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MYANMAR JUNTA ON
THE BACKFOOT

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US CRITICISES ISRAEL'S
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MONEY 10

WHOLESALE INFLATION FALLS A
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ATISHI IS DELHI CM

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi's wait for a 'full-time' functional Chief Minister ended on Tuesday after Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and incumbent Minister in Delhi cabinet Atishi staked claim to lead the NCT Government shortly after Arvind Kejriwal resigned from the post he kept for almost 11 years including five months as CM from Tihar jail. Kejriwal is now released on bail in the liquor policy case.

Chief Minister-designate Atishi handed over the letter of support from the AAP MLAs to Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and informed that she was chosen by the party as his successor. Kejriwal resigned on a day when the Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned 74 years and completed 100 days in his third term of the office.

Atishi will be the third woman Chief Minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj and Sheila Dikshit. Dikshit was Delhi's longest-serving Chief Minister, who held the office for 15 years from 1998 to 2013, while Swaraj's tenure lasted 52 days in 1998.

Atishi (43) will be Delhi's youngest Chief Minister and is also set to become the second current woman Chief Minister in the country after West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee. With a woman at the helm of the Delhi



Delhi Minister Atishi addresses the media after a meeting of the AAP legislative party in which she was unanimously chosen as the next Chief Minister, in New Delhi, Tuesday, September 17, 2024
Ranjani Dimri/The Pioneer

Government, AAP would be looking at consolidating itself among the women's constituency that Kejriwal has been assiduously reaching out to.

Oath taking ceremony will take place before the Assembly session on September 26-27. Kejriwal extended good wishes to his successor whom he earlier in the day recommended as the Leader of the ruling AAP's legislative party and next Chief Minister of Delhi.

Addressing media after the meeting with LG, Atishi said, "We have staked claim to form a new Government. I will protect the interests of

Delhi people."

The decision to elect Atishi, 43, as the AAP legislative party leader was taken at the Chief Minister house after a discussion with all party MLAs. Led by the AAP convener and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the party's senior leadership remained in a huddle throughout the day on Monday which concluded with discussions among members of the party's highest decision-making body, the Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

At the meeting of AAP MLAs, party Leader Dilip Pandey proposed that Kejriwal decide on the Chief

Minister face. When the AAP national convener proposed Atishi's name, all AAP MLAs stood up and accepted it and Atishi was elected Leader of the legislature party, sources said.

Hours after being unanimously chosen to become the Chief Minister of Delhi, addressing reporters, an emotional Atishi said it was a moment mixed with joy as well as "extreme sadness" as Kejriwal, the popular CM, is going to resign.

"It's possible only in the Aam Aadmi Party and under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal that a first-time politician has become a Chief Minister. I come from an ordinary family and perhaps would not get even a poll ticket if I were in any other party," she said.

Atishi said Kejriwal trusted her and made her an MLA, then a Minister and now the Chief Minister of Delhi. "I am happy that Arvind Kejriwal has shown so much trust on me, but more than that I am sad because my elder brother Arvind Kejriwal is resigning today," she said.

She thanked her "guru" Arvind Kejriwal on being given the "big responsibility" of succeeding him as the Chief Minister of Delhi and said she would work under his "guidance" to protect people's interests from the BJP's obstructions.

Continued on Page 2

Didi transfers senior officers, doctors to decide on resuming work

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Hours after Monday's fruitful dialogue between Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the agitating junior doctors, the State Government on Tuesday removed two senior IPS officers including Kolkata Police Commissioner Vineet Goyal and Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Vivek Gupta for their alleged inept handling of the RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case.

While Goyal was reversed to his previous position as the ADG, Special Task Force engaged in anti-insurgency operations, Gupta — accused of offering cash to the victim's parents — was shunted out as the Commanding Officer of Eastern Frontier Rifles.

Goyal was replaced by 1998 batch IPS officer Manoj Verma known for his "excellent" track record in anti-Maoist operations in Jangal Mahal area. He was the chief of the task force that had gunned down senior Maoist leader Kishenji in 2011. Before assuming the charge of CP, Kolkata Verma had been working as the ADG Law and Order. Dipak Sarkar a former Deputy Commissioner of Police in Siliguri will replace DCP (North) Abhishek Gupta, the Government circular said.

Continued on Page 2

Stop bulldozer demolition: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Upholding the ethos of Constitution, Supreme Court on Tuesday directed that all authorities across the country will not demolish properties, including those accused of crime, till October 1 without seeking its permission. A bench of Justices BR Gavai and KV Viswanathan clarified that its order will not be applicable to unauthorised structures on public roads, footpaths etc.

"Even if there is one instance of an illegal demolition... it is against the ethos of our Constitution," the bench observed, adding that bulldozer justice is against ethos of the Constitution. The apex court said till October 1, the next date of hearing, no demolition be carried out "without seeking leave of this court". The top court was hearing petitions alleging properties of those accused of crime were being demolished in several states illegally.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench that a "narrative" was being built over the demolition of properties. He said there was a petition before the apex court which alleged that because the person belonged to a particular religion, his property was demolished.

"Let them bring to your lordships' notice one instance of demolition where the law is not complied (with)," the law officer said, adding that



File Photo: Ranjani Dimri/The Pioneer

the affected parties have not approached the court because they know that they have received notices and their constructions were illegal. "Rest assured that outside noise is not influencing us," the bench told the senior law officer. The bench also expressed its displeasure over the statements made after the September 2 hearing in the matter during which the apex court had said it proposes to lay down certain guidelines on the issue that would be enforceable across the country.

"After that order, there have been statements that the bulldozer will continue ... and it all depends in whose hands the steering is," the bench said. It said such statements were made and the court was refraining from saying anything further on

that. "Mr Mehta, after these directives are laid down, we will seek your assistance on this glorification and grandstanding... You will assist us on how to stop this. If necessary, we will ask the Election Commission also," the bench said. While hearing these petitions on September 2, the apex court had questioned how anybody's house can be demolished just because he was an accused.

The Solicitor General, appearing for Uttar Pradesh, had referred to an earlier affidavit filed by the State in the matter. He had said the affidavit states that merely because a person was alleged to have been a part of some offence can never be a ground for demolition of his immovable property.

J and K all set to vote today



Polling officials leave for their respective polling stations on the eve of first phase of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election, in Kishtwar district, Tuesday PTI

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is all set to vote, for the first time in the last 10 years, in the first phase of the maiden Assembly polls after the Abrogation of Article 370 for 24 Assembly segments spread across seven district headquarters today. These are also the first Assembly elections in J and K after the delimitation exercise in 2022.

Over 23.27 lakh voters will decide the fate of 219 candidates, including 90 independents. Over 35,000 Kashmiri Pandits are also eligible for voting in

the first phase. Elaborate security arrangements have been made by the Election Commission of India to provide a conducive atmosphere to the electorate. More than 14,000 polling staff have been deputed on duty for the 1st phase of polling.

Out of 24 Assembly seats, 16 fall in the Kashmir province and eight in Jammu. Four districts of Anantnag, Pulwama, Shopian, and Kulgam will witness voting in Kashmir valley. In Jammu, voters across three districts of Doda, Kishtwar, and Ramban will exercise their right to vote. The main parties in the fray are the The major

parties in the fray are National Conference (NC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Awami Ittehad Party (AIP).

The last Assembly polls were conducted in November 2014 recording a voter turnout of 65.5 per cent. Jammu and Kashmir recorded the highest voter turnout in a Lok Sabha election in 35 years this time. The overall turnout for the five Lok Sabha seats of the Union Territory was 58.46 per cent.

The region witnessed high-voltage campaigning in the run-up to polling day. While the Bharatiya Janata Party is harping on its development agenda and showcasing its report card during the campaigning, on the other hand, the PDP and Omar Abdullah's NC have promised to restore Article 370 and statehood to J and K.

The BJP has also promised to reinstate J and K's statehood, which is a big issue in these elections. The Congress — which is fighting the polls in an alliance with the NC is aiming to improve its tally. The party vowed to bring back J and K statehood but remained silent about the UT's loss of special status.

Continued on Page 2

Pagers explosion in Lebanon, Syria: Over eight dead, 2,700 injured

AP ■ BEIRUT

Hundreds of handheld pagers exploded near simultaneously across Lebanon and in parts of Syria on Tuesday, killing at least eight people (as we go to print), including members of the militant group Hezbollah and a girl, and wounding the Iranian Ambassador, Government officials said. The number of deaths is likely to increase.

Officials pointed the finger at Israel in what appeared to be a sophisticated, remote attack that wounded more than 2,700 people at a time of rising tensions across the Lebanon border. The Israeli military declined to comment. A Hezbollah official who spoke on condition of anonymity told The Associated Press that the new brand of hand-held pagers used by the group first heated up, then exploded, killing at least two of its members and wounding others.

Lebanon's health minister, Firas Abiad, said at least eight people were killed and 2,750 wounded — 200 of them critically.

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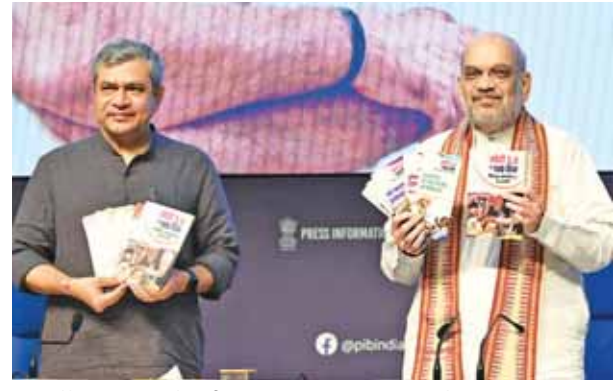
Government talking to Meiteis, Kukis in Manipur to ensure peace

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said the Government is talking to both the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur to ensure lasting peace and has begun fencing the country's border with Myanmar to check infiltration. He also said the BJP-led NDA Government will implement the 'one nation, one election' within its current tenure.

Addressing a press conference here on the achievements of the 100 days of the Modi 3.0 Government, Shah said barring three days of violence last week, the overall situation in Manipur has been calm and the Government has been working to restore peace in the restive Northeastern State. Shah, flanked by Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, said apart from the three days of violence, no major incidents were reported in the last three months.

Asked about the possible visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Manipur, Shah said, when he visits the State, it will



Union Home Minister Amit Shah with Minister of Railways, Ashwini Vaishnav at the release of a special booklet on achievements of first 100 days
Photo: Ranjani Dimri/The Pioneer

be known to everyone. "There was peace in the last three days and I am hopeful that we will be able to control the situation. We are talking to both communities. It was ethnic violence and unless there is dialogue between the two communities, no solution could be found. We are talking to the Kuki and Meitei groups. We have prepared a roadmap and will take all possible steps (to ensure peace)," he said. Shah said the Government has successfully completed

the deployment of Central Reserve Police Force personnel at strategic locations across Manipur. Home Minister said in the first 100 days of the Modi 3.0 Government, work on fencing the India-Myanmar border, which is the root cause of the problem, has begun. "Fencing work in 30 km has been completed. Besides the Government of India has approved the budget for fencing along the over 1,500 km border," he said. The Home Minister said the

Government has already scrapped the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR), which allows people residing close to the border between the two countries to venture 16 km into each other's territory without any documents.

Continued on Page 2

PM turns 74

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned 74 on Tuesday. President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and other dignitaries and politicians cutting across party lines extending their best wishes to him. Modi spent most of his day in Odisha during which he launched the State Government's flagship women-centric initiative, Subhadra Yojana, besides railway and national highway projects. He began his day by visiting home of an Adivasi family to attend their Grih Pravesh (house warming) event.

(Detailed report on Page 4)

Cheetah project by Government gets mixed response on its second anniversary

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the Modi Government's ambitious Cheetah reintroduction project at Madhya Pradesh's Kuno National Park marks its second anniversary on Tuesday, its progress has led to mixed reactions: Government officials praising the initiative for its breeding success, while activists criticising the prolonged confinement of the big cats in enclosures and raising doubts about their survival instinct in the wild. Of the original 20 imported cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa, only 12 adults remain, and of 17 births, 12 cubs have survived at the Kuno Park translocated in phases since September 17, two years ago.

key indicator of the success of any wildlife translocation effort.

Undeterred at the flak, the Government's plan is underway to introduce a new batch of cheetahs to the expansive Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary in the Northern State. At the same time, a conservation breeding Centre is also on the platter in Gujarat's Banni grasslands. Moreover, all of them are still confined to enclosures rather than roaming freely in the wild, they said.

While wildlife activists pointed out that all of the big cats are yet to inhabit the wild and might be facing significant stress due to their confinement, Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav acknowledged the challenges faced over the past two years, highlighting that numerous obstacles from habitat



adjustments to ensuring the cubs' survival in the wild have been overcome. He took to the social media platform X, praising the project which he said was envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as a pioneering global effort aimed at restoring lost wildlife populations and ecosystems. "It hasn't been an easy road. Numerous challenges, from habitat adjustments to ensuring the cubs' survival in

the wild, were overcome," Yadav posted. "Today, as the world watches these cheetah cubs thrive in their natural habitat, we celebrate not just their survival but the resilience and dedication of all involved in these enormous efforts," he added, stressing that this marks just the beginning of restoring ecological balance, with many milestones yet to come. On September 17, the Prime Minister on his birthday,

released the Cheetahs brought from Namibia into their enclosures.

However, wildlife activists are not excited at the project's progress. They cautioned that it may be premature to celebrate, given that of the original 20 imported cheetahs, only 12 adults remain, and of 17 births, 12 cubs have survived. Moreover, all of them are still confined to enclosures rather than roaming freely in the wild. Ravi Chellam, CEO of the Metastrung Foundation and Coordinator of the Biodiversity Collaborative, echoed concerns that releasing these cheetahs, particularly the captive-born cubs, might not be advisable due to their prolonged captivity. Incidentally, a day ago, a report by the Accountant General of Madhya Pradesh flagged concerns over the

management of the project at the park, stating a "lack of coordination" between central and State Government departments as well as issues regarding expenditure.

The concerns were raised in a sample audit of records - from August 2019 to November 2023 - that was made public Monday in response to an RTI filed by wildlife activist Ajay Dubey. As per reports, there is shortage of field staff in Kuno National Park, which may affect forest and wild animal conservation. This has been revealed in the inspection report of Kuno. There is shortage of forest ranger, deputy forest ranger, forester etc, said Dubey. Lions were supposed to be brought according to Supreme Court judgment, Project Cheetah was brought in a rush, he told a media house.

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Indian Hockey team clinches 5th Asian Champions Trophy title

RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Hockey Team claimed their fifth Asian Champions Trophy title with a fighting 1-0 victory over hosts China on their graveyard at Moqi Training Base Hulunbuir on Tuesday. Defending Champions India began as favourites in the tournament beating Korea in the Semifinals with complete dominance of young Captain Harmanpreet Singh

performances with new face of Indian goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak after the retirement of legendary goalkeeper PR Sreejesh. India started the contest by defeating China 3-0 in their opening league game, remain undefeated in the tournament. Defender Jugraj Singh scored a rare field goal as the defending champions toiled hard before getting the better of their opponents.

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Commuters suffer as Delhi Metro Red Line disrupted due to overhead equipment issue

ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters had to face tough times on Tuesday afternoon when the services of the Delhi Metro's Red Line were affected for around three hours on Tuesday due to overhead equipment issues between the Pratap Nagar and Shastri Nagar stations. The Delhi Metro Rail's Red Line connects Rithala in Delhi to Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh. The train services from Tis Hazari to Inderlok on the Red Line were affected from 01:04 pm to 03:51 pm when a portion of contact wire (part of OHE) got broken between Pratap Nagar and Shastri Nagar section as a train was heading towards Rithala (Down Line) around 01:04 pm. During this period, regular train services were maintained from Rithala to Inderlok section of the Red Line through Up and Down movement in one loop, according to Delhi Metro official. Regular train services were maintained from Tis



Hazari to Shaheed Sthal (New Bus Adda) section. The breach in the major changing line i.e. Kashmiri Gate affected the metro travellers because of extreme rush and delayed services for a very long time on the red line. A commuter at the Kanhaiya Nagar metro station who was returning home from the office said,

"Daryaganj se Kanhaiya Nagar aane mein 1.5 ghanta lag gaya" (it took me 1.5 hours from Daryaganj to Kanhaiya Nagar). People had to wait for nearly 25 minutes at every station which connected with the red line. Although the regular train services were maintained from Rithala to Inderlok section of the red line through

both the up and down movement on the same track in one loop, the number of trains had been reduced. Huge crowds still waited at the platforms waiting for the metro. With this delay in the red line, the commuters on twitter came harshly on DMRC with other service problems on the line. An 'X' user @poojnishhudda wrote criticizing DMRC, "The Red line metro services are always like that. No sufficient metro timings. People have to wait for such a long time. Metro services are to save our time, not to delay. Kindly see to the matter." Another user wrote, "what about the insane delay between mansarovar park and kashmere gate?" "The repair work was over by 03:51 pm and thereafter regular train services on the entire Red Line from Rithala to Shaheed Sthal (New Bus Adda) were normalised," said Anuj Dayal, Principal Executive Director, Corporate Communication, Delhi Metro.

Delhi: Two held for firing at bakery shops in Ranhola

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has arrested two persons for allegedly opening fire at two bakery shops in outer Delhi's Ranhola area. According to senior police officials on Tuesday, the shootings took place on September 14. Following the firing incident, a purported social media post claiming the firings were carried out on behalf of gangster Yogesh Tunda of the notorious Gogi gang went viral in connection with an extortion bid of Rs 5 crore. Gangster Yogesh Tunda is also accused of killing a gangster Sunil Tullu Tajpuria in Tihar jail. According to reports, he revealed during informal questioning that the reason he and his associates stabbed Tajpuria around 100 times was because of a personal grudge. According to a statement from Delhi Police, the shootings took place on September 14. "An incident involving gunfire at two



bakery shops occurred in the Ranhola area police station. A team led by Inspectors Mandeep and Jaibir from the Northern Range of Special Cell was assigned to work out the case," it said. The Special Cell was assigned to investigate the case and based on CCTV footage, 25 years old Rahul of Haryana and 28 years old Mandeep of Amritsar, Punjab, were arrested.

"Firing was claimed by gangster Yogesh Tunda of Gogi gang for extortion of Rs 5 crore. A White Apache Bike used in the incident was also seized which was later found to be stolen. Raids are currently being conducted at many locations of the accused," the statement said. It added that Inspector Mandeep sustained a gunshot injury to his leg during the arrest.

Two groups clash after immersing Lord Ganesh's idol in East Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A clash broke out between two groups when one of them was returning after immersing Lord Ganesh's idol in East Delhi's Trilokpuri area on Monday night. According to the police on Tuesday, there is no communal angle in the incident while claims of religious colour to the fight are being circulated over social media. They said that it is suspected that a clash broke out between the two groups of residents due to their old rivalry in Trilokpuri. DCP (East) Apoorva Gupta said, "On Monday, a PCR call at around 11 PM, was received at Mayur Vihar police station in which the caller alleged that he had been attacked by a group of boys."

She added that reacting to the call, the local police arrived at the scene, and verified the facts and checked the adjoining CCTV footages. "By the time a team of local police reached the spot, both the groups fled away. It was found that a group of boys from Block 31 and nearby blocks, Trilokpuri, were returning from Ganesh Visarjan in Block 36m," Gupta stated. The DCP said that when they were passing through Block 32, Trilokpuri, they came face to face with a few boys from Block 32, with whom they had an earlier enmity. "The verbal argument between the groups escalated into a fist fight. However, no injuries were reported by either party," she said, adding that there is no communal angle to the incident, as reported by some people. Further, based on the present CCTV footages, all the boys involved in the fight have been identified and apprehended. "An FIR under sections 191(2), 191(3), 115(2) of BNS has been registered in this regard, and nine people have been apprehended so far. Further investigation is ongoing and peace and tranquility is prevailing in the area," Gupta said.

Student body allege, local authorities removed Bhim Rao Ambedkar statue from DUSU office

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after a statue of Bhim Rao Ambedkar was installed at the Delhi University Students' Union (DUSU) office in North Campus, local authorities removed it from the entrance, a student body alleged on Tuesday. Outgoing DUSU president Tushar Dedha unveiled the statue of Ambedkar on Monday, the last day of the ABVP-led student union's tenure. Deputy Chairperson of MCD North Zone and Malka Ganj Councillor Rekha Amarnath, who contributed to the project, was present at the event, the students' body had said. The ABVP-led DUSU has submitted a memorandum to Delhi University Vice-Chancellor Yogesh Singh, demanding the reinstallation of the statue of Ambedkar and the construction of a Constitution Park on campus. In a statement, the student



union claimed that the removal of Ambedkar's statue outside the DUSU office hurt the sentiments of the student community. A delegation from the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and DUSU submitted the memorandum, demanding the installation of Ambedkar's statue at the Law Centre in the Faculty of Law, as well as the construction of a Constitution park. The delegation included DUSU President Tushar Dedha, DUSU Secretary Aparajita, DUSU Joint Secretary Sachin Baisla, Campus Law Centre Student Union President Akash Soni, ABVP Campus Law Centre

Unit President Aditya Tomar, and others. "The Vidyarthi Parishad observes Babasaheb Ambedkar's death anniversary on December 6 as 'Social Harmony Day' every year and undertakes various efforts to promote social harmony across all sectors of society. "It is unfortunate and hurtful to the student community that the Delhi government removed the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar, which had been installed by DUSU under ABVP's leadership. "We demand the immediate reinstallation of the statue at the Faculty of Law in Delhi University and the construction of a Constitution park," ABVP Delhi Secretary Harsh Atri said. The student body claimed that the Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University has given positive assurances in response to ABVP and DUSU's demands.

Man held from West Bengal 15 years after killing friend in Delhi over alcohol

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi police arrested a 39-year-old man from West Bengal, 15 years after he allegedly killed his friend for not giving him money to buy alcohol, police said on Tuesday. The accused was identified as Ahmed Ali, a resident of Hadliya Port of West Bengal. He was working as a labourer. He was declared a proclaimed offender by the court, police said. Deputy Commissioner of Police (crime) Satish Kumar said Ali was allegedly involved in the murder of his friend, Mohammad Zuber after a fight broke out between them. The incident occurred on February 26, 2009, in northwest Delhi's Swaroop Nagar area. Ali had demanded money from Zuber to buy alcohol in northwest Delhi's Swaroop



Nagar area on February 26, 2009, DCP said. Ali used to work as a labourer in a scrap shop in Swaroop Nagar, DCP said. Two other accused -- Safiul and Mehtab -- were arrested earlier but, Ali was on the run, Kumar said. During the investigation, the police traced him to West Bengal where he was living with his family. The team laid a trap and arrested him last week. Police is interrogation him. Further investigation is underway, Kumar added.

Delhi Medical Council takes suo motu cognisance on suicide of trainee doctor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Medical Council on Tuesday took suo motu cognisance of a recent incident of a trainee doctor's suicide at Maulana Azad Medical College and formed a six-member committee to enquire into the matter. The 25-year-old trainee doctor allegedly hanged himself in his hostel room at the college in central Delhi, police said on Sunday. According to a notification by the Delhi Medical Council (DMC) on Tuesday, incidences of suicide by medical students and doctors are increasing in various medical institutions. "It has also been noted with great sorrow and distress that two medical students have committed suicide in Delhi. Maulana Azad Medical College in the last couple of months," it said.

Pagers explosion in Lebanon...

From page 1 Iranian state-run IRNA news agency said that the country's ambassador, Mojtaba Amani, was superficially wounded by an exploding pager and was being treated at a hospital. Photos and videos from Beirut's southern suburbs circulating on social media and in local media showed people lying on the pavement with wounds on their hands or near their pants pockets. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah previously warned the group's members not to carry cellphones, saying that they could be used by Israel to track their movements and to carry out targeted strikes. Lebanon's Health Ministry called on all hospitals to be on alert to take in emergency patients and for people who own pagers to get away from them. It also asked health workers to avoid using wireless devices. AP photographers at area hospitals said the emergency rooms were overloaded with patients, many of them with injuries to their limbs, some in serious condition.

Atishi is Delhi CM

From page 1 The need to induct two new members in the Cabinet has arisen since Kejriwal's resignation will create one more vacancy on the seven-member body - which has to be one-tenth of the total number of Assembly seats in the capital, that is 70 - following his stepping down. One of the seven berths has remained vacant ever since Social Welfare Minister, and the sole SC face in the cabinet, Raaj Kumar Anand, resigned from his post as well as the party in April. Atishi currently holds the most number of portfolios in the Delhi Cabinet, serving as the Minister for Finance, Water, Education, Public Works, Power, Revenue, Planning, Services, Law, Vigilance, and other key departments.

Didi transfers senior officers, doctors to decide on resuming work

From page 1 The removal of police officers could pour some water on the burning embers of protest in Kolkata and the regions, experts said. Apart from the top officials who earned the wrath of the junior doctors for their inept handling of the rape and murder case, two senior Health Department officials were also transferred out of the their respective positions. These officials are: Director, Medical Education, Debashis Haldar and Director, Health Services, Kaustav Nayak. They were replaced by Suparna Dutta and Swapan Soren. The Government action received mixed response with a top member of the Bengal civil society saying, "this is not the end, but the beginning of the movement that will end

with the change." TMC Rajya Sabha Member Sukhendu Shekhar Roy who had earlier raised his voice against the "dastardly act and its aftermath" wrote on X, "My 2 fold demands were for custodial interrogation of 2 heads of RG Kar Hospital and Kolkata Police have now been accepted under pressures from popular movement unleashed by Jr. Doctors and millions of people. Satyameva Jayate. I'm happy like everybody." The agitating doctors had alleged that the two directors as also State health secretary had unlawfully allowed arrested former RGMCH Principal Sandip Ghosh to demolish portions of the walls of the seminar hall of the hospital where the felony had allegedly taken place, thereby

helping in destruction of evidence. The massive reshuffle in police and health administration takes place after a prolonged meeting between the junior doctors and the Chief Minister at her Kalighat residence following which she said that she had "fulfilled the 99 per cent of the doctors' demands" hoping they would "now resume their work." The doctors gave a mixed reaction to the Tuesday's development. Dr Debashis, one of their leaders said that the Government decision was a fallout of their prolonged agitation adding they would wait closely watch how the security system in and around the Government hospitals were revamped. Another doctor however

called the reshuffle a "reward posting" for Goyal. "He has been shifted as the ADG, STF, that too on his own wish which is a reward posting ... he should have been sent on 'compulsory waiting' because he had influenced the initial phases of investigation apparently in order to shield some people." Meanwhile, on whether the doctors would resume work, they said that things would be clear after general body meeting. "We have just been out of the individual meetings of the respective medical colleges ... now we are going into the 'pan GB meeting' only after which we will be able to tell you whether, when and how the doctors will resume their work," another leader of the junior doctors' association said.

J and K all set to vote today

From page 1 The participation of even separatist leaders in the polls shows the shift in the political narrative in Kashmir. Candidates fighting elections from the Kashmir division include 37-year-old Iltija Mufti, daughter of PDP Chief and former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti from Bijbehara-Srigufwara constituency on Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) ticket, Afroza Bano as an independent from Kulgam and Sakeena Masood Itoo from D H Pora constituency on National Conference ticket. The political parties have deployed a large number of women cadres to reach out to the women voters in their respective constituencies. Candidates contesting from the Jammu division include Shagun Parihar from

Kishtwar on a BJP ticket, Meenakshi Bhagat on Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) from Baderwah, Meenakshi Kalra an independent candidate from Doda West, Pooja Thakur from Padder-Nagsani on NC ticket. 29-year-old Shagun Parihar is challenging former Minister Sajjad Ahmed Kitchloo of the National Conference while Pooja Thakur of NC is contesting against BJP's organisation secretary Sunil Sharma. Meanwhile, the Peoples Democratic Party has fielded its youth leader Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra from the South Kashmir constituency of Pulwama. He is fighting against Mohammad Khalil Band of the National Conference. Parra unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha polls in May 2024. Another constituency of Pahalgam is witnessing a triangular contest between

Altaf Ahmad Wani of the National Conference, Shabir Ahmed Sediqi of the PDP, and Rafi Ahmed Mir of JKAPNI. From Kulgam, CPI (M) leader Mohd Yusuf Tarigami is defending his turf for the fifth time in a row. Tarigami has won all four previous Assembly elections of 1996, 2002, 2008 and 2014. This time he is facing a tough challenge from an Independent candidate Sayar Ahmad Reshi supported by the banned Jammat-e-Islami. The Kokernag Assembly segment, reserved as an ST category seat, is also witnessing an interesting contest between Zafar Ali Khatana of the National Conference and Haroon Rashid Khatana of the PDP. BJP has also fielded its candidate Roshan Hussain Shah Gojar. Six independent candidates are also in the fray from the reserved seat.

Government talking to Meiteis...

From page 1 "To check the infiltration, we have ended the special arrangement (FMR) with Myanmar under which free movement of the people of both countries was allowed. Now people can cross into each other's territory only with a visa. We brought a law in this regard," he said. Shah said the Government has also ended the security lapses which existed earlier along the international border. The 1,643 km long India-Myanmar border, which passes through Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, had the FMR that was implemented in 2018 as part of India's Act East policy. Ethnic violence has been going on in Manipur since May 3 last year after a tribal solidarity march in the hill districts of the State to protest against the

majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status. Since then, over 220 people belonging to both the Kuki and Meitei communities and security personnel have been killed in the continuing violence. Amit Shah claimed that the Modi Government will implement One Nation, One Poll in the current tenure. "We plan to implement one nation one poll within the tenure of this Government," he said. One nation, one election' is one of the key promises made by the BJP in its manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections. A high-level panel headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind in March this year recommended simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step followed by

synchronised local body polls within 100 days. Home Minister Amit Shah said the Government will "very soon" make an announcement for carrying out the census in the country. "We will announce it very soon," Shah said in response to a question on conducting the decadal census of the Indian population which has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We will make all the details public when we announce the census," the Union Home Minister said to questions on the caste census. India has conducted the census every 10 years since 1881. The first phase of this decade's census was expected to begin on April 1, 2020 but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cheetah project by Government gets mixed response...

From page 1 The wildlife activist minced no words as he said, Cheetah Project had actually turned into a captive breeding Centre and accountability should be fixed on officials for deaths of the royal predators. On the tourism front, the project is yet to catch fancy among the tourists. Visitor footfall has been very slow from 1,459 in 2022-23 to 3,172 in 2023-24. "The reason for poor tourist footfall is that cheetahs remained inside enclosures and far away from public view," according to reports.

Indian Hockey team clinches 5th Asian Champions Trophy title

From page 1 It was challenging for the Harmanpreet Singh to lead India against China in the first three quarters to find an angle to breach the Chinese defence in the match. He failed in the first 10 minutes after receiving the penalty against the Opposition. Jugraj, who entered as a substitute broke the halt in the 51st minute to hand India the win against Chinese side. China which was playing its only second international tournament final after beating Pakistan in Semis 2-0 in the shootout game after the game ended in 1-1 in regular time. The Olympic Bronze medalist team Indian captain Harmanpreet Singh was the second highest goal scorer in the Asian Championship

Trophy followed by YANG Jihun of Korea. It was a closely-fought match and in the first two quarters, India had more scoring opportunities. Despite this, China defended deep and launched swift counterattacks, keeping their rivals on edge. Raj Kumar Pal (midfielder) had India's first shot on goal, but Chinese goalkeeper Wang Weibao made the save. Raj Kumar quickly recovered, earning India a penalty corner in the 10th minute with some impressive stick work. Just two minutes later, Nilakanta Sharma's effort was restricted by Wang, who again showed quick reflexes to deny Sukhjeet Singh from Jugraj's pass. In the final moments of the first quarter, India

conceded a penalty corner, but goalkeeper Krishan Bahadur Pathak stood strong. The second quarter followed a similar pattern, with India dominating possession and China relying on counterattacks. Despite their pressure, India's attempts were consistently met with strong defence from the hosts. In the 27th minute, Sukhjeet Singh earned another penalty corner, but Harmanpreet missed the shot at post, leaving the score 0-0 in first half. Post break, China came out with energy, launching several attacks that resulted in penalty corner in the 38th minute, but the Indian defence stood like a wall against them. China's aggressive play earned them two corners in the 40th

minute, but Pathak solidly defended the goal. India's young guns, who had performed well throughout the tournament, managed to break through China's defence multiple times but couldn't succeed. It took brilliant attempt from Captain Harmanpreet to finally unlock the Chinese defence. He dribbled into the circle with skillful art play with hockey stick and set up. Jugraj calmly slotted the ball past the goalkeeper, giving India lead in the game. China had dominated possession 66-34 throughout the game. They pulled their goalkeeper for an extra field player with just four minutes remaining, but India managed to defend well to secure the win.

PM e-transfers Rs 2K crore to 5.11L PMAY beneficiaries in Chhattisgarh

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday virtually transferred Rs 2,044 crore as the first installment under the PM Awas Yojana directly into the bank accounts of over 5.11 lakh homeless families in Chhattisgarh to build permanent homes.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, several cabinet ministers and others marked their presence at the 'Mor Awas - Mor Adhikar' (My House - My Right) programme organized at the Indoor Stadium of Raipur.

Modi affirmed that his government has always aimed at bringing happiness and ease into the lives of the poor



and the weaker sections of the society.

Over the past 10 years, significant success has been achieved in fulfilling this objective. During the event, keys to the newly-built homes, along with certificates of

completion, decorative door adornments and religious materials were handed over to over 23,000 urban families.

Chief Minister Sai extended heartfelt greetings to the people of the state on the occasion of Vishwakarma

Jayanti and to Prime Minister Modi on his birthday.

The Chief Minister emphasized that food, clothing and housing were the most basic needs of any person, but even decades after independence, a large number

of citizens across the country do not own a home.

Through the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), the dream of providing homes to homeless families is being realized, he said.

He further mentioned that out of the 32 lakh approved houses across the country, nearly 30 per cent have been allocated to Chhattisgarh - a significant achievement for the state.

"Any negligence or irregularity in its execution will not be tolerated. He warned that if any complaints, even for misappropriation of a single rupee, arise in implementation of PMAY, action will be taken directly against the respective Collector," he said.

12 more held for killings over witchcraft



STAFF REPORTER ■
SUKMA

Twelve more persons including a 45-year-old woman were arrested on Tuesday for killing five members of a family on suspicion of practising witchcraft in a village in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh.

Based on the statements of witnesses, the police nabbed the 12 from Etkal village, Sukma. A dditional Superintendent of Police Akash Rao Girepunje said.

Earlier on Sunday, they beat Mausam Kanna (60), his wife Mausam Biri, his son Mausam Buchcha (34), his

daughter-in-law Mausam Arjo (32) and his daughter Karka Lachhi (43) to death on suspicion of practising witchcraft.

Five men were held on the day of the incident. So far 17 persons have been arrested in the case.

Further probe into the case in all possible angles is still underway.

Man hangs self after killing wife

STAFF REPORTER ■
KORBA

A man allegedly killed his 35-year-old wife with an arrow and committed suicide by hanging himself following an argument in Korba district in Chhattisgarh, police said on Tuesday.

The incident occurred in Thengrimar village on Monday, Korba Superintendent of Police Siddharth Tiwari said. Jagannath Manjwar (37) had an altercation with his wife, Santoshi Bai, and allegedly attacked her with an arrow at their house.

Manjwar then allegedly hanged himself from the ceiling in the same room, the official said.

NTPC Nava Raipur pledges for cleanliness

STAFF REPORTER ■
NAVA RAIPUR

NTPC Nava Raipur launched a 'Swachchhata Hi Seva' at its headquarters with a pledge on Tuesday in which employees participated in large numbers.

P.K. Mishra, RED (WR-II, USSC & Ash NI) and S.K. Ghosh, ED (OS) administered the pledge in Hindi and English respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, Mishra emphasised on the importance of cleanliness and fitness. He asked all to be an agent of change for their locality.

Later, he kickstarted the indoor sports facilities at the office premises.

During the fortnight long celebrations, many awareness



programmes are planned for employees and their family

members besides few for children of nearby schools.

'Chakradhar festival takes state's culture heritage to new heights'

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Governor Ramen Deka said that the Chakradhar festival will take the state's cultural heritage to new heights and get it international recognition.

He was addressing the concluding ceremony of the 39th Chakradhar festival in Raigarh district on Monday night.

He added that the festival was a medium to keep the state's rich past and traditional art and music alive.

"This festival will continue in the coming times as well. Our priority is that Raigarh remains green while working towards environmental protection." This year's festival began on September 7 and



concluded on 16. It was marked with renowned artists from across the country delivering mesmerising

performances, including Padma Shri awardees.

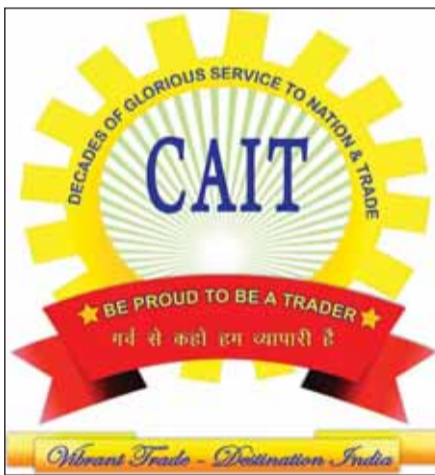
The Chakradhar festival is celebrated to honour Maharaja

Chakradhar Singh, who was a great patron of music and dance. The festival was started in 1985.



Union Minister of Heavy Industries H.D. Kumaraswamy on Tuesday paid a courtesy visit to Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai in Raipur.

CAIT slams banks, e-commerce over exclusive deals



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) in Chhattisgarh criticised banks and e-commerce companies for their exclusive

discounting and cashback strategies that exclude traditional retailers.

In a letter to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, the body urged him to issue immediate directions to banks to cease offering exclusive discounts and cashback benefits that are not extended for traditional retailers.

CAIT Senior Vice President Amar Parwani and state President Jitendra Doshi said they create an uneven playing field to the disadvantage of traditional retailers by excluding them from these deals.

They alleged that the collaboration between banks, e-commerce companies and brand owners was distorting the retail ecosystem.

"It is alarming that approximately 1.5 lakh retailers are struggling and over 50,000 small businesses have already shut down. This raises serious concerns about

the fairness of these business practices."

They alleged that, as per a recent Competition Commission of India's (CCI) report, these platforms have violated national laws by collaborating with smartphone Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs).

The findings indicate that the companies that have engaged in exclusive supply agreements are seriously undermining offline retailers, they said.

Protecting both retailers and the financial integrity of our banking sector is of utmost importance, they said.

Make cleanliness a mass movement: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Tuesday inaugurated the state-level 'Swachchhata Hi Seva' fortnight in Raipur and appealed to people to make cleanliness a mass movement.

During the event, he administered the oath of cleanliness to the citizens and participated in cleaning activities by sweeping the Telibandha lake premises.

He also honoured sanitation workers (Swachchhata Didis) and several social organisations, including Green Army, Bunch of Fools, Kuch Farz Hamara Bhi and Avengers Group, for their contribution towards maintaining cleanliness in the city.

Additionally, social worker Shubhangi Apte was recognised for her efforts.

The Chief Minister also flagged off a cleanliness marathon and inaugurated the new sanitation vehicles.



In his address, he highlighted the need to transform the cause of maintaining cleanliness into a social movement. He emphasized that public awareness is important for

maintaining cleanliness across the state.

Sai expressed deep appreciation for the "Swachchhata Didis", who are playing a crucial role in cleanliness by collecting waste

Sai highlighted the need to transform the cause of maintaining cleanliness into a social movement. He emphasized that public awareness is important for maintaining cleanliness across the state.

from households. They segregate dry and wet waste for recycling and composting.

GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER MAHANADI PROJECT, RAIPUR (CHHATTISGARH)

e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE
eProcurement Portal: <https://eprc.cgstate.gov.in>

S. No.	Name of Work	NIT No./System Tender No./ Dated	Probable Amount of Contract	Eligible class of Contractor
1.	Lining and Repair work from R.D. 390 m to 10000 m of Mahanadi Main Canal under Mahanadi Reservoir Project of Block Dhamtari, District Dhamtari.	05/SAC/202 4-25/ 158502/ Dated - 13.09.2024 (First Call)	Rs. 453.48 Lakhs	"B" and above Class registered under Unified Registration System in PWD
2.	Lining and Repair work from R.D. 10000 m to 15000 m of Mahanadi Main Canal under Mahanadi Reservoir Project of Block Dhamtari, District Dhamtari.	06/SAC/2024 -25/ 158505/Dated - 13.09.2024 (First Call)	Rs. 193.18 Lakhs	"C" and above Class registered under Unified Registration System in PWD

Date-Time Detail(s) (Tender Time Schedule)

- Bid Start Date and time: 20.09.2024, 17:31 Hours (The date and time from which bidders start preparation) Submission of their bid response, before this bidder's action will not be allowed)
- Bid Due Date and time: 04.10.2024, 17:30 Hours (The last date & time for submission of bid response, after which no bids can be submitted.)
- Bid Open Start Date and time: 07.10.2024, 11:30 Hours. (The Date of opening of Envelope - A & B online)

The bids of the contractors have to be digitally signed by the Digital Certificate of the contractor before submitting the bids online.

Any clarification / doubts regarding the process of eProcurement System (EPS) may be obtained from EPS Help Desk Toll free 1800 258 2502 or on email helpdesk.eprc@cgswan.gov.in.

All the contractors are required to submit Envelope 'A' online only. Physical submission of Envelope 'A' shall only be done by the tenderer whose financial bid is found the lowest in the manner described in para 2.1.5 (A).

Executive Engineer M.R.P. Dam Division No. 2, Rudri For Chief Engineer, Mahanadi Project, Raipur (C.G.)

G-242502559/4

Registered Office : 6th Floor, Tower A, Peninsula Business Park, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400013



POSSESSION NOTICE

The undersigned being the authorized officer of the DCB Bank Ltd., under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (SARFAESI) Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice on below mentioned dates calling upon the borrowers (Borrowers and Co-Borrowers) to repay the amount mentioned in the notice as detailed below in tabular form with further interest thereon from within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower and Co-Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower, Co-Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 also r/w section 14(1) of the Security Interest Rules 2002 as mentioned here below.

The borrower, Co-Borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property (Description of the immovable Property) and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the DCB Bank Ltd., for respective amount as mentioned here below.

The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Symbolic Possession Date - 12th September, 2024	
Demand Notice Dated :	09-05-2024
Name of Borrower(s) and Co-borrower(s) :	M/S. AIR FAIR COOLING SYSTEM (THROUGH ITS PROPRIETOR MR. SAYYAD MISBA AHMED), MR. SAYYAD MISBA AHMED and MRS. SAIYYEDA SHAKERA BEGUM
Loan Account Number :	2124260000107 / 2124160000046
Total Outstanding Amount :	Rs. 79,94,156.13 (Rupees Seventy Nine Lakh Ninety Four Thousand One Hundred Fifty Six and Thirteen Paise Only) as on 9th May 2024
Description of the Immovable Property - IMMOVABLE ASSET - ALL PIECE AND PARCEL OF PPOPERT BEARING KH. NO. PART OF 195/5 ADMEASURING 640 SQ. FT. CARPERT AREA, 550 SQ. FT BUILT UP AREA, PH NO. 105 SITUATED AT CHOURASIYA COLONY, MOUZA - MATHPURENA, TEL & DISTRICT - RAIPUR, CG, WHICH IS BOUNDED BY EAST - PLOT OF MR. SIDDIQUI, WEST - ROAD, NORTH - LAND OF MRS. BALWANT KAUR, SOUTH - LAND OF SOUMIYA KASHYAP (The Secured Assets).	
Symbolic Possession Date - 12th September, 2024	
Demand Notice Dated :	16-05-2024
Name of Borrower(s) and Co-borrower(s) :	M/S. TIWARI TYRES (THROUGH ITS PROPRIETOR MR. SANTOSH KUMAR TIWARI), MR. SANTOSH KUMAR TIWARI, MR. RITESH KUMAR TIWARI and MRS. BALESHWARI TIWARI
Loan Account Number :	12541600000019 / 12556200000019 / 12556500000019
Total Outstanding Amount :	Rs. 69,89,206.44 (Rupees Sixty Nine Lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Two Hundred Six and Forty Four Paise Only) as on 15th May 2024
Description of the Immovable Property - ALL PIECE AND PARCEL OF RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY BEARING KHATA NO. 33/3, 33/5 ADMEASURING AREA 1300 SQ. FT. 525 SQ. FT TOTAL AREA - 1825 SQ. FT, PH NO. 114/A SITUATED AT M. G. ROAD, GANDHI CHOWK, BALODA BAZAR, CHHATTISGARH. (The Secured Assets)	
Date :	18.09.2024
Place :	Raipur
For DCB Bank Ltd. Authorized Officer	

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Trouble for BJP in Goa over corruption allegations on CM Pramod Sawant

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Just ahead of the assembly elections in Maharashtra, trouble seems to be brewing up in neighbouring Goa for the Chief Minister Pramod Sawant as few ruling party leaders and legislators have expressed their resentment to the party high command in Delhi based on several allegations and complaints by the Opposition ranks to Central and State investigating stakeholders. Many state BJP members who are augmenting the ongoing membership drive of the party in the State has cited low turnout as they complained eroding Sawant's popularity who is allegedly embroiled in several controversies which could be a threat to BJP's fortune in Goa. "Our party had set up a benchmark by putting leaders like late Manohar Parrikar and in a small state which depends on tourism economy has to always think on this line only," a party legislator camping in Delhi said. Opposition leaders too like Vijai Sardesai and Amit Palekar, have raised serious concerns about the CM's policies and schemes and have written letters to probing agencies. While one allegations against the CM is similar to the



ongoing Delhi liquor scam which led to arrest of top leaders including Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Sardesai has shed light on instances of excessive spending like the expense of Rs 40 lakh on laddoos (sweets) alone. This, along with a total of Rs 4.32 crore spent on transporting VIPs since 2022 and an additional Rs 1.33 crore spent on five-star hotel stays. One of the most significant allegations is of land grabbing. Sardesai, who is also Goa Forward Party leader has accused Sawant of failing to address rampant land fraud in the state. Despite the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) and a commission led by Justice (ret'd) V.K. Jadhav,

progress has been sluggish, with only 22 out of 93 reported cases resulting in FIRs. Another major issue is the controversial Investment Promotion Board (IPB) Bill, which aimed to grant sweeping powers to the IPB over local panchayats and municipalities. The bill faced stiff resistance in the Assembly, with opposition members arguing that it would undermine local governance and facilitate indiscriminate land-use changes, particularly in eco-sensitive zones. Sardesai has also intensified his criticism of Sawant and his cabinet colleague Atanasi Monserrate, accusing them of a massive 50,000 crore scam

involving Zuari Agro Chemicals Ltd's (ZACL) land. Rebel BJP MLAs and opposition MLAs have pointed out that despite promises from Sawant to address these concerns and to withdraw illegal permissions, construction and sale of plots continue unabated. The discrepancy in the land's valuation—from 25 paise per square metre in 1971 to Rs 1,19,000 per square metre currently—further fuels suspicions of a massive scam. The "Cash for Job" scam under Chief Minister's administration has also exposed deep-rooted corruption in the recruitment processes. Congress MP Capt. Viriato Fernandes accused a woman from Sanquelim, Sawant's constituency, of taking bribes in exchange for securing government job postings, particularly in the police department. Additionally, Sardesai revealed another scam in the recruitment of Lower Division Clerks (LDC) at the South Goa Collectorate. Recent reports have revealed that District Mineral Foundation (DMF) funds, meant for public welfare and development in mining-affected areas of Goa, were allegedly diverted to Sai Nursing Home, a private facility associated with Sawant.

PM Modi turns 74; Leaders across party lines extend wishes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned 74 on Tuesday, with President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and other dignitaries and politicians cutting party lines extending their best wishes to him. Modi spent most of his day in Odisha during which he launched the state government's flagship women-centric initiative, Subhadra Yojana, besides railway and national highway projects. Speaking at an event in Bhubaneswar, Modi recalled how he used to visit his mother on his birthday and take her blessings. "Before coming here, I went to the home of an Adivasi family to attend their Grih Pravesh event...My sister in that family gave me khiri to eat. And when I was eating that Khiri, it was obvious for me to remember my mother. "When my mother was alive, I always used to visit her on my birthday to seek her blessings. My mother used to feed me 'Gud' (jaggery) by hand. She is not there anymore but my Adivasi mother fed me kheer and gave me birthday blessings," Modi said. Murmu greeted Modi on his birthday and wished that his innovative efforts pave the way to make India a developed nation. Modi was born on September 17, 1950,



in a small town in Gujarat. "Heartly congratulations and best wishes to Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji on his birthday. On the strength of your personality and work, you have provided extraordinary leadership and increased the prosperity and prestige of the country," the president said in a social media post in Hindi. "I wish that your innovative efforts with the spirit of nation first pave the way to make India a developed nation. I pray to God that you live long and always remain healthy and happy," she wrote. Greeting Modi, Dhankhar said the prime minister has firmly set the country on a trajectory towards a developed India by 2047. In a social media post, the vice president said Modi, in governance for over two decades, and as prime minister for over a decade, has aroused the soul of

has brought positive changes in the lives of the people through his tireless work, perseverance and foresight, and has raised India's prestige in the world. Leaders cutting across party lines wished Modi on his birthday. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge greeted the prime minister on his birthday and wished good health and long life for him. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi also greeted Modi and wished for his long and healthy life. Former Prime Minister and JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda greeted Modi and wished he may grow from strength to strength to successfully lead India in this third term. Taking to social media, Gowda said, "My very warm birthday greetings to Prime Minister @narendramodi avaru. May he grow from strength to strength to successfully lead India in his third term. May the lord almighty bless him with good health and a long life." Senior TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee wished for the good health of the Prime Minister. Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his Deputy Pawan Kalyan, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, among others, greeted the prime minister on his birthday.



Modi: Congress, its ecosystem angry over his Ganesh Puja participation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BHUBANESWAR/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Congress and its "ecosystem" was angry with him for taking part in Ganesh Puja, claiming that "power-hungry" people who were dividing society were also having problems with this festival. Modi made the comment in an apparent reference to the criticism by the opposition parties for participating in Ganesh Puja rituals at the residence of Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, while addressing a rally after launching the Odisha government's flagship programme Subhadra Yojana in Bhubaneswar. "Ganesh Utsav is not just a festival of faith for our country. It played a very important role in the freedom movement. "Even at that time, the British who followed the policy of divide and rule used to hate Ganesh Utsav. Even today, the power-hungry people, who

are busy in dividing society are having problems with Ganesh Puja. You must have seen that the people of Congress and its ecosystem are angry because I participated in Ganesh Puja," Modi said at the rally. He also said that Lord Ganesh was "put behind bars" in Congress-ruled Karnataka by these people. The Prime Minister was apparently referring to a viral photo of Ganesh idol in a police van in the southern state. "The whole country is disturbed because of the picture," he said adding, "We cannot let these hateful elements move forward". When the British tried to divide the country based on caste and religion, Lokmanya Tilak had organised Ganesh Utsav and awakened the soul of the country, he said. "Ganesh Utsav teaches us how to remain united and rise above caste and religion...Even today, all sections of people in our society participate in Ganesh Utsav without any discrimination.

SC rejects PIL seeking summer dress code exemption for lawyers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to entertain a PIL seeking exemption for lawyers from wearing black coat and gown in courts during summer, saying there has to be some dress code and they cannot wear 'kurta-pajama, a traditional Indian outfit of a loose-fitting tunic. "Ultimately it is a matter of decorum. You should be properly attired. You have to wear something. You cannot argue in 'kurta pajama' or shorts and T-shirt also..." said a bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and



Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The bench, however, permitted lawyer Shailendra Mani Tripathi, who filed the

PIL in his personal capacity, to submit a representation to the Bar Council of India, the state bar councils and the Centre on the issue, saying they may take

a decision on it. When Tripathi said lawyers may be exempted from wearing coat and gown during summer, CJ Chandrachud told him that the climate in Rajasthan is not similar to Bangalore and hence, let the respective bar councils take a decision on this. The bench said the petitioner can make a representation to the bar councils and the government for suitable amendments to the dress code. As the bench was not inclined to entertain the petition, Tripathi sought its permission to withdraw the PIL which was granted.

India highlights \$5 trillion climate funding need, criticises \$100 billion pledge



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday highlighted the significant gap in climate funding, stating that developing countries will need over USD 5 trillion to meet their climate goals by 2030. Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav criticised the previously pledged USD 100 billion from developed nations, describing it as 'too small' to address the scale of the challenge. He was speaking at the 19th Sustainability Summit organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) here. Yadav pointed out that developed countries, which have historically contributed most to GHG emissions and consumed a large portion of the global carbon budget, had promised USD 100 billion and technology transfer to aid developing nations in their climate efforts. However, he argued that this commitment has not been fulfilled. Yadav emphasised the disparity in resource needs by noting that if poorer countries like Ethiopia were to adopt the consumption

patterns of developed nations, humanity would require the resources of seven Earths to meet global demands. He also highlighted that India's consumption patterns are more aligned with those of African nations, reflecting a more sustainable lifestyle. The Minister underscored the necessity for developing countries to have access to energy for development to ensure a dignified life for their citizens. The need for financial support for middle-income and poor nations to address climate change will be a key issue at the upcoming UN climate conference in Baku. At this conference, countries are expected to finalize the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), which will establish a new target for the annual mobilization of funds by developed nations starting in 2025 to support climate action in developing countries. In 2009, developed countries agreed to mobilize USD 100 billion annually by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries. In 2015, under the Paris Agreement, Parties agreed to extend this goal out to 2025 and to set a new financial goal, from a floor of USD 100 billion per year, for after 2025 taking into account the needs and priorities of developing countries.

One in four use weight loss drugs without doctor consultation: Researchers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A team of researchers has flagged that while injectable weight loss drugs have become a popular option for people struggling with obesity, 1 in 4 or 25% consider using them without consulting their doctor, exposing themselves to several health risks. The team from The Ohio State University, US, who surveyed 1,006 adults in America attributed the usage of drugs such as Semaglutide (Ozempic and Wegovy) without seeking medical advice to higher cost and lack of insurance. As per the survey, at least 18 per cent participants identified cost, lack of insurance coverage (15%), difficulty obtaining a prescription (9%), and availability issues (6%) as



major reasons for bypassing professional advice. Dr Shengyi Mao, an internal medicine physician at Ohio State, underscored the risks of self-medication. Without medical supervision, individuals may face significant health risks, such as side effects and interactions with other medications. The FDA has also issued warnings about compounded versions

of Semaglutide, which can be ineffective or improperly dosed. GLP-1 receptor agonists, like Ozempic and Wegovy, are FDA-approved for weight loss and reducing cardiovascular risk in those with obesity and existing cardiovascular conditions. However, the FDA has also issued warnings about compounded versions of the drug, which have been linked to dosing errors and ineffective ingredients.

Mao stressed the importance of a comprehensive approach to weight management, involving personalized medical guidance to address individual health needs and risks. Effective weight management often requires a combination of lifestyle changes and medical intervention, and discontinuing medication can lead to weight regain if not managed properly. The U.S. FDA has approved Semaglutide for weight loss and reducing cardiovascular risk in individuals with obesity or overweight and existing cardiovascular conditions. However, the FDA has also issued warnings about compounded versions of the drug, which have been linked to dosing errors and ineffective ingredients.

Kharge urges Modi to discipline leaders over objectionable statements against Rahul Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge raised with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday the issue of "extremely objectionable" and violent statements by ruling alliance members targeting Rahul Gandhi and urged him to discipline his leaders. In his letter to Modi, Kharge asserted that strict legal action should be taken against those giving such statements so that Indian politics can be prevented from degenerating and nothing untoward happens. "I want to draw your attention to an issue which is directly related to democracy and the Constitution. You must be aware that a series of extremely objectionable, violent and rude statements



are being made against the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi," the Congress chief said. "I have to say with sadness that the violent language used by the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and your allies is harmful for the future. The world is shocked that the Minister of State for Railways in the central government, a minister from BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh, is calling the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok

Sabha 'number one terrorist' Kharge said in an apparent reference to the remarks by Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu and UP minister Raghuraj Singh. "An MLA from a party that has ties with your government in Maharashtra is announcing a reward of Rs 11 lakh to the person who 'cuts off the tongue of the Leader of the Opposition and brings it to him'. A BJP leader and former MLA in Delhi is threatening to make him 'fate like his grandmother'," Kharge said. Shiv Sena MLA Sanjay Gaikwad announced that he will give Rs 11 lakh to anyone chopping off Gandhi's tongue for his remarks on scrapping the reservation system. Union minister Ravneet Singh Bittu on Sunday said if those "manufacturing bombs" were supporting Rahul

Gandhi, he is the "number one terrorist". Minister in the BJP's UP government Raghuraj Singh reportedly made similar remarks as that of Bittu. Earlier, BJP leader Tarvinder Singh Marwah had purportedly made "threatening" remarks against Rahul Gandhi. In his letter to Modi in Hindi, Kharge said Indian culture is known throughout the world for non-violence, harmony and love. "Our heroes established these as standards in politics. Gandhi ji had made these standards an important part of politics during the British rule itself. After independence, there has been a long history of respectful disagreements between the ruling party and the opposition in the parliamentary arena.

BJP set to face anti incumbency test in high stakes Haryana Assembly polls

STAFF REPORTER ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

The high-stakes Haryana assembly election will witness a multi-cornered contest with the ruling BJP set to face the anti-incumbency test as well as a resurgent Congress as it looks to script a hat-trick in the state. Among the 1,031 candidates in the fray for the October 5 polls are several kin of Haryana's three famous 'Lals' -- former chief ministers Bansilal, Devi Lal and Bhajan Lal -- with some even taking on each other. The entry of a few more from other prominent political families has made the electoral battle an interesting one. Besides the BJP and the Congress, AAP has also fielded candidates for the polls. The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) and Azad Samaj Party are contesting the election in alliance, as are the INLD and the BSP.

Prominent names in the fray are BJP candidates Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini from Kurukshetra's Ladwa and Anil Vij from Ambala Cantt, the Congress' Bhupinder Singh Hooda from Rohtak's Garhi Sampla-Kiloi and Vinesh Phogat from Julana, JJP's Dushyant Chautala from Uchana Kalan, INLD's Abhay Singh Chautala from Ellenabad and AAP's Anurag Dhanda from Kalayat. According to the election department, over two crore voters are eligible to cast their votes in the state -- 1,07,75,957 men, 95,77,926 women and 467 transgender voters.

Among the kin of the three 'Lals', Congress candidate Anirudh Chaudhry, Bansilal's grandson and former treasurer of the BCCI, is contesting from Bhiwani's Tosham seat against his cousin and ex-MP Shruti Choudhry, fielded by the BJP. From the Dabwali seat, Devi

Lal's grandson Aditya Devi Lal, an INLD candidate, will take on the JJP's Digvijay Singh Chautala, the great-grandson of the former deputy prime minister. In Hisar's Adampur constituency, Bhajan Lal's grandson Bhavya Bishnoi of the BJP is seeking re-election. The Congress and the BJP are contesting on 89 seats each. The Haryana assembly has a strength of 90. While the Congress has left the Bhiwani seat for the CPI(M), the BJP pulled its candidate from Sirsa, leaving the seat for its ally Haryana Lokhit Party. Both the BJP and the Congress faced rebellion on a few seats but several of these leaders withdrew from the race before the last date for nomination withdrawal. The BJP is aiming for a hat-trick in the state but faces a tough challenge from a resurgent Congress looking to cash in on the anti-incumbency factor to return to power in



Haryana after a decade.

To offset the Congress challenge, the BJP made a bold move in March by replacing Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini as the chief minister ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Khattar is now a Union minister. Saini is the BJP's chief ministerial face but senior party leader and six-time MLA Anil Vij has thrown his hat in the ring by declaring that he would stake claim for the

post if the party won. The BJP came to power in Haryana on its own for the first time in 2014. Following the 2019 assembly polls, the Dushyant Chautala-led JJP joined hands with the BJP to form the government after the saffron party failed to get a clear majority. However, the alliance ended in March after Saini replaced Khattar. While the Congress is the main challenger to the BJP in

the assembly polls, the other outfits and the Aam Aadmi Party make it a multi-cornered contest. The split in the Jat vote among parties like the INLD and the JJP may not work to the Congress' advantage. Congress leader Bhupinder Hooda, a two-time former chief minister, maintains that it is going to be direct fight. "In Haryana, the direct contest is between the Congress and the BJP. All the parties like the INLD, JJP and HLP have been fielded only to cut the votes of the Congress. BJP has also given this responsibility to many Independents. The public needs to be cautious of such candidates," Hooda said. On the other hand, Chief Minister Saini has maintained that the BJP will come to power for a third time and said people know that the Congress spreads "falsehood". The BJP is looking to cash in on the "clean image" of Chief

Minister Saini, on whom Prime Minister Narendra Modi lavished praises while during a poll rally in Kurukshetra recently. The party claims to have provided "transparent administration" and jobs on merit and undertaken equitable development, as against the alleged favouritism in jobs, corruption and regional bias that prevailed earlier during the Congress regime. The BJP has the added advantage of being in power at the Centre which allows it to pitch to voters its "double-engine capability". However, being in power in the state for 10 years, the party will have to counter the anti-incumbency factor. To counteract this, the party has been highlighting the work done by its governments at the Centre and in the state over the past decade and welfare schemes brought for various sections of society, including farmers.

The Congress and other opposition parties have made farmers, unemployment and law and order major poll issues. The Congress also ran a "Haryana Maange Hisab" campaign and attacked the BJP over these issues. It also got a boost in the recent general election as it wrested five of the 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana from the BJP. However, BJP leaders have also been raking up infighting within the Congress, dubbing it as a "divided house". The JJP and INLD are facing an uphill task as both outfits faced a rout in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The INLD, led by former chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, currently has just one member in the Haryana Assembly. AAP leaders, meanwhile, are hopeful that the people of Haryana will give them a chance this time.

Submit status report on financial irregularities at RG Kar hospital: SC to CBI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed the CBI to submit a status report on the probe into alleged financial irregularities at the R G Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata where a trainee doctor was raped and murdered last month. The top court also perused the status report filed by the central probe agency concerning the rape and murder incident and said disclosing the status will jeopardise further investigation.



Manoj Misra asked the central agency to file a status report on the probe so far on the alleged financial irregularities in the medical departments of the hospital. The court later adjourned hearing in the case and said that it would take up matter after a week. It perused the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) report and said that disclosing the leads of the agency would not be fair as it would only lead to the dislocation of the investigation. "The father of the deceased has made some suggestions on the leads that

should be taken up for investigation. We are not making them public, we will say that these are valuable inputs and the CBI should look into them," the bench said. As the hearing commenced, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the West Bengal Government, sought the stopping of live proceedings in the case. He alleged that women lawyers of the chamber were facing threats of acid attacks and rapes. "I have great concerns at what is happening. What happens when you livestream matters like this

which has huge emotive implications. We are not representing the accused. We appear for the state government and as soon as the court is making a comment our reputation is getting destroyed overnight. We have 50 years of reputation," Sibal said. The top court assured Sibal that it would step in if there were any threats to lawyers and others. "We will not stop the live streaming of the proceedings. It is in public interest," the bench said. During the hearing, the apex court took objection to the West Bengal government's 'Rattier Saathi' programme which prescribes night duty avoidance for women doctors and that the working hours of women doctors should not exceed 12 hours at a time. "The West Bengal Government should correct the notification. Your duty is to provide security, you cannot say that women (doctors) cannot work at night. Pilots, the army etc all work at night. This will prejudice their (doctors) careers. The hours of duty should be reasonable for all doctors," the bench said.

After the top court's objection, the West Bengal government told the bench that it would withdraw the notification for women doctors. The top court also questioned the West Bengal Government's decision to hire contractual staff for the protection of doctors and other staff in hospitals. "We are in a situation where there is a lack of security for doctors. The state government should have at least deployed police in government hospitals. We are dealing with young interns and students who are coming to Kolkata for work," the bench said. The West Bengal Government also assured the bench that no punitive or adverse action would be taken against protesting doctors after senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for junior doctors, urged the court to record that no punitive action be taken against the doctors. Jaising also said that junior doctors know the people who were at the scene of the crime and the information shall be shared with the CBI in sealed cover.

SC closes criminal proceedings against army personnel accused of killing 13 civilians

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday closed criminal proceedings against 30 Army personnel accused of killing 13 civilians in a 2021 botched operation to ambush militants in Nagaland's Mon district. It also said the case may be taken to its logical end if the Centre sanctions their prosecution. A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and P B Varale also said the order will not prevent the Army from taking any disciplinary action against the personnel. The Nagaland government in separate proceedings has challenged the denial of sanction to prosecute the Army personnel. The apex court closed the proceedings on two separate petitions filed by wives of the personnel, including a major rank officer, who sought closure of the case lodged by Nagaland police. The wives were seeking closure of the criminal proceedings on the ground that the state government has no jurisdiction to prosecute the personnel due to



immunity granted under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Their plea contended that prior sanction from the Centre was needed to initiate any legal proceedings against Army personnel if the area falls under AFSPA. In April last year, the Central government had denied sanction to prosecute the Army men who were allegedly involved in the botched ambush at Oting in Mon district of the state. The state government has moved the apex court challenging the denial of sanction to prosecute 30 Army person-

nel through a separate petition in which notice has been issued by a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud. The Nagaland government has contended that it has clinching evidence against the Army personnel, including a major, and yet the Centre has arbitrarily denied sanction to prosecute them. In July 2022, the top court had stayed prosecution of the Army personnel belonging to a special forces on the pleas from their wives, who claimed their husbands were being prosecuted without the state obtaining mandatory sanction for prosecution.

President calls for shift in water management efforts to mass movement



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Highlighting the critical importance of addressing water scarcity for humanity, President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday called for a shift in water management efforts to a mass movement, urging all citizens to become 'water-warriors' who actively participate in preserving and managing water resources. She emphasised the need to support local communities in water and sanitation management, asserting that it is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). "Historically, water management systems in India, from Ladakh to Kerala, were well-established but diminished during British rule. These ancient systems, based on harmony with nature, are being revisited globally," President advocated for researching and applying these traditional methods in modern contexts. She was speaking during the inaugural of 'India Water Week-2024' here. She drew an analogy between water and money, noting that just as one must save money before spending, people must store water before using it. Effective water storage in regions like Rajasthan and Gujarat has successfully alleviated water scarcity. "... Similarly, villages that

store water in low rainfall areas remain safe from water crises. In many areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat, villagers have got rid of water scarcity through their efforts and by adopting effective methods of water storage," she added. The President pointed out that only 2.5% of Earth's water is freshwater, with just 1% available for human use. India's share of global water resources is 4%, with 80% utilized for agriculture, underscoring the need for efficient water use across all sectors, she said. Talking about the "Catch the Rain - Where it Falls When it Falls" campaign, launched in 2021, she said it aims to promote water conservation and rainwater harvesting. Forest conservation and involving children in water management efforts are also crucial. The President also highlighted the stark reality that only 2.5% of the world's water is freshwater, with just 1% being accessible for human use. In India, the share of global water resources is 4%. The majority of this water, about 80%, is used for agriculture, while other sectors like power generation, industry, and domestic needs also require water. She stressed that water resources are finite and that efficient use is crucial to ensure supply for all purposes.

Finally, CPI(M) accepts Islamic terrorists as a threat

PNS ■ KOCHI

The CPI(M) has declared that Kerala has become a recruiting hub of terrorists for the Islamic State, a dreaded extremist organization. The statement was made by P Jayarajan, the State Committee member of the CPI(M) and described as one of the three strong leaders from Kannur district, the other two being E P Jayarajan Nambiyar and M V Jayarajan. "Many operatives of SIMI and Popular Front of India (two banned extremist outfits) have managed to infiltrate into the party and facilitating the recruitment of indoctrinated youth to the IS. Kannur leads the table in this massive operation," said Jayarajan on Monday. Interestingly, the media in the State, allegedly under the

payroll of Islamic terrorist organizations have blacked out Jayarajan's statement. Adding fuel to fire, Jayarajan disclosed the statistics associated with the recruitment of youths from the State to the IS. "There is an increase in Islamic extremism across the world. Many youths from the districts of Kannur and Kasaragod have made it to the IS through the recruitment drive undertaken by SIMI and PFI, two leading religious fundamentalist organizations," said Jayarajan. Interestingly, V S Achuthanandan, former chief minister of Kerala, while addressing a press meet in New Delhi in 2010 had said that various Islamic outfits like SIMI and PFI were resorting to "money and marriages" to make Kerala an Islamic



republic. The Congress had termed the statement as dangerous and deplorable while a section of the CPI(M) leadership had lambasted Achuthanandan for the reported statement.

The Muslim League and other Islamic organizations in the State played their cards well and saw to it that Achuthanandan was kept away from the corridors of power for his stance against

Love Jihad. It is an open secret in Kerala that Islamic fundamentalists have an upper hand in the CPI(M) and Congress. A CPI(M) leader who misbehaved with Prof Vijayalakshmi of Kerala University was made a Rajya Sabha member since it was not possible for the party to ensure his success in the election. Though the police issued a look out notice for him, this leader is seen in the forefront of all TV debates as well as discussions in Rajya Sabha, cocking a snook at law. Right now, two Islamists P V Anwar MLA who is supporting the LDF and K T Jaleel, former higher education minister are hogging limelight by attacking police officers who do not toe their line of thinking. Jaleel was the president of the banned SIMI while Anwar is a party hop-

per having served the people through Congress and Muslim League before reaching the CPI(M)-led LDF. The recent verbal attacks unleashed by Anwar on additional director general of police (ADGP) M R Ajit Kumar, P Sasi, political secretary to chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and E P Jayarajan, the ousted LDF convener are all being seen as the Islamists tightening their grip on the CPI(M). A former Rajya Sabha member from Kerala is the unofficial link between the CPI(M) and the Jamaat-e-Islami. Anwar and Jaleel were on record attacking Ajit Kumar for the latter's meeting with Dattatreya Hassabole, the RSS general secretary. All these have cost the CPI(M) support from its traditional voters, the Hindus.

Yet to find trace of gangrape: CBI to court

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Tuesday told a designated lower court that the investigators were yet to find evidence of gangrape in the RG Kar Medical College Hospital rape and murder case, "though investigations are still going on." The CBI had earlier expressed its dissatisfaction at the way the preliminary investigation was conducted by the Kolkata Police which might have led to destruction of evidence. While seeking an extended three-day remand for arrested former Principal of RGMCH Sandip Ghosh and the Officer-in-charge of Tala Police Station Abhijet Mondal the CBI counsel said that "till now there is no evidence of gang rape but further investigation is required." The CBI lawyer's reply came

when the designated Judge asked as to whether Ghosh and Mondal too had been involved in the rape and murder of the victim a postgraduate lady doctor. The CBI however claimed that further investigation was required to ascertain the exact role of Mondal and Ghosh in destruction of evidence. The Court allowed an additional three-day remand of the two accused persons. Meanwhile, the CBI on Tuesday subjected another junior police officer, this time the Additional Officer in-charge of the Tala Police Station Pallav Biswas. The police officer was summoned to explain his role in the initial days of investigation, sources said.

when the designated Judge asked as to whether Ghosh and Mondal too had been involved in the rape and murder of the victim a postgraduate lady doctor. The CBI however claimed that further investigation was required to ascertain the exact role of Mondal and Ghosh in destruction of evidence. The Court allowed an additional three-day remand of the two accused persons. Meanwhile, the CBI on Tuesday subjected another junior police officer, this time the Additional Officer in-charge of the Tala Police Station Pallav Biswas. The police officer was summoned to explain his role in the initial days of investigation, sources said.



TMC RS MP resigns as party mouthpiece editor

PNS ■ KOLKATA

After Jahar Sircar the TMC Rajya Sabha MP who resigned his post in protest against the alleged police inaction in RG Kar case saying he being a father and a grandfather himself was scared of the incident. "A time comes when everyone should stand up for the truth ... this time has come ... because as a normal human being and a father and a grand-



father I too am scared after the incident ... particularly the way the police have acted," he said. He even demanded custodial investigation of some top Kolkata Police officials for their alleged complicity in the case. There was no information regarding whether his resignation had been accepted by the leadership or not. He wrote on X "My 2 fold demands were for custodial interrogation of 2 heads of RG

Kar Hospital and Kolkata Police have now been accepted under pressures from popular movement unleashed by Jr. Doctors and millions of people. Satyameva Jayate. I'm happy like everybody." Roy had earlier been summoned by Kolkata Police for interrogation --- with Vineet Goyal then as its Commissioner --- after he had demanded his custodial interrogation.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

First 100 days of Modi 3.0

As PM Modi marks 100 days, his Govt has achieved significant milestones, but new challenges demand nuanced approach

As the Narendra Modi-led NDA Government completes 100 days in office, a reflective assessment reveals notable accomplishments, emerging challenges, and key shifts from its earlier tenures. The Government continues to advance its vision of a "New India," driven by development, global leadership, and inclusive growth. However, the complexities of governance and the evolving political landscape have also introduced fresh hurdles that demand careful navigation. The biggest shift has been in the composition of the Government. Though PM Modi retained his previous cabinet with minor changes but the reliance on allies makes his third term depart from his earlier two terms where he had complete say in governance and policy making. The coalition compulsions led to roll back on 'lateral entry' and rethink on 'broadcast bill.' However, there is continuity in the policies. One of the key achievements of Modi's third term is the continued expansion of India's global footprint. His high profile visit to Ukraine and Russia where he implored the two sides to "to sit down and talk" won him praise. Besides, furthering his "Act East" initiative got a push through his visit to Singapore and Brunei. Indeed, the government has also taken bold steps in shaping foreign policy, such as balancing its relations with the US, Russia, and China.

In its first 100 days the Government approved projects worth Rs 3 lakh crore, focusing on roads, railways, ports, and airways. Capital expenditure was raised to Rs 11.11 lakh crore to spur job creation. Significant efforts were made in the agriculture sector, with Rs 20,000 crore distributed to 9.3 crore farmers under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, while MSP hikes benefited 12 crore farmers. The GENESIS program was launched to support startups in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, alongside a Rs 2 lakh crore package for youth employment, targeting 41 million over five years. Women empowerment saw the recognition of over 1 crore 'Lakhpati Didis.' On security front, a peace deal was brokered in Tripura, and steps were taken to counter cybercrime with initiatives like the 'Samanvay' platform and a Cyber Fraud Mitigation Center. Despite big ticket announcements and policy decision the Government will have to be mindful of the challenges that must be addressed immediately. Despite a development push, India faces rising inflation, particularly in food prices, affecting the average citizen. The political climate has become increasingly polarised. The government is facing opposition over economic policies, controversial legislative moves like the Uniform Civil Code, and rising social tensions. The upcoming assembly elections, especially in Jammu and Kashmir would be a referendum of its policies. The Government did well to built upon the successes of its earlier terms, but now it faces new challenges that demand nuanced responses. From fortifying India's global position to tackling domestic concerns like inflation, economic growth, and social unity, the Government's approach will be crucial for shaping the future of the nation.



PICTALK



Devotees take part in a procession to immerse an idol of Lord Ganesha at the end of the Ganpati festival, in Mumbai. PTI

Myanmar Junta on the backfoot

For the first time, the military junta is losing ground to a powerful alliance of Ethnic Armed Organisations and the People's Defence Force



ASHOK K MEHTA

On 3 September, the palace in Mandalay, (HQ Central Command), the second biggest city in Myanmar after Yangon, faced its first rocket attack. The Southwest Rakhine state could fall shortly with two strategic ports overlooking the Bay of Bengal-Sittwe leased to India and Kyaukphu leased to China- and Manaung left in Junta's possession in Rakhine. Military coups in the past have not failed in Myanmar. It has the biggest military in southeast Asia not unfamiliar with coups. Thailand holds the dubious record of 32 coups since 1932. More than nearly four years later, Gen Min Aung Hlaing-led Junta in Myanmar is fighting a losing battle but this time not against Buddhist monks and civil society but against a well-coordinated alliance of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO), local militia and the new People's Defence Force born out of ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy which is calling itself the National Unity Government (NUG). They are the Resistance.



The junta had so far managed rebels and revolts seeking autonomy/independence through ceasefire agreements. The junta is a formidable triservice force adept in counter-insurgency. For it to be flailing is surprising. Battlefield losses have been unprecedented in both territory and manpower through battle fatigue and fighting its people has been taxing on the psyche of soldiers and Generals. An implosion is no longer fanciful. Reliable sources place 70 per cent loss of territory. The Resistance does not control all the territory that the Junta retreated from as it does not have holding capability. But it does control key sectors along the borders that the junta ceded due to surrender/desertions. Stretched for troops Junta has followed a scorched earth policy: indiscriminate bombings by artillery, helicopters and aircraft to avenge defeat that UNHRC's Volcker Tolker(?) has called genocidal. This has led to nearly 400,000 IDPs with many having crossed over into neighbouring Bangladesh, India, China and Thailand. Junta has had to abandon trade routes to China in the northern Shan state; along the Karenni National Army-controlled border with Thailand at Myawaddy; in Rakhine state with Bangladesh and parts of Mizoram in Chin state and in Sagaing region opposite all of Manipur except Ukhrul and Moreh that PDF controls. The Kuki-Zo-Chin people in Chinland are ethnically similar to Mizos. Chinese have had active links with the Arakan Army in Rakhine state which traverses India's Multi-Modal Kaladan river connectivity project originating in India-operated Sittwe Port in Rakhine, the key to India's Act East policy. So, with the Junta forced out of Chin, Rakhine, Sagaing and Magwae, contiguous with the Indian border, New Delhi must engage these new power wielders. But it is dithering which could lead to Chinese fishing in troubled waters in a region where Manipur is breaking into a new dangerous phase of inter-ethnic conflict. Earlier in September embattled Gen Hlaing warned civilians in territory captured by Resistance that it will soon counterattack to regain ground. He also declared the Three Brotherhood Alliance in Shan state as a terrorist organization. It is these groups including the Arakan Army, that have captured the prestigious Army's North East Command at Lashio and in

THE JUNTA IS A FORMIDABLE TRISERVICE FORCE ADEPT IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY. FOR IT TO BE FLAILING IS SURPRISING. BATTLEFIELD LOSSES HAVE BEEN UNPRECEDENTED IN BOTH TERRITORY AND MANPOWER THROUGH BATTLE FATIGUE AND FIGHTING ITS PEOPLE HAS BEEN TAXING ON THE PSYCHE OF SOLDIERS AND GENERALS

Shan state and now Mandalay's Central Command headquarters, is threatened. How much longer the junta can fight on multiple fronts is unclear even as Gen Hlaing has continually extended the emergency while advocating holding of election which is most unlikely. He is disinclined to use the good offices of pro-junta countries in ASEAN like Laos, its current chair, Cambodia and Thailand to start a dialogue which the PDF and EAOs will reject as they see the balance of advantage with them. With the economy in grave distress, this war cannot go on indefinitely. China has and continues to play a crucial role in supporting the Junta and selected EAOs in the north and west. China and Russia are the junta's main sources of military hardware though India too has provided non-lethal military equipment. Army tanks, artillery and small arms are Chinese. So are most of the transport and fighter aircraft. The same goes for the Navy though India has provided Coast Guard vessels. Russian MiG 29 and Su30 aircraft have been serviced by HAL and India has provided aviation fuel which is a sanctioned item. New Delhi has called for a ceasefire and a return to a democratic process but its support for the Junta is undiminished as it burnt its fingers two decades ago in supporting NLD in preference to

the Junta which led to Chinese ascendancy. Although the Junta has a love-hate relationship with Beijing it is forced to take its support due to its proximity and domination of the economy. Still, India must review its policy due to the changed ground reality and engage the forces that control the border areas. A working relationship with the Arakan Army and Chinland authorities is essential to restore stability to troubled Manipur. It should also consider establishing humanitarian corridors to provide succour and relief to people bombed out of their habitat. India can keep reciting the import of its Act East policy to Asian neighbours but its implementation is contingent upon the operationalisation of connectivity projects like the trilateral highway through Myanmar to Thailand and the Multi-Modal Kaladan river project from Sittwe Port to Paletwa and on to Mizoram. India's eastern and western flanks are both vulnerable especially the east which is sandwiched between Bangladesh and Myanmar. A triangulation of threats from Pak-China-Bangladesh can not be ruled out. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KEJRIWAL'S RESIGNATION

Madam — The Delhi CM Aravind Kejriwal's decision to resign to the post is not surprising since the Supreme Court's bail conditions have restricted his access both to the physical office to the CM office and its official authority. But Kejriwal's strategy to face elections and secure fresh mandate in order to get the "certificate of honesty" from the people isn't easy. Last time Kejriwal resigned as CM, he returned to office with a landslide win. Much water, and waste, has flown in the Yamuna since. Over it, hangs almost a decade's worth of anti-incumbency. This can't simply be wished away by replaying the resignation card. AAP has tasted success by getting accorded as national party. While it has a super majority in the Punjab assembly and five seats in Gujarat, Delhi is crucial to further its political base and Kejriwal's ambitions. In BJP, it has a relentless opposition and the party remains in good health. In the other hand, AAP doesn't have this luxury at all. As its principal campaigner, Kejriwal has to deliver big. But he now doesn't enjoy the unblemished image being an accused in multi crore excise scandal. Only time will decide the fate and future of the Kejriwal and his party. But in all this drama, the capital's citizens find themselves lost and unheard. At the end of elections, the national capital will hope to have a normal govt.

N Sadasiva Reddy | Washington

AMIT SHAH CAMPAIGNS IN JAMMU

Madam — Reference: HM Shah to wrap up first round of High voltage campaign in Jammu (September 16). The conclusion of HM Shah's high-voltage campaign in Jammu marks a significant moment in the region's political landscape. This campaign has seen fervent discussions on development, security, and local concerns, bringing national attention to the area. However, it's crucial that the energy from this campaign translates into tangible actions that address the everyday struggles of the people.

India brokers peace



As a further escalation in the Russia-Ukraine conflict appears likely, India's possible role in peace negotiations have come into sharp focus, in the wake of recent diplomatic activity, mainly of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Ajit

Doval. Given India's unique placement on the spectrum of positions on the conflict, based on its historic, strong ties with Russia, can New Delhi belatedly step up as a possible peacemaker in the conflict persisting for well over two years? The Ukraine's Ambassador to India Oleksandr Polishchuk said that Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had proposed a retrospective move by India to join the peace process ahead of plans for a second Peace Summit in October or November this year, and that Ukraine had more "ambition" than for India to play "post office" between the leaders. We hope that PM Modi's visit to Ukraine and conversations with President Zelenskyy indicate India's support for the peace-building effort.

Jayanthi Ramani | Coimbatore

Promises made should be followed by clear timelines and transparent policies, ensuring that the political enthusiasm doesn't fade post-election. The people of Jammu need long-term solutions, not just campaign rhetoric. It's vital that this momentum is maintained, and leaders remain accountable to the commitments they've made during this charged political engagement. As the campaign wraps up, eyes will be on the next steps and whether real progress follows the promises made.

Priya Gupta | Kushinagar

ALL LANGUAGES MUST BE TREATED ALIKE

Madam — This is in response to the news report titled "Hindi, other languages are friends: Shah" (September 15). Based upon my "limited knowledge", ideal friends would share even a piece of bread equally, how tiny crumb it might be! But the language of few North Indian states are so "friendly" that it dominates over all other languages in this huge democratic land of diversities not only in Centralised sphere, but also in pusillanimous states like West Bengal where Hindi gets brutally imposed

in Railway Banking Postal sectors. Hindi is so "friendly" with others that it enjoys more Central fund for its "promotion" than the amount allotted for rest of the Indian languages put together! Yet, it remains the fact that there lies no provision of any "National Language" in the Indian Constitution. Hindi is just another language of this multi-lingual India; the latter's right over the country is neither superior nor inferior to the other languages. Thus, those who zealously project Hindi as "numero uno" and imposing it over all are merely assaulting the very basis of the Constitution - posing a fatal assault upon all norms of democracy and equality. The Government should see to it that all funds related to promotion of languages do not get usurped by Hindi. Thus if an equitable distribution of Central resources is ensured, it would benefit the cause of all languages and dialects to a great extent.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Kejriwal's resignation: Theatrics at its best

Beneath Kejriwal's impassioned speech lay contradictions, omissions, and questionable parallels aimed at swaying the electorate



PRADEEP BAJPAI

Kejriwal's expertise in political charade was on show when he spoke to his party members on 15th September, two days after being released from Tihar jail on interim bail granted by the Supreme Court subject to stringent, limiting conditions. He made this out to be an acquittal when it was only a reprieve and an initial indictment. He started with Vande Mataram, Bharat Mata ki Jai, and Inqalab Zindabad, invoking Hindutva, patriotism, and the anti-government revolutionary sentiment of our freedom struggle. He likened himself to Bhagat Singh by quoting from his diary and drawing parallels with the legendary freedom fighter. He sought the sympathy of the electorate by making out the Central Government to be more cruel than the British rulers and to be wanting to destroy him and AAP. He made himself out to be the Messiah of Democracy trying to save the Constitution, which is why, he claimed, he had not resigned earlier. The coup de grace was his



announcement that over the next two days, he would quit as Delhi's CM and not sit on the CM's chair until and unless the public judges him to be honest. He reminded his audience of the Agnipareekshathat Sita had to undergo, after Lord Rama's 14 years-long exile, to prove her innocence. He was, he said, willing to undergo a similar trial-by-fire to prove his innocence by seeking the public's mandate. Not even once, did he name the BJP or Modi; both were subsumed in the innocuous pronoun "they". It was a masterly performance of demagoguery. In the hoodwinking of the Indian masses, Kejriwal is miles ahead of other politicians. He evokes emotions and

obscures facts, sometimes even twisting them. Consider these omissions and contradictions. If Kejriwal wanted the people's verdict, to assuage his "conscience", he should have resigned much earlier, when he was sent to Tihar. Why do it after the SC has severely limited your powers as CM? Bhagat Singh was fighting for the country's independence and was accused of sedition, Kejriwal for his political survival after being found prima facie guilty of corruption by court. Bhagat Singh was hanged by the British rulers. GoI is unlikely to do that with Kejriwal. The parallel drawn was specious, the basis given — of the undelivered letter to LG — crafty. He boasted of the freebies he has been able to give because of his uncorrupted government — free electricity and free bus travel for women — unmindful of the burden that the honest taxpayer has to bear to fund his vote-buying spree and the damage it does to the national capital's exchequer.

His claim of improved medical care and better government school education would be contested by many Delhi-ites. His mohallaclinics are ministered to by unqualified doctors who visit on an ad hoc basis. Many government schools are short of teachers and have poor infrastructure. As always, he appealed to the emotions of the gullible electorate of the slums, announcing that he would not sit on the CM's chair unless and until the public judges him to be honest by voting him into power in the next assembly elections. Surely, he would have known that, given the serious corruption charges against him, his honesty would be judged not by the common man on sentiment but by erudite judges, well-versed in law, based on concrete evidence admissible in law. (The writer, a former banker, has turned in his mellow years to column-writing out of his love for nonviolence, social harmony and universal brotherhood; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

LEARNING IS A LIFELONG PROCESS

Life is a continuous education, every experience shapes our understanding



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

From the time we are born till the day we die; we keep on learning something in life. Irrespective of whether we want it or not, we can't stop learning because there is no existence of life without the process of learning. Our whole life is a bundle of experience and in turn, an education, where we all are in ever learning mode, every moment and everywhere. As conscious beings, having sense organs, also known as the five doors of knowledge, we, by our very nature, cannot remain without creating perception. Our ears are always open, so we are constantly listening. The words that go through our ears to our brains are like lessons that we receive constantly. Similarly, we see the whole world through our eyes which also results in learning good things as well as bad things. The electrical impulses that we receive through our skin or taste buds, reach our brain which is also a kind of learning for us. However, one must understand the fact that all the above mentioned processes of learning take place by awareness or consciousness that is present in our brain without which learning is next to impossible. Once we finish our studies, we feel that the education phase of our life is finally over and now it's time for us to go out in the world & attain the highest level of success. But doesn't this sound too casual & an odd idea? That only a quarter of our lives should be devoted to learning, and then we should simply rest on our laurels for the remaining part of our lives? Well!! It is said that learning never exhausts the mind, so why do we restrict the process of learning until we are pursuing formal education? Just because you've



finished your formal education, doesn't mean that your education is over! It's quite an erroneous idea, but unfortunately, the majority of us have absorbed it subconsciously. ? Remember !! It is only a dead body that ceases to participate in the process of learning & not the ones who resonate with life. Our life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us enlightened, even though many times it is hard to realize this. We must always remember that the setbacks and grieves that we endure help us in our marching onward. Hence, we must always make it a point to learn something about everything and everything about something. Throughout our journey of life, we constantly learn some such lessons that result in the formation of sanskaras according to our karma. Hence, if we know clearly that learning is unavoidable and that we are always learning good or bad things, resulting in good or bad sanskaras that lead to happiness or sorrow, then we will never say that we have no time or no interest in learning. Likewise, if we know that our sanskaras go along with our life after life, then we will be more careful in learning good things and in giving up bad things because education seems to be an elixir that can bring us a healthy mind & body along with a lasting fruitful life. We all need to be enlightened & we urgently need to improve the quality of our thoughts, speech and actions. Since we cannot avoid learning, even if we wish, why don't we then learn to inculcate, in us, moral values, virtues or good qualities so that we may make progress towards perfection? What do we gain by making lame excuses, saying that we have no time or that we are not interested? What is it that we are interested in? Are we interested in our downfall, decay or doom? In sinking and drowning deep down in the quagmire of vices, evils and mud? Remember !! The more we delay, the worse will be our condition and the more difficult it will be to rectify our ways. The process of learning, as was said earlier, is ceaseless and continuous and hence someone has rightly said "we learn everyday & shed the ego and the perception that I know everything". Hence we cannot stop it even if we try our best, putting all our might into it. So why not remain alert & follow the right path that saves us from tragedies, traumas, tensions and turmoil of life? The answer lies within us.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

Karnataka's dilemma: Conservation vs development



B K SINGH

Buffer zones, designed to protect water bodies, biodiversity, and forest ecosystems, are under threat as development pressures in Karnataka intensify



The buffer Zones are contemplated to secure the core area of streams, water bodies and biodiversity sites and definitions in each case are supported by respective statutes, government guidelines and Court orders. The flow of water in stormwater drains and urban lakes needs to be regulated at the time of cloud bursts in the city causing flooding. Karnataka State Board for Prevention and Control of Water Pollution was amended in December 2021 to locate red industries beyond 500 meters from the centre of the stream and also at the same distance from the outer boundary of the lake. 75 meter buffer Zone is fixed for orange industries and 30 meters for non-polluting green establishments. Zonal regulation of Bangalore Development Authority also prohibits any development within 30 meters from the outer boundary of the lake and similarly primary, secondary and tertiary drains have a buffer zone of 50, 25 and 15 meters from the centre on either side. Karnataka government is contemplating utilising barren buffer Zone areas for development and this would not go well with the environment conservation ethos and would have wide ranging repercussions like destroying the natural drainage pattern of the landscape and would bring misery to the people at the time of flash floods. It is recommended to evict encroachments from buffer areas and plant up with native tree species. To protect the integrity of the forests and to minimize the interference of communities around, rule 41 of Karnataka Forest Rules, 1969 specifies a buffer Zone of 100 meters from the periphery of Reserved Forests. The rule in effect prohibits the grant of any revenue land within 100 meters from the fringes of the forests without express approval from the Forest Department. Legislatures in 1969 knew that if revenue land abetting forests is granted to any individual or used for community projects, the forests would be subjected to anthropogenic pressure and



THE GROUP OF POLLUTING INDUSTRIES LIKE MINING, QUARRYING, ETC HAS BEEN PROHIBITED IN ESZ, WHILE SOME BUSINESSES LIKE RESORTS, TREE FELLING ETC ARE TO BE REGULATED AND ECO-FRIENDLY ACTIVITIES LIKE AGRICULTURE AND HORTICULTURE DEVELOPMENT ARE TO BE PERMITTED

would be encroached and degraded. Today we find that the provision has not been implemented in true spirit and there has been large-scale unauthorized occupation of forest lands after plundering the tree growth. Revenue lands are also lost in the process. If the provision is not properly regulated, even the deemed forests will be plundered and tree growth and lands will be lost. Forests are the mothers of rivers. The origin and catchments of many rivers are notified by Tiger Reserves (TRs). The original TRs that have been carved out of forests, Sanctuaries and National Parks are its core areas. By an amendment in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in 2006, it was mandated to include areas surrounding the core, as buffer areas. In respect of several TRs, buffer areas have already been notified, but many more are still pending. The buffer areas of the TRs include forest areas, sometimes even part of the Sanctuaries and National Parks interspersed with villages and agricultural lands. With the apprehension that the area commands a higher degree of protection and it may be difficult to divert any portion of it for public projects later, many state Governments are holding back the notification. Buffer for Nagarhole TR in Kodagu district of Karnataka has not been notified even after 18 years of amendment. Cores and buffers of TRs comprise luxuriant forests and are an important source of water, air, carbon sequestration, and controlling disease-spreading viruses necessary for the survival of humans and all other forms of life on earth. Taking a cue from the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the

Supreme Court of India earlier laid down an 'Eco Sensitive Zone' (ESZ) of 10 km from the periphery of National Parks and Sanctuaries, which are not TRs. It led to a huge public outcry and that resulted in several state Governments moving the Court for modification. Finally, the Court has relented and prescribed a minimum width of 1 km. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has categorized industries into three groups. The group of polluting industries like mining, quarrying, etc has been prohibited in ESZ, while some businesses like resorts, tree felling etc are to be regulated and eco-friendly activities like agriculture and horticulture development are to be permitted. Mining and quarrying lobby located on the fringes of National Parks and Sanctuaries, who aspire to expand the activities, prevail on public representatives and government to lower the width of the strip and postpone ESZ notification. Many ESZ proposals are caught in the crossfire and are held back either by respective state governments or central governments, making the conservation of biodiversity and protection of soil and water more difficult. This makes National Parks and Sanctuaries insecure. Anshi National Park and Dandeli Sanctuary of Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka have ESZ strip of zero meter width along some portion of the boundary. The origin of river Kali, on which we are dependent for power, is kept out of ESZ and made insecure. To make way for the Saravathi pump storage project near Jog Falls, the width of the ESZ strip around Saravathi Sanctuary is reduced from the proposed 2 km

to 1 km. Energy experts have questioned the viability of such projects, where excess power generated during the night time is utilized to pump the same water to the upper reservoir, which in turn can again be utilized for power generation by allowing it to flow down to the lower reservoir under gravity. We have also to sacrifice 200 ha of virgin forests of the Western Ghats in this case. This author had an opportunity to visit a similar project site "Purulia Pump storage project" in West Bengal in 1993 while working in the Government of India. Against the recommendation, the project was approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests. We destroyed 200 ha of wonderful Sal forests and today the project is a failure. Sal forests are the source of artisan wells and we lost them. The tragedy in Wayanad in the wee hours of 30th July 2024 is also attributed to the diversion of wooded areas for tea plantations and mining causing a major shift in land use pattern and exposing the earth rich in clayey soil to absorb water during incessant rains, swell sufficiently to become unstable and prone for landslides. Expert Committees headed by Madhav Gadgil and Kasturirangan have recommended Western Ghats areas be notified as Eco-Sensitive Areas (ESA) so that environmentally hazardous activities like deforestation and diverting lands for mining, industries etc are prohibited. Both the states of Karnataka and Kerala have not come on board to notify section of Western Ghats areas in the state as ESA. *(The writer is retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Head of Forest Force, Karnataka; views are personal)*

India must address the growing crisis of spinal cord injuries

As India faces an alarming rise in spinal cord injuries, the call for a comprehensive support system has never been more urgent

As India faces the staggering reality of thousands of fatalities and with 15 lakh people living with spinal cord injuries (SCIs), the call for a robust support system is now more critical than ever. On the occasion of SCI Day (September 5), the healthcare experts and leaders geared up to strongly advocate for a holistic and inclusive solution that includes surgical interventions and comprehensive rehabilitation programs. According to the WHO reports every year, between 250,000 and 500,000 people suffer a spinal cord injury (SCI). The majority of SCIs are due to preventable causes such as Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs), Falls or Violence. As many as 1.2 lakh die and



VIKAS TANDON

another 12 lakhs are seriously injured in road accidents in India. India has 15 lakh people with SCIs and nearly 20,000 people are added each year. SCI is devastating, with morbidity not only limited to physical aspects but emotional, social, and vocational life areas too. Violence stands as one of the top three causes of SCIs in India, according to a recent study by the Indian Spinal

Injuries Centre (ISIC). Analyzing data from 2012 to 2022, the study revealed that road RTAs accounted for 44% of SCIs, followed closely by falls from heights at 38.3%. Violent incidents, including stabbings and shootings, also significantly contributed, highlighting the diverse factors leading to these life-altering injuries. The study encompassed 1,537 SCI patients admitted between 2012 and 2022, maintaining consistency with earlier findings from 2002 to 2010, which reported RTAs at 45% and falls at 39.64%. In the last 10 years, the Centre treated nearly 200 SCI patients who were victims of violence. This year's theme of SCI Day is "End Violence - Protect Spinal Cord." It is very crucial

to intensify awareness and preventive and curative efforts. Spinal cord injuries are not just physical afflictions; they profoundly alter every aspect of life, including emotional well-being, social interactions, and vocational capabilities. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach that includes policy recognition, accessibility, enhanced safety measures, and robust treatment and rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation is vital for improving the functional abilities of persons with SCIs. This multifaceted process includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy, peer counselling, plastic surgery, psychological mentorship, nursing care, assistive technology, uro-



logical care, and vocational support—often essential following surgical stabilization of the spinal column. Rehabilitation, which is critical in teaching patients to adapt to their new normal post-injury, remains inadequately covered under existing government schemes and

insurance plans. Unfortunately, rehabilitation costs are rarely covered by government schemes like CGHS, DGEHS, and ECHS, nor by many insurance companies, posing significant financial challenges for SCI patients. The Delhi High Court's 2023 directive to include disabled

persons in insurance schemes is a significant step toward equality, especially for SCI patients facing ongoing medical expenses. The 2016 Disabilities Act expanded recognized disabilities but excludes spinal cord injury (SCI) as a separate category. Including SCI would grant patients access to key benefits like reservations and vocational support. Despite progress in accessibility under the Accessible India Campaign, universal access and vocational opportunities for SCI patients remain incomplete. On the treatment and care part, all solutions under one roof are needed with highly experienced, internationally trained, and dedicated spine surgeons. The Centre has also established India's first dedicated

neuro-urology department to take care of SCI patients who suffer considerably after spine surgery and are neglected. Institutions like ISIC provide essential surgical, rehabilitation, and vocational training, but gaps remain in broader societal support, particularly in accessibility and long-term healthcare affordability. It should be a mission to create holistic and inclusive solutions for those battling spinal cord injuries, aiming to build a society that truly values diversity and inclusivity. There is a need to provide more facilities and services for all SCI patients, including those who are victims of violence. *(The writer is chief of Spinal Services, Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, New Delhi; views are personal)*

US criticises Israel's Gaza strikes

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The US ambassador to the United Nations on Monday accused Israel's military of striking schools, humanitarian workers and civilians in Gaza in a sign of growing American frustration with its close ally as the war approaches its first anniversary. Israel has repeatedly said it targets Hamas militants, who often hide with civilians and use them as human shields, in retaliation for the October 7 attacks in southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people and launched the war in Gaza.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield was unusually outspoken against the Israeli military at a UN Security Council meeting, saying many of the strikes in recent weeks that injured or killed UN personnel and humanitarian workers "were preventable". Many council members cited last week's Israeli strike on a former school turned civilian shelter run by the UN agency helping Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, in which six UNRWA staffers were among at least 18 people killed, including women and children.

Israel said it targeted a Hamas command-and-control center in the compound, and Israel's UN ambassador, Danny Danon, asserted Monday that Hamas militants were killed in the strike. He named four, claiming to the council that they worked for UNRWA during the day and Hamas at night.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for an independent investigation.

Thomas-Greenfield told council members that the US will keep raising the need for Israel to facilitate humanitarian operations in the Palestinian territory and protect humanitarian workers and facilities like the UNRWA shelter. She also reiterated US "outrage" at the death of Turkish American activist Aysenur Eygi, who was shot and killed during a protest in the West Bank last week. Israeli Defense Forces said it likely killed Eygi by mistake, and the government has begun a criminal investigation.

"The IDF is a professional military and knows well how to ensure that incidents such as these do not happen," the US envoy said.

Israel says halting Hezbollah attacks is now war goal as officials warn of wider operation

Jerusalem (AP): Israel announced Tuesday that halting Hezbollah's attacks in the north in order to allow its residents to return is now an official war goal, as the country considers a wider military operation that could ignite an all-out conflict. Israeli officials have repeatedly threatened to take heavier military action to halt the near-daily attacks, which began shortly after the outbreak of the nearly yearlong Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Israel has regularly launched airstrikes in response and has targeted and killed senior Hezbollah commanders. As recently as last month it appeared a full-blown war was imminent. The tit-for-tat strikes have displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border. Hezbollah has said it would halt the attacks if there is a cease-fire in Gaza, but those talks have repeatedly bogged down. The United States has pressed for restraint even as it has rushed military aid to Israel, warning its close ally that a wider war would not achieve its goals.

The announcement on Lebanon came after Israel's security Cabinet met late into the night. It said the Cabinet has "updated the objectives of the war" to include safely returning the residents of the



Palestinians in Lebanon wave their national flags during a protest in front of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon, Tuesday. AP/PTI

seen as far more hawkish. That would be the biggest leadership shakeup in Israel since Hamas' October 7 attack triggered the war in Gaza and set off wider regional tensions. The announcement on Lebanon came after Israel's security Cabinet met late into the night. It said the Cabinet has "updated the objectives of the war" to include safely returning the residents of the

north to their homes. "Israel will continue to act to implement this objective," it said. US envoy Amos Hochstein, who has made several visits to Lebanon and Israel to try to ease tensions, met with Netanyahu on Monday. Hochstein told the prime minister that intensifying the conflict with Hezbollah would not help achieve the goal of returning Israelis to their homes, according to a US

official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private talks. Hochstein said Netanyahu risked sparking a broad and protracted regional conflict if he moved forward with a full-scale war in Lebanon and said the Biden administration remained committed to finding a diplomatic solution in conjunction with a Gaza cease-fire or on its own, the official said.

Thomas-Greenfield said the United States expects Israeli military leaders to implement "fundamental changes" in their operations — including to their rules of engagement and procedures to ensure that military operations do not conflict with humanitarian activities and do not target schools and other civilian facilities. "We have also been unequivocal in communicating to Israel that there is no basis — absolutely none — for its forces to be opening fire on clearly marked UN vehicles as recently occurred on numerous occasions," Thomas-Greenfield said. At the same time, she said Hamas is also hiding in — and in some cases, taking over or using — civilian sites, which poses "an ongoing threat."

She said it underscores the urgency of reaching a cease-fire and hostage release deal in Gaza. While the United States works with fellow mediators Egypt and Qatar to try to get both sides "to agree that enough is enough," she said, "this is ultimately a question of political will" and difficult compromises. Secretary of State Antony Blinken heads to Egypt this week for talks partly about refining a proposal to present to Israel and Hamas. The United States urges "all council members with influence over Hamas to join others in pressing its leaders to stop stalling, make these compromises, and accept the deal without delay," Thomas-Greenfield.

She spoke after the top UN humanitarian official in Gaza said the territory is "hell on Earth" for its more than 2 million people, calling the lack of effective protection for civilians "unconscionable." Sigrid Kaag, the UN senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, told council members and reporters that the war has turned the territory "into the abyss." Over 41,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's offensive, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants. Humanitarian operations are being impeded by lawlessness, Israeli evacuation orders, fighting and difficult conditions for aid workers that include

Israeli denials of access, delays, a lack of safety and security, and "poor logistical infrastructure," Kaag said. Danon insisted that Israel's humanitarian efforts "are unparalleled" for a country forced to go to war and urged the Security Council and the UN "to speak to the facts." Over 1 million tons of aid have been delivered via more than 50,000 trucks and nearly 1 million land crossings, he said, adding that hardly a fraction have been stopped. When asked about Danon's statement, Kaag pointed to recent strikes on humanitarian convoys and schools and health facilities where Israel had received prior notification. "It's not about trucks. It's about what people need," she said.

German CDU picks Merz as chancellor candidate

AP ■ BERLIN

Germany's opposition cent-right Christian Democratic Union announced Tuesday that it has chosen its leader, Friedrich Merz, to be its candidate for chancellor in next year's national election. The decision sets the stage for a possible challenge of Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the federal election scheduled for September 2025. Germans are looking ahead to next year's vote at a critical time, as the country's struggles to integrate large numbers of refugees and migrants and as the major European economy weakens. Recent extremist attacks have fuelled a backlash against migration that is leading to a surge in support for the far right. The fate of Ukraine will also be influenced by Germany's political direction. Berlin under Scholz has been one of the largest weapons donors to Kyiv, but many German voters are growing tired of the 2 1/2-year war

against Russian invasion, and have turned their support to far-right and far-left parties that oppose arms deliveries to Ukraine. Merz wants to continue supporting Ukraine. The choice was announced at a news conference in Berlin with Merz and Markus Soeder, the leader of the CDU's smaller Bavarian counterpart, the Christian Social Union, who had also been a contender for the role. Soeder, who is the governor of Bavaria, announced the decision, saying that the chancellor question "is decided. Friedrich Merz is doing it." He stressed that he fully supported Merz, and that they were united by a common goal to unseat the current government "and get Germany back on track." Merz thanked Soeder for his support and said his party, led for many years by former Chancellor Angela Merkel, has the "firm intention of taking over leadership responsibility in this country again." An unpopular three-party coalition led by Scholz

has governed since 2021. The coalition, which is made up of Scholz's Social Democrats, the Greens and the pro-business Free Democrats, suffered losses in elections to the European Parliament earlier this year and in recent German state elections in Thuringia and Saxony.

The 68-year-old Merz was considered the favorite after Soeder failed to get the backing for his candidacy, according to German media reports, and after another contender, North Rhine Westphalia's state Premier Hendrik Wuest, announced he wouldn't run. Currently polls show the Christian Democrats as the strongest party in the country. But Merz himself is not personally very popular. Scholz said during a visit to Kazakhstan that he would welcome a Merz candidacy, the German news agency dpa reported. Scholz has said he would like to run for chancellor again but his candidacy hasn't been confirmed by his party.

Typhoon Yagi death toll in South Asia surpasses 500

Bangkok (AP): Floods and landslides in Myanmar triggered by last week's Typhoon Yagi and seasonal monsoon rains have claimed at least 226 lives, with 77 people missing, state-run media reported Tuesday.

The new figures push the total number of dead in Southeast Asia from the storm past 500. The accounting of casualties has been slow, in part due to communication difficulties with the affected areas. Myanmar is wracked by a civil war that began in 2021 after the army seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Independent analysts believe the ruling military controls much less than half of the country's territory. Typhoon Yagi earlier hit Vietnam, northern Thailand and Laos, killing almost 300 people in Vietnam, 42 in Thailand and four in Laos, according to the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance. It said 21 people were killed in the Philippines, with another 26 missing.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said on Monday that an estimated 631,000 people may have been affected by flooding across Myanmar. There were already 3.4 million displaced people in Myanmar at the beginning of September, according to the U.N. refugee agency, mostly because of war and unrest in recent years. Heavy rains from the typhoon and the seasonal monsoon brought widespread flash floods to Myanmar, especially the central regions of Mandalay, Magway, Bago and the Ayeyarwaddy

Delta; the eastern states Shan, Kayah, Kayin and Mon; and the country's capital, Naypyitaw. Some flooded areas have started to see water levels recede but others in the Shan and Kayah states remain critical.

More than 160,000 houses have been damaged and 438 temporary relief camps have been opened for more than 160,000 flood victims, Myanmar Alinn reported. The military government announced that nearly 240,000 people have been displaced. Myanmar Alinn said 117 government offices and buildings, 1,040 schools, 386 religious buildings, roads, bridges, power towers, and telecom towers were damaged by the floods in 56 townships. It also said nearly 130,000 animals were killed and more than 259,000 hectares (640,000 acres) of agricultural land were damaged by the floods. The U.N.'s humanitarian affairs agency said food, drinking water, medicine, clothes, dignity kits, and shelters are urgent needs for the flood victims but alleviation efforts are hampered by blocked roads, damaged bridges and ongoing armed clashes. Senior Gen. Soe Win, the second-ranking member of Myanmar's ruling military council, said the country had received relief aid from other countries, and some humanitarian assistance from the Association of Southeast Asia, will arrive soon. Soe Win, speaking at a meeting of the National Disaster Management Committee on Monday, said that the extent of flooding in the capital was unprecedented, and cleaning and rehabilitation activities in the flooded areas began Thursday as the water level declined.

Mayor unveils plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street

London (PTI): London Mayor Sadiq Khan on Tuesday set out proposals to transform Oxford Street by turning the city's world-famous shopping hub into a traffic-free pedestrianised avenue. The plans, backed by the new Labour Party government, are aimed at rejuvenating Oxford Street to drive the UK capital's economic prosperity and regain its status as the "leading retail destination in the world." "Oxford Street is a world-renowned shopping destination and we want it to stay that way. By working with the Mayor and local leaders, we can ensure it gets the boost it needs," said UK Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner. "This plan to revitalise Oxford Street will drive growth by creating new jobs, generating economic activity, and giving a much-needed boost to London's night-time economy," she said.

US lawmakers, officials condemn vandalism of temple in New York

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Bipartisan lawmakers across the US have strongly condemned the vandalism at a Hindu temple here and called for an investigation into the incident, asserting that America must stand together against all forms of hate. The road and the signage outside the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Melville, New York, were sprayed with expletives on Monday, according to footage shared online. The BAPS Public Affairs said in a post on X that it was deeply saddened by the desecration of the temple, calling it an "act aimed at inciting hatred against Hindus".

"Today, local, state & federal leaders gathered to promote peace, respect and unity. Guided by our faith, we stand united against hate with compassion and solidarity," it said. Melville is located in in Suffolk County, on Long Island and is

about 28 kilometres from the 16,000-seater Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to address a mega community event on September 22. US lawmakers across party lines strongly condemned the vandalism, calling for perpetrators to be held accountable. Democratic Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois said he was "appalled by the despicable acts" of vandalism targeting the temple. "As our country faces a surge in political violence and acts of bigotry, we must stand together as Americans against all forms of hate," he said.

Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna also strongly condemned the act of desecration. "Freedom of worship is a bedrock of our democracy. There is no place for acts of intimidation, harassment or violence. We need account-

ability and to make sure this does not happen again," he said. Calling the vandalism "totally" unacceptable, US Congressman from Michigan Shri Thanedar "strongly condemn the hideous acts of vandalism" targeting the temple. "Such acts of vandalism, bigotry, and hate must be fully investigated. The BAPS community deserves answers and justice," Thanedar said. Democratic Congress member Tom Suozzi, representing New York's Third Congressional District said in a post on X that he was appalled by the "hideous acts" of vandalism targeting the temple. "There is too much hate!... Such acts of vandalism, bigotry, and hate are happening far too often because of inflammatory rhetoric by national leaders, extremism, and lack of accountability. Acts like these are un-American and contradict the core values of our nation," he said.

Trump blames Biden and Harris' rhetoric, despite his own history

AP ■ NEW YORK

Donald Trump claimed without evidence Monday that President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris' comments that he is a threat to democracy had inspired the latest apparent attempt on his life, despite his own long history of inflammatory campaign rhetoric and advocacy for jailing or prosecuting his political enemies. With the election now just 50 days away and early ballots already being mailed out in some places, this year's presidential campaign was among the most turbulent in American history even before Sunday's apparent assassination attempt. Trump was safe after the incident in Florida and praised the Secret Service for protecting him but didn't shy away from blaming his opponents. "Their rhetoric is causing me to be shot at, when I am the one

Florida to launch probe into Trump assassination attempt

West Palm Beach (USA) (AP): Florida law enforcement will launch a state-level criminal probe of the apparent assassination attempt of former President Donald Trump, Gov Ron DeSantis said Tuesday. DeSantis told reporters that the "suspect is believed to have committed state law violations."

DeSantis' announcement comes a day after Ryan Routh was charged with federal firearms crimes. Routh did not fire any shots, never had Trump in his line of sight and sped away after an agent who spotted him shot in his direction, officials said. He was arrested in a neighboring county.

who is going to save the country and they are the ones that are destroying the country — both from the inside and out," Trump said in comments to Fox News Digital. The Republican former president's statements are a sharp departure from how he reacted after an assassination attempt in July during a rally in Butler,

Pennsylvania, in which a bullet grazed his ear. Then, Trump called for national unity, saying in a social media post that "it is more important than ever that we stand United." A few days later, though, the former president returned to sharply criticizing Democrats and relishing the political bombast.

Nikki Haley to launch weekly radio talk show

New York (AP): Former Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley is launching her own radio talk show next week on SiriusXM that's set to air once a week at least through the inauguration of a new president. She'll do interviews, take listener calls and talk politics on the show, which will be carried Wednesday from 8 to 9 am ET on the satellite radio system's Triumph channel. Expect some talk mixed in about Clemson football, her passion for running and music — maybe even Taylor Swift. The former UN ambassador said she wanted to get away from some of the tribalism that dominates the media.

Instagram unveils teen accounts to boost online safety

Washington (AP): Instagram is introducing separate teen accounts for those under 18 as it tries to make the platform safer for children amid a growing backlash against how social media affects young people's lives. Beginning Tuesday in the US, UK, Canada and Australia, anyone under 18 who signs up for Instagram will be placed into a teen account and those with existing accounts will be migrated over the next 60 days.

Teens in the European Union will see their accounts adjusted later this year. Meta acknowledges that teenagers may lie about their age and says it will require them to verify their ages in more instances, like if they try to create a new account with an adult birthday. The Menlo Park, California company also said it is building tech-

nology that proactively finds teen accounts that pretend to be grownups and automatically places them into the restricted teen accounts. The teen accounts will be private by default. Private messages are restricted so teens can only receive them from people they follow or are already connected to. "Sensitive content," such as videos of people fighting or those promoting cosmetic procedures, will be limited, Meta said. Teens will also get notifications if they are on Instagram for more than 60 minutes and a "sleep mode" will be enabled that turns off notifications and sends auto-replies to direct messages from 10 pm until 7 am. While these settings will be turned on for all teens,



16 and 17-year-olds will be able to turn them off. Kids under 16 will need their parents' permission to do so. "The three concerns we're hearing from parents are that their teens are seeing content that they don't want to see or that they're getting contacted by people they don't want to be contacted by or that they're spending too much on the app," said Naomi Gleit, head of product at Meta. "So teen accounts is really focused on addressing those three concerns." The announcement comes as the company faces lawsuits from dozens of US states that accuse it of harming young people and contributing to the youth mental health crisis by knowingly and deliberately designing fea-

tures on Instagram and Facebook that addict children to its platforms. In the past, Meta's efforts at addressing teen safety and mental health on its platforms have been met with criticism that the changes don't go far enough. For instance, while kids will get a notification when they've spent 60 minutes on the app, they will be able to bypass it and continue scrolling. That's unless the child's parents turn on "parental supervision" mode, where parents can limit teens' time on Instagram to a specific amount of time, such as 15 minutes. With the latest changes, Meta is giving parents more options to oversee their kids' accounts. Those under 16 will need a parent or guardian's permission to change their settings to less restrictive ones. They can do this by setting up

"parental supervision" on their accounts and connecting them to a parent or guardian. Nick Clegg, Meta's president of global affairs, said last week that parents don't use the parental controls the company has introduced in recent years. Gleit said she thinks teen accounts will create a "big incentive for parents and teens to set up parental supervision." "Parents will be able to see, via the family center, who is messaging their teen and hopefully have a conversation with their teen," she said. "If there is bullying or harassment happening, parents will have visibility into who their teens' following, who's following their teen, who their teen has messaged in the past seven days and hopefully have some of these conversations and help them navigate these really difficult situations online."



Giant pandas eat bamboo shoots around a table at a zoo in southwest China's Chongqing Municipality, Monday. AP/PTI

Government has implemented several farmer-friendly policies: Amit Shah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has implemented several farmer-friendly policies in its first 100 days of the third term with focus on improving agricultural productivity and exports, Cooperation Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference on the completion of 100 days of the Modi 3.0 regime, Shah said the government has implemented policies worth Rs 15 lakh crore across 14 sectors.

Listing works initiated for the welfare of the farmers, he also said the Modi government has launched the agriculture fund to support startups and rural enterprises, driving agricultural innovation.

The minister said the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund has been expanded to enhance agricultural infrastructure and support to farmers, and Rs 14,200 crore has been allocated across seven schemes to improve farmers' lives and livelihoods. The minister highlighted key achievements in the farm sector, including the disbursement of Rs 20,000 crore to 9.3 crore farmers under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme.



"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first decision of his third term was disbursement of Rs 20,000 crore to 9.3 crore farmers under the 17th instalment of PM Kisan Nidhi. So far, Rs 3 lakh crore has been disbursed to 12.33 crore farmers," Shah said.

The PM-KISAN offers an annual benefit of Rs 6,000, distributed in three equal instalments of Rs 2,000 every four months, directly into the bank accounts of eligible farmers through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

The minister said that farm policies are being implemented keeping in mind the welfare and

prosperity of the farming community.

"This will help boost the country's foodgrains production and exports, thereby improving farmers' plight," he added.

Highlighting the government's commitment to farmers, Shah said, "Compared to the UPA regime, the Modi government has procured more crops at MSP. This shows that the NDA government is committed towards the farmers".

The MSP for Kharif crops has been increased for the 2024-25 season, ensuring that the farmers get fair prices for their produce. They will

receive Rs 2 lakh crore through MSP, he added.

He also said the government will construct wheat silos with a combined capacity of 3.4 million tonnes (MT) across the country. This will reduce grain losses and extend shelf life.

The minister said special Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) subsidy packages have been provided at Rs 3,500 per MT to P&K fertiliser companies to ensure affordable soil nutrient availability for farmers.

He said five integrated aquaparks will be set up in the country to strengthen the fisheries sector.

A total of 109 climate-resilient and biofortified high-yielding crops were dedicated to boosting productivity and bridging the gap between lab and land.

Under the 'Mission Mausam' with Rs 2,000 crore outlay, the government will help create a weather-ready and climate-smart Bharat, directly benefiting the agriculture sector.

He said under the Digital Agriculture Mission, farming will be modernised through digital technology.

To boost ethanol production, the minister said sugar mills are being converted into multi-feed distilleries.

"Now, mills can make ethanol not only from sugarcane juice but also from maize. Ethanol will be made from maize when sugarcane juice is required for making sugar in the country.

Ethanol from sugar juice will be made when there is higher sugar production," he explained.

Besides, he said, Rs 12,100 crore has been sanctioned by the government for Polavaram Irrigation Project to boost irrigation capacity. Under the Clean Plant Programme with a budget of Rs 1,765 crore, the government will enhance fruit crop standards and establish nine state-of-the-art clean plant centres and 50 multi-product irradiation facilities for helping preservation of fruits and vegetables, he said.

In a move to support exports, the minister said the minimum export price (MEP) on onion and basmati rice has been scrapped.

These policies are part of the government's broader strategy to enhance farmer welfare and boost India's agricultural exports, Shah said. Shah was flanked by Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav at the press conference.

Wholesale inflation falls a four month low in August

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wholesale inflation fell to a 4-month low of 1.31 per cent in August due to a decline in prices of vegetables and fuel, even though onion and potato prices spiked, according to official data released on Tuesday.

Wholesale price index-based inflation fell for the second straight month in August after it hit a high of 3.43 per cent in May. Inflation in July was 2.04 per cent. In August last year, WPI inflation was (-) 0.46 per cent.

"Positive rate of inflation in August 2024 is primarily due to an increase in prices of food articles, processed food products, other manufacturing, manufacture of textiles and manufacture of machinery & equipment etc," the Commerce and Industry Ministry said in a statement.

Inflation in food items was 3.11 per cent in August against 3.45 per cent in July. This was led by declining prices of vegetables, which dropped 10.01 per cent in August.

Inflation in potatoes and onions continued to be high at 77.96 per cent and 65.75 per cent, respectively, in August.

Barclays in a note said the slowing in August WPI was driven by a sequential decline in food (vegetable) prices. The continued climb in non-perishable food prices needs to be watched.



ICRA Senior Economist Rahul Agrawal said while Kharif sowing has been healthy so far, the surplus rainfall in the ongoing month can potentially delay the Kharif harvesting and/or impact such yields, even as reasonably healthy reservoir storage at pan-India level is likely to boost the sowing of rabi crops.

"The WPI inflation eased to a four-month low of 1.3 per cent in August 2024, with the fuel and power, core (non-food manufacturing), and crude petroleum and natural gas sub-groups together pulling down the headline WPI print by as much as 70 bps in the month vis-à-vis July 2024," Agrawal said.

Barclays said lower manufactured costs owing to the fall in energy and metal prices reduce the risk of spillover to core consumer price inflation.

Inflation in manufactured products was 1.22 per cent in August.

The fuel and power category witnessed deflation of 0.67 per cent in August against

inflation of 1.72 per cent in July.

ICRA said global commodity prices have remained benign through September 2024 so far, which is likely to contain the sequential momentum in the non-food WPI.

Additionally, the price of the Indian basket of crude oil has averaged 6 per cent lower in September 2024 on a sequential basis, while touching the lowest levels in 33 months, which would also help contain the uptick in the headline WPI inflation print in the month.

Overall, ICRA expects the WPI inflation to rise to 2 per cent in September 2024 from 1.3 per cent in August.

Data released last week showed retail inflation was at 3.65 per cent in August on higher prices of vegetables. This was higher than 3.60 per cent in July. Given the slight acceleration in the August CPI inflation, we think the RBI is likely to remain on a cautious hold at the October meeting and assess the impact of the monsoon on food prices, before considering monetary easing. We expect rate cuts to begin in December 2024," Barclays said.

he Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which mainly takes into account retail inflation while framing monetary policy, kept the benchmark interest rate or repo rate unchanged for the ninth consecutive time in August at 6.5 per cent.



India's exports tumble 9.3 per cent in August

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports in August declined 9.3 per cent to USD 34.71 billion from USD 38.28 billion in the year-ago month, according to government data released on Tuesday. Imports increased by 3.3 per cent to USD 64.36 billion in August against USD 62.3 billion a year ago.

The trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, during the month under review ballooned to USD 29.65 billion.

India's merchandise exports dipped by 1.5 per cent in July. Exports during April-August this fiscal increased 1.14 per cent to USD 178.68 billion, and imports grew 7 per cent to USD 295.32 billion.

Air India to upgrade its legacy A320 neo aircraft by mid-2025

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air India on Tuesday said it expects to complete the upgradation of its 27 legacy A320 neo aircraft by mid-2025, following which all its narrow body planes will have the three-class configuration of business, premium economy and economy seats.

Under the USD 400 million refit programme that commenced on Monday, the Tata Group-owned airline will upgrade all the 67 legacy narrow body and wide body aircraft, including 40 Boeing planes.

The upgradation has started with the single-aisle A320 neo aircraft and after prototyping and necessary regulatory approvals, the plane VT-EXN

is expected to re-enter commercial service in December 2024.

"Following VT-EXN, between three and four aircraft per month will undergo retrofit, with upgradation of the full narrow body fleet expected by the middle of 2025," the airline said in a release.

The refit of the first wide body aircraft will commence in early 2025, subject to supply chains. The carrier's legacy wide body fleet comprises B787 and B777 planes.

The refit project will be coordinated by Air India's Engineering team with leading global OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) such as Collins, Astronics and Thales.



The exercise will see the installation of over 15,000 next generation seats across business, premium economy and economy class, the release said.

Passengers have been complaining about some service issues with the airline's legacy fleet, including those related to inflight entertainment systems.

According to the airline, the refitted A320 neo aircraft will feature 8 business class seats, 24 premium economy seats and 132 economy seats. Among other facilities, these planes will have portable electronic device holders and USB ports.

Air India said the final preparations continue for the full interior upgradation of the 40 legacy wide body aircraft.

"The commencement of interior refit of the narrow body fleet is an important step in our journey of

enhancing the flying experience of our customers. Over time, all the legacy wide body aircraft will also be refitted," Air India Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Campbell Wilson said.

Currently, Air India has a fleet of 142 planes, including around 60 wide body aircraft. The fleet also includes 11 B 777 planes and 25 A320 family aircraft taken on lease.

After taking over the loss-making Air India in January 2022, Tata Group has put in a place a transformation road map for the airline, which is now expanding its fleet as well as network. The carrier has also started operating wide body A350 planes on various routes.

INBRIEF

ACHARYA BALKRISHNA INAUGURATES THE STATE-OF-THE-ART BLOOD TESTING MACHINE MINDRAY BC 760

HARIDWAR: Acharya Balkrishna ji Maharaj, Vice Chancellor of Central University New Delhi, Prof. Srinivas Varkhedi and Prof. Shivani ji from Bangalore inaugurated the state-of-the-art blood testing machine - Mindray BC 760 Automated Hematology Analyser in the pathology lab run under the aegis of Patanjali Ayurveda Hospital.

CANFIN HOMES NOIDA GIFTS WATER PURIFICATION SYSTEM TO KASHMIRI GATE BUS STAND

DELHI: Canfin Homes Ltd, a Housing finance Company always remains ahead in providing housing needs said the company's zonal manager, Santosh Kumar Srivastava, on the occasion of the inauguration of the water cooler.

PRINCIPAL, STAFF & STUDENTS PLANT MEDICINAL SAPLINGS AT GOVT STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

PATIALA: To promote environmental awareness, a medicinal tree plantation drive was launched at Nanak Bagichi in Government State College of Education, Patiala by the Principal Dr Depinder Kaur.

GNDU STUDENTS DO ROBOTICS HANDS-ON PRACTICE

AMRITSAR: A hands-on workshop "Robotics Workshop, Kickstart Your Robotics Journey: Beginner's Workshop on Robotics" was held at Golden Jubilee Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation of Guru Nanak Dev University.

NFR TO BOOST FREIGHT OPERATIONS AND TRAIN SAFETY

MALIGAON: Northeast Frontier Railway in a bid to further improve railway safety and efficiency of train operations, has introduced significant initiatives across its network.

RELEASE OF DOCUMENTARY, PICTORIAL ART WORK ON GNDU BOTANICAL GARDEN

AMRITSAR: Prof. Dr. Jaspal Singh Sandhu released documentary film & pictorial art work titled "Peacock's Serenade - Nature's Elegance in Botanical Gardens of GNDU".

India, UK may hold next round of talks on proposed FTA in October

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the UK are expected to hold the next round of talks for a proposed free trade agreement in October to resolve the pending issues and close the negotiations, a senior official said on Tuesday.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the officials of the UK are briefing their new ministers about the proposed free trade agreement (FTA). The two sides have already taken stock of the progress of talks at secretary and minister levels.

"The briefings are going on in the UK...They are briefing their new ministers and based on that, the negotiations will start. We are hoping that in October, the negotiations should resume," Barthwal told reporters here.

He also said India is progressing on all FTAs, but there are certain things which are not in control of anyone.

The India-UK talks for the proposed FTA began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

Due to the elections in India and Britain, both the countries lost that period. There are pending issues in both the goods and services sectors. The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is



seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).

The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

There are 26 chapters in the agreement, which includes goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights. The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from 20.36 billion in 2022-23. The Labour Party's election manifesto for the recent polls also committed to clinching the deal. A virtual meeting between Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Jonathan Reynolds, UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade was held on July 11 to discuss next steps on the pact. Talking about the trade agreement with Australia, the secretary said that the two sides are looking at ways to conclude the negotiations before December.

Gold imports surge record high



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold imports more than doubled in August to a record high of USD 10.06 billion, mainly on account of a drastic cut in customs duty and ongoing festive demand, according to the Commerce Ministry data.

Gold imports stood at USD 4.93 billion in August 2023. On record high imports, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that the tariff rates on gold have been reduced drastically so that smuggling and other activities can come down.

"And this is the time when jewellers start stocking for their inventories to be sold in the festive season," he told reporters.

In the Budget, the government slashed the duty from 15 per cent to 6 per cent.

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on a country's current account deficit (CAD), dipped by 4.23 per cent to USD 12.64 billion during April-July 2024-25. In 2023-24, India's gold imports surged by 30 per cent to USD 45.54 billion.

Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports.

The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to USD 29.65 billion in August.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry.

India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter. For FY24, the current account deficit narrowed to USD 23.2 billion or 0.7 per cent of GDP against USD 67 billion or 2 per cent of GDP in FY23.

A current account deficit occurs when the value of goods and services imported and other payments exceeds the value of the export of goods and services and other receipts by a country in a particular period.

India is seeking review of certain provisions of the free trade agreement with the UAE, which came into force on May 1, 2022.

The review assumes significance as experts have raised serious concerns over the spurt in imports of precious metals from the UAE under the trade agreement.

NIA ties up with Statiq for EV charging infrastructure

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Noida International Airport (NIA) on Tuesday announced a strategic partnership with Statiq to provide EV charging infrastructure at the airside.

As part of the collaboration, Statiq will set up, operate, and maintain the airside electric vehicle charging infrastructure for round-the-clock operations, the company said.

All concessionaires and airport vehicles will have access to this EV charging network, designed to support the airport's sustainability initiatives and reduce emissions across its operations.

The charging infrastructure will allow all airport partners to deploy electric ground support equipment (GSE) and other electric vehicles within the airport.

In the first phase of this partnership, Statiq will install a mix of 7.4 kW AC chargers for smaller EVs, and 120 kW and 240 kW chargers for high-powered, rapid-charging needs, it said.

Thailand, Vietnam and Taiwan, recorded growth.

According to the data, India's exports to the US declined 6.29 per cent to USD 6.55 billion while imports from that country dipped by 6.3 per cent to USD 3.82 billion in August.

Cumulatively, during the April-August 2024-25, exports to the US increased 5.72 per cent to USD 34 billion, while imports grew 3.72 per cent to USD 19 billion, leaving a trade surplus of USD 15 billion. Similarly, the country's imports from Russia dipped by about 40 per cent to USD 2.57 billion in August. During April-August 2024-25, imports grew by 6.39 per cent to USD 27.35 billion, due to crude oil imports. In 2023-24, the US was India's largest trading partner, followed by China.

India, China imports up 15.55 per cent in August

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's exports to China dipped by 22.44 per cent to USD 1 billion, while imports rose by 15.55 per cent to USD 10.8 billion in August, according to the commerce ministry data.

Cumulatively, in the April-August period this fiscal, exports to the neighbouring country dipped by 8.3 per cent to USD 5.8 billion while imports grew 10.96 per cent to USD 46.65 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 35.85 billion, the data showed.

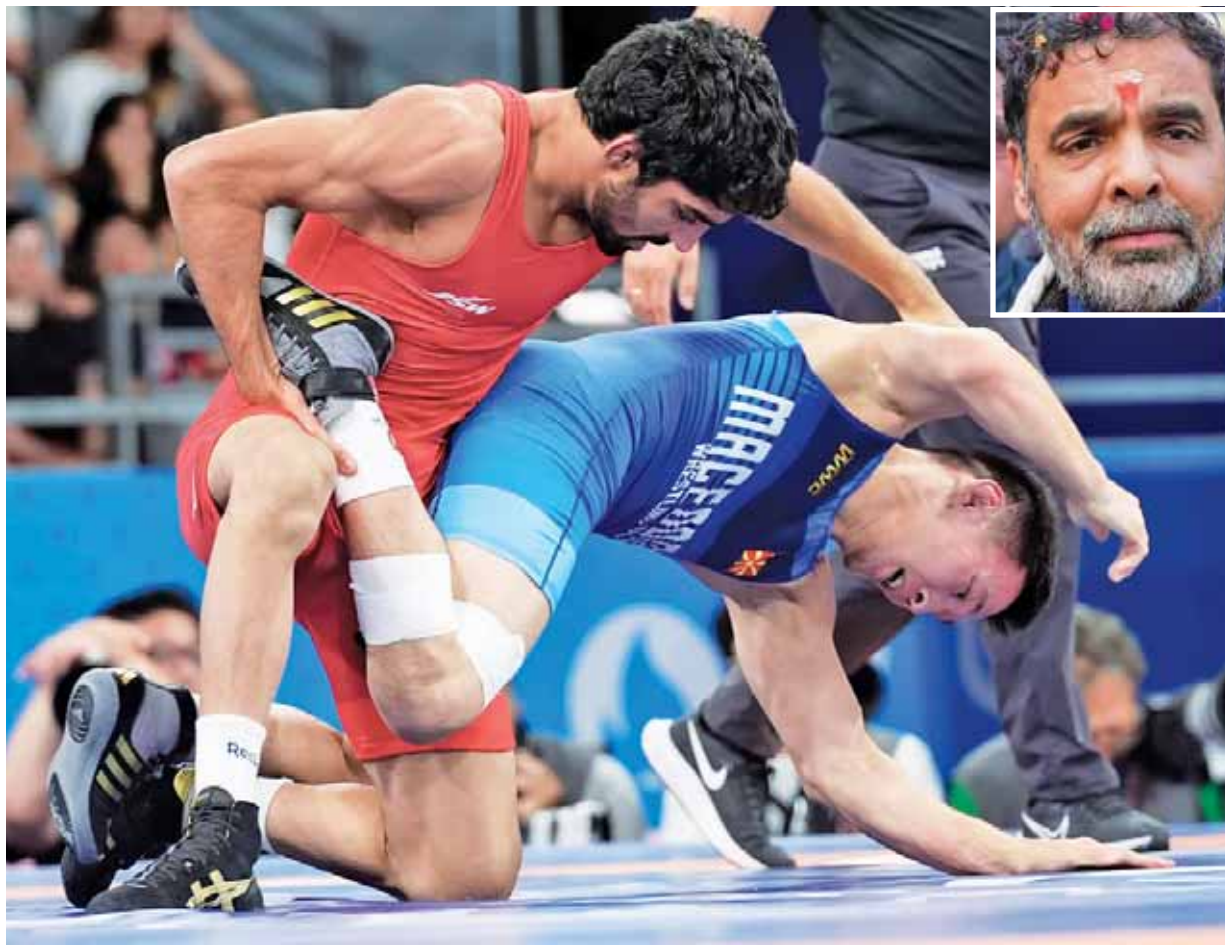
The country's exports to the US, the UAE, Singapore, Bangladesh, Australia, South Africa, France, Nepal, Belgium, and Turkey also declined during the month under review.

Also, imports from the UAE, Switzerland, Korea, Japan,

WFI requests CGF to not drop wrestling from CWG 2026 roster, but not very hopeful

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) President Sanjay Singh on Tuesday urged the Commonwealth Games Federation to retain the sport in the 2026 CWG roster but also conceded that prospective host Scotland might not relent. India is one of the most successful wrestling nations in CWG, having won 114 medals in the sport till the 2022 edition. Wrestling was part of the CWG roster in the last three editions. The last time wrestling missed out was in 2006 when basketball replaced it. Before that, wrestling was removed from the programme in 1998 for the addition of 10-pin bowling. Scottish capital Glasgow is set to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games after Victoria pulled out, citing the huge cost of conducting the showpiece. "I met CGF President Chris Jenkins and CGF CEO Katie Sadleir during NSFs (National Sports Federations) meeting with the Commonwealth Games



Federation. We told them how important it is for India and several other nations to have wrestling on the CWG roster. They said that Scotland will have a final say," Singh told PTI. "Wrestling is not very popular in the UK. England and Scotland do not send many wrestlers, so chances of it being retained are not very high. They told us the roster will have only 10-11 sports and Scotland will make the final decision," he added. The last edition in Birmingham in 2022 had 20 sports with India winning 61 medals and 12 of those medals were snared by the wrestlers. Out of 22 gold medals that India won, wrestling had contributed six, the highest by any sport followed by table tennis (4) and boxing (3). The 2026 Commonwealth Games were to be held in multiple cities across Victoria but the Australian state made a shock withdrawal in July 2023 citing a steep rise in projected expenditure. Shooting will, however, return to the Commonwealth Games roster after being kept out of the Birmingham programme.



Priyanshu Rajawat makes first-round exit from China Open

PTI ■ CHANGZHOU (CHINA)

Rising Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat suffered a straight-game defeat to Canada's Brian Yang as he made an opening-round exit from the China Open here on Tuesday. The 22-year-old Indian, who won the Orleans Master last year, went down 13-21 16-21 to his Canadian opponent in a 36-minute men's round-of-32 contest of the Super 1000 tournament. Rajawat, the world number 36, was a member of the Indian team that won the historic Thomas Cup title two years ago. World number 40 Kiran George is now the lone Indian challenger left in the men's singles event. He will take on Japanese shuttler Kenta Nishimoto in the round of 32. The Indian shuttler, who competed at the Paris Olympics including PV Sindhu, Lakshya Sen and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, are giving the tournament, the year's last BWF Super 1000 event, a miss. Commonwealth Games bronze medallist duo of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly and Rutaparna Panda and Swetaparna Panda will compete in the women's doubles event while N Sikki Reddy and B Sumeeth Reddy will lead the challenge in mixed doubles competition. Aakarshi Kashyap, Malvika Bansod and Samiya Imad Farooqui will compete in the women's singles event.

Rodri says top soccer players might go on strike because there are too many games



AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND) Manchester City midfielder Rodri says top soccer players are close to going on strike because of the number of games they are having to play. The Spain international said players are concerned about the way the game is headed as more games are added to the calendar in competitions like the Champions League, which starts on Tuesday. Rodri was asked on Tuesday if players might start refusing to play because of the calendar. "I think we are close to that," he said in a news conference ahead of City's Champions League opener against Inter Milan on Wednesday. "It's easy to understand. You ask any player, he will say the same - it's not the opinion of (just) Rodri or whoever. I think it's a general opinion of the players. If it keeps this way, it will be a moment when we have no other option, I really think. It's something that worries us because we are the guys who suffer." Rodri is expected to start his

first game for City this season when Inter visits Etihad Stadium, having been given an extended break by the club after winning the European Championship with Spain in July. City has two more games to play in the first stage of the Champions League and up to seven matches more in the Club World Cup, which is scheduled to take place in the United States at the end of the domestic season. The introduction by FIFA of a 32-team Club World Cup, which will be played every four years, is regarded by global players' union FIFPRO as a tipping point for the expansion of international competitions. The union has started a legal challenge against FIFA over its expanded competitions, which include the first 48-team men's World Cup in 2026, because it believes too much is being asked of players without consultation. Rodri said players can be expected to "perform at the highest level" if they play 40 to 50 games. Not 60 to 70

matches, a number Rodri might have to play if City goes far in all of the competitions it enters. Julian Alvarez, who played for City the past two seasons before moving to Atletico Madrid, was picked in 83 match-day squads last season. Another City player, Phil Foden, played in 72. "In my humble opinion, I think it is too much," Rodri said. "We have to take care of ourselves. Someone has to take care of ourselves because we are the main characters of, let's say, this sport or this business. "Not everything is money or marketing. It is also the quality of the show. In my opinion, when I rest, when I'm not tired, I perform better. If people want to see better football, we need to rest." Rodri said teammate Erling Haaland is demonstrating how a player can benefit from getting more of a break. Norway did not qualify for Euro 2024 so Haaland had the summer off, and has started this season by scoring nine goals in City's first four games.

Ishfaq Ahmed names 23-member India squad for SAFF U17 Championship

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The India U-17 men's team head coach Ishfaq Ahmed on Tuesday named a 23-member squad for the SAFF U17 Championship, which will be held in Bhutan. India will face Bangladesh (September 20) and Maldives (September 24) in Group A of the tournament. The semifinals will take place on September 28, followed by the final on September 30. All

the matches will be played at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu. The Blue Colts will depart for Thimphu from their camp in Srinagar on Wednesday. **INDIA'S 23-MEMBER SQUAD FOR SAFF U17 CHAMPIONSHIP:** Goalkeepers: Aheibam Suraj Singh, Nandan Roy, Rohit. Defenders: Brahmachari-mayum Sumit Sharma, Chingtham Renin Singh, Jodric Abranches, Karish



Soram, Mohammed Kaif, Usham Thougamba Singh, Yaipharemba Chingakham. **Midfielders:** Abdul Salha Sheergojri, Ahongshangbam Samson, Banlamkumar Rynjah, Kh Azlaan Khan, Levis Zangminlu, Mahmud Sami, Manbhakumar Malngiang, Md Arbash, Ngamgouhou Mate, Ningthoukhongjam Rishi Singh, Vishal Yadav. **Forwards:** Bharat Lairenjam, Hemneichung Lunlim.

Al-Nassr draws with Al Shorta in first game in AFC Champions League Elite

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Without an ill Cristiano Ronaldo, Al-Nassr of Saudi Arabia drew with Al-Shorta of Iraq 1-1 in the first ever game in the revamped and rebranded AFC Champions League Elite on Monday. Ronaldo was left behind in Riyadh because Al-Nassr said the Portugal superstar, who has won five UEFA Champions Leagues but has yet to win a major trophy with his current club, had a viral infection and could not travel to Baghdad. Sultan Al-Ghannam put Al-Nassr ahead after 14 minutes though Mohammed Dawood leveled 10 minutes later. There was another blow for Al-Nassr as Croatia international Marcelo Brozovic left the field injured early in the second half. Al-Ahli, another of Saudi Arabia's three star-studded teams in the tournament, beat Persepolis of Iran 1-0 in Jeddah. Former Barcelona and AC Milan midfielder Franck Kessie scored in the first

minute. Ivan Toney, signed from English Premier League club Brentford in August, made his Asian debut for Al-Ahli but the England striker was unable to get on the scoresheet. Former Manchester City star Riyad Mahrez missed a second half penalty but Al-Ahli held on. Al-Ain of the United Arab Emirates, which in May was the last winner of the Asian Champions League which has been replaced by the more streamlined Elite, started with a 1-1 draw against Al-Sadd of Qatar. Elsewhere, Esteghlal of Iran defeated Al-Gharafa of Qatar 3-0. The 24 teams have been divided into two groups of 12, divided into east and west geographic zones, and each plays eight games. The top eight from each group progresses to the round of 16. Saudi Arabia's third team, Al-Hilal, is in action on Tuesday and travels to Qatar to face Al-Rayyan.

Two Indian teams to participate in Pickleball World Cup in Peru

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two Indian teams comprising a total of nine players have been selected to compete in the Pickleball World Cup, which will be organised in Lima (Peru) from October 22-27. The Indian Pickleball Association said it was invited to send two teams to compete on the global stage. "At the recently-concluded selection trials in Ahmedabad, organised under the aegis of the IPA and the Gujarat State Pickleball Association (GSPA), nine talented players were selected to represent India," IPA made the announcement in partnership with Pickleball World Rankings on Tuesday. The Indian team for Open category will be led by Dhiren Patel and will feature Himanshu Mehta, Suraj Desai, Rakshika Ravi and Anshi Sheth. The Seniors 50 plus category will feature Nozer Amalsdiwala, Kiran Saliyan, Bela Kotwani and Sujay



Parekh. The sport shares similarities with tennis but players in Pickleball use paddles instead of rackets, and play on a court which is similar to the size of a doubles' badminton court. The height of the net is 36 inches on the sidelines and

in the middle it is 34 inches. "It is a proud moment for the Indian Pickleball Association to be invited to send two teams to the World Cup. We have full faith in these players and hope they will bring glory to India," said IPA president Suryaveer Singh Bhullar.

PSG starts Champions League without a galactico but clearly better equipped to succeed

AP ■ PARIS

For more than a decade, Paris Saint-Germain's Qatari owners have spent lavishly to attract big stars. Their goal was to make the club profitable, to erase the amateurish image of a side often associated with hooligans, and to build a competitive team capable of winning the Champions League. With unprecedented revenues surpassing 800 million euros (\$890 million) for the first time last year, they have managed to build solid growth. They also succeeded in ridding their stadium of the violence that often made the atmosphere at the Parc des Princes so tense and hostile. And they also managed to bring the biggest names in the game to Paris. The likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappé at times offered a glimpse of the possibility of

winning Europe's biggest tournament. But the Champions League crown remained a distant dream. The superstars have all now left the Parc des Princes, and it might sound paradoxical, but the club may be better equipped in its quest for continental glory. "The coach is leading us more and more towards his philosophy, it's more and more a soccer based on a collective philosophy. We're moving in that direction," PSG captain Marquinhos said on Tuesday. "Even if there are not any big names or stars, we are ready to go for big achievements." Following the exits of Messi to Inter Miami and Neymar to Saudi Arabia team Al-Hilal in previous years, the departure of Mbappé to Real Madrid this summer marked the end of an era at PSG, where relying on the individual skills of star players and splashing money have been the norm since the

2011 Qatari takeover. The big hole left by Mbappé was not filled by yet another superstar. Instead, coach Luis Enrique insisted on moulding what he had. Enrique's project makes sense: Mbappé can't be duplicated but he could be replaced by a handful of attacking players capable of scoring as much, or more, than the France captain did. "To me, this is the continuation of last season," said Enrique, who has used 21 players in four French league games so far. "We are a young team, that is true. But we are full of desire and hunger, which is a wonderful thing. I'm so lucky to have this sort of squad." Enrique asked for the recruitment of less known but excellent players in every sector to create competition and have second options at every position. It could be even more crucial this season as the Champions League's new format will see more teams



playing more games. PSG starts on Wednesday against Spanish side Girona. PSG signed goalkeeper Matvey Safonov, highly rated defender William Pachó and promising midfielder João Neves, as well as winger Désiré Doué. Pachó was impressive at Eintracht Frankfurt while the versatile Neves has already earned 11 caps with Portugal at the age of 19. Pachó and Neves have quickly gelled with the team and the new-look PSG has delivered immediately. They have won their first four matches to top the Ligue 1 standings. "PSG is way stronger collectively than last year, everybody runs and defends," Brest coach Eric Roy said after his side lost to the French titleholder 3-1 over the weekend. "Especially when they lose the ball, they put a lot of pressure." The biggest question mark going into the season was PSG's ability to maintain a

potent attack without its best player. With two quick and powerful players on the wings - Ousmane Dembélé and Bradley Barcola - partnering Marco Asensio in a false No. 9 role, PSG seems to have found the right answer. The team has scored 16 goals, conceding just three, and boasts the best goal difference after four Ligue matches since Reims in 1952. Only Marseille forward Mason Greenwood has more goals than Barcola and Dembélé, while João Neves leads the league with three assists. But for all of PSG's dominance of the French league - winning it in 10 of the last 12 seasons - it has reached just one Champions League final since being bought by Qatar Sports Investments. No surprise Enrique does not want to get carried away. Asked about the perceived improvement, he said, "We will see at the end of the season what the team has achieved."

NEW SUPPORT STAFF WILL HAVE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE, BUT NO PROBLEM AS OF NOW: ROHIT SHARMA

PTI ■ CHENNAI
 India captain Rohit Sharma on Tuesday said head coach Gautam Gambhir's style is different from his predecessor Rahul Dravid but insisted he shares a good rapport with the new appointee, and the rest of his fresh set of support staff. Gambhir, a World Cup-winning former opener, took charge of India in July during a white ball tour to Sri Lanka, and will now helm the team in its first Test series under his tutelage against Bangladesh, beginning here from Thursday. In Gambhir's first outing as coach, India swept the T20 series against the Islanders 3-0, but lost the ensuing ODI series 0-2. "Obviously, Rahul bhai, Vikram Rathour (former batting coach) and Paras Mhambrey (former bowling coach) were a different team and it is only acceptable that the new support staff will bring different perspective," Rohit said in the pre-series press

conference here on Tuesday. "But the matches that we engaged in (with the new staff) in Sri Lanka, they seemed to be sensible and understanding. They began to learn things pretty quickly within the team," he added. Dravid's tenure ended after India's T20 World Cup triumph in the West Indies and he will next be seen heading the coaching staff of IPL side Rajasthan Royals. Rathour and Mhambrey were replaced by Abhishek Nayar (assistant coach) and South African Morne Morkel (bowling coach), while former Dutch all-rounder Ryan ten Doeschate also joined as an assistant coach. While Nayar joining the team was largely a given, Morkel and Doeschate, who worked with Gambhir at the Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL, beat former pacers R Vinayakumar and L Balaji in the race to spots among the India support staff. Rohit used his long association with Gambhir during the latter's playing days, and with



Abhishek Nayar in the Mumbai dressing room to underline his comfortable working relation with them. "It's a new (support) staff for sure, but I have known Gautam Gambhir and Abhishek Nayar long enough. Every support staff has its operating style, and that's what we were expecting. "I have worked with different coaches over 17 years of my

career, and it's vital to understand that all of them have a unique perspective (about cricket), and it's a must that you adjust with them," said Rohit. While Rohit has never worked alongside Morkel and Doeschate, the 37-year-old said he has enough knowledge of them from their days as cricketers to strike a comfortable equation. "I have also played matches against Morne Morkel and Ryan ten Doeschate. I have some close encounters with Morkel, but not so much with Ryan, may be a couple of matches. But that doesn't matter. "As of now, there have been no issues or problems as such (with the new set of support staff). We have a great understanding of each other. "Good understanding is important, and I have that with them," he added on his dynamics with the new head coach and his team. In his first media interaction after taking charge in July, the 42-year-old Gambhir had also rejected apprehensions about his equation with the team's senior players by citing his familiarity with them during his playing days.



Massive hike in Women's T20 WC prize fund as ICC announces pay parity

PTI ■ DUBAI
 In a landmark decision, the International Cricket Council on Tuesday announced equal prize money for men and women in World Cups, starting with next month's women's T20 showpiece, the purse for which has been hiked by a staggering 225 per cent to USD 7.95 million. The winners of the women's T20 World Cup will walk away with USD 2.34 million from this fund, a 134 per cent increase on the USD one million awarded to Australian women when they clinched the title in South Africa in 2023, said the ICC in a statement. Men's T20 World Cup champions India had received USD 2.45 million in cash prize earlier this year. "The ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 will be the first ICC event where women will receive the same prize money as their male counterparts, marking a significant milestone in the sport's history," said the ICC. The decision ensures that the ICC reached its prize money equity target seven years ahead of its schedule of 2030. The runners-up at the showpiece event next month will get USD 1.17 million, an increase of 134 per cent in comparison to the USD 500,000 South Africa received for reaching the final on home soil at Newlands Cricket Ground. The two losing semi-finalists will earn USD 675,000 (up from USD 210,000 in 2023), with the overall prize pot totalling USD 7,958,080, a massive increase of 225 per cent from last year's total fund of USD 2.45 million. Each win during the group stages will see teams take home USD 31,154, while the six teams who fail to reach the semi-finals will share a pool of USD 1.35 million depending on their finishing positions. In comparison, the equivalent pool for the six teams in 2023 was USD 180,000, shared equally. Teams who finish third or fourth in their group will take USD 270,000 each while the teams who finish fifth in their group will both receive USD 135,000. "This move is in line with the ICC's strategy to prioritise the women's game and accelerate its growth by 2032. Teams will now receive equal prize money for the equivalent finishing position at comparable events as well as the same amount for winning a match at those events," the ICC added. The ninth edition of the tournament will take place across two venues in the UAE - Dubai and Sharjah - from October 3 to 20. All group matches will be completed before October 15. The semi-finals are scheduled for October 17 and 18, followed by the final on October 20.

Playing against India is the best challenge you get nowadays: Bangladesh coach

PTI ■ CHENNAI
 Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha feels playing against cricketing powerhouse India will give his team a fair assessment of where it stands internationally, as he looks forward to relishing the challenge against Rohit Sharma's side in the two-Test series commencing on Thursday. Bangladesh are coming off a triumphant 2-0 away Test-series win against Pakistan, having annihilated the Shan Masood-led side by 10 wickets in the opening game, following which they won the second match by six wickets. However, India, currently leading the World Test Championship (WTC) table, are expected to pose a much stronger challenge to Bangladesh despite the eastern neighbours riding high on confidence.

"We are encouraged by playing the best team in the world, and coming to India and playing against them is the best challenge you get nowadays. Playing against the best always gives you the perception of where you stand, and as sports persons, we always look forward to it," said Hathurusingha, the former Sri Lankan all-rounder, who was appointed Bangladesh coach early last year, during a pre-match press conference on Tuesday. Bangladesh, following the two-Test series against India, will also play three T20Is starting October 6. Hathurusingha, when asked if the Test series whitewash of Pakistan had created pressure of expectation on his side coming into the series against India, said that though the victories had boosted the team's confidence, it also knew its strengths and weaknesses.



"It's (win against Pakistan) certainly given us a lot of confidence coming into this series. Keeping the outcome aside, the way we played the series and we handled certain situations, like lagging and coming back, and the people who contributed to it -- all give us a lot of belief for this series." "Pressure (of playing against India) is

a privilege. We understand where we stand, along with our strengths and limitations," he said. The Bangladesh squad comprises eight specialist batters, six bowlers and two all-rounders and Hathurusingha called it the "most rounded" side across departments. "This is probably the most rounded team produced by Bangladesh. We have covered a lot of bases and have got a lot of fast bowlers," he said. "We also have an experienced spin attack, besides also having a great depth in our batting. Also, two of our spinners are genuine batters with Test hundreds. It all gives a great balance to our side, along with confidence." Bangladesh will continue to have the services of veterans like Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mehidy Hasan Miraz. While Shakib was decent across departments in Pakistan, Mushfiqur

emerged as the side's highest run-scorer in the series, while Miraz was their top wicket-taker. "Shakib has always played a huge part in Bangladesh cricket, and he always gives us the luxury to balance the team the way we want, thanks to his all-round abilities," he said. "His adaptability and experience add to it. He is coming off a county stint and is in good shape. Miraz has been the most-improved Bangladesh cricketer in the last 5-6 years and is ready to take over whenever Shakib moves out. "He has been batting well, and his bowling has always been his number one strength, while he has also been great on the field lately," added the Sri Lankan. Speaking about the track, which has a fair sprinkling of red soil, Hathurusingha said it looked like a "sporting wicket".

Gillespie backs Australia bowlers to do the job against red-hot India

PTI ■ MELBOURNE
 Australia's formidable bowling attack featuring Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon "can do the job" against "red hot" India in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy later this year, believes head coach of Pakistan's Test team Jason Gillespie. Since 2014-15, Australia have failed to lay their hands on the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with India winning four consecutive series, including the historic triumphs Down Under in 2018-19 and 2020-21. But Gillespie, who claimed 259 wickets in 71 Tests, feels Australian bowlers can reverse the trend. "I will be backing them in and I am sure they can do the job," the former Australian pacer told 'Fox Sports'. "They are the best bowlers in the country. Their records speak for themselves. This quartet, including Nathan



Lyon, is the best possible bowling attack that Australia can put out in the park," he added. The Rohit Sharma-led Indian team hasn't lost a series in the ongoing WTC cycle with India defeating West Indies (away) and England (home) and holding South Africa (away) to a draw. However, Gillespie is confident that Australia can beat the visitors. "They are red-hot, they are playing some good Test cricket for a while now. Even though they have beaten Australia in recent times, I think Australia have a chance to beat India this

time around," he said. The series, a part of the World Test Championship, gets underway from November 22 in Perth. It is also for the first time since 1991-92 that India and Australia will play five Tests for the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. Following David Warner's retirement, Steve Smith had moved up to fill the void in the opening slot but he has not fared well, averaging a mere 28.50 in four Tests with only one fifty to his name. Gillespie said he would expect Smith to return to the coveted No 4 slot - where the batter is 34 runs short of completing 6,000 runs in Tests. "Players like David Warner are pretty tough to replace. I didn't mind the idea of Steve Smith going up in the order. I have a feeling that he might have slot back in the middle order to bat at 4," Gillespie added. The finalists of the last WTC cycle, India and Australia occupy the top two.

ICC delegation to review security and other arrangements for Champions Trophy

PTI ■ KARACHI
 A five-member delegation of the International Cricket Council (ICC) will land in Karachi on Tuesday for an inspection visit for next year's Champions Trophy in Pakistan. Top officials of ICC's Events and Security Departments and the General Manager Cricket and Production Manager are part of the delegation. Andy Atkinson, the ICC Pitch Consultant, had also visited Pakistan on

three different occasions since April. According to details, the ICC delegation would discuss the tentative schedule of the tournament which was prepared and sent by the Pakistan Cricket Board to them some months back. "The tentative schedule is important because it involves the Indian team being based in Lahore and playing all their matches in the city," a well-informed source said. The source said a scenario where the Indian government does not allow the

Indian travel to Pakistan will also be discussed. The delegation would inspect the ongoing construction work in Karachi and the team hotel arrangements before flying to Islamabad and Lahore for the same purpose. "The delegation which includes their ICC Security Manager would also get briefings from security officials in Pakistan." The source said it is entirely up to the ICC when they decide to finalise and announce the tournament schedule.

MLC franchisee keen on signing James Anderson: Report

PTI ■ LONDON
 Former England pacer James Anderson could return to T20 cricket after a decade following a Major League Cricket team's interest in hiring his services for the upcoming 2025 season. The 42-year-old, who retired from international cricket in July, has not played any white-ball cricket since 2019. His

last T20 match was the 2014 NatWest Blast final for Lancashire while his last T20 assignment for England was in 2009. However, "senior figures with at least one MLC team have had their interest pricked by Anderson's comments last month about a return to white-ball cricket," according to a 'BBC Sports' report. The franchise is looking to hire the services of England's



all-time leading Test wicket-taker for the third edition of the T20 league in United States next year. The short stint in MLC could make Anderson, who took 704 wickets in 188 Tests, richer by 135,000 pounds (approx 1,49,00,000). Last month, Anderson had said he is "still fit enough" to continue his cricket career and will consider a move into white-ball cricket.

Harmanpreet, Sreejesh shortlisted for FIH Hockey Stars Awards

PTI ■ LAUSANNE (SWITZERLAND)
 India captain Harmanpreet Singh was on Tuesday nominated for the player of the year award by the FIH while the legendary PR Sreejesh will be in contention for goalkeeper of the year honour. The International Hockey Federation's (FIH) announced the shortlisted candidates. Both Harmanpreet and Sreejesh played vital roles in India's splendid campaign in the Paris Olympics where the team claimed a bronze medal. Skipper Harmanpreet led from the front with 10 goals - most for any player in the tournament. Harmanpreet will compete with Thierry Brinkman (Netherlands), Joep de Mol (Netherlands), Hannes Müller (Germany), and Zach Wallace (England) for the award. Playing in his last tournament for India, the venerable Sreejesh put forth resolute display of defence throughout the campaign, especially against the Great Britain

when the team was reduced to 10 men in the second quarter of the quarterfinal. India beat Great Britain 4-2 in penalty shootout to reach the semifinal and later on defeated Spain 2-1 to win the bronze medal contest. Sreejesh has competition from Pirmin Blaak (Netherlands), Luis Calzado (Spain), Jean-Paul Danneberg (GER), and Tomas Santiago (Argentina). "The list of nominees was established by an Expert Panel composed of players, coaches and officials selected by each of their Continental Federations," the FIH said on its website. "The expert panel was provided access to match data from all international matches held in 2024, including Test matches, the FIH Hockey Pro League, FIH Hockey Nations Cups, FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifiers and the Olympic Games Paris 2024 before establishing the final list of nominees." The voting process will remain



open till October 11 for national associations (represented by their respective national teams' captains and coaches), fans, players, coaches, officials and media. "The votes of the Expert Panel count for 40 per cent of the overall result. Those from National Associations count for a further 20 per cent. The fans and other players (20 per cent) as well as the media (20 per cent) will make the remaining 40 per cent," the FIH added. The expert panel consists of Janne Muller-Wieland (Germany) and Simon Mason (England) from Europe, Tahir Zaman (Pakistan) and Ms Deepika (India) from Asia, Soledad Ipparraguirre (Argentina) and Craig Parnham (USA) from Pan America, Sarah Bennett (Zimbabwe) and Ahmed Youssef (Egypt) from Africa and Amber Church (New Zealand) and Adam Webster (Australia) from Oceania. **NOMINEES FOR FIH HOCKEY STARS AWARDS: Women:** Gu Bingfeng (China), Yibbi Jansen

(Netherlands), Nike Lorenz (Germany), Stephanie Vanden Borre (Belgium), Xan de Waard (Netherlands). **Men:** Thierry Brinkman (Netherlands), Joep de Mol (Netherlands), Hannes Müller (Germany), Harmanpreet Singh (India), Zach Wallace (England). **GOALKEEPER OF THE YEAR AWARD: Women:** Cristina Cosentino (Argentina), Aisling D'Hooghe (Belgium), Nathalie Kubalski (Germany), Anne Veenendaal (Netherlands), Ye Jiao (China). **Men:** Pirmin Blaak (Netherlands), Luis Calzado (Spain), Jean-Paul Danneberg (GER), Tomas Santiago (Argentina), PR Sreejesh (India). **RISING STAR OF THE YEAR AWARD: Women:** Claire Colwill (Australia), Zoe Díaz (Argentina), Tan Jinzhuang (China), Emily White (Belgium), Linnea Weidemann (Germany). **Men:** Bautista Capurro (Argentina), Bruno Font (Spain), Sufyan Khan (Pakistan), Michel Struthoff (Germany), Arno Van Dessel (Belgium).