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OVER BANGLADESH
12 SPORTS



Police altered documents in RG Kar case, claims CBI



Activists of various left wing parties clash with police personnel during a protest march against the alleged sexual assault and murder of a trainee doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Kolkata, Thursday

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation has reasons to believe that a section of Kolkata Police officials had tried to create fake documents in the Kolkata lady doctor rape and murder case. In its remand letter submitted before Court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate, Sealdah the CBI has said that the officials at Tala Police Station which has jurisdiction over the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital where the August 9 rape and murder took place had tried

to "create" and "alter" certain documents that could change the direction of the case. Hearing a writ petition the Calcutta High Court had transferred the case to the CBI following allegations that the Kolkata Police was trying to suppress facts. While seeking an extended remand for former Officer in-charge of Tala Police Station Abhijit Mondal and arrested former RGMCH Principal Sandip Ghosh the CBI has told the Court that some additional facts had surfaced during the investigation of the two accused persons.

"During custodial interrogation of both the accused persons, new/additional facts have emerged to the effect that some false records pertaining to the instant case were created/ altered in the police station," the CBI letter said. The agency also told the court that the CCTB footages of the said police station had been confiscated and handed over to the Central Forensic Laboratory for analysis. The parents of the victim had also alleged similar things before the media. "We had told repeatedly how we were

given three versions of sudden illness, suicide and then death over telephone before we rushed to the hospital ... then in the hospital we were made to sit for three hours while her mother literally held their feet to let her see her daughter's face once," said the father of the victim. The ordeal did not end there as the old parents were made to sit in the Tala Police Station for more than an hour and were repeatedly monitored while they wrote the FIR. "They also forcefully cremated my daughter without our wishes ... as we wanted to get a second postmortem conducted" as the autopsy was done post sundown defying the general protocol in the Kolkata Police manual, they alleged. Incidentally, the postmortem was done not on the request of a DCP but that of a sub-inspector, a letter recovered by the CBI showed. The CBI has been trying to find out who was instructing Mondal and also who was instructing the person and who was instructing the arrested police officer and for what reason, sources said adding "everything will become clear in the coming weeks when the call details and forensic reports come up."

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Domestic Violence Act applicable to all women: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, is a civil code that is applicable to every woman in India irrespective of her religious affiliation or social background. A bench of Justice BV Nagarathna and Justice N Kotiswar Singh said the 2005 legislation was applicable to all women for more effective protection of their rights guaranteed under the Constitution. "The Act is a piece of civil code which is applicable to every woman in India irrespective of her religious affiliation and/or social background for a more effective protection of her rights guaranteed under the Constitution and in order to protect women victims of domestic violence occurring in a domestic relationship," the bench said. The apex court delivered its verdict on an appeal filed by a woman challenging an order of the Karnataka High Court in a matter related to the grant of maintenance and compensation. The woman had earlier filed a petition under section 12 of the Act which was allowed by a Magistrate in February 2015 granting Rs 12,000 as monthly maintenance and Rs 1 lakh towards compensation to her. The court noted that the husband had filed an appeal against the order which was dismissed by the appellate court on the ground of delay. The court noted that later, he filed another application under section 25 of the Act, which deals with duration and alteration of orders, before a magistrate but the same was dismissed. The bench said thereafter, he filed an appeal before the appellate court,



which allowed it and remanded the matter to the magistrate with a direction to consider his application by giving an opportunity to both parties to adduce their evidence. The judges noted that aggrieved by the order, the woman approached the High Court which dismissed her plea in April last year and directed the magistrate to consider the application filed by the man under section 25 of the Act. In its verdict, the Supreme Court referred to section 25 and said it was evident that an aggrieved person or a respondent as defined under the Act can seek for alteration, modification or revocation of an order made under the provisions of the Act if there was a change in the circumstances as per sub-section (2) of section 25. The bench said a Magistrate, while exercising discretion under section 25(2) of the Act, has to be satisfied that a change in the circumstances has occurred, requiring to pass an order of alteration, modification or revocation.

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Hindu Temple vandalised in US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Unknown miscreants have vandalised the BAPS Hindu temple in California's Sacramento, desecrating it with expletive-laden graffiti saying "Hindus go back!", the BAPS Public Affairs said. "Less than 10 days after the desecration of the @BAPS Mandir in New York, our Mandir in the Sacramento, CA area was desecrated last night with anti-Hindu hate: "Hindus go back!" We stand united against hate with prayers for peace," the BAPS Public Affairs said in a post on X. Wednesday night's incident comes after the desecration of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Melville, New York, on September 17. "Our condemnation of hate remains resolute; our sadness has only deepened; and our prayers for all, including those with hate in their heart, have grown stronger," the organisation said in a statement. "BAPS is working with law enforcement authorities on this hate crime," the statement said. "The BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Sacramento is home to a vibrant Hindu community engaged in numerous activities and projects to support the larger community. We are and shall remain an integral part of this community's fabric," the statement added.

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SC to hear Godhra incident appeals on 15 January

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said it will hear on January 15 the appeals filed by the Gujarat Government and several other convicts in the 2002 Godhra train burning case. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Rajesh Bindal made it clear that no adjournment will be given in the matter on the next date of hearing. On February 27, 2002, 59 people were killed when the S-6 coach of Sabarmati Express was burnt at Gujarat's Godhra, triggering riots in the State. Several appeals have been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the October 2017 verdict of the Gujarat High Court which had upheld conviction of several convicts and commuted the death penalties of 11 to life term.



Gujarat Government's counsel Swati Ghildiyal requested the bench to post the matter for hearing on some other day as she was to argue before another Supreme Court bench in a death penalty-related matter. "We have to first understand what are the cases of individuals? What is the prosecution's case? Then we have to ascertain the roles," the bench observed, adding that hearing in the matter will take at least three days. Now we will not adjourn it on the next date," the bench said.



People gather at a government hospital after their family members drowned while taking holy dips in rivers and ponds during the 'Jivitputrika' festival on Wednesday, in Aurangabad district of Bihar, Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024. At least 43 people, including 37 children, drowned and three others went missing in separate incidents in 15 districts of the state, according to officials

Several drown during Bihar festival

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/NEW DELHI

At least 43 people, including 37 children drowned and three others went missing while taking holy dips in rivers and ponds in separate incidents during the 'Jivitputrika' festival in Bihar, the State Government said on Thursday. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar condoled the deaths and announced an ex gratia of Rs 4 lakh for the next of kin of the deceased. The incidents occurred in 15 districts of the state during the festival held on Wednesday. During the 'Jivitputrika' festival, women fast for the well-being of their children and both take holy dips. "A total of 43 bodies have been recovered so far. Further search operation is on," a statement issued by the Disaster Management Department (DMD) said. The process of providing the ex gratia has begun and family members of eight deceased have already received it, the statement said. "The incidents of drowning were reported from East and West Champaran, Nalanda, Aurangabad, Kaimur, Buxar, Siwan, Rohtas, Saran,

Patna, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Gopalganj and Arwal districts. The DMD has pressed several teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) for search and rescue operations. Eight children drowned in Aurangabad district - four at Itahat village under Baruna police station area and another four at Kushaha village of Madanpur police station. According to reports from Kaimur, seven minors drowned in Bhabhua and Mohania police station areas when they were taking bath in the Durgawati river and a pond, respectively. Four incidents of drowning were reported on Wednesday evening from Amnabad village under Bihta police station area of rural Patna and five persons, including two boys, drowned in Daudpur, Manjhi, Taraia and Marhaura police station areas of Saran district. "The incidents took place when the victims, along with their family members, went for a holy dip in the water bodies," Aurangabad District Magistrate Srikanth Shastri said.

FIRST WOMAN PRESIDENT TO MEET TROOPS AT SIACHEN



President Droupadi Murmu pays tribute at the Siachen War Memorial during a visit to Siachen Base Camp, on Thursday

HP govt face flak by party for adopting Yogi model

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ SHIMLA/NEW DELHI

Himachal Pradesh Minister Vikramaditya Singh was summoned to Delhi and reprimanded by the Congress brass over a controversial order issued by his department mandating food outlets across the State to display the name and address of their owners, which has however been withdrawn. Facing flak by the party high command the Himachal Pradesh Government on Thursday said no such decision has been taken. The State Government in a statement said it has not taken any decision that makes it mandatory for street vendors to display nameplates or other identification at their stalls. The development came as the Congress came under fire on social media as well as within the party over

the move as it had criticised a similar move by the Uttar Pradesh Government during the Kanwar Yatra a few weeks back. Sources said Vikramaditya has been asked not to give controversial remarks on this matter. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was upset with Vikramaditya. The Himachal Urban Development Ministry's order came under criticism from Congress leader TS Singh Deo, who called it a reprehensible and discriminatory move. BJP leader Jai Ram Thakur on Thursday said Singh must stick to his words. "If Vikramaditya Singh has talked about implementing vendors' policy on the pattern of Uttar Pradesh, he should stick to his words," Thakur, who is Leader of the Opposition in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly, said.

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SC rejects Gujarat Government plea in Bilkis case



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed a plea filed by the Gujarat Government seeking a review of the court's verdict which contained certain observations against the State while quashing the remission granted to 11 men convicted of raping Bilkis Bano and murdering seven of her family members during the 2002 riots. A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan also rejected the application for listing review petition in open court. "Having carefully gone through the Review Petition, the order under challenge and the papers annexed therewith, we are satisfied that there is no error apparent on the face of the record or any merit in the Review Petition, warranting reconsideration of the order impugned. The Review Petition is, accordingly, dismissed," the bench said. The Gujarat Government in its plea had said the apex court's observation in the January 8 judgment, holding the State guilty of "usurpation of power" and "abuse of discretion" for complying with an order of another top court bench, was an "error apparent on the face of the record" primarily on three grounds.

Little hopes of ceasefire between Israel, Hezbollah

AP ■ TEL AVIV

The Israeli Prime Minister appeared to downplay hopes of an imminent truce with Hezbollah on Thursday after the United States and its allies called for an "immediate" 21-day ceasefire to "provide space for diplomacy". In a statement released as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who was en route to New York to attend the UN General Assembly, his office said there was only a proposal on the table and that he had not yet responded to it. The statement also denied that there

had been any directive to ease up on fighting on the northern border with Lebanon. The comments raised questions about a new international initiative to halt increasingly heavy exchanges of fire that have killed hundreds of people in Lebanon and threatened to trigger an all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah. They came as Israel has threatened to launch a ground invasion into Lebanon to push the militant group away from the border and as an Israeli strike in Lebanon killed 23 people. The Israeli foreign minister, Israel Katz, had previously said the



country would continue fighting "with all our might until victory and the safe return of the residents of the north to their homes." Hezbollah has also not yet

responded to the proposal for a pause in fighting, although Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati has welcomed it. The Lebanese militant group has insisted it would only halt its strikes if there is a ceasefire in Gaza, where Israel has been battling Hamas for nearly a year. That appears out of reach despite months of negotiations led by the United States, Egypt and Qatar. In its statement, Netanyahu's office said "the fighting in Gaza will also continue until all the objectives of the war have been achieved." Netanyahu is expected

to meet with other world leaders on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Israel launched a massive operation in Gaza after a Hamas-led attack into southern Israel on October 7 in which about 1,200 people (mostly civilians) were killed, and 250 taken hostage. More than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since then, according to local officials. Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel one day after the October 7 attack in support of its Hamas allies, and Hezbollah and Israel have traded fire ever since.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trouble for Siddaramaiah

Karnataka CM faces fresh political and legal challenge as alleged land scam during his previous tenure gains traction

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is facing the heat as a special court has directed the Mysuru Lokayukta police to investigate his connection with an alleged MUDA scam. This follows the Karnataka High Court's dismissal of Siddaramaiah's petition challenging the Governor's approval for the investigation. Siddaramaiah finds himself embroiled in a controversy as a probe into an alleged land scam during his previous tenure (2013-2018) gains momentum. The allegations revolve around irregularities in the denotification of prime land in Bengaluru, where government-owned land was allegedly released for private development, bypassing legal procedures. This development has not only triggered a political storm but also raised questions about the stability of his government, which is already navigating internal challenges. The case, brought to light through opposition parties and activists, accuses Siddaramaiah of misusing his position to facilitate the denotification of land in favour of private individuals. It is claimed that these actions led to substantial financial losses to the state exchequer. The denotification process is typically reserved for cases where the government no longer requires the land for public purposes. However, the opposition alleges that the decision-making was influenced by vested interests.



The probe, aims to examine Siddaramaiah's role and whether he acted within the framework of the law. While the investigation is in its preliminary stages, the political ramifications are already visible. With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) demanding a thorough investigation and even his resignation, the pressure on Siddaramaiah is mounting. In response to the accusations, Siddaramaiah has strongly denied any wrongdoing, calling the probe a politically motivated attempt to tarnish his image and destabilise his government. Siddaramaiah's defence rests on his claim that the land denotification was carried out in compliance with legal procedures and was vetted by relevant authorities. He also pointed out that similar cases have been registered against several politicians across party lines, suggesting that this is a standard political practice to harass the CM's of the Opposition parties and not unique to his administration. If the investigation gathers pace and incriminating evidence surfaces, it could weaken his authority, both within his party and in the eyes of the public. The BJP, as the principal opposition in Karnataka, is likely to leverage the land scam to question Siddaramaiah's integrity and leadership. Their demand for accountability could lead to prolonged political uncertainty, especially if the case moves into the courts or if there are calls for judicial oversight. Further, any perception of corruption, especially in a state like Karnataka where electoral battles are fiercely fought, could erode Siddaramaiah's public image. His government, which came to power on promises of transparency and development, may find itself in a difficult position defending its track record if this case gains momentum and more evidence surfaces.

the human mind is a unique organic entity whose lengths of reach and visions of the range are still to be fully mapped. Many believe that an average mind works at less than 30 per cent of its potential. Putting this in the context of artificial intelligence, the matter becomes even more complex. There is a theory doing the rounds in the field of artificial intelligence that suggests that entities of artificial intelligence have the potential of organic functioning, just like the human mind. The evidence for this is fairly mixed. Some conclusions may emerge over time. The crucial question concerning artificial intelligence however does include its possibilities and potential for organic evolution and growth. As observed, sooner or later, answers will emerge. Even otherwise, the human mind is a suo motu logic of its existence. Attempts to map it, are indeed one of the exciting aspects of human endeavour. Notwithstanding some breakthroughs in mapping the brain, there are areas of brain function that need a closer look both physically and operationally. Interestingly, notwithstanding all this, there is a common reference to the 'second childhood' of human beings, where people, upon reaching a certain

Exploring the depths of the human mind

As AI draws comparisons to human cognition, the mystery of the mind grows more complex, raising crucial questions about its unused potential



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM



age, start behaving with child-like traits. It is difficult to explain this process, but it is fairly obvious to notice. Similarly, the jury is out on the age by which, the basic orientation of the brain fully takes place. One also needs to know when it matures enough to develop a relationship between the 'conscious' brain and the 'subconscious' brain. Notwithstanding the diverse interpretations of the above narrative, it is obvious that at some stage the basic foundations of the mind seemingly get concretised. One such example is the influence of early childhood experiences on a growing human being. There are stages of childhood emerging into early adulthood. All this becomes integral to the individual's ways of thinking and behaving. Popularly, this is known to affect the orientations of a growing individual on matters of finance, gender or for that matter even values. The list can be extended but more to the point one does not know, exhaustively, of all the influences which go into the making of an operationally adult human mind. Very often, there may be latent influences on a human mind

that may not manifest themselves until a much later point in adulthood. All in all, many ambiguities remain, and so do many contradictions that stay alive so far as the working of the mind is concerned. Above all, it is generally believed that hormonal changes affect the working of the mind. Both men and women reportedly pass through menopause in their later life. Many are of the view that menopausal effects are more identifiable amongst the women than the men. An issue, however, remains to be fully answered: what are the factors that influence the working of the mind? Yet another element that influences behaviour is the fall out of a mental shock. It can have many approximations of derailing the thought process of the individual, and indeed, impacting many values. Put simply, many areas of thought, reflection, analysis, and research may contain indications of understanding the dynamics of the mind. IT MAY BE A CHALLENGE, BUT A CHALLENGE THAT CANNOT BE EVADED



MANY AREAS OF THOUGHT, REFLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND RESEARCH MAY CONTAIN INDICATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF THE MIND. IT MAY BE A CHALLENGE, BUT A CHALLENGE THAT CANNOT BE EVADED

Further, there are also some transgenerational aspects to it. Say, how two parents deal with each other, or singly and collectively deal with a child

is an important factor for the child's growth. This can carry on across generations. Physiologically, the passing of some genes is known to happen across generations. This is not only in terms of physical characteristics but also certain diseases that may have affected one of the grandparents in a given generation and resurfaced again two generations later in the physical system of a descendant. The mapping of this process, as of today, needs much additional work to be done. This also contains a whole research agenda of human physiology, physical anthropology, medicines and more. Such a subject matter would deserve an integrated approach of not just, anthropology, psychology, genetic sciences and more, but a whole setup of support disciplines with appropriate interdisciplinary framework. This will give insights into the physiology of the human being and the composition of the brain and mind. It is a challenging task, but it is a task that cannot be avoided. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

PICTALK



An artist gives finishing touches to a clay idol of Goddess at artisans' village Kumartuli, in Kolkata



ANJALI PATHAK

World tourism day: Uniting people, fostering peace

Whether visiting cultural landmarks, enjoying local cuisine, or simply interacting with people, tourism fosters global unity and peace

Every year on September 27, the world celebrates World Tourism Day, a reminder of the crucial role that tourism plays in fostering cultural exchange, boosting economies, and promoting peace. As borders open and people explore new destinations, tourism serves as a bridge, uniting diverse cultures and breaking down barriers between nations. In 2024, as we celebrate World Tourism Day, the theme focuses on the far-reaching benefits of travel beyond leisure, recognising how tourism helps us understand the world, its people, and its many cultures in deeper and more meaningful ways. Tourism is not merely about sightseeing; it's about experiencing the essence of a place, its history, and its culture. As Bulat Nurmukhanov, Deputy Chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee, emphasises, "Tourism is primarily a way to immerse oneself in new cultures and experience history." Through tourism, individuals are given the chance to see the world through different lenses, fostering greater acceptance and understanding of other people



and their ways of life. This broader understanding is why cities like Moscow have prioritised cultural tourism as a key driver for their economic and social growth. The Moscow tourism strategy emphasises the importance of museums, exhibitions, and cultural events, which help travelers connect with the history and artistic traditions of the region. This approach reflects a global shift in tourism, where travelers seek deeper, more authentic experiences that expand their worldviews. Tourism has always played a unique role in creating connections between people from different backgrounds. It allows us to learn from one another, building bridges of

understanding and respect. On World Tourism Day, this aspect of travel is especially highlighted, as we reflect on how it fosters harmony in an increasingly interconnected world. As Kush Kapoor CEO of Roseate Hotels & Resorts, points out, "Tourism is about the connections we forge and the cultural experiences we offer." Kapoor stresses the importance of offering travelers more than just a stay, but a chance to explore different cultures and traditions. In a world where differences can sometimes divide, tourism brings people together, promoting peace and mutual respect. For hotels and resorts, the focus is now on providing culturally aware experiences, from diverse culinary offerings to personalised services that reflect the traditions and customs of visitors. This kind of attention to cultural diversity enriches the overall travel experience, making it more inclusive and meaningful. Beyond cultural connections, tourism is a major economic driver for many countries. It generates millions of jobs, supports local businesses, and

contributes to the global economy. Sustainable tourism focuses on minimising the environmental footprint of travel while maximising the positive social and economic impact on host communities. From eco-friendly hotels to tours that support local artisans, tourism can be a powerful tool for inclusive development and environmental protection. Perhaps the most significant impact of tourism is its role in promoting global peace and understanding. By encouraging interactions between people of different cultures, tourism helps to break down prejudices and build mutual respect. As we celebrate World Tourism Day, it's important to remember that each journey is not just a trip to a new place but an opportunity to engage with the world in a way that promotes peace and harmony. When people experience the customs, values, and traditions of other cultures, they begin to appreciate the similarities and shared humanity that unite us all. (The author is a travel writer, views expressed are personal)

GOVERNOR SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi, in an unprecedented move on the evening of June 29 last year, unilaterally removed Tamil Nadu Minister V Senthilbalaji from the Council of Ministers. But he hastily backtracked from his decision late at night because he too knew that his act was not only illegal but also unconstitutional. Some people say that Ravi has always been in the habit of being in controversies. But I believe that R N Ravi is a Governor later, first he is the order follower of the ruling Home Ministry. The ideology of the Home Ministry is clearly visible in every decision and every speech of him. For example, just two days ago, while giving a lecture, he said that 'secularism is a European concept, that is why it was not a part of the Indian Constitution earlier, later, an 'insecure Prime Minister' got it added to the Constitution during the Emergency'. For example, in one of his sentences, he first hinted at the concept of a Hindutva nation and secondly, he also criticised former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Some critics are demanding the immediate removal of R N Ravi from the post of Governor, whereas I believe that this is an ideological war which has been started by the central Government through the Governor, hence it would be better to answer this verbal war with thoughts only. Ravi should be asked, and then he will also say that the entire Constitution of India is external and is a copy of Europe, especially Britain, hence the entire Constitution should be abolished? Is our Constitution, on the basis of which we are proudly waving the flag of being the largest democracy today, also a European concept? Has the Governor forgotten that he has taken oath of this Constitution? Secularism is an integral part of our Constitution. It is our biggest duty to keep religion separate from politics. Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ukraine appreciates India's efforts



The meeting of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy with the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of his US visit for the Quad is taken with the overwhelming gesture from the Ukrainian counterparts. Ukraine has been visited by almost all the Quad leaders in person, and India particularly is playing a spe-

cial role in establishing peace within Ukraine with its humanitarian assistance, negotiating stability deals and peace settlement mediation between Ukraine and Russia. The Indian efforts for peace initiation is so far as still moving ahead in the back channel diplomatic level. For which Ukraine is thankful for the clear support of India towards Ukrainian integrity and sovereignty. India's efforts in this regards is particularly welcoming that, we take care of every nation near or far from us; stuck in the political or economic or geopolitical turmoil, India's assistance will be helpful to ensure peace and tranquillity in the war hit country. Also such moves will also help India to meet its commitment of becoming Vishwa Shanti Guru or World's Peace Leader in the time to come. This peace collaboration between India and Ukraine will take Indian diplomatic skills to the next level. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

INDIA'S HOCKEY DOMINANCE CONTINUES

Madam—Indian hockey is on a high as exemplified by the way Manpreet Singh's men dominated the Men's Asian trophy at China's Hulunbuir. Notwithstanding the fact that India was the favourites to lift the title, the boys had to perform on the day, and they did. Although India fought hard to overcome an unexpected resistance from China in the final, the same team it had blanked in the league match, there was little doubt that it was the best team on display throughout the tournament. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics bronze medal, 2023 Hangzhou Asian Games gold medal, bronze at the recent Paris Olympics, and now Asian gold: India has had an excellent run on the astroturf for a couple of years, after a long, long period. The best part of the present Indian hockey team is the unity and spirit with which they come across the field come what may. Coach Craig Fulton's disinclination towards unnecessary and unwarranted chopping of players, in contrast to a few former coaches, has played its role. The talented players, of course, are indispensable

to Indian hockey. At the same time, it is felt that India should not rest on its laurels; 2026 World Cup in Belgium and the Netherlands should be another platform to showcase their undoubted brilliance. Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

ENCOUNTERS RAISE CONCERNS

Madam —The recent reports of police encounters resulting in the deaths of alleged criminals raise a critical question about our justice system and accountability, such as how can we allow a system where police act as judge, jury, and executioner? Does law enforcement cross the line from justice to vigilantism? The tragic killings in Badlapur, Unnao, and Chennai reveal a disturbing trend. We need to consider how we can assure accountability that seems to reward extrajudicial actions. It is imperative for supreme courts to intervene and uphold the principles of justice in democracy. Anshu Bharti | Begusarai

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FIRST COLUMN

SHARPENING THE QUAD VISION

Quad summit focused on maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific region as its top priority



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Modi's high-profile visit to the US this week reiterated the salience of US-India bilateral, underscored by several key decisions with a clear focus on the future of this 21st century partnership. This visit by the Indian PM, coming after his trips to Russia and Ukraine, points towards a multi-pronged approach, where India is willing to have diplomatic engagements at the highest level, keeping its national interests sacrosanct.

That PM Modi and President Biden have found a mutual friendship framework, despite the Indian PM having held a political roadshow of sorts with his predecessor in the Oval Office, is a signal to the large world, that the US-India bilateral has bipartisan support. The Quas leaders' summit, Modi's rockstar concert-style engagement with the Indian diaspora and his meeting with top CEOs from the technology sector in the US, all point towards an escape velocity having been achieved by the US and India, with no scope of a look back.

China was the invisible elephant in the room, at the Quad leaders' summit. The statement from the Quad summit without naming an aggressive, maritime international law violator, China, mentioned "As four leading maritime democracies in the Indo-Pacific, we unequivocally stand for the maintenance of peace and stability across this dynamic region, as an indispensable element of global security and prosperity.

We strongly oppose any destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion. We condemn recent illicit missile launches in the region that violate UN Security Council resolutions. We express serious concern over recent dangerous and aggres-



sive actions in the maritime domain. We seek a region where no country dominates and no country is dominated—one where all countries are free from coercion, and can exercise their agency to determine their futures. We are united in our commitment to upholding a stable and open international system, with its strong support for human rights, the principle of freedom, rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful settlement of disputes and prohibition on the threat or use of force in accordance with international law, including the UN Charter. Respect for the leadership of regional institutions, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), is and will remain at the centre of the Quad's efforts." While Quad is not a defence partnership like NATO, the presence of a global superpower, China with its coercive maneuverers in the entire Indian Ocean region, bore heavily on the leaders during the summit in Delaware. Delhi, Delaware (President Biden's hometown), Sydney, and Tokyo are keenly watching the international waters, and violations by China have been reported. The leaders announced "Today we are announcing a new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), to enable our partners in the region to maximise tools provided through IPMDA and other Quad partner initiatives, to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior. We look forward to India hosting the inaugural MAITRI workshop in 2025. In addition, Quad partners intend to layer new technology and data into IPMDA over the coming year, to continue to deliver cutting edge capability and information to the region." China would continue to be a key concern for Quad leaders, and would perhaps serve as the super glue closely packing these four countries, with major interest in the Indo-Pacific region in a tighter embrace. The next Quad leaders' summit is likely to be hosted by Delhi, where a new US president is likely to be the key guest of honour. Given that ex-President Trump had encouraged the Quad grouping and President Biden has elevated it to leaders summit, it is safe to assume that QUAD is here to stay.

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

Dissanayake's rise amidst Sri Lanka's political uncertainty

As the nation transitions under Dissanayake's leadership, questions loom about his ability to navigate the complex web of rivalries that define Sri Lanka's volatile democracy



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

One of the senior editors in Colombo recounted an experience he had in Parliament after a crucial debate, where he observed two politicians discussing serious issues. After the discussion, the editor remarked to one of the leaders, "Look, you always attack him in Parliament, but behind the scenes, you are so close and listen to him carefully." This leader was none other than Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the newly elected ninth Executive President of Sri Lanka and leader of the Marxist-Leninist Party Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna. The person he was listening to was his predecessor, former President Ranil Wickremesinghe, a neoliberal democrat. In response to the editor's comment, Dissanayake stated, "Whatever we say in Parliament, listening to him for five minutes behind the scenes is where we can learn a lot about politics." Wickremesinghe embodies the craft of political manoeuvring, while Dissanayake represents an idealism that has sought to reshape politics through violent revolution, a pursuit that has, lamentably, cost over 60,000 young lives. But later, he engineered a shift among a few key party members to adopt a middle ground to attract liberal democrats through the NPP alliance. So far, it has been a successful story.

The friendship between these two leaders grew for a reason: Wickremesinghe was facing serious internal rifts within his party, the United National Party, where his junior, Sajith Premadasa, was rebelling against him. The history of this party is filled with tales of internal conflicts and bitter betrayals that continue to haunt its prosperity. Nevertheless, Wickremesinghe demonstrated resilience, showing that no matter who declared a power struggle against him, he could adeptly play the game of politics. This Machiavellian politician, well-versed in power dynamics, understands that he would never engage in a battle when it could be won through deception. The painful reality, however, is the consequences of these internal conflicts within political parties as the country enters a new era dominated by "political coalitions." In my opinion, this is not a healthy exercise for a robust democracy.

The erosion of political parties, the backbone of political ideologies, inevitably paves the way for unprecedented crises and precarious social outcomes. However, few realise that the friendship between Wickremesinghe, a man from Colombo's elite and a well-established political family, played [knowingly or unknowingly] a vital role in President Dissanayake's victory. The longstanding enmity between Wickremesinghe and Premadasa was undoubtedly a significant factor in Dissanayake's success, even though many predicted that no candidate would secure the over 50 per cent of votes required to win.

The results reflect the polarised political divisions in Sri Lanka, where minority-dominated areas remarkably rejected Dissanayake, presenting a significant challenge for the forthcoming general elections, as his political alliance will need to secure over 113 seats out of 225 to establish its power in Parliament.

Erik Solheim, former Norwegian minister and climate change advisor to Sri Lanka, who has been actively involved in Sri Lankan politics since the LTTE era as



THE RESULTS REFLECT THE POLARISED POLITICAL DIVISIONS IN SRI LANKA, WHERE MINORITY-DOMINATED AREAS REMARKABLY REJECTED DISSANAYAKE, PRESENTING A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE FOR FORTHCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS, AS HIS POLITICAL ALLIANCE WILL NEED TO SECURE OVER 113 SEATS OUT OF 225 TO ESTABLISH ITS POWER IN PARLIAMENT

a mediator in peace talks, commented on the significance of this election, stating, "The weakness of the election winner is that his coalition has very little experience running a complicated state like Sri Lanka. They may struggle to achieve a majority in Parliament and implement their many promises in a challenging economic environment."

Despite the worldwide congratulatory messages pouring in for the new leader, I find these insights particularly useful for forecasting the future trajectory of electoral outcomes and the challenges that the island nation is likely to face. The caretaker government, appointed for just two months until 14 November, faces low expectations and should refrain from making new appointments, wisely retaining some senior ministry secretaries from the previous administration.

If the President fails to secure a majority in the House, he will need to form a coalition, but if that proves impossible, the opposition may take control of Parliament, leading to chaotic infighting—an alarming scenario for an inexperienced President unprepared for Sri Lanka's complex political landscape. This situation accentuates significant uncertainties ahead. Historical trends suggest that a President's party or coalition often secures a majority in subsequent elections; however, the recent election results, where the winning candidate failed to garner over 50 per cent of the vote amidst three main contenders, complicate this.

The strong support for Sajith Premadasa and Ranil Wickremesinghe in Tamil-dominated provinces indicates a serious challenge for the newly elected President and his coalition as they approach the upcoming par-

liamentary elections. However, what is remarkable about this election is that it was exceptionally peaceful, with no violence reported, allowing for a refreshing power transition. The commendable role played by the Elections Commission in Sri Lanka cannot be overstated. This calmness is particularly surprising in a country where people previously took to the streets, violently ousting the Prime Minister and President after experiencing a devastating economic crisis. Many find it hard to believe. Nonetheless, this should not be seen as the calm before the storm, as the country's economy remains precarious. No leader can fulfil all the promises made during the election campaign. The responsibility now lies with the leader and his team to convince the public, fostering understanding and collaboration to overcome the challenges ahead.

This is where the reality of the much-discussed "new renaissance" will be tested against the ground realities. The nation-state and its historical trajectory will provide important lessons in understanding what the future may hold. What does it mean for a nation's history to be an intricate weave of choices and consequences rather than a mere succession of events? This perspective compels us to reflect on the profound implications of individual and collective decisions on the essence of a nation. The dismissal of "what ifs" simplifies a complex reality rich with potential paths, urging us to explore the interplay between certainty and possibility. In the post-independence landscape, missed opportunities for reconciliation and economic transformation reveal a dissonance between political aspira-

tions and societal realities. The notion of a 'false renaissance' recurs throughout pivotal moments: the 1948 declaration of Independence, the 1956 Sinhala Only Act, the 1972 establishment of a republic, the 1977 shift to an open economy, the election of the first female executive president in 1994, the conclusion of the civil war in 2009, and the election of an apolitical leader (Gotabaya Rajapaksa) to overhaul the social structure in 2019—all serve as warnings against complacency born from superficial progress that obscures unresolved tensions and deep-rooted systemic issues.

Therefore, sensationalising the new leader's humble family background and expressing anger towards the "self-proclaimed elites" and their alleged corruption may not provide the sustainable answers that the nation desperately seeks. Instead, it is the collective will and the leader's capacity to engage with those who oppose him that will be essential for embarking on this new journey. While propaganda may orchestrate a false renaissance, the shimmering illusions of progress starkly contrast with the gritty ground reality, exposing a profound philosophical enigma: the allure of superficial advancement often obscures the underlying fractures of society. This compels us to confront the uncomfortable truths of our existence that we habitually choose to ignore in our quest for meaning and coherence.

This challenge now lies before the new leadership. Behold an essential, paradoxical truth: within this tranquil interlude lies the profound anticipation of the storm to come.

(The writer is a journalist and author. Views expressed are Personal)

Agri-tech 2.0 : Digital innovations paving the path to sustainable farming

By boosting productivity, promoting sustainability and reducing environmental impact, these technologies offer a pathway for sustainable future

As the global population heads toward an estimated 10 billion by 2050, the agricultural sector faces mounting pressure to significantly increase food production. For India, with its vast and diverse agricultural landscape, this presents a critical challenge. Traditional farming methods alone will not be enough to meet the needs of a growing population while also addressing the threats posed by climate change, dwindling natural resources and the imperative for sustainable practices. In this context, agri-tech, the convergence of technology and agriculture, offers a transformative pathway forward. By integrating cutting-edge digital technologies into farming, India has the potential to enhance productivity, sustain-



AUROBIND UPADHYAYA

ability, and resilience. This article explores how these emerging technologies are reshaping the agricultural sector in India, positioning it to meet the demands of the future.

Agriculture at a Crossroads : For decades, agriculture has been the backbone of India's economy, employing over 50 per cent of the workforce and contributing significantly to GDP. However, the sector is

now facing unprecedented strain. The growing population, along with environmental challenges such as erratic weather patterns, water scarcity, and soil degradation, has placed the industry at a critical juncture. The traditional methods of farming are no longer sufficient to meet the increasing demand for food while preserving the environment. This is where agri-tech comes into play, providing innovative solutions that can transform Indian agriculture by improving efficiency and promoting sustainable practices.

Precision Agriculture: Data-Driven Farming: One of the most promising advancements in agri-tech is precision agriculture, which leverages technologies such as GPS, IoT sen-

sors, and drones to optimise farming operations. By gathering and analysing real-time data on factors like soil health, weather conditions, and crop growth, precision agriculture enables farmers to make informed decisions. This approach helps in the efficient use of water, fertilisers, and pesticides, minimising waste and environmental harm while maximising crop yields.

In India, the adoption of precision agriculture is accelerating. According to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), these techniques have the potential to increase yields by 15-25 per cent while reducing input costs by 10-15 per cent. The precision agriculture market in India is expected to grow significantly, from USD 57.6 mil-



lion in 2020 to USD 124.2 million by 2025. Government initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) for water conservation and the Soil Health Card Scheme for better fertiliser management are further driving this growth. **AI and Machine Learning**: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are also playing a crucial role in modernising Indian agricul-

ture. By analysing vast amounts of data from satellite imagery, weather forecasts, and historical crop performance, AI algorithms can predict potential problems like pest outbreaks and suggest the best times for planting. AI-powered platforms are already being used to predict pest infestations and optimise pesticide use, potentially reducing the need for harmful chemicals by up to 30 per cent.

Ensuring Transparency: Blockchain technology is emerging as a revolutionary tool in agricultural supply chains. By offering a decentralised ledger for recording transactions, blockchain ensures transparency, reduces fraud, and promotes fair trade practices. For farmers, suppliers, and consumers alike,

blockchain provides verifiable information about the origin and journey of food products, ensuring adherence to sustainability standards. The blockchain market in India's agriculture and food supply chain is expected to grow at a CAGR of 47.8 per cent, reaching USD 289 million by 2027.

IoT and Smart Farming: The Internet of Things (IoT) is revolutionising how farmers monitor and manage their crops. IoT devices, such as soil moisture sensors and weather stations, provide real-time data on environmental conditions, allowing for better decision-making in the field. For example, smart irrigation systems can adjust water usage based on real-time data, saving water and improving crop health. The IoT in agriculture market

in India is projected to reach USD 634.5 million by 2027, growing at a CAGR of 12.5 per cent.

Use of Drones: Equipped with high-resolution cameras and sensors, drones provide farmers with detailed aerial imagery of their fields. This helps in identifying issues such as nutrient deficiencies, pest infestations, and water stress. Farmers can then take targeted actions, reducing waste and environmental damage. The use of drones in Indian agriculture is expected to grow substantially, with the market anticipated to reach USD 108 million by 2025.

(The writer is chief growth officer with Arahas Technologies; views are personal)

US, allies call for immediate cease-fire between Israel, Hezbollah

AP ■ NEW YORK

The US, France and other allies jointly called on Wednesday for an immediate 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations in the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that has killed more than 600 people in Lebanon in recent days.



United Nations General Assembly, has not responded to the proposal. Earlier, representatives for Israel and Lebanon reiterated their support for a UN resolution that ended the 2006 war between Israel and the Iranian-backed militant group.

and escalated attacks over the past week have rekindled fears of a broader war in the Middle East. The US officials said Hezbollah would not be a signatory to the cease-fire but believed the Lebanese government would coordinate its acceptance with the group.

border, the US officials said they were looking to use a three-week pause in fighting to restart stalled negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas, another Iranian-backed militant group, after nearly a year of war in Gaza.

Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who is the acting prime minister during Netanyahu's trip abroad, said there will be no cease-fire in the north, vowing to continue the fighting in the north "with full force until victory" and returning the tens of thousands of Israeli citizens evacuated from their homes in the north.

Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. Work on the proposal came together quickly this week with President Joe Biden's national security team, led by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, meeting with world leaders in New York and lobbying other countries to support the plan, according to US officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic conversations.

touch with Israeli officials about the proposal, one of the US officials said. McGurk and Hochstein have been the White House's chief interlocutors with Israel and Lebanon since the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas launched the war in Gaza. The officials said the deal crystallised by late Wednesday afternoon during a conversation on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly between Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron.

the French-US plan that "enjoys international support and which would put an end to this dirty war". He called on the Security Council "to guarantee the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Lebanese territories and the violations that are repeated on a daily basis".

Both Danon and Mikati reaffirmed their governments' commitment to a Security Council resolution that ended the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war. Never fully implemented, it called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon to be replaced by Lebanese forces and UN peacekeepers, and the disarmament of all armed groups including Hezbollah.

ABC's "The View" that "an all-out war is possible" but said he thinks the opportunity also exists "to have a settlement that can fundamentally change the whole region". Biden suggested that getting Israel and Hezbollah to agree to a cease-fire could help achieve a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

The US government also raised the pressure with additional sanctions targeting more than a dozen ships and other entities it says were involved in illicit shipments of Iranian petroleum for the financial benefit of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah.

Trump threatens to end Biden immigration programmes

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Former President Donald Trump, who has made anti-immigration rhetoric a key part of his reelection campaign, has warned that he would kick out hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have entered the country under two key Biden administration programmes if he is reelected.



phone app called CBP One to schedule a date to come to an official US border crossing to seek asylum. So far, 813,000 migrants have used that system since it was launched in January 2023. Separately, the administration launched a programme last year that allows 30,000 people a month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to come to the United States if they have a financial sponsor, pass background vetting and buy a plane ticket to fly into an American airport instead of going to the southern border.

an parole for two years. The Biden administration has touted both policies as ways to reduce chaos at the border with Mexico, cut out vicious smuggling networks and allow for more vetting of migrants before they enter the country.

Miller, are bringing more specifics on how he plans to carry them out in a second White House term, such as invoking wartime powers, relying on like-minded governors and using the military.

However, any efforts to deport migrants on such a large scale would almost certainly run into legal, logistical and financial challenges.

Immigration advocacy groups say that Trump's promises of mass deportations are sowing fear among migrant communities. Esther Sung is the legal director for Justice Action Center. When Republican-led states sued to end the sponsorship program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans the organization represented Americans who sponsored migrants to come to the US and wanted to preserve the program.

Trump: Ukraine is demolished

Washington (AP): Former President Donald Trump described Ukraine in bleak and mournful terms on Wednesday, referring to its people as "dead" and the country itself as "demolished", and further raising questions about how much the former president would be willing if elected again to concede in a negotiation over the country's future.

Trump argued Ukraine should have made concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin in the months before Russia's February 2022 attack, declaring that even "the worst deal would've been better than what we have now".

Trump, who has long been critical of US aid to Ukraine, frequently claims that Russia never would have invaded if he was president and that he would put an end to the war if he returned to the White House. But rarely has he discussed the conflict in such detail.

His remarks, at a North Carolina event billed as an economic speech, come on the heels of a debate this month in which he pointedly refused to say whether he wanted Ukraine to win the war. On Tuesday, Trump touted the prowess of Russia and its predecessor Soviet Union, saying that wars are "what they do".

Pope arrives in Luxembourg

AP ■ LUXEMBURG

Pope Francis on Thursday began his trip to onces-strong bastions of Christianity in the heart of Europe in an effort to reinvigorate a Catholic flock that is dwindling in the face of secular trends and abuse scandals that have largely emptied the continent's magnificent cathedrals and village churches.

Francis landed mid-morning Thursday in Luxembourg, the European Union's second-smallest country, with a population of some 660,000 people, and its richest per capita. Francis arrived under stormy skies and blustery, damp conditions, days after the 87-year-old pope cancelled his audiences because of a slight flu.

Francis greeted journalists at the start of Thursday's flight from Rome but declined to walk down the aisle to greet them one by one as he typically does.

"I don't feel up to the trip. I'll greet you from here," he said, referring to the trip down the aisle. The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, said the decision was due to the logistics of the aircraft, with just a single aisle, and the short duration of the flight, and was not a reflection of Francis' health.

Migration, climate change and peace are likely to be themes during the visit, which continues later Thursday with Francis' arrival in Belgium.

EU figures show that barely half of Luxembourg inhabitants, or 52.6%, are native citizens, with 37.2% coming from other EU nations like Portugal and 10.2% from outside the EU. After his meetings, Francis will speak to the country's Catholic priests and nuns. The venue is the late-Gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame, which was built in the early 1600s by Francis' own Jesuit order and stands as a monument to Christianity's long and central place in European history. The trip is a much-truncated version of the 10-day tour St John Paul II made through Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands in 1985, during which the Polish pope delivered 59 speeches or homilies and was greeted by hundreds of thousands of adoring faithful.

over clergy abuse have helped lead to the decline of the church in the region, with monthly Mass attendance in the single digits and plummeting ordinations of new priests. Bruni said that by travelling to the two countries, Francis will likely want to offer "a word to the heart of Europe, of its history, the role it wants to play in the world in the future".

In Luxembourg, Francis has a top ally and friend in the lone cardinal from the country, Jean-Claude Hollerich, a fellow Jesuit. In an article this week in the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, Hollerich also blamed migration and the influx of people of other faiths or none for the changes and challenges confronting the church in Luxembourg today. "In 1970, 96% of the people from Luxembourg declared themselves Catholic. We can say that Christianity characterised the identity of the country," Hollerich wrote. "But today, you cannot say the same."

Helene upgraded to Category two hurricane as it barrels towards Florida

AP ■ TALLAHASSEE

Fast-moving Hurricane Helene was advancing Thursday across the Gulf of Mexico toward Florida, threatening an "unsurvivable" storm surge in northwestern parts of the state as well as damaging winds, rains and flash floods hundreds of miles inland across much of the southeastern US, forecasters said. Helene was upgraded Thursday morning to a Category 2 storm and is expected to be a major hurricane — meaning a Category 3 or higher — when it makes landfall on Florida's northwestern coast Thursday evening. As of early Thursday, hurricane warnings and flash flood warnings extended far beyond the coast up into south-central Georgia.

Apalachee Bay. It added that high winds and heavy rains also posed risks. "This forecast, if realised, is a nightmare surge scenario for Apalachee Bay," the office said. "Please, please, please take any evacuation orders seriously!" In Crawfordville, farther inland and about 25 miles (40 km) northwest of Apalachee Bay, Christine Nazworth stocked up on bottled water, baked goods and pre-made meals at a Walmart. She said her family would be sheltering in place, despite Wakulla County issuing a mandatory evacuation order. "I'm prayed up," she said. "Lord have mercy on us. And everybody else that might be in its path." Wakulla County was one of several to issue evacuation orders. Along Florida's Gulf Coast, school districts and multiple universities have cancelled classes. Helene was about 320 miles (515 km) southwest of Tampa on Thursday morning and moving north-northeast at 12 mph (19 kph) with top sustained winds of 100 mph (155 kph). Forecasters said it should become a Category 3 or higher hurricane, meaning winds would top 110 mph (177 kph). While Helene will likely weaken as it moves inland, its "fast forward speed will allow strong, damaging winds, especially in gusts, to penetrate well inland across the southeastern United States," including in the southern Appalachian Mountains, the hurricane centre said. The cen-

tre posted lesser tropical storm warnings as far north as North Carolina, and warned that much of the region could experience prolonged power outages, toppled trees and dangerous flooding. Helene had swamped parts of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Wednesday, flooding streets and toppling trees as it passed offshore and brushed the resort city of Cancun. The storm formed Tuesday in the Caribbean Sea. In Cuba, the government preventively shut off power in some communities as waves as high as 16 feet (5 metres) slammed Cortes Bay. And in the Cayman Islands, schools closed and residents pumped water from flooded homes. Rain was already falling steadily in Atlanta on Wednesday evening as shoppers emptied shelves of water at a Kroger supermarket east of downtown. The weather service in Atlanta issued flash flood warnings for much of the state.

McComb said he still found it hard to believe Helene would seriously impact the city, which is more than 250 miles (400 km) north of the Gulf of Mexico. "It would be really unique for it to hit so far inland," Charles said as he bought water, bread and lunch meat. He was, however, worried about losing electricity. "I do live in an area where it doesn't take so much for the power to go out," he said.

Harrods issues apology to women claiming abuse by former owner

London (AP): The managing director of Harrods said Thursday that the London department store is "deeply sorry" for failing employees who say they were sexually assaulted by late owner Mohamed Al Fayed. Michael Ward said it is clear Al Fayed "presided over a toxic culture of secrecy, intimidation, fear of retribution and sexual misconduct".

Five women have told the BBC they were raped by Al Fayed, who died last year aged 94, and several others allege acts of assault and physical violence. Lawyers for the alleged victims say they have been retained by 37 women and the list is growing. Ward said he was "not aware of his (Al Fayed's) criminality and abuse" during the four years he worked for the Harrod's owner, though "rumours of his behaviour circulated in the public domain". Al Fayed owned Harrods for a quarter century before selling it in 2010 to a company owned by the state of Qatar through its sovereign wealth fund, the Qatar Investment Authority.

in the business' history," the statement said. "However, the Harrods of today is unrecognisable to Harrods under his ownership."

London's Metropolitan Police say they were made aware of allegations in the past and had questioned Al Fayed in 2008 over the alleged sexual abuse of a 15-year-old, but prosecutors at the time did not take the cases forward.

Al Fayed's family has not commented. Egypt-born businessman Al Fayed moved to Britain in the 1960s and bought Harrods, an upmarket retail emporium in London's tony Knightsbridge district, in the mid-1980s. He became a well-known figure through his ownership of the store and the London soccer team Fulham. He was often in the headlines after his son Dodi was killed alongside Princess Diana in a car crash in Paris in 1997. Al Fayed spent years promoting the conspiracy theory that the royal family had arranged the accident because they did not approve of Diana dating an Egyptian. An inquest concluded that Diana and Dodi died because of the reckless actions of their driver — an employee of the Ritz Hotel in Paris owned by Al Fayed — and paparazzi chasing the couple. Separate inquiries in the UK and France also concluded there was no conspiracy.

Labour Party members deal a blow to Starmer day after his appeal for unity

Liverpool (England) (AP): Members of Britain's governing Labour Party dealt Prime Minister Keir Starmer a blow on Wednesday, rejecting his decision to cut payments that offset winter heating costs for millions of retirees. The vote on the final day of Labour's annual conference is not binding, but it's a setback to Starmer's efforts to unite his centre-left party around the contentious measure. Since winning office in July, Starmer has cautioned that the dire state of the public finances inherited from the last Conservative government means he must make hard choices such as ending the winter fuel allowance, worth between 200 and 300 pounds (USD 262 and USD 393), for all but the poorest pensioners. Trade unions that are among Labour's funders and allies

organised resistance to the cut at the conference in Liverpool, northwest England. They forced a vote on a demand for the decision to be reversed. It was narrowly passed in a show-of-hands vote amid cheers and jeers in the conference hall. "I do not understand how our new Labour government can cut the winter fuel payment for pensioners and leave the super-rich untouched," said Sharon Graham, general secretary of the Unite union, to applause from delegates. This is not what people voted for. It is the wrong decision and it needs to be reversed."

The government has promised the withdrawal of the heating allowance will be offset by an above-inflation increase in the state pension and other measures to reduce poverty.

HK welcomes pandas gifted by Beijing, raising hopes for tourism boost

Hong Kong (AP): Hong Kong welcomed a new pair of giant pandas gifted by Beijing on Thursday with a lavish ceremony, raising hopes for a boost to the city's tourism. An An and Ke Ke are the third pair of giant pandas to be sent to the city from mainland China since the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. Their arrival came after their new neighbour, Ying Ying, gave birth to twins last month and became the world's oldest first-time panda mother on record. With the addition of the new bears, the twins, and their father, Le Le, Hong Kong now houses six pandas. Chief Executive John Lee on Tuesday said An An is a 5-year-old male panda who is agile,

intelligent and active, while Ke Ke, a 5-year-old female, is good at climbing, cute and has a gentle temperament. The new arrivals will undergo two months of quarantine and adapt to their new home at Ocean Park, a zoo and aquarium that has long been a favourite of residents and tourists. Lee expressed hope that the public could meet the new bears in mid-December. In October, the government will invite residents to propose new names that showcase the pandas' characteristics. Tourism industry representatives are optimistic about the potential impact of housing six pandas, hoping it will boost visitor numbers in Hong Kong. Officials have encouraged businesses to capitalize on the pop-

ularity of the new bears and newborn cubs to seize opportunities in what some lawmakers have dubbed the "panda economy". Pandas are widely considered China's unofficial national mascot. The country's giant panda loan program with overseas zoos has long been seen as a tool of Beijing's soft-power diplomacy. Giant pandas are only found in China's southwest and their population is under threat from development. But caring for pandas in captivity is expensive. A zoo in Finland agreed with Chinese authorities to return two loaned giant pandas to China more than eight years ahead of schedule because they were too costly for the facility to maintain amid declining visitors.

CBDT reshuffles responsibilities

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the authority that supervises the income-tax department's work in the country, has carried out a fresh reshuffle of responsibilities amongst its members, with the investigation wing reporting to the chairman.

An official order issued on September 24 said CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal, a 1988-batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, will be in charge of "coordination and overall supervision" of the board's work and that of the investigation, central and intelligence and criminal investigation directorates.

Earlier, there used to be an independent post of member (investigation) in the CBDT, but it was done away with last year as part of the work re-orientation of the board and



the chairman was authorised with the "supervision of the work of investigation", a senior officer told PTI.

Some other members' responsibilities were also reorganised then, he said. According to the order, Harinder Bir Singh Gill, a

1987-batch IRS officer, will be the member (taxpayer services and revenue), apart from holding the additional charge of member (systems and faceless services). Sanjay Kumar, a 1988-batch officer, will hold the charge of member (audit and

judicial), besides the additional charge of member (income tax). Prabodh Seth of the 1989 batch will be the member (administration) and his batchmate, Ramesh Narain Parbat, will be the member (legislation), according to the order that also listed out the zonal charges for these officers.

The CBDT, under the Department of Revenue in the Union finance ministry, is headed by a chairman and can have six members in the rank of a special secretary. The board currently has a vacancy of two members. The latest reshuffle was affected as the tenure of two members ended in August, with Pragya Sahay Saksena taking voluntary retirement from service and the scheduled superannuation of Pravin Kumar, the officer said.

Jio-bp inaugurates 500th EV charging station

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Anant Mukesh Ambani, Director, Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and Murray Auchincloss, CEO, bp, on Thursday inaugurated the 500th Jio-bp pulse EV-charging station of Jio-bp.

Jio-bp is a fuels and mobility joint venture between RIL and global energy giant BP.

"The commissioning of the EV-charging station enables access for guests at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre, Jio World Plaza and Jio World Convention Centre in Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Mumbai, marking the installation of the 500th Jio-bp pulse charging point in India," a company statement said.

Jio-bp has expanded its network of EV-charging stations at a rapid pace, growing from 1,300 to 5,000 in just a year.

With 95 per cent of its EV-charging network comprising fast charging stations -- the



highest in the industry -- the company is poised to deliver high speed electrons with unmatched industry-leading uptime of 96 per cent, establishing itself as the country's most reliable charging network, it said.

Jio-bp is also the first in the industry to deploy the top-rated 480 KW chargers backed by unique CVPs, which enables it to provide an efficient and quick charging experience at locations such as malls, public parking, corporate parks, hotels, and wayside amenities.

"By reducing range anxiety through its rapidly growing charging infrastructure, minimising charging time

with DC fast chargers, and delivering a seamless charging experience through its state-of-the-art Jio-bp pulse charging app, Jio-bp has occupied pole position in accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles in India," it said.

Ambani said Jio-bp is playing a pioneering role in accelerating EV adoption in India. "With the largest network share of fast-charging stations, fastest growth in EV charging infra, and highest reliability, Jio-bp is offering a well-packaged, digitised charging solution to millions of Indians."

With its foray into green electrons, powered by

Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd's solar power plants, Jio-bp is making rapid progress in its broader goal of promoting sustainable green mobility in India.

"EV charging is one of bp's key transition businesses in our journey to becoming an integrated energy company. We are focusing on scale, speed, and strategic locations to provide a seamless customer experience. By combining bp and RIL's capabilities, we are delivering EV charging with convenience, creating a unique value proposition for customers," Murray Auchincloss said in a statement.

With its sustained charging infrastructure growth, pioneering customer proposition, and focus on sustainability, Jio-bp is reinforcing its position as the fastest, mostly widely available, and most reliable EV charging partner in India.

ICRA sees room for petrol, diesel price cuts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A reduction in crude oil prices in recent weeks has improved margins on retail auto fuels, providing state-owned firms a headroom to cut petrol and diesel prices by Rs 2-3 per litre, rating agency Icrs said on Thursday.

The price of a basket of crude oil India imports averaged USD 74 per barrel in September, down from about USD 83-84 a barrel in March when petrol and diesel prices were last cut by Rs 2 per litre. In a note, Icrs said the marketing margins on retail sales of auto fuels for the Indian Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) have improved in recent weeks with the reduction in crude prices.

The rating agency anticipates that there is headroom for the downward revision of retail fuel prices if crude prices remain stable at current levels.

Girishkumar Kadam, Senior Vice President and Group Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said: "ICRA estimates that the OMCs' net realisation was higher by Rs 15 per litre for petrol and Rs 12 a litre for diesel vis-à-vis international product prices in September 2024 (till September 17). The retail selling price (RSPs) of these fuels have been unchanged since March 2024 (Rs 2/litre was reduced on petrol and diesel on March 15, 2024) and there appears to be headroom for their downward revision by Rs 2-3 per litre, if crude prices remain stable".

Crude prices have witnessed a sharp decline in the last few months, primarily due to weak global economic growth and the OPEC+ has pushed the rollback of its production cuts by two months to combat the declining prices.

A decline in the price of crude oil -- which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel at



refineries -- had rekindled hopes for a reduction in petrol and diesel rates that have been on a freeze for over two years now barring a pre-election reduction in March. While petrol and diesel pricing is deregulated (meaning oil companies have the freedom to fix retail rates), the state-owned fuel retailers, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL), have rarely used this freedom since late 2021 by not revising prices in line with cost.

They stopped daily price revision in early November 2021 when rates across the country hit an all-time high, prompting the government to roll back a part of the excise duty hike it had effected during the pandemic to take advantage of low oil prices. The freeze continued into 2022 but the war-led spike in international oil prices prompted a Rs 10 a litre hike in petrol and diesel prices from mid-March 2022 before another round of excise duty cut rolled back all of the Rs 13 a litre and Rs 16 a litre increase in taxes on petrol and diesel done during the pandemic. That followed the current price freeze which began on April 6, 2022, and continued till March 15 reduction. Thereafter there has been a freeze in rates again. Petrol costs Rs 94.72 per litre in the national capital and diesel comes for Rs 87.62 a litre.

Icrs said the Singapore Gross

Refining Margins (GRMs) witnessed significant moderation in the first half of the 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025) to about USD 4 per barrel due to a drop in crack spreads with higher product output and reduced demand.

The impact is mainly on account of weak demand from China due to rising electric vehicle (EV) sales, muted industry demand and real estate downturn. Further, demand in Europe has also been subdued due to weak industrial activity and a structural shift in vehicle fleets towards EVs, it said.

"A marketing gain of Rs 1 per litre on petrol and diesel would compensate for the GRM loss of USD 0.9 per barrel for the domestic refining and marketing industry," Icrs said.

Commenting on the OMCs' profitability, Kadam said: "The OMCs reported healthy operating margins in FY2024 (April 2023 to March 2024), recouping the losses incurred during FY2023. Despite moderation in the GRMs, the improvement in marketing margins is likely to result in the OMCs maintaining their profitability in H1 FY2025".

However, inventory losses due to a sharp decline in crude prices could impact profitability to an extent in Q2 FY2025. Further, the profitability for standalone refineries would take a hit with the declining GRMs.

Icrs' outlook on the refining and marketing sector remains Stable.

India aims to integrate scalable food security interventions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India is seeking to integrate scalable food security interventions into existing government programmes while promoting local crop varieties, a top government official said on Thursday.

Agriculture Secretary Devesh Chaturvedi outlined these priorities during a review of the implementation of the United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) country strategic plan (CSP) for India spanning 2023-2027.

Chaturvedi, who chaired the first meeting of the Country Programme Advisory Committee (CPAC) under the new CSP, suggested the officers to "identify the scalable interventions and



initiatives and prepare mechanisms for including the same in ongoing programmes of ministries/departments."

The secretary called for a dedicated workshop to discuss the agriculture sector initiatives in detail, highlighting the need for a focused approach, an official statement said.

Chaturvedi emphasized

promoting nutritious local varieties of rice and millets alongside fortified cereals, signalling a shift towards indigenous crop promotion. He advised exploring the possibilities of bringing the Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO) into different initiatives.

The secretary also emphasised that while accessing the

nutritional outcomes of the programmes "we should also look at the standards on nutrition applicable for the Indian population."

The committee, comprising joint secretaries from various ministries and NITI Aayog representatives, is tasked with coordinating and reviewing progress on initiatives outlined in the strategic plan. The CSP, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding between India's agriculture ministry and UN-WFP, focuses on four key outcomes: enhancing food-based social protection systems, promoting diverse and nutritious diets, empowering women financially, and building climate-resilient food systems.

WFP Country Director Elizabeth Faure briefed the committee on ongoing initiatives, including efforts to boost food security for smallholder farmers in Assam, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh, and the nationwide push to bring millets in mainstream.

The meeting saw participation from various ministries, including Food & Public Distribution, Women and Child Development, and Rural Development, as well as agencies like the National Disaster Management Authority and India Meteorological Department.

India, the world's most populous country, faces significant challenges in ensuring food security for its 1.4 billion people.

India set to achieve GDP growth in FY25 says Finance Ministry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is set to achieve 6.5-7 per cent GDP growth in the current financial year as indicated by the movements in high-frequency indicators till August, a finance ministry report said on Thursday.

The recent developments analysed indicate strong foundations of macroeconomic stability in India with steady growth, investment, employment and inflation trends, a strong and stable financial sector and a resilient external account, including a comfortable foreign exchange reserve position.

"A challenge on the macroeconomic front is of navigating the continuing uncertainty in global economic prospects. We will likely encounter a cycle of policy rate cuts globally amid fears of a recession in advanced economies and continuing geopolitical conflicts," the Monthly Economic Review for August said.

On balance, the report said, the GDP growth of 6.7 per cent in Q1 FY25 and the



movements in high-frequency indicators till August fit well with the real GDP growth projection of 6.5-7 per cent for FY25, provided by the Economic Survey 2023-24.

For the remaining part of the financial year, it said, a reasonable expectation is that public expenditure will pick up, providing added growth and investment impetus.

In the farm sector, higher kharif acreage is already visible. Adequately replenished reservoir levels will potentially give a fillip to the upcoming Rabi crops as well.

The skewed spatial distribution of rain may have an impact on farm output in a few regions. However, in the absence of any serious adverse climate shocks, rural incomes and demand should get stronger, and food inflation will be milder, it said.

There are also incipient signs of strains in certain sectors. For instance, the automobile dealers' body FADA has pointed to moderating sales of passenger vehicles and a build-up of inventory, it added.

Data from Nielsen IQ indicated that the growth of

fast-moving consumer goods sales in urban areas slowed in Q1 FY25.

While these may turn out to be transient with the onset of the festival season, they warrant monitoring. Further, capital spending by Indian states has declined in the current financial year.

Stock markets around the world are booming, reinforced by recent policy announcements in a few countries, it said.

"Consequently, the risk of an eventual correction has risen. If the risk materialises, the spillover effect may be felt globally as well," it said.

Dr Reddy's faces penalty in Mexico for regulatory deviation



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Reddy's Laboratories said on Thursday that the Mexican drug regulator has imposed a penalty of around Rs 28 lakh.

The drug regulatory body of Mexico has imposed a penalty of MXN 6,51,420 (Rs 28 Lakh) on the company for deviation from prescribed guidelines for filing intimation of import of a reference standard for one of the active pharmaceutical ingredients, the Hyderabad-based drug major said in a regulatory filing.

Shares of the drug maker were trading 0.39 per cent up at Rs 6,720 apiece on BSE.

Fixing SpiceJet's broken wings

Can the low-cost airline heal enough to effectively compete with IndiGo and Air India?

KUSHAN MITRA ■ NEW DELHI

Days after low-cost carrier SpiceJet raised Rs 3000 crore from institutional investors, the airline promptly cleared pending salary dues estimated to over Rs 80 crore. It is believed that the beleaguered low-cost airline will use much of the remaining funds to settle dues with a host of creditors from leasing companies to airports. However, even if much of the funds the airline has raised will go towards clearing dues, the fact is that SpiceJet did successfully manage to raise this large sum of money. This is despite the airline having to face a litany of problems and constantly being dragged to the courts by everyone from the previous owners, the Maran family of the Sun Group to various leasing firms. In fact, just last week the Supreme Court upheld a

Delhi High Court order mandating the return of three engines used by the airline on their Boeing 737 aircraft. With leasing companies asking the airline to pay up, and taking their aircraft away, the airline is down to just having 21 operational aircraft according to website airfleets.net. This is a precipitous decline from the halcyon days of the airline before Covid when the airline had almost five times as many aircraft in its fleet and was the first Indian operator of the Boeing 737 MAX aircraft. However, the one-two punch of the coronavirus shutdown and the grounding of the Boeing 737MAX fleet worldwide following two deadly disasters almost knocked the airline out. But this is not a time to dwell on the past, the fact is that despite difficult odds the airline has managed to raise a



large sum of money from Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) with institutions such as Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs, BNP Paribas, Nomura and Tata Mutual Fund subscribing to the issue. The quality of investment is a very positive indicator of the future prospects of the airline. SpiceJet has a lot to do, first and foremost to regain the confidence of employees,

service providers and most importantly customers. They can do this by becoming more reliable and offering more services. Due to issues with leasing companies, the airline has been forced to wet-lease temporary aircraft from airlines in Cambodia and Turkey. They should now concentrate on operating their own fleet and by repaying dues owed to leasing firms, rebuild their

confidence in SpiceJet as a reliable airline. There is now talk of the airline growing to 100 aircraft by the end of 2026. If this fructifies, it is a welcome move as the Indian aviation sector needs the competition as the domination of IndiGo and Air India/Air India Express leave customers with little choice. This duopoly needs to be challenged, and SpiceJet

was a capable third player in the sector. Now however, they will have to deal with increased competition from the likes of Akasa.

That said, the growth prospects for the Indian aviation sector are extremely high. Between January and June 2024, domestic air traffic numbered 79.35 million passengers, which was a growth at 4.28 percent from the same period last year. The growth could have been higher still had it not been for the collapse of Go First last year and persistent engine problems with Pratt&Whitney GTF engines plaguing IndiGo leading to almost a quarter of their fleet grounded. If SpiceJet can get their act together, and there is no reason to doubt that they can't after the fund-raise, the Indian aviation sector could easily grow to 250 million passengers per year by 2028.

INBRIEF

- NGEL INKS JV AGREEMENT WITH MAHAPREIT**
NEW DELHI: NTPC Green Energy Limited, entered into a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) with Mahatma Phule Renewable Energy and Infrastructure Technology Ltd. (MAHAPREIT) on 25th September 2024.
- SRM HOSPITAL OPENS TOBACCO CESSATION CENTRE**
KATTANKULATHUR: SRM Medical College Hospital & Research Centre (SRM SKMCH&RC) has inaugurated a Tobacco Cessation Centre at its Kattankulathur location. The center, located at the Psychiatry OPD (C-1/37), First Floor, C Block, will operate from Monday to Saturday, 8 AM to 2 PM.
- GOVERNMENT HIGH SCHOOL KHATARAYE KALAN RENAMED**
AMRITSAR: The Punjab government has approved the renaming of government schools to honor prominent freedom fighters and martyrs, aiming to commemorate their sacrifices for the country's independence.
- GNDU ORGANISED ORIENTATION WORKSHOP**
AMRITSAR: An orientation workshop for college eco-club in-charges from seven districts was organized by the College Development Council, Guru Nanak Dev University under the Environment Education Programme.



PONDICHERRY LITERARY FESTIVAL SHAPING INDIA'S LITERARY FUTURE

As India's literary festivals increasingly become platforms for political agendas and sensational debates, the Pondicherry Literary Festival offers a breath of fresh air

BY KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Literary festivals are reasonably new phenomena that have sprouted across the globe. They are gatherings of authors who come from all corners of the world to discuss the evolution of literature and the modern trends that drive it. A festival syndrome has taken over India's literary world. The land of Kalidasa is bereft of any authors who are incapable of matching the stature of global-quality writers. Though there are writers who get patronage from some publishing firms or newspapers because of their obsession with anarchy and "out-of-the-box" stances like equating Maoists as "Gandhians with AK-47 rifles" and comparing their country to a "mobile-free republic", they are mere pygmies when compared to the ones in the global arena.

The literary festivals that mushroomed across India gave a lot of hope to average Indians. The general expectation was that young authors would get a platform to tell the world what they felt about the emerging Indian literary world. But what we saw was that the festivals were getting hijacked by a coterie who set the agenda for wannabe writers. They want the new-generation authors to speak and write only against the concept of India. These literary festivals became an extension of the

Progressive Writers' Forum of the former Soviet Union, where the Communist Party was the last word on literature. The Party would decide what constitutes literature and ask the writers to "compose" ideology in the form of novels and poems.

The two-day Pondicherry Literary Festival held on 21st and 22nd September brought in a refreshing change. The Pondicherry Literary Festival, officially launched in 2018, has emerged as one of the leading cultural events in south India - nay, in India itself. The event featured the crème de la crème of India's intelligentsia. It saw the active participation of authors like Aravindan Neelakantan, Anand Ranganathan, Kanchan Gupta, Vikram Sampath and many others. The event has systematically avoided noise from debates that are curated for the sake of polemics, thus giving an undesirable lease of life to debunked narratives. "We empower with knowledge on spiritual, religious and cultural subjects that showcase Bharat Shakti and critically evaluate what holds her back via lectures and conversations, book talks and presentations on science and technology, defence and security. This year we focus on Bharat in the New Age. 'Bharat Shakti' is a phrase we have chosen from the writings of Sri Aurobindo to serve as our guiding principle. Pondicherry is Sri Aurobindo's seat of *sadhana* and we take these



associations with reverence and respect," said Alo Sud, the festival director, who is the moving spirit behind this event. Pondicherry Lit Fest had a baptism by fire in 2018. "There were attacks and diatribes on us from the Left ecosystem, who had no qualms in designating this festival as a Sanghi, right-wing event. We do not categorise people based on rights, lefts or based on religions. This is an event where delegates can come, take part and return with their minds filled with ideas, knowledge and ground realities," said Alo Sud. In an era where commercial writers/authors advertise their new



works well in advance, authors like Aravindan Neelakantan and Anand Ranganathan are exceptions. They do not publicise their new works and it is by word of mouth that their contents get disseminated. The "secular media" blackout their groundbreaking works because of the unpalatable facts they highlight. It is Pondicherry Lit Fest that offers everyone (irrespective of caste, creed, ideology, and religion) a platform to air their views and grievances. The delegates were given a bird's-eye view of the happenings in spheres like science, technology, defence and security. The festival

stood out because there was no name-calling or Modi-bashing. The rest of the literary festivals staged across India seem to be dedicated to abusing Narendra Modi. Sometime in 2016, a Carnatic musician, feeling he was being relegated to the fourth round, came out with a startling disclosure that there was no freedom of expression under the Sangh Parivar regime. It hogged national limelight, as even the staunchest critic of Modi was hearing such an allegation for the first time. The result? The musician became an overnight star and was honoured with the

title Sangeeta Kala Nidhi!

What Dr M Rajeev Kumar, a noted critic and author of many short stories and dramas, says about lit fests is noteworthy. "We do have many lit fests, but their agenda is fixed. There is no literature or culture in these events other than promoting certain politicians, their ideologies and some publishing houses. Lit festivals are for open discussions and not for name-calling and abusing rivals," said Dr Kumar, who has been writing for more than five decades and has yet to be invited to at least one lit fest in Kerala. Interestingly, there are lit festivals in West Asian countries too, where the targets are Modi and Indian nationalism. There are frontal organisations of extremist outfits as well as the CPI(M) (masquerading as cultural associations).

This is what makes Pondicherry Lit Fest stand out from other events. Lucid speeches, lively discussions, and speakers who are keen to take the participants into confidence make it distinct from other such festivals. Delegates are treated to sumptuous meals of knowledge, wisdom and erudition. Who said avant-garde art and literature are meant only for intellectuals? Come to Pondicherry and you will be elevated to the level visualised by Sri Aurobindo, for whom the waterfront state was the second home.

NEW ARRIVALS

SEPTEMBER RELEASES



Time to Come Home: Sowing the Seeds of Self-Love for Lasting Happiness by DAMINI GROVER (PRICE: ₹399, PAGES: 280) Hay House

In *Time to Come Home*, award-winning psychologist and life coach Damini Grover offers a transformative guide that dives deep into the vital themes of self-love and personal growth. The book emphasises that self-love is foundational for a fulfilling life, helping readers reconnect with their true selves while embracing their imperfections. Grover provides actionable steps and relatable stories to create a clear roadmap for understanding and practising self-love in everyday life, addressing common challenges of self-acceptance and personal development. This inspiring work invites readers to honour their worth and prioritise their happiness, ultimately leading to lasting fulfilment.

Turtle Moon

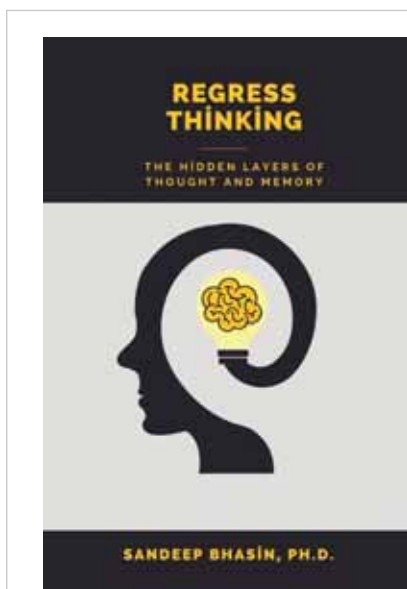
By HANNAH GOLD (Price: ₹499, Pages: 337) HarperCollins Children's Books

In *Turtle Moon*, Silver Trevelon's family grapples with unhappiness due to the absence of a long-awaited sibling. When her father receives an invitation to paint at a turtle rescue centre in Costa Rica, Silver hopes it will be the adventure that brings her family closer together. As she settles into life at the animal centre, she witnesses a rare leatherback turtle nesting on the beach. However, excitement turns to alarm when the turtle's eggs are stolen, propelling Silver and her new friends into a perilous quest to retrieve them. Their journey into the heart of the jungle uncovers long-buried secrets, testing their courage and resolve.

Exploring the interplay of thought and memory

In 'Regress Thinking: The Hidden Layers of Thought and Memory', author SANDEEP BHASIN explores the complexities of the mind and how understanding our thought processes can enhance creativity and memory, writes SAKSHI PRIYA

Regress Thinking: The Hidden Layers of Thought and Memory by Sandeep Bhasin invites readers on an enlightening journey through the complexities of the mind, combining historical insights with contemporary applications to offer a fresh perspective on creativity and cognitive processes. With over thirty years of experience across various fields, Bhasin draws on his extensive knowledge to explore these themes further. The book is structured around several central themes, each highlighting the vital role of creativity as a multi-dimensional process. Bhasin explores the psychology of creativity, illustrating how ideas emerge from the intricate interplay of different brain functions. He introduces the notion of *Regress Thinking*, a concept that encourages readers to retrace their cognitive steps to uncover hidden insights that might have been overlooked in the rush of everyday thought. This methodology is not just an academic pursuit, it has tangible applications in business, technology, and personal development. Bhasin's writing is both clear and engaging, making complex concepts accessible to a broad audience. He encourages readers to adopt a mindset of experimentation and to regard failure as an essential part of the creative process. By drawing connections between historical innovations and modern challenges, he highlights that lessons from the past can provide crucial strategies for tackling present-day problems. A standout aspect of the book is its use of case studies and real-life examples,



which illustrate the various manifestations of regression and its impact on individual's lives. These narratives offer practical insights and inspiration for overcoming challenges, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding and managing regression. Bhasin empowers readers to harness the potential of regression while mitigating its negative effects. One particularly compelling section of the book focuses on the four stages of the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Bhasin explains how each stage contributes to idea



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book : Regress Thinking: The Hidden Layers of Thought and Memory by SANDEEP BHASIN PH.D.
Publisher : Notion Press
₹990.00

generation, urging readers to embrace the non-linear nature of creativity. He also discusses the significance of environmental factors, mindset and collaboration in enhancing creative potential, reminding us that creativity

flourishes in supportive and stimulating settings. Moreover, Bhasin's examination of cognitive efficiency sheds light on the brain's remarkable ability to prioritise information and dismiss what it considers unimportant. This selective forgetting is framed as a beneficial feature, reinforcing the idea that understanding our mental processes can significantly enhance our learning experiences. *Regress Thinking* serves as a guide to individual creativity, it advocates for harnessing collective intelligence in our interconnected world. Bhasin promotes a culture of openness and collaboration, positioning these

elements as essential for addressing the pressing issues we face today. *Regress Thinking* is a fascinating read that intertwines history, psychology and practical application. It acts as both a manual and a companion for those looking to unlock their creative potential and navigate the intricacies of modern life. With its actionable insights and philosophical reflections, this book is a significant addition for anyone interested in enhancing their cognitive abilities and nurturing innovation. Bhasin's approach will resonate with those eager to explore the depths of their minds and utilise the past as a springboard for future success.

