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HARYANA ELECTIONS: BJP FACES CONGRESS' RESURGENCE

WORLD 8

IRAN'S PRESIDENT SLAMS WEST ON SUPPORT TO ISRAEL

MONEY 10

RUPEE SETTLES FLAT AGAINST US DOLLAR

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RAJ KUMAR'S
HAT-TRICK HELPS INDIA
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11 SPORTS



Stern message by Centre to Rahul for anti-national remarks in US

LEADERS ACROSS PARTIES CRITICISE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Yet another foreign trip by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has stoked another round of controversy in the political circles of India and the Centre and BJP Leaders on Wednesday also commented that Rahul Gandhi's quota remark in a foreign land has exposed the Congress' "anti-reservation face" and making "anti-national statements" has become a habit for the former Congress chief. Sending a stern message to Rahul Gandhi, Home Minister Amit Shah said that as long as the BJP is there, no one can abolish reservation or mess with the nation's security. The senior BJP Leader's comments came after Rahul Gandhi told students of Georgetown University in the United States that the Congress would think of scrapping reservations when "India is a fair place", which he said is not the case right now. "Standing with forces that conspire to divide the country and making anti-national statements have



Rahul Gandhi interacts with the media at the National Press Club, in Washington DC, USA and Amit Shah condemns his anti-national statements. Photos: PTI

become a habit for Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party," Shah said who was also joined by his other Cabinet colleagues including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Hitting back at the BJP for accusing Rahul Gandhi of making "anti-national

statements", the Congress said the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha has only talked about upholding the Constitution and asked why the ruling party has a "problem" whenever there is such talk. The Home Minister said whether it was supporting

the National Conference's "anti-national and anti-reservation agenda" in Jammu and Kashmir or making "anti-India statements" on foreign platforms, Rahul Gandhi has "always threatened" the nation's security and hurt sentiments.

Crematoriums for dogs, cats, other pets planned



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Pets are true companions in a person's life. Be it dogs, cats or any other animals and birds, they become an inseparable part and become a member of the family. As the number of pet owners is rising in Odisha, Congress MLA Sofia Firdous on Wednesday raised a pertinent question in the Odisha Assembly.

In a question to the Fisheries and Animal Resources Department, Sofia asked, "Can

the government consider establishment of dedicated pet crematoriums in major cities, including Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, to ensure respectful and environmentally-sound disposal of deceased pets?"

She further wanted to know how the government could assess the potential environmental and public health benefits of such facilities, and what impact could this have on the community, particularly in reducing illegal burial practices and promoting respon-

sible pet ownership.

In reply, Housing and Urban Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra said, "Establishment of dedicated pet crematorium in major cities has not been considered as yet. However, the proposal is praiseworthy. Evaluating the environmental aspect and public health benefits, necessary steps will be taken to create such facilities in consultation with the stakeholders and experts in the field."



Members of Hindu organisations stage protest over illegal construction in a mosque, at Sanjauli, Shimla. PTI

Shimla: Police, protesters clash over encroachment by mosque

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Protesters demanding the demolition of an illegal portion of a mosque in Shimla's Sanjauli area clashed with security personnel on Wednesday, breaking barricades and pelting stones as police used water cannons and baton-charged to disperse them. Raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" and "Hindu Ekta Zindabad", hundreds of protesters gathered at the Sabzi Mandi Dhalli and marched towards Sanjauli, defying prohibitory orders and ignoring warnings by the administration to lodge their protest and broke barricades erected near the Dhalli tunnel.

Raids on Irrigation Asst Engineer Vigilance unearths 6 multi-storey buildings

Also 5 high-value plots
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Vigilance police on Wednesday unearthed a four-storey palatial building worth Rs 2.4 crore among six multi-storey structures, five high-value plots and deposits worth Rs 11.5 lakh during raids on Prasanna Kumar Swain, Irrigation Division Assistant Engineer at Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district, for allegedly possessing assets disproportionate to his known sources of income. Vigilance said in a statement that house searches were conducted by teams led by seven DSPs, five Inspectors/ASIs and supporting staffs at nine places on the strength of search warrants issued by Special Judge,



Brahmapur.

Assets unearthed so far in the names of Swain and his family members were as follows:

1. One four-storey building over 9,000-sqft area worth Rs 2.4 crore at Tulsinagar, Brahmapur.
2. Another four-storey residential building over 6,000-sqft area at Bagdevi Road, Bhejiput, Bhanjanagar.

3. One triple-storey building over 3,000-sqft area at Bagdevi Road, Bhejiput, Bhanjanagar.
 4. Another triple-storey building over 2,500-sqft area at Bhanjanagar.
 5. A double-storey under-construction building over 5,850-sqft area at Word No 6, NAC, Bhanjanagar.
 6. A double-storey paternal house over 1,130-sqft area at Luduludi under Bhanjanagar PS.
 7. Five high-value home-stead plots (one in Brahmapur and four in and around Bhanjanagar).
- The measurement and valuation/assessment of the buildings/plots were being carried out by the Vigilance Technical Wing. Bank deposits and other investments were also being ascertained.

In State CAG finds violation of EC norms by mining leaseholders

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has pointed out glaring violation of environment clearance norms by the mining lessees in Odisha.

The CAG said production of minerals in excess of the limits stipulated in the Environment Clearance (EC) was noticed in cases of two iron ore mines and one coal mine. Deviation from the production limits prescribed in the EC constituted unlawful mining and, hence, is liable to attract levy and realisation of the price of the mineral so produced amounting to Rs 1,699.05 crore, it said. Mining activities beyond limits of environmental clear-

ances can have very severe and far-reaching adverse impacts on the environment.

The CAG, which presented its report for the year ended March 31, 2022, contains results of performance audit of systems and controls in assessment and collection of revenue from major minerals.

It further said there had also been unauthorised extraction of mineral from forestland without due approval from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in the case of one chromite mine, which is liable for levy and realisation of the price of the minerals so raised amounting to Rs 150.10 crore.

In addition, these cases are

also liable for penal action under the concerned provisions of the Environment Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act.

In regard to regulation of mining activities, it was observed that there had been production of minerals in excess of the limits stipulated in the approved mining plans in case of eight iron ore mines, attracting levy and realisation of the price of the minerals so raised amounting to Rs 3,618.50 crore.

Carrying out mining activities in violation of relevant environment protection provisions and also crossing the limits of mining plan are also bound to have adverse effects on the environment of the impacted areas, the CAG said.

CAG exposes major lapses in mineral transportation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has exposed significant irregularities in the issuance of e-Passes for vehicles transporting minerals in Odisha.

The findings were part of the CAG's report for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, which focused on the performance audit of systems and controls in the assessment and collection of revenue from major minerals in the State.

The audit noticed that 3,697 vehicles, for which e-Passes were generated, were registered as motorcycles, cars, three-wheelers, etc., and have been shown to have transported 67,271.82 MT of minerals during the audit period.

These vehicles were also not registered on IMS. This clearly indicates lack of monitoring of unregistered vehicles for carrying minerals, and, therefore, the possibility of illegal transportation of unaccounted

minerals cannot be ruled out, the report said.

Major issues were observed in regard to issuance of transit passes and their checking at check-gates and weighbridges.

Out of a total of 1,18,44,864 e-Passes, generated for Mineral Carrying Vehicles (MCVs), routed through the 10 sample check gates during 2017-22, it was found that there were no records in IMS with regard to the 16,79,220 e-Passes.

Non-checking of the 16,79,220 e-Passes generated for MCVs resulted in absence of end-to-end tracking of transportation of a minimum of 1.48 crore MT of iron ore valued at least Rs 1,473.26 crore, the CAG said.

In the absence of end-to-end tracking of these e-Passes, the risk of excess extraction and transportation of minerals in violation of existing regulatory framework could not be completely ruled out, it pointed out.

Govt hikes ex-gratia for construction workers

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Majhi on Wednesday announced an increase in the ex-gratia amount for the construction workers of Odisha in case of accidental and natural deaths.

Addressing a Construction Workers' Welfare Convention at Lok Seva Bhawan here, he said the government would provide Rs 6 lakh instead of Rs 4 lakh as ex-gratia to the next of kin of workers for accidental death. Similarly, he declared a hike in the ex-gratia from 2 lakh rupees to 3 lakh rupees in case of natural death. He highlighted the works done by the Odisha Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board and invited all workers to reg-



ister their names. Labour Minister Ganesh Ram Singhkhuntia said 43 lakhs workers have been registered and the government is working towards welfare of all the workers. The CM distributed cheques to the beneficiaries.

CAG punches holes in KALIA scheme

Says inconsistencies, irregularities defeated mission
NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India's compliance report presented in the Odisha Legislative Assembly by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday found multiple faults with the previous Naveen Patnaik government's much-hyped Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme, which helped the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) retain power for a fifth consecutive term. "Due to lack of preparedness in planning, the department

(Agriculture Department) did not ensure the feasibility of implementation of the scheme, owing to which out of six components under the KALIA scheme, only two components, i.e., 'Support to cultivators for cultivation' and 'Livelihood support for landless agricultural households', were implemented during 2018-21. Further, only three out of five installments were released to beneficiaries under the first component as of March 2021," the report said. "Two components of the scheme, 'financial assistance to vulnerable agricultural households' and 'interest-free crop loan', were dropped. The remaining two components, 'life insurance support to cultivators and landless agricultural labourers' and 'KALIA

Scholarship', are still under planning even after more than two years of commencement of the scheme. There was also a delay in disbursement of assistance to farmers.

The report also highlighted how the BJD government was not able to maintain the consistency in maintaining the numbers of the KALIA scheme beneficiaries.

"The department had provided KALIA benefit assistance to 65.64 lakh beneficiaries during 2019-21. It released installments thrice to 41.64 lakh beneficiaries, twice to 8.09 lakh beneficiaries and only once to 15.91 lakh beneficiaries. This happened due to identification of 9.76 lakh ineligible beneficiaries while implementing the scheme," the report mentioned.

The CAG also analysed the KALIA database and identified another 2.96 lakh ineligible beneficiaries, bringing the total number of identified ineligible beneficiaries to 12.72 lakh. "Against these 12.72 lakh ineligible beneficiaries, the department had transferred Rs 782.26 crore with remote chances of recovery. Payment of Rs 107.64 crore was released to 1.28 lakh account holders in which the names of account holders were different from names of the beneficiaries indicating payment to unauthorised persons," the report stated. There was release of all the three installments to 14.04 lakh landless agricultural labourers without imparting necessary training and capacity building, which defeated the scheme objectives.

Brain strokes in Odisha higher than national average

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The incidence of brain stroke has become an alarming health concern in India with approximately 2,000 cases reported daily nationwide. A recent study published in The Lancet has revealed that the incidence of stroke in Odisha is higher than the national average with nearly one in seven residents at risk.

This growing health issue, which was previously seen mostly in older adults, is now affecting the younger population due to factors such as sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary habits, rising stress levels and



an increasing prevalence of diabetes mellitus and hypertension.

These concerns were highlighted during the Indian Association of Neurology (IAN)

Stroke Subsection Midterm Conference organised by the Department of Neurology, AIIMS Bhubaneswar. Themed "Code Stroke to Stroke Intervention," the conference fea-

tured in-depth discussions on early stroke identification, treatment advancements and the importance of stroke prevention.

AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Dr Ashutosh Biswas said the Neurology Department at AIIMS Bhubaneswar handles over 500 stroke patients every month.

A poster session on stroke was organized for resident doctors and faculty members. The event also witnessed the felicitation of Dr RN Sahoo, a veteran neurologist, with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedicated service to mankind.

Shankaracharya decries plan for beach shacks

Various organisations also stage protest in Puri

PNS ■ PURI

Puri Shankaracharya Swami Nischalananda Saraswati on Wednesday joined members of different social organisations, intellectuals, servitors and researchers of Jagannath culture in opposing the Odisha Government's plan to set up beach shacks along the shores of Puri and Konark to serve liquors to tourists.

The seer condemned the



move as a disgrace to Odisha's spiritual sanctity and advocated for preserving the religious significance of Shree Jagannath Dham. He advised the BJP government to refrain from such acts.

"I have all along demanded that the Puri beach be made a place of bhajan, kirtan and

arati," the Shankaracharya said.

A large of people voiced their concerns over the government's plan to set up beach shacks to serve liquor under the Odisha Excise Policy, 2021. As per reports, the excise policy approves the setting up of beach shacks near different water bodies such as

rivers, lakes and dams, apart from beaches for tourism.

Members of different organisations staged protests at the Singhadpur opposing opening of beach shacks.

Notably, the government through the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) has invited bids to set up beach shacks along coastlines, initially from Puri to Konark, to promote beach tourism.

The OTDC also plans to open counters at beaches on the Puri-Konark Marine Drive offering tourists beverages, including liquor along with music on the lines of Goa.

CRPs demand job regularisation, salary hike

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Gandhi Marg in Bhubaneswar turned into a big strike zone on Wednesday as thousands of Community Resource Persons (CRPs) gathered demanding job regularisation, salary hike,

TA, phone bill compensation, pensions and so on.

"We are made to do all kinds of government work. We en-

sure that advantages of all the schemes launched by the government reach the beneficiaries. We help the SHGs. So, we demand a fixed monthly salary. Under the previous government, we were paid 6,100 rupees per month which has now been reduced to 3,600 rupees from February. We want payment of our old salary," said a protestor, Reena Parida,

Labourer injured as crane collapses

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

It was a close shave for several workers when a crane collapsed during the construction work of a building at OMC Colony of Unit 8 in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

As per initial reports, one labourer sustained injuries in the incident. Three towers with a 10-storey building of OMC were being constructed when the crane collapsed. Sources said iron rods were being lifted when the crane fell. The centering work of the tower was complete and iron



rods were being lifted with the help of a crane. The roof-casting work was going on when the incident occurred.

It was alleged that the safety measures were not being adopted at the construction site. After the incident, attempts were allegedly made by senior officials to suppress the matter by claiming that nobody was hurt in the incident.

Min rules out free electricity supply

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In response to a query from Congress MLA Ashok Kumar Das on Wednesday, Deputy Chief Minister KV Singh Deo said that people should not expect free electricity from the government and must learn to conserve energy and electricity at home.

He added that electricity that is consumed needs to be paid for as services cannot be provided free.

His statement comes amidst

demands for 300 units of free electricity from the government. However, Singh Deo reiterated that the promise of 300 units of free electricity would be fulfilled under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. But he did not specify when the scheme shall be rolled out.

It is worth mentioning that the BJP had promised to implement the PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana in response to the BJD's promise of 100 units of free electricity during last elections.

30th Guru Kelucharan Award Fest ends

Awardees include several eminent personalities

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After a week-long celebration of dance and music of the highest calibre, the 30th Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra (GKCM) Award Festival 2024 here, organised by Srjan-Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Odissi Nrityabasa with institutional support of Sri Sri University (SSU), Cuttack, concluded here on Wednesday.

The guests and dignitaries of the valedictory event were Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi Chairman W20-G20 India 2023, and renowned Bharatanatyam exponent and Guru Dr Sandhya Purecha, eminent cinema and television actress Mahasweta



Ray and Director, Srjan, and Dean, Faculty of Arts, Communication and Indic Studies, SSU Guru Ratikant Mohapatra.

The Shalimar Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Awards 2024, carrying a respectable allocation of Rs 1 lakh and a citation, were presented to Kumkum Lal for her immense contributions to Odissi dance, to Guru Lakshmikanta Palit and Guru Dhaneswar Swain for their lifetime achievements in the field of music and percussion, respectively, be-

honoured for his dedication to Kuchipudi and Rohita Pradhan, to Odissi music (Mardala).

Following the award ceremony, Guru Ratikant Mohapatra's famed Srjan ensemble presented a dance ballet, Tantra, inspired by a spiritual and philosophical tradition that has shaped Indian culture for centuries, since the Vedic times. The dancers, Sujata Mohapatra, Rajib Bhattacharya, Rajashri Praharaj, Aishwariya Singhdev, Santosh Ram, Preetisha Mohapatra, G Sanjay, Madhabi Rout, Alisha Dhal, Daina Ghose, Rajkumar Kar, Angelina Pal, Priti Prangya Paikray, Subhashree Senapati, Sushree Sangita Swain, and Amrita Suhani, presented the choreography with wonderful stage presence, energy, and coordination.

IIT-BBS holds training on bridges in rural roads

Focus on data-centric thorough research, geotechnical investigation

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar is organising a 5-day training programme on 'Survey, Investigation and Preparation of DPR for Bridges in Rural Roads' which began on September 9, highlighting the importance of data-centric thorough research, geotechnical investigation and safe and resilient design in bridge construction.

The training programme is being organised by the School of Infrastructure of the institute.

The event was inaugurated by Er. Ashok Kumar Basa, a renowned bridge engineer from Odisha, former president, Institute of Engineers India (IEI), and currently serving as the Executive Vice President of the World Federation of Engineering Organizations (WFEO). The inauguration ceremony was also attended by Aswani Kumar Padhi, Senior Bridge Engineer from SMEC India; Prof V Panduranga, Dean of Continuing Education at IIT Bhubaneswar; and Prof Sumanta Halder, Head of



the School of Infrastructure. The course was coordinated by Dr Suresh R Dash and Dr Umesh Chandra Sahoo of the School of Infrastructure, IIT Bhubaneswar.

More than 40 delegates from across India, involved in bridge analysis, design, or construction, participated in the workshop. The course received financial support from

NRIDA, Government of India.

It may be mentioned that since 2012, IIT Bhubaneswar has been providing technical services to the PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) programme as the State Technical Agency (STA) and Principal Technical Agency (PTA) for Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.

Dr Dash emphasised that despite the critical role of bridges in our infrastructure, bridge design is frequently overlooked in regular academic curricula in India. Past bridge failures have highlighted the need for serious attention to bridge design, construction, and maintenance.

Motivating delegates on the

importance of studying bridge failures constructively to prevent future mistakes, Basa highlighted the profession's pride in constructing numerous monumental bridges. He stressed the importance of thorough and accurate geotechnical and hydrological site data collection, likening it to prescribing medicine based on accurate pathological reports. Without adequate site data, no amount of sophistication in design can prevent structural failure, he said. He also discussed several bridge failure cases, illustrating how minor mistakes in design or construction can lead to catastrophic consequences.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

BJD must field decent front-liners to counter antagonists

Now, it is becoming clearer that many BJD spokespersons were not fit to talk ever as they were only lowest-grade slaves driven by headlessly arrogant masters.

The year 2000 saw the rise of Naveen Patnaik for quite a few reasons. He came at such a critical time when people were frantic to see the exploitative Congress gang thrown out of sight. That happened, and Naveen was welcome as a gust of fresh air. In good time, he assumed the proportions of a demigod. When he became boss of Odisha, the State was a devastated region as Congress government officials, both political and bureaucratic, had eaten up much of the public property by machinations and guile. Some top Congress leaders are sitting over hillocks of wealth even today by exploiting major minerals mines and landed property when the market boom is enormous. And to add to the woe in 1999, nature had played havoc



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

by inflicting a Super Cyclone on the coast of Odisha that had literally smashed part of the State's financial backbone. The State, ravaged both by political robbers and nature, was in a very bad shape. Naveen took over by an accidental event. The mining boom just set in to bring big money. And fortunately then, Naveen, as a political beginner, was too keen to please the masses by engaging in proverbial good

deeds. He kicked out many branded political crooks, ensured that law and order was in place by installing the rule of law in real spirit, and above all, picked a few experienced and skilled guys to guide him.

Somehow or the other, the BJD leaders ruling the country had taken a liking for Naveen only because he was the son of legendary Biju Patnaik. PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and deputy Lal Krishna Advani had extended unconditional support to Naveen to collaborate and form government by winning massively the critical election of 2000. Without BJD leaders' help, Naveen would not have become boss.

Naveen cleansed the party of evil elements as his mentors and guides told him to do and all was so fantastic until 2009 when success went into head; and on the advice of mentor-guide Pyari Mohapatra, the BJD severed ties with the BJP and went alone to the polls. Fortunately, by this time, people had found in Naveen a gem because he was a stark

contrast of comparison with Janaki Ballav Patnaik. Despite JB Patnaik having done so many noteworthy things like trying to industrialise the State and uphold the dignity of the Odia language, his colleagues and deputies were merrily left free to loot and plunder. Flyovers, bridges, ring roads and indoor stadiums came up to impress the masses while no one was aware of the 'value for money' as there was no 'value' or 'ethics auditing' of any project. The same is the case of the popular Naveen regime that brought up Puri Parikrama Marg, Cuttack bus terminal and converting the filthy Taladanda Canal into a pleasure zone at costs which no one has audited on critical fronts of 'value' and 'ethics'.

The Naveen government remained exceedingly popular for twenty long years. After the near landslide victory of 2019, his government began degenerating into a dictatorial regime with a few favoured bureaucrats calling all shots so arbitrarily as to hurt even the high-

est-wrung leaders and lately fellow bureaucrats. VK Pandian became closest to Naveen and took over total command. Despite noble intentions of doing great things, he lost head and became an autocratic ruler without once realising that people were beginning to get bored and irritated at him. Naveen committed the gravest mistake of giving VK the longest rope by even backing him on unconstitutional acts. VK, by now, had even brazenly begun treating the Chief Secretary as his sidekick. There was big rumour that big BJD leaders had degenerated into gangsters and bought over most media houses with big sums of ad as well as hush-money. What VK could never sense was that the ground beneath the feet was caving in too fast. Three principal devils misguided him with soothing lies and falsehood. They gave him the impression that the masses were crazy to have him taking over from Naveen, who by now was actually looked upon as a living vegetable for the pitiable

manner he was projected by the BJD biggies. Allegedly, one was a goddamn self-serving filmmaker from the western Odisha who designed the unforgivable 'Lungi act' by Naveen; the second was a privately-inducted IT Secretary allegedly involved in contract and tender fixing of various kinds, who kept misinterpreting facts about the prospects of poll victory. The third was some political colleagues who handled money and helped VK choose candidates. This public perception had brought down the image of BJD beyond repair, which Naveen or VK could never figure out as the crooks in the fold, masquerading as well-wishers, had whispered into the big ears.

By the time the 2024 elections were notified, the masses had decided to reject Naveen. The big reason was VK had turned commander in full public glare who even tossed top bureaucrats here and there as he liked, thereby earning formidable enemies in the bureaucratic

fold. Thus, the BJP has not actually won elections; it has come in place by default.

The saddest fact is that the BJD, even after the most shameful fall, has not realised enough to engage in self-introspective exercises to know what they should be doing now to regain lost glory. Lately, the way Rajya Sabha member Sulata Deo kept slamming victor Baijayant Panda and his wife for some insignificant 'comment on identity crisis', the Odia community across the globe has felt ashamed that such indecent, ignorant individuals are sent to Rajya Sabha. Meanwhile, two RS members have deserted the party without remorse or regret. More are on the marks, as the gossip goes. Still, Naveen and VK and the other close aides do not seem to have come to terms with the truth. They have failed to know that regaining lost glory will be out of question as long as vulgar loudmouths like Sulata are put up as defenders in public domain.

Odisha lawyers demand sops in line with J'khand

RAJEEV RATHAN ■
BRAHMAPUR

A meeting was conducted in Brahmapur on Monday to discuss the welfare measures for advocates in Odisha, drawing comparisons with the recent announcement by the Jharkhand Government. Advocates focused on the urgent need for similar provisions in Odisha, where they are yet to receive such welfare schemes despite longstanding demands.

Notably, on September 7, the Jharkhand Government made a landmark decision to support its legal community by approving a comprehensive welfare package for advocates. The State's Cabinet approved

Rs 5 lakh medical insurance for nearly 30,000 lawyers, alongside a significant increase in pension for senior advocates aged 65 and above, raising it from Rs 7,000 to Rs 14,000 per month. Furthermore, junior advocates will now receive a monthly stipend of Rs 5,000, providing much-needed financial support to those starting their careers.

The progressive move in Jharkhand has sparked renewed calls from lawyers in Odisha, who have been advocating for similar welfare schemes for years. Despite numerous appeals from the Odisha Bar Associations, the State Government has yet to introduce stipends, medical insurance, or pension schemes



for its legal fraternity.

States like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu already provide stipends ranging from Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000 for junior advocates, in addition to pension and medical assistance schemes. These programmes ensure that young and senior lawyers alike have financial security, allowing them to focus on their work without undue stress. However, in Odisha, such support remains a distant goal.

"Lawyers in Odisha have long been deprived of the basic welfare measures that are available to their counterparts in other States. The absence of a stipend for junior advocates and pension plans for senior lawyers is disheartening.

The legal profession is not just a job; it is a commitment to justice. The State must step up and provide the necessary financial and medical support so that advocates can perform their duties without financial insecurity," a prominent lawyer and Odisha State Bar Association member Sanjit Kumar Panigrahi said.

The lawyers in Odisha are particularly pushing for an increase in the matching grant to the Odisha State Bar Council from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore. This would enable the Bar Council to introduce stipends, medical insurance, and pensions, thereby aligning Odisha's welfare programmes with those of other progressive States.

At Barbil Drunk govt doc rams car into scooter



Four of family injured

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Police arrested a government doctor after he allegedly rams his car into a scooter in an inebriated condition, injuring four, including two minors, at Barbil in Keonjhar district.

The accused was identified as Dr Himanshu Jha posted at the Barbil Community Health Centre (CHC).

The accident took place near Old Cinema Hall

Square at Barbil on Tuesday. Jha dragged the two-wheeler up to a distance of 1 km even as the injured Md Farooq, his wife Ajmari Khatoon and their two children Md Farhad and Ali Sada aged 11 and 8 years, were thrown off the vehicle following the crash.

All the four injured were rushed to the CHC and Khatoon and Sada were later shifted to AIIMS Bhubaneswar as their conditions deteriorated. The condition of the eight-year-old girl was stated to be critical.

Ganjam hooch tragedy NHRC issues notices to Odisha CS, Ganjam DM, SP

RAJESH BEHERA ■
BHUBANESWAR

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Monday issued notices to the Odisha Chief Secretary and Ganjam district Collector and Superintendent of Police over the death of two persons due to consumption of spurious liquor.

The NHRC passed the order acting on the petition filed by lawyer and human rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

Citing the incident of August 20, 2024, when at least two persons died, and 14 others were hospitalised, after consuming spurious liquor in Ganjam district, the petitioner has sought for urgent intervention of the NHRC.

The petitioner stated that at least 20 people from the Chikiti area were admitted to different hospitals in Ganjam, after they allegedly consumed country liquor that was sold near Moundpur. Two persons died while 13 people were undergoing treatment at the

MKCG Medical College Hospital in Brahmapur.

Tripathy further stated that the State Government has not formulated any policy to grant compensation for the family of the deceased and there is no standard operating procedure (SOP) in the State for dealing with the issue of spurious or illicit liquor.

The petition alleged that no action has been taken against the police and Excise Department officials of the district, who are responsible for the lapses.

Requesting the NHRC for fair probe of the incident, Tripathy sought for proper vigil on the sale and purchase of spurious liquor, legal action against the errand officials and heavy compensation to the bereaved family members of the deceased and draft of an SOP in this connection.

The NHRC transmitted the petition through online mode to ensure needful action and submit the action taken report to the commission within six weeks.

Dragon fruits give new lease of life to K'mal farmers

Cultivating the fruit on a commercial basis, improving their income

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Dragon fruit cultivation has come as a boon for farmers in the tribal-dominated Kandhamal district who had given up farming and opted to work as bonded labourers in other States due to a lack of profit. The high-value cash-rich crop has transformed the lives of farmers who were illegally growing ganja.

With no other source of income in rural areas, the farmers were forced to work as labourers or grow ganja for livelihood. However, dragon fruit cultivation has come as a blessing for the farmers who are earning lakhs now and have become self-independ-



dent.

"ITDA gave us training and helped us understand dragon fruit cultivation. As per their directions, we started dragon fruit farming and it has made us self-independent. While the initial harvest was less than expected, the produce is growing by the years," said farmer Kaindra Kanhar.

Another farmer Belar Kanhar said, "Last year, we had only 50kg produce. However, this year it has increased to 3.50 quintal. We are expect-

ing to harvest another 1 quintal before the end of this year. We are happy that our hard work is finally paying off."

Two years ago, a five-acre patch of land in Betaketa, a remote village in Maoist-infested Phiringia block was lying barren due to lack of irrigation. On the directives of the district Collector, ITDA intervened and gave necessary training and assistance to the farmers for dragon fruit farming.

Now, the landscape is full

of dragon fruits that have given a new lease of life to several farmers in the area. It was initially started as a pilot project and has turned out to be a success. Now, the district administration aims to spread dragon fruit cultivation to other parts of the district.

"We had come shopping and saw this dragon fruit that is something new for us in Phulbani. This is very beneficial for our health and I'm happy that we are finally attempting to do something fresh and new," said consumer Mamata Mohanty.

When contacted, Project Manager, ITDA P Murli Mohan said, "This has set an example for other farmers who have given up cultivation or are opting to work as migrant workers. Initially, farmers weren't showing much interest, but now when they earned profits, they are showing interest."

Tripartite talk Birla Tyres new mgmt to re-engage ex-workers under 50

To provide retirement benefits, clear pending salaries

SIDDAS KUNDU ■ BALESWAR

A tripartite talk involving the workers' union, management of the company that acquired Birla Tyres at Chhanpur, Baleswar and the district administration held on Sunday went off peacefully while a consensus arrived on certain points.

Local MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi, MLA Remuna Gobinda Chandra Das, Sub Collector Sadar PA Sirkey, DLC Sachidananda Jena and the DLO among other officials were present in the meeting. 8 unions of the Birla Tyres

participated in the meeting and discussions were made on an 11-point charter of demands including reengagement of workers, pending salary of 21 months and post retirement benefits.

It has been decided that the joint venture company won't embark on fresh recruitment till the pending issues of the workers of Birla Tyres were resolved. The company would provide engagement to the workers below 50 years and to their kin of their wish in case they crossed 50 years. Further, those below 50 willing to receive technical training would be provided.

The company would also give the postretirement benefits including EPF, gratuity

and pension after scrutinising the data.

"The joint venture company agreed to absorb all the workers of Birla Tyres below 50 years of age and if they desire they would be made tech savvy through training. Further those in the category of above the age of 50 can recommend names of anyone of their choice out of their kin for their employment in the company. Within 10-15 days most of the issues would be resolved hopefully. Till the time the pending issues of the workers are not resolved there won't be fresh recruitment," said MP Sarangi.

Sub Collector PA Sirkey said, "We would compile the data regarding the workers

before fixing operational modalities for the solution of the issues of the workers."

Notably, the Birla Tyres was closed for several months from April 2021 for financial crunch and following NCLT order it was acquired jointly by the Dalmia Bharat Refractories limited (DBRL) and Himadri Specialty Chemical limited (HSCL). As per the order of NCLT, Kolkata, the success resolution plan (SRP) was approved.

According to the plan, the joint venture company would engage the previous workers who were with Birla Tyres and would be extended with services as well as retirement benefits as per labour laws, the union leaders said.

In Keonjhar Elephant calf separated from herd rescued



NARESH PATTANAYAK ■
KEONJHAR

Forest officials rescued a two-year-old female elephant calf from the Krushnapur Reserve Forest of the Telkoi Forest Range in Keonjhar district on Tuesday. The elephant was being treated at the Bandhanjhari beat house.

The baby elephant had been separated from the herd on Monday evening and wandering alone in a dehydrated condition. A forest elephant squad tried to unite it with the herd, but both the calf and herd did not show any positive communication to unite throughout the night. So, the officials

sent it to the beat house for feeding and treatment.

A team of doctors including local veterinary Assistant Surgeon, Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) doctors and wildlife biologist are treating it.

Keonjhar DFO Dhanraj HD said, "Antibiotics and antivirals are given to the calf by the doctors for its quick recovery. It is facing difficulties in eating and drinking. Hence, ORS and bananas are being fed to the calf. After it becomes stable, we will try to reunite it with the herd."

According to sources, there are 21 elephants in the herd, which is habituating the Telkoi Range areas.

N'rangpur PEO axed for bungling Rs 1cr

PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Surendra Bhatra, former Panchayat Executive Officer (PEO) of Turudihi Panchayat under Raighar block, Nabarangpur district, was suspended from his job for embezzling Rs 1 crore.

In this regard, Raighar BDO Lakshmi Sagar Majhi had lodged a complaint against PEO Bhatra.

According to information, Bhatra, when he was the Panchayat Executive Officer of Turudihi Panchayat, he embezzled money meant for various development works.

Turudihi Sarpanch and some villagers brought the matter to the attention of the Raighar BDO.

After that Raighar BDO formed a committee to find out the truth. It has been revealed that about Rs 65, 70, 600 was embezzled by the PEO without doing any work. Similarly, Bhatra was in additional charge of Kacharapara-3 panchayat, where he had embezzled about Rs 38 lakh. The matter came to the fore after a complaint of Sarpanch Suknath Gand.

Bhatra was absconding to evade his arrest.

Martyr Bagha Jatin paid tributes at Baleswar

PNS ■ BALESWAR

An ace freedom fighter of pre independence era Bagha Jatin and his associates who made supreme sacrifices to liberate country with hardly any resources against the mighty British were remembered on the occasion of the 109th death anniversary of the martyr.

About 50 members of 'Rakta Tirtha Yatri' headed by Prabal Mukharjee attended the function in commemoration of the hero's deed.

Culture Minister Suryavani Suraj, MP Pratap Chandra Sarangi, Remuna MLA Gobinda Chandra Das, MLA Bista Subasini Jena, Sadar MLA Manas Kumar Dutta, Municipality Chairperson Sabita Sahoo and district Collector Suryawanshi Mayur Vikas along with Rakta Tirtha Yatriis attended the function



organised at the Barabati Girls' High School and paid a rich tribute to Baghajatin. The speakers remembering Bagha's heroic deeds urged the present generation to draw inspiration from the supreme sacrifices made by him and follow his footprints to protect national integrity and sovereignty.

MLA Jena opined that the Girls' High School be named after Baghajatin and urged for the installation of a statue of Bagha in a prominent place in the town.

The secretary and president of the Baghajatin Development Committee Haren Chandra Rana and Sujit Deb respectively and other func-

tionaries of the committee were present in the meeting.

Similarly, a meeting too was held at Desuan Pokhari where Bagha fought with British police his last battle.

In the afternoon, the committee members along with Rakta Tirtha Yatriis visited the Baleswar jail where the captured associates of Bagha were

lodged and later hanged to death.

Born on December 27, 1879, in Kayagram, Bengal Presidency (now Bangladesh), Bagha grew up in a family of intellectuals and patriots. He studied at Presidency College, Calcutta, and later at City College.

It is said that in his childhood he came to be called 'Baghajatin' after killing a tiger single-handed and without any arms. Bagha, a man with a strong sense of self-respect and national pride, came in contact with Aurobindo Ghosh and his Anushilan Samiti.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, he joined the revolutionary movement against the British rule. He co-founded the Jugantar Party, a revolutionary organisation and led several

other activities such as the Howrah-Shibpur Conspiracy (1906) against the British.

During the freedom struggle, Baghajatin and four of his aides were one day waiting for a huge consignment of arms comprising 100,000 rifles and 6,000 pistols to arrive at Baleswar coast for an armed rebellion, when they were chased by a police team headed by Charles A Teggart. The consignment didn't come.

They entered Baleswar but their hideout at Chasakhand was soon raided by the police. While one died instantly in the encounter that occurred at Desun Pokhari, the other aides were captured. Two of them were hanged and another was sent to Andaman Nicobar jail. Baghajatin who received critical injuries soon succumbed to injuries in a hospital on September 10, 1915.

BJP slams Rahul Gandhi for meeting Ilhan Omar, calls it dangerous, mischievous

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP on Wednesday slammed Rahul Gandhi over his meeting with US lawmaker Ilhan Omar and others during his visit to that country, alleging the Congress leader is indulging in "dangerous and mischievous" activities by reaching out to people abroad who are known for their anti-India stand.

Addressing a Press conference at the BJP headquarters, party national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said that Rahul Gandhi earlier used to indulge in "childish activities" but "now he is indulging in dangerous and mischievous activities". The Opposition party dismissed the criticism over Rahul Gandhi meeting Democrat Ilhan Omar, known for her controversial positions regarding India, and said the BJP is in government and summon the US ambassador and take action if they believe so. "It is for the first time in the history of India that a Leader of Opposition has met a declared



anti-India lawmaker and expressed his sweet feelings. He has met US lawmaker Ilhan Omar, who is infamous for her anti-India stand and statements," he added. Referring to Rahul Gandhi's remarks on the Sikh community, Trivedi alleged that he has drawn support from Khalistani separatist Gurbhagat Singh Pannun. With this, Rahul has further added a new friend in his list of anti-India friends, the BJP leader charged. "There is a saying: King James I was the wisest fool in Christendom. In my opinion, the same thing applies to Rahul



Gandhi for 'Congressdom'," he added. Trivedi also showed a picture of Rahul Gandhi with journalist Mushfiqul Fazal as he hit out at the Congress leader accusing him of meeting people who are known for their anti-India stand. "He is that journalist who had asked a question regarding Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in a White House press conference and he is taking a selfie with Rahul," the BJP leader said. Trivedi slammed Gandhi for "spewing venom" against India during his US visit and termed

his meeting with the US lawmaker Omar and others as "very serious". "Omar is one of the US lawmakers whom the Pakistan government had taken on a visit to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). She has made several statements that directly or indirectly show her sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood and ISI (Pakistan's intelligence agency)," he added. Union Minister Kiren Rijju also slammed Gandhi over his meetings and remarks in the US. In a social media post BJP MP Nishikant Dubey said the woman in the red circle is Ilhan Omar, the leader of the Democratic Party in America. She has consistently supported the creation of a separate country of Khalistan and Kashmir. Responding to Shah's remarks, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said, "Ask him to take action, then we will expose the prime minister and the home minister both. The PM goes abroad and makes horrible comments against India and Indians, that is not anti-national?"

Railway Ministry orders removal of loose parts after sabotage incidents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Railway Ministry has instructed all its zones to immediately remove all loose engineering parts, rail materials and other equipment from the vicinity of the tracks so that those do not come in handy for miscreants to threaten the safety of train operations. Following some incidents of alleged attempt by miscreants to sabotage safe train operations by keeping different types of obstructions on the tracks, such as gas cylinders, cement blocks etc., the railway board has asked all zones to initiate a week-long safety drive from September 9. One of the important elements of the drive is to ensure the removal of all loose engineering materials from the vicinity of the railway tracks. "Often, after track replacement and repair, the engineering department normally leaves the loose engineering parts, track pieces, concrete sleepers and other items near



the tracks. Of late, we have realised that these items can come in handy for miscreants to place on the tracks," a railway official said. "To rule out such possibilities, we have asked the engineering departments across all zones to be careful in disposing of these materials," he added. Railway officials said an initial joint probe in the Ahmedabad-bound Sabarmati Express train derailment near Kanpur on August 17 suggested that a piece of rail, measuring about a metre in length, was placed on the tracks by

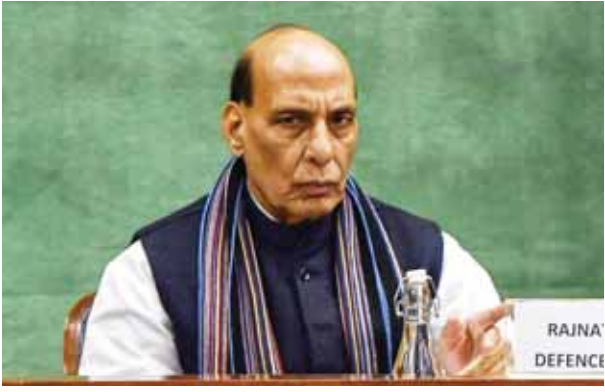
someone with an intent to cause damage to safe train run. "An FIR was lodged in that case and an investigation is on to find out who procured the rail piece and from where. However, from our side, we want to ensure that no such item should be left near the tracks that will give an opportunity to anti-social elements to exploit it against us," the official said. Safety experts say that concrete sleepers, which are used for track support, are also a threat if the discarded ones are left around the tracks.

ED attaches ₹29.75 crore assets of Nirav Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has attached fresh assets worth Rs 29.75 crore of fugitive diamond trader Nirav Modi under the anti-money laundering law. A provisional order has been issued under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach these assets that are in the form of bank deposits, land, and buildings, it said in a statement. The agency, which has been probing Modi in the alleged USD 2 billion fraud against the Punjab National Bank for over five years now, has attached assets worth Rs 2,596 crore in India and abroad in the past. Modi, 53, is presently lodged in a UK jail and has lost his extradition plea to India in connection with this alleged bank loan fraud case, which is also being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation. Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, both prime accused in the case, along with others are being probed by the ED on money laundering charges for allegedly perpetrating fraud in connivance with bank officials and by issuance of fraudulent Letters of Undertaking (LoUs) at the Brady House Punjab National Bank (PNB) branch in Mumbai. Modi was declared a fugitive economic offender by a Mumbai PMLA court in December 2019. He was arrested the same year in London. The ED said movable and immovable assets of Modi and his associates amounting to Rs 692.90 crore have been "confiscated" under the provisions of the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. Also, assets to the tune of Rs 1,052.42 crore have been successfully restored to the victim banks -- PNB and consortium banks, it said.

Border villages are first villages of country: Rajnath Singh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining the importance of border villages, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said here they are the country's first villages, not remote areas and the government is fully committed to their holistic development. Addressing the Border Area Development Conclave, he pointed out that India's geo-strategic position is such that it is exposed to different kinds of challenges and the best way to deal with them is to ensure border area development. Highlighting the progress achieved in border area development in the last 10 years, Rajnath Singh said "Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed over 8,500 kms of roads and more than 400 permanent bridges. Atal Tunnel, Sela Tunnel and Shikun-La Tunnel, which is going to be the world's highest tunnel, will prove to be milestones in border area development. Our Government has started the 220 Kilo-Volt Srinagar-Leh Electricity Line to connect the border areas of Ladakh with the National Electricity Grid. In addition, the transmission and distribution infrastructure of north-eastern states is being strengthened. High-speed internet has been provided to over 1,500 villages

through the Bharat-Net broadband project. In the last four years alone, more than 7,000 border villages have been connected with internet connection, and our focus has been Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh." Describing roads and electricity as basic facilities that form the foundation of development of any region, the defence minister reiterated the government's unwavering resolve to ensure progress in every corner of the country. He stated that the ongoing efforts have not only ensured prompt military deployments in sensitive regions, but have also connected the people residing in border areas with the rest of the country. He underlined the fact that while building roads, bridges and tunnels in border areas is imperative for national security, it is also important in making the lives of the people in these regions better, in collaboration with the state governments. Rajnath threw light on 'reverse migration', which he termed as one of the positive outcomes of economic development in border areas. He made special mention of Huri village in Arunachal Pradesh, a unique example of development through civil-military collaboration. He stated that while the central

and state governments focused on economic progress, BRO and Indian Army laid emphasis on infrastructure development, which resulted in reverse migration. In his address, Minister of Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat spoke on "Tourism A Catalyst for Growth in Border Regions". He highlighted the role of the Indian Army in these efforts. He stated that through joint projects it is being ensured that tourism growth in border regions goes hand-in-hand with security and infrastructure development. Speaking on the occasion, Army Chief General Udaya Dwivedi described Border Area Development as a core component of national security. He stated that Indian Army's efforts in the past have contributed immensely towards model villages in border areas, border tourism and developing infrastructure support including medical support and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. The border area development vision is bold, ambitious and deeply rooted in the principles of inclusivity, sustainability and security, he said, adding that there has been a 'Whole of Nation Approach' with renewed impetus. Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu also attended the conclave. It was jointly organised by the Indian Army, in collaboration with Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Telecommunications and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The aim is to create a sustainable, secure and prosperous future for India's border regions, which are not only gateways to the nation but also crucial for national security and regional development.

Manipur tense as curfew continues, exams postponed after student-clashes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The situation in Manipur remained tense but under control on Wednesday after students clashed with security forces during their march to Raj Bhavan here a day before, police said. Manipur University has also postponed all post-graduate and undergraduate examinations till further orders. Curfew, which was imposed in the State's Capital Imphal on Tuesday afternoon, continued to be in place this morning, while additional security forces were deployed and frequent patrolling by policemen was underway in the town to avoid

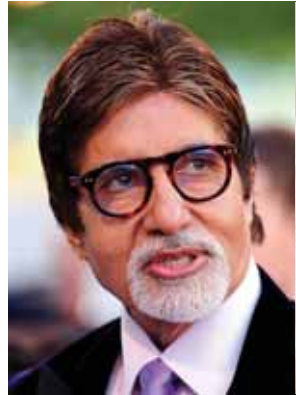


any untoward incident, a senior officer said. "The situation remains tense but under control," he said. A clash broke out between students and security forces during a march to the Raj Bhavan here on Tuesday.

The Government on Tuesday evening issued an amended order, stating that the suspension of internet services in the wake of intensified agitation by students applies only to the five valley districts.

The agitating students attempted to march towards the Raj Bhavan in Imphal to press for their demands to remove the DGP and security advisor to the State Government. The police had fired tear gas shells to disperse students who were accused of pelting security forces with stones in Khwairamband and Kakwa Naorem Leikai areas in the State Capital. More than 55 students were injured in the clashes and admitted to RIMS hospital, a students' body claimed. The Raj Bhavan, in a statement issued late on Tuesday night, said, "Representatives of students met Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and submitted a memorandum."

Amitabh Bachchan joins cyber security campaign; Amit Shah praises effort



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has joined a campaign launched to make people aware about the cyber security and the actor's move was appreciated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The campaign was launched by the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), a wing of the Union Home



Ministry. "Pursuing Modi Ji's vision, the Ministry of Home Affairs is resolved to creating a safe cyberspace in the nation. The I4C has taken several steps in this direction. I thank Shri @SrBachchan Ji for joining this campaign. Amitabh Bachchan Ji's active involvement will further accelerate our mission to build a Cyber-Secure Bharat," Shah wrote in a social media post.

In the short video, posted by the I4C, Bachchan said there has been increase in number of cyber crimes which is a matter of concern for India as well as the world. "The I4C has been relentlessly working to curb the cyber crime. Following a request of the Honourable Union Home Minister, I have also joined in this campaign. I expect that everyone of us come together to fight this problem. A bit of our alertness and precautions can save us from the cyber criminals. I will keep reminding you from time to time," Bachchan said in the video. The I4C said supporting the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the home minister, the iconic actor has joined the I4C's campaign to make India cyber secure. "You too can join this initiative, stay vigilant against cyber fraud, and contribute to building a #CyberSecureBharat," it said in a social media post.

Parliamentary panel summons officials over Waqf law delays

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary committee has summoned officials of the Minority Affairs Ministry to explain reasons for the delay in completing the process for framing subordinate legislation under the 2013 Waqf law. The decision of the Rajya Sabha Committee on Subordinate Legislation to call the Secretary and representatives of the Ministry next week comes at a time when a Joint Committee of Parliament is scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 which seeks to amend the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2013. The Rajya Sabha panel has also summoned officials of the Ministry of Defence on the reasons for delay in completing the process for framing of subordinate legislation under the Cantonment Act, 2006 on the same day.



Both Houses of Parliament have their own committees on subordinate legislation which examine whether rules and by-laws related to a law are framed in time and are in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. The 2013 Act had given certain powers to Waqf Boards. The 2024 bill, which is before a joint panel, seeks to reform the registration process for Waqf properties through a centralised portal. The Bill is the first major initiative from the BJP-led NDA government aimed at reforming the registration process for Waqf properties through a centralised portal.

DCGI suspends Entod Pharmaceuticals permission after claims violate DMR Act

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking exception to Mumbai-based Entod Pharmaceuticals' claims that its new eye drop can help reduce dependency on reading glasses for those suffering from presbyopia, the age-old related eye disorder, the country's apex drug regulator, Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) has suspended the permission granted to it to manufacture and sell their product. In its order, the DCGI said that the claims are in violation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (DMR) Act and were made without prior approval from the Central Licensing Authority. The DMR Act restricts advertisements that suggest a drug can diagnose, cure, or treat listed conditions, including optical disorders.



It also said that it has held the pharma company in violation of the permission to manufacture the ophthalmic solution under the New Drugs and Clinical Trial Rules, 2019. In an order issued on September 10, the DCGI said the Directorate had issued permission on August 20 for manufacture and marketing

of Pilocarpine Hydrochloride Ophthalmic Solution for the treatment of presbyopia in adults. Then on September 4, the drug regulator had asked for an explanation from the company for the claims it made in the press following which the drug-maker also submitted its response. In response to the claim "first

eye drop in India designed to reduce the need for reading glasses", the order stated that the company said there are currently no other eye drops approved for the treatment of presbyopia in India. "In this regard, you are informed that the Pilocarpine Hydrochloride Ophthalmic Solution USP 1.25 per cent w/v has not been approved for any such claim that it is designed to reduce the need for reading glasses," the order said. In response to the claim "this eye drop offers a non-invasive option that can enhance near vision without the need for reading glasses", the company submitted that in the clinical trial conducted, subjects did not wear glasses to participate. "In this regard, you are informed that the Pilocarpine Hydrochloride Ophthalmic Solution USP 1.25 pc w/v is approved for the treatment of Presbyopia in adults and is not

approved for such claim that these eye drop can enhance near vision without the need for reading glasses," the order said. "...you are informed that the Pilocarpine Hydrochloride Ophthalmic Solution USP 1.25 pc w/v is approved for the treatment of Presbyopia in adults and is not approved for such claim that PresVu can provide an advanced alternative that augments near vision within 15 minutes," the order read. The drug regulator stated that the company has failed to respond to the queries and tried to justify the claims for the product for which no approval was granted. The order further said considering the various media reports, there is a likelihood of the general public being misled by the claims made by the company for which no approval was granted.

IAF to participate in Exercise Eastern Bridge VII in Oman



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

An IAF contingent comprising MiG-29s, Jaguars and C-17s is ready to participate in Exercise Eastern Bridge in Oman. This is the seventh edition of the exercise that is scheduled from September 11 to 22 September at Air Force

base Masirah, Oman, IAF said here on Wednesday. The bilateral exercise endeavors to enhance interoperability between Royal Oman Air Force and the Indian Air Force and shall provide a platform for both teams to engage in a series of joint training missions designed to strengthen strategic cooperation and opera-

tional readiness. Exercise Eastern Bridge VII aims to improve tactical and operational skills, foster mutual understanding and bolster the ability of both air forces to collaborate effectively in diverse scenarios. The exercise will include complex aerial maneuvering, air to air and air to ground operations, and logistical coordination, reflecting the evolving defense needs and strategic interests of both nations. Underscoring the enduring partnership between the Royal Oman Air Force and the Indian Air Force, this exercise highlights their commitment to regional security and stability. The participating teams are expected to benefit from the shared expertise and operational experience gained during this extensive training period.

Docs demand 'televised' talks in presence of Didi with 30 representatives

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The protesting junior doctors of Bengal --- who have been sitting on a dharna near Swasthya Bhavan in Kolkata for the past more than 38 hours --- responded to the Bengal Government's offer for talks saying the dialogue process could resume only if the Government would concede to their four-point demand. Contrary to the condition set by the Government that the doctors could send only 12-15 representatives the agitating doctors wanted them to be represented by of at least 30 members. "There are 26 medical colleges and many more super-specialty hospitals ... so we want at least 30 members to represent our side," said one of the doctors adding "we have also demanded that the talks should be live-streamed by the media and should be held in presence of the Chief Minister so that no contradictory statement emanates in future ... and not least the talks should be held on the five-point demand that we have been raising for the past one month." The junior doctors of Bengal have been on a "cease work" for the past one month demanding justice for Abhaya the postgraduate lady doctor of RG Kar Medical College and Hospital who was raped and murdered on August 8. The doctors had defied the Supreme Court order directing the agitating doctors to join work by 5 pm on Tuesday. Instead they took out a march to the Swasthya

Bhavan and had been sitting there on a dharna for the past more than 38 hours. In a moving development showing that the doctors' movement had was gradually reaching the other strata of the society people from far and wide not only joined the doctors in the dharna but many of them brought breakfast, tea and lunch from their respective houses to serve them. "This is our holy duty to stand by these doctors who are fighting not only for justice to women as a whole but also improve the health sector ... we will continue to bring food for them as long as they sit here," said women from nearby Salt Lake area. Earlier State Chief Secretary Manoj Panth sent an e-mail to the doctors inviting them for talks after the medics turned down a previous mail sent by State Health Secretary terming it "insulting" for the doctors. The mail sent by Panth read "we invite your delegation, preferably consisting of 12-15 colleagues to join us for a discussion at 6 p.m. today, i.e. 11.09.2024, in Nabanna. A list of the members of your delegation may please be intimated by email. We look forward to your positive response and hope for a fruitful dialogue." It also reminded how the doctors had "unfortunately" defied the Apex Court order directing them to resume work. The doctors wrote back to the Government that they were ready for talks anytime and anywhere depending on four conditions met by the Government. "We have

written to the Government that we are ready for talks anytime and anywhere ... but the talks must be held in presence of the Chief Minister madam and have to be telecast live by the media ... we have also made it categorically clear that the talks will have to be held on the five-point demand that we have been raising for the past one month," said a doctor. There was no communication coming back from State secretariat Nabanna, when reports last came in, sources said adding the proposals of the doctors were being weighed up by the administration. The doctors have been demanding "justice for the RG Kar victim, removal of State Health Secretary and two Directors of Health Education and Health Services, revamping and beefing up of the security network," and eradication of threat-culture and syndicate raj in medical education that range from extortion from the students and mass cheating racket, sources said. In a parallel development, the senior doctors who had thus far been supporting the movement from outside on Wednesday descended on the streets of Kolkata taking out a long rally first to the Medical Council of Bengal and then to the Swasthya Bhavan. "Our rally is to tell our juniors that we are there to support them and if need be we will descend on the streets in their resolve to cleanse the medical health sector of Bengal," said Manas Gumta a senior doctor.

Three suspicious youth and mysterious escape route

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Three suspicious young men had tried to influence the police complaint lodged in the night of August 8 by the family members of victim lady doctor of AR Kar Medical College and Hospital who was raped and murdered in the morning of August 9. A close friend of the victim who too is a doctor said that three youth had been trying to take the copy of the FIR lodged in Tala Police Station, adding "the three-some stayed back inside the police station till the time the family of Abhaya the victim left." They were trying to read its content when the other junior doctors protested forcing them to give up, the friend of the victim said. Besides, Dr S Hasan a junior doctor reportedly close to Sandip Ghosh the arrested former Principal of RGKMCH also said that the CCTV footage based on which the present prime accused was arrested only provided the footage of the front side of the chest medicine department. "There is a second entry and exit route through the back area where there is hostel where there is no CCTV," he said refusing to delve much into the matter.

India invites Philippines to partner with domestic defence industry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India invited Philippines to partner with domestic defence industry in co-development and co-production of equipment during the fifth meeting of India-Philippines Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) in Manila on Wednesday, defence ministry said here. Giving details of the meeting, officials said it was co-chaired by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane and his counterpart Senior Undersecretary, Ministry of National Defence of Philippines Irineo Cruz Espino. Both sides exchanged wide-ranging discussions on bilateral as well as multilateral issues. The co-chairs reviewed the outcomes of third Service-to-Service interactions held on September 10, 2024, and expressed happiness at the overall enhancement in bilateral defence cooperation across all sectors. The Defence Secretary appreciated the Self Reliance Defence Posture Act of the Philippines government for modernising its Armed Forces. He highlighted that India has also laid out a similar vision for 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. Under this vision, the Indian defence industry is continuously enhancing its manufacturing capabilities and is exporting equipment to the world, he added. The Defence Secretary invited the Philippines to partner with the Indian defence industry in co-development and co-production of equipment. The Philippines also invited investments in



long-term equity partnership towards promoting assured supply chains. It acknowledged and appreciated India's functioning and proven template of defence industry indigenisation. Both sides affirmed the commitment to support each other to achieve the goal of self-reliance in defence production. They appreciated the operationalisation of White Shipping Information Exchange and opening of defence wing at Embassy of India, Manila in near future. While welcoming the Philippines as a coordinating country for India in ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, the Defence Secretary discussed ways and means to strengthen cooperation in multilateral forums. India and the Philippines have a vigorous and multifaceted relationship which has expanded into several strategic areas, including defence and security. During the visit, the Defence Secretary also called on Secretary of National Defence, Philippines (Defence Minister of Philippines) Gilbert Eduardo Gerardo Cojuangco Teodoro Jr. and conveyed the greetings of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Kerala Governor asks CM Vijayan for reports on snooping

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

In a rare incident which has sent shock waves across the ruling CPI(M) in the State, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has sent a communication to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan asking the latter to produce all details of telephone tapping happening in Kerala. Raj Bhavan sources told The Pioneer that the Governor himself was taken aback by the revelations made by a CPI(M) camp follower by name P V Anwar. P V Anwar, an independent MLA belonging to the CPI(M) camp in his press meet had alleged the other day that the Home Department in the State was tapping telephones of politicians, bureaucrats, ministers as well as selected persons. Many police officers and CPI(M) leaders were behind the phone tapping, according to Anwar. "I myself am tapping the phones of many persons," Anwar had claimed while speaking to reporters. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan has taken serious note of the allegations made by Anwar and also the claim that the latter himself was snooping into the communications between various police officials, bureaucrats and ministers. He has asked the chief minister to furnish all relevant details connected with the telephone tapping, which senior intelligence officials describe as a sensitive and serious issue. What is curious is the role of Anwar in this issue because he is seen as an international wheeler dealer.

Anwar, one of the crorepati businessmen in the State, was the one who set the State politics blaze with his last week's disclosure about the 2023 meeting between RSS General Secretary Dattatrey Hosabale and M R Ajith Kumar, additional director general of police (ADGP). He also disclosed that Ajith Kumar had met Sangh strongman Ram Madhav. The latest revelations made by Anwar was that the intelligence department of Kerala Police had suppressed the report about these meetings and hence the chief minister was not aware of the same. Jaleel had served in the Congress and Muslim League before casting his lots with the CPI(M), a party that is welcoming all Islamic extremists with an open heart. Former president of the banned SIMI, K T Jaleel had joined the party and is known as the close confidante of the chief minister. Last day saw the Home Department shunting out many police officers from the districts of Malappuram and Kozhikode to innocuous posts. Anwar had alleged that the officers who were transferred out on Monday had leanings with RSS. "The State Police has been infiltrated by many Sanghis and this has come to an end," he had said. According to a senior BJP office bearer, the transfers were part of the deal between the CPI(M) leadership and the Islamic hotheads in the party to smoothen the gold and narcotics smuggling via the Calicut International Airport in Malappuram.

NC-Congress alliance accuses Centre of failing to check terrorism

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Much to the chagrin of the Bharatiya Janta Party's poll pitch focusing on the welfare of the masses and the overall improvement in the security situation, the alliance partners- Congress and the National Conference Wednesday cornered the ruling party in their election meetings and accused them of failing to check the spread of terrorism in the otherwise peaceful Jammu region. Leading the charge from the front, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge Wednesday announced five guarantees for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, including five lakh interest-free loan for women entrepreneurs and Rs 25 lakh health insurance per family, if the Congress-NC alliance is voted to power in the Union territory. Addressing the election meeting in Anantnag, Kharge also announced the Congress-NC government will give Rs 3,000 monthly to the women heads of families besides promising to restore



the provision to give 11 kg grains per person through the public distribution system. He said the promise for rehabilitation of Kashmir Pandit migrants, which was made during the term of Manmohan Singh, will be fulfilled. The OBCs will also get their rights as enshrined in the Constitution, he added. The five guarantees were read out by the Congress president in presence of National Conference president Farooq Abdullah and other senior Congress leaders, including K C Venugopal and Subodh Kant. Kharge reiterated that the party will strive for the

restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir while promising to restore a bi-cameral legislature in the Union territory. In Jammu region, National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah Wednesday said the distribution of arms to people is the biggest proof of the BJP Government's "failure" to check the spread of terrorism in the otherwise peaceful Jammu region. The former Chief Minister was referring to the revival of village defence guards and arming them with self-loading rifles by replacing their .303 rifles in the Jammu region which has witnessed a spurt in terror activities over

the past few years. Addressing an election rally in support of party candidate Mehbooba Iqbal in Baderwah of Doda district, Abdullah also accused the BJP of supporting smaller groups and independent candidates with the sole motive of forming the next Government with their help even as they went to jails and openly talked about merger of Kashmir with Pakistan. "The weapons are being distributed because they have allowed terrorism to grow in Jammu which was completely cleared of the menace by our Government before 2014. The people are being armed because the situation in Jammu has deteriorated and people are worried," he said. The NC leader also addressed an election rally in support of party candidate Arjun Singh Raju in Ramban district. "We are nationalists and in the past 35 years, thousands of our workers sacrificed their lives for the nation. We have not lagged in nationalism," he said, talking to reporters on the sidelines of the Ramban rally.

BJP talking in different tones in Kashmir and outside it: Omar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Accusing the BJP of talking in different tones in Kashmir and outside it, National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah Wednesday said they welcomed the bail granted to Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) founder and MP Sheikh Abdul Rashid alias Engineer Rashid who was lodged in jail in a case related to terror funding, but strongly opposed the bail given to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during Lok Sabha elections. "...When Kejriwal was given bail by the court during Lok Sabha elections, look at the reactions of BJP leaders who questioned the court order and even termed it as undemocratic but when Rashid is freed for a limited period, BJP people were first to welcome the court order," the NC leader said.

NHA inks pact with IIT Kanpur for AI in healthcare

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Health Authority (NHA) and IIT Kanpur have signed a pact for development of digital public goods for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in healthcare, thereby unlocking the immense potential of this digital tool for improving health outcomes. Speaking on the occasion, Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra called it "very important MoU under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission that will provide an open public benchmarking platform for comparing and validating AI models". Under this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a federated learning platform across a variety of machine learning model pipelines, a quality-preserving database, an open benchmarking platform for comparing and validating AI models and a

consent management system for research under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) would be developed by IIT Kanpur. The platform will subsequently be operated and governed by the NHA, thereby unlocking the immense potential of AI for improving health outcomes, the Union Health Ministry said in a statement. Highlighting its importance, Chandra stated that "use of data for improving health outcomes is the envisaged goal of this partnership". "It will use the data available under the ABDM to create a public benchmark for AI models for quantifying and diagnosing diseases against which other AI models can be benchmarked," he added. Chandra said "one of the biggest issues related to AI models in the healthcare sector is the availability and efficacy of disease diagnosis data which will be tackled by this collaboration". "In a clinical setting, the

availability of reliable data will lead to better outcomes and result in better diagnosis," he added. IIT Kanpur Director Professor Manindra Agrawal said "this partnership with the NHA will contribute towards democratizing access to quality healthcare in India". "Partnering with the NHA, IIT Kanpur aims to create a transformative platform that will empower researchers, healthcare providers and policymakers to unlock the full potential of AI for improving health outcomes in India," he added. This platform will offer numerous benefits by enabling providers of AI models for healthcare applications to perform genuine out-of-set validation and establish publicly verifiable performance benchmarks. This platform will foster trust in the consumer market for these applications.

Congress candidate Vinesh Phogat files nomination papers from Julana seat for Haryana Assembly polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

Wrestler-turned-politician and Congress candidate for Haryana Assembly polls Vinesh Phogat filed her nomination from the Julana seat in Jind district on Wednesday. She was accompanied by Congress leader and Rohtak MP Depender Singh Hooda and Sonapat MP Satpal Brahmachari. Thursday is the last day of filing of nominations for next month's polls. Speaking to reporters later, Depender Hooda said Phogat will secure a "big win" for the party and exuded confidence that not just in Julana, the Congress will get an absolute majority in the Haryana Assembly under the leadership of Bhupinder Singh Hooda. "People have made up their mind that under Hooda sahab's leadership, the Congress has to be brought to power and BJP has to be ousted," he said. "The BJP has fielded Yogesh



Bairagi, a former commercial pilot, against Olympian wrestler Phogat in the Jat-dominated Julana Assembly segment. Though Phogat hails from Balali in the Charkhi Dadri district, her in-laws' hometown is Julana. Bakhta Khara village in Julana is the native village of her husband Somvir Rahee. Speaking with a private channel, Phogat launched a verbal attack on the Indian Olympic Association chief, PT Usha, accusing her of clicking photographs with her on a hospital bed during the Paris Olympics and politicising the matter without offering much help. Notably, Phogat became the first Indian woman to qualify

for the wrestling final at the Games. "I don't know what support I got there. PT Usha madam visited me at the hospital. One photo was clicked... Like you said, in politics a lot happens behind closed doors. Similarly, politics happened there (in Paris) as well. That's why I was heartbroken. Otherwise a lot of people are saying 'don't leave wrestling'. For what should I continue! There is politics everywhere," said Phogat said. "You are on a hospital bed, where you don't know what's happening in life outside, you are going through one of the worst phases of your life. At that place, just to show everyone you are standing with me, aap bina bataye photo kheenche rahe ho, fir social media pe daal ke bol rahe ho hum saath mein khade hain (clicked a photo without telling me and then putting it on social media to say you are standing with me). That's not how you should show support. What was it more than (posturing)!", she added.

Bhupinder Singh Hooda files nomination from Garhi Sampla Kilo seat

STAFF REPORTER ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda filed his nomination for the Haryana Assembly polls from his traditional stronghold Garhi Sampla Kilo seat in Rohtak on Wednesday and sought people's support in ousting the BJP from power in the "do or die battle". Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta, former state home minister Anil Vij, BJP leader O P Dhankar, Congress' Brijendra Singh and the AAP's Anurag Dhanda were among other candidates who filed their nominations on Wednesday. Thursday is the last day of filing of nominations. Voting for the 90-member Haryana assembly will be held on October 5 and votes will be counted on October 8. Bhupinder Hooda, a former chief minister, was accompanied by his wife Asha Hooda, son Depender Hooda and daughter-in-law Sweta Hooda during nomination filing. A "havan" was performed before Hooda filed his papers. Haryana Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta filed his



papers from the Panchkula assembly segment. He was accompanied by party leader and Haryana affairs co-incharge Bipal Kumar Deb. Gupta is seeking re-election from Panchkula. Viji filed papers from Ambala Cantt, Congress leader Brijendra Singh from Uchana Kalan, BJP's O P Dhankar from Badli and J P Dalal from Loharu. BJP's Harvinder Kalyan filed his papers from the Gharanda seat. He was accompanied by Union Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Another BJP nominee Arti Rao filed her

senior leader Manish Sisodia. Among other candidates, BJP nominee Shakti Rani Sharma filed her papers from the Kalka seat. Addressing a gathering after filing his nomination, Bhupinder Hooda lashed out at the BJP government in Haryana, alleging the state has become "number one" in unemployment and inflation in the last 10 years. "You gave me a chance. Whatever I am today, it is due to you and your blessings. I got a chance to serve Haryana from 2005-2014," he told the people. The former chief minister said that when the Congress was in power in Haryana, it was "number one" in per capita income, per capita investment, providing jobs, law and order situation and sports activities in the country. "After 10 years, Haryana today is number one in unemployment and inflation while crime has also increased," he alleged. Hooda said the Congress will come out with an election manifesto soon that will include raising old-age pension to Rs 6,000, providing LPG cylinders at Rs

500 and 300 units of free electricity. "I want to fight a battle not for myself but for you and want to make the state number one once again," the senior Congress leader told the gathering. He said the electoral contest in Haryana is between the Congress and the BJP, and asked people to be cautious of "vote katau" (vote cutters). "Five years ago, a 'vote cutter' took 10 seats. This time, not even a single vote is to be wasted," Hooda said. In the 2019 Assembly elections, the Jannayak Janta Party got 10 seats and went to ally with the BJP and form government. "Again the same conspiracy is being hatched. Earlier, there was one and now there is another one which is the BJP's B-team. So beware of these vote cutters," the former chief minister said. The Aam Aadmi Party, which was in talks with the Congress for a pre-poll alliance in Haryana, has so far fielded 61 candidates for the 90-member assembly. Hooda termed the elections a "do or die battle" and said, "Not just Garhi Sampla Kilo, you have to take the fight everywhere."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Presidential debate showdown

In a heated TV debate, Harris and Trump present sharply contrasting visions on issues like healthcare and economy

The 2024 presidential race is shaping up to be one of the most intense and polarised in US history. At the forefront of this political battle is a head-to-head TV debate between two defining figures—Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump. Their exchange, filled with sharp contrasts in policy, tone, and vision for America, laid bare the deep ideological divide within the nation. Vice President Kamala Harris took the stage emphasising unity, justice, and inclusivity. Known for her dynamic speaking style and sharp prosecutorial background, she framed her narrative as one that focuses on healing America's divisions while pushing for progressive reforms. Harris reiterated her commitment to building a more equitable society, focusing on issues such as healthcare reform, boost to small businesses, climate action, and women's rights to make choices about themselves. One of her most resonant points during the debate was her advocacy for women's reproductive rights, which she positioned as not just a women's issue but a fundamental human right. However, Harris's challenges lie in overcoming the perception of being too liberal for moderate voters.



On the other hand, Donald Trump, came out swinging with a populist message centred on nationalism, economic protectionism, and anti-establishment rhetoric. Trump focused on border security, economic growth, and energy independence, tapping into the concerns of many rural and working-class Americans who have felt left behind in the evolving global economy. At one point in time, he called Harris a Marxist implying her left-of-centre agenda. Trump's ability to connect with his base through a straightforward

approach remains his powerful asset. His rhetoric around deregulation and America-first policies resonated with voters who see him as a champion of their economic interests. However, in most of the debate, he looked less confident and defensive, unlike his debate with Joe Biden where he was more aggressive. Besides, he was floored by Kamala's facts that he was criticised by his staff and even Republicans including Dick Cheney were rooting for her. His handling of key issues like the COVID-19 pandemic and the January 6 Capitol riot also came up in the debate which further receded his confidence and put him on the backfoot. The big question is who resonates more with the people and who would eventually win. Right now, it looks like a fair competition but with Kamala having a slight edge, though it would be folly to disregard Trump's fanbase and constituency which is proactive and loud. Many of the cherished goals of Kamala like climate action, Israel policy, and Gun policy do not go down well with many Americans who would be looking up to Trump as their representative. Trump, continues to resonate with a significant portion of the American population—particularly white, rural, and working-class—who feel disconnected from the progressive direction the country has taken in recent years. His simplistic ideas may not work but they do sway people.

PICTALK



Low clouds cover the mountains after rainfall, in Shimla, PTI

Alzheimer's: Early detection is the key

Thanks to the new technology, early detection with accuracy of Alzheimer's is now possible which can lead to better outcomes through timely interventions

Alzheimer's disease is one of the most challenging neurological disorders, affecting millions globally. It is characterised by progressive memory loss, cognitive decline, and behavioural changes. While the disease is often associated with older adults, the importance of detecting it in its early stages cannot be overstated. Early detection allows for timely intervention, which can slow down the progression of the disease, offering patients more years of quality life. Moreover, early diagnosis empowers individuals and their families to plan for the future, make informed decisions, and access the latest treatments.

One of the key advantages of early detection is the ability to begin treatment when the brain is still relatively healthy. Current medications, while not a cure, work best when started early. They can help manage symptoms like memory loss and confusion. Additionally, lifestyle changes such as regular exercise, cognitive therapy, and a healthy diet can have a more significant impact when implemented during the early



stages of Alzheimer's. Researchers are now focused on identifying the disease's biomarkers before significant memory problems arise, providing a window of opportunity for early intervention. Beyond medical benefits, early detection has psychological and social advantages. It allows patients to maintain independence for a longer period, reduces anxiety associated with uncertainty, and provides clarity to families about caregiving responsibilities. Detecting Alzheimer's in its early stages has become a critical aspect of managing the disease effectively. With the advent of advanced diagnostic tools like CLEIA, early detection is now more achievable than ever. Agappe Diagnostics in collaboration with Fujirebio Holdings of Japan, has made a groundbreaking advancement in India's healthcare sec-

tor by introducing Chemiluminescent Enzyme Immunoassay (CLEIA) technology. This development is a monumental step forward in the indigenous manufacturing of cutting-edge diagnostic tools, specifically designed for early detection of critical diseases like Alzheimer's, Cancer, and Gastrointestinal disorders. "We have long standing productive relations with India that are all set to further strengthen and flourish," said Takashi Ariyoshi, deputy chief of Japanese embassy in India. CLEIA, an evolved version of the widely recognized Chemiluminescent Immunoassay (CLIA), merges the sensitivity of chemiluminescence detection with the precision of enzyme immunoassays. This powerful combination allows for the accurate detection of low concentrations of biomarkers, making it a game-changer in early diagnosis. In the case of Alzheimer's, early identification of disease-specific biomarkers can significantly slow down cognitive decline by enabling timely interventions, including medications and lifestyle changes.

In modern In-Vitro Diagnostics (IVD), CLEIA plays a crucial role not just in early detection but also in disease progression monitoring and guiding personalized treatment. These aspects are particularly relevant in Alzheimer's care, where early diagnosis opens the door to medical treatments and cognitive therapies that can prolong independence and improve quality of life. This technology is a significant leap in advancing immunoassay technology in India. Through this partnership, cartridge-based CLEIA systems have been developed and launched, supporting the healthcare system with advanced, locally manufactured diagnostic tools. Besides, beyond Alzheimer's, CLEIA is instrumental in detecting cancer markers at an early stage, significantly improving survival rates for patients. The Inod-Japanese partnership underlines the benefits of the "Make in India" initiative, reducing dependency on imports in critical healthcare technologies. (The writer is a senior journalist; views are personal)



KUSHAL JEENA

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

Haryana elections: BJP faces Congress' resurgence



KALYANI SHANKAR

As Haryana gears up for its high-stakes assembly elections, the political landscape is marked by shifting alliances and big promises

Who will emerge victorious in Haryana's upcoming assembly polls? Will the ruling BJP retain the state, or will the resurgent Congress seize the opportunity to win? The nation is watching as the results of the impending polls in Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Jammu, and Kashmir will shape these states' future and significantly impact the national political landscape. Haryana is gearing up for a diverse, multi-cornered contest with 90 seats.

The main competition is between the BJP and the Congress. Still, other parties like AAP, Samajwadi Party, CPI(M), and Haryana Lokhit Party are also in the field, adding diversity to the electoral dynamics. The BJP, JJP, and Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) have allied with Dushyant Chautala as their chief ministerial candidate. At the same time, the INLD and BSP have chosen Abhay Singh Chautala as theirs.

The BJP and Congress have not declared their chief ministerial faces, but former chief minister Bhupendra Singh Hooda is leading the battle for Congress. The new BJP chief minister, Saini, is leading the BJP. Both parties are facing internal problems. In the case of the BJP, Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala and MLA Lakshman Dass Napa left the party after being denied tickets. Other prominent figures and district leaders resigned after not being considered for tickets. During seat-sharing discussions with its coalition partner AAP, Congress leaders in Haryana, including Hooda, are willing to concede only a few seats.

The Congress, led by former chief minister Bhupendra Singh Hooda, is optimistic about returning to power after a ten-year gap. The party is strategically wooing the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Samajwadi Party for an alliance. Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is facing allegations of involvement in a liquor scam. The Haryana polls are crucial. The BJP wants a third term, while the Congress aims to regain power. Other



regional parties are also vying for a share of power. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won all ten seats.

In 2024, it only secured five seats, with the Congress taking the other five. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP, lacking the majority, formed the government with the help of JD(U) and Telugu Desam. Before 2014, the BJP was a minor player in Haryana. Only after the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the party gained momentum. In 2019, the BJP formed a government with 40 seats, just six short of the majority. Dushyant Chautala's Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), which won ten seats, supported the BJP. However, JJP recently ended its alliance with the BJP.

In Haryana, the BJP's vote share decreased from 58.2% in 2019 to 46.11% in 2024. This was mainly due to the farmers demanding a legal minimum support price (MSP) guarantee. In 2024, the INDIA bloc, a coalition of regional parties and Congress surpassed the BJP's vote share. In March, BJP replaced Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini. The new Chief Minister has introduced welfare schemes, promised to fill government job vacancies,



THE CONGRESS, LED BY FORMER CHIEF MINISTER BHUPENDRA SINGH HOODA, IS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT RETURNING TO POWER AFTER A TEN-YEAR GAP. THE PARTY IS STRATEGICALLY WOOING THE AAM AADMI PARTY (AAP) AND THE SAMAJWADI PARTY FOR AN ALLIANCE

and aims to leverage the Jat issue. However, the BJP does not have Jat's support. Also, Saini's short six-month tenure has limited his impact.

The Congress is upbeat after doubling its Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Congress focuses on joblessness, inflation, farmer's issues, and the controversial Agniveer scheme. The party is preparing its manifesto based on public suggestions, which includes welfare schemes like a Rs 6,000 pension for old-age people and 300 units of free electricity. The party also counts on 452,000 first-time voters and 4.09 million young voters. Congress aims to unite the opposition votes, while the BJP seeks to divide them strategically. AAP has some influence in border areas of Haryana. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is trying to keep the Indian coalition intact.

The AAP has agreed to fight in five seats. There are rumblings in the Congress, too. The Congress is facing factional fights. It is divided into two groups led by Hooda and Kumari Saini. The party tries to satisfy both factions, but Hooda holds more influence because of his previous role as chief minister. Turncoats and relatives of former chief min-

isters are in the Congress list of candidates.

The BJP is facing a tough battle in Haryana. Current polls indicate that the party may win fewer seats. BJP's weaknesses are the absence of strong leadership at the state level and a compelling counter-narrative against the Opposition charges. Prime Minister Modi, who leads the party's campaigns, has not addressed any election rallies yet. The Congress must work on complacency, internal conflicts, and a need for more organisation. The BJP faced rebellion after the candidate list was announced, and some influential people like Ranjit left the party.

Too many ticket aspirants could diminish the party's prospects. Ultimately, the arithmetic will determine Congress's victory. Also, the unity of the INDIA coalition is essential. If lucky, the BJP may minimise damage by securing a respectable number of seats, leading to a potentially significant outcome. Congress should avoid mistakes and take everybody along. Otherwise, it will miss a golden opportunity.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAMATA IN THE DOCK

Madam — West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose has urged Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to comply with Article 167(c) of the Indian Constitution by informing Raj Bhavan of all decisions made by the state cabinet. This request comes in the wake of the public outcry following the gruesome rape and murder of a woman doctor at Kolkata's R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

A statement from the Governor's office, issued, emphasized that under Article 167, it is the Chief Minister's duty to provide the Governor with details of all cabinet decisions relating to the state's administration and any proposed legislation. The statement also reminded the Chief Minister that updates should be provided on matters discussed by the cabinet, especially when a minister's decision was not taken into consideration by the cabinet. The Governor's office criticised the state administration and law enforcement, stating that public perception had condemned their actions in this case.

The statement outlined several concerns, including misinformation given to the victims' parents, alleged tampering of the crime scene, delays in filing the FIR, and the hasty disposal of the body despite the parents' request for more time. Furthermore, it noted that the transfer and reappointment of the Principal of the hospital raised suspicions about the state's intentions, as did the Kolkata Police's alleged attempts to cover up the crime scene tampering. The statement added that civil society and the courts had strongly reprimanded the law enforcement agencies for their handling of the case, particularly regarding the events following the discovery of the victim's body. Kolkata calling shots.

Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

COURTS MUST BRING DOWN PENDENCY

Madam—The time has come for the judicial think tank to put the house in order. The job of the Judges are becoming a thankless one while going by their contin-

GST relief for the middle class



The 54 GST council meeting held under the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has brought some important relief to the middle class with deduction of tax cuts on sev-

eral items and services apart from cancer drugs. The middle class are burdened with penumbra of taxes on GST, results in upsetting the household budgets. Over the past few years, the taxes are being added up consistently, but the economic stature of the common man in the country are still the same. The banking sector in the country are grappling with cash crunch as the saving capacity of the people have gone down of inflationary spike. The Centre's gross GST collection for FY24 stood at Rs.20.18 lakh crore but the condition of economically crumbling the non-BJP states should also be improved and their GST share must be settled. The recommendation to constitute GOM to reduce GST from eighteen percent on health and insurance services seems reasonable and boost up these two sectors if implemented by October.

Janga Bahadur Sunuwar | Jalpaiguri

LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN INDIA

Madam — The GDP of any country, alongside other factors, depends on the physical health of its citizens. However, a modern sedentary lifestyle is common, and government intervention is needed to encourage physical activity. A national survey revealed that over 200 million Indians are physically inactive, with 155 million adults and 45 million adolescents failing to meet WHO guidelines.

The joint study by Dalberg Advisors and Sports and Society Accelerator found that 48% of older adults believe they are too old for physical activity, and 45% think sports are unsafe for girls. Misconceptions, such as physical exertion being harmful to menstruating women or affecting marriage prospects, contribute to the gender gap in physical activity. Women, especially in urban areas, spend 75% of their active time on household chores, leaving little time for exercise.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai



FIRST COLUMN

GOD HAS THE SOLUTION

All we have to do is to take His shelter and remain in it



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

A famous oncologist was being interviewed on television. He was asked by a reporter about the causes of cancer. The doctor replied, "It is over stress mainly." Every time this matter came up, the oncologist emphasized the over stress reason. And we know what over stress is. It is mostly caused by cyclic thinking. We get into some problem and keep on thinking about it. Surely, worry results. The solution has to come from other sources. Aren't we extremely limited in what we know? But we refuse to accept this fact. I will recite three examples of when I found answers provided by God when I was in trouble, and only God could help. Beginning with my nature to fear excessively, I was suffering. One day I prayed sincerely for relief. Suddenly, a thought came that the Bhagavad-Geeta may have a solution.

Didn't Gandhiji turn to this book of eternal wisdom whenever he was faced with some problem? I looked for a knowledgeable person, and located one who was well-versed in the Geeta. I explained my problem. He referred me to verse #2.40, which is, "Neither there is a waste of effort here nor there is opposite effect. Even a little of this Karma-yoga protects one from great fear." This is what I was looking for. The next question was about karma yoga. What does this imply? He explained that all activities about God come under it. He cited examples of praying, having darshan, doing namaskar to God, chanting God's names or some mantra like Ohm and thanking God for favours done. They seemed simple enough and I got started. A connection was made with God. Sure enough, God got interested in me. I began to get intuitions. For example, I had been suffering from headaches mainly in the forehead part



for quite some time. I prayed for help. I got a feeling that I should go to Hanuman Mandir in Connaught Place, New Delhi. I did and prayed there sincerely for guidance and help. While returning, I felt that God was asking me to bring Him to my forehead. I was very excited and checked with my spiritual guide.

He confirmed that this is a bona fide process, as the 'ajna (agya) chakra' is located there. I began doing it and astonishingly I was beginning to get some relief. After practice for a few days, the persistent headache was gone. Since then I have been fortunate to not be so troubled by it. I recounted my experience to my spiritual guide. He told me that God is very pleased with me and giving guidance. Another headache appeared, which was only on the right side. I tried everything but there was no relief. Somehow, I had an inkling to look up various choices in Crocin. There was one with caffeine. My sixth sense, which is the same as God's guidance was to take it. Sure enough, there was relief. What happened? I had to know. I had stopped drinking green tea just before getting this strange headache. This tea had caffeine. Now I knew what the connection was. Only God could have known it, and He did. I was suffering headaches due to caffeine withdrawal. Another trouble arose due to the use of a nasal spray.

One spray and I began to feel uneasiness. When I got ready to use it another time, as prescribed, I was feeling quite troubled. Surely, I looked up its composition; it had steroids. God had prevented more damage from happening to me. All we have to do is to take His shelter and remain in it. The question is: why don't we? It is a very slow process. One must have good Sanskars to get started on this journey. Otherwise, one will not get started. Fortunately, I was blessed to have them. Lord Krishna has promised it, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My grace." (18.58) This culminates in liberation from the painful cycle of birth and death when God releases us from all sins. (18.66) However, this will take several births after we get started. (6.45) I am counting upon it.

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

The making of Kerala's catastrophe

Despite warnings from experts about the perils of unchecked quarrying and deforestation in the Western Ghats, successive governments failed to act, leading to Wayanad disaster



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN



S K Pottekkat, who could be rated as India's best travelogue writer has elaborated on his 1955 visit to Finland. "The country's area is 1,30,119 sq miles out of which 71 per cent is forests. Finland's main source of income is the pine trees grown in its forests. But to get permission from the government to cut down a single pine tree, one has to furnish proof that he has planted six pine saplings," writes Pottekkat in his memoirs.

He was a delegate to the World Peace Council meeting held in Helsinki, the capital city. In 2024, despite a massive industrialisation drive, the country has the tenth highest percentage of forest cover in the world. Pottekkat hailed from Kozhikode, the neighbouring district of Wayanad.

Once the region was full of evergreen forests filled with exotic trees, plants and flowers. Folklore is that the tribal youth who led a team of Englishmen to Wayanad was shot dead by the visitors to ensure that no more outsiders entered the fertile landscape.

But Wayanad has become a teardrop since 30 July 2024 as landslides and flash floods struck the district in quick succession swallowing hundreds of people and their houses. Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief minister, has asked the Centre to release Rs 2,000 crore as the first instalment towards the rescue, rehabilitation and reconstruction mission to be undertaken by the Government of Kerala.

He also blamed the Centre for its failure to provide the exact date, time and place of the natural disaster and has vowed to establish the State's early warning system for floods, landslides and heavy rainfalls. Vijayan will outclass the best of the entrepreneurs in the skill of mobilization of resources for the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund.

All media briefings by Vijayan end with him announcing the details of persons who have contributed to the CMDRF in the aftermath of landslides and deluge that devastated Wayanad. But what stands out is the generous offer made by High Range Rural Development Society,



PINARAYI VIJAYAN, THE CHIEF MINISTER, HAS ASKED THE CENTRE TO RELEASE RS 2,000 CRORE AS THE FIRST INSTALMENT TOWARDS THE RESCUE, REHABILITATION AND RECONSTRUCTION MISSION TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE GOVT OF KERALA

a non-governmental organisation, which came forward to build houses for all those who lost their dwelling places in the flash floods. According to the Kerala Government's estimate, 500 homes were washed away by the gushing waters. The HRDS told the Government that it would rebuild/construct 500 safe and secured houses each of 700 sq ft and costing Rs 10 lakh free of cost.

The NGO also told the government that it would help the landslide victims to set up group farming so that they could earn a reasonably fair monthly income. All the 500 houses to be constructed by the HRDS will feature self-contained guest rooms which could be rented out as part of the homestay programme. But Vijayan and his comrades are cold to the offer. The Centre has asked Vijayan to submit details of the losses suffered in nature's fury and how the State would go ahead with the rehabilitation and reconstruction. Though the disaster struck nearly a month ago, the Government has yet to come out with the details of the losses. In the aftermath of the 2018 floods, Vijayan had demanded Rs 40,000 crore as flood relief which included Rs 20,000 crore to rebuild the roads washed away in the deluge.

But senior officials who took stock of the situation once the flood water receded had told that roads could be rebuilt with Rs5,800 crore. As part of mitigating future floods, Vijayan accompanied by an entourage of relatives (including his five-year-old grandson) and senior bureaucrats undertook a junket to the Netherlands.

But there is no end in sight for the floods in Kerala. There is no need to search for the

reason behind the landslides and floods in Wayanad and other places in the State. Prof Madhav Gadgil, a noted environmentalist who headed the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) had told the State Governments not to disturb the ecology and environment beyond the current level.

The team of experts had found to their horror that quarrying and sand mining of unprecedented level were taking place with official connivance across the length and breadth of Western Ghats and this included Wayanad. In 1986, this writer shot a television documentary on the Wayanad district for Doordarshan.

There were no resorts or star hotels those days anywhere in the district. The District Collector Raveendran Thampi had been sanctioned one room as his camp office in the low power transmitter station of the Doordarshan at Kalpetta. Immediately after nature's fury in July 2024, Prof Gadgil said that the disaster was a man-made one and was waiting to happen at any time. "Wayanad has no more space for resorts, quarries and sand mining," said Prof Gadgil immediately after the landslide and flash floods.

But what the chief minister said in his briefing was shocking. "The Gadgil committee report is a big joke and one need not take it seriously," said Vijayan. The committee of experts led by Prof Gadgil toured the entire Western Ghats region and they were shocked by the kind of quarrying, mining and deforestation that was happening in the region. Prof Gadgil had described the Western Ghats region as the Water Tower of peninsular India.

Vested interests including religious groups are exploiting Wayanad to the hilt and this

made the committee ask the authorities to stop herewith the constitution of special economic zones and reschedule reservoir operations to downstream flows. More than what the Gadgil Committee had said in its report, what Prof T P Kunhikannan, a CPI(M) activist, had said about the report is significant.

A thorough study by Kunhikannan has proved that Prof Gadgil's suggestions should be accepted in toto by the authorities concerned. "The Church is campaigning against Gadgil Committee findings to save its commercial interests. There is nothing anti-people or anti-minorities in the report," said Prof Kunhikannan in his studies "Gadgil Report and Kerala's Development".

The top echelons of the Church read pastoral letters asking the laity to stage demonstrations across the country against the report as it was anti-minority," said Kunhikannan. No purpose will be served by subjecting the Wayanad disaster to another academic analysis. The Church sabotaged the Gadgil committee report by terming it as anti-development, anti-farmers and anti-people.

Through a series of pastoral letters (which were read out during Sunday Mass), the clergy unleashed a blitzkrieg against the WGEEP report. The then union government appointed another committee headed by G Kasturirangan, former ISRO chairman, to "examine" the feasibility of Gadgil's findings. Kasturirangan did his masters proud by diluting the WGEEP report and that was the death warrant of Wayanad.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

India's green hydrogen revolution: Paving the way for a sustainable energy future

Green hydrogen is emerging as a powerful alternative fuel, offering a clean and versatile energy source produced through renewable means

The entire world grapples with the dire consequences of climate change and desperately searches for sustainable and clean energy sources. Green hydrogen, a powerful alternative fuel produced using renewable energy, has emerged as a viable alternative.



ARIF AGA

Now, in India, the green hydrogen revolution is gaining momentum, with the government, private sector, and start-ups playing pivotal roles in positioning the country as a global leader in this transformative technology. In recent years green hydrogen, produced through electrolysis powered by renewable energy sources like solar and wind, has gained significant attention.

The National Hydrogen Energy Roadmap, introduced in 2006, marked the first formal effort by the government to explore hydrogen's potential in India. Since then, technological advancements and a growing commitment to renewable energy have laid a solid foundation for the green hydrogen revolution. India faces immense pressure to decarbonize its energy systems

due to its heavy dependence on fossil fuels and huge carbon emissions. Green hydrogen can serve as a versatile energy carrier, with applications ranging from industrial processes and transportation to power generation and storage.

Unlike grey or blue hydrogen, which is produced from fossil fuels and involves carbon emissions, green hydrogen is entirely clean, thus aligning with global sustainability goals. India's vast renewable energy resources, particularly solar and wind, make it an ideal location for large-scale green hydrogen production.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) has noted that India's renewable energy capacity could provide the

low-cost electricity needed for green hydrogen production, potentially making it one of the most cost-effective producers in the world. Recognizing the strategic importance of green hydrogen, the Union Government has implemented a series of policy measures to promote its development and adoption.

To make the country a global hub for green hydrogen production and export, the Indian government launched its ambitious National Hydrogen Mission in 2021. The mission focuses on creating demand in various sectors, ensuring supply chain resilience, and supporting research and development in hydrogen technologies. Key policy incentives include



subsidies and financial support for pilot projects, the development of hydrogen hubs, and mandates for industries to use green hydrogen in their operations. This proactive approach has started giving positive results now. However, there is a need to create a robust regulatory framework to facili-

tate the use of hydrogen as a fuel in multiple sectors, including refining, fertilisers, and transportation. India's commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2070, as announced at the COP26 summit. Green hydrogen is expected to play a crucial role in this journey by decarbonizing hard-to-abate sectors like steel, cement, and petrochemicals.

The transition to green hydrogen could also reduce India's dependence on imported fossil fuels, enhancing energy security and providing a significant economic boost. Indian conglomerates and big private businesses have been quick to recognize the potential of green hydrogen

and are making substantial investments in this area. Investments are being made for setting up hydrogen production units and integrating hydrogen fuel cells into transportation. Start-ups in the energy sector are also focusing on developing and deploying electrolyzers, creating robust hydrogen storage solutions, and innovating in the transportation sector with hydrogen fuel cell technology.

International collaborations will be instrumental in bringing global best practices to India and accelerating the green hydrogen revolution. India has actively sought to collaborate with Germany, Japan, Australia, and the European Union, forging partnerships to develop joint

ventures, share technology, and build capacity.

The green hydrogen revolution in India represents a unique opportunity to transform the country's energy landscape and lead the global transition towards a sustainable future.

With strong government support, proactive efforts by the private sector, and dynamic innovation from start-ups, India embarks on a journey to become a green hydrogen powerhouse. To achieve the target of net-zero emissions, green hydrogen would play a pivotal role in shaping India's energy future and driving global sustainability efforts.

(The writer is director, SgurrEnergy India; views are personal)

Trump repeats 2020 election lies, deflects responsibility for Jan 6

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Former President Donald Trump persisted Tuesday in saying during a nationally televised presidential debate that he had won the 2020 election and continued to take no responsibility for any of the mayhem that unfolded at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the building to block the peaceful transfer of power.

The comments underscored the Republican's refusal, even four years later, to accept the reality of his defeat and his unwillingness to admit the extent to which his falsehoods about his election loss emboldened the mob that rushed the Capitol, resulting in violent clashes with law enforcement. It also made clear that Trump's grievances about 2020 remain central to his campaign against his Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, as he continues to profess allegiance to the rioters. Asked twice if he regretted anything he did on January 6, when he told his supporters to march to the Capitol and exhorted them to "fight like hell," Trump at first responded by complaining that the questioner had failed to note that he had encouraged the crowd to behave "peacefully and patriotically" and by noting that one of his backers, Ashli Babbitt, was fatally shot inside the building by a Capitol Police officer. He also suggested that protesters who committed crimes dur-

'Russia's war should end'

Washington (AP): Former President Donald Trump spoke heatedly in Tuesday's presidential debate about wanting Russia's war in Ukraine to be over - but twice refused to directly answer a question about whether he wanted US ally Ukraine to win. Trump also falsely claimed that the war had killed "millions" since Russia invaded Ukraine 2 1/2 years ago, while the UN says 11,700 civilian deaths have been verified. And he claimed without evidence that Vice President Kamala Harris, his Democratic opponent, had bungled a diplomatic mission just days before Russia launched the invasion. Trump's comments are likely to heighten concern among Ukraine and its supporters that his return to the White House could push Ukraine into a losing peace deal with its stronger neighbour, Russia. Western-allied Ukraine depends on US military and financial aid to keep up its fight against Russian forces, and it would have grave difficulty withstanding their attacks if the US were to pull that support. It's "a very simple question. Do you want Ukraine to win this war?" moderator David Muir of ABC News asked Trump in Tuesday's debate, the first of two times he pressed Trump for a direct answer.

Taylor Swift endorses Kamala

Washington (AP): Taylor Swift, one of the music industry's biggest stars, endorsed Kamala Harris for president shortly after the debate ended on Tuesday night. "I think she is a steady-handed, gifted leader and I believe we can accomplish so much more in this country if we are led by calm and not chaos," Swift wrote in an Instagram post, which included a link to a voter registration website. Swift has a dedicated following among young women, a key demographic in the November election, and her latest tour has generated more than USD 1 billion in ticket sales. In a half hour, the post received more than 2.3 million likes. She included a picture of herself holding her cat Benjamin Button, and she signed the message "Childless Cat Lady." The remark is a reference to three-year-old comments made by JD Vance, Donald Trump's running mate, about women without children not having an equal stake in the country's future. A Harris senior campaign official said the endorsement was not coordinated with the campaign. Tim Walz, Harris' run-

ning mate, appeared to learn about the endorsement in the middle of a live interview on MSNBC. As Rachel Maddow read the text, Walz broke into a smile and patted his chest. "That was eloquent. And it was clear," Walz said. "And that's the kind of courage we need in America to stand up." Swift wrote that her endorsement was partially prompted by Trump's decision to post AI-generated pictures suggesting that she had endorsed him. One showed Swift dressed as Uncle Sam, and the text said "Taylor wants YOU to VOTE for DONALD TRUMP." Trump's posts "brought me to the conclusion that I need to be very transparent about my actual plans for this election as a voter," Swift wrote. She added that "I've done my research, and I've made my choice." The Trump campaign dismissed Swift's endorsement. "This is further evidence that the Democrat Party has unfortunately become a party of the wealthy elites," said spokesperson Karoline Leavitt. "There's many Swifties for Trump out there in America," she said, herself included. Swift's endorsement was not exactly a

surprise. In 2020, she supported President Joe Biden, and she cheered for Harris in her debate against then-Vice President Mike Pence. She also was openly critical of Trump, saying he had stoked "the fires of white supremacy and racism." Swift is a popular figure nationwide, but especially among Democrats. An October 2023 Fox News poll found that 55 per cent of voters overall, including 68 per cent of Democrats, said they had a favourable view of Swift. Republicans were divided, with 43 per cent having a favourable opinion and 45 per cent an unfavorable one. AP VoteCast suggests that a partisan divide on Swift was apparent as early as 2018. That's the year Swift made her first political endorsement, supporting Tennessee Democrat Phil Bredesen for Senate over Republican Marsha Blackburn. VoteCast found that among Tennessee voters that year, 55 per cent of Democrats and just 19 per cent of Republicans said they had a favourable opinion of Swift. Blackburn won by a comfortable margin in the deep red state.

Iran's President slams West on support to Israel

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday slammed the West, saying that Israel is "committing massacres" in the war in Gaza and using European and American weapons to do so. Pezeshkian, who spoke in Baghdad at the start of his first visit abroad since taking office, is hoping to cement Tehran's ties to Baghdad as regional tensions increasingly pull both majority Shiite countries into the widening Middle East fray. Iran has been a staunch supporter of the Palestinian militant Hamas group since its Oct 7 attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in the Gaza Strip. More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the war erupted, according to local health officials. The war has also caused vast destruction and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, often multiple times.

These crimes are being committed by using European and American ammunition and bombs," he added, without elaborating. Ahead of Pezeshkian's arrival, an explosion struck a site near Baghdad International Airport used by the US military on Tuesday night. There were no reported casualties and the circumstances of the explosion were unclear. The US Embassy later described it as an "attack" on the Baghdad Diplomatic Services Compound, an American diplomatic facility, and that it was "assessing the damage" and the cause of the explosion. It didn't provide further details. Pezeshkian's visit is significant for both countries. For Iran, its relationship with Iraq remains crucial for economic, political and religious reasons - something that has especially been true since the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, who launched a bloody, yearslong war against Iran in the 1980s. Baghdad, meanwhile, has been trying to balance its relationship with Tehran, which backs powerful Shiite militias in the country, as

well as with the United States, which maintains a force of 2,500 troops in Iraq that remain in battle with remnants of the oncedominant extremist Islamic State group. The American troops remain both a literal and rhetoric target for Iran, particularly as Israel's nearly year-old war on Hamas in Gaza grinds on. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani told reporters during a joint news conference with Pezeshkian that the two neighbouring countries on Wednesday signed 14 memorandums of understanding to boost relations. He also pledged that Iraq's airspace will not be used for attacks on the Islamic Republic - an apparent reference to Israel. Pezeshkian, who was sworn in as Iran's new president in July, is also to visit Shiite shrines in the Iraqi holy cities of Karbala and Najaf, a railroad project to link the southern city of Basra to Iran and Irbil, the capital of Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region. Still, there have been tensions between Iran and Iraq, particularly after Iranian missiles hit sites in Iraq in attacks over the past six years, targeting Kurdish militias, a base housing

American forces and also what Tehran alleged were Israeli sites in Iraq. Iran also fired missiles and flew drones over Iraq in its unprecedented direct attack on an Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus, Syria, that killed two Iranian generals and five officers, as well as a member of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, an Iranian ally. The Islamic Republic has also threatened further retaliation against Israel over the July assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, which could include another missile barrage. Iraq also needs the close ties to maintain Baghdad's supply of imported Iranian natural gas to meet its electricity needs. A barter deal for Iraqi crude oil has seen the supply continue, though US sanctions targeting Tehran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program have put pressure on Baghdad. Meanwhile Tuesday, the United States and Britain formally accused Iran of supplying short-range ballistic missiles to Russia to use against Ukraine, announcing new sanctions on both Moscow and Tehran.

Vietnam's storm toll rises to 155 dead

Hanoi (AP): A flash flood swept away an entire hamlet in northern Vietnam, killing 30 people and leaving dozens missing as deaths from a typhoon and its aftermath climbed to 155 on Wednesday. Vietnamese state broadcaster VTV said the torrent of water gushing down from a mountain in Lao Cai province Tuesday buried Lang Nu hamlet with 35 families in mud and debris. Only about a dozen are known so far to have survived. Rescuers have recovered 30 bodies and are continuing the search for about 65 others. The death toll from Typhoon Yagi and its aftermath has climbed to 155. Another 141 people are missing and hundreds were injured, VTV said. Floods and landslides have caused most of the deaths, many of which have come in the northwestern Lao Cai province, bordering China, where Lang Nu is located. Lao Cai province is also home to the popular trekking destination of Sapa.



Blindfolded and bounded protesters take part in a protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and call for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group in Tel Aviv, Israel, Tuesday. AP/PTI

Hong Kong slams US Congress bill that could close its offices

AP ■ HONG KONG

Hong Kong's government on Wednesday said the US House of Representatives twisted facts in an attack on the city as it passed a bill that could close its representative offices in America, while Beijing threatened to take countermeasures if they are shuttered. The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office Certification Act was part of a series of China-related legislative proposals being scrutinized by the House this week. Many of the proposals scheduled for a vote appear to have both Republican and Democratic support, reflecting a strong consensus that congressional actions are needed to counter Beijing. If approved, the measures would still need to clear the Senate and be signed by the U.S. president before officially becoming law. They are expected to increase diplomatic tensions between the world's two largest economies, which see each other as rivals in many areas and have conflicting views over various issues, including on Hong Kong. On Wednesday, Hong Kong's Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development Alagon Yau strongly condemned the bill's passage, saying it was political slander against the laws that safeguard national security

and smeared the city's human rights situation "without any reason at all." He said the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong had surveyed its members and found that about 70% of respondents felt no negative impact from the Beijing-imposed security law. He said there are about 1,200 American companies in the city. "The passing of the bill ... actually is not creating any benefit to anybody at all," he said. The Hong Kong government said in a statement that the attack on the semi-autonomous Chinese city was "politically driven," violated international law and "grossly interferes" in Hong Kong's affairs. The office of China's Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong also issued a strongly worded statement, saying if the U.S. pushed the bill forward and shut the offices, China would take resolute countermeasures. The bill passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support, 413-3, on Tuesday. It proposes to require the White House to remove the extension of certain privileges to the three Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices in the U.S. — in Washington, New York and San Francisco — if the city no longer enjoys a high degree of autonomy from China, and for other purposes.

Rights group calls for better protections for Venezuelans and Haitians

Bogota (AP): A global human rights watchdog on Wednesday called on Latin American governments to improve protection schemes, grant legal status and reverse "onerous visa requirements" for millions of Haitians and Venezuelans who have struggled to find work, access to health care and education in South America host countries, forcing them to increasingly seek asylum in the United States. Human Rights Watch, in a report describing the situation of Haitian and Venezuelan migrants, said that "limited

integration and regularisation policies in South America are forcing vulnerable people to head to the United States every month. To reach the US border, many asylum seekers make a long, dangerous journey that includes crossing the Darien Gap, a roadless swath of jungle between Colombia and Panama. The group urged governments in Latin America to implement a "region-wide protection regime that would grant all Venezuelans and Haitians legal status for a fixed but renewable term of adequate duration," even if they

may not qualify for refugee status under domestic law. The report also calls for governments to eliminate barriers that hinder the integration of migrants and refugees, including legislation that prevents people from getting work permits, while they seek asylum in other countries. "While some Latin American governments have made commendable efforts to receive migrants and asylum seekers" said the report, which reviewed asylum policies in countries including Brazil, Peru and Chile.

'Hellish' scene unfolds as wildfire races toward Calif mountain community

AP ■ TRABUCO CANYON

Alex Luna, a 20-year-old missionary, saw the sky turn from a cherry red to black in about 90 minutes as an explosive wildfire raced toward the Southern California mountain community of Wrightwood and authorities implored residents to leave their belongings behind and get out of town. "It was very, I would say, hellish-like," Luna said Tuesday night. "It was very just dark. Not a good place to be at that moment. ... Ash was falling from the sky like if it was snowing." Luna was among those who heeded the evacuation order that was issued for the community of about 4,500 in the San Gabriel Mountains east of Los Angeles. The Bridge Fire is one of three major wildfires burning in Southern California and endangering tens of thousands of homes and other structures. The fires sprung to life during a triple-digit heat wave that finally broke Wednesday. The cooler temperatures brought the prospect of firefighters finally making headway against the flames. Other major fires were burning across the West, including in Idaho, Oregon and Nevada, where about 20,000 people had to flee a blaze outside Reno. In Northern California, a fire that started Sunday burned at least 30 homes and commercial buildings and destroyed 40 to 50 vehicles in Clearlake City, 110 miles (117 kilometres) north of San Francisco. Roughly 4,000 people were forced to evacuate. California is only now heading into the teeth of the wildfire season but already has seen nearly three times as much acreage

burned than during all of 2023. Evacuation orders were expanded Tuesday night in Southern California as the fires grew and included parts of the popular ski town of Big Bear. Some 65,600 homes and buildings were under threat by the Line Fire, including those under mandatory evacuations and those under evacuation warnings, nearly double the number from the previous day. Residents along the southern edge of Big Bear Lake were told to leave the area, which is a popular destination for anglers, bikers and hikers. The blaze had charred more than 51 square miles (132 square kilometres) of grass and brush and blanketed the area with a thick cloud of dark smoke. The acrid air prompted several districts in the area to close schools through the end of the week because of safety concerns. Three firefighters have been injured since the blaze was reported Thursday, state fire managers said. For Wrightwood, a picturesque town 60 miles (97 kilometres) east of Los Angeles known for its 1930s cabins, threatening wildfires have become a regular part of life. Authorities expressed frustration in 2016 when only half the residents heeded orders to leave. Janice Quick, the president of the Wrightwood Chamber of Commerce, lives a few miles outside town. Late Tuesday afternoon she was eating lunch outside with friends and they were rained on by embers the size of her thumbnail that hit the table and made a clinking sound. A friend texted to tell her that the friend's home had been consumed by fire, while another

friend was watching through her ring camera as embers rained down on her home. "I've never seen anything like this and I've been through fires before," said Quick, who has lived in Wrightwood for 45 years. In neighbouring Orange County, firefighters used bulldozers, helicopters and planes to control a rapidly spreading blaze called the Airport Fire that started Monday and spread to about 3 square miles (8 square kilometres) in only a few hours. The blaze was ignited by a spark from heavy equipment being used by public workers, officials said. By Tuesday night, it had charred more than 30 square miles (78 square kilometres) and was heading over mountainous terrain into neighbouring Riverside County with no containment, said Orange County Fire Authority Capt. Steve Concialdi. It burned some communications towers on top of a peak, though so far officials said they did not have reports of the damage disrupting police or fire communication signals in the area. Concialdi said the fire was burning away from homes in Orange County, but there are 36 recreational cabins in the area. He said authorities don't yet know if the cabins were damaged or destroyed by the blaze. Two firefighters who suffered heat-related injuries and a resident who suffered from smoke inhalation were treated at a hospital and released. Sherri Fankhauser, her husband and her daughter set up lawn chairs and were watching helicopters make water drops on a flaming hillside a few hundred yards away from their Trabuco Canyon home on Tuesday.

Mexico's Senate approves contentious judicial overhaul

AP ■ MEXICO CITY

Mexico's Senate voted early Wednesday to overhaul the country's judiciary, clearing the biggest hurdle for a controversial constitutional revision that will make all judges stand for election, a change that critics fear will politicise the judicial branch and threaten Mexico's democracy. The vote came after hundreds of protesters pushed their way into the Senate on Tuesday, interrupting the session after it appeared that Morena, the governing party of outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, had lined up the necessary votes

to pass the proposal. The legislation sailed through the lower chamber, where Morena and its allies hold a supermajority, last week. The Senate posed the biggest obstacle and required defections from opposition parties. One appeared to come Tuesday from the opposition National Action Party (PAN) after a lawmaker who had previously spoken out against the overhaul took leave for medical reasons and his father, a former governor, suggested he would vote for the proposal. The Senate voted twice on the bill, both times 86-41, with the second coming around 4 am.



Protesters break into a Senate session in which lawmakers were debating the government's proposed judicial reform, which would make judges stand for election, in Mexico City, Tuesday. AP/PTI

Opp candidates file court appeal questioning Algerian presidential election outcome

Algiers (AP): The two opposition candidates who ran in Algeria's presidential race legally challenged on Tuesday the provisional result while harshly rebuking election officials and disputing the vote count. Islamist Abdellali Hassani Cherif and socialist Youcef Aouchiche filed appeals with Algeria's Constitutional Court, taking the first step required to challenge the results of the election, which incumbent President Abdelmadjid Tebboune won with a 94.7% share of the vote. Algerian law provides the court 10 days from the announcement of provisional election results to rule on the appeals. A verdict could require the election authority to recalculate each candidate's totals without calling into question

Tebboune's victory, for which he has already begun receiving congratulatory messages from Algeria's foreign allies. A day before lodging their appeals, both candidates took aim at Mohamed Charfi, the President of Algeria's National Independent Electoral Authority (ANIE) for how the results of Saturday's election were reported. "President Tebboune didn't need this stuffing. We knew he'd be reelected, but with these results, ANIE hasn't done him any favors," Cherif said. "We want our votes — the votes of the people who voted for us — to be returned to us. I know it won't change the outcome of the vote, but it will go down in history." Meanwhile, Aouchiche held a news conference where his cam-

paign manager showed graphics that he said proved the results had been distorted and called the outcome a "shameful and gross manipulation." "These results, which do not correspond at all to the number of votes communicated to us by the regional delegations of the same ANIE, are a disgrace for the Algeria of 2024, taking us back to the 1970s," he said, referencing a time when the country's only legal political party ran its chosen candidate unopposed. The two challengers have taken issue with discrepancies between the number of votes used to tally the results and the turnout figures that election officials published a day earlier. Late Sunday, Tebboune joined them in denouncing ANIE, aligning himself with popular anger that

his challengers had drummed up against it. In a shared statement, campaign managers for Tebboune, Aouchiche and Cherif called into question the results that ANIE had reported and how they didn't correspond with the regional figures that local authorities had reported. "We inform national public opinion that inaccuracies, contradictions, ambiguities and inconsistencies were noted in the figures when the provisional results of the presidential election were announced by the chairman of the National Independent Election Authority," they wrote. The unprecedented turn of events marks a departure for Algeria, where elections have historically been a carefully choreographed affair by the ruling elite

and military apparatus that backs it. ANIE, the election authority, was established in 2019 in response to demands from pro-democracy protests whose weekly demonstrations were consulting Algeria. Replacing Algeria's Interior Ministry, the independent body was designed to guarantee election integrity and transparency. But its independence has been called into question, particularly after it reported Saturday that Tebboune had won with a larger share of the vote than Vladimir Putin in Russia's March presidential election. In local media, commentators speculated Tebboune's decision to criticize the election authority after being announced the winner suggested a "clan war" among the shadowy ruling elite thought to run Algeria.

Rupee settles flat against US dollar

DGCA issues eVTOL guidelines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The rupee witnessed range-bound trade and settled for the day on a flat note at 83.98 (provisional) against US dollar on Wednesday as the support from the lower level of crude oil prices and soft US dollar was negated by a weak trend in domestic equities.
Forex traders said significant corrections in asset classes like the dollar index and crude oil prices supported the rupee, while a negative trend in domestic equities and concerns over global economic growth capped the upside.
At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit moved in a narrow range. It opened at 83.97

against the American currency and touched an intraday high of 83.93 and a low of 83.98 against the American currency. The rupee finally settled for the day at 83.98 (provisional) against the US dollar.
On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 3 paise to close at 83.98 against the American currency. "Indian rupee continued to remain range-bound stuck in a 83.90-84 range supported by active interventions from RBI at lower levels along with declining crude oil prices also capping the upside in same," said Maneesh Sharma, AVP - Commodities & Currencies, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers.



Sharma further noted that rupee's minimal volatility is also attributed to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) maintaining long-term

interest rate pauses and building record foreign exchange reserves. "Overall rupee is expected to maintain a trading range of 83.90-84.10 in the week ahead with minimal volatility with cues from US CPI & ECB interest rate decision in coming days to provide further direction to currency pair," Sharma added.
Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.23 per cent to 101.39 points.
Brent crude, the international benchmark, was trading higher by 2.44 per cent to USD 70.88 per barrel in futures trade.
Forex traders said crude oil level of USD 70 per barrel will act as a support for the domestic unit as India, the world's third-largest oil importer, stands to benefit from cheaper oil.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aviation regulator DGCA has issued guidelines for airworthiness certification of electric aircraft that are capable of taking off and landing in a vertical manner. An advisory circular outlining the baseline airworthiness criteria for the type certification of Vertical Take Off and Landing Capable Aircraft (VCA) has been issued.
These aircraft are powered by an electrical system and are known as eVTOLs.
"This significant step aims to streamline the certification process and ensure the safety and reliability of emerging eVTOL technologies in India," the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said in a release on Wednesday.
The advisory circular provides comprehensive

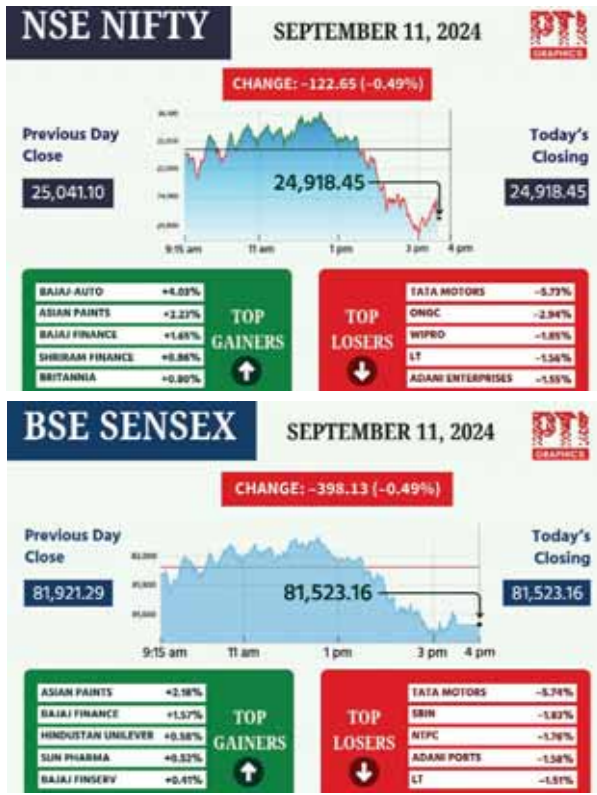


safety requirements on the design, construction, structural strength, flight performance, equipment, power plant installation, flight crew interface and other information required for type certification of eVTOL aircraft. The latest move is part of efforts to promote advanced air mobility solutions. DGCA said the initiative also aligns with global efforts to standardise eVTOL certification and encourages innovative efforts by the Indian industry in developing/ manufacturing eVTOL and its components. Last week, the regulator issued an advisory circular on vertiports that are to be used for eVTOL aircraft operations.

Market pullback: Sensex, Nifty down

India aims to become global aviation hub: Naidu

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark Sensex reversed its early gains to close lower by 398 points while broader Nifty slipped below the 25,000 mark due to selling in Tata Motors, Reliance Industries and L&T amid weak global trends.
In a volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 398.13 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 81,523.16. The index opened higher and touched the day's high of 82,134.95 points in the mid-session. However, selling pressure emerged in the pre-close session and the index tanked 498.15 points or 0.60 per cent to hit a low of 81,423.14.
The NSE Nifty declined 122.65 points or 0.49 per cent to 24,918.45. Among the 30 Sensex firms, Tata Motors was the biggest loser, tumbling nearly 6 per cent, followed by NTPC, Adani Ports, Larsen & Toubro, State Bank of India, JSW Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra, IndusInd Bank and Titan. In contrast, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers.
The domestic market experienced a minor consolidation in line with



Asian peers due to correction of commodity prices like crude which has collapsed to USD 70 per barrel. "Market sentiment remained cautious due to the slowdown in the Chinese economy. Investors await the release of the US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Highlighting the aviation sector's growth potential, Union minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Wednesday said efforts are on to make India a global aviation hub as well as to start manufacturing aircraft in the country.
With Asia-Pacific region poised to lead global aviation growth, Naidu said strategic investments in infrastructure and collaboration amongst the regional stakeholders is critical to achieving sustainable growth across the sector.
Speaking at the second Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Civil Aviation in the national capital, Naidu emphasised on three elements infrastructure, integration and innovation for the sector's growth. "My ministry is working with the vision of establishing a seamless aviation landscape in the country, integrating helicopters and seaplane operations alongside wide-body aircraft under the regional connectivity scheme UDAN," he noted.
India is one of the world's



fastest growing civil aviation markets and the fleet size of domestic carriers has increased to around 800 from 400 in 2014 while the number of domestic passengers climbed from 67 million to 152 million during the same period.
The number of operational airports have grown from 74 in 2014 to 157. "We have an ambitious plan of scaling this up to 350-400 airports by 2047," the civil aviation minister said. The country is also well-positioned to offer cost-effective and high quality MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul) services to domestic and international airlines, he noted. According to him, the government is



Uber Black returns to Mumbai

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ride-hailing app Uber on Wednesday announced the return of its upscale 'Uber Black' category in India, starting with Mumbai.
The move is a step towards addressing the growing preference of Indian customers towards premium offerings and Uber's ability to deliver a new standard of on-demand mobility in premium cars, the company said in a release.
"Uber brings Black back to India... Reintroduces its high-end category starting with Mumbai," the release said, adding that Uber Black allows for a personalised ride with customisable features like quiet mode, temperature control, and help with

luggage. Riders will get to enjoy in-car amenities and on-trip preferences, ensuring consistently high-quality experience, it added.
"We are thrilled to bring Uber Black back in an all new avatar to meet the evolving aspirations of Indian customers and introduce the business class of back seats on Indian roads," Prabhjot Singh, President, Uber India and South Asia, said.
As India's leading multimodal mobility service, Uber endeavors to cater to the full spectrum of riders, from those seeking affordable rides on two-wheelers or three-wheelers to those who desire a truly well-appointed experience in premium vehicles, Singh added.

Arunachal to add 12,500 MW of hydropower capacity in two years says Deputy CM

APSEZ to develop multipurpose berth at Kandla Port

PTI ■ ITANAGAR
Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein said hydropower projects with a combined installed capacity of 12,500 MW in the state will commence operations in the next two years, according to a statement issued on Wednesday.
The projects will be taken up by CPSUs, including NHPC, NEEPCO, THDC and SJVN, he said during the Solung festival celebrations at Roing in Lower Dibang Valley district on Tuesday, it said.
Five such projects will commence next year, while three each will be taken up in 2026 and 2027, Mein was quoted as saying in the official communiqué.



"These will meet the power needs of the state as well as the nation and will foster rapid economic development in the state," the deputy chief minister said, adding that large dams would also bring multiple benefits to the state as they are all multipurpose projects.
"We will not only harness power from these projects

but also regulate water flow downstream and harness water for irrigation purposes and fisheries," he said.
These projects will boost tourism and employment generation in the state. Mein said the state would generate income to the tune of Rs 1,836 crore annually as equity shares from the projects.
The revenue accrued from the hydropower projects in the state will benefit the young generations, he said.
The deputy chief minister claimed that the government is also committed to develop small hydro projects in border villages of the state.
"These hydro projects will benefit remote villages, defence personnel and military set-up stationed in far-flung areas," he said.
Mein also highlighted the state government's initiatives to boost economic activities, including advancements in the tourism sector through the construction of the 218-kilometre Assam-Arunachal railway line passing through the sacred pilgrimage site of Parsuram Kund.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Wednesday said it has signed a concession agreement with DPA to develop Berth No 13 at Deendayal Port, Kandla, Gujarat.
APSEZ has incorporated a wholly-owned subsidiary, DPA Container and Clean Cargo Terminal Limited (DPACCCTL) that will carry out operations at the berth it said in a statement.
Berth will handle multipurpose cargo and is expected to be commissioned in FY27.
In July 2024, APSEZ had received the LOI for the development, operation and maintenance of the berth for a 30-year concession period. According to the statement, APSEZ will develop the berth under DBFOT (Design,



Build, Finance, Operate, and Transfer) model for multipurpose clean cargo, including container cargo. Berth No. 13 is 300 metres long and offers 5.7 MMT capacity annually.
It is likely to be commissioned in FY27. APSEZ CEO and whole-time director Ashwani Gupta said,

"Berth No. 13 will diversify our presence at Deendayal Port. We will now handle the multipurpose clean cargo at the port, in addition to dry bulk cargo that we already handle."
"The statement said the berth will further consolidate the company's position on the western coast and enhance its

ability to service customers in Gujarat and north India. APSEZ, a part of the globally diversified Adani Group, is the largest port developer and operator in India with 7 strategically located ports and terminals on the west coast and 8 ports and terminals on the east coast.

Apple drops prices in India with the launch of 16 series

Honda collaborates with IITs on AI technologies

ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI
Apple on Monday has launched their new iPhone 16 series in India and markets globally. For the first time the prices of the new iPhone have been cheaper by Rs 15,000 for the pro models (pro and pro-max) due to their manufacturing in India. The Union Budget cutting of the customs duty on smartphones by 5% has also been a factor for the cheaper price of the imported models.
Apart Apple has also cut down the prices of their non-Pro models of iPhone 15.
In India, the iPhone 16, the entry level iPhone is priced at Rs 79,900 and the iPhone 16 Plus is available at Rs 89,900. Following these, the iPhone 16 Pro comes with a starting price tag of Rs 1,19,900 and the iPhone 16 Pro Max, will cost Rs 1,44,900 in the Indian

market. The 16 series of the iPhone will be the first series to have artificial intelligence as their game changer. With that Apple has introduced the new camera "shutter button" which is the addition of the Action button (previously exclusive to the Pro). The iPhone 16 and its Plus model are powered with Apple's latest A18 chipset, which uses second-generation 3nm technology. The A18 chip comes with a 6-core CPU, featuring 2 performance cores and 4 efficiency cores.
Apple has also cut down the prices of their non-Pro iPhone 15 models by Rs 10,000 in comparison with iPhone 16 with higher storage. The 15 series of the iPhones are short of the advanced features like Apple intelligence AI and the newly launched shutter button.



The iPhone 16 will still be cheaper in the US like before. The new iPhones are priced at \$799 (around Rs 67,000) with a starting price tag, whereas the iPhone 16 Plus is priced at \$899 (around Rs 75,500). The iPhone 16 Pro price starts at \$999 (around Rs 83,870) and the iPhone 16 Pro Max is priced at \$1,199 (around Rs 1 lakh) for iPhone 16 Pro Max for 256GB.
The pre-order for the iPhone 16 series starts on September 13, at 5:30PM in India. The first sale will take place on September 20.
The new iPhone has been launched in four models iPhone 16, iPhone 16 plus, iPhone 16 pro, iPhone 16 pro-max.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese auto major Honda on Wednesday said it has started joint research on AI technologies with IIT Delhi and IIT Bombay with plans to develop driver assistance and automated driving technologies applicable in various regions of the world, including India.
The joint research is aimed to further advance Honda CI (Cooperative Intelligence)--the original Honda AI that enables mutual understanding between machines and people, the company said in a statement.
Honda Cars India Ltd (HCIL), a Honda subsidiary in India, will sign a joint research contract with the two IITs.
"The IITs are a home to a large number of excellent researchers and engineers,

and through the joint research with those institutes, Honda will strive to advance the underlying technologies of CI, with an eye toward the future applications for technologies that reduce traffic collisions and enable automated driving," it said.
With an aim to achieve further advancement of CI, Honda and IITs have set joint research themes such as recognition of the surrounding environment and cultivation of cooperative behaviour, and will conduct research and development while utilising the cutting-edge AI technologies, it added.
Under the partnership, for each research theme, Honda associates and IIT professors will engage with IIT students for planning, designing, developing and testing technologies which work



beyond the confines of the laboratory and thereby proceed with the research and development more flexibly and with a high degree of freedom, Honda said.
"This will enable Honda and IITs to work in a more flexible environment with deeper exchange of academic and industry insights," it added.
In addition, as part of this research, Honda with the help

of IITs is aiming to conduct verification of driving assistance and automated driving technologies in the suburbs of Delhi and in Mumbai. Due to numerous variations in the road systems and a large number of road users, India has a complex traffic environment where situations that occur frequently are difficult for AI to predict.

RAJ KUMAR'S HAT-TRICK HELPS INDIA THRASH MALAYSIA 8-1

PTI ■ HULUNBUIR (CHINA)

Young striker Raj Kumar Pal struck a hat-trick as title-holders India sealed a semifinal spot after thrashing Malaysia 8-1 for their third consecutive win in the Hero Asian Champions Trophy, here on Wednesday.

Apart from Raj Kumar (3rd, 25th and 33rd minute), Arajjeet Singh Hundal (6th and 39th minute), Jugraj Singh (7th minute), skipper Harmanpreet Singh (22nd minute), and Uttam Singh (40th minute) sounded the board for India.

For Malaysia, Akhimullah Anuar (34th minute) managed the solitary strike.

India are currently on top of the standings with nine points from three wins.

The six-team tournament is being played in a round-robin format and the top four will advance to the semifinals on September 16 followed by the final on September 17.

India had earlier defeated hosts China 3-0 in their tournament-opener before getting the better of Japan 5-1.

Paris Olympics bronze-medallists India will next take on Korea on Thursday before finishing their league engagements against arch-rivals Pakistan on Saturday.

ENTER ACT SEMIFINAL



Against Malaysia, the odds were against India going by recent results. The last match between these two sides was the final of the 2023 Asian Champions Trophy where India were trailing 1-3 at half-time. In that game, the Indians came roaring back to eventually register a 4-3 win to claim the title.

The Indian strikers continued their fine form in the tournament and scored five field goals and three penalty corners, converted by Jugraj, Harmanpreet and Uttam.

Against Malaysia, the Indians started on the front foot with relentless attacks in the first quarter. And Raj Kumar didn't take long to

hand India the lead, scoring a solo goal displaying incredible stickwork, thereby making a mockery of the Malaysian back-line.

Three minutes later, Arajjeet doubled India's lead by finding the corner of the Malaysian post. A minute later, Jugraj extended the lead with a perfect penalty corner

conversion with a powerful drag-flick. The team headed into the first quarter with a dominant 3-0 lead.

Down by three goals, Malaysia started on an aggressive note in the second quarter and soon earned a penalty corner but the Indian defence stood tall.

India secured back-to-back penalty corners in the 22nd minute and Harmanpreet, one of world's best drag-flickers, buried the ball into the Malaysian goal with a vintage flick to extend the lead.

Minutes later, Raj Kumar scored his second goal after being set up by Arajjeet and Uttam as India went into half-time with a commanding 5-0 lead.

Three minutes after the change of ends, Raj Kumar scored his first hat-trick at the senior level from a rebound after vice-captain Vivek Sagar Prasad's initial strike was saved by the Malaysian goalkeeper.

Malaysia managed to pull a goal back soon through Anaur. But there was no stopping India as Arajjeet scored a field goal, tapping in Nilkanta Sharma's pass and then a minute later, Uttam scored from a rebound from a penalty corner. In the first match of the day, Pakistan beat Japan 2-1 to improve their chances of reaching the semifinals.



Colombia edges defending champion Argentina 2-1 in South American World Cup qualifiers

AP ■ BOGOTA (COLOMBIA)

James Rodríguez scored from the penalty spot and had an assist to help Colombia edge defending champion Argentina 2-1 on Tuesday in a South American World Cup qualifier.

The Argentina attack missed Lionel Messi, who was sidelined because of injury for the between the teams since the Copa America final.

Yerson Mosquera opened the scoring in the 25th minute but Argentina equalized in the 48th when Nico Gonzalez capitalized on a defensive blunder from the Colombians. Rodríguez' 60th-minute penalty, which was awarded after a video review, secured the win at the Metropolitan Stadium.

"It is a great win against an Argentina team that has won it all," Rodríguez said. "The weather was tough, it was so hot, but we had an excellent match. It is a fair win."

World Cup champion Argentina lifted the Copa America trophy after a 1-0 overtime victory over Colombia in July.

Colombia, which hadn't triumphed over Argentina since 2019, is still unbeaten in South American World Cup qualifying.

Also on Tuesday, Bolivia upset Chile 2-1 at Santiago; Ecuador beat Peru 1-0, and Venezuela drew 0-0 with Uruguay.

Paraguay vs. Brazil were still to

play. Argentina leads the round-robin competition with 18 points after eight matches, two points clear of Colombia. Uruguay is in third position with 15 points, followed by Ecuador with 14.

The top six teams in South American qualifying will get automatic spots at the 2026 World Cup.

Colombia once again had the 33-year-old Rodríguez to thank after he gave a perfect cross for Mosquera to nod in and opening the scoring. That equalized Carlos Valderrama's record of 11 assists in South American World Cup qualifying.

A mistake by Rodríguez allowed Argentina to equalize, with Nico González stealing the ball from him and shooting past goalkeeper Camilo Vargas.

But Rodríguez made amends when he beat Dibu Martínez, a prolific penalty stopper, and equalized Falcao García's mark of 13 goals in World Cup qualifying.

Argentina's strikers Lautaro Martínez and Julián Álvarez failed to offer as much danger as they do when veteran Messi is there to create opportunities for them.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said the heat had an impact on the match.

"The heat is the same for both, but it is evident that there were not good conditions for us to see a spectacle," the coach said.

Modi thanks Sreejesh, supports him as junior hockey coach

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Retired Indian hockey star P R Sreejesh has shared a letter that he received from Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently in which the leader has lauded the former goalkeeper for his service to the game and expressed confidence in his ability to be "impactful" as the new national junior coach.

Sreejesh called time on his illustrious 15-year career after India's bronze-winning Paris Olympic campaign, which was the his and the team's second successive Games medal after the bronze in Tokyo.

Known as 'The Wall' for his impeccable skills in front of the goalpost, Sreejesh was instrumental

in guiding the team through remarkable successes, including two Asian Games gold medals, and two Champions Trophy silver medals.

Following his retirement, Hockey India appointed Sreejesh as the head coach of the junior men's team and he vowed to make India a "powerhouse in hockey".

Confident of Sreejesh's impact as junior team coach, PM Modi wrote: "I am sure your work in the new role will be as impactful and inspirational."

"As you call it a day on your playing career, I wish to convey my heartfelt appreciation for your monumental contributions to Indian hockey," Modi wrote in the letter dated August 16.

Sreejesh thanked Modi for his



support.

"Received this heart-warming letter from @narendramodi Sir on my retirement. Hockey is my life and I'll continue to serve the game and work towards making India a power in hockey, the start of which has been made with the 2020, 2024 Olympic medals. Thank You PM Sir for your faith in me." Sreejesh wrote in X sharing PM Modi's letter.

On Sreejesh's illustrious career, Modi recalled the goalkeeper's heroics in the triumphant Asian Games campaign in 2014. Modi also talked about Sreejesh playing an instrumental role in India's quarterfinal finish in Rio Olympics and the bronze wins in Tokyo and Paris.

"There are countless such memories

that one can recall and one letter would never be sufficient!

The Prime Minister also hailed Sreejesh's humility.

"Various awards, national and international medals that came your way reflect the heights you have achieved. But what has always stood out about you, Sreejesh, is your humility and grace, both on and off the field," Modi wrote.

"I am confident that your passion, dedication and commitment will help nurture the next generation of world-beaters.

"I want to thank you for your tireless dedication, your remarkable career and for being a source of immense pride for India. Thanks for all the lovely memories and all the best for the future," he added.



Australian field hockey player suspended over attempted cocaine purchase at Paris Olympics

AP ■ SYDNEY

Field hockey player Tom Craig has been suspended for 12 months by the sport's Australian governing body for attempting to purchase cocaine at the Paris Olympics.

Craig was arrested but released without charge after trying to purchase the drug in Paris on Aug. 7 during a night out after his Olympic campaign ended.

He faced Australian media in Paris after French prosecutors issued a statement confirming the now 29-year-old Olympian - a silver medalist at Tokyo three years ago - was given a criminal warning and released after spending a night in custody.

"Following an investigation into the arrest involving national men's hockey team athlete Tom Craig at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, Hockey Australia's Integrity Unit has imposed a 12-month suspension," the Hockey Australia statement said Wednesday.

"Six months of this suspension will be served fully, with the remaining six months fully suspended, contingent upon meeting conduct and behavioral requirements."

Hockey Australia said Craig would remain eligible for selection to the 2025 national men's squad which is expected to be announced at the end of this year.

Germany, Australia, Canada and Belgium earn victories in Davis Cup openers

AP ■ VALENCIA (SPAIN)

Germany beat Slovakia 3-0 despite the absence of No. 2-ranked Alexander Zverev, and 2023 runner-up Australia came out on top in its duel with France on Tuesday as the group stage of the Davis Cup Finals kicked off.

Four groups play across four cities this week to qualify for the Final 8 knockout stage to be held in Malaga, Spain, in November. The top two in each four-team group will advance.

Germany and Slovakia were the first teams in action on Tuesday playing in China in Group C, which also includes the United States. The U.S. Plays Chile on Wednesday.

Germany sent out Maximilian Marterer in the first singles match and the 104th-ranked player won 6-4, 7-5 against Lukas Klein. Yannick Hanfmann then saved a match point and rallied from a set down to win 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (3) against Jozef Kovalik in the second singles match.

U.S. Open doubles finalists Tim Pütz and Kevin Krawietz completed the German win by claiming a 7-5, 6-3 against win over Klein and Igor Zelenay. After finishing runner-up the past two years, Australia is



again among the favorites and beat France 2-1 in Group B in the Spanish town of Valencia.

Thanasi Kokkinakis gave Australia a 1-0 lead with a 7-6 (4), 7-6 (3) win over No. 25-ranked Arthur Fils.

Kokkinakis, ranked 78th, fought back from a 4-2 deficit in the second set to record a first top-30 win in the team competition.

"Arthur is a great player, he's going to be leading the French team for a while, so I knew it was a tough challenge," Kokkinakis said. "I just tried to hang in there and I think I played steady on the big moments. There wasn't much in it."

Frenchmen Pierre-Hugues Herbert and Edouard Roger-Vasselin saved a match point then took the second set of the decisive doubles match but ultimately lost to Matthew

Ebden and Max Purcell 7-5, 5-7, 6-3. Purcell and fellow Australian Jordan Thompson won the men's doubles title at the U.S. Open last weekend.

Among the big names competing this week are Carlos Alcaraz of Spain and British player Jack Draper, who made it to the U.S. Open semifinals last week.

Italy beat Australia for the 2023 title. Playing in Group D, Denis Shapovalov converted all four break points to defeat Francisco Cerundolo 7-5, 6-3 and give Canada an early lead.

Felix Auger-Aliassime then beat Sebastian Baez 6-3, 6-3 to clinch Canada's victory. It ended 2-1 after Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni came from behind to beat Shapovalov and Vasek Pospisil 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 in doubles.



Krishna Khaitan All India Junior tourney set to start with qualifiers

PTI ■ PANCHKULA

The 31st edition of the Smt. Krishna Khaitan Memorial All India Badminton Tournament, a premier competition for the country's junior shuttlers, will start here on Thursday with a prize purse of Rs four lakh at stake.

The tournament, which is organised by the Express Shuttle Club Trust in association with the Haryana Badminton Association, will be held at the Tau Devi Lal Multipurpose Indoor Stadium, here.

Sports goods brand Yonex Sunrise has also tied up with the host body for the conduct of the event, taking forward an association that goes back to more than two decades.

The qualifying rounds will be held from September 12 to 15 followed by main draw matches from September 16 to 19. Players born on or before January 1, 2006 are eligible to participate and over 1,000 are expected to enter their names in the competition.

Viveck Goenka, Chairman of The Indian Express group, is the sponsor of the tournament, which he started in 1991 in memory of his mother Krishna Khaitan.

"We are also grateful to Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, President, Badminton Association of India, for sanctioning prize money of Rs 4,00,000/- for this tournament," the organisers stated in a press release.

The event has been a stepping stone for India's shuttlers with

prominent past winners being Olympic medal-winning superstars Saina Nehwal and PV Sindhu.

Kidambi Srikanth, HS Prannoy, Lakshya Sen and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

While London Games bronze-medallist Saina won the event in 2005, Sindhu, who has two Olympic medals to her credit, claimed this title back in 2010.

"We are certain that many more champions will emerge from this edition of the tournament," stated the release from the tournament organisers. Last year's winner in the women's competition was Anmol Kharb, who made quite a splash earlier this year with her gutsy performances in India's gold-winning run at Asian Team Championships in Malaysia.

US concedes late goal in 1-1 draw vs New Zealand; Pochettino hiring announced

AP ■ CINCINNATI

Christian Pulisic stared in frustration after the final whistle and made clear how much work Mauricio Pochettino has ahead.

An 89th-minute defensive mix-up had dropped the United States into a 1-1 tie with New Zealand in a friendly on Tuesday night, a match that kicked off 30 minutes after the U.S. Soccer Federation announced it hired Pochettino to coach the Americans through the 2026 World Cup.

"It's time to turn the page and we really have to pick it up a level," Pulisic said. "Everyone is part of this and it feels pretty low right now, but I know

there's better times ahead."

Mikey Varas led the team for the second game as interim coach following the firing of Gregg Berhalter, let go after the Americans' first-round elimination in the Copa America. The U.S. Was coming off Saturday's 2-1 defeat to Canada, the Americans' first to the Canadians on home soil since 1957.

Pulisic put the U.S. Ahead in the 69th minute, 12 minutes after entering, and with 31 international goals moved past Brian McBride for fifth on the U.S. Career list. But sloppiness by Caleb Wiley and Mark McKenzie led to Ben Waine's 89th-minute goal.

Before a crowd of 15,711 in 26,000-capacity TQL Stadium, the U.S. Stretched its winless streaks to four games overall and four consecutive home games for the first time since a seven-game stretch in 2010-11.

Pochettino arrives in the U.S. On Wednesday and takes over ahead of exhibitions on Oct. 12 against Panama at Austin, Texas, and at Mexico three days later.

"Everybody is excited for this next chapter. He brings tremendous quality," Varas said. "I'm proud that we moved the program forward a little bit. And Mauricio coming, now it's going to be accelerated, and I think really



good things are ahead of us."

Pulisic scored following an 11-pass buildup that included Chris Richards, McKenzie, Aidan Morris, Marlon Fossey, Luca de la Torre, Ricardo Pepi and Folarin Balogun. After Pepi played the ball to him, Pulisic took touches with his left foot and his right, then slid an angled left-foot shot under defender Bill Tuiloma and past goalkeeper Max Crocombe.

New Zealand's goal followed Nando Pijnaker playing a long pass more than half the length of the field. The ball bounced off a foot of Logan Rogerson, and Wiley tried a headed clearance but instead centered the ball in front of McKenzie.

McKenzie swung his left leg in

another attempt to clear, and the ball ricocheted off Waine and over goalkeeper Matt Turner, who was about 8 yards off his line.

Turner, playing his first match in 10 weeks, put hands on hips and slapped them on his side. Pulisic glared when the final whistle blew after almost 10 minutes of stoppage time.

Pepi, among six changes in the U.S. Lineup, appeared to put the U.S. Ahead in the 19th minute off a toe-poke feed from Fossey, a right back who made his national team debut one day after his 26th birthday. But Pepi shoved defender Liberato Cacace just before the shot and Honduran referee Selvin Brown

disallowed the goal after consulting with an assistant.

No MLS players started for the seventh time in eight matches. Just eight of 209 starting positions have been filled in the 19 games the full pool has been available since the 2022 World Cup.

Pulisic anticipates Pochettino to institute change.

"Hopefully a culture that is willing to fight, that is willing to take risks," he said. "There's a lot of things that need to change, just the mentality and the culture of the group. I think we have the quality but I know hopefully that's the first thing that he is going to want to change."

2023 ODI World Cup in India generated economic impact of USD 1.39 billion: ICC

PTI ■ DUBAI

The 2023 ODI World Cup in India created an "economic impact" of USD 1.39 billion with tourism among the biggest beneficiaries, according to a report released by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday. The Economic Impact Assessment conducted by Nielsen for the ICC, claimed that the mega-event held in October-November last year was the biggest ever ODI World Cup. "The ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 has demonstrated the significant economic power of cricket, generating economic benefit of USD 1.39 billion (Rs 11,637 crore) for India," ICC Chief Executive, Geoff Allardice said in a statement. Australia ended India's unbeaten run in the tournament to win the trophy for a record-extending sixth time. "The impact of tourism across the host cities amounted to USD 861.4 million of revenue generation, through accommodation, travel, transportation and food and beverage because of a massive influx of domestic and foreign tourists attending the matches," read an ICC statement. "The secondary and incremental spends within the economy was a key driver, generating USD 515.7 million, which was approximately 37 per cent of the total impact." However, the ICC did not specify



whether the massive figure cited in the report is actual revenue. A record-breaking 1.25 million spectators attended the mega event, of which nearly 75 per cent were attending an ICC 50-over match for the first time ever, the report claimed. "Nearly 55 per cent of the international respondents had previously visited India regularly, whilst an injection of new visitors thanks to the World Cup saw 19% of international attendees making their first ever visit to the country. "International travellers visited multiple tourist destinations during their stay which amounted to an economic impact of USD281.2 million and nearly 68 per cent of international attendees said that they would recommend India as a tourist destination to friends and family in the future further enhancing India's global image," read the statement from the governing body. Over 48,000 full and part time jobs were created by the event through direct involvement in delivering the tournament, as well as other organisations across the hospitality sector, added the report. "The event created thousands of jobs and showcased India as a premier tourist destination, proving that ICC events not only engage fans passionately but also contribute significantly to the economies of our host nations," Allardice said.



Rohit, Kohli, Pant are probably going to be really big ones: Lyon ahead of Border-Gavaskar Trophy

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Veteran Australian spinner Nathan Lyon has identified Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Rishabh Pant as the three "big ones" to watch out for in the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test series. The five-Test series between India and Australia gets underway Down Under from November 22, part of the World Test Championship. Besides the big ones, Lyon has also warned that the visitors have an "amazing line-up", making things massively challenging for the hosts. "Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and Rishabh Pant are probably going to be the three really big ones. But then, you've still got (Yashasvi) Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, (Ravindra) Jadeja, and who else will come out-another five, I'm not sure," he told Star Sports. However, Lyon was confident that if the Australians

delivered as a bowling unit over an extended period, it would be beneficial for them. "But, it's a pretty amazing line-up they've got, so it's going to be a massive challenge. As I said, if we, as a bowling group, are good enough for long periods, hopefully, we can challenge their defence," he added. The Aussies have failed to win the title since their last series victory in 2014-15 at home. The Indians have won the title on four consecutive instances since then, winning twice each at home and away, a record for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Besides, they also became the only Asian team to win a Test series in Australia, and also winning it on multiple occasions. Overall, India is the most successful side when it comes to the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, winning it on 10 instances, along with a retention.

It will be harder to face SG balls: Bangladesh batter Litton on India Tests

PTI ■ DHAKA

He was Bangladesh's batting star during their historic 2-0 away Test series win in Pakistan but Litton Das believes that facing the red "SG Test" in India would present an entirely different and more difficult test for the team. Litton, who scored 56 and 138 in the two Tests, along with skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan and young Shadman Islam will once again form the core of the Bangladesh batting line-up during the Test series starting September 19 in Chennai. In Pakistan, Test matches are played with Kookaburra balls, which is also used at home by Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, New Zealand, South Africa. Stitches of the Kookaburra balls aren't as thick and pronounced as the Indian manufactured "SG Test", which can aid reverse swing. "The ball will be a different



one in India," Litton was quoted as saying by ESPN Cricinfo. "It is a little harder to play against the SG ball. The Kookaburra ball is easier to play when it gets old. It is the opposite with the SG ball. It is harder to get away against the old ball when it's the SG." The right-handed keeper-batter's 138 after Bangladesh were reduced to 26 for 6 in the

second Test is considered as one of the finest knocks under pressure but Litton doesn't want to rest on past laurels. "We played good cricket against Pakistan but it is already in the past," Litton said. "It is important for us to look forward. We will need your (media's) help. It would be helpful if you don't talk about

the Pakistan series. As a player, it is already in the past for me," he said. For Litton, Bangladesh's improvement in traditional format has been gradual and inspiring. "It is inspiring that people will know you if you do well," he said. "There's nothing better than that. I don't think it is pressure. We are improving in

important these days. I think I bat in the same way that most batters approach the game." Batting with lower-order is another expertise that he has acquired in recent years. "I usually get to bat with (Mehidy) Hasan. Sometimes I bat with Shakib bhai (Shakib Al Hasan) or Mushfiq bhai (Mushfiqur Rahim). If I don't play my shots, the team score won't go anywhere. I want to play like this. I try to play the way I bat in training," he said.

Punjab FC announce squad for 2024-25 Indian Super League season

PTI ■ MOHALI

Punjab FC, the only representative from north India in the top-tier Indian Super League, on Wednesday announced their 26-member squad for the upcoming season. The team's home, away and third kits were also unveiled at an event here. The Shers will start their ISL campaign against Kerala Blasters on September 15 in Kochi and will play their first home game on September 20 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi. Head coach Panagiotis Dilmeris has picked a squad that has a bal-



ance of youth and experience. Luka Majcen, Mushaga Bakenga, Ezequiel Vidal, Ivan Novoselec, Asmir Suljic and Filip Mrzljak are the foreign signings of the squad. The new Indian signings include Vinit Rai, Ninthoingamba Meetei, Muheet Shabir, Nihal Sudeesh (on loan)

and Likmabam Rakesh Singh (on loan). Mohammed Suhail F. And Shami Singamayum from the academy have been promoted to the senior side, joining Tekham Abhishek Singh, Manglenhang Kipgen and Ayush Deswal. Dilmeris said, "We have

named a squad that can challenge for the top spots in the league this season. The foreign signings have plenty of experience and we have an exciting pool of Indian players. "We have also maintained the core of our Indian players from last season. Our pre-season has been good, and we hope we start our season well and perform to our best capacity." Dilmeris will have Konstantinos Katsaras and Sankaral Chakraborty as his deputies along with Papaioannou Ioannis as the strength and conditioning coach and Manish Timsina as the goalkeeping coach.

Duleep Trophy: Focus on Rinku, Iyer, Washington in round two

PTI ■ ANANTAPUR

Fringe players like Rinku Singh along with some seasoned names who have been ignored by the national selectors will be aiming to attract their attention when round two of Duleep Trophy begins here on Thursday. The star power in the season-opening red-ball event will be reduced significantly for round two with India squad players released for a national camp ahead of the first Test against Bangladesh in Chennai from September 19. Sarfaraz Khan is the lone India squad member who will be featuring in the domestic competition. In the absence of national regulars, the focus will shift on the likes of Rinku, who was surprisingly not picked for the first round despite having an impressive first-class record. The spirited southpaw has also done well for India in T20 cricket. Shubman Gill joining the national team has led to Mayank Agarwal captaining the India A unit. Having played his last Test in March 2022, Agarwal needs a bagful of runs to get



back into national reckoning. Pacer Prasad Krishna, who missed the Duleep Trophy opener having not fully completed his rehab for a left quadriceps tendon, has been named in the India A squad. With the Australia tour on the horizon, the performance of the lanky pacer will be keenly observed. In the India B squad, captain

Abhimanyu Easwaran will need to lead from the front following a forgettable outing in Bengaluru last week. Sarfaraz, who made a successful Test debut against England earlier this year, was upstaged by his brother Musheer in the opening game, the latter's 181 taking India B to a fine win over India A. The elder brother will be eyeing a big

knock before joining the national team in Chennai. Washington Sundar also features in the India B squad and his all-round abilities keep him in the mix for all formats. Pacer Mukesh Kumar, who was pipped by Akash Deep for the first Test, will have a point to prove. India C openers Sai Sudharsan and Ruturaj Gaikwad will be looking to pile on the runs to make a case for the reserve opener's role in the India setup. Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar will be aiming to build on his match-winning performance against India D. Rajat Patidar, dropped from the Indian team following a disastrous debut series against England, will need to show the hunger for red-ball runs. Shreyas Iyer, captain of India D, is another player who has been sidelined from the Test squad and only a mountain of runs can bring him back into the national reckoning. The same goes for Devdutt Padikkal and Sanju Samson, who was a notable name missing from India D's playing eleven against India C. Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh too needs to do a lot more to enhance his red-ball credentials.

NOTICE

I Pratap Sundaray, age about 35 years, S/o- Maguni Sundaray, vill- Bandhamunda, PO- Bhatapada, PS- Gadisagada, Dist- Puri, Odisha stated that I have missing the two numbers of land sale deed bearing No-936 on dt-19.06.1985 and another no-1947 dt.10.08.1976, which was bring from Kamadev Baiarsingh and Rabi Baiarsingh of Bandhamunda village matched property in my favour. That property is mauza Bedhatandula, khata no-03, plot no-1489.aria-Ao-22 Dec. which was recorded in my name under khata no-133/26, plot no-489/678 Ao-12dec. and plot no-489/688 Ao-10 dec. (gharabari). Now I am going to be mortgage with JSFB for availing loan against the said property. The JSFB have principle agree to approve to advance loan in my favour. If any individual Bank.FI are in interest involve with it inform the JSFB/advocate within 7 days from the date of publication of notice/advertisement relating to the above property.

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MM-152

OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER CUM WILDLIFE WARDEN
ROURKELA FOREST DIVISION, ROURKELA, SUNDARGARH, ODISHA
Phone No. 0661-2664637, Fax No. 0661-2664638, e-mail: dfo@roukela.odg.gov.in

Order No. / Dtd. _____

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

E-Procurement Bid Identification No. RKL -P.E & C.C./2024-25 Dtd.

- Name of work : CONSTRUCTION OF RESIDENTIAL QUARTER, FOR FOREST GUARD AT SECTOR 19, STEEL TOWNSHIP, FOREST RANGE PANFOSH, ROURKELA FOREST DIVISION, DISTRICT SUNDARGARH
- No. of works : 01 Nos.
- No. of covers : Single Cover
- Estimated Cost : **Rs. 16,53,414.00**
- Period of Completion : 03 Calendar Months
- Date & Time of availability of bid : From 03:00 P.M. of date 12.09.2024 to 05:00 P.M. of date 21.09.2024
- Last date/ time for receipt of bids in the portal : Up to 05:00 P.M. of dated 21.09.2024
- Date of opening of bid documents : At 11:00 A.M. of date 23.09.2024
- Class of Contractor : "D" & "C" Class Contractor
- Name and address of officer : Divisional Forest Officer, Rourkela Forest Division.

Further, details can be seen from the e-Procurement portal www.tenderodisha.gov.in. The Addendum / Corrigendum if any will be hosted in the website only.

Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer,
Rourkela Forest Division.

OIPR-08044/110008/2425

HDB Financial Services Limited
HDB FINANCIAL SERVICES

Ground Floor, Zenith House, Keshavnagar Khadye Marg, Mahalaxmi, Mumbai - 400034
Tel No: +91 22 49116300

FINAL AUCTION CUM SALE NOTICE FOR GOLD ORNAMENTS

The borrower(s) (whose details are provided in the table herein below), in particular, and the public, in general, are hereby informed that the below mentioned accounts are overdue, and the borrowers/account holders have not responded/complied with the communication, and notice sent by HDB Financial Services Limited (the "Company") requesting the borrower to clear his/her/their dues as per the documents, collectively "loan agreement") and therefore defaulted in terms thereof. The Company has in exercise of its rights as a pledgee, decided to enforce the pledge and therefore hold a public auction of the gold ornaments pledged to the company as security for the loan for the purpose of selling the same and realizing/recovering the dues owned by the borrower(s) to the company. The auction will be conducted on/after 17-09-2024 at the below mentioned local branch of HDB Financial Services Limited from 11.00 am onwards on the date and branches mentioned in the below table:-

Loan No	Customer Name	Date Of Loan	Overdue Amount	Branch Name
34313972	Dhruva Moharana	11-05-2023	19280	Bhubaneswar-Samantarapur
48097166	Som Sekhar Rath	19-04-2024	8450	Bhubaneswar-Samantarapur
45106027	Debabrata Bhuyan	28-02-2024	8412	Bhubaneswar
44954150	Biswajit Nayak	22-02-2024	47864	Cuttack
44392617	Manas Kumar Rout	30-01-2024	46524	Cuttack
44574853	Susanta Kumar Mohapatra	07-02-2024	4453	Jajpur-Road
46192856	Diby Ranjan Chakra	15-03-2024	6202	Jajpur-Road
46041127	Diby Ranjan Chakra	13-03-2024	10658	Jajpur-Road
47971804	Tarun Kanta Sethy	17-04-2024	7107	Jajpur-Road

The auction shall be conducted on an "AS IS WHERE" and "AS IS WHAT IT" basis and the Company is not making and shall not make any representation or warranties as regards the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments. It shall be the sole and absolute responsibility of the potential purchaser to verify, examine and satisfy themselves about the quality, purity, caratage, weight or valuation of the said gold ornaments prior to placing their bid and for such purpose it shall be open to potential purchasers to examine, at their sole cost and expense, and at the address set out herein above, the gold ornaments whether with or without expert advice 45 minutes prior to the time stipulated for the conduct of the auction. All the bid shall be subjected to such minimum reserve price as the company may deem fit to fix in this regards. The auction process and sale (if any) pursuant to such auction shall be subjected to such further terms and condition as the company may at sole discretion deem fit to impose.

If the borrower(s) mentioned above pays the amount due to the Company in terms of the loan agreement in his individual loan account in full before the auction as mentioned above, the pledged ornaments securing the said loan may be withdrawn from the said auction without further notice. Please note that it is the absolute discretionary power of the undersigned authorized officer of the company, either to postpone or to cancel the auction proceeding without prior notice and without assigning any reason therefor and to reject any or all the bids or offer without assigning any reason for the same.

Place : ORISSA
Date : 12-09-2024

Authorised Officer
(HDB Financial Services Ltd)