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Final countdown for AAP

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a booster dose to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), a city court on Friday granted bail to Delhi's former health minister Satyendar Jain in the Rs 4.81 crore money laundering case, after 18 months in jail. Jain is the fourth senior AAP leader to come out of prison in the last five months. The party's national convener Arvind Kejriwal, and senior Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh had secured bail in the last few months. The AAP leadership is expected to campaign extensively for the Delhi Assembly elections due early next year, to retain the AAP government. The turmoil within the party arising out of the 'liquor gate' scandal forced Kejriwal to hand over the Chief Minister baton to Atishi. Jain and Sisodia were Ministers at the time of going to jail. Jain's bail comes at a time when the entire AAP leadership is trying to regain the public perceptions about their politics ahead of the assembly polls in Maharashtra and Jharkhand after massive defeats in two states-Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. After debacle in the Lok Sabha polls in May and assembly polls in Haryana, the AAP performance was pathetic and all the candidates forfeited the deposit. Granting bail to Jain, Special Judge Vishal Gogne of Rouse Avenue Court said: "Considering the delay in trial and long incarceration of 18 months, and the fact that trial will take long to start, let alone conclude, the accused is favourably suited for the relief." The judge granted the relief on a bail bond Rs 50,000 with two sureties of like amount.



AAP leader and former Delhi health minister Satyendar Jain being greeted by party leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh

The court also relied on the August 9 Supreme Court judgement that granted bail to former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in cases linked to the alleged excise policy scam. Jain was the first AAP leader and Health minister in the Kejriwal government till he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on May 30, 2022, on the charge of laundering money through four companies allegedly linked to him. He was granted an interim bail a year later, in May 2023, by the Supreme Court on medical grounds. Jain returned behind the bars in March this year, after the

Supreme Court turned down his request for a regular bail. All senior AAP leaders who were jailed on corruption charges, are out on bail. Last month, Kejriwal was granted bail by the Supreme Court in a CBI case linked to the alleged liquor scam. Sisodia was granted bail by the top court in August this year, after spending 17 months in Tihar jail in cases related to the Delhi excise policy case. In April this year, the SC had granted bail to AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh after ED didn't oppose his plea in the Delhi excise policy case. The moment the judge pronounced the order, Jain's

wife Poonam and daughter Shreya, who were present in the courtroom, broke down. Shreya spoke to media persons later and said Diwali had arrived early for the family. The CBI had initially registered a case under Sections 13(2) (criminal misconduct by public servant) read with 13(e) (disproportionate assets) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 against Jain. The case was registered on the allegation that Jain had acquired movable properties in the name of various persons between 2015 and 2017 which he could not satisfactorily account for. Later, the ED also registered a case and alleged several companies beneficially owned and controlled by him received accommodation entries amounting to Rs 4.81 crore from shell companies against cash transferred to Kolkata-based entry operators through a hawala route. According to ED, Jain transferred money to Kolkata through the hawala channel and got it back from dummy companies in the form of accommodation entries, even though he could not show the source of the money received. He was earlier granted bail by the trial court in the case registered by CBI in September 2019. He was then granted interim bail by the SC on May 26 last year, which ended on March 18 this year, after the Supreme Court rejected his plea for regular bail. In March, the Supreme Court had observed that Satyendar Jain, along with his aides Ankush Jain and Vaibhav Jain, were prima facie guilty of the alleged offences of money laundering.

Supreme Court steps in against Child Marriage



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA) cannot be stunted by traditions under any personal law and observed marriages involving children violate the free will to choose a life partner. A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra further issued a slew of guidelines for the effective implementation of the law on prevention of child marriages in the country. The Bench, however, noted the issue of whether the PCMA would prevail over personal laws was pending with the Parliament for consideration. The Centre had urged the apex court to hold the PCMA to prevail over personal laws. The CJI highlighted that a "very extensive" sociological analysis was made in the judgement. "While the PCMA seeks to prohibit child marriages. It does not stipulate big social malaise of marriages fixed in the minority of a child which also have the effect of violating the rights to choice...It takes away from them, their choice of partner and life paths before they mature and form the ability to assert their agency..." the CJI said.

The court noted that child marriages require an intersectional approach that acknowledges the overlapping vulnerabilities experienced by children, especially girls, from marginalised communities. "Intersectionality involves considering factors like gender, caste, socio-economic status and geography, which often increase the risks of early marriage" the CJI said. Preventive strategies should be tailored to the unique needs of various communities besides focusing on addressing the root causes of child marriage, such as poverty, gender, inequality, lack of education, the judgement said. "The PCMA as a social legislation will only succeed through the collective efforts of all stakeholders to address the issue within a broader social framework, which emphasises the need for multi sectoral coordination," it added. According to the SC, the scenario necessitated the enhancement of reporting mechanisms, expansion of public awareness campaigns and investment in the training and capacity building of law enforcement. "The implementation of these guidelines is to prioritise prevention before protection and protection before penalisation. We are cognisant of the impact that criminalisation has on families and communities. To ensure effective use of the penal provisions in the PCMA, it is imperative that there is widespread awareness and education about child marriage and the legal consequences of its commission," it said. The SC, however, clarified that it should not be understood that prosecution of those who commit illegal acts is discouraged. Further, it opined the law enforcement machinery ought to make best efforts to prevent and prohibit child marriage and not solely focus on prosecution. The judgement came on a PIL filed by Society for Enlightenment and Voluntary Action seeking effective implementation of the law to prevent child marriages.



SC recalls 2022 verdict on benami law provisions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Friday recalled its 2022 verdict that had declared as unconstitutional two provisions of the law on prohibition of benami property transactions that restrains such deals and acquisition of properties by authorities. Allowing the Centre's review of the August 23, 2022 verdict, a Bench Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud, Justices P S Narasimha and Manoj Misra recalled the judgement delivered by a three-judge Bench headed by former CJI N V Ramana. In its August 2022 verdict, the top court had then held that Sections 3(2) and 5 of the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, 1988 being "manifestly arbitrary" were unconstitutional. While Section 3 of the Act deals with prohibition of benami (a property held by a person through proxies) transactions, Section 5 pertains to property of benami liable to acquisition. On Friday, the top court agreed with the submissions of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who appeared for the Centre, that the validity of these two provisions were not under challenge before the erstwhile Bench. "In this view of the matter, the review would have to be allowed. It is trite law that challenge to the constitutional validity of a statutory provision can't be adjudicated upon in the absence of a live lis and contest between the parties," said the Bench. The top court consequently allowed the review petition. It said the civil appeal, on which the August 2022 verdict was delivered, will stand restored to the file for a fresh adjudication before a Bench nominated by the chief justice on the administrative side. In its August 2022 verdict, the apex court had held that the benami law did not have a retrospective application and the authorities couldn't initiate or continue criminal prosecution or confiscation proceedings for transactions entered into prior to when the legislation came into force. The top court was dealing with a legal question -- whether the 1988 Act, as amended by the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016 had a prospective effect. The 2022 verdict was delivered on an appeal of the Centre challenging a Calcutta High Court judgement, which held that the amendment made in the 1988 Act in 2016 would be applicable prospectively. The Centre had contended that the 2016 Act would be applicable retrospectively. The benami law was enacted to prohibit such transactions and enforce the right to recover properties held to be "benami". The law punishes a violator with a three-year jail term or fine or both.

Salman Khan gets another death threat



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Bollywood actor Salman Khan received a extortion-cum-death threat from the Lawrence Bishnoi gang on Friday, even as a Panvel court in Navi Mumbai on Friday remanded Sukha alias Sukhbir Balbir Singh, the key accused in the case involving the conspiracy to kill the super star, in police custody for four days. In view of the fresh threat received by Salman Khan, the police have beefed up security in and around his

residence at Bandra and farm house at Panvel. The police have also deployed armed personnel outside the studios where Salman Khan is shooting for 'Bigg Boss 18'. On a day when the Worli police registered a case in connection with a Rs 5 crore extortion threat received by the Mumbai traffic police, Sukha -- who was picked up from Panipat in Haryana by a visiting team of Panvel police-- was produced before a court at Panvel in Navi Mumbai. The court remanded him to police custody till October 21. Apart from the conspiracy to kill Salman, Sukha will also be questioned in connection with the murder of politician-businessman Baba Siddique. Siddique was a close friend of Salman Khan and several other film personalities. In the threat message received by the Mumbai traffic police, a gangster close to Lawrence Bishnoi demanded Rs 5 crore from Khan as extortion money. Among other things, the gangster asked the actor to end his long-standing rivalry with incarcerated gangster Lawrence Bishnoi.

Delhi's winter woes begin

Poison in the air

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising air pollution in the National Capital, around 13 'hotspots' including Narela, Bawana, Mundka, Wazirpur, Rohini, R K Puram, Okhla, Jahangirpuri, Anand Vihar, Punjabi Bagh, Mayapuri, and Dwarka Sector-8 have been identified as areas where the Air Quality Index (AQI) crossed 300 on Friday. According to the Delhi government, the major factor contributing to high levels of pollution is dust. The data available by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reveals that the average AQI of the city stood at 292 in the 'poor' category at 4 pm on Friday. As per the AQICN, Anand Vihar recorded an AQI of 219, Wazirpur and Jahangirpuri recorded 157, Rohini and R K Puram recorded 154, Narela and Punjabi Bagh recorded 152, Okhla recorded 124, Mundka



recorded 114 and Dwarka Sector-8 recorded 109. Regions adjoining the national Capital also reported AQI in 'poor' category with Noida recording an average AQI of 242, Greater Noida recording 264, Ghaziabad recording 258, Faridabad recording 242 and Gurugram recording 242 according to the CPCB at 4 pm. At 8 pm, Faridabad Sector 11 recorded an AQI of 359, Greater Noida Knowledge Park-V recorded 491, Ghaziabad's Vasundhara area recorded 215 and Gurugram's Sector 51 recorded 251.

Yamuna froths in despair

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a double whammy for the National Capital Region already grappling with poor air to breathe, pollutants led to toxic foams floating in the river Yamuna. Multiple videos circulating on social media showed vast sections of the river frothing on the surface, the foam gradually dissipated later in the day. Environmental experts expressed concern about the harmful health effects of pollution and highlighted the city's deteriorating ecosystem

as it continues to grapple with pollution year after year. A political blame game also began with the Delhi BJP alleging that the AAP government in Delhi does not want to tackle pollution. At Kalindi Kunj, the Yamuna river presents a grim sight as toxic foam blankets its surface on October 18. The frothy layer not only mars the river's beauty but is also a serious health risk, with ammonia and phosphate pollutants contributing to the foam.



Commuters grope in the dark at Chirag Delhi

Heavy traffic congestion, turns peak hours into a nightmare

BY SAUMYA SHUKLA

The bustling areas around Chirag Delhi and Mehrauli-Badarpur (MB) road in south Delhi are notorious for perennial heavy traffic congestion, often turning peak hours into a nightmare for commuters. In response to these ongoing challenges, the Delhi Traffic Police has revealed that both immediate and long-term solutions are in the works to alleviate the situation at these key traffic junctions. At Chirag Delhi intersection, two major carriageways including J B Tito Marg and Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg merge. This road starts from Moolchand flyover and ends under Chirag Delhi while Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg starts from Khanpur T Point and ends under Chirag Delhi flyover. To provide relief to the commuters, the traffic department has written a letter to Public Works Department (PWD) for widening the J B Tito

Marg near Chirag Delhi flyover to get more space for traffic intending to turn on Outer Ring road towards Nehru Place side. "It will help to decongest the traffic. PWD staff has done ground inspection and they will do this work soon," Gupta stated. For a more permanent solution, the construction of an underpass beneath the Chirag Delhi flyover is under consideration, with the project currently pending approval by the PWD. Another pain point in the city remains Mehrauli Badarpur road, which is 3.5 KM stretch from Karni Singh Shooting range T point up to Khanpur T point and falls under the jurisdiction of Sangam Vihar circle, which witnesses frequent traffic congestion. Additional Commissioner of Police of Traffic Zone 2 Dinesh Gupta told The Pioneer that during peak hours, manual regulation of signals is carried out to manage the traffic flow as efficiently as possible.



Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

However, this intervention often falls short of providing lasting relief to commuters. "During peak hours staff regulate traffic by operating signals manually and clear the traffic as per available space ahead,"

he said. Presence of heavy vehicles also makes the situation worse. "The frequency of DTC buses is very high since the Ambedkar Nagar bus terminal is also situated at MB

Road near Khanpur and the entry and exit of buses also creates congestion on this road," Gupta said, elaborating on the reasons behind the traffic. An office-goer, who frequently

faces jams while going to work, urged the traffic department to solve the issue and said, "Please address the heavy morning traffic jams from Moolchand towards Chirag Delhi and Pushpa Bhawan. It's causing significant delays for employees heading to work. I get late for work even though I leave on time from my home. Immediate action on traffic management would be highly appreciated!" Although the stretch between 'W' Point and Chirag Delhi is signal-free, there's only a single pedestrian signal at the Sadiq Nagar cut, which does little to manage the heavy flow of vehicles. The traffic coming from the W Point side accumulates at Chirag Delhi intersection during evening peak hours and creates congestion. The situation will likely be the same since the expected time of completion of this metro work is December 2026. "Ever since the construction of the metro began, the area has become

chaotic. Moreover, you will also see people living on the side of the streets making the situation worse. For a local living near the area, the situation is unimaginable," a resident of Sainik Farms said. Traffic bottlenecks are further compounded by the bus stand on Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg, where the narrower road width than J B Tito Marg causes significant slowdowns when buses stop, creating a ripple effect of congestion. Buses, pedestrians, cars all jostle to get into a narrow road resulting in crawling of traffic and bumper-to-bumper jams on the roads, as the construction work of Delhi Metro has left only one lane available at some stretches for the movement of traffic, causing major inconvenience to the public. This road is also surrounded by densely populated localities including Sangam Vihar, Tigri, Devali, Khanpur, Dakshin puri, Ambedkar Nagar and Madangir.

CM Saini fulfils poll promise of free dialysis for chronic kidney patients

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday announced all government hospitals in Haryana will offer free dialysis services to chronic kidney patients, fulfilling the ruling BJP's first poll promise.

Addressing a press conference after presiding over the first meeting of his cabinet, the chief minister said the state will also implement the Supreme Court's decision empowering states to make sub-classifications within the Scheduled Castes for granting reservation "today itself". Saini said his cabinet has decided to implement the decision of the Supreme Court which held that states are constitutionally empowered to make sub-classifications within the Scheduled Castes for granting reservation. "In the first meeting, our cabinet has decided to implement the decision from today itself," he said.

The decision will ensure a fair distribution of benefits within the existing reservation system, it said. Currently, there is a 15 per cent reservation for SC and a 7.5 per cent reservation for Scheduled Tribe communities. With this decision, Haryana will be able to allocate specific quotas within this 22.5 per cent reservation to those sub-groups within SCs and STs that have



Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini addresses media persons after his maiden cabinet meeting on the first day at Haryana Civil Secretariat in Chandigarh on Friday. Photo by Akhilesh K Mishra

lesser representation in employment and education. The Supreme Court on August 1 ruled that a sub-classification would be permissible within reserved category groups for providing benefits of affirmative action. Saini, who was sworn in as chief minister for a second time on Thursday, said the people of Haryana defeated the Congress'

ysis services to chronic kidney patients, he said. "The first file that I signed (after assuming charge) was regarding the decision pertaining to kidney patients. We had also made this promise in the elections. The cost of dialysis is nearly Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 per month. Now, the Haryana government will bear the expenses," he added.

The chief minister also asked criminals in the state to mend their ways. "I warn those involved in criminal activities that they should either leave the state or mend their ways," he said.

On government job recruitments, Saini slammed the previous Congress government, accusing it of treating job distribution as a business. Regarding the Assembly session, he said the Cabinet discussed the matter, and a date would be finalised, post-festive season, within one to two days. Saini reassured the farmers that every grain of their crop would be purchased at the minimum support price (MSP). He further said that the results of the recruitment examination for 24,000 government jobs in the state were declared.

Committed to procure every single grain produced by farmers

Saini said that the state government is committed to pro-

cure every single grain produced by farmers. The Chief Minister said that so far, 30 lakh MT of paddy has arrived in the Mandis, of which 25,55,319 MT have been purchased at the Minimum Support Price (MSP). Furthermore, payments amounting to Rs. 3,056 crores have already been directly credited to the farmers' accounts for the purchase of paddy. Additionally, 13,90,199 MT of paddy have been lifted from the mandis, Saini added.

The Chief Minister said that during the current Kharif season, 3.47 lakh MT of Bajra has arrived in the mandis, of which 3.05 LMT have already been purchased. Furthermore, 1,14,358 MT have been lifted from the mandis. He also informed that Rs. 331 crores have been directly credited to farmers' accounts for the purchase of Bajra.

Responding to a question regarding incidents of stubble burning, the Chief Minister said that there has been a reduction in stubble burning incidents in Haryana. The Supreme Court has also praised the state's farmers on this issue. He said that the State government has been continuously raising awareness among farmers to prevent stubble burning and is providing various subsidized equipment for stubble management to fully control these incidents.

Haryana CM Saini and newly inducted ministers assume office

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH



Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini offers sweets to his senior cabinet colleague Anil Vij as he takes over his office on the first day at Haryana Civil Secretariat in Chandigarh on Friday. Photo by Akhilesh K Mishra

A day after taking the oath of office and secrecy along with his 13 Cabinet colleagues, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday assumed office here in Chandigarh and vowed to tirelessly serve 2.80 crore people of the State. He said, "I assumed charge as the chief servant of the State."

He said, "I am emotional and bowed down. The resolve of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' is paramount," he said, adding, "We will leave no stone unturned in making Haryana the best, prosperous and self-reliant state."

"Under the leadership and guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our full majority government will be dedicated to service, good governance, equality, prosperity and welfare of the poor," Saini added.

The newly inducted Cabinet Ministers of Haryana also took charge of their respective offices in the presence of Chief Minister Saini at the Haryana Civil Secretariat in Chandigarh. The Chief Minister first made Cabinet Minister Anil Vij take charge and congratulated him by presenting a bouquet and sweets. Vij, while interacting with the media, expressed happiness on the occasion and said the present government will not only run non-stop like the previous two terms but will do so at the "speed of the metro". In response to a question, he said whatever responsibility was given to him in the past, he had fulfilled it with full devotion and will continue to do so in the future as well.

Vij said the result of exams for about 25,000 jobs that has come out is being discussed not only in the state but in the entire country as well. People are writing on social media that youths of their village have got jobs without any recommendation or bribe. He termed jobs being given on merit as a revolution in the country. While talking to the media, Cabinet Minister Krishan Lal Panwar said, "Our government has fulfilled its promise of providing employment to the youth as soon as it took charge. The government has given a Diwali

gift by giving jobs to about 25,000 youth. The Central government and the state are working in accordance with the ideals of the Constitution and the Constitution is in safe hands."

After assuming office, Cabinet Minister Rao Narbir Singh said the promises made to the people of the state in the Sankalp Patra will be fulfilled on priority. At the same time, the problem of waterlogging in Gurugram, which is known as the economic capital of the state, will also be solved soon. He said conservation of the environment is not only the responsibility of the government but of the general public as well.

Cabinet Minister Mahipal Dhanda said the goal of our government is to make the life of the needy, poor, youth and farmers easier. Jobs have been given to the youth on merit and in future also these will be given with the same spirit. Farmers' crops are being purchased on MSP, which has provided relief to them, he added.

Minister Vipul Goel said that he will live up to the trust reposed in him by the people of the state. He assured the public that his priority is to implement BJP's Sankalp Patra. He believes only in the policy of development. He will now work to make Faridabad a developed city. Along with this, he will also complete the development works on priority.

Cabinet Minister Arvind Kumar Sharma, after assuming the charge, said people have expressed faith in the policies of

the BJP. Now, he will try to live up to the expectations and utilise this opportunity given to him by Chief Minister to serve the people.

Minister Shyam Singh Rana said that today Prime Minister Narendra Modi's name is known all over the world and this is the reason that the BJP has formed government in the state for a record third time.

Another Minister Ranbir Gangwa said apart from solving the main problems of Barwala constituency, his primary objective would be to get the promises made in the party's manifesto fulfilled. Ranbir Gangwa said the BJP government formed in the state for the third time will write new chapters of development. He said he will fully live up to the trust of the people.

Cabinet Minister Shruti Choudhary said women's empowerment and farmers' welfare will be the priorities of our government. She said in the Assembly elections, people have given a befitting reply to the Congress party through their vote. She said today is a historic day for her. She thanked Prime Minister Modi and Chief Minister Saini for giving her a Cabinet berth. She said she considers the people of Tosham as her family and will try her best to fulfill all their needs and ensure its holistic development.

Minister Kumari Arti Singh Rao said she had got an opportunity to serve the people of Haryana. She thanked the people of the state for reposing faith in her and ensuring her victory.

CM Mann calls for practical solution to stubble burning crisis, Seeks compensation for farmers

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday made a fervent appeal to the Central Government, calling for a "practical solution" to the ongoing stubble burning crisis, which continues to plague Northern India. Mann emphasized that compensatory measures for farmers could serve as an effective alternative to the current crop procurement system, which forces farmers to cultivate paddy and subsequently burn stubble to clear their fields.

As the air quality in Delhi and neighbouring regions deteriorates once again due to stubble burning, Mann underscored the need for urgent and coordinated action. He stressed that the issue is not limited to Punjab but affects the entire northern belt of India.

"If PM Modi can stop the Ukraine war like they showed in the ad, can he not stop the smoke here?" quipped Mann, expressing frustration over the lack of decisive intervention from the Central Government.

Mann explained that the absence of a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for alternative crops compels farmers to grow paddy, leading to the annual stubble burning that severely impacts air quality. He reiterated that farmers do not want to burn stubble but are left with little choice due to the current agricultural practices. "The farmers in Punjab do not want to burn stubble or even cultivate paddy in the first

place," Mann said, while urging the Central Government to implement compensatory schemes to incentivize farmers to shift to more sustainable crops.

The Punjab Government has taken several measures to combat stubble burning, including the distribution of 1.25 lakh machines to farmers, which has helped reduce the number of incidents. Mann pointed out that out of 75 lakh hectares of paddy cultivation, stubble on 40 lakh hectares is now managed without burning, thanks to these efforts. However, he believed that more needs to be done, and financial support for farmers is essential for a long-term solution.

Mann also criticized the Central Government for its approach, which he described as punitive rather than supportive. Haryana, for instance, has adopted strict measures, including filing FIRs against violators. Mann argued that this method is insufficient and that practical solutions, such as compensation, are more effective in curbing stubble burning.

With the Supreme Court expressing concern over the issue and summoning officials from Punjab and Haryana, the pressure is mounting on the Central Government to take decisive action. Mann's appeal highlighted the need for a cooperative approach to address the environmental crisis that affects millions across Northern India.

Cong MLAs authorise party high command to appoint CLP leader in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Haryana Congress Legislature Party (CLP), which held its first meeting here in Chandigarh on Friday passed a resolution authorising the party high command to appoint its next leader in the House.

Top Congress leaders—former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot, AICC treasurer Ajay Maken, Punjab CLP leader Partap Singh Bajwa, and Senior Congress leader TS Singh Deo were present in the meeting as central observers. They also spoke with all party MLAs and sought their opinion on who should be their new leader. Outgoing CLP leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda and state Congress chief Uday Bhan were also present at the meeting along with other Haryana

Punjab CM flags off delegation of 72 school teachers to Finland

Chandigarh: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday flagged off a delegation of 72 primary school teachers to Finland for specialized training. Mann, addressing the teachers during a flag-off event in Delhi, emphasized, "You are not only shaping the minds of students but also nurturing their characters to become compassionate and responsible citizens." The initiative marked a significant commitment by the Punjab Government to transform the education landscape and ensure that students receive a world-class education in their home state.

Mann highlighted that the training in Finland is not just a journey abroad; it represents an opportunity to learn innovative pedagogical techniques and best practices from one of the most effective education systems in the

Congress MLAs. The meeting lasted nearly 90 minutes.

In polls conducted on October 5, the BJP secured a third term in the state, winning 48 seats in the 90-member assembly. The Congress won 37 seats.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Ajay Maken said, "A meeting of the Congress Legislature Party was held here. At the beginning of the meeting, Bhupinder Singh Hooda read out a resolution that CLP unanimously decides that the right to choose its leader is of the AICC president. Hooda's resolution was seconded by Haryana Congress president Uday Bhan. All the MLAs present unanimously backed the resolution."

After the resolution was passed, the observers met with the MLAs separately and sought

their opinions, he said, adding "we will give the feedback to the high command" today itself.

In a show of strength on Wednesday, 31 party MLAs met Hooda and extended their support to him. However, a section of leaders is seeking to oust him as the leader of the party in the assembly and wants the younger generation to take over as the Congress failed to come back to power in the state.

But, Hooda did not seem to be in the mood to give up. The Congress MLAs from Haryana had recently felicitated Hooda at his Delhi residence and expressed their desire that he be their leader in the state assembly. It was the first time the Congress MLAs had met after the Haryana Assembly poll results were announced even though the meeting was informal.

ment schools. He stated that this initiative enhances parental involvement in children's education and builds a supportive learning environment. "We will be holding a mega PTM soon, and I'm proud to share that 157 students from Punjab have cleared the IIT entrance test," he added, showcasing the potential for success within the state's education system.

Paddy Procurement: Protesting Farmers Hold Ground, Set for Talks with Pb CM

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

In a charged atmosphere marked by escalating tensions, protesting farmers in Punjab, under the banner of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), on Friday accepted the invitation of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for talks, while refusing to back down from their demand for swift paddy procurement. The farmers, along with rice millers and arhtiyas (commission agents), have made Kisan Bhawan in Chandigarh their center of protest, vowing to stay until their demands are met.

The protest, sparked by delays in paddy procurement at government mandis (grain markets) across the State, had been gaining momentum for days. Farmers, rice millers, and arhtiyas (commission agents) — each representing critical stakeholders in the paddy procurement process — came together to march towards the Chief Minister's residence in Chandigarh. However, their plans were thwarted early on Friday when Punjab Police detained several prominent farmer leaders in Mohali district to prevent them from entering Chandigarh. Despite the police's efforts, a few leaders managed to reach Kisan Bhawan in Chandigarh's Sector 35, setting the stage for what would become a high-stakes confrontation.

Farm leaders, including Manjit Dhaner, Ruldu Singh

Punjab govt should handover century-old Shanan Power Project to Himachal: CM Sukhu

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvir Singh Sukhu on Friday said that it was time for the Punjab government to handover the century-old Shanan Power Project to the state. Sukhu inspected the 110 MW Shanan Power House at Jogindernagar and took a briefing from the officials.

Later while interacting with the media, he said that following the expiration of the lease period the government of Himachal Pradesh rightfully deserves to take over the project. The Shanan project was com-

missioned in 1932. The Shanan hydroelectric powerhouse was built under a 99-year lease between Joginder Sen, the then king of Mandi state and British engineer Col BC Batty in 1925. During the reorganisation of states in November 1966, the powerhouse was given to Punjab for a 99-year lease which expired on March 2, 2024.

"After a century of operation by Punjab, the time has come that 110 MW Shanan Power project located in Jogindernagar in Himachal's Mandi district be handed over to the state," Sukhu said in a statement.

He said that the Shanan project does not fall under the

Punjab Reorganization Act and that the Punjab government has filed an appeal in the Supreme Court. He assured that the decision of the Supreme Court on the matter would be respected by one and all.

The chief minister highlighted that the foundation of the Shanan project was laid more than a century ago. The objective of his visit was to assess the current condition of this power project. He said that although the project was presently operated by the Punjab government, discussions are underway to transfer control to the Himachal Pradesh government.

Punjab Police Unravels Gurpreet Singh Murder Case, Links Amritpal Singh to the Conspiracy

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab Police has made a significant breakthrough in the murder case of Gurpreet Singh, the former cashier of the pro-Khalistan outfit 'Waris Punjab De' (WPD), who was shot dead on October 9, 2024, in Faridkot.

The state Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav on Friday revealed that the mastermind behind the crime is gangster-turned-terrorist Arshdeep Singh, alias Arsh Dalla. In a further twist, evidence has surfaced implicating Amritpal Singh, the 'jailed' Khalistani sympathizer, Khadoor Sahib MP, and WPD's current head, in the conspiracy.

Gurpreet Singh, also known as 'Hari Nau' or 'Bhodi', was killed while riding his motorcycle back home from a local gurdwara. Tensions had been brewing within WPD after differences arose between Amritpal Singh and Gurpreet following the death of WPD founder Deep Sidhu. Gurpreet

had publicly voiced his opposition to Amritpal on social media, which led to threats against him.

DGP Yadav, in a press conference, detailed how the police had meticulously gathered evidence, including extensive analysis of CCTV footage along a 125-km stretch, to trace the movements of the assailants. The police also used mobile tower dumps and advanced big data tools to analyze the digital footprint of those involved. The investigation team, which included officials from Faridkot and the State Special Operations Cell, worked diligently to piece together the various elements of the conspiracy.

According to DGP Yadav, three individuals linked to the spree (surveillance) module were arrested — Bilal Ahmed alias Fauji, Guramarddeep Singh alias Pontu, and Arshdeep Singh alias Jhandu. These individuals, managed by Canada-based handler Karamveer Singh alias Gora, conducted surveillance on

Gurpreet Singh and passed the information to the shooter module. The killers' identities have been established, and the police are actively searching for them, he said.

The involvement of Amritpal Singh came to light during the investigation, with recorded statements suggesting that the murder was carried out at his behest. This revelation has sent shockwaves across Punjab, where the WPD movement has previously attracted controversy. Amritpal Singh's role as the key figure in WPD has already been scrutinized for his controversial actions and rhetoric, but this murder accusation could have far-reaching legal and political consequences.

DGP Yadav emphasized that the murder was part of a larger conspiracy. According to police findings, there were plans to target other individuals as well, and this wider plot is still under investigation. He reassured the public that the

police are determined to ensure the safety and security of the State and will continue to investigate all angles of the case.

"Our commitment to making Punjab a safe and secure state is unwavering," DGP Yadav said, noting that the police had acted swiftly in this case, using both physical and digital evidence. The DGP stressed that law and order would be maintained, and no person or group would be allowed to disturb Punjab's peace and harmony.

The case, registered under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Arms Act, marks another instance of the Punjab Police's ongoing battle against organized crime and terrorism. The involvement of foreign handlers, including those based in Canada, highlights the transnational nature of the conspiracy.

As investigations continue, more arrests are expected, and the police remain focused on uncovering the full scope of this complex crime.

Govt's Response

In response to the mounting pressure, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann extended an invitation for talks to the leaders of the SKM and the protesting associations. However, the Chief Minister was in Delhi for official engagements related to the state's education sector, and the talks were scheduled for the following evening. While the farmers agreed to meet with Mann, they made it clear that they would not leave Chandigarh until concrete actions were taken to address the procurement delays.

Farmers' Grievances

At the heart of the protest lies a complex web of issues tied



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Balancing act

SC upholds Section 6A of Citizenship Act, balancing humanitarian concerns with indigenous rights of Assamese people

In a landmark judgement the Supreme Court of India has upheld the constitutional validity of Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. In a 4:1 majority verdict, the bench led by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud endorsed the provisions that grant citizenship to people who migrated from Bangladesh between January 1, 1966, and March 25, 1971. The decision comes amidst long-standing debates over immigration in Assam. Section 6A was introduced in 1985 as part of the Assam Accord, an agreement between the Indian government and Assam's agitating groups to address the issues arising from illegal immigration. Those who arrived after March 25, 1971, are not eligible for citizenship and are considered illegal immigrants under Indian law. The Assam Accord aimed to balance the humanitarian concerns of migrants with the socio-economic and cultural interests of the indigenous Assamese population. The cut-off date of March 25, 1971, corresponds to the beginning of 'Operation Searchlight,'



a military crackdown by the Pakistani Army in then-East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), which triggered a significant influx of refugees into India. In the majority ruling, Chief Justice Chandrachud noted that Section 6A does not violate the fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution, which pertain to the conferring of citizenship to migrants from East and West Pakistan at the commencement of the Constitution on January 26, 1950. The court held that the legislation sought to address specific historical and demographic realities in Assam, making the separate cut-off date for the state reasonable and justifiable. However, While upholding the constitutional validity of Section 6A, the Supreme Court expressed concerns over the inadequate implementation of immigration laws in Assam. Indeed the porous borders and incomplete fencing have allowed a continuous influx of migrants, which exacerbates demographic challenges. Besides, existing mechanisms, including the Foreigners' Tribunals, are insufficient for effectively identifying and deporting illegal immigrants. The Supreme Court's decision has far-reaching implications for the socio-political landscape in Assam. The ruling, while affirming the validity of Section 6A, also recognises the concerns of petitioners who argued that cultural and demographic tapestry of Assam has changed by mandating better enforcement of immigration laws. If the directives for stricter border controls and timely identification of illegal immigrants are implemented effectively, it could help address long-standing grievances regarding demographic changes in Assam. On the other hand, striking down Section 6A would have rendered many residents, who have lived in Assam for decades, effectively stateless, leading to potential humanitarian crises. The court's ruling ensures that such individuals retain their citizenship rights, thus preventing large-scale displacements and unrest.

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PICTALK



Women make 'rangoli' on the occasion of Lakshmi Puja, in Nadia

PTI

A call to secure a lead-free future for children

As the world marks the twelfth International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, the spotlight is on eliminating lead from paints

The world is observing the twelfth International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week (ILPPW) from October 20-26, 2024. This year's theme, "Bright Futures Begin Lead-Free", echoes the grave danger that the presence of lead in paints has on the environment and human health, and more specifically on children.

Lead, a potent neurotoxin, has long been recognised as a serious public health threat, particularly to children, and pregnant and lactating women. Exposure to lead can cause irreversible damage to the brain and nervous system, leading to cognitive impairment, learning disabilities and developmental delays. It negatively affects children's intellectual ability, attention span and academic performance. Further lead exposure can have a huge bearing on the economy of the nation. According to a study, childhood lead exposure in low- and middle-income countries resulted in economic losses amounting to \$977 billion annually, representing 1.2 per cent of the global GDP



in 2011. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there is no known safe level of lead exposure in the human body. The UN agency has classified lead as one of the top ten chemicals of primary public health concern. Efforts are being made globally and nationally to phase out lead from different sources, as it directly and indirectly, harms human health. The phase-out of lead from gasoline has been a remarkable success, but lead in paints remains a key source of lead poisoning, and more so in developing and the least developed countries. Nevertheless, lead-based paint

is a common source of lead poisoning in children. They ingest and inhale lead particles even when they are in the safe confines of their homes. Lead paints are more harmful when they deteriorate, releasing dust and flakes that contaminate indoor environments and pose a direct risk to human health, particularly to children. Many countries have introduced regulations to control or ban the use of lead in paints, but it is still a problem in low- and middle-income countries where such regulations are either absent or poorly enforced. The continued sale and use of lead paint in over 100 countries without

binding legal limits, exacerbates the threat. India has restricted the use of lead up to 90 PPM in household and decorative paints through a regulation, but challenges in implementing the regulations in small and medium-scale industries, persist. The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint, formed by WHO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2009, aims to phase out lead from paints worldwide by 2025. However, considering the current pace of developments, that seems far from being achieved if the movement is not accelerated. This year's theme "Bright future begins lead-free", can perhaps be catalysed as an action-oriented approach to eliminate lead from paints. There is only a year to go, so all stakeholders including government, industries, and civil society must join hands in this global effort to eliminate lead from paints and keep the future generation safe.

The author is a Senior Programme Coordinator (Chemical and Health) with Toxics Link; views are personal



PIYUSH MOHAPATRA

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Unveiling Canada's hidden history of injustice

A contradiction in Canada's identity—championing human rights and multiculturalism while perpetuating deep injustices against its most vulnerable



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Chanie Wenjack was a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who attended the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Kenora, Ontario, in the 1960s. Like many Indigenous children, he was forcibly removed from his family and placed in the school, where the goal was to assimilate him into Canadian culture. Chanie was lonely, abused, and homesick. In 1966, he ran away from the school, trying to find his way home—over 600 kilometres away. Chanie set out on foot, without proper clothing or food, and tried to follow a set of railway tracks that he believed would lead him back to his family. After days of walking in the freezing October weather, Chanie died from exposure and hunger. His body was found on October 22, 1966, curled up beside the tracks. He was clutching matches and a frozen lump of sugar in his pocket. He was just a child, lost in a hostile world that had torn him from his family.

This tragic narrative, among hundreds of thousands of similar cases swept under the carpet of history, encapsulates a fundamental contradiction within Canada's national identity—a nation that presents itself as a bastion of multiculturalism, tolerance, and human rights while simultaneously perpetrating profound injustices against its Indigenous peoples. From the brutal implementation of the residential school system to contemporary systemic racism, Canada's historical contradictions are glaring and demand serious examination. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) reported that many children experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse while at these schools—a grim testament to a system that was, in its essence, a form of cultural genocide. This system did not simply end with the closing of these schools; the effects are still felt today, manifesting in intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination against Indigenous communities.

As the well-known Canadian writer John Ralston Saul aptly notes, "Canada's story is one of



contradiction; we celebrate diversity while practising exclusion and denying the full citizenship of Indigenous peoples," adding, "the unconscious civilisation is the one in which we have lost our sense of the individual, in which the individual has become a statistic."

While Indigenous peoples face systemic discrimination, the Canadian government has also engaged in doublespeak regarding human rights. Canada often positions itself as a global leader in advocating for human rights, yet its track record reveals a different reality. For instance, Canada's participation in international human rights agreements contrasts starkly with its treatment of Indigenous populations. The United Nations has repeatedly criticised Canada for its failure to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples, pointing to issues such as the lack of access to clean water, adequate housing, and education. The disparity between Canada's self-image and the lived experiences of marginalised communities highlights a persistent hypocrisy. Systemic discrimination in Canada impacts not only Indigenous communities but also various racialised groups, who encounter significant barriers in employment, education, and healthcare. This inequitable access reinforces cycles of poverty and marginalisation. The recent rise in anti-Asian



SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION IN CANADA IMPACTS NOT ONLY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES BUT ALSO VARIOUS RACIALISED GROUPS, WHO ENCOUNTER SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND HEALTHCARE

sentiment has exposed the pervasive nature of racism in Canadian society, with hate crimes against Asian Canadians increasing sharply. This alarming trend highlights the fragility of Canada's multicultural narrative and reflects a broader pattern of scapegoating marginalised groups, revealing the inadequacies of government responses that often fail to deliver meaningful action. It is quite unfortunate to see how Canada has become a sanctuary for extremist movements, allowing groups like the Khalistani separatists and Tamil Tiger sympathisers to thrive within its borders. This situation raises alarming questions about the nation's complicity in international terrorism. Critics argue that the Canadian government's leniency towards violent nationalists and separatists not only enables these ideologies but also positions Canada as a breeding ground for extremism that threatens global security. The government's failure to confront these dangerous ideologies casts doubt on its commitment to combating terrorism and upholding human rights.

The Khalistani movement, which seeks a separate Sikh state in India, has erupted into violent clashes, giving rise to grave allegations of Canadian collusion in the turmoil. This week, the expulsion of six Indian diplomats over evidence of a "campaign of violence" against dissidents fur-

ther exposes the hypocrisy of a government that engages in doublespeak while attempting to deflect attention from its shortcomings. While Canada positions itself as a supporter of human rights and development, its actions frequently tell a different story. For example, Canadian mining companies operating in Africa have been criticised for their exploitative practices and the environmental degradation they cause.

The extraction of resources often comes at the expense of local communities, whose rights and livelihoods are compromised in the name of profit. This contradiction is starkly illustrated in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where Canadian companies have faced allegations of human rights abuses and complicity in violence against local populations.

The quest for justice is not just a collective responsibility but a relentless commitment to truth and accountability. Only then can Canada build a future where dignity is not a privilege but a right for every citizen, thus challenging the very essence of what it means to be Canadian? As Gabor Maté, a well-known Canadian physician and author, states, "the question of who we are is deeply embedded in the culture we are raised in and the stories we tell ourselves."

(The writer is a journalist and author, views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONGRESS FACES SETBACKS

Madam — The article 'Haryana setback exposes cracks in INDIA Bloc' (October 17) has exposed chinks in the opposition armour. The tussle for the opposition face never settled even before Lok Sabha elections but after the Congress debacle in Jammu and Kashmir and Haryana elections, the severe infighting has surged on the ground. Rahul Gandhi has lost not just credibility in the opposition but even the Congress cadre has a trust deficit in him. All enthusiasm appears lost for the Jharkhand and Maharashtra Assembly elections and bypolls. The blame game on EVMs has already commenced even before poll campaigns.

The allies of the INDIA bloc are marginalising Congress on seat sharing. The Udhav Thakre-led Shiv Sena has completely sacrificed its Hindu ideology and its stand on Article 370 and Veer Savarkar, so Shiv Sena (UBT) relinquished its distinct identity and space in Maharashtra politics. The opposition in the INDIA bloc and other alliances are chasing minority votes as its vote bank leaving Hindus for the BJP. The entire opposition is numbed on terrorism-related killings, illegal waqf claims on government owned properties, temples and their lands, anti-India tirades abroad, insults heaped on Sanatan and our Gods and faiths, Bengal carnage and massacres of Hindus in Bangladesh. The National Conference boldly gave up Congress in his cabinet for better coordination with the Modi government, certainly for more empowerment of his governance. Haryana's verdict is a big blow to Congress for the fallacy of Rahul Gandhi's typical campaigning based on narratives, hypes and unsubstantiated allegations on the Modi government and the lack of good governance in Congress-ruled states.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

CRIME BEYOND BORDERS

Madam—In India, it is rarely heard that the business of the criminal gang here runs at the international level. It was revealed for the first time when Canadian Prime

Justice statue reflects change



The unveiling of the new lady statue of the justice by the delegates of the Apex Court of India is more about resemblance with the Indian Justice Vision. Despite India had been in so many years of independence now, the existence of colonial laws and justice icons presents a jeopardised picture. Often, Indian judiciary is

renowned for its delayed handling of cases, notoriously defamed as the 'Tarikh pe Tarikh' system.

The new lady icons, in their renowned appearance, will propel the audience to expect renowned justice mechanisms. The changing of sword with the Indian Constitution book, opening of her blindfold, and changing in cloth with a saree allow the same lady to visualise the renowned aspirations of the people from the Indian justice mechanism. We can expect that with indigenous statues and indigenous Samhita laws, India can pave the way for improved justice mechanisms with speedy justice delivery. We hope that this new version of the justice delivery system will enhance the trust and reliability of the Indians in these justice delivery bodies and will propel Indians to get rid of this Black coat syndrome and ineffective judiciary.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Minister Justin Trudeau said that 'India's Bishnoi group is currently carrying out its exploits at the international level. This group has created a sensation in the whole country by shooting 66-year-old Baba Siddiqui, a well-known leader and former MLA of Mumbai, in broad daylight. Apart from this, this group has also threatened to kill Bollywood celebrity Salman Khan since 2018. Bishnoi is the prime accused in the sensational murder of Sidhu Moose Wala, who was shot dead near his village in October 2022. Police say his accomplice Goldy Brar, who is also a co-accused in the murder of Moose Wala, runs the gang from Canada via remote control. Bishnoi has more than 30 cases pending against him, 19 of which are currently being heard in court. A senior officer of Punjab's Anti-Gangster Task Force has admitted that "He runs his gang from jail without any coordination."

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

BLIND SUPPORT FOR CANADA

Madam — The US, UK, Australia and New Zealand blindly supporting their

partner Canada in the 'five eyes' group on the unsubstantiated allegation against the involvement of the Indian government in the killing of an Indian-origin Canadian who belongs to the 'Khalistani Indian Separatist group is deplorable. The allegation is based only on the basis of the intelligence reports from the Canadian Police without any evidence, as per Justin Trudeau himself. In diplomatic matters such as these one wonders how there can be an assertion of charge by Canada, and the friendly nations support the same 'blindly' just on here say. It is sad the 'five eyes' group, which has opened its eyes on Trudeau's call against India, has turned a blind eye to what is happening in West Asia, where its lead member, the US is bolstering the attack by the rogue nation Israel in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, and Lebanon and now readying to attack Iran as a retaliation.

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

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FIRST COLUMN

PM MODI'S ASEAN OUTREACH

This strong diplomatic push comes as India emphasises ASEAN centrality



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lao PDR last week to attend the India-ASEAN summit was an important message for allies in the Indo-Pacific region regarding shared interests and common goals. PM Modi laid out a ten-point action agenda plan for upgrading relations with the ASEAN member countries, covering technology cooperation, trade, people-to-people ties, education, health, green energy and a focus on the global south bunch of nations. This comes at a time when External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visited Pakistan (a first-in-line visit by any Indian External Affairs minister in the past 9 years) to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit. PM Modi during his inaugural address at the ASEAN India summit mentioned "Ten years ago, I announced India's 'Act East' policy. Over the past decade, this initiative has revitalised the historical ties between India and ASEAN countries, infusing them with renewed energy, direction and momentum. Giving importance to ASEAN centrality, we launched the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative in 2019." Clear references were made regarding the Indo-Pacific's centrality for India's foreign policy interests. India has under the current government's foreign policy priorities, kept the Indo-Pacific as a centre-piece. It has joined one of the most significant multilateral platforms, QUAD with the US, Australia and Japan and also entered into an economic partnership framework with the US and several countries in Asia under IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework).

The QUAD even though not a security alliance is focussed on maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. India managed to include several crucial pointers inserted in the Chairman HE Mr Sonexay Siphandone's, (also, the Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic) statement during the summit. The statement read "We reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, security, stability, safety, and freedom of navigation in and overflight above the South China Sea.



We reaffirmed the need to enhance mutual trust and confidence, exercise self-restraint in the conduct of activities that would complicate or escalate disputes and affect peace and stability and avoid actions that may further complicate the situation. We further reaffirmed the need to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. We emphasised the importance of self-restraint in the conduct of all activities by claimants and all other states, including those mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) that could further complicate the situation and escalate tensions in the South China Sea.

We underscored the importance of the full and effective implementation of the DOC in its entirety and committed to maintaining and promoting an environment conducive to the negotiations of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) that is in accordance with International Law, including the 1982 UNCLOS. "Meanwhile as expected India did not engage in any bilateral dialogue with the SCO host country, Pakistan. Relations with Pakistan have been on the edge, for nearly a decade now, with an escalation, when India removed Article 370, regarding a special status for Kashmir. A couple of Pakistan-based terror attacks and India's surgical strike on terrorists on Pakistan soil ensured the relationship has been frosty. Meanwhile, Pakistan's national economy has plummeted in a post-Covid era. The guardian country for Pakistan in the region is India's other real problem, China. However, the binding economic packages China offers, are sure to make Pakistan a colony in the long run. While EAM's visit to Pakistan could be seen as a good goodwill gesture, in the long run, economic bilateral ties and the human bridge between the two nations, would be the only saviour for Pakistan.

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

Bangladesh reforms: Exaggerated importance



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

As scepticism mounts and electoral timelines remain vague, questions about the interim government's long-term ambitions are becoming harder to ignore

The latest buzzword in Bangladesh is reform. A report by Reuters, datelined August 16, 2024, and carried in the Dhaka Tribune under the heading, "Student protesters plan new party to cement their revolution," quoted Nahid Islam, a coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Students Movement and an advisor to the interim government, as saying, "The spirit of the movement was to create a new Bangladesh, one where no fascist or autocrat can return," and adding that to ensure that "we need structural reforms, which will definitely take some time." The government, he further said, was not considering calls from the Awami League and BNP to hold fresh polls as early as fall.

According to a report in The Daily Star, datelined August 18, 2024, and carried under the heading "No option but to succeed: Yunus," the interim government's chief advisor said, while addressing foreign diplomats during a "Meet and Greet" session at a hotel in Dhaka, that the interim government would hold a free, fair and participatory election as soon as it could complete its mandate to carry out vital reforms in the election commission, judiciary, civil administration, security forces and media. He added that the students wanted meaningful and deep reforms, which would turn Bangladesh into a "real and thriving democracy".

Things have been moving. In his address to the nation on September 11, 2024, Yunus announced the names of the heads of six commissions of reform along with the areas of governance they would address. Thus, Shahdeen Malik would lead the Constitutional Reform Commission; Justice Shah Abu Naim Mominur Rahman, the Judicial Reform Commission; Badiul Alam Majumdar, the Election System Reform Commission; Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, the Public Administration Reform Commission; Safar Raj Hossain, the Police Administration Reform Commission; and Iftekharuzzaman, the Anti-Corruption Reform Commission.

Yunus stated in his 32-minute speech that the commissions were expected to start their work from October 1 and finish within the next three months. Thereafter, the interim government would, on the basis of their report, organise discussions with major political parties and, in the final stage, hold comprehensive consultations, spread over three to seven days, with representatives of student bodies, civil society, political parties and the government. He added, "This discussion will finalise the outline of the reform plan and provide an idea on how it will be implemented."

There was, however, a stumble as early September 18, 2024, when it was announced that the Constitutional Reform Commission was to be headed by Ali Riaz, a Distinguished Professor at Illinois State University in the United States, and not Shahdeen Malik who, one learnt subsequently, had himself opted out, citing his own work load.

Even if the move does not make much of a difference in the commission's work, it indicates inefficiency and thoughtlessness. The interim government should have got Malik's consent before announcing his name as the head of the Constitution Reforms Commission. Besides, work has not been progressing fast enough. A



IF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS COULD BE HELD EARLIER UNDER CARETAKER GOVERNMENTS, THESE CAN BE HELD AGAIN UNDER A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT WHOSE COMPOSITION IS SANCTIONED BY ALL OR A MAJORITY OF PARTIES IN BANGLADESH

report in the Dhaka Tribune, datelined October 14, 2024, and carried under the heading "Badiul Alam: Election Reform Commission reviewing laws, regulations," quotes Badiul Alam Majumdar, head of the Constitutional Reform Commission, as saying that laws, regulations, and rules were [being] reviewed as a part of the election review process, "to gain a clear understanding of electoral reforms." The implication is that the commission had yet to get a clear understanding of its task. At this rate, it is unlikely to finish its work within 90 days of starting it. Delay is almost certain to happen because the introduction of the proportional representation system is being considered. According to Riadul Karim in his piece, "Proportional system scheme in discussion," in Prothom Alo English (updated on October 15, 2024), the proceedings of a virtual discussion meeting showed that while the BNP opposed the decision and the Awami League's view was not known, both "eminent personalities" and the other political parties favoured it. Given the BNP's opposition, there is bound to be heated discussions and delays if the Constitutional Reform Commission considers proposing such a change. Given the difficult and contentious nature of the political and administrative terrains to be covered, progress in the other sectors of reform would also be slow unless the commissions have been told what to recom-

mend and the members have agreed. Hence, the urgency of the question, when would the elections be held? The urgent need for an answer is sharply underlined by the absence of the announcement of a timeframe, to say nothing of dates, for holding elections to the new Jatiya Sangsad or National Parliament. Continued silence on the matter is bound to raise the question: is the interim government planning to become permanent? Some may regard this as an unwarranted question. The complete overhaul of the civil administration, foreign ministry, judiciary, police and military under way, is, however, significant in this context. The plea is that these have to be rid of those implicated in the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government's gross human rights violations. Given, however, the very large number of people shunted or compulsorily retired before time, the question arises whether all of them were actually guilty, or the interim government is staffing the administration, judiciary, police and military with people who would support its bid to stay indefinitely in power. The prospect must worry the BNP. With the Awami League being sought to be systematically crippled through murder and large-scale imprisonment, it has every chance of sweeping the parliamentary elections, which have become due following the dismissal of the former parliament on August 6, 2024. It might also

ask whether the reforms are so important as to make their completion a pre-requisite for holding elections. The argument, articulated ad nauseum, that reforms are need for holding free and fair elections and preventing the return of an autocrat to power, is ridiculous. If free and fair elections could be held earlier under caretaker governments, these can be held again under a caretaker government whose composition is sanctioned by all or a majority of parties in Bangladesh.

The point needs to be made because the importance of reforms as a means of ensuring a "real and thriving democracy," is highly exaggerated. The impeccable democratic constitution of the Weimer Republic could not prevent Hitler's ascent to power through the electoral process. No constitutional safeguard can prevent a legally-elected leader becoming a tyrant, or a military coup, or a violent mass-movement forcing the ouster of an existing government, a telling example of which has recently been provided by Bangladesh itself!

The harsh reality is reflected in the sage words of late Justice Learned Hand of the United States who said, "Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can do even much to help."

(The writer is a consulting editor of The Pioneer; views are personal)

The need for regulatory action on public conduct is imperative

The Delhi High Court's recent decision to suspend the counting of votes for the DUSU elections over public property defacement underscores civic responsibility

The High Court recently halted and deferred the counting of votes for the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) elections on the issue of public property defacement. Additionally, the court mandated that Delhi University recover costs incurred in repairing the public property from the candidates and reimburse the civic authorities including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, government departments, and Delhi Metro. This landmark decision has brought two grave issues to the fore, viz., citizens' ignorant and irresponsible behaviour and the need for regulation by authorities in issues of national interest. The world economies are



KAJLEEN KAUR

working their way to a decarbonised Green Economy, which results in improved human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. India is envisioning to be a Global Leader @2047 and boasts of its G20 presidency which focussed on creating LiFE (Lifestyles

for Environment) and sustainable practices. However, careless behaviour, such as littering, pollution, or illegal deforestation, can harm ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, and contribute to environmental degradation. Such reckless acts question the credibility of the action plan and its implementation. Repairing and maintenance of public property require financial resources, often sourced from taxpayers. It causes an unnecessary burden on public funds, diverting money away from other vital areas such as education, healthcare, and social services. The responsible use of public property is a fundamental aspect of maintaining a thriving, equitable, and sus-

tainable society. It helps preserve resources for future generations, minimises economic burdens, fosters civic responsibility, promotes environmental sustainability, and ensures public safety and equality. The modern structure of economics favours a laissez-faire economy or a non-interventionist market structure. However, ensuring a sensible regulatory mechanism that respects the fundamental role of free-market competition and can also keep a check on unfair civic practices, oversupply or wastage of resources, can provide vital public benefits. There are umpteen visible examples in the economy and society such as the infringement of public prop-



erties, illegal encroachments of roads, the almost disappearing footpaths, and unadministered vendors, distribution of freebies for attracting vote banks to name a few, which call for an ardent need for an effective control mechanism. The outnumbering E-rickshaws in the name of giving employment

are a menace to the traffic system and road safety, requiring urgent action. Another important aspect that needs policy action is the small packaging of products, often called "overpackaging" or "excessive packaging". It often leads to increased waste, particularly in the form of non-recy-

clable materials. Manufacturing small packages requires more raw materials (plastic, paper, metals), resulting in a higher carbon footprint and increased consumption of finite resources. Regulating packaging can contribute to a circular economy, where materials are reused or recycled effectively, minimising environmental harm. To quote the famous economist Say's law of the market, "Supply creates its own demand", it is for the authorities to introduce regulations, limiting the use of small packaging, especially for non-essential or high-waste products. Policies could include taxes or restrictions on single-use plastics and encourage pro-

ducers to switch to larger or reusable packaging, which is cost-effective. Most importantly, educating consumers on the benefits of choosing products with minimal or sustainable packaging can influence purchasing decisions and drive demand for environmentally friendly options. Creating a conducive society and economic structure includes judicious demand, supply, usage and a regulatory framework to ensure the same. It is imperative for all the stakeholders to act more responsibly and to minimise wastage in all forms.

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Hamas confirms Sinwar's death, vows new phase in war with Israel

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Hamas confirmed Friday that its leader, Yahya Sinwar, was killed by Israeli forces in Gaza, and the militant group reiterated its stance that hostages taken from Israel a year ago will not be released until there is a cease-fire in Gaza and a withdrawal of Israeli troops.

"Those prisoners will not return to you before the end of the aggression on Gaza and the withdrawal from Gaza," said Khalil al-Hayya, who was Sinwar's Qatar-based deputy and headed up the group's delegation during several rounds of cease-fire negotiations mediated by the US, Qatar and Egypt.

In a statement, Hamas heralded Sinwar as a hero who "ascended as a heroic martyr, advancing and not retreating, brandishing his weapon, engaging and confronting the occupation army at the forefront of the ranks." The statement appeared to refer to a video the Israeli military circulated of Sinwar's apparent last moments in which a man sits on a

chair in severely damaged building, badly wounded and covered in dust. In the video, the man raises his hand and flings a stick at an approaching Israeli drone.

Sinwar's killing, in what appeared to be a chance front-line encounter with Israeli troops on Wednesday, could shift the dynamics of the Gaza war even as Israel presses its offensive against Hezbollah with ground troops in southern Lebanon and airstrikes in other areas of the country. Hezbollah has fired rockets into Israel nearly every day since the Israel-Hamas war began. Both Hamas and Hezbollah are backed by Iran, which hailed Sinwar as a martyr who can inspire others in challenging Israel.

Israel has pledged to destroy Hamas politically in Gaza, and killing Sinwar was a top military priority. Photos which were apparently taken by Israeli troops on the scene showed the body of a man who appeared to be him, half-buried in rubble and with a gaping wound in his head.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu said in a speech announcing the killing Thursday night that "our war is not yet ended."

But many, from the governments of Israel's allies to exhausted residents of Gaza, expressed hope that Sinwar's death would pave the way for an end to the war.

In Israel, families of hostages still held in Gaza demanded the Israeli government use Sinwar's killing as a way to restart negotiations to bring home their loved ones. There are about 100 hostages remaining in Gaza, at least 30 of whom Israel says are dead.

"We are at an inflection point where the goals set for the war with Gaza have been achieved, all but the release of the hostages," Ronen Neutra, father of the Israeli-American hostage Omer Neutra, said in a video statement. "Sinwar, who was described as a major obstacle to a deal, is no longer alive."

Netanyahu was planning to convene a special meeting Friday to discuss hostage negotiations, an Israeli official with knowledge of the negoti-



ations said. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss confidential information.

Iran's mission to the United Nations issued a statement honoring Sinwar, emphasizing that he died on the battlefield and not in hiding, unlike the former enemy Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who was hanged in 2006.

"When US forces dragged a

disheveled Saddam Hussein out of an underground hole, he begged them not to kill him despite being armed. Those who regarded Saddam as their model of resistance eventually collapsed," the statement said. "However when Muslims look up to martyr Sinwar standing on the battlefield — in combat attire and out in the open, not in a hideout, facing the enemy — the spirit of resistance will be strengthened."

More than 1 million people on both sides were killed during the brutal Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s that began when Hussein launched an invasion of Iraq.

In Lebanon, the militant Hezbollah group, which has been firing rockets into Israel since the war in Gaza erupted in October last year, issued a statement early Friday saying its fighters have used new types of precision-guided missiles and explosive drones against Israel for the first time in recent days.

Hezbollah's statement appeared to refer to an explosives-laden drone that evaded Israel's multilayered air-defense system and slammed

into a mess hall at a military training camp deep inside Israel last Sunday, killing four soldiers and wounding dozens.

The group also announced earlier this week that it fired a new type of missile called Qader 2 toward the suburbs of Tel Aviv.

The Israeli military said it would activate an additional reserve brigade to the north of its country to support troops battling in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah said its fighters were working according to "plans prepared in advance" to battle invading Israeli troops in several parts of south Lebanon. It also announced several missile and artillery attacks on Israeli forces operating in villages in southern Lebanon's border area overnight and Friday morning.

In one case, the group said it fired a heavy missile barrage at Israeli soldiers who were trying to evacuate those wounded in an earlier strike.

The group also said it had fired "large missile salvos" at a military barracks in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights and at the Zvulun

area north of Haifa.

Earlier this week, Hezbollah's acting leader Naim Kassem warned the group will continue to target wider areas of Israel, which it has attacked with rockets nearly every day since Hamas' deadly incursion last year.

As Israel fought militants in Lebanon and in Gaza, its military said Friday that its forces had killed two militants who crossed into Israeli territory south of the Dead Sea from neighboring Jordan.

Such infiltrations are relatively rare, especially as Israel has ramped up border security since the Hamas attack in October 2023.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas-led militants blew holes in Israel's security fence and stormed in, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, who do not distinguish combatants from civilians. The war has destroyed vast swathes of Gaza and displaced about 90 per cent of its population of 2.3 million people.

North sending troops to Russia's aid in Ukraine, says South Korea

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korean intelligence has found that North Korea has dispatched 12,000 troops including special operation forces to support Russia's war against Ukraine, news reports said Friday.

Yonhap news agency cited the National Intelligence Service as that the North Korean troops have already left the country. The NIS didn't immediately confirm the report, but South Korea's presidential office said in a statement that President Yoon Suk Yeol had presided over an emergency meeting earlier Friday to discuss North Korea's troop dispatch to Ukraine. The statement said

participants of the meeting agreed that North Korea's troop dispatch poses a grave security threat to South Korea and the international community. But the presidential office gave no further details like when and how many North Korean soldiers have been sent to Ukraine and what roles they are expected to play.

Ukrainian media reported earlier this month that six North Koreans were among those killed after a Ukrainian missile strike in the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region on Oct. 3. On Thursday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his government has intelligence that 10,000 troops from North Korea are

being prepared to join Russian forces fighting against his country, warning that a third nation wading into the hostilities could turn the conflict into a "world war."

"From our intelligence we've got information that North Korea sent tactical personnel and officers to Ukraine," Zelenskyy told reporters at NATO headquarters. "They are preparing on their land 10,000 soldiers, but they didn't move them already to Ukraine or to Russia."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said the western alliance "have no evidence that North Korean soldiers are involved in the fight. But we do know that North Korea is supporting

Russia in many ways, weapons supplies, technological supplies, innovation, to support them in the war effort. And that is highly worrying."

The US, South Korea and their partners have accused North Korea of supplying Russia with artillery shells, missiles and other equipment to help fuel its war on Ukraine.

Outside officials and experts say North Korea in exchange possibly received badly needed food and economic aid and technology assistance aimed at upgrading Kim's nuclear-armed military. Both Moscow and Pyongyang have repeatedly denied the existence of an arms deal between the countries.

N Korean leader stresses troops to treat S Korea as hostile enemy

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reminded his troops to treat South Korea as a hostile foreign enemy and insisted that the North wouldn't hesitate to attack its rival if the South infringes upon its sovereignty, state media said Friday.

Kim's comments at an army headquarters came after North Korea this week confirmed that it revised its constitution to define South Korea as "a hostile state" and blew up front-line road and rail links that were once connected to the South.

The steps punctuated Kim's calls for North Korea to abandon its longstanding goals of reconciling with the South and reflect his intent to escalate tensions and increase leverage amid a deepening stalemate in diplomacy.

Analysts see increasing risks of possible clashes along the rivals' tense border areas, although it would be highly unlikely for the North to contemplate full-scale attacks in the face of superior U.S. and South Korean forces.

During a visit to the headquarters of the North Korean People's Army's 2nd Corps on Thursday, Kim stressed to troops the importance of understanding that any use of offensive force against the South would constitute a "legitimate retaliatory action against the hostile country, not the fellow countrymen." He said the North's detonation of the border road and rail sections on Tuesday demonstrated the North's resolve to cut off persistent "evil" relations with the South, which "lasted century after century and the complete removal of the useless awareness about fellow countrymen and unreasonable idea of reunification." He said the event was also a declaration that his troops wouldn't hesitate to use physical force against the South, an "apparent hostile country," if it violates North Korea's sovereignty, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said.

South Korea had no immediate comment on Kim's remarks. North Korea has been making increasingly provocative threats against rival South Korea in recent weeks.



NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte (left) speaks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the NATO-Ukraine Council working dinner at NATO Headquarters in Brussels on Thursday. AP/PTI

Russia flaunts its doomsday weapons to keep West from supporting Ukraine

AP ■ MOSCOW

This year has seen President Vladimir Putin repeatedly brandish the nuclear sword, reminding everyone that Russia has the world's largest atomic arsenal to try to deter the West from ramping up support for Ukraine.

He ordered his military to hold drills involving battlefield nuclear weapons with ally Belarus.

He announced Russia will start producing ground-based intermediate range missiles that were outlawed by a now-defunct US-Soviet treaty in 1987.

And last month, he lowered the threshold for unleashing his arsenal by revising the country's nuclear doctrine.

Putin is relying on those thousands of warheads and hundreds of missiles as an enormous doomsday machine to offset NATO's massive edge in conventional weapons to discourage what he sees as threats to Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A look at Russia's atomic arsenal and the issues surrounding it: Russia's strategic weapons The Federation of American Scientists estimated this year that Russia has an inventory totaling 5,580 deployed and non-deployed nuclear warheads, while the US has 5,044. Together, that's about 88% of the world's nuclear weapons. Most of these are strategic, or intercontinental-range weapons.

Like the US, Russia has a nuclear triad of ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, long-range bombers and ICBM-armed submarines.

Since Putin came to power in 2000, the Kremlin has worked to upgrade the Soviet-built components of the triad, deploying hundreds of new land-based missiles, commissioning new nuclear submarines and modernizing nuclear-capable bombers. Russia's effort to revamp its nuclear forces has helped prompt the US to launch a costly modernisation of its arsenal.

Russia has reequipped its land-based strategic missile forces with mobile Yars ICBMs and recently began deploying the heavy, silo-based Sarmat ICBMs — designated "Satan II" missiles in the West — to gradually replace about 40 Soviet-built R-36M missiles. Sarmat has had only one known successful test, and reportedly suffered a massive explosion during an abortive test last month.

The navy commissioned seven new Borei-class atomic-powered submarines, each with 16 Bulava nuclear-tipped missiles, and plans to build five more. They are intended to form the core of the triad's naval component alongside a few Soviet-era nuclear subs still operating.

Russia still relies on Soviet-built Tu-95 and Tu-160 strategic bombers carrying nuclear-tipped cruise missiles. Moscow has restarted production of the supersonic Tu-160 that was halted after the 1991 Soviet collapse, aiming to build several dozen modernized aircraft with new engines and avionics.

Russia's non-strategic nuclear weapons The US estimates that Russia has between 1,000 and 2,000 non-strategic, or tactical, nuclear weapons intended for use on the battlefield that typically are far less powerful than the strategic warheads capable of destroying entire cities.

Russia has high-precision ground-launched Iskander missiles with a range of up to 500 kilometers (310 miles), which can be fitted with either a conventional or a nuclear warhead.

The air force has a fleet of MiG-31 fighter jets that carry a hypersonic Kinzhal missile, which can be equipped with a nuclear or conventional warhead. Russia has widely used conventional versions of both Iskander and Kinzhal against Ukraine.

As part of the Kremlin's nuclear messaging, Russia and ally Belarus held drills to train their troops with the battlefield nuclear weapons in May, shortly after Putin began his fifth term.

Singapore detains teenager for planning terror attacks

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore has detained a 17-year-old self-radicalised supporter of terror group ISIS under the Internal Security Act (ISA) mere weeks before his planned attack on non-Muslim males in a public housing estate.

The teenager, purportedly influenced by the ongoing Hamas strikes and developments around Syria, wanted to use either a kitchen knife or a pair of scissors from his home as his weapon, said the Internal Security Department (ISD) in a press release on Friday.

It was a "very close shave as he could have easily gone on a rampage", Singapore's Minister for Law and Home Affairs K Shanmugam said. "I would say this is one of the ones where it was quite close, fairly close," Shanmugam said on the duration between the teen's arrest and the planned attack.

Shanmugam pointed out that the area that the teen had intended for the attack was frequented by "thousands of people" every day, including senior citizens and young children, and that it would be even more crowded during the school

holidays being a main housing estate area with shopping malls and leisure facilities. Since 2020, the ISD has detained five self-radicalised youths who wanted to carry out attacks in Singapore using such easily accessible weapons. Such attacks require little time and preparation to execute, said the department. In this particular case, the youth was determined to follow through with his plan and was less than a month away from executing it at the time of his arrest in August, it added.

He had planned to attack non-Muslim males near Tampines West Community Centre, during the school holidays in September. Following his arrest, the teenager was issued a two-year detention order in September as well, the Channel News Asia reported on Friday.

The youth chose the Tampines location as it was crowded and within walking distance from his home, said the ISD. Tampines is one of the major housing estates built, owned and managed by the state agency Housing Board.

He also took "concrete steps" to prepare himself for the attack, the agency added. A knife or

scissors was his weapon of choice because he felt he could wield them effectively and inflict "maximum damage" on his targets.

"To ensure that he could kill or grievously wound his targets, he planned to stab them in the neck, and practised stabbing motions using different grips with the scissors," said the ISD. In June, he conducted a walk-through of the route he would take from his house to execute the attack. The ISD added that the youth was determined to be killed by the police or passers-by in the course of his attack, as this would fulfil his aspiration to become a "martyr".

"He felt a sense of pride knowing that his planned attack if successfully executed would be the first terrorist attack in Singapore in recent decades," the release said. He crafted a declaration of armed jihad or struggle against non-Muslims, which he planned to release before his attack in the "hope of inspiring other Muslims to engage in armed violence," the ISD said. The ISD said the student became exposed to the teachings of foreign radical preachers in August 2023 while searching for religious knowledge online.

Yoga in Saudi Arabia dominated by women: Padma Shri Nouf Marwaai

PTI ■ RIYADH

The Saudis accepted yoga "unhesitatingly" seven years ago and now this ancient Indian practice is quite popular in Saudi Arabia and is dominated by women, says the country's first certified yoga instructor and the first Arab recipient of Padma Shri award Nouf Marwaai.

She says Saudis love anything that is good for health and well-being. Marwaai played an instrumental role in introducing yoga in Saudi Arabia in 2017 and was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian government in 2018. She now heads the Saudi Yoga Committee, established in 2021, and is the founder and president of the Arab Yoga Foundation.

She says yoga today is dominated by women in Saudi Arabia.

At the second Saudi Open Yoga Asana Championship held in Mecca by Al-Wahda Club and the Saudi Yoga Committee this January, there were 56 girls and 10 boys, she says.

Marwaai was just 17 when she was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease



called Lupus Erythematosus. "The doctors told my parents I won't live long. I was asked not to go to school and that is when I learnt yoga at home in Riyadh. My health condition surprisingly started improving. Finally, I decided to go to India to learn more about yoga," she recalls her tryst with yoga.

"In 2008, I went to India to study yoga and ayurveda and it was a big shift that happened in my life," she adds.

Asked how difficult it was to introduce yoga in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, Marwaai told PTI, "I think the

Saudi people just needed to know that they were not practising something which was in conflict with their religion."

She says yoga is vast and the philosophy itself is an ancient one.

"I believe there is no harm in studying any philosophy and learning for you to improve your life. Of course, the Vedic philosophy and yoga coming from a background like the Vedas is actually something ancient and something lived for thousands of years for humanity," she says.

According to Marwaai, there was no opposition as such from Saudi people, but from those outside.

"The Saudis love different cultures, they love to explore, they know their faith. If something doesn't conflict, they are not very hesitant. And anything that is good for health and well-being, people in Saudi Arabia love it," she says.

Last year, on the international day of yoga, we had 10,000 people including Saudis participating, she says, adding this year, in spite of the Hajj vacation, there were 8,000 people who took part.

Over a billion people live in acute poverty, half are kids

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

More than 1 billion people in the world live in acute poverty, over half are children and nearly 40 per cent live in conflict-torn and fragile countries, according to a report released Thursday.

The report by the UN Development Programme and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative at the University of Oxford also said that more than 83 per cent of poor people live in rural areas — and the same percentage live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The UN Development Programme and Oxford have been publishing the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, known as the MPI, since 2010 using 10 indicators including health, education and standard of living.

This year's index included data from 112 countries with a combined population of 6.3 bil-

lion people.

According to the index, 1.1 billion people live in acute poverty, with nearly half in five countries: India with 234 million impoverished people, Pakistan with 93 million, Ethiopia with 86 million, Nigeria with 74 million and Congo with 66 million.

Over half of the people living in poverty — 584 million — are children under the age of 18, with 317 million in sub-Saharan Africa and 184 million in South Asia, it said. In Afghanistan, where poverty has increased, the proportion of impoverished children is even higher — nearly 59 per cent.

UNDP and Oxford said this year's report focused on poverty amid conflict because 2023 saw more conflicts than at any time since World War II and that an all-time high of 117 million people were forced to flee their homes due to conflict, disasters and other factors.

Pedro Conceicao, director of

the UN Development Programme office that produces its annual Human Development Report, said: "By overlaying conflict data with global MPI data for the first time, the report reveals the stark realities of those simultaneously enduring conflict and poverty."

"A staggering 455 million people, both multi-dimensionally poor and living in contexts of conflict, face significantly harsher deprivations — three to five times more severe — when it comes to basic needs like nutrition, water and sanitation, electricity, and education, compared to those in poverty who live in more peaceful settings," he said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Sabina Alkire, director of the Oxford initiative, said it's intuitive that reducing poverty is easier in peaceful settings than for these 455 million people, representing nearly 40 per cent of the 1.1 billion poor.

Finance Minister urges Mexican firms to partner with startups and academia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday urged Mexican firms to explore collaborations with startups as well as academic institutions and take advantage of India's business-friendly policies. In her address at Tech Leaders Roundtable at the Chamber of Commerce, Guadalajara, Sitharaman emphasised on opportunities and responsibilities for similar placed economies and how India and Mexico can leverage and collaborate with each other. Mexico has been thriving through nearshoring, which has resulted in collaborations between multinational companies and enabled exchange of talent as well as joint efforts for risk mitigation, she said. "The Union Finance Minister highlighted that rapid transformation that has been taking place in India while



working towards the goal of #ViksitBharat in 2047," the finance ministry said in a post on X. Citing new areas of development and collaboration between India and Mexico, she referred to the key Budget announcement made regarding setting up of Centres of Excellence (CoE) and shared information

Smt. @sitharaman said that for large economies, The challenges are not just around growth but also to bridge gap and create opportunities for all, and that there is a need for #ResponsibleCapitalism," it said. During her visit to Tata Consultancy Services Headquarters (Latin America), at Guadalajara, the finance minister paid tribute to the iconic industrialist Ratan Tata. On October 9, Ratan Tata, Tata Group's chairman emeritus and veteran industrialist, passed away at the age of 86 years. During her official visit till October 20, Sitharaman will hold a bilateral meeting with her Mexican counterpart Rogelio Ramirez de la O. She has discussions with several members of the Mexican Parliament to strengthen parliamentary cooperation and foster economic development.

Infrastructure projects help in boosting tourism, creating jobs: Nitin Gadkari

PTI ■ PANAJI

Infrastructure projects like new expressways and facilities at tourist sites are helping boost tourism and create more jobs, Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday. In a message to a conference organised by the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) in Goa, the minister pointed out that the hospitality sector was crucial for the country's economic growth. Gadkari's message was read out on the second and last day of the conference which brings together hoteliers, restaurateurs and experts to explore topics ranging from sustainability to new-age restaurant trends, aimed at improving business operations and growth in India's hospitality industry. The minister expressed strong support for the hospitality sector and added it provides vast employment



opportunities and is crucial to economy. "Our country is focusing on developing religious and tourist destinations to boost tourism and create more jobs. Additionally, infrastructure projects like new expressways and facilities at tourist sites are helping boost tourism, which in turn creates more jobs," he added. Gadkari maintained the Union government is developing 18 more tourist destinations, with many projects nearing completion, which will further enhance tourism. "Nowadays, people are visiting not only pilgrimage sites, but also modern cities and exclusive tourist locations," he emphasised. The second day of the convention featured several insightful sessions focused on key trends shaping the hospitality industry. Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism at the Union Ministry of Tourism, said, "We must rethink our approach to attracting international

wedding tourism by offering a seamless experience for foreign guests." Direct flight connectivity, simplified visa processes, and curated, unique itineraries will make India the ultimate wedding destination, she opined. With 54 per cent of people in India spending over Rs 10 lakh on marriages and an average guest size of 525, the 'Big Fat Indian Wedding' has evolved into a creative economic force, Sinha said. "This market, second only to China, presents immense opportunities for growth. Weddings in India are not just events, but cultural showcases, and the industry can greatly benefit from promoting honeymoon packages and milestone celebrations here," she noted. Chander Baljee, CMD of Royal Orchid Hotels, discussed the future of hospitality, highlighting the need for businesses to stay agile and embrace digitalization to remain competitive.

Uber partners with IAF to offer mobility solutions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A leading cab aggregator has joined hands with the IAF to offer mobility solutions for official travel and commute of air force personnel and their families, according to an official statement issued on Thursday. An MoU was signed between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and Uber to that effect, a senior official said. "This partnership aims to provide reliable, convenient, and safe transportation services for IAF personnel, veterans and families," the statement said. Through the collaboration, the IAF will leverage Uber for Business, a platform that enables organisations to customise Uber's extensive scale and comprehensive travel benefits, ensuring a



seamless commuting experience, it said. The company will also facilitate effective change management for official travel and daily commutes, while offering enterprise benefits tailored to the unique needs of the IAF, it said. "The collaboration with Uber represents an important step in the journey towards enhanced mobility solutions for Air Force personnel and families," the IAF was quoted in the statement. The MoU signing ceremony took place on the presence of senior officials of the IAF and Uber. "We are proud to partner with the Indian Air Force to enhance mobility solutions... This partnership marks a significant step towards digitalisation by adopting shared mobility solutions. Through this MoU, we aim to support the Indian Air Force's broader vision of leveraging technology for a transformative progress."

Infosys shares tumble 4.50 per cent post earnings announcement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Infosys Ltd slumped 4.50 per cent on Friday morning after the company's second quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. The stock tanked 4.50 per cent to Rs 1,880.80 on the BSE. At the NSE, it dived 4.44 per cent to Rs 1,880.65. The stock was the biggest laggard among the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty firms. The company's market valuation eroded by Rs 31,327.94 crore to Rs 7,86,437.37 crore during the morning trade. Decline in the bellwether stock dragged the markets lower. The BSE benchmark tanked 570.45 points to 80,436.16 in early trade. The NSE Nifty slumped 178.3 points to 24,571.55. Infosys Ltd, India's second-largest IT services exporter, on

Thursday reported a near 5 per cent rise in its second quarter net profit and raised revenue guidance for the year on broad-based recovery in demand particularly from its key financial industry clients. Consolidated net profit of Rs 6,506 crore in July-September - the second quarter of current 2024-25 fiscal year -- was 4.7 per cent higher than the year-ago earnings and 2.2 per cent more than the net profit in the preceding quarter, according to a company statement. Technology services bellwether for the second consecutive quarter raised its revenue guidance for the full fiscal. It now expects constant currency revenue growth between 3.75 per cent and 4.5 per cent for the financial year April 2024 to March 2025, higher than its earlier guidance of 3 per cent to 4 per cent.

JSW Energy arms ink pacts to supply 1,200 MW solar-wind power to Maharashtra discom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JSW Energy on Friday said that its two arms have signed agreements to supply 1,200 MW of power to Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company. JSW Renew Energy Six Ltd and JSW Renew Energy Thirty Ltd, step-down subsidiaries of JSW Energy, have signed power purchase agreements (PPAs) with Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (MSEDCL) for state transmission utility (STU)-connected solar-wind hybrid capacity, according to a company statement. The agreements have been signed for two hybrid projects, each with a capacity of 600 MW, totalling 1,200 MW. The letters of award for these projects were received on August 29, 2024, and September 10, 2024,



respectively, JSW Energy said. The projects are expected to be commissioned within 24 months, it said, adding that the agreements are set for a 25-year period at a tariff of Rs 3.60/kWh. Currently, the company has a project pipeline of 8.3 GW, with PPAs signed for 4.4 GW. JSW Energy has total locked-in generation capacity of 18.2 GW, comprising 7.7 GW operational, 2.1 GW under-construction across wind,

The backbone of Star Air's growth: RCS-UDAN scheme

BY CAPTAIN SIMRAN SINGH TIWANA

The Government of India's Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) - UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) has been pivotal to Star Air's journey and growth. Since our inception, we've been dedicated to Connecting Real India, and UDAN has enabled us to do exactly that—connecting the underserved and unserved regions of the country, ensuring affordable air travel for everyone. When we launched our first two routes in January 2019, between Hubli to Bengaluru and Hubli to Tirupati, it was a significant milestone for us. It symbolized the beginning of our mission to enhance regional connectivity, starting with this crucial route. Today, I am proud to say that since that first flight, we've flown over 1.3 million passengers by fulfilling dreams of many who had tasted flight for the first time!



Today powered by the UDAN scheme we operate to 22 airports Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Through this initiative, Star Air was awarded 44 routes under UDAN 2 and 3-8 routes under UDAN-2 and 36 routes under UDAN-3. Further, we have been awarded 44 more routes under UDAN 5, giving us the opportunity to bring air connectivity to even more regions. The UDAN scheme has been instrumental in providing the necessary support for us to operate routes that otherwise may not have been viable. Through the infrastructural development that came along UDAN, allowed us to expand steadily into tier 2 and tier 3 cities, bringing us closer to our goal of Connecting Real India. We have seen the joy in the eyes of many as they took to the sky for the first time. We see many business come up to support this new air connectivity. Clearly proving

the economic multiplier Air Connectivity is. Our fleet has grown alongside our aspirations. What started with one Embraer E145 aircraft in 2019 has now expanded to five E145s and four Embraer E175s. This growth has enabled us to launch new routes, access more destinations, and serve an even larger number of passengers. Thanks to the RCS-UDAN initiative, Star Air is well on its way to realizing its vision of providing swift, affordable, and comfortable air travel to every corner of India. The backbone of our success has been this visionary scheme UDAN, which continues to empower regional carriers like us to play an essential role in India's aviation landscape. We look forward to many more milestones as we continue to build on these solid foundation. (Author of the article is Chief Executive Officer, Star Air)

Ashneer Grover withdraws oppression and mismanagement plea against BharatPe management

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ashneer Grover, co-founder and former managing director of BharatPe, withdrew his plea from the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), in which he had alleged oppressive conduct and mismanagement by the board of the fintech firm. The withdrawal of the plea from the NCLT's Delhi bench came after Grover reached a settlement with the company on September 30, 2024. A copy of the settlement agreement was also placed before the NCLT by the counsel appearing for Grover, who had filed an application for withdrawal of the petition. "... During the pendency of the said petition, parties have arrived with settlement and also executed the settlement agreement dated September 30, 2024, a copy of which is



placed on record and in view of the settlement applicant (who is petitioner in the main company petition) has sought liberty to withdraw the company petition," the NCLT order dated October 14, 2024, noted. It further said: "Liberty is granted to the applicant to withdraw the company petition... And the same is dismissed as withdrawn. The present IA is disposed of."

Innovations Pvt Ltd, which is doing business as BharatPe, to be declared "illegal". He had also requested the NCLT to order an inspection and audit of the company by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and revocation of termination of his wife Madhuri Jain by the board of BharatPe. As per the settlement, the former co-founder will neither be associated with the company in any capacity nor be a part of its shareholding. Grover was removed from the position of managing director of BharatPe by the company's board in March 2022. Since then, both parties have been involved in legal disputes. Following the agreement, certain shares of Grover will be transferred to the Resilient Growth Trust for the benefit of the company and his remaining shares will be managed by his family trust.

Homebuying decision may be impacted if mortgage rates cross nine per cent: FICCI-Anarock survey

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Nearly 90 per cent of respondents feel that their decision to buy residential properties will be significantly impacted if mortgage rates exceed 9 per cent, according to a survey conducted by FICCI and Anarock. Industry body FICCI and real estate consultant Anarock on Friday released their joint 'Homebuyer Sentiment Survey', with a sample size of 7,615 people, at a real estate conference here. "In a recent survey, over 71 per cent of respondents indicated that their homebuying decisions would remain unaffected if rates stay below 8.5 per cent. However, if rates exceed 9 per cent, then it will have a significant impact on over 87 per cent of respondents. For rates between 8.5 per cent and 9

per cent, about 54 per cent expect a moderate influence on their choice," the report said. Among other findings, the survey found that real estate is the most preferred asset class for investment for over 59 per cent of respondents. The Indian residential market continues to be predominantly driven by end-users, with over 67 per cent of survey participants buying properties for self-use. The survey revealed that the budget range of Rs 45-90 lakh continues to be the most favoured option for over 35 per cent of prospective homebuyers. Currently, over 28 per cent of survey respondents stated their preference for homes priced between Rs 90 lakh and Rs 1.5 crore. Top homebuyer demands are timely project completion (98 per cent), improved



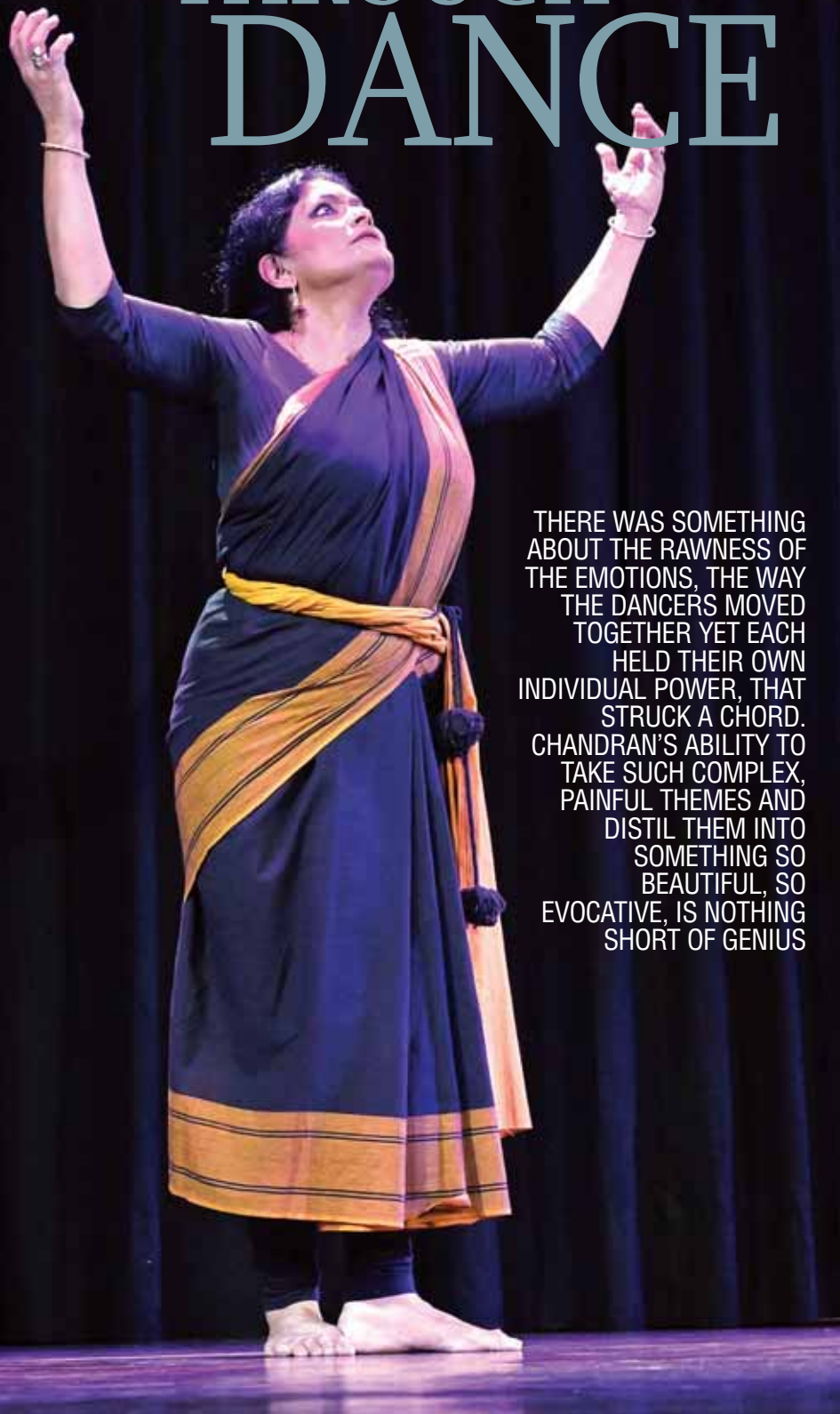
boosting liquidity and accessibility. Sandip Somany, Past President, FICCI and Mentor, FICCI Committee on Urban Development and Real Estate, and CMD, Somany Impresa Group, said, "The Indian real estate sector has shown remarkable evolution. The significant shift in consumer preferences away from ready-to-move homes towards

Supervisory Board, RMZ Corporation, said, "India's economic growth is driving rapid expansion in the real estate sector, with the residential market projected to reach USD 1.04 trillion by 2029, growing at a 25.6 per cent CAGR. This growth is fuelled by rising demand for ultra-luxury properties and significant investments." The commercial real estate sector is also thriving, supported by 1,600 Global Capability Centers and emerging secondary markets, Menda said. Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said the consumer sentiment survey is timely and important, as it gauges contemporary homebuyers' preferences in the current market environment and highlights currently significant trends in Indian residential real estate. Sanjay Dutt, Managing

Director and CEO of Tata Realty and Infrastructure, highlighted the significant evolution of the real estate sector, particularly with the shift from traditional REITs to smaller-scale REITs (SM REITs). He emphasised the advantages of fractional ownership, noting how it allows investors to access high-quality assets with lower capital commitments, democratising real estate investment. Gaurav Pandey, Co-Chairman of the FICCI Committee on Urban Development and Real Estate and Managing Director and CEO of HDFC Capital Advisors Ltd emphasized on the critical importance of investing in skilled labour and workforce development to drive progress. Additionally, Roongta underscored the essential role of the private sector in creating impactful, scalable solutions to meet the growing demand in the industry.

In celebration of WISCOMP's 25th anniversary, Bharatanatyam legend Geeta Chandran and the Natya Vriksha Dance Collective delivered a moving performance, "Our Voice," which explored women's struggles, resilience and hope in times of conflict, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

INSPIRING CHANGE THROUGH DANCE



THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE RAWNESS OF THE EMOTIONS, THE WAY THE DANCERS MOVED TOGETHER YET EACH HELD THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL POWER, THAT STRUCK A CHORD. CHANDRAN'S ABILITY TO TAKE SUCH COMPLEX, PAINFUL THEMES AND DISTIL THEM INTO SOMETHING SO BEAUTIFUL, SO EVOCATIVE, IS NOTHING SHORT OF GENIUS



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

The hall was utterly still, a silence so real that it felt as though the entire audience had collectively held its breath. Not a single whisper broke the stillness. The audience was captivated by the intensity of the performance unfolding before them. As the final movement came to an end, the applause burst forth. It wasn't a brief acknowledgment, but a wave of appreciation that seemed to last forever.

At the heart of it all was none other than Padma Shri awardee *Geeta Chandran*, a living legend in the world of Bharatanatyam. As she performed, she commanded the stage with a presence so powerful it drew in every single spectator, binding them to her every move. It was not just a performance; it was an experience, one that resonated deeply with everyone in the room. *Chandran*, true to form, paid meticulous attention to every detail. Every gesture, every glance, every step was deliberate, contributing to a performance that was nothing short of spectacular. This evening was particularly special as it marked WISCOMP's (Women in Security, Conflict Management, and Peace) 25th anniversary. The event, *Our Voice*, was a collaboration between *Chandran* and the *Natya Vriksha Dance Collective*, commissioned by WISCOMP itself. Held at the C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium in New Delhi, the performance centred on the themes of women, war, and peace. Through the expressive language of Bharatanatyam, *Chandran* told a story that resonated deeply, not just because of its artistry, but because of its urgent relevance. What made 'Our Voice' so

compelling was the way it wove together the struggles of women with such authenticity and emotion. *Chandran's* portrayal of these themes was both profound and deeply human. It was not just a dance but a narrative, a reimagining of the age-old battles women have fought, battles against patriarchy, oppression and a world that too often refuses to hear their voices. Yet, this was not a lament. It was a celebration of resilience, strength, and the quiet but relentless pursuit of peace. I've seen many performances, but few have moved me as deeply as this one. There was something about the rawness of the emotions, the way the dancers moved together yet each held their own individual power, that struck a chord. *Chandran's* ability to take such complex, painful themes and distil them into something so beautiful, so evocative, is nothing short of genius.

In the words of *Chandran* herself, *Our Voice* was a deeply personal project, one that took her out of her comfort zone. She explained how the process of creating this piece began with conversations about women's issues, particularly the price women pay in times of war. However, it wasn't just about war in the literal sense; it was about the daily battles women face, the constant struggle to find space for their agency in a world that often seeks to diminish it. From these discussions, the script evolved into something larger, a movement, a performance that speaks not only of women's suffering but of their incredible capacity for endurance and hope. And it was this hope that stayed with me long after the

final bow. Hope, not as a vague or distant ideal, but as something real, something these women, these dancers, brought to life before our very eyes. Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Founder and Director of WISCOMP, captured this sentiment perfectly when she said that *Chandran's* performance was "sheer poetry in motion on the audacity of hope." It's true. There was something bold about the performance, not in its defiance, but in its belief that, despite everything, peace is possible. That women, even in the face of conflict, trauma and violence, continue to fight not just for survival, but for a better world.

This was not the first time *Geeta Chandran* has tackled such themes. *Our Voice* is a continuation of her earlier work, *Her Voice*, performed 25 years ago. While the original piece focused on Draupadi's personal losses from the Mahabharata, this newer work took on a broader scope, exploring the universal struggles of women against patriarchal forces. *Chandran's* use of water as a metaphor for women's lives, fluid, powerful, yet constrained - was especially poignant. It was a reminder of how often women's potential is stifled by societal expectations, but also of how, like water, they continue to find ways to flow, to push forward. It wasn't just *Chandran's* individual brilliance that made the evening so powerful, though. The *Natya Vriksha Dance Collective*, a group of dancers entirely trained by

Chandran, added a richness and depth to the performance that was undeniable. There was an unspoken trust and connection between the dancers, a shared understanding that made their movements feel like a conversation, not just between themselves, but with the audience. Each dancer brought something unique to the performance while contributing to the overall harmony of the piece.

As the performance ended, the applause was not just a formality. It was a recognition of something greater, a shared experience that had left everyone in the room changed in some way. The clapping didn't just end; it stayed with us, persistent and filled with emotion. It was as if the audience didn't want to let go of what they had just witnessed, as if by continuing to applaud, they could hold on to the feeling a little longer. Reflecting on the evening, I realised that what moved me most wasn't just the technical skill or the beauty of the dance, though both were extraordinary. It was the way in which the performance so perfectly captured the essence of WISCOMP's mission. For 25 years, WISCOMP has worked to promote women's leadership in peace and security, and this collaboration with *Geeta Chandran* was a powerful tribute to that legacy. Art has always been a way to explore difficult subjects, provoke thought and inspire change. 'Our Voice' did all of that and more. It reminded us that the struggles of women are not confined to history books, but are ongoing and very real. Yet, in the face of these struggles, there is also incredible strength, resilience and most importantly, hope. As I walked out of the auditorium that night, I carried that hope with me.

Step into a World of Melody and Peace

The *Guru Bhola Nath Music Utsav* at Kamani Auditorium celebrated the legacy of Pandit Bhola Nath Prasanna through captivating performances of Indian classical music

BY TEAM VIVA

The sound of melody filled the air, bringing with it a sense of 'SUKOON', a deep, soothing peace that only music can offer. This was the essence of the *Guru Bhola Nath Music Utsav* at Kamani Auditorium. The annual festival, honouring the legendary flautist *Pandit Bhola Nath Prasanna*, was a tribute to the timeless beauty of Indian classical music, celebrating the sacred bond between guru and disciple. As the audience settled into their seats, it became clear that the evening would be more than just a series of performances; it would be a journey into the heart of India's musical heritage.

The evening began with a breathtaking violin recital by *Padma Bhushan N. Rajam*, a maestro known for her unparalleled mastery of the instrument. Accompanied by her equally talented disciple, *Nandini Shankar* and the skilled *Pandit Abhishek Mishra* on tabla, the performance was a seamless fusion of tradition and artistry. *Rajam's* violin flowed effortlessly, creating



a soundscape that transported the audience into a world of tranquility. The synergy between the artists was remarkable, each note resonating with precision and emotion, setting the perfect tone for the night ahead.

The atmosphere was further enriched by the vocal magic of *Padma Shri Shubha Mudgal*, whose performance was nothing short of mesmerising. Her powerful voice, rich with emotion, filled the

auditorium, captivating every listener. Supported by an exceptional ensemble of musicians, *Pandit Aneesh Pradhan* on tabla, *Ustad Murad Ali* on sarangi and *Pandit Vinay Mishra* on harmonium, *Mudgal's* rendition of classical ragas showcased her deep understanding and passion for the art form. The performance was a fine blend of tradition and innovation, leaving the audience in awe.

The evening began with a breathtaking violin recital by **Padma Bhushan N Rajam**, a maestro known for her unparalleled mastery of the instrument. Accompanied by her equally talented disciple, **Nandini Shankar** and the skilled **Pandit Abhishek Mishra** on tabla, the performance was a seamless fusion of tradition and artistry

Yet, the heart of the festival was *Pandit Ajay Prasanna's* flute recital. As the son and disciple of *Pandit Bhola Nath Prasanna*, *Ajay Prasanna* carried forward his father's legacy with grace and dedication. His flute performance was a soulful tribute to his guru, each note filled with reverence and emotion. Accompanied by the rhythmic brilliance of *Pandit Mithilesh Jha* and *Pandit Abhishek Mishra* on tabla, *Ajay Prasanna's*

music was a seamless blend of melody and memory, evoking the timeless spirit of the bansuri. The audience sat in quiet admiration as the music washed over them, creating a moment of connection between past and present.

As the performances drew to a close, the hall remained filled with the gentle echoes of the night's music. The sense of Peace that the audience had experienced was unmistakable, a peaceful calm that stayed long after the final note had been played. The *Guru Bhola Nath Music Utsav* was not just a tribute to a musical legend, but a reminder of the profound power of music to touch the soul. This festival, with its line-up of extraordinary artists and heartfelt performances, brought together the essence of Indian classical music in a way that felt timeless. The sound of melody, the rhythm of the tabla, the beauty of the ragas, this was the magic of the *Guru Bhola Nath Music Utsav*. It was an evening of pure musical bliss, one that left the audience with a deep sense of peace, or as the performers might say, 'SUKOON'.

Photo: Pankaj Kumar

ROHIT, KOHLI, SARFARAZ FIFTIES TAKE INDIA TO 231/3 AT CLOSE ON DAY

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Counter-attacking India kept alive the hopes of a miracle turnaround through free-flowing fifties from the troika of Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and Sarfaraz Khan, reaching 231 for three in their second innings on the third day of the first Test against New Zealand here on Friday.

Kohli (70), who completed 9,000 Test runs during the course of his knock, got out to Glenn Phillips off the last ball of the day, edging him to Tom Blundell, leaving Sarfaraz (70) at the crease at close. The deficit at the end of an overcast day was a less intimidating 125. Kohli and Sarfaraz added 136 runs for the third wicket after skipper Rohit did the early running with a fluent 52.

This was after New Zealand posted a total of 402 all out to gain a massive lead of 356 runs thanks to Rachin Ravindra (134) and Tim Southee (63), who added precious 134 runs for a flowing eighth wicket stand.

The largest deficit India has overturned to win a Test in their cricketing history is 274 during the iconic Kolkata Test against Australia in 2001.

Such an epic is still some distance away, but hopes will be flickering after the day's effort with the bat.

Amid the more coruscating fifties by Rohit and Sarfaraz, Kohli's effort still stood out for its personal and situational significance.

It was his first Test half-century of 2024, and he could not have timed his 31st in the longest format better -- literally and figuratively.

Seldom a shot describes the touch of Kohli better than the cover drive, and the moment he executed one off pacer William O'Rourke, the 35-year-old was in full flow. He took 15 balls to get off the mark.

Kohli brought up his fifty with a single off Matt Henry but at the other end, Sarfaraz resembled a race car on the tarmac.

The Mumbai man punished all bowlers with disdain and left-arm spinner Ajaz Patel was shunted off the park for two successive sixes.

Then there was a daring upper cut for maximum off O'Rourke and fortune also blessed him as a couple of edges fell inches short of Ajaz at gully and wide of third slip.

Before Kohli and Sarfaraz ran

RESURRECTION AFTER COLLAPSE



roughsho, another old-young combination of Rohit and Yashvini Jaiswal (35) gave India a solid start.

Jaiswal went through an early uncertain play-and-miss phase but he overcame that to play some sparkling shots.

Rohit had no such issues. The right-hander flicked and drove New Zealand pacers to reach a fifty off just 59 balls, and also thrilled the crowd with that patented swivel pull on one leg. But his tenure in the middle ended in unfortunate circumstances. Rohit offered a forward defensive shot to Ajaz, but the ball trickled back onto his stumps after taking a deflection from his bat.

A few minutes before that, Jaiswal's decision to give a charge to Ajaz resulted in him getting stumped by Tom Blundell, after adding 72 for the opening wicket with Rohit. The recovery was impressive but it could not overshadow what New Zealand accomplished earlier in the day.

Resuming the day at 180 for three, the Kiwis were halted to an extent by Ravindra Jadeja (3/72) and the other Indian bowlers who took some early wickets to reduce them to 233 for seven.

They lost Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Blundell and Henry in this period.

Jasprit Bumrah snaffled Blundell while Mohammed Siraj had the number of Mitchell. Phillips and Henry perished to the crafty Jadeja.

The Blackcaps were ahead by 187 runs at that point and it was imperative for them to stretch the lead at least till the 250-mark to maintain their edge.

Ravindra and Southee exceeded the expectations during their partnership to take the lead past the 300-run mark.

Ravindra started cautiously but unfurled his full range once he and the pitch settled down past the first-hour mark.

The 24-year-old, who has his family roots in Bengaluru, showed the correct method of playing Indian spinners, either staying on the front foot or making a shimmy down to nullify the turn. A cleanly swept four off Ravichandran Ashwin carried him to his second Test hundred.

Southee, who hammered a couple of his trademark sixes, gave solid company to Ravindra and duly completed his seventh Test fifty immediately after the lunch.



Arjun crushes Maxime to win WR Chess Masters

PTI ■ LONDON

Indian Grandmaster Arjun Erigaise secured the WR Chess masters title after defeating Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France in the Armageddon game following two draws in Classical chess during the final.

Arjun displayed great form and precision throughout the event to bag the winner's prize of 20000 Euros. He defeated his friend R Praggnanandhaa in the semifinals of the knock out event before eventually getting past Vachier-Lagrave. The 16-player tournament

saw Arjun scoring a 2-0 victory over Sivananda Bodhana of England who is known to be the youngest ever to play in the Chess Olympiad for her country.

Fellow Indian Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi also fell to Arjun, who won the second game in the two-games mini-match by 1.5-0.5 margin.

Against Praggnanandhaa in the semis, Arjun took an early lead by winning the first game as white and did well to draw the second game to win the match 1.5-0.5.

In the final, Vachier-Lagrave put up stiff resistance against



the World number four Indian but eventually crumbled in the Armageddon. The first game ended in an easy draw for Arjun as black, while the second game

featured wild complex play out of a Sicilian Najdorf opening where the Indian played white.

The dust subsided on the 21st move leading to a tricky endgame post the queen trade and the game was drawn.

Vachier-Lagrave had 10 minutes on his clock with white pieces in the finale against Arjun's 6 minutes and 58 seconds. However, as is the law, the Frenchman needed a win.

Arjun navigated the opening well despite less time out of a Petroff defense and reached a balanced position.

Vachier-Lagrave sacrificed two minor pieces for a rook to make some threats around Arjun's King but the Indian remained on guard. The game could have been a draw through repetition but that would have won the match for Arjun anyway.

The Queens were traded but Arjun was never in trouble as Vachier-Lagrave fought in vain for 69 moves before calling it a day.

With this victory, Arjun moved closer to the coveted 2800 ELO rating mark, though he will need to wait for his next event to achieve it.

Pakistan seals 152 run win in second test

AP ■ MULTAN (PAKISTAN)

Noman Ali and Sajid Khan claimed all 20 wickets on a recycled turning pitch as Pakistan ended a long wait for a home win with a 152-run victory over England in the second test on Friday.

Left-arm spinner Ali took 8-46 to finish with a match haul of 11 wickets and England was bowled out for 144 inside the first session on Day 4 on a tailor-made dry wicket.

Off-spinner Khan took 2-93 to go with his 7-111 in the first innings as both spinners bowled unchanged and ran through the tourists' batting lineup after Pakistan had set up a daunting target of 297 runs.

The win was first for captain Shan Masood, who lost six tests in a row since being elevated as red-ball skipper last year and also ended Pakistan's winless 11-match home run that included four losses against England.

England capitulated against Khan and Ali for the second time in the match after it

resumed on 36-2 and needed a further improbable 261 runs for victory of a tricky turning wicket.

Khan gleefully accepted a return catch from Ollie Pope on his second ball of the day before Ali cut through by claiming all the remaining seven wickets as the tourists failed to counter the spin through their sweeps and reverse sweeps.

Captain Ben Stokes, who returned to lead the side after recovering from a torn hamstring, top-scored with 37 before falling in a bizarre fashion. Stokes charged down the wicket to Ali, but the bat flew out of England captain's hand to backward square leg and he was stumped.

Brydon Carse smashed three sixes against Khan and scored 27 before he edged Ali in the slips as England couldn't counter the spinners on a wicket which had plenty of cracks and turn.

England won the first test by an innings and 47 runs last week after posting a record-breaking 823-7 declared.

Indian junior team, guided by Sreejesh, faces Japan in Sultan of Johor opener

PTI ■ JOHOR (MALAYSIA)

Two-time Olympic medal-winning stalwart P R Sreejesh will face his first major test as India's new junior men's hockey coach when the under-21 team aims for a fourth title triumph at the 12th Sultan of Johor Cup, beginning with a clash against Japan here on Saturday.

The 36-year-old former goalkeeper, who retired after the bronze-winning campaign in the Paris Olympics earlier this year, took over the reins of the junior group soon after.

India triumphed over Japan in their last encounter at the Junior Asia Cup in May last year, securing a 3-1 victory and also defeated them 5-1 in the 2022 Sultan of Johor Cup.

"The team has been training well under the new head coach



PR Sreejesh and we are excited to play our first tournament with him," captain Amir Ali said in a release. "After losing to Germany last time, we were unable to retain our crown but this time we are better equipped and ready to take on any team in the competition."

India, who have previously won the title in 2013, 2014 and 2022, will face Britain on Sunday. The side is also a four-time second-place finisher in the event.

Following a day off, the Indians will take on hosts Malaysia on

October 22 and then Australia on October 23.

India will conclude the group stage against New Zealand on October 25, aiming to finish in the top two to advance to the final on October 26.

"We have been training hard over the past few days to be in the best shape ahead of the Sultan of Johor Cup," vice-captain Rohit said.

"This time around, the team has several new players who are excited to demonstrate their abilities on the field. All of the players are encouraging one another to improve in preparation for a busy time for us, which includes the men's junior Asia Cup Muscat in November."

After the Paris campaign, Sreejesh had stated that he always harboured coaching ambitions and wanted to be the Rahul Dravid of Indian hockey by shaping the younger generation of players.

Dravid, before serving as the senior team coach, mentored the under-19 players for a significant duration.



Chelsea, Lyon and Roma stay perfect with victories in Womens Champions League

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Chelsea, Lyon and Roma all stayed perfect in the Women's Champions League by cruising to away victories.

Roma routed Galatasaray at Istanbul 6-1, Chelsea beat Twente in the Netherlands 3-1 and eight-time champion Lyon won 2-0 at Wolfsburg.

Real Madrid claimed its first victory of the campaign by easing past Celtic 4-0. Roma and Lyon both have six points in Group A. Two-time champion Wolfsburg and Galatasaray, the first Turkish team to reach the group stage, have no points.

In Group B, Chelsea leads with six points, with Madrid and Twente on three and Celtic last bottom without a point.

Renard strikes on Popp's day Wolfsburg striker Alexandra Popp made her 100th competition appearance - becoming only the second player to reach the mark but it was Lyon defender Wendie Renard, the only one who has played more, who stole the show.

Renard's header found the back of the net early on in her 118th game in the competition.

U.S. International Lindsey Horan netted from the penalty spot in the second half.

Lyon is the competition's record eight-time champion but last won the trophy in 2022. It was runner-up last season to Barcelona. Roma routIn a matchup between the Italian and Turkish champions, Roma dominated in Istanbul.

Summer signing Hawa Cissoko scored in the seventh minute to mark her debut game in the competition. The France defender who transferred from West Ham headed home off Manuela Giugliano's corner.

Valentina Giacinti made it 2-

0 in the 24th minute when she was left unmarked near the spot to head in Verena Hanshaw's cross.

Giugliano failed to convert from the spot in the first-half stoppage time but Emilie Haavi got Roma's third with a right-footed blast past goalkeeper Gamze Yaman early in the second.

Giugliano finally found the back of the net from close range for a 4-0 lead before Andrea Stankova scored the consolation goal for the hosts. Roma substitutes Marta Pandini and Alice Corelli also scored. Blues win again under BompastorChelsea struck early in another winning performance under new coach Sonia Bompastor, who joined from Lyon.

Agnes Beever-Jones put the Blues ahead with a long-distance deflected strike in the seventh minute and Maika Hamano made it 2-0 a short time later by lifting the ball over goalkeeper Olivia Clark from outside the area.

Substitute Guro Reiten added the third in the second from the spot just past the hour mark.

On Saturday, Chelsea beat city rival Arsenal 2-1 in the Women's Super League.

Real Madrid bounces backReal Madrid scored three second-half goals in 11 minutes against Celtic in Group B.

Nadal loses to Alcaraz at Six Kings Slam exhibition event

AP ■ RIYADH

With an eye on the Davis Cup, Rafael Nadal said he was pleased with his performance despite losing 6-3, 6-3 to Carlos Alcaraz at the Six Kings Slam.

Jannik Sinner beat Novak Djokovic 6-2, 6-7 (0), 6-4 in the other semifinal at the exhibition event that awards money but no ATP ranking points and is Saudi Arabia's latest foray into tennis.

The match against Alcaraz was Nadal's first since he announced last week that he would be retiring after playing for Spain in the Davis Cup next month. Nadal and Alcaraz played doubles together at the Paris Games and could team up again for the Davis Cup.

"I have the Davis Cup in front of (me) in a month so every day is an opportunity to be better and better and be ready for this final tournament of my tennis career," Nadal said. "I want to try my best to be ready for that and help the team in some way."

Thursday's match was the first contest for Nadal since his exit



at the Paris Olympics in July. "Carlos was too good. I haven't been on the competitive stage since a couple months ago," Nadal said. "So yeah I think it was a good performance, even if it was not enough to play against an animal like him. But it was a positive match for me and I'm happy."

Nadal will play Djokovic on Saturday in a third-place

Iga Swiatek has hired Wim Fissette as her new coach

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Iga Swiatek is hiring Wim Fissette to be her new coach, announcing via social media that she is bringing aboard someone who has worked with a long list of top players that includes Naomi Osaka, Kim Clijsters and Victoria Azarenka.

"I'm excited and motivated to start a new chapter," posted the No. 1-ranked Swiatek, who parted ways with Tomasz Wiktorowski two weeks ago after three years together.

Swiatek hasn't competed since Sept. 4, when she lost in the U.S. Open quarterfinals to eventual runner-up Jessica Pegula. Since then, Swiatek withdrew from the China Open and Korea Open.

Next up for Swiatek is the season-ending WTA Finals, which will be held in November in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"As you know, I'm preparing for the WTA Finals but my perspective is, as always, long-term, not short-term. I said many times that my career is a marathon for me, not a sprint, and I'm working, operating and making decisions with this approach," Swiatek wrote



on Thursday. "I want to say that I'm very excited and looking forward to working with Wim. He seems to have a great attitude, vision and huge experience at a very top level of tennis. It's always crucial to try and get to know each other better but we're off to a good start and I can't wait to compete soon."

Swiatek is 54-7 this season with five titles and about \$7.5 million in prize money. She won the French Open in June for her third consecutive title in Paris and fourth in the past five years, raising her career haul to five Grand Slam

trophies. Four of those came with Wiktorowski as her coach.

The 23-year-old from Poland also picked up a bronze medal at the Paris Olympics in August.

She will be trying to hold off Sabalenka for the year-end No. 1 ranking.

Fissette, who is Belgian and Swiatek's first non-Polish coach, had worked with Osaka most recently, and helped her win two of her four Grand Slam titles. He also worked with Clijsters and Angelique Kerber for major championships.

Other No.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is inform the general public that my clients Shri Ajit Singh S/o Shri Ram Singh and his Wife Smt. Poonam, both R/O Jahazgarh (121), Jahazgarh, Jhajjar, Haryana- 124103, have severed all their relations from their daughter Ms. Kusum R/O Jahazgarh (121), Jahazgarh, Jhajjar, Haryana- 124103, due to her illegal activities, misdeed & misconduct and my clients have no concern whatsoever with her in any manner. My clients have also debarred her from all their movable and immovable properties. My client shall not be liable for any acts & omission of their above named daughter & whoever deals with them shall do so at their own risks and responsibilities.

Mukul - Advocate
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