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AT NEXT MONTH'S TATA  
STEEL CHESS INDIA



## INDIA AND CHINA TO THAW FROST ALONG LAC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Signalling a thaw in strained ties between the two countries for the last four years, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Monday announced that India and China have reached an agreement on patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. This leads to eventual disengagement of troops from both sides, Misri said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar later said, "...We can say that the disengagement process with China has been completed... We will be able to do the patrolling which we were doing in 2020. I think it's a good development..." This significant development came a day ahead of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) summit in Kazan, Russia. The two-day summit starts on Tuesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi may have a bilateral meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the meet, though there is, so far, no official word on it.

As regards the latest development, Misri said here both the countries have reached an agreement on patrolling arrangements along the LAC following recent negotiations between officials from both countries. "Over the last several weeks, Indian and Chinese diplomatic and military negotiators have been in close



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

contact with each other in a variety of forums. As a result of these discussions, agreement has been arrived at patrolling arrangements along the line of actual control in the India China border areas, leading to disengagement and a resolution of the issues that had arisen in these areas in 2020. We will be taking the next steps on this," he said. The foreign secretary said the Indian and Chinese negotiators were in touch over the last few weeks to resolve the remaining issues. It is understood that the agreement pertains to patrolling in Depsang and Demchok areas. It is not immediately clear whether the agreement facilitates the restoration of patrolling rights that were in place prior to the standoff. Tensions flared up at the LAC in Eastern Ladakh in May 2020 when China unilaterally tried to change the status quo on the border. It led to a major clash between the troops of the two armies on June 15 that

year in Galwan. Twenty Indian army personnel including the commanding officer died in the clash while more than 40 Chinese troops were also killed. Both the sides then amassed troops and weaponry on their respective sides of the LAC. In fact, India, not willing to take any chances, also deployed its troops even during the winter months at the LAC. Earlier, the troops used to withdraw to their bases during the winters. At one point of time, more than 50,000 troops from each side were facing each other on friction points at the LAC. Given the situation, India and China, since 2020, held several rounds of talks at the military and diplomatic levels. While Corps Commanders of the two sides held military level talks, the diplomatic level talks were held under the aegis of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs.

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NIA and Delhi Police officials investigate at the site where a blast occurred on Sunday, near a CRPF school at Prashant Vihar, in Rohini area of New Delhi  
Ranjana Dimri/The Pioneer

## Delhi bomb investigation exploring multiple angles

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A suspect wearing a white t-shirt and an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), are the angles that the multi-agency probe is focusing a day after a 'bomb' blast near the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) public school sent shockwaves across the national capital. According to police sources, it is suspected that an IED, wrapped in a plastic bag, was hidden in a one-foot-deep pit near the CRPF school wall. A CRPF team visited the spot on Monday morning while its officials from the Institute of IED Management conducted a ground assessment. The National Security Guard's (NSG) Bomb Disposal Squad (BDS) is preparing to submit its final report to the Delhi Police.

The CRPF, with its expertise in ground assessment, and the Institute of IED Management's involvement, suggest a focus on understanding the blast's mechanics and origin. The Delhi Police, in turn, is

expected to submit its initial report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Additionally, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) of the Delhi Police have been assisting in the investigation. Meanwhile, shops remained shut and a usually bustling market of the Prashant Vihar area remained deserted due to fear, with businessmen left in distress who are incurring losses ahead of the festival of Diwali, which is usually a peak time for sales of items including jewellery. Moreover, the two schools near the spot, including CRPF school and Lancer's Convent, saw a low turnout of students due to the parents who are concerned for their safety. Linking the blast to a possible Khalistan angle, a purported Telegram post was being circulated on social media which claimed that the blast was carried out in retaliation to the "targeting" of pro-Khalistan separatists allegedly by Indian agents.

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## Hoax threat callers to have a rough landing ahead

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After unabated bomb threat messages to multiple Indian airlines in the past one week, lead to diversions, cancellations and passenger inconvenience, the Union government is planning to make hoax threat calls to Indian airlines a cognisable offence. The government is also planning to put hoax callers on a 'no fly list'.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu announced this on Monday, in the National Capital. Currently, this stringent law is invoked against people who make hoax calls and endanger the safety of an aircraft when it is in the air, not on the ground. Meanwhile, two top aviation security officers met Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan and discussed the unabated incidents of bomb threats to Indian airlines, leading to diversions, cancellations and passenger inconvenience. Naidu said amendments are being planned to aviation security rules as well as the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Safety of Civil Aviation Act, 1982. "We have come to the conclusion that there are two areas that we can explore - 1) Amendment in Aircraft Security Rules...one of the ideas that we want to propagate by changing these rules is that once we catch hold of the perpetrator who is behind this, we want to put them in the no-flying list... 2) Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against Safety of Civil Aviation Act...", he said.



"While it (SUASCA) takes care of the offences when the aircraft is in travel, in flight, if we want to address these kinds of threats that have been happening. We want to take strict action against people who are behind this when there is a fake or hoax threat that they are trying to do, we have to cover the act on the ground and the airport also. So we are trying to make an amendment. Our legal team has worked very thoroughly on this and we are coming up with an amendment," Naidu said. "We want to make it a cognisable offence. Even though these are hoax threats we cannot take it lightly... we have a set protocol," he said. The Union Minister said that the aviation ministry is in consultation with other ministries such as the Home Ministry. "We are trying to use intelligence, IB and all the other important people who are there in this, especially home affairs and all, everyone is cooperating together. We are taking it very seriously and we want to ensure that these kinds of incidents do not happen."

The minister said multiple meetings have been held with stakeholders since the spate of

calls began so that the people making such threats can be put on the no-fly list after they are identified. He added that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the Centre would not compromise the safety and security of passengers. The minister added that around 10 per cent security has been enhanced at airports across the country in the wake of bomb threats. In a related development, a key high-level meeting was also held in the Ministry of Home Affairs on Monday in which updates were taken from aviation security body Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) and the Central Industrial Security Force, which is responsible for security at airports. Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) Director General (DG) Zulfiqar Hasan and Director General of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) Rajwinder Singh Bhatti met Mohan at the latter's office at North Block here. The three officers remained closeted for about half an hour. However, details of the meeting are not known immediately. The CISF guards 68 civilian airports in the country.

## GRAP Stage-II invoked, NCR AQI 'very poor'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhi's air quality continues to remain in the 'very poor' category, with an average Air Quality Index of 310, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)'s sub-committee has now invoked the 11-point action plan as per Stage-II of Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) from Tuesday, with the forecast indicating that the air quality is likely to deteriorate in the coming days. To discourage private vehicles, the authorities can hike parking fees under the stage II GRAP. The CAQM has appealed to people to use public transport and minimise use of personal vehicles and take less congested routes even if slightly longer. It is also advised to regularly replace air filters at recommended intervals in your automobiles, avoid dust generating construction activities during months of October to January and open burning of solid waste and biomass. Data from CPCB shows that several parts of Delhi are currently grappling with "Unhealthy" levels of pollution. Anand Vihar, for example, registered an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 226, while other monitoring stations including Rohini, Sonia Vihar, Dilshad Garden, Vivek Vihar, Ashok Vihar have reported similarly hazardous levels, categorised as either "Unhealthy" or "Very Unhealthy."

The AQI also recorded 210 (poor category) in Gurugram, 165 (moderate) in Faridabad, 252 (poor) in Noida, 183 (moderate) in Greater Noida, 257 (poor) in Ghaziabad. The CAQM's order read, "In an effort to

AIR QUALITY INDEX ON OCTOBER 21	
AREA	AQI
Shadipur	366
Punjabi Bagh	359
Anand Vihar	356
Wazirpur	354
Burari Crossing	346
Bawana	348
Ashok Vihar	345
RK Puram	345
Rohini	345
Sonia Vihar	344
Jahangirpuri	344
Mundka	342
Nehru Nagar	335
Vivek Vihar	333
Dwarka Sector-8	325
Aya Nagar	323
North Campus, Delhi University	321
Mandir Marg	317
Okhla Phase-2	317
Patparganj	316
Sirifort	311
Najafgarh	310
Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range	306
Auribondo Marg	305
Pusa	305
ITO	301

prevent further deterioration of the air quality, the Sub-Committee decided that all actions as envisaged under Stage II of the GRAP - 'Very Poor' Air Quality (DELHI AQI ranging between 301-400) - be implemented by all the

agencies concerned in the NCR, in addition to the Stage-I actions already in force, from 8 am of 22.10.2024 in the National Capital Region (NCR)." The decision was taken after the sub-committee took stock of the air quality scenario and air quality forecasts for Delhi made by the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology. In the stage II of the GRAP, there is an 11-action plan meant to be implemented by various agencies including Pollution Control Boards of NCR States and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC). These include carrying out mechanical or vacuum sweeping and water sprinkling of the identified roads on a daily basis; Ensuring water sprinkling along with use of dust suppressants (at least every alternate day, during non-peak hours) on roads to arrest road dust especially at hotspots, heavy traffic corridors, vulnerable areas and proper disposal of dust collected in designated sites/landfills; Intensifying inspections for strict enforcement of dust control measures at C&D sites; Focussed and targeted action for abatement of air pollution in all identified hotspots in NCR and intensifying remedial measures for the predominant sector(s) contributing to adverse air quality in each of such hotspots; Ensuring uninterrupted power supply to discourage use of alternate power Generating sets/ equipment (DG sets etc.) and Strict implementation of the schedule for regulated operations of DG sets across all sectors in the NCR including Industrial, Commercial, Residential and offices etc.

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FILE PHOTO

## There is enough pollution, no firecrackers to be sold: Delhi HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court said on Monday that it cannot allow the sale of firecrackers when there is already "enough" pollution in the national capital. The court's oral observation came while dealing with a petition by the Delhi Fireworks Shopkeepers Association, a group of traders with a "permanent" licence to possess and sell crackers. The petitioner's counsel said the grievance of the traders was with respect to the ban on the storage of firecrackers as it was allegedly resulting in harassment. During the hearing, the court said it would ask authorities to seal the traders' premises being used for storage of firecrackers to ensure that there is no pilferage. "The State must be involved in the sealing process so that there is no pilferage," said Justice Sanjeev Narula. "We are not going to allow you to sell. There is enough pollution in this city,"

the judge orally added. The petitioner's counsel said that even though no crackers were being sold by its members, soon after the ban order, the police started visiting the permanent licensees questioning why they were storing the firecrackers. The court observed that in one of the instances cited by the petitioner, there was an allegation of someone selling the crackers and said whoever acted in contravention of the law would be prosecuted. "We can't make an exception for you. If you store them, there is a possibility of (misuse). We will put a seal. It will be videographed," the court said orally. The Delhi government on September 14 imposed an immediate ban on the production, storage, sale, and use of all kinds of firecrackers across the city, effective from January 1. While making the announcement, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai urged the city residents to support the government's efforts to curb air pollution.

## New nuclear reactors coming up in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology said on Monday here that at least 10 nuclear reactors are being installed in the country while two reactors in Gujarat's Kakrapar have started generating power commercially. According to sources, the new nuclear reactors coming up in states like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana are of 700 MW capacity and will start operating in the next few years. The details of the new nuclear reactors were provided to the members of the Standing Committee of Parliament on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change during a meeting here. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who is a member of the committee as well as its former chairman, said members of the panel were informed during the meeting that the Kakrapar-3 and Kakrapar-4 nuclear reactors in Gujarat have been fully synchronised with the grid and are generating power commercially. "This is a major accomplishment since these are indigenously designed 700 MW reactors that were approved in 2007. Construction had begun in 2010. More such reactors are being installed at different locations," he said in a post on X. "Another example of how much continuity there is in our development — which is never acknowledged by 'El Supremo'," Ramesh said, stressing that it was during the Congress rule when the two nuclear reactors in Kakrapar were approved.



Representational image



## Mask up! Traffic congestion jams your lungs with poison

Vehicles spew 18 per cent PM 2.5 in the peak evening hours

BY RAJESH KUMAR

Traffic congestion is the major contributor of air pollution in the National Capital. According to the Decision Support System (DSS) of Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, for Air Quality Management in Delhi, emission from transportation accounts contributed to around 11.2 per cent air pollution on Monday.

According to a study by IIT Kanpur, the contribution from the local on-road transport sector to diurnal mean PM 2.5 is largest (18%) during the evening traffic peak. It is dominated by

contributions from two- and three-wheelers (50%) followed by heavy-duty vehicles (30%), which also collectively represent 60-70% of the total on-road transport sector at any hour of the day. Breakdown of vehicles and ongoing construction works by agencies like Delhi Metro, Delhi Jal Board and National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) added woes to the congestion, causing inconvenience to daily office goers in the morning and deteriorating air pollution. Mehrauli-Badarpur Road, Mehrauli-Gurugram Road, Netaji Subhash Marg, Wazirabad Road, Raja Garden Road, Kashmere

Gate ISBT, Sadar Bazar, Chirag Dilli, roads surrounding major markets including Sarojini Nagar, Chandni Chowk, Lajpat Nagar, Kamla Nagar were among those areas witnessed heavy traffic on Monday. These stretches are the busiest roads known for heavy traffic flow during the week. Lakhs of people commute in and from Delhi to Gurugram, Noida, Faridabad and Ghaziabad daily. Neighbouring Noida has been consistently contributing between 10 and 11 per cent to Delhi's pollution, while Ghaziabad's share ranges from 5 to 10 per cent, as per the DSS -



Heavy evening traffic moves amidst a blanket of smog, in Gurugram, Monday

PTI

IITM data. Bulandshahr, a district in Uttar Pradesh around 110 km from Delhi, adds a noteworthy six to nine percent. Meanwhile, Gurugram and Faridabad in Haryana contribute somewhere between 1.5 and 3 percent and 3 and 5 percent, respectively. DSS, which identifies and forecasts the sources of pollution for the national capital, now has an updated inventory that would help in improving the efficiency of its forecast. As of March 31, 2023, Delhi had 79.5 lakh vehicles, including 20.7 lakh private cars. As per the Statistical Handbook 2023,

Delhi has 20,71,115 registered cars and jeeps; 52,94,900 motorcycles and scooters; 93,654 auto-rickshaws; and 1,18,506 e-rickshaws that provide last-mile connectivity. Data also shows that the number of taxis came down from 85,079 in 2021-22 to 83,278 in 2022-23. The number of vehicles in Delhi has decreased due to the Delhi government's ban on diesel vehicles older than 10 years and petrol vehicles older than 15 years. The number of vehicles in Delhi has increased by about 21 times in the last three decades, while the road length has only doubled.

# Within MVA, Congress has reached understanding on 96 seats: Patole

T N RAGHUNATHA ■  
MUMBAI

Mid intense seat-sharing talks among the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituents for the Maharashtra Assembly polls, the Congress on Monday announced that the discussion on its share of 96 seats had been completed and the party would come out with its list of candidates after holding one more round of confabulation with NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday. Talking to media persons in New Delhi where he has gone to hold consultations with the party high command on the seat sharing matters, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole denied that there

were any differences within the MVA. He also rubbished the speculation that the Shiv Sena (UBT) would walk out of the MVA and join the ruling MahaYuti. "There are also absolutely no differences among the constituents within the MVA. The seat-sharing talks are continuing. Till now, the discussion on the Congress' share of 96 seats has been completed. Tomorrow, we will hold one more round of talks with NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray and release our list of candidates," Patole said. "There is absolutely no truth in the speculation in a section of the media that the Shiv Sena (UBT) would walk out of the MVA and join the MahaYuti.. All I can say is that

the BJP is trying to sow seeds of confusion within the MVA, because it will face a humiliating defeat in the State Assembly polls. The Congress and its allies are working hard to install the MVA government in the state," Patole said. Given that there has been some delay in the MVA constituents — comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) — formalising their seat-tie-up among them, the fact that ahead of a formal joint announcement by the Opposition grand alliance, the Congress has chosen to jump the gun and announced that it has reached an understanding on its share of 96 seats out of total 288 seats. It may be recalled that in the 2019 State Assembly polls, the



Congress had contested 125 seats, while its only ally — the then Sharad Pawar-led united NCP — had fielded candidates in another 125 constituencies, leaving the remaining 38 seats to their smaller allies. After the 2019 Assembly polls, the Congress and NCP — which won 44 and 55 seats

respectively — teamed up with the Uddhav Thackeray-led united Shiv Sena which had won 56 seats, to form the Democratic Front (DF) government in the state. However, the Uddhav Thackeray-led DF government fell after the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena breakaway faction joined hands

with the BJP to form a government in the State. Subsequently, the Ajit Pawar-led faction of the NCP also joined the government. In the 2024 State Assembly polls, the Congress may contest around 100 seats, while the Shiv Sena (UBT) may field candidates in another 100 seats. The NCP (SP) may contest 60 seats, leaving the remaining 28 seats to the smaller allies like the Samajwadi Party (SP), Peasants and Workers' Party (PWP), CPI and CPI-M. In a related development, the Shiv Sena (UBT) also dismissed the speculation that ahead of the Assembly polls, it would walk out of the MVA and join the BJP-led MahaYuti. Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut denied that he had met Union

Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah ahead of the State Assembly polls nor would the Shiv Sena (UBT) would quit the MVA and join the MahaYuti ahead of the Assembly polls. Talking to media persons amid the ongoing seat-sharing talks, Raut said "These are just rumours being spread by the BJP's media machinery. We know who is doing it and why... We also have our own small 'Pegauti' set-up which keeps us informed," Raut said, referring to the infamous Israeli spyware scam that rocked the Indian polity some four years ago. "Supporting the BJP or Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Shah is like joining hands with the Mughal General Afzal Khan.... The fact that the media keeps flashing such

news indicates how much it is functioning under pressure... But we know from where these rumours are originating, why and how they are being circulated," Raut said. Ruling out the possibility of the Shiv Sena (UBT) joining the BJP-led MahaYuti, Raut said: "You all very know that the BJP broke up the undivided Shiv Sena founded by late Balasaheb Thackeray, stole its name Shiv Sena and seized symbol bow and arrow and handed over the state's reins to a 'traitor'" (Eknath Shinde)". Claiming that the MVA leaders had reached a consensus over 210 out of the total 288 seats, Raut said: "It is a significant achievement. We aim to contest polls in unison and we will defeat the forces looting Maharashtra".

## Nuclear reactors in Gujarat generate power commercially: Parliamentary Committee

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology said on Monday here that at least 10 nuclear reactors are being installed in the country while two reactors in Gujarat's Kakrapar have started generating power commercially. According to sources, the new nuclear reactors coming up in states like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana are of 700 MW capacity and will start operating in the next few years. The details of the new nuclear reactors were provided to the members of the Standing Committee of Parliament on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change during a meeting here. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who is a member of the committee as well as its former chairman, said members of the panel were informed during the meeting



that the Kakrapar-3 and Kakrapar-4 nuclear reactors in Gujarat have been fully synchronised with the grid and are generating power commercially. "This is a major accomplishment since these are indigenously designed 700 MW reactors that were approved in 2007. Construction had begun in 2010. More such reactors are being installed at different locations," he said in a post on X. "Another example of how much continuity there is in our development -- which is never acknowledged by 'El Supremo'," Ramesh said, stressing that it was during the Congress rule when the two nuclear reactors in Kakrapar were approved.

## ED seizes more than 300 sale deeds of properties acquired by former YSRCP MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

The Enforcement Directorate Monday said it has seized more than 300 sale deeds of properties "acquired" by former YSRCP MP M V V Satyanarayana and some others, apart from 'benami' land passbooks, following raids against them in an Andhra Pradesh government land grab case. The federal agency conducted searches against the former legislator and an auditor, Gannamaneni Venkateswara Rao, on October 19 at five locations in Visakhapatnam. Satyanarayana was a YSRCP MP from 2019 to 2024. He unsuccessfully contested the Andhra Pradesh assembly polls earlier this year from the Visakhapatnam East seat. The case pertains to a 12.51-acre land (with a market value of more than Rs 200 crore) that was allotted by the state government to the promoters of a company for creating

housing projects for old-age people and orphans. The ED said in a statement that the Andhra Pradesh Police FIR file at the Arilova police station in Visakhapatnam charged Satyanarayana, Rao and a third person, Gadde Brahmaji, for "forging" signatures, "fabricating" sale documents and using "coercion" to "grab" the land. The land located in Yendana village of Visakhapatnam was allotted by the state government in 2008 to a company named Hayagreeva Farms and Developers for the construction of cottages for the elderly and orphans. The land, according to the ED, was registered in the name of the company in 2010 on payment of Rs 5.63 crore. "However, as per records of Andhra Pradesh Registration and Stamps Department, the market value of the said property was on the date of conveyance deed was around Rs 30.25 crore," it said.

## Doctors call off indefinite fast

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a major development the nine agitating junior doctors on Monday called off their fast-unto-death after their demands were "only partially" conceded by the Mamata Banerjee Government. The doctors have been on an indefinite fast since October 5 in demand of justice for the victim of RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case and an overall improvement of the State health infrastructure in the State. "Though the body language of the Government including the Chief Minister was not positive and we were roundly threatened us during the meeting we have been able to wrench out some of our demands... Still we are withdrawing our indefinite fast consequent to the personal request of the parents of 'Abhaya' --- the victim doctor of RGMCH --- our movement will however continue," the doctors said.

## Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) made impressive strides: Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The Government on Monday said Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) has made impressive strides, achieving sales of generic drugs worth Rs 1,000 crore in October, significantly earlier than the previous year's milestone in December. The growth in Jan Aushadhi Kendras is remarkable as well, expanding from just 80 in 2014 to over 14,000 today, ensuring that affordable medicines are accessible across nearly all districts in India, said a statement here. This initiative not only enhances healthcare affordability but also promotes the use of generic medicines among the public, it said. There will be 25,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras in the country in the next two years, said the statement. The product basket of PMBJP comprises 2,047 medicines and 300 surgical devices covering all major therapeutic groups such as cardiovascular, anti-



cancers, Anti-diabetics, anti-infectives, anti-allergic, gastro-intestinal medicines and nutraceuticals, etc. Almost one million people are visiting these popular people-friendly Kendras daily, according to the statement here. "This substantial growth is a testament to the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Bureau of India's (PMBI) commitment to making healthcare accessible and affordable for all by reducing out of pocket expenditure. Notably few days ago, PMBI had sold medicines worth Rs. 200 crore in one single month

of September" as per the statement. The PMBJP initiative continues to empower communities, ensuring that quality healthcare is within reach for every citizen. The record-breaking sales not only highlight the success of the program but also it plays a vital role in promoting health equity in the country. Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendras have proved to be a boon for patients across the country, as thousands of patients are buying medicines at reasonably low prices and making a savings up to 60 per cent on the range of medicines.

## Conman Sukesh offers to buy stake in Karan Johar's Dharma Productions

STAFF REPORTER ■  
NEW DELHI

Conman Sukesh Chandrashekar, who is accused in a Rs 200 crore cheating case involving the wife of a former Fortis Healthcare promoter, made an offer to popular Indian filmmaker Karan Johar about buying a 50 to 70 per cent stake in his production company Dharma Productions. In a letter, he wrote, "Karan, I am giving you an open offer with any terms of your choice, and I am looking at 50 to 70 per cent stake in Dharma, and you give me your number which according to you is reasonable, I commit they would not be a negotiation. We will do all cash deals in 48 hours, here in India or through FDI, from BVI." He added that this is a letter of intent in regards to acquiring a major portion of stake in his Company Dharma Productions. "Recently, my financial Advisor informed me that Dharma is looking for



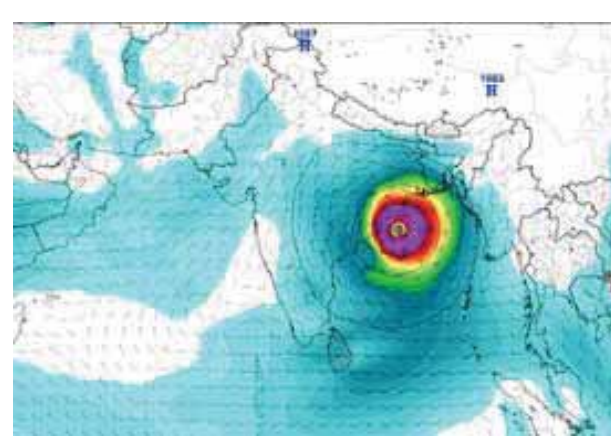
namely the Instagramam, in the South film industry. "However, in today's time to take production/Film Business to a large, pan India level, it is necessary to have large relationship in the industry and an ability to put together projects with top directors and stars, there ee feel associating with you, we can leverage Dharma's credibility and relationship in the industry," he said, adding that for him, movies is not a business, Rather, a passion and an emotion, stating that he is personally a movie buff. Sukesh, who is lodged in Tihar jail, claimed that none of his businesses are illegal and said, "We are fully a legal entity, complying with all taxes, in all Countries we are doing business in, including India. All cases against me, are politically motivated cases, and none of the charges till date, are proved against me, all just baseless charges, under intention to damage my reputation."

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## NDRF keeps teams on standby in Odisha, WB in wake of impending cyclonic storm

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has kept 14 teams in West Bengal and 11 teams in Odisha on standby for deployment in the wake of an impending cyclonic storm in the Bay of Bengal which is likely to make a landfall between Puri and Sagar Island on Thursday, a government statement said Monday. In a meeting of the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) to review preparedness for the impending cyclone on Monday, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan was also informed that additional rescue and relief teams of the Army, Navy and Coast Guard along with ships and aircraft have been kept in readiness. Besides central agencies, the chief secretaries of Odisha and West Bengal also attended the meeting. During the meeting, the Director General of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) briefed the committee



about the current status of the deep pressure area on the Bay of Bengal which is likely to turn into "a cyclonic storm by 23rd October 2024 over east-central Bay of Bengal." "...It is very likely to move northwards and reach northwest Bay of Bengal off Odisha-West Bengal coasts by 24th October morning. "Continuing to move north-westwards, it is very likely to cross north Odisha and West Bengal coasts between Puri and Sagar Island during the night of 24th and early morning 25th October 2024, as a

severe Cyclonic Storm with a wind speed of 100-110 kmph gusting to 120 kmph," the statement from the government said. Ports of Paradip and Haldia are getting regular alerts and advisories about the developing situation, it said. Emergency teams have been deployed by Union ministries of Power and Telecommunication for immediate restoration and the situation is being monitored, the statement said. During the meeting, Somanathan stressed that

Odisha and West Bengal may take necessary preventive and precautionary measures in order to keep the loss of lives to zero and minimise damage to property and infrastructure. It must be ensured that the fishermen at sea are called back and people from vulnerable areas are evacuated well in time, he said. The cabinet secretary assured both states that all central agencies are on full alert and will be available for assistance. "The aim should be to keep the loss of lives to zero and minimise damage to property and infrastructure," he said and added that in case of damage, essential services should be restored in the shortest possible time. Somanathan advised the neighbouring states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand to be prepared to handle any situations arising due to heavy rainfall. He said that the release of water from dam sites in the likely affected area should be calibrated to avoid any flood-

ing. Odisha and West Bengal informed the committee about the preparatory measures being taken to protect the population in the expected path of the cyclonic storm and measures undertaken by the local administration. They said control rooms have also been activated and are monitoring the situation. Fishermen have been asked not to venture out into the sea and those at sea have been called to safe berth. Adequate shelters, power supply, medicine and emergency services have been kept in readiness and people residing in vulnerable areas have been identified for evacuation, the statement said, citing submissions from both states. Chief secretaries of Odisha and West Bengal, Union home secretary, secretaries in the ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Department of Fisheries, Power, Ports, Shipping and Waterways, and senior officials of states and centre government attended the meeting.

## India and China...

From page 1

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas. In all negotiations since the standoff began, India has been pressing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to disengage from the Depsang and Demchok areas. Last month, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said roughly 75 per cent of the "disengagement problems" with China are sorted out but the bigger issue has been the increasing militarisation of the frontier. "Now those negotiations are going on. We made some progress. I would say roughly you can say about 75 per cent of the disengagement problems are sorted out," he said at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. "We still have

some things to do," he said. As regards the upcoming conclave in Russia, the BRICS Summit in Kazan, themed 'Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security,' will provide a platform for leaders to discuss key global issues. According to the Ministry of External Affairs(MEA), the summit offers an opportunity to review progress on BRICS initiatives and explore new areas for cooperation. Prime Minister Modi is expected to hold bilateral meetings with leaders from BRICS nations and other invited participants in Kazan, Russia during the visit. The grouping, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has expanded to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates.

## Delhi bomb investigation...

From page 1

"If the Indian coward agency and their master think they can hire filthy goons to target our members to silence our voice then they live in a fool's world. They can't imagine how close we are to them and how capable we are to strike anytime #KhalistanZindabad #JLI," read a Telegram post by "Justice League India" handle which has less than 400 subscribers. The post surfaced on social media late on Sunday evening pointing to the possible involvement of pro-Khalistani separatists behind the blast. "The police have written to Telegram to the know details of the creator of the group - Justice League Indian - in which the CCTV of the blast was shared with a Khalistan Zindabad watermark on it," a police source said.

According to sources, the police have reviewed footage of over 100 CCTVs from around the crime scene, and on the routes leading to and from the location so far. "No concrete suspects have been identified in the CCTV footage during the investigation. Only blurry images of two individuals have been seen, but their faces are not clearly visible, including a suspect in a white T-shirt spotted at the blast site, a night before the explosion," the source stated. Teams of Delhi Police Special Cell, Crime Branch and local police are investigating the case. An FIR under Sections 326 (g) (mischief with severe consequences to public safety) of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act and Explosives Act was registered at Prashant Vihar police station against

unknown persons. During the course of investigation, local inquiries revealed that there had been a loud noise accompanied by white fumes of smoke. The blast caused a hole in the boundary wall of the school. "Additionally, window panes and signboards of the shops opposite the CRPF school were damaged due to the blast's impact. Caller Akash S/o Ajay Singh R/o B-10, Prashant Vihar, Delhi has been interrogated and he revealed that he was sleeping at his home and he heard a voice of explosion, so he called the PCR However, no eyewitness is found at the spot," the FIR stated. It added that during the inspection, white powder was found scattered near the site. The area was immediately cordoned off, and senior officers were informed about the situation.

## GRAP Stage-II invoked, NCR AQI 'very poor'

From page 1

The action plan also include synchronisation of traffic movements and adequate deployment of personnel at intersections / traffic congestion points for smooth flow of traffic; alerting and advising people through radio/television about air pollution levels and Do's and Don'ts for minimising polluting activities; augmenting CNG/ electric bus and metro services by inducting additional fleet and increasing the frequency of service and resident Welfare Associations to necessarily provide electric heaters to security staff to avoid open Bio-Mass and MSW burning during winters. The Delhi government

implements GRAP in phases, which has steps including ban on construction activities, plying of heavy vehicles and closure of educational institutions, depending on the gravity of the situation. Taking a dig at Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, Delhi Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Virendra Sachdeva questioned Chief Minister Atishi and Environment Minister Gopal Rai on the deteriorating levels of AQI in the national Capital and asked, "Who will Gopal Rai blame for the pollution at Kartavya Path, which is under the Delhi government's jurisdiction? The reality is that all of Delhi is reeling under severe air pollution." Delhi's Chief

Minister and Environment Minister blame Uttar Pradesh's buses for rising pollution in Anand Vihar, even though those buses do not enter Delhi. Instead, the poor state of Delhi's roads is the major contributor to pollution," Sachdeva added. All actions under Stage II of GRAP will be implemented across the entire National Capital Region, in addition to the Stage I actions already in force. The agencies responsible for the implementation of the measures under GRAP including Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) of NCR states and Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) have been addressed to ensure successful and strict implementation of actions under Stage-II of GRAP.

# Security beefed in various markets bustling with shoppers during festive season

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police has beefed up security arrangements in various markets, which are bustling with shoppers during the festive season, and asked the railway and Metro staff to be on high alert following the blast in front of CRPF school in Rohini's Prashant Vihar area.

The strong explosion ripped through a wall of the CRPF school on Sunday morning. No one was hurt in the blast which also damaged hoardings of nearby shops and window panes of vehicles parked near the site. "We have asked our staff to keep a tight vigil on every single railway and metro station. Additional force deployment will be made to check any suspicious activities," a senior police officer said.

The officer said that joint patrolling teams with the Railway Protection Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP) and other stakeholders have been deployed. "Teams will immediately inform senior officials if they see any suspicious activities," said the officer.

Both foot and motorcycle patrolling have already been enhanced, the officer said. "Anti-sabotage checks are being conducted regularly along the



railway tracks with the help of dog squads and bomb disposal teams. We have also asked the railway staff of many adjoining cities to keep strict vigil in and around the railway stations and railway tracks," said the officer.

While agencies are usually on alert ahead of Diwali due to the threat of terror attacks, security has been further beefed up in the national capital and its different markets to maintain law and order and to keep strict vigil. Additional police personnel, both in uniform and civil dress, have been deployed

across the city and patrolling has intensified in crowded areas, like malls and markets. Patrolling by women police personnel has also been increased.

"CCTV cameras are being continuously monitored by the teams and PCRs were asked to be ready for any situation," the officer said.

Police sources said that prominent markets, including Chandni Chowk, Azadpur and Ghazipur, are especially on the radar of the police as many people from outside Delhi visit them frequently. "Elaborate security arrange-

ments have been made especially in markets, malls, vital installations and crowded places. Police visibility has been enhanced through intensified patrolling and deployments of extra pickets. All staff are on high alert to thwart any untoward incident," another senior police officer said.

The officer said that foot patrolling in market areas has been intensified with maximum police presence and soon teams, along with senior police officers, will organise flag marches. A senior police officer of the

North District said that after the Rohini blast, announcements are being at the Sadar Bazar asking people to remain alert. "We have decided that there will be no loading and unloading from 12 pm to 8 pm in Sadar Bazar which will help from the traffic point of view and to check the market by police teams ahead of Diwali.

"All preventive measures are being taken by police staff to ensure smooth festival celebrations," said the officer.

A senior police official in Southwest Delhi said that foot patrolling in market areas has been intensified and maximum police presence has been ensured in the district. Among the measures taken are flag march and intense patrolling into the by lanes of Markets and Malls of South West District being conducted to spread awareness among visitors for taking all necessary precautions while shopping.

"From the security point of view, the staff is also deployed at Machans and Morchas at strategic locations. Announcements are being made through PA systems in the market & malls to take all necessary precautions while shopping & inform the police regarding any suspicious articles," he added.

## Nearby markets deserted with businesses reporting losses day after Rohini bomb blast

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the 'bomb' blast near the Central Reserves Police Forces (CRPF) Public School in Rohini Sector-14 has left a usually bustling market in Prashant Vihar area deserted due to fear with shops shut and businesses reporting losses during festive season on Monday amid officials from different security agencies present, investigating the spot.

The shops, opposite to the school, which sustained damage worth lakhs remained mostly shut and even those open saw very less turnout of consumers ahead of the festival of Diwali. Devendra Goyal, who's shop Bhagwati Jewellers is one among those who sustained impacts due to the blast, said that he has opened his shop, which is opposite to the school, today to assess the damage.

"We have sustained damages worth Rs four lakhs due to the blast. Sign boards, glass panes, cupboards and so many other things have been damaged. But what's even worse is that this is a day when we usually



don't have any time, you see no one coming to buy anything because of the fear," he said.

"Yesterday was Karwachauth when the blast took place and in just a few days it's Diwali, when consumers are lining up to buy jewellery. But no one is coming out and no one knows how long we will see this. In the meanwhile, we will incur huge losses and have no one to go to for help," the distressed businessman said.

Moreover, all the eateries were closed. A 22 year old labourer was seen taking out damaged equipment from a sweet shop. On being asked why they are not opening the shops, he said, "The shop has been damaged and also no one is coming to

eat here because of the blast that happened."

A 50 year old Mohammed Siraj, who is a tailor and sits on the road near to the school for the last 25 years, said this Diwali won't be the same as there are hardly any customers coming since the day for getting their clothes stitched which is usually the case around this time.

Further, the two schools, CRPF public and Lancers' Convent, saw lower turnout of students. A resident of the area said that while 1000s of children study in the school, the turnout remained significantly low on Monday. "Parents were afraid to send their kids and some students that came were also accompanied by their guardians as compared to the usual day when they come from school buses," a resident of the area said.

Moreover, officials from different investigative agencies including the Delhi Police, Special Cell, National Investigative Agency (NIA) and National Security Guard (NSG) continue to probe the spot.

# Fight against terror, attempts to incite religious sentiments will continue: Amit Shah

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday that the fight against terrorism, infiltration and conspiracies to incite religious sentiments will continue even though relative peace has been established in Jammu and Kashmir, the Northeast region and Naxal-affected areas.

Addressing a function here on the occasion of the Police Commemoration Day, Shah said the sacrifice of police martyrs will not go in vain and the country will definitely become a fully developed nation by 2047. "In the last 10 years, relative peace has been established in Jammu and Kashmir, the

Northeastern region and LWE-affected areas due to the dedication and efficiency of our security forces. However, our fight is not over.

"We will continue to fight against emerging threats like drones, narcotics trade, cyber-crime, attempts to spread unrest through Artificial Intelligence (AI), conspiracies to incite religious sentiments, infiltration, smuggling of illegal weapons and terrorism which are the challenges we face now," he said.

The home minister said since independence, 36,438 police personnel have laid down their lives for the safety and security of the country, with 216 of them in the last year. He said



country will remain forever grateful for their sacrifice in the nation's development journey.

"I want to assure the family members of the martyrs that their sacrifice will not go in vain. The country will remain safe and achieve its goal despite any challenge which may come in the way and India will definitely become a developed nation by 2047," he said.

Referring to the three new criminal laws, which came into force on July 1, Shah said work to establish the infrastructure for the implementation of the new laws had started five years ago and the remaining work will be completed in the next three years.

"I want to tell the country that India's criminal justice system will be the most modern in the world and full justice up to the Supreme Court could be delivered within three years of the registration of an FIR," he said.

Giving details about the steps taken for the welfare of the police personnel, the home minister said the police personnel and their family members can now avail treatment in any Ayushman hospital after the implementation of the 'Ayushman CAPF' scheme.

To enhance the housing satisfaction of the CAPF personnel, he said approval has been given for the construction of 13,000 houses of which 11,276 will be ready by March next year. Shah

said jawans of the police forces safeguard India's borders from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Kibithu. The Police Commemoration Day function was held at the National Police Memorial here.

Before his speech, Shah paid floral tributes to all police personnel who laid down their lives in the line of duty. On October 21, 1959, 10 policemen died in the line of duty during an ambush laid by heavily armed Chinese troops at the Hot Springs in Ladakh. Since then, every year the day is observed as the Police Commemoration Day to honour these martyrs and all other police personnel who died in the line of duty.

# Rai launches Red Light On, Gaadi Off campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Monday launched the 'Red Light On, Gaadi Off' campaign aimed at reducing vehicular pollution in the capital and urged the BJP not to "take revenge against the people of Delhi".

The campaign, which kicked off at the ITO crossing in the city, saw volunteers holding placards with messages like "Yudh Pradushan Ke Virudh" and urging citizens to switch off their vehicle engines while waiting at red lights to curb emissions. As part of the launch, the minister also distributed roses to auto drivers.

Addressing the media, Rai emphasised the rising pollution levels, particularly during the winter months, and stressed the need for immediate action.

"As we all know, pollution is



increasing, and it is unfortunate that the people of Delhi not only bear the brunt of pollution from within the city but also from neighbouring states. With winter approaching, pollution levels are expected to rise further," he said. Rai said the Delhi

government was doing everything it could, but Delhiites were suffering more from pollution caused outside the city than from the pollution within it.

He added that while Delhi has taken significant steps, such as reducing vehicular pollu-

tion and dust, neighbouring states like Uttar Pradesh and Haryana must do more to curb stubble burning. The minister highlighted that stubble burning has decreased in Punjab but has increased in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. He said that although Punjab, where the AAP government took office two years ago, has seen a reduction in stubble-burning incidents, the practice remains prevalent in other states.

Referring to the contribution of diesel vehicles to air pollution, he called for greater cooperation from the BJP and urged the party to "work with us and not take political revenge against the people of Delhi".

Rai said all buses in Delhi run on CNG but at the Anand Vihar bus terminus, there are buses of the Uttar Pradesh government that do not run on CNG. These diesel and petrol buses

also contribute to Delhi's air pollution, he added.

The minister said despite Delhi's efforts, over 1,000 diesel buses contribute to air pollution in the city.

Rai also expressed concern over dust pollution in the city and said the Delhi government has been running anti-dust campaigns to tackle the issue.

"It is essential to reduce pollution from all sources, and today, we are launching the 'Red Light On, Gaadi Off' campaign to reduce emissions from vehicles. Every person in Delhi crosses at least 10 to 15 red lights a day, which leads to significant pollution if engines are left running," he added. "I request everyone to do their part and switch off their vehicle engines at red lights to help control pollution," Rai said. The campaign, first launched on October 16, 2020, will run for a month.

# MCD Mayor Shelly inaugurates spraying of anti-mosquito medicine through drone technology

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Municipal Corporation of Delhi's (MCD) Mayor Dr. Shelly Oberoi on Monday inaugurated the spraying of anti-mosquito medicine through drone technology to prevent mosquito-borne diseases in waterlogging affected areas.

Under the campaign anti-mosquito medicine was sprayed in a wide area in Ward No. 33 Rani Khera under Narela zone, to help in preventing mosquito-borne diseases like dengue, malaria and chikungunya.

On the occasion, Oberoi said, "For the first time in Delhi anti-mosquito medicine is being sprayed through drones. Due to record-breaking rains in Delhi this year many places had to face waterlogging and as a lack of drainage of rainwater in this



area the risk of mosquito-borne diseases increases." She said that first of all we have to eliminate the waterlogging after the rain and after that mosquito-borne diseases will be prevented. "In the last two to three months awareness programs are being run at many levels to prevent mosquito-borne diseases such as children are being made aware in schools and meetings are also being held with Resident Welfare Associations

(RWAs)," Oberoi said.

The Mayor said that working in this direction for the first time in Delhi anti-mosquito medicine is being sprayed through drones. "The AAP government of MCD has fulfilled the promises made by Arvind Kejriwal," she claimed. She claimed that the corporation's sanitation workers are being paid their salaries in the first week of the month unlike earlier when they were not able to get permanent jobs till the age of retirement. "But since the AAP government came to power in MCD we have made 10,000 sanitation workers permanent," the mayor asserted, adding that after the AAP government came to power in the corporation the sanitation system of Delhi has improved.

Oberoi also requested the citizens not to let water collect around them.

# Will appeal to HC to exempt Rs1 crore compensation to be paid to MCD to remove defacement during DUSU polls: DU

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University will appeal to the High Court to exempt Rs one crore compensation imposed upon them to pay to the MCD for cleaning the defacement of public property across the national capital during their Students Union elections, a varsity official said on Monday.

The Delhi High Court on Monday issued notice to several candidates who contested the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) elections held in September and summoned them to appear before it in the next hearing, slated for October 28.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi submitted before the court that it incurred an expense of Rs 1 crore for cleaning the defacement during the elections across its 12 zones.

The court had earlier asked

DU to compensate for the cost incurred by civic agencies including MCD and DMRC for undertaking the cleaning. It also said that DU may recover this amount from the contesting candidates if it wants.

Asked about the MCD's demand, DU VC Yogesh Singh said the varsity will appeal to exempt the compensation amount.

"It is a significant amount, and we do not have the funds to pay it. We cannot expect the students to cover this fine either. Although we asked the candidates to abide by the rules, they continued to violate them, which has put us in a difficult situation. We will appeal to the court to seek exemption from this amount," VC Singh said.

While the DUSU polling took place on September 27, the vote counting -- scheduled for September 28 -- has been

halted by the High Court till all the defacement material, including posters, hoardings and graffiti is removed and public property is restored.

The court on Monday reiterated its warning observing that the defacement has not been removed and declined to lift the stay on vote counting. It has also asked for a fresh status report on the cleaning of defacement from Delhi Police and the MCD by the next hearing.

Reacting to the development, the RSS-backed Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) said, "We will wait for the final verdict of the court on this matter and then will decide the legal remedies available with us. We will urge the High Court to lift the stay on counting of votes in the larger interest of students." Ashutosh Singh, national media convener of ABVP said.

# Kejriwal enjoyed unparalleled luxury at CM's bungalow: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

From smart toilets with heated seats to a massage chair and recliner sofa, former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal enjoyed unparalleled luxury and comfort at his official residence while in the top post, the opposition BJP in Delhi claimed on Monday.

In a swipe at the AAP national convener over luxuries "worth crores of rupees" he allegedly availed, BJP MP and national spokesperson Sambit Patra said Kejriwal should return the "remote-controlled TOTO smart commode that he took with him" from the 6, Flagstaff Road residence so that people could see it.

Patra quoted some media reports to claim that the former chief minister took the "TOTO commode" with him when he vacated the bungalow.

"As of now, the remote that controls the seat's temperature is with you because you are the king. But when people



cast their votes, the remote will be in their hands. And I can guarantee that they will make you sit on a 'tawa' (pan). And that tawa will be so hot..." the BJP leader added. There was no immediate response from AAP on the BJP's charge. However, Chief Minister Atishi said at a press conference on Sunday that the BJP can keep the house and allot it to any of its leaders. "We don't care about the



house, bungalow or the car. We will work for the people of Delhi, even if we have to work from the street," the AAP leader had added, replying to the similar charges levelled by the BJP earlier that day.

At a press conference at the BJP headquarters here on Monday, Patra said, "In an affidavit, Kejriwal had in 2013 stated that he would not travel in a red beacon-fitted vehi-

cle, accept any security cover and move to any bungalow." But an inventory of the items at his official residence that the PWD has prepared and shows that "even embosers" would not have the kind of luxury and comfort that Arvind Kejriwal availed at his residence, the MP claimed.

Citing the unverified PWD inventory, Patra alleged that

Kejriwal had curtains worth Rs 5.60 crore at his 'Sheesh Mahal', TV sets worth Rs 64 lakh, a recliner sofa worth Rs 10 lakh, a full-body massage chair worth Rs 4 lakh and LED smart tunable lights worth Rs 19.5 lakh among various other precious items. He also claimed that the items in Kejriwal's possession that stood out the most were seven "TOTO smart commodes" worth Rs 10-12 lakh each. "This TOTO toilet is remote-controlled. You press buttons to open its cover (lid) and seat... Using the remote, one can even control the temperature of the seat. It also has a dryer, UV cleaner and water temperature controller," the BJP leader added.

Referring to media reports, Patra said, "One person took away the 'toni' (water tap) while the other took the TOTO. What is happening? You return TOTO. People want to know how common or special it is. It should be put on exhibition."

# SC grants two-week extension to expert panel of NEET-UG reforms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday extended by two weeks the time granted to the Centre-appointed seven-member expert panel to file its report on exam reforms after reviewing the National Testing Agency's functioning in holding the NEET-UG. The SC on August 2 had passed its formal order and expanded the remit of the seven-member expert panel, headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief K Radhakrishnan, to review the functioning of the National Testing Agency (NTA) and recommend exam reforms to make the controversy-ridden NEET-UG (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test Undergraduate), transparent and free from malpractices.



The NEET-UG is conducted by the NTA for admission in undergraduate medical programs. The top court had also refused to annul the NEET-UG of 2024, saying there was no sufficient material on record at present to indicate a systemic leak or malpractice compromising the integrity of the

examination. On Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud that the deadline for filing the report of the expert committee was ending and sought two-week extension. The bench, also comprising

Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, took note of the fact that the report of the panel was almost complete and granted two more weeks for filing the same. While expanding the scope of the expert panel, the top court had flagged multiple lapses on the part of NTA like the security breach at an examination centre in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh where the rear door of the strongroom was opened and unauthorised people were permitted to access question papers, transportation of question papers by e-rickshaws and distribution of wrong set of question papers among the candidates. Besides Radhakrishnan, other members of the expert committee are Randeep Guleria, B J Rao, Ramamurthy K, Pankaj

Bansal, Aditya Mittal and Govind Jaiswal. The bench said the remit of the committee, in addition to the tasks that it has been entrusted with by the union government and the NTA, shall encompass examination security and administration, data security and technological enhancements. Its responsibilities will also include policy and stakeholder engagement, collaboration and international cooperation, and recommendations for providing mental health support to students and training of NTA staff, it had said. Over 23 lakh students took up the NEET-UG in 2024 for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses, which marred series of controversies of question paper leaks.

# 'I am Congressman till my last breath': Ajay Singh Yadav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Congress leader Captain (retired) Ajay Singh Yadav on Monday raised concerns about under-representation of OBCs in the party's Haryana unit and top bodies such as the CWC, while also lashing out at the AICC in-charge of state Deepak Babaria over the poor assembly poll showing. Yadav, who took a U-turn after resigning, stated he would remain a Congressman "till his last breath", said he had an "offer" from the BJP post-assembly polls but he did not take it as he his family has had a 70-years-old relationship with the Congress.

"I am not going to the BJP while many have gone. I had an offer after polls but I did not go. I have spent my entire life here. My son is a secretary (in the AICC). We have 70 years of ties with the party. I have worked with Rajiv ji, Sonia ji and was given respect. She made me CLP minister. So, one has to respect that," he said told a press conference here. Yadav, whose son Chiranjeev Rao lost from Rewari in the recently concluded Haryana Assembly polls, said the party could not effectively micro manage the polls. "I am not going to the BJP while many have gone. I had an offer after polls but I did not go. I have spent my entire life here. My son is a secretary (in the AICC). We have 70 years of ties with the party. I have worked with Rajiv ji, Sonia ji and was given respect. She made me CLP minister. So, one has to respect that," he said told a press conference here.

get the kind of importance that they should have. He said his post of the chairman of the OBC department is an "ornamental" one. "Be it CWC, CEC, there is hardly representation from the OBC department, backward classes, there are just SCs and Jats for representation. I had raised the issue of caste census which was not being properly implemented in the Congress ruled states, there is also the issue of raising of creamy layer limit, proper representation in higher education," he said. "In Haryana, if you see OBCs have more representation in the BJP. Rao Inderjit Singh is an OBC, Bhupinder Yadav is an OBC, Krishan Pal Gurjar is an OBC, they are all Union ministers....They have Punjab in Manohar Lal Khattar. The social engineering has not been done in the Haryana Congress party where the OBCs are being under-represented," Yadav said. "I have to point out these things, this is my duty. Like in UP, Bihar, Punjab where CLP and chief are not from the OBC community," he said. Presently my resignation has not been accepted, if it is accepted or not is upto the party to decide, he said. Yadav said he has taken back his resignation and will now work accordingly. He also said leaders rejected by the

AAP and the BJP were being encouraged in the Congress by some leaders. On Saturday, Yadav had said he was "prevailed upon" by his son and former MLA Chiranjeev Rao to "forget the past" and work for the party. Yadav quit the party on Thursday alleging shabby treatment after Sonia Gandhi left the post of party president. He also resigned as the chairman of the All India Congress Committee's Other Backward Classes (OBC) Department. In a series of social media posts, the 65-year-old leader said he has served the Congress for 38 years and gave his best to the party. He said his family has had an "association of more than 70 years" with the Nehru-Gandhi clan. "I worked with my leader late Rajiv Gandhi ji and Sonia Gandhi and cannot forget their affection towards me...I am a Congressman since my birth and would remain a Congressman till my last breath," said Yadav. "I was upset that my hard work done for the OBC department was not being appreciated by the high command and some harsh words made me take this drastic step. But with a cool mind I have decided to strengthen the Congress party, especially my mentor and leader Sonia Gandhi ji," he said in another post.

# India and Singapore to strengthen defence ties in sixth defence ministers' dialogue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Singapore will review the entire gamut of their bilateral defence ties here on Tuesday during the sixth India-Singapore Defence Ministers' Dialogue. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Ng Eng Hen will co-chair the dialogue.



intense collaboration between the two forces, as they engage in advanced air combat simulations, joint mission planning and debriefing sessions. The bilateral phase aims to enhance interoperability, sharpen combat readiness and promote the exchange of knowledge between the two Air Forces.

The meeting aims to carry forward defence cooperation between the two countries. Both sides will also exchange views on regional and global issues of shared interest, defence ministry said here on Monday.

The RSF is participating with its largest contingent till date, comprising of aircrew and support personnel from F-16, F-15 squadrons alongwith G-550 Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) and C-130 aircraft. The IAF will be participating with Rafale, Mirage 2000 ITI, Su-30 MKI, Tejas, MiG-29 and Jaguar aircraft.

The engagements have diversified to include wide-ranging contacts between the Services, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity building and training programmes, cooperation in UN Peacekeeping, ship visits and bilateral exercises.

Since its inception, JMT has been conducted under the ambit of a bilateral agreement signed between the two nations. JMT exercise comes right after RSF's participation in one of the largest multinational aerial exercises, Ex-Tarang Shakti hosted by the IAF, which is reflective of a growing professional association between the two Air Forces.

The Singaporean Defence Minister will be on a visit to India from October 21-23. The fifth edition of the Defence Ministers' Dialogue took place in January 2021 through virtual teleconference.

In addition to air operations, the personnel of the two air forces will exchange best practices, as they interact during a multitude of sports and cultural activities over the next seven weeks. JMT-2024 highlights the strong bilateral defence relationship built over years of collaboration and joint exercises, as well as the mutual respect between India and Singapore.

Meanwhile, Indian Air Force (IAF) and Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) on Monday commenced the 12th edition of the Joint Military Training (JMT) exercise at Air Force Station Kalaikunda, West Bengal, IAF said here.

The bilateral phase of the exercise will be conducted from November 13 to 21 and is expected to generate

# SC stays NCPDR directive against madrassas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday stayed the operation of the communications issued by child rights body NCPDR urging States to shift students of unrecognised Madrassas to Government schools. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra took note of the submissions of senior advocate, appearing for Muslim organisation Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind, that the communications of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR) and consequential actions of some of States needed to be stayed. The Muslim organisation



has challenged the action of Uttar Pradesh and Tripura governments directing that students of unrecognised madrassas should be shifted to Government schools. The top court ordered the communications of the NCPDR issued on June 7 and June 25 this year should

not be acted upon. The Court also said the consequential orders of the states shall also remain stayed. It also permitted the Muslim body to make states, other than Uttar Pradesh and Tripura as parties to its petition. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR) last week wrote to chief secretaries of all States and Union Territories, recommending that Madrasa boards be "closed down", State funding to Madrasas and Madrasa boards be stopped, and children attending Madrasas be enrolled in "formal schools." The Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind approached the Supreme Court against the directive of the NCPDR.

# President Murmu to present national water awards 2023

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu will present the National Water Awards 2023 on Tuesday, recognising outstanding contributions to water management and conservation across India.



The awards, organised by the Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation under the Union Ministry of Jal Shakti, honour efforts in nine categories, ranging from best state to best civil society, according to an official statement.

In the category of Best State, the first prize has been conferred upon Odisha, with Uttar Pradesh securing the second position, and Gujarat and Puducherry jointly securing the third position. Each award winner will be conferred with a citation and a trophy as well as cash prizes in certain categories. Odisha has been gaining recognition for its extensive water conservation initiatives such as establishment of approximately 53,000 water

conservation and rainwater harvesting structures, along with 10,800 reuse and recharge systems. Additionally, the renovation of 11,000 traditional water bodies, development of 68,700 watersheds, and completion of 21,000 wastewater treatment plants have been achieved. The renovation of around 1,800 km of drainage channels has reclaimed approximately 39,000 hectares of agricultural land previously affected by waterlogging. Also, over 90,900 hectares of irrigated land have transitioned from conventional irrigation methods to micro-irrigation

structures in industries and educational institutions, according to the ministry. Gujarat, sharing the third spot, was acknowledged for achieving 100 per cent tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission, covering 25 lakh households. The state also expanded micro-irrigation coverage, benefitting over 14 lakh farmers.

# INS Suvarna anti-piracy moves to Tanzania



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Navy ship INS Suvarna paid a port call at Dar Es Salam, Tanzania, from October 19-21 for operational turnaround, during its ongoing anti-piracy deployment in the Gulf of Aden and conducted drills with Tanzanian navy, navy said here. Commander Lalit Yadav, Commanding Officer, called on Rear Admiral A R Hassan, Commander of Tanzanian People's Defence Force (TPDF) Naval Forces, and Bishwadi Dey, High Commissioner of India (HCI) to Tanzania. During the visit, operation team of both navies held professional interactions including joint training on

Visit Board Search Seizure, Damage Control and Fire Fighting drills, including sports engagement. The ship also handed over the Infantry Weapon Training Simulator to the TPDF side. INS Suvarna co-hosted a social interaction on board, along with HCI, for TPDF officials. Major General I M Mhona, Chief of Operations and Training, TPDF, was the Chief Guest, along with Rear Admiral A R Hassan. The ship later carried out a joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance with TPDF Navy. The visit aimed to enhance military and diplomatic ties between the two countries in line with Indian government's vision of SAGAR.

# Stevia can also have therapeutic potential: Research

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A team of Indian researchers has highlighted the therapeutic properties of Candy Leaf, or Stevia rebaudiana, beyond its natural sweetness.



The team led by Dr. Asis Bala and Prof. Ashis K Mukherjee from the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology (IASST) in Guwahati explored Stevia's effects on cellular signalling mechanisms and found it may offer benefits for various diseases, including endocrine, metabolic, immune, and cardiovascular disorders.

Kumar Chatterjee from IASST, Rahul Singh, Satyabrata Mohapatra, and Sagnik Haldar, all from Emami Limited, Kolkata). Their multimodal strategy integrated network pharmacology with in vitro and in vivo techniques, showing that the plant used phosphorylation of Protein Kinase C (PKC) to inhibit a crucial cellular signalling route, said the study.

Phosphorylation in Mouse Macrophage Cells: Target Search by Network Pharmacology and Validation Using Ex Vivo and In Vivo Assays" shows Stevia's promise in this field for the first time. The research also found that active Stevia molecules strongly interact with AMPK, highlighting the need for further investigation. The study reveals an undiscovered facet of Stevia, underlining the necessity for creative strategies and scientific data to support traditional therapeutic practices, according to the researchers.

Published in "Food Bioscience," journal, the research identified that the active components in Stevia interact strongly with AMP-activated protein kinase (AMPK), indicating further research is necessary to fully

understand its benefits. The IASST in Guwahati is an autonomous institute of the Department of Science and Technology. The team did the research on Stevia's medicinal properties and its effects on cellular signalling mechanisms to prove the Assam's Stevia's therapeutic qualities. Currently, Stevia rebaudiana Bertonii is widely grown and distributed across Assam in Northeast India, from where it is exported worldwide. The other researchers were Piyali Devroya and Suraj

The study titled "Candy Leaf - Stevia rebaudiana (Bertonii) Attenuates LPS-Induced Protein Kinase C

The North Eastern Council under the Union Government has also highlighted the potential of Stevia cultivation to benefit the northeastern Indian economy due to high demand.

# Union Minister of Labour to launch 'eShram - one stop solution'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Labour and Employment Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya on Monday launched "eShram - One Stop Solution" here with an aim to provide seamless access of different Social Security Schemes to the unorganised workers registered on the portal launched in 2021. More than 30 crore workers have already registered themselves on eShram in a span of 3 years since its inception. Speaking at the launch event, Dr. Mandaviya emphasised the growing trust in the eShram portal, noting, "Every day, around 60,000 to 90,000 workers are joining the eShram platform, which demonstrates their confidence in this initiative." Dr. Mandaviya also highlighted that the main aim of the portal is to simplify the registration process for



unorganised workers and facilitate their access to government welfare schemes. "This platform will act as a bridge, connecting the workers to the numerous benefits offered by the government and making the registration process easier and more transparent," he said. "eShram One Stop Solution" entails consolidating and integrating data from various Central Ministries/Departments into a single repository as per the recent budget announcement and 100 days agenda of the

Ministry. Key welfare schemes such as One Nation One Ration Card, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, National Social Assistance Programme, National Career Service, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan etc. have been integrated with eShram, and onboarding of other welfare schemes is also in progress. Dr. Mandaviya urged all unorganised workers to register on the eShram portal and take advantage of the various welfare schemes

designed for their benefit. He emphasised that onboarding to the platform will enable workers to access a wide range of social security and welfare initiatives launched by the government, aimed at improving their livelihoods and ensuring their well-being. Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment, Shobha Karandlaje emphasised on the integration of State Governments portal with eShram in order to ensure last mile connectivity. "This initiative will also help in ensuring saturation of the schemes through identification of left-out potential beneficiaries, State/District-wise," she added. Sumit Datta, Union Labour and Employment Secretary was of the opinion that 'eShram One Stop Solution' will serve as a facilitator to enable seamless access to various government schemes to the unorganised workers.

# Pakistani terrorist handlers target one of India's most strategic road projects in J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Terrorist handlers sitting across Pakistan have once again attempted to derail the peace process close on the heels of a successful Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Islamabad by targeting construction workers of India's one of the strategic road construction projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

A doctor from the Nadigam area of Central Kashmir's Budgam district along with six employees of APCO Infratech, a private construction agency constructing the Z-Morh tunnel on the Srinagar-Sonamarg highway was killed in one of the most provocative strikes in recent years in the Kashmir valley. The Resistance Front (TRF), an affiliate of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Reacting strongly to the provocative terror strike, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said the dastardly terror attack on civilians in Gagangir, J&K, is a despicable act of cowardice. Those involved in this heinous act will not be spared and will face the harshest response from our security forces. "At this moment of immense grief, I extend my sincerest condolences to the families of the deceased. Praying for the speedy recovery of those injured," Amit Shah said in a post on X (earlier Twitter).

The gruesome terror strike inside the campsite has also exposed the vulnerability of migrant construction workers engaged by private agencies without caring for their adequate safety and security. The attack also signals a shift in the strategy of Pakistan-based terrorist handlers. After launching a series of strikes on the security forces convoys



in the Jammu region this time they targeted the civilians working on ground zero to earn their livelihood.

Following the strike, several workers have decided to shift to safer locations in Ganderbal and Srinagar to prevent any fresh strikes.

A large-scale search operation is also underway, with the Assam Rifles, CRPF, and the Jammu and Kashmir Police's Special Operations Group (SOG) involved. Senior police officers, including the Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat and the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir range VK Birdi are overseeing the efforts. A team from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) also visited the campsite ahead of launching detailed investigations into the case.

Meanwhile, the mortal remains of victims of a gruesome terror attack near Sonamarg in the Ganderbal district were sent home for the last journey on a day when newly elected members of the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly were administered oath by the pro-term speaker Mubarak Gul in Srinagar. According to ground reports

around 8.00 p.m. on Sunday the heavily armed terrorists barged inside the campsite without facing any resistance and started indiscriminate firing on the construction workers. As chaos prevailed, the terrorists also targeted some employees present inside the staff mess killing a local doctor, a Jammu-based designer Shashi Abrol, Safety Manager from Bihar Mohd Faheem Nasir and Mechanical Manager Anil Shukla from Madhya Pradesh. The other dead included Gurmeet Singh son of Dharm Singh of Gurdaspur Punjab; Mohammad Hanif and Kaleem from Bihar.

At least five critically injured workers have been admitted to the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) for advanced treatment. Before fleeing the terrorists also torched two vehicles stationed in the campsite. Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday said security forces will avenge the construction workers' death in the brutal attack in Ganderbal, and "exact a price" that the terrorists will remember for the time to come. Sinha called for justice to the victims as he blamed Pakistan

for "still trying to kill innocent people" in the region to disrupt peace. He also directed officials to provide financial assistance to the families of victims. Addressing a function here earlier in the day, the LG said, "We won't forget yesterday's dastardly attack." The LG said there was still a threat from the "neighbouring country". "It is still trying to kill innocent people in this region and to destabilise peace here," he added at the Police Martyrs' Day function. Sinha said there was a need to stop drug smuggling and improve counter-insurgency operations.

The LG paid tributes to those killed in the line of duty and said their sacrifices will be remembered forever. The LG also directed Chandraker Bharti, Principal Secretary, Home Department, J-K to immediately provide financial assistance to the families of civilian victims of the terror attack, an official spokesperson said. Sinha has also asked the company for which the seven deceased persons were working to release the compensation without any delay. Officials of APCO Infratech briefed the LG on the assistance being provided to the

family members of the victims, the spokesperson said. Under the security-related expenditure, Rs 6 lakh is to be given to the next of kin of each deceased civilian and Rs 15 lakh as an immediate measure to be provided by APCO Infratech. An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh to be provided to all the injured.

APCO Infratech will also provide financial assistance to the families of civilians on roll under Corporate Personal Accident Policy and five years of their gross CTC as compensation from insurance. Sinha said, "Though it is an irreparable loss and cannot be compensated monetarily, we are taking concrete measures for the families of the martyr civilians so that they live a life of dignity."

Hurriyat Conference leaders including Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Monday condemned the terrorist attack on a workers' camp in Ganderbal district.

"Chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and senior members of Hurriyat including Prof Ghani Bhat, Bilal Ghani Lone and Masroor Abbas Ansari expressed deep sorrow and grief over the dastardly killings in Gagangir," the Hurriyat said in a statement. PDP leader Iltija Mufti said elections or big-ticket events like international marathons "cannot hide the truth that there is a problem in Kashmir which needs genuine attempts to resolve it".

"Elections, marathons, a new government being sworn in. None of these can conceal or brush under the carpet a truth most unpalatable.

"There is a problem at hand in Kashmir which for decades has claimed innocent lives & will continue to rage. Unless we acknowledge it & make genuine attempts to resolve it," she posted on X.

## Wife of slain designer was observing Karva Chauth fast, entire family in shock

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The wife of Shashi Abrol, one of the Jammu-based employees of Apco Infratech, was observing fast on the occasion of Karva Chauth on Sunday when he was killed by terrorists inside the staff mess of a makeshift campsite in the Sonamarg area of Ganderbal district.

The incident has left the entire family in a state of shock.

Shashi, who has been working with Apco Infratech as a designer for over seven years now, leaves behind his wife and two kids. His elder son recently joined an engineering college in Bhopal and his daughter is currently studying in class 4. Shashi Abrol spoke to his wife for the last time via video call around 6.30 p.m. on Sunday.

His sister, who was consoling her sister-in-law informed visiting media persons, "My bhabhi, dressed in her traditional attire and sporting 'Heena' on her palms, spoke to my brother on Sunday evening as she wanted to inform him that she was going to join special prayers on the occasion and would again call him past 8.00 p.m. at the time of breaking her fast.

The couple agreed to close the call after seeing each other for the last time. On her return when she started contacting her husband she received no response. "We told her that he may be busy at work but when there was no response from his side till late night we were worried for his well-



being". "Till late at night no one from the Apco Infratech or the government informed us about the terror strike in their camp where he along with six others were killed. We came to know through the media in the morning when we read the newspapers that our loved one is one among those victims of the gruesome terror strike". Shashi Abrol's sister said. The family spent the whole day waiting to receive the mortal remains. LG Manoj Sinha met the family at their residence in Talab Tillo area.

In Kashmir, the family of Dr Shah Nawaz Ahmad Dar wept inconsolably after learning about his death in the terror strike. Dr Shah Nawaz was killed by terrorists while he was having dinner with other colleagues. He solemnized the marriage of his elder daughter last Wednesday and had promised the family to return home to welcome his newly married daughter as per their rituals on Tuesday. Unfortunately, Dr Shah Nawaz

returned home covered in a shroud early Monday morning. He leaves behind his son and two daughters. The entire village of Nadigam in central Kashmir's Budgam district mourned his death and assembled at his residence to join the funeral procession. Two cabinet ministers Javed Ahmad Dar and Sakina Ittoo visited his residence to pay their last respects.

A Jammu-based expert who often visited the Z-Morh tunnel site for technical audit remembered Safety Manager Mohd Faheem from Bihar and Anil Shukla from Madhya Pradesh as thorough professionals who were working round the clock at the location to ensure timely completion of the project. "They worked hard on the project site and when it was ready for the launch they wouldn't be present there. They sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. The Nation must pay rich homage to them and stand by their families", the expert said.

## Religious leaders will be allowed to construct permanent ashrams on lines of Haridwar: MP CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ UJJAIN

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday said saints, seers and other religious leaders will be permitted to construct permanent ashrams in Ujjain on the lines of Haridwar. The chief minister spoke at a press conference about preparations for the Simhashta Mela, slated to be held in the holy city in 2028. "Ujjain is known for saints. Simhashta Mela, held once in 12 years, will be organised in 2028. Sadhus and saints need a proper space for lodging and other activities in the city. Considering this, the state government has plans to build permanent ashrams by giving top priority to saints," Yadav said.

He said like the facilities for saints and seers in Haridwar, permanent ashrams will be built in Ujjain, and the Ujjain Development Authority will implement the plan. Saints, seers, heads of Akharas and



will also come up simultaneously. Priority will also be given to set up Dharamshalas, medical centres, and ayurveda centres, among other establishments, through interested devotees, he said. Yadav said permission will be given to saints and sadhus for ashrams, with adequate space for parking. He further informed that the tender process for the Ujjain-Indore six-lane highway is over, and the foundation stone for the Ujjain-Jaora Green Field Four Lane Road will be laid soon. He further said that in-principle approval has also been given for the operation of the Indore-Ujjain Metro train, and a circle Vande Metro train will also be operated connecting Ujjain, Dewas, Fatehabad and Indore. All railway routes of Ujjain were being strengthened, the chief minister said, adding that the existing airstrip will also be upgraded to an airport.

other religious leaders can invite everyone and work towards building their ashram, he said. The chief minister said in view of the Simhashta mela, work will also be undertaken on basic facilities like roads, electricity, drinking water, etc. A plan has been prepared with the help of public representatives to develop Ujjain as a religious destination like Haridwar, he said. Yadav said permanent infrastructure works, including four-lane and six-lane bridges, will be built while working on basic facilities, and ashrams

## Hundreds of Christians to be evicted from Kochi village over Waqf Land issue

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Archeparchy of Changanacherry, the de facto headquarters of the Catholic community in Kerala is upset and angry with both the CPI(M) and the Indian National Congress for their opposition to the Centre's move to amend the Waqf Rules.

The Archdioceses of the entire Catholic community spread across the State strongly condemned the "unanimous" resolution passed by the Kerala Legislative Assembly which demanded the immediate annulment of the Waqf Amendment Bill 2024.

More than 600 families in Munambam, a picturesque coastal village in Kochi are on the verge of being evicted from their land where they have been residing for generations.

"Out of the 600 and odd families which stand to lose their houses, 404 families are from the Christian community while the rest are from the



Hindu community," said Anup Thomas, a BJP leader who is in the forefront of the agitation along with Christian Alliance and Association for Social Action (CAASA). According to Thomas, families of the Christian and Hindu communities face threats issued by various Islamist organizations in the State.

"The Waqf Board authorities claim ownership to more than 30,000 acres of prime land in the State and the plight of

demanding that the Kerala Legislative Assembly's resolution demanding the annulment of the Centre's Waqf Amendment Act be cancelled immediately or these parties were sure to face the wrath of the people.

The Catholic Church in the State is launching various kinds of agitations all over Kerala to ensure that the land belonging to members of Christian and Hindu communities should be returned to them.

The residents of people in Munambam are unable to remit land taxes because the revenue officials refuse to accept the same citing orders issued by the Governments that ruled the State from time to time.

M A Nissar, former district judge residing in Kannur and a devotee Muslim had told The Pioneer that there were many discrepancies in the Waqf Land in the State. "The earlier they rectify the same, the better," said Nissar.

George Netto, a resident of Munambam said that because of the legal issues caused by

the Waqf Board, residents in the coastal village were not in a position to sell their own properties.

Two age-old temples, three Churches and a seminary (institution that trains wannabe Catholic priests) are housed in the village. "All these properties face uncertainty as the Waqf Board claims ownership to the land on which they stand. There never was any instance of communal discord in this village. We are all fishermen by profession," said Sukumaran, a resident.

Father James Kockavayalil, Father Jacob Rathappillil and Joji Chirayil, leading the agitation against the claims of the Waqf Board declared on Monday that they were not at all against Muslims. "We want justice to prevail. Fundamental rights should be made available to all citizens in the country and there should be no discrimination based on caste or religion," they said in statements issued from Kothamangalam and Changanacherry.

## Tej Pratap files nomination, accompanied by Yadav family

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

The political scene in Uttar Pradesh has intensified as on Monday Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Tej Pratap Yadav filed his nomination from the Karhal assembly constituency in Mainpuri where bye-elections are due on November 13. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, accompanied by Dimple Yadav, Professor Ram Gopal Yadav, Shivpal Yadav, and Dharmendra Yadav, was present during the nomination process.

Addressing the media after Tej Pratap's nomination, Akhilesh Yadav took a dig at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accusing it of orchestrating riots in Bahraich to gain political mileage. "BJP deliberately caused riots so that they could benefit politically. When questions are asked of the government, they remain silent," he said.

Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of trying to undermine the SP's prospects in the by-election by spreading fear. He alleged that the BJP was now avoiding any mention of the People's Democratic Alliance (PDA). "The BJP is scared of



PDA in the by-election. Now, they have even forgotten to mention PDA," he said adding, "BJP has hatched this conspiracy to avoid answering questions and gain political advantage."

He further criticized media coverage, highlighting that channels were focusing on trivial matters like the size of Tej Pratap's tilak rather than discussing development issues. "The BJP has worked to hinder the development of the social-

ists," he said. He refrained from directly addressing the status of the SP's alliance with Congress, stating only that discussions are ongoing. Tej Pratap Yadav is contesting from the Karhal assembly seat, a constituency that has been a traditional stronghold for the SP. Akhilesh Yadav expressed confidence that Tej Pratap would win with a significant majority, noting that the people of Mainpuri have always stood by the Samajwadi

Party and its founder, the late Mulayam Singh Yadav. "The people of Karhal have always chosen the Samajwadi Party. This time, there will be more support than before, leading to a historic result in the election," he said.

The SP chief's critique extended beyond the immediate electoral context to broader issues like agricultural policies and cybercrime. He emphasized that the BJP government's promises of dou-

bling farmers' incomes remain unfulfilled. "Development packages are often announced, but farmers are not getting fair prices for their crops. This is a big question that the government needs to answer," he said. He also raised concerns over the increasing incidents of cybercrime in Uttar Pradesh, attributing it to the misuse of technology. Citing international examples, he pointed out, "Countries like Germany have declared the use of many technical devices unconstitutional, but such incidents are increasing rapidly in India. This is a matter of concern, and the government should address it," Professor Ram Gopal Yadav, in his remarks, expressed confidence in a one-sided victory for SP in Karhal, stating, "BJP should make arrangements to save its deposit."

He referenced BJP's previous claim of winning all 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state and suggested that the ruling party is struggling in the Karhal party. Tej Pratap Yadav, the SP candidate, added that the BJP has yet to finalize a candidate to contest against him in Karhal, signaling what he described as a lack of preparedness on their part.

## Complete recruitment of 78,000 police personnel ahead of Assembly polls: Nitish Kumar tells DGP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Monday directed DGP Alok Raj to complete the process for the recruitment of 78,000 police personnel ahead of the assembly elections in the state due next year.

Speaking at a function where appointment letters were handed to 1,239 newly recruited sub-inspectors, Kumar said his government was planning to double the sanctioned strength of the police force to 2.29 lakh. While addressing the gathering, he turned towards the DGP with folded hands and said, "I am telling you, complete the process for the recruitment of 78,000 police personnel in the next six months. There is an assembly election in the state next year... Therefore, recruitment should be completed in six months."

"The current strength of the Bihar Police is 1.10 lakh. We have to increase it and make it 2.29 lakh. The recruitment



process of 21,000 police personnel is going on. Formalities have also been completed for the recruitment of another 20,000 police personnel. The remaining 78,000 personnel should be recruited in the coming six months," he added. Kumar said it has to be ensured that 35 per cent of women are recruited into the force.

Stating that the number of women in the police force has increased to about 30,000, he claimed that no other state has so many women personnel. "Appointment of woman police officers is making things easier for women com-

plainants," the CM said, maintaining that the law and order situation has improved in the state.

"The work of the police stations has been divided into two parts -- investigation and law and order, so that the work can be executed quickly and in a better manner. People know about the law and order situation in the state before 2005. It was not good. Now, people remain out of their homes till late at night and do their work fearlessly," he said. Kumar said he had promised 10 lakh jobs in 2020, and his government has so far given employment to 7.16 lakh people.

He said the police force has an important role in making the state developed. "Bihar Police should continue to discharge its responsibilities in a better way. I once again congratulate all the newly appointed sub-inspectors of police and wish them all the best for the future and hope that they will perform their responsibilities well," he said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Dastardly strike

As terrorists kill seven people in Central Kashmir, concerns grow over the effectiveness of security measures

A disturbing pattern of targeted violence has resurfaced in Jammu and Kashmir, with seven killed in a cowardly terrorist attack. The people killed were part of the construction team working on the Z-Morh tunnel, which connects Gagangir to Sonamarg in Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district. Yet another bomb blast occurred in the capital though no one was injured, which raises concerns about potential coordination between terrorist groups and the spread of violence beyond the Valley. While there is no direct evidence linking the incidents, the possibility of a broader security threat cannot be ignored. This latest attack is part of a troubling trend of escalating violence against migrant workers in the region, marking the fifth such incident this year. The recent killings underscore a persistent threat to life in Kashmir. This latest tragedy follows a series of deadly incidents in the Valley. The recent wave of terrorist attacks exposes critical vulnerability of security apparatus. While authorities, including J and K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah



and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, have condemned these acts and pledged to bring the perpetrators to justice, the recurrent nature of these attacks reveals deeper challenges in counter-terrorism measures and security protocols. The targeted nature of these attacks suggests a deliberate strategy to instill fear among migrant workers and disrupt ongoing development projects. By targeting migrant labourers involved in infrastructure work, terrorists aim to deter economic activities that could stabilise the region. These incidents not only hamper development but also erode the confidence of workers who play a crucial role in key infrastructure projects. Moreover, the attacks signify a broader

attempt to undermine the relative peace that has been maintained in recent years. Despite heightened security measures and the presence of the military in sensitive areas, the perpetrators have managed to carry out attacks on civilians, highlighting significant intelligence gaps and the ability of militants to exploit weaknesses in the security grid to target rather easy groups. A comprehensive review of security measures in Jammu and Kashmir is urgently needed. While military action remains essential, it needs to be complemented by robust intelligence gathering, better coordination between different security agencies and community-based approaches to countering extremist elements. The current situation also points to the need for upgrading the security apparatus around camps housing migrant workers and ensuring that projects with a high number of migrant labourers receive adequate protection. Another pressing issue is the socio-political narrative surrounding such incidents. There is a need for a unified political strategy that addresses not only the immediate security concerns but also the long-term socio-economic challenges that contribute to unrest. Investing in local economic opportunities, countering extremist ideologies through educational initiatives and strengthening intelligence network can make a lot of difference.

### PICTALK



A potter arranges freshly-made 'diyas' (earthen lamps) ahead of the Diwali festival, in Hyderabad

# Global Hunger Index: Misleading metrics

The accuracy and intent behind GHI rankings are suspect. Does the GHI truly reflect India's reality, or is it a motivated attempt to malign India's image?



SANTHOSH MATHEW

The recent Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, which places India at a dismal 105th position out of 127 countries, has raised eyebrows and sparked considerable debate. While hunger and malnutrition remain pressing global issues, the methodology and conclusions of the GHI, co-authored by two non-governmental organisations—Irish-based Concern Worldwide and German Welthungerhilfe—have drawn criticism, particularly from the Indian government and sections of society.

There is a growing concern that such reports may not just reflect statistics but also carry political and geopolitical undertones aimed at tarnishing India's image on the world stage. The GHI is based on four key indicators: the prevalence of undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting, and child mortality. The scores from these factors are compiled to place countries on a scale from zero (no hunger) to 100 (extreme hunger), with countries scoring closer to zero seen as having little or no hunger issues. India's score of 27.3 puts it in the "serious" hunger category, alongside 42 other countries. Critics of the GHI have raised several concerns about the methodology used in calculating India's score.

Firstly, the reliance on child mortality and child stunting indicators as primary components of the hunger index is problematic. India is a country with a large population, and while child malnutrition is a valid concern, this issue is not unique to India but rather shared by other developing countries. By focusing heavily on this aspect, the report seems to disproportionately penalise India. Additionally, the GHI report uses outdated data from global sources such as the World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). India, like many countries, has been undergoing significant improvements in food security through government initiatives such as the National Food Security Act, the Midday Meal Scheme, and public distribution system reforms. However, these efforts do not



seem to be adequately represented in the data used for the GHI. Many believe that the Global Hunger Index is not just about numbers but also about shaping narratives. By positioning India in such a negative light, the report seems to overshadow the country's genuine achievements. India's economy is among the fastest-growing in the world, and its agricultural output has been consistently high. The country's food production is more than sufficient to meet the needs of its population. India has become a net exporter of food grains and has successfully launched programs to improve access to food for its vast population. Given this backdrop, how can India be ranked lower than countries facing severe internal strife, economic collapse and war, such as Afghanistan or even smaller nations like Bangladesh and Nepal?

It's essential to question the intentions behind these rankings. Are they an honest reflection of hunger, or do they serve other interests? Reports like the Global Hunger Index can have far-reaching consequences, not just for the countries they assess but also for global perceptions. The fact that the organisations behind the GHI—Concern Worldwide (Irish) and Welthungerhilfe (German)—hail from Western countries has not gone unnoticed. It raises the question of whether the



THE RELIANCE ON CHILD MORTALITY AND CHILD STUNTING INDICATORS AS PRIMARY COMPONENTS OF THE HUNGER INDEX IS PROBLEMATIC. INDIA IS A COUNTRY WITH A LARGE POPULATION, AND WHILE CHILD MALNUTRITION IS A VALID CONCERN, THIS ISSUE IS NOT UNIQUE TO INDIA

index is truly impartial or if it subtly reflects geopolitical biases. India has made significant strides in addressing hunger and malnutrition, but it seems that these efforts are often ignored or underplayed by such indices. For instance, the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, which provided free food grains to over 80 crore people during the COVID-19 pandemic, is one of the world's largest food security initiatives. The fact that India could provide this level of support during a global crisis contradicts the narrative of widespread hunger and undernourishment. To deny that hunger exists in India would be dishonest, but the situation is far more complex than a single ranking can capture. Hunger is not a static issue; it is deeply intertwined with poverty, access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The Indian government has been tackling these root causes of hunger through a multi-pronged approach that includes social welfare schemes, employment generation programmes like MGNREGA, and nutrition programmes targeted at women and children. Programmes such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) aim to provide supplementary nutrition to millions of pregnant and lactating women, along with children under six years of age.

Meanwhile, the Midday Meal Scheme, which serves nutritious meals to school children, has had a significant impact on reducing malnutrition. Despite these efforts, it is undeniable that India still faces challenges. The legacy of poverty, the vast size and population of the country, and regional disparities make it difficult to eliminate hunger overnight. The concerns raised by the Indian government about the Global Hunger Index are not without merit. The index, while claiming to provide an objective measure of hunger, fails to capture the ground realities of individual nations. India, being the second-most populous country in the world, is bound to face issues that smaller nations with more homogeneous populations do not. By painting India as a country where hunger is rampant, the GHI risks creating a false narrative that undermines the substantial progress made by the country. It also risks discouraging the efforts of those working tirelessly on the ground to ensure that no one goes to bed hungry.

What is needed is not biased rankings or politically motivated reports but genuine collaboration between nations to tackle the global hunger crisis. As we reflect on the GHI, one thing is clear: statistics alone do not tell the whole story.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### OMAR ADVOCATES STATEHOOD

Madam — Aprosop of 'We will not give Kashmir' (October 20), the demand of the newly elected government of J and K under Omar Abdullah for full statehood is not at divergence with the vow of the Modi government on the floor of the Parliament for granting the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. The only difference is the time factor looking at the highly volatile and inflammable borders infested with Pakistan-sponsored terrorists and Pakistan's propaganda against India on all international platforms. Omar Abdullah government should not vie to show down with the Centre under the political pressure of those who lost elections and whom people rejected in Assembly elections. The National Conference, while keeping Congress at bay, has a better opportunity of coordination with the Modi government for betterment and all-round growth of the State as Congress has turned itself into a sworn enemy of PM Modi and is prone to confrontation with him. People have elected the National Conference for development, education, health, industry and job creation, not for confrontation with the Centre. Terrorism is the biggest threat to the State for destabilising it, and it comes from across the border. Since the Indian army and paramilitary forces are well equipped to combat terrorism and neutralise the terrorists, the State government should restrict itself to the state administration.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

### INDIA'S HUNGER CHALLENGE

Madam — The 2024 Global Hunger Index report, in which India ranks 105 among 127 countries, must not be ignored. The nutrition indicators for children under 5 years show that 1 out of 3 children (35.5 per cent) is a victim of stunting. Now, how can a country compete with others when the growth of more than one third of its future workforce has been stunted for not getting enough food to eat? A study says that

## Mitigate climate Change



Climate change refers to a long-term shift in temperature and weather conditions. These shifts may be natural but since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change. Burning coal, oil and gas to generate electricity and heat or to make goods like cement, steel and electronics produces carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that pollute the air to

a large extent. As temperature rises, more moisture evaporates, which exacerbates extreme rainfall and flooding causes more destructive storms. Climate change also changes water availability, making it scarcer in more regions.

According to the Climate Change Act 2017, local bodies must consider climate change when preparing their municipal health and wellbeing plan. Local bodies must raise awareness about climate change and how to adopt and mitigate its effects. They must encourage electric vehicles within city limits. Establishing minimum energy for housing infrastructure and renewable energy by creating ordinances and bylaws to help the community adopt climate change is the urgent work of the urban local bodies.

P Victor Selvaraj | Tirunelveli

many gig workers in India have to work for 10 to 14 hours daily for their employers to earn less than Rs 10,000 per month. While overwork damages their health, the poor wage makes their children and family members compromise on food intake.

This is nothing but exploitation. The Centre should allocate more funds for introducing breakfast in addition to the midday meal for all government and aided schools from the nursery level. It is highly commendable that some states and union territories provide additional items such as milk, eggs, and fruits to students from their own resources. But why should not the centre itself allocate the funds for the same for giving those nutritious food items to students all over the country? Otherwise, students of all the states in India will not get those additional, nutritious food items.

Sujit De | Kolkata

### KIWIS STUN INDIA

Madam — It's double the joy of winning overseas and certainly for New Zealand,

this victory is so special since they won a test after 36 years to claim 1-0 up in this series at Bengaluru. When Indians were dismissed for a paltry 46 in the first inning, the hope of skipper Rohit Sharma was diminished, but the ray of hope was enlightened by the scintillating 150 by young Sarfaraz Khan along with the swashbuckling knock of 99 from Rishab Pant in the second inning.

Though the Indian scored 462, the later order failed to capitalise on their complacent batting. A target of 107 for the Kiwis to chase became a customary one and Rachin Ravindra's high-powered 134 in the first and an unbeaten 39 in the second innings brought the Kiwis a comfortable win at the end. The gesture from Ravindra's father came by way of his thanksgiving to CSK Academy, where Ravindra took his week-long practice just before this series is worth observing for this young gun's success.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## The quiet struggles and shifting realities of ageing

Having left the traditional joint family behind, we now face loneliness and the stark realities of ageing in a world that moves rather fast



SANJAY CHANDRA

Recently, I sat sipping my cup of tea in quiet contemplation as life moved around me. Unbidden, a strange thought struck me. In my younger days, I often felt that the old were more rigid in their approach. I am in my mid-sixties. I still judge those older than me. In the olden days, in my age, I would have been expected to move out of the household to spend time in quiet meditation.

Not any longer. We continue to enjoy the worldly pleasures of life, with the added baggage of rigidity in attitude. We are more self-centred. There are many like me in the age group that we call seniors. I did not have to look far to seek reasons for these changes. I was in the hospital a few months back attending to the admission and discharge formalities for my father. I was told it was essential for an attendant to be present to sign various documents at different stages of the hospitalisation. I do not know if these are mandated rules or if hospitals do this to comply with



medico-legal requirements. These have serious implications for many ailing single seniors with children in distant lands.

We do not contemplate a life of dependence on others when we are young. Having led a life on our terms for decades, it is difficult to adjust to a life with rules not set by us. We belong to the generation that has moved out of the age-old joint family milieu to set up unit families. The interaction with even the immediate family is limited to meeting at festivals. One gets to meet the extended family only during family weddings, busy as they are in the daily grind of their units. It is not surprising that we now find ourselves at a crossroads. The young have their own lives and cannot be expected

to be available for each ache and pain. A few years back I met a younger acquaintance over coffee. The seniors within his community encouraged young professionals to join the governing body of the community welfare association extending unconditional support. As things settled, the young lot no longer needed to consult the old for each decision. The seniors felt rebuffed, and relationships soured. I recently flew with a medical professional who established a thriving chain of pathology clinics. Approaching 60, he has sold his business. He is now working towards establishing old age homes for the seniors.

I was apprehensive because of the stigma attached to these facilities. The old feel a sense of abandonment; the young feel guilty. To face these challenges, he is starting daycare centres for seniors, to spend a few hours engaged in activities of their choice, with adequate medical facilities available. As my medical friend expounded, the

major challenge for the old is loneliness resulting in inadequate communication, which in time may lead to dementia. I would have attributed obsession with self to insecurities over the advancing age, had I not witnessed the same even in the young. A feeling of inadequacy can strike anyone irrespective of age. We are yet to evolve into a society that respects and cares for all. It is the responsibility of each member of the community to help others feel loved and cherished. American author and motivational speaker, Felice Buscaglia, known as 'Dr Love', said, "It is not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something. May I suggest that it be creating joy for others, sharing what we have for the betterment of personkind, bringing hope to the lost and love to the lonely."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE FEAR OF LOSS AND THE QUEST FOR INNER PEACE

Accepting life's impermanence may be the key to transcending fear



RAVI VALLURI

Humans are intrinsically fearful of loss. Misplacement can assume several dimensions. Say mislaying of property, wealth, recognition, position, power, pelf, health and most importantly, life. John's (name changed) steely voice suddenly trembled and quivered as he answered the pretentious cell phone. Rachel (name changed), his daughter had met with a grievous car crash and was wheeled into the ICU of an estimable hospital. Death is the action or fact of dying or being killed, the end of life of a person or an organism. Several years ago, a Japanese warrior was captured by his adversaries and was confined to a dungeon. That fateful night he tossed and turned restlessly and was unable to sleep, fearing the following day when he would be interrogated, tortured and eventually executed. He was staring death in its face. Then suddenly he remembered the priceless words of his Zen Master: "Tomorrow is not real. It is an illusion. The only reality is now." Heeding these esoteric words, the warrior overcame the exacting condition he was encountering and soon his mind became tranquil and he fell asleep. Suffering and fear arise in our minds when humans confront ailment or impending death. No one wishes to pass from being to non-being.

The credo of the human mind is the desire to remain eternally immortal. Millions of cells in the human body perish and are regenerated. But we are not mindful or wakeful of this reality. Do humans compose dirges or elegies like Catullus or Propertius for the dead cells? Or do we carouse and indulge in delirium on the birth of new cells and recite 'Happy Birthday'



songs? "No one wants to die. Even the people who want to go to heaven do not want to die to get there! And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it." Be it Rachel or the Japanese warrior no one has ever attained perpetuity or everlastingness; however bare-knuckled a person may be, he remains a glass jaw to the reality.

Yet youngsters today cannonaded by gizmos and technology become weary and bored of life at the young ages of twenty, thirty and hotfoot to snuff out their lives. Life is indeed holy and hallowed, too valuable and will remain a mystery that should not be recklessly given up. Yet there is no covenant or magic potion which guarantees deathlessness. Identifying and unravelling this mystery has confronted the minds of spiritualists, religious congregations and those of scientists and technocrats alike. A Zen Master was unwell and desired to cast away his body. His pupils implored him that he ought to live longer and disseminate the profound knowledge. It so happened that one disciple remarked, "Whether it is life or death, let it be." The Master was ecstatic with the response and passed away. "Let it be" is much more than a mere aphorism, it is a state of mind.

Our shastras impress that the human mind is influenced by place, time, food, past impressions and associations and the actions of individuals. The footprints bear both efficacious and antipathetic impacts on the human mind. Humans are enslaved by the above-mentioned factors and habits and, as a result, involuntarily superintendents our perceptions, attitudes and behaviour.

And over a period if we are not aware of these negative emotions they compound into anxiety, anger, aggression, covetousness, low self-esteem, and fear. Knowledge about the impermanence of life and variegated dimensions can be gained only through regular practice of pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, meditation, or mindful observation of breath. This is the secret and the only truth.

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

## Unlocking the full potential of GatiShakti



UTTAM GUPTA

The PM GatiShakti initiative is revolutionising India's infrastructure by integrating digital planning tools to expedite project completion and improve multimodal connectivity

According to the Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Amardeep Singh Bhatia, as many as 208 big-ticket infrastructure projects including roads (101), railways (73), urban development (12) and oil and gas (4) worth Rs 1539,000 crore have been recommended for approval under the PM GatiShakti initiative so far. These projects have been recommended by an inter-ministerial group known as the Network Planning Group (NPG) constituted under the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan (NMP). Launched in October 2021, the PM Gati Shakti NMP is a transformative Rs 100 lakh crore initiative aimed at revolutionising the infrastructure in India over the next five years.

Its vision is to create a world-class integrated infrastructure that improves the ease of living, boosts economic growth and makes Indian businesses more competitive. It does so by expediting project completion, reducing timelines, enhancing multimodal connectivity, boosting efficiency across sectors, benefiting logistics (a jargon for handling, storage and transportation) creating jobs and fostering innovation. How does it work? The PM GatiShakti NMP has been developed as a Digital Master Planning tool. It works on a dynamic Geographic Information System (GIS) platform wherein data on specific action plans of all the 16 Ministries/Departments dealing with infrastructure sectors as well as of the States have been incorporated within a comprehensive database.

The NMP portal has over 1,600 layers of geospatial data, showing all physical and social infrastructure of an area viz land, ports, forests, and highways and so on. The NMP revolves around seven primary sectors that are fundamental to economic growth and ensuring seamless connectivity. These sectors are roads, railways, ports, airports, mass transport, waterways and logistics infrastructure.

These are further supported and complemented by sectors like energy (all fuels such as petrol, diesel, ATF, natural gas and power etc) transmission, IT communication, bulk water and sewerage, and social infrastructure. The inter-ministerial NPG has representations from the connectivity infrastructure ministries/departments, involving their heads of network planning division to ensure unified planning and integration of the proposals.

The NPG meets every fortnight and appraises infra projects to ensure multi-modality (a term used to connote several different modes of transportation to get cargo from the factory/port/warehouse to a client's front door), synchronisation of efforts, and comprehensive development in and around the project location. All logistics and connectivity infrastructure projects worth over Rs 500 crore are routed through the NPG. The NPG's approval is required even before making a DPR (Detailed Project Report) at the planning stage. Thereafter, the project follows the normal procedure of approval by the Public Investment Board (PIB) or Department of



AS MANY AS 156 GAPS IN INFRASTRUCTURE TO PORTS AND FOR MOVEMENT OF BULK COMMODITIES LIKE COAL, CEMENT, FERTILIZERS AND FOOD GRAINS, HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR INTERVENTION UNDER THE PM GATI SHAKTI INITIATIVE

Expenditure under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Cabinet.

Put simply, NMP provides on a centralised portal, a 360-degree view of all the existing projects/initiatives, those under implementation as well as projects under planning stage across all ministries and departments and offers visibility into all critical data relevant to efficient planning and execution. It helps in the identification of critical gaps in infrastructure, helping to select the most efficient routes for transportation, reducing costs, and minimising delays.

As many as 156 gaps in infrastructure to ports and for movement of bulk commodities like coal, cement, fertilisers and food grains, have been identified for intervention under the PM GatiShakti initiative.

The plan also helps in prioritising projects more effectively by leveraging cross-sector interactions, ensuring that the ministries work in harmony to align the projects and allocate resources optimally - based on national priorities - avoiding duplication and redundancies.

The upfront approval by the NPG even before the ministry prepares the DPR can help it in making the RIGHT choices, prevent delays and avoid colossal wastage of resources that were germane to the earlier dispensations when the ministries and departments were working in silos - in an uncoordinated manner - unaware of the happenings and work in progress in other departments and bereft of the crucial data on KEY parameters. The PM GatiShakti is a robust system working on real time basis in a dynamic framework to guide project planning and execution (monitoring through satellite imagery ensures that the ministries can track progress and make necessary

adjustments to keep projects on schedule).

The phenomenal increase in the capacity in all crucial areas such as ports, airports, railways, highways, roads and so on is a testament to the success of efforts made under PM GatiShakti.

But, we have a long way to go. The target of Rs 100 lakh crore investment for building the infrastructure over five years was set by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her maiden Budget for 2019-20 (out of this, 39 per cent or Rs 3900,000 crore was to come from the Centre and an equal amount from States and the balance Rs 2200,000 crore from the private sector).

Against this, the investment covered under PM GatiShakti is Rs 1539,000 crore which is just about 15 percent. Even when we take this as a proportion of the investment commitment by the Centre (presumably all projects under PM GatiShakti are centrally sponsored), this works out to 40 per cent. As for the States, they are far behind in meeting their overall investment target of Rs 3900,000 crore.

And, very few of them such as Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat have boarded the PM GatiShakti platform.

The platform by ensuring visibility, identification of bottlenecks and better coordination can help expedite approvals but it can't be a substitute. The approvals have to be given by the concerned authorities at the central and State levels. Here, projects face long delays especially when it comes to getting environmental and land clearances.

Local protests exacerbate the delays. 'Working in silos' syndrome doesn't go away just because Modi has given a platform to the bureaucrats in various Ministries to sit together and thrash out issues. Sticking to their stance, especial-

ly when it comes to staking their claim to resources (such conflicts are seen more in major projects like roads and railways) often leads to delays. Further, a lack of coordination with the states, as seen in the Sagarmala and Bharatmala projects, has led to slower progress.

Outdated or incomplete data is a major bottleneck. For instance, while land records are digitised in 13 states, the rest lag. This hampers the implementation of projects in states where land records are not digitised as well as roads/highways projects, power transmission lines, and oil and gas pipelines passing through these states.

Even as the PM GatiShakti platform allows for real-time tracking, the authorities don't always make project updates regular, which delays completion. This is particularly true of rural road projects in many districts leading to slow progress.

The investment by the private sector is nowhere near the target of Rs 2200,000 crore set by Sitharaman. In the roads/highways sector, even as the government has asked private players to come under public-private partnerships (PPPs) mode, the latter's response isn't encouraging leaving it to the former to take on the load.

The bottlenecks lead to continuing project delays and cost overruns which cause high tariff/service charges across all sectors highways, railways, ports, airports, power transmission, fuel transportation etc.

These come in the way of making Indian businesses more competitive and ease of living for the common man. All Stakeholders particularly the States should work to surmount the bottlenecks to enable PM GatiShakti to deliver its full potential.

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

## How India's workforce can benefit from the world's growing demand

Tapping into this opportunity requires a systematic approach to connect Indian talent with international employers

India's labour force is one of its greatest assets, with millions of skilled workers spread across various industries, including healthcare, construction, information technology and engineering. However, despite this abundance of talent, many of these workers struggle to find suitable employment within the country. The global labour market, on the other hand, is increasingly facing shortages in these same sectors. Bridging this gap has been a significant challenge.

Global Skill Shortage and Demand for Indian Talent over the past decade, countries across Europe, the Middle East, and parts of Asia have been facing critical shortages in skilled labour. Factors like ageing popula-



ADITI BANERJEE

tions, changing work preferences, and evolving technological needs have driven these regions to seek out talent from countries like India. Healthcare, construction, IT, and logistics are some of the industries experiencing the most pressing shortages. We need to recognise this demand early on and respond by connecting skilled Indian professionals with global employers. This will help in aligning the

skill sets of Indian workers with international standards and job requirements, offering thousands secure employment overseas.

A Systematic Approach to Global Mobilisation. The workforce mobilization model should ensure that the process is smooth and transparent for both the workers and the employers. The organisation focuses on several key stages: **Talent and Skill Gaps:** We should conduct thorough assessments of candidates, ensuring they meet international job requirements. By collaborating with top training institutes, they also provide upskilling opportunities to candidates who need it. **Job Matching:** With established relationships with employers in countries such as

Germany, Canada, and the UAE, organisations can ensure that candidates are placed in roles that match their qualifications and aspirations.

**Navigating Complexities:** Overseas job placement is fraught with regulatory hurdles, but offering complete support with visas, documentation, and legal compliance, ensures candidates can focus on building their careers without administrative delays.

**Supporting Worker Welfare:** The organisation provides post-placement assistance, offering support with relocation and helping candidates adjust to new cultural environments. This ensures long-term success for workers abroad. Shaping the Industry's Future Beyond individual place-



ments, the organisation's work is in shaping the broader landscape of international labour migration. There has to be a system for fair recruitment practices and the protection of workers' rights. This is critical in an industry that is often plagued by stories of worker exploitation and unethical recruitment agencies. A transparent process ensures that workers are fully informed of the terms of their

contracts before they travel abroad. This approach not only safeguards the interests of Indian workers but also builds trust with global employers. The global demand for skilled labour is at an all-time high, and India has the talent to meet this need. Many organisations have pitched in to fill this gap. 'Magic Billion' creates dignified, well-paying employment opportunities for Indian workers overseas. Since starting in 2018, it has facilitated over 4,000 Indian workers being placed in global roles. It is just not helping individuals find jobs; we're building sustainable careers that elevate both the worker and their families.

**Women Empowerment:** A particularly noteworthy aspect of such an organisation's work

is its focus on women and young professionals. The global job market offers unique opportunities for these groups, particularly in industries like healthcare and hospitality. Targeted programs need to aim at empowering women to enter these fields and secure high-paying jobs abroad. This is especially significant in a country like India, where barriers to women's employment are still prevalent in many sectors. The organisation's efforts to provide training and certification for nursing professionals, for example, have opened up opportunities for hundreds of women to work in countries where there is a growing demand for healthcare workers. This not only benefits the individual but also creates ripple effects

for their families and communities.

**Economic Benefits:** India's skilled labour force is not only contributing to the economies of the countries where they work but also bringing significant benefits to India itself. Remittances sent home by overseas workers are a major source of foreign exchange and play a crucial role in the economic development. By placing workers in global jobs, we can help alleviate some of the domestic unemployment pressures. This is especially important for sectors like construction where there is a surplus of skilled labour in India.

(The writer is CEO & Co-Founder of Magic Billion; views are personal)

# Lebanon assesses damage after wave of Israeli strikes on Hezbollah-run financial institution

AP ■ BEIRUT

Lebanese were surveying the damage on Monday after overnight Israeli strikes hit nearly a dozen branches of a Hezbollah-run financial institution that Israel says is used to fund attacks but where many ordinary people keep their savings. The strikes targeted Al-Qard Al-Hassan branches in the southern neighbourhoods of Beirut, across southern Lebanon and in the Bekaa, where Hezbollah has a strong presence. One strike flattened a nine-story building with a branch inside it. Smoke was still rising from several locations on Monday and bulldozers were removing the debris. The Israeli military had issued evacuation warnings ahead of

the strikes, and there were no reports of casualties. Israel invaded Lebanon earlier this month, saying it aims to push Hezbollah back from the border after more than a year of rocket, missile and drone attacks that began after Palestinian Hamas militants launched their surprise October 7, 2023, attack into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Israeli airstrikes have pounded large areas of Lebanon for weeks, forcing over a million people to flee their homes. Avichay Adraee, the Arabic language spokesman for the Israeli military, said warplanes targeted several locations "used to store money for the military arm of Hezbollah", including Al-Qard Al-Hassan, which he said finances arms purchases and is used to pay Hezbollah fighters.

He said Hezbollah stores hundreds of millions of dollars in the branches, without providing evidence, and that the strikes were aimed at preventing the group from rearming. In a series of tweets late Sunday, the Israeli military released maps noting the locations of the branches it planned to target, asking residents nearby to evacuate. Thousands of people fled, jamming streets in the capital. Local Lebanese TV networks sought to reassure the public that areas in central Beirut were not listed as targets after a map issued by the Israeli military indicated it would target an upscale mall that was incorrectly labelled as the location of a branch. The Israeli military did not target the site. The institution, which has more than 30 branches across Lebanon, tried to reassure cus-

tomers, saying it had evacuated all its branches and relocated gold and other deposits to safe areas. The registered non-profit, sanctioned by the United States and Saudi Arabia, has long served as an alternative to Lebanon's banks, which have imposed restrictions in the face of a severe financial crisis that began in 2019. Its name in Arabic means "the benevolent loan", and Hezbollah has used it to entrench its support among the Shiite population in a country where state and financial institutions have failed in recent years. Still, many of its customers are civilians unaffiliated with Hezbollah. The strikes came after US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin called civilian casualties in Lebanon "far too high" in the Israel-Hezbollah war, and

urged Israel to scale back some strikes, especially in and around Beirut. In a separate development, the Israeli military apologised for a strike on Sunday in southern Lebanon that killed three Lebanese army soldiers. It said it targeted a vehicle in an area that Hezbollah had recently used for attacks without realising it belonged to the Lebanese military. The military said it is "not operating against the Lebanese Army and apologises for these unwanted circumstances". Lebanon's army is a respected institution within the country, but it is not powerful enough to impose its will on Hezbollah or defend Lebanon from Israel's invasion. The army has largely kept to the sidelines as Israel and Hezbollah have traded blows over the past year.



Rescue workers use a bulldozer to remove rubble of destroyed buildings at the site of an Israeli airstrike on Sunday night that hit several branches of the Hezbollah-run Qard al-Hassan Association in Beirut's southern suburb, Lebanon, on Monday. AP/PTI

# BRICS remains a positive, stable force: China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Ahead of the BRICS summit in Russia, China on Monday said the bloc representing emerging economies has remained a positive and stable force committed to upholding multilateralism. The summit of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), which now has expanded with five additional members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, will be held in the Russian city of Kazan from October 22 to 24. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping along with other leaders are due to attend it. "Let me reaffirm that this year marks the beginning of greater BRICS cooperation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing here, elaborating on China's view of the BRICS. This summit is the first one after the expansion of BRICS, which draws widespread attention from

the international community, he said. "Since its founding, BRICS has followed the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation, remained true to its founding purpose of seeking strength through solidarity, stayed committed to upholding multilateralism and become a positive and stable force for good in international affairs," he said. During this summit, President Xi Jinping will have in-depth exchanges of views with other leaders on the international landscape, the BRICS practical cooperation, the development of the BRICS mechanism and important issues of mutual interest, he said. "China stands ready to work with other parties to strive for the steady and sustained development of greater BRICS cooperation, open a new era for the Global South to seek strength through solidarity and jointly promote world peace and development," he said.

Meanwhile, China's Foreign Ministry on Monday parried questions on a possible meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Russia this week. "We will keep you posted if anything comes up," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said while replying to a question at a media briefing here. Both Modi and Xi are attending the BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, which begins Tuesday. The ties between India and China nosedived following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. China last Friday announced that Xi will attend the BRICS Summit in Russia, where he will work with other parties to open a new era for the Global South to seek strength through solidarity. BRICS originally consisted of Brazil, Russia, India, China and

South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have been admitted as new members. The theme of this year's Summit is Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security. The spokesperson of the Ministry, Mao Ning, said that Xi will attend small-group and large-group meetings, BRICS Plus Dialogue and deliver important addresses. Xi will also have in-depth exchanges with other leaders on the international landscape, the BRICS practical cooperation, the development of the BRICS mechanism and important issues of mutual interest, she said. "China stands ready to work with other parties to strive for the steady and sustained development of greater BRICS cooperation, open a new era for the Global South to seek strength through solidarity and jointly promote world peace and development," she said.

# Pak limits Chief Justice's term to 3 years

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Following an overnight debate, Pakistan's National Assembly passed the controversial judicial amendment bill early on Monday, capping the chief justice's tenure to three years. The National Assembly passed the 26th Constitution Amendment Bill, which the opposition alleges is aimed at watering down the powers of the independent judiciary, at 5 am with 225 members in the 336-member house supporting the bill. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Sunni-Ittehad Council (SIC) opposed the amendment, but six independent members who held their seats with the support of the PTI supported the bill. The government needed 224 votes to pass the amendment. The Senate on Sunday night voted 65-4 to approve the amendment with the required two-thirds majority. The ruling coalition needed the support of 64 members in the upper house of the parliament. Following its passage in both Houses of Parliament, the

Constitution (Twenty-Sixth Amendment) Act, 2024 will now be sent to the president for assent under Article 75 of Pakistan's Constitution and become law after his signatures. The bill, comprising a set of constitutional amendments, including a special commission to appoint a chief justice out of three senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, was approved by the cabinet on Sunday with a consensus among the ruling coalition partners. Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar who presented the bill in the Senate said the 'new-face' commission would consist of the Chief Justice, four senior-most Supreme Court judges, two senators and two national assembly members — one of each from the opposition. He said the changes would help expedite the dispensation of justice by the apex court. The amendment blocked the automatic rise of the senior-most Supreme Court judge to the post of chief justice after the incumbent CJP retired. Speaker Ayaz Sadiq presided over the proceedings in the

National Assembly. According to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has signed the advice for President Asif Ali Zardari to ratify the 26th constitutional amendment. Following the bill's passage, Shehbaz said in the parliament: "Today's amendment, the 26th, is not just an amendment, but an example of national solidarity and consensus. A new sun will rise, emanating across the nation." The opposition alleged the entire exercise was aimed at blocking Justice Mansoor Ali Shah's appointment from becoming the chief justice on the retirement of current CJP Qazi Faez Isa on October 25. PTI leader Hammad Azhar termed the amendment "a death blow to the independence of the judiciary", and explained how giving the power to appoint judges to the apex court and high courts to the government would politicise the judiciary. Another PTI leader Salman Akram Raja called the moment the "bleakest in our parlia-

ment's history", terming it a handover of the control of the judiciary to the executive. PTI leader Ali Zafar, the first to speak in the Senate on the bill, said his party's lawmakers were being forced to vote in favour. He said his party senators were absent as they feared abduction. "It is against the law and morality that coercion is being applied to get the amendment approved," Zafar said, urging the Senate chairman not to count the vote of any PTI senator. Zafar came to the house to give his party's position despite his party saying in a statement that its political committee decided to boycott the voting process in both houses of Parliament. Pakistan People's Party chief Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, who made elaborate efforts for the passage, said the government would move forward with the amendment whether the PTI voted in favour or not. "We have waited for as long as we could, and today, under any circumstance, this work will be completed," Bilawal told the media.

# Seoul wants N Korean troops to leave Russia

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea on Monday demanded the immediate pullout of North Korean troops allegedly deployed in Russia as it summoned the Russian ambassador to protest deepening military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow. South Korea's spy agency said Friday it had confirmed that North Korea sent 1,500 special operation forces to Russia earlier this month to support Moscow's war against Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier said his government had intelligence that 10,000 North Korea soldiers were being prepared to join invading Russian forces. During a meeting with Russian Ambassador Georgy Zinoviev, Vice South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Hong Kyun "condemned in the strongest terms" North Korea's troop dispatch that he said poses "a grave secu-

urity threat" to South Korea and the international community, the South Korean Foreign Ministry said in a statement. Kim said that South Korea in collaboration with the international community will mobilise all available means to deal with an act that threatens its vital national security interests. Zinoviev replied he would relay South Korea's position to his home government, according to the South Korean statement. The Russian Embassy quote Zinoviev as saying that the Russian-North Korean cooperation is conducted in accordance with international laws and is not aimed against the security interests of South Korea. The US and NATO haven't confirmed that North Korean troops were sent to Russia. But the reports of their presence have already stoked concerns in South Korea that Russia might provide North Korea with sophisticated technologies that can sharply enhance its nuclear and missile

programs in return for the troops. North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal is a major security threat to South Korea. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un recently took steps to permanently terminate all relations with South Korea and threatened to use nuclear weapons preemptively. Some observers say South Korea will likely consider supplying weapons to Ukraine if Russian transfers of high-tech nuclear and missile technologies to North Korea are verified. South Korea has joined US-led sanctions against Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. But it hasn't directly provided arms to Kyiv, citing a longstanding policy of not supplying weapons to countries actively engaged in conflicts. Russia has earlier denied using North Korean troops in its war with Ukraine. North Korea's state media hasn't commented on the matter.

# Temple being reconstructed after 64 years in Pak's Punjab

PTI ■ LAHORE

A budget of Pakistani Rs 10 million has been allocated to re-construct a Hindu temple in the Punjab province of Pakistan, marking the first phase of restoration 64 years after it was rendered dysfunctional, a media report said on Monday. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), the federal body overseeing minority worship places in Pakistan, has started the construction of the Baoli Sahib temple in Zafarwal town of Narowal, a city on the western bank of river Ravi in Punjab, after the place of worship was rendered dysfunctional in 1960, Dawn News reported. Currently, there is no Hindu temple in Narowal district, forcing the Hindu community to perform their religious rituals at home or travel to temples in Sialkot and Lahore. Ratan Lal Arya, former president of the Pak Dharamsthan Committee, said the ETPB's control over the Baoli Sahib temple rendered it non-functional

and the Hindu community, which numbers over 1,453 in Narowal, lacked a dedicated place for worship. After the establishment of Pakistan, the Narowal district had 45 Hindu temples but all of them have over time fallen into disrepair. For the past 20 years, the Pak Dharamsthan Committee has advocated for the restoration of Baoli Sahib temple, Arya said. The government has taken steps to restore the temple to address Hindu community demands, he said. The ETPB is overseeing the construction at the four kanals of land where the boundary wall is the priority. Once completed, the temple will be handed over to the Pak Dharamsthan Committee. Shoaib Siddal, chairman of the One Man Commission of the Supreme Court, and Manzoor Masih, member of the National Commission of Human Rights, have played pivotal roles in this restoration effort.

# President Muizzu introduces UPI payment service to boost economy

PTI ■ MALE

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has taken "necessary steps" to introduce India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in the archipelago nation, slated to benefit the Maldivian economy substantially. Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system for facilitating inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. Muizzu on Sunday set up a consortium to introduce UPI in the country and appointed TradeNet Maldives Corporation Limited as its leading agency, according to a press release by the President's Office. The president also suggested the participation of the country's banks, telecom companies and fintech companies in the consortium. He "decided to take the necessary steps" on the recommen-

dation of the Cabinet, the press release said. "This move is expected to bring significant benefits to the Maldivian economy, including increased financial inclusion, improved efficiency in financial transactions, and enhanced digital infrastructure," it said. Muizzu also constituted an inter-agency coordination team comprising the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Homeland Security and Technology and the country's Monetary Authority to lead the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade in overseeing the establishment of the UPI in the Maldives. The agreement to introduce UPI in Maldives was signed during External Affairs Minister Sri Jaishankar's three-day official visit to the country in August. Earlier this month, dollar-starved Maldives floated a new foreign currency regulation,

limiting types of transactions allowed in foreign currency and imposing mandatory foreign currency exchange controls on tourism establishments and banks. The Maldivian economy appears to have taken a hit after calls to Indian tourists to avoid the picturesque island nation as a response to President Muizzu's 'India Out' campaign last year. Muizzu won the presidential election last year on an 'India out' campaign and asked New Delhi to withdraw its military personnel posted in the archipelago nation by May this year. However, Muizzu has since toned down his anti-India stance and visited India on his first state visit to the country earlier this month. Tourism is the main source of economic activity for the Maldives, contributing nearly 30 per cent of the GDP and generating more than 60 per cent of foreign exchange.

# Subianto swears in Indonesia's largest Cabinet since 1966, with 109 members

AP ■ JAKARTA

Newly inaugurated President Prabowo Subianto swore in Indonesia's largest Cabinet since 1966 on Monday, with 109 members representing his pledge for a strong government. He announced the lineup late Sunday and named his Cabinet of ministers, vice ministers and head of national agencies the "Red and White Cabinet," referring to the colours of Indonesia's flag. Subianto became the eighth president of Southeast Asia's largest economy on Sunday. The Cabinet of Subianto's predecessor, Joko Widodo, had 34 ministers and head of government agencies. Subianto's Cabinet is the largest since 1966 when Indonesia's first President Sukarno formed a lineup of 132 ministers in an extremely tense political situation after a failed 1965 coup.



Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, front centre, and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka, front row fourth from right, pose for a group photo with newly-appointed cabinet ministers after their swearing-in ceremony at Merdeka Palace in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Monday. AP/PTI

The so-called Dwikora Cabinet 2 was dismissed a month later. Subianto has said earlier that he needs a strong administration, even though analysts said that his "fat" Cabinet would bloat the bureaucracy. "I want to create a strong government that would unite our multicultural society and diverse political interests," Subianto said before inviting more than 100 people for interviews at his residence last week. "It must be a big coalition, and some will say my Cabinet is fat." The Cabinet features politicians from a coalition of seven parties who supported his victory in the February election, and figures allied with Widodo's Cabinet, who were reappointed to continue their jobs under Subianto's presidency. Analysts said the move was a political reward to Widodo for the latter's tacit support in the election. Subianto was sworn in with his

new vice president, 37-year-old Surakarta ex-Mayor Gibran Rakabuming Raka. He chose Raka, who is Widodo's son, as his running mate, with Widodo favouring Subianto over the candidate of his own former party. The former rivals became tacit allies, even though Indonesian presidents don't typically endorse candidates. Subianto was a longtime rival of the Widodo, who ran against him for the presidency twice and refused to accept his defeat on both occasions, in 2014 and 2019. But Widodo appointed Subianto as defence chief after his reelection, paving the way for an alliance despite their rival political parties. During the campaign, Subianto ran as the popular outgoing president's heir, vowing to continue signature policies like the construction of a multibillion-dollar new capital city and limits on exporting raw materials intended to boost domestic

industry. Backed by Widodo, Subianto swept to a landslide victory in February's direct presidential election on promises of policy continuity. Subianto reappointed nearly half of Widodo's Cabinet members, including Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, making her the first person to hold the ministry under three different presidents. Indrawati, 62, who has served as the executive director of the International Monetary Fund and managing director of the World Bank, is one of Indonesia's longest-serving finance ministers, having held the post for long stretches under Presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Joko Widodo. She has earned considerable respect in international circles, particularly for her reforms of the chaotic Indonesian taxation system and her role in steering

Indonesia through the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. "We regularly consulted with each other to discuss strategies for strengthening the Finance Ministry and the state finances to support his programmes," Indrawati told reporters after meeting with Subianto last week. Other ministers from Widodo's Cabinet include Interior Minister Tito Karnavian, Trade Minister Zulkifli Hasan, Energy Minister Bahli Lahadalia and State-Owned Enterprises Minister Erick Thohir. Subianto has announced an ambitious goal of increasing annual economic growth to 8% by the end of his five-year term, and embarking on an ambitious spending programme, including an increase in defence spending, hikes in civil servants' salaries, and a programme to give 83 million children free meals.



'Gives us what you stole from us,' Australian senator yells at King Charles

AN Indigenous senator told King Charles III that Australia is not his land and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the monarch is not needed as the country's head of state as the British royal visited Australia's parliament on Monday.

Opposition leader Peter Dutton, who wants to keep the British king as Australia's monarch, noted that even supporters of a republic were honoured to attend a reception for the Charles and Queen Camilla at Parliament House in the capital Canberra.

"Throughout my life, Australia's First Nations peoples have done me the great honour of sharing so generously their stories and cultures. I can only say how much my own experience has been shaped and strengthened by such traditional wisdom," Charles added.

Australian public to decide," the Buckingham Palace letter said. Earlier Monday, Charles and Camilla laid wreaths at the Australian War Memorial then shook hands with well-wishers on the second full day of their visit.

Attack on Trump was preventable, finds House panel report

The assassination attempt against former President Donald Trump at a Pennsylvania rally in July was "preventable and should not have happened," according to a bipartisan House panel that is investigating the shooting and what it calls the "stunning security failures" at the event.

Members of both the House and Senate have repeatedly questioned why the Secret Service, an agency tasked with protecting the country's top leaders, didn't do a better job of communicating with local authorities during the campaign rally, particularly when it came to securing the building and what it calls the "stunning security failures" at the event.

Moldovans secure country's path toward EU membership

Moldovans voted by a razor-thin majority in favour of securing the country's path toward European Union membership, electoral data showed Monday, following a ballot that nearly caused a major setback for the pro-Western president, who accused "criminal groups" of trying to undermine the vote.

In Brussels, the European Union's executive branch, the European Commission, said that its services had also noted Russian interference in Moldova, and it underlined its continued support for Moldova on its EU accession path.

Vietnam appoints army general as new president after turmoil

Vietnam elected Luong Cuong, a military general, as its new president on Monday, the fourth official to fill the role in 18 months. Cuong, 67, was elected by the National Assembly to replace To Lam, who remained president even after he was formally appointed as the general secretary of the ruling Communist Party in August.

lence, said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow in the Vietnam Studies Programme at Singapore's ISEAS—Yusof Ishak Institute. "Luong Cuong's appointment represents a deliberate attempt to restore balance between Vietnam's military and security functions, particularly ahead of the 2026 Party Congress," he said.

Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

"Form No. INC-26" Pursuant to rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014 Before the Central Government, (Regional Director, New Delhi) Northern Region In the matter of sub-section (4) of Section 13 of Companies Act, 2013 and clause (a) of sub-rule (5) of rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014

PUBLIC NOTICE Reg-Built up First Floor without roof rights, area measuring 52.6 sq. mtrs., Property No. D-91, out of Reel No. 27, Killa No. 9, situated in the abadi of New Gobind Pura, main Pawan Road, in the area of Village Khureji Khaz, Delhi (hereinafter referred to as the "said property")

OFFICE OF THE CITY MAGISTRATE/MARRIAGE OFFICER Gautam Budh Nagar Date: 10 October 2024 NOTICE Ms. Shashi Kohli D/o Late Mr. Dharamvir Kohli R/o Flat 2017, Sector-37, Noida-201303 Dist. Gautambudh Nagar (U.P.) have applied for Marriageability Certificate for her, objections, if any to the issuance may be filed on any day upto 23-10-2024 in the office of the undersigned.

PUBLIC NOTICE I, Uma Chran Mittal, Son of Sh. Ram Prasad Mittal, Residing at 209-A MIG Green Flats, Rajouri Garden, New Delhi-110027, hereby declare that I have Lost my Original Sale Deed and Property Papers executed on 20/05/1958 in favor of Sh. Ram Prasad Mittal, pertaining to E-6, Green Park Main, New Delhi-110016. Anyone who finds these documents may contact me at the above address.

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government (Regional Director, Northern Region, New Delhi) under section 13 of the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of alteration of the Memorandum of Association of the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra ordinary general meeting held on Thursday, 10th October, 2024 to enable the company to change its Registered Office from "National Capital Territory of Delhi" to the "State of Uttar Pradesh"

Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

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Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.) Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in E-TENDER NOTICE E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned.

Kotak Kotak Mahindra Bank NOTICE Locker Hired by Mr. Rohini Kapur / Mr. Mannu Kapur having address at Ace Flatshire Sec-150 Tower No-3 G Flt No 1701 Near-af 15 Uttar Pradesh with Noida-Sector 137 Branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd. situated at Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd-Unit No.15,16,17,18, Upper Ground Floor, Paramount Flora Ville Sector 137 Noida -201301 remains un-operated since past 5 years and the rent is also due for the last 4 years.

ELITEITY DEVELOPERS PRIVATE LIMITED Wk-88, First Floor, Lamba Complex Jwalaheri Mkt, Paschim Vihar, West Delhi, India, 110063 For and on behalf of ELITE CITY DEVELOPERS PRIVATE LIMITED (DHEER SINGH CHAUHAN Director DIN:01264684 Date: 20/09/2024 Place: Delhi

Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

Public Notice: Various legal notices regarding property and business matters.

Tapir Constructions Limited (CIN: U70200DL2014PLC267441) Extract of Unaudited Financial Results for the quarter and half year ended 30 September 2024 (₹ in Millions) Table with columns: Sl. No., Particulars, Quarter ended 30 Sept. 2024 (Unaudited), Corresponding Quarter ended 30 Sept. 2023 (Unaudited), Previous year ended 31 March 2024 (Audited)

# PM MITRA, PLI schemes to attract investment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's textiles sector is expected to attract investments to the tune of Rs 95,000 crore from the seven PM MITRA mega textile parks and the PLI scheme for man-made fabrics and technical textile products in the next 3-5 years, Textiles Secretary Rachna Shah said on Monday.

Apart from the two schemes, the textiles sector will also draw investments from several other channels like FDI (foreign direct investment), she shared, highlighting the government's focus on promoting "sunrise sectors" of man-made fabric, apparel and technical textile.

The textiles secretary informed that "much more substantive outcomes" are being envisaged from the Bharat Tex 2025 mega textiles event to be held in February next year, in terms of not only MoUs but also investments and business generation.

"We are having 7 textile parks so each of them is expected to generate something like Rs 10,000 crore of investment,



that's about Rs 70,000 crore and another Rs 25,000 crore under the PLI scheme for technical textiles and MMF fibre.

"Some of the investment under PLI has already been grounded and in the next 3-5 years or so we should have these large investments coming under the schemes itself. Apart from the schemes, of course a lot of other investment will also be happening, of course there would be FDI and investment

and investments, etc. Happening," Shah said on Bharat Tex.

The government approved the Rs 10,683 crore PLI scheme for the textiles sector in 2021, aiming to promote the production of man-made fabric and technical textile products over five years.

"Bharat Tex 2025 to be held in February is expected to be even bigger than Bharat Tex 2024. We invite you to join Bharat Tex not only as attendees but also as partners and to explore joint ventures for investments and to explore sourcing opportunities. The event represents a chance to experience first-hand energy and creativity of Indian textiles while gaining access to Indian market and export channels world-wide," Special Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs P Kumaran said.

He was addressing an interaction between the government and foreign missions in India to drive engagement on Bharat Tex 2025, slated to be held from February 14-17.

# Indian apparel exporters to post 9-11 per cent revenue growth

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian apparel exporters are expected to register a 9-11 per cent revenue expansion in FY25 aided primarily by gradual liquidation of retail inventory in key end markets and a shift in global sourcing to India, ratings agency ICRA on Monday.

The long-term prospects for Indian apparel exports are favourable, aided by enhanced product acceptance in end markets, evolving consumer trends and a boost from the government in the form of the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, export incentives, the proposed free trade agreement with the UK and the EU, among others, ICRA said in a statement.

The expected growth this fiscal follows a tepid performance in FY24 when exports were affected because of high retail inventory, sluggish demand from the key end markets, supply chain issues, including the Red Sea crisis and heightened competition from neighbouring countries, it added.



With the revival in demand, ICRA said it expects the capex spending to increase in FY2025 and FY2026 and may stay in the range of 5-8 per cent of the turnover.

"After a marginal decline (down 2 per cent) in FY24, Indian apparel exporters are estimated to report a 9-11 per cent revenue growth in FY25, benefitting from de-risking strategy adopted by various customers and replenishment of retail inventory in key end markets, especially the US and the EU regions," ICRA Senior Vice President & Co-

Group Head Corporate Ratings Srikumar Krishnamurthy said.

Nevertheless, he said challenges around demand uncertainty persist in a few key markets amid a subdued macroeconomic environment and geopolitical issues.

"Despite the revenue growth, associated operating leverage benefits and softer raw material prices, the industry's operating margins are expected to contract by 30-50 bps on a YoY basis in FY25 with increasing labour costs, freight costs and rise in

other operating expenses," Krishnamurthy added.

ICRA said the recent geopolitical tensions in Bangladesh could result in capacity additions outside the country, including India. Yet, availability of labour at competitive costs and preferential duty access, given its least developed country status for another two years on exports to the US and the EU help Bangladesh to remain competitive against most other developing countries, it added.

"Apart from the benefits to be derived from the fresh capacity additions under the PLI scheme. PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel scheme is expected to strengthen India's presence in the global apparel trade by providing scale benefits and strengthening the country's presence in the man-made fibre value chain," Srikumar said.

ICRA anticipates the culmination of these schemes to enable Indian apparel exporters to increase their share of the pie in the global apparel trade, he added.

# Data leaks: Irdai insurers to conduct IT systems audit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Insurance regulator Irdai has directed two insurers to carry out audits of their IT systems following concerns over the recent instances of policyholders' data leaks.

The regulator is also in touch with their management to address the vulnerabilities. Without naming the insurers, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) said it takes data breaches very seriously and ascertains that it will continue to engage with the companies to ensure that the policyholders' interests are fully protected.

Star Health Insurance had recently admitted data breach. The name of the second insurer could not be immediately ascertained.

"There have been reports of data leaks from two insurers recently," the regulator said. In a release, the Irdai said it is closely monitoring the situation in the case of the concerned insurers and has been in touch with their management.

Regular updates are being obtained to ensure that the policyholders' data and interests are fully protected and the company is taking all steps to arrest the threat posed by this breach, the regulator said.

Irdai said it will continue to engage with the insurance companies to ensure that the policyholders' interests are fully protected.

"The concerned insurers have been instructed to appoint an independent auditor to undertake a comprehensive audit of the company's IT landscape with the aim that there are no vulnerabilities and the IT system are adequate to meet the scale and complexities of their operations," the release said.

As part of the standard operating procedures of the concerned insurers, they reported the cyber incident to the government and Irdai, it added.

It also said the concerned insurers have ring-fenced the impacted IT system by isolating it and at the same time, appointed an external IT security company to undertake root cause analysis. "The audit firm reported vulnerabilities in the company's IT system and the methodology used by the threat actor to exploit the same, which were acted upon by insurers. The Containment, Eradication and Recoverability plan as suggested by the audit firm is being implemented by the insurers," Irdai said.

Further preventive steps outlined in the report are in the process of implementation to keep the policyholders' data safe and secure. System upgrades over immediate, short and medium periods, will be acted upon by the insurers, Irdai said.

Also, the application programming interface (API)



vulnerabilities, gap assessment, vulnerabilities assessment and penetration testing issues are at an advanced stage of rectification.

"The insurers have filed a criminal complaint with the law enforcement agencies against the threat actors. It served legal notice on the social media platform to prevent the threat actor from selling the policyholders' data," the regulator said.

Further, Irdai has issued an advisory to all insurers to check their IT systems for vulnerabilities and take necessary steps to protect the policyholders' data.

The regulator said it considers data security as very important and takes data breaches, cyber-attacks on IT systems of insurance companies, etc very seriously. Cyber security guidelines for insurance companies are in place, which require insurers to put in place robust IT and cyber security frameworks for carrying out their operations, it added.

# NCLAT upholds order to allow govt to takeover Delhi Gymkhana Club's management

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal NCLAT has upheld an order to allow the central government to take over the management of the prestigious Delhi Gymkhana Club.

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) set aside the petition filed by the erstwhile management members against the order passed by the Principal Bench of the NCLT.

On April 1, 2024, the NCLT allowed the plea filed by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs for taking over the Delhi Gymkhana Club management citing "violations" of the Company Law and said there was "sufficient material" for holding that, as it is a case of mismanagement.

In its 149-page order, the NCLT had also allowed the ministry to nominate 15 persons as directors on the club's general committee as well as manage the affairs of the club.

The said order was challenged before the appellate tribunal, which has been now upheld on Monday by a two-member bench, comprising Chairperson Ashok Bhushan and Member Arun Baroka.

However, the NCLAT bench also directed the government to carry out all remedial measures as mandated by the NCLT, by March 31, 2025.



The committee has further been directed to conduct an election at the club three months after March 31, 2025. The order was pronounced in the open court on Monday morning and a detailed order is still awaited.

"The NCLAT upheld the NCLT's order holding that Union of India's intervention in the affairs of the Delhi Gymkhana Club was necessitated in view of the mismanagement by the erstwhile general committee. The current committee has been asked to take necessary remedial measures by 31st March and conduct elections thereafter," said Advocate Raunak Dhillon, who appeared for the Central government.

In April 2020, the government through the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) moved the NCLT

under sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act, 2013, seeking to supersede the club's general committee. Sections 241 and 242 of the Companies Act deal with oppression and mismanagement and give wide powers to the tribunal, which include removal of the managing director, manager or any of the directors of the company and recovery of undue gains.

Delhi Gymkhana Club initially registered as a Section 8 company with specific objectives related to sports and pastimes, obtained land on lease from the government.

The government alleged that over a period of time, it had slightly started drifting away from the permitted objectives, which may also impact the subsistence of the lease.

# Institutional investment in real estate went up 31 per cent



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Institutional investments in the Indian real estate sector increased 31 per cent year-on-year to USD 4.61 billion in January-September 2024 amid strong consumer demand, according to Vestian.

Real estate consultant Vestian on Monday released its report on 'Investment in Indian Real Estate', observing that funds' inflow from institutional investors in the first nine months of 2024 has already surpassed the total for 2023.

"Investors have shown confidence in India's growth story on the back of robust GDP growth. As a result, the real estate sector witnessed increased participation from foreign investors which led to institutional investments touching a billion mark in Q3 2024," Shrinivas Rao, CEO of Vestian said.

He noted that domestic investors are also actively participating, supported by the rapid infrastructure development across the country.

During the latest July-September quarter, institutional investments in real estate rose 41 per cent to USD 960.8 million from USD 679.9 million in the year-ago period.

The inflow however fell sharply from June quarter that saw an investment of USD 3,116.3 million.

"Amid prevailing geopolitical challenges, India's robust economic growth continues to attract both foreign and domestic investors. Rising prominence of work-from-office policies and growing office markets are expected to boost investor confidence, setting a positive tone for coming quarters," Vestian said.

Despite this significant quarterly decline of 69 per cent, the consultant said that the outlook remains positive. Chennai received the highest investments during Q3 2024 with 48 per cent share. Majority of investments in the city were concentrated in industrial & warehousing, commercial, and residential sectors, the report said.

# Aadhaar helped people avail government benefits: Nobel laureate Paul Romer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nobel laureate Paul Romer on Monday said Aadhaar is the most important technological system in the world right now and it has laid the foundation of a platform to enable people to avail government benefits, including direct benefit transfer.

Speaking at the NDTV World Summit, Romer said that a similar platform could not be set up successfully in the US because they were monopolised by the private sector.

"Aadhaar is the most important technological system in the world right now. Aadhaar solved only one problem. Present a person to me, and I will tell you what that person's number (is). ... But with that foundation, you can then build all of these fantastic services that you now enjoy," he said.

The 2018 Nobel Prize for Economics recipient noted that the government in India



was not afraid to indicate how it would be used in something like Unified Payment Interface (UPI) and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

"What people in India saw is that they could build a platform of Aadhaar that was controlled by the government and could be used for the benefit of the people, not to generate wealth for just a...small subset of people," he said.

Romer pointed out that despite many cases in the Supreme Court against the

Aadhaar scheme, the government in India pushed this idea forward and did not let the judges hamstring them, and they achieved this remarkable success.

"In the West, we are too hamstringing by the judiciary," he said.

Romer noted that urban centres are locations where GDP gets produced all over the world and India needs to take advantage of the potential there.

"The challenge with urbanisation is land assembly.

If you can assemble a large enough parcel of land, you can take that land which is worth very little and turn it into land which is phenomenally valuable by creating a modern city there," he suggested.

The former chief economist at the World Bank also said both China and Russia want to function as empires, in a bid to increase influence.

"China and Russia both want to go back to a world of empires...They think of empires as having the ability to meddle and you know influence their whole sphere of influence, and the national border is not important," he said.

According to Romer, India needs to decide.

Does it wants to be on the side of the empire or wants to stand up for the importance of the sovereign state as the organising principle going forward in the world.

"India should be able to say we don't like empires. India's stand could decisively tip the balance," he said.

# Emaar India to invest ₹ 2,000 cr in Mumbai region

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

UAE-based realty developer Emaar is planning to invest up to Rs 2,000 crore in Mumbai and its surrounding areas in the next six-seven years, a top official said on Monday.

The group, known for projects like Burj Khalifa, has stayed away from the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) despite being present in India for nearly two decades.

Emaar India's Chief Executive Kalyan Chakrabarti said there is no specific reason to stay away from Mumbai for so long. He added that the group is attracted to the megapolis because it considers it as the deepest and strongest realty market which will be vibrant for decades to come.

The company is aware about the market realities in the space-crunched city, and is open for looking at both societies and slum redevelopments along with any fresh development proposals, he said.

The company plans to invest



USD 1.85 billion (around Rs 15,500 crore) in realty developments across the country in the same time period, he said, adding that capital is not a constraint for it given the backing of a parent company willing to invest.

Therefore, it is not keen to aggressively pursue opportunities on the capital markets, including an initial public offering or sponsoring a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT).

Elaborating on strengths of Mumbai, Chakrabarti said Mumbai is home to one of the best talent bases in the country, neatly linked to the global trade and offers a great opportunity for realtors when

coupled with the massive infrastructure being created in the megapolis.

The company will continue to serve the mid-market to luxury opportunity in the financial capital as well, wherein an apartment unit will typically cost upwards of over Rs 4 crore, he said.

The Gurugram-headquartered company already has a presence across various other Indian cities including Hyderabad, Indore and Mohali.

Around 85 per cent of its revenues come from the residential segment while the commercial segment accounts for the rest at present, he said, adding that

the company will have over 8 million square feet of space under construction by December, which will have to be delivered in four years.

The company announced its maiden venture into the Mumbai market, with a 84-villa community in nearby Alibag, which is a weekend getaway for Mumbaiers.

Chakrabarti said the company will be investing Rs 400 crore for constructing the villas, which will be spread over 25 acres of land. He, however, did not disclose the cost of buying the land.

Over three-fourths of the land in the Alibag project christened 'Casa Venero' will be free of any structures, he said, adding that costs for a three-bedroom villa will go upwards of Rs 9 crore while a four-bed one will go up to Rs 16 crore.

He said the company chose Alibag for its maiden project in the city due to the connectivity which it offers after the construction of the transharbour link and the new airport.



# STRONG INDIAN CONTINGENT FOR WORLD BRIDGE GAMES

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

A strong Indian contingent, led by Vinay Desai, will compete in all four categories of the 16th World Bridge Games to be held in Buenos Aires from October 22 till November 3. The contingent comprises several stalwarts, including 2018 Asian Games gold medallist in men's pairs Pranab Bardhan (seniors), Raju Tolani and Jaggy Shivdasani (Open category), among others. A total of 34 countries are in the fray in the 'Open' section, while in the women's section, there are 24 nations. An all-play-all round-robin will take place in Stage 1 with the qualifying teams to play in the round-of-16 knockout round. The competitions will be held in 'Open, seniors, women's and mixed categories.

India will take on Canada in the Group B opener in the 'Open' category, while in the senior section, they will square off against Turkey. The Indian women will play Brazil in the opener, while in the mixed section, they will compete against Germany. The last time South America hosted the competition was in 2009 when it was organised in Sao Paulo. The tournament is held every four years and every country can enter their team, without any pre-qualification. "The WBF (World Bridge Federation) is introducing several new measures to ensure that our motto 'Zero Tolerance for Bad Behavior' is respected, for the enjoyment of all participants," said Jan Kamras, president, WBF in a statement. The qualification round will conclude on October 26, with the round of 16 scheduled on October 28. The finals and playoffs will be held on November 2-3.

**INDIAN TEAMS:**  
**Open:** Sanjit Dey, Ajay Khare, Binod Kumar Shaw, Jaggy Shivdasani, Sandeep Thakral, Raju Tolani, Vinay Desai (captain).  
**Seniors:** Arun Bapat, Pranab Kumar Bardhan, Badal Chandra Das, Ravi Goenka, Kamal Krishna Mukherjee, Vibhas Todi, Girish Bijoor (captain).  
**Women:** Puja Batra, Devi Muthu Bhatnagar, Bharati Dey, Alka Jain, Alka Kshirsagar, Asha Sharma, Anal Shah (captain).  
**Mixed:** Himani Khandelwal, Rajeev Khandelwal, Bindhya Kohli, Kiran Nadar, Thondiculum Venkatraman Ramani, Bachiraju Satyanarayana, Vinay Desai (captain).

# India to host Special Olympics Asia Pacific Bocce & Bowling Competition next month

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Over 250 athletes from 15 countries will be vying for honours when India hosts the Special Olympics Asia Pacific Bocce & Bowling Competition for the first time here from November 18 to 23. In the lead-up to this prestigious event, Shivani, who clinched three gold medals at the Special Olympics World Games in Berlin last year, has been named the athlete ambassador. "I am proud to represent Special Olympics Bharat as the athlete ambassador. My journey in sports has transformed my life; it's truly a blessing," said Shivani. "I hope to inspire others with intellectual disabilities to pursue their passions and never give up. Inclusion in sports can break down barriers and help us all reach our true potential." Athletes from regions including East Asia, Europe Eurasia, and Asia Pacific will participate, with countries like Australia, Bangladesh, Macau, Thailand, Hong Kong, Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Uzbekistan, and Singapore. The competition will focus on older athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), aged 22 and above. While the women's team has been finalised, the men's team selection is still underway. Events will include singles, doubles, mixed, and team



formats. Dr Mallika Nadda, president of Special Olympics Bharat, unveiled the event jersey, emphasising the significance of inclusion in sports.

"Inclusion revolution is our moto and during this competition we will witness stories of courage, determination and triumph as athletes, their families and supporters come together in a powerful display of inclusion and friendship," she said. In the lead-up to the competition, a 'Run for Inclusion' event is scheduled for November 9, alongside a health summit on November 18 which will address issues faced by IDD athletes. A carnival featuring exhibitions will also take place. Last year, 198 Indian athletes participated in the World Summer Games, returning with an impressive 202 medals, including 76 gold, 75 silver, and 51 bronze.

# Carlsen star attraction at next month's Tata Steel Chess India

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**

World No. 1 Norwegian Grandmaster Magnus Carlsen will be the star attraction in the sixth edition of Tata Steel Chess India to be held here from November 13 to 17. It will be Carlsen's second appearance in the tournament. He had earlier participated in 2019 and had gone on to clinch the title. A strong Indian contingent, following its golden performance at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest recently, will see the likes of Arjun Erigaisi, R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi among others competing in the prestigious event. Nihal Sarin and S L Narayanan are the other Indian players who will be in action in the 'Open' category. Like previous editions, the tournament will have the 'Open' and women's categories with same the format — rapid and blitz — and will have equal prize money for both sections. India will be represented by Koneru Humpy, R Vaishali, D. Harika, Divya



Deshmukh and Vantika Agrawal in the women's category. Chess legend Viswanathan Anand will continue his association with the tournament as its ambassador.

"Looking forward to being back at Tata Steel Chess India. It has become the marquee event in India. This year brings the best of the world headed by Magnus Carlsen," said Anand.

"I am particularly excited that the women's event will have the best of Indian chess. This year has been a celebration of Indian chess and this event will be a fitting tribute." Chanakya Chaudhary, vice-president, corporate services, Tata Steel said, "We are excited to host the sixth edition of Tata Steel Chess India, which marks the return of world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen. Members of the Indian men's and women's squads, following their gold medal wins at the Chess Olympiad, will also join the tournament alongside top global players." **The line up for this year's tournament is as below:**  
**Open:** Magnus Carlsen, Nodirbek Abdusattorov, Wesley So, Vincent Keymer, Daniil Dubov, Arjun Erigaisi, R Praggnanandhaa, Vidit Gujrathi, Nihal Sarin, S L Narayanan.  
**Women:** Aleksandra Goryachkina, Kateryna Lagno, Alexandra Kosteniuk, Nana Dzagnidze, Valentina Gunina, Koneru Humpy, R. Vaishali, D. Harika, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agrawal.

# Time running out for Norris to catch Verstappen in F1 title chase as series heads to Mexico City

**AP ■ AUSTIN (TEXAS)**

Time is running out on Lando Norris' Formula 1 title chase of Max Verstappen. Norris and McLaren leave Texas for the Mexico City Grand Prix further adrift from Verstappen after a disappointing United States Grand Prix weekend. The Red Bull driver won the sprint race, then took the final podium spot in the Sunday main event when Norris was penalized for leaving the track to pass him in the final laps. The penalty will be debated in the garages and paddock until next season. That won't help Norris in the standings now. Verstappen is chasing a fourth consecutive season championship. Norris is trying to win his first, and Texas gave him another taste of just how hard, if not impossible, it can be to take the title from the Dutch driver. Norris had the faster car in the late stages Sunday. He got stuck behind a stubborn Verstappen who refused to yield the place as the drivers battled over every inch of the track. When Norris finally made his move to third with about four laps to go, race stewards determined he improperly left the track to gain the position. He was given a five-second penalty. Norris crossed the finish line in third. Officially, he was fourth and Verstappen took the final podium spot. The penalty and the head-to-head battle with Verstappen, left Norris clearly frustrated. "He defends by going off-track, he overtakes by going off-track. But I'm not going to complain. Max drove well



and he defended well, we had a good race together. But the rules are the rules," Norris said. At least he finished the race this time. When those two tangled in Austria, a late-race collision knocked Norris out of the race and dropped Verstappen from first to fifth. That tussle proved to be a taste of things to come. Norris has been in a months-long charge after Verstappen, who hasn't won a grand prix since June after a dominant start to the season. Norris and Verstappen finished 1-2 in Singapore, but Norris won the race by 21 seconds just before the four-week autumn break. Red Bull and Verstappen appear to have at least closed that gap.

Verstappen won the Texas sprint race for his first victory of any kind since the sprint race in Austria. And even if Sunday's finish had been reversed, Norris would have come out of the weekend just a single point closer in the championship. Yet Verstappen's weekend wasn't as good as he had hoped it would be. Red Bull brought a trove of upgrades to a car that Verstappen has alternately called "undrivable" and "a monster" this season. The car looked good in the sprint and again in qualifying when Verstappen barely missed out on pole position, which Norris won. But the sprint race victory proved a bit of a mirage. The Red Bull had nowhere near the pace of the Ferraris over a

regular race distance, and was passed by Norris at the end. It was still good enough to squeeze the title chase just a bit tighter. And Verstappen had no sympathy for McLaren's complaints Sunday about losing the podium. "They complain about a lot recently," Verstappen said. "The battle with Lando at the end was cool as we were racing hard and it was actually a lot of fun. You cannot overtake outside the white line and I have lost a podium here for overtaking outside the track." And he'll take any result that stretches his lead in the championship. "We are going in the right direction. It is still not enough," Verstappen said. "Ultimately the fact that we have extended the gap is the biggest thing for us.

# Inter beats Roma but loses two key players to injuries

**AP ■ MILAN**

Shortly after Inter Milan president Giuseppe Marotta lamented that the fixture list needed to be cut in order to safeguard the players, the Nerazzurri lost two key members of its team to injury. "We have to live with the constant stress of so many games that the players are struggling to handle ... we need to safeguard their health," Marotta said before Sunday's match. "It is not an easy situation ... but we need to sit around a table and recognize that the fixture list has to be cut back." Less than 12 minutes into the match, Calhanoglu asked to come off after experiencing discomfort in his left thigh and he was followed 15 minutes later by Acerbi who also appeared to have an injury to a muscle in the same place. Both sides hit the woodwork in the first half. A cross from Lorenzo Pellegrini bounced out of the arms of Yann Sommer and onto the post but the Inter goalkeeper managed to catch the rebound. Former Roma midfielder Henrikh Mkhitaryan sent a powerful effort off the crossbar shortly afterward.



Inter broke the deadlock when Davide Frattesi raced down the right flank on the counterattack and his low cross was deflected to Lautaro to thump into the back of the net. **CONTE INSPIRES NAPOLI:** Whatever Antonio Conte told his players at halftime must have worked as Napoli was much improved after the break. Empoli was far the better team in the first period but it was to regret its missed opportunities as it was Napoli that took the lead in the 63rd minute after Tino Anjorin fouled Matteo Politano in the area. Khvicha Kvaratskhelia kept his cool and took a stuttering run-up, waiting for the goalkeeper to make his move before rolling the ball into the middle of the net. That was the first goal the Empoli home fans had seen this season as all three previous league matches at the Stadio Carlo Castellani had ended 0-0. Napoli has won six of its past seven Serie A matches since an opening day loss to Hellas Verona in Conte's debut. The other match was a 0-0 draw at Juventus. It was a second straight loss for Empoli, which had been unbeaten until it lost at Lazio before the international break. **MORE INJURIES:** Albert Gudmundsson and Moise Kean also had to come off injured as Fiorentina romped to a 6-0 win at Lecce. Danilo Cataldi and Andrea Colpani both scored twice before Lucas Beltran and Fabioan Parisi completed the rout. It was the first time Fiorentina had scored six goals away from home in Serie A since 1966. Despite an increasingly longer injury list, Atalanta eased to a 2-0 win at bottom club Venezia.

# Lewandowski extends scoring streak as Barcelona routs Sevilla

**AP ■ MADRID**

Robert Lewandowski scored two more goals to extend his league-leading tally to 12 and Barcelona routed Sevilla 5-1 to open a three-point gap on Real Madrid ahead of next weekend's "clasico." Pedri and Pablo Torre also scored Sunday for the Catalan club, which restored its lead of La Liga a day after second-place Madrid won 2-1 at Celta Vigo. Barcelona midfielder Gavi came off the bench to replace Pedri in the 83rd minute, making his return to action nearly a year after a serious knee injury. "I had been dreaming about this moment for several months," Gavi said. "It's tough to watch from the outside. I have to enjoy every moment. I feel very lucky to be here

today." Barcelona will play Madrid on Saturday at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Both teams have Champions League matches midweek - Madrid hosts Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday and Barcelona hosts Bayern Munich on Wednesday. "This was an important win considering the matches that we have ahead," Pedri said. "We had to leave with a good feeling and the three points." Lewandowski scored twice in the first half against the visitors, first by converting a 24th-minute penalty kick and then by finding the net from close range in the 39th. The Poland striker was coming off a hat trick at Alaves in the previous league round, and had scored twice in the team's win over Young Boys in the Champions League. He has 14

goals in 11 matches in all competitions this season. Lewandowski, who received a standing ovation when he was substituted in the 65th, nearly got his hat track against Sevilla in a one-on-one situation in the first half. Pedri scored with a curling shot from outside the area in the 28th and Torre added to the lead from inside the area in the 82nd and with a free kick in the 88th. Raphinha had a 49th-minute goal disallowed for offside. Barcelona has outscored its league opponents 33-10 this season. Sevilla, which had no attempts on target in the first half, scored its lone goal in the 87th with 19-year-old substitute Stanis Idumbo. Barcelona also saw Lamine Yamal return from a muscle strain that saw him leave



Spain's squad during the international break. Barcelona defender Eric Garcia hurt a muscle in the team's

warmup and did not play. **ATLETICO'S STADIUM PARTIALLY CLOSED:** Fewer fans than normal watched

Atletico Madrid beat Leganes 3-1 in a match played in a partially closed stadium because of recent fan trouble.

Alexander Sorloth scored twice and Antoine Griezmann once after the visitors took the lead in the first half at the Metropolitan stadium, which had an empty fan section behind one of the goals as punishment after Atletico fans threw objects on the field during a city derby against Real Madrid last month. The section is where the club's more radical supporters usually gather. Atletico had been originally ordered to close the section for three matches but appealed the decision and the punishment was reduced to a single match. The derby was interrupted for more than 15 minutes after fans threw the objects near Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois in a game that ended 1-1. Sunday's victory, which ended Atletico's three match winless

streak in all competitions, moved Diego Simeone's team to third place in the league. It trails Barcelona by seven points. Atletico midfielder Pablo Barrios and defender Clément Lenglet both got injured. Griezmann was sent off late in the game after he slid into an opponent, but the red card was changed to a yellow after video review. **OTHER RESULTS:** Villarreal is in fourth place after conceding an 87th-minute equalizer in a 1-1 draw against Getafe. Santiago Comesaña had put the hosts ahead in the 44th. Mallorca defeated visiting Rayo Vallecano 1-0 with a goal by Vedat Muriqi in the 75th. It was the fourth win in five matches for Mallorca, which moved to sixth place in the standings.

# NEW ZEALAND WHITE FERNS SPLIT \$ 2.3 MILLION AFTER WINNING T20 WORLD CUP

AP ■ WELLINGTON

Members of the New Zealand White Ferns cricket team which beat South Africa by 32 runs in the final of the women's Twenty20 World Cup in Dubai on Sunday will split prize money of around USD 2.3 million. That works out at around USD 155,000 or NZD 256,000 per team member, a life-changing windfall for players who for years have struggled for years to achieve financial parity with their male counterparts. New Zealand's first-ever victory in the World Cup of cricket's shortest format was a massive surprise. The White Ferns had lost 10 consecutive T20 matches before beating South Africa in a warm-up match. That pre-tournament success proved a turning point for New Zealand who beat India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, losing only to Australia on the way to the semifinals. South Africa ousted six-time champion Australia in a massive upset in the semi in which New Zealand beat the West Indies. New Zealand made 158-5, batting first in the final, helped by Suzy Bates who made 32, Amelia Kerr who made 43 and Brooke Halliday who made 38. Kerr then took 3-24 and Rosemary Mair 3-25 as New Zealand restricted



South Africa to 126-9. "Pretty unbelievable to be honest," Mair said. "Coming into the tournament all the odds were against us so for the group to bounce back like they have is unbelievable. "We just care so much about each other. We've been through a lot of lows in the last 18 months, and we've just stuck by each other and kept working hard for each other." Captain Sophie Devine was leading the New Zealand team for the last time. She and Bates have played in all nine T20 World Cups since the first in 2009. New Zealand reached the final of the first two tournaments in 2009 and 2010, losing to Australia on both occasions. "This means everything to us," Bates said. "When you play team sport, you

want to be a world champion. "We've fought our way back to the top. (Devie) has been so outstanding leading this team... So calm and believing in us. We'll probably have a cuddle for even longer later because there's been some dark times that only the people in the (locker room) understand." New Zealand was coached to victory by Australian Ben Sawyer and former Black Caps batters Dean Brownlie and Craig McMillan. The White Ferns' success was praised Monday by New Zealand Sports Minister Chris Bishop. It came at the end of a weekend in which New Zealand also retained sailing's America's Cup and in which the New Zealand men's cricket team beat India in a test in India for the first time in 36 years. "And then to round out a truly amazing sporting weekend, at 3am Monday morning (NZT) the White Ferns, led by Sophie Devine, stepped up to face South Africa in the women's T20 World Cup final in Dubai and absolutely smashed it, bringing home their first World Cup since the One Day International in 2000," Bishop said. "Amelia Kerr's 43 runs off 38 balls and then taking 3 wickets for 24 set our team up for their magnificent performance."



## I am pain-free, need to play domestic cricket to make strong case for Australia tour: Mohammed Shami

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Seasoned India pacer Mohammed Shami on Monday declared himself pain-free but insisted on proving his fitness in domestic cricket by playing at least "one or two" games to make a strong case for selection for the marquee tour of Australia starting next month. Shami, who has not played since the ODI World Cup final last November, bowled full tilt in the nets after India's opening Test against New Zealand in Bengaluru on Sunday. This was a few days after skipper Rohit Sharma revealed that he had swelling in his knees which has affected his rehabilitation from an ankle injury sustained last year. "I am very happy with how I bowled yesterday. I was bowling from half run-up before that because I didn't want to take too much load. But yesterday, I decided to go full tilt, and I bowled at a 100 per cent," the 34-year-old told reporters on the sidelines of an event organised by Eugenix Hair Sciences. "The result was good. I am 100 per cent pain-free. Everyone has been wondering for a long time about whether I will make it for the Australia series but it is still some time away." India are expected to leave for Australia two weeks before the series opener in Perth beginning November 22, leaving Shami just about enough time to feature in two Ranji games for Bengal. Bengal take on Kerala at home from October 26 before travelling to Bengaluru to face Karnataka from November 6. Is he ready for Bengal's next game? "I don't know if I can play the next match. But the day I feel I can bowl 20 to 30 overs, doctors give me the clearance, I will go. I want to spend maximum time on ground before Australia series. "I don't want that I clear fitness here in India and something happens there (in Australia). I want to be totally sure about my fitness before going there," said Shami, who was only part of the Adelaide Test on the previous Australia tour in 2020-21. India would be glad to have Shami's services on the bouncy pitches Down Under though Rohit has already said that he is not in favour of taking an "undercooked" Shami to Australia. Shami, who played a substantial role on the 2018 tour of Australia, realises that he is important to the team's overall plans. "If I get fit, we will need to have the same package that we had on the last two tours. I might not be there but, if you see what happened in 2020, everyone was injured and still we won. "The only thing on my mind is to ensure that I am fit and how strong I can be for the Australia series. I can see what kind of attack we need in Australia." INJURIES TEACH YOU PATIENCE: Shami was forced out of action for more than a year after suffering a knee injury during the 2015 ODI World Cup. The 34-year-old is now in a similar phase and he feels injuries only make you stronger. "2015 also I was away for that long. Injury teaches you to fight against yourself, you have to keep frustration at bay, focus on fitness and game. It is difficult to get back on track after an injury. "Injuries teach you patience and add purity to your game. After you comeback the main thing is if you can maintain your fitness. Yes rhythm is important but your skills won't leave you. "You need to fight for regaining fitness," said Shami, who has taken 229 wickets in 64 Tests and 195 wickets in 101 ODIs. While he was recovering from his ankle injury, India were able to end their ICC trophy drought in the Caribbean. Did Shami, who was the standout bowler for India in the ODI World Cup at home last year, miss being part of the triumphant T20 World Cup squad? "It depends on luck as well. I feel one should not be disappointed as you gave your best for the country. You can't fight your luck. If you get injured there is nothing you can do about it," he said. India have already started preparing the next line of pacers through the likes of Shami, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj still have a lot of cricket left in them. Asked about his thoughts on the transition, Shami had only one advice for the next generation of fast bowlers. "It is a circle and will keep going on. Whether it is Mayank Yadav, Akash Deep Mukesh Kumar, Harshit Rana, I would only advise them to talk at length with the seniors in the nets, that teaches you a lot. "Last 8 to 10 years, we have bowled as a unit. Before that, we never had 140 plus pacers playing at the same time. "From those to the ones on the bench also bowl at 145kmph. So opponents don't get to relax and that creates fear. We all have different skills and that is what we have shown at home and overseas conditions." Can India win their third series in a row in Australia? "The conditions suit us. All our fast bowlers are different type and if we get bounce it only makes us better. Batters need to score a bit, rest we will manage (laughs)," Shami added.

## Mumbai cruise to nine-wicket win over Maharashtra to earn full points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Defending champions Mumbai got their Ranji Trophy campaign back on track with an emphatic nine-wicket win over Maharashtra in their second group A league game here on Monday, offsetting the heavy loss to Baroda in the opening game. Needing 74 to win, Mumbai went into the final day at 13 for no loss. While Ayush Mhatre's (15) dismissal robbed them off a bonus point, Prithvi Shaw (39 not out off 36 balls) and Hardik Tamore (21 not out off 26 balls) earned six points for the team in just 13.3 overs. This was after the 42-time champions lost to Baroda by 84 runs in the opening Ranji Trophy fixture but in the second match at the BKC ground, Mumbai excelled in all departments of the game. The match was won and lost on the first day itself when Mumbai bowled out Maharashtra for 126 in their first innings and then rode on 17-year-old Mhatre's smashing 176 and Shreyas Iyer's belligerent 142 to score 441. While Maharashtra fared much better in the second innings with centuries from Rituraj Gaikwad and veteran Ankit Banwe, apart from a 98 from former India U-19 batter Sachin Dhas, the damage was already done.

## Pressure on Siraj after only 19 wickets from 13 Tests in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian skipper Rohit Sharma believes in consistency when it comes to team selection but he will have to take a leap of faith to retain speedster Mohammed Siraj in the playing eleven for the second Test against New Zealand considering his poor run in home conditions. The match starts in Pune from October 24 and inclusion of spin bowling all-rounder Washington Sundar as the fifth slow bowler is an indication that coach Gautam Gambhir and Rohit might go for the jugular on a spin-friendly track. The 30-year-old Hyderabad has so far taken 80 wickets in 30 Test matches but 61 of those scalps have come in 17 away Test matches in three of the SENA countries (South Africa, England, Australia). Only 19 wickets after bowling 192.2 overs in 13 home Tests are figures that imply that Siraj has struggled in sub-continental conditions unlike



Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, who have had the ability to throw pitch and conditions out of equation. To be fair to Siraj, in those 13 Tests, he went wicket-less in four with a couple of them against Australia last year played on rank turners in

consistent enough to get initial breakthroughs leaving Bumrah with all the heavy-lifting to do with the new ball. PTI spoke to a coach, who has worked extensively with some of the current national team bowlers, and he thinks that Siraj's length is erroneous for Indian conditions. He explained the technical flaw that has cropped up in his bowling. "If you see Siraj's record, he has five-wicket hauls in Australia and South Africa where there is more bounce. The six to eight metre length away from the batter is considered to be ideal Test match length. But it varies from country to country depending on the bounce," the coach, who was a top domestic performer during his time, told PTI on condition of anonymity. "The ideal length in Australia is eight metres, it is around six metres in England and on low bounce Indian wickets, it is 6.5 metres. If you pitch it around 6.5 metres and get movement, you are in business for both outside edge, bowled and leg before. "Siraj is bowling around eight metre length and in India with that length, you can't hit top of off (stump). He isn't pitching it up enough," he further explained. However, the coach is confident that once Siraj goes Down Under, for the five-match series starting November 22, he will again find his mojo as the length. Which he is hitting here, will work like magic in those conditions. "When you are hitting eight metre length on Indian tracks which are devoid of pace, the batter has more time to gauge the line and it becomes hittable. "I am not sure how effective he will be in Pune or Mumbai although latter was the only venue where he looked menacing against New Zealand in 2021. Problem is when you play white ball, this back of length in Indian conditions can still fetch you wickets," he reasoned.

## Reports say hockey set to be axed from 2026 Glasgow CWG; CGF, FIH mum

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Hockey is set to be axed from the 2026 Commonwealth Games as the host city of Glasgow looks to cut costs, several media reports here stated but both the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) remained tight-lipped on the matter. Hockey has featured in each CWG since making its debut in 1998, but according to reports here, the Glasgow Games organisers want to drop it from the schedule along with net ball and road racing to ensure a trimmed programme that would be easy on the budget. Scotland stepped in to save the 2026

Games after the Australian state of Victoria pulled out due to rising costs. The schedule is due to be unveiled on Tuesday. When reached out by PTI, the International Hockey Federation (FIH) declined comment till the roster was officially out. "In a couple of days, the situation will be clear - you will get the information accordingly. From our side, until there is any official communication from CGF, we are not in a position to provide you any comment," an official said. The CGF also gave a similar response. "The sports programme for the 2026 Commonwealth Games will be confirmed tomorrow," read a statement from the body when it was approached for a clarification on the media reports.

sporting disciplines from 19 (in 2022 Birmingham) to 10 with only four proposed venues - Commonwealth Arena and Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome, Scotstoun Stadium, Tollcross International Swimming Centre and Scottish Events Campus. None of these venues have a hockey turf. Hockey's exclusion from the Games would be a major blow for India as their men's team is a three-time silver-winner and two-time bronze-medallist in the sport. The women have won three medals, including a gold in the 2000 edition. The biggest hit would be to Australia, which has won the men's gold for a record seven times and the women's top honours in four editions.



Hockey's probable omission could also be down to the fact that the Games, to be held from July 23 to August 2, are being organised close to the World Cup that is scheduled two weeks later from August 15 to 30 in Wavre, Belgium and Amstelveen, Netherlands. To cut costs, the Glasgow Games organisers have reduced the number of

# Ronaldo and Al-Nassr's ACL game moved amid Iran security fears

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Cristiano Ronaldo and Al-Nassr's AFC Champions League Elite game with Esteghlal of Tehran on Tuesday will be as closely watched in India as it is in Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) said in a statement released last Tuesday that Esteghlal had to move its home fixture with Al-Nassr to the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai due to the security situation in Iran. The decision was greeted by surprise in India as, on Oct. 7, the AFC ruled that Mohun Bagan Super Giants of Kolkata

had been "considered to have withdrawn" from the second tier AFC Champions League Two for refusing to travel to Iran to play its Oct. 2 fixture against Tractor SC in the northwestern city of Tabriz. It is not only Al-Nassr's game that has been relocated. Tractor's home game against Ravshan of Tajikistan, scheduled for Wednesday, has been switched to become an away tie. Iran's national team also had to move its Oct. 15 World Cup qualifier against Qatar to Dubai. "... (Mohun Bagan) notes that the AFC has indeed recognised the volatility of the situation in Iran and as such, has

rescheduled or shifted venues for several games," a spokesperson for Mohun Bagan told Associated Press, adding that the confederation had taken the same geopolitical instability into account that the club had. "Failing to apply the same standard to Mohun Bagan would result in unequal treatment by the AFC." According to the spokesperson, Mohun Bagan had made a request to the AFC that the game's date or venue be changed before it decided not to travel. "We consistently communicated concerns about the volatile and unsafe



conditions in and around Iran, particularly regarding the safety of players and staff," the official added. The Indian Super League club said that it had appealed the

decision to the relevant AFC committee and hoped to be reinstated into the tournament. The AFC did not reply to an invitation to comment. Al-Nassr has four points from the first two games and can take a big step towards the second round with a win. The revamped tournament now consists of two groups of 12 - divided into west and east geographic zones - with the top eight from each advancing to the Round of 16. Nassr is going well in the Saudi Pro League with a 97th minute penalty from Ronaldo giving the team a 2-1 win over Al-Shabab on Friday to stay in third place.

"There are a lot of games at the moment and it is not easy," said Stefano Pioli, Al-Nassr's coach. "We will do our best to maintain our performances in the Asian Champions League." Saudi Arabia has three of the four top teams in Group A. Al-Hilal is first and the four-time winner meets defending champion Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates and could welcome Neymar back to action after a year out through injury. Jeddah club Al-Ahli also has maximum points and travels to Qatar to face Al-Rayyan. FRONT RUNNERS MEET IN EASTERN ZONE: In the eastern zone the top two meet.

Gwangju FC of South Korea is making its first ever appearance in Asian competition and is the only team with two wins from two. It takes on Johor Darul Ta'zim of Malaysia. Australia's Central Coast Mariners has lost both games so far and head to China to take on Shanghai Port, coached by former Australian international Kevin Muscat, also seeking a first win. Last season's defeated finalist Yokohama F. Marinos also travels to China and meets Shandong Tiashan while three-time winner Pohang Steelers of South Korea faces Thailand's Buriram United.