

Centre to hold simultaneous elections with three new bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre is likely to bring three bills, including two to amend the Constitution, to put in place its plan to hold simultaneous elections. One of the proposed Constitution amendment bills, that deals with aligning the local bodies elections to that of the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, will require an endorsement from at least 50 per cent of the states. Moving ahead with its 'one nation, one election' plan, the government earlier this month accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee for holding simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies in a phased manner after a countrywide consensus-building exercise. The proposed first constitutional amendment bill would deal with making provisions for holding Lok Sabha and state legislative assembly elections together. Citing recommendations of the high-level committee, sources said the proposed bill would seek to amend Article 82A by adding sub-clause (1) relating to the 'appointed date'. It will also seek to insert sub-clause (2) to Article 82A relating to the end of terms



of the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies together. It also proposes to amend Article 83(2) and insert new sub-clauses (3) and (4) relating to the duration and dissolution of the Lok Sabha. It also has provisions related to the dissolution of the legislative assemblies and amending Article 327 to insert the term 'simultaneous elections'. This bill will not require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the states, the

recommendation said. The proposed second Constitutional amendment bill will require ratification by at least 50 per cent of the state assemblies as it will deal with matters relating to state affairs. It will seek to amend constitutional provisions relating to the preparation of electoral rolls by the Election Commission (EC) in consultation with State Election Commissions (SECs) for elections to local

Constitutionally, the EC and SECs are separate bodies. The EC holds elections to the post of the President, the Vice President, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, state assemblies and state legislative councils while the SECs are mandated to conduct polls to local bodies such as municipalities and panchayats. The proposed second Constitutional amendment bill will also create provisions to hold simultaneous elections to municipalities and panchayats, along with

elections to Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies by inserting a new Article 324A. The third bill will be an ordinary one to amend provisions in three laws dealing with Union territories having legislative assemblies — Puducherry, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir — to align the terms of these Houses with other legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha as proposed in the first constitutional amendment bill. The statutes it proposes to

amend are the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act-1991, the Government of Union Territories Act-1963 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act-2019. The proposed bill will be an ordinary legislation not requiring a change in the Constitution and will also not need ratification by the states. The high-level committee had proposed amendments to three Articles, insertion of 12 new sub-clauses in the existing articles and tweaking three laws related to Union Territories having legislative assemblies. The total number of amendments and new insertions stands at 18. In its report submitted to the government in March, just before the general election was announced, the panel recommended implementing "one nation, one election" in two phases. It suggested simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies in the first phase and elections for local bodies like panchayats and municipal bodies within 100 days of the general election in the second phase. It also recommended a common electoral roll, which would need coordination between the Election Commission and State Election Commissions.



Union Minister and BJP National President JP Nadda, and others listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Mann Ki Baat' radio programme, in New Delhi, Sunday. Photo by: RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

'Mann Ki Baat' showcases positive developments: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Sunday that his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat' has shown that people like positive developments and inspiring and encouraging stories. Speaking in the latest episode of the radio programme in which he touches about social issues and highlights people's efforts for a cause in different parts of the country, he noted that the broadcast is completing 10 years. Describing it as an "emotional" episode, he said the programme has become a unique platform that celebrates the spirit of India and showcases collective strength of the nation. He also thanked the media for taking its message to people. Modi said there is generally a perception that people don't pay attention if the content is not spicy or negative. However, 'Mann Ki Baat' has shown that they are eager for positive information. People like

positive things, inspiring examples and encouraging stories, he noted. Modi said the 'Make in India' programme is completing its 10 years, asserting that export is rising in every sector and the rise in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a testimony to its success. It has helped local manufacturers a lot, he added. He urged people to buy 'Made in India' products in the coming festival season. Referring to his recent visit to the US, Modi said the return of nearly 300 antiquities to India is being widely talked about. When people start taking pride in their heritage, the world also respects their sentiments, he said, asserting that a large number of ancient artefacts has been returned to India by different countries in the last 10 years of his government. In the programme, he highlighted the success of the 'Swachh Bharat' mission, lauding it as a great tribute to Mahatma Gandhi who put special emphasis on cleanliness all his life.



Himalayan research project to analyse sediment impact

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As climate change intensifies hazards such as landslides, avalanches, and glacial floods in high mountain regions including Himalayas, a team of researchers from India, Canada and UK is set to conduct a study to understand the long-term impacts of sediment moved by these disasters on communities and river systems including Ganges river. The team, including experts from IIT Roorkee and the Dehradun-based Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, will start research at a 150 km stretch of the Ganges River impacted by the 2021 disaster in Chamoli nestled in Himalayan region in Uttarakhand. Triggered by a rock and ice avalanche, this catastrophic event caused a devastating debris flood, resulting in over 200 fatalities and significant damage to two hydropower stations including Tapovan Vishnu Gad Hydropower. The landslide also temporarily created a dam in the Rishiganga valley, which eventually breached. The £1 million research SUPERSLUG project, led by researchers from the University of Plymouth, will centered around the 2021 disaster and focus on understanding how massive sediment flows—termed "sediment slugs"—affect river systems over time, often impacting areas far from the original disaster site. Utilising advanced monitoring technologies such as drones, satellite imagery, seismic sensors, and "smart cobbles," the team will gather data on sediment transport and landscape changes. This information will help create a digital twin of the river system, offering insights for disaster management and resource sustainability. Dr. Matt Westoby, the project lead and Associate Professor

of Physical Geography at the University of Plymouth, emphasised the urgency of this research which is backed by an £840,000 grant from the Natural Environment Research Council. He noted that while the immediate impacts of disasters are clear, the long-term consequences often remain unexplored. "High mountain regions like the Himalayas are among the most hazardous on the planet. The effects of climate change are likely to exacerbate these hazards, leading to increased landslide activity and landscape instability," he said. "We urgently need to understand the legacy impacts of sediment flows on river catchments and the communities that depend on them for water and livelihoods." The project will engage directly with local communities and authorities to ensure that findings are practical and beneficial for disaster preparedness and hydropower operations. Collaborating institutions also include Exeter, Hull, Leeds, Newcastle, Staffordshire, and the University of Calgary. Professor Tom Coulthard from the University of Hull highlighted the importance of understanding sediment movement. "Often it's the sheer volume of sediment, rather than just floodwaters, that causes significant damage during these multi-hazard events. Understanding how long sediment slugs persist in the system is crucial for predicting their impacts and managing future disasters." In a nut-shell, as per the statement from the University of Hull, this three-year initiative aims to fill critical knowledge gaps regarding the long-term effects of sediment slugs on ecosystems and communities, ultimately enhancing disaster resilience in vulnerable regions.

CITU protests FSNL disinvestment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) on Sunday protested on Government's move to disinvest the profit-making PSU Ferro Scrap Nigam Limited (FSNL). The CITU general secretary Tapan Sen in a statement said the Central Government is resorting to all "illegal practices" to sell the Mini Ratna company to Japan's M/s. Konoike Transport Co. Ltd and must roll back from the sale. Extending solidarity with the striking employees of FSNL, the CITU pointed out that PSU Navratna steel companies

are completely dependent on FSNL for scrap handling since its inception. "With utter surprise, no consultation with them has at all been initiated by the government on such a vital issue and the top managements of FSNL are also not properly aware of this clandestine move. FSNL is a company having a reserve fund of about Rs 200 crore and movable assets worth Rs100 crore employing more than 600 employees and 5,000 contract workers. During the year ended March 31, 2022, Company has paid Interim Dividend for FY 2021-22 amounting to Rs 9.50 per

equity shares," said CITU in a statement detailing the profits of the FSNL. CITU said that "such a golden egg producing company is straight away being guillotined by the government because of its sheer obsession for privatization factually without any valid reason." "CITU once again condemns the authoritarian anti-National move of the Modi government and stands strong with striking FSNL workers. CITU calls upon all its units to take this issue to all sections of workers and mobilize them insolidarity with this anti-privatization struggle," said CITU.

Mental health certificates now needed for Transgender pre-hormonal therapy, surgery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Transgenders who want to go for pre-hormonal therapy or gender assignment surgery need to be assessed and certified by mental health professionals, according to the Union Health Ministry's standard operating procedures for the purpose. As for gynaecologists, the 'SoP for Medical Treatment of Transgender Persons' states that they should enquire as to how the patient wishes to be addressed in terms of name and pronoun, and also ensure that the words they use uphold the principles of safety, dignity and respect. Outlining the responsibilities of mental health professionals, the SoP document said their primary role would include assessment for gender incongruence, as per the

current diagnostic system followed by the World Health Organization, and certification for the same. Gender incongruence is characterised by a marked and persistent disparity between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex. It often leads to a desire for a 'transition' through hormonal treatment, surgery or other healthcare services in order to live and be accepted as a person of the experienced gender. According to the SOP, "Before endocrinology treatment, a certificate from one psychiatrist is required. Before Gender Affirmation Surgery, two certificates are required -- one by a psychiatrist and one by a clinical psychologist/psychiatrist." Apart from that, a mental health professional would also assess for distress and co-



morbid mental and/or substance use disorders and provide management of the same, the document stated. They would also provide support or therapy, if needed, to cope with issues related to gender incongruence, including participation in integrated cross-disciplinary care and intersectoral

collaboration for clients and caregivers. "The support would be provided pre-hormonal therapy/gender assignment surgery, during the period as well as post-surgery, if need be," it stated. According to the document, one cannot undergo gender affirmation surgery before the age of 18 years and a

certificate of being stable on endocrine treatment for one year and suitability for surgical procedure is required before gender affirmation surgery. The SOP stressed the need to make STD clinics friendly to gender-diverse patients and such facilities should document gender identity and sex assigned at birth for all patients to improve sexual healthcare for transgenders and gender nonbinary persons. Primary care providers should take a comprehensive sexual history, including a discussion on Sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening, HIV PrEP and PEP, behavioural health, and social determinants of sexual health. Clinicians can improve the experience of sexual health screening and counselling for transgender persons by

asking for their choice of terminology or modifying language to be used during clinic visits and history taking and examination, the SOP stated. Options for fertility preservation, pregnancy potential and contraception options should also be discussed, if indicated, the document said. As for the Fertility Preservation in Transgenders (Female to Male), the SoP states that the established method for fertility preservation includes cryopreservation of embryos and oocytes for females. Ovarian tissue cryopreservation is also a successful technique for fertility preservation and is no longer experimental, the document stated, adding that it has limited availability and is possible only after attaining puberty.



Prakash Karat to lead CPI(M) interim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Senior CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat will be the coordinator of the party's Polit Bureau and the Central Committee as an interim arrangement until the 24th Party Congress to be held in April next year. The decision comes in the wake of the death of CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury on September 12 at the age of 72. "The Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), now in session in New Delhi, has decided that Comrade Prakash Karat will

be the coordinator of the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee, as an interim arrangement until the 24th Party Congress to be held in April 2025 at Madurai," the CPI(M) said. "This decision was taken due to the sad and sudden demise of the sitting General Secretary of the CPI(M), Comrade Sitaram Yechury," it added. Karat, one of the senior most leaders of the CPI(M), was its general secretary from 2005 to 2015. He was elected to the Central Committee in 1985 and became a Polit Bureau member in 1992.

Congress demands Sitharaman's resignation over extortion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday attacked the BJP after a case was lodged against Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and others on a complaint relating to the now-scrapped electoral bonds scheme and demanded her resignation for "undermining democracy." The opposition party reiterated its demand for a Supreme-court monitored inquiry through an SIT into the whole electoral bond scheme. Addressing a press conference here along with party spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh charged that four ways were used to extort money through the "conspiracy of electoral bonds — prepaid bribery, postpaid bribery, post-raid bribery and through farzi companies". He said the Finance Minister should immediately resign as



she is "guilty" politically, legally and morally. Ramesh said the FIR was lodged on orders of the court and the Congress has nothing to do with the FIR. He said the Congress has been demanding a Supreme-court monitored inquiry through an SIT into the electoral bonds scheme and reiterates that demand. Singhvi also accused the BJP of "undermining democracy." "The Finance Minister cannot do this on her own. We know who is number 1 and number 2 and this was done on whose

directions," he said. "The larger issue is the level playing field which is necessary for free and fair polls. Free and fair polls are critical for democracy. This is an attack on our democratic system," Singhvi said while terming it as "EBS - Extortionist BJP Scheme". A case was registered on Saturday against Sitharaman and others on the directions of a court in Bengaluru, following a complaint relating to the now-scrapped electoral bonds scheme. According to police, an FIR

was registered under IPC sections 384 (punishment for extortion), 120B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) against Sitharaman, ED officials, office-bearers of the BJP at state and national level, based on the order of a special court. BJP Karnataka chief B Y Vijayendra and party leader Nalin Kumar Kateel have also been named in the FIR. The complaint was lodged by Adarsh R Iyer, Co-President of 'Janadhikara Sangharsha Parishath' (JSP) alleging that the accused "committed extortion under the guise and garb of electoral bonds" and benefited to the tune of more than Rs 8,000 crore. The complainant further alleged that Sitharaman through the clandestine aid and support of ED officials facilitated extortion of thousands of crores of rupees for the benefit of others both at the state and national levels.

Udhayanidhi promotion spurs DMK discontent

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
CHENNAI



“The promotion of Udhayanidhi is all set to weaken democracy, strengthen dynasty politics, corruption and sycophancy,” Malan explained to The Pioneer. He also pointed out that only children of veteran DMK politicians could become MLAs, MPs and ministers. “The minimum qualification to become minister or people’s representatives on DMK ticket is that one should be born as the son or daughter of Stalin’s acolytes,” said Malan. He pointed out that there was discontentment

from the Stalin household, the chief minister is not in the best of health. “His recent trip to the US was for a medical check up and the results are not music to the party cadres. Udhayanidhi, though actively involved in politics since 2021 is yet to inspire the party,” said P K Srinivasan, another veteran commentator and author based in Chennai. Malan’s apprehensions about corruption and dynasty politics get substantiated as Senthil Balaji who was arrested and was imprisoned for more than 470 days too was sworn in as minister on Sunday. “Balaji was a synonym for massive corruption according to Stalin till the former crossed over to the DMK from the AIADMK. Now the chief minister describes him as the embodiment of honesty,” says Srinivasan. According to Sekhar, the DMK continues to remain in power because of the disunity in opposition camps. “The AIADMK and BJP are fighting each other ferociously than they fight the DMK. If an alliance is forged between the AIADMK and the BJP, it may enliven Tamil

Amit Shah promises pension jobs for agniveers

PARVESH SHARMA ■
GURUGRAM



Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Every Agniveer will be given a pensionable job. Shah delivered a fiery speech while addressing a ‘Jan Aashirwad Rally’ at village Dhorca Sector-95 in Gurgaon in support of BJP Badshahpur candidate Rao Narbir Singh. Shah also appealed to the people of the state not to hesitate to send their sons to the Army. Every Agniveer would get pension benefits. “The Agniveer scheme was meant to make the Army young,” he said. While targeting Rahul Gandhi, Shah said that the Congress leader is a lying machine. “Rahul Gandhi says that Agniveer Yojana has been brought because the government does not want to give pensionable jobs. I am telling you that every Agniveer will be given a pensionable job. I am going to Badshahpur saying that there will not be a single Agniveer who does not have a pensionable job.” He also accused the Congress

party and said “There was a Congress government in Haryana, it ran on cuts, commissions and corruption. The rule of dealers, brokers and sons-in-law was prevalent. In the BJP government, neither dealers nor brokers are left, there is no question of sons-in-law.” During the Hooda government, the Congress party had only developed one district and one caste, but after the BJP gained power, the party had developed the entire state equally. He also accused the Congress party and said, “The party had given jobs based on ‘Kharchi and Parchi’ System while the BJP has given 5 lakh jobs without any ‘Kharchi and Parchi.’” Shah also gave the account of 10 years of tenure: UPA government gave 41 thousand crores to Haryana. Whereas the Modi government gave 2 lakh 92 thousand crores rupees for development to Haryana in 10 years. PM Modi loves Haryana the most among all the states. Amit Shah targeted Congress and said that the Congress party could not fulfil the promises it made in Himachal and Karnataka. This is their false guarantee, but the BJP has fulfilled the promises it made.

PM launches projects worth ₹ 11,200 crore in Assembly poll-bound Maharashtra

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI



The Prime Minister also inaugurated the Solapur Airport which would significantly improve connectivity, making the western Maharashtra city more accessible to tourists, business travellers and investors. The existing terminal Building of Solapur airport has been revamped to serve around 4.1 lakh passengers annually. Modi dedicated the nation to Bidkin Industrial Area, a transformative project covering an expansive 7,855

acres under the National Industrial Corridor Development Program of Govt. of India, situated 20 km south of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar in Maharashtra. The Bidkin Industrial Area project - developed under Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor - holds immense potential as a vibrant economic hub in the Marathwada region. The Central Government has approved this project with an overall project cost of over Rs 6,400 crore for development in 3 phases. The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stone for the Memorial for Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule’s First Girls’ School at Bhidewada. Even before the announcement of the schedule for the Maharashtra Assembly by the Election Commission of India (ECI), Modi has reached out to people in four regions in the state. On August 25, Modi addressed “Lakshpati Didi Sammelan” at Jalgaon in north Maharashtra on August 25, laid a foundation stone for Rs 76,000 crore Vadvan Port at Palghar in coastal Konkan region August 30 and participated in the first anniversary function of the Pradhan Mantri Vishwakarma Yojana at Wardha in Vidarbha region. Today, he launched projects worth Rs 11, 200 meant for western Maharashtra. Speaking on the occasion, Modi said: “Today,

Maharashtra needs big goals with new resolutions. We need to make cities like Pune a center of progress and urban development. Keeping in view Pune’s progress and the pressure of the growing population, We need to take steps to augment development and capacity of the city. To achieve this goal, the Prime Minister said that the our government in Maharashtra is working with the approach of modernizing Pune’s public transport and giving a boost to connectivity as the city expands”. He underscored the importance of development-driven governance in ensuring Maharashtra’s progress, emphasizing that any disruption in this continuity leads to significant losses for the state. He highlighted various stalled projects, from Metro initiatives to the Mumbai. Recalling the discussions about Pune Metro began in 2008 but its foundation stone was laid in 2016 when quick decisions were taken by his government, the Prime Minister said: “Today, Pune Metro is gaining speed and expanding. On one hand, Pune Metro section of District Court to Swargate has been inaugurated while on the other hand foundation stone for Swargate to Katraj line has also been laid”. Lauding the work done for the expansion of Pune Metro from 2016 till now, Modi said: “The present government in Maharashtra has prepared a modern network of metro in Pune while the previous government could barely construct a single Metro pillar in 8 years”. Modi underscored the importance of development-driven governance in ensuring Maharashtra’s progress, emphasizing that any disruption in this continuity leads to significant losses for the state.



Change needed in Haryana: Kejriwal

PARVESH SHARMA ■
GURUGRAM

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, while addressing a public rally on Sunday, said the BJP had been intentionally putting him behind bars in a false case and it was time for voters to put the BJP out of power. Kejriwal also claimed during the rally that the government will not be formed in Haryana without AAP’s support. In Haryana, the assembly election is scheduled on October 5. “Haryana is asking for a change and development. The government will not form in Haryana without AAP’s support,” said the former Delhi chief minister during the public rally held in the Badshahpur constituency area in support of AAP candidate Beer Singh alias Beeru Sarpanch. Kejriwal, while addressing a public gathering, said he spent five months behind bars without any crime, “BJP targeted me because of my honesty. AAP government developed better schools and provided better health facilities in the national capital, which the BJP don’t like, and only because of good work I had to spend several months in jail,” the AAP chief said. “If the people of Haryana think Kejriwal is dishonest, don’t vote for me. But if they believe I am honest, only then vote for AAP.” Kejriwal added. Polling will be held for the Haryana assembly on October 5, and results will be declared on October 8. “They sent me to jail, and now the people of Haryana will send them out of power,” he said. AAP chief claimed that if APP came into power, free electricity would be provided. Education and Health systems in the state will be improved. Rs 1,000 will also be given to the women. While targeting the BJP, Kejriwal said, “The BJP failed to provide better facilities to the people of the state. They spread corruption, unemployment, inflation and drug addiction to your children and nothing else. This time, the entire Haryana is demanding change, and any government that is formed in Haryana will not be formed without the support of AAP.”

Memorial for P Keshava Dev takes shape

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI



The 1963 work Neighbors, an epic of a village and how the three major communities Nairs, Christians and Eezhava underwent a transformation in post-independent India, is rated as an all time great novel. The memorial meeting at Dev’s ancestral house was held as part of Kochi Literary Festival which is getting ready to observe the 28th edition with a month long cultural events. Writers from Ernakulam district undertook a cultural yatra from Dev’s house in Paravoor to Irinjalkkuda, the cultural capital which boasts of th birth place of Samgama Grama Madhava (1340-1425), the founder of the Kerala school of astronomy and mathematics. The team of writers also called on Paliyam Palace, the headquarters of the Prim Minister and Chief of Army Staff of the Kingdom of Kochi. The gurukula launched by Padma Bhushan Ammannoor Madhava Chakyar (Chakyars are the proponents of Koothu, an art form), the palace of Kunhikuttan Thampuram and Unnayi Varrier Memorial too figured in the itinerary of the team.

Himachal Minister reaffirms Congress loyalty after vendor ID remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/SHIMLA



Himachal Pradesh Minister Vikramaditya Singh met Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and assured him about being steadfast to the party’s ideology and principles, sources said on Sunday. The meeting on Saturday evening came amid a row over Singh’s recent remarks that it would be mandatory for street vendors to display their identity cards at their shops. The state government later clarified no such decision had been taken. Sources said Singh met Kharge and conveyed his

steadfastness to the Congress ideology and principles. Singh on Saturday said he has assuaged the Congress high command’s concerns about ideology following his recent remarks on the street vendors issue and described as “misconception” the perception that the Uttar Pradesh model was being followed in his state. Singh’s remarks had come a day after the Congress top brass chided him over his remarks on the mandatory display of names by the street vendors and told him that no one was allowed to go against the party’s policies and ideologies. Amid the row over the comments, Congress general secretary in-charge organisation KC Venugopal held a meeting with Singh here on Friday during which the minister was told that the party believed in Rahul Gandhi’s mantra of fighting hatred with love.

Stakes high for BJP in third phase of polling in J and K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
JAMMU

The high-octane campaigning for the third and final phase of Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir came to an end on Sunday with the voting set to be undertaken across 40 Assembly segments on October 1. Across the Jammu region where polling is scheduled to take place on 24 out of 40 Assembly seats, the stakes are high for the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) as it is locked in a straight fight with the Congress party on the majority of seats. In Kashmir Valley, where polling is scheduled to take place across 16 Assembly segments, the future of Sajad Lone’s Peoples Conference and the Engineer Rashid-led Awami Ittehad Party (AIP) is also hanging in balance. The National Conference is

hoping to repeat its past performance in the 2002 and 2008 Assembly polls when it won 9 and 7 Assembly seats respectively. In 2014 NC’s tally had come down to three seats in the region. PDP won seven seats in the 2014 Assembly polls from North Kashmir. Both Lone and Rashid, labeled as BJP’s proxy by the National Conference and the PDP are hoping to retain their stronghold in their bastions across North Kashmir. Engineer Rashid, after receiving a healthy voter response at the time of his release from the Tihar jail (on bail) is hoping to encash on the similar sentiments that propelled his Lok Sabha campaign in May 2024. Sajjad Lone who lost to Engineer Rashid in the Baramulla constituency is now contesting from two Assembly seats — Handwara and Kupwara, while Rashid is hoping to make inroads in pockets of North Kashmir to romp home victoriously. The fate of several high-profile leaders and turncoats who were given the mandate by the BJP by denying tickets to some of their ‘unpopular’ leaders will also be decided in this crucial phase. DS Rana contesting from Nagrota, Sham Lal Sharma from Jammu North, and Surjit Singh Slathia from Samba are going to test the political waters for the first time as BJP candidates in the fray. From the congress party several of its candidates are locked in a tough fight with their rival BJP candidate. Lal Singh contesting from Basohli, Raman Bhalla from RSPura-Jammu South and Tara Chand from the Chhamb Assembly segment are also making the ‘battle of ballot’ more interesting in these seats.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made by the Election Commission of India to ensure peaceful conduct of the polls in the wake of the prevailing security scenario in the region. A total number of 415 candidates remain in the fray for 40 assembly constituencies spread across seven districts of Jammu, Samba, Kathua, Udhampur, Baramulla, Kupwara, and Bandipora. A handful of independent candidates in the fray are also giving a tough competition to the BJP. The party’s performance in this crucial phase is going to make or mar the chances of government formation. BJP won 25 Assembly seats in the 2014 Assembly polls, the highest-ever tally so far. This time, the party is hoping to gain an absolute majority. In 2014, BJP swept the polls

winning 19 out of 21 seats in these four districts. Addressing Vijay Sankalp Mahalarly in support of BJP candidates at M A M Stadium on Saturday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said this assembly election has given the people of Jammu a historic opportunity to decide on the next government. They need to seize this moment and choose the BJP, Modi said. Modi also claimed, “The people of Jammu and Kashmir, who have been at the receiving end of the rule of three families — Congress, National Conference and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) — do not want them back.” On the occasion, Modi reiterated his government’s promise of restoring statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and cautioned people against bringing the NC, Congress, and the PDP back to power. During the month-long campaign period, the Prime Minister himself led from the front addressing four election rallies in Doda, Srinagar, and Katra in which he communicated directly with the voters to elect a BJP government in the maiden assembly polls after the Abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A in August 2019. Home Minister Amit Shah also campaigned extensively in the region along with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Chief Ministers from the BJP-ruled states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand and other star campaigners including Smriti Irani, and Anurag Singh Thakur also campaigned for the party candidates during the high-voltage campaigning.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Saving Sunita Williams

Relying on her mental fortitude, Sunita has not only survived the ordeal but plays a crucial role in her rescue

It is heartening to hear that Sunita Williams will be back home soon. Elon Musk's SpaceX has launched a Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida to rescue two astronauts stranded in the International Space Station (ISS). The mission aims to retrieve American astronauts Butch Wilmore and Sunita Williams, who have been stranded on the International Space Station for months due to issues with Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. Originally planned for an eight-day stay, the astronauts' mission was extended far beyond after technical problems with the Starliner. As every Indian waits for her rescue the image of Kalpana Chawla flashes in the mind who lost her life in a space mission. She was one of the seven crew members who died in the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster when the spacecraft disintegrated during its re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere on February 1, 2003. The vast, unexplored frontier of space offers countless wonders, but it also brings unique challenges. The present snag is no fault of the astronauts but a lapse on the part of NASA and Boeing company which allowed the mission to proceed despite several alarms and glitches.

Sunita Williams, a veteran of two spaceflights and a woman who has spent over 300 days in space, embarked on her latest mission with the confidence and expertise that comes from years of training and commitment. However, space is as unpredictable as it is vast. A critical error occurred during her mission, which disabled vital components of the spacecraft, leaving her stranded in the ISS. The malfunction wasn't just a minor glitch—it was a cascade of failures. Yet, if there was one person equipped to face such adversity, it was Sunita Williams. Her resilience, mental fortitude, and the ability to maintain calm in even the most extreme conditions became the defining elements in her survival. Williams is no stranger to adversity. The daughter of Indian and Slovenian immigrants, she broke barriers early in her career by rising to prominence in a male-dominated field. Her indomitable spirit and work ethic have always stood out. She has done spacewalk, she holds the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, spending 195 days in space until 2017. Over her career, Williams has accumulated more than 322 days in space, marking her as one of the most experienced female astronauts in history. Sunita Williams approached this life-threatening situation with a mix of grit, hope, and resourcefulness. She immediately got involved in troubleshooting, all the while keeping her own morale high through mental exercises and meditation. Let's hope and pray that the rescue mission succeeds and Sunita along with colleague Butch Wilmore reaches home safely and is united with her family. This mission is also a lesson and learning for NASA and its contractors to ensure zero tolerance for any glitches and snags in their operations.

PICTALK



Artistes perform 'Mahishasur Mardini' act ahead of Durga Puja festival, in Nadia district

Transforming India through 'Make in India'



PIYUSH GOYAL

The 'Make in India' initiative has completed 10 years of transformative impact. PM Modi's vision has ignited a revival in manufacturing and spurred job creation

On September 25, the country observed 10 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's game-changing 'Make in India' initiative that is transforming India's industrial landscape by encouraging job-creating investments and giving many ordinary citizens the confidence to become wealth creators. It's been a remarkable 10-year journey, which gave renewed vigour to industrial sectors turning these into engines of growth, meeting domestic demand as well as contributing to exports. The exciting journey began at a difficult time when domestic investors were despondent because of the policy paralysis and poor governance by the indecisive Congress government.

The economy was down, confidence was shattered, headlines were dominated by a regular dose of corruption scandals, inflation was soaring, interest rates were high and the rupee had an uncertain outlook. To end the feeling of doom and gloom, the Indian voters decisively voted for PM Modi. Our Prime Minister came with a vision for India. He wanted to ensure that India became a global superpower. He wanted India to provide jobs and opportunities to our youth, recognising that manufacturing was critical to India's success story. That is when the PM launched the 'Make in India' initiative. Ten years has been a remarkable journey, but it would not have been possible for the multidimensional and transformative changes done by the Modi government. Initiatives include GST, the Bankruptcy Code and a multitude of other reforms. To improve the ease of doing business, as many as 42,000 compliance requirements were done away with, and 3,700 provisions that provided for criminal penalties for minor offences were removed from various statutes to protect small businesses from harassment. India sharply improved its rank in the World Bank's Doing Business Report from 142nd in 2014 to 63rd in 2019. The government's Startup India initiative



has encouraged many job seekers to become job creators with the help of Startup India initiative. This has helped the number of recognised startups increase to 1,40,803 in June this year, bringing in investments, and creating more than 15 lakh jobs.

These startups are driving the innovation ecosystem in the country, working on solutions to pressing issues in areas such as sanitation, space navigation, reducing food wastage, improving access to healthcare, and empowering women. The development of 11 Industrial Corridors is another focus area of the Government. 20 industrial smart cities are being developed under the program, which would help make these corridors the backbone of India's manufacturing growth. Four of these smart cities have already become magnets of investment with infrastructure and clearances available for manufacturing units to be set up. Potential investment of Rs 1.7 lakh crore is already committed which will provide direct employment to 80,000 persons and indirect to many more. The Government's PLI schemes focus on critical sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, textiles and medical devices to create the eco-systems in these sectors for sustained growth



MANY COUNTRIES ARE KEEN TO SIGN TRADE DEALS WITH INDIA. THE WORLD IS NOW LOOKING AT INDIA AS A MANUFACTURING DESTINATION. AND THE KEY REASON FOR THIS INTEREST IS INDIA'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND ROBUST ECONOMIC FUNDAMENTALS

and ensure their global competitiveness. PLI schemes have resulted in Rs 1.32 lakh crore in investment and a significant boost in manufacturing output of around 11 lakh crore. More than 8.5 lakh jobs have been created directly and indirectly through this initiative. The Prime Minister's initiatives on infrastructure have been another shot in the arm of Indian manufacturing, apart from generating demand for goods and services, infrastructure development is a major facilitator of industrial activity. Today, India has a huge, and growing, network of expressways and highways. New, world-class railway stations are being built, while new freight corridors are coming up. India is increasingly being seen as a very attractive destination for investment. The country provides the 4D advantage - The decisive leadership of PM Modi; the Demographic dividend of our youthful, talented, skilled Indians; the Demand that 140 crore Indians generate in the economy; and Democracy that ensures the safety and security of investors, and the rule of law which will never allow discrimination against one or the other. The 4-D is a very, very compelling case to attract manufacturers to India. Domestic and international investors today find a golden

opportunity to grow their business. There is a flurry of activity in the investor community. A series of delegations is visiting India, hungry for opportunities to invest and participate in the Indian growth story. Foreign governments and global CEOs are keenly eyeing opportunities in India. Many countries are keen to sign trade deals with India. The world is now looking at India as a manufacturing destination. And the key reason for this interest is India's competitive advantage and robust economic fundamentals. Today, inflation is under control, economic growth is strong and the Modi government is following strict fiscal discipline. This is all the more commendable in the current global situation marred by conflict and uncertainty. The initiatives of PM Modi have helped India rise from the unenviable situation of being regarded as one of the "Fragile Five" in the world in 2014, to being one of the Top Five in the world. In effect, PM Modi's initiatives like Make in India have contributed to making the last 10 years a transformational decade - a quantum jump over the lost decade of Congress rule.

(The writer is Minister of Commerce and Industry; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

QUAD STRENGTHENS INDIA'S ROLE

Madam — China's aggressive posture has consistently threatened peace in the Indo-Pacific region. India, has faced quite a few challenges from the latter. It is a matter of pride that New Delhi is looked upon by other countries to be their firm partner on global platforms to tackle Beijing's economic and military prowess. Specifically, the Asia-Pacific region was described as Indo-Pacific to denote India's increasingly active involvement in the region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is one international forum that glues the four friendly nations—the United States, Japan, Australia and India—together. All these nations are keen to usher in a free and open Indo-Pacific region, diminishing the influence of a marauding Beijing. The four have been able to sustain a momentum that no country can ignore. In the fourth in-person Quad summit at US Wilmington, leaders of the four countries underlined the importance of shared democratic values that have kept them together. Issues of health, security, climate change, capacity building and technology occupied the leaders' attention. More importantly, India is emerging as a 'leader' of the four, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has proposed to host the next year's summit in New Delhi in 2025. It can only grow stronger from here.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

TOP COURT REJECTS GUJARAT PLEA

Madam— The Supreme Court has dismissed a plea filed by the Gujarat government seeking a review of the court's verdict, which contained certain observations against the State while quashing the remission granted to 11 men convicted of raping Bilkis Bano and murdering seven of her family during the 2002 riots. Having carefully gone through the review petitions, the order under challenge and the papers annexed therewith, the judges were satisfied

Durga Puja has transformed



This is in response to the article titled "A symphony of tradition and transformation" (September 29). In the mid-1980s, Durga Puja used to get celebrated with utmost devotion according to rituals with dominance of Bhakti encompassing both the organisers and public. Only on Saptami morning, we used to get awakened by the rhythmic beats of Dhak, all puja rituals used to

commence with rendition of Sanskrit mantras and people used to start flocking to the pandals. But in last 4 decades all things associated with Durga Puja have undergone a sea change! Far from commencing the Puja on Saptami morning, many pandals and idols now open up for public "consumption" right from the Mahalaya itself thereby "promoting" 4-day Puja to a "modern" 10-day extravaganza! After all majority of these "glamorous" Puja committees do not care to actually offer homage to it through rituals mantras holy hymns or flowers! Durga Puja of today is nothing but a fashion show of sorts with exhibition of flexing muscles - be it monetary might or trophies garnered!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

that there is no error apparent on the face of the record or any merit in the review petitions, warranting reconsideration of the order impugned. The review petitions are, accordingly, dismissed and it is a landmark decision. The Gujarat government in its plea had said the apex court's observation in the January 8 judgement, holding the State guilty of "usurpation of power" and "abuse of discretion" for complying with an order of another top court bench, was an "error apparent on the face of the record" primarily on three grounds.

CK Subramani | Kerala

TOURISM EDUCATION EMPOWERMENT

Madam — Tourism plays a pivotal role in the global economy acting as a bridge between cultures and fostering economic growth in various regions. It contributes approximately 10 per cent to the world's GDP and generates millions of employment opportunities, especially in rural and less developed areas.

By integrating tourism studies into academic curricula, institutions can equip students with essential skills in areas such as sustainable tourism practices, travel management and hospitality management. This education not only prepares students for diverse career opportunities but also fosters a deeper understanding of how to balance tourism's economic benefits with environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. Promoting tourism education in colleges cultivates a new generation ready to take the bull by the horns, driving innovation while advocating for responsible tourism practices that balance economic growth with social and environmental accountability. Moreover, it supports regional development by teaching students how to effectively market and manage local attractions thereby preserving cultural heritage while boosting local economies.

Tanisha Gupta | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Breaking life into small steps for lasting fulfillment

Happiness is actually the most important project of life. True contentment comes from savouring each step, no matter how small

Happiness is the most important project of life. It should be broken up into smaller activities to attain the eventual goal. The only time that we probably understand this is in our childhood. As a child, I had intuitively learned the art of allocating the hours of the day for various activities, like waking up, getting ready and spending time in school, having lunch on return, completing homework, going out to play, returning for dinner, and going to bed. We lived in the present from one hour to the next. I was a satisfied and happy person as I could complete the 'Project Day'. We did not have the need or the time to look too far into the future. As we outgrew childhood, we forgot the lessons learned.

I joined college. Like others, I too started making grand resolutions on the first day of the year. My resolution could be as mundane as losing the 15 kgs within the first three months, which had taken me a year to gain. It could also be an important resolution to secure 90 per cent marks in my semester examinations, a substantial



improvement over the 60 per cent in the previous one. Each resolution would fly out of the window within the first few months. I had forgotten to take small steps to reach the end destination. Things did not improve even after I started working. I found a new toy - a 'To Do List'. A diary would be earmarked for this most important ritual. I would start with one such list and continue adding till I had inked the second or third page with only a few activities completed. I would give up, and start all over again. The previous year's diary was promptly destroyed lest anyone glanced into it and called my bluff. This continued for a few years till I discovered the computer. I could delete these pending activities at will, with

no one any wiser to my shenanigans. I was fooling only myself. I quit my railway job to join a government company working in the execution of construction projects. I was exposed to software-based project management tools for the first time. I reluctantly spent weeks with the consultant to develop an activity-based project breakdown structure. He educated us about the importance of breaking each activity into smaller sub-activities. We were reluctant to accept that more activities to monitor would result in successful and timely completion. He was not satisfied with the first draft of less than 100 activities. He was a tough taskmaster. We marched on, to our ever-increasing despair, and his impatience, till we

called it quits after we had reached 1000 odd activities. It was a revelation to me. I now appreciated the time that my wife spent planning the daily household chores. The exercise in project management also brought into stark focus all the wrong I was doing while making my New Year resolutions and the To-Do Lists, and more importantly, living my life.

I now understand why we remain unhappy most of the time. We forget to derive joy out of each step that we take, however small it may be. The young of today are far more mature. Hina Khan, a young actor, recently diagnosed with cancer, is a courageous woman fighting all that life has to throw at her. Her thoughts are the most inspiring words I have read in some time, "First normalise the challenges of your lives then set goals for yourself and try to live up to them all along the way. No matter how hard. Never back down. Never give up."

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA



FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING INNER POTENTIAL

The human mind is still an enigma. It has enormous potential and is a reservoir of energy



RAVI VALLURI

His alcoholism became a quotidian habit. Dharmendra was making a last-ditch effort as he boarded a flight from Jaipur to the Art of Living Ashram in Bangalore. Fortunately, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar had given him an appointment at 4 PM that evening. Stinking of liquor, and reeking of stale cigarettes, with an unsteady gait he landed at Bangalore airport. He needed a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional, parachute. Only a 'Master' through grace could provide such a life support system. For some time, my friend was trying to seek redemption from the lethal disease of alcoholism. My inventory list was prepared: join a rehab, attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and undertake the Happiness Programme of the Art of Living. Gurudev advanced the appointment to 11 AM., and after one glance asked my friend to get admitted to the Ayurveda Hospital in the Ashram for a complete detoxification of body, mind, and soul, and after a 15-day rehab to undergo the Happiness Programme. The Guru had scripted a change in the life of Dharmendra, it was for his mind to grab the opportunity. But the monkey mind invented an excuse and Dharmendra left the Ayurveda Hospital and once again indulged in brinkmanship. He could not draw the redlines or flag the issues confronting his mind and succumbed to temptation. While the brain is an organ that serves as the centre of the nervous system, the mind is the faculty of consciousness and thoughts. It is an individual's intellect, memory or attention span and will, whose potential needs to be enhanced or live in the past. Such individuals are unable to break the patterns and barriers of their comfort zone. Their prana levels



are exceedingly low and the pendulum of their mind's swings to the past. The moot question is how we use this enormous energy. If we look at the brighter aspects of life, such mental imagery works miraculously. Over some time the mind feels blessed, gains in abundance and becomes grateful. This is what Masters refers to as the

Law of Attraction

The Law of Attraction remains an illusion if it is not in conjunction with the Law of Gratitude. Both these laws operate in tandem and will fuel inner potential to harness growth leading to robust minds. Low and the pendulum of their minds swings to the past. They carry the burden of the past and attempt a course correction without any professional help (Guru) displaying false bravado in their imaginary worlds. They invariably try to also change the behavioural patterns of those close to them, essentially to market their point of view. Such minds invariably resort to shortcuts in life, trying to please everyone without any success. Ignoring the larger picture, this is a cunning and selfish mind, which does not trust anyone: basically, short of confidence and haunted by fear. The human mind is an enigma. It has enormous potential and is a reservoir of energy. The moot question is how we use this enormous energy. If we look at the brighter aspects of life, such mental imagery works miraculously. Over some time the mind feels blessed, gains in abundance and becomes grateful. Positive thoughts beget positivity and have a spiralling effect. The jigsaw puzzle of life gets sorted out. This is what Masters refer to as the Law of Attraction. The Law of Attraction remains an illusion if it is not in conjunction with the Law of Gratitude. Both these laws operate in tandem.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Can India become a manufacturing hub?



UTTAM GUPTA

Growth is driven by strong domestic demand, export potential, government infrastructure efforts, private sector investment, and initiatives like 'Make in India'



According to a Study Report by IDBI Capital, India is set to add US\$ 1 trillion to its gross domestic product (GDP) every 18 months over the next six years. It goes on to say that "with this momentum, the country is on track to become a US\$ 10 trillion economy positioning itself as the world's third-largest economy by 2030". Currently, India has a GDP of US\$ 4 trillion. The report has also highlighted that "India's accelerated growth will be driven primarily by the manufacturing sector, which is projected to contribute 32 per cent to the incremental Gross Value Added (GVA)". It adds "India will overtake the top five economies in manufacturing IIP (Index of Industrial Production) viz. US, China, Germany, South Korea and Japan...". Manufacturing essentially involves the production of a wide spectrum of consumer products, industrial machinery and so on.

It is the most important component of Industrial activity at a broader level which also includes Construction (primarily building infrastructure); Logistics (transportation and storage of goods); Aerospace (aircraft and spacecraft etc) and maintenance and services required to support industrial activities. The contribution of the Industrial sector to India's GDP is around 30 per cent of which manufacturing alone is 17 per cent. The share of Agriculture and allied activities in GDP is around 18 per cent. The remaining 52 per cent comes from the Services sector (SS).

The SS encompasses 'intangible' services such as education, health, entertainment, hospitality and tourism, banking, insurance and so on.

While, all three sectors play a crucial role in growth, creating jobs and increasing incomes, manufacturing can provide a more sustainable basis for providing jobs and surety of income. This is in sharp contrast to agriculture which is fundamentally a seasonal activity and economic fortunes are largely tied to how monsoon pans out. Manufacturing can also provide a good buffer for absorbing the excess workforce from agriculture with positive spin-offs even for the latter in terms of higher productivity and income. Within the manufacturing sector, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) occupy a pivotal position. The



WHILE, ALL THREE SECTORS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN GROWTH, CREATING JOBS AND INCREASING INCOMES, MANUFACTURING CAN PROVIDE A MORE SUSTAINABLE BASIS FOR PROVIDING JOBS AND SURETY OF INCOME

MSMEs are ancillary units engaged in the production, manufacturing and processing of goods and commodities (mostly intermediate goods) which are supplied to large enterprises or master units. These units operate on a small scale and are further categorized into micro, small and medium enterprises depending on the 'investment' and 'turnover' threshold. According to the Ministry of Statistics & Program Implementation, the share of MSME manufacturing output in all India Manufacturing output is around 36 per cent. The share of export of MSME-specified products in all India exports has oscillated between 44 - 50 per cent during the last couple of years. As for employment, according to a report released by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), MSMEs in India contribute 62 per cent to the total. Yet, in the past, manufacturing hasn't been given the desired push. Its low contribution of 17 per cent in GDP and even lower share of total employment at about 10 per cent says it all.

Now, India aiming at the generation of 32 per cent of the incremental GVA from manufacturing shows its determination to put in the effort during the next six years or so, which is nearly double what it has done cumulatively to date. At this pace, by 2030, the share of manufacturing in GDP will have reached 26 per cent (4x0.17+6x0.32)/10.

The factors that can make it happen are robust domestic demand; strong export potential; heavy lifting by the Central Government (plus support to States) by building infrastructure; increasing investment by the private sector; key initiatives such as 'Make in India' playing a pivotal role in bolstering the country's manufacturing capabilities underpinned by the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes; India taking up a lead role in recalibrating global supply chains to position the country

as a global manufacturing hub; giving a boost to the micro small and medium enterprises (MSME) and so on. Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; Stimulating demand holds the key to putting manufacturing on an 'accelerated' and 'sustained' growth trajectory. For this, not only people's income should grow, but it should also be evenly and widely distributed. What do the facts speak? According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent of India's GDP. This shows the extreme inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. There are other pointers to confirm that this is indeed so. According to an analysis of the financials of India's largest companies - those comprising the BSE 500 index - over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 1000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent.

This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. The aggregate dividend paid by these firms increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio - even higher than 30 per cent paid by the world's largest companies in America's S&P 500.

The products made in India need to be priced low if they are to be competitive. But, there are three major reasons as to why prices are downward inflexible. First, several big businesses operating in metals

such as copper, zinc, aluminium or hydrocarbons like oil and gas, enjoy a natural monopoly enabling them to set high prices. Firms in the chemical, petrochemicals, pharmaceutical and agrochemicals sectors also charge more courtesy, high tariffs on imports and licensing and registration requirements. Second, you have the impact of high taxation particularly when it comes to petroleum products. These are taxed under the pre-GST regime leading to the high incidence of 80 per cent of the ex-refinery price of petrol (Delhi). Ditto in the case of diesel. Increasing the cost of the movement of goods raises the cost of almost every manufactured item. Third, how can one be oblivious of the exorbitant power tariff set in double digits in many states? The power distribution companies or discoms (mostly owned and controlled by the States) are forced to charge high rates on supplies to industries as they have to make up for the under-recoveries incurred on supplies to farmers and households, either free or at a heavily subsidized price.

Finally, industries are operating in highly interesting environments. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has kept the policy rate (the interest rate at which it lends money to banks) unchanged at a high of 6.5 per cent along with a 'withdrawal of accommodation' stance (a jargon for tight liquidity) for nearly 20 months. This leads to high cost loans to all industries across the board. The MSMEs are more vulnerable to all the above cost-push factors. To add salt to the injury, they get delayed payment for their dues from large firms. Unless the above fault lines are addressed, Initiatives under 'Make in India' won't yield the desired result and India becoming a manufacturing hub of the world will remain a distant dream.

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

India's education system must prioritise learning over infrastructure

Despite schools being filled with students, foundational skills like basic literacy and numeracy continue to lag

Since gaining independence, India has made significant strides in the field of education, especially in terms of infrastructure and expanding access to schools. Classrooms now accommodate children from all walks of life, and government initiatives have succeeded in bringing millions of students into the education system.

However, despite these achievements, a critical component remains neglected—the quality of learning. Infrastructure may be flourishing, but the foundational skills that students require for future success often lag behind. To understand this, imagine a farmer who diligently sows seeds in well-tilled soil, only to find the harvest insufficient because the seeds weren't suit



ASHU KAPOOR

ed to the soil. In the same way, India's educational progress in infrastructure is commendable, but the students' foundational skills—the seeds of education—are still not producing the robust results we hope for. Year after year, surveys like the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and the National Achievement Survey (NAS) reveal a startling reality: a large proportion of students struggle with essential

skills like basic literacy and numeracy.

These are the building blocks of education, without which the entire edifice remains shaky. Students are spending years in school, but many are not learning at the expected level. The alarming gap between schooling and actual learning points to a crucial flaw in the system. If foundational skills are not nurtured early on, the benefits of educational progress will remain elusive, much like the farmer's poor harvest.

The introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brings a renewed sense of hope. It promises transformative change and a shift towards a system that values not just access to education but the quality of learning.

Together with the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational and School Education, NEP 2020 emphasizes the need to measure educational progress through well-designed assessments and to tailor interventions accordingly.

The goal is clear: to raise a generation of learners who are not only equipped with knowledge but also the critical thinking skills required to thrive in the modern world. Research consistently shows that assessments play a transformative role in improving education. Their primary goal is not to rank students or schools but to provide insights into where learners stand on their educational journey. By identifying what students know and can do at individual, school, and

system levels, assessments offer a roadmap for educators to develop targeted interventions that can address specific learning gaps.

In the quest to transform learning, large-scale assessments like ASER and NAS will be pivotal. ASER, a household-based survey, provides insights into basic literacy and numeracy skills, while NAS offers a broader view of students' achievement of curricular outcomes. Recently, the State Educational Achievement Survey (SEAS) was conducted by NCERT to provide state-level insights into educational progress.

Simply generating report cards on students' performance is not enough. The data must be used to inform policy decisions and to implement specific

interventions aimed at improving learning outcomes. If not, students will continue to face the same challenges year after year, with little improvement. Large-scale assessments should be seen as the first step in a larger strategy to address educational inequities.

While NAS offers a broad overview of the education system, state-level assessment surveys (SAS) have the potential to zoom in on specific issues at the school level. NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of these surveys and recommends that each state conduct its own census-based assessment to drive continuous improvement. By focusing on local contexts, SAS can provide valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by

individual states, enabling more targeted interventions. However, the effectiveness of SAS depends on how well states define their objectives. To make SAS truly impactful, states need to align their assessment frameworks with clear objectives. A well-designed assessment should consider the needs of the educational system at the state level, and the data collected should be used to support and improve schools, rather than ranking them. India's states would do well to ensure that all stakeholders in the education system—teachers, school administrators, and district-level educators—are trained in data use and analysis.

The road ahead is challenging, but the promise of census-based state assessments is

transformative. By monitoring student progress and providing data-driven insights, SAS can reshape India's educational landscape. When combined with national-level assessments like NAS, SAS has the power to create a more responsive, equitable education system. With a strategic approach and strong governance, India can ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

The writer is a Research Fellow at Australian Council for Educational Research (India) and a former Senior Academic Consultant at NCERT and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. Views are personal. Inputs by Dr Priyanka Sharma, Director ACER (India)



BREAKING THE CYCLE THE URGENT NEED TO COMBAT ANAEMIA

ANEMIA SYMPTOMS AND CAUSES

SYMPTOMS

- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Cold hands, feet
- Irregular heartbeat

CAUSES

- Nutrient deficiencies
- Blood loss
- Health conditions
- Menstrual periods
- Women pregnancy

In a world where health often takes a backseat to the demands of modern life, anaemia has emerged as a silent epidemic writes **ABHI SINGHAL**

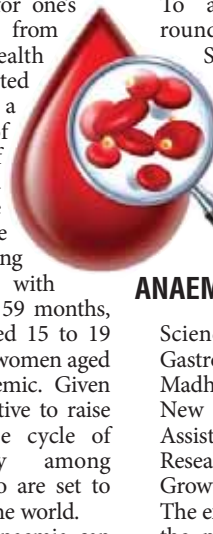
In today's fast-paced world, many individuals struggle to prioritize their health and wellness, particularly those aged 21 to 50. This neglect can lead to significant health issues, including a common yet often overlooked condition: anaemia. Anaemia, characterized by a reduced number of red blood cells or malfunctioning red blood cells, can have serious implications for one's health. The latest statistics from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), conducted from 2019 to 2021, reveal a staggering prevalence of anaemia in India: 57% of women aged 15 to 49 and 25% of men in the same age group are affected. The figures are even more alarming for specific demographics, with 67% of children aged 6 to 59 months, 59% of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 years, and 52% of pregnant women aged 15 to 49 years being anaemic. Given these statistics, it is imperative to raise awareness and break the cycle of anaemia, particularly among pregnant women who are set to bring new life into the world. The symptoms of anaemia can

significantly impact daily life, including fatigue, weakness, shortness of breath, pale skin, cold extremities, dizziness, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty in concentrating. These symptoms create a vicious cycle: anaemia leads to weakness, which in turn results in laziness and decreased productivity, ultimately affecting one's overall well-being and work output. To address this critical issue, a roundtable discussion titled "India's Silent Epidemic: Raising Awareness & Fostering Urgent Action Against Anaemia" was convened. The panel of experts included Dr Manju Puri, Director Professor of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi; Dr Tulika Seth, Professor of Haematology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences; Dr Sarath Gopalan, Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist at Madhukar Rainbow Children's Hospital, New Delhi; and Dr William Joe, Assistant Professor at the Population Research Centre, Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. The experts identified iron deficiency as the primary cause of anaemia. They

emphasized that one can have normal haemoglobin levels yet still be iron deficient. This situation is like to an iceberg, where anaemia is merely the visible tip. For instance, a person with a haemoglobin level of 12 could still suffer from iron deficiency. By administering iron supplements, their iron stores may improve, alleviating many symptoms, even if the haemoglobin level changes only slightly. Dr Tulika Seth highlighted the need for greater awareness regarding iron-rich foods. She noted that even educated individuals often struggle to name two iron-rich foods. "Unless you know about red meat and similar options, you're unlikely to consume sufficient amounts," she remarked. The discussion also underscored the significance of dietary counselling to enhance iron intake through improved dietary choices, which is essential for health management. Experts stressed that knowledge and awareness are crucial initial steps toward addressing anaemia. Furthermore, the quantity of nutrient intake was discussed as a pivotal factor. The experts addressed the role of iron supplements, particularly in light of the younger generation's reluctance to

consume leafy vegetables, which are vital for nutrient intake. While supplements can serve as a backup, they cannot replace the benefits derived from natural food sources. In response to inquiries about nutritional solutions and reliance on supplements, Dr Manju Puri noted, "Nutrition alone is insufficient. The government has implemented a supplementary program for vulnerable groups, providing low-cost supplements that are widely available. Even when purchased, they are affordable. It's important to view supplements as a necessary backup." Awareness remains the first step in combating anaemia. By understanding the symptoms, causes, and prevention strategies, individuals can take proactive measures to safeguard their health. Incorporating iron-rich foods—such as leafy vegetables, red meat, and fortified cereals—into one's diet is essential, and supplements can provide additional support when needed. Ultimately, health is one's greatest asset. Individuals are encouraged to prioritize their health by staying informed about anaemia and taking steps to prevent or manage this condition.

NUTRITION ALONE IS INSUFFICIENT. THE GOVERNMENT HAS IMPLEMENTED A SUPPLEMENTARY PROGRAM FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS, PROVIDING LOW-COST SUPPLEMENTS THAT ARE WIDELY AVAILABLE. EVEN WHEN PURCHASED, THEY ARE AFFORDABLE. IT'S IMPORTANT TO VIEW SUPPLEMENTS AS A NECESSARY BACKUP



"Nourishing Your Body: The Role of Nutrition in Daily Wellness"

BY **Dr Wajihah Mehtab**

In a world filled with fast food, busy schedules, and growing health concerns, the importance of nutrition in our daily lives cannot be overstated. Proper nutrition is the foundation of a healthy body and mind, influencing everything from energy levels to disease prevention. Eating a well-balanced diet is more than just fuelling the body—it's about enhancing overall well-being and leading a vibrant, fulfilling life.

The Building Blocks of Health

At its core, nutrition provides the essential building blocks our bodies need to function. Carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals all play crucial roles. Carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy, while proteins help build and repair tissues. Healthy fats, such as those found in nuts, seeds, and fish, support brain health and protect vital organs. Vitamins and minerals, found in abundance in fruits and vegetables, help regulate processes such as metabolism, immune function, and cell repair. Without these key nutrients, the body struggles to perform its everyday tasks efficiently. Poor nutrition weakens the immune system, slows down healing, and can lead to fatigue, poor concentration, and overall poor health. On the other hand, a diet rich in whole, nutrient-dense foods can optimise energy, mood, and productivity.

Preventing Chronic Disease

One of the most important reasons to prioritize nutrition is its role in preventing chronic diseases. Conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity are increasingly common, yet many are preventable through better dietary choices. Diets high in processed foods, refined sugars, and unhealthy fats contribute to the development of these diseases, while diets rich in whole grains, lean proteins, fruits, and vegetables offer protection. The World Health Organization (WHO) stresses that a diet full of fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of heart

diseases and certain types of cancer. Foods high in fiber, like whole grains and legumes, promote healthy digestion and reduce the risk of gastrointestinal disorders. Meanwhile, cutting down on salt, sugar, and saturated fats helps control blood pressure and maintain a healthy weight.

Mental Health and Nutrition

The link between nutrition and physical health is well-documented, but its impact on mental health is equally significant. Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids, found in fish and flaxseeds, and

gives the body a steady supply of energy, while junk food leads to quick energy crashes. Eating a variety of nutrient-rich foods ensures that the body has everything it needs to keep going strong. Complex carbohydrates, such as brown rice and sweet potatoes, provide long-lasting energy. Proteins and healthy fats offer sustained energy release, keeping us feeling full and energised for longer periods. Vitamins and minerals also play a role, helping the body efficiently convert food into energy.

Practical Tips for a Healthier Diet

Maintaining a nutritious diet doesn't have to be complicated. Simple, mindful choices can make a big difference. Here are a few tips:

Focus on whole foods: Prioritise fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Limit processed and packaged foods.

Eat the rainbow: Aim to include a variety of colours on your plate. Different coloured fruits and vegetables provide a wide range of vitamins and minerals.

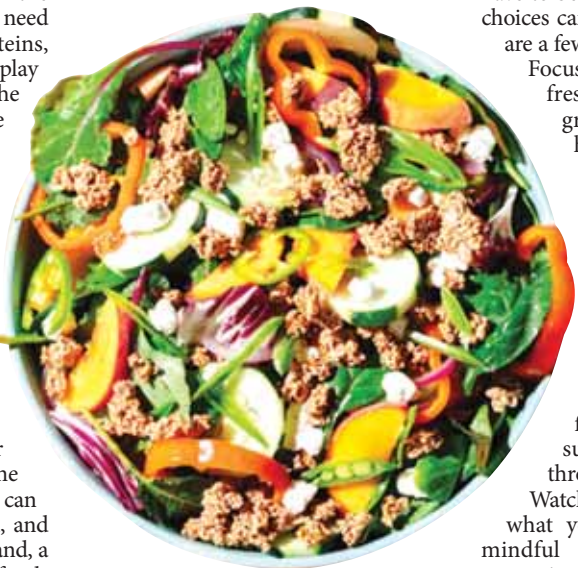
Stay hydrated: Water is essential for nearly every function in the body. Make sure to drink enough water throughout the day.

Watch portion sizes: It's not just what you eat, but how much. Be mindful of portion sizes to avoid overeating, even with healthy foods.

Plan ahead: Planning meals and snacks in advance can help you make healthier choices and avoid unhealthy last-minute options.

Nutrition is a cornerstone of health and wellness. By choosing nutrient-dense, whole foods and avoiding processed alternatives, individuals can significantly improve both their physical and mental health. Good nutrition doesn't just fuel the body—it fuels life, empowering us to live more energetic, fulfilling, and disease-free lives. Prioritising what goes on your plate is one of the most impactful decisions you can make for your long-term well-being.

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BY **Dr Dinesh Kumar Tyagi**

Monsoon is the season that brings a necessary cool to the weather after the scorching summers. Although the weather becomes extremely pleasant, monsoons also open the gate to a plethora of waterborne and viral diseases and infections. The stagnant pools of water the puddles are breeding grounds for germs and bacteria and the humidity becomes another ally of viral infections. Let's discover some tips and habits that can help you avoid monsoon diseases.

A healthy gut ensures a good immune system. It is important to maintain a nutritious diet in all your meals ensuring that you are getting the fats, minerals, and vitamins you need. Eat seasonal fruits and vegetables and avoid oily spicy food that could meddle with your digestion.

Food made at restaurants, streets, or cafe's are usually made in unhygienic conditions. Food made in unhygienic conditions can lead to typhoid, infections as it carries various germs and bacteria. Try to eat home-cooked meals as much as possible and even if you eat out, eat freshly prepared food that is served hygienically to you. Waterborne diseases are very common during the monsoons. Drinking unsafe or impure water from public water coolers can lead you to catch them. Drink safe water from RO or try to get bottled water when you are out and about.

Damp clothes can cause skin infections and even lead to allergies. Wearing dry, clean clothing during rainy seasons is very important. Go for Synthetic, quick-



drying materials as they won't stay damp for long and don't retain moisture like cotton or linen. They help you stay dry and comfortable. Many of us love to enjoy the rain and get drenched in rain like kids. This may seem refreshing but it can lead you to catching cold, fever, and other waterborne diseases, especially during the peak monsoon season downpours. Keeping your umbrella and raincoat handy while going out during monsoons is a power move. It is an easy and effective way of keeping you from getting drenched in the rain and will protect you from exposure of the rain and the atmosphere that weakens your immunity. Viral infections are rampant during monsoon season due to the weather and humidity. Close contact in crowded places during this season should be avoided as that is where you will catch an

infection like swine flu or hepatitis. While monsoons will come and go, life goes on and you will have to go out and interact with people at offices or public spaces or even crowds. All you can do is maintain a good amount of space between you and others to avoid the risk of catching any infections. Make sure you are up to date about getting all your vaccines and booster doses. Outbreak diseases like hepatitis are very common during monsoons. Consult your doctor and make sure that you are not behind on getting any vaccines. Infections through insects like malaria and dengue are rampant during the monsoons. It is important to protect yourself from such diseases. Get a mosquito repellent that you can use in areas where there are a lot of stagnant bodies and

mosquitoes. You can also use nets at night to prevent mosquito bites.

Germs, bacteria, and insects including mosquitoes all have one hotspot during winter that is stagnant water. You should avoid going to water-logged areas during monsoons to avoid all such bacteria and germs and make sure to disinfect yourself properly after you have been through those areas.

It becomes important to cover your full body during monsoons to prevent mosquito bites or fungal infections of any kind. Stick to wearing full-length skirts, t-shirts, and pants to avoid any such issues.

Sunlight, although is very important for us for Vitamin D, during the rainy season the sunlight can weaken your immunity. The combination of sun and humidity after a rain shower can lead to dehydration. Wear shades, apply sunscreen, and try to stay in shaded areas during monsoons as much as possible.

Good sleep is very important for your immune system. Good sleep regenerates your body cells and keeps you body healthy. To avoid catching any viral fevers or infections you should maintain a good sleep cycle. Staying healthy, and maintaining good habits is the crux to staying away from all kinds of fevers, infections, and flu during monsoons. Some habits should be well inculcated like wearing dry clothes and maintaining a safe distance from crowds during the monsoons to stay healthy and safe.

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Sri Lanka crushes New Zealand to clinch historic series win

AP ■ GALLE (SRI LANKA)

Sri Lanka stormed to a series victory over New Zealand, securing the two-match test series with a resounding 154-run triumph on the fourth day in Galle on Sunday. This victory, Sri Lanka's most dominant over the Kiwis, also marks their first win against New Zealand in 15 years. The hero of the games, left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya, was named Player of the Series after a masterful performance, claiming 18 wickets across the two matches. Meanwhile, Kamindu Mendis anchored Sri Lanka's colossal total of 602-5 declared. With this knock, Mendis etched his name in history, joining the great Sir Don Bradman as the third joint-fastest player to reach 1,000 test runs. Jayasuriya, who took nine wickets in the first test, was at his best again, snaring



another nine wickets in the second test as New Zealand's batters struggled to cope with Sri Lanka's spin-heavy attack. Debutant Nishan Peiris was the perfect foil, chipping in with nine wickets of his own, including a five-wicket haul in the second innings. "We discussed the need to score big in the first innings. That has been something that has been worrying us for a while. Glad we rectified that this innings," said Sri Lanka captain Dananjaya de Silva. "The spinners were superb. They kept creating pressure and didn't allow New Zealand to get away with things. It was

dominance. Resuming at 199-5, New Zealand lost three wickets before lunch on the fourth day. Despite Sri Lanka's fielding lapses, which saw three catches dropped, they eventually cleaned up after lunch. Jayasuriya removed Ajaz Patel and Peiris took the final scalp of Santner, stumped by Kusal Mendis, sealing the series win for Sri Lanka. "We had our moments in the series, but disappointed with the end result," said New Zealand captain Tim Southee. "That morning session on day three when we lost nine wickets was very disappointing. "There were dropped catches and missed stumpings as well in the Sri Lankan innings and in these conditions when you don't hold onto those chances it is very difficult." With this victory, Sri Lanka has now won three consecutive test matches and bolstered their hopes of qualifying for the ICC World Test Championship final at Lord's next June.

Indian shooters win two gold medals in Peru

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian shooters began their ISSF Junior World Championship (Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun) campaign in Peru on a good note, winning team gold in men's and women's 10m air pistol events, though a potential top-podium finish was lost in the individual category after a marksman was docked two points for reporting late for the final. The junior men's trio of Umesh Choudhary, Pradyumn Singh and Mukesh Nelavalli topped the men's team competition in 10m air pistol with a tally of 1726 points. They finished 10 points ahead of second-placed Romania, while Italy took bronze with a score of 1707. Choudhary though missed a potential individual gold after being penalised two points for reporting late for the final. Choudhary and Singh had earlier made it to the individual finals placed third and fourth respectively in the qualification round. Choudhary shot 580 and



Singh 578 but missed out on individual medals, ending up sixth and eighth respectively. Luca Joldea of Romania won the gold medal, while Chinese Taipei's Hsieh Hsiang-Chen clinched the silver. Nelavalli was ninth in qualification with a score of 574. The combination of Kanishka Dagar, Lakshita and Anjali Chaudhary tallied 1708 to clinch the junior women's 10m air pistol team gold. They

Wet outfield wipes out play for second day

PTI ■ KANPUR

No play was possible for the second consecutive day in the second Test between India and Bangladesh due to a wet outfield at the Green Park Stadium here. Overnight rain had caused a delay to the start of action but even as the sun was shining bright around 2:00pm and there were no soggy patches on the ground, the officials decided to call off the play. Almost eight sessions have been lost in the game due to persistent rain that has played havoc with the final match of the two-game series. Questions on the drainage system used at the venue have been duly raised. Bangladesh had ended the rain-shortened opening day at 107 for 3. The entire second day was washed out without a ball being bowled, and only 35 overs were bowled on the opening day. India pacer Akash Deep (2/34) and Ravichandran Ashwin (1/22) were among the wickets.

Champions League returns missing Mbappé, Rodri, Barella as injury wave hits European soccer

AP ■ PARIS

Key players will be sidelined when the Champions League resumes on Tuesday after a wave of injuries within a week of the new-look competition starting. Kylian Mbappé's sore hamstring is likely to sideline him beyond Wednesday when he was due to return to France with defending champion Real Madrid to face Lille. Serious knee injuries mean Manchester City midfielder Rodri is out for the season and Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen will miss at least most of it. The injuries to four players who were involved at the European Championship into the knockout phase have sharpened the debate about player workload in a calendar made more congested by the bigger Champions League. The extended program is what influential clubs all-but forced UEFA to create and the 18 games this week, split between Tuesday and Wednesday, still

leaves each of them with six more to play through January. Another final rematch There were two repeats of past finals in the first week of games that relaunched the Champions League in a single-standings format. Man City and Inter drew 0-0 and Liverpool won 3-1 at AC Milan. The next rematch comes Wednesday when Aston Villa hosts Bayern Munich, a giant of the European Cup era that was shocked 1-0 in the 1982 final. Villa Park will host a first game in the competition since March 1983 when the English side's title defense was ended by Juventus. Both eased to winning starts two weeks ago. Villa won 3-0 at Young Boys and Bayern's nine goals against Dinamo Zagreb was a record for any team in the 33-season Champions League era. Harry Kane scored four in Bayern's 9-2 win and has a good record visiting Villa, with five goals there in five Premier League games for Tottenham. He faces a late check on an ankle injury. Kane edges Haaland Kane's fast start to the season with 10 goals in seven games for Bayern has outpaced even Erling Haaland's 10 in eight games for Man City. Haaland was kept quiet by Inter for the



second time in 16 months, a fact he was reminded of in a post-game talk with the Italian champion's center back Francesco Acerbi, who smiled and held up two fingers. Haaland should find it easier on

for a rare European win by the Scottish champion stood out in an opening week where anticipation was not universal. Pundits including former Man City goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel noted a quietness about the stadium for the Inter game. The attendance was nearly 2,000 higher five days later when Man City met Arsenal in a tempestuous Premier League clash where title ambitions were already in play. Milan-Liverpool was a heavyweight European fixture yet far from sold out, with fewer than 60,000 at San Siro. The crowd topped 70,000 at each of Milan's first two Serie A home games this season, and 66,000 on the equivalent Champions League opening night last season to see another English club, Newcastle. Paris Saint-Germain drew at least 46,000 fans for each home game in Ligue 1 this season — and all three Champions League group-stage games last season — yet fewer than 40,000 were at Parc des Princes to see European debutant Girona two weeks ago. Sporting Lisbon also had 40,000 fans for a Champions League opener against Lille that was 6,000 down on the crowd for a domestic league game against Porto. The attendance and atmosphere trends

will be watched as fans respond to the longer and more expensive program of four Champions League home games. The 36-team standings is set to be more dynamic for the final two rounds in January. Tuesday's games The raucous atmosphere should follow Celtic to Borussia Dortmund whose fans in the Yellow Wall tribune are among the noisiest in Europe. Bundesliga champion Bayer Leverkusen hosts Milan after making a fast start in a 4-0 rout at Feyenoord. San Siro now reverts to Inter to host Red Star Belgrade. Arsenal hosts PSG in a meeting of two teams chasing a trophy they never won. Each was a beaten finalist once. Also, Barcelona hosts Young Boys. Wednesday's games Even without Mbappé, Madrid should have too much for Lille playing in the stadium that hosted basketball group-stage games at the Paris Olympics. Premier League leader Liverpool hosts Bologna, and Girona's first European visitor to the Montilivi stadium is Feyenoord. Dinamo Zagreb fired its coach, Sergej Jakirovic, after the drubbing at Bayern and brought back Nenad Bjelica for a second spell.

Osasuna stuns Barcelona 4-2 record for best start



AP ■ BARCELONA

Bryan Zaragoza scored one goal and set up another to spark Osasuna's stunning 4-2 win over Barcelona, dealing the Spanish league leader its first loss. matches this season. Messi became the sixth player in MLS history with at least 15 goals and 15 assists in a single season - and he's done that while missing 15 of Inter Miami's league contests. The tie, combined with Columbus' 2-2 draw with D.C. United on Saturday, left Inter Miami eight points clear of the Crew for the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference. Inter Miami is also seven points up on the LA Galaxy for the No. 1 overall seed in the MLS playoffs.

The lightning-fast forward on loan from Bayern Munich crossed for Ante Budimir to open the scoring in the 17th minute. Zaragoza then showed some fancy high-speed dribbling to round goalkeeper Iñaki Peña on the break for 2-0 in the 28th on Saturday. Barcelona youth player Pau Víctor pulled one back for the visitors in the 53rd, but Budimir earned and converted a penalty to put the result beyond doubt in the 72nd. Abel Bretones made it 4-1 in the 85th and substitute Lamine Yamal scored Barcelona's second goal. Barcelona recorded wins in the first seven rounds of the league. An eighth victory would have equaled a club record established in 2013. Barcelona remained atop the league standings at four points ahead of Real Madrid before the defending champion visits Atletico Madrid in a derby on Sunday. Osasuna moved into sixth place and stayed unbeaten in Pamplona in this campaign with four wins and a draw.

India U17 look to maintain dominance against Bangladesh in final

PTI ■ THIMPHU

India will fancy their chances of maintaining their stranglehold on Bangladesh when the two sides meet in the final of the SAFF U17 Championship here on Monday. India began their tournament nine days ago with a last-gasp 1-0 victory over Bangladesh in the group stage. The same script unfolded last year as well, when the India U16 boys beat their eastern neighbours 1-0 in the first game and then 2-0 in the final. Head coach Ishfaq Ahmed and his boys will hope for a repeat of that on Monday for a successful title defence. For the record, the two teams have met four times in the finals of SAFF men's age-group tournaments, with India winning thrice (U18 in



2019, U20 in 2022 and U16 in 2023) and Bangladesh emerging victorious once (U16 in 2015). "We know Bangladesh are a good side. They did well to come from behind in the semi-final. They had some hiccups but they've been more stable as compared to the other teams. Our win against them is in the past. A final is a different game," said Ahmed in the pre-match press conference. India beat Nepal 4-2 in a frenetic semi-final on Saturday, which saw four goals scored in the last 10 minutes. Vishal Yadav's second-half

brace put India in control but Nepal didn't go down easily as they kept reducing the Blue Colts' lead. In the end, goals from substitutes Ningshthoukhongjam Rishi Singh and Hemneichung Lunlum sealed the Indian win. Set-pieces are something India have been excellent with so far. They've scored four goals from dead ball situations so far and Ahmed has been delighted with that. In the second semi-final, Bangladesh showed indomitable spirit as they came from two goals down to level it at 2-2 against Pakistan thanks to Md Manik's 74th and 94th minute goals. They then converted all eight of their penalties to cap off a memorable comeback and enter the final.

Messi scores, Inter Miami moves closer to No. 1 seed with 1-1 draw

AP ■ FORT LAUDERDALE (US)

Lionel Messi moved Inter Miami another step closer to the No. 1 seed for the MLS Cup playoffs. And the MLS single-season points record remains in the club's reach as well. Messi scored in the 67th minute and Inter Miami pushed its unbeaten streak to eight straight Major League Soccer matches with a 1-1 tie against Charlotte FC on Saturday night. It was Messi's 15th goal in 16 league

Inter Miami plays at Columbus on Wednesday, and a win would wrap up the No. 1 overall seed - not just the East, but the Supporters Shield as the regular-season winners as well. Inter Miami (19-4-8) has 65 points with three matches left; Columbus (16-5-9) has 57 points with four matches remaining. "We are playing a great team that is chasing us in the Supporters Shield," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said.



"It is a very important game but so are the games against Toronto and New England. We will be ready for these remaining dates." But first, the Columbus match looms and Inter Miami knows exactly what's at stake. "It's very important," defender Jordi Alba said. The Supporters Shield would give Inter Miami home-field edge throughout the playoffs, including for a potential MLS Cup final December 7. And if Inter Miami wins out, it will

finish with 74 points - one more than the MLS record of 73 set by New England in 2021. DC United helped Inter Miami a bit on Saturday. Columbus led 2-1 late in the second half but surrendered the tying goal in the 81st minute; otherwise, the Crew could have been two points closer to Inter Miami in the standings and made Wednesday's match far more interesting. Messi's goal was his typical brilliance. He took a pass near the top of the

penalty box, dribbling once and threading his natural left-footed shot between four defenders and into the net to tie the match. It came 10 minutes after Charlotte (11-11-9, 42 points, seventh in the East) struck first, with Karol Swiderski deflecting a shot into the net. But Messi answered, and Inter Miami settled for its third consecutive draw. The team is 5-0-3 in its last eight league matches and 9-1-3 in MLS play since June 1.