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MESSI SCORES THREE GOALS AS ARGENTINA WINS 11 SPORTS



BOMB HOAXES A RED HERRING?

Multiple airlines get 19 bomb threats in 48 hours, eight FIRs filed, three arrests



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Multiple bomb threats continued to disrupt airline operations in the country for the third consecutive day. Eight flights, four of IndiGo, two of SpiceJet and one of Akasa Air, received bomb threats on Wednesday, leading to long delays and diversions. All the threats turned out to be hoaxes. However, there was panic amongst air passengers. It is not clear what triggered the sudden surge in hoax bomb threats since Monday. The threat message to IndiGo was the 19th confirmed instance of a bomb threat to an Indian carrier's flight over the past 48 hours. Worried over a trend of surge in hoax bomb threat messages, Delhi Police has registered seven FIRs at Indira Gandhi International Airport, in connection with bomb threats to several domestic and international flights in the last two days and launched a probe into the matter.

According to sources, top officials of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), National Investigation Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) on Wednesday met to discuss the bomb threats received by airlines. The authorities are also planning putting the hoax callers on 'no-fly list' and increasing the number of air marshals on flights. A unit of National Security Guard (NSG) commandos is deployed as air marshals mainly on international routes and some sensitive domestic routes. Sky marshals are armed plain clothes security officers who travel on passenger planes. Civil Aviation Minister K. Ram Mohan Naidu on Wednesday said the government is closely monitoring the situation due to bomb threats to flights and asserted that all necessary

measures are taken against such activities. Strongly condemning the recent bomb threats to Indian carriers, the minister said the Mumbai police have arrested a minor responsible for issuing bomb threats to three flights and that others responsible for disruptions will be identified and prosecuted. The law enforcement agencies are pursuing all cases actively, he said. In less than 24 hours, nine flights received bomb threats and the total count has climbed to at least 19 in three days. The threats have turned out to be hoaxes. On Wednesday, bomb threats were received by four IndiGo flights, two SpiceJet flights and one flight of Akasa Air. On Tuesday late at night, one flight each of Vistara and Air India Express had received the threats. IndiGo received bomb threats for three flights, including the Riyadh-Mumbai flight 6E 74 that was diverted to Muscat (Oman).

SC slams Punjab, Haryana for inaction on stubble burning



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Coming down heavily on Punjab and Haryana Governments over non-prosecution of stubble burning, the Supreme Court on Wednesday summoned the Chief Secretaries of the two States for explanation of no action against the violators. A Bench of Justices Abhay S Oka, Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Augustine

George Maish pointed out "complete insensitivity" on the part of both States, directing the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) to take penal action against both the Government officials for the failure to take action against the violators. The Supreme Court called CAQM a toothless tiger that only passed directions without any implementation. "This is not a political

matter. If the Chief Secretary is acting at somebody's behest, we will issue summons against them as well. Next Wednesday (October 23) we are going to physically call for the chief secretary and explain everything. Nothing has been done, same is with the Punjab government. The attitude is of complete defiance," the Bench remarked, pointing out that both States have not taken any steps to implement the directions issued by the CAQM, in the national capital region (NCR) in June 2021, to stop stubble burning. Slamming the Punjab Government, the SC said not even a single prosecution has been carried out in the past three years and it was only tolerating breaches.



AQI was 999 at Anand Vihar!

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The air of the national Capital has turned extremely hazardous for the public as data by the AQICN revealed that the Anand Vihar recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 999 at 8 pm on Wednesday. Across the city, alarming AQI levels were reported, Sector 8, Dwarka recorded an index of 876, Munda ka was 465, R.K. Puram was 334, Rohini was 322 and Narela was at 305. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the National Capital recorded an average AQI of 230.

Omar Abdullah back in the hot seat

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah with Lok Sabha LoP Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, and party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during the swearing-in ceremony of the Union Territory's new government, in Srinagar



PTI



Gold, silver soar to a new high

NEW DELHI: Ahead of Diwali, Gold prices on Wednesday touched a new all-time high of ₹78,900 per 10 grams in the national Capital, gaining ₹250 due to sustained buying by jewellers. The precious metal had closed at ₹78,650 per 10 grams in the previous session on Tuesday. Silver also followed the suit and surged ₹1,000 to ₹93,500 per kg due to fresh buying from industrial units and coin makers. On Tuesday, it had finished at ₹92,500 per kg. Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped ₹250 to hit a fresh record high of ₹78,500 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹78,250 per 10 grams. The All India Sarafa Association attributed the rise in gold prices due to strong demand by local jewellers. Besides, the decline in equity markets also aided the rally in the yellow metal as investors moved towards the safe haven assets like gold. In futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for December delivery climbed ₹268 or 0.35 per cent to ₹76,628 per 10 grams. Silver contracts for December delivery zoomed by ₹580 or 0.63 per cent to ₹92,203 per kg on the exchange. In the international markets, Comex gold futures rose 0.51 per cent to USD 2,692.50 per ounce. The yellow metal remains strongly supported by elevated geopolitical tensions and uncertainty surrounding the United States' Presidential elections. PNS

Jharkhand list leak stuns BJP



DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

In a major goof up that has not gone down well with the Bharatiya Janata Party's top leadership, a list of 35 probable candidates for the 81 member Jharkhand Assembly circulated on social media, and several news platforms, prompting the party to defer its 'official' announcement for declaration of the contestants. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and top BJP leaders were present in the party's Central Election Committee (CEC) meeting for Jharkhand held late on Wednesday evening. Sources said the meeting continued till late night but the PM left midway. Sources also said the PM told the members to reconsider some of the Assembly pockets since the party is banking high on the winnability of the

candidates to wrest power from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-Congress led government in the mineral rich state. Soon after the announcement of Assembly and By-Poll elections schedule, BJP's CEC convened a two-day marathon meeting on Tuesday and Wednesday evening at the party's Headquarters in national Capital to deliberate on the names of candidates for the upcoming Jharkhand and Maharashtra Assembly polls, as well as candidates for Assembly and Lok Sabha By-Polls. The meeting for Maharashtra on Wednesday was attended by several high-profile BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP National President JP Nadda, Union Home Ministers Amit Shah, Piyush Goel Bhupender Yadav, Ashwini Vaishnaw and Maharashtra deputy chief Minister Devendra Fadnis and respective state and CEC members. The meeting continued till the time of going to press. A day earlier CEC held a crucial meeting and discussed the names of candidates for the Jharkhand Assembly Elections. Sources said the PM left the meeting earlier and asked the CEC members to rethink on certain seats.

Must talk about lack of trust: EAM



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and other leaders during the 23rd meeting of the SCO Council of Heads of Government, in Islamabad, Pakistan, Wednesday

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

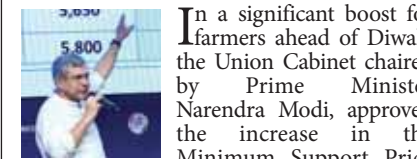
Delivering a thinly veiled message to Pakistan from its soil, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said activities across borders characterised by the "three evils" of terrorism, extremism and separatism are unlikely to encourage trade, energy flows and connectivity. In his address at a conclave of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Jaishankar asserted that trade and connectivity initiatives must recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty and it is essential to have an "honest conversation" on the lack of trust. Jaishankar spoke immediately after Sharif's inaugural address

at the 23rd meeting of the Council of the Heads of Government (CHG) of the Member States of the SCO attended among others by Chinese Premier Li Qiang. His remarks came amid the lingering military standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh and concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indian Ocean and other strategic waters. "If activities across borders are characterised by terrorism, extremism and separatism, they are hardly likely to encourage trade, energy flows, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges in parallel," the external affairs minister said without naming Pakistan. Jaishankar arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday, becoming the first Indian foreign minister to visit

Pakistan in nearly a decade. He led the Indian delegation at the SCO-CHG summit in the Pakistani capital city. Ahead of the deliberations, PM Sharif shook hands with Jaishankar and warmly received him and other leaders of the SCO member nations at the Jinnah Convention Centre, the venue of the summit. In his remarks, the external affairs minister said cooperation must be based on mutual respect and sovereign equality and that the SCO member nations can benefit immensely if the grouping moves ahead collectively with mutual trust. He, especially stressed on adhering to SCO charter, highlighting its underlying essence of strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighbourliness. "It should recognise territorial integrity and sovereignty. It must be built on genuine partnerships, not unilateral agendas. It cannot progress if we cherry-pick global practices, especially of trade and transit," he said, in remarks seen as an indirect reference to China's assertive behaviour on several critical issues such as trade and connectivity. "But most of all, our endeavours will progress only when our commitment to the Charter remains firm. It is axiomatic that development and growth requires peace and stability.

Cabinet increases MSP of six Rabi crops for 2025-26

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI



In a significant boost for farmers ahead of Diwali, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the increase in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of six mandated Rabi crops for 2025-26 marketing season in the range of ₹130-300 per quintal. The hike in MSP is significant ahead of elections in states like Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi. Rabi marketing season begins from April 2025. The decision was announced by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. The MSP for wheat has been raised by ₹150 per quintal, moving from ₹2,275 to ₹2,425 for the 2025-26 Rabi marketing season. The ₹150 per quintal hike in wheat support price is significant ahead of elections in states like Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi. Rabi marketing season begins from April 2025. Mustard saw a hike of ₹300, bringing its MSP to ₹5,950 per quintal, while the MSP for Gram/Chana was increased by ₹210 bringing the new rate to ₹5,650 per quintal. The higher MSP for mustard and chana is expected to provide farmers with better returns and encourage more cultivation of this oilseed, which is crucial for India's pulses and edible oil supply. Mustard is widely grown in states like Rajasthan, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh while chana is widely consumed by a larger part of the population.



Traffic jams on the Ring Road go round and round...

Severe congestions on routes along, Ashram, Sarai Kale Khan, Majnu Ka Tila, Hanuman Setu, Rajghat

BY SANJAY RAI

The traffic on Ring Road is anything but a smooth circle, if anything it resembles a 'jalebi' with two wheelers, autos and even rickshaws crossing lanes in a bid to get ahead in the bumper-to-bumper traffic on the circular road. From Majnu Ka Tila to Hanuman Temple these jams are making the drivers sweat in their vehicles. There is a severe traffic jam on both sides of this route from Majnu Ka Tila to Hanuman Setu. This adds to the problems of the drivers coming to Majnu Ka Tila from Rajghat side, and those coming to Hanuman Setu from Majnu Ka Tila side.

On Tuesdays, there is a severe traffic jam on both sides in front of Hanuman temple. All efforts to reduce this jam have failed. Recently, traffic signals have been installed at the end of Hanuman Mandir Setu by Delhi Traffic Police. But this has not resulted in much improvement right now. After the inauguration of Ashram Flyover, and Ashram Flyover Extension, people were expecting some relief from the jam, but due to the bottleneck near Sarai Kale Khan on the Ring Road, the mess remains. As soon as one descends from the Ashram flyover to the Ring Road, the traffic jams begin, due to which it takes more than half-an-hour for people to cover the



Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

distance of about half a kilometre to Sarai Kale Khan. This is due to the ongoing construction work of the rapid rail at Sarai Kale Khan. Meanwhile, traffic jams continue on six roads of outer Delhi. Even emergency vehicles, ambulances and fire engines also get stuck in this jam. At the same time, due to the bottle neck near Haiderpur Badli Mod on Outer Ring Road, the traffic of six-lanes gets reduced to four lanes. The jam here is due to the narrow railway bridge. Vehicles coming without stopping from the elevated road from Pitampura get stuck in traffic as soon as they reach here. Several meetings have also been

held between the Public Works Department (PWD) and Railways. According to PWD sources the width of this bridge can be increased soon if mutual consent is reached. Due to the construction work of Outer Ring Road Metro, there are traffic jams from Prashant Vihar to Rohini Jail Mod. It takes about 30 to 40 minutes to cover three kilometres in, whereas earlier it used to take five to seven minutes. Vehicles coming from KN Katju route are stuck in traffic jams as soon as they reach the outer ring road. E-rickshaws and other vehicles parked haphazardly below Rithala metro station, add to the mess.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Election time

The elections in the two states, along with by-elections, will provide a clear snapshot of the public sentiment

It is election time once again. The last round of elections in 2024 would be held in November. The Election Commission has announced that Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand will begin on November 13. Jharkhand will go to the polls in two phases, on November 13 and 20, while Maharashtra will hold a single-phase election on November 20. The votes for both states will be counted on November 23. Additionally, dates for several Lok Sabha by-elections, including in Wayanad, Kerala, where a bypoll is needed after Rahul Gandhi vacated the seat, have been announced. The Assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand are critical for both the ruling and the Opposition parties, as they serve as key battlegrounds to gauge their standing. In Maharashtra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) faces a formidable challenge from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress.



The MVA aims to capitalise on public dissatisfaction over issues like economic distress and governance failures while projecting a united front despite internal tensions.

In Jharkhand, the contest is equally poised, with the incumbent Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-Congress alliance seeking to fend off the BJP's challenge. The ruling coalition is banking on Chief Minister Hemant Soren's popularity and social welfare schemes to retain power. However, the BJP is expected to emphasise issues like law and order and tribal rights to swing the vote in its favour. Apart from the Assembly polls, by-elections will be conducted on November 13 for four Assembly seats in Punjab—Dera Baba Nanak, Chabbawal (SC), Gidderbaha, and Barnala. These bypolls are seen as indicators of the prevailing political sentiment in the regions, potentially setting the tone for broader electoral battles. In addition, the by-election for the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat in Kerala presents another crucial contest. Speculation is rife that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra may make her electoral debut from this constituency, adding a significant dimension to the Congress's campaign strategy. Elections in India are not only a period of heightened activity for political parties but also a monumental task for the Election Commission and government machinery. Conducting elections in the country is no small feat, as ensuring a peaceful, free and fair process presents significant challenge. The upcoming assembly elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, along with the bypolls, will serve as critical indicators of India's evolving political dynamics. As the states prepare for high-stakes battles, various political scenarios could unfold, influenced by factors like coalition strategies, regional issues and leadership challenges. But ultimately it would be the unpredictable and elusive voters who would decide the fate of the political parties.

On the contrary, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav's statement a day after the defeat indicated that the alliance with Congress would continue. Akhilesh said, "I want to say that the INDIA bloc will be there. The UP and Congress alliance will remain intact..." The Aam Admi Party has said it will go solo in the Delhi Assembly poll, while it allied with the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls three months ago. Congress won no seat. The other allies criticise Congress for its overconfidence and rigid attitude toward seat sharing. The resurgent Congress, which has doubled its tally in the Lok Sabha polls, weakened after its Haryana shocker. Most exit polls suggested an astounding win for Congress in Haryana because the BJP faced a 10-year anti-incumbency and dealt with a section of disgruntled people. However, the BJP sprung a surprise and registered its most impressive victory in Haryana. No party has ever won a third term in the rural state. Discussions occur between the Congress, the Shiv Sena

PICTALK



A vendor arranges earthen lamps (Diya) for sale, in Bikaner

Haryana setback exposes cracks in INDIA Bloc



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Congress defeat has not only dampened the party's resurgence narrative but also underscored the need for a recalibrated approach to coalition politics

The Grand Old Congress Party faces criticism from its INDIA coalition partners for mishandling the recent Haryana Assembly polls, allowing the BJP to win for a third time despite ten years of anti-incumbency. Most exit polls had predicted a clear win for the Congress, but the BJP secured 48 out of 90 seats, a victory even the BJP itself was surprised by. A win in Haryana would have boosted the Congress resurgence story. However, Congress lost this fifth Assembly election recently due to internal conflicts, adding to its previous losses in Punjab, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. It is uncertain whether the partners will be united in fighting against the BJP. Questions like whether an alliance with AAP would have favoured Congress to win in the Haryana polls are being debated. Secondly, the defeat would impact the upcoming elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The immediate impact of the Haryana result is likely in seat sharing in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Delhi, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. Thirdly, it is uncertain whether the Congress and AAP will have an alliance. The AAP has already said it will go solo. The INDIA bloc performed well in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls due to its adaptability and compromise. The main aim of the Coalition was to give a one-to-one fight with the BJP and not split the anti-BJP votes. The Coalition put irritable issues on the back burner and managed to work well. They functioned with the sole aim of defeating the BJP and, to a certain extent, succeeded. The BJP majority was reduced, and the government had to be formed with the help of JD (U) and TDP. The Haryana defeat has altered the situation within the Coalition, with the INDIA bloc getting an edge over the Congress. The partners would probably deal with a slightly more restrained and sobered Congress. No one has said so far that the INDIA bloc is finished.



THE MAIN AIM OF THE COALITION WAS TO GIVE A ONE-TO-ONE FIGHT WITH THE BJP AND NOT SPLIT THE ANTI-BJP VOTES. THE COALITION PUT IRRITABLE ISSUES ON THE BACK BURNER AND MANAGED TO WORK WELL

(Uddhav) and the Nationalist Congress Party in Maharashtra. Congress needs to be more responsive to the seat-sharing formula and Sena's demand for Thackeray to be projected as the CM's face even before the polls. The AAP won no seat in the Haryana election but got roughly 1.78 per cent of the votes.

It would have undoubtedly added to the INDIA bloc's kitty if Congress had allied with AAP. According to Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, the Congress ignored the smaller parties and their offers for collaboration. Leaders from the Trinamool Congress, AAP, Shiv Sena (Uddhav), National Conference, RJD, Nationalist Congress Party, and others were critical of the Congress for messing up the Haryana polls. Shiv Sena mouthpiece Saamna said, "No one thought the BJP government would be elected in Haryana again. It seems Congress's overconfidence and arrogance of local Congress leaders led to the party's defeat," the Marathi paper said in its editorial on Wednesday. Repeating the formula adopted during the

Lok Sabha polls for seat sharing is crucial, at least in the Maharashtra and Jharkhand polls. The subdued Congress will not have the upper hand in seat sharing with most of its allies. The present mood in the INDIA coalition must impact Congress's relations with its partners. The Opposition may not be able to withstand any more shocks. Congress must focus on the 286 seats in a direct fight with the BJP. The 2024 polls proved the Congress' strike rate against the BJP rose to 29 per cent from 8 per cent in 2019. Significantly, the number of seats in which the Congress fought with the BJP was 286, down from 370 in 2014. Congress came to power in 2004 and 2009 because of its cordial relationships with the partners. The onus for keeping the alliance is broadly on the Congress. It must realise that every partner, small or big, is essential. Congress has had introspection sessions, and Panchmadi and Shimla are good examples. It is time for one more such session.

(The writer is a personal columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA-CANADA DIPLOMATIC CRISIS

Madam — Apropos to the article 'Souring relations', on October 16, India is withdrawing its High Commissioner from Canada after Canadian PM Justin Trudeau again accused India of masterminding the June 18, 2023, killing of Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside the Guru Nanak Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia. Trudeau's accusation and mischaracterisation of India is based on the American intelligence's raw data supplied to Canada. But, Sikh militants in both Canada and California are deeply involved in organised crime and gang violence. Perhaps, Trudeau believed the volume and frequency of the accusation could trump the truth. He also may believe that doubling down on Sikh militants might win him votes in key districts. On both points, he is wrong. After Khalistani terrorists blew up Air India Flight 182, ignorance can be no excuse about the movement's lethality. Left unchecked, the Khalistani extremists Trudeau's government shelters can be as lethal as Al Qaeda. The movement would be impotent without funding, however. Here, Canadian banks are as complicit as the Arab and Somali hawala agents who ultimately helped move money around prior to Al Qaeda's 1998 East Africa embassy bombings and the September 11, 2001, terror attacks in New York and Washington. Hence, Canada is guilty of abetting terrorism.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Washington

END COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Madam — It is indeed a matter of concern that communal clashes are again showing their ugly faces. No religion can recommend violent reactions for any reason. But every religion suggests being patient even under utter provocation. Therefore, clash in the name of God and religion is only an organised attempt to disturb peace and take undue advantage of it. But the history is clear with its messages that such chauvinists can

Firecracker ban insufficient



This refers to the news, "Delhi government imposes ban on firecrackers to combat air pollution" (October 15). Besides the increasing population density, the air in Delhi remains polluted and it is being inhaled by the majority of the populace and people commuting there. Recently, the AQI level is showing

alarming conditions. Apparently the decision of the Delhi government to ban the production, storage, sale and use of firecrackers till January 25 seems to help in reducing the worsening pollution condition, but it will irritate the majority of Hindus in view of the upcoming Chhath pooja and Diwali festivals. The State BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has raised a valid question to the Delhi government that the main reasons for pollution are the burning of stubble in the neighbouring state of Punjab and dust is flying on many broken roads. Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee President Devendra Yadav has argued the bitter truth that the arrangements made to control pollution have been inadequate. It would be better to discourage the use of firecrackers in social and religious events.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

attract some people for sometime but not all for all the times. People have their basic livelihood issues and any group interested in relieving them of their plights should come out with constructive ideas and suggestions. But sharpening the frictions and promoting clashes should be understood by the people as anti-social acts that aim at reaping advantages for the self or the group. If any group plans to promote its cause by promoting differences and violent reactions, it should remember that the results of such activities will be only negative in the long run and the gains, if any, will be purely ephemeral. However, it is for the people to identify such persons and groups and keep them at a distance without falling prey to their deceptive traps.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

LIMIT SCREEN TIME

Madam — In our daily lives, mindless scrolling on social media has turned into an addiction fuelled by the constant overflow of news and information.

People often find themselves endlessly scrolling through content without any specific purpose. We must try to acknowledge that this scrolling addiction can lead to a decrease in cognitive ability leading to various psychological disorders, or sometimes it may also hamper the mental well-being of an individual, resulting in a reduction and a lack of focus and attention while doing any job or specific task. Scrolling might give us temporary pleasure, but at what cost? We are just making ourselves more vulnerable and slowly becoming a puppet of social media and mobile phones. Setting a limit on scrolling, planning a digital free period, and bringing offline leisure activities into our daily routine can help an individual to alleviate this dangerous addiction. So, don't lose yourself for some momentary pleasure because ultimately health is wealth.

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Why Indian women deserve support, not judgement

We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on women and inculcate a culture that promotes shared responsibilities and duties



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

Indian women are increasingly taking on obligations that exceed 55 hours per week. They manage to pursue their professional careers while also managing a household—what one may refer to as the "second job." It reveals an unsettling fact about the intimidating pressure on women to perform above their capabilities. Although this problem between job and private life affects women all over the world, it is especially difficult for Indian women due to cultural expectations, societal standards and the long-held conviction that they "must do it all."



The question arises: why is there so much pressure on Indian women to push themselves beyond their breaking point? The answer lies in deeply ingrained gender roles and societal expectations. While strides have been made in women's empowerment, the onus of managing the household and caring for children continues to largely fall on their shoulders, even as they excel in their careers. As more women enter the workforce and pursue professional goals, the expectation to continue fulfilling traditional roles has not diminished. Instead, it has expanded, creating an unsustainable juggling act. Are women taken for granted? In many ways, yes. The concept that women are born to balance this act manifests itself in the belief that they can easily handle a high-demanding profession while also serving as primary carers, homemakers, and support for the rest of the extended family. However, such an assumption ignores the impact on their physical and mental well-being. Each woman's drive is influenced by the societally imposed "superwoman" image, which puts undue pressure on them. And when they falter, they are unfairly judged. But why should society judge women for trying to manage the impossible? The expectations placed on women often come with little recognition or appreciation for the sacrifices they make. Instead, when women struggle or choose to prioritise one aspect of their life over another, they are met with criticism rather than compassion. This is especially true for those who lack a strong support system. If a woman does not have family members willing to share the load of child-rearing or household management, she is left to carry an even heavier burden. Should she be judged for

this? Absolutely not. Let us not forget that many Indian women are also teachers, a profession that requires nurturing, patience and a relentless dedication to the betterment of future generations. These women are shaping young minds in the classroom while simultaneously caring for their own families at home. The least society can do is give them the space and freedom they deserve, without the weight of judgement. It's time we, as a society, recognise that women's worth is not measured by their ability to "do it all." We must start questioning the unrealistic expectations placed on them and, instead, advocate for a culture that promotes shared responsibilities. Supporting women in their endeavors—whether in their careers or at home—by giving them the freedom to make choices without judgement is essential. Only then can we begin to alleviate the unnecessary pressures that have, for too long, weighed on the shoulders of Indian women. (The author is a motivational speaker and a freelance writer; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

REVIVING FAMILY BONDS

A family can transform a person into an achiever by right encouragement and support



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR **NIKUNJI**

Small family, Happy family (Chhota Parivar-Sukhi Pariwar) & 'Hum Do Hamare', these two jingles coined by the administration had changed the family planning scenario in India over the years. But it's so ironic that despite becoming the first country to adopt a national policy for limiting a great Indian proclivity, India is expected to overtake China in 2034. At the time of independence, there were 345 million Indians. The world took 454 years to go from 345 million in 1310 AD to a billion, but India took just 52 years. Looking at the above facts and figures one wonders as to what would be the societal structure in a country that takes the burden of a population of a billion people. Sadly, the situation is quite grim, because today we see fewer families and more individuals living their lives on their terms with an 'I care a damn attitude' which is quite common in the metropolis. Our forefathers were brought up with strong family values, but with passing time and ever-changing scenarios, today those core values have been left behind to adopt new so-called modern values. It's so unfortunate that today very few of us know the importance of living or growing up in a family. One must understand the fact that a family is the first school where the literate and the illiterate have got their first lessons in the art of living and values, traditions, customs and conventions. Also in a family, everyone feels secure and protected. Everyone feels strong because of the strength of the family. Everyone feels that others welcome him or her. Everyone feels a kind of support, sustenance and encourage-



ment. It is, therefore, essential to help and facilitate the growth of good supportive families for foundation as a family tradition rather than promoting an individualistic lifestyle for the sake of the next Gen & future to come.

There is some kind of magnetic force that holds the members of a family together. In other words, it is a feeling of closeness and belongingness in the mind of every person and the feeling of acceptance on the part of the whole group that gives it the nomenclature of a family. This feeling of acceptance is always based on the feeling of mutual love, loyalty and trust and also understanding and accommodation. Today we see that families are splitting up.

Certain values like mutual affection, love & genuine caring that make a family work are vanishing because everyone wants to live an independent life without any kind of family interference. However, if the younger ones continue to give regard to the elders and the elders continue to give love to the younger ones, then the family life will continue to be undisturbed and everyone will act responsibly. But, if each one gives up their responsibility and the feeling of concern for others, then cracks would appear and get deeper. Hence to preserve the family structure & tradition, one needs to have tolerance, sobriety & humility because family is very essential to civilised life, be it a spiritual family or the society as a family or of nations. Hence we should consider family as a place where we can work for physical, mental, moral and spiritual growth and can create an environment where others also can grow. A family can change a person into a great leader, disciplinarian, soldier, criminal or scholar by encouraging or discouraging, supporting or condemning certain positive or negative traits in him.

We must, therefore, pay attention to the transformation of families because families are the breeding grounds for good or bad human beings. So, let us awaken people to observe family values such as mutual love, trust, acceptance, accommodation, consideration and care for the wellbeing of others, the spirit of adjustment, tolerance, responsibility and cooperation because if these family values flourish, the nation and the whole humankind will flourish too.

(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Stubble burning crisis needs practical solutions

Without swift and sustained efforts, northern India would face yet another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with bad air quality



BISWAJEET BANARJEE



The Supreme Court has taken a strong stance against the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) for its failure to control stubble burning, a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi-NCR. The court's rebuke, delivered during a hearing on October 3, emphasised the need for effective ground-level interventions and questioned why the Commission had not implemented any provisions of the relevant Act to curb pollution from crop residue burning. Stubble burning, especially in the northern states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has been a major environmental challenge for years. Farmers often resort to burning crop residue after harvesting paddy and wheat due to the increasing mechanisation of farming, the use of combined harvesters, a shortage of labour, and rising labour costs. This practice, prevalent in October and November following the paddy harvest, results in the release of large amounts of particulate matter into the atmosphere, contributing to the hazardous air quality in Delhi-NCR.

The Supreme Court's criticism of the CAQM reflects a broader frustration over the Commission's inability to effectively tackle this issue. Despite being set up three years ago to address pollution in the National Capital Region and surrounding areas, the CAQM has been criticised for its slow pace and lack of tangible outcomes. The court particularly highlighted that the Commission meets only once every three months, a frequency deemed inadequate for addressing a recurring crisis like stubble burning. Moreover, the Commission has issued only 82 directives since its inception, a number that the court described as insufficient to deal with the scale of the problem. A significant concern raised by the Supreme Court is the lack of adequate staffing within the pollution control boards of Delhi-NCR and other affected states, including Uttar Pradesh. The



FARMERS OFTEN RESORT TO BURNING CROP RESIDUE AFTER HARVESTING PADDY AND WHEAT DUE TO THE INCREASING MECHANISATION OF FARMING, THE USE OF COMBINED HARVESTERS, A SHORTAGE OF LABOUR, AND RISING LABOUR COSTS

court ordered that these vacant posts be filled by April 30, 2025, to improve monitoring and enforcement capabilities. Effective staffing is critical for implementing measures on the ground, particularly when dealing with farmers who rely on burning crop residue as a quick and cost-effective way to clear their fields.

Despite repeated interventions from both the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court, stubble burning incidents continue to surge. Last year alone, more than 33,000 incidents of stubble burning were recorded in Punjab, even after explicit instructions to engage with farmers to explore alternatives. The lack of a coordinated effort between the state governments and the CAQM has only exacerbated the pollution crisis during the winter months.

Turning Stubble into a Resource: While the focus remains on the failures of the CAQM and the continued challenges in states like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a notable example of how stubble can be managed more sustainably. The state has successfully implemented initiatives that transform stubble into an energy resource and natural fertiliser, benefiting both the environment and the agricultural community.

The key to this transformation has been the establishment of Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants that convert crop residue into energy and high-quality compost. This approach has not only addressed environmental concerns but has also created an additional income stream for farmers, who sell stubble as raw

material for the CBG process. In this way, stubble has shifted from being a burden to becoming a valuable asset in Uttar Pradesh's rural economy. As of last year, Uttar Pradesh led the country in CBG production, with ten operational plants. Currently, 24 CBG units are active, and another 93 are under construction. The state aims to have more than 100 CBG plants operational soon, a goal endorsed by Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri. During a March 2024 announcement, he highlighted the state's plan to double its bio-coal and biodiesel production by 2025. The success of CBG production in Uttar Pradesh has been bolstered by the Uttar Pradesh State Bio-Energy Policy 2022, which offers various incentives for establishing bio-CNG and CBG units using agricultural waste.

The policy aims to set up CBG plants in every district, providing local solutions for managing stubble while promoting energy self-sufficiency. A significant milestone in this journey was the inauguration of a CBG plant in Dhuriyapar, Gorakhpur, on March 8, 2023, by Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The plant, built for Rs 165 crore, processes 200 metric tonnes of straw, 20 metric tonnes of press mud, and 10 metric tonnes of cattle dung daily. It produces 20 metric tonnes of biogas and 125 metric tonnes of organic manure, contributing to higher agricultural yields while reducing dependency on chemical fertilisers. This initiative allows farmers to diversify their income sources and play

a crucial role in the energy sector. By reducing the practice of stubble burning, the state is making strides in environmental protection. The Yogi Adityanath government has expressed confidence that the enhanced production of bio-coal and biodiesel will help reduce air pollution in the region over the next five years.

The Supreme Court's critique of the CAQM underscores the urgency of finding a balanced approach to stubble burning that respects both environmental concerns and the practical challenges faced by farmers. Uttar Pradesh's model of converting stubble into a resource could serve as a blueprint for other states grappling with similar issues. However, the broader challenge remains: implementing such solutions at scale requires consistent policy support, adequate resources, and a willingness to engage with farmers directly. The court's directive for the CAQM to improve its approach and for state governments to fill vacant posts by 2025 is a step towards accountability.

Yet, the real test will lie in translating these directives into action before another winter brings the familiar, suffocating haze back to the skies of Delhi-NCR. The question remains whether the CAQM, in partnership with state governments, can adapt and adopt innovative solutions like those seen in UP. Without swift and sustained efforts, the region risks facing another year of deteriorating air quality, leaving millions to grapple with the health consequences of inaction.

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

Urbanisation and youth: Building a healthier future amid rapid growth

By 2050, with 70 per cent of the global population expected to live in cities, engaging youth in shaping sustainable urban future is more crucial than ever

Urbanisation, an engine for economic prosperity and resources, sits at the centre of modernity and impacts health outcomes. With rapid urbanisation, the UN projects that by 2050, 7 of 10 people will live in cities, and the youth will likely be the most dominant population. The future will be forged by the ever-increasing global youth, who are integral to playing a dynamic and revolutionary role in creating and building strong, prosperous, sustainable, and vibrant societies. In recent years, international organisations have emphasised the meaningful involvement of youth as vital to accelerating progress towards the SDGs while development continues to grow globally. The approach also coincides



ASHWAJIT SINGH

with this year's message of World Habitat Day, which focuses on "engaging youth to create a better urban future." However, while we work towards engaging the new generation in planning their urban present and future through participatory processes and local leadership opportunities, ensuring their healthy livelihood is imperative. Urbanisation's positive attributes also mask the inequalities

that exist within it. Not all city residents experience or can access these benefits equally. For instance, 40 per cent of India's population will reside in the urban setup by 2030, with 24 per cent being the youth (15-29), making it a relatively young country. Although rapid urbanisation will continue to improve India's average household socio-economic condition and child health status, it is expected to disproportionately affect the health of urban youth, who are likely to become more vulnerable to health challenges. Urbanisation without accounting for the primary healthcare amenities results in significant health disparities. As gentrification grows with urbanisation, a large chunk of the youth is likely to reside in

urban slums and low-income areas. These areas carry distinct health challenges that are influenced by broader socio-economic determinants such as poverty, education and employment. Youth from low-income families and areas are more likely to face barriers to accessing education, which in turn limits job opportunities and perpetuates a cycle of poor health outcomes. These informal settlements may sit adjacent to an affluent neighbourhood. Still, the people living there lack access to safe water and sanitation infrastructure, becoming hotspots for waterborne and vector-borne diseases due to flooding, open sewers, and overcrowding. With such poor hygiene, increased rates of malnutrition



among children and young adults worsen the burden of diseases. In addition to infectious diseases, urban youth in lower-income areas are increasingly exposed to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, which are often exacerbated by poor diet, stress, and lack of access to early diagnosis or regular health checkups. These substantial regional disparities affecting urban youths

living and health conditions are also caused by the inequitable distribution of clinics and healthcare centres, which limits care options. According to NFHS-3, only 39.9 per cent of urban poor children get full immunisation compared to 65.4 per cent of urban non-poor children. Lower vaccination rates and a lack of awareness of ongoing health issues negatively impact school attendance and cognitive development. The National Urban Health Mission (NUHM), launched in 2013, has been instrumental in meeting the regulatory, reformatory, and developmental public health priorities for urban settings. Over the years, NUHM has improved access to health-care, allowing the urban poor

to choose public over costly private services. Among the other initiatives to focus on urban youth health, the National Youth Policy (NYP) 2021 outlines a 10-year vision for youth development by 2030, aligning with the United Nations' SDGs. The NYP prioritises youth health as essential for India's holistic growth and progress by addressing critical health components of urban youth and acknowledging mental health. Further, India's pioneering step towards building inclusive health that benefits all and focuses on the youth also found prominence in the recent G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration in 2023. The report encompasses ways to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and advance with

more health collaborations, especially when facing challenging mental health. While policies like NUHM and NYP have made strides in addressing urban youth health, more needs to be done and implemented to improve primary healthcare. Many urban healthcare centres still struggle with understaffing, lack of resources, and accessibility issues for slum-dwelling youth. To ensure that India's urban youth thrive, it is crucial to increase investments in health services, prioritise mental health care, and continue engaging youth in the decision-making process for urban development.

(The writer is the Founder and Managing Director of IPE Global; views expressed are personal)

TRAI chief highlights balanced satcom spectrum consultation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

As battlelines are being drawn over the modalities of allocating satcom spectrum, TRAI Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti on Wednesday said consultation process is currently on and that the telecom regulator will consider all inputs put before taking a considered view.

The regulator's comments came as Starlink CEO Elon Musk and Indian tycoons are locked in a standoff over satellite spectrum.

Jio recently sought a revision of a consultation paper on recommending norms for "terms and conditions for the assignment of spectrum for certain satellite based commercial Communications services".

"We have received reference from the Telecom Department and we have initiated consultation process in response to reference that has been received from DoT and it covers issue that have been referred to TRAI by the DoT... The consultation process is on, we will consider all inputs and views that are received during consultation process and we will come out

with our considered recommendations," TRAI Chairman Anil Kumar Lahoti told reporters on the sidelines of IMC.

Asked about the demand by Reliance Jio that the TRAI consultation paper be revised to ensure a level playing field between terrestrial and satellite players, TRAI chairman said, "different stakeholders raise different demands on the consultation process, and we consider all these viewpoints and inputs and take a considered view.

World's richest man Elon Musk has taken on Indian billionaires Mukesh Ambani and Sunil Bharti Mittal over the allocation of spectrum used in wireless communication using satellites, calling their demand for the auction of such airwaves "unprecedented".

While Ambani's Reliance Jio has been vocal about the need to allocate such spectrum through an auction to give a level-playing field to legacy operators who buy airwaves and set up infrastructure like telecom towers, Mittal on Tuesday articulated the need for satellite companies harboring any urban



ambitions to buy spectrum as telecom companies do.

Musk-led Starlink is demanding administrative allotment of licences in line with the global trend, as it looks to tap into the world's fastest-growing mobile telephony and internet market. This has found some backing in Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who said on Tuesday that such airwaves will be given out through administrative allocation and not auctioned.

Scindia said the Telecom Act of 2023 passed in December has put the matter in 'Schedule 1', which means that for satcom spectrum will be allocated administratively.

"... Spectrum does not come without a cost. What that cost is and what the formula of that cost is going to be, will not be decided by you or me... It will be decided by Trai... And there is a paper that has already been circulated by

Trai, and we have a regulatory authority for telecom, and that regulatory authority has been empowered by the constitution to decide what that administrative pricing is going to be," he had said.

The minister had said that he is very confident that Trai will come up with the best pricing that should be adopted, provided that it is being given in an administrative manner.

"Satellite spectrum across the world is allocated administratively. So, India is not doing anything different from the rest of the world. Conversely, if you do decide to auction it then you would be doing something, which is different from the rest of the world," the minister said.

Pointing out that satellite spectrum is shared airwaves, Scindia said, "If the spectrum is shared then how can you price it individually".

Musk first termed the demand made by Jio last week for shunning sector regulator Trai's consultation paper on satellite broadband being allocated and not auctioned as "unprecedented", and then asked if it was "too much trouble" to allow Starlink to provide internet services in India.

India reiterates opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

India on Wednesday once again refused to endorse China's ambitious 'One Belt One Road' initiative, becoming the only country in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) not to support the controversial connectivity project.

A joint communique unveiled at the end of the SCO's Council of Heads of Government conclave hosted by Islamabad said Russia, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan reaffirmed their support for the Chinese connectivity initiative.

It said the countries noted ongoing work on the implementation of the project, including efforts to link the Eurasian Economic Union with the One Road One Initiative (OBOR).

India has been refusing to endorse OBOR in previous SCO conclaves as well.

India has been severely critical of the OBOR, previously known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as the project includes the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

There has been growing global criticism against the OBOR as a number of countries are reeling under the burden of debt while implementing projects relating to the initiative.



In his address at the SCO conclave, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said, "debt is a serious concern" but did not elaborate further.

"Collaborative connectivity can create new efficiencies," he said.

The joint communique said the heads of delegations noted the proposal to create a 'Greater Eurasian Partnership' with the participation of the SCO, Eurasian Economic Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations as well as other interested states and multilateral associations.

"The heads of delegations, reaffirming their desire to ensure stable economic and social development in the SCO region, noted the importance of implementing the SCO Economic Development Strategy for the period up to 2030 and the programme of multilateral trade and economic cooperation of the SCO member states," it said.

"They stressed the need for coordinated efforts through the mechanisms of relevant cooperation in order to implement the respective action plans," it added.

The SCO conclave was chaired by Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Besides Jaishankar, the conclave was attended by Chi-n-ese Premier Li Qiang, Belarus Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Kaza-kh PM Olzhas Bektenov, Russian PM Mikhail Mishustin, Tajik PM Kohir Rasulzoda, Uzbek PM Abdulla Aripov, Kyrgyzstan's Cha-i-rman of Ministers Cabinet Zhaparov Akyzbek and Iran's First Vice Pres-ident Mohammad Reza Aref.

Piyush Goyal urges industry to prioritise quality over subsidies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday asked the industry to focus on making high quality products to tap global markets as export competitiveness will not come from government subsidies or support.

He also said that the government is putting its effort to nudge industry to get into the manufacturing of high quality products as it is a "tough" task to get industry to accept that they should be making quality goods.

Initially, the government faced a huge amount of opposition from the industry on quality control orders.

"Our export competitiveness is not going to come from subsidies or government support. It is not going to come from our closing the doors to the rest of the world. If we are looking at self-reliant India, it can only happen when India will be self-confident and that confidence will only come when we all decide that quality is not our job, it is our duty," the minister said.

He added that if the Indian industry is not competitive in any product, that can be imported the industry has to work towards competitiveness where it has a comparative advantage with other nations.

The government is taking a series of steps such as rolling out Quality Control Orders



(QCOs) to boost manufacturing in the country.

Till 2014, he said, only 14 QCOs covering 106 products were issued, but in the last 10 years, the government has issued as many as 174 such orders covering 732 products to ensure that more and more people will become aligned with better quality standards.

These orders help curb the import of sub-standard products, prevent unfair trade practices and ensure the safety and well-being of consumers as well as the environment.

Under the order, an item cannot be produced, sold, traded, imported and stocked unless it bears the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) mark. Violation of the provision of the BIS Act can attract imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of at least Rs 2 lakh for the first offence. In case of second and subsequent offences, the fine will increase to a minimum of Rs 5 lakh and extend up to 10 times of the value of goods or articles.

QCOs are issued in accordance with the WTO Agreement on Technical

Ministers' panel discusses merger of GST compensation cess into taxes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The group of ministers (GoM) on GST compensation cess, under Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary, on Wednesday discussed merger of compensation cess into GST.

States suggested that during the transition of cess, once it is decided to merge with taxes no new goods should be added to the list of luxury, sin and demerit goods.

States were of the view that since the compensation cess ends in March 2026, the only way to restructure it is to merge the levy with the taxes and bring about separate tax rates for the items on which cess is levied currently.

"GST compensation cess is coming to an end. A discussion needed to be done on what will be the future of the cess. Every state has given their views. This was the first meeting," Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said.

Should it continue as cess or be converted to tax and whether there would be changes in luxury, demerit and sin goods items, Chaudhary said, "Discussion is going on".

The next meeting of the GoM on compensation cess is in the second week of November. Sources said all states have suggested merger of taxes under GST, because

compensation cess has expired.

"But no new goods will be added. Compensation period has ended and if it has to be brought under GST then it has to be restructured and brought in as taxes," sources said.

The Group of Ministers (GoM), which includes members from Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, will submit its report to the GST Council by December 31.

In the GST regime, compensation cess at varied rates is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods over and above the 28 per cent tax. The proceeds from the cess, which was originally planned for five years after GST roll-out or till June 2022, was used to compensate states for revenue loss incurred by them post the introduction of GST.

In 2022, the Council decided to extend the levy till March 2026 to repay the interest and the principle amount of the Rs 2.69 lakh crore worth loan taken in the 2021 and 2022 fiscal years to make good states' revenue loss during Covid years.

With just one-and-a-half year remaining for the cess to end, the GST Council in its 54th meeting on September 9 decided to set up a GoM to decide the future course of the cess.

RBI celebrates 90th anniversary with nationwide quiz

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi was conducted at Hyatt Regency, Bhikaji Cama Place, Delhi, where 136 students (68 teams) competed. The team from Shaheed Sukhdev College of Business Studies comprising Ishaan Yewale & Harshita Jain emerged as the winner, followed by those from Maulana Azad Medical College and Sri Venkateswara College in second and third places, respectively. Prizes for the top three teams are of ₹2 lakh, ₹1.5 lakh, and ₹1 lakh, respectively.

The winning team will now compete in the Zonal round, which will take place between November 21, 2024, and December 4, 2024. The national final will be held at Mumbai in December 2024.

STPI Launches LEAP AHEAD 2nd Edition for Startups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Building on the success of its inaugural edition, the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) on Wednesday launched the LEAP AHEAD 2nd Edition at the Indian Mobile Congress 2024 in the national Capital.

The initiative was launched by K. K. Singh, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) and Arvind Kumar, Director General, STPI; Dr. Rasappa Viswanathan, Director, ICAR Indian Institute of Sugarcane Research; Pradeep Gupta, Chairman & Managing Director, CyberMedia and Board Member, TIE Delhi-NCR; and Roshan Lal Tamak, Executive Director & CEO, DCM Shriram Ltd, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Senior Director, STPI; Subodh Sachan, Director, STPI. Following the impactful success of the LEAP AHEAD 1st Edition, which anchored young entrepreneurs and tech startups, the second edition promises to revolutionize tech startups in scaling, product diversification, and regional expansion.

With up to Rs One Crore in funding support, the program includes a comprehensive three-month mentorship program offering a mix of virtual and in-person sessions.

Promote Indian firms in infra consultancy: Ex-PIB chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Director General of Press Information Bureau (PIB), Govt of India, Rajeev Kumar Jain on Wednesday said the government must take efforts to promote more and more Indian Companies in the infrastructure consultancy space to fully realize the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, more so when we are already promoting the manufacturing of train coaches in India.

Jain further said that Indian Railways and metro projects have embraced the "Make in India" philosophy by promoting local manufacturing of rolling stock, signaling systems, and other critical components.

"This can be done so even for the infrastructure consultancy sector," said Jain who had a stint Rail, Civil Aviation and Urban Affairs



Lal, Principal FA & CAO (Retd), Ministry of Railways and Rajesh Agrawal, Former Member Railway Board, were also present at the inaugural function.

Complimenting the Government for promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat, Jain said that the High-Speed Railway is a classic example of awarding the consultancy contract to all the Indian companies. "The project being highly technical and complex in nature, and being built for the first time in India, the Govt. has relied on all the Indian companies (Tata Consulting Engineers, Consulting Engineers Group for the job of project management consultancy. This makes a compelling case for the Govt. to do so in the other infrastructure consultancy works, particularly in metro sector," he stated.

Rubrik launches DSPM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

US-based cyber security firm Rubrik on Wednesday announced the launch of Rubrik Data Security Posture Management (DSPM) for Microsoft 365 Copilot to provide greater visibility and control of sensitive data, reduce the risk of exposure, and empower organizations to quickly and securely adopt Copilot, an AI-powered assistant that generates answers anchored in an organization's business content to deliver highly relevant and contextual responses.

"The announcement comes at a crucial time as many organizations are preparing to embrace AI tools and adopt Microsoft 365 Co-pilot in a big way. The biggest hurdle that's slowing down organizations is the lack of tools and platforms that can identify and control access to sensitive data" said Abhilash

Purushothaman, Vice President and General Manager, Rubrik (Asia).

"With the growing volume of Microsoft 365 customers in India, managing and safeguarding sensitive information has become increasingly complex. Rubrik aims to mitigate these risks, strengthen resilience for organizations and enables accelerated adoption of transformational AI tools like M365 Copilot; without worrying about potential sensitive data exposure and associated regulatory fallout that are a slowing down the AI adoption," Abhilash Purushothaman added.

"Organizations are facing significant pressure when it comes to improving security of their rapidly growing data," said Mike Tornica, Chief Business Officer at Rubrik.

"Microsoft is committed to enabling secure and intelligent productivity tools for our customers," said Tony

Surma, CTO, Americas Partners at Microsoft.

Microsoft 365 Copilot is an AI-powered assistant that generates answers anchored in an organization's business content to deliver highly relevant and contextual responses.

To ensure Copilot surfaces only data which users have permissions to view, it follows the same data access controls already in place in Microsoft 365. Misconfigurations in these controls could lead to the exposure of sensitive data to unauthorized users.

To help mitigate this risk, Rubrik DSPM for Microsoft 365 Copilot is designed to provide the data visibility and control needed to ensure sensitive data is correctly classified, labeled, and segmented - and has the right access permissions. This enables organizations to leverage the power of Copilot while securing sensitive data from the risk of exposure.

INBRIEF

RECPDCL HANDS OVER RAJASTHAN-IV

RAJASTHAN: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharatna CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, handed over a project specific SPV on 15th October 2024 at Gurugram.

IIFL FINANCE OFFERS GOLD LOAN AT 0.99% INTEREST RATE PER MONTH

DELHI: IIFL Finance, one of India's leading non-banking financial companies (NBFC), is offering Gold Loan at 0.99% interest rate per month with zero processing fees until October 19, 2024 under its ongoing Gold Loan Mela.

LOCOMOTIVES ACROSS INDIAN RAILWAYS TO BE EQUIPPED

MALIGAO: In a major milestone, Indian Railways is all set to install Kavach 4.0 - an indigenous Automatic Train Protection System on 10,000 locomotives across its network. Recently, after successful trial implementation of Kavach 4.0 was done at a stretch of 108 km in the West Central Railway.

I WAS ON EDGE OF MY SEAT WHEN MY NAME CAME UP IN HIL AUCTION: HARMANPREET

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

On the edge of his seat during Hockey India League (HIL) auctions, India's Olympic medal-winning skipper Harmanpreet Singh was silently praying that Sardar Singh from Soorma Hockey Club makes a winning bid for him. Eventually his wish came true with Harmanpreet becoming the costliest buy in the men's section as Soorma Hockey Club, representing Punjab and Haryana, secured his services for a whopping Rs 78 lakh on the first day of the three-day auction.

"I am elated that the Hockey India League is back and in marvellous fashion. I was on the edge of my seat when my name came up during the auction, mentally hoping and urging Sardar Singh to bid for me and I get to play for the Haryana-Punjab region," said Harmanpreet, who led India to the bronze medal at the Paris Olympics.

"It was a great relief when Soorma Hockey Club finally landed me in the auction and I could not have been happier," he added.

The men's HIL will feature eight teams, while the inaugural women's event will have four teams. The ace drag-flicker was happy with



the combination of the squad, insisting that they managed to get the perfect balance. "We have a very good-looking team at the Soorma Hockey Club at the end of the auction, the owners and coaching staff have hit the ball out of the park. We have the perfect balance of experienced, big-name players and young players with the potential to become big names themselves," Harmanpreet said.

The upcoming edition of the event holds greater significance as the Women's HIL will make its debut and will run co-currently with the men's league in two venues — Ranchi (men) and Rourkela (women).

India defender Udit Duhan, who was picked by Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers for Rs 32 lakh, can't hide her excitement for becoming the costliest buy in the women's auction.

"Hockey India is breaking barriers and setting new standards by holding a Women's Hockey India League at the same time as the men's league. This will be a good opportunity to showcase our skills and grow as athletes by playing with players from different nationalities. All of us are eager to give our 100 per cent," she said. "I cannot wait to get on the pitch and aim to win the league."

Hyderabad Toofans, Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Delhi SG Pipers, Tamil Nadu Dragons, UP Rudras, Kalinga Lancers and Team Gonasika are the eight men's teams.

In the women's event, Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers, Delhi SG Pipers and Odisha Warriors will fight it out from December 28 till February 1, with the final of the women's event slated for January 26.



Chennaiyin FC aim to stretch unbeaten away run against NorthEast United

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Chennaiyin FC will look to prolong their unbeaten away run at the Indian Super League 2024-25 season when they lock horns with determined hosts NorthEast United FC here on Thursday. CFC have been on the road for two out of their first three matches this season.

Speaking to the media ahead of their third away match, Chennaiyin head coach Owen Coyle praised NorthEast United while highlighting the need for his team to be more clinical.

"What you have is two very good teams," Coyle told the media.

"Two very attack-minded teams, going all out to win a tough game. NorthEast (United) are always a very dangerous opponent — they were last year and they certainly are this year. I think Juan Pedro Benali has done a fantastic job."

"Equally, we know we have a good team, we know we have good players and can stand toe-to-toe with the best teams in this league when we are at our best. So that's our focus, being very respectful of our opponents but focusing on our qualities."

"In truth, we should probably be sitting with 7-9 points; in the last two games alone, we had just under 40 chances, so

we know we have to be more clinical," he added.

Due to heavy rainfall in Chennai, the Marina Machans had to travel to Guwahati prematurely and resume training away from home.

Coyle expressed gratitude to the Highlanders for their sporting integrity in opening their gates early and also wished for the safety of those back home.

"We haven't been able to train for the last three days because of the severe weather in Chennai. But, more importantly, we want to make sure everyone's safe and well, so that's the priority," Coyle said.

This was echoed by left-back Ankit Mukherjee, who joined Coyle for the presser.

During the international break, CFC's Lalrinliana Hnamte made his international debut for India, while Farukh Choudhary returned to the fold with a goal.

Coyle emphasized their achievements and confirmed that they had returned to training ahead of the NorthEast United match.

Chennaiyin's clash with NorthEast United will be the 23rd meeting between the teams in the ISL. NorthEast United have played four matches this season, one more than Chennaiyin, with one win, one loss, and two draws.

Thomas Tuchel hired as England head coach ahead of 2026 World Cup

AP ■ LONDON

Thomas Tuchel was hired as England coach on Wednesday and will take on the challenge of ending the national team's decades-long wait for a trophy.

The German, who previously managed Paris Saint-Germain, Chelsea and Bayern Munich, will begin his tenure in January ahead of the 2026 World Cup in the United States.

The English Football Association said Tuchel had been identified as the "preferred candidate" after what it described as an

extensive search to replace Gareth Southgate, who stepped down after the European Championship in July.

Tuchel won major trophies in Germany, France and England and is England's third foreign coach, after the late Sven-Goran Eriksson and Fabio Capello. He succeeds one of England's most successful coaches in Southgate, who led the country to back-to-back European Championship finals and a World Cup semifinals.

Southgate stepped down after eight years following defeat to Spain in the final of Euro 2024.



The FA said it had interviewed several candidates before deciding on Tuchel.

Tuchel won European club soccer's biggest prize when leading Chelsea to the Champions League title in 2021. He has won league titles with PSG in France and Bayern in Germany.

He takes on the England job after leaving Bayern at the end of last season.

The 51-year-old Tuchel fits the FA's remit of hiring a coach who has delivered at the highest level and also knows the English game following his time with Chelsea.

The FA said in July that it

wanted someone with "significant experience of English football, with a strong track record delivering results in the Premier League and/or leading international competitions."

It also said the new coach would develop the team to "win a major tournament and be consistently ranked as one of the top teams in the world."

As manager of Chelsea, Tuchel beat Pep Guardiola's Manchester City to win the Champions League within months of taking the job. He also won the UEFA Super Cup and Club World Cup with the Premier League club.



Competition is stronger this year but India can lift SAFF trophy: Ashalata

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

The quality of football has improved immensely in the region but the Indian team is equipped to win the SAFF Women's Championship, senior defender Ashalata Devi said on Wednesday as the side gears up to take on arch-rivals Pakistan in its tournament-opener.

The clash against Pakistan on Thursday assumes significance since Ashalata will become India's first woman footballer to play 100 international matches when she takes field on Thursday at the iconic Dasarath Stadium. Ashalata said the first game always sets the tone, and a strong start will help them play freely in the following matches.

The last time the two teams clashed, India had emerged a 3-0 winner.

"It's always exciting to face a team like Pakistan. We have a lot of respect for them. They have grown as a unit. Last time, we won against them, but we are not taking them lightly. They are motivated, prepared well and will surely put up a good fight," said Ashalata.

India head coach Santosh Kashyap is expecting a close contest. "I have watched Pakistan's recent matches, including the one against Singapore, where they put up a tough fight and narrowly lost 1-0. They have strong physicality and play good football.

"All the teams are very close in terms of quality, and they fight hard. Whether it's the men's or women's teams, we can't afford to think we are the favourites and will win easily.

When asked about Ashalata

Devi's milestone, coach Kashyap said, "It's a great achievement for her as well as for women's football. I always tell young players to look up to her and how she has maintained herself for such a long time."

Pakistan, who have players like Maria Khan and Nadia Khan in the ranks, will not be pushovers. Skipper Maria is an experienced midfielder, who plies her trade for Saudi Arabian pro side Eastern Flames. Two other Pakistan players, goalkeeper Rumaysa Khan and striker Isra Khan, play in Canada and the United States, respectively.

"I think it will be an interesting match, India have prepared well. They have a new coach as well, so they have new strategies, we don't know what to expect. It's a good rivalry," Pakistan head coach Adeel Rizki said.

Mbappe's representatives dismiss Swedish reports of a rape claim

AP ■ STOCKHOLM

French soccer star Kylian Mbappé's representatives have rejected as "false and irresponsible" reports in Swedish media saying he is the subject of a rape investigation in the Nordic country.

Without citing sources, several Swedish media including tabloids Expressen and Aftonbladet and broadcasters SVT and TV4 reported that the Real Madrid striker was the subject of a rape claim following a visit to Stockholm last week.

In response to the reports, Swedish prosecutors issued a brief statement Tuesday saying a rape had been reported to police, but didn't name any suspect.

"According to the report the incident took place on October 10, 2024, at a hotel in central Stockholm," said the statement published by the Swedish Prosecution Authority.

Prosecutor Marina Chirakova, who is leading that investigation, declined to give any further details.

"From my side I cannot confirm whether there is a



suspect in the case," she told The Associated Press.

Names of suspects are typically not made public by Swedish authorities until charges are filed or a suspect is ordered held in pre-trial detention.

Mbappé's communications team accused Swedish media of spreading "slanderous" rumors.

"These accusations are totally false and irresponsible, and

their propagation is unacceptable," they said in a statement sent to the AP and other media.

"Kylian Mbappé will under no circumstances tolerate his integrity, reputation and honour being sullied by unfounded insinuations."

In a post late Monday on his official X account Mbappé wrote "FAKE NEWS!!!" and linked to a French article

picking up the Swedish reports. He appeared to draw a link between the reports in Sweden and a hearing in Paris on Tuesday in a legal dispute with former club Paris Saint-Germain over unpaid wages.

"It's becoming so predictable, on the eve of the hearing, as if by chance," the post said in French.

Mbappé's lawyers didn't comment as they arrived for

and left the hearing in Paris on Tuesday.

Later on Tuesday, a lawyer for Mbappé, Marie-Alix Canu-Bernard, told French broadcaster TFI that her client was "bewildered" by the reports.

"We are told that a complaint has been lodged, but at this stage we don't even know against whom. A complaint does not make the truth, a complaint does not prove anything. And once again, I don't even know if the complaint is against him," she said.

Swedish media already last week reported on Mbappé's brief stay in Stockholm, publishing pictures of him and his entourage.

The French star had been given permission to skip international duty because of a minor thigh injury as France beat Israel and Belgium in Nations League matches on October 10 and October 14, respectively.

Mbappé, who won the World Cup with France in 2018, joined Real Madrid this summer after seven years at PSG.

Messi scores hat-trick as Argentina wins in South American World Cup qualifying

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

A hat trick and two assists: Lionel Messi came back in style for Argentina in its 6-0 home win in a South American World Cup qualifying match.

Messi, who missed two rounds of the competition in October due to a right ankle injury, played from start to finish on Tuesday in front of raucous fans at the Monumental de Núñez Stadium, who chanted his name after he opened the scoring in the 19th minute.

Its archrival Brazil, whose coach Dorival Júnior was under pressure earlier this month, got some relief with a convincing performance in a 4-0 home win against Peru.

Argentina remained as leaders of the round-robin competition with 22 points after 10 matches, three points clear of second-place Colombia, who earlier beat Chile 4-0. Uruguay, which earlier had a goalless draw with Ecuador, and Brazil come next with 16 points.

The Uruguayans are in third position on goal difference. Ecuador and Paraguay follow, with 13 points each, but the Ecuadorians have one more win to take the fifth position.

The top six teams in the region will secure automatic berths in the next World Cup. The seventh-place team, currently Bolivia, will play in an international playoff for a spot in the tournament in 2026.

Two more rounds of South American World Cup qualifying will be played in November.

MESSI IN STRONG FORM ON RETURN: Messi's first goal came after a mistake by a Bolivian defender, who missed a pass and allowed the 37-year-old Messi to run freely and finish unchallenged in front of goalkeeper Billy Viscarra. Messi assisted on Lautaro Martínez's goal in the 42nd minute and gave a decisive pass once again in added time on a goal by Julián Álvarez.

Argentina appeared to slow its pace



after the break, but scored again with Thiago Almada in the 69th minute. The striker scored from close range after a low cross by Nahuel Molina. Messi's show had

two great finishing touches from the edge of the box, the first in the 84th minute and the second in the 86th minute. "We enjoyed this, we are happy to be here playing in Argentina," said

Messi, who once again refused to say whether he will play in the next World Cup in 2026. "This could be one of the last (matches in front of the Argentinian crowd)."

Bolivia, which is seeking to qualify for the World Cup for the first time in 30 years, remains in contention with 12 points.

BRAZIL REAPPEARS UNDER JUNIOR: This month's rounds of South American qualifying were important for coach Dorival Júnior. His team was knocked out in the quarterfinals of the latest Copa America and was struggling against rivals it used to beat easily, such as Paraguay and Venezuela.

Júnior's chances of success seemed low in matches against Chile and Peru due to injuries affecting several of his starters; goalkeeper Alisson, defender Eder Militao and striker Vinicius Júnior were all out. But a last-minute win against the Chileans and a convincing display against the Peruvians will give the Brazil coach some relief.

Raphinha scored from the spot twice to put Brazil in front in Brasilia, in the 38th minute and the second in the 54th.

Substitute Andreas Pereira made

more than 60,000 fans at the National Stadium gasp when he scored with a volley in the 71st minute. Another substitute, Luiz Henrique, scored for the second consecutive match for the national team with a classy shot from the edge of the box.

"These were two matches that we controlled well," Raphinha said. "We are far from perfection, but we are on the right track."

CHILE IN LAST PLACE: Chile's loss to Colombia has placed the job of coach Ricardo Gareca at risk. Davinson Sánchez, Luis Díaz, Jhon Durán and Luis Sinisterra scored the goals for Colombia. Chile is in last place in the qualifying group with only five points.

Paraguay beat Venezuela 2-1 and moved into a qualifying position in the standings. Jon Aramburo opened the scoring for the visitors in the 25th minute, but striker Antonio Sarabia came off the bench to win it for the hosts with goals in the 59th and 74th minutes.

