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KEY REFORMS NEEDED FOR
UNIFIED ELECTORAL SYSTEM

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BRITAIN'S LABOUR PARTY GATHERS
AFTER ROCKY START IN GOVERNMENT

MONEY 10
INDIA, EU TO HAVE NEW
ROUND OF FTA TALKS

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REAL MADRID
COMEBACK WIN
OVER ESPANYOL
12 SPORTS

INDIA LIFTS MAIDEN GOLD AT CHESS OLYMPIAD

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

In the battle of black and white India rose to the crown, the country's men's and women's contingent both have made the country proud by creating history, clinching the gold medal at the Chess Olympiad 2024 on Sunday. This is the triumph of India's first ever gold medal for the nation in the highly regarded chess tournament. India's chess grandmaster D Gukesh beats Vladimir Fedoseev from Slovenia and Arjun Erigaisi, who has also had an outstanding feat in Budapest picked up a win over Serbian Jan Subelj on the final

day of the event. The Indian team for the open category included Gukesh, Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa R, Vidit Gujrathi, Pentala Harikrishna and Srinath Narayanan(Captain). The team who had an unbeaten streak in the tournament with incredible performances against Fabiano Caruana of United States(2.5-1.5) on Saturday day before the final round of the event which gave confirmation of gold medal. India despite having 19 points on the tally(table topper) only China is right after the India in points tally with 17 points which gave the medal confirmation, if somehow



Gukesh D of India, during the final round of the 45th Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, Sunday

AP/PTI

china takes 2 points in the final 11 round both teams going to share the gold medal. 18-year old Gukesh Dommaraju hails from Chennai marks his presence on the world stage after the historic India's maiden gold medal in the 45th Chess Olympiad, along with women's success with Harika Dronavalli, R Vaishali, Divya Deshmukh, Vantika Agarwal and Tania Sachdev is leading against Azerbaijan in the final by 1-0 gave India double joy with another gold medal in their category. Gukesh personify a character who knows how to control his nerves in the tense situation in

the crucial moments which helps him during the tournaments. International Chess Federation Congratulated the team's success on platform X. Congratulations to Gukesh D, Praggnanandhaa R, Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi, Pentala Harikrishna and Srinath Narayanan (Captain), anand Mahindra gave his wishes on X Indian Women and Men.. Both WORLD CHAMPIONS An extraordinary feat May this inspire future generations of Indians to always keep the crown in the place where Chess Began. Welcome home, Chess. Swagatam.

The legendary Viswanathan Anand, held the FIDE(The International Chess Federation)title from 2000 to 2002, and the unified title from 2007 to 2013. Gukesh D (challenger) and Ding will face each other again in the FIDE World Championship Match 2024, which is going to happen between November 20 and December 15 this year in Singapore. This victorious moment has opened the doors for young minds for increased participation all across the nation and will work as the baton for the future generation.

Kejriwal returns, attacks PM, RSS



AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal addresses as Delhi CM Atishi party leader Manish Sisodia and others at Janta Ki Adalat at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, Sunday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Days after stepping down from his chief ministerial post, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying that he had entered politics to change it and he resigned because he was hurt by the corruption allegations levelled against him by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) to intimidate or lure leaders. In his first 'Janta ki Adalat' public meeting at Jantar Mantar following his resignation as Delhi chief minister, Kejriwal adopted a new political strategy to counter PM Modi, poising

five questions to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat, including if the BJP's rule on age of retirement also applied to Modi as it did for LK Advani. He asked whether the rule under which several BJP veteran leaders such as Lal Krishna Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi retired from active politics when they turned 75, would apply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is turning 75 in September 2025. He questioned Bhagwat if he agreed with the BJP's politics of calling politicians "corrupt" and then inducting them into its fold. He demanded answers from the RSS for Prime Minister Modi's actions, in an apparent bid to diminish his

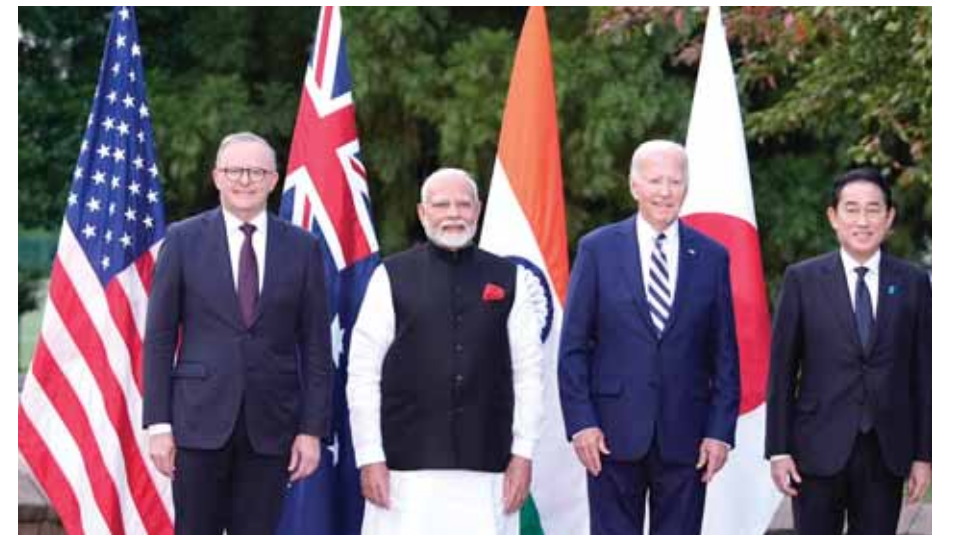
stature by implying that the parent Hindutva organisation was the master which should keep its child in control. "Has the son become so big now that it is showing attitude to his mother?" Kejriwal said at a rally where he demanded five answers from the RSS chief. The questions he asked were political softballs but the implication of bringing Bhagwat into his new political narrative is new and unusual. Kejriwal desired to know if the RSS agreed with the BJP's politics of using central agencies to break up parties and topple opposition governments, and inducting "corrupt" leaders into its fold. While Kejriwal was addressing the gathering, the

BJP held a protest against him and AAP on issues of corruption at Connaught Place, barely a kilometre away from Jantar Mantar. The BJP held another protest against Kejriwal at Rajghat on the same issue. Jantar Mantar, on the other hand, was awash with AAP's signature blue and yellow colours as hundreds of supporters filled the site with banners that declared Kejriwal as "one of us", affirming their unwavering belief in his innocence. As Kejriwal took the stage, the site echoed with slogans of "Na rukega, na jhukega..." while some AAP supporters held up posters bearing messages such as "Hamare Kejriwal imaan dar hai". "I resigned because I did not come to do corruption or to earn money. I came to change the politics of the country..." Kejriwal said. The AAP convener said whether it was ethical for Modi to topple governments across the country by using investigating agencies like CBI and ED. He said he would leave the CM's bungalow in a few days. "I will leave my house soon and give up all the facilities. When I leave the CM house, I won't even have a place to live. I'm getting a lot of calls from people saying, 'Come to my house, live at my house for free,'" said Kejriwal at the Janta Adalat. Several AAP leaders attended the party event at Jantar Mantar. AAP leader Manish Sisodia, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi also joined the event named the 'Janta Ki Adalat'.

US, India agree on theatre of war

PTI ■ WILMINGTON (US)

US President Joe Biden commended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Ukraine last month and his message of peace, as the two leaders held wide-ranging talks that figured pressing global challenges including the situation in the war-ravaged country. The US President hosted Modi at his personal home in Wilmington, Delaware on Saturday afternoon hours after the prime minister arrived in the US on a three-day visit. Modi's bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden in Wilmington was an emotional one, marking their final meeting in an official capacity as the American leader is not seeking reelection. The US President hosted Modi at his personal residence in Wilmington, Delaware on Saturday and the two leaders held wide-ranging talks covering various key aspects of India-US ties. At a media briefing, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, while answering a question on defusing the Ukraine crisis, said "very important" conversations are underway with multiple people on all sides of the conflict. In the talks, Biden conveyed to the Indian prime minister that the US supports initiatives to reform global institutions to reflect India's important voice, including permanent membership for New Delhi in a reformed UN Security Council, according to a joint fact-sheet on the meeting. Though the Modi-Biden talks primarily focused on bilateral ties, the two leaders also touched upon key global challenges including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the situation in the Indo-Pacific that has witnessed increasing Chinese muscle-flexing.



President Joe Biden, joined by Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stand for a group photo before speaking about a Quadrilateral Cancer Moonshot initiative on the sidelines of the Quad leaders summit at Archmere Academy in Claymont, Del., Saturday

AP/PTI

The fact-sheet said President Biden expressed his "immense appreciation" for India's leading role on the world stage, particularly Modi's leadership in the G-20 and in the Global South and his commitment to strengthen the Quad to ensure a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. It said India is at the forefront of efforts to seek solutions to the most pressing challenges, from supporting the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic to addressing the devastating consequences of conflicts around the world. "President Biden commended Prime Minister Modi for his historic visits to Poland and Ukraine, the first by an Indian prime minister in decades, and for his message of peace and ongoing humanitarian support for Ukraine, including its energy sector, and on the importance of international law, including the UN charter," it said. It is understood that Modi briefed Biden on his visits to Moscow in July and to Kyiv last month.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, when asked at a media briefing on the extent of discussion on the Russia-Ukraine conflict between the two leaders and whether the Indian side mentioned any kind of peace proposal, only said New Delhi is involved in a set of negotiations. In their meeting, Modi and Biden reaffirmed their support for the freedom of navigation and the protection of commerce, including critical maritime routes in the Middle East where India will assume co-lead in 2025 of the Combined Task Force 150 to work with Combined Maritime Forces to secure sea lanes in the Arabian Sea, the document said. The leaders voiced their view that a closer US-India partnership is vital to the success of efforts to build a cleaner, inclusive, more secure, and more prosperous future for the planet, it added. Modi and Biden also deliberated on ways to further bolster India-US cooperation

in areas of semiconductors, clean energy and defence. In his meeting with Quad leaders both in multilateral and bilateral settings, Modi put forward India's views and commitments for global growth, development, peace and security. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri made these remarks at a special briefing in New York on Sunday. Modi on Saturday had three separate bilateral meetings with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and US President Joe Biden along with the Quad Leadership Summit in Wilmington, Delaware. Prime Minister Modi reached New York on Sunday after wrapping up the Quad Leaders' meeting in Wilmington, hosted by President Biden. In a rare gesture, Biden hosted Modi for a bilateral meeting in his home, and the Quad summit was held at the Archmere Academy in Wilmington.

Antiquities of yore come back home

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

From standing Lord Buddha in sandstone from North India belonging 15-16th century CE, Lord Vishnu in Bronze from Eastern India belonging to 17-18th century CE, Anthropomorphic figure in copper from North India belonging to 2000-1800 BCE, Lord Krishna in bronze from South India belonging to 17-18th century CE and Lord Kartikeya in granite from South India belonging to 13-14th century CE are some of the stolen antiquities from India which was handed over to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his ensuing visit to the United States. The majority of the antiquities are terracotta artefacts from Eastern India, while others are made of stone, metal, wood and ivory and belong to different parts of the country. These belong to a period of almost 4000 years, from 2000 BCE - 1900 CE and have origins in different parts of India. According to Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) a total of 297 antiquities stolen from India were returned to the Prime Minister on Saturday. With this,



the total number of stolen Indian antiquities recovered from the US since 2016 went up to 578, the maximum antiquities returned by any country to India.

According to MEA, the Aparsa in sandstone from Central India belonging to the 10-11th century CE, Jain Tirthankar in bronze from Central India belonging to the 15-16th century CE, Terracotta vase from Eastern India belonging to the 3-4th century CE, Stone Sculpture from South India belonging to 1st-century BCE-1st century CE, Lord Ganesh in Bronze from South India belonging to 17-18th century CE were handed over. In previous years, PM Modi's trips to the US have also facilitated the return of numerous artifacts. In 2021, 157 antiquities were handed over, including a bronze Nataraja statue from the 12th century. Following the PM's 2023 US visit another 105 antiquities were returned. India has also successfully recovered artifacts from other countries, including 16 from the UK and 40 from Australia. Taking to social media platform Modi said "Deepening cultural connect and strengthening the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural properties. I am extremely grateful to President Biden and the US Government for ensuring the return of 297 invaluable antiquities to India."



Modi gifts antique train model to Joe Biden, pashmina shawl to Jill

PM Narendra Modi gifted an antique silver hand-engraved train model which is a stunning tribute to the steam locomotive era, to President Biden and a pashmina shawl to First Lady Jill Biden on the third day of his US visit for the Quad summit. This silver hand-engraved train model - a rare and extraordinary piece,

masterfully crafted by artisans from Maharashtra - is made of 92.5% silver and the model has been customised by inscribing "Delhi-Delaware" on the sides of the main carriage and "Indian Railways" on the sides of the engine in English and Hindi based on the standard format used on passenger trains in India, officials said.

MEA said that the artefacts were returned "in keeping with close bilateral ties and to foster greater cultural understanding". The statement said the pieces will be "shortly repatriated to India." It added that a select few pieces were showcased to Modi and Biden during their bilateral meeting in Wilmington, Delaware. The US State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Archaeological Survey of India, under the Ministry of Culture, Union Government, signed a Cultural Property Agreement in July 2024 to strengthen cultural ties. The agreement aims to fulfil the commitments made by President Biden and Prime Minister Modi to enhance cooperation in protecting cultural heritage, as stated in the Joint Statement issued after their meeting in June 2023, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

Govt official loses ₹87.7L to women fraudsters

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Seven women fraudsters duped a retired government official in the Gomti Nagar Extension of over Rs 87.7 lakh under the guise of investment schemes, police said on Sunday. When the victim requested the return of his investment along with profits, the accused turned off their mobile phones. The victim, Ram Achal, a retiree from Kharagpur in Gomti Nagar Extension, told the police that he formed online friendships in 2020 with Naintara from Prayagraj, Sunita Singh from Aliganj (Lucknow), Geeta Singh from Kanpur, Rashmi from Madhya Pradesh, Vinita Mishra from Varanasi, Akanksha from Kanpur, and Pratima from Madhya Pradesh. The women deceived him by claiming they had various investment schemes that promised substantial returns. Falling into their trap, Ram Achal transferred Rs 87.7 lakh to the accused through RTGS/NEFT on different dates. Recently, he sought updates on his investment and profits, but the accused evaded him, making him run around for days. When he pressed for his

money, they switched off their phones. Frustrated, the victim filed a written complaint against the women. The police have registered a case based on his allegations and initiated an investigation. Meanwhile, cyber bullies blackmailed a woman advocate, a resident of Bhoonath locality under Ghazipur police station, by editing and circulating her photos and videos. The victim has filed a complaint with the police. The advocate explained that her sister was using a SIM card issued in her name, which was stolen along with her sister's mobile phone. After getting the SIM card re-issued, the victim started using it again. The accused then gained access to her social media profile. On September 4, the victim discovered that edited photos and videos had been taken from her Instagram account and uploaded to another profile, accompanied by obscene comments. This act impacted her dignity and caused her mental distress. Additionally, the perpetrator blackmailed her. The victim said she believes that the individual who stole her sister's mobile and the one who disseminated

her edited content are the same person. The Ghazipur police have registered a case based on her complaint and are currently investigating the matter. Meanwhile, a cyber criminal duped a man of Rs 2 lakh by posing as his uncle in the PGI police station area on Sunday. The fraudster sent an emotional message claiming he was in trouble and needed money to be bailed out. According to reports, the victim, Saddam Khan from Telibagh, received a message via an app on September 18. The sender, pretending to be his uncle, claimed he had been arrested due to issues with his visa and requested help to update it, assuring Saddam he would repay the money once released. Believing his uncle was in distress, Saddam fell for the scam and transferred Rs 2 lakh to the number provided by the caller. However, as he demanded more money, Saddam realised he had been taken for a ride. Saddam reported the incident to the cyber cell and filed a complaint with the PGI Kotwali police. The police have registered a case and started investigations.

Trader found dead in hotel was killed by his female friend: Police

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Trader Santosh Kumar Gautam was allegedly murdered by his female friend after he pressured her to bring her daughter to fulfill his desires. The accused reportedly confessed to the crime during police interrogation on Sunday. Santosh was found dead in a hotel room in the Krishna Nagar police station area. According to reports, the woman claimed they had a verbal argument during their stay. "She was upset about being forced to bring her daughter and felt accused of disloyalty, despite her social stigma concerns. When he fell asleep under the influence of alcohol, she strangled him before leaving the scene under the pretext of bringing breakfast," the police stated. The accused's husband was acquainted with Santosh and had prevented her from meeting him. The autopsy report is currently awaited. Santosh had checked into the hotel with the accused, and he was found dead under myster-

ious circumstances on Saturday. His wife suspected that he had been strangled. After the woman's name surfaced, the police launched a manhunt and arrested her late in the night. Following a thorough interrogation, she confessed to the murder. The victim's wife, Krishna, filed a complaint against the accused and several unidentified individuals. She alleged that her husband had been in a relationship with the woman for five years. "The woman and her husband trapped my husband, established an illegal relationship, and blackmailed him, threatening to file a complaint at the Para police station and extorting money," she claimed. Krishna stated that her husband left work around noon on Friday and reached the hotel in Vijay Nagar with the accused at around 1:45 pm, where they consumed alcohol and food. "After becoming intoxicated, she strangled him," she alleged. The police are investigating the case and have seized the DVR from the hotel's CCTV cameras.

Another man 'digitally arrested', defrauded

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another case of "digital arrest", a 58-year-old man was duped of Rs 19 lakh under the pretense that his name was involved in a money laundering case. The victim, Mukul Sonkar from Vipul Khand in Gomti Nagar, received a WhatsApp call on September 17 from an unknown number. The caller, who identified himself as Inspector Pradeep Sawant from the RBI in Mumbai, claimed that a money laundering case had been registered against Mukul and that his bank accounts needed to be investigated. After obtaining Mukul's Aadhaar number and account details, the caller insisted that he transfer all his funds to specific accounts for the investigation. The victim was assured that his money would be refunded after the investigation was completed and was advised not to contact anyone until then. The scammer and his associates maintained constant

communication with Mukul through WhatsApp video calls and messages, claiming that he was under surveillance. Feeling coerced, Mukul transferred Rs 9.3 lakh to one account and Rs 10 lakh to another. Despite his compliance, Mukul has not received any refund, and the fraudsters continue to demand more money. He has also filed a complaint with the cyber cell. The police have registered a case and started investigations. Recently, the Uttar Pradesh STF arrested 16 individuals, including tech experts and professional cyber criminals, as well as a woman believed to be the leader of the gang, in connection with a separate case involving the defrauding of a woman associate professor from SGPAMS.

Ajit Kumar, a resident of Sector 6, Vikas Nagar, stated that on September 22, he was at the doctor's house in Mahanagar when he heard a loud noise near the boundary wall around 10:15 am. Upon investigation, he saw a boy, approximately 16-17 years old, sitting in the driver's seat of a black car (UP32 MU6663) that had crashed into the boundary wall of the doctor's house. When Kumar inquired about the incident, two men, claiming to be bodyguards of a politician, exited the car, took him to the back, and allegedly kicked and punched him. They allegedly threatened him before fleeing the scene. Kumar tried to report the incident to police by dialling 112 but was unable to connect. He then informed the doctor, who sent someone from his clinic to notify the police. A sub-inspector and constable arrived at the scene, inspected the area. Kumar gave a written complaint and reported sustaining injuries.

DOC'S DRIVE THRASHED

The driver of a paediatrician in Lucknow was allegedly assaulted by two men claiming to be security guards of a politician in Mahanagar on Sunday morning.

Woman injured as she confronts purse-snatchers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A woman confronted three purse-snatchers on a bike in Gomti Nagar on September 20, although the incident came to light only on Sunday. During the struggle, the victim sustained injuries to her neck, hands, and other body parts. As she fought back, the attackers pushed her, causing her to fall onto the road. Despite her efforts, the assailants fled the scene with her purse. The incident occurred around 9:45 pm when the woman, a resident of Viram Khand, was returning home from Patrakapuram. After getting off an e-rickshaw near Gwari crossing, she was approached by the three men on a bike who attempted to grab her purse. Displaying courage, she confronted them and engaged in a struggle. Taking advantage of her momentary loss of balance, the trio managed to escape with her purse, which contained her mobile phone, Aadhaar card, cash, and other items. The victim borrowed a mobile phone from a passerby to call the police. She later received treatment at the Civil hospital and underwent a medical check-up. Following her complaint, the Gomti Nagar police registered a case on Saturday. A police spokesperson confirmed that the investigation is ongoing and that CCTV footage from the area is being reviewed.

Experts call for increased cardiologist training

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The 14th Midterm Interventional Meeting, organised by the Uttar Pradesh Chapter of the Cardiological Society of India (CSI), took place in Lucknow on Sunday. The event was led by Prof Naveen Garg from SGPPI, President of UPCS, along with Secretary Prof Bhuwan Chandra Tiwari from RMLIMS and organizing secretary Dr Awadhesh Kr Sharma from LPS IC, Kanpur. Former UPCS presidents Dr Aditya Kapoor and Dr SK Dwivedi, along with Prof Rishi Sethi, shared valuable insights during the meeting. They emphasised the growing need for more cardiologists in the state to meet the demand for advanced infrastructure—a goal actively supported by the government. The conference fostered collaboration and learning, setting a benchmark for future meetings aimed at advancing cardiology in Uttar Pradesh. This one-day conference brought together leading cardiologists and resident doctors from across the state. With over 60 presentations, the event focused on sharing best practices in

interventional cardiology to improve patient outcomes. Discussions ranged from basic angioplasty procedures to more complex interventions, covering various imaging modalities such as Intravascular Ultrasound (IVUS), Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT), and Fractional Flow Reserve (FFR). These topics provided attendees with valuable insights into enhancing diagnostic accuracy and patient care. Dr Naveen Garg highlighted the importance of such conferences as vital platforms for knowledge sharing, noting that both seasoned cardiologists and residents could gain insights to improve their practices. Dr Bhuwan Tiwari expressed satisfaction with the wide participation, particularly the tremendous learning opportunities for resident doctors regarding proper interventional techniques. Attendees applauded Dr. Awadhesh Sharma for his hard work in making the meeting a success. The event was also attended by senior cardiologists, including Prof PK Goel, Prof Nakul Sinha, Prof Ramesh Thakur, Prof MU Rabbani, Prof RK Saran, and Prof Umeshwar Pandey.

Two semi-finished buildings sealed

Lucknow (PNS): The anti-encroachment squad of the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) sealed off two semi-finished multi-storied shopping complexes and demolished four shops located in the Devpur Para scheme on Sunday. LDA Secretary Vivek Srivastava said in a review meeting on Sunday that the anti-encroachment drive was initially scheduled for Saturday but was called off at the last minute due to a high-level meeting. The decision to carry out the raid on Sunday morning was made in secret, surprising many, as it was expected to be a holiday for government offices. The anti-encroachment squad, led by Vadana Pandey, reached the site at 9 am, accompanied by police personnel. Security guards and local construction workers surrendered and allowed the sealing of the commercial complex. However, some locals and guards attempted to stop the squad by offering various excuses. The shops were demolished because they were constructed on public land.



NOTICE

Our Correct Name is Raju Rajak & Meena Devi R/o Adarsh Kushd Ashram, Bargawn, LDA Colony, Kanpur Road Lucknow parents of Upendar Student of FR. AGNEL School, Greater Noida class 10

NOTICE

Our correct name is Makkhan Verma & Pushpa Verma R/o Jyoti Nagar, Atrauli, Lucknow parents of Aditya Verma Student of FR. AGNEL School, Greater Noida class 10

NOTICE

Information general is informed that my name is missing in my husband army record Prem Sundari Devi, while the correct name is Prem Sundari W / O (6799502 A) sephali late-Ram khilawan resident village jihwa Post and Tehsil Maharajganj District Rae Bareilly

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM JITENDRA KUAMR TO JITENDRA KUMAR S/O RAKSHPAL FOR FUTURE PURPOSE. HAZARATPUR, FATEHPUR.

NOTICE

It is informed to all that I am Hari Chandra Yadav, son of late Shambhu, resident of village Bari Kala, Post-Baravan Kala, District Lucknow. My name has been erroneously written as Harishchandra Yadav in the mark sheet of my son Lavish Yadav, where as the name Hari Chandra mentioned in my Aadhar card should be considered as my actual name and should be recorded in all the records.

101-year-old woman takes literacy exam



Lucknow (PNS): A 101-year-old woman participated in a literacy exam held on Sunday under the Ullas Navbharat Literacy Programme, inspiring people across Uttar Pradesh to pursue education. The exam took place from 10 am to 5 pm, with approximately 1,46,900 individuals aged 15 and older participating across all districts of the state. The oldest participant, Zubeda, took the exam in Meerut district. To ensure proper monitoring of the literacy examination, a team from the Government of India was present in Gorakhpur, Mirzapur, and Sitapur districts to inspect the exam centres. At the state level, officials from the Directorate of Literacy and Alternative Education, along with the State Literacy Mission Authority, coordinated the efforts. Bhagwati Singh, Director of Literacy, and Shambhu Bhan Singh, Deputy Director, along with Gaya Prasad, Administrative Officer, and Sultan Singh, Senior Assistant, conducted inspections in Lucknow district, while Dharmendra Singh, Block Education Officer, oversaw the literacy examination centres. The literacy test was conducted smoothly across 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh.

1,500 landmarks of Lucknow, Prayagraj on metaverse soon

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

As part of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision to make Uttar Pradesh the country's most favoured destination for tourism, the Tourism department is compiling 360-degree panoramic data of 1,500 landmarks in Lucknow and Prayagraj on a 3D metaverse platform. This data, combined with georeferenced maps, will be integrated into a system featuring web and mobile apps designed to provide a seamless virtual tour experience. Additionally, a QR code-based audio tour portal will be created, allowing visitors to explore 100 major locations through audio-guided tours. Work on both initiatives is already underway. "A memorable tourism experience is shaped by various key elements along a tourist's journey. With this in mind, the Tourism department is set to develop feature-rich web and mobile applications that integrate 3D metaverse technology and 360-degree panoramic views of significant landmarks," a government spokesperson said. The appointed agency will conduct surveys to collect data from approximately 1,500 sites, gathering panoramic visuals to build a comprehensive database. This will facilitate the creation of a 3D metaverse tour experience accessible via web and mobile apps in both Lucknow and Prayagraj. "A thorough survey process will be completed in these cities to connect various mythological, historical, and

cultural sites, including Lucknow's chikankari hubs, Prayagraj's ghats for Maha Kumbh, temples, and spiritual centres," the spokesperson added. The QR code-enabled audio tour portal will offer audio-guided tours at 100 major locations across the state, including 19 sites in Prayagraj, such as the Public Library, Allahabad Museum, Chandrashekhar Azad Park, and Hanuman Temple. Similarly, audio tours will be available at eight sites in Ayodhya, including Shri Ram Janmabhoomi and Hanumangarhi; eight sites in Varanasi, featuring Kashi Vishwanath Temple; and six sites in Shravasti, such as Angulimala Stupa and Kapilvastu Stupa.

CPI (ML) flays externment order against party leader

Lucknow (PNS): The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) has strongly condemned the district administration's order to extern Arjun Lal, the party's state standing committee member, district secretary and elected district panchayat member of Hargaan in Sitapur. CPI (ML) state secretary Sudhakar Yadav, in a statement issued on Sunday, called the order to extern Arjun Lal an action to silence the democratic voice of the Dalits and the poor and suppress their just struggles. "This has been done at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Yogi Adityanath government. Comrade Arjun Lal had put in all his efforts in

his constituency to ensure the victory of the Samajwadi Party candidate of the INDIA bloc in the Lok Sabha elections. In the concerned Lok Sabha constituency (Dhaurahra), the BJP had lost and the opposition alliance had won. Comrade Arjun, who comes from a Dalit community, has been continuously staging dharnas and demonstrations on public issues from the district headquarters to the Hargaan block level. He has been vocal about getting justice for the deprived, police harassment and against corruption in development works. Using the Goonda Act, which is used against criminals and gangsters, against a popular leader is a misuse and mockery of the law," he said.

Bullet fired during CISF practice session leaves farmer injured: Police

Pilibhit (PTI): A 58-year-old farmer suffered a bullet injury on Sunday allegedly by a shot fired during a Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) practice session near the collectorate premises here, police said. According to the Kotwali police, 30 CISF soldiers from Banbasa of Uttarakhand were practising at the firing range in the Nagar Kotwali area when the incident occurred. Shri Krishna was sitting outside his home near the firing range when he suddenly got shot in his thigh, police said, adding his family members alleged that the bullet came from the direction of the firing range. The seriously injured farmer has been admitted to the Pilibhit Medical College.

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda	Regional Office, Kanpur Metro Region: 118/330, 1st Floor, Gumti No. 5, Kaushalpur, Kanpur - 12
	Branch : Rawatpur Gaon, Kanpur
Possession Notice	
Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice calling upon the borrower & guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.	
The borrower/guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrowers/guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with rule 8 & 9 of the said rules.	
The borrower/guarantor in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the first charge of Bank of Baroda for amount & interest thereon.	
The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.	
Name and Address of Borrower/Guarantor & Description of Mortgage Property & O/S Amount as per Demand Notice/ Demand Notice Date & Possession Notice Date	
Borrower : Shri Avdesh Kumar S/o Shri Ram Krishna, R/o : House No. E-1/440, Block-EWS, Scheme Ratanpur Vistar Part-2, Ratanpur, Near Govinda Chauraha, Kanpur and also at House No. 56/625, LIG, Ratanpur Colony, Panki, Kanpur.	
Demand Notice Date: 15-06-2024 • Date of Constructive Possession: 19-09-2024	
Property : Land and Building Situated Builtover Residential Plot No. House No. E-1/440 Block-EWS, Scheme Ratanpur Vistar Part-2, Ratanpur, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Avdesh Kumar S/o Shri Ram Krishna, Area : 30 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : Plot No. E-1/441, South : Plot No. E-1/439, East : Plot No. E-1/465, West : 6 Mtr. Road	
O/S Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 18,84,991.80 + Intt. + Others Charges	
Total Dues as on Dated 19-09-2024 : Rs. 19,33,952.80 + Intt. + Others Charges	
Date : 19-09-2024	Place : Kanpur
	Authorised Officer

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda	Regional Office, Kanpur Metro Region: 118/330, 1st Floor, Gumti No. 5, Kaushalpur, Kanpur - 12
	Branch : Barra, Kanpur
DEMAND NOTICE	
Here by this is to inform that under named borrower has not repaid principal and interest thereon of the loan. Therefore the loan become NPA on below Dated . A notice under section 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 was issued at last known address, which was returned undelivered. Therefore we again inform to under named borrower/ Guarantor by this public notice to repay the loan amount due including interest and other expenses as mentioned in this notice within 60 days from the date of publication of this notice otherwise bank will take action u/section 13(4) of the SARFAESI Act 2002.	
The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets, that after publication of public auction/inviting quotation/tender/ private treaty your right to redeem the secured assets will not be available.	
Sl. No. Name and Address of Borrower / Guarantor and Security agreement with brief description of securities/N.P.A. Date & Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice	
1.	Borrower : Shri Shishil Raj Massey S/o Shri Cyril Mahboob Macy and Smt. Avantika Massey W/o Shri Shishil Raj Massey, Both R/o : 126/55, I-Block, Govind Nagar, Kanpur Nagar. N.P.A. Date : 28-08-2024 • Demand Notice Date : 09-09-2024 Property : Land and Building over Residential Plot No. 2/109-G, Block EWS, Yojana-Swarna Jayanti Vihar, Distt. Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Shishil Raj Massey S/o Shri Cyril Mahboob Macy, Area : 36.75 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : 6 Mtr. Road, South : School Boundary, East : Plot No. 2/109 H-EWS, West : Plot No. 2/109 F-EWS Branch : Barra, Kanpur Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 2,47,842.83 + Intt. + Others Charges
2.	Borrower : Shri Ashish Mishra S/o Shri Girish Chandra Mishra, Address : L/Comm. 19-20, Awasi Vikas-1, Keshavnagar, Kanpur Nagar & 8/569, Awasi Vikas, Scheme No. 3, Ambedkarpuram, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar and also at 853, Sarai Maswanpur, Panki Road, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar. N.P.A. Date : 08-09-2024 • Demand Notice Date : 09-09-2024 Branch : D.I. Office, Kanpur Property : Plot No. 8/569, Awasi Vikas, Scheme No. 3, Ambedkarpuram, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Ashish Mishra S/o Shri Girish Chandra Mishra, Area : 75.72 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : Plot No. 8/614, South : 9 Mtr. Road, East : Plot No. 8/570, West : Plot No. 8/568 Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 29,52,014.05 + Intt. + Others Charges
3.	Borrower : Shri Manoj Kumar Das S/o Shri Moran Chand Das and Smt. Reena Das W/o Shri Manoj Kumar Das, Both R/o : 3/797/1, Ambedkarpuram, Awasi Vikas-3, Near Kaleswar Temple, Kanpur & Plot No. 31, Block MIG, Scheme No. Nagar Nigam Enclave Awasiya Yojna, Maswanpur, Kanpur Nagar and also at 701, Guttaiya, Gol Chauraha, Kanpur. N.P.A. Date : 01-09-2024 • Demand Notice Date : 07-09-2024 Property : Plot No. 31, Block-MIG, Scheme No. Nagar Nigam Enclave Awasiya Yojna Situated Mohisanpur Alias Maswanpur, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Manoj Kumar Das S/o Shri Moran Chand Das and Smt. Reena Das W/o Shri Manoj Kumar Das. Area : 101.25 Sq. Mtr., Bounded-North : Plot No. 32, South : Plot No. 30, East : Green Area-1, West : 9 Mtr. Road. Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 61,60,422.53 + Intt. + Others Charges
Date : 21-09-2024	Place : Kanpur
	Authorised Officer

Crackdown on organised crime in UP

STF arrested 7,000 notorious criminals during BJP regime

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a decisive crackdown on crime, the Yogi Adityanath government, adhering to its 'zero tolerance policy', has relentlessly targeted notorious criminals and illegal operations across Uttar Pradesh. The state's Special Task Force (UP STF) has taken swift action against drug traffickers, arms smugglers, cyber criminals and the 'nakal mafia'. Over the past seven and a half years, more than 7,000 notorious criminals have been arrested, while 49 have been killed in police encounters, dealing a significant blow to organised crime in the state. Additionally, significant quantities of illegal weapons, narcotics and banned animal skins and bones have been seized. The STF, using its intelligence network, also thwarted more than 559 criminal incidents

before they could occur, further demonstrating its proactive approach. ADG (STF) Amitabh Yash stated that in line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directives, the Special Task Force is conducting a continuous campaign to curb crime and apprehend criminals across the state. "Over the past seven and a half years, the STF has arrested a total of 7,015 notorious and wanted criminals, with 49 criminals being killed during this period. All of them had bounties ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹5 lakh," he said. Additionally, through heightened alertness and vigilance under the zero-tolerance policy, more than 559 criminal incidents were averted before they could occur. These included serious crimes such as kidnapping, robbery and the planned murders of public representatives, prominent individuals and ordinary citizens.

Furthermore, 3,970 organised criminals were also apprehended during this time, the ADG added. On the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the STF has taken action against 926 kingpins and paper solvers from 193 gangs over the past seven and a half years to eliminate examination-related malpractices such as cheating and paper leaks. This has significantly enhanced the credibility of the Yogi government among the youth. Additionally, 379 cybercriminals involved in various cyber crimes have also been apprehended. In a separate campaign targeting illegal arms smuggling, the STF has arrested 189 criminals, recovering 2,080 illegal weapons and 8,229 illegal cartridges from their possession. Furthermore, the STF cracked down on liquor smuggling, arresting 523 smugglers involved in transporting liquor from states such as Punjab and Haryana. A total of 80,579 boxes of liquor, 330,866 litres of rectified spirit, and 7,560 litres of prepared country liquor were seized during these operations.

STF Deputy Superintendent of Police Deepak Singh reported that the agency arrested 1,082 individuals involved in the illegal drug trade and seized a large quantity of narcotics, including 91,147.48 kilograms of ganja, 2,054.651 kilograms of charas, 19,727.1 kilograms of dodapoppy, 723.758 kilograms of smack, 21,521 kilograms of heroin, 181.012 kilograms of opium, 6.1 kilograms of brown sugar, 6,938 kilograms of mephedrone, and 280,899 banned drugs. Vehicles used in the transportation of these substances were also seized, and appropriate legal action was taken.

In addition, the STF arrested 170 criminals from various gangs involved in poaching and smuggling of prohibited wildlife. The recoveries included 341 kilograms of tortoise calipee, two pangolins, one tiger skin, 18 kilograms of tiger bone, two elephant tusks, 8,011 tortoises, 4,922 prohibited birds, one hyena skeleton, 20 grey langurs, one leopard skin, 4.12 kilograms of ambergris, four wild boar teeth, 563.1 kilograms of red sandalwood, 44 ivory items, 25 leopard teeth, 24 leopard nails, 110 jackal horns, 140 Indrajail plants, one tiger skeleton, one python, and one snake. Vehicles, cash and other items used in these illegal activities were also recovered. During this period, the STF carried out a total of 2,670 commendable operations.

Faizabad MP's son booked for assault and abduction

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ajit Prasad, the son of Samajwadi Party MP from Faizabad, Awadhesh Prasad, has been booked for assault, issuing threats and forceful abduction. A case has been registered against him at the Kotwali Nagar police station in the Ayodhya district. The charges include assault, abduction and issuing threats, under sections 140(3), 115(2), 191(3) and 351(3) of the relevant laws. The FIR names three individuals, including Ajit Prasad, and involves 15 unidentified people. The complaint was filed by a person named Ravi Tiwari, a resident of Palia Tiwari of Purakalandar police station area. Tiwari claims that he had mediated in getting the land of Shitla Prasad, a resident of Akwara, registered in the name of Ajit Prasad and Lal Bahadur. During this, Ajit Prasad gave one lakh rupees through a cheque. Ravi alleges that he was standing near SBI near Civil Lines on Saturday when Ajit Prasad came there in a four-

wheeler with his supporter Raju Yadav, a constable and 10 to 15 unknown people and forced him to sit in the car. He alleges that the abductors beat him in the car and then dropped him near the tehsil office. They also took back the one lakh rupee given through cheque, further alleged, adding that the abductors also made a video of this. Meanwhile, reacting to the FIR, Bharatiya Janata Party IT Cell chief Amit Malviya took to social media, stating, "Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad, whom Akhilesh Yadav is currently supporting, has a son, Ajit Prasad, who 'kidnapped' Ravi Tiwari and 'beat him up'. Since the Samajwadi Party won a few seats, incidents of violence and hooliganism have not ceased." Malviya further said, "There is a saying in Uttar Pradesh — wherever the SP flag is raised, goons are present." According to sources, the Samajwadi Party is likely to field Ajit Prasad as its candidate from the Milkipur constituency in the forthcoming assembly bypolls. The

Milkipur assembly seat fell vacant after Awadhesh Prasad was elected to the Lok Sabha from Faizabad. Although the by-election dates have not yet been announced, there is speculation that the Samajwadi Party might field Ajit Prasad from Milkipur and Lalji Verma's daughter from Katehari. Ticket claimants, including Devmani Kanaujia, also approached the SP office on Sunday. Assembly seats where by-elections are going to be held are Katehari in Ambedkar Nagar, Karhal in Mainpuri, Milkipur in Ayodhya, Meerapur in Muzaffarnagar, Ghaziabad, Majhawan in Mirzapur, Sisamaun in Kanpur Nagar, Khair in Aligarh, Phulpur in Prayagraj and Kundarki in Moradabad. Out of these 10 assembly seats which will go for polls, five were won by the Samajwadi Party, three by the Bharatiya Janata Party and one each by Rashtriya Lok Dal and NISHAD Party. RLD and NISHAD Party are partners of National Democratic Alliance.

Govt tightens noose on cyber criminals; crime rate drops

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the past seven and a half years, the Yogi Adityanath government has implemented significant measures to combat cyber crime and protect the hard-earned money of the state's residents. Key initiatives include the establishment of 18 regional cyber crime police stations, digital forensic labs, and cyber help desks in every police station across the state. On Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's directives, the Special Task Force (STF) has taken decisive action against cyber criminals, resulting in the arrest of 379 individuals linked to various cyber crime activities. Notably, the STF apprehended a gang of 16 cyber criminals responsible for defrauding an associate professor of the Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate Institute of

Medical Sciences, Lucknow of approximately Rs 2 crore. These arrests were made in Lucknow and Gautam Buddha Nagar. Notably, the deployment of the UP STF to dismantle major cyber crime networks and gangs is among the key initiatives of the state government. As a result of these efforts, Uttar Pradesh has seen a significant decline in cyber crime cases over the past seven and a half years. Following Chief Minister Yogi's directives, the UP STF has launched an ongoing campaign to apprehend cyber criminals. This initiative has led to the exposure of numerous gangs engaged in fraudulent activities, including creating cloned cheques, operating fake telecalling centres and running bogus insurance schemes. In total, the STF has arrested

379 cyber criminals during this period and recovered a substantial cache of equipment, including computers, laptops, walkie-talkies, mobile phones, SIM cards and cash. The STF dismantled one of the largest online fraud gangs in the state, arresting 105 members and seizing approximately 2,00,000 data points from major companies such as Reliance Future, Exide, Birla Sun Life, Max Life, PNB Met Life, HDFC Agro, Paytm Online Shopping, Shyclus, and Flipkart, which were used to facilitate their fraudulent operations. STF Deputy Superintendent of Police Deepak Singh announced that a comprehensive campaign is underway across Uttar Pradesh to apprehend cyber criminals. Over the past seven and a half years, this initiative has led to the arrest of a significant

number of offenders, with Gautam Buddha Nagar, Lucknow and Ghaziabad being the hotspots for these operations. In Gautam Buddha Nagar alone, 225 major cyber criminals have been apprehended, followed by 116 in Lucknow and nine in Ghaziabad. The campaign has also resulted in the arrests of five cyber fraudsters each from Prayagraj, Agra, and Delhi, as well as one criminal each from Pratapgarh, Jaunpur and Kanpur Nagar. Additionally, four cyber criminals were nabbed in Fatehpur and Gorakhpur, and three others were arrested in Rajasthan. The STF has also uncovered multiple fraud cases linked to a cyber thug from Bihar, who was brought to Uttar Pradesh on transit remand in connection with an online fraud case in Varanasi.

Factory fire toll 6 now

Kanpur (PTI): Six workers were killed and four others suffered severe burn injuries in a massive fire at a mattress factory in the industrial area here, police said on Sunday. Kanpur Dehat Superintendent of Police (SP) BBGTS Murthy said the fire broke out at RP Poly Plast Pvt Ltd on Khanpur Khadanj Road in Rania on Saturday due to a short circuit, causing a gas cylinder to explode in the factory and the roof to collapse. Factory director Shishir Garg informed the fire station following which fire tenders were deployed. He said fire fighters recovered the charred bodies of three teenage workers, which are yet to be identified, while three others identified as Amit (19), Ajit (16) and Vishal (20) died at hospital. Three labourers identified as Manoj (18), Priyanshu (19) and Luv-Kush (19) are still reported missing. Those injured were identified as Rohit (22), Shivam (19), Ravi (24), Vishal (20) and Surendra (22), of Kanpur Dehat, the officer said.

Shankaracharya refrains from paying obeisance at 'partially-built' Ram temple

PTI ■ AYODHYA

Shankaracharya Swami Avimuktshwaranand Saraswati of Jyotirmath, Uttarakhnad refrained from paying obeisance at the Ram temple here on Sunday, asserting that prayers cannot be offered in a partially-constructed shrine. He said he would offer worship at the Ram temple only when the 'shikhar' (topmost part) of the structure is fully constructed. Asked about not visiting the Ram temple, Saraswati told reporters, "Prayers cannot be offered in a partially-construct-

ed temple. It is incomplete. I will offer worship at the Ram temple only when the shikhar of the temple is fully constructed." He conducted a special prayer service at the Chineswarnath temple and performed the circumambulation of the Ram Janmabhoomi complex along the Ramkot locality in Ayodhya. Saraswati also started a nationwide "Gau Dhwaaj Sthapana Bharat Yatra" from Ayodhya. A congregation was convened by the Shankaracharya here in the presence of seers from Ayodhya.

The convention called for the enshrinement of constitutional provisions and enactment of laws to ensure the inviolable protection of cows. Addressing the gathering at the congregation, Saraswati said, "In our country, the cow is revered as Gau Mata. However, it is unfortunate that the country that worships the cow is also the second-largest exporter of cow meat in the world." He requested the government to ban cow slaughter. "Our yatra will traverse through various regions of the country, with prominent mahants and the masses joining us," he said.

Youth held for raping minor in Maharajganj

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 21-year-old youth was arrested on Sunday for allegedly raping a minor girl after promising to marry her, in Maharajganj district, police said. It is alleged that Ankit Verma and the 17-year-old girl had an affair. The accused had promised to marry the girl and established a physical relation-

ship with her, according to Deputy Superintendent of Police (Sadar) Abha Singh. An FIR in this regard was registered against the accused three months ago at Sinduriya police station of Maharajganj district under relevant sections of the BNS and POCSO Act and he was arrested on Sunday. A detailed investigation is going on in the matter.

3 SUFFOCATE TO DEATH Meanwhile, three people died of suffocation in a well in Banda district on Sunday. The incident took place in Bara village in Bisanda police station area of Baberu tehsil. Reports said that the slippers of Anil Patel, 40) of the same locality fell into a dry well on Sunday afternoon. The family members said that Anil jumped into the well to take

out his slippers. When Anil did not come out for a long time, people around saw Sandeep Verma (19) and Bala Verma, 21), both kin, go inside the well to take him out. However, all three fainted due to suffocation. PC Patel, a relative of Amit, said that there was poisonous gas in that well, because whoever went down suffocated. After a lot of hard work, the

police administration took out all three and sent them to hospital where the doctors pronounced all three dead. Banda district's Additional Superintendent of Police Shivraj, who visited the spot, said, "Prima facie it appears that there must have been poisonous gas in the muddy well, due to which all three died." ADM Rajesh Kumar confirmed the deaths.

Empty gas cylinder found on tracks, train driver applies emergency brakes

PTI ■ KANPUR

An empty gas cylinder was found placed on the tracks by the loco pilot of a goods train, who applied emergency brakes and stopped the train near Prempur railway station in Lucknow on Sunday, the second such incident in the state this month. Police said the incident occurred at 8:10 am when the train was going to Allahabad from Kanpur. "It was



was removed from the track. The matter is being investigated," a statement issued by the local police said. Earlier on September 8, an attempt was made to derail the Kalindi Express, heading towards Bhiwani from Prayagraj, by placing an LPG cylinder on the tracks. The train hit the cylinder before coming to a screeching halt. Due to being hit by the train, the cylinder was thrown away from the tracks.

Congress' structure today as 'dilapidated' as once Babri was: Yogi

PNS ■ JIND/SONIPAT/KARNAL

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, took a jibe at the Congress, saying the grand old party's structure has become as 'dilapidated' as once the Babri (structure) was in Ayodhya. "Today, the structure of the Congress has become dilapidated like once Babri (mosque) structure in Ayodhya... when Lord Ram's devotees had raised the slogan 'ek dhakka aur do, Babri dhanche ko tod do'. "The Babri structure has been demolished forever. The structure of slavery was demolished, paving the way for construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya," he said. As Haryana gears up for assembly elections on October 5, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed rallies at Narwana in Jind, Rai in Sonapat and Assandh in Karnal and asked people to reject caste politics and bring the BJP back to power in Haryana for accelerated development. He took on both the Congress and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), both of which are separately fighting the Haryana polls, saying they are busy in 'parivarvad' (dynastic politics). He also took swipes at Aam Aadmi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. The Mayawati-led BSP is contesting the polls in alliance with the INLD. Yogi said, "The Bharatiya Janata Party's 'lotus' (party election symbol) needs to bloom for the third consecutive term in Haryana on the basis of development works." In the first public rally in support of BJP candidate Krishna Kumar Bedi from Narwana,

Yogi highlighted the completion of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. He said that the 500-year wait was over with the consecration ceremony, while taking a swipe at Congress and INLD for their opposition to the name of Lord Ram. Yogi questioned why, after India gained independence in 1947, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru did not take the opportunity to build the Ram temple, noting that there was little controversy at the time. He blamed parties "wearing the cloak of secularism" for delaying the construction of Ram temple and attempting to undermine India's faith and heritage. He praised the BJP for resolving the long-standing issue and successfully building the temple. Yogi accused Congress and INLD of focusing on family politics, claiming they insulted Lord Ram, Lord Krishna and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. He added that when these parties are in power, they harm Scheduled Castes, undermine security and incite riots. He highlighted that, despite ruling for many years, Congress named development projects after their own ancestors instead of honouring great figures like Maharishi Valmiki, Sant Ravidas and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. He remarked that in Congress, "the child was born later, but airports and stadiums were named after him first." Criticising the INLD, Yogi stated that the party holds no relevance outside Haryana and voting for them is useless. He also took a swipe at the governance of Congress and INLD, claiming rampant corruption during their tenures, including



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an election rally ahead of Haryana Assembly polls in Karnal on Sunday

the misuse of funds from Hindu temples. He said that Congress and INLD leaders were absent during the COVID-19 pandemic, while BJP workers stood by the people alongside the government. The UP chief minister raised concerns about the atrocities faced by Hindus in Bangladesh, emphasising that Hindu temples are being demolished and Hindus, particularly Dalits, are being tortured. He criticised Congress for remaining silent on the issue, accusing it of being more concerned with vote bank politics than the welfare of Hindus. "Congress, INLD and indepen-

dents, who campaign on caste lines, are like 'pots without a bottom', lacking both development vision and sincere intentions for the nation. In contrast, the BJP has always delivered on its promises," Yogi added. In the rally in support of BJP candidate Krishna Gehlawat from the Rai assembly constituency, Yogi, hailed Maharana Pratap's valour, stating that Maharana Pratap fought not for power but for self-respect, his motherland, and his faith. He praised Maharana Pratap's efforts to protect the dignity of Mewar and Chittorgarh while uniting society, stating that nations

bleamed with great leaders like Bhamashah and Maharana Pratap remain strong. He highlighted the upcoming elections as a battle to carry forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat'. He pointed out the transformation of Haryana under a double-engine BJP government and emphasised that when leaders rise above nepotism and work for the country's betterment, they gain the people's trust and blessings. He criticised Congress and INLD for ignoring the interests of the country's common citizens, villagers, youth, farmers

and women. He accused these parties of promoting a divisive agenda, stating that Congress was responsible for imposing Article 370 in Kashmir, while Jan Sangh was the first to oppose it. He commended Prime Minister Modi for fulfilling Syama Prasad Mookerjee's vision by revoking Article 370, arguing that Congress has a history of nurturing terrorism and Naxalism, which the BJP is now working to eradicate. Hitting out at Aam Aadmi Party, Yogi said it was entangled in issues related to jails and bail while in contrast the BJP had improved national security and prosperity. He stated that

Haryana, under the leadership of Manohar Lal Khattar and Nayab Singh Saini, had transitioned from a hub of nepotism and corruption to a centre of development. The UP chief minister honoured the bravery of Haryana's soldiers, stating that a young soldier from the region was recently martyred at the border. He praised the sacrifices made by Haryana's jawans for the nation's security, stating that the entire country salutes their courage. He highlighted a significant shift since the Congress era, claiming that during their rule, incursions by China were commonplace but now an intrusion is met with force. He emphasised that India's armed forces have successfully carried out surgical strikes against terrorist camps in Pakistan, representing a new image of a strong India. Yogi pointed out that discussions in Haryana have shifted from caste-based issues to critical topics like development, employment, security, housing, ration distribution and the initiative of 'one district, one medical college'. In the Assandh assembly constituency, Yogi urged voters to support Yogendra Rana. During the rally, the JJP candidate joined the BJP in front of Yogi. The UP chief minister pointed out that the poor sex ratio in Haryana under Congress rule reflected the suffering of women and girls. He also criticised Congress for obstructing the Nankana Sahib corridor in Pakistan and for preventing Harikirtan during the Prakash Parv of Guru Gobind Singh Maharaj. He highlighted Congress' 'dark history', including the 1984 Sikh riots, and

accused Rahul Gandhi of disrespecting Sikhs while abroad. Yogi emphasised that Congress, which has insulted India and its traditions, cannot be expected to respect people's faith. He added that the public has already reduced Congress to its current weak state, and noted that in times of national crisis, Rahul Gandhi looks to his grandmother rather than the 140 crore citizens of India. He warned the public against the divisive caste politics that Congress and similar parties engage in, saying, "If you divide, you will be destroyed, but if you stay united, no one can harm you." He highlighted that before 2017, riots were frequent in Uttar Pradesh, but under the double-engine government led by Prime Minister Modi, the state has become riot-free in the past seven and a half years. "Rioters now know that their wealth will be confiscated and distributed to the poor," he remarked. Drawing a comparison with Haryana, Yogi noted that just like in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana is working towards development with the motto 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'. He cautioned that if Congress is allowed to return, the situation would worsen, referring to Congress' involvement in the 1984 Sikh riots. "Congress is on its last breath and giving it any support will only create security issues," he said. He urged voters to reject Congress, BSP and INLD, accusing them of being corrupt and following a 'divide and rule' agenda. He called for unity and support for Nayab Singh Saini's government under Prime Minister Modi for a prosperous India.

MLA distributes relief items to flood victims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

As per the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, former UP minister and MLA of Varanasi South assembly constituency Dr Neelkanth Tiwari distributed relief materials to flood victims of Konia area here on Sunday. On the occasion, Dr Tiwari said that the Yogi government stands with the victims in every situation.

"The Yogi government is ready to benefit people of every class as it understands the pain of flood victims. Relief materials will reach every affected family", said the MLA, directing the lekhpal and kanungo concerned to note down the names and deliver the relief kits to the houses of the flood victims. The MLA also inquired about the well-being of the members of the affected families and directed the officers present on the spot that there should be no shortage of any kind in the relief rescue work. "Ensure that clean drinking water is also provided to the families whose homes the relief materials have reached", he instructed the officers concerned. The Yogi government has sent essential items like dal, rice, flour, salt, spices, oil, potato, biscuit, towel, soap, sanitary pad, lai, roasted gram, jaggery, candle, matchstick, tarpaulin etc to each family in the kit. City BJP sec-



MLA Dr Neelkanth Tiwari distributing relief materials to a flood victim at Konia in Varanasi on Sunday.

retary Dilip Sahni, Mandal president Nalin Nayan Mishra, Deepak Maurya, Rohit Jaiswal, Lucky Bhardwaj, Vijay Sonkar etc were prominently present in the material distribution programme. Meanwhile, the water level of Ganga continued to recede for the third consecutive day, giving relief to thousands of residents of flood-affected colonies, especially located on both banks of Varuna river here on Sunday. However, the decline has posed several chal-

lenges related to cleanliness and removal of wastes from the affected areas. The water level was recorded at 69.12 metres at 8 am on Sunday as per the report of Middle Ganga Division-III of Central Water Commission (CWC) against the warning level of 70.262 metres. The Ganga water level was declining by 20 mm per hour in the city while the same trend was also recorded at upstream right from Phaphamau to Mirzapur including Prayagraj. However,

the flood situation in downstream Ballia continued to remain grim as the water level was already above the danger mark though the river continued to recede. The Ganga was flowing in Ballia at 59.34 metres against the danger mark of 57.615 metres in the morning and is expected to come down at 58.94 metres by Monday morning. In downstream Ghazipur the river was recorded receding at 62.58 metres against the red mark of 63.105 metres and expected to decline to 62.24 metres after 24 hours.

On the other hand District Magistrate S Rajalingam inspected Harischandra Ghat and gave necessary instructions to the officers concerned. He reached there along with Nagar Nigam officers after getting information about a house collapse there on Saturday. The DM stressed the need for proper cleanliness of Ganga ghats and surrounding areas. During the inspection, the DM instructed Nagar Nigam officials present on the spot to immediately remove the debris from the spot. He also talked to the local people present. The DM asked Municipal Corporation officials that as the water of the Ganga is now receding, proper cleanliness of the Ganga ghats and surrounding areas should be ensured.

Minister stresses need to strengthen manufacturing & service sectors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A review meeting of various projects going on in the district was held at Circuit House here on Saturday under the chairmanship of UP Minister of Finance and Parliamentary Affairs and minister-in-charge of the district Suresh Kumar Khanna. During the review of the electricity department, the Minister directed the officers to make separate lists of under repair and newly installed transformers so that information about the quality of the transformers after repair can be obtained. He said that information about the approved schemes of all the departments must be given to the public representatives. He asked the officers concerned to ensure that rainwater went to the Amrit Sarovars being built under MNREGA so that it does not get wasted. While reviewing progress of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Khanna said the selection in the housing scheme should be done as per the government norms. "The panchayat secretary must give a certificate in this regard that he/she has selected the right candidate and the first installment should be paid only after cross-checking", he said.



According to Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, in the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin, 38,026 houses have been completed against the total approved number of 38,268 houses, which is 99.37 per cent and in the Mukhya Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin, 4,265 houses have been completed against the approved number of 4,350, which is 97.95 per cent and the remaining houses will be completed soon. Expressing strong displeasure over the wrong electricity bill readings, Khanna asked to correct them with immediate effect. Expressing unhappiness over the cleanliness system, he directed the officers concerned to further improve the cleanliness system. "The salary of the

sanitation worker who does not work should be deducted", he said, directing the officers to ensure that information about all the subsidised schemes of the government is constantly given to the general public so that the needy can get the benefit of these schemes. Khanna kept special focus on three departments to create a one trillion dollar economy, which include agriculture, industry and tourism. For this, he stressed the need to strengthen the manufacturing and service sectors. He asked to ensure maximum employment through all three departments. At the beginning of the meeting, District Magistrate S Rajalingam welcomed the minister-in-charge by giving a bouquet and then the CDO gave information about various schemes being

run in the district through a presentation, in which he presented information about various schemes. MLC Dharmendra Singh expressed displeasure over the Electricity department not solving the problems of the people and demanded making the roads pothole-free, checking of quality of work done at Kalka Dham, reconstruction of reservoirs and arrangements for garlanding the statues of great personalities. MLA Saurabh Srivastava raised the issue of naked electric wires, quality check of the work done by UPPCL at Samne Ghat and appointment of sanitation workers in newly expanded areas. Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya asked to fix the electric wires. Sevapuri MLA representative Aditi Patel also raised many issues. In the meeting, UP Ministers of State (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal and Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu', Mayor Ashok Tiwari, MLA Dr Awadhesh Singh, MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma, Vice-Chairman of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) Pulkit Garg, Municipal Commissioner Akshat Verma, DFO Swati Singh and many other officials of various departments were also present.

'Kashi Anaemia Mukh Abhiyan' proving to be boon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

'Kashi Anaemia Mukh Abhiyan' is proving to be a boon for better health of girls from aged six to 19 years. The campaign was launched by Governor Anandi Ben Patel in September last year. The campaign is being successfully conducted under the direction of District Magistrate S Rajalingam and Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, in which girls are being freed from anaemia. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said an initiative was taken by the CDO to make the adolescent girls of the district free from anaemia. 'Kashi Anaemia Mukh Abhiyan' is a unique initiative which is being successfully operated in Varanasi, which aims to correct the level of anaemia in adolescent girls,

promote healthy and balanced diet in them, consume iron, folic acid, calcium and other medicines and create awareness in the society. The chief medical officer said that nowadays consumption of junk food has become very common among adolescent girls. "Most adolescent girls are facing the problem of anaemia and untimely menstruation. To overcome these problems, it is very important for the girls to consume other micronutrients including iron folic acid (IFA) along with a healthy and balanced diet", he added. Nodal officer of the campaign and ACMO Dr Sanjay Rai said this campaign is being conducted under the 'National Adolescent Health Programme', in which girls from class one to 12 are being screened. If they are found anaemic, they are given neces-

sary treatment and counselling, he said, adding that the campaign is being monitored by the CDO. Dr Rai said in the last financial year 2023-24, a total of 1,444 schools of the block and the city were covered, in which more than 1.64 lakh adolescent girls have been screened as against the targeted 1.91 lakh. In the examination, 96,713 adolescent girls were found normal and 67,542 anaemic. In this, the treatment of 58,752 adolescent girls has been completed and all are healthy. As many as 8,790 adolescent girls are on treatment at present, he said, adding that whereas from April to August this financial year, 520 schools were covered, in which 58,598 adolescent girls were screened. In the examination, 38,373 were found normal, while 20,225 were found anaemic and out of

them more than 10,000 adolescent girls have been cured. The rest are on treatment. Dr Rai said anaemic adolescent girls are being given essential medicines including iron, folic acid, B complex, albendazole, calcium. Under the Weekly Iron Folic Acid (WIFA) programme, girls aged six to 19 years are being given iron tablets weekly. Varanasi's achievement in the WIFA programme is much better than the state's target, he added. **CAMP ORGANISED:** Under the National Tuberculosis Eradication Programme (NTEP), a camp was organised in Ward Number 99 (Kachibagh) by TB Unit of SSPG Divisional Hospital on Saturday under Active Case Finding (ACF) campaign. It was held on the instructions of Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary and District TB Officer Dr Piyush

Rai. The screening of 153 people was done in the camp, in which 42 people with potential tuberculosis (TB) symptoms were found who were given free X-ray examination through CHRI institution and sputum sample was taken. A total of eight people were reported positive in the X-ray examination, for whom necessary action was taken to start treatment under DOTS. People were made aware about TB disease through the camp. District TB Centre Medical Officer Dr Anir Srivastava, senior treatment supervisor Dharmendra Nath Singh, Sanjay Bharti, Sandeep Kaushal, ASHA worker Ranjana, treatment supporter Mohammad Ahmed and Ramesh Srivastava were present in the camp. The camp was supported by NGO CHRI and Apollo Tyre Foundation.

150-yr-old municipal office building undergoing ₹27 crore makeover

Prayagraj (PTI): A 150-year-old Municipal Corporation office building, which also served as the first hotel in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, is undergoing a ₹27 crore makeover. It is scheduled to be completed by December 2024 and will be showcased as a 'heritage site' during the Mahakumbh due in early 2025. However, the facade might have never happened had the original plan to demolish the building been accepted. The demolition plan was initiated after a roof in one of the rooms of the building collapsed in December 2020. But the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) did not accept the plan and suggested to restore the building instead. The IIT Bombay was also consulted on

the restoration project. Suraj VS, a consultant with the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation, told PTI, "The decision to preserve the building came after consultations with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and IIT Bombay. The ASI recommended preserving the building as a heritage site." "The old records revealed that the building originally constructed around 1865 had first served as the 'Great Northern Hotel' — the first Hotel of Prayagraj during the Raj days," he said. Vaibhav Maini, Joint Secretary of INTACH, highlighted the building's historical significance. "American writer Mark Twain stayed at the hotel during his visit to Allahabad in 1896. The building later served as an administrative building

under British rule," he said. Following the recommendations, the building is undergoing a ₹27 crore makeover. The renovation exercise undertaken by Savani Heritage, Mumbai, involves using traditional materials and techniques to restore the building's original character. "Instead of modern cement and sand, the construction team is using a mixture of lime, surkhi, sand, bel, giri, jaggery, urad dal, and fenugreek, which are more durable and sustainable," officials said. Municipal Commissioner Chandra Mohan Garg admitted the building's historical value for Prayagraj and felt that the renovated building would attract visitors whose numbers are expected to grow manifold during the Mahakumbh.

Marathon, cyclothon & walkathon held under 4S drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the 'Swabhaav Swachhata Sanskaar Swachhata' (4S) campaign, BLW Sports Association successfully organised marathon, cyclothon and walkathon for the public awareness in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) under the supervision of Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Subroto Nath. General Manager (GM) SK Srivastava and Chairperson of BLW Women's Welfare Organisation Gauri Shrivastava flagged off the cyclothon at 7 am, marathon at 7.10 am and walkathon at 7.20 am from the Golf Course Ground Gate here on Sunday. The cyclothon and marathon passed through Railway Protection Force Check Post,



Surya Sarovar, Intermediate College crossing, Nathapur, Administration Bhawan, Railway Crossing and BLW Stadium Gate while the route of the walkathon was from RPF Check Post, Kundan trijunction, Railway colonies, Cinema Hall trijunction,

Central Hospital and it ended at BLW Stadium Gate. Principal Chief Materials Manager (PCMM) Rajneesh Gupta, Principal Chief Medical Officer (PCMO) Dr Devesh Kumar, Principal Chief Engineer (PCE) Vinod Kumar Shukla, Principal Chief

Personnel Officer (PCPO) Janardan Singh, Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) Ankur Chandra, Chief Safety Officer SB Patel, Chief Mechanical Engineer (SE) Neeraj Jain, CME (Production) Sunil Kumar, Chief Design Engineer (DDE/Electrical) MK Gupta, Chief Electrical Engineer (CEE/Inspection) Arun Kumar Sharma, CEE (Loco) MK Singh, CME (QMS) Ram Jann Choubey, Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer SK Singh, DCME (Spare) MP Singh, DBM Vijay Kumawat, Senior Sports Officer Bahadur Prasad, Public Relations Officer (PRO) Rajesh Kumar, Joint Secretary of Staff Council Shrikant Yadav and many others participated, along with RPF personnel and Civil Defence volunteers.

Photo exhibition concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The three-day stunning photo exhibition featuring the work of senior photographer Anil Sindoore of the city organised at Motijheel Metro Station concluded on Sunday. This exhibition beautifully showcased the vibrant colours of nature, inviting visitors to explore its diverse forms through captivating imagery. Attendees not only get to



appreciate the beauty of nature but also gain valuable tips for improving their mobile photography skills. Dr Sandeep Srivastava, Member, Raja Lalit Kala Akademi, UP, graced the occasion on Sunday. Kanpur Metro regularly organises cultural activities at its stations in collaboration with various organizations, receiving enthusiastic appreciation from passengers.

Emphasis on providing information about banking products in simple Hindi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Bank of India (BOI) organised Hindi Diwas Samaroh and prize distribution ceremony at its zonal office on Saturday. Under the leadership of zonal manager Ranveer Singh, all the staff members pledged for doing maximum work in Hindi. Greetings of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and MD & CEO of Bank of India Rajneesh Karnatak were also read. Zonal manager Ranveer Singh, while highlighting the importance of Hindi, stressed on providing information about the banking products to customers

in simple Hindi. Dy Zonal Manager Jugal Kishore said Hindi played a pivotal role in cementing the relations between the bank and its customers. On the occasion, various competitions, including Hindi email, silent idiom puzzle, Hindi words puzzle, Hindi alphabet and number-based competition, Hindi essay writing, slogan writing and Antakshari were also organised. Zonal Manager Ranveer Singh and Deputy Zonal Manager Jugal Kishore felicitated the winners with prizes and certificates. Manager (Rajbhasha) Sunita Yadav conducted the proceedings.

SPSEC team displays exceptional skill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR



SPSEC table tennis team with the trophy.

The Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) achieved a remarkable triumph at the CBSE Cluster-IV Table Tennis Tournament organised at Gurukul World School, Farukhabad, and qualified for the national championship. The tournament saw fierce competition from 28 reputed schools. The team of SPSEC displayed exceptional skill and determination, clinching seven gold medals and one bronze medal. Their stellar performance has paved the way for 15 students to compete at the national level in various cate-

gories. Chairperson, Manorama Govind Hari Singhania, Vice-Chairman, Abhishek Singhania, Vice-Chairperson, Varsha Singhania, Vice-Chairman and Director, Partho P Kar and the Principal Bhawna Gupta congratulated the school table tennis team for this commendable achievement and blessed them for their bright future. **CLEANLINESS AWARENESS PROGRAMME:** Under the cleanliness campaign organised by the NSS unit of Christ Church College, a large-scale cleanliness awareness programme was conducted in the college auditorium. The event

commenced with the welcoming of guests. The chief guest was Abhishek Gupta, Councillor, and special guest was Dr Kshama Shukla, Joint Secretary, IMA Kanpur, senior obstetrician and gynaecologist, along with the principal and secretary of the college, Prof Joseph Daniel. In his address, Abhishek Gupta raised awareness among students about cleanliness. Dr Kshama Shukla enlightened the students on the topic of social and personal hygiene. The students performed a street play on the theme of cleanliness, emphasising how society can maintain cleanliness in their surroundings and the country through their act. The programme saw the presence of NSS unit program officer Dr Ankit Jasmine Lal, faculty members, including Dr Nazir Hussain Khan, Dr Ashish Omar, Joshua Lawrence, and Office Assistant Vishal Maurya, among others. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Nazir Hussain Khan. The program was successfully led by NSS heads Aryan Jaiswal and Ayush Kumar Bharti.

Workshop on new criminal laws held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi (PNS): A one-day workshop on 'New Criminal Laws' organised by the Faculty of Law, BHU, in collaboration with the Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies (ICPS) on Saturday commenced with the garlanding of the bust of Pt Madan Mohan Malaviya, followed by the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the dignitaries. Prof CP Upadhyay, Dean, Faculty of Law, BHU presided over the function while Dr Surender Mehra, associate organising secretary presented the theme of the workshop. Dr Seema Singh Kaul, Director ICPS who was the chief guest of the function delivered the keynote address. Dr Naveen Sukumaran, organising secretary of the workshop proposed the vote of thanks. Dr Seema Singh Kaul and Prof CP Upadhyay exchanged the MoU for future collaborations on various research projects, seminars and other academic collaborations benefiting both

institutions. This was followed by three sessions comprising lectures on 'Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita', 'Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita' and 'Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam', led by expert speakers Prof DK Mishra, BN Ranjan, Dr KA Pandey, Prof RK Murali, Prof Asad Malik, Prof Ajendra Srivastava and Ankit Bali. The participants were law students, faculty members and police officers from the Uttar Pradesh government. The major observation made by the speakers was that the new laws have made a lot of restructuring in the criminal justice system. As the legal landscape evolves, knowledge of these reforms is critical for law enforcement, engaging effectively in legal practice, and contributing to much-needed judicial reforms. They also commented that the students and academicians have the liberty and responsibility to analyse, interpret and critically analyse the new criminal laws to ensure their efficiency.

Goldiee Industry Group organises distributors' meet & lucky draw

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The famous Goldiee Industry Group organised a distributors' meet and lucky draw titled 'Chalo Chand Se Haath Milayen' at Bithoor on Saturday. Special Advisor to CM Awanish Kumar Awasthi inaugurated the programme and praised quality products and policies of Goldiee Group. He also wished the group continuous progress and praised the frequent launch of new household products. Director Surendra Gupta welcomed the guests and attributed the group's progress to the cooperation of its distributors, sellers, customers, suppliers and employees. Directors Akash Goenka, Shubham Gupta and Sudeep Goenka also addressed the gathering. Founder Director Som Goenka informed that this lucky draw was organised in context with the 'Chalo Chand Se Haath Milayen' prize



Goldiee Industry Group organised distributors' meet and lucky draw on Saturday.

scheme. He said the group also unveiled its new detergent product 'Double Engine' on Saturday. Chief guest Awanish Awasthi inaugurated the lucky draw by pushing the computer button and announced winners of several prizes, including cars and motorcycles. Founder Chairman and patron Basantlal Goenka, while wishing a bright future for all, stressed on enabling next generation attain new heights. General Manager (Sales) Alok Seth conducted the proceedings. Ramji Agarwal, Anil Arya, Naman Saxena, Kapil

Deo, Kedar Gupta and Abhishek Mishra along with large number of distributors, employees and dignitaries of the city were present on the occasion. **SEMINAR:** The two-day national seminar on "ASEAN Indian: Youth and socio-cultural connectivity" organised at Mahila Mahavidyalaya Kidwai Nagar, concluded on Saturday. The third technical session of the second day was chaired by Professor Prashant Tripathi, former Head of Department of Sociology, VSSD College Kanpur.

TMC alleges no Parliamentary Committees formed after 100 days of 18th Lok Sabha

Warns Parliament being turned into a deep, dark chamber

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

TMC leader Derek O'Brien on Sunday alleged Parliamentary Standing Committees had not been formed despite the 18th Lok Sabha completing 100 days since its constitution and said Parliament was being turned into a "deep, dark chamber". In a social media post, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader in the Rajya Sabha said seven out of 10 Bills were sent to department-related standing committees of Parliament in the 15th Lok Sabha while only two out of 10 Bills were sent to the panels in the last Lok Sabha. "Parliamentary standing committees have not yet been formed. In the 15th Lok Sabha, seven out of 10 Bills were sent to committees for scrutiny. In the last Lok Sabha, only two out of 10



Bills got scrutinised," O'Brien said. "Parliament is being turned into a deep, dark chamber," he added. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijjiu said on September 11 that

department-related standing committees and consultative committees of Parliament would be constituted shortly. According to data compiled by think-tank PRS Legislative Research, 16 per

cent of Bills were referred to standing committees in the 17th Lok Sabha. About 50 per cent of reports on the Bills were presented within 115 days. On an average, standing committees held nine meetings to finalise reports on the Bills. Apart from the Data Protection Bill, only the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021, was discussed for at least 15 meetings. The three Bills to reform the country's criminal laws were examined together over 12 meetings. In the 16th Lok Sabha, 28 per cent of Bills were sent to parliamentary committees while 71 per cent of Bills were sent to the panels in the 15th Lok Sabha. While a majority of the standing committees come under the Lok Sabha Secretariat, some are serviced by the Rajya Sabha.

Environment Ministry approves 111 urban forests in first 100 days of new Government



PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the first 100 days of the Modi 3.0 Government, the Union Environment Ministry has sanctioned 111 urban forests in six states and one Union Territory against the target of 100 urban forests during the period. The initiative is part of the Ministry's revised Nagar Van Yojana in 2020 which was

launched to enhance urban greenery, improve the quality of life, and increase social cohesion in cities. The scheme provides financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh per hectare for the creation and maintenance of urban forests, encouraging the involvement of citizens, students and other stakeholders in managing these green spaces. The size of the urban forests ranges between 10 and 50

hectares. Each urban forest must have at least two-thirds of its area under tree cover and include components such as biodiversity parks, Smriti Vans, butterfly conservatories, and herbal gardens and Matri Vans created under the Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam campaign. Under this mass tree plantation special campaign, it is targeted to plant 80 crore trees this year by September

and 140 crores by next year March end. Provision has been made on MeriLiFE portal for uploading details of plantation done by any individual or institution or organization private or government and tracking plantation efforts. More than 75 crore saplings have been planted by now under this campaign and detailed information has been uploaded on MeriLiFE portal, said the Ministry. The Nagar Van Yojana aims to develop 1,000 urban forests by 2027 with financial support from the National Fund of the National Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority. This initiative will help protect forest land within and around urban centres from degradation and encroachment and also address environmental concerns such as air pollution, urban heat islands, loss of biodiversity, and habitat degradation, said the Ministry.



SC to deliver verdict on watching child porn not POCSO offence

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to deliver on Monday its judgment on a plea challenging a Madras High Court ruling that has said mere downloading and watching child pornography is not an offence under the POCSO Act and the information technology law. A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra is likely to pronounce the verdict. Terming atrocious, the apex court had earlier agreed to hear the plea challenging the high court ruling that has said mere downloading and watching child pornography is not an offence under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Information Technology (IT) Act. On January 11, the Madras High Court quashed the criminal proceedings against a 28-year-old man charged with downloading pornographic content involving children on his mobile phone. The high court had also said that children these days are grappling with the serious issue of watching pornography and instead of punishing them, the society must be "mature enough" to educate them. The Supreme Court had taken note of the submissions made in the matter by senior advocate H S Phoolka, who represented two petitioner organisations, that the high court verdict was contrary to the laws in this regard. The senior lawyer appeared in the court on behalf of NGOs

Just Rights for Children Alliance, based in Faridabad, and the New Delhi-based Bachpan Bachao Andolan. The organisations work for the welfare of children. The high court had quashed the criminal case against S Harish under the POCSO Act, 2012 and IT Act, 2000. In order to constitute an offence under section 67B of the IT Act, an accused must have published, transmitted or created material depicting children in a sexually-explicit act or conduct, it had said. "A careful reading of this provision does not make watching child pornography, per se, an offence under section 67B of the Information Technology Act, 2000," the high court had added. Even though the said section of the IT Act has been widely worded, it does not cover a case where a person has merely downloaded child pornography in an electronic gadget and watched the same, without doing anything more, it had said. Admittedly, two videos involving boys were downloaded and were available on the petitioner's mobile phone, and those were neither published nor transmitted to others and were within the petitioner's private domain, it had said. The Madras High Court had, however, expressed concern over children watching pornography. Viewing pornography can have negative consequences on teenagers down the line, affecting both their psychological and physical well-being, it had said.

Parliamentary Panel examines Waqf Bill amid 1.2 crore email responses

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A parliamentary panel examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill has received a staggering 1.2 crore email responses amid campaigns launched by rival groups to ratchet up support for their respective viewpoints regarding the draft law. Parliamentary sources said the Joint Committee on the Waqf Amendment Bill, chaired by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jagadambika Pal, has also received 75,000 responses with documents to support the respective views, prompting the panel to seek additional staff from the Lok Sabha Secretariat. "We have deployed 15



additional personnel to go through the email responses and categorise and document those," one of the sources said. Radical Islamic preacher Zakir Naik has appealed to his supporters to oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill by sending responses to the parliamentary panel examining the draft law. The appeal from Naik has triggered a counter-reaction

and several Hindu groups too have urged their supporters to write emails to the committee in support of the Bill. Last month, the committee sought written suggestions from the general public, NGOs, experts, stakeholders and institutions on the Bill. In a statement, the committee asked people to send their comments to the joint secretary, Lok Sabha Secretariat, Room No. 440, Parliament House Annex, New Delhi-110001 or mail those to jpcwaqf-lss@sansad.Nic.In. The committee is also embarking on a five-city tour to seek feedback from government officials, legal experts, Waqf Board members and community representatives.

Railway Ministry launches ticket-checking drive around festive season

PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Railway Ministry has decided to launch a special ticket-checking drive around the festive seasons to keep a check on ticketless travellers, including policemen as they are among the top violators, officials said. The Ministry, on September 20, wrote a letter to the General Managers of 17 Zones asking them to start a special drive against ticketless and unauthorised travellers "for the period October 1 to 15 and October 25 to November 10" and take suitable action as per the provisions of the Railway Act of 1989. Railway commercial officers, who are part of the ongoing regular drive in various rail



divisions, say that along with common people, policemen will also be on their radar during the festive rush as they are among the top violators. "In our recent surprise check between Ghaziabad and Kanpur, we found hundreds of policemen travelling in AC coaches of various Express and Mail trains without any ticket. When we imposed a

fine on them, initially they refused to pay and threatened us with dire consequences. We remained undaunted and made them pay. The response of the passengers was very encouraging as they were happy and surprised to see action being taken against police personnel," railway official said.

First tri-services Future Warfare course to be conducted in New Delhi



PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

First of its kind, a tri services "Future Warfare" course is scheduled to be conducted in New Delhi from September 23 - 27 here under the aegis of Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, defence ministry said here on Sunday. A pioneering initiative by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, this will be a rank agnostic course for Major Generals to Majors and their equivalent level officers from other services. The course intends to acquaint the

officers with the operational and technological aspects of modern warfare. The course will focus on key areas related to future warfare to develop an understanding on the manner in which future wars will manifest in terms of being contact, non-contact, kinetic, non-kinetic, psychological or informational as also the domains where they will be fought, be it cyber, space or electromagnetic spectrum. It will also throw light on how emerging and disruptive technologies like Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, robotics and

hypersonics will impact the conduct of warfare. The need for a Future Warfare Course for Tri Services officers arises from the rapidly evolving nature of modern warfare, driven by technological advancements, changing global dynamics, and emerging threats. Officers must be equipped to navigate this complex landscape, leveraging new technologies, and adapting to innovative tactics. The course will foster jointness, and facilitate the development of a cohesive, futuristic, and tech-savvy force, capable of securing national interests in an increasingly uncertain and competitive environment. The course has been curated by Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff with the help of veteran and serving subject matter experts. Subsequent courses will build upon the curriculum of this course and be of longer duration with the larger objective of making the Indian Armed Forces "FUTURE READY".

Indian Navy to host fifth edition of Goa Maritime Symposium



PIIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Navy will host the fifth edition of Goa Maritime Symposium (GMS-24) at Naval War College, Goa for two days starting Monday, navy said here on Sunday. Giving details, officials said conceptualised and instituted by the Indian Navy in 2016, the GMS is a forum for fostering collaborative thinking, cooperation and

mutual understanding between India and key maritime nations of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The theme for the event is "Common Maritime Security Challenges in the Indian Ocean Region - Progressing Lines of Efforts to Mitigate Dynamic Threats such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and other Illegal Maritime Activities". The discussions will dwell on collaborative efforts towards enhancing maritime security in the region. The symposium will see participation of Naval representatives from 12 Indian Ocean Littoral countries - Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Observers from Kenya and Tanzania will also attend the event.



Congress appoints Uday Bhanu Chib as President of Indian Youth Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday appointed Uday Bhanu Chib as the president of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC), replacing Srinivas B V. Chib was currently serving as the general secretary of IYC and is a former president of the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Youth Congress. Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Uday Bhanu Chib as the president of the Indian Youth Congress with immediate effect, a party statement said. The party appreciates the contributions of the outgoing president Srinivas BV, it added. Congress also appointed M K Bhardwaj and Bhanu Mahajan as acting working presidents of its Jammu and Kashmir unit. The appointments come amid the ongoing assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir. The party in August appointed Tariq Hameed Karra as president of its Jammu and Kashmir unit. He had replaced Vikar Rasool Wani. Kharge had also appointed two working presidents for Jammu and Kashmir - Tara Chand and Raman Bhalla. Elections in Jammu and Kashmir are being held in three phases. Voting for 24 seats was held in the first phase on September 18. The next phase of polling for 26 seats will be held on September 25. Voting for the third phase would be held on October 1 while results would be declared on October 8.

Rhino numbers surge in India amidst climate threats: Report

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On World Rhino Day on Sunday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to visit Assam's Kaziranga National Park, home to one-horned rhinos, a government report has flagged climate change threats, including prolonged monsoons and the spread of invasive plant species eating away the native flora essential for rhinos' survival. The report 'Assam's Role in Protecting the Greater One-Horned Rhino' indicated that while the increase in rhino numbers is encouraging, it necessitates the urgent expansion of habitats to ensure their long-term survival and prevent overcrowding.



"With over 70% of its population residing in Assam's Kaziranga, this species stands as a testament to India's commitment to wildlife preservation," it said while enlisting several measures

taken to protect this iconic species whose number stood at 3,262 at the end of 2021. The majestic animal remains classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN. Yet, the greater one-horned

rhino in India has made a remarkable comeback, thanks to India's proactive conservation policies and the dedicated efforts of Assam's authorities. The report prepared by the

research unit of the PIB said that besides climate change threats exacerbating flooding in the region and the proliferation of invasive species, human-wildlife conflict is a pressing concern, especially as rhino habitats are increasingly adjacent to densely populated agricultural areas. As rhinos venture into these regions seeking food or territory, they can damage crops and create risks for local communities. Effective management strategies that incorporate community engagement and education are essential to mitigate these conflicts and foster coexistence. According to the report, the conservation efforts must prioritize habitat

restoration, the creation of wildlife corridors, and the involvement of local communities in protection initiatives. "Combining traditional knowledge with modern conservation techniques will be crucial for ensuring that both rhinos and humans can thrive together," it said about the conservation measures for these animals that usually weigh around 2,800 kg and live for 45-50 years. The Prime Minister posted on X: "Today, on World Rhino Day, let us reiterate our commitment to protect one of our planet's most iconic species—rhinos. Compliments to all those involved in rhino conservation efforts over the last many years.

"It is a matter of immense pride that India is home to a large number of one horned rhinos. I also fondly recall my visit to Kaziranga in Assam and urge you all to visit there as well." The Indian rhino is the largest of the three Asian species and shares its single horn characteristic with the Javan rhino. The Sumatran rhino, in contrast, has two horns, a trait linking Asian and African rhinos. Rhinos play a crucial role in maintaining ecosystems. As mega-herbivores, they shape grasslands by grazing, creating open spaces that benefit other wildlife. Their wallowing behavior also creates waterholes, supporting various species.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Quad is here to stay

PM Modi highlights Quad's role in promoting peace, stability and inclusive growth in Indo-Pacific

The latest Quad Summit in Wilmington, USA, highlights the growing importance of cooperation between the four member nations – India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, especially in a politically volatile Indo-Pacific region. It also underscores the importance of India in attaining peace in the region. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his opening remarks, reaffirmed the group's commitment to ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, emphasising that this priority is shared by all Quad members. Addressing fellow leaders— US President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, PM Modi noted that the summit was taking place at a time of heightened tensions and conflicts globally. His message was clear: the Quad's strength lies in its shared democratic values, its support for a rules-based international order, and its commitment to peaceful dispute resolution. PM Modi's address reflected India's delicate balancing act in maintaining strategic autonomy while engaging in critical international collaborations. The Indo-Pacific region has become a key area of focus, particularly due to the shifting power dynamics in Asia.



India, with its strategic location and economic influence, sees itself as a natural leader in advocating for an inclusive, prosperous Indo-Pacific. PM Modi emphasised that the Quad is not an exclusive group but one committed to advancing collective interests, particularly in areas of health security, climate change, emerging technologies, and capacity building. India's role in the Quad has grown significantly over the past

few years, positioning itself as a key player in advancing shared objectives in the Indo-Pacific. PM Modi's proposal to host the next Quad Summit in India in 2025 is a further testament to the country's increasing involvement and influence within the group. The Wilmington summit comes at a time when global challenges such as supply chain disruptions and geopolitical conflicts have increased the urgency for international collaboration. India's contribution to health security initiatives and capacity-building efforts within the Quad has bolstered its standing as a critical partner. As the Quad moves forward, India remains committed to working with its allies to ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains a region where the rule of law is respected, and prosperity can be shared by all nations. The Prime Minister's visit to the US was part of a broader diplomatic engagement, which also includes bilateral talks with President Biden and an address at the UN General Assembly's Summit of the Future. This diplomatic push underlines India's active role in shaping global conversations on peace, stability and inclusive growth. In the evolving international landscape, India's leadership within the Quad reflects its commitment to fostering cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, ensuring that it remains a region of stability and shared prosperity.

PICTALK



A one-horn Rhino at the Assam State Zoo on the World Rhino Day, in Guwahati

Key reforms needed for unified electoral system



SUBHASH CHANDRA AGRAWAL

While many proposals offer a streamlined approach, significant reforms are still needed to address gaps, such as mid-term election disruptions

Recently, the Union Cabinet approved the recommendations of the high-level committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind. While many of these proposals are commendable, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. Notably, the plan should encompass not just Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections but also local body elections. The current recommendation to hold local body elections 100 days after the simultaneous Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections falls short of a truly unified electoral system. As a one-time reform, it is necessary to hold all elections, including to local bodies, concurrently.



Another issue that remains unresolved by the Kovind Committee is the problem of mid-term elections, which arise when a State government or the Lok Sabha falls due to a hung house or the collapse of a coalition. This challenge can be addressed by electing Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers simultaneously with Speakers and Deputy Speakers through a secret ballot, utilising Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) equipped with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs). Such elections should require nominations signed by at least 34 per cent of members. This system ensures stability, as a Prime Minister or Chief Minister could only be removed through a similar process, but with the mandatory nomination of an alternative leader in the same motion. Failure to vote in this process would result in the loss of voting rights in the House, though membership would remain intact. Implementing this system is crucial for the success of the "One Nation, One Election" initiative, as it would prevent the frequent dissolution of assemblies and the Lok Sabha. Current officeholders could also be re-elected using this method.

In terms of candidacy rules, a person should not be allowed to contest elections from more than one constituency or hold both Parliament and State Assembly memberships simultaneously.

Additionally, any sitting MP or MLA who seeks to contest for a different seat should first resign from their current position. This would prevent situations like the one that arose during Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government, which fell due to a single controversial vote cast by Odisha Chief Minister Girdhar Gomango, who remained an MP after assuming office as Chief Minister. Another important reform is the need to restore secret voting for Rajya Sabha elections, again using EVMs equipped with VVPATs. Additionally, the constitution should be amended to abolish legislative councils, which are often seen as redundant. Only those who have never contested any election should be nominated to the Rajya Sabha, ensuring that this house remains a body of experienced statespersons rather than active politicians. MPs and MLAs should also be barred from holding any party or social positions to avoid conflicts of interest.

Ministerial positions should be limited to 10 per cent of the strength of the lower house, and the post of Parliamentary Secretary should be abolished. Candidates who lose their security deposits in elections should be barred from contesting for the next six years. The "None of the Above" (NOTA) option, introduced to allow voters to reject all candidates, should be made more effective. Candidates who receive fewer



MINISTERIAL POSITIONS SHOULD BE LIMITED TO 10 PER CENT OF THE STRENGTH OF THE LOWER HOUSE, AND THE POST OF PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY SHOULD BE ABOLISHED. CANDIDATES WHO LOSE THEIR SECURITY DEPOSITS IN ELECTIONS SHOULD BE BARRED FROM CONTESTING FOR THE NEXT SIX YEARS

votes than NOTA should be barred from contesting future elections, even though the candidate with the next highest vote tally could be declared the winner for that particular term.

Furthermore, immunity for MPs and MLAs from legislative proceedings should be reconsidered. In the infamous JMM bribery case, the Supreme Court was unable to act against guilty individuals due to parliamentary immunity. Parliament's rules should be rewritten to introduce fixed penalties for members who violate norms, removing the discretionary powers of the Speaker. This would prevent lenient punishments like the one imposed on MP Rajesh Manjhi, who faced only a brief suspension for taking his lady friend, pretending she was his wife, on a foreign trip at government expense.

Abandoning parliamentarians, if present in the House during sessions, should not be allowed to leave until legal authorities execute pending warrants against them. Additionally, MPs and MLAs with less than 75 per cent attendance should be barred from contesting elections for the next six years. Cases like that of George Fernandes, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha despite losing his memory, highlight the need for a minimum medical fitness certificate for candidates. Parliamentarians should also

be required to disclose all details of their assets, including the names of their spouses, to avoid cases of undisclosed multiple marriages, as occurred with actor-turned-MP Dharmendra. All dues, including those for utilities, rent, and government accommodations, should be deducted from their salaries or pensions. Pensions should be withheld until former MPs and ministers vacate government accommodations. Additionally, political parties that fail to contest elections for five consecutive years should be de-recognised.

Finally, electoral reforms should be accelerated by empowering the Election Commission to implement reforms with a one-year notice to Parliament. If Parliament does not disapprove the proposed reforms within this timeframe, they should be deemed approved. To reduce the influence of black money, sections of the Income Tax Act that allow for contributions to political parties should be abolished. Moreover, the controversial MPLADS scheme, which allocates funds to MPs for local area development, should be scrapped. It is time to bring sweeping reforms to India's electoral system to ensure a more transparent, accountable, and stable political process.

(The writer is Guinness record holder and an RTI consultant, views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RAHUL'S IRRESPONSIBLE REMARKS

Madam — Your newspaper (September 22) carries several news relating to statements of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, counter allegations by BJP and Congress party's explanations on Rahul Gandhi's asseverations on certain crucial issues in his foreign visits and election campaigns. His assertions on reservations, Sikh community's freedom, abrogation of Article 370 and its standing as alliance partner of National Conference in J&K are drawing flak in the political spectrum and in public. Weakening the country and painting gloomy pictures while abroad, will not go well for Congress and Rahul Gandhi. Selected foreign media has vested interest in maligning India. Desperation of Rahul Gandhi and his lack of conviction is writ large while his narratives against BJP and PM Modi are failing in absence of report cards of Congress and allies' ruled states. His statements are also silently eroding the INDI alliance base.

The country is facing tough times and the country needs a committed voice from all political parties against the deep state forces conspiring against and anarchy in our country. Our neighbourhood is troubled and no peace and normalcy is predictable in the near future. Apparently, these are the most challenging times since independence and PM Modi and the bulk of non-BJP political parties have identified, analysed and diagnosed the threats. We need to fight unitedly.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

ADULTERATION IN LADOOS

Madam — After Karnataka's nandi milk, its now the turn of ex Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Jagan Mohan Reddy government, who has been solely blamed for the adulteration of south famous Sri Venkateswara Swami Tirupati prasadam laddus by the ruling Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. It came as a shock to devotees that sub-

High voter turnout in J and K



This refers to the editorial, "India twins in J and K" (September 20). Polling for 24 Assembly seats in the first phase of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections held on September 18. Polling was not only peacefully but it witnessed impressive turnout of voters also. People's enthusiasm for polling in the first phase assumes more significance as this is the first Assembly polls after abrogation of Article 370 in the state. People's record participation in the election has

given a befitting reply to the nefarious forces attempting to disrupt the electoral process. People of the state have shown the entire world, their deep trust and confidence in the democratic exercise. It is good that people have realised that no stone and bullet but power of voting is more effective tool to serve their purposes. Demise of Hurriyat Conference, a conglomerate of separatist parties also have contributed to bring peace in the state particularly Kashmir valley. It is evident that separatist groups have been politically marginalised. However, growing support to Sheikh Abdul Rashid's AIP after his shocking win in Lok Sabha polls has made the political pundits to watch final result of Assembly polls closely and keenly.

Manoj Parashar | Ghaziabad

EXPLODING PAGERS

Madam — Israel has been blamed for a recent explosive attack in Lebanon that targeted Hezbollah's communication devices but injured over 3,000 civilians, raising questions about its indiscriminate nature. The operation's extremist-like methods blur the line between state action and terrorism, risking wider conflict. A ceasefire through negotiation is urgently needed. Israel is facing widespread criticism for its alleged role in a recent explosive attack in Lebanon, which targeted Hezbollah's communication systems but left over 3,000 civilians injured. The attack's broad, indiscriminate impact has sparked concern about blurred boundaries between state action and terrorism, resembling extremist tactics more than a conventional military operation. With tensions rising, the conflict risks spreading to a broader regional theatre. Diplomacy is urgently needed to de-escalate the situation.

Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Social media age limit: Will banning children be enough?



ASHA IYER KUMAR

While setting an age limit may seem like a straightforward solution, enforcing it is a much more complex challenge

Australia's recent proposal to introduce a minimum age for children to use social media has sparked a global debate about how best to protect young people from its negative effects. With the government suggesting an age limit between 14 and 16, the intention is clear: shield children from the social harms linked to excessive screen time, mental health issues, and unrealistic social comparisons. But is an outright ban the answer? Can we expect this move to be effective, or are we merely sweeping the problem under the carpet?



In theory, setting an age limit seems like a straightforward solution to mitigate the risks associated with social media. However, the reality is far more complex. One of the most significant challenges in enforcing an age limit on social media is the sheer difficulty of verifying users' ages reliably. Most platforms already have minimum age requirements. Yet, we all know that younger children are active on these platforms, often bypassing age restrictions by simply entering a false birth date during registration.

It's a loophole too easy to exploit, and without a robust verification system, raising the age limit can't be a solution. Some platforms have attempted to introduce measures such as ID verification or even facial recognition, but these solutions come with their own set of concerns. For instance, YouTube Kids requires credit card information to verify the parent's identity. While well-intentioned, this method raises privacy concerns and is far from foolproof. Moreover, tech-savvy children often outsmart such measures using VPNs. Banning social media for children without a watertight system to monitor and regulate their access is like locking the front door while leaving the back door wide

open. When discussing social media and its impact on children, parental oversight inevitably comes into play. Parents are expected to monitor and control their children's access to these platforms, but can they realistically do so in this hyper-connected world? The answer, unfortunately, is no. Even the most diligent parents cannot be expected to oversee every minute of their children's online activity. A well-meaning ban on social media might give parents a false sense of security, but it doesn't change the reality that children will find ways to access these platforms. If we push them off regulated, mainstream platforms, they may seek refuge in the darker, unregulated corners of the internet—spaces where risks of cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content, and even predatory behaviour are even greater. Social media is, undeniably, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it exposes children to unrealistic portrayals of life, leading to anxiety, depression, and a constant need to measure up to others. On the other hand, it

provides a space for young people to connect, express themselves, and access educational resources. Banning it outright may remove the toxic aspects but also deny them these valuable opportunities.

As parents and educators, our challenge is to strike a balance. Instead of rushing towards a ban, it might be more prudent to focus on equipping children with the skills they need to navigate the online world responsibly. Digital literacy, mental health education, and open conversations between parents and children can go a long way in protecting young minds from the pitfalls of social media. Rather than looking at social media as an enemy to be vanquished, we should view it as a tool that requires careful handling. Age restrictions, when implemented properly, can help shield younger users, but without holistic solutions—ranging from better parental support to more reliable age verification methods—their efficacy will be limited.

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



FIRST COLUMN

HEALTHY SPINE AND WELLBEING

A healthy spine forms the cornerstone of overall wellbeing, enabling us to restore vitality to our bodies



RAVI VALLURI

How many of us get up in the morning and virtually struggle to get out of bed as the body feels sore, the neck remains stiff, knees wobble, and shoulders and feet pain? The entire day is a torturous nightmare. Such individuals run to doctors, seeking a magical cure for the pestilence. Unless the problem is genetic or hereditary, humans get afflicted with such disorders because of a deficient lifestyle, stress accumulated over a period and poor dietary habits. The vertebra and our skeletal frame are an extremely important part of the human body, which we ignore at our peril.

Therefore, a healthy spine leads to a healthy life. Do we recall when a child begins to walk, the preliminary baby steps are raising his/her thumbs; this is called the 'Merudanda Mudra'. The vertebra consists of a series of small bones that form the backbone of the spine, having several projections for articulation and muscle attachment, and a hole through which the spinal cord passes. Office goers who for making a living are programmed to undertake a typical quotidian 9 to 5 routine, and several among them use computers for prolonged hours, or those professionals who are compelled to drive long distances to their places of work from their dwelling paces ought to necessarily know how to protect their backs, necks, and hand muscles.

These days people have become addicted to the usage of smartphones and are constantly fixated on texting messages on WhatsApp, watching various features ending up with stiff necks and sore fingers. Not only do these muscles need to be protected and fortified but the tissues should be sufficiently strengthened. Working men and women should be educated on how to deploy the correct activity posture while executing their professional tasks. Many homemakers at times develop severe middle



or lower back medical problems for a variety of reasons. Continuously undertaking repeated chores and even activities involving the handling of small or no weights, performed with an incorrect posture, damages tissues and muscles, which causes irreparable damage to the back and neck.

The afflicted suffer from infirmity for years together with pain and anguish. Awareness about the structure of the spine and adopting the right postures along with simple strengthening stretches significantly helps to avoid these misadventures in one's life. In the cases these problems assume the shape of chronic disorders the patient suffering can be guided through simple stretching exercises under the supervision of a physiotherapist or an orthopaedic. A special programme has been developed by the Art of Living to ameliorate the condition of those suffering from these debilitating health issues. Those suffering from spondylitis, frozen shoulder, middle and lower back problems, knee problems, and inter disc problems will immensely benefit upon undergoing the rehabilitation process and will certainly see visible dramatic changes in their lifestyle patterns and their daily routine. The programme encompasses the techniques mentioned below:

- Walk: For the alignment of vertebrae to open energy channels
- Posture Awareness and its correction
- Ergonomics
- Simple but powerful Stretches and Yoga – For inner surgical alignment of the spine to release the nerves that were being continually pressed
- Gait Training helps immensely
- Guided Meditation techniques to release accumulated stress
- In-depth knowledge of the spine
- Ancient wisdom and knowledge about acupressure points for overall well being "Total relaxation is the secret to enjoying sitting meditation. I sit with my spine upright, but not rigid; and I relax all the muscles in my body," writes Thich Nhat Hanh.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway and is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

GST cess extension: Is it Justified Beyond 2026?



UTTAM GUPTA

With loans likely to be repaid by January 2026, the question arises—can the continued levy of the cess be logically justified in light of buoyant tax collections



In its meeting held early this month, the GST Council had decided to set up a Group of Ministers (GoM) to suggest 'how to go about the GST compensation cess, which is levied on luxury, sin and demerit goods such as automobiles, aerated drinks and tobacco, after the loans taken to meet the shortfall in revenue of states during Covid-affected years are repaid. The GoM will be headed by Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and include members from states. The statement 'how to go together with reports suggesting that the GoM will be reworking the nomenclature for GST compensation cess points towards the intent of the GST Council to continue its levy even after the deadline of March 2026 when it is to be withdrawn as per the subsisting arrangement. The matter requires deeper examination. The key question is: Why should GST Cess be continued? In the follow-up to The Constitution (One Hundred and First Amendment) Act, 2016, which introduced the GST, the Union Government also introduced The GST Compensation Act, 2017. It provided for compensation to the States for five years (2017-18 to 2021-22) for the loss of revenue to be calculated as the difference between their actual collection (including transfer of their share in indirect tax collected by the Centre) and the amount they would have got with annual growth at 14 per cent over the 2015-16 level under the erstwhile dispensation (Central Excise Duty (CED)/service tax/sales tax/Value Added Tax (VAT) plus other local taxes).

To discharge this obligation, the Centre also passed an amendment to the GST Compensation Act (2018) to levy a cess on the so-called demerit goods (those which fall in the highest tax slab of 28 per cent—other slabs being five per cent, 12 per cent and 18 per cent besides the exempt category) such as automobiles, tobacco, drinks and so on with a proviso to use the proceeds for compensating States. The cess was to remain in force for five years in sync with the commitment to compensate States for that period.

The rationale behind keeping these arrangements in place for five years was that at the

end of this transition, i.e., June 30, 2022, the GST dispensation would have acquired the much-needed "vitality" and "resilience" to yield sufficient resources for the States to meet their budgetary requirements within a prudential limit set under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM) thereby obviating the need for any extra support beyond this deadline. However, even before the June 30, 2022 deadline arrived, the States had been clamouring for continuing the compensation beyond it. So, first, they requested the 15th Finance Commission to extend it for five years not realizing that the mandate for this is with the GST Council. Thereafter, they started pestering the Central Government.

The States gave two reasons for their demand (i) they continued to face a shortfall in tax revenue and (ii) The - pandemic had severely impacted their revenue - both their tax collection as well as transfer from the Centre - pushing them behind the curve. We need to look at the factual position on the quantum of shortfall in tax revenue experienced by the States during those five years and the extent to which collections from the cess plugged it. From the time GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, till March 31, 2019, collections from the Cess exceeded the shortfall resulting in a surplus of about Rs 47,500 crore in the pool. However, the equation changed in the subsequent years. During 2019-20, the cess proceeds were Rs 95,000 crore against a shortfall in tax collection of Rs 165,000 crore resulting in a deficit of Rs 70,000 crore. Even after using the surplus from the previous two years, the unmet deficit carried forward to the next year was Rs 22,500 crore. During FY 2020-21, the shortfall in tax revenue zoomed to over Rs 300,000

crore; courtesy, of the devastating effect of Covid pandemic.

Against this, cess proceeds were only Rs 65,000 crore, leading to an unmet deficit of Rs 235,000 crore. During FY 2021-22 also, the collections in the Cesspool couldn't fully meet the shortfall in tax collection though the deficit was much less. To make up for the deficit, the Centre, in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) set up a special window for borrowings at a "low" rate of interest and transferred the funds to states as back-to-back loans. Under this window, it borrowed a total of Rs 270,000 crore including Rs 110,000 crore during 2020-21 and Rs 160,000 crore during 2021-22. To generate the required money to repay the loan and interest, the GST Council decided to extend the cess till March 2026.

The necessary amendment was made to the GST Compensation Act (2018) to give effect to this decision. According to the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the entire loan of Rs 270,000 crore would be fully serviced by January 2026, two months ahead of the March 31, 2026 deadline. As per estimates, the collections from GST compensation cess in February and March 2026 are expected to be about Rs 40,000 crore. How this surplus money would be apportioned between the Centre and States is a task the GoM will have to carry out. The States want the GST compensation cess to continue even beyond March 31, 2026.

Naturally, its continuation can't be justified in terms of the need to service loan liabilities from the past; those would have already been extinguished before that. Do they have any logical argument? To say that they require more revenue to meet the development needs, as

reported, is plain rhetoric. Tax collection is far from being a constraint.

Only a couple of years ago, top officials in the Department of Revenue used to gloat over a collection of GST Rs 150,000 crore if achieved in any given month. Since, the beginning of FY 2022-23, monthly GST collections have been more than Rs 150,000 crore.

In fact, during FY 2023-24, the average monthly GST collection was even higher at Rs 168,000 crore. Therefore, Cess's continuation on the basis that there could be a shortfall in tax collection is untenable. The *raison d'être* behind giving the States a buffer (read: compensation) over a fairly long period of 5 years (2017 - 2022) was to ensure that they get adjusted to the new dispensation and are in a position to garner enough revenue thereby obviating the need for any further support. At the end of this transition, it is only apt that the buffer should go. The buoyancy in GST collection since 2022-23 reinforces the case for withdrawal of compensation cess. Meanwhile, taxing petroleum products under GST has been pending for long. Currently, these are taxed under the pre-GST regime entailing a much higher level of levy. For instance, in Delhi, the taxes (central excise duty or CED plus VAT) account for about 80 per cent of the ex-refinery price of petrol.

Taxing it under GST will result in lowering this to 28 per cent (even if it is put in the highest slab). This will end up reducing tax collection in the States by over one-third. To help them make up for this loss, the GST Council may consider extending the Compensation Cess with a sun-set rider of say five years.

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



THE BUOYANCY IN GST COLLECTION SINCE 2022-23 REINFORCES THE CASE FOR WITHDRAWAL OF COMPENSATION CESS. MEANWHILE, TAXING PETROLEUM PRODUCTS UNDER GST HAS BEEN PENDING FOR LONG

Nostalgia meets new age storytelling in India's diverse cinematic landscape

Beyond merely providing convenient access, OTT platforms have revived iconic shows and introduced regional cinema to the global audience

In recent years, the rise of over-the-top (OTT) platforms has dramatically transformed the way we consume entertainment. These platforms have revived classic content and introduced regional gems into mainstream media, offering a broad spectrum of India's diverse cinematic landscape to a global audience. Moreover, OTT has changed the way we socialize, becoming a central part of conversations, from casual chats to virtual gatherings.

Where once people exchanged pleasantries with questions like "Aur Batao" (What's up?), today, the perfect response is often about the latest series or film one is watching. Virtual watch parties have emerged as popular avenues for friends and families, separated by dis-



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

tance, to connect and share viewing experiences in real time. OTT platforms cater to diverse tastes, ensuring there's something for everyone. But what makes people subscribe to one OTT platform after another? The simple answer is content. OTT platforms have built vast libraries of classic shows and films, making iconic series easily accessible. Shows like "Malgudi Days", celebrated for its story-

telling and memorable music, and "Fauji", featuring Shah Rukh Khan's debut, are just a click away. This accessibility allows viewers to journey back in time, relive cherished moments, and introduce younger generations to timeless narratives that shaped Indian television during the Doordarshan era.

Contemporary creators are also blending nostalgia with new storytelling. Content like "Laapata Ladies", "Heeramandi", "Guns and Gulaabs", "Jubilee", "Bambai Meri Jaan", and "Rocket Boys" weave retro elements into engaging plots. These narratives are often set in simpler times, free of modern technology, offering viewers a respite from the chaos of the modern world. They transport audi-

ences to the past, making the stories richer and more captivating. Take "Laapata Ladies", for instance. Set in the early 2000s, its storyline is centered around a lost bride, but what captivates viewers is its charming simplicity. Scenes featuring a tea stall on a forgotten railway station or a sketch of the bride being shared in the absence of digital photos transport viewers to a different era. Such moments invite the audience to reminisce about their own memories, perhaps recalling special moments from railway journeys or simpler times in their lives.

The use of cultural symbols—retro fashion, old advertisements, vintage phones, cars, and even homes—evokes a sense of nostalgia. Everyday



objects like tape recorders, old computers, and the way people socialized in the past contribute to the surreal experience of OTT content. It's a reminder of how far society has come, while also showcasing the beauty of the past. This emotional connection enriches the overall viewing experience and keeps viewers coming back for more. OTT's appeal to nostalgia has also fueled the popularity of the "OTT and Chill" culture. A recent example is Manoj

Tiwari's rendition of the famous Bhojpuri Sohar "Hind Ke Sitare" for an OTT show, which became an internet sensation. The track went viral, with people of all ages singing along, demonstrating how content that resonates with simpler times can bring generations together.

In addition to revisiting the past, OTT platforms continuously release new content, often with extensive promotional efforts that make certain shows highly popular. Red carpet events for premieres, media coverage, and articles listing the "10 best OTT shows to watch" have all become part of the cultural zeitgeist. Even major events like the Indian Premier League (IPL) stream on OTT platforms, drawing massive audiences.

OTT also champions diverse talent. Independent filmmakers and regional storytellers, who might have been overlooked in traditional media, now have a platform to showcase their work to a global audience. This has led to the discovery of fresh voices and unique stories, breaking down geographical barriers. OTT's ability to feature content in multiple Indian languages has helped regional films and series gain national and international recognition. According to a FICCI-EY report from 2023, regional content on OTT platforms overtook Hindi language content for the first time, with the share of regional language titles rising from 47% in 2021 to 52% in 2023. Stars like Mohanlal, Junior NTR, Vijay

Sethupathi, and Fahadh Faasil, once confined to regional industries, have now become household names across India, thanks to the reach of OTT. Films like "RRR" (Telugu), "Pushpa" (Telugu), "KGF" (Kannada), "Kantara" (Kannada), have found new audiences through OTT platforms. Actors like Vijay Sethupathi, who gained prominence in Tamil cinema, have become pan-Indian stars, appearing in films like "Jawan" and "Merry Christmas". This cross-cultural fusion, accelerated by the pandemic, reflects the growing demand for diverse content.

(The writer is former additional DG, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI. Research and Inputs by Priya kamra, Views are personal)

Bangladeshi infiltrators vote bank for Jharkhand's JMM-led alliance: UP DCM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Sunday alleged that Bangladeshi infiltrators were a "vote bank" of JMM-led alliance in Jharkhand, and the ruling party would not chase them out of the state.

Addressing a public rally in Koderma as part of the BJP's 'Parivartan Yatra', Maurya accused the Hemant Soren government of "failing" to fulfil election promises on all fronts and making Jharkhand famous for "corruption". "The Bangladeshi infiltrators, who were earlier restricted to West Bengal only, spread across Jharkhand in large numbers, which is a big challenge. The JMM-led government cannot chase them out of the state. The ruling coalition considers infiltrators as their vote bank," Maurya said. The BJP considers illegal immigrants a "blot on Jharkhand's dignity" and is the "only party which can



chase them out of the state", he claimed. Maurya said, "The Hemant Soren-led government has failed on all fronts and made Jharkhand famous for corruption. I appeal to the people to vote for the BJP in the upcoming assembly polls for the welfare of the poor, farmers, bright future of youths and making women lakshpati didi." India is progressing fast under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he claimed. "Our borders are safe now and India is moving towards becoming the world's third-largest economy soon,"

he said. With an eye on the assembly elections due later this year, the opposition BJP in Jharkhand would carry out six 'Parivartan' processions to reach out to the people and "expose the failures" of the JMM-led government in the state. These marches will cover 5,400 km across 81 assembly segments in 24 districts before concluding on October 2. Around 50 national and state-level leaders of the BJP, including chief ministers of several states, are expected to participate in such rallies.

Kharge reaffirms Congress commitment to protecting rights of J and K people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday reaffirmed the party's commitment to protecting the constitutional rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Kharge said that the Congress' seven guarantees for Jammu and Kashmir aim to usher in a brighter future for the region.

"The Indian National Congress pledges to safeguard the constitutional rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Our progressive development agenda is for everyone," Kharge said on social media platform. Kharge highlighted a presentation detailing the Congress' seven guarantees for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and said "these guarantees will bring about a brighter future by focusing on social justice and economic empowerment". The presentation emphasised party's first guarantee, which starts from the restoration of full statehood to the Union Territory. The party promised free med-



ical treatment of up to Rs 25 lakh for every family and the establishment of a super-specialty hospital in every district. The guarantees also include the implementation of former prime minister Dr Manmohan Singh's plan for the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits and securing constitution-based rights for the OBC community. Other guarantees include financial protection of Rs 3,000 per month for women heads of families and food security, ensuring 11 kg of grain for every family mem-

ber, he said. The Congress also pledged to provide crop insurance against natural calamities, along with a minimum support price (MSP) of Rs 72 per kilogram for apples. The party promised financial support of Rs 4,000 per year for landless, tenant, and land-owning farming households. It also proposed an unemployment allowance of up to Rs 3,500 per month for one year for qualified youths. The Congress has further committed to fill one lakh vacant government posts by releasing a job calendar within 30 days.

CJI to lay foundation stone for Bombay HC's new complex on Monday

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud will lay the foundation stone of the Bombay High Court's new complex in Mumbai's Bandra East on Monday, an official said.

A Maharashtra government release on Sunday said possession of 30.16 acre of land will be handed over the High Court in a phased manner, adding the first tranche measuring 4.39 acres has already been given. It will have world class infrastructure, including well-designed and spacious court rooms, chambers for judges and registry personnel, an arbitration and mediation centre, an auditorium, library, as well as a host of features and amenities for staff, lawyers and litigants, the release informed. The plan is to enable stakeholders to have access to support services such as banking and telecom, medical facilities, digitisation centre, creche, cafeteria, waiting areas, multi-storey car park, museum and lawyers' chambers, with the

design keeping in mind accessibility features for differently-abled stakeholders, the release added. The land on which the new premises will come up is well located, with proximity to the island city as well as the metropolis' suburbs, the arterial Western Express Highway and the Bandra Kurla Complex, among the country's leading commercial hubs. The Bombay High Court, founded on August 16, 1862, is currently located in a majestic building near Flora Fountain (Hutatma Chowk) that the court has occupied since November 1878, the state government release added. The Bombay High Court exercises jurisdiction over Maharashtra through the Principal Seat in Mumbai and benches at Nagpur and Aurangabad as well as Goa. It also exercises jurisdiction over the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The High Court has a sanctioned strength of 94 judges, while the current strength being 66 sitting judges, the release said.

97 per cent cases of atrocities against SCs in 2022 reported from 13 states: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

About 97.7 per cent of all cases of atrocities against SCs in 2022 were reported from 13 states, with Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh recording the highest number of such crimes, according to a new government report.

According to the latest government report under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, the majority of atrocities against Scheduled Tribes (STs) were also concentrated in 13 states, which reported 98.91 per cent of all cases in 2022. Of 51,656 cases registered under the law for Scheduled Castes (SCs) in 2022, Uttar Pradesh accounted for 23.78 per cent of the total cases with 12,287, followed by Rajasthan at 8,651 (16.75 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh at 7,732 (14.97 per cent). Other states with a significant number of cases of atrocities against SCs were Bihar with 6,799 (13.16 per cent), Odisha with 3,576 (6.93 per cent), and Maharashtra with 2,706 (5.24



per cent). These six states accounted for nearly 81 per cent of the total cases. "Thirteen states, cumulatively accounting for 97.7 per cent (51,656) of the total cases (52,866) relating to offences of atrocities against members of SCs, registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, in conjunction with the Indian Penal Code, during the year 2022," the report said. Similarly, the majority of cases of atrocities against STs were concentrated in 13 states. Of the 9,735 cases registered under the law for STs, Madhya

Pradesh reported the highest number at 2,979 (30.61 per cent), the report said. Rajasthan had the second highest number of cases at 2,498 (25.66 per cent) while Odisha recorded 773 (7.94 per cent). Other states with a significant number of cases included Maharashtra with 691 (7.10 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh with 499 (5.13 per cent). The data also provided insight into the status of investigations and charge-sheeting under the Act. Among the SC-related cases, 60.38 per cent led to charge sheets being filed while 14.78 per cent were concluded with final reports due to rea-

sons such as false claims or lack of evidence. By the end of 2022, investigation was pending in 17,166 cases.

For ST-related cases, 63.32 per cent resulted in charge sheets being filed while 14.71 per cent ended with final reports. At the end of the period under review, 2,702 cases involving atrocities against STs were still under investigation. One of the most concerning trends highlighted in the report is the declining conviction rate for cases under the Act. In 2022, the conviction rate dropped to 32.4 per cent from 39.2 per cent in 2020. Moreover, the report pointed out the inadequate number of special courts set up to handle cases under the law. Of 498 districts in 14 states, only 194 had established special courts to expedite trials in these cases. The report also identified specific districts particularly prone to atrocities with only 10 states and Union Territories declaring such districts. The rest said there was no district prone to such cases of atrocities. Uttar Pradesh, which reported

the highest number of cases of atrocities against SCs, was among the states which said "No atrocity prone areas have been identified in the State of Uttar Pradesh".

The report emphasises the need for targeted interventions in these districts to curb the incidence of caste-based violence and ensure stronger protection for vulnerable communities. The report also said SC/ST protection cells had been set up in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Andman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and Puducherry. Special police stations for registration of complaints of offences against SCs and STs have been set up by five states -- Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh.

Himachal Government takes loans, gives it to Sonia, alleges BJP MP Kangana Ranaut

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/CHANDIGARH

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut on Sunday alleged that the Himachal Pradesh government takes loans and gives it to former Congress president Sonia Gandhi which has made the state's coffers "hollow". Addressing people after launching a BJP membership drive at a village here, the actress-turned-politician said, "Everyone is aware that corruption is prevalent and the Congress-ruling state governments have hollowed their respective states." She wondered how the party spends "so much" on elections. Attacking the Congress government headed by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, she said, "They take loans and give it to Sonia Gandhi which has made the state hollow." "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it



should go to the CM Relief Fund but everyone knows that it goes to the Sonia relief fund," she alleged. "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it should go to the CM Relief Fund but everyone knows that it goes to the Sonia relief fund," she alleged. "Disasters and Congress government have taken the state decades back and I would appeal to people to root out the present government," Ranaut said. "If we give disaster funds, it

"I would do more than possible for my area but the PWD minister should also do something as well," she said. "Desh ko bachana hai to BJP ko Lana hai", she said and urged the people to take part in the BJP drive in large numbers and become party members. She said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is 'Yug Purush' and deals with situations at a micro level. The bad situation of Himachal where the salaries and pensions are delayed and facilities of free electricity and water to consumers have been snatched, is not hidden from the rest of the country, she said. Claiming that sports facilities are being stopped at primary schools, she said, "The base of athletes and sports persons is made at a younger age and it seems there is a conspiracy to destroy Himachal". "The state government is trying to axe the future of the children but it would be my goal to get a big sports centre in Mandi constituency and preference would be given to children who start young in this sports complex", she said.

Health Ministries jointly issue advisory to Chief Secretaries of States for implementation of ToFEI manual



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to address the alarming rise of tobacco consumption among youth in the country, the Secretaries of the Union Education and Health Ministries have jointly issued an advisory to Chief Secretaries of states, calling for rigorous implementation of the Tobacco-Free Educational Institution (ToFEI) manual. Aligning with the provisions of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003, the advisory highlights the concerning impact of tobacco use, particularly among children and adolescents. According to the 2019 Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), approximately 8.5 percent of school students aged 13 to 15 in India engage in various forms of tobacco consumption.

Alarmingly, more than 5,500 children begin using tobacco every day, and 55 percent of lifelong users start the habit before turning 20. This early exposure often leads adolescents to explore other addictive substances, said an official from the Health Ministry. To combat these trends, the advisory has called for a united effort from all stakeholders

to protect young people from the dangers of tobacco addiction. It aims to safeguard future generations by raising awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use.

As part of the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), the Health Ministry has released guidelines for Tobacco-Free Educational Institutions (ToFEI) to shield minors and youth from tobacco and electronic cigarette use. Furthermore, the Department of School Education and Literacy launched the ToFEI Implementation Manual on World No Tobacco Day, in collaboration with the Socio Economic and Educational Development Society, said the official.

This manual, disseminated to all states and Union Territories on May 31, serves as a crucial resource for educational institutions to effectively implement anti-tobacco measures, he added. The ToFEI manual focuses on raising awareness about the health risks associated with tobacco use and provides information on cessation resources. It also advocates for a healthy, tobacco-free environment within educational institutions, encouraging all schools to become tobacco-free spaces.

Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi urges people to visit Wayanad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged people to visit Wayanad and experience its beauty, help to revive tourism, rebuild livelihoods and restore its vibrancy. He stressed that while the recent landslide tragedy affected only the Mundakkai area, it has led to a misconception that all of Wayanad has been impacted, causing a

sharp drop in tourism. "Wayanad's beauty is undisputed, but it is the compassion and kindness of its people that has always drawn me to it. Today, so many of those people who rely on tourism for their livelihood are looking to you all for help," the former Congress chief said in a Facebook post. "Let me assure you, Wayanad is still vibrant and welcoming, with its spirit unbroken. I urge you to visit and experience its



beauty, helping to revive tourism, rebuild livelihoods, and restore its vibrancy," he said.

Earlier this month, Rahul Gandhi said it is imperative to make a concerted effort to revitalise tourism in Wayanad and encourage people to visit the area by dispelling the notion that it is a "dangerous" place in the aftermath of the recent landslides. Rahul had made the assertion during a virtual meeting with

some Kerala Congress leaders and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. More than 200 people lost their lives in the aftermath of the worst disaster ever faced by Kerala, which has a fragile ecology along its coasts and hilly areas. Rahul won from two constituencies in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls but resigned from the Wayanad seat in Kerala, from where his sister Priyanka Gandhi will contest a bypoll.

ABVP, NSUI engage in extensive campaigning ahead of DUSU polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the highly anticipated Delhi University Student Union's (DUSU) polls, slated to be held on September 27, Congress' National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and RSS affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Sunday engaged in extensive campaigning including interactions with DU students.

ABVP candidates for the elections, including the presidential candidate Rishabh Chaudhary, the vice-presidential candidate Bhanu Pratap Singh, the secretary candidate Mitravinda Karnwal, and the joint secretary candidate Aman Kapasia, engaged in extensive campaign activities in various hostels including Rajiv Gandhi Women's Hostel, Gwyer Hall, Mansarovar Hostel, PG Men's Hostel, Meghdoot, and other accommodations, where they interacted with the students, discussed key issues, and sought their support for the upcoming elections. During the interactions, the ABVP panel discussed various issues including improving



campus infrastructure, enhancing hostel facilities, ensuring a more efficient and transparent examination process, need for skill-oriented courses, streamlined grievance redressal systems, and increased scholarships for marginalized students, especially in SC, ST, and OBC categories. Women's safety and hostel allocation for postgraduates were other critical points of discussion. Meanwhile, NSUI hosted a special interaction with Telugu students of DU, under the leadership of its National President Varun Choudhary where Telugu students had an opportunity to share their issues and suggestions regarding campus life to the candidates.

Delhi resident lodges zero FIR alleging harassment by cab driver

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

A Delhi resident has lodged a zero FIR alleging that a cab driver harassed and tried to rob him and his friend along with their families in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra district, according to the police complaint. The accused also allegedly misbehaved with the women of the two families, it added. In his complaint to the police on September 20, Mohammad Raahim Rafi, said he and his friend along with their families had come to Himachal Pradesh for a four-day visit and their trip was planned by a travel agency. The bookings were made for Rs 36,600 and 50 per cent of the payment was made in advance while the rest had to be deposited after checking in into the hotel, the complaint letter said. Both Rafi and his friend are journalists and working in leading media organisations in Delhi. "The driver who picked us up from Delhi demanded Rs 10,000 to fill petrol at a pump,



about an hour before reaching Dharmsala, and when we refused saying the required payment was already done, he removed our luggage from the vehicle," the complainant said. Upon complaining to the travel agency, the driver was changed and their journey was resumed, he added in the complaint. However, when the group was returning from Chamba on September 17 night, the driver who had brought them from Delhi allegedly stopped their vehicle near Gaggal airport in Kangra, shut all doors using central locking and took them into a nearby forest area, the

complaint letter said. The accused then allegedly misbehaved with some women in the group, manhandled Rafi and demanded Rs 4,000. However, the tourists overpowered the driver and got out of the car. They booked another cab and resumed their journey. The complainant said that when the travel agency was apprised of the incident, they took no action. When contacted regarding the incident, Kangra SP Shalini Agnihotri told PTI on Sunday that the incident would be looked into and appropriate legal action would be taken.

Israel raids, shuts down Al Jazeera bureau in West Bank

AP ■ DUBAI

Israeli troops raided the offices of the satellite news network Al Jazeera in the Israeli-occupied West Bank early Sunday, ordering the bureau to shut down amid a widening campaign by Israel targeting the Qatar-funded broadcaster as it covers the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

Al Jazeera aired footage of Israeli troops live on its Arabic-language channel ordering the office to be shut for 45 days. It follows an order issued in May that saw Israeli police raid Al Jazeera's broadcast position in East Jerusalem, seizing equipment there, preventing its broadcasts in Israel and blocking its websites.

The move marked the first time Israel has ever shuttered a foreign news outlet operating in the country. However, Al Jazeera has continued operating in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, territories that the Palestinians hope to have for their future state.

The Israeli military acknowledged conducting the raid 12 hours later, alleging without providing evidence that the newsroom was "being used to incite terror, to support terrorist activities and that the channel's broadcasts endanger ... security and public order."

Al Jazeera denounced Israel's "unfounded accusations" as it continued broadcasting live from Amman, Jordan, even as Israeli troops welded shut its office doors in Ramallah and confiscated its equipment.

"Al Jazeera will not be intimidated or deterred by efforts to silence its coverage," it said.

Armed Israeli troops entered the office and told a reporter live on air that it would be shut down, saying that staff needed to leave immediately. The network later aired what appeared to be Israeli troops tearing down a banner on a balcony used by the Al Jazeera office. Al Jazeera said it bore an image of Shireen Abu Akleh, a

Palestinian-American journalist shot dead by Israeli forces in May 2022.

Al Jazeera's local bureau chief, Walid al-Omari, later told the AP that the Israeli military cited laws dating back to the British Mandate of Palestine to support its closure order.

The Palestinians secured limited self-rule in Gaza and parts of the occupied West Bank through the 1993 Oslo agreements. While Israel occupies and controls vast areas of the West Bank, Ramallah is under full Palestinian political and security control, making the Israeli raid on the Al Jazeera office that much more surprising. Journalists criticise raid and closure order.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate denounced the Israeli raid and closure order.

"This arbitrary military decision is a new aggression against journalistic work and media outlets," it said.

The Palestinian Authority administers parts of the West Bank. Its forces were driven from Gaza when Hamas seized power in 2007, and it has no power there. The Authority's Foreign Ministry condemned the raid.

Israeli Communication Minister Shlomo Karhi later described the raid as affecting "the mouthpiece of Hamas and Hezbollah", the Shiite militia in Lebanon that Israel targeted with strikes on Sunday after cross-border fire from the militants.

"We will continue to fight the enemy channels and ensure the safety of our heroic fighters," Karhi posted on X. Neither he nor the Israeli military addressed what legal authority Israel had to order the bureau closed.

Israel's Foreign Press Association said it was "deeply troubled by this escalation, which threatens press freedom, and urges the Israeli government to reconsider these actions."

"Restricting foreign reporters and closing news channels, signals a shift away from demo-



Hospital staff and soldiers move patients and equipment to the underground ward at Rambam medical center as fighting escalates between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. in Haifa, Israel, on Sunday

cratic values," it said.

The Israel-Hamas war has been extensively covered by Al Jazeera.

The network has reported on the Israeli-Hamas war nonstop since the militants' initial cross-border attack on October 7. Al Jazeera has maintained 24-hour coverage in the Gaza Strip amid Israel's grinding ground offensive that has killed and wounded members of its staff.

It remained unclear whether the Israeli military would target Al Jazeera's operation in Gaza as well. While including on-the-ground reporting of the war's casualties, Al Jazeera's Arabic arm often publishes verbatim video statements from Hamas and other regional militant groups.

That has led to Israeli claims by officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, that the network has "harmed Israel's security and incited against soldiers".

Those claims have been vehemently denied by Al Jazeera, whose main funder, Qatar, has been key in negotiations between Israel and Hamas to

reach a cease-fire to end the war. An order closing Al Jazeera in Israel has been repeatedly renewed in the time since, but it hadn't as yet ordered the Ramallah offices closed.

The Israeli government has taken action against individual reporters over the decades since its founding in 1948, but broadly allows for a media scene that includes foreign bureaus from around the world, even from Arab nations. It also blocked the foreign broadcasts of the Hezbollah-affiliated, Beirut-based Al Mayadeen news channel at the start of the war.

Criticism of Al Jazeera isn't new. Washington singled out the broadcaster during the US occupation of Iraq after its 2003 invasion toppled dictator Saddam Hussein and for airing videos of the late al-Qaida chief Osama bin Laden.

Al Jazeera has been closed or blocked by other governments in the Middle East.

Most notably in 2013, Egyptian authorities raided a luxury hotel used by Al Jazeera as an operating base after the mili-

tary takeover that followed mass protests against President Mohammed Morsi. Three Al Jazeera staff members received 10-year prison sentences, but were released in 2015 following widespread international criticism.

The Israel-Hamas war began when Hamas-led fighters killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in an October 7 attack on southern Israel. They abducted another 250 people and are still holding around 100 hostages.

Israel's campaign in Gaza has killed at least 41,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't differentiate between fighters and civilians.

The closure of Al Jazeera's Ramallah office also comes as tensions continue to rise over a possible expansion of the war to Lebanon, where electronic devices exploded last week in a likely sabotage campaign by Israel targeting the Shiite militia Hezbollah. The explosions Tuesday and Wednesday killed at least 37 people — including two children — and wounded around 3,000 others.

Hezbollah fires over 100 rockets across Israel

AP ■ NAHARIYA

Hezbollah launched more than 100 rockets early Sunday across a wider and deeper area of northern Israel, with some landing near the city of Haifa, as Israel launched hundreds of strikes on Lebanon. The sides appeared to be spiralling toward all-out war following months of escalating tensions. The rocket barrage overnight set off air raid sirens across northern Israel, sending thousands of people scrambling into shelters. The Israeli military said that rockets had been fired "toward civilian areas," pointing to a possible escalation after previous barrages had mainly been aimed at military targets.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said that one person was killed and another wounded in an Israeli strike near the border. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said that it treated four people for shrapnel wounds, including a 76-year-old man who was moderately wounded in Kiryat Bialik, a community near Haifa where buildings were damaged and cars set on fire. It wasn't immediately clear if the damage was caused by a rocket or an Israeli interceptor. The barrage came after an Israeli airstrike in Beirut on Friday killed at least 45 people, including one of Hezbollah's top leaders as well as women and children.

Hezbollah was already reeling from a sophisticated attack that caused thousands of personal devices to explode just days earlier.

The Israeli military said that it carried out a wave of strikes across southern Lebanon over the past 24 hours, hitting

about 400 militant sites, including rocket launchers. Lt Col Nadav Shoshani, an Israeli military spokesman, said those strikes had thwarted an even larger attack. "Hundreds of thousands of civilians have come under fire across a lot of northern Israel. They spent the night and now the morning in bomb shelters," he said. "Today we saw fire that was deeper into Israel than before."

Israel's Health Ministry said that all hospitals in the north would begin moving operations to protected areas or shelters within the medical centres.

In a separate development, Israeli forces raided the West Bank bureau of Al-Jazeera, which it had banned earlier this year, accusing it of serving as a mouthpiece for militant groups, allegations denied by the pan-Arab broadcaster. Israel and Hezbollah have traded fire since the outbreak of the war in Gaza nearly a year ago, when the militant group began firing rockets in solidarity with the Palestinians and its fellow Iran-backed ally Hamas. The low-level fighting has killed dozens of people in Israel, hundreds in Lebanon, and displaced tens of thousands on both sides of the frontier.

Neither side is believed to be seeking a war. But in recent weeks, Israel has shifted its focus from Gaza to Lebanon, and vowed to bring back calm to the border so that its citizens can return to their homes. Hezbollah has said that it would only halt its attacks if there is a cease-fire in Gaza, which appears increasingly elusive as long-running talks led by the United States, Egypt and

Qatar have repeatedly bogged down.

The war in Gaza began with Hamas' Oct 7 attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed about 1,200 people and took around 250 others hostage. They are still holding around 100 captives, a third of whom are believed to be dead. Gaza's Health Ministry says that more than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed. It doesn't say how many were fighters, but says women and children make up more than half of the dead.

Families of the hostages have raised fears that a war in the north would distract from their plight and further complicate the negotiations over their release.

Israeli media reported that rockets fired from Lebanon early Sunday were intercepted in the areas of Haifa and Nazareth, which are further south than most of the rocket fire to date. Israel cancelled school across the north, deepening the sense of crisis.

Hezbollah said that it had launched dozens of Fadi 1 and Fadi 2 missiles - a new type of weapon the group hadn't used before - at the Ramat David airbase, southeast of Haifa, "in response to the repeated Israeli attacks that targeted various Lebanese regions and led to the fall of many civilian martyrs".

In July, the group released a video with what it said was footage it had filmed of the base with surveillance drones.

Hezbollah also said it had targeted the facilities of the Rafael defence firm, which is headquartered in Haifa, calling it retaliation for the wireless devices attack. It didn't provide evidence, and the Israeli military declined to comment on the statement.

Britain's Labour Party gathers after rocky start in government

AP ■ LONDON

This should be a time of celebration for Britain's Labour Party, which opens its annual conference Sunday less than three months after winning power in a landslide after 14 years in opposition. But it's no victory lap for Prime Minister Keir Starmer. His government is facing a reckoning with a battered economy and an electorate impatient for change. The mood among Labour members gathering in the northwest England city of Liverpool has been further dampened by a tempest over Starmer's acceptance of freebies at a time when the millions of people are struggling with the cost of living.

Starmer insists he followed the rules when he took clothes and designer eyeglasses from Waheed Alli, a media entrepreneur and longtime Labour donor. But after days of negative headlines, the party now says Starmer won't accept any more free outfits.

"I get that people are angry," said Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who also accepted donations to pay for clothing.

"But donations for gifts and hospitality and monetary donations have been a feature of our politics for a very long time," she told the BBC. "People can look it up and see what people have had donations for, and the transparency is really important." Starmer won the July 4 election on a promise to "restore politics as a force for good" after scandal-tarnished years under the Conservatives. He vowed to get the country's sluggish economy growing and restore frayed public services such as the state-funded National Health Service.

Since then, he has struck a gloomy note, saying there is a 22 billion pound (\$29 billion) "black hole" in the public finances left by the Conservative government, and warning that "things will get worse" before they get better. One of the government's first major acts was to strip millions of retirees of a payment intended to help heat their homes in winter.

Starmer also had to deal with anti-immigrant unrest that

erupted after three children were stabbed to death in Southport, near Liverpool in July. Starmer responded firmly, pledging swift justice and tough sentences for rioters. But prison overcrowding, a legacy of the last government, meant hundreds of inmates had to be freed early to make way for the newly convicted rioters.

Then came the clothing scandal, dubbed "frockgate" after dresses gifted to the prime minister's wife, Victoria Starmer.

Keir Starmer is also facing grumbling among his own employees over the salary of his chief of staff, Sue Gray. The BBC disclosed that she is paid 170,000 pounds (\$225,000) a year — about 3,000 pounds more than the prime minister's salary. The government says it wasn't involved in setting the pay scale for political advisers. Labour says that the criticism is being whipped up by the Conservatives and their media supporters. But polls suggest it has hurt. An Ipsos poll released Friday found 25% of respondents thought Starmer was doing a good job — down from 36% in July — while 42% thought he was doing a bad job, up from 14%. The firm interviewed 1,082 adults by telephone and the margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points. "He promised to be different, but he hasn't been," Conservative lawmaker Chris Philp told the BBC. "He is not running a government of service, he is running a government of self-service."

The diet of bad news has alarmed many Labour members, who worry worse is to come in the form of tax increases and spending cuts when the government announces its first budget on October 30.

Labour leaders will try to convey a more positive message when Treasury chief Rachel Reeves makes a televised conference speech on Monday, followed by Starmer on Tuesday. They're hoping to inject some cheer into the four-day conference, a blend of pep rally, policy forum and boozy bash that plays a key role in maintaining morale among party activists.

Anura Dissanayake to be Sri Lanka President

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Marxist leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake rose from a humble background to the pinnacle of leadership in Sri Lanka, presenting himself as a transformative leader to young voters and those tired of the "corrupt politics" of the traditional politicians. Dissanayake, 56, popularly known as AKD, was on Sunday declared the winner of Saturday's presidential election.

The election on Saturday was the first to be held since mass protests unseated Gotabaya Rajapaksa in 2022 after the country suffered an economic crisis.

His accession to the post is a remarkable turnaround for his half-century-old party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), which had long remained on the margins. He is Sri Lanka's first-ever Marxist party leader to become head of state.

The leader of the JVP's broader front, the National People's Power (NPP), Dissanayake's anti-corruption message and

his promise of a change in political culture resonated strongly with young voters who have been demanding system change since the economic crisis.

The NPP's popularity has risen sharply since 2022 after securing only around three per cent of the vote in the last presidential election in 2019.

"In our country, only an uncorrupt force will take action against the corrupt. The slogan of punishing the corrupt has been echoed on stage since 1994 under Chandrika (Kumaratunga), Mahinda (Rajapaksa), Maithripala (Sirisena) and Gotabaya (Rajapaksa). The corrupt will never punish the corrupt. The corrupt always protect the corrupt. It is the NPP's priority to end corruption," he said in an interview with Daily Mail online in August.

Dissanayake, during another event in March, passionately asserted that the political struggle is not merely about a change of government but an endeavour to usher in political, economic, and social transfor-

mations of paramount importance in Sri Lanka's history. Dissanayake, who hails from rural Thambuttegama in the North Central province, is a science graduate from the Colombo suburban Kelaniya University.

He joined the JVP, the mother party of the NPP, in 1987 at the height of their anti-Indian rebellion. The JVP eliminated many activists of all democratic parties that supported the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987.

The Rajiv Gandhi-J R Jayawardena pact was the direct Indian intervention to solve the Tamil demand for political autonomy in the country. The JVP dubbed the Indian intervention as a betrayal of Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

However, Dissanayake's visit to India in February this year is seen as a change in the NPP leadership's approach towards India, expressing alignment with foreign investment interests. With JVP's taking up democratic politics in the late 90s, Dissanayake got a place in the JVP central committee.

4 killed, many hurt in Birmingham late night shooting

AP ■ BIRMINGHAM

Four people have died and more than 20 were wounded in a shooting in a nightlife area in Birmingham, Alabama, according to police and news reports.

There were multiple people shot on 20th Street near Magnolia Avenue in the Five Points South area on Saturday, the Birmingham Police Department said in a social media post.

Birmingham Officer Truman Fitzgerald said the shooting with up to 21 people wounded happened shortly after 11 pm in the 2000 block of Magnolia Avenue South, AL.COM reported.

Fitzgerald said there were "dozens of gunshot victims" and at least four had "life-threatening" injuries, AL.COM reported. Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service pronounced the three victims dead on the scene and a fourth

person was pronounced dead at University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital, AL.COM reported.

Police said the victims found dead at the scene included two men and a woman, WBMA-TV reported.

Other victims were transported to hospitals in private vehicles, police told WBMA.

The Birmingham police did not immediately respond to an email from The Associated Press seeking additional information.

The Five Points South area of Birmingham has numerous entertainment venues, restaurants and bars and often is crowded on Saturday nights. Police said there were no immediate arrests.

"We will do everything we possibly can to make sure we uncover, identify and hunt down whoever is responsible for preying on our people this morning," Fitzgerald told WBMA.

German chancellor's Social Democrats seek to hold off far right in vote

Berlin (AP): A state election is taking place in Brandenburg on Sunday, three weeks after a far-right party made gains in two other states in eastern Germany. Around 2.1 million people are registered to vote for a new state parliament in Brandenburg, the state that surrounds Berlin, the capital of Germany.

Sunday's election is being watched closely for signs about the country's political direction. The latest polls showed the far-right Alternative for Germany neck-and-neck with the Social Democrats, the party that has governed Brandenburg continuously since German reunification in 1990. The Social Democrats, the largest party in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-way coalition government, are hoping to maintain control of their stronghold in the face of rising support for parties on the extreme right and left. If the Social Democrats lose in Brandenburg, where Scholz himself has his constituency, it would be seen as a bad sign for him a year before federal elections are due to be held.

Outlook gloomy as world leaders gather in NY for UN General Assembly

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Facing a swirl of conflicts and crises across a fragmented world, leaders attending this week's annual UN gathering are being challenged: Work together — not only on front-burner issues but on modernizing the international institutions born after World War II so they can tackle the threats and problems of the future.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued the challenge a year ago after sounding a global alarm about the survival of humanity and the planet: Come to a "Summit of the Future" and make a new commitment to multilateralism — the foundation of the United Nations and many other global bodies — and start fixing the aging global architecture to meet the rapidly changing world.

The UN chief told reporters last week that the summit "was born out of a cold, hard fact: international challenges are moving faster than our ability to solve them." He pointed to "out-of-control geopolitical

divisions" and "runaway" conflicts, climate change, inequalities, debt and new technologies like artificial intelligence which have no guardrails.

The two-day summit starts Sunday, two days before the high-level meeting of world leaders begins at the sprawling UN compound in New York City. Whether it takes even a first step toward the future remains to be seen. There was no final agreement Saturday on its main outcome document — a lengthy pact that requires support from all 193 UN member nations to be adopted. Diplomats said Russia and a few others still had objections to the final text.

"Leaders must ask themselves whether this will be yet another meeting where they simply talk about greater cooperation and consensus, or whether they will show the imagination and conviction to actually forge it," said Agnès Callamard, the secretary-general of Amnesty International. "If they miss this opportunity, I shudder to think of the consequences. Our col-

lective future is at stake." This is the UN's biggest week of the year.

The summit is the prelude to this year's high-level meeting, held every September. More than 130 presidents, prime ministers and monarchs are slated to speak along with dozens of ministers, and the issues at the summit are expected to dominate their speeches and private meetings, especially the wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan and the growing possibility of a wider Mideast war.

"There is going to be a rather obvious gap between the Summit of the Future, with its focus on expanding international cooperation, and the reality that the UN is failing in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan," said Richard Gowan, U.N. director for the International Crisis Group. "Those three wars will be top topics of attention for most of the week."

One notable moment at Tuesday's opening assembly meeting: U.S. President Joe Biden's likely final major

appearance on the world stage, a platform he has tread upon and revealed in for decades.

At the upcoming meetings, US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told reporters this week: "The most vulnerable around the world are counting on us to make progress, to make change, to bring about a sense of hope for them."

To meet the many global challenges, she said, the US focus at the UN meetings will be on ending "the scourge of war." Roughly 2 billion people live in conflict-affected areas, she said. Last September, the war in Ukraine and its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, took center stage at the U.N. global gathering. But as the first anniversary of Hamas' deadly attack in southern Israel approaches on October 7, the spotlight is certain to be on the war in Gaza and escalating violence across the Israeli-Lebanon border, which is now threatening to spread to the wider Middle East.

Iran supports both Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon's Hezbollah

militants. Its new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, will address world leaders on Tuesday afternoon. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is scheduled to speak Thursday morning and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday afternoon.

Zelenskyy will get the spotlight twice. He will speak Tuesday at a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council — called by the United States, France, Japan, Malta, South Korea and Britain — and will address the General Assembly on Wednesday morning.

Slovenia, which holds the council's rotating presidency this month, chose the topic "Leadership for Peace" for its high-level meeting Wednesday, challenging its 15 member nations to address why the UN body charged with maintaining international peace and security is failing — and how it can do better.

"The event follows our observation that we live in a world of grim statistics, with the highest number of ongoing conflicts,

with record high casualties among civilians, among humanitarians, among medical workers, among journalists," Slovenian U.N. Ambassador Samuel Zbogor told reporters. He cited a record-high 100 million people driven from their homes by conflict.

"The world is becoming less stable, less peaceful, and with erosion of the respect for the rules, it is sliding into the state of disorder," Zbogor said. "We have not seen this high need to rebuild trust to secure the future ever before."

A key reason for the Security Council's dysfunction is the deep division among its five veto-wielding permanent members. The United States, Israel's closest ally, is a supporter of Ukraine alongside Britain and France. Russia invaded Ukraine and has a military and economic partnership with China, though Beijing reasserted its longstanding support for every country's sovereignty without criticizing Russia in a recent briefing paper for the UN meetings.

Vodafone Idea commits ₹30,000 crore to Nokia, Ericsson, Samsung for network upgrade

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea on Sunday said it has awarded contracts worth about Rs 30,000 crore to Nokia, Ericsson and Samsung for supply of 4G and 5G network equipment for three years.

It is the largest deal awarded by any Indian telecom operator during this year. The deal also marks the first step towards the roll-out of the company's three-year capex (capital expenditure) plan of about USD 6.6 billion or Rs 55,000 crore announced earlier.

"Vodafone Idea (VIL) has concluded a mega, about USD 3.6 billion (around Rs 300 billion), deal with Nokia, Ericsson and Samsung for supply of network equipment over a period of three years. The capex programme is directed towards expanding the 4G population coverage from 1.03 billion to 1.2 billion, launching 5G in key markets and capacity expansion in line with data growth," the company said in a statement.



The supplies against these new long-term awards will start in the coming quarter. The top priority for the company is to expand the 4G coverage to 1.2 billion Indians, the statement said. VIL CEO Akshaya Moondra said that the company has started the investment cycle and it is on the journey of VIL 2.0. "From hereon, VIL will stage a smart turnaround to effectively participate in the industry growth opportunities. Nokia and Ericsson have been our partners since our inception and this marks another

milestone in that continuing partnership. We are pleased to start our new partnership with Samsung. We look forward to work closely with all our partners as we move into the 5G era," Moondra said. Vodafone Idea (VIL) was the biggest telecom operator formed with the merger of Vodafone India and Idea Cellular in August 2018 with a mobile subscriber base of 40.8 crore. With continuous decline in the subscriber, VIL is now left with 21.5 crore mobile services subscribers as per latest data released by telecom regulator Trai.

VIL had recently raised Rs 24,000 crore through sale of equity and will fund the capital expenditure from the latest capital. The capex is currently being funded out of the equity raise. For the long-term capex, the company is in advanced stage of discussions with its existing and new lenders to tie up Rs 25,000 crore of funds and Rs 10,000 crore of non-fund-based facilities. VIL said that it has completed techno economic evaluation of the company's long-term projections by an independent third party. The report has been submitted to all the banks and financial institutions basis which the banks will now progress with their internal evaluation and approval processes. VIL in the last auction had acquired spectrum worth Rs 3,500 crore to increase its network capacity. The company executed some quick-win capex for the deployment of more spectrum on existing sites and the roll-out of some new sites. VIL said that the small capex

roll-out boosted its network capacity by about 15 per cent and an increase in population coverage by 16 million by end September, 2024. The company claimed that it has started witnessing an improvement in customer experience in select geographies where these roll-outs have been completed. VIL holds a large spectrum portfolio including mid band 5G spectrum in 17 circles and millimetreWave 5G spectrum in 16 circles. After the Rs 24,000 crore fundraise, including Rs 18,000 crore through a follow-on offer, the company was reeling under the debt of around Rs 2.14 lakh crore. The company had payment obligations of Rs 2,09,520 crore towards the government as of June 30, 2024, which included the deferred spectrum payment obligations and adjusted gross revenue liability. Post Rs 24,000 crore fundraise, VIL promoters Aditya Birla Group and Vodafone hold 37.3 per cent and the government 23.2 per cent stake in the company.

Luxury carmakers expect surge during festive season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Luxury carmakers Mercedes-Benz, Audi and BMW are eyeing robust sales during the festive period this year with demand for high-end cars continuing to see an upward trend in India.

In an interaction with PTI, Mercedes-Benz India MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said the luxury car segment is set for its best-ever performance this year with festive season oftakes playing a major role in the overall performance. He noted that the festive season generally gives high double-digit sales growth, helping the automaker to average out single-digit growth of the earlier quarter.

"So in that sense, on an average, then we are able to get a double-digit growth during the festive season," Iyer said. Elaborating on the overall industry, which still remains a very small part of the overall passenger vehicle market in the country, he said the segment is headed for record volumes this fiscal year but not all players are witnessing growth. "Some (companies) are even degrowing, some are flat and they are facing headwinds, but because we are the primary player in the market, we still feel the luxury car market should cross 50,000-51,000 cars this year," Iyer said. The luxury car market in India currently remains very small accounting for less than 2 per cent of the overall passenger vehicle market in the country. Audi India Head Balbir Singh Dhillon said the demand in the last few months has grown steadily and the company expects this to continue in the period ahead.



"We are working relentlessly with our HQ to get additional allocations for India, to fulfil this growing demand," he stated. Having said that, one cannot disregard the fact that the waiting period for Audi cars has gone up owing to demand and supply mismatch, he added. "It is also important to mention that the prevailing Global challenges are not only impacting the adequate supply of new cars, but also instilling pressure on the prices," Dhillon stated. With the upcoming festive season, Audi is expecting good growth on the back of sustained demand models like A4, A6, Q5, Q7 and Q8. BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah said the fundamentals of the Indian economy are sturdy and consumer confidence in the luxury segment is on the rise. "For BMW Group India, the order bank is solid and we are trying our best to speed up deliveries for our customers. Along with additional bookings around Diwali and Dussehra, we are confident of closing the year on a high note while clocking impressive growth," he stated.

India, EU to have new round of FTA talks

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior officials of India and the 27-nation European Union (EU) will commence the next round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement from Monday here, an official said.

The agreement is aimed at further boosting bilateral trade and investments between the two regions. The two sides are negotiating a free trade agreement, an investment protection agreement and an agreement on geographical indications (GIs).

"The five-day talks will start from September 23. It will be the ninth round of negotiations. Also, the concerns of Indian stakeholders regarding the EU's sustainability measures, such as CBAM, deforestation and others, will be discussed with the EU," the official said. During the ninth round, both sides will discuss core trade issues covering goods, services, investment and government procurement along with necessary rules such as rules of origin, SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary), and technical barriers to trade. The Carbon Border



Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or carbon tax (a kind of import duty) will come into effect from January 1, 2026. It will initially be imposed on seven carbon-intensive sectors, including steel, cement, fertiliser, aluminium and hydrocarbon products. India has raised concerns over these two regulations as it would have an impact on the country's exports to the bloc. According to think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), the European Union's Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) would hit India's agricultural exports worth USD 1.3 billion to the EU starting December 2024. The GTRI said that Indian firms are concerned about the potential negative impacts of regulations like the carbon tax, deforestation regulation, and supply chain regulation. "These regulations would

adversely impact India's exports to EU. After implementation of the trade agreement, the EU products will continue to enter India at zero duties, but Indian products may pay 20-35 per cent tariff equivalent as CBAM charges. A suitable text may be inserted in the FTA chapters dealing with this possibility," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said. In June 2022, India and the European Union resumed the negotiations after a gap of over eight years. It was stalled in 2013 due to differences over several issues. "Initially, from 2007 to 2013, multiple rounds of negotiations took place but were hindered by disagreements over market access, intellectual property rights, labour standards, and sustainable development. By 2013, the talks hit a standstill, particularly due to differences on tariffs for automobiles,

wine, spirits, data security for Indian IT firms, and public procurement," it said. It added that one of the major reasons for the delay is the differing aspirations between the two parties. The EU seeks tariff elimination on over 95 per cent of its exports, including sensitive agricultural products and automobiles, while India is comfortable opening up only around 90 per cent of its market and is hesitant to lower tariffs on bulk agricultural products, the GTRI said. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that major Indian goods exports to the EU, such as ready-made garments, pharmaceuticals, steel, petroleum products, and electrical machinery, will become more competitive, if the pact gets concluded successfully. Additionally, key services exports like telecommunications, other business services, and transportation services will also see substantial growth. On the other hand, the EU will benefit from increased exports of essential goods from India, including aircraft and parts, electrical machinery, diamonds, and chemicals.

President to inaugurate 16th ASOSAI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

President of India Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate the Assembly of the Asian Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ASOSAI) here on Tuesday.

The four-day conference will be followed by a series of discussions on the evolving role of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) in fostering transparency and accountability. "The President of India, Droupadi Murmu will inaugurate the prestigious 16th Assembly of the Asian Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (ASOSAI) here on September 24th, 2024," Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) said in a release.

A key highlight of this year's assembly is the assumption of the chair of ASOSAI by the CAG of India Girish Chandra Murmu for the term 2024-2027. "His leadership is expected to drive the association towards new frontiers in public audit, particularly in strengthening governance frameworks across Asia," CAG said. As part of the programme, the delegates will also participate in a one-day symposium on Digital Public Infrastructure and Gender Divide Issues of Inclusion and Accessibility. The symposium aims to explore critical issues at the intersection of technology, governance, and social inclusion, addressing how digital advancements can bridge the gap between genders in accessing public services. The assembly will witness participation from more than 200 delegates representing 42 countries and international organisations, underscoring the diverse and collaborative nature of ASOSAI. Delegates will engage in high-level discussions



to enhance the effectiveness of public audit, with a focus on improving accountability and promoting best practices in government operations. CAG said the conference promises to be more than just a formal gathering -- it will serve as a platform for exchanging innovative ideas and forging stronger regional and global partnerships to fortify the pillars of good governance. Founded in 1979 with 11 members, ASOSAI has grown to 48 Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), an important regional group under the umbrella of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). ASOSAI plays a central role in promoting collaboration, sharing experiences, knowledge exchange, and capacity building in the field of public audit amongst its members, as per a statement. The first ASOSAI Assembly and Governing Board meeting was held in New Delhi in May 1979.

Users threaten to quit UPI over fees: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Around 75 per cent UPI users will stop using it if any transaction charge is levied on the service, a survey by LocalCircles said on Sunday.

The survey found that 38 per cent of users make over 50 per cent of their payment transactions via UPI instead of debit, credit or any other form of digital transaction. "Only 22 per cent UPI users surveyed are willing to bear a transaction fee on payments, 75 per cent of respondents stated that they will stop using UPI if a transaction fee is introduced," the survey said. The survey comprising three broad areas claims to have received 42,000 responses from 308 districts but the number of replies on each question varied. The questions regarding transaction fee on UPI received 15,598 responses. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) posted a record 57 per cent rise in the volume of transactions and 44 per cent rise in value in the 2023-24 fiscal year, compared to the previous fiscal year. For the first time UPI transactions crossed 100 billion and closed at 131 billion in a financial year, compared to 84 billion in 2022-23. In value terms, it touched Rs 199.89 trillion, compared to Rs 139.1 trillion, the report said. The survey found 37 per cent of respondents shared UPI transaction accounts for more than 50 per cent of their total payment in value terms.

GST rate review meeting scheduled on September 25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ministerial panel on GST rate rationalisation will meet on September 25 and is expected to discuss tweaking of tax slabs and rates.

"The meeting of the GoM on rate rationalisation is scheduled for September 25 in Goa," an official told PTI. The six-member Group of Minister (GoM) under Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary, last met on August 22 and had submitted a status report to the GST Council on September 9.

During the August meeting, the panel had tasked the fitment committee comprising tax officers from the Centre and states to analyse the implication of tax rate change on some items and gather more data. Currently, goods and services tax (GST) is a four-tier tax structure with slabs at 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. Under GST, essential items are either exempted or taxed at the lowest slab, while luxury and demerit items attract the highest slab. Luxury and sin goods attract ccess on top of the highest 28 per cent slab. There have been talks of merging the 12 and 18 per cent tax slabs, but nothing has been proposed so far. Around 12 per cent, the average GST rate has fallen below the revenue neutral rate



of 15.3 per cent. This has prompted the need to start discussions on GST rate rationalisation. States such as West Bengal and Karnataka were not in favour of tinkering with GST slabs for now. West Bengal Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya had said after the GoM meet in August, "I have said there should be no changes in the GST slab". Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda had said the GoM has to analyse whether there is need to "disturb" the GST system, which has now broadly stabilised. "What do you achieve by disturbing it. We said in next meeting we will discuss it (reducing slabs)," Byre Gowda had said. The six-member GoM also includes Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, Rajasthan Health Services Minister Ganendra Singh, and Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal.

Government to start FY26 budget making exercise from next month

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry will commence the exercise to prepare the annual budget for 2025-26 from the second week of next month in the backdrop of the Indian economy recording 7 per cent growth rate for the fourth consecutive year. The budget for the next financial year would focus on reforms to be pushed to further accelerate growth momentum and measures to generate jobs and boost

demand in the economy. "Pre-budget meetings chaired by Secretary (Expenditure) shall commence in the second week of October 2024. Financial Advisers shall ensure that necessary details...Are properly entered in UBIS (Union Budget Information System) before/latest by October 7, 2024" Budget circular 2025-26 issued by the Department of Economic Affairs said. Hard copies of the data in the specified formats should be submitted for cross-

verification, it said. It will be the second budget of the Modi 3.0 government and 8th straight Budget for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, a rare distinction in Indian polity. "All the ministries/departments should submit details of autonomous bodies/ implementing agencies, for which a dedicated corpus fund has been created. The reasons for their continuance and requirement of grant-in-aid support, and why the same should not be

wound up, should be explained," it said. The Budget Estimates for 2025-26 will be provisionally finalised after completion of pre-budget meetings, it said. Pre-budget meeting shall commence from second week of October, 2024 and shall continue till around mid-November, 2024, it said. During the pre-Budget meetings requirement of funds for all categories of expenditures along with receipts of ministries/departments and

expenditure estimates on net basis are discussed. Besides, receipts of departmentally-run commercial undertakings, which are netted against the gross expenditure and non-tax revenues, including arrears of non-tax revenue are also assessed during the meetings. The Budget 2025-26 is likely to be presented on February 1 during the first half of the Parliament's Budget session which usually begins in the last week of January every year.

GCCI seeks review of SC's mineral taxation ruling

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industries (GCCI) has demanded an urgent review of the mineral taxation ruling by the Supreme Court, stating that the increased cost of mining will inevitably lead to higher prices for essential commodities, including steel, power, and cement. The Supreme Court last month allowed states to collect past dues on royalty on minerals bearing land from the Centre and mining companies from April 1, 2005 onwards. "The imposition of further taxes/ cess/ levies, if any, as permitted by the ruling, will further impact the economics of mining operations possibly making it unviable with its natural consequences. It may adversely impact the



downstream industries and lead to mining cost push inflation affecting the entire economy. While GCCCI respects the apex court's decision, it believes that the decision could have devastating consequences in future, for the mining industry in the country as a whole including Goa which is yet to recover from the aftereffects of mining ban in 2018. "The iron ore mining in Goa has just begun and/or looking forward to resume its operations after a long gap of 6 years - it is in everybody's

knowledge that after the change of mining regulations in 2015, the mining companies are required to pay a substantial amount in the form of auction premium for winning the bid, besides other statutory dues like Royalty, DMF/NMET contributions, etc," it said. The imposition of further taxes/ cess/ levies, if any, as permitted by the ruling, will further impact the economics of mining operations possibly making it unviable with its natural consequences. "We are compelled to request the authorities to review the verdict in light of the submissions from the industry to find a balanced solution that ensures revenue generation while ensuring the survival of the mining sector," GCCCI President Shrinivas Dempo said.

IN BRIEF

- LIC INDIA CONFERENCE OF CEO AND FOREIGN HEADS**
MUMBAI: LIC of India organised a conference of its CEO's & Heads of foreign units from UK, Singapore, Bahrain, Kenya, Fiji, Mauritius, Nepal, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh at GIFT city, Gandhinagar on 20.09.2024. LIC of India got an approval from IFSCA, the regulator of GIFT city to open an insurance office.
- RPF RECOVERED SMUGGLED GOODS**
MALIGAON: On 2nd September, 2024 RPF & GRP of Lumding jointly conducted checking in train no. 01666 (Agartala - Rani Kamalapati Express) at Lumding railway station. During checking, they apprehended four persons and recovered 19.7 grams of Brown Sugar worth Rs. 3.94 lakhs (approx.) and 18.10 kgs of Ganja worth Rs. 1.81 lakhs (approx.) from them. Later, the apprehended persons along with the recovered items were handed over to OC/GRP/Lumding for necessary legal action.
- NFR TAKING STEPS TO ENHANCE SAFETY MEASURES IN TRAINS**
MALIGAON: N. F. Railway to prioritize the safety and well-being of its passengers during their journey they are continuing the effort of modernizing and upgrading its infrastructure to meet the highest standard of safety and convenience.
- SIGNING OF GAS DEAL IN ACG, AZERBAIJAN**
NEW DELHI: ONGC Videsh, together with the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan (SOCAR), bp, MOL, INPEX, Equinor, ExxonMobil, TPAO, and ITOCHU, have signed an addendum to the existing Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) for ACG Field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea.



THE MAGIC OF MILLETS



Millets are a super-food that can bring about a radical change in the health of the people. They can be an answer to malnutrition and an effective way to fight various ailments

BY DR AVULA LAXMAIAH

Millet is a superfood loaded with fiber, protein, essential vitamins, and minerals. One serving of this super grain can meet the daily requirements for several nutrients needed for optimum function of the brain and body. Millets also offer significant ecological benefits. Its ability to thrive in harsh, arid conditions with little maintenance makes it a viable crop option for countries with challenging climates. Furthermore, millets require less water than other crops making it an environment-friendly produce with a smaller carbon footprint. Cultivating it also decreases dependence on imported cereal grains and promotes sustainable agriculture practices, globally.

In a conference on Global Millets, Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi while referring to millets as Shree Ann, defined the super food as the core medium to address the nutritional concerns across different population segments as well as an ideal way for a nation to grow exponentially. Millets can collectively bring ample opportunity for the small farmers of the country to scale and offer benefits for a sustainable future.

The Government of India has been making tremendous efforts to revive the production and consumption of millets through Minimum Support Price (MSP) schemes that provide financial aid to farmers for cultivating millets, and the introduction of millets in the

Public Distribution System (PDS) to make them accessible and affordable. This has led to India becoming the world's largest producer and second-largest exporter of millets, today. The nodal nutrition institute in India National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) and the Indian Institute of Millet Research (ICAR-IIMR), in their research studies, have established that millet consumption has a significant impact on health and nutrition. Millet, thus, is being promoted as a means of addressing the challenges of malnourishment, which is most prevalent amongst women and children in our country. The government's initiative to add millet to the mid-day meal is a visionary approach to support the POSHAN Abhiyaan 2.0 mission and address the issue of malnutrition, particularly in children. Their food-on-table initiatives such as Take-Home Ration (THR) and Hot Cooked Meals (HCM) are gradually helping to overcome the nutritional imbalance among children, especially in ages 3-6 years. ICMR-NIN has been actively contributing towards the government's initiatives to combat malnutrition by

providing supplementary foods, diversified diets, health check-ups, and community-based interventions. Despite significant efforts by the government and various stakeholders, the challenge of malnutrition remains complex and multi-faceted, requiring innovative solutions. It is imperative that the private sector and civil society partner with the government on driving the mission to promote millets to address malnutrition concerns comprehensively. The recent launch of multi-millet Nutri-bars for pre-school children by Anil Agarwal Foundation & Vedanta is one of the first such a unique nutrition program seen after the Union Budget. The organization has piloted a project to provide multi-millet bars to 50,000 children every day in anganwadis in Varanasi district for 6 months, thus aiming to improve the daily nutrient intake of children, boost

cognitive development, and reduce absenteeism while increasing enrolment in pre-schools. To advance sustainable health with the power of millets, we need to continue taking a holistic approach that involves multiple stakeholders, including government, policymakers, farmers, food manufacturers, corporations, and consumers. Consumers need to be educated about the nutritional and ecological benefits of millet and encouraged to incorporate them into their diets thus creating a healthier and nourished India. Quantified efforts are being observed by corporate to add millet-based products into their portfolio and introduce nutritious food products with millet as the core ingredient, to the community. This paradigm shift by corporate signifies a positive trend in nutrition delivery, reflecting their responsibility to contribute to the welfare of society. We have an opportunity to transform the way we approach food, health, and nutrition. Growing and consuming ancient millets will be a key to addressing this transformation, enhancing human health, protecting the environment, and preserving cultural traditions, in times to come!

The writer is Former Scientist G & Head of Public Health Nutrition Division, ICMR-NIN



STUDY REVEALS WHY AGING IMPAIRS IMMUNE RESPONSE

Researchers discover metabolic changes that hinder disease treatment in the elderly says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

There is hope for old-age people suffering from certain ailments from which they had no route to escape hitherto. All treatments had failed to resuscitate them from the octopus-like shackles of the disease. A team of medical and bio-engineering researchers in the University Of Miami Miller School Of Medicine Immunology in the US have found out the reasons behind old men failing to respond to any treatments for a series of diseases. Nay, they have not invented any medicine for such diseases but have made a landmark invention about the reason behind the failure of drugs to cure the medical problems faced by the veterans. A research paper published in Nature Communications, a widely followed scientific publication after peer review lists the reasons for the failure of medicines among old people. What makes the findings distinct is the part played by Dhananjay Suresh, a 20-year-old bio-medical engineer, and a key team member. Dhananjay is waiting for admission to a leading medical school in the US for his MBBS course after the four-and-a-half-year-long B Tech course when he joined the team. Suresh is the son of India-born medical microbiologist couple Dr. Suresh Pallikuthu and Dr Ranjini Valiathan. The researchers led by Dr. Daniela Frasca, principal investigator and associate professor of microbiology and immunology, have successfully proved for the first time in medical history that the aged fails to respond to medicines because of the "inability of immune cells to generate protective immunity". The metabolic abnormalities in immune cells lead to a reduced ability to generate protective immunity, according to Dr Frasca. Her team identified metabolic changes that decrease the body's



immunity as people age. Dr Frasca explained that aging is associated with elevated levels of inflammation and metabolic changes. "We have identified and characterized age-associated metabolic changes that may accelerate and exacerbate deficiencies in immune cells from older adults, particularly those responsible for diminished secretion of protective antibodies against infections and vaccines. The research team also pinpointed the role a metabolic compound – long thought to be inessential – plays in immunity. Contrary to accepted wisdom, lactate can induce pathogenic B lymphocyte behavior and increase bodily inflammation. "The metabolite lactate, the end product of anaerobic glycolysis, which has long been considered a discarded metabolic compound, plays a crucial role in age-associated defects in dysfunctional humoral responses," Dr. Frasca



DHANANJAY SURESH

said. "The effects of lactate, as described in the paper, recapitulate key features of B lymphocytes that infiltrate inflammatory tissues, where lactate-induced signaling may contribute to various pathological features." Lactate can induce pathogenic B lymphocyte behavior and increase bodily inflammation. With the script ready, medical doctors can step in and start a new

therapy that will spur helpful immune responses in the elderly and keep the diseases at bay. Now, it is for medical doctors to shape new therapies that selectively target metabolic products involved in the generation of inflammatory pathogenic immune cells to improve antibody responses in elderly individuals who are susceptible to infections and/or do not respond adequately to vaccination. If the initial response from the world of medicine is any indication, this landmark research will go a long way in helping the aged to remain healthy and guarded against any kind of immune deficiency. In Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine, there is a treatment that reverses the effects of time and regenerates the entire body, mind, and spirit. It is known as Kaya Kalpa. Is Kaya Kalpa getting Americanized and reappearing as a Metabolic Regeneration Study? Let's wait.

Training on the Well-being of Individuals with IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities)

TEAM VIVA

The Manbhavan Mitra Mandali, a Self-Advocacy Group of Manovikas Charitable Society on Saturday organised a training program to augment the well-being of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

The training included the individuals with conditions such as autism, intellectual disability, learning disability, and cerebral palsy. The training was mostly determined on promoting better well-being and empowering individuals with IDD to take charge of their health and happiness.

Kaka, a South Asian football player and a 16-year-old with an intellectual disability, shared that the workshop helped him make a decision to improve his well-being. Kaka said, "This program helped me understand how important my well-being is." He further added that he learned about what makes him feel good and how to take care of himself better. Another attendee Deepika



who is currently undergoing Domestic Data Entry Skill Training at the Aryaman Center of Excellence (ACE Lab) in Delhi and a Governing Board Member of Manovikas shared how the program helped her open her eyes to discovering new ways to well-being. She stated, "I learned simple things that I can do daily to feel better. These small steps make a big difference in my feelings, and I can do them independently." Harsh Bharadwaj, another boy who attended the training, also a talented arts and crafts artist from the Love Arts Training Lab, spoke about choosing well-being activities. He said, "Our activities made me feel happy and calm." He further added that he knows what to do when he feels stressed or sad, and it helps him stay positive. The event saw the active participation of more than 25 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The training was also attended by the parents and family members of the participants where they were taught about the valuable strategies which will help them to support their loved ones in their well-being and encourage independence. The session also emphasised practical ways to enhance the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of people with IDD.

INDIA TRUMPS BANGLADESH WITH ASHWIN'S SIX WICKETS

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Veteran off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's mastery over his craft, underlined by a six-wicket haul, proved too immense for Bangladesh as India cantered to a massive 280-run victory in the first Test with five sessions to spare, here on Sunday. Maintaining a clean slate against the Asian neighbours, India now lead the two-match series 1-0. Starting from their overnight 158 for four, Bangladesh were bundled out for 234 in their second innings as Ashwin scythed through their line-up (6/88). Ravindra Jadeja supported him with a three-wicket haul (3/58). Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto waged a lone battle for

the visitors with a sparkling 82 (127b, 8x4, 3x6), but there was hardly any meaningful support for him from his colleagues. The day, however, began on a bright note for the Bangladeshis with Shanto and Shakib Al-Hasan (25) extending their fifth-wicket stand to 48 runs, resisting the Indian bowlers in the first hour. Mohammed Siraj was the standout bowler for India during this phase as he worked up good pace and hit fine lines, but luck was not in his favour as edges eluded him or fell short of fielders. It left the pacer a frustrated man, evidenced in his constant tirade against Shanto, who remained unruffled. Shakib, who played a lovely front foot pull off Siraj for a



boundary, also received a reprieve as Rishabh Pant missed a stumping chance off Jadeja when the batter was on 17. At the first drinks break of the day, Bangladesh were 194 for four and they might have hoped to further stretch the

home side. However, the introduction of Ashwin immediately after the resumption of play changed the complexion of the proceedings. There was nothing much on the surface for the spinners but Ashwin, who possesses a scientist's acumen, does not need such generosity from the deck or conditions. The Chennai man put into use his ability to find acute angles from around the wicket to left-handers to optimum effect against Shakib. Ashwin pushed the ball a bit deep and it hit the handle of Shakib's bat as he attempted a forward defence, and the resultant edge went into the eager hands of Yashasvi Jaiswal at backward short leg. Soon, the star off-spinner completed his 37th five-

wicket haul, equalling Australian legend Shane Warne, nipping to stay of Mehidy Hasan Miraz (8), who lobbed a catch to Jadeja at long-on. In the process, Ashwin also went past New Zealand legend Richard Hadlee's five-wicket haul tally - 36. It was also the fourth time the veteran all-rounder took five-wicket or more in a Test match alongside a hundred. Jadeja, the long-time second fiddle to Ashwin, too had his own moments as he scalped the wickets of Shanto and Litton Das, who edged the left-arm spinner to Rohit Sharma at first slip. However, Shanto's batting will give a speck of hope for Bangladesh ahead of the next match for the visitors. While the wickets were on a constant tumble at the other

end, Shanto batted calmly and with purpose. The left-hander swept, reverse swept and cut spinners and pacers to collect his runs from all corners of Chepauk. But the task was way beyond such a one-man show on this day. Given his cavalier methods at the crease, the dismissal was inevitable and it came in the 59th over. Shanto tried to hoist Jadeja out of the park, but the shot lacked power and timing, and Jasprit Bumrah comfortably settled under the ball near mid-wicket. The dismissal also ended Bangladesh's hopes to last at least beyond the first session, and now they will have to think of ways to regroup ahead of the second Test at Kanpur, beginning September 27.

Bumrah, Pant's fitness and form crucial for India's chances in Australia says Chappell

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah and flamboyant wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant must remain injury-free and in top form if India are to achieve a historic hat-trick of series wins Down Under, said former Australia captain Ian Chappell. One of the most respected voices in world cricket, Chappell feels that five Test matches, including three against New Zealand, is just the ideal build up that Indian team needed before the most high-profile bilateral series in this cycle of the World Test Championship. "India's priority will be to get as many players as possible into form without suffering major injuries. However, the most pressing matters are to achieve those aims with Jasprit Bumrah and Rishabh Pant," Chappell wrote in his column for ESPN Cricinfo. "Pant's ability to bounce back onto the Test scene is quite remarkable given his horrific car accident. He is a crucial wicketkeeper-batter in the Indian line-up and he'd give the team a major boost if he's at the peak of his powers for the Australian tour." Pant was the hero of India's last series win in 2020-21 when he scored 97 at Sydney



in a match-saving effort, while his 89 not out at the Gabba in the decider is now part of Indian cricketing folklore. One of the most astute readers of the game, Chappell explained why Pant's keeping will also be key to India's fortunes on bouncy tracks. "If Pant can perform at his best, he's the ideal keeper for Australian conditions. If he's able to continue with his agile performance standing back, that is what is required in Australia. You need a keeper who capably covers a lot of territory to both sides of the wicket. "Any keeper who fulfils those requirements not only

improves the team's fielding but also allows the slip fielders to spread wider to cover extra territory," he elaborated. Chappell believes that a stern warning from erstwhile head coach Ravi Shastri during his time at the helm might have helped Pant in raising the level of his glove work. "Pant's keeping standing up to the stumps drastically improved before his serious injury, following an ultimatum from coach Ravi Shastri. The fact that Pant progressed from being a dubious keeper against spinners to a very good gloveman standing up to the stumps, admirably displayed

his willingness to work hard." The other crucial aspect in Australia will be Bumrah's fitness and form. Since his comeback post lower back stress fracture surgery in August 2023, the star pacer has managed his workload beautifully across formats focussing on priority format at any given point in time. However, he has also been pretty regular in Test matches playing bulk of the red-ball games against South Africa away and England at home. "The good form and fitness of both Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj - the two most successful pace bowlers on the last Australian tour - is essential. Of those two,

Bumrah is the attack leader. "A critical part of India's build-up to the Australian tour will be ensuring Bumrah is in form but remains fit to play the bulk of the five Tests." He also cited how during his captaincy years, his lethal weapon Dennis Lillee would always want to play as many games when he was in form rather than being wrapped in "cotton wool". Chappell also hoped that Mohammed Shami can get fit by the time series starts. "It would be ideal if the mercurial Mohammed Shami is fit for Australia but the presence of a good left-arm pacer would also improve India's variety in attack. "The spin bowling is in good hands with Jadeja and Ashwin. Nevertheless I wouldn't discount the importance of Kuldeep Yadav on some Australian surfaces." For Chappell, Yashasvi Jaiswal has had a good start to his Test career but Australian tracks will demand different temperament from the Mumbai left-hander. "Of the young batters Yashasvi Jaiswal looks very talented but he needs to show good form in Australia. Both Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli should act as guiding lights for the younger batters on tour," Chappell wrote.



Indonesia Para-Badminton: Umesh clinches gold; Sukant, Sivarajan, Mandeep claim silver

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Umesh Vikram secured gold in the SL3 event, while the trio of Sukant Kadam, Sivarajan Solaimalai, and Mandeep Kaur claimed silver medals in their respective categories at the Indonesia Para-Badminton International on Sunday. Sukant bagged the silver in the men's singles SL4 event, while Sivarajan won the silver in men's singles SH6 category. Mandeep clinched the silver in women's singles SL3 category. India delivered a stellar performance in Sarakata, Indonesia, winning as many as 34 medals in the International Level 2 tournament. In men's singles SL3, Umesh triumphed over compatriot and top seed Nehal Gupta, winning 12-21 21-8 21-19 in the final. Sukant, who had missed out on a bronze medal in Paris after losing to Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan in the play-off, fell short again in the SL4 final, losing 14-21 14-21 to the Indonesian. "I gave my best in the final, but Fredy played an exceptional game," Sukant said. "It was a great learning experience, and I'll keep pushing to aim for gold in future competitions." Sivarajan, who had lost to Great Britain's Krysten Coombs in Paris, faced a tough challenge from top-seeded Indonesian Subhan Subhan in the SH6 final, ultimately losing 19-21 15-21.

Mandeep, who had suffered a defeat to Nigeria's Mariam Eniola Bolaji in Paris, also finished with silver after losing 10-21 5-21 to Indonesia's top seed Qonitah Ikhtiar Syakuroh in the SL3 final. Despite the silver medal finishes, the Indian contingent's overall performance was strong, with Umesh claiming the lone gold in singles. Jagadeesh Dilli added to India's success by securing bronze in the same category, making it a sweep for India with seven players reaching the quarterfinals. In women's singles SL3, Mandeep's silver was complemented by Neeraj's bronze. In the men's singles SH6 category, Sudarsan Saravanakumar Muthusamy also earned bronze, while Sivarajan secured silver. Among other Indians in fray, Naveen Sivakumar won bronze in men's singles SL4 category, while Ruthick Ragupathi claimed silver in the men's singles SU5. Koshika Devda secured bronze in the women's singles SU5. In the mixed doubles SL3-SL4 category, Nehal and Naveen Sivakumar earned silver, while Umesh and Surya, along with Harshit and Kartik, claimed bronze. The men's doubles SU5 saw Hardik Makkar and Ruthick Ragupathi claim gold. In the women's wheelchair WH1 category, Pallavi Kuluvehalli secured gold, with Prema Vishwas and Anusha Chidananda taking bronze. Alpha James

clinched gold in the women's singles WH2 category, and Shabana took home bronze. The mixed doubles WH1-WH2 category saw Poorna Rao and Munna Khalid win bronze. In the men's WH1 category, Prem Kumar Ale secured bronze, while Neeraj and Arati Patil, along with Vaishali Nilesh and Germany's Irina Whalers, claimed bronze in the women's doubles SL3-SU5 category. Additionally, Alpha James and Pallavi Kuluvehalli, along with Anusha Chidananda and Shabana won bronze in the women's doubles WH1-WH2 category. Mohun Bagan Super Giant seeks first win of season in match against NorthEast United Kolkata, Sep 22 (PTI) Mohun Bagan Super Giant will aim to grab their first win of the season when they clash against NorthEast United in their second home game of the Indian Super League 2024-25 season here on Monday. The Mariners had shared the spoils with Mumbai City FC in their opening match. NorthEast United, meanwhile, earned a win in their first game, courtesy a late goal by Alaedine Ajarai against debutants Mohammedan Sporting. They will now take on the Mariners whom they defeated a few weeks back in the Durand Cup 2024 final and will be upbeat to land their third successive win in Kolkata.

Super sub Vinicius leads to Real Madrid comeback win over Espanyol

AP ■ BARCELONA

Joan Garcia showed why he is an up-and-coming goalkeeper - until Vinicius Junior got the Real Madrid scoring machine going. Vinicius went off the bench to assist Rodrygo and score one of his own and Kylian Mbappé added a late penalty as Madrid topped a tenacious Espanyol 4-1 in the Spanish league on Saturday. Garcia made several saves for the visitors before the Olympic gold medalist started an attack with a long pass from his box that ended with an own goal by counterpart Thibaut Courtois in the 54th minute. But Garcia's only slip of the match let Dani Carvajal equalize four minutes later when Jude Bellingham's low pass squirmed under the goalie. The Madrid right back had to only push it over the line for 1-1. Vinicius rested in the first half as Carlo Ancelotti rotated his attacking bunch. But the coach sent the Brazil forward on immediately after Espanyol went ahead. Vinicius then took control, curling in a perfect cross with the outer tip of his left boot for Rodrygo to score in the 75th. Vinicius beat Garcia in the 78th for his goal after



Espanyol lost the ball and Mbappé played his attack partner clear on the break. Mbappé converted a 90th-minute spot kick after Endrick went on late and earned a penalty from Carlos Romero. "We made mistakes that maybe you can get away with in other games, but not here," Espanyol coach Manolo González said. Madrid pulled to one point behind leader Barcelona before it plays at Villarreal on Sunday.

Bellingham had a scare when he fell awkwardly on his right shoulder in the first half, but after briefly being seen by a doctor on the sideline he went back on. Ancelotti said it did not look like the England midfielder was fine. Unsurprisingly, Ancelotti said he was satisfied with the "well-rounded" performance. Garcia in goalAfter helping Spain win Olympic gold this summer, Garcia was rumored to have been close to a move to Arsenal before finally staying put at the club

he helped return to Spain's top flight last season. And he showed his quality at the Santiago Bernabeu. Garcia made at least eight saves before he turned playmaker with a booming kick from his box that launched Jofre Carreras down the left flank. Jofre won the end line before his low pass hit Courtois' leg and turned into the net. But once Madrid started clicking, even an inspired Garcia couldn't keep them out.

Double deflectionTwo similar goals within three minutes of one another lifted Valencia to a 2-0 win over Girona at home. A pair of shots by Luis Rioja and Dani Gómez in the 56th and 58th both took deflections off Girona defender Juanpe Ramirez before skirting past goalkeeper Paulo Gazzaniga. Gazzaniga was to blame for Girona's loss at Paris Saint-Germain midweek in the Catalan club's Champions League debut. The goalie let a cross slip through his hands in stoppage time in a 1-0 loss in France. Can't get goingReal Sociedad's surprising struggles continued after a scoreless draw at promoted Valladolid. The team from San Sebastian, which has consistently finished near the top of the table in recent years, has only one victory in seven rounds. Sociedad visits Nice when the Europa League group stage opens next week. Also, Ante Budimir earned and converted a penalty and Aimar Oroz took the winner as Osasuna beat Las Palmas 2-1 at home. The team from the Canary Islands remained in last place and without a win.

Arshdeep takes six in India D's consolation win

PTI ■ ANANTAPUR

Arshdeep Singh saved his best for the last game and returned career-best figures of 6 for 40 as India D thrashed India B by 257 runs to end their Duleep Trophy campaign with a consolation victory here on Sunday. Earlier, India D, who started the final day's play at 244 for 5, ended their second innings at 305, leaving India B with a target of 373 in little over 70 overs. Arshdeep and Aditya Thakare (4/59) then bowled unchanged for 22.2 overs to bundle out Abhimanyu Easwaran's team for a lowly 115. Arshdeep also recorded his best match figures of 9 for 90, with the distinction of getting out India's T20 skipper Suryakumar Yadav (16) twice in the same game. India B skipper Easwaran once again failed to deliver when it mattered in the larger context as Arshdeep had him caught by Akash Sengupta for 19. Thanks to Nitish Reddy, who swung his bat around for a quickfire 40 off 43 balls, India B managed to cross 100. Eight India B batters failed to log double digit score. India B thus ended the campaign with seven points from three games, having won

their opening match and then getting a point after conceding the first-innings lead. India D, who had lost the first two games outright, will finish last despite logging full six points. Arshdeep, who got pipped by Yash Dayal into the Test squad as the first-choice left-arm pacer, certainly made an impression as he got to move the ball away from the right-handers and bowled the ideal length to trouble the top-order. At the start of the day, Ricky Bhui (119) duly completed his second ton of the tournament and remained not out, having faced only 125 balls. He hit 15 fours and three maximums in the process. In the morning, India D batted for 14.3 overs to add another 61 runs to their total as Bhui scored his second successive hundred. With scores of 56 and 119, the former India U-19 skipper was named Player of the Match. Brief Scores: India D 349 and 305 in 58.3 overs (Ricky Bhui 119, Shreyas Iyer 50, Mukesh Kumar 4/98, Navdeep Saini 3/58). India B 282 and (target 373) 115 in 22.2 overs (Arshdeep Singh 6/40). India D won by 257 runs. Points: India D 6 India B.

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