

OPINION 6

THE STEADFAST DIPLOMAT WHO CRAFTED INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

WORLD 8

DONALD TRUMP PLANS MILITARY SHIFT FOR DOMESTIC POLICY

MONEY 10

GOVERNMENT IMPOSES IMPORT RESTRICTIONS ON POCKET LIGHTERS

NEW DELHI, MONDAY OCTOBER 14, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

Established 1865

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 286 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

WE COULD HAVE SCORED MORE: FARUKH CHOUDHARY 12 SPORTS



BABA SIDDIQUE ASSASSINATION AFTERMATH

Now political bullets fired

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The assassination of Baba Siddique has shaken Maharashtra's political landscape when the State is preparing to go for Assembly elections. With the Opposition uniting against the ruling party and demanding accountability, the implications of this murder in the financial Capital of the country is certainly to resonate in the election campaign which has already begun. Political analysts suggest that the incident may significantly influence voter sentiment, as safety and security are paramount concerns for citizens of Mumbai. The Uddhav Thackeray-Sharad Pawar and Congress combine Opposition is likely to capitalise on the incident terming it as complete breakdown of the law and order of the Eknath Shinde-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime in the State. Opposition parties, including the Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar faction) which is part of the ruling coalition, and Congress which in Opposition have condemned the assassination since Congress is Siddique's parent party where he began his political career, while Ajit Pawar's faction was his current party. Deputy Chief Minister



Security personnel outside the residence of Baba Siddique where his body is kept, in Mumbai, Sunday PTI

Devendra Fadnavis, who also holds the position of Home Minister has come in for severe criticism and his resignation has been sought citing a failure to ensure public safety. Siddique had moved from Congress to NCP's Ajit faction recently, and he enjoyed a good rapport in all the political parties of Maharashtra which includes two breakaway factions of the Shiv Sena and NCP. The Mumbai police arrested two persons in connection with the brutal murder of the three-time MLA Baba Siddique on Saturday, even as Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis

hit out at NCP chief Sharad Pawar for demanding his resignation over Siddique's murder. Identifying the two arrested persons as Gurmail Baljit Singh, a native of Haryana and Dharamraj Kashyap from Uttar Pradesh, the police said that the third suspect Shiv Kumar, was on the run "We are on the lookout for the third accused," a senior police officer said. Meanwhile, mothers of both accused have said that they were not aware of what their sons were up to and had not been in contact with them. Gurmail Singh's family said that it disowned him 11 years ago and it called for

exemplary punishment for his actions. Meanwhile, under flak from the Opposition parties over Siddique's murder, Fadnavis - who holds the State Home portfolio - slammed Sharad Pawar for demanding his resignation. "I think he (Sharad Pawar) only wants power. Even after such a serious incident, there is a lust for power in his eyes while we are only concerned about Maharashtra. We want to look at Maharashtra. We want to develop Maharashtra. Progress is to be achieved and Maharashtra is to be kept safe. They want to look at the power only and talk." Continued on page 2

Navratri ends, nightmares begin

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NOIDA

On the eve of Vijaydashami, when the National Capital worshipped the Goddess Durga, and celebrated the divine femininity vanquishing evil, this reporter who had gone to cover the festivities, faced hooliganism and harassment by drunks in Uttar Pradesh's Noida Sector 75. The incident that took place near a dense well guarded residential area on Saturday night, was a sign that hooligans who consider festivals an excuse to drink and drive are back on the roads after a nine-day Navratri break. The streets were bustling with people who were out enjoying Ramlilas and Ravan Dahan the effigies of Ravan are set ablaze to symbolise the triumph of truth. Suddenly, a white Hyundai I-20 sports car (UP15CD6004) came speeding down the road. The driver was racing his car and swerving dangerously down the streets, at around 10 pm. They were driving as if they were heavily drunk. At first, they nearly drove inside a shop on the side of the street risking the lives of many standing there. My friend Utkarsh, and I were there too as we had stopped to buy snacks from a street vendor after returning from a Dusshera mela I had gone to cover. When I was on the left side of the road, trying to cross it along with my friend, the car came speeding towards us. He

Numbers that shame

Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) has alarmingly high rates of violence and harassment against women, and most cases remain unreported. From September 2022 to August 2023, Faridabad registered 2,666 complaints, Gurgaon had a 12 per cent increase in reported cases. Delhi recorded the highest crime rate against women in the country at 144.4 per 100,000, Noida had a 21 per cent decrease in such crimes.

pulled me to the side just in time. Else I would have been mowed down or getting hit by the racing car. For a second, the car stopped and swayed again in an abrupt manner. While my friend shouted at the car driver, and I stood shaking, worried with what was a near death experience, two bystanders, who were also drinking on the side of the road, started abusing him. They yelled slurs and told him to not shout at the drivers. Worried over what could turn into an ugly fight and potential risk to life, I took my friend to the other side by which time the car driver must have heard people asking for police to arrive at the location and take action against them. They raced their car back into a nearby housing society. Upon calling the police on 112,

the officers responded by asking if we will file a report on the same in an unsympathetic manner. A police van with two officers arrived at the location after about 20 minutes of the incident. However, when the police came, they again asked us to file a police complaint at a station while we requested them to take action immediately so that our safety was ensured. "We saw them racing in the society right here. At least try to find out if the guards know if the car belongs to any of the flat," we told the police. The police officers asked some questions in a half-hearted manner to the guard, and we were again told to go to the nearby sector-113 police station in Noida. We were in shock, but decided to go to the police station and filed a complaint. The police assured us that action will be taken, however, none has been taken by Sunday. However, as a single working woman in this city whose job does not have fixed hours, one cannot imagine the safety concerns even filing a complaint brings about. "What if they find me alone and attack me? They must have seen my face while I remain unknown of their identity" looms over the head of a woman in a country when gang rapes and murder are an everyday affair with accused living unhinged," were some of the thoughts rushing in my head. Continued on page 2

Waqf Joint Committee has received 1.2 crore email responses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The head priest of a Nashik temple, three advocates and representatives of a Muslim organisation are among those who will share their views on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, before a Parliamentary panel on Monday. The Joint Committee of Parliament on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill meeting is scheduled on Monday and Tuesday to hear representatives of Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, Delhi, and Goa-based Sanatan Sanstha. The panel headed by Bharatiya Janata Party's Jagdambika Pal will also hear Mahant Sudhirdas Maharaj, the head priest of Nashik's Shri Kalaram temple. Advocates Ashwini Upadhyay, Vishu Shankar Jain and Amita Sachdeva will also share their views on the bill before the panel. Sachdeva represents the Hindu Janagruhi Samiti, Goa. Former chairperson of the Karnataka State Minorities Commission, Anwar Manipadi, is also listed to share his opinions on the Draft Bill. The Joint Committee of the two Houses has received a staggering 1.2 crore email responses amid campaigns launched by rival groups to ratchet up support for their respective viewpoints regarding the draft law. Continued on page 2

Ayodhya readies for Diwali



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As Ayodhya gears up for Diwali, also known as Deepotsav, the city is undergoing a substantial beautification process. A key part of this effort is the installation of solar-powered smart lights at prominent locations, managed by the Uttar Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Development Agency (UPNEDA) with a budget of Rs 300 crore. Upon completion, these solar lights will illuminate the Ayodhya Bypass and the road leading to the Maharshi Valmiki International Airport. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has long envisioned turning Ayodhya into a "solar city." Various solar energy projects, including rooftop solar installations, are already in progress, and many parks and roads in Ayodhya are now lit by solar lights. UPNEDA is expediting the installation of these smart

solar lights, with 60 planned for the area around the airport to attract tourists and pilgrims. In addition, UPNEDA is installing 58 smart solar lights along both sides of the Ayodhya Bypass and in other strategic spots. Sixteen lights are being placed near the Divisional Commissioner's residence, ten in a park near Dharmapath, and six at Mukti Dham. UPNEDA Project Officer Praveen Kumar Pandey confirmed that the project is moving swiftly, aiming for completion by Diwali to ensure that key sites are brightly illuminated for the festivities. Simultaneously, the construction of the 161-foot-high spire atop the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is progressing rapidly. The first layer of the spire has been completed, and the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has shared images of the progress on social media. The temple structure's height from its foundation up to the third floor is 76 feet. The spire will reach 85 feet in height and consist of 29 layers, each around three feet high. Approximately 300 skilled artisans are working on the project, completing each layer in about a week. After the spire is finished, a 44-foot Dharma Dhvaj (religious flagpole) will be installed atop it, with a six-foot religious flag. This will bring the total height of the temple, including the spire, to roughly 211 feet. The spire's construction is expected to be completed by February 2025.

FAREWELL MAA DURGA



Women apply vermilion on each other as they participate in 'Sindoor Khela' at a 'puja pandal', to mark the end of the Durga Puja festival celebrations Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Ola must put consumer first: CCPA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has directed ride-hailing platform Ola to implement consumer-friendly changes, including offering refund options and providing receipts for auto rides, the regulator said on Sunday. The CCPA, led by Chief Commissioner Nidhi Khare, observed that Ola's no-questions-asked refund policy only provided coupon codes for future rides, without giving consumers a choice for bank account refunds. "This (practice) violates consumer rights," the CCPA said in a statement. "The no-questions-asked refund policy cannot mean that the company incentivises people to simply use this facility for taking another ride." The regulator also mandated Ola to issue bills or invoices for all auto rides booked through its platform, citing the absence of such documentation as an "unfair trade practice" under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Following the CCPA's intervention, Ola has implemented several changes, including displaying contact details of grievance and nodal officers on its website, clearly mentioning cancellation policies and fees at the time of booking, adding more options for ride cancellation reasons, and publicizing fare component breakdowns. The other changes implemented were showing address of both pickup and drop locations to drivers and revised payment cycles for drivers for swift payment. The CCPA reported 2,061 complaints against Ola from January to October 2024, with top issues including overcharging, refund delays and driver-related problems. "Through its regulatory intervention, the CCPA has been steadfast in ensuring that Ola adheres to the legal framework established to secure the rights of consumers," the regulator stated. The move comes as the CCPA increases scrutiny of digital platforms to protect consumer interests in the rapidly growing e-commerce and ride-hailing sectors.

When aged buses collapse, traffic jams in mourning

Dozens of large public vehicles stall on the roads regularly, causing jams, diversions

BY RAJESH KUMAR

It is now common to come across social media posts by the Delhi Traffic Police urging people to steer clear of certain roads because of jams created by the breakdown of a bus in the National Capital. However, these reported incidents are a mere fraction of the actual number of daily breakdown of buses. Breakdown of buses and Medium Goods Vehicles (MGVs) has become a major cause of traffic snarls during peak hours in Delhi. Sources in the transport department said that dozens of Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) and clusters scheme buses stall on the roads every day. The consequences of a bus breakdown are complex. It not only causes inconveniences to daily commuters who are stranded on the road but it also results in traffic congestion with the slow down and idling vehicles.

Traffic was affected on Najafgarh-Bahadurgarh Road due to the breakdown of a Bus near Najafgarh Depot on Sunday. As per Delhi traffic police social media post, traffic was affected on Bahadurgarh Najafgarh Road due to accident and fire in Hyva Truck near Anaj Mandi, Najafgarh. On Saturday, traffic police posted two advisories on the breakdown of buses. The first breakdown took place on Najafgarh Road in the carriageway from Dholi Piao towards Dwarka Mor due to breakdown of a bus at Uttam Nagar Chowk, which led to slow down of movement. In the second incident, traffic was affected on Rohtak Road in the carriageway from Tikri border towards Peeragarhi due to breakdown of a Bus near metro pillar No 530. According to traffic police social media posts on Friday, five incidents of breakdown of vehicles reported in the peak hours. Traffic was affected on Mathura Road in the carriageway

from Ashram towards Badarpur due to breakdown of a Cluster bus near Sarita Vihar flyover. This is one of the busiest roads in Delhi that connects Delhi and Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. In the second instance, traffic is affected on MGM (Ring Road) in the carriageway from AIIMS towards Moti Bagh due to breakdown of a truck at Raj Nagar Flyover. The third stretch was affected on MGM (Ring Road) near IG Stadium in the carriageway from Raighat towards Sarai Kale Khan due to breakdown of an MGW at IP Flyover. In the fourth incident, traffic was affected on Mathura Road in the carriageway from Sarita Vihar towards Badarpur due to breakdown of a truck near Aali Village bus stand. In the fifth incident, traffic was affected on Ring Road in the carriageway from Ashram Chowk towards Moolchand Underpass due to breakdown of an MGW at Moolchand Underpass. This



stretch of Ring Road is considered one of the busiest in Delhi. Similarly, four incidents of breakdown of vehicles was reported on traffic police social media posts on Thursday. The traffic was affected on Ring Road

in the carriageway from Raja Garden towards Delhi Cantt Metro Station due to breakdown of an MGW on Naraina Flyover. The traffic was affected on Mathura Road in the carriageway from Okhla towards CRRI due to

PM's surprise visit

A surprise visit to Bharat Mandapam by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday led to traffic snarls in the heart of the national Capital. Commuters trying to go from Central to South Delhi were inconvenienced, as the arterial roads remained choked for the VIP movement. Security protocols were in place around Bharat Mandapam for hours in the afternoon and evening, and commuters had to wait for long hours in their vehicles, for the all clear. Detailed story on page 5

descending Akshardham flyover. This is one of the busiest roads in Delhi that connects Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. There were among 50 breakdowns that disrupted traffic since last Friday, going by the Traffic Police's social media posts. There were dozens of incidents of breakdown of buses which were not reported by the transport department and traffic police. According to a traffic police official, it typically took around one hour to rectify the situation arising from a bus breakdown. In some instances, the resolution time exceeds two-three hours. Removing the broken down bus is a tedious task since they have hydraulic brake setups that can only be opened by expert mechanics. Since buses ply on long routes, the depots are generally at some distance from the breakdown spot and the arrival of the required mechanical personnel also takes time. Continued on page 2



Kejriwal doles out advice to Omar on how to run 'half a State' in J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The top brass of the Aam Admi party led by their Convener and former New Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal landed in Doda to celebrate the victory of their candidate Mehraj Malik in the recently held Assembly polls. Malik created history by opening an account of the Aam Admi party in Jammu and Kashmir. He defeated BJP's Gajay Singh Rana by a margin of 4538 votes. Malik, a District Development Council (DDC) member, polled 23,228 votes against Gajay Singh Rana's 18,690 votes. The National Conference candidate stood third, the Democratic Progressive Azad Party candidate stood fourth and the Congress party candidate stood fifth in the tally of votes. Doling out a piece of advice



while congratulating CM Designate Omar Abdullah during the rally, Kejriwal said if Omar Abdullah has any problem in running the government, he should ask me, I have run the government in Delhi successfully. "Like Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir has also been made a half state, and all power has been given to the Lieutenant

bility in Omar Abdullah's government. "Since AAP has supported the Omar Abdullah government, I hope that our Mehraj Malik (AAP MLA) will be given responsibility in Omar Abdullah's government so that he can serve the entire Jammu and Kashmir along with Doda," Kejriwal said. Both Sanjay Singh and Bhagwant Singh Mann in their speeches congratulated the people of Doda for electing Mehraj Malik based on his campaign focused on the issues faced by the common man on the street and holding the government accountable for failing to deliver on their electoral promises. Mann said, When our future generations will be asked where the 'development politics' started in Jammu and Kashmir, the answer will be that development politics started in Jammu and Kashmir from Doda.

BJP accuses Kejriwal of illegal construction at his former residence

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta on Sunday accused former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of illegal construction at his residence on 6, Flag Staff Road, by flouting rules and stated that the BJP will write to the Central Vigilance Commissioner (CVC) demanding an investigation into it. Accusing the AAP supremo of illegal construction at Chief Minister's residence, Gupta claimed, "Kejriwal demolished surrounding bungalows and flats to include them in his residence, which is entirely illegal." He stated that carrying out illegal construction on government property without approval of the layout plan is unacceptable in any form. "Furthermore, neither the maximum ground coverage nor the maximum FAR (Floor Area Ratio) limits under building regulations have been followed," he stated. According to



Gupta, the Lieutenant Governor's office has confirmed that no approvals were taken for the modifications made at the bungalow on 6, Flag Staff Road. The BJP leader alleged that by demolishing eight Type-V flats located at 45 and 47 Rajpur Road adjacent to the residence and by merging two bungalows at 8-A and 8-B Flag Staff Road—totaling around 25,000 square yards—a luxurious Sheesh Mahal has been built over an area of approximately

construction at the Chief Minister's residence remains incomplete, but upon exposure, Kejriwal hurriedly stopped the work. "This behavior reflects Kejriwal's mindset, which only believes in governing through chaos," he alleged. Expressing his disbelief at Kejriwal, the LoP said, "How could he justify calling himself honest after failing to get his own bungalow plan approved. Kejriwal, who claims to be 'staunchly honest' and resides in a bungalow worth approximately Rs 153 crore after spending Rs 53 crore on construction over land valued at Rs 100 crore, blatantly violated all rules and laws to the maximum extent possible." He said that the BJP would soon write to the CVC to request an investigation into the matter. "This would reveal the true extent of Kejriwal's 'honesty' and expose how he flouted government regulations to carry out illegal construction at his bungalow," Gupta said.

AAP claims LG did not meet its women's delegation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Sunday claimed that the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena did not meet its women's delegation which was demanding arrest of Delhi hospital Medical Superintendent for sexually harassing a female doctor. Meanwhile, the Delhi BJP accused the AAP leaders of engaging in petty politics, even on sensitive matters involving women. Earlier, AAP's women's delegation led by Delhi Assembly Deputy Speaker Rakhi Birla, stormed the Lieutenant Governor's residence on Sunday. The party said that despite being notified in advance, Saxena refused to meet them with Birla accusing the LG of being completely anti-women," Birla charged. The delegation, comprising of MLA Dhanwati Chandela, Preeti Tomar, Vandana Kumari, Bhavana Gaur, and women



councilors, condemned the ongoing abuse and the transfer of the victim, instead of filing charges against the accused. Birla further stated that it was a matter of great shame and surprise that the elected women representatives of Delhi had come to meet the LG after informing him in advance and he didn't meet us. "We understand that the LG might have been busy, but he has a large staff—anyone could have met us. We stood outside LG's res-

idenced for several hours, but no one spoke to us. No one even asked about the issue that brought us here. Do they have any concrete information or a response regarding the issue we raised? No such conversation took place," she claimed. She added that after going to Raj Niwas, it became clear that the LG does not respect women. "He is completely anti-women and enjoys insulting them. For the past year, a female doctor has been mis-

same letter was returned to them by a steno-level officer. "Today, they sent the police after the elected women representatives instead of listening to us or giving us any assurance. If the elected representatives of Delhi are waiting for hours outside the LG House to raise their voice for a woman doctor, how much will the police listen to an ordinary woman?" asked Birla. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP Spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor accused the AAP Leaders of raising the case of female doctor's harassment only after it was published in a major newspaper. "Why Did Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj Remain Silent for So Long?" he asked. "It would have been better to ask AAP leaders like Kejriwal and Saurabh Bhardwaj, known for false demonstrations and rhetoric, why they didn't act against the harassing Medical Superintendent for the past year," he claimed.

Kejriwal claims people across city scared by Baba Siddique's murder

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal claimed on Sunday that people across the country are "scared" by the killing of NCP leader Baba Siddique in Mumbai, and gangsters have created an almost similar atmosphere in Delhi. Kejriwal, without naming anyone, alleged "they" want to bring "Gangster Raj" in the country and the people will have to stand against them. "The incident of killing of an NCP leader in public in Mumbai has scared the people not only in Maharashtra but the whole country. They have created an almost similar atmosphere in Delhi. They want to bring Gangster Raj to the entire country. Public will now have to stand up to them," the former Chief Minister said on X. 66 year old Siddique, a former



Maharashtra minister, was waylaid by three men at Kher Nagar in Mumbai's Bandra area just outside his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office and shot dead on Saturday night. The BJP is a partner in the coalition government in Maharashtra and leads the government at the Centre. The AAP in Delhi has been lashing at the Centre and the lieutenant governor, alleging criminal gangs active in the capital were making extortion calls to busi-

Maharashtra Assembly polls: MVA gives clarion call for ouster of BJP led Maha Yuti Government

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

As it released a "Gaddarancha Panchanama" (a document listing the black deeds of betrayers) against MahaYuti government in Maharashtra, the Opposition MahaVikas Aghadi (MVA)—comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Ajit Pawar)—on Sunday gave a clarion call to the people of the state for the ouster of the BJP-led grand ruling alliance. Addressing a joint news conference here ahead of the declaration of the schedule for the Assembly polls, NCP (UBT) chief Sharad Pawar, Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole and Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray went to town with a panchanama of "black deeds" allegedly committed by the BJP-led MahaYuti government during its 27 months' rule in the state. The four-page "Gaddarancha Panchanama" document released by the MVA on the occasion highlighted the corruption allegedly indulged by the ruling alliance and listed its failures on various fronts during its rule. "The MahaYuti's biggest sin is it betrayed the Maharashtra dharma and placed it the feet of Gujarat."



Among the charges that the MVA made against the ruling MahaYuti—comprising BJP, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) and NCP (Ajit Pawar) were: alleged corruption in the installation of the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji which collapsed recently in Sindhudurg district, atrocities against women and lack of safety "for our daughters", denial of guaranteed prices and crop insurance to farmers, driving away industries from Maharashtra to Gujarat and taking of "30 per cent cut" on every project and destabilising the state by promoting hatred and stirring

destroying the administrative system. We are going all out to unseat MahaYuti from power," Pawar said. Charging that there was a complete breakdown of law and order in the state, Uddhav Thackeray said: Former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said, "What were the authorities doing until the murder of Baba Siddique? During Fadnavis's government, Nana Patole's phone was being tapped, they kept a close watch on the opposition, but why not on criminals? The Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) are only for the opposition. If murders are happening in the capital of Maharashtra, if atrocities against women are happening, where is the law in the state?" "When the young Abhishek Ghosalkar (UBT Sena leader) was murdered, Fadnavis had said, 'Even if a dog comes under the car, the opposition will demand the Home Minister's resignation.' This government thinks of people as dogs. Mahayuti has turned Maharashtra into a colony of Gujarat, but the MVA will not allow Modi and Shah to take over the state of Shivaji, Shahu, Phule, and Ambedkar. This government must be defeated in the upcoming

assembly," Uddhav said. Replying to a question, Sharad Pawar said: "The people of Maharashtra are eager for change in the state, as they were during the Lok Sabha polls. The MVA won 31 out of 48 seats in the Lok Sabha, and similar results will be seen in the State Assembly polls". In response to a question about the MVA's Chief Ministerial candidate, MVA leaders clarified, "There is no leadership issue or conflict over the chair within the MVA; we are united. This election is between the MVA and the Mahayuti. Let's see what happens after Mahayuti announces their Chief Ministerial candidate." Queried as to who is the MVA's chief ministerial candidate, Uddhav said: "Forget Maha Vikas Aghadi...who would be the Chief Minister of the Maha Yuti?...let the BJP first decide their Chief Ministerial candidate...being in government they should announce first. But the BJP's position is so bad that they have been forced to contest under the leadership of thieves and traitors." "On who will lead the MVA during the polls, Sharad Pawar said: "Whatever Thackeray has said about the Chief Minister is quite clear and that is it."

Special Cell team dispatched to Mumbai to assist in Baba Siddique murder case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A team from the Special Cell of the Delhi Police is set to be dispatched to Mumbai to assist in the investigation of the murder of NCP leader Baba Siddique. According to police sources on Sunday, the team from the special cell will be joining in the Mumbai police soon, helping them to probe the matter. The 66-year-old former Maharashtra minister was waylaid by three men at Kher Nagar in Mumbai's Bandra area just outside his MLA son Zeeshan Siddique's office and shot at on Saturday night. He was taken to a hospital where he was declared dead. "A team comprising four to five members from the Special Cell

will go to Mumbai to investigate and assist the Mumbai Police. The team will look into the gangster angle," said the source. Mumbai Police has said that the crime branch has launched a probe into the case from different angles, including a possible contract killing, business rivalry, or threat over a slum rehabilitation project. Two of the accused—Gurmail Baljit Singh (23), a resident of Haryana, and Dharmaraj Rajesh Kashyap (19), a native of Uttar Pradesh—have been arrested. Some teams have also been sent out of Maharashtra to nab the third accused who is still at large, police said. The shooters opened fire on five rounds of fire from a 9.9 mm pistol, which was recovered by police.

When aged buses collapse...

From page 1

According to Delhi Traffic Police's X handle, eight breakdowns disrupted traffic just on Monday. Four were reported on Tuesday. Three were reported on Wednesday. Officials of Delhi transport department said one of the top reasons for frequent breakdowns is age of the CNG run buses. Most of the buses have a lifespan of 15 years. In fact they are on extended life and this often means more breakdowns.

Navratri ends...

From page 1

My friend Utkarsh, a political consultant, remained in a state of fear. "It was a scary moment; I could see a severe accident happening if I weren't prompt enough. But after all of it was over, all I could think was how to escape this? It was a festive night, which has now become an event to get drunk and create ruckus on the streets and ruin it for everyone," he said. "Safety is a primal instinct, things like this made me wonder if I should just leave this country at the first opportunity and settle in a

safer place. It is also disappointing to see festivals being ruined by alcoholics like this. The religious people need to introspect, while the fervour around religion keeps increasing, the religiosity is slowly dying," the 25 year old added. A shopkeeper who was present at the time of the incident, said, "It keeps happening, people are now drinking openly in the streets, there seems to be no fear of law. Same people then eve-tease women, indulge in rash-driving and overall create chaos on the streets."

Waqf Joint Committee...

From page 1

Parliamentary sources said the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has also received 75,000 responses with documents to support the respective views, prompting the panel to seek additional staff from the Lok Sabha Secretariat. Through these consultations, the panel will examine key aspects of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, including the digitisation of records, more rigorous auditing processes, enhanced legal measures for dealing with encroachments and the decentralisation of the Waqf management.

Political bullets fired

From page 1

Expressing his "profound sorrow" over his party leader Baba Siddique's murder, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar has expressed profound sorrow over the tragic murder of NCP leader Baba Siddique, stating, "The NCP has been devastated by the tragic loss of Baba Siddique, a leader deeply loved by many, and personally, I have lost a dear friend whom I have known for years."

Ajit Pawar appealed to the Opposition parties to refrain from politicising the murder. "I strongly urge everyone to resist the temptation to politicise this horrifying event. This is not a time for division or for exploiting the pain of others for political advantage. Right now, our focus must be on ensuring that justice is served. We will not rest until those responsible are brought to account," Ajit Pawar said.

TN Government set up integrated command centre in view of predicted rainfall: DCM Udhayanidhi

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government has set up an integrated command centre in view of heavy rainfall predicted by the Meteorological department, Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin said on Sunday. After interacting with the officials on the measures taken at the command centre, he said a helpline '1913' has been established to serve the public round-the-clock and people can also download the TN ALERT mobile application to receive information about the rainfall. The government is taking all precautionary measures in view of the Meteorological department predicting heavy rainfall from October 15 with some areas expected to receive over 20 cm of rainfall, he said. "Top priority is given to save human life and property," the deputy chief minister told reporters. He was accompanied

by Greater Chennai Corporation Mayor R Priya, Deputy Mayor M Mukesh Kumar and Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner J Kumaragurubaran. About 150 officers would be working round-the-clock at the call centre facility '1913' to offer their services. Besides this helpline, rain related information would be provided in all the social media channels of the government, he said. "As many as 13,000 volunteers have been enrolled to work in rain-affected areas and 100 motor pumps each with 100 horse power capacity have been kept ready to let out water from the low-lying areas," he said. The Deputy Minister noted that most of the stormwater drainage work had been completed in Chennai and appealed to the people to inform the government through social media if any work was not completed.

Crime against women in politically significant areas underscoring a troubling paradox

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Crime against women in politically significant areas like Delhi and Noida underscores a troubling paradox. Despite being hubs of governance and law-making, and home to a large workforce of women who should feel secure, these regions experience alarmingly high rates of violence and harassment. Though data available from neighbouring Noida showed that in 2023, the district recorded a 21% reduction in such crimes compared to 2022 and a 24% drop compared to 2021, this crime figure could be just a part of the story. The actual statistics may be on the higher side as

many incidents go unreported due to fear of societal backlash, stigma, or a lack of trust in the police and the justice system. Victims often face immense pressure to remain silent, which perpetuates a cycle of violence and impunity, say the women activists. Delhi despite being the national capital is already considered one of the most unsafe cities for women in India. The city has been at the forefront of several types of crimes against women, including rape, dowry deaths, and insult to the modesty of women. The national capital recorded 14,158 cases of crimes against women in 2022, as per the



National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) and a staggering crime rate of 144.4 per lakh of the female population. Data available from the National Commission of

Women (NCW) shows that in 2023, 2,411 complaints were filed. Key issues in Delhi included harassment (8,540 complaints), domestic violence (6,274), dowry harassment (4,797), and rape (1,537). Gurgaon's statistics were similarly troubling, with over 1,000 cases registered in 2023, primarily related to domestic violence and kidnapping. As per media reports, on an average, three women file complaints across police stations in the Millennium city every day. Most of these were related to domestic violence (384 FIRs). At the same time, 291 kidnapping cases were lodged under IPC sections 366 (abduction of a woman)

and 366A (procurement of a minor girl), 180 cases under IPC Section 354 (assault or criminal force to a woman), and 172 cases under IPC section 376 (rape). Neighboring Haryana also struggles with a high incidence of crimes against women, underscoring the urgent need for effective measures to ensure safety and justice in the NCR. However, overall State wise, Uttar Pradesh had the most cases in absolute numbers, totaling 65,743, followed by Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. Other significant categories of crime against women included kidnapping and abduction (19.2%), assault with intent to outrage modesty

(18.7%), and rape (7.1%). In 2022, India faced a grim reality regarding sexual violence, with 31,516 reported cases of rape affecting 31,982 victims, including 1,017 girls under 18 years old. Alarmingly, this translates to approximately 90 rapes reported daily. The charge sheeting rate in these cases stood at 75.8%, reflecting the complexities within the legal system. Crimes related to cruelty by husband or relatives accounted for 31.8% of all crimes against women. The overall crime rate per lakh women population was 66.4. Kidnapping and abduction, assault, and rape were other major categories of crimes against women.

Surprise visit by PM Modi leads to traffic snarls near Bharat Mandapam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A surprise visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday led to traffic snarls in the national Capital with commuters trying to go from Central Delhi to South Delhi facing inconvenience even as the arterial roads remained choked for the VIP movement. With security protocols put in place on the roads around Bharat Mandapam for hours in the afternoon and evening, commuters shared their experience of sitting for long hours in their vehicles, waiting for the route to clear. "There is mindless traffic diversion due to the visit. We were unable to move towards South Delhi for hours from Central Delhi," a woman stated. Another added that the arte-



den visit to the site, elaborate security plans were laid out on the roads of the city as per protocol. A working professional was not able to reach her office on time as she got stuck on the road opposite to the Bharat Mandapam and complained that there is no value of a normal citizen's time. "I was coming from the road Bharat Mandapam to ITO to my office after finishing an assignment. However, my car was stuck on the red light just near the Bharat Mandapam for about 20 minutes while simultaneously the traffic police stopped the flow of traffic from ITO to Bharat Mandapam," she said. Asking if her time isn't as valuable, she added, "I do not like that we as citizens aren't valued and the politicians that we have voted for to work

for get such undue advantage." A commuter who frequently travels by buses stated that traffic police were creating chaos at the bus stations. "They hardly gave us a minute to onboard and asked the buses to move quickly at a bus stop near the area where the Prime Minister was visiting," he complained. However, this is not the first time such inconveniences were caused to the commuters in the Pragati Maidan area which was redeveloped for hosting big events like G20, has become a bane for commuters who are stalled in their vehicles for hours, restricting their movement.

Chief Minister Atishi on Sunday announced that the AAP led Delhi government has released around Rs 100 crore for 12 DU colleges funded by it. She said that the AAP government has made a budgetary provision of approximately Rs 400 crore for the colleges for the financial year 2024-25 and added that the latest fund is for the third quarter. In a statement, the party said since the AAP came to power in Delhi, the budget allocated to these colleges has increased more than threefold. Atishi said, "Under the guidance of Arvind Kejriwal, education has always been the top priority for the AAP government. Since the formation of Kejriwal's gov-

AAP Government released ₹100 crore for 12 DU colleges funded by it: CM Atishi

Staff Reporter n New Delhi



ernment in Delhi, the largest share of the budget has been dedicated to education every year." She added that alongside schools, the AAP government has focused on higher education by opening three new universities and expanding existing ones. "The 12 fully funded Delhi University colleges play a crucial role in higher education in Delhi," she asserted, adding that the funding for these colleges has tripled since the AAP

came to power in Delhi. "In the year 2014-15, these colleges were allocated Rs 132 crore, which has now increased to approximately Rs 400 crore in the current financial year," a statement by the party said. It added that in recent years, several issues of financial mismanagement have arisen in these colleges, but the AAP government has decided that teachers and students should not suffer due to management or administrative errors. Meanwhile, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva attacked the ruling party and said, "The AAP government, which claims to have presented a 'profit budget' and a world-class education model, needs to answer why it has failed to release timely funds for 12 colleges over the last decade."



Devotees immerse the idol of goddess Durga into an artificial pond on Sunday. Ranjan Dimri

Six areas in Gurugram emerging as real estate hotspots

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURGAON

Six areas here in Gurugram are emerging as real estate hotspots. These areas, including Dwarka Expressway, Southern Peripheral Road (SPR), New Gurugram, Golf Course Road, Golf Course Extension Road, and Sohna Road, have become property hotspots. Home buyers are showing significant interest in these areas. Meanwhile, property prices have also seen a steady jump ahead of festive season, as people wish to invest in the real estate sector. Property bookings tend to increase during the festive season, and many new projects are expected to be launched. It is anticipated that many new projects will be launched, especially in the Gurugram real estate market, which could elevate the market to new heights. "As the festive season approaches, excitement builds in Gurugram's real estate market. This time of year often brings a spike in buyer activ-



ity, fueled by optimism and the tradition of new beginnings. Over the years, infrastructure developments like the Dwarka Expressway, DMIC, and Metro expansion have paved the way for Gurugram's growth, setting the stage for even more momentum in the coming months. Buyers are increasingly drawn to properties that blend quality with modern conveniences, fostering vibrant communities," Madhur Gupta, CEO of Hero Realty said. Meanwhile, a recent Anarock report of Delhi-NCR has seen a 29 per cent year-on-year increase in the July-September quarter. Experts said this is a positive

sign for the real estate market ahead of the festive season, and tremendous sales of houses are expected. Data from real estate shows that the average prices of residential properties in Delhi-NCR increased by 29 per cent to Rs 7,200 per sq ft in the July-September quarter, up from Rs 5,570 per sq ft in the same period last year. Meanwhile, in the first half of 2024, about 32,200 housing units were sold in Delhi-NCR. The surprising thing is that more than 45 per cent of these units were from the luxury segment, while 24 per cent of the units were from the affordable segment. "As the festive season arrives, it brings a wave of optimism and increased economic vibrancy, particularly in the real estate market. During this festive period, buyers are drawn to new investments and properties, spurred by attractive deals, auspicious timings, and a sense of optimism that pervades the season," Harinder Dhillon - Senior Vice President of Sales at BPTP, said.

Despite Dussehra celebrations, Delhiites breathing clean air: Rai

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Sunday claimed in spite of Dussehra celebrations in the capital, people are breathing clean air, adding the number of days with "good", "satisfactory", and "moderate" air quality is going up, indicating an improvement in managing pollution. However, the Delhi BJP refuted the claims stating that in the last three days, Delhi's average pollution AQI level has increased from 152 to 223. Rai also said that Delhi's Air Quality Index has remained outside the "poor" category after Dussehra. However, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) the city's air quality was recorded in the "poor" category with a reading of 225 at 12 pm. In a press conference, he said every year after Dussehra, the air quality usually dips into the "poor" category, but this year Delhi is experiencing clean air. The environment minister said that over the past two years, Delhi has recorded 200 days of

"good", "satisfactory", or "moderate" air quality between January and October 12, compared to just 109 such days in 2016. Rai said this is an indicator of progress in managing pollution, crediting the improvement to efforts by the Delhi government and public support. He noted that achieving this without a lockdown marks a significant accomplishment for the city. On Saturday, the day of Dussehra, the AQI was in the "moderate" category with a reading of 155. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". The minister also criticised the BJP for claiming that pollution levels in Delhi are worsening, urging them to review the data. He emphasised that during critical periods, such as post-Diwali when temperatures drop, emergency pollution-control measures become essential.

Protesters detained from outside Ladakh Bhawan

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Sunday detained several people from outside the Ladakh Bhawan where climate activist Sonam Wangchuk is leading an indefinite hunger strike since October 6 to press for their demand to include Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. According to one of the protesters, the detainees have been taken to the Mandir Marg police station. Earlier police said that Sonam Wangchuk was among those detained, but later the New Delhi DCP clarified that the climate activist was not among the detainees. "We have detained some students from outside the Ladakh Bhawan. Sonam Wangchuk is not among them," Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Mahla said. Meanwhile, Wangchuk said in a video message that the Delhi Police detained several of their supporters, as he questioned why Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) which prohibits unauthorised gatherings is permanently enforced in New Delhi.



"Many people came here today to observe a silent protest. It is really sad that they were detained by Delhi Police. It is sad because in the world's largest democracy, we can't even hold a silent protest," Wangchuk said in the message. "We have been told that Section 163 has been enforced... It is sad that the mother of democracy has

to protest at any other site. We have detained a few people, who will be released soon." Wangchuk and his supporters who marched to Delhi from Leh were detained by Delhi Police at the Singhu border on September 30 before being released on October 2. The group is demanding a meeting with the top leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to press for their demands. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution includes provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram in northeast India. It also establishes autonomous councils that have legislative, judicial, executive and financial powers to independently govern these areas. The march to Delhi was organised by the Leh Apex Body which along with the Kargil Democratic Alliance has been spearheading an agitation for the last four years seeking statehood for Ladakh, its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, a public service commission for Ladakh, and separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil districts.

Crime Branch busts supply chain of illegal firecrackers trade, three held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's Crime Branch on Sunday claimed to have busted the supply chain of illegal firecrackers trade in different areas of the national Capital with the arrest of three people and recovery of more than 1,300 kg banned crackers ahead of the upcoming festival of Diwali. According to the police, 1323 kg of banned crackers were seized from two godowns while the owner of both godowns and driver who used to supply the illicit fire crackers in Delhi and NCR was arrested. The accused were identified as 40 year old Manoj Kumar, a graduate and resident of Delhi's Nanjoi, Sanjay Atri, an illiterate and resident of Haryana's Rohtak, and Vipin Kumar, who studied upto class 10th and resident of Delhi's Rohini. DCP (Crime) Satish Kumar said, "On October 11, a secret information regarding running a racket of illegal firecrackers trading in Village Baprola, Outer Delhi. Information was further developed through field sources. It was revealed that accused



Manoj Kumar is running an illegal trade of banned firecrackers in the area and he further supplies these illegal firecrackers all over Delhi." A case under section 288 (Negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance) of BNS and 9B of Explosive Act-1884 was registered. "During the course of investigation, the accused Manoj along with Sanjay Atri (driver of the offending vehicle DL-1-LP-7813 Mahendra Pickup, by which he used to supply the illegal firecrackers in all over Delhi) were arrested," Kumar stated. He added that during interrogation with the accused/driver of the offending vehicle, it was revealed that Atri used to supply the banned firecrackers in the area of Prem Naga and Kirari. "A raid was also conducted at a godown situated at Main Majri Road, Roop Vihar, Mubarakpur Dabas, Kirari, Delhi. A huge cache of illegal firecrackers were also recovered from there," a senior police officer said. The officer said that during investigation the owner of godown Vipin Kumar was also arrested. "A total of 1323 kg of illegal firecrackers were recovered during the entire operation and we have launched further investigation into the matter," the DCP added.

PM GatiShakti revolutionises infrastructure development efforts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan has emerged as a transformative initiative aimed at revolutionising India's infrastructure and is driving faster and more efficient development across sectors. PM GatiShakti National Master Plan (PMGS-NMP) was launched on October 13, 2021 for providing multi-modal connectivity infrastructure to various economic zones. PM GatiShakti is a transformative approach for economic growth and sustainable development

which is driven by seven engines - railway, roads, ports, waterways, airports, mass transport and logistics infrastructure. In a social media post, Modi said, "PM GatiShakti National Master Plan has emerged as a transformative initiative aimed at revolutionising India's infrastructure. It has significantly enhanced multimodal connectivity, driving faster and more efficient development across sectors." The seamless integration of various stakeholders has led to boosting logistics, reducing delays and creating new opportunities for several people, Modi said. "Thanks to



GatiShakti, India is adding speed to fulfil our vision of a Viksit Bharat. It will encourage progress, entrepreneurship and innovation," the prime minister said.

Modi tagged Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal's post in which he had lauded the GatiShakti initiative on completion of three years. "Today marks 3 years since the launch of the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan for Multimodal Connectivity by PM Narendra Modi ji. By streamlining logistics and advancing connectivity, this path-breaking initiative ensures faster and more efficient project implementation," Goyal said. It continues to play a pivotal role in developing a modern, interconnected infrastructure network, strengthening the vision of building a Viksit Bharat, he said.

Israel PM mourns passing of Ratan Tata

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has condoled the death of industrialist Ratan Tata and said he was a champion of friendship between Israel and India. Ratan Tata passed away in Mumbai on Wednesday last at the age of 86. In a social media post addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Netanyahu highlighted Ratan Tata's contributions to fostering Israel-India ties. In the statement, Netanyahu said, "To my friend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I and many in Israel mourn the loss of Ratan Naval Tata, a

proud son of India and a champion of the friendship between our two countries. Please convey my condolences to Ratan's family." Prime minister Modi praised Ratan Tata in a post mourning his demise, calling Tata "a visionary business leader, a compassionate soul and an extraordinary human being." The final rites of the eminent industrialist were conducted

with full state honours in Worli crematorium. On Thursday, Singapore's prime minister Lawrence Wong paid tribute to Ratan Tata, calling him a true friend of the country. French president Emmanuel Macron also praised Ratan Tata's contributions to innovation and knowledge, adding that "France has lost a dear friend from India. Microsoft founder Bill Gates also lauded Ratan Tata's achievements and his importance for India and the world. He said, "Ratan Tata was a visionary leader whose dedication to improving lives left an indelible mark on India and the world.

Supreme Court to hear Boinpally's bail plea

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday the bail plea of Hyderabad-based businessman Abhishek Boinpally in a money laundering case related to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. As per the cause list, a bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Aravind Kumar is likely to take up the matter. The top court had on August 13 extended the interim bail granted to Boinpally. On March 20, the top court noted that the businessman had been in custody for 18 months and directed his release on interim bail for five weeks. Since then, Boinpally's interim bail has been extended from time to time by the apex court. While granting him interim bail, the top court had asked Boinpally to surrender his passport and directed him not to leave the National Capital Region except for a visit to Hyderabad. The businessman has challenged a July 3, 2023,



order of the Delhi High Court that dismissed his petition questioning the legality of his arrest in 2022. The businessman had contested his arrest before the high court on the grounds of non-compliance with section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering (PMLA) which deals with the procedure for arrests. Section 19 of the PMLA empowers authorised officials of the ED to arrest people based on the material in their possession, providing a reasonable basis to suspect that an individual has committed an offence punishable under the law. The Delhi government implemented the excise policy for 2021-22 on November 17, 2021, but scrapped it at the end

of September 2022 amid allegations of corruption. According to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the excise policy and undue favours extended to the licence holders. The money-laundering case stems from a CBI FIR that was lodged after Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena recommended a probe into the alleged irregularities in the implementation of the excise policy. It has been claimed that Boinpally was part of clandestine meetings and involved in a conspiracy to launder money along with another accused Sameer Mahendru, a businessman dealing in liquor.

BJP is a party of terrorists says Mallikarjun Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's BJP is a "party of terrorists" remark, former Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi alleged on Sunday that the Congress is selling hatred in its "shop of love". Naqvi said the opposition party has become a "multinational distribution centre" of "certificates" labelling nationalists as terrorists and anti-nationals as nationalists. Kharge alleged on Saturday that the BJP is a "party of terrorists", as he hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his recent remarks that the Congress is being run by a "gang of urban Naxals". Kharge also accused those in the safe party of "lynching and beating" people, and committing



atrocities against the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Talking to reporters, Naqvi said in its "depression of defeat", the Congress has become "hostage to hopelessness" due to its "habit of hate". The "dynasty's animosity and hostility" towards Prime

Minister Narendra Modi is becoming a "political disaster" for the grand old party, the senior BJP leader said. The Congress is trying to portray the "political danger to dynasty" as a "danger to democracy", which shows its arrogance and not wisdom, he added.

Instead of "introspection", the Congress is still engaged in "smugness" as it blames electronic voting machines (EVMs) for its internal conflict, Naqvi said, adding that it is like "a bad workman blaming his tools". Asked about the Congress criticising a recent statement of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, the BJP leader accused the opposition party of harbouring a "prejudiced political mindset" and said Bhagwat gave an effective nationalist message of "Constitution, culture, harmony, social security and inclusivity". Communal political statements made by some champions of pseudo-secularism even on a message of national unity and integrity is like "empty vessels making noise", he said. The Congress is selling hatred in its "mohabbat ki dukaan", Naqvi alleged.

Two Indian ships arrive at Port of Manama

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of further strengthening bilateral defence ties with Bahrain, two Indian ships arrived at Port of Manama there on Saturday while one ship arrived in UAE, navy said here on Sunday. Giving details, officials said continuing with the long range training deployment in the Persian Gulf, INS Tir and ICGS Veera of First Training Squadron (ITS) arrived at the Port of Manama, Bahrain on October 12. Aimed at enhancing Naval cooperation and augmenting interoperability, Indian Navy is set to engage with the Royal Bahrain Naval Forces (RBNF) on various domains of maritime ops and best shared practices. Professional interactions, cross ship visits, joint training sessions, yoga sessions, band concerts, friendly sports fixtures, social interactions and community welfare activities are planned during the port call. The sea trainees of Indian Navy will be visiting various training facilities and establishments of RBNF. A coordination meeting between the operational teams of both the Navies towards planning and conduct of a Maritime Partnership Exercise is also scheduled. Training interaction with the partners of CMF as part of cooperative engagement and reaffirming maritime security in the region will also feature during the visit. In another port visit, INS Shardul of ITS entered Port Rashid, Dubai at UAE. The ship was received by the Defence Attaché at the Embassy of India and officials of the UAE Navy. During the visit, the ship will engage with the UAE Navy on multiple training activities and harbour interactions. The deployment of ITS to Bahrain and UAE is aimed not only at exposing the sea trainees towards various Naval training activities but also endeavours to further the socio-political, military and maritime linkages. The visit is indicative of growing defence relations of India with Bahrain and UAE while boosting maritime security cooperation and enhanced synergy amongst the Navies.

Over 47,000 complaints filed by scheduled caste since 2020

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Over 47,000 complaints have been received by the National Commission for Scheduled Caste in the last four years, according to official data, with atrocities against Dalits, and disputes related to land and governments jobs being the main issues. As per information shared by the NCSC in response to an RTI filed by PTI, 11,917 complaints were received in 2020-21, 13,964 complaints registered in 2021-22, 12,402 in 2022-23 and 9,550 complaints so far in 2024. Speaking to PTI about the data, NCSC chairperson Kishor Makwana said the most common complaints received by the commission are related to atrocities against the Scheduled Castes community, followed by land disputes and issues related to services in the government sector. "In a bid to address the complaints speedily, from next month, me or my members would be visiting the state offices and looking into the issues faced by the people there," he said. Makwana added that he is holding hearings four times a week to meet people and listen



to their problems. "Since I have taken charge, I have ensured that my office remains open to meet people," he said. A senior NCSC official said the highest number of complaints have been filed from Uttar Pradesh among all states. The commission receives 200-300 complaints every day and many of them get resolved within days, so the data seen here is mostly of the complaints that are in the process of getting their resolution, the official said. "There is not a single complaint that has been left unattended. They all are under consideration," he said.

According to the data from the national helpline on atrocities against people from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 6,02,177 calls were received. Out of these, the total number of grievances stood at 5,843, of which 1,784 have been resolved. More than half of calls have been received from Uttar Pradesh at 3,10,623. This helpline is monitored by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry. According to the latest government report under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the majority of atrocities against

Scheduled Caste were concentrated in 13 states, which reported 97.7 per cent of all cases in 2022. Of 51,656 cases registered under the law in 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounted for 23.78 per cent of the total cases with 12,287, followed by Rajasthan at 8,651 (16.75 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh at 7,732 (14.97 per cent). Other states with a significant number of cases of caste atrocities were Bihar with 6,799 (13.16 per cent), Odisha with 3,576 (6.93 per cent), and Maharashtra with 2,706 (5.24 per cent). These six states accounted for nearly 81 per cent of the total cases.



Devotees carry the palanquin of the deities to participate in the International Kullu Dussehra festival in Kullu on Sunday. PTI

Kharge's son withdraws request for five acre land

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The chairperson of Siddhartha Vihar Trust, Rahul M Kharge, has withdrawn his request for the allotment of five acres of civic amenity site in Bengaluru to set up a 'Multi-Skill Development Centre, Training Institutes and Research Centre'. The move by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's son Rahul Kharge comes close on the heels of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi returning the 14 sites to Mysuru Urban Development Authority after the Lokayukta police registered a case against Siddaramaiah, his wife and brother-in-law. Mallikarjun Kharge's younger son Priyank Kharge, who is a minister in the Karnataka government, shared the information with the scanned copies of

the letter on his 'X' handle. In a letter to the Chief Executive Officer of the Karnataka Industrial Development Board (KIADB) on September 20, Rahul Kharge wrote, "Withdrawal of our request for Civic Amenity site to set up Multi Skill Development Centre, Training Institutes and a Research Centre." He said the objective of the Siddhartha Vihar Trust was to create more employable opportunities through skill development in emerging technologies for students and unemployed youth. "The proposed Multi-Skill Development Centre aimed primarily to serve youngsters to make them more employable and industry ready with skills and future skills. It was also designed to help students who were unable to pursue college education," Rahul Kharge said. The trust preferred a site within the



KIADB industrial area because of its proximity to high-growth industries as it would provide invaluable exposure and

opportunities for young people, he said. "Siddhartha Vihar Trust is a public educational, cultural, and charitable trust

and not a private or family-run trust. All institutions established under its aegis are 'Not For Profit'," he explained.

While sharing the information, Priyank Kharge wrote that the trust was fully eligible to apply for and receive an allotment of a CA site for an educational institution. However, any educational institution cannot function effectively while constantly facing malafide, baseless and politically motivated allegations, he said, adding that the trust did not wish to be drawn into long-drawn controversies which would divert attention and efforts from the primary objective of education and social service. "In light of the circumstances, the Trust wrote to the KIADB to withdraw our proposal and withdraw our request for a CA site for establishing a skill development and research centre," the Minister said. The Trust had submitted its proposal to the KIADB on February 12, 2024, and a month later, the proposal was approved.

Vaccines could prevent 500,000 deaths from AMR annually

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underscoring the critical role vaccines could play in addressing rising antimicrobial resistance (AMR), a WHO report has estimated that 44 vaccines targeting 24 pathogens (19 bacteria, 4 viruses, 1 parasite) could prevent over 500,000 deaths from superbugs' infections annually. This strategy not only promises significant healthcare cost savings but could also reduce the reliance on antibiotics by 2.5 billion doses per year, said the report released recently. Currently underutilised vaccines, such as the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine for Streptococcus pneumoniae, alongside those in development for tuberculosis, E. coli, and Klebsiella pneumoniae, hold potential for future AMR

control. The report emphasises the urgent need to integrate these vaccines into global AMR strategies, as vaccination could drastically reduce infections that necessitate antibiotic use. The analysis highlights that existing vaccines could prevent up to 106,000 AMR-related deaths and yield substantial economic benefits, while newer vaccines in late-stage development could further avert 135,000 deaths if introduced swiftly. "The best infection is the one that doesn't occur," said Yvan Hutin, MD, PhD, director of surveillance, protection and control for the WHO's AMR Division, said in a statement. The report also outlines the potential impact of early-stage vaccine candidates, which could prevent up to 408,000 deaths and significantly reduce healthcare costs and productivity losses.

MVA flags NCP leader Baba Siddique's murder, alleges collapse of law and order

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Upping the ante over the brutal murder of NCP (Ajit Pawar) leader and three-time former MLA Baba Ziauddin Siddique, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Sunday charged that there was a breakdown of law and order in Maharashtra ahead of the State Assembly polls. In an incident that sent shock waves through the city, Baba Siddique was shot dead by three miscreants outside his MLA-son Zeeshan B. Siddique's office at Nirmal Nagar in Bandra (East) here on Saturday night. A former minister, 66-year-old Baba Siddique --- who had initially been with the Congress for more than three and a half decades before joining to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP in February this year for

some reasons --- suffered three bullet wounds --- two in his chest and one in his abdomen --- after seven rounds of fire were opened at him by the miscreants. He succumbed to bullet wounds late at the nearby Lilavati Hospital. Expressing serious concern over Baba Siddique's murder, leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi wrote on "X": "The tragic demise of Baba Siddique ji is shocking and saddening. My thoughts are with his family in this difficult time. This horrifying incident exposes the complete collapse of law and order in Maharashtra. The government must take responsibility, and justice must prevail". At a joint news conference called later in the afternoon to release a charge-sheet against the ruling BJP-led MahaYuti, leaders of the three con-

stituent parties --- Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena (UBT) --- attacked the Eknath Shinde-led government and asked State Home Minister Devendra Fadnis of the BJP to take responsibility for Baba Siddique's murder. Condemning the incident, NCP chief Sharad Pawar said: "If the Home Minister and the rulers are going to push the cart of the state so mildly, it can be an alarm bell for the common people. There is a need not only to investigate this, but deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis, who holds the state Home portfolio, should accept the responsibility and step down from his post". Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray hit out at BJP-led MahaYuti government for Siddique's murder and the earlier encounter-death of Badlapur children



sexual assault key accused. "Whether it is the arrest of accused in Baba Siddique's murder or the encounter of Akshay Shinde (rape accused), suspicions are being raised on every act of this government and this is not a good thing. We are not sure who these arrested accused are. They (Maharashtra govt) are keeping tabs on our movements but are not watching the criminals," Uddhav said. Asking chief minister Eknath Shinde to take responsibility for Siddique's murder, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Balasaheb Thorat said: "Siddique's murder is unfortunate. The killing of an important person took

place on a road. The law and order has broken down in the state. The MahaYuti government has lost control over the state. More than the Home Minister, the chief minister should take responsibility for the incident," he said. Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi said: "Maharashtra hasn't seen such a state of collapse in its law and order. This death is a grim reminder of the 80s decade of Mumbai. Siddique is the fourth political murder that has taken place in Mumbai and neighbouring Thane district during the current year. Listing the four political murders that took place during the current year, Priyanka said: "On February 3, 2024 BJP MLA Ganpat Gaikwad opened fire on Mahesh Gaikwad, the Shinde Sena chief of Kalyan, inside a police

station. On February 9, Sena (UBT) leader Abhishek Ghosalkar was shot dead by Mauris Noronha alias Mauris Bhai. In October 2024, Sachin Kurmi, member of the NCP (AP), was fatally stabbed in Byculla (E). On October 12, Baba Siddique, NCP(AP) shot dead in Bandra despite knowing he was receiving death threats and had Y category security". The murder of NCP (AP) leader Baba Siddique is of considerable importance. A Congressman all through his life, he had joined the NCP (Ajit Pawar) in February this year. He was a close associate of former Union Minister Sunil Dutt and his daughter Priya Dutt, actors Sanjay Dutt, Salman Khan and Sharukh Khan. A popular figure in politics, Siddique brought about a truce between feud-

ing film stars Shah Rukh Salman Khan at one stage in the distant past. He was elected twice to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation as a corporator on the Congress ticket. Later on he was elected to the State Assembly for consecutive three terms --- 1999, 2004 and 2009. His son Zeeshan is a Congress MLA from Bndra. In 2014 Assembly polls, he had declared assets worth 775 crore. Later in 2017, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted raids on his properties in connection with an alleged money laundering case linked to a slum rehabilitation project. He had reportedly not got approval from the BJP-led MahaYuti for a few of his development projects, which was said to be one of the reasons for his joining the Ajit Pawar-led NCP in February this year.

Not cops, only men can save women, claims TMC MP

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

There is furor over an alleged "sexist" remark made by senior Trinamool Congress leader and MP Kalyan Banerjee who said that only men and none else can save the honour of women. During an interaction with some media men during Durga Puja celebrations, Banerjee said --- in an apparent reference to the ongoing protest against a plethora of recent rape and murder cases including the one of a post-graduate lady doctor inside the RG Kar Medical College and hospital --- "if men cannot honour women then no one can ... even an army of 1000 policemen cannot save women if the men don't protect and honour women." Praying Mother Goddess



Durga to destroy the evil and inspire good sense in the people he iterated "we the men will provide security and preserve the honour of all the women ... we will offer security to all the women." Reminding how "Lord Shiva had honoured Goddesses Durga and Kali," and how

members of civil society wonder why during the TMC rule the women will have to be protected by men and not by law. "We the women are equal with women in every respect ... even better than them ... at least if we take into consideration the fact that our Chief Minister is a woman ... if that be so why the men will have to protect women and why not the reverse," said Ushashi a Bengali film actress. Another actor invoked Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" to take care of the "common things" saying, while the British writer sounded racist here some TMC leaders are "sexist if it be put that way." A State BJP leader asked whether Banerjee's statement should be taken as a discredit to the police administration that that it cannot provide ade-

quate protection to its citizens, particularly women. "The way he is telling that the police cannot protect the women means that the State police administration has literally given up ... it cannot take on the TMC goons anymore," he said reminding how "encounter medicine in Yogi ji's UP had reformed all the aspiring criminals." CPI(M) leader Dipshita Dhar said that the TMC MP should herself be respectful to the women before appealing others to do so. "Kalyan Babu should walk his talk ... he should himself pay respect to the women first before asking others to do so ... if you refer to his previous remarks about women adversaries you will feel disturbed," Dhar who had contested against Banerjee in the Lok Sabha elections said.

FeMA asks for PM's intervention in doctors' fast

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

After writing a strong letter last week to Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asking her to intervene in the ongoing indefinite fast resorted to by the junior doctors demanding justice for their postgraduate colleague who was on August 9 raped and murdered inside the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital the Federation of Medical Associations (FeMA) has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi requesting him to take steps so as to save Bengal which they claimed was "passing through its darkest phase post Independence." Requesting the Prime Minister to visit Kolkata where junior doctors' indefinite fast entered its ninth day on Sunday the FeMA wrote that it was only his



intervention that could save the lives of the junior doctors. Earlier the organisation had written to the Chief Minister saying if the movement was not defused by taking some positive step and if there was a casualty among the protesting doctors then the movement would go beyond control and even the central force would not be able to control it. "No amount of vote bank or police force will be able to stop the movement. We will make sure that this extreme step that

you are forcing us to take will be supported by every common man and even your own vote bank. It will soon be followed by similar action Pan India. Even central forces will not be sufficient to douse the flames," the FeMa wrote to the Chief Minister. However there was "still no response from the Government," the doctors' organization said. Meanwhile, out of nine junior fasting doctors --- seven in Kolkata and two in Siliguri --- three had been hospitalized as their condition deteriorated. While Dr Aniket was hospitalized on Thursday night two more doctors one from Kolkata and one from Siliguri were rushed to the hospitals as ketone levels in their blood increased steadily. However in their places two more doctors joined the indefinite fast, sources said.

Baba Siddique Murder Case

Those arrested had humble backgrounds, came to Mumbai in search of work: Cops



BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The high-profile murder of Baba Siddique, a former MLA and a leader of Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in Maharashtra, has revealed the involvement of two shooters from Uttar Pradesh. The suspects, identified as Dharmraj Kashyap and Shiva Gautam, hail from Gandara village in the Kaiserganj area of Bahraich district. According to police sources, both had migrated to Mumbai in search of work to support their families. Superintendent of Police (SP) Vrinda Shukla said that both individuals have no prior criminal record and belong to regular families. They have maintained contact with their families, and police are currently investigating whether their families have any knowledge related to the incident. The murder took place on Saturday night outside the office of Baba Siddique's son Zeeshan. Reports suggest that the assailants took advantage of the noise from firecrackers being set off during Dussehra celebrations to carry out the attack. Mumbai Police have arrested two suspects in connection with the case, while investigations continue into the possible motives and accomplices. Following the revelation of a possible UP connection, the Special Task Force (STF) in Uttar Pradesh has been alerted. One of the shooters involved in the attack managed to flee the scene. There are suspicions that the underworld could be linked to the planning and execution of the murder, prompting further investiga-

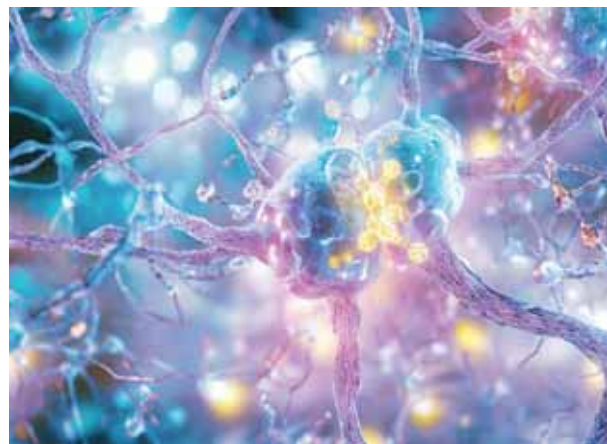
tions by the STF. ADG (Law and Order) Amitabh Yash mentioned that while Mumbai Police has not yet formally reached out to the STF, they are gathering detailed information about Dharmraj and his accomplice. The authorities suspect that Dharmraj could have ties with an organized gang, which might have assigned him a specific task in Mumbai. The manner in which he used a pistol, firing multiple shots like a professional shooter, has raised suspicions of his connection to a criminal syndicate. Dharmraj Kashyap and Shiva Gautam came from humble backgrounds in Bahraich. SP Vrinda Shukla revealed that they had gone to Mumbai as laborers and no prior criminal activities have been reported against them. Shiva Gautam, the youngest of two brothers, is unmarried, and his father, Bal Kishun, sustains the family through farming and labor. Dharmraj Kashyap, the youngest of six brothers, also remains unmarried. His father and elder brother sell fish, while another brother runs a small cart, and others work as laborers. Most of his elder brothers are married, while Dharmraj and another sibling remain single. The family possesses minimal agricultural land, which made it necessary for them to seek employment elsewhere. As investigations proceed, authorities are piecing together information to understand the motive behind the attack and the possible involvement of organized crime. Meanwhile, the revelation of the UP connection adds another layer to the unfolding narrative of this high-profile case.

Protein complex playing critical role in connectivity of brain cells and cognitive behaviors identified

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant breakthrough that could pave the way for more effective treatments for anxiety disorders, scientists at Universite de Montreal and the Montreal Clinical Research Institute (IRCM) have identified a specific protein complex that plays critical roles in the connectivity of brain cells and various cognitive behaviors. The findings from the global research hold significant relevance in the Indian context where anxiety disorders are increasingly recognised as a major public health concern amidst limited access to mental healthcare. Led by researcher Hideto Takahashi, the study published in The EMBO Journal

involved collaboration with teams from York University and Tokushima University in Japan. The findings focussed on a specific protein complex that plays critical roles in the connectivity of brain cells and various cognitive behaviors. Synapses, the junctions between neurons, are essential for the transmission of signals in the brain. They facilitate communication between neurons, allowing for complex functions such as learning, memory, and emotional regulation, said the study. At the same time, excitatory synapses, in particular, activate signal transmission and are crucial for many brain activities. However, defects in these synapses are linked to several mental illnesses, yet the precise mechanisms that



govern their organization and function have been poorly understood until now. Takahashi's team previously identified a unique protein complex that exists only in excitatory synapses, with genes associated with anxiety

disorders and autism. In the current study they demonstrated that this protein complex is vital for regulating both the structural and functional maturation of excitatory synapses. It does this by modulating

phosphorylation—a biochemical modification of proteins that can alter their function—of various synaptic proteins, said the study. When the researchers disrupted this protein complex in their experiments, they observed specific behavioral changes in mice, indicating that the proper functioning of this complex is crucial for normal behavior. High-resolution imaging of the brains of these mutant mice revealed disorganized synapses, suggesting a failure in proper synaptic structure. Further investigations showed an increase in inactive synapses and significant impairments in signal transmission. Behaviorally, the mutant mice exhibited increased levels of anxiety, particularly in unfamiliar environments, as well

as deficits in social interactions. These findings indicate that disruptions in synaptic organization and function may contribute to anxiety and other behavioral issues. By understanding how specific protein complexes regulate synaptic function, scientists may be able to develop targeted therapies aimed at restoring healthy synaptic connections and improving mental health outcomes. According to various studies, anxiety disorders are prevalent among various demographics in India, affecting both urban and rural populations. Around 14% to 30% of the population, particularly young people including students report high levels of anxiety related to academic pressure, job prospects, and social expectations in India.

Punjab: Farmers block roads, squat on rail tracks to protest 'tardy' paddy purchase

PTI ■ LUDHIANA/HOSHIARPUR/AMRITSAR

Punjab farmers on Sunday blocked roads and squatted on rail tracks at many places in the state as part of their protest against the alleged tardy procurement of paddy in the ongoing Kharif marketing season. While the Samyukta Kisan Morcha had given a call for a statewide road blockade from 12 to 3 pm, the Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) had also given a call for 'rail roko' for three hours. As farmers blocked roads at several places including national highways, commuters faced inconvenience. Police, however, had diverted road traffic through alternative routes. BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) general secretary Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan said they held their 'rail roko' protest at 17 places including Batala, Shahkot (Jalandhar), Bathinda, Ajjitwal (Moga), Wallah Phatak (Amritsar), Patti (Tarn Taran), Malout (Muktsar), Jalalabad (Fazilka), Kotakpura (Faridkot), Mansa, Dhablan (Patiala), Sunam (Sangrur), Malerkotla, Qila Raipur (Ludhiana) Lalru (Mohali), Talwandi Bhai (Ferozepur) and Mandiala (Hoshiarpur).



In Ludhiana, farmers disrupted road traffic at several places, including Samrala, Kohara, Khanna, Raikot, Doraha, Payal and Jagraon. Farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal said despite assurances by the state government regarding the smooth procurement of paddy, farmers are facing problems in grain markets. In Hoshiarpur, farmers blocked road traffic near Bijli Ghar Chowk, SDM Chowk and Adda Bhangala. They also staged 'dharnas' at various points including Adda Dosarka on the Hoshiarpur-Tanda road, Pur Hiran Bypass Chowk near the Bus Stand in Garhshankar, Sarhala crossing in Garhdiwala, Chandigarh Bypass Chowk, Majarra on the Hoshiarpur-Chandigarh

road, Bagpur Sataur, Bhunga on the Hoshiarpur-Dasuya road, and village Singhpur Tarkhana on the Hajipur-Dasuya road. The protesters also squatted on the railway tracks at village Mandiala on the Hoshiarpur-Jalandhar rail section. The protesting farmers alleged delay in paddy procurement and its lifting in the state. They also raised slogans against both the state and central governments, accusing them of failing to begin paddy procurement and lifting operations at state-run mandis. They demanded immediate commencement of procurement operations, warning that failure to act would lead to an intensification of their agitation.

BKU (Doaba) blocked a road at Sugar mill crossing in Phagwara. Satnam Singh Sahni, general secretary BKU(D) alleged that there was tardy or virtually no lifting of paddy from 'mandis', resulting in delay of further harvesting of paddy in fields as well as the subsequent preparation for sowing of wheat crop. He demanded plying of special trains for evacuating rice stored in godowns so that the required space for fresh crop was available. In Amritsar, protesting farmers squatted on Wallha railway crossing to protest against the slow purchase of the paddy crop. Parminder Singh Ugrah, a local farmer leader in Amritsar, said farmers have blocked the Amritsar-Pathankot rail tracks. Farmers have also held road blockades at places, including Attari, Kukrawal village near Ajnala town. In Sangrur, farmers squatted on the rail tracks at the Sunam railway station. In Moga, some farmers blocked Ferozepur-Ludhiana national highway near Duneke. In Sunam, a protesting farmer leader accused the state government of running away from the purchase of the paddy crop.

Demand for grant of official language status to Bhojpuri intensifies in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

The demand for grant of "official language" status to Bhojpuri, arguably the most widely spoken dialect in Bihar, has intensified with the opposition Mahagathbandhan strongly coming out in support of it in the state. Senior leaders of the RJD, Congress and CPI(ML) Liberation, constituents of the Mahagathbandhan, said they would raise the issue in Parliament. The old demand got a fresh impetus after the Union Cabinet's recent decision to accord classical language status to five more languages --- Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit and Assamese. The number of such languages now is 11, since Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia got the tag earlier. CPI(ML) Liberation's Lok Sabha MP Sudama Prasad said, "The language is spoken widely in districts such as Bhojpur, Rohtas, Kaimur, Buxar, Saran, East Champaran, West Champaran, Gopalganj, Siwan and Jehanabad in Bihar, and several parts of

Jharkhand. Why is the Centre silent on inclusion of Bhojpuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution?" The 8th Schedule of the Constitution now has 22 languages. Fourteen were initially included in the Constitution, while eight more added later. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs website, there are demands for inclusion of 38 more languages in the Eighth Schedule and one of them is Bhojpuri. "The Nitish Kumar government must send a detailed report to the central government seeking granting of official language status to Bhojpuri. We will raise this issue in the coming session of parliament," Prasad said. The NDA government in Bihar as well as at the Centre are giving step-motherly treatment to Bhojpuri speaking people, RJD's Buxar MP Sudhakar Singh alleged. "We (Mahagathbandhan) demand immediate inclusion of Bhojpuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution so that it gets official language status. Earlier, we raised this issue in the state assembly, but the Nitish Kumar government has turned a deaf ear towards it," said the RJD MP.



FIRST COLUMN

EMOJIS SPEAK WHERE TEXTING FALLS SHORT

Emojis transform otherwise bland exchanges into vibrant and meaningful interactions



ASHA IYER KUMAR

I am a huge fan of emoticons, or emojis, as I prefer to call them. In a new, technically robust world that chooses to conduct most of its private and professional business digitally, the existence of emojis is a lot more valuable than what they seem primary. Emojis fill the gap between one's feelings [thoughts] and words; they arch over the space where misunderstandings breed unintentionally. The trouble with texting is it, more often than not, conveys meanings not meant. The true import of the statements is often dispensed with an unsavoury blandness. Words, for all the power they have, are restricted in their ability to convey true emotions. There is no tone or tenor in a conversation that happens over a typed chat. It is here that the emojis take charge to let people know the precise sentiment behind the words. It's fascinating how something as simple as a tiny, colourful image can carry the weight of an entire conversation.

Emojis have become the silent saviours of our digital dialogues, transforming what could be a dry exchange into something vibrant, relatable and meaningful. I have always believed that words, despite their richness, sometimes falter in delivering the exact shade of sentiment we wish to express. How many times have we sent a message and then wondered: Will they get what I mean? Will they feel my warmth, my concern, or my light-heartedness? Emojis step in at this point, like little emotional cue cards, guiding the recipient towards the intended feeling behind our words.

A simple smiley can transform a blunt response into a kind reassurance. It acts as a gentle nudge, hinting to the reader, "Take it easy; this is friendly." Emojis allow us to soften the blows of formality, sprinkle humour on otherwise serious subjects, or underline the gravity of



what would otherwise seem trivial. Consider this: You've sent a message that says, "Let's talk later." Now, depending on the mood of the person on the other side, it could be read as indifferent, abrupt, or even ominous. But if you add a little smiley at the end, the vibe changes entirely. Suddenly, it sounds casual, almost warm. This is the magic of emojis — they are the unseen bridges in our communication, preventing misunderstandings. They fill in the emotional blanks that text leaves behind. In this world where we don't always get the luxury of hearing someone's voice or seeing their expressions, emojis have quietly become the body language of our conversations. They provide a way to infuse our cold, typed words with a cozy connection. That's where their real value lies, and why I, as someone deeply in love with words and their power, have come to appreciate the humble emoji. Moreover, in a globally connected world where language barriers can stand between intent and interpretation, emojis offer a universal code. A thumbs-up or a heart means the same whether you're in Dubai or Delhi, making them incredibly effective in fostering inclusivity and understanding.

As I continue my writing journey, both in traditional and digital spaces, I find myself more often turning to emojis to complement my words, especially when texting or communicating over social media. They are the small, unspoken allies in my digital interactions, helping me stay connected, relatable, and, most importantly, understood. In a time when misunderstandings are as quick as a keystroke, I've come to appreciate emojis as more than just playful symbols. They are, in many ways, the unsung heroes of modern communication, making sure that what we feel and what we say are in sync. And that's a role too important to ignore.

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

The booklet that redefines Mayawati

Mayawati is launching a revival effort to reclaim lost ground; she released a 59-page booklet outlining the party's roadmap, while emphasising her 'Iron Lady' image



BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Facing a steep decline in electoral performance, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), under the leadership of Mayawati, is now pivoting with a new strategy aimed at regaining its lost political ground. The once-formidable party, which made significant strides in the late 1990s and early 2000s by mobilising Dalit and marginalised communities, has been on the back foot in recent elections. With an eye on the upcoming assembly by-elections and the 2027 general elections, the BSP has taken an important step by releasing a 59-page booklet, designed not only to recount its past achievements but also to chart a new course for the future. The release of this booklet is a key part of the BSP's revitalisation plan. It features several statements from Mayawati, emphasising her leadership and vision for the party's future. One of the key aspects of the booklet is Mayawati's self-identification as the "Iron Lady," a term that echoes the strong and uncompromising leadership style often associated with female leaders in global politics, such as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

By using this title, Mayawati seeks to project an image of resilience, firmness and determination, drawing on her previous tenure as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, where she exercised considerable political influence. Mayawati's attempt to invoke historical symbolism is another notable feature of the booklet. She compares herself to Emperor Ashoka, an ancient Indian ruler known for his governance and promotion of social justice. The parallel is clear: like Ashoka, Mayawati aspires to usher in a new era of social welfare and justice for the marginalised sections of society, particularly Dalits. Through this comparison, she hopes to solidify her image as a leader capable of bringing about meaningful social change, positioning herself as a saviour of the oppressed and aligning her leadership with India's rich historical tradition of justice. The use of such symbolic language is not merely rhetorical; it is a calculated effort to energise the party's traditional voter base, which largely consists of Dalits, while also appealing to other communities. The invocation of Emperor Ashoka, a figure revered for his contributions to governance, inclusiveness and justice, allows Mayawati to appeal to a wider electorate that values strong leadership based on social equity and welfare.

By aligning her vision with that of Ashoka, she is reminding voters that her leadership stands for inclusiveness, fair governance and social justice—values that resonate deeply with her core constituency. One of the most significant components of Mayawati's new political strategy is a renewed focus on social engineering, an electoral strategy that had previously yielded considerable success for the BSP. This approach, which played a crucial role in Mayawati's rise to power in 2007, involves forging electoral alliances across caste lines—specifically between Dalits and Brahmins. By uniting these groups, the BSP was able to create a winning formula that resulted in sweeping electoral victories in the mid-2000s. The booklet highlights the party's intention to revive this strategy, indicating that the BSP aims to once again bring together a broad-based coalition to strengthen its political position. In the booklet, Mayawati makes a strong appeal to Brahmin voters, asserting that their economic and social upliftment can only be achieved under BSP rule. She takes the opportunity to criticise



ONE OF THE PRIMARY OBSTACLES IS THE EROSION OF ITS TRADITIONAL VOTE BANK. THE BSP, WHICH ONCE COMMANDED A SUBSTANTIAL BASE AMONG DALIT VOTERS, HAS SEEN A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THESE VOTES SHIFT TOWARD THE BJP IN RECENT ELECTIONS

rival political parties, including the Samajwadi Party (SP), Congress, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for neglecting the Brahmin community and failing to address their concerns. By making this overture to Brahmins, Mayawati hopes to recreate the Brahmin-Dalit electoral coalition that had been so successful in the past, particularly in 2007, when this formula helped her ascend to the Chief Minister's office in Uttar Pradesh. This strategy signals that Mayawati is determined to reconstruct a broad-based support structure, aiming to gain a foothold among both upper and lower castes. The outreach to Brahmins is not an entirely new tactic for the BSP.

The party had previously established strong support among Brahmin voters, particularly in the mid-2000s, by emphasising the importance of social cohesion and inclusive governance. In many ways, Mayawati's return to this formula reflects her understanding of the changing political dynamics in Uttar Pradesh. She recognises the importance of rebuilding alliances that cross caste lines, particularly as the political landscape in the state continues to evolve. However, the new strategy does not stop with Brahmins. The booklet also directs sharp critiques at Mayawati's political rivals, particularly Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. She targets Gandhi's recent visit to a shoe repair shop, characterising it as "symbolic politics" that does little to address the real issues faced by marginalised communities. In her view, this gesture perpetuates caste-based stereotypes, reinforcing the notion that certain communities, such as Dalits, should be associated with manual labour, including shoe-making. This critique is

aimed at resonating with her core voter base—Dalits—by emphasising her stance against caste-based occupations and promoting a broader vision of social justice. Mayawati also uses the booklet to revisit past political alliances, notably the failed partnership between the BSP and the Samajwadi Party (SP) ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The alliance, once seen as a formidable force capable of challenging the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, ultimately fell apart. In the booklet, Mayawati attributes the breakdown to a lack of communication from Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, who, according to her, stopped answering her calls. This communication breakdown, she claims, forced the BSP to withdraw from the alliance—a move she frames as one made out of self-respect. By bringing up the collapse of the alliance, Mayawati seeks to remind voters of her independence and self-reliance as a leader, further distinguishing herself from her political rivals. Despite Mayawati's efforts to reposition the BSP, the party faces significant challenges. One of the primary obstacles is the erosion of its traditional vote bank. The BSP, which once commanded a substantial base among Dalit voters, has seen a significant portion of these votes shift toward the BJP in recent elections.

In a notable shift in strategy, Mayawati has announced that the BSP will contest the upcoming by-elections. Historically, the party has refrained from participating in by-polls, preferring to focus its resources on general elections. However, the recent electoral setbacks and the changing political landscape in

Uttar Pradesh have prompted a reassessment of this approach. By contesting the by-elections, Mayawati hopes to reenergise the party's cadre and send a message to her supporters that the BSP is still in the fight. The by-elections offer the BSP an opportunity to test its new strategies and alliances in a smaller electoral context before the next general elections. By doing so, the party can identify its strengths and weaknesses, allowing it to adjust its tactics in preparation for larger electoral battles.

Additionally, Mayawati's decision to contest the by-elections is about more than just winning seats—it's also about reinvigorating the party's organisational strength. In recent years, the BSP's grassroots machinery has weakened, with many party workers becoming disillusioned after a series of electoral defeats. By throwing the party into the by-election fray, Mayawati aims to revive its organisational structure and prepare it for future contests. Mayawati's messaging, as outlined in the newly released booklet, signals her determination to reclaim the BSP's former electoral strength.

Through a combination of symbolic language, critiques of her rivals, and a recalibrated strategy, she hopes to reposition the BSP as a force to be reckoned with in Uttar Pradesh politics. The upcoming by-elections will serve as a crucial test for the party's new approach and could determine whether Mayawati is successful in her efforts to revitalise her support base and counter growing competition from both established and emerging political players.

(The writer is an Associate Editor, of The Pioneer; views are personal)

Haryana's election lesson: Why Tejashwi and Akhilesh must shun caste politics

To secure long-term success, they must cater to broader social sentiments as voters increasingly reject traditional caste-based power structures

The recent election results in Haryana have overturned pre-poll predictions and ground reports by YouTubers, sending a clear message for future elections, particularly in key states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. For leaders such as Tejashwi Yadav and Akhilesh Yadav, who belong to the dominant Yadav caste, the outcome holds lessons. Their political scenario mirrors the situation of the Jats in Haryana, where social dynamics are shifting away from dominant caste politics. In this evolving landscape, they face the challenge of addressing broader social sentiments and responding to the concerns of marginalised groups who feel overlooked or disadvantaged in the traditional caste power structures.



AKHILESH SUMAN

In Haryana, the Jats, a politically influential community, faced a consolidation of other social groups against them, as seen in the election results. This trend is significant for Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the dominant OBC groups, particularly the Yadavs, have held power for decades but are now struggling to maintain their influence. The once-powerful Yadav-led governments lost their grip on

power partly because of growing resentment from other communities who felt sidelined.

The political history of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is marked by the rise of leaders like Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mulayam Singh Yadav, who gained initial popularity by championing anti-Congress sentiment and social justice. Their "M-Y equation" (Muslim-Yadav alliance) was a powerful electoral strategy that secured their dominance, but it also instilled fear in other communities. The consolidation of their caste base came at the cost of alienating non-Yadav OBCs, Dalits, and upper castes, creating a sense of marginalisation. Over time, their politics of exclusion backfired, as disillusioned voters began to

seek alternatives, leading to the emergence of leaders like Nitish Kumar in Bihar and the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, who promised clean governance and development for all.

The memories of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the Yadav-led administrations were perceived as using caste power to consolidate authority, still linger. While the Yadavs continue to be an important electoral bloc, the rest of society—especially the non-Yadav OBCs, Dalits, and upper castes—often recalls those years as an era of exclusion. The BJP, with its "subaltern Hindutva" narrative, has effectively capitalised on this sentiment, attracting marginalised groups by offering a sense of inclusion and an alternative to Yadav-centric



politics. Akhilesh Yadav, upon coming to power, made efforts to bridge the gap between his caste and others. He distanced himself from the old guard, symbolised by his uncle Shivalp Yadav, who represented the traditional power dynamics of the Samajwadi Party. However, incidents involving unruly behaviour

by some of his caste members toward other communities made it difficult for him to secure a second term. His attempts to modernise and adapt the party's image were undermined by persistent social tensions. Similarly, Tejashwi Yadav faces challenges in Bihar, where his efforts to step out of his father Lalu's shadow have been hampered by his own caste groups' oppressive behaviour toward Dalits and upper castes. His political journey involves grappling with the legacy of Yadav dominance, which is often perceived as being dismissive of other communities' aspirations. To succeed in the future, Tejashwi must navigate these entrenched social dynamics with greater inclusivity. The lesson from Haryana is

clear: caste dominance can become a liability if it alienates other social groups. The Jat experience shows that when other communities consolidate against a dominant caste, it can significantly alter the political landscape. For Akhilesh and Tejashwi, this means urging their caste members to adopt a more accommodative stance, rather than projecting dominance. Effective leadership in this context involves advocating for social harmony and cooperation across different segments.

Both Tejashwi and Akhilesh must understand that lasting political success cannot be achieved by relying solely on their traditional caste bases. They need to expand their appeal beyond the Yadavs and reach out to other communi-

ties that have felt marginalised. Their strategy should involve building broader alliances that include marginalised communities, addressing their socio-economic needs, and promoting an inclusive vision of governance. The political landscape in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is undergoing a shift. The BJP's ability to attract non-Yadav OBCs and other marginalised groups has weakened the impact of traditional Yadav-centric politics. Leaders like Tejashwi and Akhilesh must shed the image of their parties as "Yadav-centric" and instead emphasise inclusive governance that addresses the aspirations of all communities.

(The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)

Harris helps pack aid boxes for North Carolina hurricane victims

AP ■ RALEIGH

Vice President Kamala Harris on Saturday helped pack diapers into boxes of personal care products destined for North Carolina hurricane victims, agreeing with one helper who said "it takes a village."

"You're exactly right," Harris replied to Greg Hatem, owner of The Pit Authentic Barbecue restaurant as she put two packages of diapers inside each cardboard box that was placed in front of her assembly-line style.

Harris met with Black leaders at the barbecue restaurant in Raleigh before she joined volunteers who were there to pack bandages, baby formula, baby wipes, pain relief pills and other items for victims of Hurricane Helene, which tore through western North Carolina last month.



The vice president was overnighting in the state, which narrowly backed her rival, Republican Donald Trump, in 2020. Democrats are campaigning hard to flip North Carolina into their column in the presidential election next month. On Sunday, Harris was attending church in Greenville as part of her campaign's "Souls to the Polls" effort to get out the vote and holding a rally. The weekend trip was her second to the battleground state after it was struck by Hurricane Helene. The Democratic presidential nominee went to North Carolina last Saturday to survey the aftermath of Helene and pledged federal assistance for its victims.

Before her plane left Washington, Harris told reporters accompanying her that she looked forward to talking with residents "first and foremost to see how they're doing in the wake of the hurricane."

Democrats view North Carolina as swinging their way this year with its base of Black and college-educated voters, as well as women concerned about the loss of abortion protections. But the aftermath of Hurricane Helene has become

a political flashpoint with former President Trump and his allies attacking the Biden administration's response to the natural disaster.

At The Pit, Harris met with Black elected, faith and community leaders. Her campaign did not release a list of the people she met with.

After church on Sunday, Harris, a Baptist, was set to speak about her economic plans at a rally to generate support for early voting, which starts Thursday in North Carolina. Making landfall on Sept. 26, Hurricane Helene resulted in the deaths of roughly 230 peo-

ple and wiped out roads, electrical power and cell phone service. Just two weeks later, Hurricane Milton hit Florida this week and generated an estimated \$50 billion worth of damage and left several people dead.

Harris also visited Georgia after Helene struck there, too, in addition to virtually attending briefings on the federal government's response and rejiggering her campaign schedule. She continued to travel for the presidential race with time spent this week in Nevada and Arizona.

One of her prime messages has

been that there should be no price gouging by companies seeking to take advantage of shortages caused by the hurricanes, an issue she has made central to her campaign as a way to tackle inflation.

"To any company or individual that is using this crisis to jack up prices through illegal fraud or price gouging, whether it be at the gas pump, the airport or the hotel counter, we will be monitoring and there will be a consequence," Harris said at Friday's briefing.

However, Trump and his allies have falsely suggested that disaster relief from the Federal Emergency Management Agency went to immigrants instead of hurricane victims, while also suggesting that people are not getting the full financial support to which they're legally entitled.

At a recent rally in Reading, Pennsylvania, Trump said the response has been worse than during 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which left nearly 1,400 people dead and caused \$200 billion in damages.

"North Carolina's been hit very hard and this administration has not done a proper job at all. Terrible, terrible," Trump said at the rally, adding that Harris was "on a fundraising comedy tour while people are stranded and drowning all over some of our greatest states."

President Joe Biden has called Trump's falsehoods about the government's response "un-American" and told his predecessor to "get a life, man."

Donald Trump plans military shift for domestic policy

Washington (AP): During his first term as president, Donald Trump tested the limits of how he could use the military to achieve policy goals. If given a second term, the Republican and his allies are preparing to go much further, reimagining the military as an all-powerful tool to deploy on US soil.

He has pledged to recall thousands of American troops from overseas and station them at the US border with Mexico. He has explored using troops for domestic policy priorities such as deportations and confronting civil unrest. He has talked of weeding out military officers who are ideologically opposed to him.

Trump's vision amounts to a potentially dramatic shift in the role of the military in US society, carrying grave implications for both the country's place in the world and the restraints that have traditionally been placed on domestic use of the military.

As Trump's campaign heads into its final stretch against Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris, he is promising forceful action against immigrants who do not have permanent legal status. Speaking in Colorado on Friday, the Republican described the city of Aurora as a "war zone" con-

trolled by Venezuelan gangs, even though authorities say that was a single block of the Denver suburb, and the area is safe again.

"I will rescue Aurora and every town that has been invaded and conquered," Trump said at the rally. "We will put these vicious and bloodthirsty criminals in jail or kick them out of our country."

The former president and his advisers are developing plans to shift the military's priorities and resources, even at a time when wars are raging in Europe and the Middle East. Trump's top priority in his platform, known as Agenda 47, is to implement hard-line measures at the US-Mexico border by "moving thousands of troops currently stationed overseas" to that border. He is also pledging to "declare war" on cartels and deploy the Navy in a blockade that would board and inspect ships for fentanyl.

Trump also has said he will use the National Guard and possibly the military as part of the operation to deport millions of immigrants who do not have permanent legal status.

While Trump's campaign declined to discuss the details of those plans, including how many troops he would shift from overseas assignments to

the border, his allies are not shy about casting the operation as a sweeping mission that would use the most powerful tools of the federal government in new and dramatic ways.

"There could be an alliance of the Justice Department, Homeland Security and the Department of Defence. Those three departments have to be coordinated in a way that maybe has never been done before," said Ron Vitiello, who worked as the acting director of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement under Trump.

While both Democratic and Republican presidential administrations have long used military resources at the border, the plans would be a striking escalation of the military's involvement in domestic policy. Advocates for human rights and civil liberties have grown alarmed. "They are promising to use the military to do mass raids of American families at a scale that harkens back to some of the worst things our country has done," said Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us, an immigration advocacy organization. In Congress, which has the power to restrict the use of military force through funding and other authorisations, Republicans are largely on board with Trump's plans.

Heavy Israeli bombardment rocks northern Gaza

United Nations peacekeepers in Lebanon hit again

AP ■ BEIRUT

Palestinians in northern Gaza described heavy Israeli bombardment on Saturday in the hours after airstrikes killed at least 22 people, as Israel warned people there and in southern Lebanon to get out of the way of offensives against the Hamas and Hezbollah militant groups.

In Lebanon, the UN peacekeeping force said its headquarters in Naqoura was hit again, with a peacekeeper struck by gunfire late Friday and in stable condition. It wasn't clear who fired. It occurred a day after Israel's military fired on the headquarters for a second straight day. Israel, which has warned peacekeepers to leave their positions, didn't immediately respond to questions.

Hunger warnings emerged again in northern Gaza as residents said they hadn't received aid since the beginning of the month. The UN World Food Program said no food aid had entered the north since October 1. An estimated 400,000 people remain there. Israel's military renewed its offensive in northern Gaza almost a week ago while esca-

lating its air and ground campaign against the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon. Amid Israel's war with Hezbollah, a top UN official, Carl Skau, told The Associated Press he's concerned that Lebanon's ports and airport might be taken out of service. More than 1 million people have been displaced.

The Israeli military said Hezbollah fired more than 300 projectiles over Yom Kippur, the holiest and most solemn day on the Jewish calendar. Hezbollah claimed a series of rocket strikes on Israeli military positions and said fighters engaged an Israeli infantry unit attempting to enter Lebanese territory. Israel's military also said it killed 50 militants in Lebanon. Claims on either side couldn't be verified.

Israeli airstrikes on Saturday hit multiple areas in southern and eastern Lebanon, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. Nine were killed in Maisra village in the northeast. Four were killed in an apartment building on the edge of Barja south of Beirut. Rayak and Tal Chiha hospitals in the Bekaa Valley were damaged. In Nabatieh, eight people were wounded.

The total toll in Lebanon over the past year of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah is now 2,255 killed, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. More than 1,400 people have been killed since mid-September. It isn't clear how many were fighters.

"We will keep standing with the Lebanese people during these difficult circumstances and also with the Palestinian people," the speaker of Iran's parliament, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said Saturday while touring the scene of an Israeli airstrike in Beirut.

Some Gaza residents are trapped. In northern Gaza, residents told the AP many were trapped in their homes and shelters with dwindling supplies while seeing bodies uncollected in the streets as the bombing hampered emergency responders. Those who rushed to the scene of the latest deadly airstrikes in the urban refugee camp of Jabaliya found a hole 20 meters (65 feet) deep where a home once stood.

At least 20 bodies were recovered while others likely were under rubble, emergency ser-

vice officials said. Elsewhere in Jabaliya, a strike on a home killed two brothers and wounded a woman and newborn baby, the officials said. An afternoon strike on a home killed at least four people, including a woman, said Fares Abu Hamza, an official with the emergency service. Israel's military said it killed more than 20 militants in the Jabaliya area over the past day. Military spokesperson Avichay Adraee told people in parts of Jabaliya and Gaza City to evacuate south to an Israeli-designated humanitarian zone as Israel plans to use great force "and will continue to do so for a long time."

Israel has repeatedly returned to parts of Gaza as Hamas and other militants regroup. The war has destroyed large areas of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its population of 2.3 million people, often multiple times. Once again, some families moved south on foot, in donkey carts or crowded in vehicles that navigated piles of rubble. Others refused to go. "It's like the first days of the war," said a Jabaliya resident, Ahmed Abu Goneim. "The occupation is doing everything

to uproot us. But we will not leave."

The 24-year-old said Israeli warplanes and drones struck many neighboring houses in the past week. He counted 15 relatives and neighbors, including four women and five children as young as 3, killed in neighboring homes.

Hamza Sharif, who stays with his family in a school-turned-shelter in Jabaliya, described "constant bombings day and night." He said the shelter hasn't received aid since the beginning of the month and that families "will run out of supplies very soon."

India backs statement strongly condemning attacks on UN peacekeepers in Lebanon

United Nations (PTI): India has backed a joint statement by the UNIFIL-contributing countries that "strongly condemned" the recent attacks on the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon and said such actions must stop immediately.

The joint statement, initially co-signed by 34 countries, came after at least five United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) peacekeepers were wounded in recent days as Israeli troops launched attacks in southern Lebanon as part of its campaign against Hezbollah.

"We consider UNIFIL's role as particularly crucial in light of the escalating situation in the region. We therefore strongly condemn recent attacks on the UNIFIL peacekeepers. Such actions must stop immediately and should be adequately investigated," said the joint statement posted on X by Poland's mission to the UN on Saturday.

India, initially not mentioned among co-signatories, on Saturday said it aligns itself fully with the joint statement. "As a major Troop

Contributing Country, India aligns itself fully with the joint statement issued by the 34 @UNIFIL troop-contributing countries. Safety and security of peacekeepers are of paramount importance and must be ensured in accordance with extant UNSC Resolutions," the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations said in a post on X. Earlier in a statement in New Delhi on Friday, the Ministry of External Affairs said India was "concerned" at the "deteriorating" security situation in parts of West Asia.

"Inviolability of UN premises must be respected by all, and appropriate measures taken to ensure the safety of UN peacekeepers and the sanctity of their mandate," the MEA said in its statement.

Initially, 34 nations, including Bangladesh, Brazil, China, France, Italy, Spain, Sri Lanka, and the UK co-signed the joint statement. On Sunday, the Polish mission to the UN announced that India, Colombia, Germany, Greece, Peru and Uruguay have extended support to the statement.

Train crash in Egypt kills 1, injures over 20

Cairo (AP): A locomotive crashed into the tail of the Cairo-bound passenger train Sunday in southern Egypt, killing at least one person and injuring multiple others, authorities said. It is the second train crash in a month in the North African country. The collision occurred in the province of Minya, 270 km (about 168 miles) south of Cairo, the railway authority said in a statement, and two railway carriages fell into an adjacent watercourse. The cause of the crash was being investigated, the statement added.

Footage aired by local media showed the two carriages partially submerged in the watercourse. Along with the fatality, the Health Ministry said in a separate statement at least 21 people were taken to hospitals, of which 19 were later discharged after receiving treatment. Train derailments and crashes are common in Egypt, where an aging railway system has also been plagued by mismanagement. In September, two passenger trains collided in a Nile Delta city, killing at least three people. In recent years, the government announced initiatives to improve its railways. President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi said in 2018 some 250 billion Egyptian pounds, or \$8.13 billion, would be needed to properly overhaul the neglected rail network.



People stand by the wreckage after a locomotive crashed into the tail of the Cairo-bound passenger train in southern Egypt, in the province of Minya, about 168 miles south of Cairo, Sunday. AP/PTI

New SL gov orders probe into many cases again

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka's new government has ordered the police to reinvestigate some high-profile cases, including the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks and the 2005 murder of a Tamil minority community journalist. The ruling National People's Power, which won the presidential election last month, pledged to reinvestigate past cases which had not been resolved. The Ministry of Public Security took action to identify any lapses in investigations. "The ministry has asked the acting police chief that these cases should be reinvestigated," Police spokesman Nihal Thaldudu said on Saturday. The cases to be reinvestigated include the alleged scam in the issue of Central Bank bonds in 2015 blamed on the then government of Ranil Wickremesinghe, the former president, and the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks that killed over 270 people, including 11 Indians. The catholic church has been demanding stringent action on what they alleged was a politically motivated cover-up by previous governments on the attacks. Among the other cases that are to be investigated are the 2005 murder of Tamil minority community journalist D Sivaram and the 2006 abduction and disappearance of a Tamil minority academic who headed the Eastern University at the time.

Netanyahu plans to empty northern Gaza, of civilians, cut off aid to those left inside

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is examining a plan to seal off humanitarian aid to northern Gaza in an attempt to starve out Hamas militants, a plan that, if implemented, could trap without food or water hundreds of thousands of Palestinians unwilling or unable to leave their homes.

Israel has issued many evacuation orders for the north throughout the yearlong war, the most recent of which was Sunday. The plan proposed to Netanyahu and the Israeli parliament by a group of retired generals would escalate the pressure, giving Palestinians a week to leave the northern third of the Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, before declaring it a closed military zone.

Those who remain would be considered combatants — meaning military regulations would allow troops to kill them — and denied food, water, medicine and fuel, according to a copy of the plan given to the Associated Press by its chief architect, who says the plan is the only way to break Hamas in the north and pressure it to release the remaining hostages. The plan calls for Israel to maintain control over the north for an indefinite period to attempt to create a new administration without Hamas, splitting the Gaza Strip in two.

There has been no decision by the government to fully carry out the so-called "Generals' Plan," and it is unclear how strongly it is being considered. One official with knowledge of the matter said parts of the plan are already being implemented, without specifying which parts. A second official, who is Israeli, said Netanyahu "had read and studied" the plan, "like many plans that have reached him throughout the war," but did not say whether any of it had been adopted. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because the plan is not supposed to be discussed publicly. On Sunday, Israel launched an offensive against Hamas fighters in the Jabaliya refugee camp north of the city. No trucks of food, water or medicine have entered the north since September 30, according to the UN and the website of the Israeli military agency overseeing humanitarian aid crossings. The State Department spokesperson has said the United States is against any plan that would bring direct Israeli occupation in Gaza. Human rights groups say the plan would likely starve civilians and that it flies in the face of international law, which prohibits using food as a weapon and forcible transfers. Accusations that Israel is intentionally limiting food to Gaza are central to the genocide

case brought against it at the International Court of Justice, charges Israel denies.

So far, very few Palestinians have heeded the latest evacuation order. Some are elderly, sick or afraid to leave their homes, but many fear there's nowhere safe to go and that they will never be allowed back. Israel has prevented those who fled earlier in the war from returning.

"All Gazans are afraid of the plan," said Jomana Elkhaili, a 26-year-old Palestinian aid worker for Oxfam living in Gaza City with her family. "Still, they will not flee. They will not make the mistake again ... We know the place there is not safe," she said, referring to southern Gaza, where most of the population is huddled in dismal tent camps and airstrikes often hit shelters.

"That's why people in the north say it's better to die than to leave." The plan has emerged as Hamas has shown enduring strength, firing rockets into Tel Aviv and regrouping in areas after Israeli troops withdraw, bringing repeated offensives. After a year of devastating war with Hamas, Israel has far fewer ground troops in Gaza than it did a few months ago and in recent weeks has turned its attention to Hezbollah, launching an invasion of southern Lebanon. There is no sign of progress on a cease-fire in either front.

7 killed as storm hits Brazil's Sao Paulo, knocks out power to 1.4 million homes

Sao Paulo (AP): At least seven people were killed after a brief but powerful storm swept through Sao Paulo, Brazil with around 1.4 million households in the South America's largest metropolis left without power on Saturday.

Officials in Sao Paulo state said that record wind gusts Friday night of up to 67 mph (108 kph) knocked down transmission lines and uprooted trees, causing severe damage in some parts. The storm also shut down several airports and interrupted water service in several areas,

according to the state government. One person died when a tree fell on an outdoor stall, authorities said. At least six other people in surrounding Sao Paulo state also died.

Authorities originally expected to restore power within a few hours. But several neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, which is home to 21 million people, were still in the dark on Saturday, and authorities were urging residents to limit their consumption of water. Most of the disruptions were in the service area of a single util-

ity, Enel-Sao Paulo, which is partly owned by AES Corporation. In May, the Virginia-based power company said it was selling its 47% stake in its Brazil unit for \$640 million. Regulators ordered an inspection of the utility, warning that if it doesn't resolve the outages in a satisfactory and swift manner it will move to terminate the private concession. For its part, Enel said that 17 high voltage transmission lines were affected by the storm. It did not provide a time frame for re-establishing service.

ity, Enel-Sao Paulo, which is partly owned by AES Corporation. In May, the Virginia-based power company said it was selling its 47% stake in its Brazil unit for \$640 million. Regulators ordered an inspection of the utility, warning that if it doesn't resolve the outages in a satisfactory and swift manner it will move to terminate the private concession. For its part, Enel said that 17 high voltage transmission lines were affected by the storm. It did not provide a time frame for re-establishing service.

Li Qiang to attend SCO meet in Pakistan

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Sunday confirmed that Premier Li Qiang will travel to Islamabad to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting this week and also pay a bilateral visit to enhance cooperation between the two countries. The confirmation of Li's attendance at the SCO summit followed speculation about his participation in the wake of the killing of two Chinese workers in a suicide attack in Karachi and the ongoing agitation by the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party for the release of its jailed leader and former premier Imran Khan.

Premier Li will attend the 23rd Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of Member States of the SCO in Islamabad and pay an official visit to Pakistan from October 14 to 17, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said in a brief statement.

Pakistan has deployed army troops in Islamabad to maintain security for the high-level meeting to be attended among others by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

The SCO member states included China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus.



During his four-day trip from October 14-17, Premier Li would meet Pakistan's civil and military leadership and attend the SCO meeting, state-run the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported.

He will be accompanied by ministers and senior officials, including from the ministries of foreign affairs and commerce, the National Development and Reform Commission and the China International Development Cooperation Agency.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his Chinese counterpart will lead their respective delegations to comprehensively discuss all aspects of Pakistan-China relations, including economic and trade ties and cooperation under the USD 60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The two sides will also discuss regional and global developments.

Premier Li will also call on President Asif Ali Zardari and hold meetings with parliamentary leaders.

His visit to Islamabad is an expression of the importance attached by Pakistan and China to their "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership", APP reported.

It will be an occasion for the two sides to reaffirm mutual support on issues of core interest, advance the high-quality

development of the CPEC and reinforce regular exchanges on important regional and global developments, the APP added.

Prime Minister Sharif on Monday assured the Chinese of personally overseeing the investigation into the Karachi attack, for which the outlawed Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility.

Earlier reports from Pakistan said Li may inaugurate the Chinese-built international airport at Gwadar in Balochistan.

The airport was stated to be the biggest in Pakistan. It also marks the establishment of multimodal connectivity to the port and free zone operated by China Overseas Ports Holding (COPH) Company, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported last month.

In 2013, Pakistan handed over the construction and operation of the Gwadar port in Balochistan, which connects with China's Xinjiang province.

Macao elects first chief exec from Mainland China

AP ■ MACAO

Macao's former top judge, Sam Hou Fai, was chosen as the Chinese casino hub's next leader in a largely ceremonial election on Sunday, setting him up to become the city's first chief executive born in mainland China.

Almost the entire election committee stacked with Beijing loyalists — 394 of 398 — voted for Sam, the sole candidate, in a departure from the long-standing custom of having chief executives who were born in the former Portuguese colony, typically from influential business families. The remaining four were blank votes.

The shift in the city's leadership to someone from the legal profession is likely to create expectations of a declining influence from business circles, which critics have often accused of colluding with officials, analysts say. They anticipate Beijing's policy agenda for the city will take priority.

Sam, 62, is widely seen to have Beijing's blessings. During the nomination period, he had already secured endorsements from 386 election committee members who voted in batches in a conference hall on Sunday.

Influential figures among the 400-strong committee were Shun Tak Holdings' group executive chairperson Pansy Ho, daughter of late casino tycoon Stanley Ho, lawmaker Angela Leong, one of Ho's widows, and former chief executives Edmund Ho and Fernando Chui.

Sam is expected to meet reporters later Sunday. Most of the territory's 687,000 residents lack voting rights, leading to mixed sentiments about the election. Some hope Sam will heed public opinion and avoid prioritizing business interests, while others feel disconnected from an election process they can't participate in. Still, political observers said many residents are comfortable with Sam's non-local origin in a city that has been home to migrants for decades.

With Sam's victory guaranteed, the real challenges await in the governance hurdles that lie ahead.



The sole candidate for the Macao chief executive post, Sam Hou Fai, the city's former top judge, speaks after declaring his victory in the chief executive election in Macao, Sunday

Macao is the only place in China where casino gambling is legal. Beijing has called for the city to diversify its gambling-reliant economy.

Sam has promised to accelerate the current government's plan to boost tourism and other sectors such as traditional Chinese medicine, finance, exhibitions and commerce.

However, the city will still need to rely on the gambling industry for government revenues to support the city's welfare and accomplish other goals laid out by Beijing, analysts say.

China wants Macao to develop into a world-class tourism and leisure center and play a bigger role as a bridge for trade between China and Portuguese-speaking countries.

Small local businesses have been hurt by residents who spend money in the neighboring mainland city of Zhuhai, which offers a wider selection of items with good value for money. Chinese tourists are also now spending less than before.

It remains to be seen whether Sam, with a lack of government leadership experience, can form a capable cabinet to tackle these pressing issues.

Sam was born in neighboring Guangdong province in 1962. He graduated from the prestigious law school of Peking University in Beijing. He also studied the Portuguese language, culture and law at the University of Coimbra in Portugal, and once practiced law in mainland China.

When Macao returned to Chinese rule in 1999, Sam was appointed the city's top judge, a role in which he served for nearly 25 years before resigning in August to participate in the election.

He handled some politically sensitive cases, including rejecting an appeal of a police ban on a vigil commemorating China's bloody 1989 military crackdown on the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests. His court also upheld a decision to bar pro-democracy figures from running in the 2021 legislative elections.

Ukraine's human rights envoy urges response to alleged killings of POWs

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine's human rights ombudsman urged international organisations Sunday to respond to a claim that several Ukrainian prisoners of war were executed in Russia's Kursk region, where Kyiv had launched an incursion in August.

DeepState, a Ukrainian battlefield analysis site close to Ukraine's Defence Ministry, said Russian troops shot and killed nine Ukrainian "drone operators and contractors" on Oct 10 after they had surrendered. Dmytro Lubinets said on Telegram that he sent letters to the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the claim, calling it "another crime committed by the Russians". Earlier this month,

Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine said Russian troops had killed 16 captured Ukrainian soldiers in the partially occupied Donetsk region.

There was no immediate response from Russian officials. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian air force said Sunday that its air defences had shot down 31 of 68 drones launched at Ukraine by Russia overnight into Sunday in the regions of Kyiv, Poltava, Chernihiv, Sumy and Cherkasy. A further 36 drones were "lost" over various areas, it said, likely having been electronically jammed. The air force added that ballistic missiles struck Odesa and Poltava while Chernihiv and Sumy came under attack by a guided air missile. Local authorities didn't report any casualties or damage.

Canadian MP concerned over attacks on journos reporting on Khalistani extremism

Ottawa (PTI): A prominent Canadian MP of Indian origin has voiced concern over attacks on journalists who report on Khalistani extremism in Canada and asked the authorities to deal with the situation with an iron hand "before it is too late".

"I am very concerned by attacks on journalists who report on Khalistani extremism in Canada," Chandra Arya, a Member of Parliament from Nepean in the House of Commons, said while addressing the parliament on Friday. Citing attacks on Rishi Nagar of Red FM Calgary a few days, he said that there are many more attacks in Greater Toronto Area and across

Canada by Khalistani extremists. "I call on law enforcement agencies to take notice of Khalistani extremism with all seriousness it deserves. It has to be dealt with an iron hand before it is too late," he said.

He recalled that in March 2023, Sameer Kaushal of Radio AM600 was assaulted for covering a Khalistan protest. In February 2022, Brampton radio host Deepak Punj was attacked in his studio for criticising Khalistan-related violence, he added.

He said that anti-terrorism investigative journalist Mocha Bezirgan has received death threats for his fearless reporting on Khalistani extremism.

'Albania can be trustworthy strategic partner for India'

PTI ■ TIRANA

Albania can be a trustworthy strategic partner for India in the Balkan region in Europe, a senior Albanian minister here said, highlighting the need for "wise" friendships and alliances in the current global political landscape.

"We are playing a great role in stability in the region..." said Blendi Gonxhja, Albania's Minister of Economy, Culture and Innovation.

He said the Indian government should think more about Albania geo-politically and diplomatically. He highlighted his country's efforts towards European accession.

"We have done a lot of our homework to be a proud partner of any country. Now, it depends on the Indian government. When they seek good



Blendi Gonxhja

friends, we are best of friends. We are the people that India can trust," Gonxhja told PTI in a recent interview.

"We never betray our friends and partners. The Indian government would be interested in having a strategic partnership in the (Balkan) region, maybe with a small country (like us), but in a very strategic position in Europe," Gonxhja said.

Noting developments across the globe, he said, "It's the time of wise friendships and alliances. So, I believe Albania and India will soon have very strong ties," he said.

He said there is enormous potential for increased collaboration between India and Albania in fields like business, culture and tourism.

"We have enormous opportunities here for businesses that would have the best incentives in terms of tax deductions and other incentives. Meanwhile, we can learn from India. We can be a good transponder between Indian production lines to Europe," he said.

He said booming construction and tourism sectors in



Women hold photographs of Aysenur Halli and Ikbal Uzuner during a protest against violence against women in Istanbul, Turkey, Saturday, Oct. 12, 2024. Halli and Uzuner were killed by Halli's ex boyfriend Semih Celik on October 4, in Istanbul. Boards read in Turkish: "A woman's resistance is a woman's legacy", "There is no suspicious female death, there is hidden male violence"

Bangladesh President urges unity, advocates religious values for nation's progress

Dhaka (PTI): President Mohammed Shahabuddin on Sunday urged people of all religions to work together to take Bangladesh forward as the Hindu festival of Durga Puja concluded peacefully with the immersion of Goddess Durga's idols in water bodies across the country.

Emphasising the need for a collective effort to take the country forward, the president said religious values should be used for the welfare of the nation.

During an event at the Bangabhaban to mark Durga Puja celebrations, Shahabuddin urged all citizens, irrespective of caste or religion, to unite and work together towards building a developed and prosperous nation. The Daily Star newspaper reported.

"We are all Bangladeshis, connected with each other. There is no place for majority or minority distinctions in our country," he said, exchanging greetings with the members of the Hindu community.

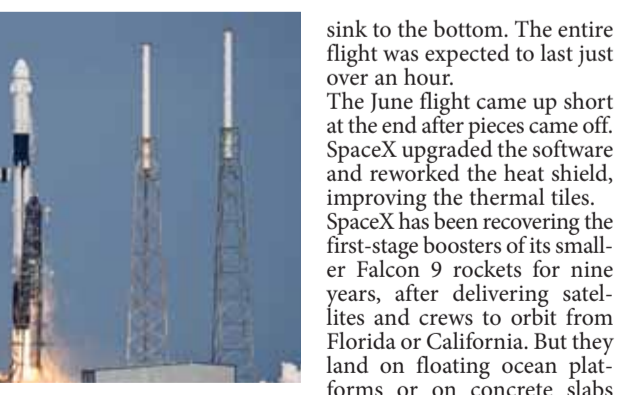
Engineering feat: Mechanical SpaceX arms catch Starship rocket booster at landing pad

AP ■ BOCA CHICA

SpaceX launched its enormous Starship rocket on Sunday on its boldest test flight yet, catching the returning booster back at the pad with mechanical arms.

Towering almost 400 feet (121 metres), the empty Starship blasted off at sunrise from the southern tip of Texas near the Mexican border. It arced over the Gulf of Mexico like the four Starships before it that ended up being destroyed, either soon after liftoff or while ditching into the sea. The last one in June was the most successful yet, completing its flight without exploding.

This time, SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk upped the challenge and risk. The company brought the first-stage booster back to land at the pad from which it had soared seven minutes earlier. The launch tower sported monstrous metal arms, dubbed chopsticks, that caught the descending 232-foot (71-metre) booster. "The tower



has caught the rocket!" Musk said via X. Company employees screamed in joy as the booster slowly lowered itself into the launch tower's arms.

"Even in this day and age, what we just saw is magic," SpaceX's Dan Huot observed from near the launch site. "I am shaking right now."

"Folks, this is a day for the engineering history books," added SpaceX's Kate Tice from Hawthorne, California. It was up to the flight director

1 dead, 9 hurt in gunfire at Tennessee university

Nashville (AP): Gunfire broke out among a crowd near a Tennessee university on Saturday afternoon, killing a 24-year-old man and wounding nine people, police said. A crowd that gathered earlier in the day for homecoming events at Tennessee State University was beginning to thin out when the gunfire erupted between two groups around 5 pm, said Metro Nashville Police spokesperson Don Aaron.

Shell casings indicate that gunfire was exchanged across a street near campus between the groups, he said.

Metro Nashville Police Commander Anthony McClain said the gunfire didn't appear to be directly related to Tennessee State University events that had included a parade and other festivities earlier in the day. The football game was taking place in another part of town when the gunfire happened.

"It's unfortunate that a few folks ruined it for everybody," McClain said. "We have to come to a point to stop this violence." A police statement on social media said a 24-year-old man died. The victims included two 12-year-olds and a 14-year-old with non-critical injuries, Aaron said.

Police spokesperson Brooke Reese said that at least some of the wounded appear to have been involved in the exchange of gunfire. Police and firefighters who had been present for the day's activities were able to quickly respond to the shooting, authorities said.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform to the public at large that Sh. Pranjali Jothi & Smt. Anshika Saxena are the Owners of the Flat No. 376, 3rd floor, Tower Ferrera, Mahagun-Moderns, Plot No. GH-02, Sector 78, Noida, U.P. It is hereby declared that the owners are now availing a loan facility against the mortgage of the aforementioned Property with State Bank of India, RACP Karkardooma, Delhi by mortgaging All Original documents. In the entire chain of documents, the Original Allotment Letter dated 04.09.2010 and Original Offer of Possession dated 10.10.2015 both issued by Mahagun Real Estate Pvt. Ltd. are missing hence not traceable. Therefore, any person having any type of claim right/interest over the said property or Flat may inform in writing or contact at the address mentioned below about his/her objections within 15 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. or any claim.

Naveet Tripathi, Advocate
SC-53, Jaipuria Sunrise Plaza, Indraprastha, Gurgaon, Mob No. 989906877

Government imposes import restrictions on pocket lighters

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Sunday imposed import curbs on parts of pocket lighters with immediate effect, a move which would help encourage domestic manufacturing and cut dependence on their inbound shipments from China.

"Import of parts of pocket lighters, gas fuelled, non-refillable or refillable lighters (cigarette lighters)... Is restricted with immediate effect," the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification.

Imports of cigarette lighters, priced less than Rs 20, are already prohibited. The import ban is also there on pocket lighters, gas-fuelled, non-refillable or refillable. Last year, the government also issued mandatory quality standard norms for flame-producing lighters with a view to contain import of sub-standard goods and boost domestic manufacturing.

Items under the quality control orders (QCO), cannot be produced, sold/traded, imported and stocked unless they bear the



BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) mark.

During April-July this fiscal, import of lighter parts stood at USD 3.8 million. It was USD 4.86 million in 2023-24. The parts are mainly imported from China.

Other sources of lighter imports include Spain, Turkey and the UAE.

In September 2022, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin had urged the Centre to ban single use plastic cigarette lighters to help the domestic matchbox industry.

These plastic cigarette lighters, which are legally and illegally imported from countries like China, are available for Rs 10 and can substitute 20 matchboxes. Further, these non-refillable lighters result in immense plastic waste, damaging the environment and also impacting health, he had said.

The matchbox manufacturing industry is a major source of employment in the southern part of Tamil Nadu.

India has been taking a series of measures to cut imports from China, which is India's second largest trading partner after the US. The country's merchandise imports from China has increased to USD 101.73 billion in 2023-24 from USD 98.5 billion in 2022-23. Exports to the neighbouring country, though, have increased at a slower pace and aggregated at USD 16.65 billion in the previous fiscal as against USD 15.3 billion in 2022-23.

Average air fares drop 20-25 per cent around Diwali

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air passengers might have a reason to smile this Diwali season as average airfares on many domestic routes have dropped 20-25 per cent compared to the year-ago period, according to an analysis.

Increased capacity and the recent fall in oil prices are considered to be among the factors for the fall in air ticket prices.

The analysis by travel portal ixigo showed that average airfare on the domestic routes has declined in the range of 20-25 per cent.

The prices are for one-way average fare on a 30 days APD (advanced purchase date) basis.

For 2023, the time period considered is November 10-16 while it is October 28-November 3 for this year. This is the time around Diwali.

The maximum decline of average airfare is 38 per cent for a Bengaluru-Kolkata flight to Rs 6,319 this year from Rs 10,195 last year, as per the analysis.

The ticket price on Chennai-Kolkata route has fallen 36 per cent to Rs 5,604 from Rs 8,725.

The average airfare for Mumbai-Delhi flight has dropped 34 per cent to Rs



5,762 from Rs 8,788. Similarly, there is a 34 per cent decrease in ticket prices on Delhi-Udaipur route to Rs 7,469 from Rs 11,296.

The decline is 32 per cent on Delhi-Kolkata, Hyderabad-Delhi, and Delhi-Srinagar routes.

"Last year, airfares around Diwali had surged due to limited capacity, primarily driven by the suspension of Go First airline. However, this year we've seen some relief as

additional capacity has been added since then, leading to a 20-25 per cent YoY (year-on-year) dip in average airfares across key routes for the last week of October," ixigo Group CEO Alok Bajpai told PTI.

According to him, the decline in oil prices, down 15 per cent this year, may have also contributed to this downward trend, offering travellers more affordable options during the festive season.

Currently, oil prices are slightly on the upward trajectory amid rising geopolitical tensions.

Meanwhile, there has been a hike in airfares of up to 34 per cent on certain routes.

While the ticket price has jumped 34 per cent on Ahmedabad-Delhi route to Rs 8,758 from Rs 6,533, the rise is 33 per cent on Mumbai-Dehradun route to Rs 15,527 from Rs 11,710, the analysis showed.

ONGC explores mini-LNG plants for efficient gas transportation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is looking to set up mini-LNG plants to evacuate natural gas from wells located in areas that are not connected with pipelines.

The firm has identified five sites in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Gujarat for setting up mini plants at wellhead that will convert the gas pumped out from under the ground into liquefied natural gas (LNG) by supercooling it to minus 160 degrees Celsius.

This LNG will be loaded on cryogenic trucks and transported to the nearest pipeline where it will be reconverted into its gaseous state and pumped into the network for supply to users like power plants, fertilizer units or city gas retailers. ONGC has floated a tender seeking manufacturers/service providers to tap stranded natural gas, according to the tender.

The locations identified for setting up mini-LNG plants in the tender are two sites at Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh and one each at Ankleshwar in Gujarat, Bokaro in Jharkhand and Cambay in Gujarat.

ONGC in the tender document said while the country has an extensive network of pipelines that connect supply and demand centres, there remains a substantial volume of stranded gas (non-connected) that is required to be tapped for enhancing



domestic supplies and meeting the needs of nearby demand centres.

The stranded volumes, it said, range from 5,000 to 50,000 standard cubic meters per day that can be produced for up to 5 years.

The tender called for bids from manufacturers and service providers to "set up a small scale LNG plant on BOO (build, own and operate) basis to produce LNG, transport the produced LNG by cascades / tankers to consumption sites located within a distance of around 250 kilometers, depressurize / re-gasify the LNG and then inject the gas into existing gas distribution grids or supply directly to bulk consumers."

India produces over 90 million standard cubic meters per day of natural gas that is used to generate electricity, produce fertilisers or turned into CNG to run automobiles and piped into household kitchens for cooking purposes. But domestic production meets roughly half of the demand. ONGC is India's largest crude oil and natural gas producer and has been investing billions of dollars to boost

production to cut India's reliance on imports.

Prior to floating of this tender, it had entered into a partnership with nation's largest fuel retailer Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) to set up a small-scale LNG plant near its Hatta gas field in Vindhyan basin in Madhya Pradesh.

The Hatta gas field is located in Batiyagarh tehsil of Damoh district in Madhya Pradesh, approximately 45 km from Damoh town.

The initial LNG plant capacity is planned for 32 to 35 tonnes, with 45,000 standard cubic meters per day of gas coming from the Hatta field.

As per that agreement, IOC, which is conducting a detailed feasibility study of the project, will bear the cost of the small-scale LNG plant. ONGC will sell gas to IOC. The LNG plant will be operated and managed by IOC and it will further sell the gas to consumers.

Earlier in March this year, state-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd had announced setting up a small-scale LNG plant at its Vijapur LPG unit in Madhya Pradesh.

SBI to raise threshold limit for MSME instant loan scheme

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To ensure easy and adequate credit availability to the MSME sector, the State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to enhance the threshold under the instant loan scheme from the existing Rs 5 crore.

'MSME Sahaj - End to End Digital Invoice Financing', provides solutions ranging from applying for the loan, documentation and disbursement of the sanctioned loan within 15 minutes, without any manual intervention.

"We have, last year, introduced a business rule engine based, data based assessment of the credit limits up to Rs 5 crore. Anybody walking into our MSME branch has to give only their

PAN and approval for sourcing GST data, we can give approval in 15-45 minutes," SBI Chairman C S Setty told PTI in an interview. Simplification of the MSME credit is something that the bank is emphasising on and making lending cash flow based backed by the CGTMSE guarantee, he said.

This reduces the need for collateral, which would enable a lot of people to come into the formal MSME borrowing system, he said.

"We still have a large number of MSME customers accessing the informal credit. We would like to bring them to the banking fold," he said.

As far as network expansion is concerned, Setty said SBI is planning to open 600 branches across the country in the current financial year.



SBI has a network of 22,542 branches across the country as of March 2024.

"We have strong branch expansion plans... This would be mainly focused on

emerging areas. A lot of residential colonies are not covered by us. Around 600 branches is something we are planning in the current year," he said.

Apart from a vast branch network, SBI reaches its customers through 65,000 ATMs and 85,000 business correspondents.

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

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

"It could be my customers, it could be our shareholders, it could be the larger ecosystem -- the society, the institutional framework -- all the stakeholders should be saying that this is the best bank to deal with," he added.

IN BRIEF

THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE LAW FESTIVAL-2024

The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi National Law Festival-2024 has come to a close with its Grand Closing Ceremony at Maharishi University of Information Technology, Noida took place recently.



ZONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL CONCLUDED



AMRITSAR: Zonal Youth Festival of Education Colleges of the Guru Nanak Dev University was concluded in Dashmesh Auditorium of the University. Khalsa College of Education, Ranjitt Avenue, Amritsar bagged the position of Overall Champion.

AICTE CHAIRMAN ADDRESSES SRMIST CONVOCATION



Kattankulathur: "Skills and knowledge are essential for sustaining a career in today's rapidly changing job market," said Dr. T. G. Sitharam, Chairman of the All India Council for Technical Education, during the 20th Convocation of SRM Institute of Science and Technology in Kattankulathur. A total of 8,438 students from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology received their degrees.

Tara Sutaria shines with her debut performance at Suroskie's sufi night

PNS ■ NEWDELHI

Suroskie hosted a Glamorous Sufi Night in the heart of the capital, with actress Tara Sutaria making her debut appearance as the brand ambassador for the company's hair care range. The event, which showcased Suroskie's products, attracted a mix of celebrities and influencers.

The event also marked an opportunity for Suroskie to highlight its commitment to ethically crafted, cruelty-free, and chemical-free hair care solutions.

Guests were invited to experience the brand's offerings firsthand, underscoring its mission to

cater to modern consumer needs while upholding sustainable practices. Deepali Bansal, Founder of Suroskie, added, "Our commitment to offering cruelty-free and clean luxury products is central to our brand's philosophy. It was a privilege to have Tara share her haircare tips with our guests, and we look forward to organizing more such exquisite events."

"The Sufi Night marks a significant milestone for Suroskie, as Tara Sutaria's association with the brand reinforces its vision to deliver high-quality, eco-friendly hair care solutions that resonate with today's conscientious consumers."

CIL's contribution to government exchequer drops marginally

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Coal India Ltd's contribution to the government exchequer dropped marginally by 0.6 per cent to Rs 28,930.27 crore in the first half of the ongoing fiscal over the year-ago period.

Coal India Ltd (CIL), which accounts for over 80 per cent of the domestic coal output, paid Rs 29,122.13 crore to the government exchequer in April-September period of FY24, according to provisional figures of the coal ministry.

Total levies paid to the government in September also dropped by 11.1 per cent to Rs 4,335.24 crore from Rs 4,878.84 crore paid in the corresponding month of FY24.

Of the total Rs 28,930.27 crore paid to the government exchequer in April-September FY25, maximum amount of Rs 6,452.30 crore



went to the Jharkhand government, followed by Rs 6,383.14 crore to the Odisha government, Rs 5,432.02 crore to Chhattisgarh, Rs

5,177.41 crore to Madhya Pradesh, and Rs 2,782.25 crore to Maharashtra, among others. The coal-producing states

earned the revenue from royalty, District Mineral Foundation (DMF) and National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET), among others.

The government had earlier said that coal-producing states earned a revenue of Rs 1.52 lakh crore in the last nine years from royalty, DMF and NMET.

The coal mining sector has proved to be a big booster for the economic growth of the states that produce the fossil fuel.

The PSU's coal output in April-September period of the current fiscal year increased 2.5 per cent to 341.5 MT, over 332.9 MT in the year-ago period. Coal India's production rose 10 per cent to 773.6 million tonne in 2023-24 but fell short of its production target of 780 MT for the fiscal year. The company's output was 703.2 MT in the preceding 2022-23 fiscal year.



SIGNIFICANCE OF GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP

Getting enough sleep is necessary for good mental and physical health says DR CHIRAG GUPTA



EXPLORING THE BENEFITS OF REGENERATIVE MEDICINE: HEALING FROM WITHIN

BY RISHI TANDULWADKAR

In the ever-evolving landscape of healthcare, regenerative medicine stands as a beacon of hope and innovation. Unlike traditional treatments that focus on symptom management, regenerative medicine targets the root cause, restoring function by leveraging the body's innate ability to repair itself. This revolutionary approach not only enhances recovery but also improves overall well-being and quality of life.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

Regenerative medicine encompasses a range of therapies designed to restore and reestablish normal function in diseased or injured tissues. This field integrates multiple disciplines, including biology, chemistry, engineering, and medicine, to develop innovative treatments. The core concept is to harness the body's natural healing processes and amplify them to treat various conditions. Key components of regenerative medicine include:

Stem Cell Therapy: Stem cell therapy involves using undifferentiated cells that have the potential to develop into specialised cell types to repair and regenerate damaged tissues. These cells can be derived from various sources, such as bone marrow, adipose (fat) tissue, or even laboratory-cultured induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). The therapy has shown promise in treating conditions like joint injuries, heart disease, neurological disorders, and diabetes.

Platelet-Rich Plasma (PRP) Therapy: PRP therapy involves concentrating platelets from the patient's blood and injecting them into injured areas. Platelets contain growth factors that promote healing and tissue regeneration. This therapy is commonly used in orthopedics, sports medicine, and dermatology to accelerate recovery and reduce inflammation.

Tissue Engineering: Tissue engineering combines scaffolds (natural or synthetic structures) with cells to create biological substitutes that restore, maintain, or improve tissue function. This technique is used for applications such as skin grafts for burns and other complex reconstructive procedures.

Gene Therapy: By altering or correcting defective genes within an individual's cells, gene therapy treats genetic disorders at their source. This approach has shown promise in treating conditions like certain cancers, cystic fibrosis, and muscular dystrophy.

Personalised Medicine: Tailoring regenerative therapies to individual patients, ensuring more precise and effective outcomes based on unique genetic and health profiles. Regenerative medicine represents a paradigm shift in how we approach health and wellness. By harnessing the body's natural healing capabilities, it is possible to address the root causes of various conditions and promote long-term well-being. With its immense potential, regenerative medicine is poised to redefine the future of healthcare, providing solutions that not only alleviate symptoms but cure diseases and repair injuries fundamentally. As research progresses and these therapies become more accessible, we can look forward to a future where the remarkable capabilities of regenerative medicine lead the way to healthier lives.

The author is the Founder of ALIV - Regenerative Wellness

damaged by heart attacks, improving heart function and potentially reducing the need for invasive interventions like heart transplants.

Neurology: Regenerative medicine offers hope for treating neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, stroke, and spinal cord injuries. Stem cells have the potential to replace damaged neural tissues, leading to improvements in mobility and function.

Wound Healing and Dermatology: Tissue-engineered skin grafts and PRP therapy are being used to enhance wound healing, particularly in chronic wounds, burns, and certain skin conditions.

Ophthalmology: Regenerative approaches are being explored to treat eye conditions like macular degeneration and corneal injuries, with the potential to restore vision.

Diabetes (Type 2): Research is underway to regenerate insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas using stem cell therapy, offering a potential therapeutic solution for managing diabetes.

THE FUTURE OF REGENERATIVE MEDICINE

Regenerative medicine is a rapidly growing field, with ongoing research and clinical trials focused on refining and expanding its applications. Key areas of focus include:

Improving Efficacy and Safety: Refining protocols to ensure the consistency and safety of regenerative therapies while minimising risks.

Expanding Sources of Cells: Investigating alternative sources for therapeutic cells, including induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) derived from adult cells, which can be reprogrammed to an embryonic-like state. Other sources, such as umbilical cord blood and donor-derived stem cells, are also being explored for their regenerative potential.

Integrating Technology: Leveraging advancements in biotechnology, such as CRISPR for gene editing and 3D bioprinting for tissue engineering, to develop more sophisticated and effective treatments.

Personalised Medicine: Tailoring regenerative therapies to individual patients, ensuring more precise and effective outcomes based on unique genetic and health profiles. Regenerative medicine represents a paradigm shift in how we approach health and wellness. By harnessing the body's natural healing capabilities, it is possible to address the root causes of various conditions and promote long-term well-being. With its immense potential, regenerative medicine is poised to redefine the future of healthcare, providing solutions that not only alleviate symptoms but cure diseases and repair injuries fundamentally. As research progresses and these therapies become more accessible, we can look forward to a future where the remarkable capabilities of regenerative medicine lead the way to healthier lives.

The author is the Founder of ALIV - Regenerative Wellness

infants or older people, but getting good sleep is crucial for everyone. Finding a sleep balance that suits your body is crucial since getting too little or too much sleep can both be harmful to your health.

Getting less sleep than your body requires on a regular basis is known as chronic sleep deprivation, and it can have both short- and long-term consequences for your health and well-being.

Sleep deprivation significantly affects cognitive performance. Lack of sleep impairs concentration, decision-making, problem-solving, and creativity. It also diminishes alertness and reaction time, increasing the risk of accidents and errors.

Sleep is essential for memory consolidation. Without enough sleep, it becomes difficult to retain new information and recall it when needed. Poor sleep can make people more emotionally reactive and less capable of handling stress. Over time, chronic sleep deprivation can contribute to mood disorders such as anxiety and depression.

Sleep plays a vital role in maintaining the immune system. When you don't get enough rest, your body becomes more vulnerable to infections and illnesses. Studies have shown that individuals who don't get adequate sleep are more likely to catch colds and recover more slowly.

Long-term sleep deprivation is linked to serious health conditions



THE IDEAL QUANTITY OF SLEEP DIFFERS DEPENDING ON ONE'S AGE, DEMANDS, AND LIFESTYLE. THE NATIONAL SLEEP FOUNDATION RECOMMENDS THAT INDIVIDUALS GET BETWEEN SEVEN AND NINE HOURS OF SLEEP EVERY NIGHT



such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and stroke. Insufficient sleep can also lead to weight gain due to the disruption of hunger-regulating hormones.

Athletes and physically active individuals need adequate sleep for muscle recovery, energy restoration, and coordination. Lack of sleep diminishes endurance, strength, and reaction time, directly affecting physical performance.

People who sleep too much may be at a higher risk of obesity and heart disease, similar to those who sleep too little. Long sleep durations can result in physical inactivity, contributing to these issues.

Paradoxically, sleeping too much can leave you feeling groggy and less energized. This phenomenon, known as sleep inertia, can make it difficult to wake up and start your day.

Tips for achieving better sleep: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. Consistency reinforces your body's circadian rhythm, making it easier to fall asleep and wake up naturally. Engage in calming activities before bed, such as reading, meditating, or taking a warm bath. Avoid activities

like watching electronic devices, as the blue light emitted by screens can interfere with sleep. Ensure your bedroom is conducive to sleep by keeping it dark, quiet, and cool. A comfortable mattress and pillows also play a critical role in improving sleep quality. Avoid caffeine, nicotine, and large meals close to bedtime. Physical activity can promote better sleep, but avoid exercising too close to bedtime, as it may enervate you and make falling asleep harder. High stress levels can negatively affect sleep. Practice stress-relieving techniques, such as mindfulness, deep breathing, or yoga, to help calm your mind before bed. Sleep is an integral component of health, and achieving the right balance is key to living a productive and healthy life. Whether it's ensuring you get enough sleep or avoiding oversleeping, understanding your body's needs is crucial. By prioritising quality sleep and adopting healthy habits, you can enhance your mental, physical, and emotional well-being, ensuring long-term vitality and success.

The author is the Senior Consultant Neurology in Fortis Hospital, Greater Noida.

“The Vital Relationship Between Nutrition and Mental Health”

BY DR WAJHA MEHTAB

In recent years, the focus on mental health has grown significantly, and for good reason. Mental well-being is vital to living a balanced, fulfilling life. But while therapy and medication are common approaches to treating mental health disorders, one often overlooked factor is nutrition. The food we eat plays a key role in influencing mood, cognitive function, and overall mental well-being.

HOW NUTRITION AFFECTS THE BRAIN

The brain is one of the most metabolically active organs in the body, requiring a constant supply of energy and nutrients to function properly. Nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, and antioxidants are essential for brain health. These nutrients support neurotransmitter function, protect the brain from oxidative stress, and help regulate mood and cognition. For example, omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish like salmon and walnuts, are critical for maintaining the structural integrity of brain cells. Studies have shown that diets high in omega-3s are associated with lower levels of depression and improved cognitive function. B vitamins, especially B6, B12, and folate, help in the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine, which regulate mood and behavior. A deficiency in these vitamins can lead to irritability, fatigue, and feelings of depression. Foods like leafy greens, beans, and eggs are excellent sources of these essential nutrients.

THE ROLE OF GUT HEALTH

Recent research has highlighted the importance of the gut-brain connection, often referred to as the "gut-brain axis." The gut, often called the "second brain," houses trillions of bacteria that play a significant role in producing neurotransmitters and regulating mood. These bacteria, also known as the gut microbiome, are directly influenced by the food we eat. A diet high in fiber, probiotics, and prebiotics promotes the growth of healthy gut bacteria, which can positively influence mental health. Fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, and sauerkraut are rich in probiotics, while fiber-rich foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains support a healthy gut environment. On the other hand, a diet high in processed foods, sugar, and unhealthy fats can disrupt the balance of gut bacteria, contributing

to inflammation and negatively impacting mental health. In fact, research has shown a link between poor gut health and conditions like anxiety, depression, and even cognitive decline.

SUGAR AND MENTAL HEALTH

One of the most common dietary pitfalls for mental health is the overconsumption of sugar. While sugary foods may provide a quick boost of energy, they are often followed by a crash that can leave individuals feeling fatigued and irritable. These rapid fluctuations in blood sugar can contribute to mood swings and worsen symptoms of anxiety and depression. Moreover, diets high in added sugars have been linked to inflammation, which is increasingly being recognised as a contributor to mental health disorders. Chronic inflammation in the body can affect brain function and increase the risk of developing depression and other mental health conditions.

THE IMPACT OF NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCIES ON MENTAL HEALTH

Deficiencies in key nutrients can significantly affect mental well-being. Low levels of vitamin D, for instance, have been linked to depression and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). This vitamin, commonly referred to as the "sunshine vitamin," plays an important role in regulating mood. Spending time in the sun and consuming foods like fatty fish, egg yolks, and fortified dairy products can help maintain adequate vitamin D levels. Iron deficiency, often associated with anemia, can lead to feelings of fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and even depression. Foods like organ meats, nuts, oilseeds, leafy

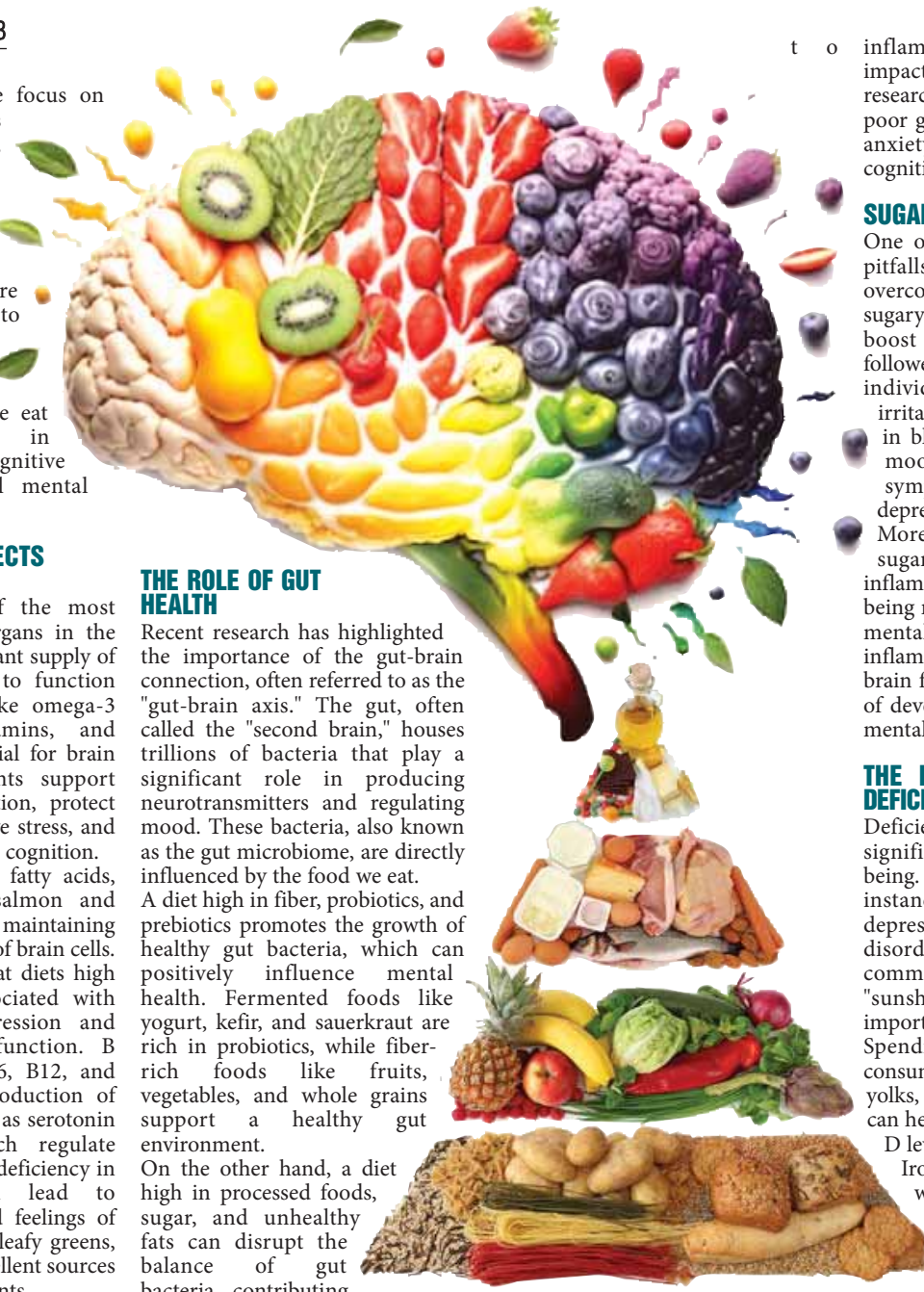
vegetables, oatmeal, and legumes are excellent sources of iron. Magnesium, another critical nutrient, is involved in stress regulation and mood stabilisation. Low magnesium levels have been linked to anxiety and depression. Nuts, seeds, and dark leafy greens are rich in this mineral.

FOODS THAT BOOST MENTAL HEALTH

There are several foods known to support brain health and enhance mood. Some of these include:

- Fatty fish: Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which support cognitive function and mood regulation.
- Dark chocolate: Contains antioxidants and compounds that stimulate the release of serotonin, improving mood.
- Leafy greens: Packed with B vitamins that help in neurotransmitter production and brain function.
- Berries: Full of antioxidants that protect the brain from oxidative stress and improve cognitive function.
- Nuts and seeds: Provide healthy fats, magnesium, and B vitamins that support mental well-being.
- Fermented foods: Rich in probiotics, which help maintain a healthy gut and improve mood.

In conclusion, mental health and nutrition are inextricably linked. The food choices we make can have a profound impact on our mood, brain function, and mental resilience. As awareness grows, it is clear that a well-balanced diet is an important part of any mental health care plan, complementing therapy, exercise, and other treatment methods. Prioritising good nutrition is an investment in both physical and mental health, helping individuals lead more balanced, healthy, and happy lives.



After Paris high, India look to continue momentum at home

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The absence of the Paris Olympic medallists notwithstanding, hosts India will not be short on firepower when they compete in the season-ending World Cup Final, starting here from Tuesday, with Rhythm Sangwan headlining a 23-member squad.

The Paris Olympics medallists automatically qualify for the tournament, but Manu Bhaker, Sarabjot Singh and Swapnil Kusale, who won the bronze, have opted to skip the event to be staged at the Dr. Karni Singh Range.

Besides Rhythm, rising stars such as Ganemat Sekhon (women's skeet) and Sonam Maskar (women's 10m air rifle) will look to excel in the tournament, having earned their spots based on world rankings.

The Indian squad features nine athletes from the 2024 Paris Olympics, including Arjun Babuta (men's 10m air rifle), Anish Bhanwala (men's 25m rapid fire pistol).

Rhythm will compete in both the women's 10m air pistol and 25m pistol events.

The other Olympians in the squad include Mairaj Ahmad Khan (men's skeet), Divyansh Singh Panwar (men's 10m air rifle), and Chain Singh (men's 50m rifle 3 positions). Also ready to shoot in the World Cup Final are Arjun Singh Cheema (men's 10m air pistol), Vijayveer Sidhu (men's 25m rapid fire pistol), Anantjeet Singh Narukha (men's skeet), Maheshwari Chauhan (women's skeet), Rajeshwari Kumari (women's trap) and Shreyasi Singh (women's trap).

All these shooters competed in the Paris Games. There are four finals lined up on each of the three competition days in this traditional ISSF season-ending showdown between the best in the world. Due to host country norms, a minimum of two Indian shooters will be in action in each of the 12 individual Olympic events on the roster.

Action begins on Tuesday with the 10m air rifle women being the first final on the schedule, followed by



the men's final.

The 10m air pistol men and women's finals are also lined up on day one. All the finals will be preceded by qualification rounds.

131 of the world's top shooters from 37 countries including multiple reigning Olympic champions participate in the competition which will determine the year's best performers in each of the 12 individual Olympic events. The world's top six athletes of the combined six ISSF World Cup stages held throughout year, along with Paris Olympic medallists, defending ISSF World Cup Final champions and reigning world champions have achieved direct qualification in each of the 12 events. Three events men's 10m air pistol, men's trap and women's 25m pistol will see all three Paris Olympic medallists compete for the top prize of 5000 euros.

All reigning champions from the previous year in Doha will also be there to defend their titles.

President of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF),

Luciano Rossi, who is in the capital to attend the tournament, hailed India's role in the growth of the sport.

"We're excited to be in India for the ISSF World Cup Final, one of the most dedicated shooting sports nations in the world," said Rossi.

"After a successful season for our athletes and a wonderful Olympic Games in Paris, this is the perfect opportunity for all to finish the season on a high," he added.

National Rifle Association of India's (NRAI) secretary general K Sultan Singh said, "Shooting sport has been witnessing huge rise in popularity and passion amongst the youth, women and specially abled athletes in the country which can be gauged by the laurels which has been achieved at the Olympics, Paralympics and continental championships."

"We wish all the participants the very best and immensely thank the ISSF and the government of India for all their support in hosting and organising the ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi."



Historic women's doubles bronze at Asian TT Championships

India clinches three medals

PTI ■ ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)

India wrapped up their campaign at the Asian Table Tennis Championships with three medals, including a historic bronze in the women's doubles, after Ayhika Mukherjee and Sutirtha Mukherjee's dream run ended in the semifinals here on Sunday.

The world No. 15 pair, who stunned the reigning world champions from China en route to a bronze at the Asian Games last year, fell to Japan's Miwa Harimoto and Miyuu Kihara, 4-11 9-11 8-11 in under 30 minutes in their last-four clash.

Prior to that, the Indian duo had defeated South Korea's Kim Nayeong and Lee Eunhye in the quarterfinals to secure India's first-ever women's doubles medal at the Asian meet.

The Indian women's team had earlier clinched a historic bronze in the team event.

The trio of Manika Batra, Ayhika Mukherjee, and Sutirtha Mukherjee secured the country's first-ever medal in the women's team category since the competition began in 1972, though they eventually lost 1-3 to Japan in the semifinals.

In the men's category, India secured another bronze, their

third straight in the tournament, after the team of Achanta Sharath Kamal, Manav Thakkar, and Harmeet Desai fell 0-3 to Chinese Taipei in the semifinals.

In men's singles, Manav Thakkar and Manush Shah bowed out in the pre-quarterfinals.

World No. 60 Thakkar, who had earlier shocked world No. 14 Jang Wooin of South Korea, was defeated by Hong Kong's Baldwin Chan, 4-11 4-11 8-11. Meanwhile, Manush put up a tough fight against Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei and took two games before narrowly losing 8-11 5-11 11-7 11-6 12-14.

We could have scored more: Farukh Choudhary

PTI ■ NAM DINH (VIETNAM)

Returning to action after three years, midfielder Farukh Choudhary feels they could have scored another goal as India had to settle for a 1-1 draw against hosts Vietnam in an international friendly here.

Manolo Marquez's selection of Farukh had raised eyebrows but the midfielder, who was sidelined for three years, struck a second-half goal to level things for India after Vi Hao Bui had given the hosts a 38th minute lead.

"Personally, I feel great. I've not been a part of the national team for a long time, but this is where I wanted to be. I worked hard at my clubs and I knew in my heart that I deserved to be here," Farukh said.

The last time Farukh turned out for India, he created an assist against



Nepal, in October 2021, in a 1-0 victory in Male. But an unfortunate knee injury meant that he had to start from square one on his way back to the national team.

"I'm glad that I could make a difference for the team, but I feel that we could have scored another," he said.

"But everyone played well together as a team. Gurpreet (Singh Saandhu) and

Anwar (Ali) also had exceptional games in defence, which is why we got this score."

In what was a game of two halves, India heaved an almighty effort for most parts of the second half, and perhaps were a bit disappointed that they could not find the winning goal. However, the head coach remains positive about his side's display as his search of a first win in charge of India continues.

"In the first half, it was practically all Vietnam. Then we discussed at half time how we have enough quality to play, and finally, we started executing our plans in the second," said Marquez.

"Sure, Vietnam could have scored in the last minutes when we were tired, but we could have scored too with our last chance. But overall, I am satisfied with this. It was a friendly game, after all."

Djokovic, Sinner reach Shanghai Masters final, Sabalenka rallies over Gauff at Wuhan

AP ■ SHANGHAI

Novak Djokovic overcame physical discomfort to beat Taylor Fritz 6-4 7-6 (6) and move closer to a 100th career title and a record-extending fifth at the Shanghai Masters. By also reaching the final on Saturday night, top-ranked Jannik Sinner ensured he will be the ATP year-end No. 1 and the first Italian to achieve that feat. "(I've won) many titles, had great battles and great performances," the 37-year-old Djokovic said.

"I did come here definitely with a vision and a desire to get to the final and fight for a 100th title. I get that chance against the best player in the world, and let's see what happens." Fellow great Roger Federer has 103 titles and Jimmy Connors leads men with 109 in the Open era.

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner will chase his seventh ATP title of the year after beating Tomas Machac 6-4 7-5.

Djokovic improved to 10-0 in career matches against Fritz, who blew a 5-3 lead in the

second-set tiebreaker and a set point at 6-5 up.

Djokovic was clearly struggling for mobility and balance with his left knee heavily strapped. "It always takes it out of me, these kinds of battles, but particularly towards the end of the tournament," Djokovic said. "At this stage of my career, I'm doing my best to recover and I had some issues here and there on the court, physically." But US Open runner-up Fritz could not take advantage.

He lost a long rally at 6-6 and succumbed on the first match point when Djokovic stabbed a volley at the net and the American flicked it just long at full stretch.

Djokovic leads 4-3 overall against Sinner, who has won the last two - including in the Australian Open semifinals.

Earlier, Sinner weathered a nearly two-hour baseline storm from No. 33-ranked Machac, who beat No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz in the quarterfinals.

The Italian has a shot at his third Masters title in 2024 following victories in Miami and Cincinnati, to go with his



wins at the Australian Open and U.S. Open.

"I just tried to stay there every point, to see what was going to happen," Sinner said.

"Just playing every point with the maximum intensity I could, so I'm very happy about that. I'm happy to be back in a final again."

"I'm just looking forward to (the final), to try to find a solution somehow ... And hopefully it's going to win the match." Sinner fired 10 aces

ranked Zheng Qinwen in the final. The Paris Olympics champion beat No. 51-ranked Wang Xinyu 6-3 6-4.

Sabalenka will be bidding for her fourth title of the season, which includes the Australian Open and US Open.

The Belarusian's 16th straight victory at Wuhan ended Gauff's own recent win streak at nine, including the China Open title last week. But it looked anything but certain for Sabalenka as she crashed 6-1 in the opening set.

"In the first set she was just crushing it," Sabalenka said.

"Whatever she was doing, everything was flying in. Everything was so aggressive. I didn't have much opportunities."

In a fight between the last two US Open champions, Gauff fled by a break early in the second but Sabalenka responded to pull level at 4-4 and saved a break point on serve to take a 5-4 lead.

Serving to stay in the set, Gauff was broken as Sabalenka hit a lunging forehand volley to force a deciding set.

Ronaldo scores again in Nations League win for Perfect Portugal

AP ■ BARCELONA

Cristiano Ronaldo scored his record-extending 133rd international goal to keep Portugal perfect in the Nations League with a 3-1 win over Poland, and Spain struck late to edge Denmark 1-0.

The 39-year-old superstar was there to put in the rebound after Rafael Leão's shot hit the post in the 37th minute on Saturday. That made it 2-0 following Bernardo Silva's opener in Warsaw in the 26th.

After failing to find the net in his five appearances at this summer's European Championship - with Portugal exiting in the quarterfinals - Ronaldo has scored in three straight Nations League matches, including in wins over Croatia - his 900th career goal - and Scotland last month.

Portugal coach Roberto

Martínez replaced Ronaldo with Diogo Jota with just under half an hour to play.

Midfielder Piotr Zielinski halved the deficit in the 78th for the hosts, only for Southampton defender Jan Bednarek to score an own-goal with two minutes left.

Barcelona striker Robert Lewandowski started alongside Karol Swiderski but the Polish attacking pair couldn't find their way past the Portuguese defense.

"We worked very hard the last few days, preparing various solutions for this game, and we were able to show it on the pitch. I am really satisfied because we controlled this game," Martínez said.

"Also, I am satisfied how Renato Veiga and Rúben Dias performed against one of the best in the world (in Lewandowski)."

Portugal leads Group A1 with



nine points from three games.

Second-place Croatia has six points after it came back to beat Scotland 2-1 in Zagreb with the visitors having an equalizer deep into second-half stoppage time ruled out by VAR. Poland has three points, and Scotland zero.

Scotland's Ryan Christie opened for the Scots and their under-fire manager Steve Clarke in the 33rd. Igor Matanovic leveled three minutes later and Andrej Kramaric completed the fightback in the 70th.

Scotland had the ball in the net right at the end with substitute Che Adams involved but VAR confirmed it was offside.

Zubimendi shines in Rodri's spot

Martín Zubimendi helped Spain crack Denmark's defense as the holding midfielder starred in place of

injured Rodri.

The Real Sociedad player unleashed a powerful volley in the 79th to smash a rebound from outside the area past Kasper Schmeichel, who got his hand on the ball but couldn't keep it out.

Zubimendi had impressed in the final of Euro 2024 when he replaced Rodri for the second half of Spain's 2-1 win over England.

Rodri seriously injured his right knee and required surgery on his ACL while playing for Manchester City last month.

"Martín is a treasure," Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said. "I suppose with his goal he will get more attention, but his play, the fact that he's got a computer in his brain, means we are privileged to have him at a time when Rodri will be out for a while."

Spain was also missing Nico Williams and Dani Olmo, two more players who excelled at the Euros, who are sidelined with minor injuries.

Spain, the defending Nations League champion, has seven points in Group A4 after three games. Denmark has six points, and Serbia has four after beating the pointless Switzerland 2-0.

The Swiss didn't help their cause with an own-goal by Nico Elvedi right before the interval.

Aleksandar Mitrovic doubled the lead for Serbia with a solo effort in the 61st, and Serbia goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic saved a penalty taken by Brel Embolo.

Wins for Kosovo, Romania Kosovo won 2-1 at Lithuania in League C, while Romania thumped Cyprus 3-0, Northern Ireland drew 0-0 at Belarus, and Bulgaria was held 0-0 at home by Luxembourg.