



India and China grab eyeballs at BRICS

PTI ■ KAZAN

In their first structured bilateral talks in nearly five years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday agreed that India and China can have a "peaceful and stable" relationship by displaying maturity and mutual respect, and endorsed the pact on the resolution of the dragging eastern Ladakh border row.



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said at a media briefing that the two leaders noted that the special representatives on the India-China boundary question have a critical role to play in the resolution of the issue and for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in border areas.

with maturity and wisdom, and by showing mutual respect, India and China can have a peaceful and stable relationship, Misri said.

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Supreme Court raps Centre taking the bite out of CAQM Act: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday pulled up the Centre for making the environment protection law "toothless", and said the provision under the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act of 2021 (CAQM Act) which deals with the penalty for stubble burning was not being implemented.

NDMC doubles parking fee

NEW DELHI: In a move to discourage private vehicles amid deteriorating air pollution, the parking charges in Delhi have been doubled by the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Wednesday.

pollution free environment. This litigation is not adversarial and is only litigation for us to ensure that citizens rights to live with dignity and clean environment are upheld," said the Court, pointing out a series of lapses in the enforcement and less penalty provisions in the Laws and Rules.

Continued on page 8

Yogi-Bhagwat script new strategy

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ MATHURA



In a meeting that could have far-reaching implications for Uttar Pradesh's political landscape, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath held a two-and-a-half-hour closed-door discussion in Mathura late on Tuesday night.

developmental needs and showcasing tangible progress must become central to the campaign," a source close to the developments revealed. This strategic shift comes as the BJP faces a formidable challenge from the alliance between the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress, now operating under the INDIA Bloc coalition banner.

Continued on page 8



Crying over split wood?

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court saying he was unaware of the requirement to take the court's permission for the felling of trees on the road proposed in the Ridge area, which is part of the Aravalli range, for widening the approach to the under-construction Central Armed Police Forces Institute of Medical Sciences (CAPFIMS) during his visit to the site on February 3.

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Odisha braces for cyclone Dana

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR



An Indian Coast Guard official during preparations ahead of the landfall of Cyclone Dana

As cyclone 'Dana' barrels toward the Odisha coast, threatening to impact nearly half the state's population, the government is racing against time to execute a massive evacuation plan aimed at relocating around 10 lakh people in 14 districts to safety.

the coast at a wind velocity of 120 km/h, Umashankar Das, senior scientist at the regional meteorological centre in Bhubaneswar, said. Das warned that low-lying areas in Kendrapara, Bhadrak, and Balasore districts are likely to be inundated and recommended that the government evacuate residents from these regions.

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Government blasts X, Meta over threat posts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As unabated bomb threat messages continued to both domestic and international flights for the past eight days, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has blasted on the social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) and slammed Meta for their roles in facilitating the spread of these hoaxes.

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Priyanka Gandhi debuts in politics, net worth in crores

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI/WAYANAD



Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with party leader and candidate from Wayanad constituency Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a roadshow before filing her nomination for the upcoming Lok Sabha bypoll, in Wayanad, Kerala, Wednesday

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra commenced her electoral journey on Wednesday from Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency by filing her nomination papers for the by-election necessitated by the resignation of Rahul Gandhi, her brother who is also the Leader of the Opposition.

valued at ₹5.64 crore. In addition to the Shimla property, she owns gold and silver jewellery worth ₹1.16 crore and ₹29 lakh respectively.

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Ray of hope for Gurugram's groaning traffic

Plan underway to link Dwarka, Delhi-Mumbai expressways via Southern Peripheral Road

BY PARVESH SHARMA

A day after The Pioneer highlighted the traffic crisis in the millennium city of Gurugram, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) have shared that they are working on a plan to link the Dwarka and Delhi-Mumbai expressways via Southern Peripheral Road near Vatika Chowk.

component of the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway. To tackle traffic congestion in the city, the Gurugram district administration has identified 18 spots on the city roads which have reported heavy traffic movement and congestion. The officials have asked traffic police and other departments to take correctional steps in this regard.

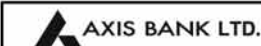


FILE PHOTO

connectivity between Dwarka and Delhi-Mumbai expressways. We have already had talks with NHAI officials and in-principle approval has already been granted." While discussions previously considered a cloverleaf-like structure at Vatika Chowk, this idea was shelved due to spatial limitations.

Commuters from SPR face either left turns at Vatika Chowk with U-turns at Subhash Chowk to access the elevated road or right turns towards Badshahpur Chowk, resulting in congestion and detours.

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PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION OF PLEDGED ASSETS BEING GOLD ORNAMENTS

THE BORROWERS, IN SPECIFIC AND THE PUBLIC IN GENERAL ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT PUBLIC AUCTION OF THE GOLD ORNAMENTS PLEDGED IN THE BELOW ACCOUNTS IS PROPOSED TO BE CONDUCTED BY THE AXIS BANK AT THE BELOW MENTIONED BRANCH. THE BELOW MENTIONED BORROWERS HAS AVAILED THE CREDIT FACILITY FROM THE AXIS BANK LIMITED AGAINST THE PLEDGE OF GOLD ORNAMENTS ("GOLD LOAN FACILITY") IN FAVOUR OF THE BANK TOWARDS THE SECURITY. THE DEMAND NOTICES WERE ISSUED TO THE BORROWERS/GUARANTORS CALLING UP THE BORROWERS' GUARANTORS TO PAY THEIR OUTSTANDING AMOUNT TOWARDS THE GOLD LOAN FACILITY AVAILED. AS THE BORROWERS' GUARANTORS HAVE FAILED TO REPAY THE OUTSTANDING LOAN AMOUNT, THE BANK IS CONSTRAINED TO INVOKE THE PLEDGE AND PROPOSED TO CONDUCT AN E-AUCTION SALE OF PLEDGED GOLD ORNAMENTS MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED IN SCHEDULE OF PROPERTY HERETOFORE ON 04-NOV-2024 AT 12.30 PM TO 03.30 PM ON "AS IS WHERE IS", "AS IS WHAT IS", "WHATSOEVER THERE IS" AND "NO RECOURSE BASIS".

DETAILS OF BORROWERS AND OUTSTANDING AMOUNT

Table with columns: Sr. No., CUSTOMER NAME, LOAN A/C NO., AMOUNT OUTSTANDING (IN RS.), DATE OF RECALL NOTICE, GROSS WEIGHT, NET WEIGHT. Contains multiple entries for various borrowers and their loan details.

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MP Jagdambika Pal defies opposition allegations, ready to resign if wrong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW



Lok Sabha MP Jagdambika Pal, who heads the Parliamentary panel on Waqf bill, on Wednesday rejected the opposition's allegations that he violated norms by going public about TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee smashing a glass bottle and hurling it at the chair during a meeting of the panel. He also asserted he was ready to resign if opposition members say he did not allow them to speak at the meeting.

The House pending investigation for what they called "unprecedented violence" during a meeting of the joint parliamentary panel on the Waqf bill. The letter signed by Nishikant Dubey, Aparajita Sarangi and Abhijit Gangopadhyay also sought an investigation into the matter by the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee to consider rescinding Banerjee's membership from the Lower House.

words with Gangopadhyay during the meeting on Tuesday, Banerjee smashed a glass bottle and allegedly threw it towards the panel's chairperson Jagdambika Pal. DMK member A Raja and AAP member Sanjay Singh had alleged that Pal violated rules of procedure for conduct of Parliamentary Committee meetings, which are conducted in-camera. "I have always adhered to rules of parliamentary procedure and upheld the dignity of the House," Pal said.

He said as the chairman of the Joint Committee on Waqf (Amendment) Bill, he made a statement on the incident of violence during the meeting of the panel on Tuesday involving Banerjee and the subsequent action against him. The panel's meeting hit the headlines after Banerjee smashed a glass bottle and threw it allegedly towards the Chair following a heated argument with BJP member Abhijit Gangopadhyay. Banerjee ended up cutting his own fingers and was administered first aid. The panel decided to suspend the Trinamool member for one day from the committee proceedings. Pal said he has already informed the Lok Sabha Speaker about the incident. Sources said Banerjee expressed regret for smashing the bottle and claimed that he never meant to throw it towards Pal, while still accusing him of "biased" behaviour.

SEBI chairperson to face Parliament's Public Accounts Committee amid controversy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch is scheduled to appear before the Parliament's Public Accounts Committee on Thursday, expected to be a stormy meeting following a senior BJP member's accusation that political motivations are guiding the actions of the panel's chairman and Congress MP KC Venugopal. The meeting's agenda includes oral evidence of representatives of the Finance Ministry and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) as part of the committee's decision to go for the "performance review of regulatory bodies established by Act of Parliament".

Buch raised hackles of the ruling party members as she has been at the centre of a political row ignited by US firm Hindenburg's allegations against her. The short-seller company's accusation of conflict of interest against Buch was seized by the Congress to seek her ouster and to attack the government, rendering political dimensions to the panel's missive to her to appear before it. BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, a

member of the panel, wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla against Venugopal, accusing the senior Congress leader of raking up non-existent issues to defame the central government and destabilise the country's financial structure and economy. Accusing Venugopal of "unconstitutional and disdainful" conduct, Dubey claimed that political motivations were guiding the committee's chairperson after the Congress was "compelled"

by voters to sit in the opposition benches following the Lok Sabha polls. Claiming that unverified allegations by a foreign company like Hindenburg against Buch were part of such a campaign, he alleged that the "India Chapter" of this toolkit has become active. "This time also, unverified allegations have been levelled against the SEBI Chief by a foreign entity viz., Hindenburg Research, which is notorious for targeting business houses, important functionaries and financial institutions of the country," Dubey told Birla, urging the Speaker to restrain Venugopal. Parliamentarians from the BJP and its allies are in a majority in the committee, and they are likely to vehemently oppose any move by opposition members to raise issues that they believe are outside the panel's remit.

JP Nadda hail renewable of corridor agreement as 'significant step' for Sardar community



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP national president J P Nadda on Wednesday said the renewal of the agreement between India and Pakistan on the Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor is "significant step"

towards honouring the spiritual aspirations of the Sikh community. The ministry of external affairs on Tuesday announced that India and Pakistan have renewed the agreement on Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for the next five years. In view of the continued requests of the pilgrims regarding the removal of USD 20 service charge levied by Pakistan per pilgrim per visit, India has once again urged Pakistan not to levy any fee or charges on the pilgrims, the ministry said in a statement.

Sikh brothers and sisters, the Modi government has extended the agreement on the Sri Kartarpur Sahib Corridor for an additional five years. "Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our government has prioritized initiatives that celebrate and promote our nation's vibrant cultural and religious heritage," the Union minister said. This "extension" of agreement not only reflects the Modi government's commitment to enhancing spiritual journeys but also ensures that devotees can visit Sri Kartarpur Sahib "with the dignity they deserve", he added.

Cyclone Dana alert in West Bengal and Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



As Cyclone Dana is forecast to make landfall on October 24-25 along the coasts of West Bengal and Odisha, Indian Coast Guard (ICG) Region (North-East) has implemented a series of preventive measures to safeguard lives and property at sea, defence ministry said here on Wednesday. Giving details, officials said the ICG is closely monitoring the situation and has taken proactive steps to ensure preparedness for dealing with any emergency arising from the cyclone's impact. The ICG has tasked ships, aircraft and Remote Operating Stations at West Bengal and Odisha to broadcast regular weather warnings and safety advisories to fishermen and

mariners. These alerts are being transmitted continuously to all fishing vessels, urging them to return to shore immediately and seek safe shelter. The ICG has mobilised its vessels and aircraft, positioning them strategically to respond swiftly to any emergency situation at sea. Additionally, ICG personnel are working in coordination with local administrations and disaster management

authorities to ensure a coordinated and effective response. Fishing communities along the coastline have been informed through various channels, including village heads, to avoid venturing into the sea until the cyclone passes. The ICG is on high alert, with its dedicated disaster relief teams and assets ready to provide assistance, rescue and relief operations.

Government to celebrate Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 150th birth anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The government will commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel with a two-year-long nationwide programme from 2024 to 2026 to honour his monumental contribution to the country, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Wednesday. He said Sardar Patel's enduring legacy as the visionary behind the establishment of one of the world's most robust democracies and his pivotal role in unifying India from Kashmir to Lakshadweep remains indelible.

"To honour his monumental contributions, the government of India, under the leadership of PM Shri @narendramodi ji, will commemorate his 150th birth anniversary with a two-year-long nationwide celebration from 2024 to 2026," Shah wrote in a social media post. The home minister said this celebration will serve as a testament to his remarkable achievements and the spirit of unity that he epitomised. Patel was born on October 31, 1875, at Nadiad in Gujarat. As part of the celebrations, various programmes are organised across the country, recalling Sardar Patel's contribution to unify India.

Districts will named after Lord Rama or Krishna if BJP wins assembly election: Assam CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MEDININAGAR /JHARKHAND



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said Hussainabad sub-division in Jharkhand's Palamu district will be made a district if the BJP comes to power after the assembly elections, and it will be named after Lord Rama or Krishna. Sarma, also the BJP's Jharkhand election co-in-charge, said that driving out infiltrators from the state



would be the priority of the party. "Hussainabad will be made a district for sure after BJP comes to power in the state. It will be named after Lord Ram or Krishna," he said. Sarma said Hussainabad will be designated as a separate district in the first cabinet meeting of the new government. The Assam Chief Minister was addressing an election rally at Japla's Karpoori ground seeking votes for

Hussainabad assembly candidate Kamlesh Singh. Singh, who was Jharkhand's sole Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) legislator, joined the BJP on October 4. Designating Hussainabad a separate district has been a demand of Singh for a long time. He withdrew his support from the Hemant Soren-led government on November 1 last year claiming that his demand was not fulfilled. At the poll meeting, Sarma

alleged that Jharkhand's demography is changing due to Bangladeshi infiltrators but the ruling JMM is silent over the issue since they are its vote bank. "Driving out infiltrators is BJP's priority. We will implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) to drive out Bangladesh infiltrators from Jharkhand," he said. He claimed that the Hindu population is declining in Jharkhand's Santhal Pargana

region, while the population of Bangladesh infiltrators is rising. "They are entering Jharkhand through Santhal Pargana and spreading across the state. Gradually, Jharkhand will face the same situation what Assam is facing today," Sarma said. He claimed that the Muslim population in Assam was not even 20 per cent in 1951, which now increased to 45 per cent due to Bangladeshi infiltrators.

Australia named 'Country of nation' at 55th IFFI in Goa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Wednesday announced that Australia has been nominated as the "Country of Focus" at the 55th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) to be held in Goa from November 20 to 28. The "Country of Focus" segment at IFFI will feature a curated selection of seven Australian films, showcasing the country's rich storytelling traditions as well as indigenous and contemporary narratives. The announcement follows the recent signing of an Audio Visual Co-production Treaty between the two nations, which aims to boost co-productions by offering incentives to filmmakers from both countries. "This collaboration will not only promote cultural exchange but also open new avenues for filmmakers in India and Australia to work together on innovative cinematic projects," the ministry said in a statement.

Additionally, Australia will participate in the Film Bazaar, the market event held alongside IFFI. A delegation, including representatives from Screen Australia, State Screen Commissions, and Ausfilm, will showcase opportunities for collaboration, with a special focus on promoting Australia as a filming destination. Up to six Australian producers will attend Film Bazaar, supported by funding from their government, to explore co-production opportunities. The event will also host an "Australian Co-production Day" to facilitate networking between filmmakers from both countries. One of the highlights of the 2024 Film Bazaar will be the Australian project "Home Before Night" that has been selected as an official entry in the Co-Production Market. A dedicated panel discussion on co-production opportunities between India and Australia is also part of the Knowledge Series at the event.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj launches weather forecast service for Gram Panchayat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj will on Thursday launch a weather forecast service for gram panchayats which will provide them with localised daily weather forecasts for five days and enhance disaster preparedness, an official statement said. Gram Panchayat Level Weather Forecasting, which will be launched in collaboration with the India Meteorological Department (IMD), will also allow gram panchayats to check hourly weather forecasts and directly benefit farmers and villagers across the country, said the statement issued by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on Wednesday. Panchayati Raj Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh Lalan and Minister of State for Science and Technology and Earth Sciences (Independent Charge) Jitendra Singh will be present at the launch. "As part of the government's 100 Days Agenda, this initiative strengthens grassroots governance and promotes sustainable agricultural practices, making rural populations more climate-resilient and better

equipped to tackle environmental challenges," the statement said. This is the first time that localised weather forecasts will be available at the gram panchayat level, supported by the IMD's expanded sensor coverage. The forecasts will be disseminated through the ministry's digital platforms: e-GramSwaraj, Meri Panchayat app, and Gram Manchitra. "These tools will also strengthen disaster preparedness and infrastructure planning. Furthermore, SMS alerts will be sent to panchayat representatives regarding extreme weather events like cyclones and heavy rainfall, ensuring immediate action to protect lives, crops, and property. This endeavour is a

transformative step toward building climate-resilient communities at the grassroots level," the ministry said. A training workshop on "Weather Forecasts at the Gram Panchayat Level" will be organised to mark the launch of this initiative. The workshop will be attended by more than 200 participants, including elected representatives of panchayati raj institutions and state panchayati raj officials, it said. The training session will equip panchayat representatives and functionaries with the knowledge and skills to effectively utilise weather forecasting tools and resources at the grassroots level, empowering them to make informed decisions and enhance climate resilience in their communities.

HC seeks action against police officials over Badlapur sexual assault case

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government about action taken against the erring police officials for lapses in lodging an FIR and probing the alleged sexual assault on two minor girls at a school in Badlapur area of Thane district. A division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan noted that departmental inquiry has been set up against the errant Badlapur police officials.

Advocate General Birendra Saraf told the court that as per the departmental inquiry, charges of dereliction of duty have been found against one officer. "A report has been forwarded to the commissioner of police for necessary action," Saraf said. Two girls - aged four and five - were sexually abused inside the toilet of the school in Badlapur by a male attendant in August. While the case was being inquired by the Badlapur police, the Maharashtra government set up a Special Investigation

Team (SIT) for a probe into the case following a public outcry over serious lapses in the police investigation. The HC took suo motu (on its own) cognisance of the (sexual assault) incident and has been supervising the probe into it. The bench on Wednesday posted the matter for further hearing after six weeks. "On the next date, we shall be informed about the action taken against the erring officers attached to Badlapur police station," the court said.

Omar in New Delhi to meet PM Modi, HM Shah J and K CM expected to call on Modi on his arrival from BRICS summit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU



Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah Wednesday arrived in New Delhi ahead of his maiden meeting with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Home Minister Amit Shah after taking charge. Omar is expected to call on the Prime Minister on his arrival from the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia while he is expected to call on the Home Minister late Wednesday evening.

During his meeting with the Prime Minister Omar is likely to submit a resolution passed by his cabinet seeking restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. Though the office of Chief Minister remained tight lipped over the agenda of Chief Minister's visit to New Delhi but the political grapevine suggested Omar is headed to New Delhi to formally submit a resolution seeking restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir in its original form. Omar is also likely to meet a

few other central ministers seeking their support to push the ongoing vital developmental projects in the region. Omar is likely to take up the issue of 'uninterrupted' power supply during the peak winter season with the Union minister. Before heading to New Delhi Omar attended a series of meetings with the administrative secretaries of various departments and took stock of the ongoing developmental projects and the availability of power supply.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A diplomatic push for peace

During his visit to Russia for BRICS Summit, Prime Minister Modi once again roots for peace

Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan to discuss wide ranging issues. The meeting highlighted India's continued advocacy for peaceful resolutions to conflicts, particularly the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The BRICS summit brought together leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to discuss global issues and solidify their collective stance on a multipolar world order. During the meeting, PM Modi reaffirmed India's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, stressing the importance of dialogue and peaceful solutions. This stance underscores India's diplomatic approach of engaging with both Russia and Ukraine while maintaining its strategic autonomy. PM Modi's message comes at a critical time when Russia is advancing on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine, and global powers are grappling with the conflict's wider implications. Modi's call for peace aligns with India's broader foreign policy, which seeks to mediate and foster dialogue without aligning explicitly with any one bloc. This Summit marks a significant milestone for BRICS, as the addition of five new members, set to be formalised through the 'Kazan Declaration' at the conclusion of the Summit, reflects the growing importance of the bloc as an alternative forum in the shifting global power structure and a multipolar world order.



No wonder Russia has touted the BRICS Summit as a diplomatic victory, countering Western attempts to isolate Moscow over the Ukraine conflict. For India, this Summit was also an opportunity to reinforce India's pivotal role in BRICS as it continues to advocate for multipolarity and global governance reforms. India and

Russia's relationship has been characterised as a 'special and privileged strategic partnership', a sentiment echoed by President Putin, who noted that the bilateral ties continue to actively develop. While the Ukraine conflict has strained Russia's relations with the West, India has maintained a pragmatic approach by continuing to engage with Russia on economic and strategic matters. Notably, India has emerged as a significant purchaser of Russian oil, much to the disapproval of Western countries that are attempting to limit Russia's trade capabilities. India's stance has remained clear: its foreign policy decisions, including energy procurement, will prioritise its national interest, particularly in securing affordable resources for its citizens. The United States remains concerned over Russia's diplomatic manoeuvres amid the ongoing Ukraine conflict. Modi's visit to Russia for the BRICS Summit and his meeting with Putin emphasised India's role as a mediator advocating for peaceful conflict resolution. The strengthening of the BRICS bloc and the deepening of the India-Russia partnership signify broader shifts in global dynamics toward a multipolar world. As India navigates this evolving landscape, its policy of non-alignment and focus on strategic autonomy will be crucial in maintaining balanced relations with all major powers, while advocating for peace and stability.

PICTALK



Women colour earthen lamps at a roadside shop ahead of the Diwali festival, in Jaipur

Israel challenges the UN ahead of UN Day



SANTHOSH MATHEW

Israel's unprecedented declaration of UN Secretary-General António Guterres as persona non grata has challenged the very foundations of global diplomacy

The United Nations was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell. These words from Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), resonate with renewed urgency today. As the world observes United Nations Day on October 24, the occasion is marked by an unprecedented diplomatic crisis that raises critical questions about the future of global cooperation. Israel's recent declaration of current UN Secretary-General António Guterres as persona non grata has sent shockwaves through international diplomacy, challenging the very principles the UN was founded to uphold. The persona non grata designation, meaning a foreign official is no longer welcome, effectively bars Guterres from entering Israeli territory. This decision stems from his comments about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which were meant to emphasise the need for aid and peace. However, many Israeli officials viewed his remarks as biased against Israel, sparking tensions that led to this extraordinary response. As the world pauses to honour the UN's efforts in fostering peace and multilateral dialogue, this incident serves as a stark reminder of the difficulties faced by diplomacy in an increasingly polarised world. Established in 1945 following the devastation of World War II, the UN was created to maintain peace, promote human rights, and foster global cooperation. United Nations Day is intended to celebrate these ideals and the achievements of the world's largest international organisation. Yet, as we commemorate the UN's 79th anniversary, Israel's declaration of Guterres as persona non grata stands in sharp contrast to the spirit of multilateralism. The move not only represents a significant rebuke of Guterres' leadership but also challenges the UN's ability to act as an impartial mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the world's longest-standing disputes. The UN has often faced criticism



for its perceived bias or ineffectiveness, especially in conflict zones. Israel's frustrations with the organisation are longstanding, rooted in concerns about what it perceives as an undue focus on its policies while other nations escape similar scrutiny. The exclusion of Guterres from Israel, however, marks a dramatic escalation in this discontent. It signals a rejection not just of the Secretary-General's leadership but of the UN's role in mediating peace, setting a troubling precedent for the organisation's future involvement in the region. The concept of persona non grata has been wielded as a powerful diplomatic tool throughout history. Declaring someone unwelcome goes beyond a personal rebuke; it conveys a nation's stance on international relations. Past examples include the expulsion of Russian diplomats from various European countries amid political tensions, or Venezuela's Hugo Chávez being declared persona non grata by Colombia. However, Israel's designation of the UN's top diplomat is an extraordinary and rare occurrence, symbolising a low point in the relationship between Israel and the international community. For Israel, Guterres' remarks on the Gaza crisis were viewed as an affront to its right to self-defense, adding to long-standing grievances over perceived



THE CONCEPT OF PERSONA NON GRATA HAS BEEN WIELDED AS A POWERFUL DIPLOMATIC TOOL THROUGHOUT HISTORY. DECLARING SOMEONE UNWELCOME GOES BEYOND A PERSONAL REBUKE; IT CONVEYS A NATION'S STANCE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

bias at international forums. Israeli officials, including the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, quickly accused Guterres of undermining their security by portraying Israel's military actions as disproportionate. This stance reflects broader frustrations with international organisations, which some Israelis feel have not adequately acknowledged the complexities of their national security concerns. While the declaration is a decision made by Israel, its implications extend far beyond its borders. Human rights organisations and diplomatic circles have reacted swiftly to the move. Amnesty International, for instance, condemned the decision, arguing that it undermines the principles of diplomacy and the UN's mission to foster dialogue. Critics assert that Guterres, in his capacity as Secretary-General, was fulfilling his duty by highlighting the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and his exclusion from Israel sets a dangerous precedent. This incident highlights a growing trend of nations rejecting external criticism, even when it comes from humanitarian or impartial voices. The result could be a world where diplomacy no longer seeks common ground but instead shuts out dissent. The exclusion of Guterres reflects not only a national stance but a broader global trend of rising nationalism and isolationism. Across the world, countries are increasingly resistant to international oversight or critique, a shift that threatens the very role of the UN as a mediator and peacekeeper. As we observe UN Day, the importance of this moment cannot be overstated. The UN's mission to save humanity from conflict, as Hammarskjöld envisioned, is more critical than ever. The exclusion of Guterres exposes a fragile global order where the organisation's ability to mediate and foster peace is increasingly questioned. Israel's actions are not only a national response to perceived bias but also resonate with broader concerns about the fairness and effectiveness of international institutions in addressing security issues. Despite these challenges, the current diplomatic crisis could serve as a turning point for global diplomacy. As we mark United Nations Day, Guterres' designation as persona non grata by Israel is a stark reminder of the challenges facing diplomacy today. Yet, in the midst of this crisis lies an opportunity. This mission remains as vital now as it was when the UN was founded nearly eight decades ago. (The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DEMOCRACY OVER RELIGION

Madam—This refers to the editorial 'Path to Democracy'. Growth and stability could be achieved only under a vibrant democracy with liberty for all forces to make their productive contributions and point out the misdeeds and mistakes of the rulers for due corrections. In Bangladesh, things are taking a swing from one extreme to the next. In the name of restoring democracy, rabidly communal fundamentalists are taking centre stage. The people should understand that religion is an innate affair and allowing it to dominate political affairs can cause only hurdles to revive the economy and care for the people. History is clear that wherever religion plays a dominant role, liberty and development suffer. Even after 7 decades, Pakistan is still lingering around its basic issues. India, which was developing in many fields, is on a retrograde path with communal forces trying to dominate the affairs, leaving 81 crore poor people to manage their lives with 5 kg of free rice, unemployment reaching its heights, untamed inflation and a minuscule section allowed to amass the wealth of the nation. Therefore, the people of Bangladesh should be careful in keeping religion away from politics and focus on development failing which the country may have to join the band of Afghans and Pakistan.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

TERROR STRIKES GANDERBAL

Madam—Apropos to the article 'Dastardly Act', October 22. The Ganderbal terror attack, which claimed the lives of a doctor and six labourers at a tunnel construction site, leaves no room for doubt that Pakistan will persist with its nefarious policy of bleeding India and J and K in particular with a thousand cuts. It is no coincidence that the terror attack has taken place in Ganderbal, the constituency of J and K's new CM Omar Abdullah. Clearly, Pakistan-backed terror groups are sending the unmistakable message - after targeting the Jammu region in recent

De-escalating border tensions



The efforts of India and China for the purpose of military de-escalation are welcome. At this critical moment, when both the nations have been facing critical tension around the Line of Actual Control and surrounding areas, including Depsang and

months - that the remarkably peaceful polls in the UT could not have taken place without the Pakistani military establishment's tacit agreement. The attempt to disrupt an infrastructure project is aimed not just at stalling development in the valley and scaring away migrant labourers and tourists who have a crucial role in boosting J and K's economy, it is also to demonstrate that no one in Kashmir is fully safe. Clearly, Pakistan's Army chief, Gen Asim Munir, has a second message to his own government in response to former PM Nawaz Sharif telling visiting Indian journalists last week, "We have lost the last 75 years, and it is important we don't lose the next 75." Which is, that hosting an Indian foreign minister on Pakistani soil is all very well, but the Army cannot be kept out of any conversation with India.

N Sathasiva Reddy | Washington

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Madam—The picture of the freshly-made 'diyas' or 'earthen lamps' ahead of the Deepavali festival, which is just days away, was a visual delight. ("Pic Talk" October

Demchok, such efforts of engagement and de-escalation are worth appreciating. Although the timing is a bit dramatic because PM Modi is in Russia for the purpose of an official visit to attend the BRICS summit, with probable estimation to meet President Xi Jinping with PM Modi on the sidelines of the summit.

The announcement from the side of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri with respect to military personnel disengagement and patrolling personnel arrangements is particularly welcoming that India's hard efforts are now ripening fruits and cooperation with China will help India to manage the bilateral rivalry and assist in strengthening ties between the two.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

22). The word 'Deepavali' is derived from the Sanskrit fusion word 'Deepavali', which is formed from 'dipa' (light) and 'avali' (series or row). It thus means a 'row or series of lights', which illuminates the country with its brilliance and dazzles all with joy. Illuminating homes with lights is the expression of obeisance to the heavens for the attainment of health, wealth, knowledge, peace, and prosperity. While the electric illumination looks stunning, there is no comparison to the age-old diyas. In fact, the advantage of lighting diya lamps is that they are biodegradable, cost-effective, and a feast to our eyes. The festival of Diwali is a lot more than just bursting firecrackers, which, in fact, pose serious health hazards given the significant relationship between air pollution and respiratory infections. In comparison, diyas serve the purpose of purifying the environment by getting rid of negativity and creating positive vibes.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Kerachakka unpaved road to development

It is home to 80 tribal families struggling for basic infrastructure. With impassable road access to education, healthcare and essential services remains a distant dream

Kerachakka village, located about 50 kilometres from the district headquarters of Sarangarh-Bilaigarh in Chhattisgarh, is struggling with a lack of basic infrastructure. Home to 80 families, primarily from the Khairwar and Bariha tribal communities, the village is accessible only through a broken, unpaved road. During the monsoon, this road becomes nearly impassable, cutting the village off from the outside world. This affects not only transportation but also children's access to education. Sunil Lal Chauhan, the head teacher of the local government primary school, explains that while 23 children are enrolled, only a few attend school during the rainy season.



The road conditions are simply too poor, making the journey unsafe, especially for adolescent girls whose education suffers the most. Chauhan adds that with only one teacher, who is also burdened with administrative tasks, the school struggles to provide the attention the children need. The broader issue is compounded by the migration of families in search of employment, disrupting children's schooling for extended periods. Resident Badri Prasad highlights another challenge: ineffective local governance. Though the village falls under Gram Panchayat Gardih, meetings are rarely held, and the Panchayat office is often closed. Essential services like ration distribution happen only once a month, which creates difficulties for the villagers. Badri Prasad emphasises that due to the village's dis-

tant from the district headquarters, Kerachakka has been left behind in the development process. Poor road connectivity remains a major barrier, preventing growth and access to opportunities. Rameshwar Prasad Kurre, a local social worker, points out that the village's rocky terrain limits agricultural opportunities. Most families own small plots of land that barely yield enough to sustain them. Consequently, many villagers migrate during the off-season in search of work, which has a particularly harsh impact on



CHOTU SINGH RAWAT

It is home to 80 tribal families struggling for basic infrastructure. With impassable road access to education, healthcare and essential services remains a distant dream

women and adolescent girls. Malnutrition is rampant, with women and girls often being the first to suffer when resources are scarce. While pregnant women and young children receive some nutritional support from the Anganwadi centre, this does not extend to other women, leaving them vulnerable. Recent government initiatives, however, offer hope. The Union Cabinet has approved Rs 70,000 crore for rural road development under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana for 2024-29, and the Chhattisgarh government has allocated Rs17,529 crore in its 2024-25 budget for village roads. These investments aim to improve infrastructure, create employment opportunities, and reduce migration. Better roads could be the first step in bringing Kerachakka and similar villages into the fold of progress, ensuring they are no longer left behind in the race for development. (The author is a grassroots worker from Ajmer, Rajasthan; views expressed are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

ENCOUNTERING THE DIVINE

From answering prayers to reducing life's hardships, the divine remains ever-present



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

With the internet and social media, we are constantly being reminded about the wealthiest, the most powerful, very famous, the prettiest, etc. Have you imagined meeting any one of these personalities except to see them in print or in a video? What about God, who owns everything there is, is omnipotent, is omniscient, is omnipresent and a whole lot more, about which I will write in this article?

God is not only omnipresent but available to us 24x7. Yes, God cannot be seen in person except to the very best of devotees like Sant Tulsidas, but can be seen in Deity forms and in nice photos everywhere. God even manifests in His murti forms like He had in His Rama Lalla form in Ayodhya.

How is Lord helping us by His activities? He listens to all our prayers, and He must respond to them, they being spiritual activities. However, the response will be appropriate at a time chosen by God. Mostly, it won't be as prayed for, because most of the prayers are for material gains, which are undesired. For example, a student prays for good marks even though he doesn't deserve them. God will give something as God can never be a debtor. Then, God is ever ready to guide us, as He guided Arjuna by preaching the instructions of the Bhagavad-Geeta. Few pray for guidance but those who do really benefit, because direction is all important. It determines where we will end up. God gives intuitions, uses mediums to convey, etc. God even instructs directly His devotees as He instructed Arjuna.



The third important help God provides is to get us out of troubles, we get into due to our past faulty karmaphalas (results of acts). God does not stop them from coming because that will make the 'Karmaphala Principle' ineffective; God only makes them less painful. Continuing about God's bounties, God empowers us in various ways. For example, a scientist is deep into looking for a solution, which will benefit humanity, and he deserves getting credit for it due to past pious karmaphalas. God gives him the intuition, because God is the only source. We cannot invent or create anything new. All big or important acts are done by God only; He makes the deserving among us 'nimitta' (instruments), just as He used Arjuna to kill the biggest warriors of the Kaurava army (11.33)

God is especially partial to welfare workers, because it suits His Creation. He has promised that doers of welfare acts will not end up badly. (6.40) What this means is that such persons will not suffer a painful death. God goes a step further for His advanced devotees; He does miracles for them. Meerabai was given poison to drink because she chose Lord Krishna as her worshipable Deity. What did the Lord do? He made poison ineffective. How did Lord Krishna save Arjuna - His devotee and friend (4.3), who had sworn to enter fire, if he could not kill Jayadrath before sunset? As soon as Jayadrath came out of hiding Arjuna's imminent death, Lord brought the sunlight back. This allowed Arjuna to kill Jayadrath before sunset.

I can go on regarding what all God does and can do for us if we link with Him. And He has made approaching Him very easy. What is so difficult to have 'darshan' of God in His Deity form in a temple? What about chanting God's names? Is it so difficult? It may appear childish but this is the way it has been designed to gain God's favour. Someone may say why is it so easy to get so much cash out of a ATM? Because this is the way it has been designed.

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

AI's impact shines in Nobel Prizes



B K SINGH

David Baker, Demis Hassabis and others have harnessed AI to revolutionise medicine and nanotechnology, ushering in a new era of scientific breakthroughs



This year's Physics and Chemistry both Nobel prizes are linked to Artificial Intelligence. While Physics laureates applied principles and tools of Physics namely atomic spin and Boltzmann's machine to create structures that can store, reconstruct and discover properties in data for artificial neural networks to enable powerful computers to mimic human memory and learning, Chemistry laureates worked on computational protein design that advanced protein structure predictions. In all living creatures, proteins are essential for cell functions. David Baker, a 62-year-old Professor at the University of Washington, Seattle succeeded in building an entirely new kind of Protein, that is known as life's building blocks and comprises 20 different amino acids. Since 2003, he and his research group have created several imaginative proteins that can be used in pharmaceuticals, vaccines, tiny sensors and nanomaterials. He was awarded half the prize money for the 2024 Chemistry Nobel Prize.

In 2020 David Hassabis and John Jumper both Britons aged 49 years and 39 years respectively presented AlphaFold2, an AI model that predicted the structure of Proteins from amino acid sequences. Two Britons were awarded this year's remaining half of the prize. AI model AlphaFold2 has opened ways to predict proteins and has already been used by researchers to predict nearly 200 million proteins. Research has also advanced in understanding antibiotic resistance and creating enzymes that have the potential to decompose plastics. Proteins are molecular machines of our lives making up a significant portion of bodies i.e. muscles, enzymes, hormones, hair, blood and cartilage.

Proteins' shape determines their function. Different shapes can be folded in numerous ways to arrive at the resultant shapes of protein. Incorrectly folded protein may lead to improper functioning and can be the reason for Alzheimer's, cystic fibrosis, and diabetes. As protein's shape is solely based on amino acid sequence, these can manoeuvre into specific shapes duly minimising inter-atomic repulsions among the atoms of amino acids.

In the new era of machine learning laure-



THE SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES HAVE EXPRESSED CONFUSION OVER HOW MACHINE LEARNING AND ARTIFICIAL NEURAL NETWORKS CAN BE ALIGNED WITH THE TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES OF PHYSICS

ates have solved the problem by using a large database of experimentally obtained protein structures to train AI and allowed it to learn the principles of folding. The result was AlphaFold2 which predicted three-dimensional structures of proteins. A new nanomaterial was developed in 2016 where up to 120 proteins were spontaneously linked together. In 2021 nanoparticles with protein were developed that were found to imitate the influenza virus which will further help in developing a vaccine for influenza. Vaccines for livestock using the technology have already been successful. Some of the other developments are the proteins that function as molecular rotors and also the geometrically shaped proteins that can change their shape under external influences.

Such geometrically shaped proteins which are impacted by external influences are quite useful in producing tiny sensors. Many new possibilities for the use of protein in nanotechnology are useful to develop new tools for precise control and manipulation of elements at the nanoscale. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of molecules has been studied and researchers have found how specially modified diamond flakes can be used as nanoscale magnetic field detectors. These tiny sensors can elucidate the structure of a single organic molecule.

With nanoscale MRI researchers may one day directly image proteins. A 91-year-old Professor at Princeton University, USA John Hopfield and a 76-year-old Professor at University of Toronto, Canada have been awarded this year's Nobel Prize in Physics. Hopfield created associative memory for storing and recreating images.

Like the structure of the brain, the artificial neural network was created where the brain's neurons were

represented by nodes and each of these nodes having different values. A neural network as a system is inspired by how the human brain works, it does the same with data. It takes in information, processes it and makes decisions, learning from experience. Neural network utilises Physics that describes characteristics of any material due to its atomic spin, which makes each atom a tiny magnet. Hopfield described the network as energy in the spin system as in Physics and is trained by finding values for connections between the nodes such that saved images have low energy. When it is fed with incomplete/ distorted images it works through the nodes and updates the values for each in such a way that the energy of the network falls.

The overall state of his network i.e. energy is calculated using a formula that uses all values of the nodes and all strengths of connections between them. When the minimum energy is attained, the corresponding saved image is most like the imperfect image fed in the network. Further improvements have made it possible to save more pictures and to differentiate between them even when they are quite similar.

Using the Hopfield network, Hinton found the Boltzmann machine using tools from statistical Physics - a new network that can learn to recognise a characteristic element in the given data. Researchers use the tool from statistical mechanics to look at the collective behaviour of a large number of particles to determine large-scale microscopic properties like temperature, pressure and magnetisation. There are different energy states in the model and the material is more likely to exist in the lowest energy state. Boltzmann distribution explains how likely the given state is. It describes the probability of a system being in a particular state -

solid, liquid or gas - based on its energy and temperature. Hinton used the tool to solve computing problems in neural networks. Hinton added hidden layers to neural networks allowing machines to analyse data in more sophisticated ways.

The machine is trained by feeding it with examples that are most likely to arise when it is run. Boltzmann machine can also classify images or create new examples on the pattern it was trained. A trained Boltzmann machine can recognise a familiar trait in information it has not previously seen. Hinton has further developed this work which led to the current explosive development of machine learning. "The laureates' work has already been of greatest benefit. In Physics we use artificial neural networks in vast range of areas, such as developing new materials with specific properties." Says Ellen Moons, chair of the Nobel Committee for Physics.

The scientific and academic communities have expressed confusion over how machine learning and artificial neural networks can be aligned with the traditional boundaries of Physics. Nevertheless, the work of Hopfield and Hinton is having a profound impact on the digital age, even if its classification within the Physics domain remains contested.

The laureates' contribution is the brain behind medical imaging systems that detect cancer faster than doctors. Scientists are inventing more and more applications of machine learning and advanced studies in Physics like processing data to discover Higgs particles, searching for exoplanets, and reducing noise in the measurement of gravitational waves from colliding black holes.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests- head of Forest Force-Karnataka; views are personal)

Nobel Prize snub of Rosalind Lee sparks debate on fairness of the system

The exclusion of Rosalind Lee has reignited discussions about the fairness of scientific recognition

The recent announcement of the Nobel Prize snubbing Rosalind Lee of Nobel Prize who was the first author of the paper that was considered for this year's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, while considering her co-worker and husband, Victor Ambros, the corresponding author of the paper for the coveted prize, has reignited discussions about fairness, recognition, and the implications of such decisions on science. Traditionally, scientific papers list authors in an order that reflects the perceived contribution to the work. The first author typically plays a significant role in conducting the research and writing the paper. In



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

contrast, the last author often represents the senior scientist or principal investigator who guided the research. Middle authors usually contribute in specific areas but are not as heavily involved as the first or last author. This system has fostered a hierarchy in academia that rewards a select few. At the same time, many essential team members go unacknowledged, ultimately

skewing career advancement, compensation, and visibility in the scientific community. We still follow this flawed authorship order in most recruitments, funding agencies, promotions, awards, and recognitions. Even for awarding doctoral degrees, our universities follow this order of authorship. It often overlooks a person's intellectual knowledge and technical skills needed for the study.

This bias creates an environment where specific contributors, though not in prominent author positions, have a diminished chance of recognition and growth, potentially leading to a loss of morale and an outflow of valuable talent from academia and research fields.

Many talented and skilled youngsters are not getting good positions because of this flawed protocol in research and academic institutions. In today's world, science cannot be done in isolation. Most of today's research involves interdisciplinary work collaborating with one or more institutions, and each person involved may contribute to its success. Projects like the Human Genome Project or the Large Hadron Collider involve the contributions of hundreds of scientists from varied institutions across the globe. Even in our national institutions, outsourcing certain works has become a norm. In that scenario, even the



company that does the work has to be credited, though they may charge for it. The importance of each contributor extends beyond the experimenters. Data analysts, statisticians, field researchers, technicians, and other support staff often carry out substantial portions of the work. While their names might not always

appear on a paper, they enable discoveries and innovations by ensuring the research is feasible, accurate and applicable. In such a framework, reducing credit to a first-author or corresponding author model grossly underestimates the collective effort, leading to unfair career advantages for select individuals over others

equally deserving. A system that values equal contribution offers a fairer foundation for hiring, promotions, and awards.

This shift would ensure that positions of responsibility and recognition are not limited to those with the resources or negotiating power to secure lead author positions. Moreover, equal credit distribution could improve diversity in science. This approach could also boost diversity by supporting women, early-career researchers, and marginalised groups who are often in middle-author roles due to limited mentorship and systemic inequities, giving them a better chance at securing resources and opportunities. Critics may argue that equal

weightage could lead to confusion over who contributed most to a particular study, possibly complicating the evaluation process.

To address this, journals should strictly include only those who actively contributed to the study, ending practices of "gift authorship" to the department or the head of the institution. Science thrives on collaboration and equal weightage for all authors in jobs and awards, including consideration for the Nobel Prize, which promotes a culture of inclusivity, fairness, and shared achievement.

(The author is the Dean-Academic affairs, at Garden City University and adjunct faculty at NIAS, Bangalore; Views are personal)

Israel says it killed Hezbollah official expected to be group's next leader

AP ■ BEIRUT

Israel said Tuesday that one of its airstrikes outside Beirut earlier in the month killed a Hezbollah official widely expected to have replaced the militant group's longtime leader, who was killed by an Israeli airstrike in September. There was no immediate confirmation from Hezbollah about the fate of Hashem Safieddine, a powerful cleric who was expected to succeed Hassan Nasrallah, one of the group's founders. Safieddine was killed in early October in a strike that also killed 25 other Hezbollah leaders, according to Israel, whose airstrikes in southern Lebanon in recent months have killed many of Hezbollah's top leaders, leaving the group in disarray. Last week, Israel killed the top leader of Hamas, Yahya Sinwar, during a battle in Gaza. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a trip to Israel that leaders there should "capitalize" on Sinwar's death as

an opportunity to end the war in Gaza and secure the release of hostages taken during the deadly Hamas attack that started the war. Blinken also stressed the need for Israel to do more to help increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Palestinians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office called his meeting with Blinken, which lasted more than two hours, "friendly and productive." The Beirut suburb where Safieddine was killed was pummeled by fresh airstrikes Tuesday, including one that levelled a building Israel said housed Hezbollah facilities. The collapse sent smoke and debris flying into the air a few hundred meters (yards) from where a spokesperson for Hezbollah had just briefed journalists about a weekend drone attack that damaged Netanyahu's house. Tuesday's airstrikes came 40 minutes after Israel issued an evacuation warning for two buildings in the area that it said were used by Hezbollah. The

Hezbollah news conference nearby was cut short, and an Associated Press photographer captured an image of an Israeli bomb heading toward the building moments before it was destroyed. There were no immediate reports of casualties. Hezbollah's chief spokesperson, Mohammed Afif, said the group was behind the Saturday drone attack on Netanyahu's home in the coastal town of Caesarea. Israel has said neither the prime minister nor his wife were home at the time. Blinken's meetings with Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders was part of his 11th visit to the region since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. He landed hours after Hezbollah launched a barrage of rockets into central Israel, setting off air raid sirens in populated areas and at its international airport, but causing no apparent damage or injuries. Hospitals in Lebanon fear being targeted by Israel. An Israeli airstrike late Monday in Beirut destroyed several buildings across the street from

the country's largest public hospital, killing 18 people and wounding at least 60 others. The Israeli military said it struck a Hezbollah target, without elaborating, and said that it hadn't targeted the hospital itself. AP reporters visited the Rafik Hariri University Hospital on Tuesday. They saw broken windows in the hospital's pharmacy and dialysis center, which was full of patients at the time. Staff at another Beirut hospital feared it would be targeted after Israel alleged that Hezbollah had stashed hundreds of millions of dollars in cash and gold in its basement, without providing evidence. The director of the Sahel General Hospital denied the allegations and invited journalists to visit the hospital and its two underground floors on Tuesday. AP reporters saw no sign of militants or anything out of the ordinary. The few remaining patients had been evacuated after the Israeli military's announcement the night before.

Blinken urges Israel to seek deal after gains as truce efforts remain stalled

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Wednesday that Israel needs to pursue an "enduring strategic success" after its tactical victories against Hamas, urging it to seek a deal that would end the war in the Gaza Strip and bring back dozens of hostages. He spoke before travelling from Israel to Saudi Arabia on his 11th visit to the region since the outbreak of the war. Air raid sirens sounded in Tel Aviv shortly before his departure as Israel intercepted two projectiles fired from Lebanon, and a puff of smoke could be seen in the sky from Blinken's hotel. "Israel has achieved most of the strategic objectives when it comes to Gaza," Blinken told reporters before boarding his plane. "Now is the time to turn those successes into an enduring strategic success." "There really are two things left to do: Get the hostages home and bring the war to an end with an understanding of what will follow," he said. The United States sees a new opportunity to revive cease-fire efforts after the killing of top Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar by



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) meets Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

Israeli forces in Gaza last week. But there's no indication that either of the warring parties have modified their demands since talks stalled over the summer. There was also no immediate sign of a breakthrough after Blinken met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other top Israeli officials on Tuesday. Israel blamed the failure of the talks on a hard-line stance adopted by Sinwar, but Hamas says its demands for a lasting cease-fire, full Israeli withdrawal and the release of a large number of Palestinian prison-

ers have not changed following his death. Hamas blamed the failure of the talks on Israel's demand for a lasting military presence in parts of Gaza. Egypt has suggested the possibility of a short pause in fighting in which Hamas would release a handful of hostages and humanitarian aid deliveries would be ramped up, especially in northern Gaza, an Egyptian official told The Associated Press. The official, who was not authorized to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity, said Egypt and fellow mediator Qatar had dis-

cussed the idea with the United States but it was not yet a firm proposal. The official said Israel and Hamas were aware of those discussions. A senior State Department official confirmed that a proposal for a limited hostage release has been discussed in recent days but that no determination had been made, even after Blinken's meetings with Israeli officials and families of the hostages on Tuesday. There was no immediate comment from Israel or Hamas. The militant group has rejected such ideas in the past, saying it is intent on securing an end to the war. It is still holding around 100 hostages captured in its Oct 7, 2023, attack that triggered the war, around a third of whom are believed to be dead. Israel has meanwhile dramatically reduced the amount of humanitarian aid allowed into Gaza as it wages another major operation in the hard-hit north of the territory. Blinken reiterated a warning that hindering humanitarian aid could force the US to scale back the crucial military support it has provided to Israel since the start of the war.

21m Americans have already voted in US presidential elections

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Two weeks before the US presidential elections, as many as 21 million Americans have already cast their vote in the middle of an intense election campaign between the two candidates: Vice President Kamala Harris from the Democratic Party and the former president Donald Trump from the Republican Party. According to data from the Election Lab at the University of Florida, about 7.8 million votes have come in through early in-person methods while the remaining over 13.3 million votes have been cast through mail ballots. Unlike the Indian general elections, wherein campaigning stops 36 hours before the start of the voting, both campaigning and voting go parallel to each other at least for about four weeks. The US presidential elections are scheduled to be held on November 5. Political pundits say the winner would be decided on the results of the polls in seven battleground states: Arizona, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia. Early voting is a unique provision for American voters wherein elector cast their vote by either asking for a mail-in ballot, which in some ways could be compared with India's postal ballots, or they go out and vote at designated polling booths which in many states open up a few weeks ahead of the actual polling day. According to the Election Lab at the University of Florida, the early voting percentage is just 1.7 per cent among Asian Americans. However, in many places, several Indian Americans were seen standing in lines to cast their vote. Chanchal Jhingani, 88, and her daughter Vandana Jhingani stood up in line on October 21 to exercise their right to



vote in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. In a democratic bastion, Vandana said she voted for someone who can "Make America Great Again." Jitendra R. Diganvkar encountered a huge line when he went to vote in Texas. "This is full parking. People are coming every minute. I recommend every US citizen who re-registers to vote," he said. According to The New York Times, more Republicans are doing early voting than expected. "They (the Republicans) have done a better job of turning out their voters to vote early," Sam Almy, a Democratic political strategist who tracks early ballots in Arizona, told the daily. "I think they realized that early voting is easy and convenient: It turns out your voters quickly, and they don't have to gamble on turning out all their voters on Election Day," he said. "It's a remarkable turnout from four years ago when Trump had thoroughly demoralised every method of voting that didn't occur in person on Election Day," the daily reported. As per, Election Lab, among in-person early voters, 41.3 Republicans have voted so far as against 33.6 per cent by the Democrats.

Hong Kong bars WhatsApp, Google Drive from govt computers

AP ■ HONG KONG

The Hong Kong government is barring most civil servants from using popular apps like WhatsApp, WeChat and Google Drive on their work computers due to potential security risks. The latest IT security guidelines from the Digital Policy Office have many civil servants complaining about added inconvenience. Government workers will still be allowed to use the services from personal devices at work, and can get exceptions to the ban with approval from a manager. Information technology experts said companies have adopted similar policies due to increasing risks of data leaks and cybersecurity challenges. Sun Dong, Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, said on a radio program Tuesday that the ban is needed as hacking is becoming a more serious problem. He said the governments of the United States and China have also adopted stringent measures for their internal computer systems. A civil servant surnamed Lee, who requested anonymity because she was not authorised to speak to the media, said her office often uses cloud storage services to exchange large files with vendors outside the government. On Wednesday, the office said in a Facebook post that the policy aims to prevent potentially malicious links and attachments from bypassing security measures through encrypted messages. It suggested affected departments seek substitutes, such as allocating designated computers for using such services but cutting these devices' connections with internal systems. Francis Fong, the honorary president of the Hong Kong Information Technology Federation, said he "somewhat agreed" with the government's blanket approach, saying it could reduce cybersecurity risks. He added that it could also address issues with data breaches. Anthony Lai, director of VX Research Limited, a cybersecurity firm based in Hong Kong and Britain, said the government's approach is appropriate due to low cybersecurity awareness among some staff and a lack of comprehensive internal monitoring systems.

Sri Lanka east coast on alert for possible anti-Israeli threat

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Security has been beefed up in the eastern coast surfing resort of Arugam Bay following information about a possible attack against foreign tourists, especially Israelis, in the area, police said on Wednesday. "There has been information on an attack targeting Israelis - a building where they are located," police spokesman deputy inspector general Nihal Thaldewa told reporters. The security net is focused on the Arugam Bay and Pottuvu area. Local media reports said that around 500

police officials and Special Task Force personnel have been deployed in the Arugam Bay tourist area. Sri Lanka's Muslim minority groups have condemned the wars in Gaza and Lebanon by holding continuous anti-Israel protests. Several posts have appeared in social media calling for boycott of Israeli businesses in the east coast. Police action was prompted by a security and a travel alert by the US Embassy in Colombo. A statement said the embassy had received credible information about an attack targeting the Arugam Bay. "US citizens are strongly urged to avoid the

Arugam Bay Area until further notice," it said. The Embassy of Russia too followed suit with a warning to its tourists. "The embassy asks Russian citizens to remain vigilant and avoid large crowds," it said. The police vowed to accord protection to all foreign nationals. "Because of the war in Ukraine and tension in the middle east, the police work in coordination with intelligence services to ensure the safety of tourists," Thaldewa said. The police have set up a hotline for tourists to alert authorities on any suspicious activities.

Imran's wife granted bail

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Wednesday granted bail to Bushra Bibi, the wife of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, in the Toshakhana corruption case involving the alleged illegal sale of state gifts, nearly nine months after she was arrested. The 50-year-old former first lady's bail plea was accepted against Rs 1 million surety bonds during the hearing conducted by Islamabad High Court judge Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb, Geo News reported. The court's decision provides relief to Bibi, who was arrested after a court on January 31 convicted and sentenced the couple to 14 years in jail in a corruption case. During the hearing, Justice Aurangzeb questioned the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) investigative officer about the necessity of further interrogation of Bibi, who is Khan's third wife and a spiritual healer. The officer confirmed that no additional investigation was required, after which the judge granted bail. The court further referenced similar practices in other countries, noting that the British Prime Minister had also taken gifts home, citing regulations. The Express Tribune newspaper newspaper reported.

Hungary's Orban claims EU seeks to topple his govt

AP ■ BUDAPEST

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban claimed in a speech on Wednesday that the European Union seeks to topple his government and install a puppet regime in the Central European country, an escalation of open hostility toward the bloc by the member considered Russia's closest ally. Speaking before thousands of supporters in Budapest, Orban was marking Hungary's national holiday commemorating a 1956 armed uprising against Soviet repression that began in the capital and spread across the country before being crushed by the Red Army. Orban has often used the holiday, which looms large in Hungarians' memory as a freedom fight against foreign domination, to draw parallels between past occupying forces like the Soviet Union and Ottoman Empire and the EU of today. "Independent Hungarian politics are unacceptable to Brussels," Orban told the crowd, referring to the EU headquarters in Belgium. "That is why they announced in Brussels that they will get rid of Hungary's national government. They also announced that they wanted to hang a



Brussels puppet government around the country's neck." Orban gave no evidence to support his claims. There was no immediate public reaction from Brussels. "Do we bow to foreign will, this time to the will of Brussels, or do we resist it?" Orban continued. "I propose that our answer be as clear and unambiguous as it was in 1956." The EU has withheld billions in financial support from Hungary over its alleged breaches of rule of law, while some of the bloc's lawmakers have repeatedly proposed stripping Hungary of its voting rights over democratic backsliding. The EU parliament declared in 2022 that Hungary can no longer be considered a democracy. Hungary's leader has clashed with the bloc especially over the war in Ukraine. Hungary has routinely blocked, delayed or

watered down EU efforts to extend assistance to Ukraine and sanction Russia, and taken an adversarial posture toward Kyiv while growing closer to Moscow. Orban has broken with other EU leaders by arguing for an immediate cease-fire and peace talks in Ukraine, leading critics to suggest that he is advocating for Russian interests and turning his back on his EU and NATO partners. "The Brussels bureaucrats have led the West into a hopeless war," said Orban, who is widely seen as Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in the EU. "In my minds, dizzy with the hope of victory, this war is the war of the West against Russia... Now they want to openly push the entire European Union into the war in Ukraine." He claimed, without providing evidence, that the EU plans to allow Ukrainian soldiers to station in Hungary after a future victory "to guarantee the security of the whole of Europe." He added: "We Hungarians would wake up one morning to find that Slavic soldiers from the east were again stationed on the territory of Hungary. We do not want that, but the pressure from Brussels is getting stronger every day."

Consulting all on president's removal: B'desh's interim govt

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's interim government on Wednesday said it is "consulting all stakeholders" to decide the fate of President Mohammed Shahabuddin, as authorities beefed up security around his residence in the wake of protests demanding his removal over comments that raised questions on prime minister Sheikh Hasina's resignation. Several hundred protesters on Tuesday tried to storm Bangabhaban, the president's official residence, demanding the resignation of Shahabuddin, who in an interview with Bangla daily Manab Zamini last week said that he did not have any documentary evidence of Hasina resigning as prime minister before leaving the country on August 5. "The interim government has not made any decision regarding the removal of President

Mohammed Shahabuddin from office," Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam was quoted as saying by the Daily Star newspaper. The interim cabinet is likely to discuss the issue this week, according to the media reports. "We will inform you of any developments regarding the matter," Shafiqul told reporters following a meeting between Chief Adviser Yunus and a delegation from Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) at the state guesthouse, Jamuna on Wednesday. Following the attempted breach at the presidential palace late last night and violent clashes with police, authorities imposed a strict security lockdown to prevent further incidents. "We have increased the security of Bangabhaban," Shafiqul told reporters. In a separate interaction with reporters, Information Adviser

Nahid Islam said a decision regarding President Shahabuddin can be reached through political consensus and national unity, rather than following legal or constitutional procedures. "There is no need to stage a demonstration in front of Bangabhaban and elsewhere. We got the message of the people and a decision has to be taken through discussion," he was quoted as saying by the newspaper. The interim government, Islam said, "is consulting all stakeholders, and a decision may be forthcoming after discussion in this regard... Whether the president will remain in office or not is not currently a legal or constitutional question. It is a political decision. To take the decision, we are prioritising stability, security and discipline in the state." Meanwhile, barbed wire fencing was installed alongside barricades at the main gate of

Bangabhaban, while APBN (Armed Police Battalion), BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh), police, and army personnel have been deployed in armed positions around the area. Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), water cannons, and riot control vehicles have also been readied in case the protests escalate further, the newspaper reported. However, tensions remained high as protests continued to surge, with various groups demonstrating outside Bangabhaban since Tuesday. A robust four-layer security cordon was established along the main road leading to Bangabhaban, bolstered by a three-layer barbed wire fence to deter unauthorised access. Nobel laureate Yunus, 84, became Bangladesh's interim government's Chief Adviser on August 8 after Prime Minister Hasina fled to India on August 5 amidst student-led mass protests.

Sikh woman found dead inside walk-in oven in Canada Walmart

PTI ■ OTTAWA

A 19-year-old Sikh woman was found dead inside a walk-in oven of the Walmart store's bakery department in Canada's Halifax city, according to media reports. Halifax Regional Police (HRP) said they were called to a sudden death at the Walmart at 6990 Mumford Road around 9:30 pm on Saturday. According to police, the woman, who has not been identified, was employed at the store. Her body was found in a walk-in oven, police said. The Maritime Sikh Society confirmed to CTV News that she was a member of their community. "It's very sad for us, for her family as well, because she came for a better future and she lost her life," said Annmolpreet Singh, with the Maritime Sikh Society. She had recently moved to Canada from India. The Globe and Mail newspaper said. The store has remained closed since



Saturday night while the investigation is ongoing. HRP Constable Martin Cromwell said police were aware of online speculation about the woman's cause of death. "The investigation is complex," said Cromwell. "We understand the public is involved, and we just wanted to encourage the public to be patient with our investigation and be mindful that there are family members and coworkers involved." Cromwell said Halifax police were coordinating with the appropriate agencies to help with the investigation.

"We urge the public to be mindful of sharing speculative information on social media," HRP said in a statement on Tuesday. A spokeswoman for the province's labour department said a stop-work order has been issued for the bakery and "one piece of equipment" at the Walmart store. "It is important to note that the investigation has not yet reached a point where the cause and manner of death have been confirmed," HRP said. Nova Scotia's medical examiner is working to determine the cause of death, and the province's Department of Health and Safety is taking part in the investigation. Walk-in ovens, also referred to as cabinet or batch ovens, allow for curing, drying or baking in batches using wheeled racks or carts. They are often found in large-volume bakeries in places such as supermarkets. In a statement, Walmart Canada said the company is heartbroken and their thoughts are with the woman's family.

States should regulate industrial alcohol, not Centre: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In an 8:1 majority ruling, the Supreme Court on Wednesday overturned a seven-judge bench verdict and held that States have regulatory power over production, manufacture and supply of industrial alcohol. In 1997, the seven-judge bench ruled that the Centre had the regulatory power over the production of industrial alcohol. The case was referred to the nine-judge bench in 2010. Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud, who wrote the latest judgment for himself and seven other judges, said the Centre lacks the regulatory power. Justice B V Nagarathna on the nine-judge SC bench dissented with the majority verdict. Industrial alcohol is not meant for human consumption. While Entry 8 in the State List under the 7th Schedule of the Constitution gives the states the power to legislate on the



manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale of "intoxicating liquors", Entry 52 of the Union List and Entry 33 of the Concurrent List mention industries whose control was "declared by Parliament by law to be expedient in public interest". While both parliament and state legislatures can enact laws on the subjects mentioned in the Concurrent List, a central law will have primacy over the state law. The nine-judge Constitution bench was hearing a batch of petitions after a seven-judge Constitution bench ruled against the State Governments.

Indian entertainment industry lost ₹ 22,400 crore to piracy in 2023

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian entertainment industry suffered a staggering loss of Rs 22,400 crore in 2023 due to piracy, according to a report released on Wednesday, that advocated for stronger regulations and collaborative efforts to effectively mitigate piracy risks. According to "The Rob Report" by EY and the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), 51 per cent of media consumers in India access content from pirated sources, with streaming services being the most significant contributor at 63 per cent.

"The size of India's piracy economy was Rs 22,400 crore in 2023, ranking fourth against the segment-wise revenue generated by India's Media and Entertainment industry. Of this, Rs 13,700 crore was generated from pirated content from movie theatres while Rs 8,700 crore was generated from OTT platforms' content. The potential GST losses of up to

Rs 4,300 crore were estimated to have been incurred," it said. Piracy refers to the unauthorized copying, distribution, or use of copyrighted material, which can include music, movies, software, and other forms of intellectual property. It is considered a form of theft because it infringes on the rights of the original creators and can lead to significant financial losses for them. Rohit Jain, Chairman of IMAAI's Digital Entertainment Committee, emphasised the urgent need for collective action among stakeholders. "The rapid growth of digital entertainment in India is undeniable, with filmed entertainment expected to reach Rs 14,600 crore by 2026. However, this potential is severely threatened by rampant piracy. It is imperative for all stakeholders --government bodies, industry players, and consumers--to unite in combating this issue," he said. Viewers cited high subscription fees, the unavailability of desired content, and the hassle of managing multiple subscriptions as primary reasons for indulging in pirated content. The report said that piracy is particularly prevalent among younger audiences aged 19 to 34, with women favouring OTT shows, while men gravitate towards classic films. Interestingly, 64 per cent of those who access pirated content expressed willingness to switch to authorised



existing measures against piracy have been insufficient, and advocated for stronger regulations and collaborative efforts across the industry to effectively mitigate piracy risks.

"Leveraging technology to combat the creation and distribution of pirated content will also be critical. This will ensure that original creators are able to protect their intellectual property and monetize what is rightfully theirs," Shrivastava said.

The report also revealed that piracy is more prevalent in Tier II cities compared to Tier I cities.

"Limited means of watching authorised content, easy access to pirated content, a lack of awareness about the perils of piracy, income disparity and inaccessible theatres are some of the reasons for this contrast. Tier I users typically access pirated content to watch old films while those from Tier II cities watch illegitimate versions of recently launched films, once again showcasing the unwillingness to pay for tickets," it said.

India remains world's largest growing economy: IMF

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

India remains the largest growing economy in the world, a senior official from the International Monetary Fund said, observing that the country's macroeconomic fundamentals are good.

"India is said to remain the largest growing economy in the world. We project growth at seven per cent in FY24-25, supported by recovery in rural consumption, as there have been favourable harvests. Inflation is expected to decline to 4.4 per cent in FY24-25, despite some volatility as food prices normalize," Krishna Srinivasan, Director for the IMF Asia Pacific Department, told PTI in an interview on Tuesday.

In terms of other fundamentals, he said, "despite elections, the fiscal consolidation remains on track. Reserve position is pretty good. Macro fundamentals, generally speaking, for India are good". He suggested that the country's reform priorities post-elections need to be in three areas.

"One is, there's an issue about creating jobs in India and so on. In that context, I think implementing the labour codes, which were approved in 2019-2020, are important because they will allow the labour markets to be flexible



while giving social protection to workers," he said. "The other thing is, if you want to be competitive, you also have to remove some of the trade restrictions you have right now. Because in India what's happening is, you know, when you liberalise trade, you allow the productive firms to survive. There's greater competitiveness and that by itself can, you know, create jobs. I think it's important that there's more trade restrictions removed," he said. "And finally, I would say continue with the reforms on, you know, beefing up the infrastructure, be it physical infrastructure or digital infrastructure, and this is a key achievement, and it continues with that. But going beyond that, I would say you have to focus on agriculture and land reforms. You have to think in terms of strengthening education and skilling," he said. Emphasising the need for investment in skilling of workforce, Srinivasan said "in

an economy which can generate a lot more jobs in the services sector, having the right kind of skills is important. So, investing in education, skilling the labour forces is very important". "Strengthening a social safety net is another reform. Finally, I would say that talking to people you still have a lot of red tape and so on. Improving the business environment will be important aspects. These are some of the reforms which I think I would prioritise," Srinivasan said in response to a question. Sharing some examples of red tape in India, he said, some investors feel that entering the Indian market, setting up an investment some way, getting a tract of land for big investments can be a problem. Some also mentioned that if you want to shut down and you want to exit, that could also be a problem. "These are just two examples. But I would say that the labour codes are still a deterrent. These are the kind

of reforms which you need to address going forward," he said.

Observing that the unemployment rate has declined to 4.9 per cent, he said the labour force participation and the employment-to-population ratio has been increasing. "For instance, from 56.4 per cent for the labour market participation, and employment-to-population (which) is about 53.7 per cent, those have gone up since the 40s. They were there before, he said, adding that most of the improvement has been concentrated in self-employed workers. Srinivasan also flagged the recent move of workers in the county 'towards the low productivity agriculture sector', saying the trend has emerged because "the kind of jobs which are being generated are not the best of jobs".

He also expressed concern over the subdued female participation in the country's labour force as well as on the prevailing youth unemployment. "There are various numbers out there, but we will all agree that labour force participation of women is on the lower side, and youth unemployment is quite high. So given that, there has to be emphasis on improving the environment for generating jobs," he said.

Paytm gets NPCI nod to onboard new UPI users

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has granted approval to Paytm to onboard new UPI users, subject to the adherence to all procedural guidelines and circulars, according to the company.

The move is expected to come as a relief to Paytm, which had suffered a blow following the Reserve Bank of India's restrictions earlier this year on associate company Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) in onboarding new UPI users on the Paytm app. In March, the NPCI gave approval to Paytm to participate in UPI as a Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP). The NPCI allowed the company to continue UPI transactions through four banks -- SBI, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and YES Bank. In a late evening filing on Tuesday, Paytm informed the BSE that it has received approval from the NPCI to onboard new UPI users.

"...We would like to inform you that wide letter dated October 22, 2024, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has granted approval to the company to onboard new UPI users, with adherence to all NPCI procedural guidelines and circulars," the Paytm filing, which also



attached the NPCI letter granting the nod, said. According to the letter, the approval is subject to adherence to all NPCI procedural guidelines and circulars issued from time to time, including guidelines and circulars issued specifically on risk management, brand guidelines for app and QR, multi-bank guidelines, TPAP market share and customer data.

The company will also need to adhere to the requirements outlined in the tri-partite agreement with NPCI and PSP Banks. It has also been asked to "...Adhere to all laws and regulatory guidelines as applicable and issued from time to time including Payments and Settlement Act 2007, Information Technology Act, 2000, Digital Personal Data Protection Act,

2023 and circular on Storage of Payment System Data, 2018," as per the NPCI letter addressed to Vijay Shekhar Sharma, founder and CEO of One97 Communications. One97 Communications is the parent company of fintech firm Paytm. While permitting One97 Communications (OCL) to onboard new users on its UPI application, the NPCI noted that it had received a letter from the company on August 1 requesting approval for onboarding new UPI users on the Paytm app, which was stopped as per RBI directions dated January 31 and February 16.

"Upon examination of your request, we hereby accord our approval and permit One97 Communications Private Limited (OCL) to onboard new users on their UPI application," the Paytm filing said, listing out the various

conditions. In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), the RBI had on January 31 directed it to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments, as it cited persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns. Meanwhile, One97 Communications on Tuesday posted a net profit of Rs 928.3 crore in the quarter ended in September 2024, compared to a Rs 290.5 crore loss it incurred a year ago, as an exceptional gain from sale of entertainment ticketing business to Zomato improved the fintech firm's Q2 scorecard.

The revenue from operations slumped 34.1 per cent year on year to Rs 1,659.5 crore during the just-concluded quarter.

IMA (Ayus) to celebrate Lord Dhanvantari Jayanti

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Integrated Medical Association IMA (Ayus) on Sunday will organise the annual celebration of Lord Dhanvantari Jayanti at NDMC Auditorium, Janpath, Delhi on Sunday, October 27, 2024. Ram Niwas Goyal, Speaker of the Delhi Legislative Assembly will inaugurate the event while Saurabh Bhardwaj, Health Minister of the Delhi Government, will be the chief guest. On this occasion, doctors who have done excellent work in Ayurveda and Unani medicine will be honoured. The Dhanvantari Award, Sushruta Award, and Charak Award will be given for significant contributions to Ayurveda. The Hakim Ajmal Khan Award and Dr. Abdul Hamid Award will be presented for commendable contributions to Unani medicine. In addition, Dr. JS Panwar Memorial and Dr. Hari Shankar Dev Sharma Memorial Awards will be given for the distinguished workers of the institution. The event will be presided over by Dr. Yogita Munjal, Director, Ayush Directorate of Delhi Government and Krishna Jakhar, Corporation Councillor.

AIIMS Delhi hosts workshop to empower medicos with AI skills



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

AIIMS New Delhi on Wednesday hosted an intensive workshop on emerging technologies, specifically focusing on Artificial Intelligence (AI). With AI projected to revolutionize the healthcare sector in India, the workshop aimed to equip medicos with the necessary skills and knowledge to leverage AI's transformative power. AIIMS Delhi has been recognised as a centre of excellence in AI, is at the forefront of this technological evolution, addressing public health challenges and promoting the integration of AI in healthcare practices. Prof. Kanwal Preet Kochhar of AIIMS New Delhi, expressed her enthusiasm about the initiative, stating, "We are thrilled to have organized this workshop that

brings together leading minds in the field of AI and healthcare. Our goal is to empower our medicos with the skills and knowledge they need to harness AI technologies effectively. By focusing on practical applications and real-world challenges, we are preparing our future healthcare leaders to innovate and improve patient outcomes significantly." The workshop underscored the need for specialized AI applications in healthcare, such as the development of a Health GPT, which would provide tailored solutions by leveraging healthcare-specific data. The participants gained hands-on experience and insights from leading experts, preparing them to contribute significantly to the transformation of healthcare in India.

Centre expands 'Bharat' brand to include chana whole and masur dal



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday expanded its subsidised pulses programme, adding chana whole and masur dal under the 'Bharat' brand in a bid to check rising prices. Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi, who launched Phase II of the initiative, said chana whole will be retailed at Rs 58 per kg and masur dal at Rs 89 per kg through cooperative networks NCCF, NAFED, and Kendriya Bhandar. "We're offloading our buffer stock maintained under the Price Stabilisation Fund at subsidised rates," Joshi said. The government has allocated 3 lakh tonnes of chana and 68,000 tonnes of moong to the cooperatives. Ministers of State for Food and Consumers Affairs B L Verma and Nimuben Jayantibhai Bambhaniya were present at the launch. NCCF Managing Director Anice Chandra Joseph said distribution will initially

begin in Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, with nationwide expansion planned within 10 days. "Chana whole has been added under the subsidised sale programme as there is a huge demand for it. We are in talks with e-commerce platforms and retail outlets to enhance accessibility," she added. The move follows October 2023's Phase I launch, which covered chana dal, moong dal, and moong sabut, along with rice and wheat flour. Current rates under Phase I stand at Rs 30/kg for wheat flour (up from Rs 27.50), Rs 34/kg for rice (up from Rs 29), Rs 70/kg for chana dal (up from Rs 60), while moong dal and moong sabut remain at Rs 107/kg and Rs 93/kg, respectively. The government is also maintaining price interventions for onion at Rs 35/kg and tomato at Rs 65/kg. The Union Minister hoped for better pulse output this year as the government hiked the support prices of pulses substantially.

IMF: The fight against high inflation is 'almost won'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The global war against inflation has largely been won - and at surprisingly little cost to economic growth, the International Monetary Fund declared Tuesday.

In its latest assessment of the global economy, the IMF predicted that worldwide inflation will cool from 6.7% last year to 5.8% this year and to 4.3% in 2025. It estimates that inflation will fall even faster in the world's wealthy countries, from 4.6% last year to 2.6% this year and 2% - the target range for most major central banks - in 2025. The slowdown in inflation, after years of crushing price increases in the aftermath of the pandemic, led the Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank to cut interest rates this year after they had aggressively raised them to try to tame inflation. "The battle against inflation is almost won," Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's chief economist, told reporters Tuesday. "In most countries, inflation is hovering close to central bank targets. Inflation had accelerated when the world economy recovered with unexpected speed from the COVID-19 recession, leaving factories, freight yards, ports and businesses overwhelmed with customer orders and creating shortages, delays and higher

prices. The high borrowing rates engineered by major central banks, along with the end of supply chain logjams, brought inflation dramatically down from the four-decade highs it hit in mid-2022. And to the surprise of forecasters, the economy - especially the largest, in the United States - continued to grow and employers kept hiring despite higher borrowing costs. "The decline in inflation without a global recession is a major achievement," Gourinchas wrote in a blog post that accompanied the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook. The IMF, a 190-nation lending organization, works to promote economic growth and financial stability and reduce global poverty. On Tuesday, besides sketching a milder inflation outlook, it upgraded its economic expectations for the United States this year, while lowering its estimates for growth in Europe and China. The IMF left its forecast for global growth unchanged at a relatively lackluster 3.2% for 2024. The IMF expects the US economy to expand 2.8% this year, down slightly from 2.9% in 2023 but an improvement on the 2.6% it had forecast for 2024 back in July. Growth in the United States has been led by strong consumer spending,

fuelled by healthy gains in inflation-adjusted wages. Next year, though, the IMF expects the US economy to decelerate to 2.2% growth. With a new presidential administration and Congress in place, the IMF envisions the nation's job market losing some momentum in 2025 as the government begins seeking to curb huge budget deficits by slowing spending, raising taxes or some combination of both. The IMF expects China's economic growth to slow from 5.2% last year to 4.8% this year and 4.5% in 2025. The world's No. 2 economy has been hobbled by a collapse in its housing market and by weak consumer confidence - problems only partly offset by strong exports. The 20 European countries that share the euro currency are collectively expected to eke out 0.8% growth this year, twice the 2023 expansion of 0.4% but a slight downgrade from the 0.9% the IMF had forecast three months ago for 2024. The German economy, hurt by a slump in manufacturing and real estate, isn't expected to grow at all this year. India's economy is expected to 7% this year and 6.5% in 2025. While still strong, that pace would be down from 8.2% growth last year, a result of consumers slowing their spending after a post-pandemic boom.

VERY BAD DECISION TO EXCLUDE BADMINTON FROM CWG: CHIRAG

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former world No.1 doubles shuttler Chirag Shetty termed the exclusion of badminton from the 2026 Commonwealth Games curriculum a wrong decision, and questioned how the organisers could do away with the most popular sport in the event.

The 2026 Glasgow Commonwealth Games on Tuesday unveiled a heavily scaled-down roster, excluding hockey, shooting, cricket, badminton and wrestling from the curriculum, a move which will severely hurt India's medal prospects at the quadrennial event.

"I think it's a very bad decision, to be honest. I can say for badminton, I think it's the most watched sport. It's definitely one of the most watched sports in the Commonwealth Games," said Chirag, who along with partner Satwiksairaj Rankireddy is the 2022 Birmingham CWG men's doubles champions, besides being the mixed team gold medallist at Gold Coast in 2018. He said the popularity of the sport in CWG could be gauged from the fact that virtually all badminton



competitions are played in front of a packed house. "I've been part of two editions at the Gold Coast and at the Birmingham editions. It's very difficult to get a seat for any of the rounds. I think it's definitely a very bad decision for the badminton community in general.

"I hope they (CWG organisers) will look into it and probably change it. As a part of the badminton community, we are disappointed. We were definitely looking forward to defend our title." The World Championship bronze medallist added that

the national sports federations and the government should take up the issue with the top-most authority in the CWG. "As far as boycotting the event goes, I think it's in the hand of the government and associations to decide. I think it has to go at the highest

place. I think the higher bodies have to be decisive and take it up to the higher authorities. "Not just for badminton, even hockey, wrestling, I think all the sports which India does well at are being removed. I think it's definitely important that we fight for it"

Sardar has a major influence on my game: Rajinder Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

It all started with a dreamy-eyed teenager Rajinder Singh's desire to own a new hockey stick and train with the legendary former India captain Sardar Singh at the Namdhari Academy in Srisa. As Rajinder, now 21, looks set to make his senior India debut in the two-match series Germany on Wednesday and Thursday at the iconic Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, he is indebted to Sardar for guiding him and giving him quality time at the academy as a 17-year-old, when the world was shut because of the Covid pandemic.



"My cousin used to go to play in the Namdhari Academy and every new player who came there used to get a new hockey stick. Seeing his stick, I also decided to go and start playing on the grass fields at the academy," said Rajinder in an interview with PTI Bhasha. "Sardar has been my role model and he has a great influence on my game. He used to give us tips in the academy, such as how to receive the ball under pressure, how to release it. "During the Corona epidemic, he was

mostly in the academy, so I spent a lot of time with him and had many sessions. I got to learn a lot there," added Rajinder. Sardar, one of the best midfielders India has produced, guided India to gold at the 2014 Incheon Asian Games and the Asia Cup title in 2017. The veteran is also a product of the Namdhari Academy, which has also produced the likes of Gurmeh Singh and Didar Singh among others. While Rajinder's brother has moved to

Rajinder scored the most goals in the Junior National Championship 2021. That success assured him of a place in the junior national camp and he went on to play the Junior World Cup last year. Rajinder, a fan of Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma, said he does not feel that he is a newcomer in the Indian dressing room, adding that the coordination of the team is very good. "There is a very positive atmosphere in the team. Senior players teach a lot, give advice when you make a mistake. They praise you when you play well. The biggest quality of the Indian hockey team is that no matter who makes a mistake, everyone covers it. No one blames anyone. There is a very positive atmosphere," said the youngster. Rajinder takes inspiration from late NBA star Kobe Bryant's books and is confident that the Indian hockey team can win the gold medal in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, and he is eager to be a part of that side. "This team can win the gold medal in 2028. I will try my best to make a place in the team. For this, first I have to play the Asian Games, World Cup and perform well," he said.



NRAI announces first ever shooting league

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) on Wednesday announced the sport's first ever franchise-based league in the country christened "Shooting League of India". The proposal, mooted by NRAI president Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo, has received approval from the national federation's governing body. A window for the same is being chalked out, post receiving approvals from the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), the sport's global governing body. The first edition of the league will be held in March. Deo said, "Shooting, particularly after the performance in the recent Paris Olympics has received a huge fillip in its popularity and we thought that this was the right moment to launch a

league. "We have seen how well organised franchise leagues have not only helped in popularising the sport even further, but most importantly have brought in new audiences and revenue for them and their athletes. We owe it to our athletes to make the sport self-sustainable." At Paris Olympics, Indian shooters won three medals in a single sport for the first time. "Shooting in its purest Olympic form and format is not considered television friendly. However, we have all deliberated upon it extensively and feel that we may have arrived at a winning formula," he said. "Let's keep our fingers crossed as all is in the interest of the sport and its super athletes, who have brought glory to the country on global platforms consistently over the last few decades," Deo added.

PSG struggling to impress in the Champions League

AP ■ PARIS

Three games. One win. No goals from the forwards. Judging by Paris Saint-Germain's performances so far, the revamped Champions League format could actually prove to be PSG's salvation because it may have struggled to qualify under the previous group format. Tuesday's 1-1 home draw in the league stage against PSV Eindhoven, the Dutch league leader, exposed familiar weaknesses in defense while PSG no longer has galacticos like Kylian Mbappé or Neymar to decide tight matches. Poor marking led to PSV's goal from left winger Noa Lang and, after right back Achraf Hakimi had equalized early in the second half, PSV

twice threatened a late winner from counterattacks. "It's the little details that count. PSV managed to make our mistakes count," Hakimi said. "It's difficult when you have to chase the game and come from behind." PSG lost 2-0 away to Arsenal in its previous game amid poor defending and needed a huge stoppage-time blunder from the visiting goalkeeper to scrape a 1-0 home win against modest Girona in its opening game. PSG's only two goals so far have been from defenders amid wasteful finishing. Left back Nuno Mendes netted against Girona but only because his cross became a goal because of the goalie's mistake. The new Champions League



has 36 teams, playing eight games against eight different opponents through January, and gives plenty of scope for qualifying even if not in form. The top eight go direct to the round of 16 in March. Teams ranked ninth to 24th go into the knockout playoffs in February and only the bottom 12 are immediately eliminated. PSG is currently 17th. Hakimi said the players should have taken their chances better, but PSG coach Luis Enrique was satisfied with how his team played. He preferred to highlight that there was nearly a stoppage-time winner after PSV goalkeeper Walter Benitez made a stunning point-blank save. "We created opportunities.

This match was not a disappointment," he said through a translator. "The only thing is we didn't score one more than them and that's a pity." But there looks much harder matches to come against Atletico Madrid, six-time winner Bayern Munich and 2023 champion Manchester City. The previous format with only two teams out of four qualifying from each group may have been difficult for this PSG team - as it was last season. PSG only qualified for the knockout stage in the last round of group games. After losing at Newcastle and AC Milan, it finished second behind Borussia Dortmund, which then beat PSG home and away in the semifinals.

LeBron and Bronny James make history as the NBA's first father-son duo to play together

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

LeBron James and Bronny James became the first father and son to play in the NBA together Tuesday night during the Los Angeles Lakers season opener. LeBron and Bronny checked into the game together with four minutes left in the second quarter, prompting a big ovation from a home crowd aware of the enormity of the milestone. The 39-year-old LeBron had already started the game and played 13 minutes before he teamed up with his 20-year-old son to make history.



LeBron James is the top scorer in NBA history, while LeBron James Jr. Was a second-round pick by the Lakers last summer. They are the first father and son to play in the world's top basketball league at the same time, let alone on the same team.

LeBron James and Bronny joined a small club of father-son professional athletes who played together. The Griffey made history 34 years ago, and they even homered in the same game on Sept. 14, 1990. Baseball Hall of Famer Tim Lincecum and his namesake son also accomplished the feat with the Baltimore Orioles in 2001. In hockey, Gordie Howe played alongside his two sons, Mark and Marty, with the WHA's Houston Aeros and Team Canada before one NHL season together on the Hartford Whalers in 1979-80, when Gordie was 51. While the other family pairings on this list happened late in the fathers' careers, LeBron shows no signs of slowing down or regressing as he begins his NBA record-setting 22nd season. LeBron averaged more than 25 points per game last year for his 20th consecutive season, and he remains the most important player on the Lakers alongside Anthony Davis as they attempt to recapture the form that won a championship in 2020 and got them to the Western Conference finals in 2023. Bronny survived cardiac arrest and open heart surgery in the summer of 2023, and he went on to play a truncated freshman season at the University of Southern California. He declared for the draft anyway, and the Lakers eagerly used the

school. The dream became real after Bronny entered the draft as a teenager following one collegiate season, and the Lakers grabbed him with the 55th overall pick. "It's been a treat," LeBron said at Tuesday's morning shootaround. "In preseason, the practices, just every day ... Bringing him up to speed of what this professional life is all about, and how to prepare every day as a professional." LeBron and Bronny joined a small club of father-son professional athletes who played together. The Griffey made history 34 years ago, and they even homered in the same game on Sept. 14, 1990. Baseball Hall of Famer Tim Lincecum and his namesake son also accomplished the feat with the Baltimore Orioles in 2001. In hockey, Gordie Howe played alongside his two sons, Mark and Marty, with the WHA's Houston Aeros and Team Canada before one NHL season together on the Hartford Whalers in 1979-80, when Gordie was 51. While the other family pairings on this list happened late in the fathers' careers, LeBron shows no signs of slowing down or regressing as he begins his NBA record-setting 22nd season. LeBron averaged more than 25 points per game last year for his 20th consecutive season, and he remains the most important player on the Lakers alongside Anthony Davis as they attempt to recapture the form that won a championship in 2020 and got them to the Western Conference finals in 2023. Bronny survived cardiac arrest and open heart surgery in the summer of 2023, and he went on to play a truncated freshman season at the University of Southern California. He declared for the draft anyway, and the Lakers eagerly used the

fourth-to-last pick in the draft on the 6-foot-2 guard. LeBron spent the summer in Europe with the gold medal-winning U.S. Team at the Paris Olympics, while Bronny played for the Lakers in summer league. They started practicing together with the Lakers before training camp. The duo first played together in the preseason, logging four minutes during a game against Phoenix just outside Palm Springs earlier this month. The Lakers were fully aware of the history they would make with this pairing, and coach JJ Redick spoke with the Jameses recently about a plan to make it happen early in the regular season. The presence of the Griffey likely made it an inevitability for opening night, even though Redick said the Lakers still wanted it "to happen naturally, in the flow of the game."

The Lakers have declined to speculate on how long Bronny will stay on their NBA roster. Los Angeles also has point guards D'Angelo Russell, Gabe Vincent and Jalen Hood-Schifino, which likely makes minutes scarce for Bronny, who likely needs regular playing time to raise his game to a consistent NBA standard. Those factors add up to indicate Bronny is likely to end up with the affiliate South Bay Lakers of the G League at some point soon. LeBron and Redick have both spoken positively about the South Bay team, saying that player development is a key part of the Lakers organization. Miami forward Kevin Love, who knew all the James children - Bronny, Bryce and Zhuri - from his time as LeBron James' teammate in Cleveland, said it was "an unbelievable moment" to see father and son playing together.

Marina Machans look to turn tide against FC Goa

PTI ■ CHENNAI

An in-form Chennaiyin FC will aim to leverage their home advantage as they look to snap a three-match losing streak against a struggling FC Goa in the Indian Super League here on Thursday. With just one win from five matches, FC Goa under India head coach Manolo Marquez have slipped to ninth in the standings, their poorest start since 2016. Defensively, Goa have struggled, leading the joint second-most goals (10) alongside NorthEast United FC. Owen Coyle's Chennaiyin FC on the other hand have secured two wins from four matches to occupy sixth place in the table. They boast of a dynamic frontline, their defence has proven resilient, having conceded only five goals this season as they are chasing their best ever start with a third win in five



matches. However, they will need to be wary of FC Goa's head coach Manolo Marquez, who has an impressive record against Chennaiyin, with six wins and two draws in nine

encounters. In their last seven ISL fixtures, the Gaur have six wins including three on the trot. Coyle on the other hand has a lower average of 0.9 points per game against Goa than against any other ISL team. Goa also have the edge in terms of head to head record. The two teams have met 26 times, with Goa winning 15 and scoring 54 goals, making them the most successful side against Chennaiyin in terms of wins and goals. Chennaiyin on the other hand secured nine victories, with two matches ending in draws. Chennaiyin will look to Lukas Brambilla to lead their attack as he seeks his first goal despite creating 11 goal-scoring chances. FC Goa's Armando Sadiku has been a force to reckon with, showcasing his pace, linking ability, and

powerful striking. Ahead of the match, Coyle emphasised the club's distinct approach to squad building and praised his team's fighting spirit. "We have a different model compared to the bigger clubs. We have shown that we can be competitive, and we are trying to build something here. It's not about a quick fix. It's about having players who can serve the club for years to come," Coyle said. Marquez is focused on taking it one game at a time, expressing disappointment over their 1-2 loss against Mumbai City FC. He however encouraged his players to remain confident. "Footballing experience teaches us to tackle any situation. The simple part is to win one game and then start all over again for the next. In my opinion, we shouldn't have lost the last match," Marquez said.

INDIA EYE RIGHT SELECTION CALLS TO COUNTER NEW ZEALAND

PTI ■ PUNE

Jolted by an unexpected loss on home turf, star-heavy India will look for right balance in the line-up to counter-attack against a spunky New Zealand in the crucial second Test beginning here on Thursday.

After being shot out for an embarrassing 46 in the first innings at Bengaluru, India's resolute show in the second innings could not prevent an eight-wicket pounding which saw the top-ranked team in the World Test Championship table dropping points even though it continues to hold the top spot.

Winning the next two Tests will be first priority for Rohit Sharma and his men before they hit the Australian shores for a five-Test affair next month.

With India in a spot of bother, focus has undeniably been on the nature of the pitch here at the MCA Stadium here. It does not have grass cover and is composed of black soil to negate the bounce which New Zealand extracted in Bengaluru.

India's free-flowing batters cut a sorry figure when William O'Rourke and the seasoned duo of Matt Henry and Tim Southee served a wake up call which no one saw coming on a pace-friendly track that was admittedly misread by Rohit despite overcast conditions. Preparing a rank turner could be one way out of the mire but it has backfired on India twice in the past.

Australia hammered them by a monumental 333 runs here eight years ago while the same team handed a nine-wicket defeat to them in Indore last year. With Shubman Gill priming for a comeback, one among KL Rahul and Sarfaraz Khan will have to make way. Coach Gautam Gambhir has expressed his desire to give the latter a long rope but Sarfaraz has made a strong case with his second innings 150 in Bengaluru.

One could say a big score for each of the two seniors, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, is around the corner. The latter, especially, would be keen to draw from his 254 not out here in 2019-20, which paved the way for an innings and 137-



run thrashing of South Africa. By his own lofty standards, Yashasvi Jaiswal endured twin failures in the Bengaluru Test and the young batter looked to iron out his flaws when he had multiple stints in the nets.

As much as the Indian camp values Rahul's credentials in Test cricket, the right-handed batter hasn't looked his best and runs haven't come off his bat on a consistent basis.

The Karnataka batter is locked in the fight for a spot against a red-hot Sarfaraz, who followed his 222 not out in the Irani Cup for Mumbai with a superlative 150 in Bengaluru, helping India fight against all odds.

Rishabh Pant kept wickets for a short period towards end of India's training session on Tuesday but it remains to be seen if he is 100 per cent fit to endure match workload.

India's perennial problem of plenty also goes along with ensuring their players are adequately rested as well as primed for future challenges, but on these counts it is unlikely that Jasprit Bumrah will get some time off given a series-leveling win is much-needed here.

However, with Mohammed Siraj enduring a "wickets-drought" as assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate put it, there could be a possibility of Akash Deep coming back into the fold. He too had a long batting stint in the nets here on Tuesday.

Ravichandran Ashwin will look to make the most of what will be on offer over the next five days, with Ravindra Jadeja in tow.

The addition of Washington Sundar, who can spin the ball away from New Zealand's southpaws in captain Tom Latham, Devon Conway and the immensely talented Rachin Ravindra, would also bolster India's batting.

On their part, New Zealand have done fairly well given the absence of Kane Williamson from two of the three Tests on this tour. Will Young appeared resolute in the middle-order which features Ravindra's brilliance.

New Zealand will, however, expect more off Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell's bats and at the same time want the others to try and emulate Southee's feats in the first innings of the opening Test.



Pakistan retain spin heavy team for third and final Test against England

AP ■ RAWALPINDI PAKISTAN

Pakistan has retained its spin-heavy team for Thursday's series-deciding third Test against England as both sides anticipate another dry wicket that will suit the slow bowlers.

The groundsman have been trying to dry out the track for the last four days, with the help of industrial-sized fans and outdoor heaters, to fulfil the wish of Pakistan skipper Shan Masood to nullify England's aggressive batters.

Left-arm spinner Noman Ali and off-spinner Sajid Khan claimed all 20 England wickets in the second test, on a recycled wicket in Multan, to level the series at 1-1.

England had won the series opener by an innings after it posted a record-breaking 823-7, with Harry Brook scoring a triple century and Joe Root making a career-best 262.

The third specialist slow bowler, leg-spinner Zahid Mahmood, bowled six wicketless overs in England's first innings, and was not even required in the second innings as the visitors folded for 144 against Ali and Khan to lose the second test by 152 runs.

"It (the wicket) is very dry with not a lot of grass on it," Pakistan head coach Jason Gillespie said on Wednesday. "We probably expect it to favor the slower bowlers."

The toss could again play a vital role, with the spinners expected to dominate the batters as the game goes on.

"It (the toss) is a 50-50 call, you always want it to go your way," Gillespie said. "Both teams will have that mindset but, yeah, we'll see."

The wicket has encouraged England to recall leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed as its third specialist slow option to go with Jack Leach's left-arm spin and the off-spin of Shoaib Bashir.

"Who knows what's going to happen?" said captain Ben Stokes after England's last training session at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

"It looks a very good wicket at the moment (but) with some cricket on it, it might change. We feel the longer it goes, more spin is going to come into play."

Bashir has replaced Matthew Potts in the England team while Gus Atkinson, who was part of the memorable win by an innings and 47 runs in the first test, will replace rested fast bowler Brydon Carse.

Reverse swing with the old ball might be ineffective, with a greener square on both sides of the wicket.

"The square is very lush and green," Stokes said. "It's going to be hard to manufacture reverse swing. The longer the games goes on, the more spin is going to come in."

Pant overtakes Kohli in Test rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

Rishabh Pant on Wednesday overtook his superstar India teammate Virat Kohli to reach the sixth spot in the ICC Test rankings for batters.

Fresh from a counter-attacking 99 in the second innings of the opening Test against New Zealand, Pant gained three spots in the rankings while Kohli, who made a fluent 70 in Bengaluru, dropped a place to be eighth.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal remains India's highest ranked batter at four. India captain Rohit Sharma dropped two places to be joint 15th alongside Sri Lanka's Dimuth Karunaratne.

England star Joe Root



maintains a healthy lead at the top of the charts.

New Zealand duo of Rachin Ravindra (up 36 places to 18th) and Devon Conway (up 12 spots to 36th) also made good ground on the latest list

for Test batters, while teammate Matt Henry (up two rungs to ninth with a new career-high rating) was the big winner in bowlers' category. Henry picked up eight

wickets during the Black Caps' drought-breaking eight-wicket victory over India in Bengaluru, while teammate Will O'Rourke (up two spots to 39th) was also rewarded for his seven scalps from the same match.

Pakistan spinner Noman Ali was re-instated at 17th on the rankings following his 11 wickets across two innings against England, while teammate Sajid Khan gained 22 places to move to 50th after he was adjudged Player of the Match in the same contest.

India's pace spearhead remains at the top of the bowlers' rankings followed by teammate R Ashwin. Retaining the seventh spot, Ravindra Jadeja is another Indian in the top-10.



Mehidy Hasan's 87 not out rescues Bangladesh from innings defeat

AP ■ MIRPUR, DHAKA (BANGLADESH)

Mehidy Hasan's 87 not out helped Bangladesh take an 81-run lead on Wednesday, ending fears of an innings defeat in the opening Test against South Africa.

The battling Mehidy led his side to 283-7 at stumps, a comeback from 112-6 during a third day interrupted by rain and bad light.

Nayeem Hasan was also unbeaten on 16. Mehidy shared a record 138-run stand with debutant Jaker Ali, who made 58 as the hosts wiped out a first-innings deficit of 202.

Bangladesh was bowled out for 106 in its first innings before South Africa replied with 308, thanks to Kyle Verreyne's 114.

Fast bowler Kagiso Rabada (4-35) and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj (3-105) then shared seven wickets as South Africa put Bangladesh under even more pressure.

Rabada used the early moisture of the pitch expertly after Bangladesh began the day on 101-3. He pegged back the hosts with two wickets in three balls in the fourth over.

Opener Mahmudul Hasan edged to the first slip on 40 after being undone by extra bounce.

Mushfiqur Rahim, who became the first Bangladesh batter to reach 6,000 Test runs on Day 2, paid the price for a lack of foot movement as Rabada's fuller-length delivery skidded through to rattle the stumps when he was on 33.

Maharaj removed Liton Das for 7 and South Africa sensed a chance to wrap up an early victory. But, Mehidy and Jaker then survived a probing spell from Maharaj and Rabada.

Mehidy hit Dane Piedt for a six over his head and drove Maharaj to deep mid-off for a single to raise his ninth Test half-century from 94 balls.

Fast bowler Kagiso Rabada (4-35) and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj (3-105) then shared seven wickets as South Africa put Bangladesh under even more pressure.

Rabada used the early moisture of the pitch expertly after Bangladesh began the day on 101-3. He pegged back the hosts with two wickets in three balls in the fourth over.

Mehidy, who hit nine fours and one six in 171 balls, continued to frustrate South Africa with support from Nayeem before bad light brought a premature end to the day's play.

India is a powerhouse that don't want to bow down: Brett Lee



PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian speedster Brett Lee has described the Indian team as a "powerhouse that don't want to bow down" to anyone, cautioning his compatriots who will take on the Asian giants in an upcoming five-match Test series.

Lee's remarks came after India's eight-wicket defeat to New Zealand in the

Bengaluru Test earlier this week. India, aiming to qualify for their third successive final in the World Test Championship, will be travelling to Australia next month to defend the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"This day and age, India is a powerhouse that don't want to bow down. They know how to win, and they know they can beat Australia; they know they can beat the Kiwis. They know they can beat anyone

on any given day," Lee told 'Fox Cricket'. Commenting on India's outing in the Bengaluru Test against the Kiwis, Lee felt that they might have got influenced by 'Bazball', leading to playing some loose shots.

"India just didn't go into their shell. Maybe it's Bazball brushing off on other cricketers around the world," he noted. "I know that India won't be proud of the way they played. They played some pretty loose shots."

India's decision to bat first in overcast conditions raised eyebrows, as the team was bowled out for 46 in the first innings of the opening Test, its lowest Test score at home.

Lee said the side needs to "weigh up the risk factor" and added the Indians should have judged the conditions better.

"But, you've got to weigh up the risk factor as well. There are times when you've got to go, 'Okay, well, maybe the big shots aren't working today.' Maybe, just rein it in a little bit. I don't think they sort of summed up the conditions as quickly as what they should have done," Lee said.

India play two more Tests against New Zealand -- Pune (October 24-28) and Mumbai (November 1-5) -- before leaving for Australia.

On utilising spinners well in second Test against India: Latham

PTI ■ PUNE

Skipper Tom Latham on Wednesday said New Zealand will head into the second Test against India without any preconceived ideas about a spin-friendly surface, focusing instead on utilising their bowling options effectively.

New Zealand hold a vital 1-0 lead after an eight-wicket win in the opening Test in Bengaluru.

The Kiwis bowled India out for their lowest total of 46 on home soil in the Bengaluru Test. Despite a second innings fightback from the hosts, New Zealand held their nerves to record their first win in India

in 36 years. "Whatever we're presented with, for us it's about trying to adapt as quick as we can," Latham told the media ahead of the second Test here.

"If it is going to be a wicket that turns a little bit more, then we've got four spinners in our line-up, that will play into their hands, but it's (also) about to try not to go into the game with too many preconceived ideas," he added.

Latham admitted he has given thought to how to utilise the spinners at their disposal. New Zealand have Ish Sodhi, Mitchell Santner and Ajaz Patel among frontline tweekers and Rachin

Ravindra and Glenn Phillips also to roll over their arms. "I obviously had a little bit of a think around what that may look like," he said.

"(We will) try to get a little bit of information from previous games here and also the practice wickets that we're on, will hopefully be something around, or similar to what we're getting," he said.

Latham said New Zealand won't be resting on their laurels of drought-breaking Bengaluru Test win.

"(It is) very special, there is myself, Graham Dowling and John Wright, to be in this position is really special. But for me it was a team effort," he said.

NZ MUST AVOID PRECONCEIVED IDEAS



"We celebrated what was a special performance, but our attention (has) turned quickly to this game and we're trying not to rest on what happened

last week, (we are) trying to take the confidence from last week and take that into this game and hopefully hit the ground running."

"The confidence that it can bring into a side is probably the most important thing, that we can come over here and we can compete and we can do well," he added.

The opening batter, who took over captaincy reigns before this tour, said his lack of big scores are not too concerning for him.

"For me it's about trying to contribute as best I can in my role, it's not just myself, it's other guys that are just trying to perform their role as best they can and that may look slightly different throughout the test match," he said.

"I've certainly been working hard behind the scenes to get my game where I want it to

be. As a batsman it's a really fine line, you can be hitting the ball really well and get a good one, or vice versa, you may not be hitting it so well and get a bit of luck," he added.

Latham said Rachin Ravindra's approach at different stages of his fabulous 134 in Bengaluru showed the right way to balance the elements of attack and defence in Indian conditions.

"The way he played throughout that whole innings was outstanding, (if) you take the situations of some of the partnerships that he was involved in, the way he played was really important," he said.

"He put the foot down a little bit, played a little bit more attacking at certain stages and then obviously sucked up a little bit of pressure at times as well. We saw that in the second innings too," he said.

Latham said Kane Williamson, who has missed the first two of the three Tests on this tour, is working closely with the medical team.

"It's a day-by-day thing with Kane, fingers crossed that he will be up and ready. He's obviously working closely with the medical team back home," he said.

"It's just a bit of a waiting game, hopefully we'll find out a little bit more after the Test," Latham added.