pepper is just... bland. With the essence of fresh vegetables fading from our experience, many sought refuge in the convenience of pre-packaged meals.

The appeal and taste of fast food or packaged snacks overshadow the presence of vegetables offered alongside them. It's hardly unexpected that many individuals find themselves torn between the less appealing, time-consuming superfoods and the quicker, more delicious meal alternatives. Yet, what is the price to pay? Here's the point: it's not about flavour or ease—it's about well-being. Even minimal exposure to pesticides has been linked to a variety of health issues, including hormone disruption and neurological complications. As time passes, these substances may build up within the human body, and despite increasingly stringent regulations, the long-term consequences remain largely unclear. This justifies the higher price tag, reinforcing the value of organic foods. Is the price: it's not about flavour or ease—it's about well-being.

Even minimal exposure to pesticides has been linked to a variety of health issues, including hormone disruption and neurological complications. As time passes, these substances may build up within the human body, and despite increasingly stringent regulations, the long-term consequences remain largely unclear. This justifies the higher price tag, reinforcing the value of organic foods. Is the price: it's not about flavour or ease—it's about well-being.

Equally, it equate to "organic." It promises a reduction in synthetic chemicals and the adoption of more sustainable farming practices. Additionally, organic farming enhances biodiversity and soil health—both essential for the future of our planet. Is this a worthwhile investment? It hinges on what you value most. Choosing organic is a positive move towards minimising chemical exposure and fostering sustainable practices. However, to truly enhance the flavour of your meals, seeking out local farmers and fresh produce that hasn't undergone excessive processing or long-distance transport could be a more effective solution to that issue. Embracing organic choices transcends mere financial considerations; it represents a commitment to your well-being, an enhancement of your culinary experience, and a forward-thinking approach to the future of our food systems.

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



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

POPULATION CENSUS 2025

Madam — Regarding 'Population Census Takes Off in 2025' (Oct 29), the census is far more than a political activity; it's a strategic framework for development as India progresses toward becoming a superpower. The proposed 31 questions for the census should encompass aspects such as the agricultural workforce, tribal and coastal populations, elderly and infirm populations, women's education and economic standing, the skilled youth workforce, informal sector engagement, child mortality rates, school and college enrollment, residents abroad, border-area inhabitants, those who have traveled or hold properties abroad, and OCI and NRI populations in India. The upcoming election delimitation should ensure fair population representation per constituency for MPs and MLAs.

Although caste census isn't constitutionally mandated, it is often used as a political tool that risks dividing society along caste lines. The lack of exact figures on castes among Hindus and Muslims and the absence of official caste records make the legitimacy of caste data contentious, often resulting in disputes and litigation. Furthermore, with the prevalence of inter-caste marriages, the caste census appears increasingly outdated.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

DIGITAL FRAUD

Madam — When a Prime Minister warns citizens about digital fraud, it underscores the gravity of this issue and its deep infiltration at the grassroots level. According to available data, Indian citizens lost around ₹120 crores to digital fraud in the first quarter of 2024 alone—a conservative estimate, as many cases go unreported due to fear of police harassment or lack of awareness. The methods used by fraudsters vary widely and evolve constantly. A common tactic involves scammers posing as relatives to extract bank details, often from numbers originating abroad. This is particularly prevalent in Punjab, where many have relatives overseas, making

FIRST COLUMN

WHERE DO WE GO WRONG?

It is essential to recognise the diverse spiritual paths that humanity traverses



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

I am referring to our relationship with God. To understand this properly, clarity must be there about different classes of men. There are two main ones. The first one is of majority. In this, there are five types. Many do not know God, those who are living in the wilderness, and do have not much connection with civilization. The next are those, who are aware but have no opinion about God. They take a neutral stance in this matter. They are called agnostics. The next level is of those, who are aware of God, but are too lazy to have anything to do with Him, i.e., they don't do any spiritual practices to develop a link with God. The fourth category is of those, who are envious of God. Why is God superior to us, why should we take His shelter, why does He control everything, etc.? And the last category is atheists, who forcefully deny God's existence. Now I come to those, who have faith in God and His instructions, but are of different levels. The first level is of those who do some spiritual practices as rituals. For example, someone has a murti of Lord Krishna in his home, which he has placed on a shelf. He lights an 'agarbatti' every morning after bath and places it near the murti. Someone else may be chanting Gayatri Mantra three times a day. Or someone maybe worshipping Suryadeva every morning with water. These are very nice activities and bring benefits, which are limited in extent. The worshiper has certain material desires, which he is keen on. He is superior to an ordinary man carrying out his material activities in pur-



suit of material goals like wealth, power, fame, etc. The next level is those who do some rituals and also have some faith in the Lord's instructions, as given in bonafide spiritual texts like the Bhagavad-Geeta. But they restrict themselves for two reasons what they can get from God. They don't do more to please God and become deserving, but displease God by their lusty, greedy, angry, hateful, etc. activities. Is this intelligent?

They end up gaining some material benefits for the spiritual acts done, and also punishments for bad acts done. They don't cancel out, i.e., both come to fruition. The next level of faith is better. They do rituals and try to gain purity in action through their minds, senses, and words. This helps them enhance their mode of goodness. They reap many benefits as a consequence. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 14.6) Then, comes the next level, who can be called devotees. They desire to please God in addition to their senses, minds and bodies. They have faith in God's instructions, i.e., try to act accordingly. But they also don't go far enough. This happens due to many reasons like fault in nature (svabhava) and not great 'sanskars' (cultural training).

They only come to a stage described by Lord Krishna. (6.41) Now we come to the highest level of devotees; he is helplessly attracted towards God due to practice done in the previous life. He transcends the ritualistic part of the Vedas. (6.44) Let us, therefore, not go wrong. We should stop ourselves from denying the existence of God staying neutral or being feeble about connecting with God. We have so much to gain even if we are not thinking of gaining liberation. God has so much to offer like opulence of all six kinds including success.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

India's shift toward competency-based hiring



DINESH SOOD

The focus on competency over credentials promises not only to improve employability but also to foster a more inclusive workforce



India is moving towards skills-based hiring over degrees, marking a significant shift in the job market. Companies increasingly adopt competency-based hiring practices, focusing on practical skills and inclusivity rather than traditional degrees. This change is influenced by the growing importance of industry-relevant competencies in today's digitised business landscape. IBM India is a notable example of this trend, as it has implemented a 'skills-first' policy, where a college degree is no longer a prerequisite for recruitment. Similarly, companies like TCS, Infosys, and Wipro are also shifting towards skills-based hiring, investing heavily in training programs in the digital economy.

This shift has broad implications for India's education sector, prompting universities and educational institutions to incorporate more industry-relevant training and competency-based curricula. Many Indian universities are partnering with businesses to offer specialized training in artificial intelligence, data analytics, cyber security, and beauty and wellness.

Recently, Medhavi University collaborated with Orane International, a pioneer global institute in beauty-wellness. Such collaborations aim to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry requirements, ensuring graduates are job-ready from day one. Reports have shown that such partnerships have significantly increased employability in specialized fields, highlighting the importance of aligning education with industry needs. Competency-based hiring is revolutionising university education and professional development in India. In today's technology-driven economy, continuous learning and upskilling are crucial for career advancement. Companies like IBM, TCS, and Infosys



THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT RECOGNISES THAT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IS CRITICAL TO NATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH. AS REFLECTED IN THE 2024 EDUCATION BUDGET, SIGNIFICANT FUNDING HAS BEEN DIRECTED TOWARDS DIGITAL PROJECTS TO PREPARE YOUNG INDIANS FOR A DIGITAL FUTURE

heavily invest in training programs on the digital economy. These programs often include online courses, certifications, and micro-credentials, enabling employees to acquire new skills efficiently.

The Indian government recognizes that skills development is critical to national performance and economic growth. As reflected in the 2024 education budget, significant funding has been directed towards digital projects to prepare young Indians for a digital future.

Over the next five years, approximately 2 million young people will receive skills training. Additionally, 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) will be modernized, with updated course content tailored to industry needs.

This government support is crucial for India's ambition to remain a talent hub. India stands at a critical juncture in its economic journey, with immense potential for growth but facing a significant challenge in bridging the unemployment-employability gap. As the world's fifth-largest economy, India's vision for "Viksit Bharat" by 2047 hinges on effectively skilling its youth to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving job market.

The Union Budget 2024-25 has highlighted this priority, allocating substantial funds for education, employment, and skilling initiatives. However, the task ahead is daunting, with nearly 73% of workers aged 15-59 years lacking formal or informal vocational training. A multi-pronged

approach is essential to harnessing India's demographic dividend and fueling economic growth. This includes bolstering institutional support, strengthening industry-academia connections, and leveraging innovative financing solutions like impact bonds. As India navigates this crucial phase, the success of its skill development efforts will play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's future and realizing its economic potential. Competency-based hiring transforms the job market and creates opportunities for diverse groups often excluded.

In India, many individuals seeking to re-enter the workforce—often in remote or part-time roles—benefit from this approach. During the pandemic, many women took online courses in digital marketing, content creation, and I.T. services while balancing home responsibilities. This shift towards skills-based hiring opens doors for a more inclusive and diverse workforce and paints an optimistic picture of the future of employment in India, full of opportunities and potential for growth.

India's thriving start-up culture is a testament to the adaptability and practical experience valued in skills-based hiring. Startups, often operating with limited resources, place less emphasis on educational background and more on the skills and potential of their employees.

As a result, startups are setting the pace in adopting skills-based hiring practices, inspiring more giant corporations to follow suit

and revolutionise the job market. Their innovative approach to hiring is not only inspiring but also a sign of the changing times in the Indian job market. Transitioning to skills-based hiring comes with challenges, including the need for accurate and unbiased skills assessments.

Traditional hiring, reliant on academic qualifications, is relatively straightforward. In contrast, evaluating practical skills requires sophisticated testing and assessment techniques. Additionally, companies must train their H.R. teams to recognize and nurture talent based on skills rather than credentials.

Acknowledging these challenges is the first step towards overcoming them, and it prepares us for the future of hiring. By acknowledging these challenges, we can better prepare for the future of hiring and ensure a more effective and inclusive job market.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of competency-based hiring are evident. Companies can access a broader and more diverse talent pool by focusing on skills, including individuals overlooked by traditional hiring processes. This approach helps fill critical skills gaps and fosters a more inclusive and innovative workforce.

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

Reviving Bihar's libraries: Bridging the gap between tradition and technology

A well-conceived hybrid model could revitalise Bihar's libraries, providing a space where traditional and digital learning coexist

In today's era of rapid digital transformation, libraries in Bihar and across India are facing a critical challenge: how to remain relevant in a world increasingly dominated by digital content and online resources. Historically, libraries have been pillars of knowledge and learning, preserving history, culture, science, and philosophy for generations. However, with the rise of the internet, mobile technology, and social media, the traditional role of libraries is being questioned, especially in rural areas and smaller towns. The digital revolution has reshaped the way people, especially the youth, consume information. Where libraries were once the sole custodians of knowledge, the



RINKU KUMARI

Internet now offers instant access to vast amounts of data. E-books, online courses, and educational videos are available at the click of a button, challenging the need for physical spaces to access information. While this shift has opened new avenues for learning, it has also contributed to the neglect and decline of public libraries, particularly in states like Bihar. Bihar's once-thriving

library culture has dramatically deteriorated. Where there were once 540 public libraries in the state during the 1950s, only 51 remain today, according to a 2022 report from the Bihar Library Committee.

Entire districts, including Arwal, Kaimur, Banka, Sheohar, Kishanganj, and Sheikhpura, now have no public libraries at all—neither in rural areas nor in urban centres. The closure of these institutions reflects a deeper cultural shift, where reading and communal learning spaces are no longer central to the lives of many. Muzaffarpur, highlights the concerning reality of the fading library tradition. Its few remaining libraries, such as

the Gandhi Smriti Library and Nav Yuvak Samiti Trust Library, are either poorly resourced or neglected. In a city of this size, there isn't a single well-functioning library that caters to literature lovers or cultural enthusiasts, leaving little hope for their counterparts in rural areas. Yet, as the world embraces digital transformation, the role of libraries must evolve rather than disappear. The challenge lies not in replacing libraries but in reimagining them as hybrid spaces—integrating digital resources with the physical charm and purpose of traditional libraries. Libraries, with their rich legacy of providing knowledge, can be transformed into community hubs that offer more than just



books. They can become centres for digital literacy, e-learning, and skill development, especially in areas where access to the internet and technology is still a challenge. In this context, Vinay, a social worker from Muzaffarpur, suggests a forward-thinking solution: modernizing libraries to meet the needs of the current generation. Libraries should be equipped with computers, internet access, and resources

for career counselling and education. "We need to reconnect young people, who are lost in the virtual world, with the world of books," he explains. Libraries can offer both—the serenity and richness of traditional books and the practicality and excitement of digital resources. This transformation would not only make libraries more accessible but also relevant to today's youth, who are accustomed to

consuming knowledge digitally.

The success of such an initiative would depend on concerted efforts by local leaders, communities, and governments. For instance, establishing a digital library in every Panchayat would bridge the urban-rural divide, bringing digital literacy to the forefront while preserving the cultural and intellectual heritage libraries represent. Panchayat representatives and village intellectuals can play a critical role in promoting the use of these modernized libraries, ensuring that the younger generation has access to both digital and physical forms of knowledge. The ongoing digital revolution has created an urgent need to rethink the purpose and structure of

libraries. The Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library in Patna, one of the few libraries still thriving in Bihar, is a testament to the potential of such institutions. However, unless libraries across the state are modernized to embrace digital tools and resources, their future seems uncertain.

The decline of libraries in Bihar isn't just about the closure of physical spaces—it reflects the broader societal changes driven by technology. But rather than view this as the end of the library's role, it should be seen as an opportunity to redefine its importance in a digital-first world. (The writer is an educator in Muzaffarpur Bihar; views are personal. Charkha Features)

Israel must step in if it bans UNRWA, says UN

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations stressed Tuesday that if Israel puts in place new laws cutting ties with the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, the Israeli government will have to meet their needs under international law.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a letter obtained by The Associated Press that there is no other alternative to the agency, known as UNRWA. It has been a lifeline during the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, and the Israeli legislation "will have devastating consequences for Palestinian refugees" in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, he said.

The UN agencies for children, health and migration also stressed that UNRWA is the "backbone" of the world body's operations in Gaza, where people have relied on its emergency food aid and health centers during the more than year-long war, which has killed tens of thousands and left much of the enclave in ruins.

The United Nations is heartened by statements of support for UNRWA from all quarters and countries, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said, and "we would very much appreciate efforts by any member state to help us get over this hurdle."

Israel has alleged that some of UNRWA's 13,000 staffers in Gaza participated in the Oct. 7, 2023, attacks by Hamas that sparked the war. It's also accused hundreds of UNRWA staff of having militant ties and

said it has found Hamas military assets in or under the agency's facilities.

Israel's new laws: Two laws passed Monday could prevent UNRWA from continuing its work. Even the US, Israel's closest ally, joined many governments and humanitarian organizations in opposing the legislation, which doesn't take effect for three months.

Guterres sent the letter Tuesday to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu outlining his concerns.

As an occupying power, under international humanitarian law, Israel is required to ensure the needs of the Palestinians are met, including for food, health care and education, Guterres said. And if Israel isn't in a position to meet those needs, it has an obligation to allow and facilitate the activities of the UN, and "UNRWA is the principal means by which assistance is supplied to Palestinian refugees," he said.

If UNRWA's activities are restricted or halted, the secretary-general said, Israel would have to fill the vacuum "to ensure the needs of the population are met."

"Otherwise, it would be in violation of international law," said Dujarric, the UN spokesman.

Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon responded to the letter by saying, "Rather than condemning UNRWA for turning a blind eye to terrorism and in some cases participating in terrorism, the UN instead condemns Israel."

He claimed in a statement that

UNRWA isn't interested in providing humanitarian aid to Gaza, calling it "nothing but an arm of Hamas operating under the guise of the United Nations."

"Israel will continue to facilitate humanitarian aid in Gaza according to international law," Danon said, "but UNRWA has failed in its mandate and is no longer the right agency for this job."

Dismay from UN agencies: World Health Organization spokesman Tarik Jasarevic said UNRWA health workers have provided over 6 million medical consultations over the past year. They also offered immunizations, disease surveillance and screening for malnutrition, and UNRWA's work "couldn't be matched by any agency - including WHO," he said.

Jeremy Laurence, spokesman for the UN human rights office, said that "without UNRWA, the delivery of food, shelter, health care, education, amongst other things, to most of Gaza's population would grind to a halt."

UNRWA was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 to provide relief for Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel's establishment, as well as their descendants.

Israel faces criticism: Timed to the Israeli laws, Norway announced Tuesday that it will ask the 193-nation General Assembly to request a ruling from the top United Nations court about whether Israel is obligated to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to

Palestinians by international organizations, including the UN.

The International Court of Justice in July condemned Israel's rule over the Palestinian territories, declaring its occupation unlawful. The nonbinding opinion called on Israel to end its occupation and immediately halt settlement construction.

Norway's foreign minister, Espen Barth Eide, told the AP that Israel's policy is making it increasingly difficult for Palestinians to access life-saving assistance. He said Norway will argue that even if Israel's occupation is illegal, it has obligations, "and we believe that these are not met."

Guterres told Netanyahu that while the Israeli laws prohibit any activity by UNRWA "within the sovereign territory of the State of Israel," the UN considers Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem part of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel has no sovereignty because of its occupation.

Meanwhile, at the UN's regular Security Council meeting on the Middle East - this month open to all UN members - speakers supported UNRWA and virtually all called for immediate cease-fires in Gaza and Lebanon.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield expressed deep concern at the Israeli legislation, saying, "right now there is no alternative to UNRWA when it comes to delivering food and other life-saving aid in Gaza."

Spanish authorities say 63 dead from devastating flash floods



AP ■ BARCELONA

At least 63 people have died in Spain's eastern region of Valencia after flash floods swept away cars, turned village streets into rivers and disrupted rail lines and highways in the worst natural disaster to hit the European nation in recent memory.

Emergency services in the eastern region of Valencia confirmed the death toll on Wednesday.

Rainstorms on Tuesday caused flooding in a wide swath of southern and eastern Spain. Floods of mud-colored water tumbled vehicles down streets at frightening speeds. Pieces of wood swirled with household articles. Police and rescue services used helicopters to lift people from their homes and cars.

Authorities reported several missing people late Tuesday, but the following morning brought the shocking announcement of dozens found dead.

Over 1,000 soldiers from Spain's emergency response units were deployed to the devastated areas.

"Yesterday was the worst day of my life," Ricardo Gabaldón, the mayor of Utiel, a town in Valencia, told national broadcaster RTVE. He said several people were still missing in his town.

"We were trapped like rats. Cars and trash containers were flowing down the streets. The water was rising to three meters," he said.

Spain has experienced similar autumn storms in recent years, but nothing compared to the devastation over the last two

days.

The death toll could easily rise with other regions yet to report victims and search efforts continuing in areas with difficult access. In the village of Letur in the neighboring Castilla La Mancha region, Mayor Sergio Marín Sánchez said six people were missing. A high-speed train with nearly 300 people on board derailed near Malaga, although rail authorities said no one was hurt. High-speed train service between Valencia city and Madrid was interrupted, as were several commuter lines.

Valencian regional President Carlos Mazón urged people to stay at home so as not to complicate rescue efforts, with travel by road already difficult due to fallen trees and wrecked vehicles.

"The neighborhood is destroyed, all the cars are on top of each other, it's literally smashed up," Christian Viena, a bar owner in the Valencian village of Barrio de la Torre, said by phone. "Everything is a total wreck, everything is ready to be thrown away. The mud is almost 30 centimeters deep."

Spain's central government set up a crisis committee to help coordinate rescue efforts. The rain had subsided in Valencia by late Wednesday morning. But more storms were forecast through Thursday, according to Spain's national weather service.

Spain is still recovering from a severe drought earlier this year. Scientists say increased episodes of extreme weather are likely linked to climate change.

Biden calls Trump supporters garbage, sparks backlash

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden sparked a controversy when he compared supporters of Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump to garbage. Biden was commenting on a racist joke a comedian made at a Trump rally days earlier likening Puerto Rico to an "island of garbage."

"The only garbage I see floating out there is his supporters, his demonisation of Latinos is unconscionable, and it's un-American. It's totally contrary to everything we've done, everything we've been," Biden said in his remarks on a campaign call for Latino voters on Tuesday.

"Just the other day, a speaker at his rally called Puerto Rico a 'floating island of garbage.' Well, let me tell you something. I don't know the Puerto Rican that — that I know — or a Puerto Rico, where I'm from — in my home state of Delaware,

they're good, decent, honorable people," he said.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio raised this issue in front of thousands of Trump supporters in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Trump, the former president, was also quick to condemn it. Trump, who was holding a rally in Allentown, described Biden's remarks as "terrible," and likened them to Hillary Clinton's comments calling some of Trump's supporters "deplorable" in 2016.

"So, you have to remember Hillary [Clinton]—she said 'deplorable' and then she said 'irredeemable,'" Trump said. "Garbage? I think is worse."

In a damage control exercise, Biden later tried to explain his remarks on X.

"Earlier today I referred to the hateful rhetoric about Puerto Rico spewed by Trump's supporter at his Madison Square Garden rally as garbage—which is the only word I can think of

to describe it," Biden wrote. "His demonisation of Latinos is unconscionable. That's all I meant to say. The comments at that rally don't reflect who we are as a nation," Biden said.

Trump's running mate Ohio Senator JD Vance described it as disgusting.

"This is disgusting. Kamala Harris and her boss Joe Biden are attacking half of the country," he wrote on X.

"There's no excuse for this. I hope Americans reject it," he added.

Karoline Leavitt, the Trump Campaign's National Press Secretary, said in a statement that Trump is backed by Latinos, Black voters, union workers law enforcement officers, border patrol agents and Americans of all faiths.

"(Kamala) Harris, (Tim) Walz and Biden have labelled these great Americans as fascists, Nazis, and now, garbage," Leavitt said.

China successfully launches new crew to space station

PTI ■ BEIJING/JINQUAN

China on Wednesday successfully launched its spaceship sending three astronauts, including the country's first female space engineer on a six months' mission to fine tune its low orbiting space station.

The Shenzhou-19 crewed spaceship was launched by a Long March-2F carrier rocket, early Wednesday from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China.

About 10 minutes after the launch, the Shenzhou-19 spaceship separated from the rocket and entered its designated orbit.

The crew members are in good shape and the launch is a complete success, the CMSA announced.

The spaceship will perform a fast, automated rendezvous and docking with the front port of the space station core module Tianhe in about 6.5 hours, forming a combination of three modules and three spacecraft. China built its space station

after it was reportedly excluded from the International Space Station (ISS) over concerns that China's space programme is manned by its military, the People's Liberation Army, (PLA).

It is currently the only country to have a space station.

The ISS is a collaborative project of several countries. Observers say China's space station may become the only one of its kind in orbit once the ISS retires in the coming years.

The two robotic arms of the station, especially the long one which has the ability to grab objects including satellites from space, drew international concerns.

Early this month China announced its plans for the further development of space programmes which included launching a manned lunar mission, construction of a lunar space station, exploration of habitable planets and extra-terrestrial life to expand its space programme in the next few decades.

Besides building its space sta-



tion, China has launched a number of space missions including a lunar probe that collected samples for the first time from the far side of the moon and brought them back to earth for scientific studies.

The Shenzhou-19 crew consists of mission commander Cai Xuzhe, and astronauts Song Lingdong and Wang Haoze. Wang is currently China's only female space engineer and the third Chinese woman partici-

pating in a crewed spaceflight mission, the CMSA said.

The tasks for new crew included conducting space science and application tests, performing extravehicular activities, installing protective devices against space debris, and managing the installation and recycling of extravehicular payloads and equipment.

Lin Xiqiang, CMSA spokesperson told a press conference on Tuesday that the crew will

carry out 86 space science research and technology experiments, covering various fields including space life science, microgravity fundamental physics, space material science, space medicine and new space technologies.

The Shenzhou-19 astronauts will complete in-orbit rotation with the trio currently manning and stay at the space station for approximately six months.

Wang Haoze explained that she will be mainly responsible for space experimental projects, cargo management, and space station operation management. China is also engaging in discussions to select and train astronauts from partner nations, inviting international counterparts to join its space station flight missions, Lin said.

Considering the close ties, an astronaut from Pakistan was expected to join in future space station missions.

"No matter which country participates, it is humanity's collective quest to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos," Lin said.

NY rally was an absolute lovefest: Trump

AP ■ ALLENTOWN

Urged by some allies to apologise for racist comments made by speakers at his weekend rally, Donald Trump took the opposite approach on Tuesday, saying it was an "honour to be involved" in such an event and calling the scene a "lovefest" — the same term he has used to describe the Jan. 6 insurrection at the US Capitol.

Trump gathered supporters and reporters to his Mar-a-Lago resort two days after a massive rally at Madison Square Garden featured a number of crude remarks by various speakers, including a set by comedian Tony Hinchcliff in which he joked that Puerto Rico was a "floating island of garbage." Some of Trump's top Republican allies have condemned the remarks, and his campaign took the rare step of publicly distancing itself from Hinchcliff's joke, though not the other comments.

But given the opportunity to apologise at multiple events and in interviews Tuesday, Trump instead leaned in. Speaking at his Florida resort, he said that "there's never been an event so beautiful" as his Sunday rally in his hometown of New York.

"The love in that room. It was breathtaking," he said. "It was like a lovefest, an absolute lovefest. And it was my honor to be involved."

On Tuesday night, he told Fox News' Sean Hannity that he knows nothing about Hinchcliff but said, "I can't imagine it's a big deal."

With just a week before Election Day, some Trump allies have voiced alarm that the rally, which was supposed to highlight the Republican presidential nominee's closing message in grand New York fashion, has instead served as a distraction and even a liability, given the electoral importance of Puerto Ricans who live in Pennsylvania and other key swing states.

"This is not a time to have anyone criti-



cize Puerto Rico or Latinos," former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who challenged Trump for the GOP presidential nomination and later endorsed him, said in an interview with Fox News Channel.

Trump later held a rally in Allentown, Pennsylvania, a city with a large Hispanic population, where Puerto Rico's shadow U.S. senator, Zoraida Buxo, joined him and defended the former president's record.

"We need this man to be our commander in chief," said Buxo, who cannot vote in the Senate because Puerto Rico is not a state. "He will make us feel safe and he will protect us."

Still, there was anger in Allentown. Ivet Figueroa, 61, stood outside the rally venue holding a trash can with the words "Trash Trump" on it.

She said of the insult and Trump: "The person who said it was vetted by him. So that's what he allowed, so he has to take responsibility for what he said. Now it's too

late for saying sorry. I don't want an apology. I want justice, and justice is on Nov. 5."

The fallout from the Madison Square Garden event risked highlighting voters' concerns about Trump's rhetoric and penchant for controversy in the closing stretch as both campaigns are scrambling for votes.

Speakers at the rally also made racist comments targeting Latinos, Black people, Jews and Palestinians, along with sexist insults directed at Trump's Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

In an interview with ABC News earlier Tuesday, Trump claimed to not know Hinchcliff but did not denounce what he said.

"I don't know him. Someone put him up there. I don't know who he is," Trump said, according to the network, insisting that he hadn't heard Hinchcliff's comments. When asked what he made of them, Trump "did not take the opportunity to denounce them, repeating that he didn't hear the comments," ABC reported.

In the Hannity interview, Trump said people were trying to make the comedian's appearance into a "big deal" when it "has nothing to do with the party, has nothing to do with us."

The comments have drawn outrage from Puerto Rican leaders.

The archbishop of Puerto Rico called on Trump to disavow them, saying it wasn't enough for the campaign to say the joke didn't reflect Trump's views. The president of Puerto Rico's Republican Party called the "poor attempt at comedy" by Hinchcliff "disgraceful, ignorant and totally reprehensible."

In Pennsylvania, where Trump campaigned Tuesday night, the Latino eligible voter population has nearly tripled since 2000. More than half of those are Puerto Rican voters.

Trump is unstable, obsessed with revenge: Harris

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris launched a fierce attack on her Republican rival Donald Trump, describing him as "unstable" and "obsessed with revenge" while urging Americans to reject his chaos and division.

Making a passionate appeal to her countrymen, Vice President Harris used the last major speech of her campaign to present herself as a fighter who would usher in a new generation of leadership.

"Donald Trump intends to use the United States military against American citizens who simply disagree with him. People he calls — 'the enemy from within.' This is not a candidate for President who is thinking about how to make your life better," she said.

"This is someone who is unstable, obsessed with revenge, consumed with grievance, and out for unchecked power," Harris said. Harris, 60, will take on Trump, 78, in the November 5 election.

Addressing thousands of people at the Ellipse in Washington, DC, where Trump told his supporters on January 6, 2021, to "fight like hell," shortly before they ransacked the US Capitol, Harris described the election as an existential choice between the liberties and the "chaos and division."

"He has an Enemies List of people he intends to prosecute. He says one of his highest priorities is to set free the violent extremists who assaulted those law enforcement officers on January 6," she said.

Harris said it was time to stop pointing fingers and start locking arms.

"It is time to turn the page on the drama



and conflict, the fear and division. It is time for a new generation of leadership in America," she said.

"And I am ready to offer that leadership as the next President of the United States," she said.

In discussing her policy plans, she cast herself as a president who would expand Medicare to cover home health care, who would back women's reproductive rights and a president who would prize compromise.

"I am someone who has spent most of my career outside of Washington. So I know that not all good ideas come from here. I am not afraid of tough fights against bad actors and powerful interests," she said.

Harris said her mother instilled in her a drive to hold accountable those who use their wealth or power to take advantage of other people.

"The drive to protect hard-working Americans who aren't always seen or heard, and deserve a voice. That is the kind of president I will be," Harris said.

When elected, Harris said she would walk into the Oval Office, with a To-Do list.

"Full of priorities on what I will get done for the American people. And I will work with everyone — Democrats, Republicans, and Independents — to help Americans who are working hard and still struggling to get ahead," she said.

Petrol, diesel commission hiked; no change in prices

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commission paid to petrol pump dealers on sale of petrol and diesel has been hiked without change in retail price but rates will go down in several places in states such as Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Himachal Pradesh on account of intrastate freight rationalisation.

Commission on sale of petrol has been hiked by 65 paise a litre and that on diesel by 44 paise per litre. Alongside, the state-owned firms also rationalised intrastate tariffs which could lead to a reduction in rates of up to Rs 4.5 a litre in some parts.

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) -- the state-owned market leader -- on October 29 wrote to dealers informing of an increase in dealer margin for all categories.

"Considering the hardship of retail outlets selling less than Rs 170 per kilolitre per month, special care has been taken to alleviate the same," it said. "You will be entitled to an upward revision of dealer margin of approximately Rs 0.65 per litre for petrol and Rs 0.44 a litre of diesel."

This is the first revision in commission paid to dealers in nearly eight years. All the three state fuel retailers -- IOC, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) -- took to X to announce the revision in dealers' commission.

"IndianOil is pleased to announce a revision in the dealer margins (effective from



30th October 2024), following the resolution of a pending litigation. This will have no additional impact on the Retail Selling Price of products," IOC said in a post on X.

BPCL in a post said the revised commission will be effective October 30. This would be "at no additional cost to consumers".

"On the auspicious occasion of Deepawali, HPCL is happy to announce revision in dealer commission effective 30th October 2024. This will have no additional impact on the Retail Selling Price of Petrol & Diesel," HPCL said.

"Thru this revision, HPCL aims to strengthen the ability of our dealer network in delivering superior customer experience and enhanced service standards for millions

of customers who visit our Retail Outlets on a daily basis."

The revision, it said, also aims at delivering happiness to all the committed staff employed at retail outlets and their families.

Dealers commission was last revised on October 5, 2016 when it was raised to Rs 1,868.14 per kilolitre, plus 0.875 per cent of produce billable price on petrol and Rs 1,389.35 per kl plus 0.28 per cent of product billable price on diesel. This has now gone up to Rs 0.65 per litre on petrol and Rs 0.44 a litre on diesel.

The three firms also rationalised intra-state freight that will result in a cut in petrol and diesel prices in several places in states such as Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and

Himachal Pradesh.

"Further, demonstrating the core value of Nation First, our endeavour to provide affordable petrol and diesel across the length and breadth of the country on a sustained basis has come to fruition. #IndianOil has undertaken intrastate rationalisation of freight which will reduce variation of retail selling price of product across various markets within a state, except in geographies where Model Code of Conduct is in place," IOC said.

BPCL said intra-state freight rationalisation will reduce price disparities in petrol/diesel, benefiting consumers, especially in remote areas.

"Simultaneously, we have also undertaken intrastate rationalisation of freight thus benefiting customers at remote places, far from our supply locations, except in areas under model code of conduct," HPCL said.

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri welcomed the intra-state freight rationalisation which he said will "benefit consumers located at remote locations (far from petrol and diesel depots of oil marketing companies) which will result in a decrease in petrol and diesel prices in several parts of the country. (Decision in poll-bound states and constituencies will be implemented later)".

In a post on X, he cited the example of Kunanpally and Kalimela in Odisha's Malkangiri where petrol price will reduce by Rs 4.69 and Rs 4.55, respectively; and diesel

rates will be cut Rs 4.45 and Rs 4.32, respectively.

Similarly, prices will reduce by Rs 2.09 in petrol price and Rs 2.02 in diesel price in Chhattisgarh's Sukma.

Rates will also be cut in Bijapur, Bailadila, Katekalyan, Bachel, and Dantewada of the state.

Similarly, prices will also be cut in several places in Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Mizoram. "The dealer commission increase will provide better services to approximately 7 crore citizens who visit our fuel retail outlets in the country everyday, without increasing fuel prices," he said.

"The fulfilment of this demand pending for the last 7 years will bring joy and happiness in the lives of petrol pump dealers and nearly 10 lakh staff working at more than 83,000 petrol pumps across the country."

Ajay Bansal, President of All India Petroleum Dealers' Association, welcomed the decision saying it will help meet a part of the increase in cost of running petrol pumps over the past eight years.

"This revision comes after seven years and eight months. We welcome it," he said, adding that the dealers have withdrawn a legal case they had filed against the oil companies over oil companies enforcing marketing discipline guidelines.

The dealer commission revision has happened following the withdrawal of the court cases.

BRICS+ group's share in global goods exports can overtake G7 by 2026

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The share of BRICS+ grouping in global merchandise exports can overtake the G7 bloc by 2026, EY India said on Wednesday.

The October edition of EY Economy Watch reveals a significant shift in global trade dynamics, with the BRICS+ group rapidly increasing its share in merchandise exports and imports.

From 2000 to 2023, the BRICS+ group's share of global merchandise exports has risen from 10.7 per cent to 23.3 per cent, marking an impressive increase of 12.6 percentage points.

In contrast, the G7's share has seen a notable decline, dropping from 45.1 per cent to 28.9 per cent. Meanwhile, the rest of the world has maintained a relatively stable share, increasing slightly from 44.2 per cent to 47.9 per cent. G7 is a grouping of advanced economies -- the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

This trend highlights the growing prominence of the BRICS+ group in the global trade arena, suggesting a potential shift towards a multipolar global economic landscape, EY India said.

"Given the present trends and the likelihood of several new members joining the BRICS+ group being strong, the share of BRICS+ in global merchandise exports can overtake that of the G7 group by 2026," EY India Chief Policy Advisor DK Srivastava said.



BRICS, consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has now expanded with five additional members - Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Central to this transformation are India and China, two key members of the BRICS+ alliance. In 2023, they ranked third and first, respectively, globally in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), both countries are projected to retain these positions by 2030.

China's contribution to BRICS+ exports has surged dramatically, increasing from 36.1 per cent in 2000 to 62.5 per cent in 2023. India has also made significant strides, contributing 7.9 per cent to BRICS+ exports in 2023.

EY's analysis further underscores the increasing importance of high-tech exports from BRICS+ countries.

The group's share of global high-tech exports has risen significantly, from just 5 per cent in 2000 to 32.8 per cent in 2022.

This shift reflects a strategic move toward technology-intensive products, positioning BRICS+ nations as vital players in the global

high-tech market, it added. In addition to trade dynamics, the currencies of BRICS+ nations are gaining traction in the global economy. The Yuan has remained stable, with slight appreciation, while the Indian rupee has faced depreciation, particularly since 2018.

Notably, the share of the US dollar as a global reserve currency has declined from 71.5 per cent in 2000 to 58.2 per cent in 2024, signalling a potential shift toward a more multipolar currency framework.

"As geopolitical tensions continue, the coordinated policies among BRICS+ members may challenge the established dominance of the G7 and the US dollar, paving the way for a new multipolar global economic landscape," Srivastava said.

The BRICS+ group is establishing a platform for conducting international trade and investment transactions, which could become a low-cost alternative to the existing SWIFT platform.

The group is also developing a trade and reserve currency, backed by gold and other select commodities, Srivastava added.

Businesses expect resounding sales this Diwali

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The roads are jammed and shops chock-a-block as people make beelines for malls and markets to grab just the perfect gift to make the festival of lights a memorable affair for their loved ones.

Dinner sets, beauty hampers, gourmet food baskets, electronic gadgets, and the ever reliable chocolates and mithai, the options are endless for the fervent Diwali shoppers but the task is to balance budgets with big expectations.

Khanna, a homemaker in her 30s, knows it too well as she treads the fine line between temptation and staying within budget.

"The temptation to give innovative and expensive gifts to your near and dear ones is always there but one can't go out of budget too. The key is in finding the right balance," Khanna told PTI.

On her shopping list is an eclectic mix of home decor for friends, smartwatch for her husband, board games for children and home appliances

for house helps. "Gifting during the Diwali festival comes with a huge responsibility. I guess zeroing in on budget and what to give to whom is never easy, and I doubt if anyone has mastered it," she added.

The festive season has always been the favourite time of the year for businesses and this year is no different as leading players in the online and offline retail sector are expecting "resounding sales".

While Bikano, a leading name in the traditional snack market, has set a mammoth "Rs 300 crores plus" year-end target in the festive season, Surya Roshni, a lighting and consumer durable company, explained how a large proportion of their sales, accounting to about "30 per cent", happens during this period.

"When it comes to the festivities, most people tend to spend more than usual, which is somewhat of a distinct period when the purchasing tendencies flout all the rules," Jitendra Agrawal, ceo of Surya Roshni,



said. He added that it's not just the urban centres but the semi-urban centres have also been "recording steady growth" in the festive period.

Chirag Gupta, founder and ceo of premium snacking company 4700BC, is upbeat about this year's demand, witnessing a "20-25 per cent" increase for its festive gourmet hampers.

The festive season has set the cash registers ringing for brands selling their wares online. And like previous years, the online sector continues to garner strong demand.

For instance, online marketplace Snapdeal

witnessed a "1.8X growth" in order volumes during the festive sale.

"Women's fashion (2.5 X growth), children's fashion (2X growth) and home decor (1.6X increase) are among the categories that saw significant increase compared to the previous year," a Snapdeal spokesperson said.

In addition to buying physical gifts, shoppers have come to rely on digital gift cards that offer minimum inconvenience and enticing discounts.

Gift cards are not just hassle free for the ones gifting but also allow the recipients the freedom of choice. Tata Neu's gift card

marketplace, which offers a diverse range of gifting options from high-value electronics to everyday essentials like food and travel, said the category has become very popular on their platform with "over 50 per cent" of existing customers returning frequently to make purchases.

Revering in the festive spirit are also the alcohol brands, with many ditching conventional gift choices such as bed linen or crockery sets for spirits.

Major players in the breweries and distilleries industry, such as DeVANS Modern Breweries Ltd and Radico Khaitan, are witnessing growing demand and bumper sales. They have launched new variants and festive packs for their premium products.

Mocktail brand Swizzle has also recorded a noticeable uptick of 25 per cent in the sales last month.

Last year, according to figures by the excise department, 64 lakh liquor bottles worth about Rs 121 crore were bought by people in Delhi in

just three days running up to Diwali.

"One of the reasons liquor has emerged as a preferred gifting choice during festivals is its strong association with celebration and social gatherings.

"This year, we hope for this trend to continue and will show sustained growth in alcohol sales, fuelled by an expanding customer base and a heightened interest in distinctive beverage experiences," said Amar Sinha, Chief Operating Officer at Radico Khaitan Limited.

Gifting an "experience" in Diwali also has its own loyal takers.

Instead of delivering a package to the loved ones, many are opting to give them a break from the daily hustle by booking an exclusive staycation at five-star hotels and resorts. The Claridges, for instance, has an array of staycation offers at its picturesque Uttarakhand, with packages starting at Rs 20,000 inclusive of breakfast.

3F Oil Palm inks pact with Karnataka Government to empower farmers

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The 3F Oil Palm on Wednesday said it has signed a pact with the Karnataka government to advance sustainable agriculture in rural communities.

This partnership will provide farmers access to advanced agricultural technologies, training programmes and essential resources to enhance productivity and support Karnataka's growing horticultural sector, according to a statement.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the Department of Horticulture of Karnataka with an aim to increase palm



oil productivity, create economic growth and empower farmers with sustainable knowledge, offering a model for long-term agricultural success for oil palm cultivators in Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and Sedam taluk of Gulbarga district, the company said in a statement. The company plans to introduce cultivation practices, focusing on sustainable growth and community empowerment.

INBRIEF

VIT AP UNIVERSITY HONoured WITH BHARAT BLOCKCHAIN AWARD

AMARAVATI: VIT AP University is proud to announce that it has been awarded with Bharat Blockchain Academic Excellence Award 2024, representing the state of Andhra Pradesh.



PRACTICAL EXAMINATION FROM NOVEMBER 04

AMRITSAR: The practical examination for all subjects of Guru Nanak Dev University affiliated colleges for BA/BSc Semester - First, Third and Fifth classes under Guru Nanak Dev University are commencing from November 04, 2024.

GNDU EXTENDS LAST DATE FOR ODL AND ONLINE COURSES

AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University has extended the last date for admission to courses offered under Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and Online mode until 15th November 2024 as per the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission- Distance Education Bureau (UGC-DEB) Notification.

BLOOD DONATION CAMP AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY



AMRITSAR: Guru Nanak Dev University has extended the last date for admission to courses offered under Open and Distance Learning and Online mode until 15th November 2024 as per the guidelines issued by the University Grants Commission- Distance Education Bureau Notification.

GNDU CELEBRATED THE "DIWALI FESTIVAL - GREEN GLOW FEST"

AMRITSAR: The Department of Education of Guru Nanak Dev University celebrated the "DIWALI FESTIVAL" under the title "GREEN GLOW FEST" with great enthusiasm under the guidance of, Head, Department of Education.



Piyush Goyal meets Schneider Electric CEO; discusses investment plans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday held a meeting with Peter Herweck, CEO of energy management and automation major Schneider Electric, in Riyadh and discussed the company's investment plans for India.

The minister is in Saudi Arabia to discuss ways to further deepen the strategic partnership between the two countries and explore new avenues of trade, investment and economic cooperation.

"Held a meeting with Mr Peter Herweck, CEO of @SchneiderElec, a global company specialising in energy management and digital automation with a strong presence in our country. Discussed the company's investment plans for India and how it can leverage the nation's talent pool and government support to provide high-tech, sustainable, and energy-



efficient solutions to the world," Goyal said in a post on social media platform X.

In March this year, Schneider Electric said that it will invest Rs 3,200 crore by 2026 to make India its manufacturing hub for domestic sales as well as exports.

As part of this, the company will set up manufacturing facilities for its various products and solutions across India. Presently, the company has 30 factories across India. The minister also held a

bilateral meeting with William E Ford, Chairman and CEO of the global growth investment firm, General Atlantic. "Discussed the company's potential to collaborate with India's healthcare sector, especially in consumer-focused health enterprises. Additionally, explored potential for expansion of their investment in Global Capability Centres (GCCs), as well as various other sectors, in the country," Goyal said in another post.

Suzuki to supply electric SUV to Toyota as collaboration expands

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Suzuki Motor Corporation will supply the all-new battery electric vehicle SUV model to Toyota Motor Corporation as the companies further expand their collaboration.

The new model is scheduled to be manufactured at Suzuki Motor Gujarat from the early months of 2025, Suzuki Motor Corporation said in a statement. Maruti Suzuki India plans to launch the same model next year.

Suzuki has around 58 per cent stake in Maruti Suzuki. "Suzuki will supply our first BEV (Battery Electric Vehicle) to Toyota globally. I am grateful that the collaboration between the two companies has further deepened in this way," Suzuki President Toshihiro Suzuki said.

While continuing to be competitors, the companies will deepen collaborations toward solving social issues, including the realisation of a



carbon-neutral society through a multi-pathway approach, he added. Toyota President Koji Sato said by leveraging the BEV unit and platform that the companies have jointly developed, they will take a new step in the collaboration in the field of electrified vehicles.

"This will allow us to deliver various choices that contribute to a carbon-neutral society to customers worldwide. We would like to learn from each other's strengths, compete, and further joint efforts based on a multi-pathway approach," he added. The BEV unit and platform

adopted for this model were jointly developed by Suzuki, Toyota, and Daihatsu Motor Corporation, utilising each company's strength.

Both Suzuki and Toyota's businesses have their roots in Enshu - the western part of Shizuoka Prefecture - and both companies took on the challenge of switching their businesses from looms to the automobiles industry, the statement said. Suzuki and Toyota started exploring business partnerships in 2016. The fields of collaboration are diverse and include production and mutual supply of vehicles, and the spread of electrified vehicles. As a result, the market launch of collaboration vehicles has expanded to Japan, India, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

The new development marks the first BEV in the OEM relationship between the two companies. It will be launched worldwide, providing a BEV choice even in the SUV market, which is showing remarkable growth.



Ronaldo misses late penalty as Al-Nassr eliminated from Saudi cup

AP ■ RIYADH (SAUDI ARABIA)

Cristiano Ronaldo missed a stoppage-time penalty and Al-Nassr was eliminated from the King's Cup in a 1-0 loss to Al-Taawoun. The five-time Ballon D'Or winner has yet to win a major trophy since signing for the club almost two years ago. Playing at the round-of-16 stage of Saudi Arabia's premier knockout competition, Al-Taawoun took the lead on Waleed Al-Ahmad's header with 20 minutes remaining. Al-Ahmad was then whistled for a foul in the area in the 95th minute. Ronaldo had converted all 18 of his previous penalties for Al-Nassr but this time shot over the bar to the shock of the home crowd of 14,519. The defeat is the first for Stefano Pioli since the Italian succeeded Luis Castro as head coach in September. Ronaldo and Al-Nassr still have two chances at silverware this season but are already six points



behind leader Al-Hilal after eight games of the Saudi Pro League and have seven points from three games in the group stage of the Asian Champions League. "Technically we performed well but we couldn't win the game," Pioli said. "We feel disappointed to be out of the cup. But we still have two trophies to go for and we will give our best in them."



Bopanna-Ebden advance to quarterfinals of Paris masters

PTI ■ PARIS

Veteran Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden advanced to the quarterfinals of the men's doubles event of the Paris Masters here. The Indo Australian pair eked out a 6-4 7-6 win over the Brazilian-German combine of Marcelo Melo and Alexander Zverev in one hour 16 minutes at the ATP 1000 event on Tuesday. Bopanna and Ebden won 91 percent of their first serve and hit four aces in the course of the match. The third seed Ind-Australian duo made a crucial break in the first game to take the opening set. The reigning Australian Open champions then had the opportunity to break their opponents in the fifth game of the second set but Melo and Zverev managed to hold with the match heading to a tie-breaker. Earlier this week, Bopanna and Ebden had clinched a spot in the prestigious season-ending ATP Finals.

Brazil's Atletico Mineiro draws at Argentina's River Plate and reaches Copa Libertadores final



AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Brazil's Atletico Mineiro drew 0-0 at Argentina's River Plate and reached the final of the Copa Libertadores for the second time. The team of veteran striker Hulk had beaten its rivals 3-0 in the first leg of the semifinal. The festive atmosphere at the

full Monumental de Nunez Stadium with more than 80,000 fans did not affect the Brazilian side, which had some of the clearest chances to score. Atletico's rival in the decider will be decided on Wednesday, and it is very likely to be fellow Brazilian side Botafogo. The Rio de Janeiro-based team will play at Uruguay's Penarol after

winning the first leg 5-0. Brazilian teams have won the tournament for the past five years. The final will be played on Nov. 30 at the same Monumental de Nunez Stadium in Buenos Aires. Atletico's win also affected the race to be the last South American qualifier for the 2025 Club World Cup, as it eliminated Olimpia of Paraguay from contention. Olimpia would have advanced to the 32-team tournament in the United States had River Plate won this Copa Libertadores edition. River Plate already qualified based on its consistent results in the continental competition across four seasons. FIFA will make the draw for the June 15-July 13 tournament on a date in early December it has not yet confirmed.

India to play international FIFA friendly against Malaysia on Nov 18 in Hyderabad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Winless in three matches after chief coach Manolo Marquez took charge as head coach, the Indian men's football team will play Malaysia in an international friendly in Hyderabad on November 18, national federation (AIFF) said on Wednesday. The All India Football Federation (AIFF) had last month announced that the

match will be played on November 19 but did specify the venue. On Wednesday, it advanced the match by a day and also announced the venue. "The FIFA Friendly match between India and Malaysia will be played on November 18, 2024, at Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad, Telangana," the AIFF said. November 11-19 is the last FIFA international match window of this year. In international matches

scheduled during a FIFA window, clubs are mandated to release players for national duty. The Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad had also hosted the three-team Intercontinental Cup tournament last month. India had played out a goal-less draw with Mauritius on September 3 before losing 0-3 to Syria, the eventual champions, on September 9 in that tournament. India then travelled to Vietnam to play an

international friendly against the hosts on October 12. The match ended 1-1. The November 18 match will be Marquez's fourth match in charge of the national team and he would be looking for a win against a lower-ranked team, though it will not be an easy one. Malaysia are ranked 133rd in the FIFA chart while India are at 125th. The last time the two teams met was in October 2023 in the Merdeka Cup semifinal. India had lost 2-4.

Alcaraz and Tsitsipas reach 3rd round at Paris Masters but Rublev loses temper and match

AP ■ PARIS

Carlos Alcaraz overcame some crusty moments on his serve to beat Nicolas Jarry 7-5, 6-1 and reach the third round of the Paris Masters. The second-seeded Spaniard was troubled by Jarry's strong forehand at times. The Chilean broke his serve in the ninth game and held for 5-5. But Jarry double-faulted in his next service game to lose the first set. "It was a little bit complicated, really happy to get through the first set," Alcaraz said. "I have to get used to the speed of the court. It's really fast for me." Alcaraz saved a break point in the third game of the second set with an ace and broke for a 4-1 lead with a crisp forehand winner.

Serving for the match, Alcaraz saved another break point with an ace to make it deuce and won the next two points, clinching victory when the erratic Jarry's two-handed backhand clipped the net and went out. "He's a really dangerous player on these courts," the 21-year-old Alcaraz said. "I'm super happy to win here." The four-time Grand Slam champion is looking for his fifth title of the year and next plays either 15th-seeded Ugo Humbert or American qualifier Marcos Giron. "It's been a great year so far," said Alcaraz, who won major titles at the French Open and Wimbledon. Tenth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece beat Alejandro Tabilo 6-3, 6-4 to stay in contention to reach the



season-ending ATP Finals for the top eight players. It is being held in Turin, Italy, next month. Seventh-seeded Casper Ruud of Norway, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, started well before losing 7-6 (3), 3-6, 6-4 to unseeded Australian Jordan Thompson. In an earlier second-round match, sixth-seeded Andrey Rublev lost two tiebreakers and his temper as his hopes of qualifying for the Finals took a hit. Rublev lost 7-6 (6), 7-6 (5) to Francisco Cerundolo and was so frustrated at one point in the second set that he smashed his racket against his left knee at least seven times in succession and made it bleed. The Russian player held the eighth and final qualifying place in the race for the Finals and could be overtaken by rivals. U.S. Open runner-up Taylor Fritz became the fifth player to qualify

for the Finals. The big-serving American reached the season-ending tournament for the second time in three years. The indoor event takes place from Nov. 10-17. Fritz joined U.S. Open champion Jannik Sinner, Alcaraz, Alexander Zverev and Daniil Medvedev in the field. Sinner pulled out of the Paris Masters on Monday, citing a virus. The Italian player is guaranteed to finish the year as No. 1. He was the second high-profile player to pull out following seven-time champion Novak Djokovic. In remaining first-round play, Holger Rune - who beat Djokovic in the 2022 final - advanced with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Matteo Arnaldi. No. 9 seed Alex de Minaur beat Mariano Navone 7-5, 6-1 to stay in

outside contention for Turin, while No. 12 Hubert Hurkacz lost 6-1, 6-3 to Alex Michelsen. U.S. Open semifinalist Jack Draper won 7-5, 6-2 against Jiri Lehecka; American Ben Shelton beat Corentin Moutet 6-3, 6-7 (8), 6-3, and Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard hit 28 aces in defeating U.S. Open semifinalist Frances Tiafoe 6-7 (5), 7-6 (4), 6-3. Fresh from his title in Basel, Mpetshi Perricard next plays Karen Khachanov and will look to add to his 512 aces. Frenchman Arthur Fils also progressed by edging Croatian Marin Cilic 7-6 (5), 6-4 and next faces Jan-Lennard Struff. But veteran Richard Gasquet, who plans to retire after next year's French Open, lost 6-3, 6-4 to Zizou Bergs.

Punjab FC, Chennaiyin FC clash following a string of good run

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In-form sides Punjab FC and Chennaiyin FC will square off in the Indian Super League here on Thursday as the battle for playoffs spots heats up. Punjab FC are placed fourth in the table after as many matches while Chennaiyin FC are positioned sixth with two victories and draws each in their five games thus far. They are arguably two definite contenders for the top-six and hence this fixture carries significance for both teams, giving them an opportunity to move up the standings and develop pressure on the higher-ranked opponents. So far, across both seasons, Punjab FC have scored 34 goals in the ISL - boiling down to 1.30 strikes per game. Impressively though, only once have they gone back-to-back



matches without finding the back of the net in the competition, which was a sequence of two clashes in December last year. Given that they didn't score in the previous game, Punjab FC run the risk of equalling that record, something that they would want to avoid especially with the coming game taking place at their home turf. In their last home match, Punjab FC held their own

against the Hyderabad FC attackers by winning 2-0. Never before in the ISL have Punjab FC managed to keep successive clean sheets at home though. They have a chance of scaling that feat against a dynamic Chennaiyin FC frontline that has netted eight goals in five games this season. Chennaiyin FC have put forth a unified front in ISL 2024-25, regularly dragging the team back from precarious positions

to achieve positive outcomes. For instance, they have won seven points from losing situations this season - the joint-most with Kerala Blasters FC. Contrastingly, Punjab FC have claimed no such points so far, highlighting the need of an early lead for the Marina Machans. The Owen Coyle-coached side have also emerged as a force to reckon with on the road. They are unbeaten in their last three ISL away games - winning twice and drawing once. The last time Chennaiyin FC registered a longer such streak was for five games from January-February 2020. Interestingly, they had made it all the way to the final that year, under the tutelage of Coyle. "We want to follow our style," Punjab FC head coach Panagiotis Dilmperis expressed confidence by saying that he wants his team to take the lead in setting the tempo of the game regardless of the ideas and plans that Chennaiyin FC come up with. "The main topic before us this season is that we want to make the opponents follow our style of play. That's our biggest concern. Chennaiyin FC have good players and a good style of play but we want to follow our style," Dilmperis added. Chennaiyin FC and Punjab FC have faced each other twice in the ISL, winning once each. "I want us to believe we can win every game," Chennaiyin coach Coyle said. "I want my players to believe that they can win every game. That won't be possible. But the intent should be there always and that's the kind of players I like working with," Coyle added.

deal sealed with Infantino at a signing ceremony in Shanghai. Reviews of referee decisions in key incidents - for goals, penalty awards and red cards - can extend to at least two minutes, despite FIFA's aim during trials in 2016 of completing checks in about 10 seconds. Hisense first signed up as a FIFA sponsor for the 2018 World Cup and it renewed for the 2022 edition in Qatar. The television and laptops manufacturer also signed its first sponsor deal with UEFA, when Infantino was still the European soccer body's general secretary, ahead of Euro 2016.



Jürgen Klopp defends his decision to join Red Bull after fan backlash

AP ■ BERLIN

Jürgen Klopp has defended his decision to head up Red Bull's group of soccer clubs, saying he "didn't want to step on anybody's toes" after his decision prompted a backlash from fans of his former teams in Germany. Klopp is taking over as the drinks company's head of global soccer from January in what was widely seen as a surprise move. It will be his first job after leaving Liverpool at the end of last season. "I didn't want to step on anybody's toes, definitely not, and personally I love all of my ex-clubs," Klopp said in an interview released Wednesday on a podcast hosted by former Real Madrid and Germany midfielder Toni Kroos. Klopp suggested any decision he made to coach another club would also have disappointed

some fans. "I really don't know what exactly I could have done for everyone to be happy," he said. Red Bull, and especially its Leipzig team, are widely resented by many German soccer fans, who see the drinks company as an unwelcome corporate presence trying to buy success. Fans at Klopp's former clubs like Borussia Dortmund have criticized the move, and Mainz fans held up banners this month expressing their disappointment and questioning whether he was "crazy." Klopp spent 18 years at Mainz as a player and coach before joining Dortmund in 2008, where he went on to lead the club to two Bundesliga titles and the Champions League final. Klopp said he had never viewed Red Bull's involvement in soccer "so critically," and

suggested it played an important role in bringing high-level club soccer back to the former East Germany with the Leipzig project. Klopp previously said he planned to take a "long break" from soccer after leaving Liverpool, where he coached his last game in May after nine years with the club. "I'm 57 so I can still work for a couple more years but I don't really see myself on the sideline (as a coach) for the time being," he said. "But it was always clear that I wasn't going to do nothing at all. And then this story with Red Bull came into the picture, and for me it's outstanding." Klopp said he saw his Red Bull role primarily as an "adviser" working together with coaches at the clubs backed by the drinks giant. "I always had the feeling that the coach is very, very often the loneliest person at the club," he said.

FIFA announces first Club World Cup sponsor with Chinese electronics firm branding VAR checks

AP ■ SHANGHAI

FIFA finally announced a first sponsor for its revamped Club World Cup on Wednesday in a deal that will brand video review checks at the tournament in the United States next year. The Chinese consumer electronics firm Hisense will have "branding appearing in the video operation room and on pitchside screens," FIFA said in a statement, when match officials study key incidents in the 32-team tournament being played in 11 American cities from June 15 to July 13. Though no previous FIFA

tournament has had a sponsor for video reviews since the technology was approved before the men's 2018 World Cup in Russia, Hisense was the official "VAR Screen Provider" for this year's European Championship organized by UEFA in Germany. Less than eight months before the Club World Cup opens - with Lionel Messi's Inter Miami hosting the first game of a tournament that sees Real Madrid, Manchester City and Bayern Munich play their first competitive games in the U.S. - it now has one sponsor but still lacks any broadcast deals. FIFA's talks for a global streaming deal with Apple+ stalled several

months ago and U.S. Sponsors have been more focused on deals for the men's 2026 World Cup that will be co-hosted with Canada and Mexico. Saudi Arabian sponsors are expected to sign soon and help FIFA President Gianni Infantino fulfil promises to clubs that the tournament's total prize money will run to hundreds of millions of dollars every four years. FIFA is set to confirm Saudi Arabia as the 2034 World Cup host on Dec. 11. The new Hisense deal "paves the way for further sponsorship deals for FIFA's new flagship club competition to be announced in the coming weeks," soccer's world body said. FIFA did not specify the value of the

deal sealed with Infantino at a signing ceremony in Shanghai. Reviews of referee decisions in key incidents - for goals, penalty awards and red cards - can extend to at least two minutes, despite FIFA's aim during trials in 2016 of completing checks in about 10 seconds. Hisense first signed up as a FIFA sponsor for the 2018 World Cup and it renewed for the 2022 edition in Qatar. The television and laptops manufacturer also signed its first sponsor deal with UEFA, when Infantino was still the European soccer body's general secretary, ahead of Euro 2016.



EASWARAN, NITISH REDDY, PRASIDH TO BE UNDER CLOSE SCRUTINY

PTI ■ MACKAY (AUSTRALIA)

The outings of Abhimanyu Easwaran, Nitish Kumar Reddy and Prasidh Krishna will be the primary focal points of India A's four-day match against their Australian counterparts, starting here on Thursday. Easwaran, Nitish and Prasidh have been included in India's squad for the five-Test Border-Gavaskar Trophy series, beginning on November 22, and the thinktank will be eager to know how they fare in Australian conditions. Easwaran's performance will, however, have far more significance as the 29-year-old opener could potentially replace Rohit Sharma's replacement if the captain skips a match or two against Australia for personal reasons. Easwaran, who is also the vice-captain of India A here, is a vastly experienced campaigner having played 99 First-Class matches to score 7638 runs with 27 hundreds and 29 fifties. He has also been part of the India squad in the past but what inspires confidence is his recent form in First-Class

matches. The right-hander struck 157 and 116 for India B in the Duleep Trophy before making a 191 against Mumbai for Rest of India in the Irani Trophy and made another hundred in his final red-ball game before flying out to Australia - an unbeaten 127 against Uttar Pradesh in the Ranji Trophy. So, he has the body of work to feel in fine fettle ahead of the match against Australia A, though the conditions here will be vastly different from what he has experienced so far this season in India. On the other hand, Nitish does not boast of such impressive First-Class numbers, as he has been drafted into squad for his perceived ability as a pace-bowling all-rounder and, even in that, batting is his stronger suit. In the Duleep Trophy earlier this year, Nitish made two ducks with a highest of 40 in five matches while grabbing just two wickets. But the selectors have backed him ahead of senior names such as Shardul Thakur, who has resumed playing domestic matches after recovering from an injury.

INDIA A vs AUSTRALIA A



So, this will be a good opportunity for the selectors to check how the Andhra man measures up to a very capable Australia A side that includes the likes of Cameron Bancroft, Marcus Harris, Michael Neser, Cooper Connolly and Scott Boland. Prasidh is a late addition to the India A squad in place of initially picked up Yash Dayal, and the Karnataka pacer needs to find some rhythm here. Since his return from injury, Prasidh has picked up just seven wickets in as many innings across Duleep Trophy, Irani Cup and Ranji Trophy. But the selectors seemed to have been influenced by the theoretical advantage his height brings in on the Australian decks. Prasidh can use this opportunity to keep himself ready if he gets a call-up to the first eleven as the third seamer behind Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj or if the management wants to rest one of the frontline pacers as part of workload management during the tour. Other than this aforementioned trio, the likes of skipper Rituraj Gaikwad, top-order batter B

Sai Sudharsan, pacers Yash Dayal and Navdeep Saini and middle-order batter Devdutt Padikkal can look forward to churn out some good efforts to keep themselves on the periphery of selection in case of an eventuality in the senior side. Ishan Kishan, the wicketkeeper batter, too will be eager to make the most of this chance after a finding his favour back with the powers that be. **TEAMS (FROM):** **India A:** Rituraj Gaikwad (capt), Abhimanyu Easwaran (vice-capt), Devdutt Padikkal, Sai Sudharsan, B Indrajith, Abhishek Porel (wk), Ishan Kishan (wk), Mukesh Kumar, Ricky Bhui, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Manav Suthar, Navdeep Saini, Khaleel Ahmed, Tanush Kotian, Prasidh Krishna. **Australia A:** Nathan McSweeney (c), Cameron Bancroft, Scott Boland, Jordan Buckingham, Cooper Connolly, Ollie Davies, Brendan Doggett, Marcus Harris, Sam Konstas, Nathan McAndrew, Michael Neser, Todd Murphy, Fergus O'Neill, Jimmy Peirson, Josh Philippe, Corey Rocchiccioli, Beau Webster.

Need to be patient with Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, says Nayar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar on Wednesday insisted that they do not ask for tailor-made pitches in Tests and also backed out-of-form legends Virat Kohli and skipper Rohit Sharma, saying that they must be given "space and time to come back". After suffering their first-ever Test series loss at home in 12 years, India will strive to salvage their pride when they clash with New Zealand in the third and final Test from Friday. Playing on a track that assisted spinners, India lost the Pune Test by 113 runs. It is being speculated that the pitch at Wankhede Stadium here could again favour the spinners. Nayar refuted suggestions that turning tracks are being made at the behest of the team. "I wish we could curate pitches, but we don't. The curators do. Whatever we're provided with, we go on and play (whether) that'd be a pitch that seemed or a pitch that turned. We don't try and get conditions according to what we want," Nayar said on eve of the final Test. Both Kohli and Sharma are woefully out of form, and that has impacted team's performance. Nayar said there is nothing wrong with the modern-day greats and all they need is just a bit of time and backing. "I've seen nothing but love for them all over. When a top player, when someone who's been through the journey, goes through a lull, a lot of times it's about giving them their space and trusting that they will come back. They will put in the work," he said. "Everyone's worked really hard, everyone wants to do well, whether you're Virat Kohli or Rohit Sharma or even someone as young as Shubman Gill. The effort is there." "Sometimes, sometimes you've got to be a little patient, even with the greatest of players, and they can have tough times. I'm pretty sure sooner rather than later, we'll have more to praise about Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma and everyone else as well," he said. Nayar said it would be "harsh" to say the current Indian batters do not play spin as well as those in the past. "That's a bit of a harsh statement. When you're trying to achieve something, there's always going to be a time when you take a certain dip because you're trying to play cricket in a different way and you're trying to push yourself out of the comfort zone," he said. "Sometimes the results don't go your way, but if you're patient enough and when that upward curve hits the team and hits an individual, then your purple patch lasts for really long.



"We're hoping that the transition that we're trying to have in terms of the mindset and the approach of the players in Team India, (given) that we're facing this dip now, but once we start hitting the upward curve, it'll be a long curve." Nayar said the dressing room atmosphere hasn't changed over the last two matches. "There are going to be times when you don't do so well. When India lost the World Cup (final) in India, that was a low point in Indian cricket for everyone..." "In the same breath, a couple (eight) of months later, we were world champions. Coming back is always a great journey. That's how stories and legacies are made. "Hopefully we can be part of creating something as special as that in the future, but the atmosphere is great. Still a lot of jokes and bubbly cricketers in the dressing room. You'll see our (training) sessions (are) filled with fun and nothing has changed. India have collapsed thrice so far in the series, starting with 46 all-out for lowest Test innings total at home in Bengaluru. After that, India made 156 in the first essay of Pune Test and crumbled to 245 all-out from 81/1. Nayar refused to read much into it and said, "I wouldn't call it a collapse, when you lose wickets in a bunch or when we pick wickets in a bunch - like we did in the last game as well, where we got seven wickets in 51 runs - I think that tends to happen in this game of cricket." "Sometimes it is the mindset. It may not be perceived from outside as trying to be aggressive or trying to have intent, but intent is not necessarily swinging at the ball. Intent is more about your approach towards the ball. "Is it worrying? Well, the only way we look at it is how we can get out of it. That's our thought process (and) mindset."

India still have wood on New Zealand while playing on turning wickets: Ajaz Patel

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A first ever series loss at home to New Zealand notwithstanding, India still have the "wood on us" while playing on turning wickets, said Kiwis spinner Ajaz Patel here on Wednesday. New Zealand have outplayed India on all fronts in their backyard so far in the three-Test series, particularly in the spin department as they head into the third and final match starting here on Friday with an unassailable lead of 2-0. While New Zealand hammered India in a rain-truncated opening Test at Bengaluru by eight wickets, exposing their shortcomings on a challenging pitch at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, the world No 2 side was given a spin-friendly track in Pune in the second Test, which the hosts lost by 113 runs. Ahead of the final Test at the Wankhede Stadium, another spin-friendly track is in making despite the struggles of the Indian batters. Patel hoped that New Zealand, who have an opportunity to inflict a 3-0 whitewash on India, would need to continue to make all the right moves despite the hosts being more adept in playing on such tracks.

"India still have the wood on us when it comes to playing on turning wickets, and traditionally, the Indian batters have done well in turning surfaces," Patel told the media after New Zealand's training session. "Obviously, they haven't had maybe as much success as they would have liked in this series so far but they're certainly an opposition that are very, very skilled and not the easiest to come up against." "Their skill set is very vast and for us as a spin group, especially it's about being able to control what we can control and making sure that we can apply pressure for long periods of time and making sure that we're delivering the best balls on a given surface," he added. New Zealand's accuracy and recentness in attack, both with the bat and the ball, has been the feature of their first-ever series win in India and Patel acknowledged that the visitors will need to stick to the basics. "It is really about continuing to challenge them. As a batter it's not easy out there when you're facing a ball that's turning as much, and so it's about us making sure we put the balls in good areas for long periods of time," he said. "On the flip side, India have got phenomenal spinners so our batters are trying to do the



opposite and they're trying to create opportunities to score runs," he added. Patel, who created history here three years ago by claiming 10/119 to become only the third spinner in Test cricket to take all 10 wickets in an innings, said the pitch for the upcoming contest looked different from the one before.

"Being back in Mumbai is always quite special and it's a place I call home as well. Having the opportunity to play out here again is quite special. To be honest, after my 10-wicket haul, I wasn't sure whether I'd get another opportunity to play out here again throughout my career," he said.

Shubman Gill takes pay cut to keep core in tact

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gujarat Titans captain Shubman Gill has decided to take a pay cut and will be the second player retained by the IPL franchise ahead of the October 31 deadline. Gill led Titans for the first time this season and both he and the management are now keen to retain the core group of players. The first retention for the franchise would be star spinner Rashid Khan, followed by Gill, Sai Sudharsan and two uncapped players in Rahul Tewatia and Shikhar Dhawan. Titans will also have the option of retaining another squad member via the right to match card at the mega auction next month. Gill is seen a future leader in the Indian cricket setup.

"Gill has decided to take a pay cut to ensure the core players are retained and build a stronger team," an IPL source said. As per the IPL retention guidelines released ahead of the mega auction, a team will lose Rs 18 crore from the increased purse of Rs 120 crore for the first player retained, Rs 14 crore for second, Rs 11 for third while for the uncapped players, a team will have to shell out Rs 4 crore each. If a team retains five capped players, they will lose Rs 75 crore from the auction pot. The mega auction is likely to be held overseas in the last week of November. The auction purse has been increased to Rs 120 crore from the Rs 100 crore teams had at their disposal at last year's auction.

AFFIDAVIT
I Rabindra Pradhan, S/O Dhaneswar pradhan, age 71 years, of village Naladia, Po-Adheikana, Dist-Kendrapara pin-754231 odisha declare by this Affidavit no 1958 dt -29.10.2024 that now onwards, I shall be known as Rabindra Kumar Pradhan S/o-Dhaneswar Pradhan for all future purposes.

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1 Name of the work	4 Nos of shifting work of 11Kv line LT line & Sub-Station of Puri & Nayagarh district.
2 Estimated Cost	From 6.22 lakhs to 26.92 lakhs (Excluding GST)
3 Period of completion	90 days
4 Date and time of availability of Bid documents in the portal	From Dt.04.11.2024 at 12.00 A.M.to Dt 12.11.2024 up to 5.00 P.M
5 Date & Time of opening of tender	Dt.13.11.2024 at 01.00 P.M.
6 Procurement officer/ Name and address of the officer inviting Bids.	Executive Engineer, R.W.EL.DIVN.BBSR At- 1st floor of Divn. Complex, Rasulgarh Behind Explanade Mall. Dist. - Khurda Odisha. Pincode-751010

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